



CALLERLAB

International Association of Square Dance Callers

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BMI/ASCAP Licensing Frequently Asked Questions

Why is There Licensing?

It's illegal to play a copyrighted song in public without the author's permission— a “license.” It's absurd for each author to license songs individually (imagine the paperwork!), so they formed BMI & ASCAP, who do it for them.

US Performance-Rights Organizations

In the United States, there are three “performance-rights organizations”. They act as agents to collect royalties that are owed to composers for the performance of their music.

BMI: Broadcast Music, Inc represents mainly composers who work in the radio, television, and movie industries.

ASCAP: The American Society of Composers, Artists, and Publishers is the oldest copyright licensing organization in the US. It represents such composers as Irving Berlin and George Gershwin.

SESAC: SESAC started out representing gospel music and European composers; more recently, they've branched out into popular music.

When Do I Need A License For Myself, Rather Than for A Club?

If you run dances or weekends of your own, you'll need a license for yourself. Where can you get licensed? You have some options: Deal with the licensing organizations yourself, join CALLERLAB, or get a license through CALLERLAB. BMI & ASCAP aren't set up to deal with individual callers, but they'll license clubs for about \$22 per dance each—if you buy a year's worth of licenses in advance.

CALLERLAB offers non-members the lowest prices on music licensing. If you call up to 50 dances/year, your cost is just \$101.00! For more than 50 dances/year, the cost is a low \$145.00. Joining CALLERLAB gives you both licenses, plus liability insurance, plus access to CALLERLAB's support and education services. Or you can get a license from CALLERLAB without becoming a full member. As a Licensee Member, you pay just the BMI & ASCAP fees plus a \$20 administrative charge! Being licensed thru CALLERLAB covers you when calling club dances & weekends, your own dances & weekends, and calling at all festivals except State and National Conventions. Those conventions must get their own licenses. You're also covered if you do rounds or Country Western dances as part of your overall square-dance program.

If Clubs Are Responsible, Why Do They Want Me To Have A License?

Not all clubs belong to dancer federations, so there's no good way for clubs to deal with BMI & ASCAP as a group. When the issue arose, club leaders got worried. BMI & ASCAP were threatening legal action, and the club leaders would be personally liable for hefty copyright penalties. The idea of paying \$20,000 per song is pretty frightening! CALLERLAB's deal with BMI & ASCAP solved the problem of license cost—but a club is only safe if every night's caller has a license. So to protect themselves, clubs have started to ask all their callers to be licensed.

Who Is Responsible For Having a License?

Anyone who performs or plays copyrighted music needs a license. Normally, the event's organizer is responsible for obtaining the required licenses. For commercial concerts, that's the promoter. For commercial trade shows, it's the trade-show organizer or individual booth-holder. For square dances, it's the dance organizer. Most dances are club-organized, so clubs are

How did BMI and ASCAP Get Involved In Square Dancing?

Over the past 40 years, BMI and ASCAP have turned their sights to square dancing several times. But there was never an easy way for them to track down square dance clubs for licensing and enforcement. Then, in 1990, they discovered S/D publications, which made it easy to find clubs. They mailed out about 4000 contracts to individual clubs and callers. This made people realize their exposure, and caused much concern.

There was another problem: Clubs are small, but BMI & ASCAP are big. So BMI & ASCAP offered their standard deal: \$22 each per dance, payable a year at a time in advance. For many clubs, that'd have been devastating--but small clubs had no way to negotiate for better terms. And new clubs would face an impossible up-front expense.

In an effort to avoid the unreasonable expense that BMI and ASCAP would impose on square dance clubs, CALLERLAB & ROUNDALAB approached them to negotiate a more satisfactory licensing arrangement. BMI & ASCAP agreed to allow licensing of members of these organizations rather than payment of the license fee by individual clubs--on the condition that all US members be licensed.