



BMG Information Sheet Number 5

Performance and Publicity

Taking it to the Public – The Performance

How do you know when you are ready to perform? This is a good question and can only be answered by you and your group. Some people will always dread performing publicly, but generally there will be a point at which most of you will want others to hear the results of all those rehearsals. There is nothing like an upcoming performance to focus hearts and minds on the task at hand, of really coming to grips with the music.

It might be a good idea to start with a small performance such as sharing a concert or charity event with another group, thereby reducing the amount of music you need to have ready. Putting on an entire concert on your own is an enormous amount of work and requires many hours of rehearsal to get the music to a 'performance' standard. This doesn't mean that everything has to be 'perfect' -- your first audiences will probably consist largely of friends and family, who usually are very 'generous' listeners. Don't hold back waiting for the day you are ready for the Albert Hall -- it is important to build up your experience of performing in front of others; it really does get easier the more you do it!

How do you decide what to play? Generally, and obviously, you would perform the material you can best play, perhaps providing a range of interest (from classical to folk or a 'musical tour') or based on a theme (such as Christmas). It's a good idea to start the concert with a piece the group knows very well and enjoys playing, making a positive impression to listeners.

How long should your programme be? Two 40-minute halves with a 15 minute intermission is the standard 'concert' length. Anything much longer than that is very tiring for players and audiences alike, and sometimes 'less is more'. On the other hand you don't want to run 'under' time by too much as the audience then tends to feel at a loose end. It's important to time the pieces in advance, during rehearsal, so that you have a clear idea of how long each lasts for. This also helps in deciding the order of play. During the concert, communicate with your audience and introduce the pieces you are playing, as well as the instruments people are playing -- audiences are keen to learn.

What venue should you use? You can look at hiring your rehearsal space for a concert, if it's appropriate. A venue with a good acoustic is important (carpet tends to drown out the sound) and churches, art centres, schools etc are all potential venues.

Should you charge entry and if so how much? Once you know how much your venue costs you will know how much you need to cover your expenses, unless you are being subsidised or sponsored in some way, even through your own membership fees. Ticket prices tend to vary from region to region. Find out what other similar performers charge (local choral groups, orchestras and other musical groups) and work out a full ticket price and a concessional price for students and OAPs.

A printed programme? Audiences like to know what they are listening to, and a



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programme is also a good advertising tool for you as well as any sponsors you have. The most economical way of getting out a programme is to design it yourselves on a home PC and then photocopy as many as you think you need. The same goes for printing up tickets. If you have a sponsor, they might assist with professional printing costs for you.

Advertising & Press releases Once you know when and where you are putting on a performance, it is very important to give it some exposure. You certainly want your event listed in the 'What's On' section of your local press at the very least. Write a Press release (see p3) and send it to the News Desk of your local newspapers well in advance of your concert, at least four weeks, following this up with a gentle phone call reminder a week or two in advance of the date. The information they most need to know is Who, What, When, Where and How Much (tickets) as well as a contact name and number. This information is also essential for flyers and posters. You can design posters and flyers on your PC and put them in music shops, arts societies, libraries, schools and universities etc. Ask your orchestra members to help with the distribution. You can also pay for ads if you have the budget. All of this might not actually increase your audience size, at least initially, but over time people will come to recognise your group's name. In the end, word of mouth advertising is one of the most effective methods.

Performing rights issues Your venue hirer may require you to fill in a form for the Performing Rights Society. This is to ensure living composers' rights are recognised and, where applicable, fees are raised. The form asks for details for all pieces you have performed and audience numbers as well as information about the venue itself.

The Event Itself Ask members of the orchestra (or family/ friends) to help on the day. Allow a couple of hours for setting up chairs, music stands etc and for a short warm-up for the orchestra, and don't forget to practise coming on and off stage as well as taking a bow (or whatever you decide to do).

You will need at least one person to man a table by the door to collect/sell tickets and hand out programmes --remember to bring a cash float. You also might want to set up a small exhibition of instruments, photos or other items to expand the involvement of the audience; people like to find out more about the instruments and your activities generally, and a small exhibition gives people something to look at before the concert and during the intermission.

An interval bar is a good idea. If your venue has an alcohol licence you can sell wine or beer, but if not you can opt for juice and/or tea and coffee, with cake if you are adventurous or have a good baker in your midst. Set up the bar using a couple of tables, organise your glasses or cups and offer a limited range of drinks. Charge round figures like a £1 (wine) or 50p (juice) or you will have a real headache chasing around for small change on the night. It is a good idea if one or two people take major responsibility for



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the interval bar and its clean-up at the end. You can also make up drinks tokens in advance and sell these on the door so that people just hand them over when collecting their drinks during the interval -- this speeds things up considerably.

Overall, one of the most important aspects of the performance is how you relate to the audience. Decide who will make announcements and roughly what will be said; this makes a huge difference in allowing the audience to feel included and part of what's going on. Choose someone who can project well and give a positive impression.

Once you have 'done' your first performance it is good to keep going. The more you perform, the easier it can get. Find out about local festivals and rallies, as well as those outside your area, and see about linking up with them. For example, the Fretful Federation has a concert every May as part of the Brighton Festival Fringe, and Da Capo Alba participate in Celtic Connections in Scotland.

Sample Press Release

Concert: The Fretful Federation Mandolin Orchestra

Date: Friday 13th May 2005 Tickets: £8, £5 concessions, from the Dome Box Office 01273 709709
Time: 8pm; Instrument Exhibit from 7.30pm Venue: St George's Church, St George's Road,
Kemp Town, Brighton Website: www.fretful-federation.freereserve.co.uk

Fretful Federation's Brighton Festival Fringe Concert 2005

Brighton's Fretful Federation Mandolin Orchestra returns to the stage on Friday May 13th for their ninth annual performance during the Brighton Festival Fringe.

The concert at their home venue of St George's Church, Kemp Town, will feature a programme from classical to contemporary, including Vivaldi's Concerto in G, with Mandolin soloist Ian Harris, who is also the orchestra's founder and Musical Director.

The 25-piece ensemble of mandolins, mandolas, mandocello, mandobass and guitars is a community orchestra of players from Brighton and the surrounding areas. They meet every Tuesday at St George's, and play a range of music from classical to folk. New members are always welcome and individual and group tuition is offered.

Tickets for the May concert are £8 and £5 concessions, available from the Dome Box Office 01273 709709. It starts at 8pm, with doors opening at 7.30 with an exhibit of Mandolin Family instruments.

End



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Notes for Editors

The Fretful Federation was formed by Ian Harris in 1995 with the aim of reviving the tradition of mandolin orchestras, which had been hugely popular in the UK up until the 1930s. While there are thriving mandolin orchestras in Europe and Japan, with some 90 in Tokyo alone, only about five are still active in England, Scotland and Wales together. Ian Harris is a professional teacher and performer of the range of instruments of the mandolin family and guitar.

Press Information

Ian Harris, Musical Director 01273 709800 Lindsay Stoner, Press contact 01273 565589 E: lindsaystoner@aol.com

The Bigger View – Ongoing Publicity Activities

For the long-term health and development of your group, it is important to put together some form of publicity material. Depending on your budget, these can range from simple handouts such as brochures detailing your activities, to newsletters, web-sites and demonstration CDs. Find out what talents people within your group have -- it is more than likely someone knows how to create a website, put together a newsletter or even record the group for a demo tape or CD. This is also a good way of developing your own skills -- why not 'have a go' at designing a website or producing a newsletter?

With whatever form of publicity you choose, you should aim both to promote the visibility and 'brand' of your group, and to draw in new members. You want to increase audiences and performance outlets, as well as attract participants.