

The Power of Residencies: Reaching Out To The Campus Community by Del Suggs

As a reflection of the value and importance of art in our lives, various institutions have utilized the idea of the "Artist in Residence." Towns and cities, colleges and universities, public schools, even visionary corporations have sought to bring working creative artists into the midst of "regular" citizens. This extended exposure gives the public a chance to see art being "made"-- whether it is a painting or sculpture, or a song or poem-- and thereby gain a deeper appreciation of the arts.

Such artists may be brought in to teach and work in a particular area for a month, six months, or even a year or more. On campus, it's a wonderful opportunity for students to receive master classes in a particular field. It's also a great opportunity for enlightenment in the arts. For example, a "real live poet" may come to a campus for a semester to write, perhaps teach a class, and present readings on a regular basis. Or, a city may provide a talented painter with a studio, housing, and a stipend for six months, and in exchange they may teach, lecture, or just be there for their value to the community. It's a great opportunity for local residents to rub shoulders with artists, and come to understand art and its value to society.

The Artist On Campus

While the extended artist in residence is beyond the reach of most student activities offices, there is a wonderful short-term alternative. "Residencies" are a way of bringing artists to your campus for more than just a single show, and allow them to work their magic throughout your campus community.

Think of a residency as a multiple performance event. Depending on the type of artist, it can consist of entertainment presentations (i.e. concerts), combined with

educational programs (i.e. master classes or seminars), along with some community outreach such as programs presented for those other than college students.

They don't have to last a semester, either. Residencies can be as long as a week or as short as a very full day. It all depends on your resources, and the goals you've set for a residency program on your campus.

Residencies can be a terrific means of community outreach. Nearly every college complains of the "Town Vs. Gown" gap in their city-- the idea of the collegiate Ivory Tower being totally out of touch with the day to day reality of the community. This is a chance for you to take your programs out into your community, and share the wealth of knowledge. It also makes for great PR. The local press will smother you with coverage when you take a visiting artist off campus and into public schools, nursing homes, or community centers to present a program.

Understand that these programs require a good deal of advance work, but the pay off is enormous. If you are accustomed to just booking an act, having them perform and leave, then a Residency will require a totally different mindset.

Selecting Your Artist

The first step in presenting a residency is to select an act interested in an extended visit to your campus. Some artists just want to play their gig and then move on to the next show. Other artists, such as myself, enjoy staying one area for several days and doing multiple presentations. Finding a compatible artist is paramount to having a successful residency.

Make sure your artist is comfortable and personable-- it may seem odd, but some artists appear warm and

friendly on stage but are cold and distant off stage. Also, consider the various skills of the artist that you are considering, and seek ways to utilize those skills to the max. You might request a vita or resume from the artist you are considering, and use that to come up with creative ways to use his or her talents.

For a quick example, you may originally plan to bring in a musical artist to perform, have him teach a master class in music, and perhaps do an additional concert in the public school system. But if you scanned his vita, you might discover he had scored some film sound tracks or produce recording sessions for other musicians. What a wonderful opportunity to have him do a presentation on your campus about working in Hollywood, or organizing a recording session! Where else will you students ever get an opportunity to learn these things from a working artist?

Advance Planning

After you've selected your artist, discuss your program ideas with him or her. Make sure that they are interested in doing the presentations you have in mind. It's always good to run these ideas down well in advance. You don't want to schedule your poet in residence to do a reading at a local high school, only to discover that his poems contain an inordinate amount of inappropriate material. Likewise, you wouldn't want to plan on a visiting musician performing at a nursing home if he or she didn't enjoy such things.

One prime concept is to use the multiple performances as "teasers" for a final performance. You might have the artist doing a concert in the theater on Friday night. For the two or three days leading up to that show, every appearance the artist makes will be promoting that big show. Or, you may want to have each and

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every small performance stand on its own, and not be serving to advance the show. It's all up to you and your artist.

Develop a schedule that works for you and your artist. Understand some basic needs, such as sleep and meals, and don't pack the schedule too full. Here is a brief example of a schedule for a two-day residency. Just for an idea, we'll assume the artist is a musician. And, this is just one example-- don't think you have to duplicate this on your campus.

Day 1

9-10 am: Presentation to Music Appreciation 101 on contemporary music

Noon: TV interview on WXYZ-TV Noon program

1-2:30 PM : Lunch break

3-4 PM: Workshop on performance skills

5 PM: Teaser in cafeteria

8 PM: Judge at campus Open Mic show

Day 2

8 am: Radio interview on WZYX-FM

9-10 am: Perform for assembly at Lincoln High School

Noon: Q&A Lunch with graduate students in Music Department

2-3 PM: Perform for Video Production class

5 PM: Sound check & dinner

7 PM: Concert

Does this make the concept clearer? And, while this example assumes the artist is a musician, consider how you could use a similar program concept and feature a mentalist or hypnotist, a comedian, a poet, and many of the other acts you see at the APCA Conference showcases.

Paying the Piper

Funding for a residency might be a challenge, or it may be easier than you think. You may be able to justify the funds from your student activities

budget. You may also be able to get additional funding from various academic departments, especially if your artist is willing to work specifically with classes in that department. Even the administration may chip in funds, if you can convince them that the presentations in the public schools and other programs are a valuable public relations exercise and community outreach.

Look also for grant funding with your state and local arts agencies. You may even be able to partner with these groups to share the expense and to open up additional venues and performances for your visiting artist.

Don't forget your College Foundation or Alumni Association. You may be able to work with them to underwrite your residency by making one performance a scholarship fund-raiser. They may even sell tickets for you, and use their considerable promotional staff to make your event even bigger!

Don't Forget

Promotion is as vital as always. Publicize every single performance to the proper target audience.

Talk directly with the artist to review plans and ideas. Don't assume skills the artist may not possess (or interests the artist may not have) regarding teaching for various age and student groups.

Plan the schedule well in advance, and communicate with everyone involved. Make sure that the professor hosting your artist for a 9 o'clock class lets him out in time for his 11 o'clock radio interview.

Don't fill the schedule too full. The artist needs time to rest, to eat, and to relax. Don't think you've got to use your artist in residence for 18 hours each day. Your guest will burn out!

Select your artist carefully. You'll find that many of the performers in this association have multiple skills, and we'd love to come share them on your campus. You're students and faculty will appreciate it, and you will, too.

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