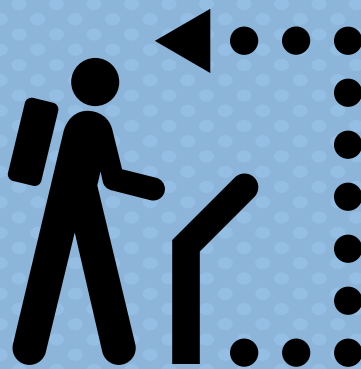


BAM! Complete Guide to Conferences - United States

by Robert Baird



#4

A guide to performing arts
conferences in the United States

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BAM! Complete Guide to Conferences – U.S.A.

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 the U.S.A.:

Conference	Website	Where	When
NATIONAL			
APAP	www.apap365.org	New York City	January
REGIONAL			
WAA	www.westarts.org	Various westerly cities	September
AMW	www.artsmidwest.org	Various mid-west cities	September
ANW	www.artnw.org	Various northwestern cities	October
STATE			
CA Presenters	www.calpresenters.org	Various CA cities	May
MAPAM	www.papresenters.org	Various PA cities	November (Biennial)*
MPAC	http://mtperformingarts.org	Various MT cities	January
NCPC ArtsMarket	www.ncpresenters.org	Durham NC	November (Biennial)*
OAPN	www.oapn.org	Various OH cities	October
PA Presenters	www.papresenters.org	Various PA cities	May/November
Wyoming Arts Alliance	www.wyomingarts.org	Various WY cities	October
SPECIALIZED			
ACDA	www.acda.org	Various cities	March (Check Regionals)
AEP	www.aepworldwide.org	Various cities	June
APCA	www.apca.com	Various cities	March (Check Regionals)
Billboard Latin American Music Conference	www.billboardevents.com/latin	Miami FL	April
Chamber Music America (CMA)	www.chamber-music.org	New York NY	January
CMJ	www.cmj.com	New York NY	October
ConsERT	www.consert.us	Various eastern cities	August
Dance USA	www.danceusa.org	Various cities	June
Florida Federation of Fairs	www.floridafairs.org	Various FL cities	May
Florida Festivals & Events (FFEA)	www.ffea.com	Various FL cities	August
Folk Alliance	www.folk.org	Various cities	February
IAFE	www.fairsandexpos.com	Las Vegas NV	November-December
IBMA	www.worldofbluegrass.org	Raleigh NC	September
IEBA	www.ieba.org	Nashville TN	October
IFEA	www.ifea.com	Various cities	September
IPAY	www.ipayweb.org	Various cities	January
LAMC	www.latinalternative.com	New York NY	July
LAO	www.americanorchestras.org	Various cities	June
NACA	www.naca.org	Various cities	February (Check Regionals)

NAfME	www.nafme.org	Various cities	October
OPERA America	www.operaamerica.org	Various cities	May
Pollstar Live!	www.pollstarpro.com/live2016	Various cities	February
RMAF	www.rmaf.net	Various MT cities	November
SXSW	www.sxsw.com	Austin TX	March
TCG	www.tcg.org	Various cities	June
WFA	www.westernfairs.org	Various cities	January
WMC	www.wintermusicconference.com	Miami FL	March

*Alternating year conferences

National Conferences

APAP (Association of Performing Arts Professionals) www.apap365.org

Held each January in New York City, the APAP conference is the world's largest networking forum and marketplace for performing arts professionals. More than 3,600 presenters, artists, managers, agents and emerging arts leaders from all 50 U.S. states and more than 30 countries convene in the city for five days of professional development, business deals and exciting performances.

APAP|NYC is the place to feel the pulse of the industry. Plenary speakers such as Stephen Schwartz, Rosanne Cash, Harry Belafonte and Ira Glass inspire attendees. Innovators from various fields share knowledge. Colleagues exchange practices and problem-solving techniques. The popular EXPO Hall is the one-stop networking hotspot with 370 exhibitors. More than 1,000 artist showcases make up a mini festival of the performing arts.

APAP|NYC is the heart of the performing arts industry.

APAP is the national service and membership organization for the performing arts presenting sector and the convener of the world's leading gathering of performing arts professionals each January in New York City. Through professional development programs and member services, APAP provides opportunities for artists, agents and managers, presenters, and producers to make the connections and gain the information, skills, and resources they need to make the arts a vibrant, valuable and sustainable part of everyday life. APAP supports and educates today's and tomorrow's performing arts leaders



Regional Conferences

WAA (Western Arts Alliance) www.westarts.org

Western Arts Alliance convenes presenters, artists, and agents around the shared goal of programming live performances. The conference features 175 exhibits, 150+ performances, networking, speakers, classes and workshops. WAA's Commons combines exhibit, meeting, and hospitality activities in one compact space.

For Presenters: From established artists to emerging talent, access artists in every discipline to fit your programming needs and budget. Expand your artistic programming expertise and technical knowledge through our Professional Development courses, in-conference workshops, roundtables, and conversations with peers. Between WAA's Independent and Juried Showcase programs, WAA offers more than 170 performances from a range of disciplines and esthetics.

For Artists, Agents and Managers: Share your or your artists' work with more than 200 presenting organizations based in the West. Introduce a project to a room full of Presenters during our fast-moving Speed Leads, or enjoy great social and professional networking over local cuisine on a Dine-Around. Broaden your range of practical skills to help plan and achieve effective tours during our Professional Development Institute. Performing artists will find opportunities for stimulating discussions about art and ideas with other artists, agents, and presenters.





AMW (Arts Midwest/MAC: Midwest Arts Conference) www.artsmidwest.org

A program of Arts Midwest, the **Arts Midwest Conference** is the preeminent booking and educational conference for the Midwest performing arts industry. Attended by nearly 1,000 performing artists, managers, and agents; performing arts presenters/venues; and arts administrators from throughout the United States and beyond, the four-day conference is filled with opportunities to network, learn, and experience live performing arts.

- Access some of the best performing artists in the nation in our high-energy **Marketplace**, where the business of booking happens. Much of what Midwest audiences will see on stages in the performing arts season will be discussed in the Marketplace.
- See and be seen at a wide variety of **live performances** — promote your or your artists' work and make new connections that are perfect for your audience or community.
- Discover innovative ideas, leadership development, and skill-building opportunities at our **professional development** sessions. We offer something for all attendees, whether you're interested in the details of the industry or in big-picture questions about our evolving performing arts field.



The Conference serves the **15 states** represented by **Arts Midwest** and our sister regional arts organization **Mid-America Arts Alliance**. (Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin)



ANW (Arts Northwest) www.artsnw.org

The largest gathering of artists, their management, and presenters of the performing arts in the northwest. Four highly productive and professional days include dynamic performance showcases, Keynote Speaker, in-depth professional development, workshops, block-booking sessions, a packed exhibit hall, sales spotlights and social networking opportunities! Presenters of the performing arts will discover untapped resources, ideas and inspiration. Performers/artist's management have a medium that allows them access to the presentation organizations and individuals throughout the northwest and helps get them in front of the audience most capable of booking them into the western U.S. market!

The NW Booking Conference is an opportunity to renew, refresh and remember why it is what you do with commitment AND passion.

State Conferences

CAPresenters (California Presenters) www.calpresenters.org

California Presenters is a presenters-only organization. Their annual conference includes a Keynote Speaker, Artist Information Exchange panelists for World Music, Family Programming, Country/Roots, Classical, Comedy/Theater, Jazz & Blues, Dance, and Pop/Indie Pop/Indie, as well as Special and Breakout sessions.

MAPAM (Mid-Atlantic Performing Arts Market) www.papresenters.org

PA Presenters has inaugurated a new conference. It will feature **showcases**, a **conversational meeting space** for artists and agents to **conduct business** with presenters, as well as **networking sessions**, **dine-arounds** and more. The event is held on a biennial basis alternating with the NC ArtsMarket.

MPAC (Montana Performing Arts Consortium) <http://mtperformingarts.org>

The annual conference features a Keynote Speaker, silent auction, resource room and artist showcases.

NCPC (North Carolina Presenters Consortium) ArtsMarket www.ncpresenters.org

ArtsMarket provides three days full of opportunities to see world-class performances in the historic [Carolina Theatre](#), to network with colleagues from North Carolina and the surrounding region, and to sit back and enjoy some Southern hospitality. Conference activities take place in downtown Durham, where theatre, exhibit hall, and hotel are all in one connected footprint. Durham welcomes hundreds of presenter, artist, agent, vendor, and service provider delegates over the

course of the conference. We offer up to 40 juried showcase performances, and 140 exhibit booths at the [Durham Convention Center](#). We do not offer independent showcases, and all conference activities are scheduled to not conflict with one another, so delegates can attend all showcases.

We want all aspects of the conference to inspire conversation among delegates. To discourage a “buyer vs. seller” attitude, we print our nametags in one color. We do not schedule concurrent activities, and we travel all together from one conference function to the next. We believe that presenting as a field benefits greatly from diversity—among artists and among presenters. We can learn an incredible amount from each other even if our venues are different sizes and our artistic mission is served by a different genre. We want ArtsMarket to promote interaction between a wide scope of organizations and individuals.

OAPN (Ohio Arts Professionals Network) www.oapn.org

The OAPN conference serves as a productive, affordable marketplace for arts and entertainment booking, as well as a valuable forum for networking and professional development. If you or your organization book performing artists, schedules entertainment, offers performances, represents performing artists, or provides support services to the performing arts field, ours is THE conference to attend. We provide a friendly, intimate setting to meet and develop business relationships with performing arts colleagues from Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and beyond!

The Annual Showcase Conference is a three day event that has 40 juried showcases, exhibit halls, professional development workshops, sponsored showcases, and lots of networking opportunities. Conference attendees include Arts and Entertainment presenters (coordinators for venues), performing artists, agents, service organizations and consultants who reside in and outside of Ohio and all across the US and Canada.

PA Presenters (Pennsylvania Presenters) www.papresenters.org

The PA Presenters Spring Art Conference is a retreat-focused getaway centering on stellar professional development and interactive networking with dozens of fellow presenters, artists, agents, and managers from Pennsylvania and surrounding states and two days of enriching networking and some great professional development.

The Pitch Party held in November focuses on specific artists and projects that have been submitted by agents, managers, and artists for review and selected by presenter members.

Wyoming Arts Alliance www.wyomingarts.org

You don't need to be an artist or a presenter to have a place at this conference – If you are interested in preserving and promoting the Arts in Wyoming and the surrounding areas; this is where you will want to start!

The conference includes a networking reception, workshop tracks, showcasing, exhibit hall time, and a members meeting. Presenters can participate in a block booking meeting as well.

Specialized Conferences

ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) www.acda.org

ACDA offers conferences at the state, division, and national levels. [National conferences](#) are offered in March of odd-numbered years; the seven division conferences take place in February and March of even-numbered years. Through concert performances by accomplished choirs, educational clinics by leading experts, and exhibits by music-industry representatives, ACDA offers its members a diverse and practical forum in which to develop their skills and professional knowledge.

AEP (Association of Entertainment Professionals) www.aepworldwide.org

"I had a blast at your conference and actually thought it was the best one I have ever attended; i.e. APAP, NW Arts, SE Arts, etc. What a friendly and open armed crowd." -Edwin Rojas President at Rojas Talent Group, Inc.

The Association of Entertainment Professionals (AEP) Worldwide is a professional organization for buyers and sellers from all segments of the entertainment industry. Now under one banner, AEP affords you, the talent buyer, a unique opportunity to experience and connect with a wide array of talent that has historically been limited to certain segments of the market. It also provides an efficient gathering place for buyers, agents and information as advances in technology and communication continues to reshape the business at a dizzying pace. So if you are involved in entertainment for the corporate, association, performing arts, casinos, special events, charities, fairs, festivals, parks, campus or military markets, then you could benefit from the connectivity that AEP offers.

APCA (Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities) www.apca.com

APCA is a for-profit national campus events association that will allow you access to all the tools you need to start working in the college events market. APCA holds five regional conferences throughout the year, and an annual conference as well, where showcasing & exhibiting opportunities are available that allow you to market to buyers live and in-person. Buyers have the opportunity to watch live performances and connect with performers, agents and vendors at APCA exhibit halls and all throughout the event. APCA also distributes your information to every campus talent buyer in our association through the online Buyers Guide and Directory and online tour schedule resources. APCA currently has over 350 school members nationwide. Over 400 schools and 2000+ students and advisors attend our conferences and institutes providing their boards with quality, affordable campus entertainment.

Billboard Latin American Music Conference www.billboardevents.com/latin

One-on-one Sessions, Latin music awards, Keynote Speaker, artist showcases, panels, roundtables and exhibits, all focused on Latin Music.

CMA (Chamber Music America) www.chamber-music.org

CMA defines chamber music as music composed for small ensembles, with one musician per part, generally performed without a conductor. The term once referred only to Western classical music for small ensembles, such as string quartets. But today chamber music encompasses myriad forms, including contemporary and traditional jazz, classical, and world genres. Chamber Music America is the national service organization for ensemble music professionals. Our members are thousands of individual musicians, ensembles, presenters, artist managers, composers, educators and others in the national chamber music community. CMA serves the national ensemble music community in many ways, and, through its National Conference, provides opportunities to connect with musicians, presenters, managers and other chamber music professionals across the country.

CMJ (College Media Journal) www.cmj.com

CMJ Music Marathon, is one of the world's most important platforms for the discovery of new music. Throughout one vital week every October, CMJ features live performances in New York City's storied venues as well as exclusive parties and cutting edge conference events. Artist showcases, guest speakers, presentations, networking session, workshops, breakout sessions, a number of panels and speakers relevant to college radio, international programming, and the latest in experiential music and technology.

ConsERT (Consortium of Eastern Regional Theatres) www.consert.us

The **Consortium of Eastern Regional Theatres, Inc. (ConsERT)** is a non-profit collective of performing arts centers and presenters, historic theatres, agents, concert promoters and industry vendors. **ConsERT** meets regularly to compare notes, discuss industry trends, develop solutions to common problems, and create programming opportunities. The annual Retreat features workshops, seminars and networking opportunities.

Dance USA www.danceusa.org

From executive directors and emerging arts leaders to managers and presenters, agents and artists, join nearly 500 individuals associated with the professional dance field for networking, creative conversation, enriching training sessions, discussion on important issues facing the field, and performances. Programming at the Conference is a mix of discussion-based sessions and practical breakout sessions. Learn from industry experts and be inspired to advance dance together in business and on stage at this exciting national convening! The Annual Conference gathers the field's experts to offer *you* relevant knowledge, wisdom, and expertise. Mix and mingle with the movers and shakers of the national dance community to swap stories, learn best practices, fuel partnerships, and share drinks with emerging artists, colleagues, and role models. Be inspired to create a rich, vibrant future for dance!

Florida Federation of Fairs www.floridafairs.org

Over 500 "Fair Folks" attend this annual conference with 35 Fairs represented from Florida, over 320 Fair members and 170 Associate members in attendance, and more than 80 exhibit booths. Activities include a pre-convention Golf Tournament, Keynote Speaker, President's Party, Welcome Reception, Artist Showcases, Silent Auction, Educational Sessions, workshops, presentations, and roundtable discussions.

Florida Festivals and Events (FFEA) www.ffea.com

Three days of education, networking, inspiration and innovation! Over 50 Educational Seminars, Roundtable Discussions and Idea Labs; Tradeshow with 60 Vendors Offering the Best Products and Services Available to the Event Industry; Awards Program Recognizing the Creativity, Innovation and Excellence of FFEA Members; Live Entertainment Showcases featuring a variety of talent for every budget; Networking opportunities.

Folk Alliance www.folk.org

The Folk Alliance International Conference is the world's largest gathering of the Folk music industry and community (crossing a diverse array of genres including Blues, Bluegrass, Roots, Celtic, Cajun, Appalachian, Traditional, World, and Singer-Songwriter). The annual February conference draws over 2,000 artists and industry (agents, managers, publishers, labels, festival/venue presenters, promoters, media) dedicated to folk music. Delegates who attended the conference represent over 20 countries including the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, Scandinavia, Continental Europe, Mexico, and Japan.

IAFE (International Association of Fairs and Expositions) www.fairsandexpos.com

The Annual Convention and Trade Show, held in Las Vegas, is the largest event serving fairs, shows, exhibitions, and expositions. Convention attendees network and learn from each other and top professionals during the intensive four days of workshops, special seminars, round table discussions, and social events. The Trade Show allows companies to showcase themselves while serving as a one-stop shop for all your event's booking, product, and service needs.

IBMA (International Bluegrass Music Association) www.ibma.org

IBMA's World of Bluegrass, is a five-day annual bluegrass music homecoming that encompasses four events: the IBMA Business Conference; the Bluegrass Ramble, an innovative series of showcases; the Annual International Bluegrass Music Awards; and Wide Open Bluegrass, a two-day festival.

IEBA (International Entertainment Buyers Association) www.ieba.org

IEBA and its Annual Conference stand alone in the entertainment industry by showcasing a diverse and uniquely-crafted lineup of live entertainment and by providing top-tier informative sessions with the entertainment business's leading decision makers. Beyond the showcases and agency-sponsored parties, attendees

have the opportunity to sit down with IEBA's distinguished Board of Directors and other industry experts to discuss the latest trends and hot topics in live entertainment. IEBA's Agents Alley gives entertainment buyers and sellers time together to discuss the specifics of the upcoming touring season. "The Buying Starts Here" slogan originated from this longstanding IEBA tradition.

IFEA (International Festivals and Events Association) www.ifea.com

The IFEA Annual Convention is the top networking event in the field. Here, professionals gather together to share ideas, experiences and opportunities that shape the successes of our common industry and individual events. In the hallways, sessions, and events of the convention you will meet many individuals with a multitude of experiences, challenges, points of view, approaches, leadership styles, and networking connections. Nowhere else will you find so many ideas, so much creativity, and such easy access to the most successful events and event professionals in the world. During the convention you will experience nearly 100 educational sessions by the top experts and success stories in the business.

IPAY (International Performing Arts for Youth) www.ipayweb.org

The annual IPAY Showcase is for **presenters** to see juried Showcase performances by outstanding international performing artists. A wide variety of performances are selected to highlight the many possibilities for young audiences. Showcase is for **artists** to perform, exhibit, and develop their work for an audience of presenters who book shows specifically for young people and their families. Showcase is for **agents and managers** who represent companies and artists that perform work for young people. Each day, Showcase features a dedicated resource room time that serves as a marketplace to discuss and book the work. Showcase is for **students** to network with the premier professionals in the performing arts for youth field and to learn about important issues and initiatives in our professional development learning communities.

LAMC (Latin Alternative Music Conference) www.latinalternative.com

Showcases, panels, exhibits and concerts featuring alternative Latin Music.

LAO (League of American Orchestras) www.americanorchestras.org

Close to 1,000 orchestra professionals, volunteers and business partners gather annually for the League's National Conference, featuring an Exhibit Hall, Reception, Open orchestra rehearsal, orchestral concert, workshops, panels, and presentations.

NACA (National Association for Campus Activities) www.naca.org

The National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) is the recognized leader in higher education providing knowledge, ideas and resources for campus life. Their school and associate members also have access to one of the largest campus activities networking and talent buying resources in the country. The four-day annual conference features over 140 exhibitors, block-booking sessions, Keynote Speakers, artist showcases and professional education sessions, mainly geared to college and university students.

NAfME (National Association for Music Education) www.nafme.org

More than 300 innovative professional development sessions, nightly entertainment, extraordinary performances from across the country, and tons of networking and in-depth learning.

OPERA America www.operaamerica.org

The opera conference attracts more than 500 attendees, including opera company general directors, staff members, trustees and volunteers, as well as artists and other industry professionals. Each year, **OPERA America** partners with a host opera company in a different city to offer nearly 100 events over five days. The conference

offers inspiring general plenary sessions, informative breakout sessions, exciting performances and abundant networking opportunities

Pollstar Live! www.pollstarpro.com/live2016

Pollstar Live! 2016 provides an "arena" for industry veterans and newcomers alike to share information and ideas, solve problems and brainstorm new ways to keep the live experience fresh as well as profitable. A number of organizations and companies schedule their own private meetings during the course of Pollstar Live!, and many others participate in the best trade show in the business. There's plenty of room for social time and celebrating built into the three-day schedule, but we're here for business and networking. Whether from ideas presented at the many panels, face time with old friends or introductions to new ones, things get done at Pollstar Live!

RMAF (Rocky Mountain Association of Fairs) www.rmaf.net

This four-day event is filled with educational workshops, networking opportunities with industry professionals, entertainment showcasing and a preview of products and services need for the coming fair season.

SXSW (South by Southwest) www.sxsw.com

The **South by Southwest Music and Media Conference (SXSW)** is a six-day event held every March in Austin, celebrating 30 years in 2016. The conference offers unmatched access to ideas and global viewpoints on an increasingly borderless industry. It aims to educate and inspire musicians and professionals alike, with sessions attended by over 30,000 registrants and showcasing artists. A large multi-industry trade show exhibition, Music Gear Expo and daytime stage performances round out the day while evenings are devoted to the SXSW Music Festival, which showcases over 2,200 acts ranging from the unsigned to the iconic.

TCG (Theatre Communications Group) www.tcg.org

The TCG National Conference is the only nationwide gathering of the not-for-profit professional theatre community. Previous conference themes have included Building Future Audience; Artistry in a New Century; Theatre at the Center; ROOTS, RENAISSANCE, REVOLUTION; Ideas Into Action; TCG at 50: What if...?; Model the Movement; Learn Do Teach; Crossing Borders; and Game Change.

WFA (Western Fairs Association) www.westernfairs.org

Workshops, Presentations, Panels, Trade Show, Artist Showcases, Welcome Reception, Keynote Speakers, Award Presentations, and networking opportunities.

WMC (Winter Music Conference) www.wintermusicconference.com

Winter Music Conference, in its 30th consecutive year, is a pivotal platform for the advancement of the industry. During WMC, music enthusiasts, artists, DJs and industry delegates from over 70 countries converge on Miami Beach for a concentrated schedule of more than 400 events, parties, seminars and workshops. Established in 1985, WMC is the largest longstanding EDM and dance music industry gathering of its kind in the world. Over 1,900 artists and DJs participated in 390+ performance events presented at 110 venues during the 29th Annual WMC Week in Miami Beach & Miami.

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 Conference

APAP: The biggest and the best. This annual conference in the Big Apple is overwhelming but it is the culmination of the booking circuit, beginning with the regional conferences in the fall. It is a swirl of activity in one of the most exciting cities in the world and is an eye-opening experience for anyone in the performing arts. Absolutely first-rate Keynote Speakers, conference tracks for various segments of the membership and thousands of showcases. Don't miss this one!

Regional Conferences

WAA: I'm an easterner and this conference has a west coast feel to it. It has been at the vanguard of change in the format and style of performing arts conferences for a number of years and will continue to evolve, I'm sure. To me, it's a strange and exotic experience but I highly recommend it.

AMW: This is the solid core of the regional arts conferences. The conference itself reflects the American Midwest character and values: solid, down-to-earth people who work hard with a no-nonsense attitude. I am convinced that the continuing success of the Arts Midwest

conference is that the staff in charge is all women and they run an amazing event. If you can only go to one regional, this is the one to attend.

ANW: The smallest regional conference but a great little conference. Earnest attendees assure that showcases are well-attended and the exhibit hall is always a busy place. The conference is held in rotation in Boise ID, Tacoma WA and Eugene OR and each of these cities has a lot to offer as well.

Specialized Conferences

ACDA: For those interested in the many aspects of choral music.

AEP: If you want to explore a myriad of performance possibilities outside the PAC (Performing Arts Centre) market, this is one to explore.

APCA: Along with NACA, APCA is directed at the college and university market. If you are in this market, or have artists who would be suitable for it, then this organization and its regional (and National) conferences are ones to focus on and showcase at.

Billboard Latin American Music Conference: Self-explanatory.

CMA: Once known solely as an organization for classical chamber groups, in recent years, Chamber Music America has expanded its mandate to include jazz and other forms of chamber music. A great conference for smaller ensembles.

CMJ: New music, young music, college radio. I'm too old for this one. ☺

ConsERT: This organization with its Annual Retreat is a wonderful way to connect with eastern regional theatres. A friendly group and small enough that you get to know everyone.

Dance USA: This is THE organization for anyone involved in dance.

Florida Fairs: The fair market offers many opportunities for artist performances and merchandise sales and Florida has a number of great fairs, including the Florida State Fair.

FFEA: *A small conference but a good connection with Florida festivals. Festival conferences are always fun with a “festive” air permeating the event.*

Folk Alliance: *For those interested in folk music of all kinds.*

IAFE: *Big conference for fairs.*

IEBA: *Nashville-based organization which features some of the biggest acts and agents in the business. Go and rub shoulders with the big boys (and women) in the entertainment industry.*

IFEA: *This is the major festival conference and you can connect with some of the world’s largest festivals through this organization.*

IPAY: *IPAY focuses on theatre for young people and brings in international artists to showcase at its annual event. It provides an opportunity to see complete performances and to become acquainted with the artistic vision of artists and performers in other countries. A valuable source for international programming.*

Latin Alternative Music Conference: *Need I say more?*

LAO: *The former acronym for this organization was ASOL (now, come on, who agreed to that?). This organization is THE one for symphony orchestras and their annual conference offers a lot of professional development. They have exhibits as well, but when I attended, the exhibits were not the focus and in this world, it is difficult to connect with the right person for getting artists booked for performance. One impediment to connecting to orchestras is the fact that email addresses of members are unavailable through the LAO. That is, of course, their prerogative: it just makes the job of connecting to orchestras more difficult. But attending the LAO conference is one way of making those connections. Be sure to get to know Stephen Alter, the face of the LAO in the Performing Arts Market: he’s a great guy and can assist anyone interested in the orchestral world.*

NACA: *A must-attend if you are in the college/university market or represent artists who would be suitable for this market. A fun-filled, educational time with a lot of young people.*

NAfME: *Once MENC (Music Educators' National Conference), this organization focuses on music education, and music in the schools can be an important performance area for many artists.*

OPERA America: *The world of opera is wacky and wonderful and if you are in it, you know about this organization.*

Pollstar Live!: *An entertainment industry conference for those of us who rely on Pollstar directories and statistics to inform us.*

RMAF: *A small but vital western fair conference.*

SXSW: *Bands, Bands, Bands and so much more. A major event for the young or the young at heart.*

TCG: *For theatre people.*

WFA: *Western fairs provides access to the fair market in the western part of the country.*

WMC: *Contemporary culture.*

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

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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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