

Notes from the Office

Sharing the Vision: Themes and Practical Ideas for Vibrant Dance Communities (Part 2)

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Traveling and talking with folks, I've learned more about what makes vibrant music and dance communities. I'm sharing a few insights and ideas in this column, directed primarily at organizers of dances but useful, I suspect, to

many roles in many communities.

The Vision: It's the least technical, most overlooked, and perhaps most important aspect of any dance. A vision is the frame through which organizers, performers, and dancers make their decisions, the ideal for which they strive, the source from which they draw inspiration. But for that to work, people have to know what it is.

You must have a vision to share a vision. Organizers, performers, and dancers all have (at least) one, whether or not they have articulated it. Having a vision that is articulated gives organizers and the community as a whole valuable guidance and inspiration. *

Avoid the Vision Void. While not without merit, an unsubstantive vision—sometimes expressed as the “so long as it's fun for the dancers” attitude—is often a dodge. After all, what is “fun,” who are “the dancers,” and how do you determine what “they” want? Organizer Larry Jennings noted, “If there is no objective, you cannot achieve it.” An organizer's vision should be engaged with the community, but this doesn't mean shying away from presenting a vision that will inspire ideas and attitudes dancers may not have even know they shared.

You must communicate the vision for people to know the vision. Make sure people know what your vision is by sharing it in both passive ways, e.g., in writing, and active ways, e.g., person-to-person.

Write it out. How else do you know what it is? It might be a few sentences or a few pages, but it should define what you care about.

Make it accessible. Put a public version of your vision prominently on your website. Email newcomers a link to it. Have it on fliers at the door. Put up posters with your values, e.g., “Anyone can ask anyone to dance!”

Each individual in the community is an asset for communicating a vision, both through their words and through their actions. Most central are:

- *The organizers.* If you are to help communicate the vision, you benefit from being visible. Some ideas to consider: make announcements, wear name badges, and have posters with your pictures.
- *The performers.* Share the vision with performers. Maybe this means explaining how to treat sit-ins to the band or suggesting to the caller how much time for socializing between dances is appropriate. Callers have authority and visibility and they can assist sharing (and crafting) a dance's vision so be sure they know what it is.
- *The leaders on the floor.* Share the vision with those charismatic and wonderful people on the floor, especially leaders of peer groups, e.g., a homeschool group. You may find this to be an informative two-way street.

State your vision in positive terms. Presumably you like your vision because there is something fun and wonderful about it. Although there's a place for “no” and “don't”, presenting the joy behind your vision is the most compelling way.

Crafting and sharing a vision has many rewards and I hope organizers and others continue to share techniques to make this happen.