



Bay Area Country Dancer

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Mindful Dancing

by Edna Wallace

Contra dancing is a practice in mindfulness; the mindfulness of movement. When I listen to the music and let it tell me the current move and when to switch to the next, when my body just twirls and spins to those directions, all is well in the world (or at least in the dance line). When I think about the washing I have to do the next day or a work problem or that there's a faint smell of body odor and I wonder whose it is or that I want to dance with the cute blond guy in the next line, then I mess up (and mess up other couples). All goes wrong in the hall for a few long minutes till I go back to listening to the music and letting my body do the dancing.

What could be better than that? Precious little. Yes, I'm one of those who also practices meditation (for a contained number of minutes), sitting in a chair with my eyes closed, following my breathing, trying to let my thoughts come and pass like clouds in the sky. Honestly, I'd rather be dancing.

Actually, there are very few things I'd rather do than contra dance. There's something magical about this "practice." It doesn't look so fabulous (doesn't shimmer and shine like Tango, for example), but it *feels* phenomenal. I remember one Saturday night during a contra dance weekend, after a few hours of twirling on the dance floor, my current partner swung me around and whispered, "Do you see how stoned everyone is?" And he was right! It was incredible. We were a hall full of human beings high on life—specifically on the dopamine of dance: twirling and grinning and stomping and jumping.

I work as a psychotherapist, devoting many hours of my workweek helping depressed patients in a hospital program. It's rewarding work, and it's hard. I have to recharge on the weekends, to follow self-care (as we always stress to our patients). And contra dancing is a major part of my self-care. It's a time when I am in my body and out of my head. I've just decided it's a need, not a want.

In this lovely dance, men often dance the traditional male roles and women the traditional female roles. Just as often, men dance the traditional female roles and women the male roles. Or, non cis-gender folks dance either or both roles. All (or some) of the folks in the lines switch roles mid-dance or between dances. All genders dress in loose clothing with sturdy dance shoes—often in swirly skirts and flowy dresses. It is, in the proverbial usage, "all good." Who cares. There's live music (how cool is that?). There's exciting calling, there's speed, there's touch. All that matters is right there in the hall: music, movement, relating, swinging, flirting, and the wondrous feeling of being fully alive. All grins and no frowns... that's the world of contra.

I take it back: we all shimmer when we're on the floor!

Haiku

by Edna Wallace

*Ricochet, twirl, spin,
Balance and swing. High on life
Through contra dancing.*

I Brought Home a Poem from Contra Dancing

by Heather Saunders Estes (8/7/17)

*Korean and English signs point the way,
past the sandy, tangled community garden,
surf close, and salt air fresh,
the side door opens wide welcoming,
streaming golden warmth into the night.
I enter the spare church meeting hall that
doubles as neighborhood basketball court,
floor polish scuffed away, well loved.
Shy and anxious, some friends and I,
children grown, tired of screens,
have come to try contra dancing.
On the small, cluttered stage,
musicians and caller tune their instruments,
fiddles, flutes, guitar, and a microphone.
The assembled dancers are a motley crew of
wiry, kilted, gray-bearded men,
friendly, strong young amazons,
ordinary kind people I pass on the street,
"Will you dance with me?"
"Thank you, yes, (delighted)
I am a beginner...it is my first night."
We line up in rows facing partners,
name buttons gleaming,
nodding, smiling, we prepare
to stomp. The music careens as bodies,
arms, legs swirl around me.
A physical pattern emerges with
repetition, guiding hands and charmed music.
Intellect is of no use. Can't pull to the side
and re-read the guidebook.
Listen to the caller, no time to dither.
The walls and my partners are dizzying blurs.
Out of my body and very in my body,
confident hand-offs send me on, and
I turn blindly, knowing
someone will be there for me,
thrilling that they are.
I spin, stamp, whirl, and twirl.
My two, new, titanium hips smooth and willing,
a full skirt, ocean blue, and
my periwinkle canvas slippers,
the blue suede shoes of a dancing fairy tale.
A sprig of church garden rosemary
carries the joy home,
till I return to dance again.*

New This October at Fall Frolick!

by Sharon Green



Whether you've already signed up for our October 13-15 *Fall Frolick English Dance Weekend* in Aptos or are racing to get your application in to the registrar before it's too late, be prepared for some exciting new staff and activities for your pleasure.

We've re-imported some of your favorite ECD leaders—Rosemary Hunt from Dorset UK, teaching a mix of contemporary English dances as well as a special session on dances by Pat Shaw; Graham Christian from Amherst MA, bringing his encyclopedic knowledge of historic dance (*The Playford Assembly*, the “Tell Me More” column in the *CDSS News*)—plus we've brought back local favorite Kalia Kliban, with her inimitable take on Andrew Shaw reconstructions, hot contras, and modern ECD.

New to the Fall Frolick music staff this year are Boston recorder virtuoso Emily O'Brien (BACDS folks who enjoyed Emily's playing at New London Assembly are delighted to have her on this coast) and hot local fiddler Ben Schreiber, regular band member of Uncle Farmer, Madeira, The Killarney Boys, and Puck's Deceit. Together with Frolick veterans Charlie Hancock, Jim Oakden, Jon Berger, Rebecca King, and Shira Kammen, Emily and Ben will rock the hall.

Remember last year's pre-lunch mini-concert with Old World Charm School? It proved such a success that we're holding a mini-concert again. It will start with Rebecca King's performance of a brand-new tune. Then come Rebecca, Emily, and Shira in concert, plus witty historical dance anecdotes from that inimitable raconteur Graham Christian. (If you attended Pinewoods English Week this summer, you know about Graham's *Playford Assembly* stories: Hilarious!)

Finally, a totally new project: San Diego's Denise Jackson, an exceptional glass artisan, asked whether there might be an opportunity at Fall Frolick for her to sell earrings she has crafted. We hope to set aside space for a small, unstaffed crafts shop. Let us know whether you have items to sell and/or are interested in helping make this project work.

An ice cream social, a happy hour, a live auction, workshops, parties—lots of fun at Fall Frolick. Check our web site at bacds.org/camps/fallwk2017. Or contact program director Sharon, sharongreen@post.harvard.edu or 510-654-7974.

Some Things are not Happening in November

by Jens Dill

In past years, some of us had to make a difficult decision on the third Saturday in November. We could go to the *Fall Ball* as English dancers, or we could go to the *Twelve-Hour Twirl* as Contra dancers, or we could try to do a bit of both. If you could settle for only six hours of twirling, skip the Ball rehearsal, *and* make a mad dash to the other end of the Bay at suppertime, it *could* work (and sometimes did). Sadly, this will not be possible this year. Neither the *Fall Ball* nor the *Twelve-Hour Twirl* will happen.

The reason in both cases is committee burnout. Last year's committee decided not to continue this year, and the people interested in forming a new committee did not get things together soon enough to make things work. They will have another chance next year, if they are still interested.

Rare Fifth Sunday English Dance In Sebastopol

by Sofi Haelan

All experienced English dancers to join us in Sebastopol for a too-seldom 5th Sunday on October 29. Affiliate group NBCDS encourages our friends from greater Bay area to come share the joy.

Time of dance: 2-4:30 pm.

Place: Wischemann Hall, 465 Morris St, Sebastopol

Caller Kalia Kliban will have some challenging dances to lively queued music on her iPod.

Find us also on Facebook and our website www.nbcds.org.

The *No Snow Ball* Returns to Saturday Night

by Jens Dill

A change in management at the Lake Merritt Dance Center in Oakland has made it possible for the *No Snow Ball* to return to its traditional first-Saturday-in-December date. This year we will be dancing to the music of KGB (Julie King, Claude Ginsberg, and Dave Bartley) and the calling of Kelsey Hartman and Yoyo Zhou. Come join us on Saturday, December 2nd at 7 pm for the Bay Area's classic winter Contra Dance. (Oh, and I understand the committee is looking for a new Snack Coordinator ...)

The President's Corner



From the President: It's time to talk about the "G" word. The term "gypsy" has a long history in the Contra and English dance communities to refer to a move where two people dance around each other face to face. For many of us it evokes a stereotypical romantic picture of flirtatious exotic dancers, and even the "Gypsy Davey" of folk ballads. For others, it has a far darker meaning. The Romany peoples of Europe, who were misidentified as "Egyptians" in the middle ages (hence the term "Gypsy"), are subject to much the same kind of discrimination Europe as African-Americans have suffered here, and in many Eastern and Central European languages, the native equivalent of the "G" word carries the same kind of nasty connotations that we associate here with the "N" word.

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years in the dance community about whether we can come up with a replacement name for the dance move that does not carry the same cultural baggage, and even more discussion about how much cultural baggage there is in the first place. This topic first came to my attention with a flurry of posts to the English Country Dance mailing list in February of 2016. I am sure these postings were not the first, but it shows that the debate has been going on for about a year and a half. It also quickly became clear that the discussion originated more from a sense of concern about using a term that might be offensive than from a specific complaint by the potentially offended group. Yes, once the discussion got going, people did ask the Romany community how they felt about it, and got mixed responses. This past month, the discussion reappeared on the ECD mailing list, with many people ready to dive into arguments that had already been aired the year before. It is worth directly quoting what Alan Winston, in his role as list moderator, posted in response to this resurgence:

Over the last couple of years I've probably spent 20 hours in (mostly online) discussion about the G-word, and I'm really tired of it. Just in the interest of saving time and angst, I'm going:

- PLEASE, nobody post any variation of "This is political correctness gone mad!" I think it's up to the conscience of each individual caller whether they want to use the term or not, and up to each series organizer whether they care about whether the caller uses it or not.

- PLEASE, let's not have a discussion about whether it's a slur if it's not meant as a slur, and if people see Bohemianism, free-spiritedness, or dressing like Stevie Nicks as positive values associated with it. (In addition: there exist a bunch of Rom people who don't want to be called gypsies, and there exist at least some Rom people who don't mind it or even like it, and there are some travelling people who aren't Rom who would rather be called gypsy than Rom. It's complicated. Can we take that as read?)

- PLEASE, let's not have a discussion about whether the word originates from somewhere else and doesn't even refer to an ethnic or lifestyle choice. (I know someone who's constructed an etymology where it comes from a Welsh word for "gaze". Doesn't help. We know what "niggardly" means, it's a perfectly fine word, but it's subject to misinterpretation and maybe it's better to consider your audience.) It's not helpful to run after people saying the equivalent of "you're only offended because you're ignorant!" Even if it's true.

So yes, this is an important topic for thought and discussion, and no, there is no consensus or even a clear picture of how much this matters to the people who have the most right to be offended. This is a period where we are all becoming aware of the possibility that a term that is deeply embedded in our dance tradition might be seen as offensive, we are exploring the issue and experimenting with alternatives, but there still needs to be lots of thought and experimentation before we reach a new consensus. And we should not rush to conclusions. The person who shouted "Please use another term" when the caller said "gypsy" at a recent Contra dance was overreaching. That kind of shout-out puts the caller on the defensive, pre-empts the decision-making power of the dance management committee, and is unanswerable by the community without stopping the dance for a protracted discussion. There is a lot of sorting out yet to do before a consensus is reached, and it is too soon to be shouting down one side or the other.

~ Jens Dill, BACDS President, bacds-president@bacds.org

Volunteer Thanks.

- ♪ Thanks to those who have offered to fill the vacancies on the BACDS Board. Your interest is appreciated even if you can't commit this year. We have at one candidate who may sign on in September, and still have room for four more.
- ♪ Thanks to the *Balance the Bay* Committee, for putting on another fabulous Contra Dance weekend: *Yoyo Zhou, Claire Matthews, Ray Grott, Claire Takemori, Peggy Chipkin, Bowen Lee, and Jens Dill*. Thanks also to the dozens of volunteers who stepped up to do everything from cleaning and prepping the floor to figuring out how to hang Bowen's splendid fabric suspension bridge to just keeping the water jugs filled.
- ♪ Thanks to *Diane Duffy* for managing the snacks at *Balance the Bay*. Duf is a real pro at this, and made the job look easy. And she says she's coming back next year.
- ♪ Thanks to *Rachel* and *Mark McClintick* and to *Kai Barnwall* for loading and unloading the gear for *Balance the Bay*, even though Rachel and Mark couldn't attend the whole weekend, and Kai couldn't attend at all. Thanks to *George Nesbitt* for all the work he did to get his van ready to lend to one of the bands; I'm sorry the van didn't cooperate.
- ♪ Special thanks to *Claire Takemori* for going the extra mile to organize hospitality for *Balance the Bay* (and the Palo Alto Contra and lots of other events). Claire is stepping back from those roles in the coming year to spend more energy working on *American Week* and the San Francisco Contra. We can always use more people to volunteer to organize and provide hospitality and rides for our visiting bands, callers, and campers.
- ♪ Thanks to the *Hey Days* committee for producing a splendid English Dance and Music Week: *Brooke Friendly, Clara Stefanov-Wagner, Diana O'Farrell, Allen Dodson, Alisa Dodson, Loretta Guarino Reed, Tom Colton, Rosemary Murphree, Cat Fox, Alan Winston*. I understand that the camp was especially energised [English spelling] by a number of young people who embraced the *Zesty Playford* manifesto.

- ♪ Thanks to the *American Dance and Music Week* committee for putting together another splendid camp. And special thanks to the new slate of officers who will manage next year's camp: *David Buesch, Jen Bamesberger* (co-managers), *Kelsey Hartman* (programmer), *Loren Kalman* (Treasurer). Special thanks to *Eric Black* for keeping this year's camp going long enough to sign up the management team for next year.
- ♪ Thanks to *Sharon Green, George Nesbitt, Marty Brenneis, Erik Hoffman, Debra Tayleur, and Mary Luckhardt* (and to *Jerry Cambra* at Christ Church Berkeley) for organizing and coordinating the floor refinishing last month at CCB. The new floor is wonderful!
- ♪ Thanks to *South Bay Contra* volunteers for your time, advice, and help for our growing, welcoming contra dance! *Kathryn Kalas, David Buesch, Ann Whitesell, Yang Wong, D'or Seifer, George Nesbitt, Matt Matthis, Marcia Davis-Cannon, Lynn Ungar, Steve Moyles, Les Addison, Jens Dill, Carlton Keedy, Eric Black, Vince Piantanida, Moria Merriweather, Tanya Merchant, Alan Winston, Julia Wong, Lori Honzik.*
- ♪ Thanks to all the invisible volunteers who keep things going behind the scenes.
- ♪ I can't possibly remember all the people who need to be thanked for their efforts. If I fail to mention someone, let me know, and I'll add them next time. I can't always fit everyone in, because of all the events they create.

Upcoming Events

Fri-Sun, Sept 15-17	Echo Summit Dance Camp (SCDS)	<i>Cis Hinkle, Luke Donforth, Syncopaths, Free Raisins</i>
Friday, September 22	Benefit Contra for Camp New Harmony	<i>Kelsey Hartman</i>
Fri-Sun, October 13-15	Fall Frolick at Monte Toyon	<i>Rosemary Hunt, Graham Christian, Kalia Kliban, Sharon Green</i>
Sunday, October 22	Community Band at Hayward Contra	<i>Mavis McGaugh</i>
Saturday, October 28	Palo Alto Hallowe'en Contra	<i>Susan Petrick with George Paul, Ben Schreiber, Mike Scott</i>
Wednesday, November 1	Special Berkeley Contra	<i>Sarah vanNorstrand with Audrey Knuth and Andrew vanN.</i>
Fri-Sun, November 3-5	Foggy Moon (MCDC)	<i>Sarah vanN. & Warren Blier w/Stringrays, Wake Up Robin, BLAM!</i>
Fri-Sun, November 3-5	Portland English Country Dance Ball	<i>Mary Devlin with Fine Companions (Portland OR)</i>
Saturday, November 11	Special Palo Alto Contra	<i>Emma Anderson with Countercurrent</i>
Saturday, November 11	Berkeley Experienced English	<i>A dance party celebrating Fried Herman</i>
Wednesday, Nov. 18	Special Berkeley Contra	<i>Sonya Kaufman with Countercurrent</i>
Wednesday, Nov. 29	Community Band at Berkeley Contra	<i>Charlie Fenton</i>
Sunday, December 2	No Snow Ball	<i>Kelsey Hartman, Yoyo Zhou with KGB</i>
Sunday, December 3	Special Petaluma Contra (NBCDS)	<i>Susan Petrick with KGB</i>
Saturday, December 23	Berkeley English Holiday Party for all	<i>Cavalcade of callers</i>
Sunday, December 24	Hayward Christmas Eve Contra	<i>Alan Winston with Wildcat Canyon</i>
Saturday, December 30	Santa Rosa Challenging Contras (NBCDS)	<i>Jean Gorrindo with Rodney Miller, Chris Knepper, Charlie Hancock</i>
Sunday, December 31	Palo Alto New Year's Eve Contra	<i>Kelsey Hartman with StringFire!</i>
Sunday, December 31	Petaluma New Year's Eve Contra (NBCDS)	<i>Jean Gorrindo with Rodney Miller, Chris Knepper, Charlie Hancock</i>
Sunday, December 31	Sacramento New Year's Eve Contra	<i>TBA</i>
Monday, January 1	Petaluma New Year's Day Contra (NBCDS)	<i>Free for NBCDS members</i>
Fri-Sun, January 12-14	Contra Carnivale (SLO)	<i>Cis Hinkle, Frannie Marr, Jeremy Korr w/Jigjazz, Maivish, Riptide</i>

See bacds.org for more information. For events sponsored by our neighbors, see nbcads.org (NBCDS), sactocds.org (SCDS), sffmc.org (SFFMC), santacruzdance.org (TDSC), montereycdc.webs.com (MCDC), cccds.org (CCCD), haywardcontradance.org (TDOGS), lafd.org/sf (QCD)