

INTRO

(The following is read by Laura Colby over jazz music composed by Manual Cinema)

Hi, I'm Laura Colby and this is The Middle Woman, a roadmap to managing the performing arts. I'll be sharing personal anecdotes from my 30 years in the field, exploring the nitty gritty and the technicalities of this job. I'll tell you the story of how I got here and what it's taken for me to work in the industry of the performing arts.

--

EPISODE 2

LAURA COLBY: Hello, this is Laura Colby, founder and president of Elsie Management, and my first question to you is, what did you see? At the end of episode one, I asked if you would please go see a live show. So I hope you did, and if you did, drop me a line, let me know what you saw, and let me know what you thought.

Today is episode two, and we're digging into who's who. What are the roles in this field of the live performing arts? And I'm excited to have a guest with me today, my vice president, Anna Amadei. She was born and raised in Italy and started working for me here, in the States, in 2008.

ANNA AMADEI: I'm Anna, and when I started working for Laura, 15 years ago, I had just arrived to the US and I sat down at my desk, with this brave woman who hired me and sponsored me for my visa. We'll get to the visas much later in the podcast. And I just asked myself, okay, who's who? Who are these people and who do I talk to? Now, I came from... A performing arts management background, um, performing background first and then performing arts management background, uh, first in school, and then I worked in Italy as a manager and tour manager for four years before moving to the US. So I knew my way in the field. I just was thrown all of a sudden in a completely new environment. Thankfully, I had Laura guiding me through it, step by step, with lots of patience. But I had to learn, uh, who I had to talk to and who were the players in this big game.

So, Laura, should we start digging into it and find out who's who?

LAURA: Yeah, Jimena, our contracts manager, has drafted us a fantastic diagram um, and it does show several roles in a circle or rather how they are connected. So Anna and I have a cheat sheet in front of us. You'll be able to find this diagram we have in our hands on our website along with a written transcript for this episode and a glossary for the terms we are using and the organizations we are referencing.

So I would like to start with the artists because, of course, we would not have our jobs if it wasn't for the artists. And connected to the artists and probably, I'm going to argue, closest to the

artists are the artist manager, the agent, the artist representative, and the producers. And then there are the presenters, who are the programmers. The folks who are maintaining, running, delivering some kind of annual performing arts series or maybe a festival.

Also in this circle are service organizations. And the service organizations serve, literally serve the field through their program. Service organizations can be on the national scale. We already spoke about APAP, the Association of Performing Arts Professionals. That is our national service organization for the live performing arts industry.

They can also be on the smaller level, such as Fractured Atlas, which actually started as a New York-based service organization and provided, for example, fiscal conduit services. And then what is helping to fund all of this, the artists, the service organizations, and the presenters, not the agents or the artists representatives, are the funders.

And the funders can include private funders, government, individual donors. So that's the rubric or the foundation of, the first line, if you will, of what these big roles are.

ANNA: And I have to say, the first huge differences that I found, um, moving from Europe and working in Europe, were the roles of the agents and managers and producers that are, similar, but not the same, and specifically the service organizations. I found out how all of these players were interconnected by these networks or small communities or, threads of, you know, that were put in, put together by the services organization, which is. It's, you know, an incredible tool for people entering this field because they give you the tips and tricks and they give you the, the contacts and, um, they give you the opportunities.

LAURA: And sometimes they can literally give you the money.

ANNA: Exactly.

LAURA: So the first service organization I was a member of was Dance Theater Workshop and my membership bought me a long list of journalists, reviewers, the right person to contact at the New York Times to try to get coverage of that New York City season that I was helping to produce. I also think of NEFA, New England Foundation for the Arts, which has been incredibly important in Elsie's trajectory in the field because NEFA administers a program called the National Dance Project, which is in the business of helping to fund new work and then tour it, get it out on the road. So, this, this interconnectivity, this network, as Anna pointed out, we are so deeply connected.

I wanted to drill down a little bit into, like, what kind of presenters there are out there.

ANNA: Yes, so presenters and programmers are the main players, right? They are those who actually book and present the live performance. They either have a stage or a venue to create that performance opportunity. They also are that organization, you know, those organizations who facilitate the exchange that happens between the artist and the audience at the moment of

the performance, but also in many other ways, through educational activities, through Q&As, and everything that revolves around a live performance.

The presenters could be little, small organization in your backyard that puts on a show or a small festival. It could be the university in your hometown. It is the big performing arts centers or the regional theaters. Or it could be a festival. The presenters could be... Internationally renowned and they could present international artists and have major funding to bring in the big performing arts.

But there are plenty of small presenters out there that do an incredible amount of work and put an incredible amount of effort in presenting artists to their audiences. So, and they're all as important as the big ones.

LAURA: Yeah, I get asked a lot. What kind of presenters do you work with? We work with the universities that maintain annual programs presenting the live performing arts, but we also work with small community or state colleges that have presenting programs as well as private organizations that are dedicated to the performing arts. Every year, we work with multi-genre festivals. Those are the organizations that present most of our outdoor spectacle.

When I first started touring artists out on the road, I worked with a lot of small colleges with dance or theater departments that had annual discretionary funds available to faculty. And in those cases, the programmer can be a faculty person who has no support staff at all. They single-handedly execute the entire engagement from securing to contracting to marketing to promotion, all of it.

It's our job, it's our job to understand the situation of each presenter. To know if they have staff or if they do not. And the reality for the majority of the programmers we work with is that they only get to focus on programming for maybe 5 percent of their job.

I want to use the Joyce Theatre as an example of roles in a presenting organization. So the Joyce Theatre is New York City's preeminent dance programmer. They program and present dance in their theater on 8th Avenue and 19th Street, 50 weeks out of the year, I think. I think literally there are only two weeks out of the year that there is not dance on that stage.

And if you go onto their website, you will see who, who, who the roles are in their staffing. So they have an executive director, a director of programming. We work very directly with the Director of Programming.

So, half of our job when we find theaters or are introduced to theaters, is figuring out who's in charge. Who has the authority to make decisions?

So, at The Joyce, the Director of Programming, That's Danni Gee she's out in the field. She is very busy looking at work and we are very involved in conversations with her about specific work and we'll bring things to her and she'll, she literally said to me this week, Yeah, I don't think

that's the right match, but this one is. Tell me more about that. And she will put together her shortlist if you will, but it's ultimately the executive director, which is Linda Shelton, who gives the final okay. That is a very classic hierarchy. Executive director with the director of programming who ultimately reports to the executive director.

We are now seeing more examples of shared distribution of leadership in our field and you will see on so many websites now co-executive director, co-artistic director, and these roles are now, there's not a hierarchy. That announces that that's a co-leadership. So those are new structures that have come about recently.

So other roles that we eventually work with at the Joyce, because you'll see all these other departments at the Joyce, but the three other departments that we work with are general management, Because those are the folks that Jimena is going to be working on a contract with. We work with marketing, of course, because we give them all those high res photos and videos that we have in hand. And we work with production, of course, which is where the tech rider comes in. We're basically the first pass to make sure everything is okay, and before things get handed off to the company.

So if you look on any website, any theater, any program, or presenting programmer's website, you'll see this hierarchy of departments and people. And again, if you're in our position, you have to ask the question, who has the authority to make the programming decisions? And sometimes you'll be surprised, sometimes it's the operations director.

We just spoke about presenter roles. I want to go back to the role of the artist manager, artist representative, and the booking agent.

ANNA: The first week that I was sitting at my desk, um, she kept saying to me, we're not booking agents, we are performing arts managers. And that difference became clearer and clearer to me along the years and looking at the kind of work that we do for our roster of artists and, what we do goes beyond just the booking of the show and the engagement. So it's beyond the actual sale if you want to call it that way. So Laura, do you want to dig into what, like, how do we go beyond, you know, the just act of selling the shows? What is that we do for all of our artists?

LAURA: What is it that we do that makes us not just booking agents? Because we're in this for the long haul, and we are looking at the career trajectory of our artists beyond first piece that, quote, put them on the map or attracted eyes or brought programmers around to have a look and go, Oh, yeah, that dance company, I should start looking at that dance company.

So beyond that first hit, if you will, what's the trajectory for this artist? In the North American market, because primarily we are working about 80 percent of our business is in the North American market, and that is specifically Canada, U. S. and Mexico for us. So, we're looking at grant opportunities, we're looking at, creating consortiums of presenters who can potentially commission this company's next new work. As far as I understand it, booking agents don't get

involved in that. We're keeping our eye on grant deadlines. As far as I know, booking agents don't do that. We actually read their grants and we weigh in on their grants and we help them with their grants because yeah, we figured the grants out so we have this running list in our head about all the reasons why you're not going to get that funding if you don't say X, Y, and Z. So those are the other services we're providing that go beyond a booking agent.

ANNA: Yeah. And I would add to that, that we file international visas for our artists, that it's something that booking agents don't do, uh, necessarily, we also, um, help the artists that are coming new into the field if we see, you know, that sparkle in them and we want to represent them, even if they don't have an infrastructure yet, then we will help develop that kind of infrastructure.

So help them creating budgets and promotional materials and so we go way more backstage I would say and if I have to you know, analyze this in a more like philosophical way I would say that a booking agent, takes the artist's product and puts it on the market and sells it as an art product. We stand beside. and help develop that product, you know, many different ways. We represent the artist and connect it to the presenter. We don't take the product and sell it on the market.

LAURA: We're a little shop of three here. I think our friendly competitors who have 20 or 30 employees. in their agency. Booking agents are essential in their sales effort. That's like, that's like an army I can't even visualize. So we, we are, you know, we are a small shop here, so we have picked up all of these roles, primarily out of necessity.

Anna pointed to a great thing, uh, when she talked about helping companies get their infrastructure. What is that? And that's what I was speaking about in the first episode about company management. Basic company management.

So, basic company management to us means that you already have your tech riders in place. You already have your high-risk photos handled. You've already got... spectacular video, full lengths and trailers, and excerpts. Everything is ready to go. And that's critical to the work that we do in our role. If we take on an artist that doesn't have management. That's a huge decision that we, and we rarely, rarely do it and in fact, at one point I remember you and I sat down, it was probably a good 15 years ago, and we said, that's it, that's it, we're not picking up...

ANNA: No more artists without an infrastructure.

LAURA: If the artist doesn't have built-in company management, we just don't have the time to take care of all of that, um, as we do our work. Because our primary role is the distribution of the performance work and then the continuation of the presence of that artist in the market.

ANNA: And these of course are all theoretical boundaries because we do see the sparkle in some artists that do not have an infrastructure and Laura is laughing because she knows that

every other year she will bring in a new artist that needs to develop all that and we're happy to do it because we know how to do it.

LAURA: And, and you know, this is where passion always comes in, and we always ask, is there a place? Can we make a place? Is the field calling for this? Can we make that place for them? Um, and we'll talk a lot more about that in the episode about how to get an agent or how an agent finds you.

A reminder about the diagram where you can see these roles we're talking about and how they are all interconnected. You can find this diagram on my website, which is linked in this episode's bio, where you can also find the transcript, glossary, and more.

Speaking of roles...I get told a lot, Oh, so you're a talent agent. So, Anna, tell us about talent agents.

ANNA: Oh, that's funny that you asked me that question because I have no idea how to describe what a talent agent does. When I try to explain what I do, I just make sure that people understand that I do not represent singular artists in their act of being hired by productions. Is that what a talent agent does?

LAURA: That's it.

ANNA: That's it. I nailed it. So I just make sure that people understand that we represent acts that are already put together and they are companies and if they are singular artists, of course, it means that they are solo artists that have a show.

LAURA: Yeah. Because we have represented plenty of solo artists, but they have developed full-length, what we would consider concert productions. Um, but we don't manage talent. We're not, that's not the business we're in. We are in the business of working with artists who are creating work that we are now helping them to distribute and also to stay relevant in the field for a trajectory for a substantial amount of time.

ANNA: To the point of what is a talent agent, if you are an actor or a singer or a musician and you want to be hired and film or Broadway productions or orchestras, you will need to find yourself a talent agent, unless you have another way to get into, in front of a producer or, um,

LAURA: or into that audition.

ANNA: Or into that audition. So, um, talent agents are definitely, incredibly important for the artists themselves who need to find work.

LAURA: I wanted to talk about producers.

ANNA: Yes.

LAURA: And that is another role and titling that has really come to the fore recently. Um, and I want to point quite specifically to our colleagues at CIPA, which is the Creative Independent Producers Alliance, and there will be a link in the glossary on the website for you.

ANNA: And that's a service organization, people.

LAURA: That's right, CIPA. CIPA came about as a response, a need in the field, as most service organizations do, for the producers to self-identify and say, "Hey, I'm an independent producer, actually, and I want to know all the other independent producers out there." So, hold on, there's that word, independent. Usually when you hear the word producer, you think of the classic Broadway producer. That person who is bankrolling a multi-million dollar production.

Let me take a moment to say that if you look at the credits for a Broadway show today, you'll notice a long list of producers. There's a group of producers backing a show. As opposed to that Hollywood version of the single producer.

The independent producers of CIPA are primarily creating work in contemporary genres. They may have no intention of their productions ever going to Broadway. They may be producing a band that will tour large outdoor music festivals. Or they're creating a solo show with live music that will tour to the university presenting world.

The big difference between the producer and the work that Anna and I are primarily doing is that, to me, to put it in simplistic terms, the producer is the bank. They hold the bank. Meaning, they are the ones that ultimately end up paying the artist, paying everybody involved, the costume designer, the set designer, the composer, for whatever the production is that they are having made.

ANNA: They are those extraordinary players in the field that will take the risk of putting on your show.

LAURA: Right. We are accustomed to representing companies, they, the company, is taking the risk to create all this new work, which comes to us often finished, and then we are the ones who are distributing it.

ANNA: We're the middle women.

LAURA: We sure are.

We are the middle women because we're, literally working for the artists, and at the same time, we're working for the presenters as we curate a roster to put out in the world in front of the presenters to say, Hey, look what we are excited about. We want you to know this work. Please come see this work live in consideration.

ANNA: And we will do everything that it takes to bring it and deliver it to you.

LAURA: Including the tech rider.

ANNA: Yes.

LAURA: High res photos.

ANNA: Yes.

LAURA: Excellent videos. And all the press. Because that's what we do.

We did not talk about the audience. And audiences come in all shapes and sizes and ages and backgrounds and class structure and everything. And here in the United States, the messiest mess of it all, audiences are just a huge staggering range.

I'll say that our favorite audience is the accidental audience.

ANNA: Yes.

LAURA: And Anna and I have been working really hard in promoting the work of Outdoor Spectacle, which is often presented outside for free, with no tickets.

ANNA: We like the audience that gives us a chance to change somebody's life just to looking at something they would have never seen in any other environment. You know, it's, it's like the best.

LAURA: It is the best. It's the best. And it's an extraordinary, uh, moment when you get to share in that and someone has an unforgettable experience that had nothing to do with buying a ticket and walking through a theater door.

Now, we're still very concerned about the audience that's buying tickets and walking through theater doors, and the industry has always spent a lot of time analyzing its audience having to answer the question. Who is the audience and why are they coming to your program every year? Why aren't they coming anymore?

The audience is a critical part of the roles in this big picture of who is who in the field. Without the audience, there is no engagement. The actual exchange between the performer and the audience. I mean, I don't know about you, but that's what I'm living for.

From super intimate theatrical experiences of one performer with one audience member to that stadium of 50,000 people cheering on a rock band. It's all about the engagement between the artist and the audience.

Artists want to tour, to have the experience of sharing their work with different audiences. Audiences that aren't necessarily in their backyard. Through that process, they gain deeper insight into their practice. They inevitably learn things that will impact the creation of their next work. And for the audience member, they may have a cathartic experience that unexpectedly shifts something inside of them. They may feel something in a new way they've never felt before. So yeah, the audience is critical to the artist and to this field.

To wrap up, I'm going to ask, please go see a live show. And when you see that live show, look at the program copy. What is program copy? Because program copy, printed program copy, has disappeared. But surely there's a link somewhere on the website where you bought that ticket for that live performance.

And that link will take you to the program copy, and in the program copy, you should be able to find these titles and these roles. You'll see them spelled out, and hopefully, that will provide further insight for you as to who's who.

So I want to thank Anna for being here today.

ANNA: Thank you, Laura.

LAURA: Our next episode will be about skills, specifically the kinds of skills you need to be an artist representative.

ANNA: Aye, aye, aye.

LAURA: Thank you and until next time.

(Fade out with jazz music by Manual Cinema)