

Callerlab 2011 Presentation - "Extended Applications"

Co-presentation with Jon Jones and Ted Lizotte, Tuesday April 19, 2011, 2:30pm
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"But that's too hard! I don't get it! That's not fun!"

"We've never done that before in our club. Wow! Our caller has NEVER called that! We'll have to take that back home!"

"Harder! Harder! Don't do your old boring stuff!"

You get all kinds of responses to veering away from what we now call "Standard Applications," don't you?

Once upon a time, there was just dancing. The dancers hardly needed a caller after a walk-thru, since they'd learn a dance like "Dive for the Oyster, Dig for the Clam," "Red River Girl" and the like. The dance was the dance. Over time, Modern Western Square Dance evolved into longer classes, more calls, less memorized dance patterns and more and more of what we call "Basics" today.

Eventually, variations on a basic call grew names for the ability of the dancers (and the callers) to be able to stretch their dance skills: "All Position Dancing" and "Dance by Definition." The key issue with that was that there were no real standards for the basic calls we all learned and loved. Every caller had their own ideas of what was standard. Individual dancers were taught anything from "soft vanilla" up through Stanford Quads/MIT Tech Square hyper-ability through Plus. Finally, the 'enuf was enuf' quotient came in and dance leaders like Jerry Reed, Jon Jones and others worked about 20 years ago for several years to build both "Mainstream Standard Applications" and "Plus Standard Applications" documents so we'd at least have a guideline for success, both locally and for traveling callers. No reason to use APD and DBD as terms anymore!

Shortly after I started teaching and calling in 1984, I started using the "90% Rule" when teaching. 90% of the time you will do a call in a certain way from a certain formation and it becomes body memory. The other 10% of the time, you'll have to do the 'hesitate and think' bit, because you're now out of your comfort level.

If you call for various clubs and get invited to call for a dance where you may not be familiar with dancer abilities, it's wise to refer to the Standard Applications documents. It's all about dancer fun and dancer success; if you're a consistent square-breaker by your calling bizarre stuff, you'll likely not get invited back.

Here are some areas we may touch upon at today's session; there are always more questions than there are answers, but we'll give it a good shot!

- Dancer fear of the unknown: Building Trust
- Build it and they will come: How to introduce Extended Applications (EA)
- Formation awareness for dancers and callers
- Definition awareness for dancers and callers; can you teach it?
- Dancer expectations, body memory and flow of calls: the "Surprise Element" and normalizing
- Hot Doggin': Recipe for Doom
- How to and whether to workshop Extended Applications: keep it dancing with music and friendship
- Helper words, cueing to the floor
- Is there EA beyond the Mainstream and Plus programs?
- Keeping the flow going with EA (avoid Stop-and-Go-itis)
- It may be danceable, but is it 'legal'? "Can you really DO that from there?"
- Caller inertia, inability to think beyond the box: "Stuck in a rut"
- "If it's left-handed, it's EA" True or false?
- Using asymmetric calling
- Expanding your own abilities to use EA in both patter and singing calls

Even experienced callers used to Extended Applications get caught by surprise at times. At a dance with unfamiliar dancers, the caller may have to scale back their intentions or programs after testing the waters with a few well-used sequences or calls. For example:

- From half-sashayed lines, "Slide Thru". If the dancers (mostly) end up in 8 Chain Thru, rather than a Trade By formation, rethink your intentions.
- From BBGG lines, "Pass Thru, Wheel and Deal, Girls Square Thru 3". If the girls have obvious trouble completing their part of the wheel and deal or the square thru, you might have to scale back.
- From any DPT, "Double Pass Thru, Peel Off". Note if dancers do not use 'Square Breathing' to re-form appropriate formations, leading to them being lost for the next call.

From here, the caller may decide to dump anything beyond "soft vanilla" or the caller may push the envelope a bit with subtle workshops during a tip.

In the end, it's about dancer success, not beating them into the ground with your genius.