



Q&A from The Hidden Curriculum of Artist Management, January 24, 2024

What is the difference between managing your own career, being “managed”, or making a part time (or full time) career out of managing someone else? Here are the questions asked at this event and the answers provided by a panel of professional artists and managers: **Casey Sherwood, Tim Mar, Margherita Fava, and Brian Major**. The goal: To get a clear vision of how to manage yourself, when to get representation, or whether you might want to be an artist manager in the future!

Q: What does an artist manager do for a musician(s)? Day to day, annually - what are they doing for you?

A: An artist manager is usually attending major music conferences, being there to promote their artists - talking to promoters and bookers, maintaining good relationships to get their artists booked. Other parts of the job include project ideation, career strategy, how do we get our clients to where they want to be in 5 years - whether that's through concert programming, recording, public facing items of the artist. Day-to-day: phone and email to presenters, promoters, artists, etc.

A: As a promoter, we're focused on the leverage and longevity of the artist - what markets are they reaching, where are they selling out - how do we best promote them and when? Additionally, negotiating deal terms. Promoters are putting together many puzzle pieces to plan for an artist's year worth of work - data and calendar collection. They're also helping artists plan a tour, what kind of support acts they should be utilizing and leveraging, and helping artists break into other industries.

A: As an artist and my own manager, my time is spent doing a lot of planning, staying relevant online and in performance spaces. I work to ensure I have no long periods of time off and if so, work towards making use of that down time - whether that's getting content, headshots, shortening video content for socials, working on an EPK, etc. Again, a lot of timing things out far in advance, check lists, and emailing. Sometimes this seems overwhelming or unrealistic, but you just put in effort every day! One gig could be the start of building the rest of your career.

A: Even if you have a manager - who can you call and run ideas by? Arts orgs have committees and boards, and individual artists need this too. Sharing ideas - how does this work, will this work? With yourself still being the president and ultimate decision maker. Put together your own personal board with 2-4 people who you can run your career ideas past.

Q: How does an artist make the connection with a manager to get representation? If you're struggling to make that connection, what are the other avenues that you can try to get management?

A: As an artist, a lot has to do with putting yourself out there. We live in the day and age of CONTENT - it's a full time job just trying to put 60 seconds of something together. But there are tons of competitions that managers/agents go to, young artist programs, conferences, etc. You can also ask your colleagues who have management to get a consultation - all of these are very helpful for finding management. Remember, there is a difference between boutique management vs. large management companies - sometimes people can get lost in the bunch, but it's up to you to continuously self-promote. When you're struggling, keep performing to whoever will listen - AND bring a camera!

A: Get content of your performances, no matter how big your audience is. You can be looking for management while managing yourself! First step while you're looking for management is to make an EPK with all of the information and content about you, the artist, so that it's easy for people to get to know you. Then continuously email and follow up with folks. And again, make sure you continuously grow as an artist while you make these items and reach out to folks.

A: As a manager, we're most likely to pick up an artist having heard about them from another manager (via word of mouth from a presenter or artist colleague) - they will take it more seriously than if you reach out yourself. (Within classical, managers are less focused on online content, but that might be changing.) Having an artist manager is building a relationship - it's built on trust and hard work on both ends. Being prepared makes that a better relationship.

A: For promotional agents, it's A LOT of social media being shared and getting its way to those artist managers and booking agents. This comes from putting yourself out there and networking! Reach out to studios, get some session gigs - you'll never know who you'll meet or what connections you can make.

Q: What should you know about wanting to be managed or managing yourself as an international student?

A: For international artists, the main hurdles are securing work authorization/visa and increased expenses and taxation. Some managements do provide visa preparation services in-house, but more and more these days, we are suggesting that folks use lawyers, dedicated visa preparers, etc. which do come with extra cost but are more equipped to keep up with changing regulations, trends, etc. We usually advise that artists apply for visas at least 6 months prior to the start of a tour to account for delays in the process, and to secure a visa, you typically need a somewhat substantial body of work planned in advance. Also, the US government withholds 30% of gross fees from international performers (though there are avenues to getting this rate decreased through something called a Central Withholding Agreement), which can make touring the US especially difficult from a financial standpoint.

Q: What are the financial costs of having a manager - what is the relationship between artist and manager and what kind of flexibility exists there?

A: Typically, the main financial cost of having a manager is a commission taken from your gross fee for performances (fee before any taxes, expenses, etc. are withheld). For classical, the standard rate is 20% but this varies across industries and can change depending on the career status of an artist (some "star artists" do see reduced commission rates). For other industries, you may see between 10-15%, and there can be different structures depending on if you're solely a booking agent, a manager, or a combination of the two.

Q: Can you pay a manager to just run your social media for X cut of the profits?

A: You can hire folks to run your social media account, but on the classical side, this wouldn't be a typical role of a manager – would suggest folks consider PR firms who are starting to offer this dedicated service more frequently. I believe not usually for a cut of profits but more on a retainer/ monthly fee structure.

Q: What are managers looking for in an artist (other than the musical content) (OR if there isn't something tangible like an album)? Is it really selective/competitive?

A: Show your unique style - who are you, how are you marketable, who are you marketable to? Buzz words: marketable, compelling. The longevity of marketing and marketability depends on that niche, how well you find that niche or build it and then become prominent in it. Marketability varies, and it's possible to sell anyone anything, and you need to find the right way to market yourself. You have to find what you care about and what you like and what makes you you, so you have to find a way to be yourself and then ask yourself, how do you market that?

A: Even if you don't think that you're marketable, you are! Not everything that is marketable - it's just how YOU can be marketable. When you're a student you're worried about your playing and the competition of playing. But this is a good time to think about what you like, what you do, where you might want to be and what you might want to be doing (front man, jazz drummer touring, on cruises, in jazz clubs, do you want to be a studio musician)? And by doing these things, find what you like - sometimes you're doing things you don't want to do to pay the bills, but then you can pivot into what YOU want to do.

Q: What are red flags that make you NOT want to book an artist?

A: You're under such a spotlight in this industry and people become hyper-fixated on you. This industry does thrive on confrontational content. So no, there aren't necessarily any red flags. There are only 2 ways to expire - you stop selling tickets OR you die.

A: YOU HAVE TO ANSWER THE PHONE / EMAIL - or you will miss out on opportunities. Find a way to do it yourself OR find someone to do it for you.

Q: How does one connect with a booking agent like Live Nations, and continue to be booked through them (especially in the sense of diversifying your audience)?

A: This is where the artist manager or agent comes in - it's very easy to maintain once you have your manager.

Q: As someone who has managed for friends, what advice do you have if you're working with a friend or colleague to help you manage your career?

A: If you have a personal relationship with someone you're working with, you HAVE to create boundaries and a mutual understanding that business is business. Don't hold grudges against things they can't control. And you have to be their number one fan to be their manager.

Q: Is the role of management to build a relationship with your manager over time, or to break into the industry and move from there? When do you need to readjust management so as to diversify your audience?

A: You might start with a friend who's managing you, but after time and growth you might need to get other management - readjust to the new needs of the artist. When you start to grow outside of playing 500 cap venues, then think about who is advancing you. You don't have to break a relationship - think of it more as building blocks - they will still support you after changing of management.

A: As an artist, I'm at that point currently. I have a fantastic manager but we have come to the peak of where we can go together. This is where I go back to that board and discuss ideas and options, and then transition as naturally as possible while being transparent with your current, soon to be past, manager.

A: Managers and artists have to have the same goals and trajectory, and if not then sometimes you have to separate and find the next person to push you who is aligned to your mutual goals.