

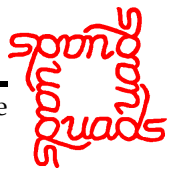


# The Stanford Quads Newsletter

Sunday, March 29, 2009

Graduation Edition

Edited by Bill van Melle



## Congratulations!

Class is over! No more calls to learn! You may be asking yourself, “What do I do now?” The short answer is, “Dance!”

You have just completed a grueling class that has taught you well over one hundred square dance calls, some of them moderately complex. Now is the time to reap the rewards of all that hard work. You may not feel like an expert right now (and nobody expects you to be), but if you invest some time dancing now, you’ll consolidate what you’ve learned, and the skills will stay with you for longer. You’ll also get to enjoy all that learning, as the calls become second nature and you can actually get caught up in the dancing aspect of this activity, rather than the frenzy of new calls every week.

As a consequence of the modern standardization of square dance levels, you are now equipped to dance at any Plus-level club, hoedown, or festival in the world. Obviously, one of the places you can exercise your newfound skills is here at Quads. Until the next class starts (October), the Stanford Quads continue to meet every Sunday, dancing Plus from 7:00 to 9:00, with some star tips afterwards; we heartily invite you all to join us.

Another fine thing to do is go to hoedowns and festivals, about which read on...

## Hoedowns

Many of you have attended “newer dancer” hoedowns, but now you’re qualified for more. If going to a full Plus hoedown seems scary to you, just remember such hoedowns are a lot easier than the Quads’ APD Plus class, on two counts: the calling is easier (though often faster), and the hall is full of people who have been dancing a lot longer than you have.

There are usually plenty of hoedowns to choose from. We have lots of flyers at the back table, organized into notebooks, as well as a copy of *Squares ‘Round the Bay*, which you can check for more possibilities. Or see [www.scvsda.org/calendar.html](http://www.scvsda.org/calendar.html) for an online calendar.

One important note: Unlike at Quads or newer dancer hoedowns, you are generally expected to appear in square dance attire. Recall that this means at the minimum long-sleeved shirts for men, and something resembling either a real square dance dress and petticoat or a simpler “prairie skirt” for women. There’s been a general loosening of

standards over the years, so that at some events it’s sufficient to dress “nicely” (e.g., men might be able to get away with a short-sleeve dress shirt), or even more casually during a day-time event, but a T-shirt and shorts for evening are definitely out.

You’ll also probably be happiest if you bring along a partner; if it turns out there are lots of singles at the dance, then you can still have fun changing partners every tip, but if not, then you aren’t stranded. Bear in mind that if you do dance as a single, conventional behavior (in the straight community) is to round up a partner before you attempt to square up.

Of course, if you go to an event sponsored by a gay club, you can ignore the preceding two paragraphs. There is no dress code, and singles are completely supported—you don’t even need to find yourself a partner before getting in a square (just hold up a finger on the side that you wish a partner).

Most Plus hoedowns include Round Dancing between tips, and usually start with a solid half hour of it (known as “pre-rounds”). By now, you’ve probably seen a bit of round dancing at Quads; think of it as a cued ballroom dance. It might seem to have little to do with square dancing (other than both being a form of dance), but what do we know?

## Festivals

While a hoedown is generally a single-evening one-hall event, there exist considerably more elaborate square dance *festivals*, which typically span several days (usually a weekend), and have multiple halls and callers. We have flyers on the back table for some festivals, some are advertised in *Squares ‘Round the Bay*, and there’s lots of information on the web (check the aforementioned SCVSDA calendar, or the more extensive one on our parent site, [www.mixed-up.com](http://www.mixed-up.com)).

Here are some festivals of local interest coming up soon:

- May 8-10: **Silver State Festival** at the Grand Sierra Resort (Reno, NV). Mainstream, Plus, Advanced, Youth, Rounds. See [www.squaredancenevada.com](http://www.squaredancenevada.com).
- May 22-24: **Golden State Roundup** at the San Ramon Marriott. Mainstream, Plus, Advanced, Challenge, Rounds.

The latter is nearby and conveniently over Memorial Day weekend. Besides regular dancing, there are workshops to introduce you to new levels or types (such as Round dancing). There are also merchants selling a wide variety

of square dancing attire and paraphernalia. We even cancel Quads that Sunday so you don't have to choose between us and the Roundup. It's a great place to get plenty of practice at your new skills, not to mention have fun. Visit [roundup.ncsda.com](http://roundup.ncsda.com) for more details.

Looking a little further ahead, the largest annual convention just happens to be in our state this year:

- Jun 24-27. The **National Square Dance Convention**, Long Beach, CA. Dress code is definitely in force here, even in the daytime. [www.58nsdc.org](http://www.58nsdc.org)

## More About Quads

We are sometimes asked, "What do I have to do to join Quads?" or "How much are dues?"

As we told you in our first newsletter, Quads is more or less an anarchy. To "join" Quads, just come and dance often enough to keep your name on the attendance roster. You can think of the quarterly rate as "dues".

We strongly encourage you to join our electronic mailing list at [yahogroups](mailto:yahogroups). This low-traffic list is our primary means of communicating with the club, including such vital information as schedule changes (especially when we'll be dark). You'll also see occasional notices of interesting dances to go to. To join the list, either send a blank email to [quads-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:quads-subscribe@yahogroups.com), or visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/quads> (which is the best way if you already have a Yahoo ID).

We have no constitution or bylaws, and no elected officers. Pat serves in the non-elected office of Despot (what might be considered Treasurer in a more formal organization). She keeps the books, and makes sure we charge dancers enough to pay for the hall and the caller and other incidental expenses.

If you look around, you'll find there are other offices that people select themselves into. Someone tends door (coming a little early every week to open the hall, and gathering money from dancers). Someone brings the water jug every week. Other people (sometimes the same people) make sure we have insurance; secure substitute callers; plan the annual hoedown; construct flyers and advertising for hoedowns and classes; and no doubt other things I'm forgetting right now.

There is nothing sacred about who does these things. The folks who do them now, especially the ones with weekly duties (door and water), would probably welcome eager volunteers to serve a stint at the job. If you would like to pitch in, see me, Pat, Joe, or Jan.

## Hand Positioning Revisited

Early on, we talked about how you should hold your hands when standing in a couple. (The answer was left palm down, right palm up, though you probably don't give it any thought any more.) Another interesting question is how you hold your hands in an ocean wave.

Here at Quads, you've learned what's known as "hands down" styling, that is, hands held in a handshake at roughly hip level. This styling is pretty much universally used at the Challenge level, common at Advanced, and we've been seeing more and more of it even at Plus hoedowns in the area.

However, hand positioning is not standardized, and hands down is not the most common styling at Mainstream and Plus clubs in the country. When you dance outside of Quads, you're likely to encounter "hands up" styling, where you hold your hands at shoulder height, palm to palm. Still another possibility is the forearm grip. You're used to this styling for ALLEMANDE LEFT; many dancers also use it for SCOOT BACK and TURN THRU. In some regions, notably New England, dancers use the forearm grip even in waves. This means instead of your hands-up wave having an up-down ripple, you get a forward-back ripple.

Why do we prefer hands down? It's much more ergonomic. It takes less effort, is much easier for people with shoulder issues, and is much more flexible at handling people of varying height. You're much less likely to get your thumb wrenched by somebody's over-eager grip, or get your shoulder wrenched by somebody heading the wrong direction while holding onto you. It also doesn't require a lot of repositioning of your hands as formations change. For example, with hands up in wave, BOYS RUN takes you to couples, where now your couple hands must be lower. With hands down, strings of calls such as SWING THRU, RIGHT & LEFT GRAND, or SWING THRU, TURN THRU, can be executed without changing hand positioning.

## No, Really, What's Next?

Those of you who hang around to watch the star tips at Quads are no doubt aware that there are levels of square dancing beyond Plus. You may be wondering what you're "supposed" to do about that, when you're "supposed" to go on to Advanced or Challenge dancing.

The short answer is that you're not supposed to do anything. Sure, if you think it would be fun, you can go on to learn more. But most people don't, and there is

absolutely nothing wrong with this. *The overwhelming majority of square dance clubs in the world dance Plus or Mainstream.* Especially if you enjoy dancing (rather than, say, complex analysis), this is the place to be. When you go to a hoedown, you can kick back and dance your heart out. Furthermore, once you've danced this level long enough, you can dance it as often or as little as you like. You don't have to feel that you're committed to a major learning experience the same night every week.

Nonetheless, there are some people who believe (and this impression is distressingly widespread) that if you're not dancing the highest level you can that you are somehow inferior. Stay away from these people. Just because you *could* go on to learn a new level is no reason that you *should* go on. There are people who keep learning (or trying to learn) the next level of dancing and never get to hang around and enjoy the level they've already learned. Worse yet, some people charge ahead to a new level without mastering the one at which they're currently dancing, which often results in them exhibiting the dubious talent of dancing equally clumsily at many different levels. Others invest a huge amount of time learning new levels and then burn out—they keep looking for the next “high”, but end up not enjoying any level and quit dancing altogether. This is very sad. Square dancing is supposed to be fun, not some competition to see who can get to the highest level. Remember, learning anything new takes time and energy that you may wish to devote to other activities. If you take the time to actually dance at a level for a while before even thinking about going on to the next, you will end up both dancing better and enjoying it more.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that some Quads members do continue to learn at a furious rate and enjoy doing so. To some extent, Quads seems to attract the very people who enjoy learning furiously. If you're one of those people and you're curious, watch the star tips some time and see whether it looks like fun, enough to make you want to spend time learning more weird and wonderful calls and formations. If it looks like too much work, or not interestingly different, then you really shouldn't bother with it.

## What Makes a Good Dancer

There is more to square dancing than just knowing the calls. Yes, you new graduates still have your hands full remembering how to execute some of the calls, and that is certainly important. In fact, at an APD/DBD club like Quads, it is important that you know the calls more than just vaguely. Do you know that SLIDE THRU involves the boys

turning right, the girls left, or do you always just turn to face in at the end? If someone asked you to define SPIN CHAIN THE GEARS, could you express it in words?

Nonetheless, there are other considerations that are important for a successful dance—the way you move in a square, interact with its members, and how you think about what you're doing. The following notes have been culled over the years from discussions with various dancers. While these points are helpful for Plus dancers, they're absolutely essential for anyone considering dancing any higher level.

**Touch hands.** Dancers should touch hands every chance they get, especially between calls. Touching hands helps set your formation, and keeps people oriented and working as a team. It's vital if you're to complete the next call and one person in your square is lost or unsure. If at the end of a call, you are next to another dancer in your square, take his/her hand. Failure to take hands is a common source of dancer disorientation and hence error. For example, after FLIP THE DIAMOND, if the new centers don't take hands, they're likely to be confused if the next call is FAN THE TOP.

Give the other dancers some hand pressure so they really know you're there. You should provide structure to the square rather than just going along for the ride. On the other hand (as it were), too firm a handhold is at least as bad as too little; the dancer holding on with a death grip is not in a position to be flexible about where he moves on the next call, and may impede those he grips.

Changing your handhold to reflect the current call can also be helpful. For example, suppose you are in facing lines, and the caller says “Centers...” Even before you hear what the centers are supposed to do, if you drop the hand between the center and adjacent end, you'll focus your attention on the center four and won't try to do the call in the outside four, and the ends won't be tempted to join in.

By the way, all this hand coordination is much easier with the hands-down styling discussed earlier, in case you needed more convincing.

**Move with a target in mind.** Before you move, you should know where you plan to end up. You should also know what kind of formation you'll be in, and which position in that formation you'll occupy. (This is related to the Sybalsky meta-rule, “If you don't know where you're going, don't go there.”)

**Point where you're going.** On calls like TRADE THE WAVE, you should first point where you're going to end up and make eye contact with the person you're trading with.

Not only does this help you get to the right spot, it assures that the dancer you're trading with does, even if he or she wasn't sure to start with. The same goes for calls like BOYS TRADE (DOWN THE LINE) or THOSE FACING PASS THRU.

**Dance small.** At Quads, and indeed most Plus clubs, squares tend to spread out. That makes for sloppy formations, causes you to take longer than necessary to complete calls, and can make it hard to find the people you should be working with. A square can dance in 12 feet square without undue discomfort. This is a hard habit to pick up, but it pays off well.

What these first four points really come down to is "formation awareness." Notice that in each formation, there are 8 specific spots on the floor which you can be in, and 4 walls you can be facing. For example, in a ¼ TAG (the name of the starting formation for PING PONG CIRCULATE), there is a wave down the center, and a couple on the outside. The couple should be lined up with the center of the wave and holding hands. If you aren't in the wave and aren't in the couple, or are facing a corner of the room, something went wrong with the previous call. If the formation is waves or columns, the dancers should be standing in a perfectly rectangular 2x4 array, not skewed, or with people sticking out. This is especially important in a T-bone formation (some dancers facing head walls, some side walls).

One thing to do to improve your dancing is practice knowing exactly what formation you are in. After each call, think "I am now number 3 in the column," "I am the in-facing end of a right-hand wave," or "I am now the rightmost end in the line." This is particularly useful when you get yourself into a tidal wave. Have you ever noticed people dancing with phantoms in the back of the hall? It's really hard to do that without a good grasp of the formation.

Thinking about the formation may also help you to keep it smaller by anticipating the little adjustments needed to get rid of the excess space in your square. For example, from a ¼ TAG, most people tend to dance the call EXTEND THE TAG by having the centers walk forward to the ends. However, once you realize that it ends in parallel waves, you'll know that the ends have to walk forward an equal distance toward the centers.

This leads into an advanced topic in formation awareness, what Challenge dancers have come to call "square breathing": the expansion and contraction of the square as calls put more or fewer dancers into the same space. Failure to "breathe" is a common reason that squares grow too large. For example, on RELAY THE DEUCEY or SPIN CHAIN THE

GEARS, the square starts in waves (ideally close together), but expands (breathes) to accommodate the intermediate 4- or 6-person wave that forms at right angles to the original formation. But by the end of the call, the formation is again parallel waves. So as the call ends, the square should contract to pull those waves back close together. If it doesn't, and the next call is something like FOLLOW YOUR NEIGHBOR, the in-facers have a long way to walk to find the person they're to cast with.

**Identify.** If the caller says "Heads" or "Boys" (especially at Quads, where people sometimes dance arky), and you are one of the named people, raise your hand. That way, those who need to know who they are working with will have a better idea of what they are supposed to do. On SPIN CHAIN THE GEARS, the people who are to trade in the very center after the star turns should raise their hands so they notice each other. More importantly, on SPIN CHAIN & EXCHANGE THE GEARS, those same people should raise their hands to make sure the rest of the square knows who's leading the exchange.

**Work as a team.** Square dancing is not an individual sport, it's a team sport. If a square is acting as a team, it can generally enjoy success even on challenging choreography; if it isn't working as a team, it can be broken down by seemingly easy calls. Note that this does not mean pushing people! It means being at the right spot yourself at the right time, making eye contact, and touching hands. It also means that the people who have the easy parts of calls watch out for those who are doing the hard parts. For example, a common failure on the call SPIN CHAIN THE GEARS (and to a lesser extent, SPIN CHAIN THRU) is just before the final cast off ¾: the dancer who should be standing still (the easy part) waiting to meet a center starts to wander. Not only should she not wander, she should be watching for that center to show up, and extend her hand to make clear which of the three dancers on that side of the square wants to cast with him.

**Move in time to the music.** Some people have a tendency to hurry up and wait. That ruins the flow of the dance, making it less pleasant. Worse, it causes failures of synchronization (getting to your next spot before the people you need to play with are there), which can take the square down. You can almost always move in a smooth continuous movement. The proper dance step is closest to walking, not prancing. Moving with smoothness will help keep the square together. Note that "flow direction" is frequently the correct direction to go for the next call; after all, the caller won't deliberately give you bad flow. Being cognizant of flow, or at least not resisting it, should also make the call ROLL easier.