Background:

Founded in 2007 by a group of 17 musicians looking for something new, A Far Cry is one of the Boston area’s newest successful musical ventures. A self-conducted string orchestra, the group “explores the traditional boundaries of classical music, experimenting with the ways it is prepared, performed and experience.” Rotating leadership and democratic decision making encourage a richer, more authentic process and product.

Each new season adds additional performances and opportunities. With a rehearsal and performance space in Jamaica Plain, just southwest of Boston, the group is committed to fostering connection to and dialogue with that community. Other Boston-area partners include the New England Conservatory, the alma mater of many of the “Criers”, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, where the ensemble has been named Chamber Orchestra in Residence, and several Boston-area schools. The group has been on the road for much of the 2010-2011 season and will expand its touring scope to Europe in 2011-2012.
Overview:

For such a vibrant, enthusiastic group, one would expect an equally vibrant, enthusiastic web presence. While the home page’s main graphic is very aesthetically pleasing, and the group photos lively and engaging, one loses sense of that energy very quickly. Also, the navigation is unfortunately neither logical nor consistent, so while I was able to find everything I was looking for, I felt that the content was not totally thought out and also a bit out of date.

Navigation/Content:

When people go to the NY Philharmonic’s website, they probably are looking first for a concert schedule and ticket information. When people go to A Far Cry’s, because the group is so new, they may first need to know who they are. I would have liked to see more “about” information immediately available, rather than buried in the top navigation (I even missed it the first time!). I know NEC has been an important part of their existence so far, but is it really at this time more important than who they are or the music they are making?

Sub-navigation is inconsistent. Most of the time the main navigation area (“get involved”, for example) is just listed on the left side; other times, however, in that spot “currently browsing” appears (for example “a new series of AFC videos, link from the home page”).

Many pages have too much text. The “concerts” page continues far too long and doesn’t have anything to clearly break up the data. The information in the top navigation is different than that in their home page graphic (“on the road” etc). The “concerts” page is totally different than both the “on the road” and “celestial rite” pages, and the Gardner Museum is not represented at all in the main nav.

Finally, Facebook has been an important component of AFC’s audience and fan communication, but I do not find a link on the website to that Facebook profile!
Design:

Some of the previous comments apply also to design, but all in all, the website is a little bland. I know one wants to be consistent with color use, but all the black and grey at the top, combined with the grey text, makes the site feel kind of stale. I appreciate having the names of all the Criers available on most pages on the left side, but it gets confusing when one is on other pages (for example when one is on the “get involved” page, the list of names is still there but unrelated to the page’s main content).

Prescription:

I recognize time is more than likely an issue, since the website is maintained by one of the musicians, BUT the content on this site really does need to be always as up-to-date as possible.

Make the home page especially more eye catching (color? video? à la Orpheus, for example: http://www.orpheusnyc.com/about.html) and primary navigation clearer, more consistent and more relevant to the group’s priorities. The group’s passions for music and education are not lost, but the site does not make me want to stand up and cry with them: “Music matters!”