

THE SINGER'S LIBRARY



SAVVY STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL TEACHING

BY BRIAN MANTERNACH

Read about a new book designed to help teachers meet their full potential—musically and financially.

David Cutler was one month away from completing his master of music degree when he brought one final question to his primary teacher, mentor, and guru: What do I do with my life? “For the first time ever, I saw a blank stare,” Cutler says. “The career advice I got was, ‘I don’t know what to tell you. I’m sure you’ll be fine.’”

Feeling dejected and a bit betrayed after devoting years of his life to musical training, he participated in what he calls a ritual known to all jazz musicians: “I moved back home with Mom and Dad.”

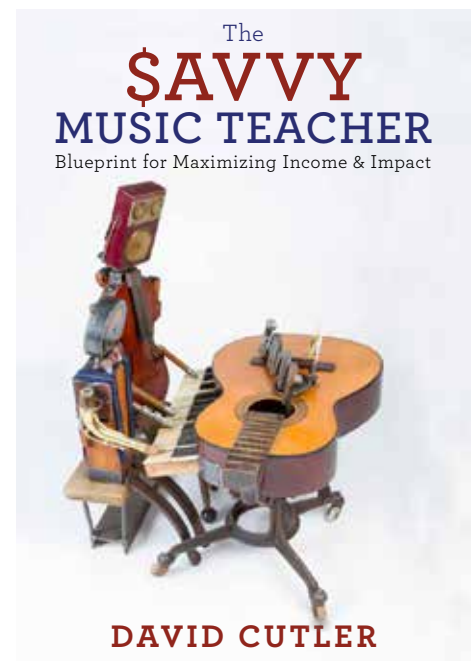
After a period of sulking and soul searching, Cutler was determined to find his way. Now, as the director of music entrepreneurship at the University of South Carolina, he outlines his discoveries in a new book, *The Savvy Music Teacher: Blueprint for Maximizing Income & Impact*. The publication is a follow-up to his 2009 book, *The Savvy Musician: Building a Career, Earning a Living & Making a Difference*, which is geared to all types of musicians and not just teachers. “That’s why I’m here,” he says. “It’s not because I knew all the answers from the start. It’s because I didn’t and I needed to find them and solve this problem for myself.”

In solving the problem, he first had to recognize that the skills he had been learning all along through music were actually quite valuable in finding career direction. Musical training had taught him to be passionate, to give attention to detail, to be a creative problem solver, and to explore multiple options in order to find answers. Other musicians can draw on similar skills as they build their businesses as independent teachers.

Cutler points to the stigma that exists in many music circles that indicates placing focus on earning money or marketing implies a lack of seriousness or willingness to “sacrifice for the art” of music. “If you thought about those things, you were selling your soul to the devil,” he says.

Times are changing, however, and while Cutler believes teachers genuinely want their students to find artistic as well as professional success, they may be much like his mentor in not having the resources to guide students in this way.

Therefore, much of *The Savvy Music Teacher* is dedicated to developing a long-term plan for success based on clearly defined goals and a vision for the future. This direction is designed to help musicians avoid the mistakes that



have become all too common among independent teachers.

Some of these mistakes—like undervaluing themselves, not having clear cancellation policies, not marketing in effective ways, and not keeping clear records—Cutler calls “easy fixes” since they can be addressed with minimal education or experience.

But there are larger-scale issues, crucial to lasting success, which are

just as likely to be ignored. "I think the biggest problem for most independent teachers is that when they start, there's no plan except 'Well, I'll just teach and pick up the students I can get,'" he says. "There's no business design."

He feels teachers need to consider themselves entrepreneurs who are starting new businesses. This involves thinking about what a mature business will look like, determining how much income needs to be generated to be sustaining, and deciding what is really being offered to students.

"I see a lot of music teachers' websites and they don't answer the question 'Why study with me?' Instead, they talk about the intrinsic value of music study . . . but it's like they can't think of one reason why people should study with them," he says.

Time management is another element—one familiar to musicians—that must be honestly assessed. While

private lessons may be a significant focus for many independent teachers, Cutler reminds us that this form of instruction is only one of the many revenue streams available. For instance, teaching group lessons or planning a summer camp can provide more income with fewer hours of teaching. This not only provides students opportunities to learn in ways that reach beyond the private studio, it also creates efficiency in scheduling that can help teachers avoid overextending their limited time and energy. "If music is valuable and you burn out and you don't offer that gift to the world, that, to me, is selling out," Cutler says. "Not thinking about business and doing this incredible art that you are put here to do, that is selling out yourself in the world."

For this reason, an ideal business model will look beyond potential income to include considering the kind of teaching schedule that will allow

outside responsibilities to be met. "Figure out what it looks like on the front end and then start building toward that, as opposed to just a free-for-all, which most teachers do," Cutler says.

Considering the troves of historical repertoire that are at the center of much of today's training, classical musicians tend to have at least one foot in the past. But Cutler feels that too much focus on bygone days can actually stifle creativity by keeping musicians from living in the present and looking to the future. Though it is important to honor the great traditions from which much music practice has emerged, he finds many teachers spend too much time "celebrating the genius of composers past and pedagogues past rather than celebrating the genius of students present."

This focus can naturally spill over into how they run their teaching studios. As Cutler observes, "Teachers who are

CELEBRATING 14 YEARS

SHENANDOAH CONSERVATORY'S CCM VOCAL PEDAGOGY INSTITUTE

Vocal Pedagogy for the 21st Century
July 16 – 24, 2016



Lisa Popeil



Dr. Wendy LeBorgne



Marci Rosenberg




Sheri Sanders

SESSION I: JULY 16 – 18
BASICS OF FUNCTIONAL TRAINING
Matthew Edwards with guests Wendy LeBorgne & Marci Rosenberg

SESSION II: JULY 19 – 21
APPLYING VOCAL FUNCTION & CORRECTING VOCAL FAULTS
Matthew Edwards, CCM faculty and special guest Sheri Sanders

SESSION III: JULY 22 – 24
POP/ROCK VOCAL STYLES
Master teacher Lisa Popeil

All courses offer graduate credit and cost \$390 until the May 15th deadline.



MORE INFORMATION & TO REGISTER:
540-665-4556
CCMINSTITUTE@SU.EDU
WWW.CCMINSTITUTE.COM



SHENANDOAH
UNIVERSITY
Shenandoah Conservatory

creative with their pedagogical model also tend to be creative with their business model.”

Of course, the emphasis of *The Savvy Music Teacher* is not solely on finances (although it outlines pathways to annual earnings of \$50,000 or \$100,000 or more). Chapter 1 is called “The Very, Very, *Very* Important Work of Savvy Music Teachers” and is just one of the many explorations of the value of music in modern culture and society. “Income and impact are both really important in this book,” he says, “[but] it’s not just about making more money. It’s about making more impact and changing the world.”

In working toward this end, he acknowledges that while most teachers can explain what they do (teach voice lessons) as well as how they do it (e.g., weekly lessons that follow a specific methodology), many teachers have difficulty articulating *why* they teach. “Why are you a music teacher in the first place?” he asks. “That should be the most important thing in driving your curriculum.”

Given that most music students will not become professional musicians, teachers must identify what it is they most want their students to learn through music and then craft a pedagogical routine that meets that vision. “Is it the great literature or is it a way of being in society or is it just loving the arts?” Cutler asks.

Book Review

Music degrees, whether focused on performance or education, have a strikingly varied curriculum. Classes are carefully chosen and specifically designed to best hone the skills necessary to become successful performers and teachers.

Among this barrage of courses, however, what is often lacking is a nuts-and-bolts guide to the business side of establishing a private teaching studio. Filling that gap is author David Cutler with his book *The Savvy Music Teacher: Blueprint for Maximizing Income & Impact*. Whether teaching is a full-time or part-time pursuit, Cutler provides the crucial missing links to building sustainable success in the studio.

From the first pages, he walks readers through the biggest questions independent teachers must ask, ranging from the philosophical (What are the learning objectives most important to your studio?) to the financial (How much can music teachers reasonably expect to earn?) to the practical (How will you advertise and recruit students?).

He also covers the nonmusical issues all small business owners must address, including health insurance options, avoiding debt, paying taxes, and building savings for retirement.

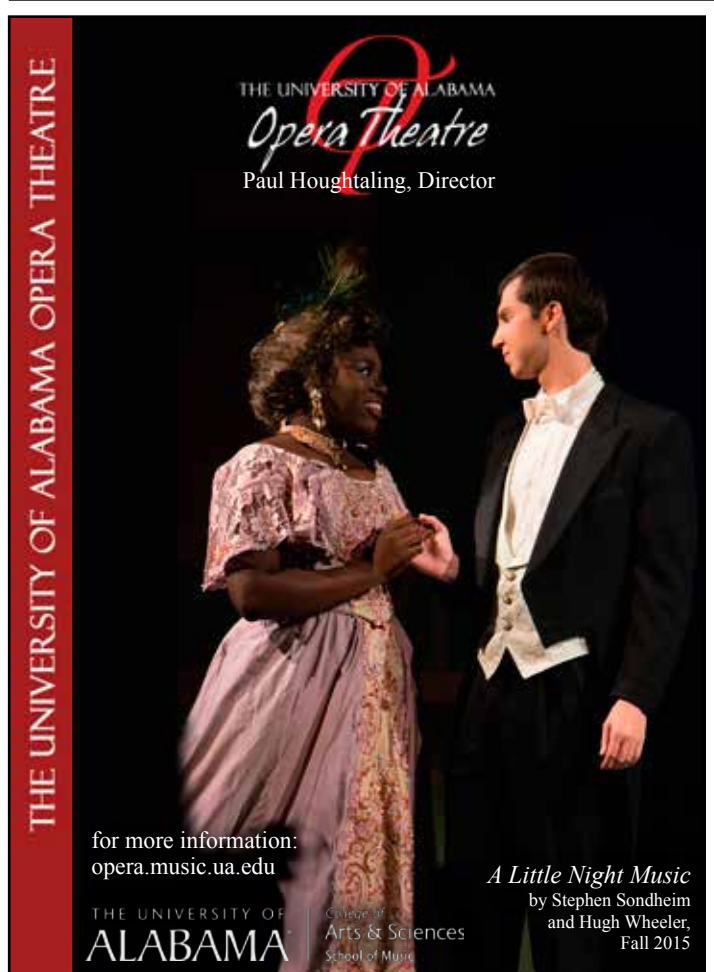
As a performer, composer, and educator himself, Cutler understands the tendency for schedules to be overwhelmed. Therefore, he helps readers define their own goals for quality of life and discusses how to set up a teaching schedule that honors those goals.

Though there are many checklists, worksheets, and calculations throughout the book, Cutler avoids giving the impression that this groundwork is overly formulaic. He demonstrates this by including dozens of “Lessons from the Trenches” and stories from other “Savvy Music Teachers” who found their own paths to success. Just as musicians must be creative in their performing and teaching, Cutler determines there is equal opportunity for creativity and individuality in establishing a unique business model.

While the book is intended for all music teachers (it is not specific to voice teachers), it is easy to filter through which elements are less applicable to voice. However, voice teachers stand to benefit from learning how instrumental studios function and may pick up ideas pertinent to their own work.

In *The Savvy Music Teacher*, David Cutler makes the case that, despite public perception, being a music teacher can be both fulfilling *and* lucrative. His all-encompassing guide can give musicians both the know-how and the confidence to pursue the important and necessary work of independent music teaching.

—Brian Manternach



David Cutler



to go,” he says. “It rarely does. But if you have a plan, at least you can go toward something.”

Ultimately, Cutler believes that the future is bright for music teachers—especially those who are prepared to meet the demands of an ever-changing musical landscape. “I’m very optimistic,” he says. “It’s a great time to be a musician and a music teacher; there’s so much need for what we do. In our troubled world, music has a certain kind of power that not a lot of other things do have—the power to affect the soul, the power to bring communities together—and there are opportunities [now] that simply never existed before. The impact a savvy musician or savvy music teacher can make is just unparalleled.”

Tenor Brian Manternach teaches voice at the University of Utah in the Musical Theatre Program. He holds degrees in vocal performance from Saint John’s University in Minnesota (BA), the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (MM), and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music (DM). He can be reached at bmantern@gmail.com. ©

Of course, he understands that all of this planning does not ensure that things will unfold accordingly. The process may take more time and effort than anticipated when laying out the initial steps. But, like financial investments, investing in a long-term vision from the beginning tends to pay large dividends as the years go by. “Life may not go exactly where you think it’s going



VOCAL ARTISTRY ART SONG FESTIVAL

To encourage the further study of Art Song Repertoire

2016 Canciones Españolas

April 22-24, 2016 at the Albuquerque Academy

This Festival is open to all singers living in the state of New Mexico

A weekend of concerts, master classes, & performances from New Mexico’s Art Song singers

Guest Faculty for the 2016 Festival

Featuring internationally celebrated Benita Valente

Conductor Guillermo Figueroa, *Pianist* Debra Ayers, André Garcia-Nuthmann, Carlos Archuleta, Christina Martos, Drea Pressley, John Carlo Pierce

Founder and Coordinator Jacqueline Zander-Wall



Application deadline April 1, 2016 Visit our website for complete schedule and application www.vocalartistryartsong.com