

THE MILFORD CONTRA DANCE

Physically Distanced Yet Socially Connected!



NEWSLETTER #11

JUNE 2021

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

Greetings Dancers, Musicians and Callers!

We hope this edition of our newsletter finds you well and enjoying the gradual return of social interaction. As for in person, indoor dancing, we're getting there but we're not there yet!

For a fun and interesting change of pace we have some insights into a dance that is a change of pace ~ the waltz! We are delighted to share a relatively new waltz with you, written by Mike Mahar, one of the Milford musicians. Until we can dance together, please enjoy this month's reading and please get vaccinated!



Dance at Bougival, 1883
Pierre-Auguste Renoir

'ROUND THE ROOM

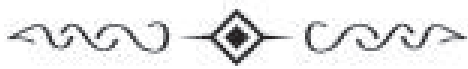
By Mike Mahar

In the fall of 2018, I attended a fiddler's festival in Massachusetts called Fiddle Hell. This event features about one hundred instructors and about a thousand other attendees all playing different styles of fiddle like Irish, Scottish, Quebecois, Cape Breton, Scandinavian, Old-Time, Klezmer, Roma, Jazz, and, of course, Contra Dance. At the end of five days, my ears rang, and my fingers were sore. So, like at the end of a contra dance, I felt like playing a waltz.

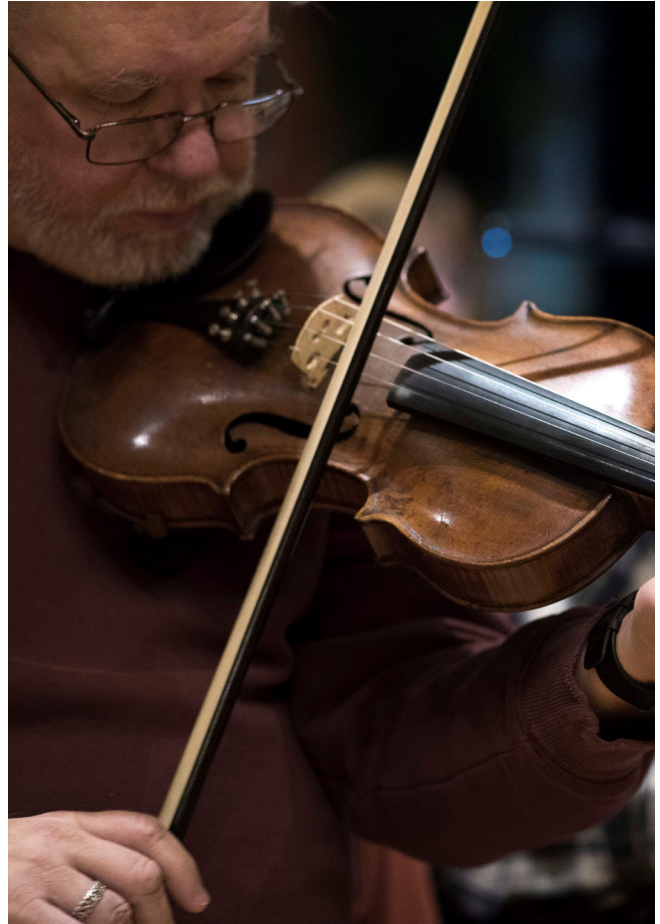
I was inspired by all the great music that I heard that week and thought that a new tune would be the right way to cap off the experience. Rather than learn a tune it seemed like a good time to write one. I heard a bunch of waltzes that week and some of them didn't have the solid danceable $\frac{3}{4}$ feel to them. I wanted a dance tune. So, I imagined the dancers gliding 'Round the Room and started playing along with my mental



image. This is the tune that came out. I like to play it with a stress on the first beat of every measure so that nobody gets lost while dancing. There is no greater joy than writing a tune and going to a jam session where you don't know the other players well and someone calls out your tune not knowing that it is yours. That's what happened with this tune. I was asked if I would like to share it with the Milford newsletter so [here](#) it is.



Mike Mahar lives in Amherst and plays fiddle at the Milford Contra Dance. He is also a luthier and builds beautiful, high end guitars at [Mahar Guitar](#)



'Round the Room

Mike Mahar (c)2018

♩ = 170

G Em G Em C G Am D

G Bm G Em C G D G

B C Am G Bm G Em D D7

C Am G Bm D D7 G 1 2



VISUALIZE THIS DANCE

by Gordon Berry

Having been a transplant into New England in my young adult life, I had never even heard of contra dance until I was in my twenties when I heard some interesting music coming from the upstairs of an old town hall. My decision to hobble up the stairs off the street was one of my better decisions in life, for I have been able to grow in appreciation for the community and the joy of participating in a dance and learning to call a dance. Although I have danced many nights away in my short years as a contra dance and folk music enthusiast, I have not landed on a favorite dance quite yet, particularly as a novice caller. Through the lens of a dancer, I enjoy both the simple dances that allow my brain to turn off while my body moves through each step with automation, but I also enjoy the dances that are complex enough to require others to shove me into position a few times before I get the hang of it. The spins, the shuffles, and the smiles are what make any dance worth dancing. As for what makes a dance worth calling, I do not yet know.



Learning to call dances has been a sadly short lived endeavor, as all the recent dances have been cancelled by COVID-19. However, I have had the pleasure of having both successful and unsuccessful opportunities to call dances. As a teacher, I am comfortable speaking in most rooms and I am a firm believer in the expression “fake it ‘till you make it,” so I figured I should apply both my confidence and my beliefs to my contra dance calling. Though I may not have the years of experience that a matured contra dance caller has, I figured that speaking clearly and with assurance would help both me and the dancers have a fun time. After borrowing a calling card from a more experienced caller, I sat down with the same card for the majority of the night, reading and reciting the card so that I wouldn’t fumble or cause the dancers to fumble. By the time it was my turn to hold the microphone, I had

already spoken with the band to understand the cues I needed to give them, I had the calling card mostly memorized, and I had already thought of witty ways to explain each move to the dancers. After a few rounds through the tune “Over the Waterfall,” the room was filled with sweat and smiles and my first contra dance call was a success! Unfortunately, my beginner’s luck would not last.



Because of my experiences with teaching, I also believe in the power of the seven P’s: “prior proper planning prevents piss poor performance.” When teaching my students in school, I always try to have my lessons planned well in advance and I try to take every consideration into account before exposing my class to whatever I am trying to teach them. When approaching my second night of trying to call a dance, I seemed to forget why I did that. Instead of reading a dance calling card in advance, I borrowed one from another caller just moments before it was my turn to call. Instead of running through the dance in my head, I simply read it on the spot only when the microphone was in my hand. Instead of reading it word for word, I got confused, omitted sections of the dance that “probably didn’t matter,” and led the dancers through a 20 minute walk through of the dance only to then realize I had not given them several of the moves needed to reset at the end with a new couple. Although my confidence had allowed me to succeed in my first dance calling, my second went awry in every way possible. Luckily, the Milford dancers were very understanding and patient, eventually erasing my errors enough so they could enjoy the dance.



Calling dances is not an easy skill to master (or so it seems), but I look forward to my next opportunity to mix together my confidence with a bit more preparation so that I can help each dancer have a fun night.



GORDON BERRY is a special education teacher in Amherst, NH teaching high school math and science. In his free time, he plays music with his trio, The Double Crossers. Playing fiddle for this band and providing vocal harmonies, he meshes his instrumentation in with his compatriots Paul Driscoll and Derek Fimble. These friends play their fiddles, banjos, and guitars as The Double Crossers in venues across New England and have toured across the east coast playing a wide range of early country, hoe down fiddle music, bluegrass standards, and thoughtful originals. Gordon Berry has been slowly learning to call contra dances in Milford, New Hampshire with the help of his mentor and contra enthusiast, Sandy Lafleur.



THE BABY ROSE - DAVID KAYNOR

Improper contra

The Baby Rose is NOT the first dance the Gordon Berry called at the Milford Contra Dance - the name of the dance is lost to history. But this is another straightforward dance, good for a beginner caller.

A1: Neighbor Balance and Swing

A2: Circle Left $\frac{3}{4}$ X; Partner Do-Si-Do

B1: Partner Balance and Swing

B2: Ladies Chain; Left Hand Star

Watch it being danced [here](#).



DAVID KAYNOR 1948-2021
David was the caller and primary organizer of the Contra Dances at the Guiding Star Grange in Greenfield, MA . Please read this article for a full [appreciation](#) of his life.



THE WALTZ

Go to just about any contra dance anywhere and you will find that there is a waltz just before the break, and another waltz just before the very end of the evening. These serve as a bit of a “cool down” after the more vigorous contras. Because the waltz is a couples’ dance, the dancing couple can come to some sort of agreement as to just how much of a cool down this can be! Some couples do indeed cover a lot of ground and execute complicated flourishes and twirls while others claim their spot on the dance floor and are content to simply sway in time with the music. It’s all good!

While contras are danced to jigs and reels, the waltz has its own music and is in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, with 3 beats in each measure. American waltz tunes have the emphasis on the first beat (think UMPH – pa – pa). The traditional ballroom position, with the lady’s right hand in the gent’s left hand, with her left hand on his right shoulder, and his right hand at her upper back provides comfortable support and connection for waltzing.



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In the preface of the first *The Waltz Book* by Bill Mattheisen, Bill notes, “The waltz is such an enjoyable dance today, and the music holds such positive associations, it’s hard to imagine that in the early 1800’s it was considered scandalous and antisocial. Originally an energetic and sexually suggestive peasant dance cleaned up for the ballroom, both music and steps have gone through many evolutions. The waltz’s ability to

change may be why, of all dances of the past two hundred years, it has not only survived but thrived in a variety of traditions.”



More information on the history of the waltz is here: <https://concert-vienna.com/blogs/viennese-things/viennese-waltz-a-scandalous-dance-that-became-a-viennese-icon>





FIND THE DIFFERENCES (ANSWERS NEXT MONTH!)



Find ten (10)
differences
between the
two pictures!



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

