

Music for All CEO Chat Transcript – February 4, 2009

Guests: Eric Martin, COO

Debbie Laferty-Asbill, Director of Marketing and Communications

<Eric (MFA COO)> Good evening, all

<Jeff> and the same to you

<Eric (MFA COO)> I hope you all will be gentle with me, as I'm not a proficient "chatter."

<Eric (MFA COO)> Hey, boss!

<CEO Scott> Good evening everyone and welcome back. As you asked last week I have asked Eric Martin our COO to moderate this evening as I am sitting in the Atlanta Airport about to board a plane home

<CEO Scott> I believe he will be joined by Deb Laferty-Asbill our Director of Marketing and Communications

<CEO Scott> Hi Eric

<CEO Scott> Thanks for sitting in for me

<Eric (MFA COO)> You are most welcome.

<CEO Scott> I wanted to answer a couple of the questions I was asked last week that I said I would respond to.

<Daniel Valdez> We're all ears/eyes.

<CEO Scott> I was asked about our 990 returns and some things that looked odd. The San Francisco Regional in fact was a typo and were the results from the San Antonio Super Regional which explains the numbers much better.

<CEO Scott> Likewise the TOR that came across as Toronto Regional was in fact the results of Tournament of Roses the last time we took the honor band there in 2005.

<CEO Scott> I hope this clears those questions up as the numbers are much more appropriate for those events that did occur.

<Ben> Is TOR a periodic program (by your choice or theirs) or do you anticipate it being an ongoing program?

<CEO Scott> Eric this is all yours

<Eric (MFA COO)> Thanks! We are hopeful that it will be a periodic program...once every 4 years.

<Eric (MFA COO)> That will give every high school child in America an opportunity.

<CEO Scott> All, I have about 5 minutes before I need to jump on this plane, is there anything specific for me before I close up?

<Daniel Valdez> I think that you cleared up what we asked for last week. Thanks a bunch, Scott.

<Ben> Read the safety instruction card ... you know ... in case of a landing in the Ohio ...

<Jeff> Only 8 inches yesterday...

<CEO Scott> Have a great chat everyone and will talk with you all next week. Be gentle with Eric this is his first run! Out

<Eric (MFA COO)> Here's a brief campaign update. Over 408 unique donors, 385 new persons since the campaign started.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Dollars to date, specifically related to the campaign... \$39,000 plus

<Deb> We also have a new "finalist" level school in the campaign donations: Walton H.S. in GA

<Eric (MFA COO)> I am hopeful that this bump in the road turns into a major opportunity...our organization is a family.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Creating and extending the passion to alums will be a real plus to the future of music education and Music for All.

<Deb> We've also started the "town hall" meetings that Scott mentioned last week. He met with folks in Atlanta today, we're hosting a meeting in our Indy office tomorrow night.

<Daniel Valdez> Do we have any confirmed donations from some companies involved in the activity? The announcement of a rather generous donation from a long-time sponsor might help people throw more money into the jar

<Deb> and next Friday night in TX at TMEA

<Eric (MFA COO)> There is nothing that could be announced of which I am aware. I know that Scott and the organization have numerous asks out.

<Eric (MFA COO)> And, I hope everyone knows that many of our sponsors and the individuals within have been and have a tradition of being generous to us.

<Daniel Valdez> I know a bunch of our staff and others will be attending the TMEA convention next week. What can we expect at the Town Hall Meeting that Friday?

<Calvin> hello

<Eric (MFA COO)> I expect a great deal of questions generally and a great deal of honesty. I expect that Scott will make the case for support and look to here the ideas, concerns, advice and counsel of everyone there

<Eric (MFA COO)> Having directors, alums, parents and others could be exciting and make a difference.

<Deb> Also, I didn't get a lot of detail yet about the Atlanta meeting today, but Scott did say that there was a lot of sharing of ideas of fundraising projects the students themselves have initiated.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Texas and Texas participation have been a major part and driver for our organization.

<Deb> on behalf of MFA - so lots of great idea-sharing in addition to helping answer folks' questions, similar to in these chats

<Daniel Valdez> We're always glad to help here in the Lone Star State.

<Eric (MFA COO)> I know that you guys don't often get to hear from me,...but I want you to know that I have been with the BOA/MFA for over 12 years.

<Brian> Will there be a transcript of the town hall meetings?

<calvin> How many more town hall meetings will there be?

<Deb> We're video taping tomorrow's Indiana meeting and will post that as quickly as we can get it ready.

<Deb> Transcripts = good idea, though, or at least a reporting, we can work on that

<Eric (MFA COO)> I believe there will be the 3 meetings.

<Eric (MFA COO)> GA, TX, and IN.

<Ben> OK - you guys have made sacrifices in the office before sacrificing programs.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Hopefully, this is a beginning.

<Ben> Optimism is a good thing. But if you don't hit targets, I assume you have some "plan B" that impacts programs?

<Eric (MFA COO)> Yes, there have been sacrifices. We've lost a number of great professionals as we try to make ends meet.

<Eric (MFA COO)> My co-workers are the best and most dedicated I have ever worked with. They work hard and it's hard for me to ask even more of them, but that is what we are doing.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Some plan B is in place now....a small reduction in the number of events, including elimination of the Fall Previews.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Those were incredible, non-competitive opportunities for education, training and building the band community.

<Eric (MFA COO)> But, today, we just can't afford to invest more into the concept.

<Eric (MFA COO)> The new 18 band minimum for a regional could cause more casualties...but I hope not.

<Ben> It's 18 by May 1, right?

<Eric (MFA COO)> It's a date in May, but I don't think its May 1.

<Brian> how is the enrollment looking so far?

<Deb> It's May 12

<Ben> What are some of your long term participants saying about their ability to travel and fundraise this year?

<Deb> Sidenote: I know that we are looking at other potential locations for town hall meetings, nothing confirmed yet

<Deb> past the GA, TX, IN meetings

<Eric (MFA COO)> we're still processing applications. We'll have a better handle on it at week's end. Some events are in great shape, but the usual slow fillers...LAS and LA are stronger than normal, but not yet at 18

<Eric (MFA COO)> Travel...I ask every chance I get. To my surprise, most are still planning to travel.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Orlando, Atlanta, STL are still destinations people will be moving buses to.

<calvin> As far as the fundraising and all goes....assuming the \$250K is raised...how will ticket prices, recording prices, and so on change for the upcoming season?

<Eric (MFA COO)> AND, West Chester and Towson are actually looking to be in pretty good shape.

<Eric (MFA COO)> please don't hold me to what I say here, but it looks like ticket prices will be flat or fairly flat. I expect the same for recordings.

<Greg> Eric, what is being done to cut down on overall operating expenses?

<Greg> as in sending so many staff members to each regional and the like

<Eric (MFA COO)> Also, those of you who bought Club Seats at Nats, please give me/us another chance. We will get it right.

<Greg> I bought the club seats and I won't buy them next year, I can tell you that

<Greg> If you'd like , I can tell you exactly why

<Brian> same here with greg

<Eric (MFA COO)> Major cuts...over the past few years we have shaved operating costs everywhere we could...now we are looking at stadium choices, the staff reductions that have already occurred, and ...

<Eric (MFA COO)> taking the economic situation now to re-bid/re-shop everything we buy and use.

<Greg> do you fly the trophy presenters to the regional on BOA?

<Greg> like does FJM go to orlando on BOA's dime?

<Eric (MFA COO)> Greg and Brian: call me sometime on this...let me hear your issues and see if our new plans and input from you can help that situation and make it possible for you to change your minds.

<Greg> I can tell you a few quick reasons

<Daniel Valdez> Our staff was in the Club Seats. We enjoyed the amenities very much. However, we would have preferred to be closer to the 50.

<Eric (MFA COO)> presenters...no, never. They are staff (doing other duties or sponsors that come on their own).

<Greg> It was special in the dome, secluded seating, special food and that....

<Greg> This year, in the section next to us was a group of Parents from Jenison that talked through every band but theirs

<Greg> I couldn't believe I paid 80 for tickets to hear a group of adults behave that way

<Eric (MFA COO)> Greg: It will be difficult, if not impossible to duplicate that...we'll have to adjust and btw...we actually lowered the price last year.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Greg: Call me! Let's try to fix it off-line.

<Greg> Will do and just so you know <--aka Skramp

<Eric (MFA COO)> aka...BOA's most passionate supporter...you have a voice!

<Greg> well thank you

<Ben> It sounds like your key band customers are confident they can maintain funding to travel to your events.

<Mac> Talk about the newsletter and how you are going to save money...don't you think most people are doing things electronically?

<Eric (MFA COO)> seems so, right now. We will continue to monitor this...but, I would assume that 2009 budgets are being done by boosters as we speak.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Deb...me or you?

<Deb> I can

<Brian> my only issue was the food. I was told about 07 club seating food and was amazed. Was really let down. My seat was perfect. Right on the 50.

<Deb> We just cut the expense of our major newsletter - the one mailing of our year-long info to all schools by 50%

<Deb> we will make at least one of the remaining two annual issues electronic only and will look at the third

<Daniel Valdez> Eric, you mentioned that a possible cutback may include venue choice. Would more shows take place at local high school stadiums if needed?

<Deb> A great number of band rooms will not hear from us at all if we don't mail at least once to every school about 2009 programs

<Eric (MFA COO)> Please know that this is a real and important issue that is debated. But know that there is also the risk ...what if directors don't read it on line.

<Greg> Deb, how many bands do you send the newsletter too?

<Deb> the primary issue, ~17,500

<Greg> But how many directors just throw it in the trash?

<Mac> Most band directors throw MOST of their mail in the trash

<Eric (MFA COO)> Venues: We are negotiating with Orlando (Citrus Bowl) to try to lower fees. Otherwise, we will go to a high school or community stadium.

<Emu> I have always read the newsletters.

<Eric (MFA COO)> We are looking a less expense, smaller college venue..ala West Chester.

<Greg> I read mine, but prefer the onloine edition

<Emu> Onlineis great for me.

<Deb> We feel we're continually improving on our mix of print marketing vs electronic and the balance continues to shift toward paperless

<Eric (MFA COO)> Centerville is a real commitment that we will remain with. I wish there were dozens of Massillon type venues available.

<Greg> Eric, has any thought or discussion been put together with DCI to develop a group that would scout stadiums and negotiate pricing?

<Daniel Valdez> Did Tropicana Field become too expensive? Personally, I'd prefer that the students avoid marching on second base.

<Eric (MFA COO)> DCI (based here with us in Indy) and MFA talk ALL the time. We have always compared notes and supported each other.

<Eric (MFA COO)> stadiums is just one area. Particularly in the current climate, we are in similar boats serving similar missions. No secrets and a lot of mutual support.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Trop...no, the porblem is that they have a great baseball team now.

<Eric (MFA COO)> They cannot commit anything until mid-November.

<Greg> Hahahahahah, sorry, had to laugh at that last comment

<Greg> What happened with Morgantown and Toledo?

<Eric (MFA COO)> And, please know...it also was EXPENSIVE (but cool and dry)>

<calvin> With Atlanta dropping down to a regular regional has enrollment dipped more than would be expected?

<Eric (MFA COO)> Morgantown: New coach then (now at Michigan)...didn't like band. Wouldn't give up the potential to practice in the stadium to a band event bringing 3,500 potential students to campus.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Toledo...dates...and now the EMU relationship is fairly solid. Toledo is still an option.

<Greg> Those were two great venues

<Greg> marching through the tunnel at WVU out into the lights at finals is something i will never forget

<Eric (MFA COO)> ATL...no...one of the strange ones that doing really well.

<Eric (MFA COO)> WVU is a special place...but know also that colleges, like everyone else, are chasing revenue as well. Prices have gone up and post 9/11 issues don't help.

<calvin> why the rearrangement of classes for this season? is it something boa/mfa has been kicking around for a while, or what?

<Eric (MFA COO)> classes...yep...discussed by staff and the advisory committee often. So far, it seems well received.

<Eric (MFA COO)> This is the 1st change of any kind in classification since I arrived 12 years ago!

<calvin> did the idea of an open class ever come up?

<Jeff> Open Class = AAAA

<Eric (MFA COO)> School sizes have grown at the top end and stayed the same at the lower end.

<calvin> gotcha

<Eric (MFA COO)> Open class...pretty open now...with a huge range of enrollment in the new top class.

<Greg> speaking of classes, would MFA consider posting which class a group is in when they release the regional lists?

<Emu> Hey Eric, has mfa/boa ever thought about doing a regional just for small bands? ones that do not have a lot of resources (especially visual) but would also want the BOA experience?

<Eric (MFA COO)> I need some advice....what do you think about making ATL remain a one day Super Regional with 12 bands in finals?

<Dan Balash> agreed with Greg...I spent a good 12 hours last year classifying all the bands to the best of my ability

<calvin> how would that work?

<Daniel Valdez> I think that would be a good idea, especially if the enrollment is there.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Small band show. An expensive model (if we do it right and continue the commitments we make to a show...judges, stadium quality, etc.

<Greg> if you're going to do that with Atl, why not the Indy regional too?

<Emu> hmm. Too bad, but I can understand

<Eric (MFA COO)> and, guess what...we didn't change their numbers for classification. They were actually protected in the new system.

<Joey> exactly...I think that the Atlanta show normally has good enrollment and doing a 1 day show with finals that night might appeal to more band directors

<Jeff> Perhaps you could use a number requirement to determine how many bands should be in finals? A regional with 30 bands being narrowed down to 10 is a lot different from a 20 band regional down to 10 for finals

<Daniel Valdez> Four Super Regionals: 2 Two-Days, 2 One Days (Assuming ATL and IND are included)

<Eric (MFA COO)> Indy Regional: enrollment is great...strongest of any regional. attendance is week (comparatively)

<Eric (MFA COO)> because GN's is the next week.

<Greg> yeah, and it's a huge stadium

<Eric (MFA COO)> Daniel: That's a thought! Noted.

<Greg> why not move Indy back a couple weeks and put it at Bloomington?

<Eric (MFA COO)> Thanks.

<Eric (MFA COO)> I love Bloomington, but it is outdoors and late October....That's a major economic risk, if weather is bad.

<Eric (MFA COO)> and wonderful opportunity...if weather is good.

<Greg> but if you move it to early october

<Brian> do you still pay rent for a rain out?

<Eric (MFA COO)> For those who are not from IN...even the IN State Championships are in Lucas Oil.

<Ho> Indy is strong because bands want to get into the stadium and give the kids a feel for the sound.

<Greg> but how does ISSMA states compare to IN regional attendance wise?

<Dan Balash> ISSMA states=huge attendance

<Eric (MFA COO)> depends...there are major costs that are lost, not to mention the lost revenue and experience for bands that are traveling.

<Greg> i mean on a spectator basis

<Dan Balash> huge spectator attendance

<Eric (MFA COO)> Correct Dan: It is a state title, a lot of tradition and 4 contests of 10 bands each in one day.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Wanted you to know more about me: I'm a product of band...Greenville (MS) H.S...Without band, I don't know that I could have successfully gotten thro

<Daniel Valdez> Eric, DCI has begun to use a modified judging panel for early season shows and shows with low attendance. Has BOA considered doing the same?

<Deb> And Eric's being modest:

<Eric (MFA COO)> through going to newly integrated schools in the South, if it hadn't been for band.

<Deb> He's a member of the International Festival and Events Assc Hall of Fame

<Deb> and holds a juris doctorate from University of Michigan

<Eric (MFA COO)> I never participated in BOA, but its that spirit and what band others, that make band, music education and MFA/BOA so important to me.

<Eric (MFA COO)> opps..."offers."

<Daniel Valdez> I think I can speak for all of us when I say that we share the exact same sentiments.

<Eric (MFA COO)> thanks, Deb...but its you, Scott, and everyone involved...communities, teachers, students, and fans...and make me get up everyday and want to try to make this thing really work!

<Eric (MFA COO)> Thanks Daniel!

<Eric (MFA COO)> btw, everyone...I'm the worst person on the planet with e-mail, but I enjoy getting great ideas and input by phone...Be persistent, but I hope you will be there for me and MFA.

<Greg> Thanks for the background Eric, as if i didn't have a ton of respect for you already

<Daniel Valdez> Thank you Eric and Deb for your time tonight.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Thanks, Greg...and for all you do for band... It is not unnoticed.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Very, very welcome.

<Deb> My pleasure, I really enjoy hearing what such great supporters have to say.

<Greg> well thank you

<Deb> If we continue weekly MFA/BOA staff chats beyond next month, do you all think this day or time work?

<Greg> eric, has another progressed as far as the older videos go?

<Greg> i mean anything

<Eric (MFA COO)> Well...everyone. Please keep spreading the word. I hope you can continue to be supportive. The campaign has life and legs. We can make it happen!

<Deb> Oh, I forgot, too, Eric has an Emmy :P

<Deb> (how else can I embarras him)

<Greg> hahaha, way to throw that in Deb

<Greg> is it on his desk?

<Brian> we want a picture!!!

<Deb> No, he carries it with him to and from the office and home....just kidding

<Deb> I've not seen it.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Problem with videos is the copyright licensing and administrative time. I need to you become a congressional lobbyist and change the law to create statutory standards and rates as Congress did for records...50 years ago. No one has done anything with it since.

<Deb> As always, if anyone has questions or ideas, thoughts, please email me at deb@musicforall.org.

<Greg> if i had the law degree i would try

<Brian> as far as the videos, is it not possible to get older dvd? i have 05 through 07 but would like 00 through 04

<Dan Balash> you can buy old vhs on MFA's store

<Greg> somewhat you can

<Dan Balash> they're fairly inexpensive, as well

<Eric (MFA COO)> if we make MFA stronger, I could get some help for me, so I would have time....maybe, I can be a friend of President Obama.

<Greg> most of the older stuff is in limbo right now

<Greg> still have it, just can't distribute it

<Brian> at nats they didnt have what i wanted

<Brian> or at stl

<Eric (MFA COO)> we would have to listen to every single song, figure out what they are, and pay for licensing of each song and each copy. the price to the customer of making it happen would be enormous.

<Brian> even though it has gone through that process once? That's crazy

<Brian> but welcome to america....

<Greg> just say Thank You to Metallica for it

<Eric (MFA COO)> problem is....honestly....not everyone we through the process the first time, when "technically, legally" it needed to be.

<Eric (MFA COO)> Thanks everyone. I had a great time!

<Greg> Thanks Eric, have a great night

<Brian> Thank you Eric and Deb

<Deb> Thanks, Eric, for sticking around past 10 and chatting.

<Greg> and Deb too

<Jeff> Thanks, we'd be happy to have you back in the future ;-)

<Deb> Thanks, everyone, I enjoy it! See you next week, same bat time.

<Greg> Same bat chat room

<Dan Balash> Brian, you can order some older videos here:
<http://www.bands.org/Public/TicketMerchandiseMFA/Catalog.asp?categoryID=10>

<Brian> thank you sir

<Dan Balash> not a problem at all

<Deb> Night all, take care and see ya later.