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**Written and Video Accounts Depict How World Music/CRASHarts
Is Building Loyalty and Brand Recognition in Boston**

Fifth in The Wallace Foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) Stories series on performing arts organizations' efforts to attract and retain new audiences

NEW YORK, March 13, 2019 – The Wallace Foundation today released a story that captures a behind-the-scenes look at World Music/CRASHarts, a Boston-based performing arts presenter, as the company attempts to attract and retain younger audiences while increasing brand visibility. The story, titled *New Format, New Name to Draw New Audiences*, features written and video accounts and is the fifth installment in the foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) Stories series. The written story, by Sarosh Syed and the video, produced by Jill Peters of WNET, are available on the foundation's blog, at www.wallacefoundation.org/crasharts.

Central to the story is how World Music/CRASHarts addressed two pressing problems using an approach of continuous learning, based in market research and implementation lessons. Like many nonprofit performing arts organizations across the country, the organization has observed that their audiences are aging and newer audiences are not attending frequently enough to take their place. Specifically, the organization was looking to attract 21- to 40-year-olds, to better reflect Boston's demographic. Also, the organization's leaders realized they had a branding problem: Because they host dozens of music, dance, and jazz performances but have no permanent space, audiences tend to attribute these performances to the venue, rather than to World Music/CRASHarts. Moreover, the name is cumbersome and includes the vague term, "world music," that can mean almost any type of music.

"The focus of the audience isn't on the presenter, it's on the artist," says Mario Garcia Durham, president and CEO of the Association of Performing Arts Professionals, a service and advocacy organization for presenting organizations. "If you're changing venues all the time, it becomes an additional challenge to make sure the audience knows that the performance is being presented by your organization."

To address both challenges, World Music/CRASHarts developed CRASHfest in 2016, to create a vibrant, social atmosphere while showcasing many different types of performances in one place. The hope was that CRASHfest would attract younger audiences, increase audience diversity through various program offerings, and, because they selected a venue that offered opportunities for their own signage, give more visibility to World Music/CRASHarts as the presenting organization.

“CRASHfest has become a key tactic to help us work through specific problems we face as a presenting organization,” said **Maure Aronson, Executive Director of World Music/CRASHarts**. “CRASHfest has allowed us to reach new audiences and to brand our organization. It has also provided opportunities to put a spotlight on our mission and intended impact in a way our regular concerts do not. Through a cycle of exploration, experimentation, evaluation, and refinement, we’ve been able to understand what was working and what needed to be changed. The festival has given us opportunities to clearly position World Music/CRASHarts as a presenting organization and to gather strategic data to learn more about our audience.”

Prior to CRASHfest, World Music/CRASHarts used a survey to test some assumptions. The responses helped the organization to confirm that a festival format would not only appeal to those surveyed, but also that it could help World Music/CRASHarts reach younger audiences, reinforce the organizations’ brand, and balance genre and format preferences. Research also informed the details of the festival, such as number of acts, venue, timing, ticket prices, and even the programming.

“We’re a small staff, with only eight full time employees, so everything we can do to help make our team more efficient is essential to our ability to function successfully,” said **Susan Weiler, Associate Director of World Music/CRASHarts**. “Through the market research process we’re now using data to really understand how to effectively engage audiences and reach new target markets. We’re still learning, but it’s been a fruitful process, as we have new strategies that we can take from CRASHfest to apply to other concerts.”

After the first CRASHfest in 2016, the World Music/CRASHarts team analyzed the results. Through promotions and other activities at the event, they were able collect data about their audience. The findings were encouraging, with 61 percent of the audience new to World Music/CRASHarts, and of that group, half was 21-to-40 years old, and the average visitor 44 years old. Over the next two years, World Music/CRASHarts continued to refine CRASHfest, addressing some of the problems cited by audience members, including expanding food offerings and making signage clearer. By 2018, attendance increased to 1,850 from 1,500 in 2016, while the share of the CRASHfest audience new to World Music/CRASHarts stayed steady—meaning many people are returning. While the festival’s ability to draw audiences to the rest of the season is yet to be determined, the organization is seeing some CRASHfest attendees at other performances.

Market research has also prompted a much more fundamental change in the organization: a new name and brand identity. Focus groups and other analyses both surfaced challenges created by the current name and are informing the development of the new identity. Working with a branding and design firm, World Music/CRASHarts spent nearly a year poring over data, defining goals, conducting focus groups, collecting ideas from staff and board and narrowing them down to the most viable options. The organization is planning a methodical rollout of the brand in the 2019-2020 season.

To read more about World Music/CRASHarts’ work to build audiences, visit wallacefoundation.org/crasharts.

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The BAS Stories series aims to capture “behind the scenes” looks at performing arts organizations that are seeking to build audiences in ways that can be sustained. In written and

video formats, the stories especially focus on the use of market research to help leadership make more informed decisions about what is effective in reaching and retaining the audiences they desire. All stories in the series can be read and viewed on the Wallace website.

Accompanying each story are discussion guides, produced by national arts service organizations, to aid arts professionals in considering which of the strategies are relevant to their own audience-building efforts. These resources, which can be used to lead group discussion or for individual reflection, can be found on the foundation's [Building Audiences for the Arts page](#).

[Ballet Austin](#), [Seattle Symphony](#), [Denver Center Theatre Company](#), [Opera Theatre of Saint Louis](#), and World Music/CRASHarts are five of the 25 performing arts organizations participating in **Building Audiences for Sustainability**, the foundation's six-year, \$64-million initiative aimed at developing practical insights into how arts organizations can successfully expand audiences in ways that contribute to their financial health. Independent researchers commissioned by the foundation are documenting and analyzing the work across the cohort to provide lessons, insights, and information for the entire field; the first of a series of published reports will be available later in 2019.

For more information on **Building Audiences for Sustainability** or on other Wallace arts initiatives, please visit: www.wallacefoundation.org.

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About The Wallace Foundation

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is an independent national philanthropy dedicated to fostering improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. It seeks to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing, and sharing of new solutions and effective practices.

At www.wallacefoundation.org, the foundation maintains an online library about what it has learned, including knowledge from its efforts aimed at: strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement; making the arts a part of many more people's lives by working with arts organizations to broaden, deepen, and diversify audiences; exploring whether and how children benefit if schools and afterschool programs work together to align and improve experiences and climate to build social and emotional skills; expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens; better understanding the impact of high-quality summer learning programs on disadvantaged children; and helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to many more children.

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