

The seasoned pianist's guide to musical collaborators

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The wife of one of my relatives is a classical pianist. She shared with me her hot takes on musicians she collaborates with.¹

- Violinists tune *forever*. Her husband is a casual violin player. Their daughter is a beginning violinist. For fun, her husband decided to play a duet with their daughter. *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. Great. He picks up his violin and starts playing and says, “No, wait, stop, I need to tune.” He then spends the next ten minutes tuning his violin, and then tunes his daughter’s. They then play a song for 30 seconds.
- Singers are always complaining about the temperature, the ventilation system, and any other imaginable aspect of the venue.
- To be fair, she concedes that pianists take forever adjusting the bench.
- Cellists complain that the piano is too loud. “Of course it’s too loud. You’re sitting right in front of the open lid. All the sound is being directed into your head. Besides, the piece is a piano trio. *Piano* trio. Guess what instrument this genre of music is named after. Uh-huh. Oh, and your cello part? Yeah, you’re basically doubling my left hand. So suck it up.”
- Reed instrumentalists blame the reed for anything they mess up. “Oh, of course, it’s the reed’s fault. Wait a second, didn’t you make that reed?”
- She asked a French horn player, “Do you need to tune?”, fearing a tuning marathon based on her experience with violinists. But the horn player said, “Nah, I’ll tune as I go.” Because apparently this is what horn players do because the characteristics of the instrument change as it changes temperature, etc.

As you might expect for a pianist, she is hired to do a lot of accompaniment. I learned that she makes more money from bad musicians than from good ones. For one thing, bad musicians are generally willing to pay a higher rate. And for another thing, they ask for more rehearsals, which means that you get paid a higher rate for longer. (The downside, of course, is that you are accompanying a bad musician.)

Though there is one specific musician that she refuses to work with any more. The other musician is drop-dead gorgeous but is always a measure late. I guess there are some musicians so bad that you won’t accompany them at any price.

Story time: When she came to visit me last year, she asked if she could bring some music with her because she had to practice for a performance. This was a silly question because everyone should have a house pianist.

While she was out, I peeked at her music. One of the pieces was the Busoni piano transcription of Bach's Chaconne in D minor. I fumbled through the first page before giving up. One of the tempo markings was *non affrettare* (don't rush), which made my mind boggle that there are people so expert at piano that rushing is even possible!

Anyway, I told her about my experience trying to play the Busoni/Bach piece, and she replied, "Oh, yeah, I love that piece. I use it to warm up."

For me, so difficult I can't even get past the first page. For her, just a warm-up.

¹ Note that attitude may have been added for entertainment purposes. Actually, that note pretty much applies to anything I post.

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