

A PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO SUCCESSFULLY WORKING WITH ANY PIANIST

While each pianist has their own unique style of operating, there are some general principals I have observed among the most successful performers to ensure that their working relationships with their pianists are always productive:

FOR THE PERFORMER TO DO BEFOREHAND:

- Keep a current list of pianists and their contact information in an easy-to-access place. Make time to maintain a working relationship with a few in your area in case a pianist you regularly play with is not available. This will greatly reduce the risk that you will ever be in a situation where you are scrambling to find one.
 - If you are still a student, you should always check with your primary instructor first before asking a pianist to play with you. Most teachers have already formed relationships with pianists they engage for their studios on a regular basis.
 - Keep high quality, clear resolution PDF scans of all piano parts from your current repertoire saved on your computer at all times. This way, you can readily email piano parts when contacting a pianist.
 - Be sure that the piano part you are providing to a pianist is the same edition as your own solo part. Mark any essential information (e.g.- tempo markings, breath marks, timings, unique cues, etc.) in the music ahead of time.
 - IMSLP and other websites that provide “free” editions of musical scores are not acceptable and are frequently full of publication errors. Always invest in a good-quality, authoritative musical edition (Henle, Barenreiter, Urtext, International Edition, etc.) so that you and the pianist have the opportunity to play your best.
 - Remember that when scanning or copying music for a pianist, double check to be sure that no lines of music or notes have been accidentally cut off in the copy. Pianists need to be able to clearly read both left and right hand lines, as well as the solo part along the top of the piano score. If any of these lines or notes are missing in the copy, then the score is incomplete and of no use to the pianist in playing with you.
 - If you are unable to provide the original hard copy of the score to the pianist and must give them a photocopy, it is best to format the copy to be double-sided and bound in an easy-open manner, like a book, or ready to be inserted into a three-ring binder. Do not give them a stack of loose, unbound photocopied music pages, and under no circumstances is it acceptable to give them copied music that is stapled together.
 - While it never hurts to ask the pianist if they already have a score of the piano part for the repertoire you are playing (most already do), expect by default to have to provide it for them.
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FOR THE PERFORMER TO PRACTICE ON THEIR OWN:

- Even when you are practicing your solo part alone without a pianist, be sure to practice counting all measures of rests and tutti sections just as thoroughly as your own solo part. This way, you will always know beyond a doubt where all of your entrances and cues are in relation to the piano/orchestra part.

(A good soloist must always know how to **anticipate** and prepare for their entrances, not **reacting** after the fact which may cause a late or missed entrance and disrupt the ensemble.)

- Commit a regular portion of your individual practice time studying directly from the piano part so that you know it just as well as your own. **A successful performer is always familiar with both the solo AND the piano parts BEFORE coming to the first rehearsal with the pianist.**

FOR THE PERFORMER TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN CONTACTING A PIANIST:

- When contacting a pianist for an upcoming project, please be sure to contact them within a reasonable amount of time before the first date that you will need them to play. A soloist would typically not be expected to have an entire piece performance ready with just a few days notice, so likewise, you should not expect the same of any pianist.

- Members of an ensemble can only succeed if they have an appropriate amount of rehearsals to prepare the repertoire to performance level. While most pianists have accompanied the standard repertoire numerous times or are capable of reading at sight, there is nothing worse than having a situation where one, or both members of an ensemble are unprepared.

- Many pianists maintain busy performance schedules and will likely be completely booked if you wait too long to be in touch with them. It is best to reach out and book them as soon as you know you will be in need of their services. Many of the students who work with me throughout the year start contacting and rehearsing with me as early as August for events they know they are preparing for in December or February, and even May of that academic year!

- While there are a variety of ways to contact the pianist (phone, email, text, social media, etc.) please check with them on their standard form of communication to ensure that your messages are always being received. This will allow them to respond to you promptly and avoid any miscommunications or misunderstandings.

- When contacting a collaborative pianist about a project, the general things you will always need to include in the initial correspondence for an effective commitment from them should be:

- 1.) Your name and instrument/voice type
- 2.) Your teacher's name (if applicable)
- 3.) The repertoire for which you require their collaborative services (composer, title, movements, etc.)
- 4.) The type of event for which you need them to play (lesson, recording, competition, etc.)
- 5.) The time, date, and location of your event

6.) Any additional relevant information or questions

An example of an effective initial correspondence email I received from a prospective performer once is included below:

“Dear Professor Dold,

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a violin student studying with Mrs. _____ in Pleasanton, CA.

I am currently in need of a pianist to play Mozart’s Violin Concerto no. 5 in A Major, movements II and III with me for the MTNA competition.

My audition time is scheduled for Saturday, September 26 at 9 AM taking place at the Braun Music Building on Stanford University’s campus.

Please let me know if you are available, and if so, when you might be available for a rehearsal during the week before the competition.

Thank you very much, _____”

- Whenever a performer’s initial email to the pianist is lacking important information, a back-and-forth of emailing results and may cause crucial pieces of information to get missed or confused. It is always best to include as much necessary information in your first email as appropriate.
- If you are booking a pianist to play with you for a competition that has multiple rounds or a winners’ concert, be sure to include those additional dates and times in your initial email that they would need to be available if you advance to the next event. Failure to do so may cause a situation in which you are scrambling to find a second pianist because your previous one made other commitments. Such ordeals can be avoided entirely with some proactive communication on the performer’s part.

FOR THE PERFORMER TO DO WHEN WORKING WITH A PIANIST

- Just as every pianist is unique and has their own musical understanding of the repertoire, so is each performer in the way they play; therefore, be sure that you are always communicating your wishes with the pianist in rehearsal so that you are always working towards the same goals.
- Some of the personal preferences all performers will need to communicate clearly with the pianist includes: tempo, timings, cues, and balances issues, just to name a few. The pianist is there to assist you and to be as supportive as possible, but they cannot do this unless you are communicating clearly.
- If you feel you may be inexperienced in working with a pianist, consider arranging to have your teacher present at your first rehearsal before scheduling individual rehearsal time with piano. If having your teacher present is not possible, a great alternative is recording a run-through of the repertoire at your rehearsal, and sending it to them for input and guidance.

(Note: Please be sure to **always ask** the pianist with whom you are working if you have their permission to record **before** doing so!)

- If a performer is still in the process of learning their solo part, or is still unfamiliar with the piano/orchestra part and how the music fits together, then they are **not yet prepared** to be rehearsing with piano. While many professional pianists are also skilled educators qualified to coach ensemble issues, it is **not** their responsibility to spend the limited rehearsal time teaching the performer how they could have been prepared.
- Please, always consult with your primary instructor on what you need to do **before** going to your first rehearsal with piano to be sure that the rehearsal time is used efficiently.

FOR THE PERFORMER TO DO AFTER WORKING WITH A PIANIST

- **Always thank the pianist after a performance/project.** With the amount of performances pianists regularly play throughout the year, they understand better than most musicians how incredibly difficult the entire process of performing truly is. Yet, every time they get on stage with you, they put their own personal reputation at stake in a commitment to supporting you. Regardless of how you as the performer may feel after a performance, a courteous “**thank you**” is always due to the pianist, without exception.
- Always be sure that you have paid the pianist the appropriate agreed-upon amount and at the agreed-upon time. Be sure to specify with them what forms of payment (cash, check, PayPal, etc.) they accept.
- As a general courtesy, follow up with your pianist after a project to share the results. There is nothing more inspiring for a pianist than when they hear great news from the performers with whom they worked, such as acceptance into a music program or school, or being a prize winner in a competition after they played for you.

In conclusion, it will always be worth it to take the little bit of time to get to know the pianist you hope to work with.

I guarantee that anyone who follows these guidelines will benefit from a very successful working relationship.

Happy collaborating,

Nicholas Dold

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