

# Jenny Alday TOWNSEND



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**H**er business marked its fifth anniversary this past February - an accomplishment in and of itself since only about

half of all new businesses make it past five years according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But Jenny Alday Townsend has more than made it. She's gotten over, around and through the various hurdles that can challenge and thwart business owners and now can say, entering her sixth year, she has also survived a pandemic.

Her business is Music Compound which started with a simple enough concept: a place for musicians to hang out and play. The idea came to her while waiting tables in Sarasota area restaurants. She'd be working late hours and many of her co-workers were musicians and many didn't have a place to jam or practice.

To graduate and earn her bachelor's degree from USF Sarasota-Manatee, she had to create a business concept. So she drew up a business plan and did a market analysis. In the process she saw a "void" in the marketplace. And thus became Music Compound in 2009—at least on paper—since she was still a student.

After graduation, Jenny had a sales job that had her traveling all across the country. In each city she visited she checked out music schools of all kinds, shapes and sizes. She knew what she didn't want: nothing like a Suzuki school and no orchestra. Her concept was more like a garage, but not grungy. Then it came to her: a warehouse.

She quit her job and plunged in. Her business advisor recommended a strip mall in Lakewood Ranch - reason being that area was growing. But she was thinking more like Cattleman Road just off I-75. She followed her vision, and with the help of a SBA loan, so far it has worked out. When Music Compound opened, the space was 1800 square feet. She had one teacher and four studios. Eighteen people signed up the first month.

That was 2016 and now, five years later, Music Compound has two locations, 30 employees and nearly 400 members working out of a 6500 square foot facility. Though it's technically a music school, it doesn't replace or compete with the music education children get in area schools. Hers was meant to fill the void for after school music classes. And classes at Music Compound are catered to each student.

Plus, her instructors take a different approach. "Music Compound is performance-based and offers a holistic and contemporary approach," is what her website explains. Her business is built on monthly membership fees. But it's not just for beginners to music. From a press release, "Music Compound's new business model allows wanna be and seasoned musicians to take lessons at home any day or time." So it's not just children, youth and teens who are learning. And it's not just music they're into.

There are classes in drum, guitar, piano, ukulele, but also choir and musical theatre and vocal lessons. And you can elect to have private lessons or group lessons; learn online or in person. Music Compound's second location is located at The Bazaar on Apricot and Lime in downtown Sarasota. Music Compound was supposed to expand to a much larger 10,000 square foot Lakewood Ranch location, but that will have to wait.

As small businesses often do, this one moved away from what it was initially and morphed into what it is now. No longer strictly a place for musicians, it has become after school music education for "kids" of all ages. Jenny wants students to "enjoy the experience...it's not about practice, it's about playing. We make it fun."

Her teachers are classically trained, but teach in a more "contemporary" method as

she calls it and yes, they still learn the basics. The most popular classes are Kidz Rock for ages 4-7. Children play guitar, piano and drums in rotation. They also learn teamwork, as well as verbal and nonverbal communication skills as they build and create their "rock band." Over 50 are in that program.

Jenny is a fifth generation Floridian and her family hails from Old Miakka. She attended St. Martha's then Cardinal Mooney then USF Sarasota/Manatee. Her family is associated with several local businesses: her father owned Bradley's Window Cleaning, sold it, and now runs Alday Farm that sells dairy products to places like Detweiler's. Her uncle owns Alday's Barbecue and her grandfather once worked for circus magnate John Ringling. So there's some possibility that there's an entrepreneur gene in Jenny's DNA.

Like so many businesses, the pandemic meant adjustments had to be made. In 2020, around spring break in mid-March, things turned for the worse as the pandemic took off. Music Compound went online-only for three months and also offered lots of free classes to help families.

The business went to in-person again in June for summer camps, taking only 10 children per session to be safe. A good bit came back by August and many who weren't ready to return didn't ask for refunds to show their support.

Classes are offered online for those who feel more comfortable learning that way, but in person, Jenny explains, Music Compound is spacious and all precautions are being taken with rigorous cleaning. The front office even made their own masks. Jenny, who knows how to sew having made quilts over the years, set it up. Yes, revenue dropped, but she has made it through by adjusting. "Covid proved we can be sustainable through memberships," she observes. Did it bother her seeing her growing business stop in its tracks? "I thrive on chaos," she says laughing.

Jenny has enough energy for three people. A visit to the Music Compound website (<https://musiccompound.com>) or a conversation with its visionary founder is like a hit of quality espresso. There's so much energy in this business and it clearly comes from its leader.

So Jenny owns a growing music school, so what instrument does she play? Um, she doesn't, actually. Her first music lessons ever were a year and a half ago. But the ukulele is something she's taken on and adds, "If I can do it, anyone can." That also sounds like good business advice. 🍷

STORY: Louise Bruderle

IMAGE: Evelyn England

#### Music Notes:

Music Compound continued its tradition of giving back with a recent donation of \$1,500 to the Child Protection Center (CPC). The funds were raised through the sale of craft soda advent calendars, titled "24 Days of Cheer." The kid-friendly items featured 24 craft soda flavors including butterbeer, sour apple, candied bacon, chocolate raspberry root beer, and more.

Jenny was a "Captain" for the CPC's 40th anniversary celebration last year, helping the organization to raise funds to support its prevention, intervention and treatment programs.

Music Compound has donated more than \$50,000 to local nonprofit organizations.

#### Events by Music Compound

Spring Break Camp at Music Compound runs March 15-19. Each day features a different instrument. Learn to play piano, ukulele, guitar, drums, and vocals. For grades K-5th for half and full-day options.

#### Music Compound:

1751 Cattleman Rd, Sarasota (941) 379-9100  
For more information, visit [www.musiccompound.com](http://www.musiccompound.com).