

ATTRACTING YOUNGER DANCERS: Creating and maintaining a multigenerational dance

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How can we find youth, incorporate them, and keep them? Getting younger people to attend dances (and keep coming back) seems to be the holy grail. This session will cover two major areas: promoting youth participation (dancers, callers, musicians, board members etc), and, how to have a successful multi-generation dance. We will hear practical ideas and tips from people who have successfully achieved this, and we will discuss things that have been tried but did not work.

OUTLINE: ATTRACTING YOUNGER DANCERS (Laura Gorrin & Karina Wilson)

Getting Younger People to Your Dance

- Advertise in spaces like colleges, community centers, message boards for parents, Facebook.
 - Advertise at other dance events that already have a lot of young people, like swing and blues. Emphasize our benefits, like live music.
 - Current members should advertise to others of their shared demographic.
- Have a welcoming culture.
 - Encourage experienced dancers to ask new people to dance.
 - Getting a few young people can make a big difference. Folks are more likely to feel like they belong if they see people like them already there.
- Lower Pricing Options:
 - Special prices for families or for people of the age group you're targeting.
 - Have a student price.
 - Have a serious Pay What You Can policy.
 - Have work trade options.
- Transportation:
 - Locate your dance near good public transportation.
 - Offer rideshare coordinating opportunities for farther away dances.
- Be family friendly:
 - Consider an afternoon dance.
 - Have a space for children to hang out when not dancing.

Keeping Them Coming Back

- Consistency: they should know when and where the dance is going to be, and should easily be able to find information about it online.
- Gender Inclusivity: Many young people are less interested in maintaining the gender norms of contra dancing, and for some the heteronormative assumptions turn them away. Here are some ways to make your dance more gender inclusive:
 - Do not assume the roles people are dancing based on their perceived gender. Have callers explain that anyone can dance either role.
 - When you ask someone to dance, ask their role preference.
 - Model inclusivity by trying the other role, or asking people of your same gender to dance.
- Appreciate their energy.
- Provide snacks at the break.

- Waltz and hambo workshops help new folks participate in all the dances in the evening.

Incorporating Them Into Your Community

- Afters: having a place to hang out after the dance gives people a chance to feel more connected.
- Have younger organizers on your board, and then listen to their input.
- Support new callers and musicians:
 - Have community band and open caller nights
 - Help young callers and musicians get established by hiring them for your dances.
 - As a special bonus, they might bring their young friends.
 - If you're not confident in their abilities yet, give them guest slots.
 - Offer workshops and mentorship for new callers.
 - Host pre-dance jams for musicians.
- Make weekends and camps accessible:
 - Some people are not settled enough to plan to attend camps far in advance, both due to money and time commitments.
 - See notes on lower pricing above.
 - Let kids attend camps.

For further reading: Here are CDSS's suggestions. <http://www.cdss.org/recruit-young-people.html>

ATTENDEE NOTES:

- have a wide variety of skills in Colorado groups: people who have emigrated from elsewhere with a lot of dance experience, newcomers
- Wendy calls BIA dances (Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced): dances that work for all levels
- what makes a dance a good BIA dance?
 - possible for beginners, interesting for people developing skills, catches interest of advanced dancers
- recap from session on building community on Saturday:
 - what community means to everyone
 - how you share community through the dancing: not just dancing with yourself + partner also with everyone in the room
 - what can you do to build your community through programming an evening of dance?
 - people who have never come to the dance before, or are just beginning, will not know that unusual figures are unusual
 - unusual figures will catch the attention of experienced dancers and be more difficult, but new dancers will just see them as another new figure
 - i.e. circle right, men's change, ladies swing
 - unusual figures can help remind experienced dancers what it's like to be a beginner
 - think about where in the programming dances like that go: later, once people know what's going on
- why are we having this conversation?
 - want the advanced people to stay, and the beginners to come back
 - sustain dance community
- need to be aware of your community, physical limitations (new under 16 dancers will make different mistakes than new over 70 dancers)
- put yourselves in the shoes of the beginning dancers

- enlist the help of experienced dancers
- 'rare opportunity for a men's chain'

- get experienced dance angels to dance with beginners
- awesome music: depends on kind of dance, and community
 - pick the best tune for a dance
- same dance with two different tunes can seem completely different
- phrasing in music is important
 - if the tune doesn't match the dance, then it is very difficult to follow even with a wonderful caller
- callers need to balance calling/not calling, prompting just specific parts, when a few people get deer in the headlights
- sometimes beginners won't understand minimal prompts (i.e. "hey")
- responsibility of dancers is to look up, to take cues from other dancers as well as the caller

- remind experienced dancers to come to the lesson, remember the joy of dancing as beginners
 - start official dance time at the lesson
 - helps partner beginners with more advanced dancers

- be aware of who will need to walk through a dance (more important in dances with more than two different parts)

- have a worksheet for incoming callers with issues specific to their hall/community
 - please give demonstrations, we're trying to do style points
 - have one announcement after each dance vs. all at once
 - helps callers to know these things in advance (before the day of), or post on website

- balance between experienced dancers helping new people in a set vs. listening to caller
 - depends on the caller, who's doing the teaching
 - 'let the caller do the verbal part, the dancers do the physical cues'
 - beginners aren't going to hear either, if two people are trying to teach at once

- encourage new people to come to the front of the hall
 - can put unwanted spotlight on them
 - grand march type thing can mix people up
 - mix up squares

- try calling from the bottom of the hall, or the side (beginners tend to be at the bottom of the hall)
 - issues with communicating with the band
 - might work better for lesson
 - can confuse people who are used to calling coming from the front

(then we went and did some dances)

Notes taken by Lucy Frey

Examples of shirt pocket take-aways

Double-folded business card



¼ page mini-flyer

