

CREATING THE

Perfect Press Kit

FOR YOUR ENSEMBLE



FOREWORD

Whether it is for local concert promotions, touring overseas, or just posting on your website, a well-constructed press kit can be an invaluable tool for raising the profile of your ensemble. If you've never created one before, it might seem like a large project to tackle, but don't worry. Our step-by-step guide walks you through the process with everything you need to know.

You can do this.

Author Bio



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What Should My Press Kit Contain?

1. The following biographies (if applicable):

- Director Bio
- Ensemble Bio
- Assistant Director Bio
- Accompanist(s) Bio
- Soloist(s) Bio

2. High Resolution Photos:

- Of each director
- Of the ensemble
- Logo (if available)

3. Recent Recordings

4. Sample Repertoire

5. Press Releases & Quotes



The 5 Essentials

Step 1: Write Captivating Biographies

Your goal is to capture the essence of you and your ensemble in a few paragraphs. Write about your group's personality and what makes it unique. Make sure to highlight group and individual accomplishments so readers immediately sense the quality and standards of the ensemble. (See page 2 for biography templates.)

Step 2: Take Engaging Photos

Great photos have a way of capturing people's attention. When taking photos, creating the appropriate atmosphere and finding the right "look" can be challenging. While we aren't all professional photographers, we can still strive for the best possible photos to represent ourselves. (See pages 3-4 for tips and tricks.)

Step 3: Prepare Recordings

Make sure to showcase your group at its best. In just a few seconds, listeners will make a decision about the performance ability of an ensemble. Recordings should be top-quality and can be obtained even on a low budget. (See pages 5-6 for suggestions.)

Step 4: Choose Sample Repertoire

A sample repertoire should showcase your ensemble's most "tried and true" pieces and reflect the style in which your ensemble performs. In addition, it hints at the ensemble's skill level based on the repertoire's known challenges. (See page 7 for additional information.)

Step 5: Compile Press Releases and Quotes

Press releases help create buzz in the community. Use them for any big announcements or to promote upcoming events. If the media attends your performances, keep track of important articles and quotes for later use to boost your reputation. (See page 8 for additional information.)

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STEP 1:

Write Captivating Biographies



The two essential biographies needed in a press kit are: director biography and ensemble biography. The templates below provide a starting point.

Director/Accompanist Biography Template:

- Title of position
- Number of years in position
- Education & training background
- Certifications
- Nominations & awards
- Recordings
- Compositions
- Publications
- Quotes from local news sources
- Other positions held
- Story of musical career
- Recent accomplishments
- Interesting facts about the person
- Personal or business website

Ensemble Biography Template:

- Number of years program has been around
- Destinations where the ensemble has toured
- Festivals group has participated in
- Competition participation and scores
- Quotes from local news sources
- Nominations & awards
- Recordings
- Repertoire style of the group
- Recent accomplishments
- Interesting facts about the ensemble
- Upcoming projects



TIPS:

- Identify audience and purpose of biography
- Put the name in the first sentence (of whom the biography is about)
- Write from someone else's point of view
- Limit text to 1-2 paragraphs
- Use unique adjectives when describing accomplishments
- Bold or italicize highlight points to stand out
- For touring groups, complete biographies for soloist(s), assistant director(s) and accompanist(s) as applicable
- Add personality!



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STEP 2:

Take Engaging Photos



Who Needs a Photo in the Kit?

Everyone. All directors, soloists, accompanists, executive directors and the ensemble itself should have a high-quality photo in the press kit.

Do I Need a Professional Photographer?

A professional photographer is always great, but not absolutely necessary. Find someone with good aim, a nice camera and a sense of photography and you can still come away with a nice product.

Choosing an Appropriate Backdrop:

Photo Backdrops That Work:

- Plain wall backdrop – against a white or neutral colored wall
- Inside the performance space – on stage, in a venue or on the risers
- Simple outdoor scenery – photo from above of ensemble standing on the grass or outdoors on the steps to a venue

Photo Backdrops That Don't Work:

- Crazy colors – too much color that distracts the viewer's eye from the performers
- Unfitting “cafeteria photos” – groups in random places
 - Other “cafeteria” photo locations might include a parking lot, a basement or outside a restaurant
- Background distractions – people or things in the background that take away the focus from the group



TIPS:

- Avoid distracting backgrounds
- Keep backgrounds neutral
- Hire professional photographer or use DSLR
- Wear standard concert attire
- Smile and keep eyes open (don't settle for blinkage!)
- Plan your pose
- Try creative shots
- Take and send high-resolution photos
- Put group in the natural light but not directly facing the sun
- Photograph a performance
- Get a few close-up shots

Examples of Good Photos:



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Tips on Taking the Photo:

Wear standard concert attire. If the group does not have standard attire, decide on a uniformed outfit, color, specific sleeve length, floor length, acceptable accessories, etc. for perfect coordination.

Smile with open eyes. Never settle for a photo that doesn't have every person smiling with their eyes open. Try the 1-2-3 approach: Have group close their eyes and relax their mouths, count to three and say open. Group will open their eyes and smile. This helps avoid fake smiles and excessive blinking. Avoid singing or playing for your main group photo.

Decide on a pose. Think of a few poses ahead of time and practice them before the photographer starts taking pictures. Align people as necessary. Put tall people in the back and centered. Try different levels - some standing, some bent at the knees, etc. All faces should be seen.

Take multiple shots. Get creative! Try different locations and poses to get the right "look." If possible, shoot from an elevated position above the group, particularly with bigger groups.

Be yourselves. Photos should instantly show an ensemble's uniqueness and personality.



Tips on Sending Photos:

All photos should be high-resolution of 300 dpi or higher so that they are able to be blown up properly for your promotional materials. Surprisingly, it's less about the camera and more about the way you send the photos that makes all the difference.

1. Import the file from your camera directly to your computer
2. Check the resolution – see tips below
 - If it is 300 dpi or higher, you are in good shape!
3. Drag and drop photo to an email as an attachment, to dropbox.com, to Google drive, or similar, and send to the appropriate contact.
 - IMPORTANT NOTE: Do not copy and paste the photo into the body of your email. This significantly decreases the resolution of your photo. Always send the original file as an attachment.
 - You can also create a zip file and send via email this way. Here's how: <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Zip-File>

How to Check Photo Resolution in Microsoft Office 2010:

1. From the image file, right-click and select "Properties"
2. Click on the "More" link next to "Picture Properties" to expand section
3. Read the "Horizontal/Vertical Resolution" number to determine resolution

How to Check Photo Resolution on MAC:

1. Open image file in Preview
2. On top menu, click "Tools", "Show Inspector", then "General Info"
3. Read the "Image DPI" number to determine resolution

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STEP 3:

Prepare Recordings



Recording at a Studio:

Recording studios cost money so it's important to have a good look at your budget and leave plenty of time to plan. Prior to going to the studio, there are a few things to plan ahead of time:

Research the recording studio's staff biographies to gauge their experience level. Inquire about the cost per use of studio and staff time. Confirm that the studio has the capacity to hold your specific ensemble – will it fit 30 musicians? 50? 100? Do you need to bring auxiliary percussion?

Make some decisions:

1. How many pieces will you record?
2. How many separate parts will you need to record? Soloists? All together?
3. What are your priorities and goals?
4. How long will you need in the studio to complete your goals?

Discuss your goals with the studio. Together, plan the recording schedule and agree on costs. Once you have a schedule date, rehearse your ensemble members following the same time guidelines as you have set aside for the professional recording. Inform them of the time limits, the recording plan and the goals.

Recording on a Low-Budget:

We would all love professional recordings for our press kits, but realistically, most of us do not have the budget or time for them. Here are two quick ways to easily obtain a recording:

Record during a performance. What better time to record your ensemble than during a performance? If your ensemble has a regular performance space, assess if there is already a sound booth and technician that you could utilize for your next concert. If you do not have a performance space yet, try to locate one that already has a sound system in place that you have the ability to use.

Be aware that a sound technician may charge a fee to work on your recording. If you do not have friends or colleagues that can effectively run a sound booth for free for you, then hiring a technician is a small price to pay to make your recording the best it can be. While it will still not be the quality of an actual recording session track, the technician can still help fix some of the levels along the way and make sure that you don't have any major problems in your recording.



AUDIO TIPS:

- Plan your recording session in advance
- Find a suitable space
- Pick your best repertoire
- Discuss goals with studio managers
- Be creative with your budget
- Edit your recording
- Take your best snippets

VIDEO TIPS:

- Post on sharing websites such as YouTube
- Avoid smartphones
- Take landscape videos
- For marching bands, capture a video of your formation

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Snag a competition recording. For youth ensembles, All-State competitions may provide you with the option to receive a recording of the competition performance. Make use of these recordings and keep an online library of them as part of your press kit, website and other social media channels. Double-check that you have the appropriate permissions to post.

Editing the Audio Recording:

There are easy editing tricks that enhance the way the recording is structured. The first step is to install an audio editing program such as Audacity which is free and easy to use. Once you have the program in place and have reviewed the controls, try these simple edits:

1. **Cut out any speaking.** Give about 2 seconds before the first note is played/sung and 2 seconds after the last note. Anything before or after the song should be cut out in the editor.
2. Adjust the volume. If you find that the recording is too loud or too quiet, you should be able to change the amplification in your editor. Check that this doesn't distort the quality of sound too much.



3. **Separate your tracks.** If you have a full hour performance track, separate each piece into its own track. Keep in mind, that people have limited time and want to be able to easily search and listen for your best pieces.

4. **Segregate or highlight your good moments.** If you really like a piece that was played but there is one part that you didn't enjoy, then take a sample clipping of the best part. For demo purposes, it is perfectly acceptable to fade in and out of the recording without providing the entirety of the piece. Most importantly, use your best judgment. You are a musician and you know what sounds good. Trust your instincts and choose the recordings that highlight your ensemble.

Sending Your Recordings:

Post your videos on YouTube, Vimeo, Soundcloud or other audio/video sharing platforms and link to these in your press kit. Title each piece with the name of the piece, composer, ensemble, and date of recording. Be sure to email or share the original files. If the file is too large to email, use a file sharing program such as Dropbox to share your video. Don't forget to list any professional recordings in your press kit!

Video Recording Don'ts:

- Avoid using smartphones. When possible, hire a semi-professional/professional sound technician or videographer to record your performances.
- If absolutely necessary to use a smartphone, turn the phone landscape.
- Never hold the camera during a recording. Set it on a tripod to avoid shaking.

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STEP 4: Choose Your Sample Repertoire



When creating a list of your ensemble’s sample repertoire, you always want to stay true to your core style. Pick your ensemble’s most “tried and true” pieces. Pieces that have earned awards are always a plus! Choose a good mix of popular songs versus classical – those that people know and those that are less known. If you’re touring overseas, put an American piece or two in the mix – your audiences will appreciate it.

Ways to Organize Your Repertoire:

- By composer
- By time period
- By style
- By language
- By country/region
- By show (theatre, opera, etc.)
- By importance (world premieres vs. recitals)
- Chronologically
- Alphabetically
- If for a specific performance, list sequentially or as “selections from”

Listed Repertoire Should Include:

- Title (in sung language and original language – if applicable)
- Movements (if applicable)
- Composer
- Composer life in years (example: 1685-1750)
- Approximate timings per piece

Formatting style examples:

Sample 1:

Sacred		Approx. Timing
Abide With Me	arr. Moses Hogan	4

Songs of War and Remembrance		
Flanders Fields	McCrae/Aitken	4

Sample 2:

Mo Li Hua arranged by Wayland Rogers (China)	3
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Sample 3:

- Symphony #3..... Mendelssohn
- Andante con moto — Allegro un poco agitato (A minor)
 - Vivace non troppo (F major)
 - Adagio (A major)
 - Allegro vivacissimo — Allegro maestoso assai (A minor - A major)

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TIPS:

- Showcase your best pieces
- Choose mix of sacred and secular
- When touring overseas, check repertoire with venue and add an American piece or two in the mix

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STEP 5:

Press Releases and Quotes



Create and send press releases to the media whenever you have a big announcement: new director, upcoming benefit concert, upcoming tour, etc. After you have sent them, keep an archive folder on your website where you are able to easily access them. Use these press releases when applicable to promote various aspects of your organization.

If the media attends your performances or if your organization is featured somewhere in an online blog, website, newspaper, radio or TV station, keep these also archived on your website. You can use these while creating your press kit; you may wish to pull a quote onto your ensemble biography or post a recording of your ensemble from the local news channel and submit alongside your press kit. This will help make your press kit stand out next to other ensembles!

How to Format a Press Release:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Top left of page: exact text, uppercase letters, bolded

Headline/Title

Left-aligned: title of the piece

City, State/Country – Month - Day, Year

Left-aligned: before the story and italicized

Body/Story

Left-aligned: multiple paragraph content

Ensemble/Director info

Left-aligned: include the ensemble biography or director biography (if applicable)



TIPS:

- Create and send press releases for your big news items
- Keep your press releases archived or on your website
- Use proper formatting for press releases
- Obtain quotes for your press kit from media and audience
- Create a high-quality digital file of your press kit
- Post your press kit to your website
- Include your contact information



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Contact Information

Left-aligned: Contact, organization, email, phone number, address, website

###

Left-aligned: 3 pound signs tells the reader the press release is over

How to Post Your Press Kit

1. Post the kit on the ensemble’s website in its own “Press Kit” section. Include your contact information, website and social channels when posting.
2. Create a PDF digital file of the complete press kit for an easy print piece. Put a download link to the PDF on the website for external sources to use.
3. If necessary, complete a terms & conditions clause. Include a restriction for photo usage that ensures a photo credit is given either to the organization or to the photographer when used by an external source.

4. If budget allows, you may wish to have a high-quality printing company put together a printed kit for you to have on hand. Print just enough for the upcoming year as you will be updating the press kit on an annual basis.

Examples of Digital Press Kits:

- [Tenebrae Passion & Precision](#)
- [Chicago Children’s Choir](#)
- [Boston Symphony Orchestra](#)
- [Dorothy Shaw Bell Choir](#)
- [USC Trojan Marching Band](#)

As you can see, there are some ensembles that have paid to make a very professional press kit and there are others that are simpler that still work very well. Choose the quality and budget that works for you and remember that having any press kit is better than no press kit at all.

Utilize Your Press Kit

Once your press kit is complete, use it to your advantage! Having a press kit can help build your ensemble’s reputation, increase your audience numbers, gain community support, enhance fundraising and recruiting efforts and so much more. Send your press kit to media outlets, parents/administration/concert subscribers and share on your social channels. Keep your content fresh and strive to update your press kit annually with new photos, videos and quotes.



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