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Interview with Sarah Jones, Music Industry Media Specialist

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Jennifer Morrow graduated from University of the Pacific with a BA in English with minors in writing and music management in December of 2019. Her research on 1960s-1970s female singer-songwriters ...[Read More](#)

This article was written as part of the curriculum for the Bachelor of Music in Music Management and the Bachelor of Science in Music Industry Studies at University of the Pacific. Each student conducted research based on his or her own areas of interest and study.

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Interview With Sarah Jones, Music Industry Media Strategist

By: Jennifer Morrow



Sarah Jones is a self-proclaimed media veteran with over twenty years of experience as a writer, editor, educator, and content producer within the music industry. She began her career at *Mix*, the world's leading audio publication, where she advanced from Editorial Assistant to Editor in Chief during her 14-year tenure. She has also served as Editor In Chief of *Electronic Musician* and *EQ*. In addition to her editorial credentials, Sarah has also served as Associate Director of Women's Audio Mission and is the current Education Chair of the Recording Academy, where she produces programming for educational events to support music-makers and give them the tools they need to succeed in the music industry.

Storytelling is the common thread running through all of Sarah's pursuits. Whether she is writing an article, producing marketing content, or planning an educational event, she always focuses on creating the best experience for her audience through authentic and engaging storytelling.

I had the pleasure of speaking with Sarah in May 2020. As a recent Pacific graduate with an interest in music journalism, I was excited to learn more about her career and ask about advice she might have for aspiring music industry professionals. We also discussed how the music industry was reacting and adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic, her lifelong love for music, and her wealth of experience working in many different — yet overlapping — spheres of the music industry. <https://www.hiresarahjones.com/>

What music have you been listening to lately? Have you been enjoying any virtual performances or live-streamed concerts?

I have been! I've been listening to some albums from artists I was planning to go see — I was about to go see *Hamilton* and I was going to see Tanya Tucker as well. But also, because I write about music, I get a lot of new releases, and luckily, while artists may not be touring right now, they're still making content and creating. I've been listening to Jason Isbell; he's one of my favorites. I've really been enjoying streaming concerts, but also just [observing] how people have

stepped up to be creative now and put together videos where they're performing remotely or making videos with their orchestras or bands. Some of them are for fundraisers and some of them are just to create, and I just love seeing how people have rebounded and embraced the internet as a viable way to be creative — and possibly even earn a living. We'll see!

As someone who has written extensively about and worked within music production, what is your perspective on how the COVID-19 pandemic — and having to work remotely — has affected the music industry?

A: I think on the recording side, it's an easier pivot because for two decades now, that technology has gotten cheaper and more accessible to people who don't have access to or the resources to build high-end studios. So I think a lot of musicians and engineers have already moved in that direction, where they have home studios or they're doing podcasts and are streaming. That's somewhat prepared them to have this mindset of working from home, but I think also, musicians want to collaborate with other musicians. So I think that's the next thing: we have to find an easier way to do that given the limitations of the internet and not being in the same space.

I also write about live sound, and the live sound production community is so tied in with long concert runs and tours — and the summer season is so big for them— that they're hurting a lot more. But I do see a lot of people using this time to build other chops, or maybe doing some studio recording and branching out in other areas, which I think ultimately will give people more skills and make them more marketable in the long run.

When did your love for music begin? From an early age, did you know that this is the industry that you wanted to go into?

A: I did! I've loved music ever since I was little, [when] I would play my grandmother's piano and I started taking music lessons. I was lucky to grow up in a place where music programs were very big, so I had access to them in elementary school and I just started there. And then when I went to college, I was surrounded by so many people — I went to UMass Lowell, which has a recording program — and I was so inspired by the work of the students who were creating in the studio that I ended up taking that path. So all along I've been playing music — my main focus is writing, but I play flute and I do gigs here and there. But I love making music, I love listening to music, and I love being around creative people, so I've been lucky to do that.

During your tenure at Mix, you advanced from Editorial Assistant to Editor-in-Chief. Can you tell me more about that experience?

A: I got the job at Mix when I graduated college in 1993, and back then there were still jobs at newspapers (*laughs*). I answered a classified ad! It was unbelievable! It was the only job in my life that I answered a classified ad and got the job, an editorial assistant job. And I was just really lucky to work with a team of editors who gave me opportunities. Within a few months I was writing stories. They gave me a really long leash. They let me make mistakes, they would help me, they mentored me, and they helped shape my interest in writing. You know, I never went

into the business with the intention of being a writer. I always liked writing, but I kind of fell into it, and it just turned out to be a great fit. But it was really, 100 percent about the mentors I had who gave me opportunities through all that time.

Speaking of which, do you have any advice for young professionals that are hoping to better make connections to help them in their careers, whether that be in music journalism or the music industry more broadly?

I've been doing this for over 25 years, and I've had different roles in the industry, and with the exception of that classified ad that I answered, every single opportunity I've had has come through personal connections — all of them. And you just have to put yourself out there and make [those connections]. I think the way to do it is joining industry organizations, like the Recording Academy, or AES if you're an audio engineer. There are educational organizations [to facilitate] getting out and meeting your community. Writing is [also] a great way — blog if you want to start getting published, that's a good way to do it. And just reaching out to people.

You have to be brave and just not be afraid of rejection, because you'll no doubt get rejected a lot, but it's just part of the process. It's part of the bettering process, as long as you learn from your mistakes.

And you'll find that a lot of

people who you reach out to are willing to help you. It always surprised me early on how willing people are to help, but they are. Especially in creative fields, where people do this because they love it — more than the millions of dollars. And they want to share that knowledge once they are in a position where they feel ready to give back and mentor others. It's just generally been a positive experience, and I'd guess anyone you ask would probably say the same thing. If you just put yourself out there and introduce yourself to people and make yourself known, people respond well to that. If you do it in a way that's not annoying (*laughs*), for lack of a better term. Just sort-of recognize what you're asking of somebody. If you're nice about it, aren't too demanding, and don't push yourself too much, then it's a natural process.



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That's great advice. I think a lot of times networking can be intimidating for people, and they assume they're bothering someone by reaching out, so I think that's good advice: just be brave and get over that initial hurdle.

Yeah. You have to. And sometimes yeah, you might be bothering someone, but that's the exception. And often, you might go down a wrong path and someone might not be the best relationship for you, but they might refer you to somebody else who would be a better connection for you. You just have to go for it!

What would you say makes for an engaging music story that you know an audience is going to connect to?

Authenticity. More than anything else. I probably get a hundred emails a day about artists and records, and talent and great music aside, I think what connects with people and resonates is being a real person and being accessible and relatable. Having a story that's unique, but is also real and authentic. People see through hype.

You work in journalism as well as marketing within the music industry. How do those fields intersect and influence how you approach both kinds of work?

That's a great question because for decades I focused exclusively on journalism and avoided any kind of marketing approach to anything. But more and more — maybe in part because I've been lucky to work with clients who make great products and are committed to making great content — I think it's the same thing as when I talk about music stories. If you're authentic and real and you have a story, it's storytelling. It's finding a new angle. And sure, you definitely have an agenda; you're selling something. But I've found it's getting easier for me to bring a journalistic perspective to marketing because people are receptive to that. If you produce something that's real and is helpful to people, then they'll want to read it — or watch your video or experience your event. It's all about understanding what's important to people.

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What does your role as the Education Chair for the Recording Academy entail? What motivates you to help facilitate change in the arts?

The Recording Academy is a member-supported organization, and its goals are to advocate for and educate members in addition to recognizing musical achievements with the Grammy Awards. One of our big pushes is helping make the lives of music-makers better, and the way we do that is through educational programs. And the way I do that as Education Chair is through educational content. I'll program career development events, events that focus on improving your craft, like a singer-songwriter workshop or an artist's interview at a club, those kinds of things. Now we're pivoting more toward online events and collaboration, but we just want to give music-makers the tools to make music.

More and more, music-makers have to be entrepreneurial. They have to know how to do a lot of things besides making music. It's a given that you have to get your musical chops, but then what do you do with them? How are you heard? And how do you make a living? So those are the kinds of things we focus on: understanding copyright and licensing, music distribution, recording, finding legal help, dealing with contracts, collaborating, fundraising grants, those kinds of things. It's all part of the big picture. When you're a DIY or entrepreneurial musician, you have to know

how to do those things or find the right people to help you, so we want to help those musicians understand that.

After your many years of success in the music industry, do you have a key tip or takeaway that you might offer to those of us at an early stage in our careers?

It's a tough time to join a tough industry. The music industry is very challenging. It's very competitive, and obviously it's a tough time to get any job. But I think if you want to work in music, it's important to keep your mind open to opportunities that may not be so straightforward. So, for example, I write magazine articles — which is what I did for most of my career — but now I'm also writing social copy and I produce interview videos. [Find] things you might have the skillset for [where those skills] might transfer. You'll have more opportunities if you think about all the different outlets for music and all the different ways people like music. You might have a dream career in your head — and you should absolutely go for that — but you shouldn't do that at the expense of exploring other opportunities that you might not have considered. Do you know what I mean?

Absolutely. And being open to different opportunities because you don't know where those might lead you.

Right, and I think it's harder now because the music industry is kind of a shadow of what it was decades ago. But, that said, there's music everywhere. So, you might want to be a studio engineer — and it can be hard to do that these days — but you might be able to make music for video games, or a TV show, or things like that. It's just really important to explore. Know what you want to do, and then think of ways you can apply what you want to do.