

BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZERS OF DANCE EVENTS/SOCIALS (PART 1)



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Our dance communities would be nothing without the amazing people who pour time and money into organizing parties, classes, and festivals for us to enjoy. Being an organizer on any scale involves handling a lot of details, and it's rare for any event to go off without a single hitch. Still, there are a number of factors that should be paid particular attention in order to create a successful event. We'll explore three of these best practices today, and a few more in [Part](#)

[2\(http://socialdancecommunity.com/best-practices-for-organizers-of-dance-eventssocials-part-2/\)](http://socialdancecommunity.com/best-practices-for-organizers-of-dance-eventssocials-part-2/)
next month.

Sticking to a Schedule

If you're running a small event, this is a simple matter of punctuality. Organizers should arrive some margin of time before they have invited dancers. Teachers should start the lesson on time, or a few minutes late, with apologies to those who showed up in a timely fashion. DJs should have completed their sound check well before they actually need to start playing music. Our very own editor went out dancing recently with his wife and had an experience marred by a complete lack of timeliness: "The event was slated to start at 10pm, but didn't get going until 11:30. The instructors who were going to teach the free lesson were late and the DJ didn't set up until late either."

Sawa Sawa Kizomba Festival Workshop Schedule
July 1-3, 2016 at Hyatt Regency Capitol in DC
www.sawasafestival.com
sawasafestival@gmail.com

Open Level
Foundation/Improvers
Intermediate/Advanced
At the discretion of the instructor

Please note: Workshops & Instructors subject to change, up to and including time of

FRIDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE	
Congressional Room CD	
1:00pm-2:00pm	Registration Open
2:00pm-3:00pm	KizalSemba - Oscar B.A.
3:00pm-4:00pm	Tarraxinha - Kimberly
4:00pm-5:00pm	Semba - Toby
5:00pm-6:00pm	Afro Pop/Afro Beats - Sylvianne
10:00pm-5:32am Evening Party #PartyHard	

SATURDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE		
	Columbia A	Columbia B
10:00am	Registration Open	
11:00am-12:00pm	Kizomba (Foundation/Improvers) - Maren & Steve	Semba (Improvers+) - Karla & Eric
12:00pm-1:00pm	Semba Social (Improver+) - Eddy/Vents	Kizomba (Foundation+) - Oscar B.A.
1:00pm-2:00pm	Afro House (Open Level) - Nico Krump	
2:00pm-3:00pm	LUNCH BREAK	
3:00pm-4:00pm	Semba (Improver/Intermediate) - Miguel PeñaTchon	Semba (Improvers+) - Karla & Eric
4:00pm-5:00pm	Kizomba Combination (Improver/Intermediate) - Philipp	Semba (Improvers+) - Karla & Eric
5:00pm-6:30pm	Semba Show (Intermediate) - Toby	Tarraxinha (Open Level) - Kimberly
10:00pm-5:37am Evening Party #PartyHarder		

SUNDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE		
	Columbia A	Columbia B
10:00am	Registration Open	
11:00am-12:00pm	Afro Pop/Afro Beats (Open Level) - Sylvianne	
12:00pm-1:00pm	Kizomba (Improvers+) - Miguel PeñaTchon	Semba (Improvers+) - Philipp
1:00pm-2:00pm	Kizomba - Nico Krump	Semba - Maren & Steve
2:00pm-3:00pm	LUNCH BREAK	
3:00pm-4:00pm	Semba (Intermediate/Advanced) - Eddy/Vents	
4:00pm-5:00pm	Semba - Miguel PeñaTchon	Kizomba - Eddy/Vents
5:00pm-6:30pm	The Wrap Up (S&A & Stories from the world of Kizomba/Semba Dancing)	
10:00pm-5:46am EVENING PARTY #StillPartyHard		

At large congresses, schedules are admittedly much harder to keep, since there are so very many pieces to have in place. An invaluable step is planning a complete schedule as soon as possible. Not only does this help potential participants decide whether they'd like to attend and what their travel arrangements should be, it also provides a framework for you and your staff for everything that needs to be worked out as things progress. When there do need to be changes in the schedule of activities, be

sure to announce them in as many ways as possible: on the website, on the Facebook page, after a class or at the social, and on paper signs posted around the rooms in question.

There are also a couple of time-tested strategies that can help you stay on schedule. For one, plan to allow breaks between all classes. Fifteen minutes is a great length to ensure everyone can make it to their next class on time, even if they need to make a last-minute decision about which one to take, fill their water bottles, and have a quick snack. Ten minutes can also work fine in a smallish venue, but five minute breaks are insufficient.

Next, employ some staff or volunteers to help keep everyone respecting the schedule. Choose a couple of people to go around to the classrooms and hold up a sign signaling to the instructors that they have 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 0 minutes

remaining. If you're short on daytime staff, you could consider a strategy I saw when I taught at an event by City in Motion(<https://www.facebook.com/events/1522329771404569/>) in San Diego: use a giant countdown clock, which just requires the instructor to press a button to have it count down from your desired class length. In the evening, have an MC who is ready to hand things off to the DJ when the band finishes a set or to announce a 30-minute warning for competitors or performers. Have a designated person running competitions, using a timepiece to keep things from running late. Especially for recurring events, demonstrating that you're committed to keeping a schedule will encourage everyone to come to class on time and get to the party before they miss the shows.

Having a Web Presence

We live in the information age, but sometimes it feels like dance organizations are not much interested in helping people find information about their events. In fact, that was what originally drove me to start my own website, [KizombaCommunity.com](http://www.kizombacommunity.com) – I was tired of not being able to do an easy search to find where I could dance kizomba in US cities. Having done so, I understand why many organizers don't have their own websites: it gets expensive. Still, there's a lot of options without paying for a site. Let's consider some useful tips for every budget.

(<http://www.kizombacommunity.com>) At a minimum, have a Facebook page or Meetup group that gives contact information and basic information about regularly occurring events or an annual festival. Then create individual Facebook or Meetup events that you can invite people to and promote. The Facebook search algorithm has improved exponentially since my period of frustration in 2012 and 2013, but it still helps to name things in predictable ways, like "Asheville Sensual Bachata Workshop."



You should also consider using a free web host and site builder like Wix (<http://www.wix.com/>) or Weebly (<https://www.weebly.com/>). I've used each of these to create sites for events I helped with, and they really are easy to use if you don't have a specific vision for your site's appearance. There are lots of templates and it's simple to fill in text and arrange images. If you want to run online registration, you are likely to have to pay for additional features, but it's still very affordable.

As for those with a bit more room in the budget, I think it's well worth paying for your own websites and domain names. You can do so much more, even if you're mostly learning on the go as I did. Plus, your site can more easily adapt as your events grow and change. One pitfall to avoid is having no direct control over the site. I have met so many organizers who delegated the website maintenance to a friend or community member, but then were always waiting on them to get around to changing anything. It's wise to share out responsibilities according to expertise, but a basic text edit announcement that happens in a timely fashion is much better than a fancy form or graphic that comes too late. Make sure that you can edit the website if the need arises.

Once you have a page or site, what to do with it? It should definitely have a logical order that makes it easy for people to find the information they are looking for. Start with one section for weekly happenings, one page for special events, and one for contact. Or one page for workshops, one for parties, one for artists and DJs, one for venue information, and one for registration. Whatever format you choose, remember that function should precede format. People won't care about the splash page and background song if they can't figure out when to show up where. Add announcements and changes as they come up, and periodically go back through your site and check for information that needs to be updated.

Now, there's nothing wrong with your site having a few bells and whistles like a homepage video or image slider. That said, consider how long it will take for your site to load on slower Internet connections. Furthermore, it is essential for your website to be responsive or have a mobile version. More than ever today people are using their smart phones as their primary means of accessing web pages. If you don't want people to bounce from your site, make sure it's neither overloaded nor ill-adapted to people's devices.



(<http://attunetoblues.weebly.com/>).

Advertising Truthfully

False advertising is condemned by consumers and the law, but sometimes in the dance scene it is just accepted that organizers will exaggerate or make last minute changes, without being willing to offer anything more than an apology to dissatisfied dancers. Having helped organize quite a few events myself, I can attest to the fact that sometimes circumstances are truly out of our control. However, too often it's negligence or even intentional deception. It's very frustrating for attendees when they make decisions to come to an event based on the information they were given, only to find the situation is quite different and they regret all the time or money they invested, not to mention the opportunity cost.

I can remember attending a party in New York City back in 2011 or 2012 that promised a kizomba lesson at 8:30pm followed by a dance social. I showed up at 8:25 to find only the organizer and one other person setting up. As it turned out, no lesson ever actually happened. The DJ didn't start playing music till after 10:00pm. And I didn't get to dance any kizomba.

Another example: in March 2014, I had tickets for a kizomba workshop in New York City. But then I found out that the Got Kizomba Festival(<http://www.gotkizombafestival.com/>), in San Francisco, happening the same weekend, was going to be running a kizomba Jack and Jill. It seemed a great opportunity for me to shine as a dancer who had no consistent partner and no desire to create choreography. I bought plane tickets and a festival pass, and headed to SF. Saturday night, it was getting quite late, but finally they announced the Jack and Jill, to be done in two parts: amateur and professional. I decided to enter the amateur competition as a leader, since I had only recently begun leading and hadn't done so in a professional capacity. There was some protest (even though a few other male teachers had joined the competition), but I was allowed to compete(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loW6RNjQtwI>). Thank goodness I insisted, because the professional competition simply never happened! When I inquired about it, the explanation was that the amateur one had taken too long and there hadn't been enough time. They haven't had one since, so I suppose it was a learning experience.

Besides, who among us hasn't registered for a workshop weekend because we were excited about the headlining artist, only to be told that they would no longer be part of the event? Or what about when a party is advertised as going until 6:00am, but when the crowd thins at 3:30 the music gets cut things off a couple of hours early?



Here are some thoughts on how to draw the line when it comes to what you promise to dancers. First, consider what your priorities are for the event you're organizing. Do you want to have a variety of workshops or intensives with a few instructors? Do you want to have pool parties and beach dances? Do you want to have live music or DJs till breakfast? Will you host performances or competitions? Unless your event is really huge, you're going to want to focus on doing just a few things well. Talk up those aspects of your event, and be sure you do everything necessary to follow through. Have the classes you say you will, at the promised levels. Don't advertise international instructors until their contract is signed and their visa is confirmed. Play the music that suits the genres you've advertised for: that means hiring DJs or bands who have experience in playing that style for dancers. Have backup plans that will allow you to offer a close alternative if something changes: a substitute for a teacher, a replacement for a performance, an alternate venue for a pool party, and so on. It's better to have last-minute extras than belated withdrawals.

What about you? What are your struggles as an organizer? When have you been disappointed by a dance event? Whose example would you offer as a standard? Share your experiences with us!

Check out [Part 2](http://socialdancecommunity.com/best-practices-for-organizers-of-dance-eventssocials-part-2/) (<http://socialdancecommunity.com/best-practices-for-organizers-of-dance-eventssocials-part-2/>).
