

“Are We Cheating the Dancers?”

By

Patrick Demerath

The AMERICAN CALLERS' ASSOCIATION in its attempt to be of service to all callers, dancers, and associations has provided current, timely, and effective information on new dancer recruitment, winning ways to retain club dancers, and pitfalls that drive square dancers away. ACA really appreciates the positive comments, encouragement to continue, and contributions from callers and dancers all over North America and abroad to continue these initiatives. ACA will continue to provide information that will help the square dance community recruit, retain and retrieve square dancers as well as encourage the dancers to speak out on the cumbersome and segregationist dance programs.

This month's ACA Viewpoint was sent in by an experienced and very dedicated caller who really understands the beauty and grace of square dancing. The AMERICAN CALLERS' ASSOCIATION would like to thank Novis and Evelyn Franklin of Morton, Illinois for this ACA Viewpoint. It addresses several issues that callers may be short changing the dancers by not teaching the movements by their definitions and by not teaching more than one position for each movement.

Recently Novis Franklin communicated to the American Callers' Association. He wrote: “I love square dancing. If, we as callers do not teach the movements from more than one position, we are cheating the dancers from fun and variety.’ Novis further believes that if we are not teaching the dancers according to the definition, we are doing harm to the

dancers. Novis has been teaching for over 35 years and always teaches by the definitions. Not one dancer ever complained about learning that way.

Novis narrates that a 2 or 3 years of his 35 years of teaching, he could not get a class together. He did conduct fun nights and sent those dancers to other local clubs who were conducting classes demonstrating his love for square dancing and his love for people.

Novis alleges that some callers think that if they teach too “hard” that the student dancers will not come back. He states that the opposite is true because most students want to learn by the book. If a caller does not teach by the book, why do callers and clubs give student books on square dance movements?

Novis relates to the 1983 Louisville, Kentucky National Square Dance Jamboree with 30,000 plus dancers attending. I can relate to the 1976 National Square Dance Jamboree in Anaheim, California with 40,000 dancers in attendance. Where all the dancers are now is a big question.

Novis answers the question by using his area of Illinois as an example. “There are three callers who teach in his area. Within a 100 mile radius there are seven more who do not teach. A couple of the callers have not taught in over 15 years. One of the reasons the non-teaching callers offer is that: “I have paid my dues.” Novis asks the question: “What if all callers felt like that. Where would square dancing be? (**Square Dancinus Extinctus**)

In today’s square dance world, some very competent national travelling callers, had to get a full time job because calling revenues have dropped along with the number of dancers. One excellent caller even moved to Sweden where square dancing is still in the growth / mature life cycle in order to continue calling full time.

Novis offers this anecdote and I will quote: “If you are one of the lucky callers who teach square dancing especially the American Callers’ One Floor program or even the Mainstream program, Keep is Sweet and simple and Fun. Next look around and see dancers rush to plus for a little challenge as the prior programs are taught from only one position and soon become boring. If your dancers stay with you, thank them and keep doing the right things.” Lastly, Novis believes that if all clubs adopted a one-floor program which would hold two classes each year, the numbers of square dancing would grow once again but the dancers must be taught more than “plain vanilla” approaches to these wonderful movements. To all callers worldwide and dance organizations worldwide Novis argues: “the ball is in your court.”

The Board of directors of the American Callers Association are indebted to Novis and Evelyn Franklin for their communication, and many years of dedicated support and service to square dancing and unanimously encourage and exhort our ACA member callers and other callers to teach movements as they were written, teach more than one approach to the maneuvers, and show patience understanding to their students. Help stop the rush to plus by teaching better and calling more variety in square dances. Help stop the loss of dancers.

Any individual, club, caller, or association who wishes to communicate his/her opinions on this subject is encouraged to contact the American Callers’ Association Loulet@aol.com or Dr. Patrick Demerath at pdemerath@uwa.edu. Please visit our website and newsletters @AmericanCallers.com/news.

Until next time, happy dancing.