

## **Wallace Excellence Awardee – Summer 2011 Updates**

### **MacPhail Center for Music**

MacPhail Center for Music's Wallace grant is dedicated to establishing the "Customer Centered Approach" throughout the entire organization. The Customer Centered Approach (CCA) is a concept we created which literally puts the customer at the center of all we do – from the first contact on the phone or web, to the registration process, through the delivery of the music class or lesson. Through 26 focus groups, onsite event surveys and annual Student Satisfaction Surveys, we have learned an enormous amount about the wants and needs of our current and potential customers. We were surprised at how few potential students know we offer music education for the very young (babies/preschoolers) and for the older set (55 years through nursing homes.) We were also surprised to learn how literal people are when looking at marketing materials – young people want to see same-age peers, *never* white hair. But older adults strongly prefer the comfort of seeing a white-haired peer. Based on what the customers shared, MacPhail has made significant changes in the ways we communicate with our audience: revised the phone system, launched a new website, introduced e-lessons for Early Childhood families, created a dedicated catalog of adult students, developed message-specific ads for Early Childhood and Adult programs. In addition, MacPhail has restructured staffing to strengthen communication between faculty, Student Services and students. Our Early Childhood Music class enrollment is strong and steady. Enrollment in our Adult Programs has increased 5% in the past year. In the next year, we plan to continue on the course we've set, thanks to the Wallace grant.

### **Minneapolis Institute of Arts**

Third Thursday partners:

We've found great success in reaching new audiences by being specific about the events we plan for those audiences. For example, Third Thursday themes that have proven the most successful (attendance, buzz/awareness): Bike Night (partner with bike shops), Art of Hair (partnered with hair salons), Fashion (partner with MN Fashion, a fashion organization in MN), and Body Art (partnered with tattoo parlors). The key has been to involve these organizations in the programming/content and focus on groups that have a large enough audience that they can reach out to those audiences and drive traffic to our events. Questions... do they come back? Are we okay with this?

Compelling people to notice and exhibition:

Also, what compels people to "stop" and look at an exhibition? After testing three diverse small exhibitions that were all in transitional space at the MIA we're looking to see if there are any common denominators about why people would stop. Our general conclusion is it doesn't have to be the same thing, but we do have to be intentional about what types of things would make people stop and notice. Some successes: music, moving the objects in the center of the space, wall treatments (sometimes), content that obvious in a quick glance.

### **Minnesota Opera**

Minnesota Opera achieved its third-year goal of increasing attendance in women age 35-60. Our audience numbers in the target demographic grew more than 20% over the course of the season and more than 136% since the beginning of the Wallace Excellence Award. This growth has outpaced our overall growth by a ratio of 5:1. The percentage of women age 35-60 grew from 16.2% of our audience in the baseline year to 21.3% in Year Three – an excellent indication that our partnership with myTalk107.1, the nation's

only female talk station, continues to exceed our expectations. Those women bought 1,736 more single tickets in Year Three than the same demographic did in the baseline year, which is 10 times more than our cumulative goal of 160 additional tickets purchased in the same time period. They also purchased an additional 330 subscription packages, which represents an increase of 45% from the baseline year, outpacing the overall growth in our subscription base (6.9%) by more than 15 times.

We are also ahead of our goals to convert comp holders to repeat attendees. This season, we have sold 14 subscriptions and 122 single tickets to comp recipients, which is more than double our goal.

Our partnerships with myTalk107.1 and KSTP-TV were strong throughout the season. The Opera's relationship with myTalk107.1 is constantly developing in fun ways, both with the station and morning show host Ian Punnett. Ian's personal engagement with the Opera also continues to grow. This season, he was instrumental in our HD video recording *Wuthering Heights* in HD video. The recording will allow us to touch exponentially greater audience members in the future than can see the live events in our theater during their limited runs.

Key take-aways from this season:

- Stay in dialogue with Ian Punnett about his ideas.
- Continue to identify ways to help people choose operas (or choose for them).
- Improve our website as an audience educational tool and address its shortcomings.

We also are beginning to imagine ways we might replicate the "Ian Effect" in other media environments, starting with the blogosphere.

## **Minnesota Orchestra**

### **Summary**

Year three results for the Minnesota Orchestra's Inside the Classics series audience development initiatives are considerably positive. Capacity sold for this six-concert series increased from 43% to 80%. The number of unique households served increased by 48% and new households are up by 86%. Total seats sold have risen by 82% (61% in subscriptions and 143% in single tickets sold). Website visits tripled in the first two years of the grant, holding steady at 30,000 monthly page views since then. Crescendo Project membership has also grown from 143 to 167.

At the heart of our learning is a strong belief that sound research and a solid partnership with our artistic team are essential for navigating powerful change and growth.

### **Surprises**

- Attenders and non-attenders alike found our materials unclear in explaining the series format and its intended audience
- Tried and true advertising methods proved unreliable
- Newcomers are acutely price-sensitive
- There is strong interest in engagement, demonstrated through blog usage and our recent audience-based MicroCommission fundraising effort

### **Adjustments**

To address our marketing challenges, we began testing a series of advertising strategies. We experimented with the language used to describe the series, new photography, and varying emphases on musical themes and onstage personalities. Our Wallace grant also afforded us the ability to try a variety of previously

untapped media and eliminate traditional Sunday newspaper ads with limited risk of failure. We discounted tickets in a highly targeted way to remove the price barrier for first-timers and, as a result, our revenue increased due to strong response. The trial phase was slow and difficult, and in some cases disappointing, but in the end we learned that just as our audience has an appetite for continued variety onstage, successful marketing for this series requires constant refreshment and ongoing evaluation.

### **Moving Forward**

In revisiting our strategy and tactics for year four, our challenge ahead is to discover new ways to engage both attenders and non-attenders, and leverage our online resources to retain and grow attendance.

### **Mixed Blood Theatre**

Mixed Blood Theatre's major components of the Wallace Excellence Award are outreach to Latino and disability communities, plus programming designed to reach these audiences. Since 1989, Mixed Blood has produced at least one show per year written by a Latino playwright or performed by Latino cast members. With this history, our project began with creation of the Latino **Liaison** position and convening a Latino Advisory Council. Council members reviewed scripts and assisted in programming choices, and participated in marketing and relationship-building. Within year one, however, it became clear that this council needed more direction.

A lack of focus for the first group led to the decision to conduct specific qualitative research before convening a Disability Advisory Council. With assistance of a Disability Liaison research began, involving key influencers **from** myriad disability communities. Not only were strong Council candidates identified, but research findings led to creation of a specific Council charter. In addition to building relations within the broad disability communities, messaging was developed to market specific programming, and to communicate more clearly with funders.

With the Council's assistance, Mixed Blood conducted an access audit to guide theatre improvements. A commitment to access is reflected in the Theatre's Radical Hospitality model of free admission to main stage, public performances. It is also evident in **the 2011-12** season's 3-play festival: **Center of the Margins**. Productions explore the complex world of disability with content and themes about disability (*On the Spectrum*), central characters with disabilities (*My Secret Language of Wishes*), and roles for actors with disabilities (*Gruesome Playground Injuries*.) These reflect input from research and the **Council**. Facility improvements and a transportation fund, allowing people self-identifying as having a disability to travel **to and from the Theatre** for free by taxi, were begun.

Success of the **Disability Advisory Council** led to reexamination of the Latino Advisory Council. There is now a specific charter for this group **as well**, and recruitment efforts are underway to achieve a re-populated Council that is more relevant and productive. Similar to that done of access services, an audit of Latino-related services and policies **is underway**.

### **Northern Clay Center**

Northern Clay Center's WEA initiative provided many opportunities for learning between August 1, 2010 and present time.

- In the fall of 2010, we conducted the first of two docent training sessions, which included 8-weeks of training techniques, field trips, lectures, and experiential workshops in clay. The Walker Art Center shared with us their specialized docent curriculum.

- We broke ground with our marketing group and developed a semi-monthly Art@Hand open house for the general 55+ audience (and others), which includes hands-on clay making activities, artist talks, an exhibition opening, and reception. We collectively identified channels through which to distribute info about the Art@Hand activities and conducted three Art@Hand activities. Despite our expensive, flashy print materials and radio spots, the Art@Hand open houses have experienced relatively low attendance. Few visitor surveys reported that guests heard about Art@Hand through the print or radio ads. Our website was the primary means through which people heard about this and other offerings.
- We conducted the first year of activity under our MN State Arts *Board Arts Learning Grant*, which helps to subsidize our Wallace work with six organizations serving a 55+ audience. Additionally, we identified new partners with which we conducted short, experiential clay programs, extended multi-week classes, and artist lectures.

### *Lessons Learned and Next Steps*

Given the high number and various types of sub-populations within the 55+ sector, we learned that no single marketing effort will entice the 55+ population as a whole. This process is surely 3-dimensional in nature. On one dimension, there are the differences in the various sub populations including age, interest, ability, capacity, income, decision-making authority, time and predilection to art. On another dimension, there are gatekeepers' interests and objectives. On a final dimension, there is the way in which we share the information with these sub groups. Word of mouth, be it person to person or institution to institution, will provide the greatest means of information sharing.

It is through strategic partnerships with organizations that serve the 55+ audience in some capacity that NCC has experienced the most success. We've determined that dollars are better spent on web-based promotional materials and on a staff person who can work to identify new gatekeepers and deepen our relationship with existing ones.

## **Ordway Center for the Performing Arts**

**Campus Connections** engages Macalester College, Saint Thomas University and Metropolitan State University with the Ordway's world-class programming. The goal of Ordway's Campus Connections program is to broaden and diversify the base of people who engage with the Ordway and to create meaningful and lasting relationships with university communities. The Ordway connects with these campuses through: affordable tickets for students, faculty and staff; transportation subsidies and coordination; arts learning and engagement including curricular connections, workshops and residencies with artists; social events; and internship and employment opportunities.

**Our initial application** for the Campus Connections program was built on some assumptions that proved to be untrue for the college population at Macalester, University of St. Thomas and Metropolitan State University. One was that long-term engagement by college students with the Ordway could be successfully tracked through a rewards program, using a card as method for tracking participation. This strategy was revised early in the process as the data revealed that students weren't interested in using a rewards card. Instead, we have been tracking attendance through discount codes specific to each campus and performance. Additionally, we had planned reaching higher numbers of student engagement through collaborations with professors and embedding the content of performances through curriculum. While there is interest and engagement in this type of work, it is dependent on faculty interest and time and reaches smaller

student numbers than we had hoped for. Our programmatic adjustment, which is being rolled out this upcoming school year, is to produce a series of social opportunities in partnership with student-run organizations on the campuses that highlight the connections between well-known Twin Cities artists and touring productions. At these showcase/social events, students will get the opportunity mingle with each other and the artists and to purchase their tickets to Ordway performances that connect thematically to the on-campus event.

**Some assumptions that did prove true** included the need for multiple entry points for participation among the students and faculty/staff on each campus. We have seen involvement from students and faculty at events at the Ordway, in classrooms with artist visits, have successfully recruited faculty to speak at Ordway events, and have seen students and faculty take advantage of the ticket discounts. We have also hired student interns from the campuses, worked with paid student advisors, and engaged Ordway staff as speakers in courses at the various campuses.

**Changes for next time** will include a greater emphasis on social interaction and relationship building between the Ordway and the campuses. We will also include more input initially from the campuses on how to integrate their communication style and mechanisms early in the process.