

THE ICING ON THE CAKE

By Barbara and Jim German

Routines, routines, routines - new material, new weekend event, new dance! Round dancers are so routine oriented. We know them by the thousands and still the demand for new material continues. As a result, some very good dances are here for a short time only. They are quickly replaced by the NEW routine. The cost of this insatiable demand is considerable:

- New records are being “pressed” at record levels – a costly matter to leaders
- Record accumulation by leaders is becoming very expensive and they are not used very long
- Complicated figures at higher levels are borrowed from the ballroom field and introduced to dancers that may not have an understanding of the techniques need to execute them
- Leaders spend much time searching for or writing cuesheets and preparing new routines
- Dancers have a hard time dancing some programs, because the new routines are becoming very complicated and the dances change so frequently

The routine should be the culmination of our efforts in learning how to dance. But do we stand out in a crowd, showing a good understanding of how the rhythm is danced and the figures executed? We have heard leaders say that the dancers tolerate the clinics and workshops on execution just to humor the leaders. We have watched dancers spend a couple hours working the rhythm or figures and when the music comes on their efforts to execute the routine fail to show off the work they put in.

Just recently at a weekend with some exceptional leaders, we watched a crowd “work” a figure in sidecar. The emphasis was on the head action for the lady – keeping her head to the left as she does in closed dance position. Good explanation was made. Group did well practicing this and showed an understanding. However, later that evening when the routine came on, few couples remembered to keep the head to the left. Once again, the routine became more important than the understanding of how to execute a figure correctly.

There is such a strong need for round dance leaders to spend lots of time teaching the flavor of the rhythm they are introducing, the basic figures in the rhythm and some possible combinations of those figures. Keep in mind that the repetition (need to hear something seven times before you are aware of it according to the advertising community) develops muscle memory. This involves Hash Cueing.... Probably well-planned hash cueing - prior to introducing a routine. Yes, it takes time to research and to teach this way and you will not get to as many routines taught. However, the appearance on the dance floor of the couples who experience strong technique teaching is a pleasure to watch. And the satisfaction of a couple who know they are executing a routine to the best of their ability, and they look and feel good on the dance floor is a joy to behold!

Round Dancers reach a level of figure accumulation that exceeds the average ballroom dancer. They move quickly through the phases of four, five and six without the slow development of the techniques needed - the body positioning, the rotation, the need for the man to lead a figure, the initiation of the figure, the lady's response, the effect of the head position etc.

Wouldn't it be nice to see much more emphasis on how to dance and let the routines become the icing on the cake!