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MUSIC TEACHERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Meet the Entrepreneur: Nicola Cantan
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TRANSCRIPT:

Hey there. My name's Nicola Cantan. I'm a piano teacher and entrepreneur here in Dublin in Ireland. I got started on my journey towards this business that I have now on a somewhat circuitous route, which I think is surprisingly common for piano teachers and especially for people running different kinds of businesses.

So I taught piano as a teenager and all the way through college. But my main thing all the way through that time was actually design. I did my degree in fashion design and I worked in the fashion industry. But gradually my piano teaching started to take over, and what was my hobby or my part-time income and my main thing switched roles, and it made a lot more sense for me to be a piano teacher full time.

As my studio grew and I developed a waiting list for lessons, I found my groove as a piano teacher. When I first started, I'd been really just teaching the way I was taught. Nothing wrong with it, but nothing particularly striking or unusual about it. However, when I started teaching full-time, that's when I really got into using games to teach things, brought improvisation into lessons, even though I wasn't teaching jazz and a whole lot of other creative stuff started coming out of that.

Now my studio is not a big, massive school. I have grown it, but I only take on two or three other teachers at a time, and I work with them very closely to mentor them and bring them up as teachers and help them to find the joy of teaching through games and improvising in their lessons too.

Now, it may sound so far, like I've completely abandoned the design side of what I had learned to do, what I studied in college, what I worked on as my career, my first career. But that wasn't actually the case. I ended up using all my design skills to create my own games and my own resources, and really to think about teaching in a different way.

And that's what I brought to my membership site, which is called Vibrant Music Teaching, and also now our practice app, which is Vivid Practice.

They didn’t start as the massive sites they are today with hundreds and hundreds of games on Vibrant Music Teaching and this practice app that’s going strong. It didn’t start that way.

It started as a blog where I was just sharing games I was creating for my students, ideas I was trying in my studio because I was still in this (and I always will be in this) experimentation phase with my teaching, and I just wanted to share that with other teachers, and I think that's why my business has grown the way it has. So if you’re someone that's thinking, “Hey, I might like to do something a bit different, I might like to expand my studio, I might like to teach in a different way, or I might like to grow some kind of an online business…”

If that’s something that’s in your head, I truly believe you need to start from your interest, start from exploration, just like we'd want to do with our students in our lessons, right?

I started my blog at Colorful Keys just to share what I was doing and to learn from other teachers, to connect with other teachers – ‘cause that's what I was really interested in doing. That’s what I could spend hours and hours and hours without noticing the time was passing. And because it started there, that’s how it naturally grew into the business idea I had then had for the membership and later on for our practice app, Vivid Practice. It grew naturally from what I was exploring myself and the conversations I was having with other teachers.

So if you are someone who’s thinking you kind of wanna go down this type of a route, or you have some interest in it, that’s great and you can be somewhat intentional about it. I’m not saying everything has to just flow naturally and you have to see where the chips land, but I do think people can tell when it's forced.

When it’s something that you’re just doing as a business move, nothing wrong with making money, nothing wrong with developing a solid business plan, but people will tell where it’s coming from and if it's coming from a place of you and your drive and your interest and your exploration, whatever you wanna call it, your inspiration, if it’s coming from there, that’s when I think it can be really successful.

Now if any of that sounds like something that you want to pick apart with me further, that you wanna talk to me about, I’d be happy to field questions, so feel free to reach out to me by email through our website and ask any questions you might have if you’re looking to go down this path too. It's been so fun talking with you and sharing a bit about my journey.