

Paws to Dance



The Newsletter of the Canine Freestyle Federation, Inc.
February 2010

The Creative Journey Retreat 2010

Join fellow freestylers for a celebration of dog work. Find the magic in freestyle as you experience the joy and delight of moving together as a team, creating a unique image of one. Share and learn with others to focus on and enhance your dog's movement technically and artistically, to create a presentation with music maximizing the dog's strengths and minimizing his weaknesses and to communicate to spectators the wonder of your relationship as a team. A retreat is an in-depth training experience. Join CFF and this exceptionally talented team of instructors for a unique journey filled with fun and camaraderie. Remember, It's all about the dog.

The Instructors for this retreat have combined over 100 years of experience in teaching and presenting canine freestyle, have earned titles at every level, earned two CFF Champion titles, 17 Highest Artistic scores in competitions 4 retiring the challenge trophy and 3 are members of the CFF Hall of Fame. Their expertise will be presented in the following classes.

Track Classes

Each Track is designed for a specific training level and includes lecture and working sessions. The tracks are conceptually taught by a team of instructors. Each track has specific sessions for Technical Execution, Artistic Presentation and Creative Possibilities.

Team & Brace

Explore the possibilities of performing with one or more friends as a team or perhaps you want the challenge of working a brace or even more than 2 dogs. Whether for competition or for demonstrations this class will introduce you to the delights of working and choreographing for multiple dog and handler teams. The class will relate Concepts to music selection and choreography, how to use the space effectively and how to train technically and perform artistically. This is a working class with demonstration.

Musical elements and their relationship to Canine Freestyle

Classes will address musical elements and their relationship to Canine Freestyle, digital music editing, and music selection.

Love of Dance

A happy, confident dance partner will give you his best performance. Dance is behavior, and behavior has its basis in physiology. To know how best to teach, we must understand how the dog learns. How often should we train? How long should a training session be? How can we prepare the environment and plan the training to best support learning? What *is* learning? The answers to these questions have a basis in neurology. Understanding the neurology at a very basic level will help you make better training decisions in building the attitude and skills your canine dance partner needs to perform his best. This class will provide you with practical methods for tapping into the science of learning, and an approach to building love of the dance in your canine partner.

Understanding Motivation

Do you truly understand your motivation for your Canine Freestyle routines? Do you show your motivation in your routines? Does your dog understand your motivation and exhibit him/herself as a true canine partner in the routine? Let's explore our motivations and learn to enhance our dogs in the execution of the freestyle performance. When properly accomplished, you will wow the audience and leave them with some understanding of your intention. This will be a working class so bring your dog and join your freestyle friends. Freestyle is all about the "image of one", but it takes you, your canine partner and encouragement from credible, honest and trustworthy allies. If you don't have a support unit, this will be a good time to join with a group and gain the reinforcement you need to soar to greater heights.

Jam Sessions

This class will address the "why" of music by observing the relationship of team's movement to the definition. The concepts will guide the demonstrations and

discussions in examining the suitability, appropriateness and the musicality of the musical choice to the choreographic intent. The class will observe movement relative to specific levels from the judging area and its relationship to the 4 levels.

More information and the registration form is available on the CFF web site canine-freestyle.org

An Invitation from Chattanooga

by Julia Gregory

Two of our members from Utah expect to spend an extra day in Chattanooga before retreat to explore some the attractions here. One asked if there was day boarding available so that her mind would be at ease about her canine partner while she enjoyed herself about town. I contacted Bev Eitner, proprietress of Play Dog eXcellent (PDX) where we have held retreat and titling events in the past. PDX is a daycare, boarding and training facility that also serves as a venue for some dog sports. Here is the email that Bev sent me.

You are more than welcome to day-board your dogs here. We have plenty of crates, and can just keep them up in Nancy's office if you'd prefer to keep them in a relatively quiet spot (as opposed to the kennel, which can be quite boisterous). We can take them out for potty breaks – or not – depending on what works best for you.

We did this last time as a no-charge service to welcome the CFF folks to Chattanooga, and I'd like to extend that same invitation this year. Just let me know if and when. Thanks!

Bev

You can contact Bev at bev@pdxdogs.com or for more fun, check out their website at www.playdogexcellent.com.

Guild News—Staccato Notes



Carolina Canine Freestyle Guild

By Shari Bryant

Things have been quiet in North Carolina. We finished up our fall classes in mid-December and the spring classes have just started. We are continuing the drop-in style classes based on the Performance Learning Center at Durham Kennel Club. Also, we plan to do a few weekend sessions at Winston-Salem Dog Training Club.

Several of our members plan to attend the retreat in April, and I think a couple members plan to show at the retreat's titling event. Also, work has begun on the two freestyle titling events we plan to co-host with Sirius Guild on November 6-7, 2010 at Durham Kennel Club, in Durham NC.



Leanne and Hank on Saturday at the Gold Coast Freestyle Guild titling event.

The Gold Coast Freestyle Guild



By Marcia Barkley

Happy New Year to all of you from (sometimes sunny) California. The Gold Coast Guild has quite a lot to celebrate as we begin 2010. For example, we ended 2009 with a two-day trial in Napa, and this is what we saw:

Abby, the tiniest of Pomeranians, showed us courage.

Hank, a Golden Retriever, and Charlie, a deaf Australian Shepherd, showed us what trust looks like.

Magic, a young Border Collie, gave us a performance that was, well, magical.

Wager, a Great Pyrenees, and Luc and Annie, both Rottweilers, showed us that there is grace to be found in strength.

Mayo, an Australian Cattle Dog, and Lindsey, a Miniature Schnauzer, showed us energy and drive.

As is probably pretty typical, our judges taught us a great deal, and we are most grateful to Brandy Clymire, Susan Colledge, Renee Filep and Kristin Sicotte for helping us to expand our horizons and appreciate our accomplishments.

In addition to several new titles awarded that weekend, special awards went to Abby (and Linda Wendorff) as Highest-Scoring Therapy Dog, and to Hank (Leanne Neufeld) and Abby as Highest Scoring Veterans. High Artistic went to Mayo (with Debbie Crain) on Saturday, and Magic (Christina Bond) on Sunday.

Guild News More Staccato Notes

Goldcoast Freestyle Guild continued

Beyond the trial, we've seen new sparks of interest in southern California – we hope to see them build their own Guild there before too long – and in the central part of the state as well. New classes will begin in multiple northern California locations in the next few weeks, and serious outreach to Kennel, Breed and Training clubs is being planned. We are determined to grow canine freestyle in general, and CFF in particular, throughout the Golden State – wish us luck!



Linda and Abby on Sunday at the Gold Coast Freestyle Guild's titling event.

Canis Major Guild

By Julia Gregory

Canis Major is pleased to have our membership numbers back up to the level required by CFF for full guild status. It really wasn't hard to do. It was just a matter of keeping track and staying aware of what's required of each guild.



We're delighted to have two new, enthusiastic women with nearly matching miniature schnauzers. Several of us are secretly hoping for a team (not much of a secret anymore, I suppose), but we don't want to startle our new folks with too many choices all at once ... but watch for it!

We have a treasure right here in Chattanooga. Ann Law is an obedience club member who is relatively new to dog training, but accomplished at dance. Among many other things, he is an instructor at Chattanooga State Technical and Community College and owns Barking Legs Theater – a local school and venue for all kinds of performing arts. We are lucky that Ann lately offered to teach some classes in choreography for freestyle. We didn't make her offer twice! We've had a class each in "Space" and "Time". "Weight" comes next. We are having a grand time and making lots of interesting connections with ideas to use in our performances with our canine partners.





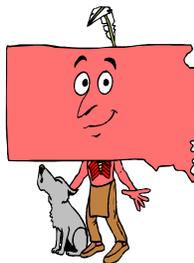
Misha Guild, Utah

By Susan Colledge

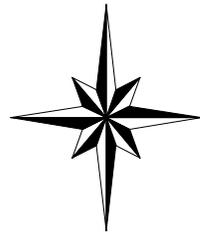
We took a few weeks off to celebrate the holidays (Christmas and New Year's Day coming on Fridays this year seemed to make it last longer). But we are back at it again. Rita Nolan has been in town the last week and it has been great getting to know her better. She will be joining our group in March. She is being transferred to Hill Air Force Base from Virginia where I first met her when she scribed for me at the trial. CFF people are SO special (AND she has a yorkie!!). I got to go look at houses with her and we went "doggie" shopping in Salt Lake City. We are looking forward to her joining our group.

Dances With Woofs South Dakota

By Dawn Madge



Good things are happening here in South Dakota. Dances With Woofs is growing! We have two new people joining our classes along with a few of Peggy Berends' vet tech students sometimes. We are working on the basics of Freestyle along with selecting music and building routines. We are a close knit group that has fun enjoying freestyle and watching each other learn and grow. It's my hope that someday soon, we will have enough people to host another show!!



Sirius Guild

"Where Every Dog Is A Star!"

by Renee Filep

Greetings from snowy Virginia!

Most members of the Sirius Guild have been busy shoveling paths for our dogs to potty and exercise, but we have been active since the November titling event. Congrats to everyone who participated... we saw some awesome dog work! Big congratulations to Mary Sullivan and Tracer for winning High Artistic and their CFF Championship! And special recognition to our first time competitors (and title winners): Joanie Brobst, Robin Carneal, Brandy Clymire and Anne White with their incredible Level I Team, and Kathy Noble with her beautiful Golden Rosie. It's so invigorating to see new people and dogs.

The weekend after the show, Janet McBrien and I continued our efforts to bring CFF to the "western" reaches of our state and demonstrated freestyle with our dogs at the Pet Expo in Harrisonburg. We received some wonderful feedback and hopefully generated some interest in CFF and the electronic learning center specifically.

We also had the first **Freestyle Holiday Celebration** at All Dog Adventures in Richmond on December 12. "Competitors" included Betty Swenson with Border Collie Yahtzee, Janet McBrien with Welsh Terriers Nicholas and Mischief, Verna Allanson and her Shepherd Breezy, one of our newest members Debbie McCluske and her Aussie Reese and myself with the Border Collies Chili and Zig. Everyone performed to holiday themed music (coordinated by our intrepid music man Jim Moore) and the audience voted for their favorite performance. Zig and I won so the proceeds were donated to FETCH A CURE, located in Richmond. Despite it being such a busy time, everyone had fun sharing in the holiday spirit and in the joy of freestyle, so we look forward to expanding the event to include more participants and audience members next year.

We now are setting our sites on the upcoming retreat in Chattanooga and looking forward to visiting with our fellow freestylers, as well as preparing for our annual demo at the Baltimore County Kennel Club AKC show in Timonium on April 25th. Keep those snow shovels handy... the forecasters are predicting round 4! Looks like a good time to work on technical skills...

First Florida Freestylers Guild

by Elaine Smith



The members of the FFF guild have been busy working towards preparing our members for the retreat in April. Our meetings are always filled with excitement and interesting developments from sharing with each other. In the last few meetings we have concentrated on concept development and making our canine partners into balanced partners. We have covered several concepts such as supporting one's dog as well if not better on the dog's weaker side, and how to use focus and energy as the glue to hold the routine together. Most meetings begin with a technical skill such as finishes or right side schutzhund turns (which proved to be tough) in the rawest form. The meetings then progress to stretch the handler and dog teams and they are asked to present the given technical skill in a unique way without changing the basic technical components. For example, the technical skill covered could be the finish and the right schutzhund could be a variation on that technical idea since the dog is taken out of heel position placed back into heel position much like a traditional finish, yet differently.

The members are then given either a floor pattern or a suggested phrase that is to be executed in a very simple way. The pieces are simplistic and the components are again raw. Each team performs the phrase or floor pattern just exactly as the phrase has been described. No real creative variation is offered yet. The next piece includes the technical skills that were previously practiced and encourages the teams to dig down and use some of the variations already discussed. Discussion takes place between each of these exercises and there is an exchange of ideas. The last

piece is the artistic component. The dog and handler teams are then asked to perform the phrase again while making it their own. The basic floor pattern is maintained and some variation of the technical skills is required, but otherwise there is freedom to create. Discussion follows each of these performances and the evolution is often impressive.

I know that I have many ideas jotted down in my notebooks from these exercises in creative work. Many of them end up in my completed routines. We usually break for lunch and then begin helping people with specific things that they need to help them to progress. Sometimes it is feedback on a phrase, music selection or input, guidance on training a specific troublesome skill, or helping with a rough patch in a routine. The meetings are always ended with skills that need to be worked on before next meeting and excitement about meeting again in another month!

Happy New Year from the FFF guild!



**Canine Freestyle Federation Titling Event
Sponsored by the
Gold Coast Guild
Saturday December 5, 2009**

Level I Brace

First Place Kamrin MacKnioght and her Japanese Kai Ken
Tenshi's Sumi of Minimeadow and Shiba Inu Take

Level I

First Place Tie Pamela Tobin and her Great Pyrenees
Mont Soleid's On A Wing & A Prayer

Linda Wendorff and her Pomeranian

Cinbow's Abra Cadabra

Third Place Virginia Lewis and her Australian Shepherd
Bay View's Dream Come True

Fourth Place Virginia Lewis and her Shetland Sheepdog
Dancer's Dream Quest for Ewe

Level II

First Place Debbie Crain and her Australian Cattle Dog
Maha's Regalo Del Ocho De Mayo **NEW TITLE**

Second Place Vange Leonis and her Pembroke Welsh
Corgi Rosewood Y Radar

Level III

First Place Chris Bond and her mixed breed Spryte

Second Place Leanne Neufeld and her Golden Retriever
Henry II

Third Place Cindy Ellis and her Minature Schnauzer
Lindsay Lady of Sunshine

Fourth Place Kamin MacKnight and her Shiba Inu Take

Level IV

First Place Judy Gamet and her Rottweiler Highland's
Anabelle Mon Ami

Highest Artistic Score

Debbie Crain and her Australian Cattle Dog Maha's Re-
galo Del Ocho De Mayo

**Canine Freestyle Federation Titling Event
Sponsored by the Gold Coast Guild
Sunday December 6, 2009**

Level I Brace

First Place Kamrin MacKnight and her Japanese Kai Ken
Tenshi's Sumi of Minimeadow and Shiba Inu Take

Level I

First Place Linda Wendorff and her Pomeranian Cinbow's
Abra Cadabra

Second Place Pamela Tobin and her Great Pyrenees Mont
Soleid's On A Wing & A Prayer

Third Place Virginia Lewis and her Australian Shepherd
Bay View's Dream Come True

Fourth Place Virginia Lewis and her Shetland Sheepdog
Dancer's Dream Quest for Ewe

Level II

First Place Debbie Crain and her Australian Cattle Dog
Maha's Regalo Del Ocho De Mayo

Second Place Vange Leonis and her Pembroke Welsh
Corgi Rosewood Y Radar

Third Place Betsy Chinn-Kuijsten and her Golden Re-
triever Darby Kuijsten

Level II B

First Place Chris Bond and her Border Collie Ghostland's
Magic in Motion **NEW TITLE**

Level III

First Place Leanne Neufeld and her Golden Retriever
Henry II **NEW TITLE**

Second Place Kamrin MacKnight and her Shiba Inu Take

Third Place Judy Gamet and her Rottweiler Meadowood's
Jean-Luc V Seagown

Level IV

First Place Judy Gamet and her Rottweiler Highland's
Anabelle Mon Ami

Highest Artistic Score

Chris Bond and her Border Collie Ghostland's Magic in
Motion

Both events were held at the Napa Valley Dog Training
Club in Napn CA

Many thanks to the judges Brandy Clymire, Susan

Hospitality at 2010 Retreat

Hi All,

It's nearly here, the Retreat that is! Pretty much everything is ready but there are a few holes to plug! Notably, Hospitality! Help is needed here. It won't keep you from enjoying the goings on and will give you a chance to interact with the attendees.

What do we do? Meet and greet, organize setting up for meals and taking down, perhaps help at registration, answer questions and solve problems, should it be necessary. If you would be interested in joining us, please email Marge Hetrick at mchetrick@verizon.net. We need YOU!

WHAT I LEARNED BY READING ...

**Through a Dog's Ear: Using Sound to Improve the Health & Behavior of Your
Canine Companion**

**A book by Joshua Leeds and Susan Wagner, DVM, MS
2008; Sounds True, Inc.; 159 pages**

By Marcia Barkley
Gold Coast Guild (Northern California)

I recently read this book and am moved to share it with you. It is easy to read, and full of information and insight based on a very impressive body of observation and scientific research. However, rather than give you a traditional book review, I wanted to just share some of what I learned, and specifically what I learned that is relevant to canine freestyle.

I learned that ...

Classical music relaxes dogs.

Some kinds of classical music are more relaxing than others: relatively simple tunes, with violin and/or piano.

The same music that calms dogs also helps people relax; the same music that causes an increase in a human heartbeat will do the same to a dog.

Heavy metal music causes agitated behavior in dogs.

The same is true for humans.

As I read through this book, I became more aware of noises around me: the TV set as my husband watched an old 1950s Western movie in the other room; the garbage truck doing its rounds out front; a jet plane in the skies above; a helicopter, probably monitoring traffic on the highway a mile south of us; children playing outside two doors down; the icemaker in the refrigerator. Knowing that a dog's hearing is so many times more sensitive than that of a human, I wondered what might Starr and Jesse James be hearing – beyond the television sounds of bad guy/good guy gunfire, beyond the heavy grinding of the garbage truck, beyond the shrieks of the children – that I could not? If I found this “soundscape” to be distracting and annoying, how did it affect them?

This book made me much more aware of the way dogs so thoroughly adapt themselves to their humans' environment. They are constantly living on *our* terms, and that includes living with sounds that trigger instinctive reactions, from curiosity to anxiety that may generalize into fear when the source or cause of the sound cannot be found or understood.

One of the (many) other important points that stays with me after reading this is that canine communication signals are not the same as my own. A wagging tail can sometimes indicate not happiness but stress. A dog that is sniffing the ground (for example, as I'm playing some music) is not necessarily bored, or distracted by an interesting scent, but may actually be uncomfortable and is demonstrating displacement behavior. (Although she may in fact be pursuing an interesting scent! It's just that I can't make that assumption, I need to watch her on-going behavior.)

This led me to think about how we perceive our dogs' reaction to music. Sometimes we say “Well, Fido is wagging his tail as I play this Bruce Springsteen piece, I guess he likes it as much as I do!” Or “Spot is stepping pretty lively to this Sousa march, she must enjoy the beat!” Maybe.

As all this applies to the music I select – whether for learning, or practice, or performance – I will be more sensitive to things like harmony, and the instruments used: some of us grew up with rock music, and think nothing of pounding drums and electric guitars, but my dog did not. Is she trotting and energetic because she likes the music, or because the music has energized *me* and she is responding to my body language? The question to be asked here is, does it matter? My answer to that question might be different from yours, but I'm not sure I would have thought to even ask it had I not read this book. I would urge you to read "Through a Dog's Ear" to discover what *you* will learn.

Honor and Respect

by Mary Sullivan

Reprinted from Font and Finish, November 2002

A month or two ago, discussion ensued on the CFF list as to what was meant by the dictum in the official rulebook's "Definition of Freestyle" to treat the dog with honor and respect. Many list writers defined it in terms relating to their dogs' own individual quirks and personalities. I think it is possible to understand the requirement in general terms, also.

To begin our discussion, we need first to review the requirement for honor and respect within the context of the entire official definition, which is as follows (I have highlighted those words and phrases that I believe are most pertinent to our examination):

*Canine Freestyle is a choreographed performance with music, illustrating the **training** and **joyful relationship** of a dog and handler team. The objective of Freestyle is to present the **dog to his best advantage** in a creative and artistic manner. A Freestyle presentation is always accompanied by music selected to suit the **rhythms of the dog**. Freestyle should demonstrate, with appropriate music, the **grace, beauty and intelligence of the dog working in harmony with the handler**. A Freestyle performance should clearly **show the dog's athleticism, attentiveness, flexibility and training**. All handler movements*

should complement and enhance the dog's movements. Teamwork is essential. The dog should always be treated with honor and respect.

According to this definition, clearly there is no allowance for a freestyle routine that emphasizes the handler's movements over the dog's or that treats the dog as an accessory to the handler. Teamwork, enhancement of dog movement, suiting music to the dog, the handler's harmonious presentation of the to HIS best advantage are all phrases telling us that, in CFF-style freestyle, the handler is there to showcase the dog. "Showcase" does not translate to "show off." It does not mean "kitchen sink choreography" which includes any possible maneuver the dog can do, whether or not it looks good or makes the dog look good. Nor does it mean the dog is an innocent bystander, occasionally trotting around on leash or performing an occasional spin, while the handler cavorts around "doing his own thing." That would trivialize the dog's role as well as demean his contribution and image.

To my way of thinking, there is no other current dog sport that runs quite the same risk as canine freestyle does of dishonoring the dog, according to the above definition. I think this is because this is a sport that at first superficial glance is least based on a dog's natural, instinctive behaviors. Consider our other dog sports today. Hunting, earth dog, and herding trials are perhaps most closely related to "normal" canine drives and reflect what dogs are actually doing in real life, as real jobs, in the real world. Although fluttering white plastic garbage bags may not be the original prey of sight hounds at work (my sheltie, Meadow, would disagree; she had major stomach surgery to remove two corncobs she ingested after a successful "hunt" through our garbage), when these bags are attached to a line and zig zagged across a field in lure coursing trials, no one watching can deny the sight hound running in fevered pursuit is not displaying instinctive prey drive. Flyball is certainly a contrived set-up not found in the normal life of a dog, but it too is a sport constructed to invoke the inherent prey and chase drives of a dog, as well as illustrating the dog's physical prowess at overcoming obstacles (hurdles and flyball box) to get to the prey (ball). Agility is a spin on the same, with additional elements of herding and earthdog (tunnel) skills, and excepting that the "prey" or objective of the race over obstacles is the handler and his or her approval at the finish line. Formal competition obedience exercises derive from tasks the working dog needs to perform in his various

jobs helping humans at work. Canine freestyle, even when based on obedience and on the equine kur (freestyle dressage) model as is CFF-style freestyle, relates a little less directly to traditional dog work-related skills than the aforementioned sports. Plus, freestyle has a component none of the other dog sports has: it is performed to music!

For these reasons, canine freestyle, to the uninformed, may seem a bit bizarre as a dog “sport” and is often mislabeled as “doggy dancing,” a term which conjures up silly images of dog and handler in drag and in a clutch, waltzing together around a ballroom floor. Those of us involved in our sport know how wrong this picture is and recognize how exquisitely trained in technical skills and attuned to the handler’s body language and verbal cues a good freestyle dog must be. However, as we have too often seen, strong temptations arise to perform certain moves that are impressive from a training perspective but for other reasons are ultimately detrimental to the picture of oneness and dignity for both team members – which frequently results in giving freestyle a ludicrous image. For example, weaves (where the dog weaves between a handler’s legs while stationary or moving) is a wonderful move when executed by the appropriate team. When a very mismatched (in terms of size and speed) team performs weaves, the result can be unintentionally humorous and/or disastrous. A Cairn terrier nimbly weaving between her tall handler’s long legs is much more aesthetically pleasing than a malamute trying to duck and shove his way between its much smaller handler’s too short legs. I have watched perfectly timed and placed leaps in place or around the handler by Kay Richard’s Jack Russell terrier, Ebby, that reflected Ebby’s effervescent personality and bounce, were in tune with and in time to cues within the music and were “managed” in such a way as to cause no harm to the dog. On the other hand, I have seen a video of a sight hound being cued repeatedly – albeit seemingly willingly – to perform twisting aerial leap after leap beyond what made sense (to me) choreographically and well beyond what I thought was safe for the dog’s structural well-being.

From my perspective, a lively, agile terrier easily twisting and darting through a handler’s legs is in keeping with its natural pursuit of rodents through rock piles and around obstacles. Therefore, asking a terrier to weave reflects a terrier’s natural tendencies, *raison d’etre*, and physical abilities. To ask a more ponderous dog like a Rottie or Great Dane to weave, especially if it has to duck its head and clumsily maneuver to even fit between the handler’s legs, would seem to me to detract from the dog’s innate dignity, movement patterns, and perhaps cause physical discomfort. When this happens, I believe the handler is not treating the dog with honor and respect. Certainly there is the individual exception to this rule: a large dog that is uncharacteristically nimble, graceful and sound enough to move fluidly with weaves (for example) with a handler tall and graceful enough to accommodate them. However, this is the exception rather than the rule, from what I have seen. To compound the indignity, some handlers ask their dogs to perform what I would perceive as “out-of-character” moves at the end of the leash, while the handler herself is executing entirely unrelated moves. Teamwork is missing, neither dog nor handler enhances the other, and the result may be as harmless as merely being humorous (usually unintentionally) or as serious as being demeaning, particularly to the dog. When choreographing for myself and envisioning new moves or phrases, I use as my yardstick for judging whether or not the new move enhances or detracts from the dog this consideration: is this move or phrase something my dog (or any dog) could and would perform on his own? For instance, although my Belgian routinely stands momentarily with his front paws on my hips when commanded, he would never keep them there, particularly if behind me, and choose to walk around the room in that position with me. Nor would it look anything other than awkward and humiliating to him if he did. To ask him to do so is not honoring him. Some freestyle venues other than CFF encourage the use of costumes and props, and routines can start and end with the team in “scene”. These characteristics are in keeping with their rules, and that’s fine. CFF however would frown on a dog wearing a costume and perhaps holding a paint brush or drinking from a bottle as demeaning to the dog (in the context of our rules) – I would too as they are not activities or moves that the dog offers naturally.

My point is this: moves which are an extension of a dog’s innate character and physical capabilities, organically choreographed with (versus *to*) the music, and safely performed can very much honor and respect the dog. Movements included in choreography simply as displays of training achievement and for sensational audience appeal, without regard to the character, personality, safety and dignity of the dog, are to me not much more than an exhibit of handler ego. When I perform a freestyle routine, I want my audience as impressed by the overall image of oneness, grace, athleticism and teamwork, as it may be by the demonstration of certain moves. In fact, if what a spectator remembers most is one particular movement over all else, I would feel as if I had failed to fulfill my role as an ambassador of CFF-style freestyle and my personal goal: to showcase my dog’s natural abilities and responsiveness through our bond and teamwork.

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FIRST CLASS MAIL

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