



SMOOTH BODY FLOW

Smooth dancing is most often the deciding component with regard to the fun of an evening of dancing whether it is Ballroom, Mountain Clogging, Round, Square or any of the numerous other forms. There are certain considerations which contribute to the sensation of smooth dancing and many of these factors apply to all forms of the dance. Since our primary concern is with square dancing, we will list some of the items necessary to smooth dancing in squares. You may use your knowledge of other forms of dancing to decide if they also apply there. There are at least seven factors that should be listed here:

1. Timing and Tempo
2. Absolute Body Position (to include hand availability)
3. Actual Space Available for the Action
4. Momentum and Trend of Motion
5. Counter dancing (Moving to Accommodate the Action)
6. Conditioned Reflex and Expectations
7. Degree of Difficulty

Let us look at each of these to see how they apply to square dancing.

1. TIMING: One of the most pleasant of all experiences is a perfect blending of flow by all dancers in a pattern that enables the dancers to glide from one figure to the next without having to wait, stop and start, or rush by lunging to complete the figure that the caller is calling. The music will provide the rhythm of the flow (one step for each beat of rhythm) and the timing of the calls will

allow each dancer to perform the call comfortably without rushing or stopping to wait for another call. (Experienced dancers will use this idle time to shuffle their feet to keep in time with the musical beat.)

Timing has several components — the time it takes to execute the call (number of steps per timing chart), the lead time the caller provides prior to the command (too early, too late, or just right) and the physical time it takes the caller to deliver the call (2 beats for most calls).

If we, as callers, clip our timing, we do not allow the dancers enough time to execute the call with comfort and the dancers will rush, lunge and jump from one call to the next with little or no grace and style. The result will be rough dancing. The end result will be a series of geometric patterns with little or no regard for the music or the rhythm of the dance. The physical time at which we deliver the call will provide the dancer thinking time in order to move to the figure and execute the call with the beat of the music.

TEMPO: Generally this refers to the speed of the music and is expressed in number of beats per minute. The generally accepted tempo used for contemporary dancing today is from 128 to 130 beats per minute. Less than 128 seems to drag and faster than 130 is racing or running to keep up. Some callers teach by using a slower tempo such as 120 and then wonder why their dancers get lost when attending a regular dance. In order to be fair to the dancers, we should all strive for a reasonable tempo of 126 to 130. (No less than 124 and no greater than 132.)

2. ABSOLUTE BODY POSITION: From the very beginning, we are taught that we alternate hands (or shoulder passing) in square dancing. We no sooner voice this so-called "law of alternating hands" than we begin to break it with calls such as Star Thru followed by a Right and Left Thru. It is true that it only uses the same hands for one of the dancers in each couple. The hand is available by virtue of its position and is therefore accepted by the dancers even though it would be better if we used Slide Thru and then Right and Left Thru.

We similarly violate the rule by the shoulder passing in such calls as Pass Thru followed by a Trade By from an Eight Chain Thru Formation. (Same as an Eight Chain Two — but more comfortable.) Look at Scoot Back with the right, right, right hands. Because of the step forward, however, this call is accepted and widely used in many programs. The conclusion from all of this is that the absolute body position is critical to the smooth execution of any call and the transition is smoothest when body position is proper.

3. SPACE AVAILABLE FOR THE ACTION: If dancers are "squeezed" into a tight area of action, they cannot dance smoothly. For example, if the formation is a Double Pass Thru and the caller calls Flutterwheel or a Ladies Chain, the action is very tight and "squeezing" occurs. When the dancers are asked to dance a figure such as Curley Cross, they rebel when there is no room for them to execute the call properly. This was one reason that this call was dropped from the Plus Program several years ago. Similarly, if you have a crowded floor, it is generally not a good idea to use Tidal Waves or Tidal Two-Faced Lines.

4. MOMENTUM — TREND OF MOTION: The movement of dancers is primarily either turning or moving past one another. When a momentum and trend of motion can be classed as straight-forward (a weaving action such as Swing Thru or Weave the Ring can be considered straight-forward), then the dancing is smooth. When we interrupt the action with an abrupt change of motion, the smooth sensation disappears. Such a combination as Right and Left Thru followed by a Reverse Flutterwheel is bad. A better combination would be Pass Thru, Partner Trade and Reverse Flutterwheel. We could continue to show various alternatives that smooth out the flow.

Consider the action when putting calls together to avoid "overflow". Overflow can be best described as an overuse of a circular pattern for one or more of the dancers. The pattern of Heads Square Thru, Swing Thru, Boys Run, Couples Circulate, Wheel and Deal, Pass Thru, Trade By may be smooth for two of the couples but a serious overflow situation for the other two. Similarly with Swing Thru followed by a Fan the Top or a Fan the Top following a Spin the Top. Look at your own choreography and see if your combinations result in overflow.

5. COUNTER-DANCING: Through experience with "normal" choreographic sequences, the inactive dancers will adjust to meet the active dancers in a manner that will tend to smooth out flow that would otherwise be either uncomfortable or incorrect. Experienced dancers will be found moving their feet to the rhythm of the music even when they are in an "inactive" status. Examples of the need for counter-dancing include choreography such as, from an Eight Chain Thru formation, "Dive Thru, Square Thru 3/4, Allemande Left." The absolute body position is bad but the outside dancers will counter-dance by facing slightly to their

right and moving to make their left arm available for the Allemande Left. Styling points are filled with actions of counter-dancing by so-called inactive dancers and the smooth flow is really dependent upon dancer experience level in that regard.

6. CONDITIONED REFLEX AND EXPECTATIONS: Dancers have grown accustomed to certain combinations of calls based upon the way we, as callers, call. For instance, Forward up and back you reel, Pass Thru now____. The dancers are conditioned to dance and have grown to expect Wheel and Deal. If we try to trick them with another call, even though it is legitimate, we are going to create dancing that is not smooth.

Another form of caller arrogance that is sometimes used is after a Dive Thru and a Square Thru 3/4, the caller says there's your corner, Do Sa Do. The dancers are conditioned to hear Allemande Left. It is true that if you Dive Thru and Square Thru 3/4, your body is in a perfect position for a Do Sa Do. Just don't use "there's your corner" first. Our job is to make the dancing as smooth as we can, not trick the dancers into doing something we do not call.

7. DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Based upon the experience of the dancers and the judgment and skill of the caller, the element of "micro-programming" becomes involved. For instance, you, as an individual, program a tip and can't understand why a set breaks down during a call. If you analyze the call and make a "micro-programming" decision, you can understand this better. Let's look at "Double Pass Thru" followed by "Centers In"

— very few squares would have trouble with that. However, if you had the dancers in parallel two-faced lines and called Tag the Line, Centers In, you would have a far greater likelihood of breaking down. There are dozens of other examples we might use to illustrate this key element to smooth dancing.

In summary, if you are plagued with the realization that your choreography and the dancers' reactions do not seem to be up to your expectations, then take a good look at how you use the tools of the trade relative to the first four items listed.

Any violation of these principles can and will cause problems. The dancers may accept them as their fault — but it is our responsibility, as callers, to learn how we can provide smoother, more enjoyable dancing for square dancers. After all, it is they who pay the freight.

Think over the dances which you enjoyed the most and ask yourself what made them so enjoyable. The chances are excellent that the caller provided a dance with smooth body flow and a continuity of motion and action which allowed you to flow effortlessly from one call to the next with proper timing, rhythm, at a comfortable tempo, with ample space to execute the calls.

Analysis of your own calling will help improve the way in which you put your calls together. Remember that Smooth Body Flow with proper timing can and does make a difference. You are the professional; earn your fee by calling the best possible dance.