



American Caller's Association

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October 2006 Newsletter

A Simple Dance Lesson

By: Don Feenerty of the Heritage Dance Association

The other evening a group of us from the Heritage Dance Association went to a dance at a county fair. It was simply billed as a square dance. None of us had ever been there, nor had we ever heard of the caller. We went, not knowing what to expect. What we found was unlike anything we had ever experienced.

The dance was held in an exhibition shelter for showing fair animals. The floor was dirt, covered with sawdust and wood chips about three inches deep. We were the first ones there and were told that this was going to be a hoe down. There was no band, just a caller with a sound system. It was close to dance time, and still no one was there but us. Then the kids started coming. First there were about ten of them, and we were impressed to see so many young people. Seeing the kids the caller put on a Tom T Hall song, not a song I would have thought teens would like at all. I was wrong. These kids all started doing line dancing. Within fifteen minutes there were close to two hundred teens over packing this building, and they were all line dancing.

After a half a dozen line dances, the caller welcomed everyone and said we were going to have us a square dance. He asked that we all square up for a few easy dances. We did "Take a Little Peak," "Just Because" and another of the more simple old time hoe down dances. After this we old folks sat down and the kids started lining up again for line dances. The caller asked that anyone who wanted to learn these line dances get up on the floor. He said they all would be easy. He walked everyone through each dance once or twice, and then put the song on. He cued the danced for only a few cycles. After that everyone was on their own.

I couldn't help but notice that though most of these kids already knew these dances many were learning them for the first time. They struggled, and several left the floor. I saw one boy follow his friends off the floor only to pull them back by the arms. He said, "Just try it." And they did. I watched these kids for much of the evening. They didn't seem to get much better at these dances, but they were having a blast. With close to two hundred teenagers on the floor dancing, there was no way these boys were going to sit these dances out. They were there to be a part of the fun, be a part of the crowd.

After three line dances it was time to square up again. We did another set of the more easy old time square dances. The caller quickly workshoped each dance, then put on the music. Again most of the dancers knew the dances, but still many did not. No matter, the dance went on and the weaker dancers either caught on or they didn't. Either way they stayed on the floor.

Next came a few circle mixers, all very easy to learn. Being an experienced dancer, and a trained dancer I feared that this entire dance was too elementary, and that at any moment the floor would become bored with the dance level. After all it was obvious that most of these dancers were experienced. I was wrong. They danced every dance like it was the best dance ever. So did we.

A Simple Dance Lesson

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One of the dancers who came with us happened to be a long time Lloyd Shaw board member. He pointed out that what we were doing was one of the early versions of the Lloyd Shaw Program. He told us how this dance, the lines, the squares and the mixers were following almost exactly the early programs that the L S Foundation put together. He told us how these programs were designed to provide dances that any and everyone could do. They required little to no dance experience, and were designed to get new and seasoned dancers dancing with little effort.

When I got a chance I approached the caller, complimenting his dance. I asked if he was using the Lloyd Shaw Program, thinking this would make for some interesting conversation. He said he didn't know there was a program, didn't know who Lloyd Shaw was. He told me that he was simply putting on the same dance he danced nearly thirty five years ago. He said that he took over from his mentor about twenty years ago, and that the program has not changed much in that amount of time. He knew of Western Square Dancing, but didn't know what made it different. He was actually aware of many other types of dance, but always thought that since what he was doing worked so well, why change it?

I spoke with some of the folks who were at the dance. One man informed me that he and his wife had been coming to this very dance for thirty five years. Another fellow told me that he has been doing this once a week for his entire life. I was told that this group dances regularly, and that sometimes they have nearly three hundred dancers in attendance. When asked, each of these people told me this was just square dancing. Not one could tell me the name of their program. There was no basic, mainstream or plus, just square dancing.

On the way home we talked about how Modern Western Square Dancing has made it more and more difficult to attract and retain new dancers. We compared it to this group. They have no lessons. They really don't progress to higher and higher levels. They do the same dances over and over week after week, and only seldom introduce new music for the same old dances. Yet these people come back again and again for their entire lives.

I won't pretend that I have the answer for how to save or rekindle the flame of Western Square Dancing. I hate to see it decline, and I am doing all I can do to keep it going. My wife and I love Western Square Dancing. Still there is obviously a problem with our favorite activity.

We need to adapt. We need to identify and make changes. None of us can honestly say that our program is as healthy as it once was. Yet the dance I just described is as healthy now as it was in its beginning. There is a lesson to be learned from the dance we just attended. I'm not sure I can quite put my finger on it, but there is a lesson there. These folks are on to something, and they don't seem to know exactly what it is either. Together we can figure this out. I invite everyone who reads this to think about it. Then email me or the good folks at the American Caller Association, or just talk about it amongst your own club. Whatever you do, don't miss this lesson, even if we don't yet quite understand it.

Don Feenerty

Heritage Dance Association (You can contact Don at Don@feenerty.com) **Heritage Dancing has a good ring to it?**

American Callers would like to thank Don Feenerty and the Heritage Dance Association for sharing this experience with the square dance world. The lesson to be learned from this is that people do not come to a square dance to become an expert Dancer, they just want to have fun. When we started trying to place people into levels or programs and classing them, we begin driving people away from the square dance activity. No longer would they be welcome to dance the whole dance. Some could dance tips 1-2-4-5, then others could dance tips 3 and 6 while a very few could dance the whole dance, but all are required to pay for the whole dance. After the sixth tip, the lesser dancers know they are there only to pay for someone else's enjoyment and many of them left forever.

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Changing the Way We Teach square dancing

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We recently received a letter from one of our members and he suggested the first step we should take to reducing the number of calls that would have to be learned to become a square dancer. We should look at the calls we spend time teaching and never use again. One was Back Track. Why teach it when you can call U-Turn Back with the same end results. For that matter U-Turn Back is a direction once you have explained the turning rule to turn in toward each other. Another one was Promenade and again once you have explained the rules and showed them the hand holds, a Promenade is not a family of calls but one call. Promenade 1/4, 1/2, 3/4 or wrong way becomes a direction. *A suggestion! do not ever say Prom 3/4, say Prom 1/2 way and a 1/4 more I don't know why but dancers understand it better that way.* Another one that was mention was Box Gnat. The members of American Callers voted to remove Box Gnat from the One Floor teaching list. We have a better way of getting the same results and that's Touch 1/4 and turn to face what you touched. This is a real easy way to get dancers started with the Roll concept. Many of the horse and buggy calls that we are still spend time teaching today but never call them after class should be dropped from everyone's teaching list. People do not come to square dancing to be experts, they come to have fun. We have for to long cluttered people minds with the name game. I guess for some callers its much better to say the name of a call than to give good directions so the dancers can win. We have played the names game of calls to the point we have run away folks that would still be dancing if we had just stuck with the fun and fellowship aspect that square dancing was most successful with. Square dancing is a local social activity, it is not dancing with the stars and will never be that. The success of a square dance club will depend on the local people that promote it and no national or international association is going to do it for you. It's up to the local caller and the local people to make it work.

Please look at the list of calls that we have to teach and see if you can find calls that can be dropped or put in the directional realm or any suggestions you have that will shorten teach time. Once we have all of your thoughts on the calls that we can leave to directional calling, we can go to the data base that was developed for American Callers.

Through the over four thousand E-mails addresses we can ask people in the dance activity all over the world (callers, dancers, callers associations, dancer association) to say what calls they want to make up a lesson plan for new dancers. One we can teach in 12 to 15 weeks. American Callers believes that everyone in square dancing should have a voice in what happens to square dancing, not just some committee that thinks they have the right to control square dancing and tell us what to do without asking anyone else what they would like. We have had over twenty five years of that and look where it has gotten us.

Go to our web page (americancallers.com) and print out a copy of the One Floor list or use the list that you teach from and send by E-mail or hard mail the changes that you believe should be made in order to bring about a 12 to 15 week entry program to square dancing. Once we have the information we can go through it and on the basis of the largest number of calls that are suggested to be dropped or move to a directional calls list, we can then send out a list for everyone to vote up or down.

I can hear some of you saying now this will never work but where will we be if we don't try. What are you doing to help stop the decline in our activity?

Letter to the Editor

I agree that we need to get lessons down to 12 to 15 weeks. I personally contacted the other group about it and did not get a positive response. They basically said that they were right and American Callers was wrong. This is one reason why next year I am going with American Callers. If we don't do something soon, western square dancing will be a thing of the past. I know when I teach my classes this year, I am going to go by your "One Floor Dance Program" and then put them on the road. I'll then work in other calls on the 3 tip workshop at my regular dances. I've been doing something similar for the last 5 years at my Blairsville, PA club and it works well.

Stormin' Norman Shaffor

Program Problems and Dancer Solutions

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First, everyone is trying to find a sure way to get people dancing. Let me tell you about the three-day lessons. They are worthless. We have clubs in our area using this technique and it does not work. The students take three 5-hour sessions of cramming and then start attending club dances. The problem arises when they get on the floor and haven't a clue as to what to do because they have not had sufficient time to practice in class what they were learning. They get frustrated and don't come back. And, they feel that they cannot dance and won't try it again. Instead of growing, these clubs are losing memberships.

Our club (The Travelers) dance twice a month, but we have lessons on the night we dance and the off-nights as well. The lessons are for one hour preceding the dance and for two hours on the off weeks. On Dance nights, the visiting callers call at least two student level tips starting with the third week of lessons. Students are encouraged to stay to dance those tips and the members socialize with them during the dances as well as at lessons. We are having a high percentage of students staying with the club after graduation because they have been made a part of the club, gotten to know the club members and visitors, and have fun. Remember, Fun is the center of this activity. The number of calls has nothing to do with retaining students after the first night. We tell the students that lessons generally run about 12 to 16 weeks, but we don't tell them how many moves there are until after the fourth or fifth lesson. Why scare them until they have had about twenty-some calls? Our last class started with 18 students, twelve graduated. Why? Because two moved, one had a disabling accident, one was military and reassigned overseas, but has vowed to return to lessons upon returning home. Two decided that square dancing wasn't what they wanted to do.

It isn't the number of calls or the breaking down of the calls that is having an effect on getting square dancers. It is the low interest put into recruiting and low level of encouragement of students that is having an impact. We have a club in Missouri that arranged with a supermarket to put flyers in grocery bags for a week preceding lessons. The lessons were performed in the store itself where patrons could see them happening. A list of students was put together from the patrons who decided they wanted to try it themselves. The club really grew with one set of lessons and is getting ready for the second set. We need to think outside of the established boxes and steal innovative/successful ideas from other organizations. We need to think along ideas that will draw attention to square dancing, and do a better public relations campaign with them. Our dancers wear their square dance attire one day a month while shopping, doing errands, etc., and it is not uncommon for them to be stopped by curious people who ask about square dancing and getting into it.

David Shafer

You can contact David at (shaferde@earthlink.net)

REMEMBERING

We received word that **Tony Oxendine's** mother passed away September 19, 2006. Our thoughts and prayers and our deepest sympathy to Tony and the Oxendine family.

We received word that **Walt Ishmael of Leesburg, FL** passed away September 14, 2006. Walt was a caller for forty years. He started calling in Michigan retired and moved to Leesburg Fl in 1990 where he remained in calling for some time. We extend deepest sympathy to the Ishmeal family. Walt will be missed.

We received a note from Reggie Kniphfer that **Jack Watts of Ohio** passed away on September 12, 2006. I remember fun times we all had at Fontana, NC. We were always ending the Swap Shop at Fontana when Jack Watts Chuck Myers and other callers came in for the Rebel Roundup that started the next week. Jack & Chuck would always get in early on Saturday and we would get to call with them. We shall miss this fine caller. We extend our sympathy to the Watts family.

In a phone call to John & Linda Saunders we learned that **Rod Blaylock of Albany, GA** had passed away. Rod & Ellen did so much for square dancing in Georgia. This is the caller that taught President Jimmy Carter and his wife to square dance. He was a long time caller and will be missed. We extend our sympathy to the Blaylock family.

Contra Page:

Grand Square Contra

I have no objection to the way "grand square" is done on the square dance floor. Three counts on a side, round "comers", home in time for a 4-count "swing", lots of hoopla along the way. Sometime during my square dance life this version of the original emerged as "fun on the floor". Fine. No complaint. It is a form of "folk process" and it happens in the dance world all the time. What I object to is the name. Calling it "grand square" is unfair to the original. The original is defined differently and deserves some respect. As for the upscale version, give it a name of its own. Call it "Grand Zip!". Seriously, that would work fine. The dancers would enjoy it. So, I expect, would the callers. Great fun! Go!! "Grand Zip!"

Meanwhile, over in the contra world, "grand square" has undergone its own metamorphosis. In contra form, grand square retains all of its original elements. They are, (1) four-count sides (2) sharp comers (3) uniform timing for all dancers, one step per count. It also retains the visual trace on the floor, of the square, underneath the feet of each dancer - and - all the necessary reversals of direction for each dancer.

Grand Square Contra. Crossover (alternate duple). Double Progression.

Actives facing down as couples, inactives facing up as couples.

- | | | |
|------|---------------|---|
| ** | Couples weave | In continuous motion, couples veer left & veer rt, then veer rt & veer left. |
| * | Rt & lft thru | Couples at the head and foot who find themselves facing out do a partner trade |
| * | Rt & lft back | in 4-counts and then wait 4-cnts. Active cpls are again facing inactive cpls in |
| **** | Heads face | normal fashion. "Heads face, grand square!". Active dancers face each other. |
| | Grand Square | Inactive dancers are momentarily looking at the shoulders of the actives. |

At this point the active couples, who normally would be facing down, have turned - "heads face" - and are facing their own partners. Inactives are still facing up, as per normal. All ready! Grand Square! Working in their own group of four, actives back up, away from their partners. Inactives, side by side with their partners, go forward into the opening left by the actives.

When the grand square starts, each dancer in the group of four traces his/her own 16 count square on the floor. Actives move: apart, turn & face down (4), walk down, turn & face across (4), walk together, turn & face down (4), back up .four (4). Then reverse and retrace, remembering that actives, when they turn to move up or down always face down towards the foot of the contra line. They will be walking forward sometimes and backwards sometimes, but *in both cases they will be facing down*. Inactives start by moving forward (4). Face and back away(4). Turn to face up and go backwards (4). Face across, come together (4). Then reverse the whole thing. Like the actives, the inactives will be walking forward at one time and backwards at another but *in both cases they will be facing up*. All of this reverses for everyone, when actives become inactives, etc.

Here is the "hard part". The size of the "square" that each dancer is working with is set by the distance between the couples as they complete the 2nd rt and left thru. They need to be 4 modest steps apart. That way, the inactives, in 4 counts - on "Grand Square" - can move from their own position to the position where the actives just were. As they move, actives and inactives trace out the same square on the floor.

Now, for the apologies. The whole dance is a set-up, of course. "Mia culpa!", Neither Grand Zip nor Grand Square Contra is the real deal. Grand Zip is the right setting, Grand Square Contra, mostly, is the right stuff. Both work well in their own way. I use "I'll Never Be In Love Again", Rawhide 147-A.

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Zero lines:

Pass Thru-- Boys Trade--Girls Turn Back
Centers Square Thru 4-- Ends Star Thru
And Partner Trade--All Slide Thru--Pass Thru
Girls Trade - Boys Turn Back -All Star Thru
All Turn Back and a Right & Left Grand

Zero Lines:

Pass Thru - Boys Trade- Girls Turn Back
All Pass Thru - Wheel & Deal-Double Pass
Thru- Leaders Trade- Right & Left Grand

Zero Lines:

Right & Left Thru & Roll a way 1/2 sashay
Centers Square Thru 3/4- Ends Pass Thru
Ends Fold- All Slide Thru - Touch 1/4
All 8 Circulate- Boys Turn Back
All Pass Thru - Right & Left Grand

Zero Lines:

Pass Thru - Ends Fold - Touch 1/4 & Roll
Pass the Ocean - Girls Trade -Girls Run
Couples Hinge -Boys Trade - Wheel & Deal
Square Thru - but on the 3rd Hand
Right & Left Grand

Zero Lines:

Square Thru 4 -Trade By - Touch 1/4& Roll
Square Thru 4 - Ends Fold - Eight Chain Three
Allemande Left

Static Square:

Heads 1/2 Square Thru - All 1/2 Square Thru
Girls Trade - Boys Turn Back - Centers Square
Thru 3/4- Ends Pass Thru - Ends Fold - All 1/2
Square Thru -Boys Trade - Girls Turn Back
Square Thru 4 - Right & Left Grand

Static Square:

Heads Lead Right - 1/2 Square Thru
Tag the Line Right – Bend the Line –Square Thru 3/4
Girls Fold –Star Thru – Girls Trade – Couple Circulate
Bend the Line – Slide Thru – Eight Chain Three
Allemande Left

Alamo Style:**1.**

Four Ladies Chain – Allemande Left
Alamo Style- Swing Thru – Right & Left Grand

2.

Allemande Left – Alamo Style- Swing Thru
Left Swing Thru – Allemande Left

3.

Four Ladies Chain – Allemande Left
Alamo Style – All Boys Run Right
All Girls Run Right – All Boys Run Left
Girls Run Right – Allemande Left

4.

Allemande Left – Alamo Style
Heads Walk & Dodge – Heads Cloverleaf
Sides Walk & Dodge – Swing Thru – Boys Run
Ferris Wheel & Spread – Star Thru
Square Thru 3/4 - Allemande Left

5.

Allemande Left –Alamo Style- Heads Scoot Back
Sides Scoot Back- All Boys Run Right
Allemande Left – Alamo Style – Swing Thru
Swing Thru again- Boys Run around
the same Girl twice – Allemande Left

Zero Box:

Touch 1/4 -Follow Your Neighbor- Trade the Wave
Scoot Back – Boys Run – Bend Line – Slide Thru
Right & Left Thru- Swing Thru - Swing Thru
Boys Run – Couple Circulate- Wheel & Deal -Veer Right
Ferris Wheel – Centers Pass Thru – Swing Thru
Boys Run – Bend Line – Right & Left Thru – Pass thru
Tag the Line – Face In – Star Thru – California Twirl
Pass Thru – Allemande Left

Since we will not have another newsletter before the holidays, we hope all of you have great holiday season.

