

Keith's Klass

by Keith Rubow

This month we will look at **Counter Rotate** (and the related call **Split Counter Rotate**). This call has an odd definition that does not involve any of the usual things that make up most calls, such as arm turns, trades, pass thrus, u turn backs, or other things we do all the time in square dancing. Because it is so different it can give dancers trouble until they get the hang of how it works.

Definition of (Split) Counter Rotate <fraction>: Walk forward in an arc the given <fraction> of a circle, keeping the same distance from the flagpole, around the flagpole center of your formation. The flagpole center is the center of the set (for Counter Rotate), or the center of your split group of four (for Split Counter Rotate). If no <fraction> is given, the default is $\frac{1}{4}$, meaning you walk $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way around a circle, turning 90 degrees to face one new wall.

What a crazy definition! Like I said, it doesn't involve any of the kinds of movements that make up most calls. There are a few important things you must know about Counter Rotates. First, you cannot Counter Rotate if you are facing directly towards, or directly away from, the flagpole center of your working group. Second, assuming the formation is symmetric (this covers 99.99% of all cases), you will be in exactly the same formation after the Counter Rotate, but turned 90 degrees to face a different wall. You will also be in exactly the same position in that formation. This rule also applies to Split Counter Rotate, but only with respect to your split group of four dancers. If you started as a trailing belle in your box, you will end as a trailing belle in your box.

So how do you know where to go, how far to go, and what direction to turn? First you must find the flagpole center about which you are turning. This is easy. If the call is Counter Rotate (callers might say "All Eight Counter Rotate" just to be clear), the flagpole center is the center of your square. If the call is Split Counter Rotate, the flagpole

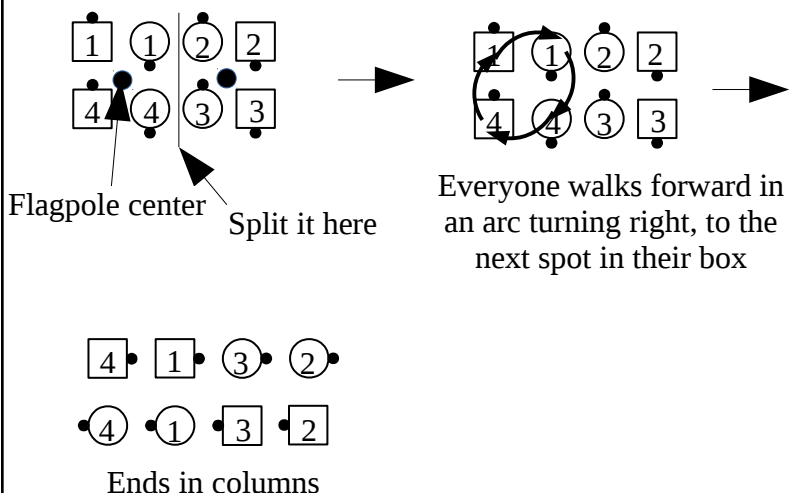
center is the center of your split group of four dancers. Where is that? If you are in a 2x4 formation (lines, columns, T-Bones) it is the center of your box of four. If you are in a tidal line it is the center of the line of four on your half of the square. If you are in diamonds it is the center of your diamond. For “Split” you always cut the square in half along the long axis of the square and find the center of your half. Note that the caller might say something like “Centers Split Counter Rotate”, in which case the center four are working in the center of the set, and use the center of their group of four, which happens to be the same as the center of the square.

Next, find out if that flagpole center is to your right or your left (it can never be directly in front or directly behind you). Caution, like the nearest exit door of an airplane, the flagpole center might be behind you, but it will still be either to your right or your left. If the flagpole center is to your right, you will walk forward (you always walk forward when doing any Counter Rotate) turning to your right. If the flagpole is to your left you will turn to your left. Walk around in smooth arc the given fraction around a circle ($\frac{1}{4}$ is the default, but it might be $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$). I suppose it could be $\frac{4}{4}$, but that would be silly! For each $\frac{1}{4}$ that you go, you will face one new wall.

One nice thing about Counter Rotates is that you can you can just do your part with no concern whatsoever about what anyone else is doing. This can be a blessing and a curse. You must do your part, but you must also allow other dancers to do their part. You might have a handhold with another dancer at the start of the call, but they might not be coming with you. You might need to let go of hands to let the other dancer do their part. They don't always come with you.

A few pictures should help clarify things. First lets, look at Split Counter Rotate from parallel waves:

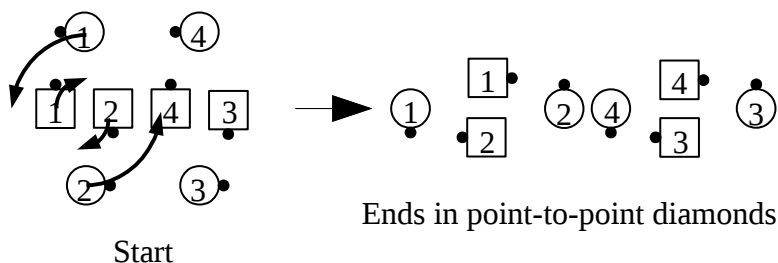
Split Counter Rotate from Waves



I have heard this type of Split Counter Rotate described as trailers walk and turn, leaders turn and walk. This is wrong! Do not think of it that way. Everyone walks in a smooth turning arc. This is important, because after any counter rotate everyone can roll.

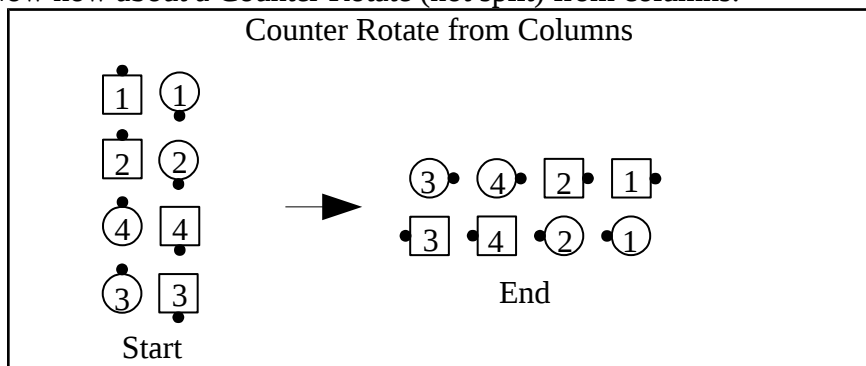
Split counter rotate from diamonds will turn twin diamonds into point-to-point diamonds like this:

Split Counter Rotate from Diamonds

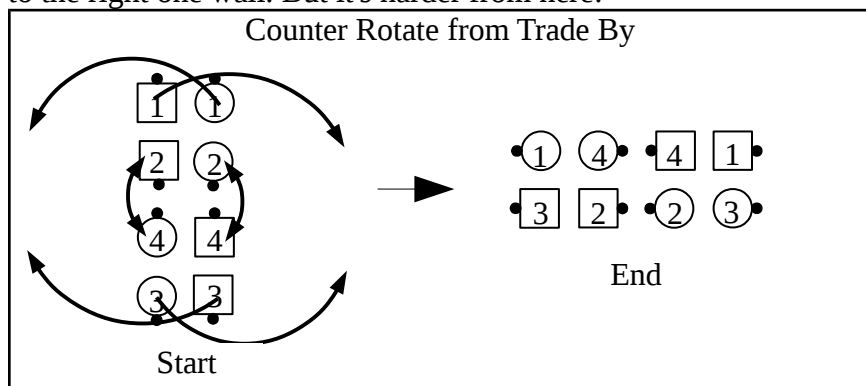


Note that the girls were turning left while the boys were turning right. Also, the girls had a much bigger looping action than the boys because they were further away from the flagpole center of their diamond. Centers of the diamonds remained centers, and points remained points.

Now how about a Counter Rotate (not split) from columns:



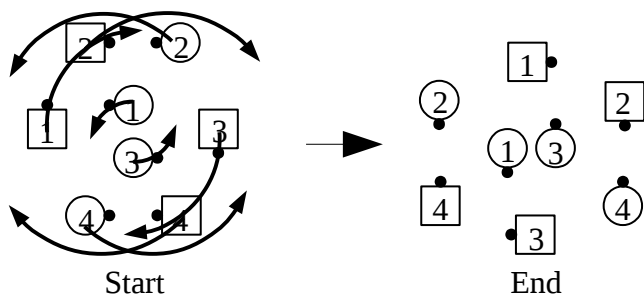
That's really easy, just hang on and crank the whole formation around to the right one wall. But it's harder from here:



From a Trade By formation a Counter Rotate is tricky because some dancers walk forward turning right, while others walk forward turning left, and their paths cross. Just do your part and pass right shoulders.

Counter Rotate (not split) can be done from a lot of different formations, such as a hourglass:

Counter Rotate from an Hourglass



Counter rotate is a very flexible call. Almost any formation can be counter rotated, as long as no one is facing directly towards or away from the flagpole center of whatever group is counter rotating. It can be done in blocks or triple boxes, among other places. It is also not limited to four dancers (in the split version) or eight dancers (in the non-split version). The caller can designate who is to counter rotate, such as Center 6 (or Outer 6) Counter Rotate. It only takes two dancers to Counter Rotate. Even 3 dancers can Counter Rotate (for example, Outside Triangles Counter Rotate $\frac{1}{2}$). In cases like that use the flagpole center of each triangle. And the dancers who counter rotate don't always stay the same distance from their flagpole center. For example from a tidal line Very Ends Counter Rotate has those dancers breath in to become points of a center diamond. Such breathing only happens when it is only some dancers doing the counter rotate.

Just remember the rules. Always walk forward and know if your flagpole center is to your right or to your left. That way you can walk around it and will be turning in the proper direction. And don't be surprised when you see a counter rotate done from someplace you have never seen before.