

# The Evening Dance Program at Camp

Dr. Jim Cain, Teamwork & Teamplay

I was recently asked to provide an evening dance program for a summer camp staff training weekend. Personally, I remember the joy of dancing at summer camp under the evening stars, so I said yes. After a bit of discussion about the program, I discovered that the previous summer, a summer camp board member had visited the camp, and witnessed a rather unsuccessful evening dance program in progress. Most campers were somewhere outside the dance hall, few if any were dancing, the lights were out, and there was little leadership and even less social interaction. In short, the camp board of directors decided on a policy of “no more evening dances!” until the camp staff could create a program that truly delivered an engaging and socially interactive, community building event.

For nearly thirty years now, I’ve had the opportunity to assist camping programs with recreation, games, evening programs, and challenge and adventure activities. My favorite of all is the dance - and here are a few ideas to help your evening music and dance program be successful.

First of all, evening programs in general, and summer camp programs specifically, have the unique opportunity to build community and help campers feel a part of the whole. Few things, however, are more threatening to a young camper than feeling awkward dancing. To avoid this situation, I specifically sequence an evening dance program to maximize the comfort level of the participants, and create an atmosphere of fun and involvement.

## At the Start of the Program

Begin the evening dance program with some general musical activities, and save the actual dancing for later in the program. Name games, activities with and without partners, small group games and activities with the entire camp are good places to start. You can freely download and copy two publications of “Raccoon Circle” activities, suitable for small group games and community building from the Teamwork & Teamplay website at: [www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com), click on “Raccoon Circles.”

Next comes musical activities that don’t actually involve any dancing. Singing is a good choice, especially those songs with some movement as well, but there are a few more possibilities, such as:

1. Name that Tune. Visit your local library or music store and collect music from television programs, game shows and movies. Then play a few seconds from each tune and let the audience, working in small groups, try to identify as many tunes as possible. CD’s are a good choice for this activity. Then replay the music in the same order, and let groups shout out their answers.
2. Music Around the World. For an international theme, try collecting music from different countries, and again playing a short segment of each selection. Small groups are asked to guess which country, or what style of music each selection represents.
3. Sing a Song about \_\_\_\_\_.! With the entire camp split into small groups of about 8-10 campers, select a single word, such as “Blue.” Groups are then given 2 minutes to brainstorm as many songs as they can with the word blue somewhere in the title or lyrics, and then be prepared to sing this part of the song. Groups take turns, singing one song per round. The activity continues with each group singing one song per turn. Any group running out of songs, or repeating a song previously sung by another group are out for this round. Next round, try another word, such as other colors, camp themes, holidays, animals or countries.
4. What are We Singing? Pass out to each small group a song title and lyrics. Each camper selects one word from the opening line of the song, and with the rest of the group sings this word at the same time. So, for the song “I love the mountains”, several campers would all sing their word from the first line, “I love the mountains, I love the rolling hills,” in one, mashed chord of words. The object of the rest of the audience is to guess what the song title is.

## The Next Level

This next level introduces music, but still provides some security for young campers by providing a structure, and the unity of a group. I chose to call this activity, “Marching to the Beat of a Different Drum.” Collect a series of different music segments (popular songs from various artists, music styles and locations, but especially music with a definite beat). Different Drum begins with each group counting off, and each camper remembering their number. Camper number one has the opportunity to lead the very first song. If it is a marching band number, they can march, or any other movement that is safe, and appropriate for the physical ability of the rest of the group members. Song segments are typically about 30 seconds long. The next song belongs to camper number two. The unique thing about this activity is that everyone in the group has the opportunity to lead, even if only for a short time.

Hint: For younger groups, the first leader can be a counselor, to demonstrate how to lead the group.

Another large group activity that can be performed with a variety of music is a grand march, where campers join hands in a large circle, and one counselor begins to lead this long line in a series of spirals, twists and circles, until they are again in a large circle.

## Dances without Partners

There are a variety of musical activities and dance styles that don’t require partners, including: line dancing, step dancing, jump roping, tinikling and limbo dancing. In many cases, some of the older line dances can be taught using recent songs from current artists. Line dances, such as Popcorn and Amos Moses, can be found on the “Best of the Barn” compilation CD from Bannerman Family Celebration Services (828) 669-7323. Novelty dances, like the Chicken Dance, the Hokey Pokey and Ding Dong Daddy can still be found in some public library collections. Even that classic dance collection, World of Fun - Featuring 202 dances from 22 countries, using 79 different tunes, is now available on CD from Melody House (800) 234-9228 and Sportime (800) 444-5700 [www.sportime.com](http://www.sportime.com).

Tinikling (rhythmic dancing between two poles), limbo dancing (passing below a slowly lowered stick) and jump roping (double dutch, multiple ropes) are all forms of dance that can be used during refreshments or break periods, and still engage many campers at one time. These and several other styles of ethnic dances can also be used during a cultural appreciation program or “around the world” event.

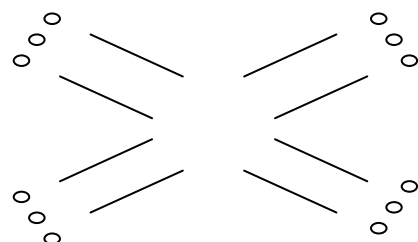
Hint: Encourage counselors to learn the dances prior to camp, and then spread out during the dance to teach small groups the more difficult steps.

## Mixers

After some solo dancing, introduce some partnered dancing using mixers. These dances quickly change partners, and keep campers active and moving. The Jiffy Mixer, Down on the Corner, and Oh Susanna are great for groups of any size. The World of Fun recordings have even more.

One of my favorite mixers, which works to a variety of music, is the hat mixer. Two lines of campers form an “alley.” Boys in one line, girls in the other. At one end of the alley are three chairs, with a large hat at the center chair. The music begins. The first boy sits in the middle chair and places the hat on his head. The first two girls take the seats on either side. The boy places the hat on one girls head, and then dances with the other. The girl with the hat moves to the middle chair, and the next two boys sit on either side. The dancers move to the bottom of the alley, and then join their respective sides again. For those that are not immediately chosen, they have the next opportunity to chose their own partner.

Hint: For very large groups (more than 100 campers), try having three or four different locations in the same room with the alley and chairs setup. When couples are finished dancing at the end of the line, they can join any of the other lines.



## **The Tunnel**

For those situations where a camper remarks, “but you never play MY KIND of music!” here is a modern mixer that works very well. Partners face each other, join hands, and form a long “tunnel.” The music begins, and these couples dance. A few (about 8) campers enter the tunnel, one at a time, and when they find a person they would like to dance with, simply back in front of this person’s partner, bumping them out of the line. The displaced camper then moves to the top of the tunnel, and has the opportunity to find a new partner on the next round. This activity works with all kinds of music, so here is your chance to try a few minutes of even the most unusual music, and keep everyone dancing.

## **Other Musical Activities**

Don’t forget to plan some activities or music for the break portion of the program. Classical dance tunes like Surfin’ USA by the Beach Boys (where campers can stand on benches or wooden planks like surf boards), Shout from the Animal House Soundtrack, and other party tracks are popular. Or, find the CD’s that baseball and other sporting events play between innings to get the crowd up and moving.

There are also a variety of ways to make music without CD players. Jug bands can be formed using a variety of percussion instruments. Sportime sells “boomwhackers,” which are tuned plastic tubes that play different tones (800) 444-5700 or [www.sportime.com](http://www.sportime.com). Perhaps your camp craft program can include some musical instruments in their daily program (shakers from film canisters and rice, pipe chimes from electrical conduit and other instruments made from recycled materials). Finally, consider using live music (a local band or DJ) or organizing a camp band, to perform for the evening dance program.

Hint: “The Great Garbage Concert” from composer Glenn McClure (585) 243-0324 has many musical instruments and musical activities that can be made from inexpensive and recycled materials, and includes the music and lyrics, and many environmentally friendly activities for your campers.

Hint: For those programs without easy access to electrical power, or musical amplification, there are several “singing games” like “A Bear Went Over the Mountain” and a variety of “play party” games, that are the early versions of modern mixer and social dances. And all they require is dancers who will sing!

## **Dancing with Partners**

While square dancing is popular at some camps, this is not the case everywhere. The World of Fun recordings have several square dances, but here are a few ideas for other forms of partner dances.

1. **Ethnic Dancing.** Many locations have some form of ethnic dance groups that could be invited to your camp to teach their style of music and dance. Scottish dancers, contra and square dancing groups, military reenactment groups (such as the Civil War or Colonial periods), ballroom dancers and modern dance troupes are some possibilities. Plus these groups often provide some educational content with their dances, such as historical facts, food events that add to the evening events, traditional costumes, and more.
2. **Athletics.** There are a variety of athletic dance styles, including tap, jazz, aerobics, tae-bo, cardio kickboxing, and other forms of music related dance. Some use partners for stretching and balance.
3. **Square Dancing.** If you are new to this dance style, try visiting your local library and looking in the 793 region, or searching for the book, “The Complete Book of Square Dancing and Round Dancing” by Betty Casey ISBN 0-385-03603-5. Another interesting and modern book which includes about 40 dances and musical activities to recent popular music is “Holy Motion - Energizing and Building Community Through Song and Dance” which is available from the Presbyterian Youth Connection Service at (800) 524-2612.

## **The Conclusion of the Dance**

Don't feel compelled to end the dance evening with "slow dances." But, if you choose to include some slower dancing music, consider the "snow ball" approach. Every time a counselor yells "Snow Ball" dancers must find a new partner. This makes even the slow dances a type of mixer.

Music can also be used to set the final mood of the evening. If you wish campers to be in a quiet mood for an end of the day program after the dance, use music which will set the tone.

You can find several ideas for large group closing activities in the "Raccoon Circle" activity guides, which you can freely download and copy by visiting the Teamwork & Teamplay website at: [www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com), then click on "Raccoon Circles."

## **About the Author**

Dr. Jim Cain is the author of the teambuilding texts, Teamwork & Teamplay, The Book on Raccoon Circles, A Teachable Moment and Teambuilding Puzzles. He is a former Executive Director of the Association for Challenge Course Technology, Senior Consultant to the Cornell University Corporate Teambuilding Program and the Director and creative force behind the adventure-based training company, Teamwork & Teamplay. Dr. Cain makes his home in Brockport, New York and frequently serves as a visiting professor and staff development specialist on subjects ranging from experiential education to challenge and adventure-based activities, and from creating connections to leadership, structural engineering, chaos and powder mechanics. Dr. Cain has presented teambuilding and active learning sessions in 43 states and 10 countries in the past 5 years, and generally has more equipment and adventure-based books in his library than most developing nations. His most recent project is the new book "The Value of Connection - In the Workplace." He is also a third generation square dance caller and musician and has always loved dancing at camp, and is available for staff training events using music, dance, games and teambuilding activities.

Jim Cain, Ph.D. Teamwork & Teamplay 468 Salmon Creek Road Brockport, NY 14420  
Phone (585) 637-0328  
[jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com](mailto:jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com)      [www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com)