

Artist Management and Self-Management

The following information is provided to de-mystify management and to offer practical steps towards advancing your own career. People often think that finding management is a straightforward process — that they simply need to make contact with a management firm, send in press materials / demo tape, and be signed on. And that once they have management, their careers miraculously take off. This is not reality.

The reality is that management companies want to sign musicians who can earn them a profit. If you've just won a major international competition, managers may approach you with a contract. Because of the notoriety that comes with winning such a competition, managers are betting they'll be able to get you enough work (bookings as soloist with orchestras and recital opportunities) to be worth *their* work. If you don't compete, managers may still consider signing you on if you are currently playing enough concerts and have a big enough local/regional reputation so that they can sell you to presenters and orchestras.

Managers need to make a profit to stay in business. They are not in the business of growing a career for you from scratch. They simply can't afford to. You are paying for their overhead, and all the expenses that go into marketing you, an unknown artist. It can take several years to start generating enough concerts to make this worthwhile if one is starting from scratch.

How management works: managers take off 20% of the concert fees PLUS all expenses, i.e., telephone, postage, publicity materials, and share of the cost of attending booking conferences. Ask yourself how much you are currently making in artist fees per concert and how many concerts you played last season. Take 20% of the total and ask yourself — would a manager be willing or able to stay in business making this amount as salary?

The three major NY management companies are: CAMI (Columbia Artists Management), ICM Artists, and IMG Artists; these are the firms with the biggest superstar performers and the most clout in terms of being able to arrange deals with conductors, orchestras, festivals, recording companies, etc. Then, there is what people consider the “mid-level” management firms: Herbert Barrett Management, Thea Dispeker Inc. Artists' Management, and Colbert Artists Management. And then there are the small management firms, generally one-person offices, too many to list. If you browse through *Musical America* you will get a sense of these hierarchies based on which artists are on which rosters. In addition, there are a few competitions that offer management as a prize: Concert Artists Guild, Young Concert Artists, as well as the Pro Musician Foundation. Musicians who win these competitions have pre-professional management for a few years and then often can move on to NY management firms.

There are, of course, people who will work as one's manager or artist representative on a retainer basis (you pay on a monthly basis for a contracted year or more — in NY you can pay \$500 and up per month). Because it can take quite some time to develop leads and contacts and then to get a presenter interested, you may pay for many months without getting any concerts, or you may get concerts that don't end up covering all the costs for the press materials, correspondence, booking conferences, etc.

Like anything else, there are good managers as well as ineffective or dishonest managers. Never sign a contract or invest in management unless you've checked it out, gotten referrals, and know that the manager has the professional connections and network to be able to get you bookings. Without the appropriate skills, network and experience, a manager is worthless to your career.

What do managers actually do?

Managers may arrange auditions for their artists, give advice on coaches, dress, stage deportment, and above all, good managers help plan their artists' career advancement, strategizing for long range career growth. Managers use their contacts and sales skills to schmooze with and court presenters into “buying” their artists for concert dates. Managers do this by phone, fax, e-mail, in-person visits, and by attend booking conferences.

It can take an enormous amount of time to book a concert, depending on how much competition there is for the concert series; once a manager has an agreement and has negotiated a fee there are all the travel and logistical arrangements and contracts to be handled.

About Booking conferences . These are held regionally across the country: Northeast Presenters conference includes New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, as well as the annual national conference that is held in NYC in January. Booking conferences are generally sponsored by regional presenting organizations (i.e. New England Presenters); the conferences are

trade shows held in convention centers. Managers buy booths and lay out all their roster's press materials, fliers, press packets, sample CDs. Presenters come to the conference and wander through the trade show areas talking to managers, looking at the press materials, and consider who they want to sign on for their next season. Some larger presenters book two seasons ahead. Self-managed musicians also attend booking conferences representing themselves; if you're just starting out you may want to offer to be an intern or volunteer at a booking conference in order to attend and see the business side of the music industry in action; it's a chance to meet presenters and managers and get a sense of the current climate. For the regional presenting organization nearest you, contact your state arts agency.

Do I need Management? How do I know when I'm ready for management?

Musical America, the annual music industry directory lists hundreds of management companies for classical and some jazz artists. It's worth browsing this publication at your music library or career center so that you can get a sense of how professional management companies market their artists. Also, it's instructive to look at who is on various rosters — what names do you recognize, are they emerging artists or well established? Notice how many of the same instrument or ensemble are represented by a firm; it can affect the amount of attention any one violinist gets if the firm represents six others.

Musicians often prepare elaborate, expensive press packets and demo tapes and send them in a huge mailing to all the managements listed in *Musical America*. Every week these management companies are bombarded by large numbers of unsolicited press packets from aspiring musicians seeking management. By and large these packets and tapes go unread, unheard. The management companies already have their hands full trying to book the artists on their roster; they are not in the business of "growing" the career of a gifted young artist from scratch. They are in business to make money. Management companies may be interested in hearing a new artist if an esteemed performer, teacher, presenter, or coach recommends them.

After you have self-managed for several years, musicians get to a point where they can no longer keep up with the volume of work: handling the press materials, writing contracts, updating mailing lists, writing program notes and press releases, etc. At that point, musicians often will hire someone to work on an hourly or contract basis, having them do the part of your management work that can most easily be delegated. The work you have them do will depend on how much you have to spend, the skills of the person you hire, and what your own strengths and management skills are. It may also depend on the types of performance opportunities you are pursuing: bookings for local/regional K-12 performances, or master classes at community music schools are different from booking the Bank Boston Celebrity Series.

So what is an artist just starting out supposed to do?

Careers are built: the "overnight success" stories and being "discovered" are Hollywood myths. Except for a few rare exceptions, everyone begins with self-management. Start with building a local/regional career and reputation. Set goals of playing a certain number of concerts in your area next season. Program well, prepare well, create a mailing list, get letters of recommendation, network like mad, book your own concerts, invite strategic people to hear you, write press releases, and get reviews. The goal is to generate media interest and a review, which can lead to further bookings. If you "create a buzz" on the local/regional level, if the concerts are well received and the press response is good, this may attract a management company to you. At the very least, your local/regional success will make it easier to book concerts in more prestigious series and to receive higher fees.

In the effort to increase your marketability, musicians need to attract the media, seeking increasing levels of visibility. To progress from having local/regional career to a national/international, the most common route is to seek progressive media visibility:

- Newspaper reviews — local and out of town
- Local radio exposure
- National radio exposure
- Recordings and international exposure

Pros and Cons: Management vs. Self-management

This comparison chart was provided by David Douglass, of the King's Noyse, a successful Boston-based early music group that has at various times had professional management and been self-managed.

Professional Management

- Pros:
- The clout of an established sponsor-manager relationship.
 - The stamp of approval that comes from having professional management.
 - Skilled people.
 - Plugging into an efficient system.

Cons: Financial: most often 20% off the top PLUS all expenses, i.e., telephone, postage, publicity materials, and share of the cost of attending booking conferences.
A staggering amount of responsibility is still left to the artist.
The management's responsibility is spread (equally?) across the entire roster.

Self-Management

Pros: Financial: your fee is yours.
Budgetary control.
Greater focus on your specific needs.
Chamber groups can divide up the responsibilities (may be a pro or a con)

Cons: The time requirement — especially large at first.
Emotional traps (you have to deal directly with rejection from presenters).
In general — not having the “pros” of professional management.

Even if professional management is obtained, self-management never ends: you will always need to be networking, researching new opportunities, and promoting yourself. You will always be your best promoter and spokesperson. The human connection is the most important one, and presenters often like to have direct communication with the artists.

How to Self-manage in 5 practical steps

Many musicians find the prospect of promoting their own career daunting and distasteful. They may feel embarrassed and nervous about “selling” themselves to a presenter, or in having to negotiate a fee for their performance. This Business of music can seem very foreign from the Art of music, but if you want to have a career, you’ll need to have the tools and the guts to get yourself started. It can seem overwhelming but actually self-managing your career involves straightforward skills and practical steps to take one at a time. The skills can easily be learned — it’s not rocket science and there are resources to help. See end of handout for glossary of commonly used terms.

Many individual musicians and ensembles successfully self-manage their careers for years, building at least a regional reputation and a following. Once you are successfully doing this, you are in a good position to attract reputable professional management.

- 1. Set goals** of a certain number of concerts for next season. Be reasonable. If so far you’ve only played degree recitals at your school then a reasonable goal might be 4 concerts for next season (2 programs, each repeated once at another venue).
- 2. Research your Market.** Find out what concert series or performance sites are in your area: churches, museums, clubs, restaurants, hotels, libraries, schools, etc. Where do you find this out? Try your hometown’s municipal government offices, the local library’s reference librarian, the chamber of commerce. Ask you family and friends to ask everyone they know — you’ll dig up some interesting opportunities and network with people who can be of assistance in planning your concerts. Other sources for presenter lists: *Musical America*, Chamber Music America Directory, College Music Society Catalogue, your local newspaper calendar section, your state arts agency, your fellow performers. The Career Services Center has lists of Boston area concert series and performance sites, as well as handouts on how to create press materials and book concerts.

Research which arts service organizations would be most helpful to you; American Music Center, Chamber Music America, Meet the Composer, Young Audiences, and Opera America are just a few. The Career Services Center has contact information on these and others.

- 3. Self-assessment: what makes you unique? marketable? interesting to presenters, club managers, critics?** What makes you special as a performer? Is it a particular repertoire? A particular style or tradition of playing? Your press materials should detail and highlight what separates you from the competition. What is your image? Is there something special in your concert presentations? Do you regularly premier new works and talk about them to the audience? You need to honestly know what level you are at so that you aim for performances at appropriate venues; get some feedback from your teachers and colleagues.
- 4. What about your programming?** What works on your graduation recital may be quite different from what is appropriate for a public audience. Think carefully about your program — what would make it interesting to the public, is there a theme to the program that would help in promoting the event to the presenter or to the press? Consider thematic programming, i.e. an all French program, or a concert that pairs Bach and Bach-inspired early 20th century works, or a jazz program including improvised music with world music influences from the Turkey paired with some examples of the

traditional folk music of Turkey or a retrospective of Big Band standards tunes arranged by various artists and including some original improvisations on the same tunes.

Why would a reviewer want to cover your concert? Is there a premier, or an interesting “hook”? What good reason can you give to draw the reviewer and the general public to your concert? Why should they be interested in attending?

In approaching possible concert sites you need to also think about it from the presenter’s point of view. You may be able to dovetail your concert with ongoing programs at the concert site, such as offering a museum a concert of music related to one of the museum’s special exhibits on 20th century American Expressionists, on Africa, or on works by women. See how what you have to offer might fit with the organization’s programming. If the site has any ongoing children’s programming you could offer to do a master class or lecture/demonstration. Do they have a special fundraising event coming up that could use a short recital program after dinner?

4. Write a Budget: Good planning involves budgeting; self-managing can be expensive, but it doesn’t have to be. Writing a budget will help keep you on track and your spending in line. Self-managing involves an initial investment before any concert fees are generated, and once they are, it is usually necessary to reinvest in an effort to upgrade materials and make your management system more efficiently.

What are the costs involved in self-managing?

photos \$200-\$500
flyer design and printing \$200-\$600
press blurbs and reviews copying \$25
general office supplies \$50 per yr.
computer and software about \$2,000
telephone/fax \$300-\$400/yr.
Booking conferences \$500-\$2,000 per yr.

5. Building your network mailing list: Start with your address book or rolodex; you need to keep track of the people you know who are interested in you and your career: friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances. These are the people you send invitations to, or postcard announcements about your next concert. These are your fans, your supporters. Include extended family, people in other parts of the country, etc. If you put your mailing list in a database on the computer, you’ll be able to generate labels and do mailings quickly and efficiently.

At your concerts you should have a guest sign-in book or postcards in the programs that people can sign up with name and address to be placed on your mailing list. If you have produced a CD this list will be essential in marketing it. You’ll get the best response if you promise (and deliver) them something in exchange for their name and address — a newsletter, a chance to buy your CDs at a discount, etc. One band in Toronto once offered to invite people who signed up into the studio to sing backup vocals for a recording session; 300 people arrived, and the whole session was filmed for CBC Television news.

Besides people you know, your mailing list should include people you’d like to invite: influential teachers, presenters, club managers, management reps, booking agents, etc.

Ideally, you should also collect is a list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of media people who are likely to be interested in your music, and are in a position to spread the word to their listeners, readers, and viewers. Media lists can be found in most public libraries.

Next, keep your mailing list up to date. Using first class stamps will ensure a return to you if the address is out of date, so if you generally use bulk mail to save money, do a first class mailing at least once a year to clean up your database.

Glossary of Terms

Venue--a place where a performance takes place

Presenter--An institution which presents concerts--
Bank of Boston Celebrity Series
Gardner Museum
Lincoln Center Productions

Promoter--an individual who promotes concerts

Festival--generally a performing arts event which takes place within a limited amount of time and often is thematic in nature

Agent--an individual (or company) who gets engagements

Manager--an individual who gets engagements and manages many aspects of a career

Personal Representatives--an individual who only works on behalf of a small list of artists, generally on retainer

Press Agent--Works on retainer for generating press

Commission-- definition 1: A percentage taken from a performance fee by an agent or manager-- ranges from 10-25%
definition 2: A request to compose work

Retainer--Monthly amount charged for services

Contract--A written commitment to perform on a specific date, at a specific location, for a specific organization, for a set fee

Fee--What you are paid for an engagement

Booking Conference--A meeting of presenters, agents, and often artists

Composer's Rights Associations--BMI/ASCAP
Organizations which collect royalties on performers for composers

Unions--American Guild Musical Artists (AGMA)
Union representing primarily singers and singing actors
American Federation of Musicians (AFM)
Union representing primarily instrumentalists
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)
Membership often required by major recording companies

For further help managing your career see the following handouts:

Booking Concerts — Tips for Classical and Jazz Musicians

Press Packets

Photos

Demo Tapes

Bios

Spreading the News — a Publicity Guide for Musicians

Fundraising for Individuals — Beyond Grants

Community Connections

Boston Area Concert Series

Boston Area Performance Venues

Performance Opportunities: K-12 Audiences, Boston area

The following is a recommendation for young artists from an artist management company.

Betsy M. Green Associates, Artists Management

36 Hampshire Road, Wayland, MA 01778 Phone (508) 358-2939 Fax (508) 358-5556

Creative Career Development

One appreciates the frustration of musicians who have so much to offer and yet don't want to spend precious practice and rehearsal time in trying to promote their careers and turn to managements and agents to develop careers for them.

Managements and agents, on the other hand, are caught in an increasingly competitive market in which there is an overwhelming abundance of great talent and a shrinking market for presenting that talent. Managements and agents are in business to make a living, and they will not take on, nor keep, an artist who provides no income for them. For some managers that means charging a retainer.

Musicians will not have success with any artist management unless they themselves are active in their own promotion. I've seen it happen too often that an artist finds a manager and says, "Aha, finally I have someone who will take care of that obnoxious part of my career and I can continue to practice and prepare myself for my great future." **BUT**, without the incentive of the participation of the artist, this fairy godfather/mother of a manager soon loses interest, especially to those artists who are active in their own behalf.

As an alternative, artists might consider hiring an assistant or secretary, who can be located by putting an ad in a local newspaper. This assistant, who might be a fan or a close friend or relative, can help research and implement the ideas which the artist him/herself has generated. Plan to spend a portion of one day per week working with that person, sending out letters to contacts, following up leads which have been received from friends or found through research into various directories available in local libraries and elsewhere.

Some "yellow pages" of the industry include:

The Musical America International Directory of the Performing Arts

MOD: Music Opera and Dance

PAYE: Performing Arts Yearbook for Europe

Both MOD and PAYE exist on CD Rom

The Stearn's Directory

Directory of Music Faculties in Colleges and Universities of US and Canada

Publish also a monthly list of job openings

American Symphony Orchestra League Directory

The internet will be increasingly important as a means of communication and information. Therefore, computer skills are possibly not just desirable but essential for success in developing a career in any field.

An excellent handbook for all musicians building a career is *Making Music in Looking Glass Land: A Guide to Survival and Business Skills for the Classical Musician* by Ellen Highstein. It is available from Concert Artists Guild, 850 Seventh Avenue, #1205, New York, NY 10019 (Phone: 212-333-5200) and is chock full of practical advice for musicians wanting to establish professional careers.