

Building Your Audience



To Standing Room Only

by David P. Miller

Conductor, Mississippi Community
Symphonic Band

National Membership Co-Chair (East)
Association of Concert Bands

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INTRODUCTION

This book is the result of my experiences in the first six and a half years of starting the Mississippi Community Symphonic Band in the greater Jackson area, which is pretty much in the middle of Mississippi.

Gulfport, on the coast, is about a two and a half hour drive to the south, Memphis is about a three hour drive to the north. Vicksburg, which is just across the Mississippi River from Louisiana, is about a 45-minute drive to the west, and Meridian, close to Alabama, is about an hour's drive to the east.

When three of us started our band, we all agreed it was a horrible feeling to play to audiences that were small, and we resolved to make one of our primary aims to be to do whatever we needed to do to ensure larger and ever-growing audiences.

We succeeded. For our very first concert, in May 2004, we had about 275 people in our audience. In the first concert of our sixth season, in August, 2009, we packed out our 800-seat concert venue.

I knew we had found out how to build our audience. But I heard over and over again about other bands who played to audiences of 200, or 125, or even less than 80, and this distressed me.

There was no question that other bands could use what we had found out, so I put together a seminar for the 2010 Association of Concert Bands convention in Plano, TX, and delivered it to about a hundred attendees over two sessions.

In late December, 2010, I read a posting on the Community Music online forum (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/c-m/>), in which the writer was tremendously distressed to be playing to audiences that seemed to consist only of relatives and friends of the players.

Again, here were more people facing the same issues.

I replied to the posting, telling the forum about the seminar I had done for the ACB, stating that the seminar was nearly an hour long, and there was far too much material to put into a posting on the forum.

I was surprised to get nearly a dozen replies from people on the forum, asking me to please, please post that information, no matter how many postings it took.

So I wrote up the information from my seminar into a series of eight articles, posting them on the community music forum, and got quite a bit of good feedback from the postings.

Before the series was even halfway through, I began getting requests for missed articles, and requests for a compilation of the articles so members of the forum could take them to their bands' boards and music directors. I began to see the need to make this information available to anyone, at any time, not just to attendees at the 2010 seminar, and not only to people who happened to be reading the C-M forum near the end of 2010.

So began the impetus for this book.

* * * * *

One of my philosophies for our band is that community band music should always be free for the audience; I want anyone to be able to come to our concerts and enjoy good music without feeling they have to stay away because they can't afford the admission charge.

Likewise, I believe that information to help you make your community bands better, or to bring more people in to enjoy your music, should also be free.

Therefore, I will not charge any purchase price for this book, although I do retain the copyright. What that means is that this book is free to download, reproduce, and distribute, but you may not alter it or brand it in any way without my permission.

Instead, if you feel you have gotten some value from this book, I ask that you make a financial contribution to the community band of your choice. If you don't have one you wish to give to, then go to www.mcsb.us and click on the DONATE button. How much? Your choice, but \$10 would be nice, or more if you are feeling generous.

If you'd like to let me know you donated to a band because of this book, I'd appreciate it. Just send me an email to dpm39560@gmail.com and let me know which band you have supported.

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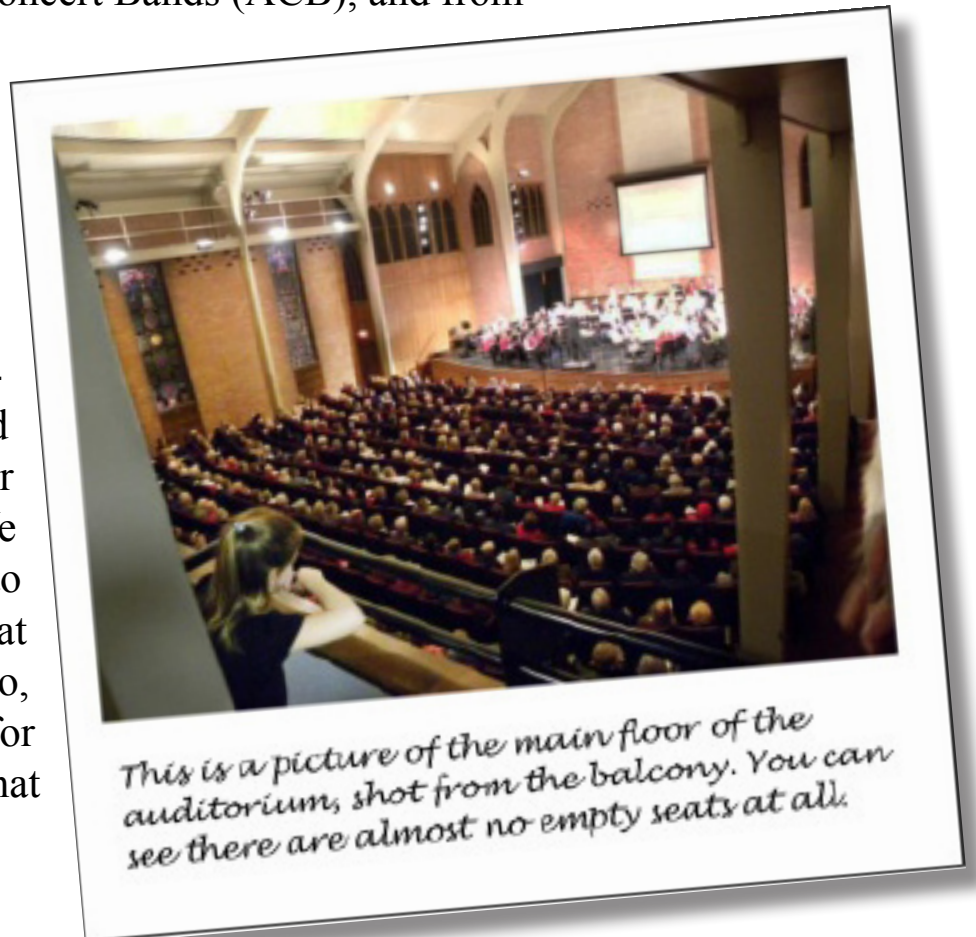
Now you know how this book came to be. Let's get on with the good stuff.

Chapter 1

PACKING THE HOUSE

This book is the result of quite a number of insistent requests, from members of the Association of Concert Bands (ACB), and from participants in the online Community Music (C-M) forum.

As I write this in December 2010, it is two weeks since the Mississippi Community Symphonic Band (MCSB) put on our Christmas concert. We knew we were going to have a lot of people at this concert, but even so, we were unprepared for the overflow crowd that showed up.



This is a picture of the main floor of the auditorium, shot from the balcony. You can see there are almost no empty seats at all.



This is a picture of the balcony at the beginning of the concert. It got even MORE crowded as the concert got under way!

We play almost all of our concerts in the Belhaven University Center for the Arts Concert Hall, a former Methodist church converted to the university's use, in their 800 seat auditorium.

Our stage setup volunteers arrived about 5:30 the evening of the concert to begin setting up chairs and stands, and were surprised to see there were already a few people in their seats, waiting for the concert to begin. We speculated they had come there directly from work.

By 6:15, there were already more than 200 people in the auditorium, and you could feel the electricity in the air.

When the concert began at 7PM, I could see the entire floor and balcony were packed full, and people were still coming in. I looked at the band members, and saw a sort of stunned smile on most of their faces.

Frank, the facilities manager for the Performing Arts Center,



This is a picture of people sitting on chairs in the lobby of the auditorium!

later told me he could see less than twenty empty seats on the floor, and maybe three in the balcony.



People sitting on the steps of the balcony!

There were people standing along the back of the auditorium, and people sitting on chairs in the lobby, listening to the concert through the open doors of the auditorium. There were people sitting on the steps of the balcony, and people sitting on chairs in the anteroom of the balcony.

It was a tremendously exciting “house” for which to play a concert.

It was also a confirmation for me and for all the band that all the things we were doing to build our audience were working.

If you’ve ever performed to a packed house audience, you know what it means to the performers. You know the undercurrent of electricity that sizzles through the perform-

ers and the audience. You know the stomach-churning excitement that undergirds everything you do on the stage. You know the way you and all the other performers seem to play a level or two above where you expect to play. You know the Mona Lisa smile and faraway dreamy look in the eyes of everyone after the performance.

There’s no comparison to the joy you feel, knowing you have brought such happiness to so many people.

* * * * *

In this book, I will share with you the things we have done in the Mississippi Community Symphonic Band to attract an audience like this, and will also include some nuggets from people in other groups.

I don’t claim to be the last word on this at all, I’ve still got a long way to go and a lot of things to learn; I learn new things every day. But this is what we know as of now.

FIVE MAIN POINTS:

When I put together the seminar on “How To Grow Your Audience” for the Association of Concert Bands national convention in April, 2010, I looked back on all the things we did in the MCSB to build our audience, and came up with five main points:

Set A Goal

Make Your Concerts Appealing

Let People Know About Your Concerts

Stay In Touch

Always Say “Thank You”

In the remainder of this book, I’ll cover each of these points, including things I’ve learned from other members of the ACB and the C-M forum.

* * * * *

Chapter 2

SETTING A GOAL

Hockey great Wayne Gretzky said, “You miss 100% of the shots you never take.” You may have heard it said this way: “You miss 100% of the goals you never set.” It only makes sense to set a goal for audience size as well.

You miss 100% of the goals you never set.”

When we founded the MCSB in 2004, one of the very first things we decided was that we always wanted to have more people in the audience than we had on the stage.

That phrase was only a bit of an exaggeration, a somewhat humorous way of stating our real goal, which was to have our audiences be as large as possible, to get larger each concert, and eventually to overflow our concert hall and force us to seek a larger venue.

The three of us who got together to outline the concepts for the band had all played in groups where the players truly did outnumber the audience. I'm certain most readers of this book have experienced this also, and can attest - this is a horribly disheartening feeling.

When you're sitting up there on that stage, knowing you've poured a considerable amount of your efforts and talents and years of experience into the preparation for this concert, a concert you just know is going to be wonderful, then you see fifty-two people scattered around the audience, you just can't escape the hopeless feeling of dismay that settles on your shoulders.

Even so, you still give it your best, you play as well as you can, but somehow, you feel your efforts are underappreciated, perhaps even wasted.

We didn't want that feeling to afflict anyone in our band.

So we set a goal: We always want more people in the audience than we have on the stage; we always want our audiences to get bigger and bigger.

You might consider setting an audience size goal for your next concert, or even for your next concert season.

"Okay, board. We had 143 people at this last concert. Let's set a goal right now to get 200 people or more at our next concert. How are we going to do that?"

As any business leader can tell you, setting a goal is the first step in accomplishing anything.



By the way, in our Christmas concert two weeks ago (as I write this), we achieved one of our goals: we packed out our current venue, we had so many people it was an overflow crowd.

Now we have to start looking for a larger venue, or we need to consider having our concerts on two consecutive nights, or two consecutive weeks.

Yes, it's a good feeling.

Our next goal will be when we get into a new venue. Can we fill 2,000 seats? It's a scary but exciting question, for sure.

* * * * *

Chapter 3

MAKING YOUR CONCERTS FUN – START WITH THE BAND

You have two types of audience members: first-time attendees and repeat attendees.

You should always have some first-time attendees. In a later chapter, I'll address how to build the number of first-time attendees. This chapter is about how to make all your current attendees want to come back.

This is important, because if you get both first-time and repeat attendees, your audiences will grow. And grow.

The best way to make folks want to come back to your future concerts is to make those concerts appealing.

There are three elements on which we in the MCSB work to make folks want to come back. All of them have to do with making the concerts FUN.

If you can make your concerts fun to attend, people will want to come back.

That's really all there is to it.

Make It So The Band has Fun

The first element of making our concerts fun is that the band has to have fun.

“If the band has fun, the audience will have fun.”

This seems self-evident, but most all of us have played in groups in which the leadership has overlooked this element.

For the band to have fun, the leadership has to seize the initiative to make it so. This starts with the conductor, but includes other leadership as well. The section leaders, the band president or captain or business manager, the librarian(s), the equipment haulers, everyone who cares about the band has to understand that everything the band does together, from rehearsals to social events to concerts, has to be fun for the band.

I know the folks reading this understand what I mean by “fun” – it’s not the juvenile cutting up we frequently see in junior high and high school bands, but rather the fun of fellowship and working hard together to achieve something worthwhile (making good music).

The first thing we did to ensure that being in the MCSB is fun was to establish our foundational philosophy: “People first, music second.”

All of us have been in organizations where the director stepped all over the people to try to make the music better.

Those organizations are no fun.

I took a step of faith when we started our band, saying, “If we take care of our people, our people will take care of the music.” For the most part, that’s been

true. Sure, there have been a few exceptions, but the overall effect of walking this philosophy for nearly seven years has proven the truth of it.

As a conductor, I do several things to make rehearsals fun. Here's a sample:

1. I never criticize an individual's playing in front of the group. We woodshed for improvements by section only.
2. Never pass up an opportunity to praise people's playing. This goes for individuals, sections, and the whole band. It's just like raising kids – you have to be eternally vigilant for things they did RIGHT, and praise them for it. My band laughs at me (with me?) because they say when I stop them, they never know whether it was because they did something right or something wrong. They say I'm just as likely to stop them to shout, "YES! YES! YES! That's exactly right! Let's do that again!" as I am to stop them to correct something.
3. Always focus on positives. For example, if the trombone section really mangles a passage, I'll try to say something along the lines of "Trombones! That passage at letter B, let's be sure to put some oomph in those accents. Ba-DAH-da-da. Let's play it now at letter B..." Sure, they may have played herds of wrong notes, but by focusing on the accents, I acknowledge that they are musicians enough to hear and fix the wrong notes on their own; the section run-through gives them a chance to woodshed and get it right.
4. Keep woodshedding sessions short. There's no avoiding the need to have a particular section run through a passage a few times during rehearsals. I try always to keep in mind that there are 60 or more other people sitting there with nothing to do while we do this, so I try to keep these sessions to a few short run-throughs. If two or three run-throughs don't get it, I'll say something like, "That's going to need a bit more work. We'll hit it again next week." This lets them know we're not there yet, but it also keeps the sessions short. It's also a gentle nudge from the podium that they should practice more at home.
5. Use humor to make points. I will never, of course, use humor at the expense of an individual, except maybe myself. For example, when trying to stress togetherness on attacks, I might say something like, "It

seems many of us in here are playing ‘somewhere close’ to the beat. We need you ON the beat. How would you like to fly with an airline that hired pilots who landed ‘somewhere close’ to the runway?”

6. EMOTE. I care about the people, I care about the music, and I show it in my actions. Think back to the best conductors you’ve played under, and you’ll probably remember those who wore their feelings on their sleeves. A big part of a conductor’s job is acting. Not in the sense of faking something you don’t feel, but in the sense of suiting your actions to your feelings in a way that magnifies what you communicate to the band. Do you shout? Do you make faces? Do you jump up and down on the podium? I do.
7. Show your people you care about them. This includes learning everyone’s name, and making it a point to speak to everyone in the group, even the very quiet ones, periodically. Sure, this means you’ll have to seek some of them out, just to speak, and you might have to ask a few questions that sound like prying. “How’s your son doing? Did he get over that fever okay?” But if you put yourself out to show people you truly do care about them as people, not just as seat-fillers and note-players, you will raise their “fun” level for every rehearsal they attend.

All these things, and many more, serve to make rehearsals just plain fun. When the band has fun in rehearsals, their musicianship will get better and better. All this will also lead them to have fun in concerts.

Here’s the main point of this chapter: When the band has fun in the concerts, it will pour out all over the audience, and they’ll have fun, too.

I have had a number of audience members, at least half a dozen I can recall off the top of my head, tell me over the years, “It’s so obvious that everyone up there on the stage is just having so much fun!” One even went so far as to say, “I can tell like night and day these players aren’t up there just to get a paycheck and go home. They’re actually having fun!”

If you want everyone in your audience to want to come back to your next concert, you’ve got to make your concerts fun to attend.

The first step in making your concerts fun is to have your musicians have fun, and this has to start in rehearsal.

Chapter 4

MAKING YOUR CONCERTS FUN – PLAY APPEALING MUSIC

In the last chapter, I explained that I believe one of the first elements of making your concerts must-see events is that they have to be fun, and for this to happen, the band must have fun.

The musicians having fun is the first element of making your concerts appealing.

The next element is that you have to play music that people want to hear, music they want to come back and hear more of. This is “programming” for your concert.

We start by realizing we can’t please all the people all the time, but we do try to please all the people with at least some of the numbers on each program.

By “all the people,” I mean the players as well as the audience.

We all know, from both player and audience perspective, that we are willing to sit through one or two numbers we don’t particularly like so we can hear or play the ones we really do like.

Consequently, I always try to program a wide variety of styles on each concert. I have no hard and fast rules, but I do have several guidelines I follow, such as:

1. People like tunes they know. It's okay to put new music onto a program, particularly if it's really good music. But I try to limit new music to one or two numbers on each side of the intermission. On the other hand, new arrangements of tunes they do know are great.
2. Variety. On each concert, we try for a good mixture of marches (2 or 3), show tunes (usually one big screen or Broadway medley), classical transcriptions (1), band literature (1 or 2), novelty or feature numbers, patriotic tunes, hymns, cultural music (particularly Spanish or paso dobles), and anything else that fits that hard to define quality: good music.
3. Alternate energy levels. We don't put all the fast pieces together nor all the slow pieces together. We will follow a high energy selection with a slower hymn or chorale type piece, or perhaps a novelty number.
4. Surprise the audience. Once or twice a year, I like to delight the audience with something totally unexpected. Once, we had a four-year-old guest conductor. Another time, we had the state attorney general featured as a bass drum soloist. Another time, we had a tuba alternate with the piccolo in the final trio of Stars & Stripes Forever.
5. Know your audience. Look at the demographics of who comes to your concerts. If you have a fairly large audience when you play indoors, it's a good bet well over half of them are over 50. An audience like this is much more likely to want to come back and hear more of your concerts if you play tunes like "Sinatra In Concert" than if you play mostly tunes like William Schuman's "Chester." From postings on the C-M forum, we can read that most indoor audiences for community band concerts are primarily older people, so if you want these people to come back, you need to play music they want to hear. (Fortunately, these people are usually your best donors as well.)
6. Consider establishing some traditions. For every concert except our Christmas concert, we begin with a rendition of the national anthem

and end with the Stars and Stripes Forever. Over the years, we have evolved our closer such that now, during the final trio, we have a waving flag projecting on the screen behind the band, we have confetti cannon shooting streamers over the front of the audience, and we have the entire brass section stand up. The cheers from the standing audience during this section can be heard over the full band. A few years ago, we thought people might be tired of this and tried to replace it with a different closer. We received such an outcry of protest that we haven't tried it again.

By the way, the wall of sound that suddenly begins to project out to the audience when you have 14 trumpets, 10 trombones, 5 baritones, and 4 tubas stand to play is enough to wake Rip Van Winkle, were he nearby. The audience always loves it.

* * * * *

Because these are guidelines, not “rules,” they are quite flexible.

The two bottom line questions I ask in programming concert repertoire are (a) Will it be fun for the band to play? And (b) Will it be fun for the audience to hear? If you can answer yes to both of those questions, you've got a good candidate number for a spot on your next concert.

Before I leave this subject, let's think for a moment about those groups that don't program their concerts this way.

We have another group locally that is exceedingly good, musically. A large number of professionals populates their ranks. They play very difficult music, and they play it very well. They have much higher level musicians than the MCSB. Yet they play to audiences of about 60-80 people.

If they are that much better than we are, why do we attract an audience ten times the size of theirs?

That's what this entire book is about, but one of the answers, no question, is the music we play. We play what people like to hear. We play they kind of music of which they want to come back and hear more.

These other organizations play more of the challenging (show-off?) level of difficulty, with far less regard to whether it's fun to play or to listen to.

To summarize, the second element of making your concerts appealing would have to be the music you play: put onto your concert programs the kind of music people want to come back to hear more of, and they'll come back.

Period.

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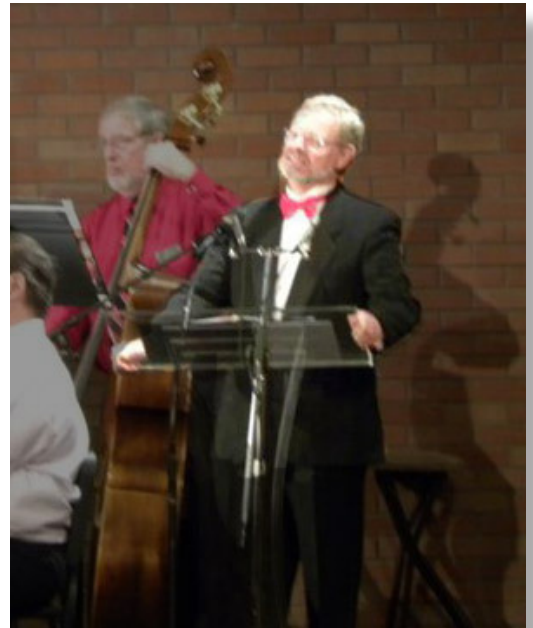
Chapter 5

MAKING YOUR CONCERTS FUN – USE A NARRATOR

The previous chapters have addressed the first two elements of making your concerts appealing – having fun, and music selection.

In this chapter, we'll go into why I believe having a good narrator and good narrator notes is essential to making your concerts irresistible.

I've had many of my band members travel to attend concerts of other community bands, some of them many hours away. With very few exceptions, these bands, while quite good musically, play to audiences of less than 100 people. My people who attend these concerts report that the main difference between these bands and the MCSB, besides the audience size, is that they seem to simply put on a recital, where we put on a show.



A big part of turning a concert from a recital into a show is how you (including everyone on the stage) interact with your audience. One of the main ways to interact with your audience is through a narrator, and some really good narrator notes.

In some bands, the conductor narrates, in others, someone in the band narrates, and yet in others there is a dedicated narrator.

We have a dedicated narrator.

I'm not sure it matters who does the narration, as long as the narrator has certain qualities.

What I'm about to say here about the qualities of the narrator are purely my own thoughts, and I'll be the first to admit I might be wrong on any or all of these points. However, over nearly seven years of concerts, I have found these to be the points that are most important.

1. Your narrator must be **UNDERSTANDABLE**. If people can't make out what your narrator is saying, it's worse than not having one at all, as it will frustrate your audience no end to know they could be hearing something good, but just can't make it out.

The two aspects of the narrator being understandable are a clear speaking voice and a good sound (PA) system. If the narrator mumbles, forget it. If the sound system gives volume but no clarity, forget it. We've all been in situations where there was a speaker saying something into a microphone, which we could hear with plenty of volume, coming across as something like, "MONH HABBOWAH KOBBO POMPFORBEN PFOG!"

The only way to be sure is to try it, in your venue. If you already have a narrator, then salt some band spouses throughout the audience, in different locations, with the assignment to pay attention to how understandable the narrator is. If you are just getting started with a narrator, do the same thing in your empty auditorium. Whatever it takes, make sure your narrator is understandable.

2. The second important thing is your narrator must be **PERSONABLE**. This a characteristic that eludes specific definition. Our primary narra-

tor sounds highly professional, with great enunciation, mostly proper pronunciation, but also has a great sense of humor. He begins our concerts with his own wit, making an announcement something like this, “Please indicate your willingness to make a sizable donation to the band by leaving your cell phones and pagers ON. When they sound off during the concert, our 500-pound ushers will accompany you to our donations table, where we’ll be happy to accept your check.”

Our alternate announcer, on the other hand, sounds like he just climbed down off a farm tractor out in the cotton fields of the Delta, yet he too relates wonderfully to the audience, using his own brand of humor.

He will say something like this, “Doctor Shelt, our regular announcer, was unavoidably detained tonight.” He will then pause a beat, raising his eyebrows and looking at the audience over the tops of his glasses, then continue, “We understand bail will be forthcoming shortly.”

The main point I’m making here is that the narrator cannot be stuffy or standoffish. He or she must relate to the audience in a way that brings them right into the performance.

3. Finally, the narrator must be enthusiastic. He or she has to seem like they’re having a good time, like they really enjoy telling you about what’s coming, like they themselves can’t wait to hear it. If they can exhibit an infectious enthusiasm, the audience will catch it, too.

One of the worst things that can happen to your concert is for your announcer to sound bored. “Oh, well, here’s another tune. Maybe you’ll like this one.”

It doesn’t matter whether the narrator is on fire inside – if it doesn’t come across to the audience, you’re missing a big opportunity to get them excited.

* * * * *

Having a great narrator only gets you halfway there. Even a good narrator can’t overcome bad material. This means someone (you!) has to pay close attention to the Narrator Notes.

Just as with the qualities of the narrator, these items I'm about to list concerning the narrator notes are my own subjective opinion. I'm very open to other opinions, especially if someone can show me how they're better than what I have here.

1. First, and foremost, the Narrator Notes have to be INTERESTING. Yeah, I know, that's another subjective opinion, what is it that makes them interesting.

Here's what's worked for us. Tell them something about the writer; something about why the tune was written; some anecdote about prior performances... "During the first performance of the Royal Fireworks music, there was some unintended additional entertainment for the 12,000 people in attendance. The large and complex machine built for the fireworks display caught fire and burned to the ground..."; tell them something about someone in the band that has to do with the upcoming piece; it really doesn't matter what, just find something interesting to say.

On the other hand, stay away from describing things no one really cares about. "This magnificent work starts with a rousing fanfare in the trumpet section, which is followed by a plaintive solo in the oboe, evocative of the B theme in a later movement of the work..."

Oh, barf! Who CARES about that dreck! That kind of stuff will put people to sleep, and for your next concert, they'll stay away in droves!

2. Keep the notes moderately short. I like to have the notes run, oh, less than a minute or so. That's not a hard and fast rule, but more of a guideline. They'll go longer if there's some good and really interesting stuff to say. I've had some notes be as short as fifteen or twenty seconds.

Besides introducing the next piece and connecting the audience to the next piece in an entertaining manner, the other function of Narrator Notes is to give the band a little break between pieces. For example, if your previous number was Sammy Nestico's "Malagueña," you might

want to work a bit harder to find more interesting stuff for the next number, just to give your brass a breather.

I always keep in mind that while the Narrator Notes might be totally absorbing, the audience didn't come to the concert to listen to someone talk. They came to hear music. So I always try to end each of the narrator notes before someone can think, "Enough of the jabber already! Let's get on with the music."

3. Use humor, but sparingly. Personally, I don't think it's appropriate to put humor in every tune's announcement. But by the same token, I also feel I've let people down if I don't put at least one or two knee-slappers in each half of the concert.

We've got to be very careful in the use of humor. I don't want to offend anyone, and there are plenty of ways to give people a chuckle without taking a chance on that.

For example, if you were introducing a movement from Handel's Royal Fireworks suite, you could be telling the audience about how the people at the celebration got some extra entertainment when the entire fireworks apparatus caught fire and burned to the ground, then add a comment such as, "We decided not to duplicate that event for you here tonight."

4. Make the Narrator's Notes legible. I write my narrator notes in a Microsoft Word document, in 16-point type, one page per announcement, with a sequencing header at the top of each page. I don't want our narrator stumbling over the notes because he can't read them, or because the light isn't bright enough, or because he has to turn a page in the middle of reading them.

Even so, we have had our share of toe stubbings. I remember one in particular that we (the narrator and I) turned into some major fun for the audience. I'll explain that in an appendix to this book.

John Coraccione, the leader of a big band in Georgia, recently had this to say about what one should say to the audience:

I say it's all about the entertainment value.

For concerts, we usually hire a MC. Last few concerts we had a local radio show announcer.

For content of narration, think entertainment.

Look for interesting facts about the song, composer or arranger. You can look beyond that and look for information about vocalists who sang the song, bands that played it, etc. Remember to keep it very short. Having a radio announcer, he/she can ad lib and sound good adding their own style, add humor and connect with the audience.

For concerts, I write a script (that can be used word by word) that includes lighting cues and soloist (in case the MC wants to recognize some).

Hope this helps.

* * * * *

One final item on writing program notes; it takes a lot of time to write good ones, and I don't see any reason why everyone has to reinvent the wheel. I've started a public domain program notes repository, specifically for band music. It's at

<http://www.silverclefmusic.com/ProgramNotes/ViewNotes.htm>

This repository hasn't been updated in more than a year as I write this, but there are already some good notes there, and I promise to update the notes soon.

Please feel free to use any of the notes there, and to modify them however you need to for your band.

Also, if you have some good program notes you've written (not copied from someone else) and would like to donate them to this repository, please send them to me.

Another good source of material for program notes (besides the internet) is the book "Program Notes For Band" by Norman E. Smith. I just checked Amazon, and in late December, 2010, they have it in stock for \$44.41 new (paperback) or from \$76.19 used (probably hardback). Please don't submit Smith's

notes for inclusion in our repository, as they are copyrighted. However, I don't see any problem with you using the facts you find there, supplemented by more research you do online or in a library, to write your own notes, then submit those.

* * * * *

In making your concerts appealing, I've outlined how we do so using three elements: (1) Make sure the band has fun, so the audience will have fun; (2) Play music people want to hear; and (3) Use a narrator and good narrator notes to make the selections come alive and connect the audience to what you play.

Making your concerts truly appealing will make your current audience members want to come back, to be repeat attendees.

In the next chapter, I'll get into increasing the number of first-time attendees, how we let people know about our concerts.

* * * * *

Chapter 6

LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOUR CONCERTS

If you want to increase the size of your audience, you have to get new first-timers to come to every concert. This is a big deal because if you can get new people to your concerts each time, and if you can get most of your current audience to keep coming back, there's no question your audience size will grow, and grow, and grow.

***“People can’t come to
your concerts if they don’t
know about them.”***

TRUISM: People can’t come to your concerts if they don’t know about them. That seems so obvious, but it’s too often overlooked.

One of the first things we did when we started the MCSB in 2004 was to appoint a Publicity Chairman.

This person was to be in charge of making certain that press releases were sent to all local newspapers before each concert. This turned out to be a good thing, because he was a former newspaper editor, and knew the right format for press releases. He already understood that different news media require press releases in different formats, and if they don't get them in the format they are looking for, sometimes they either ignore them or don't take them seriously.

You probably don't have a retired newspaper editor in your band, but if you'll do an internet search on "press release format," you'll find a number of listings that tell you all about how to do that.

Our publicity chairman is the person in charge of getting us all our publicity, but I've made sure that everyone in the band, and especially everyone on the board of directors knows that spreading the word about our concerts is everyone's responsibility.

We have appeared in radio interviews, on daytime TV shows featuring local news, and we have had multi-page spreads in three different newspapers (one daily, two weekly publications). Usually, all you have to do to get this sort of coverage is to call them up and tell them why you're so newsworthy. Sometimes, they might not have space for you, but don't give up. Keep trying, and eventually, they'll welcome you. For print media, it will help if you already have some very good pictures of your group, and some of the people, playing their instruments.

* * * * *

Some of the other things we do to let everyone know about our concerts include the following:

1. ***Make CONCERT FLYERS.*** I design a flyer for each concert, using a page layout program. As the result of quite a bit of study, I have settled on a format that seems to work best. You can see a recent (or current) concert flyer for the MCSB at <http://www.mcsb.us/ConcertFlyer.htm>; also, there are some sample flyers on the next page.

CONCERT FLYER FORMAT:

As you'll see on the next page, the largest letters at the top of the flyer state **BAND CONCERT** (or **CHRISTMAS CONCERT**, if applicable). This is because many of these flyers will be posted on bulletin boards or in store windows. We want the biggest print to "catch" people as they're walking by, and if they're interested, cause them to stop and read the rest of the poster. If they can't read something that catches their attention, they'll just keep walking.

In the middle of the flyer is a listing of (many of) the tunes we'll be playing.

DON'T MISS THIS FABULOUS MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY SYMPHONIC
BAND CONCERT!
Featuring a Special Appearance by the MISSISSIPPI SWING!

Come Hear Such Favorite Tunes As These:

MARCH GRANDIOSO Suite from CARMEN	Sousa's ANCIENT AND HONORABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY
ABIDE WITH ME Leroy Anderson's CLARINET CANDY MALAGUENA!	LIGHT CAVALRY OVERTURE AMERICAN ANTHEM BILL BAILEY (a la Dixieland!) STARS & STRIPES FOREVER

MONDAY, October 18, 2010
At 7:00 PM at The
Belhaven University Center for the Arts Concert Hall
835 Riverside Drive FREE ADMISSION!
Jackson, MS FREE PARKING!
www.mcsb.us Call 601-605-2706 for more information

DON'T MISS THIS FABULOUS MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY SYMPHONIC
CHRISTMAS CONCERT!
Featuring a Special Appearance by the MISSISSIPPI SWING!

Come Hear Such Favorite Tunes As These:

Deck The Halls God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen Silent Night Jingle Bells We Need A Little Christmas 'Twas The Night Before Christmas Hallelujah Amen from Judas Maccabeus	Sleigh Ride! SING ALONG with Santa Claus is Coming to Town, Silver Bells, Rudolph Hear the amazing BILL MARTIN sing O Holy Night The Birthday Of A King The Hallelujah Chorus
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SATURDAY, December 18, 2010
At 7:00 PM at The
Belhaven University Center for the Arts Concert Hall
835 Riverside Drive FREE ADMISSION!
Jackson, MS FREE PARKING!
www.mcsb.us Call 601-605-2706 for more information

FLYERS FROM TWO OF OUR CONCERTS

At an ACB Convention, I picked up a tip about listing the tunes by the name people know, rather than the actual title. This gives people the opportunity to think, "Wow, I want to go hear them play that!" rather

than, “Huh? What is that?” For example, you might list “Exciting Variations on When Johnny Comes Marching Home” rather than “American Salute.” Or when you have a medley, list the individual tunes rather than merely the title of the medley. People will gladly come to hear you play “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” and “Get Me To The Church On Time,” but may not be interested in hearing “Broadway Showstoppers Overture.”

At the bottom of the flyer, in print as large as I can make it and still fit everything in, is the date, time, and location of the concert, along with contact info (website and phone number) for more information. I tried “designer” flyers a couple of times, but the design always got in the way of the message. Clear, clean words will get more people to your concerts than will fancy graphics and innovative layouts and fonts.

CONCERT FLYER DISTRIBUTION:

We have always been able to find someone in the band who’s willing to run off 500 copies of the flyer. We make these available to band members a month or more before the concert, at each rehearsal, I encourage people to take a batch and give them out wherever they can.

“Give them to all your neighbors,” I tell them. “Put them up at work, give them to your coworkers to give to their neighbors; have your spouse take some to work; put them up in all the stores where you shop, grocery stores, banks, beauty salons, dog groomers, restaurants. Take them to church and give them to all the adult Sunday School classes. Take as many as you think you can give out.”

We also have the flyer available for download on our website, in both PDF and JPG format.

Does this work? I believe it does.

2. Another huge source for boosting your audience size is **Governed Living Facilities**. This means nursing homes, retirement homes, well-organized apartment complexes, any organization that has lots of people living there and provides recreation for its residents.

DO NOT OVERLOOK THIS SOURCE FOR AUDIENCE MEMBERS. I believe if you're not getting at least 20% of your audience from these places, you're missing a huge source of fans.

These facilities absolutely love to know about events, particularly free events, where they can bring their residents for an evening of wonderful entertainment. Their recreation directors usually plan quite a bit in advance, so you'll need to give them a lot of notice (usually, several months) as to when and where your concerts will be.

The residents in these facilities can't wait to come to events like your concerts. Many of them have very few visitors, and not much to do during the day, so coming to your concert will be the high point of their entire month. I have had several of these people tell me that our concerts bring them more joy than they've had in years.

How can you argue with that?

We have compiled a list of all the facilities in our area that might be interested (there are currently 17 facilities on our list), including who to contact at each place. We have a person in our band who has volunteered to stay in touch with these places and be sure their recreation directors know about our upcoming concerts well in advance.

The results of these efforts are that for every concert, we have several buses pull up to the easy-access door, unloading a couple hundred people. One bus comes from a home in Yazoo city, more than an hour away, and another facility nearby sends two full buses and several private cars.

The bottom line on this point is don't forget to let the Governed Living Facilities know about your concerts!

3. ***PUBLISH YOUR ENTIRE CONCERT SEASON ON YOUR WEBSITE.***

You DO plan your entire season in advance, don't you?

If not, you should consider it, because some people and places like to plan their events well in advance, and you don't want to lose their attendance.

The first place we publish our concert season, as soon as we know it, is on our website. Generally, we'll set up our concert season in February, covering from the following August through the subsequent May. Once we have the season dates set, we put them up on our website, where there's an easy-to-see "Concert Info" button.

4. ***PROVIDE CONCERT SCHEDULE CARDS.*** The other place we publish our concert season is on our "Concert Schedule Cards." These cards are business-card-sized, printed vertically (portrait mode, 3" tall by 2.5" wide), with our name at the top, our concert dates in the center section, and location and contact information at the bottom.

These cards have proven to be one of the best things we've done. You can get a thousand of these things for less than \$50, and have everyone in the band carry a batch with them at all times. There are places that would love to have a stack of them to give out – we have several businesses and churches that keep asking us for more cards. Several doctors in our band leave a stack of them on their receptionist's window ledge. I always keep a small stack of cards in my pocket, and give out several each week to various people who seem like they might want to hear a great concert.

Get creative. You know there are hundreds of people in your area, far more than your venue can hold, who would absolutely love to come to your concerts.

All you have to do is let them know when and where they are.

* * * * *

In this chapter, we've gone over how the MCSB lets people know about our concerts. The primary reason for letting people know about concerts is to get new people to come, increasing the number of first-time attendees. It also helps remind others to come back.

We appointed a publicity chairman, who does press releases for each concert.

We recruited everyone in the band to do their best to spread the word about our concerts, using radio, TV, newspapers, and any other media they can bring to mind.

We design and distribute our concert flyers, we make sure to tell governed living facilities about our concerts, we post our concert schedule on our website, and hand out tons of concert schedule cards.

* * * * *

Even with all these efforts, continuing over nearly seven years, there were still a couple of people at our last concert (December 18, 2010) who wailed, “Why didn’t I hear about you before?!”

You’ve got a huge amount of brainpower in your band. Put all your members to work thinking about how to let more and more people know about your concerts. The more people you tell about your concerts, the more new people will show up to hear you.

Besides making your concerts appealing and letting new people know about your concerts, you also need to make diligent efforts to stay in touch with your current audience. That will be the topic of the next chapter.

* * * * *

Chapter 7

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

One of the things that has helped us continually increase the size of our audience is that we make it a point to stay in touch with them.

“Staying in touch with our audience is one of the best things we’ve ever done.”

I credit the seeds of this idea to the Association of Concert Bands, and to the convention I went to (my first) in Hot Springs in 2004.

During that convention, I went to several seminars; in one of them, the presenter was talking about staying in touch with their audience, and how they put a “Stay In Touch” form inside each concert program to collect names and

contact information. That way, they could let the people know when the next concert was going to be.

That sounded like a good idea to me, so I made note of it.

In another seminar, the presenter was talking about funding for his band, and how they put a self-addressed envelope inside each concert program. He said (this is as close as I can remember from nearly seven years ago), “Lots of people want to make a donation, but don’t have their cash or checkbooks with them at the concert. They’ll get home and put their concert program on the desk, or maybe just the envelope. Then, a week or two later, when they’re paying their bills, they come across the envelope and remember that they wanted to give us a donation, so with the envelope right there, it’s easy for them to write a check and stick it in the mail.”

That sounded good to me, too.

So I implemented both of those ideas with our very first concert. During the intermission of the concert, I spoke to the audience and asked them to please fill out the “Stay In Touch” forms, so we could let them know about our future concerts, and they could put these forms in the included envelope, along with their check to support the band (that got some laughter), and give it to any band member or just drop it in the mail.

We got over 200 responses from that first concert, and I quickly realized I wasn’t going to be able to handle that AND all the other things I was doing as well. So I solicited a volunteer from the Board, and appointed him to be our “Chair of Audience Relations.”

The duties of this office were to be:

1. To maintain a list of everyone who wanted us to stay in touch with them
2. To notify everyone on that list in advance of every concert; and
3. To send a Thank-You for every donation (more on this in the next chapter).

Another way we have built our list is through a form I put on our website, where someone can sign up to have us send them information about our upcoming concerts. As of this writing, we have had 107 people ask us to send them concert notifications through this form.

I'd say that qualifies as a success.

Staying in touch with our audience turned out to be one of the best things we have ever done. In the nearly seven years we've been doing this, we have had only two people ask to be removed from the list – one because she moved out of state, and the other from the son of the person on the list, because his father had died and as much as his father loved our concerts, he wouldn't be able to attend any more of them.

On the other hand, we now have well over 700 people on this list, people who have asked us to let them know about future concerts. This list is about evenly divided between those who prefer email and those who prefer postal mail. (Yes, we call it “snail mail” too.)

Sending out the emails is free; sending out the postal notifications used to cost us about \$150 per concert until we applied for a non-profit organization bulk-mail permit, now it costs us about \$85 per concert.

How would you like to have a list of over 700 people, all of whom have asked you to tell them when your next concert will be?

You can get it. All you have to do is to start asking for names and contact information.

For a number of years, our Chair of Audience Relations wrote the notification letter. That letter was a pleasant but brief paragraph something like you see at the right:

Dear Friends and Patrons of the Mississippi Community Symphonic Band,

We're excited to let you know that our next concert will be our annual Christmas concert, on December 18 at 7 PM, at the Belhaven University Center for the Arts Concert Hall at 835 Riverside Drive in Jackson.

We hope to see you there.

Sincerely,
Ben Cain
Mississippi Community Symphonic Band.

That did the job, but somehow, it seemed to lack something, maybe a level of excitement. So about a year and a half ago, I decided to try to put some of the same excitement into our notification letter that we try for in our narrator notes, and to use some of the same techniques we use in our concert flyers.

I began to rewrite the notification letter to include this excitement, and our attendance jumped.

Here are some paragraphs from the notification letter for our last April's concert:

Dear Friends and Patrons of the Mississippi Community Symphonic Band,

Have you ever seen a Waltzing Cat? Have you Marched on Midway Island? Do you remember singing M-I-C-K-E-Y, M-O-U-S-E? Have you ever come from Alabama with a Banjo on your knee?

You can hear all these and much more, coming up on APRIL 3! You won't want to miss this one, so plan now to come out Saturday, April 3, to the Belhaven University Center for the Arts Concert Hall (at 835 Riverside Drive in Jackson). We had a few empty seats at the last concert, so be sure to bring someone with you.

Here are some of the tunes we'll be playing: E.E. Bagley's *Ambassador* march, a fiery baroque trumpet solo by our very own Anne Berthold, a magnificent Norwegian processional, *Valdres*, and an exciting Latin dance tune, *Carioca*. We'll also be playing the challenging and thrilling overture, *Zampa*, and an entire medley of tunes from Disneyland, including *Zip-a-Dee Doo Dah*, *A Pirate's Life For Me*, *I Can Fly*, *A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes*, and *It's A Small World*.

You don't want to miss this concert! So make your plans now to join us on Saturday, April 3, at the Belhaven University Center for the Arts Concert Hall. Downbeat is at 7PM, but you'll want to come early to get a good seat!

Sincerely,
Ben Cain
Mississippi Community Symphonic Band.

You'll probably notice that not only is there an elevated level of excitement in this letter, compared to the previous one, but I've also named some of the tunes they'll be hearing. I've had people tell me they really like knowing what tunes are coming up on the concert, and they were looking forward to hearing them for nearly a month.

Who do we send these notification letters to?

To our contact list, of course. Just under 400 emails and just under 400 postal letters, as of now but the list keeps growing. No question, these letters boost our attendance.

* * * * *

There you have it – some of the ways the MCSB stays in touch with our audience members, to let them know or remind them about our upcoming concerts.

First, we began building our list of audience members by putting a “Stay In Touch” form and self-addressed envelope inside our programs, and by providing a page on our website where people can request that we send them concert notifications.

Next, we appointed a Chairman of Audience Relations to maintain the list and to send the notices of each concert to everyone on the list.

Finally, we redid the tone of the notification letters so they give more information about the music we'll be playing, and so they sound a lot more excited about the upcoming concert.

Staying in touch with your existing audience members, with the right tone of enthusiasm, will go a long way toward getting most of them to come back.

In the next chapter, I'll tell you how and why we always make it a point to say “Thank You” to our donors.

* * * * *

Chapter 8

SAYING THANK-YOU

In this final chapter of *How To Build Your Audience*, I'll tell you why and how we make it a point always, with no exceptions, to say "Thank You" to people who give money (or anything else) to the Mississippi Community Symphonic Band.

So far, we've talked about setting an attendance goal, about making sure people want to and can come back to your concerts, and about how to let new people know about your concerts. You may notice that almost all these points have to do with maintaining and increasing a relationship with your audience. The final step to cement a good relationship with your audience – who are also probably the people who support you financially – is to be sure to say "Thank You" for any donation, no matter how small.

Here's why.

In early 2003, I went to a number of seminars put on by the Mississippi Center for Nonprofits. In one of these seminars, the presenter told a story that's stuck with me ever since.

It seems a certain elderly lady made a donation of \$5,000 to the college she had gone to many years before. More than a decade later, this lady went to her

final reward. When her will was read, the chancellor of that school was invited. He arrived at the attorney's office with butterflies in his stomach, certain that this lady had left a major bequest to the school. When the will was read, his jaw hit the floor. She had left over \$15 million to the Humane Society. After reading that section of the will, the attorney then read the following: "I would have loved to leave this money to my University, but many years ago, I sent them five thousand dollars, and they never said Thank You."

Sure, I understood this might have been a story to make a point, but it could just as easily be a true story, and I didn't ever want to take that chance.

Since posting this story on the Community-Music forum, I have heard from two other people that confirm they stopped sending contributions to a number of organizations who never said thank-you.

"I would have given them much more money, but they never said 'Thank you.'"

Therefore, from the very first day, we have made it an inviolable policy in the MCSB to write a thank you letter, that's right, a real, paper-based, mailed-with-a-stamp letter, to anyone who gives us a donation. It doesn't matter how small the donation is, we always send them a thank-you.

One of the reasons this is so important to our donors is that we are a 501(c)(3) organization, and these letters provide documentation to the donors for tax purposes. It would be wrong for us not to send them documentation of their donation.

However, by far the more important reason for doing this is to let them know we truly appreciate their support, and that their support is the only way we can continue to bring them the music they love to hear.

By sending these letters, we are strengthening the relationship between them and the band.

The mechanics of actually sending these letters, and yes, they are actual paper-based, stick-em in the mailbox letters, fall to our chair of audience relations.

This is the same person who maintains our contact list.

He receives all the donations, both from the concerts and in the mail, and records them in his Excel database of patrons. He then sends a letter to each donor and gives the money to our treasurer to deposit.

This also provides us with a database of donors, so we know who our all donors are, in the event we want to send them a special thank-you, or perhaps someday recognize them in our programs.

There are probably better ways to do this, but this is the way with which our chair of audience relations is comfortable, and I'm happy to let him do it his way.

The bottom line? Do not fail to say Thank-You to all your donors. You'll be glad if you do, and sorry if you don't.

* * * * *

Chapter 9

SUMMARY

Putting it all together, the things we in the MCSB have done to build our audience to the point of overflowing our venue include:

1. We set a goal for audience size. At first, our goal was to always have more people in the audience than on the stage, and later, to overflow our venue. We made it.
2. We realized we needed to get new people to each concert, and to make sure the ones that do come will want to come back. To make them want to come back, we knew we had to make our concerts appealing. We did this by (a) having fun – both in rehearsals and in the concerts; (b) playing music people love hearing, music they want to come back and hear more of; and (c) having a personable narrator and good narrator notes.
3. To get more new people to the concerts, we made concerted efforts (did I intend that to be a pun? I'll let you decide) to let people know about the concerts. The first of these efforts was appointing a publicity chairman, to ensure we have press releases for each concert in all possible publications, and setting up spots on radio and TV. We also boosted this by printing up 500 concert flyers for each concert, by

encouraging all band members to distribute them everywhere they can, and by printing concert schedule cards for everyone to hand out. We make sure retirement homes, nursing homes, and other governed living facilities, particularly their recreation directors, know about our concerts well in advance, and we publish our season's schedule on our website as soon as we know it.

4. We stay in touch with our audience by gathering their names and contact information into a list. We do this through "stay in touch" forms in our concert programs and a signup form on our website. We actually do stay in touch with them by sending them, by email or postal mail, an excitement-building notice in advance of each concert.
5. Finally, we make it a point to say "Thank You" for all donations, no matter how small.

I have no doubts there are dozens, perhaps even hundreds of other equally effective techniques being used to build community band audiences. The ones I've described here are simply the ones we've used to good effect.

* * * * *

I hope you can use these techniques to increase the size of your own audiences, and I'd definitely be interested in hearing your experiences with these or other techniques.

* * * * *

Appendix 1

TURNING A NARRATOR NOTES OOPS INTO MAJOR FUN FOR THE AUDIENCE

In one of our concerts in early 2010, we had some wonderful fun with what could have been a major embarrassment, and probably would have if we were a more formal organization.

The sequence of events began when our announcer began to introduce one of my arrangements in the first half of the concert. The arrangement was my *American Frontier Suites Volume VI – Pushing Westward!*

I had written the narrator notes to read like this:

In this sixth volume of his “American Frontier Suites” series, conductor David Miller brings us four familiar tunes that were popular in the middle 1800s, as the American Frontier pushed ever westward.

In our first musical stop of this medley, you’ll mosey along with some of the old cowhands as they sing “Oh, Bury Me Not On The Lone Prairie,” then amble on up to north Texas for a stop at “The Red River Valley.” Onward into cattle country, we hear the cowpokes’ song, “I Ride An Old Paint,” and we wind up driving oxen as the wagon train rolls westward as we hear “Bound For The Promised Land.”

However, our announcer, Dr. Chris Shelt, interjected his own brand of humor in rewriting the notes, saying something like this:

In this sixth volume of his “American Frontier Suites” series, conductor David Miller brings us four familiar tunes that were popular in the middle 1800s, when he was a little boy, as the American Frontier pushed ever westward.

In our first musical stop of this medley, you’ll mosey along with David, with some of the old cowhands as they sing “Oh, Bury Me Not On The Lone Prairie,” then amble with David on up to north Texas for a stop at “The Red River Valley.” Onward into cattle country, we hear the cowpokes’ song, “I Ride An Old Paint,” and we wind up driving oxen with David as the wagon train rolls westward, as we hear “Bound For The Promised Land.”

The audience laughed delightedly at Chris’s ad libs, especially when I openly gaped at him, putting my fist on my hip.

When Chris finished his announcement, I stepped off the podium, picked up the microphone I had there, and said to the audience, “We will be conducting auditions for a new announcer immediately following tonight’s concert.”

The audience laughed again at that, and there was a smattering of applause.

We performed that selection, then Chris began to announce our next selection as being Leroy Anderson’s “The Girl I Left Behind Me.” That wasn’t the next score I had up on my stand, so I checked my copy of the concert program, and sure enough, we were supposed to be playing “Nimrod” next.

I knew this would confuse the audience, as they all had concert programs, too. I quickly double checked my copy of the narrator notes, which I always have on the podium, and I realized I had totally omitted Nimrod from them!

My mind raced. What could I do?

When Chris finished announcing for the Anderson tune, I again picked up my microphone, and said, “Um, Doctor Shelt, it appears I might have left out the page for NIMROD from your notes?”

He quickly shuffled through his notes, then said, “That would be so.”

I was mortified. Here I am, up on the stage in front of hundreds of audience members, and suddenly, our concert was all out of order.

Thinking quickly, I said, “Okay. Since you just announced this one, we’ll play it next. Band, let’s play this one now, and we’ll play Nimrod afterward. Dr. Shelt, you’re good at this; when we get to Nimrod for our next tune,” I said, with a dismissive wave of my hand, “you can just make something up.”

The audience laughed again at this, but I detected a slight current of unease under the laughter. They knew I’d just put Chris on the spot, and none of them could figure out how he was going to get out of this one.

While we played the Anderson tune, Chris borrowed a part to Nimrod from a nearby baritone horn player, and saw that Nimrod was part of the Enigma Variations by Edward Elgar. This at least gave him a starting point.

We finished the Anderson tune and Chris began to announce the next tune. I could feel the audience holding its collective breath. He said, “And now, a tune that needs no introduction...”

The audience erupted into laughter and applause. They were totally delighted.

When Chris finished announcing the tune, including a few facts he knew about Elgar and the Enigma variations, the audience applauded again.

Before we began to play, I picked up my microphone once more, and said to the audience, “The auditions for a new announcer are CANCELLED!” There was laughter from the audience. “Dr. Shelt, you did a great job!” The audience laughed and applauded some more.

We played Nimrod, and did well on it.

To this day, there are people who were in the audience that night who remain convinced the entire episode was planned.

We were able to turn a major toe stub into a delightful experience for the audience, mainly because we had already established a very good relationship with them, and because we were able to have fun with it.

When you establish a good relationship with your audience, when you get a rapport with them, they are always there rooting for you to do well, eager to support your efforts to entertain them.

* * * * *