



Bay Area Country Dancer

No.79– Sept 2009

www.bacds.org

23rd Annual No Snow Ball ~ Contra Dance Extravaganza

Charlie Fenton

Once again, holiday cheer will fill the great hall at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Oakland on Saturday, December 5, at our annual festive contra dance. The 23rd annual No Snow Ball will feature the music of the Hillbillies from Mars plus perennial favorite Cathie Whitesides from Seattle. Santa Claus and "O Tinanbaum" Fields will call a premium selection of contras for your dancing pleasure.

In the words of one dancer:

"It is very magical to see both the familiar and unfamiliar people who make up this wonderful community dressed in such splendid attire; the flashing Christmas lights threaded in people's hair, the tuxedos, Scottish finery, Santa suits, sequins, crystals, and all the smiles.

"The hall itself is very stately, with a wonderful floor and lighting and so much space! The music was just great and the dances creative, challenging, and perfectly do-able. The food during the break is also very tempting and welcome, and I really appreciated the Channukah cookies!"

Delicious refreshments will be provided, but our buffet is made even more marvelous by the tasty potluck contributions from dancers. Please add one of your specialties to the table. Items for the special diets table (wheat free, sugar free, dairy free, etc.) are especially welcome.

A limited number of work exchange discounts are available for your participation on the Ball Committee (decorations, food preparation, setup, cleanup, etc.). Please email nosnowball@att.net.

Please bring your friends who are new to contra dancing at 7:00 pm for a free introductory workshop. Be sure to save the date for this contra dance ball.

23rd Annual No Snow Ball
December 5, 2009 7:30PM-11:30PM
Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Ascension
4700 Lincoln Ave., Oakland CA
\$25 General, \$21 members of CDSS and affiliates

The President's Corner



From the President: Summer is almost over, and so is another BACDS fiscal year. After so many years of repeating myself about declining attendance and fiscal losses, I'm pleased to report that things are looking brighter.

Most of our camps and weekends came out ahead this year. Fall Frolick, the English-only successor to Fall Weekend, was a great success. It filled completely and brought in a lot of money through the auction. The No Snow Ball did well. Spring Weekend lost money, but did much better than last year. It's now in the hands of a new and more energetic committee, so it may very well make money next year. The three summer camps, collectively, made money. Our new urban contra weekend, Balance the Bay, was a smashing success.

Much of our financial boost this year has come from donations. The auctions at Fall Frolick and the summer camps brought in well over \$10,000. Lynn Ackerson's dress boutique brought in nearly \$5,000. And then there are all the people who contributed to our Youth Scholarship program. I cannot thank you people enough.

Dance series attendance this year has been slightly better than last year. We won't be sure about the bottom line until all the numbers are in later this fall, but my guess is that we may be well into the black for this fiscal year.

More good news: we're doing a good job of laying the groundwork for the future. Young people are coming to our dances. The Berkeley contra youth contingent is one of the most noticeable things when you walk into the room. Last time I was there, the younger crowd was close to half of the attendance. The teenage crowd at Family Camp bonded so well that they are still getting together and coming to our regular contra dances. The people we've brought to camp on our Youth Scholarship programs (both the BACDS and CDSS programs) are continuing to contribute to our dance community.

And, I keep getting more and more people telling me, without being prompted, how friendly and welcoming our dances are. And (keep your fingers crossed) in the last few weeks, attendance at some of our contra dances has increased by more than 50% over the levels we've been seeing in the last few years. Is it a trend? It's still too soon to tell, but I'm optimistic.

Jens Dill



What a fabulous weekend it was!

Our second annual urban contra weekend was a tremendous success. It's a bit of a mind-numbing experience to have two hundred and forty people telling you what a great time they are having. Here are some of the highlights:

♪ **The music and calling:** We knew, going in, that they would be good. *Crowfoot* was awesome, and *Swing Farm* matched them. *Adina Gordon* and *Joyce Miller* kept us on our toes.

- ♪ **The dancing:** I saw dancers I've seen every week ratchet up their dance intensity by several notches. The callers threw some really tricky moves at us, especially in the contra medleys. Even when sets broke down, they reformed and were back on track in a round or two.
- ♪ **The welcoming atmosphere:** Our out-of-town guests were effusive about how friendly and welcoming we were; and how much fun they had staying with their hosts. Great job, folks.
- ♪ **The dinner:** Sarah Watts orchestrated a *massive* team effort to put together a Saturday dinner for 230 people with all kinds of dietary preferences and restrictions. I was privy to most of the planning, preparation, and background work, but I was still blown away by the final result. It surpassed all expectations. As Sarah herself said, "I also want to thank all of you for letting me, whom you barely knew, take on dinner at B-t-B....all I can say is... were you out of your &*+@#* minds??? er, I mean, it means a lot to me that you trusted (and supported) me to pull it off." She pulled it off.
- ♪ **The volunteers:** People stepped up and did what needed to be done. The high point was Sunday morning, when Sarah walked into Richard Powers' waltz workshop at the break and announced that we could serve dinner leftovers for lunch if some people would volunteer as kitchen crew, and *two dozen* people followed her out of the room. And, then, well, you see, the committee really didn't have any time before the weekend to *plan* the cleanup and teardown after the event. They just stepped up and did it. It was the smoothest and best-organized cleanup effort I've ever seen at a dance event of that size.
- ♪ **The committee:** The core committee was a joy to work with this year. The extended committee participated in E-mail discussions and took on jobs that didn't have to be done at meetings. Nearly everything ran so smoothly that the exceptions were easy to handle. See the *Volunteer Thanks* section for a list of names to be thanked, but I want to single out Kris Inman as the organizational genius who kept us all on track.
- ♪ **The newcomers:** Kevin Reilly called me to ask about registering for B-t-B *before* he'd attended his first contra dance. His wife, Cindy, had done just a little contra, and had convinced him to try it. I told him to go off to that Saturday's dance (and they live way out in the desert, so it was a long drive), and if he liked it, to register. Cindy and Kevin arrived as total novice dancers, and left as confident, experienced ones. I partnered Cindy through the medley on Sunday, and she did contra corners and men's chain without missing a beat.
- ♪ **The singing and spontaneous jamming:** The *kitchen crew* was singing while chopping vegetables. There was music everywhere.
- ♪ **The sense of community:** It was everything we had hoped for when we planned the event. We'll do it again. Mark your calendars for August 13-15 of next year. See you then.

Jens Dill, on behalf of the *Balance the Bay* Committee

Oakland 2nd Friday Contra is on Hiatus

The second-Friday contra dance that meets at Humanist Hall in Oakland is shutting down for the fall quarter, at least. The last dance at this location will be Friday, September 11, featuring calling by Chuck Galt and music by *An Drochaid*.

To the loyal supporters of this dance series, we're sorry. This series has a long and honored history, dating back to when Kirston Koths started it in 1980. But in recent years, it's been plagued by a series of changes of venue, rent increases, declines in attendance, and a noise ordinance that forces the dance to start and end too early. The last straw was a significant rent increase. Lynn Ackerson, the programmer, is tired of struggling uphill against these odds, and would prefer to take a break and hope that something new and different comes along to fill the gap. The Board concurs.

So we're looking for new ideas. The East Bay needs a new weekend contra dance series. We need to find a good hall and a date, and get an organizing committee together to promote it. Lynn's willing to sign on as programmer again. There are lots of ideas we could work with. This could be a youth dance, a family dance, a joint sponsorship with the Queer contra, or whatever you can think of. Brainstorming, anyone?

Upcoming Fall Events

Sep 18 – 20	Echo Summit (SCDS)	Seth Tepfer, Beth Molaro, <i>Latter Day Lizards</i> , <i>Contrazz</i>
Oct 16 – 18	Fall Frolic	Bruce Hamilton, Gary Roodman, Judy Erickson, Laura Me Smith, Sharon Green
Nov 21	Fall Ball	David Newitt
Dec 5	No Snow Ball	Santa Claus, O Tinabaum Fields with <i>Hillbillies from Mars</i>

See www.bacds.org for more information. For events sponsored by neighboring organizations, see www.nbcds.org (NBCDS), www.scds.ca (SCDS), www.sffmc.org (SFFMC), www.cccds.org (CCDS), santacruzdance.org (TDSC).

Monte Toyon Survey Results

Joyce Fortune

The Monte Toyon Spring Weekend committee thanks everyone who participated in our survey this June. An abrupt drop in sign-ups in 2008 led us to pursue some investigative work to determine the issues and find some answers.

315 dancers filled out and returned surveys about dance camp weekends at the Monte Toyon retreat center in Aptos, CA. 257 were surveyed at Contra dances and 58 at English dances, from Ukiah to Monterey. 187 of 315 had never attended a weekend (60%), with the percentage being higher among the Contra dancers (64%) than the English dancers (38%).

The reasons for not attending a Monte Toyon weekend were extremely varied, more than we had expected. Lack of information was the most common answer. 48% of those who had never attended a camp said they were too new, had never heard of it, or needed more information. This leads us to believe that publicity is more important than we realized.

Not surprisingly, time and money are the biggest hindrances to attending a dance weekend. 35% mentioned a time-related reason (too busy, other commitments) and 27% said camp was too expensive. While the cost of camp cannot be lowered given the cost of the venue and staff, there are subsidized camperships available thanks to generous donors who support work/trade and youth scholarship initiatives.

There were many write-in reasons that help give us ideas about what to improve at camp. Some things cannot really be changed (like the sleeping accommodations or people's personal hygiene), but some things we can work on, such as trouble getting partners, camp feeling cliquish, or preference for Contra or English dance only.

The survey asked what format people preferred for the weekend. The phrasing of the survey question was unclear, so responses were more difficult to interpret. Many people checked off more than one option, reflecting flexibility in people's preferences.

As expected, there was a section of the community that wanted contra-only. However, although 129 Contra dancers wanted all Contra, 96 wanted mixed or mixed plus other dances, so there is a certain push for variety. Of the 322 responses, 13% wanted English only, 42% wanted Contra only, and 45% wanted both English and Contra or both plus other dance types. The other dance types were waltz (20), swing (13), ballroom and couple dancing (11), square dancing (10), Scandinavian (9), international, folk, Israeli (7), Cajun (5), Scottish (3), Irish (3), polka (2), display (1), Morris (1), line dancing (1), blues (1), rock and roll (1), and Cha-Cha (1).

A question on the back of the survey asked those who had attended a dance weekend at Monte Toyon recently if they would attend again. The results were skewed by the fact that people who never attended answered this question. What seems relevant is that very few (10 of 74) said that they would not attend again (31 of 74 said yes, and 33 of 74 said maybe). Those responding "maybe" were asked about the deciding factors, and the answers were similar to the reasons why people didn't attend: money and time are the most important issues in our lives.

We also received a huge number of miscellaneous comments that are being carefully considered by the committee. As the camp program and schedule are finalized, we will be sure to keep you informed and hope to tempt you to the new and improved Spring Weekend at Monte Toyon in March of 2010. Thanks again for taking the time to share your thoughts. We appreciate everyone's help!

Volunteer Thanks

- ◆ Thanks to *Judy Rose Dornbush* and *Joyce Cooper*, who are stepping down after 7 years as managers of American Dance and Music Week, and to *Susan Petrick*, who has been the camp programmer for the last three years. The new leadership is coming together, and the camp *will* go on.
- ◆ Thanks to *Charlie Fenton* and *Robin Cohen* for all the work they have done as programmer and manager for Spring Weekend. Thanks to the new Spring Weekend Committee, headed by *Susan Gere* and *Joyce Fortune*, for picking up the ball and running with it. Thanks to *James Hutson* for stepping up to the role of programmer.
- ◆ Thanks to all who helped produce *Balance the Bay*: *Kris Inman, Sarah Watts, Jens Dill, David Garnick, Jody Distler-Dill, Joan Maramonte, Lynn Ackerson, Merrie Sennitt, Marty Brenneis, Kai Barnwell, Marcia Rosenblatt, Dina Rosenblatt, Yale Rosenblatt, Karen Fontana, Susan Pleck, Les James, Clark Cole, Andrea Veltman, Claire Tompkins, Moira Hill, Ann Brown, Diane Frank, Erik Ievins, Jim Strobe*, and more. This year's committee was tremendously well organized and just a joy to work with.
- ◆ Special thanks to the *Balance the Bay* dinner crew, headed by *Sarah Watts*. Chief cooks: *Dan Moore, Damiana Volpe, and Kai Barnwell*. Kitchen assistants: *Mary Schaefer, Tonnie Harris, Dick McGaugh, Harriet Frank, Lorra Gorrin, Greg Gorrin, Jana Dulava, Lorin Gillen, Carl Huntsberger*, and *dozens* more. Buying, prepping, transporting, cooking, and serving was a *ton* of work. The dinner was over-the-top fabulous, and we had it for lunch the next day, too.
- ◆ Thanks to *Tom Colton*, who is stepping down as manager for English Week, and to *Loretta Guarino Reid*, who is stepping up.
- ◆ Thanks to *Sharon Green* for initiating and spearheading the BACDS Youth Scholarship program.
- ◆ Thanks to *Lynn Ackerson* for all the buying, washing, ironing she does for her dress boutique. It's come to be our single biggest fund-raiser. And she does *all* the work.
- ◆ Also thanks to *Lynn Ackerson, Marty Brenneis, Ethan Weker, Lauren Maniere, Kathryn Hughes*, and all who have tried to keep the Oakland contra dance going in Humanist Hall.
- ◆ Thanks to *Craig Johnson* for his quick handling of the insurance certificate for the California Ale, and to *Ric Goldman* for acting as the liaison between the Ale and the BACDS Board.
- ◆ Thanks to all who helped make Family Week such a success, and for the teenagers who are keeping the spirit alive even after camp is over.

A Tale of a Musical Scholarship

This summer, BACDS was pleased to grant a scholarship to Owen Ragland so that he could attend Family Week. Owen's correspondence shows the process and the criteria for camp scholarships, and is a wonderful example of how BACDS supports and nurtures our young musicians.

First, Owen applied for the Jude Biggs Scholarship with the following letter.

Dear Bay Area Country Dance Society Board,

My name is Owen Ragland. I am 13 years old. I have always loved music. I've played violin since I was five. I'm now thirteen. I have always liked fiddle tunes better than the Suzuki I had to practice. About six months ago I picked up the guitar. I like it a lot and practice at least two hours a day. My brother Duncan plays violin, my mom plays banjo, and my dad plays mandolin and guitar, so we have a very musical family. We play Bluegrass and old time music as the Ragland Family Band. We have played at the Pincrest Amphitheater, Stage 3 Theatre, the Sonora Public Library, and several events at the Sierra Waldorf School, including Contra Dances called by Sue and Wayne Mullen.

I would like to go to this camp so I can learn new fiddle tunes, meet new people, and jam all night long. I hope you will consider me for the Jude Biggs scholarship.

Sincerely,

Owen Ragland

Next, Sue Endter and Wayne Mullen sponsored Owen by writing the following letter to the BACDS board.

Dear Bay Area Country Dance Society Board,

Wayne Mullen and I would like to nominate Owen Ragland for your young musician scholarship. We have known Owen and his family for many years. He plays fiddle and now is learning guitar. Both of his parents play music and his brother plays as well. He has played for several community contra dances that we have called and has done an excellent job. He is eager to learn and is enthusiastic about the possibility of coming to camp. We realize that he is young but he has already demonstrated talent and the willingness to work hard to improve his musicianship.

We think that through this scholarship he will learn new skills, gain confidence and continue to play for Waldorf schools events, community dances and public performances. We believe that Owen's participation in camp will benefit family camp, help provide a musician for our local dance group, and most important, invest in Owen's future as a musician.

Thank you for the consideration of our request. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you need more information regarding our request.

Sincerely,

Susan Endter and Wayne Mullen

After Owen attended camp, he followed up with this thank you note to the board.

Dear BACDS Board & Family Camp Committee,

I came to camp on a music scholarship. I would never have come if it hadn't been free but now I will be coming back every year. On the way to camp I was nervous because I'm not usually the best at making friends but the teens took me in and I became part of the family. Before I came, I remember thinking "I can't wait to play but I hope I don't have to dance." Now as well as picking up some great fiddle and guitar tips from guys like Ray Bierl, I love to dance! Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Owen Ragland

P.S. I love the Beatles.

Jens Dill, President of the Board, wrote Owen the following note.

Owen,

I received your thank-you letter in the mail today, and I'm passing it along to the Family Week Committee and the BACDS Board. I'm so glad that everything worked out so well.

It's wonderful to know that the music and dance traditions we love are being passed on to a new generation that will adapt them to its own needs, and pass them on again. Someday, you may find yourself in Ray Bierl's place, passing on tips to another promising young musician. Thanks for carrying on the tradition.

Jens Dill
BACDS President

BACDS is proud of the way our youth is beginning to join in and participate in the country music and dance traditions we've all enjoyed for so many years. Offering the Jude Biggs scholarship to enthusiastic and talented young musicians like Owen warms our hearts and yields results we may never be able to fully measure.

This issue was edited by Julie Thomas and Loretta Guarino Reid. Send corrections to caljuliet@comcast.net.
Deadline for *Winter Dancer*: Nov 15. Send submissions to caljuliet@comcast.net. Please join the conversation.