

BCTC REGIONAL MEETING
FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 16, 2011
ON STAGE AT THE PORT THEATRE, NANAIMO

Approximately 50 presenters, artists, agents, government funders, venue managers, support staff and BCTC board members gathered to share their experiences.

1. Everyone introduced themselves and mentioned a current challenge or a recent success:

Successes!

- Staying alive
- Working as artists for four decades and never having to get a day job
- Juno nominations
- Tours to other provinces
- Presenting a great season
- 3 days on the new job
- Increased off-site ticket sales by our ticket centre
- Diversifying rental base
- New outdoor performance stage at Duncan's Forestry Museum
- Summer tour of play
- Summer festival circuit

Challenges:

- Funding
- Facility availability for dates
- Inclusion of First Nations
- Expanding tours into Alberta
- Co-presenting money
- Succession planning
- Learning a new marketing job
- Ticket sales
- Market saturation
- Finding audiences
- Adapting to changing markets
- Volunteer recruitment
- Eroding number of venues for family audiences
- Educating presenters
- Economic downturn
- How to serve the sector
- Geographical challenges to touring
- Staffing levels
- Balancing family/work/life
- Tour coordination challenges
- Relevant programming
- Balance between renters/presenters
- Communication from artist to presenters
- What is appealing to audiences?

- Audience development
- Finding affordable workshop space and venues on the island
- Communicating government priorities/realities to the arts community
- Holding an artistic vision during an economic downturn
- Keeping our season/facility relevant
- Getting young people engaged in the arts
- Keeping momentum for our music group
- Dealing with a booking agent from artist's side
- Keeping presenters interested in my performance work
- Travel costs for artists
- Ticket sales below average
- A new venue opening in our town run by the School Board
- Decreased ticket revenues affecting artists fees
- Integrating technology into the theatre venue
- How to bring new people into the shows
- Expanding and diversifying our artistic programs

The participants then self-selected the topics they would like to speak on in more detail and BCTC board members acted as “note takers”. Here are some of the ideas that were captured during the 1.5 hour peer to peer discussions.

1. Talking to Presenters: How artists can get their attention
 - Use modern methods of communication
 - Use social media
 - Have a 4 minute video clip of your performance on your website/YouTube/My Space that you can send to presenters in an email
 - Consider different ways of being paid for concerts – “share of gate”, donations at the door, lower guarantee and then a percentage of ticket sales
 - Appear at Pacific Contact and other regional/national booking conferences
 - Get presenters to share their concert series with other presenters (spread the word!)
2. Venue Management:
 - Training new staff
 - Asking colleagues for help and information
 - Determining capital equipment/upgrade priorities
 - Creating a positive union/management relationship
 - Determining how many hours to have ticket centre open
 - Access to research/best practices from other venues
 - Staffing consistency
 - Moving the board from “hands on” to governance
3. Funding Questions:
 - How to match what you're doing with what the funding agencies are able to fund
 - How to decide what to ask funding for

- How do you get enough money to mount a big show with a big travel commitment
- Artists need enough funding to make the show affordable to community presenters
- Match your show with what presenters want to present eg. Historical show for museums
- Amount of time and energy needed to deal with the different application forms and different funding timelines
- Pro Arts Alliance in Victoria successfully lobbied the municipalities for a change in their deadlines (Sept 4 to later in Sept.) which made a huge difference for the applicants
- Pro Arts Alliance was able to get municipalities to combine their resources and make the funding pie bigger
- Don't get split up into factions
- How do you form a collective, especially of independent artists from various disciplines
- Artists have to pay their bills up front (eg. Rehearsal time) and then get funding/earned revenue to reimburse later. How to manage cash flow?
- Obtain low or no interest loans from investors – not many patron saints around these days

4. Marketing:

- Using art as a vehicle to teach
- Talk about “creative capital” - what you bring to the community
- Looking at a new level of outreach and investment
- Free Art in unusual places
- Introduce the art to the community outside of our venues
- Offer “teasers” of the event for free out in the community
- Recruit volunteers to market the event
- Trade services for exposure
- Niche marketing
- Social media – Facebook, video clips
- Live on-stage exposure – include a local group as an opening act or a lobby warm up act
- Include local performers in the show (dance extras)
- Use food as a “hook” to keep people interacting with the artist/audience
- Food as a pre-show or intermission promise

5. Inclusivity and Diversity:

- How to engage youth?
- Offer workshops
- Experiential education
- Find ways for youth to take ownership of a space

- Create youth panels to advise and guide you
- How to reach First Nations audiences?
- Our performances are very structured
- Need to create flexibility in how we present
- Encourage children/families to be part of the event
- Make it more casual
- Include food as part of the offering
- Extend invitations
- Create an ambassador program
- Find a champion in the community you wish to reach
- Hold an open house
- Recruit a board member from a specific community you wish to reach
- Communication is different for different ethnic groups
- Is there a key figure you can involve?
- Figure out how to access, communicate with an appeal to ethnic groups in ways that are meaningful to them
- The challenge is relevant communication
- Needs to be authentic
- Find out who are the cultural “players” or leaders within the community
- The cultural group within our community is invited to be a part of the entire show process – from selection of the artists, to funding, to selling/purchasing tickets, hosting the reception
- Include visual art from the group in a lobby display
- Invite drummers/performers from the group for lobby or pre-show warm up
- Building the relationship takes time

6. Audience Development:

- How to reach out and find new audiences
- Partner with those interested in our work
- Find cultural movers and shakers to be your champion
- Focus efforts on an artist from that community that has risen up in the field, include them in workshops
- Doing performances first then invite people to workshops
- Offer workshops that involve general public in the art form
- Work and partner with those artists who have similar interests
- “found venues” art in unusual places as a way of reaching prospective audiences and making art accessible to all
- Talking Stick Festival – includes schools workshops, get families to come, taking shows out into the neighbourhoods
- Get to Pacific Contact and see others engaged in the process, meet others to learn how they are doing it.

7. Representation for Artists (by Agents/Managers):

- What is the relationship between artist and agent
- Viable tours to sustain long life balanced with career development

- Self representation allows for accurate and thorough description of the artist's work, maintaining control over all business affairs, establishing and sustaining relationships with presenters
- Agent representation allows for tremendous cost savings of marketing, showcasing, booth rentals, brochure materials, website maintenance as well as not having to worry about administrative details and the messy business of negotiating fees with presenters
- Artists are securing sponsorships from businesses for clothing, sound gear, travel, drink bottles, product placement etc. etc.
- How to negotiate travel costs on top of performance fees

8. Skills Development and Professional Development Needs:

- Human resources development and management
- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Board development
- Finding sources of local skills development
- Integration of human resources to different cultural principles
- Development of guidelines and orientation for new employees
- Generational differences in the workplace culture

9. Ticket Sales:

- Target marketing by social media
- Ticket pricing
- Remove barriers
- Admission by donation
- Engaging the audience
- Creating discussions
- Prices being inclusive of HST & CDF – order fees on top
- McDonald's mentality – familiarity with the product
- How much risk do venue/promoters take
- Competing shows ie 2 ABBA Tributes – how to avoid both shows doing poorly in small communities
- Getting a regional exclusivity clause so the same show isn't playing just down the road
- Add an opportunity or different component
- A local opening act, a bonus performance for the same price

10. How to Tour Canada:

- Spend time researching each venue to find out what type of music they present
- How do you make one show in the middle of the country work
- Make sure your promo video is 4 minutes or less
- Stay true to your genre
- Find your audience and stick with it (gold and country club market)

- Artist gets a portion of every ticket sold after a certain number of tickets have been sold
- Be seen/represented at regional/national showcases and booking conferences

11. Work/Life Balance:

- Balance always changes
- We have different needs/energies at different life stages
- Feeling tugged in all directions
- Challenges of burnout
- Taking comfort when things are finished
- Have some downtime in the middle of the day
- Go for a walk
- Work flexibility
- Employer accommodation for family life realities
- What is the message from your Board/Mgt. about balance/wellness
- Take time off in summer, at Christmas
- Learn a meditation technique
- Spot signs of burnout in yourself and colleagues BEFORE it's too late
- “breathe in I am calming, breathe out I am smiling, Present Moment, Wonderful Moment”

Everyone walked next door to the Coast Bastion Inn for lunch during which they were encouraged to speak with people they did not know, to reconnect with old friends and to continue the discussions on the various topics.