

---

## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Entrepreneurial Muse: Inspiring Your Career in Classical Music* (Oxford U Press)

by Jeffrey Nytech

Reviewed by Jeremy Peters, Wayne State University

As colleges and universities graduate scores of eager classical musicians, many face the harsh reality that their coveted chair in a major symphony orchestra or immediate career as an operatic soloist hasn't quite materialized. Historically, music schools have done little to prepare students for this reality. As such, a growing number of colleges, universities, and educators are making strides at closing the gap between the necessary artistic training and the worldly experience that young musicians need as they begin their post-collegiate careers. By borrowing from the domains of business and education we can devise curriculums to help our arts graduates be practicing artists.

*The Entrepreneurial Muse: Inspiring Your Career in Classical Music* is another tool we now have in our toolbox to make up for some of the curricular deficits that have emerged and are more aware of thanks to the clarity of the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project's (SNAAP) *2017 Annual Report: Arts in Alumni in Their Communities* (Skaggs, Frenette, Gaskill, & Miller, 2017, pp. 6–10). Career training is an ongoing concern, and as advertised on the cover, Nytech's book makes strides towards bridging the gaps identified by SNAAP.

In his book, Jeffrey Nytech challenges his likely audience of up-and-coming classical musicians and takes specific care to break down preconceived notions of success and failure, using a series of small pushes or challenges early on in the book to get skeptics past their "hostility to the dreaded E-word" (pp. 3, 182). This book systematically dismantles assumptions that classical music students are likely to have with respect to product, storytelling, market forces, basic economics, and other business topics, while covering many tried and tested frameworks and skills. In order to have readers practice these skills, there are helpful exercises at the end of each chapter that synthesize the main points Nytech hopes to convey. Further, the author uses very helpful examples through the book that are relatable to his intended audience, helping to translate from the common language of business and entrepreneurship to something a bit more understandable by artists, such as his coverage of Thomas Ward's creative mechanisms (Ward, 2004 in Nytech, pp. 45–46).

Nytech makes great use of case studies and examples to cover major points such as the differences and balances between intrinsic (or artistic) and extrinsic (or market) value, a key takeaway that readers obtain, which is often overlooked or underemphasized. Nytech hammers this point home with a poignant statement:

Rather than being antithetical to the "pure" expression of art, entrepreneurship acts as an *extension* of creativity to every aspect of the artistic experience we create for our audiences. Applied well, entrepreneurial thinking empowers both creators and performers/presenters to devise new and compelling ways to reach their markets – and unlock value for their art in the process. (p. 84)

Segueing to the process by which individuals consume goods and services, and how groups of individuals demand the same, there is a non-technical, but deeply helpful discussion of the basic microeconomic forces at play within classical music. The book takes this even a step further, explaining inchoate (basic) and latent (hidden) demand with respect to works of art and

cultural institutions, and relative utilitarian and hedonic (emotional) consumption. In covering the possible tradeoffs between artistic integrity and entrepreneurial success, the overarching theme of balance is taken further. For readers, having been assigned the book or having chosen to read it, it is not enough to half-heartedly attempt to enact some of the skills in the book. Just as artistic excellence is the defining factor for musicians, both in terms of technical capability and interpretation, so must the “excellence extend beyond the art.” The author makes a strong argument to this end, insinuating that musician-entrepreneurs “insult your customers if any component” of your offering is imperfect (p. 147). Based on his previous coverage of the inertial effects of demand generation, and how difficult it can be to motivate consumers (even those theoretically interested in what you are offering) to actually act, the argument becomes crystal clear. Why struggle for artistic excellence if you only deliver marginally on your entrepreneurial offering for your customers? They won’t be pleased with the results, and neither will you.

As the book comes to a close, a more philosophical discussion occurs, with the last chapter purposely asking a question on many classical musician’s tongues: “Can entrepreneurship save classical music?” (p. 153). This chapter attempts, successfully, to get at existential challenges facing classical music performance, including key demographic concerns that classical music organizations have largely ignored. Particularly memorable are discussions of socio-economic concerns such as transportation access that amplify downward attendance trends, and important takeaways for performers with respect to the holistic experiences we need to be delivering to our audiences.

For all of its successes, Nytech’s book has a few drawbacks. A major one is the use of the term “traits” throughout the book, which, given the historic use of the word in business psychology, tends to suggest that individuals are born with a certain set of aptitudes which make them entrepreneurial, opposite of the point he tries to make. Rather, the use of “skills” is more appropriate, with the language signifying that entrepreneurship is activity-based, teachable and not pre-disposed, as Neck, Greene, and Brush (2014), Gartner (1988), Sarasvathy (2008), and others have shown. Some traits may exist, but individuals can learn skills and overcome those with ability. Perhaps this is a finer point, but this use of language, in light of the book’s goal of translating entrepreneurship for classical artists, is a concern which should be addressed in future editions.

Given that most classical musicians will not pursue formal education in business, *The Entrepreneurial Muse: Inspiring Your Career in Classical Music* is a laudable compression of and resource for core business topics and is not only insightful, but a pleasure to read as well. This places the book a level above most other texts and makes it a valuable addition to the career preparation repertoire of music schools. Nytech’s book aligns, in many ways, with a general business education, and at minimum is a helpful reference guide for classical musicians attempting to make their way in a world with fewer and fewer institutional opportunities to perform and support music-making. If partnered along with or inside of an artistic training curriculum that supports it, the learnings could be transformational and help new generations of classical musicians embrace the power of the entrepreneurial method to renew and revive the artform that they and we hold so dear.

## References

Gartner, W. B. (1988). “Who Is an Entrepreneur?” Is the Wrong Question. *American Journal of Small Business*, 12(4), 11–32. <https://doi.org/10/gdj3qb>

- Neck, H. M., Greene, P. G., & Brush, C. G. (2014). *Teaching entrepreneurship : a practice-based approach* / H.M. Neck, P.G. Greene, C.G. Brush. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham : Edward Elgar, 2014.
- Nytch, J. (2018). *The entrepreneurial muse: inspiring your career in classical music*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sarasvathy, S. D. (2008). *What Makes Entrepreneurs Entrepreneurial?* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 909038). Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. Retrieved from <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=909038>
- Skaggs, R., Frenette, A., Gaskill, S., & Miller, A. L. (2017). *Strategic National Arts Alumni Project - 2017 Annual Report* (Annual Report). Bloomington: Indiana University School of Education. Retrieved from [http://snaap.indiana.edu/pdf/2017/SNAAP\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](http://snaap.indiana.edu/pdf/2017/SNAAP_Annual_Report_2017.pdf)
- Ward, T. B. (2004). Cognition, creativity, and entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 19(2), 173–188. <https://doi.org/10/cfkpnn>