

*Santa Barbara Country Dance Society***On Good Dancing, Revisited***What's it take for more fun for all?*

Recently it has come to my attention that some people who used to enjoy contra dances have stopped coming because of dancers with styles that turn them off. For some it's because one or two dancers are too rough, and it hurts, for others it's men coming on too strong. So it's time again to examine what makes a good dancer.

I firmly believe in Larry Edleman's definition: a good dancer is someone who increases the fun for all in the hall. That's it. A good dancer makes dancing fun! If you are a good dancer you make dancing enjoyable for yourself and others.

So what makes dancing fun? For me it's the sense of connection I get by dancing with my partners and the dancers in my set. It's carrying out the figures in ways that join with the music and dancers. It's being playful in (hopefully) non destructive ways. It's seeing people I know and like, and connecting with them as our trails cross in the flow of the dance. It's meeting someone new and seeing their sense of joy as well as helping them through the initial stages of confusion. It's executing a nice twirl with an able dancer and being there on time. It's spacing out the next figure and then catching up and laughing about the mistake. It's achieving an altered state of "no thought" flow with the music, dance, and partners to the point where I feel one with the whole hall.

So when I hear that some people refuse to come to the dance because others scare them away, it pains me. If someone is dancing in a way that it causes others to react negatively, such as avoid the set in which that person is dancing, or not attend our dances, I think it's bad dancing. What are some of these things?

Being regularly late. There are people who know the figures, but carelessly execute them. It's no fun following one of these people, because tardiness and confusion follows in their wake. A new dancer is expected to be late and not know what direction to go in. And we all have momentary lapses. But for those who have the knowledge of the dance, a sense of rhythm, and can move with the beat, there's no excuse for being late and making others regularly late.

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Coming Attractions*Not to be missed!*

Take special note! Some very special dances are coming up!

February 28, this special fourth Sunday dance has been to take advantage of the fabulous Fiddling Frog Staff. Mike "Mr. Charm" Richardson will be on hand to call the dances while other planetary music will be provided by Mark Simos, Daniel Steingberg, and Danny Noveck. It's all at the usual time, 6:30 intro while the dance goes from 7 - 10. Cost: \$6.

The first Sunday May 3 dance will feature the lively calling of Seattle's Suzanne Girardot. Known for flowing contras, great squares, wonderful humor, and fabulous dresses, this should be a hum-dinger! Joining Suzanne will be the Growling Old Geezers.

The 4th Annual Sprung Floor Dance Festival returns May 29 and 30. Once again, a Saturday afternoon and evening in Oak Park, late night jamming at Rusty's, and dancing at the Carrillo Ballroom from Noon - Midnight on Sunday May 30.

The Essence of Connection*Hold On Tight*

Erik Hoffman, in several previous pieces in *Dance Star*, has addressed the issue of twirling and flourishes. He's quite rightly emphasized that these must be done only between consenting, experienced dancers. In this article I'll approach the issue from a somewhat different direction, namely, the effect of such flourishes on the tradition and structure of the dance.

The famous Boston caller Larry Jennings, in discussing the essential attributes of New England contra dancing, emphasized that contra dancing is "strongly connected." In contrast to club square dancers, and in even greater contrast to the "dancers" who crowd nightclub floors, we are strongly connected to one another. We feel this connection physically in figures such as star, allemande, long lines forward and back, and our long New England swings. We also feel it psychologically as we look

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Good Dancer

A more subtle problem is being early. It's interesting to note that dancing slow requires more grace and expertise than fast dancing. So when the band gets in a burning but not too fast groove, some rush to finish the figure only to wait until the music commands to do the next thing. It's an art and a joy to learn to take all the time the music allows, whatever the tempo.

Being rough. Rough dancing has no place on the dance floor. Rough dancing includes insisting on twirls against a partner's will (this can and has led to broken wrists), flailing elbows, excessive movements that cause accidents, down to overly stiff carriage or giving too much weight.

Giving no weight. This is the other extreme. It requires other dancers to make up for it, and is very uncomfortable. The joy of giving weight is its synergistic nature that makes it oh so easy to dance together. Giving too much or too little demands an extra effort for dance partners.

Coming on too strong. This seems to be a men doing to women phenomenon. And it definitely drives people away. Long lusting gazes, or improperly placed hands, or holding on too long, or hovering and asserting yourself onto another, with words or actions, all can be very uncomfortable for the receiving person.

Dance permits people to enter into others personal space in a manner that doesn't happen elsewhere in our culture. This is a blessing: we get contact and closeness, that leads to the enjoyment of others. This permission to enter another's space is also a privilege. Coming on too strong abuses this privilege and turns this blessing into a distasteful invasion.

So, what to do about all these things? Look at yourself, ask partners about things of which you're not sure. Ask them if your hand is in a comfortable place. Ask about the weight your giving. Listen and find out how you can improve your dancing. Communicate, let others know if there is something you enjoy or find uncomfortable. This can be done directly by speaking to the person, or indirectly by speaking through a "messenger". The messenger can be a trusted friend. Also, our local organizers and callers will be glad help in any way they can.

Our dance is a place where we want to generate good fun for all who come, in a safe and festive atmosphere. Let's foster Good Dancing!

Erik Hoffman for SBCDS Coordinating Committee

Connection

into one another's eyes. (Even the do si do is strongly connected when that eye contact is there.) This strong connection has long been essential to New England dancing, and it is for this reason that we emphasize firm arm holds, eye contact, and giving weight.

Further, we feel strong connection in the very patterns of our dances. Each dance weaves the entire group together in a tightly choreographed structure. Everyone has a part to play, and everyone's part is important.

Too often, twirling and flourishes damage this strong connection. A courtesy turn is no longer strongly connected if the dancers treat it simply an opportunity to pirouette. A do si do is no longer strongly connected if the dancers are spinning about so frantically that they can hardly catch sight of each other. And if a twirl goes on so long that the lady is late for her next move, the strongly connected choreography of the dance is damaged. (Larry Jennings once commented acidly, "Twirl or pirouette for all I care -- but only on your own time.")

So, a recommendation for less experienced dancers: Please do not equate twirling and flourishes with dancing skill. Genuine dancing skill lies much more in graceful movement, in timing, and in finding the little enhancements that make each dance special: the right arm tension, the tug of the arm to pull by, or the half turn that makes an awkward transition more graceful. Learn to appreciate the dances just as they are instead of adding flourishes which may, in fact, damage the dance. If you want to add something, consider such extras as allemanding twice instead of once in order to increase the energy of the dance.

And a suggestion for the more experienced: of course you have every right to twirl, spin, etc. (on your own time) if you want to, but ask yourself whether you really want to. When I was a beginning dancer I mistakenly equated twirls and suchlike with skillful dancing; then I went through a twirling phase, and now I don't offer twirls any more. Gents, instead of offering a twirl (or two or three or four) to every lady who comes your way, or throwing in some swing dance moves in the middle of a contra line, try instead to do something which genuinely enhances the pattern of that particular dance. And ladies, the next time I don't twirl you, it's because I would rather turn you gently in the traditional way, look into your eyes, and feel that strong connection which has been the basis of New England dancing for centuries.

Jonathan Southard

Spring 1993

Old-Time Contra Dance Calendar

Santa Barbara Country Dance Society, P.O. Box 21904, Santa Barbara, CA 93121 (805) 969-1511

Come dance on the finest dance floor in the West at the Carrillo Ballroom, or at a quaint Church Hall in Carpinteria. Join the fun! Dance to the irresistible rhythms of live old-time string bands. There is an INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP before each regular weekend dance! Come a half-hour early to learn the basic steps. No prior experience is necessary. All the dances are taught and prompted. Wear comfortable shoes and clothing. Generally dances become more challenging as the evening progresses.

PHONE: FOR THE LATEST DANCE INFORMATION, CALL THE SBCDS 24-HOUR DANCE HOTLINE: 805/969-1511

- Sat Feb. 27 CARP *Kathy Fanning* captivates us by means of *Drastic Measures!* 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Sun Feb. 28 CB Charismatic *Mike Richardson* from Seattle will amuse and enchant us, backed by Bay Area's fine and vivacious musicians, *Mark Simos, Danny Noveck and Daniel Steinberg!* 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$6.
- Sun March 7 CB *Cara Moore* and *Swing Easy* deliver the evening's delight! 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Fri Mar 21 CB Lots of ANIMATION as Santa Brabara's dazzling new caller, *Jonathan Southard*, joins forces with *Kathy Fanning* and the *Tecolote Tune Twisters!* 7:00-10:30. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Sat Mar 27 CARP Tonight *Erik Hoffman* is so hot, he gives us *The Hot Flashes!* 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Sun April 4 CB *Carl Magagnosc* and *Drastic Measures* link up to dish out an invigorating dance! 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Fri April 9 OP A lively crew tonight: callers *Cara Moore* and *Jonathan Southard*, accompanied by *Michael Mendelson and Friends!* 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5
- Sun April 18 CB *Swing Easy* and *Kathy Fanning* provide a light-hearted evening! 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Sat April 24 CARP Come cavort with *Cara Moore, Kathy Fanning* and the *Growling Old Geezers!* 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Sun May 2 CB Playful *Suzanne Girardot* from Seattle and the *Growling Old Geezers* deliver the good humor tonight! 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$6.
- Fri May 14 OP *Kitchen Junket's* inviting tunes inspire *Carl Magagnosc* to new heights! 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Sun May 14 CB *Erik Hoffman* and *Kitchen Junket* serve up a healthy dose of merriment! 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.
- Sat May 22 CARP *Drastic Measures* provide the beat as *Kathy Fanning* and *Cara Moore* move our feet! 7:00-10:00. Intro 6:30. \$5.

Location Key: CB Carrillo Ballroom, 100 East Carrillo Street, Santa Barbara
CARP Main School, Corner of 8th and Palm, Carpinteria
OP Oak Park Dance Stage, Corner of Pueblo and Junipero, Santa Barbara

OTHER EVENTS IN OUR VICINITY

- OJAI:** April 10, May 21. Ojai Art Center, 113 S. Montgomery Street, Ojai. 7:30-10:30. Intro 7:00. Info: 805/646-0117 (\$5, \$4 Art Center members).
- SAN LOUIS OBISPO:** 2nd Saturdays. March 13, April 10, May 8. SLO Grange Hall, 2880 S. Broad Street, San Luis Obispo. 8:00-11:00. Intro 7:30. Information: 805/544-7924 (\$5).
- PISMO BEACH:** Fridays. Feb 19, March 19, April 23, May 28. Pismo Beach Veterans Hall, 780 Bellow Ave, Pismo Beach. 8:00-11:00. Intro 7:30. Information: 805/544-7924 (\$5).
- IRISH SESSIONS:** 2nd & 4th Sundays. Irish music jams, songs & dance. Upstairs at Rusty's Pizza - corner of Carrillo & Bath (Free).
- LOS ANGELES AREA:** Contra dances every weekend and every Thursday. Call L.A. dance hotline: 818/951-2003.

- ❖ April 30 - May 2 *Madcap May Day Festival*, Prescott, Arizona: featuring the dance leadership of *Carl Magagnosc* and *Autumn Brook* and music by *Drastic Measures!* (call 805/964-0442 or 602/778-5118 for details).
- ❖ May 29 - 30 The 4th Annual *Sprung Floor Dance Festival*, Santa Barbara. Saturday: OAK PARK 2:00-5:00 Open Band/Open Callers; 5:00-6:30 Potluck; 6:30-10:00 Dance (\$6); 10:30-Midnight Rusty's Pizza; Sunday: Dance CARILLO BALLROOM noon to midnight (\$20).

Join the **Santa Barbara Country Dance Society**. Members of the **Santa Barbara Country Dance Society** receive a \$1 discount at all regular dances (generally those in the main listing). Membership is \$18 per calendar year, from January 1, to December 31. The cost is pro-rated for each calendar quarter, so, from April 1 - December 31, the cost is only \$13.50. From July, \$9. And during the last quarter starting in October it's \$4.50. To join simply send a check to:

SBCDS
PO Box 21904
Santa Barbara, CA 93121

**LOOKING FOR A WAY TO JOIN IN MAKING
OUR DANCES HAPPEN?**

SBCDS is looking for:

- Someone to greet people and help with signing in at the door at some dances.
- A recording secretary for our board meetings. Generally about once a month, to take notes and/or type them up.

If you are one of these people, call Bob Hamber at 964-1445, or leave a message on the Dance Hotline, 969-1511.

Lost something? Our lost & found is kept at the Carrillo Ballroom, as at the front desk at one of our dances.

Dance Star

Got something you want to write about or say about dance? The Dance Star is always looking for articles, letters, artwork, or ? All communication and contributions should be sent to SBCDS, or call and leave a message at (805) 969-9777.



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You will not receive SBCDS mailings after date on label unless you sign in at a dance or notify us.