

THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE MUSICAL ENTERPRISE IS ... MARKETING



MUSIC

DAVID JAMES

Success in music is typically believed to be a function of merit. It is believed that the best artists routinely rise to the top due to their ability to delight and attract audiences, while those less worthy fall by the wayside.

At best, this is only half right. Being able to produce high-quality music is an essential prerequisite, but success is at least as much about the ability to market effectively. Prominent musicians always have big budgets and marketing teams pushing their “product”.

To get some idea of just how great the challenges are for those who do not enjoy such support, consider the case of local classical composer Alan Griffiths (pictured), who specialises in piano and chamber writing and has scored 25 films. What he has done to showcase his own material and attract an audience constitutes a tale of exceptional determination.

A concert typically takes him six months to produce and he has found that radio exposure is the most effective means of drawing in an audience. But it has been “excruciatingly frustrating getting anywhere” with the ABC, the federal government broadcaster.

While many artists complain that the ABC ignores local talent, the problem, according to Griffiths, is that

only a few select artists get regular airplay. The scrapping of funding for the ABC’s permanent sound library has also made it harder to get original music to the right ABC staff. Marketers with big budgets specialise in developing such connections with gatekeepers.

“How can a newcomer on a small budget compete with this?” asks Griffiths.

“In my naivety, I assumed that having an internationally renowned opera singer (bass-baritone Paul Whelan) performing his one and only concert in Australia, premiering my new song cycle, in a landmark venue, would have provided me with some leverage.”

Undaunted, Griffiths turned to a range of social-media platforms, events listings and arts publication bodies. He employed someone to run his Facebook campaign, invested in a radio advertising campaign and appeared in independent media. He linked up with the music education industry, getting his concert promoted by ANZCA Music Examinations, advertising to the Victorian Music Teachers’ Association and arranging to have a peak tertiary music body publish a blog about the concert.

He also hit the streets, organising a two-week street billboard campaign across metropolitan Melbourne, and putting up posters in cafes around Melbourne. He hired a publicist in the hope of getting mainstream media coverage closer to the event and was able to get sponsorship support from instrument retailers, who, unlike musicians, strongly profit from the music industry and are skilled marketers. Bernie’s Music Land and Schimmel Pianos promoted the concert to their subscriber bases.

Griffiths says he has detected that people’s attitudes have changed since the covid19 lockdowns, noting that there is “a lot more conservatism now, which makes it all the more challenging”.

But he is optimistic. “This one has been extra special as I am finally

attracting the interest of internationally renowned musicians. So finally, after 41 years of composing and refusing to give up, my horizons have well and truly widened.”

Marketing music is problematic in part because of the difficulty of describing the “product” in such a way as to persuade people to be interested in it. Music can really only be experienced.

Explaining, for example, some of the harmonic, structural or instrumental innovations in a new classical work will gain little traction given that most people will not understand it and, even if they did, they would find it hard to imagine.

That is why music marketers almost always turn to creating stories that run parallel to the music. For instance, soprano Greta Bradman is a fine classical singer, but her story about being the eldest grandchild of Australia’s greatest cricketer, Sir Donald Bradman, would have been manna from heaven for her marketing people.

As far as I am aware, Griffiths has no connection to any major sporting figures and is probably rubbish at sports himself. Too busy locked away in his room composing, I expect.

Anyway, here is the marketing information:

Australian Premiere

***Such a Fine,
Sunny Day***

Featuring bass-baritone

Paul Whelan

**St Paul’s Cathedral,
Melbourne**

7.30pm

November 25

Tickets: \$30 – \$55



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