

THE MILFORD CONTRA DANCE

Physically Distanced Yet Socially Connected!



NEWSLETTER #9

APRIL 2021

MESSAGE FROM SANDY, PETER, RICH, KATE, AND BILL

It's been our good fortune to have wonderful contributions from near and far, offering a wide perspective on contra dancing, the dances themselves, and the tunes played for dancing. This month we are happy to have a submission about an instrument - the cello, from cellist Charlene Ledoux. From its earliest days, the Milford Contra Dance has had a welcoming, open band. The mix of instruments was different every month depending on who came to play. While we have all likely danced to just a fiddle and piano, or fiddle and guitar, at other dances, the large band sound of the Milford Musicians is fun not just for the dancers but for the musicians themselves.

We love hearing from our readers so please drop us a line with a story idea or to say hello. And please continue to stay healthy and help us get back to activities like contra dancing by getting vaccinated.



HOW THE CELLO MADE ITS WAY INTO CONTRA DANCE MUSIC

by Charlene Ledoux, Milford Contra Dance Cellist

Italy was the birthplace of the cello. In 1535, just behind the violin and viola, Andrea Amati invented the violoncello (official name for the cello). Cellos back in the 1500's were much larger than the modern day cello. The larger size produced the powerful sound needed to accommodate the large cathedrals, churches, and other performance halls of the time.

Cellos during the 1500's and 1600's, were used as an accompanying instrument. The cellist actually hung the instrument from his

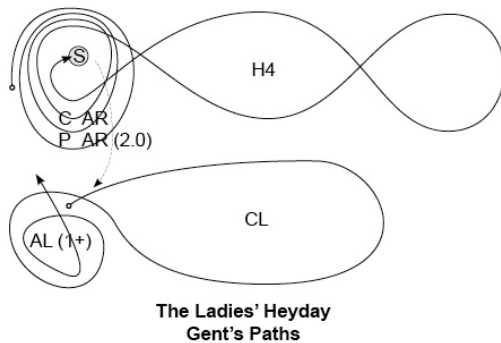
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VISUALIZE THIS DANCE

Submitted by Ted Crane

Sometime during the late 1970s, I had my first experience of contra dance “tunnel vision.” Although I didn’t call my first contra dance until 1979, for about the next fifteen years I presented that dance, Al Olsen’s The Ladies Heyday, as the last dance of the first half of every evening I called.



Everyone who has had the experience knows what I’m talking about, but there must be as many ways to describe it as there are dancers. A dancing fool I used to meet frequently said, “It’s like intentionally getting dizzy,” but the dizzy thing isn’t a part of what I felt. Quite the opposite. There was a sense of a path ahead of me, a sense of accelerating around the inside of a banked curve, a sense of a driving force pushing forward. A semi-mystical, glowing path in front of me.

That moment crystallized my concept of contra dance creation. Dances were no longer a series of discrete figures. They became a visualization of a smooth, connected path, a path entwining itself with the complementary paths of other dancers in the neighborhood. Sometimes the paths are held together by an almost gravitational attraction, other times by a firm physical connection.

Writing dances morphed from a process of finding figures that satisfied the basic needs of contra (advance from a starting position to

a progressed position in exactly the correct amount of time), to finding figures that connect smoothly and minimize abrupt changes of direction.

Being jerked around does not lead to a sense of harmony, whether it’s by other dancers or by the dance itself.

One characteristic of older, more traditional contra dances is a tendency for back-and forth movement. If you try to draw paths, your pen ends up marking the same spots over and over again. Think: circle left, circle right, star right, star left, down the center and back, right and left across and back. More recent compositions feature better balance (similar effort for everyone), more symmetry, and, well, flowing paths.

So much of modern contra composition depends on a sunwise, clockwise direction of motion. Not for nothing, has the “circle right” become harder to find in recent compositions. Widdershin movement has become a staple of novelty transitions; the good old “circle left—circle right” now appears most frequently as a filler in simpler, more relaxed contra dances.

These days, I take the most pleasure from writing—and dancing—figures that, like those in Ladies Heyday, join together in smooth paths. Two of my more recent compositions, Coleman’s March, and, See You ‘Round the Quad, come to mind. The first has seen some light in other caller’s repertoires, while the second hasn’t and may never. Round the Quad is a quad (four couples in a becket-like set); it’s demanding (a common requirement of exciting dances!) but, for fans of tunnel vision, its path sets you in an inescapable groove.

You can find these (and other) dances at URL: [yippee.tedcrane.com/dancedb-ted]

The dance transcriptions in DanceDB are



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neck in order to play while standing and walking in processions. This method created more mobility for the cello (Journal of Music and Dance, The Cello: An amazing musical instrument – Vincent Liu).

As time moved on, many famous composers – Corelli, Giovanni Antoni, Domenico Gariello and many more – wrote music for the cello. However, these compositions were mostly sonatas and/or orchestral pieces.

As the cello's versatility gained more attention, by the 1700's, composer/cellist Luigi Boccherini started "wowing" the crowd with his solo cello performances (Vincent Liu). His cello pieces were bold with double stopping in principal themes and syncopated pattern of chords.

Bach's Six Unaccompanied Cello Suites, 1717-1723, actually consist of many dance movements. Each suite consists of an allemande, a dance in 4/4 time. Courantes was a dance with a faster tempo. The gallant resembled old French dances. However, the gigue was a lively dance from the Irish word "jig". Typically the cello complemented the melody; providing low, supporting tones in the way of counter melody, harmony or chordal back up. Melodies can be played on the cello though the longer neck means that notes are further apart and are more challenging to play on a cello than a violin. As such, melodies played on the cello were most likely slower tunes like waltzes. Bach's suites was the first time any composer gave the distinction of performing dances by the solo cello

The Ecosaise, variety of contredanse, popularized during the late 1700's into the 1800's, were popping up all over France and England. It was danced in quick 2/4 time by a double line of couples, men facing women. The Contredanse, "genre of dance for several couples", was the French's take on the English country dance. They were performed throughout Europe among the French, English,

and German aristocrats and bourgeoisie. These country dances caught the attention of such composers as Franz Shubert, Fredric Chopin, and Ludwig van Beethoven who were inspired to write contredanse (Ecosaise) pieces for chamber groups to include musical parts for the cello. As a musical form written in 2/4 or 6/8 time, the contredanse was also used by Mozart (Western dance/ History, Types, & Facts – Britannica). Mozart was not a fan of the cello, nevertheless, he proceeded to give the cello an important role in many of his great string quartets (Vincent Liu).

Niel Gow (whose first name is commonly misspelled "Neil"), 1727-1807, the most famous Scottish fiddler/composer of his time, wrote many dance tunes to include the cello. Niel's brother, Donald Gow, was an avid cellist. He performed extensively with Niel. A portrait by David Allen (1744-1796) is displayed in the National Galleries of Scotland, Scottish National Portrait Gallery (artuk.com).

Cellist Natalie Haas has researched the role of how the cello made its way into Scottish/Irish music and dance. It would be well worth your time to check out her YouTube offerings. One in particular is "Natalie Haas - Niel Gow's 'The Ecosaise'".



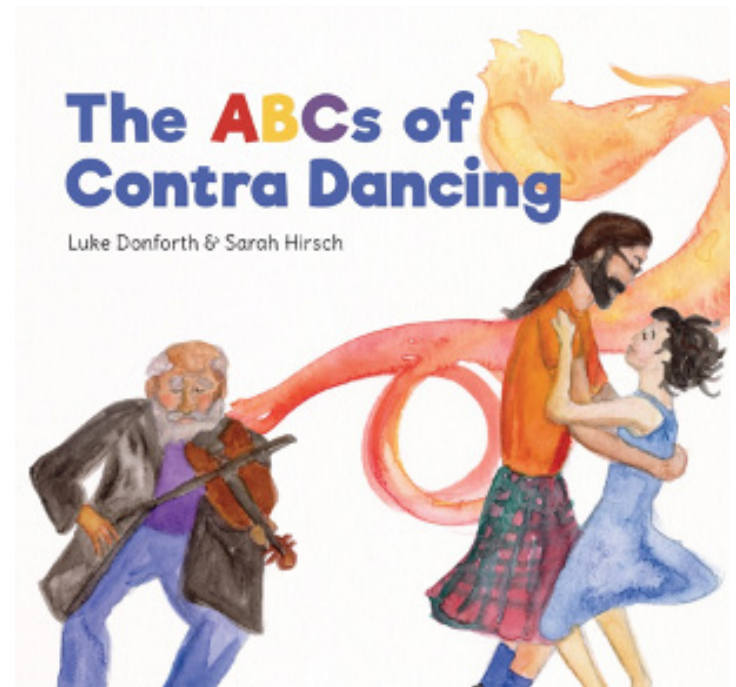


THE ABCS OF CONTRA DANCING

by Luke Donforth, Burlington VT dance caller

A is for Allemande, going 'round by the hand.
B is for Balance, a hello that is grand.
C is for Contra, a style all can do.
D is for Dancing; won't you join too?
E is for Even, with partners all pair.
F for Four Folks in a small square.
G is for Hubert, by which we mean Gene.
H is for History, to know where we've been.
I for Improper, a formation to start.
J for the Joy we share from our heart.
K for Kinetic, see how we move.
L is for Legs that step to the groove.
M is for Music, live from the stage.
N is for Neighbor, no matter the age.
O is for Organizers' gift to us all.
P is for Partners, some short and some tall.
Q is for Quiet, before the band plays.
R is for Reels that stay with you for days.
S is for swing, a spiraling rose.
T for together, how a community grows.
U: Understand the caller's short prompts.
V is for Vigorous hollers and stomps.
W is for Wavy lines post allemande rotation.
X is for Cross Trail in dance card notation.
Y for the Youth, this tradition we pass.
Z is for Zesty, while dancing with class.

Contra dancing is a wonderfully diverse and expansive activity. Even with an entire alphabet of couplets, I can't encompass every wonderful thing in contra. However, over the course of a year of driving to dances, running through sound check, walking to work, and reading LOTS of board books with my kids (including the ABCs of Particle Physics and a plethora of the incomparable Sandra Boynton), I composed an ABCs for Contra Dancing. Once I had it in mind, I wanted everyone else to have the option of having it in their hands. I worked with Sarah Hirsch, an illustrator, art teacher, dancer, and dance organizer to put together illustration



for a board book and then ran a Kickstarter in March 2020 to print a physical copy with Pint Size Productions (an upstate NY printing house that specializes in board books).

The Kickstarter campaign was a tremendous success! Much more so than my original plan to have books to folks by November (thanks 2020...). However, I do now have physical books (as do over 100 other people). You can buy them from me via PayPal: \$15 to calling.luke@gmail.com covers the book, taxes, shipping and handling (make sure to let me know your address, and if you want it signed to anyone). CDSS will be carrying the book in their store, as will Phoenix Books (a VT chain).

You can also download a free PDF with the illustrations: <http://tinyurl.com/59l7c3v9>

It doesn't replace the dancing that we all miss, but it will help share the joy with the next generation so that they'll be ready when it comes roaring back!



WORD LADDER

Start from the bottom and change one letter per clue to make the word "note"

Not Any Amount

A tone from a musical instrument

The apple has seeds

I eat my ice cream from a _____

A 3D Square shape

To make an illness go away

A musical melody

A long hollow cylinder

M. McClure

Courtesy of National Education Assn. Click [here](#) for the solution .



SUGGESTION BOX

Forward your feedback, article ideas, and personal updates to Sandy Lafleur at strumma@aol.com. Prefer the phone? Call Kate at 654-9854

The Milford Contra Dance is sponsored by the Milford New Hampshire Recreation Department

