



## Publicity for Musicians

### Overview

Publicity is the process of stimulating public interest in your work—whether for an upcoming performance, an album release or an artistic project you are undertaking. Publicity can include a wide range of activities and strategies, including smart use of social media, non-traditional collaborations, and even crowd-sourced funding campaigns. However, one of the most effective methods of reaching a wide and diverse audience remains coverage in public media. This handout will focus on the process of attracting press coverage, including print and online publications, blogs, public and college radio stations, newsletters, university papers, city music guides, instrument specific journals, educational journals, and TV.

While this handout focuses on “traditional media” it is worth noting that the lines between social and traditional media have become increasingly blurred—many writers are very active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and some maintain private blogs that could become outlets for information about your work. Much of the content that is created for print and air has a second life online, and increasingly, there is unique content created for online platforms. If a piece about you is published in an online e-zine, and a reader has no address to find further information about you online (in the form of a website, Facebook fan page, SoundCloud account), the impact of the coverage will be greatly diminished. Your promotional efforts will be most successful if you are present and active both on and offline. In our handouts “Web Presence for Musicians” and “Audience Development” you will find tips for using social media, e-newsletters, blogs, poster campaigns and other creative projects to reach your audience directly.

The sections that follow will cover general tips on increasing your media literacy, reaching out to journalists, crafting press and radio releases, and the range of outcomes you can expect from hiring a publicist.

### Increasing Your Media Literacy

There are many small but crucial steps you can take now to increase your media literacy, build contact with writers, and collect rich information that will enable you to be an effective DIY publicist, when the time comes.

- Read writers who cover music in your genre, write for the arts and culture section of your local paper, or maintain blogs that hold sway in your community. This will help you gain awareness about trends, ideas, challenges and special projects in the arts community and will expose you to the writers who, hopefully, will one day cover your work. This will also help you figure out which magazines and publications contain certain types of coverage: previews, live reviews, CD reviews, profiles, news stories, industry news, educational pieces, etc.
- Maintain a running list of writers who cover music in your genre or who might be interested in the work you do. When you have a project or album that you are looking to promote, this will help you target the right individuals.
- Many writers also participate in panel discussions, lectures, CD releases, classes and other events. Attending these programs will give you the opportunity to meet writers and begin cultivating a relationship around shared interests.

- Consider hiring a professional writer to write your bio, press release or liner notes. Working with a professional writer could potentially give you access to new contacts and professional advice. Just be aware of conflicts of interest (i.e., a journalist who writes your bio cannot review your album or otherwise cover your project because you have paid them for a service).
- Another way to participate in the arts journalism community is by contributing yourself through a blog, letter to the editor or your own column. If you like to write, consider this as a way to promote your own work and build relationships with other writers in the community.

### Categories of Media Coverage

There are many different categories of media coverage, and your strategy will vary based on the type of coverage you are seeking. In order to attract this kind of coverage, you will need to submit a press release to the relevant writers at a number of local, regional, national publications (see below for tips on writing an effective press release, with samples).

- **Event Listings:** Most print and online publications have local arts event listings. Depending on the circulation and prestige of the publication, you may be able to simply submit your event information for free. Whether or not a publication curates its events listings, there will likely be clear instructions for how to submit your event information. Follow those instructions religiously, and make sure that you're submitting all the information requested, on time. Having a visually appealing press photo really helps here—make sure to submit it in print resolution (300dpi or higher). If the staff writer has to go fishing for missing information or a hi-res photo, he/she simply won't include your event.
- **Event/Concert Preview:** An article or radio piece that provides a rich portrait of an upcoming performance can go a long way in attracting a diverse audience that may be new to your music, and to upping attendance at the performance itself.
- **Review:** Attracting a writer to your concert to write a review can bolster your reputation in the community and serve as an asset for your promotional toolkit or for future grant applications. In addition to a press release, you will need to invite potential reviewers themselves, usually with the offer of comp tickets to the performance you hope they will review.
- **Album Release/Review:** If you are looking to promote a new album, you will need to submit a press kit, either physical or electronic, which includes a press release about the new album and events associated with the release.
- **Profile of an Artist:** Writers and radio correspondents often publish or create pieces about artists, or groups of artists, whose work connects to larger, timely narratives or new trends in a particular discipline. This kind of press coverage is less likely to come about through a cold press kit or release, but rather through the process of networking, establishing one's work and reputation in a community, and making clear links to broader narratives in one's own writing and promotional materials.
- **Artistic Project or Program:** As an artist, you will likely be involved in a range of activities, ensembles, organizations and communities. It is possible to get coverage through your involvement with larger organizational structures. If a writer or radio correspondent is doing a profile on an organization or program with which you are intimately involved, you may be included in the form of a quote, interview, soundbite, short mention, photograph, etc. If you are actively seeking coverage on behalf of your organization or project, you will need to send press and radio releases that highlight a new or newsworthy aspect of your work.

### Blogs, E-Zines and DIY Podcasts

While print media is still a sure-fire way to promote your music, online publications such as blogs, e-zines and DIY podcasts are also great outlets for coverage, and may in some cases be a more effective avenue

for reaching a young audience. There are literally thousands of affinity based blogs and online publications that cover music of all-genres. Create a list of the online publications that cover music in your genre, and get involved by commenting on posts and sharing content via social media. Many blogs are intensely local, which make them ideal for promoting a performance in a particular neighborhood or geographic area.

Many online publications are run by music fans—the writers that sustain blogs and e-zines see it as a labor of love. Be personal and generous in your outreach to these writers: offer a free ticket to an upcoming show, share a link to their blog on your website, send fan mail if you really loved a piece they wrote. These gestures can go a long way in establishing relationships with writers in your community.

## Writing a Clear and Compelling Press Release

There are three important factors that will increase the chances of your press release attracting coverage: **content, format, and timing**. You need to quickly and effectively show that your release is newsworthy. You are competing with hundreds of other releases for very limited print space, so creativity and brevity are paramount. Below is a step-by-step guide for writing a release:

1. **Write a headline** for your release that encapsulates the main focus of the story. Make it catchy or engaging for readers. If you're from the area, emphasize your local connections, since editors (especially at smaller media outlets) are looking for news of special interest to local readers.

**ABC STRING TRIO LAUNCHES RESIDENCY PROGRAM AT HOMELESS SHELTERS**

**SOPRANO CONQUERS STAGE FRIGHT, WINS INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION**

**5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BRASS BASH WELCOMES TUBA -TOTING MAYOR AS GUEST ARTIST**

2. **Cover the essential facts in your opening sentence** (your "lead"). This should be the *who, what, where, and when* (the four Ws). Your language should be succinct and direct.

*The Quintet of the Americas will present a special program of Polish music for wind quintet on Sunday, April 27, at 3 pm at the Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 East 65th Street, between Fifth and Madison, in Manhattan.*

3. **Consider the "Why"**—the fifth "W." *Why* does this news item matter? What's the real *story* here? Is what you have to say of interest to others in your community? Journalists need to provide readers with compelling and thought-provoking information about the cultural happenings in their area. If the item is of only marginal interest to a select group of readers, then you'll have a hard time gaining media attention. Emphasize what would be of interest to the general public. Make sure your release passes the *Who cares?* and the *So What?* tests.
4. **Stick to concrete facts**. Newspaper editors want news, not advertising. Avoid superlatives or "hype." Instead, state your credential and provide a dynamic overview of your background. Include quotes from presenters or teachers (if you've first obtained their permission). You can also quote yourself, as though you'd been interviewed, as long as you have something interesting and fresh to say about the repertoire or some other aspect of the performance. Note that some journalists prefer *not* to get quotes from other journalists, so use these with discretion.

*Ms. Smith is looking forward to returning to Whoville for this performance and says, "Whoville is where I got my start. So I'm thrilled to be performing for both new and old friends to help celebrate the opening of the ABC community center."*

5. **Language**—think carefully about your target audience. Consider submitting your release to appropriate specialized newspapers. If the paper is published in a language other than English, it's best to send the press release in that language. Be sure to avoid music jargon or technical terms that might alienate a reader. Find engaging ways to describe the program so that non-musicians can "get" it.

Hill's work, "Thoughtful Wanderings," features natural horn and a taped accompaniment of nature sounds and percussion instruments. The piece was inspired by the music of the Native Americans from the Plains.

6. **Use short, well-organized paragraphs**—newspapers prefer them. Keep your paragraphs to 2-3 sentences each, in logically organized units of thought. After the lead paragraph, where the essential information is covered, subsequent paragraphs should flesh out the story with background info on the performers and details about the program, composers, and sponsors. Keep in mind that editors assume that the essential info is in the top of the release ("inverted pyramid" style), so they generally cut from the bottom.
7. **Double check your details.** Don't forget the all-important information such as ticket prices & purchase information (phone number or web link), performance date, venue address, and the necessary contact information. Leaving out crucial details is an all too common mistake and very often why releases don't make it into print. Have friends proofread your work carefully before sending it out.

It's best to send your press release directly to a contact you have with a publication. If you don't know who to contact, check the publication's website to identify the correct person and/or email address. Make sure to pay attention to the genre specialty of each writer. Sending a press release about your classical performance to the jazz/world critic will not get you coverage. Another resource for media contacts is *The Musician's Atlas*. You can buy a hard copy for \$50, or subscribe online. It is a thorough database of national and local media outlets complete with information on when to send press releases, and other useful tips.

Timing is also key—print publications deal with strict deadlines. The general rule of thumb for daily publications is allowing six weeks lead time for your event or album release. For weekly or monthly publications you may need to allot even more time. National magazines such as *Spin*, for example, require that you submit a press release three months in advance.

It's good also practice to keep track of who you sent your releases to and when, as well as any feedback you receive. Keep an excel sheet with this information for each promotional campaign you work on. If you receive a response from a writer—even if it's a simple rejection—make sure to send them a thank you note and/or follow up on their email as soon as you can.

## Calendar Listings

In addition to feature articles and reviews, most newspapers and magazines print listings of daily cultural events. Most news organizations will have one person, the calendar editor or listings editor, who is responsible for these announcements. A calendar listing should be in the same format as a press release; however, it contains *only* the basic information about a concert—who, what, when, where, how much, where to call for ticket information, a brief program description, and a hi-res photo. Many venues submit their own listings, in which case you don't need to duplicate efforts. Remember to check with the venue to find out if you need to send your own listings.

## Radio Announcements

If you are seeking promotional coverage from a radio station, you can submit a radio announcement, which is effectively an abridged press release that accounts for the format and timing of radio programs. The ideal length of a promotional announcement is 15-30 seconds, and the time it takes to read your announcement should be included at the bottom. The following word count will give you a rough idea of time: 10-15 words—10 seconds; 25-40 words—20 seconds; 55-65 words—30 seconds. Be sure to find out who at the station usually receives these listings. Give the reader a prose version of the announcement and a "bulleted" list of the key points (see sample below).

## General Format for Radio Announcement

Release Date

Contact Name  
Telephone and email

### HEADLINE

Include who, what, where, and when in short. Give the announcer two version - a bulleted list of the vital information, and a prose version. Be sure it can be read and understood easily. Include phonetic pronunciations of unusual proper names.

(— seconds)

###

## Sample Radio Announcement

Radio Announcement  
15, 2012

CONTACT: Bob Annis, Manager April  
(617) 721-5423  
bobtheman@bob.com



COLLAGE NEW MUSIC

FINISHES SEASON

MONDAY, MAY 9 AT  
SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY'S C. WALSH THEATRE

### 30-Second Announcement:

Join Collage New Music on May 9 for this prestigious contemporary music ensemble's final concert of the season. With premieres of works by Jacob Druckman, Cameron Ince (IN-say), and David Lang, this concert presents the very newest of new music. Frederick Rzewski's (SHEV-skee) *Song and Dance* is also on the program. Collage New Music performs on May 9 at Suffolk University's C. Walsh Theatre at 8:00 p.m.; for tickets and information, call (617) 573-8680. That's 573-8680.

### (30 Seconds)

#### At a glance:

- Collage New Music, David Hoose, Music Director
- 8:00 p.m. Monday, May 9
- Program:
  - Boston premiere of Jacob Druckman *BO*
  - Frederick Rzewski (SHEV-skee) *Song and Dance*
  - Boston premiere of Cameron Ince (IN-say) *Night Passage* (1992)
  - World premiere of David Lang *Cheating, Lying, Stealing* (1993)

- C. Walsh Theatre at Suffolk University, 41 Temple Street on Beacon Hill in Boston
- Tickets: \$12 general admission; \$6 students and seniors
- For tickets and information, call the C. Walsh Theatre Box Office: (617) 573-8680

###

## General Format for a Press Release

### LETTERHEAD OR LOGO

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Today's date

**Contact name**  
**Contact telephone and email**

### HEADLINE IN ALL CAPS AND CENTERED

#### The first paragraph should list:

- Who, what, where, and when in a few sentences
- Specifics only where necessary and a summary of the importance of the event
- If relevant, program information

#### The second paragraph should provide:

- Biographical or historical information that provides further context
- Potentially a quote from a featured artist or important collaborator, providing a personal or organizational perspective as to why the particular event, project, or album is newsworthy

#### The last paragraph should contain:

- Information about admission or tickets
- Contact information: phone number, email, address, etc.

###

(This signifies the end of the release and should always be included)

Funding credits should go at the very end on one or two lines, unless they are included in the copy above.



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 24, 2012

**CONTACT:** Rachel Roberts  
Director, Entrepreneurial Musicianship  
617-585-1108  
rachel.roberts@necmusic.edu

**NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY STUDENTS EXPLORE THE CONCEPT OF “OPEN SOURCE”  
THROUGH PERFORMANCE OF NEW MUSIC**

BOSTON, MASS. - The New England Conservatory's Entrepreneurial Musicianship (EM) Department is sponsoring a student-run contemporary music concert centered on the theme of “open source.” Responding to the trend of open and crowd source music platforms, a creative team of NEC students have spent the last seven months exploring this phenomenon musically through seminal works and original compositions that make use of electric and multi-media elements. The performance will take place at 7:00PM May 17th at Space with a Soul (281 Summer Street, Boston).

The inspiration for this event grew out of the EM Innovation Forum, a lecture and open discussion led by acclaimed U.K.-based cellist Peter Gregson, who has been recognized internationally for his work in electronic new music. Looking forward to his return trip to Boston for the May performance, Gregson shared, "Although our evening's theme might be current, the concept of commissioning music from your peers is hardly new, but is often overlooked. It's been tremendously exciting to watch this project develop with such passion from all involved; it won't just be a concert, I'm convinced it'll be a sign of great things to come."

Newly composed and adapted works will be performed by NEC students, including *(OPEN)Source* by Peter Dodds, which uses crowd-sourcing data in composition; *Silence* by Charlie Haden for solo bass and loop station; *Unseen* by Tara Mueller for Violin, Voice, and electronics; *Significant Transits* by Vanessa Wheeler for solo tuba and electronics; *Solo Duet in Three Movements* by Peter Gregson, which uses goPlay, a new responsive performance interface; and *H No. 1-7 Redux* by Neal Markowski, performed by *The Gradient Us Ensemble*, with art film by SMFA student Angela Counts.

Thrilled to see this fruitful collaboration between Peter Gregson and NEC's EM Department, Director Rachel Roberts commented, "It's immensely gratifying to see students take charge of all facets of this event—from artistic vision, to marketing and production—our students are actively engaged in making their music live outside the walls of NEC."

Admission is \$10 (\$5 with valid student ID) and tickets can be purchased at the door with cash or credit card, or in advance at [opensourcenec.eventbrite.com](http://opensourcenec.eventbrite.com). More information can be found at [necmusic.edu/open-source](http://necmusic.edu/open-source).

---

---

**Sample Press Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 17, 2012

**CONTACT:** Vessela Stoyanova

617-111-2222

vessela@mail.com



**EMPEROR NORTON'S STATIONARY MARCHING BAND CD RELEASE FOR "DISCO DISCHORDIA"**

**Who:** Emperor Norton's Stationary Marching Band, Bury Me Standing

**What:** "Disco Dischordia" CD release

**When:** Friday, August 3rd 2012, 9:30pm

**Where:** Johnny D's, 17 Holland St., Somerville, Massachusetts 02144

**Additional info:** \$12, 21+

Boston's premier steampunk circus party band Emperor Norton's Stationary Marching Band is releasing their second full-length CD on Friday, August 3 at Johnny D's (Somerville, MA). ENSMB is an eclectic 16-piece group, whose instrumentation includes marching-style brass, electric violins and marimba, accordion, guitar, upright bass and drums. Their music is influenced by fast, odd-metered Eastern European folksongs, klezmer, vaudeville, New Orleans second line, and James Brown-inspired funk.

ENSMB's new album, recorded at the famed Blue Jay Studios, showcases original songs, as well as their own arrangements of Serbian and Indian traditional songs. ENSMB will perform much of this material at the CD release party, along with the frantically grooving repertoire for which they are well-known. Strap in -- their raucous stage antics is where "stationary" collides with "marching," with circus-level energy and close encounters with the audience.

Indeed, Johnny D's couldn't be a more appropriate venue; it's right in the heart of Davis Square, where the activist street band festival HONK! originated—the highlight event of ENSMB's season. ENSMB has spent the past couple of months traveling around the country, including pummeling HONK! audiences in Austin and Seattle. Now they're back home. And it's time to have a ridiculous party.

ENSMB will be joined by Bury Me Standing, self-described as gypsy dirge-core, whose music is a strange intertwining of art metal and Balkan folksong, with haunting Turkish inflection from their otherworldly singer.

###

*necmusic.edu/em | em@necmusic.edu*