

DANCE STAR

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Just What Does the Board Do?

by Keith Connes

Everyone is facing up for the announcements, and after he has acknowledged the caller and the band, Elliott will sometimes mention that there's a Board meeting and everyone is invited to attend. Okay, so you know that the SBCDS has a Board of Directors but maybe you don't know who sits on it and what they do. And maybe you should to know, because the Board makes decisions that affect everything from how much you pay to get in to the quantity and quality of the dances you attend.

So, to get an insight into how the Board functions, I interviewed Bettine Wallin, who has served on the Board for 13 years. Here's our conversation:

Q: Bettine, tell us how the Board functions.

Bettine: On November 3, 1993, we became a non-profit corporation in the state of California with a self-perpetuating Board. Currently, Bob Leonard is president, Elliott is Secretary, and I am the Treasurer. Gary Shapiro's current job is coordinating the English Dances, which is a subsidiary organization. We have a total of seven members who attend meetings once a month; occasionally, we have a special meeting for such things as financial planning.

There are others not on the Board who volunteer to do major jobs. For years, Scott Swain has been the coordinator of the Carrillo events. Moira Butler was coordinator for the last Harvest Moon. Sammy Ellis does a lot of volunteer coordination, especially in terms of Sprung Floor. Rob Gardiner has worked on the bookkeeping a lot, especially as a computer consultant.

Q: Let's talk about the way you book the callers and bands.

Bettine: Currently, the booking for the regular dances is done by a non-Board member, Kelli Butler, and she consults with us once a quarter in terms of contract details for the next quarter's schedule. There is a minimum we pay each band and caller and we also give them a percentage of the net under a very complicated formula. On the Board there is a person in charge of things like insurance and the overall budget. We choose a person to be the coor-

dinator for each of the special weekends.

Q: Awhile back, the Society had a change in its relationship with the City, which owns the Rec Center.

Bettine: The year before last, the City became a co-sponsor of the dances. The current rental (that others pay) for the ballroom is \$300 a night, and that doesn't include the Baylor Room or any of the side rooms. As a nonprofit organization, we used to be able to get it for under \$150 a night, including the Baylor Room. Now, as co-sponsor, the City gets 50 percent of the net proceeds in lieu of rent, and they share the cost of the doorkeeper. This means that at times the City gets no split; for example, in December the dances did not make their costs, and in the past we would have had to pay rent.

Q: So this arrangement has taken some of the risk out of our operation.

Bettine: It has taken a lot of the risk out of it, and so we have had a bigger net than usual. We now have the biggest bank balance during my 13 years on the Board, whereas three years ago we were worried that we were going to go seriously into the red. In fact, we were considering not having a dance every week, which we've been having since 1996.

As of December 1, we have raised the pay to the bands and callers, and that means that we have to come up with a new formula that will still give the City a fair return. Elliott is our liaison with the City. We set policy, we set admissions, we secure insurance, and we deal with program ideas and changes, like having the all-day half-English/half-contra. We handle contracts and volunteer recruitment and coordination. Most of our meetings are open to all.

Our founders believed in Quaker-meeting-type rules, so for anything controversial we require a consensus vote. That means nobody voting "nay," so sometimes things don't change very often because we're waiting for a consensus. That was done because when we incorporated there were very contentious issues—for example, whether we should have special events for experienced dancers only,

whether we should have only local bands and callers, admission prices.

Q: For what length of time does a Board member serve?

Bettine: There is no specified length of time. A Board member can be removed only for malfeasance or a felony conviction.

Q: Sort of like Justices of the Supreme Court.

Bettine: That's right.

Q: Why do the dancers have to sign a book when they come in?

Bettine: That's an insurance requirement. Some people come in and say they'll sign in later and forget to do it. Those people are not covered by our insurance policy, so I urge everybody who comes to the dance to sign in right away.

Thanks, Bettine.

RESPONSES TO "THE PERFECT CALLER"

Dear Editor:

The article in the Dance Star by Keith Connes, "The Perfect Caller," disturbs me. He has opened a topic that can only lead to criticisms of callers. I do not like the general tone of the article just from that viewpoint. Whether he intended it or not, the message is let's all focus on instances of bad calling which will somehow lead us to define the "perfect caller." And what for? This is not going to be healthy for the dance community. The focus should be on the dance, on the community, on how we all build the community together, how to encourage new people to come again, etc. Urging the dancers to have a critical eye on the callers cannot lead to a good community feeling of mutual respect and creativeness.

We also do not want to create an atmosphere of super-criticalness that will keep away beginner callers. The beginning caller has to overcome quite a bit already in terms of putting himself up in front of the group. It's a scary process until he/she reaches a level of calm confidence. He/she needs a nurturing and accepting atmosphere and not feel like the dancers are judging him/her.

As a caller, I have always felt like I am just one of the dancers helping to put on the dance. I do not want to have to perform to a level of professional perfection that would separate me from the dance community. Yes I want to be good and professional in what I do, but I also want to keep the "folk" tradi-

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tion and homey quality about the dances. A slick uniform standard of perfection is not what the folk process is all about.

Running a dance from the caller's box is quite a bit different than I think most people would understand from just dancing. The caller is juggling many factors and the ability to do that smoothly requires much practice. Callers are always evolving in their techniques and abilities. I think it rather a good thing that different callers have different styles and solutions to the problems of running a dance, getting cooperation from

the dancers, teaching the movements, managing the floor, programming the night's dances, etc. It would be very boring indeed if we all did it the same.

I guess what I am having a little trouble with is, yeah, we can all say we want a caller with a vibrant, cheerful, charismatic and entertaining personality who teaches smoothly and perfectly, has a huge repertoire of magical, fun, flowing dances and programs them exactly according to *your* current level of expertise and endurance level. Ain't, unfortunately going to happen very often, and you had better learn to enjoy the experience offered at that moment instead of wishing it were something else. And I say we should all revel in the differences and unique attributes of the callers and encourage new callers by being patient with their foibles as they learn.

Them's my sentiments.
Barb Stewart

Dear Editor:

I found (the) article very disturbing. The article invites dancers to pass judgment on a caller's performance, offers a set of standards, and implicitly faults a caller who fails to meet those standards.

Contra dancing is first and foremost a group activity in which all participants - caller, musicians, dancers combine their efforts to create a fun time for all. I don't consider the role of the caller or dance leader to be any more significant than that of the others. Ideally, the leader communicates the dance to the dancers as unobtrusively as possible, then gets out of the way, so as not to stand between the dancers and the music.

The dancers themselves have the most important role. Their contribution is to follow the leader's instructions to the best of their abilities, and to turn these instructions into a dance by connecting their movements to the music. Thus the dancers actively engage in the creation of their fun, experiencing not only the rewards of personal accomplishment, but also the satisfaction of sharing with others the achievement of a common goal. This creates a sense of community bonding, a quality that many people feel is the most attractive feature of contra dancing.

A thoughtful dance leader may wish to nurture that community spirit by developing strategies to increase the dancers' active engagement in the creation of the dance. Such strategies might include dropping out parts of calls as soon as possible to gradually turn the dance over

Essay Contest Winner!

We're pleased to announce that **Chuck Sackett** of Ojai is the winner for his essay on "Why Contra Dancing Has Lasted So Long in the United States." Chuck's prize is a free admission to the fabulous *Harvest Moon* weekend Sept. 27-29, a \$95 value. His essay will be published in the next issue of the *Dance Star*.

to the dancers, or delaying the calls until slightly after the dancers need them in order to challenge them to remember the next move on their own.

But according to your article, callers who engage in these strategies may be perceived as ill prepared at best, or negligent at worst. Placing such judgments on the front page of a newsletter for dancers can create an attitude of reproach: If a caller calls a move late, it must be because the caller did not practice, not because the dancers are failing to fulfill their responsibility to engage in the dance. When dancers adopt this attitude, they paradoxically become not only more dependent on the caller but more dissatisfied with the caller's performance, while failing to recognize their own complicity in their dissatisfaction.

Dancers are probably best served by paying less attention to the performance of the dance leader and more to the needs of each other. This is, after all, asocial activity, and we dancers can best enjoy the rewards of

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FEATURED SUMMER EVENTS

June 1-2 Irish Festival at Oak Park. If you enjoy our dance music you won't want to miss this event. For info: 805-564-5419 email: santabarbarairishfestival.com

June 8 Come early to the **Ojai** dance and enjoy a **Potluck Social** on the lovely garden patio. Bring a dish and a friend

June 16 Wild Asparagus performs at the Carrillo Ballroom! This popular group from the East Coast comes our way to make us groove to the beat.

June 21-23 Summer Solstice Festival
The popular weekend will take place at Soka University, 26800 W. Mulholland Hwy at Las Virgenes Road, Calabasas. There will be contra dances Friday night from 7:30 to 10:30 and Saturday night from 7:00 to 10:30, with callers Cis Hinkle and Kathy Anderson and a variety of bands. All-day workshops on Saturday and Sunday will include contras, squares, and a clogging class. For further information, call the California Traditional Music Society at 818-817-7756 or visit their website at www.ctmsfolkmusic.org.

June 30 Laura Light and Dave Wiesler are here for a special evening to show us a great dancing time. Watch for a House Concert flyer coming soon.

July 21 & August 18 Take note: Our Sunday dances will be under the stars at **OAK PARK** for these two dates.

Sept 27-29 Our legendary *Harvest Moon Dance Festival* will feature dynamic caller Cis Hinkle and the Hotpoint band. It will be held at the Carrillo Ballroom Friday, 7-10 PM, and Saturday 1:30-4:30 PM. On Saturday evening, join the ballroom dancers at the Carrillo or go to the gym next door for a sock hop/contra party. The weekend cost is \$95, pre-registration required, deadline Aug. 1. The Sunday evening dance costs \$10 extra and is open to all. For further information, phone Bettine Wallin at 805-565-1501 or email bettine@wallinstudios.com.





SANTA BARBARA ~ OJAI ~ SAN LUIS OBISPO

DANCE SCHEDULE SUMMER 2002

CONTRA DANCES

Enjoy dancing a thriving tradition of flowing New England contras, plus other delights, to the irresistible rhythms of a live string band.

All dances are taught and prompted, with no experience or partner necessary. Generally, the simpler dances are taught earlier in the evening.

Arrive 30 minutes before each contra dance for an introductory workshop.

Wear comfortable clothes and shoes.

Carrillo Ballroom

100 E. Carrillo St.

(Take the Carrillo exit off the 101, go east to Anacapa)

Time: (6:30 Lesson) **7:00-10:00 Cost: \$7** unless noted

- June 2 **Jeff Spero** / Kitchen Junket
- June 9 **Gary Shapiro** / Turtle Creek
- June 16 **WILD ASPARAGUS** (a \$10 dance)
Don't miss this popular group from Massachusetts !
- June 23 Caller's Jubilee / One Night Stan'
(to Call, contact Keith Connes at: kconnes@cox.net)
- June 30 **Jonathan Southard**
with Laura Light and Dave Wiesler
- July 7 **Gary Shapiro** / Chopped Liver
- July 14 **Chuck Galt** / Une Petite Soiree
- July 21 See **Oak Park** Schedule
- July 28 **Jeff Spero** / Kristina and Her Right-Hand Stars
- Aug 4 **Gary Shapiro** / Southern Exposure
- Aug 11 **Warren Blier** / Chameleons
- Aug 18 See **Oak Park** Schedule
- Aug 25 **Donna Karpeles & Keith Connes**
with Chopped Liver (come support our newest callers)

Sponsored by

Santa Barbara Country Dance Society

Phone: (805) 969-1511

www.sbcds.org

Oak Park

Junipero at Calle Real, Santa Barbara

Time: (6:30 Lesson) **7:00 -10:00 Cost: \$7**

- July 21 **Jonathan Southard** / Michael's Mixed Nuts
- Aug 18 **Gary Shapiro**
with Kristina and Her Right-Hand Stars

Sponsored by

Santa Barbara Country Dance Society

Phone: (805) 969-1511

SAN LUIS OBISPO VETERAN'S HALL

801 Grand Ave.

(East of 101, Cal Poly SLO exit)

Time: (7:30 Lesson) **8:00 -11:00 Cost: \$7**

- June 8 **Barbara Stewart** / Squirrel Heads
Free Polka Party 5:30pm to 7:00pm!

For more info, call 805-927-3096

- June 26 (Wednesday) **Gary Shapiro**
with Laura Light and Dave Wiesler

- July 13 **Elliott & Donna Karpeles**
with Growling Old Geezers

- Aug 10 **Warren Blier** / TBA

Sponsored by

Central Coast Country Dance Society

Phone: (805) 541-0201

Ojai Art Center

113 S. Montgomery

Time: (7:00 Lesson) **7:30 -10:30 Cost: \$7**

- June 8 **John Rogers** / Chopped Liver
Come early for a Potluck Dinner 6:00 PM on the Art Center patio. Bring main dish, salad, or dessert to share. Families welcome.

Sponsored by

Ojai Contra Dances

Phone: Karin @ (805) 933-0660

English Country Dances

Join us any Tuesday of the summer, at Oak Park, for a delightful evening of English Country Dances, all of which are taught and prompted, no experience or partner necessary. This is contra dancing at its roots with more in common with the European dances of the last century. Music is said to be like "folk-chamber music" and the dances are varied in tempo, formation, and spirit.

Wear comfortable clothes and shoes.

Time: 7:00 - 10:00 **Cost: \$2** (CD's) **or \$5** (live music)

Oak Park

Junipero at Calle Real, Santa Barbara

- June 4, 11, 18 & 25 **Gary Shapiro** / TBA

- July 2, 9, 16, & 23 **Gary Shapiro** / TBA

- Aug 6, 13, 20, & 27 **Gary Shapiro** / TBA

Sponsored by

Santa Barbara Country Dance Society

Phone: (805) 969-1511



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community dancing by considering the attributes that contribute to that spirit: remaining alert but quiet during the walk-through (to hear the instructions while allowing others to hear them also), silently but efficiently assisting other dancers who are struggling with a challenging sequence (and contemplating later on the best strategy to do this), responding to all lapses of concentration on the dance floor with good humor, assisting in a friendly and non-threatening manner other dancers who need assistance, and showing appreciation and respect for the talented individuals on stage (and behind the scenes) whose work and perhaps less-than perfect effort is intended to make the event seamlessly enjoyable for all the participants.

James Hutson

Dear Editor:

In reading (the) article, I found myself thinking, "Here we go again."

In all fairness to Keith, he does make some sensible and valid observations regarding a caller's responsibilities (e.g., having good teaching skills, anticipating the next figure,

keeping an eye out on what's happening on the dance floor). However, stating that a perfect caller does things like "takes a firm hand" and "demand" are not sentiments that will entice me to want to keep coming back.

Since we appear to be revisiting the center-set issue ad nauseam, as an unapologetic center-set dancer, let me make it clear to all callers: Among other things, we do not, I repeat, do not appreciate being manipulated into two separate lines by being ordered to separate the ones from the twos. It's not "Magical!" It is, in fact, infuriating. For those of us who specifically choose to dance in the center set—and I believe we still have the right to make that choice—it irritates the hell out of us, to put it mildly. At one dance, for example, I overheard a dancer grumbling that if Gary Shapiro used that technique one more time that evening, he was leaving. Another dancer told me recently that he now boycotts those dances where the caller is in the habit of utilizing this particular form of line manipulation. Speaking for myself, I have grown weary of leaving a contra dance feeling frustrated, and/or bored to tears, and wishing I had stayed home that night. As a result, I now attend only a fraction of the dances that I used to attend. As I have said many times in the past, callers need to remember that dancers can—and do—vote with their feet. So while a caller may be patting him or herself on the back for creating "perfect"ly symmetrical contra lines, perhaps (s)he should instead be a little more tuned in to the actual mood of the dancers in those neatly formed lines.

It seems to me that anybody and their uncle (or aunt) who wants to be a caller is accommodated and regularly given a platform to do so, with total disregard as to their calling ability or the dancers' (i.e., the paying public's--remember us?) preference. I do understand that being a good caller is not nearly as easy as it may look from the dance floor. And, of course, new callers should be encouraged and given a fair and reasonable opportunity to hone their skills. But, perhaps there should come a point where the dancers are also allowed to weigh in with their opinions; and any "seasoned" caller whom the majority disdains should no longer be forced on the (usually hapless) dancers.

While Keith's article dealt with many of the "dos" for a caller, allow me to add some of the "don'ts," which are culled from many dancers' ongoing complaints:

We Want to Hear from You!

It's our constant goal to make the *Dance Star* reflect your wishes and needs as dancers. Therefore, we encourage you to send us your comments and articles. Please email them to the Editor, Keith Connes, at dancestar@sbcdds.org. If you don't have email capability, snail-mail them to Keith Connes, 283 Carlo Dr., Goleta, CA 93117. If you do not want your comments published, please say so; otherwise, we will assume that you have submitted your material for possible publication in the *Dance Star*. We reserve the right to edit all submissions

(1) Don't call uneven dances; and, especially, don't start or end a dance session with an uneven dance. (2) Don't call dances that have no partner swings. (3) Don't call two (or more) dances in a row that don't have neighbor swings. (4) Don't surprise us by turning a contra dance into a square dance. Those of us who don't like squares, do not want to feel trapped into doing them. (5) Don't let a dance run on endlessly. When you're in a long line, in a single progression dance, and encountering the same neighbors more than once, the dance has gone on too long.

Callers, please consider: Is it more important for you to stand on principle and always be "right," or would you rather have dancers who eagerly look forward to the next time you're scheduled to call? Think about it. And thank you for listening.

Faigy Avnon

Author Replies:

Although I serve as Editor of the *Dance Star*, I want to emphasize that all opinions expressed in my by-lined articles are strictly my own and not those of SBCDS. In "The Perfect Caller," I certainly was not suggesting that dancers should be unsupportive of callers who don't reach some pinnacle of perfection, and I expect that every conscientious caller has standards that he or she tries to meet, whether or not they are the same as the ones I mentioned. As for Faigy's dislike of square dances, there are also "those of us" who *do* like them. Regardless, not many callers include squares, and those who do will call just one or two of them during the evening.

Keith Connes



Santa Barbara Contra Dances
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CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

Parks & Recreation
Enriching People's Lives

The SBCDS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation
Phone: 805 969-1511
email: dancestar@sbcdds.org
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Scheduling: Kelli Butler
Bookkeeping: Gunn Toms
Dance coordination: Scott Swain
Mailing coordination: Gloria Hall
Mailing list: Mary Ballard, Carl Magagnosc
Liaison to Parks & Rec: Elliott Karpeles
Mr. Helpful: Rob Gardner
Refreshments: Elliott and Donna Karpeles, Tony Marzio, Matthew Thomley and Rebecca Zendejas.
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