



This newsletter provides promotion and marketing ideas, shines a light on people in our dance community, provides history and general information about our much loved activity, and highlights provincial and national events. If you wish to contribute an article, or see an event, topic, person, or club featured, contact the editor.



A FRESH START - by Editor Claudia Littlefair

“COVID-19 closed a door for us to keep far from each other, but it opens a window to the world which give us a chance to see the world in a different way.” – from China’s report in the European Newsletter for square dancing, December 2020.

Covid-19 has given us the extraordinary opportunity to stop, make change, and restart our square dance activity. The need for a shorter, easier dance program has been discussed for many years as a solid way to grow our activity. The Social Square Dancing program has the potential to do just that BUT in order for your Club to grow, would you be willing to make the change? Find out more about SSD in this issue.

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SSD (Social Square Dancing) CONVERSATIONS

- by Buddy Weaver, Music Review November 2020

Recently, an on-line meeting of local dancer association leadership and prominent callers/teachers was held. This meeting produced many constructive thoughts on how square dancing will look when we are able to restart – post COVID-19 shutdown.

There is tremendous support from both dancer leadership and callers for a destination program that would allow for non-dancers to become full club members in a much shorter period of time than it currently is. **The most discussed “program” is SSD, Social Square Dancing.**

Some folks have asked why SSD? After all it is not a “recognized program” as legislated by CALLERLAB. Why not Mainstream? Why not Basics? **This article offers facts for the purpose of answering those questions.**

- 1. SSD compared to Mainstream.** To form the basis of this comparison, I will resource from CALLERLAB, the institution that founded Mainstream and has by committee, managed said program since it's inception in 1976.
 - **Mainstream has 67 calls plus 24 subsets.** An example of a call with a subset is Circulate that has five listed subsets of named dancers, couples, all eight, single file, split/box. Any veteran teacher will tell you this is not a single call to teach in one lesson; this is easily six different calls as split and box do not mean the same thing.
 - **Mainstream recommended teach time is 59 hours.** With an average learning window of 90 minutes, this requires 40 weeks of consecutive teaching/learning. While this sounds simple, there is a problem that few are talking about – if the student misses one week they are no longer in consecutive learning. In reality, when missed classes are taken into consideration, whether missed by the student or missed because the hall was closed, the learning window must expand beyond 59 hours. To properly learn Mainstream in a relaxed setting, it would take one-year.
 - By contrast, **SSD has 50 calls in a recommended 12-weeks.** Use the above example of dancers who miss a lesson thereby expanding the learning window, you would properly learn SSD in a relaxed setting within 3 months. Furthermore, for the dancer who has missed, it is easier to catch up when the total number of calls is 50 versus 67 plus 24 subsets.
- 2. SSD compared to Basics.** Again, I will resource from CALLERLAB for this comparison.
 - **Basics, comprised of A & B recommends 44 hours to learn 48 calls plus 21 subsets (really 69 calls).** At 90 minutes per class, this is 30 consecutive lessons.
 - **SSD is again shorter in class time using fewer total calls.** It also incorporates some of the more popular Mainstream calls that Basics does not.

More than anything else, **SSD is not part of the CALLERLAB escalating program series.** Basics has since its' inception been a stepping stone to a higher program – Mainstream. In many parts of the world, Mainstream is only a stepping stone into Plus. Whether or not the programs were meant to be used in this way, the reality is, they are. **SSD may be our chance to “reset” this reality.**

SSD is a club level. It doesn't replace Mainstream or Plus. It isn't a tool to get people in the door then extend classes to make them Mainstream or Plus. In just the same way that Mainstream clubs offer Plus tips and Plus clubs offer A-1 tips, then the SSD club can offer a Mainstream or Plus tip. We can keep Mainstream and Plus dancers happy in a dance setting while growing our clubs at SSD.

About the Author: *Buddy Weaver started calling in 1977 while still in school, living in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is a third generation square dance caller who lives with his family in San Diego, California. Buddy became an accredited member of CALLERLAB in 1981 and is currently on the Board of Governors. He is active in teaching other callers, conducting seminars in the United States, Japan, and Europe.*



Buddy has been active in the square dance recording industry since 1981, with over 300 vocals released. He is producer of the largest square dance music company in the world, Blue Star Music. Buddy Weaver created the "Music For Callers" web site, which serves as the primary music search tool for callers today and contributes a monthly music review column along with an article on making square dancing better for the dancers. His articles appear in the American Square Dance magazine and elsewhere online.

He has called numerous times in Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Germany and most United States. Buddy is the first American caller to teach and call in post-cold war Poland and the first American caller brought to both Tasmania, Australia and Takagawa, Japan for a square dance festival. In addition to his travel calling, recording, and day-time work as a contractor, he also maintains a strong home program of three weekly classes in Southern California

HISTORY OF SSD (Social Square Dancing)

Excerpt from ‘SSD Program FAQ’s’ - by Jerry Story & Deborah Carroll-Jones

*To know where we are **going**, we must understand where we have **been**.*

Who started SSD?

SSD was started by a “who’s who” of prominent callers and leaders. If we “name names”, we risk omitting some folks who made a contribution. It’s correct to say that SSD is a **grass roots** effort.

SSD is also the culmination of a movement which has been ongoing for decades. **Most leaders recognize the need for a shorter, easier entry program to make square dancing more marketable to new dancers.**

What is the difference between SSD and the CALLERLAB Basic program?

Basic is a **stepping stone**. SSD is a **destination**.

The CALLERLAB Basic program is the first step of the Dance Level Escalator. Except most of the time, we completely **skip** that step. After a new dancer learns Basic, they **never** get to actually **dance** and enjoy it. Instead, they immediately **rush** onward to learn Mainstream. Then Plus. Then Advanced One. And so forth. New dancers are pressured to learn **more** calls and move up the escalator. Basic is **not a dance** program. It’s a **teach** program. Basic is the first step of the escalator.

By comparison, SSD is an active, vibrant **destination** program where people happily dance with **no pressure** to move up to higher levels.

Another key difference: SSD is far more **popular** than CALLERLAB Basic. How many Basic dances or clubs are there anyway? **Very** few, if any! And even if any Basic dances exist, they are only a temporary stepping stone to higher levels. Every Basic dancer is **expected** to learn more calls.

By comparison, SSD dances are held at locations and clubs all over the map. SSD is a **destination** with no pressure to move up. You can bring your friends in a few **weeks**, instead of just one time per **year**.

What's the difference between SSD and Target 2000?

Target 2000 tried to **change** existing CALLERLAB programs. SSD is a separate program which does **not** alter existing CALLERLAB programs in **any** way.

Back then (and still today), Mainstream has about 70 calls and Plus has about 30 calls. Many dance leaders felt that Mainstream was **too large** and Plus was **too small**. Mainstream took **too long** to learn. The relatively **few** survivors from a long Mainstream class immediately rushed into a Plus class. Target 2000 attempted to **balance** Mainstream and Plus. The idea was to make Mainstream **smaller** and Plus **larger**, so that **each** program would have about 50 calls.

A smaller Mainstream program would be **easier** to learn. Thus, more beginners would **survive** the class. A larger Plus program would be **harder** to learn. Thus, we could discourage brand-new Mainstream dancers from immediately **rushing** to Plus.

It was a great idea, with one huge **drawback**. **Changing** the existing CALLERLAB programs is almost **impossible**. Those programs are too firmly entrenched. Everyone wants change but no one wants **to** change. Any successful new idea must be a better mousetrap and **also** must **not** alter the existing mousetrap.

SSD is an easy-teach, fun-dance **destination** which can be reached by new dancers far more **easily**, and far more **often** (more beginner classes per year) than Mainstream.

What's the difference between SSD and Mainstream?

SSD is a sub-set of Mainstream. Mainstream has about 70 calls. SSD has about 50 of the most **popular** / most **fun** / **easiest** to learn Mainstream calls.

Here's another very important difference. Mainstream is a **stepping stone** on the Dance Program Escalator. Everyone who learns Mainstream is **expected** to eventually (and often, immediately) learn Plus. By contrast, SSD is a stand-alone **destination** program. People are welcome to dance SSD for as long as they want, with **no pressure** to move up.

SSD is aimed at people who **want** something that the existing CALLERLAB dance programs **cannot** give them. Think about the last time **you** started a beginner group. Only **some** of those people survived until the end of the class. SSD is aimed at the people who dropped **out** of Mainstream class, along with all of their friends they **would** have brought in. SSD lets us **lose fewer** and **keep more** new dancers.

Callers who use SSD report that most SSD dancers are **happy** to dance that program forever, and to bring their friends. Always remember that SSD is a new product aimed at a new (and **bigger**) audience than Mainstream.

Why was SSD created?

Square dancing needs a thriving **entry** program which is **also** a **destination** program and which does **not** even attempt to **change** the existing CALLERLAB dance programs. Fortunately, such a program has **already** been around for decades.

Each year, millions of people migrate to warmer climates for the winter. They're known as "snowbirds" or "winter Texans" or "winter Arizonans" or "winter Floridians", etc. For many decades, square dancing was and continues to be a popular recreational activity for temporary winter visitors. A winter dance program must absolutely be teachable during a **12-week** winter season.

Over the years, winter square dance programs have been extremely successful. Some groups are **huge**, with hundreds of members.

If you said "the SSD program was born in the winter RV parks", you'd be correct. Square dancing today needs a dance program which is **quick** and **easy** to learn, and also **fun** and **satisfying** to dance. SSD borrowed heavily from the most **successful** program of this type. SSD achieves the delicate **balance** between the needs of both **new** and **experienced** dancers.

What do the letters SSD mean?

SSD started a few years ago as “**Sustainable** Square Dancing”. Shortly after SSD began, CALLERLAB did what they always do. They formed a committee to study and test the new idea. The study came back with good news. Clubs using SSD were able to **grow** their groups with great results.

Now it’s time to introduce this experimental program to a **wider** audience. “Wider audience” means “**all** callers and dancers outside of the SSD committee”. The SSD committee has already had the product for a few years.

Recently, the SSD committee voted to **change** the name from “**Sustainable** Square Dancing” to “**Social** Square Dancing”. Let’s agree that the SSD committee is the proper place to shape the program. We have no need to worry about **why** they wanted to change the name from Sustainable to Social. The name changed because a majority of leaders voted **for** the name change.

From the very beginning of SSD, it was common to use just the acronym “**SSD**”. That common term remains the same. The general plan is to promote SSD as **Sustainable** Square Dancing to callers and leaders (who care a great deal about **sustainability**), and to promote it as **Social** Square Dancing to dancers and prospective beginners (who care a great deal about **sociability**).

If SSD is from CALLERLAB, why can’t I find it on the CALLERLAB website?

It’s there. It’s just buried underneath a **mountain** of other things CALLERLAB has done for the past five decades. CALLERLAB documents decades of square dance history. SSD is just the latest chapter.

Search is your friend!

If you want **general** knowledge about SSD from many different sources:

- The **CALLERLAB Knowledge** website has extremely good info on almost any square dancing topic. Go to <http://callerlabknowledge.org> and search for **ssddoc**.
- The very first result is “SSD Documentation and Support Materials”, a collection linking to documents and materials from many different sources. Here’s the direct link: <http://callerlabknowledge.org/?s=ssddoc>

If you want **specific** info about **current** items of **business** in the CALLERLAB SSD **Committee**:

- The regular CALLERLAB website has current documents for active committees. Go to <http://callerlab.org> and search for **SSD**.
- The search results will contain all current CALLERLAB documents mentioning SSD, including the Teaching Guide, press releases, committee brief, etc.

Who uses SSD?

Callers and dancers all over the world! The **Social Square Dancing** group on Facebook has over 500 members, and the number increases every week. More and more leaders discover SSD every day.

You might wonder why there is no published list of SSD leaders. Here’s why: SSD is growing very **quickly**. Any roster of SSD groups would be out of date before you could even read it. The best answer to “Who uses SSD?” is “People who have **found a better way** for square dancing to **thrive!**”

Jennifer was a pretty 18 year old girl. In the week before Christmas she sauntered up to the curtain counter, and was trying to decide which of the many types of tinsel she would buy. Finally, she made her choice and asked the spotty youth who was manning the fabric section. 'How much is this gold tinsel garland'.

The spotty youth pointed to the Christmas mistletoe above the counter and said, 'This week we have a special offer, just one kiss per metre'. 'Wow, that's great', said Jennifer, 'I'll take 12 metres'.

With expectation and anticipation written all over his face, the boy measured out the tinsel, wrapped up the garland, and gave it to Jennifer. She then called to an old man who had been browsing through the Christmas trees and said, 'My Grandpa will settle the bill.'

RECOVERING FROM COVID . . . STILL

- by Kendall Smith, Caller, Lloyminster, Saskatchewan

Hi all, Kathy and I are in our early 60's, and we both came down with covid-19 in July. We believe she got it while out to a restaurant with some friends. She was the only one who went to the bathroom. Yes she washed her hands but she had to open the door to leave and that was how we figured she got it. Only one of the group got sick.



She had a mild 6 day flu and no further symptoms or issues since then and then generously gave it to me. My initial 5 to 6 days was also a mild flu and we both thought so much for covid. We did get tested on Friday July 31 and they called us Sunday Aug 2 with the news we tested positive.

I thought I was getting better when on August 4 I suddenly had a really hard time breathing so I was sent to emergency where I spent 8 hours being tested and found to have bacterial infections also. So started extra strength antibiotics and steroids, which had some lovely side effects to the point where they had to change them.

Over the next two months things were not too bad. I thought I was doing ok and slowly recovering. I had difficulty breathing, rashes, brain fog where I had difficulty thinking or remembering things, severe indigestion due to liver damage from the virus, fever sweats, headaches, sore throat, and a few other issues.

Today I still have breathing issues where standing up and walking for as little as 15 minutes and my heart rate jumps to over 110 and breathing at over 30 breaths a minute. Still have a rash and severe indigestion so I have had to change my diet which has not helped a lot as I am still on medication twice a day to help control the acid in my stomach. Cannot talk without running out of breath and start wheezing. Brain fog starts to happen later in the day as I get tired. Still have a sore throat and a constant feeling as if there is a lump in the back of my throat.

Before covid came around I was exercising daily when not sheep shearing where I could easily shear over 100 sheep a day. No pre-existing conditions, no allergies, no health issues. I was fit! Now I turn down jobs because there is now way I could even shear one sheep. No possibility of square dance calling even if we were open which I still hope we will be able to sometime in 2021.

One of the biggest things I think would help if we stop seeing the stats on people being "recovered" from covid-19. There are thousands like me who are no longer covid positive but we are not recovered. Some are going on their eighth and ninth month from when covid first came out in the spring. These are hospital workers, doctors, health care people who are reporting this so it is not just something that should be blown off as people who do not know health issues. Yes for most people covid-19 will not be a major issue if they get it but for some (figures are putting it between 10% to 20%) people who get covid-19 it turns into a long term horror story.

Do I have the answers? Hell no! It would help if people would take it a little more seriously though. You don't want to wear a mask, fine but wear it to help other people. For all those like me, we are being told to still isolate ourselves as much as possible due to our weakened immune system. I wish there was a quick and easy answer to all this, unfortunately there is not. Depending on which side of the fence we are sitting on the government is either doing a good or bad job. If they lock us down they are bad and if they let us stay open they are bad. Yes they could be doing somethings better but remember that the government is composed mainly of people like you and me and our neighbours who are just trying to get by on a day to day basis.

Well Claudia is probably going to cut me off so one final word - take care of yourselves and hope we can get back dancing as I have some square dance tunes I would love to call for all of you when we are back on our feet again. Hope you all are doing well and that eventually we can get together for wine and cheese. I have 120 bottles in the basement I cannot drink as the liver damage still has not come around to being healthy yet. Wine will age and improve hopefully like the rest of us.

"Nothing ever seems too bad, too hard, or too sad when you've got a Christmas tree in the living room." - Nora Roberts



HOW I DEALT WITH COVID

- by Beverly Vallieres, Square Dancer, Calgary

It all started on March 17, 2020. That's the day things came to a halt and everything closed. It was unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. We were effectively in a lockdown!

I'm 61. I was feeling nervous about this as I was just getting my feet back on the ground from a terrible 2019. My daughter was especially anxious about me being alone here in Calgary with no family. **It was decided that for both our sakes I would go to their place and hunker down.** They have a very small, cozy typical old farmhouse with two bedrooms and only one bathroom, which will become important later on. I now felt better as this would give me company, I could help with my grandson's online schooling and we like playing games together.

Fearing they might close some roads out of the City I ran around gathering things I would require like passwords, laptop, reading material etc., as well as what I needed for my dog. A day and a half later I arrived in the country where I settled into my room, setting up a cot at the end of my grandson's bed. We were roomies now, but after 2 or 3 days things suddenly changed.

I was feeling tired but put it to having been working lots of hours and was now doing nothing. The fatigue however became worse to the point I would fall asleep sitting on the couch, and then even on the phone to my other daughter who resides in British Columbia. But I did not realize I was doing this. This frightened her! Then I became extremely chilled despite having four layers of clothes and two blankets. I shook like a tree in high winds unable to even hold onto my phone. My daughter was convinced I had a high fever but it proved not to be the case. This prompted my daughter to call the Covid phone line where she was advised that I should isolate and she needed to make sure I could be awakened. I said goodbye to my roomy and he was effectively removed to the living room, which now became his bedroom! No more games, laughing, etc. for us! It was sad, so sad.

I then developed a debilitating headache, which I had trouble controlling. Then came the dreaded phone call from AHS Tracing. I had been exposed. Due to my symptoms it was advised that I be tested. It took four days for this to happen. Oh, how terrible I felt! What if I was positive and I had exposed my family? All the what-ifs kept going through my head.

Six days after being tested and not hearing anything I went on my health account page and to my surprise my results were there in black and white - POSITIVE. I gasped as I could not believe it. I was in shock!

During all this time in isolation (about 12 days) my food was made for me and delivered to my door where I consumed it in bed by myself feeling very lonely. I felt fat from eating and not doing anything and mentioned to my daughter that my spare tire was getting inflated.

But the real ordeal was every time I needed to use the bathroom that we all had to share. It went like this. With mask on I would enter and do what needed to be done, close the toilet lid as this is advised, then flush. Wipe the lid and toilet handle with disinfectant. Proceed to the sink, turn the tap on, wipe it, then open the bathroom door and wipe the door handle, go back to the sink wash my hands, turn off the tap, exit the bathroom and dispose of the paper towel. Made you really think about whether or not you really needed to go!

During my time in isolation I mostly slept, and talked to or texted a few friends that called/texted to check on me. Could not read much as my head hurt too much.

A couple of times if the family were in the living room watching a movie, I would go sit in the kitchen and watch the movie from there, with a mask on. I would then wipe the area before they came through and back to my room I'd go. **There was one event that brought a smile to my face.** From my room I had the view of the stove where I could see my daughter making dinner. One evening she turned on the wrong burner and set an oven mitt on fire. She was so funny jumping and saying, "What do I do? What do I do?" I'm telling her, "Get the baking soda!" Then she said, "Oh my, does it ever stink!" This is when I realized I had no smell!

The call finally came from AHS on the seventh day after my test. We went over everything and I was then freed from isolation after a total of 14 days. But now everyone else had to stay home and I became the shopper. To my relief my family did not get it and we are all living happily ever after, covid free!

I was one of the lucky ones in the sense that I had no severe breathing issues or have any lingering side effects. Be safe everyone!

Why are Christmas trees so bad at sewing? They're always dropping their needles.
I got a Christmas card full of rice in the post today. I think it was from my Uncle Ben.
A gingerbread man went to the doctor's complaining of a sore knee. "A sore knee?" the doctor said. "Have you tried icing it?"

COVID-19 AND OUR DANCE ACTIVITY

- By Jerry Reed, ARTS Executive Director, December 2020

In December 2020 the ARTS sent a request to our mailing list asking for information regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our dance community.

We received over 20 responses from 18 different areas. With only a few exceptions, the reports were very similar, i.e. "We are not dancing." The one very notable exception was a report from Australia. The activity is down in Australia, however, they are recovering and there are reports of considerable square and round dancing throughout the country. The same is true for Tasmania.

There are areas in the USA with limited dancing, both Square and Round. Most areas report strict protocols including; wearing masks, strict use of hand sanitizer, only individual drinks & snacks, limits on the number of attendees, social distancing when not dancing, strict cleaning requirements, and limited use of gloves.

Some reports included hope for improvement after the vaccine has been dispensed. Some areas will be re-evaluating their situation in January/February 2021.

In the Spring of 2021 The ARTS plans to do this survey again. We are hopeful the activity will be on the road to full recovery by then. We hope this information is useful. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact our Executive Director, Jerry Reed at - Email DirectorARTS@aol.com. Safe dancing to all of you!

FOUR CANDLES

Four candles were burning and it was quiet. So quiet that you could hear how the four candles started talking to each other. The first candle sighed and said: *"My name is PEACE. My light gives security, but in the world, there are so many wars. The people don't want me anymore."* Its light grew smaller and smaller and finally, it went out.

The second candle flickered and said: *"My name is FAITH, but I feel useless. The people don't believe in anything anymore. What difference does it make, whether I burn or not?"* A whiff of air went through the room and the second candle went out.

Softly and shyly now the third candle spoke up: *"My name is LOVE. I don't have the strength to keep burning. Egotism, ignorance and hate are ruling the world. The people are only concerned about themselves and are not willing to treat each other lovingly, friendly and considerately and to make each other happy."* And with a final flicker this light as well was gone.

A child came in. With astonishment, he looked at the candles and said: *"Why are you not burning? You can't have died! I need you!"* Sadly, he glanced at the three burnt out candles and tears ran down his cheeks.

At this moment, the fourth candle spoke and said: *"Don't be sad, child. My name is HOPE. As long as I am burning, we can always relight the other candles."* With a small piece of wood the child took light from this candle and brought PEACE, FAITH and LOVE back to life.

- Source: European Newsletter for Square Dancing, December 2020

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF DARKNESS - by Dee Jackins



Dee is an avid square and round dancer and enjoys writing. She shares the lighter side of some of her experiences, challenges and near disasters as a sight impaired person. See issue #2015-6 for her complete story under "Chatter Close-up".

One of my neighbors was heading out to the mall to get some shopping done and invited me to come along on this expedition. There was certainly nothing pressing in my schedule so away we went. After visiting too many establishments and just about draining the bank account, darkness had fallen and we headed home. We had been discussing certain tradesmen who were available for maintenance or repairs when I started to look for my slate and stylist to write down a few names. As I'm rummaging through my handbag, she commented "*Just a minute, let me switch the lights on.*" Before I could speak up, she said "*There you go.*" With a grin from ear to ear, I glanced over in her direction and replied, "*Thank you! But that's not necessary; I really don't need any lights.*" I heard this odd sounding gasp with an apology, as we both started to laugh. "*There's no need for apologies - it actually happens quite often. It's just a part of life!*"

Sometime ago my daughter had made arrangements to meet with a friend at my home, this would save time since she planned to visit here first. I was informed of this to avoid any misunderstanding. An hour or more had passed but no friend had shown up. After a quick phone call she found that her friend had spent over half an hour in the driveway waiting for her to show up. When asked why she didn't go in and wait inside, well, "*The house is dark, there's no one home!*" My daughter had to chuckle but apologized for not explaining, "*Oops, I should have told you, my Mom is home but sometimes she forgets to turn the lights on, you should ring the door bell.*" Since then I try to pay attention to these little details. If I'm expecting anyone the lights go on immediately, whether it's family, friend or foe. The first words I hear when someone enters my home are, "*Its dark in here!*"

While attending a square dance one time, a lady was looking for me but was unsuccessful in doing so. She had checked in the kitchen, down the hallway and past the washrooms with no success. Finally on her second attempt to find me, I met her in the hallway. "*Where have you been? I've been looking for you.*" I told her I was in the washroom, and then it dawned on her... "*Oh goodness, (with a little chuckle) I forgot, there were no lights under the door so I just walked right on by.*" Now there's a definite advantage, it sure simplifies my vanishing from sight if necessary.

There's a proverb about the 'blind leading the blind', but I like the response given by a 5 year old child, "*Get out of the way!*" **Wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Prosperous and Happy New Year!**

KELLY'S KORNER - by Kelly Thompson

Kelly started square dancing in 2016 after being coerced by his sister. He admits that he would have never walked into the club on his own. He has since found a whole new way of looking at life, a community of new friends and personal confidence that didn't exist before.

TIME FOR LAUNCH

If we said that lunch will be served at five a good many people will show up on time. There is something about being called for lunch that inspires people to take action. If we were to take a ride in a spaceship or on a cruise usually a time is given for the launch. In that case, is it because the word 'launch' is so close to being the same as 'lunch', or is there another reason people take action?

I wonder with square dancing what might happen if we set a time to launch something new? We know advertising can do wonders but if something isn't new, people don't usually pay attention. So then perhaps square dancing needs to create a new association or two.

I think to launch something old as something new, first we need to perhaps become convinced ourselves that it is new. We know the reasons we square dance: lunch, exercise, fun, and togetherness, and that dancing is a by-product of our program. But the general population don't know that. Some people think we are there to dance! We need to change that.

Covid 19 has given us a chance to change some perspectives on a few things. We know the virus is a corona virus named after a beer which, if taken in quantity, will help alleviate the fear of the virus. We don't do that, but we do the same thing



with the lunch, exercise, fun and togetherness. It is good, clean fun that directs the mind away from the problems and takes those heavy loads making them easier to carry. It probably can't be said, but we know it is the best anti-viral medication and it is practically free.

What is new in any of this? Don't we already know it all? It is actually quite simple - we just need to think differently. **When we promote (l)unch, (e)xercise, (f)un, and (t)ogetherness the Left Allemande will follow!** See, it is all in the way we look at things.

I think this virus will teach us to invite others for lunch, and they will stay for the rest. When will it start? Well, first we need to set a time for the launch.

WEAVING OLD-TIME MUSIC AND DANCE INTO THE FABRIC OF SMALL TOWN LIFE

- CDSS News, Summer 2018, by Leslie Gotfrit, Community Dance Caller, Calgary

Out here in the wild west of Canada, there isn't much in the way of Southern old-time music and dance. It isn't our tradition after all. But a bunch of Appalachian wannabes is slowly changing that with a series of small town dances called *Hip To Be Square*.

Five years ago, Mike and Anie Hepher were musing with me about creating an old-time style square dance like the one done at the Nimblefingers Bluegrass and Old-Time Music Workshop midweek. **From this conversation the first "Kootenay Old-Timey Dance" billed as a "family friendly square dance party" was born in Fernie, British Columbia, a mountain town better known for skiing and coal mining than dancing.** The first hour was family centered and there was childcare for the second two sets. Beer and snacks for sale. The venue was too small and only half of the sold-out crowd could dance at a time. There were 15 musicians on stage, in thrift shop square dance frocks, shirts and cowboy boots, all having a grand time. I was somewhat green as a caller, the alcohol flowed, the noise was deafening but despite all that, it was a success. While the collective repertoire was ten tunes that were not quite up to speed, it was the beginning of the Kootenay Stringbenders band and the Hip To Be Square Old-Time Dance.



Many sold-out dances later we have refined the concept. We've clarified our mandate — to develop a traditional dancing and musical community in southern Alberta and eastern British Columbia. We have a brand, a logo and poster courtesy of Clawhammer Letterpress, 30 or more musicians have participated on the stage, and a couple of thousand folks of all ages, mostly inexperienced, have crowded our dance floors.

Local musicians in one of half a dozen mountain towns do the organizing for their dance, find the volunteers, promote, book and insure the event, organize the liquor license and bar, and decorate the hall. The Saturday night dances are often part of a weekend jam gathering. Musicians will travel hundreds of kilometers to participate and rehearsing, eating, hiking, mountain biking and just hanging out together go a long way to creating a one-night stand band. Everyone is welcome to play. The model has evolved to include a sitting, mic'd "Front Row", who receive gas money and perhaps an honorarium. The "Back Row" musicians are encouraged to dance if they don't know the tune in their sleep. The strength of the model has been to develop musicians who get to experience playing for dances before they might otherwise be invited on a stage.

We break even, splitting the money from tickets and an occasional small grant (like the one we received from CDSS), amongst the musicians, the sound technician and equipment, ticketing and posters, and me, the caller. We are almost always at capacity and depending on the size of the hall, 75-150 people show up. We spend \$0 on advertising but take advantage of free listings, social media and the power of word of mouth. Local newspaper coverage, when we are lucky to get it, always brings in the curious.

Some dances are billed as family-friendly, but most are adult events. **Teens are welcome but a majority of folks are 20 to 60 years old.** Depending on the location, the average age is skewed higher or lower, but we always get a good range.

Creating community is a goal and we've noticed the level of socializing, skill levels, and noise going up in subsequent dances in a town. Saturday night is all about having a good time and we supply that. **The fact that we almost always sell out tells me we are filling a need for connection, pleasure, laughter, and participatory experiences.** The two words I hear all the time are fun and community. We present it as retro and hip, not Modern Western Square Dancing, and invite those with two left feet. We say we are not the crinoline crowd but dressing up in vintage dresses and cowboy boots is hinted at and has been embraced by quite a few people. We encourage dancing with lots of different people, do mixers all evening, and make sure there is a playful element, perhaps a little bit of chaos, in every dance. The pace is fast with one walk-through only. A quick elbow swing is all that is ever needed. Most dances are gender-free, but occasionally I will call a square using Ladies and Gents, emphasizing anyone can dance either role. **I focus on satisfying dances that introduce people to a variety of formations and figures, have opportunity for interaction and problem solving as a group, and lead to laughter and fun.**

The actual program is three 45-minute sets of traditional, mostly Appalachian, community dancing—longways, circle mixers, scatter sets, squares and a competitive game, with breaks to encourage socializing, and the beloved Waltz Mixer to end. Smaller bands often perform in the break between dance sets. A bluegrass foursome, a trad country trio, swing tunes, and old-time harmony singing have graced our stage. The Hip To Be Square dances have become a way for different combinations of musicians to try out their repertoire and add richness to our evenings. This model has worked really well for this itinerant dance series. Musicians will drive three hours for gas money because it is a guaranteed good time and a chance to develop skills and relationships. The success of the early Hip To Be Square dances provided the mostly amateur musicians the incentive to get together between gigs to practice tunes. One example is the town of Canmore, where dances sell out in a less than a day, and there's a weekly Sunday night jam. They also showed up in force for a workshop with visiting old-time musicians Greg and Jere Canote.



There are also challenges. One example: At most dances someone will inevitably request we bring Hip To Be Square to his or her private birthday or wedding party. As a caller I began employing smaller bands, under the "Kitchen Party" banner, for paid private events. This is what we hoped for. However, the increasing strength of musicianship in the Kootenay Stringbenders community has meant it is harder to find weekends where the core musicians don't have other gigs and there is an expectation to start paying musicians more than gas and a small stipend. Growth may put our brand out of business.

The success of Hip To Be Square empowered me to take the leap this past year and offer a new three-dance series called The Calgary Old-Time Experience. I'm collaborating with a musician, Greg Monforton, who shared my vision for a regular urban dance that replicated the joy we saw on the dance floors of those small towns. **The model is different, and the risk higher, but the results have been the same.** We are filling the hall with a mostly young crowd who are experiencing traditional dance and music for the very first time, as well as developing small bands that can play for dancing.

Far from the dance riches of the East or West Coasts, oldtime dance and music are gaining a tiny toehold in little Canadian mountain communities and one big city. We'll keep at it, spreading the joy one dance at a time.

Leslie Gotfrit is a dance caller in Calgary, Alberta, who uses Anglo-American traditional dance forms and live music to create joy, fun and community. Website: www.LeslieGotfrit.com.

"May you never be too grown up to search the skies on Christmas Eve." - Anonymous

"Christmas, my child, is love in action. Every time we love, every time we give, it's Christmas." - Dale Evans Rogers

"Christmas isn't just a day, it's a frame of mind." - Miracle on 34th Street

"I wish we could put some of the Christmas spirit in jars and open a jar of it every month." - Harlan Miller

"I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year." - Charles Dickens