

Group Corner—Sound Engineers

by Jeff Martell

I have heard from a few different groups as of late that they have been having problems finding someone to run sound for their dances. A good sound engineer can make the difference between a wonderful evening of music and an ear rattling cacophony. The reality of doing sound is that most people don't notice it at all unless something has gone awry. If your dance has an experienced sound engineer, do whatever you can to keep them happy! They are worth their weight in gold. They show up early, set up all the equipment, make sure the band sounds great, work all night (yes, even if they are dancing they are still listening), then they put it all away after everyone has left. Keeping them happy may include paying them if you can at all afford it, feeding them, or giving them free admission to other events.

If your group does not have a sound engineer on hand, you still have some options. For a bigger event it is often best to hire a sound company. They are professionals and have the right tools for bigger shows, but that can get expensive. Before hiring anyone, get some references. Another idea is to get the band to supply the sound for the night. The upside of this option is it is their stuff, and they are used to it. The downside is that if they don't have a sound engineer either and are mixing from the stage, they are the ONLY ones in the room that cannot hear what is going on in the room.

Possibly the best idea is to train one person, or a few people, in basic sound reinforcement. Most of our groups are not running huge sound systems, nor are they using complicated pieces of equipment, so most anyone with a basic to good ear can be trained in how to use it. There are a few options for this. You could send your sound people to a sound training held at an event or festival near you. It might be hard to find one or expensive to do however. One of the better options is to hire a sound engineer to come out and do a training, or several, with your system at your site. The benefits are that people get hands-on time with your particular system and hall, and it is probably less expensive than sending a group to a larger event. The CDSS store has copies of *All Mixed Up: A Guide to Sound Production for Folk and Dance Music (revised)* by Bob Mills, which is a great basic sound engineering primer for a pretty reasonable price, <http://tinyurl.com/otnbar6>. There are also CDSS funded grants that a group could apply for to help fund such a training in their area. Information on these can be found at <http://www.cdss.org/outreach-funds.html>.

In closing, if you have a sound person, thank them! If you are looking for one, it might just work best to grow your own!

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photo: Rachel Winslow