

DANCE STAR

Issue Number 62, Winter 2005 • News, Articles & Calendar of Events

Attendance is Down

What Can We Do About It?

By Bettine Wallin

If you've been contra dancing regularly at the Carrillo Ballroom for the past couple of years or more, no doubt you've noticed that attendance has been declining steadily. In 2002, the average attendance of all Sunday night dances was 85. The following year that figure dropped to 77, and this past year we've seen a further decline to 64.

Our Treasurer, Rob Gardner, projects a \$1,000 deficit for this past year, with a greater loss forecast for 2005 unless there are increased donations and an average of seven more paid attendance at each dance. The loss is less than the previous two years but 2005 will have higher insurance and rent. The Board wishes to avoid an increase in the entry cost. There is a \$10,000 bank balance from past years and our goal is to help make the community of dancers grow and experience great dances.

Some of the cost-cutting measures enacted by the Board include: Using volunteers for Dance Greeters and Doorkeeper; eliminating the three poorly attended Oak Park Dances in the summer; renegotiating a rental agreement with the City Parks & Recreation Department; and negotiating lower printing costs for the *Dance Star*. Also under consideration is eliminating mail distribution of the *Dance Star*, which can be downloaded from the Society's Website at www.sbcds.org; changing to an earlier dance time; establishing a demonstration dance group led by Jatila van der Veen; charging admission for the Christmas Dance; reinstating the Host committee, led by Donna Karpeles, to greet, welcome and partner new and beginning dancers; and a postcard mailed to first timers with a follow-up pass and questionnaire coordinated by Bettine Wallin.

The SBCDS Board decided to invite dancers to join in an open discussion, following the Pre-Thanksgiving Potluck on November 21, of ideas to increase

attendance and help reduce the budget deficit.

Nearly sixty dancers took part in the discussion. To facilitate the exchange of ideas, the participants were divided into six groups, moderated by Board members Moira Butler, Rob and Vicki Gardner, Elliott Karpeles, Gary Shapiro and Bettine Wallin. Following is a summary of their input:

Active support was shown for dancing as a friendly, aerobic social event. Interesting calling and lively music were praised as attractions. Some supported local talent and many urged that out-of-town or guest callers be scheduled once a month. Other suggestions included publicity and advertising in college publications, as well as local papers, TV and radio; the use of music, video and demonstration dances in colleges, community organizations such as the Newcomers

Club, festivals and parks, and public access TV; and distribution of flyers to places of worship, businesses, other dance groups, dance festivals and social groups. We all promised to "bring a friend" and call former dancers we know to invite them back.

Also explored were ways to improve the dance experience for newcomers and regular dancers. It was thought that the newcomers need more help in understanding the evening's schedule and ways to deter unwanted partner actions, such as dizzying embellishments or inappropriately intimate behavior.

Callers could prompt each dance longer; give dance etiquette tips; remind us each to dance with someone new and someone of a different skill level; and teach the waltz and partner dances used at the end of the first half.

Many urged an increase in socializing through more potlucks or other

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Break Dancing



By Jatila van der Veen

At most of the regular Sunday night dances, while the band and caller are taking a break, you may have noticed that there is still music playing. A few die-hard dancers are still out on the floor, resisting the muffins and donuts and other goodies. Who are those crazy folks whose feet never stop?

Leading the way are Steve Davis and Jatila van der Veen, playing folk dance music on a lap top plugged into Victor's sound system. On any given night you'll find other "regulars" out there, too: Jan Dromlewicz, Scott Swain, Tony Marzio (former dancer with the Aman Ensemble), Marcia Michael, Simon Keifer, Luci Andrino, Bonnie Sangster, Marie Callas (Greek folk dance teacher from Los Angeles) and Bettine Wallin, to name just a few. Occasionally we are joined by visiting folk dance teachers Jean and Keith Gorrindo from San Luis Obispo. On such nights you'll find Keith leading a traditional Bulgarian Pravo, calling the figures in Bulgarian. There are many others who join from time to time, and we often have out-of-town visitors who come for the contra dance, and are pleasantly surprised to find some folk dancing as well!

But you don't need any prior experience to join the break dancing fun! Anyone who wants to get a bit of an ethnic experience, dance to a different beat in between schmoozing and munching, or just keep moving so as not to get cold while you wait for the band to resume playing, is invited to participate. Just join the line at the end, or jump into the middle between two people who look like they know what they are doing, and allow yourself to be swept up in the experience. We usually start the line

dances with a Greek Syrto, a lively dance in a syncopated 8/8 rhythm, then do two or three easy Balkan dances, and end with a Macedonian Les Noto, a slow "cool down" dance in 7/8 time. Often the last dance tune we play is the popular "Shto mi e Milo," sung by the Kitka women's a capella ensemble of San Francisco. Send email to Jatila at jatila@physics.ucsb.edu if you would like a copy of the words. If you have a particular favorite dance or tune, send an email ahead of time (same address), and if we have the music, we'll be happy to play your request.

How did it all start?

We began about three years ago, when Steve had the idea that exposing contra dancers to folk dance music would help increase general interest in ethnic dance, and also encourage "closet folk dancers" at the contra dances to come out and meet others. He approached the SBCDS Board with an experiment: allow us to play folk dance music at the breaks in the Sunday night contra dances, and see what kind of reception we get. At first it was just us, with two or three others, but gradually the break dancing caught on, so that now if we miss a week, people ask where we were! We have also seen an increasing number of people participating in both the folk and contra dance communities as a result of this "double exposure."

For the first two years we started each break with a Cajun piece and a swing piece, followed by three or four Balkan and East European folk dances. Last spring the Board decided to change the format of the contra dances so as to have shorter breaks, with an all-international program twice a month, an all-swing program once a month, and an all-Cajun program once a month. As a result, we now alternate with Elliott Karpeles, who handles the Cajun and swing Sundays, and for the ethnic nights we try to start with one international couple dance.

We still play all three genres at the fifth Sunday "zesty contras" – Cajun, swing, and international – in a slightly longer break, within a format that is half an hour longer than at the normal Sunday dance.

And if you want a real Balkan village experience, we invite you to the Oak Park outdoor platform (Junipero Street entrance,

where Harvest Moon used to be held) every Wednesday night at 8 PM, where the Santa Barbara Balkan Village comes alive. We play Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Greek music, with a sprinkling of Croatian, Romanian, Turkish, and Armenian, mostly on the original old records.

Our village elder, Luis Goena, who started folk dancing in Santa Barbara over forty years ago, brings his homemade wine and goat cheese, and others often contribute a variety of treats. This impromptu weekly celebration is similar to a gathering such as you might find in a village on the outskirts of Bitola (capital of Macedonia). In cold, rainy weather (usually starting some time in November) the party continues in the parish hall of the Unitarian Church on Santa Barbara and Arrellaga Streets; same time, just a different location.

If you would like to be on our mailing list, send an email to Santabarbarafolkdancers@yahoo.com and you will receive announcements of ethnic music and dance events, including special classes, performances, and parties, around Santa Barbara.

Sonnet on the Contra

"Hands-four!" the caller shouts, or shouter calls, and singles couple up in pairs of pairs in rows of lines in time to get prepared to leave for water, way, way down the hall.

And now we're back, expectant and renewed, waiting hushed and anxious, then, "Surprise!" we start to chuckle, chat and socialize when the caller begins the first walk-through.

This touchy-feely closeness, and clamour of pounding feet and hearts – friv'ulous merit; fleeting chance connection – I won't bear it. In closing, caveat my disclaimer:

If the good Lord had meant for us to dance, I think we'd all been born joined at the hands.

Peter B. Bergonzi
Mt. Baldy SkiDance weekend, 2004

The Disastrous Caller

Where's the Clown Suit?



By Keith Connes

About two years ago, I wrote an article for the *Dance Star* titled *The Perfect Caller*. I certainly wasn't referring to myself, but a few months later, as if I had angered the contra gods, there occurred a dance at the Carrillo Ballroom in which I starred as *The Disastrous Caller*. It was the worst dance of my life, and the same could undoubtedly have been said for those folks who had innocently come expecting better.

Now, this was not the first dance I had ever called. I had participated in a number of Caller's Jubilees (open caller dances) and had also shared an evening of calling with Donna Karpeles, and on those occasions things had gone quite well. Why, then, the fiasco on December 15, 2002? Probably the primary reason was that I had prepared a program that was far too ambitious for someone at my experience level. It has been said by many wise heads that it's better to call a simple dance well than a complex dance badly. I had spent days preparing a textbook program that started with easy dances, then gradually escalated to dances of increasing complexity. Toward the end of the evening, I was piling it on — including, of all things, a *medley*, in which movements are switched around during the course of the dance. Not for the fledgling caller!

Also, I didn't teach the walkthroughs well. Dancers need to know where each figure takes them, for example: "This brings you to the same side of the set as your partner, whom you will swing." Of course, the caller needs to know that beforehand, and it's not a big confidence-builder when the caller inquires hopefully, "So now you're facing your partner, right?" and 70 voices shout back, "Neighbor!"

Actually, I'd had a wakeup call hours before I set foot on the stage. It was in the form of some sudden and nasty cold symptoms. I felt awful and should have asked another caller to substitute for me. But no, this was my Big Night. It was a Big Night, all right — like the last one on the *Titanic*.

After it was all over, I went before the SBCDS Board, acknowledged the error of my ways, and asked for another chance. They generously gave it to me, with the proviso that I do what most serious callers do: get some good training.

I attended two week-long caller's workshops, conducted by veteran caller Bob Dalsemer at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC. (Highly recommended!) In addition, I asked for and received critiques from some of the best callers in our area. I've also gotten comments from dancers, complimentary and otherwise. I have benefited from them all.

I hope I'm becoming a fairly decent caller. I thank those dancers who have given me support — especially those who have returned after that evening two years ago, when I should have come on dressed in a clown suit.

I'll see you December 12th. Let me know how I'm doing.

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

Phone: 805-969-1511

Email: contact@sbcds.org

Website: www.sbcds.org

Board of Directors: Moira Butler, Rob Gardner, Vicki Gardner, Elliott Karpeles, Bob Leonard, Gary Shapiro, Bettine Wallin

The *Dance Star* is produced quarterly.

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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.

Attendance

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events. Other projects include the organization of carpools for those traveling long distances; design and manufacture of a First Timer's badge; helping all dancers get a variety of partners; and a volunteer to chair the flyer distribution.

There were many suggestions for raising and saving money. SBCDS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Donations are welcome, and we can try raffles and other fund raisers. The Board and most dancers value the live music and professional sound management. We cannot rent another space for less and we have the best dance floor in the West, which the city is in process of dehumidifying to cure the warping problems. Others have not given a better bid on insurance.

If possible, download the *Dance Star* from www.sbcds.org/download/ then contact maillist@sbcds.org and ask to have your name deleted from the mailing list. This will save us printing and postage expense.

Bring a friend to the dance. Come more often to greater enjoy our community. Tell us of contacts you have for more publicity. We can each help our contra dance community grow.

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 express yourself 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. The deadline for the next issue is February 1.

DANCE SCHEDULE – Winter 2005

English Country Dances Westside Community Center 423 W. Victoria, Santa Barbara (Where Victoria dead-ends at Hwy 101)

Tuesdays during December, January, and February
7:30 to 9:30 **Except: No dances Dec. 21 & 28**

Caller will be either Gary Shapiro or Alice Williams
Live music by Thruppence on the following dates:

Dec. 7, Jan. 11, Feb. 8 – \$5.00

All other dances will have recorded music – \$3.00

Also, there will also be an English Country Dance at the Carrillo Ballroom on Feb. 20 at 2:30 – See Box at Right

San Luis Obispo

Note: The Dec. 10 dance will be held at the Veteran's Hall,
801 Grand Ave. (East of Hwy 101, Cal Poly Exit)

All other dances from now on will be held at the Odd Fellows Hall,
520 Dana St. (Hwy 101 Marsh St. exit, left on Nipomo,
left on Dana) 7:30 to 10:30 (7:00 workshop) Admission: \$7.00

Dec. 10 Gary Shapiro/Foggy Bay

Jan. 8 Keith Connes/Growling Old Geezers (New location!)

Feb. 12 Warren Blier/The Crabapples

Ojai Art Center 113 S. Montgomery, Ojai (South of East Ojai Avenue)

7:30 to 10:30 (7:00 Workshop)
Admission: \$8.00

Jan. 22 Susan Michaels/TBA

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

Carrillo Recreation Center and the Westside Community Center
Santa Barbara Country Dance Society 805-969-1511
www.sbcds.org

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

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

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

Dec. 5 Gary Shapiro/Michael's Mixed Nuts

Dec. 12 Keith Connes/Southern Exposure

Dec. 19 Barbara Stewart/The Pilgrim String Band

Dec. 26 **Christmas Festivity!**

2:30-5:00 Cajun & Swing Dance/Bayou Seco

Free! Sponsored by Elliott Karpeles

5:15-6:30 Potluck Dinner

7:00-10:00 Contra Dance (\$7.00)

Warren Blier/Bayou Seco

Jan. 2 Jonathan Southard/Bog an Lochan

Jan. 9 Keith Connes/Kristina & Her Right Hand Stars

Jan. 16 Donna Karpeles//Michael's Mixed Nuts

Jan. 23 Gary Shapiro/Fiddle Tunas

Jan. 30 *Zesty Contras!*

Warren Blier/Syncopaths

7:00 to 10:30 (\$8.00)

Feb. 6 Susan Michaels/Kitchen Junket

Feb. 13 John Rogers/Paddy O'Furniture

Feb. 20 **President's Day Weekend Mini-Fest**

2:30-5:30 English Country Dance
Alice Williams/Chopped Liver (\$7.00)

5:30-6:30 President's Day Potluck with
turkey provided (\$1.00)

7:00-10:00 Contra Dance

Donna Karpeles/Chopped Liver (\$7.00)

Feb. 27 Gary Shapiro/Kristina & Her Right Hand Stars

