

Jessica Grossman Leadership Bluegrass report

I was requested to submit a summary of my experience attending IBMA's 2018 Leadership Bluegrass conference in the beginning of March. It was truly an honor to attend, and was an inspiring conference with simply amazing leaders from every facet of the bluegrass music industry, and I am very grateful for the NIBGA board for supporting me in this endeavor.

During the intensive three day conference, numerous topics spanning every inch of the bluegrass music industry were presented, dissected and discussed. A bonus of the format was that many of the attendees contributed expertise and added value to the subject matters as established professionals. I could write a short novel on the content of the conference, but I would much rather outline a few resonating takeaways.

Diversity is important now more than ever in ensuring the future of bluegrass music. There are preconceived definitions of diversity, as this is currently a hot-button term in many areas of the world. In regard to the state of bluegrass music, I would challenge us all to expand this definition to of course include musicians of varying age, race, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation; BUT also to include different styles of bluegrass music.

Bluegrass music is a very young genre, and if the scope of acceptance of this music can be broadened to include non-traditional forms of the music, the support base and reach of the impact of bluegrass music will be much more powerful. As a Monroe traditionalist myself, I know well that this conversation is very divisive, but think for a moment- modern bands such as Greensky Bluegrass and Infamous Stringdusters could serve as a conduit through which audiences who otherwise wouldn't discover bluegrass can join our community and experience what we all already know is wonderful about this genre.

From its inception, musicians have been pushing the lines of bluegrass music, and it's honestly how we've seen the likes of great musicians take center stage, such as Tony Rice and Sam Bush. Neither of those great talents are strict traditionalists, but both are strongly tied to the bluegrass community and have made important contributions.

Taking smart, efficient and collaborative approaches to promoting and preserving bluegrass is another key to sustaining and thriving moving forward. This may seem like a no-brainer, but given the broad range of demographics of those who are leading and promoting this

industry, this can be exceptionally challenging. Our industry needs to make certain that we are making wise decisions to bring together various stakeholders to achieve long term goals. Gone are the days of folks clamoring to reserve their spot at a traditional bluegrass festival or busting down the doors of a record shop to snag the latest cut from their favorite artist. Rather, consumers are streaming and exploring music at the touch of a finger, and also searching out opportunities to disconnect from daily life and truly immerse themselves in experiences. Musicians, educators, festival promoters and non-profits are realizing these changes and adapting accordingly. The more collaborative and open our community can be, and the more tools we can use to ensure success and support- the likelihood of longevity increases drastically.

Unsurprisingly, bluegrass education was another hot topic. It is imperative that not only new fans and audiences be educated in bluegrass music's heritage and culture, but that a new generation of 'grassers are raised and steeped in the excellent musicianship of this genre.

There was much discussion about collaboration with local schools and educators to incorporate bluegrass music into their curriculum- many times in cooperation with a local festival or non-profit led program. Many communities have worked collectively and seen great success in cultivating passion in young children.

The importance of quality musical education and training was also noted. There are countless opportunities for students of all ages to partake in workshops and classes with the top musicians in bluegrass, and continuing to connect players with educators is vital to continuing the high standard of musical talent that has shaped the genre and continues to play an important role in its success.

In closing, I would be happy to discuss any of the above in further detail and I am still overwhelmed by the generosity of the Leadership Bluegrass planning committee and IBMA. I would highly recommend anyone who is interested in attending to apply for next year's conference.

I am very excited for the chance to apply the knowledge I have gained through this incredible opportunity and continue to give back to this community of bluegrass fans and musicians who all mean so much to me.

Jessica Grossman