

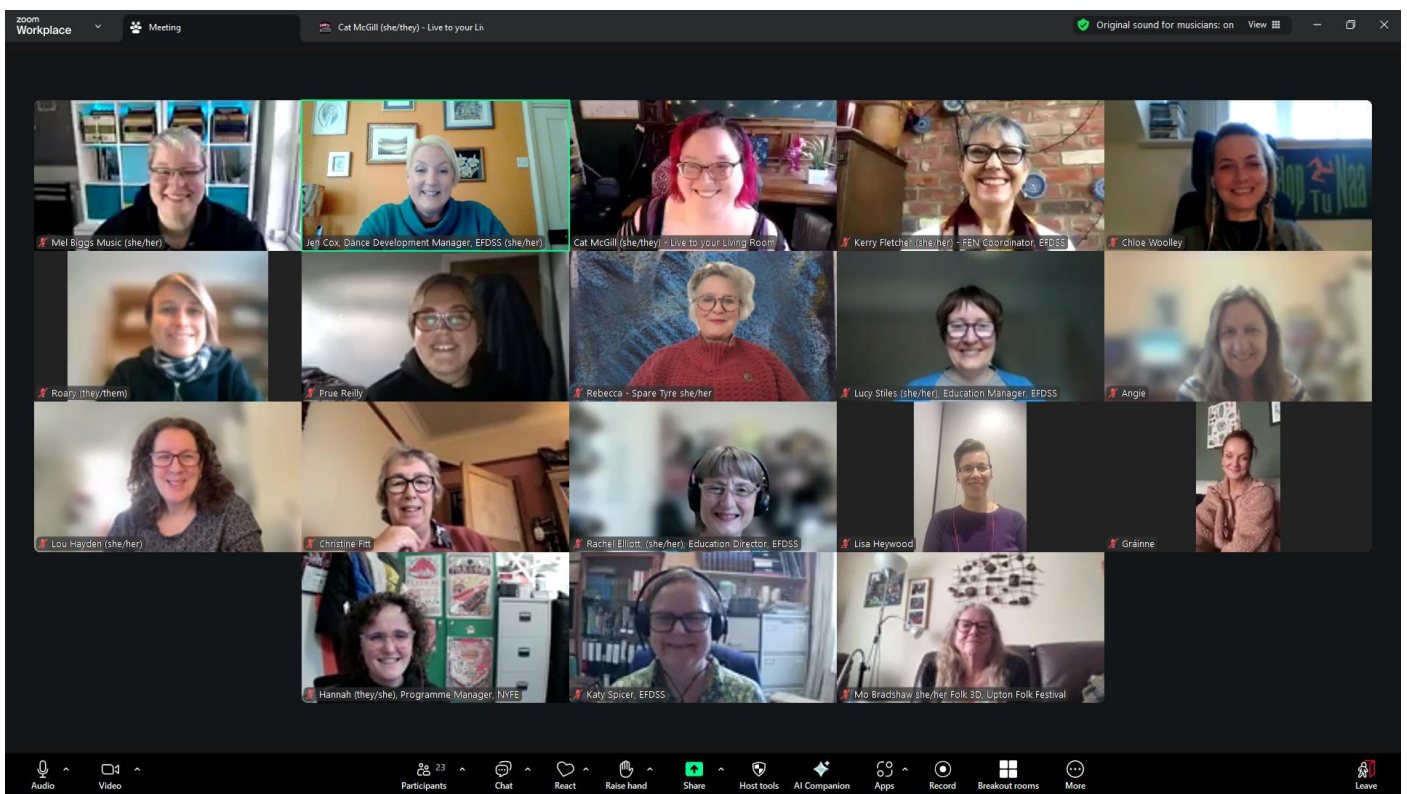


**Folk Education Network  
Folk Education Development event**

**Online via Zoom**

**Connection Online: Focus on Virtual and Hybrid Learning.**

**Tuesday 7 October 2025 2pm – 5pm**



Screenshot By Jen Cox

## Review by Prue Reilly

Working with Live to Your Living Room has provided an excellent opportunity to understand how hybrid and online events are revolutionising accessibility within the arts. This online workshop, “Connection Online: Focus on Virtual and Hybrid Learning”, was a crucial step in expanding my own knowledge and exploring methods to make learning more accessible to a wider audience.

The session began with a warm welcome from Kerry Fletcher, Folk Education Network Co-ordinator. Kerry immediately fostered a relaxed and inclusive atmosphere by encouraging attendees to use the Zoom chat for introductions, sharing pronouns, and locations - a community-building technique Live to Your Living Room uses in their own concerts. Kerry also demonstrated how Zoom can be used accessibly, specifically highlighting the use of closed captions and adjusting screen contrast, ensuring everyone felt welcomed and informed from the outset.

Jen Cox, EFDSS Dance Development Manager, introduced Live to Your Living Room Co-Founder Cat McGill, who detailed the organisation’s premise and their new research project: the ONEAudience Method. Since their inception, Cat and the team have successfully produced hybrid gigs, accessible globally, proving a longevity that meets a previously unmet need in the arts sector.

Funded by Arts Council England, the ONEAudience Method project has produced a valuable resource, offering a framework for future hybrid event organisers. It is structured around three core pillars - Connection, Quality, and Inclusion - designed to bring audiences closer to artists and venues.

Cat’s presentation offered significant food for thought on how people genuinely connect during an online gig experience. The project delves into the entire audience journey, from ticket purchase through to post-gig engagement. Live to Your Living Room uses an online WhatsApp community to facilitate discussion throughout the gig, alongside smaller communities dedicated to various hobbies. While talking during an in-person concert might be considered rude, these online communities promote an unintrusive connection, allowing attendees with varied life experiences to engage socially. Cat also discussed their team’s review of their own processes, focusing on breaking down the traditional barriers that prevent people from attending in-person events. The resource, which will launch in an online webinar on 12 November, provides information encouraging the use of streaming platforms to share experiences and bring audiences together.

Following Cat’s talk, the first breakout room session allowed small groups to discuss the ONEAudience pillars (Connection, Quality and Inclusion). Our group mused over the mutually beneficial nature of hybrid events, postulating that an online viewing option could benefit a mobility aid user, for example, by allowing them to review a venue’s accessibility options online before committing to an in-person visit. These sessions were brief but productive, enabling a rapid sharing of diverse opinions.

The second speaker was musician and online course producer, Mel Biggs, who focused on developing online businesses to create a stable income - a critical topic for touring musicians. Mel's career stabilised significantly after she began teaching melodeon online in 2013. This evolved into a successful YouTube channel and, crucially, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of Patreon to further support her students.

Mel demonstrated Patreon's features, explaining that it allows her to upload on-demand video tutorials for subscribers, extending her reach globally and attracting clients from varied economic backgrounds through flexible payment options. She highlighted Patreon's ethical and sustainable practices as a key factor in its business development. Mel is now expanding into online business coaching, and offered several key takeaways for attendees:

- A small community can make a significant difference.
- Clear financial offers help people understand what they are purchasing.
- Think actively about how people will find your business.
- Patreon is a low-risk option for content creators.
- Generating a viable income from online work is possible for artists.
- Remember to take it steady and progress at a sustainable pace.

After another short breakout EFDSS Education Director Rachel Elliott presented on their online singing workshops, Monday Folk Singers Online and introduced Maddie Morris the current term's tutor who is a, musician, singer, and songwriter. Rachel described the creation of an online choir during the pandemic, which has been maintained consistently ever since. The song workshops connect tutors and participants from across the country, highlighting regional songs and specific topics, that are the speciality of the tutors who are leading that term, thereby significantly broadening access to these cultural resources.

Maddie discussed their work with the workshops, focusing on making online singing more accessible. Echoing Mel's advice, they emphasised letting attendees know the expectations of the online call and allowing participants to learn at their own pace. From my personal research into disabled audience experiences, providing information prior to an event is known to eliminate anxieties and allow for adequate preparation - a practice both Mel and Maddie strongly supported. Maddie then taught the group a song, "Cedar Swamp," a playful Appalachian tradition piece learned from the singing of Jean Ritchie.

A final breakout session led into a comprehensive panel discussion.

Jen Cox, also an events manager, started by detailing Clog Zoom, an online step clog workshop event which took place during the pandemic.

Lisa Heywood, an experienced ceilidh caller and accessibility advocate, presented her online calling classes. This includes the development of resources for the Introduction to Ceilidh Calling classes, her teaching platform, the Caller's Chat community resource, and previous work developing ceilidh dances specifically for disabled participants.

Rebecca Manson Jones, Artistic Director / co-CEO of Spare Tyre, an artist-led participatory theatre company, then spoke about Chronically Creative, an online 'café' dedicated to bringing people with long-term health issues together through self-help workshops utilising the arts. Rebecca promotes the platform as a space to experience joy for those living with a variety of long-term health conditions.

Finally, Becky Driscoll, founder of RootNotes, showcased her hybrid tune learning classes. Created during the pandemic, these classes originated in the Bideford area but expanded their reach significantly by using Zoom and a unique call-and-response technique. The mute function proves crucial, allowing online players to participate without fear, making the classes highly accessible.

The day concluded with a wider discussion on the remarkable diversity of opportunities offered by hybrid and online learning environments. There was significant inspiration for all attendees to utilise Zoom and other streaming platforms as effective learning environments. Many reiterated the potential utility of the ONEAudience method for navigating the challenges of these tools. The panel discussed resources, particularly the model used by the RootNotes groups, were viewed as significantly helpful for developing their own online communities. The overall discussion strongly emphasised the powerful connectivity aspects of hybrid and online events.

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### **Prue Reilly** Freelance Admin and Event Support – Live to Your Living Room

Prue Reilly works freelance in admin and event support roles for Live to Your Living Room. She has 35 years of experience in the folk and traditional dance and music community, including 15 years calling for ceilidhs. She is currently the Concerts Manager for Chippenham Folk Festival, after many years of volunteering at folk music festivals and events. She prefers Border Morris and Rapper Sword, but dabbles in North West Morris Dancing when her health permits. She has recently completed an MSc from Sheffield Hallam University in International Events Management, specialising in disabled audience experiences at English folk festivals.

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