

# Reprint

## Square Dancing

Psst – well it's no secret; square dancing is one of the best all-around activities for all age groups! Wait a minute, how can anything with the word "square" being part of it be all that great. Well modern western square dancing is not quite what you may have learned in school. This puppy rocks!

It's a party every time you go as it brings people together for fun and fellowship – even during class lessons. The fun starts right from the beginning, meeting new people and making new friends and continues the more you dance.

Square dancing's motto is "Friendship Set to Music" and the music is very diverse. From golden oldies to current hits, Broadway show tunes, country, and even gospel, square dance music in singing calls covers them all. Patter or hash as it is sometimes called usually features music with a strong down beat. Believe it or not, one caller even used "Hooked on Classics" as patter music in square dancing. Nothing quite like swinging to the "Flight of the Bumblebee".

Square dance tips as they are referred to usually consist of two parts. During the first part of the tip the caller will use patter or hash calls for the dancers to execute. The dancers do not know which calls are coming next so naturally listening is very important. The caller may use certain combinations of calls which he or she intends to use in the second half of the tip which is a singing call. The singing call will be to a song which is usually very recognizable to the dancers. Most square dance callers feature excellent singing voices and are very entertaining.

The "tip" derives its name from long ago when following each dance set the caller placed his hat down and dancers would deposit money in it and in that way the caller was paid. Square dancing is not only fun, but healthy too! Dancing is a recommended activity of the President's Council on Physical Fitness. No specific type of dancing is mentioned but square dancing with its combination of constant movement and quick directional changes is obviously a low impact activity which helps keep the body in shape. While dancing may not provide all the conditioning a person needs it can sure help. It's estimated that square dancers may cover as much as five miles during a typical two or two and a half hour dance burn up to 500 calories.

Another health benefit is the social component that solitary fitness activities lack. During a typical square dance, dancers meet and interact with many others as there are eight dancers in each square. This opportunity to develop strong social ties contributes to self-esteem and a positive outlook – all in an alcohol and smoke free environment.

Square dancing is a unique American heritage dance. It is the official folk dance of the United States and is practiced in many countries of the world. English is used for all square dance calls even though the caller and dancer in foreign countries may not speak it. Governor Charlie Crist recognized September as Square Dance Month as it usually marks the beginning of a new square dance season.

Most every country with a folk dance features costumes that reflect their culture. Modern western square dancing features dance attire with a western flair that attests to some of its frontier roots. Jeans, long-sleeve western style shirts often featuring collar points, colorful scarves or bolo ties are available for guys. Dresses with crinolines or skirt and blouse combinations have been traditional for the ladies. However, dress codes have greatly relaxed over the years, especially for the gals. Prairie skirts and slacks are approved now, and actually, the emphasis is on relaxed, comfortable attire. Most square dance clubs subscribe to casual dress during the summer, some even feature it at most dances year round.

To add to the variety of the square dance activity, many clubs also include round dancing in their programs. Rounds are couples dancing to choreographed steps by a cuer. These dances include a variety of rhythms including two-step, waltz, foxtrot, rumba, and cha-cha.

Norm Barnes

Published in The Citizen (Ocala)

Reprint from Bow & Swing – February 2009 Volume 51 Number 2

Finnegan's

Reprint from DANCERgram – February 2, 2009