HOW TO LOOK GOOD WHEN YOU ARE DANCING

by Ed Foote

Many people watch you while you dance: others in the set, dancers and visitors on the sidelines, and the caller. Do you impress them with good styling and appearance? We all want to look good to others when we dance — here is how to do it.

1. GOOD DANCE HABITS

A. Keep your head raised. Do not look at the floor. In addition to giving you a good appearance, it also lets you see what is going on in the entire set, and this will result in fewer breakdowns. Also, stand erect — do not slouch.

B. Take hands immediately after every call. This allows everyone in the square to be aware of the formation, and aids in proper execution of the next call, thereby averting a possible breakdown of the set.

C. Eliminate rough dancing. Such techniques as hip-bumping, jumping, extra swinging and twirling, kicking, etc., are seen as great fun by some dancers. They tend to do these actions when other dancers are not doing them, often disrupting the timing of the dancers who wish to dance smoothly. **Rule:** All eight dancers should work together as a group, using the same styling as the majority of the square.

D. Dance in time to the music. Some people, concerned about doing a figure correctly, have a tendency to rush through the steps. If you do your part of a call too quickly, others may not see their position and cause your set to break down. It is better to relax and move to the beat of the music. **Rule:** Dance 2-4 beats behind the caller.

E. Counterdance. This means moving your body so the transition from one call to another is made smoothly. It also means adjusting slightly to allow others room to do a call. (Example: heads move forward and back when the sides are told to Promenade Halfway.) Think of flowing smoothly through the calls.

2. STYLING AND DRESS

A. GIRLS: Consider a left-face turn back into a promenade. On a Right and Left Grand, immediately after pulling by the fourth man with the left hand — do a looping U-Turn Back to your left. Time this so you finish just as your partner is stepping up beside you to Promenade. It looks sharp and impressive.

B. GIRLS: Use skirt work. It really makes you look distinctive.

(1) **How to hold skirt:** Let your free hand hang at the side of your skirt. Grasp your skirt where your hand is, bend your elbow, lift your hand slightly above your waist, roll your hand backward 90° so that your palm is facing up with your skirt on top of your palm (you should not be able to see your hand).

(2) **When to use skirt work:**

a. **On Weave the Ring.** It looks beautiful and is outstanding. Do the skirt work very slowly. Alternately raise and lower the skirt on the side nearest the man you are passing. Do not swish the skirt swiftly from side-to-side — skirt work should be elegant.

b. **On Promenade.** Consider only holding the man's right hand with your left hand and using your right hand to raise your skirt. It looks great.

c. **If you are the end of a line.** Use skirt work with your free hand when the caller says "up to the middle and back."

d. **On Right and Left Thru and Ladies Chain.** On the pull by, use left skirt work; on the Courtesy Turn, use right skirt work.

e. **On selected calls, when you are on the outside of the set.** For example: Circulate, Load the Boat, Allemande Thar and Wrong-way Thar, Pass Thru, Wheel and Deal.

f. **On Teacup Chain.** Use skirt work with your free hand.

C. GIRLS: Wear a full or semi-full petticoat. It gives your dress a crisper look than a limp one would, and presents an overall better appearance.

D. BOYS: Remove western hat while dancing. Wearing a western hat indoors is improper etiquette, and conveys the old-fashioned image of square dancing that modern western dancing is trying to eliminate.

3. POOR DANCE HABITS

A. Not taking hands immediately after every call.

B. Rushing through a Grand Square, using only 12-14 beats for each half of the call instead of 16 beats. Thus, dancers finish in 26-28 beats when they should not finish until the 32nd beat. If dancers have time to Swing their partner halfway through or at the end of the call, then the call is not being danced in time to the music. **Solution:** Allow 4 beats for each 4 steps of the Grand Square.

C. Ignoring the music. Dancers will lose the rhythm by:

(1) Hip-bumping or high-kicking on a Right and Left Grand.

(2) Side-jumping or hopping on a Grand Square.

(3) Walking the calls rather than dancing them. The difference between walking and dancing: Walking — the heel of your foot touches the ground first. Dancing — the front of your foot touches the ground first. (Glide on the balls of your feet.)

D. Being sloppy on position. Instead of occupying a position firmly, dancers are hesitant and either over-turn or under-turn the move.

E. Moving up to the middle and back (from facing lines) when the caller has not said to do so. The fact that the caller says to "make a line" or "you have lines," does not mean that dancers should move up and back. This throws the timing off for everyone in the set, because the caller has usually timed the next command to flow smoothly from the previous command. Dancers should only move "up and back" if this is called by the caller. **Rule:** Do exactly what the caller says; do not add anything or leave anything out.

F. Centers of facing lines slapping hands. When the caller says "up to the middle and back," hands should always be joined with adjacent dancers to maintain formation awareness. If the centers patticake hands, they probably won't hold hands with the adjacent center on other calls either.

G. Doing an improper Do Sa Do by swinging the person in front instead of going back-to-back with them. This action demonstrates a disregard of, and lack of concern for, the correct definition of the call. Also, most people who do a "swinging Do Sa Do" will automatically form a wave, but this is not the correct ending position—the correct ending position is two people facing. So if people automatically form a wave, they could be out of position for the next call, thus causing the set to break down.