

A Brief History of the NMMC Foundation – a personal perspective

By David Schwartz

Lee Berk, who some of you may know as the man behind Berklee College of Music, was the first chair of the NM Music Commission when it was created by Gov. Richardson in 2005. In 2009, Lee began forming the Music Commission Foundation, due to Gov. Martinez's cutting the commission's budget drastically. Lee's intention was to support the activities of the Commission with funds the Foundation could raise.

Lee asked me to preside over the Foundation. The first couple of years mostly involved assembling the bylaws, putting together a board of directors and establishing the 501-c3 non-profit tax status.

In 2013 Lee left the Commission Chair, retired and moved to Scottsdale. He asked me to take his place on the Commission and, since I couldn't be an officer of both, I left the Foundation to become chair of the Commission. Foundation Board member John Greenspan then took over as president of the Foundation.

Little funding came to the Commission from the Foundation between 2013 and 2016. The board did not have deep pockets, and also found it difficult to raise money for a government commission that had very little visibility. In 2014 John Greenspan developed cancer and he passed away in 2016. The Foundation was in limbo, without a successor for about a year, and all but two had left the board by that time.

In 2015-16, the Music Commission constructed a 3-year strategic plan that included establishing a high-profile event to bring some visibility to the Commission and address many of the Commission's goals. After much discussion the Platinum Music Awards concept was conceived to be this event.

The plan we developed involved me leaving the Commission and rebuilding the Foundation as the producers of the event. The Commission, through Thomas' office, would begin the awards process by soliciting and processing nominations from around the state. A jury was put together by the Commission to go through the nominations and select honorees to build the show around, at which point the Foundation would take over the development and production of the event.

The first Platinum Music Awards were presented in July of 2017 at the Lensic, in Santa Fe. The show recognized five of New Mexico's musical heroes, and the contributions they made to the musical culture of the State. It included dedicated musical performances, tribute speeches and mini-documentaries on the lives of the honorees. About 600 people were in attendance. It was well received and made a small profit that was shared with the co-presenting partner organization, Solace, in exchange for co-marketing the event in the first year.

The PMAs were again presented in 2018 and 2019 at the Lensic. Both were highly reviewed though the cost of the production versus the revenue from sponsors and ticket sales proved to be not sustainable in their present form. The 2020 event, originally scheduled for August, was cancelled and no reschedule date has been announced.

The Foundation has been considering major changes in the event in order to make it more financially viable and allow it to raise funds for additional activities of the Foundation and Commission. These discussions include moving the event to Albuquerque and soliciting a major media sponsor.

Other activities the Foundation has been developing with the Commission, as well as independently, include music in elementary school events and performances, Art2Art educational demonstrations, and MusicBiz Mondays zoom educational sessions for musicians about industry topics.

In-person meetings of the Board of the Foundation have been suspended during the pandemic. Occasional informal Zoom meetings have kept the board in touch in the meantime.