

SCA Music Consorts and Other Strange Matters

The following is a list of helpful hints (not set in stone) that will assist you in having smooth performances for musicians.

1.) Demos and Heralds:

If a Demonstration is being given to an audience, it is a good idea to assign a herald to announce the dances and explain to the audience what is happening and basically banter with them. This gives the dancers and musicians' time to get ready for the dance. Some things to remember about the Herald is: When the herald starts addressing the audience, he/she should be the only one speaking to the crowd. It becomes too confusing if there is too much chatter from several directions. Therefore the Herald has the floor. All the players should defer to the herald during his/her speech. If you have any recommendations to the monologue, make them between performances, not during.

2.) Dance Instructors:

Remember, the current dance instructor for the performing dance is GOD/GODDESS! (She/he who must be obeyed, the big honcho, the grand wazoo, the boss, etc. etc.) She/he has the last say on how a dance is to be done, what version, and how fast. If you are another dance instructor among the dancers, remember to defer your opinions to the current instructor until after the performance or after the practice. Too many cooks during an event will cause friction and generally will really kill the mood. Ask the lead instructor if she requires assistance prior to leading the dance (some of this stuff can apply to dance practices as well). If the instructor has obviously left out a critical step or is obviously in error, you may make a recommendation POLITELY! Remember, Delivery of your intent can make a huge difference with people. Do be aware that every Barony has specific nuances with dances that may be different from what you are use to. Adapt!

3.) Play list:

It is a good idea to give the music master/mistress a list of dances that are to be done for an event prior to the event. What is definitely not required and not recommended is the play list order. In my experience I have noticed that most balls hardly ever keep to a pre-defined dance order. This is usually due to requests made in-between by dancers or perhaps a re-order of dances may be required based upon available sets. This is not a bad thing. It is better to just tell the music principle what the next dance will be. This keeps musicians from putting dance music in a list order. When the order deviation occurs, they are totally lost. It is better that musicians keep their music in alphabetical order. It makes music easier to search for. **It is extremely important** for the dance instructor to let the musicians know what dance is next to be performed when you are ready to go on to the next dance. Musicians are sometimes the last to know. The dancers are in place and ready, the dance instructor tells the musicians they are ready and your

band stares off into space like a German shepherd watching TV. It makes for an amusing scene
:) Also when possible the dance instructor should tap out a tempo for the music principle.

4.) Dancer's/Musician's attention:

Whilst the Herald speaks or the instructor is teaching, it is critically important that you attend their voice with fullness. Do not be distracting towards your fellow dancers. This applies to musicians as well. Refrain as much as possible from warming up loudly whilst heralding or instructions are in progress. Tuning is important but doodling on your instrument whilst the instructor is trying to confuse the dancers or the Herald is trying to bore the audience is not well looked upon :)

5.) Musician's arsenal:

Music, stand, a pencil, chair, stand light, clothespins, instrument. Not every performance will be well lit. Therefore, it is in your best interest to purchase a battery operated music stand light for dark performances. You can get these at most School Band related Music stores for about \$16. The florescent tube light comes with a metal clip that fastens on to the top of your stand. Unfortunately, the metal clip is usually too small for any practical use. Therefore, I suggest you replace the metal clip with a grocery store bought "chip clip,"(you know the yellow plastic one with the mammoth flat clip). If you are using a collapsible stand, you may want to bring along a thin hard board to place on your stand for the clip light to fasten to. They usually need a flat surface. Bring extra batteries. It may be a long night. For outside events bring a wooden chair (or something that doesn't look too modern) to sit upon. Also bring your stand, instruments and music (and maybe a tankard to drink out of). Remember that people will appreciate your presence and may want to fill your tankard with something yummy, so make sure you have something for them to fill. Most of the time they just want to see if you can still play your instrument whilst in a state of intoxication. There is only one thing to do in this case, Humour your fans.

6.) Music During Court:

Most of the time court is long enough without having to make it longer with music involved. But if music is requested for the festivities it is **IMPERATIVE** that you coordinate what is going to be played and when it's going to be played and for how long, and from what location are the musicians going to play it from. All this needs to be worked prior to the event with the court herald. A script of what is going to happen and when, would help immensely. The other thing you could do that does not involve coordination is: if court is being held outside, the musicians can park themselves 25 to 50 yards behind the court and play some ambient music to set the mood of the court. This has worked in the past with surprising appreciation. Make sure though you are situated behind the court as to not interfere with their vocal projection of the court towards the populace. I've noticed that low winds work better for ambient court music than upper winds. It is possible to do pieces entirely on tenor and bass recorders. It sounds a little funny but at least it will not be distracting during court. It is still important to park yourself far enough away from the court. My best recommendation for court background music is plucky type instruments (harps, lutes, citterns). These instruments are usually in the high range and have more volume control than most other instruments.

7.) Music During Feast:

I've usually discouraged having group musicians play during feast due to the fact that there are always numerous interruptions with toasts and announcements. Feast is always better for individual performers who can pause in the middle of their table entertainment. Individual performers (bards) need to be very aware of the performance distance rule of etiquette. This rule indicates that if you can understand the words of a song or poem from the bard at the next table, you should either wait till they are finished or go and entertain a table a bit further away. Basically be courteous to your fellow bards and don't distract their bardic by belting out yours too close by. If an ensemble is playing the rules are a little different. I usually will not have an ensemble stop playing when someone wants to make a toast (or just likes to hear their own voice). The pit does not start playing during someone's toast, that someone should not start toasting during the pit's playing. Its a matter of courtesy.

8.) Heralds and Musicians:

General Heralds making daily announcements need to be aware of any bardic or group musicians performing before they interrupt the performance. This happens far too often, I am afraid. If they do it too often, politely ask them if they can wait till after a song is finished (it's a difference of a minute or two). This does not apply to heralding during feast since several bards are usually working the tables at once, but it does apply to ensembles playing during feast.

9.) Bards and Feast:

I would really like to see in the future (if possible) the bards who will be performing for the tables to get fed first or even before the feast is even announced. This will give the bards an opportunity to entertain the populace as they are standing in line for feast or waiting at their tables during serving. Bards, remember, do try to stay out of the way of the servers. The populace will prioritize their tummies and your song, accordingly (you will always come up short), so try not to get in between a hungry populace and their food. Bards, it is always a good idea to carry around a tankard with you (see last part of item 5).

10.) Orchestration:

As Master Robin Solarius (an Ansteorran Kingdom Music Master of days gone by) has in the past stressed, the most important part of your dance music is going to be the MELODY LINE and the PERCUSSION. These two are the most (and I cannot stress this enough) important part of what is coming out of the pit (where the band sits). Everything else is "gravy."

11.) Instrumentation:

As far as recruiting musicians, the thing that everyone has to remember is that period instruments are ungodly expensive, so you have to be a little accommodating in putting together a guild since not everyone can afford to fork out a load for some of this stuff. Consider gathering

musicians from outside the SCA. Many early period musicians and groups in a city are not familiar with our organization and are usually looking for places to practice their art. This is a wonderful way of introducing newcomers to the SCA. Take advantage of their interest. If you can't find musicians with period instruments than consider finding music readers who play instruments that sound period (hammer dulcimer, classical guitar, double reeds, classical flute, folk harp, classical strings, trombone, 12 string guitar, mandolin, Irish cittern). So they are not period designs, ...live with it. The purpose of a dance musician's guild is to provide a period sound for the dancers. Adapt. Obviously you have to draw the line somewhere. But that is a very gray line. I see a lot of folk guitars at events. Well, steel strings sound like a Bandora, especially the 12 string variety. Most SCA folks are on a budget. Don't expect them to go out and buy a \$3K Bandora. Though, I think a Fender Strat with Marshall stacks is probably right out.

12.) The Sacred Band Pit:

Okay, here is a touchy subject. It has to do with educating the populace about the pit. The pit is usually defined as the area where musicians are playing and have their instruments laying about for easy access. The problem is that non musicians do not understand the value of the instruments that we are using and there for you will see folks stepping over them, handling them, brushing up against music stands, and placing belongings near them, and allowing children to run around them. In my mind I understand that the populace is not to blame for this but in fact is our responsibility to educate them. It is very important for us to politely spell out in big huge letters the following rules for the populace concerning the pit.

If you are not playing in the band, please do not enter the perimeter of the pit. I don't give a rat's ass if you are a brass hat or not. The perimeter of the pit is there to protect things that most SCA participants cannot afford to replace unless they sell their car or cash in their CD...whatever. Think of it as a list field with fighters engaged. If you accidentally step on a \$4000 instrument you may be performing a real financial death scene as a result. This goes for everyone, royals included. The pit perimeter protects those from any unpleasant law suits or hostel scenes.

If someone needs a musician whilst he/she is in the pit (such as children or others needing attention), please don't enter the pit to talk to them. Ask them to leave the vicinity of the pit and you can take it somewhere else.

Never Ever reach out to touch an instrument that is not yours. Many musicians like myself consider their instruments as an extension of themselves. Reaching out to touch or handle an instrument without permission is similar to reaching out and grabbing someone's bodily privates. I could not be more serious about this.

Please don't be offended if you offer to carry a musician's instruments for them and they politely refuse. Most musicians prefer not to pass on the responsibility of accidentally damaging an instrument upon a gentle with good intentions. You have to realize that most people do not know that the little piece of wood that a musician carries around can range anywhere from \$300 to \$10,000. At any one event, a musician's instrument could very well be the most expensive single item present on site. Replacing a period instrument becomes more expensive each year

and there is usually a 1 year to 5 year wait to replace it. So you can understand how a musician can become obsessive over a single piece of wood.

One thing that site stewards are now doing is bringing a small version of list field posts with yellow ribbon to tie a perimeter around the pit to give a visual reminder of the no step in zone for the populace. This may sound extreme but a musicians do what they have to do in order to continue bringing period music to events and still maintain the safety of period instruments.

12.) SCA Dance Music Sources:

SCA Dance music can be purchased through the following sources:

- a.) ****SCA Dance Music - Pennsic War (\$10.50)
If you have to get any book...this is it. It is an extensive volume of SCA Dance music!!!!!!!!!!
Lady Phaedria d'Aurillac
706A Liberty Street
El Cerrito, CA, 94530-3110
510/525-7587
kristina@us.oracle.com

- b.) Playford Dances Vol.1, London Pro Musica- LPM102 (~\$9.50)
This has 68 dances from Playford in SATB recorder formats.
Boulder Colorado Early Music Shop
1-800-499-1301

- c.) Early Period Dance Music - (\$20)
This book has an Ansteorran specific list along with the Out of period music used for some SCA choreographed dances (Duchess Rhondalyn's, John Tallow's...etc.).
Al Cofrin
16018 Constitution Ln
Friendswood, TX. 77546
281/648-7885
<http://www.flash.net/~avatar1/>
avatar1@flash.net

- d.) Period Music (**Highly Recommended**)
This is a full collection of period consort music arrangements (two volumes worth)
Hld. Samuel Piper (Steve Hendricks)
512-990-7700
steve@musician.org

If you have any comments or additions to these thoughts please bounce them off me.
Al Cofrin (Avatar of Catsprey), 281/648-7885, avatar1@flash.net