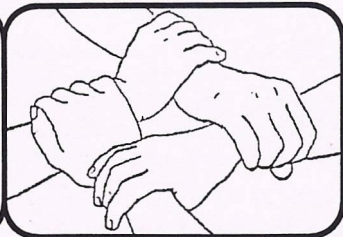


# Santa Barbara Country Dance Society dance star

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Spring 1997



## Putting on the Style

by Erik Hoffman

What is style in contra dancing? Before getting into that, we need to define some things: what makes a "good dancer," a "neutral dancer," and "bad dancing"?

Good dancers make dancing fun for those around them. They are not only on

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■ A version of this article will appear as a chapter in the author's forthcoming yet-to-be-titled book.

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time for the next figure but help those they're dancing with to be on time too. They don't add flourishes that detract from the flow of the dance. They are aware of others, and strive to be flexible in matching their needs.

Neutral dancers neither add nor detract from their own fun or the fun of others.

Many things contribute to bad dancing. Note that I don't say "bad dancer." All of us who keep dancing have the abilities to be good dancers. And we all make mistakes; it's an integral part of the dance. Most of us, at some time, have done something that might have hurt someone else. We are guilty of bad dancing when we do these kinds of things on a regular basis. So, bad dancing happens when you hurt others, are categorically late to the next figure, regularly leave people in the wrong place at the wrong time, regularly add confusing flourishes, or are licentious. The bad part here is characterized by "regularly" and "categorically."

Developing good style requires becoming a good dancer.

We all have style; what we can do is to develop it and make sure it's good. Again, what makes it good is making it pleasurable for others to dance with us.

### THE STYLE THAT FITS

Now, let's look at where style fits. When we first come to a dance most of us are overwhelmed. It's a wonder to even get through our first dance. Nevertheless, other dancers helped us through and it was fun, so we came back for more. At this stage we don't have much time for think-

ing about style—we barely have enough time for thinking what's coming next.

As we dance, the figures become more automatic, and we might even start memorizing the sequence of figures as we dance them. As this happens, we find a lot more time in the dance for style. Time for that little bit of extra eye contact, or twirl, or who knows what. Little cracks open up. Dare I say we find more space in the dance. It's here where our personal style gets honed. Personal Style: you can strive to be elegant, playful, sexy, fun, cool, and more. Personal style can also be bad: you may be rough, lecherous, too fancy, too much.

So, some suggestions. First, keep it personal. It's your style. Don't force others into it, invite them. In twirling this comes up over and over again. I can't tell you how often I watch men make imbeciles of themselves by thinking it's real cool to twirl women under in a grand right and left. What happens is these men leave a wake of women all pointed in the wrong direction after the twirl. Bad style.

Then some dancers think everyone should get an extra twirl in contra corners, so they aggressively push off every dancer they meet. Again, too much of a force  
see **STYLE**, next page

## Star Gazer

### Spring Dance Forecast

Here the Dance Star gazes into the future and shares what it sees...

*March 16:* It's time for the wearing of the green as **Kitchen Junket** plays an all-Irish program at the second annual St. Patrick's contra dance. Look for dance surprises from caller **Jonathan Southard** and an Irish step dance demonstration by the **Claddagh School of Irish Dancing**. Come celebrate St. Paddy's with lively jigs and reels and beautiful Irish waltzes.

*April 6:* Our traditional **Spring Potluck**, at 5:30. Bring tableware, a dish to share (other than turkey—that's provided), and \$1. Following the potluck, the **Growling Old Geezers** and **James Hutson** drive us to dancing delirium.

*May 24-25:* Eighth annual **Sprung Floor Dance Festival** on Memorial Day weekend, featuring San Francisco's widely admired caller **Charlie Fenton**, talented tunesmith and Uncle Gizmo guitarist **Larry Unger**, and National U.S. Scottish Fiddle Champion **Elke Baker**.

On Saturday we celebrate the **sprung** season outdoors at Oak Park. First, calling all callers, musicians and dancers for a free  
see **STAR GAZER**, page 3



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### Forward & Address Correction

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

## Style from first page

that can even be painful. Note I'm not saying, "don't twirl." I'm saying, "don't force others to do it!"

This may seem a bit confusing, because when in the leader role, we do take an active role in inviting our partners to do different things. The goal is to make it a pleasurable meeting of styles, not a battle of wits. When I'm dancing with a new partner, I might try leading an underarm turn. Then I'll ask if they like it. If so, we'll try more. It is amazing what a few words can do: you can find out all sorts of things! If my partner is new, tired, or whatever, they can let me know and I'll work to make it fit their ability. I want them to have as much fun as me!

With good style, we know where we need to be, and when to be there. We know where our partner needs to be and how to end this figure so that they can be there. This is what frees up time for extras: extra looks, extra twirls, extra playfulness, extra whatever.

### MAKING IT EASY

Now, let's look at some things that open up the space for style.

*Being on time.* We are working as a group, so timing is everything. It seems funny that being on time gives you more time, but it's true. If you're late, you have to rush through the next figures. And being rushed doesn't permit contact. If you're early, that's a problem too: you have to stand around waiting for the next figure, or worse yet, you start others doing something early, and thus get more people off from the music.

Several things make it easy to be on time: moving to the phrase of the music, knowing your bearings, knowledge of figures, sequence memory, and dance repertoire.

*The Phrase of the Music.* Music is a powerful force, and the backbone of the dance. With contra and some square dancing, the dance and music are inseparably intertwined. The music is divided into sixteen-beat major parts, and further subdivided into eight and four beat sub-phrases. The figures are choreographed to time out exactly with these phrases. Listen to music, count the eights and sixteens, see how the parts repeat, learn to sing a few tunes, learn to play it on that piano or

guitar or jug at home. Get it so that when the dance is going on, the parts and phrases jump out at you. (A secondary benefit of this kind of activity is that you learn to hear better: it takes less of your brain to hear more of the music and derive even greater pleasure from the music while dancing.)

*Bearings.* The dance floor has no markings telling us where the lines form, and which way is which. Bearings are overlays that we put upon the hall. I had this brought home to me when calling a dance for families. Young ones had no idea what was meant by lines, or down the hall, or even right and left. We lay these concepts on top of the hall, and use them to dance. What are they?

Here are the basic bearings for contras:



down, up, the line, in the middle, outside, across, right, and left. Then there's neighbor, partner, same sex neighbor, minor set, and our direction of flow. Moves have a way of defining these things. Long lines is a very strong, connected movement that clearly defines our lines. Hey for four is much less connected. On the diagonal makes it even more ambiguous.

Here are the basic bearings for squares: heads, sides, couple number (one, two, three, and four), partner, corner, opposite, right hand lady (left hand man), in the middle, outside, grand right and left direction, right, and left.

*Figure Memory.* Learning figures and what they do does a lot to help develop style. It's when you can carry out the figures without thinking that gives you time to think of other things. This gives you time to add style and flair. It's interesting to watch beginners do *si do* because most of them already know it. Their style (at least in the U.S.) is to cross their arms in front, hold them high, and sort of high step through it. This is in marked contrast to the modern contra version: twirl, twirl,

and twirl again. But note how it's knowing the figure that permits this contrasting style. In a women's chain beginners rarely have a clue, and it's all they can do to keep it straight. Learn the figures and their names, and it'll loosen up a lot of time for style.

*Dance Memory,* or sequence memory, is remembering the sequence of figures as you dance. We callers often stop calling contras as people start remembering the dance. Some dances flow. Some seem impossible to recall. But like everything, the more you practice, the easier it gets. Knowing what's coming next also frees up a lot of time: it's what lets you know where you're going, and when you need to be there, so you can improvise *ad infinitum* (*ad vomitus?*) in the cracks and be right where you need to be for the next figure.

Another level of dance memory comes when you start remembering whole dances, along with their names. So when the caller says, "Chorus Jig" or "The Reunion," you already know it. If you like a dance, take note of it, request it, and learn it. The first one is the hardest.

*Meeting our dance partner's abilities.* While developing style, learn to sense the capability of each dancer. As you move through the line or square, you meet dancers of all levels: those who are just starting out, and lost in almost every figure, those with some experience, but still struggling with some of the less used figures, those with lots of experience. Also, there are physical abilities. We have people with lots of experience, on medication, or with ailing bodies, or youthful zest, etc. Learn to sense these differences and work with them. Make your style inclusive.

*Community Style.* Many things make one community different from another. Some are in how the moves are done. Some communities prefer the right and left through with the right hands pulling by while crossing, others prefer a no-hands pass through. Some places prefer stars with a wrist grip. Others favor hands across. As you become familiar with figures, it's good to note these differences, and learn to enjoy all of them, even if you do have a preference.

Then there's the feeling of the community or even particular dance series. Some

have the overall feeling of lively fun. Others are sedate. I've called where the dancers whoop and holler, and the center set syndrome is absent. I've called where dancers never applaud, and hardly look at the band or caller. Other communities are snobbish, and wait for you to prove yourself before accepting you as "one of their own." At one regular dance series, you didn't even ask a partner to dance, you just went and stood in line, and whoever was across from you was your partner.

Having been to England, I'd even venture to say there is a national style. There they dance a contra eight or nine times through, and that's it. The dancers seem to be after something else, an appreciation for the flow of the dance perhaps. Once they see it, that's enough.

So, learn the bearings, figures, and dances so the "cracks" open up. Then develop your style so that it's flexible, and meets each dancer with your personality and joy. Let it be flexible, and not forceful. This way you can have a meeting of styles that is pleasurable for all. Then learn about the music so you can hear the many virtuosos we're lucky to have in our community. Learning to let the details take care of themselves gives us much time to be ourselves!

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*Erik Hoffman, formerly of Santa Barbara, now resides in Oakland. He will be calling for us on March 30.*



## Star Gazer from first page

open mike/open band dance from 2:30 to 5:00 p.m. (Interested callers or wannabes call Gary Shapiro at (805) 682-5523; musicians call Mary Sossong at (805) 957-0064.) At 5:30 we meet across the creek for our Sprung Floor Potluck Dinner. Then at 7:00 our featured staff lifts music (and us) into the spring air for our first Oak Park evening dance of the year. Introductory Workshop at 6:30 as usual. Following the dance we party and jam at Rusty's Pizza, 232 W. Carrillo at Bath.

At 12 noon on Sunday we literally spring into action on the Carrillo Ballroom's famous sprung floor and don't

## comments & opinion

### StarQuestions & Answers

*Wherein questions are asked and at least one possible answer is presented. (Was "Frequently Asked Questions" in the last issue.)*

**Q:** Why doesn't the Introductory Workshop start on time?

**A:** You can't have a class without students (unless it's a Zen class). Maybe if callers started on time anyway, the word would get out that the class starts on time. But the class is for people who in many cases would never "get the word." Suggestions?

**Q:** Why don't callers skip more of the walkthroughs for figures that end up where they start such as circle left (once) or do si do?

**A:** It has to do with learning modes. Many of us learn best kinesthetically. When a circle left that was left out of a walkthrough comes around in the actual dance, kinesthetic learners might forget that it's there, even much later in the dance after the calling has stopped. The dance can "imprint" during the walkthrough.

**Q:** Why do many callers not teach the hey for four in the Introductory Workshop?

**A:** It has to do with learning abilities. We can only learn so much at a time. Some people take to contra dancing quite quickly and easily, but many others who come to be quite proficient contra dancers can only absorb so much at a time.

If we were to teach the hey in the Workshop, most likely we'd have to teach it again anyway, not only for the newcomers who didn't quite pick it up in the Introductory Workshop, but for those who arrived later. Also, it's much, much easier and quicker to teach new dancers when they're surrounded by experienced ones,

stop until midnight, except for a merciful break for dinner. See the Sprung Floor flyer in early May for more details about workshops and additional personnel.

Lots more is happening this spring and on into summer. The Gazer has run out of space but sees lots of flyers, now and in the future, on the literature table in the lobby of the Carrillo Ballroom during our every Sunday dances.

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- **A FAVOR** for two friends, yourself, and the
- dance community: bring two new dancers to a
- dance (or one each to two dances) and receive
- a free dance pass. Your friends also each receive
- a pass good for their next dance evening.
- 

than in an Intro Workshop with only a sprinkle of experienced dancers participating (hint, hint).

Some of us expect the instructor, in just a few minutes, to thoroughly indoctrinate new dancers into the perfect balance and swing, allemandes, women chain, right and left through, pass through, promenade, half figure eight, the concepts of ones and twos, progression, up, down, left, right, inside, outside, partner, neighbor, changing partners, asking strangers to dance, timing, sharing weight, eye contact, recovering from mistakes, ending a swing with the woman on the right, being able to hear a call and understand it within a fraction of a second, all taught without music! Well, it doesn't happen that way, except in the unusual case.

**Q:** Why do we now ask for cash contributions for the refreshments?

**A:** Costs continue to creep up. If all of us who partake contribute toward the cost of the refreshments (which includes food, water, paper goods and dance passes for refreshments volunteers), it will help reduce that increase somewhat, and delay some (hypothetical) future price increase of the dance for everyone.

**M**ore questions? Yes, you with the hat...

*Send your questions, or comments on the above, to StarQ and A, clo the SBCDS.*

*Gary Shapiro*

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**dance star**  
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 Newsletter cast & crew: Gary Shapiro  
 The SBCDS welcomes articles, letters, illustrations, comments and suggestions.  
**Opinions expressed are those of the individual authors.**



# Spring 1997 Santa Barbara Contra Dance Calendar

plus Ojai and San Luis Obispo listings

Calendar produced by Santa Barbara Country Dance Society • P.O. Box 21904 • Santa Barbara, CA 93121-1904 • (805) 969-1511

Come enjoy a dance to the irresistible rhythms of a live old-time string band. We'll dance flowing contras of New England, a thriving North American tradition, plus other delights. All dances are taught and prompted: no experience or partner neces-

sary. Wear comfortable clothes and shoes. Come for the **Introductory Workshop** held 30 minutes before the dance. Also, generally, the dances are simpler earlier in the evening.

**Santa Barbara** dances are sponsored by the Santa Barbara Country Dance Society and are held from 7 to 10 p.m.

Dances at the Carrillo Ballroom are held every Sunday, cosponsored by SB Parks & Recreation Dept. And don't miss our occasional under-the-stars Oak Park dances.

For more information call the SBCDS Dance Hotline at (805) 969-1511.

**San Luis Obispo** dances are sponsored by the Central Coast Country Dance Society.

Dance in SLO on the second Saturday of each month from 8 to 11 p.m. International folk dancing precedes at 5:30. Separate \$3 admission includes \$1 off the contra dance.

For information call the SLO Danceline at (805) 541-0201 or Cynthia at 783-0112.

**Ojai** dances are sponsored by Ojai Contra Dances and are held from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. For more info call (805) 646-0832.

**Admission** for all dances is \$6 unless otherwise noted.

## Key to Dance Locations

CB	Santa Barbara Carrillo Recreation Center Carrillo Ballroom 100 E. Carrillo St.
OP	Oak Park Junipero at Calle Real, SB
SLO	San Luis Obispo 801 Grand Ave. Veteran's Hall East of 101, Cal Poly exit
OA	Ojai Art Center 113 S. Montgomery

DATE	LOC	CALLER • BAND • Etc.
Feb 23 Sun	CB	Jonathan Southard • Chameleons • This dance is confirmed.
March 2 Sun	CB	Carl Magagnosc • All Spruced Up
March 8 Sat	SLO	Erik Hoffman • Compound Meters
March 9 Sun	CB	Chuck Galt • Chameleons
March 16 Sun	CB	Jonathan Southard • Kitchen Junket • In honor of St. Patrick's Day, the band will play Irish jigs and reels, we'll all wear green, and look for a surprise or two.
March 23 Sun	CB	Gary Shapiro • Hot Flashes • All burnt out of hot flash puns.
March 30 Sun	CB	Erik Hoffman • Michael Mendelson, Suzie Richmond, Mike Mullins & Tom Lee
April 6 Sun	CB	James Hutson • Growling Old Geezers • Our annual Spring Potluck precedes the dance. At 5:30, bring food to share, tableware and \$1. Turkey provided.
April 12 Sat	SLO	Greg McKenzie • Growling Old Geezers
April 13 Sun	CB	Don Ward • Kristina & Her Right-Hand Stars
April 19 Sat	OA	Leda Shapiro • The Four New Potatoes • Sour cream, not notes.
April 20 Sun	CB	Gary Shapiro • Chameleons
April 27 Sun	CB	Jeff Spero • Immortal Lemmings
May 4 Sun	CB	Jonathan Southard • Michael's Mixed Nuts • All quality ingredients.
May 10 Sat	SLO	Susan Michaels • Kitchen Junket and Growling Old Geezers (Free!)
May 11 Sun	CB	Gary Shapiro • Kitchen Junket
May 18 Sun	CB	Drew Tronvig • Growling Old Geezers
May 24 Sat	OP	Charlie Fenton • Larry Unger & Elke Baker (\$7) • Preceding this special 7 p.m. evening dance: free open-mike/open-band dance at 2:30 (see the "Star Gazer" column for more info), a potluck in the picnic area at 5, Intro at 6:30 as usual. Party at Rusty's Pizza after the dance; bring your musical instruments!
May 25 Sun	CB	Several callers • Several bands • Dance on the superlative sprung floor from 12 noon to 12 midnight. Simultaneous workshops in the afternoon. (\$TBA)
May 31 Sat	OA	Drew Tronvig • Michael Mendelson & Suzie Richmond

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