

# **Styling**

*Robert (Bob) L. Riggs*

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**Presenters:** Susan Morris moderator and Bob Riggs, Panelists

**Description:** Dancing is entertaining for us the dancer when we can execute the called choreography smoothly and elegantly in a way that makes us look and feel good. This implies that the square can execute each figure as a team. Many performance teams have taken this one step further, by developing consistent style in the execution of each call and including flourishes and flair to enhance the show.

Styling starts with having a proper body posture ... executing a dance walk instead of just walking ... taking one step for each beat of the music ... executing the calls with proper timing ... and the physical fitness needed to move through the figures with grace and elegance.

Next, dancing with style requires that we dance together because square dancing is a team activity. In all cases we must use "counter dancing" to smooth the dance and flow between the dancers involve in each figure. Counter dancing is the appropriate give and take between dancers such as when executing an arm turn, if the connection is loose the turn will be slow and uneven unless a good connection is established between the dancers. Or as in a right & left through, the men will move slightly left to make room for the right pull by, after the dancers pass by the right the men typically lag slightly back and move slightly right with their left hand across their bodies to take the left hand of the lady who moves slightly ahead. The pair then initiates a wheeling motion, with the pivot point between the dancers. The men are moving back while the ladies are moving forward through the courtesy turn, note tension between the dancers makes this turn smooth and flowing. Without the tension the dancers will be moving independently resulting in uneven flow of the turn.

The styling documented in the Callerlab definitions form the basis of what should be taught and understood by our dancing community. This includes normal dance relationships, body flow and handholds. Our dancers will move smoothly through the dance patterns. Some of our dancers may desire to further style their dance by uniform use of hand positions, hand movements and shape/actions of the arms. This includes flourishes like twirls, extra turns and skirt work and other dancer to dancer connections like swings and formation connections. Performance teams will develop these actions even further to create a pleasing and entertaining show for audiences.

In the early days of dancing there were competitions that focused on the timing and styling of the dance, since the choreography was mostly set patterns. Today, some of the competition dancing, such as the Northwest Teen competition show how teams dance complex contemporary material with style. It is thought that the best dancers are/were considered those that could dance the called pattern to the music with the most uniform and appropriate style.

## **Figure styling**

Starting from the first call of our dance programs we can add styling beyond the basic defined in the definitions. Below are a few suggestions that will enhance the basic styling.

#1. Circle left/right ... the dancers can execute it with a vine that causes the skirts to flair

#2. Forward/Back ... can be executed from a circle with the knees and hands rising on the 4th beat of the forward. Remember that forward/back timing is 4 for facing lines that are close and 8 for all other formations

#3. DoSaDo ... can be executed with the men's hands behind their back and ladies hands out to the side or with their skirt, further it can be done with each dancer rotating individually around each other 2 or 3 rotations

#4. Swings ... A swing should be at least 4 counts, or once around. In performances at least 8 counts is preferred. Swings of 8, 12 and 16 are found in contra dancing. The ballroom swing is preferred when dancers are of the opposite gender. The two hand swing is preferred when the dancers are of the same gender. A twirl

out of a swing is only used when the man will continue to dance with the lady he just swung. If the next call after a swing is not with the partner a twirl should not be executed.

#5d. Star Promenade ... the center of the star should be a palm star because all dancers are facing the same direction, the center dancers should have their outside arm around the waist of the outside dancer who has their inside hand on the shoulder of their partner. If possible the arms should be over the arm of the inside dancer with the hand on the inside dancer's shoulder. If the outside dancer is a lady they should hold their skirt or hold out their hand gracefully.

#8b. Weave the Ring ... execute the weave the ring action with men's hands behind back, ladies hands on both skirts held out to the side ... extra flair would be to do a full spin when you meet your partner 1/2 way through the weave the ring, done correctly it doesn't require more beats of music to execute.

#23. Grand Square ... skirt out and hands behind ... 4 counts on each side of the grand square ... sometimes the dancers will execute as 1, 2, 3 & 4, where the dancer takes weight on count 3, on the & count and on the 4th count (as in a Cha Cha).

#28. Square Thru ... execute a square through on the 3rd hand men bring the right hand over as they turn left face 3/4 to give right to opposite and complete call with left to original partner.

## Flourishes

1. Hands - we acknowledge the regional differences in hand holds so will only stress that for optimum style all dancers in the square must use the same hand styling. When we started dancing, Colorado was teaching and using the styling that had grown from the Lloyd Shaw era of dancing. This meant that most hand holds were what is referred to as hands up, i.e. dancers passing used hands up, dancers facing opposite directions used hands up, i.e. palm to palm (no interlocked thumbs), stars were palm stars when moving forward, pack saddle stars when backing up, etc. In the late 70's and 80's when the definitions were published most of our Colorado callers that taught classes changed to the published styling and hand holds. This meant we changed more than 40 years of practice in our region. We knew that we were a regional island in the activity and expected that others would also change toward the newly defined standard. Today, though we respect the choices of other regions, we see that the activity has further locked into the hand holds and positional styling of their region which makes it difficult for our traveling dancers to smoothly flow through our contemporary choreography. The following is described in the style of our region.

.. For a normal promenade ... the men should always present both hands palm up, while the ladies presents both hands palm down during a promenade. Further, to add a little style to the promenade the men should raise the left elbow to shoulder height and the right hand dancer should raise their right elbow to midway between their waist and shoulder height.

.. For a skirt skaters promenade ... the men should always present left hand palm up and their right hand in the small of the lady's back. The ladies present the left hand palm down on top of the men's left hand and holds the right hand to the side, with or without their skirt. If the hand is not holding a skirt their right hand is held palm down with fingers shaped as if they just let go of a handkerchief. The men should raise their left elbow to shoulder height.

.. Traditionally, when in a normal couple position the men's hands are palm up while the ladies have hands facing down. In some settings, i.e. same sex couples the hand position for all dancers may be left hand palm down, right hand palm up.

2. Lines ... in a line of 4 the entire line should have hands joined with only the ends having a free hand
3. Twirls ... should always be suggested by the men and either accepted or reject by the ladies. Ladies can indicate that they don't want to twirl by taking their twirling hand out of the man's hands.
  - .. Twirl to home at the end of a promenade: this action for a couple starting on count 3&4 of a measure with a downward/upward motion of the hands signify the twirl would follow on counts 1-4 of the following measure, ending at home in normal couple position.
  - .. Twirl after a swing to a promenade ... this twirl should be initiated on counts 3&4 of a measure and be completed in the promenade on counts 1-4 of the next measure.

- .. When executing a Right & Left Grand ... twirl the lady right face on 1st and 3rd hands, it is not recommended that a twirl be included on the 2nd or 4th hand.
- .. when meeting partner after Right & Left Grand or Weave the Ring, twirl the lady right face into the promenade position. For extra flair both dancers can join right hands and turn under the joined hands, man turning left face/lady turning right face into promenade position in 4 counts (a “dishrag” turn).
- 4. Skirt Work (when the ladies are wearing full skirts, the styling can be to flip the skirt (in a figure 8 motion) during the execution of certain figures.
  - .. Ladies chain or ladies star ... the ladies may bring their right hand forward, up, back, down, up and forward into the middle with their skirt in hand to form the star
  - .. Star Promenade ... the ladies may hold their skirt with their outside hand during the promenade

Styling is enabled by clear and precise **delivery** of the choreography by the caller

- Can you say that you deliver choreography for which the dancers cannot fail while being thoroughly entertained?
  - Have you completed call analysis for every call you use and intuitively understand how to use it? For example do you know your options for the next call after a heads square through four? I count 21 calls that could be executed with proper body flow and hand availability. Would you know which ones though legal, are difficult and thus would not be danced with proper styling and smoothness?
  - Do you have modules that use a variety of next calls from any formation?
- Do you understand the natural body flow of the dance relative to call delivery?
  - Do you know that though Flutter Wheel is legal the body flow works only if the call is delivered early enough for the right hand dancer of both couples to flow into the right forearm turn of the call?
  - Do you understand why four ladies chain followed by circle left works, but circle right is difficult?
- Do you truly know the calls you are delivering? What options you have after the current call? For example: heads square through, right & left through, veer left, etc. However, even these calls are not danced smoothly unless delivered with proper timing and danced with proper understanding of each call and the transitions between.
- Do you dance smoothly?
- Do you execute each call with the appropriate timing?
- Are you modeling the style you want your dancers to use?

As the director of several performance square dance teams over the last 40 years we have assisted in the development of styling to make each performance a beautiful and fun form of entertainment.