

PUBLICITY GUIDELINES FOR PERFORMING ENSEMBLES

by Carolyn Peskin

The success of an ensemble's concerts depends largely on three preliminary activities: planning, preparation, and publicity. Planning means putting together a program appropriate for the occasion and intended audience. Preparation involves group rehearsals and individual practice. Publicity refers to the ways in which the group announces the concert to its intended audience.

Some ensembles devote a good deal of time and effort to planning and preparation, resulting in top-notch performances, but, unfortunately, neglect to publicize their concerts adequately, resulting in poor attendance. A first-rate performance deserves a good-sized audience, and a performance, no matter how polished, cannot be considered successful without an appreciative audience to enjoy it. For professional ensembles, poor attendance spells financial disaster. For amateur groups, habitual poor attendance leads to frustration.

My purpose in writing this chapter was to provide ensemble directors with guidelines for publicizing their concerts more effectively. My main source of information was a chapter on the same topic by Beverly Simmons in *A Performer's Guide to Renaissance Music*. (See reference no. 4 in the bibliography at the end of the chapter.)

Types of Publicity

Studies have shown that any message needs to be presented a number of times in order to really take hold. (That's why television commercials are repeated so many times.) If you want to obtain good-sized audiences, you will, therefore, have to publicize your concerts in a number of ways. The possible kinds of publicity include posted flyers, direct mailing, newspaper, magazine, and radio announcements, email messages, and word-of-mouth. For best results, you should try all of them.

Posted Flyers

Flyers announcing your group's concerts can, with the proprietor's or supervisor's permission, be posted on bulletin boards in bookstores, libraries, restaurants, supermarkets, music schools, student unions, and other venues. Some of the above venues may also have display tables where you can leave a packet of flyers.

Modern word processors will enable you to create attractive flyers. Aim for an uncluttered appearance. Use fonts large and dark enough for easy visibility. Include the following essential information: what, who, when, where, admission fee, and a contact telephone number. If there is room, include a few

sentences about the performers, instruments, and/or music. An eye-catching graphic would be desirable, too. (Consult the bibliography for sources of copyright-free graphics depicting early musicians, instruments, and music notation.)

Direct Mailings

Direct mailing is an effective way of reaching a large number of people. Bulk mailing, which allows you to mail at a special third class rate, is the most economical option offered by the U.S. Post Office. To be eligible for the bulk rate, your mailings must include at least 200 identical pieces, and your ensemble will have to incorporate itself as a nonprofit organization in order to qualify for a bulk-mailing permit. To obtain the permit, you will need to submit an application (Postal Service Form 3624) along with documented proof of nonprofit status to the Post Office from which you will do the mailings, and an annual permit fee will be charged.

In order to achieve nonprofit status, your consort must comply with section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. To receive full benefits, the group should incorporate itself as a “public charity,” which means filling out a lengthy exemption application (Form 1023) showing that the group’s “organizational structure, proposed programs, and method of operation are likely to attract broadly based support from the general public.” The completed Form 1023, along with other required forms and a “user fee” payment, must be submitted to the Internal Revenue Service. To find out whether your consort meets the above federal requirements, you might want to consult an attorney specializing in tax law. It is also a good idea to contact your state’s Arts Council to find out whether there are any additional state requirements. References on nonprofit incorporation are included in the bibliography.

Bulk mailing is considerably slower than mailing first class. Expect a delay of anywhere from a few days to several weeks depending upon the delivery area. If you use bulk mailing, you will have to prepare and send out your announcements early!

Bulk mailings must be sorted by zip code. (Instructions are available at your community’s main Post Office.) Preparing 200 or more flyers—labeling, counting, sorting, and bundling according to the Postal Service’s strict rules—is tedious, time-consuming work but is worth the effort because of the savings afforded by bulk mailing. You can reduce the boredom by inviting the members of your consort to a labeling party and by serving refreshments.

How big should your mailing list be? If direct mailing is the only type of publicity you use, it is advisable to make your mailing list at least five times as large as the audience capacity of your concert venue since the percentage

response to direct mailing alone is low. You can reduce the size of your list considerably by using other types of publicity in addition to direct mailing.

How does one go about developing a large mailing list? Start by having all the members of your consort ask their families and friends to write down names and addresses of people who might be interested in attending your group's concerts. Include local music teachers and church music directors on your list. Borrow or rent mailing lists from music organizations in your community.

How does one work with a mailing list? Rather than relying on index cards and other antiquated methods of record keeping, obtain sophisticated database software for your list so that you can sort it in various ways—alphabetical order for updating and revising it, zip code order to print address labels for bulk mailings, and <date entered> or <source> to weed out "dead wood." Keeping the list up to date is important.

Press Releases and Public Service Announcements

As mentioned above, the percentage response to direct mailing alone is low, so you will want to supplement it with other types of publicity. Utilization of print and electronic media is essential for audience building. The press release is a form of free publicity that will enable your ensemble's concerts to be announced in the events calendars of local newspapers and magazines. The public service announcement (PSA) is free publicity broadcast by a radio or television station.

For your press releases, contact the editors of ethnic and suburban newspapers as well as the events editors of your community's main newspapers and magazines. Find out how much advance notice is required for each publication. (Monthly magazines may require two months notice. Most newspapers require two or three weeks.) Contact the station master, PR person, or music director of your local classical-music station(s) to find out how much notice is required for PSAs. (Most radio stations require one to two weeks notice.)

In the absence of a paid PR person, you or another member of your consort will have to write the press releases and PSAs. There is a standard format for press releases. (See Example 1 below.) On the top write "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" and the date submitted, plus a contact name and telephone number. At the bottom write "-more-" if the release has more than one page, and "-30-" or "-###-" at the end. (Don't include the quotation marks.)

The body of the release should have three or more paragraphs. The first one tells what, who, when, and where and should also mention the name of any sponsoring organization. The final paragraph includes ticket prices and

availability, plus a telephone number for further information. (It need not be the same as the contact number above.) The middle paragraphs include details about the ensemble, instruments, and music. You should put into those middle paragraphs about twice as much information as is needed, in order of importance (most important item first). That format will allow the editor to cut out the least important material if not enough space is available for the whole release. Keep sentences simple, and be sure to mention your consort's name repeatedly throughout the release.

Example 1. A Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 1, 2004	Contact: Tom Morley 216-123-4567
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THE QUEENSBRIDGE RECORDER ENSEMBLE IN CONCERT

On Saturday, April 17, 2004, at 2:00 PM, in the Fern Hill Public Library, the Queensbridge Recorder Ensemble will celebrate William Shakespeare's 440th birthday with a concert entitled "Four Centuries of English Music."

The program will include a potpourri of instrumental and vocal music from Shakespeare's day to the twentieth century. You'll hear English folk songs, Renaissance madrigals and court dances, theater pieces by Henry Purcell, excerpts from Handel's *Water Music* suites, and music by Benjamin Britten.

The Queensbridge Recorder Ensemble was founded in 1996 by members of the Fern Hill Recorder Society, a chapter of the American Recorder Society. Each of the group's five members plays several different sizes of recorders. The ensemble's main purpose is to increase public awareness of the recorder as a venerable and versatile instrument, suitable for playing a wide variety of beautiful music.

Tickets for the Queensbridge Ensemble's concert are \$10 at the door (\$5 for students and senior citizens). For further information, call 216-123-4567.

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There is a similar format for PSAs, but they are shorter than press releases. (See Example 2 below.) A PSA usually runs 15, 30, or 60 seconds. Time yours by reading it out loud. If your local classical-music station allows background music, you might want to submit an audiotape or CD of your ensemble to be played during the announcement.

Example 2. A Public Service Announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 1, 2004

Contact: Tom Morley
216-123-4567

MUSIC Up and Under.

ANNOUNCER: Celebrate William Shakespeare's 440th birthday with the soothing sound of recorders. On Saturday, April 17, at 2:00 PM, in the Fern Hill Public Library, the Queensbridge Recorder Ensemble will give a concert entitled "Four Centuries of English Music." You'll hear favorite songs and dances of Shakespeare's day, selections from Handel's *Water Music* suites, theater music by Henry Purcell, and other musical treats. Come and enjoy a relaxing afternoon with the Queensbridge Recorder Ensemble. That's Saturday, April 17, at 2 PM, in the Fern Hill Public Library. For more information, call 216-123-4567.

MUSIC Up and Out

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Email Announcements

The advent of the Internet and electronic mailing revolutionized communications. Because email is so much faster and more economical than mailing via the Post Office, it is a godsend for amateur ensembles with a limited budget. Attractive flyers can be sent to a large target audience via email as PDF or Microsoft Word files, and email is also a practical way of sending press releases. A press release sent as an email message could be accompanied by a photograph of the ensemble or a concert program complete with program notes sent as an attachment. Why not try that? If you are lucky, the editor might feature your ensemble in an advance story.

If you subscribe to a recorder or early-music listserve, you can post your group's concert announcements to it. (Subscribing instructions for several such listserves can be found on the ARS website, <www.americanrecorder.org>.) And if you are a member of Early Music America, you also have posting privileges on EMA's Early Music Online concert calendar.

Conclusion

A great deal of work is involved in publicizing an ensemble's concerts effectively, but the end result is well worth the effort. The relationship between performers and their audience is a mutually beneficial one. The listeners are entertained and educated by the performance. At the same time, the performers derive pleasure from knowing that their talents are appreciated and from

knowing, in addition, that they have increased public awareness of the recorder and its music. Players and audience alike are winners.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

References about Publicity

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Includes a chapter on the press and public relations.

Newman, Danny. *Subscribe Now!* New York: Theater Communications Group, 1977, 4th printing, 1983.

Includes chapters on public service announcements and the use of mailing lists.

Papolos, Janet. *The Performing Artist's Handbook*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 1984.

Look at Chapter 9, "Spreading the News: You and Your Public."

Simmons, Beverly. "Publicity Guidelines for Early Music Concerts." Chap. 27 in Kite-Powell, Jeffery, ed. *A Performer's Guide to Renaissance Music*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1994.

Wolf, Thomas. *Presenting Performances: A Handbook for Sponsors*. New York: American Council of the Arts, 1983.

See Chapter 3, "Filling the Auditorium."

References about Nonprofit Incorporation and Bulk Mailing

ARS Chapters & Consorts Committee. *ARS Chapter Handbook*. Littleton, CO: American Recorder Society, 1999.

Nonprofit incorporation is discussed on pp. B-17 and B-18 and C-30 to C-44. The C section includes sample completed IRS forms. See pp. H-1 to H-3 for information on bulk mailing and mailing-list maintenance.

Mancuso, Anthony. *How to Form Your Own Nonprofit Corporation*, 5th Ed. Berkeley, CA: Nolo Press, 1997.

Gives "do-it-yourself" instructions for filing federal and state IRS incorporation paperwork. Additional help is available at <www.nolo.com>, which gives line-by-line instructions and includes state sheets listing specific requirements.

Sources of Copyright-Free Graphics

Appelbaum, Stanley, ed. and transl. *The Triumph of Maximilian I: 137 Woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair and Others*. New York: Dover Publications, 1964.

Fraenkel, Gottfried S., compiler. *Pictorial and Decorative Title Pages from Music Sources: 201 Examples from 1500 to 1800*. New York: Dover Publications, 1968.

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Harrison, Frank L. and Joan Rimmer, editors. *Antique Musical Instruments and Their Players*. New York: Dover Publications, 1964.

A collection of 152 engravings by the 18th-century artist and historian, Filippo Bonanni, with an introduction and captions by the editors.

Harter, Jim, compiler. *Music: A Pictorial Archive of Woodcuts and Engravings*. New York: Dover Publications, 1980.

Contains 841 illustrations from Europe, America, and non-Western cultures, representing all periods from antiquity to the present. Shows early musicians and instruments as well as musical excerpts in early notation from Medieval manuscripts and works by Lassus and J.S. Bach.