

DANCING SMOOTHNESS

N.E. SQUARE & ROUND DANCE CONVENTION PRESENTATION

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THIS IS DANCING

Square dancing should be dancing. It is not just "getting through" the figures. The movement calls for a shuffling step. When we walk, the heel hits first. When we dance, the ball of the foot is the first to touch the floor. It's also important to think about how we look. Stand tall. Be proud of how you look when you dance.

Square dancing is also something that we do with other people. It's not a "solo" activity. The interaction between us is sometimes called counter dancing. When we turn, we should counterbalance each other. A swing is not two people walking around each other. The swingers should become a single unit. Some have described the interaction as "giving weight." The same is true of hand or arm turns like Allemande Left and Swing Thru.

Another aspect of counter dancing is the way we move to make dancing easier for others in the square. Actions like Separate Around One require the "inactive" people to move also. In a run, the "runnee" moves into the space the "runner" came out of and on Ladies Chain, the men should move to their right and start the turn before the ladies get to them.

COURTESY

We hope that courtesy is not yet dead in square dancing. If you want to dance with someone, ask them. Don't stand in a square and yell or gesture to them. It's best if you go together as a couple to fill squares and it's not polite to pass a square that needs a couple so that you can dance with your friends in another square.

If you must save a place for a couple that is late getting onto the floor, at least fill that place by separating a couple to put one person in the position you are saving. If you don't want to dance this tip, leave the room if that's at all possible, so that you don't seem to be refusing to dance with the people who are in the square that needs a couple.

Sometimes it is necessary to leave a square - never because you don't want to dance with these people - but you might get sick. If possible, get someone from the sidelines to fill in for you and, certainly, explain to the folks you left as soon as possible. It's also nice to applaud the caller's performance and the pleasure of dancing in your square. THEN, thank those who shared this tip with you - including the partners.

Some dancers seem to enjoy gimmicks like extra spins and twirls. These are not usually a problem - unless you have new or fragile dancers or folks you don't know in your square. Be careful that your enthusiasm doesn't spoil the dancing for others. Sometimes your eagerness to help others leads you to yank, shove or yell at someone - **DON'T**. The best way to help is to dance your part of the action absolutely correctly with NO unusual styling.

TIMING

One aspect of square dancing is not under your control. Callers call it "Timing." The best timing happens when you know what the calls mean and the caller delivers the call JUST before you need to hear it. When the call comes too late, you have to stop for a beat or two between each action. That gets tiring. When the calls come too soon, you have a tendency to rush to keep up. The dancing then becomes scrambling. Sometimes, when the dance pattern is unusual, you need a little more lead time to figure out what you're supposed to do.

All square dance music is based on 8-beat phrases. Your action fits the music best when the caller lets you start each action on the first beat of one of those phrases. Because our actions are not all 8-steps long, you can't get the first beat every time. That would interfere with good timing. But there are a couple of calls where you SHOULD always have the first beat. These are Grand Square and an Alamo Balance.

ACCEPTED STYLES

There are a few "accepted standards" of styling in square dancing. Sometimes these are so often ignored that they may not seem so "accepted" but it's good to know what they are anyway. Most important is that grabbing and tight hand grips are never right.

In a Promenade, the men should have palms up and the women palms down. In arm turns, the forearm hold does not mean "grab the elbow."

The palm should be flat against the other person's forearm with the elbows bent to encourage counter dancing.

In Ocean Waves, here in New England, we use a forearm hold. The CALLERLAB recommended style for Waves is hands up at (her) shoulder height, palm to palm. In Canada everyone holds hands-up in Waves (including Swing Thru and Spin The Top.)

The recommended style for Stars is the "Palm Star" with all elbows bent to touch hands with the fingers pointing up. The exception is a Thar when everyone holds the wrist of the person in front of them (called the "Pack Saddle" hold.)

CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS

There are a few calls in square dancing that have become sloppy in execution. Most often the action of the men causes the women to do something uncomfortable. They've done this so much that they often don't even notice.

From the stage, every time I call Star Thru, I see most of the women duck to avoid getting a man's elbow in the face. Guys, keep the elbow high - and, if she's too tall, don't insist on keeping the hands joined.

Another of those troublesome calls is Ferris Wheel. The men usually head directly at each other dragging the women behind them. When Don Beck created this call he described it by saying the In-facing couples move straight ahead until they have formed a Two-Faced line in the center. Then they do a Wheel and Deal.

A similar problem occurs in Recycle which was intended to be a Hinge, Fold and Follow action. Often, these days, it seems to be "women reach across and get dragged by the men around the corner." Small wonder that so many women find this an uncomfortable call.

ACCURACY

My final point is to encourage accuracy in your dancing. This is particularly important in the Basic actions like Runs, Trades and Circulates. A large share of dancing errors occur with these fundamental actions - even among dancers in the Advanced programs.

In every line, touch hands (and that includes Ocean Waves.)

On the call Run, only the runner changes facing direction. The "runnee" just moves sideways into the vacated spot.

In Trades, both people turn around - and change places.

In any Circulate, the people facing in walk straight ahead with no turn. Those facing out will always make a turn to face in.

Three-quarter turns are tough. Practice being very precise. Try turning half and a quarter more. Another technique is to count walls - as long as the hall isn't circular. Three good sized steps will usually work, too. Find something that works for you and then try to be accurate every time.

One-quarter turns are tough too. Many people turn too far on Hinges. Try taking just one small step. It's better to turn too little than too much for one-quarter turns.

DANCE WITH PRIDE.

Square dancing is a wonderful recreation. At it's best it provides both physical and mental exercise and all in the company of some of the nicest people you will ever meet. Please do your part to make it the best it can be.