

Tutorial: Using CSDS To Call Dances

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Vic Ceder's choreography and performance computer program, "Ceder Square Dance System" (CSDS), is rich in function, to the point that many people feel discouraged from trying some of its most useful features.

Although I have used CSDS extensively for several years now, I make no claims to having exhaustive expertise. What I *will* discuss is how *I* make use of the program and the features *I* find most useful.

Please don't infer from the discussion that this is the *only* way to use CSDS; this is simply what works for me (most of the time).

Allan Hurst asked me for a write up on how to use CSDS to call written material at a dance. Since that's quite a large subject in itself, I'm (happily) limiting myself to that particular topic and leaving other subjects such as writing sequences, using the music player, the tip and break timers etc. for another time.

This article provides a general overview followed by a deeper dive into the individual techniques involved. If you'd only like an idea of how CSDS works, you can read just the first section without being subjected to screenshots and detailed procedure descriptions.

Overview

Using written choreography at a dance involves certain generic steps regardless of the technology employed:

- First, you must create some written sequences. Some callers write for a specific dance (e.g. "I have to call an A2 dance on Friday, I'll write the material for that dance").
- More commonly, callers create a body of written material that is not targeted at a specific dance but from which they can draw what they need for any upcoming dance.
- Next you have to select specific sequences as candidates for use at a dance. This might consist of brand new sequences, previously-called (proven) sequences, or (most likely) a mixture of both.
- At different times during the dance, different sorts of material are needed: some tips are easier, others harder, some might focus on a specific call, some dances even have different program levels from tip to tip. It's therefore necessary to organize the selected sequences into groups allowing you to quickly select appropriate material for the next sequence.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

- During the dance, you call sequences by selecting the next sequence from the appropriate group. After finishing a sequence you place it in a “used” group to ensure it is not called again for the remainder of that particular dance.
- After the dance, you need to make a record of the material that was used to ensure you do not reuse the material with the same people.
- You also need to record any problems you encountered with individual sequences – such as being harder than marked, not resolving properly, having bad flow, etc.
- Finally, you need to store the sequences, both used and unused in a manner that allows you to find them again.

Before the advent of calling from a computer, callers wrote their sequences on paper or index cards. Most callers labeled the sequences for program level (Mainstream, A2, etc) and level of difficulty (EZ, Med, Hard, etc.). At the dance the caller would lay out his or her sequences in piles by level of difficulty.

CSDS was designed to allow this “card stack” model to be easily replicated using a computer.

CSDS defines three basic structures associated with calling dances from the computer screen: sequence databases, dance definitions, and date logs.

When creating choreography, you place the written sequences in a *sequence database*. When it is time to select some choreography for use at a specific dance, you create a *dance definition* file that points to the specific sequences that are candidates for the dance.

After the dance, you create a *date record* that documents the sequences that were used at the dance. It's important to keep in mind that the actual sequences reside only in the sequence database – dance definition files and date logs only contain lists of sequence indexes.

This general process is illustrated in Figure 1 below, followed by more detail on how each of these CSDS structures works:

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

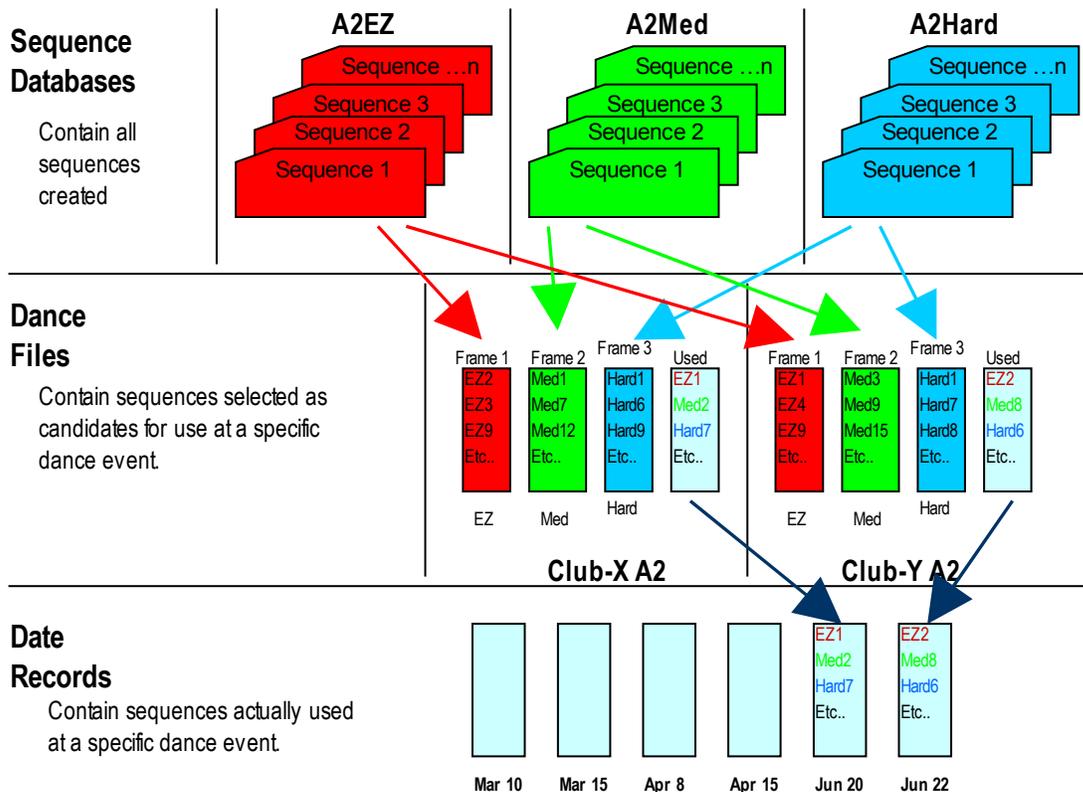


Figure 1. Organization of CSDS dance structures

Sequence Databases

Sequence databases are used to house written sequences. You may define any number of sequence databases and each individual database can contain any number of sequences. A common strategy is to define databases that correspond to program level and sequence difficulty.

Thus, you might define one database to contain easy A2 sequences, a second to contain medium A2 sequences, and a third to contain hard A2 sequences. You might also have a database that contains A2 “biggees”, or one that contains A2 singing call figures.

CSDS provides flags and description fields to allow you to describe the material in the database. Sequences may be loaded into a database by using CSDS’s own sequence writing facilities or by importing them from other sources such as the SD program. (The procedures for creating native CSDS choreography or importing from other sources are not discussed in this article).

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

As each sequence is loaded into the database it is assigned an index number which is used by other parts of CSDS to identify the sequence uniquely. So, for example, the 100th sequence loaded into the database named “A2EZ” would have an index tag of A2EZ-100. This tag allows the sequence to be referenced when building dances or date records.

Dance Definition Files

A dance is simply a file containing lists of sequences chosen for use at a specific dance. The actual sequences remain in the database that houses them. The dance definition merely uses the sequence indexes to point to the sequences you have selected for the dance.

The lists of sequences can be organized into as many as 10 “frames” that correspond to the piles of material you might have created when using physical paper or cards. Each frame contains a list of the sequence indexes that appear in that “pile”.

To avoid forcing you to list individual sequences, CSDS provides a shortcut syntax that allows you to specify that you want the frame to include all sequences from a given set of databases minus any sequences that you have already called to the group or that were found to have problems.

When you are calling the dance, the sequence you're calling appears in a large display area for easy reading. You select which frame or “pile” is to be currently active in the display area using a Function key. After calling a sequence you can move it out of the active pile into the used pile with a single keystroke; CSDS automatically displays the next sequence in the frame. Alternatively you can use other Function keys to move forward or backward through the frame if you do not want to simply take the next one on the pile. Other Function keys allow you to load a different frame into the active calling area.

Date Logs

After calling the dance, you can create a date log entry that documents the sequences used at the dance. CSDS provides a mechanism to quickly import the used sequences from a dance into a date entry.

A single date entry can record multiple dances, allowing you to document separate dances called during a single weekend in one date entry. When building subsequent dances you can exclude sequences called at earlier dances by pointing to the date log entries describing them.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

This completes the conceptual overview. For the blow-by-blow, keep reading.

Detailed Description

This section provides a more detailed description of how to perform the actions outlined in the Overview section.

Assume that choreography has already been created and loaded into the appropriate sequence databases.

Let’s further assume that you’re about to call an A2 dance for a group called the A2 Aces in Timmins, Ontario.

The group has asked you to workshop something and enjoys doing singing calls.

The databases that contain your A2 sequences are named as follows:

1. “A2-0” contains “biggee” sequences – short sequences used to open a tip
2. “A2-1” contains easy sequences
3. “A2-2” contains moderately difficult sequences
4. “A2-3” contains hard sequences
5. “A2WS” contains special sequences you have written for their workshop
6. “A2SING” contains singing call figures

In the following sections, we’ll discuss what’s involved in creating a new dance, calling a dance, and recording what sequences were used at the dance.

Creating a Dance

The first step is to create a dance description file. To start, go to the CSDS welcome panel,

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

click on Dance, and select New as shown below:

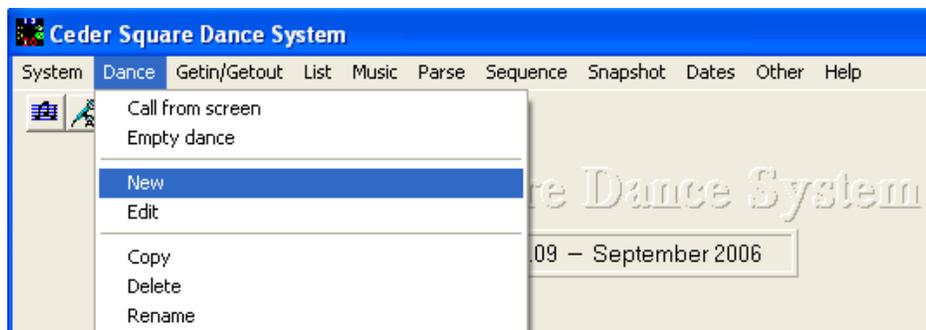


Figure 2. Creating a new dance

Clicking on “New” will bring up a dialog box that lets you name the dance file and provide some other descriptive information about the dance.

Filled in for our dance, it looks like this:

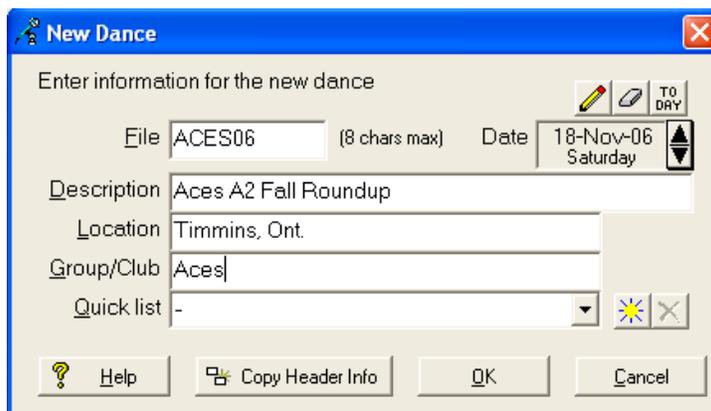


Figure 3. Filling in dance header information

Notice the “Copy Header Info” button. If you already have a dance defined that has similar information, you can use that button to copy it into this dance.

Clicking OK from the dance header screen above will display the following screen. The example shows how it would be filled in for the dance we’re describing:

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

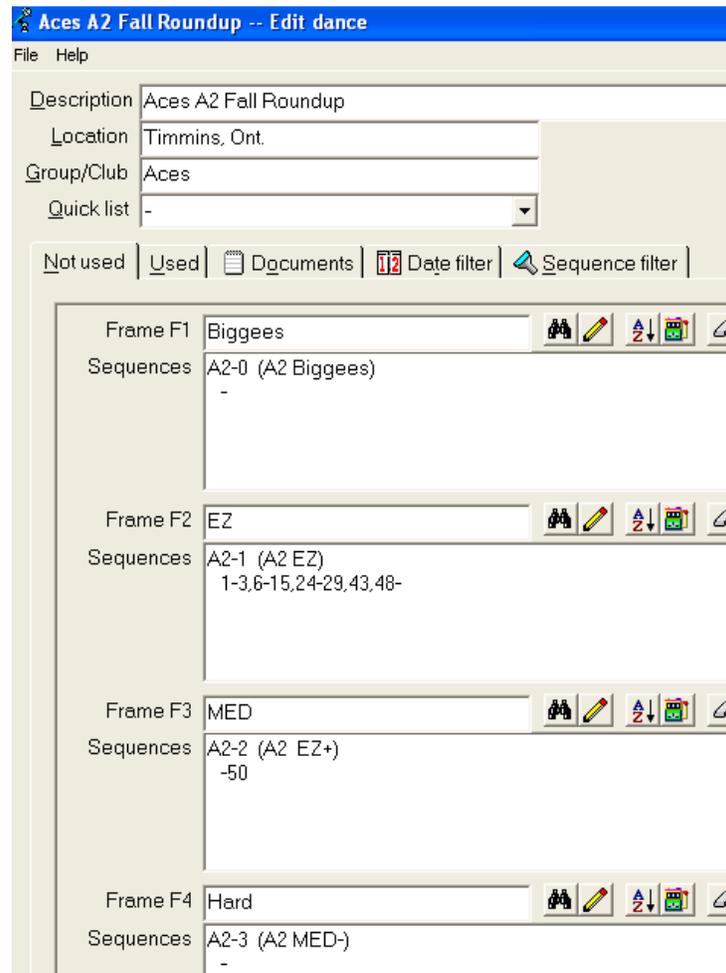


Figure 4. Putting sequences into frames

Refer to Figure 4 above as you read the following description of what the entries are doing.

The syntax for defining the sequences to appear in the frames specifies that sequence database names appear in column 1 and lists of sequences to be included from that database start on the next line in any column beyond 1.

Frame 1 contains our “Biggee” pile. Frame 1 sequences are drawn from a database named “A2-0”. The “-” in column 2 of the second line just under the database name indicates that all sequences from database “A2-0” are to be included.

Frame 2 contains easy sequences drawn from the “A2-1” database. The list shown indicates that sequences 1 through 3, 6 through 15, 24 through 29, 43, and 48 through the end of the database will be included.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

Frame 3, defined as the medium pile, specifies that all sequences up to index 50 are to be included from database “A2-2”.

Frame 4 is the “hard” pile and includes all sequences from database “A2-3”.

Frames 5 and 6, containing workshop and singing call sequences respectively, are not shown in Figure 4 above but they are coded in the same way as the ones you see.

After specifying the sequences that are to be retrieved for the dance, you can use the Date Filter and Sequence Filter to exclude specified sequences from the dance.

The Date Filter excludes sequences used in specified previous dances and the Sequence Filter excludes sequences flagged as having problems of some kind.

To filter dates, click on the Date Filter tab that appears just under the dance description fields at the start of the dance definition record. That will display a dialog box that looks similar to this (once you've defined some dates in the Date file – we'll talk about that later):

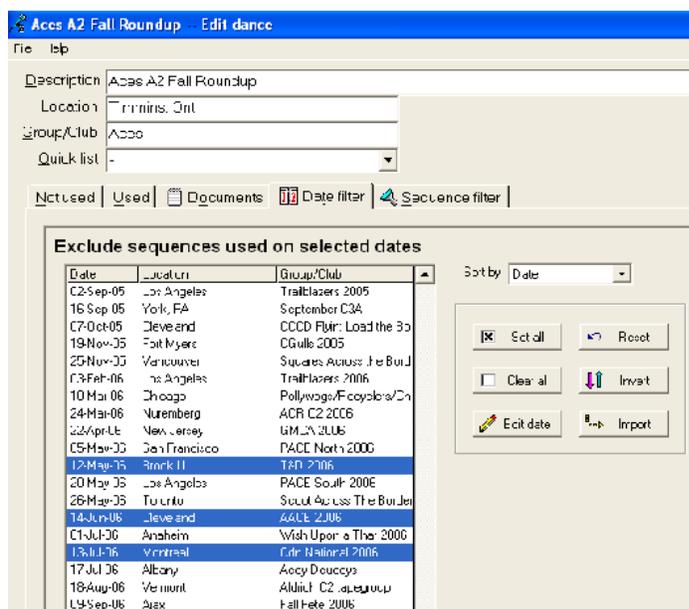


Figure 5. Selecting dates to exclude

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

Sequences used at the selected dates (the ones highlighted with the blue bars) will be excluded from the dance being currently built. You can use the “Sort by” selection to change the sort field for the list.

The “Set all” and “Clear all” buttons can be used to select or deselect all items in the list.

“Reset” returns all items to their state when the list was first opened.

“Invert” reverses the selected and unselected items.

“Edit date” allows you to edit a date record and change its contents.

“Import” allows you to import the list of excluded sequences from some other dance that has already been built.

To use the Sequence Filter, click on the Sequence Filter tab. That will display a screen like the following:

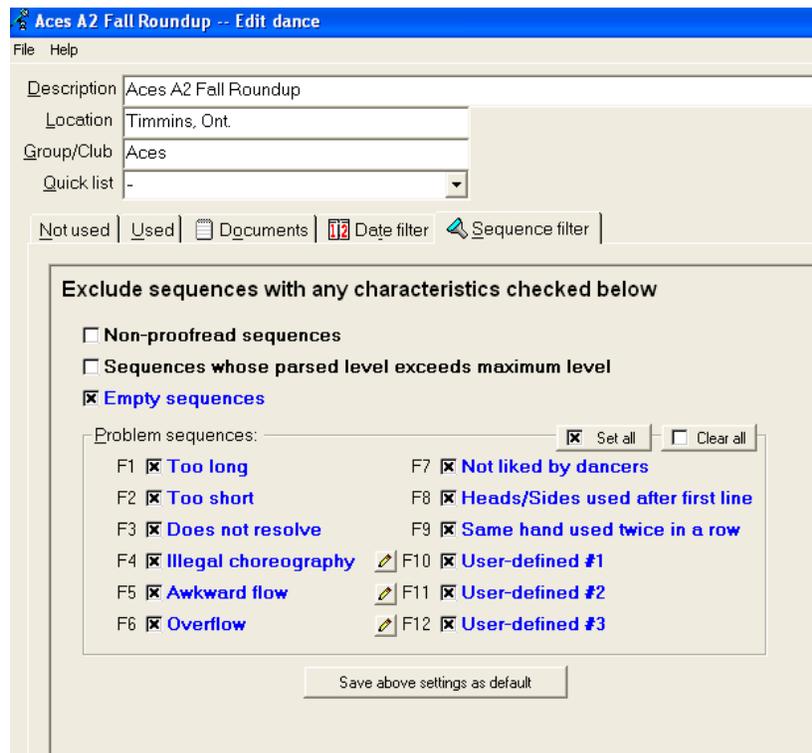


Figure 6. Selecting problem flags to exclude

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

During the dance you can mark a sequence that you discover has a problem by setting one of the flags that you see in the figure above. When building subsequent dances you can exclude sequences that have a problem flag set by using the Sequence Filter. Simply select the problem types that you wish to exclude. Instructions for how the flags get set for a particular sequence appear later in this paper.

The dance is now completely built. You can save it by clicking on the “Close” button at the bottom of the screen. When you click on “Close” a prompt box will be displayed asking if you wish to save the dance – click on “Yes”. When the dance is saved CSDS will display a dialog box containing a build report that will look something like the following:

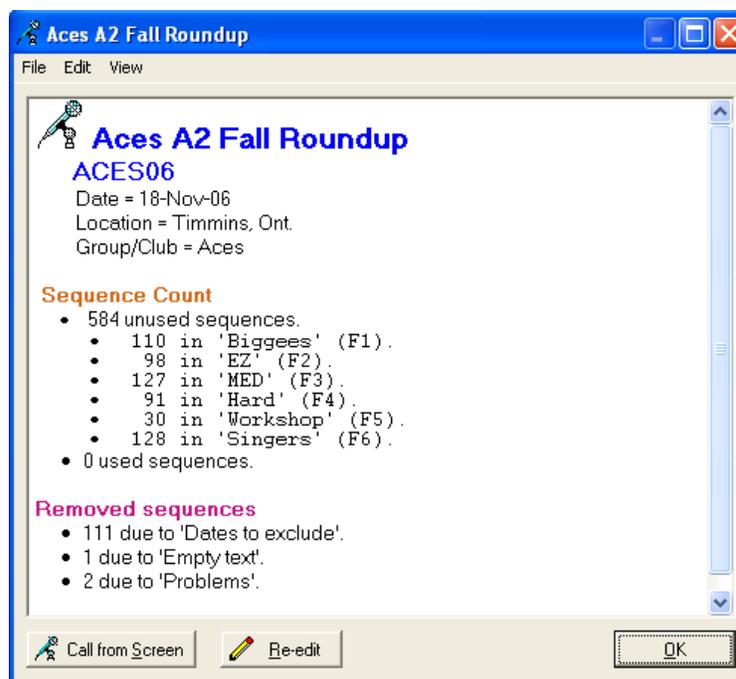


Figure 7. Dance build report

The dance is now ready for use!

Calling The Dance

To display sequences for calling you must first open a dance previously built. To start, from the Welcome page click on “Dance” and select “Call from screen” as shown below:

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.



Figure 8. Opening a dance to call from the screen

This will display a list of the dances that you have built as shown below:

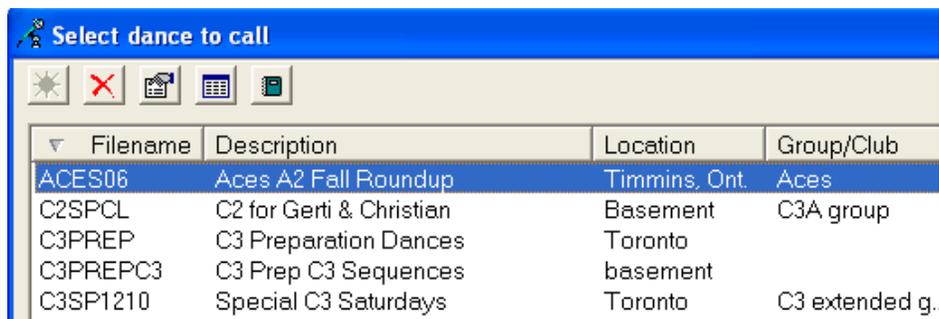


Figure 9. Selecting a dance to open for calling

Simply double-click on the dance you wish to load into the calling display area. Once loaded, it will look something like the graphic on the following page:

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

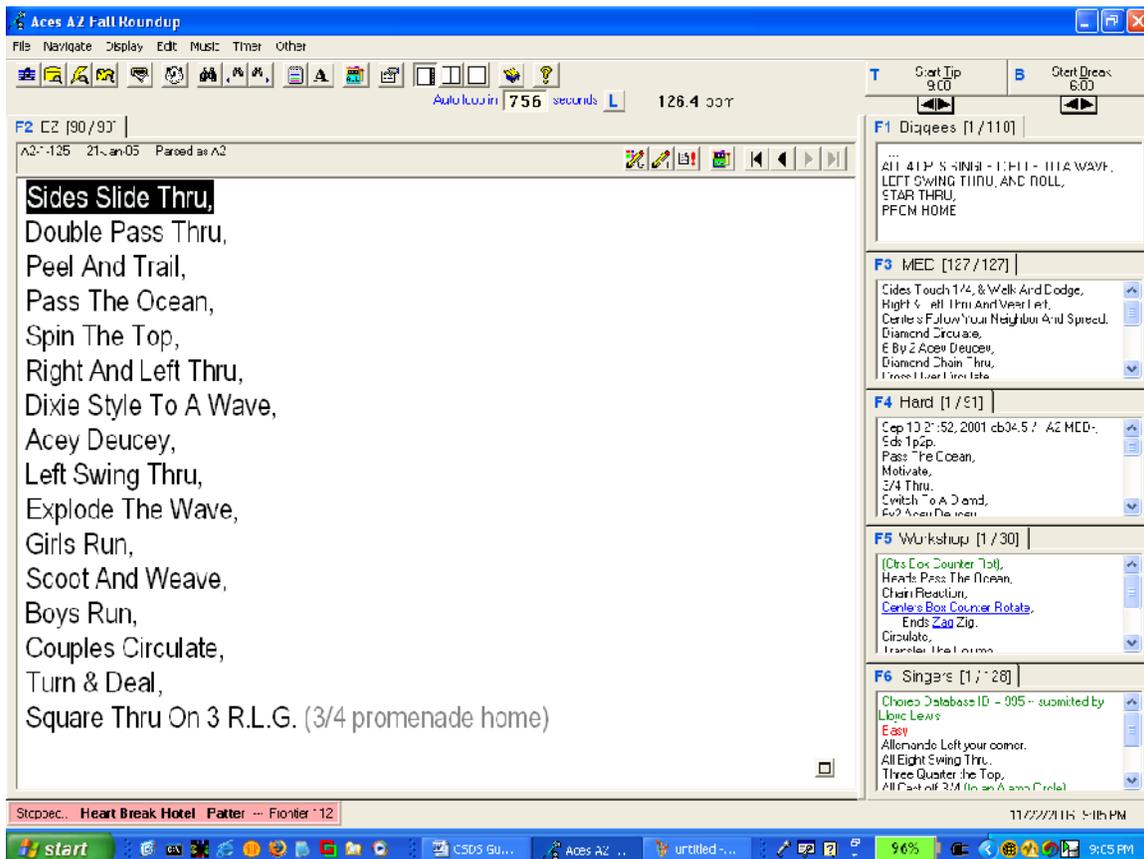


Figure 10. The call from screen display area

Following relatively standard conventions for screen organization, CSDS places the title of the dance being called in the blue Label Bar at the very top of the screen.

In the second “row” is the gray Action Bar. Clicking on “File”, or “Navigate” etc. will cause a menu of actions to drop down for your selection.

Under the Action Bar is the Button Bar which contains a row of action buttons for the more commonly used functions. The icons on the buttons are relatively self-evident, but if you hover your mouse over a button a pop-up will explain the button’s function.

The current sequence in the active frame is displayed in the large viewing area on the left.

Down the right side is a column of windows that displays the inactive frames showing the current sequence in each one.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

The fonts used can be tailored to your own preferences (just click on the button in the button bar with the “A” on it). Only one sequence at a time is displayed in the window. Now all you have to do is read it!

During the course of calling, there are a number of actions you will need to take: scrolling forward and backward within a sequence, selecting a new sequence within the active frame, placing a finished sequence in the “Used” pile, displaying a new frame (i.e. “pile” of cards), etc.

All of these functions could be accomplished using the mouse to click buttons or select menu options, but using a mouse is far too cumbersome to be useful during a dance. That is why CSDS provides keyboard shortcuts for all important functions. Most of the previously listed functions can be performed with a single keystroke.

If you look carefully at the screenshot above you will see that some features on the screen have a large blue label in the upper left corner. For example:

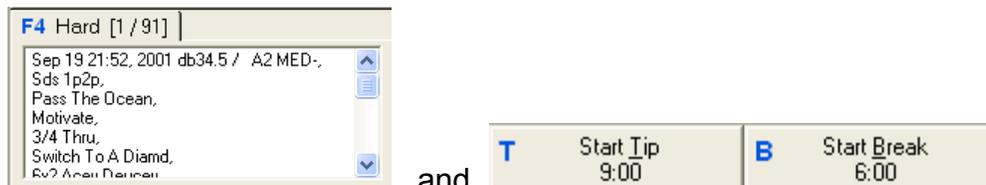


Figure 11. Hotkey labels

These blue labels show the keystroke that will perform the associated function. For example, pressing the F4 key will cause Frame 4 (the frame we labeled Hard) to become the active frame. Pressing “T” will start the tip timer, and pressing “B” will start the break timer.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

The following table shows the shortcut keys associated with the most common functions:

Key	Function	Key	Function	Key	Function
PgDn	Scroll down within sequence	PgUp	Scroll up within sequence	F12	Display next sequence in active frame
F11	Display previous sequence in active frame	F1	Display Frame 1	F2	Display Frame 2
F3	Display Frame 3	F4	Display Frame 4	F5	Display Frame 5
F6	Display Frame 6	F7	Display Frame 7	F8	Display Frame 8
F9	Display Frame 9	F10	Display Frame 10	T	Start Tip Timer
B	Start Break Timer	C	Display singing call cuesheet	U	Move current sequence in active frame to the “Used” frame (note that an option can be set to require two keystrokes if desired)
Ctrl+P	Display the problem flag dialog to mark the sequence as having a problem.	P	Play/Pause music player	W	Rewind music player
L	Loop music player to first loop point	D	Display music database	Q	Display music quicklist

Table 1. Shortcut Keys

Let’s assume you are starting a new tip. Here is a typical series of actions you might go through and the keys you would use to accomplish them (refer to Figure 10 to see what has been loaded into various frames):

1. **Select a record to play:** Press **D** to bring up the music database, which will let you scroll to the music that you want play, and select it.
2. **Select a “Biggee” sequence to call as the first sequence of the tip.** Press **F1** to make the Biggee frame active. To look through the Biggee pile to find an appropriate sequence to call, use the **F12** key to move forward through the sequences in the Biggee pile and **F11** to move backward.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

3. **Start the tip:** Press **P** to play the record loaded into the music player. Press **T** to start the Tip Timer, which will count down from whatever time you have set it for.
4. **Call the Biggee sequence:** that you picked out before starting the tip. It should still be showing in the display window after selecting it in step 2. When you have called it, press **U** to move the sequence into the “Used” frame. Note that there is a Settings value that you can set to cause a confirmation prompt to be displayed when you press **U** if you wish to guard against inadvertently sending a sequence to the “Used” pile. If you have that option set, you must press **U** and **Y** in succession to move the sequence.
5. **Change to the EZ frame:** Press **F2** to move to the frame containing the Easy sequences. The currently active sequence in that frame will be displayed.
6. **Call the new sequence.** If it is longer than the display window, use **PgDn** to scroll down the sequence. When you have finished calling the sequence, press **U** to put it in the “Used” frame. The next sequence in the active frame will be displayed.
7. **When the tip is over:** press **P** to pause the music player and **S** to stop the tip timer.

Finding Special Sequences and Moving Them Around

Sometimes during a dance a dancer might ask you to exercise a certain call or concept. One of the big advantages of working off the computer is that it is very easy to find material that uses specific calls and move it into its own frame.

Let’s suppose that a dancer has asked us to focus on Motivate. All we have to do is set up a search on the word “motivate” and do it repeatedly. To start the search, either click on the button in the button bar with the binoculars icon or press Ctrl+F (“Ctrl” and “F” keys simultaneously).

This will bring up the following dialog where we can type in our search string – “motivate”:

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.



Figure 12. Find dialog box

Clicking on the “Find Next” button will initiate the search. The first sequence with the string “motivate” in it will be made active in the active sequence area of the screen and the search term will be highlighted in reverse video.

The easiest way to collect our “motivate” sequences together is to put them in their own frame. However, the only frames displayed on the right of our calling display screen in Figure 10 are those with sequences in them.

As we start our search, we have to take a special action to put the first “motivate” sequence in an unused frame. First, right-click anywhere on the sequence to bring up the menu shown below and then select “Move sequence to another frame”.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

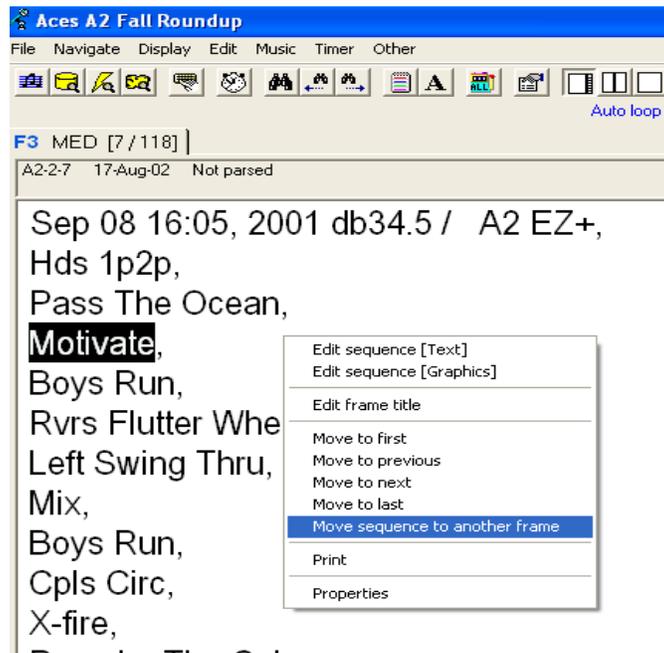


Figure 13. Right-click menu

That will cause this display to be presented:

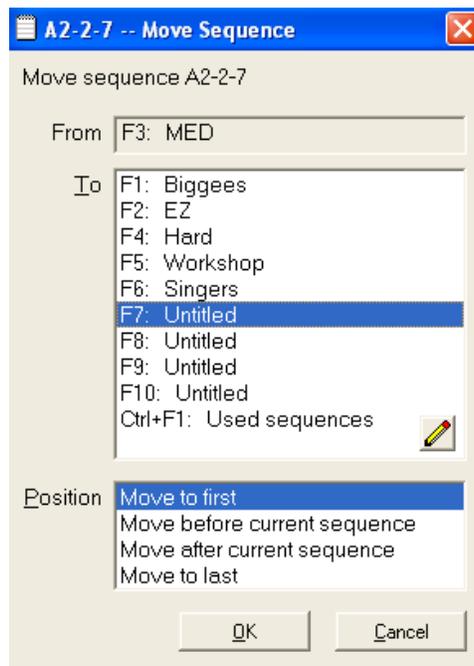


Figure 14. Move sequence dialog

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

Select an “Untitled” frame to move the sequence into and press OK. You will see a new frame labeled “F7: Untitled” appear in the list of frames on the right hand side of the calling area, with our selected sequence in it.

Subsequent sequences will be much easier to locate. To find the next sequence containing the text “motivate” simply press “N”. You can now move the new sequence to the F7 frame using “drag and drop”. Left-click anywhere on the sequence and the cursor will change into a hand holding a piece of paper. Holding the left-click down, drag the cursor over to frame F7 and release the left button. The sequence will be moved.

The drag and drop function must be enabled for this to work. To enable it, click on “File” on the Action Bar and select “Settings”. Click on the “Call from screen” tab and make sure there is an “x” beside “Enable drag+drop to move sequences”.

After The Dance

Following the dance, you need to make a date record of the sequences that you used so that you can avoid repeating them to the same people at another dance.

To create a new Date record, go to the CSDS Welcome page, click on Dates, and select New, as shown in the figure below:

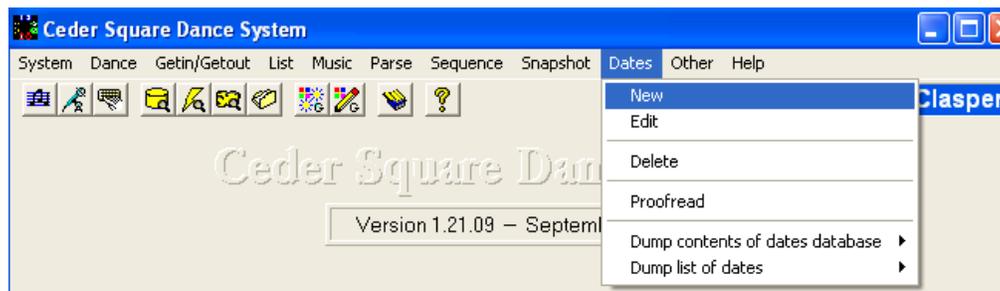


Figure 15. Creating a date record

This will bring up a dialog box that will allow you to fill in information about the date, as shown below:

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

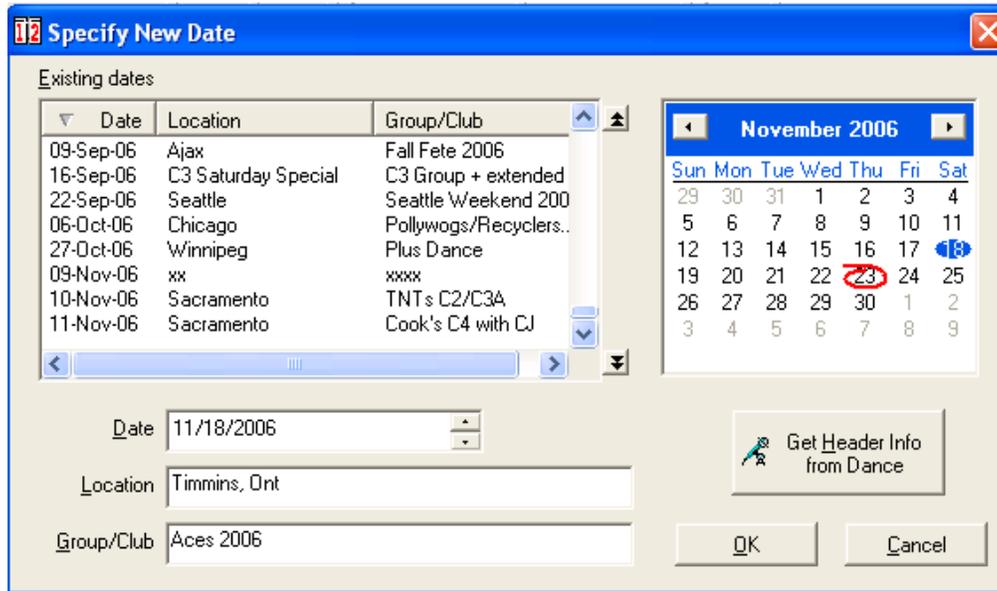


Figure 16. Specifying date header information

When you click on OK you will then be presented with a screen similar to this:

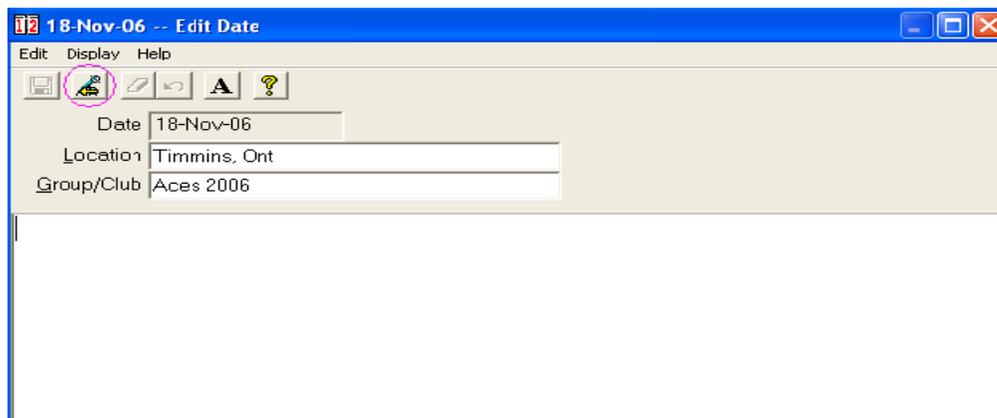


Figure 17. Date sequence list screen

Click on the icon circled in pink (above, just under the menu option “Display”) to display a list of dances from which you can select, as shown below:

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.



Figure 18. Selecting a dance from which to import used sequences

Select the dance that you wish to import into the date and click on the “OK” button. This will cause the used sequences from that dance to be recorded in the date entry, as shown below:

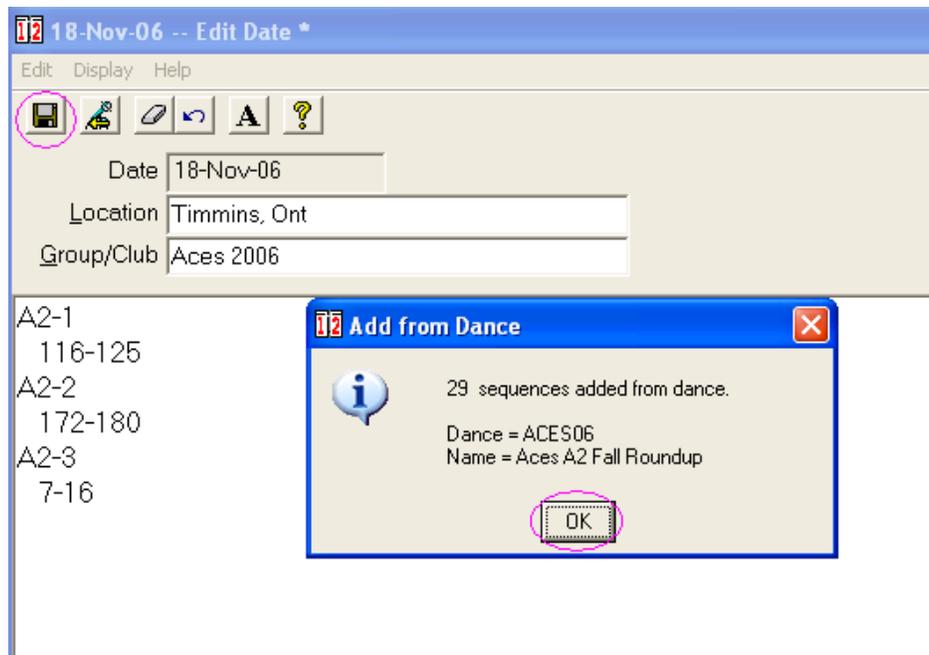


Figure 19. Used sequences listed in the date record

Click on “OK” to clear the dialog box reporting the number of sequences added.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

At this point you can either include more dances in the date, or you can save it by clicking on the icon with the picture of a floppy disk.

The final task I suggest performing after the dance is over is to delete the dance definition file.

While this is not mandatory, if you don't make it a normal practice, you'll find that over time the list of dance files will become unwieldy and difficult to work with.

Once the dance is over, the dance file is not needed. To delete the dance go the Welcome page, click on Dance and select Delete as shown below:

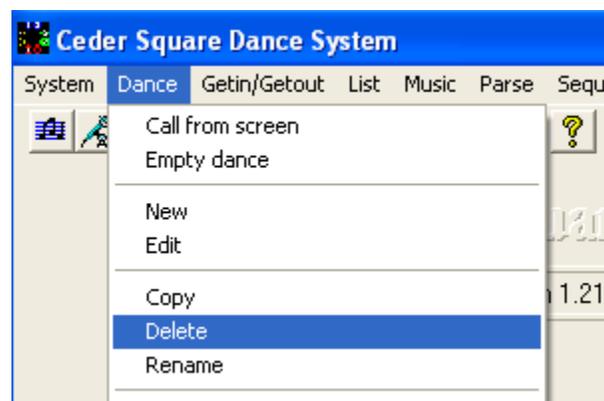


Figure 20. Deleting a dance

This will bring up a list of the currently defined dances from which you may select the dance to be deleted.

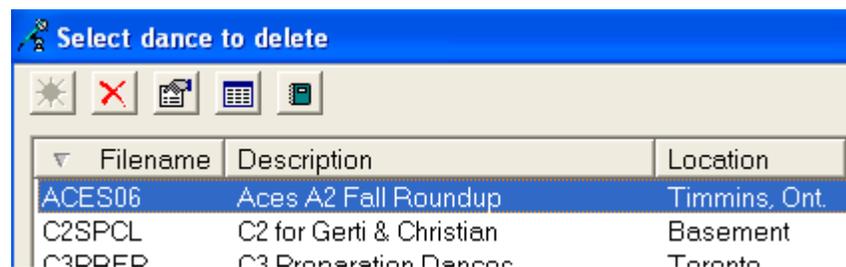


Figure 18. Selecting the dance to delete

After selecting the dance to delete, click on the Delete button at the bottom of the dialog box.

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“Using CSDS To Call Dances”, continued.

Summary

While this article may seem detailed, it's actually just an overview of the rudiments of the “call from screen” functions in CSDS.

If all you ever learn how to use are the functions described here, you should be able to call dances with no problems.

However ... there's more in there! (There is *always* “more in there”.)

The best way to learn is to explore. Read through the help files and FAQs that Vic has supplied. They certainly don't cover everything but they are a start. Talk to friends who are using the program; you will probably find they have stumbled on some facilities you did not – and vice versa.