

Less Obvious Aspects of Smooth Dancing

Electronic Tips for Callers

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When we want to achieve dancing that is really smooth, we need to pay a lot of attention to body flow and timing. Examples of really bad body flow are well-known; as a result, they are not encountered very often. However, some of the imperfect details have an impact on smoothness, too, so I would like to take a look at them and to give you a few tips based on how I perceive body flow and how I deal with it when calling.

Using the momentum from the previous call

When I consider a call to give, I evaluate the mutual body flow of two dancers who will start to perform the call together. The body flow results from the preceding call and it is usually a combination of the following directional possibilities (together with possible rotational flow of each dancer):

- to the left / to the right (after *Circle Left/Right*, *Veer Left/Right*, *Wheel And Deal*, *(Reverse) Flutterwheel*)
- forward / back (after *Courtesy Turn*, *Half Sashay*, *Bend the Line*)
- towards each other / away from each other (after *Star Thru*, *Run*, *Trade*, *Split Two*, *Cloverleaf*)

Symmetry of the call action is also an important aspect to consider (usually in a formation of four dancers): we need to distinguish between central symmetry (right/left) and axial symmetry (inside/outside): *Bend the Line* from a Two-Faced Line is an example of central symmetry while *Bend the Line* from an One-Faced Line is an action with axial symmetry. In general, it is not a good idea to combine calls that have strong body flow but represent different kinds of symmetry: if we use *Flutterwheel* after *Bend the Line* from a Left-Hand Two-Faced Line, the flow is great and the same is true when using *Reverse Flutterwheel* after *Bend the Line* from a Right-Hand Two-Faced Line; however, if we call *Bend the Line* from a One-Faced Line, following it either with *Flutterwheel*, or with *Reverse Flutterwheel* results in good flow for some of the dancers but very bad for the others.

Similarly, dancers with momentum that makes them go away from each other (in opposite lateral directions) do not find it comfortable to move in the same lateral direction, for example when *Star Thru—Veer Left/Right* or *Star Thru—Circle Left/Right* is called. The same is true for *Star Thru* followed with *Wheel And Deal*, *Ferris Wheel* or *Couples Circulate*; in these cases, it is also the reversal of the direction of turning on the spot that makes the action awkward for some of the dancers.

An interesting thing to realize is the fact that the momentum of *Pass Thru* is actually not forward only: in reality, there is also a small step to the left when passing each other and a small step to the right at the end, and that is why *Pass Thru—Veer Left* does not feel comfortable. Considering this, we can also see why *Trade By—Circle to a Line* is not very good either (actually, the flow is not perfect for six out of eight dancers!).

Last but not least: It is useful to keep in mind that a call can result in different body flow if used from different formations (compare *Swing Thru* from a Right-Hand Ocean Wave to *Swing Thru* from a Left-Hand Ocean Wave). This plays an important role especially in cases of calls with central symmetry and we should be aware of the formation the call was used from: following *Walk and Dodge* with *Wheel Around* is great if *Walk and Dodge* was called from a Left-Hand Box Circulate Formation but definitely not if the starting formation was right-handed.

Using handhold for reversing the rotational body flow

We also want to avoid sequential overflow resulting from rotation in the same direction during several consecutive calls. A nice way of reversing the rotation is using a handhold as the turning point; this way, we can create S-shaped patterns that are smooth, for example by using pieces of choreography like *Swing Thru—Cast Off 3/4* from an Ocean Wave or *Couples Trade—Center Couples Trade* from a Tidal Two-Faced Line.

All callers who ever attended a caller school know that following *Ends Run* with *Bend the Line* is a no-no. However, we encounter *Ends Run* followed with *Couples Circulate*, *Wheel And Deal* or *Ferris Wheel* quite often and I find the flow equally bad (not only for the original Runner but for the other dancer, too). A simple trick would be to follow *Ends Run* with *Centers Trade*, making use of the flow reversal using the handhold in the middle (and giving the new Ends a little time to get rid of their momentum).

Incorporating timing into body flow

There are calls that require different timing for different positions within the starting formation. The worst case is when just two of the eight dancers need more time (for example for *All Eight Circulate* or *Acey Deucey*): we usually do not want to stop the others so we do not wait long enough and those two have to rush. We can get out of this awkward situation by using the next call that gives those two a chance to adjust their pattern in order to catch up, for example by calling *Scoot Back* (the turning point of *Scoot Back* can be closer to the spot where the dancer running late is coming from) or *Centers Run* (so that the path that the dancer running late has to walk gets shorter).

We can also make use of adjusting the timing if the combination we want to call makes some dancers reverse their body flow abruptly. If we give the next call a little too early, these dancers have a chance of stopping before finishing the first call, and therefore of losing their momentum before starting the next call. Examples include *Couples Circulate—Chain Down the Line* from Parallel Right-Hand Two-Faced Lines #0 (watch the Boys) or *Pass Thru—Bend the Line* from Facing Lines (watch the Centers).

Careful evaluation of unusual combinations

When you get an idea of a combination that you have never heard from any other caller, be extremely careful and check it thoroughly from the body flow point of view. Chances are that this combination is known but not used because its flow is not good.

Doing the homework

Many instances of bad flow can be identified in advance: when you plan to use some combination that could be a problem, I recommend to check the body flow for all possible positions using checkers.

Another useful thing is to have a mental database of short sequences (of three or four calls) that flow well (*Right and Left Thru—Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave—Swing Thru—Chain Down the Line*). By inserting them into your choreography every now and then, you can give the dancers (and yourself) a break and be sure that the flow is good.

Letting music become a friend

One practical reason why we use music is to synchronize the dancers because their internal tempo could differ otherwise. An extremely important skill of a caller is to call in such a way that the dancers start performing the calls at the same moment and also finish at the same moment. If your delivery and timing is good and the beat of the music is clear and suitable for square dancing, most dancers will move with the same speed and the dancing will be smooth because they will be where they are needed just in time.

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