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An Overview of Mental Image Choreography

Mental Image choreography refers to a method of choreographic management. The degree of spontaneity that it affords you as a caller in creating sequences as you go along, is somewhere between modular calling and sight calling. Unlike sight calling, however, you do not have to memorize who started with whom, nor do you have to locate and manipulate these moving targets, in a dancing square, to resolve.

Unlike modules, you do not have to memorize groupings of calls, and be restricted to calling sequences committed to memory. Here is an overview of one mental image technique. First, let's dispel the myth that you must follow eight dancers in your mind and then sight call them back to partners and corners (or even the four dancers a sight caller follows). Although being able to do this would accomplish what we want, it would be terribly difficult, if not impossible for most of us.

Just like a sight caller or a module caller, you must know what formation the square is in at all times, e.g. do we have lines, waves, etc. and you must know the arrangement of the formation, i.e. are couples normal, half sashayed, or same sex, etc.

In addition, you must follow the location of one *and only one* key dancer through the changing formations. The number one man is frequently chosen as the key dancer, but any of the eight dancers will do. Following the position of this key dancer does not usually add an additional burden, but actually makes following the formation/arrangement easier.

Unfortunately, as you must realize, just following an active dancer is not enough to allow you to resolve, but here's where the mental image technique really begins. As long as you do not exchange partners or flip flop the square, when you move the active dancer to where (s)he would be in a zero box (i.e. have heads Square Thru [assuming the active dancer is a head]), then all seven of the other dancers will also be ready to do an Allemande Left.

The key term above is "do not exchange partners." About 2/3s of the calls we commonly use do not exchange partners. (These are called O-type calls or Os. Ones that do are called X-type calls or Xs.) The clue is to know which ones do, and each time you use one, call another one (any other one) to cancel its effect. In addition, you must be aware that when calling Xs, you must call one and then cancel it in the same location in the square, or you must cancel it in a different location in the square plus be aware of how that moves the spot to which you must dance the active dancer before you can call an Allemande Left.

This may sound complicated, but when learning it step by step (as taught in Don Beck's book, *Out of Sight*), it is quite logical, and when you have learned many steps, you can generalize them so that there are really very few rules to remember.

As well as being academically very interesting, being able to use Mental Image is a powerful tool in a caller's arsenal. Even a sight caller will appreciate being able to ad-lib his singing call figures when memorized corners change every sequence. Think of what you can do in a guest spot when everyone comes in club costume and they all look alike for a tip or two, until you learn faces. There are many other ways that mental image calling can help also; use technical zeros with confidence; know instantly if a square is in sequence or out; ad-lib six couple choreography; etc. Learning mental image calling is well worth the time it takes.