



CDSS Goes to New York, New York!

by Pam Paulson, CDSS Executive Committee member,
and Alexandra Deis-Lauby, NYC Dance Community member

Over 100 years ago in New York, Cecil Sharp founded what was to become the Country Dance and Song Society. Today, New York's folk scene encompasses a rich variety of dancing and music that includes CDSS affiliates, inclusive and engaging dances of English, contra, squares, morris, Scottish, and genderfree dancing as well as a plethora of early music and folk song groups. In November 2015 the CDSS Traveling Executive Committee gathered there to celebrate 100 years of song and dance with our host organization, Country Dance New York, and the wider NYC folk community. We spent the weekend meeting as a Committee, dancing, sharing meals, and talking with community members about the dance organizations in and around the city.

Gathering in NYC

On Thursday and Friday, the Exec converged on NYC from across the continent. Thursday evening bought us to the delightful Country Dancers of Westchester English dance, just north of the city proper. Friday night offered a choice of two great dances, English in Greenwich Village with the historic Country Dance New York, and contra in Brooklyn with the younger organizations Brooklyn Contra and Village Contra. Thank you to Susan Amessé for organizing the English dance and to Avia Moore and Carol Geisler for the contra. The Thursday and Friday dances showcased NY's dynamic local talent. One Exec member described the English dances as "divine" and highlights of the weekend. Another Exec member attended the contra and found a "welcoming, inclusive group that danced with energy and enthusiasm."

The Exec Meeting

CDSS's birthplace was the perfect spot to take stock of the organization in its centennial year. On Saturday, the Exec Committee gathered to do just that. CDSS continues to evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of song and dance communities around the country and our discussion was wide-ranging—we want to offer advice, resources, and support to members and affiliates, reach out to the broader community and increase membership, promote the 2016 Year of Song, increase monetary support for the organization, help with community building, run and support successful camps, and much more.

photo by Jill Allen

Our Centennial Year was packed with outreach and initiatives. Much of our discussion was about how we can continue to reach our goals on a modest budget.

As always, budgets and funding generated ongoing discussions. How can we best use our funds so that we will continue to thrive and support the local communities in coming years? We are always seeking new and growing funding avenues. Membership is a vital part of our organization, comprising both affiliates and individuals and is a major component of our budget. This strong and growing membership base allows us to continue to support doing the things that we love, including:

- offering grant advice or hard-to-find materials related to song and dance;
- running and supporting camps (did you hear about the new camp in Michigan?);
- presenting classes and workshops that bring in and support a new generation of dancers, callers, singers and musicians; and,
- building an extensive set of publications.

Financial discussions can be uncomfortable, and they are crucial to a fiscally healthy organization.

We discussed ways that CDSS supports the affiliates, such as offering insurance. IndepenDance is one of many weekends and dances that gets its essential liability insurance coverage through CDSS. The local organizers have said: "This is a great benefit that CDSS provides because it gives us an easy way to have insurance coverage that otherwise may be difficult to find and expensive to acquire." Is your local dance or weekend covered by insurance? If not, check out this CDSS benefit.

Planning our Future

We used the reports from our committees and working groups to look to the future and plan our next steps. How will camps grow and evolve? How can CDSS strengthen our relationship with and increase the number of local affiliates? What other relationships can we strengthen? How can CDSS continue to fulfill our Strategic Plan and mission and to ensure advocacy for the vitality and sustainability of song and dance for the next 100 years? With these big-picture questions, we rounded off our meeting and were ready to start connecting with the local dance communities. We set out to our CDNY hosts to enjoy community and contra dance.

Delightful Dancing

The Exec headed over to the advanced contra dance that was already in progress and jumped right in. Saturday's dances brought in talent from across the Atlantic. King Kontra, a rockin' band from the UK, made our feet fly. The first dance session ended all too soon for us, but our

dancing jitters were calmed by the promise of more dancing after dinner.

Community Discussion

During the dinner break the Exec Committee heard from members of the local dance communities. The enormity of the greater NYC area presents huge challenges, such as how to get sound equipment to a dance venue on public transportation, and on the flip side, great pleasures such as a wealth of musicians and callers. We learned about the rich tradition of song, dance and music in this area; Cecil Sharp would be so proud! Traditional dance forms are alive and well and newer forms such as gender free dances are taking root.

Some of the topics that came up in our discussion with the community were:

- NYC dances have a wide variety in dancers: all ages, genders, and experience levels, and are all working toward increasing the diversity, broadening the community, and enriching the dances.
- Intergenerational dancing has many benefits. We must remember that many of us like to partner with someone similar. Branching out, to dance with different partners, can bring up issues while also building respect and broadening the community. We need to be sensitive to each other's needs including our partner's agility, interest in flourishing, and any injuries we might have.
- How can we retain new dancers when the dances compete with a lively city's infinite creative, leisure-time offerings.
- How can we create a safe dance environment?
- How can we encourage each other to attend the other dances in our area?
- NYC has a wealth of talent and history, paired with youthful energy, a recipe for success!

Thanks to Jeff Bary as the overall weekend coordinator. A special thank you to Beverly Francis for her CDNY/CDSS history display posted at the Church of the Village dance hall and for her eloquent history presentation.

It's always good to know where your roots are: strong roots grow a mighty tree. New York is part of CDSS's mighty tree. It's where we started and it's a community that is continuing to thrive to be a part of the success of the next one hundred years. Thank you, New York, for your hospitality and warm welcome!