

Pardon Our Crowing About the Mad Robin Ball

by Gayle Bergman for the Mad Robin Ball Committee*

We had a clear vision of what we wanted the Mad Robin Ball to be: an elegant change of pace for the local English dancers, but fun and accessible. In building our bridge between two geographical areas [Sebastopol and San Francisco], we wanted to give our local dancers the opportunity to dance with experienced dancers from the Bay Area. Our faith in the graciousness of their community was justified, as we all felt a wonderful spirit that evening. Callers David Newitt and Lydee Scudder understood the committee's vision and executed it perfectly in a delightful program.

At the end of the ball, we made evaluation forms available...and comments were one hundred percent positive, including things like, "Fantastic", "Great," "Keep it up!" "Look forward to second annual," "Great ball — same again please!" "Excellent atmosphere!"

I noticed a congenial interaction among the dancers that can be attributed to the program. The dances were familiar and fun to do, so attention could turn to more social aspects of English country dance. It will be some time before we can tell if we met our goal of building a bridge between the two communities. We certainly succeeded in bringing them together, registering over forty-one North Bay dancers, fifty Bay Area dancers and fifteen from quite a distance — San Diego to Seattle and as far east as North Carolina. How many more of our Sonoma County dancers will go to the Fall Ball? How many Bay Area dancers will make a Sunday drive to Sebastopol for the regular dance? Time will tell if more people will cross our bridge.

We owe much of the credit for our successful management of the Mad Robin Ball to the organizers of the Fall Ball, who generously provided a template for every aspect of the production, including the budget and the timeline for taking care of everything from hiring musicians to printing booklets. Many people commented on the smooth flow of announcements during the evening, for which Bruce Hamilton is responsible.

The committee was divided on the capacity of the hall. This first time we all fit, but we were able to determine a definite limit of one hundred twenty dancers. Now we must decide whether to have only advanced registration or still accept registration at the door and risk crowding or disappointing our fellow dancers.

Most of the problems we encountered were minor:

- 1) We had no budget for promotion and were grateful for Bay Area CDS support in giving two Mad Robin tickets away as prizes at the Playford Ball in March. For [this] year's Mad Robin Ball, we offered two tickets at English Week in Mendocino 2002 and again will offer two tickets for the Playford Ball in March.
 - 2) Failing to take into consideration the generous donation of sound equipment used by the Fall Ball, we underbudgeted for sound.
 - 3) The late start in organizing led to an increase in mailing costs associated with inserting the Mad Robin Ball flyer with the North Bay CDS newsletter.
 - 4) We did not know the incremental costs/quantities of supplies associated with increased registration and ran out of punch. Easily remedied next year.
 - 5) We included first and last names on nametags and they were not large or clear enough. Easily remedied next year.
 - 6) Childcare became an issue. The hall manager was very specific in restricting use of the hall and the committee determined that dancing children were welcome, but no childcare could be provided. We concluded that we could support an additional event for families, but we would be better served to focus on executing our plan, keeping in mind our vision for the Mad Robin Ball.
 - 7) A last minute medical emergency with one of our musicians was seamlessly handled, thanks to the generosity of Charlie Hancock, who came to dance, but was able to play for the first half of the ball!
- All in all, it was an elegant evening of friends coming together to dance. We have established a niche: a

social ball, consisting of familiar, but fun dances in a beautiful hall. We plan to follow the advice of the evaluation forms: we will produce another social ball next year. Just for the fun of it.

** The Ball Committee: Avril Draudt (Chair), Gayle and Peter Bergmann, Shirley and Howard Carlberg, Tom Colton, John Erbaugh, and Celine and Jim Passage. This article is excerpted from their report to the May Gadd/Phil Merrill Endowment Fund of CDSS which provided financial backing. For information about their next ball, write or call North Bay Country Dance Society, 707-527-9794, info@nbc.ds.org, or see www.nbc.ds.org. This article was published in the CDSS News, issue #171, March/April 2003.*