

## Calling for Non-dancers

Whether it is a wedding, a church dance, or an introduction to barn dancing, calling a dance for non-contra dancers is my favorite! The people are enthusiastic, ready to have a great time, and most importantly, have *no expectations!*<sup>1</sup> I call these kinds of dances community dances. People who come to a community dance do not expect to learn how to dance, or go away experts on a particular style. They do not expect anything but to have a good time.

You have an awesome responsibility – you are representing all of folk dancing to these people. This could be the first time they have ever danced! Perhaps they have never heard of contra dancing or English country or anything besides square dancing.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the evening, we hope they will want to dance again.

### People just want to have fun

People come to a community dance to socialize with their friends, using dancing as the medium. In contrast, people come to a contra dance<sup>3</sup> to dance with their friends, with socializing as a side effect. At a community barn dance, the dance is the excuse to interact. This difference manifests in many ways: more breaks; longer breaks; larger percentage of people sitting out – or not dancing at all<sup>4</sup>; individuals joining one dance, then sitting down, then dancing one later in the evening.

My assumption is that your crowd is made up of mostly people who have never done any folk dancing. You have a wide range of ages – from 5 year olds to elders. Perhaps a few couples are ‘club’ square dancers, dressed in their traditional costume.

If you have a crowd where a significant percentage are familiar with the conventions of called dances (English, contra, Scottish, etc) you may wish to start with an accessible program and then build into a more standard dance program. However, if the dance will require significant teaching time avoid it.

### Keep it simple

Start with, end with, and use as your primary formations circles, longways sets, and simple squares. This means avoid improper and becket contra dances. Why spend all the time, energy, and frustration teaching “hands four,” “actives trading places,” “crossing over on the ends,” when you can be successful and evoke the same joy with a dance that takes a fraction of the time to teach? Perhaps, later on, a

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<sup>1</sup> Contra dance crowds have many built-in expectations: high energy contras; few or no squares / circles; partner swings; etc.

<sup>2</sup> However, you can be certain they have heard of square dancing. Modern Western Square Dancing is a part of the culture. Most people have seen a square dance – or even a parody of a square dance. They know what club dancers looks like.

<sup>3</sup> Or English or Scottish or International or Contra or ...

<sup>4</sup> Listening to the music and watching the dancers *is* a great time for many people at a community dance.

Sicilian circle might be appropriate (you don't have to worry about a couple being 'out' at the ends or switching over).

The new dancers are frequently nervous, and perhaps intimidated by the idea of dancing. They are afraid of looking foolish! People will cling to their partners. Start with simple non mixing dances like "Galopede," or a circle 'mixer' that you start without mixing. After you've run the circle mixer several times, then add in the partner changing. Build on success!

Avoid ladies chains, right and left throughs, heys, even balances. The only figures I use are allemande, do si do, swing (turn hand turn, really), star, promenade, circle, and sashay / gallop.

Here are a couple examples of dances I use:

<p><b>Galopede</b>  <b>Placement:</b> great 1<sup>st</sup> dance or later  <b>Formation:</b> longways set dance for 5-8 couples  <b>A1:</b> (8) forward and back; (8) trade sides with partner, passing right shoulder  <b>A2:</b> (8) forward and back; (8) trade sides with partner, passing right shoulder  <b>B1:</b> (8) partner do-si-do; (8) partner swing  <b>B2:</b> All make a tunnel, 1<sup>st</sup> couple down to bottom</p>	<p><b>La Bastringue</b>  <b>Placement:</b> great 1<sup>st</sup> dance or later  <b>Formation:</b> circle of couples facing center  <b>A1:</b> (8) forward and back; (8) forward and back  <b>A2:</b> (8) circle left; (8) circle right  <b>B1:</b> (16) swing corner  <b>B2:</b> (16) promenade corner – new partner</p>
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**Walk-thrus**

Don't worry about the dancers getting the figures correct, or the formation in the appropriate manner. Just guide them through the dance. If they smile and have fun, the dance is a success. If they dance in time to the music, that's the icing on the cake. If they manage the progression, bonus! Ice cream with the cake!

When you call an allemande or a swing, they will often do a elbow swing / turn instead of a contra dance allemande or a ballroom swing. Let them dance the way they want. Sometimes, to distinguish between the two, I'll ask for a two hand turn instead of a ballroom swing.

In a longways set don't fret over gents side / ladies side? For most of the longways set dances you will be doing, it doesn't matter which side they are on. Say it once, but don't be attached to correctness! You may use the terms to label one line or the other. Or, you might use "tall line" and "short line," or "green line" and "blue line" or "pizza line" and "burrito line." Be creative.

There are times when dance formation matters – in a square, you expect the lady on the right, gent on the left. In many circle mixers, the progression is based on ending the swing with the gent on the left.

Keep your teaching short – even shorter than you would for your standard contra (English, International, etc) dance. Use dances that you can have them dancing in short order – 90 seconds or less. As the evening progresses, you can build on what you teach earlier, but don't base your entire program on that fact. A little alcohol, and you can forget about any progression!

### **Programming the evening**

You will find that using the same limited figures (circle, star, do si do, ) but mixing figures – longways sets, circle mixer, and squares – will give you a very satisfying evening. Throw in a few couples dances and some novelty figures, and you have a full evening.

Do not be afraid to change dances to fit your needs. Most dances suitable for non-dancers are very flexible, and quite adaptable. Remember, non-dancers do not need or expect a partner swing in every dance. Take interesting but easy to use figures from other dances and insert them as needed. Dances experienced dancers would consider uninteresting are quite gratifying new dancers as they are written.

Run the dances shorter than you would for a more experienced dance crowd. Your audience has not built up stamina or the skills to conserve energy while dancing. They will dance with abandon, and quickly use up energy. Do not be surprised by people sitting out frequently, but then jumping back in.

In addition to running the dances shorter (say 7-10 times through), you will take more frequent breaks. Lead three or four dances, then have a 10-15 minute break. Give them time to socialize. Repeat. Despite the breaks, they will tire easily. Most barn dances last 90 minutes to two hours, rarely longer. 90 minutes will be enough – they will be satisfied. They will have a feeling of accomplishment – they have danced!

Be certain to have flyers directing them to the local dances (contra, English, international, Scottish).

Often you will have a few couples who have done club square dancing before. They will be dressed distinctly and are easily recognizable. Use them to your advantage. They are mostly likely used to “angel-ing” (working with new dancers), and only need a slight nudge to mix with the non-dancers.

### Sample Evening Program

Here is a sample evening program suitable for anyone over 9. Use this as a starting place as you learn new material to insert and rework.

<b>First Set:</b>	<b>Second Set:</b>	<b>Third Set:</b>	<b>Fourth Set:</b>
Galopede ( <i>longways</i> )	Flying Scotsman ( <i>longways</i> )	Dig for Oyster ( <i>6 person</i> )	Jack turn Back ( <i>5 person</i> )
La Bastringue ( <i>circle</i> )	Lucky Seven ( <i>circle</i> )	Virginia Reel ( <i>longways</i> )	Ninepin ( <i>square</i> )
Redwing ( <i>square</i> )	Texas Star ( <i>square</i> )	Pattycake Polka ( <i>circle</i> )	Un-deux-trois ( <i>longways</i> )
Open Waltz	Polka or Swing	Other couple dance	Waltz
Break	Break	Break	Break

### Special case: 5-8 year olds.

When working with mixed crowds that include children under 9 years, you can use essentially the same program. I include a sprinkling of Singing / Play Party Games such as “Jump Jim Joe” or “I Let Her Go-Go”. These songs / games are simple dances. The more 5 – 8 year olds in the group, the more singing games to include. Again, use variety to your advantage. Alternate softer, quieter songs and dances with rowdy, active dances.

### Special case: Christmas and office parties.

Use the same Sample Evening Program listed above. Be aware! When available, alcohol loosens inhibitions, for good and ill. People dance freer, but can be noisy, dangerous, or controlling. Suddenly, certain individuals are on the floor telling others how to dance, you how to call, the musicians how to play. Smile, but be firm. Maintain control. If you must, ask the organizer or your contact to have a word with them.

Calling for non-dancers can be fun, and very rewarding. The individuals leave satisfied at having danced – perhaps for their first time! Their needs and your responsibilities are very similar to when calling a Contra, English, or other dance evening:

- Keep the dances accessible to the majority of your dancers
- Keep the teaching and non-dancing talk short
- Smile and emanate joy

### Selected Resources

*A Barn Dance Repertoire*, Thomas Green, <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/greenery/BarnDances/>  
*Chimes of Dunkirk*, (book & CD), New England Dancing Masters ©1991; [www.sover.net/~nedm/](http://www.sover.net/~nedm/)  
*Community Dances Manual*, books 1-7 © 1991 English Folk Dance and Song Society  
*Dance Parties for Beginners*, Ed Butenhof ©1990; [www.lloydshaw.org](http://www.lloydshaw.org)

*Dance a While*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition: *Handbook of Folk, Square, Contra, and Social Dance*  
*Listen to the Mockingbird* (book & CD), New England Dancing Masters ©1997; [www.rovers.net/~nedm/](http://www.rovers.net/~nedm/)  
*Recreation with Dance, Movement, and Music*, Glen Bannerman & M. Neil Pugsley ©1999  
*Step Lively 1,2,3*, (book & CD), Marian Rose © 1998; [www.cdss.org](http://www.cdss.org)