



Andrew Street

JOB TITLE: Composer, arranger, session musician, performance coach

WHAT HE DOES: Scores music and writes songs for TV shows; mentors contestants on FOX's *American Idol*.

ANDY STREET FIRST DISCOVERED his passion for composing at 10 years old. It blossomed through his teens as he created and arranged parts for all of the bands he played with. “I had piano lessons, but writing out the different parts for my bands was something I did on my own,” he explains. “It came naturally to me.”

Unsure about how to make a living after studying music at the University of Cambridge, Street went to Paris and worked as a street musician, playing the accordion. After that, he moved back to England to be a cabaret musician in a nightclub, and then played piano in hotel lounges for years. “We had to sight read every night,” he says. “That’s

how I developed that skill.”

He eventually found his way into television, working as a musical director for an English comedian and composing songs for U.S. children’s shows like *Sesame Street* and *Madeline*. After moving to Los Angeles to work on more children’s show projects, one thing led to another and Street was offered a job with

the hit show *American Idol*. “It’s all been about people knowing my work,” he explains, adding that he has never gotten a job by submitting unsolicited material. Making personal connections is what helped his career. “It’s also important to be adaptable—to be able to write and play anything. I know how music is put together, and I can reproduce it.”

He starts the *American Idol* season as an auditioner, listening to people try out for the show at regional qualifying events in order to narrow down the field for the TV judges. “With 15 thousand people entering, you can’t have the same three judges. So there are a number of panels with record company people and TV producers who travel to the

regional qualifying events.” Once the show starts, he also mentors contestants and helps them prepare their songs. “In a lot of cases, the singers don’t know the songs, and everything has to happen really quickly. A mentor will ask us to transpose a song or change tempos on the spot. There’s no, ‘Wait a minute, I’ll think about that.’ You have to nail it every time.”

Being part of *American Idol* sometimes means staying up until four or five in the morning to work with contestants. “I’m with them, teaching them the songs, I’m advising them on harmonies and keys,” he explains. “The songs, which are usually three to four minutes in length, have to be cooked down to a minute and half for the show. Editing those songs is one of my most important jobs.”

In addition to working on *American Idol* and scoring music for other TV shows, Street is also a session musician (playing piano on other people’s records) and writes musicals. He recommends doing something creative for a living, but cautions that it can be stressful. “The hardest part is balancing family life with deadlines,” he says. “I actually thrive on pressure, but the hours are long.” The best part about his job, however, is hearing his music on TV and all over the world. “I once went to Paris and I saw a Strawberry Shortcake doll. When I pressed the button, it played one of my songs! In French!” **T**

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