

The Royal Canadian College of Organists  
Le Collège royal canadien des organistes

**PUBLICIZE IT!**  
**WRITING A MEDIA RELEASE**

by

Sandi Macdonald

Revised and corrected (2006) by the RCCO Education and Resources Committee,  
Simon Irving & Nicholas Fairbank, co-chairs.

**Publicize It: Writing A Media Release**  
by Sandi Macdonald

It is easy to gain media respect via honesty, accuracy, professionalism and integrity of the information which you communicate to them. Often we, as concert and event promoters, feel that our most precious tool is our ability to produce the Media or News Release. After all, in this era of sky-rocketing media costs the Release is thought to be the cheapest form of advertising and marketing. We are naïve though, if we think that mere informal and unstructured communication with media people will provoke their professional response. Consequently, we, as public relations practitioners, must know the communication requirements of each medium and make every effort to accommodate them.

The guidelines which follow should be applied in conjunction with the examples given.

**Guidelines for Writing a Media Release**

1. **FORMAT.** News Releases should be typed and double-spaced on one side only on good quality white paper, and should contain generous margins (1½ inches on either side).
2. **INDICATE THE SOURCE.** In the upper left-hand corner type the name, address, telephone number, email address & website of the person writing the release. Listing your home phone number along with the business phone number is a PR plus.
3. **PROVIDE RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS.** These instructions, which are usually in capital letters and often underlined, indicate your preference of release time;
  - a) If you have a specific time and date in mind, type:  
(HOLD) FOR RELEASE, MONDAY MAY 2, 3:00 P.M. or
  - b) If the information is for immediate release, type:  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
4. **HEADLINES.** These are optional. (Most editors prefer to write their own headlines.)
5. Every Release should be **DATED.** Sometimes this is included on a line just below the information about the writer of the Release. Most commonly this occurs in a 'dateline' which precedes the story's lead sentence, thus (Edmonton, Alberta, May 2, 2001)
6. **WRITE CONCISELY.** In a Press Release, outline the important facts at the beginning, working out the remaining details in more or less descending order of importance. This is called the inverted pyramid style. If a reader has time to read only one paragraph he/she should be able to obtain most of the facts in the first one. Avoid long and involved sentences, keep your paragraphs short, and indent each paragraph 8 spaces (instead of the usual 5). Use the five W's and the H in your lead paragraph: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.
7. **MECHANICAL DETAILS.** Ideally a Press Release should be restricted to a single page. However, if multiple pages are required, type " –more- " at the bottom centre of the page

that is to be continued. The following pages should be numbered and titled with an identifying headline or subject reference. The end of a release is indicated by using any of the following symbols:

-30-  
or #####  
or -END-

8. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.** If you wish to add additional information about accompanying photos or an invitation to a special event, insert a note to the editor following the end of the release.

Writing for the electronic media (TV and Radio) should be different from writing for the print media. However, most Public Relations persons send the same Release to all media with small alterations which allow for a more conversational tone. Difficult words and names should be given phonetic pronunciations: eg. Exultate (Egg-sool-TAH-tay) Chamber Singers.

Important: The amount of time required to read the Media Release on the air should be typed in the upper right-hand corner of all electronic Releases.

### **Common Problems**

- Out-of-date mailing lists.
- Releases requesting return of photos. (photos are only returned in the case of obituaries).
- Releases that say FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE with no date listed.
- Releases which don't provide enough information.
- Cute leads – keep the information straight-forward.
- Releases that contain nothing new, or don't bother to tell anything new until halfway through the Release.
- Releases that are grammatically incorrect.
- Releases with too much fancy printing, die-cut paper, etc. Let your information sell itself. Advertising in this manner doesn't work in the newsroom.
- Releases that arrive a week after the release date, or when the news event is no longer news.

### **Remember**

- Always treat your media sources with respect.
- Be helpful to the media – often a Release will suggest that the media contact the writer of the Release, only to discover that this person is unavailable for telephone consultation.
- Ensure that you are contacting the correct journalist and that you have the correct spelling of his/her name. Therefore it is important to update your media list once a year to ensure the integrity of your contacts.
- Don't peddle weak stories – most journalists receive an oppressive quantity of Releases each day – without question, a significant number of these will lead to worthwhile stories, while many will lead to a nearby recycling bin. Ensure that yours are read by making them brief, interesting and honest.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****TORONTO, ONTARIO, FEBRUARY 27, 2001**

The Toronto Centre of the Royal Canadian College of Organists presents **Stephen Cleobury**, Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge, England, in an organ recital April 1, 2001 at 8:00p.m. in St. James' Cathedral, King and Church Streets, Toronto. This recital is Mr. Cleobury's debut in Canada and his only appearance here on this tour.

Mr. Cleobury was the Organ Scholar at St. John's College, Cambridge, 1967-1971, and Sub-Organist at Westminster Abbey, London, 1974-1978. In 1978, he became the first Anglican to be appointed Organist of Westminster Cathedral, London. He has been the Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge, since 1982. In addition to recital appearances, he has also made numerous recordings, both as accompanist and as solo performer.

Tickets for this concert are \$10.00, \$7.00 seniors and students, and are available at the door. Tickets may be reserved in advance by calling (416) 593-4025

**STEPHEN CLEOBURY IN CONCERT**

St. James' Cathedral  
King and Church Streets, Toronto  
Wednesday April 1, 2001  
8:00 p.m.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: JACK HILLIER (416) 593-4025**

**(HOLD) FOR RELEASE, MONDAY MARCH 24, 2001**

47 seconds

**TORONTO, ONTARIO, FEBRUARY 14, 2001**

The Toronto Centre of the Royal Canadian College of Organists presents **Jan Overduin** (Yahn **Oh**-ver-doon) in an organ recital April 1, 2001 at 8:00 p.m. in St. Valentine's Church, First and Second Streets, Toronto. This recital will feature the first performance on the Guilbault-Therien (Gee-boe Té-ree-ehn) Organ.

Mr. Overduin will perform Suite on the First Tone by Clerambault (**Clay**-ram-bow), Prelude, Fugue and Chaconne (**Pray**-lewd, Fewg, and Sha-**kohn**) by Buxtehude (**Book**-steh-who-duh) and Homage to Rameau (Rah-**moe**) by Langlais (Long-**glay**).

Tickets for this concert are \$10.00, \$7.00 seniors and students, and are available at the door. Tickets may be reserved by calling (416) 593-4025.

**JAN OVERDUIN IN RECITAL**

St. Valentine's Church

First Street and Second Avenue, Toronto

Wednesday April 1, 2001

8:00 p.m.

-30-

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: JACK HILLIER (416) 593-4025**

## **PRESS KITS**

Press Kits may include a News Release and photograph and usually combine a current news story with background information. For example, you might find the following items in a press kit announcing a fundraising concert to rebuild an organ:

- Biography of guest organist
- Photo of guest organist
- Media Release giving details of the concert
- Drawing/Specifications of the new organ
- History of the building or church which houses the organ (if pertinent)

## **MEDIA LISTS**

The compilation of the media list involves researching the local and regional media, both print and electronic, and often, when broader circulation is required, the provincial and national media. In all cases it is important to research the name of the direct contact at each source. More important, after the initial research, is the maintenance of the list, through bi-yearly updates. The original master list should be compiled including telephone numbers so as to make the updating process a simple one. The importance of this updating activity cannot be understated. If one is successful in the creation of a relationship with the media, it should naturally follow that the acknowledgement of new contacts or the absence of old contacts would be ones that we as Public Relations practitioners would be sensitive to.

[Sandi Macdonald is the Business Manager of the Exultate Chamber Singers, a Toronto based chamber choir. A graduate of the arts management course at the Banff School of Fine Arts, she is currently involved in a management training program with the Canadian Opera Company and the National Ballet of Canada. (2001)]