

Producing Successful Church-based Concerts

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Music is often said to be the life-blood of any church, almost as important as the Sunday talks. For the purposes of community outreach, inspiration, enjoyment, introducing artists to a new audience and vice versa, and fund-raising, there's nothing like a well-executed and inspired musical performance.

Let's take a brief look at the ingredients necessary (and/or helpful) to make your event a reality:

- >The producer (you, most likely) needs a passion for music and a vision. The producer should also have planning and organizing ability, as well as an ability to work with a variety of personality types, ie, understanding the artistic temperament.
- >Support is absolutely vital. If the church minister(s) and board/advisory council are in full support of doing these events, you'll almost automatically succeed. Spiritual and emotional support, and holding the vision, while you as producer agree to the overall responsibility, is necessary.
- >Establish a purpose (or several purposes) for these events. Community outreach, buying a new sound board or choir music, sending your Y.O.U. to conference, (or your music team to Sound Connections!)
- >Establish a theme, which may go along with the purpose for that specific concert, or not. Examples—celebrating the feminine voice; hurricane fund-raiser; community outreach, etc. Having a theme for the event helps keep focus, draws attention and maintains enthusiasm.
- >Gather your resources; musicians, funds, communications outlets, equipment, volunteers, etc. If you do not have connections within the community media then recruit someone in the congregation who is well-connected or someone who may actually work at a newspaper, radio or television station. Also, carefully screen any and all outgoing publicity material for errors and appropriate wording.
- >Having some connections within the music community is always very helpful, even necessary.
- >Computer equipment and skills (publishing)/someone with writing skills (for publicity materials) is always valuable.

Now a brief word on a few of these items is in order by way of elaboration:

Give yourself, and your team, plenty of time to plan. Several months is generally a good rule of thumb to follow. If for no other reason, it allows time to search for other artists should anybody have to drop out of the lineup. Be flexible, but don't "bend" too much. Be sure you and the minister have a firm date and stick to it if at all possible.

A further word on planning: Time of year selected for the event is crucial. Summer, in many churches, is not a good time. Many people are on vacation. Artists often have standing gigs during certain seasons.

Decide on a format, ie, 60-90-2 hours; consider the artists and how they "fit" with the overall concert and the energy flow; will you have an all-artist finale? a specific set list? act one, act two, act three, or a more collaborative join-in-and-jam kind of show? Will a certain style/genre be emphasized? Will there be any spoken word or dance incorporated, and can you find someone to choreograph those elements?

Be sure to listen to your inner guidance as to what's yours to do and what is not. Delegate those things that are not yours to do. Then, do your best to match the volunteer with the job; and keep their jobs closely related if they have more than one. Then, let go and let God. Realize you may wear more hats than you wish if you can't get the number or type of volunteers you desire—it just goes with the territory.

Think about your venue. It is likely the church, and in many instances, the church sanctuary given the absence of a good auditorium or other room. Consider lighting; existing interior lighting fixture/brightness, windows, time of year, time of day of the concert - and whether or not you'll need to rent a lighting system. (This is an especially important consideration if you plan on video taping the event.)

Be sure all audio/visual equipment is in good working order and staffed by someone who knows how to operate it. Know the layout of the room: Where's the "stage"? Where will the instruments be kept, plugged in? Will their cords reach from the mixing board to the stage? Some of these might sound like little things, but can loom quite large come time for the actual event.

Miscellaneous items checklist:

- >Door persons/greeters.
- >Do you sell tickets or make it a love offering?
- >Do you pay the musicians?
- >Collect a mailing list for future events.
- >Create and print a hand-out program for the night of the event containing general information about the event and a list of artists who are performing.
- >Be sure to have an emcee who is comfortable with public speaking and has a pleasant voice and personality. This individual should be supplied with some brief but interesting information about each artist with which to introduce them.
- >Have refreshments and someone to be in charge of that.
- >Ask for volunteers for a set-up and clean-up crew.
- >Have some "intro" music (live or on a CD) to play as people file into the venue.

Follow up, follow through, and do it some more.

Lastly, a brief word about sound checks and rehearsals. While everything should be in place prior to the arrival of the audience, it will invariably happen that sound check time, no matter what you do, will – at least in part – turn into a mini-rehearsal for a few of the artists who feel a need to practice one last time. This requires tact and perhaps a little give and take.

However, when announcing sound check times, make it plain that rehearsals should be completed prior to this. Rigidity isn't necessary, but stating the plan will at least for the most part ensure most of the artists will be prepared.

Finally, after following up, following through and doing everything that's yours to do as the producer, as was said before, give it up, let it go, breathe and enjoy.

Happy concerts!

Find additional resources on how to produce successful special events in "Music In Ministry – A Handbook for Ministers and Music Directors" at www.empowerma.com/store)