

Partner Station Thoughts & Themes
Phoenix presentation – 8/4/16
Wende Persons

It is so great to be here together, and it's a remarkable moment. We're embarking now on a project that focuses exclusively and in depth on Classical public radio's present and future opportunities. And to look at the things we can do TOGETHER for Classical radio that we can't do by ourselves (or not as easily).

I want to thank the generosity of the truly tireless souls who have been working on the behalf of all of us... Tom Thomas and Terry Clifford at SRG, and the Steering Committee: Brenda Barnes, Jennifer Ridewood, Judy McAlpine and Matt Abramovitz. Most of them have spent 3 years honing the topics, getting the grant, hiring me (thank you) and now bringing us all together.

I was drawn to this project the minute I heard about it (thank you, Steve Robinson, for tipping me off) because I have always loved radio as "the way in" for bringing people to Classical music. I love the power of radio to be a trusted guide and tastemaker – and to ignite a love of classical music through the curated process of Discovery that your stations offer.

Even though I've been working in classical music, I haven't been living in the daily operational world of Classical radio. A big discovery upon returning – was learning about the present strength of the broadcast format. Who knew when everybody's talking about digital? And in Classical radio, there hasn't been a lot of conversation about what's going on at our stations and in our format.

There's good news like KUSC's in Los Angeles – that in the first quarter of 2016, had more listeners than any public radio station in the country – and that's with a 24-hour classical format.

When I got this job, I spoke with Susan Elliott, the editor of *Musical America*, which is the performing arts industry's equivalent of *Current*. She said, "Wende, that's nice for you, but everybody knows Classical radio is in the toilet." And I realized that all she and others in the music media and performing arts industry have heard about Classical radio for a couple of DECADES is bad news. That commercial Classical stations have been bought and changed formats. That public radio has been transitioning to single formats to improve your services to listeners – but for the most part when that's happened, Classical has taken the hit as stations became all News. What people haven't been hearing so much about is how Classical stations are continually being ADDED to the public radio system – that there are more Classical public radio stations in major markets than ever before. That across the country stations are acquiring frequencies

and expanding on their offerings; most recently in Maine where Mark Vogelsang launched Maine Public Classical in May.

I'll bring my experience as a publicist and a marketer to this job. Every chance I get, I'm telling Classical radio's story to colleagues in the music media and the performing arts. I'm building Friends of Classical Music Rising list and a Classical radio list to share our news. I invite you to send me names and contact information for people who should be on these lists.

So... I started in mid-March and spent three months researching your stations, surfing websites, listening, looking at the station activities survey, and talking with you. Sometimes it just poured out – like the incredibly stimulating hour and a half that went by in 30 seconds I had with Bill Johnson at WRTI in Philadelphia.

Some of you are running major market powerhouses. Others are... not. Some are here with decades of experience running Classical stations. Some have more limited experience, or are now giving Classical a renewed focus. I hope CMR can be the “glue” that brings you together to talk about common issues, concerns, to ask those who've done stuff for advice: “How did you do that? What did it take? Was it successful? The contact sheet is for this group to be in touch both formally and informally. I think of you as the brain trust for the future of Classical music radio.

Here are my lofty goals: I want CMR to benefit every type of classical station in the system– from the big guys to the fully automated turnkey operations (which is why the quality and delivery of the experience of the classical services is so important). We're here as a group to champion the enduring strength and vitality and relevance of Classical radio today – and everything it can become tomorrow.

THOUGHTS, THEMES AND BIG IDEAS FROM THE CALLS

You conveyed relief that the Classical Music radio format is being paid attention to in this major way, that they will have opportunities to hear what others are doing and discuss what's working – and not working – in the world beyond your “silo.”

My calls to stations have reinforced that the five strategic major topic areas outlined in the *Classical Music Rising* plan resonate with Classical station leaders. And although the project's “elevator speech” focuses on shaping **the FUTURE of classical music radio**, you mostly talked about **improving and strengthening current broadcast operations** to maximize revenue and mission. I've learned this is your anchor and economic engine – and there are still significant opportunities for growth.

You asked: “*What's in this project for my station – and for my community?*” You're putting dollars on the line, and your time and energy. (“*What's in it for me?*”)

A major benefit for you as active partners in *Classical Music Rising* is this opportunity to join with colleagues and outside experts to ask, “Where do we want to be, and how do we get there?” It’s hard to think about the future when you’re busy with the day-to-day demands of your job.

I asked how you want *Classical Music Rising* to help you. **The common touch points** can be summarized (in random order) as:

- Building communications mechanisms
- Building content sharing mechanisms (in the digital space)
- Clarifying & obtaining rights for using music in On Demand offerings
- Developing a brand for Classical Music public radio akin to NPR’s brand for News stations.
- Doing research to determine Best Practices in station offerings: on-air, online & in marketing outreach. Clear metrics.

You said we need to have a way to measure and analyze what’s working, from station to station. Which efforts are worth doing (and are consistent with our missions)?

Daniel Gilliam at WUOL in Louisville said, he’d love a survey of what stations that are doing digitally that are getting a lot of attention in traffic – and what are those things? You asked for it, Daniel! Our digital survey is a first step in understanding our collective activities.

And he wasn’t alone in this area.

Sean Nethery at CPR: *“Can we come up with a set of best practices that correlate with better performance - and find common ground among participants in Classical Music Rising with an objective way to do it? THIS is the research project that needs to be done.”*

[Digital session tomorrow]

In the area of **Communications:**

Scott Williams at KBAQ/Phoenix: Classical stations "don't have a good communication thing in place" - a way to share good things they're doing & lessons learned from mistakes. Maybe an "Ideas Worth Stealing" on a website like ClassicalMusicRising.org. [We'll talk about what you would like to see in Communications later this afternoon.]

Areas of Concern

SRG gathered illuminating responses to “What keeps you awake at night” last spring with the Station Activity survey, and I asked this question in my calls.

You spoke of a commitment to localism in the unease of what the digital future means for your broadcast stations. Some are investing in niche streams that reflect your geography & differentiate you on the Web. What’s more Minnesota than MPR’s choral stream? WCRB has an early music channel showcasing Boston’s famous Early Music Festival.

Do any of these concerns sound familiar?

Vermont Public Radio:

The connected car and how that will affect listening.

Changing Millennial habits: preferring podcasting to broadcasting.

George Preston/KCME said, *"Can we get together as a group to get some agreements on music rights?"* (Yes, SRG – Triple A station efforts)

José, who is brand new at Hawaii Public Radio, is operating stations with different formats. He asked, *"How do we market towards the two different audiences without having to double our expenses?"*

Shawn Yu/Discover Classical: *Is there a better mousetrap than Pledge?*

WQED/Pittsburgh: Needs to demonstrate that CMR will benefit her cultural community as well as the station. *"Helping the station lifts the entire classical community in this region."*

That's our role as radio in the classical music ecosystem. The Knight Foundation study shows we're critical to the success of arts organizations. It's a delicate balance of serving the arts community AND opening up the funnel – as Bill Lueth in San Francisco likes to say – to invite as many people as possible to Classical music by being great, smart, strong, healthy RADIO stations, first and foremost.

One station leader asked [JoAnn Urofsky/WSMR], *"After all the research that's been done, I still wonder who we're talking to. Is it only the classical music lovers? Are we leaving out a whole bunch of people who could be part of our revenue streams & community activities?"*

In that vein...on my calls, I focused mainly on Marketing and Digital activities at stations. You've heard the Coleman Insights research findings that Classical stations suffer from low awareness. That's why marketing is important. It is also critical to expand services beyond radio broadcasting to reach the digitally wired generations.

Here are a few **Marketing** highlights for our discussion tomorrow:

Major interest in a marketing campaign as *"the biggest thing we can do as a group to bring attention to classical music broadly."* (Tony Rudel/WCRB)

Tony Rudel wants *Classical Music Rising* to lobby major ad agencies for a *Got Milk?* type of national campaign for listening to Classical Radio.

Some of you suggested that *Classical Music Rising* craft a marketing and branding campaign that stations can adapt locally.

Nick Kereakos & Brian Newhouse/APM: Partnerships & Collaborations – “and which non-public media partnerships should we consider?”

George Preston & Charlie Katz/KCME: Collaborative national underwriting effort for Classical radio.

A branded app for Classical – like NPR ONE (*discuss in digital session*)

- Steve Robinson text: “Have you ever seen the Edison research that was shown at the PRPD two years ago? Here’s a pic of the last slide. ‘Astonishingly – there is still no branded option for Classical Music discovery. Pandora gets it by default. And Pandora is stealing your listeners every day. Why aren’t you ganging together to build THE Classical streaming app? Not station apps – a single app that you brand together.’ Would this be a good goal for Classical Rising to discuss?”

Digital Experimentation

In a world where Streaming audio has now surpassed broadcast radio for the first time among 18-24-year-olds & where in-home ownership of the hardware – the box we call radio - has dropped.... *the clock is ticking...* [Source: Infinite Dial’s *Share of the Ear*]

Many of you said you are “behind” on your Website digital offerings, that you lack statistics for measuring what’s effective, and that you would like a mechanism to share Website content.

Some recommend creating a VuHaus-style destination site for Classical Music public radio, while another idea is a “PRX for online offerings.” Some asked how *Classical Music Rising* stations might be able to have a bigger footprint on NPR Music.

In the area of music rights for On Demand content: your activities range from those who have the resources to clear the rights for music podcasts to others who are doing nothing at all because you’re frustrated by the music rights issues. Some say your podcasts are covered by educational fair use, and others are doing things that you admitted are “under the radar”... and you hope nobody will notice.

One of my favorite comments (Kari Anderson/VPR – baby): “The tough part is not being able to put up podcast playlists that are more Vermont focused. Things like 10 pieces for when your tires are stuck in the mud.”

Talent development

There’s concern about the pipeline:

- Jim Allison/WETA: Not so long ago you only had to whisper that there was a host opening at a major market station and you’d get an avalanche of resumes. He was surprised by the dearth of talent when they went to fill a host slot.

- Jennifer Ridewood/KING – considers KING’s *Second Inversion* new music stream as a great, “out of the main fishbowl” place to train and mentor the next generation of station leaders
- Ruth Phinney/WXXI: Eastman School of Music student interns [*I’m curious: How many in the room interned at a station?*]
- Joe Barr & Paul Conley/KXPR: participates in NextGenRadio project to build talent & diversity in the newsroom - developed with Doug Mitchell from NPR (also with a dozen stations around the country). *“It’s been quite successful. A counterpart for music would be great.”*

Where does programming fit into this project?” WQXR’s Matt Abramovitz asked at our Steering Committee meeting in June. (Let the PD heads nod in unison.)

What about **Station sound & appeal?**

My online listening is admittedly cursory for all of the stations I’ve contacted, but across the board I’m enjoying great, listenable music, personable hosts, and little talk between pieces.

What you are doing on the air reinforces the research of Coleman Insights:

Classical radio should move forward with confidence in the appeal of its on-air product (Those who listen to public Classical radio are satisfied with the programming executions of these stations. The music mixes are in synch with their tastes, the hosts are appreciated and the specialty shows are well liked.) ... Those not listening frequently are, in most cases, seeking a more personalized music selection that is difficult for a radio station to cater to.

That last part is the impetus for the “Classical Radio 2.0” part of our collective envisioning of where we want to be to meet those not listening to broadcast radio.

And I surfed all of your

Station Websites

As a marketer I always look for “hurdles to participation” – such as a cluttered, confusing Website or an online stream that stops when the user leaves the page. This is basic “housekeeping” that can boost user participation. Understanding what listeners are looking for when they visit station Websites is key to helping them find it easily.

I am always curious to see how the Classical station is positioned and integrated into a dual licensee’s Website, which can be a promotional opportunity for Classical music. Does TV promote Classical and vice versa – when the affinities line up? [Zero mention on one TV site – not in this room.]

I was struck by a value statement on KING’s Website... The Seattle station switched to public in 2011. *“Thanks to the commercial-free format, the station plays an additional three hours of music every day. Longer pieces can be played without interruption, and*

nearly 100 live and local broadcasts can be aired annually.” That’s a huge benefit to listeners, clearly communicated.

I found other examples of communicating value – actually saying what you want your listeners to know and believe about your station – through short videos or letters from station executives posted on the site.

The biggest thing that struck me in my research: I was mostly approaching your stations as a newcomer – and trying to determine in an instant – by listening and by surfing your website – what your station does and what you will provide for me if I stay awhile.

I’ve been very inspired by Jarl Mohn’s Spark III “Back to Basics” campaign of using radio fundamentals: communicating dial position and positioning liners – i.e. *letting people know what we are doing and where to find us.*

Scott Williams - KBAQ/Phoenix: *“The worst thing that’s happened over the last 5-10 years in public radio that we’ve gotten so consumed by the new technologies that we’ve forgotten about broadcast basics. It’s still the biggest way that we get people in.”*

Dial position & liners. Jarl Mohn says, “It isn’t magic. It’s the basics.”
“We need to remind our listeners why they should come back.

So I’m curious. How are we individually and as a format communicating what we do in branding and marketing Classical radio? [Yes, Core Values]
Your liner – your tagline or slogan or positioning statement - is what the station is for your listeners.

POSITIONING:

- Write down your positioning liner or tagline. It may be your station name, if it says “what you do”
- Poll: how many focus on
 - Classical
 - Arts
 - Benefit of listening (oasis of calm, etc.)
 - Where your station is
 - Just use call letters
 - Something else?
- Lightning round: in best radio voices, tell us your station name & liner
- Finally: take out phones, go to your station’s homepage. Do you see your liner?

Are we communicating the benefits of listening?

Take your liner and put it everywhere: on the air, on your website, in your Google search results, in all of your station materials right down to the signature in every email that you and your staff send out.

All this is to say: WE are the cheerleaders for our format. We are the one who need to suggest to listeners what the station can do for them – the power, the passion, the joy, the tears – that we are, as WDAV says, your classical companion. [“Your classical companion” ...for inspiration, for relaxation, for the commute, for the weekend, for the holidays... Listeners are looking for a companion.]

Shaun Yu at Discover Classical did this with his TEDx talk in Ohio – and I recommend going to YouTube and spending 11 minutes watching it. It’s called “Driveway Moments.” Shaun ends with a nod to Heinrich Heine and says, “When you seem to be at a complete loss for words, this music can pick up right where you leave off.”

So here we all are together. It’s a testament to our different missions and priorities – and positioning - that each station here can pursue what’s most important to you, while this group – called Classical Music Rising - exists to brainstorm, exchange ideas, lobby together for things we want, dare to dream, and to tell everybody why it matters to have Classical public radio in every American community.

Thank you for listening.