

Flatfoot Flatbush

Flatfoot Flatbush is a joyous, participatory parade of Old Time music and Appalachian flatfoot dancing, organized for the past four years on December 21st along the Brooklyn thoroughfare of Flatbush Avenue. The event is run as a partnership between a local dance school, and a neighborhood Business Improvement District (BID), which promotes it and enlists support from local shops.

In your city, chances are you do not have a “Flatbush Avenue,” so you’ll want to change the title to something locally appropriate. You can also adapt the concept to other kinds of percussive dance – tap dancing, clogging, or classical Indian Kathak dancing could all form the basis for a parade.

Generally, a *Flatfoot Flatbush* event starts with a 30 minute dance workshop, followed by 1-2 hours of outdoor music and dance in a commercial district, ending up at a bar or restaurant for food, drinks, and more music.



WHAT YOU’LL NEED

1. A lead guitarist and lead fiddler who know the songs you’ve chosen. Anyone who shows up with a guitar, banjo, upright bass (ideally with an endpin wheel), mandolin, or violin should be able to join, but it’s best to line up a couple of strong players in advance to form a “house band.”

2. A dance instructor / dance caller. He or she can teach a few flatfooting steps and square dance calls at the workshop that begins the event, and call out steps for the dancing along the way. The instructor may want a small CD-playing boombox to use for the class, or the house band can accompany the class.



3. A few hundred pennies, Shoe Goo adhesive, and a sheet of plywood. If dancers bring an old pair of sneakers, they can glue pennies onto the soles of their shoes at the start of the event to create a percussive tap shoe. (Since it takes time for the glue to dry, it's best to prepare the shoes the day before, if possible.) The plywood provides a louder platform for dance soloists during the event.

4. Hand Warmers for the musicians, if cold weather is expected. These are disposable plastic packs that give off heat for up to 10 hours. A package of 40 pairs should cost about \$25.



HOW TO ORGANIZE

Permits and Venues

This event works best when musicians play each song while standing still, letting the dancers square dance / flatfoot on the sidewalk in front of them. At the end of each song, the whole group then walks to the next stop. (The musicians may sing or play between stops as well, if they are able.) Playing acoustic music on the sidewalk for a few minutes will not necessarily require a permit, but since people may be dancing in front of a store's entrance, you should get permission in advance from each business where you will be stopping.

We recommend partnering with a Business Improvement District, block association, or Merchants' Association, who are often happy to reach out to their businesses on your behalf. In December, retailers are usually eager for attention and walk-in customers. By agreeing to serve as a *Flatfoot Flatbush* stop, they can be listed in your marketing, and promote the event to their own customers as a fun reason to come to the store that day.

In Brooklyn, the North Flatbush Avenue BID goes above and beyond, lining up





free samples and small gifts from restaurants and stores for all *Flatfoot Flatbush* participants, printing posters and postcards to help shops promote the event, and providing a small budget to the organizers. Not every BID will play such an active role, but if you have an enthusiastic partner, you should explore these options.

Starting and Ending Points

Find a quiet, spacious place where people can gather at the start of the event and learn the dance steps.

Flatfoot Flatbush celebrates Appalachian flatfooting, but the music is also perfect for square dancing. This gives many participants, who are unfamiliar with flatfooting but have gone square dancing before, a way to join in. Typically, the workshop covers the basics of square dancing to refresh these dancers' memories.



Then, the workshop introduces flatfooting. You won't have enough time to teach a beginner how to flatfoot, but it's helpful to demonstrate a few steps so everyone can appreciate what's going on. And if you glue pennies on the soles of someone's sneakers, they can improvise their own percussive accompaniment to the music, even if they're not the "right" steps.

If you have secured an indoor starting place, musicians and dancers can leave their cases and bags here during the event, and pick them up afterwards.

After 1-2 hours of playing and dancing, people are likely to be tired and hungry. It's nice to end at bar or restaurant where everyone can relax, and listen to more music from the players in your house band.

Repertoire

Before the event, post a list of 6 to 8 Old Time songs that you're going to play. Include links to sheet music or YouTube videos so that people can practice in advance. Some favorites from *Flatfoot Flatbush* have been "Sandy Boys," "Big Sciota," "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss," "Liza Jane," "Cluck Old Hen," and "Breaking Up Christmas."

Marketing

- **To dancers:** Contact local dance schools, and square dance & folk dance venues, and ask them to spread the word to their patrons. Some cities have active email lists or Facebook groups for square dance enthusiasts. Your dance



instructor should know the best places to find local dancers. Remind people to bring an old pair of sneakers that they can glue pennies to. Also consider partnering with a school to offer flatfooting workshops for three weeks in advance on December 21, so participants can thoroughly learn the steps.

- **To musicians:** Give fliers to your house band musicians and ask them to distribute them at folk, bluegrass, and Old Time jam sessions, and email them to their musician friends. Emphasize that anyone can show up with their instruments and join in, regardless of experience.
- **To locals:** Use your participating businesses, and your BID partner, to promote the event throughout the neighborhood. Ask businesses to post about it on their Facebook pages, mention it in customer email lists, and put up a sign in their window two weeks in advance.
- Finally, send your event details to aaron@makemusicday.org as soon as possible for inclusion on the national Make Music Winter website and in press outreach.



WHAT TO DO ON DECEMBER 21

1. Gather at the starting location 30 minutes in advance with your dance instructor and lead musicians, and go over the route and itinerary. Set up the boombox for the dance workshop (if your instructor will be using one).

2. As dancers arrive, introduce them to the instructor, and point them to the glue and pennies if they want to make their shoes more percussive. As musicians arrive, show them where to put their cases, pass around handwarmers for them to put in their pockets, and introduce them to the house band musicians to talk through the songs and tune their instruments together.





3. At the end of the dance workshop, say a few words to thank everyone for coming, and start walking to the first stop. Ideally, the musicians will sing or play while walking from one stop to the next, and keep everyone's energy up, but if this is too challenging they can just play at the designated stops.

4. When everyone has arrived at the first location, the dance instructor places the plywood board on the ground, in a central spot. The musicians start to play, and the dance instructor calls the first square dance for everyone to join. Gesture to the more experienced dancers to step out of the square dance and onto the plywood to do some solo flatfooting, then they can rejoin the square dance and give someone else a turn.

5. At the end of the song, the local business should have a chance to thank people for coming and distribute a free sample from their store or restaurant. Then it's time to move on to the next stop and do it again.

6. The final stop should be at a bar or restaurant, where everyone can relax, talk to each other, and hear more music from the house band. Remind people how to pick up their bags or instrument cases they may have left at the starting point. Thank everyone for coming and invite them to come back next year!

If you have further questions about Flatfoot Flatbush, feel free to contact event organizers Nick Horner and Theo Boguszewski at mmnyporchstomp@gmail.com.

