

Astral Artists: Preparing Tomorrow's Musicians

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Propose a concert series for an arts organization in support of its mission.
- Evaluate the success of nontraditional music events in an arts presenter's portfolio.
- Determine strategies to help a small arts organization compete with larger institutions for audience and funding.
- Identify novel methods of engaging modern audiences with classical music.
- Assess the value of a concert event from the vantage point of the audience, artist, and presenting organization.

Topics For Discussion

Astral's Programs

- Ask students to review the following list of career services that Astral provides. Do these services fulfill the needs of aspiring professional musicians? Should any services be added?
 - ♦ Performances on Astral's various concert series
 - ♦ National booking program
 - ♦ Contract and fee negotiation
 - ♦ Outreach events in schools and retirement homes
 - ♦ Website design and social media consultation
 - ♦ Press photos
 - ♦ Event planning and brainstorming sessions with staff and other artists
 - ♦ Professional development meetings with Astral staff (to evaluate previous outreach and concert events, future plans, and artists' individual brands)
 - ♦ Meetings with outside contractors (career advisors, recording engineers, brand consultants)
 - ♦ Micro-Commissioning Program
 - ♦ Private concert showcase for New York City managers
- Astral's primary outreach events include visits to schools and retirement homes. Invite students to consider one of these settings and to suggest how a program could be structured that incorporates audience interaction and an educational component. How can Astral ensure that the event benefits both the artists and the audience?

- Should non-Astral musicians be permitted to participate in Astral events (assuming an Astral performer is involved)? Why or why not? If so, should these players be required to audition in some way?

Cultivating the Roster

- Astral seeks musicians who have entrepreneurial mindsets and a clear vision for the future. Interviews represent an opportunity for staff to decipher these qualities in each auditionee. What kinds of questions should be asked of potential artists?
 - ♦ Astral's current roster includes thirteen string, guitar, and harp soloists; six pianists; four wind soloists; two vocalists; and two chamber ensembles. Should Astral always strive for a variety of different instrumentalists, vocalists, and ensembles on its roster, even if that means rejecting auditionees who are otherwise qualified to join? Provided that Astral can only manage 25 to 30 artists at a time, should the staff set quotas on the different types of performers it will accept?
- **Appendix 1** lists Astral's "success indicators" for musicians. Probe the individual indicators with the students.
 - ♦ What factors give a performer an "authentic artistic identity"? Consider elements such as instrument, repertoire, audience engagement, and types of events.
 - ♦ Ask several performers in the class to share what defines their own "artistic identity," as well as how they might further clarify or strengthen it.
 - ♦ What does "social responsibility" look like for artists in the 21st century? Is this a necessary requirement for a successful performer?
 - ♦ Ask the students for any suggestions to amend or expand Astral's list of success indicators. Consider possible additions to the list, such as "entrepreneurial mindset" or "capacity for creative vision."
- Astral has advanced the mission of helping classical performers launch performing careers. What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of expanding the organization's purview to include additional genres (for example, jazz or electronic music)?

Mission and Brand

- Astral's most recent endeavors have included the "Astral at Dizengoff" series, which engages small audiences in an intimate setting. The organization has also attempted to cultivate new patrons with performances in high-rise buildings, and yet neither event has had a substantial impact on audience growth. With this in mind, Astral's upcoming season will include a "block party" designed to target larger crowds. The case requires students to conceptualize other innovative events that will connect with new audiences. Gather ideas for creative programming and consider the following questions:

- ♦ Do any consistent themes emerge from the class as a whole? Is there a clear preference for certain types of events or venues?
- ♦ Would it make sense to place all of the events on the same concert series, or should they be branded using different titles and marketing campaigns?
- ♦ Are there certain events that Astral should try first (whether because they are smaller, less costly, or more likely to engage a diverse audience)?
- Astral has described events like the Dizengoff concerts as part of a “NextGen” series designed to target younger audiences, but the staff has avoided using this label publicly. One concern is that giving new concerts a distinctive title puts more pressure on the organization to succeed in its pilot attempts. Discuss the merits of publicizing new initiatives as “NextGen” events. Should new initiatives be given a label at all, or is it best simply to fold them into the next season, forgoing any independent branding? If the latter, would a title be appropriate if or when the series gains popularity? What would that title be, and what does it imply about the target audience, repertoire, and experience as a whole?
 - ♦ Should Astral focus its future efforts primarily on young professionals, or target a wider demographic?
- Astral has opted to work exclusively with classical musicians. What language should the organization use to describe the music it promotes? Given that descriptors like “classical” and “Western art music” may connote rather narrow musical styles, is there a more appropriate term that captures the range of music it presents?

Preparing for the Future

- Although it recruits artists nationally, Astral has chosen to operate locally, in part because it maintains a small staff and a commitment to evaluating every event in person. Expanding the business to other cities would present obstacles to quality control. Is there a way that Astral could effectively duplicate its efforts in another large market, and is such a move critical to increasing national recognition?
 - ♦ Since Astral does not aim to expand at present, how can the organization continue to maintain a national presence, thereby enticing future auditionees? Consider possibilities like growth of the booking program, ad hoc concerts in other cities, or other initiatives.
- Audience conduct in nontraditional spaces has been an important concern as new series are entertained. This question was raised at Astral’s Dizengoff concerts, where attendees are apt to converse over their meal rather than listen intently to the performers. Should such events require audience members to remain silent, or should attendees be able to talk freely, as they would in any other restaurant? Who must adapt: the audience, the musicians, or both?
- Small, intimate musical events present important opportunities for concertgoers to meet the artists. How can Astral balance this one-to-one benefit with the need to increase concert attendance?