

Square Dance Apparel

by Jeff Garbutt

Does it matter what we wear ? Are we so focused on a dress standard that we are turning some (potential) people away ? Alternatively, if we have a "free for all" , would square dancing lose a unique character that adds to the overall experience ? As always - the truth lies somewhere in the middle - so we should seek to find this middle point.

Other people who have already brought this subject up are probably feeling like lone voices in a large crowd at the moment - but please don't shoot the messenger if you don't like the message. They genuinely care about the movement, and wish to see it grow. And are only trying to make us "consider the possibilities". People who care about the future of anything should always be critically looking at every aspect of their interest.

At the risk of being shot down in flames in the same firing line, I would like to add a bit of support. As already stated by others - our costumes aren't the only reason for the downturn in dancer numbers, but they certainly are a "contributing factor". And if we are really serious about revitalizing our activity - we have to look at all contributing factors. But firstly let's look logically at why dress standards are used in other circumstances - and ask ourselves where square dancing fits in:

- **Safety considerations:** We have a "duty of care" to ensure we dress to reduce the risk of injury to ourselves and others. This is normally considered in the context of "work-sites" - but also affects us in Square Dancing - in particular the shoes we wear.
- **Site considerations:** Most venues we dance in specify a minimum contact area for shoes - to help preserve their floors.
- **Health and hygiene:** We also have a duty of care to promote a healthy environment and being considerate of others' comfort . This means coming in neat and clean clothing. Being considerate of others also covers the reason that men wear long sleeve shirts - so that ladies do not have to make contact with sweaty, hairy arms.
- **Ethnic and cultural values:** This is where a particular group preserve their cultural heritage by using traditional dress. I'm sorry -but this does not apply to Square Dancing ! Square dancing is a truly international pastime that does not belong to any one particular country. Firstly in respect of it's origins, which can be traced back to a "melting pot" of influences. All the Americans did was to stir the melting pot and serve up the end result ! And secondly on where it is practiced - worldwide. Even decisions on the future of square dancing are made on an international basis. In any case - if we were to accept the "traditional American barn dance clothing" as the traditional dress - then we are so far removed from that heritage with our current standards as to be untraditional.
- **Current fashions:** One lady I know recently made the following comment: "In the late 70's ... square dance apparel matched the era", but it certainly doesn't now.
- **International standard:** Actually there is no international standard, just a de-facto dress style that has grown out of years of an active "square dance fashion" industry. Oops - there's that word "fashion" again.

I'm sure that many others can add additional items to the above list and others could discredit my comments. But when I look at it logically - I can only see two main considerations that must be enforced - shoes of a stated minimum surface contact area - and long sleeve shirts for men. Everything else is open to fashion, neatness and personal considerations.

Naturally we don't want total chaos - but a broadening of what is acceptable. Contrary to popular wisdom, which states that square dancing is not for everyone, I believe that square dancing can be for everyone.

It is inherently easy to learn, interactive, fun, promotes friendship and fitness and all those other things that is good for the human physique.

In fact it is so good that I don't see why anyone should miss out - so let's not put any impediments in their way.

And finally I put to you one question - would you prefer to see a strict dress code worn by a small number of dancers - or a slightly relaxed standard worn by many more?

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