

Advice for Pennsic European Dance Musicians

Greetings Musicians who are interested in supporting European dance! You are an essential part of making historical dance a reality at Pennsic, and your participation is most appreciated and desired. This page is set up mostly for new Pennsic musicians interested in supporting European dance and as a reminder of Pennsic veterans on what the operating procedures are for dance support.

So here are a few things that are critical to know in order to support dance in open pits with live music. (The term "open pit" refers to a musicians' pit that is open to all who meet the requirements below. A "closed pit" refers to a pre-coordinated set of musicians or fixed ensemble)

Sheet Music

- The Pennsic Pile 2019 is what we will be playing for most of the time. There is also some additional music for the Choral Ball, and additional music for the English Revel.
- Gregory will be donating 10 copies of the Pennsic Pile for use in the Pit during Pennsic. The point of these donated copies is to support new musicians who wander in and are interested in playing for the first time.
- If you're a veteran, please print and bring your own copy. The PDF will be designed to be printed 2-sided and 3-hole punched. Your local copy shop should be able to do the right thing if you take them a copy of the PDF on a thumb drive.

Musician Requirements

- It is highly recommended that you be able to read and follow available dance music that is written in modern notation. This includes percussionists.
- It is highly recommended that you be proficient enough on your instrument to be able to play the dance music provided in the Pennsic pile (see above). You need to be able to play it up to dance tempo.
- Your instrument must be able to play in A=440 pitch (most modern instruments do).
- Your instrument must be able to produce a volume that plays nice with others.

Essential Musician equipment to bring to support European dance

- Your copy of the Pennsic pile and other collections bound in a folder
- Your instrument.

- Music stand (preferably a light weight folding stand 'cause ... you have to carry the stupid thing). (*Unless you have a fancy medieval stand made out of wood that I constantly covet.*) Clothes pins to hold down your pages when the wind picks up
- A battery-operated stand light or book light. These things are really cheap but will save your butt in those moments when the musician pit area is too dark.
- Tankard or some accessible drinking container. Dance coordinators are always making sure we are well watered.
- Tuner (all smart phones now have available tuner apps and I highly recommend them). I use ClearTune, but another really good one is TE Tuner.

Things to keep in mind while you are supporting

- Look on the Pennsic School of (European) Dance Homepage to see what balls are open pits and the list of dances to be called. Keep in mind the balls that have a closed pit refers to a set of musicians that will be exclusively supporting that evening's dance. So you want to make sure you show up on the evenings with open pits. (This year, the closed pits the day-time dancing at Casa Bardicci)
- When playing, pay attention to your music director and less on the dancers. You are a supporter not a spectator and by doing so, tempo changes, timing and roadmaps will need your focus towards a good performance.
- In between actual dances, please keep conversations down to a whisper in order to allow the dance principle to provide audible instruction to the dancers. And please, no noodling on your instrument unless you are trying to get your instrument in tune which is important. Best time for noodling is when you are practicing the tunes before the dance ball begins or during the set breaks.
- Please show up early to get settled and (dare I say) warm up and tune.
- Chairs will be provided. The lighting in most of the venues is pretty good.

Modern instruments welcome in open pits

Mind you not everyone that comes to Pennsic can afford (yet) expensive historical instrument reproductions, so here is an incomplete list of modern acoustic instruments that work well in open pits.

- Modern hammer-dulcimer, classical and acoustic guitar, oboe, bassoon, classical flute, modern harps, classical bowed strings, muted-trombone, mandolin, Irish cittern, kazoo, Baroque recorders (even the plastic ones), Bowed psaltery, banjo, Russian balalaika, and dombra, cleverly disguised electronic keyboards, ukulele, Baroque flutes.
- Percussion: frame drums but not durbeke, dumbek or jimbe as these drums are too aggressive in sound to work with a European dance pit.

I left out band instruments that do not read in concert pitch, as our sheet music is only available in concert pitch.

But what instruments are considered historical you may wonder?

So, for the curious, here is a common list of instruments that you may see at some of the open pits:

- Renaissance hammered dulcimer, Hackbrett, Renaissance recorders (very different from baroque versions), Gemshorns, Lutes, ouds, Ren citterns, krummhorns, Racketts, Cornamuse, Viola da Gamba (pitched at 440), medieval fiddles, tabors, sacbuts, shawms (if they can play softly), Cornetto, Serpent, Plucked psaltery, Kanoon, Belgama Saz, Rebec, Rabiba, Ney, Ren violin (curved bow and no chin rest), citole, Gitterns, Medieval soft bagpipes (the ones that play nice with recorders .. yes they do exist), slide trumpet, portive organ, Renaissance harps, Renaissance flutes, plucked psalteries. virginal.

I left out the "one volume knob set to 11" historical instruments as they typically do not play nice with others:

- Rauschfife, Zurna, Medieval great-pipes. Renaissance Hurdy-Gurdies

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me and I will be happy to help.

Your humble (well, partially humble) servant

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