

GCA Caller School: One Year Later

Allan Hurst 7/23/1999

This year was my third year attending GCA Caller School, and I thought I knew what to expect. However, the school class structure/format changed quite a bit from previous years. (This article is going to focus mostly on this year's caller school; if this is your first time reading about caller school, you may want to refer to my article in last year's SquareUp!, entitled "Debunking Six Myths About Caller School".)

As in previous years, students ranged from first-timers to those with several years of experience. This year's GCA Caller School staff included Anne Uebelacker, Mike Jacobs, and Dave Wilson. We were also lucky enough to have Frank Lesclinier sit in on many of the sessions.

In previous years, the school's teaching format split up the students into three groups, by level of experience, then rotated each of the three coaches through a full day with each group of students. This year, the students were split up into three groups only part of the time, and groups were formed and re-formed as needed, depending upon the curriculum being taught to each group. As before, assistant coaches were on hand to provide additional help and support to the coaches and students as needed. (This year's assistant coaches: Kris Jensen, Andy Shore, and Jbear Bibb.)

This year, the coaches asked us all to perform patter material (both written and, if possible, sighted) and singing material. The coaches then individually and collectively noted strong performance points as well as areas needing improvement. This took a lot more time than last year's school, in which the three groups performed separately. However, this seemed to provide the coaches with a better overall understanding of what skills we needed to work on as a group, as well as individually.

A general discussion of common areas of interest kicked off most days, followed by splitting us up into different groups to work on different aspects of calling. Some sessions, we were separated by experience level. Some sessions, we were separated by topic. (For example, sight resolution techniques in one room while another room focused on calling Advanced & Challenge level material.) While there was as much microphone time as could be crammed into three full days, because there were a number of all-together-now sessions, I didn't feel like there was as much mic time as in previous years. On the other hand, the all-together-now sessions provided invaluable information about performance technique, choreography flow, stage presence, and vocal techniques.

This year's school involved twenty-three students, many of whom were first-time attendees. Some of the students were aspiring to be club callers, or club teachers. Some students were investigating what it took to be a caller. Some were dancers who were merely curious. A personal note: perhaps I only noticed because I live there, but the San Francisco Bay area seems to be a hotbed of new caller activity these days, since there were at least ten students from Bay Area clubs! As noted in my previous article, caller school is one way to meet other callers and begin building life-long professional calling relationships.

One challenge facing GCA Caller School every year is not having enough dancers to dance for the students. It's very difficult for calling students to dance AND take notes, for example! One of the wrap-up items discussed at the end of school this year was how we could attract dancers to the school, and/or encourage students to bring a dancing partner with them. (It's quite common in other caller schools for each student to bring a dancing partner – often a spouse – with them.)

Each year, the rotating staff of the GCA Caller School brings new faces and new perspectives. This year (1999) included:

- Mike Jacobs, who provided a depth of information based on his extensive calling career, much of which I'd never heard anywhere else previously.
- Dave Wilson, who I'd only seen during dances and conventions, proved to be an exceptionally patient and supportive teacher, and brought a whole new set of simplified sight resolution tools to the school.
- Anne Uebelacker, who once again demonstrated why she's one of my favorite caller coaches, helping students discover numerous small, simple changes to their technique and presentation, all of which made a world of difference in performance.
- Frank Lesclinier, a professional caller coach himself, who was kind enough to sit in on many of the sessions, offering invaluable advice on performance technique and an incredible fifteen-minute "mini-session" on carefully selecting and listening to singing call music.

If you're interested in becoming a caller, or if you're a caller wanting to polish your skills, or even if you're just curious about what it takes to become a caller, consider attending GCA Caller School!

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