



TIMING

In order to understand TIMING, you must first understand music and the structure of the musical phrases of the music you are using. While this is obviously true for singing calls, it is equally important for patten calling. It requires a great deal of discipline by the caller and in many instances will require a total rework of the currently used skills of most callers.

There are three parts to TIMING. They are COMMAND TIME, LEAD TIME, and EXECUTION TIME.

COMMAND TIME is defined as the amount of time it takes to give the command to be executed. Generally speaking this should be done in no more than 2 beats. There are some exceptions to this two beat call such as SPIN CHAIN THRU or in the Plus Program, SPIN CHAIN AND EXCHANGE THE GEARS, etc. A good exercise to help with this would be to practice just the commands themselves with different music so that the commands are automatic and never (seldom) take more than two beats to deliver. When doing this, however, do not consider the choreography, but rather just concentrate on giving the calls in not more than two beats.

LEAD TIME is defined as the amount of time you give the command prior to the dancers beginning the execution of that command. Generally, this should be limited to somewhere between 2 and 4 beats with 2 beats being the norm. The reason you sometimes have to give more LEAD TIME is for formations and arrangements that are other than standard or for some calls which require more than two beats to give the COMMAND. Sides Face, Grand Square should normally be given on beats 5, 6, 7, and 8 so that the dancers can start out the Grand Square on beat 1 of the musical phrase.

EXECUTION TIME is the most precise of the three timing elements and is defined as the amount of time, measured in beats (steps to the music), that are required to dance the command comfortably. This work was pioneered by Dick Leger and his committee and carried on by Bob Wilson and is now complete for all dance programs from Basic thru A-2. It was completed by dancing the patterns over and over until a consensus on how many steps were needed was reached for each of the calls on the various lists.

Assuming that we are using a standard 8-beat phrased piece of music (probably in 2/4 or boom-chuck music) then the anchor beats are 1 and 5 primary and 3 and 7 secondary. If we are talking about the delivery of most calls (2 beat Command Time and 2 beat Lead Time) then we should strive to deliver the command on beats 7 and 8 so that the dancers get to dance on the first beat of the musical phrase. This is not commonly done. Most callers take the 1st and 5th beats for themselves and let the dancers fend for themselves. In singing calls, many callers will start the opener using the phrase calling technique but then revert to using the anchor beats for themselves. This is one of the main reasons why dancers have to wait on a Grand Square while the caller gives the command for the action which should start on beat 33 of a 64-beat opener. Listen to many singing calls and you will hear the artists call using the anchor beats for themselves and not for the dancer.

The entire concept of TIMING should be considered as a part of the overall use of music as well as the careful consideration of such other items as SMOOTH DANCING and PROPER BODY FLOW. Of course, these cannot be used without regard to the DEGREE of DIFFICULTY which are covered elsewhere in this booklet. The proper TIMING involves the three elements of TIMING so that the dancer has the correct hand availability and proper body flow at exactly the time it is needed without having to stop to hear the next command or to rush in order to keep up. If you consider that most dancing today is done at a tempo between 124 and 128, (some are faster and a few are slower), you are taking one step for each beat of music and that step takes about 1/2 of a second. If you are off by just half a second, you are off by one beat and the dancers will start to stagger or not dance smoothly.

There is a school of thought that ALL choreography should be preplanned. When this is done, and if it is done with proper phrasing in mind, then it is possible to give the dancer the first beat of the musical phrase throughout the entire routine except where split phrasing must be taken into consideration. In today's choreography, however, there are many calls which are less than 8 beats and in some instances use less than an even number of beats to complete. If you use these calls, then some adjustments will have to be made in TIMING to make the dance routine smooth. If we look at a normal square and call Heads Square Thru, it should take the dancers 10 beats to arrive at the corner with their right hands available. If we follow this with a Swing Thru, it adds 6 beats to make a total of 16 or two musical phrases. If the caller gives the command to Swing Thru on beats 7 and 8, the dancer has been given the command too early and will tend to rush the call. This can also be called clipped timing on the part of the caller. To call it correctly, the command should be given on beats 1 and 2 of the next phrase. Then the following call should again be given on beats 7 and 8 and both you and the dancer are back on phrase.

Think of the times, when you were dancing to various callers. If their TIMING was good, you were unaware of the time during the dance. It seemed to fly by and you were not physically tired but were surprised when the caller announced last tip. On some other occasions, you may have tapped your watch to see if it had stopped because the evening was dragging on and on. In those cases, the caller was probably using bad TIMING by 1) being too late with the calls (stop and go dancing), or 2) he was too early and forced you to run in order to keep up. Which kind of caller are you?

There are some callers who are not able to discipline themselves to pre-cue a command and give the first beat to the dancer. This is not uncommon. Many callers are just not aware of the proper method of calling and take the simple way out. This is not to say that you won't have a good time with them. Many of them are the superstars of today and dancers love them. They would be loved even more if these same callers could improve their technical calling skills to call using the preferred method of PROPER TIMING. Can it be done? — You bet. Is it easy? — No. It takes an understanding of MUSIC, PHRASING, SMOOTH BODY FLOW and CALLER DISCIPLINE. Work on it. Your dancers will love you for it.