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Gabrielle Pitman, singer-songwriter, Musicians Can Thrive podcaster, advocates for people in the music life during these Covid-19 days.

Proem 00:52

I enjoyed playing clarinet in the 4th and 5th grades. I was second chair in the elementary school band. My mom was super strict about practicing. In my infinite wisdom, I quit. Today, I regret that missed opportunity. In 1989 I wanted a master's degree. I had an Associates Degree in Nursing, plus 190 scattered credits and no bachelors degree. I could get a Regents Degree at the local Community College. All I lacked was 11 credits in the State of West Virginia – credits in anything. I went to the music department and asked if I could get credit for taking clarinet lessons. I was told, 'no, not unless I was planning to be a music teacher.' Just then, a man walked in and said he needed another sax player in the jazz band. 'No, I don't play sax, but if you give me clarinet and sax lessons, I will play in the jazz band.' Done deal, five credits. The second semester they gave me a baritone sax to play. I was in love. After I got my bachelor's, I stopped playing while I got my master's at the University of Minnesota. I've been playing regularly since 1994 - 26 years, 4-6 days a week in Jazz Bands, Big Bands, a Latin and Blues Funk Band, sometimes no bands. My peak experience in music was on a Blues Cruise a few years ago. My oldest friend, John, gave us tickets for our 40th wedding anniversary. The first night on the cruise I went to a Pro-Am Jam – Professionals and Amateurs. Except for me, the amateurs were local professionals. There were horn players from Los Lobos and A Roomful of Blues. They got a kick out of this old guy with a bari sax and said stuff like, 'whatever we play, you play C, Eb, and G' or something like that. Voila, I was part of a professional horn section. Heaven for an old man.

Introducing Gabrielle Pitman 03:17

My guest, Gabrielle Pitman, is a Customer-Attuned Marketer by day, Indie Musician Champion by night.

Gabrielle used to dream of building a career as a recording artist who could sell-out world tours. Think: the attitude of Rihanna, with the lyrical prowess of Stevie Nicks, combined with a little Etta James and Amy Winehouse. As she began the process of promoting her first EP, and booking shows in Austin, TX, The Podcasting Fellowship came along. That's where we met.

Now, Gabrielle produces the Musicians Can Thrive podcast. This audio documentary explores the ways that musicians (and other creative people in that industry) make money, and build careers that are sustainable long term. She is setting up the business as a nonprofit, so Musicians Can Thrive can grow into an organization that champions indie musicians around the world. Gabrielle still writes songs in her spare time. So whether you listen to an episode of Musicians Can Thrive, or you listen to the music that she'll be releasing this year, you can sink your teeth into the stories, and the music.

Health Hats: Gabrielle Pitman, I'm so blessed to be speaking with you.

Gabrielle Pitman: I'm glad to be talking to you, too. This is fun for me.

Health Hats: Good. I love your podcast.

Gabrielle Pitman: Honestly. That means so much. Thank you.

Health Hats: I follow a lot of podcasts, and I confess that I don't listen to very many, all or every one, but yours is one of them.

Gabrielle Pitman: Wow. I'm speechless. Cause I understand that challenge, there so many podcasts out there and so many interesting stories to listen to.

Health Hats: There's just not enough time. My time to listen is low. I want to support people.

Gabrielle Pitman: Yes.

Health Hats: So, why do I listen to yours regularly? Well, for one, I love music, and it's not my normal brain. I'm really good at what I've done professionally for 45 years. Not so much music, but I've been playing music for 25-30 years.

Gabrielle Pitman: Wow. Well, that's longer than me, longer than I've been alive.

Health Hats: So it's humbling for me, and it uses a very different part of my brain. I enjoy listening to people talk about the music life. So your podcasts are so gentle. They wash over me. It's relaxing to listen to them.

We're musicians! 06:59

Gabrielle Pitman: Well, I'm glad to hear that. So you are a musician.

Health Hats: I'm an adult learner, and I've never actually taken a music class in my life, even though I've had many teachers. I've been studying with a guy from Berkeley College of Music in Boston for more than ten years. He's a wonderful teacher,

Gabrielle Pitman: Dan Fox?

Health Hats: No, his name is Jeff Harrington. He's a sax player. No, Dan is a community treasure. He sponsors so much music.

Gabrielle Pitman: It was such a pleasure to interview him, by the way. Thank you again for connecting the two of us.

Health Hats: So you went from Montana to Austin, right?

Gabrielle Pitman: I did. Yes.

Health Hats: How did that happen?

Gabrielle Pitman: It's funny the way things work out. As a child, you view things in life one way, and you may be aware of how things are helpful, but the degree to which things are helpful often doesn't hit you until you're an adult. I had just graduated eighth grade. I lived in a small town. I went to a small country school, a class of maybe 20 people. I was very attached to going on to high school and having that whole experience in Bozeman, Montana. I was angry when my dad told me that we were moving to Austin, Texas. I thought it was this random place with a bunch of sand and cactus. I grew up in Montana. I already know the 'ride your horse to school jokes.' Why would I go to Texas? Then we get here, and it's this vibrant place with music everywhere. You walk around, and there's music spilling out of almost every restaurant or at least a lot of the bars, especially if you go to Sixth Street. I happened to be very fortunate. My father is an entrepreneur. He chose Austin as a place for our family to come. My mom needed sunlight. Austin had interesting happenings with businesses involved with tech, and it was also a music city. My dad has been the biggest supporter of my music the entire time that I've been a musician. So honestly, I just had very, very good luck.

Health Hats: How long have you considered yourself a musician

Gabrielle Pitman: Are you going to make me do math on a Saturday? Let's say 14 years. I was eight years old, and I'm 23 now for context. One day, I honestly can't even tell you where it came from; I had this deep desire like I needed to play guitar. I pestered my mom until I got one, and that's where it started.

Health Hats: Okay. So you got a guitar, and it was like, I'm a musician? Let me tell you why I'm asking this question. So I'm 67, and I've been playing music since I was in my thirties. It's only this year that I've considered myself a musician because I'm not professional. I will never be professional. I am so aware of my limitations as a musician that I'd never even considered myself a musician. Then one day, I thought, Oh my God, I have been playing five to seven days a week for 30 some years. What else is a musician? I'll never make a business of it.

Gabrielle Pitman: There's something to be said for not placing that limitation on the definition of what it means to be a musician. I began exploring that as part of the process of making my podcast, Musicians Can Thrive - what does it mean to be a musician? What does it mean to cross that line between amateur or professional or hobbyist? In my journey, it wasn't until I had to choose between dance lessons and guitar lessons around sixth grade or so that I decided, okay, music is what I want from my life. I don't know how it's going to happen yet, but I am a musician. I started making my podcast in the midst of

realizing that I did not want to live the musician life that I thought I wanted to live. I'd spent over ten years thinking about how to build a career as a performing, touring, recording musician, basically trying to be the next Stevie Nicks/Rihanna and realizing that I didn't want what that forced me to go through. It was a surprisingly long period where I had this identity crisis.

Showing up 13:18

I've come to understand that making money off of music does not decide whether you are a professional or not. I much prefer Steven Pressfield's view, the man who wrote the War of Art and Turning Pro. I've yet to finish the War of Art. But what I understand is that the act of showing up consistently, again and again, playing your instrument, performing music, that's what makes you a professional. The money is what enables you to keep it going in a lot of ways. But it's just showing up that makes you a professional. So by my definition, you are most definitely a musician, and I'd say a professional at that.

Health Hats: Wow. That makes sense. Now I play in a community blues-funk band and a Latin band. I've played in a big band, and I played in jazz bands. Sometimes I think why don't they kick me out? I think it's several things. One is I play a Bari sax, and there's not that many Bari sax players. I'm not technically that good; I'm not a virtuoso; I don't have good chops, but you don't need to with a Bari sax. It's not like playing an Alto sax, and I'm a nice guy and I show up.

Gabrielle Pitman: At the end of the day, that's half the battle because a nice guy, fun to work with, and you can be relied on to show up when they need you.

Health Hats: And it is so much fun.

Gabrielle Pitman: Isn't it?!!

Health Hats: It is. The Latin band is the newest. They came to me. 'We need a bari player. Do you want to play? I've never played Latin music. What do I know?' The first time I turned him down and then I thought, 'I've always wanted to be part of a horn section, this is my opportunity.' There's an alto, a trombone, and a trumpet so four horns in one band. Everything else I've played, except the big band I've been the only horn player. I thought, here's the opportunity, so why not? Then the first time I went, Oh my God, I was lost. They said stuff like just listen and play by ear; just read the chart in concert C even though I have an Eb instrument. I was lost, absolutely lost. I got in the car after, and I cried. I cannot do this. This is too much. But they are really nice people. I've been working at it, and now I'm good enough, and I'm getting better and they appreciate that I'm getting better; that I'm working at it.

Gabrielle Pitman: And probably that you were willing to come back even after that first challenging experience.

Health Hats: My mini breakdown in the car. Another thing that attracted me to your podcast was that you're a podcaster and that we met through the podcasting community. Also, a big part of the art of being a podcaster for me is how I use music. Just before we started talking, I was working on the episode that I'll publish tomorrow about medical PTSD and the COVID world. I'm using the Animals tune: We got to get out of this place if it's the last thing we ever do. Do you know that tune?

Gabrielle Pitman: I wish I could say I did

Health Hats: Listen to the episode, and you'll hear it.

Gabrielle Pitman: Yes,

Podcasting and music 17:35

Health Hats: It's fun to use music as part of the palette that you have for this art form, podcasting. If I was going to give you criticism, I would say that I would like to hear more of you.

Gabrielle Pitman: Well, I appreciate that. That's been another part of the journey, figuring out how much of my own story to weave into things.

Health Hats: That's the challenge isn't it?

Gabrielle Pitman: But one of the things that I have come to I appreciate more and more as I become both a podcaster and a musician because that was part of my crisis last year: do I say I'm not a musician anymore because I'm not trying to perform and make money off of it, or do I say I'm a podcaster or now what do I do? So I realized that there is room for all of it, and I am primarily a songwriter, which is probably a part of why I have the perspective on music that I do because music and podcasts are stories.

Health Hats: Oh, they are. Isn't that the truth?.

Poetry in lyrics 19:01

Gabrielle Pitman: The music helps you tell the story, whether it's adding ambiance to a moment in a podcast or whether it's helping take you into the context of something that the person who is featured on the podcast, or they're telling you a story. You're helping the listener live in that moment through nothing but audio. I think that with the state of the world right now, we need stories more than ever. We need stories from all kinds of different voices, and music is one way that we can do that.

Health Hats: Being a songwriter, it seems like there's a lot of poetry to your music. I can't say I've listened to a lot, maybe three or four of your tunes on YouTube and wherever.

Gabrielle Pitman: Oh my gosh.

Health Hats: The poetry is great. I think your lyrics are exceptional.

Gabrielle Pitman: Thank you. I didn't realize that you've listened to my music.

Health Hats: Do you know who Sheila Jordan is?

Gabrielle Pitman: The name sounds familiar.

Health Hats: Sheila Jordan. Actually, Dan Fox, who we have in common, interviewed her a couple of weeks ago on his Facebook page. She's a singer in her nineties. Sheila's an old friend of ours. My wife was her massage therapist, and she is still touring, not touring right now, but she interrupted a tour to go home and hole up. She's in her nineties. We heard her in Boston about a year and a half ago. Oh, my God, she has some pipes. She was playing with a young band of local Boston musicians. You could tell

the band was pumped to play with her. I bet they were better than they usually are because they were playing with her.

Gabrielle Pitman: Fed off her energy.

Health Hats: Yeah. She was so excited, and she interacted with the band. She is such a voice-as-instrument singer. You could just hear her improvising off of what they were doing. A musician that can listen is priceless. I find for myself as a musician, I've only begun to figure out how to play less and listen more. It's much more satisfying. That's what I'm working on these days. But anyway, so tell me, what are musicians doing these days who like, can't go play out. What are people doing to get by?

Getting by these days 22:35

Gabrielle Pitman: Well, it's been a challenge, and that's probably an understatement. I think my favorite thing that I've seen come out of this is how I've noticed a lot of musicians just in the few live streams that I've watched or participated in being able to have the audience send the comment. Say, Oh, I love this. Or will you play this song? Or even just asking how they are letting them know that they appreciate the musician showing up and playing the music. The musicians have gotten to have direct feedback and interaction with their audience that when you're on a stage and you hear people cheering, or you see them dancing, or you hear them clapping. Yes. That's one kind of interaction and playing on stage and feeling that I'm not sure if adoration is the right word, but just the love and appreciation that's coming from the audience, enjoying your performance. That feeling is unlike anything else in the world. And it's honestly one of my favorite feelings. But being able to hear people's words or have them directly request songs, that's a different kind of interaction. It's almost more intimate in many ways. I can see a lot of musicians appreciating that, but at the same time, it's also incredibly challenging to adjust to this because there is the challenge of demand and attention span, because I love many different artists. But if they're live streaming more than once a week, the odds that I will have the personal time or just mental bandwidth to go and find it and participate are very low. So one of the things that I've found is, now more than ever, musicians need us to support them with our money because we get paid less than a dollar every single time a song is streamed. You get a performance royalty, and it's less than 5 cents for most of the streaming services. It's hard for me to reconcile that because, on the one hand, I've grown up the daughter of an entrepreneur. I am a student of Seth Godin, Tim Ferris, and many other wise people who encourage you to give some work away for free to build the audience. But at the same time, it costs money to create the recorded songs. It's more affordable than it was before, but it's still money that goes into it.

Health Hats: Besides you gotta eat.

Gabrielle Pitman: Exactly.

Supporting musicians 25:47

Health Hats: How can I support musicians?

Gabrielle Pitman: One of my favorite ways is buying merch (merchandise) from artists.

Health Hats: Hats and cups and stuff like that?

Gabrielle Pitman: There are all kinds of cool things. There's even an artist I love who wrote and drew a whole graphic novel, and it matches up with the album. I could go on a very long tangent about how genius that entire strategy was, but at the end of the day, I find that encouraging people to buy music, to buy a CD. Wow. That is wonderful. We all have all kinds of demands on what we are going to spend our money. So, if you can buy a tee-shirt or a hat, people are going to buy t-shirts anyways. So why not buy one that supports the artists that you love and it shows to other people in the world or other people at this point, looking at you on social media, that you're a part of this tribe, help others find the others, the people who do things like we do, the people who love the music that we do. And I think becoming aware of what your smallest viable audience is going to become more important than ever.

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Use Abridge to record your doctor visit. Push the big pink button and record the conversation. Read the transcript or listen to clips when you get home. Check out the app at abridge.com or download it on the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. Record your health care conversations. Let me know how it went!"

Musicians in Covid-19 28:18

Health Hats: My next question: how do you think going through this COVID and the dynamic of surviving as a musician, whether it's emotionally surviving or financially surviving, what do you think musicians will stick with?

Gabrielle Pitman: I think it's different for each musician. There are many people who if they're a guitarist who just plays in someone else's band and they are an incredible player, but they don't have the ability to go, 'Hey, I'm going to sing and play, and these are my original songs and come join me in this story.' How do they get people to just listen to them playing instrumental guitar for an hour or so? There are some wonderful ways to support musicians. And one of them besides merch is Patreon where musicians can build that smallest viable audience, the people who go, 'okay, I love what you're doing, and I'm going to regularly show up and support you with my money. You're going to use that money to regularly show up and deliver music to me.' I think a complementary way to do that is this platform called Twitch. It's primarily known as a video game streaming platform. But one of the really interesting things about Twitch is because there are all of these video gamers out there who have devoted audiences by the hundreds of thousands who come and watch them play like a video game. I can sort of understand it, but there's a part of me that's like, this is crazy. But the wonderful thing about it is they become trusted curators. So if they are playing music while they're watching, while they're playing a video game and the people watching are going to go, huh? They like this song. 'How do I feel about this song? You know what I think I like it too. It's going to remind me of this moment I had of this experience. I shared with all these people on this live stream, watching my favorite gamer, destroy the competition and see us go or something.' And so a musician could be a partner in that live stream and play live music instead of the gamer playing recorded music in the background. So I think it's just going to force people to become really creative in ways that we haven't previously considered.

Putting yourself out there 31:09

Health Hats: Are you on Patreon?

Gabrielle Pitman: Not yet.

Health Hats: There you go.

Gabrielle Pitman: I'm figuring out what I would want to offer, but that is something I will be looking into doing year or two.

Health Hats: Why don't you do it in the next month?

Gabrielle Pitman: Honestly, I might have just to get some ability to do more with Musicians Can Thrive.

Health Hats: So offer your new track. Start small because I'll sign up.

Gabrielle Pitman: Not a bad idea. Well, it starts with one person so

Health Hats: One person.

Gabrielle Pitman: Alright, well, honestly, part of my delay in doing this is I was originally intending on turning Musicians Can Thrive into an LLC, but in light of, to be blunt, the killings and protests of the past week, I have done a lot of reflecting because I was deeply disturbed by what was going on. Honestly, yesterday I pretty much did the equivalent of either burying my head in the sand like an ostrich or retreating into my shell like a turtle

Health Hats: We are messed up.

Gabrielle Pitman: The results of putting my head in the sand was I got some quiet to reflect on, 'okay, this is horrifying. What can I do to help in some small way?' I can tell the stories of all kinds of musicians, of all kinds of races and ethnicities and backgrounds.

Health Hats: You're really good at it.

Gabrielle Pitman: Thank you.

Songwriting 33:12

Health Hats: Yeah. I'll bet there's some songwriting in that as well.

Gabrielle Pitman: Oh, absolutely. The political riots songs are gonna roll out. So get ready.

Health Hats: I'm excited.

Gabrielle Pitman: I'll thank you. Yeah. So in light of that, Musicians Can Thrive may end up being a nonprofit so that I can help people better. So I just need to take some time to look into all of that before I start earning money through Musicians Can Thrive.

Health Hats: Well, here's a different way of thinking about it. Put yourself out there on Patreon so you can begin to get some experience with the process of the money through Patreon. And then when

you're ready to be an LLC, be an LLC, you don't need to be an LLC to be out there and start building a fan base.

Gabrielle Pitman: This is true. That's an excellent point.

Health Hats: I'll proselytize.

Gabrielle Pitman: Well, thank you.

Health Hats: So what should we be talking about that we're not?

Gabrielle Pitman: If you're interested in talking more about songwriting and stories, I had this thought come to me in the past couple of days. So, when I was about, I want to say 12 years old, I was just starting to come into my own as a songwriter and figure out what I wanted to say that was more interesting than which boy was currently ignoring me in the hallway. Because love songs are a great place to learn how to write a song, but inevitably it gets a little old when all you're playing is love songs. And so my dad told me about a Scottish philosopher who is known for saying something along the lines of, 'if I can write the songs, then it doesn't matter to me who writes the laws.' Where he was going with that is the songs, the poems, the ballads, the stories throughout history are what truly capture the hearts and minds of people. And if you want to change something, earning people's trust, getting their heart and their mind to be aligned with yours is half the battle. I don't quite agree with that quote because I think we live in a time where who writes the laws do make a pretty significant difference, but the point of being able to change things through the stories that you tell that still stands.

Health Hats: The oft attributed quote to the 18th century Scottish writer and politician Andrew Fletcher: Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws. What he actually wrote is this... I knew a very wise man so much of Sir Christopher's sentiment, that he believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads he need not care who should make the laws of a nation, and we find that most of the ancient legislators thought that they could not well reform the manners of any city without the help of a lyric, and sometimes of a dramatic poet.

Gabrielle Pitman: And so there are some musicians out there today who bemoan the loss of the storytelling musicians. People like Bob Dylan and the Beatles, who had lyrics that were political, that drew a line in the sand and said, 'Hey, this is not okay. Or we can do better than this.' Any number of spins on that. There were a lot of songs in the sixties and seventies even before then, and after that talk about, 'Hey, this is wrong or this needs to be made better.' And I think that now more than ever, we need that kind of songwriting to come back. And there are people who have continued to do it. There's a rapper that I love, his name is J Cool, and his lyrics tell some wonderful stories. They're not comfortable stories. But there are stories worth listening to. I was actually, while I was putting my head in the sand yesterday, I was watching a TV show, that is based on a series of books that I love called The Shadow Hunters. And although it's really silly and it's angels versus demons and vampires and werewolves. The way that they use music in television or film to also help tell the stories. I think that's how we're going to make the changes that we need to. So that's just where my creative brain is going. Okay. So if I'm a storyteller, how do I go about doing this?

Health Hats: Well, that's great. I'm an eager consumer.

Gabrielle Pitman: I appreciate that.

Health Hats: Yeah. So anything you want to ask me?

Help the helpers – Covid 39:21

Gabrielle Pitman: I listened to an episode of your podcast before we did this. Bbecause of limited time I don't get to listen to all the podcasts I want, but I want to make sure that I knew more about you and your episode on sharing the stories and helping the helpers.

Health Hats: Yeah.

Gabrielle Pitman: You started with this wonderful story about, I believe it was your grandmother, who was a Jewish woman hiding from the Nazis during World War Two. I think there's something to be said for preserving our history in a way that I think we've forgotten about in the past couple of years. The past couple of decades is more accurate. And I'm just wondering if that's changed - it seems like it's affected your perspective on quarantine and COVID and how we move through this as a people?

Health Hats: Yes. I think more about my mother, who was also in hiding during the Holocaust, and I'm more in touch with her experience, even though I learned about being in hiding first from my grandmother because my mother didn't talk about it. But then when my mother did in my adult years, she never talked about it in my young years. I think several things. One is that I'm glad she's gone now because what's happening now would totally freak her out. I think that this is nothing compared to what she went through.

Gabrielle Pitman: Oh, absolutely.

Health Hats: While I think it's important to realize that you could always find somebody who has it worse than you. It's still your situation. It's still your tragedies. It's still your heartache. It's still your emotion. It's all yours, and comparing has mixed value. But, so what do I think? I think that my mother survived with denial. That's how she survived four or five years as a teenager in hiding and, or maybe it was three or four years. I'm allergic to denial. Cause I grew up with it and my reaction to it was no way, but, so denial is not my style. So I'm the opposite is I wear it all on my sleeve, and that's what you hear in my podcasting is I just let it all hang out. I do think that, like the episode that I'm going to publish tomorrow on PTSD when I think about what's the one thing you can do, it's like connect, share, and whether you're on the receiving end or the giving end, connect and share. Cause it's hard. It's really hard. So I don't know if that answers your question, but that's a good one.

Gabrielle Pitman: I'd say you said what needed to be said.

Health Hats: Thank you very much for chatting with me

Gabrielle Pitman: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

Health Hats: We'll chat again. I'm a fan.

Gabrielle Pitman: It was such an honor. Bye Danny.

Reflection 43:11

Mozart said, 'The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between.' I love that. It fits with my outlook on life – listen to the pearls outside the boundaries, beyond the obvious connections. I'm pumped to be a musician – continual learning. My neurologist told me that he has nothing for me better than playing the sax. Good for my lungs, my dexterity; creates new brain pathways and keeps me spiritually sound. I am a musician. Thanks, Gabrielle. Listeners and readers, stay safe; keep relatively sane.