

INTERVIEW WITH JERRY JESTIN, August, 2017 – Excerpt from Alberta Chatter #2017-7.

How many professional international callers are there?

There are probably about 20 to 30 professional international callers worldwide that make their living at calling. This would mean that they do not have a retirement income but calling brings in the main income for the family.

Besides Canada and the U.S., what countries have you called in and how often?

Australia - many times	Finland - once	
Austria - many times	France - twice	Norway - many times
Belgium - 3 or 4 times	Germany – many, many times	Saudi Arabia - once
Czech Republic - once	Holland - two times	Scotland - many times
Denmark – many, many times	Japan – two times	Sweden – most often (50+ times)
England - many times	New Zealand - many times	Switzerland - many times

How did you get your first overseas assignment?

We were working in Yuma and another caller from Mesa was having two Swedish Callers that were doing a world tour call there. He called and asked if we could use them for a dance. They were Ingvar Pettersson and Robert Bjork and they were around 21 years of age. I got to know Ingvar very well and he wanted to set up a tour for me in Europe. My first dance weekend that he set up was around 1990 in Oslo, Norway. Janice came with me and we went to Orebro, Sweden where Ingvar lives and called there also and saw the sights. Then we went to Germany for the first time and called in Cologne. It was there that we met Torsten Geppert for the first time. He is probably the best caller in Europe.

How does a typical dance night differ from ours?

- Depending where I am, there are many variations. A three hour dance may be B-M-B-P (ie. first tip Basic, next Mainstream, next Basic, and next Plus).
- There are no breaks between the tips in most countries. At the end of a tip, they turn and get a new partner and square up again (this depends on the level). Sessions tend to be longer – sometimes 4 hours with one 20 minute break.
- In Scandinavia and parts of Germany rounds are separate from square dancing.

Describe the dancers, ie. age range, dress, dance levels, proficiency, men, women, declining/increasing numbers.

- Age of the dancers is going up worldwide. There are places that have younger dancers but overall it is becoming an activity for retired people.
- Dress varies all over the world with Japan being the country that really sticks to the old dress code. For each festival they make new matching outfits for their club. Some countries do not have air conditioning and so they relax the dress. In the past few years it has become more and more relaxed.
- Most of Europe and Japan bring their clothes to the dance and change at the hall. After the dance they change back into normal clothes. It is considered more of a uniform.
- In Europe and Japan the dancers at each level (basic, mainstream, plus and up) tend to be better than North America. That happened as new callers learned the list and nobody told them that you should not teach the moves thoroughly. There really is no such level as soft/vanilla/easy. In the early times when foreign callers travelled to North America they were shocked that the dancers could not dance to them. They had to find out the "normal" starting positions here and adapt.
- Even though this is mainly a couples activity there is a tendency to see more singles, especially women. In Japan the dancers are about 2/3 female as the men are working. Japan is the only country that keeps stats and dancer numbers have been increasing for many years by 10% per year. Even there, this has decreased to around 5%.
- Many dances have "single rotations" available at the dances.

How do you deal with the language barrier?

- There is definitely a language barrier, especially in some countries. In Japan there is little English spoken. They learn the names of the call exactly as they are written, eg. "boys run" not gentlemen or men, the call is "4 ladies promenade" not four girls, and the call is "girls run" not ladies or women.
- In other countries there can be some barriers because of language. If the dancers in Germany, Austria or Scandinavia are older they tend to speak and understand less English.
- When I went back to University to finish my degree I majored in "teaching English as a second language". You learn that there are many other ways to get them to understand including inflections of the voice, body and facial expressions.
- I do learn some words in each language to help when necessary eg. left/right/home/ welcome/hello/thank you.
- Australia, New Zealand, England and Scotland talk funny but overall they understand English (lol).
- Basically you need to speak slower, distinctly, not use slang, and use only the calls. eg. "come down the middle and square thru" is too many words that will cause problems when the caller could say "heads square thru". Extra non call words in English tend to add to the confusion of understanding what to do.

What are some highlights of calling overseas?

There are so many highlights I could probably write a book. I have been so lucky to see so much of the world. I have made lifelong friends all over the world. I drove cars in most every country I was in. I learned how to travel by trains, busses, and planes. I enjoyed the flying and have over 3.5 million life time air miles. I have been very fortunate to make a living at something that I have a passion for - entertaining people.