

Singing Call Adaptation

Changing Figures

It never ceases to amaze us that so many callers do not know how to change figures in their singing calls and are thereby limited to when they use that particular song because of the calls used on the called side. Years ago, it was considered almost sacrilegious to change the figure the artist put on the other side. Those callers prided themselves on writing something different and unusual for their record. That, unfortunately, has become passé and most records released now start their figures with "Heads Square Thru" or the same boring 'Standard Ferris Wheel Figure.' It is an absolute MUST that today's caller know how to change figures so s/he can insert whatever choreography fits any particular dance, class or workshop material. New callers will need to work on gathering the knowledge necessary to apply this skill with ease. Experienced callers should have been doing this all along.



Every good cook starts with a recipe; great cooks then begin to tinker with the basics until they have a unique creation. The fundamental formula for writing your own singing call figures, and applying them, starts with these simple steps:

1. **Decide** whether you want to create a Right Hand Lady **progression** or a Corner progression; since we can't mix the two, it's important to stay with whichever one you choose for the duration of that singing call.
2. Choose the call or concept you are planning to highlight.
3. You will also need a **Timing Chart** so you can be sure the figure you write fits into the music phrasing properly.
4. Watch what **quadrant you start your "Swing"** in, as it will affect the amount of steps needed to complete the Promenade. It's advisable to have a full Promenade (16 beats); if you have less, you will need to somehow compensate for that within the figure itself.
5. **Check Hand Availability, Smoothness and Body Flow.** If there are problems, you will need to fix that right away.
6. **Sing it to your favorite singing call** – one whose musical phrasing you really know well. If it fits – great! If not, back to the drawing board.
7. Lastly, **DANCE what you've written.** Record yourself and dance to your calling. If all seems copasetic, try it at your next gig.

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Keep these first attempts very straightforward. At this point, it's enough to just be cooking with fire. Trying to be clever at the onset can backfire in a hurry. It's very hard for a newer caller to recapture the phrase of the singing call if it gets lost. It's happened to every experienced caller while working at acquiring this skill, and we can all testify it's not a great feeling. Experienced callers also need this knowledge to help train newer callers.



Let's say that the call "**Split Circulate**" was to be highlighted with a Corner progression. Start by writing a quick Get-In to the Corner FASR, and fill in from there. Keep the figure fairly simple to start with; as your experience grows, you can write a more challenging one for later on. An example would be something like this:

Heads Touch $\frac{1}{4}$ (4), Head Boy Run (4)
(which sets up my Zero Box)
Touch $\frac{1}{4}$ (2)
Split Circulate (4)
Boys Run (4)
Pass the Ocean (2 to 4)
Swing Thru (6)
Boys Run (4)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tag (4)
Balance (4)
Split Circulate (4)
Corner Swing (6)
Promenade (16)

The Timing Total is 64 – a perfect match, according to the Timing Chart. But what if when the calls are delivered, because of the musical phrasing in the particular singing call chosen, the dancers don't have enough time to smoothly accomplish the figure? In that case, take out the "Balance" and nothing else will need to be changed choreographically. What if the dancers complete the figure with time to spare? Then what do you do? Substitute a longer Get-In to that Corner FASR (Zero Box). A trick that I (Deborah) use for timing purposes is to sing whatever figure I'm working with (after I've written it) to the singing call "Rocky Top," whereas Jon uses "Just Because." If it fits there – it'll fit anywhere else – for the most part.

Remember: Before calling this to "live" dancers, be sure the Body Flow and Hand Availability factors are kosher as well. Watch what you're doing – a glitch of that sort can devalue an otherwise good figure.

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Enhancing the Figure

This same figure can be made more challenging by doing it **left-handed** with some minor changes:

Heads Left Touch $\frac{1}{4}$ (4), Head Girls Run (Left) (4)
Left Touch $\frac{1}{4}$ (4)
Balance (4)
Split Circulate (4)
Girls Run Left to a (4)
Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave (6)
Boys Trade (4)
Left Cast Off $\frac{3}{4}$ (6)
Girls Fold (2)
Boys Pass Thru (2)
Corner Swing (6)
Promenade (16)

This one times out to 66 according to the Timing Chart; Flow and Hand Availability seem fine and it works to "Rocky Top," so I might be good to go!

Whatever happened to swinging the Right Hand Lady first, and then progressing clockwise from there throughout the rest of the singing call? We've forgotten all about that Right Hand Lady. Here's a **Right Hand Lady progression**, with "**Split Circulate**" as the featured call, using the above-described formula:

Heads Star Thru (6), Pass Thru (2)
(which sets up my Across the Street Box)
Right and Left Thru (6)
Touch $\frac{1}{4}$ (2 to 4)
Split Circulate (4)
Boys Run (4)
Pass the Ocean (2 to 4)
Swing Thru (6)
Boys Run (4)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tag (4)
Split Circulate (4)
Swing Right Hand Lady (6)
Promenade (12 -14)

This one times out at 62 - 64 according to the Timing Chart; however, I believe it's useable, especially since the swing is performed in the Right Hand Lady quadrant. Did you notice the similarities with the first figure written? There's no need to reinvent the wheel every time ... the act of **swinging the Right Hand Lady instead of Corner will lend an entirely**



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different feel to the dancers.

Now with some readjustment to the second figure above, we can also have a **Right Hand Lady Progression**:

All 4 Couples Promenade Halfway (8)
Heads Left Touch $\frac{1}{4}$ (4), Head Girls Run (Left) (4)
Left Touch $\frac{1}{4}$ (4)
Split Circulate (4)
Girls Run Left to a (4)
Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave (6)
8 Circulate (4)
(which sets up my Right Hand Lady FASR)
(Left) Single Hinge (2)
Boys Run Left(4)
Boys Fold (2)
Swing Right Hand Lady (6)
Promenade (16)

This times out to 64; as the dancers become more comfortable with the pattern, their execution time may increase by a couple of beats. Also, you can help them by pre-cueing the "All 4 Couples Promenade" while they are still in the process of promenading home, providing them with the experience of segueing smoothly into the figure.

Knowing what may make a figure more difficult for the dancers to comprehend comes with caller experience. For newer callers – stay with the simpler figures. Once you start writing your own figures, practice using them with several different records so you become comfortable with the timing and delivery of them. For experienced callers – be sure to note any speed bumps in the highway of your creation so you can help your dancers through them. This is a "spice" to add to your recipes that will make them more palatable to your crowds.

Being able to substitute figures at will provides your dance program with additional variety and flexibility. Who could ask for anything more?



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