



Pursuing the Muse in New York

by Jim Goodin

"Okay, you're on for Monday at 8, but can you guarantee that you'll have 25 people there paying the \$10 cover and two-drink minimum? You know the bar and I have to make money."

Therein lies the monumental challenge to a musician performing in New York club venues. As I'll point out in the following paragraphs, alternative music such as instrumental guitar requires that you look beyond the "club scene" for a wider audience; to achieve visibility in this market, however, a certain amount of club venues are necessary. In these circumstances, it's not only a matter of bringing the talent,

but also carrying about 99% sole responsibility for bringing the audience as well. Some of the well-known places will at least run an advertisement in the Village Voice listing all who are playing every week but for the most part you are held accountable for getting the draw. It's hard not to become jaded in the Big Apple club market when it seems as if all that matters in the booking agent's mind is that people are present in the club partaking of whatever is offered.

As a musician offering instrumental guitar-based music either solo, with my percussion-driven ensemble East of Where, or with the artful acoustic guitar performance project Language of 3 - the pressure to draw a crowd is rather daunting in the club venues. Though I do seriously pursue getting a good turnout for club appearances, I've learned to look beyond them and realize my better fan base is going to be other types of gatherings than in nightclubs. Types of venues that have proven good alternative choices have included retail music stores that have supported performances or clinics, churches where I've done benefits as well as renting the space in one instance, coffee bars and bookstore cafes, house "apartment" concerts, the NYC subway system, and collective networking with fellow artists (see below).



Though the alternative types of venues mentioned have often provided a wider audience, there have been several times that I've played in "limelight" clubs in New York and clearly reached people; I've even had pleasant surprises with celebrities. Case-in-point: Earlier this



year my East of Where ensemble got a booking at CBGB's sister club, The Gallery. We were given a 10 p.m. set on a Friday between two singer-songwriters. Though we could have accounted for about twenty people on our own that evening, with the help of the other two artists performing on the same bill, we played to a crowd of sixty people. One of those people was actor Kiefer Sutherland who approached me after our set and said, "I really liked the stuff you played this evening."

As an alternative venue of "wide-open" reactions from ignoring to subtle curiosity,

playing in the NYC metro system has produced some real positives for me. For example, the other day I was playing at the 'R' train 4th Avenue stop in Brooklyn, I finished a piece and off to my side I heard one person applauding enthusiastically. I turned to discover a Chinese man saying, "Very good, very good" in broken English. He introduced himself through asking whether I taught music, seeming to strike a parallel in sharing that he was a teacher of Tai Chi. I told him that from witnessing a Tai Chi exercise in the park I was once inspired to write a piece entitled "Tai Chi". As we exchanged emails he suggested I might be interested in accompanying one of his class performances, something I've seriously wanted to do.

A week later I performed with my ensemble at the East Village C-Note. I had put the Chinese man on my mailing list and I was delighted to see him walk in that evening. He asked me to play "Tai Chi" which I used as a closer. In a sense, this is what music is about beyond everything else - coming full circle with your audience.

Though subway performance does meet with a wide range of reactions including the "You can't be serious!" it is a definite alternative performance channel that has produced successful results beyond a "few coppers in the kettle". During one performance a gentleman began drawing a caricature of me playing and ended by giving me the drawing along with a note that said, "Call me if you play weddings." That led to a lucrative event that was overseen by the first African American mayor of New York City, David Dinkins. At other times subway performances have generated CD sales and a few artistic positives like the meeting with my Chinese friend.

Along with performing as a subway musician I've learned to accomplish a lot when I'm on the commuter train from my Brooklyn home to and from Manhattan. For example, I wrote this entire article while on the train utilizing a PDA. Often I listen to rehearsal recordings via an MP3 or minidisk recorder, writing out music or assembling press kits.

Two relatively new marketing alternatives that are examples of "looking outside the box" and finding growth in combined artist networking for the New York market and beyond are "apartment" concerts similar to the popular house concerts, and a project called Language of 3 that grew out of brainstorming with colleague Matt Richards.

Last spring I was speaking on the subject of house concerts to the Professional Women Singers Organization, a group that promotes and helps women who are classical artists in the Metro area. I was hired to speak to the group on networking and marketing for house concerts. The booking came about from a casual conversation with friend and classical singer, Phyllis Farmer, about co-networking with fellow artists. In this day and age of so much independent music you should never underestimate who may know who.

In a question/answer period at the house concert seminar, someone in the audience asked if I had thought of taking the house concert idea to Manhattan, customizing it for the apartment world as some of the organization's members had done. I thought it was a great suggestion and recently moved on it by going to several upper west side Manhattan apartment buildings and either leaving my flyer for the building board, or in a few cases the doorman let me post them in the tenant mailroom or leave copies in the lobby.

For those new to apartment or house concerts, here's how it works: For a fee either set by the artist or negotiated with the potential host, you invite an artist whose music you like to come to your home to perform for a group of close friends. If you have hosted several such events you might take a more businesslike approach, even selling tickets to the public. The event might be enhanced by the host providing refreshments or it has become increasingly

popular to have each guest bring a "dish" akin to a potluck. For further information on my house concerts visit the House page on my website.

In the spring of 2003 while having dinner with friend, guitarist and colleague Matt Richards, we began to discuss ideas that led to the creation of Language of 3. Matt and I have considerable time and experience vested in our solo careers and it occurred to us over dinner following a show in Philadelphia that combining efforts in 'an evening with...' might be a good thing. A similar concept has been executed by another Mel Bay author Muriel Anderson in her All Star Guitar Nights as well as Brian Gore's International Guitar Night, and we decided to follow suit in our own way.



A concert with Language of 3 features both Matt and myself along with a third featured artist each in brief solo settings interspersed with collective duos and trios, sometimes rehearsed but often spontaneous. The Language of 3 rosters have featured musicians of note including guitarists Richard Leo Johnson, Michael Hewett, David Belmont, cellist David Sharpe, bassist Bill Zola, percussionists Joshua Neritin, Will Romano, and Ray Istorico. Other artists planned for 2006 include guitarists David Cullen, Adam Werner, Scott Burwell, and a return appearance by Richard Leo Johnson and bassist Michael Manning.



One of the major selling points about Language of 3 is that we often look for a venue such as a school or community arts league as we can offer a pre or post-concert workshop in guitar technique as an added incentive. Both Matt and I are experienced educators and clinicians. Should you be on the booking committee for your school or organization please visit <http://www.Languageof3.com> for more information, contact us for a press kit and consider booking Language of 3 for a concert and workshop in 2006.

In this day and age of independent artists the key element in our survival and progress is realizing that networking with our colleagues and peers is essential to our success. With that as the directive let me say I'm always on the lookout for new ways to market my music. I hope you've benefited from reading about my experiences, and if you should come up with a fresh approach, I'd love to hear about it.

Jim



To learn more about Jim Goodin and Language of 3 please see:

Home of Language of 3 - <http://www.languageof3.com>

(click on lower left link on opening page)

<http://www.jimgoodin.com>

<http://www.matrichardsmusic.net>

<http://www.woodandwiremusic.com/jimgoodin/house.html>

<http://www.ign.com>

<http://www.murielanderson.com>

<http://pwsa.homestead.com/>