

Youth Talent Showcases

By Deborah Lein



Minnesota Public Radio *Minnesota Varsity* Showcase Artists

Photo: Matt Mead

Many classical public radio stations seek pathways into the world of music education but are searching for meaningful roles that make sense for them as media organizations. A handful of stations have developed initiatives that use the station's platforms to bring talented young performers to public notice. By recognizing and rewarding skill and potential, efforts that showcase young musicians encourage musical aspiration and sustained participation, and may even offer rising stars a springboard for their future careers.

The potential benefits of youth talent showcases to young people are easy to grasp. But what are the benefits to stations in undertaking this work?

This report explores the details of four contests for young musicians at WUOL Louisville, Classical KING Seattle, Minnesota Public Radio, and WDAV Davidson, NC. All four of these contests feature young performers (one of them also has a composition division). A fifth showcase at Vermont Public Radio, which features young composers, takes the form of a recurring broadcast segment.

Below are observations regarding the opportunities the showcases create for the organizations themselves, an “at a glance” chart of key facts regarding the five case studies, and observations about the different philosophies and purposes that guide these efforts.

The second section of this report comprises five station case studies, presented in the form of a consistent Q&A format with the station personnel most responsible for the showcases.

A final section – [Contest Planning Considerations](#) – presents a checklist of issues and questions for any station thinking about developing a showcase effort of its own. It provides a roadmap for identifying and articulating high-level priorities and working through the practical considerations that support those priorities. The items range from big-picture considerations to the myriad details of successful execution, all drawn from stations’ experiences.

Benefits for the Station

Our study of classical stations that are already making a serious commitment to showcasing young musicians highlighted five important opportunities:

Change the narrative

Classical audiences and performers are exposed to consistently negative media reports about the current status and future prospects of the art form. Classical stations, with their “giant megaphones,” have an opportunity to challenge this narrative by celebrating the vibrancy of their local classical scenes. The deep engagement of young people in classical music is an important story within this larger effort; station-branded youth showcases provide a platform to both tell and show that story in ways that connect the station even more deeply to the local ecosystem.

Champion music education

Station-sponsored youth showcases not only provide visibility for individual performers but also shed light on the educational scaffolding needed to support young musicians in reaching high levels of achievement: teachers, mentors, after-school ensembles, and fellow students. By creating opportunities for young people to demonstrate their skills, stations support and recognize the work of music educators at all levels. The showcases provide their own educational value, too, as preparing for a contest audition or being interviewed for broadcast helps students gain greater confidence and sense of

purpose as well as mastery over challenging repertoire. Showcases also encourage and incentivize kids further down the ladder of proficiency to aspire to greater heights.

Play to stations' greatest strengths

Classical public radio stations can step into the “competition circuit” with two quite significant advantages: guaranteed broadcast reach and professional recording capacity. While cash and other awards are solid incentives for young people, opportunities to be heard on-air by thousands of listeners and recorded by studio professionals are consistently cited by young participants as the mostly highly-valued and memorable parts of the showcase experience. Such experiences are especially meaningful to those who aspire to music careers, and many make further use of their recorded performances and interviews in music school applications and submissions to other music competitions. Stations that may not feel ready to mount a full-blown competition can offer some of these same benefits as part of other approaches to showcasing young musicians and composers.

Build stronger relationships and networks

It takes a village to pull off a successful talent contest, and one of the greatest benefits to stations is the quantity and quality of valuable relationships that are built over time in the course of producing annual music competitions. Because music educators play a crucial role in encouraging contest entries, stations build contact databases of private music studios, public and private secondary schools, existing teacher networks, after-school youth ensembles, and university music schools and conservatories (if appropriate) for targeted promotion of the contest and its related deadlines.

The most prestigious classical music organizations are the most logical sources for contest judges, in-kind donations of performance space, and partnerships for non-contest showcase projects. Finally, all youth contests and showcases provide high-touch opportunities with dozens of parents. In many communities, there is a high degree of overlap among these groups, as the same musicians head up teaching studios, perform in local groups, lead musical organizations in their day jobs, and prioritize music education and performance opportunities for their own children. The value of these relationships can go far beyond their roles in the showcase itself.

Attract significant funding

Every nonprofit fundraiser knows that where kids go, money follows. For many donors who care passionately about classical music, there is no more important goal than bringing young people “into the fold” to sustain the art form, and helping to launch the early careers of young performers. Other significant donors whose primary interest is education (rather than music) may be interested in promoting the beneficial effect that musical proficiency has on academic achievement generally. In short, young musician showcases can be magnets for philanthropy, enriching the station’s case for support and opening new doors with both current and prospective donors. Showcases are also rich in potential for corporate sponsorship, both cash and in-kind.

Five Station Case Studies – At a Glance

A side-by-side overview of the stations’ work:

| Station | Years | Staff hours | Entries | Cash prizes (total) | Other prizes | Categories | Ages | Residence |
|---------------------------|-------|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| WUOL Louisville | 11 | 30-40 | 25-30 | \$200 | Live broadcast | Solo | 8-18 | 125 mile radius |
| Classical KING Seattle | 7 | 100+ | 100 | \$500 | Live broadcast | Solo, Ensemble | 6-23 (3 age groups) | State of WA |
| Minnesota Public Radio | 7 | 700+ | 100 | None | Live broadcast, professional audio recording, scholarships, participation prizes | Solo, Ensemble, Composition | 14-18 | Broadcast area |
| WDAV Davidson | 4 | 700+ | 50-70 groups | \$12,000 (among five prizes) | Live broadcast, professional audio recording, scholarships | Ensemble | 14-30 (2 age groups) | National |
| Vermont Public Radio | 4 | 50-60 | 6 per year, hand-picked | (Not a contest) | Produced broadcast feature | Composition | Grades 6-12 | State of VT |

Each of these showcases has an on-air component, blurring some distinctions between community engagement and programming and requiring balance among simultaneous commitments to young people, to the highest standards of musical excellence, and to good radio.

The staff hours listed in the chart above indicate the sheer amount of detail work involved, especially for more complex contests with multiple age divisions and elimination rounds. Yet these five stations feel that their showcases provide significant returns on their investment of time and take considerable pride in their quality, using phrases like “centerpiece,” “signature program,” and “cornerstone event” to describe these programs in the larger context of their stations’ public service.

Three Showcase Philosophies

While similar in many respects, our five case studies reveal significant differences in underlying goals, which find expression in operational details. Three distinct orientations emerge from these examples:

Encouraging broad participation

In keeping with the goals of Minnesota Public Radio's overall educational program, MPR's youth contest is designed to encourage and reward music-making among young people, both individually and collaboratively. Of these case studies, MPR's program has the most expansive menu of entry categories and repertoire parameters. Because their primary goal is to inspire and welcome, their promotional messaging encourages participation and downplays competition, while behind the scenes MPR staff works with their judging panel to consider diversity along several dimensions (age, ethnicity, instrument families, geography) alongside proficiency, especially up through the semifinalist round.

Vermont Public Radio's Student Composer Showcase takes a completely non-competitive approach. A recurring broadcast feature rather than a contest, the program profiles talented students but focuses on self-expression and the creative process rather than emphasizing virtuosity. The Student Composer Showcase, produced in partnership with a local online mentoring program for young composers, highlights students' deep engagement with classical music and is designed to promote an active and vibrant student composer community in VPR's listening area.

Recognizing highest achievement

The priorities of KING's Young Artist Awards align with the traditions of elite classical music competitions. Designed to discover and promote the most talented young performers, this contest prioritizes technical excellence in musical performance. Because finalists are broadcast on-air, the station emphasizes the quality of the actual performance rather than more general indications of musical potential. KING places a particularly high premium on professionalism, deliberately placing the bar as high as possible on the quality of the submission video as well as the quality of the live performance. While the contest allows very young contestants, it generally serves as a "rite of passage" into the world of professional music-making.

WUOL's Young Artist Competition priorities fall between the MPR and KING approaches. Like KING's competition, the Louisville contest allows grade-school entrants and in some years gives out a junior prize for the younger end of the age parameters, designed to reward participation at a lower skill level. Yet while its judging process is on a more contained scale than KING's (in-person auditions only, and only one round of judging), the WUOL competition's overall "best of the best" emphasis is similar.

Maximizing competition prestige

WDIV has approached its young musicians competition as an opportunity to elevate the station brand; quality of performance not only ensures good radio, it also promotes the reputation of both the competition and the station. Two strategic decisions have been crucial: finding a niche that is

underserved by the rest of the “competition circuit” (chamber ensembles) and removing the residency requirements to attract applicants from across the country. WDAV’s contest is quickly gaining stature in the music world by dint of its substantial cash and studio recording prizes and its VIP treatment of finalists. Its age parameters allow older contestants than the other case studies in this report.

Young People: A Love Story

The fundamental values shared across these five case studies are a deep passion for young people and a profound respect for their abilities and accomplishments. Every station interviewed remarked on the breathtaking level of musical performance at young ages, and on the proprietary pride each station feels in winners who go on to professional musical careers. It is worth noting that every contest represented here has had winners that have gone on to Juilliard, the Cleveland Institute, the New York Philharmonic, etc. (Top talent can come from anywhere.) Every station in its own way has approached its showcase as a true labor of love. Several interviewees spoke of the importance of handcrafting unique experiences for young people that respect their serious musicianship while embracing a sense of fun.

The Funding Opportunity

While positive feedback from participants, community goodwill, civic pride, and commendations from the music education community are all important outcomes, several stations emphasize that revenue is one of the top measures of success. These showcases represent a truly significant investment of time and energy, and need to fully “pull their weight” by attracting revenue to the station.

Showcases are powerful enough to meet that challenge through the combination of a strengthened general case for support, earmarked gifts, sponsorship dollars and in-kind donations, and ticket sales to public performances. It is critical that development staff have access to stories and visual collateral to share with donors, not only about contest winners but also about the countless staff hours of care and attention to detail in the service of young musicians.

Conclusion

Talent showcases are a recommended activity for stations prepared and able to handle a labor-intensive but powerful initiative focused on young musicians.

Whether approached as a contest or as a broadcast feature, youth talent showcases require significant staff time, meticulous attention to detail, strong relationships in the local classical ecosystem, and a genuine respect for young musicians’ talent and work ethic.

In return, youth talent showcases inspire audiences and communities, delight station staffs and Boards, drive philanthropic giving, provide sponsorship opportunities, and elevate the station brand.

About the Report

Both within the local arts ecosystem and beyond it, public radio classical music stations seek opportunities to step into more visible roles, where their civic value is recognized as a force for good by classical music lovers and non-lovers alike. This report is one of three recommendations for community engagement activities that align with the core services, strategies, and sustainability of a public media classical music station.

The initial work in this area was carried out by a working group of station leaders, including:

KING, Seattle, Jennifer Ridewood (chair)

KDFC, San Francisco, Bill Lueth

Capital Public Radio, Sacramento, Joe Barr and

Minnesota Public Radio, Brian Newhouse

Paul Conley

WFCL, Nashville, Anita Bugg and Nina Cardona

KCME, Colorado Springs, George Preston

WQED, Pittsburgh, Deb Acklin

The working group was supported by Wende Persons, former Managing Director, Classical Music Rising.

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Classical Music Rising is a project of the Station Resource Group, supported by participating stations and a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Tom Thomas and Terry Clifford, SRG's co-CEOs, work with a station-led Steering Committee to provide overall leadership for the initiative.

CLASSICAL MUSIC RISING | www.classicalmusicrising.org

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Youth Talent Showcases Station Case Studies

The following five case studies (four youth talent contests and one recurring broadcast feature) are presented in a consistent Q&A format to enable easy navigation and apples-to-apples comparisons. Each case study contains an **Overview**, **Contest Parameters** (where applicable), **Nuts and Bolts**, **Marketing/Promotion**, **Business Side**, and **Evaluation** section.

[WUOL \(Louisville, KY\)](#)

[KING \(Seattle, WA\)](#)

[Minnesota Public Radio \(St. Paul, MN\)](#)

[WDAV \(Davidson, NC\)](#)

[Vermont Public Radio \(Colchester, VT\)](#)

Louisville Public Media

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Winners of 2016 90.5 WUOL/PNC Young Artist Competition

Photo: 90.5 WUOL/Louisville Public Media

OVERVIEW

- **What is the name of your contest?**
WUOL / PNC Young Artist Competition
- **How long has your station been doing this contest?**
Eleven years (since 2006) as WUOL's own event (we had been partnering with University of Louisville on a similar contest for a few years prior).
- **How many applicants did you have for your most recent contest? Has that number gone up or down over time?**
Upper 20s. The number has fluctuated from the upper teens/low 20s to the low 40s. It seems to ebb and flow based on how many resources we can devote to promoting it and based on a natural cycle of talent. Overall we consider it has remained flat.

- **What's the upshot?**

We see this as an important component of our education program and a very important piece of our case for support. It's a unique role for us in our region, which gives us visibility and branding especially in the music education community. At eleven years in, we have the process pretty ingrained so that we're efficient with our time and there aren't many surprises.

CONTEST PARAMETERS

- **What age groups are eligible? How was this decided upon?**

Ages 8-18. This was inherited from the previous iteration.

- **Are there different "classes" for different instrument groups or do different instruments compete with each other?**

Both solo musicians and chamber ensembles are eligible and compete against each other. We don't have separate divisions. We do get very young competitors and some years we've awarded a separate "junior award" for the grade-school competitors as a way to say "Good job, buddy! You're really brave for doing this!"

- **What other eligibility requirements are there?**

We have residency requirements within a 125-mile radius of the station (even though our listening radius is only 50). We have had competitors from as far away as Nashville and Cincinnati. Contestants must be pre-college and studying with a teacher.

- **Are multiple entries allowed?**

No

- **What kind of submission is acceptable?**

Since our contest uses a live audition format, contestants do not submit video files (just a brief application form). We don't specify the kind of repertoire. The only two restrictions are: performers can't use an "accompanying track" (a CD of the piano accompaniment in lieu of a real pianist), and we can't accommodate piano concertos because we only have one piano in the studio (piano concertos would require two).

NUTS AND BOLTS

- **How is (or was) the timing of each annual contest determined?**

The current team inherited the timing – it has always been in the fall and although the original reasoning wasn't documented, it may have been because there are so many educator association festivals in the spring and early winter. By doing the contest in the fall it feels as though we're avoiding big conflicts. We do try to check as many calendars as possible before setting the audition and recital dates. This time around the final recital date fell on the day before Thanksgiving – we thought it would be bad, but it turned out really well because kids (and many of their parents) got the day off.

- **How long is the application period?**

We announce the opening of applications in late September/early October, and then hold auditions mid-November, so usually 6-8 weeks. We announce the winners in mid-November.

- **Do you require an application fee?**

Yes, \$20

- **What kind of award or recognition do the finalists receive? (cash, scholarships, on-air performance, live performance, etc.)**

Our contest is held as a live audition in front of the judges, with everyone scheduled on the same day. Every contestant receives written feedback from the judges upon request (usually by email).

The first place winner receives a \$200 cash prize. All winners (first place, second place, and honorable mentions) perform their pieces live in a recital program for broadcast, which is taped in our performance space. The recital concert is also open to the public.

- **Do non-finalists receive anything?**

No

- **Do you partner with another organization (or more than one)?**

Only for funding.

- **What is your adjudication process? How are judges selected?**

We have three local judges (professional musicians and teachers). It rotates – we try to pick different judges every year, all active and respected musicians but ones who don't have any students competing in the current round. Kids submit a brief application form but the contest consists of a live audition in a closed studio with judges. The maximum allotted time per audition is 10 minutes, and judges have the option of ending the performance at any time.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

- **How is the contest promoted to the community? What marketing happens before the application process opens? During the application period? Afterwards?**

Our only paid advertising has been Facebook ads. We don't do print advertising. We begin promoting in late summer. One of the most important parts of our promotion is sending an email to different educator networks, schools, the Cincinnati Conservatory prep program, etc. Word gets out because teachers often teach in multiple locations, so they help spread the word to those who aren't on our mailing list.

We're in touch with the Music Educators Associations also. We do keep our own contact list of teachers, but we also work through existing networks.

- **What kind of year-round visibility do you give to your ongoing efforts?**
We have a standing web page. Over the years we have done some “where are they now” features, but it’s not been very consistent. Sometimes we might invite them back to do a concert after they’ve gone to Juilliard, etc. The recital includes a short interview with each of the winners and we post that online also.
- **Do you collect testimonials, video, etc. from kids / teachers / parents? How are they used?**
We broadcast the concert on the radio and online and we also post live video on Facebook.
- **Do you mention your contest as a service to your community in your fundraising (membership, major giving, foundations, etc.)?**
Yes, especially during fund drives.

BUSINESS SIDE

- **How much staff time is involved?**
Each year we put in 5 - 10 hours a week for the four weeks leading up to the competition, so in all we estimate 30 - 40 hours between the two of us (me and our education coordinator). We also get support from volunteer coordinators for help on the day of the event, and we work with the marketing director to promote the competition and the recital event.
- **Beyond the costs of your staff time and a cash award, what are your other related expense categories?**
We pay the engineering contractor \$100 per service. And we have done paid Facebook advertising. Everything else is staff and volunteer time.
- **How is the contest funded? Do you raise money specifically in support of this contest?**
Yes, we have a sponsor (PNC) and this is part of their overall sponsorship of our educational programming. They get title recognition.
- **How are applicants tracked and acknowledged? What kind of ongoing follow-up do you have with applicants, if any?**
We haven’t had the bandwidth to do this consistently.

EVALUATION

- **How do you approach goal-setting for this effort?**
We don’t set formal goals, but long-term, it’s my dream to grow the contest so that the final concert is a little bigger. We’d like to add a component where you send in a video or recording as a pre-audition or first round. We think we’d open up the audition pool by doing it that way.
- **How do you think about and measure success for the effort?**
We see it as an important component of education work. It’s the only opportunity for young people to compete to be heard on the radio, as we are the only media organization that does

this in town. For kids, getting on the radio is a big deal. We see ourselves as a component of the competition circuit. The producer for From the Top wants us to send him the recordings of the winners – they have to apply to be on From the Top but it bumps them to the top for consideration. We think that’s a nice tie-in with the national show (and it speaks to the quality of our contestants) and a nice perk for the local contest.

- **Is there skepticism from elsewhere in the organization about this contest? If so, how do you handle this?**

No, quite the opposite – it really helps with fundraising, helps with grants, and raises our visibility. That said, I have been the one that is most doubtful. I’ve questioned it more than anyone else. But we haven’t found a real reason to stop doing them. It fits our educational mission.

- **What kind of debrief/evaluation process do you have following each year’s contest, if any?**

Honestly, by this point it’s pretty much plug and play. If something big blows up we talk about it. But that’s rare.

- **Have you made major changes to your contest over time? What lessons have you learned?**

The big one is the need for absolute clarity over rules and communication. We definitely have refined and honed the rules over time.

We have modified the judging process over time but haven’t changed anything dramatically. We’ve gotten better at communicating the goal of the competition to the judges – that’s really important. We are looking for potential, sure, but we are judging THIS performance. The ultimate goal is what’s going to be on the radio so the quality of the performance really matters to ensure good radio.

We are intentionally vague about the number of honorable mentions, but we tell the judges to pick the kids they think will perform the best on the radio. That can be one kid (beyond the first and second place), or it could be five kids. We ask them to look for variety among ages and instruments, but we especially emphasize that they should look for kids they are pretty sure won’t embarrass themselves if they make a mistake in live performance. They need to be able to keep their cool under pressure – again, this is going live on our airwaves.

- **What advice would you give a station that is considering creating their own contest?**

Make sure you tell the kids who are bringing accompanists to bring their own page turners!!! Sounds like a small thing but it sure isn’t.

For more information: <http://wuol.org/yac/>

Back to [Station Case Studies](#) menu.

CLASSICAL KING

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Marley Erickson, Winner of Classical KING's 2017 Young Artist Award

Image: Classical KING

OVERVIEW

- **What is the name of your contest?**
Young Artist Awards
- **How long has your station been doing this contest?**
Now in our 7th year.
- **How many applicants did you have for your most recent contest? Has that number gone up or down over time?**
Close to 100 this year. It has fluctuated anywhere from 90 - 110 over the years.
- **What's the upshot?**
The Young Artist Awards are the centerpiece of KING's education initiatives. We have a mission-level commitment to encouraging and celebrating young people's participation in classical music, and this is the most visible of KING's youth programs. While the contest is a lot of work, we feel it is a critical piece of long-term audience development since it enables us to build strong relationships with young people, parents, teaching studios, and the various local music organizations that we tap for our judging panels.

CONTEST PARAMETERS

- **What age groups are eligible? How was this decided upon?**

The competition is open to musicians (solo instrumental, vocal, or chamber groups) ages 6-20 and to instrumental ensembles ages 13-23.

- **Are there different “classes” for different instrument groups or do different instruments compete with each other?**

Two age classes for solo musicians (instrument or voice). Group 1 is ages 6 - 15 and Group 2 is ages 16 - 20. Ensembles are ages 13 - 23 (no member of the ensemble can be younger or older than that range).

The ensemble category is new for us – we want to encourage kids to make music together, but it’s rare to get a really seasoned trio or quartet in this age range. We are hoping that creating the category will encourage students to form ensembles and that we will see more applicants in this category as time goes on. We are reserving the possibility in this first year of not awarding a prize, if we don’t feel the performance standard is high enough.

- **What other eligibility requirements are there?**

The contest is for amateurs only, and past winners are not eligible to enter again in the same age group. Contestants must be residents of the state of Washington. We require proof of residency, age, and identification. No KING employees or relatives may enter.

- **Are multiple entries allowed?**

Yes, a musician can enter in one solo division and also once in the ensemble division.

- **What kind of submission is acceptable?**

Entrants submit a brief online form and a link to their unedited YouTube video up to 5 minutes in length.

NUTS AND BOLTS

- **How is (or was) the timing of each annual contest determined?**

I inherited the timing and I have kept it on the same annual calendar (spring).

- **How long is the application period?**

Early January through early March (approximately 10 weeks). The window is long because we put a very high premium on the quality of the application package. We want kids to take their time over their materials, especially to create good video – this is very important to us. Quality can be all over the place and we do judge on the basis of the quality of the presentation. We allow lots of time to educate contestants about the importance of the presentation: what does it take to prepare a good video? In our guidelines we emphasize preparation, sound quality, setting, lighting, attire, etc. We don’t want raw video shot in bad lighting with a camera phone. We want to treat the kids like professionals, and that means the kids also have to present

themselves as professionals. But we provide lots of help and hand-holding – especially for the parents! They're VERY invested and can get upset or anxious about this process.

- **Do you require an application fee?**

No

- **What kind of award or recognition do the winners receive? (cash, scholarships, on-air performance, live performance, etc.)**

The semifinalists perform live in-studio. Audio is broadcast on-air as part of our NW Focus LIVE program and video is also posted online for audience voting. Several weeks after the winners are announced, the Grand Prize Winners all perform live before an audience in a concert hall setting, which we broadcast and stream live. The musicians also are individually invited to perform at various KING events throughout the summer.

We offer a \$500 cash prize to the Grand Prize Winners, provided by our contest sponsor.

- **Do non-winners receive anything?**

Semifinalists perform live in the studio (broadcast on-air and also streamed online) as part of the judging process.

- **Do you partner with another organization (or more than one)?**

We have a contest sponsor, which provides the cash prize.

The Seattle Chamber Music Society helps judge, and they are allowed to present their own special commendation to the top chamber ensemble or soloist. The winning ensemble or soloist may be invited to play at an upcoming Seattle Chamber Music Society event. The Society has been our partner since very beginning. They use their own lists of teachers to spread the word and promote the contest, which contributes to the number and quality of applicants.

- **What is your adjudication process? How are judges selected?**

The first “cut” is conducted by me and the Seattle Chamber Music Society’s Education Director. They send along the videos for a pool of around 40 semifinalists to the judging panel.

The judging panel has nine members, composed of KING staff and representatives from the music community (most of them associated with the Seattle Chamber Music Society), such as concert soloists, teachers, and local symphony musicians. The judging panel selects ten finalists based on skill, presentation, and creativity. The finalists are recorded live in the KING studios, and the recordings are broadcast on KING’s NW Focus LIVE program and also posted on www.king.org where they are voted on by the public. The Grand Prize winners for each division are based on the highest combined score from the judging panel and listener votes.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

- **How is the contest promoted to the community? What marketing happens before the application process opens? During the application period? Afterwards?**

We use our own channels, with a VERY heavy promotion schedule throughout the day during the application period. We increase our presence even more on-air, online, and on our social channels as we get closer to deadline. We also have a network of teachers, so we reach out directly to them to make sure they know. We've been doing the contest for enough years that it is definitely on the radar screens. The best studios in the area always have their students enter.

- **What kind of year-round visibility do you give to your ongoing efforts?**

We often invite former winners to perform for big events. KING sponsors a lot of local public events, so we bring in former contest winners to perform. This is good visibility for them, for the contest, and for KING. We also produce many station events with our patrons and donors, where we often feature former winners.

We try to provide lots of opportunities for performance as one of the perks of winning. They become part of the KING family, and we track their careers afterwards. We have a good network of former winners by this point.

- **Do you collect testimonials, video, etc. from kids / teachers / parents? How are they used?**

We post videos of the finalists on our website and are very pleased with the quality – these are filmed by the KING staff. We do use testimonials from participants and parents in our Impact Report and Annual Report. We also use them on our website.

- **Do you mention your contest as a service to your community in your fundraising (membership, major giving, foundations, etc.)?**

We try to be careful not to appear to be exploiting the kids for fundraising purposes, but yes, we do mention the contest in our fundraising because it's a big part of KING's educational mission. We've made a commitment to using our airwaves to promote young artists, and it's important for donors and funders to know what we're doing for young people locally.

Radio as a medium can open powerful channels of communication and expression and exposure for young people that they can't get elsewhere.

BUSINESS SIDE

- **How much staff time is involved?**

Between setting up the website, updating the submission form, correspondence with parents and contestants, judging, promotion, and taping and broadcasting the sessions, we estimate that we spend about 100 hours between 3 staffers, plus the time spent on sponsorship efforts and the partnership with the Seattle Chamber Music Society. Attention to detail is CRITICAL in this whole effort – we don't want upset parents (who may also be listeners and donors). All

details must be perfect and clear (esp. about the judging process, categories, etc.). If there's one thing we've learned, it's to be incredibly careful about communication. We treat every entry with GREAT respect – kids have spent so much time putting their materials together. Parents have the birds-eye view on just how much effort is involved.

- **Beyond the costs of your staff time and any awards, what are your other related expense categories?**

Ideally the final concert venue is sponsored; otherwise hall rental would be an expense. We don't do paid advertising, but if we did that would be a budget item.

- **How is the contest funded? Do you raise money specifically in support of this contest?**

Certainly some donors are inspired to give, at least in part, by our track record with the contest. But we don't have a specific appeal to fund the contest.

- **How are applicants tracked and acknowledged? What kind of ongoing follow-up do you have with applicants, if any?**

We do keep track of past winners informally. It would be great to have something more formal, but we haven't gotten there yet.

EVALUATION

- **How do you approach goal-setting for this effort?**

We feel the quality is more important than the quantity of applicants. We want everyone to feel that the door is open... BUT we make it known that our standards are extremely high. (That's one reason we can commit to putting the young musicians on our air.) If you win this contest, it should really mean you're at the very top of the game. We've been pretty amazed at how high the bar can be set, actually. These kids are amazing.

- **How do you think about and measure success for the effort?**

We feel good about providing something for young musicians to strive for, even if they didn't win. We know that young musicians have learned something in the process – it's a huge effort for them and requires them to step up into a new level of professionalism. We have gotten great feedback from participants on the process – we have a good feedback loop.

For us this is the future: students who study music at an early age will not only be the next generation of performers, they will also be the next generation of classical listeners. We do broadcast the performances, so to us this is still about radio.

- **Is there skepticism from elsewhere in the organization about this contest? If so, how do you handle this?**

So far there doesn't seem to be internal skepticism. This is a lot of work but it is such a clear fit with our mission.

- **What kind of debrief/evaluation process do you have following each year's contest, if any?**
We just have an informal debrief with the team that worked on it. We review any grievances if there's anything that did not work.
- **Have you made major changes to your contest over time? What lessons have you learned?**
Our biggest changes have been cleaning up the messaging. We've worked hard on the verbiage of the form to simplify and clarify the process.
- **What advice would you give a station that is considering creating their own contest?**
Establish very high standards right away, and provide applicants with tools to produce a strong submission with solid musical as well as production values. Assemble a great team of judges. Be very clear about procedures.

For more information: <http://www.king.org/yaa/>

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Minnesota Public Radio (Classical MPR)

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Minnesota Varsity Showcase

Photo: Courtney Perry

OVERVIEW

- **What is the name of your contest?**
Minnesota Varsity
- **How long has your station been doing the contest?**
7 years
- **How many applicants did you have for your most recent contest? Has that number gone up or down over time?**
Around 100. It's been fairly consistent over time.
- **What's the upshot?**
Minnesota Varsity is a signature component of MPR's educational strategy, and we put considerable resources against it. Its purpose is to encourage young musicians to make music and to be involved in the process of collaborating musically with their peers. We downplay the

element of competition in many ways: instead of emphasizing a “you have achieved a certain level” message, we instead encourage and reward broad participation.

Minnesota Varsity plays an important role in Classical MPR’s relationships within the local and regional music community, ranging from music studios, school programs, and extracurricular youth ensembles (who actively promote the contest) to local music professionals (who help judge the contest). Varsity has also been a catalyst for fundraising for our education programs generally.

CONTEST PARAMETERS

- **What age groups are eligible? How was this decided upon?**

Eligible applicants must be ages 14 - 18. We specifically wanted a program for high school, for several reasons: we wanted to showcase young musicians in their prime, at the highest level of their musical achievement before they leave town for college and other pursuits. We also wanted to engage high schools specifically (we have other educational programs that work with elementary schools).

- **Are there different “classes” for different instrument groups or do different instruments compete with each other?**

There are different classes by type of performer:

1. Instrumental chamber ensemble without a conductor (maximum 8 participants including accompanist) performing Classical Music
2. Instrumental soloist (with or without accompanist) performing Classical Music
3. Vocal Chamber Choir (e.g., Classical/Glee Club/Show Choir) without a conductor (max 8 participants including accompanist) performing Classical or Musical Theater
4. Vocal soloist (with or without accompanist) performing Classical or Musical Theater.
5. Composer of an original, complete, and fully notated (no improvisation) musical composition of 3 to 7 minutes in length, scored for flute or piccolo, clarinet, and/or alto saxophone, or for voice(s) – texts provided

We welcome submissions in both classical music and musical theater (definitions are provided in the application materials).

- **What other eligibility requirements are there?**

Applicants must have parent or guardian permission, must live or go to school within our broadcast area, and cannot be related to any MPR or APM employee. They also cannot have been a Featured Artist (semifinalist and above) in any previous year’s competition and must participate in a school or community music program. The competition is strictly for amateurs.

- **Are multiple entries allowed?**

Yes

- **What kind of submission is acceptable?**

For the performance categories, applicants submit the entry form and a video file up to 10 minutes in length (recorded in a single take). In the composition category, applicants submit an entry form plus a pdf of their composition. Entries can be submitted online or by postal mail.

NUTS AND BOLTS

- **How is (or was) the timing of each annual contest determined? Any coordination with State Contest?**

The application period is in the fall, which is the only time of year we feel we can do this because of the pressures of the academic year. There's a lot of work involved in submitting an application and the kids are just too busy in the spring – they need the previous summer and early fall (before things get too busy) to work up the repertoire and the submission materials.

Spring is when we record the Featured Artists and hold the public concert for the final Showcase round. We work around school spring concerts and other spring contests held by the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies contests and Minnesota Youth Orchestras. We don't actively coordinate with the MSHSL statewide music contest, which is also in the spring.

- **How long is the application period?**

It was a bit shorter this year (which is unusual) – 8 weeks in 2017 from announcement to deadline

- **Do you require an application fee?**

No

- **What kind of award or recognition do the finalists receive? (cash, scholarships, on-air performance, live performance, etc.)**

Those advancing to the Featured Artist round (10 - 15 contestants) are professionally recorded in-studio, and those pieces are broadcast on-air and streamed online.

The five finalists (Showcase round) keep a professionally produced CD of their studio performance, perform live in concert at the University of Minnesota's Ted Mann Concert Hall, and are eligible to receive scholarships from four regional colleges.

- **Do non-finalists receive anything?**

Yes! This is an important new feature – again, we're trying to encourage broad participation rather than exclusivity. All contestants receive either a voucher for 2 tickets to a Minnesota Orchestra concert or access to 2 free tickets to a Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra concert. In addition, we're trying out a Varsity Team Challenge, with drawings for other classical music-related prizes based on responses to fun questions emailed out to all entrants.

- **Do you partner with another organization (or more than one)?**

We began Minnesota Varsity in a close partnership with the Minnesota Music Educators Association. Over time we've moved away from that formal partnership but MMEA continues to be very supportive and to work closely with us. The executive director is an advisor to the program and gives Varsity lots of free publicity.

The American Composers Forum (headquartered in St. Paul) sets the yearly parameters for our Composer category, and provides guidelines for young composers to write for the instruments and texts that ACF has selected. ACF members also serve as judges for that category.

Three regional colleges offer \$6,000 scholarships to the Showcase finalists. They also pay a sponsorship fee to be an institutional partner, and we give them publicity during the contest period.

- **What is your adjudication process? How are judges selected?**

Our local judges are a mix of station staff and local professionals from organizations like Minnesota Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the University of Minnesota music school faculty, etc. We have ongoing relationships with these organizations, but the individual judges rotate year to year so it's not always the same people.

Our Classical Initiatives Coordinator makes the first "cut." Then a group of MPR Classical staff select the first round of semifinalists: 10-20 kids who become Featured Artists.

Then a hand-picked panel of independent judges from the music community (both classical and musical theater traditions) select four Showcase finalists. We always have a fifth "audience choice" finalist, selected through an online voting process.

These final five perform live in concert at the University of Minnesota's Ted Mann Hall. This year we are experimenting with streaming it online in addition to broadcasting on-air.

- **How were your contest rules developed? Did you seek professional legal advice?**

A lot of the details are governed by law, so our legal team has been heavily involved. We partner with the American Composers Forum on the rules for the composition category.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

- **How is the contest promoted to the community? What marketing happens before the application process opens? During the application period? Afterwards?**

We do print advertising (both trade and purchased) in Minnesota Orchestra programs, the Minnesota High School Music League magazine, and similar publications. Last year we moved much more of our promotion to social media, and it seemed as though we got more applicants and also a bump in attendance for the Showcase concert, for much less money.

We do promote heavily on air and on our website. We have a new Facebook page for our overall education program (Music for Learning) and feature Varsity heavily there.

- **What kind of year-round visibility do you give to your ongoing efforts?**

We do features on the Classical MPR website and do have a standing page year-round. But we continue to discuss internally how best to promote the contest outside of the application period. Like every station, we wrestle with allocation of resources: budget, bandwidth, online placement, etc.

- **Do you collect testimonials, video, etc. from kids / teachers / parents? How are they used?**

We do, as part of our “return on investment.” One thing we have discovered is that THE most exciting thing to contestants is being able to record in world-class studio, to be videotaped and taken seriously as young artist. We spend a lot of time with our Featured Artists – each taping session is several hours long and there is lots of hand-holding with the kids (and their anxious parents). The resulting recordings go on our air or on our website, so they’re produced at the highest level of professionalism (we also press CDs for the Showcase finalists, who sometimes use them as audition materials for music schools). It’s expensive and it’s a labor of love for these kids, but it’s something that we can do uniquely.

So we try to get a lot of mileage out of this investment of time and resources by gathering lots of “collateral” – MPR retains the rights to this material, as part of contest rules. Our legal department warns us daily about liability, though, especially where online video and photos of kids are concerned.

We use this material to promote the contest and to celebrate the winners. We also share it with our development department to use with major donors. These materials are incredibly effective for fundraising purposes.

- **Do you mention your contest as a service to your community in your fundraising (membership, major giving, foundations, etc.)?**

Yes, we certainly do talk about the contest extensively with major donors and foundations. For a few of our donors, this is THE thing that engages them philanthropically.

BUSINESS SIDE

- **How much staff time is involved?**

It’s really intense for several months and then mostly “dormant” the rest of the year. Overall, we estimate that our Classical Initiatives Coordinator spends about one-half of her time managing this program. Vaughn also spends some time on Varsity as a supervisor, and then there’s 3 - 4 hours of staffed studio time for each of 13 - 15 Featured Artists, plus support from the digital and marketing teams. Our production team creates audio modules for on-air promotion as well.

- **Beyond the costs of awards and your staff time, what are your other related expense categories?**

We pay for placement on social media. We pay our six judges a small honorarium and have some catering expenses for the judging process, which takes place in person.

- **How is the contest funded? Do you raise money specifically in support of this contest?**

Minnesota Varsity was originally funded by the Minnesota State Legislature’s Legacy Fund – in fact it was the “model child” for our education initiatives funded through the Legacy Fund. One of the requirements of the Legacy Fund is that the program has to migrate to private support, so it is now funded by major donors as well as by our institutional partners (the colleges that provide sponsorship prizes).

We also receive in-kind support from the University of Minnesota in the form of donated performance space at their concert hall.

- **How are applicants tracked and acknowledged? What kind of ongoing follow-up do you have with applicants, if any?**

We do keep up with previous contestants. These are really impressive kids, whether or not they go on to musical careers! We do periodic “where are they now” blog posts on past Featured and Showcase winners. We also keep a database of past contestants to make sure that no previous Featured or Showcase winners are entering a second time, which is prohibited.

EVALUATION

- **How do you approach goal-setting for this effort?**

The whole spirit and goal of Minnesota Varsity is, again, broad participation. On a more granular level, another goal is direct impact on kids’ lives. It’s amazing when a former winner gets into Juilliard and refers to the Varsity experience as having been instrumental.

We want Varsity to do more than celebrating excellence, though that is important. We want to publicize the art form of classical music for young people – Varsity should have an aspirational and inspirational quality for the kids who are younger or less advanced. And Varsity acknowledges and reinforces the importance of school-based music education, and the support and expertise of private teachers and parents, in musical success.

- **How do you think about and measure success for the effort?**

There are some metrics that we watch very closely: number of applicants is a big one. In a way, the incredibly high level of performance of the winners works against us: we think lots of kids “self-select” out of entering because they don’t see themselves at that level. That’s why we’re offering incentives this year for all entries, not just prizes for the winners. We want the entry pool to continue to grow as a goal in itself.

Attendance at the Showcase contest is really important – we’d like to have two or three times the attendance we have now, so we’re working on how to drive that number up. We also track

our online traffic for the posted Featured Artist studio performances, as well as the number of audience favorite votes. We want to get beyond friends and family of the semifinalists. The level of performance certainly merits audience and attendance beyond that group.

We also track diversity: geographic diversity (since we're a state network) and racial diversity are both priorities. In terms of volume, most of our applicants do come from the Metro area (especially the suburbs) but some of our best applicants come from rural areas. There's definitely talent everywhere and we want our full broadcast region represented. We've had good ethnic diversity in the applicant pool the last several years, perhaps because Minnesota itself is diversifying so rapidly.

Instrument variety is also important to us and to our local judges. As with many contests, the overwhelming majority of applicants play strings or piano. This is definitely a consideration in the judging process – we look at factors beyond proficiency because our goal is to inspire young people to participate in music-making on all instruments.

We also track the number and quality of our relationships with other organizations and sponsoring institutions as part of our ongoing evaluation.

And finally, Minnesota Varsity has been a strong vehicle for raising money. In addition to raising money for the contest itself, we also tap Featured and Showcase musicians to perform at our Board events and at home concerts with donors (these are paid gigs for the kids). This is great visibility for these young musicians and a good way to reinforce to donors what we do for kids and the musical community.

We're working on creating metrics to get at the value for our branding.

- **Is there skepticism from elsewhere in the organization about the value of this contest? If so, how do you handle this?**

There definitely has been passionate discussion about how the recorded performances fit in with our on-air sound. Some of the repertoire choices are not music we would normally put on our airwaves. This year we are experimenting with streaming the student performances, rather than broadcasting them, for the audience favorite voting. We'll evaluate whether that was successful based on page traffic and on feedback from participants after the contest. We don't yet know whether online exposure will be as valuable to young participants as on-air exposure has been. We need to find the right balance between a consistent on-air sound and consistent value for contestants.

- **What kind of formal debrief/evaluation process do you have following each year's contest, if any?**

Every year we have a formal debrief with stakeholders who have made it happen: producers, major gift officers, technicians, etc. Every year we respond to that learning with improvements

in Varsity.

- **Have you made major changes to your contest over time? What lessons have you learned?**
The goals and rules for the contest have been pretty stable over time. The experimentation happens in areas like promotion, audience voting, and incentives for entry.
- **What advice would you give a station that is considering creating their own contest?**
Give yourself plenty of time to think through all the steps: does it fit your mission? Your vision? Yes, a contest is a lot of detail work, but what might this open up for new partnerships in your community – not least of which are relationships with donors you haven't yet met?

For more information: <https://www.classicalmpr.org/topic/minnesota-varsity>

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WDAV

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WDAV's Young Chamber Musicians Competition – 2017 Junior Division Champion Quartet Bellezza, Midwest Young Artists Conservatory

Photo: LunahZon

OVERVIEW

- **What is the name of your contest?**
Young Chamber Musicians Competition (YCMC)
- **How long has your station been doing this contest?**
4 years
- **How many applicants did you have for your most recent contest? Has that number gone up or down over time?**
We get between 50 and 70 applications – this contest is exclusively for chamber ensembles, so each application represents a group.
- **What's the upshot?**
WDAV's Young Chamber Musicians Competition, which we've taken national, has allowed us to tap into a specific niche (chamber music ensembles) that is underserved by the "competition

circuit.” In a very short period of time we’ve seen explosive growth in the number of applications and in our visibility at the best music schools and conservatories in the country. Because the talent pool is national, the level of performance is phenomenal and it’s a perk for judges and audiences to get to hear these musicians “before they hit the big time.” The competition has become a magnet for local sponsorship and a great opportunity for partnership with Davidson College, our licensee. We see nothing but opportunity ahead.

CONTEST PARAMETERS

- **What age groups are eligible? How was this decided upon?**

Our Junior Division is ages 14 - 18, and our Senior Division is ages 19 - 30. The average age of the musicians competing in the Senior Division cannot exceed 25. We’ve patterned this off of similar contests such as the Fischhoff Competition.

- **Are there different “classes” for different instrument groups or do different instruments compete with each other?**

Two age divisions but no other divisions.

- **What other eligibility requirements are there?**

This is a national contest, so there are no residency requirements. It is for amateurs only, so no member of a competing ensemble can be a professional musician (we provide detailed definitions in the application materials). WDAV staff and their families are ineligible.

Ensembles must be from 2 - 8 players, and all players must perform on both of the submitted application videos. We don’t allow vocal ensembles, electronic instruments, or multiple pianos.

- **Are multiple entries allowed?**

No

- **What kind of submission is acceptable?**

One point person for each ensemble submits an application form along with two separate unedited videos that each includes at least one full movement of a work, performed by all members of the ensemble. The two pieces must represent two different periods: 1770 and earlier (Baroque and earlier), 1770 – 1810 (Classical), 1811 – 1900 (Romantic), 1901 – present (Modern). These are the pieces that the ensemble will perform in live recital if they are selected as finalists.

NUTS AND BOLTS

- **How is (or was) the timing of each annual contest determined?**

In our first year, the competition was in September. But that didn’t work out well: this is an ensemble competition and the performers were scattered during the summers, so pulling together their repertoire was difficult on that timeline. We shifted the timing to winter/early

spring for the application period and that has been a much better fit.

- **How long is the application period?**

About 12 weeks

- **Do you require an application fee?**

Yes, \$25. This is new in 2018. The competition was free to enter between 2014 and 2017.

- **What kind of award or recognition do the finalists receive? (cash, scholarships, on-air performance, live performance, etc.)**

Four ensembles compete in the final round and receive a total of \$12,000 in cash: in the Senior Division, \$4,000 goes to the grand prize winner and \$2,000 goes to the runner-up. In the Junior Division, the winning ensemble receives \$2,500 and the runner-up receives \$1,500. We also award an additional \$2,000 audience choice award based on live in-person voting and text-to-vote.

We have additional non-cash awards. In the Junior Division, each musician is eligible for a \$3,000 scholarship to the Brevard Summer Institute.

The winning ensemble in the Senior Division receives two consecutive days of professional (staffed) studio time, to record of the material of their choice – generally an album’s-worth. The ensemble retains rights to the recordings, which are provided in transferrable digital form (WDAV retains the rights to broadcast and/or stream the recordings). The ensemble also plays their own concert in the Davidson College Concert Series. The ensemble is paid \$2,000 (plus lodging) by Davidson College for their performance.

- **Do non-finalists receive anything?**

No

- **Do you partner with another organization (or more than one)?**

Only funding partners (9 altogether)

- **What is your adjudication process? How are judges selected?**

The YCMC screening panel reviews all submitted videos and selects four finalists: two ensembles in each age group. The finalists compete live in concert at the performance space at Davidson College. We sell tickets to this event and also broadcast and stream it live. The judges select the winners and runners-up in each age group, and the audience votes on one “audience choice” award, using text-to-vote. We use a service provider called SMS Poll for the text voting.

I line up the judges – a mix of local conductors, university music faculty, and professional musicians from the community. No staff members are involved in the judging.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

- **How is the contest promoted to the community? What marketing happens before the application process opens? During the application period? Afterwards?**

We do a lot of Facebook promotion on our own channels, and we also do paid Facebook advertising. Early on we created a separately branded Facebook account for the competition so we could move it out from under WDAV's banner and do separate promotion. In addition to getting the word out to applicants, we also promote ticket sales for the final concert to the general public – that goes on the WDAV Facebook page. We also do paid Facebook advertising for ticket sales.

We promote to a private email list of music educators at high school and college / conservatory levels. We've had interns mine the websites of all of the instructors at the top music schools (plus deans, etc.) to add to our database. So it's not just young artists driving submissions, it's also teachers. From the Top generously promotes the contest to their networks since it's a national contest.

Of course we have prominent promotion on our website and on our airwaves. We also send press releases and solicit media coverage from the *Charlotte Observer* and various local magazines. We put up posters in the community as well.

Often our contestants come from music schools and conservatories, so last year we did some coordination with the finalists' music institutions on social media to try to drum up some "school pride" around the audience choice award. They used their social channels to promote listening to the live stream of the contest and to try to involve the student body in boosting the vote for "their" ensemble.

- **What kind of year-round visibility do you give to your ongoing efforts?**

We wish we did more. We're not as good at that as we could be – time is our greatest limiting factor. This is a big commitment for WDAV and it takes all year just to organize and produce. We need more bandwidth for ongoing promotion. We do have a standing web page for YCMC.

- **Do you collect testimonials, video, etc. from kids / teachers / parents? How are they used?**

We have done some of this on the YCMC website. We posted a video titled "Aspire to Greatness," which is a compilation of video interviews with contestants and jurors. We wish we were better with social media in the moment – we have a lot of back room fun with the contestants and think we could do a better job playing that up on social media before, during, and after the competition. But we have only two staff members working on this and we're just run off our feet during the competition weekend. Feeding our social channels with the fun "offstage" stuff might be something to assign to an intern in the future.

We're still pretty early in this (we're now in Year Four) but in year two we did feature the winning ensemble from our very first year. They were a fantastic ensemble, and two of them

ended up at Cleveland Institute. They came back and did a live interview with one of our on-air hosts and also performed in-studio to help us kick off the second year of the competition. As time goes by we'll have more past winners to tap for this kind of thing.

- **Do you mention your contest as a service to your community in your fundraising (membership, major giving, foundations, etc.)?**

Yes, somewhat. For example, for Giving Tuesday we invited representatives from community organizations to join us on-air for brief interviews. OrthoCarolina was one of them, and they talked about the competition (which they sponsor) as a highlight of what WDAV is doing in the community.

BUSINESS SIDE

- **How much staff time is involved?**

There are two of us on staff who are involved in the planning (including lining up sponsors), which is year-round and very intense during the application period. Across the year, we spend hundreds of hours in total – the two of us and others on staff. During the competition weekend, we lean heavily on WDAV staff for a number of tasks, such as driving a shuttle to pick up arriving musicians at the airport, driving musicians to and from rehearsal spaces on campus, working the post-concert reception, coordinating volunteer ushers, producing the live broadcast, chaperoning ensembles backstage, and coordinating the presence of our sponsors who are often set up on site.

In addition, WDAV makes a significant commitment of studio time – 2 full days of studio recording with the winning ensemble staffed by a sound engineer and producer.

- **Beyond the costs of staff time and any cash awards, what are your other related expense categories?**

Since this is a national contest and we bring people in to compete, we have hotel and meal/hospitality expenses for each member of four ensembles (the cost varies depending on how many are in each ensemble). We don't cover their travel but we do cover everything else.

We do paid Facebook advertising to promote the contest and sell tickets to the final concert. We also print posters.

We also pay an annual subscription for the Submittable online platform, which we use for video submission and review.

- **How is the contest funded? Do you raise money specifically in support of this contest?**

Competition is funded entirely through corporate sponsorship – 9 different sponsors in all. We have the overall corporate sponsor (OrthoCarolina), plus sponsors for contestants' lodging, their meals, student seat sponsorships for the final concert, streaming video sponsorships (broadcast

on FB live and on-air), and a sponsor for the \$2,000 prize awarded by audience (part of the overall \$12K kitty).

- **How are applicants tracked and acknowledged? What kind of ongoing follow-up do you have with applicants, if any?**

Not a lot. We should do more.

EVALUATION

- **How do you approach goal-setting for this effort?**

We are very informal about this. We don't set specific goals. That said, we do track ticket sales, revenue, number of views, and number of votes so that we can compare year to year.

- **How do you think about and measure success for the effort?**

We dream big: we want the contest to eventually rival the Fischhoff Competition (the premier chamber music competition). We'll always be a different kind of event, so we're really not in direct competition, but we can grow to rival the Fischhoff in prestige, opportunities for performers, etc. Each year we do new things that try to move closer to that goal. So if we're moving incrementally in that direction, we're doing it right.

The long-term vision is to create a WDAV music festival with the Young Chamber Musicians Competition as the capstone. In 2018 we will be one step closer: in addition to the final round concert with this year's competitors, we are bringing back the winning Senior Division ensemble from last year to perform at the Davidson concert series the night before (this will be recorded for broadcast). So now we will have two days' worth of big activities. We've just launched a chamber concert series at a local brewery, and the previous year's winners are scheduled to perform at that series as well while they are in town for the YCMC weekend. Every year we will add more events.

- **Is there skepticism from elsewhere in the organization about this contest? If so, how do you handle this?**

No – this is a cornerstone event for us. It's a revenue driver for the station, and we get a lot of branding and PR value from it. It "puts us on the map" in unique ways.

- **What kind of debrief/evaluation process do you have following each year's contest, if any?**

We honestly don't have a formal process. We debrief among ourselves and with our major funder.

- **Have you made major changes to your contest over time? What lessons have you learned?**

We have made lots and lots of changes by trial and error – luckily mostly by building on success. This has been an ensemble competition from the beginning (it all began with a sponsor's idea for a classical "battle of the bands") but most other aspects of the contest have changed since our first year.

We started as a regional contest in our first year, but only had four applicants (exactly as many as the number of prizes!) Luckily they were absolutely fantastic and the first year was a great success. Eliminating the residency requirement in Year Two really allowed the contest to take off.

The first year, we didn't have a good process for the video submissions. Now we subscribe to an online platform called Submittable, and it is worth every penny. The submissions process is totally smooth for applicants and the platform allows our judges to log in and view the videos easily on their own time.

We limit the finalist pool to only four ensembles, which means we can really give them the VIP treatment. This is one of the things that make our competition distinctive (and we want the finalists to "talk us up" to their friends back at school). But we weren't sure what "VIP treatment" might mean, so when From the Top came to Wingate University (90 minutes away) a few years ago, I spent the weekend with them, shadowing them and watching how they worked with young musicians behind the scenes. This was hugely helpful – I came away with a lot of ideas for keeping the contestants engaged with fun activities and good bonding.

We've got the nation's top talent coming in, so the level of musical performance is incredibly high. But we also need the concert experience and the live broadcast to have really high production values as well. So we've added a run-through on the day before the competition. Each ensemble now gets a half-hour run-through on stage with the emcee (one of our announcers). We iron out the kinks and everyone gets comfortable with space, the green room, etc. That means on Sunday we're able to keep everything very tightly scripted. The whole concert is about 75 minutes long.

We think we're lucky in that we conceptualized this with an underwriter from the very beginning. They've completely bought in to the vision. I imagine things would have turned out differently had we come up with the idea on our own, started building it out, and then asked sponsors to get on board.

With the addition of the \$25 application fee in 2018, we haven't yet received as many applications as in past years. However, there are still 3 weeks left in the application period, so it's hard to tell what kind of impact this will have on the final tally. One lesson we've learned over the years is that most (85%) wait until the final week to submit.

- **What advice would you give a station that is considering creating their own contest?**

Our first suggestion: always have an odd number of jurors!

There are lots of symphony-sponsored contests out there for solo musicians, and the grand prize is always the opportunity to perform with the symphony. Obviously that wasn't something we would be able to provide, but we wanted to achieve that level of prestige. Focusing on

ensembles rather than soloists was one way to differentiate ourselves in our particular market. Cash prizes also help, but one of the best pieces of advice we got was from the CEO of our local symphony, who really pushed us to think of opportunities for contestants beyond cash prizes: “what else can you do?” That really made us think about what we could provide that other competitions can’t, and about what would be of most value to young musicians. We’d suggest that other stations think about that as well: what can you provide for young musicians that is unique to your capacities, your brand, and your local market?

While worthwhile, this is a huge undertaking. For sure, there could be ways to make it easier than the way we do it: we could keep it local instead of going national. We could record everything in-studio instead of broadcasting a live event. We could have contestants make (and pay for) all of their own travel and lodging arrangements, instead of handling all of that for them. Each year, we’ve added elements that make it more demanding on our time, and at this point, we’re close to maxed out. But as intensive as this is, we feel the YCMC is adding to our brand and visibility in immeasurable ways, both locally and nationally, and that we’ve created a rare opportunity for our community (and our judges!) to see rising stars before they hit the big-time.

For more information: <https://ycmc.wdav.org/>

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Vermont Public Radio

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Student composer Rachel Schwartz

Photo: Music-COMP

OVERVIEW

- **What is the name of your showcase?**
Student Composer Showcase.
- **How long has your station been doing this initiative?**
Four years
- **What age groups are eligible? How was this decided upon?**
There's no lower age limit, though kids usually start in middle school. We feature Vermont student composers up through the end of high school.
- **What kind of showcase is it?**
Student Composer Showcase profiles student composers in brief features (3 - 10 minutes long) that are broadcast and posted online. The features are produced every other month.

- **How many features have you produced?**

Around 40-50 to date.

NUTS AND BOLTS

- **Do you partner with another organization (or more than one)?**

Student Composer Showcase is a partnership with Music-COMP, an online mentoring program that partners professional composers with student composers. I and the executive director of Music-COMP hand-pick the students who are featured.

- **What is your selection process?**

When a student is suggested by Music-COMP, I ask them for recordings of that student's work (Music-COMP does live performances of student compositions as well as online mentoring). I listen for a fit with VPR's on-air sound. What I don't know in advance is how the young person will be in interview. That's more of a gamble. Still, even though some of the kids are harder to draw out of their shells at first, even the shyest kid has thoughts about why they write and what they get out of it. What inspires them? That's the spirit of the show. So I trust that if the musical compositions sound like something I would want to air, I know I can bring out an interesting conversation with the student.

- **What is the format?**

The students are invited to the studios for their interviews. The final format is flexible depending on what I feel is most compelling in each instance. Sometimes it's a meditation with music underneath, followed by a full piece. Sometimes it's an actual interview. Generally the segment is approximately 2 - 5 minutes of talk plus a short piece of 2 - 5 min. The feature is broadcast 4 times over the course of a week on the classical station.

A recent feature paired up two southern Vermont students instead of an individual profile. I am also considering broadening out to students from the broader region beyond Vermont. There is a lot of latitude. While the initiative started out with monthly features, they are now produced every other month. I feel this keeps it a little more special.

Music-COMP puts on an annual contest/concert (25 students in a 3-hour concert). We let people know about the concert, although we don't broadcast it. But we do show up, and we take advantage of the show for interview purposes. If featured students are from other cities hours away, I will wait to interview them when they are in town for the show.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

- **How is the feature promoted to the community? What marketing happens before the feature airs? Afterwards?**

I write to reporters out in the community to ask for coverage. I also pitch them to VPR's own news station, which sometimes picks up a segment for broadcast.

I produce 30-second promos and tease the segment live a lot. VPR does a whole build-up on all platforms (website and social media). The executive director at Music-COMP gets in touch with the music teacher and principal at the student's school to make sure they know the student is being featured, and also contacts the local paper in the student's hometown.

- **What kind of year-round visibility do you give to your ongoing efforts?**

The features are simply archived and accessible; we don't do more with them at the moment. However, VPR produces the kids podcast "But Why" (in which kids submit questions), and I have been looking for tie-ins.

- **Do you mention these features as a service to your community in your fundraising (membership, major giving, foundations, etc.)?**

We certainly pitch around it during pledge drives. It's a point of pride. The community does see this as an important service – the response has been really positive. Having these kids on the air generates a lot of good will, especially for parents and for musicians. It's heartwarming to hear young people engage so deeply with classical music. And it's fun to hear student compositions played by professional musicians.

BUSINESS SIDE

- **How much staff time is involved?**

I spend approximately 8 - 10 hours per show (bi-monthly).

- **How is the contest funded? Do you raise money specifically in support of this contest?**

Music-COMP would like to jointly explore the opportunity for sponsorship, but we haven't done it yet

- **How are applicants tracked and acknowledged? What kind of ongoing follow-up do you have with applicants, if any?**

Music-COMP helps with record-keeping. We don't do formal follow-up, though we do sometimes have a student on for a second time – several years later it is like talking to a different person!

EVALUATION

- **How do you approach goal-setting for this effort?**

I keep an eye on audience metrics. I monitor the segments in NPR One where I can see the audience response at a granular level. That has been educational. In the past, the features

always included a long intro with credits, but I saw a 50% skip rate as soon as a credit came on, even before audiences heard anything about the program. So now I am putting content first. That's an important lesson.

I take page views into consideration but do not evaluate it by formal metrics. What I do know is that the audience for Student Composer Showcase does show geographical diversity throughout listening area, and that it's heard by a healthy balance of young men and women.

- **How do you think about and measure success for the effort?**

To us, this is all about the broader community spirit. Classical music has this reputation of being aging, dying, etc. so this is an antidote: irrefutable proof that young people are making more of it, performing it, making it their own! We don't have a specific strategic goal.

- **Is there skepticism from elsewhere in the organization about this contest? If so, how do you handle this?**

Not at all. People are pretty psyched about it. They like that we do it, the audio is well produced, and kids have insightful and compelling things to say.

- **Have you made major changes to your contest over time? What lessons have you learned?**

We have learned that it is a fair amount of leg-work to produce these features, which is why we've backed off on the frequency a little bit.

We've definitely learned that talking to them like adults is key: "You're a composer; you have important and valid things to say musically." The kids have really interesting perspectives, and open up other pathways as they write pieces for local orchestras! It is very cool to see interconnected pieces of the musical community come together, and it's good to feel that VPR's airwaves can help to connect those dots.

We would like to stay in better touch with these kids in the future – we should be cultivating this group of youth advocates as part of our audience development.

For more information: <http://digital.vpr.net/term/student-composer-showcase#stream/0>

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Youth Talent Showcases

Contest Planning Considerations

Based on conversations with Daniel Gilliam (WUOL), Christophe Chagnard (KING), Brian Newhouse and Vaughn Ormseth (Minnesota Public Radio), Will Keible (WDAV) and Kari Anderson (Vermont Public Radio).

Local Context

- What are the musical resources of your listening area?
- How might this context affect the volume and quality of entries?
- How does it translate to the potential pool of contest judges?
- How does it relate to the availability of live performance space, if needed?
- What limitations or opportunities does it suggest for promotion of the contest?

Entrant Pool Goals

- How does your station rank the following priorities?
 - Broad participation from kids of all abilities
 - Excellence in performance by the very best of the best
 - Geographical representation from throughout your listening area
 - Instrument family representation
 - Age representation
 - Socioeconomic diversity
- Is it important for your top priorities to be reflected among your finalists as well as within your entry pool?
- What incentives for entrants are needed to match your priorities?
- What instructions to judges are needed to match your priorities?
- What promotions and messaging strategies are needed to match your priorities?

Contest Parameters

- How many entries can your judges handle? How will you structure your parameters and judging process accordingly?
- Will you have a residency requirement?
- What will your eligible age range be?
- Will you have more than one age division?
- Will you have solo and ensemble divisions?

- What instruments will be eligible? Will you allow vocalists?
- What repertoire guidelines will you provide, if any? Is any non-classical repertoire acceptable?
- Will winners or finalists be eligible to enter in future years?

Application and Judging Process

- What legal requirements apply in your state?
- What information will you require on an application form? How will forms be submitted?
- Will applications include a video submission or a live audition? If video, what platform will you use?
- Will there be multiple elimination rounds?
- Will you allow audience voting? If yes, when and how will audience voting occur?
- How many finalists will you have? Will you recognize runners-up and/or honorable mentions?
- How will judges be selected and invited?
- Will the judging happen in a single day or on some other schedule? Will they reach agreement in person, virtually, or by phone?
- How will judges be publicly identified and thanked?
- Will judges (or the organizations they represent) receive an honorarium or any other special perks, recognition, or gifts?

Prizes

- Will you offer a cash prize? If yes, will only 1st place winners receive cash prizes?
- Will you offer professional studio time as a prize? If yes, will only 1st place winners receive studio time?
- Are there other kinds of prizes you could offer (scholarships, concert tickets, gift cards, etc.)? If yes, will only 1st place winners receive these prizes?

On-Air Considerations

- Will your contest include an on-air component? If yes, will it function as part of the judging process or as one of the prizes, or both?
- Will you broadcast live-on-air, live-to-tape, or fully produced performances?
- Will performances for broadcast be recorded in your studios or in another location? Will an audience be present?
- Is it important to you that student performances played on your airwaves match the quality of your regular programming? If yes, how will you ensure that level of quality (age considerations, submissions guidelines, judging)? If not, how will you frame this for audiences to manage their expectations?
- What rights will you retain for recorded performances (including those offered as prizes)? What rights will performers retain?

Live Performance

- Where will this performance be held?
- Will live performance be part of your judging process, or a winners' showcase after the prize is awarded?
- Will this be a public event? Free or ticketed?
- If your eligible residency area is quite large (national or regional), will you cover any travel or lodging expenses for finalists related to the live performance?

Revenue and Fundraising

- What kind of ongoing communication is in place between the contest planning team and the sponsorship and development teams?
- What sponsorship opportunities can be developed?
- Will you solicit major gifts or foundation support for your contest (restricted gifts and grants)?
- How might the station's Board and major donors connect with the contest? Examples:
 - Major donors receive VIP tickets to live performance
 - Contest winners are invited to perform at major donor events and Board meetings
 - Collateral is shared with donors and Board members, such as audio and video recordings of winning performances (if rights are retained as part of contest rules); video of interviews with winners, judges, teachers, parents; "where are they now" stories of past winners that demonstrate long-term impact.

Branding

- Do you aspire to be considered part of the "competition circuit"?
- Is it more important to your station to "put your town on the map" (by casting a wider net for entrants and/or seeking regional or national visibility) or to showcase homegrown talent (by tightening residency restrictions and emphasizing community pride)?
- What will make your contest unique – to your mission, to your brand, to your community, to your capacities as a media organization? How will you stand out among local, regional, or national contests?
- How will you get on the radar screens of the best private studios, music schools, or conservatories in your area?
- Will you allow title sponsorship of the contest or do you need exclusive branding?
- How will you get visibility for your contest? How will you promote during the application and judging period? How will you promote year-round?
- How will you produce and use collateral related to this contest – photos, video, social media content, etc.?

