The Role of an MC

September 2021

Colin Duncan, supported by Ken Martlew, took us through the role of an MC with a comprehensive check list of to-do's and anecdotes from his long experience.

Colin Duncan, formerly of BHS Borders Branch but now from Innerleithen in the Scottish Borders, gave an excellent presentation on the role of an MC. Colin used his Checklist (see below) for us to work through and discuss. We worked in groups to discuss the requirements of an MC, working with the band, the Priorities and lastly MCing Sins!

Four attendees volunteered to recap dances for a set of dancers to dance as well. These recaps gave interesting examples of problems that MCs encounter, such as unusual formations that don't fit the normal RSCDS terminology.

Colin mentioned his own private Excel spreadsheet that he uses for programming and has kindly sent this to us. If you would like a copy, please contact us.

Our musician for the day, Ken Martlew also commented from his experiences of working with MCs. His main criticism of poor MCing was when they "called over the music".

A copy of Colin's clear and effective check-list is attached below.

Thank you to Colin for the superb presentation and to Ken for his lovely accompaniment.

Jane Rose February 2022

A CHECK LIST FOR THE MC

BEFORE THE DAY	Issues and notes
Agree with organisers (& other MCs) • Start/finish times • Recapping & walking through • Housekeeping announcements • Commercials • Finale (Thanks/ALS/Queen/Polka)	*e.g. full / brief / no recaps* *e.g. fire exits, toilets - who will make?* *Preferably as few as possible*
Study the dances • Prepare recaps • Memorise!	*Ideally, write them out as you will say them* *Avoid reading from cribs if possible*
Consider the timing • Lengths of dances • Time for possible encores / extras • How to monitor progress	*Has the programme deviser created problems?*) *Don't rely on rough rules of thumb - check the*) *actual dancing time and know when each dance*) *should start to avoid overrun & control encores.*
BEFORE THE START	
Discuss with band • Playing 8 bars: when? • Introducing band members • Likely encores • Finale • Tempi	*Before announcing dance has advantages* *Some bandleaders like to present their team* *Band may have alternative sets in anticipation* *Make sure band and MC are in agreement* *This isn't a taboo subject!*
Microphone test	*If time permits, but have a colleague planted in the hall to give feedback after first dance*
Reconfirm with organiser • All points previously discussed • Number of lines	*Especially if time has passed!* *Don't leave this to the dancers to decide*

Continued over

BEFORE EACH DANCE	
Announce key details • Dance name • Type • Set size & shape	*Particularly important if <u>not</u> 3 couples in 4C set*
Optional information • Source • Deviser • Music composer • Special association	*Normally only for a special reason* *e.g. if new or local book* *e.g. if present* *e.g. if member of the band (homework needed!)*
Counting lines • Check it's happening • Ensure clear communication	*Watch closely and prompt 1st man if necessary* *Counters may have to be reminded to signal clearly*
Dealing with incomplete sets • 3C in 5C set with 4s & 5s sharing • 2C in 5C set with 1s & 3s starting	*Always try to resolve as quickly as possible*) *Think about in advance! Suggest 7-C set if*) *appropriate for dance. MC may also suggest how*) *to share turns i.e 4th C to bottom or stay in 2nd pl.*
If no recap: • Repeat name of dance • Say if 2 chords	*Ensure bandleader is aware*
RECAPPING • From memory greatly preferable • Level of detail the minimum necessary • Optionally repeat opening bars	*Should be clear and as concise as possible*) *RSCDS terminology is not sacred! Better to use*) *popular abbreviations e.g. 3rd/4th corners, diagonal*) *R&L. Stepping up/down instruction rarely needed.*) *Never call while band is playing!*
KEEPING IT FLOWING	
After selected dances • Decide encores quickly • Communicate decision clearly • Compliment band	*Be ready to assess dancers' reaction* *… and avoid changes of mind!* *Particularly after good / novel sets of tunes*
Discipline • Encourage best use of space • Balance formality & informality	*"Light touch" is best - don't overdo the orders* *Line spacing may need adjusting occasionally* *"Asides" should be used sparingly*
Sensing the mood • When to push on or hold back • When to cut the programme	Need to balance the moods of band and dancers *Always know if getting ahead or behind - timing!* *A last resort, but know who should be consulted*