

"Diversify."

By Randall Williams

It's not easy to be a full-time musician, and it's a tough road to get there. There's no pre-fab success roadmap that works for everyone, but there is one bit of advice that is just as applicable to musicians as it is to corporate moguls and corn farmers: Diversification is vital.

Diversification means not putting all your eggs in one basket, all your money in one company's stock, or the same crop in the same field every year. It also means that musicians who do only one thing are going to have a hard time building a successful career.

There are lots of really talented musicians out there and you might be better than some or even all of them. But what makes you unique? Why are you going to get hired for a gig over two-dozen others? And how are you going to get enough work to leave the day job behind and do what you love full-time?

Let's ask Kari

I put these questions to somebody who knows: Kari Estrin. Kari's been in the business for more than 20 years, promoting and managing internationally, and offering customized career consulting for artists. Kari spelled out the need to diversify income streams as well as the need to diversify artistically.

"Diversity means not just relying on one facet of what you can do," she said. "Typically, musicians experience this when they learn a new instrument because the band needs it, or when they become their own booking agent because nobody else is."

"But as you get older, the stakes change.

When you're married with children, you can't drive around the country, sleep on couches, and take poor-paying gigs. I work with artists to examine what other skills they have, and capitalize on those."

Who would have thought...

Kari said something really interesting. She talked about creative diversity, but it seemed to go hand in hand with generating diverse sources of income.

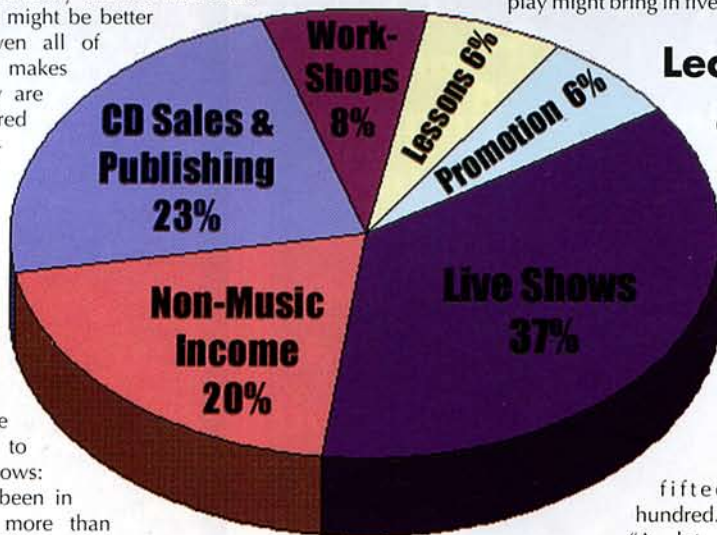
"I had a client who won the John Lennon Songwriting Contest," Kari said. "But while working on her second CD, the songs just weren't gelling. I realized she was still too close to the subject matter, trying to put too much emotion into rhymes. I suggested that she write her songs as stories. The end result was a book, a play, a collection of one-act plays, and a CD. She developed her voice as a writer and became a playwright and an author in addition to being a musician."

In this case, artistic diversity spawned financial diversity. "Threetosevenhundreddollars may be standard for a concert," Kari said, "but a play might bring in five to

special, and also so they're not forced to rely on one thing for income. Diversifying your income empowers you to turn down the shows that you probably shouldn't be taking anyway. Plus, running around taking every gig you can is a great recipe for burn-out.

Kari suggested other ways to diversify, too: "Capitalize on your particular skills," she said. "Some people do publicity, accounting, or radio promotion for other artists. Or find a niche market such as a concert series for the elderly in your state and get a grant for it."

She brought her point home with the example of how she came to produce a concert for Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie. "Although I was a successful Boston concert promoter in my own right, out-of-town promoters coming to Boston used to hire me to cater," she began. "I made great connections that way. I catered a gig for Pete and Arlo once, and was asked to write Pete's bio for that show. I had no idea how hard it would be, so I agreed." Afterwards his wife Toshi remarked that it was the best bio they'd had in a while, and Howard Leventhal dropped her a note shortly afterwards asking Kari to produce their next concert at Symphony Hall!



Learn how to capitalize on your skills as you work toward your goal of making a decent living doing what you love to do.

But what if you think you can't do anything else but play music?

"If you can't do anything but music, then do it the best you can," Kari says. "Maybe you'll be able to play full-time and find somebody else to do all the other stuff, or maybe you'll have to get a part-time job that allows you the flexibility to travel when you need to and take the shows you want to play."

Personally, I'd say if you think you can't do anything else, you should look harder. Or maybe you should call Kari.

SMU
Kari Estrin Management: www.kariestrin.com
You can reach Randall Williams at randall@iLiveToPlay.net

www.iLiveToPlay.net