

Guest Musicians Protocol

by Ahria, M.D., Seaside Religious Science Church, Encinitas, CA

Throughout all of our events that involve guest musicians, my role as music director is to be the bridge between the church and the artist. While I work for the church, I am a performer and recording artist myself, so it's easy for me to appreciate and understand the needs of both. My personal goal when I was hired at Seaside over 3 years ago was to support the ministers with the highest quality music possible, while at the same time making Seaside a place where musicians absolutely LOVE to perform. And, based on the feedback we repeatedly get, I think we're doing a great job at both.

Here's our formula:

- **Start with great talent**
It's my job to find the best talent I can. Not just good talent, but exceptionally great talent helps draw people and helps keep them coming back. And the right music helps carry our minister's message deeper. It's important that the style of musicians we bring in support the minister's delivery style and the overall "vibe" of the church. This creates congruency in the service, which translates into an "easy-to-integrate" experience for the congregant.
- **Make it easy for them to do their job**
I send guest artists an instruction sheet (usually via email) with all the details of what they need to know. This keeps me from having to answer the same questions every time I hire someone new, and it makes sure I don't leave out anything important. The instruction sheet includes things like driving directions, what time to arrive, what kind of music to choose, how to prepare charts for the band, etc. I don't generally screen songs or lyrics beforehand, but if a particular artist is known to sing standards or covers, I will often ask what they plan to sing just to avoid repetition of recent performances. Lyrical content is rarely an issue with professional signers who know the New Thought circuit. I'd rather give them freedom than be a control freak. It's easier on both of us.
- **Make it easy for them to shine**
This starts with great musical support. Our jazz band features piano, upright bass, multiple saxophones, flute and drums. The guest artist brings charts with them for rehearsal an hour before the service, and away they go. It's amazing to witness. It continues with a great sound technician, who fills the house with big sound, and is complete with the congregation's genuine appreciation for the music. Rarely does a musician leave without at least one standing ovation.
- **Treat them well when they are here**
When the guest artist arrives, I am there to greet them and assist them with anything they need from the moment they arrive until the moment they leave. I will make copies, set up CDs, bring them water, make them tea. We give them a table to sell CDs in the family room where people congregate -location is everything - and I help them with sales if they need it.
- **Pay them well**
We pay our guest musicians very well - as high as any other church I've found so far - and we're proud of it! AND we don't take any of their product sales. They worked hard to create their CDs, and if they sell a lot it's because they're awesome, then they deserve it. In return, some musicians tithe back to us, and some don't, but that's between them and God. I know that some churches don't share this same philosophy, but I hope that by being congruent in our prosperity consciousness and paying our guest artists well, Seaside can be a role model for

other organizations. We recognize that great music is an essential element in our service and that the talented individuals who bring this gift to us deserve to be honored abundantly for their craft. We know we're doing something right when guest artists are referring our church to their performing peers!

Our formula appears to be working beautifully, as we never are short of talent (we're generally booked 6-8 months in advance). It doesn't mean we are without challenges from time to time, but fortunately our ministers and staff are solution oriented. We always find creative ways to make things work in a pinch and with a laugh. And just in case... I always carry my songbook with me!