

## SIMPLIFIED SQUARE DANCE MUSIC

Music is unique. It has the ability to set a mood all by itself. Music can make you feel excited, relaxed, nostalgic, romantic, etc. In modern western square dancing, callers blend music with dance movement (choreography) to create an entertaining experience. It is a fact, square dance choreography MATCHED to music, will move dancers from a degree of complacency to a degree of elation. Joe Lewis once said, "If a caller is truly entertaining, people will not fully realize what they are dancing. They will be entertained to the point that they will only be conscious of the fact that they have had an enjoyable evening." Let's take a comprehensive topic and make it simple.

A simplified view, categorizes singing calls as a "sing along", "driver", "mellow", "themed", etc. A "sing along" type song will quickly engage the dancers in happily joining in with the caller. The "sing along" singing call has an easy to remember tune and lyrics. Sing along titles that come to mind are "When The Red Red Robin" or "Waiting For The Robert E. Lee". When doing a sing along singing call, be sure to use choreography that is easy to dance so the dancers are not confused, broken down, or concentrating so hard on the dance calls, that they won't enjoy this crowd pleaser.

A "driver" or exciting type of singing call used to always mean the rhythm was a boom-chuck type. Think of the classics like "Mountain Music", "Rocking In Rosalie's Boat", and "Tennessee River". All of these are boom-chuck rhythm with music played in a high-energy style that sent the dancers into orbit. Great for their time, but the square dance music being produced today is far superior in it's creative musicality. Once called the "slow four rhythm", many of today's driving singing calls use the shuffle with added percussion, a good example is "Let The Good Times Roll" on Blue Star. Here again, the caller should use choreography that is easy to dance while moving dancers quickly through various calls. A "driver" can only be a "driver" when dancers have wind in their face.

In my opinion, "mellow" singing calls can be a slow shuffle rhythm where the caller croons the song. A song like "It's Just The Sun" or "Summer Sounds" comes to mind as a "slow shuffle crooner". Mellow also includes boom-chuck rhythms where the song is laid-back and music seems middle of the energy chart. "Peaceful Easy Feeling" comes to mind. The caller could get away with choreography that makes the dancers think a bit more, just make sure the material doesn't push dancers off of the singing tag lines. You wouldn't want dancers missing their circle to the "ting-a-ling-a-ling of the ice cream bell" while they are still trying to get back home after your last figure went way too long.

When it comes to "themes", let your imagination run wild but do make sure you keep in mind varying the rhythms – shuffle, jig step, boom-chuck. Even Christmas singing calls get tiring if they are all one rhythm.

We could extend the simplified view of square dance music to hoedowns. Some are "sing along" type pieces, especially if there are singers in the background doing a familiar number. Some "sing along" hoedowns are subtle in that the melody is playing without a singer. Many dancers will subconsciously latch on to the tune while still following your calls. An example that comes to mind is "Blue Star Rainy Day" – dancers will track the musical phrasing in their movement as long as the caller doesn't push them off the phrase.

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There are “driver” and “mellow” hoedowns. “Skillet Lickin” and “Ten-Twenty Hoedown”, respectively, come to mind. Just as singing call music and choreography are carefully matched, you want to place driving hoedowns with “wind-in-your-face” dance movement, saving your more difficult material for the mellow hoedown. Using singing calls as hoedowns opens even more music that you already own to being re-purposed.

Understand what the music in your computer does for the dancers, then plan in advance, what kind of choreography works with it and where in your dance program it belongs. This is programming your dance. Please visit some of the previous articles from this magazine for research on music rhythms, arrangements, and programming. To wrap-up this article, here is my short list of titles that fall in the categories mentioned.

### Sing along singing calls

“Those Were The Days” (shuffle)  
“Amie” (boom-chuck)  
“Beautiful Sunday” (sh)

### Driver singing calls

“Rocky Top” (sh)  
“Gone At Last” (bc)

### Mellow singing calls

“House Of The Rising Sun” (bc)  
“Chapel Of Love” (sh)  
“Hallelujah” (sh)

### Themed singing calls

“When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” (bc)  
“Last Christmas” (sh)  
“Mele Kalikimaka” (bc)

### Sing along hoedowns

“Mony Mony” (sh)  
“I’ll See You In My Dreams” (bc)  
“Make A Wish” (sh)

### Driver hoedowns

“DX Land” (bc)  
“Up The Creek” (bc)

### Mellow hoedowns

“Easy Does It” (bc)  
“Samba Guitar” (sh)  
“Mountains Of Harmonica” (bc)

### Themed hoedowns

“Irish Washerwoman” (jig step)  
“Christmas Pop” (sh)  
“Diamond Head Hoedown” (bc)

You’ll notice that for each title, I note what the rhythm is. It is important to vary the rhythms and vary the style (aka genre) to create a dance that changes the mood of the dancers from tip to tip. A sustained rhythm or mood, even elation, becomes monotonous. All of the titles are available right now and can be found at [buddyweavermusic.com](http://buddyweavermusic.com) website. Questions? Please send your comments to [buddy@buddyweaver.com](mailto:buddy@buddyweaver.com)