



## "A truly triumphant evening"

by Keith Murphy

For over ten years, Becky and I have been teaching what we call "Celtic music classes" at our local music school, the Brattleboro Music Center. These are not dance-focused classes, per se, but awhile ago we realized that it was a nice way to end our Sept–June year by having all our classes play together for a dance.

It's been a great assemblage of players of different ages and skill levels. It's a celebration of community that comes from relationships based on creating music in a larger group. Sometimes we have donated the financial proceeds of year-end events to a local cause. For the dance this past year, we realized we had the opportunity to offer our support to fiddler and contra caller icon David Kaynor, who was recently diagnosed with ALS.

By the time of our dance at the end of May, David had lost his ability to speak and had been having a lot of difficulties eating. He had lost a lot of weight and has been using various electronic means to participate in conversation. None of this kept him from the dance floor or from playing his fiddle! The fact that the dance was a benefit for David seemed to bring out dancers who we had not seen for many years at the Greenfield Grange. Among them were many leaders in the dance world—musicians and callers who themselves have been critical to the growth and enthusiasm for contra dancing around the country and beyond. (Connecticut dance caller Ralph Sweet came to the dance in a wheelchair and passed away a couple of weeks later at the age of 90.) The turnout was beautiful, though it would have taken a stadium to hold all the people whose lives have been touched by David.

Sometime in the mid to late 1980s, after attending Pinewoods Scottish Week, someone took me out to try contra dancing in Cambridge, MA. I can still picture the hall on that steamy summer's night—David was at the caller's mic. There was wild energy in the hall, but David anchored the night with a controlled clarity and humor. It was exhilarating, and I kept thinking about that night for months. It planted a seed of something I was excited to become a part of, and it was an important moment in my path towards working as a dance musician.

A little while later (before Becky and I had met), Becky was honing her skills as a contra dance fiddler and found herself drawn into the orbit of the Greenfield, MA dance scene. David and the band gave her a place to cut her teeth. Having David fiddling by her side at our recent benefit felt like a musical circle had been closed.

Before the dance, an online donation platform was created to allow people unable to attend to make a contribution.

By the time of the dance, thousands of dollars had come in, and after the dance donations continued to amass. The generosity of donors is first and foremost a reflection of the immense contributions that David has made to the world of contra dancing and music over the years. But the success of the event was also the result of the cooperation and support of several key entities. The Brattleboro Music Center created and managed the online donations (mainly Carol Compton) and publicized the event. Friends of the Grange also played a key part in spreading the word and managing the house on the night of the dance. Ray Sebold, a long-time member of the Greenfield dance community, recorded some video of the evening, capturing both the music on stage as well as the energy on the floor. It's a beautiful record of the people who made it out, including David himself dancing.

David has made such a profound and indelible imprint on the world of contra dancing and we owe him so much. We are all deeply saddened by the challenges that David is facing. It will not be an easy time ahead for him, and there will be many opportunities for people to show their love and support for David. It was a privilege to help create a moment to honor him and offer some financial support. I'll give him the last word, quoting a comment he left with the posting of Ray's video:

*"This video fills me with the sounds, sights, and spirits of a wonderful multi-generational, multi-backgrounded, multi-skill-level community band in which everyone, at every level, is learning, discovering growing, and having a terrific time doing it. Keith Murphy and Becky Tracy make it happen. Teaming up with dance teacher/caller Nils Fredland, they created a truly triumphant evening. While I'm quite pleased with myself for all the dancing I did, too much can never be said about...beautifully played music, and the connection with the people to whom it has brought...meaning, and joy."*