

Tri-State Chamber Music Alliance
November 15, 2003
University Club, Cincinnati

Meeting Summary

Present: Nicholas Fry, Joel Hoffman, Jeff Huntington, Ed King, Acton Ostling, Jr., Charles Thompson, Dick Waller, Jo Anne Warren, Fran Webb, Mary White, Bob Wilhelm.

We began with introductions and brief descriptions of our series and organizations. Although we differ substantially in the size of our annual budgets and audience, we present series of similar numbers of events and caliber of performers and face many of the same problems and challenges.

We developed a list of primary concerns that we hoped the Alliance would be able to help with, including the following:

- Outreach
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Board development
- Planned giving
- Presenting competition winners--Fischhoff/Yellow Springs
- Joint commissions
- Syndicated radio broadcasts
- Alliance operations

We were only able to touch of a few of these in the time we had.

Commissions:

Joel Hoffman, on the composition faculty at CCM, introduced the idea of a joint commission. He has a partial funder (up to \$2000) who is looking for a work with an international connection. The goal would be to solicit a composer/ensemble combination, and split the fee between the commission and recording/distribution/outreach. Composers Stanley Silverman, Lowell Lieberman, and Charles Washington were mentioned. This is an idea that Joel will follow up with us in the future.

The commission opportunity with the Pacifica Quartet and Jeff Mumford has been taken up by Chamber Music Columbus and interest was expressed from some other groups--no fee minimum required.

Outreach:

Efforts to broaden an audience base through programming unusual works or ensembles were seen as unsuccessful--new people come for the single concert that interests them, but generally do not subscribe as a result.

The importance of outreach for very young children was emphasized, and the Ying Quartet, Debussy Trio, Cypress and Cavani Quartets mentioned as exemplars of such programs.

Outreach efforts in Cincinnati were described in *Over the Rhine* and the School of Performing Arts. While the events go well, it is impossible to know if they plant a seed for future audiences.

It may be helpful to use musicians in one's audience community as "Ambassadors of Chamber Music" to encourage children and teens to play chamber music or attend concerts.

We spoke briefly of the need for competition winners to have opportunities to perform. Concerts may serve as an outreach activity, a fundraiser, or a joint effort shared of the Alliance. We need Ann Divine's (Fischhoff Competition) thoughts on this.

Block Booking:

After much discussion, we decided that in most cases, we will share our season information only after our seasons are fixed and then negotiate individually with agents. In rare cases, we may wish to collaborate in offering a major ensemble, such as the Emerson or Guarneri Quartet, a stable place to stay for a few days with runout concerts to different series. Dick Waller has personal contacts with many fine ensembles, including the Emerson, Guarneri, Orion, Cypress, Frye Street, and Pacifica Quartets, and will explore whether such collaborations are appealing and feasible.

Member Benefits:

Each of the Alliance members offered comp tickets to members who visit their series.

Jo Anne proposed we develop a voucher system in which subscribers could purchase tickets that are redeemable for concerts on any of our series. She will develop this idea further and get back to us.

Operations:

We decided to call our group the Chamber Music Alliance. But on searching the internet that name has been taken by a group in Chicago--so (for the moment) we are the "Tri-State Chamber Music Alliance" (TCMA). Suggestions for a better name are welcome!

We decided that all participating members will send \$100.00 to Mary White, who will open an account for our petty cash needs.

The first of those needs is to join Chamber Music America with an organizational membership, which will cost \$100. This will enable us to benefit from their consulting and other services. We agreed to do this.

Bob Wilhelm will make a listserve of all members.

Bob has the ability to make us a page on his website if we wish--we didn't discuss this further and would need to think about what would go on it.

We can each put live links to member websites on our own websites.

Fran Webb will make an integrated calendar of all our concerts and post it to us.

Mary will update the roster, revise the mission statement, and post to all.

We concluded the meeting by asking each person to share their thoughts on how it went. All were positive, several saying the time together just sharing from our experience was worthwhile. But some skepticism was expressed as to whether we really can help each other. Mary urged everyone to participate as actively as possible in listserve discussions as a first step.

Many questions of operations were touched on at this meeting without time for further discussion. These included:

Board development--how to solicit good board members and promote board effectiveness.

The importance of knowing your audience--how do you go about this? How do you know who might be interested in making a special donation toward a recording or commission etc?

Developing and involving volunteers--how to do this in a way that promotes ownership in the organization.

Publicity materials--what do we do, and how? Some groups send out program notes in advance, or a regular newsletter. How do these materials help, and at what cost?

Grant writing--some groups are better at this than others--what do they know? Who do they approach? What can we learn from each other?

Planned giving: how do you do this, where do you announce it, who do you target?

Audience building--how to move away from elitist image of chamber music and its audience to attract new and younger members?

Subscribers vs. door ticket sales--are there advantages and disadvantages in an excess of either?

Anniversaries: what kinds of activities and items can commemorate great dates in our respective histories? (Some nice examples were provided by members.)

Syndicated radio broadcasts of our concerts. Great idea--needs someone to follow up.

Should we expand our membership? Mary recommended keeping it small until we get our bearings.

Communication: How to do this most effectively? E-mail? Conference calls? Meetings? This is something we need to think about as it is the foundation of any potential we have as a group.

Fundraising--remarkably, this was not mentioned. I assume it is an issue for all of us.

In conclusion--we have a lot to talk about and questions to explore together. May I ask that each of you think about your needs and interests and let us all know what you would like to work on and where you need help?

Next Meeting: April 2004, date and place TBD.