

PROGRAM PUBLICITY

By David Vogels, CAGO

One way to make your local community aware of the work and purposes of the Guild is by publicizing chapter events that are open to the public. Even if they cannot attend, those reading the publicity will know that there is an active AGO chapter in the community, which draws attention to our profession and can attract new members.

Clear and concise publicity will add immeasurably to the success of your programs. Concerts and other events can serve as fund raisers for the chapter. The success of these activities depends on effective communication with your potential audience.

CHAPTER MEDIA BOOK

One efficient way to keep track of the publications, radio stations, and television stations in your area is to assemble a chapter media book. Your media book should include contact information for each publication or station, their deadlines, how large their audience and where located, frequency of publication, etc.

The following are some guidelines for conducting publicity and media relations and for developing your own Chapter Media Book:

1. It is most effective to have one or two members who have the time and skills to take responsibility for the chapter's public relations effort; they will provide valuable continuity in contacts with the press.
2. Keep an up-to-date, effective press list, including the following:
 - * radio and TV stations in the area
 - * local newspapers and magazines
 - * local arts calendars
 - * local Chamber of Commerce events listings
 - * publications with a special link to the program or performer (faculty member of a local college, for example)
 - * national professional journals
 - * other regional and national publications
 - * church bulletins, newsletters, and area church periodicals
 - * web sites

Each listing should include the name of a specific contact person. At larger newspapers and magazines, there may be several contacts - Arts, Religion, Community Organization News, Calendar section, etc. A copy of your release should be sent to each one of these people, as appropriate.

3. Contact the individuals on the list to determine their deadlines, the types of information they will be able to use, and the format they prefer for submission of news items. Much frustration about not being included in the listings of events comes from submitting information too late to make the deadline.

4. Inform the media contacts by means of a brief, clear, and factual press release about all activities and meetings of the chapter and about other events in the organ and choral field. Obviously, not all activities will merit the same coverage. A routine meeting may be listed in an activities or organizations column. The chapter's recital series or a visiting artist or speaker might merit a feature story. Other features can be developed to highlight major activities such as membership drives, choral festivals, etc. Remember that any story must be made interesting to a **general** audience.
5. Having sent out your press releases and any other pertinent materials (see numbers 6 and 7 below), allow two or three days for postal delivery and **call each of the media contacts to see if they are interested in using your material**. This contact can swing an editor's attention toward your chapter's activities and helps to foster a good working relationship between the AGO and the local media. **Persuasive use of the telephone is an invaluable tool in successful public relations**.
6. For print media, do not forget photographs. You can often gain space for a story if you provide a clear, interesting (usually black-and-white) action photograph (preferable to posed pictures). Have a competent photographer available at each chapter event to take candid shots of performers, speakers, audiences, organ crawls, etc. Show the AGO at work.
7. For broadcast media, remember that all U.S. stations devote a certain amount of time to public service. This includes public service announcements and calendars of community events. Investigate cable and public access channels, as well as the local commercial stations. It is important to check with each station to find out how and when to provide information about the chapter's events. If you're targeting a local radio station, radio station personality, or music critic, you may wish to send a CD recording along with your publicity materials.

PRESS RELEASES

One widely used medium for public relations is the **press release**. A short, concisely written announcement of the chapter event (possibly including a brief description of the Guild and its functions) should be sent to the various media outlets in your community several weeks before the event. It is important that you know the deadline for each organization - usually one to two weeks ahead of time for radio or TV stations and as long as four or five weeks for local magazines. Equally important is knowing to whom the release should be sent. Getting the information into the hands of the correct editor the first time makes all the difference.

Utilize the media (newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations, college and institutional publications, etc.) to inform the general public about the AGO and its local activities in the organ and choral fields. You have something of cultural interest to give to the community, and the local media are looking for stories of interest to their audience. With organization, attention to detail, and diligent follow-up, you can launch your own successful chapter public relations campaign.

OTHER AVENUES FOR PUBLICITY

In many areas, the local AGO chapter is the focus of organ and choral activities. As a result, it may be possible to draw on the resources and contacts of the membership to establish a community calendar of events sponsored by the chapter, churches, and schools. Such a calendar can be used to avoid scheduling conflicts that reduce everyone's audience and support, and can serve as a means of communicating with the other performing arts organizations in the area. Once such a calendar is established, it can be widely publicized and distributed.

Use your imagination to invent interesting ways to let your community know that the Guild is alive and well in its midst. Ask your members if they have any ideas, special contacts, etc., to publicize your chapter and its activities. A little creativity goes a long way in publicity, and your chapter is bound to benefit from such an effort.

David Vogels, CAGO, is currently the AGO Councillor for Competitions and New Music and previously served as the AGO National Councillor for Professional Concerns. He has also served as Professional Concerns Coordinator for Region VI and as Dean of the Denver Chapter. He holds degrees in journalism from the University of Missouri and in music literature from the University of Colorado, as well as the CAGO certificate. He is organist at St. John's Episcopal Church in Boulder, Colo., and managing editor of the Journal of Clinical Orthodontics.