

{Intro Music}

This is the Institute for Music Leadership

**Stephen:** OK. Jeepers. Here we go. Here's Ashley. Hi, Ashley.

**Ashley:** Good morning.

**Stephen:** Good morning. How are you?

**Ashley:** Good, how are you?

**Stephen:** I'm fine. I'm in the, uh, I'm in the IML office today and I'm in like this - the weird back part where there's fire extinguishers and a giant E on the wall.

**Ashley:** I recognize that.

**Stephen:** Oh, do you? I think that was before my...before my time here. Um...great great great...

**Stephen:** Welcome to another episode of Create. Inspire. Lead. Today I'm talking with Ashley Danyew.

**Ashley:** I am Ashley Danyew.

**Stephen:** And Ashley does a lot of stuff.

**Ashley:** I am a musician and educator and an entrepreneur or a Musicpreneur as we're starting to call it.

**Stephen:** Entrepreneur - or musicpreneur - sort of glosses over the myriad things Ashley seems to do. We'll get into her portfolio in a little bit, but first, a little more about Ashley. Ashley was born and raised in Georgia, and she grew up playing piano and singing in choirs.

**Ashley:** And I knew from a really early age, probably 12 or so, that I wanted to go into music and more specifically, go into church music.

**Stephen:** So, the logical choice was to go to college to study organ...and piano....oh, and voice. And because she needed to keep busy...

**Ashley:** I got my first church job my sophomore year. And then I started branching out and doing some accompanying and private teaching as well.

**Stephen:** By the time Ashley came to Eastman for her Master's she was now an accompanying major...

**Ashley:**...but I switched into music education my second year when I realized that there was more that I wanted to do than just accompany. And I've always been multi passionate and interested in all different kinds of work. But I recognized at that point, I think that music, teaching and learning was kind of the common thread through everything that I saw myself doing.

**Stephen:** After graduating, Ashley moved to a small, rural town in Massachusetts with her now-husband Steve - and enjoyed the slow pace of country life. Right?

**Ashley:** So I had a part time job as director of music at a small church there. Started a piano studio. I started my blog at that point. We also started a summer chamber music festival. I was also adjunct teaching at the local college. Teaching class piano.

**Stephen:** But, being the town musicians eventually took its toll.

**Ashley:** And then I got burned out pretty quickly. We were working all the time teaching and writing and planning, writing grants, trying to build our careers.

**Stephen:** Ashley realized to be the best teacher she could be - the thing she was truly passionate about - she'd need to go back to school. So, she and Steve moved back to Rochester while Ashley worked on her PhD at Eastman. And while she did that, she also worked on slowly building up a studio here; doing some part-time church job work; and all along, she was blogging, something she'd started a few years back.

**Ashley:** I started my Web site in 2010 when I finished my Masters. And I think it was just kind of a natural...it was a natural opportunity at that point to start writing.

**Stephen:** Ashley always loved to write - she still keeps a journal to this day . So, it made sense to keep a blog. Well...for herself, at first.

**Ashley:** So when I first started my blog, it was not meant for anyone else to read. It was kind of just for me. It was a way of documenting what I was doing, the work I was doing and the things I was creating and the things I was learning and experimenting with.

**Stephen:** At the time Ashley started blogging, she was just starting a new church job. She was tasked with creating a children's choir - something the church hadn't had in almost 20 years. And in trying to set it up, she discovered, as is often the case:

**Ashley:** That church didn't have any budget. So I was trying to piece things together. I just couldn't find a lot of information out there.

**Stephen:** So Ashley started creating her own content - rep lists, resources, rehearsal plans, and on and on.

**Ashley:**...Then I started putting it on my blog as I thought. I want to have a place to go back and find this later and look back on what I was doing.

**Stephen:** And after a few years of posting this stuff to her blog, she noticed something.

**Ashley:** I realized that it was connecting with other people. This is a way of serving and equipping other people who were called to the same type of work. And it was resonating with people. So I started shifting my focus to create a space where other church musicians and music educators can come for inspiration and ideas and tools that will help them in the work that they're doing.

**Stephen:** And just like that, Ashley was onto her new venture. She kept up her blog, of course, but she also added all sorts of digital resources, templates - even some service music she had written as well as music for handbells.

**Stephen (from tape):** Do you have a sense of. I'm sure you do. But do you know how many people sort of visit your, your website or your blog?

**Ashley:** Sure. I mean, it's seasonal. I get some spikes during certain times of the year as you might expect. But it tends to be between...40 and 60 thousand page views a month. A lot of people and coming from Pinterest or Google. They're looking for one specific topic and they find a specific post that I've written on that topic. So individual users is a little less than that. Maybe like thirty to thirty five thousand a month.

**Stephen:** And all the while, Ashley kept up many of the other things she was doing - and even started some new projects, like her own podcast, and she's also getting ready to launch a new company with her husband. Even before the pandemic, she had a pretty hectic schedule.

**Ashley:** So right now my schedule looks a little different being from home. So teaching is taking up a little bit more time in my portfolio right now. But usually I start teaching around 2:30 in the afternoon and I teach until 6:30 or 7:00 each day. So that's pretty much Monday through Friday afternoons. So I get maybe three to four and a half - three to four and half hours a day, I would say, on other projects.

**Stephen:** Ashley uses the morning for blog posts, recording podcast episodes, research, building the new site for the series of online courses she's developing with her husband Steve.

**Ashley:** I usually have one big project that I'm working on at a time. So right now, that's that's kind of been our big project. If I'm writing a course, that's kind of my focus. And then everything else kind of I keep to a minimum just so I can focus on...on that big project. And then as things kind of rotate, then, you know, content creation will come into play. And that'll be my big project is getting ahead and in content creation or recording a new podcast episode every day for a week or something like that. So I tend to kind of batch it and work in rotation like that.

**Stephen:** One thing you may notice that's missing from Ashley's portfolio at the moment is a church job. In just a moment, we'll talk about why that is, and what Ashley's experience in various church jobs has taught her - and how they informed her website and subsequent ventures.

**Ashley:** And all of it's been shaped by my own experiences growing up in church, watching my own teachers and music directors at work, and then learning about church music ministry and music education kind of being out in the field.

**Stephen:** More, after a short break.

**AD:** The Master of Arts in Music Leadership degree is designed for musicians who seek to lead traditional and/or non-traditional musical arts organizations. This 14-month degree program uses an integrated approach to develop and hone both artistic and managerial skills for the next generation of music leaders. It combines intense classroom study, courses from Eastman's rich performance and scholarly offerings, and hands-on experiences through internships and mentorships. You can visit our website to learn more about the program. And while you're there, you can also explore the dual

degree program with Simon Business School that offers students the opportunity to earn the MA in Music Leadership in combination with an MBA; and, you'll also discover how DMA and PhD students can add Music Leadership as a minor. Just visit the IML website at [lml.esm.rochester.edu](http://lml.esm.rochester.edu). That's [lml.esm.rochester.edu](http://lml.esm.rochester.edu).

**Stephen:** Welcome back. So, as I mentioned, Ashley currently doesn't have a church job. And we'll talk a little more about why that is, but first, let's talk about church gigs for a minute. A church job can mean different things depending on your instrument. For organists, it could be that you solely play the organ; or again, for organists, and also conductors, maybe you're a music director in charge of a staff of other organists and conductors. Or, maybe you're it - you're the organist - or piano player - choir director, children's choir director, handbell director and on and on. Singers, maybe you have a church job you dutifully report to on Sundays - sometimes with a mid-week rehearsal thrown in. Brass, winds, strings, percussion - you might play for big holidays - Christmas, Easter, things like that. And depending on where you are in the country, this could be a large part of your income, or it could be gas money. Or somewhere in between. Now, we could certainly do a show about what it means to be a singer or orchestral musician with a regular church job, but in today's episode, when talking about a church job, we're talking either assistant director or director of music. And for some people transitioning from the practice room to a bona-fide church job, all of the other...stuff...you suddenly become responsible for? It can be overwhelming. You have to pick rep tha'st appropriate for the musicians you have, schedule rehearsals, plan concerts, make seating charts, keep track of your music library, deal with clergy, create and maintain a departmental budget, deal with all sorts of personnel issues, meet with families to help plan a funeral, a wedding - and on and on. All before you can sit down at a piano or organ and actually practice. Fortunately, Ashley wasn't totally shell-shocked when she got her first church job.

**Ashley:**...I had the opportunity growing up to intern with the music directors at my church during high school. So I actually got a full behind the scenes look at what went into running a music ministry and a midsize church, including, you know, what it looked like to prepare for those weekly rehearsals and managing a team of people and the administrative work and copying and collating and doing mailings and running training meetings and leading children's choirs and directing cantatas and music library...

**Stephen:** But even that preparation Ashley got didn't prepare her for everything. Depending on the job, there were often new challenges that arose. Sometimes she'd have to play contemporary church music from lead sheets; sometimes there wasn't an organ, so she had to jump on piano. At one church, they wanted handbells.

**Ashley:** I think our church had borrowed a set of handbells because they didn't have a hint about choir, but they wanted handbells for something for Christmas or something like that. And they put a little group of people together. And I kind of just taught them the basics of ringing. So I learned the basic motions, but I didn't know anything about assigning Bell parts or choosing music or how to teach spells to someone who doesn't read music or anything like that.

**Stephen:** Ashley had one of the most frequent conversations many musicians have over the course of their careers.

**Ashley:** Do you have an experience? Yeah, a little bit, but we'll figure it out as we go.

**Stephen:** The other thing about a church job is the time commitment. If you're able to find something that is full-time and supports you financially, then it's probably fine to devote most of your time to that job - if that's what you want. But a lot of church jobs are part-time. Except, part-time doesn't always mean part-time.

**Ashley:** It is always more than it is on paper. And so on paper, it might come out to be a 10 hour per week job. But that does include any practicing time, any time looking for repertoire, any professional development time, even sometimes committee meetings and that kind of stuff is all extra. And so, yeah, becomes a 15 to 20 hour a week job instead.

**Stephen:** This is often true of a lot of freelance work, right? Someone wants to hire you to play at their wedding, for example, and suddenly balks at your fee. They're seeing 50, 100, 200 dollars to sing or play a 5 minute piece, whereas you're seeing the hours of practice, maintaining your instrument, transportation, the time you spend soundchecking, rehearsing, waiting around to play. In a church job, there's that, but all of those added elements of a larger organization on top of it.

**Ashley:** A lot of it is outside of just that traditional, like, show up and play hymns for worship or choosing music for the choir.

**Stephen:** And so that brings up another issue that can sometimes arise with a church job.

**Ashley:** Yeah, I think just in exchange for your time, when you start thinking beyond getting paid, just for your time. So in a church position, you're pretty much gonna be capped at a certain salary and it's going to be based on a certain number of hours that you put in. And so even if you go above and beyond and you put in extra time, you're not going to be compensated for that.

**Stephen:** Now, that depends a little. If you're salaried and exempt from overtime, then yes. If you work more, you won't necessarily be compensated more. But, also what constitutes work within your church job? I mean. Church jobs usually aren't paying you to practice, or even necessarily to research rep, or lesson plan, or stay 30 minutes after rehearsal to listen to a volunteer choir member complain about sitting next to so-and-so. And...services? Generally, they're about the same length every week, but what about when you get the guest preacher who won't stop talking. Or feast days, or holidays - all the additional set up and prep, and the breakdown and clean up that comes after. That's why even part-time church jobs are hard to track - even if you report hours. That's not even taking into consideration budgetary woes.

**Ashley:** There's no guarantee that you're going to get a raise every year. I think I've been in a position where I got a raise for one year out of all the years I've been church music, because there's always, you know, a budget freeze or something happening where, you know, we can offer raises this year. So you're kind of trapped in that. You know, whatever you agree to is kind of where you might expect to live for a while. And that can be good depending on where you are in the country. And it can be not so good depending on where you are in the country.

**Stephen:** That can be a big thing. For example, when my wife and I had church jobs in New York City, both as singers, we typically got around around \$150 per call. That meant if we sang an 11am service and then a 4pm evening service, we'd make \$300 that day - each - with no weekday rehearsal. And very often freelancers we knew would bounce around a little - sing a temple service on Saturday, sing a Sunday morning service, head uptown to sing an Evensong, then back downtown to sing Compline. You could make a few hundred bucks over the weekend if you hustled. When we moved to Rochester, the average fee was closer to \$60 per call, almost always with a weekday rehearsal as part of the fee.

And on top of that, if part of having a church job fulfills your spiritual side, you may have to be flexible. You might end up at a Catholic church, or in a Lutheran or Methodist congregation. It could be a very liberal or very conservative church. You may not get to choose a church that is your own denomination or espouses your ideals.

Ok. I know it sounds like I'm bashing on church jobs - and I'm not at all. My wife's family actually has quite a few church musicians - my mother-in-law was an organist and choir director for over 30 years; my sister-in-law runs a music program at a cathedral down in North Carolina; even my wife is a music director at a church here in Rochester. It can be very fulfilling work, and depending on where you are, it can be quite lucrative as well. Both my old boss and my wife's

old boss in the city had pretty good salaries for New York and got free housing as part of their contract - which, in New York City is where, like, 2/3 of all your money goes anyway.

But, for Ashley, after weighing all of the things she wanted to do, it wasn't quite the right thing for her right now.

**Ashley:** So I think for me, I kind of always knew it was gonna be part time work in my portfolio, if anything, because trying to find a full time search job, especially in this area, is more challenging. And I knew that there were other things I wanted to do with me, with my time. I wanted to teach and I wanted to write and and have time to work from home and work on my own creative projects. And if I was doing a full time church position, that would hinder me from doing some of those other things. So I think I saw potential for being able to grow my career in other directions if I were to take that the accompanying church piece out.

**Stephen:** Sometimes it's really important to understand how that thing you're passionate about realistically fits into your overall plan. For example, my wife loves singing, but the few months where she was solely a freelance singer in the city were some of the most soul sucking months of her life. She's now figured out a way to balance her passion for singing with her other interests in a way that feeds her soul and her wallet in a more simpatico way. And so did Ashley.

**Ashley:** But I think for me with the blog, one of the things that I recognized going through that first couple of years, I've kind of just blogging for myself and then realizing that there were other people out there that were benefiting from what I was sharing was a lot of a lot of people were struggling with the music education piece of the job. And I realized that that's kind of where my passion was, is the intersection between church music and music education.

**Stephen:** Ashley saw an opportunity to offer her expertise as an educator to a community of other church musicians. She took her passion for both education and church music and found a way to marry the two. And even though she was stepping back from her church position, it wasn't a total career change. It was...

**Ashley:** 00:16:23,000...kind of a pivot...

**Stephen:** Yes. Exactly. It was a quick pivot - one foot still in the church music world, while she spun to grow her studio and websites.

**Ashley:** You know, now I'm at 22 students meant that I had to, you know, free up some space in my career somewhere. My portfolio to be able to devote more time to my blog and building up those educational resources. So at the time, stepping away from that church position was just kind of a pivot, you know, stepping away from accompanying and more of that performance side to focusing a little bit more on teaching and training and educational resources for others.

**Stephen:** And ultimately, this is totally in line with how a young Ashley pictured her career back in the day.

**Ashley:** Yeah. I think I always wanted to do multiple things, so I didn't know to call it a portfolio career at that point in time.

**Stephen:** She always saw herself being a church musician in some small respect, but also as a teacher, an accompanist, maybe playing in a duo or playing for choirs in the community.

**Ashley:** So I kind of always pictured, you know, doing at least three things like that, maybe gigging on the side and playing for weddings and things like that. That was something I was doing by the time I was finishing my undergrad degree.

**Stephen:** And this helped keep things exciting for Ashley.

**Ashley:** And I liked doing multiple things because I felt like it kept me fresh. It kept me creative and inspired. And I still feel like that today, that it keeps me from burning out on one thing. So I don't burn out on teaching because I'm not teaching all day, every day. And I don't burn out on writing because I'm only writing for a couple hours each day in the mornings. I mean, I don't burn out on accompanying because I don't do it all the time. It's not something that I feel like is demanding of my time. So I think having a balance of different types of work has always kind of been my ideal, and it's something that I've found fulfilling.

**Stephen:** And this approach has led to a varied, well-balanced, and fulfilling career so far. And when I was talking with Ashley, she seemed so self-assured and confident in what she was doing. It seemed like she always had a pretty strong sense of what she wanted to do, and maybe even how she'd get there. So, I don't think she's surprised by the way her career looks now, but, she still has a bit of advice for others embarking on their careers.

**Ashley:** I would say and I wish that somebody had told me this early on. I would say everyone's path is gonna be different and your career doesn't have to look like your friend's career or your teachers career or what your parents think of me as a career looks like or anything else. There's

so much that you can do with a music degree. And music is a creative art after all. So think about all the different creative skills that you have as the person, as a musician, but as an artist and as a teacher and as a leader and how to integrate all of those things into something that is unique to you. And that's that's the core of your career. And then you build upon that. So find what makes you really come alive. What makes you unique? Find that passion, that you know, for me was the intersection of church music and education, and then live there and create there and build something from that.

{Outro Music}

**Stephen:** Special thanks to Ashley Danyew for taking the time to answer all my long-winded and circuitous questions. She was exceedingly kind and a real pleasure to talk with.

If you want to learn more about Ashley and read her blog, you can find more at [www.ashleydanyew.com](http://www.ashleydanyew.com). We'll have a link to that in the show notes. Also, check out her podcast *Field Notes on Music, Teaching, and Learning*. They're really great, short 10 to 15 minute episodes for music educators. You can find that and subscribe in Apple Podcasts. And finally, if the last name Danyew sounds familiar - yes - Ashley is married to Steve Danyew who teaches a number of courses for the Arts Leadership Program. Ashley and Steve have started a new website: *Musician and Company*. Their mission is to provide an innovative model for bridging the gap between the practice room and a profitable business. You can find out more by going to musician and company - all spelled out, no spaces - dot com - and we'll have that link in the show notes as well.

So, our student workers have just finished a long fall semester, so they are all off on a very well-earned break. Thank you so much to Frances Inzenhofer and Emma Gierszal for all that you do for this show. I can't tell you how much I miss your incredible work already. Since they are on break, today's episode was mixed by me, Stephen Biegner. Outro music was composed by Alexa Silverman, and I did the intro and incidental music. We also heard Steve Danyew's arrangement of "Still, Still, Still" for bell choir conducted by Ashley right before the outro music.

As always if you have questions, comments, ideas for an episode, or you want to collaborate, you can send me an email, or you can comment on our SoundCloud page. You can also follow the IML on Facebook or subscribe to our SoundCloud page to get updates about future episodes. Go out, make art, do good work. From the IML, I'm Stephen Biegner. Until next time.