

A Callers Workshop - Preparing:

Learn a diverse set of contras (and a few good squares), including ranges from easy to challenging, dances with partner/neighbor swings as well as just partner swings, dances with and without heys, improper, Becket, etc. Figure out a system that works for you for organizing your dances, whether it is index cards or a computer database or both.

Practice teaching a walkthrough as well as calling. Practice the calling you'd do at the beginning of a dance, when you prompt all the way through, as well as the calling you'll do later in the dance, with just occasional reminders. Practice with music to get your timing down.

Night of the Dance:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early to do sound check and meet musicians.

The Musicians:

(optional) Prepare a program of the evening's dances, with descriptions of the dances and/or tune requests and make a copy for each of the band members.

Write down or learn their names so you can introduce the band to the dancers.

Decide on how you will communicate with them during the dances. E.G. *Is this the last tune in your medley?* or *Three more times through the dance.*

Let them know what kind of dance you are doing, what kind of music you want, before you start doing the walkthrough (especially if you have not prepared a dance set list for the musicians).

Find out before the dance starts if there is a set number of tunes in their medley.

Give them a clear signal when you want them to start playing.

Let musicians know when to go out. You can start warning them 3-4 times before the dance is over. I typically will put four fingers up to musicians on the last B of the 5th to the last time through the dance. I continue to follow this pattern with 3, 2, and then one finger on the last B of the 4th, 3rd and 2nd to last time through.

Once the dance is going OK, leave the stage and check the sound, particularly if there is not a designated and dedicated sound person.

Make sure the musicians are happy with the sound; particularly with their monitor mixes.

Introduce the musicians at least twice in the evening. Lead the dancers in enthusiastic appreciation for the music throughout the dance.

Advertise the musician's wares (CD's and books for sale). A good time to make an announcement is right before and right after the last dance before the break.

Take responsibility for getting the dance going after a reasonably length break; typically 10 - 20 minutes.

The Dancers

Make the dancers feel welcome, especially beginners. Encourage dancers to mix around. Encourage beginning dancers and experienced dancers to dance together. Encourage dancers to pick partners from the sides who have not been dancing.

Teach to the beginners. Use language that works for both beginners and experienced dancers, especially in the beginning of the evening.

Keep dancers successful and safe.

Take responsibility when dancers get confused: “*I’m sorry, I did not teach that very clearly...*”

Take responsibility for making the evening successful and fun for everyone by, for example, deciding and announcing how many sets there are, and asking dancers to make a new set when sets get too crowded, having dancers spread sets out, both to the sides and up and down, and asking dancers from a long set to join a set that is too short.

The Walk Through

At the beginning of the dance explain EVERYTHING to the beginners in a clear and concise way. Assume there are dancers who have never danced before; there usually are.

Use language throughout the evening that beginners will understand, even as you teach them the contra dance vocabulary.

Teach each new figure from scratch. When necessary have a small group of dancers demonstrate a tricky new figure.

Teach no more than one new figure in each dance.

Practice your walk through teaching.

Scan the whole floor when doing the walkthrough to make sure everyone is with you.

Repeat the walkthrough as necessary.

Tell dancers name and author of each dance.

Calling the Dance

Remind callers of 1st figure before the music starts.

Use clear diction and don’t talk too fast.

Alternate between conversational prompting and calling in harmony to the band’s tune.

Call rhythmically to help dancers with phrasing.

End each prompt one beat before figure starts.

Practice calling (drill and drill) both “thick” (calling all the way through at the beginning) and “thin” (light, occasional prompting in the middle of a dance).

Call “thick”, then “thin. Call all the way through the dance at the beginning, then prompt less and less as needed.

Keep an eye on dancers and throw in extra prompts as needed throughout the dance.

If dancing is getting ragged or some beginners are floundering come in in the middle of the dance with a “thick” calling all the way through one sequence.

If you choose to add an extra partner swing at the end of the dance, bring your voice in early (somewhere towards the beginning of the last sequence) so dancers can adjust to your voice again and go more smoothly into the change in choreography.

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