

Address to

**The Opening of the 14th Canadian National
Square & Round Dance Competition**

2004 July 29

Deputy Mayor Diane Colley-Urquhart

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, and greetings to our visitors from around the world. I understand that we have guests tonight from such countries as Australia, Scotland, the United Arab Emirates, as well as our good neighbours to the south.

It is my privilege, on behalf of His Worship Mayor Dave Bronconnier and the citizens of Calgary, to welcome you to our city ... and to the 14th Canadian National Square and Round Dance Convention.

And it's also my great pleasure – because what city in the world wouldn't want to have three thousand visitors whose basic aim is to enjoy each other's company ... who prefer to express their politics through their feet ... and who start every get-together with the words, 'Honour your partner'?

There's something very right and very civilized about a form of recreation that appeals to everybody - regardless of age, sex, race or religion – and whose origins come from so many sources that historians waste endless time arguing about it when they should be out on the floor dancing.

It's been said that some of the oldest dance forms – the Circles, Chains and Processionals – started with primitive peoples observing and copying the courtship rituals of birds and animals.

It's been claimed that the ancient Egyptians were the first to describe dance movements on paper, making them the inventors of choreography.

It's been shown that the Hebrews danced circle dances to accompany their hymns of praise ... that the Greeks combined dance with various forms of worship and education ... that the Hopi Indians used dance to cure the sick ... and so on, and so on ...

But the truth of the matter is that human beings are made with legs, and legs are made to move, and there's no better way to step outside the cares of every-day life than to kick up your heels now and then.

Anyone in this room will tell you that it works like a darn. The best stress reliever. The best way to get to know people. The best way to exercise. The best way to learn and appreciate music. And the best way to realize that every human being on the planet has a fiddle playing somewhere in the back of his or her brain.

In fact, I'm wondering if we shouldn't revisit the whole idea of government and politics to reintroduce some fancier footwork into everyday life.

Perhaps we could use the square dance to teach our kids geometry or music; get them off their rear ends and on their feet where they belong.

Perhaps we could pull out that big old round table at NATO and have our big shots exercise something other than their tongues for a day or two.

Perhaps, instead of taking sides and marching off to war, we could take partners and march off in a quadrille. Forget the Alamo. Remember the Allemande.

Imagine what the world might be if we favoured the two-step over the goose-step... if we were more concerned with finding 'methods of dance instruction' than those other nasty things.

Well, if the people in this room have their way, it could happen.

Square and round dancing is enjoying a new swell of popularity as people realise that physical activity doesn't have to be hard work ... that you don't need computer

matching and dating services to enjoy social interaction ... that getting out there and strutting your stuff is not only good for you but the society you live in.

Plato said that, to sing and dance well is to be well educated.

The American philosopher John Locke said of dancing, that nothing gives children so much becoming confidence and behaviour.

And the wisdom of their words is being recognized today by educators around the world. Teachers, recreation leaders and others are using dancing to encourage activity, promote interest in music, and enrich people's lives. And all of you here are a part of it.

To all the organizers and volunteers who made this convention a reality, I extend our thanks and congratulations. To all the visitors honouring our fair city, I offer good wishes for a safe and pleasant stay. And to everyone taking part, I remind you that what you are doing is wonderfully worthwhile.

To quote the famous American caller Al Muller: "It's just the same in square dancing as it is in life. There isn't any use – or time – to worry over a mistake. Relax and enjoy it."

Or, as we say around our house, dance as if nobody's watching!

Thank you.