

Dancing into the New York Times

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“The sound of fiddles and foot stomping may be the last thing you expect to hear at the Chinatown Y.M.C.A. Nevertheless, every weekend Country Dance New York turns the basketball courts into a country dance hall, filled with jigs, reels and plenty of swinging your partner.”

That’s how [an article in the New York Times](#) last December began. Entitled “Country Dancing in the Big City”, it was a piece for the local edition that described the English and contra dancing going on around the city, highlighting [CDNY’s series](#), the [gender-role free series](#), and the new [Brooklyn contra dance](#).

I thought it was quite cool to get a mention in the Times and asked David Chandler, president of CDNY (and CDSS [board member](#)), for some of his observations of how the piece came together and what (if any) results they had seen. These were his thoughts:

“Getting an item into the NY Times was a combination of having volunteer professional help – and luck. One of our dancers is a professional publicist who is very aware of different ways to get one’s story out, and she contacted an editor at the Times who seemed a likely bet about a story focusing on young people in contra. Oddly enough, that seemed to fall through because of the last media success for contra dancing, the [NPR story](#) a few months ago – the editor didn’t want to just repeat that story.

However, that contact may have laid the foundation for a reporter independently finding out about contra dancing from a swing dancing friend, and presenting this to the editor as a possible story.

The reporter was great, coming and dancing all night and trying to write an accurate, positive story, at which she generally succeeded despite vigorous editing. We were reminded of the fact that one does not control the story, since the Times chose to publicize one of our events which was for experienced dancers only, and didn’t provide clear address information about our two locations (though the online edition mentioned our website).

The upshot is, as always, unclear. The new contra dance in Brooklyn which was also mentioned got 90 dancers for their first dance, although we don’t know how many responded to the story. Our next two regular dances and the experienced dance got perhaps fewer new dancers than at a typical dance. But the dance last night [Dec. 11] got a lot of new people, some of whom mentioned the story or came to us after initiation at the Brooklyn dance, an offshoot of our story. So, generally positive for sure. And we are hopeful of finding other media outlets through our highly motivated professional volunteer.” That was in December. I saw David more recently and he confirmed that it’s difficult to know how the Times article has affected attendance, a question that’s always hard to examine. (He did note that the Brooklyn dance has continued to do very well, though they’ve also been doing a great job of promotion in all kinds of ways. That’s the stuff of another post.)

Perseverance and luck paid off for getting a mention in the Times, though it’s a useful reminder that newspapers have the final cut of a story, as much as you can try to guide a story. (Fortunately, I don’t see a lot of hit pieces directed towards traditional music and song.) [Once again](#), too, it’s interesting to see how mainstream media portrays traditional dance and music.

Have any thoughts on getting traditional music and dance into the media spotlight? Or wish merely to pontificate on the impending death of print journalism? All comments welcome.

– Max