WORKING ON WEEKENDS: Organizing your dance festival

*Leda Shapiro*

Organizing a dance series is one thing, but planning a weekend-long event for 100 people or more with big name talent is something else entirely. How is it done? Can it be a source of revenue that helps the dance community all year long? We’ll expose the sweat and magic that goes into creating a wildly successful dance weekend.

OUTLINE: Working on Weekends (Leda Shapiro)

I FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU NEED
What result do you want? A hot weekend? Build skill level? Local participation?

II DO NOT GO IT ALONE
What skills do you need?

III BUDGET for different options for:
Talent : 1 out of town band/caller, 1 local? 2 out of town?
Travel: Local versus out of town or both
Potluck or catered? Or all meals out?
Be open to change, hone budget.

IV COMMITTEES & MEETINGS
The art of delegating
Detailed task lists

V DEBREIEFING
Compare Budget to actuals
Meeting discuss things that went well, things that didn’t

ATTENDEE NOTES:
- ran weekend for 20 years
- started with ~20 dancers in regular dance
- first weekend, local talent, charged $25, in regular hall
- Penn Fix came in to teach style the next year (from Spokane)
- weekends = generally Friday night -> Sunday afternoon
- Fiddler’s dream camp in Texas, around New Years for 3 days, largely unstructured
- NM Folkmads does Boo Camp in Jemez Springs (residential, 1 or 2 nights), local + regional talent
- Folkmadness, 4 day over Memorial Day on a college campus, some national talent
- need to decide if you’re doing a local camp, bring in national talent, do a resident camp, etc.
- resident camp gives a camaraderie you can’t get otherwise
- figure out what you need, and what you want it to be

- picking a named band: how big a name they are, how much they cost, availability, travel costs
- camps are exhausting for a single band if you have dances all day
- some bands only want to play for x hours per day

- important to write everything down: every detail about the band, space, toilet paper, etc.
- need really good volunteer staff, have frequent meetings to go over things
- know who to go to with various issues during the weekend

- used to have other various dance workshops, sessions of talking about pet peeves, style workshops

- themes for a weekend: something that's unique to the weekend
- thrift store prom
- temporary tattoos
- t-shirts
- clothing exchanges
- polka dots and stripes

- first need to figure out your revenue (conservative estimate of attendance)
- can be flexible about meals: volunteers prepare meals or potluck is much less expensive than catering
  - catering is not community building, but is much easier
- can organize people to host out of town people
- need to know what percentage of out of town people you expect

- 1996 budget on handout

- how long to plan:
  - band is determining factor: will be booked a year ahead
    - need to know what you can afford by a year before (and a date and location!)

- what to charge?
  - look at other weekends around you, see what people are willing to pay for similar events
  - can require exclusivity with bands: can't play within certain radius and time

- the bar goes up as weekends are held repeatedly

- previous discussion from 'crossing borders' workshop: you can sometimes get a better band to come if you organize other associated events (house concerts, musicians workshops, one-night dances, etc.)
- other groups hosting the band need to be willing to contribute to travel costs
- dance groups can help host house concerts (even though the audiences will be different)
- there are pre-existing communities in some places that host house concerts
- just need to know who to talk to

- working to replace an ECD ball with a weekend workshop
  - want style workshops + place for people to dance at a higher level setting
  - big challenge in LA is venue: breakout rooms, dancing rooms, cost issue (with people travelling)
  - not likely to convince new dancers to commit to a weekend: something to consider
  - big name bands don't draw for ECD in the same way as they do for contra
  - newer dancers aren't going to recognize big-name callers
- some week long camps are being eroded by proliferation of weekends, and the difficulty of traveling and doing a whole week
- ECD ball in Santa Fe gets free venue for letting in students free
- a lot of colleges want to keep their campuses open and active during the summer
- what will take a lot to plan that you might not expect?
  - what to check?
  - have a group of people, go to the hall multiple times, think through every step of the program
  - contact presenter for checklists
  - think a lot about food details
  - catered vs. potluck
  - staff is the most important thing: have designated people for meals (if not catered)
- it's surprising how much time goes past that you don't have to do anything: flurry, nothing, etc.
- decide to have it, book a band, start discussing broad strokes with small committee
- then have a programming community to discuss workshops, someone else doing logistics (facilities committee)
- alternate model: have a single committee that does everything
  - everyone wants input on everything
  - discuss order of program, length of dance periods, concert, breaks, related workshops
- plan out project in time: when different parts need to be completed
- how do you deal with getting people to register ahead of time?
  - already have online registration
  - use PayPal
  - have Facebook group
  - just ask people to please sign up now
  - give an incentive for early registration
  - mail chimp gives a measurement of open rate: (26% space still open for Stellar Days & Nights)
  - people need to be reminded in multiple ways
  - people might not need to open email: just read subject line
  - if you do gender or lead/follow balance, then advertise that
- include things like "how to ask/get asked to dance" in workshops, remind people to pick a new partner
- don't want a single person in charge of program
  - if changes are made to a traditional schedule, explain why!

Notes taken by Lucy Frey
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BUDGET</th>
<th>ACTUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revenues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125 @ $75</td>
<td>9375</td>
<td>9900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday night</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>10145</strong></td>
<td><strong>10808</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band/Caller</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cajun</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies/Coffee/</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post FROG lunch</td>
<td>150</td>
<td><strong>120</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Band</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buttons</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refreshments</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refreshments</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorations</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Breakfast</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat Lunch</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri Refresh</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-op Fee</td>
<td>180</td>
<td><strong>198</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.P./bath supplies</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoos</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat Breakfast</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental coffeepots</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri-dinner/groceries</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Sun day dinner</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>10145</strong></td>
<td><strong>9680</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>1128</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROFIT**