

VNESI Supplement for First-Timers

If you've never been to a "live" NorthEast Squeeze-In (NESI) in the Berkshires, you may be puzzled by some of what we are trying to do with our virtual event. **Here's some information about the live event that may help, and there is a lot more online.** As our webmaster Stewart says, "You'll get the best feel for what NESI is like and how it happens by grazing the website." However, since some of our usual web content may be harder to find as we clear space for the virtual weekend, this could provide some context for you.

NESI is an annual event in the Berkshires at a Y camp called Chimney Corners, which is part of the Berkshire Outdoor Center. NESI is run by a small group of volunteers that are our Board of Directors, currently Bob, Sarah, Gus, Kate, Stewart, Jim, R. D., Tony, and Lynn. The board members do the structural work – we create and update the website, manage the finances, rent the event site and get it ready for us, register the participants and assign housing, emcee the concert, provide a system for offering workshops, provide a caller and organize a band for the contra dance after the concert, provide a space for private sales, and arrange for the meals that are served throughout the weekend.

Although this year's virtual event doesn't cost anything to participate, the live event does, of course. We are a non-profit organization under the umbrella of the Country Dance and Song Society. We charge what we need to meet our site contract costs and other expenses but try to make it affordable for all. In 2019, you could attend the whole weekend for \$85 if you camped on site (it's free) or stayed elsewhere and brought your own food. Staying in a cabin or lodge included 6 meals and cost \$215 and \$295 respectively. There were some other options, too. We have a Young Player Award that offers a free weekend to a selected player applicant under 25 years. We want to make it possible for everyone to take part.

Other than the work of the board, everything else at NESI comes from the participants. It's a DIY gathering of free-reed players and sometimes family members who enjoy getting together. It's not a festival. There is no audience for the concert except us players. It's not a hard-core instructional weekend. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Attendance at workshops is not required. Jam and/or sleep all weekend if you want. Workshop leaders are not paid (nor is the NESI board).

The workshops and focused jams get organized from the time the event starts on Friday night through the last moment on Sunday. We have no idea what they will be. There is a "Big Board" that contains the available time slots and locations. People put up small Post-its with a title or brief description. Requests for workshops are written on Post-its and put onto the sides of the Big Board. Typical examples include: Quebecois Tune Swap, Dead Beginner Melodeon Playing, Jazz Chords on the English Concertina – you get the idea. Some people do start to promote their workshop and assess interest on Si-Talk ahead of time. They also may distribute sheet music through Si-Talk or email it on request as well as giving it out at the event.

The instruments that people bring are as varied as the players – piano accordion, button accordion, melodica, harmonica, duet/Anglo/English concertina, what did we leave out? And some of us (or our family members) play other instruments that are welcome in the jams and the concert as well as some of the workshops.

The concert presents players of every level of skill. We've had any number of professional recording artists, but we've also had young teens just learning to get a tune out of their squeeze box. You'll never have a more sympathetic and appreciative audience, especially if something goes wrong.

So trying to put this free-form, participant-run, highly-social gathering online is a new challenge for all of us. We're glad you're with us this year. We hope to see you at the "real" NESI in 2021.

If you still have questions after all of this and after having read the VNESI Guide, please email me at lynnh1947@gmail.com. I'll try to get back to you quickly.