

## Call of the Month: Formations and Formation Awareness by Barry Leiba

In this column we often talk about various formations — a call starts from this formation, or a call ends in that formation. Just what **are** the various formations, and why is it important to know about them?

To answer the second question first, if you understand formations it helps you to be precise about your positioning, it allows you to fix yourself (and possibly the rest of your square) if things get confused, and it gives you a better basis for helping other, perhaps newer dancers when they need help. When you understand the starting and ending formations, then you really know what's going on when you dance a call.

There are only a few basic formation types, with variations among them. A **STATIC SQUARE** is a formation that resembles a squared-up set — the way the square is when you start a tip. A **THAR** is a familiar formation; it's what you get when you do an **ALLEMANDE THAR**. The other two basic formations are **LINES** and **COLUMNS**.

When we say **LINES** in this context, we describe a whole class of formations.

- **FACING LINES** (everyone facing in).
- **BACK-TO-BACK LINES** (everyone facing out).
- **TWO-FACED LINES** (one couple facing each direction). These can be right-handed (with a right hand in the center) or left-handed.
- **INVERTED LINES** (the centers are facing one way, the ends are facing the other).
- **OCEAN WAVES** (dancers alternating facing direction). These can be right-handed (end and adjacent center have right hands) or left-handed.
- **THREE-AND-ONE LINES** (any three dancers facing one way, with the fourth dancer facing the other way).

Similarly, when we say **COLUMNS**, we're talking about another class of formations. It's a bit harder to describe these, so they're called by the names of the basic calls that start from them.

- **DOUBLE PASS THRU** formation (or **DPT** formation for short). Here all dancers are facing the center of the set.
- **COMPLETED DPT** formation. All the dancers are facing away from the center.
- **EIGHT CHAIN** formation. The center couples are facing the outside couples.
- **TRADE BY** formation. The center couples are facing each other and the outside couples have their backs to the centers.
- **RIGHT-HANDED (OR LEFT-HANDED) COLUMNS**. Dancers have right (or left) hands with the dancer next to them.
- **MAGIC COLUMNS**. The outside dancers have right

hands while the center dancers have lefts, or vice-versa (this is a C1 formation).

Normally when we speak of **LINES** we mean that we have two lines that are **PARALLEL** (the lines are the same, and are symmetric). The lines can also be end-to-end, where we have a **GRAND** or **TIDAL** line (**TIDAL** is most often used when describing a **GRAND OCEAN WAVE**).

There are other formations, like **DIAMONDS** and **QUARTER TAG**, that you'll see at Plus levels and above. But we'll leave those for another time, perhaps, so that there's room to talk some more about the **awareness** of what your formation is and where you are.

Are you in **OCEAN WAVES**, or **TWO-FACED LINES**? You might have to do the call a little differently depending upon the answer (**LINEAR CYCLE** is an example here). Are you an end, or a center? The definitions of some calls require you to know that. Are you in a left-handed **OCEAN WAVE**? **SWING THRU** feels different from there, since it always starts with the **right** hand, which in this case is the center.

If we **PASS THE OCEAN** from **FACING LINES** we get **OCEAN WAVES**, but if we do it from **EIGHT CHAIN** formation we get a **TIDAL WAVE**. The difference is important, and it helps if you know what to expect at the end of the call. If you're expecting the wrong formation after **FAN THE TOP**, you're likely to go too far or not far enough. **FAN THE TOP** will take **OCEAN WAVES** to a **TIDAL WAVE** and vice-versa.

And while we're talking about **TIDAL WAVES**, remember that a **TIDAL WAVE** is two waves end-to-end. It's important to know whether you're an end or a center of **your wave** as well as whether you're in the center of the **TIDAL WAVE**. For instance, if we **RECYCLE** from a **TIDAL WAVE** each wave works independently. If you're confused about where the center of the wave is, you'll have trouble. On the other hand, we can have just the center four **RECYCLE**. You need to know whether you're one of the center four.

There's a lot more that we could say on this subject, but space doesn't permit it. Now when we talk about the difference between doing **RIGHT AND LEFT THRU** from **FACING LINES** and doing it from **TRADE BY** formation, you'll know what we mean. And if you learn what to expect when you **SCOOT BACK** from **QUARTER TAG** (ending in **THREE-QUARTER TAG**), you'll be better able to help the dancers who have trouble with it, and you'll keep your square going. Next time you're dancing, give a little thought to the formations. Start looking around and seeing what formation you're in and where **you** are in it. End? Center? Facing in? Facing out? Is your partner on your left, or your right? Once you get used to it, you'll find yourself more certain of what you're doing than you might have been before.