



Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen

Advising Students About Pursuing Careers As Professional Cellists

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• Jeffrey Solow

At first glance, pursuing a life as a cellist seems to be a wonderful thing. Who can resist the vision of actually earning a living through daily contact with a beautiful product of human hands that enables one to have intimate association with some of the noblest creations of great minds - and then to pass this experience on to others, thereby enriching their lives? Why is it, then, that when I was newly married and introduced my wife to other professional musicians, when they would ask if she, too, was a musician and she responded in the negative, they would invariably comment, 'Good!?

It seems that in most professions, competition and struggle are taken for granted, but somehow in 'art' (and perhaps in science, as well) it is expected that human nature will be suspended. Art's practitioners should float serenely through life as they engage in their holy quest for Truth, their competition being only with themselves and their struggle involving only the mastery of their chosen medium. I've heard so many students say, 'I'm not ambitious about a career - I'd just like to have a teaching position somewhere and be able to play a few chamber music concerts,' or 'I don't have any ambition as a soloist. I'd just like to be a member of an orchestra.' Yet if two people desire to fill the same niche and there is room for only one person, competition results - head-to-head competition with a winner and a loser (with orchestral positions these days, more likely one winner and hundreds of losers!). For a professional musician, losing may involve not only feelings of rejection and self-doubt, but also the practical considerations of food, clothing, and shelter. In the insulated and sheltered world of most students, competition and its results can certainly involve the emotions, but it rarely directly impacts their ability to sustain everyday existence.

Even though the economic challenges of today's world are readily apparent, it seems to me that many music students still maintain much of the idealism that my generation did when we were students. Also, for most students the university is their first experience of living without direct parental supervision. This freedom is heady wine that can substitute for many creature comforts. It usually takes years to discover that cramped, maybe shared, noisy, perhaps dingy Bohemian apartment living gets old and ceases to be fun. Often, it is only when

this realization occurs that the clash between artistic idealism and material needs becomes apparent. And if this clash happens far enough into life that it seems too late to consider changing careers, another (and all too common) disappointed and embittered musician can result.

As a professor of cello at a major university, almost all of the students I teach are aiming toward professional careers in music. Among the myriad duties and responsibilities involved in my job, one of the most difficult can be advising students about their future in the profession. While I certainly don't mean to inflate the power of my opinions and judgments, I am acutely aware that my advice, evaluations, and pronouncements may influence someone's entire life.

It can be very difficult to assess a student's ultimate potential. One student may possess latent talent so completely obscured by bad habits that their talent is barely perceptible, but a new approach can allow it to come bursting forth, producing surprising progress and achievement. Another student, though apparently similar, will be dogged by one problem after another; there does not seem to be a key that unlocks the door to their understanding of how cello playing is supposed to work and feel - it is a continuous uphill struggle.

I am also aware of the potential negative effects of a self-fulfilling prophecy. I have had students of limited talent who so intensely craved to be successful professionals that they made it happen despite seemingly insurmountable hurdles. If they had been discouraged by predictions of failure and disappointment made by someone they respected and believed, they might never have succeeded.

For all these reasons, I concluded that devising a self test for students to confront realities that they might not have explicitly considered could be useful, at the same time minimising the negative influence of my reservations.

My test has two parts. Part I is meant to be done mentally (although it could be done on paper). When correlating Column A with Column B, consider such things as these: if you hate to travel, playing in a concertising chamber ensemble or touring as a soloist would probably not be good goals toward which to aspire; if you love to live in the country, you should probably rule out playing in a major

symphony orchestra or freelancing (unless you don't mind lots of driving or live near a train); if you crave the excitement and variety of life in a major city, then teaching in a small college town or playing in a regional orchestra might not make you happy.

Part II is a written essay. If you are doing this test on your own, just writing down your thoughts should clarify them in a way that could be very beneficial. It would be even better to share your essay with your teacher and/or with other musicians whose judgment you respect and who know you and care enough to give you an honest opinion.

Here is another thought to consider: you don't have to earn your living through your cello to think of yourself as a musician or to get pleasure from playing. In England, traditionally, the word 'amateur' denotes a person who does something for the love of it, not for the money. Some of the happiest musicians I know make their living in another field (and a much better living than they would have made from music!) and play only for pleasure (though sometimes for profit, as well). It is also worth remembering that one doesn't have to matriculate in a music program to continue studying and improving.

After all of this soul searching, if you still feel that music is your calling, give it all you've got. With perseverance, patience, and a certain amount of luck, you could have a thrilling and rewarding life ahead of you.

Self-Test: Thinking About Your Future As A Professional Cellist

PART I: Two-Column Exercise

Picture your life as you see it about fifteen years in the future and answer the questions below as best you can. Can you find a reasonable correlation between the more material aspects of life (Column A) and the professional goals you hope to achieve (Column B)? Do you have a sense of the demands, duties, remuneration (including health and retirement benefits or lack thereof), and competition (both entry-level and ongoing) involved in these different fields? How do you know?

A. How do you see your future lifestyle?

- Where do you want to live geographically? (What part of the country or even what country?)
- Do you prefer to live in an apartment or a house? Would you rather rent or own?
- Would you prefer to live in a large city, a small town, or a non-city?
- Family? (married or single, one or two incomes, children?)
- How important to you are fine clothes, restaurants, food, wine or spirits?
- Do you like (or dislike) to travel?
- How about cars? (none, more than one, economy or luxury?)
- Recreation and entertainment? (vehicles, planes, or boats; electronic “toys”; travel; sport; theater, movies, opera, etc.)
- Instruments and bows? (Would you be satisfied with a modern cello or perhaps a French or English cello, or do you want to own a great Italian cello? Are you aware of current market prices?)
- Do you like to set your own schedule or do you prefer (or mind) an externally structured one?

B. Optimistically but realistically, how can you earn a living playing the cello?

- Teaching: private studio (beginning or advanced students?); institution (large university, small college, conservatory); group teaching
- Chamber music: permanent ensemble (duo, trio, quartet); pick-up or occasional groups; traditional concerts or weddings/events, etc.
- Soloist: major international touring, self-managed concerts; concertos or recitals
- Orchestra: major symphony (principal, section member, on-call sub), regional or smaller orchestra, opera, ballet
- Freelance: pick-up orchestras, ballet, opera, theatrical shows; commercial recording (TV and movie scores, session player, jingles, etc.)
- Non-classical: improvisational, jazz, rock, ensemble, solo, electronic media, composer, arranger, etc.
- Other ideas? Perhaps a combination of fields?

of music? (Why have you continued to play?)

- What are your cellistic strengths?
- What are your cellistic weaknesses?
- How do you rate yourself in comparison with your peers, both nationwide and worldwide, and how do you make this assessment? (What is your potential in your desired job market?)
- Do you have an ultimate goal as a cellist? Why do you think that you can achieve it?

Jeffrey Solow writes: *the first version of this article appeared in the ASTA journal American String Teacher (Vol. 39, No. 4, 1989) soon after I began teaching at Temple University in Philadelphia. Although the questions I posed are as relevant today as they were then, many aspects of life, musical and otherwise, have changed and I have updated it accordingly. This revised version is printed here with kind permission from ASTA.*

Jeffrey Solow is Professor of Cello at Boyer College of Music and Dance, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and is a Past President of the American String Teachers Association and The Violoncello Society of New York. He is an active performer with wide-ranging interests in cello repertoire.



PART II: Essay

Please address these questions

- How did you start playing the cello?
- What do you get out of playing the cello and out

Of Special Interest

Cello Epiphanies

Searching for Inspiration and New Lyricism at the Turn of a Year

• *David Lewiston Sharpe*

Just as I was making final corrections to my new Sonatina for cello and piano, I learned fortuitously that Germany had voted the cello Instrument of the Year 2018. The idea is that local authorities country-wide use the vote to animate pursuit of instruments that are – perhaps for inexplicable reasons – falling out of favour among people taking up and learning to play music. In 2017 it was the turn of the oboe.

Both oboe and cello are ‘vocal’ instruments, and Steven Isserlis has written of the cello that it is ‘the most human of instruments’. It is fitting perhaps that I turned to the cello following my commission to write a choral anthem for Her Majesty’s Chapel Royal; I have been thinking of the voice a great deal for the work they asked me to write to mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther and the Reformation.

Reflecting its status as Instrument of the Year, I’m pleased my new cello piece is being programmed for 2019 by the Almati Duo (cellist Dmitrij Gornowskij, pianist Amir Tebenikhin) in Germany; Dmitrij will also be performing my sonata for unaccompanied cello and violin in May this year, with violinist Hayley Bullock. Additionally, Julian Lloyd Webber is very kindly spreading the word about the piece at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

At the end of 2017 I had just completed a new string quartet, a two-movement work exploring themes of time and universal mysteries of space and scale, called *The Sand Reckoner*. Ideas for this work proved more expansive than the quartet had called for, drawing as it does on Archimedes’ thought experiment about how many grains of sand it would take to fill the universe.

Notions of pulse, and cycles, along with transitions and transience occupy the background to the quartet and subsequently, and to a degree consequently, my more recent Sonatina for cello. That, and a perennial preoccupation of mine: ‘how it feels to remember’.

None of this is very far removed from my aims in another chamber work for strings, a violin sonata written in 2016. Titled with a quotation from the Roman historian Pliny the Elder, *Beautiful Are The Drinking Doves* is a meditation on an ancient mosaic that depicts two doves drinking at a bronze bowl; the much-copied image belies the disappearance of the original painting, whose loss in the mists of time speaks as much for the intangibility of remote eras as it does for the dove of peace, which seems to represent an a priori ideal always out of reach – a little like the mystery of music itself.

Ritual reveries

Some of the ideas behind the Sonatina are tied to the fact that as I was writing it, the end of the year was approaching. There is something reflective and indeed melancholy about the weeks following Christmas. Perhaps it is a feeling which holds at its core the rhythms of expectation. No doubt our sense of this is coloured by cultural associations and deeply engrained stories that we learn early on. The particular expressivity of the cello is ideal for this deep seriousness.

The Wise Men have their part in the calendar of Christmas and the arrival of the New Year, around the feast of the Epiphany. The star of Bethlehem and the expectant journey of the Magi constitute an important element of this account. It is again fortuitously that at that point, 5th January, I completed the middle movement of my Sonatina, an Intermezzo that I’ve dubbed ‘Epiphany’.

When I started to think about this piece, it quickly became obvious that no other instrument would carry the same depth of expression or bitter-sweetness which the poetry of the ideas needed, and which the cello possesses in huge measure. The piece favours the tenor, perhaps even the ‘mezzo’, range of the instrument, which of course has greater potential for its more yearning quality;

Isserlis writes further that ‘one’s relationship to [the cello] is somehow similar to a singer’s with his or her voice’. The physical embrace of the instrument he alludes to makes of it a projection the performer can almost wear as a dramatic mask that incarnates and characterises the message of the music.

I would emphasise the Sonatina is, as described in my composer’s note, a ‘sequence of songs without words’ and not really a religious work. The Intermezzo is the heart of the piece, not simply because it is the middle one of the three movements. Cello harmonics rise to where the piano arguably aspires to musical evocation of the star of Bethlehem; I like to consider those repeated shifting chords at that particular point as being suggestive of a constellation, perhaps even a star cluster, or a galaxy.

Tensions of form and technique

The main intention overall has been to fashion a transparent form across the three movements that is engaging while at the same time allowing for the solo line to be given space for development and interpretative potential.

An authentic approach to characteristic techniques was a significant aim in the last movement of the piece, and I presented the Sonatina to various cellists who I was very pleased to say have been gratifyingly convinced of the results of my efforts.

I had a Sonata by Telemann for unaccompanied viola da gamba at the back of my mind, for the last movement’s technical concerns – rather than Bach. Also, studies by the 19th-century French and German cellist-composers Auguste Franchomme and Friedrich Grützmacher. These proved useful thinking around issues of virtuosity in the ‘cadenza’-type sections that appear a couple of times against a floating, layered, soft, chordal piano accompaniment.

The first movement is the most classically sonatina-like of the three, from a structural point of view. It constitutes a straightforward presentation of two melodies that repeat, in different keys, with the addition of a lingering codetta. This ends with the cello pointing forwards with a held note, while the piano evasively digresses through a series of

migratory harmonies. The cello soloist is also more clear of where we have got to, I believe, when we arrive at the very end of the whole piece and the last cello chord.

David Lewiston Sharpe is a composer and writer, and trained at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, King’s College London and the Royal Academy of Music. His works include the Piano Concerto premiered by the RPO and Nicholas Cleobury, choral music for Her Majesty’s Chapel Royal, and at Chichester Cathedral, song cycles, and chamber music.

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In Memoriam

Roger Lewis (14th April 1945 - 9th October 2018)

The London Cello Society deeply regrets the passing of Roger Lewis, one of the early members of our board who assisted us with the Bernard Greenhouse film production and made it possible for the films to be distributed worldwide.

Roger, a solicitor by profession and long-time resident of North London, was also an amateur cellist and great music lover. We treasured his participation in and support of our activities and will miss him dearly.

Being a Cello Dynamo

• *Joely Koos*



Picture this: a cool calm juggler enters a circle of poles and starts spinning plates. With extraordinary focus and almost an extra sensory level of awareness, she ensures that one by one each plate spins with dynamism, and any plate that slows and wobbles is immediately attended to. Gasp! Once or twice some plates teeter precariously: she gets to them just in time. And every moment, when the rhythm and the momentum allow, the juggler throws yet another plate onto a new pole.

This is the ideal 'me' as a cello teacher! Although it is the student who metaphorically spins plates, as the teacher I take the overview and the plates represent the multifarious aspects of cello playing. My job is to inform, enable, encourage, take a bigger more holistic perspective, and try to keep everything in balance; you could say I was the plate spinner's mentor, as it were.

Whilst I strive to be the perfect mentor the reality is

that plates wobble and sometimes fall off, smashing to pieces; I am only human!

I am fascinated by the potential of the mentor's interaction with each individual student. The thrill of the progress made by a student, both as player and as human being, the 'geekiness' I can indulge in with cello technique, and the sharing of the love of music, make this a job I enjoy with a passion. For my own gain, the perspective of a focused calm plate-spinner is one I strive for as a performer and it is primarily teaching that has helped me to come closer to this goal.

At Trinity Laban Conservatoire I have a cello class of six students (18 -24yrs) where I combine weekly 1:1 teaching with twice-monthly group classes focusing on varied aspects of playing. These classes create an opportunity for students to observe and help each other in a safe supporting environment as well as a target for their practice. I note that this healthy sense of cooperation and support then extends beyond the classes.

This framework helps me to tackle the many aspects of teaching, from which the following come to mind as key:-

• **Structure /Flexibility**

It is important for me to balance a clear firm structure of teaching with a flexibility to adapt to each student and to adjust for the vagaries of each student's life. Some learning challenges presented by students have affected my practice, for example dyslexia, where we work more in patterns, or autism, where I am required to make my points more succinctly and clearly.

• **Competition/Co-operation**

Being able to take pleasure and truly appreciate how one of your colleagues performs can be a problematic area. In a competitive world there are issues of defensiveness and envy, but these matters are at odds with learning constructively and making music.

Music is a form of communication which by its very definition requires more than one person in its



involvement. As musicians we are not alone – we are all bees tending to the same hive - and it is the music that counts, that nourishes us.

In appreciating the good in others' playing we can positively feed back into how we play and into our philosophy of making music. We can learn to become open, generous, caring, listening musicians who enjoy being mentored by, as well as influencing, others.

• Your unique voice.

A student who has found and can take a pride in their individual voice can listen and enjoy the voices of others. So, I encourage students to find their sound, to question and take responsibility for their decisions, to be an independent thinker who can be flexible with their ideas.

I suspect I was a 'marmite' pupil. I loathed being dictated to and was a complete pain in the derrière for any teacher who I felt had the whiff of 'guru' about them. I was drawn to those who allowed me my questioning voice. I teach in this way and so it may be that my style is not right for everyone... perhaps a little daunting? I expect my students to question, to initiate and to discover.

• Know yourself.

I ask each student to consider this issue. How do you work best? How does your brain operate so

that you can process and practise more effectively? What are sensible targets for you and how will you create opportunities to attain them? How do you function under stress? How do you come across as a performer? How much more could you be creative?

Oh dear, this is all getting far too earnest. I have forgotten to emphasise the most important bit - all of this might lead to a few broken plates but when done positively it is a joyous task, a life-enhancer and fun!

Therefore, it is inevitable that I have been cooking up a plan to do this more intensively. I am very excited to say that I have joined forces with excellent colleagues Alexander Baillie, Michal Kaznowski and David Burrowes to bring our shared ideals of teaching into an immersive inspiring dynamic environment. We have set up a new summer cello course 'CELLO DYNAMO' for 14yrs – post graduate +, and teamed up with Annelies Scott who runs 'CELLO DYNAMITES' – a sister course for younger cellists (8-13yrs) where we will assist in teaching.

What with ever more stringent child protection and GDPR rules, as well as the insecurity of Brexit, are we mad? Yes! We are absolutely NUTS about teaching in this way.

This is our website: <https://cellodynamo.co.uk/>
Come on! Join us this summer!

From our Members

• From Ros Kane

I'm really enjoying playing the cello in the Hackney Community Orchestra. We meet on Thursdays at 6.30pm, conducted by amiable Chris Harrison. One of the many things I like is the variety of instruments. Any are catered for: drums, saxophones, you name it, as well as all the strings including four or five cellists. No auditions, everyone's made welcome. The repertoire is international, with an interesting mixture of pieces, well-known and lesser known. We give end of term concerts in the library and hope to branch out: for instance, playing in old people's homes. I loved going to the Oxford Cello School summer course where it's all cellos and I like my orchestra too. Makes me think it's good to try out as many ways to play the cello as we can fit into one lifetime!

• From Olivia Kilmartin

I took up the cello in my late fifties after starting to learn at school aged about 14 and giving it up 5 years later in 1975. I'm now 65 and passed Grade 8 with distinction about three years ago. Never thought I'd do it. I had never got beyond Grade 5 before. Just goes to show it's never too late! I think my cello teacher was more chuffed than I was! I was inspired by my son who was whizzing through all the grades on his clarinet. Nothing like a bit of competition to spur you on!

Once I got to Grade 8 I was approached by an opera singer, neighbour and friend who asked me if I'd like to play one of the parts in the Villa Lobos Bachianas Brasileiras No.5. I ended up booking all the cellists and a conductor and paying for it! We put it on, along with No.1 and a local chamber group who filled up the rest of the evening, for free with my financial backing at the local church. It was a huge success and attracted a lot of people who don't normally go to concerts. We played an arrangement of The Swan as an encore - it was great fun and I got most of my money back in donations and selling refreshments. It was SO thrilling to play alongside professionals who were very kind to me (maybe it was just because I was paying them!). It was a real community event. We are planning to do it again in the autumn, this time as part of the Hackney Proms. For that concert I had the idea of commissioning a companion piece to the Villa Lobos. This is only an idea at the moment. I would need to find funding.

• From Peter Ball

OCTOCELLI DAY

I arranged for eight of us, members of two cello ensembles I play with, to meet in my house under the tutelage of the inspiring Gill Walshaw for a day of fun. We improvised, played canons, sight read a range of pieces. The highlight of the day was playing The Octopus Waltz, an exciting story of a battle between an octopus and a shark composed by Thomas Hewitt Jones for 8 cellos. The climax of that was a variety of glissandos from various starting points from high D to open C. Good fun and lunch enjoyed by all. Playing at home is always more rewarding than going to a hall. More like chamber music used to be.

• From Jonathan Hunt

A forgotten work? Villa-Lobos: Fantasia Concertante for an Orchestra of Violoncellos

Among my treasured LPs is an Everest disc containing Heitor Villa-Lobos's Fantasia Concertante for an Orchestra of Violoncellos, with some Bach preludes and fugues arranged by Villa-Lobos for cello orchestra. The Fantasia, one of Villa-Lobos last compositions (he died in 1959), was written at the request of Bernard Greenhouse. The premiere took place in Town Hall, New York in December 1958 and was recorded shortly afterwards. The sleeve lists the names of the 32 members of New York's Violoncello Society who performed the music, conducted by the composer. As well as Greenhouse himself, it includes such other eminent names as Claus Adam, Madeleine Foley, Janos Scholz, Harvey Shapiro, Alan Shulman and Luigi Silva. Why, I have wondered for years, has this work never been re-recorded? Has it indeed, ever been performed again? It seems extraordinary, given the popularity of Villa-Lobos's Bachianas Brasileiras Nos. 1 and 5 and the greatly increased popularity of the cello in recent years.

I currently have a copy of the score 'on perusal' and would welcome any information or opinions.

draketalbot52@gmail.com

• From Jill Newton

For Sale: Full size Stentor II cello outfit. Excellent condition. Set up by Caswell's with Jargar strings. Spare set of new Jargar strings. £450. Contact Ines Day ines@goldwell.org.uk

*The London Cello Society thanks our member
Kathy Weston for her expert assistance with our
newsletter preparation.*