



Fine-Tuning The Board

by Molly Penn

When an ensemble decides to “go non-profit,” it needs to form a board of directors. Likewise, presenters in their start-up phase must identify a governing board. For many in the music field, this is a first-time administrative experience—and the beginning of a relationship for which both sides have had little preparation.

In a nonprofit’s first stages, the board often takes its direction from the organization’s day-to-day leader—an executive director, ensemble members, or an artistic director. But as the organization matures, a cooperative but passive board may no longer be serving the organization as effectively as it might. In fact, it’s not uncommon for non-profit executives and their boards to get slightly out of sync with each other when the organization moves to a different stage in its life cycle. The good news is that this is an opportunity for the organization to take stock and re-define its long-term direction.

The ideal relationship between a board and the executive director is a supportive partnership. While board members do not micromanage day-to-day operations, they wrestle with difficult decisions right along with the executive and staff and are truly invested (in every way) in the organiza-

tion’s outcomes. Getting to that level of partnership takes a conscious effort, but it is not as challenging as it may sound.

BOARD “CULTURE”

Every board develops its own distinct culture, and the executive director and/or volunteer leaders can help shape it. To identify “best traits” that the organization would like retain or to develop in its trustees, ask some of the following questions:

- In discussion, are board members readily compliant, or productively challenging?
- Are they self-starting, or do they wait for direction?
- Are they able to evaluate their own performance?
- Is it an active, hands-on board, or a high-level policy group?
- Do members hold one another accountable—e.g., ask one another about gifts and deal directly with underperforming colleagues?
- Is attendance at meetings relatively consistent?
- Do members follow formal procedures in taking votes, or are decisions arrived at more casually?

- Is the agenda tightly controlled by the chair or executive director, or is there ample room for debate and discussion?
- Does the board represent all the communities/constituencies the organization would like to be involved with?

RECRUIT DELIBERATELY

Steering a board in a good direction requires stepping back from the day-to-day and making careful choices for the long run. It begins with recruitment and orientation and can be accomplished one board member at a time.

Board members move on and off with some degree of regularity, particularly if the organization has term limits that are enforced.

Depending on the organization’s by-laws, a nominating committee of the board and/or top administrators choose new candidates. The leadership should think of a role for each new member, a role that will ultimately move the board/executive relationship toward the partnership model.

Recruitment should not be rushed. The executive director and board leadership should take time to get to know prospective members. If someone volunteers to join the board, don’t accept automatically. The committee and chief administrator should consider whether the volunteer’s skills, experience, working style and level of interest are compatible with the organization’s goals.

Likewise, prospects should be given time to get to know the organization and its expectations. Before being asked to join, a candidate for the board should be provided with a clearly written job description and brief descriptions of each board committee. Include the board meeting schedule; prospective members need to

Mark Your Calendar!

Chamber Music America’s 30th National Conference

January 4–7, 2008

Westin New York at Times Square

Watch for updates at www.chamber-music.org.

CMA Around the Country

CMA will present workshops and member showcases at the Western, Midwest, and PAE regional conferences coming up in August and September. Please register for these conferences through their websites.

Western Arts Alliance (WAA)

www.westarts.org

Los Angeles, CA August 27–31

CMA staff attending: Nicholas Iovanna, conference and events manager,
and Susan Dadian, program director

CMA-Produced Showcase

Duo 46, Falla Guitar Trio, Luna Nova Quartet, Musica Pacifica, Quartet San Francisco, St. Petersburg String Quartet.

Wednesday, August 29, 8:00–10:00 PM

*Taper Auditorium (at the Los Angeles Central Library),
630 W. Fifth Street, Los Angeles*

(across from the Biltmore Hotel, WAA conference headquarters)
This concert is free and open to the public.

CMA Member performance in WAA-produced Showcase

Quartet San Francisco

Wednesday, August 29, 4:00 PM

Herbert Zipper Concert Hall

A Conversation with Billy Childs and Members of the Calder Quartet, moderated by Lindsay Nelson

Wednesday, August 29, 9:00 AM

CMA Panel Discussion: Music à la Carte— Varied Tastes for Your Audience

This workshop will introduce a diverse sampling of musical styles—Latin, European traditional, Asian-influenced—and demonstrate how presenters can use this variety to engage audiences. Session leader: Joanne Rile (Joanne Rile Artists Management); panelists: Christopher Beach (La Jolla Music Society), Judy Tsang-Henderson (Stern Grove Festival); and Jeremy Ganter (Robert & Margaret Mondavi Center).

Thursday, August 30, 10:00–11:15 AM

Midwest Arts Conference

www.artsmidwest.org

Columbus, OH September 5–8

CMA staff attending: Nicholas Iovanna, conference and events manager

CMA Program Meeting: Nicholas Iovanna will speak about CMA's grant programs and member benefits.

Thursday, September 6, 8:00–9:00 AM

CMA Member performances at Midwest Arts

Quartet San Francisco, Borealis Wind Quintet, Parker String Quartet and Chestnut Brass Company

Friday, September 7, 7:45–9:35 PM, Studio One

CMA Panel Discussion: Music à la Carte— Varied Tastes for Your Audience (see description above).

Session leader: Joanne Rile (Joanne Rile Artists Management); panelists: Karen Christilles (Lied Center of Kansas) and Mark Jacobson (University Musical Society).

Friday, September 7, 2007, 9:30–11:00 AM

Performing Arts Exchange (PAE)

www.southarts.org

Louisville, KY September 26–29

CMA staff attending: Susan Dadian, program director

CMA Member performances at PAE

The Kandinsky Trio, Pianafiddle, La Catrina Quartet and the Poulenc Trio

Thursday, September 27, 7:30–8:45 PM

Bomhard Theatre

CMA Panel Discussion: Music à la Carte— Varied Tastes for Your Audience (see description above).

Session leaders: Joanne Rile (Joanne Rile Artists Management) and Susan Dadian (CMA); performers/panelists: La Catrina Quartet and the Georgia Guitar Quartet.

Saturday, September 29, 2007, 9:00–11:00 AM

CMA Consultations

Regional conferences provide an opportunity for our staff to meet with local CMA members. If you would like to schedule a consultation please contact Susan Dadian at (212) 242-2022, ext. 13. Registration at regional conferences is not required.

know how many meetings per year they would be expected to attend.

If the organization has a “give or get” policy for fundraising, or a minimum board gift, that should be made clear as well. Most important—prospective board members should be given time to think about the commitment before being asked for a decision.

ORIENTING NEW MEMBERS

Once they agree to join the board, new members should be invited to an orientation session—a leisurely meeting in which they’ll learn more about their responsibilities. The chair or executive director customarily articulates that the board members—as stewards of the organization—have fiduciary obligations and are responsible for setting policy and overall direction.

New members should understand all aspects of board tradition and overall philosophy. Their role in fundraising should be clarified—are they expected to give to the best of their ability and/or help get funds for the organization? Every new board member needs a manual that contains the organization’s history and mission, policies (such as conflict of interest), a board contact list, the board member job descriptions, by-laws, current budget, current strategic plan, and a case statement for funding.

MAINTAINING ENTHUSIASM

Agendas for board meetings should be shaped with the utmost care. It is easy to get bogged down in procedure. If the agenda is completely limited to “business”—approving the minutes and analyzing the budget—then meetings are dry, attendance will fall, and the board cannot develop into a strategic ally for the organization’s leadership. The executive director and staff are empowered to take care of day-to-day business on their own; forward-thinking, strategic discussion is the domain of the board meeting. The executive director should keep the board abreast of developments in the field, or of issues that will affect the organization. These issues should be discussed openly to ensure that the organization is ready to address them when they come up.

In addition, the executive director and board leadership might periodically conduct self-evaluations. A good self-evaluation asks whether board members feel they are performing well, individually and collectively and whether the organization’s values are embodied in their meetings. If, for example, an organization espouses creativity, integrity, and openness, those qualities should be exemplified by the trustees.

The mission statement should be reviewed for relevance and vibrancy.

High-level discussions about the role of the organization in the community, region, and the wider world are entirely appropriate, as are provocative questions about whether the organization is still relevant and necessary. Inviting a guest speaker to make a presentation on an issue can help to develop the board’s capacity in an area such as financial management, board development, fundraising, or long-term planning. To remain invigorated about the work it does for its community, the board needs to be engaged in strategic thinking on a regular basis. A strategic planning process, which can last for up to six months, can guide the board and executive director in making decisions about the organization’s future.

BALANCING STABILITY WITH CHANGE

Regular turnover is healthy and keeps new ideas and energy coming in. To be effective, term limits must be enforced consistently, even for the best board members. But to ensure continuity of institutional memory, the organization should think about staggering board terms—board members usually need a minimum of three years service to reach their potential.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

These ideas for keeping a board involved and fresh should inform the work process throughout the year. The board needs to evaluate itself, and the leadership must make sure the board is focused on the right issues, creating the culture it wants or needs, facilitating connections among the members, and generally staying connected to the mission. In turn, the organization will be rewarded with a board that is a resource and a strategic partner, ready to step in when needed for fundraising, connections and/or guidance. As the organization evolves to new levels of professionalism, the board and administration will take that journey together.

National Endowment Launches New Chamber Music Program

American Masterpieces: Chamber Music, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, is a new component of *American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of American Genius* and was created in collaboration with Chamber Music America.

Grants, ranging from \$5,000 to \$75,000, are available for performance and residency projects focusing on music by American composers. Matching funds are required.

Interested ensembles and presenters may apply to the NEA. Deadline October 15, 2007. Visit www.arts.gov for more information.

NOTE: All applicants must be registered with grants.gov, the federal government’s online application system. Registration may take up to four weeks to become final. Organizations that have not already registered should visit www.nea.gov, “Apply for a Grant.”

For questions about the application or registration process: contact Court Burns, Music Specialist at the NEA (202) 682-5590 or burnsc@arts.endow.gov.

Molly Penn, founder of Penn Consulting in Dobbs Ferry, NY, works exclusively with nonprofits on organizational development, strategic planning, board development and fundraising.

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DATELINE

CMA: New Works Encore Program—Support for performances of New Works: Creation and Presentation Program compositions by the commissioned grantees and their ensembles. DEADLINE: September 14, 2007. FMI: Susan Dadian, (212) 242-2022, ext. 13 or sdadian@chamber-music.org.

CMA/FACE French-American Jazz Exchange—Support for collaborative projects between French and American jazz artists. DEADLINE: October 12, 2007. FMI: Susan Dadian, (212) 242-2022, ext. 13 or sdadian@chamber-music.org.

CMA/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming—Recognition for commitment to contemporary chamber music programming for ensembles, presenters and festivals. DEADLINE: October 5, 2007. FMI: Susan Dadian (212) 242-2022, ext. 13 or sdadian@chamber-music.org.

CMA Residency Partnership Program—Support for ensembles, festivals and presenters to program chamber music residencies with community partners. DEADLINE: December 7, 2007. FMI: Susan Dadian (212) 242-2022, ext. 13 or sdadian@chamber-music.org.

Trust for Mutual Understanding—Grants to non-profits conducting cultural exchanges with institutions and individuals in Russia and Eastern/Central Europe. Letter of inquiry required prior to application. DEADLINE: August 1, 2007. FMI: www.tmuny.org.

NEA Access to Artistic Excellence—Supports touring, outreach projects, recordings of works by American composers, music appreciation for adults and children. DEADLINE: August 13, 2007. FMI: www.arts.gov.

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