

What Makes Choreography Difficult and Why Should We Care?

Text and Sequences by Don Beck

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- at your beck and call -

Dancer success is important because it leads to dancer satisfaction. Dancer satisfaction is important because it leads to dancer enjoyment, which in turn leads to caller success! (*i.e.* if dancers feel good about themselves, they feel good about the caller, so why not help them to succeed!)

Choreography can be easy for dancers to execute or it can be very difficult, and this is independent of which Callerlab program the calls in a sequence come from (*e.g.* Mainstream, Plus, Advanced, *etc.*). Here is a partial list of some of the factors that can make a sequence difficult.

Common formation or not	Standard sex arrangement or not
Good acoustics in the hall or bad	Dancer experience
How tired the dancers are	Slipperiness of the floor
Left-handed vs right-handed	Good or bad body flow
Enunciation of the caller	Dancer familiarity with the calls
Tempo of the music (<i>i.e.</i> thinking time)	How full the moon is, <i>etc.</i>

Some of the above factors are beyond the control of the caller. The caller should just be aware of them, *e.g.* how slippery the floor is. Some of the items are within the callers power to avoid, to keep the dancers moving and happy, such as not using calls the dancers have never heard of, enunciating properly, being sure that body flow leads the dancers in the right direction for the next call instead of sending them somewhere else, and that the correct hand is available to do the next call. But even when the above items are kept in control, some sequences are just more difficult to interpret than others, for dancers with less experience.

Choreography is not just either hard or easy, but can fall anywhere in between. An experienced caller should be able to slide the difficulty up and down this scale, without using bad choreography to do so. The way to gain this control is to first learn to recognize the difficulty in choreography that others create; then recognize it in choreography that you create; next you experiment with changes you make to see if things get easier or harder; and finally, having learned which changes do what, slide up and down the scale at will. Once you are there, hopefully you will have the judgment to keep the dancers moving at a level where they feel like they are being challenged, but they can still win.

So, where do you start to learn how to recognize whether something is hard or easy? Well, I've got good news for you. You already know. I have found over the years, after presenting hard and easy sequences to callers, that all skill levels of callers have the ability to recognize which are which. I have even set up squares of very experienced dancers, who could dance smoothly through any Mainstream sequence without faltering. I used experienced dancers since faltering on some sequences would have given the callers that were observing a clue about difficulty. I was amazed and pleased to find out that even before callers have enough experience to control the difficulty of the dance that they are calling, they were able to tell how difficulty the choreography was.

Here are some sequences for you to see for yourself. In the sequences that follow, all of which use only Mainstream calls (except one), some are very basic, some are standard and typical of "club dancing," and some are quite difficult. On a scale of one to five (easy to hard), see if you can figure out

1. HEADS SQUARE THRU 3/4 & STEP AHEAD
SIDES HALF SQUARE THRU
CENTERS IN
CAST OFF 3/4
TOUCH 1/4
SINGLE FILE CIRCULATE ONCE AND A HALF
IN THE COLUMN OF 6 CIRCULATE ONCE AND A HALF
CENTER 4 SINGLE HINGE & FAN THE TOP &
OTHERS BEND THE LINE
CENTERS PASS THRU
STAR THRU
WHEEL AND DEAL
DOSADO ONCE AND A HALF
ALLEMANDE LEFT!

2. HEADS SQUARE THRU
TOUCH 1/4 SPLIT CIRCULATE MEN RUN PASS THRU WHEEL AND DEAL RIGHT AND
LEFT THRU SQUARE THRU 3/4 DOSADO TO A WAVE WOMEN TRADE WOMEN
RUN TAG THE LINE - RIGHT WHEEL AND DEAL ALLEMANDE LEFT!

3. HEADS SWING THRU
SINGLE HINGE
WALK AND DODGE
TOUCH 1/4 CENTERS TRADE ALL EIGHT CIRCULATE WOMEN TRADE CENTERS
SQUARE THRU & OTHER STAR THRU SWING THRU SINGLE HINGE FAN THE
TOP TURN THRU WHEEL AND DEAL SQUARE THRU 3/4 SLIDE THRU CENTERS
SQUARE THRU 3/4 & OTHERS SQUARE THRU ONE HAND ALLEMANDE LEFT!

4. (Contains a Plus call)
FOUR LADIES CHAIN HEADS PASS THRU PARTNER HALF TAG FAN THE
TOP RECYCLE & SWEEP 1/4 RIGHT AND LEFT THRU PASS THRU TOUCH
1/4 RECYCLE SPIN THE TOP WOMEN FAN THE TOP & MEN SINGLE HINGE THOSE
FACING PASS THRU IN THE 2-FACED LINE HALF TAG ALL PARTNER TAG ALL STEP
AHEAD PUTTING CENTERS IN CENTER RUN & ROLL (A PLUS CALL) BOX THE

GNATGRAND RIGHT AND LEFT!

5. HEADS SQUARE THRU
SWING THRU
SCOOT BACKRECYCLEVEER LEFTCOUPLES CIRCULATE WOMEN TRADETAG THE
LINE - INTOUCH 1/4CIRCULATEMEN RUNSQUARE THRU 3/4PASS
THRUALLEMANDE LEFT!

6. HEADS PASS THRU
PARTNER HALF TAGFAN THE TOPSINGLE HINGEWALK AND DODGEREVERSE
FLUTTERWHEELBOX THE GNATFAN THE TOPPARTNER HALF TAGMEN RUNLEFT
HALF SQUARE THRUALLEMANDE LEFT!

7. HEADS BOX THE GNAT
HALF SQUARE THRU TOUCH 1/4ALL EIGHT CIRCULATE ONCE AND A HALFCENTER
WAVE RECYCLE & OTHERS SINGLE HINGE & THOSE MEN RUNCENTERS LEFT
SQUARE THRU 3/4SQUARE THRU 3/4ALLEMANDE LEFT!

8. HEADS LEAD RIGHT
TOUCH 1/4
FAN THE TOPPASS THRU
WHEEL AND DEALPASS THRU TOUCH 1/4RIGHT AND LEFT THRU PASS THE
OCEANSPIN THE TOPGRAND RIGHT AND LEFT!

9. HEADS CROSS TRAIL THRU
SEPARATE AROUND ONE TO A LINEEIGHT CHAIN TWO
BOX THE GNAT
PASS THRU
TRADE BY
SLIDE THRU
CENTERS PARTNER TRADE
SAME SEXES TRADE
ENDS FOLD
CENTERS PASS THRU TWICE
GRAND RIGHT AND LEFT!

10. HEADS SQUARE THRU
SWING THRU MEN RUNCOUPLES CIRCULATE WHEEL AND DEALRIGHT AND LEFT
THRU SWING THRU MEN RUNFERRIS WHEELSQUARE THRU 3/4ALLEMANDE LEFT!

11. HEADS HALF SQUARE THRU SWING THRU MEN RUN HALF TAG THE
LINE WALK AND DODGE PARTNER TRADE REVERSE FLUTTER WHEEL HALF
SQUARE THRU TRADE BY ALLEMANDE LEFT!

12. HEADS LEFT SQUARE THRU LEFT SWING THRU SINGLE HINGE SPLIT
CIRCULATE FAN THE TOP LEFT TURN THRU HALF TAG THE LINE RECYCLE &
SWEEP TWO QUARTERS ALLEMANDE LEFT!

13. HEADS SPIN THE TOPPASS THRU SWING THRU WOMEN RUN PASS THRU TAG
THE LINE - IN RIGHT AND LEFT THRU FLUTTER WHEEL SPIN THE TOP TURN
THRU ALLEMANDE LEFT!

14. HEADS PROMENADE HALF RIGHT AND LEFT THRU SQUARE THRU SWING
THRU MEN TRADE MEN RUN WHEEL AND DEAL STAR THRU PASS THRU WHEEL AND

DEALRIGHT AND LEFT THRU SQUARE THRU 3/4 ALLEMANDE LEFT!

15. HEAD LADIES CHAINHEADS SQUARE THRU SWING THRU SPIN THE TOP RIGHT AND LEFT THRU STAR THRU DIVE THRU SWING THRU MEN RUN WHEEL AND DEAL SWING THRU TURN THRU ALLEMANDE LEFT!

16. HEADS SPIN THE TOP
TURN THRU PASS THE OCEAN FAN THE TOP RECYCLE & SWEEP 1/4 STAR THRU DIVE THRU CALIFORNIA TWIRL DIVE THRU PARTNER TRADE STAR THRU FORWARD AND BACK LEFT SQUARE THRU ALLEMANDE LEFT!

1-4, 2-2, 3-5, 4-5, 5-3, 6-4, 7-5, 8-5, 9-4, 10-1, 11-2, 12-5, 13-4, 14-2, 15-2, 16-4

The sequences below were written on February 5, 2021, are all Mainstream calls, and written in a way that Taminations will understand. The sequences above were written many years ago, and some of the calls are no longer on the MS list, e.g. Fan the Top.

(1)
Heads Square Thru 4
Swing Thru
Boys Run
Ferris Wheel
Centers Right and Left Thru
Centers Square Thru 3
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(4.5)
Heads Lead Left
Touch a Quarter
Left Swing Thru
Centers Scoot Back
Cast Off Three Quarters
Centers Cross Run
Split Circulate
Swing Thru
Recycle and Sweep a Quarter
Pass Thru
Ends Cross Fold
Slide Thru

Trade
Promenade Home

(3)
Heads Pass the Ocean
Extend
Swing Thru
Boys Run
Couples Circulate
Chain Down the Line
Flutterwheel and Sweep a Quarter
Square Thru 4
Bend the Line
Slide Thru
Pass to the Center
Centers Square Thru 3
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(3.5)
Heads Pass the Ocean
Extend
Swing Thru
Boys Run
Couples Circulate
Chain Down the Line
Flutterwheel
Reverse Flutterwheel
Pass Thru
Bend the Line
Slide Thru
Pass to the Center
Centers Square Thru 3
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(4)
Heads Pass the Ocean
Heads Boys Fold (& Centers Step Ahead)
Centers Walk and Dodge

Touch a Quarter
Centers Trade
Boys Trade
Slide Thru
Trade By
Pass Thru
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(3)
Heads Lead Right
Veer Left
Ferris Wheel
Double Pass Thru
Centers In
Cast Off Three Quarters
Star Thru
Centers Touch a Quarter
Heads Walk and Dodge
Heads Step and Heads Trade

(1)
Heads Star Thru
Centers Pass Thru
Right and Left Thru
Dive Thru
Centers Right and Left Thru
Centers Square Thru 3
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(3.5)
Heads Pass the Ocean
Extend
Swing Thru
Boys Run
Ferris Wheel and Centers and Sweep a Quarter
Centers Lead Right
Pass to the Center
Double Pass Thru

Leaders Trade
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(1.5)
Heads Promenade 1/2
Heads Square Thru 4
Right and Left Thru
Veer Left
Circulate
Chain Down the Line
Forward and Back
Pass Thru
Bend the Line
Slide Thru
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(1)
Heads Star Thru
Centers California Twirl
Right and Left Thru
Dive Thru
Centers Pass Thru
Right and Left Thru
Dive Thru
Centers Pass Thru
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(3)
Side Ladies Chain
Heads Lead Right
Circle to a Line
Pass Thru
Wheel and Deal
Centers Square Thru 2
Centers Separate Around One to a Line
Star Thru
Double Pass Thru
Cloverleaf

Centers Pass Thru
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(5)
Heads Lead Right
Centers In
Centers Cross Run
Touch a Quarter
Circulate
Trade and Face In
Pass Thru
Girls Cross Run
Cast Off Three Quarters
Boys Cross Run
Pass Thru
Tag the Line and Face Left
Ferris Wheel
Centers Wheel Around
Pass to the Center
Centers Partner Trade
Allemande Left and Promenade Home

(2)
Heads Promenade 1/2
Heads Lead Right
Circle to a Line
Forward and Back
Touch a Quarter
Circulate
Boys Run
Square Thru 3
Trade By
Allemande Left and Promenade Home