

This is a copy of a section of the minutes of a meeting of the Southern California Callers Assoc. held in February of 1961. At the meeting Bob Van Antwerp presented the Training Session on the subject of dancing style and how callers should teach it to new dancers. The minutes are from the files of the Square Dance Foundation of New England in Manchester, NH.

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TRAINING SESSION

Don't Forget Callers Our Style Is Always Showing By: Bob Van Antwerp

My lecture will "be styling in the Square Dance Movement, and maybe for some of you that are teaching classes, I'll give you a few little pointers, which I have been using and have found very successful for me and maybe helpful to you.

I thought I might title this lecture "Don't Forget Callers Our Style Is Always Showing"¹¹. It is from this stand point, I honestly feel, that the style we are actually presenting and the styling in our classes is not enough. I feel like the Callers, all this group here and everywhere. If each of us will stick together and go all the way with it, by making these people who are learning to dance, do it with style, we are going to be far more successful having better dancers. Right now, styling is at a low ebb. I feel it very much. Also, thinking back of our travels around the country, I ask myself, Where are some of the areas that we actually see, that are putting Style in their square dancing? Here in our area we are somewhat low in our styling. Our smoothness of dance is not there I think it is going to be up to us to band together and improve the styling We can do it and we can make the people dance smoothly, if the callers themselves will learn to dance smoothly. And if our Callers, and I have been one of them, many times, actually feel that you are rushing these things so far and so fast, and so furious, that we are forgetting, What is the beat of the music? How do we dance to the beat of the music? Do we dance to the off beat? Do we dance too fast? Are we making it look easy? And have you thought, how many times your dancers that you are teaching look at you on the floor when you are demonstrating? I know that every time that I have a class that graduates, I know that they are watching me dance. It makes me try to do every dance movement as perfectly as I can. I don't think that you have to be a stuffed shirt, but I think if you will dance smoothly and put every effort into this, that your dancers will be the same way. Smooth.

I have a Few thing here that I might make some suggestions on, In a Beginning class, my first night, I always start the dancers in a circle, which I believe most of us do- But, I will put on maybe six, seven or eight different beats of music and have the people take their positions in a promenade position. Then I'll have them do nothing but maintain a simple beat to the beat of the music in a smooth, shuffling step, also I'll change the music back and forth from one beat to another and have them in turn find the beat. I also ask my dancers never to lift their feet from the floor, reminding them to shuffle along on the balls of their feet, keeping their feet on the floor. In this way they will establish a shuffling movement to their dancing. I try to remind the people something to think about. Such as the gents hand position in the promenade. The gents palm up, the ladies palm down. The gents palm is acting as a landing field for the ladies hand. Tell the ladies that the gents are giving them a landing field so the ladies can put their hands somewhere. And usually if you will say landing field, landing field several times, and let the ladies hands lite, they usually comprehend.

Know your hand positions while circling. This may seem very little to you at the present time, but as you go around dancing, and see them using this palm upward affair, approximately at the height of the ladies shoulder, it gives the ladies a real good landing field and support for their hands and it looks good.

One thing that I have been very critical of with my dancers and I know that you have the same problem as callers and teachers and that is the roll off from the left allemande. I have noticed that many times in classes and clubs, the dancers have a tendency, I don't think they are being taught this, to twirl or do a vicious swing

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going into the left allemande. As they twirl or swing the lady into the left allemande, I know the ladies will "bear me out in this, the lady has lost her sense of direction, and she doesn't know how hard the gent is going to twirl or swing her, so she is completely off "balance. The gent that is going to meet this girl doesn't know whether to grab her here or there or just wait till she stops. Therefore, an easy, simple roll off from a swing is so much easier for the lady and I think it is easier for the gent too. At this point in the lecture Bob got a square on the floor for some simple demonstrations. His first demonstration was having the gents swing their partners twice, then twirling them to their corners for a left allemande. As the dancers did this, most of the ladies were out of position to allemande left. Then he had the gents swing their partners twice around and let the ladies roll off their right arm easily to a left allemande. This was so much smoother and the ladies were in a position to do the left allemande. He mentioned that in his teaching that he demonstrated the right and the wrong way to do figures and he is of the opinion this is a great help. Now he had the gents swing their partners twice around and twirl them into a four ladies chain. When the dancers did this, the ladies were somewhat out of position to start a four ladies chain. Then he had the gents swing their partners twice and let the girls roll off their right arm and stop momentarily "before doing the grand chain. So much smoother and graceful.

Vicious swinging... Vicious swinging is something we all have problems with. Vicious swinging seems to "be creeping in more and more. I don't know whether the man feels more manly or what when he viciously swings the ladies. I tell my classes and dancers that a vicious swinger doesn't know how to dance. If you can swing smoothly and dance smoothly, people won't know how long or how short a time you have "been dancing. All they will know is that you are a good dancer. I sometimes tell the ladies that if a certain gent is a vicious swinger and you know it, the next time that he is ready to swing you take your feet off the floor and chances are he will calm down on his swings. There is a chance that the vicious swing may hurt a ladies arm twirling her out of the swing. This is not good. Another thing about the vicious swinger is that his partner never knows where she is going or where she is going to stop.

At this time Bob demonstrated the allemande "A." First he did the allemande left, then right and left, holding onto this girls hand as he did the half sashay. Then doing the same thing again but when he met the lady with a left hand and before doing the half sashay he dropped the lady's hand and did the half sashay, this seemed to make this part of the figure flow a lot more evenly.

His dancers were still on the floor and as he reminded them and the rest of us of several don'ts he uses, he demonstrated the don'ts with the square on the floor.

1. Don't jerk or kick in a left allemande
2. Don't box the gnat or box the flea in a right and left grand
- 3* Jerking arms in the alamo style.

(he had the gents put their hands shoulder high to the ladies with their palms facing out. The ladies put their palms against the gent's palms and balanced in this position. As they swung by the right or left the hand position remained the same. Holding hands at waist height can dislocate shoulders very easily, he said.)

- ^ Twirling into a left allemande or chain the ladies
- 5• Twirling when doing the right and left grand
6. Back Lash (He suggested we callers either all teach it or drop it, and the membership present seemed to agree with him when he made the remark that he was against the back lash).
- 7* Constant twirling in the promenade.

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Bob now demonstrated how the ladies on the end of the line of four got to that position when two couples were circling four and one of the gents broke to a line of four. First he had the lady back up to a line of four, which seemed very awkward, then he had the lady turn under the gent's arm and she moved to the end of the line in a flowing movement.

Another reminder on all eight chain thru, that at the end of the chain across the floor there is always a courtesy turn before starting to chain back. Know what I mean?

Here is something that we use a lot in class work that I think may benefit you a lot. How many of you have been in squares where the call is to pick up your corner and promenade? We have trouble with this, and this is the way we get out of trouble. Assuming that the gent has just turned his partner with a left hand swing and is going to his corner to take her in a promenade. If the gent, after he turns his partner with a left, will put his back to the center of the set, his corner is on his right if he is facing out. All he has to do is to give his right hand to the corner and twirl her under to a promenade position. Easy, isn't it? Bob still had his square on the floor demonstrating. Bob pointed out that when the gent went to his corner without going to the center first; facing out, and he twirled the girl to a promenade position, neither the gent nor the girl was in position to promenade.

Next came the proper hand hold for the forearm swing. Bob stressed the point for the gents to keep their thumbs out of the ladies inside part of their arms. He said that the proper position for the thumb was alongside the side of the hand and the thumb pointing toward the index finger. At this time Bob thanked his square of dancers and they went back to their chairs.

I would like to remind you that we have three "C"s which most of us know are in our Callers Guide or Code. Courtesy, Consideration and Comfort. These are good steps; but there is something else I would like to remind each of you callers. That is the "Correct" instruction we give our dancers and the way of styling is another way of adding a part to the three "C's". Something else that is not completely apart from styling is to count the steps for each figure when instructing beginner dancers. For example, right and left thru needs eight counts of music to do it right, not five or six etc.

At this point Bob had everybody get their partner on the floor and in circles of four around the floor he demonstrated the required steps needed to execute figures, such as pass thru, right and left thru etc.

Note- This write-up of Bob Van Antwerp's lecture is an interpretation of a taped recording made by Gunner Cosgrove and could not take the place of his actual lecture.