

## OCCA Presentation, September 25, 2005

by Buddy Weaver, producer of Blue Star Records

### Square Dance Music Today

Our Square Dance recording industry, which by definition are the companies that pay to have music orchestrated for sale to the public (more on this later), well, this industry sells in only three formats: 45 RPM vinyl, Compact Disc and on-line MP3 downloads.

Since the early 1960's our traditional format has been 45-RPM vinyl. Even when it seemed that many callers were turning to Mini-Discs or Laptops – by last sales statistics provided by Hanhurst's, vinyl records represent 90% of new release sales. For every new release, vinyl = 90% of sales, CDs = 8% of sales, Mp3 = 2% of sales.

You may think that 45 RPM are a thing of the past but outside of Square Dance recordings, vinyl records are in demand especially with DJs and clubs; in Japan vinyl records are a billion dollar per year retail market.

The companies that make vinyl records, the pressing plants, have significantly decreased in number. The most recent plant to close is Universal Music in Gloversville, N.Y. – a plant that pressed vinyl going back to 78-RPM records. That plant was the biggest job provider in the area, and when they closed, employees who'd been there more than 25 years lost their local job. Universal outsource their records now.

The number of square dance record producers has also decreased. Many labels that were big, independent names are now under one owner – Chaparral, TNT, Hi Hat Rounds are owned by Tom and Pam Dillander, Tracy Brown, a traditional caller from Kentucky owns – Square Tunes, Big Mac, Thunderbird, Pioneer, Scope, Riverboat, Square L, Mustang, and 9 other lesser known, formerly independent labels. Blue Star, Hi Hat, Dance Ranch, Bogan, Lore, B-Sharp, Petticoat Patter, Swinging Square, Rockin A, EZ, Bob Cat, Blue Ribbon, and DJ – now fly under my Blue Star flag.

Square dance vinyl sales are also down. According to Hanhurst's Tape and Record Service, over a five-year period, vinyl sales dropped 37% since 1998. Bill Heyman believes the decline is much steeper especially when you consider a #1 "best seller" sells 15% of what it did in 1998.

In vinyl record production, a "first press" is the quantity of vinyl records manufactured for a new release when it's first ordered. That first press has gone from 1200 records in 1980 to 150 today. Standing orders are half of what they were a few years ago; in fact a big seller today is equal to a standing order when I started, three years ago. This is a big problems for producers, because a constant number of records must be sold to pay for the orchestra, studio time, mastering and making of vinyl records; if the number is not met, you are in the red and I don't know any producers who will stay in at a steady loss.

Why the drop in sales??

- 1) Fewer callers today.
- 2) The loss of "home record players" – the dancers represented as much as 40% of my buyers fifteen years ago. The dancers won't buy records, since they can't play them.
- 3) Illegal copying of music also known as copyright violation. There are so many callers that record their records to MD or laptop and then sell the records at a discount. It's illegal and it's killing what little is left of our market.

Callerlab has added to its Code of Ethics, the following:

*"I will only perform music which has been obtained in a manner which properly and completely compensates the artist and producers responsible for it's creation. I will not enable others to use copies of my music while I retain my ownership."*

Sadly, Roundalab's board has voted NOT to adapt the same policy and instead leaves it to each individual dance writer to address ethics.

A handout written by Bill Heyman a few years back for Hanhurst's and Dosado.com stated that illegal music copying is done primarily by folks who don't realize that what

their doing is wrong and harmful to the record industry. There are others who continue to make illegal copies fully aware of the foulness of their act. I've heard arguments that say, "Well, the technology is there to make copies and sell them or sell my original, so why not?" Friends, just because you can – it doesn't make it right!!

I believe square dance vinyl is on borrowed time. Like anything on it's way out, we begin to see "downsizing"; we are down to one record player manufacturer, Hilton Audio; we are down to one record wholesaler, Palomino Records, who is also the only vinyl pressing plant in the country to press small quantities regularly. I believe there will always be vinyl, but not square dance vinyl. Can we slow its demise?? Maybe, that depends on the integrity of our buying public's adherence to copyrights; it's through spreading the word, that we educate our buying public – callers.

Vinyl is viable right now and Blue Star-Hi Hat records are committed to pressing vinyl records. We will continue to be committed for the foreseeable future.

Moving away from vinyl lets look at digital formats, the most popular of which is CDs.

In 2001 there were 11 square dance companies producing CD singles; in 2005 there are 40 CD labels.

In all of 2001 there were 41 CD single releases; in first six months of 2005 there were 121.

Historically, in 1962 the square dance recording industry began bringing many of it's old hits from the 1950's, that were on 78 RPM, back and releasing them as 45 RPM – history repeats itself as music from 45 RPM vinyl now becomes available on CD. Some songs have been done by many labels and producers know that sales of that song will be much less than an exclusive release; vinyl pressings by their minimum costs and anticipated limited sales are cost prohibitive, so the song will be done on CD. CDs are not only cost

effective, but they hold 74 minutes of audio compared to a maximum 8 minutes on vinyl, for callers this is a bargain since both are the same price.

Another difference is audio quality. Vinyl records are studio recordings cut into lacquer then made into a “father” then made into a stamper; the process is like taking a photo, Xeroxing it, then making a copy of the copy, and so on. You lose a little with every generation. Bass for example, too much of it narrows the groove and will cause the needle to jump or skip – many of you know about that and have tried coins on the tone arm to correct that. By comparison, my CDs are straight from studio masters and can play every sound without adjustment for vinyl idiosyncrasies.

Other reasons CDs are the way to go:

1. They are lighter, smaller and stronger than records
2. They are inexpensive
3. They are now easy to adjust for speed, with so many players at or under \$100 that is easy to use for older fellows like myself.
4. They are playable in your home, your office, and your car, which makes it easier to practice. This convenience, has lead dancers to embrace CDs as their format of choice – in all overseas markets, CDs have replaced cassettes.

For every new release done in vinyl, CD, and MP3, CD sales represent 8% of total sales, but sales have remained steady over the past three years while vinyl has dropped. Dance Ranch CDs have seen an 80% increase in re-orders of CDs, which indicates that more callers are starting to use CDs and as they begin to do so, they look through existing releases to fill their case. Dance Ranch CDs put out 24 singing call/ extended hoedown combinations every year. On average, Blue Star and Hi Hat – both vinyl-producing labels – release 36 CDs in a year.

Another digital format – MP3 have held steady in sales over the past three years. While more labels are beginning offer MP3 downloads, there is only one retail outlet. That fact alone may be why square dance MP3 has not and probably will not be a mainstream

commodity; if that one retail outlet ceases so too will s/d MP3 sales. As a producer, I would not sell MP3 direct because quite frankly, sales of MP3 are so small. I passed on the opportunity to sell MP3 direct. CDs are the digital format of choice for Blue Star, Dance Ranch, and Hi Hat.

I was asked to speak a little about “showmanship” – which is a big subject that I will limit to “music as a tool in showmanship”; music is something we already use and is easier to modify in our presentations. You’ve heard the difference between vinyl and CDs from studio masters and it is very important that your music be clean and clear in its playback, because no matter how good the choice, it’s effect is lost when it’s not heard.

Most callers have their “showy” singing call(s), so I’m going to focus on hoedowns.

Music is not just the sound in the background; it is how you change your style around it and how that affects your dancers. I’ve heard a caller state that he can’t stand the “boom chuck” so prevalent in square dance hoedowns, preferring the alternative sound. Friends, “boom chuck” is prevalent because it sells – it sells because callers can call to it and dancers can dance to it. “Boom chuck” has many different sounds and I’ll play a few samples here to illustrate that while orchestration changes, the rhythm remains the same.

### **SAMPLE**

The first sample is what many expect “boom chuck” to sound like, it is traditional in orchestration and a piece that I would use to open a dance because it tells dancers and callers where to step, where to start calling, it has drive. It is “Cindy” on Blue Star 2478.

If I’m going to use material that is difficult or in a workshop, I don’t want dancers distracted by a strong melody playing in the music, nor loud instruments cluttering up my calls, so I’ll use a subdued “boom chuck” piece that give the dancers a strong sense of beat – the second sample is “10/20 Hoedown” on Blue Star 2498.

Many of our dancers are hearing impaired and one thing I've discovered is the use "big calls" in one tip and the relaxing effect it has, especially on those with hearing difficulties. "Big calls" are the Load the Boat, Relay the Ducey, Tea Cup type calls where the dancers move for many beats by themselves. This is important - hearing impaired dancers are on edge, struggling to hear every little call, and a lot of short, "stabbing" calls make for a tense tip, therefore, many "big calls" in a single tip allow them to relax, breath and enjoy. Musically, I'll use something with a recognizable melody playing just beneath my "big calls"; the example also illustrates a contemporary sound using "boom chuck". The third sample is "After All" on Blue Star 2490.

Alternative music is a term used a lot among square dance callers, but it's subjective in it's meaning. Is a different rhythm?? Is it different orchestration?? There is a lot of "alternative music" being used that feels like a three-legged dance – there is no danceable rhythm to it. If you can't find a beat, throw it out.

Beat, as an "alternative sound" to "boom chuck" is best characterized as a "boom, boom, boom" sound. With it's pronounced "step, step, step" feel, I choose choreography that is short, modular, "stabbing"; the dance step feels different and so will your delivery. Probably one of the best I've heard in this type of delivery is Larry Ward. Those of you who know him will easily hear his voice going along with this type of music and may help you master this different calling style; an excellent showmanship tool. To illustrate, I'll play a sample of the music and add some of my calling on the end. **SAMPLE**

The music played was, "Amplitude" on Blue Star 2476, "Driven" on Blue Star 2502, and "Waikiki" on Blue Star 2504. "Waikiki" would also be great for your Hawaiian themed dances.

More alternatives are varying rhythms. The first example, "Sunny Day" on Blue Star 2470, has been referred to as a Samba rhythm and I would probably use "big calls" like Spin Chain & Exchange the Gears and have the dancers Exchange "Samba style"

**SAMPLE**

Good drive, nice sound, smooth Latin rhythm is “Macarena Hoedown”, Blue Star 2462

**SAMPLE**

Blue Star Records hoedowns feature a traditional side and a contemporary side; every side, every record has different musicians from Texas, California, Europe, and Japan, that give us such a diverse sound. You could use only Blue Star hoedowns and never play the same band twice in a night (smiling).

Recently, a caller asked me if I’d used the following sample for a hoedown. I responded that I hadn’t even thought about but would try; I did and like it. Here is the singing call “I Found A New Baby”, Blue Star 2458 **SAMPLE**

Speaking of singing calls, briefly, let me give you some examples that I use for music showmanship. The first offers a different beat, different feel, not a lot of instruments getting in your way; this is “Be Bop A Lula” by Gary Shoemake on Blue Star 2485.

**SAMPLE**

Another singing call great for showmanship is, “Plastic Saddle” by Jerry Story on Blue Star 2487. **SAMPLE**

If I were using a hoedown with an “alternative sound” as shown, then I would follow it with a “boom chuck” rhythm singing call, probably a sing-along like, “When The Red Red Robin” or “Hello My Baby” – both on Blue Star. Likewise, if I were using a “boom chuck” rhythm hoedown, then I’d probably go to “Be Bop A Lula” or “Plastic Saddle”; the exception is the first tip where you just want folks to find their rhythm and build their confidence in themselves and you.

In closing, let me say that musical variety is what many folks at my dance comment on and that to me is a huge compliment because it’s all about my research, my homework, my effort in musical showmanship that is recognized.

Complete list of recommended records and CDs

Traditional:

CINDY – BS 2478

GALE – BS 2514

RUNNING AWAY – BS 2508

CRACKERJACK – BS 2472

UP THE CREEK – BS 2500

Boom-chuck with little melody:

10/20 HOEDOWN – BS 2498

HOT BRAKES – HH 639 (no melody)

ROCK A BYE – BS 2516

LANI – BS 2464

Contemporary sounding boom-chuck:

AFTER ALL – BS 2490

GROVE – BS 2480

HOTEL PACIFIC – BS 2514

SMOOTH & EASY – BS 2510

Alternative hoedowns:

AMPLITUDE – BS 2476

TRIBAL HOEDOWN – HH 5264

RIP TIDE – BS 2516

WORKING FOR MONEY – BS 2506

ACCENTUATION – BS 2518

BLUE STAR RAMBLER – BS 2510

HOT CHOCOLATE – HH 5270

Hoedowns with varying rhythms:

SUNNY DAY – BS 2470

GOOD ENOUGH – BS 2478

MACARENA – BS 2462

STAR'S HOEDOWN – BS 2484

Singing calls for hoedowns:

I FOUND A NEW BABY – BS 2458

WITCH DOCTOR – BS 2469

STREET FAIR – BS 2515

PLASTIC SADDLE – BS 2487

SUMMERTIME – BS 2463

Singing calls with diverse orchestration:

BE BOP A LULA – BS 2485

PLASTIC SADDLE – BS 2487

I DROVE ALL NIGHT – BS 2489

CAN'T HELP FALLING IN LOVE – HH 5269

YOU'VE GOT TO CHANGE YOUR WAYS – HH 5262

I'VE GOT A LOVELY BUNCH OF COCONUTS – BS 2499

Sing along type singing calls:

CALIFORNIA HERE I COME – BS 2519

HELLO MY BABY – BS 2507

YOUNG AT HEART – BS 2475

SWANEE – BS 2477

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE – HH 5266

Blue Star web page: [www.buddyweaver.com/bluestar](http://www.buddyweaver.com/bluestar)

Hi Hat web page: [www.buddyweaver.com/hihat](http://www.buddyweaver.com/hihat)