Angela Answers

Have a question about how to move forward in your professional or creative life? Email **angelaanswers@chambermusicamerica.org.**

Beyond the Plateau

Dear Angela: My ensemble has accomplished a lot, but in the last few years it feels like we've plateaued. We continue to book decent concerts, but I don't feel that we're actually growing—it's more like we're maintaining our skills. And we're not moving up to the kinds of venues or opportunities we'd hoped for. Any ideas to help?

BY Angela Myles Beeching



FIRST, KNOW THAT THERE'S A NATURAL cycling of energy in any ensemble. There are times of growth (taking risks and surging ahead), and necessary periods of processing (reimagining and regrouping). These "quiet" phases are part of the creative cycle—the gestational time before a new growth spurt. It's the yin and yang of a life in the arts.

That said, if things feel stagnant and you're wondering what could spark renewed momentum—artistically or otherwise—your group might benefit from a few coaching strategies to re-energize your programming, collaborations, and rehearsals.

Discovery Programming

Before your next meeting, invite each member to bring two works they'd be genuinely excited to explore. These pieces can be outside your group's comfort zone—what matters is that the member proposing the work feels drawn to the music.

Have each member write the title and composer on an index card and toss them into a hat. Then take turns drawing cards, with the nominating person briefly explaining why they chose the piece. One guideline: keep your pitch to three sentences, as if introducing the work from the stage to spark curiosity in a new audience.

It may feel awkward at first, but this exercise invites everyone to expand beyond the "usual suspect" repertoire and consider new sources of inspiration.

New Collaborations

You can also brainstorm fresh project ideas by inviting each member to suggest an unusual collaborator—ideally someone local. This could be someone you know or someone you've admired from afar.

Think beyond musicians: an actor, dancer, urban planner, marine biologist, or chef could all spark creative possibilities. Even without a complete plan, your group might find connecting threads between the collaborator's expertise and a program you'd love to perform. For example, a program inspired by fairytales and fables, with an actor or poet offering contemporary retellings of familiar stories between works.

Rehearsal Experiments

How might you rehearse in ways that encourage members to listen with new ears? What would it take to dream up a more expansive palette—of tonal colors, textures, dynamics, articulation? And how might listening together to historic recordings or live concerts open new expressive pathways?

We're all used to the tired cliché of ensemble relations being like marriage. But maybe it's more helpful to think of an ensemble as a living organism—one that breathes and evolves through shared trust, vulnerability, and generosity.

If you're hoping to grow beyond what you've already achieved, try risking more each time you show up—for the music, and for each other. Because your highest potential isn't just about playing better. It's about playing truer. Together.

Angela Myles Beeching is a career consultant and the author of Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music. *Angela works with individuals, ensembles, and organizations to facilitate positive change.*