

How to Entertain At Your Square Dance!

As a square dance caller, stepping up on the stage and putting on some great music and calling is one of the most fulfilling feelings in the world. I fully realize this after having taken quite a long “vacation” from the activity. I always get butterflies just before I get up to call, then I feel a rush of highly energized excitement when I actually am calling, and then I delight in having appreciative dancers at the end of the night’s dancing thanking me for the great calling.

So what is it that makes for a great night of calling? Square dance calling is unlike any other form of entertainment, it definitely is one of the more unique music and dance forms in the world, steeped in a rich historical heritage, and as it evolves it continues to progress along with the modern world. This is true of both traditional and modern square dance.

To be a great square dance entertainer, even for someone with loads and loads of talent, there is a required set of things that need to be in place for that person to be great. Extreme talent is one of the foremost integers in the formula for stardom, but having a good program in place and lots of practice on that program have to be present in a practice regimen that the artist must commit to regularly and diligently.

Apart from having a great varied selection of music ready to go and preparing a set program of choreography for the night, there are qualities that you must perfect and hone to be a great square dance caller. Or to be considered the best.

Stage Presence, Confidence and Maintaining Composure

Composure is the state or feeling of being calm and in control of oneself. Self control and confidence is absolutely necessary to be a top caller. Ever hear the phrase “lose your composure?” This is the last thing you want to have happen when you are calling a dance. Being prepared will help you achieve this. If your confidence is present in your calling, then you will be believable and engaging. If you are nervous and your voice lacks presence and projection then you will not have the “get up and go” that you need to instill into the dancers. Remember the dancers came to do two things: socialize and enjoy being entertained by YOU! Make sure that you don’t appear nervous, uncertain or unprepared. Square dancers are not that much different than other people who are being entertained. They do not have a lot of patience and they are your hardest critic. Put yourself in their dancing shoes and remember they are judgmental. They are expecting to have a great time. So make sure that you make that happen. Which brings us to the other important element that is essential in calling a great dance.

Display Enthusiasm and Energy

When entertaining, energy comes from two sources. First, how well you are mentally prepared to call? Second, how prepared physically are you to call? Have your program

down. Spend some time thinking about what you want to say between the music breaks of the singing calls and the patter portions of the tips that you call. Depend on using humor and smile a lot. Your energy and enthusiasm will be contagious if you project that in the first place. Make sure that you have enough nourishment before you go to the dance so that you have plenty of physical energy to project your voice and sing the singing calls the best that you can. Practicing is a way of training for the dance. Your voice will hold up better if you are used to calling and using your voice for an extended amount of time. Along with energy you need an enthusiastic way of connecting with your audience. You can accomplish this by using humor and keeping everything as positive as you possibly can. Rehearse this in your practice if you need to. Start from scratch if you have to. Work on being funny and engaging. Then you will entertain the group that you call for. Remember if you do not exude enthusiasm and energy, it will show.

Commit to Improve

By committing to developing your square dance calling, you are expanding your talents and improving your ability to entertain. Be creative in what you choose to call throughout the evening's program and be ready to make changes. The best way to do this is practice! Keep in mind that practicing is not just doing the same things over and over again! Change the choreography in your practice sessions. Imagine that the dancers cannot dance "Spin Chain Thru" or you are approached by a dancer to teach or give a review on Tag the Line." Be ready with choreography and some singing call figures that you are comfortable with. This will make you ready to adapt to change in what you are asked to do in terms of choreography and you will in turn be able to do this with energy, enthusiasm and you will not lose your composure. Besides, this will allow you to be more creative and expand the boundaries of your craft.

In order to improve you have to push yourself when you practice, so that when you are being the entertaining caller you strive to be, you can. Collaborate with other square dance callers from time to time. Everyone will benefit from learning to be funnier, more creative, and overall, better at calling.

To conclude on getting the sparkle: it takes a lot of practice on your part, review what you call at the dances and be prepared.

Give the dancers time to applaud when the music ends. This is an opportunity for the dance floor to both thank you, the square dance caller, and congratulate themselves and the rest of the square for a job well done. Allow the night to sparkle upon the dancers. They will thank you for it!

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