



an interview with

# JERRY HELT (concluded)

by Jovana

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IN CALLING A SQUARE?

To communicate with the crowd. To satisfy their needs. You have to have a dedication to the group; you have to satisfy them. There will always be a deep need in the human being for another human being, and there's always a need for a group. We have always run in tribes. This is human instinct. I have to accept this as a leader, and I have to encourage this. This seems to be the thing that satisfies a group. This is what they want and really need.

There's a psychological thing that's involved here. In an average Square Dance club, when people walk into the hall, they are individuals; they have individual personalities, individual emotions. Now, if the caller's really on the ball, through his music, his actions, and the things he says, he molds all the emotions together and comes up with a mass emotion. And he works with that. You send people up, they're high; bring them down, and they're low. And in the course of an evening, you can really get a response from the group, really bring this group together.

I compare it with Classical music. If you listen to a good piece of Classical music, it's arranged in such a way that one minute you're depressed, the next minute you're high. And this is what you do in a Square Dance. This is what the caller should do with his music, with his voice, his actions, and the things that he says. You can't keep everybody on the ceiling all night long. You have to deliberately sometimes bring them down a little bit. THEN go up again. It takes a caller that's sensitive to the group; he has to have a good barometer as to what the group's needs are at any point. And there's a certain sensation, a certain good warm feeling that you get from this experience. I think people like the excitement of it; they like team work; they like being together. They like the element of surprise that's in it. All these things add up to a good time.

DO YOU ALTER YOUR STYLE WHEN CALLING FOR FOLK DANCE GROUPS?

I alter my style when I call for every group. Folk Dancers basically are not frequent Square Dancers; it's a known fact. So, you change your style of calling for the simple reason that they don't know all the fancy terms. I'd be an idiot to drop some wild, crazy things on Folk Dancers. You have to look at this from a commercial standpoint. You pay your money; I'm here to do a job. I'm being paid to do that job. I'm paid to get up and make you look good. It's like a little game between the dancer and the caller. The dancer always wins. ALWAYS. Because he pays the bill. And you make him look good; you have to. That's what he pays for. It goes back to the basic philosophy: The customer is always right. I think sometimes callers and leaders make the mistake of going in the other direction, saying, "What a bunch of dumb dancers; they can't do this, and they can't do that." Maybe it's the dumb caller; he isn't calling what they're dancing.

## HOW DID 'EXPLODING SQUARES' DEVELOP?

Well, let me explain an Exploding Square. Usually, it's made up of, say, four squares on the floor; this is a minimum. From four squares you could go to anything that represents a square or a rectangle--it could be uneven or even.

A man by the name of Ed Gilmore, who lived in Ukaipa, Calif., was calling a dance one night, & he noticed that the people were kind of horsing around. All of a sudden their lines were just going into another square, coming back out again, and kind of mixing and mingling. So he put his brains together and wrote up a movement, where he actually mixed the people from one square to the other. Moving lines of couples are the Progressive Squares, and couples going into the other squares are Exploding Squares. Gilman developed this in the middle sixties, so it's fairly new.

I like it for the simple reason that it's a sneaky mixer; you're breaking down that barrier between people, and they don't realize it until after it's over. Even beginners can do it with a certain group of fundamentals. Strange thing is, I don't do this a lot at home, because on a regular group, you do it once, and "OK, what's new?" But on the road, I like to do it, and I think people like it. It's an innovation, it's a gimmick, or whatever you want to call it. But it's interesting, it's fun.

## WHAT KIND OF ROUND DANCES DO SQUARE DANCE GROUPS ENJOY?

The current trend is basic two-step, basic waltz, some samba, cha-cha. Here again, in Round Dancing we have a group that want to do all new dances. And then we have another group that say, "I just want to do the Classics; I don't want to bust my brain every-time I get up to dance."

I think our Round Dancing can learn a lesson from Folk Dancing. I remember one time that Folk Dancing just got off the deep end. A guy would get up and teach five new dances, and they would say, "OK, what else is new?" And this is happening in Round Dancing. They're getting to the point where what is neglected is the quality of the dance. They're working on quantity, not quality. I'd rather see one good dance than get up and learn four or five mediocre dances.

## SHOULD THE SQUARE DANCE BE AMERICA'S NATIONAL DANCE?

Oh, definitely. I think it's American all the way. I think it's a toss between that and maybe some of the Rock Dances, but I think Square Dancing has developed and is accepted as the American Folk Dance. It's as close to the 'American Folk Dance' as I think we'll get.

We are a new country; we're still growing. Our Folk Dance is changing. (Remember that ream of material that I get?) Compared to Austria or Yugoslavia; they have their Folk Dance; it's developed. They had their problems; we're having ours. It takes time, and I can see a healthy growth in it now. More and more people are concerned about it, about the people who are involved in it, about leadership. In fact, this year for the first time, we're



having a National Callers' Convention, strictly callers. We have a National Square Dance Convention each year, but this year we're getting together as callers and leaders to sit down and say, "Hey, what direction are we going in? What are our goals? What are we going to do about them?" And I think Folk Dancing should do this. I think every dance activity should do this. Because you might satisfy people now, but what's happening to the activity? What's going to happen ten years from now? Are we developing new people? Is the activity developing? I think we have to project ahead.

The definition of Folk Dance is something that's been there for a while and is accepted and standardized in dancing. I would consider Jitter-Bug a Folk Dance. But Square Dance is more likely to survive, because everybody can do it. It appeals to the masses.

#### HOW DO YOU JUDGE A DANCER?

This is a bone of contention with people. I feel we judge people on their ability to execute movements, & I don't think that's right. I think you have to judge people on, Are they good people? Do they fit with the group? Are they having a good time? They might be a lousy dancer as far as executing figures. But I can't go to that person and say, "You're not a Square Dancer." Because he IS a Square Dancer. Sometimes he's a better Square Dancer, as far as I'm concerned, than those who follow the general picture that we want people to do, because he's having a good time.

