Concerts in the Courtyard

Boston Public Library

Adults

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Children

|

Intergenerational

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Young Adult

Concerts in the Courtyard

Jun 18, 2015

$5,000+

$$$
Byline

Rebecca Campbell, Adult Programs Librarian, Boston Public Library

Concerts in the Courtyard is an annual, free summer concert series sponsored by the Boston Public Library Foundation. The courtyard of the Central Library in Copley

Square hosts music — ranging from jazz to classical, world to folk — on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. and Fridays at 12:30 p.m.

Refreshments are available for purchase through the library’s café, which is adjacent to the courtyard. The courtyard is almost an exact facsimile of the arcade of the Cancelleria Palace in Rome. Frederick MacMonnies' Bacchante and Infant Faun, a bronze cast fountain statue, sits in the middle of the courtyard.

Advanced Planning

The goal of Concerts in the Courtyard is to provide free access to art and culture through a diverse range of music appealing to patrons of all ages and interests. The series also serves as a platform for both independent artists and local music organizations.

The semi-weekly concert series begins the first week in June and runs through the last week of August. The series is funded by external funders through the Boston Public Library Foundation. The funding covers honoraria and the design/printing of promotional materials.

In order for the series to maintain its diversity, each concert features a different musical genre. (Concerts in the Courtyard is a live concert series; musicians performing with tracks are not accepted.) The adult programs librarian begins the selection process in January. Musicians are encouraged to submit a program proposal form, located on the BPL’s website.

Performance dates and musician’s press materials are confirmed by March 1.

The adult programs librarian then works with the library’s communications and web services departments to generate the promotional materials, such as press releases, the concert series brochure, posters, concert web page and social media presence. Materials are distributed in early May.

Marketing

In addition to the traditional publicity efforts mentioned above, the library’s communications office maintains a strong social media presence throughout the entire series. Social media outreach begins one month prior to the start date. The first two 2015 Concerts in the Courtyard Facebook posts had a reach of 18,023. The first two concert tweets made 212 engagements and 11,036 impressions. Individual performers are also encouraged to conduct their own social media outreach, generating as much excitement as possible.

It is important to note that the Central Library experiences a summer surge in visitation, and many tourists simply discover the concerts during their visit to the library. The Concerts in the Courtyard have been so successful that, in 2014, the series was expanded to include evening concerts.

Budgeting

In order to stage these events, the BPL incurs a variety of expenditures, from performer honoraria to advertising costs. Due to the concerts' growing popularity and the rising costs for multi-member musical acts, the Boston Public Library Foundation recently raised the musician’s honorarium by $200. If cost-cutting was required, suggestions would be to either shorten the series as a whole or offer one concert a week rather than two.

Day-of-event Activity

The concerts are managed by the adult programs librarian and one audio-visual staff member. The series offers a diverse range of music and each musical act has different set-up requirements. The adult programs librarian sends a set-up checklist to each musical act asking them to outline their needs, such as:

- Number of armless chairs or armless stools (The BPL can provide up to four of each)
- Number of music stands (the BPL can provide up to four)
- Number of bottled waters

- Instrumentation and technical needs (e.g., will they use the library’s sound system? The library can provide two speakers and two microphones and one DI. Or will they bring their own sound system. If so, what does their sound system include?)

The adult program librarian compiles this information and shares it with the library’s Audio Visual Department three to four weeks prior to the concert date.

The actual program space is prepared and musicians are requested to arrive one hour prior to the start of the concert.

Sound checks are the biggest challenge and require the most time.

Program Execution

During summer 2014, the library hosted 25 concerts with a total attendance of 4,212. The average number of attendees per concert was 169. The library hosted 12 Friday afternoon concerts with a total attendance of 2,390. Summer 2014 was the BPL’s first season hosting evening Concerts in the Courtyard. The library hosted 13 evening concerts with a total attendance of 1,822.

Concert attendees consisted of families with young children, school-aged children accompanied with their day camps, area employees on their lunch breaks, older adults and tourists visiting the library. The library even had one couple who traveled from Providence, R.I., every Wednesday to attend the concerts. The Concerts in the Courtyard series continues to be a significant programming series touching patrons of all ages and backgrounds.

In addition to featuring local musicians, the Boston Public Library partnered with notable community organizations, such as Berklee College of Music, Boston Lyric Opera and JazzBoston. The diverse musical offerings included jazz, classical, world and folk.

Advice

Allow ample planning time.

Consult and confirm. Consult with the library’s audio-visual staff regarding the equipment the library is able to provide (such as number of speakers, microphones, availability of electrical outlets, availability of armless chairs/stools and music stands) and confirm the exact set-up with both the AV department and performers.

For an outdoor concert series, have a plan for inclement weather. The Boston Public Library’s Concerts in the Courtyard have been moved indoors due to both rain and days which the city declared a “heat emergency."

Providing bottled water is a simple but meaningful gesture.

Ensure the type of music is appropriate for the library setting and your target audience. Request audio clips from musicians or view performers online. If this is your library’s first attempt at a concert series, consider partnering with an established music organization that can screen and select musical acts for you. Partnering with a notable music organization will also help the series gain recognition. The Boston Public Library and Berklee College of Music partnership has not only introduced a wide range of fresh talent to the Concerts in the Courtyard series, but has also brought new audiences to the library.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

More Programs

May 19, 2009
Children (9 and under)+ | □□
Image



Arts Programming in a Public Library, Part I

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
May 26, 2009
Children (9 and under)+ |
Image



Arts Programming in a Public Library, Part II

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational