



The Music-Preneur Mindset Podcast

Ep89: Music-Preneur Spotlight: Sharon Ruchman

You're listening to Episode 89 of the Music-Preneur Mindset Podcast.

Hello! You're listening to [Episode 89: Music-Preneur Spotlight: Sharon Ruchman](#).

I'm your host, Suz - a mindset coach helping music professionals get clear on their goals and find the time to get it all done while maintaining a healthy work/life balance.

I know we're well into 100+ days in quarantine for most of us, and it hasn't been easy. But mindset is a powerful thing, and it's a choice. It's important to remember while so much is out of our control, our mindset is in our control and that's a lot of power to have.

We can choose to focus on everything that's upended our plans for this year, focus on the limitations that have been put on us, focus on the ugliness that is out in the world that can often feel like a losing battle.

Or, we can choose to focus on the fight. Focus on the choice we have to see these challenges as a turning point and a time to dig deep and find out new things about ourselves. Focus on the fact that this time was given to us and it's up to us to do something impactful with it.

We can choose to be brave and leave that comfort zone we've crawled into to cope with the world around us. Sometimes it's what is outside our comfort zone that holds the tools we need not just to cope but to thrive in new environments.

It's an important reminder for us to keep close, which is why I'm using today's episode to share with you our very last Spotlight of Season 3. Before we wrap up this season next week, more on that later, I wanted to leave you with a very inspiring conversation I had with Sharon Ruchman.

Sharon is a composer, pianist, and violist based in CT who received her Bachelor of Music at

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New England Conservatory and Master of Music at Yale School of Music in voice. In 2008, she released her first chamber music album and has since released 5 more albums of both solo music as well as chamber ensemble music.

Her music has aired on classical radio stations throughout the United States, Canada, and Australia, and in 2018 she published her memoir, *The Gift of Rudy*, detailing an incredible story of her connection with her great-uncle, whom she had never met, through music.

I'll let her share the details (you won't believe it if I told you!) as well as the projects she is currently working on during this lockdown.

Be sure to visit www.therockstaradvocate.com/ep89 for links to all of Sharon's music, her book, and her social channels.

But, for now, pull up chair, get cozy, and enjoy Sharon's inspiring story...

Suz: So, Sharon, thank you so much for joining us today.

Sharon: Thank you.

Suz: I just read your extremely impressive bio to our listeners. And here's so much I want to touch upon. But first, I just want to ask you, it feels like you've just been always dedicated to music, and some of our other guests in the past might have found music later in life or had had other career paths and all these changes.

As your story grew through your music education and your profession, was there ever a time where you doubted if you would stick to doing music professionally or has it always been that way? What's kept you going through this profession?

Sharon: Great question. So I had many obstacles and struggles along the way. When I was five years old, I sat down at the piano and I always had melodies going around in my head. I was so entranced by that. I was enchanted. I loved it, and that kept me going. Of course, as I got a little older, I began voice and piano lessons, but there were a lot of challenges with that.

There were too many expectations from teachers and parents and in addition to that, I had ADHD, which I didn't realize - no one recognized at the time. But there were so many pressures about performing and being a good student and being a good performer that it just got in the way.

I had a lot of insecurities and guilt. I had stage fright, and music became less desirable for me as I continued on. It was a struggle. It was a constant struggle - first to sit still and be able to practice and then to be able to keep the performances going and actually enjoy what I was doing because it was a downer sometimes, it really was.

I think that it took me a long time before I get to the other side of that. In college, I did summer programs where I was at the Ambler Music Festival and the Blossom Music Festival and singing under conductors as Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa and Robert Shaw, and it was pretty fabulous. But, I wasn't practicing and working the way I should have, and I was fortunate because I had the abilities and talent to keep it going, but it certainly wasn't the way it should have been.

It took until I was much older to understand what ADHD was and to find a solution for that, so that when I finally decided to get back to my composing, I knew that I had to be able to sit still for more than 15 minutes at a time and I couldn't. So when I realized that this was a big issue for me, I sought help.

I was able to get on medication, and I went from sitting still to 15, 20 minutes at a time to 10 hours a day. That's when I started to really create, compose. I actually completed five CDs in five years. It was like there was a well of stuff inside that could now come out, and it was all sitting there just waiting to be accessed and unearthed.

I guess we can't decide when we want these things to happen. I wish I could say that it could have happened 30 years ago, but this was, I guess, the time that I was ready, and there were a number of things that led me to this place.

Suz: That's really, really inspirational - so many things that I'm taking from that immediately. One of the things, I know a lot of our audience, their biggest struggles is the patience. You know, we want success tomorrow or we want it all to make sense to us today or we want all the answers, and I really commend you for, once you were able to see that this ADHD was present, that you

asked for help because no matter what chapter of our lives, it's really difficult to seek help for something that we don't understand or that we don't know about.

I know a number of members in our community do have either ADD or ADHD, and it's been coming up in conversations more of them trying to make sense of it for themselves and trying to find ways, as you said, to be able to sit for longer periods of time and write what needs to come out. And as you said, once you were able to get the right help, and that looks different for everybody, but once you found what worked for you, this "well" ... it's amazing.

Sharon: Right. And I think also that it was really actually a combination of things that brought me to this present place. The other one was actually healing from my difficulties of childhood and letting go of the past - these were two simultaneous issues.

The ADHD was not even known until I was probably in my 40s or 50s. Growing up and people thinking it was your fault that you couldn't study and you couldn't perform well and actually, my piano teacher used to tell me that I was wasting her time most of the time, and she said 'Because of that Sharon, I think our lesson is now ended.'

And she would actually put me out on the street. So those sorts of things were just really humiliating.

Suz: Yeah, I mean, it's amazing, you know, just in the mental health community, so many things that we don't understand, and when other people don't understand them or don't know what it feels like for us to go through those things, you know, lose their patients or think you're doing something on purpose or think you're incapable. And it's amazing that once we're able to get the right support, what it can do.

Sharon: Yes, absolutely.

Suz: Wow. One of the other things that really struck me about your background, you might have stuck with music most of your life, but there's so many different chapters to it. One of the things that we tried to showcase on this podcast is understanding that your goals can change, your passions might change, and you're going to have hopefully a very long career so there's going to be many chapters.

You're not only a composer, a pianist or a violinist, you're also an author, and you're also studying the viola most recently. I love the story behind it. Can you share with our listeners a bit what brought that on and about your uncle and all of that stuff?

Sharon: I would love to, actually. So when I was growing up, my grandfather introduced me to one of my great uncle, whose name was Rudolf Fuchs. He was a virtuoso violinist who tragically died at the age of 25, So I never met him, but I always felt I had a connection to this man because I was the only other really serious musician in the family.

My grandfather would introduce me to this other viola player who played with my great uncle in his string quartet. As the years went on, there wasn't a lot to talk about Rudy, although my father had his own stories - he used to be in the practice room when Rudy practiced his violin because actually he played the viola for a few years and then switched over to violin. My father would tell these stories of how he was the only one allowed in the room, and he felt very honored by hearing him play.

So we would talk about him, and my father actually had letters of my great uncle's between my grandfather and my great uncle when my grandfather was trying to find work across the country. He was a heating engineer and Rudy, who did a lot of moonlighting with his music and with his violin playing, actually supported my grandfather while he was struggling.

So the story actually begins really seriously about 25 years ago when Rudy's sheet music actually was delivered to me through a second cousin, and that's a long story, but the second cousin knew about me being a musician, and he lived in Connecticut. His mother was the girlfriend of Rudy's and she had his sheet music, so that was the first thing that I received of Rudy's.

Over those years, I received many other things - that was photos, documents. Then there were letters, of course, between my grandfather and Rudy and then, when I became very serious about finding out more about Rudy and wanting to compose more, I decided to do my own research about Rudy, and it lasted for about three years.

I received, a month later an email from an unknown sender, a young woman who actually played with the Youth Symphony Orchestra in Richmond, Virginia. She had purchased a viola on Etsy, and she proceeded to not only email me, but to take photos of what was in the viola case.

One was an original receipt of the viola, and it was in perfect condition. It was about 100 years old at that point, and it had my great uncle's name on it with a date, 1923, when it was finally purchased by Rudy's brother, who is also a violinist, not on the par of Rudy, but he played the violin. His name was Charlie, and he bought the viola for Rudy.

In any event, below was another photograph. And that photograph was actually the chin rest that Rudy played on, on his viola, and his name was etched on it - *Rudolph Fuchs, 1920*. I said, 'Oh, my God.'

Suz: I have chills.

Sharon: I have chills on me now. I said, 'Is this possible? Really? Is this possible?'

So after that, I decided to purchase the viola, and then I realized that I needed to play it because I had already played the cello on and off over many years and I was familiar with a string instrument and then also played the piano for almost all my life.

And so I said, 'I need to play this viola'. Actually, I'm four years into playing the viola, but what was quite remarkable beyond this is that a year later, I received another email from another unknown sender, a choral director in New York, who told me that he had found, on a table somewhere in New York, a copy of Rudy's 1929 recording.

Suz: Wow.

Sharon: And I said, 'Oh, my gosh'. And he actually sent it to me. I eventually purchased the record, the original 1929 record. There's another one out there I still don't have of 'Ave Maria,' but the point is, I have, and it was the first time I actually could hear Rudy play, and it was breathtaking. It really was.

So I had most of Rudy's things now after all this research, and I said, 'This is a message for me.' This message is that, not only am I inspired, but I need to go back to my music and look at it very differently.

This is my second chance to not only play the viola, but to compose, to be open about everything in music now, and there are no boundaries at this point - anything is possible. And this is when I felt that my life, in a way, with music had started all over again.

Suz: That's amazing. I still have goose bumps, that's such a cool story. I'll certainly have the link in the show notes, if anybody would like to purchase that memoir and read more about it you can get the link in the show notes and you can also go to www.sharonruchman.com as well to find out more information about it.

I also want to touch upon all the different ways you've been able to build your career as a musician. There's so many avenues out there for sharing your music, for being able to find a career as a musician. There's so many avenues out there for sharing your music, for being able to find a career as a musician.

There are so many ways that so many people never even think of or don't even go into. With classical musicians, a lot of the younger classical musicians that I've spoken to always feel like, 'Oh, I have to do this particular thing if I'm a classical musician' or 'I have to play in a symphony or that's it, and if I don't do that, what can I do?'

And you've been able to do so many things from putting out your CDs over the last few years to your music has aired on radio stations, you've composed for different chambers and different ensembles. So what what's the story behind Sonoro? How did that how did that come together?

Sharon: Well, I'll tell you what this is about, and this really is such a great outcome of some of the other things, because of the extraordinary of chain of events from Rudy and feeling inspired and all of that, I had already written enough music for five CDs and put them out and did radio and all the things we talked just talked about.

There was a part of me that still had experienced, over the years, all the different styles of music that I was exposed to. You know, jazz and blues and Latin, and, of course, I have this great experience of not only taking tango lessons, but I have a connection to Argentina through my great-grandfather, so I've spent time over there.

In any event, all of those have been influences and I decided now that my composing was going to go in a different direction. It wasn't just classical, which I love and that's my base because

that's what I studied all my life, but I started to incorporate and infuse, so to speak, different styles of music into compositions that I was writing.

I never fit into a genre, so to speak, and so this was kind of something new. I don't know even if there's a category, but it was a mix of different things that I have experienced all my life.

So I started writing this, and before I knew it, I was writing pieces for viola and for cello and for flute and then combining those different instruments. Then, I brought on the saxophone player and the percussionist, and part of it started with my old high school buddy.

We started to meet with different high school classmates a few years ago, and this one particular classmate is a really, really great saxophone player. He said to me, 'Sharon, I think you ought to write some stuff for the saxophone.' And I thought, 'Write? Sure.' So I said, 'OK'.

And before I knew it, I was writing for the saxophone. All somebody has to do is prompt me, and I'm going to do it. So then I said, 'Okay. This is starting something that's really exciting me.' I already had this repertoire of maybe 20 pieces and it was all different instrumentation.

I said, 'I need to now form a group'. So I spoke to my friends, I have a very dear friend who's also been playing on my other CDs - she's a cellist, she's terrific. And she said, 'Sure, I'd love to be part of the group.'

All of these people, by the way, most of them playing in an orchestra, but they also were interested in doing something different. I spoke to my teacher and she was on board, and the flutist was also on board, and the saxophone player, of course. He lives in New Jersey, so he's a little far, but he said, 'Sure, why not?' Actually, we already had a performance scheduled, but now we can't do it live, but then the percussionist who's a local guy and teaches, he was on board also.

Before I knew it, we had six people in this group and I came up with the name Sonoro, which means 'resonance, a resonant sound' and here we are! And I have this great social media person who is doing all of this work for us online, and that's where music is going now - online!

Suz: Yes, absolutely. What I love about your story and what I hope our listeners are taking from it, too, is that so many times I feel that musicians forget that they're creative. It's almost like, you

know, they'll work on their latest song and their new album, but when it comes to the next thing or figuring out the next steps or when they're feeling like they're limited... to remind yourself that you're creative, so be creative with testing out new things!

The fact that your approach to it was, 'Well, why not?' You know, it wasn't, 'Well, I can't' or 'That's not what I do' or 'That's not my area of expertise.' It's like, but you're musical! I see it in your story as like a common thread is that you remain curious about different genres, different instruments, different ways of exploiting music and your way to make a living from it. All these different things, you don't let yourself be define, 'Well, this is who I am' or 'I'm a pianist, so I can only compose for piano.'

Sharon: That's correct. I think that everything is yours in a way today. The opportunities are unlimited - it wasn't like that when I was growing up. And now, as I said, there's online and social media and so many different ways to get your music out, and you shouldn't just close yourself off. I think the idea is to be open about things, that's all.

Being creative is an extraordinary thing to have, but it is hard. Being creative has its limitations sometimes because it's not a 9-to-5 job. It's not saying, 'I'm going to work. I know I'm going to make X amount of dollars.' But being creative, you have to just love what you're doing, and if you do that, you find ways to make a go of it.

It's not going to happen overnight. But you have to do what you love, ultimately, that's what it's about.

If you are on your own, or even married, and you still have to make a go of things, many people do moonlighting, they do teaching, but they also find those little gigs on the side because sometimes it's hard. I mean, there's no question about it. I don't want to idealize this. It is hard. It is hard.

And I think you have to find every which way, and like I said, I think there are more opportunities now, but that being said, you have to find your own way. There's no one who's gonna hand you something, but maybe you can get, especially if you're a composer, a great gig writing for an ad or doing something like that, which I think is terrific. The problem with a lot of these things is that it's hard to get in the door.

Suz: Right.

Sharon: So let me tell you, when I was younger, I was a singer/songwriter, and I worked at a record company. I tried so hard to get my songs sold. Actually, it was a company where Whitney Houston's mother used to hang out sometimes, Cissy. I had a great lyricist that I worked with, and I did it because I loved it. I did it for a long time, actually. I thought, 'I'm going to make a go of this.' And I never made it. I wanted to do jingles, but that didn't fly because a lot of these industries, they close their doors - they only let a few people in.

But, sometimes you get really lucky, and I think sometimes that's what it is, but what you do have to do is get yourself out there. The more people who know about you, whether online or live performances, the more opportunities you have to do gigs, to get out there, and I think that's really what it's about. It's having people find out who you are. That's how you're going to make a dime, and that's how you're going to also just get more performances. It's a combination of those things - it takes time, but it's doable. It is doable.

Suz: I love that, and I really appreciate your transparency with all of that, because it is so important for people to know. You know, they want the blueprint. They want the, 'Just tell me what to say or who to contact or what I have to do,' and the fact is you gotta just be out there. I think a lot of people are scared to go out there without the answers, but you can't find the answers unless you go out there.

Sharon: Right, and you can't say no. You know, unless it's a real downer, but you can't say no. You have to follow all your leads. That's what you have to do, and the last thing I'll say about this is, what makes it particularly difficult is if you're a musician and you're trying to do it on your own - you do need assistance. You do. So, I mean, I'm fortunate. I have a social media person, unless you're great at it, but I'm not. You need people to help you, and that does take some money.

But you might be able to find a friend that you can pay the minimum amount to and say, 'Can you help me so many hours a week?' You don't have to be sweating it. You don't have to be saying, 'Now, I'm spending all my time on this and not on the thing that I'm good at. Not on my creativity and my performances.'

Suz: Exactly. I couldn't have said it any better. We try to always repeat, 'Do it yourself does not mean do it alone.'

Sharon: Right. That's it.

Suz: You know, right now we're having our conversation during I think we've just entered the ninth week of the pandemic, I've lost track now, but that being said, I think it's just worth noting how you're dealing with staying at home. You had mentioned that you've been getting through this quarantine by 'journaling through music.' And I thought that was really interesting. Can you kind of share with us what you meant by 'journaling through music' and how you've been spending your time?

Sharon: Sure, sure. Absolutely. So I have to say that I'm used to being home most of the time because as a writer/composer, I spend a lot of my hours every day sitting down in my Finale program, which is a notation program, that's how I compose my music.

So I'm used to doing that at home, so this is not difficult in that way, but it is difficult not seeing the musicians that I play with, my friends, you know, the personal interactions which are hard not to do. But at the same time, I am writing, but I'm finding other ways now, instead of live performances, I'm doing this with my social media/marketing team, they're helping me put things online.

So every day I go to my piano and my social media actually puts it on Twitter. She puts it on Instagram, etc. And I've actually been saying a little something about some of my music - some of it is improvisational and I'll sometimes talk about the mood I'm in and do a little piece. I'm doing that pretty much every day.

And then in terms of the other musicians, in my group Sonoro, the idea is to do more virtual stuff. We're going to not only record more, but do our videos at home and then have someone edit so we can put them up online. We're just trying to keep that going, and also do podcasts and try to share the music online with as many places as we can.

I've also kind of propped up my website, so there's a lot more YouTube stuff and things like that. I guess that's really the best I can do right now until my team says, 'Check something else out,' but I am I'm getting involved. I'm very hands on during this time.

Suz: Yeah. I applaud you also for the consistency, because I know a lot of people struggle with that, but you've kept it manageable. It's not like, 'I'm gonna do hours upon hours and share everything that I'm doing.' You know, you do the videos, you keep it consistent. You've found things that you can manage to do so that you can stick with it and that it doesn't become, 'Oh, I did that once and now I'm dragging my feet trying to do it again.'

Sharon: Right!

Suz: Yeah, I really like that. Thank you for sharing, because hopefully it'll inspire our listeners. You know, a lot of people are just still trying to find their footing. Just consistent action, and sticking with a routine like that is really helpful.

If you could go back and tell your younger self any lesson, if you could learn a certain lesson faster. What would it be?

Sharon: I would say just keep going! If you love something, nothing should stand in your way because it's about the love of something. It's about the enjoyment. It's about feeling fulfilled. It's so important, so that's what I would say to anyone. I would say, 'Just go with it.' You have to know. You can't ever look back and say, 'I didn't try it out.'

Suz: I am 100% all about everything you just said. And if you could have one superpower, what would it be?

Sharon: I would love to be a virtuoso. I guess since I'm playing the viola now, I would say that I would love to be a virtuoso violist. And that is because to experience and to have the command over an instrument so well that you could play before an audience with such comfort and no insecurities, because I had so much of that growing up, to be able to have that power over an instrument and to be able to play it any way you wanted and to express in the fullest way you wanted would be such an extraordinary thing.

Suz: If you could invite three musicians living or dead over to your house for dinner, who would they be?

Sharon: I would say actually all of them have died. The first one would be Rachmaninoff, who to me was extraordinary because he was a romantic or romanticist during that period. I love

romantic music because it has beautiful, rich melodies that stay with you. To me, that's what music is about, and there's a lot of emotion in his music and it just touches me. It really does. So I love Rachmaninoff.

The second would be Jacqueline du Pré. She was very young when she died, she was in her 40s, but she was extraordinary. She was one of the greatest cellists ever.

The third one would be my great uncle, because all my life I've wanted to have met him, and I think he would have been an important figure in my life if I had known him.

Suz: Oh, wow. Yeah. That's wonderful. I think this is the first time we've had a guest invite a relative to dinner, so it's so wonderful that you have such talent in your in your bloodline! My last question for you is, what's something that you would like our listeners to go do for themselves this week?

Sharon: So this is my general advice. That you should do something that's not in your comfort zone. Maybe that means taking an instrument. Maybe it means that you don't think you have the talent, which you actually don't know, but you should go for it and just try something totally different.

It's very important that we stretch ourselves because we may discover something about ourselves that's really pretty fabulous.

Suz: It's so inspiring to talk to you. I've had such a wonderful time getting to know more about your journey as a composer and as a player and as a student of music. This has been so wonderful. Is there anything else you'd like to share with our audience before we wrap up?

Sharon: I just think that we have to find things that inspire us and that make us keep going. Especially now, because sometimes we feel sort of sad about what's happened and feel like we want to give up, but this is an opportunity now to rediscover and to discover things about yourself.

Suz: I love that, and I also encourage all of our listeners to go discover Sharon's music. Take a listen to her wonderful ensemble, Sorono, and all the wonderful things they're doing to connect with their audience at this time. I've got links to all of Sharon's wonderful music, social media, her

amazing book that I look forward to grabbing and I hope you do as well. You can also just go straight to sharonruchman.com and find all of the wonderful things about her career there.

Sharon, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us and share your story. It's very inspirational!

Sharon: Thank you so much. I appreciate you having me. I really do. Thank you.

I hope if you take anything from this story, it's that you're out of excuses to give up. Is it going to be a fight? Yes. Is it always going to go the way you planned? Not really. But nothing is worth living with the feeling of "what if."

Be bold. It's easier said than done, but choose to focus on the amazing outcomes that are possible when you bet on yourself.

If the outcome isn't what you thought it'd be the worst that happens is that you learn an important lesson for your next fight. This is not a race and it's not a competition. Ground yourself, tune into what it is you truly want, and then go for it.

Most importantly, don't go it alone. As Sharon reminds us, you're not meant to do this by yourself. Ask for help and build your team brick by brick.

I know it can feel daunting, but take the first steps. If you feel overwhelmed with what those first steps can look like, reach out. Email me at anytime suz@therockstaradvocate.com or go to bit.ly/suz15 to set up a time to talk! I'm happy to recommend resources and options that you have for support as you work towards your goals.

Before I go, I want to let you know that next week will be our final episode of Season 3, after which I will be taking a bit of a hiatus from new episodes while I work on some new projects.

Stay tuned because next week I'll be announcing what those new projects are and I hope you'll join me on this new journey!

Don't worry, this podcast isn't going anywhere, just taking a break, and there will 90 episodes to revisit should you need a reminder on any lessons we've discussed.

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