

OrganFax.co.uk Article

# Promoting Your Club ...

Arguably, the most asked question relating to the very survival of many organ clubs and societies is "How can we increase our concert attendances?" The following thoughts and suggestions may not be entirely appropriate to all clubs, nor are they intended to be comprehensive. However, it is hoped that they will at least provoke some form of positive reaction. Of course, in certain cases, clubs will struggle due to a dearth of persons available and / or willing to assume the various essential duties, administrative and otherwise. Therefore, if concert attendances can be increased it follows that there will be a greater likelihood of volunteers being found to share the necessary responsibilities.

## 1. PUBLICITY:

Whilst 'word of mouth' is always a good way of publicising a club, it is by no means adequate on its own – and not every member or supporter will be able or willing to help in this respect. If everyone attending a specific concert was encouraged to introduce just one new person to the club for the



next event the attendance would be doubled at a stroke. However, in reality, it is doubtful whether, at best, an increase of 20% would be achieved ... and in some cases even 20% would probably be an insufficient amount for the clubs that are poorly supported and whose financial resources are depleted.

Regrettably, successful publicity is not that simplistic and as many promotional avenues as possible should be explored. Here are just a few examples:-

### (a) Advertising - via the press:

Without adequate finances, payment for advertisements in the local press is not really viable. Nevertheless, many newspapers offer facilities for publicity through a 'What's On' section and some may even be prepared to include brief concert previews and reports. It may also be possible to persuade a newspaper to run a competition for a special concert – for which complimentary concert tickets could be offered as prizes – so for no more than say £20, the event is brought to the public's attention and the competition winners may



well be interested in attending future concerts (Hopefully, existing members and supporters won't be so mean-spirited as to enter such a competition themselves!).

Another possible source of publicity is via local (often free) magazines; the publishers are usually only too pleased to help non-profit organisations as a service to the community, whilst at the same time including some additional information for their readers.

### (b) Advertising – via Television and Radio:

The prospects of any co-operation with a television company are so remote that this particular avenue of assistance can probably be discounted. Whilst national radio is another unlikely source of help (can you remember when 'The Organist Entertains' programme on BBC Radio 2 gave a weekly boost to the electronic organ?), many local radio stations – particularly those that are non-commercial – will offer occasional support in publicising concerts ... although a live outside broadcast of a concert is probably a 'dream too far'!

### (c) Advertising – through the Internet:

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OrganFax is an excellent source of publicity which can benefit every club that subscribes to this website ... a real 'must' for all clubs that wish to be known. In addition, if a club is able to establish a separate independent site this would provide other advantages, such as concert reviews, special notices, video clips, photographs, etc. – all of which can only serve to encourage new support. Apart from a relatively small annual fee for such a website there should be no other costs involved. Local councils will often help with Internet publicity, i.e. including concert dates on their web sites, deeming that such clubs are providing a beneficial service to the community, whilst a few newspaper websites will also accept free advertisements.

## (d) Posters, flyers, and brochures:

Posters are a traditional, well-proven method of publicity and when supplemented by flyers (where practical) they can be even more effective as readers can then have a permanent reminder of the particular advertisement. Brochures or leaflets can provide the public with additional information about the club, pointing out that the concerts do not consist of 'two hymns and a collection'. The opportunity should be taken to inform the public about the wide range of musical styles and sounds on offer – not to forget the excellent quality of musicianship on show.

Libraries and Tourist Information offices are usually happy to display posters and literature (although some libraries may

insist on the completion of a simple registration form). In fact, where the situation permits, some libraries may even be prepared to offer window space, for a limited period, for more extensive advertising – although there could well be a lengthy waiting list for this facility.

Other possible advertising locations include hospitals, surgeries (doctors and dentists), charity shops, village stores and garden centres – to name but a few – and the occasional inducement of some complimentary concert tickets will never go amiss. However, there has to be a limit to the number of suitable display points available – and indeed the amount of printing expenditure that can be allocated.

With regard to publicity costs, a 'Catch 22' situation obviously exists. Advertising is necessary in order to improve attendances, which in turn generates more income – but without accepting the costs of advertising it is quite likely that the club could be forced to close in any event through lack of income. The possibility of some form of sponsorship to meet printing costs might be worthwhile exploring – a little commercial enterprise may be all that is needed.

## (e) Local Organisations:

Links with other organisations such as Age Concern, Community Centres, etc., can be useful, by way of Internet links – through an independent site – and by reciprocal advertising (e.g. the display of posters, etc.). Similar arrangements could also be established with other local entertainment groups and venues – and it has been known for a

theatre to provide tickets for one or two of its events (i.e. for use as raffle prizes) in return for displaying flyers. It is also conceivable that certain pubs and restaurants would be prepared to offer meals at specially discounted/pensioner prices (perhaps by issuing vouchers) in return for free publicity.

## 2. CHARITIES:

It is always a good idea to raise funds for deserving charities from time to time and, whilst excellent PR can be achieved, such efforts can also be of benefit to the club. One



suggestion is to select a charity, preferably one with strong local support, and (as an example) offer to donate the sum of £100 in return for the sale of 30 tickets. If the tickets were priced at £5 each a club profit of £50 could be achieved, plus extra income from the raffle. More importantly, there is every possibility that some of the new visitors would wish to return and bring others with them!

Alternatively, and funds permitting, a club could opt to donate the entire concert raffle proceeds to a charity, inviting a representative to attend the concert to collect the cheque, then reporting the event to the local press (perhaps with a photograph) and thereby gaining further valuable PR and publicity.

## 3. INDUCEMENTS:

Of course, whilst attempts continue in order to encourage new visitors, it is equally important to ensure that existing support is maintained. Clubs

differ in many respects so, inevitably, there will be variations in the methods employed. However, the following ideas may provide a little 'food for thought':

(a) Make concert tickets available in advance at a discounted price (or add a surcharge to the price of tickets purchased at the door). The cost of printing on a home computer is minimal and in any event the cost would probably be more than offset by the income generated from a larger attendance. Just consider how many people would prefer to take advantage of the preferential price – and how, for example, a few spots of rain may not therefore have such an adverse affect on future attendances.

(b) Offer incentives to supporters by way of 'loyalty bonuses' – e.g. a small gift for every six differently dated tickets purchased during a given period.

(c) Produce a quantity of complimentary tickets which can be allocated as prizes to local fetes and shows, to businesses that offer advertising facilities and, for that matter, potential first-time visitors. Two committee members of one particular club were first introduced to a concert by way of complimentary tickets so this method can certainly be productive. If the concert venue has sufficient space, clubs should always consider issuing free tickets to potential newcomers ... they will have nothing to lose and everything to gain!

#### 4. COMMITTEES and PERFORMERS:

Committees need to make an impact by continually reviewing

and updating club policies and procedures, developing and



maintaining an open-minded approach to the presentation of concerts and to technical innovations. Society is rapidly changing and it is essential that clubs keep pace with these changes if they wish to survive. For instance, it seems outdated to refer to the events as 'meetings' when they are in fact 'concerts' – and it would be even more alarming to refer to them as 'recitals'.

Obviously, most new support will have to be drawn from a younger age group, most likely from recently retired persons or those approaching retirement – an age group that will probably have been influenced in the most part by music of the 60s, 70s and 80s – so this factor will have to be borne in mind when clubs are selecting artistes – to ensure that the music played is suitably attractive.

In order to 'move with the times', clubs would be unwise not to consider arranging occasional alternatives to the 'traditional' one-organist concert. Whilst retaining an organ or keyboard as the basis for concerts, it should be possible to introduce another facet – e.g. another instrument, a vocalist or even a comedian – by way of variation.

Diversification surely must occur if clubs are to survive for much longer. In any case, even if modernisation takes place, it is questionable whether persons currently aged in their 40s will be interested in this style of entertainment in twenty years'

time. Society is constantly changing and ageism, in one form or another, continues to have an influence over trends. Such prejudice clearly exists within the media and entertainment business in general and this obviously makes life that much more difficult for individuals and 'senior' clubs alike.

Besides hoping to provoke interest and positive reaction, this article is submitted with the genuine intention of helping clubs to consider how they may be able to survive for another fifteen to twenty years. Beyond that, it is certainly not easy to believe that the electronic organ scene can continue in anything like its present form.

It must be emphasised that players will also have to contribute to the necessary changes, by virtue of the content of their concert programmes. Whilst not ignoring the more senior members of their audiences, they must direct their music – little by little and year by year – towards the younger age group that clubs are (or should be) working hard to attract.

Thankfully, a number of players have moved, or are moving, in the right direction. Sadly, however, other players



continue to produce programmes containing a preponderance of pre-war music (Classics excepted, of course), vainly expecting that this will attract a generation that was not born until at least ten years after the war had ended!

Diversification, modernisation, an open-minded, pro-active attitude ... these are all essential aspects of

progress. It is a challenge that should not be ignored.

So what response is this article likely to evoke? ... Hopefully, a forward-thinking reaction – not necessarily in full accord with every idea or opinion expressed

herein, but at least a positive response. Those who believe that most of the above suggestions are impractical, or not even worth attempting, are probably already resigned to failure in the not-too-distant future. After all, let's face it, negativity is an easy option!

*Article supplied by a well known club chairman, 2009*  
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