

Microphones



Microphones are one of the key components of our success as square dance callers, as entertainers.

Microphones come in a variety of shapes and sizes. There are microphones on stands, hand held, headsets, or lavalieres. They come wired and wireless. The cost of a microphone varies from less than \$100 to many hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

Microphones also have a variety of sounds. They can add treble or bass to your voice. They can help you sound clear or muddy.

Microphones are very personal. Much like your toothbrush, you don't want to share.

When you are in the market for a new microphone, look around. Go to lots of dances. Make notes of what you like or dislike about the sound. Talk to the caller to see what brand and model microphone he/she is using. Find out why they chose that one. [Note: Sometimes the sound is good or bad due to the settings on the amplifier and/or how the music was recorded not the microphone.]

When you are finally ready to purchase the microphone in person take a friend with you. Take someone who is familiar with square dance music and who can hear well. Take your amplifier, speakers and music. Use a piece of music that you know well. Ideally, it will have a variety of highs and lows so you can test the microphone thoroughly. Play and sing with all the microphones that you are interested in. That way you will hopefully be comparing apples and apples.

You will notice how you sound. Pick the sound you like best. You will not be familiar with this sound but you will like one more than another. Have your friend listen and choose the best sound too. Compare notes. Hopefully, you will both like the same microphone. If not discuss the pros and cons you both have and try the microphones again.

The success of your microphone is actually contingent on several things that are separate from the microphone itself.

Technique

Volume

Treble/Bass Settings

Articulation/enunciation

Technique: hold your microphone at an angle to your mouth; not directly in front but down a little bit. **DO NOT REST IT ON YOUR CHIN.**

Articulation/enunciation: move your lips and tongue. If your microphone is on your chin you can't move your lips and jaw.



Treble/bass settings: if you have the right microphone for your voice you shouldn't need to adjust these too much if ever. Too many callers add TONS of bass to their voice, which makes it muddy and hard for the hearing challenged to understand. If they can't understand what you are saying they can't dance.

There is a great tutorial online about microphones at www.mediacollege.com. Click on the Audio tab then click on Microphones.

If you can, test as many microphones as you are able. A good place to try different microphones is at your local callers association. Have everyone bring their mics and you can try each other's out.

The care and feeding of your most valuable tool

In addition to buying and using the right microphone, you need to take care of it.

Some things should be obvious:

Don't drop it!

Don't share it!

DON'T BLOW INTO IT!

But you also need to clean it. Hand held microphones will have a screen that can be unscrewed. You should take a soft brush (I use a soft toothbrush) and gently brush all the dust and dirt off. You can also gently scrub it under running water with a mild soap. This is particularly good for lady callers if there is lipstick in the screen. Rinse it well and set it on a towel to dry. You can gently hand wash and rinse the foam filter too. Make sure both are totally dry before putting your microphone back together. I let them sit out for a couple of days.

Take care of your microphone and it will help you sound your best for several years. The diaphragm in the microphone can wear out. If you notice your sound changing or being as clear as you think it should be, it may be time to replace your microphone.

Happy dancing!