

*In Preparation for the Agrarius Ball*  
*Oakland Hills Community Church, Farmington Hills, MI*  
*February 16, 2008*

*I praise the dance, for it frees people from the heaviness of matter  
And binds the isolated to community.  
I praise the dance, which demands everything:  
Health and a clear spirit and a buoyant soul.  
Dance is a transformation of space, of time, of people,  
Who are in constant danger of becoming all brain, will, or feeling.  
Dancing demands a whole person,  
One who is firmly anchored in the center of his life,  
Who is not obsessed by lust for people and things  
And the demon of isolation in his own ego.  
Dancing demands a freed person,  
One who vibrates with the equipoise of all his powers.  
I praise the dance.  
O man, learn to dance,  
Or else the angels in heaven will not know what to do with you.*

*Saint Augustine*

## *English Country Dance Vocabulary:*

### **Architecture and Structure of the Dance.**

Most dances in the English Dance Repertoire have a structure of longways sets, where couples line up one below the other. Some dances are danced in Circle formation, or occasionally in squares, or unusual formations.

### **Sets.**

Most dances have a structure of either longways lines, or of individual longways sets made up of 2, 3 or 4 couples. In the case of longways lines of couples, the caller will direct to ‘take hands four’, or more rarely ‘hands six.’ This means to take hands down the line in groups of 2 (or 3) couples.

### **Progression.**

In each rendition of the dance, you will dance with the other people in your group of 4. As part of the dance, there is always a progression so that the first couples move down the set, and the second couples move up the set. Thus, each time you dance the dance, you are dancing it with a different other couple. At the ends of the lines, you wait out one time through the dance, and come back in as the opposite of the position you just danced (ie second couple at the bottom, as first couple at the top.)

### **First and Second Couples.**

The couple closer to the music in a 2 couple set is called the first couple; the couple below, further away from the music, is the second couple.

### **Corners.**

The person diagonally across from you in your group of 4 is called your corner. Traditionally, the corners composed of the first man and second woman are the first corners, and the first woman and second man are the second corners. Sometimes a distinction is made between 'first corner position' and 'first corner people.'

### **Proper and Improper.**

Typically, if each couple faced towards the music, the man (or the individual playing the man's role) would be on the left with his partner to his right. This arrangement is called "proper." In some dances, designated "improper", the man and woman of the top couple change places, so that the woman is on the left with her partner to her right.

### **Figures.**

These are the individual components, like musical notes or building blocks, that compose each dance. Once you have mastered the basic vocabulary of figures, you can comfortably incorporate them into the wide variety of dances that comprise the English Dance Repertoire.

### **Basic Figures.**

Unless otherwise directed, always begin to the right. These are the most basic figures. If you need other figures, the callers will teach them.

### **Setting.**

'Setting', or the command to set to your partner or to your neighbor, is where you transfer your weight from one foot to the other, usually starting to the right – so you would dance, right, left right, and then left, right, left in response to the direction to set.

Notice that both individuals start to the right so if you are setting, for example, across the set to your partner you will move in opposite directions.

### **Step and honor.**

Here you take a single slow step to the side, and honor by bowing or curtsying

### **Casting.**

This is often confusing to beginning dancers. The instruction 'first couple cast down' means that the first couple face up the set ( away from the direction of the cast) and then turn outwards away from each other and move down the outside of the set to the place of the second couple (who move up out of the way.) The first man would be turning out over his left shoulder, and the first woman would be turning out over her right shoulder.

### **Turns.**

Turns can be executed on your own or with another dancer. When turning with another dancer, you may join one or both hands. A '**right-(or left-)hand turn once around**' is where you join right (or left) hands and execute a full turn around the pivot of your joined hands back to your starting point.

A **two hand turn** is where you hold both hands with the other dancer to execute the turn.

A '**turn single**' is where you walk in a small circle on your own as if around a post; it is not a spin.

The instruction to '**turn alone**' usually occurs when you are walking down the middle of the set hand in hand with your partner, and then turn around to come back. By turning alone, you each walk back up the set on the same side of the set (woman's side, man's side) that you walked down the set.

### **Gypsy.**

A gypsy is like a turn without hands, where you are making contact and pivoting around each other using your gaze as the connection.

### **Circles.**

A **circle** is where you join hands with the other members of your set of 4 (or 6) and walk around in a circle – once around would take you back to where you were when you started the circle. You will be directed to 'Circle left' or circle right.'

A '**Slipping Circle**' is when you join hands with the other members of your set, as in a regular circle, but instead of walking around the circle, you slide one foot sideways and then bring the other one to join it. So the direction to "slip left 8 steps and back" would mean you would step left with your left foot and then slide your right foot to meet your left foot before sliding left again with your left foot, 8 times – before reversing direction, sliding right with the left foot coming together with the right foot before stepping again.

### **Hands across.**

This is similar to a star. For 'Left hands across', each person in your set of 4 would offer their left hand to their corner and walk in a circle, once around or half as directed.

### **Rights and Lefts.**

This is a figure where you walk around the 'square' composed of the 2 couples in your set. It begins with extending your right hand across the set to your partner, and 'pulling by' – ie passing them by the right shoulder. You then turn towards your neighbor on the side of your set of 4, and take their left hand and 'pull by' – pass them by the left shoulder. For 3 changes of rights and lefts, you would complete the figure by facing across the set – to your partner again – and offer your right hand to pull by, passing right shoulder. If the call was 4 changes of rights and lefts, you would then make an additional change by facing your neighbor on the side, extending your left hand and passing again by the left shoulder. With four changes you would of course be back where you started; with 3 changes you have 'progressed' and this is one figure that is sometimes used to effect the progression.

### **Heys.**

Heys are weaving figures where you pass the other dancers first by one shoulder and then by the other. There are many different kinds of heys. The Circular Hey and the Straight hey are the two commonest; other hey figures will be taught by the caller as needed. Please visit (<http://www.rivkinetic.org/flash/ecdfash.html>) for a Flash animation with music, prepared by Judy Rivkin.

A Circular Hey is identical to a right and lefts across, except that you do not use hands as you pass by, first by the right shoulder and then by the left shoulder as you walk around the perimeter of your set of four as if you were weaving your way around a circle (which of course you are!)

A 'straight' hey is a linear hey up and down the line, or across the line, but follows the same principle of weaving in and out passing first by one shoulder and then by the other. With a linear hey, you also have to change direction and go back the way you came, compared with a circular hey where you keep going in the same direction. In a hey for four, the middle people in the line of four would face out, the end

people would face in. The middle people would begin by passing the person facing them by the right shoulder, loop left at the end to change direction, and then pass the person they meet also by the left shoulder, the next person by the right shoulder, and continuing for the requisite number of changes. Again, your caller can give more specific directions.

### **Figure Eights.**

A half figure eight is where a couple cross up or down between the other couple in their set of 4, with the woman crossing first, and then cast down past the other couple to each other's original place.

A full figure eight makes a "figure eight" (the path they walk around the other couple) around the other couple, beginning like the half figure eight by crossing up or down and then casting down or up to each other's places – and then continuing by crossing up or down again, lady crossing first, back to their original places.

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### **Back to Back.**

Either with partner across the set or neighbor, you go forward and pass by (usually) the right shoulder and then moving slightly to the side so you don't crash into each other, back up to your starting place passing by the left shoulder.

Diagram Back-to-back:

### **Forward a Double and Back.**

Either with partners or lines of four facing up or down the hall.

Dancers hold hands and face up the hall, and walk three steps and bring the feet together, and then 3 steps back and together.

### **Siding.**

There are two kinds of siding, Sharp and Shoulder siding.

In **Shoulder Siding**, dancers approach each other till they are right shoulder to right shoulder, then fall back and go forward again till they are left shoulder to left shoulder. When done properly, there is a line of dancers in the middle of the set, each shoulder to shoulder.

**Sharp Siding** is named after Cecil Sharp's reconstruction of this figure, and is sometimes called 'banana siding.' Dancers trade places across the set passing by the left shoulder, and returning to their original places by passing right shoulders.

### **Arming.**

Dancers execute a turn by linking arms at the elbow, first right arms and then left arms.