Drifting

Musings About Body Flow

English Abstract

The article describes some of the difficulties we are facing when trying to make use of the body flow. A new modifier is introduced that could probably help in some cases. When considering a new entry level for square dancing, it might be worth considering this modifier explicitly or implicitly.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel beschreibt einige Schwierigkeiten, die entstehen, wenn der Caller sich auf den Body Flow verlassen will. Oft muss man auf ein unnötig umständliches und sehr künstliches Dancer Naming zurückgreifen, da es keinen Modifier gibt, das den Impuls des Tänzers ausnutzen könnte. Ein neuer Modifier wird eingeführt, der hier möglicherweise weiterhelfen könnte.

Sogar Callerlab fragt nach Impulsen für die Neukonzeption eines Einsteigerprogramms – sollte hier nicht der Body Flow generell stärker berücksichtigt werden? Auch hier kann dieser Modifier (möglicherweise als unausgesprochene Regel) nützlich sein.

1.

A guest caller in my club one day called *Four Boys Make a Right Hand Star*, and in the entire hall, all boys did a left hand star without hesitating and without even realizing it. This was what body flow and hand availability had suggested. When I talked to this caller afterwards, he revealed that even he had not noticed – the result was just what he had intended. We agreed this to be 'a good sign'.

Sometimes callers make use of the modifier *Reverse*. If they are skilled, they will find strong support in body flow. From right hand two face lines, they might call *Bend the Line* and have it followed by *Reverse Half Sashay, Reverse Wheel Around* or even *Reverse Dixie Style*. An interesting observation is that there are always dancers (I estimate a bit less than ten percent) who will constantly turn to the wrong side. Even with some practice, they do not get it.

Apparently they tend to associate the term *Reverse* with 'to the other side, the wrong side, the unexpected side, funky side, against the flow'. Usually they do not get the point in the entire tip. Are these dancers fools?

2.

It is possible to claim that these dancers are very clever. Perhaps they do not associate calls like *Half Sashay*, *Wheel Around* or *Flutterwheel* with a particular direction and with the belle going forward but simply with going with the flow, trusting the choreographic skill of the caller. If so, then *reverse* cannot possibly mean anything else than awkward, or 'wrong way'.

How do you perform *Lead Right – Veer Left*? Beginners usually hesitate before the *Veer*, experienced dancers don't. Do they know faster where left and right are? – I cannot imagine that. Instead, they know that in this sequence they will find a particular pattern (an excepted flow) if the two directions are opposite. Left and right is still a problem for experienced dancers, but I am convinced the sequence has simply been learned as a kind of call on its own. Learning and expecting particular call sequences is not part of our usual picture of square dancing; we like to compliment ourselves (and praise us in front of new dancers) for being open and awake for the unexpected all the time. In reality, nobody can achieve this, and so we occasionally need some conventional stuff that will simply flow, which gives us a chance to shutdown our mental engines for a moment. *Swing and Promenade* is certainly an example on which we all can agree.

But why does *Courtesy Turn – Veer Left* flow so much better than *Courtesy Turn – Veer Right*? I never heard a really convincing explanation. The best I know is that there is a rest of some 'real

dancing' where a boy actually leads a girl. This might even explain why *Circle Left* is much more frequent and feels so much more 'basic' than *Circle Right*. But even if this is so – it is no law of nature but of culture (except we presume that an average boy dancer is substantially heavier and stronger than an average girl dancer). I think we can agree that to a big part it is a habit. And this is a good thing: We certainly cannot (and do not want to) stop and think again after each and every call. And, most of all, not about left and right.

3.

We can divide most of the calls into two groups – either they draw upon left and right (perhaps only for the passing rule), or they are entirely symmetrical, using center and end. By the latter group I mean calls like *Split the Outside Couple* versus *Pass Thru*. The first is purely symmetrical, *Cloverleaf*, *Separate* or *Face In* are more or less the only possible continuation that would match this style. The share of 'symmetrical' calling in a typical dance is quite small, I estimate it around 5 percent.

Sometimes after *Double Pass Thru – Put Centers In – Cast Off Three Quarters* we might want to call *Do a Half Sashay or Reverse Half Sashay, Depending on Your Flow...* This is completely impossible within the boundaries of today's Mainstream program in spite of the fact that it would both be easy to explain and easy to perform. If I was informed correctly, it is even impossible up to the C4 level.

From a right or left hand two faced lines I can call *Bend the Line, x Walk, y Dodge* – but only from either a normal or half sashayed arrangement, all other arrangements would need the dancer naming *beau* and *belle* that is not accessible in Mainstream. My problem is not that I want to introduce them here but that that boys, girls, beaux or belles all simply are inadequate... I do not want to talk about left and right but about *the one with the forward impact* and *the one with the backward impact.*

4.

The wish to simply follow the body flow, and not have to encode the dancers that are to go forward (so that the dancers would have to decode it) lead me to invent a concept that I would like to call **Drifting**. It should basically mean: Do either the call, or the reversed call – the one that simply flows better. In Mainstream program, it applies to the four and a half calls that are beaux/belle dependent, namely *Half Sashay*, *Roll Away*, *Wheel Around*, *Flutterwheel* and *Dixie Style*. Its typical place is after *Bend the Line* from a Two Faced Line, or after *Wheel and Deal*. It can also be used for a natural decision of who is *x* in calls like *x Walk, the others Dodge*, so we could call *Drifting Walk and Dodge* when the flow supports it. (As far as I know, the C2 dancing program knows a call *With the Flow* that is essentially what we might call here *Drifting Walk and Dodge*.)

After *Ferris Wheel* or *Wheel and Deal* from a right hand two faced line, many callers will prefer to use a call with a right shoulder passing for the centers, implying a 'drift' to the left; when the same call is used from a left hand two faced line, the left shoulder passing might be more appropriate. Consequently, we might think of using *Drifting Veer* or *Drifting Dosado* in such a situation. Frankly, I am currently not yet convinced that this is a good idea: The next step would be to use it for 'handed' calls like *Pull By*, *Swing Thru*, *Spin the Top* or *Square Thru*. In a way I fear that this moves too far from how square dance works today (more on this later).

In any case, it would certainly simplify a lot the calling (and also the understanding) of a certain part of the Mainstream choreo. Isn't it ridiculous that the simple flow of, say, (from outfacing lines) *Wheel and Deal and the Centers Half Sashay* is – according to the present definitions – translated into something like *Wheel and Deal and then the right hand center dancer crosses in front of the center left hand dancer* by the caller, and then again re-translated by the dancer? Nobody really wants to think about *beau* and *belle* here – it is our language that forces us to do so.

5.

Excursus – as we just talked about *Wheel and Deal*: Why does in one faced lines actually the right hand couple go in front of the left hand couple and not the other way round? There seems no obvious reason. But at this point within our context we see that this allows flows like *Centers Half Sashay*, *Centers Flutterwheel* or *Centers Wheel Around*. These obviously seemed more 'basis' calls than their *reversed* counterparts at the time when *Wheel and Deal* was defined. If we insisted to want *Reverse Half Sashay* or *Reverse Flutterwheel* we would have to define a kind of a *Reversed* (or possibly *Left) Wheel and Deal* where the left couple goes in front of the right (no, I do not want to propagate this kind of choreo).

But in order to realize that the Mainstream program is aware of body flow to a certain extent, we do not need to go so far – there are at least *Sweep a Quarter More* and *Ladies Center, Men Sashay* before *And Roll* will be added at Plus level. As these are the only two apparent instances, this may feel a bit as a faint-hearted concession – on the other hand it is astonishing that nobody ever complains in the most regular case (usually the only one that the dancers master) – *Ladies Center, Men Sashay* after *Circle Left*: The *Sashay* is actually performed here as a *Reverse Half Sashay*. This might make aware of how strong the evidence of body flow actually is.

6.

In the beginning of 2006, the Callerlab members were asked to vote for a couple of changes suggested to the Mainstream program. One of these suggestions was to abolish the term *Wrong Way Grand*. The idea was that the dancers should always start with the dancer they are facing, in doubt with the partner. I was very much against the change as I easily could imagine situations where the direction would be ambiguous, and I certainly do not want *Right and Left Grand* to be restricted to the use with the original partner only (I personally often do start it with the corner, usually from a zero box: *Box the Gnat – Right and Left Grand, Go Five Hands – Do Paso*).

When I realized that a good caller and friend advocated this change I started to think again. Although I still do not really support the idea, I do understand that it has something to do with the topic we are discussing here – the conviction that sometimes we should perhaps more rely on body flow and an obvious progressions than on exact descriptions of what to do next, at least when the exact descriptions become lengthy and suggest a complexity of movement that is actually not there, and that might more lead to irritation than actual help.

7.

I just read the last sentence again, and stopped when reading we should rely on 'obvious progressions'. Isn't this what square dance was in the very beginning? No clear definitions, many directionals, a kind of 'common sense' what could possibly come next, and what not. If the caller happened to have a good sense for body flow and timing, chances for success were high. Of course, we are all eager to confirm that today's dancers (at least in the non-English speaking countries) would

not manage such a calling style. But the question is if the same dancers manage the usage of well-defined calls!

Often enough, they apparently do not. But there is a big difference: If they do not succeed, it is their fault, not the caller's. The caller has moved his responsibility to a higher instance –- the definition, or the definition committee at Callerlab. This makes his life by far easier.

8.

We drifted around quite a bit now... What did we get so far?

We realized that it might be good for today's square

dancing if body flow was better respected – i.e. if our repertoire of calls and modifiers regarded it much more as the usual and expected case, and if the dancers could implicitly rely on it. We can use a

modifier like *Drifting* to achieve this. Whenever we want to break this pattern (most of all to break sequential overflow), a word like *Undrift* could signify this in a clear way. I personally often wished the existence of a *Reverse Roll* at Plus level (and the callers to make use of it) as I am a dancer who easily feels overflow; in the all too common sequence *Touch a Quarter – Scoot Back – Boys Run* with its 450 degrees spin for the boys you will always see me turn the other way round during the run to avoid feeling sea sick. The short straight sections of the way (within *Scoot Back*) do not really help to make me feeling better, unfortunately…

Back to *Drifting*: Sometimes I fancy about starting square dance with an unusual group that would not necessarily be connected with the regular square dancing scene. For example, for my colleagues at work in a computer company, or for some homeless friends who are living in old wooden trailers, formerly used at construction sites. In this kind of groups, a subset of the Mainstream program would certainly be sufficient, and there would even be no need to stick at all to any Callerlab codified set of calls or definitions.

Callerlab recently encouraged experiments with new groups and new dancing programs – not as a replacement of the existing but as an addition. In a situation where nobody wants or needs to learn a complete codified program, we can suddenly take a step back and think first: What elements would we like to be part of our dancing and calling. If we try to disengage from what we are used to, we might find that our vision of an 'ideal' square dancing is closer to body flow than today – closer to awareness of body flow both for dancers and for callers, and relying on this awareness. With that, it will also be closer to a 'dancing' that deserves this name. If we find that this is where we want to go for, an implicit, built-in *Drifting* rule will be a useful element.

Colophon

Author

Martin Ingenhütt
Mail: Pellenzstraße 44, 50823 Köln, Germany
Phone: ++49 - 221 – 41 38 29.
Email: martin.ingenhuett@ecta.de

Source

Who Are My Readers?

I got some response in the beginning when I started my site but much less in the recent year. Of course I ask myself if what I write can be of any use for somebody else. So I invite you to let me know that you read the article and tell if you did find anything in it that can be of use to you. By writing even a short email, you actually help convincing me of the sense to write an essay like this and motivating me to go on.

Typeset

Written in Word 2004 on Apple Macintosh, style sheet by Martin Ingenhütt. – Fonts: Body: Optima 9; Marginalia: Optima 7; Sub-headings: Papyrus 9 (Blue RGB 52-144-203); Main Headings: Papyrus 22.

Version History

2006-06-27	First version
2006-07-02	Added 'With the Flow'; Last chapter reworded.
2006-07-10	Corrected the routine that makes me feel seasick.
2006-07-16	Even more precisely: The routine that makes me feel seasick.
2006-07-18	Ported from HTML to PDF; additions about the importance of expected flow.
2006-07-22	Minor additions after suggestion by Clark Baker
2006-07-31	Minor revision
2006-10-01	Added English and German abstracts
2007-07-27	Formal amendment of colophon
2007-08-08	Added *Who Are My Readers?*