



# Bay Area Country Dancer

No.117– March 2019

[www.bacds.org](http://www.bacds.org)

## Magic!

*By Edna Wallace*

What happens when you put a rabbit into a hat and wave a black wand over the hat? Nothing! The rabbit just looks up at you, a bit annoyed. Unless of course you're a magician. Then magic happens. The rabbit disappears. I don't know how that works. But if you break it down, if you learn the trick, you'll learn there's sleight of hand and illusions at play. That's what they tell me.

What happens when you put a bunch of ordinary-looking people, all shapes, sizes, and ages, together in a dance hall with polished wooden floors and snack trays in the back? Not much. The people greet each other, pick at the laid-out snacks, hug. Some are nice-looking, others not. There are grey-haired elderly folks and fuchsia-haired young ones. There are men and women in skirts—long peasant skirts or short brightly sequined purple skirts—or in loose dancing pants or shorts and a T-shirt. There are teens. There are people with knee braces or wrist wraps. Some of the dancers have potbellies; others are slim and lithe. There are some who are extremely tall, others who are shorter than I am (and I'm not tall). But they all take shoes out of a bag and change out of the ones they walked into the hall in. These shoes are black dancing shoes or sturdy sneakers or slippers. Some of the people go barefoot.

Then it changes. Everything changes. What happens, you may ask? Well, the dancers ask one another for the first dance and start lining up in the hall. The musicians on the little stage at the front of the hall prepare their instruments. There's a banjo and a trombone and a fiddle and a bass and a harmonica and an instrument that looks like a cooking pan with a square drumstick. The caller introduces the name of the dance and then gives the dancers the basic moves of this particular dance. Then the music starts, slowly at first, then gathering speed like an avalanche gathers snow on its way down. You're contra dancing.

What happens is that you balance and swing, you do-si-do, you do a round robin, you promenade, you do a right shoulder turn melting down into a swing, a left-handed star, a circle left, an ladies' allemande right, a California twist, a gents' allemande, a ladies' chain with a courtesy turn, a box-the-net, a right-handed star, a half or full hay-for-four, a pass-through, a ricochet, a petronella turn ... not, of course, in that order. You make the moves that the caller calls. You form long lines and balance or short waves and balance. You progress up the line. You forget one move and recover, with a short, smiling apology to your partner. You remember "better never than late." You've got to know what you're doing. It's fast. It's relentless. You can't think. This IS your exercise in mindfulness.

It doesn't matter that the guy you've partnered with for the first dance is potbellied, that there's a definite whiff of sweat in the room, that the next people in line have switched roles so that the girl is playing the gents' role and the guy is playing the ladies' role (or that they switch back again, mid-dance, and back again later in the line). It doesn't matter that the guy coming at you is ugly or cute or that the girl is smiling or stern, correcting your step. Every one moment of connection is over in a flash. You keep moving up or down the line. You keep smiling or laughing or twirling or sashaying. You're moving fast all the time ... face it, you're high.

When I'm contra dancing, I'm transported to a Coney Island roller-coaster ride. I'm transported, period. What happens is pure magic. I don't know how that works. But it works. With Contra Dancing, anywhere, especially when the hall is full, the music fiery, the dancers wild, it happens, that magic. And I'm in, all the way in!

## Annual ContraWaltz – April 19, 2019

*By Scott Gamble*

(Note: this event, although produced with approval by the BACDS board of directors, is not a BACDS event.)

The 8<sup>th</sup> annual ContraWaltz takes place on April 19, 2019 at the First United Methodist Church.

A ContraWaltz is made up of a called contra dance, then a waltz, then a one step (or polka or mixer), repeated 8 times during the evening.

We have many regular Friday Night Waltz dancers and very many dancers from the Bay Area Country Dance Society. The waltzers benefit from skilled contra dancers, and the contra dancers benefit from the skilled waltz dancers. A happy time for all. Meet over 100 new dancers!

Our caller is Susan Petrick, and our band is StringFire. There will be a one-hour introductory contra dance class for our social dancers from 8 to 9pm by Susan Petrick in the Kohlstedt hall (downstairs, take the elevator to the Lower Level); additionally, Richard Powers teaches introductory One Step from 7:15 to 8:00 and introductory Rotary Waltz from 8:00 to 9:00. Afterwards, the dancing will run from 9 to midnight.

Admission: \$15 general; \$13 for BACDS members with membership card; and \$10 for students under 25 (with ID).

Delicious snacks include: shrimp platter, veggie platter, fruit platter, several artisan ice creams, raspberry cheesecake, chocolate cake, grapes, M&Ms.

Ice cream tasting: Many unique ice creams from famous Fentons Ice Creamery, including Rocky Road (which was invented by Fentons). Other flavors are Apple Pie, Banana Nut, Black Walnut, Blackberry, Blueberry, Butter Pecan, Cappuccino, Cinnamon Coconut, Dark Chocolate, Raspberry Twist, Egg Nog, Green Tea, Lemon, Light Mango, Maple Nut, Peppermint, Pineapple, Light Pomegranate, Raspberry Swirl, Rum Raisin, Spumoni, and Toasted Almond.

<http://contrawaltz.com/>

Friday Night Waltz: <http://www.FridayNightWaltz.com>

## President's Corner

By Kevin Goess

*And one came and said to him, "Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may be saved?"*

*And he told the young man, "Well, try keeping the commandments."*

*"Which ones?" asked the man.*

*"You know. Don't murder, don't commit adultery or steal, don't lie, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself."*

*He kept at him, asking "I've done all that since I was a youth. What else should I do?"*

*"Have you considered joining the board of a local nonprofit?"*

Yes, your friendly neighborhood BACDS has a Board. Somebody has to keep the lights on. There are about a dozen of us, we meet once a month, it's very pleasant.

Do you have ideas? Opinions on how things should be run? Changes you'd like to make? Things you'd like to see fixed? Think about joining the Board!

Do you like things just the way they are? Do you want to make sure these newfangled changes don't upset the applectart? Do you want to keep these dances you love so much going just like this forever? Think about joining the Board!

Do you want to brainstorm ideas to get more dancers to the dances? Do you want to see more young people at the dances? Are you worried that the army of volunteers that make all this happen aren't getting the credit and appreciation they deserve? Does the thought of the pianos drifting out of tune keep you up at night? Do you feel driven to make sure the camps are counting their income and expenses in the right buckets? Think about joining the Board!

Really, this is a terrible way to recruit board members, writing a generic column in the quarterly newsletter. The more effective way would be for current board members to find likely victims, and buttonhole them one-on-one. But your current President (that would be me) is a hopeless introvert and a social lummock, so this may be all the prodding you're going to get. Help replace him! Think about joining the Board!

Meetings are open, come to one! Talk to a current Board member--ask around, they shouldn't be too hard to find. This ball that Brad Foster started rolling something like forty years ago has a momentum of its own, but somebody needs to give it an occasional prod. That could be you!

## Musician's Workshop With Buddy System

By Audrey Knuth

Hey everyone, we're really excited to have BACDS sponsor a musician's workshop, led by some incredible musicians next month: Julie Vallimont (MA) and Noah VanNorstrand (NC).

**What:** Musician's Workshop hosted by Julie Vallimont (piano/accordion) and Noah VanNorstrand (fiddle/feet) of Buddy System.

**When:** Thursday March 21st. Doors open at 6:30. Workshop from 7:00-9:00pm

**Where:** The Gorrin's House in Berkeley. Space is limited, so please RSVP at [audreylk24@gmail.com](mailto:audreylk24@gmail.com) and we'll send you the address.

**Cost:** Suggested donation of \$20.

Feel free to bring a snack to share!

**Facebook event:**

<https://www.facebook.com/events/220692228882532/>

"What are the elements of being a good dance musician? We'll learn a tune and talk about rhythm, groove, chords, variations, dynamics, etc. And we'll explore ways to match contra tunes and dances, and to adapt your playing to fit the dance. From the perspective of both melody players and rhythm players. The workshop can be tailored to fit the interests of the participants, so bring your questions. Callers welcome, too!"

<https://www.buddysystemband.com>

**Note:** Don't forget to see and Dance to them on Wednesday March 20th and the regular Wednesday Contra Dance: [https://bacds.org/series/contra/berkeley\\_wed/](https://bacds.org/series/contra/berkeley_wed/)



## Berkeley Wednesday Contra Open Mic Night

*by Yoyo Zhou*

On Wednesday night, February 20, 2019, we had the first open mic callers night in several years in Berkeley. I brought together five callers of varying experience levels -- all of whom had some prior calling experience, some of whom have called an entire evening, but none of whom is (yet) a household name on the BACDS calendar -- who got experience teaching and calling one or two dances (some of which they had choreographed themselves) to our usual mixed crowd of brand-new and more experienced dancers. Practicing in front of a live audience is the surest way for callers to improve their skills, receive immediate feedback, and grow their comfort zones, and it was a great experience for all involved. The dancers had fun too but gave me some constructive feedback as well, about which I'll discuss more later.

Back in 2012, when I was getting started as a caller, there were more scheduled opportunities for new callers to call for a regular dance crowd: Hayward contra's community night had signups for callers, and Berkeley contra had regular open mics on 5th Wednesdays, and both of these were valuable to me at the time. But over time, these scheduled opportunities went away; as the interest from newer callers decreased, the dance organizers couldn't keep them going. Personally, I think these things come and go in phases, but right now, we're seeing renewed interest in calling. And as a community, we should encourage our newer callers to develop, carrying on our dance traditions while bringing their own perspectives. I'd be glad to see other open mics (or similar) happen around the Bay Area.

For some food for thought, the Philadelphia (Mt. Airy) contra regularly bills the schedule as "Main Caller Name with other callers" if the main caller isn't visiting from out-of-town. The expectation there is that the main caller always has a couple of "guest spots" open for up-and-coming callers to have a chance to practice.

### \*Coordinating Open Calling\*

As the coordinator, your job is to put together a program of dances, much as you would if you yourself were calling the evening, with the challenge that each caller will have their own preferred dances to call, and they may have a shared love of, say, Petronella dances. I wrote this advice with contra in mind, but you can apply most of it to ECD as well.

To make sure you get a good caller turnout, advertise to reach those you don't know and reach out directly to those you do. (For Berkeley, we put the open mic, along with my name and contact info, in the BACDS calendar as well as social media, and I asked everyone I knew who'd ever expressed interest or done it in a more informal setting.) You'll likely get some interest from folks who'd like to try calling for the first time as well as budding callers who'd like more experience or exposure. Ask me if you'd like me to some people to reach out to.

Talk to callers to gauge their level of experience and whether they'd like some help from you directly. Newer callers may have questions like: What should I call? How do I teach this figure to a bunch of people who don't know me? How long do I run the dance? What's the skill level at this dance? How do I talk to the band, and how do I ask them to stop? Who makes the announcements?

Remember that the dance is for the benefit of both the callers and the dancers. So, don't be afraid to push back and tell callers that actually their preferred dance wouldn't be a good fit for the program or the crowd. Just as we as callers assume responsibility for the satisfaction of the dancers, we as coordinators should accept the same. Some things to watch out for:

- Dancers like variety - not too many repetitive figures.
- Dancers like neighbor swings.
- Complex dances can be too much.

Offer to give feedback if they're interested, but don't force it on them. Be kind when you do so.

Let the band know in advance what you're planning and talk to them at the dance to see if they have any requests.

Make sure that everyone gets some recognition, so that someone introduces each caller (perhaps themselves). Don't forget to thank the band and sound person. People love clapping if you give them the right chance!

Brand-new callers may want your guidance, help with timing, or moral support. Be there for them!

Should you yourself call? I think so, at least one dance, but the number will vary based on how many other callers you have. If you see a way to improve the overall program, say, by teaching a figure in an earlier dance that a newer caller is unsure about in their dance, that'd be best.

Afterwards, thank the callers for participating, and give anyone feedback if they asked for it.

### \*Advice for Fresh Callers\*

Prepare some dances to call. Practice teaching them (by yourself, or even better is if you have a few friends who can act out "being confused") and prompting them (you can do that as you listen to a contra music recording). Saying the words over and over again will make them come to you more naturally. Don't be afraid to ask for advice.

There are a lot more resources out there to build up a repertoire of dances than there were just a few years ago - The Caller's Box and ContraDB are some online catalogs. Bob Isaacs and Lynn Ackerson have both compiled lists of easy to intermediate-level contras (ask me if you'd like me to pass them on to you). Collecting dance choreographies can be a good exercise, either at a dance you attend or from YouTube videos.

Be aware that what you find exciting as an experienced dancer, one who perhaps goes to dance camps, is not the same as what works well for a mixed crowd with beginners who perhaps missed the lesson. If you write your own choreography, make sure it works!

If this is your first time calling for a live audience, tell them so - they'll be supportive and patient.

Be receptive to feedback, but don't feel a need to engage with criticism. Separating your ego from your performance isn't always easy, so a simple "thank you for the feedback" goes a long way. You can process it later. You can also ask a friend to make a recording of your teaching and calling - though it can be painful to watch yourself later, you can learn a lot.

For more opportunities, ask established local callers if they'd be willing to have you call a guest spot. Many would be happy to slot you in for one or two dances at a regular evening and can also give you great feedback. You could also think about splitting an evening with another caller; since Bay Area dance organizers don't typically book dances this way, you may need to be proactive about it. There are also informal settings like house parties, dance/music camps, and such, which are often pleasantly free of expectations.

How do you, or dance organizers, know when you're ready for a full evening? There's no simple answer, but with more practice, you'll become more confident in your craft. And it's okay if it doesn't go totally smoothly the first time, as long as you take away something that helps you improve for the next time.

Always remember why you're calling. It's not about you; it's about bringing people together for our shared joy, which is dancing. Have fun, and good luck!

## In Memoriam

By Mary Luckhart

### Ed Burke

I had word from Mike Silver this morning that Ed Burke passed away in September. Ed was BACDS member #689, and was a member from 1986 until 2015. He and his wife Robin danced mostly at Palo Alto English, where Robin's mother lived. They also went to the Mad Robin Ball regularly. Robin died in 2011 at a relatively young age. I remember Ed as a very sweet man, who stood with his feet crossed most of the time, and did not look like he'd be a good dancer, but when the music started, he was on time, in the right place, and fun to dance with.

PS - Ed loved hands, it was even in his email address [handyed@...](mailto:handyed@...) Which was a play on his occupation, too.

### Ken McFarland

Ken McFarland, leader of group dance tours to England, Florence and other places, passed away in late January at the age of 69. In the 90's Ken lived in the Bay Area and was active in the Scottish and English dance scene. As a travel agent, he had the idea of organizing tours for dancers to dance in castles and country homes, first in Scotland for Scottish dancers, and in '93, to England for English dancers. Many dancers from around the country went on Ken's trips. Ken always brought along great talent, like Bruce Hamilton with Bare Necessities, and encouraged the intermingling of European and American dancers. He had an England trip planned for this spring, which has now been canceled. Ken and his partner Dennis lived in Anchorage, Alaska, and he will be greatly missed.

## A Rare and Wonderful Opportunity For That Special Dancer/Collector/Teacher and Historian

By Cheryl Fuller

My father, Gene Fuller, danced, taught, loved, and put his heart into collecting a library of amazing books on dance. Our appraiser made the following comment: "The Gene Fuller dance library is an exceptionally valuable collection for the purpose of teaching dances, historical research and the teaching of dance history. *He was extremely careful in acquiring books in very good to fine condition.* A remarkable feat for any collection."

Several pieces of the collection are in the possession of various callers; other pieces are kept by the UOP in Stockton. I want to donate the rest of it to a person (or persons) who will treasure it.



The books are composed of folk, round, square, contras, ballroom, Native American, modern, sacred and vintage dance. The main focus is folk dancing. There is another extremely valuable section on costume – presenting authentic ethnic dance and history of the dance and folk costumes from every country imaginable, some hand-painted. His collection spanned 40 years of heartfelt collecting and indexing. Some of the books are very rare. He also wrote over 30 of his own booklets on different dances and different countries, including tap, polkas, maypole, schottische, waltz, contras, Scottish, German, Balkan, Greek and Swedish dances, etc.

He also wrote booklets on callers, shoes, and many other subjects, including a chronological history of dance from primitive man and the ancient world to the present time. The library alone comprises over 3,000 books that are very valuable.

He also has records; 45's and 78's, and a cabinet full of albums on folk dances from every country. He has a complete collection of National Geographic magazines, indexed to references of dance and costume. He has Califone equipment for teaching, record players, and microphones. There is a complete "Viltis" collection of magazines and sets. He also bound in neat binder form every Let's Dance magazine from January 1949 to December 1992.

Anyone who is interested in more information, or viewing the collection of any of the items, please email me at [cfull2@aol.com](mailto:cfull2@aol.com). I would be most happy to show you my father's collection.

## Call For Hosts In July And August

By Claire Takemori

One of the most special parts of being in this dance community is to get to know the visiting talent a little better. You can help by offering rides or housing when we have bands touring, or dance weekends or week-long camps.

If you have the flexibility to offer:

- ~ rides to/from airports and to/from dances,
- ~ a guest bedroom (or more),
- ~ have an extra car you can loan to the band during a weekend or camp,

please let me know! I'm coordinating hospitality for American week (June 30 to Jul 5) and Balance the Bay (Aug 9-11). Who doesn't want The Figments, Wake Up Robin, Elixir, and Faux Paws jamming in their living room? Or get to chat with Luke Donforth, Cis Hinkle, Dana Parkinson? (We are lucky Susan Petrick lives here already)

Thanks for your offers to help! It takes a community to make our weekends and camps happen.

## Upcoming Events

Saturday, March 30	<b>Playford Ball (ECD)</b>	<i>Bruce Hamilton</i>
Friday, April 19	<b>ContraWaltz</b>	<i>Susan Petrick, StringFire</i>
Sun, Jun 30 - Fri Jul 5	<b>American Week at Camp Jones Gulch</b>	<i>Luke Donforth, Susan Petrick</i>
Sun, Jun 30 - Sat Jul 6	<b>Family Week at Monte Toyon camp</b>	<i>Various</i>
Sun, Jul 7 - Sat Jul 14	<b>Hey Days at Sonoma State University</b>	<i>Brooke Friendly</i>
Fri, Aug 9 – Sun Aug 11	<b>Balance The Bay in San Francisco</b>	<i>Various</i>

See [bacds.org](http://bacds.org) for more information. For events sponsored by our neighbors, see [nbcads.org](http://nbcads.org) (NBCADS), [sactocds.org](http://sactocds.org) (SCDS), [sffmc.org](http://sffmc.org) (SFFMC), [santacruzdance.org](http://santacruzdance.org) (TDSC), [montereycontradance.org](http://montereycontradance.org) (MCDC), [cccds.org](http://cccds.org) (CCCDs), [facebook.com/NorthOaklandSquareDance](https://facebook.com/NorthOaklandSquareDance) (NOSD), [lcfid.org/sf](http://lcfid.org/sf) (QCD)