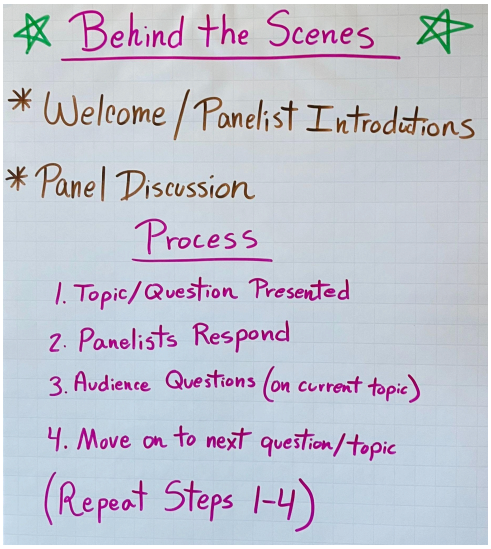
Puttin' on the Dance 3!

Dancing Forward Together - 2025 - Belfast, Maine

Behind the Scenes: Insights from Caller, Musicians, and Sound Techs

Facilitator: Liz Nelson

Join facilitator Liz for a lively panel discussion with those who bring the dance to life. Several experienced performers will share their perspectives on topics such as compensation, the ins and outs of the booking process, navigating feedback, nurturing local talent, and more. The session will include audience questions and conversation. Questions were focused on regular, locally scheduled events (not festivals or dance weekends).



PANELISTS:

Imogen Mills, English & contra caller and fiddler
Quena Crain, contra caller
Alex Hennings, sound engineer
Hannah Chamberlain, caller
Maggie Robinson, caller and fiddler for dances

BOOKING:

For regular local gigs, what's your ideal booking lead time?

- **Imogen:** 3-5 months
- **Quena:** 3-6 months with reminder but sometimes life gets in the way if you book to far in advance
- **Alex**: 2-12 months
- **Hannah:** flexible but too far in advance is not useful
- **Maggie:** flexible. Maine winters often require cancellation

Before events, performers usually receive a detailed email a week or two in advance. What kind of info do you find most helpful in those communications? Are there any common gaps or missing details you'd like to see addressed?

- **Imogen**: Who is point person if email contact person isn't going to be present
- **Quena**: Boilerplate about community, typical makeup of dance, role terms, publicize role terms ahead of dance, when to come for sound check, expected lessons or beginner session needed; agreed on payment
- **Alex**: 2 weeks before: Evening schedule, date, address, connect them with band and get band's stage plot, equipment needed; does band have their own equipment let him know; info about venue (ex: electrical outlets)
- **Hannah**: Reminder is great but succinct: guidelines, safety, etc. Where and when to show up is key.
- **Maggie**: Doesn't feel email is needed but some basics: time frame of dance, break duties, logistics

What improvements could be made to the performer booking process?

- **Imogen**: If you're sending a mass email to multiple musicians, tell us! Fewer emails is better. Designated sound person (not in the band) is always preferred.
- **Quena**: Explain the typical dance population demographics when booking
- **Alex**: Would be great if the bookers could share their booking document and sound techs could fill in dates where they are needed

- **Hannah**: As a booker, I want to be transparent about how to get on the list to get booked (if a list of performers is kept that the booker uses, how can callers/musicians get on that list?)
- **Maggie**: Ditto to Imogen's response
- Audience member offered the idea of using a video of a dance event at your hall for a caller who's not called there before.

COMPENSATION

Without needing exact numbers, can you share what the typical fee range looks like for a standard local gig?

- **Quena**: $125-250. Guaranteed pay is best for performers. More $ if the caller is travelling long distance, and ideally someone hosts the caller overnight.
- **Alex**: $100-500. Prefers to get what the band is getting is fair. Cash, check, venmo all works.
- **Hanna**: $100-175 guaranteed. If she's traveling for a gig, she wants to be compensated (fun, travel, friends) and know what the guaranteed pay is in advance.
- **Maggie**: $100-150 (Maine). Guaranteed pay is best. Adjustment should be made for a caller if the band is more than 5 musicians.

Audience Q: How do you receive payment?
Maggie response: For a university gig, receiving a check in the mail is typical. Make the form of payment clear in the pre-dance emails.

ADVERTISING

From your experience, what types of event promotion have been most effective – flyers, social media, email campaigns, word of mouth, or something else?

- **Imogen**: all of them
- **Quena**: all of them. Remember to include role terms being used
- **Alex**: email list; website; business cards to promote dancing (website should have info about the dance). Ask the performers if they want specific photos and bio info in the initial email to the band/caller.
- **Hanna**: all of them
- **Maggie**: All methods allows you to reach a range of people

FEEDBACK (not the squealing speakers kind)

What kinds of feedback from organizers do you find most useful or constructive after a gig?

- **Alex**: Tell your sound person if it's too loud DURING the dance when it's happening. Also, if you can't hear the caller, tell them RIGHT away

What kinds of feedback do you find unhelpful or not particularly useful as a performer?

- **Quena**: Comment only on things that can be changed. For example, a caller cannot change the sound of their voice.

NEW PERFORMERS/ORGANIZERS

What are some meaningful ways organizers can support and encourage newer callers, musicians, or sound techs as they get started?

- **Imogen**: Give new callers MANY consistent opportunities to gain experience.
- **Quena**: Offer special opportunities at potlucks, events, etc. If you call at a dance, ask the org if it's ok to let a new caller call one dance.

- **Alex**: Ask audience if anyone's interested in learning how to do sound: can book a sound person and a sound shadow (novice). Callers/sound need more practice than once a month in order to make progress.
- **Hannah**: Think creatively about how to incorporate new folks into your dance; maybe not too far ahead like you would with experienced callers
- **Maggie**: Some dances are starting a weeknight dance to foster new callers.
  Imogen: Increase opportunities to get English calling experience as a new caller (currently there aren't many).
  Persis (audience): Cambridge has a special English dance for new callers that runs once a month and is a success.
  Sam (audience): The bay area also has this.