



*... dedicated to the
promotion, composition,
performance, understanding
and dissemination of
new and contemporary
music ...*

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C'mon—Host a Conference!

By Mike McFerron

For the past 13 years, I have hosted Electronic Music Midwest (EMM), a festival of electroacoustic music held at Lewis University and Kansas City Kansas Community College. Like many of you, I've also attended many conferences hosted by SCI and other organizations. Because of these experiences, I am convinced that every composer should host a new music conference, at least once, for several reasons.

First, it's a great way to promote something we're passionate about and provide audience members a chance to interact with living composers who are contributing to our musical heritage today. Recently, I attended a concert where I overheard a patron commenting that he didn't like Barber's *Knoxville Summer of 1915* because he didn't like new music ("I know what I like in music" = "I like what I know"). So maybe there isn't any hope for that guy. Granted, for many audience members like him, "new music" is music written by Ives, Stravinsky, or Schoenberg, but I believe we have a responsibility to promote music that is being written today—to recruit listeners and engage in our music communities. Hosting a conference is one way of contributing to our musical circles in a meaningful way. Simply, it's a way to promote the

diversity of new music and what we do.

Second, hosting a conference is a great way to build relationships with colleagues. Certainly you can network with other composers and performers by attending festivals and conferences, and doing so has immense value. Hosting a conference, however, is different. As host you build a different kind of relationship with composers and performers. For instance even if you have an external adjudication panel for submissions, you spend more time with the programmed music than if you were an attendee. By contrast, when you're a guest at a conference you generally hear a work only once. As a conference host, you also get to know more about the composers through collecting, editing, and formatting biographical sketches and program notes. Of course the second time you host a conference, you will hopefully have learned that the music secretary can do these tasks much more efficiently and accurately than you can. Regardless, a good conference host communicates often and directly with the guest composers and performers regarding everything from scheduling sound checks and rehearsals to suggesting where to eat.

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About the Newsletter

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How to Submit Items to the Newsletter

Articles: The Newsletter welcomes submissions of articles to run in future issues. Articles, if accepted, may be edited for length and content. Please include a photo with all submissions if possible (photo may be of author).

Member News + Photos: Please send all member news and activities with a photo. Submitted items may be edited.

Ideas/Suggestions: The Editors welcome any other ideas or suggestions.

Submit to the newsletter via email at: newsletter@societyofcomposers.org



Upcoming SCI Events

**2013 Region V Conference
April 11–13, 2013**

Clarke University, Dubuque, IA
Host: Amy Dunker
amy.dunker@clarke.edu

**2013 Region I Conference
August 15–17, 2013**

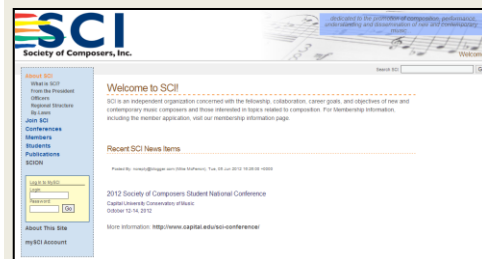
Portsmouth, NH
Hosted by PARMA Recordings as part of the PARMA Music Festival

**2013 Region IV Conference
October 17–19, 2013**

Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, KY
Host: Thomas Couvillon
Thomas.Couvillon@eku.edu

**2014 Region VIII Conference
March 7–8, 2014**

University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA



Internet & Email

www.societyofcomposers.org

- Conference dates and submission guidelines
- Contact information and links to member web-pages
- Student chapters and opportunities
- CDs and journals produced by SCI
- Details on SCI such as membership, contacts for officers, regional structure, by-laws, newsletter archives and more...

SCION

SCION is a listing of opportunities on our website exclusively for members. It is updated on a continual basis so that it may be checked at any time for the most current notices. In addition, members are emailed on the first Monday of each month to remind them to visit the site for new or recent postings. The large number of listings is easily managed by a table of contents with links to the individual notices. In-depth coverage; contest listings in full; all items listed until expiration; this is a valuable resource that you may print in its entirety or in part at any time.

John Bilotta, SCION Editor
scion@societyofcomposers.org

scimembers

scimembers is a member-driven e-mail mailing list that is intended to facilitate communication between members of the Society on topics of concern to composers of contemporary concert music. It conveys whatever notices or messages are sent by its members, including announcements of performances and professional opportunities, as well as discussions on a wide variety of topics. For more information, including how to join and participate in the listserv:

<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/listserv.html>

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University of Montana

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Membership Information

For complete details, please visit
<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/join/membership.html>.

Full Membership (\$55/year): Eligible to submit scores to the National Conferences, regional conferences, SCI Recording Series, SCI Journal of Music Scores. Access to the SCI Newsletter in electronic form. Optional subscription to [scimembers], the SCI listserv and all other SCI publications. Eligible to vote on Society Matters and in elections for the National Council.

Joint Membership (\$75/year): Same benefits as full members

Senior Membership (\$27.50/year): Open to those 65 years of age or older, or retired. Same benefits as full members.

Associate Membership (\$27.50/year): Open to performers and other interested professionals. Receives the SCI Newsletter in electronic form and can participate in national and regional conferences.

Student Membership (\$27.50/year): Eligible to submit to national and regional conferences and to vote in society matters. Access to all SCI publications.

Student Chapter Membership (\$17.50/year): Same benefits as student members, but only available on campuses having Student Chapters.

Institutional Membership (\$25/year): Organizations receive hard copy of the SCI Newsletter and other mailings.

Lifetime Membership (\$1100 or \$120/year for 10 years): Benefits the same as full members, for life.

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C'mon-Host a Conference!

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Hosting a conference is a lot of work, and it can seem intimidating to anyone who has never done it. The most difficult areas to navigate many of the same we deal with every day in other aspects of our lives: Funding, space resources, funding, marketing, funding, performing forces, and... funding. Although many of these obstacles may seem unresolvable, with a little work they can often be overcome causing only a few minor headaches along the way.

Most other decisions, however, can be made using common sense and drawing upon your own experiences. Below are a few nuts and bolts tips based upon my own experiences that I think contribute to a successful conference.

Keep concerts short. Just as a new teacher might overprepare for a class by trying to cover too much material, newer conference hosts may program too much music. Remember, 60 minutes of music does not equal a 60-minute concert. At EMM, we hardly ever have an intermission and rarely program over 50 minutes of music. Some may not agree with this amount of music and you should try to find the amount that seems right to you, but I have been disappointed by conferences that have long concerts and few breaks. I feel as though I have missed a lot of really good music during these "Marathon" sessions due to ear fatigue.

Don't over program or over invite. You will receive a lot of submissions and the overwhelming majority of that those submissions will consist of outstanding, highly crafted music that deserves to be heard—much of it written by people you know and respect. The hardest part of the submission process is rejecting pieces for programming. Unfortunately, it has to be done. Keep in mind that it's not personal; it's simply practical. To effectively program a conference, the host has to organize a number of puzzle pieces, and unfortunately, not every piece will fit.

Also related to shorter concerts, **make sure your conference schedule allows for social time.** Obviously everyone attends a conference to hear new music, but one qualitative value of a conference occurs after the concert at a reception or at a bar. As an aside, administrators at many institutions like to host (i.e., pay for) receptions. An administrator may not

want to (or be able to) fund a guest performer, but they may be able to cover the expenses of some hospitality services. Every place is a little different, but approaching your administration may be a good way to address some of the funding hurdles associated with hosting a conference.

Do not charge composers a fee to submit their work for consideration. I understand some competitions and ensembles have reasons for a submission fee and the discussion of those policies is beyond the scope of this article. Just know that conferences traditionally do not charge a submission fee to enter a work for consideration. Instead, conferences often charge a registration fee to invited guests. These registration fees help defray the cost of the concert. EMM, for example, requires a \$60 registration fee for each programmed work (i.e., performers don't pay and collaboration works only require one registration fee). In the case of EMM, it could not exist without a registration fee. In support of EMM's mission, the registration fee allows us to present concerts that are free and open to the public.

On a related topic, **don't pay judges.** A number of your colleagues are willing and able to adjudicate for you. Often times, conference hosts will ask their performance colleagues to adjudicate (i.e., pick the pieces they are willing to play). This obviously has strengths and weaknesses depending on the situation. Regardless, there is never a reason to pay adjudicators. Your limited funds will be better spent elsewhere.

Avoid programming "aesthetic" concerts. Although it might seem like a good idea at first, an entire concert of one compositional or aesthetic direction generally doesn't work so well in the conference setting. Within the context of a conference, I find programs that are diverse more engaging. Of course, sometimes it is unavoidable—the "electroacoustic concert" is a common occurrence due to space and/or equipment restrictions.

Appreciate your guests. The composers and performers coming to your conference are sacrificing time and spending a lot of money to do so. When hosting a conference, the devil is in the details. Good hospitality can be demonstrated in many small ways from making sure the performer's bio is

printed in the program (too often overlooked) to sending a short thank you email once the conference is over.

Be careful when including a “featured composer.” This is a common element at many conferences, and many times it works out very well; however, I don’t have to tell you that some composers have a pretty large ego (not me, of course). A featured composer at a conference can create a sense of “big me—little you.” Even unintended, there is potential to generate bad vibes. At EMM, we used to have a featured composer, and the composers we had were outstanding composers whom we were thrilled to feature. We realized, however, that *all* of the composers attending the festival were qualified to be our “featured composer.” Since then, we have opted to have a different featured performer each year that composers can submit their work to for consideration. This has worked very well for us.

Reserve rehearsal spaces and practice rooms. This seems obvious, but it is often one of the things forgotten or left to the last moment. Visiting performers will need a place to

warm up, and often times, a space to practice the composition they are programmed to perform.

Hosting a conference can be an immensely rewarding experience. The first conference will be a ton of work and you will be completely exhausted (and thankful) when it’s over. Know, however, that the second one will be much easier and the third much easier than that. Hosting an SCI conference is even easier because we have resources to help shepherd you through the process. So c’mon y’all, host a conference!

Mike McFerron is Professor of Music and Composer-in-Residence at Lewis University. Dr. McFerron is host and founder of Electronic Music Midwest and serves SCI as Chair of the Executive Committee.

For more information about EMM, visit emmfestival.org.

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