



MUSIC TEACHERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Meet the Entrepreneur: Artina McCain

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TRANSCRIPT:

Hello, my name is Artina McCain, and I am a pianist and musicians' advocate. I feel that's the best way to sum up what I've done in my career because I advocate in many spaces—wellness, repertoire, arts administration, as a teacher and a concert artist.

In the wellness space, I had the unfortunate beginning of suffering an injury and I didn't play for six years. During that time, I realized what huge connection there was between muscular function and our minds. I got out of a self-deprecating mindset that said "this is all your fault," which sometimes you hear in classical communities, and realized that it could be a much bigger picture of trauma and genetics that lands us in a space of injury. I have also had the opportunity to speak about my journey from injury to recovery to encourage other musicians along the way.

In the spaces of repertoire, after my injury, I really wanted to advocate more for voices I wasn't hearing, and that started off by me exploring the music of American composers. I would go on to record many albums of works that I commissioned or I found that weren't recorded, and that was a wonderful way for me to learn more about myself. I learned about American composers. I learned about African American composers. And then I put those pieces in that repertoire in an album so other people could hear about it too. Like my album *Heritage* was all American composers. *I, Too* was African American art songs. And *Shades*, with my husband Martin McCain, which was commissioned works by American composers right in our own community and even some of our faculty colleagues.

As a teacher, I love my students. My students are so important to me and for me to advocate for them to have the best opportunities based on what they desire and their skill sets. Something that I've done recently to do that is just exposure and experiential learning. Now, that can make some people a little bit nervous who are teachers. You know, you don't want students who are not prepared making your name sound bad or perhaps they'll find some methodology that they like, and they'll leave. Those are real fears that teachers have. But I have found that the more I have an open hand, the more my students are able to fly into their own purposes in life. I've so enjoyed thinking about how to curate various teachers and master classes, recital opportunities, so that they can hear things in a voice they understand. It's very important for us to think very strategically about that, so thinking about gender, ethnicity,

socio-economic class, when we're bringing in teachers, so that we don't end up with always the same voices or even voices that are identical to our own.

As an arts administrator, this is an area that a lot of people don't know that I've had quite a big career in actually. I've been a curator for more than 10 years, curating concert series for other arts organizations, and I even run my own arts organization called the Mahogany Chamber Series and the McCain Project, which is an artist collective helping other artists and teachers realize their goals.

These projects have all connected to my greater purposes and greater advocacies, which is to bring new repertoire to the stages, to highlight artists and to show my students different voices that might speak to them in a way that I cannot.

It's been an incredibly rewarding experience, and difficult at times too. I've been a director of an international piano festival and competition here in Memphis for the last 8 years, and I've seen the competition grow from 25 students to—we have almost 300 people here in various categories, and their families, every year.

It's so meaningful to me when, at a conference or somewhere nationally, a stage, and someone says "I so enjoyed my time in Memphis. I enjoyed practicing in your office before I had to play." It just shows me that we can have such a big impact outside of our immediate communities.

And last but not least, I enjoy a life as a concert artist. I end with this because I started with wellness, and I didn't think I could be a concert artist after injuring myself at age 23 and not playing for 6 years, so this was a huge miracle in my life and also an enormous blessing because now I've been able to play at storied halls like Carnegie and Wigmore Hall and Barbican...places I never imagined I would play when I was struggling in my 20s. I've even added a few celebrities to my list, like Bill and Melinda Gates, and Solange Knowles, who is Beyonce's sister if you didn't know.

I'm so glad that I carved a path that was uniquely my own because if I had followed the path that was given to me, I would never have seen some of my greatest victories. And I wish you your greatest victories on your own path.