

Different Ways of Playing Table-Tennis in a Square

Electronic Tips for Callers

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Issue 2

The Plus program offers a call that might seem to be related more to a game than to dancing. The name of this call, *Ping Pong Circulate*, is probably coming from its typical starting formation, Quarter Tag (which is sometimes even called Ping Pong Circulate Formation): it resembles a table-tennis table with a net (Ocean Wave in the center) delimiting both players (couples on the outside). *Ping Pong Circulate* is an extremely popular Plus call and dancers have no problem to dance it successfully if used in a standard way—they even add hand-clapping, perhaps to imitate the sound of a bouncing ball. As a matter of fact, they clap twice in my area—could that mean serving the ball to open the game?

However, limiting the starting formation to Right-Hand Quarter Tag (which is the absolutely prevailing usage nowadays, as far as I can tell) is not necessary; moreover, it might allow dancers to form habits based on this kind of usage that would prevent them from performing the call correctly from other starting formations.

So, what else can be done with *Ping Pong Circulate*? First of all, let us keep in mind that Left-Hand Quarter Tag works fine as the starting formation, too—the crucial point is to teach the dancers that Outsides have to keep the handedness of the Ocean Wave by following someone’s back (which means that the circulate paths are not the same as when dancing from the Right-Hand Quarter Tag, but depend on facing directions of dancers in the Ocean Wave). It is also important to emphasize that the Ends of the Ocean Wave in the middle always go around the outside so the Right-Shoulder Passing Rule does not work from a Left-Hand Quarter Tag (as a matter of fact, it does not apply to *Ping Pong Circulate* because there is no real passing but we have to think in terms of tracks instead—like when dancing *All Eight Circulate* from Parallel Left-Hand Ocean Waves).

Another possible way of achieving variety comes to mind after reading the CALLERLAB definition of *Ping Pong Circulate* (somebody could be surprised that it does not say a word about performing the *Extend—Extend—Outsides Partner Trade* combination which is an improper way of teaching this call and the traffic pattern is incorrect when starting from the Left-Hand Quarter Tag). The definition is based on identifying two tracks in which the dancers circulate. Although I am not very happy with defining the call by means of a figure, I admit that it is quite illustrative in this case and it gives a good idea of the traffic pattern—however, we need to describe the action by words when teaching this call anyway unless we want to give hand-outs to our students or use blackboards or flipcharts. If the track approach is used for teaching *Ping Pong Circulate*, it can be used furthermore by calling *Outside (Inside) Track Only, Ping Pong Circulate*, or you can move dancers of the same sex to one track and call *Only Boys (Girls), Ping Pong Circulate* or *All Ping Pong Circulate, Boys (Girls) Go Twice*;

however, do not let your dancers get used to having each track consisting always of the dancers of the same sex, although I admit that using this kind of designation is easy to call as well as to understand what the caller means.

The philosophy of using two tracks has another advantage: one of the tracks can be also found in some formations other than Quarter Tag. You can let the dancers use the outside track from other Quarter-Tag-like formations, like Quarter Line or Wave Between Parallel Mini-Waves (of the same handedness). Another possible starting formation can be established from a Quarter Tag by calling *Very Centers Single Hinge*—the result is a Diamond between Facing Couples, so you can change focus between the Diamond, the Facing Couples and the outside track for *Ping Pong Circulate*, which gives dancers a feeling of variety.

The inside track itself is a Z-Formation (consisting of two tandems where the Leaders are holding hands in a Mini-Wave). It is quite easy to set up for example by having Ends of an Ocean Wave *Fold*. However, if you want to use the inside track of *Ping Pong Circulate* this way, I advocate starting from a Tidal Wave rather than from Parallel Ocean Waves due to possible lack of space and problems with orientation. Another “hidden” Z-Formation can be found in Parallel Columns of Three (dancers #2 and #3 of each Column), although this setup might feel a little too crowded for the *Ping Pong Circulate* action because of the remaining #1 dancers who are blocking the way.

We can also try to rotate one of the tracks by 90° , for example by calling the following combination from the Static Square: *Heads/Sides Pass the Ocean—Facing Dancers Pass Thru—Girls Face In—Girls Touch One Quarter—Column of Six Circulate 1 1/2—Girls Single Hinge—End Boys Half Fold—End Girls Fold*. We have established the outside track (Boys) and the inside track (Girls) perpendicular to the outside one. I think it is wise to let the dancer practise *Ping Pong Circulate* first with this arrangement first, as this setup might look quite strange to them; afterwards, we can use just the track designation. After a slight modification of the formation (for example by adding *Trade the Wave* for the center foursome before bringing them into the Z-Formation), we can also let both tracks work clockwise (or counterclockwise).

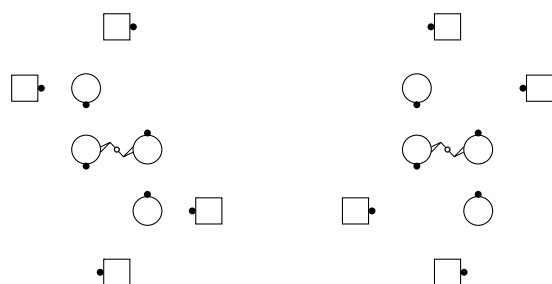


Figure 1: Both tracks rotated by 90° : the tracks can be working either in opposite direction, or in the same direction

I also want to mention some other frequent cases of non-standard usage of *Ping Pong Circulate* although I do not agree with all of them. For example, I am often encountering *Ping Pong*

Circulate Once and Half when dancing Plus. Although dancers generally know that they are supposed to perform *Ping Pong Circulate* and *Extend*, I strongly object to dividing *Ping Pong Circulate* into halves. In my opinion, the resulting formation is quite unclear (dividing the tracks into halves is a problem here) and dancers have to adjust to Parallel Ocean Waves anyway—so why not to call simply *Ping Pong Circulate—Extend*?

Another kind of choreography uses non-existing dancers for establishing the circulate tracks. Typical starting formation is the I-Formation (have the Sides or Heads *Step to an Ocean Wave* from a Static Square to get there): Centers have to imagine the corresponding couples on the outside and vice versa, and the circulate tracks may not be obvious. I believe this can be easily solved by emphasizing *Everybody Do Your Part of Ping Pong Circulate*—dancers usually know their route and know they have to switch between a couple and an Ocean Wave. What bothers me more is the fact that dancers starting in couples on the outside do not see any backs to follow and by intuition always step to a Right-Hand Ocean Wave. As a result, they tend to end in a Right-Hand Quarter Tag also when performing *Ping Pong Circulate* from a Left-Hand Quarter Tag. Naturally, this leads to confusion because some dancers usually know the Left-Hand Quarter Tag way of performing the call and they try to end in this formation, too, while some others just walk forward with right hands ready for establishing the Ocean Wave through the middle.

Modifying *Ping Pong Circulate* by having dancers do their parts provides (among other possibilities) several ways for using a surprising “at home” Get-Out: establish Allemande Thars (with boys in the middle) or Wrong Way Thars (with girls in the middle) where dancers are adjacent to their original Opposites and time the call *Everybody Do Your Part of Ping Pong Circulate* so that the dancers start performing the call at the moment they are facing the wall that was behind them at the beginning of the tip. However, using this Get-Out from Allemande Thars requires a good knowledge of the traffic pattern—if the dancers start to try to pass with right shoulders regardless of what is correct, they end in a mess instead of their original spots in the square.

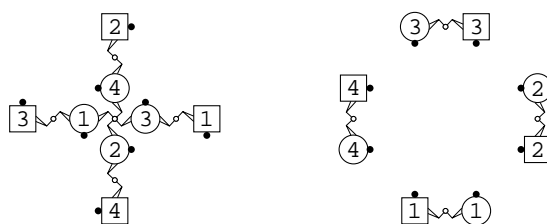


Figure 2: Wrong Way Thar: *All Do Your Part of Ping Pong Circulate... You Are Home!*

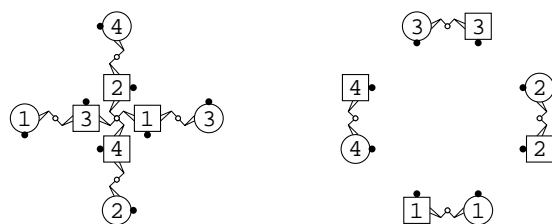


Figure 3: Allemande Thar: *All Do Your Part of Ping Pong Circulate... You Are Home!*

Apart from these modifications, the Plus program offers two suffix calls that can be used with *Ping Pong Circulate*. When calling *Ping Pong Circulate and Roll*, make sure that only the dancers in couples perform the *Roll* (towards each other) and establish in fact Parallel Diamonds where all Points are facing in (the Points should actually end a little closer to the other person from their former couple but I guess all dancers at Plus naturally adjust to Diamond footprints). You can use this combination for a Get-Out, too—it can be followed with *Right And Left Grand* if used from a Right-Hand Quarter Tag, or with *Allemande Left* if used from a Left-Hand Quarter Tag (it is in fact not necessary to use the ... *and Roll* suffix but it might help the Outsides to determine who to start the next call with).

If you want to use the ... *and Spread* suffix, I advise you to focus on formations consisting of two inside tracks where the *Spread* action is performed by dancers in the Mini-Wave stepping apart and single dancers stepping forward between them. You can also call *Ping Pong Circulate and Centers Spread* from a Quarter Tag; however, note that the name of the call is rather long so dancers may be done with *Ping Pong Circulate* before being told to *Spread*, which would result in awkward body flow. I do not advocate using simply *Ping Pong Circulate and Spread* from a Quarter Tag because it is ambiguous: the rule of Centers and Ends (in the wave through the middle) can be used as well as the rule of Leaders (Very Centers in this case) and Trailers (some of the dancers in the couples on the outside).

If you are a module caller, you probably know that *Ping Pong Circulate* itself is a Technical Zero: it has no effect if the sequence state of boys is different from the sequence state of girls; otherwise, it has a Four Ladies Chain effect and if used twice in a row, it has a True Zero effect in all cases—it rotates the square 180°. It is equivalent to *Centers Step Thru—All Pass to the Center—Centers Step to a Right-Hand/Left-Hand Ocean Wave*; however, note that the real traffic pattern is different when danced from the Left-Hand Quarter Tag. You can play a nice trick based on the “zero effect” knowledge: from a Static Square, call *Heads/Sides Fan the Top* and let the dancers choose whether their square will or will not dance a *Ping Pong Circulate* (or any number of them)—the effect from the FASR point of view is zero in this sequence state. The resolution will therefore work fine for all squares, provided that you don’t use an “at home” Get-Out—bring them to (*Allemande Left—*)*Right And Left Grand—Promenade Home* instead.

The call *Ping Pong Circulate* allows also some space for playing with simple non-symmetrical choreography: if we have one Center and an adjacent End in the wave through the middle *Trade*

and *U Turn Back*, we get an Inverted Line between two couples. It is possible to call *Ping Pong Circulate* from there, although there is no outside track or inside track any more—in this particular setup we can use just the Boys' Track and Girls' Track (so the arrangement should be set up in a way that allows it). However, if we want to let all dancers work together at the same time (as they usually do from symmetrical setups), they should be instructed about it: those coming out from the very center of the formation need to start like *Half Sashay*, and the Ends of the Inverted Line need to pass right shoulders when they meet although they both want to walk on the outside. If we want to get out of this mess, we can call *Explode And...* for the Inverted Line through the middle, or *Very Centers Run—Center Four Bend the Line*, and with a little effort, you can find an easy “at-home” Get-Out from this formation.

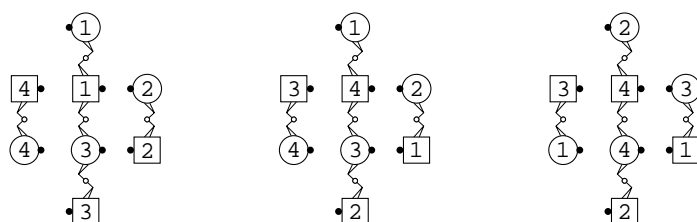


Figure 4: Static Square: *Heads Pass the Ocean—Original #1 Dancers Trade and U Turn Back; Boys Ping Pong Circulate; Girls Ping Pong Circulate*

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