

serTA Sweet Sixteen Weekend – 23-25 September 2022

Saturday Short Talks
Saturday 24th September 2022

Gender Free / Positional Calling in English Country Dance

Sue Last explained that she had attended some American presentations on Gender Neutral Calling during the pandemic. Below are her notes on her talk.

A discussion took place after the talk with a wide range of views amongst the teachers.

Thanks to Sue for raising this important issue.

Workshops with Brooke Friendly who taught Louise Siddons

First of all WHY?

In Carl Wittman's 1977 dance manual introduction he writes: *"Dancing has always taken on the contours of the times...and assumed our philosophical attitudes – that one need not be married or escorted to take a place on the dance floor, that we accept each other as people and, for the moment at least, leave behind the labels of homosexual, single, married. All of us have a birthright to these dances."*

I admit I was sceptical, as I have always danced as either sex, we are used to what we do, and it is tradition.

I was unhappy with the comment that you 'Dance from where you are' which takes away the precision of the dance.

BUT

I could see that it is useful for children / ceilidhs / parties / weddings, and was prepared to take on the preferences of the broader community.

And it so happened that the first gig I had after COVID was a 60th birthday party, and groups of the children of the sixty year olds attended, most of them never having danced before. I knew that to try to get them into pairs would be largely unsuccessful and be very slow, so I just told everyone to bring the nearest

person onto the dance floor and we did a simple 2 facing 2 dance to give everyone confidence, and it really didn't matter who were 'girls' and 'boys'.

This was so successful that I continued for the whole evening.

I noticed the occasional look of surprise when an older man was confronted by a six foot lad where he expected a girl, but no comment was made, and everyone enjoyed themselves.

This is all easy with most ceilidh dances, and I adapted with 'window side' and 'bar side' when necessary, but I had got many tips from my American friends for managing more challenging points:

Instead of gentlemen offering their hands everyone has their right hand up and their left down, which works in all situations and is far easier to remember for those of us who habitually 'change sex'.

You call for the 'right hand' or 'left hand' person.

For a ladies chain the 'right hand person starts with their right hand' - or left for a gentlemans chain.

For the Gay Gordons, for instance, it is far easier to have the shorter person on the righthand side!

And advantages are that you get to know the whole dance and have a wider choice of partners than a man would normally have.

Yes, it is "not the same", but the young have a very different view, and I am finding it useful to be adaptable.

I have used coloured bands with children in the past, and for many years used bands to denote a lady dancing the man's part.

I have one group just dancing as 'reds' and 'greens'

In America they have been using 'Larks' and 'Ravens', but all these have tended to drift back to split sexes.

And it can work with everyone just dancing as 'people'!