

serTA Sweet Sixteen Weekend – 23-25 September 2022

Saturday Short Talks
Saturday 24th September 2022

Recapping, Walk Throughs and the Dance Event:
a discussion led by Ian Robertson

Ian explained that the purpose of his talk was to encourage MCs to think about the impact recapping and walking through dances has on the band's ability to create an atmosphere in the hall (the main *raison d'être* of the band).

Drawing on his experience as a market researcher, Ian had collected data from 10 dance events, which between them comprised 153 dances, an average of 15.3 dances per event. Whilst not representative statistically, it offered an interesting insight.

Of the 153 dances, 112 were unique to 1 particular evening, only 41 appeared on more than one programme. This relatively small sample underlines the wide range of dances. The dancing time took an average of 150+ minutes, and the talk/walk through time an average of 30 minutes. This demonstrates that the band is spending 20% of its time as 'down' time, whilst dances are being talked/walked through.

The length of time spent on each talk/walk through ranged from 2 – 7½ minutes. This compares with the average 'play' time of 4 minutes. Across the evening, recaps (talk/walk throughs) are taking up 7 – 37% of available time. Sitting through lengthy talk/walk throughs makes it extremely difficult for the band to sustain the atmosphere in the hall.

Ian referred back (c 30 years) when there were c 23 - 25 dances on a programme, compared with today's 14 - 17. 30 years ago the pool of dances was much smaller, and therefore the need for recaps was much less. Indeed there frequently were none – dancers having learned the dances beforehand. Given the complexity and range of dances, he accepts that talkthroughs are needed – but walkthroughs?

Ian spoke about the extremely important job of the MC, but suggested that perhaps a bit more discipline is needed, perhaps by way of devising programmes with predominantly simpler dances – more difficult dances being reserved for classes. He concluded his presentation by stating that **something needs to change** in terms of managing the dance evening.

In the discussion which ensued, the following points were made:

- Dancers must feel 'comfortable' or they will not support dances. This needs to be seen in the context of the wider range and increased complexity of dances.
- If it is known that there will be 'walkthroughs' some dancers rely on these and don't try to memorise the dances.

- If too many simple dances are included, experienced dancers might lose interest
- Perhaps a list of popular dances – say 100 – could be devised. Of these, perhaps 50% could be danced without a walk through – less confident dancers being asked to start from 4th position – or rely on a brief re-cap, i.e. **don't walk through every dance.**
- Perhaps we are trying to be too inclusive. Less experienced dancers should be encouraged to be selective, and until they gain confidence, learn by watching more experienced dancers perform more complex dances.
- Too often less experienced dancers are left unsupported to form a set 'at the bottom' of the hall. This should be avoided, as such sets frequently collapse.
- Dances need to be able to attract a critical number of dancers in order to be financially viable.

Ian was sincerely thanked for his thought provoking talk – definitely food for thought!

Report written by Betty Arrol

