

THOUGHTS ON SQUARE DANCING

By Karl Arnold Belser

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I wrote the article "The Problem with Square Dancing Today, A Dancer's Point of View" for the August issue of American Square Dance Magazine. My conclusion is that it is the process of teaching square dancing, not promotion, that is the problem. You can read the article on the Committee to Promote Square Dancing (CPSD) website at:

<http://www.karl-belser.com/Square%20Dance%20Problem.html>

Let me summarize some CPSD history.

CPSD was founded in 1999 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit to promote square dancing in the San Jose, CA area. It raised and spent about \$15,000 for radio, TV and newspaper advertising. This advertising campaign produced no significant result over a period of two years. The CPSD went dormant in 2001 with no idea on how to proceed.

I took charge of CPSD in 2006 when I saw that people were leaving my plus-level club because the club's class was during the first part of the normal club night. The Club president did a survey of the club members and about 60% voted not to have a class on club night. I also observed that some of the students our club was training were really members of other clubs that wanted a friend to learn to square dance. So I redirected CPSD to take over the teaching activity with a class night that did not conflict with any other club.

The CPSD has graduated between 15 and 20 students every year over the last six years. We currently have about 20 students in our seventh year.

Our student dancers primarily come from flyers left at the various local clubs so that members in these clubs could train their friends to dance. We let angels who are members of any square dance club dance for free. Apparently some of those club members invite their friends. Hence I conclude that the main interest of the new dancers is a social interest to be with their friends.

Some percentage of our graduates quit. Some percentage come back the next year saying that they could not remember the material. The students who learned and had confidence in what they learned were apparently not that interested in the social nature of square dancing because some soon became advanced dancers and didn't focus on their plus clubs. The result has been a general weakening of leadership for our local plus clubs.

Based on this experience I conclude that the problem is one of teaching. The potential plus club members that are social and who would not move on to higher levels are the ones who did not learn to dance on the first pass. It was mostly the weakest of the students that joined and stayed with their plus clubs.

I wrote my article for American Square Dance called "The Problem with Square Dancing Today, A Dancer's Point of View" in which I propose rote memory learning rather than thinking, i.e. pattern walking rather than dance by definition. My thesis is that pattern walking is simple enough that the dancers would enjoy the social nature of a club.

A possible consequence of the high attrition is that the people that leave are the social people that would enjoy a plus club. They would normally bring in more friends. Instead I believe that they are telling their friends that square dancing is too difficult and not fun. This is the salesman's rule of 250 which implies that the teachers are poisoning the well of potential new dancers. Square dancing can not possibly be the American folk dance because the way it is taught today makes it simply too difficult for the average person.

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