

Teaching and Using Circle to a Line

Electronic Tips for Callers

Published by Tomas “Doug” Machalik

Issue 3

Many well-known callers I know of use their own teaching order, which in some cases differs significantly from the order recommended by CALLERLAB. As far as I know, some of them postpone the teaching of some calls appearing in the first part of the Mainstream list to a later period, when dancers have more experience and their brains are used to the Square-Dance way of thinking.

One of such calls is *Circle to a Line*. It is generally considered a tough call (it consists of two parts that have to be danced precisely) but I have my reasons to teach it in an early stage of class: in my area (Czech Republic), classes usually start in late September or early in October. On the first or second weekend in November, a big student dance is organized where new dancers are expected to know *Circle Left* through *Bend the Line* (according to the order of calls recommended by CALLERLAB) plus *California Twirl*. Using this set of tools, callers entertain the students from Friday evening through Sunday noon. *Circle to a Line* comes handy in this situation, as it is a call offering a lot of variety and different dance feel simply by varying the arrangement of the starting formation.

I bear this in my mind when I am teaching the call in the class. Unlike other non-gender calls, I start by teaching *Circle to a Line* from an Eight Chain Thru Formation consisting of normal couples (after preparing the dancers by practising *Circle Left 1/2* several times from there). I draw the dancers' attention to the dancer that is standing in the center couple on the left side (in this particular case, it is a man, but ladies can happen to appear there, too)—I designate this dancer the most important one for the call and his/her left hand (which is free now) the most important hand.

After telling the dancers the name of the call and the definition (of course, I follow the CALLERLAB definition exactly), I remind the most important dancers to concentrate on their important hands and walk them slowly through the call. After performing *Circle Left 1/2*, the most important dancers are told to drop the handhold of their important hand and stop circling; instead, they are to walk to their left (or to follow their important hand), unwrapping the rest of the line that ends facing the other line. I do not teach the twirl on the other end of the line as mandatory (as the definition is rather inconsistent in this regard)—I tell the dancers that ladies usually walk under this arch but I let them make the decision for themselves. Another point I emphasize is that no one lets go his or her Partner in the couple they have started the call in.

After *Right And Left Thru—Two Ladies Chain—Star Thru*, all dancers get back to the position they started from. I let them dance the new call several times from there, reminding them the hand which has to be made free in a moment. Then, by calling *Right And Left Thru—Two Ladies Chain—Star Thru—Right And Left Thru*, I interchange the outside couples with the

center ones, I repeat the teaching and practise it several times. So far, the arrangement has been normal.

As the next step, I usually convert the lines to an Eight Chain Thru Formation consisting of half-sashayed couples. The most important dancers are ladies now, and the “tail” dancers will be men in this case (by the way, I consider this arrangement the most difficult even for experienced dancers, as it takes just a little more circling than required by the definition to end in Normal Facing Lines which feel standard and safe). After a walk-through and practising the call several times, I interchange the outside couples with the center ones again. (By the way, it always makes me smile to see that the men have much fun going under the joined hands in a twirl.)

So far, every dancer has practised the most-important-dancer role so dancing from other arrangements should not be a problem: I set up an Eight Chain Thru Formation consisting of same-sex couples and give dancers a hint to keep the men together as well as the ladies. As the next step, I use the call from the Eight Chain Thru Formation where dancers of the same sex are facing each other. In this case, the hint is to finish with all the men (or all the ladies, depending on the starting arrangement) in the middle of each line. Of course, I let them try both possibilities (starting with normal couples on the outside and also with normal couples in the center).

In my opinion, this step-by-step expansion of usage helps the dancers remember the definition (they get only a little bit of something new every time) and to gain experience by dancing the call from all possible positions. On the other hand, such a workshop often takes more than twenty minutes so it is better to do it as the third tip of the class (when the dancers’ concentration is not distracted as a result of their tiredness or of several new calls they would have to think of).

Further on, I make sure not to use the well-known combination *Heads/Sides Lead Right—Circle to a Line* too often—in fact, I use it only when teaching, and later I try to precede the call with anything else that flows well (a good example is *Dosado*, bad examples include *Star Thru* and all other calls that do not let all dancers continue smoothly to the left).

Although there are some “suffix calls” available, I would not use any of them after *Circle to a Line*: for *... and Roll* and *Sweep 1/4*, it is not clear what to do and who shall do that, and for *... and Spread*, the body flow is awkward.

Despite that, *Circle to a Line* does offer many more ways of adding variety to one’s choreography (based on the “feel” of the call rather than on the exact wording of the definition). However, I definitely leave them out in the teaching stage, and even when using some of them with experienced dancers, I am extremely careful since many of them have probably never experienced anything like that before—on the other hand, it is a good qualification for these variations to become a topic for a workshop.

We can start with playing with different starting formations—they do not have to consist of couples only. Why not to try single dancers or lines of three?

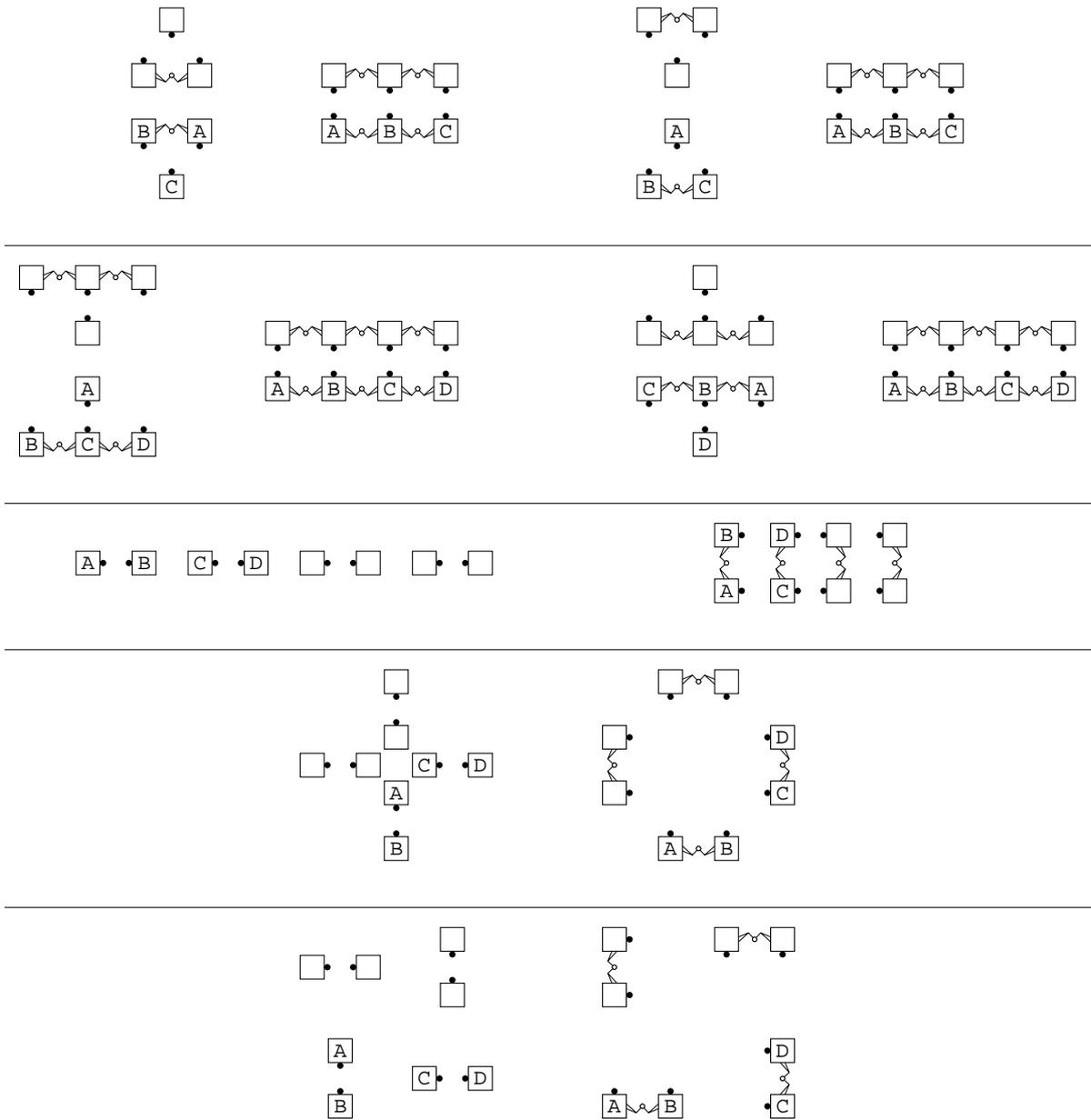


Figure 1: *Circle to a Line* from unusual starting formations

After workshopping some of the presented ways of using the call from unusual starting formations, the following combination from a Static Square should not be a problem for the dancers: *Heads/Sides Lead Right—Pass the Ocean—Boys Run—Outside Couples Reverse Wheel Around—In the Line of Eight Dancers Tag the Line—Very Outsides (Very Leaders) U Turn Back—Four Outsides (Facing Dancers) Circle to a Line (of Two)—Six Outsides (Couple Facing a Dancer) Circle to a Line (of Three)—Everybody (Line of Three Facing a Single Dancer) Circle to a Line*. At this point, Zero Lines are established and one of the options is to follow with *Now Everybody Circle . . . to the Left—Allemande Left*.

We can also use a logical extension—in this case it would be *Reverse Circle to a Line* employing *Circle Right 1/2* as the first part. Of course, the unwrapping part is a mirror image of the standard unwrapping action of *Circle to a Line*.

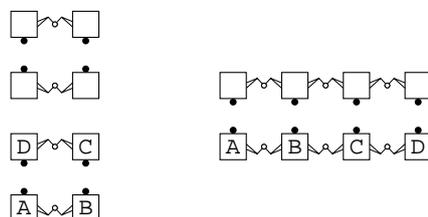


Figure 2: *Reverse Circle to a Line*

Now let us move to something trickier—what about a starting formation with some dancers facing “wrong” direction? In this case, we could not use *Circle Left* nor *Circle Right* because the out-facing dancers would have to go in an opposite direction. As a hint, we could use the description of the rotation of the circle (clockwise for *Circle Left* or counterclockwise for *Circle Right*) if the dancers can understand it. I think the toughest part is to explain how the dancers should join hands to establish two circles of four.

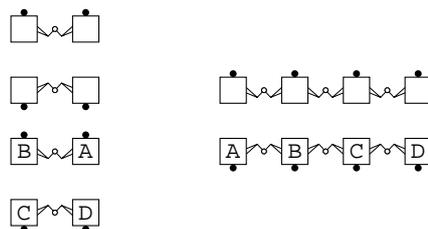


Figure 3: *Trade By Formation: Start clockwise, Circle to an Out-Facing Line*

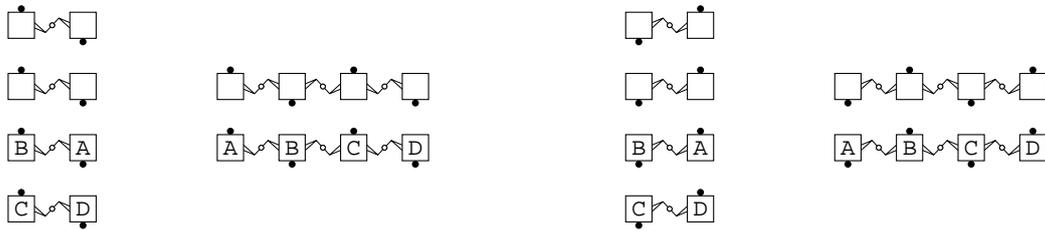


Figure 4: Columns: *Start clockwise, Circle to a Line*—or maybe ... *to an Ocean Wave*?

If we change the unwrapping part, we can call *Circle to an Out-Facing Line*—now it is the original left-hand outside dancer who unwraps the line.

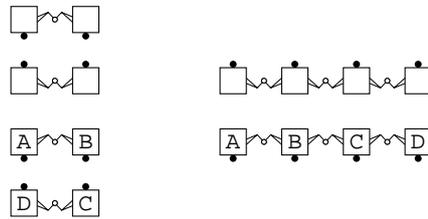


Figure 5: *Circle to an Out-Facing Line*

For Plus dancers, we can combine *Circle to a Line* with *Single Circle to an Ocean Wave* resulting in *Single Circle to a Line (of Two)*.

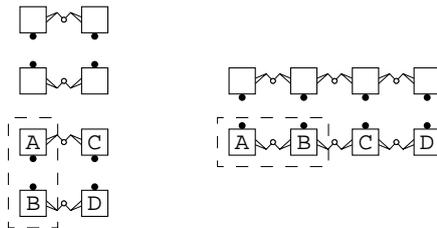


Figure 6: *Single Circle to a Line (of Two)*

I have also taken part in many discussions concerning *Circle to a Line 3/4*. My opinion is that this particular call should not be used because it is not clear how to determine three quarters of the *Circle to a Line* action (I would never divide it into any fractions—the farthest I would go in this direction is splitting the call into two parts: circling and unwrapping). However, the idea could be expanded in a more reasonable way: I think that calling *With the Couple in Front of You, Circle 3/4 to a Line* from Facing Lines is quite clear—dancers should do the *Circle Left 3/4* and then do the usual action of unwrapping to a line. In a similar way,

Circle 1/4 to a Line or *Circle 5/4 to a Line* could be used. Note, however, that although these extensions retain the feel of the call, there is no couple who started on the inside, as expressed in the CALLERLAB definition:

CIRCLE TO A LINE: Starting formation - facing couples. Couples circle left one half (180°). The lead dancer in the couple who started on the inside (man's position) releases the left handhold, but retains the handhold of the dancer on his right to become the left end dancer of the line. The released dancer moves forward under the raised arm arch formed by that dancer and the adjacent dancer to become the right end dancer in the line.

STYLING: The circle portion is the same styling as in circle eight. As the man breaks with his left hand to form a line, he should lead the line several steps before turning. After the end lady has released her right hand, and while retaining the right hand of the man beside her, together they will raise their joined hands and make an arch. Then as the line begins to straighten out, she will move forward under this arch, turning left face gradually under her own left arm so that instead of backing up she is moving forward to the end of the line.

TIMING: 8 steps.

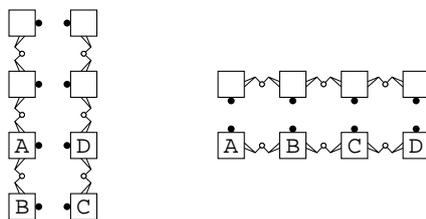


Figure 7: *With the Couple in Front of You, Circle 3/4 to a Line*

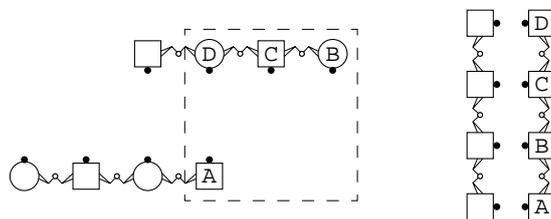


Figure 8: *Line of Three with Two Girls and One Boy Between Them, Go Forward And Back—The Other Boys Go Forward—Join Hands with the Line of Three in Front of You—All Circle Left 3/4 to a Line*

On behalf of different naming and performing this call: I have never encountered the “Slide to a Line” action (which seems to be very popular in the USA) in Europe—everybody dances *Circle to a Line* according to the CALLERLAB definition here. If the caller says who is to break out to a line, it is usually considered to be “patter smatter” as this information is not necessary for the dancers.

By the way, am I the only one who finds *Circle to a Line* one of the toughest Plus calls? From my experience I can say that the vast majority of dancers starts to dance *Single Circle to an Ocean Wave* when they hear the word “circle”.

Electronic Tips for Callers, Issue 3

Publisher: **Tomas “Doug” Machalik**

Contact: Tomas “Doug” Machalik, Litevska 2598, 272 01 Kladno, Czech Republic, Europe

e-mail: doug@square.cz

phone: #420 / 602 250 534

web: <http://etc.square.cz/>

Graphics: Created using **SDIA** (<http://www.square.cz/sdia/>). Many thanks!

This article can be reprinted on non-commercial basis provided that the author was notified in advance.