

CMA Matters

CHAMBER MUSIC AMERICA

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Road Shows

Arranging a tour for a jazz ensemble can be a tough task—but it isn't impossible. We asked three seasoned pros to tell us how it's done.

Myles Weinstein, the president of the management agency *Unlimited Myles*, outlines the steps that he goes through when he's booking tours for his clients. Publicist **Chris DiGirolamo**, head of *Two for the Show Media*, offers his ideas on grabbing media attention on the road. And composer/performer **Joel Harrison** shares some of his experiences as a musician who has masterminded his own tours.

These three professionals all come from the jazz world, but much of their experience is relevant to any ensemble attempting to put together a tour.



Putting It Together

A Conversation with Myles Weinstein

How do tours happen?

It starts with an anchor date, like a well-paying gig with a big performing arts center, noteworthy club, or festival. Once one of these makes the offer, you may ask for a little time, to see if you can fill in around it and put together a tour. That isn't always possible; sometimes the presenter will want confirmation right away. In those cases, you have to make sure that you can justify a "run-out"—a trip back and forth, with no other gigs. There has to be a big enough fee to cover the airfares in and out, and still keep the engagement a win-win.

How do you turn separate anchor dates into a tour?

Let's say you've got two anchor dates a week apart, but relatively close to each

other geographically. You don't want to have to pay two sets of round-trip airfares. The goal is to get as many gigs as you can in the week in between. You don't want the band sitting in a hotel room on a night when they could be playing. Maybe it'll be a smaller venue, and they'll be getting a significantly lower fee. But it's worth it, because it keeps them on the road. And you have to write it off against the big fees on the same tour. At least it will take care of the hotel and meals—suddenly those expenses are gone.

Be aware that Mondays and Tuesdays are hard to book—a lot of places are dark on those nights.

What about door gigs—the only fee being a proportion of the gate? Are they worth it?

Nine times out of ten, no. Not only is the fee a big question mark, but you're going out of pocket for your hotel and ground transportation. The people who run those venues can be difficult to get in

touch with, and they probably aren't going to do much to advertise and promote the event. It only makes sense if you're a young artist trying to get out there and make a name for yourself. Then it might be an investment for bigger gigs in the future.

How do I go about finding presenters and making my pitch?

It comes down to research. Attending regional conferences. Getting to know the presenters. Of course, the Internet has changed the business—you can find out so much from websites. The annual directories from CMA and *Musical America* are useful. So are directories from regional conferences, like WAA [Western Arts Alliance], Arts Midwest and PAE [Performing Arts Exchange].

But you want to bark up the right tree. If you're a startup artist, you don't want to be going after a 1,000-seat venue. Look at the roster; see whom they're booking and whether you fit the mold.

It isn't always clear who does what: in some small organizations, you've got one guy in charge of marketing who also does bookings. Some of the bigger performing arts centers have an artistic director, but that's not the first person you should contact. Sometimes it's the right-hand person who will be your main contact.

When you're making the initial contact, is it better to call or send an email?

If it's a cold contact: both on the same day. I'll leave a short voice message, then give more details in an email. I'll mention the cities that a band is playing nearby, and say something like "I can give you a good fee, since it's a routed date." It's important, too, to do persistent follow-up—usually once a week, until I get a response. You have to have a tough skin. When they don't call you back, it's not a personal thing—they just don't have enough time. Of course, after a certain point, you do have some pride: you have to say, "Forget it" and cross it off the list—at least for a few months.

Promoting Your Tour

When you get a gig, your first job is research, research, research. You have to find every local newspaper and figure out who the arts editor is. What you're really hoping to get is a profile, so that people will open up the arts section on Thursday and see a preview on you and your music, with an announcement about Friday's show. Just understand that sometimes we come across areas that are dead in the water—where the jazz press is all but nonexistent. And sometimes it's a matter of bad timing: if Sonny Rollins is playing around the corner that night, there's not much you can do about it.

You want to coordinate with the club or

presenter. Getting in a newspaper's event listings is crucial. In many cases, the presenter or club will have covered that, but it will be up to you to get further attention. Find out how many people the room holds. If it's 5,000, you've got to work harder than if it's 50.

Is there a local jazz station? Give them a pitch. And *offer* something. I don't blink at saying, "We want to do a 15-minute Q&A—and give away two pairs of tickets." One good thing about these radio spots is that most of them are Internet-ready—anyone can link to them. Which means you can use it for anything else you're promoting. Get that link to anyone you can.

—Chris DiGirolamo

How to (and How Not to) Organize a Tour

By Joel Harrison

I learned how to book a jazz tour the hard way—by making mistakes. When I lived in California as a younger man, it was enough to offer three pals \$50 per night and drive mind-numbing distances to play in small towns at venues with names like "Squirrel's." Needless to say this was not a sustainable model.

Through trial and error I have figured out a rough system for putting together a worthwhile tour. When I book an anchor gig, I try to decide whether there will be a fighting chance to reach into surrounding locales. A mistake I have made is extending one excellent date into a week's worth of mediocre dates. Sometimes the wise thing to do is to fly out, fly back, and call it a day.

Let's say you get two dates separated by five days. Maybe you were booked in Albuquerque and Seattle, or Berlin and

Amsterdam. The trick now is to drum up a tour by pitching yourself for gigs in between those two anchor spots. You'll want to look for clinics and masterclasses, as well as performances, so make sure your pitch as a teacher is strong.

Filling in dates is hard work. Your best results will come from your personal rolodex, but this probably won't be enough. You have to doggedly pursue every last venue in whatever your selected region is, and this takes research. One way I've found likely targets is to go to websites of musicians I respect, and see where they're playing. Check out those venues and see if your brand of music fits their offerings. You can also get help from databases such as Allaboutjazz, The European Jazz Network, Jazzclubs Worldwide, and the Jazz World database.

When pitching a venue, I find it is best to email and also call. Some people won't answer emails; some won't answer the phone. If it's a country where little English is spoken, email with the help of Google Translate. Whatever language it's in, the email pitch should contain a short description of your project, the names of key players, a couple of press quotes, and a link to music. It also helps immensely to

When it comes to negotiating fees, I recommend doing energetic research into what's possible, and then having the courage to ask high.

have a CD, so that you have some way to let promoters know you have a product that will help them promote you. It goes without saying that having at least one "name" player in your outfit will open doors.

Over the years I have also learned whom *not* to approach: venues, for example, that clearly specialize in music more commercial than mine, or rock clubs with a "jazz night" that doesn't actually attract a jazz audience.

There will likely be an agonizing period during which you'll have contracted the

*Get creative!
Part of the skill of
booking a tour
is finding the best
travel solutions.*



band and committed to the bigger gigs—and still have no idea whether the tour is financially feasible, because you need to fill more dates. Everyone has a different risk tolerance. I, for example, have often committed to tours that had several gaping open dates. I have usually had my faith rewarded, but you need to decide whether you can handle a worst-case scenario—in other words, how much you're willing to lose if your options don't pan out.

When it comes to negotiating for fees, I recommend doing energetic research into what's possible, and then having the courage to ask high. Don't ask different fees of different venues—keep your asking price consistent across the board, and then be ready to be talked down. Negotiating payments to side musicians, assuming your band is not a collective, is another difficult step. Your own profit margin may feel perilously slim, but you've got to strike a delicate balance. No matter what the shape of your tour, one thing is constant: your band has to feel good about playing your music.

For travel in the U.S. you have two options—plane or car, period. (Remember to use your CMA member discount when renting!)

Let's turn to Europe, where travel is both easier and more complex. You have filled almost all your dates. Your heart swells with excitement—until you go online and find out that the train travel costs three times what you had anticipated. Get creative! Part of the skill of booking a tour is finding the best travel solutions.

Air travel is an option, considering the abundance of low-cost airlines in Europe. Be wary, though, of hidden fees. Some budget airlines may promise a 10-euro flight; but after auxiliary luggage, the actual fare may turn out to be as high as €150.

Trains, of course, are the most common option. In order to reserve seats, you have to go first-class for long-distance trips. The last thing you want is to miss a date because the train you need is sold out. Warning: booking train travel for your whole band can be an overwhelming task. I strongly urge enlisting a travel agent to organize your itinerary. There are helpful websites that European countries maintain for booking trains, but it's still a big job to figure out the details.

One option for navigating Europe is to hire a van and driver. It takes a lot of pressure off, knowing that all you have to do is get into a car and a local driver takes

Joel Harrison's Tips for a Successful Tour

Always have your contract on hand in case some of your requirements aren't met. (It's rare, but it happens.)

When catching a train or a plane, always leave earlier than you think you should.

Tired musicians will try to get that extra half-hour of sleep. Bad idea.

You're in charge of the group's morale. **Feed people well, and provide decent hotel rooms.** Try to get sound checks that are close to performance time.

Sleep well (if possible!). Sure, you want to stay out and have fun after the exhilaration of the performance. But the pressure of being a leader begins the moment you wake up.

care of the navigating, especially when the road signs aren't in English.

I conclude with a fond memory: I was talking to the estimable woodwinds player, bandleader, and record-label founder Vinny Golia one evening after a gig. He was approaching 50 at the time, but he still planned to spend the night without sleep so that he could get to an engagement in a far-off state. "It's not about rest and comfort," Vinny said. This is serious business. We sleep where we can, and do what's necessary for our music to survive."

The point is this: get out there and play, no matter what!

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Date
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CMA Opportunities

CMA/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming—Recognition for ensembles, presenters, and festivals with exceptional commitment to contemporary chamber music of all styles, including jazz and world music.

DEADLINE: October 7, 2011

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

Presenting Jazz—Support to U.S. presenters for concert engagements of emerging and mid-career professional jazz ensembles.

DEADLINE: October 14, 2011

FMI: Jeanette Vuocolo, (212) 242-2022, ext. 17, or jvuocolo@chamber-music.org

Residency Partnership Program—Support for ensembles, festivals and presenters to create residency projects bringing live music and related educational programs to cities, towns or rural areas. Residencies may feature classical/contemporary or jazz music.

DEADLINE: November 18, 2011

FMI: www.chamber-music.org

Other Opportunities

REGIONAL CONFERENCES

Western Arts Alliance Conference—August 29–September 2, Seattle, WA.
FMI: www.westarts.org

Midwest Arts Conference—September 7–10, Minneapolis, MN.
FMI: www.artsmidwest.org

Performing Arts Exchange Conference—September 21–24, Baton Rouge, LA.
FMI: www.southarts.org

American Music Center/CAP Recording

Grant—Provides funds for recordings of music by living American composers. Applications are accepted from composers, nonprofit professional performance ensembles, and nonprofit or commercial recording companies.

DEADLINE: July 14, 2011

FMI: www.amc.net

Trust for Mutual Understanding—Grants to nonprofits for cultural exchanges with institutions and individuals in Russia and Eastern/Central Europe. Letter of inquiry required prior to application.

DEADLINE: August 1, 2011

FMI: www.tmuny.org

Virginia Center for the Creative Arts—

Fellowships (2 weeks to 2 months) for writers, visual artists, and composers, February to May, 2012, at Mount San Angelo, a 450-acre estate in Amherst County, Virginia.

DEADLINE: September 15, 2011

FMI: www.vcca.com

Aaron Copland Fund for Music: Supplemental

Program—Support to non-profit organizations (such as presenters and music service organizations) that have a history of substantial commitment to contemporary American music but whose needs are not addressed by the Copland fund's other programs.

DEADLINE: September 30, 2011

FMI: www.coplandfund.org