

# **Presenting International Artists: A Timely Status Report**

March 2017



## **PREFACE**

### **Introduction**

As the Executive & Artistic Director of the Meany Center for the Performing Arts, which has supported the presentation, public engagement and creative development of artists from around the world for nearly 40 years, I believe that this work has never been more crucially important. The international performing arts promote a far-reaching and interconnected understanding of the world, bring together diverse communities, teach cultural literacy, and give us tools to interpret the onslaught of images and information we navigate on a daily basis. Whether the depth and intricacies of Mughal music, the culturally rich stories of Kathak dance, or the indefinable beauty of Butoh ...these experiences expand our lives to include new realms of awareness, help us to cultivate empathy and connection, and establish our shared universal humanity.

We learn to value societies very different from our own through opportunities to experience centuries of cultural tradition interwoven with contemporary thought and aesthetic practice. As a field of performing arts professionals, we face a tremendous challenge to contribute to creating a world that resists fear, misperception, and prejudice, and advances compassion, illumination and inclusion through the democratic and open exchange of cultural knowledge and shared experiences. We are called to engage in what has become an historic moment to commit more seriously to our role as international cultural leaders than ever before, and seek to understand and develop strategies to overcome growing obstacles to international arts and cultural exchange.

### **The report**

This Summary Report on international artists exchange is the result of the Association of Performing Arts Professionals' (APAP's) investigation into the programming of international artists by member organizations, as well as experiences of Cultural Exchange Fund (CEF) travel grantees. As noted in the following Overview, APAP engaged consultants Trudel | MacPherson to explore the current state of the field, to identify the various challenges and opportunities of presenting international artists, and to formulate recommendations toward advancing greater international

touring and cultural exchange in the U.S. What follows is a clear and robust set of recommendations based upon input from artists, agent/managers, presenters and other stakeholders that outlines the wide-ranging motivations and benefits of presenting international artists, as well as core guiding principles and key elements of success, exemplified by best practices from across the field.

This report comes to the performing arts sector at an extraordinarily opportune time, as we vigorously seek to understand how to support far-reaching and thoughtful exchanges within our communities through the performing arts from around the globe. This important research has resulted in a number of new findings that can be immediately put into practice, as well as recommendations for sector wide advancement to provide ongoing resources to the field. The research included interviews with a range of constituents currently presenting the international performing arts and gives a window into the impulses that drive their work.

These powerful motivators include fulfilling organizations' missions to present relevant work that builds knowledge about societies and cultures with roots outside the U.S., connects audiences to contemporary societal issues in a global context, and cultivates inclusion for a larger range of audiences in a region, including immigrant populations. As cited, many organizations are deepening contemporary political and cultural inquiry through the artists they present. For example, Lane Czaplinski of Seattle's On The Boards (OTB) notes various "socio-political goals that are served" through their international work, and Samantha Pollack of Washington Performing Arts states the "importance of their educational responsibility." Linda Lucero of Yerba Buena Gardens Festival agrees, "We want to be relevant to our very heterogeneous community—presenting international artists is essential to achieving this goal." Such conversations are taking place across diverse segments of the country in rural and in urban settings.

The report investigates what makes international programming truly effective—and part of successfully presenting international artists is in presenting work within a context that audiences can understand and that connects with "culture-bearers from the artists' homelands," says the Asia Society's Rachel Cooper. Alicia Adams of the Kennedy Center concurs, "We [strive] to establish a comfort level and represent a gentle introduction to a culture." Findings report that audiences are eager to have "once in a lifetime" experiences that distinguish presenters, and that non-traditional venues can increase participation and access. The report also explores the benefits of presenters being able to see artists in advance, in their home countries, and discusses the resources and strategies necessary to best leverage these experiences.

Building broad-based community participation is a key element of any successful exchange with international performing artists and this research investigates best practices—from finding key influencers, to building unique branding that enhances participation and distinguishes a program or festival. It also proposes resources for the issues of visas and taxation, an area that bears further investigation in light of recent political events that heighten challenges to artists' entry to the U.S. from a range of countries.

The report suggests a number of new exciting opportunities for the field, which APAP could support in collaboration with other stakeholders in the sector; including ad hoc international programming networks, such as those currently advanced by the Major University Presenters (MUPS) consortium and others. Curated exploratory travel collaborations, the development of anchor presenting structures and formal block booking associations, touring marketplaces, and online block booking tools linked to APAP's Cultural Exchange Laboratory are seen as highly desired throughout the field. The report touches upon professional development resources such as "Do-It-Yourself" tool kits and more formal learning opportunities that could be developed and led by "thought leaders" in the field. It also suggests ways to maximize APAP's valuable and effective Cultural Exchange Fund grant program, which supports travel to expand and deepen presenters' knowledge of artists, traditions and cultures from around the world. Interviews with numerous individuals from museums, performing arts centers, festivals, management agencies and others prove that the international performing arts are an increasingly essential and vital part of our activities as a sector.

## **Conclusion**

This valuable new research sheds important light on the path of deepening our commitment and our vision, broadening our horizons and collaborating together as we develop new approaches and refine current practices in presenting the international performing arts. Now is the time for all of us to engage in the fullest possible spectrum of dialogue within our own communities and with artists that represent every corner of the globe. As cultural leaders, we are in the position to not only support the unbounded and liberal exchange of arts, culture and ideas, but we are urgently called upon to be courageous visionaries within our communities, across the country and around the world. The field of the performing arts in the U.S. is facing one of the most critical moments of its contemporary history; a cultural crisis that possibly exceeds what any of us have experienced, or may again experience in our lifetimes. In a global environment increasingly fraught with barriers to the democratic exchange of ideas, cultures and artistic expression, it is critical that we ourselves ensure that an unrestricted and open international performing arts community flourishes, and that our audiences and communities have access to the expansive and complex influences that shape our time.

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## A SCAN OF THE PRESENTING FIELD

The mission of the Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP) to advance and support the performing arts in communities across the U.S. includes the value and relevance of direct experience with artists who reflect societies and cultures from around the world. APAP has made programs and services available for members to pursue this important work over the past ten years through the generous support of foundations, including the Cultural Exchange Fund (CEF) with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Building Bridges grant program with support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation/Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Arts.

The CEF program makes travel stipends available for artists, presenters, producers, and agents-managers to travel internationally to meet and learn more about the work of artists and presenting colleagues, and to seek collaborative opportunities for presenting international artists in their communities. The Building Bridges: Arts, Culture, and Identity grants program provides support for projects aimed at building knowledge and changing perceptions about Muslim societies through encounters with artists from Muslim-majority regions around the world.

In mid-2015, APAP commissioned an analysis of the depth and breadth of programming international artists, as reflected by current APAP member organizations and Cultural Engagement Fund grantees, that would examine the role, value and exigencies of presenting international artists and work in the U.S. APAP engaged Trudel | MacPherson (T|M) arts consultants to investigate the scope and scale of programming international artists, the challenges and opportunities inherent to this work, and to formulate recommendations to foster a more vibrant international touring scene in the United States.

In consultation with APAP, T|M conducted a discovery phase that included online surveys of practitioners, agent/managers and artists; personal interviews with thought leaders; convenings of field experts and analyses of offline practices; and, leading online platforms currently in use by presenters. The intent of this discovery process and situation analysis is to serve as a springboard for designing processes, products and learning activities centered on presenting and touring international artists.

After the robust discovery phase, T|M identified key information, trends and issues affecting international artist exchange, including:

- Data on the quantity and prevalence of international presenting gathered from surveys and interviews
- Motivations (the role and value of presenting international artists in the U.S.)
- Benefits (fulfilling organizational mission, branding, community inclusion)
- Enablers (networking and relationship building)
- Challenges (barriers/inhibitors)
- Emerging Best Practices (highlighting incentives and strategies of successful presenters)
- Opportunities (tracking modes of presenter/agent manager collaboration)

Based on this deep data dive, T|M consultants developed a number of specific recommendations for actions and learning activities to be considered to expand and sustain international artists exchange for the future.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Overview of the quantity and prevalence of international presenting in the U.S.**

The study project revealed helpful information about the frequency and proportional representation of presentations of international artists by APAP member presenters. In June 2015, T|M distributed an online survey to APAP presenter members, with 57% of respondents indicating that they feature or include international artists in 25-50% or more of their season's programming events. 19% reported presenting international artists in less than 10% of their programming and 12% reported not presenting international artists at all.

In August 2016, T|M distributed an online survey and also conducted phone interviews with recipients of CEF awards. Again, approximately 60% of the responding presenters indicated that they feature or include international artists in 25-50% or more of their season's programming events. Only 6% present international artists in less than 10% of their lineup. The average proportion of these presenters' seasons' events that featured international artists was 40%. They also reported that their average number of events per year that feature or include international artists ranged from one to 40. The average number of annual international events per presenter was 14.

### **Motivations**

#### Mission-driven

The presenters interviewed by T|M consistently linked their rationale for featuring international artists to fulfilling their organization's mission and goals, including: fostering dialogue, keeping work relevant in a global context, demonstrating commitment to high artistic quality, encouraging engagement with different art forms, and educating audiences.

Most find it energizing, Lane Czaplinski, Artistic Director of OTB in Seattle, explained, "We present about 25-30% international work each season. Usually the engagements are one week long. I call it 'burning the jet fuel.' We do it to foster dialogue with other cultures and other forms of creative expression. There are also socio-political goals that are served by the interaction of cultures."

University presenters and those with a strong connection to public education are serious about the importance of their educational responsibility. Samantha Pollock, Director of Programming at Washington Performing Arts said, "Presenting international artists is integral to our educational mission." Michelle Witt, Artistic Director of University of Washington World Series, concurs, "50 to 60% of our programming is of international artists. We live in an international world and need our work to be relevant in a global context. The best artistic work is not necessarily coming from

the U.S. and we need to present challenging and interesting work from wherever it is happening. Our 21st Century students—30% of our 50,000 student enrollment are international—are citizens of the world and they need to know and understand the global environment.”

Presenters in urban areas want to present programming that reflects underrepresented communities in their region; as Monique Martin, Director of Programming of the City Parks Foundation’s SummerStage in NYC said, “The market we serve (New York City) is a global village so we need to present a diversity of aesthetics and give audiences a chance to see artists from all over the world.” Christine Tschida, Director of the Northrup at the University of Minnesota, agrees, “Work in all other fields is global. Arts are the same. Borders are breaking down. Cultural understanding is essential. American artists’ work is improved by exposure and contact with international work.”

A cluster of agents also feels drawn to international presenting in spite of its challenges and risks. As Manuel Prestamo, President of PMI Arts, said, “I consider myself an ‘International product’ so as an agent/manager I decided to specialize in bringing international artists to the U.S.” 40% of Elsie Management’s Laura Colby’s roster are international ensembles. She notes, “I work to curate a roster of artists that presenters want to share with their audiences. One of my main motivations for representing international artists is the call in the market for international work. There is great cachet for venues to present international artists.”

## **Benefits**

### Unique branding

Many successful presenters use high profile programming of international artists to create unique, cutting edge brands for their organizations. International artists, new to a community, can form the nucleus of themed festivals and offer “once in a lifetime” experiences which set presenters apart in their marketplaces. As Kim Whitener, Producing Director of the HERE Arts Center said, “Our selling point is usually ‘you’ll see something unlike you’ve ever seen before!’”

Over time audiences learn to trust that the international programming will be exciting and worth seeing, regardless of whether they recognize any of the artists on the lineup. Festival audiences particularly expect to be surprised and enthralled and are willing to “sample” unfamiliar artists/genres within the context of a themed event. Linda Lucero, Artistic and Executive Director of the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival in San Francisco, explained, “We want the audience pre-sold that they’re going to ‘love it.’” The key for presenters is to identify the events/festivals/tours of international artists as something synonymous with their brand. Lane Czaplinski at OTB explained, “International events are our stock in trade – to bring the best and brightest from the global artistic community to OTB.”

In rural settings, arts centers can be one of the few spaces which provide access to world class art and artists and connect audiences to the bigger global world. Fresh unexpected programming can also intrigue donors and sponsors and enhance project fund raising. Jenni Taylor-Swain, until recently director at the Walton Arts Center, explained, “We are in the northeast corner of Arkansas and it’s crucial that we help our audiences connect to the bigger global world. Our

donors, sponsors and audiences want us to ‘bring the world to Arkansas.’ ” Margaret Lawrence, the Director of Programming at the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College, agreed, “International artists can bring a unique perspective to rural communities and connect audiences to different cultures through the artists’ work.”

### Community inclusion

International artists can relate to immigrant communities and attract new and more diverse audiences. An artist from a particular country, tradition or genre can bring out audiences who are not regular attendees at a presenter’s venue. Jane Hirshberg, Community Engagement Manager of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland in College Park, MD explained, “When singer-songwriter Emeline Michel of Haiti performed, she connected to Haitian students and those in our local neighborhoods. Events like that have been a revelation about who actually lives in our community.” Michelle Witt of UW agrees, “Our market is very heterogeneous with large Asian, Indian, Native American and Latino populations who will come out for artists from their cultures.”

Artists of color can draw non-white, culturally diverse and younger audiences, often exceeding presenters’ expectations. Kathleen Spehar, Director of the O’Shaughnessy at St. Catherine University in St. Paul MN, noted, “We predicted that two international events would draw 10-20% new audiences, but ended up with 40% new and 40-50% non-white and they tended to be younger than our typical audiences and more culturally diverse.”

### **Enablers—What makes it work?**

#### Artists as ambassadors

Seasoned presenters of international artists tend to be very aggressive in creating audience engagement activities to place performances in context and build awareness and understanding of unfamiliar artists and work. Efforts toward providing educational and contextual background are a high priority for presenters studied. All presenters that completed the August 2016 survey indicated they host talk-backs and more than 80% also conduct workshops and school or community events. Residences are conducted by 56% of respondents and 75% indicated master classes are also frequently offered.

Presenters surveyed agreed that international artists, especially those without a global following, need to go the “extra mile” to engage with U.S. audiences—serving as ambassadors for their culture, region, art form and way of life. It’s important for international artists to be invested in communicating context as well as content. As Karen Farber, Executive Director, University of Houston Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts said, “The artist must be able to speak for themselves beyond their artistic performance to help the community build knowledge and to change perceptions.”

Most university presenters prefer to present artists within week or longer residences and expect artists to participate in educational and community outreach programs. Residencies can showcase artists and their art form in intimate interactive exchanges that help audiences connect

with the artist and can turn audience members into advocates and evangelists for the performances.

Pre-performance workshops in non-university settings can allow artists to share their traditions and place their work within the context of what's happening in their home country. Devon Akmon, Director of the Arab American National Museum, asks artists to serve as audience educators, scheduling pre-performance workshops with visiting artists. Akmon reports, "Artists need to be comfortable with 'warming up' the audience to connect them with the content."

### Seeing artists in advance

All presenters of international artists would prefer to see the artists they book BEFORE they contract them to appear. Seeing artists at international festivals or in their home countries allows presenters to gauge how their work can be presented most effectively and to envision how the artist/ensemble would fit in the presenter's venue. Advance contact also is crucial to managing the artists' expectations. Presenters who booked artists without establishing a rapport often found the artists either were unwilling or unprepared to handle the additional activities required in a residency.

Jordan Peimer, Executive Director of ArtPower at UCSD, said, "Booking artists without having built solid relationships with them [meant that] the artists weren't as invested in the program and simply did their show and left." Jane Hirshberg agrees, "Worst is when the company is only there one day, you load in and out the same day and present only a stage performance. It's an issue for us when an artist has no interest in working with students or communities." And Jenni Taylor-Swain concurs that it is, "Difficult working with artists who don't really understand what is expected of them in a U.S. residency situation."

Seeing artists in advance offers opportunities for enhanced collaboration, commissioning new work and creating bridges with local U.S. artists to foster joint engagements. This also allows time to develop powerful marketing materials and understand the artist's "story" so it can be communicated to multiple audiences and stakeholders.

It is also essential to build relationships that can ripen over time. Linda Lucero commented, "It's extremely helpful [to travel to see artists] but it's not always a one to one payoff right away. But if I can see an artist in person, I know whether or not they'll work for our festival. Artists typically appear on the east coast so we need extra effort to get unfamiliar artists to our festival. Seeing them in person and knowing how they'll be in a setting like ours is essential."

### Building bridges in the community

In general, the best experiences of arts professionals who work with international artists occur when they've taken the time to nurture local audiences, either by reaching out to culturally relevant local groups, building connections with grass roots community organizations or marketing successfully in advance.

Finding the “influencers” within target communities can foster joint fundraising and marketing. This is a time consuming process but a majority of presenters who work with international artists find the in person connections are crucial to breaking through cultural barriers and making new audiences feel welcome.

Advance work with local consulates and foreign cultural agencies can tap into potential funding streams and gain partners to bring immigrant communities out in force.

### **Challenges—What stands in the way?**

#### Visa acquisition

The difficulty of procuring proper U.S. visas is a recurring problem that is only becoming more complicated with the rising threats of global terrorism. Most of the major presenters with whom we spoke prefer to work only with artists who have professional managers to handle the visa and tax issues. Jenni Taylor-Swain said, “I must only work with artists who have U.S. managers that arrange travel, visas, etc.—otherwise it’s too difficult to make the tours work.”

Visa issues often occur after a tour is booked and sold. This continues to be a problem for presenters all over the U.S. As Mary Lou Aleskie, formerly Executive Director of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas and currently Board Chair of the International Society for Performing Arts noted, “Visa restrictions are impinging on our responsiveness; now there’s a minimum of 6 months to complete the process. The intricacies of the system can be very taxing. The burdens on artists are very high, and there are trust issues when they deal with the U.S. government. The visa system was down for entire weeks last year.”

More presenters are considering premium processing as the default process. Kim Whitener worries about the impact of the visa process on her selection of artists, “It’s starting to have a chilling effect. We filed 4 months in advance for a Belgian company, but didn’t use premium processing. In the meantime, DHS changed a requirement and we just ran out of time!”

#### Tax withholding

It can be a complex matter for presenters to act in accordance with U.S. income taxation requirements. As described by the online guide, [artistsfromabroad.org](http://artistsfromabroad.org), “The appropriate tax treatment for any particular artist is extremely fact-specific, depending on the artist's country of residence, the amount of money earned by the artist in the U.S., and the artist's status as an ‘individual’ or ‘business’ for tax purposes.”

Many presenters believe that the complexity of tax law is having an impact on how much work is coming to the U.S. Lane Czaplinski said, “My perception is that it is becoming harder to find

important artists who are interested in coming to the U.S. With us withholding 1/3 of the fee for taxes, many artists say no.”

### Travel resources to see artists in person

As noted above, presenters prefer to see artists in person before booking them. Survey respondent presenters reported that they had previously seen 70% of the international artists they book. Presenters who book artists without having seen them in person often rely on videos which do not do the artists justice and cannot capture audience reactions. Showcases are judged as better than nothing; however, as Michelle Witt said, “Showcases are better but it’s still hard to imagine a full performance when you’re only seeing a cameo. Seeing the artists in their home countries is vital for me to be able to understand how to best present the artist and to be able to have compelling stories to tell patrons, donors and my colleagues about why it is important to bring this particular artist/group to the U.S. And to have material for marketing and our blog. It’s also key to developing relationships with artists and their managers for future bookings.”

Although travel funds are not always available for every presenter who wants to travel to international festivals to audition artists before booking them, more than 40% of respondents surveyed have received touring support or travel stipends from government agencies or non-arts sector organizations that deal with international exchange. These include U.S. groups like the APAP’s Cultural Exchange Fund, New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA), CenterStage, National Performance Network, Mid-Atlantic/Southern Exposure; U.S. embassies of foreign governments; and, cultural ministries of various countries which provide touring funds to support export of their artists.

### Artist expectations

Many presenters noted that international artists expect a great deal of hand holding, such as a welcome package, personal meet and greet and sometimes translation of their materials—this puts an additional burden on the presenter’s staff. The cost of a translator on site is an often neglected budget expense and presenters struggle to get more resources to artists’ managers to manage such issues.

Artists who don’t really understand what is expected of them in a U.S. residency situation are a challenge. Linda Lucero noted, “Having artists in an ensemble arrive separately is a logistical challenge and it’s very hard to work with artists who do not have agents. Some artists aren’t really prepared or experienced in performing in an outdoor setting which creates issues on site.”

## **EMERGING BEST PRACTICES**

### **Festival branding**

Successful presenters of international artists often create annual festivals and series, themed around a specific region, concept or genre. The established festival “events” are an organizing principal which accustoms audiences to “sampling” unfamiliar artists within an overarching theme. Such festivals can deepen local community roots; becoming major cultural tourism

destinations and drivers of economic impact for their regions. Many festivals offer free programming which can attract new audiences with programming outside of typical “concert” venues.

Legendary multi-venue festivals include:

- The Lincoln Center Festival, bringing a variety of artists/genres together for a two to three-week period at venues within the Lincoln Center campus and around New York City.
- New York City Parks Foundation’s SummerStage festival, offering summer-long free programming throughout the five boroughs of New York City.
- The White Light Festival at Lincoln Center which focuses on spiritual awakening themes and programming.
- The Festival of Arts & Ideas, an annual cultural festival in New Haven, Connecticut which features landmark premieres and masterworks as well as community engagement activities connecting the “town and gown” in socially diverse New Haven.
- Spoleto USA (modeled and in partnership with Spoleto Italy) which annually brings a lineup of global artists to Charleston, South Carolina.
- The citywide Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts, the irregularly occurring, citywide festival that includes street fairs and public art installations in addition to events presented at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts.
- World Music Festival Chicago presented by the City of Chicago and produced by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events brings artists from all over the world to Chicago.

Important single venue themed festivals include:

- The Wavelengths: APAP Global Music Pre-Conference and globalFEST, an annual world music convening and showcase presented in conjunction with the APAP annual conference.
- Kennedy Center’s themed festivals, such as the spring 2016 IRELAND 100: Celebrating a Century of Irish Arts & Culture, a major festival highlighting Irish culture and its relationship to America, curated by Alicia Adams, Vice President of International Programming and Dance.
- Asia Society’s multidisciplinary festivals such as the recent Lahore Literary Festival which featured Qawwali singing and other poetry-based music from South Asia
- The MET Museum’s Met LiveArts programming which integrates performing arts throughout the MET collection as well as presenting chamber and world music series in its auditorium.
- Fall for Dance at City Center, a two week showcase of dance companies from around the world. Its special appeal is that all tickets are \$15.

Linda Lucero explains the impact festivals can have: “We want to be relevant to our very heterogeneous community—presenting international artists is essential to achieving this goal. We want to become a destination and presenting artists from all over the world who exemplify

the best of world music, jazz, afro-Cuban, etc. genres helps us do that. Of course, we also present San Francisco artists but the appeal of presenting international artists people haven't seen before or who rarely perform in the U.S. helps us stand out and become a must for local audiences."

Mary Lou Aleskie feels her festival is essential to the quality of civic life in New Haven, "A third or more of our events are international. It's more important than ever in this time when there is so much fear. International arts are a way we can level the playing field. It is ground zero for how you can create empathy through the arts. New Haven is a very different place than it was when the Festival was founded 21 years ago. It was conceived almost as a civic organization. It's essential in bridging the town/gown (Yale) divide and connecting to international communities. There is a large refugee community in New Haven and there are three refugee agencies in town. H-1 visa students are prominent and the immigrant community includes about 15,000 undocumented immigrants, so many that the previous mayor enacted a "citizens' card" ID card as a safety measure."

Alicia Adams of the Kennedy Center says about the 2009 festival, Arabesque: Arts of the Arab World, "It happened at one of the worst time in relations between the U.S. and the Arab World. I didn't know if we could even get artists to tour. We sought ways to bridge the gap for people entering the building and to get them to think about the Arab World a different way.

"Then I saw a museum show that featured a wedding dress and the henna ornamental skin designs. We brought 44 elaborate wedding dresses from all 22 countries in the League of Arab States to exhibit in the very long halls of Kennedy Center. This caused men, women and children to stop and look and imagine the women who wore these dresses. I overheard people observing how beautiful they were. One woman said 'I'm Jewish, and I'm amazed how similar these dresses are to ones I know about.' We established a comfort level and represented a gentle introduction to a culture. The dresses tell stories. We used a curator who found the individuals who wore the dresses and gathered and shared their stories."

### **Creating context**

Festivals, special series and residencies also offer the opportunity for presenters to establish context, placing artists within a frame of world events and trends. Most presenters agree that framing and establishing context is key to the successful presentation of new artists and work to mainstream audiences. As Rachel Cooper, Director for Global Performing Arts and Special Cultural Initiatives at the Asia Society noted, "Presenters need to present work within a context that audiences can understand, ideally connecting with scholars and culture bearers from the artists' homelands."

The extra effort to provide relevant context can pay off in attracting mainstream as well as immigrant audiences. As Michelle Witt reports, "We had great success with the Nile Project in 2015. None of the artists were known but the concept of a dozen artists from a particular

region, tied in with a conversation about conservation, water and sustainability—within the context of world events—was compelling to general audiences.”

Bobby Asher, Senior Associate Director of the Artist Partner Program at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland, had success with a focus on climate change, saying, “Another powerful event was Water Is Rising: Music and Dance Amid Climate Change with performers from islands that are sinking. We did a partnership with the School of Public Policy for discussions and workshops.”

Karen Farber feels the advance work of setting context is vital, “I want arts to be part of a larger ‘human’ story and be able to deal with different types of people. Artists need to be able to talk about their work in a way that creates cross cultural bridges to students, audiences and community members.”

### **Programming beyond the venue**

As part of the of the Midnimo project at The Cedar some presentations took place in non-traditional venues, including concerts in living rooms and backyards. Executive Director Adrienne Dorn said “A nontraditional venue can engage audience members who otherwise might not be inclined to participate.” She sees value in the intimacy of such venues, “Even though The Cedar is known as this intimate venue where people, audience members, interact more than in other public spaces, it’s still a public space. And I think a living room is kind of like an intimate party where if we successfully bring in members of the Somali community and from the non-Somali community, then they’re much more likely to be having lengthy conversations in that space. We want to do this every time we have a residency.”

Karen Farber said, “We do lots of things in spaces for smaller groups of audience members for lots of different reasons, including just having that intimacy. The Slavs and Tartars Collective that we worked with had a museum component where the Blaffer Art Museum on our campus hosted an exhibition of their work. We hosted a series of performance lectures that the collective does and one of them was in a collector’s home.”

Jacob Yarrow, Programming Director at the Hancher Auditorium, welcomed the necessity of programming in spaces all over campus and town after the Auditorium was flooded. He said, “We’ve had eight years of multi-venue programming which connected us to all types of different communities on and off campus. Our challenge now that the Auditorium is rebuilt, is not to lose those community connections.”

### **Annual FOMO events/series**

A trend spotted among successful presenters is the value of creating annual or more frequent series which include artists which cannot be seen at any other time and place. This responds to the growing FoMO phenomenon, defined by Wikipedia as: Fear of missing out (FoMO) is "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is

absent."

This social angst is characterized by "a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing." FoMO is also defined as a fear of regret which may lead to a compulsive concern that one might miss an opportunity for social interaction, a novel experience, profitable investment or other satisfying events. In other words, FoMO perpetuates the fear of having made the wrong decision on how to spend time, as "you can imagine how things could be different."

Leading presenters who program to maximize FoMO include:

- The Joyce Theater in New York City—which programs exclusively dance and takes the lead on bringing new/important/legendary artists to the U.S. who have not toured here before.
- On The Boards in Seattle—which identifies unique events as something synonymous with its brand. As Lane Czaplinski says, "International events are our stock in trade—to bring the best and brightest from the global artistic community to OTB. Many people don't know how few cities, if any others, get to see the works when we bring them to Seattle."
- There are several prominent destination festivals that showcase international contemporary performing arts, including Under the Radar at the Public Theater in New York City, the Time-Based Art (TBA) Festival at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art in Oregon, and Fusebox in Austin, Texas.

Audiences who are dedicated to a particular genre are often eager to see works in that genre which push the boundaries of the known and familiar. As Christine Tschida at the Northrop says, "Dance audiences want to see dance works from everywhere!"

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

Unanimously, presenters and agent managers reported the desire to collaborate with peers to share information, view artists of interest and coordinate collaborative/block booking and touring. The collaborations are various and include:

### **Informal interactions**

Most survey respondents and individual presenters queried reported relying on consultations with trusted presenter colleagues as they curate upcoming seasons, fill holes in programming mid-season and plan festival schedules. Attendance at conferences and festivals, in the U.S. and abroad, is another essential source of information. And though many presenters sought funding to travel outside of the U.S. to see artists of interest as an ideal, more than two-thirds of respondents report that recommendations from other presenters are even more crucial to their decision making.

Experienced presenters often develop ad hoc "Cool Kids" networks which they consult frequently about artists/themes/genres of interest. Bobby Asher at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center connects with his "usual suspects" including the Walker in Minneapolis

and the Wexler in Columbus when trying to put together a tour. Margaret Lawrence agrees, “I often reach out to a group of presenters I know are interested in programming the types of artists I want to book to try to put a tour together.”

Presenters access information from peers they respect. Devon Akmon from the AANM says, “I would like to learn from other presenters’ experiences and so be able to gauge how to best present artists and genres with which I’m not familiar.” Pam Tatge, former Director, Wesleyan University Center for the Arts (currently Director at the Jacob’s Pillow Festival) said that she researches websites of presenters she respects to spot artists she might want to book.

This type of informal sharing and trust can reassure presenters about booking artists they have not seen in person. As Charles Swanson, Executive Director of the Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa said, “We had a great experience trusting our MUPS (Major University Presenters) colleagues and collaborating on presenting artists from China that we personally hadn’t seen. MUPS partners helped Hancher understand how to talk about the work and plan a successful residency.”

Many presenters would like more sharing opportunities, Swanson, agreed, saying he would appreciate, “More access to testimonials from trusted colleagues,” adding, “We don’t tend to share on a regular basis.” However, many presenters reported being uncomfortable giving negative feedback on any types of public forums, preferring discreet “off the record” one on one conversations with “people I know.”

### **Showcase group travel/Collaborations**

Smaller and mid-sized presenters seek access to tours organized by third parties or led by another trusted presenter colleague. Many sought opportunities to, as Devon Akmon from the AANM said, “Get presenters together to build a network of referrals and collaborations.”

There is universal interest in sharing information/ideas/calendars and artist knowledge among presenters. Samantha Pollock seeks, “The opportunity to plan visits with other presenters to cook up tours.” Linda Lucero would welcome, “A chance to talk with other presenters about who’s interested in which artists for their next season so we can try to collaborate.” Jane Hirshberg agreed, suggesting, “Chances to see live work [together], a shared calendar that is a scale up of the usual—phone calling.”

Many presenters sought help (from programs such as CEF) to travel to festivals in groups to experience international artists and start planning tours while at a festival together. Many value collaborative efforts, growing out of shared interest in genres or geography. Jenni Taylor-Swain would welcome, “The opportunity to be part of a presenter community/group interested in particular genres—travelling together to a festival, planning a tour together. I would appreciate the chance to see new work/artists with other presenters to share our opinions on how to best market the artist and to generate ideas together.”

Increased touring by international artists could be encouraged by funding group travel which can facilitate block booking. Monique Martin mentioned the serendipity of being at a festival with other presenters, “I was able to work on a tour with two other cities (Houston and Montreal) because we were all in Morocco at the same festival at the same time.”

### **Tour wranglers/Anchor presenters**

Presenters agreed that successful tours require a “tour wrangler.” Kim Whitener, of HERE said, “Collaboration on tours is very dependent on presenters’ programs and focus. We helped put together an eight-site tour of a Peruvian puppeteer. Yolanda at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago put in an inordinate amount of time to make it happen. Block booking is all about having someone at the center—virtually a producer—a curatorial professional. Maybe technical assistance for such people would be useful.” Agent/managers, such as Lisa Booth and Laura Colby, also serve as “tour wranglers” to book international artists and create a multi-city tour once an initial booking (and visa) are secured. Another model of interest is a larger presenter—such as the Anchorage Concert Association—taking on the role of tour anchor, working with smaller presenters to feed them artists that can tour Alaska’s smaller towns.

The Chicago DCA and Special Events’ annual World Music Festival Chicago spawned a self-organized consortium called the Midwest World Music Consortium with members throughout the Midwest and as far away as Albuquerque. With the festival in Chicago as the anchor, the summer world music festivals hosted by consortium participants agree to block book many of the same artists, helping all the members to save money and present more expensive artists than they would be able to afford on their own.

### **Formal block booking consortia**

Presenters in various regions across the U.S. have formed block booking consortia to facilitate tour generation and sharing and a number of other regional consortia meet in person to plan their seasons or festivals. At the annual APAP conference in New York City a number of state collaboratives meet to plan block booking projects, including Pennsylvania Presenters and Maryland Presenters, for example.

As noted above, one especially successful collaboration is The Midwest World Music Consortium (MWMC) which connects small and mid-sized Midwestern communities to world cultures through coordinated presentations and residencies with global music and dance performers. Currently, the presenters review acts annually at globalFEST in NYC. Early each year they meet in person to jointly plan the dates for their September Upper Midwest World Music Festivals and prepare their block booking of artists.

But these collaboratives do not serve every presenter who is interested in block booking. As Jeff Martin, Arts Manager of Brigham Young University’s BYU Arts, said, “I would like to know of a network of presenters in the USA who actively present the type of international work I also

present. This would be so helpful to me as I try to find additional dates for guest artists I bring to the U.S. from overseas just for my isolated dates.” Lane Czaplinski of OTB suggested, “What would be great would be a flexible fund to help support block booking, which for the international tours we are involved in tend to be three to five weeks with three or more venues.”

There are also sponsored tours such as the Southern Exposure Grant tour funded by the MidAtlantic Arts Foundation to tour an Argentine dance troupe to five venues (MidAtlantic also supports block booking of jazz artists.) MUPS (Major University Presenters) often collaborate around tours of artists of interest. Center Stage is a model of collaboration as is the NEFA Idea Swap which convenes presenters to facilitate regional tours (with the requirement that at least three presenters, covering at least two states agree to collaborate on touring an artist/ensemble.)

### **Collaborative online booking tools**

Nearly all the presenters and agent/managers who responded expressed interest in “a digitally based portal serving the presenting field that would help facilitate more booking/presenting of unfamiliar artists from other cultures.” However, the challenge is to identify or develop an online tool that is specialized enough to serve a variety of presenters’ needs without being so complicated that it is difficult to learn and use.

- Cultural Exchange Laboratory (CXL) Prototype Booking Engine based on Australia’s National Touring Selector (NTS): Currently in the testing phase, the CXL booking engine was used to organize voting by Building Bridges grantee presenters for their preference among artists nominated to appear in the CXL Virtual Festival on November 17, 2016. The current version of NTS that was adapted for this purpose proved fairly easy to use, but it is not especially flexible, making it necessary to ask the developer to implement work-arounds on the back end. However, NTS is currently implementing a significant upgrade to the database tool that will result in a cleaner, more flexible resource being available by early next year. NTS is also in talks with the Ontario Performing Arts Presenting Network about joining NTS to their system of calendaring, routing and contract-generation. This could result in a tool that facilitates the process from identifying artists all the way through tour management.
- Other online booking resources include World Cultures Connect, Made in the Web, I Want to Showcase, and Culture Path. They all face similar challenges of relying on a robust set of active users to regularly update their information, and trying to predict and serve users’ needs rather than being built to align with the way presenters actually do their work.
- An important model for information exchange among presenters of international artists is the Cultural Exchange Laboratory website ([culturalxlab.org](http://culturalxlab.org)) with social media components and the CXL Working Group, comprising a closed Facebook group. Presenters, managers and artists have been actively participating in vibrant online discussions and real-time

video webinars on topics that they identify as essential to their missions of propelling international cultural exchange.

### **Ready to tour marketplace**

Interviews with presenters and agent/managers reveal a strong desire to participate in block booking tours and a number of informal processes are in use to make tours happen, as noted above. Clearly the largest percentage of U.S. presenters *need* to block book in order to be able to attract and afford the best international talent.

The largest presenters such as the Kennedy Center, Asia Society, Lincoln Center, The Joyce and Carnegie Hall, for example, are anomalies since their budgets and staffs are sufficient to program solo bookings whenever they wish from wherever the artists are based. In the past, these leading institutions functioned as “anchor” presenters and helped organize additional dates for the artists they present. Latest research with field leaders indicates that this is less and less manageable, given the difficulty with visas and artist travel. The regional or genre focused presenters who are trying to collaborate now use a patchwork of list serves, email contacts and phone networks to sort through artists and try to plan tours together.

In current practice, the practitioners having the greatest success creating tours of international artists are leading agent/managers. In addition to taking responsibility for managing all the essential aspects of visa procurement and artist “care and feeding,” managers take the lead in identifying artists and securing “tent pole” dates to begin to create workable tours. Managers currently stake out a six to eight-week “tour window” and work to line up presenters in geographically reasonable routes for a tour.

As an example of a typical manager/tour creation process, Laura Colby, Director of Elsie Management, is working on a May/June 2017 tour of the Polyglot Theater from Australia. She has three dates “booked” in May in Ottawa, Pittsburgh and Calgary, creating a three-week tour. Now she is scrambling to fill in dates before and after the three she has secured. She is using phone and email to reach out to potential presenters around the country (which is a very inefficient, time consuming process.)

APAP hopes to be able to provide a Ready to Tour Marketplace—possibly as a special “members only” feature of the CXL. The key aspect of the platform would be a master calendar, listing briefly which artists/ensembles are ready to tour and when.

The type of information listed would include:

- Name/genre of artist
- Dates available
- Audience appeal (family, singles, etc.)
- Links to artist’s website, promotional material and media coverage
- Range of prices

- Number of artists in the ensemble
- Tech requirements
- Contacts
- Any funding support the artist/ensemble has from its home country

APAP members—presenters and managers—would be authorized to list tours in formation and view artists “ready to tour.” Clearly there would be more information and activity in upcoming seasons (Fall 2016 interest for Spring 2017; Spring 2017 for Fall 2017, etc.) but the calendar can also list dates one to two years out, if presenters are planning WAY ahead for a special anniversary, etc.

In theory, this portal could become the *must* destination for the majority of US presenters interested in block booking. Managers and presenters would have a strong incentive to list their tours in formation so they can be seen by the greatest number of potential partners.

## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

All presenters surveyed said they’d welcome presentations and access to information about successful presentation of international artists. This might include the following types of products and activities:

### **Best practices library and touring toolkit**

As outlined above, successful presenters continuously seek ways to build audiences, including programming that features international artists. Winning strategies noted include: Developing festivals, building strong brands, establishing relevant/compelling context for unfamiliar artists and genres, programming outside conventional venue spaces to draw new audiences and building anticipation and perception that events are “once in a lifetime” happenings, creating the FOMO effect (fear of missing out) among potential audiences.

APAP is considering additional enhancements to the CXL to make these successful strategies accessible to the widest number of presenters and members. Ideas under consideration include building a reservoir of best practices on the CXL, creating brief case studies about successful presenting techniques and accomplishments. The case studies would be curated to serve as a stimulus for regular Q&A interchanges with the highlighted practitioner. The Q&A would be generated electronically as a blog or be the basis of a mini webinar—one presenter, one idea, 15 minutes—and archived in a prominent spot on the CXL. Leading presenters would continue to be invited to present “live” at the APAP conference, in addition to this best practices resource as an added benefit to members.

Also under consideration for adding to the CXL is an international touring tool kit that could include:

- A checklist of required steps (for example, visa procurement, tax and insurance arrangements and key communications with the touring ensemble)
- What you need to know lists, including reminders of important questions such as: does the ensemble have able management to provide support and promotional materials, is the ensemble based in a country that has a tax treaty with the U.S., and how many artists or other personnel will travel?
- Worksheets: For example, to help with planning the timing for submission of visa application forms.
- Needs Assessments: To analyze potential needs when the touring artists are on site, such as providing for language translators, special dietary needs and religious restrictions so schedules do not conflict with prayer times, etc.).
- The Tool Kit could be created and updated regularly by Trudel | MacPherson, with guidance from experienced professionals.

## MOVING FORWARD

APAP is grateful to T|M for the research and conclusions framed in this report, and to Michelle Witt for her insightful introductory remarks. It is clear that APAP's CEF program is a valuable service and support mechanism for the presenting field. Based upon conclusions drawn from this field research, additional strategies and resources are needed to advance programming and touring of international artists, especially in this period of volatility associated with global terrorism and distrust of individuals from Muslim-majority regions of the world.

APAP will continue to build upon field-based learning from its Building Bridges grant program, the CEF program, the annual APAP|NYC program of sessions and showcases with members of the international presenting community, and the development of the CXL. With this knowledge and continuing collaboration and support from sources such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Arts/Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, APAP is committed to further developing tools, resources, and opportunities to advance and support direct experience with artists who reflect societies and cultures from around the world.

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