

Some suggestions for learning singing squares

1. Material. Pick material that you like, whether it's from live events or books or records - only by trying it out will you find if it's really you. When I started out, I mostly learned material that I heard at dances and found appealing. This usually involved recording that part of the dance (with permission, of course) and then transcribing the words and the phrasing so that I would get very familiar with it. I then memorized the material by repetition, often during my daily morning bicycle rides, and I usually found that I was modifying the words and phrasing to suit my tastes and sensibilities.
2. Finding the appropriate key. Since I have a limited useful (untrained) vocal range of about an octave and a half, and most singing squares cover a range from an octave to an octave and a quarter, it's very important for me to pick the right key so that I don't have to push my range and at the same time be as high as possible for maximum intelligibility. Trial and error with a piano or other instrument is a way to do this, or you can ask a musician to help you. Be forewarned that what is comfortable in the privacy of your home may not be what's comfortable on stage when you're enthusiastic, so be preprepared to adjust a bit.
3. Working with musicians. Once you have learned the material and picked your key, then it's time to think about working with musicians. I think of singing squares as a duet between the caller and the piano with the melody instruments filling in, but other people have other ways of thinking about it. You might remind the musicians that playing for a singing square can be a bit different than playing for reels or jigs, as sometimes the material is not in the standard AA BB format and it often wants to swing a bit more than regular contra dance music. So contemplate at least a short rehearsal before doing it in public. And consider putting a little bit of your voice into the stage monitor system just for the singing square.
4. Duets. Singing square duets (and trios) can be a lot of fun both for you and for the dancers, but it means all the participants have to be on the same page as far as wording and phrasing is concerned. At times it can seem like it is a game of musical chicken, which makes it exciting and likely either to

be spectacularly successful or to crash and burn. When picking a common key, I have found that a man's range is often about a half octave lower than a women's range, so picking a key you both can work in comfortably might be a challenge. But it's also possible for one of you to do higher low harmony if this is an issue.

Above all, enjoy yourself and have fun !!

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