

Callerlab 2019 – Digital Music Enhancement Panel – Hal Barnes

Developing Patter Music from Commercial Sources Using Audacity

When I moved from vinyl records to computer mp3 files for calling, a whole new world of music became available for patter calls. About half of my patters come from square dance labels and about half from commercial sources. I found that virtually all music from commercial sources had to be edited in some way: tempo, pitch, length, volume level consistency, or removing undanceable sections. This presentation focuses on Audacity which has great editing capability, an intuitive user interface, and the right price (free). The purpose of this presentation is to show the capabilities of Audacity. A paper showing the detailed procedures and additional capabilities can be downloaded from my website: www.halbarnes.com See the Caller Corner tab for the download papers.

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Summary

Audio editing falls into two phases: Phase 1 includes those activities which alter the wave form of the music; Phase 2 includes those activities which repackage the music such as changing the length or removing unusable parts. The topics enclosed in boxes will be demonstrated at the Callerlab session.

Phase 1: Condition the music – Music conditioning activities are those which manipulate the wave form of the music. The step includes the following activities:

- 1.1 Reduce or eliminate the vocals while retaining the instrumental parts – Vocals are normally much louder than the instrumentals. This can interfere with the dancers hearing the calls, especially if the vocal is in the same voice range as the caller. I prefer to keep the vocals but to reduce them to the same volume level as the instrumental.
- 1.2 Equalization – Change the volume according to frequency. For example, make the bass louder or softer.
- 1.3 Level the Volume – As callers, we expect the recorded music to have a consistent volume level. Music that suddenly gets much louder or softer is a distraction to the caller who must constantly be adjusting the volume. Furthermore, the wave amplitude (volume) should be as big as possible without causing distortion because that gives the cleanest sounding music (maximizes signal to noise).
- 1.4 Adjust the tempo – Generally the tempo is not exactly what you would like, so we adjust the tempo.
- 1.5 Adjust the pitch – The key can usually be moved up or down a couple of steps without ruining the sound of the music.

Phase 2: Package the music – Music packaging breaks the tune into multiple clips and manipulates these clips to get the desired length and content. This step includes the following activities:

- 2.1 Develop a packaging strategy – Generally commercial music is about 3.5 minutes long. As callers we want the patter to be between 5 and 6 minutes. In addition, some sections of the music may not be suitable for dancing due to rhythm or arrangement. We must identify sections of music that must be cut in the packaging process.
 - 2.2 Define the clips - Break the music into clips which will become the building blocks for repackaging. Deciding the size of these clips is totally driven by the packaging strategy. For example, we might decide to just loop through the main body of the tune twice to get the desired length. In that case there are three clips: the intro, the loop, and the ending.
 - 2.3 Put each new clip in its own track. This makes for much easier clip alignment and editing.
 - 2.4 Repackage Using Clips - Copy, delete and sequence the clips to accomplish the packaging strategy. When repackaging, we must take care to have rhythm continuity so dancers cannot tell the tune has been edited.
- 2.5 Generate the final mp3 file for use. Then copy it into your patter library.

The tune used in this example is “Let’s Work Together” by Dwight Yoakam.

www.karaoke-version.com

This web site allows users to mix their own version and then download the mp3 for \$3. This is a very good way of eliminating the vocals and applying the EQ. It has a wide variety of tunes available. Because it is a Karaoke site, the vocals are not the original artists. Audacity can then be used to complete the audio editing.