

DANCE STAR

Issue Number 57, Fall 2003 • News, Articles & Calendar of Events

Zesty Contras Off to a Great Start

By Keith Connes

For some years, I and other Santa Barbara dancers have been schlepping down to Pasadena to rise to the challenge of the Zesty Contras held there on those months that have a fifth Saturday. Now — and hopefully forever — we have the zesties right here at the Carrillo Ballroom. Credit Steve Davis for making the suggestion to the SBCDS Board, which decided to institute the dances on fifth Sundays, on a trial basis.

What's a Zesty Contra? It's an evening of contra dances that are given minimum walkthroughs and are generally on a more challenging level. At Pasadena, the bar is set pretty high; there's no introductory workshop and beginners are not encouraged to attend. For Santa Barbara, it was decided to be more inclusive. There is a workshop and the intention is to start the evening at a fairly mild pace and then ease into a more ambitious program.

Our first Zesty Contra was held June 29. In charge of the proceedings was Chuck Galt, who calls the zesties at Pasadena (with a co-caller). Prior to our dance, Chuck told me he was going to keep a very watchful eye on the floor and tailor his program so that the attendees would have stimulating dances that were within their capabilities. This observer and participant feels that Chuck accomplished his objective admirably, backed by the creativity and high energy of Michael's Mixed Nuts.

Two more zesties have been scheduled: August 31, with Martha Wild calling and music by Ruby's Dream (which you may have already enjoyed by the time you read this) and November 30, with caller Brenda Goodwin-Cole accompanied by the Laura Light Band.

Our Zesty Contras run from 7:00 to 10:30 — a half-hour longer than our usual dances — with an introductory workshop at 6:30. Admission is \$8.00.

Last Call for Harvest Moon

As of press time, there are still some openings for the Harvest Moon Dance Festival, which runs from Friday night, September 26 through Sunday, September 28. The weekend will feature Lisa Greenleaf, a caller from Boston who is widely known for her flowing, sometimes challenging contras and fast-moving Western-style squares. Lisa will be calling to the music of Flapjack, the Ontario-based band that plays old-time Canadian bush swing. Our dancer-caterer Janet Berg, whose food was a big hit at last year's Harvest Moon, will return to provide a scrumptious lunch and supervise a buffet supper on Saturday. Registration costs \$95. Enrollment is limited and consideration will be given to a gender balance. To register, download an application at our website, www.sbc.ds.org and mail it with the fee to Elliott Karpeles, SBCDS, PO Box 21904, Santa Barbara, CA 93121-1904. For further information, contact Elliott at 805-682-1877 or ebkarpeles@aol.com.



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

Why Becket?

By Gary Shapiro

(Reprinted from the Winter 1997-98
Dance Star)

Q: When lining up for a Becket formation dance we're told to line up improper, then circle one place to the left. Frequently, the first figure in the dance is circle left 3/4, putting us right back where we started. Why bother making it a Becket dance?

A: Let's look at one example, "Mary Cay's Reel" by David Kaynor (printed with permission).

Formation: Becket

- A1 Circle left 3/4 & pass through
Future neighbor allemande left
- A2 Balance & swing current neighbor
- B1 Long lines forward & back
Women allemande right 3/4,
next woman allemande left 3/4
(while men slide left a little)
- B2 Balance & swing partner

Where would you start this dance as an improper dance? There is nowhere to do it without modifying the dance. You can't start

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Profiles



James Hutson

Interviewed by Keith Connes

Q: James, when did you first become interested in contra dancing?

Hutson: I first heard about contra dancing in the early 1980s from an avid contra dancer named Harvey Deneroff. He tried to get me interested, but I'd never danced a step in my life and it didn't have any particular appeal to me. Then I ran into another friend, Anita Anderson, who convinced me that I should come to a dance at which she was playing piano. I said, "Okay, Anita, I'm willing to make an absolute fool of myself in front of a roomful of strangers." I went, I was absolutely confused, everybody was quite reassuring, and I had a lot of fun. It wasn't so much the dancing that was appealing, it was the sociality — the people were so friendly. However, I didn't really learn dance technique at the contras because they're not really set up that way. You don't learn how to balance your weight, how to give good weight in a swing. It was Anita's room mate, Jennifer Brosious, who introduced me to Scandinavian dancing, and it was at those classes that I learned how to balance my weight and how to partner. I started to go to other kinds of dances, and I realized that what I really enjoyed was the sociality of the contra dances, the challenge of the Scandinavian dances, and the pure elegance of the English Country Dances.

My local dance was at Westwood, where the primary caller was Harry Brauser. Harry was a very sociable, genial dance leader — not a perfect caller, but the kind of caller who could put new dancers at ease, which made him a very good community caller. I

discovered that new dancers would be very nervous about making mistakes. Well, Harry would make all kinds of mistakes — and if he can make a mistake, well, then, it's okay for me to make a mistake. In that sense, having Harry around was very good for the community. Harry also did a lot of the more traditional dances, which really appealed to me.

Q: How did you become a caller?

Hutson: The person most responsible for getting me to call dances was Leda Shapiro. She had observed me on the dance floor and saw that I was the kind of person who could guide people to the correct place when they weren't sure where to go. She informed me that I really needed to learn how to be a caller and she was doing a caller's workshop shortly thereafter. I really was not interested in being a caller, because if I'm up on the stage calling, I'm not dancing. So I did not go to that workshop. However, somebody who did go to that workshop in 1988 was Susan Michaels, and Susan went on to become one of the premier callers of Southern California. Leda had another workshop in 1989 and I went to that one. I had gotten some advice from Harry Brauser as well. Harry said, "When you get up on stage for the first time, no matter what you expect that it's going to be like, it will be different." I wasn't sure what he meant at the time, but I got up on stage to call my first contra dance and I realized at a certain point that I did not know how to talk to the musicians. I knew the dance sequences, but I knew very little about the music, and dealing with the musicians behind me was as challenging as dealing with the dancers in front of me. So I put my study on that. I realized that Harry's point was that no matter how well you prepare, there will always be something unexpected, and I have found that to be quite true.

Q: Please expand on what you mean by dealing with the musicians.

Hutson: When I'm dealing with a band, I don't try to dictate to the musicians what they should play, but I try to make myself aware of what they play and how they play it — what their sound is like. And I try to choose material that is complementary to the music that is available. To me, the caller's job in a contra dance is to connect the dancers to the music, and the tool I use to do that is the dance sequences themselves. So my job basically is to teach the dancers how the sequence goes, get them to connect that to the music, and then I step out of the way so that the dancers and the musicians are interacting directly with each other.

It helps to have a certain amount of musical training. I had taken accordion lessons as a child, but hadn't touched the instrument

for something like 20 years. Then at a Summer Solstice Festival's consignment table there was an accordion available and I snatched it up. Playing came back to me immediately and I got all the requisite tune books and started learning the tunes.

Q: Let's go back a bit. After you took the caller's workshop, how did you start getting jobs?

Hutson: At first, it was Leda giving me guest slots on some of her programs. Chris Miller in Claremont also gave me guest slots and I began picking up calling gigs here and there wherever I could. I quickly learned that when you are a new caller you are most likely to get asked to call at venues that are very far away. That's difficult for someone like me who doesn't drive. I have to sometimes take a train all the way up to San Luis Obispo to call a dance, stay overnight, and then take the train back again. If anybody called me up I would basically say yes to anything, and in that way I got a lot of experience.

In the early '90s, because I was doing well at calling squares, Leda Shapiro decided that I should have my own dance series in Los Angeles. I immediately agreed to the idea but said that I had never run a dance before. Leda gave me pointers on how to do it and she actually arranged for me to get the Culver City Masonic Hall, where she had a couple of dance series going. So I did a Sunday night series there, which was billed as a Barn Dance, but it was mostly going to be squares or Sicilian circles — things that were more circular than longways. I ran that series for about 15 months. It never broke even. I lost a lot of money out of my own pocket, but at the same time I learned a lot about calling squares and handling a crowd. It was after that series ended that I began getting calls from people all over the place wanting me to call their series.

One of the people who was definitely a positive influence on me was Erik Hoffman, who was one of the premier callers in Santa Barbara. He and Carl Magagnosc were really good callers that I admired a lot and one of the things I liked about both of them was that they both called a lot of squares. There weren't too many callers in the L.A. area that called squares. In the early days, Drew Tronvig will call the most squares, but when I started doing squares, Drew stopped. The most fun squares I did were the ones that Erik and Carl were calling in Santa Barbara.

I also became a regular attendee at the English Country Dance events in Santa Monica, but the hall was not very good and attendance fell off to nothing. So there was no English Country Dancing in Los Angeles for three or four years until Giovanni DeAmici came down from the Bay Area, looked for

English Country Dancing and, finding none, started a series down in Torrance, in 1997. He contacted me to find out who the local musicians were and then asked who I would recommend as a dance leader. I said, "Well, I would recommend me." I had led a few English Country Dances toward the end of the Santa Monica series and I was also teaching some Scandinavian dance workshops. So Giovanni took a gamble and hired me and it worked out quite well. I went back to Pinewoods to build on my repertoire and these days English Country Dancing is interesting me more than the contra dancing.

Q: You are known as a good teacher. Are there any special teaching principles you follow?

Hutson: I realized early on that in order to get a dance across I'd have to approach it from the point of view of the dancer: what is it that the dancer needs to know? Dancing in sets is not dancing patterns, it's dancing people — the people are more important than the patterns. Take a phrase like "figure eight." If you tell people you're tracing the route of the figure eight on the floor, people are going to look at their feet and they may bump into each other. Whereas, if you say, you pass this person by right shoulder and that person by left shoulder — why do we say "shoulder"? We could just as easily say "hip" or "knee," but we say "shoulder" because it's close to the face and we want people to look at each other as they dance. So sometimes the choice of an individual word can affect the way people dance and the way they relate to each other.

There is one more element that added to the style in which I call. I was sort of just your

run of the mill caller: teach the dance, do the walk through, send them back to place, start the music, prompt the figures, and then get out of the way. Then around '96 or '97 I saw Ron Buchanan, a caller from Pittsburgh. Ron does terrific squares. He has his own unique style of calling all over the place! The first time I heard this guy, I thought, "What is this?" It was like being hit by a cyclone, and I thought, "Wow — he is really loose!" And yet, like all good callers, he had complete command of the material. And I realized that I could loosen up a little bit and maybe get a little more personality into the dance leadership. So I started doing that. What I wanted to communicate most especially was the fun of the dance.

Q: You certainly do that, James. Thanks!

Why Beckett?

(Continued from Page 1)

with the pass through in A1 because that would have the balance & swings crossing musical phrases, which is a choreographic no-no. To start the dance at A2, dancers would line up with the 2's crossed and not the 1's, and then progress backwards. Becket formation is much less confusing than that. In addition, the dance the way it is ends with a partner swing, and all's well that ends well.

In truth, some Becket formation dances that begin with the circle left 3/4 could be started in improper formation at a different part of the dance. However, contra dances have beginnings and ends and the choreographer has this in mind when writing a dance. Also, perhaps Becket dances have a certain mystique that puts dancers in a slightly different frame of mind.

English Country Dance Classes at Carrillo

As you probably know, English Country dances are held on Tuesday evenings, in various Santa Barbara locations, led by Gary Shapiro and Alice Williams. Now, here's a chance to get a more thorough and methodical indoctrination in the fundamentals of this delightful dance form.

English Country Dance (ECD) is similar to contra dance, but different. Similar enough to be familiar, but different enough to be interesting in its own right.

Different how? ECD, in general, has less physical contact but more eye contact. ECD can be more mentally challenging. There is an amazing variety within ECD: in the music, meter, mood, attitude, tempo, formation and figures. For example, some dances are slow and elegant, but others are faster than a contra and not even in elegant's area code.

You're welcome to attend any of the regular Tuesday dances, but if you'd like to delve deeper into this dance form, the Santa Barbara City Department of Parks and Recreation and the SBCDS have a class for you.

Introduction to English Country Dance

Instructor: Gary Shapiro

Six Tuesdays beginning October 7

8:00 to 10:00 PM

Carrillo Recreation Center

Dance Studio 2 (upstairs)

100 E. Carrillo St.

\$36 for the series (\$10 drop-in fee)

According to Gary, "This class is appropriate for non-English Country Dancers (and non-dancers) since we will start from the beginning. It is also appropriate for experienced ECD-ers because we will be creating a solid foundation upon which to build and rebuild our skills, leading to a deeper enjoyment and appreciation of the dance form."

The regular weekly dances will take place throughout September but will not be held during the class dates and will resume on November 18. See the Dance Schedule on Page 4 for details.

Santa Barbara Contra and English Country Dances are co-sponsored by SBCDS and

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
Parks & Recreation
Enriching People's Lives

SBCDS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation

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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.

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!

The best way to become a writing (Dance) Star is to email your priceless words to dancestar@sbcds.org. If you don't have email capability, snail-mail to Keith Connes, 283 Carlo Dr., Goleta, CA 93117. If you do not want your comments published, please say so; otherwise, we will assume that you have submitted your material for publication. Incidentally, we also welcome dance-related photos.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Deadline for the next issue is November 1.



DANCE SCHEDULE — FALL 2003

English Country Dances

Oak Park

Junipero at Calle Real, Santa Barbara
(Hwy 101 north to Pueblo exit, proceed 1 bl. past Pueblo)

Tuesdays 7:30 to 9:30

For dances with live music the cost is \$5.00,
recorded music \$3.00

- | | |
|---------|---------------------------|
| Sept 2 | Gary Shapiro/Recordings |
| Sept 9 | Alice Williams/Recordings |
| Sept 16 | Gary Shapiro/Recordings |
| Sept 23 | Alice Williams/Recordings |
| Sept 30 | Alice Williams/Thruppence |

English Country Dances

Carrillo Recreation Center

Dance Studio 2, upstairs
(For directions, see box at right)

Oct 7 - Nov 11, 8:00 to 10:00 PM: A six-week Introduction to
English Country Dancing class, taught by Gary Shapiro
Cost: \$36 (\$10 drop-in fee)

The following dances are also at the Carrillo Recreation Center,
Dance Studio 2 — 8:00 to 10:00 PM — Admission: \$3.00

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|--------|---------------------------|
| Nov 18 | Alice Williams/Recordings |
| Nov 25 | Gary Shapiro/Recordings |

SLO Veteran's Hall

801 Grand Ave., San Luis Obispo
(East of Hwy 101, Cal Poly exit)

Contra Dances are normally on the second Saturday of the month
8:00 to 11:00 (7:30 Workshop) \$7.00

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Sept 13 | Elliott & Donna Karpeles/Foggy Bay String Band |
| Oct 11 | Jonathan Southard/Chuck and the Woodchucks |
| Nov 8 | Warren Blier/Crabapples |

Free Dance — Centennial Park Banquet Room
600 Nickerson Rd, Paso Robles 7:30 to 10:30 (7:15 workshop)

- | | |
|--------|-----------------------------------|
| Sept 6 | Gary Shapiro/Growling Old Geezers |
|--------|-----------------------------------|

Ojai Art Center

113 S. Montgomery, Ojai
7:30 to 10:30 (7:00 workshop)
Admission: \$7.00

- | | |
|--------|--------------------------------------|
| Nov 28 | Brenda Goodwin-Cole/Laura Light Band |
|--------|--------------------------------------|
- Note: This is a **Friday** night!

Carrillo Ballroom

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

Contra Dances Every Sunday*
7:00 to 10:00 (6:30 Workshop)
Admission: \$7.00, except as noted

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Sept 7 | Caller's Jubilee/Kristina & Her RH Stars
Blossoming callers contact Donna Karpeles:
donnabayet@aol.com or 805-682-1877 |
| Sept 14 | Gary Shapiro/Michael's Mixed Nuts |
| Sept 21 | Don Ward/Chopped Liver |
| Sept 26-28 | Harvest Moon Dance Festival
Pre-registration Required — \$95.00 |
| Sept 28 | Lisa Greenleaf/Flapjack — Public dance
following Harvest Moon — 7:00 to 10:00
Admission: \$10.00 |
| Oct 5 | Keith Connes/Kitchen Junket |
| Oct 12 | Donna Karpeles/One Night Stan' |
| Oct 19 | Susan Michaels/Southern Exposure |
| Oct 26 | Gary Shapiro/Chopped Liver
Halloween Masquerade Ball — <i>Free Dance!</i> |
| Nov 2 | Jonathan Southard/Porch Dogs |
| Nov 9 | Warren Blier/Kitchen Junket |
| Nov 16 | Donna Karpeles/Michael's Mixed Nuts |
| Nov 23 | 2:30-5:30 English Country Dance
James Hutson/Band TBA
5:30-6:30 Pre-Thanksgiving Potluck with
turkey provided — Cost: \$1.00
7:00-10:00 Contra Dance
Gary Shapiro/Kristina & Her RH Stars
Note: Dances are \$7.00 each |
| Nov 30 | <i>Zesty Contras</i>
Brenda Goodwin-Cole/Laura Light Band
7:00 to 10:30 — Admission: \$8.00 |

Dances appearing in this Calendar are sponsored by the
following organizations, listed by location:

Carrillo Recreation Center and Oak Park:
Santa Barbara Country Dance Society 805-969-1511
www.sbcds.org

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

San Luis Obispo Veteran's Hall:
Central Coast Dance Society 805-541-0201
www.cccds.org