

**Dance Organizers Dinner and Discussion, December 6, 2007**  
**Sponsored by the DanceFlurry Organization**

**Discussion Points**

Brunswick Contra, Gail Griffith, 674-3052, geg@taconic.net

Best Practice: We keep it simple so that it's beginner-friendly

Major Issue: # of dancers

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Cambridge Contra Dance, Fern Bradley, dancingfern@verizon.net; ph: 518-677-5853

Best Practice: 1. handing out "second dance free passes" to people the first time they attend our dance series, and  
2. dance committee members making a conscious commitment to asking newcomers to dance, especially the first few dances of the evening.

Major issue: Our dance series is so young that we don't have any major issues yet. We are wondering whether our format (1 hr. family-friendly dancing; 2 hr beginning contra/square/other dance) will find a following that is sizable enough to support the dance for the long term.

Other topics we could focus on: \* Best methods for publicizing dances.

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Capital English Country Dancers (East Greenbush Dance), Marilee Urbanczyk, MURBANCZ@mail.nysed.gov

Best practice: The google group email notification system I use to update dancers on our monthly dances (which Don helped develop and implement).

Major issue: Spreading the word, getting new people interested in English Dance and inspired enough to keep coming back - especially young people!!

Other topics: Concerns about rising gasoline costs effecting dancer participation negatively, as well as callers and musicians who must travel a long distance - costs of running dance series will only grow larger, not decrease!!

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Rensselaer (RPI) English Country Dance, Don Bell, [donbell@nycap.rr.com](mailto:donbell@nycap.rr.com), 518-273-5172

Best Practice: Keeping costs low. Lucky to have free venue and local house band willing to play for whatever we can afford to pay them. Another best practice: combining email lists with other local ECD groups to make one comprehensive email list. We use a free Google group email list service which makes it easy to manage and send emails.

Issue: Attracting/retaining new dancers.

Capital Scandia; Tuesday night International Folk Dance , Joan Savitt, H:18-489-7996; W: 518-591-8177

Best Practice: explaining how the music and the dancing go together, i.e., making learners/dancers aware of what part of the music the experienced dancers are responding to

Major Issue: >EXTINCTION!!! It would be great if there were some way the DFO could help us arrange a beginners' series in Scandinavian.

Capital Swing Dance, Heather Coleman-Ibrahim, hlcoleman2002@yahoo.com; & Mike Ibrahim, mikeib\_2006@yahoo.com

Best practice(s): 1. Bringing the best talent (bands, teaching, etc). Affordable admission prices with good discounts for students & members

2. Having paperwork organized because it affects the overall flow of the event.

3. Making sure the event runs or "flows" smoothly so you don't have energy dips or "empty" times during the event when guests get bored & want to leave. Example: have a great DJ or performance arranged during band breaks, etc. During a weekend-long event, allow plenty of time for meal breaks, sleeping, etc. This may sound like common sense, but if you have an event that goes to 4am, don't start your morning workshops before 11am or 12pm!

Major issue: Deficits-- Most months we find it difficult to meet costs, much less make a profit. We would love to increase attendance to improve this, and are in the process of changing venues in the hopes that it will help. We would welcome any other ideas.

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Glens Falls Contra , Bill Schwarz, 518-793-2781, [bschwarz@nycap.rr.com](mailto:bschwarz@nycap.rr.com)

Best Practice: Personal contact by phone or visit to venues where you want to post flyers. You may have to explain the concept of contra or other type of dance, but librarians and store employees are usually receptive.

Other topics: Should we have a set pay rate for all DFO contra dances, outside of the festival, for callers and band members? Just wondering.

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Hudson Valley Community Dances (Contra, Swing, Cajun, Zydeco, English Country, International Folk). Ed Berkel, edberkel@verizon.net; Bena Silber, benasilber@verizon.net; John Pagliarulo, jpagliarulo@hvc.rr.com; Susan Deane Miller, susiemuse@verizon.net  
Phone: 845-454-2571

Best practice(s): 6-7 dances almost every month within an organization of volunteers meeting infrequently; decentralized structure for our organization has worked well for us.

- possible best practice: at swing dance to recorded music volunteer DJ's alternated 3 songs east coast/lindy and 3 songs west coast.

Major issues: Low attendance by new, young dancers at contra; low attendance at contra.

-- Difficulty meeting conflicting music preferred by Lindy or West Coast fans; our dance has always been attended by east coast dancers, west coast dancers and lindy hoppers; In order to continue our live music dances in their current format, we need to hold together all 3 parts of the group.

--High rent for dance spaces.

Other topics we could focus on: Need a light weight sound system for 2500 sq ft. for dj'ing

- Need trained volunteers to do sound for some bands

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Lenox Contra Dance, Jon Greene, [greene@mc.com](mailto:greene@mc.com) and Steve Moore, [stevmoor@mac.com](mailto:stevmoor@mac.com)

#### Best Practice

Our best practice is the functioning of our organizing committee. We (six of us) each have well defined roles suited to our skills and interests, we meet bi-monthly with a well developed agenda, and we have common core values about what we would like to achieve, i.e. an engaging and rewarding dance and social experience, "growing" (enhancing both the number of dancers and skillfulness) the dance, and maintaining financial stability to be able to continue the dance.

#### Major Issue

Our major issue is one comprised of several smaller (by themselves) issues. Money. Our hall rental is increasing; our cash flow is positive in fall-winter, and negative in summer; we would like to pay performers better, and we are entertaining owning our own sound system. We are addressing these issue through trying to draw more people to the dance, creating more formal tracking of cash flow, and pursuing small grants and fund raising for specific purposes (e.g. the Welcome dance and potential sound system).

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Saratoga Contradance (in Ballston Spa), Rich Futyma, 885-4430, [rfutyma@verizon.net](mailto:rfutyma@verizon.net)

Best Practices: I am of the opinion that you can't get too much publicity, so for each dance, I send out nearly 50 notices to various media outlets, mainly newspapers (daily, weekly, and monthly) and radio stations. Most are in the form of postcards with a brief announcement (see attachment for an example), but some are e-mails in essentially the same format. I print the postcards on 4" by 6" plain index cards on my computer printer; postage is \$0.26 per card. It pays to learn the format preferred by the publication. For example, my local weekly (The Ballston Journal) and the Pennysaver won't publish it if sent in the postcard format, but will publish it if written in the form of a news article (see attached). If the publication has a specific format for its event listings (e.g., the Times-Union's Preview section), it pays to emulate that format. Also, be sure to find out their publication deadlines. A monthly publication generally needs the copy by the middle of the month before the publication comes out.

Unfortunately, I can't check all the publications to which I send the announcements to verify that they get published, or listen to all the radio stations to see whether they get air time, but I figure that the effort and cost is relatively low. Seeing as we always have newcomers at our dances, they are seeing the announcements somewhere.

Major issue: I cannot say that there are any major issues that we are confronting. If anything, the one major issue is the same for all dances: attracting and retaining new dancers. The attracting part is addressed above, although I am sure that many other ways exist to attract people. The retaining part has more to do with creating a friendly ambiance and good programming.

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Saratoga Savoy, Dave Wolf, [dance@saratogasavoy.com](mailto:dance@saratogasavoy.com), Studio 518-587-5132; Cell 518-859-2885

I generally teach social dances, including, Argentine Tango, swing, lindy hop, salsa, polka, merengue, waltz, - heck, if it has a partner, I pretty much teach it.

Best Practice: a. Crowd control is essential. If there are a lot of people in a smaller room, consider being in the middle and having the inner circle of people sit down to observe instruction. This way more people can see. Also, if you rotate the circles, it is more fair.

b. We are in the 21st century, lets remember that not every man is a leader, and not ever woman is a follower. When these dances are taught, use leader or follower, and keep gender stereotypes out of dance. It is as simple as learning to change your terms, but means a lot to those who do not appreciate these stereotypes.

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*Saratoga Savoy, Dave Wolf continued*

Major issue: Depending on the room, I never know what the sound equipment is. I have an ipod and connection cables - and have a speaker system in my car's trunk ready for any emergencies - as well as camping lights (yes, I could have even taught the Friday night without power!) But I would rather not have to lug all this equipment.

Is there an easy way for me to know in advance if I need to bring a CD, Ipod, cables, speaker system etc. Of course, when there is a band, it is great. It is just those 101 sessions that can be a play on one's nerves as you have to discover what is there at the moment of instruction.

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Name: Margherita Davis Phone: 518-828-6181 margheritad@hotmail.com

Dance Series: Columbia County Country Dancers (aka Stockport)

1. At least one example of what you consider a best practice that might be helpful to others.

The hiring of experienced, skilled English callers who mostly have been hitherto unknown to the local dance community. Some of them have been so well-liked, that they have been hired for other local series. (NB: There has been an added cost for this, which has been absorbed by the organizers.)

2. A major issue you are confronting at the moment related to your dance series.

When our dance series started, there were no other venues in the time we were operational (daylight savings months), and we had great attendance. However, other series & events started being scheduled. This caused people to have more choices resulting in a decrease in attendance, esp. since we were further from homes of people who normally attended. Since we had higher costs (bringing in more famed talent, and striving to pay musicians a decent fee) this was sorely felt in our series. It is my experience that there are a finite number of people who are interested in ECD, so consolidation might make the whole stronger. By that, I mean it is more fun to dance with a group of 40-50 people, than having 25 at one dance, then 20 at another. Larger groups are also easier to manage, since there are more experienced dancers available to help the less skilled, leading to fewer set breakdowns.

3. Other topics you would like to discuss.

I am sad to report that the Stockport series will be ending; my husband & I are planning a move out of the area. We have polled a few locals and they do not want to take on the leadership of the series, so it will fold. It's probably not a great loss to the general community, since there are now other dances and, despite great publicity and tireless efforts, I have not been able to get enough of a critical mass of folks in the immediate area to take it up.