



Sound Off

What should an artist look for in a manager (and vice versa)?

BY BRIAN WISE

Michelle Cann ('13)

Eleanor Sokoloff Chair in Piano Studies

→ Pianist Michelle Cann signed to Curtis's management division in 2021 after having mixed results with earlier managers. She recommends that young musicians do their homework. "Sometimes, we have a little bit of a starry-eyed view of things and think, 'As long as I have management, then I'm good to go,'" she says. But it's important that management understands your artistic priorities as you grow—and that you understand them.

"For most managements, they get paid when you perform. They get their 20 percent, so they are sometimes very motivated by money. I get it because that's their bottom line. Therefore, if you say, 'I would love to do this [unconventional] venue,' they may respond that 'these venues are cool, but they don't pay as much.' There's a balance, and you must respect the management team. Do your research on a manager. Look up the artists that they are working with and what they program. If they have a variety of artists who do a variety of things, that means that this manager does know how to book for different audiences and venues.

"Look at how many artists they have and look at who is on the staff. At the same time, if it's a decent management, they only want artists that are bookable. And the only way they're going to know if you are bookable is if you are out there doing things. Say yes to performance opportunities."

STEVEN MAREAZI WILLIS

Jonathan Biss ('01)

Pianist

→ After years of working with separate managers in New York and Europe, the concert pianist, writer, and teacher Jonathan Biss recently signed exclusively with the London offices of IMG Artists. The consolidation, he said, was for efficiency. Regardless of one's career goals, Mr. Biss believes that trust and creativity are the essential traits of a manager.

“A manager ends up having hun-

dreds, if not thousands, of conversations about you and your strengths, weaknesses, and what you have to offer—that you will never be party to. For the relationship to work, you must feel that that person understands you, and you must feel that you can trust them.

“There is stuff in the contract about what kind of piano has to be provided. But sometimes, it happens that there are three days

between concerts on tour in California and it doesn't make sense to go home, and you have to figure out where you're going to practice. You need people who are going to be creative and kind of come up with a lot of different solutions.

“There's such a huge spectrum of piano situations that a manager has to be able to read. And of course, it's their job to keep you out of five-alarm fires in the first place.” →



BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

Maria Ioudenitch ('18)

Violinist

→ After Maria Ioudenitch won first prizes at three competitions in 2021, including at the Joseph Joachim International Competition, she received management inquiries from multiple agencies—including one that “just dropped off the face of the earth.” Now she is signed with Emily McClean at Opus 3 Artists, who oversees her dates in the Americas, and Christopher Dingstad at Künstleragentur Dr. Raab & Dr. Böhm, who serves as her general manager. Ms. Ioudenitch stresses the importance of flexibility.

“For me, it was especially important that I build a personal relationship with my manager in addition to the business side. You have to talk to them weekly, even daily, and if you don’t have that personal connection, then it’s going to be really tough. It was also important that both Chris and Emily understood the importance of taking care of oneself and being aware of the amount of work that I can take on. Of course, for an agent, it’s important to have many concerts because the more concerts you play, the more money you bring in. But for me, it was important that both understood that, for the longevity of my career, they can’t just book concerts whenever and just hope that I can make it. They both ask me, ‘Is this feasible, and are you going to be okay after this period?’ They really care, and that’s maybe even more important.”



JENNY CHOU

Andrew Lane

Vice President, Touring and Artist Management

→ Since Curtis expanded into artist management in 2020, Andrew Lane has overseen a growing roster that now includes the Dover Quartet, Michelle Cann (see above), and Trio Zimbalist. Mr. Lane also heads Curtis on Tour, booking students, faculty, and alumni on four continents. Honored by *Musical America* as one of its 2022 Professionals of the Year, he stresses the importance of a 50/50 partnership with an artist.

“The artistry must be there, but what I’m also looking for in an artist is a personal and professional drive and charisma, on and off stage. In terms of a more measurable thing, I’m looking for a critical mass of past and upcoming engagements. And most importantly, meaningful connections with conductors or artistic programmers that result in reengagements. That’s how careers are built. I’m looking for an artist who’s willing to do 50 percent of the work. It’s not that I would expect an artist to bring 50 percent of the dates to me, necessarily. But an artist is willing to do the press interviews, dinners, and receptions with donors or presenters—and is building those relationships when on the road and making those connections. Ultimately, once I’ve booked a date, arranged [transportation], and done everything on the management side, then it’s up to the artist to deliver and to hit the home run.”



Josef Špaček ('09)

Violinist

→ Josef Špaček has a management team that includes a Brussels-based general manager (Jeroen Tersteeg of Nymus Artists) and regional managers representing central Europe, Japan, China, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Such specialization is beneficial, Mr. Špaček says, when dealing with “niche” markets where it helps to know the local language. Mr. Špaček is also a member of Trio Zimbalist, which is managed by Curtis’s artist management program.

“The ideal manager is not just a person who books you for concerts but who serves as a personal therapist, in a way. You share all your struggles as an artist and have someone to rely on. So, someone very reliable and trustworthy is key. A good manager should know about repertoire, should know what pieces you do well, and can recommend repertoire choices—what you should play where. Of course, you can have managers who are total sharks and know nothing about music and just take it as a business. And maybe you can have a successful career with them. But I always enjoy working with someone who is kind of a music connoisseur.”

Comments have been edited for clarity and length.



RADOVAN SUBIN (ŠPAČEK)