

Teachers' Association Scotland

Leaflet 3

Discussion on the role of the MC

Members discussed this topic in September 2008; enclosed is a list of issues considered in taking on the role of MC at a Scottish Country Dance.

1. Often the MC will be involved with the programme and therefore needs to take note of the points raised in TAS Leaflet 1.
2. Since the MC has to work with the band, it is advisable to see the SCD Group has sent the programme to the band with details of the dance titles, their source, tempo and number of bars. When recorded music is to be used, the MC has to check which original tracks are on hand and select alternative music for those dances where the original tune is not available. Any alternative music should provide similar types of tunes to the original, giving the same tempo, style and barring to the published dance. Variations in styles of playing by different bands might also be a feature in selecting specific recordings where there is a choice. With older recordings, it is useful to check the tempo of the tracks to be used and note which might need adjustment if the equipment has a variable speed control.

Preparation before the dance:-

- invite members to do recaps of the dances, or prepare the recaps for yourself;
 - it might also be prudent to check who would have recorded music locally should there be a problem by the band being delayed;
 - besides assembling any equipment to take, don't forget some slip stop;
 - give oneself good time to check preparations in the hall:-
 - i. state of the floor;
 - ii. adequate seating;
 - iii. arrangements and timing for refreshments;
 - iv. assemble the equipment if there is no band;
 - v. programmes are on the wall;
 - vi. any raffle is controlled and short. Dancers have not come to listen to a long lottery.
3. Before the dance begins the MC should:-
- welcome the band and see some refreshment is available if they have had a long journey;
 - check that the band has power supply and if they provide a microphone for the MC etc.;
 - agree with the band leader:-
 - i. how you like the introductions to each dance e.g. 8 bars of music as soon as the band is ready;
 - ii. that you will decide on any encores depending on the pace of the programme, since it is always better to complete the published programme rather than having to curtail it;
 - iii. how the evening will end – Auld Lang Sine and a polka...;
 - if recorded music is being used, the equipment should be set up in good time, so it can be checked and the recordings cued, so that they are ready to play, thus avoiding undue delay between dances. Preparation is also needed for the provision of encores. Check you are heard clearly over the microphone.
4. Before the dancing commences:-
- a) the MC should stand in a focal point – be seen; speak clearly and use his/her personality to create a happy atmosphere;
 - b) welcome:-
 - the assembled company;
 - and the band;
 - indicate any precautions in the event of an emergency, access to the cloakrooms etc.;
 - how many lines of dancers the room will accommodate, and whether stewards or the top person in each line will count the sets.

4. The MC should encourage dancers to make full use of the available space, and ask sets to move if crowding is apparent in part of the room. Dances performed round-the-room may be arranged with an inner circle of sets to avoid overcrowding. These dances should only be danced 5 or 6 times through, since they are usually fairly exhausting.
5. The MC must make quick decisions on making up sets. Are there sufficient dancers sitting out to make up the sets? If it is a two couple dance, can three couple sets be made up? Rather than ask dancers to sit down, it is better to form five couple sets with the 4th and 5th couples taking one turn each, or consider having an encore for some couples to change into the sets. At no time should the MC coerce those seeking to rest to get up on the floor, or persuade less experienced dancers to join in a very difficult dance.
6. The appropriate recap, short sweet and to the point, is then given, avoiding any walking through unless the evening is specifically for less experienced dancers, or there are one or two less familiar dances on the programme. The name and tempo of the dance should be clearly stated and the assembly should be expected to remain quiet so all can hear the instructions.
7. Just prior to giving the band the sign to start, remind them of any unusual start and or length e.g. two chords, 40/48 bars. On occasions where recorded music is used, it is interesting to name the band being used on the recording.
8. There is no reason that an experienced MC cannot join in some of the dancing. It is best not to be dancing all the time to give time to check other activity e.g. refreshment preparation is going as planned. It is useful for an MC to be available to make up a set, particularly if there are frequently an odd number of dancers left out.
9. At the end of some dances a quick decision must be made if it is to have an encore, and an appropriate signal given to the band to indicate how many times through are required.
10. At the end of a dance the MC should thank the dancers (it signals no encore) and during the first few dances remind dancers to clear the floor and wait for the band's introductory music for the next dance.
11. After a few dances the introduction of individual members of the band to the dancers give a good feel factor between band and dancers. It is also encouraging to the band if they are commended for good sets of tunes periodically during the evening. In fact, good communication between the MC and band-leader throughout the evening without affecting the continuity of the dance, is beneficial. Offering drinks to the band during the evening can be very valuable in a hot room.
12. The pace of the programme calls on one of the most important skills of an MC. An older clientele will often prefer slower pace and tempo. During the first two dances, the MC should listen to the tempo and do a sound check at the far end of the hall, and carefully advise the band-leader of

any slight variation preferred, or in the case of recorded music adjust the equipment. A general guide is that one jig, reel and full strathspey takes about 30 minutes.

13. Two or three dances prior to the refreshments, a quick message from the kitchen will indicate if any adjustment is required in the programme. Any extra dances to be included in the evening should be announced at least one dance before they are danced, and should never be added in preference to completing the published programme.
14. Before the recap for the interval dance:-
 - advice should be made as to the arrangements in the procedure;
 - requests for any announcements about forthcoming events given to the MC for one “commercial” during the second half of the evening.
15. At the interval the MC should see that the band are catered for and have a place to sit together possibly with a few friends who are in attendance.
16. If time is running short, the curtailment of encores and the reduction of 8x32 strathspeys to 4x32 might help avoid cutting out any dances.
17. If there are to be any announcements of other events – do them quickly between two quick tempo dances.
18. Prior to the last dance, or earlier if some dancers are starting to leave:-
 - Make a vote of thanks for the caterers;
 - similarly for the janitor and helpers prior to the dance;
 - acknowledge the programme deviser;
 - thank everyone is thanked for their support;
 - give the band a big appreciation.
19. Groups who run regular social dances with recorded music should:-
 - invest in a facility to vary the speed of the music;
 - be prepared to buy CDs as they are issued, so they have copies of most original tunes;
 - have a current “ppl” licence (licence to play original recordings)
 - have the equipment submitted for portable appliance test (PAT)
 - apply for any licence/certificate required by the letting authority (e.g. Food Hygiene Certificate to use the kitchen).

A memorable evening is a combination of a good programme, wonderful music and good dancing with a true social spirit of friendship evident.. When the dancers enjoy the music, the musicians respond to the stimulus of the dance.

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PJC