



Bay Area Country Dancer

No.80 – Dec 2009

www.bacds.org

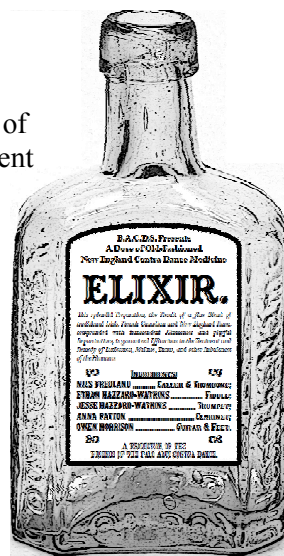
Take the Cure! Elixir is in town January 14

Come on down to Mountain View on Thursday night, January 14, for a dose of Old-fashioned Contra Dance Medicine. This splendid Preparation, the Result of a fine Blend of traditional Irish, French Canadian, and New England tunes, compounded with transcendent Harmonies and playful Improvisations, is guaranteed Efficacious to the Treatment and Remedy of Listlessness, Malaise, Ennui, and other Imbalances of the Humours.

Elixir consists of Nils Fredland calling and playing trombone, Ethan Hazzard-Watkins on fiddle, Jesse Hazzard-Watkins on trumpet, Anna Patton on clarinet, and Owen Morrison on guitar and feet. They have generously made time to play a dance for us on the Thursday before they appear at *Contra Carnivale*.

This is a special dance organized by the Friends of the Palo Alto Contra. It starts a little earlier than usual (7:30 instead of 8:00), and it costs a bit more (we couldn't get our regular hall and have to pay a higher rent). But even at \$12 (\$14 for non-members, \$7 for students), it'll be a bargain. Come to the S.F.V. Lodge in downtown Mountain View, 361 Villa Street, near Calderon, just a few blocks from the Caltrain station and the restaurants on Castro Street.

Mark your calendar for Thursday, January 14. *Dance your way to health and balanced humours*



Spring Fling

Formerly known as "Spring Weekend"

Have you become wedded to a country dance style? Those loops and twirls may do it for you week after week, but do you ever wonder what is waiting just beyond the horizon?

Have a fling. Go on, you know you want to find out what it's all about in those other worlds. Where better than at a mixed dance weekend?

You can always be faithful to your chosen routine; with two tracks, everyone's favorite should be available nonstop. Or sneak out for a quick encounter with the Other Kind. We won't tell.

This year's dance weekend in March at Monte Toyon has an amazing lineup of talent from all points of the compass- musical as well as geographical. Want to try hot English... to a cool Contra band? How about amazing American to a sizzling Scottish(english/contra/waltz) band?! Our musicians are so multi-talented, you may not know *what* style you are dancing--only that it is fabulous.

Our program for Spring Fling is designed to obscure the distinctions in our heads and spread our wings over new territories. Our 'playshops' will teach style and skills, including how to be a welcoming/enabling experienced dancer.

Come enjoy three of the best fiddlers in the country (Ryan McKasson, David Knight, and Kevin Carr) for a country dance weekend that will dazzle you. We'll throw in a wee taste of Scotch with Bruce Hamilton, and for a special treat, discover Tony Elman, creator of Mokale--"a magical journey into the world of rhythm and song."

See more detailed descriptions of our staff and program at bacds.org/springfling, or via Facebook group 'Spring Fling at Monte Toyon'. Hope to see you there!

Palo Alto Contra Dance Revitalization

You may have heard rumors and rumblings that the Palo Alto Contra Dance is going through a revitalization process. A group of about two dozen local dancers came together over a scrumptious potluck meal on September 25 to discuss and plan how to breathe new life into this cherished but flagging event. As a result, the dance is now run by a collection of committees with over 20 members. Six managers rotate the job and by encouraging door-sitting make it less of a burden on any one person. The programming committee, also consisting of a half dozen members, enjoys a lively debate about talent available to us and is diligently planning a fabulous first quarter of 2010. The dance now offers potluck snacks throughout the evening and a publicity committee is working on projects to reach out to the general community and reach in to the dance community to let everyone know what a great place Palo Alto Contra dance is. The job of sound tech is also being shared among several people, which, along with all the other collaboration going on, is leading to a feeling of ownership in the dance and excitement about the future of this great local dance.

Among other upcoming events, we have a special dance programmed for January 14 with Elixir and at the Portugese Hall in Mountain View.

We hope to see you in Palo Alto soon for one of our energetic, exciting Saturday nights.

I Thought I Knew How to Call

By Laila Lewis

I thought I was a pretty good caller, and I was on my way to being a better caller, but until recently, I didn't realize just how much more I still have to learn. I confess, I had almost started to let my calling slip into a routine and was wondering if there was anything more to know. But then, I had an experience that kicked me off my comfy plateau and made me see what I have to do to rise to the next level.

Thanks to a generous Youth Scholarships granted to me this year by the Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) and the Bay Area Country Dance Society (BACDS), I was able to attend the Callers' Mini-Course that was part of the BACDS American Dance and Music Week in the Mendocino Woodlands. I highly recommend the course, which was led by Lisa Greenleaf with the assistance of Lynn Ackerson, to any callers who want to improve their skills. As a caller, I learned more than I would have thought possible.

The music and dance camp itself is also a great experience, and CDSS is willing to fund half of the cost for young dancers to attend. Usually, the young dancer's local organization contributes the remaining half, but unfortunately, my local group, Tucson Friends of Traditional Music (TFTM), was unable to contribute the funds for me. In an effort to foster young performers like myself, BACDS graciously stepped in and contributed part of their scholarship fund to me. Judging from all I learned, I'd say they got their money's worth.

When Lisa Greenleaf says her Callers' Mini-Course is "intensive," she is absolutely not kidding. I'd taken callers' workshops many times before. I'd been lucky enough to do week-long courses twice before. But I'd never done anything like this.

I suppose the fact that I had to fill out a separate, lengthy application to get into one of the six spots in the course might have been a clue. And, although I had received an email a couple weeks in advance telling me to prepare one of the attached dances ahead of time, or, even that Lisa had included a supplementary notice in the camp registration packet to the callers describing the rigors to come, I still didn't quite understand what I had gotten myself into.

That first afternoon before dinner, as I looked over my schedule, I saw that only three of the five periods were taken up with the Callers' Course. Really, that would only be a 4.5 hour investment of time per day; I would have plenty of time and energy to other things, such as afternoon workshops during my free periods, or so I thought.

Bright and early the first morning after breakfast, the six of us stumbled into the cold, dark Camp House and huddled over our cups of coffee. I recognized a couple familiar faces, including my friend from Flagstaff, Deb Comly; but others were unfamiliar to me. We dragged over some benches and huddled some more in front of the smoky fire. Lisa didn't waste any time. She had us introduce ourselves, and then handed out some papers. One said "Sunday Homework" across the top. Homework? At a dance camp? Someone else voiced my disbelief, "We have *homework*?"

"Yes, I'll talk about that later. But first, let's get moving!" said Lisa brusquely. "Take a partner, line up, take hands four." We made a six-person contra set, with quite a few semi-stifled yawns and bleary-eyed blinks. I volunteered to be the first to teach a dance.

Lisa laid down the rules: No more than one walk-through. No demos. Pretend we're a mixed-level crowd. Use the fewest number of words possible.

I took a deep breath and tried to teach the dance. Now, I consider myself a reasonably competent teacher. But Lisa, imitating new dancers she had seen during her career, ceaselessly found perfectly logical ways to do what I said, rather than when I meant. The other callers picked up on this and set about finding other likely misinterpretations. It felt just like talking to a room of total beginners -- except

that beginners don't talk back and tell you, "I got confused when you said _____; I needed to hear _____."

The process continued with me and then with the other callers. My analytical side was immensely pleased as we talked through each move in slow motion, describing what the dancers were actually doing, and then paring down the description to only the most necessary words. Once we had the perfect verbiage, the caller behind the mic at the moment would teach it again, fresh, and I marveled at how clear the instruction became.

Over and over, Lisa would say, "Where am I facing? Who is this person here (partner or neighbor)? Allemande, circle, etc. UNTIL...? Give me a direction! 'You're going to...' is not a direction!" Throughout the week, these kernels of wisdom were drilled into us.

Additional dancers and the band came to join us later in the morning, and we continued working. Before I knew it, the lunch bell tolled, and Lisa was explaining our homework. Every day, our homework included reading a handout, preparing a dance for the mandatory open mic, preparing a dance for class the next morning, and at least one other task. One day, the other task was to interview at least two musicians, and it was highly recommended that we inquire about their "caller pet-peeves." Boy, did that one lead to an earful! The most common complaint was about callers who become an uninvited member of the band with their percussion instruments, singing contras, or clogging board. I guess I'll never do that, then.

I never did make it to a non-calling-related afternoon session. I spent my free time meticulously picking over teaching language for new dances with other callers, or conducting various interviews, or simply lying down and letting all the new information spin through my head. Even during the evening dance, I found it hard to deactivate my brain. I couldn't stop paying attention to the language that came out of the mic as Lisa and the other professional callers, Linda Leslie and Chris Bischoff, taught the dances. The closest I got to a break were a few games of Cribbage fit in before meals.

I didn't even realize how thoroughly absorbing the course was until it ended Friday afternoon, and I went to the first evening dance in a week where I was actually FREE! I finally let loose and, just for one night, danced myself into the ground with my brain in the "off" position. After a week's hard work, it felt immensely rewarding. Since I didn't have to be coherent the following morning, I went to my first after-dance party of the week, and in the same small room where six callers had toiled away their mornings for a week, 20 or 30 dancers and musicians crowded in and jammed and couple-danced the night away, finishing the half-empty bottles of leftover wine from dinner (only for frugality's sake, I'm sure). I had my break, finally. But it wouldn't be long before I started thinking about calling again.

I came away from the Callers' Mini-Course stuffed to the brim with new ways to approach calling, and feeling like it would take me months to really integrate everything. With excitement over having something new to work on, and with a loud mental groan as I realized the process of improvement is never-ending, I came back to Tucson and started planning what to call at the Ghost Town Chill Down dance camp the very next weekend. I nitpicked the teaching language and privately vowed to myself that I would get through the weekend without ever doing more than one walk-through. Already, the Callers' Course had left its mark on me. The change must have been apparent to others, too, for after calling the Chill Down, I received enthusiastic comments on the dramatic improvement in my calling. I plan to continue to integrate what I learned, and not let myself slide lazily into a rut again. If I can do that, I will be able to give the dancers a better experience, and then BACDS/CDSS's investment in me will be repaid many times over in dancers' enjoyment.

The President's Corner



From the President: It's nice to be able to report good financial news. BACDS turned a profit in the past fiscal year, although not enough to erase the losses of the last two years. Most of the increase in income came from camps and special events, which is greatly to the credit of the volunteers who put in the energy and hard work to make them succeed. Regular dance attendance is creeping back up about as slowly as it was drifting downward before. It's too soon to tell if it's a long-term trend, but there's room for hope.

About half of last year's profits came from a single source: Lynn Ackerson's dress bazaar. For those of you who don't know, some years ago Lynn started buying and donating dance dresses, shirts, and skirts to be sold as a fundraiser for American Dance and Music Week. She buys the clothes at yard sales and thrift shops wherever she goes, carts them all home, launders them, irons them, and stores them in her back yard. She has set up her dress bazaar at American Week, English Week, the FaultLine Frolic, and Balance the Bay, and who-knows-how-many other places. It's a tremendous effort, and it raises big money. We cannot thank her enough.

Another bit of good news is that the Palo Alto contra dance has a new management committee, the Friends of the Palo Alto Contra. About two dozen people attended a meeting in September convened by Joyce Fortune, to brainstorm ways of breathing new life into their local contra dance, which is, perhaps, the longest-running contra dance in California. The result was phenomenal. Five committees came out of the meeting: management, programming, publicity, sound, and food, all eager to jump into action. Their enthusiasm is generating a *lot* of E-mail traffic as all these new volunteers learn the ropes. If you are interested in joining the E-mail discussion (or getting involved), visit <http://bacds.org/mailman/listinfo/friends-of-pa-contra> and sign yourself up.

One obstacle the Palo Alto contra committee faces is the bad rap the dance is getting in some parts of our dance community. There are people who are actively bad-mouthing the Palo Alto contra, and discouraging others from attending. I've also heard people say good things about this dance, including that it's friendlier than some of the others in the area. But positive gossip somehow never seems to travel as fast or as far as negative gossip. Everyone has personal likes or dislikes. I know I do. If you are avoiding the Palo Alto dance because of your own personal experience, that's your business. If you care to, by all means let me know (off the record) so any problems can be addressed. If, however, you are listening to rumor, you really ought to come check it out for yourself. And if you are asked to recommend one dance over another on the same evening, there are plenty of ways to do so without being disparaging to either.

~ Jens Dill, BACDS President, bacds-president@bacds.org

Volunteer Thanks

- ♪ Thanks to *Paula Wolfson* for coming up with the idea of the January 14 Elixir dance and making it happen. We need more people to just step forward as she did and say "We really ought to do this special dance, and I can help make it happen." Thanks also to *Bill Ward* for putting together that fantastic flyer.
- ♪ Thanks to *Bill Ward* and *Valerie Neer* for applying their FaceBook publicity skills to BACDS dances, as well as Hayward and Santa Cruz dances.
- ♪ Thanks to *Merrie Sennett* for re-starting the hall search effort for the 2nd Friday East Bay contra dance.
- ♪ Thanks to *Bruce Hamilton* for stepping into *Bill Bryg's* shoes as Playford Ball Chair so that we can get *Bill* and *Cathy Bryg* back as food co-chairs.
- ♪ Thanks to the *Fall Ball* committee for putting on such a splendid ball this year, and to *David Newitt* for putting together such a fabulous program.
- ♪ Thanks to the *Fall Frolick* committee for running yet another successful English Dance weekend at Monte Toyon. The camp auction raised close to \$2000 for our Youth Scholarship Fund.
- ♪ Thanks to *Sharon Green* and her committee for planning the upcoming CDSS Lifetime Achievement Award presentation for *Chuck Ward* (Sunday, March 28, 2010 at St Clement's Church in Berkeley).
- ♪ Thanks to *Joyce Fortune* for organizing the Friends of Palo Alto Contra committee and guiding the community into supporting and running its local contra dance. And thanks to *James Tank* for supporting her behind the scenes.
- ♪ Thanks to *Diane Zingale* and *Eric Black* for keeping the Palo Alto contra dance going for so long, rebuilding it when it lost attendance, and supporting the efforts of the new committee to make it even better.
- ♪ Thanks to everyone on the *Friends of Palo Alto Contra* committee for taking Joyce's lead and running with it so well that Diane and Eric don't have to stick around for the end of the dance unless they want to.
- ♪ *I can't possibly remember all the people who need to be thanked for their efforts. If I fail to mention someone, let me know, and I'll add them next time.*

Other Notes

With "heavy hearts," *Celia Ramsay* and *Carlo Calabi* have decided to close down the Napa Valley Contra dance, due to declining attendance. By the time this is in the mail, the final dance party will have happened.

On the bright side, we can look forward to gaining two "new" dancers this spring. *Joyce Cooper* and *Joan Maramonte* both underwent knee replacement surgery this fall, are recovering well, and looking forward to returning to the dance floor.

News from Family Week

Come join us at Family Week this summer, July 4-10, at the Foothill Horizons Camp in Sonora, CA. Learn something new, and spend a great week with your kids (or even without your kids!). We'll have Brazilian percussion with Kim Atkinson, English and ceilidh dancing with Michael Barraclough, medeival woodworking with Julian Shaw, border morris with Julie James and assorted silliness with Susan Michaels and Kalia Kliban. Contrasts! Singing! Body Rhythm! Stiltwalking! There will be fabulous music as well, with a cast of new and old Family Week favorites. Full staff lineup and preliminary schedule to come soon at familydancecamp.org.

Mendocino English Dance and Music Week

The magnificent Mendocino Woodlands will soon come alive with dancing, music-making, singing, feasting, and merry abandon. Join us for a wide range of English Country Dance classes, Baroque dance, a complete music track, and a longsword class for all.

We have two international stars sharing English country dance: Andrew Shaw and Bruce Hamilton. Both highly regarded teachers are back to English week by popular demand, with Andrew celebrating the recent release of his latest book of dances, *Farnicle Huggy*.

For display dance, Kaila Kliban will present a new style of longsword, with dances designed to be performable by pickup groups as well as established teams. Kaila will also bring her sense of fun to the picnic in the meadow and many other camp activities through the wee hours of night.

Carol Marsh will teach Baroque styling for ECD as well as a class exploring the impacts of English dance migrating across the channel.

We have a fabulous line up of musicians led by the amazing multi-instrumentalist, Jim Oaken, English Dance and Music Week 2010 program director. Bare Necessities—Peter Barnes (winds, piano), Mary Lea (fiddle), Earl Gaddis (fiddle), and Jacqueline Schwab (piano)—will treat us to their unique sound. To round out the music staff we have local favorites Shira Kaman (fiddle, duck call), Jon Berger (fiddle, melodeon), and Rebecca King (piano). Look (listen) for wonderful music for classes and evening dances as well as a full schedule of music workshops for all levels.

There will be many camper-led activities such as the Morris tour and pub sing in town, campers’ night dance, parties, picnic in the meadow, and a plethora of late night dancing and jamming opportunities. The

Back Porch Gathering features staff and camper performances, stories, jokes and more.

We are delighted to continue our successful matching scholarships from the Country Dance and Song Society. Targeted for campers age 18-30, CDSS will match three local groups who want to send a budding caller, musician, or community leader to camp.

Check out the website (www.bacds.org/eweek) to get details and a registration form. We hope to dance, sing, and play with you at camp!

Brooke Friendly (OR)

Bay Area Country Dance Society

American Dance and Music Week

... Movement Afoot

JULY 3-10, 2010

at the Mendocino Woodlands
in the Coastal Redwoods
of Northern California

OUTSTANDING MUSIC

The Avant Gardeners: Laura Light,
George Paul & Jubal Creech with
Alice & Al White

The Figments: Anna Patton, Ethan
Hazzard-Watkins & Owen Morrison

CONTRAS AND SQUARES

Scott Higgs,
Cis Hinkle &
Gaye Fifer

COUPLE DANCING

Matthew Duveneck &
Anna Gilbert

STORYTELLING &
PERCUSSION

Jubal Creech

JAMORAMA

Given Harrison

SOUND

Marty Brenneis

SIMPLE PLEASURES
CATERING

Tod Nysether

For more information,
go to www.bacds.org/amweek
or contact Deb Comly, Registrar <amweek2010@amweek.org>, (928) 774-5936

REGISTRATION OPENS JANUARY 30, 2010

Upcoming Winter Events

Dec 26–Jan 2	Avant Gardners Northern California Tour	(NBCDS, BACDS, TDOGS, SFBQCD, MCDC)
December 31	NBCDS New Years’ Eve Contra Dance	Andy Wilson, with the Avant Gardeners
December 31	SCDS New Years’ Eve Contra Dance	Joyce Miller with Swing Farm
December 31	New Years' Eve English Dance	Bob Fraley
January 14	Special Contra Dance with Elixir	(Friends of the Palo Alto Contra) Nils Fredland
January 15-19	Contra Carnivale (CCCDs) (full)	George Marshall, Nils Fredland, Warren Blier
January 16	Seattle Ball (www.seattleball.org)	Scott Higgs
March 6	Playford Ball Workshop, East Bay	Bob Fraley, Kalia Kliban
March 7	Playford Ball Workshop, Roseville	Alan Winston, Lise Dyckman
March 14	Playford Ball Workshop, Peninsula	Bruce Hamilton, Sharon Green
March 19-21	Spring Fling	Seth Tepfer, Tom Roby, James Hutson
March 26	Playford Ball Rehearsal	Brad Foster
March 27	Playford Ball	Brad Foster

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

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