

Eeny meeny miney moe

After money matters, picking a band or speaker that will pack the house is the biggest concern for student programmers.

Choosing performers for campus is just like picking melons at a supermarket. You start by looking at the choices, be it rock or rap, activist or businessman, honeydew or cantaloupe. The most obvious choice is what's in season and whether it's in your price range.

For the most part, students rely on catalogues and conventions that showcase the hippest and hottest acts on the college circuit. Groups like the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) sponsor conventions and publish brochures that give programmers the chance to see the goods and thump-test them for ripeness.

Programmers agree that the most inexpensive and hassle-free method of booking performers is to go straight to the source — the performer's agent.

But there are no guarantees in the college booking game. Even if programmers pick a sure thing, it's a given that some shows will bomb. Whether it's rain, faulty equipment or performers who flake, the programming show must go on.

"You've got to make a lot of lucky predictions," says Mark Shulman, a senior at Penn State U. and director of the university's concert committee. "Sometimes you'll fall flat. It's all a risk."

"Knowing I had a part in helping 4,000 people forget about everything but having fun for two hours — that's what it's all about,"

RON OPALESKI, U. OF FLORIDA

And sometimes, you've just got to wing it. When Richie Havens, a folksy throwback from the Woodstock days, showed up at California State U., Chico, minus instruments, student programmers scrambled for backups. "Luckily, all he needed was acoustic guitars," says Ajamu Lamumba, adviser to the programming council.

Scheduling conflicts are just part of the risk. When programmers at the U. of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, booked Alamo — a hot local country act — they were sure they had a hit. And if it weren't for a Green Bay Packers game, they would have raised the roofs, says Owen Sartori, a senior at Wisconsin and student coordinator for Center-tainment Productions. "About 20 people showed up for the show. Everyone else was at home watching the Packers game," Sartori says. "It was a lesson learned."

The money pit

Even if they use an agent, colleges can still end up paying a higher market price for performers and speakers.

"It's a cutthroat business," Opaleski says. "If I'm an agent selling a band, I know that college boards are there to entertain, not to make money. The funds are replenished every year, and agents know that the money is there to be spent, so the price we pay can be higher than what they would get at other venues."

With acts like the Black Crowes, Notorious B.I.G. and Jon Stewart under his campus entertainment belt, Opaleski says spending UF's \$250,000 budget is a risky game.

And then there are those bands (who will remain unnamed) that milk the college circuit for money, exposure and a following, only to jack up their price or dump the campus scene the second they hit the cover of *Rolling Stone*. What's up with that?

"Students are the ones who buy the music. We're the ones who listen, and we're the ones who give some of these bands their big breaks," says Sandy Brouillette, a senior at Nicholls State U. in Louisiana and president of the student programming association. "Now those bands say they don't even want to do the college circuit."

Bureaucracy is part of the problem. Programmers are bogged down with school procedures and guidelines and spend precious bargaining time choosing performers and getting checks approved, Goldberg says.

The growing rift between college radio and programming boards is also changing the college music scene. College radio tends to lean toward giving airplay to the poor and unknown, while programmers look for big-name bands that will pack the house.

"The college market hasn't been as much of a launching pad for bands as it used to be," Goldberg says. "Radio thinks that anything you've heard of is too commercial and mainstream. It's like, if a band has commercial success, it's sold out."

And if colleges aren't breaking out the talent like they used to, why bother with the college circuit at all?

You can't always get what you want

The most common complaint programmers face is about who they choose. Even the big names draw criticism from remote corners of campus. Hootie and the Blowfish? A frat boy's band. Phish? No more hippie stuff! Dan Quayle? Die, Republican scum! The Walltones? Who?

"You can't please everybody" seems to be the universal mantra chanted by all student programmers. Getting a variety of performers is the ideal, but so is accurately predicting the whims of students' entertainment interests.

"Our mission is to provide entertainment for students at the lowest prices," Opaleski says. "Students have no idea what goes on behind the scenes — the risks we take, how much we pay the bands."

And what's the reward for this seemingly thankless and harrowing job?

Being able to say "I got 10,000 Maniacs for \$200 back in '90."

Or better yet, telling stories about rubbing elbows with the now rich and famous — or just getting them clean towels.

For others, being on the programming board is just a foot in the door to opportunities after college.

"I get paid \$65 every two weeks. For the amount of time I put in, that works out to about 35 cents an hour," says Opaleski. "You don't do it for the money. You do it because you love music and want to work in the industry."

Colleen Rush, assistant editor, is currently touring on the college circuit. With a little coaxing and a few beers, she'll stuff herself into a shimmering prom dress and do the best Aretha Franklin impression this side of Detroit.

Catch 'em if you can

Here they are, kids — listed in no particular order (other than our preference). Some you've heard of, some you haven't. Like it or not, these acts are coming to a campus near you soon.

Natalie Merchant
Joan Osborne
Bob Dylan
Neil Young
The Bodines
Matthew Sweet
Soul Asylum
Blues Traveler
Sponge
Coolio
Blur
G. Love & Special Sauce
Big Head Todd and the Monsters
Luscious Jackson
Widespread Panic
Sugar
Godstreet Wine
Rusted Root
The Archers of Loaf
Phish
Better Than Ezra
The Samples
Violent Femmes
George Clinton and the P-Funk Allstars



Meaty performers like Blues Traveler are a big hit on the college circuit.

Show and Tell

Wining and dining (or is it boozing and cruising?) the acts that come to campus is a tough job, but someone's gotta do it. For all the thankless hours that student programmers put in, they get to tell stories like these:

• Brandon O'Leary's claim to fame is trying to get Mark Bryan of Hootie and the Blowfish from the U. of Miami, Ohio, to Indiana U. a few hours before the show. The bus left Miami, minus the guitarist, the morning after a show. But O'Leary, a junior at IU, was a tad late and a thumb short. Bryan hitched his way to an airport, rented a car and made it in time for the performance.

• Mark Shulman, a senior at Penn State U., remembers getting the Red Hot Chili Peppers in '91. Only slightly more bizarre than Pearl Jam opening for practically nothing was the Peppers' request for four Penn State socks. Knowing their rep for wearing socks on their pee-pees and nothing else, the students waited until after the show to hand over the goods.

• Carrot Top had students lining up backstage at Nicholls State U. "They weren't asking questions or getting autographs or anything," says senior Sandy Brouillette. "They just asked to touch his hair."

• Keith Lobdell, a senior and programmer



at Colorado State U., didn't notice the glamour of his job until he booked Sheryl Crow... two days before she picked up five Grammys. "Seeing her on TV was like, 'Whoa, we are bringing big names to campus,'" Lobdell says.

• The student programmers at Texas A&M U. can't help bragging about teaching Mikhail Baryshnikov how to western dance. "He was on campus for a performance of *The Nutcracker*, and he said he was really interested in country-and-western dancing," says Jonathan Neerman, the executive vice president of relations for student programming and a senior at A&M. "So some student took him out and taught him how to Texas two-step."