



The Music-Preneur Mindset Podcast

EP28: Music-Preneur Spotlight: James Divine



You're listening to Episode 28 of the Music-Preneur Mindset Podcast.

Hey there! You're listening to Episode 28 - Music-Preneur Spotlight: James Divine.

I'm your host, Suz - a mindset coach to help music-preneurs build sustainable careers in music by setting clear goals and creating time management systems that enable them to work smarter, not harder.

One of the biggest hurdles that often gets in our way is ourselves. Being too much in our own heads we can lose sight of the bigger picture and get caught up in the minutia of what we're doing.

For example, when working towards a goal that no longer serves us, rather than stepping back and observing what's changed and where our new paths wants to lead us, we often continue suffering through the path we're currently on simply because we're on it.

We can forget that in the larger scope of things the main goal is to be happy and create a life we love, not suffer through something we have the power to change. Forgetting to give ourselves permission can hold us back from achieving our full potential.

Sometimes giving ourselves permission to change our narrative or realizing we didn't have all the answers we once thought we had is all we need to break through what's been holding us back.

A few months ago I had the pleasure of crossing paths with music-preneur, James Divine. He's a professional saxophonist and full-time high school band teacher. I'll let him tell you more of his own story, but if you've ever felt stuck in your journey, unsure of

where to go next or if you feel you're working towards a certain goal and you're not clear as to why then listen up!

I hope this discussion inspires you to live life on your own terms, whatever those terms may be and regardless of the life you've lived before.

Without further ado... I bring you Mr. James Divine!

Suz: Ok, so welcome! James I want to thank you so much for being here. You have a lot that you could teach our listeners and I'm really excited for us to get started. So tell our listeners a little bit about your journey as a musician up until this point.

When did you decide you were going to be a professional musician? When was that? When did that become a goal for you?

James: I decided that I wanted to be a professional musician in my junior year of high school. Music was one of the few things that are really found success in, starting all the way back to sixth grade when I first started in band. In 10th grade I made it into our all region band and also made it in my 11th grade year and that kind of convinced me that that was something I was I was going to do.

I auditioned for the Army band and made it into that and had a 10 year career in the Army band serving in Virginia, Japan, and then to Colorado, where I decided to get out of the Army band and we ended up staying in Colorado we loved it so much.

I tried about two or three years as a self employed musician and that was working OK, especially towards the end, it started opening up a little bit more, but that's when I discovered my true calling of teaching music and so I was able to transition from performing full time and teaching part time to teaching full time and performing on a part time basis.

And the nice thing about being a teacher is it gives you some extra time in the summers and on the weekends to still do some performing aspects of it, but I think every-

one has to kind of find their niche, some people will not teach at all, some people will teach part time, some people will perform full time in front of audiences of 10 thousand, some people will perform full time in front of audiences a 50, so everyone has to kind of find their niche, but that teaching part is what I've been doing for the last 20 years. It's taken up about 80% of my time.

Suz: That's wonderful, yeah I thoroughly enjoyed reading about your journey because you know as a mindset coach I also decided in high school that I would be in the music industry professionally, but I certainly didn't think I'd be a mindset coach, or even knew what that was. So I always enjoy people's journeys and how you can't really predict it and you just follow this overall goal and you do the best you can, and as choices unfold before you, you find things that you don't necessarily think you'd find so I always think that's very interesting.

James: Exactly I think everybody has to find that thing that's going to work for them.

Suz: Absolutely! And in your book, *The Saxophone Diaries*, which I absolutely loved {and everyone listening, the link to that book is in the show notes}, you share a lot of the misconceptions you originally had about what your journey would look like in music compared to how it actually went.

One of my favorite parts in the book is when you discuss the fallacy that most musicians think - "Well if I just get my music out there then I can start making money!" So you learned pretty quickly that there's more to it than that and you share a lot of those great tips about how to approach your journey from an entrepreneur standpoint and how to pace yourself a bit more.

We often discuss on this podcast a lot of those similar tips like monotasking and working through rejection, and staying organized with systems, and even writing down your goals which you know, writing down your creative thoughts and ideas, which I thought was a great tip that you had mention. So what's the biggest lesson for you in terms of seeing yourself as a music-preneur? Like as you went on this journey, what was the biggest lesson that you were like, "Okay this is how it goes"?

James: I think if I looked at my biggest lesson from my current standpoint of being 51 years old, I would say that I wish I would have gotten into writing my goals down sooner. Zig Ziglar has a great *[Wheel] of Life* that he has where we're supposed to have these goals in 6 areas of our lives: finances, our job, personal goals... and I encourage everyone to look that up and kind of see those. But there's something about writing them down and I didn't discover this till about 10 or 15 years ago and I wish I would have known in my younger days.

There's something about writing it down that transfers it to a different part of our brain that is more likely to happen and I actually do this on a weekly basis. Now I have a weekly calendar that I write out by hand and it includes all the things I want to get done each day and I think about what I want to get done, what I need to do for a long term goals.

So, as you as you know, if you're going to record a song you can't just say on June 15th I'm going to record a song. When am I going to write the song? When am I going to develop it and work on it and really refine it? The recording may happen on June 15th, but there's a whole process going into that, so every week I'm sitting there thinking about how I'm going to refine my long term goals.

I think another mistake I made for the longest time was not realizing that the goals were adaptable. So sometimes, because I wrote them down in November, I thought that I had to follow through on that the following year. But sometimes, in the middle of the year, you realize maybe I don't like doing that as much as when I put it down as a goal, but I don't like doing that, or I came across something in the process or something in life has come up that has taken more urgency than that original goal, and so now I realize that the the goals are flexible.

Suz: Yeah that's so important, understanding and giving ourselves permission to be in control to call the shots. It's pretty easy, sometimes surprisingly, to forget that we have that control and that we can make those calls.

I 100% relate to that as well, and yes writing down goals is so, so important, as you said, many studies have shown that it just triggers something different in the brain when you put that pen to paper.

Which is one of the reasons for [The Rock/Star Life Planner](#), you know, people have asked us so many times, "Well are you going to create an app for it or is there an app to go along with this?" It's like, NO! It's meant to be written on! So I thank you for sharing that with us.

One of my favorite quotes in your book, you say, "Setting your heart on fame may be fleeting. If you set your heart on money and that's your main focus, in the long term you'll be dissatisfied. If you set your heart on adding value to people's lives you will make an impact on the world."

And I really loved that, it's something that I often try to get musicians to see, the larger picture in things. So how did you come to that realization and how has it served you so far in your career?

James: The main way I came to that realization was probably teaching at the small private school that I started my teaching career at. There's so many times that we think we're not having an impact because we don't have a hit song or were not singing or performing in the big arenas, and those people do have their own different kind of impact, but I don't know if they have *life-changing* impact.

So I have some students... I was just looking at one of the pictures recently at my first 4th grade band in 1998 and I had about 12 students in that in that group and these "kids"... I put kids in quotes... they're in their thirties now, and there's a couple of them that still keep in touch with me a couple times a year, and they were 9 or 10 years old when when I had them as a teacher and I haven't taught at that school for 13 years.

There is also a story from that book if it's okay for me to share it... when our school was based around a quad there were four or five buildings, and there was this big - about

half the size of a football field - quad where sometimes the high school students would be throwing frisbees or running around and the playground was in a separate area.

One year, there was a bear or something hanging out in a tree, in the Fall, on the playground and so all these students from kindergarten through 5th grade were on the quad - there were probably about 200-250 students - and I was walking through the quad with my saxophone and one of the kids said, "Hey Mr. Devine play something for us!" And I just started playing a little ditty or jazz lick or something and it was very creepy at first... 250 kids all stopped running and playing at the same time and mobbed me... they all ran towards me.

It was the coolest experience and I really felt like a rockstar! That 3 minutes of fame, it didn't earn me any money, it didn't do anything to improve my life except make me feel good that I added some value to those 250 kids for that for that couple of minutes and of course it made me very popular in the school, doing things like that, to be able to move that to the future, when I was recruiting for band students which would remember that.

So I think sometimes we think something we do doesn't have a huge impact but if it impacts one person's life... Recently I just wrote a song for my youngest granddaughter, it was her birthday - she turned 2 - and I just spent about 20 or 30 minutes working on this little song that was specifically for her and I recorded it and sent it to my daughter-in-law and my daughter-in-law said that my granddaughter wanted to hear it like 7 or 8 times that day, she kept wanting to hear it, it had her name in it you know.

So I don't even know if I can remember the song, I probably saved recording somewhere, but that song may never... no one but my granddaughter may ever hear it, but it had that impact on her life.

Suz: I love those stories thank you for sharing that. It's 100%, I think a lot of musicians especially when they first start out they've got this pressure even if they haven't... I've noticed some don't even want the fame but they haven't asked themselves that yet, so they just kind of move forward under the assumption, "Well this is what I gotta do. I

have to try to get as many followers on social media as possible or I have to sell as many records or downloads or streams these days as I can," and they don't often ask themselves well #1 Is this what I want? and #2 Can whatever it is I want show up in different ways for me?

As it has for you, and I think the fact that you've been able to find that in other paths that maybe you didn't think of you know 20+ years ago it's there, you know? When you can find it, you can find satisfaction and you can find happiness and success in just realizing that and focusing on the impact rather than the money. Doesn't mean the money won't come, doesn't mean you don't value yourself, you obviously charge for your work you know, it's not about looking at money as bad but just not making it what drives you.

James: Right.

Suz: I think that's really important. It's funny and it kind of lends itself into this other question that I wanted to ask you regarding money. I really love your outlook in terms of valuing your music and your talents. You mention when it comes to building a sustainable career that learning and knowing your worth in this industry is important and you have a chapter in the book - Never play for free.

But there's a little bit more to it than that, you know I know that when you talk about that it doesn't mean that the venue owner has to give you a check specifically so would you elaborate on what you meant by that and how musicians can take more full advantage of that when they play live?

James: Sure and that's something I didn't learn until about 8 years ago. I actually went to a speaking workshop and the presenter said, "Never speak for free even when you do." And that was confusing at first as like, "Well what do you mean? You said never speak for free even when you do," and he said, "Always have a purpose in what you're doing."

So if you're going somewhere and you're playing for free and it's because you want to, maybe you really love the organization and this is just your way to contribute, everybody is giving their product for free, or the accountant is donating their time the lawyer's donating their time and this is you just your donation, but you've chosen to do this, then that's one thing.

You see a lot of ads for people wanting musicians and they'll say you know you'll get exposure that's always the the word I hear and I hate that word because I have rarely seen something come of that where supposedly you're going to get a lot of exposure. So that's one thing with the playing for free, make it mindful, don't just do it because someone asked you or because you think you're not going to get any other gig.

Be mindful about it. I'm doing this because I want to donate to the cause, I'm doing this because I'm going to try out a new set of brand new songs and I would feel bad if people paid me for it because some of the songs may not go well or something like that, where here you have a specific purpose.

The other thing that I learned is that when you play for something beneath your pay level, your pay grade so to speak, then you're stealing that from somebody else.

This was a really big insight for me, so for example, there was a time in town where this was probably almost 20 years ago where I was on the coffee house circuit. Everybody and their mom was starting a coffee house and they were wanting to have lots of live music.

A lot of these coffee house things... I was earning like \$20, \$10, I think even \$5 one time, despite telling people, you know there was a good audience there, and despite telling people this is the only income the musician's making, that was what the worth was to them and I finally realized, you know what? I'm not doing anybody... I'm not doing my family a favor by missing a Friday night with them to play at a coffee house that I don't need to be at.

However, what I see sometimes is older musicians will get disgusted with that and they'll say, "Well nobody pays and these coffee houses, they want you to come for just \$5 or just \$10." And they'll really mouth off about their personal feelings about that and that should be the case either.

What I figured out is those gigs are good for someone who's in high school or someone who's a young college student because when I was that age and I earned \$5 or \$10 I felt really good and even if I gave up a Friday night, even if I was on at 2am and they gave me ten minutes but they pay me \$10 I felt really good and really valued and that was sometime... you know, that at one point it was the first time I got paid for playing, I was 16 or 17, so those those gigs are important for some people.

But at the point I was earning those \$10, \$15, \$20 and I had already been in the Army band for 10 years, I was a professional musician and I was stealing those gigs from people who needed them like the college students and the high school students.

Suz: Interesting yeah I think that's a really important mindset to have. I think that's great. We've talked on this podcast before about the importance of saying no, and I know you've touched upon in your book as well, understanding where you are in your journey and knowing yes, it's an opportunity and it might be a great opportunity for somebody but is it a great opportunity for you where you are right now in your journey?

And I think that's a perfect example of that and I think it's a very wonderful way to think of it - who are you taking this opportunity from? For those of you listening that find it hard to say no to certain things thinking of it in those terms might help you say no. I think that's such a great story.

James: Yeah we've got to definitely think about what our mission is, what our goal is, where we are at in our career because it'll be different for everybody.

Suz: 100%. I also loved what you said earlier about the impact that you could have on children that are now full grown and some of them are still doing music or still taking

something that you've taught them and implementing it into their day. My my mother actually taught at my high school and she's retired and I'll still get messages on Facebook, people find me and say, "Can I have your mom's email address I have to tell her how she's helped me." And it's so wonderful to to see the impact that teachers have and it's such a special thing and I wanted to ask you, as a full-time band teacher you're shaping the lives of the students through music and so I'm curious what's been the most surprising thing for you?

I know you mentioned in your book that you never expected to to be a teacher and that this road kind of surprised you. So what's been most surprising about it now that you've been doing it for 20 years?

James: The number of students who will be in touch years later, and for every student who's in touch there's 10 or 20 who have thought about it and never made that that step, I've been guilty of that also, but the number of students who talk about, "Hey Mr. Divine, you weren't only teaching us music you were teaching us about life," this has been a process for me.

I can't say that I thought about this when I first started teaching, but I've come to realize that music is just a tool for teaching young people discipline, for teaching them persistence, for teaching them being able to see the result of hard work because there's very few things... we we live in a very instant society now and people want things instantly. "Hey, I want to lose 20lbs. and I will want to lose it by tomorrow." We've lost our determination and push to to do things, but in the arts, especially those things still exist so that has been cool to see.

Like I was saying, it took me awhile to develop that mindset and that view point because when I first started teaching music it was all about the end product and making me look good, and I've developed over the years as I've gotten older and realize that that's not the important thing.

Suz: Yeah, it's amazing how our perspectives can change, what life teaches us that if we only knew way back when, but I feel like there's a time and a place to learn every lesson and I thank you for sharing that with us.

What advice would you give those listening who know they want a career in music but may not be totally sure about what path to go down or can't maybe fully visualize what their career would look like?

You've gone through many iterations as a professional musician in your career and what could you tell somebody that's like, "I know I want to be in music, but I can't really see it, I don't know what that looks like for me"?

James: I think that the biggest piece of advice I would give young people, and I've had some who, they're coming to the end of their high school career, and they tell me, "Well I've really loved band, Mr. Devine! I think I want to be in music." I'd never give them a specific answer, but I'll ask them a lot of questions. So I'll ask them:

Did you enjoy playing with the band?

What did you enjoy about it?

And I just really dig deep and ask questions because sometimes someone finds out they really like the music part and maybe if they play in a community group that's going to be the best thing for them. If they believe, "This is something I *have* to do with my life," and those are going to be a smaller percentage of people - this is something I *have* to do with my life, I want to make a living doing this - then I would suggest that they get some training from a college.

But I wouldn't suggest necessarily that they major in music.

Suz: Interesting.

James: Some people should do that, and some people, if they can find someone to study with, I think they just need to get out there. So for example, if someone let's just say someone who's 22 and who's a decent singer, if they came to me for advice and they said, "Hey I really want to sing professionally should I go back to college and get my performance degree in voice?"

My answer would be, "It depends if you tell me you want to sing at the Metropolitan Opera then probably you need to get a Masters or Doctoral degree in voice performance at a major university. Say you want to sing some pop songs, then my thought would be to start singing at your church or start singing at some local coffee houses and kind of see where that goes, you're going to start seeing where your weaknesses are and where you need to work on some things. Plus it's either going to ignite that passion so that you you say, 'This is something I *have* to do. I need to do more of this. How can I cut back on my other job and focus on this?' or you might realize, 'I really don't want to do the work it's going to take.'"

So many times we tell people go get a degree in something and if you're a performer, nobody cares about your degree let's hear you sing or give me a demo or give me a link to your page and let's see what you're doing. So I think it's getting getting out there and doing something is probably the most important thing.

Suz: Absolutely I couldn't agree more, 150% with everything you just said, for sure. I think it's also, as you said earlier, getting out there and and while writing down your goals and giving yourself permission to say, "Okay this is what, as of right now, this is what I think I want to do and what I would like to accomplish," and then as time goes by maybe you learn new things, somebody teaches you something, your eyes are opened up to a new opportunity, and that goal changes or that goal gets stretched out into something different, and so giving yourself permission to, as you just said, just act, just do it, just think about what it is you *think* you want right now and see, experience that and learn from those experiences.

I think that's great advice to pass on. I think some young people when they don't have the answers, it's kind of paralyzing and they just kind of think, "I don't know so I just won't do anything."

James: Yea, do something and then if you have to change midstream that's okay but start moving. It's interesting, being in an education, I've had students and bumped into them 4-5 years after they graduated from high school, and this can happen to anybody but it just happens to be young people that we're talking about and I've bump into them at the grocery store and I'll say, "Hey, Sally what are you up to?" and she'll say, "Oh I'm working and saving money for college." And then I'll ask them, "Where are you working or what are you doing?" "Oh I'm working at this restaurant about 15 or 20 hours a week until I can get my money for college together."

Well they're 22 years old and they haven't done anything since they graduated from high school and I always tell them when I have students who say, "I'm not sure whether I want to get a degree. I'm not sure what I want to do."

Okay go work full time take one or two college classes. For me, I joined the army band right out of high school. I was really fortunate, I don't think it's even possible today to do that, the level of the military bands has just grown so much, but I knew that a degree would be important at some time and I started taking one or two classes.

Now I never could see the end in sight, it's like this can take me forever, but finally after 10 years I had my bachelor's degree. That's why I always tell people no matter what age you are, start moving forward towards something because if you don't do anything in 5 years, 5 years will have passed and you won't have moved towards any type of goal, but if you start moving towards something, 5 years will have passed and you'll have learned some things or you'll be closer to your goal, or you'll have changed your goal and now you're moving towards that new goal.

Suz: Yes absolutely, and I think, as you said before, with this kind of society of instant gratification, if they can't see the end in sight they just figure "ugh...." but as you had said, the end can only get closer if you start moving forward, so it might not be instant

but you'll certainly be closer and you'll certainly know more. So yes absolutely, guys if you are out there listening and you aren't sure of what to do, there is no right answer just do something and you'll either find out it's not what you want to do or you'll find it is what you really want to do and either way it will inform your next steps.

James: Exactly.

Suz: So we've gotten to the point of a podcast where I like to ask my guests these 4 questions. I ask every guest these same 4 questions it's always a good time. So whatever first comes to mind for you, again, no wrong decisions here.

If you had an extra hour in the day to do whatever you wanted with it how would you spend it?

James: I would spend it writing music.

Suz: I love it! So if you could collaborate with one artist or band in any capacity - you could record a song with them, you can go out on tour, collaborate in any sort of capacity - who would it be and how would you want to collaborate with them?

James: It would be with a regional musician here in our area, named Steve Watts, he's a saxophonist like I am and I would love to play a duet with him or work on a song where we really expounded on two saxophones doing something.

Suz: Very cool. So along those same lines I always talk on this podcast about Your Ask. So, much like staying put and not making a decision won't get you any progress, if there's something out there you want and you don't ask for it the answer will always be, "No."

So what right now is a request that you have? What's something that you'd like to see happen in your career and whose help or resources would you need to make that happen?

James: So the thing that has always been slightly frustrating for me is that I've always had this desire to teach at the college level and it's one of those weird things because they want you to have your Doctorate degree and in fact someone who's 26 with no experience who went right from high school to college and took 8 years of college and has their Doctoral degree is more likely to be hired by a college than someone, I'll just use me as an example, who's 51 and has a Master's degree and 31 years experience in the in the music field.

It's just kind of a nature of the of the system, so I don't know who could help me with that, but if there were something that I could do, wave a magic wand and change that to spend the next 10 or 20 years of my career actually teaching at the at the college level.

Suz: I know we have a few listeners in the education field, and in the university field, so anyone listening - if you have some advice or resources or know of anything that might help our good friend James here, make it happen!

I truly believe that, you know, putting things out in the universe the right people will hear. It's really a shame I've kind of looked down the path of education as well and spoken to some people on the college level and it's... so many things in our education system her just a little backwards which you know is a soapbox moment for another day, but it's really... the value we place on on certain things, it's a little upside down but that's just my humble opinion.

So every week I have an Actionable for our listeners, usually I provide a downloadable worksheet or something that they can go do based on what they've learned here today. Taking action, as we said, often helps solidify certain lessons for us. You can take your time with this if you'd like, but if there's anything that you'd like our listeners to go and do, what would you like the Actionable of the Week to be?

James: So the Actionable of the Week would be for listeners to look up Zig Ziglar and find his his [Wheel of Life](#), I don't remember exactly what he calls it, but it's like a wheel

of life goals sheet I think he has actually a book based completely on it, but it has so many things to help propel you forward.

And then the second thing that I would suggest people read is someone else's book, an author named Dan Miller, and he wrote a book called [40 Days to the Work You Love](#) and he talks about taking 40 days, I think it there's an action plan in it also, of moving from a job you don't like to something that you love doing and it talks about even everything from the resume and what to do with your resume and to send it out, so that's what I would suggest. Hopefully that's okay that I put two in there.

Suz: Absolutely and thank you so much! I actually know both of those resources and I love them as well so I will certainly have the links to those in the [show notes](#) everyone. So please go and do that and I'm also going to have a link to James' books and I highly recommend you read them as well. I thoroughly enjoyed them and I want to thank you so much for spending this time with us. You have such an inspirational story and they're so much more to it than we had time to discuss here today, but it really is just so inspirational and motivational and I thank you for sharing just some of the lessons with us here today because are so important for people to realize. And thank you, thank you so much for being here.

James: It has been my pleasure, thank you so much for having me.

Ok, so who's inspired? I know I am!

I want to thank James for sharing his story with us. The biggest takeaway I hope you took from our discussion is that success is defined on your own terms and no one else's.

You don't have to make a big splash to be impactful. You don't have to have wild and crazy dreams to be successful. If that's your thing, than by all means go for it! But always remember success is what you make it.

If you don't like the direction your life is taking, be bold enough to change course. No matter what you'll learn something about yourself and about life.

We've had a lot of great guests on this show already and what I love the most is that no matter their story, they are all big successes in their own rights.

Indie-pop band Sub-Radio, in [Ep 13](#), showed us how to be successful by creating a band that works together. In [Ep 17](#) Zach from Broken Luxury illustrated their success in creating an engaged, niche market of fans that support their decision to create unique, immersive musical experiences. In [Ep 20](#), DJ & comedian Cipha Sounds broke down for us what it takes to hang with industry elite without losing yourself or your reputation. And in [Ep 24](#), singer-songwriter Lesley Barth rolled out for us her blueprint for leaving her day job and living with her husband who is also a full-time musician. If that's not a success then I don't know what is!

What does your success story look like? If you need some more inspiration, all of the books and Rocksources we've mentioned here today can be found in the show notes.

Simply go to www.therockstaradvocate.com/ep28 and check them out.

And stay tuned for a BONUS episode where James and I do a LIVE coaching session for the very first time on this podcast! If you're listening from your favorite podcast app it'll be the next episode. If you're listening from my website the bonus episode is in the shown notes at www.therockstaradvocate.com/ep28.

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If you're looking to figure out your next steps, find time to balance everything on your plate, or if you'd simply like your own clarity session with me, let's talk!

As always, feel free to email me at any time: suz@therockstaradvocate.com.

Until next time, Rockstar! Have a wonderful week and I hope to see you back here next Wednesday so we can get grounded to get rising! Take care.