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# IBMA 2011 ? A Message from Stan Zdonik [1]

A Year of Renewal.

2010 was a historic year for IBMA as we celebrated the achievements of our first 25 years of service to our music.  The year itself saw a number of accomplishments as well ? from sharing information, building relationships and hearing what?s new at the World of Bluegrass, to another amazing IBMA Awards Show broadcast, to an active Trust Fund that made over $70,000 in grants to bluegrass pros in need.  IBMA?s first series of web based seminars (webinars) became a reality. We fostered millions of positive media impressions for our music, worked with dozens of event producers and new broadcasters to get more music in front of fans, and we made some inroads with retailers and corporate partners.  On top of all that, our members (you) logged thousands of calls to IBMA for a long list of services and information, and you volunteered on more than 30 committees working together to grow our music.

At the World of Bluegrass events a few months ago, I was asked to be the board chairperson and president and am deeply honored to have the opportunity to serve in that role this coming year.  I also was given the podium during the week to outline some of the challenges ahead for bluegrass in general and IBMA in particular.

Effective leadership implies a relationship between those with the responsibility for providing direction and those interested in and capable of making those goals a reality and both roles are critical to one another.  In short, the Board and I cannot do it alone and would like to invite each of you to participate as we work together to build an even stronger organization in the coming year.

Here is an outline of some of the priorities in front of us.

**We?re Listening!**

As leaders, we?re sometimes criticized for not understanding what?s important to our constituents and I want to pledge here that your input will be welcomed and listened to by the board and staff.  We need more than ever to understand the issues critical to our members and which confront the bluegrass and the broader entertainment world.  I think that it is important as well to try to keep you informed about what the board is up to, so that the conversation can be two-way.

Members must also recognize that IBMA represents a diverse set of perspectives.  Despite this, we must develop a consensus on what our priorities should be, so that we can work together to use our assets to their best advantage.

You?ll be seeing more surveys and questions coming from IBMA in 2011 and I encourage you

to let your ideas be known through those forums and in any other way convenient to you.

We have also created an easy way for you to share ideas for how we might make IBMA more responsive to your needs. We created an e-mail address (ibmasuggestions@gmail.com [2]) for you to send specific suggestions. A suggestion should say what problem it?s solving and how you think we should go about solving it. We promise to consider each and every suggestion, so give it a try. The suggestion box is open.

**Finding Resources**

It?s no secret that institutions of all shapes and sizes have been greatly impacted by the downturn in the economy. The music business has been especially hard hit, and IBMA has not been immune to these cycles. Further, we may have relied too heavily on past successes as a guide for decisions on where resources would come from.

We no longer have that luxury and though we?re currently able to pay expenses, we?ve trimmed them just short of damaging our ability to provide benefits to you and engage in projects that promote and open new doors for our music.

It?s time to look into creative ways to finance our efforts to achieve our mission by leveraging the talents of the members of IBMA. In the short term, we?re hoping to organize several special events among artists and other constituencies with an interest in supporting IBMA. We are looking into new models for providing benefits (example: see Bluegrass Nation info in the recent issue of our newsletter) as we also examine in what form existing programs, events and initiatives will continue.

*You can contribute and we need your help!*

**Growing Membership**

Our professional membership has remained fairly stable over the past few years, but we need to involve more people, companies and organizations in our ranks. On the surface, this may sound like a plea for more dues income and frankly, it is in part. But more importantly, the larger our membership base, the stronger we are as a voice for our community and the more effective we can be as we try to achieve our individual and collective goals. If we?re going to ?work together? for our music?.we need others to work with.

To that end, we want to grow our membership by a very reasonable goal of 250 new professional members by the end of the World of Bluegrass events in 2011. You can help in at least two ways. First, by sharing the value of being an IBMA member with your peers and encouraging them to join and second, by simply renewing your own membership when the time comes.

And once we?re ready to commit fully to develop the Bluegrass Nation project, we?ll entirely revamp our non-professional membership category and have the opportunity to engage thousands more as participants in the broader bluegrass community.

**An Invigorated World of Bluegrass**

What are your expectations of our annual convention, the IBMA Awards and Bluegrass Fan

Fest?

That question is central to how we will plan events this year and as noted earlier, you?ll be seeing a survey very soon that invites your input. We are contractually committed to hosting the events in Nashville through 2012, but we begin planning now for 2013 which includes everything from site selection, the dates and the configuration of activities. Your input will be critical in helping to shape the future of World of Bluegrass.

I hear from attendees regularly about how much they enjoy the events, and it?s appreciated. But there are also folks who are less satisfied with their experience or who haven?t attended for a variety reasons. We need to make the convention more valuable to them. Thus, it?s important for us to constantly redesign our events, and we have several member-led committees working feverishly to do just that.

Expect to see an invigorated World of Bluegrass experience in 2011 as we focus on two primary goals. First, we don?t want to just meet your expectations, we will exceed them and I?ll ask you after the events if you?re able to say as much. Of course, as stated above, we are extremely interested in your input on what you would like to see. Second, we?re planning for a sold out IBMA Awards Show and expect attendance to grow at the conference (up 13%) and the festival (up 10%).

*Again, you can help by planning now to attend and encouraging others to do the same.*

**Benefits of Value to You**

The list of services available to members has always been impressive and I want that to continue. But I?m not sure some of our benefits are of value to every member and understanding the right mix of benefits for most members is a question we?re going to explore in greater detail in 2011. Again, we?d love to hear from you on this.

For example, we?ve long offered consumer research data that can help identify prospective sponsors and guide management decisions in a variety of situations. These services have been provided free to members, and they are fairly expensive. But if they are not widely used, the board has to question their relevance and whether or not there are more important priorities.

Maybe we just haven?t explained the benefits of membership in the right way or maybe there are other benefits that members would find more meaningful. We will begin anew in 2011 to seek out answers to these questions and to plan accordingly.

**Evaluating IBMA Itself**

We just celebrated our organization?s 25th anniversary, and I believe it?s natural that we would have built a framework of policies, procedures, committees and what I?ll refer to here as the architecture of IBMA during that time. It?s essential to have that kind of structure to guide our work together and to build it on values like integrity, positive relationships, and professionalism which we hold important in our work with one another.

You elect a board to shape such things and I know from my experience serving that my colleagues take their posts seriously. As individual issues arise, we look for the right answer

and also the structure and resources it takes to address it.

Frankly, time doesn?t always permit a broader examination of the entire structure through which IBMA operates, but it?s time to do so.  So I?ll be asking our board, committees and staff to embark on a year-long examination of everything from our mission and purpose to our values, priorities, committee structures, policies and procedures.

It?s an ongoing process, so don?t expect one large seismic shift in how we operate, and there will be some things we?ve long done that will not change.  But I expect there will be changes?some minor and some major.

In summary, the Board and I will be listening very closely to you as we go through a renewal of this organization, its services and events.  And again, I invite you to become even more active as we work together and address some important issues this coming year.  IBMA will be stronger as a result and, most importantly, so will our ability to strengthen bluegrass music!

Happy New Year and THANK YOU for your involvement,

Stan Zdonik

IBMA President & Board Chairperson

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