

section in the third piece.” Tell the performer or composer which moments stood out for you and why. They will definitely appreciate it.

If you go to a concert given by someone with whom you would like to have a subsequent, in-depth conversation, then go backstage and offer your congratulations. Say what you found particularly compelling and what you especially admired about their performance. Should you get a receptive response, continue with, “If you have some time in the next few weeks [or before you leave town], I would really like to speak with you briefly about . . . [be realistic, specific, and appropriate].” The worst thing that can happen is they will say they are too busy. Depending on what you seek, they may refer you to another person or resource, but they may also say, “Sure, send me an e-mail; here’s my card.” Note: don’t hand them your card expecting them to contact you. This is a matter of respect and deference; since you’re the one asking, you should do the contacting. Ask the other person if you may call or e-mail them and if you may have their card.

## How to Work a Room ♦

Imagine you are attending a large post-concert reception or a professional conference (such as Chamber Music America, the Classical Singer Convention, or South by Southwest conference). Whatever the specifics, you are faced with a room full of strangers. You may think, “There may be some people here who would have useful career information or contacts for me.” But then you may wonder, “How can I talk to strangers when my mother always told me not to?” Read on; here are a dozen tips for “working a room.”

1. *Observe.* Look around. Are there people you know? Where is the food and drink? Are there other people who are by themselves? (You might want to strike up a conversation with one of them later.) Also look for conversation groups of three or more that you might join later. Do not worry about whom to talk with yet: just get your bearings.

2. *Use positive self-talk.* We each make our own reality—what we tell ourselves determines what we perceive and how we feel. If you are nervous, you may have these kinds of thoughts playing in your head: “This looks awful,” “I wore the wrong thing,” “No one looks friendly,” or “I can’t wait to get out of here.” Replace these negative messages with positive and realistic statements. You can choose to think, “These are people I have something in common with; they are musicians and music lovers,” “Other people here feel just as awkward as I do,” “I may feel a little nervous but it doesn’t show,” or “This is an opportunity to make a new acquaintance and have an inter-

esting conversation.” Do yourself a favor and keep your self-talk positive. This goes for networking as well as for performing!

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The former Santa Barbara–based ensemble Anacapa String Quartet ended up with a sponsor for their first CD through good post-concert “schmoozing.” It started with a woman who approached them at one of their concert receptions and asked if she could buy their CD. The quartet told her they didn’t have one—that they didn’t yet have the funds to make a recording. The woman liked the group so much she ended up helping them finance the CD!

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4. *Be approachable.* Be open and friendly; stand up straight, smile, and make eye contact. You need to circulate: people will not approach you if you are sitting. To avoid the soggy handshake syndrome, hold your drink in your left hand so you can shake with a dry right.

5. *Strike up conversations* with people waiting in line for drinks or name tags. If you’re waiting in line to check in, it’s easy to ask the person in front or behind you where they are from and how they heard about the event. Most people welcome a bit of friendly ice-breaking conversation. A pleasant or wry comment about the weather, the food, your surroundings, or about the event you are attending may lead to an interesting conversation. For topics, play it safe: avoid politics, religion, and sex (until you know your conversation partner very well).

6. *Use conversation openers.* Ask open-ended questions, such as “What do you think about the. . . [performance, speech, workshop]?” as opposed to yes or no questions. Ask questions that show your interest in the other person’s perspective.

7. *Approach groups* of three or more. Do not interrupt a twosome—it may be a very personal conversation. But a group of people smiling and displaying easygoing body language are good to approach. As you approach a group, stand a little off to the side, smile, and try making eye contact with one person. If they smile in return, then when there’s a pause in the conversation, ask, “May I join you?” and introduce yourself. If you do not get the eye contact at the edge of a group, just move on and try elsewhere. The only way to get good at this is by doing it.

8. *Reintroduce yourself* to people you have met before. Start with a familiar face. If you cannot remember a name, simply say, “Hi, I know we’ve met before, I’m Jane Smith, [shake their hand] and you are . . . ?”

9. *Get unstuck.* Sometimes you find yourself talking to someone who latches on to you and you need to escape. There are tactful exit lines to use: “Sorry, I need to find . . . [the event organizer, ladies room, or the person my friend mentioned would be here]. It’s been so nice meeting you. Have a good evening!”

10. *Exchange business cards* when you have reason to. Write yourself a note on the back of the card reminding you where you met the person and what your intended follow-up action will be. Did you offer to send someone information? Did someone say it was fine to e-mail them to arrange an appointment or referral? Writing a note on the back of the person’s card will help you remember to do the right thing.

11. *Be realistic* about networking. An initial chance meeting will not yield a job offer or a performance opportunity. But it may lead to setting up an informational interview or an e-mail exchange of referrals to other contacts, organizations, or resources. At a two-hour networking event, you should probably expect to talk to five to seven people and maybe have one or two substantive conversations. Networking is not about instant gratification.

12. *Follow through.* If you say you will call, send an article, or leave a message for someone, do so. Your promise and your word need to be good. It’s the mark of a professional.

## Hosting a Brainstorming Party ♦

One other great way to get more out of your network is to harness the brain power of your closest group of supporters. Popular author and career counselor Barbara Sher, who wrote *Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*, and *Live the Life You Love*, originated the success team approach. This involves forming a career support group that meets regularly, once or twice a month. Members give support, contacts, advice, and hold each other accountable for work they promise to do before the next meeting.

I recommend a variation on this approach: hosting your own brainstorming party. The object is to use the collective brainpower of a group of your colleagues and friends to generate ideas and possible action steps toward a specific goal. Here are guidelines:

1. You will first need a **clear directive**: a specific project for which you want feedback. It might be launching your own performance series or festival. Perhaps you want to book a mini-tour of performances in