

HOW TO PRESENT A SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE

c 2006 Chris Vallillo

Many MOMS sites will be presenting performances for the first time. As a performer and presenter for over 25 years, I've tried to put together some thoughts that might help you through this process.

Most MOMS sites will be working with less than ideal performance spaces, but being aware of several factors will help the sites make the most of what they have. After all, music has been performed in situations like these for generations, particularly the very music we are showcasing in *New Harmonies*.

This is a great opportunity to build partnerships. It may be possible to partner {or cooperate} with small venues, theaters, opera houses and other historic meeting houses (very cool places to present roots music) to act as performance venues. The best of these may have sound and lights. This can be a very successful way to go.

However, many sites will end up using non performance spaces for their events. A lot of subtle things either add to or detract from a presentation. Here are some simple things you can do to enhance a performance in any space you use.

- 1) Put performers in an appropriate space and give them room to work. When I perform as a soloist, I ask for a minimum "stage" area of 8 ft X 10 ft. A band will need significantly more depending on instrumentation, but figure **at least** 10 X 20 and that's probably underestimating. This is information you'll want to know about an artist well before the performance. You'll do that with a stage plot which I'll address later. Acts don't need to perform on a fixed stage or risers, but they do make things look more professional and enhance visibility for your audience.
- 2) Make the act the featured attraction. Even if you don't have a stage, make the performers the focus. Have a clear line of sight to the stage and make the stage the point of focus in the room. Add some simple touches to make it look good. Hanging a banner behind the act is an effective way to spice up the area; a small rug where the performer stands can warm up a space.
- 3) Seating: Plenty of comfortable seating is very important. Arrange the chairs or benches to focus on the stage. Leave adequate room for folks to get in and out.
- 4) Lighting can help draw attention to the stage. It doesn't need to be stage lighting. Something as simple as a couple of old floor lamps at either end of the stage can provide extra light, set the mood, and draw the eye towards the stage. Regardless of how fancy or simple you make it, be sure to have general lighting on the stage area in such a way that the performer is easily and clearly seen.

- 5) Sound. In rare cases, you will be able to present artists with no sound re-enforcement (no PA). While this works in some instances, more often than not you'll need a PA in order to get the most out a performance, particularly with older audiences. I'll talk about that in depth below.
- 6) Always use a short prepared introduction with a sentence or two of background about the performer(s), and appropriate credits for sponsors, etc. Don't rattle off a whole bunch of announcements here; keep it short and to the point; a maximum of 2 to 3 minutes. Save your extended "Thank You's" for after the show. Let the audience know the performance length and what to expect. Some common performance lengths are a single set of 45 minutes to an hour (the longest you'll want to go without a break) or two 45 minute sets with a break in between for refreshment and CD sales (think fund raising *and friend raising*).
- 7) Have access to bathrooms! It seems like a no brainier, but you'd be surprised.
- 8) Promote the event with press releases to newspapers, radio, and TV timed so they arrive 10 days to 2 weeks ahead of the event. Always include a picture! Most papers prefer email and high resolution j-pegs these days although some small papers may still take hard copies. Many performers have web sites that have downloadable jpegs and press information.
- 9) Booking the acts: What to pay? That's a tough one! \$250.00 to \$500.00 for a professional soloist is reasonable, but expect to pay more for very recognizable acts. For bands, budget at least \$400.00 - \$800.00 as a low end and on up from there. Soloists will make more per person than band members and that's appropriate. Negotiating with an artist can be confusing. You can begin by giving them a rundown of the event (date and time, location, length of the set or sets, and target audience), then ask for a price. Remember "asking price" is just that. We all negotiate. If an artists' asking price is "outside of your budget" say so. Use those exact words. Have a ceiling price in hand when you talk so you don't have to go back and seek committee approval. Then, if you think it's appropriate, offer the best price you reasonably can and see what happens. There's no shame in asking if they will consider performing for less than their asking price; just don't be offended if they don't take it.
- 10) Details! Get them in writing and be explicit! This will save you many headaches down the road. Use a simple contract or letter of agreement that lists all contact information: time, date, location of performance, length of performance, who, if anyone, is providing sound and any special requirements or unusual details. Spell everything out clearly and simply. Send copies to your performers with a simple cover letter asking that they sign and return one of them (otherwise they may end up in a drawer unopened and unread). It never hurts to include a self-addressed envelope they can use to return the contract to you, along with a set of "Map Quest" directions to the venue. In some cases, sites may be presenting folks that

are not full-time professional performers, so it will pay to be clear. I'll include a sample contract at the end. Feel free to use, modify or ignore as you see fit.

- 11) Tech: You'll need to know technical information about the artists to make things go smoothly. For example, how many performers will be on stage and what kind and number of instruments will they be playing? How much space will they need to set up and what will they need for sound (microphones, stage monitors, speakers, mixing boards, how many outlets)? Who will provide sound? Many professional artists have a stage plot they can send you that will show the layout of performers on stage and list the various instruments and microphones needed. If not, send them a simple blank stage plot and have them fill it out and return it with the contract. I'll include one at the end of this document as well as a copy of my own as a sample. Be aware of electrical needs. Sound equipment isn't too extreme on electrical use, but lighting is! If an act is bringing lights be sure you have enough power and have extra fuses on hand if your facility still uses them. Make sure you have **GROUND**ED electricity.
- 12) Set up: It's a safe bet that an act will need at least 30-45 minutes to set up. As a soloist, I ask for a full hour and that can still be tight if I'm providing sound. If possible, have the performers set up and do a sound check before the audience arrives. A sound check simply means they will run through a couple numbers and set the sound levels. This is always much better than just winging it and trying to get things right during the show. If you are going to put on a more complicated act, plan on extra set up and sound check time! A full blown band with PA could easily take 1½ to 2 hrs.
- 13) Sound system or PA: In most cases, you'll need to have a sound system in order to present music. The focus of *New Harmonies* is music. It's critical that music be heard clearly and comfortably in a performance. Don't scrimp here! Your event will be more successful, your audience response will be stronger and your artists can give you better performance when the sound is right. Do not try to present a musical act with a wireless clip-on mic or podium style mic and speaker. These may work fine for a lecturer, but will not do for music! Sound systems vary a lot, but the good news is that in this day and age there are many outstanding systems that are relatively inexpensive. Your first option is to have the act provide the sound system. Be sure to address this issue when you book the act. Most professional musicians and many amateurs have their own sound systems and if you don't have access to one or have no experience with one, this will be the way to go. If you plan to go that route, ask about that right off the bat and negotiate it into the performance price. Write it into your agreement.

If you are using an act that doesn't have sound but needs it, there are several ways to go. One is to use a venue that has sound in it. Some venues such as clubs and small theaters have sound in place and people to run it. See if they will donate the space or rent it at a reduced rate as an in-kind contribution in exchange for being listed as a sponsor. It is also possible to hire a sound company to run sound for

your event. Prices and quality vary. Expect to pay at least \$150.00 on up. Frequently you can rent a small system from a local music store. For many small museums this will be the most cost effective way to go. Again, rates vary (\$75.00 to \$200.00 and on up is common) but this might be an opportunity for a promotional trade out with the music store. Consider asking them to provide sound and be listed as a sponsor. Be sure to send them posters for the display!

A few of you may want to purchase a small system to have permanently at your facility. Good systems are available for between \$1,000.00 and \$1500.00. You can talk to a local music store (again, ask for a sponsorship/discount), but I prefer to work with one of the many mail order houses that can offer wider choices and lower prices. There are many to choose from, and most will give you 15-20% discount off list price.

Two of the larger ones, Sweetwater or Full Compass, have excellent service and great prices. I primarily use Sweetwater because they have great technical support people that can help you get things set up and running easily. All these mail order stores have web sites these days as well. I'll attach a sheet at the end with contact information. I've put together an example of what should be a very respectable sound system, easy to use, solid and good sound quality that should do nicely for most small situations. It prices out with shipping at just over \$1350.00. This can be a good reference for what you'd need to do anything from a soloist up to a small acoustic group in an indoor venue.

- 14) Performer amenities: You'll want to have a secure place for the musicians to put cases, coats, and other personal items, and if at all possible, the space should be able to serve as a dressing room or green room where they can warm up before the show. It doesn't have to be special -- a spare room or office is fine. Finally, provide a desk or table where the performers(s) can sell compact discs after the show. You will find that most acts will bring their recordings along, and these sales not only provide significant income for them, they will give your audience an opportunity to take something home to remember your show!

NEW HARMONIES MUSICAL EQUIPMENT RESOURCES

National Mail Order Music Chains

Sweetwater Music

1-800-222-4700

<http://www.sweetwater.com/>

Full Compass

<http://www.fullcompass.com/>

800-356-5844

800-476-9886

Sam Ash

www.samash.com

800-472-6274

NEW HARMONIES SOUND SYTEM EXAMPLE

This sound system consists of a pair of Samson XP200 speakers, 2 speaker stands, a Mackie DFX6 mixer, 4 Audio Technica dynamic microphones, 4 boom mic stands, and all the necessary cables to put on a show right out of the box.

You can beat this price with a lesser system, but you'll sacrifice sound quality. **Use this as a reference for a basic set up that you would do well for anything from a soloist up to a small bluegrass style band (although you might need more mics for the band). Also this is a good "checklist" of what you'll need if you rent sound.**

If by any chance, you want this exact set up, call Sweetwater, give them the Quote ID # 918247 and the exact system is listed in their computer along with this quote.

Sweetwater - Music Technology Direct
 5335 Bass Rd Date 05/04/06
 Fort Wayne, IN 46808 QuoteID 918247
 (800) 222-4700 Salesman Arend Raby Ext. 1276
 Fax (260) 432-1758

Quote To: Ship To:
 Chris Vallillo
 Gin Ridge Music

W 309 833 4838 H F X

Qty	ItemID	Description	Wt	Mfg List	Sell At	Extended
2	XP200	12" Active PA Speaker	65	419.00	299.97	599.94
1	DFX12	12-Ch Compact Mixer w/ EF	10	319.99	249.99	249.99
2	TS100	Speaker Stand (ea)	9	119.99	39.97	79.94
4	MB1kc	Dynamic Vocal Mic w/Cable	3	59.00	39.97	159.88
1	XLR30	30' XLR - XLRM Cable	1	30.46	23.87	23.87
1	XLR50	50' XLR - XLRM Cable	2	40.49	29.97	29.97
4	MicStdBoomLt	Euro Tele-Boom Mic Stand	12	72.00	30.00	120.00

Retail prices on your quote total \$1,987.45.
 You will save \$730.76 with Sweetwater.

Subtotal 1,256.69
 0% Tax 0.00
 Ship & Hand 100.00
 =====
 QUOTE 1,363.59

Via: FedEx Saver (Home)