

What Makes a Good Dance Programme?

Topic discussed at a Workshop in May 2007

Checklist when devising a SCD Programme

1. There should be roughly equal numbers of reels, jigs and strathspeys on each programme and no two consecutive dances should be in the same rhythm.
2. Programmes should contain as much variety as possible. Consideration should be given to
 - a. Types of dance – longwise 2/3/4/5 couple sets and the occasional square set
 - b. Popularity of dances – plenty of familiar dances using a range of publications, only few new unknown dances. When there are musicians playing it is a shame to spend time walking through more than one or two dances.
 - c. Formations – a wide selection of different formations within the programme. Identical formations should not appear in consecutive dances particularly at the start and finish of a dance or even too many times within the programme. Analyse the draft programme by looking at the formations, the number of dancers in the set and the length of the dance. Then use a grid list to note formations and see whether some common ones have been omitted. The *Pilling Aide Memoir* can be useful in checking for the overuse of certain formations.
 - d. A good mix of energetic and less demanding dances gearing in mind the stamina/average age of the participants.
 - e. Mix old and new dances.
3. Consider the level of participants (beginners/experienced/or all abilities) and provide for them all. Never neglect the less experienced dancers, not select too many “mastermind dances” which tax the mind and the body. Many think it a good policy to build up the complexity of dances in the first half and ease off in the second half of the programme.
4. Always start with an easy dance with very little or no setting – regard it as a warm up dance. Bands prefer to play in jig time initially and avoid the difficult reel tunes until they are warmed up.

5. Always finish the evening and even the first half of the programme having a popular original names tune, and in which most of the set are active in the last formation.
6. Consider the length of the break, the longer the pause the more important it is to start with a gentle relatively easy dance. After a long break a three couple strathspey might be appropriate.
7. Publicise the programme in advance and always give the reference to the dance deviser/publication.
8. The inclusion of certain dances will preclude others, for example a programme could include with the Eightsome or the Buchan Eightsome, the Foursome or the Shepherd's Crook.
9. Avoid having more than one 8x48 strathspey or too many short dances since it takes longer to make up the sets than to do the dance. Keep the strathspeys which are only three times through to the second half of the evening.
10. Avoid two couple dances near the end of the evening unless they are done in three couple sets i.e. six times through. Avoid four and five couple dances near the end of the programme – they tend to leave more couples out if you are short of dancers. Three couple dances in four couple sets encourage a many people as possible onto the floor.
11. A programme devised around dance titles to meet some "theme" will generally not produce as good a programme as one based upon dance content.
12. Be courteous to the group teacher who should see the programme before it is published.
13. Extras should always be well known dances.

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