

Teachers Who Can

Performing in Your Own Community, *Part 1*

By Daniel Roest

Inspire your students and upgrade your community profile with a LOCAL concert – here's how.

Those Who Can, Do.

You have likely heard “those who can, do; those who can't, teach.” Dispel that notion right now, because you can, and you teach. A newer saying makes more sense: “Those who can – do; those who can – and teach – are TEACHING ARTISTS.”

Most guitar teachers work as much as they can throughout the year, combining teaching and performing in a number of settings. This two part article will focus on performing **locally with a purpose** and how to go about it.

If you are a teacher whose students haven't seen you perform, you and they are both missing something: they haven't seen you do what you love in a live, real world setting with a diverse audience, and you haven't shown them an important side of your life – you up on stage, giving your best. For all the teaching studio work you do and the countless words said in lessons, there are lessons to be learned by watching live musicians. You have a ready fan-base just in the students you teach, and a potential fan-and-student base in the rest of the audience. If you put on a good show, people will talk and think of you when someone says, “do you know anyone who teaches guitar?”

The following is based on a local concert I gave in my home town of Folsom, CA, that proved these points.

My concert was at the main library's large meeting room on a Sunday afternoon. *It was filled to capacity, standing room only, and at the end a line formed to buy my CD.* What led to that standing ovation and happy ending? In the words of my favorite television detective, Adrian Monk, “Here's what happened:”

Think Locally and Visualize the Event

The first item is to have a concept – a basic visualization of the event. In my case I aimed for a room I was familiar with at the local library. I contacted the library staff and asked about the possibility of doing a concert and the dates available. For this concert, I would not be asking the cash-strapped city department to pay me an artist fee. I wanted to make it relatively easy for them to say yes, which they did. It would be advertised as a free concert.

It would be a solo concert with no opening act. Decide if you'll have an opening act or, as I have many times, if you'll BE the opening act for a more well known and powerful act.

As for getting paid and how much, that depends on a number of things. You may be able to get paid well if you arrange for the venue, adequate promotion and personnel that can handle it. My plan was simplicity – a free local concert at the library, and I wasn't after a big profit.

The Date Is Set – Now What?

What if you set up a concert and nobody came? Avoid that dilemma with adequate promotion. The truth is that there is no guaranteed formula for good audience turnout. But one way to help your odds is to check the calendar for competition – or possibly assistance – from concurrent events. My local library is located adjacent to a city park where they hold an annual Renaissance Faire, and that is the date I chose. People would already be around. With luck, Faire attendees would be attracted to the free concert next door. And that proved to be the case – imagine a portion of your next concert audience walking in with swords and costumes!

Once you have your date set, you need to get the word out. When you have a city agency such as a library as the event location, local papers are more likely to write about it. An additional angle for my concert publicity was a “theme” of celebrating National Arts and Humanities Month (October). If you find a theme such as that or a charitable cause, your concert becomes the vehicle by which the host can participate and make a contribution.

Getting community support is a powerful asset with any concert – and the local guitar-centric music store was my ally. I went to the owner, a classical guitarist and luthier, and asked him if he would like to be a main sponsor – I was happy to walk away with a check then and there, and made plans to make it worth his investment.

I have found that sometimes when you write your own copy it gets through to being printed. So the publicity text I sent in to my local paper, along with my photo, came out just as I sent it:

Classical guitarist Daniel Roest invites you to a free concert

“With October being National Arts and Humanities Month, the classical guitar is being exceptionally well represented in our area. I will give a free concert at the Folsom Public Library on Sunday October 19, and hope that all who are able will attend. The concert is sponsored by the Nicholson Music Company.

Not only will you hear a solid hour of my best, but the concert is a short walk from the 16th annual Folsom Renaissance Faire – a great way to spend a day. *Hundreds of merchants, over a thousand actors, acres of entertainment over four stages, jousting...* I’ll include Renaissance music in my set as a tribute. Mind the parking time involved. My concert starts at 3 p.m. sharp in the Library Meeting Room.”

Remember that your partners in the concert have a vested interest in its success, so meet and talk with them about it. In the case of my library concert, they had the materials and ability to not only notify other city workers, but create a nice poster. Prominent in the foyer of the building was a large poster with my picture and the essential facts: date, time, the headline “Folsom Public Library Celebrates National Arts and Humanities Month,” “Free Event,” and an introductory sentence. Be sure to monitor your publicity throughout the time leading up to the concert – if you aren’t sure things are happening as you envisioned them, do not take them for granted. I paid visits to the library and the music store to make sure my publicity was visible.

As a teacher, your students and their families provide a ready audience – be sure to let them all know you’d like to see them there, both verbally and with flyers.

Plan Your Set Well in Advance

My style is to practice late at night, testing repertoire and planning the sequence. I have learned that how you introduce a piece can have a big effect on the audience’s reaction.

You really need to tailor your set list to the crowd you'll get and what makes you shine. My concert was an afternoon concert for the general public, so I made sure not to play material so nerdy, out there and inaccessible that they wouldn't like it. This is vitally important if you want to succeed with your audience. On the other hand, you might want to create a kind of "break" in the set by playing something "completely different."

Another vital part of preparing your concert is finding a sound you can believe in. Volume and tone have to be set to work with the venue you have chosen. For amplifying fingerstyle, flamenco and classical guitar playing, tone is a very complex issue. The library did not have an adequate sound system, so it was up to me to provide it.

I would not recommend relying on only the output of onboard internal pickups in a sit-down solo concert. A good condenser microphone will provide what pickups cannot. If you don't have a good instrument mic or find them inconvenient, look into the Fishman Aura pedals that mimic a mic sound and allow you to blend in their customized mic models.

As a tone hound and classical guitarist who amplifies, I came up with this setup for a room that held 95 seats: I had a moment of inspiration when I looked at my teaching studio gear and thought of taking the Bose CD player to the gig instead of my Fender Passport PA. It actually worked well in combination with a Shure condenser recording mic (KSM32), an LR Baggs Para Acoustic DI for my piezo output, and an Alesis mixer with phantom power and a good reverb effect. The DI took care of a good low end and tailored EQ – the best available through my gear. The LR Baggs DI has a great array of tone sculpting options. The Shure recording mic then didn't have to carry all the volume – just enough to add clarity and definition at the high end. I've never seen a Bose Acoustic Wave System home system used to amplify guitar before, but it has plenty of power and dynamic range. After testing everything at home, I took it to the concert.

Don't Forget to Practice

What if you gave a solo concert and the audience was indifferent? The keys to success on stage include great material, stage presence, playing from the heart and playing expressively. Bring only your best when you showcase your own playing. If you need help in these areas, read my previous series on teaching expressive playing from May 2008 [<http://www.guitarsessions.com/may08/teaching.asp>] to February 2009 [<http://www.guitarsessions.com/feb09/teaching.asp>]

To summarize the essential projects before your big day,

1. Pick a theme for promotion and pitch the concert to a venue.
2. Assist in the promotion to insure a good turnout.
3. Decide what you're going to play and practice it thoroughly.
4. Plan on what you're going to say throughout the concert.
5. Work on optimizing your sound for that venue.
6. If programs are printed, write the copy and include acknowledgements of your sponsors and key personnel.

In the second part of this topic, we will go over the event itself, what to do, what to say, and how to make the most of your opportunity to **show your students and your community what you're all about artistically**. See you here next month!

Daniel Roest (pronounced "roost") started playing guitar at the age of seven and never stopped. Today he has performed in countless solo and ensemble events in nearly every kind of venue, and his concerts are praised for being entertaining and informative. For ten years he served as President and Artistic Director of the South Bay Guitar Society based in San Jose, CA, preparing many successful grant applications, and is now Director Emeritus. He is recognized for presenting gifted guitarists such as Laurence Juber, Peppino D'Agostino, Muriel Anderson, Jeff Linsky, Franco Morone, Michael Chapdelaine, Richard Gilewitz, Chris Proctor, Mark Hanson, Duck Baker, Sharon Isbin, Lily Afshar, Carlos Barbosa-Lima and many others. His *Great Guitars! 2004* CD received 5-star reviews.

Roest majored in guitar in college and earned three degrees in music performance. He participated in dozens of masterclasses, including many he produced. He taught guitar and music fundamentals at California State University Stanislaus and De Anza, Foothill and San Jose City Colleges and now maintains a full-time teaching studio in Folsom, CA. He has adjudicated several multi-instrument competitions, presented music clinics and introduced many new audiences to the art of the classical guitar. His original solo composition, *February 4th*, was selected from hundreds of submissions by the *ERMMedia* "Masterworks of the New Era" CD series. Last year he was selected to be a teaching artist in the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission's Artist Residency Institute. Previous columns for Guitar Sessions include:

So You Want to Make a Living with the Guitar, Parts 1, 2 and 3:

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/jul07/class.asp>

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/aug07/class.asp>

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/sep07/class.asp>

and a ten part series, **Expressive Guitar Playing – Tapping Your Student's Inner Artist:**

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/may08/teaching.asp> Dynamics,

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/jun08/teaching.asp> Tempo.

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/jul08/teaching.asp> The Big Picture,

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/aug08/teaching.asp> Rhythm,

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/sep08/teaching.asp> Balance,

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/oct08/teaching.asp> Rubato,

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/nov08/teaching.asp> Pitch effects,

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/dec08/teaching.asp> Tone,

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/jan09/teaching.asp> Phrasing and

<http://www.guitarsessions.com/feb09/teaching.asp> Stage Presence and Heart.