

ADVANCED DANCING

A CALLERLAB COMMITTEE PROJECT



HISTORY OF ADVANCED DANCING

Unlike Mainstream or Challenge dancing, Advanced dancing has no true, direct lineage. It is a compromise dancing program. Its origin was at CALLERLAB between 1974 and 1977, where a group of callers correlated their ideas and experiences and compiled a list of calls that would bridge the gap between what are now the Plus and Challenge Programs. It was necessary to do so in order to define a program that would include a large number of dancers who were then dancing what is now Advanced, but were not dancing enough calls to be Challenge dancers. Also, there was a need to maintain a balanced teaching order throughout, as well as continuity between the various dance programs.

In 1977 CALLERLAB formally recognized the existence of the program called Advanced, along with its related list of Advanced Dancing's Basic Calls. Prior to this, Advanced dancing was a term with several meanings. It had different and conflicting applications from one area to another. The term "Advanced Dancing" lacked continuity and portability. When dancers traveled, they found it difficult to find a type of Advanced dancing with which they were familiar. It existed under various identifiers: Advanced, Hot Hash, High Level, and Closed-Club Level. In some areas, it was defined by club names and was understood only by the dancers in those areas. Because of the lack of uniformity, it was not acceptable as an international standard. The creation of the CALLERLAB-approved list of Advanced Dancing's Basic Calls provided this international standard, giving the dancer greater mobility.

This list of calls is reviewed annually by CALLERLAB'S Advanced Dancing Committee and every call is voted on every other year to ensure its compliance with current usage. In addition, the committee has adopted a set of uniform definitions of the listed calls, in order to maintain international uniformity.

WHAT IS ADVANCED DANCING TODAY?

Advanced dancing is the next CALLERLAB program of square dancing after the Plus Program. In addition to the Mainstream and Plus calls, Advanced dancers and callers are responsible for knowing an additional group of calls known as Advanced Dancing's Basic Calls.

The Advanced Program is not composed of a few preferred calls, nor a collection of favorite current experimental calls. It is a highly structured program of dancing that includes all the calls on the Advanced Program list, not just those the caller prefers. Advanced dancers are expected to cope with a higher degree of choreographic complexity. Advanced callers tend to place greater emphasis on the dancers' ability to recognize formations and to dance the calls from less common formations and dancer arrangements with minimal guidance or directional assistance.

Advanced dancing is not an introduction to Challenge dancing, any more than Mainstream is an introduction to Plus or Plus an introduction to Advanced. While the Advanced Program should properly prepare those dancers who desire to continue on to Challenge dancing, it is primarily a program that dancers can enjoy for years without ever going on to the next program.

WHAT ABOUT A-1 AND A-2 DANCING?

The Advanced Program list has been divided into two distinct sub-programs, with about half the calls appearing on the A-1 list and the remainder appearing on the A-2 list. Both the A-1 and A-2 calls are listed in their suggested teaching order. The A-1 calls should be learned and danced well before the A-2 calls are attempted. CALLERLAB has formally recognized the division of A-1 and A-2 acknowledging that there are many groups who are dancing only the A-1 calls. Festivals and other events are beginning to sponsor separate A-1 and A-2 dances in their dance programming.

HOW DIFFICULT IS ADVANCED DANCING?

There are many degrees of ability among dancers in any program. Because Advanced is generally much more demanding and intricate than the Mainstream and Plus Programs, callers must be especially sensitive to differences in dancer ability. In an effort to describe this difference in "depth of application", callers and dancers have coined the terms "Easy" and "Hard" to distinguish between the two extremes of difficulty. Also, there is a large "middle-of-the-road" presentation called "Standard" that fits between "Easy" and "Hard" or "Standard".

The "Easy Advanced" dance is one in which the caller presents the Advanced calls from common or familiar formations and arrangements. This type of delivery is generally used with Advanced dancers who have recently completed an Advanced dancing course. It is comparable to an easy Mainstream dance for recent graduates of a Mainstream class, where the purpose is to adjust material to keep the majority of dancers dancing.

The term "Easy A-1" indicates that only those calls from the A-1 portion of the Advanced Program list will be used from common formations, with little stacking of Advanced calls and with much directional help from the caller. The term "stacking" is a measure of difficulty that means using a long succession of calls, with little repetition. The caller is striving for a high success ratio, trying to keep everyone dancing as much as possible.

It is recognized that there are some experienced Advanced dancers who enjoy dancing the Advanced calls in this fashion and do not require a constant personal challenge in order to enjoy the variety offered by the additional calls on the Advanced list. These people prefer to dance the Advanced calls at this minimum difficulty level in a somewhat relaxed atmosphere.

At a "Hard Advanced" dance, the caller uses many variations of the Advanced calls, sometimes fractionalizing them. The caller might not use directional calling to assist the dancer. The technique known as stacking is more prevalent and a high success ratio on the floor may be of less importance. Some Advanced dancers want to dance the Advanced calls in the more difficult formations and arrangements. These dancers expect to dance material designed with maximum complexity.

Usually a caller will vary the difficulty of the dance depending on the overall ability of the floor. The vagueness of the "Easy" vs. "Hard" concept is rooted in three elements: the knowledge and ability of the caller, the knowledge and ability of the dancers, and the desires or expectations of the dancers on the floor.

Most callers use a "Standard" delivery a majority of the time, especially when calling to groups of dancers with whom the caller is not familiar or when calling star tips. As in other programs, using proper judgement in delivering Advanced material is a significant factor in the successful calling of Advanced material. A caller can exercise considerable latitude in presenting Advanced material and still remain within the definition of Advanced dancing. The majority of Advanced dances will fall between the "Easy" and "Hard" categories.

AS A DANCER, IS ADVANCED FOR ME?

In some respects, dancing the Advanced Program is no different from dancing any other program. The dance will include proper timing, smoothness of flow, styling and comfort; however, the material being presented by the caller is inherently more complex because of (1) the greater number of calls the dancer must know; (2) the complexity of the dancing patterns, ie, choreography; (3) the stacking of many Advanced calls; and (4) the strict adherence to performance in accordance with an absolute definition. The dancer who will most enjoy Advanced dancing is one who enjoys knowing exactly what each basic is and how to execute it, understands that Advanced dancing is more of a puzzle-solving type of dancing than Plus in regard to choreography and likes to participate in this type of dancing frequently.

The most important qualification a dancer should possess before becoming involved in Advanced dancing is experience. Experience is based on knowledge and dancing frequency. A dancer should be competent in dancing the Mainstream and Plus calls before attempting to learn the Advanced calls. It is not enough simply to have the calls committed to memory. The dancer must also be able to function successfully in a square while dancing those calls in various combinations and arrangements.

Dancing frequency is equally important. Aside from dancing often, the dancer should have a well-rounded dancing exposure. He should have attended some festivals or weekends and had the experience of dancing to many different callers in order to be exposed to varying presentations of material and delivery styles.

Longevity in square dancing is never synonymous with ability. People are not Advanced dancers by virtue of the fact that they have been square dancing for many years. For example, a 3 year dancer who dances once a week may be better suited to becoming an Advanced dancer than a 20 year dancer who dances once every other month. It is the frequency of dancing as well as a variety of dancing exposures that develop the experience needed to become a good Advanced dancer.

Advanced dancing is a wonderful, free-wheeling form of square dancing that emphasizes the teamwork of eight experienced people executing exciting and somewhat complicated choreography from a broad base of calls in an environment of fun and fellowship. All dancers, regardless of which program they dance, should strive to maintain the important social aspects of our square dance recreation. Dancers should remember to carry into the Advanced Program the proper etiquette and styling techniques developed in the previous Mainstream and Plus Programs.

HOW CAN I GET STARTED?

After reading this information, if you are interested in becoming involved in Advanced dancing, here are some tips.

Many of the more densely populated, urban areas have regularly scheduled Advanced clubs through which one may become involved in the Advanced Program. Check with your local and area square dance publications and your local square dance stores for information on workshops and classes or contact some of your local callers and inquire about Advanced dancing.

Advanced dancing is difficult to locate in some areas. Many dancers who are involved in Advanced are accustomed to driving long distances to get their type of dancing. If this is your case, you should consider car pooling as an effective way to lower the cost of travel.

Most Advanced dancing courses are being conducted by individual callers in their own areas. For information about Advanced dancing, write to the CALLERLAB Office at 829 3rd Ave SE, Ste 285, Rochester MN 55904-7313. Please include a brief description of the areas for which you are seeking information and, if possible, include the names of towns and their respective zip codes. You will receive a list of CALLERLAB callers who are calling Advanced dancing in these areas.

AS A CALLER - IS THE ADVANCED PROGRAM FOR ME?

If you desire to teach Advanced dancing, you have an obligation to become fully aware of all the definitions, applications and teaching techniques used in Advanced and must be able to express these concepts for the purpose of teaching. In addition, you must possess the appropriate skills necessary for calling and must be capable of writing, creating, teaching and presenting choreography. Along with all the other general calling skills, you should be proficient at sight calling. You should have had the experience of teaching at least five regular beginner classes and should have had at least two years experience dancing the Advanced Program. From this experience you will have gained knowledge of good body flow and will have acquired the ability to judge the degree of difficulty of Advanced material.

Just as Advanced is not appropriate for all dancers, the teaching and calling of Advanced may not be appropriate for all callers. As a successful caller and teacher of Advanced, you must know your material very well. You will take the time to study how calls are used and know the trouble spots involved in teaching the Advanced calls as well as the calls in the previous programs. You will expose the dancers to different sequences of calls and patterns of flow so that they will not be taught just a few applications of the Advanced calls. "Routing" the dancers through the same patterns as well as continual flow in one single direction (ie, clockwise or counter-clockwise) would be avoided. At the same time you would realize that repetition is useful as a teaching tool. The dancers need repeated exposure to the new vocabulary and concepts being taught. You would also be certain to include the various Plus and Mainstream calls in your program, using them from various formations and dancer arrangements.

Calling Advanced requires a more sophisticated use of all calls up to and including the Advanced calls. You must be particularly aware of the differing degrees of dancer ability on an Advanced floor, since you have an obligation to marry your material to the floor, to keep the dancers moving and to maintain their interest. This is not an easy task and there are many excuses that can be used to try to justify poor performance on the part of the caller. You must not use Advanced dancing as an excuse to break down a floor by calling material that is beyond the capabilities of the dancers. Most callers are aware that Advanced dancing does not mean fast tempo, awkward choreography, stop-and-go choreography, questionable or inaccurate applications of defined calls, a conglomeration of off-the-list experimental calls or limited use of just a few favorite Advanced calls. If you decide to teach Advanced, you have an obligation to teach the Advanced calls in their entirety and by their definitions. You must also expose your dancers to as many positions and formations as they are capable of handling.

You should foster those attributes of social interaction which constitute the mainstay of our square dance activity. You must have developed a responsible philosophy concerning square dancing and be able to transmit this philosophy to your dancers. You must generate fun and excitement and you must emphasize social amenities in your teaching series. You are responsible for assuring that the dancers maintain a proper perspective on the activity and that all acceptable styling, social and ethical guidelines are observed.

AS A CALLER - HOW CAN I GET STARTED?

If possible, you should attend a complete Advanced dancing class presented by a qualified caller/instructor. Along with this, it would be wise to study the calls on the Advanced Program list and practice writing choreography using these calls. You should become completely familiar with each Advanced basic, its definition, its applications and its limitations. The additional skill of sight calling should be acquired and perfected to the best of your ability. Exercising proper judgement while calling, perhaps the single most important skill a caller can possess, becomes even more important when calling advanced material because of the complexity of the material and the wide difference in dancer ability on most Advanced floors.

If you wish to call and teach Advanced dancing, you need to be aware of current events regarding the activity. Advanced dancing is in close proximity to Challenge dancing, where a lot of choreographic innovation and development occurs regularly. It would be wise to subscribe to various note services in order to keep up to date. Being in communication with other Advanced callers and dancers and becoming actively involved in CALLERLAB's Advanced Dancing Committee are important. You should attend as many Advanced dances as possible, especially those called by out-of-area callers, in order to share experiences.

Eventually it comes time to bring together a group of dancers who want to learn Advanced. First, make an assessment as to whether or not the dancers are ready to learn Advanced. Most dancers who first try Advanced dancing come from Plus clubs. Some of these dancers may have formed inappropriate dancing habits or may even have been misinformed by their previous teachers with regard to proper execution of certain Mainstream or Plus calls. This happens frequently and is a problem that the Advanced teacher must reconcile. If this is the case, rather than being critical of other instructors, the Advanced teacher should spend the time re-educating the dancers,

stressing that proper execution and understanding of the calls is more necessary in the Advanced Program. If the dancers are lacking any preliminary skills that should have been acquired in the Plus Program, or if they have any undesirable dancing habits that need modification, concentrate on making these corrections along with teaching the Advanced calls. If, in your opinion, any dancers are simply not ready to learn because of lack of prior dancing experience, you should tell them so in a tactful manner.

A caller must use effective and complete teaching methods to ensure that the dancers get a complete and accurate exposure to the Advanced calls. Such methods include the use of handout sheets with definitions and styling hints; the use of teaching aids such as progress charts and check-off sheets; the use of a system that will mix the dancers into different squares; and exposure to presentations by other qualified callers. You should let the dancers know what to expect of Advanced dancing, pointing out how Advanced fits into the overall square dance picture. The dancers also should be made aware that while Advanced dancing does tend to place an increased emphasis on intricate maneuvers and complex choreography, it does not do so at the cost of good dancing, acceptable styling or smooth-flowing choreography.

Finally, a caller should give equal emphasis to the social and dancing aspects of Advanced dancing as well as the choreographic aspects. Dancers should be taught to dance to the music, using the established styling techniques. Proper dress should be emphasized along with other practical and social amenities. For the sake of continued growth of the activity, dancers should be encouraged to support, whenever possible, the Mainstream and Plus clubs and dancer associations in their area.

WHAT IS A STAR TIP?

In the past, the programming for one of the major festivals on the East Coast included certain time slots that were marked with an asterisk or star. These asterisks indicated that the dancing during such a time slot would be at a "higher level" than the regular program and warned the dancers that more difficult dancing would be encountered. These asterisked time slots became generally known as "star tips".

A star tip is a special tip of dancing that is more difficult than the general dancing of the session where it is used. For instance, a Plus dance might include one or more A-1 and/or A-2 star tips while a dance that is advertised as an "Easy A-1" dance might include one or more star tips that could be any degree more difficult than "Easy A-1". Usually these tips are announced prior to their inclusion so the dancers can be aware of a temporary change in the dance program. After the star tip, the dancing returns to the original advertised programs.

Proper placement of a star tip is critical at Mainstream or Plus dances. There are some who feel that star tips have no place in the Plus or Mainstream Programs. If a star tip is to be included in an evening of Plus dancing, it is considered proper to place the star tip at the end of the regular dancing session, after the completion of the Plus dance, unless the sponsoring club specifies otherwise. If the dance is to end at 11:00 PM, the star tip would occur after 11:00 PM so as not to pre-empt the regular dancing session.

Placement of star tips is less critical at an Advanced dance. Advanced dancers are more accustomed to the star tip and it can occur anywhere before, during or after the regular dancing session.

Star tips should not be used as a means of enticing dancers into the Advanced Program; rather star tips should be used only as an enhancement to the program when circumstances allow their inclusion. Also, star tips can be good or bad depending on how dancers view them. If strong dancers always square up together, the newcomers will see a star tip as a place for dancers to show off. It is better if more experienced dancers invite the newer dancers into their squares and show genuine concern with their success.

A caller must avoid giving the impression that star tip participants are competing with each other or showing superiority in any way. Instead, the star tip should be light and lively and the dancers should be relaxed. The experience should appear to be as much fun as it is, or spectators may get the wrong impression of the nature of Advanced dancing. There are times, however, when the star tip is purposely designed to be the "toughest". Usually, the dancers know this ahead of time. In this circumstance, the atmosphere may become somewhat strained. Probably the best rule of thumb is, give the dancers what they expect and the star tip experience will be a good one.

These and other problems are possible when including a star tip in the dance program. Callers should be aware of this and use star tips carefully and wisely.

...SO, IN CONCLUSION

This booklet is designed to give you an indication of what you can expect if you get involved in Advanced dancing, as well as what would be expected of you. The Advanced Dancing Program is the third of four CALLERLAB Western Square Dance Programs. Whether you are a caller or a dancer, Advanced dancing will always be there for you to enjoy. There is never any reason for you to rush through the various CALLERLAB dance programs. Doing so not only lessens your degree of enjoyment and involvement, but also leads to sloppy, careless and unstylish dancing, and an incomplete or incorrect understanding of the calls. As a caller, if you attempt to teach any dance program without proper knowledge of the basic calls in that program, you will do harm not only to yourself but also to the square dance activity in your area. The dance programs are there for all to enjoy. Remember, square dancing is first and foremost, a recreation! Have Fun!

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