

What is a session and what do you do there?

Sessions are a bit different from bluegrass or old time jams. They are not 'jams', because we don't really improvise. Everyone plays the same tune in unison with little variation. Using sheet music is impractical, because (1) the printed music is probably not the same version/key of the tune that is being played, and (2) by the time you've found the sheet music in that giant three-ring binder, we've moved on to another tune. Traditional music has been passed on through the years by people hearing the tunes, then figuring them out and playing them with their friends.

We play tunes. We sing songs. Some tunes are also songs, but most aren't. Songs in the old style (sean nós) are usually sung unaccompanied.

The tunes are usually played in sets of two or three, with each tune being repeated a few times. The person who started the set will usually indicate the change with a 'hup.' We generally don't do the Circle of Death where each person is asked to start a tune. Anyone can start a set of tunes, and that person gets to set the pace.

There are a few guidelines:

- 1) Acoustic traditional instruments, please. Fiddles, flutes, whistles, pipes, and button accordions are common melody instruments, with guitars, bouzoukis, banjos, and bodhrans backing or playing melody. This is not a complete list. If you know the tunes and understand the music, you'll probably fit in.
- 2) If you don't know the tune, don't play. This applies to both melody players and backers. Chopping or droning doesn't teach you the tune. Listen to it a couple of times through before attempting to pick it up. If a tune is new to everyone, the person playing will try to play it a bit slower and repeat it until it sounds like the rest get it. Bring a recorder for the tunes that are new to you.
- 3) Backers beware: this is not bluegrass. Irish and Scottish music tend toward the modal keys that have a different chord structure than the standard major/minors. *Melody players, give the backers a break and let them know the key of the tunes that you start.*
- 4) Backers beware: This is dance music, so the rhythm is just as important as the melody. We play a lot of jigs, reels and hornpipes, with a strathspey or two just to keep things interesting. The rhythms are distinct, and can be a bit puzzling if you don't already listen to Irish or Scottish music.
- 5) If someone begins a song or a slow air, relax and listen. If they want accompaniment, they will ask for it.
- 6) Pull up a chair. This is not church. Everyone cannot sit in the back row. If the melody players sit too far away from each other, you can't hear what the tune is doing. Come closer! We all try to bathe regularly! If you aren't confident that you have a lot of the tunes, sit behind the first circle, but stay close to the action.
- 7) Listen.
- 8) Did I mention listening?
- 9) Oh, and buy a beverage. Dudley's Bookshop is our kind host, and when we support them, they are able to keep hosting our session.

Traditional sessions are social. They are instant parties where everyone just happens to be a musician. At Dudley's, we hope to nurture a community of musicians who are interested in traditional music. Everyone who plays here was a beginner once, and we learned to play this music because of the kindness and encouragement of other musicians. Please join us.