

DANCE STAR

Issue Number 63, Spring 2005 • News, Articles & Calendar of Events

Music and Dance

By Erik Hoffman

The following is the major portion of a chapter from one of Erik's books, "Contra Currents," and is reprinted by permission. For more information, visit Erik's Website at www.erikhoffman.com.

Music and dance, movement and sound. Dance is movement set to music. Music is vibrations carried through the air and received by the ear, stimulating the brain. Dance is vibrations of the body, harmonic motion: hearts beating, lungs breathing, heads bobbing, arms flowing, legs swinging, and feet stomping.

What does it mean to move to music? Music has a pulse, a rhythm. This pulse varies; in eastern music (India and the Orient) the pulse is often tied with breath rate, a swelling and collapsing "breathing" rhythm. The pulse in western music is much more related to the heartbeat: thump-thump-thump-thump. However, it's all related to experiences in our body. When the musical pulse resonates with our heart and feet (or inspiration and exhalation) it drives a dance.

All are connected: the lungs expand and contract rhythmically, making a musical sound. The heart beats in a life sustaining dance. The feet propel the body, making a percussive sound on the floor. The fiddler's fingers do a jig on the fingerboard while the bow dances on the strings. Movement and sound. But I digress from these metaphysical considerations.

What makes old-time music and dance unique is its structure. Contras and squares are built on a structure of fitting music and dance together. It is a structure that creates a strong interaction between the music and dance, between the musicians and dancers, and between the dancers themselves. The most basic rule that applies is this: each beat of the music gets one step with the foot; each step of the foot takes one beat of the music. This requires being able to feel the pulse of the music. Luckily, this isn't hard. Stepping

in time with the music is the primary key.

The rules for contras (and Sicilian circles, and most circle mixers) are quite well defined. The tune and the dance fit together like a glove. The length of the dance is the same as the length of the tune. The figures of the dance are timed to the phrases of the tunes used for the dance. The musical structure goes like this: A tune suitable for a contra dance lasts sixty four beats. One time through the dance is one time through the tune and vice versa. That means one time through the dance takes sixty four steps. This sixty-four count is further broken down into four sixteen-beat phrases. In the music, the normal pattern is a sixteen count phrase, called A1, which is repeated, A2. Then a new sixteen count phrase is played, B1, and repeated, B2. So tunes go: A1, A2, B1, B2. It's worth it to listen to the music, and learn to recognize these phrases, and how they fit together.

Music for New England contra dances break down into even shorter phrases. Most New England tunes have musical statements

that give a strong indication at the end of eight beat phrases. This is good for the dance because most of the figures take eight or sixteen beats. A half woman's chain, the do si do, a short swing, circles and stars, a half right and left through, all take eight beats (or eight steps). Some take the full sixteen-beat part, such as the hey for four, women chain over and back, and balance and swing.

With or without knowing it, dancers respond to these phrases. The musical phrases drive the dance, they tell when to do the next figure. In contras, where the figures are repeated with the tune many times, callers like to let the music lead the dance. Dancers start anticipating doing the next figure when the music commands. The feet keep the beat, and the figures flow with the phrase. Taking the first step of a figure on the first beat of a musical phrase is what people mean when they talk about, "being on time."

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P.O. Box 21904, Santa Barbara, CA 93121

Just Say “No, Thank You.”

By Barb Stewart

I have come to a change of consideration about some customs within our wonderful dance community and I would like to share my thoughts and open the subject up for discussion. As a dancer, caller, and Board member within our Los Angeles community for the last 10 years I have seen a lot of what takes place on and off the dance floor both in Los Angeles and across the country. I have had a chance to talk with many dancers and other dance community leaders and it has been a truly wonderful experience.

The situation I am concerned about is the manners involved with choosing and accepting dance partners. When I first started dancing, I somehow got the idea that I must always dance with the first person that asks. If I were to turn the first person down it would only be because I wanted to sit this dance out, and to then accept someone else's offer to dance would be rude to the first person and so is “not done.”

So what does a dancer do when the person requesting the dance is not someone that the dancer wants as a partner? What if this person is offensive in some way, i.e., dangerous, lewd, too sexy, painful, obnoxious, unhygienic? How does the dancer cope with this? Per the historic protocol, the dancer either accepts or sits out. The other option is to book ahead, in itself a controversial practice. Then there is the covert method of saying you have a partner already and then grabbing the next available partner you can find.

Is this the best custom we can have? Let's be analytical about it and take a look at manners and customs that come from hundreds of years back. Those manners dictated that no one ever said anything unpleasant to anyone. A gentleperson would never show displeasure in another's company or betray any other emotion than calm acceptance. There is a lot to be said for some of the old manners. But we are in the 21st Century and attitudes about men's and women's roles have changed. Yet some of our manners haven't. Maybe it's time.

A few years ago I found myself in this awkward position when I started going to a Scandi dance class. There was a man who took it upon himself to show me how it

was done. He thought he was a good teacher for the newcomers, but I only got more and more confused, could not get my balance in the moves, felt battered after dancing with him, etc. I didn't have the courage and self-esteem to say that I didn't want to dance with him. As a result, this dancer is still around, still manhandling beginners and is resistant to any comments that his behavior is at all inappropriate. And how many new dancers have not come back to our dances again because of similar treatment? We'll never know. I dropped out of Scandi dancing partly because I felt I could not avoid dancing with this person.

I would like to start a program of “Just Say No, Thank You.” I think it ought to be okay for anyone to just say “No, thank you” and walk away from any dancer that they really do not want to dance with. And the really gutsy dancer could say, “No thank you. You grab on too hard and hold me too close, so I don't wish to dance with you.” It can be said calmly and matter-of-factly without anger or rudeness. I guarantee the sky wouldn't fall if we did that. The wannabe partner would then have a few choices in how to deal with this: denial that there is anything wrong with her/his dance style; being so affronted that s/he wouldn't return to the dance again; or s/he could discover that there might be something to learn regarding being a good partner and set about getting some help. So the refusing dancer might want to add to the refusal, “...but if you want to see me after the dance I'd be glad to work with you on your style of dancing.”

So I have added to my beginning contra classes the concept that anyone can say “No, thank you” when asked to dance. I hope that this choice will be reserved for really egregious behavior. If the person is just new and as yet unskilled, please help the person out and dance with them. Some of our most long-time experienced dancers claim it took them quite a while to get the moves and steps down smoothly. It can be a lot of fun dancing with a wide variety of skill levels, dance styles, personality types, ages, etc.

So let's not abuse this privilege or get elitist about whom we dance with. We are a community and the community is our greatest joy and strength in contra dancing. But let's give ourselves the right to say “No, thank you,” when circumstances call for it.

Dance Star By Email?

No, not quite. But if you sign up for any of our three email lists, you'll be notified via email with a download link within minutes of its availability.

Once that is done, if you don't feel the need to continue receiving the *Dance Star* by mail, write to maillist@sbcds.org and ask us to cancel your subscription. But first, you need to sign up for at least one of these email lists:

ds-notify: This one is one to two messages per quarter. Its only purpose is to notify subscribers when a new *Dance Star* is available for download. Just send a blank message to ds-notify-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

sbcds: This one is for news and discussion about SBCDS and related events, and other events of interest to dancers. It can be used to discuss dancing issues, arrange carpools, organize a party, etc. Just send a blank message to sbcds-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

sbfed: This one is like the previous list, but with more of a focus on the SBCDS English Country Dances. Just send a blank message to sbfed-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Yahoo Groups requires a confirmation email, which they will solicit from you in response to your subscribe request. Please make sure yahoogroups.com can get through any hyperactive spam filters. If you have any questions, please send a message to gary@sbcds.org or call 682-5523.



Dances to Start Earlier

Times are a-changing. The times, that is, for our contra dances here in Santa Barbara. During March, April, and May, the dances will start at 6:30 and end at 9:30, with the introductory workshop getting underway at about 6:10. Just think “half an hour earlier.” The time change is to accommodate people who have to get up early Monday morning – especially those who travel long distances to participate in our dances. After this three-month trial period, the Board will decide whether or not to make the time change permanent.

Music and Dance

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There are exceptions to these rules. Many tunes don't fit this sixty-four-beat structure. Dances have been choreographed to fit these variations. The tunes, "Reel de Beatrice," and "Banish Misfortune," are ninety six beats long with a sixteen beat phrase structure that goes AA BB CC. Both have inspired people to make up contras with two extra sixteen-beat parts. Then there are tunes like Cherokee Shuffle, that have a twenty-beat B part. David Kaynor put figures in the B part that use these extra beats. Though there are more examples like these, the vast majority of dances fit the sixty-four-beat rule.

Being On Time

The rigidity of this structure leads to the concept of "being on time." In this contra structure, the caller plays the role of prompter, often trying to be transparent. Thus, as the dancers catch on to the flow of the dance, the caller will stop calling. At that point the phrasing of the music drives the dance, meshing music and movement together in a most satisfying manner. "Being on time" means fitting the dance to the tune, moving through the figures in sync with the phrases of the music. It means being ready to step into the next figure with the next musical phrase. Most dancers find it extremely satisfying to enter each figure as the music dictates, and complete that figure as the musical phrase is ending. This leads to many discussions on this topic, especially about people who "are never on time," or "are such great dancers because they're always on time." Thus it's good to understand and develop "being on time" habits.

The Wonderful Connection

The fact that live music is the primary source of music preserves the strength of connection between the music and dance. We are so lucky that our musicians are in love with the beauty of these traditional and traditionally styled tunes. As a dancer, spending time listening to the music improves your connection to the dance. Also, it will give you a greater appreciation for the wonderful musicians carrying out the tradition of playing for dances.

There are many wonderful tapes, records, and CD's, both of present and past musicians. Support your musical friends, buy these and enjoy them. Just like rock and roll, (or classical music, or whatever) you will learn to recognize

your favorite tunes. And then you might whoop and holler when bands play them at a dance. And as you get more familiar with the music, your ears will perk up and your feet will know when to move as you move from figure to figure. Finally – as the caller says – "Thank the band, they're the best in the land!"

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!

Email your priceless words to dancestar@sbcdds.org or write to the Editor, Keith Connes, 283 Carlo Dr., Goleta, CA 93117. Unless you state otherwise, we will assume that you have submitted your material for publication. Incidentally, we also welcome your dance-related photos.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions. The deadline for the next issue is May 1.

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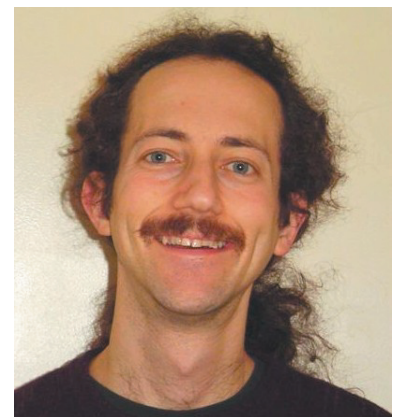
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Our special thanks to all the many volunteers who give their time and efforts to make the dances fun and contribute to the content of this publication.

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

New Caller, New Band

New to Santa Barbara, that is. The caller is Jeremy Korr, who has appeared often at other venues in Southern California. About his craft, Jeremy says, "I regularly call contras, squares, circles, triplets, and other formations, and I enjoy developing programs that fit the vision of a specific dance series or event." Jeremy will be calling for us on May 1. The new band is called The Figments, and its members are Ethan Hazzard-Watkins, (fiddle), Anna Patton (clarinet), and Owen Morrison (guitar). Ethan and Anna have played regularly throughout the Northeast and Owen performs in the Southern states. The three met several years ago during a Pinewoods dance week. We'll meet them on May 22.



Jeremy Korr

Letter of Farewell & Thanks

"I wanted to say not only farewell and fare-thee-well but also thank you for being such a terrific dance community, which enticed me down as often as possible from Santa Maria. Sadly, one that I must leave. Happily, because I have returned to my 'home' community of Corvallis, Oregon, not just to dance but to be married and dance happily ever after. My dancing improved so much by dancing with you all over the last two-and-a-half years, and I will miss all the extra spinning—with both men and women! Take care, and if you are ever up our way, there is (good) dancing every weekend in the Corvallis-Eugene area. I'll see you there! Fondly, Christine Harvey"

DANCE SCHEDULE – Spring 2005

English Country Dances

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

Tuesdays during March, April, and May
except for March 8 and April 12, when the dances will be held
on the preceding Mondays, March 7 and April 11.

New dance time: 7:15 to 9:30, for 15 extra dance minutes!

Calling by Gary Shapiro and/or Alice Williams

Admission for recorded music: \$3.00, live music: \$5.00

Live music dates unavailable at press time.

For current information, visit www.sbcdds.org/ecd.

San Luis Obispo

Odd Fellows Hall
520 Dana St, San Luis Obispo
(Hwy 101 Marsh St. exit, left on Nipomo, left on Dana)
Second Saturday of every month
7:30 to 10:30 (7:00 workshop) Admission: \$7.00

Mar. 12 Gary Shapiro/Fiddle Tunas

Apr. 9 Gary Shapiro/Growling Old Geezers

May 14 Karen Fontana/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: \$8.00

Mar. 12 Jeremy Korr/Ruby's Dream

Carrillo Ballroom

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

Contra Dances Every Sunday

Note new earlier time schedule:

6:30 to 9:30 (6:00 Workshop)

Admission: \$7.00

Mar. 6 Gary Shapiro/Southern Exposure

Mar. 13 Keith Connes/Paddy O'Furniture

Mar. 20 5:00 to 6:00 Spring Potluck Dinner
6:30 to 9:30 Contra Dance
Jeff Spero/Porch Dogs

Mar. 27 Erik Hoffman/Fiddle Tunas

Apr. 3 Jonathan Southard/Chopped Liver

Apr. 10 Donna Karpeles//Growling Old Geezers

Apr. 17 *Free!* Arlen Bass Birthday Celebration
Jonathan Southard/The Chameleons

Apr. 24 Gary Shapiro/Bayou Seco

May 1 Jeremy Korr/Michael's Mixed Nuts

May 8 Donna Karpeles/Porch Dogs

May 15 Jonathan Southard/Kitchen Junket

May 22 Gary Shapiro/The Figments

May 28-29 Sprung Floor Weekend!

For details, visit www.sbcdds.org/sf/

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.sbcdds.org

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

San Luis Obispo Odd Fellows Hall:
Central Coast Dance Society 805-541-0201
www.cccds.org