

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

# On the next page of the score

Some musicians find a second career to be a sound idea, delivering artistic as well as financial rewards.

BLAIR TINDALL

When celebrity photographer Barbra Porter picks up her camera, such stars as Billy Bob Thornton, Garth Brooks and Eric Clapton know she'll make them look good. But in her other career, Porter also makes the stars sound good — by performing as a violinist for the Academy Awards telecast, on the soundtrack to "Pirates of the Caribbean" and in concert with Céline Dion.

"I think many musicians have multiple talents," says Porter, who rejects the image of stuffy, single-minded classical artists. "A musician's mind is often racing with ideas, yet you're expected to just sit there without wiggling during a performance."

Porter is one of many successful musicians who lead parallel lives, carrying on two or more high-powered careers simultaneously. Blasting through stereotypical images of the starving artist, these top studio, symphonic and theater musicians explore multiple passions without compromising their musical integrity. In doing so, they also hedge their bets against the economic downturn that is eroding arts budgets and threatening employment.

"Dual careers are almost always a bonus — both for the income and for the variety and exposure to contrasting environments," says Barbara Sher, author of the 2006 book "Refuse to Choose: A Revolutionary Program for Doing Everything That You Love." "And the second job might allow them to use sides of their natures that aren't expressed as musicians."

Manhattan Beach cellist Margo Tatgenhorst Drakos could be a poster child for Sher's book. A former member of the American String Quartet, Drakos has taught at the Manhattan School of Music, summered at Vermont's prestigious Marlboro Music Festival and worked as associate principal cellist with the Pittsburgh Symphony.

You'd think that any performer would be content with such a résumé. But in 2008, Drakos also earned a master's in human rights from Columbia University's School of International Affairs, and today she works as chief operating officer for *instantencore.com*, an online service in San Diego linking audiences, performers and music schools, while continuing her performing career.

Much like those of other dual-career musicians, the path Drakos forged wound unpredictably. Her executive job developed after she met high-tech board members while playing with the San Diego Symphony; her graduate studies grew out of political debates with her husband, a petroleum engineer turned physician.

"I didn't feel qualified to back up my arguments, so I applied to Columbia in international affairs," Drakos says. At first, she was denied admission because the college she had attended — Philadelphia's elite Curtis Institute of Music — did not become accredited until 1993, but she was later accepted.

## So complementary

As Drakos began studying at Columbia, she was surprised to feel resistance from colleagues in both the classical and the business worlds. Fellow musicians sometimes dissed her for "selling out," she says, while co-workers in the second career assumed that she had been a failure as a musician and were distrustful of her other abilities.

Yet musicians such as Drakos often excel equally in two discrete worlds, their pursuits complementing each other. For example, mathematics and proportion learned through musical form may plug directly into another field, such as architecture or computing. Other musicians find more abstract uses for their musical training, citing the competitive nature of performing, the discipline of practicing and flexibility learned from irregular scheduling as among their professional assets.

Tenured as assistant principal cello with San Francisco Ballet, Victor Fierro is also a top real estate agent who nailed 15 deals in his first year of sales back in 1988. He keeps the two careers separate but sees how they also mesh well.

"Real estate is very compatible with a musician's life," says Fierro, whose busy "Nutcracker" ballet season falls during the winter house-selling doldrums. "And because I like to practice cello late evenings, I see clients late morning or afternoon."

Many musicians such as Fierro — especially those with entrepreneurial second interests — jump at the chance to fold a new career into their existing schedules. Others, tired of working nights, weekends, holidays and at other people's weddings, actually yearn for the regular hours of nine-to-fives.

"Law school gave my life order and consistency," says Rochelle Skolnick, an attorney in St. Louis who describes playing freelance violin in southern Florida as tenuous and stressful. Skolnick left her violin in its case during law school but recently started fiddling again. "Now when I'm playing, it's like filigree," she says.

A union musician and the daughter

of a tuba player from Ohio, Skolnick at first found the formality of a legal office unsettling. However, her choice of labor law made her feel right at home; the friendly personalities of her father's brass-player friends were similar to those of the electrical workers and pipe fitters she now champions.

## 'There's a rhythm'

Like Skolnick, nearly every musician with another career seems to feel facets of his or her old world in the new one. Some even see that new life as a lot like performing a musical work, when communication flows between players who wordlessly sense timing

and emotion among themselves.

"Counseling is much like playing a symphony," says Rae Ann Goldberg, a Bay Area violinist who is also a certified marriage and family therapist in Oakland's Early Childhood Mental Health Program. "There's a rhythm. There are silences. Intensity and release."

Goldberg completed her master's degree at the California Institute of Integral Studies after her orchestra, the Sacramento Symphony, folded in 1996. With a full schedule and increased income, she now cherry-picks only the gigs she really wants instead of accepting everything in order to

survive.

"Sometimes a second career takes the financial pressure off, so they can do the work they love in the way they want to do it," says Sher. "I say they should consider it a subsidy to the arts."

Goldberg, like many musicians, began considering a second career only as her once-stable orchestra began imploding. Other considerations, like an uncomfortable working environment or even a serious injury, may force the change.

When a Rottweiler attacked Oakland French hornist Erin Vang, her shredded lips and face prevented her

from playing the horn for four years. Fortunately, a college double major in music and math paved the way to computers, and Vang worked until recently as a facilitative leader at SAS, a statistical software company.

"Having that Plan B gave me the serenity to explore options," says Vang, who says she thinks more musicians should consider acquiring other skills as a backup. "Any job that depends on the whims of others can be crazy-making."

## Flexible, portable

Fellow hornist Kathy Canfield can relate to Vang's philosophy. While living in New York, Canfield grew increasingly uncomfortable in her chair in the orchestra pit for the Broadway production of "Cyrano," playing beside a colleague against whom she had earlier filed sexual harassment charges. As the climate worsened, she took a friend's advice and signed up for just one class in something she loved — visual art.

Paying her way through New York City's Pratt Art Institute by performing at night in "Les Misérables," the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera's stage band, Canfield also worked a day job for early website companies in the 1990s before founding her own firm, Canfield Design Studios, which grossed \$175,000 last year.

When Canfield's husband was appointed music librarian at UC Berkeley in September, her business made the transition seamlessly. All employees and clients interact online, she says, leaving her free to explore the Bay Area's music scene without missing a beat.

In fact, computer work is a popular choice for musicians. Cellist Nick Dargahi works at Microsoft as a hardware verification engineer on Xbox, a game console. He'd always been interested in technology — writing manuals for games and flight simulators and working at times as a technical editor. So when his orchestra, the San Jose Symphony, went belly up in 2001, Dargahi began earning a master's in electrical engineering from Stanford University.

Today, Dargahi is delighted with his parallel universe. Much of his work testing chips involves recognizing patterns and translating abstract ideas into symbols — much like the mental processes involved in interpreting written music. The salary's nice too.

"The concept of pay packages was completely alien to me as a musician," says Dargahi. "A bonus? More than a \$5 tip at a party gig? I feel very lavishly treated here, no complaints."

Dargahi's tech work has also circled back to his artistic life — in both benefits and culture. Upon learning that Microsoft matches up to \$12,000 in employee donations to any charity, Dargahi chose Ballet Fantastique, a Monterey company operated by his 97-year-old grandmother, a former Ballet Russe member.

Although respected as an engineer, Dargahi stands out to his fellow workers, who have grown accustomed to seeing him leave work clad in white tie and tails, cello in tow.

"A lot of people in the office love classical music," says Dargahi, who now plays regularly with Symphony Silicon Valley — a reincarnation of his old San Jose Symphony. "In front of my chair in the cello section, there's a cluster of seats we call Microsoft Row."

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FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

**SHUTTERBUG:** Barbra Porter is a photographer when not playing in Hollywood orchestras. Denise Ames, left, and Gretchen Bonaduce pose.



RANDI LYNN BEACH FOR THE TIMES

**A SIGN:** Victor Fierro unpacks his cello at his Oakland real estate office. He likes the way the careers fit. "Because I like to practice cello late evenings, I see clients late morning or afternoon," he says.



LIZ O. BAYLEN Los Angeles Times

**NEW SCHOOL:** Margo Tatgenhorst Drakos, a symphonic musician, earned a master's degree in human rights and today is COO of an online service that links audiences, performers and music schools.