

# Organizing Traditional Dances

## Getting Started

- assess your motivation - do you want to make money? (Think again!) Do you want to enhance the local community by offering something they don't already have? (Great!)
- think carefully about your audience -- who they are, where located, age group, dance interests, etc.
- solicit advice from experienced dance organizers
- get support from other local dance groups, organizations and musicians. Do you want to go it alone or become part of an existing organization? An argument for the latter is that your personal assets are not jeopardized, and the affiliation may offer a hall, insurance, equipment, a publicity outlet, clientele, etc.
- be conservative – limit financial risk (shorter season), keep costs low. The exception to this rule is the first dance. It may be worth spending a little more money on the caller and band for the first dance to attract attention.
- advertise like crazy

## Promotion/Advertising/Communication

- tailor your advertising to reach your target audience -- who are they, where are they?
- flyers, email list, web page, contact phone# and email, web page, photos, video
- local newspapers, entertainment papers, calendar listing, DanceFlurry Organization Dance Calendar (for NY Capital Region only)
- distribute flyers to other dance series
- special flyers for special dances
- build an email list from attendees – email reminder Monday, the week of the dance
- laundromat & grocery store/coop bulletin boards ... bulletin boards on school campuses ... music stores
- make a list of poster/flyer drop-off locations -- get volunteers or a paid person to make the rounds on a scheduled basis

## Booking Bands

- try to book the bands and callers for the whole season at once – then only need to do one version of the flyer and one communication to others, don't need to constantly update web page and other people
- if possible, try to put together a local band – saves money on travel expenses and is better for the environment; fosters the development of local musicians

- When starting out, you may want to consider "making a splash" instead of doing a low-rent slide-into-town-under-the-radar type of event. This may mean going into the hole to get some attractive performers that people from miles around may want to travel to enjoy. Think of it as an investment in the future.
- figure out a consistent/fair pay scale for bands ... it's ok to pay extra for sound system & travel

### **Booking Callers**

- book callers that are well-prepared, popular with most dancers and beginner-friendly; they need to have the ability to improvise on the spot if their dance program needs adjustment
- advise callers and bands on local traditions – e.g. beginner lesson at start, one dance for “those who know”, waltzes before break and after last dance, etc.
- be honest and forthcoming with all talent about how much they are going to be paid
- keep a log of what was called at each dance and make that available to subsequent callers

### **General Admin**

- make a list of contact phone numbers and email addresses (with consent, obviously) for all the local callers, musicians, dance organizers and programmers, as well as phone numbers for the halls and/or cell numbers for the managers, and distribute that to everyone who's on that list, but only those folks; it really helps things along if you're able to contact the other folks you're booked with (since you often haven't worked with them before), or to be able to call the managers to tell them you're stuck in traffic but will be there in 20 minutes. Keep the list updated, since email addresses change often. It's a really handy thing to have.
- in case of a last minute cancellation (due to bad weather, etc.), keep a list of email addresses and phone numbers of regular attendees. Make the cancellation decision early enough (24 hours ahead if possible) so there is ample time to inform the regular attendees.

### **Insurance**

- make sure you have insurance to cover your liability for dancer injuries and hall damage
- you can obtain dancer insurance through CDSS.(cdss.org)

### **Managing the Dancers**

- try to make sure everyone feels welcome and has a good time
- provide the social grease - introduce beginners and newcomers to more experienced dancers
- take steps to avoid center set syndrome – where experienced dancers dominate the center set
- encourage mixers, social mixing and changing partners
- make sure hall bathrooms have adequate soap and towels for the whole evening
- make provisions for hall cleanup before/after your event

- name tags are another helpful way to get people feeling comfortable faster than they otherwise might.
- try very hard to talk to all the new folks and get them paired with experienced partners right off the bat
- for new folks who don't know the traditions, let them know (1) any person can ask any other person to dance; (2) we encourage frequent partner changes
- encourage beginners to dance with more experienced dancers - they will become better dancers faster
- encourage experienced dancers to dance with beginners - they may even wear a 'dance angel' button indicating that beginner dancers are welcome to ask them to dance.
- encourage car-pooling to dances; saves money on travel expenses, good for the environment and encourages people to feel part of a dance community

### **Sound**

- consider how you'll handle the sound system (& piano, if available) for your event -- who will bring, set up, take down, store between dances, etc.
- consider acoustics of hall - if the hall is small or the natural acoustics are good you may be able to get by with just miking the caller. Amplification without a good sound person can result in sound that is much worse than no amplification at all.

### **Volunteers/Community Involvement**

- solicit attendees for volunteer jobs – managing admission, doing sound, refreshments, cleaning up, etc.

### **Provide Water & Refreshments**

- make sure dancers have easy access to drinking water
- involve dance participants in helping provide and pay for refreshments; either a potluck before the dance or snacks during the break. It gives folks something to socialize over and to volunteer for.

### **Feedback**

- solicit oral and/or written feedback from your dancers, musicians and callers on how the dances can be improved