

TWO-PERSON (MINIMAL PHANTOMS) SQUARE DANCING

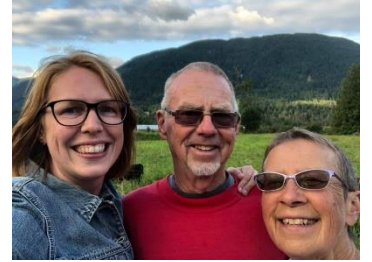
- by Bob & Dorothy Simpson and Darby Love, Nanaimo, BC

Check out our 'Dancing in the Garage' two person square dance videos on YouTube here:

<https://tinyurl.com/dancinginthegarage>

WHO WE ARE

We are three callers and cuers who live in Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, BC. Our caller/cuer run club is the Wheel Arounds and we have largely focused on Plus and A level dancing over the last year. Bob and Darby call, Dorothy and Darby cue. Some of you may have met us at caller schools run by Lorne Smith in the last few years. Fortunately for us, we all live together and could safely enjoy two person square dancing with a caller.



COVID-19 HITS!

In mid-March we were still riding high from our Leap Year dance which was the biggest dance of our season by far. Our club was suddenly shut down and there was no reason to practice whatsoever. **We only lasted a week before deciding that we all needed to work with our music if we had any hope of making it through the next weeks** because we were all so morose. The natural lockdown-friendly thing to do was to video Dorothy and Darby cueing rounds and post them online so people could enjoy them at home in a couple or alone. Then Bob and Darby decided that they could definitely make two person or one couple square dance sequences because there were still lots of moves that would work. **We created many volumes of 'Dancing in the Garage' on Facebook and YouTube where we would have a tip or two of squares (both patter and singing call) and two or more rounds.** For the first while we filmed nearly every day! At that time nobody had started Zoom square dances.



OUR GOALS:

- To connect with our own dancers.
 - To keep up our own skills.
 - To have fun and share that with other people.
 - **To use minimal phantoms.**
 - To remain definition-correct with the calls.
- **To build something that we could continue to do for a long time if needed.**

ADJUSTING CALLS FOR TWO-PERSON SQUARE DANCING

To get started we each made our own lists of calls that would be possible with two people, including many that are normally four person calls. The call lists include how many beats the calls normally take for easily creating singing call modules. Many of our first modules were not ones we still use now four months into this journey. There was lots of learning about flow, what calls feel good to dance with just two people, and which moves were technically fine but just no good in practice (like "recycle" and especially "recycle and sweep 1/4 more" - too disorienting). Without the natural structure and landmarks provided by the other dancers "home" and "the square" became very important -it only took a few days before we taped landmarks on our garage floor!

It was fun making the 'Dancing in the Garage' videos. We got quite the enthusiastic following of dancers and callers alike both locally and internationally. Several of the callers made suggestions of moves and sequences to try. Two person choreography gets you to use the tiny, often forgotten calls of the Basic and Mainstream programs like "Fold" and "U-turn back". Darby had lost her first class of beginners when the pandemic hit and decided to focus on Mainstream. Her favourite moves to use for two persons are "Separate" and "Cloverleaf" because they flow well and are longer moves.

Bob took on the challenge of incorporating some Plus and even some A calls into his modules. His favourite element is breaking down the Plus call, “Load the Boat”, to be performed by two people.

Our normal eight person square dancing relies on calls like Swing Thru, Circle Left, Allemande Left, and the Square Thru family provide no-brainer moments for dancers where they are certain to be successful. Many of our regular go-to calls don't work well with two people or are impossible. **In two person dancing, there is no “standard figure” for callers and dancers to fall into. All of our choreography had to be from scratch.** Patter was the natural place to start playing with the new format, and we eventually ended up creating singing call modules that could also be used for patter.

CREATING CHOREOGRAPHY FOR SINGING CALLS

We created a structured routine for ourselves and our dancers by beginning to only use singing calls with Grand Squares in the open, middle, and close. Then we made up several options for the section that we would normally put in “Allemande Left and Weave the Ring”. The “Swing and Promenade” remained the same but came a bit later than before so that we only got to sing one line of the song instead of the two lines that the eight person pattern allowed. The winning combo was “Grand Square” (with two lines of music), “Boys Run, Girls Run, U-turn Back, Swing and Promenade”, followed by one line of music.

We evolved to create other 32 beat “GO” sequences that we teach the dancers and name. The caller can then say “GO four leaf clover” instead of Sides Face Grand Square or a variation of it. Darby decided to create some 16 beat GOs to use in those “Circle Left” singing calls. She would tell the dancers to do the 3-4 moves when she just said “GO” in the singing call, sing one line, call another 32 beats of moves, then do the standard end routine of “Boys Run, Girls Run, U-turn Back, Swing and Promenade”, followed by one line of music.



LEAVING THE GARAGE FOR GREENER PASTURES

Once BC progressed in its Restart Plan, we got to see other people in smaller groups, preferably outdoors, and at a distance of 2m or more away. **We took the dancing out of the garage and into some parks.** The best locations are level, made of a smooth surface, and have shade for operating a laptop in. Our favourite locations include event shelters, ball diamonds, and driveways. While various outdoor locations are fun, they are also more work for the organizers.

BACK IN THE COMMUNITY HALL!

Fortunately, our local community hall was happy to have us back if we adhered to COVID occupancy limits, had a plan for the flow of people, and included physical distancing. While many of the elements of putting on a successful dance are still the same, others have changed for us now.

- Our group loved to share potluck snacks and say hi to everyone at an event. Now we bring our own snacks and water bottles, don't make coffee, and head outside or stay 2m apart during breaks.
- Everything is separate, sanitized, and packed in/out by the dancers.
- Darby writes down who attends instead of a guestbook so we have contact tracing capabilities without sharing a pen.



- We cannot welcome everyone to our dances and singles must find their own partner prior to the evening and come as a 'couple'.
- Dancers must RSVP.
- Our floor is segmented out with painter's tape to maintain physical distancing of our one couple squares.

We know we must comply with our province's guidelines in order to continue dancing and our group is happy to do so.

KEEPING THE DANCING FUN

How do we, as callers, make sure our dances are still fun and successful despite the loss of touch and close socializing?

- **We plan our choreography and test it out where possible.** Bob and Darby rely on written modules, though they definitely end up sight calling at times. Callers, it's unlikely that your floor of couples will all move in unison at first, and the sight of it can be disconcerting. The dancers also tend to move at different paces so a couple that was a reliable pilot for sight calling can be totally unreliable for this format or throughout the dance.
- **Look for a balance of simple/successful and challenge/figuring it out in your choreography.** The dancers are working really hard, both physically and mentally (nobody gets to be the Sides and watch the Heads do something for half of a figure).
- **Use helper words to orient your dancers and keep them successful.** Tell them they are doing well. Tell them "You're home!" so they are totally sure. Tell them they're dancing by definition (dancing DBD). We can all use the positive energy right now.
- **Your music choices need to be upbeat.** Look like you're having fun and stay away from talk of death tolls or the end of square dancing as we know it. Focus on the things we can do.
- **Take breaks** and encourage them to drink and eat their own snacks. Make sure you do the same.
- **Rounds were the whole start of our idea and we haven't lost sight of how important they are.** Half of our dance is rounds as they are a welcome change and comforting since they are the same despite the pandemic. Make sure your dancers can do them well. Take requests from your round dancers for their favourite songs.



Bob, Darby, and Dorothy all agree that this experience has made us better callers and dancers. We have engaged with choreography and calls in ways we likely never would have before, and had some vigorous discussions about definitions and concepts. **While we all miss our regular way of dancing, we are embracing the fun and challenge of working with two person/one couple dancing and are prepared to continue on like this for a year if needed.** It is a huge privilege to continue to bring the joy of dancing to our group and to ourselves during a time where we need that joy more urgently than ever.

FOR MORE INFO

Please contact us if you are interested in learning more! We can be reached at wheelarounds2017@gmail.com, 778-268-0122, or on Facebook. Check out <https://tinyurl.com/darbydance> for a behind the scenes look at choreography with Darby. You can find the 'Dancing in the Garage' series on YouTube via this simplified link:

<https://tinyurl.com/dancinginthegarage> (make sure you keep scrolling - there are lots of videos including our friend Dwight Fry's outdoor rounds!)