

The Extra Mile

instructor to demo a few walls of the dance at the beginning of the workshop, then again at the end of the workshop so we can cement in our minds what we want it to look like.

After some trial and error, we have found that we would rather concentrate on the harder dances on Saturday, while we are still relatively fresh. Then on Sunday the program is geared to the improver level, so everyone can relax a little and not feel too overloaded.

Another thing is that there is always an interpreter (usually me) on stage to translate for the guest instructors who come from overseas. Just learning the steps to a dance in English isn't such a problem, but since most of the dancers don't speak much English, it's a big help to have what the instructor is saying translated into Japanese.

Details

There are always a lot of little things that demand careful attention. None of them by themselves are a big deal, but hopefully, added together make our event a little special.

For example, we serve box lunches. Traditionally there tends to be a lot of deep-fried foods in such lunches, but we request a healthier menu with lots of vegetables, since dancers don't usually want anything heavy while they're dancing. The same is true for the buffet dinner in the evening.

A lot of people call for taxis to take them to their hotel after the dancing at night. We have someone from our club out front to make sure that everyone gets the correct taxi, and no one is left stranded.

In Japan it's a tradition to buy "omiyage" - a souvenir, often something edible, local to the area you visit when you go on a trip. Since people don't have a chance to get out and shop during the event, I asked my favourite local sweets shop to come during the lunch hour and open a booth at the venue. They sold out of everything they brought.

These are just a few examples of some of the things we do. I think the most important thing, as with any enterprise, is being willing to "go the extra mile". Events can only be successful if organisers enjoy being there to make things happen no matter how stressful it can get.



Organisation

First of all, our event is put on by a club, rather than an individual owner. We have about 50 members in our club, and everyone is expected to help out in running the event. The club members pay to attend, just like everyone else, so we try and make sure that everyone is able to take all of the workshops. All of the busy work takes place during the breaks, and as soon as the workshops start, members are told

to quit what they were doing and go take the workshops. The things that need to be done are all pre-assigned, and there is a master list of all the jobs and who is doing what when, so things stay pretty organized. We also have a meeting early each morning for club members to check on last minute details and any changes.

The common denominator for any event organiser is wanting the attendees to have a good time. That's a given. But every event goes about this in different ways. Here are some of the things that have been incorporated into our event to make it as enjoyable as possible for everyone involved.



Programming

In terms of what is taught in the workshops, we go for quality rather than quantity. We ask the guest instructors to spend time teaching good dance technique along with steps, and review each dance multiple times over the weekend. We also ask the

Open Dancing

The workshops are held during the day, then in the evening there is a buffet dinner followed by open dancing. Just like anywhere else in the world, the people attending all know different dances, so we try and keep tabs on what other instructors are teaching throughout the year, and make up a playlist of common dances, including both recent

dances and many classic dances. We publish the list about two months before the event, and take requests, then post the finalized program a week or so before the event. We also pass out copies to everyone, so they'll know what's being played as the evening progresses. We have someone from our club assigned to dance at the front and back for each of the dances to make sure they get started correctly. We also try to incorporate a lot of floor splits. Since we choose mostly easy dances for the floor splits, people are able to join in and learn the dance on the floor even if they don't know it already. My personal goal for the last event was to have 80% of the dancers on the floor all evening for open dancing, and I think we succeeded.

Our last issue featured *Martha Ogasawara's* club Nagoya Crazy Feet and their celebration event with Jo Thompson Szymanski and Scott Blevins. Here she looks back at what makes the perfect event.