

Music Management

by Tim Marriner

Music is the medium that provides rhythm and dance to the activity. There are several aspects that must be considered when you first decide to work with dancers. First of all, how do you plan to offer music? One approach is to offer it “live” with instruments or a full band. Years ago this was the only way to offer music. Now days there are various means to deliver prerecorded music through electronic equipment. Amplifiers, speakers and all of the appropriate cables and hookups are necessary. Proper shielding and lengths of speaker wire and electrical cords need to be considered for added clarity.

Vinyl records, 78’s, LP (Long Playing), and 45’s were widely used. Cue sheets and sometimes teaching suggestions were included. Square Dance 45’s are still available on a limited basis and require a turntable to play them. Hilton Audio still offers new professional turntables with different wattages or power designed for our activity. Refurbished and used equipment is also available from several distributors. Evaluate your own needs and desires to determine what is best suited for your business.

Another means to deliver music are Compact Discs (CD’s). CD Players are necessary as well as an amplifier, speakers and appropriate cabling. Some square dance music producers offer their music in the CD format but not all. These producers usually provide extra tracks with upper and lower keys and sometimes harmony. Not all provide cue sheets so an alternative booklet may be necessary. A good quality CD player with large buttons and speed control is best suited for this medium. Self recorded CD’s are possible but the music will still need to be recorded with a turntable or downloaded and saved as a Wave File, WMA or MP3, a compressed computer music file. Be sure the CD player can read the various file formats needed. Some players are limited.

MP3 players and iPods are another means to deliver music to the dancers. They are relatively small and can hold a large quantity of music. Again, an amplifier and speakers along with all the proper hook ups are necessary. Direct downloads via the Internet are available from most square dance producers and distributors. Cue sheets can be downloaded from various web sites but are not always provided. CD, MP3 and iPod players allow one to use alternative music sources other than the standard square dance producers. Just be sure it is suitable to the audience. Most iPods will record and play back MP3’s but most MP3 players can not play the iPod format which is encoded differently.

The portable computer or laptop has become a very popular medium to offer music to the dance community. Several software programs have developed that offer music management and playback designed for our activity. Speed and pitch control are offered by most programs. Lyrics, cue sheets, definitions, dance programs and written material can all be managed. Free ware can also be used with additional plug-ins that can do similar tasks but not as seamless as the purchasable programs. Music can be downloaded or recorded from a suitable turntable or CD player. Cue sheet can also be downloaded

from various sites and square dance distributors. Unfortunately music sharing has become a large problem for our industry forcing several square dance producers out of business.

The various formats of equipment being utilized today induce new problems. When sharing the stage with others be sure everyone has proper connectivity to deliver their music. Do not assume everyone has converted to a digital format and show up at a function where someone is expecting to use a turntable with just an amplifier. If equipment is provided be sure you have all the necessary cables to connect. Be prepared; consider alternative music delivery if anything breaks down or crashes.

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