

## Round Dancing - Is it about making money?

It is a common practice by some choreographers not to include the artist and the original title of the music on their cuesheets. By withholding this relevant information these choreographers make it extremely hard for other cuers to locate the corresponding piece of music on alternative music sources (for instance a normal record or CD) and almost impossible to buy a legal copy of it on the normal music market. This practice inhibits the spreading of wonderful dances and it also binds valuable resources by forcing cuers to either waste their time on unnecessary research or their money on expensive pirated copies that they are not even allowed to use.

In the past it was common for choreographers to invest their own private money into the pressing of a special press record. Often neither cuesheet nor record provided information on the artist and original title. This made it difficult for others to locate the original source of music, but it insured that the money the choreographers had invested paid off. It was considered a reasonable and acceptable way to prevent choreographers from losing money through their work.<sup>1</sup> It is not my intention to criticize this. But today some choreographers withhold information on the original piece of music in order to be able to sell pirated copies on minidisc for high prices - sometimes even as high as a legal copy would be - without having invested their own money into the pressing of a special press record. In my opinion cuers and the whole round dancing community should neither support nor tolerate this practice.

Why this practice really hurts the whole round dancing activity:

- It prevents wonderful dances from becoming known, spread and danced.
- It contradicts the principle of free information for all.
- It forces cuers to waste time on research to locate the music on a legal source.
- It is not very considerate of nor helpful to fellow cuers and contradicts the spirit of cooperation and friendship that I always thought to be part of our round dancing community.
- It is illegal, since it is not in accordance with copyright laws.
- It prevents all who like the music (cuers and dancers) and want to buy it from easily finding and buying a legal copy of the music. This denies the artist (singer or band) of his rightful wages for his work.

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<sup>1</sup> It is assumed here that all of these special pressings have been legally pressed. While this practice has helped the choreographers to sell their special press records it also has endangered the continuing survival of the particular dance in question. For a deeper discussion of this topic please see also my article "Endangered Dances" at <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/5624/download/EndangeredDance.pdf>

- It tempts cuers into buying expensive pirated copies. They waste their money, risk personal legal consequences and may be used as bad examples by the music companies to condemn the whole round dancing community for illegal practices.
- It could be used as an argument against the round dancing community as a whole and lead to even stricter rules and regulations. BMI and ASCAP really could make your lives as cuers difficult if they wanted to. Don't risk to draw the attention of the music industry onto yourselves by selling pirated music!
- It sets a bad example that will be followed by others.

These reasons speak against the described practice and for the inclusion of the artists and original source of music on the cuesheet. For a choreographer it only takes a minute to include this information on the cuesheet, but it spares many cuers hours of research and frustration.

Now - if we agree that it would be sensible and good to include this kind of information - why is it not a common practice to provide it freely? Why do we find so many cuesheets saying "music available by choreographers on minidisc"?

I find it hard to believe but there seems to be one big reason: **MONEY!**

The following could be read on an internet discussion about this topic a little while ago:

*" I do hope that you realize [...] that the omission of the artist name is not a slip of the mind or an act of laziness but a deliberate policy. Round dancing may be an art, a hobby, a passion.... but it is also a business."*

(Annette Woodruff, Weaver Discussion Group 22. Nov 2004)

Well, if it is about making money and about business then the people making money could and should be considered professionals. From a professional we can expect that he acts in accordance with the laws, sets a good example and does not tempt others (non-professional cuers) to do things that are not right. If some choreographers want to make money by selling the music needed for their dances why don't they do it in a professional way and trade with legal CDs instead of selling pirated copies? Why do they have to hurt the whole activity of round dancing by bringing it into discredit? How can someone be respected as a role model and professional when he acts in such an irresponsible way?

I'm not writing this article to condemn anyone. I just want to point out clearly a real problem and I want round dancers - especially choreographers - to think about it and change a practice that really hurts us all as a round dancing community in many respects!

And all of us can help to initiate this change:

Choreographers: Please include original title and artist and a legal source of music on all of your cuesheets and by doing so set a good example for others! Also for your own good: Please do not sell pirated music!

Organizers of round dance events: Please do not tolerate the selling of pirated copies on your special dance, festival or convention! Please talk to the teachers and choreographers before the event and ask them to include the necessary information on their cuesheets to be distributed or printed in your syllabus!

Publishers of Cuesheets: Please do not accept cuesheets that say "music available on minidisc by choreographer" or the like! Please ask choreographers to include artist and original title on their cuesheets before publication!

Cuers: Please do not buy pirated copies of music! If cuers stopped buying pirated copies choreographers would have no reason to withhold the information on the original source of music!

But there is another point to consider. Why do some choreographers feel that they have the moral right to sell pirated music? I've heard well-known choreographers explain this practice with the following line of argument: "We are not rich. We put so much effort, time and money into the activity. We really need the money to be able to continue (pay for the travel expenses etc.)". Maybe some choreographers feel that they should get at least some monetary reward from their work - their choreographies - and since there seems to be no other way they help themselves and sell pirated copies to get what they feel should be rightfully theirs.

I'm not a legal expert but in my understanding a good choreography is a piece of art and most likely protected by the copyright laws just like any other piece of art - be it a poem, a novel, a drama or music. So in principle a choreographer should have the sole right to use (copy, publish, teach or perform) his own choreography. And he also could sell this right to perform or teach their choreography to others, just like any other owner of copyrights can do.

Up to date choreographers have distributed their cuesheets freely with the unspoken licence for anyone to use them without permission or fee paid. This is very generous. But if choreographers feel the need to get some financial benefit from their work they should find ways to organize themselves and fight for their rights just like authors and musical artists have done. They should not ask for the understanding of cuers to honor and respect their work by paying money to them when by the very act of doing so another artist's right (of the one who has written the music) is ignored and infringed.

Why should a cuer pay a lot of money to the choreographer for a pirated copy of music when he can get it for free from a friend? Obviously copying a pirated

copy is not more immoral than buying a pirated copy. The only reason why a cuer should feel obliged to buy an expensive pirated copy is because he is asked to pay the choreographers for their work. I'm convinced that many cuers and dancers would be willing to voluntarily give a small amount of money to a choreographer when asked to do so as an acknowledgement for the work done. But as a cuer I don't like to be forced to buy an expensive illegal copy that I can't legally use just because the choreographer withholds relevant information and sells pirated copies in order to get paid for his work! If choreographers want their rights to be respected they should respect other artists' rights!

Maybe we as a round dance community should find other ways to reward choreographers for their choreographies when they are used or workshopped - similar to paying a fee for playing music. But then these fees should be paid by all dancers who enjoy the dance and not only by the cuers - as it is done when choreographers try to get paid through the purchases of pirated music! Not that I want this to happen - but it would be the choreographers' right to ask for a fee and therefore this had to be respected. Of course it would be much nicer if choreographers continued to support the activity of round dancing by not asking for any fee on the use of their choreographies!

As a cuer I also put a lot of effort, time and also money into the activity. Buying legal music is undoubtedly expensive. Some cuers have argued in the past that using pirated copies of music is morally tolerable because otherwise the expenses for a cuer would be too high, that using pirated copies of music does not hurt anyone and that it is not done to make money. But if everybody who uses music bought it legally, legal music would not have to be so expensive. Using pirated music instead of legal music hurts the artist. Some choreographers sell pirated copies of music to make money. Using pirated music in an official setting like round dancing is illegal whether we like it or not.

I think each cuer should have the right to choose whether he wants to buy a legal copy of the music or not. By withholding the information on the music some choreographers are depriving cuers of this possibility and leave them only two options: either not to use the dance or to buy an illegal copy. Please, choreographers, give us cuers at least the choice and chance to buy a legal copy! Please name artist, original title and legal music source on your cuesheets!

Thank you very much!

Gabriele Langer (Hamburg, Germany)

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This article is available on the internet at:

<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/5624/download/money.pdf>