



South East Region Teachers Association

The role of an MC Andrew Kellett September 2013

Reporter: Alison Raisin

Anyone who thinks that all an MC does is stand at the front and announce then recap dances should have attended the SERTA session on being an MC where Andrew Kellett took us through the detailed ins and outs of the role.

He began with the musicians playing 8 bars of Wild Geese, then he asked for sets to be made up and counted, a quick recap and we were off dancing. A lovely, lively start but then the work began! Before he even began to talk about being an MC, WE had to tell him all the things an MC would have done before that first 8 bars of music were played.

First, the preparation. Remind yourself of the dances and decide the best way to present them. Then, think about what may be a problem; it may be a difficult dance, or possibly two very similar dances adjacent, or a sequence of 4 couple dances that may leave a number of people sitting out when they don't want to. You may want to find out the likely standard of dancing; new dancers need more information in their recaps for example. You can't make definite decisions about how to address these issues as you need to read the feel of the dance, but have some ideas. Plan your timings (Andrew recommends working on the basis of 6 dances an hour), making sure

you know from the organiser when the interval will be, how long it will be and what is happening during the interval. Drawing raffles during the interval, for example, often leads to the interval over-running. While you are planning the timings think about what may be encored, but more on managing encores later, and whether the group expect to end with Auld Lang Syne and a waltz or polka.

You've done the planning and it is the big day! Get there in good time. That way the organisers don't panic, you have time to review the hall layout, talk to the musicians, get answers to any outstanding questions, check whether you make the housekeeping announcements – and if so exactly where the fire exits are. Then there are some logistics – where is the best place to stand while announcing dances; is there somewhere out of the way on stage where you can keep an eye on the dancing. Have you got a microphone and how does it work?

Talking to the musicians is critical. Introduce yourself. Different bands work different ways. Do they like to introduce themselves or be introduced? Are they happy to play 8 bars before you announce the dance? Check how many times they expect to play a dance through. If there are some that you may want to encore have they got the music? Suddenly asking for 10 times rather than 8 will not go down well.

You are now ready to BE the MC. Announce the first dance and make sure the lines are counted – don't use too much time trying to get sets fully made up but be prepared to adapt; have a 5 couple set but ask 4s and 5s to dance once each. Recap the dance – keep it short but clear; the words in the instructions are for teaching so find an easy way, e.g. to your right is likely to require less thought for the dancers than 'with 3rd couple'. Your planning will have prepared you to recap the 'meanwhile' and tricky formations. Remember, you are on stage so you can see the dancers BUT THEY CAN SEE YOU, so look cheerful and enthusiastic. First dance over, allow breathing space but not long enough to let the atmosphere flag.

You are in the swing of things now so start thinking about encores. These must be what the dancers want encored so listen for a really enthusiastic call from the floor. Don't encore 8x32 strathspeys! Andrew also said don't start encoring too early in the programme as it can really upset your timings and sets a difficult precedent. However, do plan for an encore of the last dance.

Time to plan how to end the dance so it finishes on a high and the dancers will want to return. Get as much of the detailed thanks done at the interval, e.g. listing all those who did the food, so the final thanks can be brief. As MC it is your job to thank the band, and much of it should have been planned in advance, e.g. Auld Lang Syne etc. Make sure everyone who wants to dance the last dance can do so.

Well done. You have MC'd a successful dance – what have you learned? An MC projects enthusiasm, good humour and warmth, but avoid humour for its own sake. Be organised but flexible, appear confident and decisive, especially about encores, know (not read) your recaps, project your personality, protect the band, make sure the tempo is right.

Alison Raisin