



Anniversary Edition

The

Don't Stop!
San Francisco

February 2005



Don't Slow Down!

Western Star

Newsletter of Western Star Dancers, a contemporary American square dance club primarily serving the San Francisco LGBT community. International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs member.
Address:

584 Castro Street #480
San Francisco, CA 94114

Visit our website:
www.westernstardancers.org

City Budget Crunch Forces Schedule Change

Class Night Shifted to Thursday

Mayor Gavin Newsom's budgetary belt-tightening pressured the Western Star Dancers Board of Directors into changing our instruction night from Mondays to Thursdays, effective January 20, 2005. Fortunately, Instructor Rich Reel was flexible enough to make the schedule change.

Upon arrival for the festive holiday party in December, board members were informed by Mission Playground Staff that City Hall had decided to close facilities funded by S.F. Parks & Recreation Department on Mondays beginning in January. We were given a choice of any other night of the week to reschedule our class night.

Administrator Steve Scott confessed to agonizing sleeplessness trying to find a solution. In the December Board of Directors meeting Tuesday evening was rejected because it's Foggy City Dancers (FCD) class night. Friday was rejected because, well, it's Friday night. Wednesday evening seemed like a workable option, even though we would conflict with El Camino Reelers.

Upon further reflection, Steve realized that Wednesday is also class night for the new square dance club in Oakland, and the Blue Mainstream Class would be reduced by moving class night to Wednesday because of other commitments of some class members.

Ultimately, Thursday evenings were chosen to accommodate most people, although it is in conflict with FCD Club Nights, and Midnight Squares (MS) Challenge Club Nights. FCD was invited to join WSD for Club Nights on the first and third Wednesday of every month at our space, but they have declined for the present, due to the lease on their dance space.

Club Night will continue on the third Wednesday of the month, with class night on Thursday evenings from 7:30-9:30 pm.

It is unknown what our schedule may be when we return to Eureka Valley Recreation Center after its remodel.

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2005 Callers Announced

Dance Coordinator Joe Iser has announced the names of the callers for dances and club nights for the remainder of the year. **Eric Henerlau** (whose sister was an early WSD dancer) will call the Anniversary Dance. **Kris Jensen** will be on hand for the Pride Dance, and **Darrin Gallina** will call for Leather & Lace.

The scheduled club night callers are:

- February: Allan Hurst**
- March: Someone Special**
- April: Ron Masker**
- May: Allan Hurst**
- June: Allan Hurst**
- July: Someone Special**
- August: Peggy Shumway**
- September: Ron Masker**
- October: Fen Tamanaha**
- November: Peggy Shumway**
- December: Rich Reel**



THE FIRST WESTERN STAR DANCERS

BY
RUSS KING
 LIFETIME
 MEMBER

When Western Star co-founder Scott Carey attended the 20th Anniversary hoe-down of the San Francisco Rebels back in 1984, he little imagined that in 2004 he'd be attending our 22nd Anniversary Dance, and that the Rebels, like all but one other straight club in San Francisco, would be long gone. But a lot has changed, for gays and straights alike, and Western Star, through a combination of good planning by the founders, the determined efforts of later generations of dancers, and sheer dumb luck, has managed to hang in there. As a member of the first WSD class back in 1982, and a member of the old Foggy City Squares (not to be confused with Foggy City Dancers, though related) starting in September 1981, I saw a lot of the action up close and personal, and recent conversations with Scott have helped fill in a few gaps. So here's some of our early history, and to paraphrase a bit, "Fasten your seat-belts, it's going to be a bumpy ride."

It was a very different world when gay square-dancing first came to San Francisco in 1980. The Gay Band and the Gay Men's

Chorus were just two years old, Armistead Maupin was still cranking out new adventures for Mary Ann Singleton, Castro Clones were remaking themselves into Urban Cowboys, and all things Country-Western, thanks to John Travolta, were suddenly trendy. There were two major stores on Market Street specializing in nothing but cowboy gear—boots, hats, shirts, the works—and the Reno Gay Rodeo was off and running; for the next few years it would be Gay Country-Western Mecca, attracting hundreds from the Bay Area alone. You could even admit liking the songs of Tammy Wynette without fear of ridicule. At this point, an unknown, gravel-voiced singer, full of ambition and good-ole-boy sex appeal, wandered onto the scene and spotted a golden opportunity.

Skip Barrett didn't know much about square-dancing—he was not a dancer himself, let alone a teacher or caller—but he knew how to work a room and work a crowd, and he knew how to sell a song. He learned the square-dance versions of the kind of country-rock vocals that were his specialty, got someone to teach the calls in the songs he wanted to use, and set up shop at

Dreamland. Foggy City Squares was soon off and running, and the performance and exhibition teams became key components of the fast-growing group. While Skip belted out his high-energy vocals and strutted around like a rock star, the teams did flashy high-kicking demonstrations of the new dances to be taught at class, and functioned as his back-up chorus in public appearances around the city and beyond, as Skip spread the square-dance gospel far and wide. In November 1980, Scott Carey and his friend and co-worker Agnes Smith wandered into Dreamland for a square-dance demo/intro evening, liked what they saw, and signed up for the next ten-week class starting in January. And at the January class, Scott Carey and Ron Douglass met up, liked what they saw, and soon became a couple.

After the January class, the still-growing Foggy City Squares relocated to the Trockadero Transfer on 4th Street, a large club with raised stage, plenty of dance space, revolving disco ball, and a well-stocked bar on the mezzanine level, which the students were encouraged to patronize during breaks. By the time I started dancing in September,

classes numbered over a hundred, but any resemblance to a contemporary Callerlab class was purely coincidental. We learned whatever calls were in the new song Skip wanted to feature, so my class learned to teacup chain before we could spin the top. There was no hash, and stirring the bucket—forget about it! Essentially, we didn't learn calls so much as memorize choreography,

other guys all working as a single cooperative unit. But he expected everyone to be extremely grateful to him for giving them this experience, particularly the team members.

Because Skip had no ability as a teacher or a dancer, he was completely dependent on his various deputies to run the cash cow that Foggy City Squares had now become. Skip was no idealist, and his first priority was to monopolize the square-dance market with an iron grip. There were rumors of substance-abuse problems, and hints of his paranoia and

mood-swings began becoming visible even to class members. If a member of the teams got on his bad side, which became increasingly easy to do, they were unceremoniously given the boot, demoted overnight from flashy chorus cutie to square-dance limbo. Ron, Scott, Dennis, Roger and Agnes decided they'd had enough of Skip, and it was time to break away before they found themselves in the same situation. But they'd fallen in love with square-dancing, weren't about to give it up, and didn't see why it should be considered synonymous with Skip Barrett. The newly formed Gay Marching Band and Gay Men's Chorus were democratically run organizations, so why couldn't gay square dancers have something like that? So what to do, and where to start?

What Ron, Scott, Dennis, Roger and Agnes decided to do was to found another gay square dance club in San Francisco. They knew nothing about Callerlab, and in any case Skip had done his best to push the idea that standard square-dancing could never work for same-sex couples, that memorizing singing-calls from a single position was the only way to make it possible. But they were five thirty-somethings with lots of energy and determination, and they plunged in anyway. Scott scoured the Yellow Pages for stores that might sell square-dance records or instruction manuals, eventually BARTing over to Phil Maron's dusty folk shop in Oakland, where he obtained a modest supply of singing-call records and a short square dance handbook published in 1954. The little group, plus three obliging phantoms, met in Ron and Scott's large kitchen space to walk through calls and try figuring out their actual definitions.

By February 1982, they'd been joined by two more dancers and had a lead on a free space they could use. Discreet conversations with other dancers followed; a second-floor ACT rehearsal space on Geary was secured, some inexpensive (but not easily portable) used stereo equipment was purchased, a name for the new group was chosen, and finally the equipment was hauled downtown for the first Western Star Dancers' drop-in square-dance evening on Friday, March 5. (I remember getting the word passed to me by Alan Hall, one of the regulars in my square, where I had a long-standing commitment to the role of third lady.) There was a lot of good-natured haggling about what to do when the calls on the records didn't produce exactly the same results as when taught at Foggy City Squares, or what to do about the calls that hadn't been taught at all, but on the second evening, a challenge-level dancer by the name of Bill Klein walked through the door and decided to give the new group his help and encouragement.

Bill was a short, opinionated leather queen. He wasn't a caller, but he knew all about Callerlab and the world of straight square-dancing, and he knew what the new group would be up against, since he'd already had his own run-in with Skip. Bill did not approve of the teaching methods at Foggy City Squares, and his opinions on the subject were not well-received by Skip when he volunteered to teach the calls correctly; their encounter may or may not have ended in a fist-fight, depending on which version you

We were encouraged to stay in the same position in the same square throughout the ten-week class

and "Brian," our 'teacher,' freely modified definitions to keep things simple. (Betcha didn't know that 'Load the Boat' ends in an ocean wave—well, it does, at least when the next call is swing thru and you don't want to bother explaining why facing couples can do 'ocean wave' calls. And by the way, swing thru always begins with the boys on the ends of the wave.) We were encouraged to stay in the same position in the same square throughout the ten-week class, so everyone could dance up a storm with the same pinpoint precision as the team members—even when Skip got the calls mixed up, as he tended to do fairly often. It wasn't square dance as we know it today, or as anyone outside of San Francisco knew it even then, but it was great fun. As we lived out our fantasies of being in a high-energy Busby Berkeley chorus, we all worked up quite a sweat, and quite a few guys stripped down to tank-tops or less; the atmosphere was hot in more ways than one. But behind the scenes, a real-life backstage drama was developing.

Through his new boyfriend Ron, Scott met another couple at Foggy City Squares, Roger Perry, a costume designer for Charles Pierce, and Dennis Ficken, who owned a flower shop on Potrero Hill and had once studied for the priesthood; with Scott's friend Agnes, they became a tight group of friends, with everyone except Scott winding up on the teams. But being on the teams, or having your boyfriend on the teams, meant having to get up close and personal with Skip, and as they would soon discover, Skip was a person better seen from a distance. There's a reason that San Francisco has three gay square dance clubs, all founded within a fairly short time period—in two words, Skip Barrett. Skip was charismatic, media-savvy and boundlessly energetic, introducing large numbers of gay men (and a much smaller number of women) to the joy of dancing in a square with seven

On Monday May 10, 1982, the first Basic/Mainstream class got underway in the 2nd floor lobby of the Civic Center YMCA.

believe. In any case, Bill agreed to teach a real class for the new group, based on the Callerlab teaching order, and to help them connect with the larger contemporary square dance community. On Monday May 10, 1982, the first Basic/Mainstream class got underway in the 2nd floor lobby of the Civic Center YMCA. They had hoped to rent the auditorium, but Skip had beaten them to it, renting it himself for non-existent team practices.

Bill Klein was not the most patient of teachers, as I can testify from personal experience, but he was doing it without any kind of remuneration. We had no hash records, so Bill introduced the idea of all-position dancing by having us learn both roles as soon as possible. When some dancers complained that they couldn't keep track of who was dancing what, Bill sternly admonished them: "You will learn the calls by definition. If you are doing your part correctly, it will not matter if it's a man, a woman, or a Hanukah bush coming at you." Virtually every dancer in that first class was

class had no problem, but those who'd only had classes with Foggy City Squares were left floundering, and Skip hastily hustled his team members onto their bus and back to their hotel, to avoid being contaminated by suspicious outside influences.

Shortly after the first WSD class graduated, we elected our first Board of Directors. The five founders wanted to immediately establish a new precedent for a member-run, non-profit group, and that's how it's been ever since. With Bill Klein again teaching at no cost to the club, a second class was started on September 13, and in October Dave "Happy" New Year was flown up from Los Angeles to call the first official Western Star weekend dances on October 22 and 23. Finally in December

1982 we were able to make it from the YMCA lobby into the auditorium to give the newbies a proper graduation. (Those of us in the first class didn't have anyone ahead of us to do hosting duties—instead of being graduated by the club, we became the club.) It was a slightly bittersweet occasion though, since Agnes, emceeing in dazzling white cowgirl drag, had transferred to a new job and was moving to Seattle only days later. Steve Browning was on hand to videotape and photograph the occasion—the first club function in the YMCA auditorium, which would be our home throughout most of the 1980's, the first WSD graduation night, and the last club event to be attended by all five of the founders.

“You will learn the calls by definition. If you are doing your part correctly, it will not matter if it's a man, a woman, or a Hanukah bush coming at you.”

also a member of Foggy City Squares, so we already knew, or thought we knew, most of the calls, but we also had a lot of bad habits to unlearn. ("What do you mean, it's okay for the women to start a swing-thru on the end of the wave?!?") The schedule was accelerated, going all the way through Mainstream in 10 weeks. There were three squares rather than the dozen or more we were used to at the Trocadero, but here we changed partners and squares every tip, and actually got to know everyone in the class. Rumor had it that Skip's lieutenants were parked outside watching who was attending this rival class, and whether true or not, Skip seemed to know immediately which of us were two-timing him.

Whether he liked it or not, the formation of Western Star was only the first crack in Skip's empire. Another group of dancers from Foggy City Squares had been meeting for extra practice in the El Cerrito living-room of Richard Tuck, and that summer they branched over to San Francisco and became Midnight Squares. At the Reno Gay Rodeo in August, gay square-dancers from all over the country made their first major contacts with each other, and when a gay caller from the Los Angeles area, Dave "Happy" New Year, set up his equipment for some impromptu squares in the parking lot that Saturday night, it quickly became apparent that what Skip had taught us bore little resemblance to what gay square-dancers were learning in the rest of the country. Those of us who'd taken Bill Klein's

1983 would bring more changes; over a dozen WSD members would fly to a February fly-in hosted by the South Florida Mustangs, where the groundwork for what would become the IAGSDC was laid. The long and convoluted process of building bridges with the local straight square dance community would begin. In June, Western Star would be the primary organizer of the first major square-dancing presence in the Pride Parade, with new

graduate Freeman (aka Steffany) Stamper getting his picture in the Chronicle in full drag regalia. In July, Larry Brown would organize the first Western Star 4th of July Angel Island picnic. Up in Seattle, Agnes would join the Puddletown Squares, and become a key player in the planning of the first IAGSDC Convention the following year; she's now living in the Tacoma area. The Foggy City Squares exhibition and performance teams would finally rise up en masse against Skip, buy out his interest, rename the club Foggy City Dancers, and move the new group towards Callerlab teaching and a cooperative relationship with the clubs that had already broken away. Skip would betray the terms of the buy-out and start a rival group in direct competition with them, but the tides of history and his own personality would work against him, and despite his enormous influence in the early growth of gay square dancing in San Francisco, he's largely forgotten today except by a few of us old-timers. Scott and Ron would break up amicably, remain friends, and Ron would eventually move to Palm Springs, where he now lives. Scott would remain active with the club for the first ten years, and also become active with the emerging IAGSDC, serving a term as Chairman and becoming an early recipient of the Golden Boot Award. Roger and Dennis would break up less amicably and Roger would move to Miami, where he briefly danced with the Mustangs before moving on to other things. Western Star teachers, callers, dancers and boards have changed over the years, not to mention our location, but the club has managed to survive. If the personalities and the gossip haven't been quite as juicy as the earliest days, it's because the founders believed, unlike the man they reacted against, that square-dancing, and the fellowship it spreads when it's at its best, is bigger than any one person, and ultimately the property of the dancers themselves. It's a philosophy

If the personalities and the gossip haven't been as juicy as the earliest days, it's because the founders believed that square dancing is ultimately the property of the dancers themselves.

that's served us well—23 years and counting...

DANCE CALENDAR



DIABLO DANCERS
 Class/Club Night
 Tuesdays
 TGIF Dance/Potluck
 3rd Friday
 1700 Oak Park Boulevard
 Pleasant Hill



FOGGY CITY DANCERS
 SAN FRANCISCO • CALIFORNIA

Class Night
 Tuesdays
 Club Night
 2nd & 4th Thursday
 Friends School
 117 Diamond Street



MIDNIGHT SQUARES
 SAN FRANCISCO

Class Sunday Afternoons
 Friends School
 117 Diamond Street
 Club Night
 A - 2nd & 4th Wednesday
 Mission Playground
 C - 1st & 3rd Thursday
 Friends School



Oaktown 8s

Class Night
 Wednesday 7-9:30 PM
 Montclair Women's Cultural Arts Club
 1650 Mountain Boulevard
 Oakland



El Camino Reelers

Class Night
 Wednesday
 6:30-9:30 PM
 St. Andrew's Methodist
 4111 Alma Street
 Palo Alto

Dancing with Local Clubs

February 5
2-5 pm & 7-10 pm

Pass Thru Paunxutawney Prime 8s & Capital City Squares. Eric Henerlau caller. Afternoon A, C* \$7 Evening MS, P, A* \$8. Bell Avenue School, 1900 Bell Avenue, Sacramento

February 12
7-10 pm

Valentine's Dance Foggy City Dancers. Deborah Carroll-Jones caller. MS, P, A* \$8/\$10. Ebenezer Lutheran Church, San Francisco

February 16
7:30-9:30 pm

Club Night! Allan Hurst caller. Mission Playground

February 18-20

PACE, Ben Rubright caller. C1-C3A. Oak Park Center, 1700 Oak Park Boulevard, Pleasant Hill

February 18-20

ACDA VI, East Coast Gay A&C Weekend D.C. Lambda Squares, Washington, DC. Callers: S. Bryant, L. Kendell, J. Marshall. Info: (703) 931-1849, acda@dclambdasquares.org

February 19-20

1st Annual Central Coast 'Mini' Fly-in Cuesta Squares, San Luis Obispo. Callers: D. Gallina, D. Rensberger. Info: (805) 543-4289, CuestaSquares@DarrenGallina.com

March 6
1-5:30 pm

Winter Dance Midnight Squares. Saundra Bryant caller. A1-C3A, \$8/\$10. Friends School, 117 Diamond Street, San Francisco

March 11-13

PACE, Vic Ceder caller. Saturday C2. Oak Park Center, 1700 Oak Park Boulevard, Pleasant Hill

March 11-13

Rain Festival—Wet Dream Puddletown Dancers, Seattle, WA. Callers: S. Bryant, M. DeSisto. Info: (425) 687-8652, seattleorbust@hotmail.com

March 12
7:30-10:30 pm

Flip the Flowers Diablo Dancers. Gina Darcy caller. MS, P, A*. TBD

March 16
7:30-9:30 pm

Club Night! Someone Special calling. Mission Playground

March 19
7:70-10-30 pm

23rd Anniversary Dance Eric Henerlau caller. MS, P, A*, \$8/\$10. Friends Meeting House 65 – 9th Street, San Francisco

March 21-23

32nd Annual Callerlab Convention, Louisville, KY Info: (321) 639-0039, info@callerlab.org

Joe Iser
February 11

Joe Caserly
February 19

Nelia Damaji
February 25

Happy Birthday

Paus King
March 1

Dan Smith
March 7

Tom Ophardt
March 21

Don't Stop!



Don't Slow Down!

1982-2005



Anniversary Dance

March 19 7:30-10:30 pm
Friends Meeting House
65-9th Street
San Francisco

\$8 Members \$10 Guests
MEMBERS -- PLEASE BRING FOOD TO SHARE

Eric Hernandez
Golden



Western Star Dancers
584 Castro Street #480
San Francisco, CA 94114