

Calling for a Gay Club

A Brief History of Gay Square Dancing

While gay people have been square dancing as long as square dancing has existed, gay square dancing officially began around 1980 with the birth of the South Florida Mustangs. The dancing is high energy and has its own flashy styling. Today gay clubs exist from New York to San Diego and from Miami to Calgary. New clubs are constantly forming. (Interesting note: Because the European Union forbids discrimination based on sexual preference, there are no longer any gay square dance clubs in Europe.)

IAGSDC™ and GCA

IAGSDC™ stands for the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs, a Lesbian and Gay Organization. The IAGSDC™ is the umbrella organization for the gay clubs. The IAGSDC helps new clubs get started, selects the site for the annual convention, and acts as liaison with the larger world of square dancing.

As gay square dancing grew in popularity, a number of club members decided to try their hand at calling. The GCA (Gay Callers Association) became the organization for gay and gay-friendly callers. Any caller can join this organization. The GCA publishes a quarterly newsletter, sponsors an annual callers school and holds an annual membership meeting.

Terms and Concepts

- Bi-Dansual** This term refers to a dancer who is able to dance both Boy and Girl roles.
- Lead(er) and Follow(er)** Lead is the term used by many gay clubs to denote person dancing the Boy's part; Follow to denote person dancing the Girl's part. These terms were adopted in an attempt to make square dancing gender-free and politically correct. Unfortunately, in square dancing the term the Lead/Leader has a specific meaning and refers to someone facing out of a given formation. Therefore these terms can be confusing (e.g. Leads trade – who should trade: the Boys or the people facing out??) **Do not** feel obligated to use these terms when calling.
- Fly-In** A Fly-In is a weekend festival hosted by one club. At some fly-ins members of the host club welcome out of town visitors into their homes. Many fly-ins have moved to hotels which offer dance space and restaurants and keep the party going all weekend under one roof. Some fly-ins offer calling slots for GCA members. Clubs usually hire 1-3 staff callers for a fly-in.
- Convention** This term refers to annual gay square dance festival. The convention is hosted by one club. The convention is usually attended by between 500 and 1,000 participants dancing Mainstream through C4. The host club negotiates hotel and caller contracts, and sets the dancing and social schedule for the weekend. During the Convention, the IAGSDC™ holds its annual general membership meeting, its delegates' meeting, and the GCA holds its annual meeting. The convention is usually preceded by a GCA-sponsored callers school.

Gender Identifiers for Sight Callers

At present, IAGSDC™ clubs have no official policy requiring dancers to wear any gender identifying clothing. Most gay dancers are sympathetic to the difficulty a caller experiences when first looking out and seeing squares comprised of 7 men and one woman *who's dancing the boy's part!* If you

explain that you're trying to give them your best dance possible, gay dancers are willing to wear bandannas or other visual aids (to mark boys or girls) to help you out. Some devilish couples, however, like to try confusing the caller by switching roles before the start of every new sequence.

What if you decide to 'fly blind'? Use the terms 'centers' and 'ends' when calling. If you lose track of the boys or girls, get the dancers into waves or back-to-back lines and ask one gender to either trade or U Turn Back. You can also ask the Boys or Girls to identify. Of course sometimes bi-dansuals forget which part they're dancing during a particular tip. So you may have to ask more than once!

Psychological Issues

The first psychological obstacle for male callers stems from the fact that men are not comfortable in the role of sex object. Society teaches men to be the *givers* of 'sexual attention' NOT the *receivers*. Women callers may be used to receiving 'sexual attention' but only from members of the opposite sex. How to cope? First of all, if someone lets you know that they find you attractive, take it as a compliment and change the subject. In the unlikely event of an unwelcome sexual advance, simply treat it as you would an unwelcome sexual advance from an opposite-sex dancer. Bringing and introducing your spouse or significant other to your first dance at a new club may subtly mark you as 'off limits' without having to raise the issue at all.

The second psychological hurdle deals with PDA - Public Displays of Affection. Even though many people disapprove of all PDAs, square dancers (and this includes gay square dancers) are friendly folks and can be affectionate when they greet their friends. At a dance you may see same sex couples hugging, kissing, holding hands, sitting on each others laps, etc. These are the same types of PDAs you would see at a non-gay singles club.

Language Issues

Jokes and patter which go over well in the straight world may fall flat at a gay dance, e.g. 'Four bosses do this', 'Four dish washers do that', 'When you get back home and you get all straight'... (You'll have a long wait for that to happen!!) However phrases like '4 sexy ones' or '4 pretty ones' will get a very positive reaction.

Rules for using the "G" Word. 1) Don't be afraid to say 'gay' WHEN APPROPRIATE. Referring to a friend or relative as 'not straight' may cause dancers to think you're afraid of the word "gay" or worse, homophobic. 2) Conversely, don't feel obliged to use the word 'gay' in every other phrase to prove you're not afraid. For example, when calling for a primarily African-American square dance club, you wouldn't say "I'm really happy to be calling for you African American dancers here at your African-American square dance club. You African-American folks really make me feel welcome."

Gay Styling and its Impact on Timing

Allemande Left Immediately followed by a clap. Leave a beat of silence (or noodling) before the next call: Allemande Left - (beat) - in the Alamo Style; or Allemande left - (beat) - like an Allemande Thar.

Square Thru 4 Inactive Dancers do a double California Twirl to 'pass the time'. Inactive Dancers may not be in position to Half Sashay, Roll Away, Separate, etc. once this twirling begins.

Promenade Outside Inactive Dancers move to the center for a Highland Fling. You may not be able to have the Sides Square Thru while the Heads Promenade - at least not for the first several tries.

Promenade Home	On returning home, dancers do a Slap, Slap, Hip-Bump and Clap taking 4 counts.
Right & Left Grand	The Right Hand pull-by may be replaced by a 'turn the girl under'. This styling should not impact timing of the move.
Shoot the Star	Dancers let out a 'WHOOOP!' Be prepared to adjust delivery of the next call.
Weave the Ring	Dancers replace both right shoulder passes with a 4 beat Hand Clap - Knee Slap - Join Hands - Kick followed by a twirl under and move on for the left shoulder pass. This styling takes longer than Callerlab's 10 counts. In singing calls, you should deliver the 'Ring' of this call on beat 29 (4 beats prior to beat 33 when the dancers actually start the movement)
Double Pass Thru	Dancers clap their hands 3 times. Be prepared to postpone the delivery of the next call.
Slide Thru	Dancers may shout 'Whoosh!' Be prepared to postpone delivery of the next call.
Grand Square	Gay dancers have many ways of dancing this call - most of them involve finishing long before the allowed 32 beats.
Right and Left Thru	Dancers may shout 'Thank You' in response. Be prepared to postpone delivery of the next call.
Spin the Top	Dancers may shout "He's no Top" (Don't ask!)
Pass the Ocean	Dancers may shout 'Splash'. Be prepared to postpone delivery of the next call.
Flip the Diamond	Dancers let out a 'WHOOOP!' Be prepared to postpone delivery of the next call.
Linear Cycle	Dancers shout 'Hinge, Fold, Follow and Peel'. Be prepared to postpone delivery of the next call.
Hour Glass	Centers of the inside diamond freeze in a Highland Fling position with arms around each others' waists.
Motivate	Dancers moving into center star may shout "I'm a star" to help other dancers find them. Give additional cueing before star forms or be prepared to postpone delivery of the next call.
Teacup Chain	Dancers moving into the center arm turn may literally scream their lungs out. Don't be offended if no one can hear your singing! This might be a great time to sneak that much needed sip of water!

Will this dance be a 'Costume Event'?

When traveling to non-gay dances regional festivals, etc., gay dancers wear customary square dance attire. Club night at a gay club calls for casual attire. Gay costume parties however, are a different story entirely. Drag (men dressed as women and vice versa) will seem tame compared to some of the more revealing costumes you may encounter. Recent events have seen one dancer dressed in two fig leaves (front and back a la Adam), another wearing only a leather harness and jock strap, and a body builder wearing nothing but boots and a posing strap! This information is not meant to shock, but simply to inform. You may be very happy calling for a 'normal' club night at a gay club but feel the costume party milieu would interfere with your giving a good performance. Also, while you may

be comfortable at such a costume event, you might not want your spouse or children to accompany you on this particular night.

Why Haven't They Called Me?

You're a popular caller with a large local following and a national or even international reputation. You've called to add your name to the list of gay-friendly callers. Why hasn't your phone started ringing off the hook with offers from gay clubs?

Thirty years ago, same sex couples were not welcome at many dance events. Those brave few who broke into the square dance community at large had to do so by bringing their own square of eight dancers. Eventually friendships developed outside the gay circle and very gradually acceptance started to grow. These gay dancers got to dance to callers their fellow club members never experienced.

The person who does the hiring for a particular club may not be one of the brave dancers who ventured out to major festivals and may never have danced to you or heard of your reputation. Seeing your (unknown) name on the list of gay-friendly callers, (s)he may pass you by to find a name more familiar to her/his club members.

Why Haven't They Called Me Back?

You've called your dance. The dancers were enthusiastic. The club officers congratulated you on a good job. Nine - twelve months have gone by and you haven't been contacted for another booking. You're wondering if you did something wrong or if you offended somebody?

The answer is probably 'No'. The gay 'market' is a small one. Only a handful of callers can truly be considered 'regulars' at gay events. Outside of that happy few, the rest of us have to wait our turn. Some other factors to consider: 1) Because the stigma attached to calling for gay clubs has worn off, more and more callers are interested in calling for gay clubs thereby increasing the competition. 2) Some clubs try to provide their members with a constant variety of callers. You may find yourself hired for several events over a two year period and then not be booked again for the next three (or more) years while the 'new kid on the block' gets a turn in the spotlight.

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