

# Extended But Not Extreme - Plus

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## Introduction

This is a handout for a 2015 CALLERLAB convention session. It is primarily intended to provide some of the theoretical thinking behind examples demonstrated during the presentation. For best results, read it in conjunction with listening to the session recording.

There have been many sessions at past conventions poking at this topic from a variety of angles. They had titles such as "Creative Choreography", "Different But Not Difficult", "Different But Not Destructive", and so on. For all of them, the idea was to show ways to provide entertaining and varied choreography without unduly abusing dancers. The key issue was always how to find the line between entertaining and frightening, but approaches varied.

This presentation comes at the subject from yet another direction.

Over the past 20 years or so, we have seen a greatly increased pressure to teach more calls more quickly. There are many reasons for this, which we will not discuss here. The result is we now have a large population of dancers with only a superficial understanding of most calls, including the "foundation" calls such as Trade, Cast, Hinge, Circulate, Split Circulate, etc. We responded to this situation by restricting our call usage to a few common positions and patterns that dancers eventually become familiar with through sheer repetition. Repetition brought the capability to dance the patterns smoothly, but without any real insight into the mechanics of the action. We documented these positions and patterns in the "Standard Applications" books. There are now callers who believe the usages documented in those books are all that need to be taught.

Many of the patterns/calls that have become familiar are actually fairly complicated. Spin Chain and Exchange the Gears and Relay The Deucey are not simple, yet dancers do them easily and reliably - from the "standard" positions, at any rate. Yet there are other call usages that are much simpler by comparison but most dance floors will not execute smoothly - or at all. Why? Because dancers are unfamiliar with them - because callers don't use them - because dancers are unfamiliar with them - ad nauseam.

We (CALLERLAB) devote a lot of time and effort to discussing what calls should be on various lists (especially in years like this one - a Triennial Review year). We agonize over whether this or that call should be deleted from a list. The irony is that dancers continuously and effortlessly prune these lists in their own minds. When we don't use a call much, they DROP it. What typically happens when you call Spin Chain The Gears these days - cold, that is? Same deal with Follow Your Neighbor. These calls have become dangerous to use because large portions of the floor will either do what they THOUGHT you said, or they will break down trying to remember how that call actually works. Dancers are now more familiar with the complicated variation than its simpler sibling, so the simpler call is "harder" (that is, less familiar).

So the idea here is to look for usages which are "hard" mainly because they are unfamiliar, rather than being inherently difficult.

## Unfamiliar vs Inherently Difficult

How exactly can you distinguish between that which is inherently difficult - genuinely hard - and that which is merely unfamiliar? Well, we're usually familiar with what is unfamiliar (so to speak), but how do we pick out the calls that are also simple? Remember, our end objective is to expose dancers to a call variation that does not require extensive teaching or workshopping. Here are some elements that contribute to difficulty:

- **Number of Parts**

The more parts a call has, the harder it is. This is true from two standpoints. The more parts, the more there is for dancers to remember. Secondly, more parts generally implies more evaluation

## Extended But Not Extreme – Plus ... cont'd

points: points in the call where the dancer must determine their current position and make a decision about what to do next. For example, Spin The Top has an evaluation point after the first Arm Turn Half, where the dancer must determine whether they are a center or an end in order to do the next part. Spin Chain and Exchange the Gears and Relay The Deucey have many evaluation points.

- **Number of Roles**

A role is the identity of a dancer as defined by their position and facing direction in a formation and, sometimes, their gender. Calls are generally defined in terms of these roles: centers do something, ends do something else; leaders do something, trailers do something else; etc. Roles determine the action the dancer must execute as their part of the call. The more different roles there are, the harder the call. A call that is defined entirely in terms of "centers do this, ends do that" is inherently simpler than one defined in terms of "trailing ends do this, lead ends do that, centers do something else". When this attribute is combined with parts, the inherent difficulty is multiplied: for the first part here are the roles and what they do, for the next part here are the roles and what they do, etc.

For many dancers, some roles are harder to identify than others. Some dancers have a great deal of trouble seeing whether they are on the right or left side of a couple (they can tell if it's "normal", but beyond that specific case, they struggle). Leader/trailer is another one many need time to determine. Tidal setups present special difficulties. And asking dancers to identify roles with multiple attributes (e.g. trailing center, lead belle, etc.) adds to the load.

- **Number Of People Involved**

Somewhat paradoxically, calls requiring more people to execute can actually seem less difficult, whereas calls requiring fewer often have a larger number of problematic cases. This is because the more people required to do the call, the fewer possible starting formations. The existing formation when dancers hear the call is a major clue in determining what they need to do. Dancers have a natural tendency, reinforced by the way we teach and use calls, to assess calls in the context of the whole square. For calls that do not actually require all 8 dancers, this tendency causes dancers to make some faulty judgments, particularly about ending formations. This effect accounts for why a call like Slide Thru (how simple can a definition get?) can be so problematic from all but a very few of the possible starting formations.

On the other hand, reducing the number of people required to do a call tends to also reduce other difficulty factors. For example, a two-person call can only have 2 roles and is unlikely to have many parts.

- **Unassisted Motion**

Some calls require dancers to figure out where to go without any helpful cues from other dancers such as handholds or arm turns. Many dancers have trouble with Circulates for this reason: it requires them to visualize a destination and go there without reference to what other dancers are doing. Crossfire has this property, too. The ends have to visualize where the Cross Fold takes them and go there (especially hard from diamonds).

There are a number of Plus calls that are fairly high on these dimensions of difficulty. I have already mentioned Relay The Deucey and Spin Chain And Exchange The Gears several times. They both have a lot of parts, which is primarily where their difficulty comes from. They each have 4 possible starting roles: end facing in or out, or center facing in or out. If we include left-hand setups, that gives us eight. We have addressed this complexity by using them almost exclusively from one arrangement of right-hand waves, which means dancers only need to learn them from 2 of the 4 possible right-hand starting roles. Frequent repetition from limited situations has allowed dancers to "chunk" these complex actions – that is they have eventually stored the entire action for each of the two variations they see as a single "chunk", which they can execute without thinking.

## Extended But Not Extreme – Plus ... cont'd

Indeed, this chunking process applies to all calls as dancers gain experience with them. New dancers are hesitant and tentative when they first encounter something like Right And Left Thru (which hand do I start with, when do I let go, where do I put my hands after the pull-by, which way do we turn, how far do we turn?). With repetition it eventually becomes a single thing in their minds – they have chunked it into a single entity, and are no longer aware of its parts, or the decisions they are making during execution.

## Extending The Chunk

Experienced dancers have internalized and chunked the calls they know based on the experience they have had. By and large, this experience has exposed them to just a few variations of the call. Our goal is to show them a new variation, without doing extensive re-teaching or workshopping. This means we need to extend their chunks – just a little.

Once a dancer has chunked a call, they are reacting to some familiar cues (call name, formation, their position, current motion, etc.) and executing by feel. One key to a successful extension is to introduce a variation that feels almost the same for as many of the dancers as possible. Once dancers realize you are monkeying with their chunks, they will start trying to remember whatever they understand about the definition of the call (What did they say when they taught me that one? What was that weird position we saw last week?). If the call has a lot of parts or roles, they will be overwhelmed, and lengthy explanations will be necessary. Such calls are not good candidates for this exercise. Therefore, we need to find applications that have a similar feel for at least some of the dancers, and which do not have a lot of parts.

Let's look at some examples.

### Peel The Top

Swing Thru, Girls Fold, Peel The Top. This is pretty much the ONLY situation from which most dancers have seen Peel The Top. It is a 4-person call done from a mini-wave box or equivalent Z. The definition implies it has two parts, although no re-evaluation of roles is required between part 1 and part 2. It defines two roles: a leader and a trailer. It is not an easy call. Its difficulty stems mostly from the leads having to figure out where the peel off and move up a quarter action takes them. They usually rely on the casters to accurately cast  $\frac{3}{4}$  and provide them a right hand to tell them when to stop. For experienced dancers it is firmly chunked from the Z formation with the boys as leads, and it does not exist from anywhere else, and it is always preceded by Girls Fold. How do we extend that chunk?

The Z formation created by the Girls Fold is essentially a distorted left-hand column. Therefore, Peel The Top from a BGBG left-hand column should feel almost identical to what dancers are used to. Here is a way to get them there:

- First do it from the usual combination to refresh the action in their minds
- Then do the Girls Fold, and stop. Let them examine the Z for a moment.
- Now, all take a small step forward and make a left hand column. Boys are still Peeling, Girls are still Casting, all Peel The Top.

Showing dancers the high similarity between the familiar Z starting point and the left-hand column starting point should make this extension fairly painless. Moving on to left-hand columns created some other way, would be the natural next step. However, for many dancers, moving to left-hand GBGB columns would be large step up in difficulty, and right-hand columns would similarly feel "backward" for them. Success from that situation would likely require a lot of drill and repetition. Ditto for right-hand columns.

This is not to say that you should never show dancers Peel The Top from other arrangements or formations. Only that they will require more teaching and drilling before dancers can do them smoothly, because they will feel quite different to what they are used to.

## Extended But Not Extreme – Plus ... cont'd

### Acey Deucey

This call has a very simple rule but can be used from a wide variety of situations. Dancers are most familiar with doing it from right-hand waves with either 0 or 1/2 arrangement. Acey Deucey lends itself readily to small bite-size extensions that dancers easily adjust to. For example:

- First order of difficulty: Generalized Lines
  - Start with an extension that leaves half the dancers doing something familiar. You can either make the Ends Circulate different (typically by having the ends all facing out or facing in), and leaving the Centers Trade as an Arm-Turn Trade. Or you can leave the Circulate alone and make the Centers Trade from a couple. For example:
    - Start with 3x1 lines, centers with right hands, ends facing in (easy to cue ends it's a Pass Thru)
    - 3x1 lines, centers with right hands, ends facing out
    - 3x1 lines, centers facing out, ends with right shoulders in (easy to cue centers it's a partner trade)
    - Then, inverted lines, centers facing out, ends facing in
    - Lines facing out (ends will need cuing)
    - there are more, but you get the idea ....
- Second order of difficulty: Columns with ends facing out
  - From CDPT (i.e. Full Tag) – difficulty is centers recognizing they are centers
  - From 3/4 Box (i.e. from normal arrangement CPDT, center girls UTB)
- Third order of difficulty: T-bone formed by having Centers Touch 1/4 from Facing Lines
- Fourth order of difficulty: Diamonds

There are a number of other examples of calls that can be incrementally extended that will be discussed during the presentation.

## Summary

The Standard Application books are intended to document call usages that have a high assurance of being successful if you use them. While they were never intended to restrict call usages, they have had that effect. The result is that many dancers now have a quite superficial understanding of most calls.

The "standard" applications are not necessarily the easiest applications. They are simply the ones dancers see most often. There many usages which are not inherently difficult, but are rendered difficult by infrequent usage. Callers can expand their repertoires, and add variety to their choreography by discovering and using these "easy but unknown" variations.