

Developing Singing Call Figures

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What is the purpose of doing singing calls?

- Should they be fun and relaxing after the more challenging patten?
- Should they be easy to allow the dancers to focus on the music?
- Should the choreography relate to the music?
- Should they reinforce the theme of the patten?

I would say yes to all of the above, but not at the same time. If you've worked something particularly hard in the patten, you could choose to either feature that in the singer or back off and let the dancers wind down. If you did wind in the face choreo in the patten, you probably don't want to break the mood, and will do easy, flowy choreo in the singer. If you want the dancers to focus on the music and (maybe) your singing, you don't want them breaking down on the singing call figures.

Why change the singing call figure that comes with the singer?

- The figure isn't appropriate for the floor at that time. If you're using the singer in a class, the dancers may not know the calls yet. The figure may be too hard or too easy.
- The figure may not fit your programming needs. The figure may not fit the purpose for that tip. It may not provide the variety you want for your program.
- Many callers use more than one figure during the singing call. Some use four different figures. Some use two. My bias is towards using four different but related figures, but I'll use the same figure four times if it's "worth it" in some way.
- The figure itself may have flow, hand-usage, or timing issues. Or you may just not like the figure. I don't like figures that keep the inactive dancers standing around for too long for no purpose. For example, I won't use figures that start with "Heads Promenade Halfway; Come down the middle for a Right and Left Thru." The heads are back where they started while the sides just stood there.

So you want to use different figures. Now what?

1. Use "researched" figures

There are many different sources for singing call figures.

On line:

Andy Shore's Collection: <http://www.andyshore.com/singers-20100721.pdf>

Vic Ceder's website: <https://www.ceder.net/choreodb/modules.php?Type=10>

Rich Reel's website: <http://all8.com/sd/calling/mynotes.htm>

Before you use any figure, you should check it for timing, hand-usage, and flow. Get a copy of CALLERLAB's Timing Chart: <https://bit.ly/2TQrs8a> and use it to roughly approximate the figure's timing.

2. Write your own figures

With all the hundreds of figures already written, why write your own?

- a. You're teaching a class and want a particular combination of calls.
- b. You're teaching a class and want a short figure to allow time for the dancers to hesitate but still be successful.

- c. You want to feature a call that's new to the list or with a new application

Examples: Generalized Extend at Basic, Follow Your Neighbor from a Quarter Tag at Plus

- d. You want to feature a call using a particular setup or formation

Examples: Dixie Style to a tidal wave, or Wheel and Deal from a tidal 2F line.

- e. You want to use a theme in the patter and singer.

Example: Separate around 1, 2, or 3 to a line

- f. You want to provide additional variety through resolves: you could write sequences that go directly to a promenade (without a swing) or resolve to the RH Lady. Or you could write a series of sequences that resolve first to the Opposite, then to the RH Lady, then to the Corner (or any other order)

- g. You enjoy writing sequences.

How to approach writing singing call figures

1. What's your idea? What do you want to accomplish with this figure?

2. What's your resolution? Most singing calls resolve to a Swing Corner and Promenade Home. Most of the promenades start in the home quadrant, resulting in a 16 count promenade. The resolution affects both the singing call usage (you can't mix Corner and RH Lady resolution sequences) and the timing for the figure (if you plan to resolve to a promenade in the opposite quadrant, you have more time for the "meat" of the sequence).

3. Write your get-in sequence. You can divide a singing call sequence into three parts: a get-in, a module that goes from the get-in to the resolve, and the Swing and Promenade (or just Promenade).

If you're writing a Corner figure, you'll probably do a get-in to a Corner Box (this is why H/S Square Thru 4 is such a ubiquitous figure starter). However, if your choreographic idea involves doing something that involves all 8 dancers, you may want a different get-in so that your all 8 move takes you to a Corner set up.

Example: The common Ferris Wheel figure (H/S Promenade Half, Square Thru 4, Right and Left Thru, Veer Left, Ferris Wheel, Centers Square Thru 3) has a RH Lady get-in. But the Ferris Wheel converts to a Corner set-up.

4. Write a module that goes from your get-in FASR to your resolution FASR. I generally start out writing the simplest sequence I can think of that uses the idea that is the reason I'm writing the figure.

Example: I want to use the combination Dixie Style to a Wave, Swing Thru (boys start with a right hand), Chain Down the Line.

First Try:

Heads Square Thru 4, 10
Slide Thru, 4 14
Right & Left Thru, 6 20
Dixie Style To A Wave, 6 26
Swing Thru, 6 32
Chain Down The Line, 8 40

Oops: already a little long and leaves me in an awkward setup (Mixed pairing, paired couple on right side of line)

How about:

Heads Square Thru 4, 10
Slide Thru, 4 14
Reverse Flutter Wheel, 8 22
Dixie Style To A Wave, 6 28
Swing Thru, 6 34
Chain Down The Line, 8 42
Slide Thru, 4 46

This is also a little long, but at least I'm facing my corner. Would I use it? That leads to a discussion of timing.

Timing

I'm not sure I agree with the CALLERLAB Timing Chart on some calls. While an inexperienced dancer might take 4 beats to do a Slide Thru, I think it would normally take about 2 beats. I think the timings are approximations and vary based on a lot of factors including the skill levels of the dancers.

I test timing by trying the figure to "Oh, Lonesome Me" while visualizing the dancers. If it seems to fit okay, I'll try the figure at a dance.

I don't worry too much if the figure is a little short. I'd rather have skilled dancers standing a little than having other dances rushing to get home. If I can get the idea across in a short sequence and leave the dancers facing their corner, I can always throw in additional calls to fill the time.

An extreme example: I wanted a series using separates.

Heads Pass Thru and Separate Around 1 to a Line
Pass Thru
1/2 Tag
Girls Trade
Recycle
(Corner Box)

Heads Pass Thru and Separate Around 2 to a Line
Touch 1/4
Boys Run
(Corner Box)

Heads Pass Thru and Separate Around 3 to a Line
Star Thru
Zoom
Centers Square Thru 3 (or Left Square Thru 3)
(Corner Box)

All of these are very short, but there are lots of facing couple zero modules or other combinations that will keep the corners together so they can swing and promenade at the appropriate time in the music.

Using your figures:

Whether you're using a borrowed figure or your own figure, you have to know your music and know how to meter the words in the figure to the tune of the singing call figure.

It takes a lot of practice to develop your own singing call figures, but it's worth it to have the flexibility to fit your singing call choreography to your patten choreography and give the dancers something a little different at the appropriate time.

TIMING — THE CALLERLAB BASIC AND MAINSTREAM PROGRAMS

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ABBREVIATIONS: SS = Static Square, FC = Facing Couples

Timing is given from point of contact. If it takes some steps or beats of music to get to the point of contact, then add that to the numbers. We have listed this in more detail for the commonly used calls where the Squared Set Convention returns the dancers to a Squared Set.

TIMING — THE BASIC PROGRAM

Alamo Style	Allemande Left in Alamo Style: 4
Allemande Left	1/2 arm turn: 4 to 6, 3/4 arm turn: 6 to 8, full arm turn: 8
Allemande Thar	Left Arm Turn 1/2 to Thar: 2, SS Allemande Left Forward Two to Thar: 12
Arm Turns	1/2 around: 4, 3/4 around: 4 to 6, full around: 6 to 8
Backtrack	2
Balance	4
Bend the Line	line of four: 4, line of eight: 6
Box the Gnat	4
California Twirl	4
Chain	Two Ladies from FC: 6, from SS: 8, Four Ladies from SS: 8, 3/4: 10, Down the Line: 8
Circle Left (or Right)	SS 8 people full around: 16, 3/4 around: 12, 1/2 around: 8, 1/4 around: 4
.....	FC 4 people full around: 8, 3/4 around: 6, 1/2 around: 4, 1/4 around: 2
.....	2 facing dancers 1/2 around: 4, 3/4 around: 5
Circle to a Line	8
Circulates	4, except if the Circulate is a Pass Thru: 2
Courtesy Turn	4
Dive Thru	couple diving: 2, couple making arch: 6
Do Paso	12
Dosado	SS across set: 8, otherwise: 6
Dosado to a Wave	6
Double Pass Thru	4
Extend	2
Ferris Wheel	6
First Couple Go Left/Right, Next Couple Go Left/Right	6
Flutterwheel / Reverse Flutterwheel	FC: 8, SS Heads or Sides: 10, SS All: 12
Forward and Back	lines close together: 4, all others: 8
Grand Square	32
Half Sashay / Rollaway / Ladies In, Men Sashay	4
Lead Right (or Left)	4
Pass the Ocean	4
Pass Thru	Facing Dancers: 2, SS Heads or Sides: 4
Promenade / Wrong Way	SS full around: 16, 3/4 around: 12, 1/2 around: 8, 1/4 around: 4
Right and Left Grand / Weave the Ring / Wrong Way Grand	10
Right and Left Thru	FC 6, Ocean Wave 6, SS Heads or Sides: 8
Run / Cross Run	centers: 4, centers Cross Run: 6, ends: 4, ends Cross Run: 6
See Saw	8
Separate	2 plus time to travel around the outside

Separate around 1 or 2 to a Line	Pass Thru, Separate Around 1 to Line: 8, around 2: 10
Separate around 1 or 2 into the middle ..	Pass Thru, Sep. Around 1 into Middle: 8, around 2: 12
Shoot the Star	4, full around: 6
Single File Promenade	4 dancers inside: 8
Slip the Clutch	2
Split Two	2 plus next call
Square Thru	FC 1: 2, 2: 5, 3: 7 or 8, 4: 10, SS odd numbers: add 2 to previous count
Step to a Wave	2
Star Promenade	four couples full around: 12, 3/4 around: 9, 1/2 around: 6, 1/4 around: 3
.....	four couples full around with back out at home: 16
Star Thru	4
Stars	four people full around: 8, 3/4 around: 6, 1/2 around: 4, 1/4 around: 2
.....	eight people full around: 16, 3/4 around: 12, 1/2 around: 8, 1/4 around: 4
Sweep 1/4	two couples: 2, all four couples: 4
Swing	advancing skill and variable, at least 4
Swing Thru	6
Touch 1/4	2
Trade By	4
Trade	4, Couples Trade: 6
U-Turn Back	2
Veer Left (or Right)	2
Walk Around the Corner	8
Wheel and Deal	4
Wheel Around	4
Zoom	4

TIMING — THE MAINSTREAM PROGRAM

Cast Off 3/4	6
Centers In	2
Cloverleaf	8 dancers: 8, 4 active dancers: 6
Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave	FC or facing tandems: 6, SS All: 8
Eight Chain Thru	eight hands: 20, four hands: 10
Fold / Cross Fold	Fold: 2, Cross Fold: 4
Half Tag	4
Hinge	Couples Hinge: 3, Single Hinge: 2
Pass to the Center	dancers who finish in the center: 2, dancers who finish outside: 6
Recycle	4
Scoot Back	6
Slide Thru	4
Spin Chain Thru	16
Spin the Top	8
Tag the Line	6
Turn Thru	4
Walk and Dodge	4

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