

# *Harmony*

by Tim Marriner

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Square dance singing calls usually provide a great deal of enjoyment for our square dance activity. Callers can apply different vocal and showmanship techniques to create various moods or levels of excitement that can transfer across the dance floor. Adding other vocalist can also enhance a performance. Many callers never get the chance to work with others so when they do, many find it difficult to manage. Practice is utmost important for those that are not well trained on how to layer vocals with harmonies that sound pleasant to the ear.

First of all, someone must sing the lead vocal without drifting off into a harmonic. This anchor vocal allows others to blend harmonies with the main melody. With that, other vocalist can seek vocal blends that sound pleasant with bass tonalities, baritone thirds, tenor fifths, or possibly even octaves/sevenths. Some callers have a talent to quickly find harmonies. This is an acquired skill that can be developed with lots of practice. Not only do you need to train your voice but you must also train your ears to hear the possible blends.

As a rule, harmonies should not override the lead vocal and should be softer tones to maintain the ability to listen to all the parts blend. Often, multiple callers sing in unison, creating just a loud tone. Microphones volumes usually need to be turned down to avoid the vocals overdriving the music.

Some music has minor cords that increase the difficulty to perform with other callers. Occasionally music might already provide vocal harmonies that might muddy the overall sound if performed with others. Just be aware of the song selection when trying to harmonize with others.

There are many callers that only hear the melody and should not try to harmonize. Their vocal is necessary for others to work around. Some callers have higher timber vocals and should always take the thirds or fifths without alternating with others. Some callers hear base tones better and would be best suited to sing those notes. The trick is to predetermine who is doing what part and follow the pattern throughout the entire song. Very few callers are able to interchange harmonic parts between figures during a song. Again, practice and cooperation are the keys to performing as a collective unit. Without which the blends can be brash or harsh on the ears. When possible record and listen back to a practice performance or have an unbiased individual critique the overall sound. Individuals could practice their own parts by themselves until they are confident to stay on pitch; then, join the others to find the sweet blend of harmonies sure to excite a dance floor. With computers, it is now easier to record lead vocals and record harmonies, to be played back for a performance or to review. The more you practice the more instinctively you will be able to hear and sing the natural harmonic blends.