

# *Paws to Dance*



The Newsletter of the Canine Freestyle Federation, Inc.  
February, 2006

## **Going Forward with a Joyful Noise**

by Julia Gregory

When I look up the word “retreat” in my *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, the first two definitions read as follows:

1. The act of going backward or of withdrawing. 2. A quiet, private or secure place; a refuge. Well, for CFF that’s about half right! During the retreat, June 23-25 in Mebane, North Carolina, 1. NOBODY’S going backward! We’ll all be moving forward toward our performance goals. We’ll withdraw from the world of carpools, office politics and housework, hmmm, sounds good to me! 2. I doubt it will be quiet with so many dogs, CD’s and handler opinions. It will be a joyful noise! Private? Nope! Anyone’s welcome! Secure? You bet! We’ll all be surrounded by people who want to help us to succeed. I wouldn’t miss it. Take a look at the class list below and I’ll bet you’ll want to come too. *(Please note that these classes are still subject to cancellation and change.)*

### **Viva La Difference** – Susan Colledge and ...

This class covers training techniques and issues, music selection, choreography and presentation with reference to first the big dog, then the little dog. The juxtaposition will generate additional productive insights for training and handling.

### **Building a Movement Vocabulary** – Kay Richards

How do you take the required movements and combine them into phrases that are both logical and organic? It’s different for every dog. Learn the basic concepts to guide you in building YOUR vocabulary.

### **Handling and Attire** – Sally Kirschenman, Nancy Smith

This dynamic duo will show you what’s wrong and what’s right in the ring. Avoid out-shining and over-facing your dog and learn instead to be the perfect enhancement to your dog’s beautiful movement.

### **With the Music**

Learn how to download free programs that you can use to edit that perfect tune for your dog. Step by step instructions and expert help along the way.

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# From Your President



Spring is just around the corner and it's time to celebrate and to share the wonders of your dog with others. CFF and 3 guilds are offering three different opportunities for you to present the unique relationship between you and your dog before a supportive group of spectators. The three celebrations are in Rockville, Virginia, March 18 and Chattanooga, Tennessee, April 29-30. Please join us for these wonderful celebrations of dog work.

I can hear you all saying "What is she babbling about now. The 3 dates are all competitions". True statement but wouldn't it be refreshing and exhilarating to approach competitions creatively and artistically. John Madden was once asked if there was artistry in sports specifically football. His response was yes, he went on to say, and this is not an exact quote, in sports artistry is mutual trust and confidence in each other. There is a willingness to share, to give, and to accept and harmonize like instruments in an orchestra... It is training together to be one effortlessly. There is a mutual trust, believing that working together will produce the effort to achieve a mutual goal. The goal in this case is to create a unique new entity THE TEAM with 11 parts. . functioning as one. Now the coaches can create, choreograph, the plays to enable the team to achieve more points than their opponents.

Artistry is achieved through relationships. In the case of Canine Freestyle and football it is the relationship of a learned skill, movement, and expressing that skill dynamically and rhythmically in a specific space. Artistry in Canine Freestyle also includes a relationship with the art form music. The imaginative use of movement to create aesthetically pleasing designs with music is a non-verbal form of communication. Presentation before spectators is necessary to test the power of the team's artistic expression.

Canine Freestyle like football is really not about winning but it is about achieving oneness.

This Spring let's all celebrate dog work in relationship to the team's trained movement and choreographed with music artistically expressing the joy you have in working and training together in a creative and artistic manner.

Believe in the celebration and trust your teammate to express the joy of your unique relationship. Both you and the dog must be willing and responsive to each other to achieve oneness.

If all of this seems like a lot of gobbledegook or if you believe the way I do then join us in Mebane N.C., June 23-25. It is a wonderful weekend to learn more about artistry and its relationship to the CFF vision. See you at the celebrations this Spring.

*Joan*

## Up-Coming Events

You won't want to miss it!

**March 18 2006: Sirius Guild Show**

**April 29-30 2006: First Florida Freestyle & Canis Major Joint Show**

**23-25 June 2006: Semi-annual CFF Retreat, Felicite Lane Animal Sanctuary, Mebane, North Carolina**

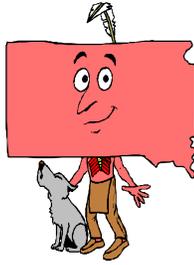
This is a very special opportunity you won't want to miss, so mark your calendar today to save the dates. The nation's finest freestyle teachers and performers will be there, at your disposal, to help you and your canine teammate "kick it up a notch" and learn to enjoy freestyle even more.

If you have an event you want to appear in this space, simply contact the editor of Paws to Dance.

## Guild News—Staccato Notes

### *Dances With Woofs* *South Dakota*

by Dawn Madge



Hello out there from the great state of South Dakota, home of Mount Rushmore!! We are very busy working on our routines, tweaking and polishing!! We are also welcoming newbies to our sport and watching them learn about Freestyle has been wonderful. We have ongoing classes every Friday night from 6-8pm at Happy Tails Dog Training Center. We had a Freestyle Fun Day at the center Sunday, January 22. We have been asked to put on a demo in Hill City, SD for the annual Sled Dog Race festival, February 11. This will be a great opportunity to work on routines, share our wonderful dogs, and show the general public our great sport! This spring we will have our big Garage Sale fundraiser. Don't forget, the Dances With Woofs show will be the first weekend in November 2006. So mark your calendars and plan to saddle up and ride to the Black Hills!!

### *The Gold Coast Freestyle Guild*

By Judy Gamet



It was a Very Merry Christmas for all of the Gold Coast Freestyle Guild teams this year. Our Holiday Freestyle Festival was an incredible way to celebrate a year of creating and training with our canine partners. Co-sponsored by the Napa Valley Dog Training Club, sixteen routines were performed, with 19 dogs and handler's participating! The glory these dogs demonstrated will not be soon forgotten. The morning started off with run throughs for each team to get acquainted with the Napa Valley Dog Training Club's facility. Very good move... it made a huge difference when it came time to perform the routines in front of the audience. Those teams that struggled with the run through, handler's determined to not give up, shone in the end! The show opened with Bella, my 12 year old, dysplastic rottweiler, who brought canine freestyle to my

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### **Canis Major Guild**

by Fay Taylor



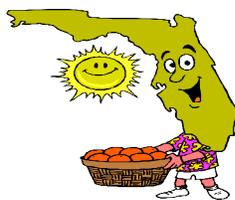
Training, teaching, planning a show, and planning the June retreat! Our plates are full. It's a wonder that we actually managed to get Christmas decorations put away! And, we seem to manage to get to our jobs most days as well.

Canis Major is sharing show responsibilities with First Florida Freestylers for the April 29 and 30, 2006 shows. These were originally scheduled to be in Tallahassee, but two university graduations on that weekend filled up the motels and increased the prices. To the rescue!... Bev Eitner at Play Dog eXcellent, on short notice, has graciously offered us the use of her building again. So, the two-day show, Saturday by First Florida Freestylers and Sunday by Canis Major, will be in Chattanooga on April 29 and 30. The Canis Major Guild could not have a better group of folks to work with than those great gals from Florida. We can promise you it will be a super weekend. Don't miss it!

We've been polishing up old routines and learning new ones to present to our judges this spring. We've also been teaching some new students, whom we hope to introduce to our CFF friends from out of town.

We will have several opportunities for demos this spring, The Dog Daze and the North Georgia Animal League Fair will be the big ones that attract many pet owners from this region. Plans are in the works to send a couple of us to Kentucky to teach at 4-H camp.





## Guild News More Staccato Notes



### First Florida Freestylers Guild

by Gaea Mitchel

As we launched into 2006, we looked back on the year just past. We are a small and diverse group, and find it hard to be together regularly. There's never a guild meeting that isn't missing a few of our number. (We meet monthly to train and brainstorm routines, with a business meeting over lunch.) So where are they? What are they doing? What gives here?

Ann Holder has a busy schedule with her Space Coast Therapy Dog group, as well as teaching with her local obedience club. Her Peruvian Hairless, Coy, is being shown in the Rare Breed shows as well as making great progress in his obedience and freestyle training. Ann also serves on the CFF board and keeps the rest of us on schedule with our guild efforts.

Cathy Nirenberg and Spock (Belgian Ter-vuren) had a busy 2005, finishing their UD in April. They followed that with a CFF-II title (and the President's trophy) with an inspired routine in Chattanooga. Since then they have racked up two Rally titles and are making tracks (literally) toward a TD title.

Cynthia Campbell and Mandy finished the UKC Agility Champion title (not bad for a twelve-year-old princess dog) and have welcomed Shamrock, a Cairn Terrier, into their home and training schedule. Shamrock has already earned an agility leg or two and is learning the ropes for obedience and freestyle.

Elaine Smith had a productive year, reorganizing her entire world for herself and her dogs. She even was able to sell ten acres of Florida swampland so she could move closer to work and some of her training buddies. Now Itchie, Rhyme and Jasmine are sharing a much happier home with Elaine.

Barb Giudice has recently joined us, and has been polishing Evie and Duncan (Cairn Terriers) for the Open obedience ring.

Fran D'Amico and her Keeshond are working on a routine, but spend more time competing in agility and working with a new puppy.

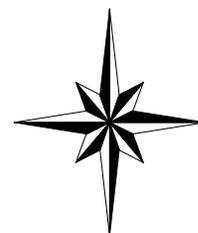
Pat Roberts and Bobby (Keeshond) are also very active in agility, and Pat teaches agility which pulls her away from many of our meetings.

Gaea Mitchel and PeliAnn, (Cavalier King Charles Spaniel) enjoyed the year with therapy dog visits to several Alzheimer's units as well as the inaugural visit to the hospital's pediatric floor. Peli finished her UKC AgII title, earned her entry level titles in AKC obedience, rally and agility, and added the OAJ later in the year. Her routine in Chattanooga earned a CFF-II.

Now we are all looking toward a new year, and new adventures in dog sport. We each have high hopes of pulling together routines in time for the April show. Hope we see some of you there!

### *Sirius Guild*

"Where Every Dog Is A Star!"



by Nan Marks

The Sirius Guild is getting ready to host our fifth freestyle trial this March 18<sup>th</sup> at the Rockville (VA) community civic center. See show chair Jim Barrett's article in this issue and we hope to see you there! We greet the New Year with a new slate of officers chosen unanimously by the guild members: Kay Richards (President), Nancy Smith (Vice President), Susanna Pathak (Treasurer) and Verna Allanson (Secretary). A lot of good freestyling and training has gone on despite the chill (actually surprisingly little chill)

of winter. Many Sirius Guild members were able to take advantage of a terrific CFF Seminar hosted at the Tennille's and conducted by Mary Sullivan and Betty Swenson. Sirius Guild members training at Capital Dog in Maryland and at the Richmond Dog Obedience Club (RDOC) in Virginia were active in holiday sessions designed to show routines and routines in process, celebrate freestyle, learn from each other, and celebrate holiday cheer. A giant thanks goes out from the Guild to Carol Maupin, the RDOC, and Ellen Lipps for a wonderful fund raising effort. Carol donated time and talent to put on a popular day long heeling seminar hosted by the RDOC and beautifully catered without charge by Ellen Lipps. The combined profits exceeded \$1600 and were all contributed to the Sirius Guild for the March show in Rockville, VA! A Guild meeting and planning session was hosted January 29<sup>th</sup> by Brandy Clymire so stay tuned for great doings from the freestylers of the Dog Star.

## Misha Guild, Utah



This report was compiled by the editor with excerpts from Susan Colledge's emails.

"No news at all from the Misha Guild. We are not meeting right now because Tessa (Jo-Nel's Angel Touch Contessa, CFF III) is rehearsing for Toto in the Wizard of Oz. I teach all day and then rehearse six hours at night and ten hours on Saturdays. I have no life except work and rehearsals. Closing night will be February 21 and we will meet again after that."

Good grief! Can you believe that Susan thinks that one of her guild's star dog's going "Broadway" is "no news"! The editor began to wring details from the modest handler in Utah ...

"We started rehearsals the beginning of November - just a couple nights a week and a few hours on Sat. In December the hours got longer and after the holidays we began every night and all day on Saturday.

Woods Cross High School is putting on the production. The instructor is VERY professional. Professional companies have said they could not do it as well. It is triple cast (except for Toto). All the kids are great with Tessa and love her to death. She also enjoys going down to rehearse. She gets really excited when we get there. However, SHE can sleep all day while I am at school.

Several times she must run in from offstage to Dorothy and once to the Scarecrow when she escapes the witch and goes to get help. She must go to the curtain to unveil the Wizard. The hardest thing for her to do is stay in the basket during the dances. (She's hyperactive and sitting still is never her long suite.) Her favorite scene is when Dorothy meets Professor Marvel and she has to eat part of his hot dog. (She ends up getting her whole supper during rehearsals.) She has four costume  
*Continued on page 6*

### **Freestyle Run-throughs February 18th CTA Beltsville, MD**

The Sirius Guild is sponsoring a freestyle run through event at CTA in Beltsville MD. First run throughs are 8 minutes of ring time for \$10 and additional run through time is \$5 per time. We'll run your music, cheer you on, and give you a nice chance to train and proof your routine or routine-in-development. Fun for all and great timing for those with their eye on the March show! All styles of freestyle will be welcome. Proceeds to benefit the Sirius Guild. Questions to Nan Marks 301-589-4970 or [marksnanj@aol.com](mailto:marksnanj@aol.com).

*Misha continued from page 5*

changes (change of bows) and she has a stunt double that does the flying parts (during the tornado and dog-napping by monkeys). We are going to use our new ending shape from her freestyle routine when she comes out at the end to take her bow.

Opening night will be February 9. We'll run every night (except Sundays) with matinees on Saturdays until February 21 (closing night).

Well, I think that is all. I'm tired just talking about it. It's a 25 mile drive for me. It's snowing like crazy today so I'm not too thrilled about going down tonight, but Tessa seems to be a natural at acting. Maybe I have finally found her thing."

Final note: When the editor expressed concern for the welfare of the stand-in dog doing the flying scenes, Susan sent the following, soothing message:

"The stunt double is a Ty brand stuffed yorkie."

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*Retreat continued from page 1*

**Imagination, Innovation and Invention** – Kristin Sicotte

These three "I's" are the building blocks of artistry. Develop your choreographic technique and creativity. This class offers discussion and floor exercises.

**Neurology of Music** – Sue Ann Lesser

The music you think is perfect for your dog might be unpleasant for the audience. Why does your dog strut to one piece of music and shuffle along to another? This class explains the abilities of humans and canines to process the components of music at their hearing centers and how this may affect music selection.

**Conditioning to a Peak** – Betty Swenson

Freestyle is not for couch potatoes! For your dog to be able to maintain attention and engaging movement for one and a half minutes or more requires a certain level of physical fitness. Learn about different levels of physical conditioning for the freestyle dog.

**Inspiration to Celebration** – Kristin Sicotte and Julia Gregory

"Tricks of the trade" from music selection to honoring the audience are the topics of this class. Having a plan helps you avoid unpleasant surprises and set-backs and puts you at your most prepared as you enter the ring.

**The Empty Canvas** – Joan Tennille

The performance space may look large and empty to you, but each part of the space has a power and a use of its own. Learn to use the space to put your dog in the spotlight.

**Building the Multi-dog Team** – Julia Gregory, Gaea Mitchel

Why build a multi-dog team? It's a less frightening way to start freestyle. It's a great way to have fun with friends. Not many people do it, so it makes you special! These sisters and teammates will explain how to pick partners and music; give ideas for innovative choreography and even address how to practice together separately.

**A Little Handler Fitness Goes a Long Way** – Dr. Francisca Lytle

You don't have to be an athlete to excel at freestyle, but each of us can improve our performance by improving our fitness. The class addresses handler conditioning for safety, strength, grace and stamina. This instructor's motto is "A LITTLE handler fitness goes a long way."

**The Rules of the Game** – Joan Tennille

View recordings of past shows, demos and workshops and join in this discussion led by a panel of experienced freestylers. How do we maximize creativity within the framework established by CFF rules?

## Get Ready for the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Sirius Guild Trial!

By James Barrett

The Sirius Guild is getting ready to host our fifth freestyle trial this **March 18<sup>th</sup>** at the Rockville (VA) community civic center. This is the same building we used for previous competitions. We will open at 8 AM and start the show about 9:30. As in the past, you will need to bring your own lunch as no food vendors will be on the site. If the past Sirius Guild trials are any indication, it should be a great trial – I'm personally expecting to see a lot of great routines and I know the guild members are ready to put on that southern hospitality to make the trial a memorable experience for all. You can expect the premium to be available in February – plenty of time to decide to send in your entry.

For more information contact me, the show chair, ([barrett@virginia.edu](mailto:barrett@virginia.edu); voice: 434 293 9326), or the show secretary Dave Brobst ([dbrobst@vcu.edu](mailto:dbrobst@vcu.edu)). Verna Allanson ([verna.allanson@carpenter.com](mailto:verna.allanson@carpenter.com)) is co-coordinating trophies and gifts – so please help her out with donations and help. We will be collecting dog food for the Hanover Humane Society – see Nan Marks ([marksnanj@aol.com](mailto:marksnanj@aol.com); 202-622-4621) for more information. The catalog ads chair is Brandy Clymire so send in your ads to her now.

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### Sirius Guild Trophy Fund

The 2006 CFF Sirius Guild competition is quickly approaching. Please consider making a trophy contribution or pledge for the upcoming show. Don't forget about trophies for your favorite breed or any group that you would like to honor. You can send your donations to me at the address below:

Verna Allanson CFF Trophy Fund  
4609 Gaardahl Dr.  
Sandston, Va. 23150

Or you can e-mail your pledge to me at [vallanson@verizon.net](mailto:vallanson@verizon.net)  
All check should be made out to CFF-Sirius Guild.  
When making a donation please include the form below.

Donations are due FEBRUARY 25, 2006.

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CFF Sirius Guild Freestyle Show

Description of Trophy:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Trophy for:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Donated by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
I will contribute to the General trophy Fund. Amount:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Information:

*Gold Coast continued from page 3*

life and the Bay Area; displayed the true spirit of a working dog who is just not ready to retire!

A routine performed by "the Weimettes", a group covering several counties throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, consisting of Debbie Gross and Tori, Sandra Kelley and Shadow, and Sue Ingalls and Crystal, displayed the pride that is unique to the trot of the weimaraner breed. The well known team of Anna Sowik (Vice President) and her golden retriever Huffle Puff, and Terri Prince (Secretary) and Maverick charmed the audience with their fun filled duet. Both Huffle Puff and Maverick each dazzled the audience with a solo performance later in the show.

Also representing the Veteran world was Epic and Karen Kaua (Gold Country) celebrating with a 1960's theme. All of us were just amazed just how important this performance was to the veteran dogs and how Epic danced with pride. Karen also performed with her dog, Milton, using fun props showing off some of his agility skills within the scope of freestyle.

Among the solo teams were Chris Bond and Spryte (South & East Bay Area), performed a very classy Latin routine, Kathy Burnett, also from the Gold Country area, and her beautiful heeling dog Cleo, showed off their technical skills while performed a ragtime classic. Debbie Gross and her weimaraner, Tori, one of the most accomplished sporting dogs in the show, performed a graceful jazz routine to the song Take 5. All 3 teams performing at level 2, hoping to carry these routines over to competition.

Lori Jackson, (Treasurer) and Darcy, performed a routine, creatively interlacing many rally obedience moves within their routine of Peanuts Theme. Karen Jackson, (Solano County, Napa County Representative) and Maddie, one of our most dependable demo teams, performed a joyous routine to "Winter Wonderland".

One of the newest teams to CFF is Linda Wendorff and her Pomeranian, Abbey. No one could take their eyes off Abbey strutting her "stuff" to Herb Alpert's Jingle Bell Rock.

Martia Nelson and Rincon performed as guests for their first public demonstration and had a ball improvising a 70's style routine to music by Stevey Wonder. We were thrilled to welcome them to our CFF family.

If you've ever seen Nacina Dawn (Chairperson) and Candy, you wouldn't ever forget the bursting joy of Candy's happy golden retriever trot as the two of them performed to a beautiful instrumental version of Carol of the Bells with a level 3 routine.

The show closed with the youngest performer, Anabelle, my 2 year old rottweiler performing her upcoming competition routine to Peer Gynt, a classical piece, selected to show off the heartfelt intensity and devotion that is true to the working dog breed.

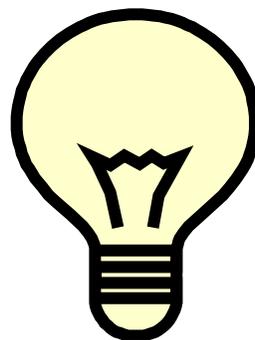
The day finished with a festive potluck lunch with the Napa Valley Dog Training Club, and memorable pictures with Santa . We expect to make this Holiday Freestyle Festival a tradition each year! I'd like to thank Betsie Corwin, Kathleen Hinds, and Margery Cavins for all of their help running the show. All 3 are eager to continue preparing routines for this new year!



## Board News

CFF officers re-elected as nominated were:

President - Joan Tennille  
Treasurer - Carl Tennille  
Membership Chair - Brandy Clymire  
Director - Nancy Smith  
Director - Fay Taylor



You Might Be a Freestyler If ...

... the little music snippets on the weather channel might be the right rhythm for your dog.

Verne Foster



**Come South  
and  
Enjoy a Weekend  
of  
Southern Hospitality  
and  
Freestyle Fun!**

First Florida Freestylers and Canis Major Guilds will host a two day show on **April 29 and 30, 2006** at Play Dog Excellent in Chattanooga, TN. This fabulous facility is indoors, permanently matted and very spacious. We will hold two complete trials.

CFF's Music Man, Jim Moore, will share his music for freestyle expertise in a workshop following the Saturday trial. Then relax and hang out with other exhibitors, judges, and CFF members at a Wine and Cheese get-together followed by dinner at the show site. Sunday will offer you a second full show and another opportunity to demo your talents.

We are accepting trophy donations for both shows. Please make checks payable to First Florida Freestylers Guild and indicate if your check is for the FFF or CMG trophy fund.

Mail to:

Cathy Nirenberg  
6491 SE 168<sup>th</sup> Ter Road  
Ocala, FL 34481

Catalog ads should be print ready and sent to:

Gaea Mitchel                      Email: [gmitchel@nettally.com](mailto:gmitchel@nettally.com)  
2902 Terry Road  
Tallahassee, FL 32312-2740

The Premium list will be in the mail in early February and available on the CFF web site.



## What's That Judge Thinkin'?

by Nancy Smith

In all freestyle judging, regardless of level, the judges are going to be considering the same categories; i.e., training, teamwork, choreography, music, and artistry. This article will concentrate on what the judges are looking for in scoring a routine in Levels I and II. This is not intended to be all-encompassing, I'm just hitting the highlights here.

Let's get Level I out of the way quickly. The requirements in Levels I and II are essentially the same, but for the leash. Everything below applies to Level I. The only different things the judges are going to be watching for in Level I are whether your leash is being used to drag your dog around, and whether your handling of the leash is distracting. Just because you have entered Level I, don't think you can get away with your dog's not being trained to do the moves without guidance from the leash!

The primary focus of judging at Levels I and II is the use of the performance space. I can't stress this enough. I have seen routines that include quite complicated sets of moves, trained well, and yet the routine falls flat when it comes to the primary focus of the level. What's a judge to do? Even if the dog is trained perfectly in the moves, you will not receive a great score if you do not use the space well. In Levels I and II, you should take care to be sure that you have used all the space, that your choreography is balanced, and that you incorporate interesting shapes into your routine in a way that keeps in mind that you are performing for an audience. Don't hide your dog.

The actual movements you include need not be complicated or complex. In fact, very basic movements, performed smoothly, are much more interesting to watch, and make for a far better routine, than a bunch of herky-jerky, complicated moves thrown together with little or no thought given to the transitions from one to another and, again, the use of the performance space. I have been captivated, mesmerized even, by routines that are quite simple. By the same token, I have felt jarred, distracted, and not at all entertained by performances that included some very complicated stuff. Use simple combinations of moves that go together, and focus your routine more on your transitions and moving about in the space.

As far as training and teamwork go, in Level I your leash should be pretty much invisible to me as a judge. Take care not to wrap it around Fluffy's nose, whack him in the head, or pull him around like an anvil on a rope. Take care in training in Levels I and II that your moves are performed crisply and are not muddy. Stop is stop, stay is stay. Neither is creep, creep, creep. Let Fluffy finish each move before going on and DO NOT RUSH him. Pauses help sometimes! Remember, the idea is not to finish your routine as quickly as possible and get the \*&^% & out of there. The whole idea is to take your time in the ring to show Fluffy to his best advantage. So don't make Fluffy do moves he is not ready to execute, or that aren't fully trained. Technically, this is called "over-facing".

Interactive attention is often the element that makes a good routine into a great one. This means that you have to pay attention to Fluffy, as well as he to you.

Take care not to glam it up too much when it comes to attire. It's just plain distracting, and an evening gown and diamonds won't make your routine look any better than it is. At the same time, take care to be sure your clothing is neat and tidy, and complements Fluffy and your theme. For example, please don't wear bright white shoes and black socks, and too-short green pants if you are showing Fluffy, your cream colored Pomeranian. The judges will never even see the dog with all that going on!

Finally, don't feel compelled to use long music just because you can. Pick music just long enough to do what you have to do, and not so long that it becomes repetitive and b-o-r-i-n-g.

If you concentrate on these basics in Levels I and II, you will have a great foundation to move on to Levels III and IV, where you will want to get a little fancier, so to speak. With this foundation, you will find it much easier to be able to develop your phrases and use your music in the upper levels.

## I Have a Dog; Now What Do I Do?

by Mary Sullivan

Because canine freestyle is a relatively new sport, I am often asked how to get started in it. New-comers frequently have a preconceived image of freestyle as simply moving to music in human dance steps with the dog as an accessory to the handler. In contrast to CFF, some freestyle organizations emphasize the handler's role in the freestyle team or at least equalize it in importance to the dog's role. Music is matched to the handler's rhythm, and some human dance steps are required. These characteristics can focus spectator attention on handler movement versus that of the dog. Poorly executed or choreographed freestyle of *any* style may result in the dog appearing as little more than a sidekick to the handler.

Correct CFF-style freestyle showcases the dog over the handler. Music is chosen to match the dog's rhythm at a trot. Handlers are even advised not to obviously match their own rhythm to the beat of the music to avoid pulling attention away from the dog. Deferring handler image to that of the dog can be difficult for some people. According to the dog the limelight encompasses the handler not "marching" (or tapping or bobbing or swaying) to the music's beat, wearing a performance outfit that enhances rather than competes with the dog's natural "beauty," choosing music that suits the dog's personality and rhythms over the handler's, and choreographing movements that show the dog to his best advantage while refraining from movements that exist just to show off his repertoire (what we call "kitchen sink" choreography). From the start, the handler should keep in mind these guidelines for music and movement choice as he trains and choreographs the dog.

The CFF rulebook defines *front* and *heel* as the two "foundation" positions. Most of the movements executed in freestyle routines relate the dog to the handler in one or another version of these two positions. Therefore, teaching your potential freestyle dog to heel and to work in front of you is important to your success. I would add that *visual attention* is also a crucial element in freestyle work. It's great if your dog can find front or heel (on either your left OR right), but if he doesn't pay close attention to you, he'll miss the subtle body cues and perhaps the verbal ones, too, and the bond between you will look weak. Before any other training, I teach attention--on cue--from my dogs. I then pair attention with beginning heeling and front work. I teach right-side heeling at the same time I teach left-side heeling, but I do use different commands. Backing is a requirement in the upper CFF competition levels, so I teach that as soon as I think a young dog or puppy can physically handle it. I ask for only one or two steps at a time, also on both sides of me. With backing in particular, proceed slowly. Straight backing is much harder to teach after a dog has become accustomed to backing crookedly. I speak from experience!

Once your dog is proficient at heeling and attention on both sides of your body, knows where front position is and can back from in front and on the side, you can start working on the more difficult versions of heel and front: side passes (at heel, perpendicular to your body, or in front), spins, pivots, cross-behinds and front switches, to name a few. All involve your dog understanding the foundation positions and your expecting him to maintain these positions.

To Be Continued



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## FIRST CLASS MAIL

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