



NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2017

Article 3.1: Booking ...Into the Weeds



Booking...Into the Weeds



And if you really want to get into the weeds on the topic of booking....the festival invites emerging artists, artists who are growing in recognition and developing “buzz,” artists who are riding the apex of a loyal following, and artists who are well seasoned, who have honed their craft for years with varying degrees of commercial success and name recognition. An ideal line-up is a mix of all of these.

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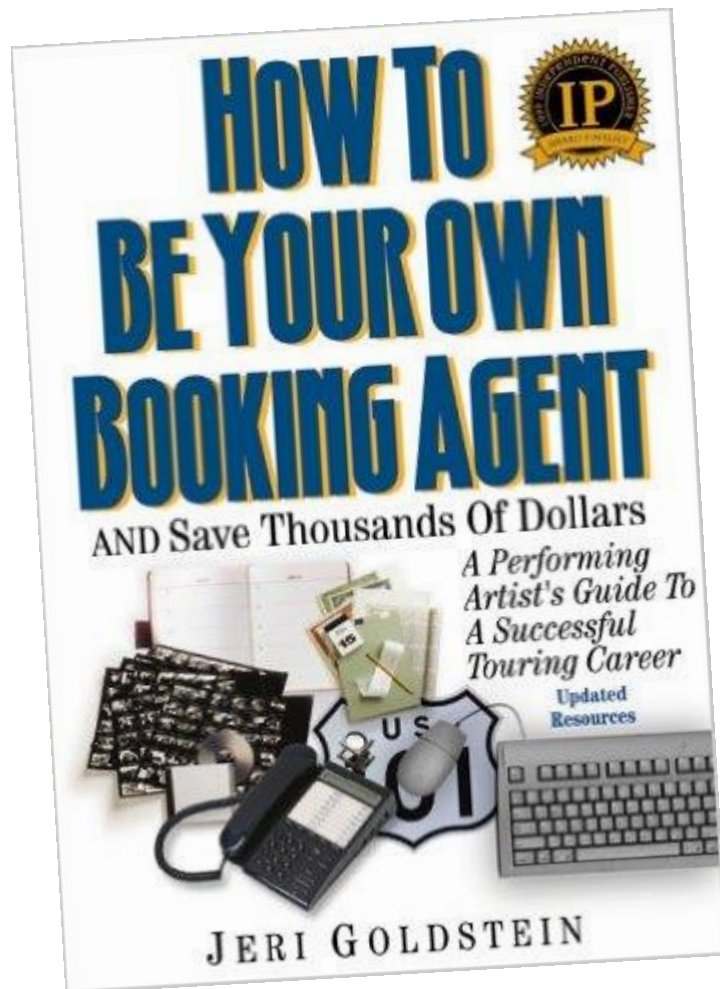
Remember, at the Kerrville Folk Festival, no differentiation is made on where an artist is on their career ladder; all are given equal value. And, unlike most other offers, in addition to the artists' fees, the festival does reimburse artists and their accompanists for travel, which are capped in order to control expenses.

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So let's reflect for just a minute on how artists measure booking offers.

- The emerging artists are the most hungry and most likely to accept the invitation.
- The artists who have achieved some regional or national recognition often have hired management to negotiate their bookings and plan their schedules.
- Artists who are well seasoned are a mixed bag. Some have management and or a booking agent, and some have found that they are better served self-managing, or perhaps having a close friend or family member represent them.

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So now let's think about the role of booking agents. The relationship between the artists and the agent is co-dependent.

Agents are most often compensated on a percentage of what they are able to negotiate for the artist in the form of performance fees. Most often, travel reimbursement is not included in the percentage an agent is paid.

Travel reimbursement is a bonus to the artists, but it is not a strong incentive to an agent.

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When an artist enters into an agreement with an agent or agency, they relinquish their schedule and booking decisions to the agent. So when an offer is made, the artist may or may not know of the offer and may or may not be participating in the booking decisions.

If a festival or venue steps around the agent and contacts an artist directly, the artist may influence the decision, may state strong preferences, and on occasion may say, “book it.” But such action does not build a good relationship with the artists’ agency.

And, a producer may deal with the same agency for an array of artists. So, it is a tightrope to know when and how to push a decision.

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Typically, a tour is built around one or more “anchor” dates. Anchors are often well paid or high profile opportunities. Additional dates are plugged in around the anchors.

Dark nights (those without bookings) and the amount of days on the road are important factors. Suffice it to say, there are many factors that are weighed around booking decisions. This means that from the time an offer is made until it is accepted may involve 60 or 90 days, sometimes more. And, it is not unusual for an agent to leverage one offer against another in the process.

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Consequently, when songwriters who are:

- Known
- Achieve the name recognition to put “butts in the seats,” and
- Who have an agent booking tours,
...unless the offer is
- Perfectly timed,
- Lucrative, or
- A performance to which the artist has given specific priority,
...acceptance comes slowly, if at all.



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So given all these factors, the Kerrville Folk Festival may continue the booking practices on which it was built, or make changes in order to assure a handful of the artists who are riding the apex and serve as a draw beyond the festival community are booked.



Rest assured, there is openness to such change, however, change is akin to letting the genie out of the bottle. Once there, we must live with it. So as we consider booking, changes, following are questions to consider.

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How do we fund acts demanding more than the scale paid by the festival?

- Do we reallocate the funds we have?

- Do we book less acts?

- Do we find underwriters for specific artists?

 - What if an underwriter wants to specify who they underwrite?

By varying the pay scale, do we undermine our very definition of honoring the art, not the celebrity?

How big do we want our audience to be?

- There are artists who may draw a larger audience than we can accommodate on the ranch. How is that managed?

What about the artists who have played the festival for years?

- Will they feel betrayed?

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There are no flippant, easy answers to these questions.

And if or when this bottle is opened, its impact will ripple throughout every aspect of what the festival is.

So decisions must be well thought out and made with consciousness.

