



MUSIC AS USED BY CALLERS

While music may not be the most important single item in the callers' repertoire, it is a vital ingredient. It is true that you may become a successful caller without being able to sing. However, it is equally true that if you use music well, you will be more effective than if you do not. This session will show you how to be more effective with music.

Music is a part of everything that we do, from teaching to a full-scale stage show during a festival. Music enables the dancers to move comfortably from one figure to another. Music gives the dancers that euphoric feeling of floating with grace and style. Music can and should be used to help with programming and variety. Music can and should be varied by record producer labels.

When we talk about music, we are not suggesting that you should be a music major or composer but rather you should learn how to use the music to suit your own particular talents. Most callers can feel the beat of the music and many will instinctively call on the musical phrase. Some may be more melodic than others and that is what makes square dancing so enjoyable. Each of us has observed a caller who does not call with the music and this leads to a long evening because the dancers are not comfortable.

Music consists of several parts, which we will describe in terms that presuppose no prior knowledge. Music has several parts — RHYTHM, MELODY and HARMONY. The variety is provided by the way in which these elements are combined to create a mood or an overall sensation. We each have our favorite square dance labels and these combinations are what make each of us choose one label over another.

RHYTHM is expressed as a measure of time. It can be said that it is a function of time between beats. It may be regular or irregular. However, for most square dance music, we see and hear the following:

2/4 Time: The bulk of our music is written in this time signature and is often referred to as Boom/Chuck music. Technically it says that there are two beats of music to each measure and that a quarter-note gets one beat of time.

4/4 Time: This time signature is generally referred to as March Music and it is characterized by a heavy Boom Boom style. The 4/4 music gives a different feel to its rhythm and is often hard to identify other than by feel. Some hoedowns use this time stamp, but more often you will find 4/4 in singing calls. "Summer Sounds" on MacGregor is a popular 4/4 piece.

2/2 Time: This is referred to as cut time and feels much the same as 4/4 time. As a caller, it is very difficult to tell the difference between these two time signatures.

6/8 Time: This is referred to as Jig Time and gives an entirely different feel to the music. It can be counted and used by the caller in the same fashion as other rhythms but it can also give a Rat-ta-ta, Rat-ta-ta beat in which we, as callers use the Rat count to give us the beat. Some examples of this music are most often found in Contras or Quadrilles. This is not a common rhythm in singing calls.

All square dance music must have a recognizable downbeat to enable us to deliver the call on the musical phrase. That is the heavy beat of the music. It is recognized by a bass type of instrument in the orchestration.

There may be other beats that you can hear but the bass beat is what gives the dancer and the caller the feeling to move and call by.

Regularity is essential to smooth calling. If we, as callers, do not deliver our calls in a regular pattern to the music, we are inviting disaster. Sometimes this is referred to as TEMPO. Tempo can best be described as the number of beats per minute. It is the count of steps that a dancer can and should take in a given period of time. Generally speaking, a dance tempo is comfortable when set at 128 to 132 beats per minute. Slower than this will give a draggy feeling while faster than this will lead to rough dancing. Increasing the tempo is not synonymous with higher level dancing.

Variety can be enhanced by your using a mix of different rhythms, tempos and compositions.

The second element of music is MELODY. This is generally considered as the tune that we recognize. Melody is the pattern of the tones used by the writer of the music. It is what gives us a song that we can sing to. The melody consists of tones that are put together in a pattern that creates an enjoyable and pleasurable sensation. A tone is a single sound that is made when a piano key is struck or a guitar string is plucked. A tone then is the basic element of Melody just as the Beat is the basic element of Rhythm.

A group of tones put together form a tune. We can all sing many different tunes. It is the variations of tones that create the tunes or melodies we recognize. If we played a scale of eight different tones, we would know this as the Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Do. The Do tone at the beginning and end is identical in tone but varies only in pitch. Technically the two have a frequency of a two to one ratio. That is to say that the Do on the first part is half the frequency of the Do at the last part.

This frequency difference is also referred to as an octave. If we added the black keys to the piano scale, we add the half tones and thus obtain the full 12-tone chromatic scale that encompasses all tones used in any music.

The next element of music that we need to recognize is the **KEY**. This, in callers' parlance, is what determines the comfort zones of tones we use to deliver the call. The key gives us a comfort range for the music we select. The chords used in any piece of music provide the allowable tones to use without being off-key. Different hoedowns will be recorded in different keys. Keys will provide a certain feel for the music. The Key of "A" will seem to be higher than the Key of "G" and refers to the structure of the scale to play music written in that key.

Key and Pitch are also used to reflect the degree of accuracy with which a person sings a particular note. If a caller is slightly off-key or off-pitch, we refer to that person as "sour" or "flat". You, as a caller, can talk a call and not try to deliver the call with a singing tone and avoid this being off-pitch. If a note is too high for you to reach comfortably when singing, use a variation of that delivery style in order to avoid singing off key.

HARMONY is the last element of music that we are concerned with and generally refers to the combinations of tones that, when played together, yield a pleasurable mix. If two tones are played concurrently that are too close to one another in tone, they are said to be in dissonance or discord. Generally harmony occurs when two tones are played concurrently and are separated by at least one other complete tone.

Chords are combinations of tones. On a standard scale the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 8th notes of a scale comprise the major chord. Minor

chords, seventh chords, augmented chords are other variations of tonal arrangements that you need not concern yourself with in order to be effective. However, you must be able to recognize chords in order to deliver the calls on key.

These tones are the notes on which you can deliver the call and make the delivery style comfortable and pleasurable for the dancer. As mentioned above, if a note is too high for your voice range, use a tone that is in harmony with the one you are unable to reach.

In order to be effective, a caller must deliver his calls three ways.

- 1) ON RHYTHM
- 2) ON PITCH (KEY)
- 3) ON PHRASE

Today's choreography doesn't always allow us to deliver each call on the musical phrase, but when we do, we will provide the dancer with a more enjoyable dance and they will leave the dance without being as tired as otherwise. There are other elements that contribute to this feeling that will be discussed in other segments of the seminar under smooth dancing etc.

Calling on Phrase is also sometimes referred to as metering the call to the music. This is most often talked about in singing calls but is a technique we use in patten calling as well. Since music is often written in 4 or 8 beat musical phrases, we should try to deliver our calls in phrase to the music.

When we get a call that only requires two beats, then we will have several calls in a musical phrase. If you examine the timing lists published by CALLERLAB, you will see that most of them are in multiples of 4 or 8 beats. With very few exceptions, they are in even counts. Thus, if we combine our calls to come up with a series that add up to 64 beats or steps, we will have a combination that fits the music story or melody.

Hoedowns are generally written with a four or eight beat phrase that is repeated to yield a 32 beat paragraph. Then a different paragraph is played using the same philosophy for another 32 beats and this comprises the story the composer wished to tell. As you listen to various music, you should begin to develop this understanding of the music. By using this understanding effectively, you will become a better caller that the dancers will enjoy more.

Remember, you don't have to be able to sing in order to be a good caller, but you do have to be able to use music effectively. Music is the foundation of our calling and if we fail to use music effectively, we are dooming ourselves to failure.