

# Calling Patter / Chanting

Jeannette Staeuble

## Introduction

Traditional patter music is often a combination of chords, sometimes without a melody line. Some singing calls may be used as patter music, and today, often modern/alternative music is used also.

When singing patter calls, callers rarely try to match or sing the exact melody line of the tune. Instead, they create a simple counter-melody out of the harmonizing notes that are part of each tone's chord structure and this is called „chanting“.

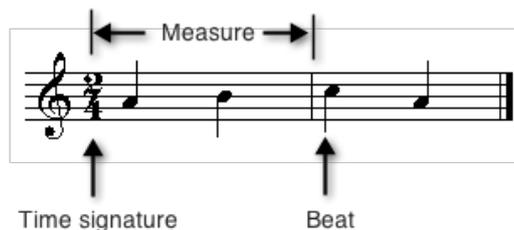
Callers with musical talent do this automatically, for the others here are some ideas on how to find the harmony notes and how to learn chanting.

## Basics

To use chanting successfully, it helps to understand the terms „rhythm“, „phrasing“ and „metering“

### Rhythm

Rhythm is the „time element“ in the music. The recurring musical pulse - known as the "beat" - is the foundation of all rhythm. Beats are arranged in groupings called measures. Musicians identify rhythm in terms of a fraction, which is called the time signature.



The beat tells the dancers, when they have to walk, and also the callers, when they have to give the commands.

### Phrasing

The melodic line of square dance music is nearly always divided into 8-beat segments called "phrases". The first beat of each phrase can be easily recognized by dancers and callers.

There are two possibilities, how a caller can use the phrase:

1. The caller gives the command **before the first beat of a phrase**, and let the dancers start on the first beat.
2. The caller gives the command **on the first beat of a phrase**, and the dancers start on beat 2 or 3.

The first possibility (first beat for the dancers) gives the dancers a stronger dance sensation, because they often start also the following calls on the strong first beat.  
The other possibility (first beat for the caller) is (specially for a newer caller) easier to accomplish.

Dancers who step in time with the beat of the music will enjoy dancing more if they can begin to do a series of calls at the first beat of a phrase or section of the music, even though many of them may not be consciously aware why they like it better.

### **Metering**

Metering is the term used to identify the process of matching the rhythm of the caller's word syllables to the rhythm of the musical phrase.

When callers say " **Allemande Left with the Ole Left Hand** ", they correctly match the 4-beat feel of the words with the 4-beat phrase of the music.

But if they say "**Allemande Left with the pretty little corner lady**" they are seeking to cram a 5-beat word package into a 4-beat musical package and the resulting mismatch is obvious - and somewhat painful - to all who hear it.

Dancers expect callers to produce their calls in 2 or 4-beat groupings and to also match or synchronize these groupings with the 4-beat phrase of the music

### **Learning Chanting**

Chanting can be used with all kinds of patten music (traditional, singing calls, alternative music, but it is easier, to use traditional music in the beginning (for example: „Boogie Beat“ or „G-String“ from ESP, „Guitar Rag“ from Red Boot, „B.J.“ from Sting).

1. Learn to say the square dance command in rhythm. Most of the calls are called in 2 beats (also see #5)
2. Listen to the patten music carefully:
  - a. When does the musical phrase start?
  - b. How long is the intro.
  - c. Which are the lead instruments.
  - d. Are there special effects in the music (key-changes, musical-breaks, etc)?
3. Train your musical ear with listening to the base-instrument and follow their musical line. Also the last note of the music is the „root-note“, and this note often fits to most of the chords of the musical piece.
4. Try to sing these notes, first with „BOOM“, „BOOM“, then with counting from 1 to 8.
5. Now take the calls on the Mainstream Program, and chant these calls in Rhythm (all commands in 2 beats!) with the harmony notes above.  
Also call these notes with the musical phrase.

Examples are:

**Pass the Ocean, Swing Thru, Allemande Left, Right and Left Thru**

6. Now start using „Fill in patters“ (4-beat phrases), always start with the musical phrase:

**Bow to your Partners, Corners too**

7. Then add to the 4 beats above „Circle Left all eight of you“ (the „fill-in“ patter is now 8 beats)
 

**B**ow to your **P**artners, **C**orners too  
**C**ircle **L**eft all **e**ight of **y**ou
8. If this works out well, add another fill-in patter:
 

**A**llemande **L**eft with the **o**le left **h**and,  
**P**artner **R**ight and a **R**ight and Left **G**rand
9. Keep using this choreography, until it works well
10. Collect and work on more of these musical phrases
11. Up to #10 it was home work... Now on your regular calling, start and finish each Tip with chanting. The more complex the choreography, the less filler-words are used. But still call rhythmically and use harmony notes.

For callers, which lack musical talent is learning chanting not easy, but with a little effort it can be done. Most of the successful callers use chanting in patter. It sounds better and therefore dancers enjoy it much more then if a caller only speaks the patter.

Note to women callers:

Additionally it is important for us to use the (lower) chest-voice for chanting. On most of the female callers, the head-voice is much to high and thin for square dance commands and who would like to dance patter to a soprano-singer?

## Fill-In Patters

Bow to the Partner, Corners too  
Circle up Left all eight of you

Bow to your partner, corner salute  
Circle left, go lickety-scoot.

Allemande Left with the ole left hand  
Partner Right and a Right and Left Grand

Promenade, go two by two  
Now you walk 'em home like you used to do

Allemande Left like an allemande Thar  
Forward two and you form a star

Other Fill-In Patter can be found

- Online bei [www.ceder.net](http://www.ceder.net)
- Booklet "Square Dance Calling Fill-In Patter", compiled by Jon Jones