

## Creative Uses for Small Acts by Del Suggs

Has this ever happened to you: You're at the APCA conference, watching this incredible duo showcase. You get so excited, and you want to book them-- but you can't figure out how to present them on your campus. You think-- Sure, they are great in the showcase, but you don't have a theater on your campus.

Or how about this: you love all the showcasing acts, but you can only afford the least expensive performers. Where would you put a solo, duo or trio on your campus-- when students only turn out to hear big bands?

Whether you can only afford small acts, or you happen to find a small act you love, you're actually very fortunate. Some big acts-- concert bands or illusionists, for example-- can only perform in a traditional theater setting. Smaller acts, on the other hand, can truly be presented almost any where on your campus. Let's consider some alternate uses for smaller, easily produced acts.

There can be any number of reasons to invite a performer to campus-- as part of an ongoing entertainment series, for a special event, as a complement to a traditional event (homecoming or spring weekend). Maybe a performer offers a program that ties in with a national awareness week, or would be an appropriate addition to a community event.

The entertainment can be culturally enriching, or have an educational slant, or simply be entertainment for entertainment's sake --something that can be overlooked on campuses. College and university life can be very demanding, with academic deadlines, work schedules, cocurricular and civic obligations. Entertainment can be the way you spell "relief." A performance that allows or encourages people to set aside the details of their day-to-day

responsibilities for a little while and relax, sing, laugh, dance or simply reflect on the talent and beauty that an artist might share accomplishes a great deal. People leave an event refreshed, rejuvenated and ready to go again. They'll be looking forward to the next show whether it's a week, two weeks or a month later.

Ordinarily a program-- whether it's a concert, coffeehouse house show, comedian, performing arts-- features the "performance." People are there for the performance, as opposed to putting the performer in a situation where a group has gathered for another purpose. The show might take place on a concert stage with theater seating, a function room in the campus center, or possibly a residence hall lobby. Regardless of the facility, there would be a defined stage area, appropriate lighting and sound, and, most importantly, the seating in the room would be arranged to focus everyone's attention on the act.

Consider bringing in a second act as an opener. This opening act slot is a prime opportunity for using a smaller act. Don't be afraid to mix and match here. You could have a male duo open for a female comic, or have a storyteller open for a mime and offset the physical presentation with the spoken word. While we're on the subject of openers, if you're doing a major concert with nationally recognized talent, you should consider using a campus favorite as opener.

Small, easily produced acts also fit easily into larger special and/or traditional events. For example, a "welcome back" barbecue might be the perfect situation for that trio you saw showcasing but couldn't figure out how to fit into your schedule or your three-hundred seat auditorium. A solo acoustic performer is a nice addition to an activities fair-- loud enough to entertain and draw people to the event but not so loud that representatives of clubs and

organizations can't tell you who they are.

Half-time entertainment at a football game is expected. A flat bed truck with a sound system and a small act driven out to the fifty yard line is a bit out of the ordinary. Plug it in and do a twenty-minute set, unplug it and drive away. It can and has been done! You might try clowns or some form of broad, physical comedy at center court for a basketball half-time.

Small acts can add sparkle and draw attention to events that might otherwise be fairly mundane. Perhaps an organization on campus wants to make and sell tie-dye t-shirts to raise money to sponsor a thanksgiving dinner for local needy families. Have a couple of tie-dyeing booths on site and let anyone donate a dollar and dye a shirt. Announce that the shirts will be auctioned at a comedy show the following week. Invite a representative of a local human services organization to speak on campus, during the auction and/or as a separate event. Have the M.C. or one of the comedians be the auctioneer. The day of the dinner you might have a caricature artist, roving artists doing balloon animals, face painting, sleight of hand, etc. Turn it into a party. A string quartet or classical guitarist at dinner can provide just the right ambiance.

Easily produced acts can be especially helpful in attracting people to another event or entertaining a group gathered for a purpose other than the performance. If your campus elections are typically a low turnout affair, a performer at or near the polls entertaining and constantly reminding passers-by to vote might be just the thing. Same for voter registration drive, etc.

Where people are likely to be waiting in line (for what might seem like years) some music, comedy, or maybe a caricature artist would be appreciated. Does registration or

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drop/add ring a bell? You might even approach the registrar's office to see if they'd like to cosponsor with you! Do students wait in line to sell back used books to the bookstore? How about your college blood drive? What could be better than having a laid-back musical act play while students are waiting and giving blood. It helps them relax, and takes their mind off the issues at hand.

Music works for any kind of waiting. If you bring in a popular novelty, such as wax hands, candlemaking, or caricature artist, remember it takes time to do complete those things. Stage a musical act near the novelty, and your students will be entertained while they are waiting to be drawn or waxed. You'll have fewer complaints about the lines, and fewer students will walk away without participating.

Many artists' performances involve issues larger than the hour or two on stage, such as a musical performance that focuses on women's issues, or the history of the underground railroad, or a dramatic presentation on native American culture. These artists often offer seminars, lectures and residencies in addition to their performances. Get these performers into the classroom, too.

Keep in mind that any act you bring to campus for a program may be of special interest to different groups and make an effort to target them. For example, the psychology department might even recommend that students attend a performance by the hypnotist or mentalist that you've contracted for homecoming. Perhaps the theater department might offer technical support for the mime you are featuring on Parents' weekend. Take advantage of every opportunity to invite and involve as many different segments of your college community in your programs as you can.

Instead of bringing in one solo artist a week, you might offer a

"singer/songwriter night" featuring three or four in a round-robin performance with a songwriting seminar following. How about a show featuring student talent using a professional comedian as the emcee-- just like an APCA showcase!

You'll find that professional performers active in the college market are usually willing and able to adapt to your performance situations. If you're considering using an act in a unique situation be sure to discuss everything in detail well in advance-- if a cellist is expecting to perform in a concert hall, but arrives on campus to find out that you decided it'd be cool to set her on a small stage at the bottom of an empty swimming pool to draw attention to water quality issues there could be a few tense moments! Don't forget that touring performers have experience with lots of different situations. We can very often help with organizing your event, and making it a success.

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[Del@DelSuggs.com](mailto:Del@DelSuggs.com)**