

The Call Sheet

Professional Journal of the Gay Callers Association

September 2007

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"My father always said, the bigger the
belt buckle, the smaller the ..."
-- Deborah Carroll-Jones, on dress codes.

"Perception of level by dancers differs wildly
from perception of level by callers."
-- Rob French

The Call Sheet is the official publication of the Gay Callers Association.

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The **Gay Callers Association** is open to anyone who calls and/or teaches for GLBT square dance clubs.

No assumptions should be made about the sexual orientation of any contributor to this publication.

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Further information about the GCA can be found at our web site: <http://www.gaycallers.org>

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All articles are the opinion of the authors and in no way reflect any official position of the GCA.

Editorial: An Uplifting Story

Allan Hurst – allanhurst@gmail.com

The editorial I'd originally written for this space will appear in a future issue instead.

I don't always look at submitted articles closely until I'm ready to start preparing a new issue for publication.

I found one of the new articles so emotionally powerful that I chose it to lead off this issue, right after *Prez Sez*.

Ett McAtee authored, compiled, and edited the article, which describes Abe Feldman's experience at GCA Caller School.

“So? What's so powerful about *that?*” you may be thinking.

If you've ever danced with him, you probably already know that Abe is one of the sweetest men and most patient challenge dancers you'll meet on any dance floor.

That's not why I think this is amazing.

That's not why I was so astonished to learn that Abe had attended GCA Caller School.

Here's why I was totally blown away by this article:

Abe is legally blind.

Please keep Abe's story in mind the next time a dancer is thinking of attending GCA Caller School, and asks you just how supportive an environment it is.

This is the kind of story that makes me intensely proud to be a member of the GCA.

After reading the story, hopefully you'll feel that way, too.

In this issue ...

This issue may seem a bit shorter than previous issues. That's because I've chosen to present several medium-length technical articles rather than many smaller articles:

- GCA President **John Oldfield** talks about **How to Make a Class Feel Like a Dance**.
- **Ett McAtee** documented the incredibly moving experience of **Abe Feldman Goes to GCA Caller School**.
- An excerpt from **Clark Baker's** fascinating article on **Square Games** (along with a pointer to the full length version).
- **Nick Martellaci** provides us with a highly useful tutorial on writing and managing choreography, entitled **Building Critical Mass**.
- The reaction to **John Oldfield's** article in the last issue on proper use of the call "...and Roll" was highly positive. This month, John was gracious enough to present an analysis of one of his favorite calls, "**Chain Reaction**".

Continuing our ongoing feature, "How Callers 'Suss Out' A Floor," we look at two very well known callers:

- One of the most vivacious callers in the business - **Deborah Carroll-Jones** - made time to write an article just for *The Call Sheet* on **How To Suss Out A Floor**.
- In **How DeSisto Does It**, we find out from **Rich Reel** how Mike DeSisto manages dance floors in real time with such apparent ease and smoothness of performance.

One other piece of trivia about this issue...it marks one full year since the debut of the Call Sheet's professional journal format. Sure doesn't seem like it's been a whole year...



“Prez Sez”: Make Every Class Feel Like A Dance

John Oldfield - john@oldfield.com

One of the ways that we, as callers, are most influential in the square dance world is as teachers. The teaching role is varied: from conversations between tips answering questions to the full time role – weekly classes teaching a level.

Teaching is like calling a dance on many levels. Both require that you study and prepare. Long before you do either you will spend a great deal of time becoming fluent in the levels.

What does “fluent” mean in this context? You need to know which calls are in which levels. From the highest level you call down to Basic, you must know what calls are in each level and have a very clear perception of what the level is about.

Basic is the introductory level. Basic starts with calls that keep people in circles for a while and then introduces them to the world of lines, waves and columns. People tend to be in standard positions. People get confused if put into non-standard positions.

Mainstream expands the number of calls and introduces a call that results in a left-handed wave (GASP!) and a multi-part call – 4 parts in all! People still tend to be in standard positions.

Plus continues along the same lines, but adds Z’s, tidal waves, diamonds, ¼ tags and ¾ tags and, of course, the call with the greatest number of parts (excepting challenge calls that include the *Interrupt* concept which can extend the length of a call from beats to decades).

Advanced is totally different from the first three levels.

The Advanced level talks about formation awareness and position independent of those around you. The hourglass formation and the concept of “if you are this, you do that” i.e., “zig zag”, “clover and...” come into play. Advanced requires you to look at where you are and determine your part – always definitional, but not always obvious.

Challenge introduces invisible people (who, by the way, do not make mistakes but are sometimes maimed or killed in action).

Class Preparation

Before you get up in front of your class you will need to decide upon a teaching order. With this teaching order you will lay the foundation of getting from Point A, the beginning of the level, to Point B, the end of the level. You need to review your teaching order for consistency. (For example, check that you are not teaching *Swing Thru* before introducing *Ocean Waves*.)

[Editor’s Note: Clark Baker made the following comments regarding teaching orders: “CALLERLAB will soon be publishing a paper on teaching order design, and a new teaching order for Mainstream. They will need feedback and comments as people try it over the next year. Look for it on the CALLERLAB website in the very near future.”]

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[**Make Every Class Feel Like A Dance**, continued]

Once the teaching order is set, decide how you will teach each of the calls. This goes beyond knowing the definition, starting formation, ending formation, count. You also need to figure out several ways of explaining each call.

So now you are ready to step up to the mic and teach, right? Not *quite* yet.

Now you need to *plan each class as if you were planning a dance*. You need to decide on the order in which you will teach the calls for that evening.

Plan out your tips.

Start with a moderate tempo. Work on combining the calls as you teach them. Work the new calls into your choreography, and don't forget to reward.

Do a lively singing call at least a couple of times each class. This helps your students take a break while enjoying the calls you have been working on.

Spend breaks interacting with your students. *You are the teacher* (expert). Your students will ask you simple questions and complex questions – none beyond your ability. Talk to them one on one or in a group. They are *your* students and will learn to dance because of *your* skill.

Work your class up to a peak toward the end of the session and finish off with smooth choreography and a memorable singing call. If you can get them exiting the hall humming your singing call, you did a great job!

Why do I think this is important? I believe that if you make people happy they will come back. If you do not, they will not come back. It takes effort to attend a weekly class for eight to nine months – even if you like the subject matter.

Best,

John!



Abe Feldman at GCA Caller School

Ett McAtee – justetthon@comcast.net

Photos courtesy of Ett McAtee

Editor's Note: *This isn't a typical caller school article. The first time I met Abe at an IAGSDC Convention was many years ago, just after he'd rescued me in a tough C1 tip. At that time, he told me that he was legally blind. As my mother would say, please close your mouth, you'll let the flies in. And keep reading. Definitely, keep reading. Thanks, Ett!*

Abe Feldman started dancing with DC Lambda Squares many years ago. I've known Abe personally since 1995, when I first met him at the Chesapeake Squares "Pass the Ocean, HON!" fly-in. He appeared to be a very good dancer and I've had the pleasure of dancing with and calling for his squares ever since.

This past year, Abe decided to go to GCA Caller School in Denver. This is an account of the experience, with input from the coaches and Abe himself.



The school was coached by Anne Uebelacker, John Marshall, and Deborah Carroll-Jones. The Teaching Assistants were Bill Eyler, Barry Clasper, and myself. When I heard Abe was taking the Callers School, I was delighted (and a little anxious) to have the opportunity to follow his progress.

Abe: I've been dancing for more than a decade, and have gotten through C2, so calling seemed like the next step. I took a long time to decide to attend Caller School, making sure I was doing it for the right reasons (e.g., not just wanting to be on stage).

I'm partially sighted, so I was concerned about how I would handle the visual aspect of calling.

My main preparation prior to attending the school was being a "human checker" at previous Caller Schools and local caller workshops. This gave me a clue about "square dance theory" and what I might be expected to do. I also talked to callers about the school and their calling philosophies. A friend suggested I should prepare a singing call, but I didn't do that. *This would have been a good idea.*

Caller School was difficult, but it was also a great experience.

There were 10 students in the Beginner class. Most of us had never picked up a mic. Some of us had called for a while.

We were told that ideally, we would have prepared sequences and had done some sight calling exercises.

[continued next page]

[Abe Feldman at GCA Caller School, continued]

My preparation paid off, since I was able to get through the exercises better than I thought I would.

The hardest part was making myself watch the dancers. At one point I had to ask the dancers to move closer to the front of the room so that I could see everyone, and even then it was a challenge. Thank God for the colored smocks. I got through it with a combination of visualizing and good guesses.

We only had a half day with Deborah Carroll-Jones, but it was useful. We got the whole package: discussion of the entertainment side of calling (showmanship) and...more exercises.

Deborah: Abe was intensely focused and involved, a terrific sport, and aware of (yet *not* limited by) his visual challenge. He is a sweetheart. I wish there were more like him.

Abe: The third day with John Marshall was also a mixture of talk and exercises. During the school we were given assignments to come up with sequences during meal breaks. Anyone going to the hotel bar or a nearby restaurant would find groups of us moving checkers around and comparing notes.

John Marshall: I don't know what it was like for Abe, because when the average person attends a caller's school for the first time they usually bring with them a certain expectation that they are, or are going to be, a caller. That wasn't the case with Abe Feldman; he attended the school purely to find out what this calling thing was all about and if it was for him.



In spite of his limited vision, Abe acquitted himself quite, quite well! As you might imagine, it's truly a harrowing experience to get up in front of other students and coaches and try to call for the first time. He handled the challenge with great aplomb. I was pleased to hear from Abe that he intends to pursue learning to call.

Please allow me to encourage all who read this to congratulate Abe and all of the other students who attended the GCA Caller School held prior to the IAGSDC convention in Denver. They all worked hard and deserve your support. I'm sure...but when it comes to the choreography, I think Abe must be using "The Force." Wow!

Abe: I used my one-on-one session with John to just process the whole experience and bounce ideas off him as to what I got out of the school and what my next steps might be.

The vocal workshop at the school was a nice surprise. The voice teacher had a great way of coaxing people to sing who hadn't done much singing. I hadn't sung in public in years, so it

[continued next page]

[Abe Feldman at GCA Caller School, continued]

was nerve wracking. I borrowed a singing call from a friend, but I would have been more comfortable with something I know better.

Also, we got a lot of good information about square dance music. All the teachers talked about it, and Barry Clasper did a session on the subject.

The only thing I might want to add to future schools would be some time with a turntable to sample records in the "swap boxes".

Barry Clasper: I didn't get a lot of time with the beginner class, but I was, of course, mightily impressed just by the fact that he tried it at all, given his vision challenges. From the conversations I had with him, he seemed to have a pretty good handle on what options were available to him as far as choreo strategies and was prepared to do the work to master the ones that might work best for him.



We all know the pressures and anxieties that accompany anyone's first forays into calling, and I can only imagine how much those are magnified for someone in Abe's situation. I thought he handled that all with great aplomb. I have to admit, I admire the guy a lot.

Anne Uebelacker: Abe has a presence about him that calms people down and he's very comfortable to be around. If he continues hard work, he has the makings of a very good caller. Limitations are only in your own head and he had no idea that he had any. I wish him well and look forward to watching him grow as a caller, and a person.

Bill Eyster: Having known Abe for a number of years as an enthusiastic dancer, I was both surprised and pleased to see him at the Denver caller school this year.

Conquering some of my own inner demons about working with a vision-impaired person, I saw that Abe was enthusiastic about participating in his three days of school. Abe has a super ability to just fit in, and neither asked for nor received any special compensation for limited sight.

Although I did ask him at one point, I was never clear on what he actually could and could not see. He didn't stumble much when having to read written choreography; certainly no more than any other participant in the class.

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[Abe Feldman at GCA Caller School, continued]

I'm glad we got to work together at this school. Although Abe may not pursue calling as an avocation or hobby, it was great to have him put himself out there. All of the students in the beginner's class did great for first timers!

Ett McAtee: Of course, the crown jewel of the Caller's School is the GCA Graduation Dance.

Abe: I was nervous about calling at the Graduation Dance on Thursday morning. I didn't have a singing call prepared, and I wasn't going to try doing one without practice, so I used the sequences I had written throughout the school.

I was paired with Lee Griffiths, one of my classmates, for a patter tip. This was perfect, since it gave me a moment to look at my next sequence while Lee was calling.

Again, watching the dancers was the biggest challenge. I knew my sequences worked, but every time I called Allemande Left and I heard that hand clap, I felt a great sense of relief.

Everything I learned that week came together in those ten minutes.

Overall, I got a lot out of Caller School. I was taught a new skill by some of those who are best at it. I haven't called since the school, but I'm taking a local workshop soon. Getting myself on stage is just one more part of the process.

(Ett notes: "Abe tells me that he will be attending the 2008 Caller's School in Cleveland with Anne Uebelacker and Sandra Bryant coaching. Kudos, Abe!")

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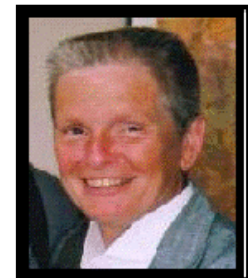




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Square Games [Excerpt]

Clark Baker – cmbaker@tiac.net

Assume that you know how to square dance. Not only that, but that you are good at it. Perhaps you have already learned some Advanced and Challenge dancing.

Perhaps you are even a little bored at the current dance, weekend, festival, or convention.

Or perhaps you just want a slight change to make things interesting.

What you need is a *square game* – something you or your square can do while the caller is calling to the rest of the folks.

My ground rules for this type of dancer-led fooling around include:

- Obtain the cooperation of your square(s)
- Do it in the back of the hall
- Don't bother others
- Don't disrupt the calling
- Don't come across as being better than everyone else
- Don't seem like you are having way more fun than everyone else

My main criterion for inclusion in the following list is that the particular square game can be danced in real-time while the caller is calling to the rest of the floor. This means that it must work with his choreography and timing.

Dance with phantoms

If you don't have enough dancers for a full square, form a partial square (1 to 7 dancers works) and try to dance the choreography. Sometimes it helps to identify your counterpart in another square so you can double check in the cases where you are uncertain or get lost. This especially helps with only one or two dancers in your square.

As the square fills up, dancing with 6 or 7 dancers should feel more like a full square, and your focus should be more internal to the square than external checking off a counterpart.

Skills you will need to develop include knowing what the overall formation is (e.g. Right-Hand Ocean Waves, Lines Facing, etc.) and your position in it (e.g. Lead Center in Right Hand Waves, #3 in a column).

Usually it is not necessary to track the exact sex arrangement, but experienced phantom dancers can do a reasonable job on that. Another skill is dancing so that the square is always the correct size and shape with respect to the the other real dancers. This will allow you to interact with the real dancers when you are supposed to. With only 2 or 3 real dancers in the square, it is important to know when they are adjacent to you, etc.

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[Square Games, continued]

In squaring up, you have a decision to make with respect to diagonal opposites. With two dancers, you could both decide to be head men (i.e. opposite each other). This allows you to check each decision off the other dancer. Another alternative would be to be one head man and one side man. This would be harder, but you would always know where the men are, and hence where the women are.

Dance "no hands"

Unless you have tried it, dancing without using hands is a lot harder than you might expect. You lose many of the kinesthetic clues that may help you start a call or allow you to realize that you are heading in the wrong direction.

When dancing without hands, it can help if you try to make connections with the other dancers using eye contact.

I find it better to have the whole square decide to dance without hands instead of just one or two dancers. That said, my daughter shows her displeasure with me by refusing to use hands only with me.

Mirror Image square

The Mirror concept is on the C3B list. However, the basic idea of interchanging left and right occurs at Mainstream with Left Square Thru and Reverse Flutter Wheel.

The idea of dancing mirror image is to have the whole square dance with all the right actions interchanged with left actions. When you square up, the boy normally has the girl to his right, so a mirror-image squared set will have everyone sashayed from normal. Boys are still boys. On a Star Thru, the girl still goes under. However, boys use their left hand and girls their right hand.

Some think of this as the same kind of switch one must take when driving in England. Others are helped by thinking that they dance so as to make the dancing look "right" in a mirror. However you think about it, it takes some practice and it is a lot harder than Arky.

If you give this a try, be sure to walk some calls first. I recommend Allemande Left, Right And Left Grand, Promenade Home, Star Thru, Double Pass Thru, Track 2, Swing Thru, Wheel And Deal (one-faced line) and then some that don't matter like Boys Run, Ferris Wheel.

I find it is useful and important to try hard to get every little bit correct. Be sure to make all Pass Thrus left shoulder. The same goes for all Partner Trades (including the ends of a Trade By). Tapping your left shoulder, using eye contact, and making slightly wide adjustments can help. Also, be careful that all handholds are done properly. Be sure to dance the singing call. Practice a Swing first. Good luck.

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[Square Games, continued]

Czech Line Dancing

This was invented by Milan Vancura who showed it to us at iPAC 2005. He describes it as follows...

This game is not in a square. Make a line facing caller at the bottom of the hall, doesn't matter about gender or amount of people. Everyone imagines his own phantom square in which he/she acts as a man #3 (the head man who is watching caller in a normal square). As the tip starts the whole line is doing the same action, it looks like dancing N-some. **[Editor's Note: read the complete version of the article online, and see the section entitled "Have 1 or more dancers dance Twosome" for the explanation of "N-some".]** You can also make a column instead of line and try to act as a girl #4 (for example). It depends on agreement of people in a line.

It is a good exercise to dance with Phantoms and also an interesting feeling to see the line working "as one man". You can also play it when you have 5 people who can't establish the square.

The complete article (which covers many more square games) can be found at:

<http://www.tiac.net/~mabaker/square-games.html>



Choreography: Building Critical Mass

Nick Martellaci - nmcaller@aol.com

Planting Seeds.

You've just attended caller school. You're all excited about choreography and can't wait to make your mark on the square dancing world. In this article, you'll find a simple formula for writing lots of material very quickly.

The goal is to build up a "critical mass" of material so you can get out there and start calling tips and even full dances.

The tool you'll use is something I call "planting seeds." A "seed" is a group of two or three calls. Once planted, you see what springs up from there.

Step 1. Make a list of typical opening moves:

- *Square Thru 4*
- *Lead Right/Left*
- *Pass the Ocean*
- *Pass Thru*

[continued next page]

[Building Critical Mass, continued]

We'll hold off on *Ladies Chain* for the moment, sticking to simpler opening moves.

Step 2. Pick *one* of those opening moves (e.g. *Square Thru 4*) and list *all* of the the calls that *could* come next:

- *Swing Thru*
- *Spin the Top*
- *Touch ¼*
- *Pass thru*
- *Pass the Ocean*
- *Slide Thru*
- *Right & Left Thru*
- *Dive Thru / Pass to the Center*
- *Boys / Girls / Centers / Ends U-Turn Back*

That last one is legal...but it isn't pretty. I'm including it here to remind you that creative choreography involves *making the best choice* from all the possibilities.

Make sure you know what all of those possibilities are, and don't call yourself into a rut!

Step 3. You have your opening. Now, pick the *next* call – let's say you've chosen *Touch ¼* – and list all the calls that could come next:

- *Split Circulate*
- *Centers / Ends / All 8 Circulate*
- *Scoot Back*
- *Girls Fold*
- *Centers Trade*
- *Walk & Dodge*

So let's start with the seed of *Square Thru 4 + Touch 1/4 + Split Circulate...*

Step 4. Write down where your checkers are after these three calls. Doing this keeps you from having to start from scratch for each new sequence. (There really *is* a method to my madness.)

Step 5. Complete the exercise by coming up with a list of all the legal calls that could come after your "seed" and then write a card for each possibility that could be called next. For example: *Boys Fold + [resolve]*, *Scoot Back + [resolve]*, *Centers Trade + [resolve]*.

When resolving figures, vary the length of each. Short figures are good for starting a tip. Some of your figures can be very long. On the average, however, I try to keep most figures

[continued next page]

[Building Critical Mass, continued]

between 12-17 calls in length.

Remember, *you* control the length of the *figure*; don't let the *figure* control *you*. This means don't keep writing for pages and pages simply because you can't navigate to a final *Allemande Left*.

Step 6. Once you've written a couple dozen cards using the first seed, move on to a new starting combination.

Reminder: As you write towards the resolve, try to use *all* of the calls in the program you're using. At Mainstream, don't forget about *Spin Chain Thru* or *Eight Chain Thru*. At Plus, don't forget *Fan the Top*.

[Editor's Note: I find it useful to print out a copy of the **CALLERLAB** lists for each level I'm writing, and place a check mark by each call each time that I use it in a sequence. This serves two purposes. It ensures that I've used every call for a given level, and it alerts me when I'm relying too much on a small subset of calls.]

Expanding On What You've Already Done.

Remember the *Ladies Chain* that we skipped at the beginning? Well, now let's add it back into the mix.

Start with a *Ladies Chain*, then add in your seed calls:

All 4 Ladies Chain + H/S Square Thru 4 + Touch 1/4 + Split Circulate

Write down where your dancers are at this point. Now, add another follow up call to the *Split Circulate* and then resolve.

Congratulations! You've just potentially doubled the amount of choreography you've just written. If you chain the ladies $\frac{3}{4}$ before adding your seed, you – oh, never mind, you get the idea. You've now *tripled* your original stack of cards.

Rating and Shuffling.

Now that you have a couple hundred cards created (see how fast?) it's time to start getting ready to put together a dance.

Read through each card, and think (carefully) how difficult it would be *for the average dancer* to complete successfully. A common error of newer callers is forgetting that not everyone dances as they do. (And rarely as well as the checkers on your desk or computer screen.)

I wrote a detailed article on this rating system. Perhaps the editor will reprint it. (Wink wink nudge nudge!) [Editor's Note: As soon as "somebody" submits it to me, I can reprint it.]

[continued next page]

[Building Critical Mass, continued]

Separate your cards into piles of Easy, Medium, Difficult, and WFH. Now sort them by seed. A fair damsel might enjoy getting a dozen roses, but dancers want variety - a choreographic bouquet as it were.

The Perils of Repetitive Choreography.

Many moons ago I was dancing in the C1 Hall at the New England Convention. I can't tell you how well the caller called. I can't tell you about his timing, delivery, or body flow. I *can*, however, tell you that he started every single figure of his tip with *Heads Lead Right + Circle to a Line*. My only thought was: "Hey dude...you're calling Challenge! Ever hear of equivalent modules?"

To avoid this pitfall, don't put your cards in order *based on the same starting move*. Don't lump together all of the cards that start with *Square Thru 4* or *Pass the Ocean*.

Just in case you're wondering...if Card 1 starts with a *Square Thru 4* and Card 2 starts with a *Ladies Chain + Square Thru 4*, you've really used the same starting move twice in a row.

You also should not repeat the same sequence of starting moves. For example, "The last figure started with *Square Thru 4*, this one will start with *Lead Right*, the next one will be a *Pass the Ocean*..." The dancers *will* pick up on this.

Why make such a fuss about this variety? Simple. If the dancers screw up and you need to repeat the card, when you finally move on to the next figure it won't sound like a repeat of what you already did twice. Make sense?

Programming Your Tip / Dance / Whatever.

For Opening and Closing Tips (and guest tips at fly-ins or convention) use easy cards only. The dancers don't know you or trust you yet. You need to build up their confidence in *your* abilities.

After the first tip, you can throw in the occasional difficult or gimmick card.

Towards the middle of the evening you can do an entire tip of material of medium difficulty.

At the end of the evening, you want to back off from the difficult stuff, and give the dancers material from your easy pile to rest their weary brains.

You now have a tried-and-true formula for cranking out choreography.

Some of it will be brilliant.

Some of it will be tossed into the trash after its first use.

But *all* of it will be *yours*.

Go for it!



Teaching Chain Reaction

John Oldfield – john@oldfield.com

Chain Reaction is one of my personal favorites. This probably is the result of a severe learning block on this call in which: I could not remember the definition, I could not dance the call, I could not even remember the *name* of the call. Finally “getting it” was my biggest breakthrough as a new Advanced dancer.

CALLERLAB says:

From any quarter tag or quarter line formation in which each very center can Pass Thru with an outside dancer. *[At Advanced, this call is restricted to starting from right or left-hand quarter tag formations only.]* The very centers Pass Thru with the dancers they are facing, while the ends of the center line/wave Promenade $\frac{1}{4}$ around the outside of the set. The original very centers and the dancers they are next to, Hinge. The centers Star (or Diamond Circulate) one spot, while the outsides Trade. Those who meet now Cast Off $\frac{3}{4}$, while the others move up (as in Hourglass Circulate) to become the ends of parallel waves.

- CALLERLAB Advanced Definitions, revised September 9, 2006 (Rev B)

Chain Reaction was written by Lee Kopman in 1975.

I will be talking about *Chain Reaction* from an Advanced point of view, so I will limit the formations to those allowed at Advanced level as far as teaching is concerned. I will talk about some of the Challenge level implications towards the end.

The starting formation at the Advanced level is right or left handed $\frac{1}{4}$ tag. This formation is the result of, from a static square, *Heads (or Sides) Pass the Ocean*. The formation has an ocean wave down the center and the outside couples are facing in.

A *Chain Reaction* is danced just as it sounds – it starts with two dancers and spreads to the entire square. Danced well, it is quite an elegant call to watch from the caller’s table.

Two dancers start the *Chain Reaction*. These would be the very centers of the central wave.

Those two dancers drop hands to start the call. This starts the *Chain Reaction* by “activating” the ends of the wave (dropped hands start the reaction), so we now have 4 active dancers: the two centers of the central wave, and the ends of that wave.

When the initial hands are dropped, two things happen:

1. The centers of the wave “activate” the dancers they are facing directly with a *Pass Thru* (and the active dancer starts the reaction with an inactive with a *Pass Thru*). Please remember that a *Pass Thru* does not involve touching in any way.

[continued next page]

[Teaching *Chain Reaction*, continued]

2. The ends of the wave *Promenade* $\frac{1}{4}$ around the outside of the set. They need to get there quickly because they must serve as an “anchoring” handhold for other dancers as the call progresses.

When the centers have finished the *Pass Thru* - leaving two new dancers in their place - they touch their *new* current partner, thus activating him/her (finally!). They *Hinge*, creating a star in the center comprised of the two dancers from the outside who completed the *Pass Thru* and the two dancers who have been *Hinged* into the star.

There should also at this point be mini waves at the “top” and “bottom” of the formation, consisting of the end-of-the-wave dancer who *Promenaded* $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way around the outside of the set at the beginning and the very center dancer, who passed though and *Hinged* with the remaining outside dancer.

It is critical that *the original centers who start with a pass thru do not touch the person they are passing* and instead take the outside dancer’s hand and hinge them into the star.

So now we have a central star and mini waves on each end. Those in the mini wave *Partner Trade* while the *Star Turns* $\frac{1}{4}$. Those who meet *Cast* $\frac{3}{4}$ (the centers - those in the star or diamond - always go forward while the ends – those in the mini wave - act as a pivot), while the other 4 move up (as in an *Hourglass Circulate*).

Teaching *Chain Reaction*.

Chain Reaction is typically one of the first “big” Advanced calls in the teaching order. It is the tenth call on **CALLERLAB**'s teaching order. In one sense, this is a good thing. It gives the dancers plenty of time for practice. On the not-so-good side, **CALLERLAB**'s definition makes reference to a formation (hourglass) that has not yet been introduced.

I typically move *Hourglass Formation/Circulate/Cut/Flip* way up from their position (at #17, #18, and #19) Advanced 2 list, to the early part of the Advanced 1 list. Not coincidentally, usually right before *Chain Reaction*.

When I start with *Hourglass Circulate* I take the dancers back to *Coordinate* which has the same ending (like an) *Hourglass Circulate* for four dancers in exactly the same place as they will be at the end of *Chain Reaction*.

I include *Cut the Hourglass* and *Flip The Hourglass* because they are relatively easy if dancers can do the *Diamond* counterparts, and because I think that the *Hourglass* family should be kept together (**CALLERLAB** apparently thinks so as well, because they group these calls together on the Advanced 2 list).

Teaching the whole “family” of *Hourglass* calls at once gives you many more options for getting out of an hourglass figure. Pointing out the “like an *Hourglass*” *Circulate* is not always clear to the dancers.

[continued next page]

[Teaching *Chain Reaction*, continued]

This means you may need to work with hourglasses and *Coordinate* for a full tip or more to show dancers the connection.

When I start teaching the call, I number the dancers in the order in which they will activate. They are numbered one through four and each number indicates two (opposite) dancers:

- *Ones* are the very centers of the wave,
- *Twos* are the ends of the wave,
- *Threes* are the outsides directly facing a very center, and
- *Fours* are the dancers who will be hinged into the star.

If you can get the dancers to count out, the *Fours* will stay immobile until it is time for them to hinge into the star.

Two other critical points:

1. The dancers passing through must not touch. If they touch they will turn. If they turn your *Chain Reaction* will go “out of containment”.
2. The very center and their adjacent Number Four MUST touch and MUST turn (*Hinge*). If they do not, Number Four will have to make up his own mind which hand to put into the star. I’ve been teaching for a while and I am still mystified by how people choose which hand to put into the star. Don’t give them a choice. *Hinge* them in.

Chain Reaction at C-1.

At C-1, the restrictions from the Advanced Program on the formations from which you may call *Chain Reaction* are removed. In effect, this adds quarter lines and a two-faced line or a wave between parallel mini-waves to the list of starting formations.

- CALLERLAB Basic Challenge (C-1) Definitions, Revision D, August 13, 2006

This is, as they say, a “whole other boogie”.

It adds *Partner Hinges* between dancers One and Four which can, as a result, put dancer One into the Star rather than dancer Four.

It adds Facing Stars that require *Facing Diamond Circulates* to execute. Dancers confronted with this Facing Diamond setup early on assume that someone is wrong.

It adds “push casts” to the final action. Dancers must know who is the center on the cast so that they go the correct direction.

[continued next page]

[Teaching *Chain Reaction*, continued]

Finally, C1 adds the flexibility to designate the number of quarters for the star to turn. In order of difficulty (most to least difficult), they are: 0, 2, 3, 4, and 1.

It is really helpful to be on your toes and anticipate when you will have to insert a cue such as “You have a facing star, you have a partner hinge.” One of the joys of Challenge dancing is to be faced with the unusual and figure it out, so after the dancers have learned the call, don’t overcue, but do be ready to help.

When you are teaching the C1 version of *Chain Reaction*, be thorough. Review Advanced 1’s *Chain Reaction*. Get them dancing right and left $\frac{1}{4}$ tag equally smoothly.

Only after you are confident that they know and dance to the A1 *definition* (which is *not* the same thing as knowing how to dance the call from the legal Advanced *formations*), move on to the Challenge formations. Point out the Facing Stars, the push casts, the *Partner Hinges*. *Put everyone in every position*. Help them to be confident that if they are dancing the definition, no matter how weird it looks, they will succeed.

The first time you introduce *Chain Reaction* from a C-1 formation, you will know who does and does not dance by the definition. This makes it critical that dancers know the differences between Challenge and Plus dancing. Challenge dancing is designed for people to have learned to evaluate formation, position, leader/trailer, beau/belle on an ongoing basis as they are dancing *and* who know and can dance the precise definition for every call below the level they are learning. Challenge dancing involves a great deal of flexibility and the ability to analyze each of the above after every part of the call.

Final word.

Chain Reaction is one call that demands precision in dancing.

Every *Pass Thru*, *Promenade $\frac{1}{4}$* , *Hinge*, *$\frac{1}{4}$ turn*, *Partner Trade*, *$\frac{3}{4}$ cast*, and *Hourglass Circulate* must be precise.

Every part of the call will result in the dancer facing a wall.

One can only: turn one quarter, turn one half, turn three quarters, turn all the way around or not turn at all. Each of these turns must be precise.

As a teacher, demand precision starting at Basic level. Always keep in mind that one of these dancers may someday go to the Challenge level and will be appreciated as a precise dancer.



How I Suss Out A Floor

Deborah Carroll-Jones - dc@deborah-carroll-jones.com

Umpteen years ago, when I first started calling, one of my first goals was to be able to "read" a floor to figure out the overall skill level...*before the first half of the first tip.*

Over the years, there are a few things I've learned to watch for as soon as I pick up the mic.

1. *Are the dancers "pre-programmed"?* If you like, substitute the term "over-trained". When I first say "Bow to the Partner, Corner too"...do they automatically join hands to *Circle Left*? If they do, then I have to be careful to use standard choreography.
2. *How does each dancer connect to their partner?* Are they gripping hands so tightly that their knuckles are white? This can be an indication of either very new dancers (nervous) or physically older dancers who may be afraid of falling. Whichever case applies, I'll give such dancers a little extra time to complete calls, and may even slow down my singers a bit. If dancers stand in a relaxed position with a casual or easy touch, I know it's going to be a smoother tip all around.
3. *My first sequence is always simple and memorized.* The very first thing I call (after the opener) is *always* a memorized module. I use something as vanilla and simple as possible, because this is the *one* chance I have to get the dancers used to my voice. For example, I'll often use a module with a *Square Thru 3* leading into an *Allemande Left*, followed by a *RLG*.
4. *What's their enthusiasm?* I watch carefully during calls such as *Square Thru*, *RLG*, or *Weave The Ring* to see how enthusiastic the dancers are. This helps me gauge their mood. Are they smiling? Frowning? Laughing? Talking?
5. *How do they hold hands?* This may sound strange, but I also watch handholds. Do the center two dancers actually *connect* to each other during facing lines of 4, or are some of them staring off into space and forgetting to hold hands, giving me 2 "mini-squares?" "Connected" dancers tend to have better formation awareness.
6. *Build a trust level.* I always use my simplest and easiest choreo for at least the first half of the tip, and avoid gimmicks, to help build a higher trust level with the dancers. Once they trust you (usually not before the end of the first tip or beginning of the second tip), *then* you can trot out the fancier choreography and trademark gimmicks.
7. For my first tip, I like to use a *RLG* get-out, then watch how they react. Dancers who appear to be uncomfortable with *RLG* without an *Allemande Left* first tells me that I need to use simpler, more predictable get-outs if I want to get the best response.
8. *Find a call you like to use as a "leveler".* A "leveler" call is something a caller uses to figure out how well the dancers can dance. This is the meat of the answer to this article's original question...but if you haven't already built trust and figured out all of the other attributes listed above, it won't help you very much. I like using the call *Scot Back* as my leveler.

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[How I Suss Out A Floor, continued]

In order from easiest to hardest application, I...

- Call *Scoot Back* from parallel waves with the *boys* facing in.
- Call *Scoot Back* from parallel lines with the *girls* facing in.
- Call *Scoot Back* from parallel lines with *mixed genders* (one boy and one girl facing in to do the “scooting” part).
- Have the *centers* of a *left-handed* wave do a *Scoot Back*.
- Have each “box of 4” in a *left-handed* wave do a *Scoot Back*.
- From a $\frac{1}{4}$ *tag* formation, do a *Scoot Back*.

If your dancers can do all *that*...then *honey*, it's gonna be a *wild* night.



How DeSisto Does It

Rich Reel – rich@all8.com

One day I was watching a floor of dancers who'd squared up for Mike DeSisto. I saw Mike step up to the stage, put a record on and *immediately* start calling.

After the tip, I pulled him aside and asked him, "How did you memorize the couples so quickly?"

His answer: He *doesn't*.

Mike starts by calling memorized material. At first, he calls whole memorized sequences (like an opener), and watches the floor to see which squares look like ones he can depend on.

Next, he calls memorized *modules*. At each point when everyone should be in the correct sequence, he'll look at a square and start memorizing. He'll then call another module or so and look at the same square again. When he feels confident with his ability to recall the order of couples in that square, he may start looking at another.

When the dancers have danced enough, he resolves (since he's been calling memorized modules, he always knows the sequence for a resolve.)

This continues until he feels he can trust his memory and the pilot squares he's chosen...and *then* he moves to sight calling.

This process is completely invisible to the dancers (and before he let me in on his secret, invisible to me!) Since then, I've observed many professional callers using similar techniques.

This is virtually the same method I use for floor testing. If I think about it, I'll write down key couples. (However, with my deteriorating eyesight, I often can't read what I wrote on the fly.)

I've found that it's easy for me to depend on this method, using memorized modules to start out, watching the progress of the squares, gauging the general strength of the floor (often using *Circulates* or *Thars* as a skill indicator at Mainstream), and sight from that point forward for the rest of the *tip*.

I stress the word "*tip*", because at most dances for unfamiliar clubs, the floor level can change dramatically from tip to tip. I find that I often must reassess the floor every tip.

The source material for this article appears at <http://www.all8.com/sd/calling/keycoupl.htm>



Next Issue...

Allan Hurst – allanhurst@gmail.com

This issue, we happened to have several articles by East Coast callers. Next issue, we turn our sights to the Midwest for at least four of our authors.

Alan Hirsch (my “twin brother” from Chicago and Colorado) offers us a thoughtful article on the subject of dancer **Hand Contact**.

Sandie Bryant (Chi-Town Squares) weighs in on **How To Suss Out A Floor**.

Continuing our “Chi-Town authors” theme, **Michael Maltenfort** has written an incredible article on a choreographic technique he calls “**X**” **Sequences**.

Just in case you're counting...the fourth Midwest author is, of course, GCA President **John Oldfield**, with another **Prez Sez** column.

Plus whatever *you* care to send in...[hint, hint, hint] ☺

Some of the types of articles I'm *always* hoping people will submit:

- Teaching and/or In-depth analysis of a specific call.
- Choreographic techniques.
- The business side of Calling.
- How to teach a class.
- Professional ethics and behaviors in Calling.
- Cultural differences in calling to straight and LGBT clubs.
- How callers “suss out” a floor to figure out how strong the dancers are.
- Digital music techniques and “how-to”s.

**Colophon**

Primary body text for the *Call Sheet* is set in 12-point Arial.

A sarcastic but reasonably complete history of Arial may be found at <http://www.ms-studio.com/articles.html>

A less comprehensive but more neutral history of Arial may be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arial>

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