

DANCE STAR

Issue Number 60, Summer 2004 • News, Articles & Calendar of Events

Harvest Moon Sept. 10-12

The 21st Annual Harvest Moon Festival will be held on the second weekend in September, Friday the 10th through Sunday the 12th. All dances will take place on the fabulous Carrillo Ballroom sprung floor except for the Saturday evening dance, which will be at the Schott Center, the same place as last year. By popular demand, Susan Kevra will be on stage to call zesty, challenging dances as well as traditional dances for all experience levels. A veteran of many international dance camps, Susan brings with her a new group of all-stars, Celtic Menace, which includes the fabulous accordion and piano player Jeremiah McLane of Vermont, who last appeared in California with Nightingale, Clayfoot Strutters and Big Top; fiddler Ruthie Dornfeld of Seattle, who also plays with Jeremiah as Hummingbird; and Sam Bartlett of Indiana, also of the Monks and Wild Asparagus, returning with his myriad strings, clogging and as Stuntologist Extraordinaire. All three of these artists have made dozens of recordings.

Workshops are still being finalized, but may include French Canadian and English dancing, rounds, folk singing, and instrumental jamming. Food again will be catered by the wonderful Janet Berg for Saturday lunch and supper.

The total fee is \$100. Pre-registration is required. A form is available at www.sbcds.org/download.

The Sunday evening meltdown with Susan Kevra and the Celtic Menace will be open to the public at a separate charge of \$10. Volunteers are needed to house out-of-town guests. SBCDS runs on volunteers; we have no paid staff except performers and caterers. Contact Bettine at 565-1501 or Elliott at 682-1877 to help.

Getaway Dance Events

Want to get away and do some dancing? Here are some day-long, weekend, and week-long dance events for you to consider:

Spring Into Summer Dance Festival 2004 Contras and square dances. Sat., June 19, noon to midnight, \$20. Grass Valley Elks Lodge, 109 S. School St., Grass Valley. Callers: Rick Mohr, Lynn Ackerson, and Joyce Miller. Bands: Nightingale, Swing Farm, and Hot Cider. Contact: Jamie at 530-273-3844, email: ncskylark@hotmail.com. <http://members.aol.com/foothilldancers/>

CTMS Summer Solstice Participatory Music, Crafts, Singing, Storytelling Workshops, Contra, English, Celtic, International Dance, and more. Fri. eve., June 25 through Sun. eve., June 27. SOKA University Campus, 26800 W. Mulholland Hwy., Calabasas (Las Virgenes Rd. Exit, South of 101 Fwy at Mulholland). Prices per Day: \$22 adv., \$25 gate (\$19 students). Fri. or Sat. eve. Contra, or Fri. Storytelling: \$10. Sat. Eve. Concert: \$12 adv.; \$15 door) English dance w/ James Hutson. Contra Dance callers: Seth Tepfer and Susan Michaels. Bands: Nightingale, The Monks, Domino, Turtle Creek, Syncopaths, and Blue Ghillies. Contact: 818-817-7756 10 AM to PM. ctms@lafn.org, www.ctms-folkmusic.org

27th Annual San Francisco FREE Folk Festival Contras, English, Ceilidh, Country and Regency Dance, and more. All-family activities, Crafts, Puppetry, Songwriting, Music & Movement. Sat., June 26, Noon-11 PM & Sun., June 27, Noon-10:30 PM. Price: FREE! Roosevelt Middle School, 460 Arguello St. (at Geary), San Francisco. Evening dances: International Folk Dancing, Waltz, Swing, Ballroom, Contra. Contact: info@sffolkfest.org or Hotline 510-287-9095. www.sffolkfest.org/

BACDS American Dance Week Contras, Squares, Clogging, and Couple Dancing; Music, Singing, and Storytelling. Sat., July 3 to Sat., July 10. Woodlands Camp, Mendocino, CA. Price: \$665. Callers: Lisa Greenleaf (MA) and Cis Hinkle (GA). Teachers: Ira Bernstein, Angela Lloyd, and Jon Berger. Contact: Judy Rose Dornbush at 415-456-46021, dancenart@aol.com or Joyce Cooper at 408-858-4812, ibedanzr@yahoo.com. www.bacds.org/americanweek.

BACDS Family Week at Alta Sierra Camp Contras, Squares, English Country and Family Dance, Morris and Longsword, Dance, Hula and Clogging. Music and Instrumental Workshops, Singing, Storytelling, Folk Crafts, Lake Swimming & Canoeing. Sat., July 10 to Sat., July 17. Alta Sierra Camp, Dunlap, CA, near Kings
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P.O. Box 21904, Santa Barbara, CA 93121

Profiles



Jeff Spero

Interviewed by Keith Connes

Q: Jeff, where did you get introduced to contra dancing?

Spero: It was in Louisville, Kentucky. A friend of mine took me to a dance there, but I had two left feet, was incredibly shy, and would not be dragged onto the dance floor. After about half an hour, my friend had pity on me, so we left. When I was young, I was so shy and scared of dancing that I would play in bands so I wouldn't ever have to get out on the dance floor.

Q: How old were you when you started playing piano?

Spero: I started at age five, mostly just plucking out melodies from musicals that my parents would take me to. I was playing by ear even then. I took lessons until I was 13 and at that point I realized that I wasn't very good at playing by music – I was a terrible sight reader. From that point on, I was pretty much self-taught.

Q: Do you play any other instrument?

Spero: For a short period of time I was playing ukulele. I do a little bit of percussion, but I wouldn't call myself a percussionist by any means.

Q: But eventually you found your feet and started contra dancing.

Spero: Yes. The same friend who I went to the dance with in Kentucky came out to California for a visit. She wanted to go contra dancing and she found out where all the contra dancers were, and this was in Culver City in 1990. I hesitantly joined in on the instruction and danced that evening. I really got hooked that night. I found that contra was a really good dance form for someone with two left feet.

Also, I found myself enjoying the company at least as much as I was enjoying the dancing. It was such a welcoming group.

Q: Today you're a caller as well as a contra band musician. Which came first?

Spero: Calling. I started one evening in June, 1992 in Claremont. Susan Michaels asked me if I would want to call a dance and I jumped at the opportunity, foolishly picking one of my own creations that had never been danced before. Not only that, it was a tough dance to teach. I did not teach it well and I did not call it well, but the dancers were really good natured and followed along and managed to enjoy it anyway. This got me interested in calling more. I was interested for a couple of reasons: One, to help break out of my shyness shell and, two, to get some of the dances that I'd been writing called. If you're a dance composer and not a caller it can be very difficult to get your dances out.

Q: It's sort of like a writer becoming a self-publisher. Now, going back to that dance in Claremont, since you'd had no training as a caller, what made Susan think you could get up there and call a dance?

Spero: I have no idea. I'd told her earlier that I was interested in calling and she actually wrote out my first dance card for me – Monadnock Reel – and told me to go home and practice it with my favorite contra dance music, and I did that. Other callers also helped during my early days of calling. Lou Dow and Leda Shapiro both had me call dances at their dances.

Incidentally, the Claremont dance was another milestone for me. It was where I took my wife Gigi on our first date. I had asked her the night before at a Westwood dance whether she wanted to go with me to Claremont and she said no, she was really busy. But I gave her my phone number and she called me the next morning and said, "Sure, I'll go with you."

Q: So despite your difficulty with your first call, Gigi was obviously willing to see you again.

Spero: Exactly. We had a very wonderful time together and that was the beginning of our romance. The last waltz that evening was something I will never forget.

Q: I've noticed that your little girl Miranda has been introduced into the world of calling.

Spero: Yes, she likes to call and she loves to dance. She has her favorite dance partners – some about her age, some a little older, and some much, much older.

Q: How old is she?

Spero: She's five – and a half. If I don't say "and a half" she'll get really mad.

Q: When you're writing a dance, what do you try to do and what do you try to avoid?

Spero: I try to avoid things that don't flow. I'm very much into flow – I like dances with a lot of movement in them for all the dancers. The transitions are very important to me. I like trying to find a hook that has never been danced before – some combination of moves that is really unique, and I'll write a dance around that.

Q: That must be pretty challenging, because so much has been done before.

Spero: Yes, it really has and you can find inspiration from the weirdest sources. I was driving up to Santa Barbara to call a dance one evening and I was right around Summerland on the 101, watching the ocean waves coming in. The 101 was looking like an S curve and I was imagining a hey for four at that point and it made me think, "Okay, what can I do that's interesting that goes from an ocean wave into a hey for four?" I came up with the idea of balancing in an ocean wave and then walking forward and doing a hey for four with the next. I put that idea aside for awhile. Then, on another day when I was driving up and James Hutson was in the car with me, I revisited the idea with him and he and I sculpted a dance around that concept and we called it "Winter in Summerland." It's one of my favorite dances that I've written, or, in this case, co-written.

Q: How many dances have you written in all?

Spero: About 30, probably 20 of which will never see the light of day again after having been danced once. Of the other ten, there are some good ones in there.

Q: Have you found differences in the caliber of dancers in various locations?

Spero: The dancers in L.A. were always technically pretty good, but the dancers in Van Nuys were amazingly good. They were dancing most often to Lou Dow's calling. Lou had some very interesting dances that he liked to call and that created a wonderful group of dancers. Lou asked me to call from time to time and that went really well because the dancers were so good and they'd do anything you asked without questioning it. Then I was asked to call a dance in Ojai a few months later and I went there thinking I was really hot stuff coming in from L.A., since all my dances there had gone so well. I didn't realize that you can't call the same dances in this place, where there were mostly beginners. I was pathetically bad and in the entire evening

Getaways

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I had one dance that went from beginning to end without breaking down.

In all honesty, I think the secret to good calling, aside from the technical aspects, is letting your personality come out. If the caller is having fun, the dancers are going to have fun, no matter whether the dance breaks down or not.

Q: How did you get to that point, considering your earlier statement that you were a shy person?

Spero: Most people don't believe that I'm a shy person. It takes forever to convince them of that. Growing up, I was always the last person chosen for anything athletic and I was always trying to blend in with the wallpaper. When I first started coming to contra dancing, I really had to kick myself to get out of the apartment and go to the dance. Contra dancing has helped me get over that because of the community of dancers. They've been so supportive of me as a friend when I first started dancing, and as a caller and as a musician, that it has really done wonders for me.

I still have these periods of being shy in my life, but not really at contra dances. I used to get butterflies when I first started calling, but not any more. I'm more used to winging it now. I don't come in to dances nearly as prepared as I used to. I think one reason is because I've got a family now and I just don't have the time to prepare as well as I used to, but it's also a little bit more freeing, knowing that I can change course in midstream a lot

easier, and again realizing that if a dance falls apart that doesn't mean that people aren't going to have fun. A lot of fun can be had when a dance falls apart. And sometimes if a dance falls apart and the line gets it back together again, the success that the line feels can be just wonderful.

As for getting my personality out, it's nervous energy. You get up there and get into performance mode. I do it with my playing as well. I'm an extremely extroverted pianist and that comes from nervous energy. It also comes out of boredom. In contra dancing, when I'm playing the same tune over and over and over again, I feel the need to come up with different things to do with the tune.

Q: I've noticed that. You sometimes deliberately play dissonances that weren't in there.

Spero: Sometimes the dissonances are intentional and sometimes they're not. The fun thing about playing is learning how to play with your mistakes and around your mistakes. The same thing happens as a caller – learning how to deal with your mistakes. In playing, there's also, "What can I do to re-energize the tune so the dancers get a lift?"

Sometimes it's difficult for guitarists or bass players to play with me because I change the chords around so often and I don't even know where I'm going to go before I go there.

Q: Nevertheless, you get there very well. Thanks, Jeff.



Make Your Voice Heard!

Do you have ideas about making our dances better? Or any other dance-related thoughts, feelings, or experiences that you'd like to share with others through the pages of the Dance Star? Well, don't be shy – this is your newsletter, and your contributions are most welcome!

The best way to become a writing (Dance) Star is to email your priceless words to dancestar@sbcdds.org. If you don't have email capability, snail-mail 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 publication. Incidentally, we also welcome dance-related photos.

We reserve the right to edit submissions. Deadline for the next issue is August 1.

Canyon National Park. Price: \$660, less for work-trade and children. Callers/Teachers: Sue Rosen, Susan Michaels, Lydee Scudder, Kyla Brooke, Evie Ladin, Andy Wilson, Susan Curley, Mikel Kovach-Long, Stan Fowler, and Jerry Allen. Contact: Rae Fixler, 925-283-3400 or familyweek@bacds.org. www.bacds.org/familyweek.

Echo Summit Dance Weekend Contras, Squares, and Couple Dances. Camp Sacramento, East of Placerville, CA on Highway 50. Fri., Sept. 17 thru Sun., Sept. 19. Price: \$190 (higher after 8/1). Callers: Kathy Anderson and Sue Rosen. Bands: PhantomPower and The Reckless Ramblers. Jolie at 916-489-0488 or jb6197@aol.com. www.fussell.org/bacds/westerndancecamps.htm#echosummit

BACDS Fall Weekend English, Contra, Couple and Display Dance, Singing, Music and Callers Workshops. Fri., Oct. 15 thru. Sun., Oct. 17. Prices (to be confirmed): \$175-225, children less. Monte Toyon Camp, just south of Santa Cruz in Aptos, CA. Callers/Teachers: David Millstone and Michael Cicone. Contact: Vanessa Schnatmeier or Alan Winston 650-365-2913 or meier@srsl.slac.stanford.edu. www.bacds.org/fallweekend.

For additional dance venues, visit www.ucolick.org/~sla/dance/CaConEng.html and www.fussell.org/bacds/westerndancecamps.htm.

Got Snacks?

If you'd like to donate snacks for one of the breaks at a Carrillo contra dance, please contact a refreshment coordinator by 6 PM of the evening of the dance (although several days ahead is even better). This will help assure that the right amount of food is on hand and none will go to waste. Following are the coordinators for the remaining months of 2004. June, September, and December: Elliott Karpeles, ebkarpeles@aol.com or 805-682-1877. July and October: Charlotte Gould, charlotte@contrakayak.com or 805-895-5842. May, August, and November: Barbara Briggs, barbaraabriggs@aol.com or 805-509-2272.

Letter to the Editor

A big THANK YOU to all the Santa Barbara dancers who supported our San Luis Obispo Contra Caper FUNdraiser! It always adds to the enjoyment when you participate with us. You are welcome anytime...and are especially invited to our July 2nd dance when Susan Petrick will be calling and The Jamie Laval Trio from Seattle WA will be playing terrific tunes.

See you on the dance floor!

Judy Ellis

Co-chair, Contra Caper II

Santa Barbara Contra and English Country Dances are co-sponsored by SBCDS and

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

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

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The Dance Star is produced quarterly.

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Our special thanks to all the many volunteers who give their time and efforts to make the dances fun and contribute to the content of this publication.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the articles, news, and letters do not necessarily reflect the views of SBCDS.

DANCE SCHEDULE – Summer 2004

English Country Dances Westside Community Center 423 W. Victoria, Santa Barbara (Where Victoria dead-ends at Hwy 101)

Every Tuesday during June, July, and August
7:30 to 9:30

Caller will be either Gary Shapiro or Alice Williams
Live music with \$5.00 admission on the following dates:
June 1 and June 29: Thruppence
July 27: TBA

All other dances will have recorded music and \$3.00 admission

SLO Veteran's Hall 801 Grand Ave., San Luis Obispo (East of Hwy 101, Cal Poly exit)

Contra Dances are held once a month, either on a Friday or a Saturday
7:30 to 10:30 (7:00 Workshop)
Admission: \$7.00

June 4 Donna and Elliott Karpeles/Growling Old Geezers
July 2 Susan Petrick/Jamie Laval Trio
Aug 7 Barbara Stewart/Foggy Bay String Band

Ojai Art Center 113 S. Montgomery, Ojai (South of East Ojai Avenue) 7:30 to 10:30 (7:00 Workshop) Admission: \$7.00

The next contra dance will take place October 2.
Details will appear in the next issue of the *Dance Star*

Dances appearing in this Calendar are sponsored by the following organizations, listed by location:

Carrillo Recreation Center and the Westside Community Center
Santa Barbara Country Dance Society 805-969-1511
www.sbcds.org

Ojai Art Center:
Ojai Country Dances 805-933-0660
www.geocities.com/ojaicontradances

San Luis Obispo Veteran's Hall:
Central Coast Dance Society 805-541-0201
www.cccds.org

Free Contra Dance Party

Contra dancer Margot Eiser invites all to celebrate her birthday
July 4 - 7:00 PM (Contra workshop at 7:30, dance starts at 8:00)

Keith Connes/Tom Sauber and Family
Temple B'nai Emet

482 N. Garfield Ave., Montebello

For directions, contact Margot: 323-728-2315 margoteiser@ojai.net

Carrillo Ballroom

100 E. Carrillo St., Santa Barbara
(Hwy 101, Carrillo St. exit, go north to Anacapa St.)

Contra Dances Every Sunday
7:00 to 10:00 (6:30 Workshop)
Admission: \$7.00

Note special price and closing time Aug. 29.
Also, dances at Oak Park have been discontinued.

June 6 Gary Shapiro/Growling Old Geezers
June 13 Jonathan Southard/Kitchen Junket
June 20 Gary Shapiro/TBA
June 27 **No Dance**

July 4 Keith Connes/Foggy Bay String Band
July 11 Barbara Stewart/Turtle Creek
July 18 Donna Karpeles/Porch Dogs
July 25 **No Dance**

Aug 1 Donna Karpeles/Michael's Mixed Nuts
Aug 8 Keith Connes/Chopped Liver
Aug 15 Gary Shapiro/Kristina & Her Right Hand Stars
Aug 22 **No Dance**
Aug 29 *Zesty Contras*
Lynn Ackerson/Chameleons
7:00 to 10:30 (\$8.00)

