

Measure Twice, Cut Once

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CALLERLAB Convention 2017

Introduction

This is a handout for a 2017 CALLERLAB convention session. It is primarily intended to serve as companion reading for the live presentation. For best results, read it in conjunction with listening to the session recording.

This year's convention theme is "Build The Base – Now", which has resulted in most of the panel sessions having cryptic titles containing construction references. This session is about planning your choreography. Of course, choreography has to be designed to serve some purpose, so the session is also about programming, whether that be programming a tip, a dance, a weekend, or a teaching season.

The ideas discussed here apply regardless of the method of choreographic management you choose to use: reading, modules, mental image, sight, or rote memorization.

This panel session focuses on choreography, however, presentation, choice of music, and other elements of showmanship should also be part of any overall plan.

You Need an Objective

Programming is about creating a plan. To build a plan you must know what you are trying to accomplish – you need an objective. The nature of your objective will depend on what you are planning for: a tip, a workshop hour, a teaching night, an intro dance, a dance season, a convention ...? What mood are you trying to create? What information are you trying to impart? What do you want them to be able to do when you're done? What kind of experience do you want the dancers to have (easy flow, positional puzzles, hot singers, fun games, high energy, mellow cruisin')? Until you decide on an objective you can't plan anything.

Building Things

Once you know where you're trying to go, you can start building something. You need to be clear on what it is you are trying to build. Sometimes it's a single tip, sometimes an entire series of lessons, maybe a dance, a festival, a single hour at a convention, or a multi-session weekend. For this discussion I'm going to use the term "session" to refer to a contiguous period where you are calling for the same dancers. This might be a single tip, a convention slot, or an entire dance. It's a period where the same dancers are dancing to you without a break for meals or sleeping. Regardless of the session length, you should have some objective in mind – what do you want the dancers to experience?

What are the piece-parts you use to build toward your objective? Sessions consist of tips (at least one), tips are composed of sequences, and sequences contain calls. The calls chosen, the way they are strung together into sequences, and the way the sequences relate to one another, should all contribute to the overall objective for the session.

Let's look at an example. Suppose you're calling an evening hour at a convention, say from 9PM to 10PM on the second day of the convention. You will have 4 tips in the hour. What might your plan look like?

Objective for the Hour

The dancers have returned from the dinner break and have danced an hour before you're on stage. It's the second day of the convention, so they should be warmed up and primed to dance well. It's the evening, so they will be looking for a higher energy presentation and more of a party atmosphere. They want to dance, but they have now been dancing long and intensively enough to want (and be able to handle) a seasoning of non-standard stuff.

Tip 1

Acclimatize the dancers to your voice and style. Many won't know you so you have to get them used to

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you and the way you deliver calls. Use upbeat but not excessively driving music, mostly standard choreo, short sequences, watch their execution to see if plans for subsequent tips need changing. Use an easy middle of the road singer that can be easily adapted on the fly if they bobble execution.

Tip 2

Use music that is emotionally bright, and slightly higher energy than the first tip. Theme call XXX. Use applications *A, B, C*, in that order. Use a slightly higher energy singer than tip 1, use call XXX in figures.

Tip 3

Use a high energy driving patter. Use mostly easy flow standard application modules, but use a high energy presentation and drive them. If tip 2 went well, use simple applications of call XXX. This is the leave them screaming tip. High energy singer.

Tip 4

Calm them back down. Use a mellow crusin' kind of patter music. Call smoothly with low pressure, wind-in-your-face choreo. Use a quieter singer that they can sing along with.

Disclaimer: I'm not suggesting this is the standard or recommended plan for every convention hour – I'm just presenting it as one *possible* plan. You can craft your plan however you please – but you should have one. In each tip, every sequence and every call used should reflect the plan for the overall hour and the tip in particular. Sometimes things don't go as planned. Sometimes there are problems with sound, or the floor, or ambient distractions, or maybe the dancers just aren't in the mood. You need to be flexible enough to modify or abandon your plan on the fly if that happens. Tip 1 will tell the tale. Be prepared to react to make adjustments after you see what happens.

Preparing Choreography

As stated earlier, regardless of how you plan to *present* your choreography - sight, modules, mental image, rote memory, or reading written material – there is a common thought process to be used in preparing that material for presentation. However delivered, the sequences you use should support your general plan and the purpose for the particular tip they are used in.

Many callers will assume that this topic is about writing sequences and reading them verbatim at the dance, a method most commonly used in the Challenge programs. However, the vast majority of callers use pre-written material at some time, for some purposes. Avid sight callers are known to have tables of getouts that they use to add variety to their dance. Module callers may use written modules to augment what they have memorized, or to exercise some specific call. When preparing a workshop, we often think through the various applications of a call, how to set them up, and get out of them, and write notes for reference during the dance.

If you are sight calling and working from notes with ideas you have thought about ahead of time, you are tailoring your choreography in the moment to fit your objective. If you are using pre-written sequences or modules, you are tailoring your choreography by making appropriate *selections* from your stockpile of material in the moment.

Often when writing choreography ahead of time, you are not creating it with a specific event in mind. You're not preparing for a specific workshop, dance, or convention. Rather you are adding to your stockpile of material for use at an appropriate but as yet unknown time. When the time arrives, you need to be able to go through your stockpile and select material appropriate for the objective you have established for the event. This means your material must be organized so you can find things. Every caller has their own approach to doing this, but here are some examples of categories choreography might be assigned to:

- Program (MS, Plus, A2, etc.)
- Difficulty (EZ, MED, HARD, etc.)

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- Workshop Call X
- Flow
- Surprise Getout
- Asymmetric
- Opening Biggee
- Gimmick
- Singer

You can devise your own categories that best serve the kind of calling you do.

Of course, if at the time of writing you know about the event and have your objective in mind, you can prepare material aimed specifically at that objective, whether it be in the form of complete sequences, modules, or notes for sight calling. However, it is still wise to use your categorization system so that if you have to do something similar at another time, you can reuse the material.

Attached in the Appendix are some examples of written material to give you an idea what it might look like. The material is for a workshop hour on T-Bones at A2 for the AACE convention. First are some sight calling notes, followed by an example of a full written sequence. The written sequence was one of 40 written for this convention.

Summary

The key to success is to be well prepared – in fact, over-prepared. Measure Twice. Know what it is you are trying to accomplish and fashion your choreography and presentation to accomplish your objective. Part of being prepared is having some idea how you can respond if, despite measuring twice, your plan goes awry.

Experienced callers have an array of usable plans memorized, which allows them to quickly adjust to whatever the situation presents. They can do that because over time they worked out enough plans for enough situations that their generic elements became embedded in their minds. Do the work. Measure Twice. Cut Once.

Appendix

AAE 2014 Focus Notes

A2

Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Transfer And 14:00-14:30 22:00-22:30	Finish 22:00-22:30	T-Bones 11:00-12:00

Transfer And

- From Cols
 - Peel The Top, Walk and Dodge, Scoot and Dodge, FYN, Scoot and Weave, Peel Off, Peel and Trail, Counter Rot, Box Transfer, 1/4 In/Out, Box Circ (1-1/2), Turn Thru, Zig Zag, Remake, 1/4 or 3/4 Thru, Leads Roll Rt to Wave, Zoom, Single Wheel, Partner Tag
- From result of (Hds Slide Thru and Spread, All Touch 1/4 and Boys Roll):
 - Crossfire, Wheel And Deal, Turn and Deal (if RH), Cast Off 3/4, Lockit (or Cpls Hinge), Mix, Centers (i.e. very ctrs) Hinge, Slip, Bend The Line, (Left) Tag The Line, Single Wheel, Wheel Around,
- From here:



Transfer and 1/4 Thru

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A2 T-Bones (Teach Follow-on From Anne):

T-Bones

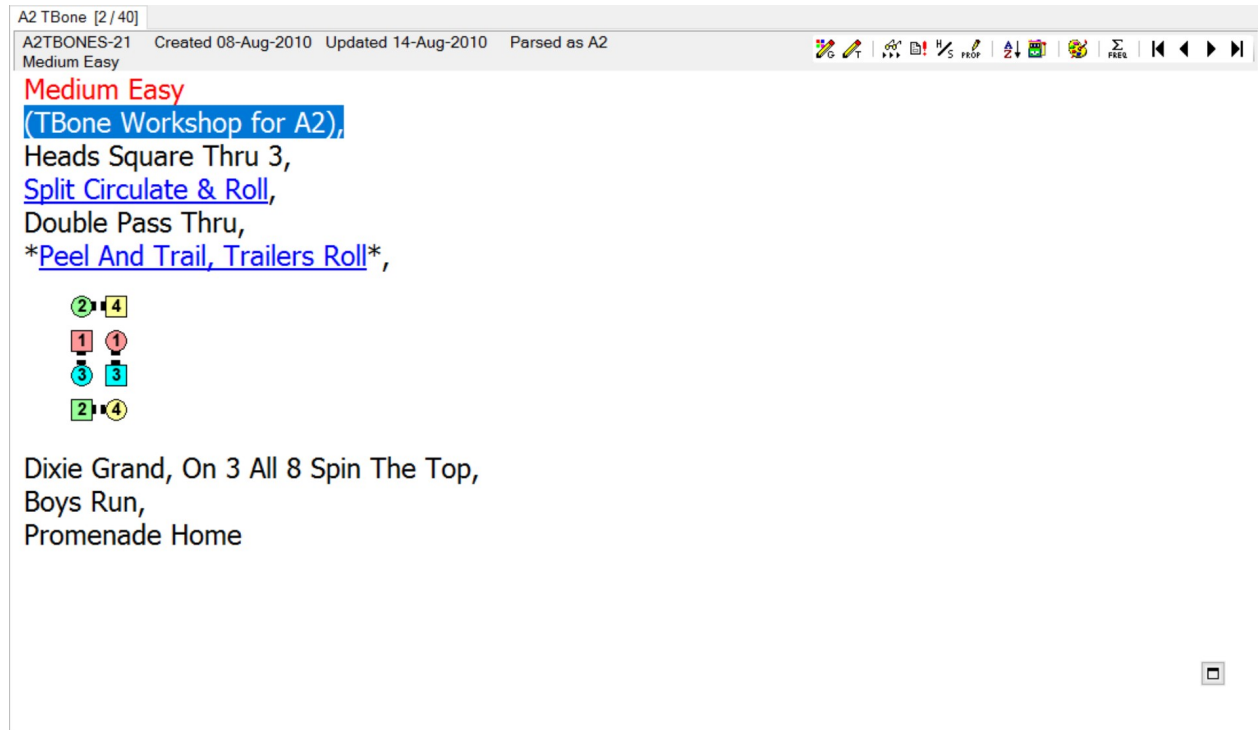
- Entries to tbone box setups with diag opposite leaders and trailers, 2 leaders and 2 trailers:
 - From 0 RH waves: Hinge & Boys Roll
 - From RH waves: ScootBack and Roll (only flippers can roll)
 - From RH waves, boys as leaders: split circ, boys roll
 - From RH 2-Face: T&D, original ends roll; or W&D original centers roll
 - From RH Diamonds, boys as points: 6x2 AD, Flip the Dia, Boys Roll
 - From normal lines facing: Boys only Wheel Thru (could do girls only as well)

- Calls you can do from that setup
 - Peel and Trail
 - Follow Your Neighbor
 - Split Circ (1/2)
 - ScootBack
 - Scoot and Weave
 - Split Counter Rotate
 - X-Over Circ
 - Zig Zag
 - Zoom

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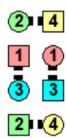
Sample T-Bone Written Sequence

The following screenshot shows an example of pre-written sequence as formatted for reading from a computer screen using the CSDS program. If printed, this sequence would appear on a single sheet of paper. Note that the program is clearly displayed and the level of difficulty of the sequence is also prominent. There is a comment that identifies it as an A2 workshop sequence exercising T-Bones.



A2 TBone [2 / 40]
A2TBONES-21 Created 08-Aug-2010 Updated 14-Aug-2010 Parsed as A2
Medium Easy

Medium Easy
(TBone Workshop for A2),
Heads Square Thru 3,
Split Circulate & Roll,
Double Pass Thru,
Peel And Trail, Trailers Roll,



Dixie Grand, On 3 All 8 Spin The Top,
Boys Run,
Promenade Home