

BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZERS OF DANCE EVENTS/SOCIALS (PART 2)



Post Views 375

This is the second part of [an article](http://socialdancecommunity.com/best-practices-for-organizers-of-dance-events-socials-part-1/)(<http://socialdancecommunity.com/best-practices-for-organizers-of-dance-events-socials-part-1/>), begun in January. Read, reflect, then decide: is there something you or your organizers could be doing better?

Choosing a Venue

An appropriate space is a must for a dance event. We have all had experiences that speak to the truth of that! Start by finding a venue with enough room for the number of dancers you are expecting. No one can predict the future exactly, of course, but no one enjoys competing with 80 people for a dance floor meant to fit 20. There's nothing wrong with organizing something in a smallish bar as long as you're aiming for an

intimate social. Make sure it's clear whether a restaurant venue will need to move servers across the dance area. Classes require more open space than socials, so you need to plan additional capacity. You should also consider capping the number of participants based on space. For large festivals, sometimes you need to be flexible and swap an overcrowded class or dance floor to another room with a lower attendance.



Next, you also need to be sure you have a danceable floor. There is a huge range of flooring possibilities, even in venues specifically listed for dancing. The three most common dance floor surfaces are hardwood, laminate, and marley (vinyl). Marley is not so great for partner dancing because it tends to grip the feet. Laminate is better but can be very slippery. Hardwood is generally considered most desirable, but it's rarer because of the expense. The other primary dichotomy is whether or not the floor is sprung. This refers to the structure underlying the floor's surface. A sprung floor has a subfloor made of plywood to provide give and rebound.

Consider what characteristics make a floor suitable in your dance style and search accordingly. How fast (slick) should the floor be? How cushioned of a floor do you need? How much does smoothness matter? Are there any policies that will make it difficult for your dancers? To give a few examples: any dance with momentum is very difficult on a sticky floor, salsa dancing on an unsprung or concrete floor leads to joint pain and even injuries, Brazilian zouk dancers will trip if there are uneven seams, and some studios prohibit stiletto heels on their hardwood floors. When it comes to rented floor, top priority should be keeping the floor even, without dips or separations.



I know we can't always have the perfect floor (though I'll never forget dancing on the sprung hardwood floor of a Mason Lodge in Tennessee). Nevertheless, it's important to stay within the range of what will yield reasonably good dancing.

Accommodations can also sometimes be made to improve an imperfect situation. Organizers can provide

talcum powder to help with a higher friction floor, give dancers a heads-up to wear footwear that is unlikely to be torn up or which has extra cushioning, or offer affordable heel covers. For those big events with rented floors, you can keep a rotation of people responsible for doing maintenance and repairs to the floors as needed.

Climate control is also key; in fact, for me it can make or break an event. I could barely bring myself to dance at the Kizomba Swimming Festival outside Paris in July 2013. Before I even made it to the floor for a dance I was already sweating: the ballroom was hotter than the summer air outside. On the other hand, you can have too much of even a good thing like air-conditioning. For large events, consider appropriate adjustment in the thermostat for peak dancing at 11:00pm compared to classes at 10:00am. At the 2016 DC Bachata Festival the kizomba and zouk students shivered their way through morning classes, though it was quite comfortable at night.

Managing Sound

As dancers, we are expressing music with our bodies. So the quality of sound we are listening to is pretty important. It's nearly impossible to be musical and creative if we are straining to listen to the melody or can't hear the beat. It's distracting when speakers crackle and pop. It's disruptive if there's a sudden silence, or worse yet a shrill whine.

Fortunately we live in a time when quality sound equipment is readily available and relatively affordable. Even if you're just running a small social, you can invest in a couple of speakers that will fit in a handbag. There are even mug-sized ones now that deliver solid bass, like the Minirig(<https://www.amazon.com/Minirig-Bluetooth-Speaker-Battery-Premium/dp/B00TYGAS8A>).



Every event should have a sound check before classes or dancing get started. That means connecting everything, playing some music, and walking around to hear how it's delivered to different parts of the room. I also strongly advise always having a backup sound system. Whether that's speakers in classrooms that can be pulled in for the big party in a pinch, or little computer speakers to help when the classroom sound system fails, you never want to be in a situation where the music stops completely for any length of time.

A professional audio engineer friend of mine from the swing and blues scene wrote an article(http://rockstepradio.com/blog/protecting_the_hearing_of_swing_dancers.php) about

hearing damage at dance events. Shaun Wall explains: “Over the years, I have consistently measured sound (live or DJ) at dance events between 95-100 dB. This means that permanent damage begins between 2-6 songs into a set. And that’s if you start at a zero baseline for the day. What people don’t realize is that damage doesn’t just occur at loud levels, but is also due to time of exposure.”



(<http://rockstepradio.com/>) Now, keep in mind that most of these events have much lower sound levels than Latin or kizomba events; I almost never feel

the need bother with earplugs at the former, but I very quickly feel physical discomfort or pain if I forget to wear them at the latter. I know that as dancers we like to feel the music in our bodies, but organizers have a responsibility to those who attend their events. As Shaun puts it: “You wouldn’t let someone slowly scar your eyeballs over years and years until you couldn’t see. Why do you let bands [or DJs] do that to your ears?”

The good news is that there are a few simple things that can improve the situation not only for those of us who are sensitive in the moment, but in fact for all of us in the long term. First, turn up the volume only as necessary. DJs and live music acts shouldn’t start the volume at the point they expect to need it at midnight, but only as the number of bodies increases to the point that it’s required. In addition, maybe consider letting go of the need to feel bass vibrations running through your bones. It also helps a lot to have multiple speakers placed around the room rather than just one or a few blasting from the front.

Fostering Safety

Organizers have a responsibility to make sure dancers stay safe. That starts with simple physical safety checks, but should extend further. Walk through the venue and mark steps and uneven surfaces as trip hazards with bright tape. Keep a first aid kit on hand, equipped with at the very least an ice pack, some bandages, and antiseptic. Only hire instructors with a clear track record, whom you can be confident won’t lead your dancers into injuring themselves.

It’s also smart to make a conduct policy so it’s clear what kind of behavior is or is not acceptable at your event. That can include dance moves that aren’t appropriate for the venue; for example, lifts, air steps, and high kicks are often banned in small or crowded venues. Such a policy can also provide guidelines for etiquette and communication: how to invite someone for a dance, or whether to ask before initiating close embrace or a dip. I am a strong proponent of a growing movement toward such policies including statements about community values, banning

aggressive behavior and unwanted touching, and providing means of mediating when a dancer does experience violence or sexually inappropriate behavior. I have compiled several resources(<http://www.kizombacommunity.com/service-category/resources/>) to help you make such a policy.

Focusing on People

In the end, a dance event is all about the people who attend; that's why organizers should always show appreciation for their dancers. It's easy enough to give a shout-out on Facebook, but the best organizers go further. Why not make an event exit survey? E-mail it out and post it on Facebook. Ask what attendees appreciated or didn't, then adjust accordingly so that the next event can be more in line with what the dancers want. For those organizing a local weekly or monthly event, consider how to invest in the community. If people in your scene only ever dance to recorded music, maybe it's time to hire a live band. Consider what kind of dance instruction would help your fellow dancers grow and reach out to teachers that could help.

So how well does your dance scene measure up? Do you have any plans for improvement? What other best practices do you prioritize? Leave us some comments!

1. What did you think of the schedule, overall?

Hated it

Didn't like it

Liked it okay

Liked it a lot

Loved it!

If you didn't love it, what can we change?

(<http://listenaminute.com/t/travelling.html>).

Example from Blues Muse 2013 exit survey