

# Chamber Music America

## Meet the Music Press with Steve Smith and Nate Chinen March 1, 2011

**SUMMARY:** A candid conversation with music editor Steve Smith and critic Nate Chinen about the art of getting press coverage. Learn what attracts journalists' attention and how to present your information in an effective way.

### I. Nate Chinen

A. Current position: writes about jazz and pop music for *The New York Times*

#### B. Career

1. Began his career as a jazz critic and musician in Philadelphia, PA
2. Moved to NYC in 1998 and co-authored a book with jazz impresario George Wein
3. In 2005 began writing for the *Times*
4. Writes about all styles of music, not just jazz

### II. Steve Smith

A. Current position: music editor of *Time Out New York*

#### B. Career

1. Began as a radio host for a now-defunct classical radio station in Houston
2. Was a publicist for classical and jazz record companies
3. Reviewed new classical CDs for the syndicated radio program *Weekend America*
4. Currently a freelance contributor to a wide variety of newspapers and magazines (*Washington Post*, *Village Voice*, *Symphony*, *Chamber Music*, *Jazz Times*, *Down Beat*, *Decibel*, *The Wire* and *Signal to Noise* among them)
5. Classical-music industry columnist for *Billboard* and an assistant editor for *Jazziz*
6. Blogger on Night After Night

### III. How to Get Calendar Listings

#### A. Publicity

1. Calendar listings are a great way to promote your event to the public.
2. Often listings are free to post.

#### B. What to provide in a calendar listing:

1. A brief description of the event
2. Necessary information about the venue
3. Date and time of the event
4. Pricing

#### C. Reliability

1. A performer can get into the listings on a fairly regular basis if performing at a certain level in New York.
2. Listings are likely the most reliable form of consistent media coverage on music events in any metro area in the United States.
3. People do really make plans based on the listings.
  - a) The *New York Times* removed its listing system, and the action met a negative public response. As a result, the listings were reinstated.
  - b) Both writers cited anecdotes about acquaintances saying they consulted the listings when planning a weekend out.

### IV. Submitting a Calendar Listing

#### A. Keep in mind that Calendar listings will be due approximately a week to ten days prior to the event.

1. Small last-minute changes to a listing can always be made; the important part is holding the space for the listing.
2. Submit early gives writers time to plan where they will place it.

#### B. Submit your information to as many sources as possible

1. Editors often search the Internet for listings on other websites; therefore, an event may be picked up by virtue of its being several places.
2. Different kinds of publications look for specific items to make up their weekly listings. Just because your listing does not fit for one periodical, does not mean it will not be appropriate at another.

#### C. Submitting an event to the periodical does not guarantee a listing, but comprehensive information will give your listing more credibility.

1. Some events fall into a category that an editor needs to fill—such as a specific style of music or specific venue.
2. Try to make your event information unique, different; editors must be comprehensive in their listing choices.

## V. Print-Based Reviews

### A. Album Reviews

1. An album review is an expert's evaluation of a recording, and the author may assign the work a rating to indicate its relative merit.
2. There is a shrinking amount of space for reviews in papers today.
  - a) *Time Out New York* no prints album reviews.
  - b) Too many albums to review
  - c) *Time Out* is more interested in events than in albums.
3. Reviews are typically only done when an album release is coinciding with a performance.
  - a) Editors only have so much space; so a combined event will get more attention.
  - b) Columns have become more action-oriented; columnists, too, are looking for an activity involving music more and not just an album release.
4. Other reasons an album may be reviewed
  - a) An album may have so much interest that every medium will review it.
  - b) A writer may have a specific interest in that style of music.
  - c) The album may relate in some way to a unique event, a trend, or human-interest story.

### B. Live Reviews

1. A live review is an expert's evaluation of an event or performance, such as a live concert, and the author may assign the work a rating to indicate its relative merit.
2. Featured Space in print media:  
Overall print space has shrunk in newspapers and magazines, but there is still an interest in live reviews.

## VI. How to Get Your Album Reviewed

- A. Combining a live event with the release of an album will improve your chances of a review.
- B. Timing
  1. Writers should be given advance copies of the album.
  2. Give writers as much information about the album as they need.
- C. Having an added element to your album launch, such as a charity event, may improve your chances of being reviewed.
- D. Be original

1. Instead of an album launch event, plan a series of events that takes place over a few weeks. This creates
  - a) an opportunity for multiple listings to attract interest; and
  - b) allows editors to give a live review while the series is still happening.
2. If an idea for an event involves a side story or an interesting personality, it may allow a writer to use your event in a column or feature story that's not directly related to your event.

## VII. Playlists

- A. Playlist articles list songs that are the writer's favorites or are appropriate for a certain time or event.
- B. These articles are growing in popularity and can be a good way to get information on your album out to the public.
- C. If there is a particular performance on your album that relates to the playlist theme, it is worth contacting a writer in the hopes that they might include it.
- D. Playlists often appear at regular intervals (say, every fourth Sunday), so timing your submissions to writers to fall enough in advance of these scheduled articles will improve your chances of receiving press.

## VIII. Features

- A. Deciding on the publication to contact
  1. Smaller media geared to your style will be more likely to do a feature on your album.
    - a) A good album with a good lineup could easily produce a feature in *JazzTimes*.
    - b) A major medium, such as the *New York Times*, will not have the space to include a similar review.
  2. Getting your piece in a major newspaper or magazine
    - a) If you know when most albums are released and live events take place, you may have a better chance during a slow time.
    - b) Find an angle for your event or album that might work in any section of a periodical, not just the music section.
- B. Find a writer who shares your passion
  1. Research which periodicals write features about your style of music.
  2. Get to know the writers; features are often written because the writer fights for its placement.
  3. Make connections with advocates of your style of music, they can work with you to make your feature happen.

C. Effectively marketing and publicizing your event will attract writers simply because you have created a “buzz” for your project.

## IX. Blogs

A. Being mentioned in a music journalist’s blog can give you great exposure to both the public and to other press.

1. Members of the press will tend to read their colleagues’ blogs.
2. Being mentioned in a popular blog can give you the same publicity as a feature in a magazine.

B. Blogs often connect the public to tweet feeds and links on sites such as YouTube, where the blog’s visitors can learn more about your event or album.

C. Nate Chinen’s Blog, “The Gig”

1. Through “The Gig,” Chinen’s intention is to express ideas about music, principally from a jazz perspective.
2. Debuted in the spring of 2001
3. “The Gig” is so named because it connotes not only an appointment but it is also the space in which a player reconciles commerce with art.
4. “The Gig” has covered topics ranging from women in jazz to the ups and downs of composer commissions, with occasional detours.
5. Bonus features
  - a) Special section where Chinen has commentaries and interviews
  - b) Great place to mention new albums or events

D. Smith’s Blog, “Night after Night”

1. Debuted in October 2005
2. Dedicated to the music and events in New York City, “live and otherwise”
3. “Night after Night” integrates Twitter, so that Smith can interact directly with his readers.

## X. Tips for Networking with the Press

A. Publicists

1. A well-connected publicist can help an ensemble tremendously with the press.
2. Be selective in choosing a publicist
  - a) Do some research and find the best publicist for your style of music.
  - b) A good publicist will have a working relationship with the members of the press who are likely to be interested in your ensemble or event.

## B. Timeliness

1. Editors have many dates to remember, keep your dates in an obvious spot on any materials you forward to them.

a) List the date and time in the subject header of any emails sent to the press.

b) Include the date and time on the outside of any hard copy materials sent to the press.

2. Have your materials and information ready well in advance, there is no such thing as sending a press release too early.

## C. Forwarding materials to the press

1. Writers receive many CDs every day and don't have time to listen to each one.

2. Try to make your presentation as eye-catching as possible.

3. Follow your hard copy information up with an email.

4. If you do not receive a response, try making your hard-copy material electronic and presenting it that way.

## D. Etiquette when dealing with the press

1. Send reminders, but remain polite. Writers do not require a daily email update about your event.

2. Do not expect to receive a response to every email. A busy professional writer does not have the time to return every inquiry.

3. Be sure you know where you are calling when attempting to contact the press. Writers do not like to be wakened at 2:00AM to a call about your event.

E. Do not give up. Events are rejected for any number of reasons; stay positive, and your events will get the press you want.

***To hear the complete session, please download the audio recording that this summary accompanies.***