

Behind the Scenes

Building Constructive Relations between Performers and Organizers

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Dance organizers, bands, and callers work together in short-term collaborations to present dances and events, meeting the needs of everyone involved – organizers, dancers, performers, and event series. We will discuss the challenges we all face, and explore specific solutions to common problems.

It's key that understandings between performers and organizers be clearly communicated. Questions that should be answered, possibly in a formal contract or letter of understanding, before the gig include:

- Where is the hall?
- Who will be at the hall, when, and how can that person be reached?
- When and how long is the sound check? (A good rule of thumb is to allot 45 minutes for a sound check; some bands may require more.)
- Are the caller and the band sharing the income? (Many performers like equal shares between band members and callers.)
- Will there be profit sharing?
- For how long will the band play? When will there be breaks?
- Who on the organizing committee speaks to the performers? It is simpler to have a single organizer/band member negotiating on behalf of their respective groups.
- Will the band accept other musicians sitting in?
- Who handles sound?
- Are there local expectations, such as specific terminology the caller should use for gender-neutral calling, or playing a hambo at the break?
- What does the caller need to know about the dancers (e.g., expected proportion of beginners)?
- Where will the performers stay? Any allergies, dietary preferences?
- What is the cancellation policy? Performers expect at least token payment in case of cancellation for reasons such as a snowstorm. Dance organizations should build a slush fund to handle snow cancellation.

Many organizations create a standardized version of such a document.

Other Useful Tips

- Sometimes a caller or band is not a good fit with a particular community. In such cases, organizers can decide whether or not to provide feedback to the performer (and how to do so), and ultimately decide whether or not to re-hire another time.
- When booking, it is a good idea to ask callers and musicians to suggest people that they'd like to work with.
- How far in advance should performers be booked? This varies, but in general travelling performers need to anchor the commitments that are far from home further in advance (a year or so out). With their travel schedule outlined, it is possible for them to then book with the local series (6 - 9 months out).

- Extras such as booking mini tours with a dance gig every night, house concerts, style workshops, and callers' workshops help boost incomes. This can sometimes allow you to attract a performer to your region that you could not otherwise afford.
- Providing a minimum guarantee with profit sharing feels very fair, and also gives performers incentive to promote the gig.
- Performers with a following will attract more of a crowd. Making it possible for them to earn more is one way to honor the work they have put into honing their skills and building their reputation.
- It is appropriate to cover travel expenses for bands or callers who need to travel a significant distance to the gig.
- For weekends, it is important not to overwork the callers and musicians you hire. As a rule of thumb, do not ask for more than 8-13 hours of service for the entire weekend, or more than 6.5 hours a day.