



SOUNDSCAPES

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INTRO

Just a brief introduction for those who may not be familiar with my work. I am a composer / producer and over the past 10 years I have been focusing primarily on the international export – pitching my productions to major festival, theatres and opera houses. It's an ongoing challenge - there is no magic formula and there no guarantees but there are techniques and skills that you can acquire. So I will be sharing with you some of these techniques that have worked for me as a full-time / freelance artist. I currently have 4 productions touring internationally:

KIRANA children's opera

<https://www.soundscapes.com.mt/projects/kirana/>

PARADE & the Velvet Gentleman

<https://www.soundscapes.com.mt/projects/parade/>

TRANSITION the interdisciplinary piano

<https://www.soundscapes.com.mt/projects/transition/>

HREJJEF – Maltese folktales

<https://www.soundscapes.com.mt/projects/hrejjef/>

... my flagship project over the past 4 years has been the KIRANA children's opera with 15 international bookings.

So the techniques that I will share with you in my presentation are working for me and I believe can also work for you. Obviously I will be literally skimming the surface on this subject and I will be focusing on some basic assets that I feel every artists needs to have before reaching out to the international market.

PROVISOS

1) I work in the contemporary performing arts arena so I will be targeting the performing arts platform: music, dance, theatre, opera, music theatres, interdisciplinary expression ... so not publishing or visual arts ... although some concepts may apply to different artforms.

2) The techniques and skills that I shall present apply to programming on the basis of artistic excellence. Let me explain – there are many different ways an artist can travel to showcase one's work: students have access to student networks, there are exchange programmes between EU countries or Mediterranean countries – a music ensemble is invited to perform in Malta from Tunisia and in return a music ensemble in Malta performs in Tunisia. There are cultural diplomacy programmes – like the cultural diplomacy fund where a

Maltese embassy say in Germany receives funds to organise a performance by a Maltese dance company in Berlin. That's all good but I won't be discussing those options. The biggest challenge for any artist in terms of internationalisation is when your work is selected and programmed on the basis of its artistic excellence ... not because you have a travel fund, not because there is a socio-political agenda, not because you are doing it for free, not because the work is part of an export programme ... but because your work is recognised on the basis of its artistic excellence.

Ok so let's look at the very basics of international export – what I like to call “before you strike” ...

BASICS **“before you strike”**

We are living at a time where an artist can pretty much do without a manager or an agent and still reach out to international clients. However - you still need to implement the tools and infrastructure of an agency. I do not have an agent but I operate via my own company “Soundscapes” which functions like an agency platform for my projects:

<https://www.soundscapes.com.mt>

I have another website under Ruben Zahra as my own personal composer's website but business transactions are handled via Soundscapes.

<https://www.rubenzahra.com>

These basic references are very important because programmers / artistic directors will screen your work ... they will do their homework and research on your proposal and if they do not find a solid online presence and legacy they won't take you seriously. So the basic set-up is:

- i) **a good website** – that is your **home**
- ii) **social media platforms** – there are your **portals**
- iii) **professionally produced videos** – this is your **legacy** as well as your bait ... because you never know who is going to bump into your video and there are endless success stories of artists' videos going viral or being picked up by the right influencers – leading to solid bookings and opportunities.

I believe that the strongest medium to pitch your work internationally today in the performing arts is video. I do not have the time in this presentation to go through case studies and examples ... but good videos of short trailers are highly effective.

I do not recommend reaching out to international festivals if you do not have this set-up. What's even worse is if you have a mediocre website or sloppy videos. The production value of these assets will indirectly or directly reflect the quality of your work.

And this brings me to the “content” of your proposal.

CONTENT

“your project needs to stand out”

I am not going into the issue of quality because obviously the quality of your production needs to have a high benchmark of artistic excellence. But quality alone is not enough and I will illustrate what I mean by showing 2 proposals featuring the same pianist Tricia Dawn Williams:

The Forbidden – concert recital

<https://youtu.be/AJCY2zWLctw>

TRANSITION – the interdisciplinary piano

<https://youtu.be/wuCQ1JGjV5s>

The first video is simply a piano recital while the second video portrays a multi-media production by the same pianist ... but this time the performance includes video-art, gesture control technology, electronic music, live camera ... etc. It's no longer a programme ... it is a production. Bottom line – every city has great pianists so why should they endorse a pianist from Malta? ... on the other hand TRANSITION is a full-blown production which cannot be readily reproduced. In fact TRANSITION was selected last year for an important classical music showcase in Rotterdam and the next booking is in Montreal Canada next February 2021.

Not all good projects are strong candidates for international export. Do not pitch projects that are commonplace and conventional. Remember that you are competing with the rest of the world. Festival are constantly receiving proposals and **your project needs to stand out**. Find ways of being competitive. This is probably the single most important characteristic of the project that artists fail to see.

There is also an important financial aspect to consider. If (say) your project involves 4 artists and you request a fee of (say) €3000 ... when you add flights, hotel, hospitality and tech, your project will cost the festival a minimum of €5000. At that price tag there is a lot of competition. So your project needs to stand out and your work will speak for itself.

THANK YOU

Ruben Zahra