

# CDSS Sings—A Singing Square Dance

by Bob Dalsemer

Dancers really enjoy “singing calls,” i.e. squares where the calls fit a song’s melody. Even if the original song is unfamiliar, singing calls are usually more relaxed than “patter” calls and offer the satisfaction of dancing the figures in sync with the music. Singing calls became popular with the advent of 20th-century technology. Microphones and amplifiers allowed a large group of dancers to hear a single caller. Sound recordings made new dances and calls more widely available as well as opening up the possibility of dancing to recorded music. Some of the earliest recordings of singing calls were made in the early 1940s by Benjamin Lovett with the Henry Ford Orchestra: Captain Jinks, Life on the Ocean Wave, Hinky Dinky Parlee-vo and Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane.

The 1950s saw a flood of widely disseminated recordings of singing calls, many on record labels like MacGregor and Windsor, devoted exclusively to square dancing. Some of these singing calls became so popular for so long that they could be said to have truly entered folk tradition. Thus, in the mid-1970s when I discovered old time square dances with live music at a fire hall in rural Maryland, most of the dances were singing squares and many of them could be traced back to square dance recordings made 20-30 years before. I later discovered that many of the same dances were being called in New England, Ohio, North Carolina, and Florida. Tunes for these singing calls ran the gamut of popular song from the 19th century through the 1940s, e.g. Golden Slippers, Red River Valley, Listen to the Mockingbird, Hot

Time in the Old Town Tonight, On the Trail of the Lonesome Pine, Old Fashioned Girl, Just Because, Pistol Packin’ Mama. Many of these songs were well known to me, but a few of the square dances I encountered were set to songs I had never heard before. In these cases, the popularity of the square dance far outlasted the associated song. One good example is the dance Hurry, Hurry, Hurry. I first encountered it at live music dances in rural Maryland and neighboring Pennsylvania. It’s a simple melody, 16 bars long, with only two chords—very accessible to folk musicians. The primary dance figure is based on a classic traditional square, The Route, danced from facing lines of four with ladies’ chains across and along the line. Rather than the usual “circle to a line” to make the lines of four, the dance uses a nice variation taken from another classic square, “Forward Six and Back.” The original square dance recording was released in 1953 with calls by a California caller, Doc Alumbaugh, who was also the founder of Windsor Records. Alumbaugh’s recording added a four-measure tag to the introduction, middle break and ending which the callers and bands in Maryland and Pennsylvania (as well as Otto Wood in Brasstown, NC) eliminated, simplifying the music and the choreography. There are half a dozen references to the dance on the [squaredancehistory.org](http://squaredancehistory.org) website showing the popularity of the dance with callers from all parts of the country.

I had never heard the song on which the dance is based until recently, when I discovered the original (and easily forgettable) 1949 Decca recording by the

## Hurry, Hurry, Hurry

The musical notation for "Hurry, Hurry, Hurry" is presented in two staves. The first staff begins with a C chord and ends with a G7 chord. The second staff begins with a G7 chord and ends with a C chord. The melody is simple and repetitive, consisting of eighth and quarter notes.

Andrews Sisters which has a vocal “bridge” that was not incorporated into the singing call. The first verse is:

Hurry! hurry! hurry! hurry! back to me  
When I’m all alone, I’m lonely as can be  
All I do is think about you constantly  
So, darling, hurry! hurry! hurry, back to me.

### Introduction, Middle Break and Ending

Allemande left your corner and a right hand  
to your own.  
It’s a grand right and left around the ring you go.  
You do-si-do your partner and you promenade  
back home.  
Yes, you hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry home.

### Figure

Now the first couple lead to the right and circle four.  
Now leave that lady go on to the next and circle three.  
Take that couple along with you and circle five.  
And the gent join your partner in the line of three.

Two ladies chain across the set, but don’t return.  
You chain ‘em up and down the line and  
watch ‘em churn.  
You chain ‘em straight across the set,  
don’t let ‘em roam.  
And then you chain ‘em down the line,  
you chain ‘em home.

1. Introduction
2. Figure led by couple 1
3. Break
4. Figure led by couple 2
5. Break
6. Figure led by couple 3
7. Break
8. Figure led by couple 4
9. Ending

### Notes on the figure:

First couple joins hands with the second couple, they circle left once around. First gent leaves his partner with the second couple who form a line of three (second gent in the middle, first lady on his left) facing couple 4. First gent goes on to couple 3 and the three of them circle left once around. The first gent, with the third couple on his right, leads them on to couple 4 and the five of them circle left a little more than halfway around. The first gent then leaves the other four in a line facing couple 2 and his partner and goes diagonally across the set to stand on his

partner’s left. The end result is two lines of four with couples 1 and 3 on the end of the line nearest their home position—the same result as “head couples lead to the right and circle to a line.” When couples 2 and 4 lead the figure, the lines will go across the hall instead of up and down—the same result as “side couples lead to the right and circle to a line.”

Ladies chain “up and down the line” means with the couple in your own line of four. It’s helpful for the dancers to remember that the ladies will never chain back to the same gent they just left. It also important to remind the gents that they have an important job—to help the ladies head in the right direction for the next chain.

It is possible to substitute a short swing for the do-si-do in the introduction, middle break and ending.

### Links for Further Enlightenment:

Tony Parkes, Short History of Singing Squares:  
<https://squaredancehistory.org/items/show/542>

Andrews Sisters’ Recording, 1949:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJ72-hVyWgI>

Doc Alumbaugh Recording, Windsor 1953:  
<https://squaredancehistory.org/items/show/438>

Dalsemer, Square Dancing at Maryland Line:  
<https://squaredancehistory.org/items/show/530>

Part 1 Guy Steele, Jr. Presentation on Singing Squares in Modern Western Square Dancing:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_TqFOyYYmc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_TqFOyYYmc)

Part 2 Guy Steele, Jr. Presentation on Singing Squares in Modern Western Square Dancing:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTIZS\\_X0oKk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTIZS_X0oKk)

Also see two CDSS Publications, both available in the online store: <https://store.cdss.org>

[On the Beat with Ralph Sweet](#) (CDSS, 2010)

[New River Train: Singing Squares from the Collection of Keith Blackmon](#) (CDSS, 2013)

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**WEB EXTRA!** Hear Bob Dalsemer calling Hurry, Hurry, Hurry at <https://www.cdss.org/news>