



## Puttin' on the Dance Session Notes

### “The Dancing We Do: Past, Present and Future”

With David Millstoné and Max Newman

Transcribed by: Catherine Elliott

#### **Contra history**

*(Hopefully this is accurate, folks! Check facts with David if you're interested)*

- **1651: English Dance manual first published**
  - some line dances
  - some with 2-3 couples
  - some circles
- **Late 1600s/early 1700s: Developed into long ways dances**
- **1803: The French Quadrilles (squares)**
  - Louisiana Purchase, so the Port of New Orleans is no longer French
  - Crisis! What does the dance program look like? Nobody knows! Riots in the streets! (Literally.)
  - A LAW is passed (ha!) establishing an appropriate ratio of squares to contras
- **19<sup>th</sup> Century: The Couples Dances**
  - polka, waltz
  - (gasp) “close dancing”
- **Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Country dancing really only found in the country**
- **AND THEN. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century REVIVALS!**
  - **1899: Cecil Sharp, Traditional English Dance, English Folk Dance Society**
  - **1915: CDSS**
  - **Mid 1910s: Nationalism kicks in, and we use dance as a way to teach American/Christian values to immigrants**
    - Becomes a fixture of physical education.
    - Henry Ford and teaching “true” New England dances
  - **Lloyd Shaw:**
    - Teacher-principal-superintendent in Colorado
    - Wanted activities that ALL people could participate in, regardless of their genetic makeup
    - Out of this came what we know of as the Western Squares
  - **Ralph Page**
    - 1930s, the “Dean” of New England callers
    - Post WWII in Boston area
    - Increased student involvement, GIs in Boston
  - **Dudley Laufman**
    - Check out David’s video about Laufman:  
<http://www.laufman.org/videofilms.htm>

- *Made a career out of “being a curmudgeon” (“and he does it well”)*
- *We owe contra as we know it to Mr. Laufman*
- *Called almost every night ME to CT*
- *Open bands*
- *See his influence in Chicago, Berkeley, Portland, NY, TX, Bloomington, Seattle, and more.*
- *Basically, he’s a cool guy and we should all know who he is.*
- *1980s: Big festivals with long lines, less of the inactive dancing. There are more people, so the choreography starts changing!*
- *1990s: Beckett formation, partners always active (swinging on the side). What does this mean for music? Well, dances are longer! Bands don’t want to play one song for the entire dance, so they start doing medleys!*

**Max speaks: Contradance NOW.**

- *At Harvard: Revival of the Outing Club Square Dance*
  - *People reliant on accessibility: When the NEFFA dance moved and people couldn’t walk to the dance anymore..... they stopped going. Needed a solution!*
  - *Saw evidence of these historical trends in the Harvard newspapers and documents about dances*
- *We are creating history by participating in this movement! (Max’s aHA! moment)*
  - *Doing old dances in old halls - that’s what they used to do!*
  - *Seeing ideas into action through CDSS*
  - *Meeting and playing with influential musicians*
  - *History is accessible, and we are actively creating it.*

**Aside:** *August 2012 is the 200 year anniversary of Hull’s Victory. David says EVERYONE should get a copy of Cracking Chestnuts, learn the stories, and do something to commemorate the*

**Some thoughts on music.**

*We had the benefit of listening to expertly picked selections to illustrate the trends discussed, below. Follow up with Max or David if you want more information!*

- *1920s: We have recordings (thanks to Elizabeth Burchenal) of tunes that people actually did*
  - *generally larger band sound*
  - *Canterberry Orchestra*
  - *Brattleboro Country Orchestra*
- *1930s: Technology! PA equipment late 30s, changes the game.*
  - *Singing squares (because the caller can participate more)*
  - *Smaller music groups, too*

- *Airplane: “Album that opened the floodgates.” So NOW. Boy, have we got it good, folks. Younger musicians, new sounds, varied sources of inspiration.*
  - *Wild Asparagus*
  - *Moving Violations*
  - *Giant Robot Dance*
  - *Elixir*
  - *Nightingale*
  - *Perpetual e-Motion (technology! Loops!)*
  - *Great Bear Trio*
  - *Double Apex*
- *Now: People are getting away from the fiddle tunes. Doing medleys, other additions. Creativity is piquing, and that’s exciting.*

***So, a couple reflections on history.***

- *History can be really surprising. There are things that seem old that are actually new (like contradances, even! They weren’t really publicized as the evening events we think of until the 1970s)*
- *Lots of things that seem new are actually pretty old (Did you know that Canterbury Orchestra had an electric guitar? Neither did I, but they did!)*

***And then a demo with two songs.***

- *The moves: long lines, almande, swing.*
- *The music*
  - *Song 1: more traditional*
  - *Song 2: more modern*

*What’s the conclusion? People dance to the music! People respond to music in similar ways, which means that the music we make matters. A lot.*

*David: the “meat and potatoes” of the songs are a recognizable tune and a beat. But are we getting away from that? What does it mean to go to DEFFA and get nothing but “spice”? What about the rise of the jam band, the semi-beatless tunes? Interesting developments.*

***Conclusion: Our roots matter to us, but they do not have to constrain us. We have a lot to learn from history, but we’re also living that history. So go forth and create!***