

The following are personal notes provided by Barrie Sheldon on Programme compiling and the role of the MC

COMPILING SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE PHOGRAMMES

Don't ask members of your group to submit dances (inevitably their favourites). It's unlikely that a dance committee can produce a balanced programme from their choices.

Allow ten minutes per dance. This provides sufficient time for encores, forming sets and intervals between dances. It's better to have time to spare when an extra dance or two can be inserted than missing encores, finishing late or missing out a dance.

Keep to the classic reel, jig, strathspey or jig, reel, strathspey form.

Don't place jigs or reels in consecutive order.

Good music should be a primary factor in the choice of dances. When using recorded music simple dances with sparkling music are preferable to dances having interesting figures but with dull music.

Don't overload the programme with difficult or unfamiliar dances. This may deter some people from going to the dance. On the night, the extra concentration needed may depress the atmosphere and the experienced dancers will be less able to help the others. Scottish country dancing should be fun. not an elitist, intellectual exercise.

Start the programme with a simple dance with bright music. Finish with a popular dance, preferably one with memorable music.

For variety, include one or two square set dances but don't have too many dances which need a fixed number of couples. Lacking the flexibility of classic line dances, where three and five couple sets can be formed quickly, there will be delays looking for couples to complete a set or dancers will be left out.

Don't place physically or mentally demanding dances in consecutive order or late in the second half.

Don't place dances starting with the same figures in consecutive order.

Having compiled a programme check that the dance titles are complete and spelt correctly and give the sources.

Aim to produce a programme that is conducive to a happy, relaxed dance.

NOTES FOR SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE MCs

Memorise the approximate time for each dance and its encore. Allow ten minutes, on average, for each one including time to form sets and intervals between dances.

Have a thorough knowledge of the figures and formations of every dance enabling walk or talk-throughs to be given, if necessary.

Arrive early in order to give assistance to the band should any problems arise, to check that the microphone and other equipment is working properly and in general to see that the hall is fit to dance in, eg the floor may be slippery and require powder.

Aim to start at the advertised time.

Following a short piece of introductory music announce the dance by welcoming the dancers and the band.

Always remain on the stage or at the top of the hall to provide a focal point and to be able to see and assess everything that is happening in the hall not least to expedite the forming of sets and for making quick decisions on encores.

Always face the dancers even when addressing the band.

When announcing the dance always give its formation, the number of couples required and finish with its title.

Do not allow interminable delays waiting for the last couple to complete a set. If it is not possible to arrange a three or five couple Set quickly or if a precise number is needed the M.C. should take a partner and dance.

If a five couple set is arranged for a three couple dance make it clear to the 4s and 5s that they have one turn each but to remain at the top of the set following their turns. If the dance is encored they are then in position for, "Once and to the bottom".

When sets are completed, if a line is crowded, one or more sets should be asked to move across to another line.

When dances require a precise number of couples any couple left out should be invited to, "Change in" if the dance is encored.

Ideally sets should be formed haphazardly but, dancers out of enthusiasm may form lines before a dance is announced. They may also be motivated by fear of being left out especially now that many dances require a precise number of couples. This is less likely if they feel confident that the M.C. will invite dancers to, "Change in" as above. It also happens when some MCs socialise or search for their next partner: no one is visibly in charge and dancers become bored and drift up.

The tempo of the music is critical and occasionally a band will need to be advised to adjust their tempo

The more difficult part of MCing is judging when to give encores. Advance preparation can cover most other duties. Never decide in advance which dances will be encored. Try to respond sensitively to the dancers' wishes. Never refuse an encore and then insert an extra, dance. Refuse only if time is short. If in doubt do not give the encore. Above all, do not delay. The encore must follow within seconds, otherwise, the mood of pleasurable excitement which has led to the call for it will be lost and it may become an imposition.

When nearing the end of the first half or the end of the dance an extra dance may be needed. If extras have not been entered on the programme it is essential to choose a dance that is both simple and popular. Even so, be prepared to give a walk or talk-through.

Remember to thank the band, the dancers for coming and the helpers. A suitable moment for this is before the last dance.

Round off the dance with a polka immediately following the last dance.

In general be friendly, positive and brief. The MC should set in motion response and counter-response between dancers and music until ideally, the dance, "takes off".