

Music – What to Use

Music is one of the most important factors in creating a successful square dance party. As demonstrated this weekend, there are many ways to conduct a square dance party, which include pattern dances, mixers, contras, solo dances, trio dances, and squares. I am primarily a square dance caller, and so use 2 couples in a large circle, squares and contras when I conduct a dance. I do not teach lines dances, although I can play music for those who know a line dance and want to do it in the break.

I live in New Jersey, in a suburban area near New York City, and my attitudes are influenced by the people in that area. Many non-square dancers have expressed to me that they would not consider square dancing because of their dislike of Country Music. I myself like older country music and am also a bluegrass fan. However, I feel that if I want to give people in our area a good square dance experience, I need to combat the stereotype of all country music by using the same variety of music that I use for club dances. Therefore, one of my goals in planning a square dance party is choosing a variety of music that will suit the group. Now, I have been calling a long time and am carrying over 400 singing call titles and almost as much patter music, but newer callers can research what is available and create a varied play list.

To plan music for the group, it is important to be aware of the nature of the people who will be participating. Is this party a family dance or a father/daughter girl scout group? Am I working with the students at an elementary school or a high school? Older adults will enjoy dancing to different music than the children.

When I start a square dance party, I like to start (if possible) in one circle of couples. I use some lively patter to get them moving while I introduce such moves as Circle Left/Right, Forward and Back, Dosado (with teach) and then Single File Promenade and couples Promenade. The music may very well be a country music choice for most groups, because that is what they expect. Examples: Diggy Diggy Lie - ER1018; Hi Diddle Diddle – GP405; Get Rhythm – Prairie 1116; Tennessee Flat Top Box – MR163; or Sweet Georgia Brown – BS2483. However, for high school and/or college groups, I will use some of the most modern music I have to get their attention. Examples: Here for the Party – ESP1083; Barbie Girl – CBC607CD; BLT ESP428; Blue – GP201; Shut Up and Dance – Walk the Moon/download; Then, without a break, I help them arrange into a circle of facing couples (Sicilian Circle) and continue dancing while adding Circles, Stars, and Pass Thru. The music can be changed while arranging the Sicilian Circle. Examples: Billie Jean – OP0029; A Friend Like Me – DGR014CD; Fiddlin' Man – LM173; Believe – RR1313;

After a break, I have the dancers from squares and continue with a patter and singing call combination as I use in a square dance club. Music for this will be chosen according to the needs of the crowd.

Examples for Adults Patter – Funky Town – RIV278; Hot Stuff – SIR – 904; Singers – Put a Little Love in Your Heart – GLDR217 or ESP – 1170; Proud Mary - RR197.

Examples for Young Adults: Patter – P Trap/Feels Like Dancing – CAC003; Moves Like Jagger – Karaoke version – download; Singers - Hit Me with Your Best Shot – CRC183; Hey Soul Sister – ESP1138; Joy to the World – SSK107.

Examples for Children – Patter – A Friend Like Me – DGR014CD; Electric Parade – TNT319
Singers: Hakuna Matata – RWH1005; It's a Small World – SSK105; Zip A Dee Doo Dah – HH5323.

Very often, I use the contra Virginia Reel and an English dance, Thady U Gander, which is similar to the Virginia Reel. Music for each of these dances has been recorded, but I choose a patter piece to suit the group. I have found that many new dancers will not complete the reel figure in these dances in the time allotted by the designated music, so I choose music that will allow them more time. Examples: Virginia Reel - Dance - HH5271; Rock This Town – LM187; Thady U Gander – Music Box Dancer – TNT336; St Ann Reel – TNT333 .

It is also important to use different styles of music for the Patter/Singers. A Latin beat, Dixieland, or classical touch will really add to the program. Examples: Patter – Sopa De Caracol - TNT227; La Aranita – BS2601; Basin Street Blues – SD214. Singers – Blame It on the Bossa Nova – HH5281; Chicago – BVR131. The same figures will seem different when danced to a different beat.

Searching for different music to use for beginner parties will take time. I have tried to pick example selections that are listed as available on different square dance music websites. I worked with square dance related websites - <https://www.dosado.com/>, <http://www.musicforallers.com/>, and <http://www.asrecords.com/> . Sometimes the music I was looking for was on only one of the sites, sometimes on more than one. I have also used downloads from Amazon.com. I believe that the work involved is worth it to create a musical variety for your dance parties.

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