

CALLING A DANCE USING "SKYPE"?

GENERAL INFORMATION

In December 2015 Andy Allemao from Chula Vista, California, USA called a "long distance" Square Dance using a Skype (Internet) connection. Over six squares attended the dance. Reports are that Andy did a GREAT job. As always he was energetic and called a high energy fun filled dance.

Photos and comments are posted on Face Book at:

<https://www.facebook.com/michael.streby/posts/1308599845832218>

Andy called the dance from his home, not at a live dance; therefore, he did not have live dancers in the room with him. However he could see the dancers, via a Skype connection. In other words, the total interaction was via Skype.

There have many other Skype dances, including between Yuma, AZ and Red Deer, Alberta, Canada by Jerry Jestin and a dance called by Vic Kaaria in January 2016 from his den in California. Many additional Skype dances have been scheduled.

The overall consensus is that dances called using a Skype connection are a new and innovative way to bring Square Dancing to remote areas or other areas where there is a lack of experienced qualified callers. While the reports so far have been about Skype Square Dances, there seems to be no reason why Round Dances could not be done with a Skype connection. Reports about these dances show that callers and cuers can save the day by bringing dancing to remote areas or other areas where there is no Caller/Cuer.

The following "technical" items were provided by Michael Streby:

1. First to ensure the best possible connection, we hardwired directly into the Cable Modem on both ends of the connection and both ends had high speed connections (over 5Mb uplink; over 10 Mb down would be sufficient).
2. For obvious reasons, Caller camera at face level showing roughly the upper third of the caller's body. We had a head shot on a 46" monitor. Caller, Andy Allemao, was literally bigger than life.
3. To ensure complete control of the voice/music mix, caller set his MA150 up just like he was calling a live dance, including an 8 Ohm speaker to ensure there was plenty of impedance. Dancers expressed that they were originally worried that they would not be able to hear the calls, but once at the dance they were all comfortable with the voice to music mix. But since Andy had control of the mix he could have adjusted it if it was needed.
4. Caller used the line level output of the MA 150 into the "Mic" input of a USB Sound Card of the Laptop he had Skype running on.
5. The rest is just using Skype, which is a simple tool.
6. Caller will need two computers one for your music and one for Skype.
7. On the dance end we used a laptop hooked into a 46" HD screen. Laptop's camera was set to view 4 squares, next dance we will be raising the camera higher to give the caller even a better view. And if the caller has a large screen available to plug in their laptop, HDMI output, they will get a better effect of actually being at the dance on their end.
8. An ambient "hall mic" makes the virtual experience even better on the caller end.

Andy Allemao was our first Skype Caller here is a few of his comments about the dance:

"I was surprised at how quickly it felt like a real dance."

"I truly had a great time, and feel that we were able to make more than just a virtual connection. I hope the dancers also felt that it was not just novel, but also truly enjoyable as a dance. The bottom line for me is that I would definitely do that again. I see opportunities opened up to bring top notch Square Dancing to under served areas. Not just dances, but workshops and classes. I think you are on to something, and am honored to have been asked to be the first. I expect this will catch on!" *Andy*

Dancer feedback has been great. Most came for the novelty but soon were just there enjoying the dancing and calling:

"Having a National caller available through Skype was wonderful! We enjoyed the unique patterns and different music that was offered. Andy gave us enough challenge to make it very fun and exciting. He didn't appear to have any trouble seeing dancers and offer suggestions (corrections) to a square. The time went very fast, which meant we had a really good time! We think this is the wave of the future!"

Terry & Cindy

"Carl and I enjoyed the dance. The Skype dance was very interactive and fun." *Doris*

"I had a blast! I was concerned with the quality of sound and being able to maintain a continuous connection. But it seemed flawless. I look forward to attending as many as possible. Thank you Michael for providing this opportunity." *Nancy*

"I thoroughly enjoyed the dance last Saturday. We learned a lot, and were not intimidated by the fact that the caller was in California. It was really fun." *Mavis*

All of this really comes down to, the dancers had a great time and the caller was able to do a great job. The dancers came out to have a new experience and went away having really enjoyed a good dance. This will go a long ways in keeping Square Dance alive in our area.

The last few months have had a couple of our callers retire and another deeply reduce his calling. Another moved out of the area and yet another head south for the winter. We are down to almost no callers, I am trying to fill the void but it is a struggle. This option to have a great monthly dance is a life saver and I can see having a club or two that are fully Skype based. Beginner classes on one end of the building; and Advanced on the other?

Skype calling seems to be a great option to replace or work along with a record based club of any dance program. As long as you have a good Internet connection you can have a great caller.

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