

EPIISODE 041

CARNEGIE HALL

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Bobby C. Martin Jr., Champions Design

AND

Sara Villagio, Carnegie Hall

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

ARMIN

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode 41 of The Follow-up. The first of 2022.

This week we are following up on Carnegie Hall, one of the most prestigious music venues in the world. Named after philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who funded its construction, and located on the corner of 57th Street and Seventh Avenue in New York, NY, Carnegie Hall is comprised of three venues. Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage, Zankel Hall, and Weill Recital Hall, totaling 3,671 seats. Aside from classical music performances, the venue has hosted jazz, blues, and starting in the 1950s, popular music acts like The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and the Rolling Stones.

The project, designed by New York-based Champions Design in collaboration with Carnegie Hall's in-house team, was posted on Brand New on June 14, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast041 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast041, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Bobby C. Martin Jr., Co-founder of Champions Design; and Sara Villagio, Chief Marketing Officer at Carnegie Hall.

In this conversation we first hear about the unexpected aspect of this project that brought Champions Design and Carnegie Hall together: an appreciation and an embrace of a long, drawn-out project that would take a considerable amount of time to be done right. Started before the pandemic, the project REALLY went long as its launch was delayed but in the two-plus years of working together and collaboratively, Champions Design and Carnegie Hall arrived at an identity heavily informed by the history, artifacts, and legacy of the building as well as by the input of people from across the organization. Lead by a desire to push the brand forward while staying close to the essence that has attracted and retained long-time supporters, we learn about how Champions embraced its reputation as design archaeologists to create a flexible and robust identity to allow Carnegie Hall to communicate to its wide audience across an increasing amount of different mediums.

Now let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Bobby and Sara.

BRYONY With audiences and performances in mind, 2019 started with ambitious branding plans for Carnegie Hall. Fast forward through some exciting times, lots of thinking, historical digging, and a pandemic, to June, 2021, and we all got to see the end result. And the beginning of being able to experience the hard work of many talented individuals,. So, let's dive into the details. Sara, Bobby, welcome to The Follow-Up.

BOBBY Hello.

BRYONY So Sara, Carnegie Hall has been around for... just a minute, you know, since 1891 to be exact. What prompted the need for a rebrand at this particular point in its history back in January, 2019?

SARA Well, it was interesting because we didn't actually go into it saying we need to redo everything. We need to update everything. In fact, I think the organization had expanded and contracted in so many directions over the last 10 to 15 years, that we weren't sure if the assets we were using were really still meeting our needs. It started with a conversation

about, okay, what are we using? How does it actually represent us and speak to the audiences that we're engaging with, today? As a way to start an exploration, it was really sort of like a brand audit. That's what I think I came to you with Bobby and said, I think I need a brand audit. Help.

BOBBY <laugh> yep, exactly.

BRYONY The starting point was really a question mark. Where are we headed? What are we doing? What do we need to do? So as you embarked on finding that creative team that would take on the challenge of answering that initial question and creating an audit, what were your top priorities guiding the final choice? And what was the process like in finding that creative agency?

SARA I think one of the philosophies that we really ascribe to at Carnegie Hall, which is straight from the top, our Executive and Artistic Director, Clive Gillinson is to start pretty much every project with the questions we're asking, rather than the solutions, or the answers to those questions. And that was one of the frames in which we started the process to understand who might be a good partner for us to undertake this. And as you said, Carnegie Hall's brand, you know, it's been around for a minute to say the least. And I'll say that this was both one of the most terrifying and thrilling projects I've ever worked on. So I knew that whoever it was that came into the mix needed to be able to collaborate across this complex organization, understand all of the various business needs that we have, get a handle on how Carnegie Hall might need to evolve for the future, or be prepared to respond to future needs.

And also just understand when to dial up and when to dial down, and finally really get into how much time might it take to actually do this. When you think about a brand that's been around for 130 years, how much time is it going to take to really develop a thoughtful system that meets the needs of all of these different business areas. And that really was one of the points that brought us to Champions. We did interview a few different groups and talk to them about working with us on

this, and Champions prior work with Dartmouth, the NBA, a couple of those really spoke to the leadership here. And... as soon as we started having conversations with Bobby and the team there, we all started to get excited about working with them. And I think the clincher was them sending us a proposal that had a long timeline on it. <laugh> Which sounds ridiculous, and is so simple, but honestly, I just couldn't imagine doing this project in 12 weeks, say. It was going to be longer than that. And if our partner didn't understand that from the get-go, then they probably just wouldn't be the right fit for the organization. In addition to everyone's design talents, sparkling personalities, and a lot of good creativity going on, I think that was one of the items that we really sought in this partnership.

BRYONY So the fact that they were actually realistic from the get-go. So Bobby, landing a new client or a project is a universal need for all design firms. And we have all developed our techniques and our particular approaches. What is the process like for Champions Design? And in particular to this project, did you see a call? Did you get a phone call? How did you end up securing this project?

BOBBY Well, it's a really good question. Getting projects is always—they come in different ways. The old saying of, oh, we received a phone call is how I talk about new projects all the time, but we actually never receive phone calls—it's always through an email or something like that nowadays, but it's doesn't sound as cool. I'll give a little bit of background because Sara Villagio and I worked together many years ago at Jazz at Lincoln Center. Sara was in the marketing department, I was in the design department, and so we had the opportunity to work together over several years on evolving and building the Jazz at Lincoln Center brand and ultimately trying to figure out how to put butts in the seat. So, so that collaboration was something that was brought back up when Sara started thinking about what to do about Carnegie Hall. So we had the opportunity to discuss really candidly, some of the challenges that Carnegie Hall was facing.

That's when Sara brought up the question about potentially doing a brand audit. Of course we were very excited about it. At Champion's one of the things that we love to do is, we call ourselves "The Archeologists of Design," so to speak because of these organizations that have these rich, long, complex histories, and it's so important to understand some of the challenges and opportunities that they've had along the way. But then also really help them to pave the way forward. That was a lot of what we talked about with Sara and the rest of her team, Clive Gillinson and others, talking about how an organization like Carnegie Hall has a lot to lose. And so how do we work with them really deliberately? How do we take the time that's needed in order to get this right? And that time that was needed was even more important during the challenges, the curve balls that we were thrown with the pandemic.

So that was a whole thing that we didn't see coming. But luckily, in the plan and in the conversations that we were having early on, we were able to talk about how this needed to be really collaborative. We knew that we needed to make sure that we were being as collaborative as possible from the Champions Design team; and from the Carnegie Hall team, that was a must for them. We didn't want to be this kind of fabulous agency that came in and just waved a wand and said, "this is it." We knew that it needed to be really collaborative with both the creative services and the marketing teams at Carnegie Hall. So that was built into the proposal, that was built into the conversations that we were having very early on because we needed a lot of back and forth. And what we've learned is that brand systems are not successful if the teams that are working with it on an ongoing, long-term basis, aren't fully up to speed, aren't fully involved, and excited about the work. And so the really two-and-a-half-years that we ended up working on this project, we were able to both contribute to the future of this brand and do it in a way that hopefully sets the internal teams up for success in implementing it over a long term. Those were really the conversations that we were having early on. And I think what was so special about Sara and I knowing each other for quite some time, is

we were able to have a little bit of shorthand. And so she knew some of the ways that I like to work as a designer, and I knew about the ways that she liked to work as a marketer. And so we were able to have this really open, candid, back-and-forth about the needs, about the shortcoming. And I think that's a lot of what helped us to land this gig. And I'm really happy that we were—not just because of the work, but because it was just a really fun project to be a part of.

BRYONY Oh, and anything that's historical, that falls within the identity of a city...

BOBBY Exactly.

BRYONY Just exciting, no matter what. Right? So in terms of the branding foundation, once you got going and you had these conversations taking place, what kind of guidance did you get on the onset to guide you from Sara and her team? And what was the first line of thinking, taking place at Champions Design?

BOBBY One off the things that I remember most about the onset of this was, even probably before we actually secured the project, but it was conversations that we had with the Executive and Artistic Director Clive Gillinson, where he was really talking about the ambition that they had for the Carnegie Hall brand. And he was just wanting to make sure that we pushed them. He said, you know, can you push us enough? And he would always refer back to the Theodore Roosevelt quote that he often talks about where it's "keeping your eyes on the stars, and your feet on the ground." And he really envisioned that for, not just Carnegie Hall as an organization, but also for the brand. So how do we remain ambitious? How do we push and be innovative? But do it for an organization that needs to remain grounded in who they are. And really think about the whole. Really consider that this isn't about creating a system for a very specific elite audience.

This is about creating a brand for everyone, not just those with all the money in New York. It's those that are young and old, it's those that are rich and not so rich, it's those that are not just in New York, and

how could we make sure that we help to move Carnegie Hall into the digital world. And so that's what I was really inspired by because we also heard how important the Carnegie Hall brand identity was for those who had been subscribers, and members, and participating in Carnegie Hall events for decades. And how important the Carnegie Hall brand had become to them, and how difficult change is for them. So we've had to really walk that fine line of being ambitious with where we would wanna go, while at the same time staying true to who Carnegie Hall is, and helping those that are long-term constituents, long-term members move along with us. And what was really exciting in the end is that we learned that those that had been part of Carnegie Hall for quite some time were very open to change. But early on, it was something we needed to take really seriously, and make sure that we were able to deliver on that goal.

BRYONY Sara, the first phase was the scope of figuring out the audit, what it is that we actually need to do. What was your reaction and the team's reaction overall, once Bobby came back and said: everything needs to be done. <laugh>

SARA Well, Bobby's actually really skilled because he didn't quite say it that way. They just gave us a lot of options. And I think that was critical because we had enough to work with, I think we looked at three directions early on if I'm remembering correctly. And, what was interesting about that process and I think unique to our collaboration was that we didn't look at any one of them and say: that's the one. We were able to look at all three, and pick out the fine points, the things that we thought were really successful. The things we were a little more challenged by didn't get as much of a resonance with. And Champions worked with us to fine tune in such a way that we were utilizing elements from all three of those directions to come up with the right approach. And I think that is part of what made the work so special.

We didn't constrict ourselves from the beginning of, you need to go in this direction. Everything has to work in a certain way. And one of the

things I got really excited about early on was that we were obviously talking about how do you represent a brand like Carnegie Hall online. How does it become digital, and flexible, and nimble enough, to be iconic on a screen in the same way it is in this concert hall? And the directions we landed on really exhibited some flexibility, both in terms of cohesiveness across the system and challenging some norms in which you might make assumptions about how design systems need to work. And I think Champions really did push us in a way that opened up some doors for us to represent ourselves differently online. And that was very exciting.

BRYONY So Bobby, in those three routes that you presented, what were the key differentiators or elements that you wanted to present to Carnegie Hall to make sure that you were covering all their bases?

BOBBY It's a really interesting conversation that we're having here because from the design world and the design perspective, a lot of times you'll have that moment where you present three different directions, and instead of choosing one, somebody said, well, can we have a little bit of all three? And I think a lot of designers would say, oh, that's not what you want. For us, that was actually totally what we were wanting and excited about because what we were able to do is build a foundation. So much of this project was strategy development. So much of this project was research. The way that we approached this is we did this big brand audit to learn all that Carnegie Hall does. What we learned is that they create over 2,000 individual pieces a year. We learned how many different programs they had, not just for Carnegie Hall proper, but the educational programs, the social impact programs, and all of these other initiatives. So we had to do a lot of planning. We had to do a lot of thinking that didn't involve making stuff. It was more around building out a sound strategy that could guide the work. And so we did a lot of that, and that was so important, not just for guiding the design work, but it was also really important for any work that we were doing to be able to sell that in to the leadership team—the board of trustees. In the process of creating this strategy, we developed this foundation,

but what's so interesting with design is you can take that strategy and interpret it in a variety of different ways. So the signals that we would send the concept that we wanted to be able to communicate, that story that we needed to tell, could be told in slightly different nuanced ways. And so when we came back and presented the first round of exploration to the marketing and creative services teams, and I believe Clive was involved in that. Leadership, marketing, and creative services team.

When we shared that broad range of work, they were telling the story in slightly different ways, but it was the same story that was being told. So, we didn't have any problem with being able to take a little bit from this one and a little from that one. And in the end, that's where we got some of the real kind of stars of, I think, what ended up being in the system. Because we knew that there were going to be some things that were really challenging in some of the directions, but we needed to show that in order to push the whole forward. And we knew that there were some things that were maybe a little bit safer, or expected. Throughout our process there were certain things that we heard often. We heard about the ring of lights, which is these two rings of lights that are at the top of Stern Auditorium that are very recognizable to those at Carnegie Hall. I think a lot of what was expected is to come back with something that referenced these rings of lights. What we were able to do in these three directions— in some, we were able to be very overt with it, and have things that felt very ring-like. But in other ways, we were able to evoke that feeling without actually having to hit it. And in the end, you'll notice that there's no ring of lights in the system, but there are things that reference this kind of circular emotion. There are things that reference this coming together, which we saw the ring of lights as being a symbol of. But we were only able to get the more evocative by going right at it. And that being like, whoa, that's too much. So in the end, we were able to show a variety of different directions, but then the team was able to get excited about a few different things from each. And some things were right away loved, universally loved. That was really easy for us to then go and further develop.

BRYONY Let's geek out a little bit about the logotype in its own, because it really deserves a minute to itself. You found the historical stained glass, which was a natural launching pad, but I'm very interested in the process that your team underwent from finding that first reference in the window, all the way down to getting Frere-Jones type involved in kind of working out all of those nuances, especially given the really tight kerning that you ended up with that makes it all come together really nicely—but I know, was very challenging.

BOBBY I'm glad you asked about the process of the logotype because one of the things that we fear the most is designers being looked at as just kind of creating something out of our heads and voila, that's the logo. And with an organization like Carnegie Hall, and many others that we work with, that's totally the opposite way of how we work. Carnegie Hall has this incredible archive, and an incredible archivist who created the archive, what 35 years ago... in the eighties. And so over the course of time, they have collected over 300,000 individual pieces from over 50,000 concerts. And, as a designer wanting to try to understand the visual legacy of a brand, there's no better way than to start in an archive like that. That's where we began. We began with diving into this archive, as well as having a tour of Carnegie Hall, of the actual space.

You might imagine a tour being, Hey, this is Concert Hall One, this is Concert Hall Two, this is Concert Hall Three, but it's not like that at all at Carnegie Hall. It was a three-hour-long tour by the Lead Archivist. And we were able to go literally behind the stages, in the rafters, and learn about how the light bulbs in those rings of lights are changed, and understand the different stages, from Stern to Zankel to Weill Recital Hall, as well as a brand new education wing. So what we were able to do is learn about the history and the people that have stood on these stages. At the same time we were taking pictures. This is what we were doing. We were able to document all of this. Myself, our lead strategists, our designers... were all on this tour. And the whole time we were documenting all of the flourishes, and the end caps, and just all these different things that could be interesting things to build off

of graphically. And of course on the outside of the building are these poster cases. And what was so fascinating about the poster cases is at the very top there's stained glass, it has the words Carnegie Hall. But one of the things that we don't talk about often is how each one of those stained glass signs at the top of the poster case, each one is slightly different. There's a handcraftedness to these signs. If you go to, let's say the side on 57th Street, it's gonna be a little bit more condensed than if you go to the side on 7th. It's a little bit more kind of rounded. And so when we saw these details in the stain glass, of course, we were taking pictures of anything that said Carnegie Hall, but this is one of the first instances that people engage with the name. So when you come up to Carnegie Hall, you'll see the stained glass windows, and then you see the actual posters for the different events that are happening there.

And when we saw that variation, we started to think about, of course, different typefaces that we might be able to pull in that reference it. But then we pitched to Sara and her team that instead of choosing something that's off the shelf, could we work with a type designer to create something that is really customized, that feels unique to Carnegie Hall because it's so special. And that's where we were able to bring in Tobias Frere-Jones and his team who we know very well. I sat on the board of the Type Directors Club with Nina Stossinger. And I sat on the board of AIGA with Tobias many, many years ago, when I was at Jazz at Lincoln Center. I also knew the way that they worked, I knew the level of detail, and the attention to detail that they brought to lettering, and they bring to type design.

We proposed to Sara's team that we would bring Tobias' team on to help us look at the wordmark. This is after we had focused in, on that wordmark as being a direction. So we knew that we wanted to build off of that stained glass in the facade. And so from there, the Champions team worked directly with Tobias and we were able to take some pictures of the stained glass and to make refinements. What we learned is that the letter forms, when you have a "C" next to an

“A” or an “H” next to an “A”, the letter forms just have a lot of awkward spacing. What we also needed to do is then make some variations that differ a little bit from the stained glass. It wasn’t an exact copy of the stain glass. What we wanted to do was to kind of refer to it. But we then made some tweaks that would help this to be a logo that would stand strong and proud, but also something that could then translate to being itty bitty that could work on, you know, retina screens and non-retina screens. Also, which was really important to the system is, it needed to be flexible. So something that could be stacked, or turned on its side, or could be fully horizontal. That’s what we were able to do with the Frere-Jones Type team is, make a lot of those little refinements to not only make sure that we were speaking a language specific to Carnegie Hall, but also making sure that it has these sound little details that make it a strong, beautiful wordmark.

SARA Can I just add... the awesome nature of this logo for us is how flexible it is. I mean, having the permission to utilize that up, down, and all around, across our materials has actually been, I think, one of the major wins of the system and really putting Carnegie Hall forward as a digital-first brand. I think that was a huge part of what makes it. It’s beautiful. It felt like us. And that was the response from the senior leadership at Carnegie Hall and everyone who saw it, it’s like, oh gosh, this has been there right in front of us all along. And the Champions team really picked up and grabbed that. It was exciting. It’s one of my favorite parts of the system, obviously. <laugh>

BOBBY And that’s like one of the best things you could ever ask, comment-wise, coming back from a partner. That response on a mark. That really motivated us to continue building out the system.

BRYONY Well, you definitely brought it to the 21st century, not only in stepping away from the handcrafted side of it, but in that process, giving it the wings that it needed, as you said to go itty bitty, huge, all of these things without losing that historical context and it’s foundation of where it comes from. Now, the logotype in itself is complemented

by a monogram that you developed in collaboration with Jesse Reagan. And it is one of the most magnificent monograms I've ever seen. If anything, because it is an affront to all of the design rules. It goes against everything you're taught in school, and everything you encounter out there in the "real world" as they call it. I need all the details from both of you, not only in the geekery of the process of actually developing it, but where it comes from and, from Sara's team, when you see something that goes against all of these design rules, what is the first reaction? And how do you move forward?

SARA That's a great question. It's another favorite piece. It's hard because there's a lot of things I obviously really like about the system. Just to say that the monogram was inspired by a steel beam with the Carnegie name stamped on it. And this is Carnegie steel that comes from the finest steel mills of Andrew Carnegie himself. That beam was discovered during a renovation that took place, I think around 2003, I can't remember the exact year, but it was part of our Studio Towers project. At that time, that was before the Resnick Education Wing existed that Bobby mentioned, it was before our administrative offices that I'm sitting in right now existed in the way they do today. The Hall was just in a different place and facing a need for expansion. And I think asking a question of what space did we need to accomplish the aspirational ideas of the leadership here.

And a lot of that was rooted in education and social impact, which led to this discovery I think, in that process. The monogram, I think really did challenge us early on. We all saw the beam in the presentation, we saw how it had come together. We knew we needed something that would act as that avatar moment on social, for example, and be able to represent us. But I mean, you hit on it, it totally goes against the thinking that this asset needs to immediately reflect on say, the logo. It's a challenge to that. At the same time, it brought together a whole new mood for Carnegie Hall. It's another asset with another mood. And I think that there's this energy to it—that some of our trustees remarked on its musicality, which I think does come through in it. At

the same time, I find it playful and engaging, and I think it was the right challenge for us to actually push forward with something that felt a little different. It took me some time to get used to, I'll admit. It was one of the assets that we had the presentations, we looked at it, we thought about how cool it looked, and how we could see it on social, and see it working... And then we came back, we said, does this all make sense? Does it all fit together? What does this mean? And the Champions team really challenged us to think a little bit out of the box, and envision how it could all work together. One of the pieces I love in the assets that we ultimately put together was just how in motion graphics, the logo and the monogram can bounce off of each other, and reflect off of each other so that you start to see that connection, just like the logo. It comes from the stories that come straight from the building. You really can't go wrong with that, in my mind.

BOBBY There were two instances where we encountered this beam. One is a little museum within the Carnegie Hall space. When we first started going to check out some of the concerts, the Carnegie Hall team had generously offered us the opportunity to check out a variety of different concerts in their different halls. All of our teams were able to participate. And during a lot of the intermissions, you're able to go into this museum area and that's where drinks are served, and snacks, and that type of thing. And there was this beam sitting there as well as like things like tickets and other ephemera, but that beam was sitting there. And I just looked at like, oh my God, we have to do something with that. Maybe a month or two later, we were sitting in the archive, and I think it had been moved out of that museum and placed on like—there's a fireplace, or a hearth in the back of the archive room, so we were able to get there and pick a lot of closer pictures. And so very early on in the process, we started playing with it, and mocking it up. The challenge is, it just says Carnegie. We knew that we wanted it to say either fully Carnegie Hall, or at least have the abbreviations of the "C" and the "H." That's when we thought to bring on Jesse Reagan, Jesse's like an extension of our design team. Jesse's just so great to work with. And he's such a scholar when it comes to type design and

typography. We reached out to Jesse and we said, Hey, you know, we found this in some work that we're doing with Carnegie Hall, but we need to create new letter forms, can you help us? In the matter of just a day or two, he came back with variety of options.

And then we started playing with the contrasts. Sara I'm going to geek out a little bit on the design of this, but then we started playing with the contrast because when it stamped out of the steel, it has a roundedness to it. And it has this kind of heaviness to it. So, what we started to do is play with the variety of how heavy it could be, how light it should be, how rounded it should be. We also played with the contrast of the letter forms. And what we found is when we added more contrast, it started feeling a little bit more standoffish. It started to feel a little bit more precious. In the end, we tried to keep it as close to that stamp from the steel as possible. But then we added a few nuances to the extra round terminals, because as Sara mentioned, the letter forms that are in the steel itself are so musical. They have these beautiful round terminals. And so what Jesse was able to do is create this "C" and this "H" that played off of each other. The "H" is very much inspired by the "N", here's this really iconic "N" in the full name in the stamp, which you can see in the case study. What Jesse was able to do is create the "C" and the "H", we were able to refine it so that it would work really well as an informal mark, or as it digital mark. We did show a full name of Carnegie Hall like that, but that was just too much. It started to get a little weird. What we knew is in building out this system for Carnegie Hall, it couldn't be a monolithic brand. It couldn't be a thing that we'd hammer the exact same thing on everything, over and over and over again. If you flash back 30, 35 years, that was the way that visual identities work.

But now we are introduced to social media and to all of these different ways that the programs needed to communicate digitally, as well as the printed posters in the front of the building, and all of these other different applications. We needed to build a system that was really, really flexible. Sara talked about the flexibility of the wordmark

and how key that was, but we also knew that it needed to push the boundaries of what a system should be, and having a mark that's slightly different. You might see often let's say in the fashion world, you'll see a, sans serif, all caps wordmark, and then you'll see this really beautiful elaborate monogram. And you'll see that monogram used in the fabrics of jackets and that type of thing. Here, we wanted to be able to play off of the boldness and that kind of visionary quality we saw in the wordmark, with something that was a little bit more, as we call it, magical. A little bit more playful, a little bit more musical in the monogram.

And then the ability for those to be used in conjunction. You might wanna speak in a little bit more of an informal way, or when you're working across digital, then that monogram is really all you need. And then when you need to really make sure that people know the history, and the power of Carnegie Hall, then that wordmark becomes more present. And then as Sara mentioned, the next challenge was then how do we introduce it to the world? How do we teach people what this is, what this means, what it signifies. And that's where we started to really leverag motion. And Zipeng Zhu was our motion designer on this. And he was able to just do what he does, his dazzlerness, and start to bring in this kind of back and forth connection between the monogram and the wordmark. It was a lot of fun. And I think that was really what we needed. We needed to make sure that this brand wasn't just the expected brand system. We needed it be fun. We needed to be musical. And that was what the monogram was able to do for the system.

BRYONY Bring in a little bit of the entertainment world into the corporate world, if you may.

BOBBY Yeah.

BRYONY And how they marry each other, because you do have both sides, it's still a business. It needs to be profitable. It needs to be stable and all of those things, but it does so through entertainment. You mentioned earlier, there's like 2,000 pieces of marketing materials and things like

that per year. There's a lot of branding application. And throughout this whole process, you have a very close collaboration. Now, Sara, I don't know how big of a team you have, that'd be an interesting part to cover, but as you're developing all of the brand language and these applications in choosing the color palette, that also has a really interesting foundation and how you are changing that color palette throughout the seasons. How closely are you working together, and bouncing all of this off? So that eventually Sara and her team have not only ownership, but all of the toolkit parts that they need to carry this forth in the years to come, in developing these thousands and thousands of pieces for very different audiences.

SARA Just to hit on that point about the team... the creative team at Carnegie Hall is, I think... there's six graphic designers. We have a team of editors, about five people, and two production team members, and a creative services director. She and I worked very closely together. And that team was absolutely essential to making this work for Carnegie Hall. As Bobby was describing, our Design Director Bernie has been with the Hall for something like 20 years. And you can imagine all of the ideas that he's had over the years, we've been laughing about this in other context, because Bernie has something at the office that he shared with me, the very first meeting I had with him. And I've been at Carnegie Hall a little more than four years at this point. When I joined the team, I wanted to meet with everyone and get to know them, and Bernie comes into my office and says: well, I'd love to tell you about all the ideas that haven't happened. What a great way to start a creative conversation. You know, coming in as a marketing leader. He shared that he has something in the design team's office space called "The Drawer of Broken Dreams"—it's actually labeled "The Sorrowful Drawer of Broken Dreams—It is literally a drawer that is full of mockups and printouts of design concepts that just never came to be, for some reason or another. And some of them are hilarious, and some of them are brilliant, and some of them are inspiring. And I wonder what the stories are behind them. He had all of these ideas, that was

just a critical element I think of the partnership that we developed over this long project, that these two teams had to work in sync.

And as Bobby said, really, our team had to embrace, and get into, and dig into this system in order to make it the success on the other end of it. The team is a really critical part of all of this. Now, having gone through this process, it's like an emotional journey to go through a project like this together. There's highs, there's lows, there's moments of frustration, there's moments of genuine excitement and energy that come forward from it. We kept it real throughout this process. We really were honest with each other about what was working, what wasn't, whether that was about a design element, or about a way in which we were giving each other feedback, or whatever it was. And that to me is that human element of collaboration was what ultimately really led to a great deal of success. And I think that now Champions can't get rid of us. So <laugh>, there's, there's always, there's always room for, you know, creative connections and collaboration. I think there's a lot of enthusiasm across the Hall, not just within the marketing team, but for the work that's been done and appreciation for this relationship that we have, because not only was the Champions team listening and engaging with the marketing team, they literally engaged across the entire institution. And we have a big staff. Carnegie Hall is a complex, nonprofit organization, with both business-driven objectives, as well as mission-driven objectives across these areas. Some of those are really high profile and really visible. Others are really only speaking directly to participants of programs that we have. That's what brings up 2,000 pieces a year. 2,000 pieces a year doesn't even cover the digital landscape, just to say, that is rooted in print and other materials. And this small team that we have miraculously gets all of that done, year over year. It's a pretty amazing feat unto itself. Their production schedule is a work of art if I've ever seen one.

BRYONY Yeah, it's like you would expect to have two or three floors of designers, and marketers, and everybody working—.

SARA It's true.

BRYONY —24/7 for that amount of work.

SARA The crazy part was, I think it was Bobby who pointed out to me, he said to me: are you even aware of the volume of work that your team is doing? I'm paraphrasing. I don't think you said it to me exactly in that way, but really I had just kind of a Eureka moment at some point in the process where I thought, gosh, this team is just delivering at such an incredibly high level, with all kinds of objectives being thrown at them all over the place. Which really speaks to the success of the system because it needed to work within that framework. We don't have the big resources some corporations might have. This team needed to be able to execute and utilize a system in a way that can meet all of these competing needs and demands as they came to be.

BOBBY I'll say that we approach a lot of this, I think a little bit differently than in a lot of times we had before, where we set up a whole system of back and forth, and what we call testing phase. So we kind of brought in a whole phase where we tested, because we now knew when our launch date was, so we had a few more months to be able to get it right. And so what we wanted to do is then work on the actual materials that fall into the over 2,000 pieces and see how the system needed to be more flexible, or be more constricted. And so what we were able to do is have these weekly sessions with the different designers. And they were sharing the work that they were working on, we would give feedback, we would do some of things that we were working on, they would give feedback. And so there was this back and forth. It was great because now that the brand is out there in the world, you see all these materials and it's just so inspiring. And it's so exciting to see things that you never would've considered. 'Cause that's the thing is a brand is a living organism. What Carnegie Hall now has when you go to the building is they have what they call a sidewalk. What is it called? A sidewalk shelter?

SARA Bridge. Sidewalk bridge.

BOBBY Basically the scaffolding outside. But it's wrapped in the brand language. And it has red beams, most beautiful one that you've ever seen, but you never would've imagined that six months ago, even. To be able to have a system where you could build something like a scaffolding outside, to all of the different print materials inside was something that had to really be kind of taken on by the internal team, and internalized by the design team in a way that they could then think about how they could articulate this brand in so many fresh ways. And that's what I got really excited about in working with the design team, and the creative team, and the editors. Everybody was so helpful in making this happen.

BRYONY And can you talk a little bit more about the photography, the color palette, the supporting typography, what those choices ended up meaning to the brand?

BOBBY So I'll touch on typography a little bit. What we try to do is pair down the amount of typefaces that the team worked with because they're creating so many different pieces. They didn't have to also then cycle through their type palette and figure out which is the best one for that. We worked with them to provide a serif typeface, Fournier, that has a lot of that beautiful classic feel. And then a sans serif typeface, Cadiz that has really a more contemporary, warm feel. The whole point is in contrast to each other, they help share the breadth of what Carnegie Hall does. You could have something that's speaking to a classical concert and something that's speaking to a hip-hop masterclass. And then at the same time you were having these typefaces that work in contrast to the wordmark and the monogram. So we needed something that didn't compete, but then helped the wordmark and the monogram to really stand strong.

So those were the choices for the type. In the case study you can see there's an interesting relationship between some of the letter forms in the serif and the sans serif, like the "W" for instance, has this really beautiful classic cut to it that is both in the sans serif and the

serif.—it has the same unique “W” and as well as a couple other letter forms. So those were some of the things that we loved about that. And our Design Director, Michael McCaughley, went through a ton of different references to get the right family for the system. And then for color, there were two key approaches that we needed to think about for color. The first was just the Carnegie Hall Red is so recognizable, it’s been part of Carnegie Hall for so many years, so we knew that wasn’t going anywhere. The red also is a color that’s used for many different brands. We knew that we needed to expand the color palette a little bit. And while we were sitting in the archive, there’s this pre-seated bench behind the archive table. And we learned the history of that bench was the original color of the seats in Stern Auditorium. So we call it a rose. It was like this rosy velvet, this beautiful color. And so I was a little bit obsessed of figuring out how we could bring this color into the mix. That color with the Carnegie Hall Red just really opened up a new palette that was fresh, and fun, and exciting. Then we had a little bit more traditional color, which is a blue that was still, I think, inspired by the windows and some other places in Carnegie Hall. Together, now Carnegie Hall has a core pallet of the Carnegie Red, the Carnegie Blue, and Carnegie Hall Rose.

But then the big strategy that needed to be figured out is... a year-long season for Carnegie Hall starts in October and then goes through almost a full year. However, Carnegie Hall launches a new season while the previous season is still in action. What we had to figure out is how do you signify to the public that there’s a new exciting season upon us, to be able to subscribe to new concerts and buy tickets and that type of thing, while at the same time, still go to the exciting season that is happening at the moment. With the Carnegie Hall Red, then we were able to introduce a season color that the marketing and creative services team would pick, that would be inspired by maybe the theme of that season, or something that’s in contrast to the previous season, or just the color that’s just right.

There’s a lot of back and forth around color. As you can imagine,

color can be one of the most vocalized and polarizing things in a project. That gives the team the ability to think about the season in conjunction with the artistic department within Carnegie Hall. And then from there, figure out a way to differentiate one season from another. So that was the big strategy there. And then the internal team, Bernie and his team, came up with this beautiful luscious plum color that works in nice contrast with the Carnegie Red for this current season. So for the 21–22 season, it's this beautiful plum with red. The introduction of this new color strategy. Sara, anything you wanna add to that?

SARA I mean, I think we had dabbled in the past with the idea of a seasoned color as a device, but really hadn't honed in on it in the way we did as part of the work together. And it's been really embraced across the institution because it's a way to differentiate each season from the one prior. It's an exciting choice. It's another opportunity for us to tell a story. All of the things that Bobby just shared really get at the stories, and as a marketer and a content creator, I just, you know, I live for this stuff. Is how do we tell the story? The reason behind our decisions? How do we engage people on all of that? The season color is just yet another opportunity to do that, and it's one that our colleagues get excited about joining us for that process. Clive always says that we're aspiring always to do better than what we did before. This is yet another way we continue to evolve Carnegie Hall artistically, as we move forward and innovate from a programming perspective.

BRYONY Two and a half years from that first question to actually launching the brand is a very long time to be entrenched in this whole process. I'm curious to know if there was a particular aspect, or moment, or decisive little thing that sprung your excitement and just made it all click for you.

BOBBY There are a lot of different moments, really kinda iconic moments over the course of this project, because there was the set timeline, and then we were thrown the curveball of the pandemic. And at one point I think, think you would say, oh, well, we're not gonna launch now.

What are we gonna do? And it was a little bit of a, oh, okay, well, how is this gonna happen? But I think what ended up happening for us is during the pandemic when things were so tough for everybody, that was also a time when we were able to build out and test and refine the system. And the ultimate most exciting moment for us, and maybe this is the same for Sara and her team is that launch moment. It's not just the launch of the brand, but this is the launch of the new season.

And it was the launch of the reopening of Carnegie Hall. This was probably around Memorial day and <laugh>, I remember Sara, and her team, and me, and my team, we were sending emails back and forth like four in the morning, five in the morning that last week, but it was just so exhilarating and thrilling. And then to actually see it out in the world was just very, very exciting, especially for our team where we were now working remotely. So we were all over the country, really. And to see it out there in the world, and accepted, and people getting excited about it. There were two moments. I'll just add. The same artist, Yuja Wang, once everything went live, she immediately tweeted about it. So you could see the new logo, the new system in play in her tweet, and she was excited about the new season. And then just a couple of weeks ago at the opening, she had the "CH" monogram drawn on her arm as she was doing her thing. And when you say Yuja Wang doing her thing, I mean, she does her thing. And the whole time she has the logo on her arm in front of the first audience, that's been to Carnegie Hall in over a year. And that was such an awesome moment. I can't remember any other moment in brands, in the world of branding where I've seen something as exciting as that.

BRYONY So it keeps defying the rules. Huh?

BOBBY Totally.

SARA That's a good one Bobby, that's one of my favorite moments too. And I think for me, as someone who's responsible for... in my business and this line of work that we do... year over year, need to reinvent ourselves. And there's this moment in the process of putting together

a new season, and getting ready to unveil that to the public where behind the scenes, we're going through this process of developing these materials. For me, we had gone through all of this time together working on the system, and doing all this testing, but it wasn't yet the real thing. When the artistic team had finally nailed down on all the programming, when we had finally decided after going through this pandemic moment, this awful closure for Carnegie—the longest in Carnegie Hall's history—it was 19 months, which is crazy. Bernie and the team started to show me the mock ups. And when I tell you that I got emotional about mockups, I got emotional about mockups. I mean, they came into my office, they put them up on the board. And at that point we might have even still been virtual. Some of this was all online, <laugh> it didn't even matter. I just thought, wow, this is gonna knock the socks off of everybody who sees it. And I think we're sharing Carnegie Hall with the world in a way that hasn't been done before. It really hit me. It's the little things, like, as Bobby said, seeing it on the scaffolding outside the building. Hey, I never thought I'd be thrilled about seeing scaffolding outside of our beautiful historic hall, which by the way, we're restoring that historic facade, which is why it's there right now. But that expression of the brand, I think the scaffolding got me a little emotional too.

SARA Whoever thought that scaffolding would make it anyone feel emotional in New York City.

BOBBY Yeah.

SARA Ever <laugh>. But actually, again, it was, Bernie's incredible concept to wrap our mission around the exterior of the building. So when you walk up from any angle, from any block to that historic corner of 57th and 7th, you literally read our mission wrapping around the building. And I couldn't think of better way to capture this historic moment of Carnegie Hall reopening after a 19-month closure. Just to say, this is why we're here. We're back. We're here to share it with you. And welcome back. That moment for me was just, blew me away along

with the lipsticked monogram on Yuja's arm, which I think we're gonna make some temporary tattoos of, so stay tuned.

BOBBY <laugh> I love that.

SARA Maybe you'll see those in the shop or you might have to know somebody to get one. We'll see. <Laugh>

BOBBY Seeing it come to life is so special and it's also live music. Those two things together—there's nothing like it.

BRYONY So I just have one last question for you, Bobby. You went into the archives and sifted through 300,000 pieces and had a 3-hour tour of the facilities, but I'm sure you went back more than once. I wanna know how many pictures of Carnegie Hall are in the hard drives of Champions Design.

BOBBY Well, you know, the problem is we also took these pictures in raw. <laughter>. So they're massive files <laugh> we definitely have folders and folders. And during the pandemic, we switched from a classic server, a big, hard drive server to a virtual server, which helped. Then on top of that, the Carnegie Hall has an incredible digital library, too. They have tons and tons of photographs that we have access to, which has been awesome.

BRYONY But I know designers to be very snap-happy when doing research and getting excited about things.

BOBBY I think I have like thousands of pictures on my phone. <laugh>

BRYONY Well, thank you so much for providing so much insightful information, and for sharing the very long, but very rewarding process that definitely put your brand with your feet on the ground, and eyes on the stars. And a bright, bright future ahead, as you continue to evolve all of these pieces with your fantastic team, Sara, who definitely is put through the ringer, but seems excited, and very much looking forward to seeing where this brand will take them in the next year, three years, five years, and so on and so forth.

BOBBY Thank you.

SARA Thank you so much for having us.

ARMIN Giving a new visual voice to a storied institution like Carnegie Hall is no easy task as this conversation has demonstrated. What made it work was the open collaboration between design firm and client and an understanding from both parties that stepping out of their respective comfort zones would be necessary. It was clearly worth it, though, as — I don't know about you but at least for me — I got goosebumps as Bobby and Sara shared their excitement around the brand launch. So how does one get to Carnegie Hall? Aside from “practice, practice, practice” as the old joke goes you can also get there by following the new wordmark, monogram, and comprehensive identity that make Carnegie Hall easier and more exciting to find than ever before.

Today, thanks for listening. Until next week, we'll be here, we hope you'll be there.