

European Bluegrass Summit, 7-8 Feb. 2009

As a direct result of the success of [IBMA's](#) International Summit at World of Bluegrass 2008, a group of those who had attended decided to organise a similar event in Europe. The European Bluegrass Summit was held on Saturday 7 (9.00 a.m.–5.00 p.m.) and Sunday 8 February (9.00 a.m.–5.00 p.m.) at the Bühl Civic Center, Bühl, Germany.

The organising group included [British Bluegrass Music Association](#) chair John Wirtz, [Scottish Bluegrass Association](#) secretary John Sheldon, IBMA International Board representative Rienk Janssen, and IBMA International Committee chair Richard Hawkins.

Objectives:

- * To provide an opportunity for a wide audience of up to 40 participants to meet face-to-face, bond, and get to know each other;
- * To highlight issues affecting the promotion of bluegrass music in Europe;
- * To explore issues facing different countries and different cultures; and
- * To encourage closer cooperation and more effective communication.

Present: Fred Bartenstein (US; facilitator), Lili Drumeva (Bulgaria), Mikhail Dushin (Russia), Joel B. Espeset (France), Walter Fuchs (Germany), Olaf Gläsmer (Germany), Ruth Ellen Gruber (US/Italy), Alexander Gubanov (Russia), Harald Harland (Germany), Richard Hawkins (Republic of Ireland), Christopher Howard-Williams (France), Richard Hurst (Northern Ireland), Rienk Janssen (Netherlands), Hannah G. Johnson (UK/England), Chris Keenan (Republic of Ireland), Hannie Lamers (Netherlands), Loek Lamers (Netherlands), Regine Mayer (Germany), Kent Miller (Switzerland), Rosi Miller (Switzerland), Lilly Pavlak (Czech Republic /Switzerland), Dagfinn M. Pedersen (Norway), Peter O. Ruby (Czech Republic), John Sheldon (UK/Scotland), Karl Heinz Siber (Germany), Angelika Torrie (Switzerland), John Wirtz (UK/England), Moira Wirtz (UK/England), Peter Wroblewski (Germany), Michael Zumstein (Germany).

Procedure: Every attender was assured of an effective voice by

- (1) the choice of topics for discussion by consensus among attenders (topics on which there was no immediate consensus were set aside on a 'parking lot' for later consideration); and
- (2) a 'queue' system for speaking, in which attenders could reserve their turns by standing their place cards upright.

The main points made by each speaker were recorded by Fred Bartenstein on flipcharts, which were later photographed and transcribed as the basic record of the meetings.

NB: This report is necessarily a highly compressed account of the discussions, omitting much of the significant detail shown on the flipcharts. For a more comprehensive record, photos and transcripts of the flipcharts are available. An edited version of the flipcharts has also been prepared by Fred Bartenstein, reorganising the raw texts to present a more coherent and comprehensible picture.

Proceedings:

On behalf of the city of Bühl, Hans Striebel (mayor) and Wolfgang Jokerst (director of cultural administration) welcomed the Summit and placed the Center's facilities at the disposal of attenders. John Wirtz, on behalf of the organising group, welcomed everyone to the Summit and outlined some of the history of bluegrass in Europe, and the place of the Summit in this process.

All attenders gave in succession a brief introduction of themselves and their roles inside and outside bluegrass music, and expressed their hopes for the Summit.

All attenders received a copy of a digest, compiled by Fred Bartenstein, of replies to a pre-Summit survey (August/September 2008), in which IBMA members outside the US had been

asked for comments on **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)** facing bluegrass in their areas, and on other significant issues and recent developments.

Participants identified topics they would like to cover at the Summit, and a straw poll was conducted to determine their relative interest. The following issues were selected, and the Summit devoted 30–45 minutes to considering each, with the results shown below. Volunteer working groups were set up under conveners for further study of five of these issues.

1. Associations and their relationships

It was noted that conditions varied widely throughout Europe, with bluegrass associations reflecting this variety in size, scope, structure, efficiency, and services offered to members. In many cases, association activity depended on a few key people.

It was agreed that, while local initiative and activity was valuable and should not be jeopardised by over-organisation, an 'umbrella' or 'hub' organisation was desirable to deal with matters of common concern throughout Europe, without attempting to duplicate the functions of local or national bodies. The facilities offered by existing 'pan-European' bodies were reviewed.

Richard Hurst, as EBMA chair, gave a presentation on the structure and working of the EBMA. The European World of Bluegrass Association (EWOBA) was also considered, in the light of the experiences of Summit attenders. Statements by Dennis Schut, founder of EWOBA, and by the EWOB (Voorthuizen) festival committee, which sought a wider coordinating role, were noted but not discussed.

It was agreed that in present circumstances the EBMA appeared to be the most credible organisation for a 'pan-European' role; that it should be given the opportunity to respond to what national and other bodies required of such a body; and that it should receive support, conditional on its fulfilling those requirements.

Membership issues were considered. It was noted that while subscriptions remained an important part of funding, competition between local, national, and international bodies for membership should be avoided as far as possible. The possibilities of joint membership, or the funding of an international body by national bodies, were noted. The example of IBMA, and the relationship between IBMA and EBMA, were also considered.

2. Internet-based, inclusive networking – Hub

It was noted that post and telephones remained highly effective in some contexts. Media such as Facebook, YouTube, and MySpace, however, were necessary to reach new people. Experience with blogs, Yahoo groups, the Wiki format, and means of informing website users of updates, was considered. The importance of reaching across language barriers was also noted, and examples of translation on websites were considered. Mandolin Café and Banjo Hangout were noted as examples of networking websites.

It was agreed that the internet should be the primary means of networking, and that people (especially younger people) with expertise in IT and communications should be involved. It was further agreed that a project to achieve such a networking medium within an EBMA context should be attempted, with a review of progress after one year before deciding on further action.

Participants agreeing to pursue this included Angelika Torrie (convener), Peter Ruby, Ruth Ellen Gruber, Mikhail Dushin, Moira Wirtz, Dagfinn Pedersen, Hannah Johnson.

3. The involvement of young people in bluegrass

It was noted that conditions affecting the exposure of young people to bluegrass varied widely from country to country, and that in several areas active programs to involve children were already operating. The importance of presentations, concerts, and teaching in schools as a means of involving not only a new generation but family and others, was noted, and the initiatives of IBMA in this field were considered. While selling bluegrass to youth required

special approaches, it should also be seen as part of overall marketing strategy and of the search for funding.

It was agreed that this was an area in which the EBMA or a similar body should exercise a leadership function, to encourage workshop facilities, make instruments available, sponsor young musicians, and develop new leaders for European bluegrass. The need for a child protection code was noted.

Participants agreeing to pursue this included John Sheldon, Richard Hurst, Moira Wirtz, Olaf Glasmer, Karl Heinz Siber, and Peter Ruby.

4. Lobbying, fund raising, and marketing on a continental scale

It was noted that professional fundraisers could be a valuable resource. Funding and other supportive relationships could also be sought at local, municipal, regional, governmental, and European Community levels. Lobbying could be conducted through the networks of music, arts, leisure, and tourism, and in contact with American embassies and consulates. A wide range of means of attracting media interest was discussed. The importance of aiming high, using all available talent, and excluding no potential allies, was stressed.

It was agreed that a group should be set up to pursue lobbying, fundraising, and marketing issues. On behalf of the EBMA, it was affirmed that the board was open to new thinking at all times; that the members would be informed of developments at the Summit; and that the aims of the proposed group were in full accordance with those of the association.

Participants agreeing to pursue this included Richard Hurst (convener), Olaf Glasmer, John Sheldon, Chris Keenan, and Christopher Howard-Williams. It was noted that others not at the Summit might also assist (BBMA can offer delegates).

5. The use and significance of the term 'European World of Bluegrass'

It was noted that statements had been received from Dennis Schut, asserting the legal right of the Netherlands Bluegrass Music Association to the EWOB title; and from the EWOB Festival committee at Voorthuizen (NL), inviting cooperation in developing the Festival. The value, origins, and varying significance of the title, and the different characters of the events using it, were discussed.

It was agreed that whether 'EWOB' continued in use as a title or not, agreement between the parties now using it should be sought, with a view to developing a strong, meaningful, and recognised brand, setting standards for the whole of Europe.

Participants agreeing to pursue this included Richard Hurst (convener), Peter Ruby, Christopher Howard-Williams, and Dagfinn Pedersen. People not at the meeting who will be invited to take part include Liz Meyer, Dennis Schut, and Ronald Groot.

6. Continent-wide booking

It was noted that there was strong interest among US bands in touring Europe, and that opportunities for longer, more rewarding tours could be greatly increased by European promoters working more closely together. The increasing costs and complex regulations attached to bringing in bands were considered, together with exchange rates and general rising prices. It was noted that there was a danger of thinking too much in terms of small events, small venues, and low budgets, resulting either in underpaying good bands or in presenting a lower quality of bands.

It was agreed that an internet guide to tours being planned would assist promoters in cooperating; and that FAQ pages dealing with local legislation, scale of expectations, and venues, country by country, were also desirable.

Participants agreeing to pursue this included John Sheldon (convener), Christopher Howard-Williams, Chris Keenan, Dagfinn Pedersen, and Rienk Janssen.

7. Country-by-country review of the current European market for bluegrass

Participants summarised current activities and conditions facing bluegrass music in the 11 nations represented at the Summit. Notes were not made of these presentations.

Next steps

Proceedings ended with the listing of consequential tasks, including the completion of comprehensive minutes:

Task	Responsible	Deadline
EBMA board meets to consider input	EBMA board	8 February 2009
Quick description of Summit to European Bluegrass Blog and Bluegrass Blog	Richard Hawkins	10 February 2009
Touching base with Ronald Groot, Dennis Schut, Liz Meyer	Richard Hurst	10 February 2009
Committee conveners make initial email contact with volunteers	conveners	22 February 2009
Minutes of Summit	Angelika Torrie	8 March 2009
EBMA Board decide at Voorthuizen meeting whether to have another summit	EBMA board	May 2009
Follow up with hands-on actions		

Parking lot

Time at the Summit did not permit discussion of all topics proposed by participants. Those that were not covered included:

- Organising unorganised regions of the Continent (including raising awareness of jam sessions and the concept of a 'travelling festival')
- Celtic: friend or foe? (advantages and disadvantages of promoting bluegrass connections with Celtic music)
- 'Purity': the desire to separate commercial and non-commercial aspects of bluegrass
- Whether and how to hold future bluegrass trade conferences

Closing

All attenders were asked to give their individual impressions of what had been achieved during the Summit. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. John Wirtz thanked all who had taken part, and the attenders expressed their special gratitude to Fred Bartenstein, Walter Fuchs (city host), and the Summit organising group.