

Fifth House Ensemble and Agent Relationships

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Explore how a performing arts organization can provide services beyond performance.
- Understand the advantages and disadvantages of a booking agent.
- Recommend a course of action for finding success with an agent.

Topics For Discussion

Partnerships beyond Performance

Fifth House Ensemble (5HE) is a Chicago-based chamber music group that specializes in contemporary music and media. Its imaginative programs have touched a wide range of audiences and have included many unexpected partners, from graphic novelists to video game designers. As the case highlights, 5HE's work is defined less by its pure performance credentials and more by the depth and breadth of the collaborations it undertakes. Education of all types infuses 5HE's offerings beyond the concert hall. The case provides a window into some of the ensemble's engagements and custom design approach, which should prompt classroom discussion purely on its inventiveness.

- Engagement with universities has been a staple of 5HE's work and usually outpaces its stand-alone concerts at performing arts centers. The group arranges multiple college residencies per year, some single-day events, others multi-year partnerships on a deep creative level. Such was the case in the example involving the School of Music at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana
- ♦ DePauw approached 5HE to address two disparate issues—the needs of its student musicians who were entering into a dynamic music landscape and the school's own desire to welcome the surrounding communities of Putnam County into the campus's performing arts culture. How did 5HE approach each of these goals? From what is described in the case, what role did the ensemble play in its two-year residency? What areas of the project had measurable results? What seeds were planted for the long term, both in the community and within the school?
- ♦ Students might wish to explore the website 21cm.org, which 5HE helped launch with video resources. What areas does the site emphasize? Is 5HE in a position to offer consulting services to keep the site updated?

- Arts-integrated educational programs are part of the core of 5HE's work, which reaches thousands of students each year. The case explains in detail a partnership—the Prometheus Project—with The Cleveland Orchestra and the Cleveland School of the Arts. 5HE was not enlisted as a performer in this arrangement, but as a kind of education arts consultant, a role that may strike readers as atypical and certainly creative for a performing arts organization.
- ♦ Following a connection between Beethoven and Prometheus embraced in the orchestra's 2017-18 season programming, 5HE proposed student exploration around the idea of the "Hero's Journey." Substantial four-week residencies led by musicians from The Cleveland Orchestra (assisted by 5HE members) invited students to probe the notion of the Hero's Journey through different academic disciplines and artistic mediums. Reflect on how core curriculum subjects English/Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies bridged to the arts using the concept of the Hero's Journey. How did students and the orchestra benefit from the project? How did 5HE benefit from the "consulting" arrangement?
- 5HE has co-created artistic projects in urban communities and has allied with social service organizations that were mentioned but beyond the scope of the case's main focus. Instructors may wish to assign students or groups of students to investigate these community efforts in more depth. What materials and press can be gathered from projects such as Broken Text referenced in the case's introduction? How do the projects compare to the array of endeavors presented in the case? Encourage students to visit the group's [social initiatives page](#) to learn about case studies of long-term projects, annual reports, and evaluation and design toolkits.

Booking Agents

The principal lesson of this case revolves around readers understanding the merits and drawbacks of involvement with a booking agent. In the narrative, professional contact between a member of 5HE and a leader from an artist management company, DTC Concert Artist Management (a pseudonym), brings the two parties together for a discussion about a potential relationship. DTC had existing relationships with many performing arts centers and was active with clients like 5HE who did innovative multimedia programming.

- Using a whiteboard, instructors may wish students to produce the pros and cons of artist management in the abstract and then advance to dialogue about the case in particular. Interrogate the adage that artists are their own best advocates.
- Why was 5HE a special case when it came to determining whether a booking agent was a wise course of action? Ask students to form groups and think of similar arts organizations (generally of smaller size) and individual artists. How might their needs for an agent compare to 5HE?
- What topics consumed the discussions between 5HE and DTC Concert Artist Management? Why was exclusivity such an important part of the talks?

Finding Success with an Agent

5HE considered a number of factors in its search for an agent. Its unique work as an ensemble presented a special set of challenges if an agent were to enter the picture. Its highly customized programs typically materialize from existing relationships and conversations with artists and staff. Agents would normally not be well suited to intervene on behalf of artists under these

conditions. Nonetheless, 5HE settled on a three-year agreement with DTC Concert Artist Management, which included a long list of presenters exempt from the agreement, which the agent could not contact.

- What other provisions were made in the agreement between 5HE and DTC? Why were these areas important to the success of the relationship between agent and client?
- The case presented the Beethoven/Prometheus project, the partnership with the School of Music at DePauw University, and the program *Journey Live*. Why were the former two engagements ill-suited to involvement by an agent?
 - ♦ *Journey Live* is an interactive concert experience rooted in the 2012 indie adventure video game *Journey* and featuring the game's musical score composed by Austin Wintory. The program quickly became one of the 5HE's most successful tour programs. What role did DTC play in the success of *Journey Live*? Why was *Journey Live* better suited to agent assistance than the other projects presented in the case?
- One year after signing with DTC Concert Artist Management, the agent was only responsible for booking *Journey Live*. The program was singular in the 5HE portfolio, and projects were sprouting in other directions that would not be helped by DTC or any agent. The contract was terminated well short of the three years specified in the agreement. What other reasoning drove 5HE to part ways with its agent?
- Within a few months of ending its relationship with DTC, 5HE continued to develop interactive concert experiences by announcing a concert version of the video game *Undertale* for its 2019-20 season. How was the program similar to *Journey Live*?
 - ♦ A geographically-focused set of tour stops were planned using 5HE's existing relationships with presenters. But as the case explains, the season's booking cycle is approaching, and the ensemble is hoping to offer *Undertale* to presenters and venues. Melissa Ngan has been asked by the board of 5HE whether an agent might return to boost bookings for *Undertale Live*. The agent could be enlisted on an ad hoc "project basis," which would distinguish it from its former agreement with DTC. Freshly freed from the bonds of the agent relationship, there is some hesitation about how an agent might now work for 5HE. The group prides itself on venturing beyond "just a performance" mentality of many music groups. This is a scenario in which agents may excel, however. Ask students to reconcile the mission of 5HE with the successful video game offerings.
 - ♦ The case invites a response on the question of how an agent could be involved in *Undertale Live* and similar projects. How could a project-based partnership work? What would be the benefit to the ensemble? Why would an agent choose to become involved in a project of limited scope? How might an agent work in tandem with 5HE's internal team to expand booking opportunities or add residency activities to performance engagements? Students may submit their ideas in various ways in advance of classroom discussion. Instructors should highlight the tensions suggested in the case among mission-centered programming, agent involvement, and organizational success.