

TrashDance (What A Feeling!)

By Allan Hurst - 12/9/04 (Formatting and minor spelling edits updated 3/9/15)

Leave it to me to find a weird solution.

One of the clubs I call for occasionally has problems filling out a square on some club nights. Leaving aside the question of how to build attendance at club nights ... what can you do when only 6 people show up to dance?

This was the vexing question I faced one year. I'd already spent a tip calling every two-couple sequence I could think of (with one couple tagging in for each sequence). I'd taken the dancers through a "sashay workshop" of familiar calls from sashayed positions. Nobody could think of anything else they wanted to workshop.

One of the dancers then said, "Gee, it's too bad we can't use a couple of dummies – like broomsticks at our graduation dance."

It was at that point someone else noticed me eying two garbage cans (with lids) on wheels at the back of the hall. They all turned and looked at me, and I shrugged, and said "Let's try it."

Wheeled garbage cans (or wheeled chairs, as we found out a few weeks later) work quite well as "dance dummies" to fill one or two empty places in a square.

Thus was born "The Garbage Can Tip," a/k/a "TrashDance".

This worked well enough the first couple of times we couldn't fill out a square that a few weeks later, even with more than a full square in the hall, a couple of dancers specifically requested that I call a TrashDance tip.

The other dancers wanted to know what a TrashDance tip was, and the word spread. Out of the blue, one week a couple of local callers asked me at different points what all this was they'd heard about me choreographing for *garbage cans*?!

If you'd like to try this some time, here are some guidelines I've developed:

DANCERS

- The dancer who first has to touch a garbage can at the beginning of a call (to get the can moving), is responsible for moving the garbage can into place for the next call.
- If the dancer moving the garbage can has to step out of place to do so, the caller needs to wait an extra beat to let them move back into place before saying the next call.
- If the garbage can hasn't needed to move for one or more calls, the dancer nearest to it is responsible for getting it moving when appropriate.
- More than two garbage cans in a square is too confusing for all parties concerned.

PERFORMANCE & TIMING

- Call a bit more slowly than usual.

- Expect to cue more frequently than usual. “Don, you need to finish turning thru with your garbage can partner.” “Someone needs to help that garbage can boy do his u-turn back...”
- Resist the urge to stack calls without warning. If you stack calls “in real time,” your 2nd or 3rd call is likely to not be heard by the dancers, who will probably be laughing and shouting at each other as they try to get the garbage cans moving.
- If you’re sighting, make the garbage can be in one of your key couples.

CHOREO TIPS

- Keep choreo simple, and stick to standard applications as often as possible.
- If you’re calling Plus, and the dancers complain it’s too easy, throw a *Coordinate* or *Spin Chain* family call at them.
- *Relay the Deucey* with two garbage can “dancers” is especially heinous ... but it will leave the [human] dancers laughing.
- If you’re calling an Advanced tip, it’s fun to get the square into wave setups and call sequences such as *swing slip slide slither*, where everybody has to move.
- At any level, “8-person” calls work the best with two garbage can dancers.
- Singing calls are both easier and a little more fun if the garbage cans are girls. Dancers will quickly figure out they can just “roll the girls” to the next boy in sequence.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

- The wheeled garbage cans I’ve been working are industrial sized plastic cans featuring half-dome-shaped covers with hinged lids, so they’re taller than a regular garbage can. That helps dancers manipulate the cans more easily. Rectangular or square cans with hinged lids also work well.
- Only use garbage cans with snug lids.
- Empty the can before dancing with it.
- Expect many bad puns and garbage can nicknames from the dancers. “Trashy boy/girl,” “Trashmouth,” “Garbage For Brains” are some of the more printable varieties I’ve heard.

One unexpected benefit of TrashDancing is making the dancers (and the caller!) more aware of dancer flow and positional dependencies in calls. It’s a lot easier to track the progress through a square of a single garbage can than one of six humans.

So the next time you only have six or seven people squared up ... search for a garbage can!

[end]