

Angela Answers

Dear Angela: I've been hustling like crazy for bookings, but my group has exactly the same number of concerts lined up for this season as we had for the last. I'm discouraged. We don't seem to be getting anywhere. What should we do?

BY Angela Myles Beeching

Angela Myles Beeching is a career consultant and the author of Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music. Angela works with individuals, ensembles, and organizations to facilitate positive change. Learn more at angelabeeching.com.



Here's my two-part response: the philosophical first, the practical second.

Many musicians feel as though they're working at 120% trying get to the next rung of a career ladder. We all want to feel that we're getting ahead—but where?

We want to be playing more concerts, releasing more albums, getting more reviews, likes, awards, and money. But it can still leave us wondering “Are we there yet?”

Some of the angst stems from comparing ourselves to others. We look at social media and compare others' “outsides” (their shiny promotional updates) with how we feel inside. And then we “should” ourselves, as in “we *should* be playing at those venues or getting those kinds of reviews.”

Unplug from social media and take a beat to reflect on the following, as individuals and then as a group:

Consider...

- What success actually means to you.
- What constitutes a “good” season.
- Which creative risks you took last season.
- What scary project you want to tackle next. (The projects we fear help us grow.)
- Which kinds of performance settings, programming, and audience interaction are most rewarding.

Ideally, we find a combination of creative challenge, audience engagement, artistic growth—and financial compensation. But the right balance of these is different for each of us.

And now for the practical...

The sweet spot of opportunity is where what we're good at, and what we want to do, converges with the needs of others. Clarify the needs that your offer addresses so you can better target your booking efforts.

Let's say your ensemble especially loves doing multi-faceted residencies at colleges.

Imagine you have an audience engagement program of works by Beethoven and Boulez that explores issues of autobiography, culture, and the compositional process. Your idea is to offer this in partnership with faculty in comparative literature and history departments.

What needs does this program fill? The need colleges and faculty have to engage students in multi-disciplinary content. The program is designed to spark discussion and debate among students and faculty. It aims to deepen the collaborative learning in liberal arts programs and enhance the community's involvement in the arts. This specificity, conveyed in your promo material, can help you sell the program.

Take action

1. Pitch non-generic clinics, master classes, and workshops to book fill-in dates.
2. Design distinctive workshops and hybrid concerts. How about a program that pairs architecture with Debussy? Invite a local architect to help lead the discussion. Offer this as part of the local architectural society's seasonal events. This could help build your audience base and attract new donors.
3. Identify needs within your community that you can fill creatively: relevant programming for regional museums, historical homes, or community centers.
4. Create a series of house concerts. Reach out to your supporters and fans: cultivate your tribe.
5. Ask for objective expert feedback on your pitches. Details count.

Summary

Clarify what you really want and use these practical suggestions to take action and achieve your desired goals.