

The International Beethoven Project

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Recognize innovation in programming and planning for an arts festival.
- Anticipate pitfalls in soliciting donations.
- Develop strategies for dealing with negative press.
- Suggest fundraising options in light of financial pressures.

Topics For Discussion

Programming and Event Planning

George Lepauw's cosmopolitan upbringing and experiences throughout his musical training shaped his ideology regarding classical music communities and experiences. Riding the success of a newly discovered Beethoven work through the Beethoven Project Trio, George founded the International Beethoven Project (IBP) in 2009, a nonprofit that would play host to an annual Beethoven Festival. The festival offered a relaxed and progressive atmosphere with excellent art. Not only were canonical compositions presented (in addition to Beethoven's works), but also new commissions and recent works from an array of composers were programmed. Beyond musical performances, there were also art showcases, poetry readings, and other cultural events as part of the festival.

- Ask students to review the excerpts from the 2011 and 2013 programs offered in **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**.
 - ♦ What sorts of activities might have the broadest appeal for audiences of the Beethoven Festival? Which target a niche audience? Which aspects of the program appear to be the most costly?
 - ♦ How does the festival strike a balance between musical offerings and offerings from other disciplines?
 - ♦ Which events seem most cost effective? Which appear more dispensable if budgets are tight?
- Accessibility was a key ingredient in the success of the Beethoven Festival, achieved by offering relatively low ticket prices. With ticket sales contributing less to the net income of the festival, there was a greater reliance on donations to ensure its viability. With donors' somewhat conservative tastes mind, the IBP needed to cater in some way to them, while upholding the organization's values and vision for progressive and inclusive programming. Invite students to anticipate donor reactions to the festival programming, again using **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**.



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- Debate the merits of having a festival theme.
- Consider the growth of the festival budget from \$70,000 in 2011 to \$400,000 in 2013. How could George and his team identify the right size for a festival of this scope?

Donor Relations

George was well aware that many presenters of classical music rely heavily on large gifts from a small list of donors, rather than ticket sales and small donations. The 2012 Beethoven Festival in particular illustrated this reality with private donations rising substantially to generate \$300,000 for that year. The case profiles a major donor to the 2013 festival, Charles B. Danyew. The Danyew Foundation pledged a matching grant of \$100,000.

- What relationship did Charles Danyew have with George prior to the large gift for the 2013 Beethoven Festival? What assurances did Danyew provide with his matching gift?
- Several donors (including Danyew) did not fulfill their pledges to the 2013 Beethoven Festival. How did George rationalize the shortfall? How could he plan in the future to ensure the solvency of the annual festival? Are there ways in which he can avoid donors backing out at the last minute?
- What actions did George take to maintain his relationship with Danyew in light of the 2013 fallout? What else could George have done to shore up support from Danyew and his foundation in the festival's time of need? Challenge students to envision how George might approach major donors, the Danyew Foundation, and Charles Danyew (or his wife) for a future festival. Consider the delicacy of the pitch in light of the reality that some donors would essentially be repaying debts of the past and not funding the upcoming festival.
- Given the deficit of \$85,000 from the 2013 Beethoven Festival, George decided another festival would need to be planned in 2014 to fundraise and pay down debts. Was this the right choice? What other fundraising avenues might George have pursued instead of planning another event?

Negative Press

The 2013 Beethoven Festival was an artistic success, despite the fact that the IBP was only able to compensate 30% of its artists in full. As the case explains, communication with performers from 2013 and those scheduled for 2014 was kept to a minimum. George walked the line between discretion and transparency with these contributors: he wanted to keep them honestly informed, but also could not disclose every detail about his plans to complete the compensation of the artists of the festival. Some musicians called attention to the issue of the remaining unpaid musicians on social media. The unflattering news spread like wildfire in music circles nationally, including many who had not heard of the IBP or Beethoven Festival. Locally, gossip created mistrust between George and the greater Chicago musical and cultural communities.

- Probe the details of the case at this point with students. What were the optics of the situation between the 2013 and 2014 festivals? Describe the intervention of *Slipped Disc* and the Chicago Federation of Musicians.
 - ♦ Compare the positive press provided in the **Appendix 3** with the letters from the Chicago Federation of Musicians given in **Appendix 4**. What perceptions emerge from these pieces?

- Who was controlling the narrative? What power did George and the IBP have in this fragile period? How could they fight what they believed was unfair treatment by musicians who had relied on them? What was the intended effect of musicians rallying against the IBP and George (an accomplished musician himself)?
- George was “blacklisted” by many musicians in Chicago, who refused to participate in an organization that was perceived as not paying its debts. Even the local classical radio station WFMT blocked George from providing a response to the controversy. Did the radio station or the IBP have the stronger argument at that time? If George were allowed to issue a statement on the air, what could he say?
- In George’s effort to balance transparency with discretion, what could he have released to show more openness with the public? Alternatively, is there anything he could have shielded further that would have benefitted future festival prospects?

Making Amends and Moving Forward

Having been rebuked publicly on the radio, in classical music blogs, and through strongly worded letters issued by public-facing musical leaders, George and his team were at a crossroads with the annual Beethoven Festival. The pressure issued in these statements, as well as the continued struggles to fundraise for both the past 2013 festival and scheduled 2014 performances, caused George to cancel the 2014 event.

- The case concludes with George pondering his next move. How could he repair the damage he was perceived to have done to the musical community of Chicago?
 - ♦ Would a letter of apology to donors be appropriate? What are other ways amends could be made in writing?
 - ♦ A number of musicians were still in support of the Beethoven Festival and understood its unfortunate predicament in 2013 and 2014. How could their enthusiasm be leveraged?
- In what form could the Beethoven Festival continue in the future? An “UnFestival” in private homes was mentioned as a possibility. What would a letter of invitation to key donors look like? What other ways can students imagine to maintain the spirit of the festival on a reduced scale?
- The future of the IBP was very much uncertain at the end of the case study. How can the organization learn from its one-time financial shortfall? What changes could be made to the organizational and fundraising strategies that would ensure a strong financial position for the IBP? What are the advantages and disadvantages of crowdfunding in order to quickly gain new supporters?