



THE JAZZ SERVICES  
GUIDE FOR  
NEW FOLK  
PROMOTERS  
BY STEVE HEAP & ALAN BEARMAN



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## PREFACE

The Guide for New Promoters evolved through a fairly lengthy process. Firstly in the Jazz world, it was promoted and conceived by Jazz Services. Then, at the suggestion of Chris Hodgkins, Director of Jazz Services, FolkArts England adapted the work for use by new folk promoters.

Thanks are due to the original authors Joan Morrell and Dan Somogyi for their crusading work and to Chris Hodgkins of Jazz Services for this opportunity to build on the original work.

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## INTRODUCTION

A look through the venue section of any folk magazine will confirm that folk, roots and acoustic music now prospers way beyond the stereotypical view of a folk club housed in the upstairs room of a pub.

Although the folk club circuit has diminished significantly since its peak in the 1960s and 70s, many clubs still flourish and plenty of them are still in the pub room. Many more are in arts centres, village halls, community centres, hotels, cafes and social clubs, all of which have their own strengths and challenges.

The focus of a booming and successful folk scene is now to be found in the flourishing festival scene. There are hundreds of events that can be described as Folk Festivals and the music is now prominently featured in major Arts Festivals across the country.

Whilst the clubs have reduced in numbers, folk music has established itself in a number of mainstream venues as part of their regular music programme. The same magazine section will show folk as part of the programme in numerous arts centres, theatres and concert halls. Sometimes the venue's programmer promotes these shows, recognising folk as a significant and attractive part of their programme.

Increasingly though, independent promoters are hiring established venues and putting on their own shows. Most major cities and many smaller towns have folk enthusiasts actively promoting in mainstream venues. There are obviously significant differences between running a folk club in a small upstairs pub room and booking the local theatre for a concert but many of the same principles hold true.

One of the first decisions to be made is to determine just what it is that you want to run. Most clubs and regular music venues emerge because of an enthusiasm for a particular genre of music. Alongside this is often a clear vision of how that music should be presented. A look around the folk club circuit will identify not only a range of different music styles but also a variety of presentation styles. The music and the presentation are inextricably linked. A Singers' Club will usually have a different physical layout from a concert style club as well as a different etiquette, pricing system and marketing policy.

It is usually the preferences of the volunteer club organiser that dictate what and who gets booked. Often a policy evolves over a period of time, affected by both the nature of the venue and a history of what worked and what didn't. Some successful clubs are very "broadminded" whilst others have a very carefully defined artistic policy.

With folk now more prominent in the media, a variety of terms have emerged that are applied to strands of the broader folk and roots scene. Acid Folk is now regarded as a genre on E-Bay whilst Twisted Folk is defined as "music that has been enriched by the influence of folk and roots history". Whilst there are plenty of artist and audience crossovers between different types of "folk" there are distinct but similar music scenes running parallel. There may be a folk club running close by to a "new acoustic" venue or a Singers' Club in the same town as a regular folk concert series.

Quality control (or lack of it) has always been an issue in folk clubs. If a club wants to encourage allcomers through "floor spots" etc, then it's not always easy to justify door prices high enough to pay top quality guests. It's tempting to play safe by booking supports or use tried and tested residents but where then, does the next generation of top quality guests come from? Regional folk magazines carry the evidence that there are plenty of choices out there; Singers' Clubs, venues with nationally known guests every week and all stages in between. Clubs emerge from an enthusiasm for a particular style and a wish to promote it. Starting from a decision on what sort of event is to be created; a truly conducive venue needs to be found. Door prices, amplification issues, advertising policies and the whole shape of the evening all follow, once the nature of the beast is clearly defined.

Some clubs will go on relatively unchanged for years because that's the way the organisers and audience like it. If that doesn't fulfil the needs of a large enough constituency, then other venues and even whole circuits will emerge. One of the best folk clubs in London emerged partly because a group of enthusiasts felt that their local club wasn't delivering what they wanted. The original no longer runs but the "alternative" goes from strength to strength.

Then there's the whole range of other potential venues for folk music. A cursory look through the Tour pages of fRoots magazine will identify artists as diverse as Cara Dillon, Aly Bain, Martin Simpson and Lau playing a similar range of arts centres, theatres and large folk clubs whilst Kate Rusby and Fairport Convention take the music to the major concert halls.

Whatever the style of the event, the interpretation of "folk music" or the size of the venue, there are some guiding principles that can be identified, throughout the process; from first idle thoughts to the day of the first show.

## GETTING STARTED

The first decision to be made then is to identify exactly what it is that you want to run. This should be closely followed by some thoughts on just why you want to do it. Within the range of events commonly regarded as folk clubs there are plenty of variations, from song clubs who meet regularly but rarely, if ever book guest performers, through to clubs who always feature a guest performer of national repute. The shape of the evening varies too. Some clubs start with a resident band playing tunes before the evening formally starts with residents and floor spots (performers who aren't booked but want to sing or play for their own enjoyment or to gain experience and exposure). Some venues rely just on a house band to open proceedings followed by the guest doing two sets either side of an interval.

It has become the norm in most clubs for the guest to finish the first half and then finish the second half, sometimes after more floor singers and residents. Whereas the guest often used to be programmed for two half hour spots, this has stretched to 40 or 45 minutes in many clubs. This can be seen as a positive move in that it gives the audience more of what many of them came to see. On the other hand it could restrict opportunities for up and coming performers.

Some of the bigger concert style clubs ensure against a possible dearth of good quality floor singers by booking a support act to perform one or two sets. This has the advantage of being able to guarantee that the paying audience will get good value for money. It can also mean that good floor singers might think that they probably won't get a spot and go elsewhere instead. The whole issue of floor spots begs a number of questions. Do you give everyone an equal chance and put him or her on whatever the standard or do you exercise quality control? Does everyone get one song or two? Do you give favourites the best and longest spots? Should floor singers pay to get in? All answers are defensible ways of running your own club but there is the question of pleasing and keeping your audience. A Singers' Club may consist of a relatively small number of people who are happy to pay a nominal price for the pleasure of singing to and listening to likeminded regulars. A concert club audience may be willing to pay the sort of door price that pays for top nationally known guests but what do they expect to hear the rest of the evening?

There are plenty of clubs who have such a store of good singers and musicians willing to do one or two numbers that they never have to worry too much about keeping the standards up. There are others who struggle to fill the rest of the evening and have to present their paying audience with somewhat less than they may feel entitled to. To the newcomer enthused by a range of top quality artists at a festival this can be a real turn off.

So, some early decisions to be made include those on what level of guest, if any, you intend to invite and how you intend to fill the rest of the evening. This will affect the type of room needed and how you arrange it. You may have been prompted to start a new club because the nearest club doesn't meet your needs and those of your perceived audience. If that's the case then try to see the new venture as complementary to the existing club rather than the opposition. Assuming that there are like-minded people in your area, you may have a number of volunteer helpers and singers and musicians who are happy to work with you on a common vision. You must then be sure that as well as these committed ones, there is actually an audience out there who wants to buy into your vision.

So far we have referred to clubs rather than venues. The majority of the smaller regular events still call themselves clubs for a variety of reasons but significant numbers of folk events are now run in established arts venues with no thought of club status. Many of the decisions to be made are the same and as club is a useful term in this context we'll continue with it for now.

You have decided what it is that you want to run. Now you have to decide when. It obviously makes sense to avoid the nights of the week that the nearest clubs run on. A look at your local folk magazine will show you which nights should be avoided. Different nights of the week have their own pros and cons although some of these may be regional and seasonal. Fridays and Saturdays are obviously the most popular going

out nights but then there is more competition and more demand on venues. It can be harder to get an audience out early on a Friday night whereas a 7.30 start and an earlier finish on a Sunday night can be popular. If you find the perfect venue, then you may find your choices limited by when you can actually have it.

## THE RIGHT VENUE

### Licensing

There are lots of factors to be considered here and some are common whatever sort of folk event you want to run. New licensing laws came into operation in November 2005 (the 2003 Licensing Act) and so whatever venue you choose it needs to be properly licensed for music and if you wish to sell alcohol as well then the licence must also cover that. Without doubt the easiest way is to hire a venue that already has a full 'premises licence'. The responsibility to check the licence is yours so you must have sight of it. You could be accused of running an unlicensed venue as well as the venue owner.

Advice in this area is easy, and the process is also quite simple. Start by asking the venue owner or manager and/or check with the Local Authority Licensing Department. They often list all of their licensed venues on their websites. If you go down the route of an unlicensed venue then it is your job to get it licensed for your events. This could be a full premise licence or a TEN (Temporary Event Notice), again you should consult with your Local Authority Licensing Department.

### Creature comforts

The venue needs to be comfortable, with furniture that facilitates your preferred style. Do you need a stage? If there isn't one, will the audience be able to see the performers? Is there a bar in the room? If so, do you want it open during the evening with the possible attendant problems of ringing tills and chatter? Whilst the ideal may be to have a bar in a foyer or adjoining room it doesn't often work out like that.

Good acoustics are obviously a big plus but what about sound overspill from outside the room? Traffic noise and music from the bar below are common intrusions that have to be avoided or minimised. Is the room warm in winter and airy in summer?

If the room is above or adjacent to a bar, it is worth checking that it's a bar your audience is comfortable visiting to buy their drinks or even to just pass through to get to the clubroom. Toilets are also an issue, needing to be easily accessible and well maintained.

Lighting is an issue, depending on the type of event you want to run you may be able to cope with the existing lights or you may have to invest in some additional lighting. Then there is the issue of PA. If you are looking at regular guests playing for more than 50 people you are likely to be looking at needing a system in place, particularly for groups mixing instrumentals and vocals. Apart from the cost element there are the logistics to be considered here, as you will need earlier access to the room in order to set up so it needs to be available well before the show starts. There will need to be easy access for equipment both then and at the end of the evening.

The perfect room is hard to find so in the end you will probably need to decide which factors are most important to you and settle for those. Many clubs have led a nomadic existence over the years with changes of ownership and management leading to enforced venue moves. It's worth finding out what the situation is and how long the current management thinks they are staying for. When naming your club it is worth considering if calling it the Brown Bear Folk Club will seem such a good idea when you have to move to the Royal Standard.

Many clubrooms are made available free or at a nominal rent in exchange for the expected increase in bar takings but it is still worth getting an agreement in writing.



## Health and safety issues

These matters are covered by Jazz Services' Guide as such important issues remain constant whatever the music. A few additional notes may be of use.

When you take on a responsibility of an organiser you are effectively inviting people, (whether they pay or volunteer or are paid as the artist is not relevant), to come into the venue which you are now taking responsibility for. This is known as Duty of Care.

In the eyes of Health & Safety Executive, the Local Authority Licensing Department and an insurance company you are the person responsible for the care of these people whom you have invited in. This is not as onerous as it sounds. You will need to satisfy yourself that there is a safe supply of electricity before musicians plug in and that the musician's electrical equipment is also certificated and safe. You should also see to it that the performers (musicians) have their own Public Liability Insurance. Musicians' Union members are indemnified for up to £10 million public liability, by far the simplest route.

You should also ensure that such things as staircases to the venue are safe for their purpose. That the venue has adequate emergency exits, sometimes called fire exits, and meets with the local authority's building regulations. All of this will have been checked by the police, the fire authority, the environmental health and the local authority licensing officer before the venue was licensed and this work can be encompassed by a sight of the venue's full licence.

If you intend to change the main structure of the venue in any way then again you will be modifying the venue under the new 2003 Licensing Act, modifications of venues trigger re-inspection before re-licensing. Not included in modification are such things as arrangements for tables and chairs, position of stage, temporary lighting and PA. It is your direct responsibility to position these in safe places leaving clear runs to fire exits, and comfortable access to the stage for musicians, and to the bar for your customers. Here refer back to your Duty of Care as accidents caused by your positioning of temporary equipment in the room are your responsibility.

## Smoking

Clearly, venues where the public gather like pubs, clubs, arts centres, and concert halls fall under the Non-Smoking Law. You as the organiser must ensure the law is obeyed.

## Insurance

Referring again to Duty of Care, your safety net is a Public Liability Insurance policy to the value of £10 million in any one claim at any one time. Your local car insurance broker is not normally suitable for this role; there are specialists who work in this area. Once again, first check with your venue owner who may well already have the necessary cover, which can be built into your hire charge. If not then you must ensure you take out your own Public Liability Insurance as you are clearly taking responsibility for a great number of potential hazards. Premiums will vary on size of venue, geographical location, and type of music, entertainment and audience expected. The authors would recommend insurance brokers within the events industry. These can be found by viewing a variety of websites.



## PRS licence

The Performing Right Society is a non-profit making organisation, which collects licence fees on behalf of its members who have written or published an original piece of music or a variation on a traditional piece. This is known as a PRS registered work.

PRS have a variety of different licence categories and one specifically designed for live music in clubs, societies and small organisations.

Once again first check if your venue has got its own PRS Licence, and if not contact them at **PRS for Music, 29-33 Berners Street, London, W1T 3AB, tel: 020 7580 5544, email: [info@prs.co.uk](mailto:info@prs.co.uk), web: [www.prsformusic.com](http://www.prsformusic.com).**

The licenses are not expensive.

Once your PRS Licence is in place you should request a pad of programme return forms and encourage your artists to complete the form with their full set each evening. Return these to PRS for a proportion of the licence fee to be then forwarded to the writers and publishers of the material that was used on your club night. The system is not 100% watertight and samples are often taken for distribution of funds, but the system in principle returns a proportion of the licence fee to writers and publishers of music.

## Access for the public

From 1999 to 2005 a variety of new legislation was introduced known as the Disability Discrimination Act. Once again check with your venue manager or owner that their venue complies with the act, or has proper dispensation, i.e. a flight of stairs up, and a fire exit down a flight of stairs is not accessible for someone who can't walk. Morally you should take every possible opportunity to make your venue as accessible as possible to all people at all times. Legally you must fit into the Disability Discrimination Act, which does give some dispensation for venues that are for whatever reason not always totally accessible, and once again check with your Local Authority who will have checked the venue before licensing to see that it either fits the DDA or has the appropriate dispensation. See Disability Discrimination Act at the Equality and Human Rights Commission website ([www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)).

## Car parking

Depending on the venue location you may wish to check parking facilities but in many cases it will be more appropriate to promote the use of public transport.

## FINANCES

You have a vision of the event you want to run and a venue to run it in, now it's time to plan in detail before committing yourself to costs that you can't meet. This means drawing up budgets.

### Expenditure: venue expenses

Depending on the nature of the event you are envisaging there are plenty of variable costs. Venue rent varies dramatically, from non-existent through nominal to a serious commitment. PA can be a major cost, unless you can source the equipment and the engineer from within your own ranks. Lighting may also be an extra cost depending on what is already in the room.

### Expenditure: publicity expenses

These will include the design, print and distribution of publicity, advertising in magazines, website design and maintenance. Postage, stationery and telephone costs will be incurred in distributing your print and in general club administration.

### Expenditure: artistic expenses

The main cost will in most cases be your artists. You will be paying for the main band and it may be that you choose to pay for a support act as well.

## Income

This will be mostly in the form of income from ticket sales. If you are running a club in a pub room and dealing with ticket sales yourselves you should be able to work on gross ticket sales. If you are working within an arts centre or other organisation registered for VAT you will need to subtract at the ruling rate of the gross. Some venues also charge for credit card commission and some charge a flat rate for PRS.

### Income: ticket prices

When calculating a ticket price there are a number of issues to consider, starting perhaps with the local economy. It is worth checking local folk and general arts magazines to get an idea of the going rate. The price needs to reflect what is on offer both in terms of the main guest and the rest of the experience, particularly the other performers and the comfort of the venue. Arts Centres often charge substantially more to see a well-known performer artist than a local folk club may charge to see the same artist. The audience expectations are often different; the venue may be more comfortable with better facilities and higher production values. The Arts Centre may also have higher costs with professional staff and a whole raft of legislation to stay in line with.

Most clubs have a Membership structure with Members paying less than their guests or non – members. Due to the inconsistencies of licensing laws over the years, some clubs have relied on their status as a private club to stay legal. This has often meant that clubs have offered free membership to all provided that they joined 48 hours before their first visit. It is early days but anecdotal evidence suggests that the Licensing Act 2003 now properly covers many clubs where the venue management has taken advantage of the new licensing scheme embracing both alcohol sales and music.

Some venues vary their price depending on the stature of the artist and the level of the fee they have to cover. This is seen as positive and flexible in some quarters and elitist and confusing in others.

Clearly you need to fix a price that is competitive but realistic. If you go for the top end of the price range the audience expectations will be raised so be sure that you can match them. Folk has always struggled

to break away from the image of being a cheap form of entertainment. Providing you can match audience expectations of a good evening's music in comfortable surroundings then be brave and set a price that matches those charged for other comparable events.

It is essential that you make realistic projections about your income and expenditure and that you keep accurate accounts. Many clubs have a treasurer who takes responsibility for this side of things.

## BOOKING THE ARTISTS

Most artists are booked three to six months in advance although some clubs go for a longer lead time and some artists plan over a year in advance. You will need three months at least to get all your publicity together and to organise your team. Most potential organisers take on the task of running a music venue because they feel passionate about the music they want to promote. That often means there is a mental list of artists to be booked as soon as the opportunity arises. Ideally such passions and preferences will be shared with the rest of the team and the potential audience.

### Before you make the call

Before making the first enquiries take time to consider how your audience will perceive your targeted artists. There may be some history of comparable venues in the area, if so will that audience take to your intended guest list? Within the broad range of music regarded as folk there are many sub-genres. It is well worth reassuring yourself that your audience will welcome your interpretation of folk music. It will take a while to establish a new market so it is prudent to consider the preferences of your most immediately identifiable audience before you rush to fill up the date sheet.

Now you have an artist in mind, you can consider if he or she is right for your venue. Are the layout, physical structure and ambience conducive to the artist giving of their best? Can you meet any technical requirements the artist may have?

If you don't know how to reach your preferred artist there are a number of directories that will help but most artists have web sites that will give contact details for bookings.

Then there's the question of whether to call the artist direct or call an agent. Often there is no choice as many artists work only through agents. Some artists do look after their own diaries and some operate a mixture of both methods dependant on who is asking them. There is still some resistance to working with agents among some folk club organisers and it is worth looking at the pros and cons.

Some artists have proved impossible to tie down over the years until they've found the right agent. Sometimes the more impersonal contact through an agent can allow for exploration of ideas and possibilities without feeling the obligation to proceed if things don't turn out quite as intended. Many artists are away touring a lot and don't have the time, facilities or inclination to deal with the necessary administration.

The dynamics between the parties are different between booker and agent from those between booker and artist so potential benefits and problems should be considered in advance. Booking artists who are friends is great when everything is going well and the audience shares your enthusiasm but can be problematic when attendances start falling.

Agents vary considerably in their methods and it is useful to establish a way of working which improves the chances of the relationship being a fruitful one.

Before that first call it is worth thinking about what you can offer the artist. What level of fee can you realistically afford? Are you looking at a flat fee or do you want to talk about percentage splits? It sometimes suits agents, artists and bookers alike to settle on a guaranteed fee against a percentage usually 70-90% of the ticket income. You pay whichever is the higher. So, if you offer a guarantee of £300, but the takings are £700, the artist will expect to receive the agreed % of those takings instead of the basic £300. Such a deal allows the artist to be assured of a certain level of income whilst sharing the risk that is inevitably taken when promoting any live music. If you want to suggest a percentage of net income you need to think about what costs you wish to subtract from the gross takings before calculating the percentage. This will vary depending on the type of the venue and individual circumstances. Some clubs have their own PA and lights, get the venue for free or at a nominal rent and use volunteer staff. Arts Centre based venues are likely to have a range of costs including VAT, PRS License, credit card commission, staffing, heating and more.

Some established artists do very well out of percentages but it's not always the case with up and coming artists who rely more on the strength of the venue's regular audience than on their own drawing power. When working out what you can afford to offer, think about what additional costs there may be on top of the fee. You may need to pay for accommodation and some hospitality is always welcome.

Just before you make that call, clarify your intentions in your mind. Are you "buying", "window shopping" or "shopping around"?

## The enquiry

You've made the call, assuming that you have a particular artist in mind and a specific date; the first thing to ascertain is the artist's availability. Make it clear what you want the artist to do and what the nature of your venue is. You need to establish what level of fee the artist / agent is looking for. This should clarify whether it is worth continuing this particular line of enquiry. If the price quoted is out of your reach, don't give up straight away, there may be room for negotiation. Much depends on how much the artist / agent wants the gig to happen. If it fits nicely into a tour there may be plenty of scope. If it doesn't and your venue is many miles from the artist's base then you may be unlucky this time. If you are new to this, then it is unlikely that the artist will be especially desperate to play your venue unless your organisation has established a reputation as a reliable booker elsewhere.

### VAT

Before agreeing to any fee it is best to establish what else is involved. Is the artist registered for VAT? If they are and you are not, that will add VAT at the ruling rate to your costs straight away.

### Accommodation

Is accommodation needed? If so, for how many and at what level? Many performers playing the folk club circuit are used to staying at the organiser's house. This is less likely to be acceptable with bands used to playing Arts Centres and Theatres.

### Technical requirements

Check to see that your PA provision will be sufficient and that no further equipment will have to be bought in. If the band is touring from overseas make sure that you don't have to provide drum kit or double bass.

### Hospitality

Many club organisers offer a meal or refreshments to the performers and this is always well received. At the top end of the market you may be asked to provide a "buy out" meal for the band so this needs to be budgeted for.

### **Transport**

It is generally safe to assume that artists can get themselves to a venue but you may be asked to collect a non-driver from the nearest station. Look out for the band that flies in and needs collecting from the airport. Generally this is not seen as the responsibility of the club organiser but it's worth checking.

### **Riders**

Many artists playing Arts Centres and Theatres have a Rider as part of the contract. This may include meals, alcoholic drinks, stipulations about the quality of the dressing room, the provision of towels and in some cases esoteric selections of herbal teas, fruit and sandwiches. Often this is a general rider not aimed at folk clubs but if you have any doubts ask if there is anything that is in the artist's rider that will cost you money. If you are still unsure then make a point of asking to see the Rider and Tech Specs before agreeing to anything.

### **Exclusion clauses**

It is worth asking where else the artist is playing on the same tour or in the few weeks before or after your event. Agents generally understand that artists shouldn't be playing too much in the same area but they may not realise that there are specific venues or towns that you wouldn't want to conflict with. If you think it's necessary you could ask for an exclusion clause in the contract preventing the artist appearing locally in a certain time span but it may be enough to just agree that the agent / artist will ask you before accepting any gigs that may conflict with your event.

### **Payment**

Payment is traditionally made on the night after the performance. Clubs usually pay cash whilst Theatres and Arts Centres usually pay by cheque or by bank transfer. Some agents may request advance deposits. This is unusual at club level and is generally only enforced if the artist is making a major commitment and wants to have some guarantee that they won't make a long trip for nothing. The money is usually held in an agent's Clients' Account until the gig is fulfilled. Such arrangements do cause problems for clubs living hand to mouth but are usually manageable for bigger organisations.

### **Overseas artists**

If the artist is from overseas then there are a number of further things to check such as Visas, Work Permits and Foreign Entertainers' tax. If the artist is from a non-EU country, you will need to check the position on the Visa requirements. This is the responsibility of the agent who will need to be a sponsor under the points based system. Further information can be found at [www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk). Check also that the agent will deal with the requirements of the Foreign Entertainers Tax Unit ([www.hmrc.gov.uk/forms/feu8.pdf](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/forms/feu8.pdf)). See "Cutting through the Red Tape" in the Appendix.

### **Publicity materials**

With negotiations nearing conclusion it's time to be sure that you are going to have access to good publicity materials. Many agents deal mostly with electronic images now so check that you can be emailed appropriate photographs. Beware of the promised impending photo shoot and ensure that you will be sent something immediately in case the new photos don't materialise. Biographies and other copy suitable for Press Releases can also be sent by email. Sometimes you will be referred to the artist's website but be sure that the images there are suitable for downloading and printing from. Some agents expect the band's management or publicist to provide such materials. You need to be confident that you are going to be sent what you need and that you know who to approach to ensure this.

Some artists will have posters and flyers available. These can be useful if you have appropriate places to display them. Posters bigger than A3 can be hard to place and sometimes A4 posters can be more effective. Flyers are sometimes designed with space for overprinting your details; some tours covering bigger venues will carry a list of venues. Ask for CDs if you think you can get local radio airplay to promote the show.

Before you put the phone down check that you know what is happening next. Is the artist confirmed? If not, how do you stand, is it pending you or the artist/ agent and what is the likely timescale?

Many negotiations are now dealt with by email but it's sometimes worth introducing yourself with a phone call. Emails can be very valuable as they can save a lot of time and provide a written account of everything that has been agreed. On the other hand it is easier to avoid answering difficult questions by email so make sure you have everything covered.

## CONTRACT

It is essential that everything be written down to avoid any misunderstandings. It may be agreed that the agent will send you a contract or that you will send your own. It is best to send one that reflects your own needs rather than just rely on the artist / agent's contract. It's a good idea to follow the phone conversation with a quick email outlining what has been agreed and noting that a contract will follow.

Whatever the legal muscle of your contract, its main function in these circumstances is to make sure that both parties share the same expectations of what will happen. The level of complexity needed depends on what sort of act you have booked and how confident you are that their representative sees the gig the same way as you do.

### Artist name (as known)

The addition of the bracketed phrase makes it clear that you expect the booked band to turn up with their usual line up and not with one key member and four deps. If you think this might be an issue it is best to talk about it before contract stage.

### Nature of performance

What do you want them to do and for how long? "Concert 2 x 45 minutes" should be enough.

### When?

Day and date of performance

### Timings

Arrival time, soundcheck time, doors open time, on stage time and curfew if relevant.

### Where

Venue name and address and most importantly, a contact number should anything go wrong on the night.

### Fee

How much? Is the fee inclusive of any travel expenses? If VAT is being charged, insist that you receive an invoice with a VAT registration number. Which currency are you paying in (if there's any doubt)?

### Payment Method

Cash or cheque on the night? Folk Clubs have traditionally paid cash on the night. The increased use of Ticket Agencies means that some venues have to collect money from an agency before they can pay the artist. It is best to explain this to the artist or their agent in advance.

### Foreign Entertainers' Tax

If you are booking an overseas performer make sure that you place the responsibility to sort out the Foreign Entertainers Tax on the agent. If you are booking direct with an overseas artist you may well find yourself dealing with this. See [www.hmrc.gov.uk/forms/feu8.pdf](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/forms/feu8.pdf)

### Accommodation

If you are providing this make it clear what sort of accommodation is being offered, for how many and for which nights.



## Local Transport

You may feel it necessary to make it clear that the artist's transport arrangements are their own concern unless you have agreed to collect them from station or airport.

## Hospitality / Meals

Make it clear what you can provide in terms of meals/ drinks/ refreshments etc.

## Guest Tickets

Some artists will want to bring some guests, it's a good idea to put a limit on this if you are likely to be tight for space.

## PA / Backline

Specify who is providing the PA and if appropriate, the backline (drumkit, bass amp etc.)

## Employment

It is advisable to make it clear that you are engaging artists on a self employed status and that they are responsible for their own tax and national insurance.

## Publicity Requirements

Make it clear what you need and when you need it.

## Exclusion clause

If you have agreed that the artist won't appear within a certain area, within a specified period, put it in writing.

## Insurance Requirements and Indemnity

It is advisable to request that artists have their own Public Liability Insurance. Members of the Musicians' Union will be adequately covered. You may also choose to add an indemnity clause, making it clear that you cannot take responsibility for the consequences of any negligent actions by the artists. Situations you need to cover might include an artist dropping their accordion on someone's foot or damaging your hired-in backline.

If you are dealing with agents, it is likely that they will want to issue their own contract. This is likely to differ from your own and even include clauses that are at odds with yours. The more you have discussed prior to contract the less of a problem this is likely to be. Make sure you query any sections that you don't like. Don't just ignore them. It is usually possible to reach agreement on any points that appear to be difficult.

## ORGANISING YOURSELVES

Most clubs are run by committees although in some cases these are fairly notional. A number are run by benevolent dictatorships and it may not be coincidental that these include some of the better known ones. Whatever you decide you will need to share the load. The role of booking artists is often the most prized and the one held by the main mover.

Publicity and marketing is a time consuming role, then there's database management (mailing lists), box office, account keeping, liaison with the venue, web site maintenance and of course various roles on the night.

It is advisable to set up the club as a not for profit club or society with a written constitution. This should spell out what your organisation does, its aims and objectives, how decisions are made and to whom you are accountable. Constitutions also set out the structure of a group and map out its development. Such a constitution is vital for access to public and charitable funding and often even for setting up of bank accounts.

The Voluntary Arts Network at [www.voluntaryarts.org](http://www.voluntaryarts.org) produces a number of useful Briefings explaining the intricacies of constitutions and the roles of key committee members.

It is important to have a team of people available to run the night. Dealing with admissions is a key position whether it is a proper box office or a desk inside the clubroom door. The door person is the first point of contact for the audience so it's important that they are friendly, welcoming, informative and set the tone for the evening. On busy nights you will need to have others dealing with any queues and placating those who are turned away. A small group of people to set out the room and clear away afterwards helps take the load of the main organiser and provides more opportunities for interaction with the audience. It is worth deciding in advance whether committee members and helpers are expected to pay for their admission. Consideration should also be given to including such helpers in your insurance policy.

If you are using PA and lights these obviously have to be someone's particular responsibility. If you are not employing a professional but are dealing with it within your own ranks then do make sure that someone appropriately qualified is taking responsibility for the safe installation and use of all equipment.

In most clubs the MC has a pivotal role. As well as introducing the performers they are responsible for promoting the ethos of the club both from the stage and when talking to individual audience members. It is important that the MC is in tune with your vision of the club and its music and with any code of etiquette that you wish to promote. Depending of the nature of the club and the venue, your MC may need some help with stage management. It is certainly useful to have someone herding the band together when the MC is on stage and unable to locate the bass player who has just wandered off to the bar. The MC needs to have a conversation with the band to make sure it is clear how the evening is to be drawn to a close. It is common for the MC to indicate to the artist when there is time for one or two numbers before closing. He or she also needs to know that the artist is willing to do an encore if required. Audiences like an encore, it reinforces the feeling of having had a good night and if sensitively planned by the artist they can still be left wanting more.

### Planning your programme

Clubs that meet on the same day each week can quickly establish themselves in the mental diary of the intended audience. If you run once a month or every two weeks it is helpful to establish clearly what the pattern is. Are you the first Monday of the month or the second and fourth Fridays? What happens when there are five Fridays?

Some clubs have a pattern of Singers' Nights alternating with guest nights. Whatever the shape of the programme it's good to be clear so everyone knows what they are getting.

## Planning for the first night

Opening Nights often feature a high profile artist and do well as the name draws in a wider audience than you might usually expect. This can lead to a tricky second night so plan your programme carefully and make sure the rest of the entertainment on subsequent nights is well up to standard.

You should have an idea of how you want your room to look, who is going to do what and how the evening will run. You might want to be doubly sure that you have good singers and musicians lined up to support the main guest. To have some tunes playing as your audience comes in is always welcoming and adds to the sense of anticipation. Decide that you are going to start on time and at what time you will finish. Some clubs have a policy of finishing well before last orders at the bar to allow for plenty of socialising. Changes to opening hours (2003 Licensing Act) may have taken the pressure off in many venues but it's never a good idea to aim to run to as late as you are permitted, as it leaves no scope for anything to go wrong. Pay close attention to all the other factors that might make the evening a pleasure for your audience. Atmosphere, friendliness, good sound, appropriate lighting, comfortable furniture, good well priced beer, easy access and absence of extraneous noise will all help. Many of those factors may not be in your control but maximise those that are. A useful long-term aim is to get to the point where the audience arrive at the pay desk and ask who is on. If they come because they trust you to entertain them in comfort you must be doing something right.

## Etiquette

Some clubs ask people not to enter or leave the room when someone is performing mid-song or tune, most take exception to people talking through songs. This may seem important when it's an unaccompanied ballad singer in full flow it may not seem so relevant if it's a six piece band playing loud instrumentals through a PA. Again it's down to your vision of what the event is. If you want your audience to follow any such "rules" they need to be seen as essential to the enjoyment of all involved and need to be consistently upheld by your team members. Clubs invariably crave a wider audience but it's important to recognise that these welcome newcomers may be totally unaware of folk club etiquette and may not adapt easily if there seems no point to it.

## Ticketing

Some clubs have little need for any ticketing and don't even issue an actual ticket. Again it depends on circumstances. If you are looking at thirty people mostly known to each other, any rigid system can seem a little excessive. Larger numbers and full houses may well be easier handled if you have a ticket and pass out system in place. Whilst theatres and arts centres will have well established box office procedures many folk clubs have fairly ad hoc arrangements. Advance ticket sales will definitely require some decisions to be made. Are you going to make tickets available by telephone, email or in person? It is easiest to sell tickets for future events at the club. That also makes sure that your regulars get first knowledge of any nights that are likely to be particularly busy.

If your club has a limited number of unreserved seats and plenty of room for standing you will need to decide what a ticket actually entitles the holder to. It is not ideal for the ticket holders to arrive to find that others have been admitted and have taken all the best seats. Make it clear in such cases that you are guaranteeing admission not a seat and that the doors will be open at a certain time and after that it is first come first served for the best seats. If you sell 50 tickets in advance and you are able to sell 50 more on the night, be prepared to explain to anxious queuers that you have sold half the tickets already. Whatever system you set up, ensure that it is clear, consistent and as transparently fair as possible.

If you are based in an established arts venue all this can be much easier but there may well be a charge for the use of the box office facilities and credit card charges may also be deducted from the income that is passed on to you. Some clubs are now using online ticket agencies. Audiences seem increasingly willing to pay slightly over the top for being able to book on line at their convenience. This can be done at no cost to the club but will mean that you won't have the money available on the night.

## Membership

Decisions will have to be made about whether or not you want a membership scheme and how it will work. If there are no licensing pressures on you then you need to devise a scheme that is appropriate, easy to maintain and preferably gives you extra income. Some clubs have opted for giving free life membership to help them stay in line with past licensing laws. An annual membership scheme can provide a boost to club coffers. It is often linked to the club's year, starting after the summer break. It is best to avoid giving a full year's membership to everyone whenever they join through the year as this is very hard to maintain and the number of lost members is likely to outweigh the advantages of being able to charge a full year for everyone.

Some newer venues avoid membership altogether preferring to promote a welcoming message free of the implications of clubs and membership.

Whatever system you employ, make sure that you ask for contact details including email addresses so you can mail information about coming events. An annual membership will give you a chance to check details and update your database.

## PUBLICITY AND MARKETING

### The Leaflet

With the venue in place, artists booked and your team ready to go it's time to start telling people all about it. Folk clubs have traditionally printed detailed flyers carrying basic information on the club and a list of forthcoming events. This is often fairly cheaply produced although some bigger venues are now producing some very attractive glossy leaflets. Descriptions of each artist should look beyond your regulars and make it clear to that new audience what sort of entertainment they can expect on a given night.

The flyer obviously needs to carry the name of the club preferably with a distinctive logo. The address of the venue needs to be clear together with a map of the location and details of public transport links. Give a telephone number for enquiries and the web site address. It is helpful to give an idea of the general booking ethos of the club. This can be done in a brief summary or a pithy one liner. "From the fiercely traditional to the frankly eccentric" leaves the reader in little doubt that this is an eclectically minded club with a definite emphasis. State clearly the day and regularity of the club together with the start time. A useful check list is W<sup>3</sup> – What it is? Where it is? When it is? Other useful information might include the policy on floor singers, how any membership system works and details on booking tickets in advance. Leaflets need distribution so talk to all your supporters including performers and try to get yours placed in as many clubs and arts venues as possible. The leaflets will probably speak to an audience that already knows what a folk club is, so target places where that audience will see them. Festivals are obviously ideal and even if they are not particularly local it does no harm to get the name wider recognition. If you have a nearby festival that does mail outs you may be able to buy into theirs and get your leaflets out to their customers.

If your event is based in a theatre or arts centre you may be able to be included in their brochure and flyers. Production values are often much higher but that can mean long lead times so make sure you offer your information in plenty of time.

### Websites

Many folk clubs now have their own web sites and this is a vital tool in making your details available to the potential audience. All the leaflet information can be included and much more. Pictures of the venue are useful and there's plenty of room for archive material, news and comprehensive details on forthcoming artists. Links to the artists' own websites and MySpace pages are useful and better still if you can get reciprocal links. Encourage the artists to list your event on their site but make sure they are clear about the correct name and location of your club. It is always helpful to provide a link to a mapping service, which gives you a choice of maps that potential newcomers can download and print. You may be able to obtain music samples from agents or artists to add to your site or provide links to music on MySpace pages. Whether or not you have your own web site yet, there are plenty of sites that would welcome your information. A search for "folk clubs in Lancashire" for instance will reveal a number of sites eager to include information about your new venture.

Lots of enterprising clubs now send their newsletters by email; it's cheap, effective and usually very welcome. Building up an address book group can take time but in the meantime there are a number of e-lists that will include your information.

Posters are a longer established means of letting people know that you are there but think carefully about where you can place them before spending on design and print. It is often hard to use anything bigger than A3 and A4s are more likely to be displayed by local shops, businesses and libraries. Some artists will provide their own, particularly if they are on tour but these are likely to need overprinting so allow time and budget. Postcards have become both popular and cheap lately with plenty of businesses competing for your online business.

Press releases are another effective way of letting people know you are there but consider your target audience before you write. National and local folk magazines are obviously a priority and it's here that you can eulogise knowing that the readers are suitably tuned in.

Send press releases to your local papers and arts magazines but make sure you write in an accessible manner for those who may be interested but not too familiar with the music and the artists. Advertising is often money well spent but again, ensure that your ad is going in a publication that will be read by people who are likely to be interested. Local folk magazines are often good value but some are quarterly or bi monthly and work on long lead times. Regional listing magazines can work for some venues and some artists so think carefully about when to take the plunge.

Word of mouth is probably the most critical way of publicising your event. If the audience has a good time they will come back and they will tell others. If all your careful planning combines with a bit of good luck you should soon have an attractive venue, a developing audience and a great folk venue.

## IN SUMMARY

So there you are. This is far from the whole story but it will be enough to get you started or act as a reminder to those already in the business of running a folk club.

Much of this guide was originally written for jazz promoters and we are very grateful for the groundwork of Joan and Dan, and Chris Hodgkins for this opportunity to review their good work for folk enthusiasts.

*Alan Bearman and Steve Heap*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND THEIR COMPANIES

### Folkarts england (FAE)

The FAE is a national development agency for Folk, Roots and Traditional Music acting as an umbrella organisation for folk activists.

#### **Aims**

**To support the development of those working in / for Folk Arts in England.**

**To promote Folk Arts to audiences, artists and the arts, education and tourism sectors.**

**To widen participation in Folk Arts in England for audiences, artists and organisers.**

**To gather and disseminate information about Folk Arts in England.**

FAE is represented at many local and national Government levels and regularly consults with organisations such as the Health and Safety Executive, The Performing Right Society, Voluntary Arts Network, National Campaign of the Arts, The Events Industry Forum and many more.

#### **FAE Statement of Purpose**

The FAE provides a voice for the Folk Arts, promoting their growth, accessibility and development in England through the provision of services in information, publishing, education, training, communications and marketing.

### **FolkArts England**

PO Box 296, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3XU

sh@mrs-casey.co.uk

www.mrs-casey.co.uk

Tel 01629 827014

## Association of Festival Organisers

### **AFO Statement of Purpose**

The Association of Festival Organisers formed in 1987 when half a dozen folk festival managers came together to discuss a sharing of ideas and information. It has continued since then and developed to encompass not only folk but acoustic music generally and now has 150 members, which regularly communicate with each other and meet for an annual Conference in November. The AFO is open to all festivals, of any genre.

## Alan Bearman Music

Alan Bearman Music (ABM) is primarily a music agency representing some of the foremost artists on the folk, roots and acoustic music scene. ABM was formed in late 2004 and is based in North London. Alan worked as Artistic Director for Sidmouth International Festival for 18 years and programmed numerous prestigious festivals and events for Mrs Casey Music. He continues to programme Towersey Village Festival in Oxfordshire and Conferences and Showcases for the Association of Festival Organisers.

## Mrs Casey Music

Mrs Casey Music (MCM), formed in 1974 in response to many requests for assistance with the presentation of Folk and Roots music, has grown into an Arts Consultancy working mainly in the field of Folk, Roots and Acoustic Music and Arts. Our work covers festival and event management and consultancy, CD & DVD production and sales, training and advisory work and all things in-between!

## APPENDIX

### Useful organisations

#### **Voluntary Arts Network (VAN)**

PO Box 200, Cardiff CF5 1YH

info@voluntaryarts.org

www.voluntaryarts.org

Tel: 02920 395395

#### **Visiting Arts**

www.visitingarts.org.uk/redtape.html

A guide to work permits, visas, Foreign Entertainers tax, and other practical issues to consider when bringing artists and other people into the UK from overseas.



**PRS for Music**

29-33 Berners Street, London, W1T 3AB,

info@prs.co.uk

**www.prsformusic.com**

Tel: 020 7580 5544

**Media****FRoots**

PO.Box 337, London, N4 1TW

froots@frootsmag.com

**www.frootsmag.com**

The netrooting section of the froots web site has links to many useful regional magazines, listings and other helpful web sites

Tel 020 8340 9651

**The Living Tradition**

PO.Box 1026, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire KA2 0LG Scotland

admin@livingtradition.co.uk

**www.folkmusic.net**

**English Dance and Song**

Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY

eds.editor@efdss.org

**BBC Radio 2 Folk and Acoustic web site**

[www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/r2music/folk/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/r2music/folk/index.shtml)

**English Folk and traditional music on the Internet**

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/martin.nail/Folkmus.htm>

A useful introduction to regional and national listings and resources

**Spiral Earth**

[www.spiralearth.co.uk](http://www.spiralearth.co.uk)



















































