

HANDLING SESSION PROBLEMS

The Zouki Cultural Laboratory is nothing if not empathetic to the various problems that session leaders face every time they walk into their pub. Dangers lurk where we least expect them (if we expected them, they probably wouldn't be "lurking", but that's another discussion.) The following simple test will indicate where help might be needed.

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(1) You're at a session where some previously unknown Neanderthal-type appears from the bar and announces in no uncertain terms that you all face severe physical harm if you don't play "Who Threw the Overalls in Mrs Murphy's Chowder?" You should:

- (a) drop everything and play it immediately**
- (b) point to your least favorite bodhrán player and tell the caveman that he/she is the only musician there that knows it**
- (c) apologize profusely for your failure to play it, and offer him counseling for the trauma that you may have caused him**
- (d) suggest that the caveman engage in a biological paradox and continue playing whatever you want**

(2) A new player stops by your session some night who is obviously brilliant and who unfortunately plays the same instrument you do. After they blaze through three complicated reels in D flat minor, you:

- (a) say to the player "Fantastic - wish I could play like that!!"**
- (b) remark to your neighbor "Great stuff but you could never dance to it!"**
- (c) shout at the guy furthest away from you at the table "Remember Jimmy used to play those tunes just before his lung collapsed?"**

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(d) apologize profusely for your failure to play the same tunes, and offer to undergo counseling for the trauma that your inadequacies have obviously caused everybody

(3) A great session is in progress when a singer unknown to the group decides to follow the Michael Coleman reel set with a twenty-verse dirge in Manx. Your reaction:

(a) around verse 5, begin figuring your tax deductions for next year

(b) around verse 13, begin noticing that your left cheek is twitching uncontrollably and worry about whether you're having a stroke

(c) around verse 17, begin trying to remember the "Our Father" in Latin (NB not recommended for non-Catholics)

(d) around verse 20, begin wondering why anyone of sound mind and steady employment would want to learn a 20-verse song in Manx

(e) around verse 23, realize with a start that the song only had 20 verses and you dozed off

(4) You and your gang are hacking away at some polkas one Sunday evening when a set of quintuplets approaches the table, all carrying bodhráns. You should:

(a) welcome them insincerely but heartily to the session, then disappear to the bar for three hours

(b) pretend to look for chairs for them

(c) eventually share your deepest musical feelings with them and tell them you're in counselling

(d) tell them you once retrieved Ringo McDonagh's clapper at a concert and hope they're impressed

(e) sneak around the corner and phone a bomb threat to the pub

(5) After a neat set of jigs, a large sincere person with thick glasses and a "Kiss Me - I'm an Ethnomusicologist" button approaches,

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takes out a note pad, and asks you for the names of all the tunes you just played. Your reaction:

- (a) you tell her the names
- (b) you tell her that real traditional musicians never know names, and act insulted that she asked you
- (c) you make up silly names and hope someone hears you telling them to her
- (d) you tell her that tune names are a product of patriarchal white colonialism that you refuse to acknowledge (wokespeak for "I have no idea")
- (e) you apologize profusely for not knowing the names, and offer to undergo counseling etc. etc.

Congratulations - you have reached the end of the test! of course there is no passing or failing - that would be judgemental - but now you know the areas you have to work on. Good luck!

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