

CMAA Matters

CHAMBER MUSIC AMERICA

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Conferences Call

A performing-arts conference can offer professional opportunities that you'll find nowhere else.

by SUSAN ENDRIZZI MORRIS

The arts may be a “people business,” but let’s face it—music professionals do a lot of their work alone. Whether you’re a musician woodshedding in a practice room, a composer writing in a studio, a development director sitting at a computer screen or the lone presenter in a small city, you’re going to find yourself working in isolation.

As far as I’m concerned, this presents a problem: I’m a firm believer in the value of networking. Staying connected to others in the business is a vital part of my job, and it isn’t going to happen if I’m simply stuck in the office. The ideal place to do it? A performing-arts conference.

These are great venues for getting to know the players in our business. You can meet newcomers, mid-career pros and seasoned veterans, administrators and board members, recent graduates of conservatories and arts-administration programs, and gigging musicians. And you can learn a lot about the business—new industry trends, emerging technologies, the latest marketing and fundraising tactics. Sure, conferences are an investment; depending your circumstances, they can cost anywhere between a few hundred and several thousand dollars. But personally, I find them essential. In fact, I’ve been going to at least three conferences a year for the past few decades.

A NEXUS OF NETWORKING

Every conference offers plenty of occasions to make connections and meet people. Some hospitality events are set up for that very purpose. But in fact, a conference is one big networking opportunity. Whether

it’s a quick conversation before or after a learning session, a chance run-in in the exhibit hall, or a leisurely restaurant dinner after the day’s formal events are over, you’ll have plenty of chances to reinforce old friendships and make new ones.

I certainly go to conferences in the hope of getting business done. I’ll meet presenters in the hope of generating bookings, and I’ve often gone home and issued contracts the day after a conference closes. For me, these conversations are all about note-taking and listening to what the presenter wants. I’m in this industry for the long term. If we aren’t working together next season, it doesn’t mean we won’t be working together the season after that.

But for me, conferences aren’t only about generating business. In fact, some of the people I have met at these gatherings have become important contacts, even though I’ve never even done direct business with them. For instance, I’m not looking to other agents for business, but nonetheless I don’t think there’s an agent in the industry that I can’t call for help if I have a professional problem, and that’s because of the connections I’ve made at conferences. Fifteen years ago, I had an exhibit booth at a regional conference next to Tom Gallant

of MCM Artists, and we started to discuss how we run our businesses—no value judgments, just information-gathering. We discussed everything from the artists we carry, to staffing, to how we do our billing. To this day, if I encounter a roadblock in my business, I’ll call Tom, just to see how he would handle it.

Attending conferences has also helped me forge valuable ties with presenters. Even if a presenter’s offerings don’t match my roster, that tie can prove extraordinarily valuable. For instance, many years ago I met Michael Goldberg, then head of Wisconsin Union Theater at the University of Wisconsin. He’s left that post, but he’s still my Midwest contact—if I have a regional question, I call him up and he helps me solve it.

I am speaking, of course, from my own point of view as a manager. But everyone in the business—from agents to presenters to the artists themselves—can benefit from the connections they make at conferences. Music truly *is* a “people business”—and conferences are where the people are.

TIPS FOR ARTISTS

For musicians, though, I offer a word of caution: *a conference is not the place for a hard sell*. Do not approach people with the hope of landing management or a booking. Rather, think of the conference as an opportunity to expand your network. When I go to a conference, I’m not there to pick up new artists: I’m there to work for the artists who are already on my roster. If you’re interested in representation, make the pitch *after* the conference.

With new airline regulations on over-

weight luggage in place, I now take fewer publicity materials to conferences. I would caution would-be clients to do the same. Nobody can afford to get on an airplane to fly home hauling pounds of paperwork and press kits. If someone sends a CD to my office afterward, though, I'm going to sit down and listen. Make the contact at the conference; send the materials later.

Attending a conference is an investment in both your career and your organization, so make it work for you.

CONFERENCE COMPONENTS

A conference usually offers a variety of different kinds of elements—learning sessions and workshops, showcase performances, exhibits, speeches. Here's how you can use them.

HOSPITALITY EVENTS Whether they're formal dinners, dessert receptions or cocktail parties, hospitality events are, of course, prime networking opportunities and a chance to put on your "A" personality. One

rule of thumb—if the event is a "mixer," as opposed to a sit-down dinner, limit each conversation to five or ten minutes. You won't make your best impression if you're monopolizing someone's time.

SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS Here is where you can really pick up some brass-tacks guidance and hear new points of view. For instance, NAPAMA (North American Performing Arts Managers and Agents) arranges wonderful sessions at various conferences on issues of vital importance to managers, artists and presenters, including federal tax withholding and visa regulations. (Full disclosure: I'm on NAPAMA's board.) These sessions can also be great opportunities to learn from one's peers.

SPEECHES Conferences will often feature speeches from celebrities in the arts and other fields. These necessarily offer a "softer" kind of enlightenment than a professional-development session: you aren't going to take home practical knowledge on, say, new fundraising strategies. But a great speech can nonetheless be a powerful motivator, and lift the whole conference to another level. At an Arts Presenters conference years ago, for example, Anna Deavere Smith delivered a keynote speech that was so inspiring it brought tears to my eyes.

SHOWCASE PERFORMANCES These help ensembles and presenters alike. Musicians get a chance to be heard; presenters can scout out talent, and get exposed to performers and genres that they may not have yet encountered. Some showcase opportunities are meted out by juries, others by lottery, and in some instances showcases are independent offerings, staged by the artists' management during a hospitality event. Generally, three showcases are programmed simultaneously in 20-minute segments; presenters often move from room to room, sampling different ensembles in a particular time slot. No other conference activity is scheduled against the performances.

In all cases, musicians and agents need to do some advance marketing to make sure that presenters show up. At the showcase itself, presenters expect to receive marketing materials and a personal greeting. The showcase's time constraints make it essential to assemble a program that will display the ensemble's strengths quickly and decisively. Follow-up after the conference is essential: be sure to get in touch with any presenter who attended the showcase.

THE RESOURCE ROOM This is the exhibit hall or conference marketplace, where managers and other industry professionals purchase a booth space; the booth

What, Where & When

Conferences are organized regionally and nationally. The three major regionals are booking conferences, all held in September and each targeted to presenters in a specific area of the country: western states (the Western Arts Alliance Conference), the Midwest (Midwest Arts Conference), and the Southeast (Performing Arts Exchange. Many mid-Atlantic and Northeast presenters also attend this conference.) Sub-regional organizations like Arts Northwest also hold annual conferences, as do some state arts groups. Performing arts conferences are generally three to four days long.

The major national and international conferences are produced by Chamber Music America, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters and the International Society for the Performing Arts. All three are held in New York in January, which means an ambitious conference-goer can attend all three in one trip.

DATES FOR UPCOMING CONFERENCES INCLUDE:

REGIONALS FALL 2009

Western Arts Alliance
Phoenix, Arizona
August 31-September 4
www.westarts.org

Midwest Arts Conference
St. Paul, Minnesota
September 9-12
www.artsmidwest.org/programs/mac

Performing Arts Exchange
Norfolk, Virginia • September 23-26
www.pae.southarts.org

Arts Northwest
Boise, Idaho • October 12-16
www.artsnw.org

NATIONAL / INTERNATIONAL: JANUARY 2010

Association of Performing Arts Presenters
New York, NY • January 8-12
www.apapconference.org

International Society of the Performing Arts
New York, NY • January 12-14
www.ispa.org

Chamber Music America
New York, NY • January 14-17
www.chamber-music.org

becomes their “address” or go-to location for the duration of the conference. The resource room is where presenters will find information on artists, touring dates, collaborations, projects, fees and repertoire from the managers, the direct link to the artists. Managers display materials about the artists on their rosters, while state arts councils provide information about their services. (CMA’s conference also includes publishers, ensembles, composers, instrument makers, competition organizers and service organizations.) I’ll use the resource room to talk to managers, often in meetings set up before the conference itself. These give me a chance to offer comprehensive presentations of my artists, and also to get a sense of the needs and management style of the various presenting organizations. For artists, the resource room is a good place to learn about managers. You can see how they work for their artists and interact with presenters. It’s okay to have informal discussions with a manager—perhaps with the aim of assessing whether you’d be comfortable with his way of doing business. But, as indicated above, it’s *verboten* to approach a manager’s booth to talk about representation.

THE INVESTMENT—AND THE REWARDS

Yes, going to a conference is an investment. The conference fee, the cost of airfare, hotels and meals, plus (in some cases) the rental of exhibit space and/or a showcasing fee can add up to several thousand dollars. But attending a conference is an investment in both your career and your organization, so make it work for you. You’ll come away feeling inspired, re-energized and empowered, and you’ll have made contacts whose worth may prove invaluable. When you attend the same conference year after year, it becomes a family reunion of like-minded people, bonding around the performing arts. It’s a career investment that will pay off for years to come.

Susan Endrizzi Morris is the founding director of California Artists Management, a management, booking, and producing agency representing an international roster of classical and early music, world music, and opera/new theater. She also provides technical assistance and professional development services to national and international arts service organizations, including the Western Arts Alliance and Arts Northwest. This article was co-written with Susan Dadian, Program

CMA and its members at the regionals

CMA and its members will participate in the following regional conferences. (Please register through the conference websites.)

Western Arts Alliance (WAA)

Sheraton Phoenix (Phoenix, AZ)

CMA STAFF ATTENDING:

Margaret M. Lioi, chief executive officer
Susan Dadian, program director,
CMA Classical/Contemporary

Thursday, September 3, 8:30 AM

CMA PANEL DISCUSSION: *The State of the Arts*

SESSION LEADERS: Margaret M. Lioi, CMA chief executive officer, and Andrea Snyder, president and executive director, Dance/USA

The leaders of Dance USA and Chamber Music America will discuss the highlights, challenges, and the issues facing the field. Arts participation has been declining over the past 20 years, and we’re now in the midst of an economic crisis. What long-term changes will result as a consequence of the present economy? How has the economy impacted the companies? The artists? This is your opportunity to engage in a dialogue about the challenges, successes, new strategies and approaches organizations are taking to cope with and “make it” in today’s tough economic climate.

CMA MEMBER SHOWCASES AT WAA

Showcases take place at the Sheraton Phoenix, rooms noted below.

Darryl Harper: Stories in Real Time

(Laveen A Room)

September 1, 9:00 PM

September 2, 10:20 PM

September 3, 8:40 PM

Melody of China (South Mountain Room)

September 2, 8:30 PM

Performing Arts Exchange (PAE)

Norfolk, VA

CMA MEMBER VIDEO SHOWCASES AT PAE

Each year, PAE presents a number of Video Showcases, shown continuously in a designated screening area. This year’s showcases will feature two CMA members:

Amstel Quartet

Brasil Guitar Duo

Midwest Arts Conference

St. Paul, MN

CMA STAFF ATTENDING:

Susan Dadian, program director

Wednesday, September 9,

12:30-1:30 PM

CMA PANEL DISCUSSION: *The New Face of Classical Music*

PANELISTS: Todd Wetzel, director, Purdue Convocations; Steve Shaiman, Concert Artists Guild; Kee-Hyun Kim, Parker Quartet.

SESSION MODERATOR: Susan Dadian (CMA)

Classical music means a lot of things to a lot of people. It’s a great, centuries-old tradition, but it’s also a living art that can cross myriad cultural boundaries and speak to many audiences. This session will focus on classical chamber music that can be encountered in large-scale concert halls and in intimate, non-traditional spaces, on lavishly promoted CDs and on home-made YouTube videos. A panel of seasoned professionals will offer creative strategies and a fresh perspective for presenting classical chamber music, suggesting ways to harness the music’s power in your venue and community.

Thursday, September 10, 8:00-9:00 AM

CMA Program Meeting: Susan Dadian will speak about the CMA’s grant programs, annual conference and member benefits.

CMA MEMBER SHOWCASES AT MIDWEST ARTS

Showcases take place at the Fitzgerald Theater, Saint Paul.

Cantus

September 10, 6:55 PM

Bottom Line Duo

September 10, 7:15 PM

Corky Siegel’s Chamber Blues

September 11, 5:10 PM

Dallas Brass

September 11, 6:10 PM

Big ideas

Mark Your Calendar!

for presenting **Small Ensembles**

Chamber Music America's 32nd National Conference

January 14–17, 2010

Westin New York at Times Square

Watch for updates at

www.chamber-music.org

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CMA Opportunities

CMA Acclaim Awards—National recognition for individuals, ensembles, or organizations whose local chamber music activities have significant cultural impact on a community or region. Awards recognize diversity of musical styles, range of audiences served, and geographic location. Any CMA member may submit a nomination, but the nominee need not be a member. No self-nominations. **DEADLINE: September 30, 2009** FMI: Amanda Vogel, (212) 242-2022, ext. 24 or avogel@chamber-music.org.

Presenting Jazz—Support to U.S. presenters for concert engagements of emerging and mid-career professional jazz ensembles. **DEADLINE: October 2, 2009** FMI: Jeanette Vuocolo, (212) 242-2022, ext. 17, or jvuocolo@chamber-music.org

Conference Showcasing—Showcase opportunities at the CMA National Conference. **DEADLINE: October 9, 2009**. FMI: Marc Giosi, (212) 242-2022, ext. 14, or mgiosi@chamber-music.org.

CMA/FACE French-American Jazz Exchange—Support for collaborations of French and American jazz artists. **DEADLINE: October 23, 2009** FMI: Jeanette Vuocolo, (212) 242-2022, ext. 17, or jvuocolo@chamber-music.org

CMA/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming—Recognition to ensembles, presenters, and festivals for commitment to

contemporary chamber music in any and all styles, including jazz and world music.

DEADLINE: October 30, 2009 FMI: Susan Dadian (212) 242-2022, ext. 13, or sdadian@chamber-music.org

Residency Partnership Program—Support for ensembles, festivals and presenters to program chamber music residencies with community partners. **DEADLINE: February 12, 2010**.

Other Opportunities

US Artists International—Funding for U.S.-based ensembles that have been invited to participate in international festivals. **DEADLINES: September 8, 2009** for projects taking place between November 1, 2009 and October 31, 2010 and **January 8, 2010** for projects taking place between March 1, 2010 and February 28, 2011. FMI: www.midatlanticarts.org.

American Masterpieces: Presenting—NEA support for presenting projects that embrace multiple arts disciplines. Projects must consist of either a single multidisciplinary project or a multidisciplinary series comprised of several different single-discipline presentations (including performing, visual, media, design, and literary arts). **DEADLINE: September 24, 2009** FMI: www.nea.gov.

American Masterpieces: Chamber Music—NEA support for chamber music performances in conjunction with educational activities that highlight specific repertoire by American composers. Styles encompass music for traditional ensembles, such as string quartets, as well as compositions for mixed ensembles, traditional jazz and indigenous instruments, and jazz. Projects may include recordings and broadcasts. **DEADLINE: October 8, 2009** FMI: www.nea.gov.

Johnson and Johnson/Society for the Arts in Healthcare—Support to nonprofits and government agencies whose arts-in-healthcare programs show high potential for replication. Awarded organizations will have the opportunity to replicate, document and disseminate programs nationally and internationally over the three-year grant period. Letter of Inquiry **DEADLINE: October 15, 2009** FMI: www.thesah.org.

Live Music for Dance—Grants to New York City and New Jersey dance companies for costs of using live music. **DEADLINE: December 7, 2009** FMI: www.amc.net.

Aaron Copland Fund for Music Recording Program—Support for organizations that record contemporary American music. **DEADLINE: January 15, 2010** FMI: www.amc.net.