



Music and Los Angeles

by Greg Porée

Los Angeles is truly unique among large cities, and when it comes to music- that description definitely applies. It's natural for any artist to want to display their skills, find acceptance, and be part of something that will earn them money, but I think the fundamental misconception musicians have in coming to L.A. is that they're looking for an established music scene instead of creating one of their own. That's a very tricky juggling act when you're trying to pay your rent and follow your dream, but of all the major cities in the world Los Angeles is great only if you go there with a vision of what your music is about. There are many ways to make money with music but, in my mind, finding your own voice should be your first priority.

First and foremost, no matter what your profession, I think it's vital that you love what you do; that's how I feel about music and the people who express themselves in that way. As a player, I prefer the classical guitar; in the context of Los Angeles that's definitely a challenge, and even though I make a decent living by being able to do a lot of things, such as studio work (mostly TV), producing, arranging, teaching and composing- my sanity is based on being able to perform and record my own music. There is no one simple formula for survival and I do understand that for newcomers, the enormous size and diversity of Los Angeles can be intimidating- but to me, that very size and diversity simply means that there are more opportunities and chances to hone your skills.

My sons are both musicians and they most definitely went through the whole process of lessons, bands, starving, record deals and general L.A. craziness; they never lost sight of what they wanted to say as musicians, however, and as a result finally wound up being involved in great bands. My oldest son is the guitarist in a large ensemble called the Dakah Hip Hop Orchestra that does hip hop, jazz, old-school R&B, and spoken word in an orchestral setting of about 40 musicians. They're funded by Toyota and tour all over the country. My youngest son is a percussionist/songwriter and one of the founding members of the two-time Grammy-winning Latin rock band, Ozomatli. I'm proud that they are involved with music that is artistically sound, cutting edge and not ruled by the fashion of the day.

For me the things that keep me grounded are teaching, giving classical guitar concerts and performing with my jazz band. The classical concerts are either solo guitar or guitar and cello. I'm now looking to try some other configurations as I truly like arranging for different instruments. My jazz band usually consists of guitar, bass, percussion and sax; I get around the volume thing by playing a Chet Atkins nylon electric going through a SWR acoustic guitar system. I always try to mix things up though; sometime I'll have trap drums instead of percussion, another guitar instead of sax, or electric bass instead of the double bass. This approach keeps the music

fresh. Money is not the driving force for me in teaching and performing though; the music industry is how I make my money and that's in sessions, licensing and touring with established artists. Doing my own music in LA doesn't bring in much money, but it is very satisfying given the level of talent in the city; I think this holds true for all who live and work here. One can make money doing original works as long as you look for your audience outside of Los Angeles.

In closing, I simply want to say that balance is the key, and even though I've made this article specific to LA, the principal applies everywhere. While you're looking for ways to make money in LA's music scene, you must also look for ways to express your own voice. Making money is scary enough as it is and when you're in a creative profession the scare factor is doubled. It's vital that you always find a way to be professional in fulfilling whatever demands the music industry requires, but in the process- never forget to create music you really enjoy in an environment that is not dictated by money or politics.

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