

The Round Dance Movement Embodies the American Spirit

By Kaye West

As we reflect on the 250th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence, a document that changed the world, it is appropriate to review characteristics which comprise the American spirit which fostered this momentous change in world history.

Heather Cox Richardson (HCR), the noted historian who daily writes a **Letter from an American** (heathercoxrichardson.substack.com) describing national and world trends in an historical context is the driving force behind a tribute to Americans which she and her team are in the process of creating called **"250 to 250"** (Find it on **YouTube**. Search for **WeAreAmerica250 Heather Cox Richardson**).

250 to 250 is a series of what will eventually be 250 serially-released *one-minute* video stories narrated by prominent Americans depicting "many people, places, and events that have built our country and remind us of the power of *each person to make history*." These vignettes are available freely on the internet and on multiple platforms (including Instagram, Substack, etc.). Watching new stories released weekly throughout the year (and archived online) is a great way to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence!

Why Does It Matter?

In her introduction to **250 to 250**, HCR names eight characteristics defining what it means to be an American: Community, Democracy, Innovation, Mobility, Civil Rights, Education, Conservation, and Creativity. It was individuals embracing these characteristics who were the catalysts behind the American Revolution. And it was partnership dancing by the colonists which brought together people from multiple countries, speaking various languages, and embracing divergent cultures to form the union.

Dancing also plays a pivotal role in societies around the world to bring cohesion to their respective countries. As the most ethnically-diverse nation on earth, the USA should promote **partnership dance** to develop an *inclusive* national culture which positively addresses many contemporary social needs:

- physical activity to counteract obesity and a sedentary lifestyle,
- continual learning opportunities to promote healthy brain functioning and lifelong learning,
- social interaction to combat increasing isolation,
- a sense of community to overcome national divisiveness,
- a worthwhile purpose to balance self-centeredness,
- a healthy activity which provides discontinuous time to counteract the stresses of modern living, and
- a recognition of the need for a paradigm of society which values contributions of co-equal genders and diverse perspectives.

Partnership dancing is the one activity in which two people can participate and which can be enjoyed from childhood through senior citizenship! Partnership dancing, such as that available

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via cued/choreographed ballroom dancing and also known as round dancing, builds community today just as it did 250 years ago.

How the Dance Movement Embodies the American Spirit

Each of us, both individually and collectively, can do **something** to promote partnership dancing so that the activity can again bring unity to Americans as our activity thrives prior to America's 300th anniversary! We can dance ourselves and encourage others we know to do likewise! When participating in this way individuals today embody the American Spirit:

Community: Dancing promotes the coming together of diverse people (from different backgrounds, preferences in dancing, geographic locations, ages, etc.) to share a body of knowledge and enjoy pleasant time together. Newcomers are welcomed in local clubs, at weekend festivals, and at conventions. All dancers can join the International Choreographed Ballroom Dance Association (icbda.com) to gain access to valuable resources and to enhance the support an organization provides.

Democracy: Dancers are encouraged to get their friends, neighbors, and relatives to dance (find details at <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/dance.html>) and to share their expertise and ideas in organizations at local and international levels. Their choices for programmed dances are honored at the dance events they register for; in organizations such as ICBDA they can serve on committees and participate in decision-making by voting for their leaders and for dances which remain popular over time, and they nominate those they believe to be worthy of special recognition.

Innovation: Over the last thirty-five years more Rhythms have been added to our dancing repertoire, new figures have enriched the various Rhythms, and an amazing array of dance routines at multiple phases in many Rhythms have been created and are listed in the **Index of Rounds** maintained by Roundalab, the organization of round dance teachers (roundalab.org). New programs have been created, such as a presence on platforms such as **Facebook**, Schools for cuers and choreographers, a video library at <https://cuedballroomdance.com/practice-it/>, and bylaws changes to respond to contemporary needs. People are encouraged to invent ways to promote the activity.

Mobility: Our dance activities are held throughout the United States locally as well as in a number of other countries, and dancers routinely travel to various festivals and clubs as well as to attend the annual ICBDA convention and meetings of other organizations which provide a full-time round dance program such as the National Square Dance Convention and USA West.

Civil Rights: All are welcomed in round dancing circles, regardless of ability, ethnicity, age, or gender, and different events are geared to dancers at various skill levels. There are youngsters dancing with parents and grandparents, females dancing together, males dancing as partners, and solo dancers participating with a phantom partner. Also we are accepting of dress choices and different styles of dancing.

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Education: Rather than competition, our entire activity embraces lifelong learning and continual *self-improvement*, the meaning our founding fathers had for the phrase “the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence!

Conservation: As partnership dancing with roots from at least four different continents (Europe, Africa, Central and South America, and North America), our activity is conserving partnership dancing from many traditions which have melded together as a smorgasbord which dancers and leaders can choose from for their dancing pleasure.

Creativity: While it has been said that there is “nothing new under the sun,” dancers have been able to build upon the shoulders of those who have gone before as they continue to find ways to dance more comfortably, to better describe how to dance for the greatest ease of movement, and in recognition that partnership dancing is continuing to evolve, as has been explicitly stated in the newest guidebooks of the World DanceSport Federation (WDSF), the authority selected by the World Olympics.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, if everyone pitches in and finds ways to help encourage others to dance and become engaged in this vibrant activity, the round dance movement has the potential to continue to grow and develop to be a highly effective force in the lives of people everywhere to promote their physical, mental, social, and emotional growth and development.

Let’s all help in whatever ways we can to encourage people to dance and join ICBDA, since as an international organization we can do much, much more when we work together!

New classes begin here in Mesa in November in Bolero, Waltz, and Foxtrot. We sincerely hope many people will be inspired to join this movement to help themselves as well as to contribute positive benefits to our entire country and to history itself!