

Musician Guidelines for Wednesday Night Musicians

Vision

Germantown Country Dancers (GCD) is committed to continuing to support a strong and vibrant community of English Country Dancing in the Delaware Valley. This can only be possible if the dancers, musicians and callers are equally committed to the organization and to one another. GCD is truly fortunate to have a wealth of musicians who enjoy playing for our dances, and the organization values and appreciates their many contributions. GCD supports a variety of workshops for dancers, musicians and callers to achieve this goal and looks for ways to nurture the development of local musicians. GCD hopes that the musicians that play for our dances also love English Country Dancing and being a part of this community.

This document outlines expectations for all GCD Wednesday night musicians, providing overall expectations as well as more detailed information.

1. Playing music for a Wednesday night dance is a commitment, and it is a paid job. Callers plan their dance programs, study them and think about how best to teach them. Musicians receive the program about 4 weeks in advance and are expected to prepare to play the tunes for these dances with their band. GCD expects that each musician will take responsibility for playing to the best of their ability. Ideally, they will practice the Wednesday night program together. All Wednesday musicians should be familiar with and comfortable playing all the tunes in the [“repertoire” list of dances](#) provided by the GCD callers group.
2. Musicians are expected to strive to develop their skills and understanding of this genre in order to best support English country dancing. They are encouraged to attend GCD-sponsored workshops as well as to seek other opportunities to improve their skills. Not all musicians are ready to play in a small ensemble for a Wednesday Night Dance. GCD offers a variety of other opportunities to play. We encourage musicians who are new to playing for English to begin by playing in Open Band, Fish and Chips and Musical Chairs. 2.
3. English Country Dance (ECD) is social dancing that began in the 16th century during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Modern ECD is a living tradition, blending historic and newly composed material and linked to a unique genre of music. GCD encourages musicians to participate in the GCD community as a dancer. Gaining a better understanding of this genre of dancing can enhance a

musician's ability to play for the dancers. GCD encourages the Wednesday night musicians to dance and/or come to watch the dancing to gain a better understanding about how to play the music to best support the dance. Each musician that plays for a Wednesday night dance receives a coupon for free admission to a future Wednesday night dance or towards admission for a GCD Saturday Night dance.

4. GCD encourages musicians to become members of the community. Membership includes discounted admission to dances and to musician workshops. Opportunities for one-on-one mentoring with skilled ECD musicians will be made available free of charge to musicians who are GCD members.

Some Basics:

GCD expects that the musicians who are hired to play on Wednesday nights have a basic familiarity with playing English Country Dance music and are able to demonstrate the following skills on their instrument(s).

1. **Tuning/Intonation:** the ability to tune your instrument and maintain accurate pitch to ensure that your instrument is in tune with itself and with others
2. **Steady rhythm:** the ability to maintain the tempo asked for by the caller and make and maintain adjustments to the tempo during the dance as requested by the caller
3. **Familiarity with tunes on the caller's program:** not just playing the notes, but having an idea of the tempo and character of the dance
4. **Familiarity with the [repertoire list](#) provided by the callers group:** These tunes may be added at any point during an evening if the callers need to adjust the program.

Advanced Skill: Playing the tune behind the caller (underlining) to support the caller while they are teaching. When done well, this can enhance the caller's teaching of the dance.

Logistics:

1. Musicians are expected to arrive at the hall no later than 7:30pm to set up and to meet with the caller to discuss the logistics and needs for the evening's dance.
2. Sound support on Wednesday nights is one of the many roles performed by volunteers to support the community. If the sound person is not present, members of the community will work together to carry out the functions of the

sound person. If this should happen, the band should assist by setting up and taking down the sound equipment. Even under normal circumstances, the sound person might appreciate help from the band at the beginning or end of the dance. Check with the sound person to find out how you might be helpful.

3. Both an acoustic and a digital piano are available. If a band chooses to use the digital piano, the band is responsible for helping to set it up and put it away. If the pianist is not able to arrive early enough to set up the keyboard, other members of the band are expected to do this.

Communication:

Each band is expected to designate a contact person who will act as a liaison with the caller both before and during the dance. This role may be filled by the Band Organizer, but it does not have to be. A band may choose to have two different musicians in this role; one before the dance and one during the dance. Whatever the band decides should be communicated to the caller.

Before the dance:

1. If the band has questions regarding their upcoming program, the contact person should reach out to the caller. All of the GCD callers encourage communication with the band during the weeks leading up to the dance to answer questions about the choreography and character of the dance, style points or the individual caller's preferred tempo for the tune.
2. Callers are also open to input from the band and may be able to adjust the program, if they have sufficient notification. If the band has any questions or concerns regarding the program, the contact person should reach out to the caller **within 2 weeks of receiving the dance program**.
3. Please keep in mind that callers often choose dances, or arrange a program based on the key signatures of the tunes. If a band would like to suggest a key change, they should discuss this with the caller prior to the dance - within two weeks of the dance.

During the Dance:

1. The designated contact person should identify themselves to the caller before the dance starts. This contact person will be the primary liaison between the caller and the band and will help ensure good communication during the dance.

2. At least one musician in the band must be able to play the introductory notes or measures to start the dance. They should be played “in time” to clearly indicate the tempo to the dancers. If unsure about the tempo for the dance, musicians should check with the caller before starting. At GCD the usual convention is a two note introduction. Occasionally a caller may request a different introduction. If the band has a special or unusual introduction, the contact person should first discuss this with the caller.
3. The band’s contact person for the evening should ask whether or not the caller would like a musician to play the tune behind the caller during the teaching of the dance (underlining). The caller may ask a musician to underline the tune during the teaching of some, but not all tunes. This is a role for a **single** musician. Underlining is a skill that may require practice and an understanding of the dance for musicians to do this effectively. If not done well, it may actually make it more difficult for a caller to teach.
4. The contact person and/or the caller may want to check in with one another during the break to give and receive feedback about the first half of the dance.

Engagement:

1. Musicians are expected to be present and engaged during the evening. During the teaching, watch the instruction and the walk-through carefully to identify any tricky or important points of the choreography and to note the character of the dance.
2. During the teaching, musicians should tune quietly and off mic. Noodling, making noise or talking loudly can be distracting to the caller and the dancers. *“This is an excellent opportunity to learn to practice with your eyes only.”* (Leah Barkan)
3. Musicians are expected to be flexible and understand that different callers may have different interpretations of a dance. This may require that the musicians have the ability to play a familiar tune at a different tempo or in a different style.
4. GCD would like Wednesday nights to be a collaborative and enjoyable experience for everyone. Musicians and callers are encouraged to be open to giving and/or receiving constructive feedback. Have fun! Just remember that *“...you and the caller are there to serve the dancers.”* (Gene Murrow)

Addendum: There are many musicians who are admired for their contributions to English Country Dancing. Two of these, Gene Murrow and Leah Barkan, have also dedicated much of their careers to passing on their knowledge and

experience to other musicians. We are extremely fortunate to have a number of documents that were written by Gene and Leah. These documents were used as workshop handouts or shared with musicians in bands that they were working with. The thoughts and suggestions in these documents reflect their personal views about what helps make a good ECD musician and their viewpoints articulate many of the tenets of the GCD Guidelines for Wednesday Night Musicians.

We have included links to these documents below and consider them to be a part of these Guidelines. Please read them.

GCD Wednesday Night Music Committees

GCD has two committees that work together to support Wednesday night music and musicians. Their responsibilities and contact information are below.

Music Development Committee:

gcdmusicdevelopment@gmail.com

Overview - The Music Development Committee is made up of three GCD musicians who work together to focus on the following goals:

- Ensure enjoyable, danceable music at weekly GCD dances while continuing our tradition of community based live music
- Identify the needs and interests of our musicians..
- Provide opportunities for our musicians to meet their goals and become more integrated into our community.
- Help new musicians and bands develop so that they too can play for Wednesday dances.

In order to support these goals the committee works to integrate new musicians into our community, develops workshops and mentoring opportunities for all musicians and oversees the process of adding newly formed bands to the Wednesday night schedule.

Additional details about this committee's role in supporting GCD musicians:

1. Welcome Letter: A copy of the letter is posted on the Musicians Page on the GCD Website <https://germantowncountrydancers.org/musicians.php>.

Musicians new to GCD will receive a letter from the Music Development Committee welcoming them to the organization. This letter provides information to help musicians who are interested in playing for English Country Dancing become familiar with the varied opportunities to play for GCD. We encourage all interested musicians, regardless of their skill level or experience, to participate in playing for GCD. If you know someone that might be interested, please let the Music Development Committee know.

2. Mentoring and other opportunities to gain skills: The committee is excited to work with individual musicians and bands that are interested in exploring ways to gain new skills or work toward achieving new musical goals. Contact the committee to learn more about these opportunities.
3. Coordination with the Music Scheduling Committee: The Music Development Committee maintains a list of band organizers as well as the bands that may be scheduled to play for Wednesday nights. This list, currently including 43 bands and 28 band organizers, will be shared with the Music Scheduling Committee. Additions are always welcome, and the process for expanding these lists is detailed in the Band Formation Guidelines document. A copy of this document is posted on the Musicians Page on the GCD Website <https://germantowncountrydancers.org/musicians.php>.
4. Feedback Process: The Committee will provide a mechanism for callers and bands to share feedback with one another. The goal is to achieve a better experience for all. Two separate surveys will be sent out through gcdmusicdevelopment@gmail.com within one day of the dance; one to the caller and the other to the band organizer. Responses to the survey will be expected by the Saturday after the dance. The committee will synthesize the feedback and, within four weeks, will send the caller's feedback to the band organizer and the band's feedback to the caller.

Music Scheduling Committee:

gcdwedmusic@gmail.com

Overview: The Music Scheduling Committee consists of two or three people, one of whom is a GCD Wednesday night musician. The primary goal of this committee is to create the band schedule for the Wednesday night dance.

Scheduling Process: GCD has three scheduling cycles each year. The Music Scheduling Committee sends an email prior to each cycle to a list of Band Organizers. The committee gathers the responses, creates the schedule and notifies the Band Organizers. It is not uncommon that there are more band requests than there are available Wednesday night dates. If this happens, the committee keeps track of the bands that were not scheduled and prioritizes scheduling them in the next cycle.

Resources for Musicians

GCD provides the following resources to support musicians to gain experience and to improve their skills as players of English country dance music.

1. A list of [“repertoire” dances](#) – tunes that GCD callers expect Wednesday night musicians to be comfortable playing without prior notice.
2. Videos of English country dancing
[Jan Alter’s ECD Videos](#); [Lambertville Country Dancers ECD videos](#)
3. [Musicians Page on the GCD Website](#)
4. [Musicians’ workshops](#)
5. [Open Band](#)
6. Slow Jam sessions
7. [Fish & Chips](#)
8. Musical Chairs
9. Notes about musicianship from Gene Murrow and Leah Barkhan. See Addendum above for further explanation. These documents may be found on the Musicians Page on the GCD website
<https://germantowncountrydancers.org/musicians.php>.
10. The GCD callers: They are open to answering questions and providing guidance to help musicians better understand the genre of English Country Dancing.
11. Come and dance on a Wednesday Night! Weekly Wednesday night Dances and monthly Saturday night dances October through May. Wednesday night musicians are given one coupon each time they play. Admission to any Wednesday night dance is free with one coupon. Coupons may be combined and used toward the admission price of a Saturday night Dance.
12. Learn more about GCD: Visit the [GCD website](#) to learn more about the wide variety of activities that the organization is involved in.

