



Bay Area Country Dancer

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www.bacds.org

Fall Dance Weekend: A Romp in the Redwoods

Vanessa Schnatmeier and Alan Winston

The new version of Fall Weekend at Monte Toyon, October 17-19, 2008, is shaping up beautifully, retooled as an all-English and display dance weekend. (See the flyer enclosed in this mailing.)

Programmer Sharon Green has booked an amazing array of talented leaders and musicians, including callers Scott Higgs (Philadelphia), Michael Barraclough (who just moved to Virginia from the UK), and Barbara Finney (Boston). There will be English dance new and old, as well as callers' and reconstructors' workshops; Francis Attanasio (from New Hampshire) will teach the dramatic Papa Stour longsword dance; and Meg Ryan (Northampton, Massachusetts) will lead clogging.

We'll offer music and music workshops with some of the Bay Area's own world-class musicians: Jon Berger, Noel Cragg, Shira Kammen, Rebecca King, Judy Linsenberg (of Musica Pacifica), Jim Oakden, Erin Vang, and national treasure Chuck Ward. Doug Olsen (of Oak Ash and Thorn and Goat Hill Morris) will lead singing. Nick Cuccia will return to do another splendid job with sound.

It's even possible that a bit of contra dancing will break out.

After more than a decade as managers of a mixed-genre Fall Weekend, we felt that the way forward was to recast Fall Weekend as an all-English camp. Victoria Williams has graciously stepped forward to be the new camp manager, leading a dedicated and thoroughly competent committee. (We're remaining on the committee to share our expertise.) If you're interested in helping with Fall Weekend, please drop a line to Manager Victoria (victoria@berkeley.edu) or Programmer Sharon (sharongreen@post.harvard.edu).

The camp dates are October 17-19, and we expect to open registration in early June. The flyer is enclosed with this newsletter. There will be discounted work-trade positions available. Please note that registration is first-come, first-served -- there is no lottery. BACDS members get a better shot than non-BACDS members at coming to this camp; we're reserving two-thirds of the spaces for BACDS members who register by August 15. We're already hearing a lot of interest from out-of-towners, so don't wait to sign up!

Upcoming Summer Events		
June 14	<i>The Mad Robin Ball (NBCDS)</i>	<i>Joseph Pimental with Chuck Ward, Stan Kramer, Susan Kramer, Erik Ilevins</i>
June 20-22	<i>Faultline Frolic (NBCDS)</i>	<i>Cis Hinkle with Notorious</i>
June 21-22	<i>San Francisco Free Folk Festival (SFFMC)</i>	<i>All kinds of music and dance, for free</i>
July 5 - 12	<i>BACDS Family Dance Week</i>	
July 5 - 12	<i>Mendocino American Week</i>	
July 12-19	<i>Mendocino English Week</i>	
Sep 12-14	<i>Echo Summit (SCDS)</i>	<i>Joseph Pimental, Gaye Fife with Groovemongers and Great Bear Trio</i>

See www.bacds.org for more details. For events sponsored by neighboring organizations, see www.nbcds.org (NBCDS), www.fussell.org/sacramento (SCDS), and www.sffmc.org (SFFMC)

English and American Dance: Country Cousins

Alan Winston

Historically, English country dance (ECD) and Contra dance were the very same thing. There's a species of dancing which has been called "country dancing" in English since 1651. In French, it is *contredanse*; in German, *Kontratanz*; in Spanish, *contradanza*. However, country dancing did not survive much past the early 1700s on the continent.

In country dances, for the most part, the basic unit is the couple. The couples dance predetermined choreographies with other couples and usually go on to repeat the same steps with each new couple participating in the dance. This predetermined interaction with both partner and multiple neighbors is the distinguishing feature of country dancing and differentiates it from couple dancing. The progression (repeat the pattern with a new couple) also distinguishes it from two-line processional dances found in many different cultures.

But, if ECD and Contra were essentially the same in 1812, why are they different now, and how?

Country dancing stopped being fashionable in the urban ballroom by the mid-1800s. In 1844, polka was the thing. Then, other couple dances and quadrilles became increasingly popular until there were very few country dances described in late-19th-century dance manuals. Rural villages in England kept on doing some country dancing. Rural places in New England kept on dancing, and some places still have an unbroken tradition of Contra dancing.

ECD was revived by an assortment of people in the early 1900s. The best-known was Cecil Sharp. He observed the robust and unaffected way dances were done in the villages, and then (with very little historical justification) attributed the same style – vigorous, up on the ball of the foot, weight carried in the chest – to historical dances from published 17th and 18th century sources, which were probably actually done with very specific footwork and a ballet-like style.

As Sharp's influence continued to spread, his English Folk Dance and Song Society started a branch in the United States in 1916. Much later, the name was changed to the Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) of which the Bay Area Country Dance Society is an affiliate. Sharp's disciple, May Gadd, taught his style to Americans, and she insisted on dancing to a good standard. The Sharp style was taught to people all over the country who came to the Pinewoods dance camps, and generations of leaders from the United States have presented it.

Although there's nothing like May Gadd's level of style enforcement in ECD now, the ideal for good dancing still includes a particular kind of upright, robust grace, and precise timing. Because English has an historical component, the dances range from the 1600s to today, with music varying from folk ballads to Baroque compositions, with specific dances set to particular tunes.

English country dance evenings include a wide variety of dance formations (two-couple sets, three-couple sets, squares, longways duple and triple minors, various kinds of circles and Sicilian circles). The music varies, as well, with waltzes, triple-time, reels, jigs, slip-jigs, rants, polkas, classical compositions, folk ballads, and tunes by Carolan. Tempos range from stately to driving, and moods shift from exuberant to melancholy.

The Contra dance revival started in New England during the second half of the 20th century and really started spreading across the country in the 1970s. The Contra dance revival seems to have started when city folks would attend rural dances while vacationing in Maine and New Hampshire. Without any style enforcement, the mode for the dances – which until about 1960 were what we now consider chestnut dances – was more comfortable and had more room for improvised footwork, clogging, and embellishment than ECD.

Once Contra dance was in the hands of respectful innovators like Ted Sanella and Larry Jennings, a conscious effort was made to invent dances with more flow, and more action and figures were borrowed from other dance forms. Gypsies, heys, and the Mad Robin came from English; the star promenade and other figures came from square dancing; and some figures, like give-and-take, were invented outright.

In Contra dance style, dancers stay close to the floor, leave their shoulders completely loose, and add many improvised flourishes such as extra twirls and variations in heys. Dance instruction at a contra dance often includes techniques to reduce dizziness and how to avoid injury during vigorous allemande figures. Improvised embellishments, often borrowed from swing dance, are left to the imaginations of individual partners, as long as each dancer is on time for the next pattern.

Contra dance events are nearly all Contras with perhaps one or two square dances and a circle mixer. Traditional contra music is mostly reels and jigs with a fairly fast tempo and a high level of energy and excitement. The mood, lively and upbeat, stays mostly the same throughout the evening. Modern contra dance bands are eclectic. As long as they deliver a beat that works for the movement, they can – and do – borrow from many musical traditions, including bluegrass, Celtic, jazz, blues, swing, klezmer, European, and African traditions. The traditional string band is sometimes augmented with flute, clarinet, saxophone, percussion, and a variety of other instruments."

Today, callers and dance choreographers like Scott Higgs, Joseph Pimentel, Mike Richardson, Laura Mé Smith, Mike Barraclough, Brad Foster, David Newitt, David Millstone, and me call and compose both English and Contra dances. Many terrific dance musicians (locally, Charlie Hancock, Jim Oakden, Shira Kammen, Jon Berger, Rebecca King, Debra Tayleur, Craig Johnson, and many others) enjoy playing for both Contra and English dances.

English and Contra dancing have evolved with different styling and have grown in different directions, but both are experiencing amazing creative growth with more good new dances, good new tunes, and exciting musical experimentation now than at any time in the last hundred years. English country and Contra dance may have diverged, but they are still close cousins, each with its own challenges and charms.

BACDS offers many opportunities for dancers to participate in both these forms of county dancing always to wonderful live music and led by accomplished callers. The BACDS Spring Camp at Monte Toyon offers a rare opportunity to experience both forms of country dancing in one fabulous weekend.

Dear Miz EI:

Could we have better food at dances?

SF Veggie

Dear Veggie:

Miz EI, a vegan, sympathizes. But food at the break is not sponsored by BACDS. Some dancers, seeing the need for goodies at the break, bring them. Some sell food; some supply it as a contribution for the good of BACDS. If you want to contribute to the food table, seek out the Dance Manager or the person who seems to be in charge of the food. Find out what you could do to help. Or just bring the kind of good stuff you enjoy and put it on the food table for others to share. There should always be signs and announcements to Wash Your Hands before eating and *afterwards*, before dancing with someone who might have a flour or nut allergy. And keep on dancing.

If you have comments on this or other Miz EI subjects, send them to caljuliet@comcast.net.

This issue was edited by Julie Thomas and Loretta Guarino Reid. Send corrections to caljuliet@comcast.net.
Deadline for Fall *Dancer*: Aug 15. Send submissions to [<TheDancer@bacds.org>](mailto:TheDancer@bacds.org). Please join the conversation.