James Banner - CV of 'failures'

During a lecture I delivered to graduating students at Leeds College of Music in early 2019 we discussed the idea of finding and creating opportunities as a professional musician, amongst many other things. The overarching theme was that work opportunities (commissions, finding gigs, recording opportunities, teaching positions etc.) are in general very hard to come by, and succeeding in those areas, whilst of course necessary as a musician, is difficult and can sometimes seem insurmountable as a student entering the professional world - something I also felt myself as an undergraduate. Perhaps more importantly to state is that the systemic barriers such as sexism, ageism, ableism and racism facing those coming from non-white/male/non-binary/disabled groups make this process even more difficult for those groups.

To illustrate the point in numbers from my own experience, I decided to tally up how many opportunities I had applied for in the previous two years and how many of those had succeeded, the result being 6 out of around 30-35 at the time (beginning of 2019, some were pending) - around 20%. I had personally never considered this 'success' rate to be low since the 'failures' I had incurred during the process (learning how to write applications, updating my CV, making new contacts etc.) had been so valuable to me as a tool for my own development, even though 20% in most other contexts would be considered a fail.

This 'CV' may hopefully show someone that the 'failures' are inevitable, normal and worthwhile, and to go some way in normalising how widespread rejection is generally in the arts. Not that normalising this makes it ok, but engaging in conversation about this publicly, especially in the perceived perfect world of social media, may go some way in recognising mental health and artistic/financial survival in the freelance art world.

Credit goes to Lecturer Melanie Stefan for this idea, and to Composer Jenni Pinnock for passing it on to me. I decided to do this myself because of an interest in Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset (a term introduced to me by creative entrepreneur, musician and teacher Megan Jowett), and my recent introduction to an academic world where I am lucky to be able to discover new viewpoints on successes and failures from my own students.

n.b. for clarity, I don't include any 'non-failures' except where they are directly related to a 'failure'. In terms of performances, this list also only includes applications made for festivals, not venues, since there are too many 'failures' to list in this area.

2014

Deutsche Bank Award For Creative Enterprise - shortlisted and delivered presentation
Peter Whittingham Award - got to audition stage

2015
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2016

Elsa-Neumann Artist Stipendium - delivered presentation but was rejected (however was awarded this in 2018!)
Berlin State - Project Funding - for creation of new ensemble
Jazz Institut Berlin - Carl Hoffer Gesellschaft - soloist prize application

2017

12 Points Festival - Jazz festival application
Manchester Jazz Festival - Jazz festival application
100 Masters - Application to take part in a multidisciplinary arts festival as musician/composer
for-Wards - Call for composer
Francis Chagrin Award - Open fund, applied to help cover costs of a recording
Jazzlines Commission - Call for composer to create collaborative work with young musicians

Lots Of Odds - Call for composer for new theatre piece (lack of time to complete process)
Berlin State - Project Funding - for creation of new ensemble
Private call for typesetting/engraving work
OPUS - Call for composer to workshop a sketch with Britten Sinfonia members
Berlin British School - application for teaching position

2018

Terrestrial - Application for collaborative residency
12 Points Festival - Jazz festival application
Manchester Jazz Festival - Jazz festival application
Women of Longbridge - Call for composer to create collaborative piece - got to interview stage
Theatre Royal Plymouth - Call for composer for a new theatre piece
Hammersmith Apollo - Call for composer for a new theatre piece
Basel Composition Competition (did not enter despite registering)
CoDa/REwired - Call for composer for new dance project
Berry Theatre - Call for composer for new theatre piece
Help Musicians UK 'Do It Differently Fund' - Open fund
Leeds Creative Labs - Call to work collaboratively with Biological Researcher
London College of Music - Pieces rejected for inclusion in new piano syllabus
ORA Singers - Call for pieces to be workshopped and performed
Paperfinch Theatre - Call for collaborators to work on new theatre pieces
People Express - Commission to deliver workshops in schools
Imaginosity - Commission to deliver workshops in schools
Berlin State - Tour funding
Streetwise Opera - Call for composer in residence
Live Music Now - Call for new ensembles
Sound and Music - Call for playlists
Two part-time academic positions at Leeds College of Music - accepted for one other

2019

Phoenix Dance Theatre - Choreographers and Composers Lab - applied as musician
Queens Hall/Alnwick Playhouse - Call for composer for a new Christmas theatre piece
Music:Leeds Launchpad - Commission for new work as part of festival
Frozen Light - Call for composer for new choral piece
The Handful - Call for composer for new choral piece
LSO Soundhub - Call for composers for mentorship programme
Listenpony - Call for composers to write new 5 minute pieces for a concert
ISCM World Music Days 2019/2020 - Call for pieces to be workshopped/performed
Two part-time academic positions at Leeds College of Music - accepted for two others
Iwona Glinka/Phsama Music - Call for scores for compilation CD
No Dice Collective - Call for composers to collaborate with writers
Leeds International Festival OFF Programme - Call for arts events
Psappha - Call for composers
Young Composers Meeting Apeldoorn - for participation in a composition workshop
59th RMA Annual Conference at Goldsmiths - call for duo scores for workshop
Leeds College of Music - teacher of bass
Musikfonds - to perform and record Voices of Berlin
Berlin Senat - to record Voices of Berlin
Take Five - opportunity to be part of a yearly jazz talent development scheme
LSO Panufnik Composers Scheme - Call for composers for mentorship programme
Riot Ensemble/PRS - Mentoring scheme

2020

Vale of Glamorgan Festival - PRCS (composers studio) - put on waiting list
Riot Ensemble - Call for scores
Composer-Curator - For funding to set up new music event in Leeds
George Butterworth Award - a cash prize for pieces created through Sound and Music programmes
Musikfonds - to perform and record Voices of Berlin
Psappha - Composing For… scheme
Leeds Creative Labs - Call to work collaboratively with academic researcher

To be continued…

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