



# Collegiate Arts Bridge at MAX

## May – September 2026 Syllabus

### Description

Heartland Performing Arts is committed to expanding access to meaningful educational opportunities within the performing arts. Through the Collegiate Arts Bridge at MAX, a 16-week program, the organization provides hands-on, real-world experience for emerging artists, agents, and presenters. This innovative program fills a critical gap in the performing arts conference industry by connecting the next generation of professionals with practical learning, mentorship, and industry exposure, strengthening the future of the arts through education and collaboration.

### Committee

The Collegiate Committee of the Midwest Arts XPO is led by a dedicated team of presenters, agents, and artists with over 20 years of professional experience in the performing arts industry. Each member holds advanced degrees and brings a passion for mentorship, education, and empowering college/graduate students in the Midwest to explore real-world pathways in the arts.

- Laurel Canan
- Jim O'Connell
- Tianna Conway, Program Coordinator
- Barron Ryan
- Hannah Cummins
- Andrei Reynoso

Students accepted into the program will receive email contact information from the committee.

### Required Dates of Participation

Participation in the Collegiate Arts Bridge at MAX is a key part of the program. Students accepted into the program are required to attend all sessions, including five virtual meetings and one in-person conference week. The schedule for 2026 is as follows:

Virtual Sessions (2–3:30 p.m. CT):

- Wednesday, May 20 | Orientation Online Meeting
- Wednesday, June 10 | Online Session 1
- Wednesday, July 8 | Online Session 2
- Wednesday, August 12 | Online Session 3
- Wednesday, September 9 | Online Session 4

In-Person Conference:

- Milwaukee, WI | September 22–25, 2026

Attendance at each session is mandatory to ensure full participation in the program.

### Objectives / Learning Outcomes

The Collegiate Arts Bridge at MAX prepares undergraduate and graduate students for advanced study and careers in the performing arts. Through the program, students will gain a deeper understanding of the

performing arts ecosystem, including the roles of artists, agents, managers, and presenters. Participants will develop professional networking skills, connect with peers and mentors, and engage in an immersive conference experience that equips them to navigate the field with confidence and insight.

### **Participation Expectations**

Active participation is essential for success in the Collegiate Arts Bridge at MAX. Students are expected to:

- Engage and participate – Ask questions, contribute to discussions, and interact with panelists and peers.
- Be present online – Keep cameras on and functioning during virtual sessions.
- Provide your own technology – Students must have reliable access to a computer, internet connection, and any necessary software or equipment for virtual sessions.
- Embrace the experience – Approach all sessions with curiosity, professionalism, and a sense of fun.

Active involvement ensures that students gain the maximum benefit from both virtual and in-person components of the program.

### **Resources**

The program committee will provide resources and reading materials to help students become familiar with relevant terminology and language in the performing arts. While reviewing these materials is not required, it is strongly encouraged to enhance understanding and support students' engagement throughout the program.

### **Final Project / Capstone Project**

As part of the Collegiate Arts Bridge at MAX, students will complete a culminating project that demonstrates their learning and artistic growth.

- Project Proposal: Students must submit a detailed proposal by August 2026 outlining their project concept, goals, and plan of execution.
- Final Submission: The completed project is due to the program committee by October 2026 for review and feedback.

The capstone project provides an opportunity to synthesize skills, creativity, and professional insights gained throughout the program, reflecting each student's unique artistic vision.

# PROGRAM

## SESSION 1

### **Behind the Curtain: The Good, The Bad & The Standing Ovation**

Presenting the Arts from Season Planning to Show Night Reality

Wednesday, June 10 | 2:00-3:30 p.m. CT

#### **SESSION OVERVIEW**

What really happens between booking an artist and the final curtain call? This session pulls back the curtain on the business, strategy, risk, and resilience required to present the performing arts. From season building and routing logistics to contracts, board of directors, budgeting, and the inevitable show-night surprises, this session explores how presenters balance mission, finances, audiences, and artistry. Panelists represent a range of venue types and market sizes offering multiple perspectives on what defines “success” when the curtain goes down.

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this session, students will be able to understand how venue size, market demographics, and organizational structure influence programming decisions and apply strategies to build a performing arts season. They will develop the ability to interpret common contract structures and negotiation terms while recognizing the hidden “iceberg” costs that extend beyond artist fees.

#### **SESSION AGENDA**

- I. Meet the Panel
- II. Building a Season
- III. Contracts, Riders, Budgeting, Oh My...
- IV. Boards, Advisory Groups & Committees
- V. When the Curtain Goes Down
- VI. Q&A and Closing Takeaways

#### **PRE-SESSION RESOURCE GUIDE AND SHARED LANGUAGE**

Students are encouraged to review and understand:

##### Organizational Structures

- Nonprofit vs. For-Profit Models
  - Mission-driven programming
  - Revenue shows vs. financial sustainability shows
  - Earned vs. contributed income
- Revenue-Generating Venues
  - Rental models
  - Risk-sharing structures

##### Industry Terms

- Papering the house
- Split deals
- All-inclusive offers
- Radius clauses
- Block booking
- Ghost routing
- Drop-ins
- Redlining riders

## **PANEL**

**Jim O'Connell** is Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of Arts, Entertainment, and Media Management at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He holds an M.A. in Arts Administration from the Wisconsin School of Business/University of Wisconsin-Madison and an A.B. in Drama and Government from Dartmouth College. He served on staff at Dartmouth's Hopkins Center for the Arts, the Wisconsin Union Theater, and New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts; and as executive director of the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines and Arizona State University Public Events. From 1992-2014, he was CEO of Wausau's Performing Arts Foundation/Grand Theater. Jim is an emeritus member of the Wisconsin Presenters Network, a member of the Association of Arts Administration Educators (which he served as treasurer from 2020 to 2024). He currently serves as board member and treasurer of the Wisconsin Humanities Council.

**Tianna Conway** is the Managing Director of the Fine and Performing Arts Center at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, IL. With 22 years of experience, she has also held roles as the Director of Arts Events and Audience Engagement at Carthage College where she founded the Office of Performing and Visual Arts and developed 35 student positions supporting programming, presenting, front-of-house, marketing, grant writing, outreach, and event production; Director of Education at the Schauer Arts Center; Box Office Manager at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; and Assistant Director for the Office of Performing and Visual Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Platteville. Tianna holds a B.S. in Music Performance and an M.S.E. in Arts Management from the University of Wisconsin–Platteville. She served as Chair of the Wisconsin Presenters Network (2021- 2025) and is a founder and former Board Secretary and Vice President of Heartland Performing Arts, Inc., which launched the Midwest Arts XPO in 2023.

**John Hassig** is the Executive Director of the Schauer Arts Center, bringing over 25 years of leadership in arts administration, programming, and fiscal management to the organization. Previously, as Director of Programming & Education at the Marcus Performing Arts Center, John curated multiple diverse series including jazz and dance, while spearheading educational strategies and community engagement efforts. Throughout his career, John has developed a proven track record of growing programs and optimizing operational resources, having curated thousands of performances. His leadership background includes serving as Director of the Center for the Arts at UW-Platteville, Executive Director of the Heartland Festival and Artistic Director of the Galena Festival of the Performing Arts. In addition to his administrative work, John has served as an adjunct faculty at UW-Whitewater. He holds a Master of Arts in Community Arts Management with his undergraduate work in Theater Arts. John remains deeply involved in the arts community through service that has included the Wisconsin Presenters Network and on the various panels for the Wisconsin Arts Board, Black Arts MKE, Arts Midwest and MAX.

**Kate Williams** is the Executive Director of the Ashwaubenon Performing Arts Center. Additional information is coming soon.

## **SESSION 2**

### **Agent vs. Artist Manager: What Sets Them Apart?**

Representing an Artist, Ensemble or Program From Intake to Show Curtain Call

Wednesday, July 8 | 2:00-3:30 p.m. CT

### **SESSION OVERVIEW**

There are many career options in the field of arts administration. Careers may include working at a performing arts venue, a theatre, or with an orchestra or dance company. This session will offer insight into the world of working as a booking agent and artist manager. Each has its own distinct role in the performing arts infrastructure. This panel will share their experiences as agents and artist managers, booking large scale performances into performing arts spaces, tour management and in addition, working with artists managing creation of programs, marketing assets and guiding the artist career.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this session, students will be able to understand the two distinct roles of agent and artist manager, noting the common intersections between them. Session attendees will also understand the intricacies of the booking cycle, building a tour and the importance of the conference convening. An emphasis is placed on building critical relationships with venue programming personnel.

### **SESSION AGENDA**

- I. Meet the Panel
- II. Role of an Agent
- III. Role of an Artist Manager
- IV. Common Role Intersections Between the Two
- V. Emotional Resilience
- VI. Audience Q&A

### **PRE-SESSION RESOURCE GUIDE & SHARED LANGUAGE**

Students are encouraged to review additional resources and understand:

- Sales is applied to either role
- Building Relationships
- Setting Goals

Industry Terms

- Booking Cycle
- Routing
- Radius Clauses
- Tour Management
- “Weekly Nut”
- Roster Curation

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Booking & Tour Management for the Performing Arts*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Rena Shagan 2001

*Sales Bible: The Ultimate Sales Resource*, Jeffrey Gitomer 2008

*The 25 Sales Habits of Highly Successful Salespeople*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Stephan Schiffman 2008

*Every Job is a Sales Job* Dr. Cindy McGovern 2020

### **POST SESSION: CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE**

Program participants will have the opportunity to shadow an agency participant at MAX. Sitting in the exhibit hall booth space and observing how conference business gets done. Observations will include

first impression/contact, listening to sales pitch and sitting in on meetings with prospective venue programming personnel.

## **PANEL**

**Laurel Canan** (Artist Manager) has 26 years of experience in the arts industry, with a background in programming, marketing, strategic planning, fundraising and nationwide arts advocacy. She has worked as an artist manager, booking agent, and the executive director of a start-up performing arts center. Laurel's leadership has been widely recognized, including Forward Janesville's *Woman of Excellence* award, commendation from the Wisconsin State Assembly, and induction into the Rock County Arts Hall of Fame. A frequent speaker and mentor at national conferences, Laurel has also lectured on Arts Administration and Development, teaching in multiple university programs. Laurel served on the first board of Heartland Performing Arts., Inc. She is the former president of NAPAMA, the Ohio Arts Professionals Network and co-chaired the 2016 Arts Midwest Conference. She holds an MPA from Ball State University.

**Kevin Horton** (Agent) has been with William Morris Endeavor since 2010 and is currently an agent in the Music/Personal Appearance Department with a focus on Theatrical and Non-Traditional touring properties. With a client roster that includes A.R. Rahman, Riverdance, Bernadette Peters, YANNI, and Mannheim Steamroller, his passion for the arts industry began at an early age. Prior to joining WME, Kevin performed as a dancer/singer for 8 years with the international stage show Riverdance, which has given him a unique perspective from both the performer side and now as an agent. Looking for new opportunities and ways to bring people together in this great industry has been a goal of his since the beginning.

**Jennifer Morris** (Artist Manager) joined Siegel Artist Management in 1998, became a partner in 2002, and assumed ownership in 2016. Together with her dedicated team, she looks forward to celebrating the company's 55th Anniversary in the 2026–27 season, continuing the professional integrity and legacy of founder Ethel Siegel. Jennifer served on the Midwest Arts XPO (MAX) planning committee and held board positions with Pennsylvania Presenters and the North American Performing Arts Managers and Agents (NAPAMA). For more than 25 years, she has contributed to professional development initiatives and produced artist showcases nationwide. She founded the Agents & Managers Retreat—now a NAPAMA event—and received the NAPAMA Award for Excellence in 2014. She is also a member of the Dance Managers Collective, which produces the annual APAP Dance Showcase at New York City Center and the Ailey Citigroup Theater.

**Charles “Charley” Ray** (Agent) has been an agent with Action Entertainment Collaborative since its inception in May of 2021 and was previously the president and owner of Music City Artists from 2008 – 2020. AEC's exclusive worldwide talent roster includes Trace Adkins, John Anderson, Sawyer Brown, Billy Bob Thornton & The Boxmasters, Terri Clark, Confederate Railroad, Davisson Brothers Band, Default, Lee Greenwood, The Kentucky Headhunters, Kevin Costner & Modern West, Lonestar, Montgomery Gentry ft. Eddie Montgomery, Jason Petty, Collin Raye, Aaron Tippin, TLC, and Phil Vassar as well as comedy acts Jeff Allen, Etta May & The Southern Fried Chicks, Cledus T. Judd, Pauly Shore, and The Trailer Park Boys\* (*Canada only.*) A firm believer that the entertainment business thrives on genuine human connections rather than transactions, Charley has built a career focused on long-term, trust-based relationships that benefit all.

## **SESSION 3**

### **The Startup Artist**

Blazing Your Own Performing Trail

Wednesday, August 12 | 2:00-3:30 p.m. CT

#### **SESSION OVERVIEW**

You've got talent—now what? 'The Startup Artist' tackles the nuts and bolts of becoming a successful performer: positioning your act in the market, booking shows, conferencing, finding representation, managing finances, weathering the ups and downs of touring life, and more. You'll hear from artists with decades of collective experience talk about their biggest lessons learned, what they would tell their younger selves, and what to expect as your performing dream becomes a reality.

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this session, students will be able to identify key elements of positioning and branding their act in today's marketplace; describe effective strategies for booking performances and building meaningful industry relationships; recognize options for securing representation and understanding contracts; outline basic financial management strategies for touring artists; prepare for the personal and professional realities of touring life; and apply real-world lessons from experienced performers to their own artistic journey.

#### **SESSION AGENDA**

- I. Welcome & Framing
- II. Building Your Artistic Brand
- III. The Business of Performing
- IV. Touring Life: Lessons Learned
- V. Q&A and Closing Takeaways

#### **PRE-SESSION RESOURCE GUIDE AND SHARE LANGUAGE**

Students are encouraged to:

- Reflect on their current artistic "brand statement"
- Review their website, social media presence, and promotional materials.
- Prepare one business-related question about their performing career.
- Research at least one conference, booking organization, or presenting venue relevant to their genre.

#### **PANEL**

**Jeremy Davis** ([equinoxjazz.com](http://equinoxjazz.com)) leads The Fabulous Equinox Orchestra across North America and around the world, and with his Equinox Entertainment team curates live entertainment for more than a dozen venues across the Southeast. With a background in business management and entrepreneurship, Jeremy fervently curates musical arrangements with as diverse musical styles as gospel to the Great American songbook, Texas swing to Broadway—making The Fabulous Equinox Orchestra a big band show unlike any other.

**Victor Haskins** ([victorhaskins.com](http://victorhaskins.com)) is a boundary-pushing multi-instrumentalist and composer, weaving immersive sonic tapestries that transport audiences to new realms of imagination. *All About Jazz* has called Haskins a "Visionary performer, composer, and...an incorrigible explorer," as evidenced by his varied recording and collaborative projects. With influences from diverse cultures and a passion for storytelling, Haskins' performances are not just concerts but transformative experiences that engage the mind and soul.

**Barron Ryan** ([barronryan.com](http://barronryan.com)) is an internationally renowned concert pianist, composer, and musical storyteller. He has released nine studio albums, published an illustrated storybook, and been named one of ‘Ten Innovators to Watch’ by *Smithsonian Magazine*. Barron tours the country as a solo artist, half of the Ryan & Ryan father-son piano duo, and leader of his classical piano trio. He also enjoys work as a commissioned composer, and relishes fulfilling his artistic mission to ‘discover and present the beauty he’s uniquely positioned for.’

**Shana Tucker** ([shanatucker.com](http://shanatucker.com)) is a lyrical storyteller, soulful cellist, dynamic singer-songwriter, and rare performer. Her voice defies categorization, and she effortlessly traverses genres through her unique genre of ChamberSoul™ that weaves together jazz, roots folk, acoustic pop, and R&B. With soul-stirring performances imbued with passion and authenticity, Shana is a trailblazer, activating her unique brand to perpetuate a musical experience that is both timeless and contemporary.

## **SESSION 4**

### **Navigating the Business of Conferencing at MAX**

Understanding the Ecosystem, Toolkit, and Strategies to Best Prepare for MAX

Wednesday, September 9 | 2:00-3:30 p.m. CT

#### **SESSION OVERVIEW**

Move beyond being a "fly on the wall" and step into the mechanics of the performing arts industry. This session is a tactical deep dive into the Midwest Arts XPO ecosystem, designed to turn students into informed insiders. We'll deconstruct the "backend" of presenting—mapping the symbiotic relationships between agents and managers—and walk through the anatomy of a deal from booth chat to contract. You'll get familiar with industry-standard conversations and etiquette, master the "MAX lingo".

#### **SESSION AGENDA**

- I. Meet the Panelists,
- II. The Ecosystem
- III. The Toolkit
- IV. The Strategy and Job Hunt
- V. Q&A and Closing Takeaways

#### **PRE-SESSION RESOURCE GUIDE AND SHARED LANGUAGE**

Students are encouraged to review and understand:

- Presenting vs. Producing Houses
  - What are the key differences
  - The unique aspects and opportunities of being in presenting
- Industry Terms
  - Agents
  - Artists
  - Managers
  - Presenters
  - CRMs
  - Routing
  - Block Booking
  - Riders

#### **PANEL**

**Hannah Cummins** is a performing arts specialist currently working at Moraine Valley Fine and Performing Arts Center as the Performing Arts and Events Coordinator where she manages the Box Office, Front of House staff, and heads all hospitality related needs. She received her undergraduate degree at Drake University in both Musical Theater and Public Relations. Following graduation, she dove right into event management and found herself led back to her true passion – performing arts coordination. She is currently attending Roosevelt University in Chicago, IL to receive her graduate degree in Performing Arts Administration. She plans to continue working, educating, and growing in the fine arts field to help strengthen the arts as a whole, not just for her community but globally.

**Tommy Hensel** is a veteran arts administrator with more than thirty years of experience leading performing arts organizations, festivals, and cultural nonprofits. Since 2022, he has served as Senior Director of Performing Arts at Elgin Community College, overseeing programming, operations, and community engagement for the college's performing arts venues. A founding member of Heartland Performing Arts, Inc., Tommy served as its inaugural board president and now contributes as treasurer and a key planner of the annual Midwest Arts XPO. His work in presenting, producing, artist

management, and teaching gives students a practical, insightful understanding of how arts organizations thrive.

**Andrei Reynoso** is a graduate of the University of West Florida with a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Humanities, in Arts Administration on the Music track, with a minor in vocal music. They currently attend Michigan State University, pursuing a Master of Arts in Arts, Cultural Management, and Museum Studies. They currently work as a Programming and Marketing Graduate Assistant at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts, and as a spread designer for VIM Magazine. Their work at Wharton consists of marketing data analysis, audience research, outreach, and artist research. They plan to continue working in the arts and culture sector after finishing their degree to help keep the arts alive and support the creative vision of others.

**Lisa Rock** is a nationally touring vocalist, writer, and producer whose show, *Close to You: The Music of the Carpenters*, is recognized as the number-one Carpenters' tribute in North America. For sixteen years, the production has toured extensively, presenting more than 450 performances for more than 250,000 audience members and earning praise for its authenticity and for Rock's four-octave vocal range. She has created more than 35 original concerts performed across the country. In addition to her artistic work, she is the founder and lead agent of Lisa Rock Entertainment, representing five national touring acts, and a founding and current board member of MAX.



# MIDWEST ARTS XPO SEPTEMBER 22-25

## COLLEGIATE ARTS BRIDGE SCHEDULE

Tuesday, Sept. 22	Wednesday, Sept. 23	Thursday, Sept. 24	Friday, Sept. 25
		Coffee Quick Chats 8-8:30a	
	Understanding the Ecosystem: Why Every Corner of Arts Management Counts 9-10:15a	Professional Development 8:30-10:15a	Professional Development 9-10:15a
	Keynote Speaker 10:30-11:45a	Professional Development Youth & Family Showcase 10:30-11:45a	XPO Hall 10:30a-Noon
	Lunch on Your Own 11:45a-1:15p	Lunch on Your Own 11:45a-1:15p	Lunch & Learn XPO Hall Noon-1:15p
	XPO Hall Tour 12:30-1p		
	XPO Hall 1:15-5:15p	XPO Hall 1:15-5:15p	XPO Hall 1:15-3p
New Colleague Connection 2:45-4p			
Opening Plenary 4-5:15p			Closing Reception 4-5:30p
Opening Reception 5:30-7p	Dinner on your own 5:15p	Dinner on your own 5:15p	
Artist Showcases 7-11:30p	Artist Showcases 7-11:30p	Artist Showcases 7-11:30p	

All events will take place in The Baird Center.