

Atlanta Radio Theatre Company (ARTC)

Board Meeting 26 March 2016

MINUTES

Attending: David Benedict, Ron Butler, William Brown, Oreta Campbell, Kristine Dennis, Anthony Fuller, Alex Lucyshyn, Bill Ritch, David Schroeder, Nancy Skidmore, Paige Steadman, Brad Strickland, Hal Wiedeman.

President Bill Ritch called the meeting to order at 14:06.

1. Report on production of CDs by Anthony Fuller:

Fuller offered two options that would allow us to continue to produce CDs of shows:

- OPTION 1 is to buy a CD burner/printer. The advantages here would be that, having the equipment in-house, we could print on demand and control the number of each printing precisely. However, we would have to do our own quality control—these would be CD/RW discs, and they can be tricky—and the cost, which would take a long time to amortize. The two best printers are a Bravo (purchase cost \$890.00) and an Epson (\$1837). In addition to this cost, we would have an ongoing need to buy ink and supplies. In response to questions, Fuller said that the cost of inks would be about \$40.00 per color cartridge. The Bravo unit requires three colors of ink; the Epson requires six. The estimated annual disc production would be fifty (five titles at ten each); therefore, we would expect to produce 250 discs over the projected five-year life of either machine.
- OPTION 2 is to outsource disc production. Fuller offered a spreadsheet demonstrating that, for our purposes, ordering a quantity of fifty discs total would be most cost-effective. The turnaround time on outsourcing, from the company's receipt of our tracks to our receipt of the finished product, is ten days. Of seven companies represented on the spreadsheet, Fuller recommended DiscMakers as having the best cost per unit. He has received samples of the products of all seven company, and he reports that all of them are acceptable.
- The Board commended Mr. Fuller for his research and organization in presenting us with this well-put-together report.

In further discussion of the issue, Bill Ritch asked if we want to continue with CDs at all, for new products only, or for all titles. The Board discussed this. Paige Steadman said that one of the companies, CD Baby, will not only produce CDs, but will sell the disks from their website if we wish. They would, however, take a commission to do so. The sense of the discussion was that ARTC does, for the near future, need to produce CDs, since these are one of the mainstays of the sales effort at conventions.

The next question was who should be in charge of deciding what should be produced on disc. Nancy Skidmore said it shouldn't be just one person; Hal Wiedeman responded that it should be just one person. Ritch said that in his view

the best approach would be to have three people on the production committee: (1) a general sales manager, (2) a representative from the table-sales team, and (3) a representative for online sales.

David Schroeder proposed that David Benedict should be named as the one representing online sales; Benedict declined. He pointed out that first we needed a general sales manager, and that must be a person with a specific skill set. He suggested recruiting such a person from outside the organization. Oreta Campbell objected that bringing a person in from outside would mean that the general sales manager would lack experience with and understanding of our product. Benedict said in his view it will be easier to recruit someone with the skills and bring that person up to speed than to attempt to train someone. Campbell said that was not true for a general sales manager, and that Internet sales would be different, anyway.

Benedict said that we do have someone who is a member who also runs an online store and has experience with Internet sales—but she wouldn't want to take on the additional responsibility. Steadman said that if we take someone from outside, we will have to pay the person (probably by commissions on sales).

For the interim, the Board agreed that Bill Ritch will appoint a small team. Some shows will be produced both in digital and CD form, some only digital, and this will be the status until we work out a sales structure that ARTC can live with.

In the meantime, Ritch asked Benedict to check out what other audio producers do. We have a sense that most production companies do NOT sell recordings, but survive by finding sponsors and selling merchandise. “Welcome to Nightvale” is free, but the production team makes its money by selling merchandise and performing live. Benedict said that of about 50 shows represented on the Facebook audio production site, fewer than 10% charge for their products—most is given away. Audible.com commissioned a 13-hour adaptation of “Locke and Key” but made it available for free, and it received negative reviews because it was an audio drama, not an audio book. Caran Wilbanks said that Great Northern Audio is similar to our organization and believes they are still selling CDs.

Benedict said that “The Truth” is very popular, but minimally produced (light soundscaping only). It is part of the Internet audio network Radiotopia and is offered free, but it does have a sponsor (MailChimp).

Ron Butler asked if we cannot sell shows, does that mean there's no public interest in what we do? Ritch responded that listeners do want the material, but they want it for free. Wiedeman said that he estimated that for us to continue as we are, we will have a cost of \$5000 to \$10,000 per year to cover. Lucyshyn thinks that one way we can avoid running a serious deficit is to expand our outlets.

Skidmore said that we have survived for 31 years because of sales. Wiedeman agreed that ARTC does need sales, but they alone are not sufficient to defray our expenses. Skidmore said then we should increase sales, not take them away. Benedict said that ARTC needs to reinvent the wheel. Right now in the U.S. there are more audio dramas being produced than at any other time since the 1940s. ARTC is unique in bringing in any money from sales, and that is because we have built a brand by being on the convention circuit. DragonCon makes room for us, but if we pulled out, that convention would not replace us.

Ritch said we need to send people to other venues; ARTC needs to develop performance venues at other conventions and suggested creating a lean “away” team to travel to conventions. This would be volunteer work—we could expect convention memberships for the techs and performers, but not hotel money or gas money. The approach would be to develop a repertory of shows with minimal casts and a minimum requirement for soundscaping (probably no Foley effects, for example, just recorded ones).

Steadman suggested that we might supply ophthalmic surgeons who do cataract operations with cards or catalogs of our product, since many cataract patients want audio entertainment. Benedict pointed out that ARTC is a supporter of the Center for the Visually Impaired, but it’s difficult to schedule performances for that constituency, because (especially in Atlanta) it is difficult for the visually impaired to reach venues. Campbell asked if we could make CDs available for lending. It is possible, but the Center for the Visually Impaired has declined to carry our product in its shop for sale.

Steadman asked if we might apply for a grant to do performances for specific groups. Schroeder said that the group Theater to Go does have grants to do performances for assisted-care and independent-elderly housing: they receive \$250.00 from different banks for travel. Benedict responded that such sponsored performances would be great for us—but again ARTC would have to have a light “away team” approach, with compact scripts (few performers) and a small technical footprint. Ritch said that would be hard—any show would need a minimum tech team for set-up, performance, and break-down.

Campbell suggested that David Schroeder and Paige Steadman consult and suggest an approach to ARTC’s developing a plan to developed sponsored performances for targeted demographics (residents of retirement homes, visually-impaired people, and so on).

Wrapping up the discussion, the Board agreed that we will for the time being approach CD production on a case-by-case basis. Bill Ritch will supervise and offer input; this effort WILL NOT affect digital downloads.

2. Overall Goals: The discussion of CD production, finding more performance venues, and exploring sponsorships really covered this agenda item. Summing up, Ritch said that the real goal is to keep ARTC running on a “sustainable” basis. Members should consider ways in which the organization can continue to sustain itself; the highest goal is to create shows that people want to listen to.
3. Update on Studio Move: ARTC is in promising negotiations with the Lawrenceville Road United Methodist Church for renting space in their building for our production facilities. Currently ARTC’s landlord, Terminus Media, is leasing building in which our studio is housed on a month-to-month lease, with some idea that they will continue in this vein for the rest of the year (pending a hoped-for client). Benedict has told them that given this uncertainty (we were earlier given a deadline of April 1 to move), ARTC is actively investigating a new space. Schroeder has negotiated a \$2000/year rent with the Lawrenceville Road UMC, but a requirement is that the organization purchase liability insurance, which will be an additional \$800 per year (still less than our current rent).

- The space for the recording facility is slightly larger than our current room. We would also have access to an adjacent room to use as a meeting site, green room, etc. There are also bathroom facilities. Kitchen accommodations are severely limited, but we don't cook in the current kitchen, anyway.

Benedict says that currently he has told Terminus Media that we will plan to move out by May 1. The Lawrenceville Road UMC is currently preparing a lease document; if it is acceptable, ARTC will proceed with the move. Benedict said that we should consider remaining in the present building IF Terminus Media makes a counteroffer that would make staying worthwhile. On the other hand, Campbell said that we should consider the greater stability of being in a church-owned facility, without having to worry about losing a lease.

- The Board empowered the Executive Committee to sign a one-year lease on the Lawrenceville UMC space providing that the rental and the insurance will come to no more than what ARTC is currently paying for the Terminus Media facilities.

4. The next meeting is set for Saturday, May 14, at 14:00.

With no further business, the Board meeting adjourned at 15:17.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Strickland
Secretary