

Hello, Musician Playing for the TORONTO Wednesday Dance Jam

What is the Wednesday Dance Jam?

A place to practice contact dance improvisation.

What is Contact Dance Improvisation?

Contact dance improvisation is a social dance involving touch, in which momentum between two or more people is used to create and inspire dance movements. The dance form is practiced with or without music. Techniques include rolling point of contact, balancing over a partner's centre of gravity, following momentum, and "listening" with one's skin surface. The form involves opening the sense to tune into the movement of other people. Contact dance improvisation is accessible to people with no previous dance training and to people with physical disabilities.

Music in the context of Contact Dance Improvisation

Historically, jams have been done in silence or with very low-key meditative music that has lots of space in it (for example music has long pauses). This allows an opening of the senses and a deep concentration and felt-sense-playfulness that is based on being in tune with your own body and another's person's body.

Music at the Wednesday Dance Jam

At the Wednesday Dance Jam we are departing from tradition by having music that can influence the room with emotions, story, and crescendos/decrescendos. Although this is the case, I ask that music not be too loud or directive so that people can deeply attend to their sensation and the movement of others. The music can still deeply influence the room, however music over a certain volume makes it hard to hear body sounds such as sliding, body impact, breath etc. Contact dancers rely on sight, sound and sensation to feel their partner. Because loud music can limit sound tracking methods, I feel it reduces safety at the Jam. It also can be hard to maintain the meditative "listening" to another when the decibel goes beyond a certain point and/or the music sweeps you into its own rhythm. Also, consider that to do contact dance one has to open their sense to feel the movement of another. So, you are playing for a room of people with senses that are perhaps more open than a regular situation.

Music for Ecstatic Dance that carries people into rich and wonderful experiences, riding different waves of rhythm and sound, would not be a good fit for the Wednesday Dance Jam.

It is a bit of a balancing act creating music for the Wednesday Dance jam. Influence the room with story, emotion and rhythm, but do so in a way that allows dancers to have space and to stay connected to their own rhythm and the rhythm of their partners. I offer that the musician can think of themselves as another dancer in the room who dances using sound. Some musicians find joy in embracing this challenge and limitations and others find having to "hold back" impedes their creativity and is not for them.

Also, at play is that I have High Functioning Autism and I experience loud music, high pitch sounds and drone or vibrational sounds (such as crystal bowls and electronic deep bass drone) as physical body pain. As the main facilitator of the Jam I need to create a space to work in that is not painful for me.

For all these above reasons I might approach you during your set the ask for lower sound levels or a shift in tone or for their to be more "space" in the music.

Things That Can Work Well

These are things that can work well when creating music for the Wednesday Dance Jam:

- Think of yourself as a dancer in the room dancing with sound.
- Keep an eye on the room (do not get lost in your music and lose a sense of the room)
- As a dancer, dancing in the room with sound you influence the room, but other dancers do as well. It is an ensemble piece created between musician and dancer
- It helps if you follow a theme and variation for a while (Let's say 10 minutes or longer). This gives the dancers something to "bite" into and develop. If the music hops around allot it can be hard on the dancer's bodies as they keep trying to keep up with the switches.
- Keep the volume with in range of the vision for the Wednesday Jam (i.e. dancer can still hear body sounds and keep focused attention on sensation and the movement of another).
- Sometimes you can pick a duet or trio in the room and play as if you are dancing with them
- If you are unsure about anything, please ask the Jam Facilitator.

First Time Playing for the Wednesday Jam

If this is your first time playing for the Wednesday Dance Jam please know there is an acclimatization period in which you get to know the Jam and what works or does not work in this context. This process might involve some guidance from me or whoever is facilitating on the day that you play. The guidance can be during your set, before or after. Usually after two to three times playing, the acclimatization process resolves, and you will have more space to do your thing with only occasional guidance from me.

I wanted to let you know all of this, so you understand the context and have informed consent about what you are signing up for when you agree to play for the Wednesday Dance Jam.

Please let me know if you have any questions,

Kathleen Rea