

Encouraging your local musician

You have someone in your SCD community who would like to try playing for Scottish Country Dancing. You don't want to ask more than they can manage, and you don't want to burden your dancers with unsuitable music. Where to from here?

A gentle path into playing is through warm-ups. Marches and waltzes are usually easy to play, and can be a good way to learn the skills of playing at a suitable (and steady) speed. Afterwards, offer constructive feedback on speed, style, volume... whatever needs attention for next time.

Once you, your musician and the dancers are comfortable together (think in terms of a number of weeks), try following the warmup with a short (3 or 4 x32) reel or jig. Do emphasise the importance of playing easy tunes well, rather than the often more challenging "correct" tunes less confidently. Involve your musician as you teach the dance to accustom him/her to "ready-and" starts and playing in short bursts. (If a full 8x32 is too much, you can just use your musician for teaching the dance, and then dance to a recording.) Again, offering constructive feedback is a critical element in developing his/her skills.

As confidence and ability develops, you can expand the number of dances played for and introduce strathspeys. A word of warning here: the "slow air" style strathspeys are usually technically easy to play, but quite difficult to maintain the correct pace and drive. Stick to traditional tunes to start with.

New musicians need to be told what they are getting right and what to improve on. Everyone is on the same side – wanting to provide a great experience for dancers – so please do help your new musicians along with helpful comments.

And then, when the great day comes that you have live music for a social night, do include the musician(s) on your advertising poster. This acknowledgement of the effort they have made to get to this stage provides a surprising boost to confidence and morale.

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