

Managing Groups Part 1 - Why Learn Groups?

By Kip Garvey

It is very important for new callers to understand that learning Extemporaneous Sight Calling and Extemporaneous Sight Resolution is NOT the final goal. It is NOT the 'Holy Grail' that some callers believe it is. New callers need to develop their skill in recognizing Groups, associating them with the two possible pairing states in a Group, writing and creating many different and interesting Getouts that associate with specific Group Setups, and understand the calculus for using Groups to determine precisely where the dancers are at specific times. Callers should want to understand the underlying mechanics of choreographic structure. Group technique pulls together these underlying mechanics into an understandable and usable form that is highly flexible, intuitive and easy to learn.

Most highly respected traveling callers utilize Group technique to some degree. It is especially useful in Convention and Festival situations where callers move from hall to hall, sometimes only calling a single tip before moving on. There is little time to familiarize oneself with the dancers, which can make selecting key couples an issue. The fall-back for callers is either using memorized material or mental imagery. Or, relying on something like Group technique to follow the relative dancer locations.

Ability to use a wide variety of Getouts is a built-in aspect of Group technique. It offers an especially huge benefit for traveling callers. It enhances the entertainment factor, which is an important element when callers move from one area to another. Newer callers can also use Group technique since they very often will be a guest caller for a tip or two from time to time. Every club caller should own some Group technique in order to present a variety of Getouts to their club dancers and avoid possible over usage of the same old Getouts.

It may help by understanding some of the history of the development Group technique. In 1986, Bill Davis and I finalized and submitted to the Caller Coach Committee the Extemporaneous Sight Resolution flow chart. The Committee added it to CALLERLAB's caller training curriculum. It received extensive attention over the next half decade giving newer callers a graphic path to square resolution, allowing them to call extemporaneously, without concern for following precise pairings throughout a call series. It gave them a method to resolve at will.

Davis and I shared lunch together several times a week, working on theory of choreographic structure. We did not agree on everything. In the early 1990's, at one such lunch, I let Bill know I didn't think the Extemporaneous Sight Resolution flow chart was practical for two reasons. First, we could witness that callers were hunting and pecking, trying to pair up their Focal Man, searching continually for the resolution path which more than 75% of the time ended up being 'Ferris Wheel, Zoom, Square Thru $\frac{3}{4}$ ' type of solution. We could see callers searching for this pairing and running dancers all over the place while they looked for it,

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sometimes using as many as 12 or 15 calls to find a pairing they should only be using a maximum of 3 calls to find.

Second and more important to me, I didn't resolve that way. Neither did any of the callers I ran with, the Festival callers and those who traveled extensively. We hardly ever used that resolution path. Instead, we have control over a large library of Getouts. Once we spot a particular pairing situation, we pull out an appropriate Getout and let it fly. The Getouts are all different, and interesting. We have plenty of them. All we need is a recognized pairing situation from which we apply an appropriate Getout.

Bill acknowledged this, but asked: How does one explain this to new callers? At the time, the vocabulary wasn't available to explain this, never mind teach it to new callers.

Bill did not entirely agree, but he saw value in us investigating further. We worked through CALLERLAB and got a special session set up where Bill and I could examine how these callers called, what they 'saw', when they see it, and what resolution processes go through their minds. We ran these investigations in the early 90's at successive CALLERLAB conventions. Several of the more popular callers in the country participated, Jerry Story, Bob Baier, Tony Oxendine, Randy Dougherty, and several others.

Davis and I went over the results of these investigations during many of our lunches in Milpitas in 1993 and 1994. I put a paper together summarizing our results and outlining the entire sight calling training curriculum in 1996, submitting it to the CALLERLAB Caller Coach Committee for inclusion as a Technical Supplement into the Curriculum Guidelines for Training Callers.

The first thing Davis and I discovered was a lack of vocabulary necessary for even the most skilled callers to express what it was they saw and when they saw it. We knew each of them recognized 'near-Setups' and moved dancers to specific 'marker points'. We also knew that at the point of resolution, determination of Sequence is embedded in a prefabricated Getout they intended on using. As sophisticated as these callers were, their conversations often started with '...from Home, or from 1p2p Lines, or from Corner Box call this and this and that. Now, here's the Getout'. The Getout was the target, the goal. This was the reason that so many of these callers very seldom used the Extemporaneous Sight Resolution flow process that all new callers were learning.

We later agreed that the Sequence question was actually pre-loaded in the 'maker Setup' the callers used in setting up the Getout. We heard these callers make statements like, "...from Corner Line plus Flutter Wheel, here is the Getout..." In Group speak, we now

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express this Setup as a Corner Mixed Line, Out (a member of the Corner Group), which is the same Setup as 'from Corner Box, Swing Thru, Boys Run, Bend the Line'.

One goal we sought was to be able to express a specific Setup without reciting the litany of calls required to arrive at the Setup. With the Setup expressions developed by Davis and I, this same Setup was articulated as "Right ends unpaired, facing corners". We developed six of these articulations that satisfied all possible Setups in normally arranged Facing Lines. None of these six articulations ever became popular and accepted.

Over the next few years these Setup articulations became refined, rephrased, replaced and categorized into Modes, Stations, States and Groups. This made remembering them a lot easier, which made learning them a lot easier. Various callers and authors penned out their interpretation of these concepts. The required vocabulary that allows callers to communicate these concepts began to take shape. Rules were developed that helped callers understand how Group mechanisms work and how they relate to pairings recognition.

Ultimately, callers must be able to communicate the concepts to newer callers so they can easily comprehend them and put them immediately to good use. Equally important, we need to de-emphasize the one-size-fits-all solution that Extemporaneous Sight Resolution suggests. It is not the culmination of sight calling technique, which many callers today believe it is. Sight calling is pairing-centric, not resolution-centric, which is the total focus of this writing.

We should not ignore the single target in Group technique. It is the Getout. The Getout is the target. Highly skilled callers use Group technique primarily so they can deliver a clever and different Getout. The focus is on the Getout. The Group setup is the roadmap to the Getout.

Should new callers learn Group technique right away? I think, yes. Michael Haworth has done some extensive research on teaching new callers Group technique before Extemporaneous Sight Resolution technique with success. Mike's conclusion is, new callers can learn Group technique just as easily as they learn Extemporaneous Sight Resolution.

New callers must, first and foremost, learn to move dancers around with good timing, flow and appropriate use of hands. When it comes time to learn about resolving the square, there is nothing wrong with teaching them Group technique prior to teaching Extemporaneous Sight Resolution technique. Personally, I think we are doing them a favor in this regard.

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Barry Johnson has also been working with Group technique under the CRaMS banner. Barry authored a book on this technology entitled 'Controlling Choreography with Relationships', a downloadable file located in the CALLERLAB Knowledgebase collection.

How should a new caller learn Group technique?

1. Understand Group structure. See the papers 'Managing Groups Part 2 - How to Spot and Use Groups', 'Managing Groups Part 3 - The Final Calculus' and Barry's writing, 'Controlling Choreography with Relationships'.
2. Pick a particular Group that you want to focus on. Corner Group is a good place to start.
3. Write Getouts for each of the 4 possible Setups from normally arranged Facing Line formations within the Group. Then do the same for the 4 possible Setups in the Box formation of this Group.
4. While calling and practicing, pick the Getout you want to use. Maneuver the dancers first into the Group, then into the precise normally arranged Setup that the Getout requires. Call the Getout.
5. Repeat this process for each Getout associated with the various Setups within this Group. Get very comfortable with them.
6. Move to the next Group and repeat the process, one Group at a time. The next logical Group is the Right Hand Lady Group. However, the next Group that may be easier to learn and work with is the Partner Group.
7. Develop Transition modules that will move dancers from the Corner Group to the RHL Group, or from the Partner Group to the Opposite Group
8. Finally, develop Conversion modules that will move dancers between the two Major Groups, the Major C/R Group and the Major P/O Group.

Writing and working the Getouts is very important. Every caller studying Group technique should take sufficient time to develop their own collection of Getouts that are easily remembered.

The final paper in this collection presents the single, all-inclusive formula in Group-speak for determining where the dancers are located any time dancers are in a 2x4 Formation/Arrangement. However, to truly appreciate how this formula works, it is important for callers to understand the basic construct of Groups and how dancers move from one Group to the next.