

# The art of self-promotion

With some professional advice and a little effort, you can create the ideal CV and promotional package to apply for a range of paid work.

Feature by  
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**With graduates pouring out of music colleges each year and the competition becoming ever stiffer, it is easy to become dependant at the chances of being considered, let alone hired, for paid employment as a session musician or singer. Yet there are a multitude of jobs on offer — not only studio sessions for pop bands, big bands and orchestras, but also for film scores, adverts, corporate events, cruise ship slots and musicals.**

But how do you ensure that you stand out from the crowd? The answer involves what your grand-parents may have called putting your best foot forward, meaning, in this case, creating a polished promotional package presenting a concise view of what you and your music are all about. With the right CV, photographs and optional audio and video clip links, you will provide potential employers with the overall 'flavour' of your musical talent and experience.

## The right balance

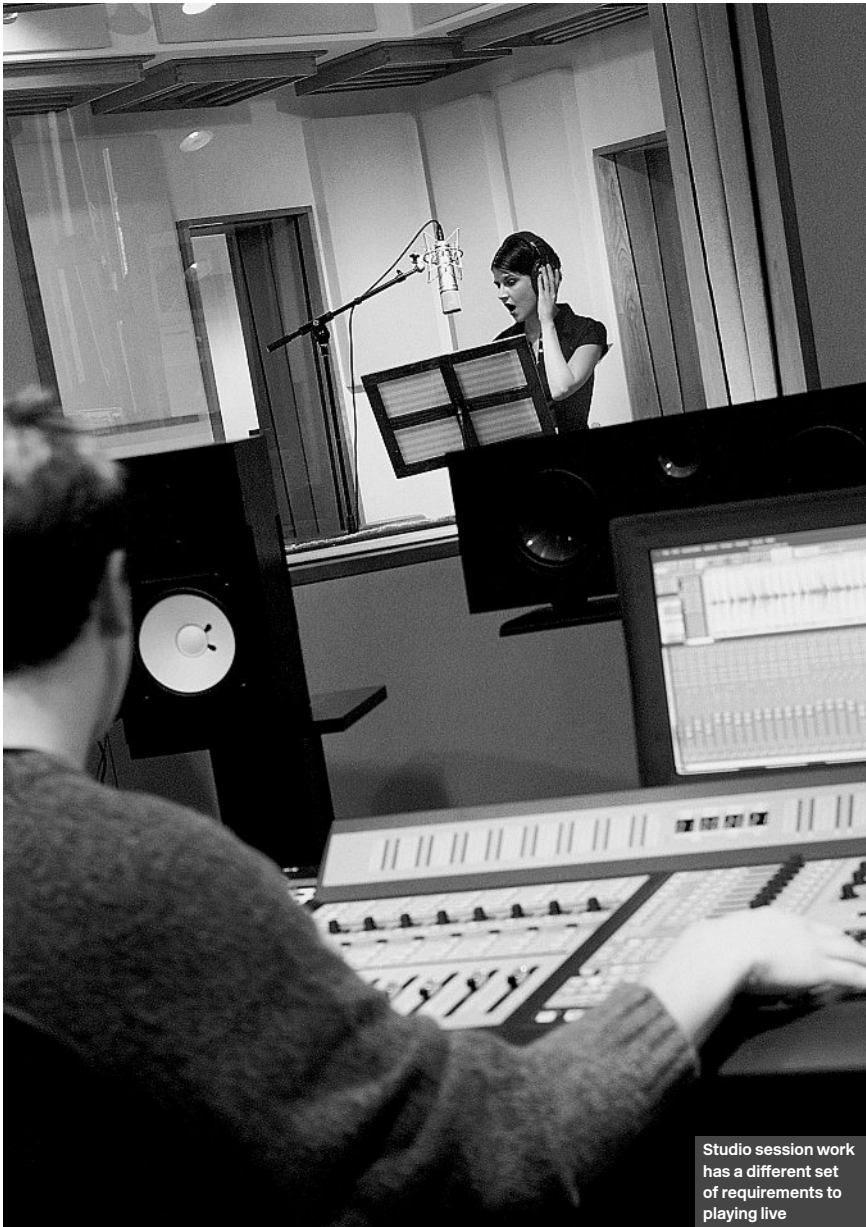
A CV is a snapshot of your musical career to date. It sounds obvious, but a good place to begin is by stating your main instrument and any other instruments you play, and the genre(s) in which you specialise. Next, compile a list of your best gigs and achievements. This need not be chronological — you may want to highlight the most impressive gigs first. Keep information to the point, making it easy for potential employers to assess at a glance.

It is a given that most musicians have experience playing live, but if you are after mainly live session work, do make this clear. If, however, you are seeking recording session work, it is especially important to flag up any studio experience you have had and also the people you have worked with.

'People recognise that with a musician who is an efficient live player, you can put them in a recording studio and turn the red light on, and they sometimes go to pieces,' says MU Sessions Official Pete Thoms. 'The employer needs to have the confidence that you've been in a studio before, that you've played with other people and, ideally, that the product of those recordings has been released. There's nothing more telling than being able to say, "I played on that record that you've heard on the radio". That's an important part of the CV that will make most employers take you much more seriously.'

So does Pete recommend name-dropping in a CV? 'Absolutely, you'd be crazy not to,' he says. 'If you've played with someone who's got a reputation — for example, "I played guitar on a Robbie Williams track" — they're going to say, "Hey, this guy's obviously of very high calibre".'





Studio session work has a different set of requirements to playing live

## 'Employers want your experience, not how many A Levels you have,' Pete Thoms, MU Sessions Official.

As well as CV 'do's' there is one major 'don't', according to Thoms — putting too much focus on education. You may have worked at them for years but qualifications should enjoy only a brief mention and come last on the CV. 'Employers want to know what performances you've done, who you've played with and your actual experience,' Pete says. 'People are just not very interested in how many A Levels you have, it's not a very useful bit of information.'

### Agency advice

Recognising that musicians are not always the best self-publicists, Young Guns ([younggunsuk.com](http://younggunsuk.com)) is a session agency that aims to help music graduates maximise their promotional profile and work opportunities. With 1,000 musicians and singers on their books, the company has been successfully placing its hefty roster in different session scenarios for the past six years, from hip-hop to rock, classical to soul, funk and dance.

The founder and director of Young Guns, Dominic Lyon, believes that a great promo package is the ticket to success: 'We get inundated with materials all the time, so having strong promotional material — the CV, the biography, the photos and the demos — makes a massive difference. The more professional and the higher the quality of the presentation, then the more interested we are going to be.' →

'It's getting that validation from an artist or a producer, something which will make you stand out and make people think, "Okay, someone else has actually paid good money for this player to go in, capture their performance and release it, and they're making money out of it". It's really part of the game. You let people know, that's expected. People should never be shy.'

A CV with reference to a well-designed website with audio or video clips makes it easy for employers to quickly assess your level and style of playing. You can also add links to artists with who you have worked with, for instance, and indicate on your CV that it is your oboe playing on a track at 1:33.

## Online CVs

**Posting an online CV on a networking sites can raise your chances of exposure to potential employers.**

### — Singers Pro

Post your CV online with bio and audio. You will be notified when employers have viewed your profile. Apply via [singerspro.com/uk](http://singerspro.com/uk)

### — Professional People

Sister site for instrumentalists and music professionals (sound engineers,

producers, etc), working mainly in television, film and on stage. [professionalpeople.org/music/uk/](http://professionalpeople.org/music/uk/)

### — LinkedIn

Post a guided online CV to connect with music business professionals. [linkedin.com](http://linkedin.com)

### — Facebook

Social networking site offering artist pages that raise your public profile. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

**'CVs are so misleading, because people can write anything in them,' Chris Wheeler of the Heritage Orchestra.**

Lyon also stresses the importance of having great photos. 'You don't have to spend a fortune, but I recommend professional studio shots rather than shots in someone's garden. Professional shots look really crisp, well-styled and well-lit. I think that's what will set you apart.'

When it comes to recording work, the issue of how a musician or singer looks — their attractiveness and perceived age — usually does not enter into the equation. But in the realm of live music or TV, it can be an important factor in being hired for certain types of work.

'Often the imagery is more important for TV. If you've got some imagery that a record or TV production company is going to look at, they will often just pick someone on the basis of the images,' says Dominic Lyon.

Pete adds: 'With TV, where artists want sessioneers to mime behind them producers may want a particular look — quite often they'll say "we want all blonde girls, or all redheads", for example. That sometimes happens, but that's TV. But it does vary — if they're recruiting for a mature artist, they may not want very young people backing them.'

The same is true when the pressure is on: producers may opt for seasoned session players who they know will deliver in a live TV setting, such as *Later... With Jools Holland*. The focus here is on finding artists who will confidently produce the goods in those three or four televised minutes.

#### Word of mouth

Not all music employers are impressed by slick promotional packaging, however. The eclectic Heritage Orchestra plays a wide spectrum of live shows and recordings, everything from a performance of Vangelis's *Blade Runner* score to gigging with Antony And The Johnsons or backing comedian Tim Minchin on tour. Chris Wheeler, artistic director and producer of the orchestra, looks for musicians who have classical training but who take a broader, genre-fusing view of music. Personality and personal recommendation are considered as well as talent.



You must emphasise if your recorded music has been released

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'CVs are so misleading because people can write anything in them,' he says. 'I really like it when people come to me and say, "This person is an excellent player, they're open-minded and they're going to fit in." The CV is by no means the first port of call. Sometimes the CV is the thing that tips it over the edge — the player has a lot of experience, that's really comforting to know. But we're looking for the right attitude. People who are stuck in their ways have no place in the modern music world.'

Wheeler feels that musicians may let themselves down when they send audio or video links. 'I don't know if that would give someone an edge,' he says, 'sometimes people have done themselves out of a possible job with what they've got online, because it's not good enough and it's sort of pigeon-holing them. But some websites are really excellent.'

#### Calling card

Simply put, a CV/promo package is all about selling your musical talent and personality. It should broadcast healthy confidence but not cross the line into bravado. It should highlight your musical skills, include a great photo and a succinct list of your best accomplishments. It is your "calling card" to a great session career, so it is worth spending a decent amount of time to hone it to its best. ■■■

## Orchestral rules

**Classical orchestras or choirs differ in their application procedures and repertoire requirements.**

Bill Kerr, MU National Organiser, Orchestras, suggests studying each set of requirements carefully, submitting exactly what is asked for and no more. As is common, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) requests a covering letter, a CV and a completed application form (including details of visa status). Director Simon Webb advises: 'Make your CV easy to understand and two pages maximum. Read it back as if you are the one recruiting. Concentrate on experience, don't exaggerate and always proofread it.'

Unlike some orchestras, the CBSO is not interested in photos or audio/video links, aiming to audition as many musicians as possible. And if you have not been chosen to play, Webb says: 'Do ask for feedback — drop us a line and say "Why not?" and you'll get an honest answer.'