

AS A DANCER, WHAT I LOOK FOR IN A CALLER

Each year my Plus club has guest callers, and I try to attend if I am in town. I also try to attend dances when I am traveling. As a dancer, here is a list of things I look for in a caller.

1. **FREQUENT ALLEMANDE LEFTS.** The dancers need to be rewarded with the carrot of a Left Allemande when they have done well, and it is good to have constant positive reinforcement. Thus, I like to see a Left Allemande at least every 45 - 60 seconds. The Allemandes do not all have to be followed with a Right & Left Grand - the key is the Allemande itself. Some callers just call and call with very few Allemandes, and this causes some dancers to be nervous, in addition to putting a damper on enthusiasm from the floor.

2. **SMOOTH CHOREOGRAPHY.** This should be automatic for all callers, but I am amazed by the number of times I experience direct reversal of body flow, or combinations that are adequate but could be made much better with a little thought. Women dancers often suffer more from un-smooth choreography, because most callers are men and they assume that if something is smooth for the men then it is also smooth for the women. This is not necessarily the case.

On the flip side, I danced to one caller who was so perfect on smooth choreography that everyone was a constant state of perfect flow. By the second half of the dance my body was crying out for something different - not something awkward but at least something that would let some dancers stop occasionally. We never got it. In other words, it is possible to be too perfect.

3. **FEW TO NO DO-SA-DOS.** Do-Sa-Do is a double reversal of body flow. The more this call is given, the less smooth the dance. In addition, if a caller calls Do-Sa-Do prior to a Swing Thru, it is talking down to the dancers, in effect saying: "I don't think you are capable of doing a Swing Thru without doing a Do-Sa-Do first." I count the number of times a caller uses Do-Sa-Do. Three or 4 a night might be ok, simply because it is a traditional call, but any more is excessive and indicates a lack of thinking about choreography. One or no Do-Sa-Dos during a dance greatly elevates the caller in my eyes.

4. **ENTHUSIASM.** Callers have this to different degrees, but the key is whether it is genuine and relates to this particular floor. Dancers can spot "rote enthusiasm" right away, where you know the caller does the exact same thing and says the exact same thing at every dance. This is a turnoff. On a related note, rapport with the floor is very important, but it must relate to this particular floor.

5. **CREATIVITY.** A little variety is wonderful and goes a long way. There is a difference between "hard" and "creative", and successful callers know this difference. On the flip side I attended a Plus dance where the caller did nothing but Basic Program gimmicks the entire night, with virtually no Plus calls used. This was a giant letdown. To rephrase an old saying: Too much of a good thing might not always be wonderful.

6. **MUSIC JOCKEYS** turn me off. This term means cranking the music up loud after each command, then turning it down before the next command, and continuing on and on with it. This is distracting to the dancers, and implies that the caller does not have enough ability to carry the floor in a normal manner. Occasionally turning up the music is fine, such as during a long call (Spin Chain Thru, Spin

Chain the Gears) or for the Left Allemande. But some callers will jockey the music every call or two, and this is excessive.

7. DRESS. Most callers dress fine, but I am always amazed when someone shows up who just looks sloppy. This type of "I don't care" attitude is a slap in the face to our activity and is a real turnoff. Women callers always dress well - it's the men who have the problem.

8. SOUND. Is the music balanced well with the voice, are the caller's words clear and crisp, is the music too soft so the dancers feel they are walking to a voice rather than dancing to music? All of these are problems I've seen with callers. National traveling callers don't seem to have these problems - it is usually local callers and ironically often it is callers who have been calling a long time and just don't realize what is happening.