

Website Rules

Building the Musician's Essential Promotional Tool



by LIZ PARKER

If you're a musician building a website, here are a few tips to ensure your website is functional. When your website is easy to use, marketers assume you 'get' it, and are thrilled to promote you. Presenters, agents, publicists, marketers, and customer service staff will all be checking out your site for information—and they *take that information and apply it*. If you aren't servicing their needs, they can't promote you to the public. They want to sell your tickets, too.

Have a clear vision of your site's intended audience. Many websites are ad hoc, and treated like an online corkboard. Most musicians want to acknowledge their fans, but they have to include the industry.

BASICS

One long, medium, and short bio. Long can be around 1,000 words, short—about 500 words and an added bonus is a very short bio of about 250-300 words. Why the latter? House programmes have fewer advertisers and sponsors, so the editions have fewer pages. The editors need a brief bio, as does the publicist who wants to keep her release to one page. The marketing manager will create e-cards, posters, or flyers to distribute—a very short bio is perfect for this purpose. It's *very important* your bios be downloadable into a Word document, as publicists don't want to cut/paste from your site, creating major formatting problems. If your bio scrolls downward in a small window, it can't be cut/pasted, period. Downloading into a PDF file is a pain because editing is no longer an option. Include a list of press quotes, if you have them; they're often used. It's a good idea to include a list of conductors you've worked with. And finally, include the month and year at the bottom of your bio so publicists know how recent it is.

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOS

A minimum of five great photos is a good start.

Two types of photos are required: PR stills (in-studio, head shots, full body shots in concert dress) and editorial (suitable for print articles) in casual dress, outdoors, in a café or during a gig. Amateur photos won't be used, not if they're low-res, with clichéd poses, in poorly chosen clothes. Clothes should be in solids, not patterns and must fit. Hair and makeup are non-negotiable, including for men, as the camera picks up everything. PR stills: the background should be uncluttered, ideally with a neutral grey background since grey won't clash with brochure colour schemes and prints well in black and white. Ads require a lot of info: concert details, logos, a press quote and more. Editorial photos: choose an interesting location with something eye-catching—a plaza with



water fountains, sculptures, graffiti, ivy on a brick wall. Again, not too much clutter behind you, and leave lots of room in the frame for text. Magazine and newspaper finances are tight and there's less budget for freelance photographers. If the local paper interviews you and doesn't send a photographer, you need to provide the paper with a photo that *looks* like it was taken to go with the article. You want to provide a range of photos for a good match with the article. If the publicist has a wide selection of photos, she can send a different photo to different papers to avoid duplication.

REPERTOIRE LIST

This is really important for opera and classical instrumentalists—we need to know what type of roles you commonly sing if you're an opera singer. If you're an instrumentalist we need to know what concerti and other works you play. When there's an artist cancellation and the presenter is desperate to find a replacement, you'll be glad you posted a repertoire list.

NEWS PAGE

Going on tour? Just released a CD? Doing a



FROM L-R: Liz Parker; Liz-directed photo shoots for TorQ; and pianist Lily Ling; www.sineadsugrue.com, a singer's website overseen by Liz PHOTOS Tara McMullen

benefit concert? Provide info about the genesis of your current fabulous project and why it means so much to you. Marketing/Publicity people need this info.


SOUND BYTES

Let people sample your music—video's great too. If it sounds and looks great, it will be used by the venue on its website. Let it run at least five minutes for editing purposes. Please do not have music blasting out upon arrival. Most people viewing it are in open-concept offices and they will jump in their seats and bother neighbours.

CONTACT PAGE

Have an email address just for professional correspondence. If you're busy on Facebook, Twitter or Flickr, have these social media logos on your contact page with a link.

The overall look should be clean, with simple lines and no visual clutter. Publicists look at several artist websites a day—go easy on their eyes.

If you're wondering how you can afford this, the Canada Council provides grants for exactly that kind of thing: www.canadacouncil.ca. A basic website costs approximately \$800 and up. Too many musicians consider this an expendable cost; that's like saying a violinist shouldn't bother finding the very best instrument she can afford. If you want people to find you, learn about you, and promote you, you can't afford *not* to have a website. 

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