

NOTES FROM THE 2024 DANCE FLURRY ORGANIZERS DISCUSSION

Questions? Email the facilitator – Emily Addison (EmilyLAddison@gmail.com)

The 2024 Dance Flurry included an organizers discussion midday on Sunday. Originally scheduled for 1.5 hours, there was some confusion in the printed schedule as to when the session was to start. Therefore, a handful of organizers chatted for the first half hour and then there was a much larger discussion (approximately 25 organizers) for the last hour.

ONE THING THAT GETS YOU EXCITING ABOUT ORGANIZING DANCES

We started the session by going around the room, mentioning one thing that gets us excited about organizing dances.

- Patty Giavara (Montpelier): Being able to compensate sound, musicians, callers well.
- Marsha Webster (Greenfield): Welcoming, introducing new people, being together.
- Patricia Maxwell (Rochester NH): Community of people to dance and hang out with - having some place to go to and making that happen.
- Vic White (Yukon College): Introducing new people to contra, especially if they say they don't dance.
- Alice (Surrey Maine): Instilling a culture of dance in my small town.
- Michele (Beckhook NY): Excited to bring contra back to local community. Also excited about collaborating with local pride organization to bring more gender neutral calling to upstate NY.
- Jeff (Fishtail? NY): Getting new dancers excited about contra. Making sure everyone has a good time.
- Kristin (Brooklyn NY): Researching new ideas to try at their dance and figuring out how to do them. Building community.
- Joe (Brooklyn NY): Building partnerships. Dances in a local park.
- Paul Rosenberg (Albany NY): Introducing community dance to people/families/non-dancers.
- Kevin Music (Albany NY): Supporting and growing the dance community. Enjoy the problem solving and logistics. Making it happen.
- Emily Addison (Ottawa ON): Love that what we're doing helps to make the world a more caring place.

(There were approximately 10 other organizers that showed up after introductions. Their names and communities weren't captured.)

DISCUSSION AROUND CRAFTING THE FEEL OF DANCE EVENTS

Emily asked participants to consider the following statement and to talk in pairs about actions that could help instill items 1/2/3, noting that they may not overlap.

Some dances feel...

1 warm/community focused

2 welcoming to new (who?) people

3 vibrant & 'happening'

Organizer vision and actions impact this...discuss!

Participants switched partners three times and then we came together to share a bit about what was discussed.

Participant thoughts regarding the idea of community:

- Having a vibrant dance is potentially in contrast to being welcome to new people.
- Different things can make the dance feel vibrant/happening to different people.
- Community can mean people who share similarities. Do new people need to fit that?
- Is community even a useful word?
- Coming from a small town and involved in pride events within that town, community can mean many different things. The focus of their new dance series is to bring their local geographic community together under the umbrella of dance (i.e., people of different organizations/affiliations). Amplify connections and mutual humanity. "That is the community pitch. We are all people of this town and we can come together."
- Similar experience in a small town in the rocky mountains. Community of many different religious organizations. Their dance organization is trying to bring all these people together.
- There can be smaller communities within the same dance. How about those little communities mixing?

- At one organizer's rainbow dance, they feel it's important to have younger and older dancers mixing and so they are focusing on the intergenerational piece of their community.
- Community can be making the dance work and folks having fun.

Participant ideas on creating the sense of community:

- As dancers, we focus on whether the dance was great. For new people, so much of their experience is not on the dance floor – it's around the dance floor.
- Try putting background music on before the dance (e.g., at concerts, there's music playing before the concert itself begins). Having background music can make people feel more comfortable if they don't have someone to talk to – it's something to focus on and they are not just sitting in silence. Different view... if playing music before/after then the live music doesn't feel as special than when there is no music playing and the band starts up.
- Don't rush people to leave after the dancing finishes. Encourage people to socialize for 20min (still snacks!) before starting to clean up the hall.
- Using Larks and Robins can make a big difference. Bringing younger people in and feeling included. Different view... at the same time, there are other dance communities who aren't as keen on gender neutral terms.
- It's hard to have a conversation during the dance. Go out for drinks after the dance – like going for coffee after attending church. It's an important part of building community connection.
- Some people find it very hard to do spontaneous socializing. Helpful when there's some structure to it. Maybe there are other things that can happen like helping with setting up.
- It is helpful to have something to do during the break other than talking to people that you know. Have volunteers who look around for people who are sitting on their own and engage with them. ID'ing those volunteers can happen dance to dance and this can be a role for building organizers.
- Part of being welcoming is keeping people engaged before, during, and after the dance. Beginner lesson, pairing folks. During the break, approach if people are on their own. Check in after to see whether they had a good time.
- Heard from someone that had attended one dance years ago and no one talked to them - don't want to see that.
- In focusing on the beginner folk, don't want to neglect the intermediate beginners. Agreement... weird that we have a 30min beginner lesson and dancers learn everything else on their own.

IDENTIFYING TOPICS OF INTEREST

Emily posted a number of topics of possible interest to the dance organizers. (The ideas came from past organizer survey and facilitation work.) Participants went around the room and starred their top topics of interest. There was also space to add other topics.

Topics	# of stars
VOLUNTEERS	
# of organizers	1
Need certain skills in organizing team	3
Mode of committee ??? (someone added this)	1
Committee meetings and communications	4
# of day-of volunteers	0
Managing day-of volunteers	0
Interpersonal issues among volunteers	4
Engaging 'youth' in volunteering	3
DANCERS	
Getting new people in the door	2
Converting first time dancers to regulars	5
Dancer ability – skills	4
Dancer ability – aging/mobility/disability inclusion	1
Engaging 'youth' in dancing	2
Engaging regulars (come back often, deeper involvement, too dumbed down for experienced, skill improvement ceiling)	6
Interpersonal issues with dancers / Safety	5
TALENT	
Getting more callers	0
Caller skills	1
Interpersonal issues with callers	0
Getting more musicians	1
Musician skills	1
Interpersonal issues with musicians	4
Sound equipment	1
Sound engineers	3
\$\$\$ (and hall!)	
How much to charge at admission? Admission structures?	3
Membership	1
Fundraising	2
Alternative sources of revenue	7
Pay for callers/musicians	5
Pay for sound	4
Insurance	0
Hall cost	0
Hall – location/lighting/etc	3
OTHER TOPICS ADDED BY PARTICPANTS	
How to deal controversial issues	3
Polarization with gender terminology	1
Is your dance a non-profit?	1
Balancing jobs of organizers	1
What do we (organizers) need?	3
Organizers role in the contra "ecosystem" – the talent we bring	1
How to start organizing without the structures already in place	1

SHARING IDEAS FOR POPULAR TOPICS

We spent the rest of the session sharing ideas on how to address some of the topics with the most stars. (In some cases, I've identified the organizers who shared ideas in case participants want to follow up.)

Alternative sources of revenue:

- Brooklyn Contra – can write grants. Have city and state grants.
- Use CDSS for non-profit status – very easy to get through them.
- Cities will sometimes pay for groups to hold a dance. Or a larger community non-profit.
- Business sponsorship – talk to restaurants open after the dance (logo on flyer)
- Individuals can sponsor a dance – donate \$500 for a dance and then acknowledge that (e.g., celebrate birthday)
- CDNY used to (not sure if still do) have a great year end fundraising appeal for donations. Belfast Flying Shoes holds a really great annual appeal as well.

Interpersonal issues among organizers and between organizers and talent:

- Great webinar from CDSS on conflict among organizers. [Video available here.](#)
- Ottawa Contra used to communicate with bands/callers ahead of their gigs. They would say -we really appreciate feedback on our dance/organizing so let us know. And proactively, we like providing feedback to talent so let us know ahead of time if you are NOT open to feedback. This meant that before the event happened, we had the door open to providing feedback. We didn't always follow up but we could.
- Brooklyn Contra: Normalizing professionalism. Treat it like a job. Don't be a jerk. Wrote a code for their Board members. Agreement among volunteers that will treat each other a certain way.
- Montpelier organizing committee uses consensus decision making. Things might happen more slowly but everyone has a voice. Sometimes committee members may have differing opinions, but everyone agrees to support the direction.
- Make sure decisions are written down in minutes, reviewed by committee members.

Converting first time dancers to regulars:

- Some people find it SO scary the first time attending a public dance. Be aware.
- Find them, talk to them, look friendly.
- Brooklyn: Come twice, get in free third time on a business card. Stamp them. Like a little latte card for contra. Ottawa Contra did second time free cards but third seems like a neat idea. Three times get hooked.
- Think about how address dancers who demonstrate off-putting behaviour (e.g., changing sweaty shirts on side of dance floor). (This is behaviour that doesn't violate a code of conduct but would be uncomfortable for new people.)

Engaging regular dancers:

- (Brooklyn) Monthly membership program. Have special events for them (e.g., volunteer and member event where share yearly goals). Give discounts on admission that correspond to the level. Stickers.
- Double dance events where the afternoon event could be skill building or experienced dance.
- Hiring a diversity of callers or bands that excite the regular dancers.
- Create an ambassador program can create a sense of ownership among regulars.

Interpersonal challenges with dancers / safety:

- Proactive safety policy. Post publicly.
- Organizers need to be prepared to intervene. Protocol to deal with that.
- After the third dance in an evening, stop for a moment to talk about consent + point out the safety reps wearing red badges. Can post the face/names of these folks.
- Have safety folks separate from the organizers.

DISCUSSION ITEMS BEFORE THE SESSION STARTED

As mentioned above, there was a bit of confusion on when the session started. Below are topics that were discussed by a handful of organizers before the formal session began.

Re differing views in communities:

- Being an organizer can be so weighty given current contentious issues (e.g., role terms; masking; safety).
- Fascinating how different dance communities/organizers can have widely different views on topics (e.g., masking) depending on who is involved and their knowledge of the wider scene.

Potlucks:

- Potlucks can be amazing for community building.
- Someone unrelated to the main dance organizing can look after the potlucks.
- Montpelier has their committee meeting once a month at the hall in the afternoon before the dance. Then they have a potluck and anyone is welcome. Sometimes small, sometimes large.

Halls:

- It can be so difficult to find one. And the status of how a hall is managed can change.
- If a hall is too empty, can impact the feel of the dance.

Timing of dances:

- Norwich dance (now getting 120 dancers) has moved their start time to 730pm
- If Montpelier were to consider this, would need to poll their community.
- Could consider doing a community dance from 7-8pm (rather than beginner lesson at 730) and then roll into contra until 1030. This approach would allow for younger and mobility challenged dancers to participate earlier in the evening. It would also allow for more social time afterwards. Belfast Flying Shoes does this and has an open band play in the back corner unmic'd.

Puttin' on the Dance:

- One organizer suggested we needed another Puttin' on the Dance conference. All those in the room agreed. An organizer from Vermont wanted the conference to go back to Ottawa. Another organizer from New York City suggested we tack POTD onto the Friday or Monday of the Dance Flurry.