Industry Advice for Photos

By Rebecca Anne Clark

An artist, or anyone who wants to be talked about in the media, should make it as easy as possible for the media to get a hold of press materials. For me, the ideal things are:

* **I google your name and the results make it easy to see which is your official website.** If your name is Dulcinea Langfeld, it's less confusing, but if your name is Genviève Tremblay or if you share your name with another somewhat-famous person, make it clear and have your website's homepage title be "Genviève Tremblay, trombonist" or whatever you are.
* **Your website makes it easy to find the photo section, and download photos from that section.** Don't make me look at your site map. Have a clearly-visible menu with a clearly-labelled ("photos", "gallery", "media", or "downloads") section for photos. Make sure these photos are easy to download. Flash slideshows look cool, but sometimes saving these photos is difficult. If you MUST have the fancy Flash slideshow, make sure there are links to download photos in high resolution.
* **The photos on your website are high-res.** When it comes to printing, there's no such thing as too big. Err on the side of caution and put that 3000-pixel-wide version there. If you want to be really ideal, include a web resolution version in the 740-to-1024 range. If you can't host large photos on your website for some reason, DropBox or Flickr are great alternatives. If you have a lot of photos or you add photos frequently, a link to your Flickr page is always welcome! If you can't host photos on your website due to copyright issues, provide a link to the place where these photos can be obtained, e.g. your artist management website or the photographer's website.
* **Appropriate photo credits.** Photographers like to be credited for their work, and media outlets like to credit them. Make sure any necessary photo credits are easy to find, or that you label a photo "press handout" so that we the media know we can use it. If you want to REALLY make my day, name your photos like this: Genvieve\_Tremblay\_Trombone\_credit\_Bo\_Huang.jpg
* **Have a variety of photos.** You should probably have at least 2 photos of yourself, and the more the better, up to a point (I don't want to have to sift through more than 15 to decide which one is best, unless your career spans over a decade). Here are my suggestions:
  + At least one good **face shot*,*** for when we're running a thumbnail of your smiling mug.
  + At least one good **body shot, with your instrument** if you're not a singer. If you're a trombonist, we want to see that! The more interestingly you pose with your instrument, the better—not that we're not going to run a photo of you just smiling and holding your instrument, but we really want to run an interesting shot and it's going to draw eyeballs. If you're a singer…it sounds cheesy, but consider a photo with your mouth open wide. If you're a composer, try one holding a partition and/or a pen. For conductors, your instrument is a baton.
  + At least one **landscape-oriented** and one **portrait-oriented** photo
  + One photo with an **interesting background** and one with a **plain background** (the plain background is perhaps the more important one, the interesting background is a nice bonus)
  + (Mostly for singers) While **costume shots** are good, they aren't quite enough by themselves. You may look amazing as the Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute*, and I'd definitely want to run it if we're promoting another performance of same, but I'm not going to choose this photo to accompany a text about you singing Mimi in *La Bohème*.
  + **Action shots**, or photos of you performing, while not as polished and nice as studio shots, can be very valuable. (My editor-in-chief is always asking us to look for photos that "tell the story" and nothing tells them better than this). If there's a photographer at your concert and they aren't there taking photos for a specific media outlet (who will subsequently own the rights to those photos), get this person's contact info and ask if you can use their photos on your website/for press purposes, with credit of course. Have relevant captions: "La relève au trombone, concert with the OSM at the Maison Symphonique, July 7, 2014"
  + If you're an ensemble, have at least one photo where **you're all squeezed together** closely, for those times when space is tight and we can only fit a square photo but don't want to cut off anyone on the edges. Having individual photos is good if different members have different side projects, but make sure you've got at least a couple shots together as an ensemble.
  + **Show off your character.** While both can be great photos, a pic of you in formal dress with perfect posture has a very different feel than you in a nice sweater sitting on some stairs. Consider what kind of character you want conveyed in your photos, and plan accordingly.
* **Download format:** I much prefer to download only the photos I want, as opposed to a .ZIP file with 6 hi-res photos and a PDF with your biography and upcoming concert schedule. But that .ZIP file is still far preferable to a website where the only photos available are 300 pixels wide!

As for the sins of website/photo issues:

* **Photos not readily available/hard to find:** Even if all you have is an official Facebook page, one decent photo that I know I can use (i.e. has a photo credit or says "press handout") is infinitely better than nothing. If I have two people to choose from to run a photo of, I will choose the one whose press photos are more easily available.
* **Photos too small:** Anything smaller than 400 pixels is all but useless to me for print. Colour glossy printing is 300 dpi which means that for every 300 pixels, you get one inch of photo. The smallest photos I usually bother with are 480 x 640 and even that's not ideal.
* **Great photos, can't be downloaded:** If I can't alt-click and choose "save as" and there's no link to download hi-res photos, I can't use what you've provided.
* **Excessive watermarking:** If the photographer's name/watermark appears in the bottom corner, that's fine. If it appears across the main part of the photo, that tells me I don't have permission to use that photo.
* **Photos taken with potato:** Every once in a while, I run across someone who has one photo that looks like it was taken with a toy camera in the corner of their kitchen. These photos are not for your Tinder profile! That being said, a clear, half-decent photo taken with your friend's iPhone is *still better than nothing*.

I cannot emphasize enough, especially for not-yet-big artists who have some sort of gig (at a competition, playing in a student orchestra, performing in school concert/opera/etc, part of the chorus), how much having *any* sort of professional web presence with *any* half-decent photo(s) will put you ahead of the crowd.