

ALTERNATIVE MUSIC SOURCES

By

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One topic that seems to be on caller's minds these days is alternate sources of music.

When callers started using recorded music instead of live bands, the source was records. At first, they were 78 rpm and were large and easily broken. The technology progressed and the 33-rpm Long Play (LP) albums came into being along with the 45 rpm records for singles.

In 1961, when I started dancing, there were many 33-rpm records available. These were pre-recorded with a caller and you got about 12 dances to an album. In fact, we learned to dance to these records, but that's another story.

Music for callers to use for calling appeared in the 45-rpm format and these are what the vast majority of callers used and still use today.

The music industry evolved again and the Compact Disc (CD) was invented and ultimately replaced the 33-rpm albums as the source of commercially available music.

As computer technology progressed a device was invented called a mini-disc. This is similar to computer 3½-inch floppy disc. Callers are able to take their vinyl records and record up to about 20 tunes on a mini-disc. This allows them to stop toting large boxes of records around and carry enough mini-discs to cover an evening program in their shirt pocket, if they so desire. Of course, callers have to carry an extra piece of equipment to play these mini-discs.

One major feature of the mini-disc is the ability to "loop" the hoedowns. This means that the tune will play over and over until the caller stops it.

At the 2000 Callerlab convention another idea was demonstrated. This was the concept of music contained in a computer file. This was not a new concept for the world at large, but it was a new concept for Callers.

When music is stored in a computer file initially it is in WAV format. This occupies approximately 10 MB of storage for each minute of music. This is the format that commercially made CDs use.

A 3½ hoedown or singing call will take up about 40 MB of storage. That is a lot!

There is an alternative and this is called an MP3 file. Condensing the WAV files by about 10 to 1 makes MP3 files. So now a 3½-minute tune will only occupy about 4 MB of storage.

One of the major music suppliers – Supreme Audio – now markets square dance music in MP3 format in addition to vinyl records. The neat thing about that is you can order these tunes over the Internet and download them into your computer, also over the Internet. All the licensing is in place and this is perfectly legal.

The caller can now copy these MP3 files into an MP3 player or into a laptop computer with MP3 player software. This is the route I chose to go. I will eventually have hundreds of tunes in my laptop in MP3 format. I also purchased a software program called Goldwave (a Canadian product), which allows me to play a vinyl record and record it into a computer file.

With the MP3 player software that I purchased, I can do the following things:

- Sort all my tunes into various categories. I can also have multiple categories. For example, I can flag a new, exciting singing call as a Singing Call (S), Exciting (E), and New Tune (N) etc. Then I can display all the Singing Calls, all the Exciting Singing Calls or all the New, Exciting Singing Calls.
- Preselect the patten and singing call tunes for the next tip. I could also preselect the tunes for the whole night.
- Count the Beats Per Minute of the tune.
- Change the tempo of the tune by quite a large margin.
- Display the cue sheet on the laptop screen.
- "Loop" the patten tunes. I can select exactly where I want to loop the tune so that it plays over and over again until I stop it. If I do it carefully, I can make the "loop point" seamless.
- Pause the music at any point and pick it up at exactly the same point to start it playing again.

Originally, equipment to “burn” a CD was very expensive, but today it is relatively cheap. If a caller has a computer, he can purchase a CD burner with appropriate software.

Using software such as Goldwave to record music into a computer, a caller can record his vinyl records and then burn a CD in either WAV or MP3 format to take to the dances. This acts in a similar way to a mini-disc. Callers need a CD player and there are variable speed CD players on the market.

I have a CD player built-in to my laptop. I recorded 16 Singing Calls and burned a CD. I then use it as background music during a break.

Having said all that, the vinyl record will still be with us for a while yet. There are thousands and thousands of jukeboxes that use 45-rpm records. So as long as they are still out there, 45-rpm records will still be produced. This means, for us, that the machines to manufacture 45-rpm records will still exist and be maintained. The down side of this is that vinyl records will continue to escalate in price. It has been estimated that they will reach \$10.00US.

Until next time!

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