

Origins of Square Dance Sound Effects

By Allan Hurst – 4/22/2001 (content revised 7/29/2002) version 2.0

Have you ever wondered how sound effects are created, or who created them, or why? If you've been dancing or calling for any length of time, you've probably heard sound effects for many square dance calls, such as:

"Whoosh!" (Slide Thru)

"Fuzzy boo-boos!" (Rotary Spin; Vancouver BC variant)

"Whoop! Whoop!" (Track II)

"Hinge, Fold, Pass, Peel" (Linear Cycle)

"...Big Deal" (caller's retort to "Hinge, Fold, Pass, Peel", Chicago variant)

"My peas are frozen!" (Mini Busy, West Coast variant)

"Scratch and sniff!" (Step & Slide, West Coast variant)

Why do we have sound effects? Generally, to enhance the fun dancers derive from a specific call through humor. Sometimes sound effect are used to "spice up" what have become otherwise routine calls for experienced dancers who are feeling bored.

Granted, this type of information isn't essential to square dancing or calling, but they are fun, and have become highly ingrained in gay square dance culture. Sometimes, sound effects are used by students or new dancers as mnemonics for the calls themselves.

For example, Mike DeSisto is well known for calling a novelty tip in which he only vocalizes the sound effects for a series of calls, rather than using the calls themselves...and the dancers who know the sound effects seem to have no problems at all remembering which call to perform. (For example ... "Quack! Squeak!" would translate to "Acey-Deucey, Hinge")

There's a list of popular sound effects compiled by Paul Asente of El Camino Reelers, which can be viewed online at:

http://www.iagsdchistory.org/historywiki/index.php?title=Sound_Effects

...but there's little or no information regarding the *origins* of sound effects.

After a fair amount of informal research, I believe most popular sound effects are created and spread spontaneously. One person starts a sound effect, one or two observers note the effect and like it, so they begin using it, and as others notice, general usage increases. (Much like that annoying series of shampoo commercials many years ago "...and *they* tell two friends - and so on, and so on, and so on...") Each sound effect has its own story of origin.

I happened to be present at the time and place a relatively recent sound effect- "*My peas are frozen!*" -came into being for the A2 call, "Mini Busy".

In July of 1999, at the IAGSDC Convention in Los Angeles, I was dancing in the C1 hall with Joe & Jenny Dadek from Stanford Quads. We three tend to be a bit boisterous when we're having fun (who, me?). The C1 room and the other dancers were fairly quiet during that particular session, as it was early in the morning. Joe, Jenny and I were getting bored (always a dangerous thing).

At one point, the caller said, "*Mini Busy*". The usual sound effect for Mini Busy (up to that point) was "*But few are chosen*".¹ So ... Joe and Jen and I all enthusiastically yelled out "*But Few Are Chosen!*" and kept dancing.

The room was quite chilly (its air-conditioning having been adjusted to handle more people than were actually present). Jen was wearing open-toe sandals, and the caller began moving us around very quickly. Eventually, Jen started complaining to Joe and I how cold her feet had become. This happened to coincide with the caller calling "*Mini Busy*". Intending to say, "*my toes are frozen!*" Jen later told us she unconsciously echoed "But few are chosen", and blurted out "*My peas are frozen!*"

None of the three of us ever figured out why Jen mixed up "toes" and "peas". Some things are beyond analysis, and rightfully so.

Jenny looked at me. I looked at Joe. He looked at Jen. And the three of us (and one or two others in the square) started laughing, because it was *that* kind of a fast-and-furious square, and we were having fun, and it was such an obscure and bizarre non-sequitur that we found it hysterically funny at the time.

The next time the caller used "*Mini Busy*", we yelled out "*Our peas are frozen!*" and started laughing again. Eventually, the crazy mood of our trio spread to others in our square, and soon we were all yelling, "Our peas are frozen!" at the appropriate moment. To the visible relief of the caller on stage, the dance session came to an end just about that time, and we all dispersed to other squares and other rooms and activities.

The next day, in the A2 hall, I heard someone else say, "*My peas are frozen!*" This intrigued me since the person voicing the sound effect hadn't been in the C1 room with Jenny and Joe and me.

After convention, I kept on using the sound effect at local dances and club nights in the SF Bay Area, as did Joe and Jenny. And that's when I saw the sound effect take on a life of its own:

- Later that month, I was dancing to Anne Uebelacker, who called "*Mini Busy*." I automatically yelled, "*My peas are frozen!*" She stopped the music, leaned over the table and looked at me, and said "Beg pardon?" I repeated, "*My peas are frozen!*" She winced, said that sounded a bit painful, giggled, and then kept calling. A couple of other dancers took up the sound effect the next time she called "*Mini Busy*." Anne just did what she normally did when I was dancing in front of her; she rolled her eyes at me and said nothing further at the time.

¹ As in, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

- In August of 1999, during Seattle's annual fly-in, I heard dancers from Seattle and Portland echoing the sound effect. None of them had been in the C1 room at Convention, but a couple of dancers seemed to remember hearing the sound effect in the A2 room at Convention.
- In late 1999, it was reported to me that Anne was *teaching* the sound effect to her A1/A2 class in Vancouver BC. By now, the effect had spread through both my A&C home clubs (El Camino Reelers and Midnight Squares) and their associated classes. Grant Ito (Squares Across the Border) reported to me that he'd heard it used by dancers in Squares Across the Border during several club dances.
- By November of 1999, during Squares Across the Border's "Weave The Rain" November fly-in in Vancouver BC, dancers from all up and down the West Coast were using *"My peas are frozen!"*
- At the July 2000 IAGSDC Convention held in Baltimore MD, I heard dancers from the Midwest and East Coast using *"My peas are frozen!"* on the dance floor.
- By the end of 2000, Anne Uebelacker herself had added a variation. When she called *"2/3rds Mini Busy"*, she suggested that the dancers yell back, *"My peas are mooshy! (Ewww!)"*

Based on the above experiences, it doesn't seem unreasonable to suggest that most sound effects are propagated via one of the following four channels:

- usage (by a dancer or caller) during a local club night/dance
- usage during a fly-in
- usage by angels or being taught by a caller during a local class
- usage during a Convention

As a result of documenting the above anecdote, I've become interested in collecting stories regarding the origins of square dance sound effects.

If enough people send me information on their favorite sound effects, you may see another article on origins of sound effects!

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