

Pegasus Early Music and Younger Audiences

Over 150 people packed into the small auditorium of the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, New York, eager to see the young Australian-based quartet Ironwood. The dynamic quartet capped the 2013-14 season of Pegasus Early Music, the sole presenter of early music in western New York. After mingling with longtime donors and other attendees during intermission, artistic director Deborah Fox scanned the audience and confirmed a trend she had been witnessing for the past decade. While the audiences for Pegasus's concerts were consistently growing, the composition of the audience was getting older. People under the age of, say, 35 were scarcely found at Pegasus events. The director believed it was not the quality of the music that posed the disparity, but rather she felt that the organization had neglected younger audiences in its promotional efforts. This case examines Fox's initiatives to lure the next generation of patrons to her early music series. What is the best way for a small not-for-profit arts organization to attract new and younger audience members to concerts? How can an organization with limited resources and personnel successfully reach and monitor its target audience? You will be asked to evaluate the success of Pegasus's current initiatives and recommend a path forward for this niche concert presenter.



This case study was prepared by Blaire Koerner. Eastman case studies are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements or sources of primary data nor are they to serve as illustrations of effective or ineffective leadership or decision making.

A Decade of Early Music

Based in Rochester, New York, Pegasus Early Music is a 501(c)(3) concert presenter of pre-modern music founded in 2005 by lutenist Deborah Fox. Its mission is to present the community with an annual public series of early music concerts at the highest professional level, drawing on artists who perform, record, and teach this music worldwide. Focused mainly on music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a few excursions into medieval and Renaissance music, Pegasus's concerts encompass the spectrum of early music. Concerts are usually developed around a specific theme, composer, or genre, and between three and ten musicians will be hired for each performance. All Pegasus artists perform on period instruments, and some are at the forefront of research on historical performance practice. Renowned solo artists on the series include violinists Elizabeth Wallfisch, Robert Mealy, and Julie Andrijeski; GRAMMY award-winning lutenist Paul O'Dette; fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout; cornetist Bruce Dickey; sopranos Julianne Baird and Laura Heimes; and ensembles such as Ironwood and Cambini Winds.

"Pegasus is very expansive and brings in world-class musicians, people who have paved the way for everything we are trying to do right now in early music...it's amazing to see so many world-class early music artists in Rochester."

Dominic Giardino,
2016 intern

Beginning with three concerts per season at the Rochester Academy of Medicine, the series has since expanded to five performances per season, which are given in medium-sized venues (often churches) around the city. To help further expose early music to the Rochester community, the artists themselves frequently deliver pre-performance talks as well as master classes and workshops for local music and dance students. Since its foundation, Pegasus has collaborated with local

arts organizations such as Downtown Arts Link, the Rochester City Ballet, the University of Rochester's Humanities Project, and the afore-mentioned Memorial Art Gallery. In 2013, Pegasus began an ongoing partnership with New York State Baroque, an early music concert series based in Syracuse. Although Pegasus and NYS Baroque remain distinct arts organizations with separate boards and budgets, they share an artistic director (Fox) and achieve some cost efficiency by offering the same performers across various cities.

Pegasus Early Music has earned a strong local musical reputation, named by *City Newspaper* as "Best of Rochester" in 2013. As the prestige of the series has risen over the past decade, financial support has followed. Pegasus has received multiple grants from the Wegman Family Charitable Foundation, Rochester Area Community Foundation, Canandaigua National Bank, Farash Foundation, and the New York State Council of the Arts. With support from the Lennox Foundation, the organization staged a grand conclusion to its tenth season with a performance of Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, a work which uses twice the amount of performers Pegasus usually hires. Between grants, individual donors, and ticket sales, Pegasus's income has gradually increased with each season. Typical of their model, each year's income almost always equaled expenses incurred (2013-14 income statement in **Appendix 1**).

As a niche genre of music-making, early music tends to yield small audiences, even when it takes place in big cities. It is all the more difficult to draw consistent audiences in a medium-size metropolitan area like Rochester, New York. Headcounts and tickets receipts from the 2013-14 season show an average attendance of 125 per concert in the Pegasus Early Music series. Of those concert-goers, no more than nine were under the age of 35 years old. At one concert only two attendees were under the age of 35. Since the future of Pegasus Early Music will depend