

## DANCE STAR

VOLUME 12 NUMBER 6

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News, Articles, and Calendar Dance Events For Country Dancers

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FALL 2002

## Reaching Out to New Dancers

By Karsten Kelley

We see it at almost every contra dance: A “black hole” in your set from which people seem unable to escape and progress. Couples always coming in from the set above or below you a few beats late. Neighbors walking in the opposite direction from you when you’re supposed to be balancing and swinging with them.

“It’s because of the new people, and it’s worse in the outer sets!”

This is a common, though not always spoken, contra complaint. Many experienced dancers naturally respond to this by, at the end of one dance, quickly partnering with nearby known, experienced dancer and heading for the center set for the next dance.

“This way we get better dancing!”

I disagree.

When most experienced dancers quickly pair up with other experienced dancers and aim for the center set we end up with even more couples, and often some foursomes, with no dance experience than there otherwise would be. These clumps of newer dancers are usually the people lost, perceived as dance obstructions, treated poorly by experienced dancers and not having a good time.

The way to better dancing is for us experienced dancers to make a point of frequently asking unfamiliar and newer dancers from the periphery of the dance hall to dance and to choose our sets randomly.

Is this a matter of generosity, helping newer dancers enjoy their first tastes of contra dance at the expense of experienced dancers as a community?

No, though generosity may be a persuasive reason for some of us. If each newer dancer had an experienced partner and mostly experienced neighbors to help them along they’d generally be on time and headed in the right direction, and there would be no black holes. The sets would be less prone to breakdown and the dancing would be smoother and easier for everybody, experienced dancers included.

Is this for the benefit of the wider contra

dance community at the expense of the individual partners of the newer dancers?

No. I offer here two completely selfish reasons for each of us to dance with new and unfamiliar dancers:

I dance today because an experienced dancer saw me standing nervously at the side of a dance hall my first night there and asked me to dance. I’ve seen that first dance partner only a few times, but I can still recall her face clearly now, years later and many miles away. Partnering with a new dancer is our opportunity to be that memory for somebody else.

Most new dancers are nervous and worried about being able to dance at all, much less well. Many times I’ve asked an unfamiliar person hugging a wall to dance and heard “I don’t know how, and I’ll screw it up for everybody.” With patience, kindness, good leading and strong body english from their partners and neighbors they almost always do fine, of course. Some new dancers stay nervous through the whole dance. With others, however, there is a moment when their nervousness drains away and you can see them relax and start smiling. I’ve been to more than a few dances where the highlight of my evening was not the smooth or flashy dancing I’d done with other experienced dancers—it was sharing, and knowing I helped make possible, that magic moment with a beginning dancer.

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## Give a Dancer a Lift

By Gary Shapiro

As some of us know, bus service comes to a full and complete halt early on Sunday nights, which makes our dances difficult for people who depend on the bus. I know of a few folks who do not come to the dance very often because they feel uncomfortable asking for a ride home. There may be others

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## TIPS FOR DANCING WITH NEW DANCERS

**1. Smile.** It helps new dancers feel welcome and relax.

**2. Offer only polite, positive suggestions** for improving their dancing if you offer any suggestions at all. One negative comment that seems minor to you can seem like a condemnation to a nervous new dancer.

**3. Minimize verbal suggestions** for improving their dancing unless they ask for them or are doing something dangerous or painful. They’re probably overloaded just from trying to remember the moves. Show them how to dance well by your example and they’ll learn by imitation.

**4. Swing with them slowly** and in the traditional ballroom position until it’s clear that they can comfortably swing faster or in other positions. Dizziness is probably the biggest cause of new dancer confusion and slow swings will help reduce this. If they still have problems with dizziness remind them of techniques like keeping their head level and looking at some part of you straight ahead of them during swings.

**5. Don’t twirl in courtesy turns.** Twirls increase the dizziness of new women dancers and the question of “does she want to twirl or not?” perplexes new men. In addition, courtesy turn twirls prevent leading into the next move.

**6. Lead firmly (but don’t push).** A strong lead in the right direction gets them started right on the next move whether they remember what to do or not. There’s not usually much leading done in contra, but there are plenty of opportunities for experienced men and women to lead newer dancers.

**7. Provide good body english.** Even when you’re not able to lead you can help direct them with exaggerated body movements.

**8. Be on time.** Many new dancers have trouble matching moves to counts of music and crisp timing helps them learn how to do this.

**9. Warmly thank them for the dance after it’s over.** You don’t want them to think they disappointed you because they weren’t “good” dancers.

HAPPY DANCING!

(Continued from page 1)

who have not tried our dances because they could see no way home other than an expensive taxi ride.

I suggest we help them feel comfortable asking for rides. We who have cars could feel good about helping them out from time to time.

After all, if they pay taxes, if they shop at stores that have free parking, if they are affected by respiratory ailments or noise pollution, then they are heavily subsidizing those of us who use cars. The least we can do, from time to time, is offer them a ride, maybe go out of our way a little, or even offer taxi fare.

### Report Bad Behavior

We have learned from the SBCDS Board of Directors that there have been several recent instances of inappropriate behavior, mostly by male dancers. We're not referring to unwanted twirling or other overbearing dance tactics, which are indeed inappropriate but don't sink to the level of the misdeeds in question. We're referring to aggressive sexual advances, including such tactics as unwanted touching and following – behavior that clearly doesn't belong in our contra dances.

Complaints to the Board have been substantiated by observation of the behavior and those responsible have been confronted and admonished. Further incidents should be reported to any Board member, and effective action will be taken.

### ECD & Contra Combo

Go ahead, enjoy an extra helping of Chopped Liver on **Sunday, November 10. James Hutson** leads both new and experienced dancers through an afternoon of English Country Dances, with tasty tunes by the appetizing band known as **Chopped Liver**. Ingredients include the fiddle of Michael Mendelson, the flute of Suzanne Duffy, the mandolin of Bill Flores and the piano of Jeff Spero. Move through a variety of formations and tempos, set to some of the world's most beautiful music, from **2:30 to 5:30 PM**. With luck, a second helping of chopped liver could be served during the **potluck, 5:30 to 6:30**. Bring a delightful dish to share, chopped or otherwise. The third helping is for our contra dance at the regular time, with Gary Shapiro calling. Admission is at the regular price of **\$7** for each dance.

See *Dance Calendar*, next page.

## WINNING ESSAY!!

In the Spring issue of the *Dance Star*, we announced an essay contest on the subject "Why Contra Dancing Has Lasted So Long in the United States," with a prize consisting of admission to this year's Harvest Moon for the lucky and talented winner. Here is Chuck's award-winning essay.

### Why Contra Dancing Has Lasted So Long In The United States

By Chuck Sackett

With seven months' experience as a Contra Dancer I am the least qualified person to write on this subject. I have more questions than answers. Square dancing has been my favorite dance form since I started in 1960, with Round Dancing moving up to number two over the years. Then I watched the final Ojai Contra Dance in June 2000, and thought, "How can that be legal, those people are having too much fun?"

By June, 2001, I was sufficiently mobile to attend the 50th International Square Dance Convention in Anaheim, which offered a three hour "Boot Camp," called "Contra College," and some Contra Dance opportunities, too. I graduated Magna Cum Euphoria, but realized Anaheim was about half as much fun as those folks I watched in Ojai were experiencing. I came home without a clue what good my "education" and diploma would be.

Then I saw a notice in a paper, and intrepidly ventured to Carrillo Ballroom on a hot muggy Sunday evening last July to give it a whirl. (Dreadful pun intended.) I almost died from exhaustion, hyperventilation, dehydration, dizziness, etc., but I didn't care, I was hooked. The only Sunday evenings I have missed since that experiment were unavoidable, mostly due to illness. Harvest Moon was the most fun, best exercise, and my greatest weekend in several years. At the end of the Sunday evening finale, I was depressed by the necessity to go home to that other world. Square/Round Dancing has steadily become boring and dreadfully slow – I'm spoiled.

To become a competent and comfortable Square Dancer requires about 100 lessons over a two year period; Round Dancing about the same. Then there is a required significant investment in (hot and heavy) proper attire. The median age is well into the fifties or sixties. The International Convention featured a major emphasis on attracting and retaining younger dancers.

To become a competent Contra Dancer (forget Contra College), one must arrive 30 minutes early and participate in the basic introduction; then presto, you are a New

Contra Dancer. Almost every experienced dancer will help and encourage you. You should bring your kids; they may do better than you do. If you persist for a month, you will find it becoming easier, and natural. In three months you will probably be as comfortable and competent as 100 Square Dance lessons accomplished in that venue. Dress code: comfortable, no special attire required! Median age: varies greatly, according to how many pre-teens are dancing. Fun level: out of sight, binoculars recommended. And then, there are the people with whom you dance. If I start on that, I'll exceed the word limit.

O yes, the *subject*: Why Contra Dancing Has Lasted ... Why indeed! Why hasn't it out-paced and overwhelmed most other popular forms of dancing is a better question. I tell everyone I know how much fun, with such great people, and what great exercise I enjoy every Sunday evening. It is worth the admission to come listen to the music and watch the fun!

I suspect the reason Contra Dancing has merely lasted may be because it is such a well-kept secret. If all of the experienced dancers had been proclaiming its virtues far and wide for all of their years of participation, it would likely have grown appropriately. But, alas, you are probably too wise for that. You realize the difficulty in obtaining top callers and great musicians, let alone splendid venues, if there were dozens of Contra Dances every week. Like, how many Carrillo Ballrooms are there? Just one. I'm certain there would be other problems I can't imagine. Some year I will mellow out too, and just enjoy the great benefits we have now.

Contra Dancing has lasted so long because it is *the greatest*: it attracts the best people, provides the most fun, the best exercise, the finest musicians, great callers, and great friendships develop; what more could a sensible person want?

We already have more than enough couch potatoes and web-weenies in our midst. If Contra Dancing dies out in America, I fear for our lifestyle and our society in general. Keep America healthy and prosperous — promote Contra Dancing!

# CALENDAR DANCE SCHEDULE ~ FALL 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.

| DATE       | CALLER   | BAND   | LOCATION                                  |
|------------|--|--|---|
| Sun. 9/1   | Martha Wild  | Stump Tail Dog ( <i>Sacramento Area</i> )                                    | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sun. 9/8   | Gary Shapiro   | Michael's Mixed Nuts   | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sun. 9/15  | Donna & Elliott Karpeles   | Kristina and Her Right-Hand Stars  | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sun. 9/22  | Chuck Galt   | Chopped Liver  | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sat. 9/21  | Keith Connes   | Paddy O'Furniture  | SLO Veteran's Hall                        |
| Sun. 9/29  | <i>Post Harvest Moon Dance (\$10)</i>  |  |   |
|            | Cis Hinkle   | Hotpoint   | Santa Barbara Carrillo Ballroom           |
| Sat. 10/5  | Jeff Spero   | Cruel Willies  | Ojai Art Center                           |
| Sun. 10/6  | John Rogers  | Cruel Willies  | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sat. 10/1  | Greg McKenzie  | Pink Chihuahuas ( <i>Geezers+John Wright</i> )                               | SLO Veteran's Hall                        |
| Sun. 10/13 | Gary Shapiro   | One Nights Stan'   | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sun. 10/20 | Barbara Stewart  | Kitchen Junket   | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sun. 10/27 | Jeff Spero   | Growling Old Geezers   | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sun. 11/3  | <i>Caller's Jubilee</i>  | <i>Caller Sign-ups, Contact Gary Shapiro 805-682-5523 or gary@sbcdds.org</i> |   |
|            | New Callers Showcase   | Kitchen Junket   | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sat. 11/9  | Donna & Elliott Karpeles   | Paddy O'Furniture  | SLO Veteran's Hall                        |
| Sun 11/10  | Gary Shapiro   | Chopped Liver  | Carrillo Ballroom ( <i>Also see ECD</i> ) |
| Sun. 11/17 | Susan Michaels   | Kristina and Her Right-Hand Stars  | Carrillo Ballroom                         |
| Sat. 11/23 | Warren Blier   | Kristina and Her Right-Hand Stars  | Ojai Art Center                           |
| Sun. 11/24 | <i>Annual pre-Thanksgiving Potluck, 5:30-6:30 pm. Bring lots to share (turkey provided) and \$1.</i> |  |   |
|            | Warren Blier   | Michael's Mixed Nuts   | Carrillo Ballroom                         |

### Carrillo Ballroom

100 E. Carrillo St  
Santa Barbara

*Carrillo Exit off the 101, go east to Anacapa*

**Time: (6:30 Lesson) 7:00-10:00 pm**  
**Cost: \$7.00 (Special Dances \$10+)**

Santa Barbara Country Dance Society  
805-969-1511  
www.sbcdds.org

### SLO Veteran's Hall

801 Grand Ave.  
San Luis Obispo

*East of 101, Cal Poly SLO Exit*

**Time: (7:30 Lesson) 8:00-11:00 pm**  
**Cost: \$7.00**

Central Coast Dance Society  
805-541-0201  
www.cccds.org

### Ojai Art Center

113 S. Montgomery  
Ojai

**Time: (7:00 Lesson) 7:30-10:30 pm**  
**Cost: \$7.00**

Ojai Contra Dances  
(Karin): 805-933-0660  
www.geocities.com/CirclesAndRows/oac/

## ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCES (*Contra at its roots*)

Join us every Tuesday for a delightful evening of English Country Dances, all of which are taught and prompted. No experience or partner necessary. Come join fellow dancers in elegant dances of the late 1800's. The dances are varied in tempo, formation, and spirit. Wear comfortable clothes and shoes. Sponsored by Santa Barbara Country Dance Society.

| DATE              | CALLER              | BAND                  | LOCATION                              |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Tue. 9/3          | Gary Shapiro        | TBA                   | Oak Park                              |
| Tue. 10/22 & 29   | Gary Shapiro        | TBA & Thruppence Six  | Westside Community Center             |
| Tue. 11/5 & 12    | Gary Shapiro        | TBA & Thruppence Five | Westside Community Center             |
| <b>Sun. 11/10</b> | <b>James Hutson</b> | <b>Chopped Liver</b>  | <b>Carrillo Ballroom 2:30-5:30 pm</b> |
| Tue. 11/19 & 26   | Gary Shapiro        | TBA                   | Westside Community Center             |

### Oak Park

Junipero at Calle Real in Santa Barbara.

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### Westside Community Center

423 W. Victoria St. in Santa Barbara

**Time: 7:30 - 9:30 pm**  
**Cost: \$2 (CDs) or \$5 (Live Band)**

### September 21: Potluck on the Farm and Contra Dance

**Where:** Paul Rys' farm, 657 Evans Rd, San Luis Obispo

**Potluck Time:** 4:00-7:00pm **Contra Time at Veteran's Hall:** 8:00-11:00pm

On September 21, prior to the contra dance at San Luis Obispo, Paul welcomes you to his Harvest Party. He'll provide fresh organic vegetables, you provide a dish to share. Time: 4-7 pm. Place: 657 Evans Rd in SLO. For directions, call Paul at 805-543-2825. A farm dinner and a contra dance ... perfect!

### November 10: Special English Country Dance and Potluck

Carrillo Ballroom, 2:30-5:30, \$7.00. Caller: James Hutson; Band: Chopped Liver. Potluck at 5:30 for all. Contra dance follows at 7:00. Bring a dish to share and your dancing shoes.

## How Contra Got Started

By Keith Connes

“You do *what* kind of dancing?” How many times have you gotten that question after you’ve told friends how you spend your Sunday evenings? Then you’ve tried to explain that, no, it’s not some event involving festive Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries, and it’s called contra dancing because, well ...

Okay, why *is* it called “contra dancing”? Take your choice. The Latin word for *opposite* is *contra* and opposite is where we stand relative to our partners. However, some prestigious dictionaries maintain that the term comes from the French word *contredanse*, a corruption of the *country dance* form that crossed the English Channel into France and was defined as “a folk dance in which couples face each other in two lines or a square.” That rings a bell.

Contra dancing, and its cousin square dancing, came to our shores via the Pilgrims, who – as every schoolboy/girl knows – landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620. (Not having been a schoolboy for several centuries, I had to look it up.) Later, the English tunes were largely supplanted by jigs and reels that migrated from Ireland and Scotland.

In his highly informative book *Contra Dance Calling*, Tony Parkes tells us that contra dancing went into a decline starting around 1850. It seems that dancing teachers couldn’t sustain a living teaching a type of dance that was so easy to learn, so they touted the more complicated terpsichorean

## 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. The best way is to email them to the Editor, Keith Connes, at [kconnes@cox.net](mailto:kconnes@cox.net). 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. Thanks!

Submission Deadline: Oct 20, 2002

forms. (I can relate to that, having taken ballroom lessons forever.) However, contra and square dancing found favor again starting in the 1930s, when Americans, stunned by the double whammy of the aftermath of World War I and the Depression, yearned for simpler (and less expensive) pleasures.

Of course, contra dancing is very much alive today, with hundreds of societies scattered throughout the U.S. For example, if you happen to find yourself in Fairbanks, Alaska on the first Friday or third Saturday of the month, you’re welcome to drop in on the Contra Borealis Dancers. Sleepless in Seattle? You can balance and swing there, as well as in Richmond, Texas; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and on and on.

And there’s always Santa Barbara.

Contras every Sunday, and English Country Dancing on many Tuesdays as well. Aren’t we fortunate?



## Last Chance for Harvest Moon

As we go to press, Bettine Wallin informs us that there are still some chances for dancers to attend this year’s Harvest Moon Dance Festival. This fabulous weekend will start with a Friday night dance at the Carrillo Ballroom. Daytime on Saturday will be filled with dance, singing, and music workshops at the Rec Center, and that evening you can choose between a ballroom dance and a sock hop/ contra party. Sunday there will be a brunch potluck and afternoon dance party, along with an optional nighttime dance that’s open to the public. The caller will be Cis Hinkle from Atlanta and the band will be Hotpoint. Cost of the weekend, which includes a catered Saturday lunch, is \$95. A gender balance will be maintained. To check on availability, contact Bettine by phone at 805-565-1501 or send an email to [bettine@wallinstudios.com](mailto:bettine@wallinstudios.com).

Santa Barbara Contra Dances are  
co-sponsored by SBCDS and

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA  
**Parks & Recreation**  
Enriching People's Lives

The SBCDS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation

Phone: 805-969-1511

Email: [sbcdds@sbcdds.org](mailto:sbcdds@sbcdds.org)

Website: [www.sbcdds.org](http://www.sbcdds.org)

Board of Directors: Moira Butler, Sammy Ellis, Rob Gardner, Elliott Karpeles, Bob Leonard, Gary Shapiro, and Bettine Wallin

Scheduling: Kelli Butler

Dance Coordinator: Scott Swain

Liason to Parks & Rec: Elliott & Donna Karpeles

Dance Refreshments: Joe Aleks, Barbara Biggs, Rob Gardner, Elliott & Donna Karpeles, and Vicki Tracy.

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Special Thanks: Thank you to all the many volunteers who give their time and efforts to make the dances fun and contribute to the content of this publication.

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