



More Than MIDI: Working with Live Musicians as an Indie

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Ryan Ike

**FROG 2**
FRACTIONS

Jacob Pernel

CLOSE CASTLES



PRESS ANY BUTTON



SNOW HORSE





What We're Covering





What We're Covering

Convince Yourself

- You can afford it
- You can build a network of high calibre talent
- It does make a difference

Convince Your Client

- How to pitch to a developer
- How to account for live player budget
- Seamlessly including performers into production pipeline

Pay and Get Paid

- Common rates for musicians
- Alternative methods of payment
- Finding the right people for your budget

Perfect Harmony

- How to effectively give feedback
- Leaving room for your players to help your score shine
- Better Communication = Better Score





Convince Yourself





CONVINCE YOURSELF | Faux Sound vs. Pro Sound

- Sample Libraries can be great, but they only go so far
- Not every project needs live performers, but when you do...
- Even a single live performer can bring your game score to life!
- (This talk focused on smaller ensembles/solo performers)



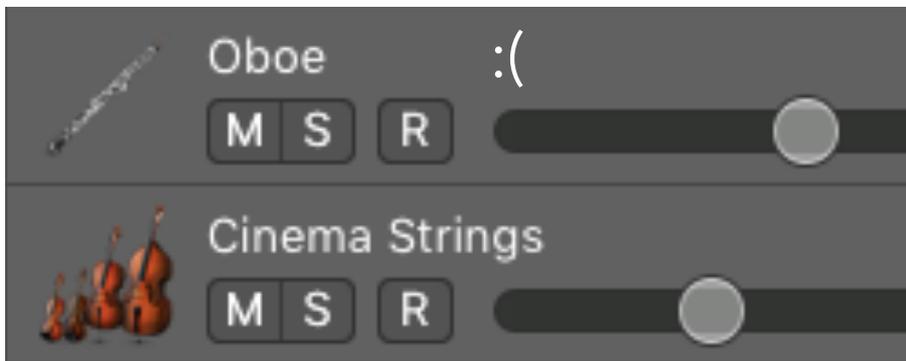


WTWTLW - Before



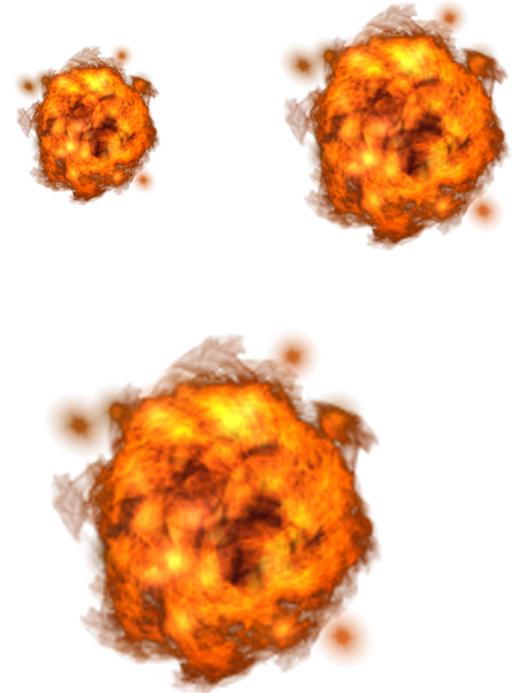


WTWTLW - After



Kristin - Before





Kristin - After





CONVINCE YOURSELF | \$£€

- Working with live players is financially feasible
- Using your indie budget creatively for maximum impact
- Skilled performers do cost money, but save you time





CONVINCE YOURSELF | Where to Find Players?

- Conventions!
- Concerts
- Universities
- School/Community Orchestras
 - GME, Berklee, The Summoner's Orchestra, etc.
- Social Media
- YouTube/SoundCloud
- Word-of-Mouth
- Materia Collective





CONVINCE YOURSELF | Managing Performers

- Know your performers' schedules
- Space for recording
- You are the middle-person between them and developers





CONVINCE YOURSELF | Working with Performers

- What do they need? (MIDI, audio, sheet music?)
- How do they want to be paid?
- Give a breakdown of the current project, such as:
 - Key
 - BPM
 - File format and where to send it (48/24 .wav; Dropbox, GDrive, etc.)
 - Notes from the developer on what they're looking for
 - Composer notes: narrative/emotional background about piece
 - Expressive details and any other special instructions
 - An idea of if/when they can expect feedback
 - Deadline

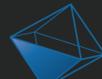


Joshua Du Chene

Guitar/Vocal Performer, Composer (Ashes of Eden)

“Emphasize [what it is that a live performer is going to bring to the piece that you'd otherwise be missing] when you explain what you want from your performer - this will give the performer a better idea of what they should convey with their performance, and it will help assure you get that extra thing you're looking for.”





John Robert Matz

Horn Performer, Composer (Fossil Echo)

“Sometimes a bit of singing in a voice memo is worth a thousand words, or a minute on Skype outweighs half a dozen descriptive emails.”





CONVINCE YOURSELF | Bringing the score to life

- Many composers worry bringing new creative minds into their work will cause their own creative voice to be overshadowed
- Don't be a rigid musical gatekeeper
- Scoring a game and creating the soundtrack can end up being way bigger than yourself. Bringing in live performers can help breathe more life into the soundtrack, and can help people connect with it.
 - Can be community building (behind-the-scenes photos/videos of recording session, preview of score)





Michaela Nachtigall

Violinist, Otomatonist, Composer

“Working with a performer not only gives the composer more insight on how the performer's instrument works and (actually) sounds, **but it also allows the composer to learn and grow with the performer to better understand each other as fellow musicians.**”





Convince Your Client





CONVINCE YOUR CLIENT | How to Pitch

- Show examples of previous work
- Make them a custom demo with live players
- Have as much info about your performers on hand as possible
 - What they cost
 - How fast they work
 - What their talents/strengths are
- Be prepared the the client still might not be convinced





CONVINCE YOUR CLIENT | Have a Plan

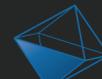
- Approach your client with a detailed outline of how live performers can fit into development, including:
 - How/when musicians can expect to be paid
 - How many performers you plan to use
 - What parts of the score you plan to write for live players
- Prioritize! What parts of the score benefit most from live instruments?
 - Most emotionally/narratively important tracks and most frequent





Pay and Get Paid





PAY AND GET PAID | Alternative Methods of Payment

- Pay your performers!
- There are many ways to work with a live musician
- Come to mutual (contractual) agreement
- Alternative compensation:
 - Percentage of album sales/revenue
 - Skill Trade
 - Home Baked Pumpkin Spiced Muffins
- Don't exploit players!





PAY AND GET PAID | Finding the Right Performer

- Be your own resource: the more you can do yourself, the more options you have in hiring professionals
- Hiring one talented multi-instrumentalist can be much cheaper than hiring different people for a suite of instruments
- Many performers are willing to be flexible if there's clear communication up-front
- If a performer is being accommodating for you, return the favor.



Jessica Curry

Composer (Everybody's Gone to the Rapture)

"I [told my booking agent] that I am quite shy and this this was the biggest score that I'd written to date and so would love to have nice players who would be patient and kind. This really paid off and it was a beautiful and very gentle session. **So always take the time to communicate your ideas, invest people in your project, speak with passion and then let them do what they're good at.**"





Perfect Harmony





Kristin Naigus

Beastmaster, Oboe Sorceress (Abzû)

“It’s nice for me to know not only the deadlines and how lenient the schedule is (aka where do I put this project into my own schedule), but what kind of feedback to expect and when. Will I hear back if the recordings are satisfactory? Will I only hear back if something needs to be fixed?

Feedback helps me help you to make your music sound its best!”





PERFECT HARMONY | Communicating Effectively

- Be clear and open with performers about what you want stylistically
- Use audio examples
- Use jam sessions as part of the brain storming process
- Make your players feel like a real part of development
- Ask for what you want VS focusing on what's not working
- Learn what makes your players unique, and write to those strengths



Gareth Coker

Composer (Ori and the Blind Forest)

"I've found there's usually a 'hot zone' in soloist recording sessions, where the artist is super focused and locked into what is required [...] **I see my job as merely a facilitator of trying to get to that 'hot zone'**. That can be anything from doing multiple takes, to having a chat with the artist."





PERFECT HARMONY | Share Your Vision

- Leave room in your score for the musicians' voice to shine through
- Consider writing your parts with flexibility; be mentally prepared for change
- Be prepared to let go: many of the best scores are made through collaboration and adaptation



A photograph of Austin Wintory, a man with glasses and a dark jacket, standing with his arms crossed in a room with acoustic panels.

Austin Wintory

Composer (Journey, The Banner Saga)

"I am huge advocate of leaving room for performers to bring something to the table. Anything that pushes the live recordings furthest from the mockups only benefits the project, not to mention probably makes it more intrinsically musical too. **We have to remember that the players we hire are specialists in their instruments and, by and large, have a far deeper knowledge of the nuances than we ever could.**"



LET'S RECAP

- Working with live performers is achievable, affordable, and creatively rewarding
- Clients will be much more receptive to hiring musicians if you communicate clearly, early, and use examples of live performers in action
- Utilizing multi-instrumentalists, alternate payment methods, and flexible performers can bring your score to life without breaking the bank
- Your music will only improve by being honest with your performers about your needs and leaving room for their expressive input





Thank you!



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