



MUSIC TEACHERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

**Meet the Entrepreneur: Jeremy Siskind**  
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TRANSCRIPT:

Hi everybody! My name is Jeremy Siskind and I'm honored to be shooting a video for the MTNA Business Digest. And I'm going to dive right in because I don't have much time. So the first question that I was asked is to describe my current profession. So I am a jazz pianist and a college professor—I teach full time at Fullerton College, which is a community college, and at the college I'm able to recruit a lot of students for my remote jazz piano classes—I have about 90 students in 5 different sections of remote jazz piano from all over the world, which is really fun.

I'm also an author and a publisher. I've written about 25 books or so in my career. In the last few years, I've been self-publishing a bunch of jazz piano books, including one called *Playing Solo Jazz Piano* and a *Jazz Piano Fundamentals* method that has 3 different volumes now.

I'm a content creator—I have a YouTube channel that I post two videos per week to. I've also created content for some of the best online lesson platforms out there—Tonebase, Open Studio, and Piano with Jonny, so that's been an honor.

I am an arranger and composer. I've been doing more and more arranging these days. Pretty exciting news is that an album that I did most of the arrangements for won a Grammy for best vocal performance/best vocal album this last Grammy cycle—Julia Bullock's album, *Walking in the Dark*. I've also been doing a lot of arrangements for pianist Lara Downes lately, which is a huge honor.

As I mentioned, I'm a professional jazz pianist. I perform as a jazz pianist. Some of what I do would be called concertizing. Other things that I do would be playing in a jazz club and more of that kind of a vibe. And I do have a private studio. I don't have weekly students at this point, but I have a handful of students who rotate through about once a month.

The second question was "What are key steps or experiences that helped guide you to where you are now?" I have so many that I could say but I want to focus in on three things that helped me get in touch with my audience as a content creator and author. The first one is that I started reviewing jazz publications for *Clavier Companion*. This was so interesting because about every

month, I would be sent a handful of books, and I would be asked to look through them. It was such a great way to know the landscape of what people are trying to offer and what was resonating with people and what books stood out to me.

A second thing also has to do with my time in publishing. For quite a few years I was doing a lot of teacher workshops for Hal Leonard, and I would go to these local music stores all over the country. And the kinds of questions that I got and seeing teachers' responses to different materials really helped me figure out what teachers might want and what would be useful.

And then thirdly, when I transitioned from teaching at a four-year university to a community college, I got to know the amateur piano community much better. As great as universities are, they definitely select a certain caliber of students and at the community college you get much more in touch with who the amateur is and how they digest information. So, learning how to be a good teacher at my community college really was a game-changer for me in terms of being able to present material and content in a way that's going to resonate with a wide swath.

The third question asks, "What advice do you have for others who may hope to follow a similar path?" So, you might infer from what I just said that one thing to do is to get to know your audience. Don't just say here's what I want to give you. Ask and really figure out and pay attention to what they want and how they want to receive it.

This kind of goes to this triangle that I've been advised about, which is that a good career choice is going to be some combination between what you're good at, what the world seems to need and how you can make money. Right? And if you can find something that really addresses all three of those things, then that's going to be a win.

Most of the most important things that I've done in my career I've done without any kind of guarantee. The thing that springs first to mind is my debut concert at Carnegie Hall. I didn't make a cent. I sold out Weill Hall, which was very cool, but didn't make a cent. And spent the whole year practicing, but ultimately that was what got me my first tenure track teaching job. Similarly, my first book, *Playing Solo Jazz Piano*—I didn't really have an audience for, that I knew about, but I put it out there and that's really what started my publishing company. So, taking those leaps of faith has been really important—not to wait until you have a sure thing.

I have this theory about "excellence plus" which means that any new professional must be excellent at their instrument *plus* they should be good at one other thing, maybe it's talking, maybe it's research, maybe it's photography, maybe it's visual art, maybe it's fashion. But you want to have something about you that makes you stand out from all the other people that are excellent at their instrument.

And then lastly, I have this philosophy that less planning and more working is the way to go. Now, everyone is different, but for me I see a lot of students using planning as an excuse to put things off. So instead of planning, get to work. Use that planning time to edit because you're

going to learn much more about what a project needs to be by actually getting in there and starting it rather than trying to plan it.

Thank you so much for watching. I need to leave it here. My website is <https://www.jeremysiskind.com/>. There you can check out books, etc. and I would also love it if you could subscribe to my YouTube channel which you can easily find by searching “Jeremy Siskind.” Thank you everybody!