Call of the Month: Thars and Alamo Rings by Barry Leiba

Both THARS and ALAMO RINGS are formations that are introduced at the Mainstream level, but little is done with them at that level. This month we'll take a look at some of the less usual things that we can do from those formations.

An ALAMO RING (or for brevity, an ALAMO) is a slightly distorted formation, requiring some people to turn a little more and others a little less than usual in order to form it. A THAR has a star in the middle of it, but it can also be though of as two OCEAN WAVES that are crossed in the middle.

The things we typically do from a THAR at Mainstream are SHOOT THE STAR and SLIP THE CLUTCH. At Plus we also REMAKE THE THAR. From an ALAMO we seldom do anything but SWING THRU (and LEFT SWING THRU).

What about doing SWING THRU from a THAR? Well, we have a pair of waves. Follow the definition: turn ½ by the right, then ½ by the left. If we have a right-handed THAR, the ½ by the right is obvious. For the ½ by the left we have to turn the center star ½ while the ends stay put (it's important that the ends don't move).

So that's a little unusual, but it isn't too bad - we don't have a lot to do and we maintain the THAR formation all the way through. Let's look at the Advanced call QUARTER THRU; it's a simple call for the Mainstream dancers to look at too. It's got the same feel as SWING THRU, but you only turn ¼ by the right, then ½ by the left. Let's start it from an ALAMO. The ¼ by the right is just a HINGE, and it puts us into a THAR. Then we star ½ by the left to end in a THAR. So here we've started in one formation and ended in another, making the call a little harder.

Now from that same THAR, let's do another QUARTER THRU. Turn ¼ by the right (it's quick!) to stop in an ALAMO RING. Most dancers try to go too far, but remember that the ¼ turn happens very quickly, especially since (because of the ring's distortion) some of the dancers are slightly underturning. Then the ½ by the left is like the end of an ALAMO SWING THRU and we finish in an ALAMO.

THREE QUARTER THRU would be similar (if you don't know it, you can probably guess the definition), though the ¾ turn isn't as quick as the ¼ turn and you have a little time to think. Here's a tip, while we're talking about ¾ turns: whenever you have to turn ¾, think of it as a TRADE and then a ¼ turn (or HINGE) . By breaking it down that way, you're less likely to lose track of how far you've turned, and so you're less likely to turn too far or not far enough.

Plus dancers have done ALL EIGHT SPIN THE TOP, which is simply SPIN THE TOP from a THAR. How about FAN THE TOP from a THAR? The star turns ¾ while the ends move up ¼, and everyone ends with the same person they started with, just as in ALL EIGHT SPIN THE TOP. Remembering that you'll go back to the same person is a good way to keep from getting lost in either of the two calls.

Now it's time to get out your little dancers (or matchbooks or whatever) while we look at a couple of things that are a bit more involved. Can we RECYCLE from a THAR? Hey, was Oscar Wilde gay? Let's try a sequence from a squared-up set. Heads PROMENADE ½ while the sides RIGHT-AND-LEFT THRU. That puts everyone opposite where they started. Next PARTNER HINGE (into a THAR) and ALL EIGHT SPIN THE TOP. Everyone's now in a THAR with their partners, girls in the middle, ¼ rotation from home. If we RECYCLE from here, the boys will cross fold (but keep it a bit wide to avoid collisions) and the girls will follow, and guess what... we end up back home in a squared-up set!

Let's finish with a nice one: SPIN CHAIN THRU from an ALAMO. This is a tough one because it's an unusual position and the formation changes back and forth throughout the figure. Go back to the definition. Turn ½ by the right, then ¾ by the left. That will put us into a THAR. Now the ends stay put for a while (actually, the caller would probably direct them to circulate, just as she often

does in a regular SPIN CHAIN THRU) and the very centers TRADE. Well, in this case there are **four** "very centers", and they star ½ to do the TRADE. Next everyone turns ¾ by the left and we end up back in an ALAMO.

Notice how we talk about the definition of a call whenever we look at an unusual formation. Do you always run the definition through in your mind when you dance? If not, when do you do so? We'll consider that next month.