

MINI-FESTIVAL 11/13/11



DON BECK (Massachusetts): Calling Mainstream through C2

“At your Beck and Call”

Don has been dancing since 1958 and calling since 1964. Before moving to Martha’s Vineyard, he called weekly for Tech Squares and guest called regularly over a seven state area. He has been class teacher or workshop caller for fourteen of the local clubs at one time or another and has called in twenty one states and seven countries. He has called for clubs, festivals, the New England Square and Round Dance Convention and the National Convention.

He calls regularly at all levels from Mainstream to C2. He has recorded for the Sets-In-Order and 4-Bar-B labels. He is a member of Tri State Callers’ Association where he served as president, the Advanced and Challenge Callers’ Association (ACCA), and Callerlab (since 1975). He has attended every Callerlab convention since then, has served on the Board of Governors for ten years, and is an accredited Callerlab Caller Coach.

Don has taught many caller schools, given seminars to callers’ associations around the country as well as in Germany and Sweden, and represented Callerlab in seminars at the National Convention.

As a writer, he was a contributing editor to The New England Square Dance Caller magazine where he wrote a monthly column for seven years. He has written articles for Sets-in-Order magazine, American Square Dance magazine, and “The Callers’ Textbook.” He wrote and published the callers’ note service Choreo Breakdown and the callers’ textbook Out of Sight.

As a choreographer, Don is the author of many calls, including Ferris Wheel, Ping Pong Circulate, and Chain Down the Line. In addition, he has developed a computer training aid for callers that simulates dancers on a Macintosh, called Desktop Dancer.

In 1967, Don was one of the founders and the first caller of Tech Squares, a square and round dance club at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Tech Squares dances high-energy modern Western squares in an “all position” style, with no dress code or couples requirement. It has a large number of student members. The club dances the Plus program, but many members also dance Advanced and Challenge. Tech Squares is well-known for doing difficult and ambitious choreography, and for having an achievement-oriented mindset. At a time when many Modern Western Square Dance clubs are finding that the long learning time for a high degree of proficiency does not attract a sufficient number of newcomers to the activity, Tech Squares thrives on high-proficiency dancers. This appears to be because it is in a college setting (MIT) and is populated by college students and other like-minded people who derive gratification from learning new things. The technological orientation of these people may also mesh with the subject matter of sophisticated Modern Western Square Dance choreography. A great many Tech Squares members dance proficiently at high Advanced and Challenge levels. The Tech Squares beginners’ class, touted on its web page as “faster than any other class that we know of,” goes from zero to a reasonably rigorous Plus program in 13 weeks.