

Bios for Classical Performers

A “Bio” is an important marketing tool for musicians. Bios are used in booking performance opportunities, seeking publicity for performances, in building an artist’s reputation, and in creating interest and connections to audiences. A musician’s “bio” should NOT be her biography. If you simply give the reader dry facts that outline your life and career thus far, you will put the reader to sleep and this will not help your career! This handout gives you tips and methods for creating a winning Bio—one that presents you professionally and dynamically to readers—no matter what stage in your career you may be. Every musician has interesting material that can be fashioned into a distinctive and compelling bio appropriate to the occasion and audience. This handout shows how!

Basics:

- Your bio should present your most impressive credentials: venues where you’ve performed (the halls and their cities/states/countries), ensembles you’ve performed with, competitions, scholarships, or awards you have won, your range of repertoire, special projects, interesting hobbies, and where and with whom you have studied.
- Bios are written in the third person (use she/he, and Ms./Mr., not “I”).
- A bio is NOT a biography—it should NOT be a chronological record of your life. Do NOT start with “Jane Doe began her studies at age three . . .”
- Do NOT start with your educational credentials—save this for the end of the Bio.
- Stay away from “filler” and from your own sweeping superlatives — leave that up to the critics, and then quote them.
- For purposes of mailing and press kits, bios should be printed on your letterhead and double-spaced for ease of reading.

Concert series and festivals often ask musicians for their bios to use in printed programs and for publicity purposes. Bios in programs give the audience a chance to be impressed with you before you actually get on stage, and they give the audience an impression of you both as a person and as a professional musician. Bios are also routinely used in booking performances. Musicians and/or their managers send bios to club managers or “presenters” (people who organize concert series or festivals), to try to interest them in booking the musicians. Bios used for booking purposes are typically one page documents with letterhead at the top: the name of the soloist/ensemble, instrument(s), address, phone, email, and website address.

It’s typical for musicians to have more than one version of their bios—long and short, or one for promotional materials for booking performances and another for teaching. Keep in mind that publications and concert programs needing your bio information may have strict space requirements (they may request a one paragraph Bio of no more than 200 words, for instance). It’s helpful to have both a short and a long version of your bio to fit different situations, but you should tailor and update your Bio as needed for each opportunity. Keep in mind the intended reader for the particular version you are creating. What a general audience member might want to read in a program is going to be different from what a grant panel would want to see as part of an application, or what a concert or festival presenter would want to read in considering hiring you for a performance. To writing an effective Bio, you need to think about the intended reader(s). If you’re producing a Bio to get bookings, the presenter is going to want to know what repertoire and programming you offer and what relevant performance experience you have.

The main problem with most musicians' bios is that they are boring! They tend to read like laundry lists, with no indication that the musician is an actual person with interests, passions, and intriguing projects. The challenge in writing a bio is to convey what is individual and specific to the musician—what makes this musician tick. So, including interesting or unusual repertoire, hobbies, collaborative projects, and future plans, can mean the difference between a bio (and a musician) that is memorable, and one that is not. You need to create interest in the writing.

Your Bio in 6 Easy Steps

This is the method we recommend for writing a great Bio. Instead of plunging in on a first draft, we've found that using this step-wise method, in the end, will save you time and trouble, and will lead to a better Bio. It's worth the effort!

1. Start by making a 'meta' list of items you might include in your bio. It's good to keep track of all your career-related where you've given performances, repertoire, projects, and awards. If you haven't been keeping track, this will give you a reason to start. Keep this list saved on your computer so you can easily update it. Don't simply rely on your resume for this list, since your bio should include items and info that don't show up on most resumes. List venues (names of hall, city, state, country) where you've performed, names of ensembles you've performed with, names of well-known artists you've collaborated with, festivals, scholarships, recordings, range of repertoire, premiers of works, your teachers, coaches, upcoming projects, etc. Add interesting personal information, such as why and how you became an early music aficionado, where you were born, unusual hobbies, or an interesting quirk such as you began composing for accordion at age three. If you have good quotes from reviews, use them. You can also use quotes from letters of recommendation as long as you have permission from the person you are quoting. Don't worry about order, or writing sentences or paragraphs yet — just make your list as complete as possible.
2. Once you have a list of your most impressive accomplishments, events and personal information, take a stab at choosing the lead. Bios should grab the reader's attention with the first sentence! You may have one particular item that stands out as a good lead or you may end up with 2 or 3 items that make a great grouping (for instance a group of impressive venues where you've performed). Don't start with your educational credentials because the reader will assume that you don't have much professional experience. Instead, save all your educational listings (schools, degrees, teachers, coaches) for the end of your Bio (typically the last paragraph works well). In choosing your opening, think of your intended reader. If the bio you're working on is for booking solo recitals, then don't start with your orchestral experience.
3. After choosing your opening accomplishment, see what similar other items can be grouped together in following paragraphs (i.e. solo performances in one paragraph, chamber in another, upcoming projects in another, etc.)
4. Next, write a draft, dealing with one paragraph topic area at a time. For instance, if you have a grouping of contemporary music performances and premieres, work on a paragraph that concentrates on your commitment and interest in new music. As you write sentences and then paragraphs, alternate referring to yourself by your full name, by Ms. or Mr. So-and-So, and by She/He. Any general statement or description of you must be backed up by specifics, such as ". . . has won top prizes in major US competitions, including first prize in the ABC competition and second prize in the XYZ competition," or ". . . has performed recitals in New England and the Mid-West, on the ABC concert series in Cambridge, MA and the XYZ series in Chicago," or ". . . with a wide repertoire ranging from Monteverdi to Haydn, Schumann and Harbison." Without the specifics backing up your generalizations, you won't sound credible.

Make sure that the sentences in one paragraph are logically linked together and that transitions from one paragraph to the next are smooth. If the previous paragraph discussed solo experience, then the next might start, "Active as a collaborative artist as well, Ms. So-and-So has performed with the ABC quartet and the XYZ trio at the 123 festival in Quebec."

5. It can be useful to enlist the help of colleagues in writing your bio since people often feel self-conscious in speaking or writing about their own accomplishments — you may not (yet) be your own best spokesperson. Once you've completed a draft, make sure you proofread it carefully and then have your colleagues read it and give you constructive criticism. It is typical for musicians to write 3 or 4 drafts before "finalizing" a bio. Remember, you will be continually updating your bio as your career progresses, so your bio, as well as your repertoire list and résumé, are never finished documents — they're always in flux (so don't print up more than 5 at a time).
6. Proofread. Proofread again. Then show your bio to three other people and have them proofread and edit. Don't send something off and then find the mistakes after it's too late to change.

Useful phrases:

"Her recent recital [chamber music, orchestral, opera, etc.] performances include. . . "

"His 2004-05 season engagements include. . . "

"Ms. XYZ has appeared as a collaborative artist and chamber musician with renowned artists so-and-so and you-know-who."

"Her primary studies were with So-and-So at the New England Conservatory. She has also worked with. . . or coached with—"

". . . received his training at. . . " ". . . holds a Master's degree from. . . "

". . . currently on the faculty at. . . "

For gig marketing purposes: If you are using your bio to market an ensemble for gigs, weddings, etc. do not assume that all readers are familiar with the instrumentation of a brass or woodwind quintet or a piano trio. Also, your reader may assume that your repertoire and the general sound of the group is different from the reality, so describe the repertoire and the range of sounds your ensemble can deliver. See the Apollo Brass bio example.

As you read any bio, don't get hung up on comparisons. People always feel inadequate when writing a bio. Don't worry about what you have or haven't done at this point in your career! Rather, take what you have and tell it in an interesting compelling way. The goal is to get the reader motivated to listen to your demo, or to invite you to audition, or to want to meet you and hear your performance because your Bio sounds interesting!

As you read the sample bios enclosed or any others, instead of comparing your credentials to those that you read, ask yourself what stands out in this bio? Do you get a sense of what this person's musical interests and passions are? Notice how the bio is structured—is the lead compelling or not? Are the topics of paragraphs clear? What about the order of the information? Does it make sense?

Bio Samples are shown on the following pages, including bios for both individuals and groups.

Below is a fictitious bio we created in the office to demonstrate how specific details can make a bio and a musical personality memorable and compelling. This musician hasn't yet won a big competition or played Carnegie hall, but has found a way to make a distinct and memorable impression.

Philippa Marlowe, Lutenist

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Lutenist Philippa Marlowe's recent performances include recitals of solo and chamber repertoire at the First Church Congregational in Peabody, Mass., the Community Music Center of Boston, and the Concord New Hampshire Senior Center. Last season Ms. Marlowe performed on tour with the Concord, NH-based Peripatetic Early Music Consort in Arizona at the Phoenix Convention Center for the Western Early Music Festival. Ms. Marlowe is especially interested in reaching out to new audiences and plays regularly with several early music and contemporary groups that perform in alternative spaces. She has performed at a rodeo show, a botanical garden, a Sci-Fi convention, a supermarket opening, and at a sewage treatment facility.

Her repertoire includes both early music and contemporary works, from Dowland and Rameau to premieres of works by members of the Boston Composers Collective. She collaborates with the Boston Arabic Ensemble, a group that includes traditional and ancient instruments, and also with an electro-acoustic experimental group called Buzz Fiends.

A native of Nashua, New Hampshire, Ms. Marlowe won the New Hampshire Youth Music Award and has attended the Oberlin College and Indiana University early music summer institutes. Ms. Marlowe began her music studies on piano and violin, but at age 8 she switched to guitar and age 10 to lute. She says, "It was the pluck and strum that got me hooked."

She is completing an undergraduate degree in lute at New England Conservatory in Boston, where her teachers have included Robert Sullivan and Eliot Fisk, and her early music coaches have been Daniel Pinkham, Craig Smith, and John Gibbons.

Beyond her musical activities, Ms. Marlowe is a fly fishing enthusiast and a collector of antique vacuum cleaners.

Hsin-Bei Lee, Pianist

5 Centre St. #2 Jamaica Plain, MA 02130 (617) 555-1212 name@email.com

Hsin-Bei Lee, a native of Taiwan, has won top prizes at the Robert Casadesus International Piano Competition, the Leschetizky Competition, and the Morneault Competition. Of her 1993 New York debut at Carnegie Recital Hall, Harris Goldsmith described her in *New York Concert Review* as a “superbly equipped performer” with “already a strong statement of considerable musical stature.” She has appeared as a soloist with the Pacific Palisades Orchestra in Los Angeles and with the Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra.

Ms. Lee is also active as a chamber musician. She has performed piano chamber music at the Sarasota Festival, the Meadowmount School, and the Music Academy of the West. In conjunction with the Pacific Music Festival, Ms. Lee toured with a piano wind quintet in Japan, culminating in a concert at Casals Hall in Tokyo. In Sapporo, she performed with principals from the Vienna Philharmonic and Houston Symphony.

Ms. Lee holds Master’s degrees in Piano and Piano Accompanying from the Cleveland Institute of Music. Her teachers have included Paul Schenly, Anne Epperson, and Joanna Graudan. She is currently a graduate diploma candidate on full scholarship at the New England Conservatory in Boston where she studies accompaniment with Irma Vallecillo.

Mara Hazzard, Soprano

123 My Street #6 Our Fair City, MA 02115 (617) 555-1212 name@email.com

In the Boston area, soprano Mara Hazzard has appeared as a soloist with the New England Conservatory Chorus, the Boston University Women's Chorus, and the Boston University Collegium Musicum. Ms. Hazzard has also been featured on WCRB broadcasts as soloist and section leader with St. Paul's Cathedral choir. As a chorister, Mara Hazzard has performed with the Choir of Trinity Church, the Boston University Chamber Singers, and the New England Conservatory Chamber Singers. She has performed in Symphony Hall, Jordan Hall, the Tsai Performing Arts Center, and Marsh Chapel.

Pursuing a strong interest in early music, Ms. Hazzard studied and performed at the Austro-American Institute in Vienna in 1994. Based on her own manuscript research of composer Marianna Martines, a contemporary of Mozart, Mara Hazzard produced a modern printed edition of a Martines cantata. Ms. Hazzard performed the Martines cantata at Boston University the following year.

A native of Long Island, Mara Hazzard is currently pursuing a Master's degree at New England Conservatory in Boston, studying voice with Carole Haber. Ms. Hazzard received her Bachelor's degree in music from Boston University, graduating *summa cum laude* and with departmental honors in Voice.

Ms. Hazzard's upcoming projects include a solo recital at New England Conservatory, solo appearances with the New England Conservatory Extension Division Youth Chorale, and a tour of England with St. Paul's Cathedral Choir. The cathedral choir, with Mara Hazzard as a soloist, will be releasing a CD later this year.

Florin Croitoru, *Violinist*

1 My Street, Our Fair City, MA 02115 tel/fax (617) 555-1212 name@email.com

26 year old Romanian violinist Florin Croitoru, hailed as a “phenomenal soloist” with “perfect technique” in the Austrian papers after his debut with the Vienna Philharmonic and Christoph von Dohnanyi, has appeared in recitals and as soloist with orchestras in Europe, Japan, South Africa, and more recently in the US. Since the end of communism in Romania in 1989, Mr. Croitoru has been free to travel throughout Europe and abroad, winning prizes in ten international competitions, including first prize in the Fritz Kreisler competition in Vienna, and top prizes in the Varga and Paganini competitions.

Florin Croitoru’s playing has been described as “emanating a greatly cultured musicality,” in *Le Soir* Belgium, and as possessing an “absolute freedom and conviction,” in the *Pretoria News* of South Africa. In Italy, he was described as an “absolute master of the instrument, with a playing of rare intensity,” in *Il Secolo*, Italy. Mr. Croitoru’s repertoire ranges from standard concerti to cutting edge works by the Romanian composers Dumitru Capoianu, and Sergiu Sarchizov.

Mr. Croitoru has appeared as soloist with the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna Symphony (Austria), the Isada Chamber Orchestra and Chofu Philharmonic (Japan), the Genoa Symphony (Italy), Cape Town Symphony (S. Africa), Bucharest Philharmonic (Romania), and many other orchestras in his native country.

As a recitalist, Florin Croitoru has performed at the Chatelet Theatre (Paris), the Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), and on concert series in Italy, Hungary, Romania, Guam Island and the continental US. Florin Croitoru has made broadcast recordings for Austrian and Romanian radio and TV, and for an Austrian radio appearance, he performed on Fritz Kreisler’s favorite Guarnerius instrument.

Mr. Croitoru received diplomas from the prestigious Music Academy of Bucharest where he studied with Stefan Gheorghiu, a protégé of David Oistrakh. To further his career on this side of the Atlantic, Mr. Croitoru came to the US in 1994 to work with Professor Victor Danchenko, also a student of Oistrakh.

Florin Croitoru has taught masterclasses in the US at the Idyllwild Festival, CA and at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX, and abroad in Hamamatsu, Japan. When not touring, Florin Croitoru teaches and resides in Massachusetts.

Upcoming projects for the 1996-97 season include performances of the Prokofiev second violin concerto in Bucharest’s Radio House Concert Hall, a recital broadcast on WGBH Radio Boston, and a performance of the Brahms concerto with a new orchestra, of Valcea, Romania.

Apollo Brass

contact: Brian Kay 1 Main St. Anytown, MA 02116 (617) 555-1212 www.AolloBass.com

Apollo Brass first drew national media attention during the running of the 100th Boston Marathon, performing for the mid-race wedding of two runners. Boston-based Apollo Brass delights audiences with their rich, finely blended sound, and interpretations that range from warm and lyrical to festive and rousing. Apollo Brass was invited to play the Christmas and Easter services at Boston's historic Park Street Church and these performances were heard live by radio broadcast in Boston and New Hampshire.

Since its inception in 1995, Apollo Brass has quickly established itself as a top-flight ensemble. Their repertoire includes Renaissance and Baroque music of Gabrieli, Bach, and Handel, as well as ragtime, Stephen Foster favorites, and gospel arrangements. From its core quartet of two trumpets and two trombones, Apollo Brass can expand to perform as a quintet or larger ensemble. The group's players are graduates of New England Conservatory and Boston University, and are also in demand individually as freelance musicians. Members of the group serve as faculty at Boston Conservatory, South Shore Conservatory, and Indian Hill Arts.

Apollo Brass is available for concert presentations, master classes, lecture-demonstrations for K-12 audiences, as well as for weddings, holiday parties, special events and business functions. For further information and a demo tape, call Brian Kay at (617) 555-1212.

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