

“TIPS FOR YOUR TIPS”

A series devoted to helping you become a more confident dancer

By Jan Thompson

CALLS AND THEIR DEFINITIONS: OUR SQUARE DANCE LANGUAGE

Every society has a language, a means by which its members can communicate. In square dancing, the calls and their definitions are our language. For both “social” dancers and those looking for a mental challenge, there is much to be gained by knowing your definitions.

1. Importance of a solid foundation – Let’s get down to basics, literally. In Europe the CALLERLAB Basic program is a dancer’s entry level into the square dance world. Fundamental calls (e.g. Trades, Circulates) need to be mastered, for they are the building blocks of many calls. In “All Eight Circulate”, follow your own circulate pattern regardless of the facing direction of the other dancers. For instance, from two facing lines, “All Eight Circulate” = “Pass Thru” so don’t be intimidated by someone walking toward you.
2. Confidence when your square is having difficulty – Accurately doing your own part within the definition of a call will assist less confident dancers in your square. Touching hands with the appropriate people will help to establish the proper formation. Moving to the music will maintain the flow.
3. Approaching calls from less familiar positions – When you find yourself in an unfamiliar position – playing the opposite gender due to a mistake in your square, or because the caller uses a half-sashayed or left-handed formation – don’t panic! Think definitions. A “Flutterwheel” is initiated by the right-hand dancer, a “Reverse Flutterwheel” by the left-hand dancer – not specifically by a girl or boy. A “Scoot Back’s” arm turn is done with the inside hand (i.e. the hand with which you are holding your partner’s hand). A “Swing Thru” always begins with a right hand trade. Knowledgeable dancers allow callers to call more varied sequences using familiar

calls in different ways, resulting in fun and interesting choreography.

My survey of caller/teachers in our area revealed they teach calls by CALLERLAB definitions, incorporating body flow and helpful hints as needed. Most point out the parts of the calls. They feel that dancer proficiency in a program is more important than the program (number of calls) itself, and that it is unfortunate that students’ exposure to other than “vanilla” applications is limited. It was suggested that dancers consider DBD (Dance by Definition) workshops, especially before moving to the next program.

You may solidify your knowledge of definitions and different positions through the CALLERLAB website, animations, videos/DVDs, handbooks, angeling a class, dancing arky (i.e., the other gender’s part) at a dance where you are comfortable with the program, or taking a DBD workshop. Happy dancing!

(Reprinted from *Grand Square*, Sept. 2012 – Jan. 2013 issue)