

Intro Slide

Building a Night of Square Dancing Around the Basic Choreography of Singing Call Figures

Choreographic Development

We have talked numerous times about the development of choreography for patter calling, the use of modules, sight calling, sight resolution, calling styles such as mental image calling, Crams, etc. We have also spent a fair bit of time trying to understand the mechanics of a singing call, the music, structure and how to maximise the benefits of singing calls in our presentation of ourselves, as well as a means to enhance an entire program.

SLIDE – why singing calls need simple variety

In this session what I thought about was a couple of comments I received from some new callers but also from a record producer. The comment generally is as follows:

Just wanted to let you know. The vocals you did with different levels has been going very. I noticed people are buying some of the stuff you did. Thanks for doing that. It is a good idea.

It seems that there is a developing niche market for singing calls that have choreography attached to them, one figure per program level that is just a little different and progressive for each record. I am a pretty average singer and caller I think, and some of the recordings and music has been available for decades. I am only recording to keep the music alive and available. So if the music is there, and it was there before, and I am not the greatest singer, what is the draw? The answer has to be the choreography – different but not difficult

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As you know I am a proponent of writing your own material and development of your choreography to best understand the material that you will be presenting. In contradiction however, you also know I am a proponent of researching material into my repertoire, especially singing call figures.

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I believe that delivery of singing calls should be done with a purpose, and that includes the choreography. That said however, sometimes it is nice just to build a program of interest and variety around the basic choreography of singing call figures that are practiced and prepared.

If callers want to expand their program with more effective ways of creating an original and super dynamic night of square dancing, a very simple way to succeed

in doing this is to use **more original singing call figures** as a basis for delivering innovative and different (not difficult unless it is dancer group appropriate) choreography.

It is important to remember that when using a singing call figure approach to programming, you have a fair chance of delivering much more choreography that is on the program list to which they are calling. The reason for this is that the material on the program list has the same platform on which to base itself. It is likely also one of the reasons for the earlier comment, in that many callers and teachers are purchasing singing call music based on the choreography first these days to be level appropriate, and the music second.

This means that fundamentally, a good repertoire of program specific, danceable singing calls is something that any caller can count on in a program for positive variety and entertainment.

Slide Obstacle

The biggest obstacle that challenges callers in this aspect however has always been simply “to provide interest that the square dancers can truly comfortably dance and feel excited about” This is often a difficult achievement when you have only one tip, or generally one to one and a half hours of actual calling time in an evening Keep that in mind and remember, don’t dive too deeply into the choreography for singing calls. You do not need to go deep to get interesting, different, and creative ideas. Deep diving is Dark and Technical, shallow diving and snorkelling is easy but full of wonder and different memories that last.

It is important however that you as a caller provide what feels like “fresh new ideas” in dance combinations. Believe it or not, dancers do not remember the choreographic sequences of patten routines, but they often remember the singing call routines because it ceases to be choreography and becomes dance lyrics.

For many years many callers and producers put out the same “stuff” with the exact same approaches to all dancers everywhere – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. The focus was on the callers working to develop their craft and the producers who were making music as a platform to sell that craft. Over the years this has changed and the singing call in many places has become just another patten record but with a melody line and lyrics., While some dancers may like that, I can assure you, most do not, especially those coming into the activity. They want comfort, success, entertainment, and the ability to sing that song.

Slide – Carpool Karaoke

I remember when I started dancing, we would drive to a big dance and play square dance music in the car with our favourite callers. We would karaoke carpool the music including the choreographic lyrics of the song. When we heard that song being called, the repetition of innovation (different but not difficult) or the familiar known were equally welcome. What was not welcome was the discomfort

of having to think and work our way through the singing call. That is what the patter was for.

SLIDE - Judgement

It is important to always remember that both calling and dancing can be challenging and amazingly hard at times due to the unexpected choreography of the caller. Throw in a collection of square dancers that have a varied range of abilities and everything can become jumbled. It will be difficult for the dancers to complete all of the choreography and even harder for the caller to keep everyone moving. One of the great things about square dancing is recovering from those occasional mistakes is often part of the fun. In fact, making mistakes is proof that everyone is trying and learning! However, when you have to constantly work for it with no reward, it ceases to be fun. Singing calls are a perfect way to build an evening of predesigned choreography with a little variety to make this entertaining – especially at festivals and larger dances.

This is all about judgement and when calling, a discrete judgment needs to be made about various square dance movements and how much the dance floor can handle as far as difficulty is concerned. **Mistakes are OK**, but if the dancers falter too much, the “dancing lesson” becomes almost miserable, and you have become the reason for that. The dancers will lose respect for you as a caller and your reputation overall will become diminished. (keep in mind, dancers have long memories of bad times and those dancers will one day be the ones choosing whom to hire for the next big dance.) Remember that dancers are human, and humans tend to deflect blame away from themselves. The natural target for failure is of course the Caller, while in contrast, the natural reason for success is the Dancer and the caller is only the delivery means for that success. No matter what the issue is on the floor, Success belongs to the dancers. Failure is the sole responsibility of the Caller and nothing you do can change that perception.

Slide – good variety

A good variety of singing calls as a choreographic structure with a little variety can often be a good way of keeping a floor high, supporting the choreography, and building momentum and delight in an evening program. Momentum and energy can be lost due to squares breaking down on the dance floor. A good selection of singing calls can act as a mitigation tool against this. This idea is also especially nice when you have those built-in review nights for just dancing what you know.

This is a very thin line to walk for a caller, providing great overall interest in the choreography that is presented while at the same time keeping everyone smiling and happy and dancing.

Slide – Caution

One caution; Singing calls, generally do not always permit the dancers much time to recover from involved choreography. Therefore - **Basic and more simplistic choreography in singing call figures are the better ones to use in your**

square dance calling program. You want to achieve different but not difficult and your choreography must compliment your patter not be in contrast with it.

As a caller, you can encourage proficient dancing by offering different twists in your patter part of the hoedown and then follow that up with a themed sequence or two in the singing call figures. I do not ever encourage more than two figures in a singing call but that is a personal choice. I prefer to have one that is themed to my patter whenever possible.

We have previously discussed how you can improve your program with a formula for calling and dancing success by working on new ideas first, in the patter or hoedown, and then following that up with those same choreographic ideas, or perhaps similar ones that are on the simpler side of things in the singing call figures.

We are now adding to that, you can improve your overall performance and “street creds” with the dancers at a larger scale by periodically formulating your program around singing call choreography, and then developing your patter as a support mechanism for the singing call success. You will find that your patter on these evenings will become easier but a little more innovative (different but not difficult) and your dancers will be able to deal with the inverse (patter focus leading to singing call theme) much easier.

Slide – Simple changes

One simple way of doing this is by taking a favourite singing call figure and provide minor changes without changing the overall effect of the choreography. We will look at a standard very common singing call figure as follows:

- Heads Promenade 1/2, Heads Square Thru 4, Dosado, Swing Thru, Boys Run, Ferris Wheel, Centres Square Thru 3, Swing Corner and Promenade”

This figure has good flow and times out nicely at about 64 beats of music to home. If need be you can drop the Dosado to give yourself 4 extra beats of music without changing the effect of the choreography.

By making a subtle change in the choreography we can give it an entirely different feel as follows:

- Heads Promenade 1/2, Heads Square Thru 4, Swing Thru, Girls Turn Back, Wheel and Deal, Dosado, Pass Thru, Trade By, Swing Corner and Promenade

This figure times out at about 60-62 beats of music but it is important to time the girls turn back while just as the boys start the Centre part of the swing thru so you don't get a stop action. The flow also changes from a right-hand looping to a left-hand looping with the wheel and deal.

Other additions that can be made to keep this the same yet different is changing the Dosado, pass thru, trade by to Dosado once and a half, trade by. Nothing physically changes but the fractionalised Dosado will seem and feel different to the dancers.

Let's now look at keeping the theme up to the Ferris Wheel but changing the Square Thru 3 in the Centre.

- Heads Promenade 1/2, Heads Square Thru 4, Swing Thru, Boys Run, Ferris Wheel, Centres "Left" Touch 1/4, Centres Box Circulate Twice,(to the corner, Swing Corner and Promenade

When called correctly with the Left touch $\frac{1}{4}$ and box circulate twice stacked just before the completion of the Ferris Wheel, this also takes 64 beats to dance and is very smooth to play with. (you can also to a touch $\frac{1}{4}$ box circulate but there is a potential overflow problem there for the girls) However, when was the last time you called box circulate let a lone a left handed one at a dance or the dancers heard it. Yet, they will have no real option but to succeed as there really is nowhere else to go with their momentum. Different but not difficult. What this effectively does is strengthens the dancers' ability and adds some good variety in choreography at the same time:

Now what we can do, without making major changes is play with the same choreography idea (Heads Promenade 1/2 , Square Thru X) - but essentially not do anything with the dancers but put them in a ZS line (all in sequence such as sides slide apart and face in line). What we are going to do is keep that Dosado 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ idea and still start with the heads promenade half but the square thru is only 3. This will feel different to the dancers because of the $\frac{1}{2}$ sashayed line the in and out movements on the square but it is not difficult, and dancers will really have no choice but to succeed.

- Heads Promenade 1/2, Heads Square Thru 3, Heads Separate Around Two to a Line, Forward and Back, Bend the Line, Touch a Quarter, Boys Run, Dosado 1 $\frac{1}{2}$, Turn Back, Swing Corner and Promenade

This too will time out to 64 beats of music, but it is important here that although you can omit the forward and back it is best not to because the sides will be stepping forward as the heads go around them and back when they get to the outsides. This too will time out to 64 beats of music.

This is a common singing call as well

- Heads Promenade 1/2, Heads Lead Right, Touch a Quarter, Split Circulate, Boys Run, Right and Left Thru, Slide Thru, Square Thru 3, Swing Corner and full Promenade

The thing about this is that regardless of how many times you say full promenade, it takes 48 beats to home + 16 beats to the promenade, and you will have already

gone $\frac{1}{4}$. Many dancers, especially plus or higher that are dancing down a program or two, will stop at home which is frustrating for the newer dancers.

A little innovation to this is easily achieved by changing the opening. And eliminating the swing but letting it blend into a forward action thus encouraging a full promenade because of the tightening of the square in the Centre...it will feel different but not difficult

- Heads Promenade $\frac{1}{2}$, Heads Right and Left Thru, Heads Lead Left, Touch a Quarter, Split Circulate, Boys Run, Right and Left Thru, Slide Thru, Square Thru 3, (take a new girl and promenade home)

In addition to the ending, we have done a lead left with the Centres, which is also not difficult just a little different to give us success with different not difficult.

Consider the following:

- Heads Promenade $\frac{1}{2}$, Sides Right and Left Thru, Sides Flutterwheel and Sweep a Quarter, Centres Pass Thru, (CB on opposite side) Spin Chain Thru, Girls Circulate, Swing Corner and Promenade

Compare it with:

- Heads Square Thru, Eight Chain Four, (CB on opposite side) Spin Chain Thru, Girls Circulate, Swing Corner and Promenade

This is the same feature call and the same essential set up but getting there feels so much different to the dancers.

Consider the following Singing call

- Heads Lead Right, Swing Thru, Spin the Top, Right and Left Thru, Pass the Ocean, Boys Circulate, Girls Trade, Hinge, Scoot Back, Swing Corner and Promenade

Compare it with:

- Heads Right and Left Thru, Heads Lead Left, Dosado, Swing Thru, Spin the Top, Right and Left Thru, Pass the Ocean, Boys Circulate, Girls Trade, Swing Corner and Promenade

SLIDE – LOOK FOR FILLER – THIS GIVES PLAY ROOM

When you see figures that end with a:

- Scoot Back, to a Swing or
- a Hinge, Scootback And Swing,
- or a Touch $\frac{1}{4}$, Scoot Back And Swing,

that leaves you a lot of room to play to change the openings slightly to give a different feel to the same figure for innovative different but not difficult variety.

Consider simple symmetry in your quest for singing call variety when it presents itself to you. Remember the line to box conversion, touch $\frac{1}{4}$, circulate boys run as opposed to left touch $\frac{1}{4}$, circulate, girls run....that will also help with different but not difficult transitions in your singing call repertoire. Consider the following figure:

- Heads Right and Left Thru, Heads Lead Left, Touch a Quarter, Split Circulate, Boys Run, Reverse Flutterwheel and Sweep $\frac{1}{4}$, Pass Thru, Trade By, Allemande Left, Swing Corner and Promenade

Compare it with a symmetrical (mirrored version)

- Sides Right and Left Thru and Back Away, Heads Lead Right, Left Touch a Quarter, Split Circulate, Girls Run, Flutterwheel and Sweep a Quarter, Pass Thru, Trade By, Allemande Left, Swing Corner and Promenade

Understanding that you can use your singing call choreography as a driver to create simple variations without much change (different but not difficult) you can structure entire evenings or dances to greater success and maximise both your music and performance benefits.

Slide 10 hints and tips

Simple hints that help with singing call success

1. Use of equivalents that time out
2. Use of filler at the end – (play time)
3. Short focus flow zeros
4. Set up RH quadrant CB to swing and alternate
5. Dosado 1-1/2 instead of pass thru
6. Right and left thru, lead left instead of lead right
7. Use Right hand Lady progression periodically
8. Use of simple mirror symmetry
9. Half sashay in and out quickly
10. Use BBGG stuff easy in and easy out

Consider a figure like this which has it all for success:

- Heads Square Thru, Sides Half Sashay, Dosado, (BBGG), Swing Thru, Boys Run, Pass Thru, Wheel and Deal, Zoom, Centres Square Thru 3, Swing Corner and Promenade