



*News, Notes 'n  
Nonsense:  
A Magazine for  
Callers & Cuers*

# **JUNE 2018 SOAPBOX SPECIAL ISSUE**

## ***On the Inside Track***

This Special Issue of BTM came about a few weeks ago when I received an interesting question from Wade Driver in the USA:

*Barry,*

*Thank you for continuing to send the latest from down under. I have a question for you:*

*The singing call and the patter call each take up 50% of our dance. What, in your opinion, would be the breakdown of the work and study that go into each? And what, again in your opinion, would be the reason?*

*Wade*

Wade's question took me by surprise and made me look long and hard at how we structure our education programs for callers. I was so intrigued by the question that I decided to send it to a number of callers here in Australia whose opinion and ideas I respect and who are all involved in

caller education in one form or another. As the ball was in motion, I then sent the question to a number of well-known and respected callers overseas.

What I noted in my messages to these callers was this:

*Wade's question has raised a lot of issues in my mind. I think that it a very valid question. I am sending this out to a number of callers who may wish to be involved and have a say in the answer to Wade's question.*

*The answer to this very question may us look at our education programs in a different way.*

*When we think about it, a Singing call only lasts for 4 minutes in a given bracket. We normally have two numbers, a hoedown (patter call) of usually around 6-7 minutes length at MS (this is around the standard worldwide) and follow with our 4 minute SC. With these figures, the patter is longer and has more relevance in teaching, variety, locking in knowledge, etc...BUT in reality, what we are creating with our hoedown is just a path leading to a specific destination. I most things in life, the destination is our aiming or end point; our goal. In SD it is the reward we grant the dancers after the challenge (etc) in the hoedown. On that basis, is the Destination not more valuable than the path? That is the end point. We hope to gain a good response from the dancers to our patter, but we hope for an even better response to our SC.*

*At Plus the concept is pretty much the same as in MS, Of course as we progress up the ladder, the destination point actually changes. With A1 and A2 , quite often, the destination point is just a relaxation concept. Here in Australia, we still have a SC as part of bracket (tip) in the Advanced program...in many countries and areas, this is not always so.*

*When we move to the Challenge programs, a SC (in most areas) is regarded as a waste of dancing time. The choreo within the patter is both path and destination at the same time.*

*Please have a good think about this and let me know your thoughts as I believe that this can be an important issue.*

The replies have been very interesting and insightful, from simple to very complex. All have taken the basic idea onboard and given a lot of thought into their replies. I thought that this topic was an important one and everyone should have the opportunity to peruse the replies.

So, here we go:-

### **From Glenn Wilson in Queensland:**

*Let me preface by saying I only call Basic, M/S & Plus and a good SC is expected.*

*Yes, the Patter portion is longer, but has a more "make it up as you go" element to it. Meaning that while there is a plan, it's not set in stone and ideas occur "on the fly" as you get into it. You haven't got as much of a Pitch/Tune issue and you don't have as much of an issue of matching word meter and phrasing. And mostly there are no time constraints. But I do find, I'm researching more formations & arrangements for more movements as I progress. I think it takes more work to present a good singing call, because you have to match pitch, word meter and phrasing to the song you are singing. There is that pesky 64 beats for your Get-In, the move you wish to highlight and the Get-Out including Promenade. You have to start exactly on the beat and finish exactly on the beat and hit the beat points all the way through the song ie start of each 64 beat phrase. I try to have a singing for all movements from as many Formations & Arrangements of each movement as possible. I don't agree as*

*some espouse that the SC is for relaxation only. I believe it should re-enforce what you do in the patter. Or more specifically, work it in the Patter, so you can use it in the Singer. I don't very often Sight call my Singers, I don't believe you can do the job as well if, you are searching for the corner Swing while trying to sing to the tune. If you concentrate on one specific, you tend to let other stuff go.*

*You can see I have thought about this*

*Regards, Glenn*

**From Mike Sikorsky in USA:**

*My patters are 6 1/2 to 7 minutes long, while the singing call is usually 3:50 long, so the patter is 60-65% of my dance. This is very important because 60-65% of my dance is searching for what they know and then building on it, done to patter music carefully chosen to enhance the dance experience every step of the way. A singing call is always the same music each time you sing it, so it's important to view a singing call as a delicate, tasty, and carefully chosen icing addition to the excellent cake being constructed beneath it, meant for dancers who want the icing.*

**From Jim Mayo in USA:**

*It's an interesting question. Unfortunately, I think the question of how much work is sort of irrelevant. Years ago singing calls used the same routine 4 times and the design of that figure was a matter of pride and ingenuity. Today it appears that many - actually, most - callers treat the singing call much like the patter with the figure changing for each chorus.*

*I believe that the primary difference between patter and singing is the length of the routine. In the singing call it is limited to 64 beats while the patter may go on much longer. Wade's question assumes that some advance planning goes into one or the other. Today I believe few callers do much advance planning - for either patter or singing. The concept of planning a program in advance was never very widespread and I doubt that it receives much attention at all these days. A couple of years ago I gave the University of NH library more than 50 years of written-out programs for the dances I have called. I had a plan, in writing, for nearly every dance I called but I think I am virtually unique in that regard.*

*As another data point, in response to your question, I check the recording I have of the Past Chairmen's dance called at the 2009 CALLERLAB Convention. I used a circle contra for my singing call with the figure the same for each of the 7 choruses. The other 5 callers each used 4 different routines for their singing call figures. For the breaks most used the same routine for each of the 3 with a couple of exceptions. The break was a grand square routine for 2 of the callers.*

*I'm quite sure that the singing call choreography for most callers uses a fairly standard set of routines that take little study or advance thought. The patter routines are longer but, I suspect, tend to repeat in pretty standard ways for most callers. For many sight calling means they set up a mess and then wander through the routine until they find something they recognize with a lot of sloppy timing while they try to work out the exit.*

*I'm guessing there's a lot of difference between callers with more than 30 years experience and those with less. The newer callers never experienced planned, innovative choreography in their own programs and they may not even recognize it when danced to the more experienced callers.*

*Sorry for the pessimism. I'm on an active campaign to encourage MWSD to recognize that it's past success was based more on sociability than choreography. That's an uncomfortable thought for most (including me until the last few years) but I am increasingly sure that we*

have caused a large share of our trouble with complicated choreography that has little dancing included.

Cheers,  
Jim

**From Graham Elliott in South Australia:**

*From my perspective:*

*For hoedowns I will spend time working out get-outs and return to home routines, sometimes with a theme in mind. I may spend some time working a concept to see if it flows well – eg “stretching a definition”.*

*For singing calls I spend time choreographing so it*

- *Fits the 64 beats*
- *Resolves with as close to a full lap promenade as I can for 16 beats*
- *Each figure in a theme is different or cleverly reverse boy/girl role etc.*
- *No overflow or “ouch” and flows well.*

*So as I do use a lot of sight for hoedowns I would say I put more time into amassing a collection of singing call figures. Again many to a theme.*

*I like having variety in SC figures.*

*Percentage wise? Well that’s a very variable number but for the sake of discussion - wild guess but probably 70% of the “desk time” on singing call choreo.*

Cheers  
Graham

**From Paul Bristow in UK:**

*Wade's question is one of great interest to me. I agree with all that you have written.*

*As I see it, the primary function of any Caller is to "Entertain the Dancers" and the principal place where that can happen is during the Singing Call.*

*The first thing I would say is that I'm not entirely sure that I agree with Wade's suggestion that the Singing Call takes up 50% of the Dance - the Patter tends to be at least twice as long as the singing call so proportionately it takes up closer to 60% (maybe 70%) of each tip; that may or may not be relevant.*

*What is relevant - I feel - is the history of the Singing Call.*

*Originally, it was the primary device for any Caller (in fact if you go back far enough we only had "Singing Calls"). I have read a lot about the period just prior to the point when I started to Dance (and Call) and allocation of the current favourite Singing Calls was on the basis of the Caller's ability - the top Callers had first choice; of course, at that time there were very few Patter Callers of any great ability, as this was a "whole new world".*

*When I first started dancing (in 1975) the Singing Call was a lot more than the "Cherry on top of the cake" - it was the primary element of Square Dancing. At my regular Club the evening would start and finish with two Singing Calls - and there would be at least one more tip during the evening in which there were two Singing Calls presented. The number of Patter calls was a lot less than 50% of the evening and often felt to me to be the workshop/practice part of the evening a "necessary evil" rather than a requirement.*

*Of course everything has changed and these days many people are looking for elements of "challenge" and - as you move up through the programmes you will reach the point where Singing Calls are considered by many to be a waste of time.*



*I still insist upon using a Singing Call on every tip at an Advanced Dance (and Workshop) - but I have had to give in to pressures and stop using Singing Calls at C1 (there was one occasion when I tried to finish a C1 tip with a Singing Call (at an "all levels" Convention) and two Squares "sat down"); that is one of the main reasons that I do not call very much in the C1 programme.*

*I feel that - in this day and age - Callers are not making as good a use of the Singing Call as they could do; quite often they just use it to show off their "singing ability" in a type of Karaoke format. I feel that we should be making a lot more of Singing Calls and that we should restore them to their proper place: not just the "cherry on the top of the cake" but the "cherry, the colourful icing and everything else that is good" on the other side of the Patter!*

Regards, Paul

**Paul sent me another email the following day, with some further thoughts:**

*I've had a few more thoughts about this subject that I would like to share with you.*

*First is the amount of time that Callers spend on deciding which Singing Call they will be using; I quite often see a caller start to look at his list to choose a Singing Call as he is finishing his patter - quite clearly a last-minute selection. My personal feeling is that this is wrong.*

*We now have the opportunity to make use of a much larger quantity of music; in olden days - with vinyl - there was a limit to how much you could carry there was a limit to how much of a choice you had available and perhaps a last-minute selection might work - but with the modern computer based music libraries we are able to carry our entire repertoire of music, which makes selecting a tune towards the end of a patter an impossible task.*

*I know that most of the successful Callers take the time to programme their Singing Calls; now - more than ever before - we need to take time (perhaps even make time) to programme our Singing Calls more effectively.*

*There are so many personal favourites that I've heard callers use.*

*Your "around the world" routine, my Seven Spanish Angels (with the Hop skip jump routine) and Brian Hotchkiss' infinite number of tunes (many of which seem to provide him with the opportunity to remove most of his clothes while he is calling - and make everybody laugh rather than scream in horror) - an excellent entertainer.*

*If we go back a few years, I remember very clearly that there were certain Singing Calls that were in vogue - it was often a case of who got there first or who laid claim to a particular title in order to assure that no one else would use the track. I remember very clearly many dance situations when there would be a list of Singing Calls that have been used - that you could check to ensure you didn't duplicate; this happened quite often at major conventions and also from time to time in multi Hall situations (in the early days of split level programming).*

*I am very much of the opinion that a lot of time should be being spent by Callers on choosing Singing Calls and preparing to give the very best possible presentation.*

*In my own personal situation, I now write out the complete music program for any event where I am Calling prior to working at the event; this includes both the Singing Calls and the Patter records. I have found that this is the only safe way to proceed, the alternative would be to try and read through a list of almost 1000 or more tunes and try to select my programme from the computer database, while the dancers are standing on the floor waiting for you to call.*

*Apart from anything else, it is one aspect of stress that I can control - and I don't need any more stress than I get as a consequence of the adrenaline rush when I'm Calling.*

*I feel that a lot more time should be spent in preparation of Singing Calls than in preparation of the patter section - but that is just my own opinion.*

*Ok Barry, I hope this adds something useful to my previous comments.*

*Regards, Paul*

**From Daryl Clendenin in USA:**

*Hi Wade, Barry & All,*

*Wade: The singing call and the patter call each take up 50% of our dance. What, in your opinion, would be the breakdown of the work and study that go into each?*

*Without expressing any opinion of good or bad, I'll state; "In the activity as it exists today, there seems to be very little difference between the patter and the singing call."*

*There was a time, in my memory, when any really good singer could do a singing call. But, it took a caller to do patter. Of course, there is very little variety in new singing call figures being released with the new music.*

*In the 'old' days, most callers took the cue sheet with (hopefully) well-constructed choreography, memorized it and called it after a good patter tip.*

*Today it's almost as if the patter doesn't end. All that happens is, we add some lyrics during the promenades.*

*Okay, my answer to Wade is; if today's caller is expected by the dancers to include four, more or less extemporaneous, figures in every singing call, the difference in work and study for the two is minimal.*

*If a caller is only to use the choreography included with the music, the difference in work and study is tremendous. 90%-10% in favor of the patter. Presentation of the "singing" becomes more important.*

*Wade: And what, again in your opinion, would be the reason?*

*Evolution. Today, as important as it is to be able to entertain with both patter and singing calls, dancers today seem to value challenging choreography more than pleasant singing. This seems to be like a 'snowball' rolling downhill. The more capable we are at changing the choreography in singing calls, the more likely we are to do it. The more we do it, the more we appeal to those that are there because we do it.*

*Barry, you say, "When we move to the Challenge programs, a SC (in most areas) is regarded as a waste of dancing time. The choreo within the patter is both path and destination at the same time."*

*I agree but some of the same attitude in a minor degree exists at MS.*

*My opinion: We have and are, creating through evolution, an activity that has and will continue to become increasingly difficult to enter into by the mass mind and preference. Our activity has evolved from a "recreation" to a "hobby."*

*This applies to both the dancers and the callers. We are only retaining those dancers and callers that are capable of entering the activity as it exists. And, because it continues to evolve, it becomes more difficult as time goes by and we seem to have fewer survivors..*

*If my opinion is factual, we are destined to have increasingly fewer dancers.*

*Also, in my opinion, what I am saying here is an over-simplification. There are many things that factor into the current state of the activity but I am offering what I feel applies to Wade's query. Thanks for the soap-box Barry.*

*Daryl Clendenin*

**From Darren Taylor in Victoria:**

*I think what Wade is asking is why do we spend so much time working on our Patter and not much on Singing Calls. This includes almost 90% + of all caller education seminars or training I have attended here in OZ or in the USA. Here in Australia we do brackets with more singing (In some areas-Barry) than patter and as Wade suggested in the US it is 50/50 or there about in the USA. Here in Australia we almost pay no attention to Singing. And we all know that to be good at choreography is a difficult thing that needs a lot of work so most of our study goes into that even if you don't want to do it it is forced upon you. That said some Callers who do average choreography are loved by the dancers so being good/great at it is not necessarily required if you have the other "IT" Factors. I have never seen a floor encore a Caller after a patter, has anyone? We Callers are judged by dancers more on our singing calls than patter at the entry levels and at the A program and above it flips, as you suggested.*

Answer to question 2:

*I suspect most callers rely on natural vocal talent and spend next to no time on vocal improvement, most of the dancers are very forgiving of callers with less than good vocal presentation even though this is over 50% of their presentation skill set, some callers are loved by the dancers but to the general public their voices would be considered less than desirable. I have asked over the years and brought up that I have had lessons and I can't say that I know of any other callers who have done vocal training away from calling to help improve their calling and improve their vocal presentation. I am aware of Callers who have had vocal training before being Callers for singing, I mean pure singing but not for our special type of singing requirements, it took trying many vocal teachers to find that one who would and could help with our special vocal requirements as a Caller.*

*Regards  
Darren*

**From Scott Smith in USA:**

*I don't know if I'm qualified to answer as I have been out of the activity for so long, but as I've thought about Wade's question for a few days I went back to when I was calling MS, Plus, and A1/A2 dances fulltime and dabbling with Challenge.*

*To me, it seemed like I spent a majority of my time on patter while preparing for MS & Plus dances, but that changed as I prepared for A1 and A2 dances. It was harder to fit the advanced calls into a 64 count phrase that was both pleasurable and interesting to the dancers. I have always felt that patter and singing calls belong together if you are going to call it a dance. I believe that one of the major reasons that many A/C callers gave up on singing calls is that it just took too much time to create 64 count choreography for A/C dances, and the dancers didn't seem to enjoy that aspect of their dance. Callers did, however, use much of the singing call music as hoedown music to call A/C levels.*

*As dancers climbed the level-ladder their need or want for more complex choreography increased. In M/P, we resolved more often than we did in A/C. Allemande Left was anticipated and exciting at M/P dances, but was ho-hum or boring at the A/C levels. It seemed that as the dancers increased their portfolio of dance moves they enjoyed spending more and more time away from resolutions and singing calls.*

*Just my thoughts on how it was 15 years ago,  
Scott*

**And of course it would not be a BTM publication without something from Mel Wilkerson in Australia (who out there guessed correctly that Mel would have a lengthy opinion?):**

*Wade; what an excellent question and I am sure you are going to get a lot of rather strong opinions on the subject.*

*I like what you defined as 50%/50% and although you were referring to the amount of time, I believe it is also a fair ratio as to the importance at the dance. I differentiate somewhat in the importance of the singing call as a "whole presentation" rather than just the ability to sing. (I will get to that later)*

*I agree with Barry on this that the singing call, is the culmination, reward, affirmation and relaxation to enjoy the success of the patter. The singing call, at least in my opinion, should have a direct correlation to the patter used; primarily a successful reinforcement of whatever the focus movement or idea was that the patter call was structured around. (That is to say, if I am focussed on using spin the top from left hand waves in my patter, I will have a spin the top from left hand waves in my singing call)*

*I said earlier the importance of the singing call, Patter% / Singing Call% in my opinion is 10/90 in selection, 70/30 in choreographic preparation, 40 /60 in practice, 50/50 in delivery time, and 40/60 in entertainment presentation from the caller and about 20/80 in dancer evaluation of entertainment value of the tip.*

*The amount of time and preparation in developing good choreography, focus modules, fix point flow modules, resolution modules and singing call modules is quite extensive. There is a distinct advantage however in that the longer you do it, the less time it actually takes because they tend to build and mutually support one another in the development and research stage.*

*I would say however that in the development of patter modules, singing call modules to compliment the patter are also developed. The actual practice of the choreography once it is checked however; is an individual choice. I balance about 40 percent patter for 60% to the singing call.*

*This work and preparation is not just about the choreography however. I am selective, as far as possible to the music structure, tempo and "mood" of both the Patter Call and the Singing Call, so that they can complement each other and also fit into the climbing mood scale of the evening program. That is where the singing call takes so much more work and why it has a higher percentage ratio in preparation.*

*Delivery of patter takes practice, but in reality, once I have my modules prepared, I can practice timing and delivery, mix and match and it is pretty much a matter of memory and ensuring I know the music well. With the singing call however it is much more important to practice the delivery, the timing, the nuances that I want to portray, or subject the dancers to, or highlight to show off my own talents. This takes far more work.*

*I think back to the early days in Europe where I would watch callers (and would myself do), go through patter records at conferences and conventions. They would listen to the patter, move the needle forward a bit, come back, deliver a few memorised pieces of choreography, then lift the needle and put the record in the "buy box" or put it back into the "don't buy" box. The process took about 30 seconds per record.*

*With singing calls however, the callers would have heard it or knew the song, listened to the entire instrumental side, listened to the called side, delivered the opener and a figure, re-listened to the called side, listened to the full instrumental once more and then likely at the middle break and end once again all before even selecting the record to "buy". This was usually about 10 minutes per record. It was no wonder that there were more turntables with headsets set up at the record shops than there were in the halls. Callers also came with a preselected list of singing calls they knew, borrowed, heard, practiced, and thought long and hard about before even going through the boxes at the record shops.*

*If you compare the selection of the music, patter to singing call decision making ratio; then I think you can see the importance of the singing call. It is what sells the dance to 90 percent*



*of the dancers. The choreography has to work to be effective but that should have already been taken care of.*

*At the beginning, I noted a difference between the importance of the singing call and the ability to sing. The two are not always synonymous. I would like to think I am a fairly good singer, and my wife even has a sewing machine by that name, but being able to sing is not as important as being able to call, and definitely not as important as being able to entertain.*

*This is where practice with the singing call and preparation is so important. Being able to sing is nice, but it does not necessarily make the delivery of a singing call good. Not being able to sing really well is often a liability but it does not necessarily make the delivery of a singing call bad. A good entertainer can be a lousy singer and still deliver a singing call that both entertains and engages the dancers and leaves them wanting to come back for more. The reason that it is successful for the good entertainer is that that person chose the right singing call with the right mood for the right time in the structure of the program and prepared and practiced the choreography to meet the needs of the tip, and prepared, practiced, practiced, and practiced some more to get the delivery just perfect to meet the entertainment factors he/she wanted to deliver to the dancers.*

*I know really good singers, who are excellent technical on paper callers but they are terrible from behind the microphone because there is no personality in the delivery. The dancers go home having danced, but are essentially “\*\* YAWN\*\*”, that was ok I guess – can’t really say anything good or bad about it....*

*I also know and knew some really bad singers, and by bad I mean “couldn’t carry a tune in a bucket if you wrote it on paper, sealed it in the bucket and nailed the lid shut” bad singers. Two in particular that I know and highly respect as much better callers than I will likely ever be, have never to my knowledge ever failed to entertain the floor, keep them dancing, smiling and laughing through both the patter and the singing calls. They would even get requests for specific songs.*

*I asked once because I recorded the song at the dance and analysed it and it was absolutely terrible. There were missed notes, areas skipped because the caller couldn’t reach the high, areas deliberately flat lined because the melody line was complex and yet, the dancers loved it and always requested it. I asked him about it and he said, he knew he couldn’t sing it worth a dam, but it is a great song, very entertaining, and you can have a lot of fun with it. You don’t have to be good singing, but you do have to be able to use it to your advantage to be great at entertaining. He explained it as “The key to my success is that when you can’t sing it takes more practice than you can imagine to be that good at being that bad successfully”.*

*A while back an article was collated for BTM about singing calls. It was collated from material old and new and is still as valid today as it was then.*

*There is lots of material written about patter calling, choreography, sight calling, dancer manipulation systems and such but with regard to the singing call there is little. With regard to practice and time however, there is very little on patter other than*

- 1. Learn the fundamentals of choreography (also applies to singing calls)*
- 2. Pick good music that is useable (also applies to singing calls)*
- 3. Have modules ready to highlight your theme (also applies to singing calls)*
- 4. Practice and keep practicing (also applies to singing calls)*

*Hmmmm – makes you wonder about patter music when all the work in calling applies to both patter and singing calls with the only real difference being that singing calls are a series of*

fixed routine modules that are prepared before hand – but then again, that is done for patter calling a lot as well.

Yet when we look at singing calls, there is a lot more that can be said about understanding the mechanics of the singing call, the purpose, the complimentary aspect, the structure, the use, the selection and the delivery that is not emphasised as heavily with patter calling.

I reviewed this article which was collated for BTM before responding. It is a good synopsis of understanding the singing call in very basic terms.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE SINGING CALL**

### **Singing Calls – they used to call it the frosting on the cake**

Today, while singing calls are still considered the “relaxer” part of an evening of square dancing, they play a more dominant role in the program, sometimes being as unpredictable as patter calls. The ability to present an effective singing call is an important skill. **Caller text part VII**

#### **Key differences**

<i><b>PATTER CALLS</b></i>	<i><b>SINGING CALLS</b></i>
<i><b>May begin and end at the whim of the caller</b></i>	<i>Structured musical phrasing constrains when and where choreography is used</i>
<i>Seldom able to predict musical choreographic arrangement</i>	<i>Limited specific phrasing restricts choreography</i>
<i>Re-usable for a variety of styles and dances</i>	<i>Melody line is carried through the song as a base for choreography</i>
<i>Generally free form and seemingly unstructured</i>	<i>Highly structured formations (O – F1 - F2 - B - F3 – F4 – C )</i>
<i>Dancer’s concentration is more focused on the choreography than on the music</i>	<i>Dancers tend to focus more on the music and comfort in the dance</i>
<i>The music is generally not remembered by the dancers</i>	<i>Dancers remember the song, often humming or singing along with you</i>

The primary purpose of all square dance music is to provide the basic rhythm and melodic background that makes it possible for:

- \* The dancers to dance; and
- \* The caller to call.

Both singing calls and patter calls meet these requirements. This being the case it is important to ask:

**Why Singing Calls?** Singing calls add colour and personality to an evening's program.

*Hoedown melodies are generally repetitive to the point of becoming boring, thus dancers will not usually remember the music. Their focus remains primarily, then, on the choreography and their dancing.*

*Singing calls are extremely varied and diverse, providing flavour, and style to the dance and giving essential ingredients to the caller's program by:*

- \* *Giving a variety of music, melodies and rhythms;*
- \* *Providing contrast for musical balance;*
- \* *Providing a showmanship platform for the caller; and*
- \* *Acting as a "mood" metre and repair kit when required.*

### **SINGING CALL CONSTRUCTION - MUSIC**

*Most singing calls are fairly simple in their construction which usually consists of two parts*

- \* *A predictable theme or melody line; and*
- \* *A chorus usually 64 beats in length (8 - 8 beat lines)*

**Rhythm.** *Rhythmically, singing calls are very similar to patter calls. They are generally played in standard 2/4 or 4/4 time though exceptions do exist and are becoming more popular. -Latino, jig time (3/4), rhumba beat or waltz beat rhythms exist but even they tend to be modified slightly to be similar to the 2/4 or 4/4 range in rhythm.*

**Music.** *The arrangement of the music is very important. Generally it consists of three basic features; the pick-up phrase, the melody of the song, and the closing phrase.*

- \* **The Pick Up Phrase.** *Most singing calls begin with a short 8 - 16 beat introductory phrase. The main purpose of this phrase is to establish for the dancers and the caller the tempo and the rhythm of the following song. It also lets the caller identify the singing key.*
  - *The Pick Up can also quickly establish the mood or the personality of the song. This can be a most effective tool in preparing or adjusting an evening's program.*
- \* **The Melody of the Song.** *Singing call music is essentially background music and serves as an accompaniment for the caller's voice. It must support the caller rather than compete. The best singing calls normally feature a musical arrangement that is simple and unobtrusive. The song does not highlight any fancy solos or instrumentals that will be in competition with the caller's choreographic matrix or delivery. The music should not place the caller in a fight with the musicians.*
  - *This does not mean that a good singing call is routine or dull. Most feature numerous devices, which the caller may use to emphasise his/her show and the music being used. They include:*
    - *Neutral phrasing for opening figures;*
    - *Emphasised tag lines or "singing" lines;*
    - *Key changes and modulations (\* always up);*
    - *Musical breaks; and*
    - *Vocal accompaniment at strategic points in the song*
  - *(2) Each of these useable devices is there for the caller to use to emphasize and highlight the show, while giving the dancers time to relax to a familiar, or at least recognizable melody.*

- \* **The Closing Phrase.** Traditionally, there is an 8 - 16 beat coda or closing phrase at the end of a singing call. It is usually a musical re-phrase of the last two lines of the song giving the caller the chance to repeat or to directionally close the tip with the music. Other songs have a "socko" or sudden finish ending. While effective and entertaining when used correctly, these type of song are still the exception rather than the rule.

*(Note on key changes. It is important to note that the most common method of raising interest in a song is to raise the key at a prime moment in the presentation. The key change is always up, never down. An upward key change will raise the dancer's spirits while a downward change would depress them. An upward change also uplifts and heightens the emotional impact of the song to the listener. It creates a highly increased sense of building in the minds of the dancers. Used correctly, it greatly improves the ability of a singing call to impress the dancers.)*

**Structure.** The structure of a singing call must conform to the exact structure of its associated singing call melody. In other words, choreography for a 64 beat phrase of melody line must be 64 beats in length to attain the most comfortable dancer response. The same is true for those songs of 80 or 96 beat phrasing.

The two styles of dance in a singing call are:

- \* A phrase that calls for a **partner change**, usually the figure part of the call. Most singing calls are specifically structured and designed for 4 repetitive progression changes to move the ladies around the square sequentially.
- \* A phrase where **partners do not change**, usually the opener, middle break and closing phrases of the singing call.

*(The structure of most singing calls is 7 specific phrases with 3 non-progressive phrases and 4 progressive phrases. Be careful in selection, as there are exceptions.)*

## **ADDING SINGING CALLS TO YOUR REPERTOIRE**

**The process: A three Step Process**

**Step 1.** Selection - choosing the right call.

**Step 2.** Adaptation - preparing and practising the call

**Step 2.** Presentation - calling the call

*Each of these phases is as important as the next and must be followed through in order to ensure success with your singing calls. In choosing a record, each caller reflects his/her personal choice, which in turn gives the dancers a glimpse into your personal tastes, preferences and professional individuality.*

### **SELECTION**

Every caller buys music that sound great, but for some reason they become "duds" as soon as you get home and try it out again. It is possible to minimize the dud pile however, by identifying the main trouble spots of singing calls. They are:

- \* **The quality of the music.** This is a fixed and unalterable part of the recording and nothing you do can make it any better or worse. This is why the nature of the music is such an important factor in record selection. A caller must listen to each recording to:

- Identify the **principal melody line** of the song;
  - Assure a **strong and pronounced rhythmic background**;
  - Assure the **musical arrangement backs up the caller** and does not get in the way;
  - Verify if the musicians **call attention to the caller** or to themselves; and
  - Determine whether or not the music **inspires and lifts** the caller.
- ※ **The key of the music.** The actual key of the recording is not all that important in the selection of the record. Most callers know their personal ranges and flexibilities. What is important is the effect that key has on the musical parameters of the melody line. The caller must identify the highs and lows and determine whether or not he/she can reproduce them vocally.
- ※ **Style of the music.** Identifying a simple tune, which is neither high nor low, allows a caller to sing the song using a number of musical keys, inflections and styles. Songs that have strong melody lines and wander all over the spectrum can mean the difference between a comfortable strong presentation and uncomfortable vocal strain.
- ※ **Test the record.** The best way to test the record is to put it on and belt it out without a microphone. This will allow you to know quickly if it is the record for you. If it is too high you will be scratchy and strained. If it is too low, your voice will tend to disappear.

**CAUTION: Humming.** When selecting records be careful that if you hum the song while listening to it in a record shop, or on your square dance tapes, because you cannot belt it out, your vocal range in humming is tone or two different at both ends of your vocal spectrum. **Harmonizing.** A caller may often be able to harmonize or talk style call his/her way through a troublesome high/low note, but such actions are usually only "make do" repairs and should only be used if the record has a lot going for it.

The first thing to remember in choosing a singing call is: **Do you like it or does that tune inspire you as a caller.** However, remember that variety is the spice of life in every dance program. Try to avoid overloading with one style or type of pattern or singing calls. The dancers enjoy all types and kinds of music and a caller's first responsibility is to them.

### **SINGING CALL PREPARATION AND PRACTICE**

Once you have purchased the record, you cannot change it from what it is. **Use it or lose it.** The same is not true for what you do with the music or the dance that you call to it. It is very difficult for a caller not to make changes (large or small) to the printed call that comes with the record. The caller will then begin to change certain timing structures and rhyming patterns, then the way in which the dance is metered or phrased. This is the caller's personal and unique contribution to the unchangeable music.

- ※ **Review the dance to see if it fits to your dancing level.** Does it require modification? If it does, the caller begins to rephrase the dance to suit his/her preference and choreography. This gives great flexibility in being able to respond and call to dancers various experience levels on the floor. (Note: this step of modification becomes second nature to callers as experience levels increase. It often becomes incorporated as part of the initial selection process.)
- ※ **Choreographic quality.** The caller must review and consider the choreographic quality of the singing call with emphasis on smooth body flow, timing and logical sequencing. Danceability is extremely important in the singing call. Ask yourself if the choreographic sequence has natural and comfortable body mechanics. Does it keep the dancers involved or does it "goal-post" the inactive dancers. In answering these questions, a caller must put his/her own personal judgement on the line. **Remember: The dancers are your**



**jury and the singing call is what they usually remember.** The best singing calls are those that offer a combination of interesting basics in a slightly different arrangement, while maintaining smooth, “everyone dancing” choreography.

- \* **Practice your timing.** The choreography must allow a step for each beat of square dance music. Command words must appear in the correct places and allow the dancers time to execute each movement in a smooth, unhurried manner. Consider that presentation timing is as important as dance timing. Tools such as phrase inversion are invaluable when correcting basic problems in presentation timing. For example, the phrase:

**When you meet the heads - Square Thru**

can be inverted to

**Square thru- when you meet the heads**

*A simple inversion of phrases like this can correct timing in command problems or dancing versus running or standing for the dancers.*

- \* **Rhyming Patterns.** There is a trend in modern patter calling to lessen the rhyme scheme of the more traditional square dances. When the "hash" is called, it becomes virtually impossible to maintain a consistent rhyming pattern. There is no reason to do so. The dancers do not miss it and aren't really looking or listening for it in patter calls. The caller has enough to worry about with the choreography, rhythm and timing in the patter. **This is not true for singing calls.** Singing calls should rhyme as the dancers are very aware of a: songs musical phrasing and **they do listen.** For this reason, a caller should review his/her poetry (the words of the song) with an ear to his/her choreographic poetry (the dance cues). Make sure they are clear, clever and consistent. (Important note: Never substitute good choreography with poor poetry. In other words don't force it to rhyme and mess up the metering and presentation of the calls just for a rhyme scheme. This leads to running or standing rather than danceable calls.)
  - o The rhyming sequence of a singing call figure is relatively unimportant and should be given up if it means losing smoothness in the dance. The structured tag lines of each figure will generally compensate.
  - o Practice will allow the caller to create rhyme schemes that will blend well with the choreographic sequence and the music of the song, adjust as required or to create new ones. Smooth syllablization coupled with smooth dancing is essential for total success with singing calls.

*Finding your own way through practice is the best way of personalizing a singing call. Listen sometimes to a singing call and read the accompanying words. They rarely match exactly. This is your personal style mark. Make it a good one.*

## **PRESENTATION**

*After long and sometimes painful (for you and your partner) preparation, it is finally time for "your" singing call to be given to the dancers. The caller is now faced with the two fundamentals of singing call presentation:*

- \* *When to call it - programming the call into the evening's dance; and*
- \* *How to call it - what delivery should be given to the song*

The variety and ability of singing calls to affect a floor with mood, style and flavour make it one of the most versatile and powerful programming devices that a caller has. In considering your singing calls, associate each to the accompanying patter in music and content for the effect that you wish to achieve. Some possible examples are:

<b>PATTER CALL</b>	<b>ASSOCIATE SINGING CALL</b>
<i>Workshopping a particular new figure</i>	<i>Smooth easy use of that figure</i>
<i>Heavy use of trade and circulate patterns in Body Flow</i>	<i>Consider star and circle patterns for a contrasting effect on the dancers</i>
<i>Non melodic and rhythm oriented patter call</i>	<i>Strong melodic singing call</i>
<i>Complex hash calling with intricate routines</i>	<i>Relaxed and lazy singing call to bring them back to earth gently</i>

It is usually safe to assume that singing choreography is easier and less demanding than its preceding patter call. **Dancers can usually complete the figures without breakdowns and return to the sidelines with a feeling of success.** This makes the singing call a most effective tool to erase the memory of a particularly difficult piece of choreography that did not work, or to get rid of the "pangs" of having made an annoying mistake.

Where to put a singing call will depend on the style and personality of that call. It is usually a good idea to program the first two tips with peppy upbeat songs and save the "ballad" type songs for the middle of the evening. An upbeat start will set an upbeat mood for the dance and create anticipation for what is to come.

- \* **Singing call programming note:** Many callers consider the third tip of a dance the most critical of the evening. The tone has already been set. Success or failure is decided by the dancers early and by the third tip arrives, the dancers usually know whether or not they like the caller and are going to have fun. This is why the third tip is so important. It behooves a caller, then, to call a "WOW" for that all-important third. **If you don't have them by then, you likely never will.**
- \* A successful program has considerations for common sense, variety, style and contrast. Success with singing calls needs a program that balances swingers with ballads and the novelties with the current hit parade.
- \* It is also important to leave one of your best for the last tip of the evening. This will be your last crack at the dancers and should therefore be the one that they take home on their lips and on their minds. In many cases it is the only one that they remember.

## **THE SALE**

A caller must sell his/her singing calls in the same way that any singer or stage performer sells his/her art. Fervent feeling with a strong sense of showmanship and audience identification is essential. **The caller is first and foremost and entertainer** and the dancers are there to be entertained. He/she must then become a showman, crooner, singer, clown and an actor.

The singing call is the time for the caller to really let go and capitalize on the inherent desire to "be a Ham", giving the performance of a lifetime which each singing call presented. **The delivery should be deliberately designed, thoroughly rehearsed; building from one chorus to the next, and most importantly appear relaxed and natural.**

Use **caution not to deliver all too soon**. This will disappoint the dancers with an anti-climactic feeling. The high point is at the end of the song and not the middle or beginning. Each singing call, just as the overall program, should build and bear the personality and uniqueness of the caller. If too much too soon is given, you set the dancers up wanting more and you will be unable to deliver.

#### A FINAL NOTE

**Choice old or new.** There is a trend for everyone to get on the bandwagon of new music. While there is some phenomenal music entering into the square dance market, don't sell things short because they are dated. Good classics and old favourites are just as popular today as they were when they first arrived. Remember, what is new and fanciful now may be a classic oldie ten years from now. A quote from Bob van Antwerp in 1969 is still valid today as when he first said it.

*"Every week I bring back one or two of the "oldies". I feel that the dancers are getting a treat because many have not experienced music or the dance of that time, and it lets them know what we were doing a few years back. Certainly I'd rather bring back a good oldie than introduce a poor new one, that's for sure"*

*Bob van Antwerp on Square dancing January 1969*

## **Editor's final words . . . well at least for now.**

The above comments are just some of the many I received. I found all the replies to be most interesting, intuitive and informative. I have been involved in various aspects of caller education for many years, and, like the majority of educators, first priority has always been to do with the basic skill sets required for the understanding of patter calling. We often look at many other aspects...teaching, programming, music selection, etc., however we rarely look at the overall concept of Singing Calls as a separate entity – not just the structure, but the very reason for their being a part of our very basic presentation as callers.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading the comments from these great and well-respected callers...lots of food for thought,

Cheers

Barry



# 2018 SARDA NSW EDUCATION CLINIC

With Special Guest Caller Coach

## BETSY GOTTA (USA)

September 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> 2018

**4 DAY CALLERS EDUCATION SCHOOL**

**At WOONONA-BULLI RSL CLUB**

**Princes Highway, Woonona**

This 4 day School will be held from Thursday September 27<sup>th</sup> thru Sunday September 30<sup>th</sup> at Woonona-Bulli RSL Club (On the highway at Woonona – 6 km north of Wollongong). The cost will be \$200.00 per person which will include entrance for Friday night, Saturday Night AND Sunday morning dances'

As part of SARDA NSW's commitment to Caller Education a subsidy is available for SARDA NSW members of \$100.00 per caller. This means that the cost for members will be \$100.00 per person.

- Partner cost is \$30 (dance included).

Program:

Thursday Afternoon (Barry's house – 18 Brownlee Street Mangerton)	1:30PM – 4:30PM
Friday Morning	10:00AM - 12:30PM
Friday Afternoon	1:30PM – 4:30 PM
Friday Night Dance	7:30PM - 10:30PM
Saturday Morning	10:00 AM – 12:30PM
Saturday Afternoon	1:30 PM – 4:30PM
Saturday Night Dance	7:30 – 10:30PM
Sunday Morning Dance	10:00 – 12:00PM
Sunday Afternoon	1:00 – 4:00PM

Betsy Gotta is an Accredited Callerlab Caller Coach (in fact head of the Caller Coach Committee: Roy is a Round Dance Cuer and has been Chairman of Roundalab. This is a truly unique opportunity for all callers. Numbers are limited to 15 callers for this special event

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Please send form and payment to :

SARDA NSW,

PO Box 2146,

Carlingford,NSW 211870

or direct deposit to CBA a/c 10436279,BSB 062329 (ref Sep 2018)

NAME(s).....

ADDRESS.....

EMAIL.....PHONE.....

CALLER TICKET.....AMOUNT PAID.....

PARTNER.....AMOUNT PAID.....

## ACCOMMODATION IN AND AROUND WOONONA

Woonona-Bulli RSL Club is located on the Princes Highway, which is also the main street of Woonona. The club is located on the southern side of Woonona. The club has lots of parking at the rear.

The suburb of Woonon is located only a few kilometers north of Wollongong central. For people traveling south, take the Bulli Pass exit and head south thru Bulli and then next is Woonona. There is an alternate route (slightly longer but not as sharp) by passing the Bulli Pass exit and heading down Mt Ousley. Take the exit to the left at the bottom of the pass to the big roundabout at the junction of the Princess Highway...turn left, thru Fairy Meadow, Corrimal and then Woonona.

The following businesses offer accommodation that is within a reasonable distance from Woonona-Bulli RSL Club. There are other alternatives that can be found via a websearch. Please note that these are listed in descending order relative to distance from the Woonona-Bulli RSL Club.

WINDMILL MOTEL, WOONONA 42848766

- 1 minutes drive

BULLI BEACH TOURIST PARK 42855677

- 5 minutes drive

CORRIMAL HOTEL (PALM COURT HOTEL) 42844086

- 10 mins drive

CORRIMAL BEACH TOURIST PARK 42855688

- 10 minutes drive

CORRIMAL BEACH BED AND BREAKFAST 42832899

- 10 minutes drive

TOWRADGI BEACH HOTEL 42833588

- 13 minutes drive

COMFORT INN, TOWRADGI BEACH

- 13 minutes Drive

LYNDON HAVEN B AND B 42859491

- 10 minutes drive

WOLLONGONG SURF LEISURE RESORT 42836999

- 13 minutes drive

All of the above have websites where you can check prices and view the type of accommodation available. All are within a short drive of the venue.



IF YOU ARE THE  
SMARTEST  
**PERSON**  
IN THE ROOM  
THEN YOU ARE IN THE  
**WRONG**  
**ROOM**