

Hive Mind—Attracting New Participants

Every group is eager for fresh ideas for particular challenges. The Hive Mind is a new column with readers sharing insights about different subjects (see next page for the Summer topic). Our thanks to caller Scott Higgs for coordinating the column, and thanks to this issue's participants.

Emily Addison

Ottawa Contra, www.ottawacontra.ca, Ottawa ON

Ottawa Contra has had some pretty good success getting new participants in the door. (On average, we have 15 brand new people each dance.) Just a few strategies we use include:

- posting on online calendars (local public radio calendar, city government calendar, a local calendar of all dance events in the city)
- cross-advertising with groups with possible like-minded interests (e.g., folk dancing; outdoor adventure clubs)
- promoting through our current dancers (Facebook events that they can pass onto their friends, a prize for our current dancers on who can bring the most new people who come back a second time using our second dance free cards)

With new people coming in the door, we're now working hard on converting those new folks to regular dancers.

Chloe Mohr

Mt. Airy Barn Dance (Germantown Country Dancers affiliate), Philadelphia, PA, <https://www.facebook.com/MountAiryBarnDance>

We renamed our family dance to be called a "barn dance," and also now use the name of the neighborhood where it takes place. We have reached out to homeschool communities, neighborhood groups, and our own contacts in the area. We have made it clear that all ages are welcome, including adults who come without kids. We have the same three callers who rotate calling: they have gotten to know the attendees and built the community feel. We have a mini family camp style "gathering" in the middle, singing a song or two together, and sometimes having an attendee share a talent. We have worked to build a sense of community and

regular attendance. It's been successful and very fun!

Catie Condran Geist

Melbourne English Dancers, Melbourne, FL, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/676021995760720/>

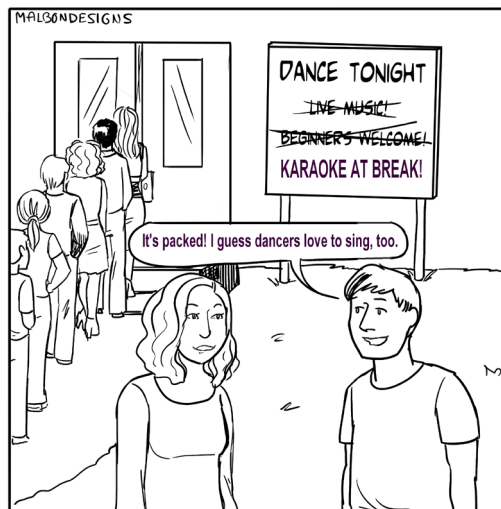
We have been able to attract new dancers by encouraging cosplay (costume play) and Steampunk enthusiasts to dress up in historic or vintage or fanciful outfits for our dances. We have dress-up dance parties throughout the year and costume parties for Mardi Gras (we dance on Tuesday evenings, and Mardi Gras is always on a Tuesday!).

We also have a Talk Like a Pirate Day Contra Dance on the third Friday of September every year, and everyone loves to dress up for that dance. So, my suggestion is to find a young person who is a natural leader of a cosplay group or a Steampunk group or a college/university group and talk to that young person about bringing groups of friends to your dances. Maybe one night a month could be a dress-up dance party and everyone could be encouraged to wear at least one accessory that would be part of the theme (a hat, a scarf, a certain color, patterned socks, etc.). It has been my experience that personal invitations bring in new dancers.

Scott Higgs

Germantown Country Dancers, Merion, PA, <http://dancewithjaneausten.com> and <http://www.germantowncountrydancers.org>

In Spring 2008, Germantown Country Dancers created two special dances, to coincide with national Jane Austen publicity. We hoped to attract people with no dance connection—who would see dancing on TV, get excited, and perhaps go out one evening to try something new. Once they arrived, we would make sure that they had a wonderful time. Special full-color flyers (with a movie photo) were distributed to libraries, historical societies and colleges all through



the Philadelphia area—much wider outreach than usual. To provide an easy-to-remember link, we established the website, DanceWithJaneAusten.com. Two Wednesdays featured the Jane Austen theme. Our regular dancers were excited about welcoming newcomers and making the events special (many dressed-up, or brought refreshments). These events enjoyed a huge surge in attendance, averaging over 80 dancers per night. Despite this success, we did not pick-up any new longterm dancers.

Some thoughts:

- 1) Piggybacking on TV/movie publicity gave us a priceless boost in visibility.
- 2) Many non-dancers are willing to try dancing, given a special opportunity.
- 3) Next time, we might put less effort into PR, and more into thoughtful, systematic follow-up of new prospects.

Our next Hive Mind topic: MILESTONE CELEBRATIONS. People celebrate birthdays, weddings, memorials, anniversaries, and more with music and dance. Please share your story of such a celebration. What elements made it special and memorable? Were there any lasting effects for the community?

Please submit your brief story (200 word limit) at <http://www.cdss.org/hive>.

(Back Row Bands, continued from page 11)

Some Back Row musicians will advance to Front Row playing, while others will be forever content with participation in the Back Row. No matter what the goals of a Back Row player, this setting provides a hands-on, ears-on, in-the-moment, on-the-fly experience with advantages laid out above. The hired band has the pleasure of two kinds of participation in its music—that of the dancers on the floor along with the energy and enthusiasm coming from the Back Row behind. Encouraging a Back Row is the essence of “Welcome” for musicians—a strongly held value throughout our entire community. I hope those of you not already doing so will add this possibility to your dances.

Discuss Back Row Bands further on the List-Serv musicians@lists.sharedweight.net and on Facebook at Contra/ECD/traditional dance musicians.

*Sue Songer has been playing for contra dances in Back Row and Front Row bands since the early 1990s. She directs the 75-member Portland Megaband and, along with Clyde Curley, is the editor of The Portland Collection tune books.**

*available from the CDSS Store, <http://store.cdss.org>

Dancing Lad

by Marge Bruchac

She's thinking of a dancing lad
who caught her eye with soulful glance
when she was young, and wild, and free
and nothing loved more than to dance.

Perhaps it was his steady gaze
that caught her heart and held it fast
perhaps it was his artful steps
or was it when he made her laugh?

While all around them swirled the crowd
in that small space, the world stood still
apart from cares of work and time,
no anger, sorrow, love or loss
in that old wooden dancing hall
the music paused, they held their breath.

Two strangers met, and danced, and then
the music called them off again
to other lives.

It matters not, the name, the time,
the places where we solace find
betwixt where we would like to be
and where we are.

Outside the bounds of dancing halls
none can predict the steps we'll take
or mark what notes will sound the tune,
what voice will rise to call the dance
how to progress.

The music moves her, slower now
she ponders all that life has dealt.
And though her memory fades at times,
she still can spot that dancing lad,
she sees him now, across the hall.

His eyes meet hers.
She laughs.

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