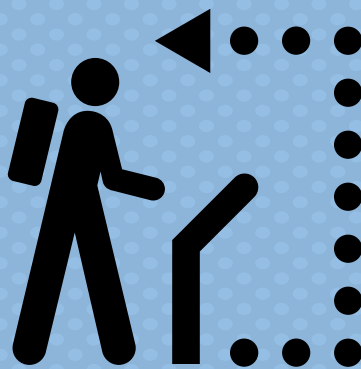


BAM! Complete Guide to Conferences - Canada

by Robert Baird



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A guide to performing arts
conferences in Canada

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BAM! Complete Guide to Conferences - Canada

Introduction

Conferences take place for different reasons and everyone involved in the performing arts has to decide which conferences are most valuable for their particular goals. A presenter may attend a conference to book part of or a complete season, attend workshops, re-connect with colleagues, and take in local attractions or any combination of the above. An agent will most likely attend to connect with presenters, have an exhibit booth, and/or present artists from their roster in showcases. An artist may be attending to try to get an agent, see how the conference works, and pick up some ideas on how to be successful or to showcase at the event. Whatever the reason, conferences are part of the overall investment in your work and you must be selective in terms of time and effort you can expend on conferences in general. Conferences are expensive to attend and it may take some time before you are able to realize a return on your investment. Attendance at a conference has many benefits:

- An opportunity to connect with colleagues
- An opportunity to learn about the industry
- An opportunity to showcase your talent (See *BAM! Complete Guide to Showcasing*)
- An opportunity to experience different cultures, events, geography, climate, architecture and more.

Choose which conference or conferences are best for you at any given time. Seek the advice of trusted colleagues who may have attended the conference to ascertain if it would be valuable for you to attend. Be prepared to get the most out of any conference you attend (see “How to Work a Conference” below). Attending a conference can be exhilarating, a must for anyone involved in the performing arts. Let’s get started with performing arts conferences in Canada:

Conference	Website	Where	When
National			
CAPACOA	www.capacoa.ca	Various Canadian Cities	November
CINARS	www.cinars.org	Montreal, QC	Biennial: November 2016
Regional			
Alberta Showcase	www.artstouring.com	Alberta	October
Bourse Rideau	www.rideau-inc.qc.ca/bourse-rideau	Quebec City, QC	February
Breakout/West	www.breakoutwest.ca	Winnipeg, MB	September
Contact East	www.contacteast.ca	Various Maritime Cities	September
Contact Ontariois	www.reseauontario.ca/fr/contact-ontariois	Various Ontario Cities	January
ECMA	www.ecma.com	Various Maritime Cities	April
Manitoba Showcase	www.manitobaartsnetwork.ca	Various Manitoba Cities	October
Ontario Contact	www.ontariocontact.ca	Various Ontario Cities	November
OSAC	www.osac.ca	Various SK Cities	October
Pacific Contact	www.bctouring.org/pacific-contact	Burnaby, BC	April
Showcase PEI	www.musicpei.com/showcasepei	Charlottetown, PEI	September
Specialized			
Blues Summit	www.torontobluessociety.com	Toronto, ON	Biennial: January 2017
CAFE	www.canadian-fairs.ca	Various Canadian Cities	November
CCMA	www.ccma.org	Various Canadian Cities	September
CDA	www.cda-acd.ca/en	Various Canadian Cities	September
CMW	www.cmw.net	Toronto, ON	May
COCA	www.coca.org	Various Canadian Cities	June
FEO	www.festivalsandeventsontario.ca	Various Ontario Cities	March
Folk Music Ontario	www.folkmusicontario.ca	Various Ontario Cities	October
Mundial Montreal	www.mundialmontreal.com/en/	Montreal, PQ	November
NXNE	www.nxne.com	Toronto, ON	June
OAAS	www.ontarioagsocieties.com	Toronto, ON	February
PACT	www.pact.ca	Various Canadian Cities	May

National Conferences

CAPACOA www.capacoa.ca

A four-day gathering of members and stakeholders from the national and international touring performing arts sector, with an emphasis on professional development, networking, and advocacy. The conference brings together over 200 cultural entrepreneurs and key industry stakeholders working in the national and international performing arts sectors. The conference includes an exhibit hall, live artistic performances, peer-to-peer meetings, keynote speakers, workshops and other activities that advance and unite the sector.

CINARS www.cinars.org (Biennial)

Since 1984, CINARS organizes every two years in Montreal, one of the most important international performing arts conferences in the world, with nearly 1300 professionals hailing from 40 countries including 270 show presenters, some of whom are the most influential in the business. During one week, over a hundred shows from Quebec, Canada and abroad grace the stages while workshops, networking events, as well as an exhibition hall are teeming with participants. After 14 editions, the CINARS Biennale has become a key worldwide event in performing arts touring.

Regional Conferences

Alberta Showcase www.artstouring.com

Each year Alberta Showcase brings together presenters, performers and promoters for one jam-packed weekend of live performance, networking, and professional development. This explosive event allows presenters and promoters to see performances before they book the artists. Over 40 artists will perform excerpts of their best work in a variety of settings throughout the weekend. You will have the opportunity to meet artists in our **Contact Room**, a trade fair where the business of the art happens

Bourse Rideau www.rideau-inc.qc.ca/bourse-rideau

For over 1000 professionals in the performing arts industry, the Bourse RIDEAU is the must-attend event of the year in Quebec. One of the most important international gatherings regarding the French arts scene today, the Bourse RIDEAU is also a remarkable window to the performing arts and a unique meeting place for presenters. The impressive schedule of events includes over 70 previews or full shows presented in venues throughout the city. The Place du marché creates the perfect environment for negotiations between producers and presenters. Workshop and discussion areas encourage productive dialogue on current issues affecting the performing arts. Since its beginnings in 1988, the Bourse RIDEAU has grown to become a festive tradition in the heart of the Quebec winter, reflecting the multi-faceted world of the performing arts.

BreakOut West www.breakoutwest.ca

At BreakOut West artists have full access to all conference sessions, one-on-one meetings, mixers and events. The conference features a schedule, developed in consultation with staff and a conference advisory panel of established music industry professionals, designed to highlight current industry-relevant topics through specific workshops and discussion sessions. Face-to-face interactions, one-on-one mentoring sessions and round table workshops between industry professionals and artists are included and international industry professionals

from around the world add their expertise to the conference, networking with artists and delegates, with the intent to generate export opportunities for western Canadian music.

Contact East www.contacteast.ca

Contact East is the Atlantic Presenters Association's hallmark event and Atlantic Canada's premiere performing arts booking conference. The conference, started in 1975, brings together performing arts presenters and in-demand, tour-ready arts performers to showcase contemporary and classical music, dance, theatre, and youth-oriented programming. Contact East is made up of several components, all of which are designed to enhance the presenter's knowledge of the field. Event components include high quality showcases, provocative speakers, professional development sessions, informal meetings and networking. Contact East provides an essential and inspiring experience for delegates, who encompass Canadian and international showcasing artists, performing arts presenters, managers, and agents from regional, national and international levels.

Contact Ontariois www.reseauontario.ca/fr/contact-ontariois

Contact ontariois is one of Canada's premier French-language events and celebrates the arts by bringing together hundreds of artists and Canadian broadcasters, highlighting a significant number of proud-to-be francophone artists from Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes and Western Canada. Contact ontariois has become a major event for the Canadian art Francophonie. Contact ontariois celebrated its 34th edition in 2015 and had the pleasure of welcoming 145 artists, agents and producers, 97 delegate observers, 42 multidisciplinary members from 16 organizations and 125 members including 40 school students. There was a delegation of international guests from Europe as well.

ECMA www.ecma.com

The East Coast Music Association (ECMA) is a regional collaboration of people in the music industry of Atlantic Canada, dedicated to the music of Atlantic Canada. Membership is open to all individuals working in any sector of the music industry or those who support the music industry. Membership includes musicians, artists, agents, managers, record companies, studios, media, related corporation and

retailers. The ECMA currently has over 1,000 members. Now, as the industry continues to change drastically worldwide, ECMA strives to keep on top of these changes by presenting relevant and helpful workshops and seminars during East Coast Music Week. East Coast Music Week is now a five-day, non-stop musical celebration showcasing and recognizing the best of East Coast artists and music. The ultimate goal of this internationally-recognized event is to position and promote it as the premiere music event for the public and the music industry in Canada and the conference of choice for artists and industry professionals.

Manitoba Showcase www.manitobaartsnetwork.ca

Every fall, The Manitoba Arts Network brings some of the best Canadian talent in music, dance, theatre, and visual and literary art together in a different Manitoba community to showcase their work for delegates from arts organizations across the province. Both artists and delegates have the opportunity to check out performances, participate in professional development workshops, see visual art exhibitions, attend literary readings, and network with their peers over the course of three days structured toward celebrating and sharing the arts. The conference and professional development components of Manitoba Showcase are designed to address issues surrounding the delivery of cultural programming through workshops, seminars and discussion groups. Meanwhile, the showcases of talented artists from across the country gives delegates the chance to preview and meet acts they might want to bring to their community during the following season. The preeminent event of its kind in Manitoba, Showcase provides opportunity for rural and northern arts presenters to exchange ideas and renew professional relationships.

Ontario CONTACT www.ontariocontact.ca

An exciting, engaging celebration, Ontario Contact is an opportunity for those working in the touring performing arts sector to come together to network, and to share information in a three-day conference featuring contemporary and classical music, dance, theatre, spoken word, and youth-orientated programming. Produced by Ontario Presents (formerly CCI), Ontario Contact engages over 500 artists, presenters, workshop leaders, and various government and arts service agencies in showcase performances, workshops, and an arts industry

marketplace. It is the goal of Ontario Contact to continue to address the ongoing needs of Ontario's cultural presenters, and assist local, national, and international artists and their agents to tour and perform for Ontario communities. Ontario has a large and diverse population spanning many kilometers and communities. Ontario Contact is an annual opportunity for those working in the performing arts field to come together. It gives presenters, artists, artist agents and managers time to network, to discover new work, to be introduced to best practices and to do business. Finally, it facilitates networking to help strengthen the Ontario arts community.

OSAC www.osac.ca

Each October, the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils presents its annual Showcase Conference. Showcase is a booking conference for visual and performing arts, trade show area and an excellent opportunity for networking, and professional development. Now in its 47th year, OSAC is pleased to offer the very best of performing and visual talent from Saskatchewan, across Canada and internationally. Along with all this OSAC also hosts its Annual General Meeting, provides a silent auction and a hospitality suite for socializing. Delegates that come to Showcase come from across Saskatchewan, Canada and the United States. The weekend includes performing arts and school presenters, visual artists, managers, agents, OSAC Members and industry representatives and government funding partners.

Pacific CONTACT www.bctouring.org/pacific-contact

Now in its 40th year, Pacific Contact is the BC Touring Council's annual tradeshow and booking conference for the performing arts. It includes artist showcases, a contact room (tradeshow booths of artists and agent/managers), workshops, networking and a hospitality suite for late night fun. **Presenters** come to Pacific Contact to book performances for their communities, organizations, schools, festivals and facilities. They come to the showcases at Pacific Contact to experience artists "live – on stage". They get to see who is in the marketplace and the level of artistry available for touring. **Artists, Agents and Managers** come to sell their shows and book tours and to network with colleagues. **Everyone** comes

for professional development, workshops, networking opportunities, hospitality, special meetings, presentations – and fun!

Showcase PEI www.musicpei.com/showcasepei

Over 200 delegates attend Showcase PEI and they have included many types of music industry professionals from a dozen different countries around the globe. Music PEI has a membership of over 1000 artists, both internationally-touring or emerging or related companies and is devoted to advancing careers of Island musicians and actively seeking ways to promote, foster and develop the music industry on PEI. Prince Edward Island (PEI) is the smallest province in Canada and is located on the eastern coast of the country and home to one of Canada's greatest cultural exports, [Anne of Green Gables](#). Showcase PEI focuses entirely on live performance opportunities: approximately 20 PEI artists are showcased in a diverse collection of styles and genres. Everything from pop, rock, alternative, roots, folk, Celtic, world, jazz and more are presented. There is world class music here being created on PEI by a committed group of emerging artists.

Specialized Conferences

Blues Summit www.torontobluessociety.com

Blues Summit is a not-to-be-missed, biennial forum for all members of the blues music community including artists, presenters, agents, festival bookers, event organizers, and industry representatives of all kinds. The conference provides an opportunity for members of the community to connect as well as for artists to showcase in front of blues industry professionals. Blues Summit 7 includes opportunities for artists to showcase their music for industry professionals as well as network and develop their careers. Blues Summit showcasing provides artists an opportunity to perform for national and international festival and venue bookers, promoters, event organizers, agents, industry representatives, members of the media and other musicians.

CAFE www.canadian-fairs.ca

The Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions is a non-profit organization established in 1924 and funded primarily by its members. The organization represents a broad spectrum of fairs from small community rural fairs to large urban exhibitions. In addition, the membership includes provincial associations that represent agricultural societies from across the nation, industry service providers and affiliate associations who have a direct interest and link with the Canadian fair industry. Each year a conference is held in a different Canadian city, featuring a tradeshow, artist showcasing, keynote speakers, panels and roundtable discussions.

CCMA www.ccma.org

Country Music Week began in 1977 as an annual event created to heighten awareness and increase exposure for Canada's country music artists. Today, **Country Music Week** is made up of three components: a **music festival**, which includes a Songwriters' Series, talent showcases, a full-day FanFest and a Countdown Concert prior to the awards show; the **CCMA Awards Show**, which is a 2-hour live, television special highlighting a year in country music; as well as an **industry conference** which allows the Canadian country music industry to honour those working behind the scenes via educational workshops, networking receptions, awards ceremonies and more.

CDA www.cda-acd.ca/en

The Canadian Dance Assembly, with a membership of over 600 dance professionals, representing each Canadian province in diverse practices, presents a national conference each year. The conference features keynote and sessions speakers, panels, roundtables, and showcases.

COCA – Canadian Organization of Campus Activities www.coca.org

The Canadian Organization of Campus Activities, better known by its acronym COCA, represents more than 65 post-secondary institutions across the country from British Columbia to Newfoundland. COCA also boasts more than 80 associate members. Typically, associate members are entertainers, booking agencies, artist management, and other suppliers to the campus entertainment

and programming industry. The highlight of every year is the National Conference in June when campus representatives gather to see various entertainers such as comedians, bands, DJ's, theatre and variety acts. The Conference also features guest speakers on the lecture circuit as well as film showcases and a trade show (Campus Activities Biz Hall) for Associate Members to meet campus buyers one on one. All members are encouraged to attend educational sessions, panel discussions and professional development workshops which take place during the day. The members of COCA also host regional conferences or meetings (East, West, and Central) held from time to time during the academic year. Regional conferences provide more opportunities for associate members and campus buyers to do business.

CMW www.cmw.net

Canadian Music Week's 3-day Music Summit is designed for both industry executives and recording professionals focused on the business of global music. Encompassing 3 days of dedicated programming streams to Social Music, Live Touring, and Global Creators Summit, as well as keynotes, celebrity interviews, breakout sessions and workshops, it will provide you with the tools and knowledge to build your profile in the business and put you face-to-face with the forward-thinkers who shape the entertainment.

Festivals and Events Ontario www.festivalsandeventsontario.ca

Festivals and Events Ontario annual Conference is held in late Winter (just before festival planning timeframe) in any one of Ontario's major cities across the province and boasts vibrant presentations, collaborative industry education, in-depth workshops and an outstanding opportunity to learn from and network with top industry professionals. The Conference attracts 250+ festival and event professionals from across the province of Ontario. With a major tradeshow marketplace, an industry recognition Award Program and numerous showcase entertainers, the FEO Conference provides the perfect backdrop for industry professionals to soak up the excitement of a successful festival and event year gone by and prepare for another exciting year ahead!

Folk Music Ontario www.folkmusicontario.ca

The Folk Music Ontario conference is the key event for Ontario's folk, roots, and traditional music community. Over four days and three nights in October, 750 delegates will hear provocative speakers and learn about new products and services for performers and presenters; engage in lively roundtable discussions and private meetings with industry professionals; interact with panelists during educational seminars and workshops; hear some of the best performer showcases in the country; play in the best jam sessions outside of the festival circuit and have a whole lot of fun!

Mundial Montreal www.mundialmontreal.com/en/

At Mundial you will not only discover Montreal's nightlife and culture, but you will experience the best-kept secrets on the emerging music scene from Canada's most influential cultural hotbeds. Mundial is one-of-a-kind, specialized event with key industry professionals. We like to say we curate showcases, and we curate curators! Our boutique program allows you to see everything, all this in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, while mingling with your colleagues. Mundial Montreal has been working to create a network of professionals engaged in presenting world music, determined to expand their horizons, swap trade secrets and inspire a better vision for world music. Mundial hosts private Presenter Meetings to architect the path to more cooperative and effective touring strategies, address common issues, etc.

Mundial offers the opportunity to play a 25-minute set in front of national & international tastemakers, festival programmers, venue buyers, journalists, and agents.

From the wonderful exceptionally well-curated performances, to the amazing schmooze dating interactions, to the fantastic opportunity to spend quality time with peers from around the globe, Mundial Montreal was a wonderful conference.

Dan DeWayne, California WorldFest

NXNE www.nxne.com

North by Northeast is a five-day festival encompassing a whack of different things, but mostly centred on a collective love for music. Celebrating its 22nd year in 2016, it takes over Toronto with showcases, screenings, panels, parties, installations, and a whole lot more. From free shows to extended last calls at your favourite sweaty club/bar/general place that was able to get a liquor license or is very good at being sneaky, NXNE is the premier destination for bands, filmmakers, innovators, funny people, artists, and most importantly, fans of all of the above.

OAAS www.ontarioagsocieties.com

The Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies is the provincial association representing over 220 agricultural societies from across the province. The highlight of the year is the annual convention, which takes place in mid-February. The convention, which brings together upwards of 1000 delegates from all across the province, provides the OAAS members with education, information, networking opportunities, and artist showcases.

PACT www.pact.ca

The Professional Association of Canadian Theatres is the collective voice of professional Canadian theatres, a leader in the national performing arts community, and a devoted advocate for the value of live performance. Since 1979 PACT has focused on providing a community where theatre practitioners (both artistic and administrative) can come together to discuss important issues of the day and work together to create innovative solutions. The annual conference offers four days of face-to-face networking, hands-on workshops, international inspiration and open forum discussion. The conference acts as a hub for conversations that have occurred throughout the calendar year and offers much opportunity for new discussion, debate and collaboration.

Personal Reflections

WARNING: I am including this section because I have often been asked what a conference is like and I wanted to give my opinion. Conferences have their own “personality” and a conference which is good for one attendee, or for one purpose, may not suit another attendee or purpose. So, please read these VERY subjective comments with a grain of salt. And remember, the only way to know a conference is to attend a conference.

National Conferences

CAPACOA: I have not been to many CAPACOA conferences. I was told by colleagues who had attended before I did, that it was a very “clique-y” conference and that it would take some time to become one of the clique. When I did attend I found that most of the networking took place outside of the exhibit hall (it was hardly visited whenever I exhibited), usually at a bar. Since I am not a great drinker of beer or alcoholic beverages, I was not as much interested in networking in this way. But it is a well-run conference and it has moved around the country in recent years. If you want to connect with some of Canada’s largest presenters, then it is certainly worth attending.

CINARS: I have never attended CINARS for various reasons. If you want to connect with international artists and presenters, and experience the French-Canadian culture, this would be a good one to attend.

Regional Conferences

Alberta Showcase: The provincial showcases in Alberta are small-scale but for showcasing artists they can result in block-booking tours of the province (if you are able to drive long distances). The fees are lower, but the opportunity for sales of merchandise is higher and a provincial tour can be quite a success for an artist. Be warned though, travelling in a Canadian winter is not for the faint of heart and most tours are arranged for times when weather is a factor.

Bourse Rideau: I have never been, but my Quebec colleagues assure me that not speaking French should not be an impediment to attending. The Quebec market is significant and attending this conference could open up a whole new territory or enhance programming.

Breakout West: A conference for emerging and mainstream artists in popular genres.

Contact East: Never been, but this is one of three regional conferences which I would recommend highly. If you've never been to Eastern Canada, go!

Contact Ontario: Never been, but was surprised to find out that it is a larger contact than Ontario Contact, which I had thought was Ontario's largest performing arts conference. The focus is primarily Francophone but the arts are an international language and this conference should be considered.

ECMA: This is a great conference. It features musicians from "down east"- Canada's Maritime Provinces - and you'll come away with an appreciation of "kitchen concerts" and the rich heritage of music from this part of Canada, as well as attending a very fine conference.

Manitoba Showcase: See Alberta Showcase

Ontario Contact: One of my favourite Canadian conferences. It is well-run under Cheryl Ewing's leadership and it gives access to presenting venues - small, medium and large - in Canada's largest population centres.

OSAC: See Alberta Showcase

Pacific Contact: Never made it to one of these but thought, if I ever had one of my artists showcasing there, I would have to go. It turned out that the fees my artists were asking were too high for the British Columbia market, so it never happened. Many of my colleagues have reported good things about this conference and it is highly recommended, along with Contact East and Ontario Contact.

Showcase PEI: Never been but PEI is a must-see.

Specialized Conferences

Blues Summit: Never been, but if you're a blues musician, this is for you.

CAFE: I have attended this conference several times and it is good for connecting with the larger fair and exhibition venues. Canada has several large events like the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) and Western Fairs and if you have a performance suitable for these events, then this is one to attend.

CCMA: Never been because my country & western artists never showcased there (See Pacific Contact above). If you like both kinds of music (country & western), or perform in this genre, try this conference.

CDA: Never been but a good way to connect with Canada's dance community.

COCA: I entered the agency business later in life after several previous careers and I specialized in established artists for my roster, so I never really had any artists suitable for COCA. If you are a young artist or an agent with young artists on your roster, or a manager of a young artist, or a presenter from a college or university, this is the conference to attend. It is a scaled-down version of NACA or APCA.

CMW: A very large event in Toronto every year with a lot of bands performing. I never connected with this conference but could see its use for some artists/managers/presenters.

Festivals and Events Ontario: I served on the Festival and Events Ontario Board of Directors for many years and always liked this conference. It was a way of connecting with the multitude of festivals that occur every year, mainly in Ontario, but also throughout the country. Festivals provide many performance opportunities and their themes are extremely diverse. One of my favourite personal activities is yearly attendance at the Alliston Potato Festival which features a number of performances from street buskers to outdoor stages, to indoor venues.

Folk Music Ontario: I attended one, but only as a speaker. My impression of folk music festivals is that they provide a valuable service to folk musicians who love what they do but

have a difficult time doing it and making a living. Fees in the folk music world are generally very low.

Mundial Montreal: North America's World Music Showcase. Never been.

NXNE: See CMW above.

OAAS: I love this conference. It is a small conference, and the exhibit hall is held for one day only, but what a day! The exhibit hall is busy from morning to early evening and the attendees come to your booth and want to know what you can offer them. They have several showcases, especially children's artists and a lovely auction of items from around the province. The fees at most Ontario fairs are not large but the people are wonderfully friendly and merchandise sales help the artist.

PACT: Never been but would definitely go if I represented theatre. I know some of the people at PACT and they are well-respected and their conference is an important factor in Canadian theatre life.

So, there you have it. Don't take my word on any of these conferences. Go, explore, experience.

How to Prepare for a Conference

1. A conference should be part of your overall career plan and each conference you attend should be a part of this plan. When I wanted to expand my business from Canada into the United States, I started with a conference in the north eastern part of the United States – NEPAC (now defunct). It was the closest conference geographically to me and so it made sense economically. I exhibited there and had artists showcasing there and over the ensuing years I gradually expanded my reach into the United States until I was attending selected national, regional, state and specialized conferences which fit into my expansion plans and my artist roster.

2. Do some pre-conference research: go through each email you receive about the conference and any printed material the conference sends you. Know what the conference schedule is and make a tentative plan for your time at the conference. You may also have time to explore the city/area in which the conference takes place.
3. Find out who the main speakers are and get some information on them. Connecting with industry leaders is a good strategy.
4. Check the attendees list (if available) and determine with whom you'd like to connect. You can certainly send out emails (or postcards, etc.) but be aware that right before a conference attendees are inundated with materials and emails and most of them end up in the garbage or recycle bin. It is much better to build up a relationship over time and then the conference can be an opportunity to connect with someone with whom you already have a relationship.
5. Register early for the conference to take advantage of any discounts offered for early-bird registration. And reserve your flights in plenty of time if you're flying to a conference.
6. Plan on staying at the conference hotel. This will allow you to network most effectively. There is usually cheaper accommodation available but it is often at a distance and entails transportation costs and just getting back and forth will increase your level of fatigue.
7. Find out what the weather will be like at the conference location and bring suitable clothing with you. It's always a good idea to take along something dressy for a closing party or an off-site event.
8. Bring PLENTY of business cards.
9. You may want to bring headache or upset stomach medications, water, and workout clothes/running shoes for the Fitness Center. (Don't forget your phone charger).

10. Bring materials for taking notes and keeping track of the connections you make.
11. Bring information such as a brochure on your venue (presenters) or artist one-sheets, roster listings, press kits, etc. (agents, managers).

How to Work a Conference

The goals of attending a conference should be **learning** and **connecting**. There are a multitude of opportunities at every conference to learn: keynote speakers, panels, roundtable sessions, workshops, etc. Attend as many events as you can and increase your knowledge of the performing arts field. Conferences are all about networking as well. The connections you make at a conference can lead to more and better business opportunities and life-long friendships.

1. Plan on taking as active a part in the conference as possible. Be a volunteer. Be a mentor. At every conference I attended, I volunteered to assist with Professional Development sessions, helping to hand out materials and evaluation forms at the door. I got to meet a lot of people and became a fixture at each conference. I also enjoyed mentoring at conferences – helping newbies negotiate a conference and achieving their goals.
2. Have goals in mind for attending the conference. You have to choose your activities with these goals in mind. Are you hoping to acquire representation? (Identify those agents/managers with whom you would have a rapport and fit into their roster. But remember that they are unlikely to have time for you at the conference. Contact them later.) Get booked in certain geographical areas? (Identify venues from a certain part of the country. Investigate the possibility of block-booking with them.) At certain venues? (Find out all you can about the venue – background, history, age, mission, achievements, staff, etc. and demonstrate your interest and knowledge in discussions with the venues' representatives.) Increase your knowledge of a particular part of the industry? (Choose which professional development sessions will be of most use to you.) Plan accordingly.

3. Have real conversations with people. Don't just promote yourself or hand out materials or business cards without first of all making a real connection. Ask meaningful questions and listen to the answers. Maintain eye contact, relax, and let them do the talking. People remember people who are interested in them and what they do as opposed to people who only talk about themselves. Showing that you are interested in the other person is the start of a beautiful friendship.
4. Remember that opportunities to connect can take place at social events as well. Plan on attending as many of the conference's events as possible, including meals or other events which may require additional expense. Connecting with people will take place not only in the exhibit hall, but in the elevators, at showcases, in the bar, in the hotel lobby, on a bus, at a professional development session, during a social event, etc.
5. Keep track of the people with whom you connect. Try to exchange business cards and, at the first opportunity, record the gist of your conversations, or how you will follow up this connection.
6. Dress according to your style and the norms for the conference. Some people feel that business attire is de rigueur for agents or manager, while presenters may be dressed according to their normal mode of dress, be it casual or otherwise. Artists often dress "artistically." In any case, you should dress so as to make a good first impression.
7. Conferences days are extremely busy and usually packed from early morning to late at night. If you are staying at the conference hotel, you can retreat to your room periodically to refresh yourself. Be sure to bring a supply of breath mints, make-up items, etc. to keep you fresh throughout the day.
8. Have a prepared "elevator speech" ready. Everyone is rushed at a conference and will expect, in 25 words or less essentially, to find out who you are, what you do and why they should continue the conversation with

you. Listen carefully to how they respond, since it may provide you with an opening to carry on the conversation.

9. When you attend professional development sessions of any kind, take an active part. Ask questions and/or contribute to the session in a positive way.
10. Wear your name tag or ID badge properly, so that it can be seen at all times, especially when you are seated at a dining table. Wear it high and wear it proud!

Follow-up

1. Send an email to everyone with whom you connected at the conference. Remind them of your conversation and detail if you are sending them information or materials by mail or courier. If appropriate, share your knowledge and experience with them.
2. Use social media to connect with people and/or to report on your experiences at the conference (you could do this during the conference as well.) Name names and make positive comments.
3. Stay in touch by phone or email after the conference. It can sometimes take years before the right opportunity arises for you and your connection to make something happen. People change job positions frequently these days and that connection you made a while back may now be in a position to assist your career goals.

Final Thoughts

Once you've attended a conference, you will have a much better idea of its value for you. You may decide that a conference is not an annual event, but should be on your agenda every second or third year. You may find a conference with which you'd like to be more involved (Serve on its Board, contribute to a professional development session, etc.). Conferences should be an important part of your professional life. Go. Experience.

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Robert Baird, President of Baird Artists Management, is now available for consultation and advice regarding Canadian and U.S. regulations and information for performers, agents/managers and performing arts venues. Mr. Baird has been in the performing arts for over fifty years and has had distinguished careers in education, publishing and musical theatre. He served on the Board of Directors (2008-2010) and was President (2011-2013) of the North American Performing Arts Managers and Agents (NAPAMA). He was Treasurer and Vice-President of Festivals and Events Ontario (FEO) and served on that Board on various committees (2010-2013). Mr. Baird received the Arts Northwest Coyote Award and the Performing Arts Exchange Mary Beth Treen Award in 2012. He is Chair of Team Agent Network (TAN) and APAP Showcase Coordinator.

Robert is a regular columnist in *International Musician: The Official Journal of the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada* (Circulation 100,000+ Monthly) where he writes a monthly column entitled "Crossing Borders". The column focuses on what artists need to know to get into Canada or the United States. He also writes a monthly column entitled "Artist Manager's Toolkit" for *International Arts Manager*, based in London, England.

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