ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: HANDS FOUR AND PASS IT DOWN: GENERATIONAL ENCOUNTERS IN MODERN URBAN CONTRA DANCE

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Contra dance is a form of folk dance with a heritage dating back hundreds of years. Now, in the early twenty-first century, contra dance is thriving, its participants successfully navigating elements of their multi-faceted lives to bring the living tradition into a relevant and meaningful present. In this dissertation, I examine generational encounters, with both vertical (from one generation to the next within contra dance) and horizontal (between members of the same generation but across genres) flows of ideas, as a means by which contra dance communities and practices are perpetuated.

I approach this through a variety of perspectives. Culminating in the recent electronically-infused music crossover trend, which I locate as part of a larger twenty-first century remix phenomenon, this study delineates the younger generation's contribution to the community while observing the interaction of the community as a whole. I describe contra dance as a community of practice in which participation is a key component for individuals to engage in and contribute to the practices of their communities, and for communities to refine their practice and ensure new generations of

members. I analyze contra dance as a participatory practice in which style characteristics of the choreography and the music combine with a spirit of invitation to provide opportunities for people of varying levels of commitment, interests, and skills. This is valuable in bridging states of competence and challenge, and creating the possibility of optimal experience (flow). These practices allow contra dance to evolve with the times. Through this examination, contra dance is seen as a practice that has proven consistently malleable and open to transformation in both social context and in regard to music and dance capable of absorbing aspects of other styles. Contra dance, in all its facets, is not a vestige of the past, nor is it a passive form, but a practice fully in the present.

HANDS FOUR AND PASS IT DOWN: GENERATIONAL ENCOUNTERS IN MODERN URBAN CONTRA DANCE

by

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The room is dimly lit, hot, crowded, and loud. Articles of white clothing, glow-sticks fashioned into jewelry, and hi-lighter drawn temporary tattoo designs glow under the blacklight as people dance in as much space as they can carve out on the floor. I have heard dance remixes of songs by The Who, Lady Gaga, Adam Tensta, and although I don't recognize the current song the DJ has chosen, the bass is pounding a steady "four-on-the-floor" beat under the female vocals, and that's all anyone seems to need. While the DJ is pulling out remixes of some of the "best of's" going back to the '70s, the dancers are also doing some of the "best-of's" going back to the '70s. Nearer the 1670s. And everyone is doing what a caller is telling them to do. Far from anybody looking like they feel any bit foolish mixing such disparate elements, most people appear equally comfortable with the club-like atmosphere and the prescribed choreography of yore, even adding their own sultry style inspired by swing and blues. But this is not swing, blues, or a club dance. This is a techno contra dance.

When I made these observations at the Lake Eden Arts Festival in October 2011, I had been contra dancing off and on for a few years and had in fact already experienced a techno contra. Giving myself a moment to observe this particular dance, I was struck by the way contra dance seemed so utterly in the present; both with a quality of being in the present moment and suited to current times. My own experience of contra dance seemed reflected back to me as I observed many participants who appeared fully immersed in the

experience, totally engaged in the music and dance such that not even thought impedes the doing of the activity. I also saw that this "folk" style, with a heritage dating back centuries, was thriving in the twenty-first century, not as anachronism or re-enactment, but as a viable contemporary form of itself, its participants successfully navigating elements of their multi-faceted lives to bring contra dance into a relevant and meaningful present that honors the past and points it toward the future.

Figure 1: Lake Eden Arts Festival Fall 2011 Techno Contra Dance (still from video)

The techno contra, a crossover contra dance event, which I discuss in detail in chapter six, is a form that came into being recently, a twenty-first century innovation birthed by the imagination of a generation of contra dance participants who feel equally at home with more traditional contra dances as well as with a modern club-style atmosphere and digitally manipulated, electronically infused music. Crossover contra

dances exist alongside the more traditional contra dances, each style serving the context and intent its participants put forth. Contra dance has not evolved into this crossover style, but it has evolved to include it.

The scene of a techno contra dance may at first seem familiar to those who have visited a club and may, on closer observation, seem familiar to those who have been to a more traditional contra dance. To many, however, contra dance in any style is unknown, as it takes place in the margins of mainstream society. Many people ask upon mention of it, "what is contra dance?," surprised to find that there may be one happening regularly very near where they live. One of the most common answers goes something like this: "It's like square dancing, but done in long lines." This response, offered as what seems to be the simplest way to describe in words what is better experienced, carries layers of associations. For many, this answer conjures up images of cowboy boots, retirees, women in puffy gingham skirts and men in matching gingham shirts with bolo ties, notions of simple, rural life, conservatism, something old-fashioned. People with these assumptions would probably be surprised by the state of both square dance and contra dance today.

Modern Urban Contra Dance

The current state of contra dance has evolved from a series of small changes that have occurred since the 1970s and 1980s (as well as others throughout its long history), differentiating it from the style of the first half of the twentieth century, in particular. I discuss these changes in the context of the history of contra dance in detail in chapter

two, but here offer a description of a Modern Urban Contra Dance as an event where most or all of the dances have the following characteristics[1]:

- longways for as many as will
- first couples improper, or Becket formation
- flowing choreography
- no-one stationary for more than 16 beats
- containing at least one swing and normally both a partner swing and a neighbor swing
- 95% of the moves from a set of well-known moves that the dancers know already
- comprised mostly of moves that keep you connected to the other dancers
- generally danced to 32 bar jigs or reels played at between 110 and 130 bpm
- danced with a smooth walk with lots of spins and twirls

The name is used among members the contra dance community; however, it may propose a delineation not precisely found in practice. “Modern” suffices to set it as the current style and offers a hint at the concept of living tradition. “Contra dance” seems apparent and encompasses the change from earlier dance events, often called a square dance though they typically involved several formations of country dances, and indicates the rise in popularity since the 1970s of the longways style. “Urban” is somewhat problematic. My experiences in Baltimore, MD and Jonesborough, TN were not markedly different according to these characteristics, though how “urban” Jonesborough might be considered could be for debate. Regardless of these distinctions, contra dances are generally similarly recognized from place to place.

[1] Janet Bertog, “Contra Dance Calling Philosophy,” accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.nku.edu/~bertogj/Contra.htm#_Contra_Dance_Calling.

Come to a contra dance and most likely, after paying somewhere between five to twelve dollars for the evening, you will enter a hall to find a group of mostly middle-class American men and women, ranging in age from their teens to their seventies chatting and lining up to dance. Most will be dressed in casual, often rather colorful, clothing that is comfortable for dancing. Many women, and sometimes a few men, will be wearing skirts that provide ease of movement and fun twirl. Unless it is a special occasion, the hall, which is usually rented space in a public building such as a War Memorial, a theater, or church fellowship hall, will not have any particular decorations. You may come upon a table with flyers about other local dances and special weekend dance events. Prior to the start of the dance, there may be a beginner's lesson to help anyone who is there for the first time.

Amid the laughter and amiable chatting of the gathering of people who have formed themselves roughly into lines leading down the length of the room, a caller on stage will offer the invitation to "take hands four and pass it on down," an indication to form small groups of four within the long lines. The friendly noise will subside. Like the motion of a kaleidoscope, through the joining of hands, single lines connect to an adjacent line, with groups of foursomes within the parallels. The caller begins a walk-through, a sort of practice of what is to come, guiding the group in a flow of movements that include do-si-do, balance and swing, circle, long lines forward and back. After walking through key parts of the choreography, musicians sharing the stage with the caller give "four potatoes" (four beats to set the tempo) before the tune and the dancing begin. After half a dozen or so dances—mostly contras, but maybe a square—and as many different partners, the caller will announce a waltz and step aside. The break after

the waltz may include recorded music for those who wish to try more waltzing, or perhaps a hambo or schottisch, maybe some light refreshments, or in any case a brief break to rest and socialize before the symmetrical second half begins.

The music for contra dances is typically drawn from tunes of the British Isles traditions – Scottish, Irish, and English melodies or tunes written with reference to these styles, including old-time tunes. Most often the music is provided by a contra dance band of musicians on instruments such as fiddle, guitar, piano, accordion, flute, various strings, and sometimes brass instruments. Some dance communities host an open band evening, inviting any musician to sit in. The music of a crossover contra dance, like the techno contra depicted above, is typically provided by a DJ and can include remixes of pop, Celtic fusion, electronica, as well as techno.

Today many people who make up a contra dance community consider contra dancing a main part of their social life. Musicians, dancers, callers, DJs, someone running sound. . . often a person will fill more than one of these roles. Some have been involved for decades, others are newer to the dance. Some came to contra dance as one of the forms of participatory music- making that regained popularity during the folk revival; some are children of this generation; some were brought by a friend not knowing what to expect. There are also many reasons to stay: many note the feeling of connection among the people, considering contra dance their community of belonging.

Contra dances are regularly found as weekly or monthly events sponsored by folk societies or specific folk dance and contra dance communities. There are also annual contra dance weekends held by many of the same groups. In the region where the Lake Eden Arts Festival takes place, there are several sites for contra dances. Nearby

Asheville, North Carolina has a vibrant dance community with contra dances every Monday at the Grey Eagle and every Thursday at Warren Wilson College (supported by the Old Farmers Ball). Less than an hour south a dance is held on Saturdays at the River Falls Lodge (Harvest Moon Folk Society). Another Saturday dance option occurs every other week an hour's drive to the north in Jonesborough, TN (Historic Jonesborough Dance Society). For an hour's drive to the west, one can dance in Knoxville on Mondays. To the east, the Fiddle and Bow Country Dancers offer contra dances every Tuesday and Saturday in the Winston-Salem and Greensboro areas. A bit further east, dances can be found in the Durham and Chapel Hill area. Further north, contra dances are found in the Virginia towns Charlottesville, Staunton, Harrisonburg, Bluemont, Roanoke, and Richmond. One of the largest dances in the region, often including dancers from smaller local dances, meets in the Spanish Ballroom of Glen Echo Park just outside Washington D.C.

Regardless of the location of a particular event, the music, the choreography, and the unfolding of the evening are generally recognizable to one who has been to a dance before. Those with a familiarity of contra dance would be able to visit a dance anywhere and be able to participate and connect with others with relative ease. In fact, this is frequently the case in contra dance, such that the term "dance gypsy" is used to describe one who travels for dancing. While each of the venues listed above may be a gathering location for a local community, it is not uncommon to see those community members throughout the region. These dance venues represent a small but active region for contra dancing in the United States, and this, along with Baltimore, MD and Shepherdstown, WV, is the general area of my fieldwork.

Fieldwork and Methodology

I first attended a contra dance in my twenties. While I spent many years in a region that encompasses several of the sites I would visit as part of the fieldwork for this project, other than the requisite Virginia Reel lesson in fifth grade, my experience at any kind of country dance came well after that.[2] I was introduced to contra dance in the way many people come to it: by the invitation from a friend. At an annual gathering that included dancing in a barn-turned-studio art space, the "spirit of grown-up play" that Henry Ford recognized in country dance became obvious to me, and the people at the dance, even at this private party, confounded the "simple country folk" stereotype sometimes associated with the dance in both romantic and condescending ways.

The cultural history of fieldwork and its connections to missionary expeditions and aggressive colonialist endeavors have often emphasized the "otherness" of those among whom the fieldwork is done. The explorer musicologist/anthropologist sets out into unknown territory to observe and document, searching for "raw cultural goods that can be that can be converted into intellectual capital."[3] While this attitude has changed, as

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[2] Throughout the twentieth century, many children experienced folk dancing as part of the physical education curriculum in public schools. I address this in chapter two. Additionally, there are varied histories for the dance groups in the region of my fieldwork and some were not yet formed when I was previously in the area, for example, the Historic Jonesborough Dance Society was chartered in 2005, but Fiddle and Bow Country Dancers celebrated their thirtieth year of dancing at the Feet Retreat weekend in 2012.

[3] Kiri Miller, *Traveling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 22.

Leslie Gay notes in the introduction to *Music and Technoculture*, the terminology of our practice often still evokes a set of assumptions:

> In the conventional discourse of music ethnography, distance and difference are encoded in words like "culture," "tradition," "customs," and indeed, "fieldwork." Although there are exceptions to this rule, we might assume that 'the field' remains inhabited by people comfortably remote from our academic lives, socially and geographically.[4]

Contrary to these assumptions, the "field" of my research is not so remote from me either geographically, socially, or indeed academically. Contra dance communities thrive in many areas of the United States. While there is often a wide age demographic, the majority of the participants are white-appearing Americans, like me. It is not unusual for some contra dancers and musicians to be well-informed of the tradition in which they participate, indeed, some even take part in documenting contra dance with videos and photographs of dances. Those who would be my informants are also social analysts and documenters of tradition.

New technologies have undoubtedly impacted contra dance (particularly in musical style, sound expectations, tune transmission, and one of my focuses, the recent crossover trend) and diminished face-to-face social activity in the United States in general. However, not all changes brought by technological shifts are as hostile to musical and social traditions as the rhetoric of crisis suggests. Charles Seeger hoped for a sort of alchemy under the pressure of technological progress when he wrote about the concept of "folk" and the prognosis for folk music in highly industrialized society:

> Rather than say "the folk is dead" and attempt to keep folksong alive as something quaint, antique and precious, let us say "the folk is changing – and its

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[4] Rene T. A. Lysloff and Leslie Gay, eds. *Music and Technoculture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 4.

> songs with it," and then help what it is changing into – which may be the whole people welded into one by the new media of communication . . . Better than to lament the loss of ancient gold will be to try to understand its permutation into another metal which, though it might be baser, may still surprise us in the end by being nobler.[5]

Certainly when he wrote in 1953, Seeger recognized the shifting perception of "folk" and its musical associations due to technological and societal changes. While contra dances today may occur in rural towns and at house parties, they frequently occur in or near large cities as Modern Urban Contra Dance. Increased ease and speed of communication and travel have resulted in a dynamic contra dance community on a national scale. The twelfth annual Contradancers Delight Holiday (CDH) held in Morgantown, West Virginia in 2014 hosted 250 dancers from thirty-three states and Canada, many of whom were in communication before and after the event on sites such as Facebook.

These aspects that have impacted contra dance also helped shape the methodologies of my fieldwork. I have been able to participate in discussion threads in Facebook groups, read various blogs, stay up to date on contra dance events in the region, and maintain communication via chats and emails. While some of these modalities have given me larger pictures of the contra dance world, interviews, participant-observation and in-person conversations have proven equally if not more valuable.

Contra dance is particularly accommodating of participant-observation because it welcomes newcomers of any age and background. The dance itself is typically advertised

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[5] Charles Seeger, "Folk Music in Schools of a Highly Industrialized Society," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 5 (1953): 44.

as being open to anyone, with or without experience and with or without a partner, as you will get both, in quantity, on the dance floor. Musical roles and calling require more knowledge and different skill sets to fulfill. I have attended numerous contra dances and several dance weekends and, while I have experienced a great deal of joy and learned quite a bit in the midst of the dance activity and open band evenings, the nature of contra dance necessitates finding time beyond dancing and playing music to have a conversation. I took part in musician workshops, dance workshops, late-night jams, pot-lucks, meal sharing, and general hanging out around the dance. I volunteered on the Gate Committee for the Baltimore Folk Music Society dances (one of many of the subtler roles needing to be filled in contra dance communities), greeting dancers at the entrance, collecting money for the evening, signing up new members to join the Society and for the listserv. I am grateful to many dancers, callers, and musicians for conversation, interviews, and for taking time to fill out questionnaires.

Throughout this dissertation I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of those in the contra dance community. Because "the culture is so tight knit that practically everyone knows everyone by less than three degrees of separation" the request of any one participant to remain anonymous compels anonymity for all.[6] In the case of touring musicians well-known throughout the national network, I have used true names.

It is impossible to draw precise boundaries around contra dance practice on a national scale. While there may exist certain perceptions regarding regional or local styles, contra dance across the country has a similarity that is instantly familiar in its

[6] Personal communication, David, February 7, 2015.

multiple locales, creating a sort of portable community.[7] The ease of transportation and communication again affects dance communities. A dance or a tune composed by someone in Massachusetts may become known throughout other areas of the country by touring callers, touring bands, dance "gypsies," well-attended dance weekends, discussion threads, and recordings.

In the course of my research I have focused on interactions in the mid-Atlantic (Washington D.C.-Baltimore area) and southeast Appalachian (Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina) regions. While each locality and each region has its own contra dance community, there is dynamic and fluid overlap in the community participants including callers, band members, and dancers. These areas also represent dances that came into being during and that have been maintained since the folk revival era, dances newly formed in the last decade, and importantly, the sites of creation and enthusiastic adoption of the new crossover trend. As yet there has been no attention given to the young phenomenon known as crossover contra, which is occurring in tandem with the more traditional style of live-music contra dances.

While a contra dance community does physically manifest in time and space, it is not a community into which a researcher may move and live among its inhabitants for a prolonged period of time. In a contra dance community, members come together during specific times and for specific events (a weekly or monthly contra dance, a potluck

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[7] Robert Owen Gardner, "The Portable Community: Mobility and Modernization in Bluegrass Festival Life," *Symbolic Interaction* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 156. Portability here stands in opposition to the geographically-defined community. Such a grouping of similarly-minded individuals may surface in multiple locales but take on a similar form and logic that allows such individuals to easily fit in to the various occurrences of this kind of community.

supper, a dance weekend, etc.), and reinforce their association with that community through participation in the event, rather than living communally with one another. A contra dance community is constructed temporally during the contra dance event itself. The contra dance community is also situated within the context and history of such individual gatherings, both locally and in larger perspective and the community coheres experientially through participation as well as through the habit and memory of the experience.

An Explanation of the Title

The title of this dissertation is derived from a contra dance caller's invitation to begin a contra dance. "Hands four" is a moment of connection, the indication of the beginning of a contra dance in which small groups are formed among the long lines. It is a call that begins the dance as so many dances have begun. Partners and neighbors take hands, establishing the current location and organization of the dance set and it is passed down the lines as other groups of four realize the orientation and connect in their foursome. This project represents a moment, a hands-four, in the long lines of contra dance's history and its future, as it has been and continues to be passed down through generations, exploring connections to self, to community, to generations, and to the larger world.

The second half of the title is inspired by Étienne Wenger's community of practice model that observes generational encounters as a means by which communities and practices are perpetuated.[8] Ethnomusicological studies often address transmission,

which tends to indicate the inheritance of a standard repertory and changes over time. Here, a central focus is the younger generation's contribution to the community and the impact of a "youth culture."[9] This study does not, however, isolate the younger generation as a subject of analysis, but looks at the interaction of the community as a whole. A community of practice is "a history collapsed into a present that invites engagement . . . newcomers can engage with their own future, as embodied by old-timers who deliver the past and offer the future and . . . newcomers can provide new models for different ways of participating.[10]

The contra dance community, as a participatory practice, welcomes and invites beginners; however, while beginners are a part of it, the moment I am observing in contra dance is not solely predicated upon true "newcomers." Rather, it is the youngest involved generation come of age. It is a group Thomas Turino refers to as the "second generation," the children of the first generation of "immigrants" into the folk revival of the mid-twentieth century and into practices such as contra dance.[11] In chapter two, I consider that those coming to contra dance and other folk practices during the folk revival were, in part, seeking an alternate form of expression and experience than was available in the mainstream.

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[8] Étienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[9] Rupa Huq reinvigorates the concept of "youth culture" in her book *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

[10] Wenger, 156.

[11] Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), 188.

"Mainstream," to which I refer occasionally through this work, is roughly associated with corporate ideals, mass-mediated production and commercial formulae with the aim of profitable success as the dominant trend. Contra dance and its participants are identified and self-identify as outside the mainstream. That being said, the area outside the mainstream is large and diverse and I do not presume to locate these individuals in any one particular spot therein. Several recent works take into account the "heterogeneity and multiplicity of relationships characteristic of many aspects of modern society."[12] The point is made that individuals have multiple identities and exist in a "web of affiliations," where identity is a "nexus of multimembership" and participation in different groups articulates the "pluralistic nature of the self."[13]

I take as a point of departure as well as a return in this analysis the "pluralistic nature of the self" and the "nexus of multimembership," but the focus of this study is more on the social experience generated by this living tradition and the practices of the groups - those potentially magnetic aspects that draw the group together - particularly around generational encounters, rather than on identity. David Coplan suggests that music (and dance) are "crucial to the reapplication of memory and the creation and re-creation of the emotional qualities of the experience in the maintenance of a living tradition."[14] Throughout this dissertation, I explore the living tradition of contra dance

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[12] Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 323.

[13] Georg Simmel cited in Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993): 39; Wenger, 159; Turino, 112.

through the participants and practices of the community. The heterogeneity and plurality associated with identity and modern society mentioned above is reflected in the theoretical positions and the source material drawn on for this paper.

A Hands Four Theoretical Approach

The theoretical underpinning for much of this approach can be traced to Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 – 1914), whose work is the foundation of American pragmatism, a philosophy relevant to, and informed by, human experience and practice. Much of the thinking in American pragmatism revolves around the assumption that we are all active participants in our social world, and that it is through our participation that we continuously construct and reconstruct the social meanings that shape our thoughts and actions.[15] Thomas Turino has advocated a Peircean approach that involves consideration of signs (semiotics as espoused by Peirce) within the style of American phenomenology originated by Peirce for the analysis of specific instances of experience; in other words, a "focus on the becoming of individual selves, which are also social selves, though ongoing experiences in the world," layered with a concern for signs that indicate "different linkages within individual selves and the world."[16]

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[14] David Coplan, "Ethnomusicology and the Meaning of Tradition," in *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History* edited by Stephen Blum, et al (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991): 45.

[15] Barbara Simpson, "Pragmatism, Mead and the Practice Turn," *Organization Studies* 30, no. 12, (2009): 1329 – 1347, accessed November 7, 2016, http://journals.sagepub.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0170840609349861.

These concepts are found in Étienne Wenger's concept of community of practice, in which the social nature of individuals is apparent. With a focus on learning and meaning making, the community of practice framework locates learning "in the relationship between the person and the world, which for human beings is a social person in a social world. In this relationship of participation, the social and the individual constitute each other."[17] As a participatory practice, contra dance is more about the social experience than about producing a kind of art object discrete from the experience.[18] Through participation, those in contra dance gain stylistic competency and cultural knowledge (they learn and shape the resources of the community of practice), and demonstrate their knowledge through obvious and subtle indicators of their involvement in the community.

A Peircean approach—using his categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, as utilized by Turino—is clarified by and helps to clarify the flow phenomenon. Csikszentmihalyi uses the word "flow," a type of Secondness, to describe optimal experience. While this occurs within an individual, friendly fellowship is also a hallmark, thus highlighting a contribution of social relations to the experience. An analysis with each of these elements begins to illuminate the possibilities for recent happenings in contra dance. Throughout this study, I attempt to account for the

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[16] Thomas Turino, "Peircean Thought as Core Theory for a Phenomenological Ethnomusicology," *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 2, (Spring/Summer 2014): 185 – 221.

[17] Étienne Wenger, "Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: The Career of a Concept," http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/09-10-27-CoPs-and-systems-v2.01.pdf.

[18] Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 23 – 36.

emergence of the crossover style by looking both within the contra dance community and outside it, considering generational encounters with both vertical (from one generation to the next within contra dance) and horizontal (between members of the same generation but across genres) flows of ideas.

Without belaboring the language of semiotics, I allow the influence of Peirce to shine through these theoretical constructs. As defined by experience and understood through learning and meaning making, I explore questions about what constitutes the contra dance community and its music at this moment in time, about the experiences in the community, about contra dance as a microcosm of society at large, about social relations and interactions among people not fully fitting or interested in the mainstream. Much like a contra dance is enacted within a group of four, each with similar but separate contributions, I incorporate four theoretical positions to contribute to a study of the state of contra dancing in the early twenty-first century. All of these intertwine, dancing together in order to articulate ways by which the contra dance community is thriving and sustained.

I. Community of Practice

Because the contra dance community represents a complex social entity, with varying levels of individual commitment and participation, it does not fit a simple community model. The dimensions of a community of practice and their extrapolations provide a rich depth for analysis. Wenger's theory has been applied in education, organization sciences, and sociolinguistics and I use it here to analyze contra dance.

A community of practice, an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement, need not be conceptualized in the same sense that a neighborhood or

village has been viewed as a community. The concept of a community of practice focuses on the social nature of humans, on what members of a community do, the practices that indicate that they belong to a group, and the extent to which they belong. In his book, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Wenger identifies three crucial dimensions of a community of practice: mutual engagement, a joint pursuit of a negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time. As a social learning theory, a central ideal of this framework is that learning produces meaning and that "being alive as human beings means engaging in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn."[19]

In a community of practice, collective learning occurs through interaction and tuning relations with each other and with the world at large, resulting in practices that reflect both the pursuit and the relations. The concept of practice connotes not simply doing, but doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what is done. Participation in the community of practice is both a kind of action and a form of belonging, with various levels of belonging and competency.

A joint enterprise is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing; it is "a result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of the mutual engagement."[20] In contra dance this is reflected in centuries of negotiation as

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[19] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 45.

[20] Ibid., 77.

well as present negotiations. The enterprise is joint not in that everyone believes the same thing or agrees with everything, but in that it is communally negotiated. Any outside influence is always mediated by the community's production of its practice.

Over time, the joint pursuit of an enterprise creates resources for negotiating meaning—routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, discourse, stories, gestures, actions, concepts that the community has produced or adopted—this is the shared repertoire. These resources reflect a history of mutual engagement and gain their coherence not in and of themselves, but from the fact that they belong to the practice of a community pursuing an enterprise.[21] Meaning has been navigated for centuries and the negotiations undertaken have allowed contra dance to continue into the twenty-first century. The dance and dance music are not static entities; rather, their transmission depends on a collaborative process that moves across generational lines. The community of practice framework encompasses generational encounters, points at which the resources are central to negotiations of continuity and discontinuity. These are particularly in focus as new community members engage in the practice and then, in their own way, perpetuate it. This is particularly meaningful when observing some of the more recent trends.

II. Participatory Practice

As an alternative to the commoditized view of artistic practice that the capitalist structure in North America tends to promote, contra dance offers an opportunity to

[21] Ibid., 82.

experience participatory music making. Thomas Turino's work on participatory music making helps highlight the social aspect of contra dance, as well as characteristics of the choreography and music that enable a wide variety of skill and interest levels among participants. Thus, it holds appeal for beginners as well as more advanced participants by allowing space for improvisation by those more advanced, within a basic structure that is suitable for those who are less advanced. In this manner, participants are able to match their level of competence to the activity. This approach proves quite useful for both the music and the choreography in contra dance, an activity about which is said "if you can walk, you can contra dance."

III. Flow

Contra dancers use the word "flow" to describe the feeling they get when the dancing is good. It is sometimes used to describe a quality of choreography or the way the music and choreography intertwine, and sometimes it describes that nearly ineffable quality of feeling fully in the present yet in a moment of timelessness. One dancer's comments about a particular contra dance pointed this out in describing "the sort of slow-flowing, fluid dance where you become hypnotized by its mesmerizing circles."

Both music and dance can be transcendent experiences. Both are activities in which one might feel so engaged that all distractions disappear. They might lead to a feeling of timelessness or being out of normal time ("where did the time go?"), and to the feeling of transcending one's normal self as the ego and extraneous thought fall away. Some refer to it as "being in the zone." This state of heightened concentration, in which our acts appear to follow each other in a united, organic way without our conscious effort has

been described by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his theory of optimal experience as "flow."[22]

The term flow was first used by Csikszentmihalyi and anthropologist John MacAloon, students of anthropologist Victor Turner, known for his work on *communitas*. Flow has similarities to *communitas*, but turns inward to individual experience. While the larger group, the contra dance community, is at the heart of the moment—with the interplay of music, choreography, calling, movement with partners and neighbors—the feeling of being at one with the moment occurs within the individual.

This state seems challenging to articulate, measure, or predict, however, Csikszentmihaly's contribution has been to pinpoint conditions within activities that enhance the potential for reaching flow. Finding a balance between skill level and activity is perhaps the most important condition for getting to a state of flow. If the challenges are too low, the activity becomes boring; too high, and the activity leads to anxiousness and frustration. In either case the actor does not fully engage with the action. When the balance is just right, a sense of flow can appear.

IV. Remix

In the early 2000s, impromptu contra dancing to recordings of Celtic fusion and techno tracks from an iPod, combined with the ease of access to communication technology, set the stage for a blossoming of alternative style contra dances. As part of

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[22] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

this alternative style, an increased spectrum of musical possibility arose within contra dance communities to include extended use of electronics, from looping with live music to entirely pre-recorded mixed and remixed tracks. Several individuals from within contra dance communities began mixing tracks, stepping into the newly created DJ role at a contra dance, and occasionally calling to their own mixes.

The term remix is often associated with music to indicate the combining or editing of existing materials, often associated with club dance music and hip hop's history of sampling. While the term has taken on particular potency, the concept behind it is, perhaps, quite old, as it simply points to techniques of copying, transforming, and combining. In a 1996 interview, Steve Jobs referenced the rather notorious line "good artists copy, great artists steal," attributing the quote to Pablo Picasso, and further said, "it comes down to trying to expose yourself to the best things that humans have done and then try to bring those things in to what you're doing."[23]

The technological and cultural changes indicated in communication technologies such as the personal computer, internet connectivity, media editing software, peer-to-peer file sharing software, and portable media devices have enabled a shift in the way people communicate. The most recent generations of youth in this country have had inexpensive, accessible, and even disposable audio recording equipment in the home from early childhood. Audio and video production have become increasingly accessible, affordable,

[23] Robert X. Cringley, *Triumph of the Nerds: The Rise of Accidental Empires.* John Gau Productions and Oregon Public Broadcasting documentary, 1996.

and seemingly ubiquitous. Such availability contributes to what has been termed the remix culture, a term generally attributable to Lawrence Lessig.[24]

Organization

My goal is to craft this writing in much the same way an evening contra dance would unfold, so that each concept builds on the previous one, as dance figures might be introduced and combined throughout successive contra dances. The observations of my research are organized into the six chapters of this dissertation, and supported by relevant literature that I incorporate along the way. In chapter two, I offer an historical perspective and review of literature on contra dance. My discussion focuses on publications and perceptions of contra dance, its history and place in society from its British origins, French influence, and its time in America. Specifically, I trace the waxing and waning of its popularity, key figures in its preservation and development, the influence of the notion of "folk," and a common perception of it as a "revival" tradition.

In the remaining chapters I give specific attention to each of the theoretical perspectives outlined above. In chapter three I analyze contra dance as a community of practice. Using this model as established by Étienne Wenger, I consider both stated and tacit pursuits and repertoire, with a focus on community behaviors. In chapter four, I focus on the music and choreography, analyzing contra dance as a participatory practice according to one of four fields proposed by Thomas Turino. In chapter five, I examine the concept of flow more closely. The emotional, psychological, and neurological aspects

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[24] Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

invoked through contra dance are in some ways ineffable (dancers often say "magic") but are aided in descriptions of experience, movement, and participation. I consider the possibility of flow as a pursuit and as part of the intangible repertoire of the community, as an aesthetic in music, choreography, and community interaction. In chapter six I locate specific contra dance trends in the remix phenomenon of recent history. I consider remix, the folk process, and generational encounter in the community of practice, using comparisons of club culture and exploring the semiotic juxtapositions that result.

Contributions and Significance

Contra dance and contra dance musics have been closely aligned in the literature with the 1960s folk revival and the Back to the Land generation, its practitioners sometimes labeled "anti-modernists."[25] Thus, studies of contra dance are informed by literature on musical revivals, what Tamara Livingston views as "social movement[s] with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition which is believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past."[26] As Burt Feintuch suggests, however, "we should understand folk music revivals as transformations."[27] Musical revivals tend to

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[25] Thomas Turino, "Old-Time Music and Dance: Cultural Cohorts and Cultural Formations," *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); John Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance: Community and Folk Revival* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[26] Tamara Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no.1 (Winter 1999): 66 – 85.

[27] Burt Feintuch, "Musical Revival as Musical Transformation," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

be intertwined with the topics of change and transformation, not least because culture is dynamic and "change is a constant in human experience."[28] These can be further understood as reinterpretations, involving both values and forms, something made apparent in contra dance throughout its history and in the present moment.

Now, as always, a new generation must invest itself in the tradition if it is to continue, though without the impetus of a revival movement. How are newer generations adopting the practice and adapting it in ways that resonate with their various experiences of twenty-first century American life? For example, if contra dance has been associated with the Back to the Land movement and viewed as a haven in a heartless world of speed and greed, and cell phone intrusions, how can the techno contra movement be located and understood in this trajectory, as it is no longer a conscious escape from the music and rhythms of mass culture?

In this dissertation, I expand on the available literature. Offering a sort of companion piece to Mary Dart's work, *Contra Dance Choreography: A Reflection of Social Change*, that observes changes in dance aspects, I explore the current musical moment. To Dorothea Hast's "Music, Dance, and Community: Contra Dance in New England," that explores the role of contra dance specialists (musicians and callers) and transmission within circumscribed parameters of repertoire, I add a glimpse of contra dance outside those parameters. I extend Turino's mention of the "second generation" to give in-depth consideration of how this group is involved with contra dance, adding to growing bodies of literature on participatory practices and taking contra dance beyond

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[28] Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 303.

anti-modernism. To studies that have hinted at or briefly mentioned flow, I offer an exploration of the concept in contra dance, using descriptions and evaluations of those in the community to discover the "magic." Importantly, as yet there has been no attention given to the young phenomenon known as crossover contra, which is occurring in tandem with the more traditional style of live-music contra dances.

At the heart of this study is what I have come to understand as the heart of contra dance: an open invitation to consider participating in music and dance as community. In this dissertation I consider what bonds that multigenerational community together and how it is maintained and regenerated. Participants are involved with continuing the practice and, to that end, negotiations, both embodied and verbalized, of how best to keep the practice alive and inviting are an ongoing part of the practice. There have been changes in several aspects of contra dance across its long history, but the practice has proved quite resilient. That resilience is both a subject of and a justification for this study, locating contra dance in this moment as we continue to "take hands and pass it on down" for generations to come.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTRA DANCE IN HISTORY AND LITERATURE

In the previous chapter I described the techno contra, one example of a modern urban contra dance. Crossover contra dances exist alongside more traditional contra dances, each style serving the context and intent pertinent to its participants. Although crossover contra dances are a relatively new phenomenon, the adaptability and malleability of the genre is a characteristic evident from the earliest publications.

Throughout its history, the country dance genre has fit a variety of contexts for a variety of groups. It was enjoyed by peasants and by nobility in England. Among early colonists—those who initially brought country dancing to America—it was declaimed at best a frivolous waste of time and at worst a moral evil, as by Increase Mather, who wrote against the profanity of "mixt" gender dancing as a duty of his pastoral care. However, it was also exalted as a polite accomplishment important in the etiquette of gentlefolk. Much later, similar attitudes were still to be found, although in some cases country dancing represented the wholesome alternative, such as in Henry Ford's reactionary attempt to influence leisure activities during the sweep of the "decadent" jazz era. Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, the genre was adopted and associated with the politics and ideology of left-wing groups, youth culture, and anti-modernists.

That country dancing and contra dance have been able to fit a variety of ethics suggests the strength of constructs and notions that we are able to hold within our minds individually and as a society. The labeling of contra dance as anti-modernist, old-time, and folk indicates some perceptions surrounding the genre. Categories such as "old-

fashioned" and "modern," "folk" and "non-folk" or "commercial," "mainstream" and "marginal" demonstrate a certain effort to define boundaries and create meaning within and between types of musical expression. The seeming arbitrariness of what is placed into each category, however, points to the collections of assumptions that are ascribed to a style; to the *idea* of "folk," for example, rather than definitive parameters. While "folk" and "folk music" may not be specifically useful as descriptors, these are terms that may still hold cultural relevance and insights into values and worldviews. As such, the history of contra dance as it is represented in historical accounts and academic literature may reveal a good deal about notions of the genre itself, of folk music and folk dancing, and of tradition.

In this chapter I will explore historical aspects: the role contra dance has played in society, the attitudes and perceptions regarding contra dance, and the adaptability of the genre as it appears in publications and scholarly literature from country dance in England to contra dance in the United States. The information here is largely established; however, the contribution of this chapter is a synthesis, drawing on many sources in order to highlight specific trends. I will problematize the "folk" and "revival" concepts and will track trends of "folk" in mass (or mainstream) culture and mass (or mainstream) culture in "folk." Culminating in the recent trend of techno contras, this history will help explore the possibility that the more it changes, the more it is the same.

The term "contra dance"

Perusing music references such as Oxford Music Online yields little in results for a subject entry on contra dance. What does appear are a few brief mentions, such as in the

rather short, three-paragraph subject entry on country dance, sourced from the second edition of *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*. Here country dance is defined as:

> A lively (but not rustic or rural) dance of seventeenth century English origin known in France as the "contredanse," by which name it soon came to be called in England as well. In the United States, "contre" became "contra," and the name "contradanse" has been used interchangeably with "country dance" to the present day.[1]

Rather oversimplified, this rough estimate definition provides a glimpse of the country dance genre and misses many nuances. The definition omits, for example, the formation-specific terminology, as in France the dances in "longways" formation were known as "contredanses anglaises" while those in square formation were simply "contredanses" or "contredanses françaises." Furthermore, while "country dance" is the term used to refer to a variety of mixed–sex group dances originating in England, the date of origin is generally believed to be some unknown time before the mid-sixteenth century. The particularly critical aspect is that, while for some time "country dance" and "contra dance" were interchangeable in the United States (until a time in the nineteenth century, roughly), at this point the term "contra dance" is used quite specifically by its practitioners.[2] Those involved in Scottish Country Dance (SCD) or English Country Dance (ECD) are not likely to interchange the term contra dance, as each carries its own

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[1] Pauline Norton, "Country dance," in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed August 26, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2256240.

[2] Kate Van Winkle Keller points out that by the 1780s Americans began calling these dances "contra dances," and that the names country dance and contra dance coexisted into the nineteenth century. Kate Van Winkle Keller, *Early American Dance and Music: John Griffiths, Eighteenth-Century Itinerant Dancing Master*, (Sandy Hook, CT: The Hendrickson Group, 1989): 7.

particular implications. Likewise, while both square dancing and contra dancing may reference American Country Dance, the events and styles have diverged sufficiently to denote separate events, and indeed, sufficiently to merit independent address of "contra dance."

While today the term contra dance carries specific connotations, some clarification on the uses of the term is helpful. Contra dance may refer to a dance event, as in "are you going to the contra dance tonight?" In recent history "contra dance" and "square dance" have been used interchangeably in this instance. Such an evening could include dances in square formation, dances in longways formation, perhaps some other folk dances such as the hambo or schottische, and even a few waltzes. Now, however, the two generally indicate different kinds of events and are advertised separately, such as The Great American Square Dance Revival events, which are different from the Contra and Square Dance evenings (weighted much more heavily toward contras) though both are sponsored by the Folklore Society of Greater Washington. Contra dance may also refer to a particular dance during the event, in which case the term is used in opposition to square dance. For example, a caller might announce to "find a partner for the last contra dance before the break" or "find a partner for a square." Contra dance can also refer to the activity and style of dancing at one of these events, as in "do you contra dance?"

Certainly, the origin of "contra dance" is country dance, however the means by which it has come to be called this are a source of some speculation and debate. There are two prominent theories found in literature about the genre. Belinda Quirey illuminates one theory suggesting that the word contra is derived from the formation of the dance, in which dancers face each other across the set rather than all facing the Presence,

historically, the king, queen, or other notable high-ranking person. (This is now typically the location of the music and the caller). In other words, the dancers face against each other, or contra, as it were.[3] Curt Sachs postulated a similar theory when he observed that "on the Continent, the *longways* had been transformed from a 'rustic' *country dance* into a *counter* dance, a *contre*." Noting the familiarity of the French language at that time, Sachs explains that "contre" was kept as the phrase re-entered the English context, which in turn affected English perception and name for the dance.[4] Within the American contra dance tradition, New England caller Ralph Page supported this theory. In *The Country Dance Book*, he suggested that:

> If you are an all-wool Yankee, you naturally call them *contry* dances. If you're just part-wool, you'll probably mis-hear them as *country* dances. And if you bother to look the word up, you'll find that *contra* is the term as it originated, suggesting, of course, the two "contrary" lines in the set-up . . . To get the whole business straightened out once and for all, here's a little formula: *Contry* dances plus quadrilles equal *country* dances.[5]

The other main theory also indicates a reinterpretation from French, although instead of a directional interpretation it is a phonetic interpretation of "country" to the French "contrée." John Millar suggests contrée, meaning country or region, was later shortened to contre and thus contre-danses.[6] This phonetic theory also has support within

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[3] Belinda Quirey, *May I Have the Pleasure: The Story of Popular Dancing* (London: Dance, 1987), 39.

[4] Curt Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1937), 421.

[5] Beth Tolman and Ralph Page, *The Country Dance Book: The Best of the Early Contras & Squares, Their History, Lore, Callers, Tunes & Joyful Instructions* (Brattleboro, VT: The Stephen Greene Press, 1976), 83.

American contra dance history. As New Hampshire-based caller Dudley Laufman told Dorothea Hast in an interview:

> It's the way we slur the word. When I was a kid they were called square dances, but we did contras – contras being the line dances, a contry, a country dance. I really don't know where that came from because the country dances that were collected by the French dancing masters were done in squares as well as lines . . . and that's the way they thought the word sounded. It's not the French word for country and it's not the French word contrary, it's the way they heard the English word. And it came back to England, and the English thought it was quaint. And it got over here.[7]

Similarities between the theories point to the exchange between England and France, and an agreement that English country dance became "*contredanse*" in France, which then influenced the English name in return. Although the exact meaning of contre is unclear, both theories are apt. The French influence is so obvious in the contra dance name, and further, in the names of choreographic moves such as dos-à-dos (do-si-do), allemande, and promenade that one might wonder if we were not dealing more directly with a French origin, however early sources note the genre's origins in England and scholars do not now debate this aspect.

To establish a chronology of usage and appearance of the word "contredanse," Cecil Sharp asserts that the word did not come into use until well after country dance had become established in both form and name. He notes that in *Popular Music of the Olden Time,* William Chappell observes that contredanse is not described by the French dancing

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[6] John Millar, *Country Dances of Colonial America* (Williamsburg, VA: Thirteen Colonies Press, 1990), 4.

[7] Dorothea Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community: Contra Dance in New England" (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 1994), 29.

master Arbeau, who first published the dancing manual *Orchésographie* in 1589, or by any other earlier French writers on dance. He notes furthermore that the first French dictionary to include the word "contredanse" was published in 1732, whereas the 1680 and 1694 editions did not include the word.[8] (Hugh Thurston notes the first occurrence of "country dance" given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 1579.)[9] Sharp's assessment echoes that of J.F.R. Stainer, who in 1901, wrote that there could be little doubt that the French contredanse was an adaptation of the English country dance because in England the country dance was well known "at least as early as 1579, when Mr. E.K., in his notes to Spenser's 'Shepherd's Calender,' explained 'haydeguies' as meaning 'a country daunce or rownd;' and in 1597, Thomas Morley, in his 'Introduction,' speaks familiarly of 'our country daunce' and 'the English country daunce.'"[10]

As for printed dance manuals, Feuillet's *Recueil de Contredanses* (1706), the first manual to be published in France that describes English country dances, appeared half a century after Playford's first volume of *The English Dancing Master* began to establish a printed collection of country dances in England. In the preface of *Recueil de Contredanses* (Figure 2), the author credits the English as the originators ("Les Anglois

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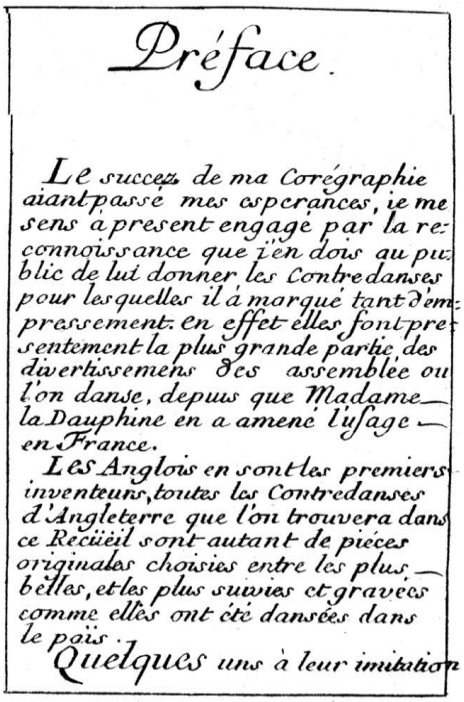
[8] Cecil Sharp, "The Country Dance" Letter to the Editor, "Correspondence," *The Musical Times* (January 1, 1916): 24. Additionally, for Cecil Sharp, the origin of the term "contre-danse" was clear enough, "for the performers in that dance invariably stand in couples *opposite* or *over against* one another."

[9] Hugh Thurston, "The Development of the Country Dance as Revealed in Printed Sources," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 17, no. 1 (December 1952): 29.

[10] J.F.R. Stainer, "La Contredanse," *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 42, no. 696 (February 1, 1901): 97.

en sont les premiers inventeurs") and also notes that the contredanses were a large part of the entertainment in dancing gatherings.[11]



Préface.

Le succez de ma Corégraphie aiant passé mes esperances, ie me sens a present engagé par la reconnoissance que i'en dois au public de lui donner les Contredanses pour lesquelles il a marqué tant d'empressement: en effet elles font presentement la plus grande partie des divertissemens des assemblée ou l'on danse, depuis que Madame la Dauphine en a amené l'usage en France.

Les Anglois en sont les premiers inventeurs, toutes les Contredanses d'Angleterre que l'on trouvera dans ce Recüeil sont autant de pieces originales choisies entre les plus belles, et les plus suivies et gravées comme elles ont été dansées dans le païs.

Quelques uns à leur imitation

Figure 2: First paragraphs of the preface to *Recueil de Contredanses*.

Feuillet was not the only one to credit England with the dance as John Essex in *Treatise on Chorography, or the Art of Dancing Country Dances* (1710) stated "that which we call country dancing is originally the product of this nation," a sentiment that resonated with John Weaver in *Essay towards an History of Dancing* (1712) who wrote of the form as a "peculiar growth of this nation." The claim was not only asserted by

[11] Raoul-Auger Feuillet, *Recueil de Contredances*, facsimile of the 1706 Paris Edition (New York: Broude Brothers, 1968).

English writers, but affirmed by French writers. In addition to Feuillet, Jacques Bonnet, in 1723, mentioned in his *Histoire de la Danse* that the contredanse was introduced into France some twelve or fifteen years earlier by an English dancing master.[12]

History to Mid-Twentieth Century

Earliest Publications

Until the mid-seventeenth century country dances were carried in the minds, feet, and hearts of those who danced and played them, passed from one generation to the next by observation and imitation. Most sources suggest that country dance may have been the domain of the rural folk or peasants prior to the seventeenth century. Joy Van Cleef asserts that country dances were "originally based, it is true, on figures found in the dances of rural England" and enjoyed for several generations before tunes and dances were first printed, as evidenced by the inclusion of some in Shakespeare's works ("Hearts Ease" in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example) and in various diaries and journals.[13]

Although sources indicate country dance as an aspect of rural England, most do not venture a speculation about its earliest origins. Cecil Sharp is an exception, as he hypothesized that the English took a primitive ritual dance and out of it conjured something that later would bear little resemblance to its original. The seed of the country dance, he postulated, was the Round, "which was danced hand in hand, around the tree, sacred grove, menhir, holy well, i.e. at the halting places made in the course of the

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[12] Stainer, "La Contredanse," 99.

[13] Joy Van Cleef, "Rural Felicity: Social Dance in 18th-Century Connecticut," *Dance Perspectives* 65, no. 17 (Spring 1976): 6.

ceremonial processions on May Day."[14] While admitting that irrefutable proof was impossible, Sharp drew connections with the circular formation and movements toward the center of the circle during the ceremony with country dances of similar structure and movement such as "Gathering Peascods" and "Mage on a Cree." Sharp felt it fairly safe to assume that the country dance round as found in the early Playford editions was a genuine survival of a primitive ritual dance.

While the origin of country dance can be traced to rural England, the dances and tunes were further developed by expert dancers and musicians in the court. Social dances of urban elite are documented from the Tudor period and records indicate that country dancing was popular at court from the time of Elizabeth I, adopted by the rising middle class, and copied by their servants and tenants. The publication of dance manuals attests to, and further fueled, the growing popularity of country dance among the upper classes (those with the financial capacity to buy printed music books). Music publishers in England issued books of country dances beginning in 1651 with John Playford's *The English Dancing Master: or, Plaine and easie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances, with the Tune to each Dance* (in later editions, simply *The Dancing Master*)(Figure 3).[15]

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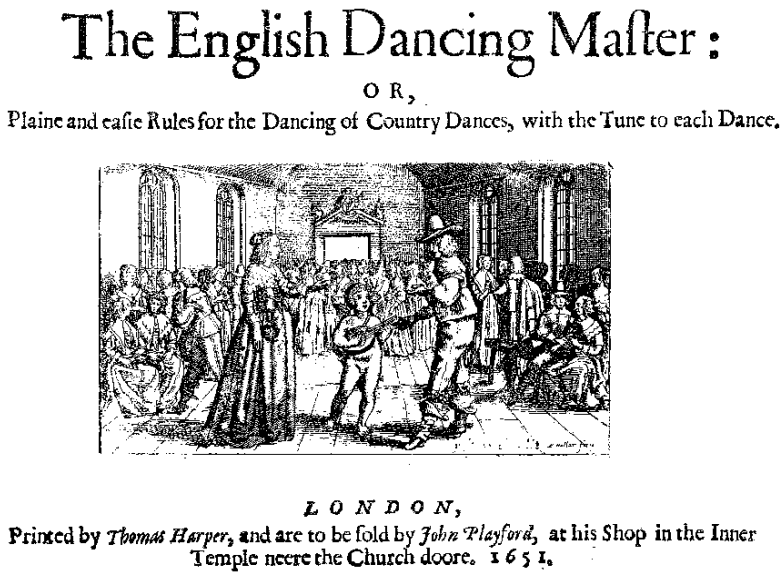
[14] Cecil Sharp, "The Country Dance" Letter to the Editor, 24.

[15] Playford's importance to music publishing in seventeenth-century England and his collection of country dances have been well examined elsewhere. See, for example, Margaret Dean-Smith, *Playford's English Dancing Master: A facsimile reprint with an introduction, bibliography, and notes* (London: Schott, 1957); Cecil Sharp *The Country Dance Book* (London: Novello and Company,); William MacPherson, "The Music of the English Country Dance" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1984); Stephanie Louise Carter, "Music Publishing and Compositional Activity in England, 1650-1700" (PhD, The University of Manchester, 2010).

Playford's book, containing 105 country dances, introduced these dances to a larger urban community and encouraged enthusiasm for the genre, commending the art of dancing for "making the body active and strong, graceful in deportment, and a quality very much beseeming a Gentleman."[16]



The English Dancing Maſter :

OR,

Plaine and eaſie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances, with the Tune to each Dance.

LONDON,

Printed by *Thomas Harper*, and are to be ſold by *John Playford*, at his Shop in the Inner Temple neere the Church doore. 1651.

Figure 3: Facsimile of the cover of the 1651 edition as printed in Mellor and Bridgewater's modernized reprint.

Country dancing became increasingly popular in English society, and between 1651 and 1728 approximately one hundred country dance books were published, about half of which are extant. The majority of these books were published by two firms: the house of John Playford and the house of John Walsh. Most of these books followed a similar format with the tune (melody only, scored for treble instrument) and dance

[16] John Playford, "To the Ingenious Reader," *The English Dancing Master* 1651, edited and transcribed by Hugh Mellor and Leslie Bridgewater (London: Dance Books Ltd, 1984).

instructions together on one page in a format established as standard by Playford's *The Dancing Master*.[17]

The dances are characterized by the arrangement of participants in rounds, squares, or lines. Each dance consists of several figures chosen from a stock repertoire which may be combined in any number of ways. The number of dancers is sometimes specified (for example, "a square for eight," or "round for six") but is often indeterminate ("for as many as will"), and increasingly through time, "longwayes for as many as will." The dance movements are not described in detail and must have been more centrally located in general knowledge and in-person transmission at the time. The dance tunes are short and many are anonymous. Some of the tunes in the earliest collections were fifty to one hundred years old at the time of publication. Many of the tunes were used for singing broadside ballads and some in Playford's early editions are also found in instrumental settings by Elizabethan and Jacobean virginalists and lutenists.[18] In later editions, tunes by composers of the day, including composers associated with the theater, are included in significant numbers.

The English Dancing Master was published in eighteen editions (known after the initial printing as *The Dancing Master*) and several supplements between 1651 and 1728. The repertory of dances and tunes changed significantly over these editions. After the first publication, there was a decline in the circle and square formation dances in favor of the longways dance, and after about 1690 almost all new dances were "longways for as

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[17] William MacPherson, "The Music of the English Country Dance" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1984), 11.

[18] Ibid., 2.

many as will." The reason for this is change not clear, although perhaps it reflected a desire to accommodate the demand for country dancing and more dancers. In any case, subsequent editions of *The Dancing Master* illustrate the popularity of the longways formation: in the first edition, thirty eight of the 105 dances are longways for as many as will, by the seventh edition in 1686 more than half are longways, and in the last editions nearly all the dances are in longways formations. Later collections by other publishing houses contain no examples of the square or round formations.

Significant changes also occurred in the music repertory over time. New tunes were added while others were dropped, musical notation was modernized to include clefs, key and time signatures, bar lines, and note values. No instrument was specified for the melody in the first edition (an advertisement in Playford's *Musicall Banquet*, 1651, suggested the treble viol or violin) while subsequent editions mention the treble violin on the title page, and the fifteenth edition makes the first reference to bass accompaniment (though none have been found).[19] More newly composed tunes were included in later editions. William MacPherson surmises that the numerous editions were an attempt to both follow fashion as well as to create it, perhaps emphasizing newness as a way to create demand for the publications.[20] MacPherson divides the body of tunes into three categories: 1) the first four editions consisting mainly of old, anonymous tunes, 2) editions five through seven which are "transitional," with a mixture of old and new tunes,

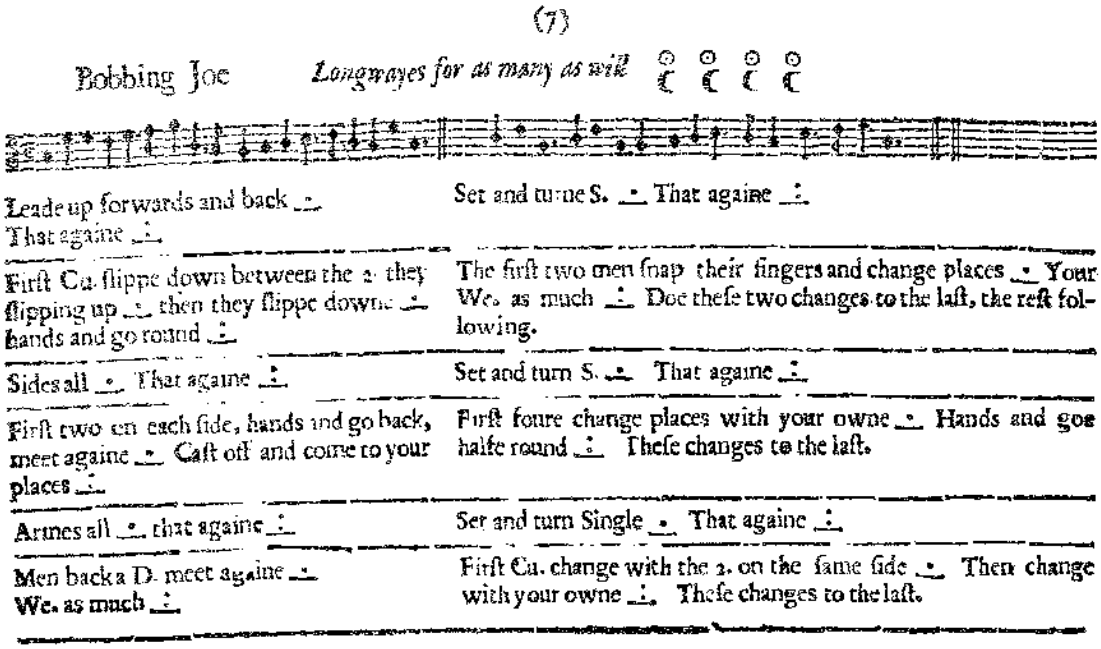
[19] Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community," 35.

[20] MacPherson, "The Music of the English Country Dance," 94.

and 3) editions eight through twelve in which many new tunes are added and some older ones deleted. About the changes in tune repertoire he notes:

> The musical evolution of the repertoire kept pace with public enthusiasm for the dance. First, short, simple, old anonymous tunes, many of which were used both for singing and dancing, and were not written especially for the country dance. Then, another sort of borrowed repertoire: music, much of it from the theater, by composers well-known in the late 17th century (and a few, like Purcell, who are still famous). Finally, added to this, a deluge of mass-produced tunes, intended to meet (and, at the same time to spur on) public demand for novelty as the country dance fad reached its peak in the first two decades of the eighteenth century.[21]

"Bobbing Joe": An example from Playford's series *The Dancing Master*


(7)

Bobbing Joe *Longwayes for as many as will*

Leade up forwards and back . . That againe . .

Set and turne S. . . That againe . .

Firſt Cu. ſlippe down betweene the 2. they ſlipping up . . then they ſlippe downe . . hands and go round . .

The firſt two men ſnap their fingers and change places . . Your We. as much . . Doe theſe two changes to the laſt, the reſt following.

Sides all . . That againe . .

Set and turn S. . . That againe . .

Firſt two on each ſide, hands and go back, meet againe . . Caſt off and come to your places . .

Firſt foure change places with your owne . . Hands and goe halfe round . . Theſe changes to the laſt.

Armes all . . that againe . .

Set and turn Single . . That againe . .

Men back a D. meet againe . . We. as much . .

Firſt Cu. change with the 2. on the ſame ſide . . Then change with your owne . . Theſe changes to the laſt.

Figure 4: "Bobbing Joe" as it appeared in the first edition, *The English Dancing Master*.

[21] Ibid., 101.

Here can be seen the format that Playford standardized for country dance books: the title is located in the upper left corner and beside that is the type of dance with a diagram for the starting formation using the symbols ⊙ to indicate "woman," and ☾ to indicate "man."[22] Below this is the tune, a single melodic line to be played by a treble instrument. At the bottom half of the page are the dance instructions using common abbreviations and signs that are explained in a table at the beginning of the volume. In the early editions the instructions were aligned to indicate the corresponding section of music; horizontal lines indicate instructions for one complete statement of the tune.

"Bobbing Joe" is the seventh dance and tune in the first edition of *The Dancing Master* and the first in this edition to be characterized as "longwayes for as many as will." It is typical of the early Playford repertoire and fits into the first of MacPherson's categories, but was also one of the tunes and dances kept throughout all the editions of *The Dancing Master*. An old, anonymous tune, "Bobbing Joe" is rather short - both A and B sections are four measures long. In later editions, the 6/8 time signature, bar lines, and note values are indicated in print. While the tune is quite short and would be repeated AABB several times through, the dance is game-like and rather less repetitive with several figure changes. Movements alternate between large group figures (for example, "sides all" or "Set and turn S.") and smaller group figures (such as "First Cu. Slippe down," indicating the first couple, or "first foure change places") every other time through the tune. Once through the entire dance corresponds to six times through the tune, or ninety-six measures of music.

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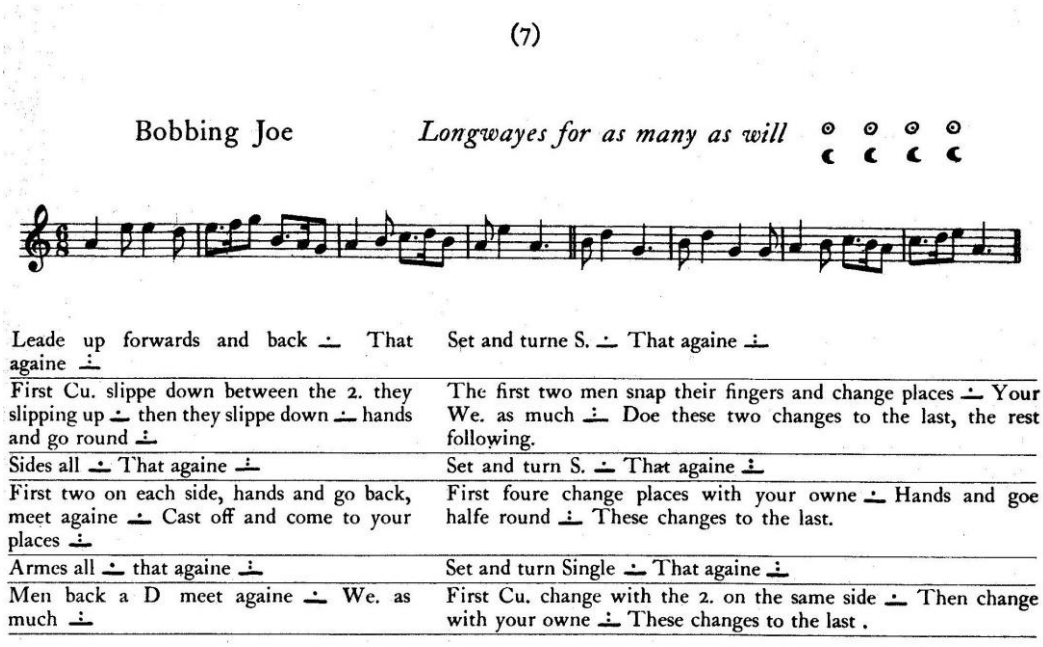
[22] After the first two editions of *The Dancing Master* these symbols were reversed.



(7)

Bobbing Joe *Longwayes for as many as will*

Leade up forwards and back ÷ That againe ÷	Set and turne S. ÷ That againe ÷
First Cu. slippe down between the 2. they slipping up ÷ then they slippe down ÷ hands and go round ÷	The first two men snap their fingers and change places ÷ Your We. as much ÷ Doe these two changes to the last, the rest following.
Sides all ÷ That againe ÷	Set and turn S. ÷ That againe ÷
First two on each side, hands and go back, meet againe ÷ Cast off and come to your places ÷	First foure change places with your owne ÷ Hands and goe halfe round ÷ These changes to the last.
Armes all ÷ that againe ÷	Set and turn Single ÷ That againe ÷
Men back a D meet againe ÷ We. as much ÷	First Cu. change with the 2. on the same side ÷ Then change with your owne ÷ These changes to the last .

Figure 5: "Bobbing Joe" as it appears in the Mellor and Bridgewater reprint, edited and with modern notation.

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"Bobbing Joe," also known as "Bobbing Joan" is early in the Playford repertoire and, fitting MacPherson's first stage of the musical evolution, is short, simple, old, anonymous, and was used both for singing and dancing. The tune is a ballad, somewhat bawdy in nature, of which, the earliest mentions in print appear to be the first Playford edition, Patrick Carey's 1651 *Triviall Ballads, Writ Here in Obedience to Mrs. Tomkin's Commands*, and as "a new Bob-in-Jo" in *Mercurious Democritus*, 1652. The tune was apparently quite popular, with many songs sung to the melody, such as "My Dog and I" (Figure 7), and appeared in several ballad operas such as "Polly" (1729), "The Bays' Opera" (1730), "The Mad Hour" (1737), "A Cure for a Scold" (1738), in the novel *The*

History of Tom Jones (1749), and in the burlesque *burletta* of 1762 entitled *Midas* (Figure 6).[23]

The popularity of this tune and the endurance of its associated dance through the Playford series is striking and alludes, in a way, to the misconception that country dance refers only to a rural, "folk" history. While country dances were originally based on figures found in the dances of rural England (and the rural simplicity evoked in the imagination of generations to come is quite potent, even to this day), as Joy Van Cleef points out, it would be "quite wrong to think of the country dance as the bucolic pastime of heavy-booted villagers."[24] As noted previously, country dancing became popular at court and with the rising middle class, and by the eighteenth century was the most popular urban social dance genre, danced by various strata of society and exported to other countries. The country dance repertoire is, in fact, by far the largest collected body of English popular music of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[25]

A distinction for "popular" music is not relevant to the country dance in England at this time as such was not made, and the word "popular" itself may fit many colloquial definitions. However, the popular repertoire in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be indicated by those tunes found in country dance books, broadside ballads, and collections of theater music, as some possible resources. These sources also indicate a written record, in addition to repertoire that is preserved and

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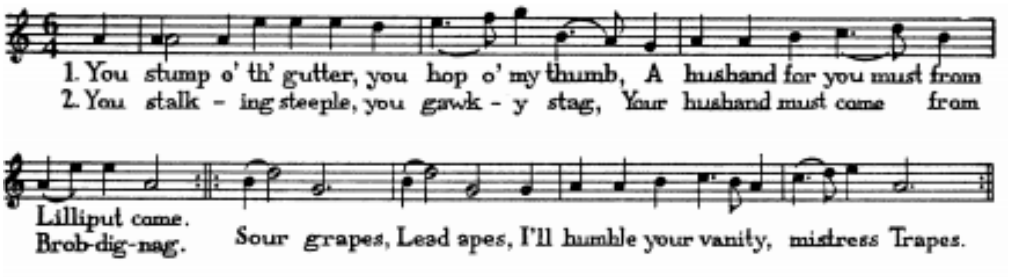
[23] S. Baring-Gould, *English Minstrelsie: A National Monument of English Song*, volume 6 (Edinburgh: Grange Publishing, 1896), xiii.

[24] Joy Van Cleef, "Rural Felicity," 6.

[25] MacPherson, "The Music of the English Country Dance," 6.

transmitted orally. A good bit of past research has connected country dance and contra dance with a folk tradition. While country dance's place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in more urban areas, among upper classes, and at court has been acknowledged, their ascribed rural origins and characterization as a "folk" dance—regardless of how accurate this was in those times—has affected perceptions of participants and scholars throughout the genre's history.

Figure 6: The "Bobbing Joe" tune in Kane O'Hara's 1762 burlesque burletta *Midas*.[26]



[26] Walter H. Rubsamen, "The Ballad Burlesques and Extravaganzas," *The Musical Quarterly* 36, no 4 (October 1950): 553.

Figure 7: The "Bobbing Joe" tune as the old ballad "My Dog and I." Arrangement by F.W. Bussell for *English Minstrelsie: A National Monument of English Song*.

if you'd know the rea - son why, Be - cause she lov'd my
where good fel - lows I es - py, There gai - ly go my
ma - ny thieves are hang'd on high, No law can touch my
dog and I, my dog and I, my dog and I, Be -
dog and I, my dog and I, my dog and I, There
dog and I, my dog and I, my dog and I, No
cause she lov'd my dog and I.
gai - ly go my dog and I.
law can touch my dog and I.

Early Perceptions

"Rather Inclining to the Mirthful than the Graceful…"

Kellom Tomlinson, a dancing master of the day, seems to have been reluctant to include the less refined country dancing in his *Art of Dancing* (1735), as he had intended originally to speak only of "genteel dancing." However, as he saw that "country dances are at all assemblies or balls . . . and is become as it were the darling or favourite diversion of all ranks of people from the court to the cottage in their different manners of dancing," Tomlinson included a chapter (the very last one in his work) so as to at least instruct his readers to be able to carry out the dance as gracefully as possible. Tomlinson indicates that if one would simply pay close enough attention it could be accomplished without disorder and could give a view of "fine gentlemen and ladies gracefully in motion to the sound of music and compleating each part of the dance in time to the measure, or strains of the tune, as it were of one accord."[27] In *Analysis of the London Ballroom* (1825), Thomas Tegg described the dances as representing simplicity and freedom, being "rather inclining to the mirthful than the graceful, and to cheerfulness than elegance."[28] Giambattista Dufort included the most popular dance forms of this time, minuets and contredanses, in his *Trattato de Ballo Nobile* (1728). While it is apparent in his description that the contredanse consisted of rather simple movements, and therefore

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[27] Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing* (London: Kellom Tomlinson, dancing master, 1724), Chapter XV, accessed September 13, 2014 http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/musdi:@field(DOCID+@lit(M15858).

[28] Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community," 44.

did not meet with his unqualified approval, it is also apparent that cooperative work among the dancers is emphasized.[29]

Certainly, in comparison to the formal French court dances prevalent at the time, English country dances were simpler and more light-hearted. The ascendency of French court dances throughout Europe between 1623 and 1700 was reinforced in the courts of England upon the restoration of Charles II (1660) from his exile in France. French dancing masters traveled throughout Europe (and later America) teaching these rather complex dances of display. In contrast to postural dances such as the galliard and the minuet, country dances offered a sort of relaxation from the complicated and more technically demanding presentational *danses à deux*.[30] In addition to the physical relaxation, country dances defied the class-conscious artifice and formality of dances like the minuet. As noted by various authors, country dance was a rather "democratic affair" in which a number of people danced together and interest lay in the dance patterns rather than in self-presentation.[31] Participation in the dance was open to all, encouraging self-

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[29] A.H. Franks, *Social Dance: A Short History* (London: Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1963), 110.

[30] Cecil Sharp remarks, however, that by the mid-eighteenth century, the influence of dancing masters and the refined minuet being placed in proximity to country dance had begun to "devolve" and corrupt the country dance until the middle of the nineteenth century when the genres were superseded by the waltz and polka. The main complaint was that dancing masters, such as Nicholas Dukes, suggested a refined air for the country dance and that the ladies and gentlemen (a noted change from Playford's simpler "men" and "women") performing the dance should first be duly qualified in a minuet. Sharp contended that this stifled the freshness and gay simplicity of country dance with artificial graces and genteel posings. Cecil Sharp, *The Country Dance Book, Part V* (London: Novello and Company 1918, reprint: Yorkshire, England: EP Publishing Limited, 1976), 9 – 12.

[31] Van Cleef, "Rural Felicity," 7.

expression and informality, in contrast to the segregated and exclusive world of the minuet. In this way, as Mark Knowles states, the country dance offered a way of "democratizing social dance."[32] It should be noted however, that while the country dance may have been enjoyed by various classes of society, the events where it was danced still tended to be segregated by class.

Many aspects of the music and choreography of country dance support the perception of the genre as democratic, mirthful, and simple. Although in its early life there was no caller as we have today and the movements would have needed to be memorized, Tomlinson indicates that if one would simply pay close attention to the head couple, the movements could be imitated with little difficulty. Indeed, as is the case today, Van Cleef asserts that at that time a "measured walking step seems to have been the most common movement for passing from one position to another."[33] Furthermore, individuality, in the sense that one need not master more refined technique or turning out the feet, seems to have been welcomed from an early period. André Lorin, a French dancing master who visited England in 1684 in order to learn the English country dances which had become popular in the court of France, wrote of "*la bizarrerie et la diversité des pas, que chacun y faisait à sa fantasie*" [the strangeness and diversity of the steps, that each did according to his whim], and that "*beaucoup de pas et de mouvements different faits dans le meme temps, lesquel ne s'accommodent pas avec la manière*

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[32] Mark Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 191n45.

[33] Van Cleef, "Rural Felicity," 7. Playford makes no mention of the steps themselves.

française" [many different steps and movement done at the same time, which were not in accordance with the French way. Translation mine.][34]

The ethos of country dancing, as well as the perceptions about the genre, revealed through these writings seem to pervade the life of country and contra dance, rippling through its waters to the present day. Overall, there is uncovered through the literature an ongoing notion of the welcoming openness (for as many as will) and simplicity of the dance. That notion, however, and its association with ruralness, is considered both a virtue and a fault. The emphasis on democratic participation rather than spectacle and display, on cheerful lightheartedness, and on simplicity, initially illustrated a contrast in perceptions of English rusticity to the hegemony of French or continental sophistication that may perhaps still be seen now, retranslated as anti-modernist values in today's cosmopolitan society.

Country Dance in America

"I said my prayers…I danced my dance." (William Byrd II of Virginia, April 7, 1709)[35]

Early colonists that came to America naturally brought their dances with them. While records describing country dance in America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are not abundant, scholars have been able to construct some history through newspaper accounts, diary entries, letters, and a few manuscript books. Joy Van Cleef

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[34] Hugh Thurston, "The French Country Dance, the Quadrille, and the Cotillion," *English Dance and Song* 34, no. 2 (Winter, 1972): 18.

[35] William Byrd, "The Diary of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1709-1712," accessed September 13, 2013, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/economies/text5/williambyrddiary.pdf

and Gilbert Chase believe that copies of *The Dancing Master* were known in America and that newly-published vocal and instrumental music arrived here well before the eighteenth-century imports of which there are records.[36] The dancing master as a person, not the book, however, may not have been part of the first migrations, as there is no mention until the 1670s. Through the figure of the dancing master there is exemplified another set of perceptions regarding dance, as a few dancing masters occasioned the stern reproof of clergy. Thus, in the form of missives and court diaries, more information regarding dance and its place in early American society is found.

The first extant American anti-dance treatise, "An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing Drawn out of the Quiver of the Scriptures" was written by Increase Mather, a Puritan minister, in 1684. The outrage for Mather and other Boston clergy appears to have been the effrontery of dancing masters such as Francis Stepney, who allegedly declared that, "by one Play," he could "teach more divinity than either the Old Testament or Mr. Willard."[37] The audacity exhibited by Stepney was redoubled by his plans to hold his dancing school during the midweek day for church. Clerics took their complaints to the court of Judge Samuel Sewall, who, in his diary entries of late 1685 and early 1686, recorded that Stepney was charged with "Blasphemous words; and Reviling the Government," and then fined 50£ and ordered not to keep a dancing school.[38]

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[36] Van Cleef, "Rural Felicity," 9; Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present* revised 3rd ed., with a foreword by Richard Crawford (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

[37] Ann Louise Wagner, *Adversaries of the Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 48.

There are further records of other dancing masters such as Charles Cleate, or Clete, not being allowed membership in the city and ordered out of town in 1678, and Henry Sherlot, ordered out of town and colony because of his ill fame.[39] In Philadelphia, Quakers in 1706 voiced concern "that a dancing and fencing school, are tolerated in this place, which they fear will tend to the corruption of their children."[40] However, dancing masters of better repute must have been available and, although many considered dancing to be wasteful and sinful, others held it to be varyingly acceptable as part of an education, and perhaps even pleasurable.

During the seventeenth century dancing in the colonies was domestic and informal, and seems to have been typical of many kinds of celebration. However, since dancing was mostly a private affair there is little external evidence in the historical record. Puritan opinion on the subject of dancing (though this was not unanimous) and a strong, established church make it unlikely that there would have been formal, organized gatherings specifically for dancing. That dancing occurred informally in homes and taverns is indicated by laws for its regulation. Other evidence from diaries and biographies suggests occasions for dance; for example, a dance was reportedly held in the

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[38] Samuel Sewall, *Diary of Samuel Sewall: 1674-1729. Vol. I. 1674-1700,* Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society Vol. V. – Fifth Series; Boston: Published by the Society M.DCCC.LXXVIII (Cambridge University Press: John Wilson & Son), 112. Second Edition. Google books.

[39] Wagner, *Adversaries of the Dance,* 48.

[40] Franks, *Social Dance,* 115.

Connecticut childhood home of Jonathan Edwards to celebrate the ordination of his father in 1694.[41]

Although throughout this time denunciations persisted, the dance and dance school became established as an integral part of society. Country dance grew in popularity throughout the colonies, fostered by traveling dancing masters such as John Griffiths, who has been traced from newspaper notices from Rhode Island and New Hampshire as far south as Charleston, South Carolina. These itinerant dancing masters reached even a few remote communities (although people also danced—in whatever form tradition had preserved—in areas where traveling dancing masters never reached), offering classes and dancing to the public for a fee, with music provided either by local musicians or traveling fiddlers, if not by the dancing master. A typical newspaper notice looked something like the following advertisement from the March 20, 1789 *New Hampshire Spy*:

> Dancing School. Mr. Flagg begs to inform those ladies and Gentlemen who wish their children to acquire the knowledge of that polite Accomplishment that he will again open a school, at the Assembly Room on Wednesday, the first of April next, and on the Saturday following, if a sufficient number of scholars offer. He will teach the mode of the English Minuets, Cotillions, and the Newest Contra Dances.[42]

From the beginning of the eighteenth century there are more frequent mentions of public dance contexts. The earliest mention of dances by name was recorded at a party called a "Turtle Frolic" (occasioned when George Bresset sailed to the West Indies and

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[41] Wagner, *Adversaries of the Dance*,56.

[42] Hank Greene, *Square and Folk Dancing: A Complete Guide for Students, Teachers, and Callers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 9.

sent home a turtle and a keg of limes to his friend Samuel Freebody; as the story goes, the limes did not survive the voyage but the turtle did and was promptly cooked up for the town) in Newport, Rhode Island in 1750 or 1752.[43] Some of these dances later appeared in *A Collection of Contra Dances*, printed in Walpole, New Hampshire in 1799. The earliest dance manuscripts date between 1780 and 1795. Kate Van Winkle Keller identified eleven manuscripts that contain dance description but no musical notation. All but three dances are in longways formation. Dancing master John Griffiths published *A Collection of Figures of the Newest and Most Fashionable Country-Dances* in 1786 and another collection, containing cotillions, in 1788.[44]

Dancing regularly took place at governors' balls, assemblies, and house parties. Country dancing provided entertainment for all social classes (though typically not mixed), but records generally describe urban dance events of the elite. At formal balls and assemblies, great effort was made to observe etiquette and elegance as might befit a London ballroom. Such gatherings generally opened with the minuet and perhaps some other couple dances, but the majority of the evening was devoted to country dances.

The term "ball" was applied to any formal, social occasion at which dancing was the central part of the evening's entertainment.[45] Joy Van Cleef asserts that a Boston ball

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[43] John Millar records the year as 1752 in *Country Dances of Colonial America,* 3; while Joy Van Cleef describes a "turtle party" in 1750. "Rural Felicity,"15.

[44] Kate Van Winkle Keller, *Early American Dance and Music: John Griffiths, Eighteenth-Century Itinerant Dancing Master,* (Sandy Hook, CT: The Hendrickson Group, 1989).

[45] Accordingly, even today, the term "ball" is sometimes used, particularly at weekend-long gatherings (for example, the Grand Fall Ball at the Feet Retreat weekend in North Carolina; The Springforth Ball in Richmond, Virginia; The Ball at

would "have more in common with its London prototype than with a back-country frolic a hundred miles away."[46] The differences between a frolic and a ball would have been degrees of formality, a frolic being a more informal gathering at inns and taverns, in towns and countrysides, where less structured dancing would take place. Frolics appear to be more closely associated with lower classes and rural communities, plantations, and the south, although not exclusively so. John Adams described such a gathering at a Boston area tavern in 1760: "Every Room, kitchen, Chamber was crowded with People. Negroes with a fiddle. Young fellows and Girls dancing in the Chamber as if they would kick the floor thro . . . caught a Girl and danced a Gigg [jig] with her."[47]

It was considered a high honor to receive an invitation to a governor's ball, which could be quite discriminating in its attendees. Moreau de Saint-Mery noted in *American Journey* that "There is great snobbery in Philadelphia, where the classes are sharply divided. . . This is particularly noticeable to balls. There are some balls where no one is admitted unless his professional standing is up to a certain rank."[48] This may stand in contrast to the informal gatherings such as "frolics." A.H. Franks observes the popularity of social dance in the south, in particular among lower classes where, he conjectures, pleasure and communal spirit may be more forefront than protocol and privilege. Causes

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Charlottesville, Virginia's Fall Festival; the weekly gathering in Asheville, North Carolina known as The Old Farmer's Ball; and several English Country Dance groups host an annual Playford Ball).

[46] Van Cleef, "Rural Felicity," 12.

[47] John Adams, *The Adams Papers/Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol 1: Diary 1755-1770*, edited by L.H. Butterfield (New York: Atheneum, 1961), 172.

[48] Franks, *Social Dance*, 118.

for dances, or frolics, here, may have been initiated by communal work when several families gathered at one farm. This often occurred as a communal meal followed by a dance (this notion continues in some contra dance communities today as a potluck meal shared before a dance). Franks cites one writer's fondness of a frolic: "I really know among us of no custom which is so useful and tends so much to establish the union and the little society which subsists among us… if we have not the gorgeous balls, the harmonious concerts, the shrill horn of Europe, yet we delate our hearts as well with the simple negro fiddle."[49]

The Custom of Calling Dances

"I use to call out de figgers: 'Ladies, sasshay, Gents to de lef', now all swing.' Long after de war was over de white folks would 'gage me to come 'roun' wid de band an' call de figgers at all de big dances." –Narrative of Isaac Stier, *Federal Writers' Project 1936* [50]

Dances in southern colonies, informal gatherings, and, in particular, the influence of African-Americans play a vital part in the history of country dance and contra dance. As early as 1670 there are records of planters in Virginia erecting a "banqueting house" and at least one occasion when the popularity of dancing carried the evening's activities through until eleven o'clock the following morning.[51] Dancing and dance schools were established in towns such as Williamsburg, Charleston, and Savannah, and dances also

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[49] Ibid., 118 – 119.

[50] Quoted in Philip A. Jamison, "Square Dance Calling: The African-American Connection," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 391.

[51] Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1940), 81 – 82.

occurred at plantations and among the more rural population. The minuet and country dances were quite popular, as were jigs and hornpipes.

Serving as attendants and musicians at the assemblies in great houses and at plantations, blacks had a significant influence on these forms, and there was most likely exchange and modification of dances and music between blacks and whites. The ex-slaves interviewed by the WPA in the 1930s show that the dances most often remembered from slavery days were contradances, square dances, the cotillion, the waltz, and the quadrille.[52] In the 1920s Henry Ford actively sought musicians, including Ed and John Campbell, sons of a Kentucky-born ex-slave fiddler, to help in his dance revival efforts.[53] As early as 1690, slave fiddlers played for dances on plantations in Virginia and by the mid-eighteenth century, slave musicians were common at white social functions, both urban and rural, throughout the American colonies.[54] Travelers' accounts of music in cities such as Richmond, Wheeling, Baltimore, and Charleston mention black fiddlers playing for white and black audiences.

In addition to playing for white dances, slaves began to dance the European dances themselves. For close to a century they had provided music for whites at balls and at dancing schools and in doing so, they were exposed to the figures of the European

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[52] John F. Szwed and Morton Marks, "The Afro-American Transformation of European Set Dances and Dance Suites," *Dance Research Journal* 20, no. 1 (Summer, 1998): 32.

[53] Paul M. Gifford, "Henry Ford's Revival and Fiddle Contests: Myth and Reality," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 3 (2010): 318.

[54]Philip A. Jamison, "Square Dance Calling: The African-American Connection," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 388.

dances as dancing masters taught their students. One account from a South Carolina newspaper in 1772, mentions a "cabel" of about sixty slaves gathered near Charleston to dance "Country Dances."[55] Dances from both the African and European traditions co-existed at plantation "frolics."

In Appalachia, the earliest narratives regarding country dancing include contra dances, jigs, and reels. A. W. Putnam's *History of Middle Tennessee* mentions dances on puncheon floors at weddings and at Christmastime at settlements on the Cumberland Plateau in the 1780s: "The contra-dance and the jig were the very common evening's exercise and entertainment at these stations."[56] Other accounts, including David Crockett's autobiography, make reference to dancing, some with mentions of black musicians. One central element that is missing from all accounts until just before or around the Revolutionary era, however, is any mention of a caller or of calling dances.

The practice of calling, which is unique to American folk dance, and now standard, did not arrive with early European settlers, but originated and developed in this country. Phil Jamison examines the apparent rise of calling dances and traces early accounts in Appalachia. The earliest references to dance callers, all of whom were African-American, date from shortly after the introduction of French cotillions and quadrilles just prior to the American Revolution. Jamison proposes that calling may have evolved as slaves called out figures of European dances at their plantation frolics, and as

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[55] Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 82.

[56] A.W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee or, Life and Times of Gen. James Robertson* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971, 1859), 273.

an alternative to the formal instruction that white dancers received from dancing masters. Jamison links calling to the call-and-response tradition found in African music and dance.[57] Szwed and Marks suggest that calling is "at least partly rooted in the older tradition in which African master drummers signal and direct dancers."[58]

With the invention of calling it was no longer necessary to attend dancing school to learn the figures of the dance (although this may still have carried some import among certain social circles), and while calling may have been a necessity at slave frolics, at some point black musicians began to call out the figures for white dancers as well. Jamison's earliest found reference to anyone calling a dance is the journal of Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Describing a ball in New Orleans in 1819, Latrobe wrote: "Altogether the impression was highly favorable. The only nuisance was a tall, ill-dressed black in the music gallery, who played the tambourine standing up, and in a forced and vile voice called the figures as they changed."[59]

Jamison speculates that the dissemination of calling may have been aided by resort hotels located near hot springs, such as the Sulphur Springs Hotel that was built near Asheville, NC, which had a large ballroom and featured music by a black string band with musicians from Charleston and Columbia, South Carolina. In 1832, an English traveler described a scene at a resort hotel in Lebanon Springs, New York:

> The evenings were usually passed in dancing. The band consisted of two negroes playing on violins, and a third upon a bass. The leader . . . acted as a kind of

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[57] Jamison, "Square Dance Calling," 391.

[58] Szwed and Marks, "The Afro-American Transformation of European Set Dances and Dance Suites," 32.

[59] Cited in Jamison, "Square Dance Calling," 391.

> maitre du ballet, crying out 'Balanciey!' – 'tan your patners!' – 'La's shen!' and other jargon, utterly unintelligible even to those who were acquainted with the figure of every quadrille.[60]

Calling was adopted by white musicians as well, although it is not clear when this occurred. However, by the middle or late nineteenth century, dance calling seems to have become a fairly common practice (with a caller who was not necessarily also a musician), if not universally accepted (it should be no surprise that dancing masters and teachers were prominent critics). When Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles gave accounts of dancing in Kentucky in 1917, they wrote that "It is customary for one of the company, not necessarily one of the dancers, to 'call' the dance as it proceeds, that is, to name the figures and describe them, movement by movement."[61]

Wars and Waltzes: The waning of contra dance in the nineteenth century

As calling became a common practice, quadrilles were also gaining popularity. Kate Van Winkle Keller notes that country dances were "the most popular of the social dances done by all ages and all classes of society during the latter part of the eighteenth century," and reaffirms that country dance was a generic term for progressive longways dances which, by the 1780s, were also called contra dances.[62] However, the histories

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[60] Edward Thomas Coke, *A Subaltern's Furlough: Descriptive Scenes of the United States, Upper and Lower Canada, New-Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, During the Summer and Autumn of 1832* Vol 1 (New York: J.&J. Harper, 1833), 204.

[61] Cecil Sharp, *The Country Dance Book, Part V* (London: Novello and Company 1918, reprint: Yorkshire, England: EP Publishing Limited, 1976), 19.

[62] Kate Van Winkle Keller and Ralph Sweet, *A Choice Selection of American Country Dances of the Revolutionary Era, 1775 – 1795* (New York: Country Dance and Song Society of America, 1976), 4.

record that the popularity of the longways style began to wane after the American Revolution, drastically so in the mid-nineteenth century, as they were displaced in fashionable circles by the quadrille and couple dances.

Mary Dart asserts that "the political division between England and her colonies during the American Revolution did not result in a cultural division."[63] However, this statement requires a caveat. Certainly, new contra dances continued to be developed in the pattern of the older ones, but as a result of the military alliance and trade with France, there was an influx of aspects of French culture. The presence of French influence can be seen the publication (circa 1799) of new longways country dances such as "Spirit of France" and "LaFayette."[64] Furthermore, French styles of dance such as the cotillion (a direct ancestor of both the ballroom quadrille and the modern square dance) and the quadrille, which, as opposed to the English longways, were performed in a four-couple square formation, began to gain popularity.[65]

The French influence that began to penetrate social dance as a result of alliances during the American Revolution was further sealed with anti-English sentiment during the War of 1812. Following this war many people refused to dance the English longways

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[63] Mary Dart, *Contra Dance Choreography: A Reflection of Social Change* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 7.

[64] Daniel J. Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of the Folk in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 45; Keller and Hendrickson, *George Washington: A Biography in Social Dance*, 55, 60.

[65] Originally composed in five distinct parts, the quadrille was a combination of cotillion figures that became popular sometime before the end of the eighteenth century.

dances, turning instead to the French squares.[66] The new dances soon began to replace the old contra dances, reels, and jigs. Following the War of 1812, with the exception of New England, which remained pro-English, Americans largely abandoned the tradition of English contra dances in favor of the French cotillions and quadrilles.[67]

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, new exciting couple dances such as the waltz, the schottische, and the polka were becoming all the rage and beginning to push out even the favored quadrille. Like the country dance, the waltz did not require hours of meticulous study; anyone could learn a few basic steps. When the waltz made its appearance in England circa 1790, it was regarded as a country dance and was often inserted as an embellishment to contre-dances and cotillions. Noting the energy and vigor, as well as the excitement of a closer body position, J.H. Katfuss noted in his pocket journal in 1800 that, "[The waltz] has now become such a general favourite and is so fashionable that no one can any longer be reconciled to the English dance without it, for practically all English dances are usually mixed with two turns of the waltz."[68] Gaining notoriety and favor in many parts of Europe, it was even said about its draw at the Vienna Congress (1814 – 1815) that "le Congrès ne marche pas, il danse."[69] The waltz arrived in the United States at roughly the same that it appeared in England, but did not gain the public's full attention until after the turn of the century. By the mid-nineteenth century it

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[66] Dart, *Contra Dance Choreography*: 8; Greene, *Square and Folk Dancing*: 10.

[67] Jamison, "Square Dance Calling," 389.

[68] Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz,* 30, 25.

[69] Ibid., 28.

(along with the quadrille) replaced country dance in popularity. In 1859, Thomas Hillgrove wrote that "Country dances have become nearly obsolete in fashionable assemblies, but are still in comparative favor at provincial balls and private parties."[70] In 1889, Judson Sause included a chapter on contra dances in *The Art of Dancing,* and noted that "these dances are no longer fashionable, yet they are frequently danced all over the country."[71]

Preservation in New England

By the end of the nineteenth century, the contra dance was in a decline almost everywhere. Dancing manuals and fashions of the day declared it unfashionable. The influence of dancing masters had led to a formality and gentility that was rather stifling to the country dance. At the same time, new exciting (scandalous to some) dances were garnering attention.

Although some scholars have claimed that country dance disappeared from the urban dance floor, it continued as a vital part of rural American culture, especially outside the cities in New England, the West, and the southern mountains. The longways contra dance had thrived in the northeastern United States and continued to be danced in the New England area after the War of 1812 as anti-British sentiment was not as strong in that area. John Szwed notes that in 1859 a "typical ball" in New Hampshire "consisted of

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[70] Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community," 62.

[71] Judson Sause, *The Art of Dancing, "*The Household Library, N.Y." 4. No. 44 (July 8, 1889) (Chicago, New York, and San Francisco: Belford, Clarke, & Co.) accessed October 1, 2014 http://www.memory.loc.gov.

17 quadrilles, 2 contradances and 4 other multiple dance forms."[72] (The predominance of the quadrille is striking, but that the contradance was present in a "typical ball" is significant). The longways contra dance flourished and evolved as a distinct dance tradition of rural New England where, Mary Dart speculates, escaping the influences of dancing masters and fashions of the day, it remained relatively unchanged.[73]

Although its popularity was diminished, contra dance was still present in comprehensive dance manuals of the time. Boston music publisher Elias Howe included directions to ten contras among the three hundred dances in his 1858 *Complete Ball-Room Handbook.*[74] Howe also issued several broadly-based anthologies of instrumental music meant to appeal to a large audience. The anthologies included contra dance tunes along with opera melodies and popular songs from minstrel shows. The contra dance tunes were a rather small part of the repertory and were reused from previous collections. Dorothea Hast notes that "newly composed contra dance tunes (specifically written for contra dances) were not entering the mass market," and while many of Howe's publications included contra dances, other publications of the same period left them out.[75]

Although new contra dance tunes may not have been making a way into the mass market, music for contra dancing was still being played and shaped by those who kept

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[72] Szwed and Marks, "The Afro-American Transformation of European Set Dances and Dance Suites," 31.

[73] Dart, *Contra Dance Choreography*,8.

[74] Elias Howe, *Complete Ball-Room Hand Book* (Boston: Ditson & Co., 1858).

[75] Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community," 64, 67. Of interest is the assertion that Gretchen Schneider makes that Elias Howe didn't really write his dance books but often pirated. Gretchen Schneider, "Using Nineteenth-Century American Social Dance Manuals," *Dance Research Journal* 14 no 1/2 (1981-1982): 40.

contra dance in their lives. As Daniel Walkowitz notes, by the late nineteenth century, French Canadians, Cape Breton Scots, and Irish immigrants who settled in New England mill towns had given the English longways contra dance its own unique musical character, adding, according to folklorist Skip Gorman, "Celtic and French Canadian bowing and fingering techniques, as well as tunes, to the Yankee dance bag."[76] Another characteristic introduced into dancing in New England in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the buzz step, which is still present and beloved today. A swing in closed ballroom position, the buzz step is a scooting motion in which the dancers' right feet stay close to their center of gravity, while their left feet scoot them around in a tight circle. The buzz step replaced the rather more sedate two hand swing.

Dances in New England commonly took place at a junket—also called a kitchen junket, house party, house dance, or heel-burner—a dance event held at a community member's house. As had been the case with some of the informal gatherings of the previous century, gatherings were often held to celebrate a particular occasion, after a day of communal work of husking or sugaring, for example (Ralph Page remembers that in Vermont and the Connecticut River Valley the communal sheep shearing was a rousing excuse for a big dance)[77], or simply as a spontaneous party. Some farmhouses had dance rooms built onto them, but usually the kitchen (with furniture removed) was used for dancing. Participants included people of all ages, and any musician present might be

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[76] Cited in Walkowitz, *City Folk*, 46.

[77] Beth Tolman and Ralph Page, *The Country Dance Book*, 17.

pressed into service. The music was typically provided by a fiddler, who also often called the figures if necessary; guitars and banjos might also be found as part of the music.

In addition to the junket, public dances were held at town halls and grange halls. The public dances were more formal than junkets (admission was often charged) and dances included various forms in addition to country dances. These public dances were typically advertised in newspapers and posters and usually drew a larger number of dancers than might be found at a junket, including those who traveled some distance to take part.

Not every community, however, held regular dances. The degree to which country dancing became a part of the life of the community depended on the community, the availability of musicians and callers, and the willingness of people to participate in the dance. Where there were families in which these skills were shared, the dance traditions flourished. The repertories of these communities and small town bands, and the influence of some itinerant dancing masters and fiddlers played an important role in what survived and was performed. As Ralph Page figured it, contra dance survived in New England thanks to "a combination of English resentment to change, Irish bull-headedness, and Scottish stubbornness."[78]

Folk Revivals to the Present

The First Twentieth-Century Folk Revival

What would lead to a course of revival in the United States during the twentieth century began during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in a wave of

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[78] Ralph Page, *Heritage Dances of Early America* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: The Lloyd Shaw Foundation, 1976), 9.

European nationalism. Prussian philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744 – 1803) wrote of language as a learned behavior, a social or community product that could reveal unique values about that community. Linking language and nation, Herder's ideas suggested that a linguistic heritage and the folklore that gave that heritage its most authentic expression united the people who shared that heritage. Finding a reflection in the arts, other aspects of expressive culture could then be viewed as part of the fundamental nature of a collective spirit; folklore and folk song were seen as embodying a unique essence of the community or nation, and in Britain and across the continent there was a surge of interest in documenting folk cultural expressions.[79]

Folklore and folk song in England transitioned from being largely a fad among the middle-class and aristocracy for things "country," to an academic pursuit and national treasure. The British Folklore Society was founded in 1878 followed by the Folk Song Society in 1898 and the English Folk Dance Society (by Cecil Sharp) in 1911.[80] These institutions served as models for their counterparts in the United States when, by the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of an American folklore had evolved, and the American Folklore Society (along with its affiliated journal) was established in 1888.

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[79] Herder, himself, collected folksong and folklore, publishing *Stimmen der Völker* in two volumes (1778 – 9). Richard Taruskin notes in the "Nationalism" entry of *Grove Music Online* that Herder is credited with coining the word "*volkslied*" to describe what had formerly been "peasant" or "rustic" song.

[80] The English Folk Dance Society merged with the Folk-Song Society in 1932, creating the English Folk Dance and Song Society. This in turn served as a model for the 1915 founding of what would become the Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) in the United States as a branch of the English Folk Dance Society by enthusiastic Americans inspired by Cecil Sharp's work.

A concentrated interest in American folk song began among scholars who became fascinated with the culture of the Appalachian Mountains. The northern middle-class reading public had been aware, to some degree, of the Appalachian folk since the 1870s when local-color fiction writers had based stories on folk characters and traditions. As early as 1889, James Mooney called attention to the southern mountain region as a resource for the collection of folklore and folk song – things of increasing interest as the process of industrialization altered cultural patterns. He noted a peculiar otherness, developed by the environment and isolation that he thought "distinctly American, and yet unlike anything to be found outside of the Southern Alleghenies."[81] The first published collection of songs from the area consisted of one ballad and two songs collected by Lila W. Edmonds in North Carolina, printed by the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1893. A number of articles documenting folk songs followed suit over the next two decades, mostly appearing in the same journal.

Collectors were selective about what music they were seeking. Thanks primarily to the influence of Francis James Child, a Harvard professor of English whose collection *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* was published during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, collectors were primarily searching for ballads of Anglo-Scottish origin. Child approached ballad study from a literary point of view, with a focus on the text. His collection is grouped according to narrative type, a system that groups similar plots together. Child's agenda, according to Michael Bell, was to "rescue from oblivion

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[81] Cited in Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and the Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870 – 1920* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 245.

evidence of the cultural childhood of the American community, in order to suggest a path towards achieving an ideal cultural unity in the newly United States."[82] Child's work provided a frame of reference and scholarly legitimation for collectors. It became habitual to note parenthetically where the songs collected belonged in Child's canon.

An added force for preservation of folk culture in the face of migration, increasing literacy, and industrialization was the establishment of the first state folklore societies; among them were North Carolina and Kentucky in 1912, Virginia in 1913, and West Virginia in 1915.[83] The state folklore societies, likewise, were dedicated to collecting and preserving "Old World folk song, especially the Child canon."[84] The ballads of the Appalachian region began to resonate beyond the hills, and these along with local handicrafts began to spark a keen interest among collectors interested in the "products" of the region.

Settlement Schools

At about the same time that an American urban folk revival was getting under way, settlement schools such as the Log Cabin Settlement (mid-1890s) near Asheville, NC, the Pine Mountain Settlement school (1913) and the Hindman Settlement school (1902), both in Kentucky, were taking root in Appalachia. These settlement schools were

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[82]Tom Cheesman and Sigrid Rieuwerts, *Ballads into Books* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1997), 10.

[83] David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 54.

[84] Helen Myers, "North America: British-Americans" in *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*, edited by Helen Meyers (London: The Macmillan Press, 1993), 39.

established to serve isolated rural communities in Appalachia, inspired by settlement houses, such as the well-known Hull House in Chicago. The settlement movement and settlement houses were important reform institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with goals of alleviating poverty and providing education. Social reformers taught folk dances from English and American traditions as a way to "transmit values and modes of expression from an essential 'natural' rural past" they saw threatened by the presumed artificiality of urban life. At Hull House, ball room and folk dances were taught to both sexes as early as 1897.[85]

The schools seemed to have an interesting dual duty of both helping to educate and improve the quality of life in the Appalachian area as well as helping to preserve what they saw as the mountaineers' traditional culture. Inspired by the Fireside Industries concept at Berea College that promoted traditional handicrafts (in Berea's case, this allowed students to earn toward their education), crafts, music, and dance as well as academics were encouraged. The settlement institutions were soon serving as headquarters for ballad collectors, as creative centers for traditional mountain crafts, and

[85] Daniel J. Walkowitz, "The Cultural Turn and a New Social History: Folk Dance and the Renovation of Class in Social History," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 [Special Issue on the Future of Social History] (Spring, 2006): 785.

as focal points for folklorists.[86] Olive Dame Campbell may have been the first person to use the settlement schools as a center for collecting music.[87]

Olive Dame Campbell was the wife of John C. Campbell, the director of the Southern Highland Division of the Russell Sage Foundation. While her husband was engaged in a project of upgrading the Appalachian School system she accompanied him on trips to the mountain schools. In December 1908 while visiting the Hindman School, she heard children sing tunes "as old as the hills – the real old plaintive folk tunes handed from mother to daughter," and was inspired to begin one of the most far-ranging collections up to that time, covering counties in Kentucky, Georgia, and Tennessee by early 1910.[88]

The Campbells were introduced to the concept of the Danish folk school (*folkehojskoler*) which placed less value on exact knowledge for its own sake, focusing instead on critical thinking and vocational skills. Olive described its purpose as being "to awaken, enliven, enlighten – awaken to new ideas, new ideals; keep purposes alive and in action . . . to the good of community, country, mankind."[89] The Campbells had plans to

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[86] Judy Flavell, "Settlement Schools and the Culture of the Mountains," *Settlement School of Appalachia* KET documentary, 1995. Accessed October 2, 2014, https://www.ket.org/settlement/setschools_04.html

[87] Virginia Chambers, "The Hindman Settlement School and Its Music," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 21, no.2 (Summer 1973):140.

[88] Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine,* 110 – 111.

[89] Olive Dame Campbell, *The Life and Work of John Charles Campbell* (Madison, WI: privately printed, 1968), 228, 205-206; M. Ana Fariello, "The People: Olive Dame Campbell," *Craft Revival: Shaping Western North Carolina Past and Present* (2007) accessed October 2, 2014 http://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CraftRevival/people/olivecampbell.html.

visit Denmark to study the folk schools firsthand, but the trip was delayed when World War I broke out in Europe. John died in 1919 before the journey could be made. Olive continued his work, publishing *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* in her husband's name, and making the trip to Denmark in 1922 with a fellowship from the American-Scandinavian Foundation, accompanied by her sister, Daisy Dame, and Margeurite Butler, a teacher at the Pine Mountain Settlement School in Kentucky.[90]

In 1925, with the help of Margeurite Butler, Campbell located land in Brasstown, North Carolina for her vision of a school that would be an alternative to the missionary and independent settlement schools. Appealing to a prominent member of the Brasstown community, she wrote of the idea "to relate the culture of books to the culture of the soil."[91] In an answer to Olive Dame Campbell's ever-present question "How shall we keep an enlightened, progressive, and contented farming population on the land?," the John C. Campbell Folk School was founded in 1925. Following a model of Berea College's "fireside industries," the school connected to the surrounding community through local craft. Crafts, drama, song, and dance were valued parts of the school activities, strongly influenced by both the Danish schools and Campbell's interests. The John C. Campbell Folk School played an important role in the twentieth century as a safeguard of American folk dance.

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[90] Fariello. "The People: Olive Dame Campbell."

[91] Olive Dame Campbell in a letter to Dr. James H. Dillard, 24 November 1925, John C. Campbell Folk School Archives, accessed October 2, 2014, http://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CraftRevival/people/olivecampbell.html.

Figure 8: The John C. Campbell Folk School logo as recorded with the U.S. Copyright Office in 1935

It was in part thanks to Olive Dame Campbell (who contributed some of the songs she had collected to *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians*) and the work already being done in the United States that noted English collector Cecil Sharp was successful during his time in the States. In Sharp's words: "Chance brought me to America in the early days of the war…and while here Mrs. John C. Campbell of Asheville, NC told me that the inhabitants of the Southern Appalachians were still singing the traditional songs and ballads which their English and Scottish ancestors had brought out with them at the time of their emigration."[92] Prior to meeting Campbell, Sharp had been in the states as a dance advisor for a production of A Midsummer Night's Dream.[93]

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[92] Letter to George Parmly Day, President of the Yale University Press, 15 August 1917; Vaughan Williams Memorial Library of the English Folk Dance and Song Society; Michael Yates "Cecil Sharp in America," accessed October 2, 2014, https://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sharp/htm.

[93] *Boston Herald*, 23 February 1915; ibid.

One of the leading figures of the English folk-song revival, Cecil Sharp's initial interest was partly sparked when he witnessed a Morris dance, an event that left such an impression upon him that he began collecting dances from what living examples he came across in England. The great majority of these dances were "longways for as many as will" and were published in his first volume of *The Country Dance Book* in 1909. Sharp discovered Playford's *The Dancing Master* and spent many months studying and reconstructing the dances and tunes but made no attempt to make an exact reproduction of the style of dancing as his goal was to remove country dance from the artificiality of the ballroom setting to their truer nature:

> Our aim in reviving these dances should be to keep them fresh and natural and, to this end, to avoid the use of elaborate steps, together with the tricks and mannerisms of the theater or of the drawing room; for that way, as history shows, danger lies. The steps that I have ventured to suggest may or may not be historically accurate; but they can, at least, be executed without injury either to the form or spirit of our very beautiful national dance.[94]

Sharp's interest was in the collection, preservation, and dissemination of English folk song and folk dance. Believing that authentic traditions were dying out and fearing that much had been lost with industrialization, Sharp, with his assistant Maud Karpeles, searched for old, authentic English material in the United States (1916 – 1918) where he assumed the British heritage might linger in more isolated communities.[95] In his correspondence of 1916, written in his time in the southern Appalachian mountains, he offered that:

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[94] Cecil Sharp, *The Country Dance Book Parts I and II* (London: EP Publishing, Ltd., 1975; originally published 1909 and 1911), 23.

[95] Helen Myers, *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*, 6.

> The people are just English of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. They speak English, look English, and their manners are old-fashioned English. Heaps of words and expressions they use habitually in ordinary conversation are obsolete, and have been in England a long time. I find them very easy to get on with, and have no difficulty in making them sing and show their enthusiasm for their songs . . . I should say that they are just exactly what the English peasant was one hundred or more years ago.[96]

Collecting some 1600 English tunes and variants, and publishing *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians* circa 1917, it appears that Sharp found what he was looking for, though he was a bit of a late arrival. Six years earlier, Hubert Shearin published an article entitled "British Ballads in the Cumberland Mountains" and noted about the Appalachian region that "Like the belated April snows upon their shady slopes, the folk-lore of the British Isles yet lingers here untouched and unchanged."[97] Sharp's work, however, reinforced trends that had been emerging in folk song scholarship and his status as an authority on British folk song added weight to the idea that the mountains were rich in Child ballads.

Sharp also visited settlement schools, about whose purpose he appeared ambivalent as he observed an intrusion upon the musical heritage. In August 1916, he recorded the following:

> I stay at missionary settlements, usually in a log cabin, where I fend for myself—make my own bed and do all sorts of things I am quite unaccustomed to do—and have my meals in the settlement house. It is the Presbyterians who run these places, and some of the women I have met are very nice and broad-minded. But I

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[96] John R. Gold and George Revill, "Gathering the Voices of the People? Cecil Sharp, Cultural Hybridity, and the Folk Music of Appalachia," *GeoJournal* 65 no. 1/2 Geography & Music (2006): 60-61; Michael Yates, "Cecil Sharp in American: Collecting the in Appalachians," https://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sharp/htm (accessed 2 October 2014).

[97] Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 17.

> don't think any of them realize that the people they are here to improve are in many respects far more cultivated than their would-be instructors, even if they cannot read or write. Take music, for example. Their own is pure and lovely. The hymns that these Presbyterian missionaries teach them are musical and literary garbage.[98]

Despite his complaints about the music that was being taught, Sharp was able to find numerous ballads in the area. He was also delighted to find dancing, and particularly fascinated by one dance called the "running set" on his visits to settlement schools in Kentucky:

> We had a splendid time at Hindman. I liked the people there and think the school is almost, if not quite as efficient in every way as Pine Mountain . . . We got a lot of songs in the neighbourhood of Hindman – one day I took down no less than 38, a record for me, I think. I saw a *Running Set* again but it was not nearly so well done as at Pine Mountain so I am going back there to note it carefully.[99]

Getting the dance down on paper was a relief to Sharp who recorded in his October 8, 1917 diary that the dance "is as valuable a piece of work as anything I have done in the mountains."[100] In a letter to Helen Storrow he described the dance:

> It is a wonderful dance. Formation, a circle. Six couples is the best number. There is a formula—circle movements, swinging partner and contrary partner etc.—all done at a great pace and full of style. This formula begins the dance (it takes 16 bars) and ends each figure, while a shortened form of it comes after each progression. After the formula, the leading couple does a figure—sometimes a very complicated one—with the 2d couple, then the 3d and so on with all the couples. Some of these figures although done mainly by the leading and one other couple engage the activities of all others. That is different from anything we have.

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[98] Michael Yates, "Cecil Sharp in America," accessed October 8, 2014, http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sharp.htm.

[99] Cecil Sharp, letter to Miss Scovill, 26 September 1917; Yates, "Cecil Sharp in America."

[100] Cecil Sharp diary; Yates, "Cecil Sharp in America."

> The rapidity of the dance is remarkable and the constant repetition of circular movements in the formula and many of the figures produces an emotional effect similar to that of the Sword rather than the Country dance. The moment a dancer is idle he begins clapping his hands, or his thighs—if he's a man—and stamping his foot making an exciting syncopated rhythm.[101]

In other places, the Kentucky Running Set was done as a four-couple square. Maud Karpeles notes that she understood the Running Set as a type of dance rather than a specific individual dance, and although Cecil Sharp called it a Running Set for convenience, the local Appalachian people spoke of "running a set" or "set running," likely to imply a set of figures.[102]

Although this dance was not known to Cecil Sharp, and some of the English Country Dances that were taught to the people at Pine Mountain were likewise unfamiliar to them, there are noticeable similarities. Sharp, in the introduction to *The Country Dance Book,* Part V, theorized that the Running Set was a survival of a type of Country Dance which in order of development preceded the Playford dance, and that sometime in the eighteenth century it was brought by emigrants from the border counties to America, where it has since been traditionally preserved."[103] Karpeles remarked that the greatest difference was "not so much in the figures, for many of them are common both to the Running Set and the Square Dance, but in the style and character of the dance-

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[101] Cecil Sharp, letter to Mrs. Storrow, 27 September 1917; Yates. "Cecil Sharp in America."

[102] Maud Karpeles, "Some Additional Figures for Set-Running," *The Journal of the English Folk Dance Society* No 3 (1930): 39.

[103] Karpeles, "Some Additional Figures," 42.

execution."[104] She attributed the difference in style to the differences in environments of New England as compared to the isolated Appalachians. "The dances are now performed not only in remote settlements, but in the public dance-halls of small country towns, such as Stratford, Ct.…The usual custom is to organize an 'old-fashioned' dance once a week. It should here be mentioned that the term 'Square Dance' has come to be applied generically to any form of old-fashioned dance, whether it be actually of Square or Longways formation."[105]

Institutions such as the settlement schools and the John C. Campbell Folk School served an important role in local folk song and folk dance life in the twentieth century. More than a collection source for folklorists, students also learned from and contributed to the music in the schools. While music and dance were a part of life, it would be inappropriate to assume that these folklorists were traipsing through "a land of troubadours whose inhabitants carol before breakfast, woo at luncheon with love lyrics, entertain in the evening with ballad shockers, and retire with gospel hymns, folk of course."[106] Music and dance could be found in varying degrees throughout the area. These institutions were a locus for gathering and disseminating, strongholds for maintaining the life of these forms of music and dance which would be rediscovered and revived throughout the twentieth century. In an interview with Ruth White, the music

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[104] Ibid., 40.

[105] Ibid., 41.

[106] Richard Dorson, "A Theory for American Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 72, no. 285 (July – September 1959): 200.

teacher at Hindman from 1940 until 1966, Virginia Chambers noted that her activities included a ballad club and playing for a folk dance class five or six nights each week.[107] John Bealle states that for most of the 1970s, Pinewoods,[108] the Berea Christmas Country Dance School, and the John C. Campbell Folk School were "the main outlets for disseminating revived traditions associated with English and American folk dance."[109]

Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) and Pinewoods

Cecil Sharp had been an early member of the English Folk Song Society. By 1911 his efforts at reviving interest in and preserving folk music, as well as his dedication to the traditional forms, led him to form a separate society to further the folk dance revival. Founded at the close of 1911, the English Folk Dance Society activities were practical rather than academic. Whereas the Folk Song Society existed to preserve folk music as it had been collected, the Folk Dance Society intended "to give back to the people of England their heritage of folk dances that were all but forgotten" by instruction and demonstration.[110] The foundation of the English Folk Dance Society came on the heels of

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[107] Virginia Chambers, "The Hindman Settlement School and Its Music," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 142.

[108] Pinewoods Camp was founded in 1919 as a Girl Scout camp by Helen Storrow who was also active in English country dancing and served as the president of the American branch of the English Folk Dance Society from 1916 until 1944. She invited staff of the Dance society to teach the girl scouts and in 1933 Pinewoods became the permanent home of the summer programs for the American branch (now the Country Dance and Song Society). Both Pinewoods and CDSS continue to thrive.

[109] John Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance: Community and Folk Revival* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 153.

[110] Ralph Vaughn Williams, "The English Folk Dance and Song Society," *Ethnomusicology* 2, no. 3 (September 1958): 109.

disagreements with other folk dance enthusiasts, and Cecil Sharp's intention to keep the movement "on its right lines and prevent it from becoming vulgarised and popularized, although they aimed at popularising it in the best sense of the word."[111]

Sharp's fears of vulgarization and popularization were the seed of his disagreement with Miss Mary Neal and her Esperance Working Girls' Club. Neal and her club were an important part of the folk dance revival circa 1905 and Sharp had some involvement with them. In 1907 a conference was held with the aim of establishing a society "for the further development of the popular practice of English Folk-Music in Dance and Song" and a provisional committee was elected which then established the Association for the Revival and Practice of Folk-Music in 1908, and any involvement Sharp may have had was ended. Mary Neal wrote that "In 1907, Mr. Cecil Sharp and I disagreed over the constitution of a committee, and from that date have worked on entirely separate lines."[112] It seems the main disagreement between the two stemmed from issues of accuracy and artistic style. Neal commented about one of Sharp's events (one of a few that were so well-attended Sharp was compelled to create the Society) that: "the dancing was beautiful, graceful and charming, so much so that I do not feel able to criticize it, for it falls into the category of the art and not the folk dance." Sharp's complaint was that "Miss Neal seems to consider that it is enough if the teacher be

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[111] Excerpt from the *Morning Post* of December 7, 1911, cited in Derek Schofield, "'Revival of the Folk Dance: An Artistic Movement': The Background to the Founding of the English Folk Dance Society in 1911," *Folk Music Journal* 5, no.2 (1986): 215.

[112] Frank Kidson and Mary Neal, *English Folk-Song and Dance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 165.

instructed by a traditional dancer. But surely this must depend upon the capacity of the teacher to assimilate what she is taught . . . her teachers have made many grave errors."[113]

Current concepts of the "folk process" may illuminate the tension of their argument. In fact, Douglas Kennedy, Sharp's successor as the director of the English Folk Dance Society, stated that there had always been opposition to artistic grooming and "In England it seemed to us that the revival had gradually been turned away from a real understanding of the meaning of 'folk' toward an art subject which was becoming increasingly artificial and which we seemed powerless to deflect."[114] Nonetheless Sharp's ideas were manifested in the English Folk Dance Society and dominated that society for years after his death in 1924. The long shadow cast by Sharp's dominance over the ideas of Neal had implications for the "respectable" and "authentic" expression of these forms; the spirit of the dance would be codified by "experts," and would "be more restrained and contained, more horizontal than vertical."[115] Likewise, his influence was felt in the United States.[116]

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[113] Cited in Schofield, "Revival of the Folk Dance: An Artistic Movement," 218, 217.

[114] Helen and Douglas Kennedy, *Folk Dance and Song 1911-1961* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, n.d. [1961]), 6; Schofield, "Revival of the Folk Dance: An Artistic Movement," 218.

[115] Daniel J. Walkowitz, *City Folk*, 115.

[116] In spite of the preferences Cecil Sharp might have held to avoid popularization in the worst sense, folk song had already undergone such a process to some extent in the United States. Songbooks such as Josephine McGill's *Folk Songs of the Kentucky Mountains: Twenty Traditional Ballads and Other English Folk Songs* (1917), *Lonesome Tunes: Folk Songs from the Kentucky Mountains* (1916) and *Twenty Kentucky Mountain Songs* (1920), both by Loraine Wyman and Howard Brockway, featured piano arrangements, without background information, in decorative parlor editions that fit

During Cecil Sharp's tour of lecture-performances in the United States, George Baker, a Harvard drama professor, and Helen Osbourne Storrow, a Boston philanthropist and founder of the Girl Scout Training School, were inspired to form two American branches of the English Folk Dance Society, in New York and Boston (probably the two largest urban areas of the United States, again raising the class and rural/urban distinctions). The idea of a national organization gained momentum in the 1930s and in 1937 the American branch of the English Folk Dance Society dissolved. A new national organization took its place, centered in New York; its name eventually became the Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS).

Storrow combined her interests by initiating dance classes to be taught to the girl scouts at the camp in Massachusetts (now known as Pinewoods). In 1925, the Boston branch began holding summer sessions at the camp and by 1933 Pinewoods was the permanent home for the summer dance camp. Teachers and organizers May Gadd and Lily Conant had been personally selected by Cecil Sharp in England to go to the United States to teach at the camp. When Storrow died in 1944, she bequeathed the camp to Lily and her husband, Richard Conant, under whose stewardship CDSS expanded its programs.[117]

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nicely on a piano's music stand. This was necessarily an unusual process. The history of piano arrangements dates well back in the United States, such as to those produced in the late nineteenth century by John Comfort Fillmore and Alice Fletcher of songs from Omaha Indian music.

[117] Pinewoods Camp, Inc., "History," *Pinewoods*, accessed October 4, 2014, http://www.pinewoods.org/about/history/.

Today, both CDSS and Pinewoods Camp are thriving. CDSS is a national non-profit with over 3000 members. While the organization was founded to promote English traditions, by the 1940s, its mission had expanded to include American folk traditions. The mission and vision of CDSS today includes education, support, sustainability, and advocacy. From their website:

> CDSS is a national leader in promoting participatory dance, music and song that have roots in English and North American culture. We believe in the joy that participatory dance, music, and song bring to individuals and communities. Within the U.S. and Canada, we educate, support, and connect participants in these living traditions. We advocate for the vitality and sustainability of these art forms into the future.[118]

This vision and the inclusion of contras and squares would certainly be supported and, in fact, may in some part be accounted to the efforts in the 1920s of a well-known American: Henry Ford.

Henry Ford and Benjamin Lovett

"…the spirit of grown-up play is irresistible."[119]

Interestingly, the man largely responsible for bringing mobility and mass production to the lives of Americans also had a keen interest in reviving aspects of a time that was less hurried and more neighborly. In a 1925 interview, Ford stated, "I'm trying in a small way to help America take a step, even if it is a little one, toward the saner,

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[118] Country Dance and Song Society, "CDSS Mission Statement: Mission and Vision," accessed October 5, 2014, http://www.cdss.org/mission-statement.html.

[119]Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford, *"Good Morning"* (Dearborn, MI: The Dearborn Publishing Company, 1926): 30

sweeter idea of life that prevailed in pre-war days."[120] The way he was trying to do that was through music and dance.

Growing up on a farm outside Detroit, Ford was familiar with both rural life on the farm as well as a more industrial, urban life from his days working in Detroit – perspectives that would seem to continue throughout his life. Music and dance were a part of his life; he was given a violin by his mother when he was ten, and in his teens he began going to dances where he danced to some of the tunes he had learned to play, joining the Greenfield Dancing Club in 1882.[121] Extant sources, such as diaries, dance programs, manuscripts, and sheet music from the Detroit area between 1875 and 1895 show that contra dances and square dances made up the majority of the dances. These sources also indicate that the music included collections by Elias Howe, as well as current interests of the day such as the *H.M.S. Pinafore Quadrille,* and local fashions such as the *Detroit Polka*.[122] As was seen even in the earliest publications such as Playford's *The Dancing Master,* the music kept pace with public enthusiasm, including a mix of older, more traditional tunes, as well as those more popular and cosmopolitan in nature.

In the mid-1920s Ford's interest in country dance and music moved from being an enjoyable personal hobby to a public campaign. In part a way to enjoy dancing regularly

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[120] "Ford Sees New Hope in Dance," *Detroit News,* 11 December 1925, cited in Gifford, "Henry Ford's Dance Revival and Fiddle Contests: Myth and Reality."

[121] Ford R. Bryan, *Friends, Families & Forays: Scenes from the Life and Times of Henry Ford,* (Dearborn, Michigan: Ford Books, 2002), 12, cited in Paul M. Gifford, "Henry Ford's Dance Revival," 308.

[122] Paul M. Gifford, "Henry Ford's Dance Revival and Fiddle Contests," 310.

and in part an effort to revive a style Ford thought to be much more appropriate and preferable to jazz and the Charleston, Ford began seeking musicians and a dancing master. While on a trip to Massachusetts, Ford met local dancing master Benjamin B. Lovett. Impressed by Lovett's efforts to recall and learn the "old-fashioned" dances, Ford invited him to Dearborn and offered him a job. Ford sectioned off a corner of his Engineering Building in Dearborn to create a ballroom large enough to accommodate seventy couples where Lovett would teach and called in company executives and their wives to share his enthusiasm. When it was immediately apparent that confusion reigned on the dance floor, instruction became compulsory for a time, along with attendance at the Friday night dance.[123]

One of the earliest manifestations of the larger scale public campaign was dancing classes for children. As a dancing master in Massachusetts, Lovett had taught children's exhibition dancing as well as modern ballroom dancing. It is not surprising that, as someone hand-picked by Ford, Lovett shared Ford's convictions that the old-fashioned dances could play a role in instilling manners in young people, and so in May 1925 a dancing and etiquette class was formed with sixteen children that met in the Engineering Building.[124] This quickly outgrew the facility and Lovett requested and received cooperation and space from the physical education department of the Dearborn Public Schools with the Detroit schools following soon after implementing the etiquette and

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[123] Kate O'Neill, "Model T's & Do-si-do's: Henry Ford and the Revival of Country Dancing. The Man who Revolutionized the Automobile Industry also Revitalized an Old-Fashioned Dance Tradition," *Dance Magazine* (August 1997): 52.

[124] Gifford, "Henry Ford's Dance Revival," 319.

dancing program. Ultimately this extended to colleges and universities in addition to over 150 public schools.

In order to help revive the dances Ford felt it was necessary to standardize the different variations that existed. This impetus resulted in a 1926 publication with the help of Lovett, called *"Good Morning": After a Sleep of Twenty-Five Years, Old-fashioned Dancing is Being Revived by Mr. and Mrs. Ford.* The books begins with chapters on style and deportment, followed by descriptions of dances with directions for plain and novelty quadrilles, lancers, contradances, and round dances of various kinds. The introduction, "The Return of the Dance," placed the revival in a political context that seemed to sustain an argument that Ford's motives were propaganda, arguing against dances that were "foreign to the expressional needs of our people" in favor of the dance style outlined in the book which "best fits with the American temperament…that type of dancing which has survived longest amongst the northern peoples."[125]

Part of the promotion of *Good Morning* included the production of phonograph records by Victor, Columbia, and Edison. The dance orchestra had broadcast from WWJ in Detroit for a half hour in December 1925 as part of what the *Detroit News* called the first step in a plan "to nationalize a revival of the old dances."[126] Shortly afterward the orchestra played in Detroit's Arcadia Ballroom where, on a Tuesday evening, in what Lovett called "the greatest gathering I ever saw under one roof at a dance," 5,223 guests

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[125] Ford, *Good Morning: After a Sleep of Twenty-Five Years, Old-Fashioned Dancing is Being Revived by Mr. and Mrs. Ford* (Dearborn, Michigan: Dearborn Publishing Company, 1926), 8.

[126] *Detroit News*, 14 December 1925 cited in Gifford, "Henry Ford's Dance Revival," 324.

paid admission fees while the management turned away another two thousand.[127] The dance orchestra continued to play for weekly dances, which by 1937 had moved to Lovett Hall in Greenfield Village; the calls and the music were nationally broadcast and the ensemble made a few dozen recordings until the early 1940s as Henry Ford's Old-Time Dance Orchestra or as simply Ford Orchestra.[128]

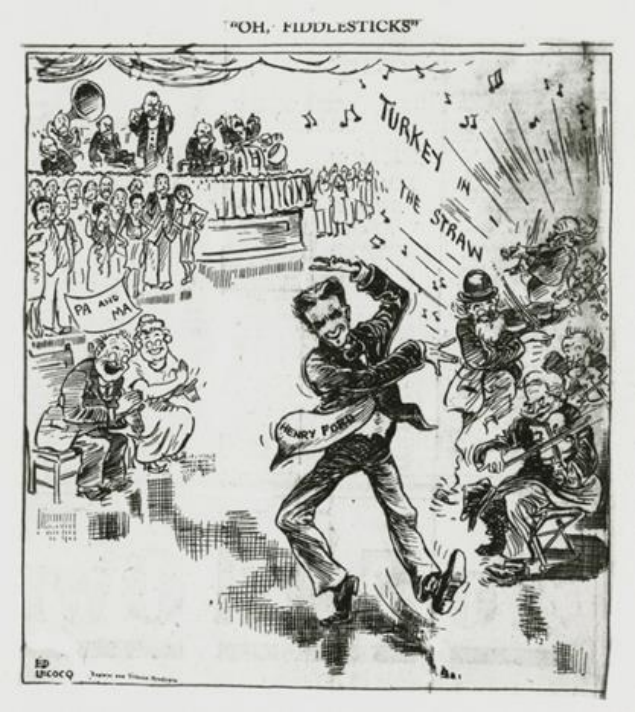

Figure 9: "Oh, Fiddlesticks" cartoon of Henry Ford by Ed Lecocq[129]

[127] Gifford, "Henry Ford's Dance Revival," 325.

[128] O'Neill, "Model T's & Do-si-do's," 53.

[129] Ed Lecocq, "Oh, Fiddlesticks," *The Henry Ford: Online Collections* accessed October 20, 2014, http://collections.thehenryford.org/collection.aspx?objectKey=60111.

Ford helped to initiate a "square dance revival," bringing squares, contras, and "old-time" music into mainstream America in what could be considered a highly mediated reactionary campaign, countering the contemporary music and dance genres. Using the media of the day—recordings, radio, newspapers, and books—old-time music and dance were effectively brought into new urban contexts. This revival with Ford as representative is rife with complications, however. As Henry Ford apparently enacted a plan to "nationalize a revival of the old dances," he continued in the vein of Anglo-American national projects and the Anglophilia of a national folk identity that Cecil Sharp had espoused. As Daniel J. Walkowitz points out, Henry Ford "extolled the fascist Protocols of Zion at the same time as he was publishing and teaching 'American' country dance in his pioneer 'model American' museum at Greenfield Village in Michigan."[130] Although hypernationalists may have been only a minority, Henry Ford was a very visible representative in the country dance movement. Ford's extensive efforts to revive this style of music and dance also acted to explicitly counter the jazz movement and African-American presence in mainstream culture. And while based on vernacular traditions, Ford infused his revivals with an aristocratic code of etiquette. Although the echoes of the play between peasant and aristocracy are certainly not new in the history of country dance, these seeming contradictions would become disturbing revelations, and an impetus for questioning subliminal prejudices for mid-century revivalists.

While Ford's attention no doubt gave fiddling more prominence, it is not the case that it rescued old-time music from the clutches of extinction or from progress. Richard

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[130] Walkowitz, *City Folk*, 154.

Blaustein suggested that Ford's experiences of the general decline of traditional life were shared in the general populace, but old-time music was not yet among its casualties.[131] Most of Ford's programs were contemporaneous with the golden age of commercial old-time recordings and niche marketing of "hillbilly" music by record companies. With the involvement of such a prominent American industrialist, John Bealle suggests that "if Ford saw antique tradition in old-time fiddling, it could well be said that old-time fiddling saw exactly the opposite—progress and opportunity—in Ford."[132]

While there is some irony in the story of Ford acting as a conservative preservationist in the face of "newer" music such as jazz when the dances from his youth he later attempted to revive were, in some cases, new dances, it serves to highlight the complexities and contradictions inherent in "folk revivals" and in aspects of country dance history.[133] Ford's youth dancing era witnessed changes in style: new round dances became

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[131] Richard Blaustein, "The Oldtime Fiddlers Association Movement: A Grassroots Folk Revival," *Southern Folklore* 51: 204.

[132] John Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance*, 164.

[133] The complexities of the idea of "folk revival" are explored in works by, among others, Serge Denisoff, "The Proletarian Renascence: The Folkness of the Ideological Folk," *The Journal of American Folklore* 82, no. 323 (1969): 51 – 65; Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Charles Keil, "The Concept of 'The Folk'," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 16, no. 3 (1979): 209 – 210; Keil, "Who Needs 'The Folk'?" *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15, no. 3 (1978): 263-265; Jens Lund and R. Serge Denisoff, "The Folk Music Revival and the Counter Culture: Contributions and Contradictions," *Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 334 (1971): 394 – 405; Neil V. Rosenberg, ed., *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Charles Seeger, "The Folkness of the Nonfolk and the Nonfolkness of the Folk," in his *Studies in Musicology, 1935 – 1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Daniel J. Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of Folk in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

popular as old contra dances and jigs waned, and a dance called the ripple came into vogue. About the ripple, D.C. Page said in 1882, "What do you think the [pioneer] . . . would say were he to attend a modern ball of today, and see the youngsters dancing the ripple? I suppose they call it the ripple because it makes one ripple all over with laughter to see them scull around the ballroom in all sorts of inhuman shapes and figures which are called graceful."[134] However, the ripple was one of the dances that Ford attempted to revive in the 1920s.

Signs of Change

In the early 1930s a harbinger of change (though it would be delayed) occurred in the English Country Dance movement. In 1930, Pat Shaw, then a thirteen-year-old dancer, wrote an English Country Dance in the "historical style." His dance, "Monica's Delight," used Playford stepping, choreography, and period music, and was found to be quite enjoyable by many dancers. However, writing a new historical dance directly challenged the meaning and rationale for the revival, which had been based on reconstructing old dances. Shaw's dance was not a revived dance, yet it revived the spirit of old dances; it expanded the idea of folk and stimulated new generations of choreographers who would revolutionize twentieth century practice, but it was an idea whose time had not yet come. Most of his dances were not published until after his death in 1977, but Shaw is now a well-known twentieth-century composer of country dances, many of which have become "classic." As Daniel J. Walkowitz explains, "writing a

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[134] "St. Joseph County, Proceedings at the Annual Meeting of the St. Joseph County Pioneer Society, at Centreville, Michigan, June 14, 1882," Pioneer Collections, *Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan* 5 (1884): 516, cited in Gifford, "Henry Ford's Dance Revival," 311.

modern folk dance in the historical style was an oxymoron" at the time, and it would be years before participants and revivalists were ready to embrace the concept.[135] However, it was a hint of things to come. In 1970, Pat Shaw articulated what would become a broader conception among dance participants: "It really depends on what you mean by "folk." I don't think origins matter very much . . . Obviously, a lot of these dances have been composed at one time or another, so if the time happens to be the twentieth century, why worry."[136]

Ralph Page and The Northern Junket

"Modern country dancing has been responsible for a friendship of town and country, young and old, beginner and veteran, "high" and "low" . . . It's a workable democracy."[137]

The impetus from Henry Ford's revival peaked after a few years, but weekly dances, including the one in Lovett Hall, continued to draw dancers. Another surge began in the late 1930s and picked up momentum in the 1940s. The World's Fairs of 1939 and 1940 featured native villages and dances typical to certain nations, including dances called by New Hampshire-based Ralph Page, sparking interest in international dance. Recreational International Folk Dance clubs (RIFD) formed and children experienced folk dancing as part of the physical education curriculum in many public schools. Interest surged in square dancing at both urban and rural dance events, and by the early 1940s

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[135] Walkowitz, *City Folk*, 153.

[136] Hugh Rippon, "The English Country Dance: An Interview with Pat Shaw," *Country Dance and Song* 3 (1970): 27.

[137] Tolman and Page, 23.

California had become a large center for square dance with the Folk Dance Federation of California (formed 1942) and square dance segments in a few Hollywood movies. Beginning in 1940, "weekly square dances were held in the Rainbow Room atop Rockefeller Center in New York with actors such as Bing Crosby and Ronald Coleman presiding over the activities."[138] As square dancing became more popular, clubs and associations formed all over the country. By the mid-1950s Modern Western Squares, or Club Squares had evolved with a more formal, choreographed dance form done in western dress costumes that was "closer to the conservative world of country music than to folk dance."[139]

One of the few callers to maintain and promote contra dance from the 1930s into the 1960s, always calling both contras and squares, was New Hampshire-based Ralph Page. Page was part of a lineage of dancers and musicians in Keene, New Hampshire; his father and grandfather both fiddlers and his mother a dancer. He began as a dancer and made his debut as a caller when he filled in for his uncle in 1930. From 1935 to 1937, Page wrote a series of articles for the magazine *Yankee* and in 1937 published *The Country Dance Book* with *Yankee* staff member, Beth Tolman.

The Country Dance Book contains a selection of squares and contras, as well as descriptive anecdotes about dance in New England, including a certain appreciation for antics and light-heartedness. In the author's note of the 1976 edition, Page confesses that

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[138] Patricia Phillips, "A Philosophical, Historical, and Cultural Analysis of the American Square Dance" (1973:211), cited in Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community," 81.

[139] Walkowitz, *City Folk,* 202.

at its first publication in 1937, "we really believed that everybody in the country knew how to dance a contra dance. How naïve can you be?"[140] For those who didn't know and for those interested in the revival of folk culture, this book brought contra dances to attention and is still an important source of information about the dance tradition in New England. Moreover, Ralph Page was an influential figure and essential to bridging contra dance toward its modern form.

Bob McQuillen, an accordion player with Page's orchestra asserted that Page (called "the dean of American contra dance callers") was the American authority on contra dances in his lifetime.[141] The tunes being played for the dances when McQuillen joined the band in 1947 were "the old traditional stuff…there wasn't any particular new influx."[142] However, Page was not opposed to incorporating new tunes, and in fact, honored his accordion player with a tune called "McQuillen's Squeezebox." While Tolman and Page do come across as pleasantly tolerant of some antics, recounting tales from past generations of practical jokes by "young smart-alecks" and liquor for fiddlers adding zest rather than trouble, personal stories indicate certain expectations of dance behavior.[143] Although *The Country Dance Book* includes recollections of hijinks on the dance floor, Page's daughter Laura Wilson remembered her father insisting that the

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[140] Tolman and Page, *The Country Dance Book*, 3.

[141] David Millstone, *Paid To Eat Ice Cream: Bob McQuillen and New England Contra Dancing* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Farnum Hill Productions, 2002), DVD.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Page and Tolman, *The Country Dance Book*, 20.

dances be done correctly, to flow through the sets, and McQuillen called Page's dancing stately.[144] John Bealle's assessment that Page "was thoroughly contemptuous of dance decorum" feels overstated, although it seems that he did hold mixed feelings about the aristocratic bearings of revivalists such as Henry Ford (the difference of Ralph Page having always been in the living tradition).[145] Page's views on Ford's revival attempt reveal a rather ambiguous appreciation for all Mr. Ford did "to re-awaken slumbering interest in the country dance" with a backhanded compliment on those "things that would rate approval from the Historical Society. There is much to be said for the fine loyalty of these people, their devotion to keeping another "quaint" (his quotes) American custom in repair, even though at times we want to guffaw at these earnest and perspiring ones as they go through their bi-weekly renditions of the Varsovienne and Downeast Breakdown. Hats off, anyway, to them all."[146]

By 1943, Page was leading an urban revival as well, calling squares and contras weekly at the Boston YMCA in addition to leading dances in New Hampshire. In 1944 the series was already drawing over two hundred people every week, and, as an interesting indicator and augury of the urban life of the dances, most that attended were college students.[147] Page (along with some other square dance callers) did not take the

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[144] Millstone, *Paid to Eat Ice Cream*, DVD.

[145] Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance*, 163.

[146] Page and Tolman, *The Country Dance Book*, 9.

[147] Ralph Page and Louise Winston, "NEFFA History: The History of the New England Folk Festival 1944-1994," edited by Tony Parkes, accessed October 25, 2014, http://www.neffa.org/history.html.

Modern Western square dance direction and was not influenced by the "Western" trend in the look and performance of the square dance. Instead, he perpetuated the vernacular tradition and continued to use live music at dance events. Warning against the growing commercialism and competition of the square dance industry in the 1940s and 1950s, Page wrote:

> Has square dancing become a fad? Yes it has, to a certain type of person. Notably the "café" society; by smirking reporters of the metropolitan press; by ham actors of the radio and by Hollywood. All have given this form of recreation the poison kiss of faddism. The pressure is increasing weekly, and the next few months are critical ones in showing the directions we are to take…Beware of the "Johnny-come-lately" leader with all sorts of crazy tunes and figures which are no more in keeping with the spirit of square dancing than a dog is related to a billy goat. Beware of the dancer who would turn square dancing into an athletic contest. And most of all, beware of the person who would turn dancing into a form of political activity.[148]

Page's platform for such arguments was his own publication, *Northern Junket*. A labor of love, Page single-handedly produced 165 issues in fourteen volumes from 1949 until 1984. Each issue contains a forthright editorial, directions and tunes for squares, contras, and folk dances, as well as folk songs, recipes, riddles, tongue-twisters, old wives' tales, and other folklife traditions. There is now a digitized version through The Digital Library at the University of New Hampshire.[149]

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[148] Ralph Page, "Take It or Leave It," *Northern Junket* 1, no. 4, 1949: 3.

[149] An electronic version of *Northern Junket* may be accessed at http://www.library.unh.edu/find/special/northern-junket.

Figure 10: The June 1953 cover of *Northern Junket* 4, no. 1

In October 1944, a combination of dance enthusiasm with gubernatorial concern for ways to counteract wartime stress and promote understanding between cultures presented an opportunity for the first of what would become the New England Folk Festival. The first event, called simply a "Fall Folk Festival" was held at the Boston YWCA for two days of music, dance, and crafts. The festival exhibited RIFD and various groups including Irish, Lithuanian, Polish, Swedish, English country dance, and several American dance groups. A set of dance tunes "just for listening" was played by some of New England's old-time fiddlers. The 1944 festival was more inclusive than some later years and also "included music of Wampanoag and Navajo tribes, as well as Negro spirituals and songs from China (nothing from Germany or Japan, though!)."[150] The

[150] Ralph Page and Louise Winston, "NEFFA History: The History of the New England Folk Festival 1944-1994."

festival continues to this day including "a *lot*" of participatory dance and "*music everywhere!*" (their italics from the website description), with all performers volunteering their time.[151] An association (NEFFA) was chartered in 1950 and sponsors the annual festival, weekly contra dances, the Ralph Page New England Dance Legacy Weekend, a folk concert series, as well as awarding grants. The beloved organization has even been featured in light-hearted comic strips:

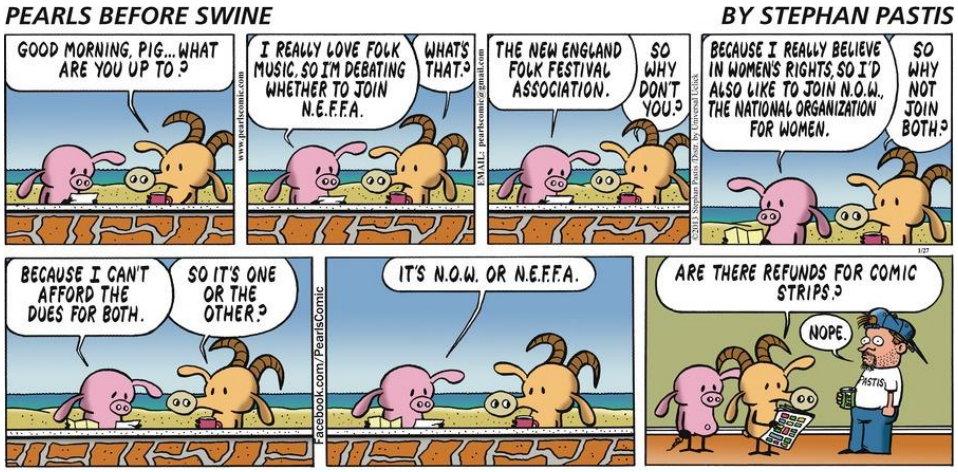

Figure 11: NEFFA in the comics, January 27, 2013

Ralph Page's influence on contra dance is considerable. Although some younger dancers today may not be aware of his impact, there is a definite indebtedness that the current contra dance scene has to Page. In a 1990 interview with Mary Dart, caller, musician, and dance composer Steve Zakon spoke about his dance entitled "With Thanks to the Dean": "…and it's amazing now how many dancers have never even heard of him. And we're doing what we're doing largely because he did it, in the thirties and forties,

[151] "The NEFFA Festival," accessed October 25, 2014, http://www.neffa.org/What_is_Festival.html.

and he kept it alive."[152] Page was an active proponent of dances and taught them across the United States, Europe, and Japan, popularizing what would otherwise be a scholarly interest through his teaching, recordings, and publications. His influence on the next generation of callers such as Dudley Laufman, Tony Parkes, Ted Sanella, and Larry Jennings and the inspiration this had on the continuing and evolving life of contra dance is immeasurable.

John Bealle calls Page "a genuine cultural ancestor for the contra revival."[153] Ralph Page preserved the traditional dance of New Hampshire's Monadnock region, giving attention to contra dance at a time when squares were dominant. As David Millstone points out:

> In the 1950s, some well-respected leaders made efforts to introduce contras into the rapidly expanding square dance movement. As early as 1952, the well-known modern square dance caller Al Brundage co-authored *Contras Are Fun,* but they didn't really catch on among square dancers. It took a different group of people than the established square dancers to embrace contras.[154]

That group of people who would embrace contras included those directly influenced by Ralph Page, most notably, Dudley Laufman who helped breathe new life into contras and helped create an even bigger wave of contra dance revival and expansion.

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[152] Mary Dart, *Contra Dance Choreography,*76.

[153] John Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance,* 198.

[154] David Millstone, "Contras? Squares," https://www.davidmillstonedance.com/writing/essays/82-contras-squares.

The Second Folk Revival and Dudley Laufman

If Ralph Page preserved the traditional dance of New Hampshire's Monadnock region, Dudley Laufman made it exciting for a new generation. Indeed, some say he saved it, further influencing a generation that would take contra dance across the United States. As Jim Collins said in his article for the December 1995 edition of *Yankee Magazine*, "He took the torch of a dying oral tradition from the hands of a few old-timers and fired up an entire generation of young people. He took contra dancing out of the history books and made it part of a living lifestyle."[155] Laufman, a musician and caller, was the charismatic figure at the center of the dance revival in the late 1960s and 1970s, whose effects can still be seen in today's vibrant contra dance scene.

As a teenager, Laufman (born 1930) moved to New Hampshire to work at a dairy farm and began to attend local dances. In an interview when he received a 2009 National Heritage Fellowship, Laufman remembered the kitchen junket at the farm where he worked, "the smell of wood smoke [from a fire in the fireplace], the rosin-y sound of the fiddle, and the firelight gleaming on the girls' hair, and I was hooked."[156] Laufman also remembers dancing in towns such as Keene, Nelson, and Peterborough in New Hampshire where the music and the dancing were a little different than in homes, and also falling in love with those dances. He attended a dance called by Benjamin Lovett in

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[155] Cited in Janet Farrar-Royce, "Dudley Laufman's 'Calling': 'Everybody Dance!'," *Fiddler Magazine* Fall 2002, accessed 28 October 2014, http://www.laufman.org/ArticlesReveiws/FiddlerMagazine.htm.

[156] Interview with Nick Spitzer, National Heritage Fellowship Award Concert, September 2009, accessed October 28, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfJhQBefnXQ.

1949 and remembers the dancing master dressed in a tuxedo, teaching the minuet: "he was kind of a stuffed shirt, not our cup of tea."[157] Laufman called his first dance in 1948, soon started his own musical group for the dances (which later became the Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra), and has been deeply involved ever since. The homey, communal feel is what stays with him wherever he plays, whether it is in a gymnasium or at a large festival.

Laufman brought a rather different feel to contra dancing. Regarded as "good-looking and charismatic" by Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra musician Deanna Stiles; Sarah Bauhan (also a musician with the group) remembers something "sort of the equivalent of the Grateful Dead – this scene and following. Everywhere Dudley went, this group came with him."[158] Crowds of young people flocked to "Dudley dances" throughout New England, his following made up of many Back-to-the-Land-ers, and what some might call "hippies." The "Dudley dances" were "cool" for a younger crowd at a time when callers such as Duke Miller and Ralph Page may have begun to appear somewhat old and formal in the backdrop of 1960s and '70s American youth culture.

The second folk revival of the twentieth century, which occurred midcentury, has largely been viewed as a music revival, but it transformed dance as well. The "boom" of the revival is often dated to the late 1950s when the Newport Folk Festival began and a counterculture began to emerge amid the mobilization of folk music by civil rights and anti-nuclear-bomb movements, though its antecedents really date back even further. Its

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[157] Kate O'Neill, "Model T's & Do-Si-Do's," 52.

[158] David Millstone, *Paid To Eat Ice Cream.*

causes and effects were many, and as Thomas Turino notes, one of its effects was to usher in participatory music making all over the country.[159] The inclusiveness of a "longways for as many as will" certainly provided an opportunity for participation, and changes that began in contra dance at this time opened even further possibilities for participation.

Bob McQuillen noted that around this time "the scene started to change…getting away from the old format and going into a more today approach to the thing. The squares diminished and the contras became more *the* "in," new "in" thing."[160] Changes in the scene included music, dance style, and a certain focus on social values. The Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra was described by Laufman as "sort of a lifestyle" rather than something that included actual "card-carrying" members, with over seventy musicians at various times. Sarah Bauhan described their early 1970s sound as "a wall of sound" with the "stage full of musicians," up to twenty at a time. Laufman's approach was inclusive, with a "sit-in" or open band approach where community musicians were welcome to play with the group as they pleased, depending on the venue. For recordings, a number of which were made by the group, however, the number of musicians was pared down. Twenty years after their first recording, Laufman described the group: "We played no leads, no medleys. It was absolutely fresh."[161] Through the group, his own writing, and

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[159] Turino, *Music as Social Life*,155.

[160] Millstone, *Paid to Eat Ice Cream.*

[161] Jim Collins, "Who Still Follows the Pied Piper of Canterbury?," *Yankee Magazine* December 1995, accessed November 1, 2014, http://www.laufman.org/Yankee1995.htm.

others who began writing tunes, Laufman infused new material into the contra music world. Sarah Bauhan recalled being "hungry for new material and it was coming at us faster than we could learn it."[162] She also noted the various trends of music styles, including the Irish wave, the Scottish wave, the French-Canadian wave, and the Nova Scotian or Cape Breton wave, as the possibilities came pouring in.

Changes to the scene included changes in the style of dancing, some in choreography but also in expressivity.[163] Pianist Marianne Taylor describes the "Dudley bump" as a "clumpy step, bent over slightly at the waist" in contrast to the stately, upright posture of Ralph Page.[164] Gene Murrow describes the style of dancing at "Dudley dances" as "slow, with lots of clogging and a very grounded, earthy style."[165]

An obvious influence was Laufman's time on staff at Pinewoods for dance weeks. In 1973 Laufman led contra dancing, as did Ted Sanella, along with Bob Parker teaching English Country dance, and Jim Morrison teaching Southern Mountain Square dances (also known as running sets, the same that Cecil Sharp had been so excited about). As Murrow notes about the collective influence on contra dance and some changes in choreographic possibilities, "It was quite a stew. After that summer, Dudley began

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[162] Millstone, *Paid to Eat Ice Cream.*

[163] Mary Dart's *Contra Dance Choreography: A Reflection of Social Change* is a nice synopsis on changes and trends from the 1970s to the 1990s.

[164] Millstone, *Paid to Eat Ice Cream.*

[165] Gene Murrow, March 15, 1998 email to ECD listserv, reprinted online by Alan Winston, accessed November 1, 2014, http://www-ssrl.slac.stanford.edu/~winston/ecd/gmurrow.htmlx.

calling Prince William and Childgrove, among others, at the Dudley dances. Ted was writing more and more contras and triplets with English figures (including heys and gypsies). Soon the contra tradition, via Ted and Dudley and others, would embrace the figures, flow, and faster tempos of the English and Southern mountain dances, culminating in the 'zesty contra' style."[166] That "zesty" style is described by Larry Jennings in his book *Zesty Contras* as "smooth, exhilarating swings; powerful allemandes and other strong connections; strict compliance with the phrasing; elegance, with eye contact and without extra turns or twirls," including that "a zesty dancer puts more than the minimum enthusiasm into a dance with the expectation of more than the minimum reward. A dance figure, sequence, program, or series which encourages such dancing is also referred to as zesty."[167]

The account that passed through Ralph Page to Dudley Laufman depicted contras as allied with rural life and as fundamental to a worldview that linked dance to community.[168] Participants drawn to Dudley dances in the late 1960s and early 1970s were primarily white college-aged urbanites. From the impetus of the Folk Music Revival and the counterculture, many of similar social values were propelled into the contra dance scene – a rather left-liberal political bent, opposition to the Vietnam War, interest in both

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[166] Ibid.

[167] Larry Jennings, *Zesty Contras: A Selection of 500 New England Style Dances with a Provocative Explanatory Text* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The New England Folk Festival Association, 1983), 4.

[168] Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance*, 198-199; Laufman 2009 National Heritage Interview.

tradition and experimentation, desires for alternative, communal, rural lifestyles were common. Contra dance provided an accessible, community-oriented, participatory experience that served as a sort of link between tradition, popular mediated folk music, and counterculture values. Literature on contra dancing since the second folk revival typically emphasizes these qualities, occasionally using labels such as "anti-modernist" in descriptions.[169]

Buffeted by the Folk Revival, country dance made appearances at the Newport Folk Festival and the National Folk Festival among others. In the 1960s Laufman traveled throughout New England calling parties, kitchen junkets, and events, bringing contra dance to large numbers of new dancers, a sort of "Pied Piper of Canterbury." By the early 1970s his popularity was at a height and the revival in full swing. Dancers and musicians arrived at his events "spilling into the hall like a tipped-over basket of many colored balls of yarn."[170] After a time, however, the scene changed again. As the music and dance became so apparently open to possibility, the demand for more complicated dances and more variety increased. Deana Stiles noted the decline in Laufman's popularity because of the demand for more music and more dances, "he chose to just go

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[169] Throughout part of the twentieth century, the prevalent view celebrated "folk" as pure and primitive, unsullied by the "modern." Thomas Turino (2008) and John Bealle (2005) specifically use the term "antimodernist" in their discussions of old-time music and dance, including contra dance.

[170] Dudley Laufman, "How MUCky Got Invented," accessed November 1, 2014, http://www.mombu.com/music/old-time/t-two-poems-how-mucky-got-inventer-how-square-dance-calling-got-invented-1625560.html .

completely the opposite of everybody else, back to the roots. He has this other following now."[171]

Laufman is heralded as a major catalyst for creating what is now a nationwide grassroots network of dancers, callers, and musicians. Dudley dancers took contras across the United States, through the heartland in Bloomington, IN, and to the west coast to San Diego and Palo Alto.[172] Indeed, that generation of dancers initiated many of the dances ongoing today, including communities that have contributed to this study – the Baltimore Folk Music Society's Wednesday Night Contras, The Friday Night Dance at Glen Echo near Washington D.C., the Charlottesville Contra Dance, and the Old Farmers Ball near Asheville. While old-time dance and contra dance had lived in New England towns and Appalachian hollows, by the late 1960s, there was an eager new audience, predominantly of back-to-the-land hippies reveling in the (imagined) idyllic rural portrait and a sense of community. There was a new smooth, grounded style with exciting improvisational clogging and innovative dances with original patterns; contra dance was flowering across the country by the end of the 1970s. The number of dances all around the country has mushroomed in the last thirty years.

Toward a Modern Urban Contra Dance

Dudley Laufman kept his dances the way he likes them – relatively simple patterns so everyone could join in with plenty of time for standing around and chatting

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[171] Millstone, *Paid To Eat Ice Cream.*

[172] John Bealle's *Old-Time Music and Dance* recounts the formation of the dance community inspired by Dillon Bustin, who danced with Laufman.

between dances. But as Ralph Page before him, Laufman and his dances began to be seen as old-fashioned. The new generation was an increasingly urban, sophisticated dance crowd that longed for the rural idyll but also liked rock-and-roll. The back-to-the-land movement was waning. There were fewer farmers and more computer programmers and engineers who commuted to dances, drove miles to hear hot bands, and sometimes danced several times a week. This generation wanted more challenging dances, rather than dances for relaxing after the work was done (Laufman grumbles about "aerobic dancers"). Dancers began spicing up the figures with twirls and flourishes. A new dancing community evolved, based around the dance rather than families and neighbors, with shared values and interests and an understood rhythm and code of behavior to the gatherings; but this wasn't the type of community Laufman cherished.[173] A growing trend toward the dance community illustrates what is now perhaps the now less common form of the community dance.

The population of the contra dance communities has changed since the 1970s, accompanied by changes in social dynamics. There has been quite a growth in the number of dancers and these dancers represent a wider cross-section of the general population than was true earlier in the revival. Previously many dancers were interested in an alternative to modern lifestyles, seeking a change by going back to the land and by exploring roots and tradition. While the essence of the back-to-the-land movement ebbs

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[173] Jim Collins, "Who Still Follows the Pied Piper of Canterbury?," *Yankee Magazine* December 1995, accessed November 1, 2014, http://www.laufman.org/Yankee1995.htm.

and flows, and certainly has a contemporary representation, many dancers now come to contra dance mainly for its social activity. In a 1990 interview, Bob Dalsemer noticed:

> There's not much concern about whether it's "traditional" or not . . . That definitely counted for something in the good old seventies, you know, part of the back to the land and back to the earth, and Mother Earth and Mother Nature and all that…That was an important catch word. This is something that people before us did. This is something which we are linked to, some past reality, even if it's a reality that we and our families never shared . . . But not anymore. People are coming into it purely for social reasons. Hey, this is a good place to meet people.[174]

In fact, many dancers appreciate, and even prefer, the changes of the last few decades. Until the 1950s the dances typically began with partners facing each other across long lines, as it was outlined in Playford's manual: . In the 1950s, Modern Western Square Dance caller Herbie Gaudreau introduced a formation with partners side-by-side, rather than across, which resulted in alternating genders in the same line. This formation became known as Becket formation in the 1970s, named after the YMCA camp where Gaudreau taught in Becket, Massachusetts. This Becket formation and improper formation, which also results in alternating genders in a line but with partners opposite each other, have grown in popularity. Triple minors, in which the lines are divided into subsets of three couples, have essentially been left behind in favor of duple minors, subsets of two couples. This preference reflects the trend of increased activity, moving away from dances that include active and inactive couples to all-moving choreography.

Increased activity is happening not only in dance sequences but also within and between the dance events, both in physical motion, variety, and the number of dancing

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[174] Cited in Dart, *Contra Dance Choreography*, 163 – 164.

opportunities. Dances became longer in the 1980s as bands began playing medleys of two or three tunes, growing from seven or eight minutes into ten or fifteen minute dances. The time between dances for socializing decreased as the impetus to "dance, dance, dance" drove the momentum. The longways style came to dominate an event, but the desire for variety within the longways dances increased. New and different dances now appear on a regular basis rather than a similar modest repertoire at every dance event, whereas in the past the modest selection of dances served more as a backdrop for socializing.

One opportunity for socializing and for a wider variety of dance styles is at the dance weekend. Similar to the Pinewoods model for a dance week (which is still thriving today), regional dance weekends have proliferated since the 1980s. Giving dancers a time to immerse themselves in dance, music, and fellowship, dance weekends are quite an attraction for experienced dancers. While these weekends are typically centered around contra dances, the additional time provides opportunities for a variety of dancing and workshops such as waltzing, couples dancing, flatfooting, singing, and music workshops. Dance weekends are equally loved for the time participants take to just hang out or play music together as they are for the abundance of dance time.

Gender roles have become more flexible since the 1980s. While terminology including "ladies" and "gents" is still quite common, since the '80s there has been some movement toward gender neutral dance roles. Carl Wittman, a Scottish Country Dance instructor who taught in San Francisco in the 1970s and at a commune in Wolf Creek, Oregon sought to be more inclusive of the gay community and those who preferred not to identify with gender. Initially Wittman and his partner, Allan Troxler, used red and green

pieces of cloth to identify roles, as well as gender-free language such as "left" and "right file."[175] The gender-free movement spread nationwide through the 1980s but did not gain the same momentum that the gay MWSD movement did. Erica Nielsen speculates that this is because contra dance groups were already welcoming of people with alternative lifestyles "because dancers themselves often dodged mainstream culture."[176] Currently, some dance communities keep a few neckties on hand for women to wear as an indication that they are dancing the "lead," or "gent's" role. Often dance weekend organizers will opt to not gender balance the weekend registrants. Gender balancing ensures an equal number of male and female dancers under the supposition that the gendered dancing roles are maintained. A popular saying recently initiated in the Washington D.C. area suggests to "dance with who's comin' atcha!" – useful in many situations.

Innovation and experimentation by bands in the 1970s and 1980s helped grow the contra scene and opened further possibilities for contra music. David Cantieni, who cofounded Swallowtail in 1978 and Wild Asparagus in 1984, recalled that "people tried all kinds of tunes: Beatles tunes, old Swing tunes, show tunes. Anything that's thirty-two bars and the right phrasing [was] fair game."[177] This approach created a model that fit the aesthetics for younger players after the 1970s who had grown up with rock and roll; a

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[175] Walkowitz, *City Folk*, 233.

[176] Erica M. Nielsen, *Folk Dancing, The American Dance Floor,* Ralph G. Giordano, series editor (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2011), 126.

[177] Cited in Nielsen, *Folk Dancing*,123.

model that suggested flexibility and creativity. Just as individual improvisation was added by dancers in the form of flourishes and twirls, musicians began improvising with the music as well. Wild Asparagus, one of the most widely traveled bands in the early 1980s was known for improvisations on concertina, oboe, and piano. Thomas Turino observes the continuation of opportunities for improvisation as another generation embraces contra dance, and his son, Matt's preference for improvisation on fiddle.[178] The currently popular contra dance band Great Bear Trio is beloved for embracing improvisation within a jam band aesthetic.

Many changes that have largely been incorporated into contra dance throughout the past few decades have become standard in what is now sometimes referred to as the Modern Urban Contra Dance, the characteristics of which I list in chapter one. Musician and caller, Jeff Kaufman, proposed models of contemporary contra dance (with some debate and disagreement). Kaufman suggested that the primary differences in what he classifies as Modern Urban Contra Dance (MUC) and Modern Rural Contra Dance are in frequency of the dance event, types of dances included in the event, and the experience and attitudes of the dance participants. In his estimation, the Modern Urban Contra Dance occurs weekly to its rural equivalent's monthly event. The urban setting focuses on contras, where "nearly all dances are equal turn duple minor and include a partner swing. Few chestnuts. Squares are looked down on. Whole set dances are *really* looked down on."[179] He offers this in contrast to his assessment of rural dances where some locations

[178] Turino, *Music as Social Life,* 183.

[179] Jeff Kaufman, "Models of Contra Dance," accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.jefftk.com/p/models-of-contra-dance.

dance chestnuts, occasionally whole set dances, and squares are more common, partly as a way to deal with small turnouts.

While these characteristics may allow a simple classification, the larger context of Modern Urban Contra Dance is one that provokes conflicting opinions, particularly in regard to the motivation and attitudes of dance participants. Musician, teacher, and caller, David Kaynor summarizes differing points of view and his own opinion:

> As I read it, a large category of dances and the dancers who enjoy them are sweepingly dismissed as "MUCky", inconsequential, socially challenged, crazed, and worse. I feel I'm reading that "real" folk dancing and "good" folk dancing are on some kind of moral high ground because of promoting socializing more than learning choreography, while "Modern Urban Contra Dancing", because of doing the opposite, is in the toilet. In my opinion, it's this thinking which is perilously close to the toilet. I've been on a lot of stages and a lot of dance floors where I've seen copious evidence that these much-maligned modern compositions contribute significantly to the enabling of a growing number of people of diverse ages and abilities to learn choreography while *enhancing* desirable social interaction…We could do worse than to let go of the notion that if it's recent, it's for the college-educated software engineers, human services people, and sensation junkies to the exclusion of the less formally educated tradespeople and farmhands and people who unacademically treasure the past. I don't know of any solid evidence which supports this.[180]

Kaynor is generally positive about the proliferation of dances and music as well:

> Our many local dance scenes and the American contra dance scene as a whole are a very richly detailed patchwork quilt. It's getting more richly detailed all the time. Although I have my share of concerns and complaints, the bottom line is that I'm more and more proud of it, and us, all the time. To create is to invest in our experience of living. Let's *really* be alive; let's *really* create. I don't care if the ratio of mediocrity to excellence in new contra dance compositions is 100 to 1. I say, what are we waiting for? Let's get to it! Let's compose 1,000![181]

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[180] David Kaynor, "Assumptions," accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.davidkaynor.com/Assumptions.html.

[181] Ibid.

While any distinction between a modern urban contra dance and its alternatives is bound to be a bit fuzzy and with a good bit of grey area, the style described by Janet Bertog has become incredibly popular. Contra dances still also occur in rural areas, in schools, at parties and junkets. Whatever the model may be, there is perhaps the philosophy to "let a thousand flowers bloom."

In recent years the Modern Urban Contra Dance has certainly blossomed. In its case, what was once an activity of an existing community has become an activity that creates community. What was localized has become widespread with increased sharing of style and standardization. Many contemporary dancers value the physicality of the all-moving newer dances and the opportunities for added flourishes. Given the choice to dance or not, many dancers, both new and seasoned participants, choose to dance regardless of the specific character of the event.

The newest movement among contra dance communities is the techno or crossover contra dance, which I examine in chapter six. Fully DJ'ed techno contra events represent one current end of the spectrum of contemporary contra dance. Alongside events using recorded music, a few bands blur the line between recorded and live music. The band Double Apex combined recorded samples with live traditional music, while the band Perpetual e-Motion has gained popularity with their heavy use of electronic effects and looping which allows them to build complex arrangements in the moment with just two musicians. These events co-exist with the more traditional live music events, and none of those involved with the proliferation of crossover contra want it to interfere with the more traditional events.

While some would say that the contra dance scene lost its oppositional status as part of the youth culture, it still operates in the margins in regard to most commercially oriented music and dance. It may indeed be the case that some of the countercultural aspects have become more prominent in the broader conversation of American society, and thus do not seem so oppositional in contra dance. There do linger aspects of those values, however, and some evidence in the contra communities of a waxing of the back-to-the-land philosophy. The current contra scene must be described in terms more nuanced than the modernist and anti-modernist binaries represent. In a 2009 interview, musician Ethan Hazzard-Watkins described the newest generation of musicians and dancers, which he considers himself part of:

> The scene that I'm really part of, and that I connected to, is very creative, very accepting of innovation…Where I live, there's a really strong local organic food movement – people who are farmers, people who are home gardeners, people who are food activists of one kind or another. I think that this group has a strong natural affinity for contra dancing…[Some dancers] are connected to this sort of punk, activist, old-time music, organic-food, dumpster-diving, hopping-freight-trains kind of scene.[182]

The process of change since the second folk revival (as ever) includes both individual and community evaluation. As Ralph Page and Beth Tolman consider in their country dance philosophy: "Individualism of the ideal kind is encouraged: all, the dancers, the orchestra, the caller, may express themselves, improvise on the theme to their hearts' content, provided they show respect for the theme itself."[183] Throughout its history, variations on the theme have been possible because the theme itself is so simple.

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[182] Quoted in Nielsen, *Folk Dancing*, 127.

[183] Page and Tolman, *The Country Dance Book*, 24.

Szwed and Marks hit upon what feels to be a longstanding truth about the simple nature of the music and dance in their discussion of African-American influence on European set dances, noting that "what was being developed was a form capable of absorbing folk, popular, and classical musics and molding them to new functions… there is the sense that these European dance forms were flexible and open to transformation and improvisation, at least within the performances of Afro-Americans." [184] Old-time musician and dancer, Pete Sutherland, echoed that suggestion when he questioned what was attractive and what was being revived in southern old-time music. His conclusion was that "the key source of this distinctive sound was not conservative 'resistance to outside influences' but rather its systematic openness to the influences of diverse non-European cultures, notably African."[185]

As in other points in time, influences from contemporary popular culture often find a way into the dance communities. The boundaries for acceptable improvisation have been pushed further and further, and with individual and community evaluation, contra dance continues to evolve in the early twenty-first century. It is here that my study takes place; as yet another generation embraces the living tradition of contra dance.

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[184] Szwed and Marks, "The Afro-American Transformation of European Set Dances and Dance Suites," 32.

[185] Quoted in Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance,* 163.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTRA DANCE AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Each contra dance event is unique, but there are resemblances, patterns, and expectations uniting individual events. Each local contra dance community, likewise, is both unique and is more broadly representative of contra dance communities at large. With few exceptions, region is generally not a strong determinant of behavior; contra dance groups everywhere adopt similar practices. In this perspective, the national network of individual local contra dance communities, each with permeable and sometimes overlapping boundaries, can be analyzed as a community of shared practices.

The community of practice was a suggested theme for a 2001 volume of the journal *Western Folklore*, with a specific focus on traditional music and dance. Editors Paul Jordan-Smith and Laurel Horton assert that the collection of papers included in the volume deal with groups that "are '*communities of practice*,' even if the feelings of communality do not define in full the lives of their individual members," as they "already fulfill, in the complex dynamics of interaction, those criteria which justify applying the term."[1] The authors of the various articles are less certain in applying the term. Several authors seem to be evaluating the concept of community of practice (rather than the

[1] Paul Jordan-Smith and Laurel Horton, "Guest Editors' Introduction," *Western Folklore* 60, no. 2/3 (Spring – Summer, 2001): 106.

music and dance group) from the perspective of a differently held view of what community is.

Burt Feintuch's contribution does not directly address the community of practice concept, but instead outlines his concern at the continued and variable use of the term "community" among scholars, suggesting that an overapplication "waters down the fundamental idea of community's intensity and density." In his estimation, too often are the social relationships one-dimensional to use the word community, when what is actually present among the group as well as researcher is a longing for community. After proposing that a new metaphor may be in order because, perhaps "'community' has failed us," he reveals his own preference of "moral community," and concedes that many music-based groups "have also managed to create a social space that is moral [concern both for one's own integrity and for the well-being of others], and despite its contingent and ephemeral qualities, this allows them to feel the kind of connections long associated with community, however fleeting the experience."[2]

In the article of this volume addressing contra dance, Laurel Horton also seems hesitant to apply the term community, offering her solution with the use of the term "communality" instead.[3] Rather than looking directly at the practices of contra dance, her paper focuses on non-dance related activities, the creation and display of quilts made by three different groups in order to explore communal behavior. Horton argues that a dance

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[2] Burt Feintuch, "Longing for Community," *Western Folklore* 60, no. 2/3 (Spring – Summer 2001): 159.

[3] Laurel Horton, "Material Expressions of Communality among Dance Groups," *Western Folklore* 60, no. 2/3 (Spring – Summer 2001): 203 – 226.

community must do more than simply dance together, cautions about too quickly adopting the referential term simply based on the group's own use, and analyzes her observations of "complex and stable networks of affiliation characterizing many groups, which they express in a multitude of traditional ways on and off the dance floor."[4]

While listed under the volume's general title, "Communities of Practice," many of these articles only begin to allude to the application of the framework proposed by Étienne Wenger, and indeed still center around the larger debate of the use of the word community at all. None of these articles seems to go beyond a basic definition further into Wenger's concepts, rather the ongoing debate about "community" continues. For my part, I find the language and parameters of Wenger's theory potentially useful, in particular when considering the ways many people interact currently in North American society (part of which is reflected in the observance of the diminishing community dance and the rise of the dance community).

With some understanding and appreciation for the long, complex history of the terminology, I propose to explore the concept of community in this chapter as it may be applied to contra dance, specifically using the community of practice framework. I see more potential than is yet fulfilled in the possibility of investigating the shared resources, ongoing negotiations of participation and reification, and the way new or "outside" ideas are navigated in the community (as represented the generational encounter). It is apparent from this *Western Folklore* volume that the suggestion has been made for the consideration of community of practice to be applied to traditional music and dance; it is

[4] Ibid., 204.

my intention to explore this framework and apply it more thoroughly to show how this model can work in contra dance and to outline the ways in which contra dance may be considered a community. Of particular interest for me is getting beyond basic parameters of a community of practice to investigate the intertwining processes of participation and reification for the production of meaning and negotiations among the community, particularly in regard to recent trends in contra dance.

This work adds to other literature on ways specific dance forms have helped shape a community as well as to literature examining music and dance as a means for community creation and community reinforcement.[5] Additionally, this study contributes to scholarship specifically on contra dance, which is nearly always referred to using the term community but, except for Horton's article broaching the idea (yet, steering away from it by means of "communality"), has not been examined under the community of practice framework.

Using the community of practice framework, I give specific attention to the practices: the shared repertoire of resources such as routines, experiences, ways of doing things, discourse, gestures, actions and concepts that the community has produced or adopted. Some aspects that comprise a contra dance community are apparent, others must be learned and understood by gaining a certain amount of cultural competence. I agree with Laurel Horton that the community must do more than simply dance, and while non-

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[5] See for example: Cynthia Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Sally Ann Ness, *Body, Movement, and Culture: Kinesthetic and Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

dance activities are informative about the scope of relationships, I think there is further opportunity to investigate more of what happens on the dance floor. In my estimation, there are an abundance of behaviors enacted even within the dancefloor confines that are of value in examining. Much of what I explore here are mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, means and modes of belonging in the community. Music and dance are core practices of the contra dance community which I address in detail in the next chapter. Here, I address community behaviors that categorically convey meaning, many that indicate nuanced signs of belonging and that frequently serve as sites for negotiation of consensus, identity, consent and transgression.

A Sense of Community

The word community often calls to mind family and friends, tribe, nation, a sense of familiarity, safety and security. Genetically and culturally we are social beings and our history predisposes us to need and to care for each other. We need others and they need us, but modern society conceals this in many ways with opportunities for independence and self-determination. The other side of what seems like independence and self-sufficiency, however, includes loneliness and fear. Examples abound, particularly in the media, of the fear that can plague society. Christopher Thomson considers community dance a healing respite from such aspects of society: "We need to counter fear with trust and care, and that's where dance has so much to offer."[6] A North Carolina caller that I spoke with recognized this quality in contra dance: "I watch people learn to love other

[6] Christopher Thomson, "Foreword" in *An Introduction to Community Dance Practice,* ed. Diane Amans (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), x.

people by holding them in their arms and looking into their eyes. I watch people care for each other on the dance floor."[7]

Many contra dance participants mention a sense of this type of community feeling as a reason for their participation. One dancer I spoke with mentioned its utmost importance to him:

> In my opinion, community is first and foremost in contra dancing. Before I began contra dancing I had no notion of community. When I discovered contra dancing, I actually had no idea it was a "community" dance. I knew it was a folk dance and I kind of knew it was a set dance, but not necessarily a place where everyone coming in was greeted and warmly invited in. I was enveloped in the warmth of community.[8]

North Carolina dancer, Julie, shared similar thoughts with me about her experience:

> One of the main reasons I kept coming to contra dance after my first time was and continues to be the wonderful people who attend the dances. [Contra dance] has to be one of the best communities I have ever experienced. The people are very welcoming, kind, helpful, fun, caring, friendly…I could go on. This contra dance community really makes me feel cared about, which is a very important feeling for every person to experience.[9]

"Community" is often expressed by contra dance participants as a feeling and a sense of something experientially knowable; defining what it is and what it comprises, however, proves a bit more complicated:

> I think that community exists where you find it and in many, many forms.
>
> I have long been thinking about what it means to be a community in contra dancing and have been struggling to put thoughts into coherent words. I think that one would say "you'll know it when you see it."

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[7] Personal communication, December 28, 2012.

[8] Personal communication, April 9, 2014.

[9] Personal communication, December 28, 2012.

And in an article for the "Heritage" newsletter, Bob Stein enumerates various possibilities for where to find community, in the end resorting, once again, to personal experience:

> So what is this thing called "community"? Is it some nebulous concept bandied about by callers, dancers, and musicians at workshops? Is it the number of potlucks, outings, birthdays celebrated, friendships, marriages, children that are generated from one's local dance? Is it just the dance itself? Is it the "cool people", or the "nerds"? And what about the different dance types: is the contra dance community similar in structure to the international folk dance community? Is community defined by geographical location, or are we all part of one world-wide community? And if that is so, how does one hold a potluck for **that**? And what about the communities-within-communities? One can speak of the community of dancers, of musicians, of callers, of organizers. And what about the discrete groups of people who come together as social entities **within** each type of dancing – do they define what a community is? Hmmm . . . I keep asking questions, and instead of narrowing the focus of this concept, I seem to have expanded it to the limits of infinity. It seems that I can only rely on my personal experience.[10]

To understand the sense of "community" as it is expressed by contra dance participants, these personal descriptions are helpful, but what is experientially understood by community members proves elusive as an academic definition.

Defining community

Community has long been recognized as a fundamental theme in the social sciences. It has been just as well recognized for the difficulty in pinning down a definition for it. In 1955, sociologist George Hillery identified ninety-four definitions for

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[10] Bob Stein, "What is This Thing Called 'Community'?" Heritage Newsletter, accessed April 9, 2015, http://www.musaique.com/contradance/community/12-what-is-this-thing-called-community.

"community" in the literature with no overall congruence of meaning except that they all dealt with people.[11] By 2011 the case was not much clearer in literature of musical scholarship when Kay Kaufman Shelemay wrote of the complicated history of the expression and its replacement with alternatives, before offering her own ample parameters for a musical community:[12]

- a collectivity constructed through and sustained by musical processes and/or performances
- can be socially and/or symbolically constituted
- does not require the presence of conventional structural elements nor must it be anchored in a single place
- a social entity, an outcome of a combination of social and musical processes, rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves

"Community" is one of a host of terms that have been suggested in analytical frameworks by scholars to define and understand the subgroups that play an important role in the lives of many people in contemporary North American society, many of which could be applied to contra dance. In his book *Seeking Many Inventions: The Idea of Community in America*, political scientist Philip Abbott suggests that a culture based on Lockean premises (such as the United States) will naturally invent communities that people join voluntarily rather than inherit, but that some of the inventions challenge presupposed notions of community.

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[11] G. A. Hillery, "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement," *Rural Sociology* 20, no. 2 (1955): 111 – 123.

[12] Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 349 – 390.

Abbott describes an "instant community," where "intimate anonymity" can flourish in a collective not reliant on time, geographical space, and primary relationships to create fellowship and community.[13] In many ways, contra dance is an example of an instant community where intimate anonymity can flourish because there are varying degrees of participation within the community. As Dorothea Hast notes: "At a contra dance event it is possible to be physically close to many people and to share the experience of dancing together, but in actuality, to have no further commitment to them outside the dance and indeed, to not even know their names."[14]

Contra dance could also serve as an example of what Robert Owen Gardner calls a "portable community." Much like the bluegrass festival life Gardner depicts, contra dance communities can be "spaces for intimate and inclusive *gemeinschaft* [communal] social interaction" that participants create "as an alternative to geographically rooted neighborhoods and participate with varying levels of commitment."[15] Gardner observes that portable communities "surface in multiple locales but take on a strikingly similar form and logic that is instantly familiar to members. With relative ease, members can connect and bond with others without having formal contacts or institutional relationships to establish initial entrée into the setting."[16]

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[13] Philip Abbot, *Seeking Many Inventions: The Idea of Community in America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 164 – 165.

[14] Dorothea Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community: Contra Dance in New England" (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 1994), 127.

[15] Robert Owen Gardner, "The Portable Community: Mobility and Modernization in Bluegrass Festival Life," *Symbolic Interaction* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 156.

Gardner's "portable community" bears a resemblance to the phenomenon Ruth Finnegan describes as the "folk club network" in her study of community music making in Milton Keynes. Finnegan writes: "As one much-travelled participant put it, 'they're all the same and different. You can go into any and know they'll be friendly.'"[17] Most contra dances are set up in a similar way such that one could (and, in fact, many do) go to a dance in a different locale with a set of assumptions about what will happen, and feel relatively secure that many of those expectations will be met.

In addition to these community types are alternatively-termed group formations such as "subculture," "pathway," and "scenes," for example.[18] Specific mentions of contra dance are found in the suggestions of cohorts and affinity groups. Thomas Turino applies the term cohort to groups in examining "ways that shared habits bind people together into social groups according to specific aspects of the self." In considering groups that may be drawn to alternatives to modern capitalist lifeways, he further provides the example that "contra dancing and old-time music are the basis of a *cultural cohort* – a social group that forms around the activity itself."[19]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Finnegan, 61.

[18] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians*; Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5 (1991): 368 – 388.

[19] Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 95; 187.

Mark Slobin mentions contra dance in his discussion of affinity groups, "charmed circles of like-minded music-makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding," noting that strong, ineffable attractions often pull people into an activity.[20] As in my experience also, Slobin observes that "contradance enthusiasts…may also belong to groups that perform "vintage" dances (nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular styles) as well as groups that do square dance, Scottish country dance, or even reconstructions of eighteenth-century English social dances of John Playford." (During my research I found a great deal of participant overlap among contra dance, English country dance, and blues dancing, which is particularly popular among younger dancers). Slobin goes on to problematize any clear boundaries by stating that "the listing confounds any sense of belonging out of regional revivalism or ethnic orientation. The only affinity seems to be to dance itself," and that, "in the conditions of modern diversity, we may have to assume, rather than prove, affinity, since the evidence may be hard to come by."[21]

While many of these terms go some way in describing contra dance groups, in this study I use the term "community" for a number of reasons: 1) the term aligns with Étienne Wenger's Community of Practice framework that I use 2) previous scholarship on contra dance sets a precedent in terming the groups as communities that I do not intend to break with because 3) the term "community" honors the way the groups self-identify.

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[20] Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), 98.

[21] Ibid., 56.

Still, a precise definition is elusive. Brian Alleyne suggests that community "is so fundamental a concept, encompassing as it does myriad ways of thinking and talking about human collectivities, that it quite unsurprisingly is a term which is impossible to define with any precision" [22] Yet, despite any vagueness it is still a "warmly persuasive word."[23] And perhaps, as Alleyne suggests, it is a term best understood in action.

Practice

In addressing the question, "what is practice?," Sherrie Ortner broadly asserts that the answer is "almost unlimited: anything people do."[24] In social theory, practices are the observable manifestations by which to begin to comprehend shaping forces between individuals and society. Thomas Turino suggests that observable practices are the realization of "ongoing dialectical interactions between individuals and their social and physical surroundings."[25] This statement has echoes of Pierre Bourdieu's dialectic in his suggestion to build a theory of practice, which would serve as a "precondition for establishing an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*."[26] In his theory of a community of practice,

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[22] Brian Alleyne, "An Idea of Community and Its Discontents: Toward a More Reflexive Sense of Belonging in Multicultural Britain," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 4 (2002): 608.

[23] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[24] Sherrie B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies and History* 26, no. 1 (Jan 1984): 149.

[25] Turino, *Music as Social* Life, 95.

Wenger acknowledges a similar context of participation and reification, noting that the concept of practice connotes not simply doing, but doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what is done.[27]

Community of Practice

In chapter one, I outlined a community of practice along the dimensions of mutual engagement, joint pursuit of a negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire of resources. More recently, on his website, Wenger elaborated on characteristics for identifying a community of practice using similar language: 1) the domain: a shared domain of interest through which is implied a shared competence that may or may not be recognized outside the community and that distinguishes members from other people; 2) the community: in pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships but do not necessarily work together on a daily basis; and 3) the practice: they develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice.[28]

The practice reflects a process of participation and reification: people engage directly in activities and various forms of participation in social life through which are

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[26]Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

[27] Wenger, 47.

[28] Étienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, "Introduction to Communities of Practice: A Brief Overview of the Concept and Its Uses," accessed August 10, 2015, http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/.

produced physical and conceptual artifacts that congeal those experiences into "thingness." Shared resources gain their coherence not in and of themselves, but from the fact that they belong to the practice of the community. Participation and reification are woven together in the negotiation of meaning within the practice and in an experience in the world at large. These are intertwined but distinct lines; "at each moment of engagement in the world, we bring them together anew to negotiate and renegotiate the meaning of the experience. The process is dynamic and active. It is alive."[29] Thus, for a "living tradition," such as contra dance, the community of practice theoretical dimensions provide a neat analytical space. In the following sections, I present characteristics of the contra dance communities of practice of my research - practices that are the result of years of negotiations, participation and reification, and that are likewise presently negotiated.

Participants in the Community

Upon arrival at a contra dance, after entering the building where the dance takes place, one will find a couple of people seated at a table – volunteer gatekeepers for the evening who are there to welcome dancers, accept the entrance fee, and offer additional information about the dance or the dance group. Beyond this table, usually into a larger room, one will likely spot the musicians and the caller for this gathering, and because they are typically amplified, a sound technician. Some of the behind-the-scenes forces that may not be obvious are the board of directors, various committees, and the dance

[29] Étienne Wenger, "Communities of Practice and Social Leaning Systems: The Career of a Concept," accessed August 10, 2015, http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/09-10-27-CoPs-and-systems-v2.01.pdf.

organizer. One of the most apparent features will be the people gathered to dance. My focus here is includes musicians, callers, and dancers, as these groups interact most directly. I do not go into great detail—these are elements well covered in contra dance literature—except to mention aspects not previously addressed that are of relevance in the scope of this paper.

As Wenger notes, those in a community of practice build relationships but do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. In contra dance communities, a weekly dance provides the opportunity to establish and reinforce the community. Often, the same dancers return week after week, forming a core of membership for a local dance. Their relationship with each other and with the contra dance community at large is frequently reinforced by traveling to other regional dances.

Callers

The contra dance caller has become a fixture at dances. As teacher, guide, and tradition bearer, callers have a specialized skill set in the contra dance community. Like the musicians' role, the role of caller is filled by personnel that change from meeting to meeting. A sort of intermediary between dancers and musicians, the caller is the only member from the stage area to speak directly to the dancers, unless and until an organizer makes announcements before the break. Asheville, NC-based caller Beth Molaro speaks of the role of managing the room:

> There's a lot of crowd control from the stage, you've got the bird's eye view, you get to see everything that's going on. If you're not paying attention to everything, something might not be good for someone. You want to facilitate everyone's fun. You have to be mindful and watchful all the time.[30]

Many contra dance callers talk about making people happy and "facilitating fun." They navigate this through a variety of tasks such as choosing material, teaching, and working with groups that include both beginners and experienced dancers. Effective callers are able to gauge the dancers' skill levels, consider the crowd size in the hall, gauge and guide the energy level of the evening (I address this in chapter five) and choose dances accordingly and with respect to the tradition.

Reconciling the trend of the last few decades toward the Modern Urban style with a desire to keep older dances in active repertoire ("chestnuts" such as Hull's Victory, Chorus Jig, and Money Musk) is also in the hands of the callers. Editors of *The Dance Gypsy* asked this question in 1993:

> Does the caller rely on his or her own judgement of what makes a balanced program of old and new dances? (If old dances are included, does the caller's popularity plummet?) Or should a caller kowtow to modern-day dancers' preferences and develop a program that excludes the old-fashioned dances? [31]

Paul, an organizer and caller in the Baltimore area, has echoed the question:

> It has been suggested by different people, for example, that 'chestnuts are boring' and also that 'we need to do more chestnuts in order to preserve them and remember where we came from.' So what do I as a dance leader do to ensure that everyone is happy and having their dance needs met?[32]

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[30] Beth Molaro on her personal style. Interview with Dennis Merrit, Old Farmer's Ball, accessed September 26, 2015, http://www.oldfarmersball.com/TheMusic/.

[31] Val Medve, "Do Today's Callers Ignore Yesterday's Dances?" *The Dance Gypsy* (May 1993): 1.

[32] Personal communication, April 18, 2015.

Callers fall into a continuum in relation to the perceived "tradition" of contra dance – some are interested in history, some want to present as much variety as possible, and some are more interested in being at the forefront of change and innovation. There is also a wide age range for callers in the contra dance community at large, from sixty-somethings to twenty-somethings, fitting their individual perspectives and experiences into calling and integrating all these factors into the own personal style. They all express a desire for the dances to be successful and for people to have a good time. During my fieldwork, I noted that the resolution of these questions for callers at most dances was at the least weighted more toward contras than other formations.

Musicians

There are quite a variety of bands in the contra dance community. The variety and number are appreciated, as a different band is scheduled each time a contra dance meets. Almost all of the dances that I visited for this study featured both local and touring bands. Layered upon the local and touring types, bands of either distinction may be recently formed or may have been together for years (Swallowtail was formed in 1978 and performed at Glen Echo's Contrastock event in 2011), and may be considered more traditional or more innovative. Baltimore, MD, Glen Echo, MD, and Asheville, NC hold regular open band evenings, in which a few musicians are secured to lead the group and any other musician who wishes to play is welcome to participate.

Named bands are generally stable, although substitutes may sit in and some musicians play with multiple bands. Some musicians are relatively new to their role, most at an open band evening are amateur musicians (sometimes part of a band they have formed for their enjoyment), and some musicians are professional or classically trained.

The popular band Elixir is a somewhat non-traditional band consisting of guitar, fiddle, clarinet, trumpet, and trombone. The band biography describes a "blend of driving fiddle and guitar with the rich texture and rhythmic excitement of a full horn section, deftly weaving brassy riffs and daring solos in and out of traditional Irish, French Canadian and New England tunes."[33] Each of the musicians has classical training, and the fiddler and guitarist have been involved in traditional music for much of their lives.[34] Bits of Dixieland, swing, klezmer, and even the guitarist's time abroad in Spain can be heard influencing the sound of the tunes. Elixir is based in New England but is nationally known. As a touring band, they are more likely to be found playing dance weekends and larger dances. Local bands may be comprised of professional local musicians or amateur local musicians. Occasionally, these musicians are also dancers in the community. Again, the roles within the community are not restrictive.

An open band (as can be found in Baltimore, Glen Echo, and Asheville) is usually comprised of local musicians, some of whom may be quite talented amateurs or even professional players. There is not a set personnel for the open band, as anybody may play, although often some of the same players are there each time. While the Asheville Open Contra Band meets for rehearsal, the Glen Echo and Baltimore open bands do not rehearse together outside the dance event. There are some collections that are helpful for

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[33] Elixir, "About," accessed November 7, 2015, http://www.elixirmusic.com/about/.

[34]Fiddler, Ethan Hazzard-Watkins and guitarist Owen Morrison both grew up in a family of contra dancing and contra dance music; Owen is the son of Jim Morrison, mentioned briefly in chapter two. Jim Morrison, a CDSS Lifetime Contribution Award Winner, has been instrumental in country dance and in creating and contributing to a thriving contra dance community in the Charlottesville, VA area.

being familiar with possible repertoire, such as *The Portland Collection* and the *New England Fiddler's Repertoire*.[35] For the Baltimore Open Band (BOB), one player kindly emailed to me a list of tunes specifically used by the open band, most of which could be found in the collections mentioned. Even without familiarity of the tunes, some musicians may be able to find musical space with a simple bass line, drone, or rhythmic addition since the tunes are generally well held down by central players.

Conceptions of "musician" in Anglo-American expressive culture are often viewed within a Western art music framework with performances as staged concerts with clear distinctions between audience and performers. In contra dance, although dancers direct appreciative applause to both the caller and musicians after a dance, the event is considered to be co-creative. Dancers do not say they are going to a band's performance, for example; they dance to a band and the musicians facilitate the dance experience. The musicians that I spoke with mentioned the importance of cooperation and being mindful of creating the best dance experience, rather than the most impressive performance of musical skills.[36]

Contra dance musicians tend to think of themselves as "dance musicians" within a close network and community of dancers and musicians. While some lines are drawn

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[35] Susan Songer with Clyde Curley, *The Portland Collection* (Portland, OR: Apollo Graphics, 1997); Randy Miller and Jack Perron, *New England Fiddler's Repertoire* (Peterborough, NH: Fiddlecase Books, 1983).

[36] Contra dance is a participatory event in the participatory-performative spectrum. I address this participatory aspect as well as musical qualities that are effective in creating an optimal experience in detail in chapter four.

between these more specialized skills and the general community, boundaries are relatively permeable as all participants belong to the same community.

Dancers

Dancers at the contra dance events I attended ranged in age from their teens to their seventies. Most were white-appearing Americans, those with other identity characteristics were present but few in number. Most were roughly of a middle-class background with professions and avocations ranging from medical sales reps to IT professionals, teachers to massage therapists, graphic artists, woodworkers, and students. While some dancers freely talked of their life off the dance floor, others were more reserved. Particularly among younger dancers, the question "what do you do?" is not great beginning conversation. As one response to such a question, I overheard "I dance and help organize dances" from someone who I knew to be actively employed in an area that interested him, but who chose to keep non-dance aspects of his life off the dance floor in general conversation.

The reasons why someone might participate in a contra dance community are many. When asked in a questionnaire about the circumstances of their introduction to contra dance, participants who have made contra dance a regular part of their lives gave responses that demonstrate the what drew them into the practice:

> I was 23. I was frustrated with some Swing dance classes where I was always on the wrong foot and the teacher was very critical. Seeking more fun, a colleague told me vaguely about contra. I went without knowing what it was or anyone there. What I discovered that July night was wonderful live music that compels me to move, a community that extends great hospitality to new dancers and a style of dance that is very easy to learn. I was thrilled to encounter a place where the whole community dancing together is more important than any one person or couple looking good.

> I started contra dancing in 2003 when I was 72 years old. My husband had died the previous year and my brother had been a contra dancer for years. I went with him to a couple of contra dances and am now more addicted than he is. It's great to have fun without having to go with a partner. OK to dance with other people's spouses, significant others and dates and other singles who go alone. I have traveled to many places and put up total strangers and stayed with total strangers, all because of contra.
>
> I started dancing in 1990 when I was 14 because my friend dragged me off to one. Haven't looked back since.
>
> 1973 at age 23. To meet ladies, what else?
>
> I started dancing in 1973 when I was 19. I was new to Brattleboro, VT, on my own, my new boyfriend turned me on to contras and English. Not a lasting relationship, but a fine, fine legacy.
>
> I started contra in 1984 at 23. After the Army (yuck) I lived near Chapel Hill, NC, and looking for social activity, tried international folk dancing. It wasn't much fun, but worse, the socializing was lame. Someone I started working for said try contra, I went the next Friday, and was immediately hooked. Didn't go back to international, and became an instant contra gypsy. Now I like zydeco, blues, other two steps, looooove waltzing, some tango, contact improv, but contra is home.
>
> Started in my parents' arms. I was about 5. It was fun.

For dancers, musicians, and callers alike, I have heard many similar stories of beginning either at a young age, often with family, or coming to it in an oblique manner from friendships or diverse musical paths. For all participants, contra dance is a co-creative musical and movement experience with others. For some, contra dancing, like other associational activities, seems to fill a gap in their lives. Among other benefits, the contra dance community seems to offer a safe haven for a variety of levels of emotional needs. Contra dance participants sometimes contrast contra dance communities with the "real world." As one dancer told me about his first contra dance experience:

> Since that fateful night I stuck with dancing. I loved the music, it was joyous and uplifting. I don't think I had a clue what I was doing at the time, but the

> experienced dancers were so kind and helpful to me that I left the dance wanting more. Looking online I found more dances near me and I went to them. They were smaller dances but all the same - joyous, friendly, and uplifting. Something I had trouble finding in the "real world" before I started dancing.[37]

Several aspects of the contra dance community contribute to this sort of experience. Yet, while often idealized as communities of egalitarian and inclusive values, contra dance communities articulate many similar relations and interactions as found in "the real world," a sort of microcosm of society at large. I attempt to give space to many of those aspects, realized in the practices of the community, in the rest of this chapter and those that follow.

In Pursuit of Play

As a community of practice engaged in a joint pursuit, those active in contra dance often mention the pure enjoyment of and from the activity. Contra dance is social and participatory, it is not a presentational art. While there are varying skill levels, and certainly a few participants who want things done "right," even beginners are encouraged with the suggestion "as long as you're having a good time, you're doing it right." This is the reason most people give for their involvement in contra dance – to have a good time, to have fun, and to be social.

Contra dance is a leisure activity for most people. As described by Victor Turner, leisure is "freedom from forced chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office…freedom to transcend social structural limitations, freedom to *play*" and can be "hard or exacting, subject to rules and routines…but because they are optional, voluntary,

[37] Personal communication, December 12, 2012.

they are part of an individual's freedom, of his growing self-mastery, even self-transcendence."[38] The freedom to play in contra dance has been recognized by many, including Henry Ford who asserted "the spirit of grown up play is irresistible" in country dance.

Many dancers that I spoke with mentioned fun, an opportunity to step out of regular thought patterns, or otherwise somehow outside the "daily grind." I heard expressed several times at the end of a dance weekend the lamentation that we now had to return "back to the real world." This sense of being outside ordinary life engaged in activity of choice is encapsulated in Johan Huizinga's definition of play. The characteristics outlined in his definition strongly resonate both with comments I received from those in the dance community at large as well as aspects of flow, which I address in chapter five:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules in an orderly manner.[39]

Activities of play and leisure may be viewed as autotelic—having an end or purpose in itself—and as Huizinga also mentions, "connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it." Csikszentmihalyi views play as "a state of experience in which

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[38]Victor Turner "From Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, 60, no. 3, (1974) Rice University, http://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159.pdf: 68.

[39] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955): 13.

the actor's ability to act matches the requirements for action in his environment;" it is what happens "after all the decisions are made and 'let's go' is the last thing one remembers."[40] Play is the going.

Signs of Play

There are structures, signs, and cues among the community that may indicate that "this is play." Play is recognized as being set apart from everyday activities. The playing field may be uniquely marked to help the player shift from the "boundless stimulus field of everyday life to the magically sheltered field of the game."[41] For many in the dance community, simply beginning the journey, getting in their car with the intention of going to the dance, begins the shift. Upon arrival at the dance hall there are physical cues and a few simple rituals that further help in setting it apart from daily life.

Entering the building, hearing sounds of the dance, greeting the welcoming gate committee, paying the entrance fee, and proceeding into the dance space all serve as markers for entering what might be called the playing field. With caller and band at the top of the hall and chairs lining the sides, the arrangement of the space (and its occasional decoration), provides visual cues. Likewise, seeing fellow dancers, musicians, and caller gathering in the dance hall together, whether familiar faces or not. In fact, "the very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant," generating a sort of electricity

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[40]Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Stith Bennett, "Exploratory model of play," *American Anthropologist* 73, no. 1, (1971): 45.

[41]Csikszentmihaly and Bennett: 54.

among the group of gathered individuals.[42] The preparatory, ritualistic activity of changing shoes serves to literally remove an aspect of everyday life, to be replaced by an indexical sign of play – soft-soled dance shoes. Gathering in long lines, taking hands four, and walking through the dance are perhaps the last moments before the band's "four potato" cue indicates "let's go."

Interaction between dancers, musicians, and caller during the evening can further provide signs of play. These signs are learned and take on meaning experientially, socially, both by an individual and among the community as part of the repertoire of the community of practice. As Gregory Bateson points out, play depends largely on the metacommunication between the players. Play "could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of metacommunication, *i.e.*, of exchanging signals which could carry the message 'this is play.'"[43] Much of the interaction that takes place among participants during a dance has this characteristic and function. Dancers flirt with each other, callers and musicians engage in playful banter and signaling, musicians exchange meaningful looks or gestures and interpret musical cues and body language, callers and dancers tease each other, dancers respond with whoops and other interactive sounds, not only to show appreciation but also to acknowledge the game in which all are engaged.

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[42] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* 217 – 218 in Tim Olaveson, "Collective Effervescence and Communitas: Processual Models of Ritual and Society in Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner" *Dialectical Anthropology Dialectical Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (2001): 99.

[43] Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* 1972, reprinted 1987: 177 – 193; in Katie Salen *The Games Design Reader*, 316.

Flirting on the dance floor is perhaps one of the behaviors with a finer line to observe, particularly in the case of newcomers. Knowledge is experiential and gained in the community of practice by social interaction. Someone new to contra dance who may not have learned the behaviors and the meaning of the signal might, as one dancer I spoke with put it, be "taken a little aback and misinterpret the meaning intended. In contra dancing, flirting is NOT meant as 'Will you go out with me?' or other similar meanings. Contra dancers flirt for the fun of it."[44] Of course some dancers enjoy flirting while others do not, and the complicated part of learning these signs is that, people being people, there are also occasions when flirting is serious and intended as an overture as opposed to "not serious" play. It becomes a matter of learning the signs.

Practices of the Community

This anecdote from the beginning of my fieldwork reveals many subtle indications of contra dance practices:

Toward the end of the first half of the dance, I finally caught up with Ed and we agreed to be partners for the next dance. Between a couple of men having asked for the next dance as we passed as neighbors and I having consented, I had booked ahead for partners on a dance or two and had not yet danced with Ed. He and I agreed to meet back in the line stage right after a quick drink of water. As I returned to the line, I noticed Ed still on the side sifting through an array of fabric in his bag, which was crowded on the floor space under the chairs by other bags and various pairs of shoes. Ed took the time to change his T-shirt, which I appreciated since he seems to have earned the nickname "Sweaty Ed." I'm not clear whether he knows this is a sort of nickname for him or whether it's more secretive - not out of ill will but still behind his back. I would guess he might know and maybe had some genial teasing since this dance group is friendly and everyone seems to like Ed but, still, I don't ask. Knowing this will most likely be a fun dance for me, I feel like I must have a twinkle in my eye and notice other expressions like the flirtatious look the woman diagonal to me in the tie-dyed dress is giving her partner. Although I haven't yet learned to lead, Ed is a skilled enough dancer that he can guide me

[44] Personal communication, Julie, December, 28 2012.

into all kinds of flourishes and change-ups in the swing so that I sometimes find myself in the lead of a swing, going in an opposite direction than usual or twirling in a variety of ways. I think this must be really good for my dancing, good for my brain, and just a lot of fun.

An Evening Routine

As noted earlier, contra dances are "all the same and different" because they "take on a strikingly similar form and logic that is instantly familiar to members."[45] This strikingly similar form is created by the practices of the community, most apparently in the musical style, the choreography, as well as the way in which an evening dance unfolds. In chapter one I describe a typical evening at a contra dance, from entering the hall to the last waltz. There is a predictable structure for the evening, with the dance divided into two symmetrical halves. Each half consists of a half dozen or so partnered set dances followed by a waltz to complete the half. During my fieldwork, the set dances were nearly all contra dances, with an occasional square or, more rarely, a circle dance, broadly reflecting the trend toward the Modern Urban Contra style.

Among most dancers, the contra is the favorite formation, and the longways style has come to dominate dance evenings. While most dancers participate in other styles the caller chooses, I did overhear an occasional complaint and see a few dancers sit out at larger dance venues if something other than a contra was called. As mentioned in chapter two, musician and caller Jeff Kaufman notes this tendency in what has been called Modern Urban Contra Dance: "Few chestnuts [older dances such as Money Musk and

[45] Finnegan, 61.

Chorus Jig]. Squares are looked down on. Whole set dances are *really* looked down on."[46]

In the processes of participation and reification among the contra dance community, the routine of the evening has become essentially standardized. However, as evidence of negotiation over the years and through generations, that standardization has shifted. Whereas in the early twentieth century the program of evening dances was often predictable (for example, Money Musk was always the first dance after the break for caller Ralph Page), now, the program of specific dances is mutable and left to the caller's discretion. And although the specific dances are now unpredictable, dancers have come to expect the format of several set (mostly contra) dances and a waltz in each half. Reification of this practice in material form was apparent to me when I attended the Feet Retreat weekend in September 2015 and encountered a gentleman who lightheartedly displayed it on his shirt, much like a dance card of old (Figure 12).

Clothing Practices

While clothing choices are ultimately dependent on personal style and may vary by age, event type, and dance location, because "dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time," they also reveal something about a participant's relation to the contra dance community.[47] The outfits worn by contra dancers might not be appropriate for the workplace or for formal events,

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[46] Jeff Kaufman, "Models of Contra Dance," accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.jefftk.com/p/models-of-contra-dance.

[47] Joanne B. Eicher, ed., *Dress and Ethnicity* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), 1.

but they do not differ appreciably from casual outfits the same people might wear in everyday circumstances; they are not costumes. Contra dance clothing tends to indicate practicality, self-expression, and group identity (displaying membership in the community).

Figure 12: A gentleman's shirt reflecting the structure of an evening.

For contra dance events participants wear clothes and shoes that are, first and foremost, comfortable for dancing – garments that allow ease of movement and evaporation of perspiration. Typically, this means men in T-shirts or short-sleeved cotton shirts (sometimes a brightly colored Hawaiian shirt or the like) and shorts or lightweight pants, occasionally skirts or kilts. Women frequently wear dresses or skirts with blouses or sleeveless shirts, all usually of a lightweight, breathable material. The length of the skirt or dress may vary, with leggings or shorts worn under those of shorter length. Sometimes the skirt is full enough to give some twirl during the brisker dance figures.

Musicians and callers - non-dancing participants – also generally wear what is comfortable and casual for them.

While comfort is first and foremost, fun and style are also considerations in clothing. Batik, tie-dye, and patchwork are often seen on the dance floor, often with a "folksy" flair. (At some dance weekends, that folksy flair carries over to quilts that clothe the dance hall.) Some of these styles may be representative of the counter-cultural influence present when certain communities were formed and the age of participants so dressed. Warren Doyle, caller and organizer of events such as the Contradancer's Delight Holiday (CDH), is known for his colorful batik outfits. He mentioned to me that he sees them as a visual representation of the joy that is dancing.[48]

Younger dancers frequently opt for a less "folksy" style. Sometimes this is indicated by a youthful, urban style or a noticeable trend happening within the community, such as the short shorts, lacy or fishnet tights, and boots trend I witnessed among young women in one community. It can also be an indication of the dancer's experience dancing in a crowded hall where there is less space for a wide-twirling folksy skirt.

[48] Personal communication, September 2011.

Figure 13: Colorful patterns in contra dance clothing

Figure 14: Women at Summer Soiree contra dance in Asheville, NC

One North Carolina dancer developed a business selling handmade clothes at contra dance weekends, focusing on lightweight, colorful fabric in styles that satisfy dancers on the floor.

Figure 15: Selling handmade contra dance clothes at Feet Retreat 2015

Footwear is also an indication of a participant's level of experience and commitment. A new participant typically dances in the shoes they arrived in. If a woman arrives in high heels, it is especially obvious that she has not contra danced before. Many people who are regular contra dancers bring shoes to change into for the dance and it is not unusual to see a collection of shoes lining the side of the hall with other belongings, as I indicated in my anecdote above. Changing shoes at the dance is done to protect the dance floor from street shoes and so that a dancer dances in shoes that are smoother for moving around the dance floor. Many dedicated contra dancers wear specialty dance shoes, while others wear sneakers or fashionable boots, and a few dance barefoot.

In addition to changing shoes, many dancers change clothes during a night of dancing. Most commonly, it is men who change their shirts as they become sweaty, but sometimes women will also bring a change of clothes. If the dance is crowded or

particularly aerobic, this is much appreciated among the dancers, although it not commonly known to newcomers.

Dance weekend paraphernalia is often seen worn by contra dancers. Many communities host an annual dance weekend. Since dance weekends typically draw a larger group of dancers from a wider region than regular events, nametag buttons are typically created for attendees. If a dancer is visiting outside her local dance, she may wear her nametag as an introduction as well as a visual symbol that, although she is not familiar to the community, she is an experienced dancer. In addition, commemorative T-shirts are frequently available for purchase at dance weekends. These are items that clearly identify a participant as an experienced contra dancer and that can be a source of shared meaning with fellow dancers.

Some men may wear skirts, a practice considered playful by most and practical by some in light of the comfort and coolness afforded by it. In mainstream society this clothing choice is currently outside the norm. Within the contra dance community no gender or sexual orientation is implied by the practice and none is assumed by the community. The men who wear skirts at a contra dance events typically do not wear skirts for other activities and typically do not adopt other garments or behaviors that may be considered, by mainstream society, to be within the feminine domain. To some degree, wearing a skirt serves as a marker for experienced dancers. Although not all experienced male dancers wear skirts, those who do likely are experienced contra dancers as the message is not understood by those who are not within the contra dance community.

Gender

Partnered couples on the dance floor in American social dance have historically been regarded to be one male and one female, often with a "lead" role and a "follow" role. This is the case in contra dance where formations in the repertoire are quite ordered: proper formations indicate men lined on one side and women on the other, improper formations involve lines that alternate man, woman, man, woman. Couples interact with other couples (neighbors), both one-on-one and as a group, as they progress up or down the set. These pairings of couples and neighbors, and their "ideal" relations - including cooperation, mutual responsibility, individuality, and order – could be seen as metaphor for society at large. Conceptions of gender and partnering have been changing in American society and this is reflected in contra dance. Increasingly, contra dance participants are playing with non-gendered or gender-free roles. In examining gender in contra dance two approaches are helpful: 1) representation of gender roles in the repertoire and 2) gender in the act of contra dancing.[49]

While it is pervasive in the structuring of contra dance lines, explicit representation of gender roles in current contra dance repertoire is less pronounced. Most of the dance figures themselves are ungendered: men and women perform many of the same movements, often in symmetrical unison. Ungendered figures for two people include allemande, do-si-do, promenade, gypsy, balance and swing; for four or more include circle, star, long lines forward and back, right and left through. The only overtly

[49] Appadurai et al. eds., *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 1.

gendered figure is a ladies' chain where the two women in couples facing each other take right hands to pass to meet the opposite man, who offers a courtesy turn, ending with each lady in the other's place. At times choreography may indicate an otherwise ungendered figure for the same dance roles – in other words for the two ladies, or for the two gentlemen. Frequently this is done both for dancing interest and to position dancers for the next move in a continuously flowing manner. "Centrifugal Hey," written by Gene Hubert is an example of this, with a men's allemande in the first half[50]:

> A1 Allemande right neighbor once-and-three-quarters. Men allemande left once-and-one-half.
> A2 Hey, starting with partners passing right shoulders.
> B1 Swing partner.
> B2 Right and left through. Circle left three-quarters and pass through along the set.

In the activity itself, there are some dances that a caller could prompt without giving any reference to gender. Contra dance couples are more often referred to as ones and twos, actives and inactives, particularly when acting as a unit. However, the terms "ladies" and "gents" still arise in practice. These have been a point of some debate, as potentially outdated and exclusive terms. Alternatives such as jets and rubies, elms/oaks and maples, larks and ravens, leads and follows, spoons and ladles have been bandied about and picked apart for connotations by the contra dance community at large. During my fieldwork, the terms "ladies" and "gents" were used consistently by most callers. While no one that I spoke with seemed offended by the traditional terms, some

[50] Gene Hubert, *Dizzy Dances* Vol. II (Published by the author, 1986), 1.

participants made comments that the language was too restrictive and did not adequately represent the full potential and practice of contra dance.

In verbal communication for teaching beginner dancers, keeping the language more traditional seems to help avoid confusion. (Although this may also lead a new dancer into the community with an assumption of an assigned role, they often enter with the same assumption and by learning the community practices gain both the skills necessary to dance the other role and the understanding that dancing the other role is acceptable). In beginner's lessons new dancers are instructed first that the "lady's" position is to the right of the "gent" – this should be the starting position and the position to which the couple returns after executing the figures. There is a sort of recurring joke among some practitioners to help remind dancers of this. I overheard several times the quaint memory aid that "the lady is always right." Often said as if it could be accompanied by a wink, as a reference to heteronormative, propitiatory, and potentially sexist, relationship dynamics off the dance floor, one can practically hear a "yes, dear" right behind it.

Beyond terminology, I observed cisgendered, transgendered, and non-gendered experiences in the community. In one dance community in North Carolina, I met Stephanie, a dancer and caller and a self-described 40-something transgender southern belle. Stephanie is a welcomed part of the community, but it has not always been easy for her. The reaction of any given individual may vary, but the community at large adheres to openness, welcoming, and egalitarianism as a general ethos. In my conversations with Stephanie she mentioned that the contra dance community has become her safe haven.

> It has all the things I ever wanted: community, friends, positive outlook, touch, and even an occasional paying job. I don't have to hide who I am. I can be me to

> the fullest and be loved by people. A community that is welcoming to all opens itself to all the possibilities. No longer is it a strange sight to see two gents or two ladies dancing together or even a transgender person dancing both roles. The dance is made to accommodate all types of people no matter their gender, age, shape, size, or any number of things. We welcome each other with a smile and a gentle touch. These are things that much of the world says that I as a transgender woman don't deserve. Yet over time, the dance community has accepted me as part of that mass of movement. We all hear the music, and it compels us to come together, to be better, to give the joy to others, and then to depart back to the real world strengthened until the next dance. Whether I dance or call, I am at home with my real self and free to explore the possibilities.[51]

Current contra dancing is only nominally gender specific; many people dance either role. Women may dance with other women as partners and men may dance with other men as partners, with one dancing the "ladies" role and one dancing the "gents" role. Additionally, any manner of role swapping may sometimes occur during a dance between skilled, experienced dancers, as long as both roles are fulfilled. Partners must decide between themselves who will dance which role. Swapping dance roles could be viewed as a rejection of traditional gender roles. In my fieldwork, I understood that often these instances occur when the ratio of dance attendees is unbalanced or simply for fun.

Reactions to same-gendered couples in the dance vary from approval, confusion, or even aversion. MJ, a female who is competent dancing either role mentioned:

> I have danced all over the southeast and in New England, and I usually dance lead, and no one has ever made me feel that they were disappointed…but I will say that there were a couple women in my community who turned me down for a dance because they only dance with men. That was ten years ago and one of them dances with me now, and we have a blast… and I saw the other dance with a woman recently, and I was happy for her.[52]

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[51] Personal communication, November 8, 2015.

[52] Personal communication, December 14, 2014.

As most of the figures are executed between "lady" and "gent," if a female is dancing the "gent" role or vice versa, an encounter with a same-gendered couple allows more interaction between similar genders. Sometimes this may lead to confusion on the dance floor, however, if an expected cue is altered. Dancers have expressed to me that it sometimes breaks up the normal flow of the dance, causing some hesitation to figure out which person to swing, for example. The advice many people give to help with this is to "dance with who's comin' atcha" – the person in the position where the dance figure takes place is the person with whom to dance.

Gender balancing has been a goal of some dances, particularly at dance weekends, though this has become a point for reconsideration. For events such as dance weekends that draw a larger number of participants, the registration process often involves stating one's gender, with the assumption that one who registers as female would dance the "lady's" or "follow" part. The aim of gender balancing a dance is to assure that equal "leads" and "follows" are available for pairings so that the most number of people are able to dance. Waitlists have been created if the balance of registrants is too heavily weighted in one direction. However, this has also been viewed as a potentially discriminatory practice, and as I was told by one dancer, "the annual Mid Winter Ball in Baltimore was sued in the late '90s by a woman who was on the wait list" since she was on that list only because she was a woman; they needed more men for balance.[53]

[53] Personal communication, April 17, 2014.

Recently dance organizers have extended a non-gendered option that still accomplishes a balance of dancing roles. The possibility of stating one's dancing preference rather than gender, including the option "both roles," is being tried for dance events. This has received a generally positive reaction as a progressive step.

Inclusivity

One of the qualities of contra dance for which many participants express appreciation is an open and welcoming attitude. Most calendars and advertisements of a contra dance event indicate in similar wording that beginners are welcome, no experience is necessary, no partner is necessary, and each dance will be taught. Occasionally it is indicated that a beginner's lesson will be held.

As noted above, new dancers frequently come to a contra dance and, while they are welcome in the community, no special acknowledgement is given, except in some cases a pin to wear indicating a new dancer status. This pin informs the community that a dancer is new and is also intended to be an unspoken indication that courteous experienced dancers should seek out someone wearing that pin to help them learn and have a positive experience. During the beginner's lesson, most callers will instruct beginners that it is best not to dance with another beginner since they may both end up confused and unable to help each other. It can be difficult to redirect a pairing of beginners since they might be friends who came together and find comfort in knowing they are at the same level.

In a few communities something akin to an outreach program or philosophy is part of the approach to welcoming dancers, though this may not be explicitly stated. In Asheville, for example, one gentleman I spoke with was acting as a sort of "dance

ambassador," seeking out new dancers and checking with those sitting out to offer partnership in a dance. In other cases, most experienced dancers will gently guide a beginner or confused dancer (beginner or not) throughout the evening.

Dance gypsies may likewise be "new" to a community but are not considered new (beginner) dancers. Quite frequently there is something in their appearance or behavior that indicates to others that this unfamiliar dancer has some competence. During my first visit to the Harrisonburg, VA dance—a small dance of maybe two or three dozen participants and two lines in the hall that evening—one of my partners upon introductions asked where else I danced rather than if I had danced before, noting "you look like you know what you're doing."

Contra dance is idealized as an open, welcoming, egalitarian activity—and that is indeed what is socially desirable and a goal of contra dance communities—but, as in any human group, social relations are dynamic and do not always lean toward the ideal. Community norms and goals may also be observed by behaviors that fall outside those parameters. Potentially disruptive behaviors to the ideal of inclusivity in contra dance include advanced dances and cliques within a community.

An advanced dance is rather rare among contra dance communities. While a dance weekend frequently includes a "challenging" session (generally offered as one of a few possibilities in a certain time block), most dance communities do not hold a separate event noted as challenging. One exception is an advanced dance offered by the Old Farmer's Ball in Asheville, NC. The description indicates that it is not recommended for

beginners. Caller Beth Molaro's description offers further advice for expectations at an advanced dance[54]:

> This Dance is Not Recommended for New Dancers
> Expect Little to NO Teaching
> Expect Lots of No-Walkthroughs
> Expect the Energy of a Dance Weekend in ONE Night!
> Expect a Great Wooden Floor and A Magical Atmosphere!

The exclusivity of an advanced dance within an open, welcoming community has been a point of debate. However, it is still advertised and open and the decision is left to participants to gauge their desire and ability to participate. Further the dance is held separately and in addition to regular dances; it is simply one more event for experienced enthusiasts.

Center Set Syndrome and Cool, Hip Dancers

Exclusivity may also arise within communities large enough for a subgroup to form. While the contra dance ethos suggests communality and neighborliness, particularly in the custom of dancing with a new partner for each dance, there are sometimes cliques within the community that only want to dance within that subset. My first experience that indicated the presence of this behavior was at a rather large dance during one of my first visits to a local community recognized for its "hotshot" dancing. My partner and I joined a line and shortly thereafter one of the couples who would be our neighbors stated "This might be really difficult if you don't know what you're doing" with a tone that implied she did not recognize me, wasn't sure that she wanted to dance

[54] Beth Molaro, "The advanceDANCE Series,"accessed October 24, 2015, http://www.bethmolaro.com/advancedance.html.

with me, and didn't want me to ruin her fun by messing things up. Her tone of discouragement rather than the typical contra attitude that implies "don't worry, if you get lost we'll help you" led me to question whether there was an idea of "wrongness" associated with my appearance in the line. Not being a regular at the dance I was not recognized by face, and though I did not consider it at the time, it is possible my clothing choices that evening identified me as someone not within the local community and not within the clique, and thus my competence uncertain.

Such cliquishness has been described previously as a "center set syndrome."[55] My questioning about a right or wrong line falls into this concern. "Center set syndrome" is a process of exclusion in which "good" dancers rush to find each other and arrange themselves in the same line (often, the center set) where they can enjoy the nuances that sometimes elude beginners. This "syndrome" became particularly apparent after a nationwide network took shape in the 1980s and dancers became more aware of the way dance style articulated relations in the community.[56] David Millstone further characterizes it with any of the following symptoms:

> Hot-shot dancers lining up to dance with other hot-shot dancers in the center set, clamoring for ever-more-complex dances, disdaining to do squares or mixers, vocal complaining when those dances were presented, refusal to dance with newcomers or generally making them feel inferior, high proportion of extra twirls, spins, and other flourishes, frequently making the perpetrator late for the ensuing figure, constant motion even to the extent of adding in all kinds of extra movements when not called for in the dance, etc...[57]

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[55] See Dart, 1995; Bealle, 2005; Dalsemar, 1988.

[56] Bealle, 127.

[57] David Millstone, "Creating a Vision," accessed November 21, 2015, http://www.davidmillstonedance.com/writing/essays/32-essays-creating-a-vision.

The general attitude in regard to this behavior is often lighthearted while still attempting to correct the tendencies, albeit indirectly much of the time. Shared among the communities are jokes about the stages of being a dancer that indicate at first you don't know anything, then you "know everything" and only want to dance with the cool dancers, until you actually do know everything and enjoy dancing with everyone. One dancer inverted the center-set syndrome, adding "we banish all the clique-ish dancers to one line until they learn how to play well with others."

Such a syndrome is acknowledged today within some contra dance communities, although the terminology is different in the areas of my fieldwork: hot shot dancers are still at the focus, but they have been termed "cool, hip dancers," often stated with a touch of sarcasm. The sarcasm stems from the irony of the "cool, hip dancers" being perceived as viewing themselves as "good" dancers – cool, athletic, young, "hotshot" dancers - while many of their behaviors are an antithesis to good dancing, as they may go against the larger contra dance ethos.

Musician Noah VanNorstrand created a text-to-movie rudimentary video in 2011 that circulated with many laughs and some groans of recognition among the contra dance community.[58] The video is a conversation between a "cool, hip dancer" and a caller at odds as the caller makes suggestions that are best for the whole floor while the "cool, hip

[58] This video was made using Xtranormal, a digital company whose software allowed users to create animated videos, free of charge, in which typed text became the speech of the animated characters. The company closed in 2013.

dancer" ignores and refuses them. The dialogue frames the core of the "cool, hip dancer" issue among the community and includes lines from the dancer such as:

> The only way to have fun in contra dancing is to be in the line with all the cool hip dancers. Besides, being in the line with the cool hip dancers is the only way I can hope to dance with them and if I do not dance with them my life is worthless… If I do not constantly twirl, dip, spin, contort, toss, grope, and confuse my partner then none of the cool-hip dancers will want to dance with me, and my life will be worthless.

The dialogue from the "cool hip dancer" is meant to mock the behavior. Pointedly, the video is made by a young, competent musician and dancer who, were he not more communally minded, could fall easily into the "cool, hip dancer" range of associations.

The phenomenon indicates sites of negotiation for inclusion, consensus, communality, and identity. Further, for many who see contra dance as a microcosm of society at large, there are direct relations between how the contra dance community addresses unfavorable and inappropriate behaviors and how this may be mirrored in larger perspective. Interestingly, David Millstone's list of symptoms overlaps with some of the general trend in choreography and the demarcation of the Modern Urban Contra Dance. I have noticed a similar phenomenon in my fieldwork during larger dance events; however, in my experiences the "syndrome" with younger, more aerobic ("cool, hip") dancers was located on a far side set.

"A Friend of Mine"

During my first visit to the Lake Eden Arts Festival in Black Mountain, NC, I arranged to meet my friend Holly at the barn where the contra dances were held. She informed me that she would be toward the left side of the hall. Giving me a little insider information, she also mentioned that the far right side was for beginners and for those

experienced dancers who felt like helping the newcomers during the dance (and since this was a mixed event, rather than strictly a contra dance weekend, there would be many first time dancers who happened to wander in).

For the contra dance, the hall seemed near capacity and the far left especially crowded. In the time I took to observe the dance event I noticed that most dancers frequently changed partners and changed lines, but the dancers on the far left line generally shuffled partners among those in that same line. I wanted to dance in that line to get a sense of their particular style which included dips, twirls, and sometimes closer physical proximity than the typical dancing in other lines. I told my friend I was heading toward that line and mentioned my concern about the length of the line and being able to make my way in with enough physical space and social capital. Holly reassured me: "Don't worry. I'll tell them you're a friend of mine." In an instant, I had a flash of recognition of the American mafia movie *Donnie Brasco*, as if I had just been vouched for among a rather impenetrable cabal.

Physicality and Sexuality

Contra dancing has a fairly high level of physical contact, providing sensory and interpersonal interaction on a number of levels. The sense of touch—of hands, feet on the floor, and other parts of the body—is important to the dance, to the individual experience, and to communication between dancers. Because most dances are progressive line dances, dancers interact with their partner and all members of the set while moving up and down the contra line. Generally, one has as much or more close physical interaction with a neighbor, a relationship that lasts one repetition of the dance cycle, as with one's partner. The group of four (thus, the call for "hands four") is the core unit in the set,

composed of an active couple (the "ones," who progress down the set) and their neighbors (the "twos," who progress up the set). Dancers have a relationship with everyone in the set as well as all the dancers in the room. This can be particularly noticeable to dancers during certain figures: in long lines forward and back, each line of dancers takes hands all the way down the hall and walks four steps forward to meet the facing line, then four steps back to place; and during some figures, such as forming short wavy lines horizontally across the set, dancers will often take hands with the set beside them, although that is not an instructed part of the choreography. It is this combination of dancing with a partner, dancing with many neighbors, and working together as a set and across the entire floor that makes contra dancing a unique form of participatory dance and one which promotes a high level of interpersonal interaction and community spirit.

Physical connection is at the foundation of every interaction on the dance floor. There are differing distances and degrees of touch. Some figures have no physical contact (do-si-do, hey, gypsy), while others have minimal or hands-only contact (handholds for four in circle or stars, balance, allemande, chain). The swing figure has the greatest degree of physical contact, including hand, body, and arm. Proximity, either by choice or by spatial constraints, can affect the degree of physical contact in any of these figures.

Continuing the physical connection off the dance floor is not uncommon, particularly at weekend events. While not appropriately applied to all members, I have heard a description of contra dance as a "touchy-feely" community. This may be more the case among those who maintain a relationship beyond the regular dance, and, of course, varies by individual. During my fieldwork, I have seen massage chains, what some people call "cuddle puddles" (Figure 17), and human braids during breaks and after

dances at weekend events, in particular. These physical interactions reinforce the experience and social bonding that happens on the dance floor. Contra dance events "bring groups of people together for extended periods of time through intense participatory activities where people experience *each other* in heightened physical-sonic ways that provide a powerful sense of identity and unity beyond normal social interactions."[59]

Figure 16: Contra dancers enjoying physical closeness after the dance

Most humans have a need to deeply connect with others, both physically and emotionally. Dance and music offer a particularly vivid way to realize this. A great deal of research has recently begun to extol the benefits of music and dance.[60] Neurological phenomena including the release of pleasure and bonding hormones such as serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin, in combination with participatory music and dance, community

[59] Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 188.

[60] Publications by Oliver Sacks; Valorie Salimpooer et al; C. Pacchetti; Pawley and Müllensiefen; Holden, etc. explore relationships of music and neurological phenomenon.

spirit, and physical touch frequently promote experiences of euphoria, joy, and social bonding among contra dance participants. I address this "magic" of contra dance in chapter six.

Figure 17: A contra dance "cuddle puddle"

Adding to the heightened sensorial experience are practices of eye contact and playful flirtation. In contra dance, sustained eye contact serves two main purposes. It is a means of connection between dancers as well as a means of preventing dizziness during some figures, such as the swing. In the latter case it serves much the same purpose as "spotting" in ballet: it provides a point of constant visual focus, which helps offset the sense of imbalance caused by rapid turning.

Eye contact is also important in figures without physical contact, such as in the figure known as the gypsy. In this figure dancers—often partners, though not necessarily, and frequently opposite roles (lady and gent), though not necessarily—circle around each other without touching, maintaining eye contact the entire time. It is an intentionally

romantic, flirtatious connection. In many dances the gypsy is followed by a swing so that the dancers first circle each other without touching then make the fullest physical connection in the contra dance repertoire. It could be considered a move of sublimated sexuality, and many contra dancers take great pleasure in this playfulness.

Flirtatious behavior is sometimes taken to an extreme as I have observed among some younger dancers and in the Asheville, NC area, in particular. A blues dancing influence, postures with a closer partner hold, often perceived as sexually suggestive are part of the swings among some dancers. This practice was observed as early as 1999 by Paul Jordan-Smith at the River Falls Lodge in South Carolina, a sister community to Asheville and one visited by many dancers I met. As what Jordan-Smith called "sleaze dancing" appeared in the community, debates about violations of community norms focused on two issues: 1) "force[ing] a fellow dancer to engage in kinesic behavior or personal display outside the bare requisite for a given figure" 2) placing "'stylistic' restrictions on a dancer's behavior."[61]

At this point, in some few circumstances, this style could be considered a norm, or perhaps a normal variant. There is resistance to the derogatory naming of it, however. This style is particularly prominent among a contingent in the Asheville, NC area, but not all Asheville dancers use this style, and the style is not necessarily seen at every dance in that community. As contra dance has expanded into a national network since the 1980s with travel and dance weekends becoming common, styles and knowledge of styles have

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[61] Paul Jordan-Smith, "About that Swing: 'Sleaze' Dancing and Community Norms at River Falls Lodge" *Western Folklore* Vol. 60, no. 2/3 Communities of Practice: Traditional Music and Dance (Spring – Summer, 2001): 189.

also spread. Though not all dancers engage in embellishments, playful flourishes such as dips, twirls, and sensual swings may be seen or at least acknowledged in a much wider range now; participants in each of the communities in which I danced knew of these style extras, and some included them in their dancing.

Consent and Transgression

This style of dancing can only operate within community norms if it occurs in a consensual space and without crossing perceived boundaries of propriety. For some who enjoy it, the late night dance at dance camps in the '90s was a form of consenting and reifying the behavior. It could also be a source of misunderstanding during the day, however. As one participant noted:

> Back when late night Sleaze Dancing was in vogue at many dance camps and weekends, there were issues with the previous night's moves from 2am appearing at the next contra at 10pm, usually by dancers who assumed that this woman danced that way with me last night, it must be ok to continue, without "checking in." Or worse, someone who observed a couple dancing at the "sleaze" dance and then would assume that they, either the man or the woman, must dance that way with everyone, without knowing the dance dynamics of that couple.

Sexuality in contra dance is generally in the prerogative of consenting individuals within the norms of community behavior. When asked about sexuality in contra dance, participants remarked in various ways:[62]

> Contra dancing is not implicitly sexual. Otherwise, what would that say about dancing with someone other than a spouse or significant other, or someone under the age of 18?
>
> People dance for all kinds of reasons. I dance for the sheer joy of it. I don't dance to flirt, don't participate in flirting (for my own reasons) and generally avoid partners who want to make that a big part of their dancing. I find it distracting from the music. I'm intersted in fun and play. I'm interested in vigorous, athletic

[62] Personal communications, December 14, 2014.

> dancing and expression of the music. And being with folks who are high on endorphins – that shared experience with the group.
>
> So of course dance and sexuality are intertwined, but for the good of ourselves (and the community) it's my belief that other aspects of dance have primacy over sexuality within the context of contradance (less so in other dance forms where the communal is not a consideration, like blues, swing, and tango). Which is not to say I don't love to flirt, or play flirting up when I call. It's just to say that if we all get over ourselves we have a better time on the dance floor.
>
> To be frank, I do NOT believe that you can ever separate sexuality from any activity where there is a potential for a hookup – and I use that term loosely. Dancing with a person of one's preferred gender is an opportunity to explore conections that is unparalled among most social activities. To say that contra dance and sexuality are not inextricably entwined is to suggest that we are not human.
>
> I dance because I love to dance and do not find it implicitly sexual. It's about the movement, the music, and a shared experience.

General conviviality, silliness, playfulness, and flirtation are as much appreciated on the dance floor by many dancers as are good timing, competent, considerate dancing, and even personal style. Consensual behavior is of utmost importance for most dance communities. The practices in a contra dance community serve as sites for negotiation of consensus, consent and transgression.

During my fieldwork any embellishments outside the basic figure were negotitated between individual dancers. The flourishes for which I was verbally asked permission as a dancer were dips and twirls. Dips are especially important as a point of consent since it is quite difficult for the dancer being dipped to physically contradict the movement in way that is both effective and physically safe. Most of my "leads" were conscientous partners who asked before the dance began; however, I did encounter a few partners who, as in the late night dancing account above, saw that I had been dipped before I reached them in the set and assumed they could also dip me.

Twirls and blues-style swings are a bit easier to communicate permission or denial through a tactile response. If an arm is raised for a twirl, the dancer who will execute the flourish may accept the offer or lower his or her right arm to decline. In swings, if one dancer continues with their feet in a buzz-step pivot and maintains framed space between the two bodies of the dancers this can serve to deny permission for a slow, blues swing, which involves closer body contact and swaying between left and right feet rather than a pivoting buzz step. None of my "leads" who were interested in this type of swing broached the idea with me verbally; it was negotiated physically at the time of the swing. Verbal or physical consent, sensitivity and awareness of tactile reaction are crucial for negotiating the experience – ideally, an experience in which partners are equals.

Not all physical behavior that occurs on the dance floor is considered socially acceptable or within community norms. Most transgressions can be addressed between the individuals involved. If it is more serious, or if one party is uncomfortable about a confrontation, the dance organizer may be called upon. Larger problematic trends often become a topic of conversation among members of the community to be addressed in person, at board meetings, and sometimes in on-line discussion groups, which often include comments from the larger community. Conversations off the dance floor and in on-line discussion threads are often a means of navigating sites of contestation in contra dance. No public shaming occurs. Many contra dance participants have voiced a firm stance on this. Contra dance communities work toward open and respectful attitudes and harmonious relations, but if necessary will eject an offender from a dance or, potentially, the community.

Awareness of hall conditions, crowd, and dancing space as well and tactile and verbal communication and consent between dancers are essential to a good experience and can be sources of discord, unpleasant experience, and even physical and emotional damage when ignored or contradicted. A few issues in particular were prominent during my fieldwork. The community used specific language to understand, address, and share the concern about what they termed "creepers," "crankers," and "cool-hip dancers."

Online conversations centered around Glen Echo's second annual all-day Contra Stock event in 2012 illustrate these concerns within the community. In one discussion, a Baltimore dancer with 26 years of dancing experience asked for advice on how to "survive the gents who insist on twirling [her] like a top." Controversy about twirling seems to have been a concern among the larger community at least since 1991, as Dorothea Hast notes that *The Dance Gypsy* reported in July of that year that a woman broke her wrist at a Vermont dance because a man insisted on twirling her even after she asked not to be twirled.[63] Twirls are an embellishment that are not part of a basic given figure in which one partner may indicate that, with enough time left before the next move, one dancer—almost always the "follow"—will turn over her shoulder, spinning in a circle as many times as she chooses. *The Dance Gypsy* offers this advice to the "lead":

> If there's enough space for a twirl, raise your hand a bit and offer two downward pointing fingers to the lady…If the woman wants to twirl she will accept those fingers and spin without any additional help (i.e. "cranking") from you…Never grasp her hand with yours – if you 'engulf' her hand, she can only writhe in pain.[64]

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[63] Hast, 166.

[64] Cited in Hast, 166.

Differentiating between "cranking" and spinning highlights issues of consent as well as issues of power imbalances. Contra dance is an egalitarian, cooperative endeavor; partners dance together as equals, one is not "danced" by the other. Cranking, although it does occur, is not socially acceptable within the community (although twirling is), and can result in injury in some cases.

An incurred injury, at first presumed to be a cranking injury, was the beginning of another online conversation following Contra Stock. Dialogue proliferated after it became clear that a young female dancer sustained a shoulder injury, not from a twirl but from a partner who persisted in trying to swing her more closely than she was comfortable with and her trying to create physical space between their bodies. (This was the sort of swing described as "sleaze dancing" by Paul Jordan-Smith, to which the girl did not give verbal or tactile consent).

The "gent" was a noted "creeper" among the community – one who treads into non-consensual space in sexually suggestive ways, usually either by suggestive eye contact or inappropriate physical touch. As a way of addressing the problem, dance organizers had approached him to discuss the issue and there was talk of banning him, but the community also had concerns about doing this in a "litigious" society.

The online conversation that ensued became a way for members of the community at large to have a conversation and work together in regard to the specific issue, as well as the health of the community as a whole:

(before the realization that the injury was not from cranking):

> The flourish is not necessary to the dance and should be only and always a mutually agreed embellishment. Contra is NOT a dance of lead and follow . . . Telling (mostly) male dancers they are responsible for 'leading' the dance and

(mostly) female dancers they should passively 'follow' is an open invitation to the abuses cataloged here.

Too much discipline could make for a super annoying dance. How does one determine what is a difference of style and what is outright wrong? I like twirls and flourishes, but I also like dancing with those that don't, as long as there is a lovely connection. I'm not sure how you'd teach and regulate and advise. You could ban twirling – that would eliminate injuries and cranked arms, but, bleh.

(after it was understood that the injury was caused in a "creeper" situation):

Tolerating sexual predators is another way that our dance community reflects society. Most of them get away with it because we don't, for the most part, have adequate organized ways of dealing with them effectively. Many of our communities have known chronic problem dancers; many of us have watched in dismay as a notorious creeper that many women already refuse to dance with offends yet another young woman who doesn't come back. This is a widespread issue challenging the greater community to maintain a safe and welcoming environment for an activity that is often flirtatious and sexy. I'm sure that we will remain welcoming, lenient, and tolerant, but when someone has established himself as a problem, we as a community have a clear need for a better way to deal with it. Amongst the groups I have experience with TCD, in particular, does a great job of announcing that if anyone is uncomfortable with someone's behavior to please say something to a board member. It is imperative that women have the courage to speak up, but that's not enough; society has trained them that they will not be heard, and until/unless we honor them and show them that speaking out brings real consequences to the abuser, they will continue to be reluctant to speak. Can we combine the roles of law enforcement and dance management? How do we collectively confront the issue?

Sometimes the person has to be made aware that not all folks like to dance that way. These are social skills that not everyone learns at the dance, esp if your reason at the dance is not to dance. The contra dance community looks out after its young ones and I have seen other communities "ostracize" the offending person as no one would dance with him. Easier to do in a small dance than one the size of Glen Echo. The larger the dance the easier it is for the "predatory" dancers to operate, esp if the group does not speak out to protect the newcomer.

Many people were still addressing the same issues noted by Paul Jordan-Smith in 1999: forcing a fellow dancer to engage in behaviors or personal displays and placing

stylistic restrictions on a dancer's behavior. The conversation culminated in an open letter to the community (included as Appendix A) emphasizing a safe environment.

In addition to this open letter, the contra dance community at large has produced a variety of documents over the years as a result of negotiating issues such as these. Many local communities include guidelines and tips for community behavior on their website. Documents such as "To Twirl or Not to Twirl" and its spin-off "To Sleaze or Not to Sleaze" (Appendix B) have circulated among the community, as have a particularly pointed animated video and a fun yet incisive song.

"Contra Dance Etiquette for the Guys"

The performance of one song, in particular, demonstrates myriad aspects of the current contra dance community and its negotiations of social norms. "Contra Dance Etiquette for the Guys," written by New York-based touring musicians Andrew VanNorstrand and Noah VanNorstrand, was performed by the brothers during an evening concert at the 2013 Contradancer's Delight Holiday in Morgantown, WV:[65]

Chorus: Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It's my hope you memorize
All that I have got to say
Contra dance in a respectable way
Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It's my hope you realize
When you're dancing with a girl
You gotta think about more than the next twirl

[65] Used with permission. Full lyrics are in Appendix C. A video of this performance is available https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wmk6xTj3dcY

Verse 2: All right younger guys, it's your turn!
I'm gonna make your ego crash and burn
You think everyone's in love with you well I got news for you!
It ain't all about you, when you gonna learn to dance
Best for your partner
Best for your hands-four
Best for the whole line
Best for the entire floor
That's the golden rule that you should live for
Stop treatin' common sense like it's a damn chore!
Go ahead, call me old-fashioned
But dippin' a girl without asking is lacking compassion
I've seen elbows crashing
Into heads that are bashing
Into the floor…what for?
Just so that you can be the hottest guy on the dance floor?

Doesn't matter with whom you're dancing
Old or young, a newbie or veteran
Stop acting like you're broke on a payday
Grow up and respect the ladies!

Andrew VanNorstrand and Noah VanNorstrand are younger members of the contra dance community. They are part of several bands, including the Andrew and Noah Band, Great Bear Trio, and Giant Robot Dance, produce recordings on their private label Great Bear Records, and hold a dance weekend in upstate New York called The Groove. Much of their musical style is innovative, with extended techniques such as chops on the fiddle and a sound influenced by jam bands. "Contra Dance Etiquette for the Guys" was performed by Andrew on guitar and Noah on fiddle and foot percussion. Noah delivered the verses in rap style accompanied by Andrew, who played rhythmic guitar and joined him in harmony for the more lyrical choruses.

This song would not be performed at a contra dance, but its inclusion in the evening concert, as a performance to a seated audience, allowed the lyrics to be the main focus for attendees. The song is a vehicle for addressing serious community concerns in a

lighthearted way. The lyrics of the first two verses are directed toward the "guys" of the dance community. While the word presents a nice rhyming opportunity, it is also reflective of the contra dance communities (and of society at large) that, more often than not (and considered a sexist point of view by some), hold men as the perpetrators of the transgressions. While in responses to this song, women voiced appreciation for the acknowledgment that this is often the case, further discussion indicated opinions that it is not only or always just men that should be held accountable. The final verse, indeed, calls out entire specific local communities.

The lyrics include several references to issues of consent and navigating socially acceptable dancing. These allude to the issues of creepers, crankers, and cool-hip dancers that I have discussed previously. Flirting and dipping are mentioned specifically. Regional quirks are also part of the song by these touring musicians who have had opportunity to witness first hand much of what they sing about: Asheville "sleaze dancing" is hinted at; the trend of Modern Urban Contra away from "chestnuts" such as Money Musk are addressed directly by way of the Seattle dance weekend called Dancing Fool. Elitist, exclusive, and inappropriate behaviors are referenced in comparison to what the brothers call the "golden rule": an ideal ethos of community and communality, consent and compassion, all negotiated among the wider contra dance community.

This song was performed in West Virginia at the five-day Contradancers' Holiday Delight by a music group from New York, but the concerns addressed and the humor within the song were understood by those in the audience. The Contradancers' Holiday Delight included participants from many states – several contra dancers that I knew from North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland were in attendance.

Many of these dancers are self-declared dance gypsies and have traveled (sometimes extensively) for dances. The performance was met with applause, laughter, and some whooping (this last especially from women) from the audience because they recognized, many having directly experienced, the dancing styles described in the lyrics. Although regions as far as Asheville, NC, the West Coast, and New England are mentioned, both the audience and the performers find a unity among the areas as one large contra dance community.

Conclusion

The obvious and official pursuit of a contra dance community is a contra dance, a gathering of people together to enact a music and dance event. However, beyond that explicit goal, are subtler pursuits such as a sense of community, a negotiation of social relations, and, in an ideal instance, a connection with joy. Contra dance, for many participants, is a microcosm, mirroring society in many ways, including social concerns among members. While the dance is an arena for leisure, play, and pleasure, it is also a vehicle for norms, conventions, and sanctions. As Wenger notes, communities of practice are "neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations. Disagreement, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation."[66]

The contra dance community is a self-consciously constructed community that creates and enacts its connectedness through modes of participation, repertoire, style, context, and rhetoric they use in describing themselves. In this chapter I have explored

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[66] Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* 77.

several of these modes and behaviors indicative of the contra dance community. In the following chapter, I examine the participatory nature of the music and dance.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE

Contra dance provides an opportunity to experience artistic practice as a participatory activity. Offering an alternative to the commoditized view of artistic practice that many in North America hold, contra dance is more about being involved—co-creating a musical, movement, and social experience with others—than it is about producing an artistic product or commodity. While there may be many ways of participating in or with music, in this study, participation is viewed through the community of practice lens as a form of active contribution by the participant "engaging in and contributing to the practices of the community"[1] and, more specifically here, "actively contributing to the sound and motion of a musical event through dancing, singing, clapping, and playing musical instruments when each of these activities is considered integral to the performance."[2] In participatory performance, "stylized sound and motion are conceptualized most importantly as heightened social interaction."[3]

In this chapter I present contra dance as a participatory performance using the concept of an "artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles," the primary goal of

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[1] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 7.

[2] Turino *Music as Social Life*, 28.

[3] Ibid.

which is "to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role."[4] I explore the ethos and forms in contra dance – resources of the community of practice - specifically focusing on choreographic and musical features that characterize it as participatory. Elaborating the concept suggested by Turino, I explore in detail how contra dance exemplifies a participatory practice. Important through this exploration is the demonstration of how contra dance is a form that is flexible and open to transformation and improvisation. I analyze specific examples from the dance and music repertoire, with particular attention to musical improvisation.

This chapter is intended to establish the participatory nature of contra dance and strategically position it as a form capable of incorporating various styles and improvisation. This understanding is essential for the approaches I take in the following chapters; the flexibility of form enables experimentation and optimal experiences on a variety of levels. It is likewise important in understanding the musical and choreographic forms involved in the negotiations of a generational encounter in contra dance. Adding to the behavioral and social practices of the community I outlined in the previous chapter, here I discuss musical and choreographic aspects.

Features of Participatory Performance

There are several common style features that are indicated in a participatory practice:[5]

- Open forms without set beginnings or endings
- Short but repeated over and over

[4] Ibid., 26.

[5] Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 23 – 48.

- Cyclical: the same short, repeated melodic-harmonic-rhythmic unit constitutes the basic piece
- Emphasis on heightened repetition of musical material – motives, phrases, sections, entire form
- "Feathered" beginnings and endings, rather than clean starts and cut-offs
- Lack of pre-planned dramatic contrasts
- Constant repetition of core musical parts
- Variation is intensive - added within or on top of basic musical material
- Genre specific formulas
- Dense textures and timbres

These style characteristics create security in constancy and repetition, as well as a cloaking of individual contributions, which create comfort for participants to join in at their own level of ability. These features function to inspire and support participation and enhance social bonding.

A Participatory Ethos

A general ethos in contra dance is that everyone can and should participate. Contra dance websites and advertisement flyers often indicate this in descriptions of open invitations to all, regardless of experience. Encouragement to join in is frequently offered to beginners, reassuring them that "if you can walk, you can contra dance." Similarly informative, and somewhat prodding, several times during my fieldwork I heard callers mention that contra dance is not a spectator sport. Most who attend a contra dance do so with an understanding that the music and dance are central to the evening and that they will be invited and expected to participate. While people sometimes sit out during a dance to rest, socialize, enjoy the band, or because they do not have a partner, they are not part of an audience.

There is no artist-audience distinction in contra dance. Instead there are participants and potential participants. However, appearances at a contra dance may be

somewhat deceptive in this regard. At the top of the hall, space is reserved specifically for the caller and musicians. Frequently a physical separation by means of a stage gives an initial appearance of artist-audience distinction. On closer observation, though the musicians and caller perform for the dance, attention is on sonic and kinesic interaction among the participants. The dancers do not focus on the musicians as an audience for a presentational performance would; their focus is on their own action and interaction. Rather than artist and audience, the musicians, callers, and dancers are each filling a separate performance role.

The variety of roles available and a wide range of abilities able to be accommodated facilitate participation in contra dance. While some roles are simple, others may require more finely honed skills and specialization. Dancing the basic choreography is the simplest role to fulfill, while calling and playing music require a certain specialization. There is space within each of these roles, however, to engage people of various skill levels. Inclusion of people with differing levels of investment and ability is characteristic of the contra dance ethos and creates an interesting dynamic within the practice. The music and choreography of contra dance provide an easy place for people to begin while enabling continuing challenges for those with more experience.

Choreographic Aspects

"For As Many As Will"

The expression "for as many as will" was used at least as early as the mid-seventeenth century to describe certain types of longways dancing, the style from which contra dance is derived. The phrase indicates that the dance is open to as many couples as can fit the length of the dance floor. I repeat it here to reaffirm the participatory nature of

contra dance, not only with dancers but in the general ethos of the practice. The formation of longways sets means that the structure of the dance is an open form. The only limitation, in theory, to the length of the set and the number of dancers able to be included is the capacity of the hall and the number of participants present. "For as many as will" inherently suggests that those who wish may participate and any others may potentially be considered participants at their will. Choreographic form in contra dance is one way in which participatory performance features of contra dance are realized.

Halls where contra dances take place typically have a long dimension and a short dimension; in other words, they are generally rectangular in shape. The top of the hall is located along one of the shorter sides and is where the caller and musicians are located. The bottom of the hall is located along the other short side, and the dancers align the length of the long dimension, from top to bottom of the hall. Partners in a couple usually stand side-by-side or opposite one another in a set, according to one of a few formations. Proper formations are indicated by all "gents" lining up on the left side of the set when facing the top of the hall, and all "ladies" across from them on the right side.[6] Improper formation alternates "ladies" and "gents," with the "gents" of the active couples or "ones" on the right side of the set, partners standing across from each other. This is usually indicated when the caller asks that "ones cross over," with lady and gent trading places and now facing down the hall. Active couples, or "ones," are every odd-numbered couple. They are neighbors with, and alternate in the lines with inactive couples or

[6] As discussed in the previous chapters, improper formation is most popular now. Typically when lining up, groups of four will arrange themselves in an improper formation before any indication from the caller.

"twos" – every even-numbered couple. A third formation, called Becket, also alternates "ladies" and "gents" but has partners standing beside each other in the same line of the set. This is usually indicated by the caller asking the group of hands-four to circle three-quarters to the right.

Progression is an essential concept in contra dance. In a typical contra dance, each couple dances with the couple next to them in the lines (neighbors). Each time through the execution of the figures, the couples move either up or down the set to dance with a new neighbor couple. In all of the formations listed above, the "ones" progress down the hall and the "twos" progress up the hall during the dance. The progression allows every couple in a set to dance with every other couple in the set, a distinctive and enjoyable feature of the contra dance formation that contributes to a feeling of community. The movement through the set likewise indicates an open form: the top and bottom of the set are open as couples move through the progression, rather than maintaining fixed positions. Upon arriving at the top or bottom of the set, couples wait out one turn before rejoining the dance in the opposite direction – a sort of feathered entrance. Partners who began at the top of the set work their way to the bottom, and vice versa as couples continuously trade places. If a couple wishes to join in, structure and etiquette allow them to join at the bottom of the set. In many cases, they may even join after the dance has begun, though etiquette here suggests that this is appropriate if they are able to catch on to the choreography quickly and without the walk-through.

There is a core and fairly small repertoire of dance figures that are used in a variety of combinations to make up the rather large (and increasing all the time with newly composed dances) body of contra dances. These patterned movements—do-si-do,

star, hey, allemande, chain, and swing, among others—make up a sort of set of genre specific formulas. These are generally danced with partners and neighbors within the minor set of the longways set (four dancers when the dance is a duple minor, six when it is a triple, though this is less common currently). Mary Dart's work, *Contra Dance Choreography: A Reflection of Social Change*, includes a generous appendix of illustrations of figures including directional arrows to indicate movement. Although I use some of the same elegant illustrations, I will not repeat such a detailed description here. Instead, to make clear how the figures are used, how progression occurs, and how these may be analyzed as participatory performance features, I present the light-heartedly named dance "Al's Safeway Produce," by North Carolina contra dancer Robert Cromartie.

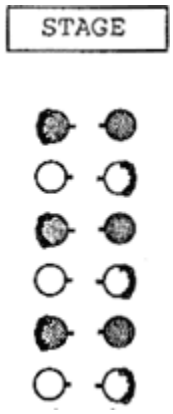
"Al's Safeway Produce"

On a caller's card, the dance is often written in a form to correspond with the tune structure, typically four eight-bar phrases in the form AABB. Beside the letter for each phrase is a description of the dance movements that take place during that phrase. "Al's Safeway Produce" would appear as follows:

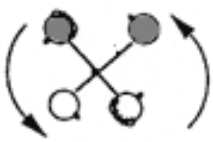
A1 Star left; Allemande neighbor left 1 & 1/2.
A2 Women allemande right 1 & 1/2; Swing partner.
B1 Circle left 3/4; Swing neighbor.
B2 Long lines forward and back; Star right.

This is a relatively uncomplicated duple improper dance, which indicates that the minor set (duple) includes two couples and that, after the dancers line up with men on one side and ladies on the other, the caller asks the "ones" to cross over. Partners are

across the set from one another and neighbors are beside each other in the same lines, in improper formation.

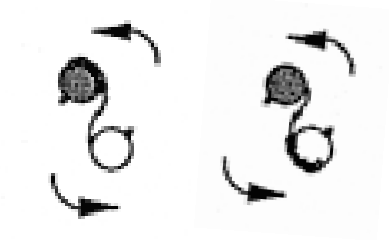


The dance begins with a left hand star performed by the four dancers in each minor set. Using either a handshake grasp with the person opposite or placing one's hand on the wrist of the dancer ahead (this was most common in my fieldwork, but often depends on ease of moving into the subsequent figure), the four dancers place left hands together in the center of their little circle and walk counter-clockwise one full rotation until they are all back to their original position.

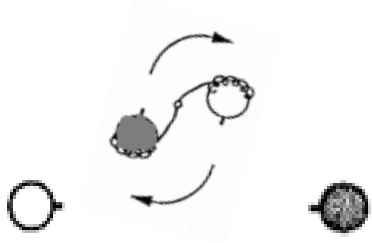


Back in their starting position, neighbors are beside each other and can easily move their left hands from the star position to an allemande position. The dancers move from a circle

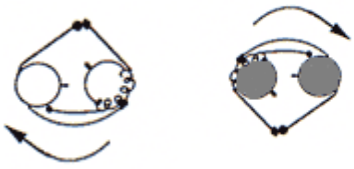
of four into the neighbor allemande without pause. Pressing their left hands together at about shoulder height, with arms bent upward from the elbow, neighbors turn counter-clockwise in a smaller two-person circle once-and-a-half.



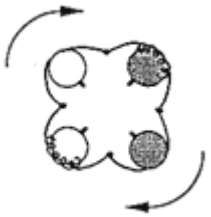
Once-and-a-half around effectively trades positions of the neighbors. From here, the ladies continue a circular motion, meeting in the center of the circle and changing direction for a right hand allemande.



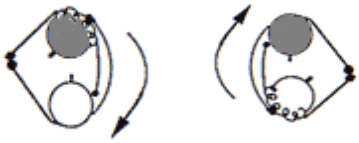
Turning once and a half, the ladies are now facing their partners on the other side of the set, and can continue the clockwise circular motion in a swing with their partner.



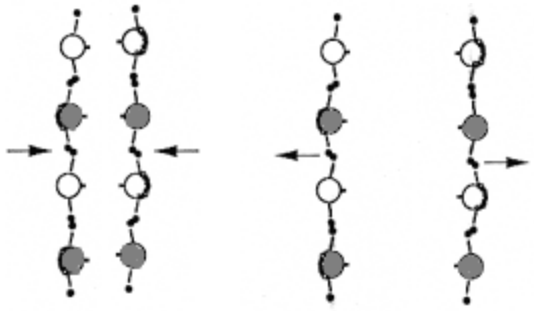
The swing ends with the lady to the right of the gent. Partners can easily unfold from the ballroom position swing, opening out their arms to clasp hands with neighors for a circle left three-quarter around the circle.



After circling left three-quarters around, neighbors swing.



The swing ends with the lady to the right of the gent. The couples are now standing such that neighbors are side-by-side and partners are across from each other. The couples then join hands with those to each side of them, forming long lines down the hall. In these long lines, dancers go forward four steps and back the same.



Then, in the original minor set of four, dancers perform a right hand star. This is the same as the star before, except now with right hands and walking clockwise.

When the couples have walked about three-quarters of the way around their circle they are facing in the direction of their progression (ones progress down the hall, twos progress up the hall) and easily walk in that direction to meet new neighbors. In this dance, the progression allows couples to flow elegantly from a right hand star with their original neighbors to a left hand star with the next neighbors, where the dance continues from the beginning figure. Just as there is continuous movement between each figure in the dance, there is continuous movement from one repetition of the dance to the next and from one set of neighbors to the next. The exception is at either end of the set, where a couple waits out one time through the dance before re-entering the set, moving in the other direction.

Couples waiting out at either end of the set during the dance are one possible example of feathered beginnings and endings. Rather than the set being closed and exact with all participants beginning and ending precisely as one, all couples take a turn out at some point. (During this time the couple may wait and observe or they may choose to dance for their own amusement, being sure to enter at the appropriate time). Additionally, couples may work their way into a dance already in progress, rather than necessarily being present at the very beginning of the dance, creating staggered or feathered entrances.

"Al's Safeway Produce" has eight choreographic figures that are executed in one repetition of the dance, with even fewer figure types, considering the allemande, swing, and star are each repeated with a slight variation. One repetition of the entire choreographic cycle takes less than one minute to execute; after the progression, couples then repeat the dance with their next neighbors. The open form of contra dance is apparent, as these repetitions may continue for nearly ten minutes – an average length of a contra dance. This feature of a relatively short form with an emphasis on repetition is one of the most common stylistic features of participatory performance. The use of stock figures and the high degree of repetition allow dancers to quickly learn and join the dance.

Stock figures and a high degree of repetition provide an easy place for dancers to begin, but could potentially threaten boredom for those with more experience. The basic simplicity of the form, however, is also what allows space to engage people of various skill levels. The intensive variation that is accepted by form and etiquette enables continuing challenges for those who have more experience. Variations or additions within

or on top of the basic form that do not alter or extend the overall form have been adopted and, in some cases, standardized among contra dancers.

Intensive variations performed by dancers may be individual or between dancers, and run the gamut from a simple twirl to rather complex flourishes during a figure. These are movements beyond what the choreography specifies that, ideally, add to the dancer's fun while not disrupting others.[7] Many dancers choose to add spins, turning themselves around solo during a figure. Some individuals may try a little flatfooting while they are not actively involved in a figure (the gents who are waiting while the ladies allemande in "Al's Safeway Produce," for example). There are a number of creative flourishes that can be executed between dancers, ranging from alternative hand holds in several figures to changes in direction of movement, and a combination of these. On occasion, more experienced dancers will negotiate a skillful change-up to switch dance roles with their partner mid-dance (when agreed upon by a larger group the result is a "chaos line," in which a variety of changes occur nearly constantly). A few movements, such as spins and twirls (and, to a much lesser extent, dips) have become a regular part of contra dance.

For years, swing dance accents have been among the stylistic choices of contra dancers. It is common to see a variety of turns and flourishes form the swing dance repertoire, including rather complicated moves like the sidecar (a challenging acrobatic lift) and the pretzel (a complicated under arm flourish). Similarly, blues dancing moves have also been incorporated into contra dance. The blues posture is used sometimes in partner swings; this is typically a closer hold that is distinctly more intimate than the buzz

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[7] Flourishes have been a point for debate and discussion among dance communities. I addressed this in the previous chapter.

step swing. The Asheville, North Carolina contra dance scene is particularly noted for dancers emulating a sexier, blues-fusion dance style, but the blues moves can be seen in contra dances throughout the country.

There is a density of texture created within the dance as couples and individuals execute the choreography to their own abilities and styles. The dancers' different variations are in sync with the underlying groove but, since they are not in strict unison, the dancers are slightly out of phase with each other, a phenomenon that Steven Feld refers to as "in-sync-out-of-phase."[8] This "in-sync-out-of-phase" phenomenon allows dancers to feel a sense of unity across the floor, as well as the liberty to express their individuality as a dancer. The density provides a comfortable space for dancers to learn and enjoy the dance at their own ability, without the demand of clear and precise synchronization on the dance floor.

Musical Aspects

Contra Dance Tunes

Contemporary contra dance practice offers a good deal of flexibility in matching dance tunes to choreography. Whereas by the end of the nineteenth century many tunes were associated with dances of the same name, some of which persist—Hull's Victory, Chorus Jig, Money Musk, for example—recent practice does not generally align tunes and dances. Today, tunes are nearly interchangeable. While many callers and bands attempt to match tunes with dances based on qualities of mood, choreographic flow,

[8] Steven Feld, "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style, or 'Lift-Up-Over-Sounding': Getting into the Kaluli Groove," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* (1998) 20: 74 – 113.

smoothness, or bounce, individual tunes do not typically become associated with a particular dance. Rather, any tune that adheres to the basic structure can potentially be used for any dance.

Contra dance tunes follow parameters of Anglo-Celtic and American fiddle tune structure. This structure is 32 measures and two main dance beats per measure for 64-beats in each tune, often in AABB form with two repeated sections of 8 measures each. These 64-beat tunes are called "square," an important characteristic for ease of phrasing in contra dance. Tunes that are not an even, 64 beats are "crooked" and almost never used for contra dances. Tunes are most frequently in time signatures of 4/4, 2/4, or 6/8, with jigs and reels particularly common, and melodic modes of D, G, and A – keys that align well with the open strings of a fiddle.

In discussing traditional tunes for contra dances, fiddler Laura Lengnick notes that "generally what you find is that they are strongly-phrased, four-bar melodies, with distinctive A and B parts. If you think about this for a while, you begin to realize that this structure supports the dancers best, because most contra dance figures are done in four bars (or eight counts at two counts per bar). Instinctively, dancers listen for eight counts as they move through the figures, finishing up as the eighth count nears and ready to start the new figure as the eighth count ends."[9]

[9] Laura Lengnick, "So You Wanna Play Dance Music?" http://www.oldfarmersball.com/newsletters/articles/so-you-want-to-play-dance-music.pdf.

“Sandy Boys”

“Sandy Boys” is a reel common in American old-time repertoire (Example 1). This tune has been played for contra dances by the Baltimore Open Band and the Glen Echo Open Band, as well as other established and touring bands. The tune itself, and the typical performance of it in a contra dance context, includes many features characteristic of participatory music.

Example 1: Pairing “Al’s Safeway Produce” with the tune “Sandy Boys” reveals how a tune and choreography align

A1: Star Left……..…..….Allemande neighbor, left 1½……...
A2: Women allemande right 1½ ….Swing partner……..

B1: Circle left ¾ ……..…Swing neighbor……..
B2: Long lines forward and back…Star right……

“Sandy Boys” is in a short bipartite form. The A section and the B section are each eight measures, both repeated to produce the AABB structure. The typical structure of 32 measures and 64 beats is apparent, as this particular notation in 2/4 makes the two dance beats per measure obvious. Looking more closely at the tune, the four-bar melody

Laura Lengnick spoke of is apparent in both the A and the B parts. In each section the first 4-measure phrase and the second four-measure phrase are nearly identical, with differences coming at the ends of the phrases. The similarities within the phrases and the repetition of each section create internal repetition among the melodic units, the harmonic progression, and the structure of repeated sections. In addition to the internal repetition the entire tune is repeated many times in performance. As mentioned above, one time through (dance and tune correspond in length) takes less than one minute. The tune is then repeated, either the full duration of the dance or a portion of it if the band chooses a medley.

I learned this tune on both cello and in clawhammer style banjo to play with the open bands. As an experienced cello player and a novice banjo player, I had an opportunity to explore those aspects of participatory music that can accommodate both beginners and those with more experience. Although I was still not a very experienced contra dance musician, my experience on the cello enabled me to explore more nuance in the music than my banjo ability. Melody, countermelody, harmony, rhythmic back-up, bass lines, and chord progressions idiomatic of the instrument played are all possibilities given musical structure and etiquette.

Open bands

With open bands in particular, there is a density of sound created by the musicians, which, during my fieldwork, numbered from a half dozen or more in the smaller Baltimore Open Band, to a few dozen in the larger Glen Echo Open Band, each varying on any given evening. As is common in old-time jam formations, there is a layering effect in the open band, with lead musicians in the front row near microphones,

and others in rows behind them. Musicians on fiddles, concertinas, banjos, guitars, mandolins, piano, flute, clarinet, bodhran, bones, shakers, upright bass, cello, hammered dulcimer, tin whistle, and even a marimba, all perform the tune as they feel competent and moved to do. There are no specific written parts, other than the tune and a chord progression (some musicians use sheet music, others play by ear or memory), so what happens in an open band depends on individual contributions, style, and skill level. The tendency in these open bands is toward many musicians playing a relatively straightforward melody with others, such as those playing rhythm guitar, offering a typically steady chord progression.

Within the relatively straightforward performance, however, in addition to each musician's style and ability, the nature of the instrument, as well as the spectrum of aesthetics, also add to the density of sound. In contra music, there is a palette of tones that includes scratchy and rough sounds as well as sweet ones. This is particularly noticeable in fiddle playing; whether by intention or by skill, different fiddlers may use different sounds. My performance of "Sandy Boys" on cello or on banjo could differ markedly, not simply because of my skill level, but also because of the nature of the instruments. On the banjo, I could play a melody (though I, and some other musicians, play it without the syncopation over the bar line from mm. 2-3 and mm. 4-5) or follow the chord progression with the "bum ditty" rhythm characteristic of the clawhammer style ( ). On cello, I could perform the same rhythm (or others) as rhythmic back-up, albeit with distinct timbral differences when compared to the banjo. Melody and simple bass lines were other options I used. Since there were no scripted parts and no pre-planned contrasts, it was up to my discretion whether I wanted to play melody or rhythm, or anything at all at various

times through the tune, as well as when and how to enter the sound when I did play. As described above in regard to the dance, the same phenomenon can be observed in the music: I and the other musicians were often out of phase in our heterophonic performance, but always finding the groove of being in sync.

Touring bands

Professional touring bands represent another end of the spectrum to explore participatory music's ability to accommodate and offer challenges to more experienced musicians. The most marked difference I noticed in performances by community open bands and some touring bands is the degree of improvisation the musicians use. Whereas the open bands in my fieldwork typically perform a more straightforward, melody-centric version of the tune, many established and touring bands make more use of improvisation or stylized, formulaic playing as a means of adding variation to the short, repetitive tunes, with less emphasis on melody, something several credit to the influence to swing and rock. As Turino notes, "pieces and dance styles are treated by some performers as loose models with associated collections of formulas rather than as set, closely reproducible items."[10]

Playing one tune ten to twenty times through creates an opportunity in which adding variation is feasible and, often, desirable for both musicians and dancers. Ed Howe, fiddler with the band Perpetual e-Motion describes the effect of adding variation:

> I might actually, at three or four times through it…You know you play that tune so many times it becomes…I wouldn't say boring but it's, you know, I might

[10] Thomas Turino, "Formulas and Improvisation in Participatory Music" in *Musical Improvisation: Art, Education, and Society* edited by Gabriel Solis and Bruno Nettl: 104.

> want to try to change it up a little bit. And what it does is it gives it a little bit of a different feel. So all of a sudden I just sort of took the tune and I said alright, John's playing these chords and I'm gonna play something that goes along with the chords now to give it a different flavor for one time through the tune and then I might go back into playing the tune again. And what it does is it makes the dancers aware that there's music happening. And not necessarily music, but good music.[11]

Some musicians might improvise an entire solo over the chord changes of the tune, others might create slight variations within the tune each time through. The simplicity of the tunes, the participatory qualities, lend them well to improvisation. A contra dance flutist notes, "I think one of the things that really has worked for us is finding tunes that are super simple and then playing with them, building on them. Because it's so simple it leaves a lot of space to move around in…you have potential for a lot of shapes within it."[12]

Musicians may have their own habits and styles when playing tunes, but it is generally agreed among musicians, callers, and dancers, that the structure of the tune must remain clear during improvisation. One guitarist suggests "that's an important thing to think about…there's always somebody holding down some sort of level of phrasing, ideally."[13] Several bands experiment with periods of jamming during a tune, often paring down to a minimal sound while still, ideally, maintaining the structure so that the dancers can maintain the choreography: "once you have them locked in—they've done the dance

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[11] Ed Howe, interview with Dennis Merritt for the Old Farmer's Ball, http://www.oldfarmersball.com/TheMusic/.

[12] Musician's Workshop, Feet Retreat, 9 September 2015.

[13] Ibid.

eight times, nine times—then they kind of are in the zone, they have that physical sense of how long things are supposed to last by that point, so you can [drop the melody], but I'd say as a general rule you want to maintain some level of structure."[14] A flutist describes this process for her band and the confusion that can occur among dancers when the feeling of the musical structure for the dance is lost:

> I think that's something we do a lot, we drop off the melody. And just to tell the story, I think we failed at it for a while and, so, the dancers didn't fire us, fortunately, but it took us a little while to feel like if we drop out of the melody what do we need to keep in, and sometimes we dropped too much out and sometimes they think it's the end and the dancers stop. Oh, oops! So you have to be real nice and steady, clear: we're still going but there's not a whole lot happening.[15]

Ed Howe shared similar thoughts on improvisation and maintaining clarity and structure:

> One of the things I try to keep in mind when I play for a dance is that if I start a phrase I try to make that phrase recognizable to the end of a dance move. So for instance, if it's a four beat phrase or an eight beat phrase or even a full A1 or A2 phrase. And it could be a completely improvised phrase.

Dancers and musicians agree that a clear beat and regularity in the rhythm help maintain the structure. Laura Lengnick asserts that "at its most basic, the band's job is to provide a beat for the dancers to walk to."[16] Andrew VanNorstrand observes that "the first thing the dancers will pick up on from the music is the rhythm."[17] Another fiddler

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Lengnick, "So You Wanna Play Dance Music?"

[17] Personal communication.

echoed this as a musician's obligation that "the dancers have to be informed of where the beat is," citing rhythm and regularity of rhythm as a crucial aspect of contra dance music.[18]

"Sandy Boys" Revisited

During my fieldwork, I noted that several established local and touring bands played the tune "Sandy Boys," creating the opportunity to observe the tune at various points on a continuum of musical experience and style. The band Elixir performed "Sandy Boys" at the Glen Echo contra dance on October 19, 2014. As described in chapter three, Elixir is comprised of guitar, fiddle, clarinet, trumpet, and trombone, and often perform in a jazz-influenced sound. For one dance at this event, Elixir performed a medley of "Sandy Boys," "Who's That Blue-Eyed Lady," and "Back Door Slam," the last two reels both written by Dave Wiesler. Elixir began the set with "Sandy Boys," playing the tune ten times through, lasting just over five minutes before transitioning to "Who's That Blue Eyed Lady."

The first time through the tune was a pared-down presentation performed on fiddle and guitar in a relatively straightforward style, with melody on the fiddle and rhythmic accompaniment on the guitar. The sparse instrumentation and straightforward style allowed space for the caller to announce the figures and for the dancers to begin to establish the pattern of choreography. This continued into the second time through the tune until the clarinet entered at the B section in sustained notes before eventually joining in the melody with the fiddle for the third round.

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[18] Personal communication, April 3, 2013.

Beginning the fourth time through the tune, the band steadily increases the instrumentation and activity, trading and improvising around the melody, and guiding the energy toward an eventual transition to a new tune. The horn section becomes prominent; the clarinet takes the lead, the trumpet and trombone join the sound with fiddle and guitar adding a driving, off-beat, rhythmic accompaniment. Calling, which had lessened in the third time, is now dropped off entirely, allowing what has been established to hold together on its own. At this point, the dancers have a physical and mental memory of the choreography and can be more in the flow of the dance and musicians may ready to expand the edges of the tune, playing with possibility. It is at this point, especially, that individual flow and social synchrony, and some of the magic of contra dance become palpable. Here, the potential within the simplicity of a contra dance tune begins to be realized.

Below, I have extracted the clarinet part of my transcription for the fourth time through the Sandy Boys tune as performed by Elixir on October 19, 2014 (Example 2). The first remarkable aspect of this process, in consideration of the exploration of contra dance music within this chapter, is that this is, in essence, a clarinet solo with accompaniment. This differentiates performance practices of named and touring bands from community-centered open bands, in which there are typically no solos. The personal style of the well-rehearsed band and the clarinetist is also evident in the clarity of the solo. The syncopated rhythms and the lowering of the third degree (C-sharp to C-natural) in the A-mixolydian tune lend a jazzy feel, a hallmark style of the band.

As the clarinet takes the lead in the fourth iteration, specialization and artistry are apparent. The band members allow each other enough space throughout the tune to allow

moments to unfold. Although there are not necessarily any planned contrasts here, small bands that rehearse together frequently come to know each other's playing and to be able to read subtle cues and respond quickly. In part, this is one way musicians help guide the energy of the dance event.

Example 2: Clarinet part from transcription of "Sandy Boys" as performed by Elixir, October 19, 2014

In this fourth time through the tune bits of melody begin to be dropped more and more, allowing space for variation in improvised parts, something of interest and excitement that does register on some level with the dancers. The rhythm also becomes

more driving and exciting here. Although even in the first round of the tune, the guitar emphasized offbeats, by this round the guitar and the fiddle create a rhythmic groove that emphasizes the offbeat, reinforced occasionally by the trumpet and trombone, who also play some longer notes and some harmony notes in order to not overwhelm the rhythmic feel. Repetition of notes and shrinking the rhythmic unit, particularly in the B section, continue to drive and sustain the energy. The melody is dropped except for what is hinted at by the trumpet, and the clarinet repeats an A building the tension and momentum. The end of the fourth time through leads to higher register (mm. 31-32) where the tune on the fifth iteration (m. 33, above) begins an octave higher.

Example 3: Ending the fourth iteration of the "Sandy Boys" tune

The band continues the accelerated momentum (in feeling only, the tempo stays relatively the same – around 120bpm), dropping the melody and improvising even more in the fifth round before paring back and re-establishing the melody of this tune,

improvising around the melody again, and then transitioning to the next tune of the medley.

As in this fourth iteration as well as through the tune, the medley, and the evening, named and touring bands often attempt to shape and guide the energy of a dance. Both for themselves and the dancers, well-rehearsed bands (and callers) keep in mind the arc of the dance, including energy and mood, something that open bands with little or no rehearsal do not much discuss.

The Experience of Participation

In the previous chapters, I discuss a typical evening routine and general practices of the dance community. Above is my effort to outline the participatory features within the music and choreography. Beyond each of these explanatory endeavors, lies a realm of experience –which I visit in some detail in the previous chapter, and again in the next— that I now here offer in descriptions in my own voice and from accounts given to me.

In a community of practice, participation must be more than just showing up. Participation implies being active in the practices of the community and constructing an identity in relation to the community. There are many layers of identity creation and interpretation; the most basic of these may be assessed as beginner, intermediate, and advanced within the various roles of contra dance.

For beginners, the dance is stressful, both physical and mentally, and sometimes socially. Physically, a new dancer feels awkward not knowing what is coming next, not accustomed to dancing with momentum or giving weight. The activity of the dance combined with the motions of the figures can be disorienting and add to a dancer's confusion. Often the circular motions of the choreography cause dizziness for a new

dancer. One evening of my fieldwork, after a particularly swirling dance, a woman new to contra dance approached me for advice because she was experiencing a bit of motion sickness. The general suggestion, which is also intended to bolster social interaction, is to look your partner in the eyes. Another possibility is to use a spotting technique in which a dancer tries to keep their focus on a single point. Altering the direction of motion is one of the best remedies and if it does not occur in the choreography, learning to twirl is helpful.

Mentally, both new dancers and first time open band musicians may feel stress, though most musicians are at least physically accustomed to playing their instrument. Concerns about making a mistake may encroach, as well as a certain level of self-consciousness regarding competence. Both new dancers and first time musicians fix their awareness on their activity - dancers listen closely to the caller, musicians to fellow musicians - occasionally concentrating so hard their mind goes blank anticipating the next move or trying remember whether it is the first or second time through the A section of music. At its most challenging and least successful, the dance is a group of people trying to stay together, paying no attention to others because they are each too focused on trying to get through all the notes or all the movements, or lost in the process of doing so.

There are times when contra dance simply doesn't appeal to someone. One possibility is that after a work week fulfilling obligations, sometimes what is most wanted is a sense of looseness in one's free time, rather than being told what to do – as by the caller. One comment I received reminded me of the less-recognized experience of those who "come to the dance not knowing what to expect and are approached by dozens of strangers who have very little understanding of personal space due to their involvement

with contra, and then proceed to start doing a dance where they have no idea what is going on, are being told what to do by someone they have no reason to respect, and if you hate it you are told you can't defect from the line because it breaks the dance. And if you do leave, someone might start trying to tell you how breaking the dance is bad etiquette and attempt to make you feel bad for not suffering through."

There is a thrill in it too, however, and that is why many first timers return. Building moments of success one-by-one by completing a figure or playing through a section of music, beginners start to feel themselves part of the larger experience. It is exciting to be part of a dance, to have it work, and to feel that you have contributed to it. Furthermore, once the dance is underway, the music and the movement can create physical and emotional reactions that are exhilarating. Comments from dancers reveal the allure:

"You get to really be energetic and be with people"
"Geometry in motion - You have a mass of people who are going one direction and all of a sudden, you're working with another group of people rotating in a completely different direction."
"You're just grooving, and it's awesome. It's like a rhythmic swirl of awesomeness and dancing." "It's just amazingly fun."

Beyond the beginning stage, into intermediate and advanced levels, the activity becomes habitualized. This habitualization leads to less effort and concern about getting it right. Both dancers and musicians at these levels begin to innovate, to entertain and challenge themselves. At this level of experience dancers and musicians are less tense physically and mentally, and have more stamina. Energy is more focused, but with a softer concentration, and movements are smoother and more relaxed. At its best, it is "like having a really wonderful conversation." These are the moments when the "magic,"

as many people have referred to it, can occur. This is the most conducive space for flow, or optimal experience.

Conclusion

In regard to participatory practices, Thomas Turino notes that "much of the social power and aesthetic fulfillment . . . come through synchrony of sound and movement – moving and sounding as one."[19] As I indicate above, at its best, a contra dance is a group of people who have moved beyond *trying* to stay together into a synchrony in which they *are* together. Synchrony and similarity of movement act as signs of social comfort and belonging.[20] In contra dance this can be experienced directly, "without verbal mediation, as true signs of similarity and, thus, identity."[21] Participating in the music and movement of a contra dance, experiencing similarity, underscores the creation of a community identity. By recognizing the mutuality of our participation, we become part of each other, representing an identity constituted through relations of participation.

Within that community, engagement takes place embedded in culture and history. Engagement and collective learning within the community, over time, result in practices that reflect both the pursuit of the enterprise and the attendant social relations. In contra dance, our observations and interactions allow us, at the least, to learn how to dance, how to play music for the dance, how to interact with others, what is appropriate and what is

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[19] Turino, *Music in the Andes: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 26.

[20] Edward Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1977).

[21] Turino, *Music in the Andes,* 26.

inappropriate. These practices are resources for negotiating meaning among the community, a process that involves the interaction of participation and reification as complementary components. Participation is a social process of learning and knowing; it refers to action and connection, engagement and contribution. The process of reification gives form to our experience by producing objects (abstractions, symbols, tools, etc.) that congeal this experience into "thingness." The folk process provides an example of this interaction, which in contra dance has led to the addition of claps during the petronella and to standardized flourishes, such as a twirl, as well as expansion of the musical idiom, to list but a few.

Contra dance is a participatory experience emphasizing engagement and interaction of participants. The spirit of contra dance communities is one of inclusion, welcoming all, and intended "for as many as will." Style characteristics of the choreography and the music woven together with a spirit of invitation provide opportunities for people of varying levels of commitment, interests, and skills. These qualities are equally valuable in bridging states of competence and challenge, creating the possibility for individuals to experience a feeling of being in the moment and opening the possibility of flow, to which I turn my focus in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

FLOW: THE JOY OF CONTRA DANCE

"This is the real secret of life…to be completely engaged with what you're doing in the here and now"
-Alan Watts

I have a yoga teacher who likes to begin and end each class with an "om" sounded among the group of participants. The "om" at the beginning of class is often a little wobbly, the 10-20 students sounding not quite settled on a pitch center together. Sometimes, there on my yoga mat with my eyes closed I smile a little, finding the humor in the sound, and knowing the difference of what usually comes at the end of class. Because what does come at the end of class is much more choral – harmonious and unified. Perhaps this sound is partly because we have done some deep breathing work, exercising our lungs and our bodies and warming up physically. But I believe it is more than this. I think our time on the yoga mat, individually focused on a steady vinyasa flow—the inner concentration, the physical work and movement often pushing out things of the mind—yet moving together in synchrony, establishes within each individual and among the group some unifying sense through which, at the end of class we are also sounding together.

Observing and experiencing such synchronizing phenomena serves as a source of wonderment and piques the curiosity. Whether with others or within the individual, aligning with something greater, in time and yet somehow timeless, acting while being

met by a source for a sort of effortless effort and tuning in to our full capabilities often produces feelings of joy, contentment, flow. Synchrony and similarity of gestures, movement, and body language are signs of social comfort and belonging; there is a powerful potential for social bonding in moving and sounding as one.[1]

The human emotional response to moving rhythmically and synchronously together, termed "muscular bonding," by William McNeill, who examined aspects of human history to conclude that such experience was crucial to "widening and differentiating social bonds among our species," can include feelings of unity; moving as one invokes feelings of being as one.[2] As Thomas Turino states about this phenomenon in music and dance, "the signs that emerge from each performer's manner of interacting sonically and kinesically affect and are directly affected by the kinesic and sonic signs of others….When music makers and dancers are in sync, such signs move beyond felt resemblances to experienced fact of social connections and unity."[3]

While there is a unifying sense of oneness among a group created by synchronous behavior, there is another related but distinct potential for the individual to experience a sense of oneness in "flow." Flow similarly points to a manner of being in sync, though here through a merging of action and awareness within the individual. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi reinforces my yoga experience, stating, "it is not unreasonable to regard

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[1] Edward Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1977).

[2] William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 66.

[3] Thomas Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircean Semiotic Theory for Music," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 2, (Spring – Summer 1999): 241.

Yoga as one of the oldest and most systematic methods of producing the flow experience" by its means of "uniting the various parts of the body with one another, then making the body as a whole work together with consciousness as part of an ordered system."[4] He notices similar characteristics that may occur for people engaged in making music and dancing.

Csikszentmihalyi defines his concept of flow as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it…for the sheer sake of doing it."[5] He cites Abraham Maslow, a pioneer of humanistic psychology, in his work. Maslow developed an idea of "peak experience" with characteristics of full attention, intrinsic value of the experience, disorientation in time and space, and an emotional reaction of awe or surrender as before something great.[6] Many of these characteristics overlap the flow concept, although Csikszentmihalyi writes of "optimal experience" rather than peak experience. Peak experience is a form of intense joy distinguished as mystic and transpersonal, whereas flow, an intrinsically rewarding experience (often indicated at a lower level than "peak" moments), is differentiated by fun and play, and characterized by outer structures and the importance of other people.[7]

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[4] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 104-106.

[5] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 4.

[6] Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1968), 88.

[7] Gayle Privette, "Peak Experience, Peak Performance, and Flow: A Comparative Analysis of Positive Human Experiences" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1983, 45: 1361 – 1368.

Several scholars have given their own name to similar phenomena, both in group experience as "collective effervescence"[8] and "*communitas*,"[9] and in individual experiences as "peak experience," and "flow." Csikszentmihalyi notes that the concept of flow has been found useful by anthropologists interested in the phenomenon of collective effervescence and rituals.[10] Edith Turner comments that "communitas may be found when people engage in a collective task with full attention – often a matter of ordinary work. They may find themselves "in flow."[11] Edward Slingerland makes a connection between the Chinese philosophical concept of *wu wei*, often translated as "non-action" or "non-doing," and flow states (and to the "Force" in *Star Wars*).[12] What these concepts tend to have in common is an essence of being fully in the moment, utterly immersed and engaged in the activity, among other qualities.

Characteristics of play, flow, *communitas*, and Secondness overlap and contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon that became apparent to me during my fieldwork, a phenomenon many in contra dance simply call "magic." Play, which I discuss in chapter three, is something most of us usually know when we see it (if we read the

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[8] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995 [1912]).

[9] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

[10] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow,* 5.

[11] Edith Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillam, 2012), 3.

[12] Edward Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try* (New York: Crown (Random House), 2015).

indicators correctly). In his frame theory, anthropologist Gregory Bateson suggests about play that there are signals, metacommunication, we exchange to come to an understanding that the actions or events related to those signals are 'not serious' though they may resemble actions that are, and that these actions are somehow outside ordinary life proceeding by their own rules and time.[13] Thomas Turino, in his work with Peircean semiotics, asserts that Bateson's "Play" and frame theory can be subsumed by Peirce's work, particularly around ways a sign is interpreted as representing its object.[14] Using Peirce's ontological categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, flow is a means to Secondness experience, though not coterminous with that state.

Like play, flow is an autotelic experience proceeding according to its own time, fully engaging the individual whose full concentration is on the experience. Flow is a common experience during play, but they are not same phenomenon. Flow, observed as an individual experience, may induce *communitas* and *communitas* flow, but *communitas,* a collective phenomenon, is differentiated by its association with religious and mystical experiences.

A good portion of the writing on contra dance mentions some quality similar to flow. Hast writes briefly of "moments of transformation,"[15] Bealle describes the

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[13] Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy."

[14] Turino, "Peircean Thought," 214.

[15] Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community," 116-117.

"euphoria"[16] of the dance, Paul Jordan-Smith discusses the "spirit of play,"[17] and Turino specifically cites Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow.[18] There are also several mentions of setting or matching tunes to dances, but as Janet Herman acknowledges, "in fact, the interdependence of dance and music in 'Anglo American' tradition seems particularly neglected by scholars."[19] Her short 1995 article, however, does not venture much beyond a suggestion that flowing, driving, and bouncing dances can be paired with music in an aesthetically satisfying way.

In this chapter, I suggest how these particular qualities, that have so far been described, may be evoked in the experience. It is clear to me from my fieldwork that the energy of a dance and of an evening is taken well in consideration by callers, musicians, and dancers. Providing ethnographic evidence from conversations and interviews, I discuss the intentions and the strategies of musicians and callers for guiding and shaping the energy of a dance, the experiences of dancers in synchronicity, and the ways that this may compel an optimal experience.

Secondness

Peircean theory is directed toward analysis of specific instances of experience, the interpretation of signs as experience and meaning, and the ongoing processes of "selves-

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[16]Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance,* 177.

[17] Jordan-Smith, "For as Many as Will," 218.

[18] Turino, *Music as Social Life,* 4.

[19] Janet Herman, "Music in a Dance Context: The Case of Contra in Los Angeles," *UCLA Journal of Dance Ethnology* 19 (1995): 11 n1.

in-the-world mediated by signs."[20] Phenomenology and semiotics as associated with Peirce offer a typology of mediation and states of mind in which "Secondness" closely corresponds to flow. Firstness is an entity without relation to a Second; it is objective reality; it is a "being" mode. These experiences are often described as moments of being completely "zoned out," being somewhere else, not present or self-aware. Secondness is the direct relationship between two entities without the mediation of a Third; it is a "reacting" mode. Thirdness involves the mediation of a First and Second by a Third; it is a "thinking" and reflective mode.

Secondness is often described as being "in the zone," "in the groove," or "in the pocket." This is a state, like flow, where action and awareness merge. Flow, as offered by Csikszentmihalyi, correlates strongly with many musicians' and dancers' experiences of a common type of Secondness. Using language commonly found in accounts of Secondness experience, one dancer stated: "When my co-dancers and I are in the groove, I feel like we're trapeze artists. I love the 'Zoom'." A caller used similar language: "I know I'm really in the pocket when I'm giving myself chills." Secondness is a much-appreciated and desired state because the emotion of this experience is happiness or joy.

Peircean theory, with its consideration of signs within a phenomenological approach is useful for understanding musical experiences, including flow experiences. As Victor Turner states regarding the content of the experience: "This is where the analysis of symbols begins . . . Surely, the processes of *communitas* and flow are imbued with the meanings of the symbols they either generate or are channeled by."[21]

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[20] Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 11 – 12.

Flow

Flow is a state in which a person is so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. It is a state of intrinsic motivation, one in which a person is fully immersed in what they are doing for the sake of the activity itself. Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement:

> a state in which action follows action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part…we experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future. (Csikszentmihalyi 1972).

The characteristics of flow state include an intense and focused concentration on the present moment, a merging of action and awareness, a loss of reflective self-consciousness, a sense of personal control or agency in the situation or activity, a distortion of temporal experience (one's subjective experience of time is altered), and an experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, also referred to as autotelic experience.[22]

Intense and focused attention occurs on and by means of a limited stimulus field. Consciousness must be narrowed and attention centered so that outside distractions dissipate, it is the *now* is what matters. Intensification may happen by formal rules or by motivational means such as competitiveness. The environment may hold physical cues, uniquely marking the field to help one shift from a "boundless stimulus field of everyday

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[21] Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid," 90.

[22] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*.

life to the magically sheltered field of the game."[23] Rewards and immediate feedback help complete the focus.

As I mentioned in my discussion of the playing field in chapter three, there are environmental cues, routines, and behaviors that act to create boundaries around contra dance. Even the pace of the evening in modern contra dance leaves little time other than the break or sitting out a dance for conversation to broaden the stimuli. In addition to these structures, musical and choreographic forms may also serve as a means of concentrating focus. For dancers, since the dance is a pre-arranged set of moves, decisions do not need to be made about what move to do next. This simplicity is an advantage - since the decision is already made, that part of the thought process can be eliminated (once competence is achieved) so dancers can simply be present to the music, to partners and to fellow dancers. Likewise with callers and musicians, since dances and tunes are pre-composed, decisions are limited to what may occur in the moment around the predetermined structure. All of these structures work to limit the stimulus field, raising the possibility for flow.

This intense, focused concentration makes possible a merging of action and awareness. There is a resolution of dichotomies: mind/body, subject/object. Action follows action in a unified experience flowing from one moment to the next. For flow, one may be aware of what they are doing, but cannot be aware that they are aware, or thinking about what they are doing or going to do. In other words, self-awareness is still present (Secondness) but the thought processes (Thirdness) have quieted. Comments such

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[23] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, "An Exploratory Model of Play," *American Anthropologist* 73, no. 1 (1971): 54.

as "I enjoy turning my brain off for a couple of hours and melting into the music" and “It really gets me out of my head,” made to me by dancers indicate an absence of the thinking mode of self, or the Third. Consciousness and behavior become one.

Loss of ego or self is another characteristic of flow. The self as a level of mediation or reflection (Thirdness) becomes irrelevant, as mentioned above. One is immersed in flow, bound by rules and a limited stimulus field and there is no need to determine what should or should not be done. This is not a loss of self-awareness. Kinesthetic and mental awareness is heightened, not reduced, concentration is focused. Additionally, there is “no solipsism…about the experience. Flow reaches out to nature and to [others] in ‘intuitions of unity, solidarity, repletion and acceptance,’ all felt to be one.”[24]

In flow, one feels a sense of personal control or agency. Though one may not be aware of it at the time, one’s skills are matched to the demands of the activity; the ability to act matches the requirements for action. By means of rules and a narrowed stimulus field there are boundaries for the necessary skills and demands made on the actor. Rules reduce anxiety about the number of possibilities available as a response to any given situation. Additionally, for the flow experience, there are clear, non-contradictory demands for action as well as immediate feedback. This produces a balance between boredom, where skills are greater than the requirement, and anxiety, where the requirements are more than the skills available – each cases where Thirdness is

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[24] Victor Turner “From Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology,” *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies,* 60, no. 3, (1974) Rice University, http://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159.pdf: 88.

prominent. In my fieldwork, I often heard the thought expressed that contra dance is particularly appealing to people who respond to a sense of form. That, given rules in regard to what need occur next, one is able to relax. At that point, action may follow action. Flow differs from the everyday in that there are explicit rules and a limited field which make action and the evaluation of action unproblematic.

Absorption and full attention, often overwhelming other senses are critical to full involvement. Because of this absorption, being thoroughly focused on the present, a distortion of temporal experience is also noted in flow. Interaction with time becomes imprecise; through a merging of personal and experiential awareness, the feeling of a linear passage of time becomes indistinct. When coming out of flow, one may stop to wonder what happened to the time. The distortion of time may occur in either direction, a lengthening or a shortening; one may feel that some amount of time went by "in a flash" or that a particular moment "seemed to last an eternity." In contra dance this is layered on the move away from clock time. Though a dance evening generally has beginning and ending times, and individual dances all tend to average around ten minutes, once the evening is underway dancers and musicians are freed from having to think about time. The caller sets the dance in motion and calls it to an end.

Flow is an autotelic experience. When compared with other overlapping positive subjective experiences, flow is defined as an intrinsically rewarding experience distinguished by an element of fun.[25] It seems to need no goals or rewards outside itself. Csikszentmihalyi was attempting to understand happiness and what gives people a

[25] Privette, "Peak Experience, Peak Performance, and Flow."

feeling of meaning and purpose in life; he wanted to know as much as possible how people felt when they most enjoyed themselves, and why. To flow is to be as happy as a human can be - the particular rules or stimuli that triggered the flow do not matter.

Flow ranges from repetitive, nearly automatic behavior, to very complex behavior: instances of microflow to macro or deep flow, which has a full range and depth of potential that may be accompanied by ecstasy. Even simple physical acts may produce flow when there is an overall goal, there are ways of measuring progress, concentration is kept, necessary skills are developed to interact with the opportunities available, and the stakes are raised to prevent the activity becoming boring.[26]

Flow states are joy and fun. This was acknowledged to me by many in the contra dance community such as one person who commented, “I've danced thousands of dances and have discovered a source of deep joy and great playfulness.” Another dancer mentioned her experience as "Ecstasy - the state, not the drug." It is a high level of flow that was often presented to me in comments of ineffable qualities like “magic”:

> When the dancers are comfortable with the sequence of moves, the band starts playing, the caller calls the figures and the dancers put it all into a fluid motion. What happens next is pure magic.
>
> Those magical moments – it’s why I dance.
>
> I have had this kind of magic happen on the dance floor. I wish for more magic.
>
> If not for moments like these, why would we dance? This IS what dance is about, fluid musical communication with partners and friends, pure joy!

Although these states are marked by a fusion with the world or object and a subsequent loss of self (at least in thinking mode), the actor is interactive with the

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[26] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 97.

environment in order to attain flow; one participates in a transaction, responsive to a task, another person or situation. Importantly for contra dance, flow may be a time of companionship during activity. Although the degree of companionship may vary, there is "widespread evidence of friendly fellowship and, in some cases, stimulating competition during flow."[27]

Contra dance is a social participatory dance that is best fulfilled when cooperation and mutual dependence are fully realized. By the end of the first contra dance of the evening, caller, musicians, and dancers are inextricably linked as co-creators of the experience. Without a doubt the interactions of the group and the fellowship experienced are central to contra dance. Though it is difficult to measure as a group experience, and my accounts indicate that there are times one individual experiences flow while another does not, there are notable comments that indicate the sense of a collective experience occurring. One musician mentioned to me that he watches the dancers, looking, in a way, for a moment when the floor seems to merge action and awareness, looking for a "critical mass where they aren't dancing the dance, they're dancing themselves." One caller and dancer said she sometimes felt the whole hall was "vibrating with joy." Musician David Kaynor expressed a sort of awe in regard to a collective moment, saying "Sometimes after playing a tune twelve times, on the thirteenth time everybody will have this incredible thrill…all of a sudden, something really powerful happens… it brings everybody together. It's unpredictable and fleeting. It's like an affirmation of immortal

[27] Privette, 1364.

life."[28] A favorite description of mine was given by a caller, teacher, and dancer who observes that "the joy of many expands to the joy of one."

Signs of joy

Signs among the group – whoops vocalized by dancers, an energetic exchange between dancers and musicians, the caller fitting in just so and fading out without notice, indicators that the group is ramping up, and indications that things are generally going well can be observed in a number of ways. One observation from my fieldwork is that many in the community – musicians, callers, and dancers alike - express a certain understanding of when things are "good." As one dancer said: "Dancers recognize the many facets that make up a gem of a dance: the general feel of the night, the music, the other dancers, one's state of mind, the general romance of "the dance", and, oh, yes, one's partner."

In order to figure out what makes the dance, the music, a moment or a night "good," what might facilitate flow, I look at the interactions and exchanges that take place between individuals and among the group. My focus is an attempt to understand flow, as my work is based on individual accounts and I have gained an understanding that while one might be in flow, another might be in the midst of a moment filled with contraindications for flow. If, as Victor Turner suggests, the processes of communitas and flow are imbued with the meanings of the symbols they either generate or are channeled by, I believe that the aspects I analyze in the following sections may illuminate the signs and the processes.

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[28] Hast, "Music, Dance, and Community," 116.

My curiosity was piqued by comments about the magic, the transcendence, of certain moments in contra dance. To be sure, I have encountered a spectrum of experience, from contentious, nearly litigious, encounters to moments of bliss. Analysis of specific instances of experience, as a potential of Peircean theory, was made very tempting to me when I received comments that seemed to indicate a certain manner of relating, of reading others or the situation:

> I have had such experiences here and there with one partner or another but the one I remember most was a glorious, magical weekend about five years ago when a certain individual and I shared that magic from Friday evening clear through Sunday afternoon. No romantic entanglements, no exchanges of e-mails or promises to get together, no invisible lines were crossed, but we shared 72 hours of bliss. As I have learned over the course of my schooling, it is those connections we make in this form of folk dance that make contra so special. We haven't crossed paths since, but it was – for me at least – a very special weekend and I was fortunate enough to share it with a very special partner. (DS)

> There was this one particular dance and this one particular dancer…everything about the dance in question just clicked right from the get-go. The timing between us was perfect and we were both right there, right in the moment. The eye contact was easy, penetrating and very pleasant. The dance wasn't flashy, the flourishes were basic, but we were both totally in sync with each other and with the music. The music flowed through our bones and the dance flowed through our bones. We were always there, on time, for each other and for the other dancers. I recognized this dance was something special. Magic. (GM)

> It was, quite simply, transcendent. I've participated in many, many good dances, but that one was such that I and my partner were in sync, and it seemed as though we just floated around that floor. It was lovely, and obviously memorable. I wish for all similar experiences! (HR)

In each of these cases quoted above, I have only one side of the account and so I do not know how the partner might describe the experience. In my estimation, these appear to be a high level of flow, and most likely a peak experience for the dancer. These memories point to a singularity and specialness of a magical, peak moment. Dancers, callers, and musicians speak of enjoying flow moments "in the pocket," but particular moments are especially memorable. Trying to achieve a magical moment does not make

it so. Happily, contained within the accounts is a good amount of language describing what might have facilitated those magical moments, aspects that contribute to the magic and to flow. In contra dance, as in other activities when things are "rolling along," there are some conditions that seem to help set the possibility, as well as some that seem to interrupt flow.

The second comment from above is particularly rich with language indicating some of the elements between dance partners that contribute to a good dance, and possibly flow. Being "in sync" with other dancers and with the music, being on time with both a partner and the rest of the set, having comfortable social behavior such as easy eye contact, are indicators of ways that people can fit in together in contra dance. These begin to point to ways of analyzing how the "magic" can happen and recall Turino's statement that "the signs that emerge from each performer's manner of interacting sonically and kinesically affect and are directly affected by the kinesic and sonic signs of others….When music makers and dancers are in sync, such signs move beyond felt resemblances to experienced fact of social connections and unity."[29] When music makers and dancers are not in sync, the thought process—Thirdness—becomes prominent, in an attempt to correct the alignment within an understood aesthetic of matching. Discussions during my fieldwork about approaches by dancers, callers, and musicians, helped clarify observable behaviors as well as the experiences of those in the community.

[29] Turino, "Signs of Imagination," 241.

“Good” Dancing, Cuing, and Habit

While dips, twirls, and flourishes may appear to be signs of good dancing (or at least experienced dancing), the qualities that are most appreciated among the contra dance community are less associated with showiness and more associated with community-minded behavior. There are several principles underlying good dancing that apply to all dancers, whether beginner or experienced. Some of these have to do with individual behavior and some with partnering and community.

Management of one’s own body in the physical dancing space, especially while learning a new physical skill, is perhaps one of the more difficult individual skills to master. The caller may give sufficient guidance for even the most inexperienced dancer, but remembering verbal information and translating it into bodily motion can be challenging when the dance is underway. There are two aspects to learn and to keep in consideration for the individual dancers, and the embodiment of these understandings form a basis for good dancing. The first is a familiarity of the figures and their names. The second aspect is an understanding of the energy needed to execute the figures, specifically, the understanding that, unlike the vertical bouncing motion of some solo dance styles, contra dance is motivated by a forward motion. With this knowledge a dancer can direct his or her body through the dance with ease.

An understanding of the music and dance relationship is also fundamental to good dancing. In any dance, the ability to listen to the music and follow the rhythm and musical structure is critical for an individual dancer. In a contra dance the choreography is set so the dancer does not need to make creative decisions about which figure to execute, but since figures do not take uniform amounts of time, a sense of musical

phrasing can give a dancer clues about where they are in the dance. With experience, a kinesthetic sense of rhythm can help a dancer's intuition about when and where to move. A kinesthetic sense of rhythm is likewise appreciated when partnering, as a swing that is in rhythm with the music often flows more smoothly, for example.

In partnering, one aspect of physical connection considered to be important to good dancing is called "giving weight." This concept indicates an equilibrium of body tension between dancers such as can be found two people facing each other and taking hands, then leaning back slightly so that one is not pulled more toward the other and both are equally supported. An example could also be given with two people pushing their hands together to a point of firm structure to maintain a firm but gentle connection. Without this body structure, dancers actually have to work a bit harder to maintain their physical connection. Giving weight and arm frame provide a sense of tactile communication between dancers; a good deal of information about direction, speed, and potential for flourishes can be communicated this way. The right equilibrium allows two people to dance as one: "the magic increases as we keep a little tension in our arms. With this dynamic tension, we can gently push and pull each other along and act as one unified body."

Communication between dancers, as observed between "lead" role and "follow" role is also important to good dancing. While the effort is collaborative and cooperative, and no one is "being danced" by the other, the "lead" often takes a bit more of a directive approach, guiding the "follow" into the movements and often anchoring the couple's position; however, ideally, both partners are aware of and use care in interactions

between themselves and with the rest of the floor. A good "lead" and "follow" relationship requires sensitivity and good non-verbal communication.

At one point after I had been dancing for a while, I decided to test my own cuing communication and the sensitivity of my partner. Throughout one particular dance, my "lead" continually guided my right arm up to enable me to twirl under. I grew tired of the motion as well as the insistence, my growing irritation preventing any chance of a flow state.[30] At the next instance I kept my arm low, adding a gentle downward pressure to indicate I did not want to twirl. It was a learning moment for both of us, certainly within a state of Thirdness, but one that may contribute to future moments in which such thinking is not required. This example indicates how issues of consent may be part of an understanding of flow during the dance.

With fellow dancers in the set and across the floor, good dancing is marked by an awareness and consideration of others. This is often most apparent, as with individual behavior, in careful use of time and space. When partners want to join a set, whether the dance is just beginning or is already underway and they feel competent enough to jump in without the walk-through, joining at the end of the set is the acceptable way to get into the line. With most contra dances, a couple is "out" at the bottom of the set waiting for one repetition before the choreography enables them to rejoin, so even if the dance has begun, a couple may join the set by waiting out until the progression to a new cycle

[30] This example alludes the dynamic nature of perception and thought, and to the possibilities of individual response for which a semiotic chaining process may be observed. A deeper analysis could include the possible objects the twirling stood for that triggered the effect of my irritation. This paper addresses a larger scope to theorize generalities based on consensus of accounts within contra dance.

begins. In the case of crowded halls, a dancer's awareness and physical ability to "dance small" makes for a more pleasant evening across the floor ("elbows in!").

Being on time for the next figure likewise helps to create a more enjoyable, flowing dance. Lateness causes a moment of interruption, in which a physically anticipated action cannot follow upon the previous action without awareness of misalignment coming to mind, and is one of the complaints directed toward showiness. If the flourish can be executed in a timely manner, however, it can be quite a fun reward. As opposed to the common saying "better late than never," one adage in contra dance proffered as gentle advice is "better never than late."

Cuing

A cue could be any aural, visual, tactile, or movement event that gives an indication of what is happening either musically or in the dance. There are variety of cues in each case, and many depend on a certain level of experience. Cues used by dancers include the verbal cues of the caller, gesture and touch, symmetry of some figures, eye contact, directional movements of figures and dancers, patterns on the floor and the competence of the floor as a whole. The more experience a dancer or group has, the more they are able to rely on cues for dancing. The more a dancer responds to these cues or signs, relying on the competence of the community and a connection to the music, the more they are able to dance in the moment. Dancing to the music, without individual thought processes or the voice of the caller is a better opportunity to fall into flow.

Good dancers are aware of the musical phrase and dance in alignment with the phrasing. This kind of dancing connects movement to movement, and movement to music, filling out the phrases and defining the beginning and end. A change in musical

phrase serves as a cue for a figure change. It is one way that dancers may feel the magic of being "in sync" with the music.

Musicians work with cues in a variety of ways that serve as signs to the dancers, for the caller, as well as among themselves. As with most musical groups, non-verbal communication is essential for a multitude of reasons. Those musicians with more experience and those who are accustomed to playing together, such as the named and touring bands rely on musical cues. A discussion with one band highlighted some of these: "When we're going to come in or drop out we kind of give a few musical cues as ways to indicate those rather than just abruptly not playing anymore. But you create a little context for the space you're creating."[31] When asked if they discuss a plan beforehand, some of the inner workings and relationship of the group is evident:

G: We don't. Usually there's some communication but…so we've learned each other's patterns so you can kind of start reading but initially we were much more explicit, like 'you take this one.' The musical cues like what I just mentioned are probably the main communication that we use for indicating what we're about to do and that just takes some time to develop.

B: A lot of what he means is, don't end, don't start and stop right at the top of the phrase. Instead, if I'm about to drop out I'll maybe just hold a note two bars early and fade that out, so that [she] is like "ooh, the fiddle is disappearing I should step in" or [he] will play more sparsely. And the thing when you come back in, usually, is to warm it up and lead in rather than hitting it right at the top.

F: Lots of bands have different theories on this but we tend to be much more an easing of things, I think, than abrupt. Sometimes we hit abrupt, a "pow" moment but for the most part our personal aesthetic taste is more like a slow burn, kind of like working into it then charge. So similarly if you're coming back in…usually you announce ahead of time. It's all about looking ahead to what you want to do. Thinking about how you can ease yourself out.

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[31] Musician's Workshop, Feet Retreat, September 9, 2015.

From the last comment above, a state of Thirdness—thinking mode—for that musician is apparent. Different musicians focus on different goals, sometimes dependent on their role within the band. Thomas Turino describes playing in a band in which his son, who is the leader of the band, pays more attention to conscious decision making. Turino, a self-described lover of the Secondness state ("I get grouchy when I go too long without having flow experience.") frequently finds flow by "playing formulaic variations on a tune that are automatic or by reacting in habitual ways to the habitual moves of [his] partners."[32] When his son offers the band verbal suggestions, Turino's Secondness state is knocked back into Thirdness and flow is interrupted. While Turino's goal is a flow state for himself, his son is more concerned with the flow experience of the dancers.[33]

Callers and musicians frequently discuss the dance choreography to choose an appropriate tune. Certain dance figures are smooth and flowing, while some have sharper edges, and this can be portrayed musically, and thus serve as a cue. Other figures are without an obvious rhythmic prescription: hey, circle, allemandes, swings, and to a lesser extent gypsy, anything where people are walking in a circle because there is no direct start or stop. Those musical aspects that cue or correlate to certain dance figures are also often represented in reciprocity, mirrored in the body.

Habit and Repetition

The repetition of tune and dance patterns creates habit and, as a result, the possibility for release from a certain kind of willfulness and effort. The body "comes to

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[32] Turino, "Peircean Thought," 207.

[33] Ibid., 209.

coordinate an increasing range of muscular activities in an increasingly automatic way, until awareness retreats."[34] Through numerous means of repetition apparent in contra dance the awareness retreats to present an opportunity for flow.

The practice of the walk-through in contra dance allows the caller's instructions to move into embodied recognition and action. Repetition of dance figures creates a deeper association between the feeling and the movement, and the experience of the dance can be felt more strongly in the body. Once the body has learned the activity, the mind can participate differently as thoughts of specific movement instruction are allowed to fade.

For musicians, beyond the practiced repetition of where to find a note, playing a tune repetitively for many years produces a skilled player who does not need to think about playing, but just plays. This similarity is also noted in playing "formulaic variations" (deviations from the melody in an improvisational manner, but within certain bounds as to be formulaic) as well as in playing regularly with others, as noted by the musician speaking in regard to musical cues and having "learned each other's patterns."

The effect of repetition within the community is also of fundamental importance. It is the repetition of the experiences that entices people to return and it is the experiential and sensorial aspects that create feelings of community. Repeated encounters "coalesce into a rich lived experience, one that is manifested in its entirety immediately."[35]

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[34] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 94.

[35] Steven Friedson, *Dancing Prophet: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 6.

Embodiment

Physical aspects in contra dance are paramount – touch, changing partners, physical contact with other people or with an instrument, tempo at which the body is moving, heart rate, raising the arms which expands the ribcage and effects breathing. Knowledge and qualities are exchanged through music, postures, physical contact, social context. We can learn experiences through our bodies because our "selves-in-the-world" are selves in bodies.

Learning and participating in contra dance can lead to an increased sense of community. That bodily practice facilitates feelings of community and feelings of oneness is represented throughout my notes from my fieldwork. Some in the community make comparisons of spiritual experience, using words such as "ecstatic," "transcendent," "a moving meditation," and one comment that "this is as close as I get to organized religion." Embodied knowledge is valuable in relating to others. In contra dance, this knowledge within oneself and the transmission of it to others are vital in the role of caller, the musicians, as well as the dancers, and are a key component of the experiences of the individual, within the community, and of community.

The relation of embodiment to flow is most obvious in the immediacy of bodily knowledge, that it is not a verbal or necessarily conceptual intelligence. In contra dance, one of the foremost instances of bodily knowledge is represented by the relationship between caller and dancers. During the walk-through and perhaps the first few times through the tune, the caller offers verbal instructions and cues for the dancers to guide their bodies accordingly. One layer of knowledge is represented through the familiarity that many dancers have with the limited stock of choreographic figures - the dancers have

already come to an embodied knowledge, often without much, if any, need for thought, of how to execute that figure. After a few times through the dance and tune, the caller typically drops out. The experience of forgetting, or not thinking of, which figure comes next, but finding one's body moving into that step as a result of one's own embodiment as well as the embodiment and cues of other dancers and the music, is one way to experience embodied knowledge.

It is similar for musicians with habitual movements of fingers on a fingerboard without stopping to think about where the fingers go next and habitual, formulaic ways of playing. Through habitualization, something may become perceived as natural, the result is often a feeling of directness and an un-reflected upon effect.[36] That state without reflection, a state of reacting rather than thinking, implies Secondness.

Embodying the dance makes obvious the dancing and dancers' reflection of the music. More than cuing dance movements or body positions, and indicating social comfort, embodiment often reflects the character of the music; "Those slow turning, mesmerizing dances," for example. I felt a beautiful experience of this at one of the dance weekends I attended (again, as I have noted before, more experienced dancers are better able to dance to the music in the moment, and dance weekends usually draw the more experienced contra dancers):

> The band chose a slower, bluesy tune for a contra dance Saturday night – starting in long lines, the ladies move forward and connect hands in the center to "balance the wave," the gents walk forward, turn and lead a single-file promenade. Balancing in this manner provides a nice opportunity for side-to-side motion, a kind of sensual swaying that immediately seemed to grip all the dancers, even finding its way into the walking step, somehow cued by the musical style. A slower, more fluid dancing than the bouncing or stomping that can often energize the dancers took over. The shuffling of feet added a

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[36] Turino, "Peirean Thought," 196

mellow wash of sound like ocean waves, there was a susurrus of shoes, sliding with liquid ease across the floor.

This was a dance I found very enjoyable – everything feeling in sync, the combination of tune and choreography and dance styles matching. This sense of everything matching is not a coincidence. Musicians and callers are aware of this phenomenon and give consideration in choosing tunes that match choreography, and the style of music shows in the bodies of the dancers. During this dance I was enjoying a flow moment until something brought me out of it. There was something new happening. The quiet of the dancers—no whoops or laughter during this one—allowed the sound of the shoes on the floor to come out and join the band's sound. But this particular sound of the shoes was not something I had experienced much, I was more used to certain rhythmic stomping. The newness and surprise of the sound brought me back to a reflective mode.

In a later conversation with fiddler Laura Lengnick, I realized that during that dance I had fallen right into the mood so artfully proffered by the caller and musicians:

> The music I like best is full of emotion. How does the music make you want to move? How does the music make you feel? How does it encourage you to interact with other dancers? This is an important aspect of playing for dancing as it can really add to the dancers' enjoyment when the music sets a mood that fits the figures of the dance. The musicians have the opportunity to goose the dancers into laughing and feeling silly, to drive the dancers to thunderous primitive stomping, to melt the dancers into sensuous slinky figures, or to transport them to new ethereal heights of graceful melodic rhythm.[37]

I, and everyone that I noticed on the dance floor, had melted into those "sensuous slinky figures." Although it is not something that can be guaranteed, everyone at a dance

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[37] Laura Lengnick, "So You Wanna Play Dance Music," 2.

can potentially be enticed fully into the moment. In the hopes of facilitating these joyful, magical moments the relationship between the music and the dance is given thoughtful consideration.

Relation of Dance and Music

"What's most important, in my opinion," fiddler Mara Shea told me, "is how the dance music fits the figures in the dance, and how it builds energy, both in an individual dance being called, and throughout the evening."[38] Many contra dance musicians beautifully articulate this idea, both in conversation and in their playing. Most tunes, typically 32 measures in AABB form, structurally fit well with the choreography. Most tunes are composed of clear phrases, and in addition to this, musicians are conscientious of playing with clear phrasing. Flow, and that magic moment, however, sometimes lie beyond a clear architecture of tune and choreography, into the realm of emotion and experience of the two together.

Musicians are thoughtful in their approach to choosing a tune for a dance, giving consideration to the emotional and energetic experience of matching a tune to choreography.

> In my experience, a caller will come to you with a dance they have in mind…I look at the dance and think how I want the dancers to *feel* about that particular dance. So, sometimes…it's very, very obvious that right at the top of the B part is this big important moment with your partner, that it's this big moment in the dance. I would try to pair that with music that had some sort of big memorable moment right at the top of the B part. So that could be a lot of different things, it could be a key change, it could be a rhythmic stop, it could be… oh, all sorts of different things, but I would try to look at those and match them up together. Other times…there might not be such an obvious singular moment in it, and then the ball is a little bit more in my court and I decide well, what did we just do,

[38] Personal communication, 9 October 2013.

> what are we doing next, and what part of this dance do I want people to remember? So, say if you have a dance that has a hey-for-four, and a long-lines-forward-and-back, and a partner balance-and-swing, you could get the dancers to really remember the hey-for-four if you played a smooth set. But if you played a more rhythmic set, you could still do the hey-for-four and that would be fine but they'll remember the partner balance-and-swing. Or you could play a marchy set and the hey would work and the balance-and-swing would still work but they'll really remember the forward and back.[39]

There are a number of techniques musicians may use to create the mood or drama in a dance. As mentioned above, a key change or rhythmic stop in the right place is effective. There is also an opportunity to sculpt the mood by using crescendo, with medleys, or with variations or improvising on a single tune. Often changing keys in the medley of tunes is effective. One general pattern follows keys of D, G, A, D, such that one could begin on D, then follow with tunes in G, then A; or, beginning in G, follow with tunes in A, then D. Another easy and effective transition is to move from the major key to its parallel minor. A somewhat more sophisticated technique is to follow the pattern of keys, substituting a relative minor in the pattern (Bm for D, or Em for G, for example).

One of the more dramatic possibilities is to change time signatures, such as with a jig-to-reel set. If the musicians successfully change the time signature (without changing the tempo) and the tunes fit the figures, there is often a rousing result for both dancers and musicians (as long as it is not overused). The main idea is to build excitement by increasing the sense of drive in the music.

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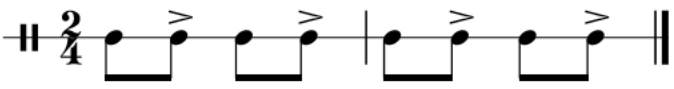
[39] Personal communication, May 3, 2014.

Groove and The Power of Suggestion

Musicians often adjust their playing style for emotional effect in the dance. As has been noted earlier, both dancers and musicians regard clarity of rhythm as crucial to the dance and one of the elements dancers pick up first. This feature is prominent in organizing and influencing the dancers' movements on a number of levels, including the manner in which they move. Rhythmic back-up is a place of great potential for creating a feeling for the dance and many musicians mention creating a groove and giving momentum to the tune itself, or lift to a dance by manipulating the rhythmic feel.

A "boom-chick" approach is quite common among guitarists for rhythmic back-up. The boom-chick rhythm is a downstroke on the bass note for the "boom," followed by another downstroke with the rest of the chord on the "chick" (often, with an upstroke for an "-a" to create "boom-chicka"). The effect is that of repeated eighth notes, although the "boom" (on the beat) may only be played for chord changes to guide the harmonic progression:

Example 4: Basic "boom-chick" rhythm



This places a steady emphasis on the backbeat ("chick"). Adding various syncopations, however, can change a dance noticeably.

Echoing the power of rhythmic influence and its prominence in shaping a dance, guitarist Andrew discussed the approach of his well-loved band:

> We're not much of a tune oriented band and the reason for that is that…contra dancing isn't much of a tune oriented dance. You'll do the exact same dance to [different tunes] and so we don't really play those tunes we play…this (demonstrates boom-chick rhythm), or you'll dance completely differently to (demonstrates rhythm transcribed below in Example 5)…you can play tunes with different feels. Those are very different ways of dancing between those two. So that's what we play. We play things that affect the actual way that people dance and we'll put whatever little melody into that, but the melody's basically there just to amuse ourselves. I mean it's not, it's there for sonic variety, it's there so it doesn't get boring, it's there to keep your place, but it's not really the important thing that we do. So sometimes we write those tunes and sometimes we pick tunes that we know, but…the melody is usually kind of secondary to the feel.[40]

Example 5: Basic syncopated back-up groove

He also discusses adding variation throughout a single dance by alternating a boom-chick rhythm in repetitions of the tune with walking down a diatonic scale and changing the rate of rhythmic interval or creating a drone in order to subtly build anticipation and expectation in the dancers. The difference—from the faster, more staccato rhythm of the boom-chick with its divided chord to a single note rhythmically pulsed—catches the attention of dancers. Carefully spacing the build-up affects dancers' perceptions. Musicians use techniques such as this to guide the energy of a dance and an evening.

"Good" Music

Musicians that I spoke with mentioned the importance of cooperation with all the elements of an evening and being mindful of creating the best dance experience, rather

[40] Personal communication, May 3, 2014.

than showing the most impressive performance of musical skills. An interaction with the dancers, an exchange in which everyone present in the evening is actively participating contributes to the contra dance experience; the music is influenced by these factors and becomes a different thing during the dance than it is in a concert:

> It's not like concert music where people are just sitting and appreciating it, you know, listening and watching your fingers or what have you. In contra dance they're busy doing stuff and so if the music is really busy and you know, if I'm trying to play every single note of an Irish reel with all the ornaments for eight minutes straight I get kind of tired, although it can be done, but it's unnecessary. It's more than the dancers need and in a way it can be, just, noisy to them whereas there's a lot of space if the tune is simpler, which is then easier for us and gives us space to play with it and shape and build the energy. You don't need to play all the notes, is the take-away on that.[41]

This thought was echoed by another contra dance musician who agrees that "only some of those notes are really important and the rest of them are just kind of here, you know, to fill out the right amount of time."[42]

When a musician is mindful of the dancers' flow experience, they are in a thoughtful state of Thirdness, making decisions about how to shape the music and the energy, reading responses from the dance floor. Within a band, it is helpful that at least one person maintains this awareness, though they might risk pulling a bandmate out of flow to make a suggestion. Tristan Henderson of the band Atlantic Crossing is but one musician who acknowledges the importance of thoughtful awareness of the surroundings:

> I've seen some bands where they'll play and it's almost like they're having more of a jam session on stage – they're playing more for themselves and they're kind of in their own little world. Whereas you've really gotta be looking at the dancers

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[41] Musicians workshop, p.c., September 9, 2015.

[42] Personal communication, May 3, 2014.

> and keeping track of what's going on. It's all about a conversation and being aware of things.

For musicians in stable bands, a combination of interactions within the dance and rehearsals away from the dance provide an opportunity to develop a personal aesthetic and philosophy of playing style. This can be an opportunity to make many artful decisions, upon which decisions in the moment of the dance are layered.[43]

One group of musicians mentioned the effectiveness of a layering approach to the sound of a band, the "bluegrass sandwich":

> So, you have one layer, you could say it's the bread, is this rhythm chord thing that is happening all the time and one of the fillers, we'll say the peanut butter, is the melody. You always have one instrument or one voice as the melodic part. You can have multiple people doing it too, you have harmony – two and three-part harmony; not always. So, that one layer, you always have a melody. And then the other layer, the jelly layer, is chords that are not rhythmic. And [in bluegrass] the banjo roll was considered that since it's not like the bass and mandolin which is going on all the time, and the fiddle could sustain a chord, and other instruments can and do find ways to fill that role. So, you have the quote-unquote non-rhythmic harmony filling in the chords. In bluegrass that was one thing but it actually works in pulling apart what bands do in all kinds of other genres too where you have somebody who is the drums and the bass that are the rhythmic chord part, and then somebody that, like the keys, that are holding and filling in, and then you have some melodic. There are three layers that are happening. Either happening all the time or they're coming in and out.

Another approach used by musicians in creating a band sound includes four archetypes: melody, rhythm (including foot percussion), ambient soundscape, and silence. In a similar method as the "bluegrass sandwich," a combination of these elements is effective. These tactics provide a pool of resources for making musical decisions.

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[43] Tristan Henderson, interviewed by Dennis Merrit for Old Farmer's Ball.

"Good" Calling

"My job as a caller is to bring those two groups of people (band and dancers) together and to bring it into this wonderful vortex of energy that catches everybody and feeds everybody so that we all get to spin around together, literally and figuratively."[44]

Callers keep a stock of dances on three-by-five notecards or on some type of electronic notepad. Having the cards handy to remind themselves of the figures is important, but then learning the dances well, memorizing the dance and getting away from the written reminder can create a conversation that the caller is having with the dancers, rather than a speech being given. Callers are then also able to watch the floor for indications that they can ease out of calling or for indications that the dancers need to be reminded of a figure.

Calling from memory also changes the caller's voice, creating more freedom in the voice as they are having a sort of conversation, rather than reading the dance. For some callers, this also is an invitation to add melodic or rhythmic inflection to their calling, inspired by the music and fitting in as lyrics. This can be perceptible during a dance and can affect the feel of it. One caller refers to the freedom of calling from memory as "calling from the heart." "It becomes more heartfelt. I think people feel that."[45]

In many ways, one of the most important aspects of good calling is knowing when and how to stop calling. The walk-through and beginning of a dance are the most active

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[44] Personal communication, September 21, 2014.

[45] Ibid.

times for a caller. After two or three times through the sequence of figures a caller will gradually fade out, offering only minimal cues—the right word at the right moment—before fading out completely. In most instances, dancers are not really aware of the caller dropping out. As the calling gradually becomes less and the sequence of figures works its way into the dancers' bodies, the thought processes for analyzing this change (Thirdness) recede and the feeling of being in the moment (Secondness, flow) can take over. "The caller's responsibility is to stop calling at some point. That's when it really elevates, when it's just the dancers and the music. The whole place just starts to pulse. When the caller stops calling and everybody is dancing all together, yeah, it's pretty amazing."[46]

"A Gem of a Dance": The General Feel of the Night

Musically, callers and bands work together to shape the arc and energy of a night of contra dancing. In a way, each dance can be thought of as a chapter in the story of the evening. Callers often try to provide variety through the evening and the succession of dances is planned with care. Ideally, callers program an evening so that the difficulty level and the number of figures in a dance builds over the evening, each one building on the previous dance:

> You start out and you build to a peak of difficulty and then it drops before the break. That last dance before the break, those new people that have come in should feel successful. And then the peak in the second half, maybe the second dance, and then it becomes party dances the rest of the way home. Just to keep everybody interested. A difficulty level *or* an energy level, although I like the energy to continue to ride at the end, but the difficulty to come down. And it changes each night, depending on what the band brings to the table and what the dancers bring to the table.[47]

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[46] Personal communication, September 9, 2015.

[47] Personal Communication, September 21, 2014.

The importance of this is apparent in both guiding the energy of an evening as well as in building skills and increasing challenge opportunities for those skills (and creating a situation that might encourage those new to the dance to return for the next one), seeking balance between anxiety and boredom, moving into flow.

Moments of flow, positive subjective experiences, feelings of community and a larger sense of oneness leave impressions on the dance community. One dancer shared her thoughts with me about a particularly memorable, magical evening, and what made it so:

> The biggest reason this night was so magical was how our community stuck together to magnify all of the wonderful attributes the contra dance community demonstrates. At this regular Saturday dance, I think the attendance was at least close to, if not, record breaking, and surprisingly about a third of the dancers were new to contra dancing that night. The experienced dancers of our community were very welcoming to all of the beginners, doing a good job of making sure to dance not only with their friends, but asking the shy beginners to be their partners so that the beginners would feel welcome and the dances were less likely to fall apart. I was pleasantly surprised how smoothly all but one of the dances played out; even the one dance that we struggled to keep together was saved by the caller turning it into a mixer. On nights like this it is obvious why we are there. People come together to help each other feel better about themselves and become better versions of themselves, because they have entered into a strong community where good deeds, care, kindness, selflessness, and friendliness are all contagious.

Many of these suggestions for creating a "good" dance have been articulated in community guidelines. A dance organizer in North Carolina shared his "8 Steps to Contra Nirvana," which begin to touch on what can make a "gem of a dance." These suggestions indicate physical and social manners for dancers, each includes further description (see Appendix D):

1. Build Community
2. Learn How to Both Lead and Follow

3. Don't Book Ahead
4. Be Gentle
5. Communicate with Your Partner
6. Listen to the Music
7. Appreciate the Musicians and Caller
8. Have Fun!

Many of these factors contribute to what a few in the community refer to as the vibe, a "collective energy that can be experienced on an individual basis as well."[48] This feeling is shaped by a number of variables including the venue, the number of dancers present, the style of music, many of the behaviors I describe in chapter three, and the components I describe in this chapter. At its ideal best, a contra dance community will display a sort of "wise selfishness." As each individual acts for the good of the community to create something together, individuals experience the result of the combined effort, perhaps being carried along by the flow during "friendly fellowship." As a result, they experience joy.

Participatory Practice Revisited

Flow experiences are often found in games and play, activities with "patterns of action which maximizes immediate feedback, intrinsic rewards to the participant."[49] Csikszentmihalyi identified key activities or common triggers for flow. In addition to play and games, these included creativity and research; transcendental, peak, or religious experience; collective ritual; and Zen, yoga and other meditative states. Csikszentmihalyi

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[48] Kai Fikentscher, *You Better Work: Underground Dance Music in New York City* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 81.

[49] Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: The Experience of Play in Work and Games* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1975), 21.

notes that flow experiences are reported by athletes, who often describe "being in the zone," as well as people engaged in activities such as making music, rock climbing, dancing, playing chess. These are activities that, according to Csikszentmihalyi, are of a design to facilitate optimal experience by requiring learning skills, setting up goals, providing feedback, and enabling control.[50] Flow is most likely when skills and challenges are matched.

The style characteristics of a participatory practice allow a variety of skill levels within the contra dance community. The basic structure of the music and dance allow beginners to find a way in and build moments of success. The space of the simple forms allows advanced musicians to use chord substitutions and complex variations to increase the challenge for their skill set. Here may also be an upside of the "center-set syndrome." Sometimes viewed as poor community behavior, dancers of certain skill or preferences who dance with others of like mind and skill, may more easily be met at a point that combines challenge, skill, and interest.

The feelings of happiness and joy that characterize flow, and the experiential and sensory components of an evening, create community and fellowship during a contra dance. As we move together and play together, as our physical movements mirror and evoke the other, we may identify with each other. Participation and the (ideally) decreased insistence on ego also add to an experience of community. Because the flow experience is marked by joy, contra dance is often a fulfilling experience of community that people wish to recreate.

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[50] Ibid., 72.

CHAPTER SIX

CONTRA DANCE REMIXED

"Science and technology revolutionize our lives, but memory, tradition and myth frame our response." (Arthur M. Schlesinger)

"Traditions last only if youth are allowed to both embrace and evolve them." (Warren Doyle, contra dancer, caller, teacher)

"How else than by suiting a thing to its present-day needs, can we hope to keep its tradition really alive and meaningful?"[1] Ralph Page, the "dean of contra dance callers," posed this question in 1976 while witnessing jazzy improvisations by young contra dance musicians. "As horrified as some of the orthodox old-timers may be, we believe this is a terribly encouraging note," he admitted, as the process brought new life to contra dancing. Indeed, contra dance is vibrant and thriving today, thanks in large part to the newcomers of that time as well as those who welcomed them. Gathering momentum on the heels of the Folk Revival, since the 1970s contra dance has expanded throughout the country, moving out beyond its reserve in New England into a national network and bringing new generations of participants to the community.

The legacy of contra dance inherited during its revitalization depicted contras as allied with rural life and as fundamental to a worldview that linked dance to community, and thus it drew those interested in lifestyles alternative to the mainstream. Literature on contra dancing since the folk revival often emphasizes these alternative qualities, such as

[1] Tolman and Page, *The Country Dance Book,* 11.

in analyses of the "anti-modernist" cohorts involved with the music and dance.[2] As the scene continued to grow, however, those coming to it were an increasingly urban dance crowd that may have romanticized a simple, rural life but also liked rock-and-roll, might drive miles to hear hot bands, and sometimes danced several times a week. The character of dances was already shifting as the children of the Folk Revival crowd were being raised with contra dance as part of their life.

In the early twenty-first century those children (and their friends who might not have grown up with contra dance) have come of age and are taking their opportunity to offer a "terribly encouraging note" to the contra dance community. Once again, and still, the idiom of contra dance is expanding. Of particular interest is the contra dance community's relationship with technology. Where an anti-modernist analysis characterizes the community in part by technological avoidance, contra dance communities are now interacting in a new way with the technology and media of the mainstream they had previously appeared to avoid. Embodied by a new generation of contra dance participants who are equally comfortable with modern technology as with the folk practice, the intersection of technology in daily life (including unprecedented access to technological creative processes) with these participatory practices is manifested in the recent trends of contra dance.

In this chapter I explore these recent trends, including fully DJ'ed music and contra dance events that combine aspects of club culture with aspects of contra dance, as well as live bands incorporating technology by various means. Taking inspiration very

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[2] Thomas Turino *Music as Social Life*, John Bealle, *Old-Time Music and Dance.*

broadly from Everett Rogers's *Diffusion of Innovations* to explore the trend of alternative style contra dances that began to catch on first in the East Coast, I consider Rogers's idea of diffusion—the "process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system"[3]—and traits that may enable or limit the adoption of the new idea. Rogers's traits affecting the adoption of an innovation, which I lightly trace throughout this chapter, include its complexity; trialability; observability; relative advantage; capacity for reinvention; and compatibility with existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters. Observing this trend as a generational encounter in contra dance with strong evidence of both the horizontal flow of ideas (between members of the same generation and across genres) as well as a vertical exchange (within one genre and from one generation to the next), I consider the concept of remix culture and the situation of contra dance within broader twenty-first century phenomena.

The Technology of Music

The technology of music, in a basic definition outlined by Simon Frith, simply indicates the manner in which sounds are produced and reproduced. Using this perspective, Frith identifies three stages in the history of music, each of which holds further implications for consideration of music's role in life: 1. folk, in which music is kept in in the body and musical instruments and retrieved by performance; 2. art, in which music is stored by notation and retrieved by performance; and 3. pop, in which

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[3] Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 5.

music is stored on phonogram, disc, or tape and retrieved mechanically, digitally, or electronically.[4]

Each of these technological stages is currently represented in contra dance. Many musicians learn tunes by ear, develop and create their own versions in the same way, and may or may not read notation. Oral transmission of tunes is still occurring in many fiddle realms, including at Irish sessions, at old time jams, and during various musical gatherings. It is common for musicians to acknowledge their lineage, indicating from whom they learned a tune (and at this point, their sources may include recordings). Bolstering this are collections of notated music, such as the *Fiddler's Fake Book*, *New England Fiddler's Repertoire*, *The Portland Collection*, and *The Waltz Book*, that may be used as memory aides or to learn tunes if one reads music. Representing the third stage are recordings, which have become increasingly common. This stage has only been a peripheral part of contra dance, recordings made by bands that could be enjoyed away from the dance, until recently.

During my fieldwork, all the tunes presented at musician workshops during dance weekends were introduced and taught without notation. In similar fashion, bands performing at contra dances typically play without written music. A notable exception to this are the open bands, which display a combination of approaches to enable more participation among a varying ability of musical literacy and inclination. Each of the open bands keep a digital collection of the notation of their most commonly played tunes to which I had access, either kindly sent to me via e-mail or included as a link on a website.

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[4] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998): 226-227.

The folk stage is predominantly represented during a dance event. The third stage, while until recently not directly represented within a dance event, has nonetheless been present and influential in the lives of those in contra dance.

Recording Influences

In considering technology and vernacular culture in polka and blues of the United States, Charles Keil notes that the "folk" style does not develop or occur in isolation, out of sight or hearing of the media, rather it develops "*in* the soundscape mapped by the media."[5] Similarly, though seen as an alternative to the mainstream, contra dance and its participants are in a niche still within the broader mainstream formation. Contra dance has proven malleable within society both socially and musically, and since the 1970s has been incorporating aspects of more mainstream music styles such as jazz and rock, as well as bearing hallmarks of the influence of advances in recording technology.

The impact of recording technology is seen on myriad aspects of music and its study; technological advances have affected sound preservation, sound production, attitudes regarding music, and the distribution of music. Recording technology has multiple levels of influence on contra dance and its participants related to sound and perception. In addition to lengthy histories surrounding instruments in regard to what they should sound like and how they should be played, developments in recording processes contribute significant impact on aesthetics and attitude toward musical sound.

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[5] Keil "People's Music Comparatively: Style and Stereotype, Class and Hegemony," *Dialectical Anthropology* 10 no. 1/2 (July 1985): 119 – 130, cited in Frith, *Performing Rites*, 232.

Influences of a studio quality aesthetic are found not only in performances at contra dances by musicians of a high skill level, but in the albums contra dance musicians themselves are creating. The sound of refined production quality in music circulating throughout the United States is habitualized among contra dance participants who have lived with it as part of their lives. Having become used to what sounds "good" in this manner, musicians strive for a finely-honed sound, with reliable intonation, nuanced phrasing, and enough contrast within a tune to keep the interest of a listener.[6] Dancers and callers, also accustomed to the studio sound, appreciate this, both at a dance and if they choose to listen to a band's recorded albums.

Many contra dance bands record albums, both as a means of supporting and promoting themselves and because, thanks to unprecedented accessibility and general trends at large, "it's what bands do." Noticeably, the majority of these albums are not live and so do not include sounds of the caller and dancers, and many that are recorded live eliminate those aspects. Thus, out of context and with specific sonic elements removed, the feeling of a recorded album is different than a contra dance. Analyzing Keil's writing on vernacular communities, Simon Frith observes two aesthetics indicating that a recording offers one kind of pleasure (the perfection of a form), while live performance

[6] This pertains most specifically to bands of consistent personnel who practice together to develop and refine their sound away from the dance. Open bands display less of this aesthetic as participation is encouraged without as much regard to skill level or sound quality.

another (the pleasure of a process).[7] Further, Keil believes "the normative recordings intensify live performance as something extraordinary, abnormal, and magical as well."[8]

Recordings of contra dance music are used in settings outside the dance for individual listening, evoking the energetic and emotional memories of the dance in a present moment. In some cases, it is a way of extending the feeling of social life beyond the activity. They are often simply found to be enjoyable by those who listen. Most frequently those who listen to contra dance band albums are contra dancers, and for many these albums represent just a few in a smattering of recorded music available to them. The availability of recorded music (as well as the technology to record it) and the enculturation of records within U.S. music culture at large helps illuminate the relationship of contra dance and its community members to recorded music, and the most recent musical trends in contra dance.

An iPod and an Idea

The production and reproduction of music by various means has evolved to now include electronic and digital technologies. Alongside these means of production and reproduction has evolved the manner in which we interact with the reproduced sound. Gathering for the purpose of social dancing has a long history in the United States, but it is after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933—when bars, taverns, and the like reopen with jukeboxes in place—that the idea of dancing to technologically mediated music starts to

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[7] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 232.

[8] Charles Keil, "People's Music Comparatively: Style and Stereotype, Class and Hegemony," *Dialectical Anthropology* Vol 10, no. 1/2 (July 1985): 129.

become familiar.[9] Since that time people have danced to various media in a variety of contexts. So it was that in the early twenty-first century, for those comfortable in both the folk realm of contra dance and the mainstream realm of technologically mediated music, the combination of the two was an easy next step.

The first instance leading this trajectory of pre-recorded music used at a contra dance seems to be from two Boston-area callers who had the idea while listening to Celtic rock music. Inspired by Scottish "hypnofolkadelic" band, Shooglenifty, Lisa Greenleaf and Clark Baker began to experiment with mixing music electronically for dances at small parties. This experimentation is indicative of a relatively high level of trialability for this innovation since the music can be mixed and edited to satisfaction upon playback, and then further tested in context beginning with small house parties. By 2007 a fundraiser dance at the Concord Scout House in Boston expanded the repertoire to include Rock and World Beat music (Appendix E). While initially these alternative music dances were called live, by the time of the fundraiser these callers were experimenting with recorded calling tracks for musical sets. These events were fairly popular, but it was a dance weekend in South Carolina that truly set the trend in motion.

At the Whipperstompers Weekend (a dance weekend drawing a younger dance crowd) in South Carolina, June 2008, a few participants were lingering at the end of the weekend. An impromptu dance was called to techno music from an iPod, and the movement quickly dubbed "techno contra" was born. Among those still at

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[9] Kai Fikentscher, "'There's Not a Problem I Can't Fix, 'Cause I Can Do it in the Mix': On The Performative Technology of 12-Inch Vinyl" in *Music and Technoculture*, Lysloff and Gay, eds (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 296.

Whipperstompers for the impromptu dance were North Carolina dancers Forrest Oliphant and Jordy Williams, who carried the idea out from the weekend and were probably the most influential in the early spread of crossover events.

On the heels of the South Carolina weekend, Forrest Oliphant arranged a techno contra dance after the scheduled dances at the inaugural Youth Dance Weekend held in Vermont in late September 2008. Inspired by a brief video filmed by one of the attendees at Whipperstompers, Oliphant, whose work is in web development and interactive media, created a video, shooting two takes of two sets dancing to Adma Tensta's "My Cool."[10] The video has inspired many dancers and organizers, and the medium has become common in the recording and transmission of this style of contra dancing, providing one of the means for the observability of the innovation and representing in itself the accessibility of digital media and technology in contemporary society.

Jordy Williams was present at each of these attempts at a techno contra, and the experiences left him seeing a greater potential than had yet been realized:

> The first, at Whipperstompers dance weekend was…kind of a last minute thing and it sort of worked. I will say it was very fun. Basically, no one had picked out a song, or figured out how it was going to go, or anything. We stood around while someone ran to their car to get an iPod and played a random techno song. I don't fault anyone for this, it just wasn't quite as satisfying as I had pictured in my head. The second one is probably the most well known – to me at least. It was the "Dirty Cool" video made at the first YDW [Youth Dance Weekend]. The problem with that one was that it was too short. The song was great, but it was three minutes and I just wanted more. Then later that evening – actually it was 4am by that point – we did one to a Girltalk song which lasted way too long and was not techno at all. It barely had a followable beat. It was borderline torturous. This is more or less what inspired me to do one of my own.[11]

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[10] The video can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcwgicJf4rg.

[11] Jordy Williams, interviewed by Ryan Holman, June 6, 2011, used with permission.

Jordy Williams began organizing techno contras in Asheville in June 2009.[12] Late 2009 marked the beginning of a proliferation of alternative style contras, which spread to various areas—particularly college towns—throughout the country. Special events have been organized at Bates College in Maine, in Boulder, Colorado, in Seattle, Washington, in Portland, Oregon, and regular events have been scheduled in areas of my fieldwork. Recurring alternative contra events have been hosted in Asheville, NC and the Triangle region of NC; central Virginia; and Glen Echo, near Washington, D.C.

Brian Hamshar, founder of Club Contras, a crossover series in central Virginia that hosts "electronic contra dances with club lighting" was also at Whipperstompers in 2008:

> Ever since I started dancing contra in 2002 I've thought about how cool it might be to contra dance to my favorite club dance, classic rock and disco music. I had never thought the dance club scene particularly exciting because of the complete lack of dance structure, which is what provides interactivity, which is what I really craved. On the other hand, I initially was very concerned that contra with anything other than traditional fiddle tunes would be rejected by this close-knit community that I love and deeply respect. Enter the Whipperstompers weekend, where an impromptu techno contra appeared out of nowhere with non-phrased music, no significant preparation, and 100-degree heat, but was met with amazing enthusiasm. Jordy Williams built upon this with his events in Asheville, which quickly became very popular and talked about all over the Southeast.[13]

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[12] Video, created and edited by Forrest Oliphant, of the first techno contra dance organized by Jordy Williams can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2KjCwa1tXc.

[13] Personal communication, February 3, 2014.

Techno Contra

By 2010-2011 Jordy Williams's name had become synonymous with techno contra in the Asheville contra dance community of North Carolina, as well as up and down the East Coast. His first events fanned the flames of interest that were sparked at the Whipperstompers and YDW weekends, but also fanned a different type of flame, setting a precedent but also creating a reputation and some discord in the larger contra dance community. His first techno contra event in June 2009 was held at the Asheville Contemporary Dance Studio, and had a decidedly different feeling than most contra dances. Furthermore, the event, which drew a full studio with 70-80 people, was invitation only.

His particular brand is noted for not only using the lighting and music evocative of club culture, but for including some of the sex appeal of the nightclub culture as well.

> The vibe is decidedly hot and sexy, but definitely not terribly scandalous. There is no sex going on or massive orgies, but it's basically a bunch of contra kids getting out their fairly strong sexual tension in a healthy and sweaty manner.[14] No nudity, no sex, but they're fast paced and not for the faint of heart. To me it really doesn't seem like anything more naughty than a dance without grown-ups. If any of the rep is bad, it's probably just word of mouth. I try to keep them pretty PG-13, though they are certainly borderline. And honestly, the regular contra here has enough youth at it that we have our own line usually and it's generally similar.

Williams had a specific vision creating his techno contras: "I created this dance out of a passion for the dance and the music and the complete experience. Know exactly what you want this thing to look like and make it happen. Nothing less." What the techno contras looked like was reminiscent of clubs and raves. They included a darkened

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[14] To be clear, the "contra kids" referred to here are typically individuals in their twenties.

environment, sometimes with blacklights or strobe lighting; loud pre-recorded techno and trance music that was occasionally danced as 90-minute-long sets; a caller to get the dance going; participants in club/rave/festival style clothing frequently accessorized with glow-sticks; and dancing heavily infused with a blues style. To make his concept happen, he wanted a group with a high level of experience that would be comfortable with the vibe:

> [I] realized that not only was I going to need a bunch of good dancers for this potentially very difficult dance, I also didn't want a bunch of the old creepy guys ruining the vibe (for the girls). I knew the girls would be scantily clad, and I really didn't want them in any way to be uncomfortable. The notion of an extremely advanced/exclusive dance was really only a by-product of necessity, but admittedly I had been very loosely toying around with the idea for a while…There were plenty of complex and political reasons to keep them private, but basically I had limited space and I really just wanted a dance for and solely consisting of young, good dancers (many of whom were my friends).[15] They were never meant to be an exclusive, but more an inclusive thing. I just wanted something where we could throw our inhibitions out and just be youthfully exuberant and not worry about who's looking or judging or creeping. Eventually I got enough flak that I felt a public one was necessary.[16]

The technological base of the music, as evidenced in the name of the "techno" style, is a noteworthy feature and quite fitting for a generation who have grown up with computers and cell phones. Occasionally a catch-all term for a variety of styles that began to emerge in the 1980s including techno (associated with Detroit), but also house (which began in Chicago) and a number of others derived from these, the style of music is linked to participatory dancing, especially as represented as festivals, clubs, and raves. These

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[15] In chapter three, I discuss "cool, hip dancers." Though the individuals here do not self-identify as "cool, hip dancers," the dancing styles and behaviors they embody would identify them within that description according to community definitions.

[16] Personal communication, March 7, 2014.

styles are largely instrumental, typically with little emphasis on lyrics, as the principle function is in the pleasure of dance. The musical style is generally an "uptempo and highly syncopated dance music with lots of overdubbed cross-rhythms, sampled voices and effects . . . the words not of any real significance . . . the "feel" behind the music of more importance."[17] Thus, an overlap of dance musics for participatory dancing offers a point of compatibility for what may otherwise seem an incongruous match. In these first crossover style contras it was not the musical selection that was the main point of controversy, however, but the manner in which the dances were offered.

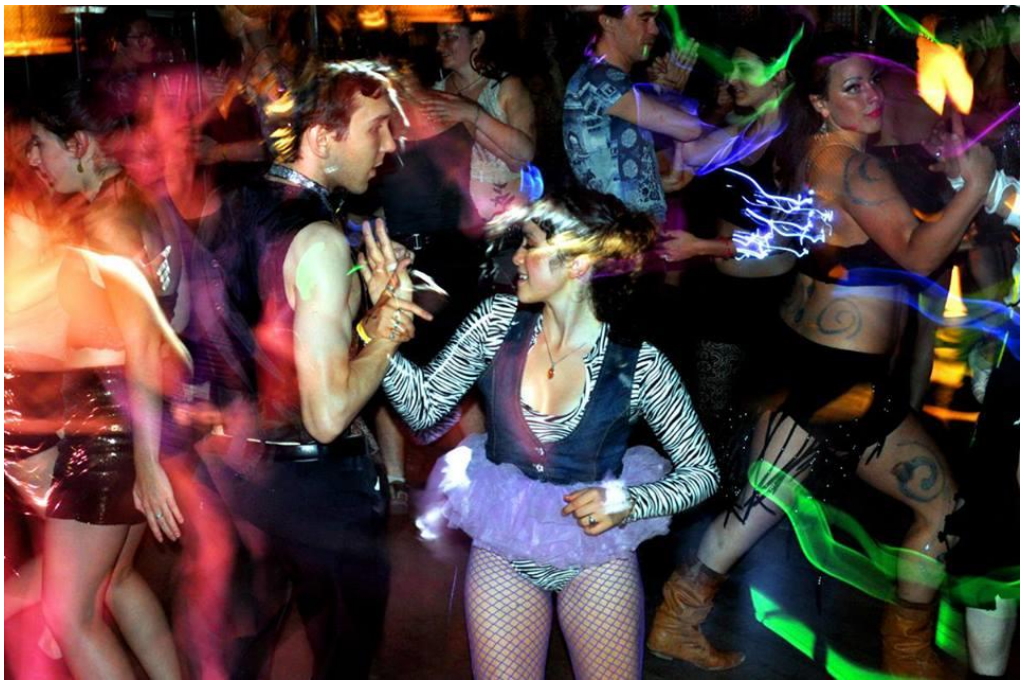

Figure 18: Right hand allemande in a scene from an Asheville techno contra dance

[17] Paul Willis, *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Lives of Young People* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 65. In the previous chapter I discuss the importance of the "feel" of the music in acoustic, live music contra dances.

In a tradition known for openness and inclusivity, the invitation-based techno contras caused upset among the dance community. Williams admits to hearing of "genuine distaste" for being exclusive, but receiving praise once techno contra became more open. The first public techno contra Williams organized was for the June 2010 Asheville dance weekend, Summer Soirée. This was a late-night dance, for which anyone could purchase a ticket regardless of whether they were attending the dance weekend. Since this event, a late-night alternative style contra dance has become common at dance weekends. Further, a variety of alternative style contra dances began to appear among dance communities that encapsulated a range of reactions to the combination of club elements with contra dance, many as a response to the Asheville techno style.

Other Alternative Styles

The term "techno contra" is the most succinct and most popular name for this trend in contra dance. It conveys the energy and club atmosphere of the dance, and although it indicates an integration of electronic music into contra dancing, not all alternative events are considered techno contras. In some cases, this naming difference comes from a recognition of musical distinction between the dances. Peter, a dance organizer in North Carolina created what he called "electroflow" events based largely on neo-traditional music: "At my own crossover contra dances, "techno" is not an accurate term to describe the music. We have included some trance/techno, but it has only been a small part of the program."[18]

[18] Personal communication, April 19, 2011.

In other cases, a difference in naming creates a separation from the bit of notoriety associated with the early Asheville style. Peter spoke to me of trying to find a space to hold a crossover style event that would be inclusive of the community, with a fun but more family-oriented atmosphere. Upon asking to rent space in a Catholic church with which the dance group was already affiliated, he was apparently turned down: "the bishop googled techno contra and saw what was going on in Asheville—men in lingerie and stuff—and denied the techno contra. So if you change the name it's better."

The response of many dance organizers interested in trying alternative music contras included opposition to the exclusivity of the first techno contras. Brian Hamshar started Club Contras in Virginia with a goal to "bring crossover contra more into the mainstream [of contra dance], to tweak it so that it is less of a fringe curiosity and more of a complement to traditional dances, providing more variety of dance experiences with the same community feel that we cherish." Similarly, the first regular crossover series attempted by a dance community—Contra Sonic, starting in late 2010 as a monthly event in Glen Echo, Maryland—was specifically intended as an inclusive dance: "I wanted our alt music series to not be an exclusive thing. The first alternative contras were by invitation only and those were . . . the music and calling were both recorded ahead of time, and for me that wasn't what contra dancing is about."[19]

Representing some possibilities for reinvention of the innovation, crossover contra dances include a variety of musical styles, not just techno. In central North

[19] While pre-recorded calling tracks have been used in some cases, most crossover contra dances include live calling to pre-recorded music, including Asheville's early techno contras, often called by Jesse Edgerton.

Carolina dances using neo-traditional tunes by bands such as Shooglenifty and the Peatbog Faeries have been popular. Remixed pop tunes have recently become one of the most popular DJ'ed sets, making use of popular songs from the '80s and '90s with which many dancers enjoy singing along. Further not all crossover contra dances are as heavily infused with a club-style environment, some omitting strobe and other such lighting effects, although the general club-style feeling still tends to be evoked.

Clubs vs. club-style contras

While contra dance may be of diminished oppositional status it is still marginal in relation to a mainstream in the United States ("mainstream" is associated with corporate, commercial formulae and minimal risk-taking with the aim of profitable success as the dominant trend). Both the practices and the participants may be located outside this mainstream, but not without awareness of it, and not without influence, unidirectional as it may seem. Participants are involved in various activities and groups as a natural part of their lives and these various aspects of an individual are not necessarily relegated to discrete units. Analogous features from different spheres may interact by virtue of an individual's participation in each realm, but within a realm any outside influence is mediated by the community's production of its practice. These concepts are illuminated in the interaction of dance music (such as EDM) and dance music (as for contra dances), and the interaction of club culture and contra culture. Any relative advantage, as a trait affecting the adoption of this innovation, can be considered not only in regard to more traditional contra dances but in regard to club and rave culture as well.

Speaking with members of the regional dance communities about the intention behind creating a club-style contra dance reveals why contra dancing with this

combination of elements could be appealing. One key reason, voiced multiple times, centers around the contrasts in social experience between clubs and the contra dance community. Contra dance communities as a safe social space reckons prominently in these accounts: "I have a lot of philosophies about what contra dancing is, and how in some respects it's really different from the club scene, and more of a safe place…you can leave your glass of water, and it will still be there when you come back, un-tampered with."

One dance organizer noted the difference in the social environments while casting a critical eye toward the early techno contras:

> The social atmosphere is completely different. In many cases, to even get into a club, first you have to get past the bouncer, which means you have to be wearing the right clothes, or, in the case of guys, have a girl with you. Clubs also tend to cater to a narrow demographic. For example, the 21-25 year-old set or the "grown and sexy." It feels like an environment of rigid conformity and social hierarchy. I have heard it said that clubs are intentionally designed to create an intimidating atmosphere to drive alcohol sales. When I have been to clubs, people were mostly sticking with a small group of friends, so it wasn't very social. By contrast, a contra dance is open to everyone and encourages mingling and dancing with strangers. There isn't the same rigid expectation of conforming to "cool." Instead of being forced to put on airs to fit in, it's more about non-judgmental, high-energy togetherness. Of course, I have heard reports from techno contra dances in a certain community taking on more of a club character, but that applies to their weekly live music contra dances as well.[20]

Other accounts allude to the inclusivity and interactivity inherent in contra dance that is lacking in a typical club setting. As one dancer mentioned to me: "I've done the clubs but…nobody dances with each other. I want to dance with people. I look at the club

[20] Personal communication, April 19, 2014.

and like, I can do that at home on my own, I came to dance WITH people, ya know?"[21]

Other comments affirm this point of view:

> Contra dancing is naturally inclusive, while club scenes are exclusive. The structure of contra dancing provides a framework for people to interact and discover one another where freestyle dancing is more about angling for dominance.
>
> A lot of people who like contra like it because they need the structure in place to participate. They wouldn't talk to strangers at a normal party or dance of their own volition. There needs to be a mechanism in place to encourage participation. Obviously not all contra dancers. Some participate in other dances or have outside social lives.

Apparent within many of these comments is an indication of an "outsider" status that contra dance and its participants seem to have in relation to the mainstream. Words of contrast such as "normal" and "cool" reveal this as a self-identified status among some in the contra dance community. The suggestion I heard that "having familiar [pop, techno, etc.] music at a dance contributes to giving newcomers the impression that the dance is for them, as opposed to them crashing a quirky subculture's event" underscores an outsider status.

This comment also reveals another goal of crossover contras: attracting newcomers. Speaking of her vision for techno contra dances, a local dance organizer affirmed the goal of attracting new dancers while hinting again at the outsider status:

> When we've had young people try to bring their friends [to a contra dance] and get shot down because they think it's 'too dorky,' this [techno] is the dance where they might be convinced to come try it. They might be overwhelmed, because contra dancing can be pretty overwhelming the first time, but it's [techno contra] also an environment where you could just freestyle, if the contra dancing part is still too dorky…I mean I have no problem whatsoever, if I don't feel like doing a

[21] Personal communication January 15, 2015.

> contra, going out on the floor and just dancing in the back of the hall. So that could be less intimidating than contra.

Thus, some of the main reasons voiced for a crossover contra dance trend include bringing club elements of music and atmosphere into the safer, more interactive social space of the contra dance community for individuals who may or may not feel comfortable attending a regular club or rave. The crossover trend is also an attempt to attract new participants to contra dance and to expand the options for those already involved in contra dance. Beyond these stated thoughts is a generation of contra dance participants who feel a comfortable sense of belonging in the contra dance community. If "one of the main ways in which youth carve out virtual, and claim actual, space is by filling it with *their* music," this generation is marking their place in the contra dance community at large.[22]

Their **Music**

A great majority of those involved in contra dance music as touring bands and as DJs claim the desire to make music that they themselves would want to dance to. Currently, this may mean creating a groove and style improvised around more traditional tunes in live music or choosing mass-mediated music that is enjoyed away from contra dance that can then be edited and mixed for a contra dance. On the concept of youth filling a space with *their* music, I consider "*their"* music both in the sense of *their* generation carrying the crossover trend, as well as in the sense that *their* music refers to a more mainstream sound thus far viewed as outside the realm of *our* contra dance music.

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[22] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996), 19.

Rather than adding a rock or jazz feel into fiddle tunes, as Ralph Page was observing in the ‘70s, much of the music used at crossover events is directly from commercial sources. At the far end of the spectrum, representing *their* music is a new role in the contra dance community – the DJ.

DJs “Fusing Passions”

The phenomenon of the contra dance DJ is a grassroots one. No crossover contra dance event has employed a DJ from outside the community; this role has been created and stepped into by a handful of contra dancers themselves, with knowledge and experience of the dance, the community, and the music. Although each DJ is a familiar member of a contra dance community they typically do not use their given name when performing as a DJ, but rather create a named persona. This adds yet another element alluding to the mainstream club culture, where the practice is standard. Some develop clever monikers derived from the language of contra dance, such as DJ Improper; many use a play on their own name, such as DJ Jor-D. The adoption of a separate DJ name in contra dance, as with the naming of bands and special events, is to create branding and generate excitement about an event. DJs speak of creating a persona for a performance as fun and exciting and as a way to create a sense of an event.

A few contra dance DJs have experience as a DJ in other settings. Comparing spinning for a contra dance to regular gigs, DJ D-No asserts it is “much more intense to spin a contra. Elsewhere you can gloss over a transition…add or subtract songs from the

playlist. This is severely limited in the techno contra."[23] The challenge is affirmed by DJ Becket:

> The world of DJing is really competitive because anyone with a laptop can produce an okay DJ set with a little practice. If you were to approach a club DJ and tell them you wanted them to play music, but they have to play good music and follow all these crazy rules that govern figure dances, they'd probably tell you they couldn't do it. It's a really good DJ exercise though. After you try DJing with all these limitations in place, you find that your other stuff starts sounding really tight. I mean there's a reason traditional music has lived for so long. Traditional musicians must be doing something right, so if you learn to play by their rules, you can really expose your creativity on other areas.[24]

These DJs typically view their endeavor as a way to share what they love, fusing two of their passions: music and contra dance. DJs I spoke with mentioned a love of music and a curiosity around it that leads them to seek out new experiences with music. One DJ traces his familiarity with a variety of music (notably all of relatively easy access within the United States) from his parents' influence to metal to indie, hip hop, and electronica, eventually focusing more on subgenres of EDM like Hardstyle and Old School Rave and, today, everything he can get his hands on, 8-bit to zydeco. For most DJs, their personal music preferences contribute to their selections for a crossover contra dance, but this is tempered with styles and musical feature that work best for the process. The community in general will also democratically "vote with their feet" or validate in conversation their musical preferences.

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[23] Personal communication, February 10, 2014. Although DJ D-No uses the word "spin," evoking the turntable, contra dance DJs use laptops to configure and play music. I address this below.

[24] Personal communication, February 7, 2015.

Remixes and Strategies

Incorporating technologically-driven music mixed by a DJ, crossover contra uses currently standard contra dance choreography with DJ'ed music including house, techno, electronic/Celtic fusion, and pop, typically in the form of remix or mash up. Remixes and mashups, whether created by a contra dance DJ or simply incorporated into their playlist for a dance, are quite popular in contra dance, mirroring the rise of remix in music and other practices in contemporary American society. A remix is typically considered to be a piece of media—for purposes here, a musical recording—altered from its original state by adding, removing, or changing pieces of it, or produced by combining sections of existing material in new patterns and with new material. Remix is commonly used in various types of popular music, but is usually most closely associated with club dance music. Mashups are generally considered to be a type of remix that, rather than remixing one particular composition, incorporate two or more sources.

The concept of a "remix culture" in the twenty-first century emerged in writings of the past decade or so, described by Lawrence Lessig in his 2008 book *Remix* as a Read/Write media culture as compared to the Read Only culture of the twentieth century. In a Read Only culture, media is typically consumed passively. A Read/Write scenario can turn passive consumers into more active participants. Remix culture is a result of the unprecedented access to ever more sophisticated computers and digital media. Indeed, American society is now being shaped by a generation of relatively inexpensive, accessible, even disposable technology such as that for audio recording. The process of digital configurability, a sort of cut/copy and paste is gaining widespread familiarity.

A crossover contra dance event is itself a sort of mash up, combining distinct elements of contra dance with aspects attributable to club culture. Many in the contra dance community, particularly the younger generation of teens and twenty-somethings, who could be considered "digital natives," are fully aware of the creative digital possibilities of a remix culture; the technologies have been available to them throughout their lives, and some choose work within those fields. The availability of technology and software for creative processes implies a relatively easy process for a combination of disparate elements that can be cut and pasted together, and thus a similar consideration for the relative complexity enabling or limiting the adoption of this innovation.

Digital posters shared online or printed out to serve as flyers to advertise upcoming events are one representation of remix culture in contra dance. An advertisement for a techno contra dance for the Contra Sonic series in Glen Echo, MD demonstrates a mash up of visual media, combining faces of two different popular music artists, while alluding to the mashup of the techno contra event.

For someone within the contra dance community this poster is atypical of contra dance. The purple laser lights, the mention of techno music, and a sense of individuality represented by a face (although flyers are used to advertise dance events, I have never seen one with a single individual represented) are unusual with contra dance practice. For some this can feel edgy and perhaps similar to what they have seen outside contra dance, where events with special lighting and solo artists of popular music are more common. For those outside a contra dance community, the most unusual aspect of the poster is the phrase "traditional contra dance."

Figure 19: A digital poster for a techno contra dance featuring a facial mash up of popular music artists will.i.am (left) and Sly Stone (right)

The poster was created by a friend of a techno contra DJ, a graphic designer who has had a hand in the design work for the local dance events, but who doesn't have much interest in contra. The mashup of faces was inspired by other facial mashups created for the A + D Bootie blog. Bootie began in 2003 as the first club night in the United States dedicated exclusively to bootleg mashups, created by DJs Adrian & Mysterious D (A + D). Their website now claims Bootie as the biggest mashup event in the world with regular parties in several cities. This blog has been a source of music for some techno contra dances. The DJ I spoke with mentioned the choice of artists as representative of music that he was planning for a techno contra, "a set with some funk or disco leading into a Black Eyed Peas song."[25]

[25] Personal communication, February 7, 2016.

Although there are implications for consideration in the choice to use faces of black popular musicians for an event typically linked to white, Anglo musical styles and likely to be at least 90% comprised of white appearing individuals, the DJ I spoke with said it "probably wasn't racially or inclusivity motivated at the time." Inclusivity is an ideal of contra dance, but despite good intentions there is a perceived lack of diversity on the dance floor. How to attract a wider representation of the population is a mystery not yet solved by contra dance communities.[26] The artists represented in this poster - will.i.am, a solo rapper/singer and member of the group The Black Eyed Peas, and Sly Stone of the funk and soul group Sly and the Family Stone – point to commercial popular dance music, and among other possible analytical levels, allude to the listening habits of contra dance participants which include a wider diversity than represented in contra dance.

The music and artists referenced in the poster above, as well as the style and design of the poster, are intended to generate excitement for the event. In hopes of drawing newcomers, the poster gives a sense of mainstream familiarity that also appeals to some contra dancers. Further appeal is based on the potential for dancing interactively

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[26] Although it is a rare opinion, one individual with whom I had early contact has since distanced themselves from the contra dance communities, in which they were a long-time participant, because they felt complicit in racist and sexist dynamics. The opinion this young individual cited to me was that there were "years of white organization shrugging their shoulders and thinking people of color just aren't into contra, instead of going out of their way to make more people of color feel welcome." While this individual suggested that racist dynamics are difficult to experience if there is no racial diversity at a dance, it is the ideal of the community and my general experience that all who come to a contra dance are welcomed. It was also my experience that an occasional dance bias seemed to be based on another's dance style or ability (see discussion of cool, hip dancers and center set syndrome) regardless of other identity characteristics.

with another style of "fun" music. As part of the community, DJs understand contra dance and the music that evokes a response. "My musical choices are based on what I think will be fun to dance to. I've been contra dancing for most of my life so I have a feel for what will work musically for contra dancing."[27]

Implicit in this statement for what works for contra dancing is not only music that seems fun, but also music that structurally aligns with standard contra dance choreography and style. "When you dance in a club, you freestyle, but when you do a figure dance, you need to do certain moves at specific times. This must be reflected in the music. It's important for dancers to be able to tell where they are in the dance…the music can't really get too loose for very long" (p.c DJ E). This DJ's consideration of musical indicators for dancers is parallel to the same concern of acoustic musicians. Indeed, as mentioned by DJ Becket above, learning to play by the same rules traditional musicians follow can be a key to a successful remix or playlist. DJs for techno and crossover contra dances employ a variety of strategies for putting their music together in a way that will work for contra dance.

The simplest strategy mentioned by a DJ is to sort through a personal catalog for songs around the proper speed (120 – 130bpm), check the length of the song, and check for the tune to be "square" (groups of 64 beats), editing if necessary, and adding drum tracks or other various sounds. In some cases, dance-remixed popular songs are queued for a contra dance. One example is Tomik's techno remix of "Like a G6," a 2010 song by Far East Movement with featured artists The Cataracs and Dev. Another example offered

[27] Personal communication, DJ E, March 3, 2014.

to me was by a DJ who claims to lean toward electro-remixes of indie pop songs. In his opinion, Keljet's remix of Irish indie rock band, Two Door Cinema Club's "What You Know," offers a perfect crossover contra dance tune if slowed to 124 beats per minute and with an eight-beat introduction added.

As a practical matter, DJs choose samples or songs with a tempo in the right range, usually 112 – 130bpm. Too much manipulation can lead to a frantic sound when sped up or a ponderous feeling when slowed down. One of the most important elements is a consistent beat. Particularly if a melody is faded out, a strong rhythmic groove and consistent beat are necessary to keep the dance together. Dropping the beat was one of the main complaints offered as an example of what doesn't work for a crossover contra. In addition to a danceable tempo and consistent beat, a structure that matches the dance with a square 64-beat pattern is a goal for the music. If the songs are not already square, "they just have to have the potential to be square. I can cut, copy, and paste to make it work out."[28]

As with the beginning of the techno contra dance trend, many of those stepping into the DJ role decided to give it a try because they felt frustrated or unsatisfied after experiencing a crossover event. Many DJs I spoke with talked of it being a tough "nut to crack," tempting them to take matters into their own hands to remix music in a way that would satisfy. DJ Petronella's first techno contra experience "was rough both as a caller and a dancer, particularly for phrasing reasons, but also because the music the DJ picked wasn't very interesting." What did prove useful in this situation, since DJ Petronella had

[28] Personal communication, DJ Petronella, September 6, 2014.

no prior music editing experience was observing transitions from one track to the next. This helped to "conceptualize how to edit the music together, which I did in Audacity, a free program I downloaded."

Energy and Flow: Further Strategies

Speaking directly about the concept of flow, one DJ attributes the flow experience to the reason he has never grown tired of contra dance; "Every night is new," always a "new opportunity for magic." He loves "the pursuit of that moment where I could lose myself in this, have it carry me across the floor" (DJ Bowz). He does not, however, discuss it as part of his experience as a DJ. For its potential in prerecorded music, his thought is that a flow experience may be more likely in real time mixing, where a DJ can respond in the moment and "use effects for builds to really achieve this." Another DJ mentioned his own flow experiences, "chilling in the pocket," as a dancer and while selecting music for a dance event, but did not note it during the dance in his DJ role. So, while it may be that DJs tend to be busy thinking about their actions (as opposed to a merging of action and awareness), several dancers allude to flow.

When asked only generally about their experiences with the music at a more traditional contra dance and a crossover contra, without the mention of flow, dancers responded in a number of ways that may point toward a flow experience:

> Faster dances, louder music, more immersive experiences. Only rarely in ordinary contra dances do I feel completely in the thrall of the music, but on most good dances I get into that state with techno.
>
> It does seem slightly easier to slip into a trance state, where the music is enjoyed on a new level, with the permeating sound of a techno contra.

These comments highlight the individual nature of flow and an immersive, permeating sense of these individuals' experiences. The focused concentration found in flow may stem from the environmental conditions of a darkened room and loud music, limiting the stimulus field and centering attention on the present moment. These experiences also parallel those of dancers at clubs and raves who use the term *vibe* (recall Jordy Williams's use of the term above), a "collective energy that can be experienced on an individual basis as well…that collapses the boundaries between individual and collective musical experience, an energy made possible when the music transcends the acoustic realm and becomes physical."[29]

While I did not hear reports of a DJ experiencing a flow state during a dance, their musical selections help guide the mood for dancers. Musical choices made by DJs are shaped by their own experience as dancers in a contra dance community. "There's a reason traditional music has lived for so long. Traditional musicians must be doing something right, so if you learn to play by their rules, you can really expose your creativity on other areas." I reiterate DJ Becket's comment here in order to recall some of the "rules" musicians follow to help shape the energy and mood of a dance. The energy and mood are a large component of the "magic" contra dancers speak of, and as I analyze in the previous chapter, contribute to moments of flow. DJs, likewise employ certain strategies to help guide a dance.

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[29] Kai Fikentscher, *"You Better Work": Underground Dance Music in New York City* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000): 81 – 2.

Responding in a group conversation on this topic to a query about live music compared to the perception of a DJ simply pushing a "play" button, DJ E responded with his thoughts:

> Musicians practice and rehearse in the time before they perform. While there are some improvisational elements to how some bands play contra dance music, one could argue that in the same way a DJ is essentially hitting play, a musician is essentially hitting play and producing the sounds that they worked on crafting before they arrived on stage. I create communication with callers in some instances, like a band. I also loop and cut parts of songs to make them fit the phrasing of the dance, in the same way that a band might have to adjust the phrasing. Sometimes I have a set up so that I can just press play. Even then, I am monitoring the floor to determine if the tempo is too rushed or relaxed for the dance and making adjustments based on my perception.

Most of these comments were taken into thoughtful consideration of how a DJ shapes the energy of a dance. There was, however, some debate regarding the comment on live musicians "essentially hitting play." The main point of the debate revolved around the energetic exchange between the stage and the floor and the ability of musicians to respond in real time, consciously or not, to the feedback loop shared with the dance floor. DJ Bowz has the energy of a dance in mind, and wondered whether smaller venues might facilitate the feeling: "you want the feeling of a party like a kitchen that is full. The energy would benefit." The lack of this kind of exchange is acknowledged, but DJ E saw some benefit to a recorded set: "Because the music is prerecorded, there's not the same energy feedback loop between bands and dancers. I think this is okay, because I never have to deal with having a low energy set for a small dance crowd. The energy is always there even if the crowd is small. The peak moments are built into the recording of the songs."

Sets are generally pre-edited and thus have some pre-determined characteristics. For example, the duration of the sets is not flexible to the circumstances. Keeping sets a

bit short is one strategy used by a DJ Bowz, who "would rather keep folks wanting more than be bored if there aren't many dancers in the line. Also, because the tempo for crossover contras tends to be faster and I'd rather they have a break." Tempo and tempo changes within a set are also deliberately chosen in advance but can be manipulated to some extent during a dance.

A dance matching agenda is prevalent in the DJ's process, as it is with bands. The success of the ongoing interaction between the stage and the floor is largely dependent on the programming to help create the vibe, which can in turn affect the quality of the dance experience. The style of music and phrasing is considered with the choreography to create smoother, flowing dances or bouncier dances. Editing tunes together, matching different originals, often results in a set that works well for a dance under many of the same premises used in matching in general for contra dance. "With fast sets, it's important to have relatively simple dances where you don't have to move too far. I also have one set in particular that is extremely flowy and jazzy, and I particularly like to pair it with 'Al's Safeway Produce.' However, I aim to change up my program for each evening so that even if dancers hear familiar music the dance is fresh."[30] Maintaining variety between different pairings is important since, after the great deal of work put in during the editing process, DJs may reuse their tracks.

The most common strategies of DJs for creating a successful dance include squaring the music, being mindful of tempo, and selecting songs that suit the crowd and the choreography, whether neo-traditional, '90s pop, or Chicago house. Recordings must

[30] P.C., DJ Petronella, September 6, 2014.

be manipulated by a DJ in order to build to a peak moment. Using the language of techno, DJ Bowz suggested that, for guiding the energy, "it doesn't work when the drop hits halfway through the phrase. Instead you have to work and build to where you want it to build."

Laptops, Software, and Copyright

Laptops are not specifically designed to serve as or be perceived as musical instruments, but over the last several years they have been adopted as such by electronic music performers, including contra dance DJs. In a historical trajectory that includes the guitar pitted against the synthesizer in the 1980s, the turntable established as an instrument by the 1990s—a development that began in the late 1970s with disco and rap—remix culture and the software to remix, such as Logic, go a step further. The accessibility of communication technology - personal computers, internet connectivity, media editing software – and the ease with which many people maneuver among the technologies, has led to at least one opinion that "the laptop is a folkloric instrument of our time."[31]

DJ Becket also hinted at this phenomenon in his statement that "anyone with a laptop can produce an okay DJ set with a little practice." Although it seems like something any kid in his bedroom could do, there are skills and creativity needed. Knowing how to choose and how to arrange the music, while being sensitive to the best way to fit the needs of contra dance are important qualities.

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[31] Quoted in Aram Sinnreich, *Mashed Up: Music, Technology, and the Rise of Configurable Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2010): 69.

Arranging and editing generally occur in software such as Logic, Ableton, or Audacity and the tunes are often played using the same software, sometimes Serato DJ or even iTunes, depending on the DJ and the playlists. Adding various percussion tracks and other sounds from the software, DJs may compose their own tunes, pull from their music collection, or sometimes scour the internet, YouTube, and Soundcloud to find songs to remix, putting in quite a bit of time to square and edit the music. As part of this process, DJs frequently work with the intellectual property of others, most of which likely has an interested copyright holder behind it.

While there now is a possibility for openly licensed work under the Creative Commons vision of copyright that makes creative content available for public use—including sharing, repurposing, and remixing—far more prevalent (and more likely to affect the works in consideration for crossover contra dances) are the regulations put forth as Copyright Law in Title 17 of the United States Code.[32] Any work created after January 1, 1978 is granted copyright protection whether registered or not (though to take legal action on infringement the work must be registered). In general, copyright is held by the artist; however, in the case of most mainstream music of the United States promoted by a record label, the label or publishing company often holds the copyright. Many countries have reciprocity with the U.S. Code, and therefore some music from abroad also falls under these rules.

Pertinent to DJs and remixing in general are provisions included in Section 106, which grant exclusive rights to the copyright holder (emphasis mine):

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[32] Title 17 of the United Stated Codes may be accessed online, https://www.copyright.gov/title17/.

(1) To reproduce the copyrighted work in copies or phonorecords;
(2) ***To prepare derivative works based upon the copyrighted work****;*
(3) To distribute copies or phonorecords of the copyrighted work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending;
(4) In the case of…musical…works…***to perform the copyrighted work publicly***;
(5) In the case of…musical…works…to display the copyrighted work publicly; and
(6) *In the case of sound recordings,* ***to perform the copyrighted work publicly by means of a digital audio transmission.***

These rights may be sold in part or in total, but unless otherwise specified they are exclusive to the copyright holder. To help with permissions, ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC serve as clearinghouses to license public performances of recordings and covers; member artists receive licensing fees for performances of their work. In this way, a DJ, radio station, or performance or club venue does not have to solicit each copyright holder. In the cases of independent artists or those not covered, permission must still be obtained by addressing the artists individually.

Dance organizers and DJs who sought out the permission of the less well known artists, generally fared quite well in the process. With only one negative response (from a small label in Scotland concerned about the editing), most "groups seem to have been pleased to be asked and pleased that people are interested in their music" (DJ Petronella). Initial inquiries about licensing and fees had positive results after paying a fee, but with the understanding that the music would be used for a folk dance, most artists did not ask for a fee. One caller supposes, "it makes a difference that it's clear that we aren't a big-time operation. It may also make a difference that many of these groups aren't mainstream. Right when we asked, the label for Enter the Haggis was looking for

advertising for a gig shortly after one of our dances, and they were happy we said that I announce each of the artists and would plug their concert."[33]

Liveness

A frequent academic point of consideration in regard to electronic music performers focuses on the concept of liveness.[34] It was the development of recording technology that made it possible or necessary to distinguish a representation as "live," and while in some cases a recorded version is meant as complement to the live, quite often in contemporary capitalist society, the recording as product is viewed as the music itself. Following Walter Benjamin, issues are raised of authenticity, of a work's "here and now," once it is reproduced. Benjamin's assessment that "technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations to which the original itself cannot attain" seems aptly applied to remixes.[35]

In the case of electronic music performers, a sense of virtuosity may be lost when a laptop is used where more traditional instruments are associated. In some sense the

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[33] Personal communication, Ellen, September 12, 2014.

[34] The concept of liveness has been addressed more broadly by Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Mark J. Butler, *Playing With Something That Runs: Technology, Improvisation, and Composition in DJ and Laptop Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Paul D. Green and Thomas Porcello, eds., *Wired For Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).

[35] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its First Technological Reproducibility [First Version], translated by Michael W. Jennings, *Grey Room* no. 39 "Walter Benjamin's Media Tactics: Optics, Perception, and the Work of Art," (Spring 2010): 14.

visual images often included in a show may serve to compensate for this perceived lack.[36] While crossover contra dances feature a DJ working from a laptop and frequently alter the visual experience of contra dance by using darkened rooms, black lights, and occasional projections on the ceiling, the visual focus of dancers is not that of an audience watching musicians as performers. In many ways, these issues of liveness and authenticity are placed onto the event as a whole. A sense of liveness in contra dance is experienced in ways that include interaction among the various participants.

There is some similarity in both live music contra dances as well as electronic music contra dances to what Sarah Thornton analyzes in regard to club music:

> What authenticates contemporary dance cultures is the buzz or energy which results from the interaction of records, DJ, and crowd. 'Liveness' is displaced to the dancefloor…the DJ and dancers share the spotlight as de facto performers; the crowd becomes a self-conscious cultural phenomenon – one which generates moods immune to reproduction, for which you have to be there.[37]

This interaction, sharing a spotlight as de facto performers, and creating a mood for which you have to be there, are all aspects that are well-known to contra dance. Thus, the experience is the focus, as are the moods immune to reproduction rather than a particular work of art and its reproduction.

Yet, still, there seems to be something lacking for many dance participants during a fully electronic contra dance. It is the energy feedback loop, as mentioned earlier, that truly heightens the live music experience for many contra dance participants. The

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[36] Christopher Anderson, "Aesthetic Perceptions of 21st-Century Laptop Performances," *Pop Matters* 2 December 2012, accessed February 28, 2014, http://www.popmatters.com/column/165451-aesthetic-perceptions-of-21st-century-laptop-performances/.

[37] Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 29 – 30.

interaction with liveness and an appreciation for that sense of the human element from all involved with live music contra dance experiences is encapsulated in one dancer's comment that "after five days at CDH (Contradancers' Delight Holiday) this techno contra hurts my soul," in a way echoing Simon Reynolds's conclusion of late 1980's dance music as an experience with "no depth, no human truth or social concern to be divined."[38] Affirming the human element, DJ Petronella believes "the strongest future of crossover contra, in my mind, is in bands who bring the presence of a live band to the stage and mix in beats, synth, and samples or otherwise draw in fusion influences."

Live-Electronic Fusions

Several popular bands today are fusion bands in a style sense insofar as they blend the sounds of jazz, swing, or jam bands into their contra dance tunes, but a live-electronic fusion became popular on the contra dance scene with the Maine-based band Perpetual e-Motion, comprised of Ed Howe (fiddle) and John Cote (guitar, digeridoo, foot percussion).[39] The sound of this band was born from "experimenting with sound textures and the love for rhythm and world beat and electronica…drawing from traditional music…[including] French-Canadian, old-time, some bluegrass style, Cape Breton, Irish, and jazz chords and textures."[40] In particular, this band is known for the layers of sound created by these two musicians with their equipment.

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[38] Quoted in Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth, and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (London: Routledge, 2006, 93.

[39] By the time of this writing both musicians have gone on to other projects.

Ed Howe plays an electric five-string violin and, through the use of looping technology, is able to coordinate multiple lines in real time. The music is created anew each time. The first line, often a rhythmic groove including percussive sounds of the bluegrass "chop," is recorded live to use in repeated playback as a backdrop upon which he can build further melody and countermelody lines.[41] Various effects such as delay, reverb, compression, or distortion can be added or taken away (as can a particular recorded part) to add interest and variety throughout the music. A pedal board Ed created allows him to control everything with his feet, in a way mirroring some of the work John does beside him with foot percussion.

To match's Ed's experimentation, John plays with the possibilities of an acoustic/synthesizer guitar. The guitar has a pick-up under every string so that each note is translated to a MIDI signal that can then be expressed as any sound in the synthesizer module. The result can be anything from a familiar acoustic guitar sound to a sort of ambient soundscape built around the chord being played. Both the guitar and the digeridoo can be run through the same kind of processing as the fiddle for effects, to create a sort of "surreal sound, still using Celtic melodies and such but in a wide sound field, with delays and those kinds of things . . . to make some of the sound sources a bit

[40] Seng-Wheeler, John-Michael, "Perpetual e-Motion" documentary, EpsilonFilmsOnline, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsHCDbk2WY0 accessed 17 May 2013.

[41] The "chop" is a percussive technique for bowed strings made known by bluegrass fiddler Richard Greene. Similar to the stopped string sounds played on backbeats by guitar, or mandolin, the chop is accomplished with a vertical movement of the bow downward into the strings of a violin, cello, etc. for a percussive effect followed by pulling the bow up with a slight horizontal movement for pitched effect.

more ambiguous than otherwise would be with just an acoustic instrument going through a microphone."[42]

The impulse for combining these various technologies into their live playing came from thoughts on studio recordings, bringing to high relief the influence of studio quality aesthetic mentioned earlier in this chapter: "First and foremost we had this idea that when every band goes into a studio you have all this equipment available. You have all this technology to make things sound good." Typically, however, for live bands "the sound equipment is a second thought. Why not have that attention on stage, with the best sound you can make, with mics and sound boards. The electric violin…afforded us a whole other world. If you give an artist more tools, they will use them."[43]

Both musicians are clear about delineating their band as live music. "Ed and I are doing live music. The sound is a bit unique and involves a lot of multi-tasking to sound like a three- or four-person band. The difference between us and techno is that everything is there. Ed clears the loop machine before each dance." Techno is prerecorded, while Perpetual e-Motion use layers and loops as tools with live music, working with synthetic sounds in an interactive way to add flexibility. There is an emphasis on the human element in their work: "electronics can play but can't listen. The loop is the loop is the loop. For all it knows you're in the next room. It doesn't care."

Alluding to the liveness concern facing many electronic music performers, John mentions that with techno it is often assumed everything is coming from a computer, and

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[42] Seng-Wheeler, "Perpetual e-Motion."

[43] Personal communication, October 2, 2013.

adds that he feels their music is accessible because people know where the sound is coming from. Recalling the unique and beloved place of live music in contra dance as opposed to some other forms (such as blues and swing) that use recorded music: "I've never been to a contra dance without live people on stage." The power of recorded possibilities, especially particular sound types, nonetheless holds something nearly ineffable for Ed, who has a longtime interest in electronics:

> With a computer, you can really tailor the sound, suddenly the sky's the limit. It's a lot of fun. I need to put a disclaimer here: I'm a huge, huge supporter of acoustic music, but when you get a whole recorded sound, there is something…tribal and powerful. You can connect to dancers in their souls.

Without question, he is talking about a particular kind of recorded sound, one about which many dancers, particularly fans of EDM, world and electronic genres would agree.

As for their place in the contra dance tradition, both musicians are conscientious of a dynamic concept of "tradition," defining themselves as a tradition-based band pushing the envelope. With reference to his bluegrass beginnings, Ed offers Bill Monroe as example: "[He] was seen as a rebel in his time. Perpetual e-Motion is traditional to the core. We will probably be seen as traditional in the future because we're pushing the envelope like others have." Further elaborating he offers, "we're creating a path inspired by past tradition. We're heavily influenced by traditional fiddle style."

While he indicates that he believes that in contemporary society "we're losing sight of the soul of music," he feels no contradiction in the addition of electronics to contra dance:

> We're using electronic to update it to modern society. Traditional music was not amped because they didn't have it. Adding electronic influences helps the tradition keep up with newer stuff. What we are doing does not replace tradition. The tradition has soul, character, charisma. We're doing something different. Not better, just different.

Intention also keeps the tradition alive, as the band is "more about connecting with people to create an emotive product. We want to inspire people to want to dance. We're about pulling everyone back together. Lately it seems the world is forgetting community and it's really important to keep that."

Perpetual e-Motion was a relative anomaly until late 2010 when a couple of dance musicians who shared a love of techno music, often realized at raves in the 1990s, decided to try what they called "fiddle techno." The band Double Apex debuted their sound as a combination of sequencing and prerecorded samples with a fiddle both live and looped. A small handful of bands, some with members in common, have followed. While this music is closer in sound to the fully electronic music of a techno contra dance, the emphasis remains on live human interaction. "I want to have live interaction where I can match the intensity of the dancers, and recorded music can't do that."[44]

By late 2014, live-electronic band Buddy System (who also perform acoustically) was garnering acclaim in much of the contra dance scene. Noah VanNorstrand performs on fiddle, digeridoo, foot and synthesized percussion, while Julie Vallimont plays accordion, synthesizer, and jaw harp (with which she is able to create a sound reminiscent of an electronic track). Vallimont, who frequented raves in the 1990s, sees a connection between the trance beats of club music and the repetition prominent in contra dance choreography. The energy feedback loop is again alluded to by Buddy System, "The

[44] Julie Vallimont, interview by Ryan Holman, September 2011, used with permission.

band plays off the dancers, the dancers react to the band. That synergy is so incredible – it's what drew me to contra dances in the first place."[45]

Community Negotiations and Responses

Considering contra dance under a community of practice framework entails consideration of "a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of the mutual engagement."[46] While contra dance choreography and music have evolved through the years, several in the community feel the incorporation of electronically-infused music to the extent of the crossover event is a more distinct rupture than any previous stylistic changes. Boundary questions are raised as it becomes obvious that "we can apparently play around a good bit with the musical style – break with tradition completely, but for some qualities. When does it stop being "this" and start being "that"? Generally, any outside influence is mediated by the community's production of its practice, worked out through participation and reification, all communally negotiated. The crossover contra trend has illuminated many points of negotiation for contra dance communities, including the music, behaviors, and community norms.

The safe, participatory, inclusive nature assumed and espoused of contra dance comes into focus again as an ongoing dialectic among the community, presented through the first of techno contra dances which were invitation-based in part to "not worry about

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[45] Alli Marshall, "After Midnight LEAF's Late Night Lineup is Worth Staying Up For" Mountain Xpress, 8 October 2014, accessed January 28, 2017, http://mountainx.com/arts/after-midnight-leafs-late-night-lineup-is-worth-stayinng-up-for.

[46] Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* 77.

who's looking or judging or creeping." The youth of the Asheville contra dance community, in particular, experimented with events that aligned, at least in some ways, with their sense of the music, clothing, and dance styles that appeal to them. In viewing this as inclusive, Jordy Williams created an event to encapsulate a certain demographic of the community; yet again the idea of an outsider status is raised, not only in comparison to mainstream society at large, but as it is navigated within contra dance communities themselves.

Responses of the community at large have varied between those who have some preference for the crossover experience, those who don't necessarily care for it except for the fact that it is another contra dance to attend ("I come to techno contras when I don't have another dance to go to.") to those harboring some opposition ("I find nothing related to the tradition of contra dance. I wish they would come up with another name related to club dancing." This comment was in response to techno contra with prevalent blues-infused dancing). At this point, the trend does not seem to be bringing in an increased number of newcomers (perhaps because the events with the most club intense atmosphere are often presented as advanced dances) and many believe it is most effective as a special event. Indeed, the Contra Sonic series, which began as a monthly series is now occasional, occurring a few times a year.

Through negotiations compelled by crossover contras, community ideals have been both challenged and reinforced. One development in North Carolina included a community series specifically aimed at gentle community inclusivity. Despite its name, Rowdy Contras (inspired by the earlier Zesty Contras), took a solid yet non-

confrontational stance against the blues- and flourish-infused dance styles and the limiting "advanced" designation of some techno contra dances:

> Rowdy Contra Dance is a welcoming dance form specially conceived for everyone from newcomer to long-time participant to have a great time! This rare non-performance dance form also caters to the shy. The only thing you need to join in is a willingness to have fun! Instruction is given before and during each contra dance. Rowdy Contra Dances are a dip-free zone where good vibes and kinetic energy flow![47]

Responding himself to the proliferation of the crossover trend, Jordy Williams noted:

> A lot of other people are doing them now . . . which I like . . . but I've heard less than glowing reviews of pretty much every single one…which I don't like. I'd really rather it not become a joke. I never intended for it to become as popular as regular contra (which I doubt it ever will), but I find it at least a little frustrating that people are doing mediocre techno contras. And pretty much everyone thinks that I have something to do with all the techno contras, so it kinda drags my rep down.

These responses are informative on the state of contra dance and layered with meaning for those in the communities. Two creations in particular carry a certain semiotic density: one a digital poster and the other a tune arrangement by live-electronic fusion band Buddy System.

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[47] GSO Rowdy Contra Dances Facebook event page, https://www.facebook.com/events/264643307040454/

Figure 20: A digital poster for a live music contra dance event in North Carolina, 2011

This digital poster for a live music contra dance uses the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation's well-known searchlight logo, replacing the word "Fox" with the word "Contra" to imply a twentieth-century-style contra dance; in other words, *not* a crossover contra. For added emphasis, stamped on the upper left corner is the phrase "The Untechno." With humor this poster plays against the digital creations advertising crossover contra dances; here, however, may be found a certain nostalgia. Overlapping indicators of mainstream media add irony to the poster: the use of the logo of a large entertainment corporation for a non-corporate, participatory folk culture's event, for which the digital advertisement itself is a remix, created using accessible technology to alter an original image with which many in contra dance are, in fact, familiar. The various levels of understanding indicated by the image are taken in stride by the contra dance community, which is comprised of individuals who are able to interact both with the

mainstream and the marginal as part of their multifaceted lived experience, without cognitive dissonance.

The band Buddy System recently created a live-electronic arrangement that incorporates some of the spoken dialogue from the "Cool, Hip Dancer" animated video created by Noah VanNorstrand in 2011.[48] While a live performance of this arrangement may vary to some degree each time, a normative recording is available on the band's 2016 EP *Newfangled Technological Contradance Novelty Revue*. The arrangement on the recording begins with only the digital voice generated by Xtranormal from the video, using the opening lines from the animation: "I am a contra dancer and I want to contra dance. Is there a contra dance caller here?," effective for catching the attention of the dancers and framing the music that follows. Following this, the music begins with three synthesized tracks setting a four-on-the-floor rhythm at around 120bpm, a syncopated bass line that establishes a tonality in G, and an ambient soundscape slightly evocative of a planetarium showing. Further electronic sequences follow, the sound of an acoustic fiddle on the melody and improvising around the traditional tune "Paddy on the Turnpike" is interwoven with the dialogue from the video, and an occasional acoustic piano line. Extended techniques on the fiddle, such as rhythmic shuffling, chops, and scratching sounds blend with the synthesized sounds.

This particular arrangement is dense with signs and meanings for interpretation among the contra dance community all enfolded within a sort of humorous, this side of snide, playfulness rich as a commentary on contemporary contra dance. The dialogue,

[48] I discuss this animated video in chapter three.

both in and of itself, as well as its association with the original video are more meaningful to those who have some experience in the contra dance scene (who understand the language, some of the intangible repertoire of the community of practice). The original video and this musical arrangement are a handful of years apart, but for those who were part of the community throughout this time, the relationship is easily established. The reference to "cool, hip dancers," particularly with an electronic style of music, the use of which grew from invitation-based techno contras initially attended by those considered "cool, hip dancers," also carries a depth of meaning. The band members themselves are relatively young within the contra dance community and understand the appeal of a modern soundscape to a younger crowd, but emphasize the inclusivity of contra dance: "It's not about being cool. You should be able to walk in as who you are because for me, the magic of contra dance is being accepted into a community."[49] Combining acoustic sounds, a traditional tune, and electronic sounds audibly demonstrates a "nexus of multi-membership"[50] and alludes to the "pluralistic nature of the self."[51]

Though it would not typically come to mind during a dance, the title of the EP hints at a generational encounter illuminated by the recent trends in contra dance. The word "newfangled" evokes a sense of needlessness or confusion over newness, for some youth conjuring up images of an old-timer shaking a cane with some consternation and

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[49] Marshall, "After Midnight."

[50] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 159.

[51] Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 112.

saying, “Well, sonny, when I was your age…”. The words “novelty revue” hint at a trend that is enjoyed, that doesn’t take itself too seriously, and that allows another opportunity for fun and expression in contra dance with no intention to supplant the normative style.

A Mashup of Participatory Cultures

The act of remixing enables once passive consumers to become more active participants, and the recordings that were previously a product become part of a process. As Aram Sinnreich states in his book *Mashed Up*, “configurable technologies are simply returning the status of music to its original pre-commodified state.”[52] It is this process, and the effect of multiple contributors that support the idea of DJ culture and sample-based production as participatory and “inherently communitarian.”[53] Here, compatibility with existing contra dance community ideals becomes apparent.

Considering again the different pleasures associated with recording (“the perfection of a form”) and live performance (“the pleasure of a process”), one may view a combination of these occurring in crossover contra dances.[54] While the sampled recordings and the electronic sounds produced on a computer may represent high fidelity music and studio audio art, respectively, the sounds are shaped with the intention of participatory dancing; this is the case for clubs and raves, as well as crossover contra dances, all of which make use of a compelling musical grooves among other factors. Even with the use of music produced in studios or by computers, the participatory goals

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[52] Sinnreich, 139 – 140.

[53] Ibid., 111.

[54] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 232.

are clear, and the shift from consumer of musical products to participant in remix creation as represented by the DJ offer points of intersection to understand the compatibility of these styles.

Participation is also a key component in a community of practice. For individuals, it means engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities. For communities, it is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members. Engagement always takes place embedded in culture and history.[55] The recent crossover trends represent an obvious moment of engagement and refinement (though, this process is through an initial expansion of previously perceived boundaries) in the ongoing dialectic of the community.

Remix as Folk Process as Generational Encounter

In his studies of social class and folk dancing, Daniel Walkowitz posed the following: "The sense that we who dance are now the folk and that dancing is itself part of the folk process is the postmodern conundrum of the present folk dance movement: what does it mean to do a 'folk' dance and do it 'right' if however it is done is simply the folk process?"[56] A question best, and perhaps only, answered by the community through its practices of participation, negotiations, and reification. Doing contra dance "right" is not much of an issue among the community, and questions of authenticity are rare. Contra dance is not intended as reenactment and has historically been malleable,

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[55] Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* 47.

[56] Daniel J. Walkowitz, "The Cultural Turn and a New Social History: Folk Dance and the Renovation of Class in Social History" *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 783 – 4.

adaptable to the needs of its practitioners musically, choreographically, and socially. The folk process has brought it to its present state and indeed, perhaps offers a means of compatibility with remix culture.

John Egenes considers remixing and the remix culture to be a twenty-first century folk process. He is not alone in his understanding that remix signals a shift from product to process and echoes Sinnreich when he writes that "it is a signpost pointing away from our . . . mindset . . . that focuses upon music (and any other intellectual creation) as a commodity."[57] A modern folk process may indeed be one that encompasses our apparent human nature and proclivities as well as constructs of technology, transmission, and ownership.

The phrase "folk process" is often attributed to musician Pete Seeger but the action Seeger was labeling had been described by Cecil Sharp in his book *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*. Sharp describes the evolution of the folksong and folktale (Seeger's "folk process") as encompassing three principles: continuity, variation, and selection. "Continuity" refers to the idea that "types" remain constant; "variation," considered the exception to the constant, refers to the phenomenon of changes introduced whether unconsciously or with intent to change; "selection" refers to the theory that the musical taste of every community will vary, and peculiarities ultimately determine the specific characteristics of the folk-songs of the community.

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[57] John Egenes, "Commentary: The Remix Culture; How the Folk Process Works in the 21st Century," Prism 7 no. 3 (2010), http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Social_media/Egenes.pdf.

The folk process, when described as above, also resonates with generational encounter in a community of practice. Generational encounters are more complex than mere transmission of a heritage. These involve continuities and discontinuities as the new can both continue and displace the old. Variation and continuity come into focus as newcomers forge their own identities in the community and find their place in relation to the past and the history they want to continue. Selection is enacted through the community's production of its practice. In contemporary contra dance, crossovers and electronic music are the newcomers representing a generational encounter with strong horizontal and vertical informational flows. There is something old, something new, something borrowed, and no one seems terribly blue.

Signs of the Times

Throughout the twentieth century the music industry employed a top-down system of control. The folk process and remix culture represent a bottom-up process. "Mediated musics, sounds schizophonically split from their sources," have been around for years, and while mass mediation is often considered a hegemonic force, people can (and do) reclaim mass-mediated musics for their own purposes.[58] Digital media and technology play a large part in the reclamation process for remixing. Indeed, techno has become a sort method, in addition to a genre.

The genre itself, and related dance music genres that began to emerge (initially underground before coming more into the mainstream) in the 1980s, as well as the rave

[58] Charles Keil, "Music Mediated and Live in Japan," *Ethnomusicology* 28, no.1 (1984): 91.

phenomenon taking off in the 1990s, remix culture and its related technology, are generally associated with modernity. These are also associated with youth, which is also generally associated with modernity.

The techno/crossover contra trend is part of a larger temporal phenomenon and shares characteristics of youth culture, remix culture, and musical and identity boundary questions with other movements such as Bhangra-beat[59] and Nortec,[60] which combine a folk music with the technologies used in electronic dance music (EDM), and the music of A Tribe Called Red, a Canadian First Nations DJ Collective combining electronic sounds with those of traditional powwow. Within fiddle music, the crossover contra/electronic infusion timeline corresponds with the explosive diffusion of the chop, a technique likewise associated with youth.[61]

Within this modern musical and technological movement had been noted an interweaving of futurism and nostalgia.[62] The futuristic sense of the enabling technologies of digital music-making combines with its predecessors as well as the musical roots and influences of EDM, mirroring the generational encounter in the

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[59] Sabita Banerji, "Ghazals to Bhangra in Great Britain," *Popular Music* 7, no. 2 (May 1998): 207 – 213; Anjali Gera Roy, *Bhangra Moves: From Ludhiana to London and Beyond* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010); Laura Leante, "Shaping Diasporic Sounds: Identity as Meaning in Bhangra," *The World of Music* 46, no. 1 (2004): 109 – 132; Sanjay Sharma et. al., eds., *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (London: Zed Books, 1996).

[60] Alejandro L. Madrid, *Nor-tec Rifa!: Electronic Dance Music from Tijuana to the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[61] Laura Risk, "The Chop: The Diffusion of an Instrumental Technique Across North Atlantic Fiddling Traditions," *Ethnomusicology* 57, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 428 – 454.

[62] Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture*, 91 – 95.

community of practice. Manifesting in the musical tastes of some of the recently popular crossover dances, one finds a club style atmosphere tempered by the soundtrack of '80s popular music, including MTV hits such as the B-52's "Love Shack," Paul Simon's "Graceland," and Dead or Alive's "You Spin Me Round" (signaling earlier good times for many in the community) negotiated through the practices of the contra dance community for broader appeal.

What may seem like a combination of disparate elements represents a merging of various realms of participation—our pluralistic nature—allowing those involved to freely range between possible selves. Rather than reducing an analysis to singular associations, it is understood, that we are all a member of numerous communities of practice and our identities are not fixed and singular, but dynamic and plural. People have various ways of organizing their lives "so as to manage . . . the heterogeneity and multiplicity of relationships characteristic of modern society."[63]

Similarly, it is no longer automatically presumed that youth equates with rebellion and resistance to the hegemonic order.[64] Interviews of those involved with Bhangra and A Tribe Called Red, as well as my fieldwork, reveal a primary intention of having fun. Though not necessarily of political impetus, the contexts in which these musics occur often bear a second look beyond fun. Sinnreich's claim that "the impact of the DJ on today's hegemonic institutions couldn't be more destabilizing if it had been plotted in the back room of a smoky café by a cabal of wild-eyed insurrectionists" offers a moment to

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[63] Finnegan, 323.

[64] Huq, 39.

consider the direct incorporation of more mainstream music—and its manipulation in the remix process—into contra dance as another way to oppose the mainstream.[65]

Further social considerations implicate the empowering possibilities in this generational encounter, not only as DJs take this work into their own hands, but also as a younger generation finds comfort and belonging in community and is empowered to make its voice heard. Earlier musical movements such as grunge and nu metal have been viewed as reactions against a society in which "exaggerated claims of improved economic conditions of the post-war west with sustained growth, full employment and higher-than-ever standards of living and salaries overlook the precarious nature of much youth employment."[66] Thus the empowerment that accompanies remixing's possibility to shape sounds and convey them make for a discovery "so radical (and still unfolding) that it is probably rivalled only by historical developments on the scale of the Renaissance's two-point perspective, Baroque music's equal temperament or Willie Kizart (of Ike Turner's Kings of Rhythm) band dropping an amp only to discover what distortion does to a guitar."[67]

While DJs and crossover contra dance events turn commercialism on its head once again, this is not an intentional outright goal of the contra dance community in embracing this style. It is seen within the contra dance community more as a natural evolution that aligns with the times and accommodates the wide-ranging interests of the

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[65] Sinnreich, 3 – 4.

[66] Huq, 26.

[67] Stefan Goldmann, "Mills, Hood, and FM Synthesis as a Metaphor" https://sgoldmann.wordpress.com/archive/fm-techno/.

individuals involved. Contra dance is a "continuum of experimentation . . . they've used whatever they had at hand," so, for George Marshall who has been calling since 1978, when it comes to looping and sampling technologies, "adding them makes all the sense in the world to me."[68]

[68] George Marshall, interviewed by Ryan Holman October 12, 2011, used with permission.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Thank Your Partner . . .

At the end of each contra dance the caller encourages dancers to thank their partner in acknowledgment of the time shared together. This is a moment of gratitude, the motions leading up to it recognized for the individual and group contributions. Here, at the end of this dissertation, I offer a moment of gratitude and recall the aspects leading to this point.

As a living tradition, contra dance and dance music are not static entities; rather, their transmission depends on a collaborative process that moves across generational lines. In this study, I have drawn on contra dance history as well as contemporary practice to indicate where those lines intersect, merge, and blur. I examined social aspects that convey meaning and serve as sites for negotiation of consensus, identity, consent and transgression among the community of practice to indicate that these practices are the result of years of negotiations, participation and reification, and are likewise presently negotiated. I described the participatory nature of contra dance and the flexibility of its form that enables experimentation and optimal experiences on a variety of levels. I portrayed the "magic" - the feelings of happiness and joy that characterize flow, and the experiential and sensory components of contra dance that create community and fellowship. In understanding the social, musical and choreographic forms involved in the negotiations of a generational encounter among the community, I then turned to the

contemporary phenomenon of incorporating a variety of electronics, to consider the musical spectrum in contra dance.

Through this process, the welcoming, "for as many as will," nature of contra dance is apparent, with various means of belonging noted among the practices of the community. Beginner lessons and dance walk-throughs, calling the dances, an "if you can walk you can contra dance" attitude, the style characteristics of the music and the dance, and community open bands all indicate a place for newcomers, while dance flourishes and musical improvisation create space for those with more experience. Yet, within the genre noted for inclusivity is also the possibility of behaviors that seem to denote certain exclusivity, such as "cool, hip" behaviors and the initial invitation-only techno contras. What seems an ideal communal activity occasionally succumbs to some of the ills of human behavior in transgressions such as "creeping" or "cranking" on the dance floor. Much as with any human social group, these aspects are navigated on both individual and community levels.

Moments of heightened experience, the "magic" that enchants so many of the participants who choose to make contra dance their community, are understood in the concept of flow. Such moments are a great benefit (mental, physical, emotional, etc.) to an individual and can serve as a source for feelings of communal bonding. These moments are, in a way, a pursuit of the community. As several callers and musicians discuss, guiding the energy of a dance and an evening to facilitate this experience is a consideration in the choices that are made.

The interaction of contra dance and mainstream society continues to be a point of interest. Where contra dance is frequently viewed as an intentional step out of the

mainstream, crossover contras and club-style atmospheres bring elements of the mainstream into the community. Looking historically at the tradition, it is clear that it is not truly an "either, or" distinction. Contra dance participants, like all people, express a pluralistic nature and belong to various groups. Musicians interested and involved in contra dance music as well as rock and jazz incorporated improvisations, expanding the musical style repertoire after the mid-century folk revival. These broadened style possibilities remain a welcome option for musicians today. As electronic and digital technology has become more common in everyday lives of contemporary society, those comfortable navigating it experiment with bringing these aspects into the realm of contra dance, the forms and community of which have proven open to the idea.

. . . And Find Another for the Next Dance

It is the custom in contra dance to change partners for each dance. This not only increases the social and communal aspect of the genre, but offers the opportunity of a different dance experience and a new perspective. As a metaphor here, it offers a sense of continuation, with possibility for further investigations in contra dance and related topics.

It is interesting to note the degree to which a prevalence of technology in society has made an impact on contra dance. While traditional forms such folk dance and music are not generally considered to be reflective of the most modern aspects of society, this study portrays the responsiveness of the genre to contemporary society. The boundaries of contra dance have shifted through time and continue to do so. The incorporation of electronically-infused music, particularly to the extent of a techno contra, illuminates this aspect.

Still, any innovation will be negotiated among the community. At the time of this writing, techno contras are held less frequently than at their inception. While some dance organizers attempted to create a recurring event, the community has indicated that a crossover contra is preferred as a special event. The dance weekend seems to currently be the most popular option for a DJ'ed event. Future work on this topic will reveal the course of the crossover style.

In the 1990s, there was concern that dance communities were getting older and younger people seemed reluctant to join. That has shifted in the last few decades to include a number of popular, talented young musicians, dancers, and callers. Because these young ones have come of age and are contributing their gifts and time to contra dance, many of their peers have also come to discover the tradition. Several dance communities have thriving college-aged populations. The nature of contra dance allows this younger generation to invest itself as it will, giving them space to express their identity within the group, and one result is the most recent musical trend.

Another pattern of responsiveness to contemporary society is seen in the shifting and broadening of conceptions of gender roles. Gender equality concerns are noticeable in terminology and in interactions on the dance floor; same-gender dancing is more common; and there are a few queer contra scenes, such as those in San Francisco and in Chicago. The queer contra dance is another area for future work on this topic.

Benefits of community and social dance in various aspects of individual and social life are increasingly acknowledged. Collaborative studies with neuroscience can reveal the depth of possibility here. A recent endeavor created in Kentucky called "Dancing Well: The Soldier Project," has a mission to use community dance to help

restore wellbeing to veterans and families affected by PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and brain injury. This important project is already noting benefit to those involved. There is great potential for other projects and further study.

Concluding Thoughts

Any kind of modernity has to "focus retrospectively, fix ideologically, and contour aesthetically a master tradition in terms of which its own pragmatic and up-to-date identity makes sense and appears inevitable."[1] From afar, perhaps techno contras may not appear inevitable but upon closer examination they are validated as part of a practice that has proven consistently malleable and open to transformation in both social context and in regard to music and dance capable of absorbing aspects of other styles. Contra dance, in all its facets, is not a vestige of the past, nor is it a passive form.

As viewed from within contra dance, each of the elements I discuss in the previous chapters open the possibility for the emergence of recent trends in contra dance. From without, musical trends in the late twentieth, and especially, into the twenty-first century contribute prominently to this moment in contra dance. The combination of participatory practice, possibilities of flow, and the feelings of community, in tandem with individual agency (much a part of practice and engagement in the Community of Practice) and the multiplicity of experiences help establish a situation in which these expressions arise. While newcomers forge their own identity, they do not necessarily want to emphasize discontinuity among the community; likewise, old-timers are not

[1] Christopher Waterman, "Our Tradition is a Very Modern Tradition," *Ethnomusicology* 34 no. 3: 377.

necessarily seeking strict continuation, if the practices can be given new wings. Each depends on each other for full expression and to carry and create memory and meaning through time. It is through such generational encounters that the community finds its experience – the past and future interact as the history of a community unfolds across generations.

Appendix A: Open Letter

Open Message from the Dance Chair

Ensuring a safe, comfortable dance atmosphere; a message from the (FSGW) dance chair.

Dear dance community;
All the dancers in our community deserve to be safe and deserve to dance in an environment free from the fear that they will be subjected to inappropriate behavior. Certainly accidents happen --there was an injury at a recent dance-- but we can minimize the risk. We can also ensure a safe, comfortable dance environment.
If we implement these two guidelines we will have a safer, better, more welcoming dance community:

1. If someone is dancing in a manner that hurts you (too tight grip, arm wrenching, yanking, pushing, stomping, etc.), or in a manner that exposes you to inappropriate touching (too close holding, non-accidental or repetitive brushing against you inappropriately, un-invited ﷺleaze-dancingﷺ grinding, etc.), please tell them or tell me. If you are not comfortable telling me, ask someone to tell me, or tell someone at the door, or someone on my committee.
2. If I (or a member of my committee, under my direction) approach you to discuss your dancing or behavior, please hear me out. Alternatively, if a fellow dancer approaches you to discuss your dancing or behavior please hear them out. Even if you disagree, think about how you might modify your behavior to help others feel safer and more comfortable.

Thank you.
Penelope Weinberger
Folklore Society of Greater Washington Dance Chair

To Twirl (a Lady) or Not to Twirl

TO TWIRL (a Lady) OR NOT TO TWIRL

Wherein is DESCRIBED the *SECRET* of this GENTLE art

If Gentlemen (or men) Do NOT Twirl ladies --- then

---Who Does?

For GENERATIONS, members of the female sex have been *twirled, whirled, spun, tossed, flipped, pushed* and *shoved* by the males of the species. Whether through lack of KNOWLEDGE, Or EXPERIENCE, this lamentable practice continues to the present day in traditional and other dance forms.

Since TWIRLING is a part of MANY dance forms and can add to the pleasure of the dance

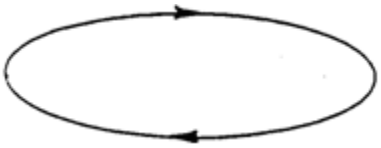
and

Since a Statement has been made, TO WIT: ***Gentlemen do NOT twirl Ladies***

And a question posed: ***Who Does?***

The following CLUES, to be verified by *OBSERVATION*, are offered:

LOOK at the motion of a couple's joined hands during the act of twirling. If the **man's hand describes a large oval**, THUSLY:



One can be SURE that **such "Cranking" is a certain mark of *Inexperience*** and/or *Lack of Proper Dance Knowledge.*

ON THE OTHER HAND, if said joined hands **travel in a very small oval**, thusly:

One is watching **KNOWLEDGEABLE dancers** and the *Great* (and very old) *Secret of Twirling* has been revealed!

So --- ***Who Then, Does the Twirling?***

The LADY, of Course!

She being the *Only* dancer who has the *Right* to Twirl. And that Right is for herself only. GENTLEMEN (and males) have NOT RIGHTS in the matter. Privileges only, if granted by the Lady.

So then --- ***How is Twirling accomplished?***

The ANSWER:

- The Gentleman's hand is offered to the Lady, Palm Up
- The Lady's hand is placed in the Gentleman's Palm Down
- The Grip is Finger Tip and *LIGHT*
- The Gentleman raises his hand (with the Lady's) and SHE TWIRLS – (His hand/fingers being a point of pivot for the Lady, and he being ready to check or guide if necessary.)

and --- If the Lady is
NOT DESIROUS OF TWIRLING?
Then --- She simply *Lowers* the raised hands and smiles sweetly.
A *Mature Male* will take no offense at this, as none, indeed, is intended.
It has been said that there is a limited number of twirls in all humans and when that number runs out, well…
So then is the SECRET (*Not because the dance teachers have ever wished it!)* OF TWIRLING revealed!
Go now and enjoy!
This piece was originally prepared by C. Cyril (Chip) Hendrickson, Dancing Master, 1983
Here's a picture of the To Twirl or Not to Twirl tiny pamphlet you can download and print out to hand out at your dances. You'll need to cut the edges off (it ends up about 8"x10", or 4" x 5" folded).

TO SLEAZE OR NOT TO SLEAZE

Part of the fun of dancing in the midst of the current contra dance renaissance is enjoying the hybridization with other dance forms. The Farmer's Ball and the greater Asheville dance scene are a fine cauldron to blend traditional called dances and elements of many other couple dances like waltz, hambo, polka, swing, blues, cajun and zydeco. The focus of this article is the use of the famous and infamous Asheville Sleaze Swing at contra dances.

The 'sleaze' move is from blues, swing and various other couple dance styles, and involves full or partial frontal body contact. It is substituted for the zingier 'buzz step' or walking swing step of traditional called dancing.

The important thing for all dancers to know is that the sleaze swing is an OPTIONAL variation. Both partners must be comfortable with the closer body contact for this to be enjoyable for all involved. Some dancers enjoy the sleaze swing always, some enjoy it only with select partners, and some do not enjoy it at all.
A good dancer is sensitive to the preferences and abilities of all partners. He/she can create a comfortable and exciting dance experience with dancers of varying skills and boundaries.

It is the responsibility of all dancers to be conscious of their partner's abilities and limits, AND to convey their own. Below are several 'tools' to help communicate all this, hopefully without losing any of the creative, passionate thrill we enjoy as contradancing in Asheville.

BEST TOOL: "Give Weight" This often-elusive concept refers to the use of core strength and control as the 'center' of one's dance movements. More graphically, it means using the abdominal, lower back, pelvic and upper thigh muscles to be one's personal center of gravity that directs movement. The tone in the core muscles is dissipated thru the legs and arms to dance, lead and follow. If you see a couple effortlessly, gracefully navigating fast and complex moves together, they are using well-tuned core strength.

If dancers are utilizing good core strength while swinging, it is quite apparent what each partner's body language is conveying about personal space.

If core strength is elusive for you, practice this: Imagine you are walking on a balance beam or straight line. If you can move with grace and ease changing speed and direction

and 'not falling off', you are using core strength. You can also practice walking/turning smoothly on tip-toe and/or with a book balanced on your head.

2ND BEST TOOL: If the core strength thing doesn't work for you, try this.
FOR SLEAZE-EES: If you are being pulled into an unwanted sleaze swing, bend your knees slightly-which pulls your center farther from your partner. Reinforce the statement with a push/stiffening arm movement that indicates "stay back".

FOR SLEAZE-ERS: Pay attention for signals from partners and accommodate their wishes. If you're not sure, use a standard swing which is ALWAYS appropriate.
IF-ALL-ELSE-FAILS-TOOL: Since some dancers are oblivious to body language tools, it is fine to use verbal cues if necessary. Some suggestions:

"I'm not comfortable dancing that close to you."
"I prefer a regular swing"
"Not so close"
"I don't dance that way with you"

If verbal cues fail to modify behavior, you are dancing with a disrespectful partner (or one who doesn't speak English!) and can certainly decline further invitations to dance with them, and even tell them why.
As our dance grows and appeals to dancers of all ages from 7 to 70, it is important for us all to learn what is appropriate dancing for the wide range of age and maturity levels of dancers at the OFB today. Being aware, adaptable and able to communicate your style are the best tools for creating dancehall harmony, and a happy experience for everybody. We can be proud that our vital community continues to foster an atmosphere of joy, inclusiveness, passion, creativity, safety and respect for all dance lovers.

Laurie Fisher, OFB dancer/musician since 1982. (oy!)

Appendix C: “Contra Dance Etiquette for the Guys”

Chorus:
Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It’s my hope you memorize
All that I have got to say
Contra dance in a respectable way
Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It’s my hope you realize
When you’re dancing with a girl
You gotta think about more than the next twirl

Verse 1:
First up on the docket is the older guys
Don’t worry I’m gettin’ to the younger guys
You guys are supposed to be wise, so I’m surprised
What I see happenin’ with my own eyes
Let’s say you’re dancing with a girl who’s pretty and young
You think “It’s just contra dancing I can flirt with this one”
DAAAAMN dawg, what’s wrong with you, son?
She’s fifteen and you’re sixty-one!
Don’t worry, I’m not saying you’re a pedophile
But, put on her shoes and walk around for a couple miles
What you find may not so kind
Old sweaty guys just might not be your style!

Doesn’t matter with whom you’re dancing
Old or young, a newbie or veteran
Stop acting like you’re broke on a payday
Grow up and respect the ladies!

Chorus

Verse 2:
All right younger guys, it’s your turn!
I’m gonna make your ego crash and burn
You think everyone’s in love with you well I got news for you!
It ain’t all about you, when you gonna learn to dance
Best for your partner
Best for your hands-four
Best for the whole line
Best for the entire floor
That’s the golden rule that you should live for
Stop treatin’ common sense like it’s a damn chore!
Go ahead, call me old-fashioned
But dippin’ a girl without asking is lacking compassion

I've seen elbows crashing
Into heads that are bashing
Into the floor…what for?
Just so that you can be the hottest guy on the dance floor?

Doesn't matter with whom you're dancing
Old or young, a newbie or veteran
Stop acting like you're broke on a payday
Grow up and respect the ladies!

Chorus

Verse 3: You got your Ashe-villains tearin' up the scene
But you make contra dancing look a little obscene
You got your West Coast, being all cool
But you can't dance Money Musk at Dancin' Fool
Got your Greenfield, Cambridge, I'm your biggest fan
But you can seem a little snobby in New England
I love the dance community, it's got a hold on me
So fellas, let's make it better – who's with me?

Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It's my hope you memorize
All that I have got to say
Contra dance in a respectable way
Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It's my hope you realize
When you're dancing in long lines
You've got to get her there on time

Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It should not be a surprise
Keep your hand off her butt
Thank you very much

Contra dance etiquette for the guys
It's my hope you memorize, realize, memorize

Appendix D

8 Steps to Contra Nirvana…

1. **Build Community** Contra Dancing is a social dance. The idea is to create a sense of community (not to show what a great dancer you are) This includes showing concern for other dancers.
2. **Learn How to Both Lead and Follow** The famous Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, said, "To lead, one must follow." When you have experienced first hand what your partner is feeling, that you have a better sense of how to dance with them.
3. **Don't Book Ahead** When you routinely book ahead, you destroy the social nature of contra dancing. Trust that there will be someone to dance with after thanking your partner, and don't forget the people sitting out who may want to dance the next dance. If necessary, it's okay to occasionally sit out a dance.
4. **Be Gentle** Remember that the human body has its limits. If you want to test your strength, try martial arts, not dancing!
5. **Communicate With Your Partner** Dancing is meant to be social. Just because you like to twirl doesn't mean that your partner does. When in doubt, ask! Most importantly never use force to lead a partner (see: **Be Gentle**) A lead for a twirl should be treated as a suggestion or invitation rather than an order.
6. **Listen to the Music** In any type of dancing, it's important to be in sync with the music. Don't forget to be on time! Being on time is much more important than twirls and flourishes. The fun of dancing in a set is for everyone to move together and flow.
7. **Appreciate the Musicians and Caller** We are quite fortunate to have such talented musicians who play for our dances and dedicated callers to lead us. Don't be shy about showing your appreciation! If you have constructive feedback about the program, please direct it to a host or organizer instead of the band/caller.
8. **Have fun!** Don't forget that dancing is supposed to be fun! Don't take yourself or others too seriously. A wise man once said: "Rule number one of contra dancing is that you're going to make mistakes. Rule number two of contra dancing is that no one is going to care, including you."

Credit to Yael Schy's "What I've learned in 40 years of Partner dancing and 35 Years of Teaching Dances"

Appendix E

Extraordinary Dances at the Concord Scout House

mostly Spring 2007 74 Walden Street, Concord, MA

Second Saturdays

Saturday, March 10, 2007, 8:00PM
Daniel Friedman calling with
Lissa Schneckenburger and Bruce Rosen

Saturday, April 14, 2007, 8:00PM
Will Mentor calling with **The Dixie Butterhounds**
Paul Boyd, Geroge Touchstone, Jon Gersh & Mark Wholley

Saturday, May 12, 2007, 8:00PM
Scott Higgs with **Contra Loco**
Pan Chan, Phil Pitha and Barb Kirchner

Fridays

Friday, March 30, 2007, 8:00PM
Barb Kirchner calling, with **Beeswax Sheepskin**
Ethan Hazzard-Watkins, Anna Patton, Roger Kahle & Chuck Corman

Friday, June 1, 2007, 8:00PM
Will Mentor with **Airdance**
Rodney Miller, Elvie Miller, Marko Packard and Stuart Kenney

Scout House Fundraiser

Saturday, June 9, 2007, 7:30PM
Lisa Greenleaf calling to **Alternative Music** (pre-recorded)
Lisa has chosen unusual dance tunes from trad-rock to pop
- and anything else un-imaginable to contra-dance to!

Receive email notices for these and other Concord Scout House Dances.
Visit http://groups.yahoo.com/group/concord-dance

Admission Second Saturdays: $9 - CDS Boston Members $7, Students $5

Concord Scout House, 74 Walden Street, Concord, MA

Produced by New England Dance Committee of Country Dance Society, Boston Centre, Inc.
Committee Contact and Snow Storm Announcements 857-499-8907
www.cds-boston.org CDS Boston 781-662-6710 nedc@cds-boston.org
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