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# PREPARING FOR MUSIC CONFERENCES

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are not meant to substitute for legal advice which should be sought in each particular instance.*

## Introduction

Musicians have a variety of music conferences to choose from every year. This article aims to provide some helpful tips to the musician selecting and preparing for the typical music conference.

## Do Your Research

Your preparation should start before you even decide to attend a conference. Go online and find out more about the various conferences that are out there. All of them have Web sites. Some of the best and well-known conferences for Canadian musicians are:

Canadian Music Week – late Winter/early Spring; Toronto, ON  
North By Northeast – June; Toronto, ON  
New Music West – May; Vancouver, BC  
CMJ – Fall; New York, NY  
South By Southwest – March; Austin, TX  
Midem – January; Cannes, France

All of these conferences have Web sites and most have application deadlines way in advance of the actual conference dates.

## Submit A Professional Package

There are numerous books and other learning materials which outline the key ingredients (i.e. music, bio, photo, etc.). Make sure it is all professionally done. A screening committee will review your material before you are selected (or not) to showcase. Put your best foot forward.

Supplement your submission by accessing referrals. For example, if you have an agent, manager or lawyer who can put in a good word for you make sure they do. There are hundreds of bands submitted for these conferences – you need to cut through somehow.

## Venue and Showcase Slot Is Key

Many bands travel long, long distances to showcase at less than favourable venues at less than favourable time slots. If your goal is to have industry types attend your show obviously a well-located, popular venue will better serve your purposes. Again, research is key in this regard. Find out about the city and the venue you are slotted into. I would seriously reconsider expending substantial amounts of \$\$\$ to showcase if you are slotted into a bad sounding room with a makeshift PA and inadequate lighting.

Time slots are important too. Most conferences showcase bands on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Experience has shown that the best night to showcase is Friday. Some key delegates do not show up for the first night (Thursday) and many depart prior to the final evening (Saturday). I would not cancel if I was slotted on Thursday or Saturday, but if you have a choice: choose Friday.

## Competition Is Fierce/Be Realistic

Conferences do not lead directly to record deals. They are often one step on the way to initial industry interest or increased industry interest. Most of these conferences showcase a minimum of 400 acts over a three-day period and South By Southwest showcases over 1,000. Expect nothing and you will be pleasantly surprised if you get some industry interest out of it.

Prepare in advance of the conference to contact as many people as possible to get them your package and let them know about your show. A politely worded e-mail should suffice. Make up flyers or stickers with showcase venue and timeslot information to hand out to everyone you see. However, understand, the most heavily attended showcases are for bands that have developed a “buzz” months before the conference. Start developing your buzz *today*.

## A&R/Managers/Agents/ Publishers/Journalists/ Promoters/Lawyers

Many artists focus on record company A&R people and ignore other industry types that can be instrumental in their careers. These conferences are attended by managers, booking agents, music publishers, journalists, concert promoters, lawyers and other bands. Again, do your research and focus on some of these key players to help you build your team.

## Panels

Normally, one of the band members receives a pass to attend the panels. Someone in the band should use it. Panels can be a valuable source of information and can also provide access to industry types that can be approached after they finish their respective panel. Panellists attend the conference to meet new people and network too.

## Timing/Rehearsals

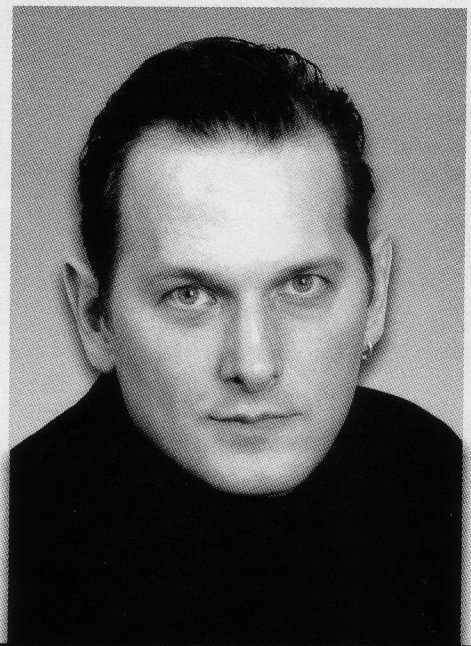
Time your set. I am always amazed by bands that have to cut sets unexpectedly because they have run out of time. Rehearse your actual set list and time it out. Leave five minutes for error. Many of these conferences run like clockwork and will turn off your sound if you run over. You will irritate other bands in the process.

Set times are normally between 35-45 minutes. This is more than enough time to exhibit your talents. Any extra time is unnecessary.

## Conclusions

Conferences can be an integral part of the growth process for any musician. Start building your buzz today; do your research; and, be reasonably in your expectations. We'll see you at the conference!

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by Chris Taylor