



Tips on Bio Writing

A bio is an important piece to have in your marketing toolkit—you will use it to book performance opportunities, seek publicity for concerts, build your reputation as an artist, and connect with audiences. While your bio should include information about your most notable performances and achievements, it can be more than a mere list of facts. The best bios generally provide a more holistic view of an artist's life, creative motivations, and passions, both on and off stage. Writing your own bio is challenging—everyone struggles to strike the right tone and balance of detail—but you are also in the best position to create a dynamic portrait of your music and personality as an artist. This handout will help guide you through the process of writing a professional bio, 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.

The 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, or your last name, etc.)
- It's best to organize your bio according to topic rather than chronology. For example, if you wish to demonstrate that you are a multi-faceted artist, comfortable in a wide range of genres, you might dedicate each paragraph to a different area of your music making.
- Educational credentials are generally listed at the very end of the bio.
- If you have any reviews from critics or recommendations from notable artists describing your music or a particular performance, quote them (in the case of recommendations, make sure to request permission from the person who wrote it before using it in a bio).

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 get to know you, both as a person and professional musician, before you actually get on stage. 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), or include it as part of an electronic press kit, to try to interest them in booking the musicians. If you have an artist website, this is a great asset to include, generally on a sub-page of the site, or for download as part of your electronic press kit.

It's typical for musicians to have more than one version of their bio—long and short, or one for booking performances and another for teaching. Keep in mind that publications and concert programs may have strict space requirements (they may request a one paragraph bio of no more than 200 words). It's helpful to have both a short and a long version of your bio to fit different situations, but you should ideally tailor and update your bio 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 will likely 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. 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. We recommend creating a "master document" that includes all the information you might possibly include in different versions of your bio. That way, when you need to fashion a new bio, you will have a large pool of language to draw from.

The challenge in writing a bio is to convey what is unique and special about you as a musician. You can consider including interesting or unusual repertoire, hobbies, collaborative projects, and future plans to make your bio stand out. You can also play with the formality of your language—while you may want a slightly more formal bio in your toolkit to supply for programs or to presenters, consider infusing a little more creativity and flare in the bio that you use for your website, of course, if you feel it would better represent your music, personality and/or specific project.

Your Bio in 6 Easy Steps

Instead of plunging in on a first draft, we've found that using this step-wise method can produce a tighter and more dynamic bio.

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 accomplishments: 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 may not necessarily show up on most resumes. List venues (name 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 accomplishments, performances 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. Generally speaking, it's best not to start with your educational credentials because it may give the reader the impression that you don't have much professional experience. Instead, save all your educational listings (schools, degrees, teachers, coaches) for the end of your bio. In choosing your opening, think of your intended reader. You should also lead with the information that will be most relevant to the intended audience—for example, if you the bio you're working on is for booking solo recitals, put your solo experience right up front.
 3. After choosing the information you want to lead with, 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 to and interest in new music. As you write sentences and then paragraphs, alternate referring to yourself by your full name, by last name, and by She/He. Any general statement or description of you should 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."
- 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, "Also active as a collaborative artist, Jan Doe 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 when speaking or writing about their own accomplishments. Once you've completed a draft, share it with fellow students, your teachers, and family members to collect their 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 resume, are never finished documents — they're always in flux.
 6. Proofread. Proofread again, and get one or two fresh pair of eyes to proofread it again!

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 been coached by”

“. . . 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. keep in mind that not all of your readers will be familiar with the instrumentation of a brass or woodwind quintet or a piano trio. Also, your reader may make assumptions about the repertoire you perform or the general sound of your ensemble/music, so try to deliver a clear picture of the repertoire and the range of styles your ensemble can deliver.

Getting Inspiration

Before you sit down to draft your bio, take an hour or more to read the bios of artists you admire, or musicians who are at a similar stage in their careers. Ask yourself what stands out in the bio? Do you get a sense of what the 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? What style of language or tone is conveyed—is it formal, informal, inviting, personal, quirky? This exercise is about getting a wide range of examples, approaches, and formats, not about comparing accomplishments. A long list of achievements doesn’t necessarily make an interesting bio. When you are perusing, think about which pieces of information, phrases, or descriptions leave an impression, and jot them down to help inform your writing. Below are a few examples to jumpstart your thinking:

Miki Sophia-Cloud, Member of A Far Cry

Always on an adventure, violinist Miki-Sophia Cloud indulges her musical wanderlust with an itinerary that is constantly challenging, varied, and fresh. As a soloist, she has appeared at the Kennedy Center and Boston Symphony Hall, the Salzburg Mozarteum, and on National Public Radio. Recent performances include Barber’s Violin Concerto under Maestro Peter Oundjian, Berio duets with Ani and Ida Kavafian at Lincoln Center, Bach’s Concerto for Two Violins with Curtis Macomber, and a debut at the 2009 Bang on a Can Marathon in New York City. Always a passionate chamber musician, Miki was recently appointed the new violinist for the North Country Chamber Players, the first appointment of the group’s “new generation” of members. Her drive to support talented young composers has led Miki to give frequent premieres and performances of new works, several of which have been written for her. Outside the purely classical realm, she also performs with the free jazz/art rock nonet “Your Bad Self” and is known to shed some bluegrass fiddle from time to time.

A graduate of Harvard College, where she earned a double degree in English Literature and Music, Miki was awarded the George Peabody Gardner fellowship upon graduation, which granted her the opportunity to study at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna with Philharmonic Concertmaster Rainer Küchl. Miki completed her master’s studies with Ani Kavafian at the Yale School of Music, where she won first prize in the Concerto Competition and served as a concertmaster of the Yale Philharmonia. She is currently a doctoral candidate under Miriam Fried at the New England Conservatory of Music. The lone crier residing in Cambridge, Miki happily tinkers in the kitchen whenever at home, feeding her gracious husband and friends all of her experiments.

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Michael Dahlberg, Cellist

Michael Dahlberg is an engaging performer and educator in the Boston area. After graduating from New England Conservatory in May, 2011 where he studied with Yeesun Kim of the Borromeo Quartet, he has explored music as a community-building tool, maintained a regular performance schedule and a private studio.

During the 2011/2012 season, Dahlberg became the cellist of the Boston Public Quartet, performing across New England. In addition to the role as a professional string quartet, the group is also a team of teaching artists and co-organizers of the non-profit musiConnects, providing the communities of Mattapan and Roslindale with access to holistic music instruction, forums for creative collaboration and free performances.

An active freelance cellist in Boston, Dahlberg plays regularly with the Boston Philharmonic and Discovery Ensemble. This summer will be his fourth at the Tanglewood Music Center where he was awarded the Karl Zeise Memorial Cello Award (2009) and featured in contemporary chamber works as a New Fromm Player (2011/12).

Recent projects emphasize the layered nature of Dahlberg's early career. These range from collaborations with composers such as Oliver Knussen, Charles Wuorinen and John Zorn to shows with the Mark Morris Dance Group and the Laura Grill Band. He has held leading positions as Mentor in the inaugural class of Arts Leaders at From the Top's "Center for the Development of Arts Leaders," faculty at the Community Music Center of Boston and guest teaching artist for the 7th annual Panama Jazz Festival. With the aid of an entrepreneurial grant from New England Conservatory in the spring of 2011, Dahlberg founded the "LilyPad Quartet" project, which aimed to refocus classical music performance on the relationship between artist and audience as people.

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Laura Grill Band

It's jump jazz, it's barroom rock, it's chamber folk, and it's downright infectious." *Boston Globe*

"There's a moment or two on Never Before that make Norah Jones look crude and belligerent by comparison." *Weekly Dig*

Born and raised outside of Chicago, Laura grew up with an appetite for picking up instruments...and the inability to put them down. In seemingly no time this translated to a personal investment in the study and creation of new music. Laura traded the heartland for the coast and moved to Boston in 2008. In the company of Crooked Still, Joy Kills Sorrow and Sarah Jarosz, Grill found her voice at the New England Conservatory.

Amongst the crowd of conservatory musicians Laura assembled her eclectic band of Tucker Antell (Clarinet, Flute, Saxophone), Matt Consul (Viola, Violin, Mandolin) and Brad Barrett (Bass, Cello).

Although clearly infused with jazz and classical sensibilities the Laura Grill Band sound is undeniably folk. Reflective lyrics are combined with tastes of chamber music, improvisation and four part harmonies to create a sound that is uncatalogued. "Never Before," the debut album from the Laura Grill Band, was released to much acclaim on June 23rd. The collection of intimate songs was recorded one-hundred percent live in a picturesque snowy cabin in New Hampshire.