



## **SXSW 2010 SHOWCASE PRIMER**

### **SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST MUSIC AND MEDIA CONFERENCE AUSTIN, TEXAS, USA MARCH 17-21, 2010**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The following document offers a concise primer for non-USA artists on the South by Southwest Music Festival, including advice on making the most of a showcase appearance. Please read this carefully and share with members of your team.

#### **FOR INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS, ALL ROADS LEAD TO SXSW**

South by Southwest is one of the largest and most prestigious music industry events in the world. The list of talented artists and industry luminaries who attend SXSW each year speaks for itself. In 2009, over 1900 artists, including over 570 international artists from 49 nations - representing every imaginable style of music - played before more than 13,000 registrants from around the world at 88 of Austin's premier stages ranging from the most intimate clubs to the outdoor stage located at Auditorium Shores.

What you may not realize is that SXSW Music showcases offer artists unique opportunities to make their musical vision a reality. The people who write about music and the people who can put it in a film, play it on the radio or television, or produce a CD are all at SXSW. You know it's one thing to hear about how talented an act is, or how great someone's new material is, but it's another thing altogether to see and hear it for yourself.

#### **WHO SHOWCASES?**

SXSW prides itself on presenting a music festival program that is hip, adventurous,

eclectic, and challenging to the musical tastes of the 13,000 delegates and more than 25,000 consumers in attendance. Delegates (and consumers) take gig-going very seriously and everyone criss-crosses downtown Austin each night to check out as many bands as they can. Musical genres represented include Alt Country, Avant/Experimental, Bluegrass, Blues, Conjunto, Country, DJ, Electronic, Hip Hop/Rap, Jazz, Latin Rock, Latin, Metal, Pop, Punk, R&B, Reggae, Rock, Singer/Songwriter, Ska, Tejano, World, and other styles not easily defined!

### **TIPS BEFORE YOU APPLY....**

*The international artists that get the most out of SXSW are those that have prepared a marketing strategy for the US and are using SXSW to achieve very specific goals. They are also generally the ones who are poised and ready to translate domestic success into international success.*

*SXSW recommends that you consider whether you are at the right point in your career to benefit from a showcase. Going up against 2,000 other artists means you must have resources to be heard above the noise, have recordings, airplay and market recognition in your home country and also have the backup of management and other support to take advantage of the opportunity.*

*Depending on many different factors, a showcase at SXSW could cost an act upwards of \$2,000 per person so take time before you apply to research potential sources of funding.*

*This does not include marketing or promotion costs.*

*You may find opportunities to apply for local funding to help defray roughly 20-30% of costs but in general grant aid opportunities are limited, demand outstrips supply and strict eligibility criteria apply.*

*SXSW recommends that any artist applying to showcase intends to have in place a business representative who will register for SXSW in their own right to work on the artist's behalf.*

*Read the showcase FAQs at <http://www.sxsw.com/music/shows/apply/faq>*

### **THE SHOWCASE APPLICATION PROCESS**

#### **AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2010**

SXSW accepts international showcase applications from August 3 until November 6. All applications must be completed online, using the application via Sonicbids. Type in all the details, print out the confirmation page and use your credit card to pay the fee. If you do not have a Sonicbids account, create one and SXSW will use your Sonicbids EPK to access your music and information. Sonicbids offers a free trial for artists applying to showcase at SXSW.

The early application cost is US \$30 through September 25, 2010. From September 26 the cost increases to US \$40. To be considered for a showcase, you must have your application and Sonicbids EPK completed with your music and press materials uploaded by the appropriate deadline. We strongly recommend you complete your application and upload materials sooner rather than later. We cannot evaluate your music to consider you for a showcase until you upload it.

### **TIPS**

*Make sure the audio material you send accurately reflects how you intend to present yourself. If solo acoustic, then don't send a big band recording. If you need to submit a demo recording make sure to label it as such.*

*Do include a photo, as photos of showcase artists are included on the festival website and can*

*promote your visual image.*

*Do not nominate a "primary" track when you apply online, as MP3s of showcase artists are included on the festival website and can give listeners a sense of your musical style.*

*Please upload at least 3 songs.*

*Be careful what person you list as your primary contact on the form as this is the person to whom all correspondence from SXSW will be directed. Ideally, your primary contact should be a member of the act or someone with regular contact with your act.*

*If you wish to apply as a showcase presenter, please email [una@sxsw.com](mailto:una@sxsw.com) for guidelines and procedures on how to submit a proposal*

## **NOVEMBER 2010**

November 6, 2009 is the absolute last date for international artists to complete their application for a showcase.

### **TIPS**

*SXSW receives over 10,000 showcase applications every year. Your application will be acknowledged by email but due to the volume of applications received, SXSW asks that you please do not call the office to enquire about the status of your application*

*SXSW has to turn down the majority of applications to perform at SXSW. But know that all applicants are carefully evaluated*

*Ensure your Primary Contact has any email spam filters set to receive mail from @sxsw.com addresses.*

## **NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2009**

SXSW makes an enormous effort to get all invitations out to international artists during the months of November and December. They make this effort to give artists the opportunity to start applying immediately for work visas within the required 90-100 day turnaround time.

### **TIPS**

*Do not underestimate the costs; the challenges and the time involved in securing US work visas so act immediately when you receive your invitation. We strongly recommend you seek informed advice from one of the three agencies listed in the invitation.*

*If you apply for a visa with less than 90 days turnaround you may have to pay a premium charge to the INS, the US immigration authorities.*

*US Department of State regulations require most non-immigrant visa applicants aged 14 to 79 to schedule an appointment for an interview, in part to obtain finger scans. (Diplomats and government officials travelling on official business will be exempt from this requirement.) Interviews are by appointment only.*

*As of January 12th 2009, travelers entering the US with passports from Visa Waiver Program countries must obtain advance online travel authorization by visiting the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) website (this online authorization is free):*

*[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id\\_visa/esta/](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/esta/)*

*A complete list of US Embassy locations is available at: <http://usembassy.state.gov/>*

*As of June 26, 2005, citizens from the 27 Visa Waiver Program countries seeking to enter the US for temporary business or tourism/pleasure (B status), without obtaining a visa stamp will be required to present a machine-readable passport. Please check with your nearest US Embassy to determine if you qualify for a visa waiver.*

*If necessary, SXSW can provide you with an official written invitation. Email:*

*[musfest@sxsw.com](mailto:musfest@sxsw.com) and put: Visa Letter Request in the subject line*

## **JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2010**

If you have received a showcase invitation, January-February is a very busy and important time. Have you confirmed acceptance of the showcase? Have you already initiated the visa application process? Have you prepared a budget? Have you confirmed your sources of funding? Have you researched your goals for the US market? Have you prepared a marketing, promotion and PR plan? Will your representative be available to meet with SXSW at Midem?

### **TIPS**

*If invited, you are required to confirm your showcase invitation without reference to date of performance, venue location or time slot. SXSW programs the festival from the list of confirmed artists.*

*You will need to keep the four days of SXSW clear (Wed – Sat) while you wait for SXSW to send you a confirmation email, which gives provisional confirmation of date, venue and time. Do not go to print using any information you receive at this time as all programming is still subject to change.*

*Media Travel in London is the preferred travel partner for SXSW. They are an independent travel agency specialising in the travel needs for the music and media industry. They understand the specific and, sometimes unique, requirements of their clients and have established relationships with a number of airlines to enable them to effectively meet these requirements. Experience shows that an online flight reservation is not always the most economical way to make your booking. They can save you time and give you the widest choice of travel options, with greater flexibility, increased baggage allowance and 24 hour emergency contacts. <http://www.mediatravel.com/events.html>*

All artists will be notified of their status no later than January 29, 2010. Artists who apply to showcase but are not invited to perform will be offered the opportunity to purchase registration badges at the lowest registration rate, after notification of status. There are no refunds on purchased registrations (and no exceptions) if you buy a registration at a higher rate or purchase a registration and then decide not to attend if you are not offered a showcase.

With one month to go it is time to get going on the promotion front. Have you confirmed your marketing plans? Have you contacted MG Ltd. SXSW's international PR consultants who are strategizing the major international media stories for SXSW 2010? Send an electronic promo pack to Tracy Mann at MG Ltd <[tmann@mglimited.com](mailto:tmann@mglimited.com)> and include details of your own particular 'story' that brings you to SXSW. If you have a US publicist working on your behalf, let Tracy know their contact details.

### **ADVANCE AND ON-SITE PROMOTION**

The SXSW website is a valuable promotional tool but it is a mistake to rely on the SXSW website alone to promote your showcase.

### **TIPS**

*Invited artists have the opportunity to include a song on the streaming SXSW Music Player. This option is available on your unique Artist Admin site.*

*The "bio" section on the Artist Admin site will appear on your public artist page on the SXSW website. It's an opportune way to present your band to the public.*

*Onsite in Austin, there are designated sites within the Austin Convention Centre to put up posters promoting your showcase.*

*It is a good idea to mail press kits to the local press and radio in Austin.*

*Take advantage of mailing lists – yours, your label's, etc. – to inform people about your show. All artists (via the primary contact) have access to the SXSW Online Registrants Directory, containing contact information on everyone registered to attend SXSW. You can sort this directory by industry or job title so you can send email notifications.*

## **MARCH 2010**

Many artists schedule private parties, record in-stores, and radio performances during the week of SXSW, and you may want to consider doing so, also. But please help make your official showcase a successful one: a showcase slot at the SXSW Festival is a valuable commodity. Consider the effect that other performances may have on the attendance at your official show. Help maximize attendance of media and registrants, and focus the public attention on your SXSW showcase. It is SXSW's desire that your SXSW showcase experience be a positive one.

## **TIPS**

*To that end, SXSW asks that you limit other appearances (private parties and record in-stores). Also be aware that acts may not perform any public shows in Austin between March 17-21, 2010. (A public show is any show that charges admission to the general public and/or is advertised in any media available to the general public and/or any show that occurs between 7p and 2am.)*

*Be sure to notify SXSW of other performances during SXSW week so SXSW can avoid scheduling conflicts with your official showcase. If you have questions, please contact SXSW at [musfest@sxsw.com](mailto:musfest@sxsw.com).*

*To get maximum exposure and networking opportunities at SXSW, international artists should choose the registration package offered in the performance agreement rather than the cash payment.*

*SXSW recommends that any artist invited to showcase have in place a business representative who will register as a delegate for SXSW in their own right to work on the artist's behalf.*

## **PRACTICAL ISSUES**

The registration package includes SXSW artist wristbands for each band member listed on your application. The wristbands enable band members to attend nighttime showcases other than their own and to attend the daytime Trade Show and specific panel programming.

The badge, a conference registration, provides access to daytime panels, artist interviews, and mentor sessions. Participating in these activities offers opportunities to network with fellow musicians, agents, producers, record label representatives, PR representatives, tour managers, etc. Badges will be made available for band members to purchase at a discounted rate (Still waiting on confirmation of this info).

International artists have the option to apply for the International Housing Program whereby local families put up artists for free while in Austin. If you would like to be included in this program, please email Marilyn Faust at [marilynfaust@hotmail.com](mailto:marilynfaust@hotmail.com). Each SXSW venue is overseen by a Stage Manager who can assist you in acquiring any gear you will need for your show. SXSW provides PA systems and production in participating venues. Artists are responsible for supplying their own backline equipment. A SXSW Stage Manager will contact invited artists when the SXSW staff books the artist at a specific SXSW venue. To help hold down costs, Stage Managers will work with all artists playing a venue on the same night to coordinate equipment requests and determine what gear can be shared among those artists.

If you have questions about rental gear prior to being contacted by your stage

manager or are in need of an approximate quote for a rental, please contact [backline@sxsw.com](mailto:backline@sxsw.com)

SXSW will provide voltage transformers for international acts, but it is your responsibility to bring sufficient plug boards for on stage power distribution.

### **IN CONCLUSION...**

For more than 20 years SXSW has been in the business of exposing some of the world's best music makers to the music business – showcasing new talent along with fresh material from established artists. Musicians and the companies they work with have used SXSW as a cost-effective way to promote themselves since 1987. They come back year after year because SXSW works. It's a practical and cost-effective method to connect with press, radio and other music industry players.

For further information: Una Johnston, SXSW UK/Ireland Mgr, [una@sxsw.com](mailto:una@sxsw.com)  
Mirko Whitfield, SXSW Continental EU Mgr, [mirko@sxsw.com](mailto:mirko@sxsw.com)

Matthew Covey from Tamizdat has provided SXSW with the following Visa Primer.

### ***In a perfect world...***

You've just been accepted to perform at SXSW! That's great, and in a perfect world, all you would need to do now is book your flight, promote your showcase, and hit the stage ready to play a hell of a show. Unfortunately, the real world is not so simple: you'll also have to deal with getting the proper US visa. There is a remarkable amount of misinformation and rumor in the music industry about US visas, so we have prepared this "primer" to help dispel confusion and give you a basic understanding of what you're up against.

### ***Who needs a US visa?***

#### ***Most likely you do.***

If you're performing before a paying audience and you're not a US citizen, US law states that you must have a work visa. (The same goes for individuals who are members of a performing artist's crew.) Unfortunately (and infuriatingly), the fact that you're probably not getting paid does not exempt you from the US Government's requirement. (Note: if you are a music business professional, and you're coming to SXSW is not essential for a performing artist's performance—you're an agent, promoter, label rep, etc.—there's a good chance you do not need a visa. For more information about visa-free travel to the US, see [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without\\_1990.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html) )

### ***What kind of visa do I need?***

#### ***You need a visa that allows you to work.***

There are many different kinds of visas issued by US Embassies and Consulates around the world, and each has specific limitations regarding what you can and cannot do. Most SXSW-bound artists, however, seek some kind of a "P" visa (if you're a member of an ensemble or in the stage crew of an ensemble) or some kind of an "O" visa (if you are a solo artist or a solo artist's backing musician or stage crew). P1 and O-1 visas are the most common, but P-2, P-3 P-1S, P-2S, P-3S, and O-2 all may be applicable, depending on your situation, as well as a handful of other visas, under limited circumstances. If you already have a visa and you're not sure if it would allow you to perform at SXSW, check with a US consulate or an immigration professional.

### ***Can't I just come without a visa (officially called the "Visa Waiver") or with a tourist or business visa (officially called "B1" or "B2" visas)?***

#### ***Nope... Not legally anyway.***

Every year loads of musicians claim they are coming as tourists when they enter the US to perform. Many get away with it. Many do not. If a US Immigration officer suspects you're coming to perform, you'll probably be denied entry to the US, and they may make it very hard to enter the US again in the future, even if later you do get the proper visa. If you're serious about the future of your career in the US, it's wise to get the proper visa.

### ***Do I need a "sponsor"?***

#### ***No, but you do need a "petitioner".***

Technically, P and O visas don't require a "sponsor". However, to get a work visa, some US entity needs to first file a "petition" (officially called the "I-129") with US Citizenship and Immigration ("USCIS",

formerly the "INS"). The entity that files the petition is called the "petitioner". A petitioner can be a US citizen or a US company or US organization. For SXSW, petitioners tend to be an artist's US label or US agent, a visa agency, or SXSW itself. (For Canadian artists who choose to seek P-2 visas, the AFM will be your petitioner). *There are strategic concerns in choosing your petitioner. If SXSW is your petitioner, chances are your visa will only last long enough to perform at SXSW, which is a pity, because it costs no more to get a visa that lasts significantly longer. If your label or agent is the petitioner, your visa is then tied to that label or agent, so if you change labels or agents, your visa is invalidated. Many artists choose to hire a visa agent that acts as the petitioner. By doing so they can seek the longest possible visa duration and not be tied to a specific business arrangement.*

#### **Then what happens?**

##### **Getting a US work visa is a two step process.**

First, your "petitioner" needs to file a "petition" with USCIS. USCIS will review the petition and decide if the person who needs the visa (the "beneficiary") is eligible for the visa requested. If USCIS approves the petition, the "beneficiary" then needs to schedule an interview at a US Embassy or Consulate. At the interview the consular officer will determine if some factor convinces them that he or she is *ineligible* for the requested visa. For example, if you are applying for a P visa as a member of a professional musical group, USCIS will review your petition and decide if they believe that you are in fact a professional musician; then at your consular interview, the consular staff will determine if some other *disqualifying* factor (like a criminal record) overrides the eligibility established by your petition. If USCIS approves your petition, and your interview is successful, you'll be approved for the visa. (There are a lot of details we're not going in to, but that's a basic overview)

#### **How long does this process take?**

##### **More than three weeks, and less than four months. (How's that for unhelpful?)**

How long it takes really depends on two factors: luck and how much you are willing to pay the US Government. Once your petition is prepared and filed, USCIS typically takes anywhere from 10 to 90 days to process it. The phase of the press can normally be significantly expedited by paying the Government's \$1000 "Premium Processing" fee, which typically reduces the processing time to 15 calendar days or less. Once the petition is approved, one can usually schedule a consular interview within two weeks (though much shorter and much longer waiting times are common). Once the consular interview has been completed, most beneficiaries receive their passports back (with their newly minted visas affixed) within a week. However, if the consular staff has concerns about a possible prior criminal record, prior visa violations, or a potential threat to US security, consular processing of the visa can be delayed significantly, often adding several weeks to processing, but sometimes adding months of waiting. Beneficiaries who most frequently experience significant "security clearance" delays are males from countries with strained relations with the US.

What if I'm denied?

##### **You probably won't be, if you start early enough.**

If you're far enough along in your career to be offered a SXSW showcase, chances are your petition will be approved. If you've not got a serious criminal record, chances are you'll be approved for the visa. There are always exceptions, but in general you should worry more about getting it done in time, and less being denied. 99% of the visa problems faced by SXSW artists could have been avoided by leaving more time to complete the visa process. Really!

#### **How long do the visas last?**

##### **Up to one year for members of groups, and up to three years for soloists and their backing bands.**

The good news is that for most people, US work visas are multiple-entry, and it's usually possible to obtain visas that are valid for considerably longer than just the week you're in Texas. The bad news is that getting longer durations can be tricky, some petitioners do not wish to seek longer durations, and both multiple entry visas and longer durations are not available to beneficiaries from all countries.

#### **What should I do?**

##### **Mostly, take this seriously. Soon.**

If you figure getting into the US to play one little show couldn't possibly be this hard, you're wrong. You need to deal with it, and you'll probably need help. While it is theoretically possible for any US entity to file a petition on a foreign artist's behalf, in practice the process is so complex and counterintuitive, that most artists hire a professional agency or law firm to assist them. If you hire someone, make sure they have experience with artist visas (many immigration lawyers do not), and make sure the professional you work with can provide the best visa for your needs the best price. It's very possible to spend a stupid amount of money to get an unnecessarily limited visa, so make sure you do your research. Most importantly, as soon as you get serious about going to SXSW, get serious about addressing the visa issue.

—Matthew Covey, Tamizdat Visa Services