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**Revival of American contra dance:
Performing community through folk dance**

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Preface.....	iii-iv
Chapter One	
Introduction and Approach.....	1
Chapter Two	
New England-Style Contra dance: Basic Terms, Formations and Music.....	27
Chapter Three	
A Short History of the Contra Dance Tradition.....	51
Chapter Four	
Local Dance Venues.....	104
Chapter Five	
Revivalism, Community and Contra Dance.....	119
Chapter Six	
Summary and Conclusion.....	156
Appendix One: Dance Figures.....	162
Appendix Two: Sample Choreographies.....	165
Bibliography.....	168

Abstract

Contra dancing is a social dance form practiced today among small audiences in several large cities and college towns across the U.S. As a dance form requiring little formal training, it is performed in a casual atmosphere and offers ample opportunity for active participation. The dance and music forms that comprise the tradition today are outgrowths of an English social dance tradition documentable as far back as the sixteenth century (Keller 1991). Aside from vestiges of an ongoing tradition in rural New England towns, the popularity of contra dance and of its associated music tradition has been maintained through the efforts of several revival initiatives. These have included the administered efforts of diverse folklore associations and the work of many dance enthusiasts, callers and musicians. The most recent resurgence of popularity of contra dance has its roots in the popular folksong revival in the 1960s. As this thesis will demonstrate, successive generations of writers, dancers, musicians and callers have discussed or embraced the dance tradition in terms of a host of socially positive attributes. These attributes include: the dance as an idealized expression of social unity, the dance as an enabler of a small cohesive community, the dance form as a complex forum for intimate interaction across gender lines and finally, the dance as a continuation of a 'genuine' Anglo-American folk tradition.

One fairly active audience for the tradition exists among a loose group of contra dance enthusiasts in Madison, Wisconsin. My understanding of contemporary contra dance as expressed in this thesis has been partially shaped by my participation in and observations of the numerous local dances. Based on my research, I consider the dances in the Madison area as representative of a national contra dance audience, as the several dance events in this locale share much in common with other contra dance locations across the United States: an emphasis on the New England-based contra dance and music repertory; a consistent schedule of contra dance events, each with its own organizer, band, musicians and caller; a devoted group of dancers who attend a majority of the dances in Madison; frequent visiting callers and musicians from outside the region; relationships and friendships that carry outside the dance context; and expression of commitment to an open and sociable atmosphere.

As with the many contra dance communities nationwide, the Madison-area contra dance scene has been strengthened by the currents of folklore revivalism. The circumstances of this revival dynamic have shaped the context in which contra dance and music are performed, both historically and as a cultural practice. The contra revival was initiated in New England and has been refracted through numerous other cultural movements in this century that have shaped, for many, how the dance is experienced as a genre of American folk culture. This thesis presents a combined review of the historical and ethnographic literature on contra dance and its revival, augmented with observations from my own introduction and limited participation within the local dance community, as a dancer and occasional musician.

Preface

As a preface to this thesis, I would briefly like to acknowledge my own introduction and involvement with contra dance. In much current ethnomusicological and cultural anthropological field research, clear acknowledgment of the researcher's position in relation to the topic of inquiry often illuminates something of the character of the results of the research. In addition, this will reveal part of the process by which this accessible tradition was in a sense 'othered' for purposes of analysis. Like many others involved in contra dance today, I was introduced to the tradition by a friend who had been actively involved as a caller and musician for several years. Prior to this initial dance, I had not heard of contra dance before and my closest experience with any folk dance was limited to a few elementary school square dance classes. For more than two years now, I have consistently attended many of the Madison area dances described below and I have occasionally played piano or guitar with the loosely organized 'pick-up' band for the Tuesday night dances. During this time I have had many informal conversations and a few more structured discussions with dancers, callers and musicians.

In the spirit of these reflections I feel that my distance as an outsider to the tradition, despite similarities in educational, ethnic and class background that I shared with many dancers, contributed to and enriched my observations of the contra dance scene. My own background is one of extensive training in the standard European solo piano concert repertoire, and listening to and performing rock and heavy metal music. My own personal identification with both of these was qualitatively different from that which arose through

my recent involvement in a tightly knit folk music revival context. The contrast most salient to me was the element I eventually chose to emphasize: how the genre of contra dance as practiced today fostered an unusually intensive atmosphere of inclusive participation. I arrived at this topic of interest partly as it contrasted with my own prior personal experiences of musical participation that were often defined by a distancing between audience and performer. The latter seemed to hold true for both the performer centered culture of European concert music and the commodified spectacle of commercialized rock culture. The union of live music and highly integrative group movement furthered my awareness of the participatory character of contra dance. Part of my frame of reference for this research was thus shaped by the ease of introduction to the dance with no prior experience or skill whatsoever. My experience in this was not unique, as I soon learned from other dancers.

Turning to the literature on country dance I found that both academic and popular writers returned to this participatory facet of the tradition again and again, leading me to believe that this had been and remained one of the principal attractions of the genre. Later on, this ease of participation contributed to minor difficulties in distancing myself once I was involved fairly regularly. At the same time my ease of access concealed the very real adjustments to ideas about music performance, dance and performance, that complicated and enriched my experience and research into this scene. For these reasons the task has been quite challenging, leading me to reconsider those aspects that seemed given or self-evident at first. At the same time, I have sought to balance my observations with a critical perspective by reading the recent writings of several cultural critics on the place of folklore and periodic folk revivalist enterprises in American cultural life.

Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

There are several dimensions to consider in the current contra dance phenomenon in Madison and the U.S. Aside from the purely formal and recreational aspects of the tradition itself, contra dance stands at the intersection of several analytical interests that constitute overlapping issues of concern in folklore and ethnomusicology. These include the historical development and continuity of tradition; conceptual definitions of folklore and critical understandings of the cultural mechanisms of revival; relationships between music and dance; the experiential dimension of music, dance and the body; music and dance as a constitutive element of identity and gender; and the dynamics of subcultural music traditions. A thorough study of contra dance and its revival could thus draw upon the disciplines of ethnomusicology, folklore, dance ethnography, cultural studies, social history and anthropology. While this thesis cannot address each of these dimensions in their fullest depth as they intersect in this tradition, I have found some of the literature on these topics valuable in understanding the history and current practice of contra dance in the U.S. as represented in the Madison contexts.

Currently, contra dance remains a marginal practice within the mainstream of American culture, and is predominantly an activity that consumes a small fraction of the available leisure time of most participants. In the Madison area, it is one among many other cultural activities involving music and dance that can often generate small communities of enthusiasts, such as live rock music clubs, University-sponsored music groups, and other

dance traditions, such as swing or various international dance clubs. At the same time it has been and continues to be a very important point of identification for many within the dance communities. Engagement with issues in the above acknowledged areas of inquiry and literature offers a useful vantage point from which to understand some of the contemporary dimensions of the contra dance tradition. Here I consider briefly some disciplinary approaches as they apply to this thesis.

Approaches

Folkloric approaches

The recent work of some folklore scholars has been useful for two primary reasons. The first is the current trend towards critical and reflexive analysis of the development of folklore as a scholarly field. Much of this literature considers the intellectual climate in which scholarly paradigms concerning 'folklore' and 'tradition' have been generated and perpetuated (see Rosenberg 1993; Bohlman 1988; Jackson 1993). It also examines conceptions of folklore and the ways these concepts have surfaced in the popular domain, particularly as they have grown out of, and intersect with scholarly understandings (Cantwell 1996). Much of this work also investigates the historic link of folklore scholarship with public sector advocacy (see Baron and Spitzer 1992; Becker and Franco 1988). These writings demonstrate an increasing turn toward cultural criticism in folklore study, and a reappraisal of the scope of the discipline. Broad issues in the complex links of folklore scholarship and advocacy are worth considering, as the discourse surrounding contra dance and its programmatic revival has often been articulated in terms of earlier scholarly

categories and assumptions about folk life.

The second useful direction from current folklore studies examines revivalism as a unique cultural mechanism, and as a highly appropriate topic for scholarly inquiry (Bealle 1989; Bausinger 1961). This is in marked contrast with some prior folklore scholarship and represents a sharp divergence from the assumptions upon which that scholarship rested.

Jackson, for instance, has discussed the scholarly omission of both urban and revival folksong practices in terms of a prevailing academic atmosphere:

There has been a great deal of journalistic writing about the folksong revival, but very little scholarly attention has been paid to it thus far. It did not fit the academic models of folkloric behavior fashionable in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Jackson 1993: 80)

Guided by ideas of a sharply defined authenticity, the 'academic models' to which Jackson alludes tended to dismiss or even malign the efforts of revivalists as fraudulent intrusions or phony commercial corruptions. Indeed some scholars were often quite inimical to the revival enterprise and the changes in content and context that came with it (see Dorson 1976 for example, and Jackson 1993 for a critical evaluation of this situation). Proschan acknowledges that something of this attitude has persisted to the present in some quarters of academic folklore:

Our conceptions of how to approach folklore research . . . are shaped in large part by a pastoralism that continues to have a pervasive influence on our practice even as folklorists increasingly turn their attention to urban settings... We are inclined to idealize a vital, vibrant folk community as one somehow bounded if not set apart (Proschan 1992: 147)

Concurrent with critical examination of the narrow approaches perpetuated in the history of folklore studies, the field has opened up to scholarly treatment of traditions that

arose from the numerous instances of revival. This work has relied upon both ethnographic and historical perspectives (see especially Bealle 1989: 1-92; also Rosenberg 1993; Baron and Spitzer 1992; Becker and Franco 1988). These and other publications are the first steps in taking stock of the enormous wealth of practices that exist today, practices that owe much of their continuation to conceptions of prior folklore scholars and the cultural mechanisms of revivalism that they intentionally or inadvertently helped to set in motion. Among these genres is contra dance and its associated music repertoire.

Ethnomusicology

Observational field research, with attention to collecting 'data' and gathering information through interaction, augmented by some level of participation, has been a central facet of ethnomusicological research particularly since the publication of Alan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (Merriam 1964). This process was promoted for several reasons; for one, many musical traditions worldwide had few or no literary sources for consultation; fieldwork provided a primary source for further analysis. Second, and more importantly, it was held that experiential fieldwork afforded a researcher a privileged glimpse of how music functioned within everyday contexts. From this vantage, the researcher could strive to understand a musical tradition from the "insider's" point of view (Hood 1963, 1971). The participatory imperative was most forcefully articulated in the work of Mantle Hood. Hood argued that the fullest understanding of music as sonic process could most adequately be achieved through active learning and participation, a process not unlike learning a second language, for which he coined the term 'bi-musicality' (Hood 1960).

Since then, approaches to fieldwork and ethnographic writing have diversified substantially. Most significantly, there have been moves to consider music performatively, as a dynamic process involving a range of interpretive issues for 'insider' and 'outsider' (see Keil and Feld 1994). In this perspective, the field situation becomes a chance to witness a complex unfolding of socially situated performances. This view considers performance as process, rather than a presentation of a static product fulfilling some abstracted function. Thus interest has shifted in some writings to the ways in which contextual factors actively shape music in creation, performance and reception rather than a restricted consideration of the structural, formal or sonic properties of musical sound alone. The most recent strategies for accomplishing this include investigation of the various social, political, economic and personal discourses in which music performances are situated, with attention to the way people negotiate and shape these discourses. Inspired by the performative 'ethnography of speaking' approach to interpretation advanced by Dell Hymes, Feld has described the varied acts of negotiation, and active interpretation that accompany a performance of any kind, as 'interpretive moves' (Feld 1994: 86):

Interpretive moves involve the discovery of patterns as our experience is organized by juxtapositions, interactions, or choices in time when we engage symbolic objects of performance. Interpretive moves--regardless of complexity, variety, intensity, involvement--emerge dialectically from the human social encounter with a sound object or event (1994: 86).

For purposes of clarifying a research methodology, Feld's formulation is meaningful here in two respects. First, it seeks to account for the diversity of 'verbal representations' generated by a musical 'encounter' through consideration of the speaking positions of participants, musicians, dancers, listeners and composers (1994: 94). In this manner, the

verbal evaluations, descriptions, and criticisms of interpreters, whose differing perspectives have been shaped through social institutions like gender, class, education, race, and so forth, can be understood as contributing to the discursive domain surrounding any musical (or dance) experience. Secondly, in an interactive research situation, this broad formulation also necessarily implies consideration of the position of the researcher who, as another interpretive agent, is also a part of the performance. The admission of the interpretive dimension of constructing any ethnographic text has been a crucial factor in the assertion of the critical faculty of the researcher/writer. Rather than conceiving the research process as one of detachment and accurate reportage of events witnessed, or an inventory of 'texts' performed with supplementary descriptive commentary, the process can be more adequately conceived as one of dialogic engagement. It is with this second point in mind that I approached the fieldwork component of this thesis. Experiencing the tradition through the participant-observer mode of investigation has yielded information unattainable through a strict review of the literature on contra dance. At the same time, and in part because the cultural 'distance' was not too great, I have also been liberal in articulating my own understanding of the tradition. This will become clearer in chapter four by explaining the inclusive context of the dance events.

One other recent ethnomusicological work has been helpful: Mark Slobin's *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Slobin 1993). Slobin's work has been appropriate to this study for several reasons. The first issue is fairly clear from the title of Slobin's book: it alludes to the continued lively diversity of musical activity in Euro-America alongside the development of corporate controlled mass mediated music markets. Offering a

short inventory of Euro-American 'micromusics', Slobin defines the latter term (1993: 11) as "the small units within big music cultures," suggesting that they "have not disappeared, despite the dismal forecasts of earlier commentators". Yet, by his account, studies on the micromusics of Europe and America "have been noticeable largely by their absence" (1993: 106). Slobin urges scholarly consideration of these traditions within an ethnomusicological orientation. His suggestion thus resonates with the broader trend of 'repatriation' in the allied field of cultural anthropology, that has been described by Marcus and Fischer (Marcus and Fischer 1986).

A second important angle from this work, related to the first, is methodological. Slobin, in addressing his work partly to ethnographically oriented ethnomusicologists, urges a "rethinking about the units of analysis" (112). By his measure, an anthropological study of music must broaden its scope beyond ethnographic localizing strategies. He outlines a model of music study that places 'on-the-ground' musical practices within fluid networks of cultural production and circulation that extend out from the more immediate and intimate settings of 'micromusical' traditions. In this analysis, 'micromusics' exist not in isolation, but within a dynamic relationship to global conditions that exert an undeniable influence in mediating and shaping the processes of musical traditions. As researchers take into account these levels of analysis, they can no longer conceive music practices within a territorially bounded frame of localized, face-to-face transmission and participation. Of course this does not mean that the latter are not worthy of analysis, but rather that such sites may be considered as 'micromusical' scenes embedded within extensive networks of social and cultural forces. As this thesis will describe it, the current contra dance phenomenon is one

example of a 'micromusical' practice that is an intensively participatory genre, often generating and sustaining local dance communities. At the same time, its perpetuation is part of a complex historical pattern of cultural responses to social and musical conditions existing well beyond the dance floor.

Though this thesis is concerned with music and dance events and the conceptions of them, it should be noted that participation in contra dance does not constitute a singular cultural identity for most participants, and is, as Slobin coincidentally notes about contra dance himself, only one of several other music or dance genres participants enjoy. Yet during the events themselves, 'the tradition' becomes a momentary focal point of 'micromusical' action and group identification within the range of additional cultural activities of individual participants. Furthermore, this genre-bound community radiates outward from the dance event frame as dancers, musicians and callers travel to distant dance events, or move to other locations and become engaged with established but unfamiliar dance communities. Within the flux of shifting personal circumstances and occupational opportunities, contra dance scenes in many urban areas across the U.S. seem to offer a familiar point of reference for participants, a place of temporary stability in the "inherently volatile, constantly shifting world of today's expressive cultures" (Slobin 1993: 112). As a result of social and historical developments that will be touched upon, what formerly was the practice of a small audience of contra enthusiasts in New England has, since the late 1960s, expanded beyond the confines of this geographic identification. Bolstered considerably by the highly successful folklore revivals of this century, the tradition has circulated along the currents and networks arising from these movements and has been established in places far

beyond the New England region.

Cultural Anthropology

Recent directions in cultural anthropology have also shaped this thesis, in particular, the work of Marcus and Fischer (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Through discussion of recent developments in anthropological thought, these authors have discerned an intellectual trend they refer to as the 'repatriation of anthropology' (Marcus and Fischer 1986). One of the features of this repatriation has been the increasing tendency for researchers to explore, through ethnographic methods, situations quite close to the experience of the researcher. These authors argue that cultural anthropology has been associated for much of its history with a fieldwork process involving radical dislocation and a compressed period of enculturation undertaken by an outside investigator. Though this type of experience continues to generate new directions or paradigms within anthropology (and ethnomusicology), scholars of cultural anthropology are increasingly working among communities less distant from the researcher's own background:

there is indeed a growing awareness in anthropology that the functions of ethnography at home are as compelling and legitimate as they have been abroad . . . distinctive cultural variation is where you find it, and is often more important to document at home than abroad (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 113)

As a corollary to this development, the thrust of recent investigations has been redirected towards reanimating the comparative potential of anthropology for a critical project. In this newly realized project, comparative cultural criticism can no longer be founded on romanticized 'difference' for its own sake. Nor can it credibly depend upon constructing an idealized 'other' as an oppositional, contrastive or emancipatory foil to a researcher's own

social milieu. Instead, they argue:

What matters, then, is not ideal life elsewhere, or in another time, but the discovery of new recombinant possibilities and meanings in the process of daily living anywhere (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 115).

As is the case with any ethnographic research, the level of involvement of the researcher depends in part on the scope and intention of the project. But it is also greatly determined by the context of engagement and the people involved, so that the balance of 'observing' and 'participating' can vary considerably. Significantly, in terms of my own introduction to the dance community and in terms of my analysis of contra dance, I quickly became an active participant. As anyone who attends contra dances will attest, anyone present without instrument or microphone in hand is an eligible dancer. Invitations to dance, especially for inexperienced newcomers, are extended generously, sometimes insistently, and most dance callers are known to encourage and exhort anyone sitting on the sidelines to join in. As I realized from my very first night at a dance, there was an atmosphere and subtle rhetoric of inclusion that appeared to generate a lot of the enthusiasm at the dance (and swept aside any notions that I might merely sit out and watch before trying it!). My initial understanding expanded over the subsequent months of participation, but the theme of inclusion kept returning in my notes and reading and this theme guided the writing of this thesis. Practically speaking then, my field experiences were not that different from anyone else coming to dance: attending dances, asking questions, sitting in as a musician occasionally, watching (occasionally) and dancing, becoming something of a 'regular'.

'Dance' as analytic category in the literature

Recent work of dance scholars suggests that just as music has sometimes been mystified by the non-referentiality of musical processes, so also has dance been mystified by its intensively experiential dimension (Ward 1985; Royce 1977). Dance scholars have convincingly argued for an approach to all forms of dancing that looks precisely at the bodily experience of dance, to supplement analysis of the formal component of dance. Among many others, Royce has drawn attention to the neglect of dance as a cultural activity among anthropologists (1977). She speculates that the neglect may be due to its unfamiliarity among non-dance scholars, and argues that efficient notational developments should assist in overcoming this omission in cultural study. Yet others have noted that adequate notational devices, while offering sophisticated descriptive tools, do not in themselves remedy any scholarly omission or misunderstandings (Ward 1985, Spencer 1985 and Blacking 1985).

In this respect, Ward offers a useful critique of the functionalism that, until recently, inhibited efforts in dance scholarship to come to terms with the experiential, bodily and affective dimension of social dance (Ward 1985). He faults a wide range of scholarship and popular notions that have contributed to two misconceptions of dance. One is that dance, because of its non-discursive, non-referential character, can only be explained through recourse to overarching functional categories. From this view of dance as a seemingly non-rational activity, it followed that dance was a sort of vestige of pre-rational humanity, and could be discussed only as it constitutes an avenue to the pursuance of other underlying non-dance related goals: outlet for aggression, tension reducer, marriage partner-seeking, precursor to sexual engagement, etc. In this evaluation, dance is merely a momentary but necessary means in the striving for ultimate goals beyond the dance venue (Ward 1986: 21).

Ward suggests that recent writers have shifted from this type of analysis to understanding dance in context. Like Ward, Kaeppler also suggests consideration of dance movement as certainly constituting a unique experience, but one that is nonetheless approachable within a context sensitive, communication-centered understanding:

Pragmatically dance . . . conveys or communicates information as a symbolic medium that is quite different from language and thereby is a significant part of uniquely human social and cultural systems (Kaeppler 1992: 202).

The second misconception Ward describes is less common now and unrelated to the first: that when the actual movements of dance have been examined for analysis in the past, all too often a search for universals has obscured the shifting contexts that can bestow very different meanings on identical movements, even identical dances. In this restricted perspective, meaning is somehow constituted in the movements themselves, so that a proper analysis need only be concerned with detailed, exhaustive inventories and accurate descriptive practices. As a result, context, including the personal, experiential aspect of dancing has been overlooked in favor of the formal considerations as indicators of meaning. Again, Kaeppler succinctly provides a more elastic conception of dance movement and meaning:

Dance as a symbolic system that operates through conventionalization creates meanings that can be undone or revised with relative ease and thereby can respond to changing contexts or circumstances (Kaeppler 1992: 203).

However, until recently the descriptive approach has been prominent among many scholars, beginning with Sharp (1924), who theorized social dances, including country dances of Europe and America (see also Sachs 1937 and Nevell 1977). One lengthy example with regard to contra dance in a historical perspective will demonstrate the inadequacy of the

idea that dance movements carry inherent meanings within them. Based on choreographic considerations alone, some scholars have deduced something inherently democratic and egalitarian in the country dance form (Sharp 1924). As chapter three will demonstrate, this is an idea that has endured in some form until the present. Briefly stated, the idea was that some inherent sociability was the defining experience of the dance, based on two main factors: 1) that since contra dance does not hierarchically differentiate roles in the choreography and is not a presentational dance, there is no spectator vs. participant barrier, and 2) that all the movements of the dance tended to integrate all the dancers together into a cohesive unit. But closer attention to the discourse and the larger social reality that generated this kind of understanding has been overlooked and the dance form has been overly idealized or 'essentialized'.

Thus, as the work of Dart shows, even though the contra dance tradition has relied on a fairly stable repertoire of choreographic possibilities for many years, a tension between egalitarian accessibility and advanced competence in the dance choreography has arisen. In contemporary situations in particular, dance composers, using essentially the exact same movements and formations that have been in use for a few hundred years, must balance accessibility (to foster inclusiveness) and complex challenges (to keep the interest of more experienced dancers; see Dart 1992; Hast 1994). Consequently, as is clear from the literature and in my dance experience, there are on the one hand dancers for whom the dance, although ideally a social experience, is often more satisfactory as a fast paced forum to exercise personal dance skills. On the other hand, a subtle rhetoric of inclusivity has been carefully maintained and is typically noted in the literature geared to dance callers (see Page

and Tolman 1937, Maddocks 1950 and Bealle 1989).

Any claims made for the structure of the dance 'itself' are weakened, as the supposedly socially integrative attributes of the choreographic conventions of contra dance do not necessarily always square with the actual dance as performed. The sociability of the dance form is not so much due to any absolute formal properties as it is to the context in which the dance is practiced. Yet, since this claim persistently occurs in the literature, in ethnography and among prior dance scholars, it at least suggests that this ideal has been and continues to be a considerable factor in shaping the experiences and discourse surrounding its practice today.¹ This suggests that the idea of social communion through dance experience can be investigated as a cultural construct, rather than an absolute feature of the dance itself. This will be addressed in more depth in chapter four.

Dance scholarship

Historical studies of contra dance have been curiously absent, especially in view of the amount of documentation and the fact that, as a dance form it has been part of a tradition that has endured in some form for literally hundreds of years. This persistence has been one of renewal, alteration, blending of various formations, figures, and appropriate musical accompaniment, and shifts in attendant social and cultural meanings. It is also a close relative to one of the most visible symbols of Anglo-American vernacular cultural tradition, the Square Dance (see Phillips 1973). Anecdotal evidence of any social dance prior to the

¹ See Tomczak 1996 for several postings with intensive discussion among dancers and callers about changes in the social character of contemporary contra dances.

twentieth century is available in the form of dance manuals, newspaper announcements, diaries, and histories of dance masters. Some of this has become available (see Aldrich 1991 for instance), but as yet there has been no attempt to synthesize these materials into a historically grounded interpretive (though see: Van Cleef 1976, Keller 1991). Choreography has been one particularly fruitful avenue for investigation, as the notations for various dances offer empirical evidence of the dances as practiced. But focused examination of such forms in themselves may not be able to take into account the social dimension in which the dance forms and music were enjoyed and perpetuated. Such information is invaluable for this highly social form of participatory dance.

Some justification for treatment of contra dancing in terms of its social and participatory character can be found in an article by Nahachewsky (Nahachewsky 1995) that proposes an analytic distinction for dance analysis. This work offers a practical typological distinction that has implications for dance research, a distinction too often overlooked in the treatment of dance performance as fundamentally a product-oriented activity, aimed at recreation of an abstracted formal entity. Nahachewsky theorizes a continuum of dance experience with presentational dance at one end and participatory dance at the other, the former category tending to be product-oriented, the latter process-oriented:

In participatory dances, the focus tends to be on the dancers themselves. The process of dancing is important. A good dance differs from a less successful performance based on how it *feels*. Presentational dances tend to be perceived more as a product than a process. The success of a particular performance is judged by how it *looks*. Participatory dances take place at social events where a particular community comes together to celebrate . . . Presentational dances are often performed on formal stages and in other locations where the physical and cultural distance between performers and audience is greater (Nahachewsky 1995: 1)

This definitional exercise may risk overgeneralizing dance experience, but based on my observation and participation in numerous contra dances, it offers a valuable perspective from which to focus on the highly valued dynamic of participation, rather than strictly on the realization of a choreographic presentation. From my experience speaking with dancers and callers, open participation is among the strongest reasons for the popularity and the enjoyment of these dance events. It is this quality about the genre that is the focus of recent ethnographic work on contra and the aspect emphasized in this thesis (see Hast 1993; Bealle 1989; Levine 1987).

From my reading of the literature, the most useful approach does not isolate the dance from the music or both from the social context, but considers both inclusively as fundamentally interlinked components. This kind of approach has been suggested in the work of dance scholars Hanna (1979), Royce (1977) and Torp (1983). Each of these scholars frames an anthropological approach to dance in terms of the 'dance event'. This method involves taking an instance of performance as the fundamental level of analysis from which to proceed. In the case of contra dance then, dancers, musicians and callers as well as the choreography and tunes are considered integrally within the time span of a three to four hour dance event. A full investigation of this activity can then be turned outward, to the threads of history, memory, and creativity that impinge onto the event and that converge to shape the various experiences within the frame of the dance event.

As this approach unites what are often conceived as two related but separable levels for analysis, music and dance, it clearly overlaps the realms of anthropological dance scholarship and ethnomusicological scholarship. Though each may concern itself with

different domains, it is clear in the case of contra, as in many other contexts worldwide, that in many instances, music, dance and social events are often tightly knit and conceived as integral components of a single cultural performance (see Feld and Keil 1994: 53-76). In the case of contemporary contra dance, this conceptual unity of live music and dancing takes on a special significance, contributing in part to the vibrant social atmosphere and aesthetic of community. Thus my approach involves the recognition, based on the 'dance event' concept, that the meanings, significance and personal experience are multiple, engaging bodily movement, musical awareness, historical and social experience. Each of these factors converge to play a part in current contra dance contexts.

Just as Slobin suggests for music research, dance scholars have also recently argued that it is the way in which music and dance are experienced by individuals that is a key component for analysis. For example, Paul Spencer has pointed out the importance of questioning

any axiomatic assumption that the basic choreographic pattern of every dance must be loaded with an inner subliminal meaning. This is to shift the emphasis in analysis from the dance itself as a self-explanatory structural entity -- its choreographic form -- to its ritual context (Spencer 1985: 38)

Anthropologist John Blacking also urges such a fieldwork analysis centered on discursive context:

I suggest, therefore, that a way forward in the anthropology of dance lies not so much in developing a metalanguage for cross-cultural study, or analyzing movements in terms of a standard set of parameters, as in asking dancers and spectators from the widest possible range of societies and social situations what *they* think they are doing and experiencing (Blacking 1985: 66, original emphasis)

Finally, Royce, in *The Anthropology of Dance* has mapped out just such a shift in emphasis

in recent dance literature:

What is apparent from the kinds of historical studies of dance that have been produced in the last twenty years is that the focus is not so much on the dance forms as it is on the dance as a part of particular cultures and societies . . . just as histories with specific focus in terms of dance style or time have replaced the massive compendia with an evolutionary slant, so have historical studies concerned with dance *culture* replaced those concerned with dance *form* (Royce 1977: 98, emphasis mine)

In this spirit then, I understand the dance event as an experience that is saturated with constantly shifting points of reference. The event combines several socially meaningful levels of experiences to which dancers, callers, and musicians orient their attention at different times. At one point is the dancer, shifting attention between movement, aural/musical sensation, social cooperation and negotiation and cross-gender intimacy. At the musician's point there is first the physical and mental aspect of making music in an ensemble, then the visual (and auditory) sensation of observing the dance floor and establishing a connection with the dancers, and then interaction with the caller in keeping things going smoothly. Then from the caller's perspective there is the first priority of coordinating and communicating with dancers and musicians to facilitate the structuring of the event, then the visual aspect of watching the dancers, listening to the musicians, analyzing the choreographic 'flow' (see Dart 1992), and sometimes joining in the dance for a few repetitions. This, the immediate or synchronic experience is enriched by the extra-musical and extra-terpsichorean conditions surrounding the event. This includes the social and historical, as well as the personal dimensions.

Contra dance ethnographies

Taken together, the few ethnographic accounts of contemporary contra dance suggest

a high degree of uniformity of practice linking the widely geographically distributed contexts. As this thesis will discuss, this literature collectively portrays a nationwide network of dance enthusiasts participating in closely corresponding ways, with only minor regional variations. Clearly, as individuals are involved in calling, performing, and dancing, there is variation and creative innovation across the many separate communities. Yet variations tend to be of degree and cannot be said to constitute wholly different regional traditions. This applies to the shared dance and music forms of contra dancing as well as the shared social dynamic that is clearly a prized aspect of the tradition. This consistency of form and social atmosphere of contra dance nationwide can be attributed to several factors: the mobility of callers, musicians and dancers, distribution of printed dance manuals, music notation and recordings, and folk music networks. This continuity is observable where dancers and musicians are often able to move to unfamiliar places and be absorbed into a local group fairly readily. The proliferation of postings and calendars, arranged by state, about contra dance events nationwide on electronic services such as the Internet, has most recently opened another avenue connecting those in the dance community (see, for instance, a national listing of dances posted by Bill Tomczak, 1996). As will become clear, this current nationwide network now constitutes a creative, meaningful reference point for many within the U.S. dance community.

Contra Dance in Cultural History

Attention to the historical frame and cultural forces outside the contra dance floor 'event' constitutes a crucial supplement to the "ground level" ethnography of dance. This is

in response somewhat to some recent research on American vernacular dance. For example, the ethnographic study of social or community dance has been the subject of a published collection, *Communities in Motion* (Spalding and Woodside, ed. 1995). There are useful suggestions here, particularly as community social dances are considered dynamic genres that generate and define social groups as individuals choose to join in. As one of the editors put it: "tradition is the process--and vernacular dance is the medium--by which people in communities try to maintain continuity with their past while dealing with changing circumstances in their present" (Spalding 1995: 7). However, the sometimes celebratory discussions of dance in this volume (see Spalding and Woodside 1995: 1-87) suggest the sort of analysis that, in Slobin's words, makes "no attempt at an overview", and merely offers "an idiosyncratic set of analytical terms and tools" (Slobin 1993: 6). Analysis of continuity of a tradition as simply consensual, self-sustaining community-spirited preservation overlooks other social conditions beyond the dance floor, that come to bear upon and interact with the tradition.

The contemporary contra dance tradition itself, though sometimes imagined as a continuous and long-standing American cultural expression, has always been responsive to the needs of new audiences and to the changing social dynamic before, during and after various revivals. Structural changes and modulation of certain aspects of the dance event's social environment are thus related to conditions outside the immediate dance context. These changes, subtle as they may be, have been noted in the realms of contra dance choreography (Dart 1992), music (Bealle 1989) and social atmosphere (Hast 1993). These changes have been as much the result of purely local choice as they have been the result of the reception

and continuation of contra dance as a part of a series of mass mediated popular folk revival in the U.S. from the 1930s through the 1960s (Cantwell 1996). These larger concerns will be addressed, then, as an important foundation to the contra dance tradition in the Madison area as elsewhere.

Folklore and revival

Finally, it is not coincidental that a reconstituted genre of American folk culture gives rise to positive images of communal cohesion or social solidarity. As several authors have noted, folkloric genres have frequently been idealized as affirmations of community, lending a sort of moral force to the many attempts of folklore revivalists to reactivate interest in folklore in the industrializing and post-industrial eras (see Boyes 1993, Cantwell 1996 and Rosenberg 1993). Thus, the periodic resurgence of interest in American country dance (i.e. both Western-style club dance and New England contra dance; see Chapter Two) in this century may be understood as part of a larger cyclical cultural trend. This trend involves the recurring desire to seek in traditions of the past, a socially and personally restorative cultural response to the anxieties of rapid social changes. Placed within this broad context, as cultural and social formations respond to the rapid shifts and often disorienting effects of large scale industrialization and rapidly fluctuating economic circumstances (see David Harvey 1989), folkloric items very frequently take on a significance as affirmative symbols of continuity with the past, and are transformed into reflexive points of communal identification.

As chapter four discusses, from this perspective, folkloric genres have become invested with a symbolic power that can complicate any simple descriptive approach to the

performed reality and historical continuity of these genres. The discourse surrounding contra dance often reflects participants' conceptions of its placement in the special category of 'folk dance and music'. As both intellectual and popular constructs, the idea of 'folk' and the related conceptions about folk genres have been intimately connected with the processes of industrialization, nationalism and the rapid social changes engendered by capitalism. Several scholars have traced the historical emergence of the conceptions of "folklore" and "revival". In chapter four I will draw upon the works of three writers in particular, each with his own disciplinary approach, that have guided my understanding of the place of folklore in contemporary culture. I acknowledge them briefly here.

The first is Hermann Bausinger, whose *Folk Culture in a World of Technology* (1961/1990) offers a compelling analysis of how ideas of "folk" genres have been necessarily dependent upon the circumstances of rapidly industrializing societies (Bausinger 1990). His research concerns the romantic idealization of vanishing customs of southern Germany but has wider applicability. His formulation of "folklore as a counterworld" has been productive for examining the ways that folk revivals offer an oppositional response to modernity and feelings of social dislocation. In this response, folk traditions become detached from certain contexts and adopted in others, carrying with them new meanings. Bausinger analyzes this trend based on a pessimistic, but cogent linkage of folklorism and modern alienation, suggesting "that programs of flight --including folkloristic programs of flight -- do not contribute to an escape from the industrial society and its conditions" (Bausinger 1990: 140).

A second scholar, ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman, also concerns himself with

theoretical issues of folklore revival. He offers several similar ideas concerning the interpenetration of modern industrial culture with the formation, delimitation of, and participation in folk music activities. Responding to the "invention of tradition" concept of Hobsbawm, he agrees that the impulse to 'invent' authoritative folkloric canons with or without regard for prior existing forms attests to a peculiarly modern sensibility that reveals itself in the "ascription of considerable value to the need to express certain aspects of culture -- especially history -- in canonical fashion" (Bohlman 1988: 108). In this process of expression, a repertoire is fashioned from cultural practices from within the group concerned or sometimes drawn from some culturally engaged other. This repertoire then comes to serve a definitional purpose. The self conscious cohesion around these constituted canons of music "in some cases has come to define the subgroup, rather than the subgroup defining its musical practices" (Bohlman 1988: 139). Looking at the modern formation of communities devoted to revived canons of folk traditions that are frequently no longer associated with their prior contexts, he suggests the potency of new meanings for these repertoires:

Revival is, in an ideological sense, the ultimate collapse of time and space because it fully admits of the efficacy of that collapse for creating contemporary meaning . . . Ideology determines the ways in which time and place collapse and how the musical activities that result from this collapse articulate a specific message to a specific group . . . so that even more meaning and symbolism [is invested] in folk music than it might otherwise convey (Bohlman 1988: 135)

Subject to periodic revival and promotion throughout its history, contra dancing has, in fact, often been conceived as a part of a thoroughly Anglo-American heritage. As such, its contemporary situation can be analyzed with attention to the historically constructed meanings that arise from its practice (see Bealle 1989, Flinn 1993 and Page 1977). In this

respect the work of another scholar, Robert Cantwell, has been instructive both as a theoretical orientation and as a historical resource. Cantwell's recent work, *When We Were Good* (1996), offers a sweeping cultural and historical assessment of the series of folk music revivals that occurred in the United States, beginning in the early twentieth century and extending to the present. In his interpretation he also understands this series of revivals as part of an ongoing cultural reaction to contemporary issues of sociological, economic and political concern, ultimately arising from the dislocations of industrialism, colonialism and capitalism. As chapter three and four will make clear, the contra dance genre has been self-consciously mobilized as a response to the cultural currents noted by Cantwell, and also has been energized by the same forces that brought an awareness and idealization of folklife in general to the consciousness of twentieth century America.

Summary

Though in many senses a marginal tradition, contra dance continues to be practiced by new audiences who find great value in the tradition. Yet as with any cultural tradition, it has not been perpetuated in a vacuum, but has consistently been subject to numerous movements in this century that affect its practice today. I would argue that while its documentable history as a social dance form is not immediately significant during the events, nonetheless, those prior constructs have contributed to a cultural -historical context by which the dance and its music have come to be what they are today. Though dancers may merely experience this in terms of a vague conception of the dance's 'folk' qualities, a brief retracing of the evolution of contra dancing as a cultural institution and its incarnation as a revitalized

tradition are significant. Of equal importance is the contemporary discourse about the dance that emerges as dancers continue to perform it.

This project, like other recent works, considers the 'dance event' as central in order to complement the body of country dance and music scholarship that sometimes focused narrowly on structural aspects within a purview of folkloric selectivity (Sharp 1924). An account of the forms and music is clearly necessary. Yet as Mark Slobin argues for music study, "it is not how the music sounds, but how it can be thought that counts" (Slobin 1993: ix), a suggestion equally pertinent to dance research as Royce has noted earlier (Royce 1977: 13). I have aimed at balancing a summary historical narrative, of how and where the forms were sustained and developed up to the present, with an integrated summary of the current contexts of contra dance as reported in other ethnographies supplemented with my own fieldwork in this location. This will expand the "frame" of the dance event so that it is not conceived as an isolated, self contained domain, but connects the historically and culturally derived meanings generated within a music and dance tradition in a specific time and place (see Quigley 1993: 74-5 for discussion).

Many of the dimensions of contra dancing noted above have been articulated at many places in contra dance ethnography: experience of the music and the shaping of musical performance to suit dance (Herman 1995), perception of the choreography (Hast 1992), understanding the caller and cooperating with other dancers (Levine 1987), negotiating the boundaries of appropriate physical contact and flirting (Hanna 1988), euphoric transcendence (Bealle 1989), and temporary formation of 'community' as a pleasurable response to atomized social experience (Levine 1987), and the dance as an antidote to

feelings of dislocation (Flinn 1993). Consideration of the formal aspects forms only a small part of this work: to most effectively engage the concerns I have outlined above, the chosen focus is not on the purely technical description or an inventory of dances and tunes.

From the diachronic perspective there is the documentable development of a social dance form (Rust 1969; Aldrich 1991; Kennedy 1949), its association with a pastoral lifestyle (Sharp 1924), the Americanization of an English cultural form (Damon 1957), its mobilization by activists for cultural agendas (Ford 1926), and its relationship to popular folklore revival (Bealle 1989). Such an approach is especially useful for contra dance, since numerous published books and manuals that include detailed and concise descriptive information and commentary circulate widely within the contra dance community (Sannella 1982, for instance, briefly outlines a suggested 'grammar' of dance construction; see also Page 1984; Gunzenhauser 1996, Piper 1956 and Jennings 1983). This research is not aimed at summarizing such information, or how the actual performance correlates with the dances described in these works (see Dart 1992 for such an analysis), but at how the events are and have been shaped and experienced by recent musicians, dancers and callers.

Chapter Two

New England-Style Contra Dance: Basic Terms, Formations and Music

This chapter will present a summary description of the formal aspects of the dance as they are most commonly encountered at contemporary contra dances. As composed and performed today, contra dance choreographies are fairly formulaic, in terms of the duration, movements and synchronization with musical accompaniment. With very few exceptions, all of the dances in an evening use the formations and figures as presented below. This description will be limited to the general characteristics of the most typical dance forms in the contra dance scene today. More intensive treatment of the grammar of choreography is beyond the scope of this paper; there are numerous publications in the bibliography that treat the mechanics and the process of dance composition.

The regularity of form imparts a high level of consistency from dance to dance. Awareness of the vocabulary of forms and the formations provides any dancer with a base level of competence and also constitutes a stable element of the genre that contributes substantially to the initial ease of participation. Here the focus is on the stereotypical configurations of dancers in the lines and subsets of the lines so as to give a sense of the tight group coordination required to 'work' through the choreography in performance. As will be seen, the conventions of the choreography structure the typical dance in such a way that there is a near constant interaction, not only with one's chosen partner, but with nearly all other dancers in the chosen formation at some point in the dance. Aside from one or two couple dances during the evening, all the dance formations are group intensive.

Dance evenings where contra formations predominate in the Madison area go by several different names as printed in flyers and newspapers and among dancers. Besides simply "contra dance", other designations include: "New England style Contra", "Barn Dance" and "Country Dance". Each of these generally refer to the same type of event as described here. In a printed listing of dance events in Madison, sometimes only the name of the performing band is printed and the type of dance expected will be known from past performances of that band.² The caller's name is usually listed as well, giving dancers an idea of what the evening may be like, given the callers reputation from past dances. Often, upcoming dances are announced during dance breaks, and discussed among dancers while socializing at the end of an evening. Many times the next event is simply referred to as "a dance" on a certain night. In such a context, unless otherwise specified, such a generic reference typically designates an evening of mostly contra dances, so that there is a sense that the series of events is collectively defined around a single genre.

Though each local dance event varies in terms of musicians, callers, and dance participants, the majority of the dances performed are the type known as "American country dances" in the literature on American social dance (Hast 1993; Blaustein 1993; Gunzenhauser 1996: 1-10). In the local dance events, the term "country dance" is not commonly used, but the term is useful as an umbrella term for these historically and socially related dance formations that will be described individually below (Gunzenhauser 1996: xi; Blaustein 1995: 191-4). In the discussion that follows, the terms "country dance"

² Six month dance calendars are distributed at most dances and are available online as well.

and "contra dance" will be used, and each should be clarified as much as possible at the outset, though I should note here that their use in much of the literature is quite often non-specific. The term 'country dance' as I use it here is meant to be a very broad and inclusive analytical term, incorporating a whole complex of dance formations, figures and choreographic conventions sharing a common history. For purposes of analysis this term can be applied to all of the historically related dance traditions, wherever they have existed, England, Germany, France, the United States. "Contra dance" as a term will be used in two senses: one simply designating the dance formation in which single file lines of dancers stand face to face (a subset of "country dance"); and secondly to collectively refer to the recent tradition under consideration, in which this single formation predominates: i.e. "the contra dance scene."

Country dances, then, are group social dances that involve the choreographed arrangement of a finite number of 'figures' performed by paired couples in conjunction with varying numbers of other couples that result in constantly shifting geometric patterns. As a formal designation the term 'country dance' includes a wide array of dance styles that have historically shared a similar vocabulary of movements and music, each tradition differing principally in the manner of choreographic arrangement (Sharp 1924: 23; Bealle 1989: 109-112; and Kimball 1988: 72). In American country dancing since the colonial period, this has included contra dances properly defined, as well as squares, circles, mixers and set dances. As chapter three will discuss, over the past 30 years the contra formation has become a favored one among several folk revival audiences, so that a distinct, self-designated 'contra dance community' now exists in many places nationwide.

Generally speaking, the actual choreographed sequences are relatively short for each of these dance-types. With the exception of a few special cases, nearly all sequences are composed to last the duration of a typical Anglo-American fiddle tune: exactly 32 measures, either in 6/8 or 2/4 meter. Each of the individual figures requires either 4 or 8 measures of music to complete so that the figures often correspond in length to the phrase segments of the fiddle tunes (see Appendix One for descriptions and durations of the most common figures). An important feature of the choreography is the 'progression.' At the completion of a single sequence, each couple has shifted (progressed) to some new position in the formation, from which point dance sequence and tune are repeated, without pause, for as long as the caller decides (between 9-15 minutes usually). As a result of this constant progression, each couple typically interacts with each of the other couples in their circle, lines or squares. In performance, the totality of successive repetitions of a single sequence is collectively known as 'a dance'. In most instances, the arrangement of figures in a given dance sequence remains the same for the duration of the performance.

The Contra Formation

The "contra" formation proper consists of two parallel lines of dancers facing. Since it is the single most common dance type at the events, it is perhaps the best model by which to explain how a dance works in performance. (See figures 1-3.) Having chosen partners before the dance begins, dancers stand facing their partner in the opposite line or sometimes next to them in the same line. These two lines are collectively called a 'set'. The caller, after selecting a composed dance beforehand, teaches the dance verbally to the dancers, using the vocabulary of "figures" which can be considered the smallest formal units in the 'grammar'

of a dance.

Depending on the figure, each dancer interacts with a partner, neighbor, 'circle of four' or the long line in which he or she is standing. Contra dances (as opposed to squares) are always 'progressive', meaning that figures are arranged for a dance composition so that at the end of a single sequence, each couple will have shifted one or more positions away from or towards the band and caller (see figure 2). Beginning with the couple closest to the front of the hall, each couple is alternately designated 'active' or 'inactive', respectively, indicating their progression towards or away from the band/caller area. From this point, the sequence is exactly repeated. As a result of progression, dancers eventually interact with all couples in the 'set'. The progression portrayed in figures two and three is common to a majority of dances today. Other progressions are possible, depending on the inventiveness of the choreographer. An undefined number of repetitions of this sequence is known as "the dance" and the repetitions may continue for as long as the caller or band wishes.

To get a visual sense of the arrangement of dancers, musicians and caller in the venue during a contra-style dance, refer to figure 1. The place where the musicians and caller and PA system (if used) are located is called the 'front' of the hall; the opposite end the 'rear' or 'back' of the hall. Though always using parallel lines, the arrangement of partners in a contra dance can vary. In contemporary contra dance, the two most common arrangements are the 'proper' and 'improper' duple formation. 'Proper' simply indicates that all the men stand in one line, while all the women stand in another, each line facing in (see figure 3). 'Improper'

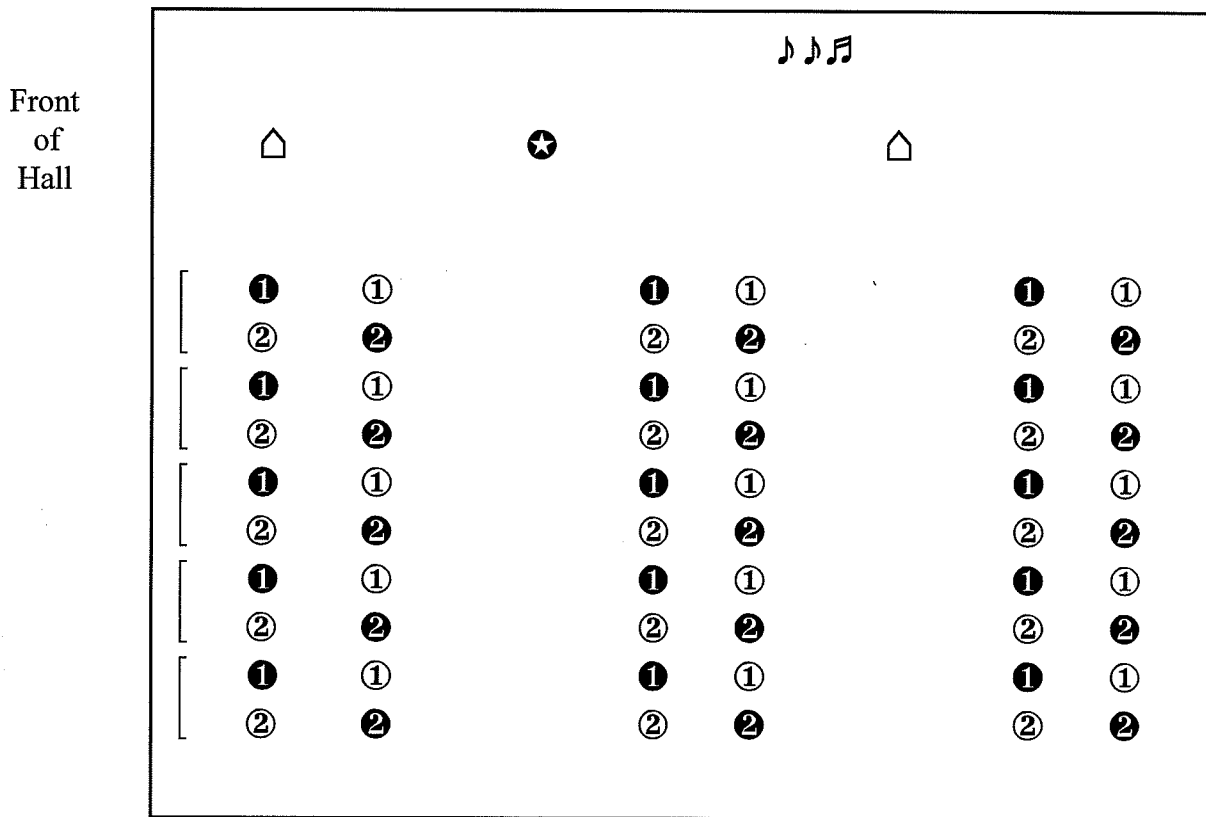


Figure 1: Positions at the beginning of a contra-formation dance ('improper')

Key to symbols

● = woman

○ = man

♪ = musicians

★ = caller

△ = PA loudspeakers

Paired numbers indicate dance couples' status: #1 couples are 'active', #2 couples are 'inactive'

During this dance, spacing between dancers within long lines is fairly uniform. Brackets here indicate the subgroup of four formed by a pair of active and inactive couples within the line during a 'duple'.

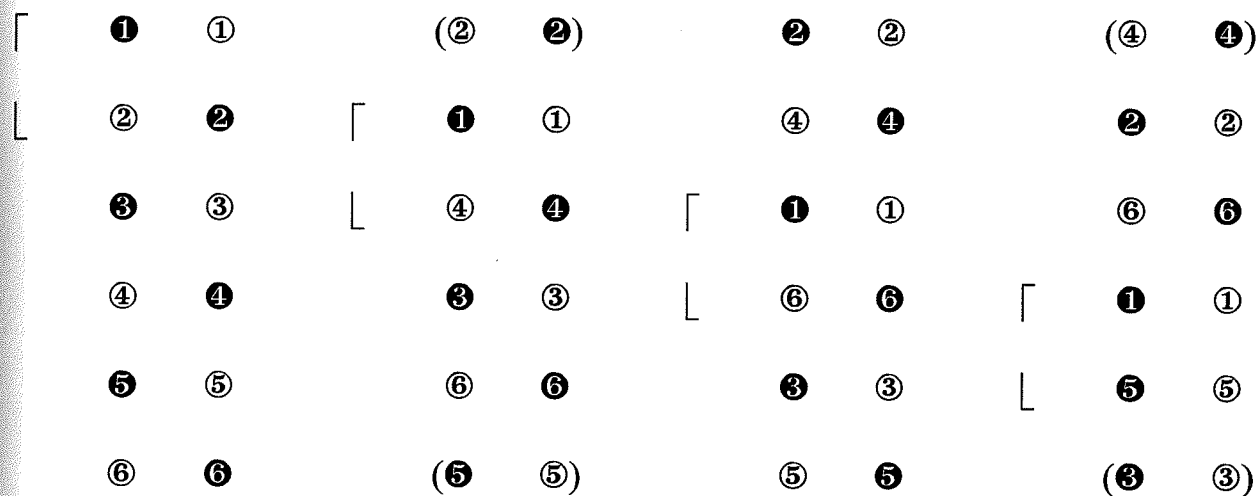


Figure 2: Sample Progression for an *improper* duple contra dance. The farthest left hand column is the beginning of the dance; successive columns to the right demonstrate the 'progressed' positions of dance couples after each completion of the choreographed dance sequence (32 bars of music, the standard duration of dance tunes). The brackets trace the progression of couple #1. Every other progression, the end couples must 'wait out' a full sequence, indicated here with parentheses.

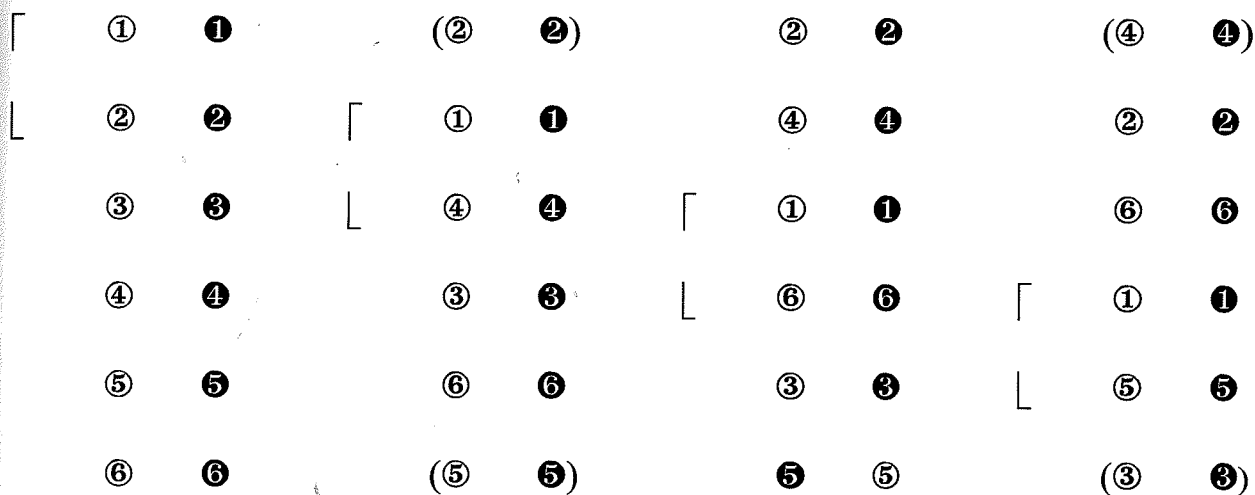


Figure 3: Sample progression of a *proper* duple contra dance. Read as above.

indicates an alternation of men and women within each long line (see figure 2). In either case, male-female partners stand facing opposite one another. 'Duple' refers to the fact that the dance choreography uses figures requiring a subgrouping of four dancers.³ Figure 1 is a representation of what has become one of the most favored variations of the contra formation: the 'improper' duple formation. Dances where partners stand side by side are known as Beckett formation dances, and are not as commonly called.

Additional Formations

There are several other formations that have historically been part of the country dance repertoire and that continue to be performed within the contra dance scene, though with much less frequency than the contra. These other formations for the most part draw upon the same vocabulary of figures and some are progressive.

One such formation is the circle or, as it is sometimes called, the 'big set' formation. Frequently associated with dance traditions in the Appalachian region of the United States (see Nevell 1977 and Quigley 1995: 75), the simplest circle dance involves couples joining hands in a large circle, the male partner to the left in the couple. As long as the hall can accommodate it, a single large circle is the norm, but a smaller circle can be placed concentrically inside a large one if needed. The figures used are drawn from the same pool as contra figures, though omitting some of those requiring couples to be facing. In circle

³ In the English Country Dance tradition, as far back as John Playford's *Dancing Master* and extending to its present revival, there has also been a 'triple' formation in addition to the duple. In this arrangement, the primary subset for the choreography is three couples, rather than two as in the duple. This type of formation is much less frequently danced than the duple formations at most current New England style contra dance events.

dances, one does not usually retain one's original partner for the duration of the dance, and for this reason sometimes callers will refer to them as "mixers". After the composed sequence is completed once, each dancer begins anew with a different partner somewhere in the circle.

The other circle shaped formation dance is sometimes called the 'Sicilian circle'. The arrangement of dancers in this formation can most easily be visualized as taking the two ends of a single contra set, and bending the lines so that the ends meet to form two concentric circles, dancers in the inner circle facing away from the center, while those in the outer circle face into the center. Progressions, length of choreography, and figures are similar as for a contra-formation dance.

Squares are less common in several of the Madison events, though some callers make an effort to incorporate one or more of them into an evening. In this formation, four couples are arranged in a square, couple facing couple, the men to the left of the women. Depending on the choreography, one may change partners several times during the dance. While the square is the same formation used in club square or Western square tradition, the compositions and types of figures used in New England-style squares are more closely connected to the contras, 19th century quadrilles and cotillions. The vocabulary of calls for these New England squares is much smaller than the Western-style which uses a much larger number of basic movements, to which new ones are constantly being added. A fuller comparison with the Western club-style dance square dance tradition can be found below.

The mechanics of the dances performed on a given night seem complex when rendered in text. I have found that descriptions only clumsily convey what was, even on my

first attempt, an otherwise easily learned dance style. Judging from conversations with other dancers, and comments in the literature, my experience was not unique. Several ethnographies suggest that learning the figures and acquiring a basic proficiency are very straightforward matters for most newcomers (Hast 1994: 129 and Flinn 1993: 89). Only one's proficiency increases with time; the basic movements remain the same, regardless of experience. While dancers often evaluate other's dance skills, it appears that most would support the idea that the dance is potentially accessible to anyone that can follow the directions provided by a caller. As chapter four discusses, ease of access for newcomers is one of the prized features of the tradition, though some dance callers will give a brief, 30 minute teaching session prior to the dance.

The vocabulary of figures used in the contra and other related dances can be traced to the country dance tradition in sixteenth and seventeenth century England and France (see Appendix One for a list of the most common contemporary figures). The term 'figure', rather than 'step', is used in country dancing for good reason. Except for the common 'balance' step, and the infrequent 'sashay' step, most figures concentrate on the hands, arms, shoulders and upper body, with minimal attention to the feet. Earlier in its history, especially among court and sophisticated urban dance audiences, elaborate footwork was an important aspect of country dances. According to Keller, this was likely an influence from French court dances such as the Minuet, that cultivated a number of different stepping styles (Keller 1991: 10-20). Stepping of this sort continues to be a feature of the related tradition of contemporary Scottish country dance (see Emmerson 1967: 12-15), but in the current American contra dances, the usual step employed is a smooth walking step. Kimball reports the passing of

interest in a diverse vocabulary of steps in the U.S. sometime during the middle of the nineteenth century (Kimball 1988: 73; Levine 1987: 198).

Other dance types

Aside from dance types from the country dance 'family', two or three other dances, known collectively as 'couple dances', are performed regularly at significant points in the dance evening. These dances are not part of the country dance designation and emerged much later historically. At a typical contra dance today only a short amount of time is typically devoted to these couple dances, but at least one is included at almost every contra dance event. These 'couple dances' include the waltz, schottische, hambo and an occasional polka (Bealle 1989: 162; Damon 1957). If the musicians know the appropriate repertoire, sometimes a two-step or swing dance is done, but this is even less frequent than the other couple dances. As a group, these dances are quite different from country dances formally and aesthetically. Unlike the country dances a single partner is maintained for the duration of the dance and there is no interaction with anyone other than the chosen partner during the dance. These dances are of a different character than the contra dances, in that the interactive group coordination required of the contras is absent. Finally, couple dances also differ from contra dance in that each requires a specific musical repertory that is not used for contras, i.e. a waltz tune, polka or hambo.

Contrast with Western style square dancing

As chapter three will discuss, in the twentieth century, two largely separate audiences have developed around either the New England style or the Western/club-style of country dances. Though square formation dances can be found in the earliest English sources for

country dances, these are different from the square dances as they developed a distinct identity in America. According to Kennedy, the American square dance can be best understood as a unique merging of two strains of dance tradition that took place in the colonies:

when these French squares [Cotillions and Quadrilles] filtered into the United States, they mingled with older traditional square and round dances, introduced in the Colonial days from England, Scotland and Ireland (Kennedy 1949: 106)

But the transformations that made the Western style club dancing most distinctive occurred largely during the 1940s and 1950s American square dance boom (Gunzenhauser 1996: xv).

Today the two traditions can be differentiated by a number of formal features. Aside from the squares-only formation in the Western-style clubs, there is a substantially larger vocabulary of figures used in the latter than in the contra style. Estimates range from 20 to 30 figures used in most contra dance communities, whereas in the club-style, there can be anywhere from 70-100 figures. This profusion of figures has led one author to describe the style as "very intellectual" (Gunzenhauser 1996: 4), due to the considerable demand on the dancer's ability to recall a greater number of movements on cue. In contra style dances, there tend to be more frequent and longer lasting swings than in the club style. Unlike the New England contra dances, club square choreographies need not necessarily correspond with the phrase structure of the musical tune, allowing for greater flexibility on the part of the caller and musical accompaniment. Rather than the musical phrasing being a key aural cue for the dancers, rhythm is most important for coordinating the dance movements.

A few other factors also contrast the two styles presently. Club dancing is a much more institutionalized movement, complete with graded training sessions, caller certification

programs and occasional contests. Many club dancers wear some sort of coordinated standard dance outfit for dance evenings. Club dancers also tend to come to events in pairs, and will keep their partner for the duration of the evening, unlike the contra dances where singles come alone, and pairing off for dances is much more open-ended: typically a contra audience is encouraged to switch partners for every dance, and to try to dance with partners of varying experience levels during an evening. Finally, live music is not a priority for most club dances, as it is for most contra dances; recordings of bluegrass or country and western are most commonly played for Western club squares, rather than live music.

Dance Manuals

Aside from direct participation in dance events, there are several print resources that explain the formal aspects of contra dancing, including the published dance manuals that, since the publishing of John Playford's *The Dancing Master* in 1650 (see Chapter three), have played a significant role in the maintenance and transmission of items in the tradition. Since the inception of printed collections of country dances, countless manuals and guidebooks have been published, many of which were limited in distribution or are no longer in print. Geared towards potential as well as experienced callers, these manuals typically include definitions and details of execution of the figures, complete dance sequences with tips for calling each one, suggested tunes for accompaniment and general advice on running a smooth dance evening (see, for example Gunzenhauser 1996 or Sannella 1982). Earlier dance manuals also contained suggestions on dance etiquette and appropriate attitude (Ford 1926; Mayo 1943) though most manuals omit this or only make very general remarks about maintaining a sociable, non-competitive atmosphere (Sannella 1982).

Recent manuals dwell little on social manners and principally consist of instructions for favorite older dances and newly composed ones (Gunzenhauser 1996 and Page 1984). These comments here refer to those publications that are in print or have been standard works in the recent revival. These manuals are often passed along among experienced and beginning callers, but are not commonly used during a dance. Collections widely considered to be longstanding 'classics' in the American contra dance community, both for the selection and presentation of dances, include books by Ted Sannella, Ralph Page and Larry Jennings (see Gunzenhauser 1996: 269-283 for an exhaustive listing). These and other works like them often contain an introductory chapter that may offer general advice on efficient calling, teaching, coordinating the musicians with the dance and how to pace a dance evening. Instructions for individual dances are often accompanied by a notated tune that has historically been closely associated with the dance, or is somehow well suited to it according to the author's experience. If a dance is particularly old or famous, a paragraph or two may accompany the choreographic instructions, thus placing it in some historical context. Notes for a newly composed dance may discuss some special twist in the dance choreography or anecdotal comments about its inspiration (see Page 1984). Since this thesis is concerned with the practice and social dimensions of the dance event, I will not offer an analysis of these texts, but note their availability within the U.S. in libraries and bookstores. I would conjecture that their distribution suggests some level of standardization across the country, but determining this would require more research.

Finally, callers often keep a small personal file of dance choreographies handwritten on index cards, either of dances learned at another dance, or of their own dances. Often

included are the name of the dance, shorthand notation for the figure sequence, the composer and place of residence (if known), and sometimes a suggested tune. These cards can be easily consulted prior to or during a dance, and often collectively constitute a sort of personal history of dances called or danced. Other sources for new dances include magazines such as the *Country Dance and Song Society*, *Country Dancer Magazine* and *Contra Conversations* (see Gunzenhauser 1996 for an exhaustive list of current periodicals devoted to contra dance).

Dance Music

The repertoire of music common to most contemporary contra dance events is an amalgamation of several different streams of Anglo-American dance music. Writers on contra dance music generally classify this varied repertoire into two distinctive categories, both of which derive from acoustic Anglo-American folk styles (Bealle 1989: 106 and Gunzenhauser 1996). The first is commonly known as "New England dance music", reflecting its association with that part of the U.S., and it derives from a broad array of sources: Irish, British, Scottish, Breton and French Canadian. The second type is commonly referred to as "Old Time Music", or "Southern string band music", indicating a vast array of tunes also deriving from Anglo-American sources as with the New England dance music, but having a different development. The latter became a focus for many American folklore revivalists in the 1960s and 1970s (Cantwell 1993: 36). As a thorough analysis of the historical developments and relationships of these repertoires is available elsewhere (see Bronner 1987 or Bealle 1989) I will assume this classification and offer a brief overview of this repertory, with appropriate examples.

First it should be pointed out that although the repertoire used for contra dance choreographies is stylistically eclectic, there are conventions of phrase duration and repetition common to nearly every tune that allow tunes to be used interchangeably for any given contra dance sequence. Unlike the earlier tradition in which dances were inseparably united with a specific tune, in current practice there is considerable flexibility and spontaneity in the choice of music for a dance. This means in practice that the caller need not alert the band to the dance he or she will be calling. Any tune in the repertoire will generally be considered appropriate for a given composed dance sequence, though in many instances there is some consultation between the caller and band. Dart, for example (1992:186), notes that sometimes there is an attempt to match up tunes with choreographies on the spot. This may mean pairing a 'busy' choreography having many figures of short duration with a fast-paced tune having a steady stream of sixteenth notes and multiple chord shifts. In theory, though, any tune with the correct number of beats can be matched with a choreography.

At the most general level, all tunes appropriate for contra dancing are 32 bars in duration, whether in duple or compound duple time signatures, giving a total count of 64 beats. Most of the older dances still in circulation and newly composed dance sequences assume an accompanying tune of 32 bars in duration, each bar conceived as having two beats, giving a total of 64 beats. The exceptions to this are few (see Page 1984 for a listing of the most common), and do not appear as frequently as the conventional 32 bar dance tunes. Each of the figures of contra dance requires a fixed number of beats to execute, and in order to correspond to a given tune the total must not add up to more than 64 beats (see Appendix). In addition to the conventional length for a contra tune, for most New England tunes and

many Old Time tunes, there is also a consistent phrase structure. Most tunes consist of two eight bar phrases repeated in the pattern:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \parallel & & a & & \parallel & & b & & \parallel \\ & & \underbrace{\hspace{1.5cm}} & & & & \underbrace{\hspace{1.5cm}} & & \\ & & 8 \text{ bars} & & + & & 8 \text{ bars} & & \end{array}$$

Notation of the choreographies acknowledge this phrase structure, subdividing the figure groupings under the headings, 'A1', 'A2', 'B1' and 'B2' (see above or Appendix 1).

Consult the staff notation examples reproduced in the next subsection as an illustration of this phrase structure.

New England Contra Dance Music

As the name designates, this grouping refers to a body of tunes coming from diverse sources, that were once prevalent in this region of the United States. As discussed by dance historians (Gunzenhauser 1996 and Bealle 1989) and callers (Page 1984 and Sannella 1982), this repertoire is primarily made up of reels, jigs and hornpipes brought over from Ireland, Scotland, England and France. While a complete treatment of these various strands is beyond the scope of this thesis, several commonalities can be observed and have been noted in several sources (Sannella 1984, Gunzenhauser 1996 and Bealle 1989). In describing the common traits of this body of tunes, it is easiest to contrast them with the characteristics of the Old Time repertoire.

Gunzenhauser (1996) has enumerated some of the general features of this musical repertoire that I will summarize briefly. The "Northern-style" tunes, as she names them, are set in one of two time signatures, 2/4 (reels, hornpipes) or 6/8 (jigs). Though rollicking and angular melodic lines are a prominent feature of several of these tunes, it is the rapidity and

relative complexity of the chordal changes that gives the tunes a forward drive (Gunzenhauser 1996: 5). Whether provided by a piano, guitar or accordion, the chordal underpinnings of these tunes need not be limited to I, IV and V chords, as with the "old-time" style. A skilled chordal accompanist can increase the excitement on the dance floor through manipulation of harmonic tensions generated by these chord changes. Though the cadences that typically mark the ends of the 8-bar phrases are characteristically 'strong' (i.e. ending on a 'V' chord after the 'a' section and finishing with a 'I' chord at the end of the 'b' section), the melodic content of many tunes may allow for a wide range of diatonic chord changes that can be explored improvisationally. To see what I mean by this refer to the notation of one of the oldest and most commonly played items in the contra dance repertoire, "Fishers Hornpipe",⁴ noting the rapid chord changes possible:

Fisher's Hornpipe

The image shows the musical notation for "Fisher's Hornpipe" in 2/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. Above the first staff, the word "Traditional" is written. Chord changes are indicated by letters above the notes: F, B^b, F, B^b, F, B^b, F, C. The second staff has F, B^b, F, B^b, F, C, F. The third staff has C, F, C, G, C. The fourth staff has B^b, D^m, F, B^b, C, F. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and bar lines.

⁴ "Fishers Hornpipe" has appeared in American dance tune sources from the 18th century (Morrison 1976 and Keller and Sweet 1975) up to the present (Page 1984, Gunzenhauser 1996) and is a consistent tune at many of the Madison dances. It is presented here as notated in Page (1984).

Bealle notes that such rapid harmonic movement is not incidental to the dancers' experience and can contribute positively to the excitement of the dance (Bealle 1989: 137).

Another feature of many tunes, such as 'Fisher's Hornpipe', is the distinct contrast between the A and B phrases of the tune. This may mean, as in the case of this tune, a brief modulation to a related key, or a dramatic shift in register. Even within the A or B phrases themselves, subphrases can often be clearly heard, providing a further aural guide for the dancers and caller.

Finally, when playing this repertoire, it is common for musicians to play a medley of three or four tunes without breaking in between. The players may determine the pieces and order before beginning, or in some cases one player may shout out the name of another tune to the other band members while they are still playing. When playing a medley, it is common to build up the intensity over the course of the three or four tunes, saving a particularly energetic tune for last in the order (Dart 1992: 191).

Old Time String Band Music

This repertoire, as Chapter Three discusses, appears to be a fairly recent adaptation for the New England contra dance revival. Bealle reports that in Bloomington, many dancers there were actively involved with many types of folk music, including pre-Bluegrass string band music as popularized by such revivalist groups of the 1960s and 1970s as The New Lost City Ramblers and the Highwoods String Band (Bealle 1989: 130). The congruity of much of this repertoire (tunes with 32 bars and many with an AABB phrase structure) with the choreographic conventions of contra was a primary factor in its successful adaptation. This

repertoire had already been in use for square dancing elsewhere, for instance in the Southwest and Southeast, as noted by Shaw (1939: 15). A fundamental stylistic difference in this repertoire is the harmonic simplicity as compared to the New England repertoire (see the notation for "Arkansas Traveler" below).⁵

ARKANSAS TRAVELER

The musical notation for "Arkansas Traveler" is presented in five staves of music. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The notes are written in a treble clef. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: D, (G), (A), (D), A, (D), (A) on the first staff; D, (G), (A), (D), G, A, D on the second staff; A, D, D, A, D, A, D, A on the third staff; D, A, D, A, D, A, D, G on the fourth staff; and A, D, A, D on the fifth staff. The notation includes first and second endings for the final phrase.

Played on guitar or occasionally on piano, chords tend to be restricted primarily to the I, IV and V chords in a single key. As Gunzenhauser notes, it is even possible to accompany some tunes with a single repeated chord (1996: 5). Along with the harmonic simplicity, the tunes tend to be less well defined than the New England tunes, in terms of cadences, and in some cases the two 8-bar phrases can sound almost identical. The tunes in this repertoire are all in 2/4 or 4/4 meter. Other common distinguishing features may include the

⁵ A 'traditional tune' also available in many sources, including Shaw (1939). Presented as notated in Gunzenhauser (1996).

predominance of driving and repetitive rhythms in the melody, the use of double stops by fiddlers, and the use of glissandi in performance, all occurring with more frequency than tends to be the case with the reels and hornpipes of the New England style.

Instrumentation

In performance, there is considerable flexibility in the choice of instruments for these tunes. Though acoustic instruments are used, some sort of electronic amplification system is always necessary at larger dances, usually a PA system with a multi track mixing console and microphones. At the dances I have attended, instruments include: fiddle, piano, guitar, button accordion, concertina, electric bass, mandolin, banjo, penny whistle, double bass, wooden transverse flute. The most basic ensemble consists of a melodic instrument, nearly always a fiddle, and an instrument capable of playing chords, guitar or piano. While an accomplished melody player can render the melodic line so that the ends of phrases, cadential points and rhythmic emphases are clear for all the dancers in the hall, the rock-steady chordal playing of the pianist or guitarist is essential for underscoring a consistent beat that can be heard throughout the room. At its simplest, this chordal accompaniment is a straightforward 'oompah' rhythm, alternating between the left hand playing the tonic of the chord in octaves and the right hand playing complete chords an octave or two above. More sophisticated playing could involve passing tones in the left hand, or inversions in the upper chords, and syncopated rhythmic interplay between the two hands.

Sources

Musicians encounter and learn this repertoire from several places: printed scores in collections of fiddle tunes, commercial or field recordings and from fellow musicians, friends

at dance camps, or hired instructors. Some bands or musicians use music notation during dance, some do not. As with the choreographic notations, often music notation is used more as a visual reminder of a tune or as a reference to consult during selection of the tunes for a dance evening. Nearly all the commercially printed dance manuals listed in the bibliography include tune notations and most include a suggested tune on the same page as the dance choreography (Page 1984, Gunzenhauser 1996, Sannella 1982, Mayo 1948, etc.). For musicians there are a few acclaimed country dance tune 'fake' books available, such as *The Old-Time Fiddler's Repertory: 245 Traditional Tunes* (Christeson 1983), *New England Fiddler's Repertoire: A Source Book of Established Contra Dance Music* (Miller and Perron 1983) and *The Fiddler's Fakebook* (Brody 1983). Other sources for learning tunes include commercial recordings from established contra dance bands, such as the Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra (1972) or Wild Asparagus (1993) and old time string-band discs (A. Robic and the Exertions 1987, and The McLain Family Band 1986).

Obviously repertoires very tremendously, given the large number of available tunes appropriate to the dances, and the number of practicing bands today. But like 'classic' contra choreographies, there are many tunes that are staples of many contemporary bands. These include the ubiquitous "Fisher's Hornpipe" noted above, "Devil's Dream", a hornpipe-like tune, the reels "Gaspé Reel", "Old French", "Indian Reel" and "Chorus Jig" (technically a reel, as it is 2/4 meter and not 6/8 meter), "Hull's Victory", "Soldier's Joy" and "Liberty".⁶

⁶ Each of these tunes can be found in many current and older publications, including Shaw (1939), Maddocks (1950), Page (1984), Gunzenhauser (1996), Sannella (1982) among the others noted above.

“La Chicaneuse”, known in English as “The Growling Old Man” is a favored French Canadian tune. Common jig-type tunes include “Colraine”, “Irish Wash Woman”, and a recent tune by Bob McQuillen, “Broken Sword”. Tunes from the Old-Time repertory include the “Arkansas Traveler,” notated above, “Golden Slippers”, “Turkey in the Straw” and “Red Haired Boy”.

Summary

Over the last few decades, within American country dance groups such as those in Madison, the two-line contra dance formation as described above has become the predominant formation, as it has in several other dance evenings reported in ethnographies of the dance revival in the United States (Nevell 1977, Levine 1987, Bealle 1989, Dart 1992 and Carlin 1995). While some callers, particularly those with many years of experience, or those who have been involved in English country dance, will vary the evening’s dances, the contra formation has come to define a dance community. As such, the dance evenings in Madison as a whole fit within a broader, national network of dance events.

Though there are potentially thousands of different choreographies, to participate successfully in any dance, one need only be aware of the building blocks of the dance, the figures. The method of choreography provides a consistent frame from dance to dance in an evening and from event to event. This regularity and consistency of the contra format contributes to the ease of access for newcomers and also allows experienced dancers to learn quickly dances they have never before encountered. Even the other occasional formations, the circle and square, share enough in common with the contra dances, in terms of dance structure and figures that they too allow for relatively easy participation. As demonstrated

above, the contra dance formation and the choreographies for it require a high degree of interaction not only between individual couples but also among the other dancers in the various subsets formed by the choreography ('circles of four', 'four in a line', 'long lines', 'neighbor' etc.).

As the following chapter on dance history will relate, this form of country dancing was among the most popular in the middle of the eighteenth century in Great Britain and subsequently became so in the American colonies. It is also the form which is said to have survived in isolated pockets of New England well into this century (Nevell 1977: 60-67 and Damon 1957: 40-50). The location of its revival in the northeastern United States is often revealed in local dance advertisements that identify a dance as a "New England-style Contra Dance."

Chapter Three

A Short History of the Contra Dance Tradition

Introduction

The many dance formations within the designation "country dances" in America share a common history, and only in this century have separate audiences emerged to take up one or another form to the exclusion of others. Formally at least, the current dances and the music of each of these now distinct traditions are traceable to the same sources in Anglo-American culture, but are practiced today in the different dance communities of New England contra, English country dance, southern Appalachian style and Western or club style square dance. At the outset it is important to stress that the New England-style contra dance events of today, while formally an outgrowth of prior forms, are not the result of an unbroken continuous history leading to the present, in terms of audience or transmission. As

Hast notes:

Looked at from a diachronic perspective, contra dance's role in society has been an historically discontinuous process. The genre has been recycled for different purposes according to the needs of each generation (Hast 1993: 21)

Several historians of American folk dancing in the United States confirm that much of the current interest and participation in contra stems from a series of several revival movements that started in the early part of the twentieth century primarily in New England (Nevell 1977: 62; Carlin 1995: 222-4; Kimball 1988: 84; Hast 1993: 22).

A few decisive revival instances that can be pinpointed include the broad scholarly

institutional efforts of Cecil Sharp in Great Britain (his first society was formed in 1911); Henry Ford in the United States (1920s); Margaret Mayo and her American Square Dance Group in New York (1950s); various festival organizations, such as the New England Folk Festival Association (NEFFA); and folklore camps such as Pinewoods in Plymouth, Massachusetts (Boyes 1993, Twork 1982 and Cohen 1995: 30). These were paralleled by and overlapped with the more localized work of such celebrated callers as Ralph Page and Dudley Laufman in the New England area (Tolman 1972; Nevell 1977). Several accounts acknowledge isolated vestiges of the contra-style formation in small town dances, especially in New England, that predate the revival (Bronner 1987, Kimball 1988 and Tolman 1972). The results of the revival developments were evident most recently in the early 1970s, as a country dance revival arose on the heels of national interest in folk song and counterculture politics (Hast 1993: 21-2; Tolman 1972). This latter period was probably the most significant in establishing many of the active dance scenes in the country, including those that were formed in the Midwest region.

Square and contra dance have been mobilized and promoted in overlapping ways by revivalists, callers, and musicians. Each in somewhat differing fashion sought to define, transmit, and implement social dancing among American audiences, drawing upon a pool of 'folk' based music and dance. Appealing to different audiences, each of these instances have had varying purposes and agendas (Kimball 1988: 78). Participants in the current contra phenomenon seem to engage infrequently with other, historically related forms of Anglo-American social dancing, such as club square dance or country and western line dancing. Currently the contra dance constitutes a distinctly separable phenomenon among these other

dances.

Despite the widespread reach of these traditions in American culture and beyond, there has not been a solid integrated historical or social analysis published. A few accounts of contra dance exist, accounts based either on ethnographic research of recent practice or drawing upon written sources from the past, such as traveller's accounts, newspapers, instructional guides and choreographic and musical notations. Summarizing some of these secondary sources, I will outline the historical development of country dance with some attention to the social and discursive dimensions of the dance as a popular tradition. Aside from names, dates and places, consideration of the social dimension of dance is necessary for there is some consistency in the portrayals of this dance form in particular as a democratizing social experience, and (especially since the work of Cecil Sharp) expressions of the benefits gained through maintaining or reviving it.

After a brief review of the literature on the history of contra dance after it emerged in Britain and was subsequently transformed in the American colonies I will present an account of the several revival movements in the United States. I should note here that in spite of the long-standing popularity and wide geographic spread of country dance in the United States, documentation about the adaptation and spread of the dances can often be sketchy. Beyond the formal mechanics offered in manuals following Playford's editions, researchers on country and contra dancing have had to rely on very sparse documentation. Folklorist Jan Brunvand, citing a 1942 reference to the meager number of sources available about "old time" dancing, states that the "situation is little better" in 1978 (Brunvand 1978: 271). In recent years, though, the literature has expanded, with contributions from folklorists,

ethnomusicologists, and dance scholars.

For country dance in the United States, S. Foster Damon's work (1957) offers a concise, broad overview. Recent efforts by Kate Van Winkle Keller and Joy Van Cleef on early American social dance are helpful in constructing an account of the dance and its place in American social history. Other works by R. Nevell and Ralph Page offer colorful but incomplete and anecdotal summaries. An integrated and solidly grounded account does not yet exist for country dancing in its various guises, as it does for some other social dance genres in the United States, such as polka (Keil, Keil and Blau 1992) or African-American dance (Stearns 1968; Hazzard-Gordon 1990).

One challenge for historians is untangling the complex overlapping of formal and social boundaries that frame what dance historian Colin Quigley has called "the complex whole of traditional vernacular dance of the British Isles and America" (Quigley 1995: 74). The range of dances within this 'complex whole' contributes to the sometimes confusing terminology in some writings. For example, though the title of Damon's book (1957) mentions squares, and N. Tolman (1972) speaks of 'square dancing', it is clear both authors are referring to squares, contras, and circles collectively. Only in the middle of this century has there been sharp differentiation between these forms so that there are now two distinct national audiences for squares and contras. In addition, there are gaps in the record for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries among the few written histories that touch on country and contra dancing. Folklorist Richard Blaustein offers the following assessment of the most current state of research: "An authoritative history of . . . country dancing on either side of the Atlantic has yet to be written" (Blaustein 1995: 191). He further notes that this is

surprising, given that "the country dance, though English in origin, had become part of international cosmopolitan social and cultural life by the turn of the eighteenth century" (ibid: 193).

Blaustein has analyzed some of the issues surrounding dance history and concludes that this history is incomplete and fractured for two reasons. One is the simple fact that what little documentation there is tends to report mainly on urban, elite or middle class practices. Given this emphasis, establishing patterns of development or early circulation remains a speculative undertaking. Dance scholar Theresa Buckland notes this problem in researching English social dance and suggests an alternative direction:

Traditional dances may begin their existence in the fashionable ballroom or indeed in the theater. In many cases their origin cannot be discovered. However, the task of the student of the history of traditional dance is not to concentrate solely on origins but to extend present knowledge of the nature of the form, its context and transmission in the past (Buckland 1994: 45)

Blaustein notes a second weakness in dance history in that when some twentieth century writers and folklorists chose to view folk traditions, they did so through the lens of nineteenth century notions of folk authenticity, narrowing the scope of their research to reconstructing the preserved, presumably antiquated traditional expressive genres of small communities (see also Buckland 1994: 45-60). Urban practices or revival movements, though well documented, have been almost entirely discounted as adulterated refashionings, and thus of a completely different nature than 'true' traditional dancing. Blaustein argues for a less polarized approach to country dance history in order to animate the processes of interchange that inevitably occurred between rural and urban, lower and upper classes (Blaustein 1995: 191). Methodologically this is a useful insight, but may be quite difficult

given the range of materials and the paucity of evidence for many contexts.

Early roots in Europe

Country dancing as practiced today in America stems from a tradition that was formulated in England (Sharp 1924, Keller 1991 and Royce 1977). Sharp expressed no "doubt but that they were danced in sixteenth century England and probably earlier" based on scattered literary references (Sharp 1924: 19). He also asserted that the dance was a tradition arising from non-aristocratic social settings, yet the earliest and most thoroughly descriptive documentation of country dancing remains a 1650 choreographic manual marketed to literate middle class audiences (Sharp 1924: 15-20). Keller writes that though the tradition certainly took shape in late sixteenth century England, it was based on prior Italian models and was a "contrived urban dance" (1991:7), perhaps sharing only a few figures with "rustic" dances of the time (ibid: 8). Emmerson also notes possible influence from Italy, as he describes some English court dance composers who,

aware of the recently published books of the Italian dancing masters, Caroso and Negri . . . very possibly revised some of the raw material coming to their hands under the influence of the Italian figured dances (*Contrapassi*) described in these (Emmerson 1967: 10)

Rippon also states that figure dances such as "the longways for six, eight or more couples, the square for four and the square for eight were all known in Italy before they came to England" (Rippon 1975: 28).

Sharp's scholarship has been roundly criticized for a romantic idealization that was fueled by a nationalistic desire to locate the origins of an authentic English culture among

rural, preferably peasant populations (Boyes 1993, Buckland 1994: 47 and Quigley 1995: 74). Sharp relied on an evolutionary folkloric narrative of dance development that posited a mythic golden age when country dancing crystallized as a finished form, only to be subject to later decline and corruption at the hands of urban dance instructors. To Sharp's credit, his research did provide valuable, if selective, documentation of British and American traditions at a time of decreasing interest and spurred further research on folk traditions in England and the United States. However, as Quigley notes: "Investigation of Anglo-American dance traditions long continued to be hampered by these earlier research paradigms" (Quigley 1995: 74).

Despite Sharp's romanticized oversimplification, there was some sort of traffic between rural traditions and those at cosmopolitan court centers, but the details of this are not clear. Rippon and Rust cite several 16th century literary references to such an engagement as court choreographers took inspiration from rural dance gatherings (Rippon 1975: 30). Beginning with the first court reference in 1595, until 1625, there was a noticeable increase in references to country dance at the courts. In addition, a few court documents do mention the introduction to the court of some rurally derived dances, whose names would later turn up in a well known published collection of country dance notations (Rust 1969: 48). It is with the publication of this work that a firmly documentable history of country dance can be said to begin.

Playford's Manual

In 1651, London composer and publisher John Playford published a manual of notated country dances called the *English Dancing-Master*. From 1651-1728, seventeen

editions of the work appeared, each longer than its predecessor, testifying to the growing popularity of this type of dancing among the literate public. Newly composed dances were added and the volume was significantly edited over the years to reflect the changing appeal of certain of the dances in it. From the first to the seventeenth edition the number of notated dances went from 104 to 918 (Nevell 1977: 21). The vocabulary of figures in the earliest editions was not yet standardized, but it is clear that the dances were 'figure dances' and were unlike the majority of other couple dances popular at the time (Sharp 1924: 20). The editions also included notated dance tunes to accompany each specific dance or song text (see Playford 1652).

Over the course of re-publication of the *English Dancing Master*, there was a shift in the type of dance that was numerically favored. The first edition contained figure dances set in several different formations: circles, "longways for as many as will", and square eighths. After several editions though, the longways form of the dance came to predominate at the expense of the others, perhaps reflecting a change in taste as well as the move to dancing in large assembly halls that could accommodate the formation (Rust 1969: 61 and Sharp 1924: 23). The longways form is the type that uniquely persisted in rural New England well into this century and is currently the predominant form within the contra dance revival. In addition, some of the figures used to construct dances in current choreographies are directly related to those found in the editions of this compilation. The reception for Playford's works was such that a minor publishing industry commenced and a flood of manuals was issued. Recognizing the commercial success of Playford's volume, several other composers began to write and publish manuals. These manuals, as compact distillations of a given dance

master's knowledge and tastes, became an important channel for the circulation of dances throughout Europe and the colonies.

Sharp notes that despite puritanical denunciations of dance in England around the time of Playford's work, the popularity of country dancing increased and that the active repertoire included both old and more recently composed country dances (Sharp 1924: 22). Citing pre-Playford iconographic sources he suggests that, although the growing British middle class had most likely performed some version country dancing, it was after Playford that their popularity began to soar in public dance halls (*ibid*: 23). Later, as they became more popular with court audiences, country dances began to fill the programs that had formerly been devoted to some of the more formal French dances such as the minuet (Rust 1969: 58-65). From this time until well into the 18th century, new dances, including country dances, were composed for English courts and for commercial publishing houses. In both cases, these dances were paired with pre-existing musical pieces or, less often, with newly composed tunes (Rippon 1975: 31). The practice of naming a newly composed dance after its tune in many cases led to a fairly fixed union of that tune and dance. This practice was typical for much of the documented history of country dance in this era, and may have persisted in the United States in some parts of New England into the early 20th century (see N. Tolman 1972 and Maddocks 1950: 12). In the contemporary revivals, these tune-dance linkages have been part of the English Country Dance revival, but have been less important in the American contra revival tradition.

According to Keller, the printing of Playford's book marked a significant moment in the social dynamic of country dance history (Keller 1991: 24-30). She depicts the overall

trajectory of country dancing as an adaptation by upper classes of elements of rural dance forms. The dances became formalized and dance manuals were printed and circulated, resulting in a sort of democratization of taste, as manuals were made available to a wide middle class public who desired to demonstrate their ability to achieve in traditions newly associated with elite circles. Whatever Cecil Sharp may have wished, in terms of establishing some prior bedrock of "pure" peasant dance that somehow survived in remote villages into the late nineteenth century, most sources seem to agree that the currents of country dance moved in several different directions. In the process, it came to be enjoyed by a wide spectrum of social classes, inevitably absorbing and discarding influences from a wide variety of contexts (Rust 1969: 58; Keller 1991: 24-29; Royce 1977: 120-123).

Country dance beyond England

Two important factors contributed to the spread of country dancing outside of England: printed dance manuals and itinerant professional dance teachers. By these two agents, English country dances radiated outward to continental Europe, across the Atlantic and numerous places where significant British colonialist activity occurred, including South America, the Caribbean and parts of west Africa (see Waterman 1990: 32 and Quigley 1993: 73). For this reason, most historical research about the early spread of country dance revolves around publication dates of manuals and the activities of dance masters.

As Playford's work and the subsequent books it inspired began to circulate outside of Great Britain, English country dance caught the interest of the French aristocracy. Though the dance also became popular in the Netherlands, Germany and Austria, it was the French

innovations and reworkings of dance choreography that had the greatest impact on the 'return trip' back to Great Britain and later the United States. The first printed evidence of the dances' introduction to France appeared in a 1706 manual, *Recueil de Contredanse* (Keller 1991: 8). This was a collection of country dances edited by A. Feuillet that contained numerous dances from Playford's collection. This work was instrumental in the introduction and transformation of dancing at the French courts (ibid: 9).

In France, the newly popular dances became known as 'contredanse anglaise', or later simply 'contredanse'. This usage accounts for the current American term 'contra dance' (Rust 1969: 61 and Sharp 1923: 26). Sometime in the 1720s, contemporary writers started to distinguish 'contredanse francaise' from other court dances. The 'contredanse francaise' included the cotillion, a hybrid form involving English country dance movements with older French dance formations. The cotillion and its later transformation, the quadrille, both used the formation that would become the basis of American square dancing: four couples arranged in a square facing in. Cotillions were introduced to England sometime in the 1760s and to America just prior to the Revolutionary war (Keller 1991:8; Sachs 1937: 423).

Earlier, in 1700, this same Feuillet had published a thorough method of dance notation, immediately translated into English, which, along with the ever changing editions of Playford, helped to create what Keller has described as "a commercial environment which thrived on fashion and newness" (Keller 1991: 27). For the remainder of the century, country dance was at its peak in popularity in England. With the innovative notation method, printed guides to all kinds of social dances began to proliferate. But this system of choreography required some decoding though, and the requirements of this task contributed some to the

importance of the dance teachers, or 'dance masters' as they were called.

The role of dance masters

While printed dance manuals were important in the spread of country dancing, it was the dance masters who played a key role in establishing and promoting the dances, eventually becoming active agents in the transmission of the tradition outside of England (Royce 1977: 120). Dance masters were employed as instructors in many European cities, especially among more affluent audiences, and their position was further solidified with the popularity of country dancing. Most tended to work among middle and upper class audiences in Britain and the United States. Dance masters offered formal private instruction and arranged dances for private and public events well until the closing years of the nineteenth century in both countries (Benson 1963).

Though Sharp saw the dance master as an unfortunate interloper, both commercializing and formalizing what he thought was properly an unselfconscious folk expression, dance masters maintained a prominent presence in the dance settings in Great Britain and then later in the North American colonies (Sharp 1924: 28). Prior to the advent of the caller, who is currently responsible for teaching and prompting dancers as they dance, dance masters taught choreographies to be memorized prior to the dance. After sufficient instruction and practice, dancers memorized the sequences that were to be performed; prompting dancers during the dance, as is currently done, was unnecessary. Since a tremendous number of dances were being composed, some of them requiring "considerable rehearsal before they could be performed" (Keller 1991: 7), dance masters were able to hire

themselves out to satisfy demand for instruction in the latest choreographies. At the same time, the appeal of and access to the tradition continued to increase so that "by the mid-eighteenth century, the country dance had simplified to a repetitive, progressive dance flexible enough for many skill levels and many dancers" (ibid: 8).

True to their title, dance masters were expected to possess a wide range of technical knowledge of numerous dance and music forms, including country dances. But they were also responsible for teaching proper manners and promoting social etiquette. A polished level of decorum and propriety was considered an essential byproduct of a good dance education, while in many contexts formal dance instruction could be an indicator of one's social status (Damon 1957: 30-33). Thus, instruction by a dance master not only insured a person's dance competence, but also initiated one into an atmosphere of refined habits and deportment. In Britain, as social dance contexts were increasingly the site of interaction among people of widely varying class backgrounds, dance events became factors in a certain standardization of manners and "spreading of a polished social pattern" (Keller 1991: 5).

The element of social display may also have been of concern for some colonists in America. According to Keller:

Letters, diaries, journals, and memoirs echo again and again the impression that the exhibition of good taste and knowledge of current fashion was uppermost in the minds of most citizens who stepped out onto the dance floor (1991: 5)

Keller goes on to describe the semi-formal atmosphere common to many aristocratic dance assemblies in which several types of dances were done in America and Great Britain until late in the nineteenth century. To a certain degree one's social status was often assumed from

the skills and manners one could display at such social dance events. Central in the transmission and maintenance of this attitude was the dance master. Much later, memories of the type of social propriety maintained at such dance meetings guided Henry Ford, among others, to try to reinstate 'old time' dance and music as a popular leisure time activity in the U. S. (Ford 1926).

Itinerant Dance Masters in the United States

Dance masters were also instrumental in the propagation of European dance traditions in the United States, including country dances. The documented presence of dance masters has been noted in the North American colonies as early as the 1670s (Marks 1957: 19). According to Benson, many of the dance and music masters coming to the colonies were itinerant instructors, and were "extremely mobile and adaptive" (Benson 1963: 389). Their travels between major cities and smaller towns likely led to some degree of uniformity among dance audiences despite the distances separating them. Though newly arriving populations from Europe likely continued informally those types of dances with which they were already familiar, dance masters occupied a special role as instructors and organizers. Many sources indicate an interest among urban and rural wealthy families in establishing formal dance instruction led by trained dance masters and dance masters were eager to go abroad in search of work. As Royce points out:

perhaps [a] more direct source of English and French choreographies took the form of dancing masters who emigrated to the colonies. They reasoned correctly that the competition would be less stiff and their talents more appreciated in a country with fewer purveyors of the amenities of gracious living (Royce 1977: 120)

Royce here describes the motives that may have brought dance masters to the colonies and additionally suggests the sort of connection with home that some colonists sought through the established cultural form of social dancing. Again, specific written accounts are lacking for rural or non-aristocratic populations. Most of the available research draws upon accounts of the urban elite in the colonies, but as Morrison writes:

Dancing masters had a pervasive influence 200 years ago. Their services were not limited to the rich; there were dancing master, at varying prices, available to most levels of American society, including slaves in some instances. People living far from a city were visited periodically by itinerant dancing masters (Morrison 1976:9).

most itinerant dance masters sometimes traveled to more remote towns and plantations this information may have a wider relevance (Keller 1991 and Royce 1977).

As Royce noted above, dance masters not only came to the states from Britain; many also came from France bringing with them minuets and the English country dance-inspired French cotillion. During the eighteenth century, as dance teachers began to proliferate in the larger American towns, several contemporary documents suggest that audiences looked to France as much as to Britain for the latest in dance styles (Morrison 1976: 7). The prominence of French terminology is reflected in the instructional manuals of this time. And by the 1780s, Americans were referring to the dances collectively as 'contra dance', the anglicized form of the French word, '*contredanse*' (Morrison 1976: 7). French influence was especially evident in the period following the French Revolution and, later, the war of 1812 (Royce 1977: 120 and Damon 1957: 22). Some authors even speculate the pervasive anti-British sentiment of the time may have contributed to the colonist's attraction to French dances, especially cotillions and quadrilles (Damon 1957: 25 and Royce 1977: 121). The

cotillon was introduced as early as the 1760s, but its popularity in America was not until the early 1800s. Though the cotillon may have passed to the colonies via some dance masters from Britain, it was most likely the French dance masters who were instrumental in encouraging it alongside the English style dances and minuet. Later in the nineteenth century, the cotillon became the basis for the development of the later square dance tradition in the United States. The quadrille, a later adaptation from the cotillon by French choreographers, was also introduced to the colonies sometime in the early years of the nineteenth century. But the appeal of quadrilles was mostly limited to urban, fashion-conscious audiences, due to its formal complexity, studied elegance and use of grand operatic tunes sometimes played by small string orchestras (Damon 1957: 27 and Blaustein 1995: 197).

American enthusiasm for country dance continued to grow substantially in the early years of the eighteenth century. Reflecting this enthusiasm and the growing potential for marketing the tradition, Blaustein notes that in a six year period prior to 1800, "no less than thirty dance tutors were published in the new republic" (Blaustein 1995: 195). Though eventually country dancing would take on a new character in the colonies, many American audiences continued to look to Europe for the latest in dance fashion well into the nineteenth century. Newly printed manuals from Europe were valued and dance masters 'fresh off the boat' and acquainted with the latest dances were sought after. Given this situation, it is not surprising that trans-Atlantic parallel changes in tastes would occur. Of this period in general, Royce (1977) notes:

we see colonial preferences changing along with tastes and, what is more, with

very little time lag between them. On both sides of the Atlantic there is a progression from minuets and country dances to cotillions and quadrilles, and finally to waltzes and then polkas (1977:128).

Rust and Karpeles also note the parallelism between Britain and the colonies, as country dance remained the most favored dance until mid-century, when the waltz, polka and quadrille were popularized (Karpeles 1967: 106 and Rust 1969: 66).

Some writings on the broad shift in taste from the stylized French minuet to country dance suggest one of the very aspects of country dancing that has animated much of the enthusiasm of the recent revivalists and participants in the current tradition: country dancing as a communal expression of group solidarity and democratization of experience (Damon 1957: 54, Rust 1969: 51 and Sharp 1924). That is, in opposition to the highly formalized couple dances such as the minuet, sarabande and other fashionable European court dances, country dance, as a more socially integrative group activity, was emblematic of the loosening of social and class barriers of the time. As the basic movements could be easily learned, access to the dance was expanded leading to its enjoyment by both privileged and non-privileged audiences. In Sharp's highly idealized nationalistic vision, this preference for and development of the highly interactive genre of country dancing were indicative of the innately democratic English spirit (Sharp 1924: 22). The idea that this dance form in particular enables or enacts such a 'democratic' or egalitarian spirit has proven to be significant in much of the literature which often celebrates this situation as far back as the nineteenth century dance manuals (see Wilson 1811 and more recently, Page and Tolman 1937). The idea continually surfaces in different guises in the scholarly and recreational literature about country dance as well as in the rhetoric associated with the various folk

revival movements in this century.⁷

From the work of Keller, it is apparent that those who had the time and leisure to cultivate social dance forms with a focus on personal presentation were at the upper range of social dance skill in America. This involved detailed attention to elaborate footwork, so that "just walking" was not always appropriate for country dances (Keller 1991: 16). The emphasis on this most likely came from the French style of dancing, especially from the minuet, with its ordered system of foot movements:

it is clear that the minuet was the backbone of eighteenth century social dance practice throughout Europe and in the English and French colonies of the new world (Keller 1991:16)

Furthermore, her work shows how the minuet inspired a highly cultivated sense of taste and fashion that was actively demonstrated in the correct performance of the newly elaborate steps and figures of country dances. As a result, many dance events became public displays of class or educational standing where aspiring middle class people could demonstrate their achievements.

As for the popularity of country dance in the colonial period in America, Keller summarizes existing primary sources by asserting, "the most frequently mentioned and best documented dance form is the longways progressive form of the English country dance" (Keller 1991: 7).⁸ Though the genre was widely enjoyed, she speculates that, depending on

⁷ For examples, see Rust 1969: 58-65, Boyes 1993: 70, Sharp 1924: 22, Ryan 1926:10, Ford 1926: 8 and Nevell 1977.

⁸ Among others, Morrison (1976) also notes some other common dances in eighteenth century America about which little is definitively known. These include the reel, likely a figure dance for a specified number of couples (3, 4 or 6), as well as the hornpipe and

the context, the character of a given dance varied. The maintenance of formal display was most likely one of the marks of style that distinguished the country dance as done by privileged audiences. As for non-elite practice, since written evidence is negligible, Keller speculates that "simpler forms of dance and music were practiced by the lower classes . . . reels, repetitive round and line dances" (Keller 1991: 24). She concludes this based on the observation that few had the time or money to access the more intricate points of dance style and refinement.

In any case, the restrained propriety of the minuet dance, as it remained in vogue from the 1680s until the mid-nineteenth century, continued to play a role in some country dance contexts, well after interest in the minuet itself had diminished. Later associations of the minuet-inspired atmosphere of concern with precise stepping and decorous formality resurfaced when Henry Ford undertook to revive country and other social dances in the 1920s (Ford 1926).

Early American country dance music

As for the musical accompaniment for country dances in the United States during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was most common for the dance tune types to be reels, hornpipes and jigs. Blaustein cites numerous dance tunes from early 18th century

the jig, interchangeable terms probably indicating a solo or couple dance using Anglo-American step dance movements. While these dance forms are not part of the current American contra tradition, the tunes appropriate to each live on, as seen in the abundance of tunes in the current music repertory with the words, 'jig', 'reel' or 'hornpipe' in their titles. See Chapter Two.

American dance publications in wide circulation that were part of the standard repertoire of the time (1995: 195). Several of these tunes, according to Blaustein (1995: 193), still comprise a "major part of the repertoires of North American fiddlers to this day" and are still part of the common contra repertoire. These include current standards in the dance band repertoire such as "Chorus Jig", "Money Musk", "Fisher's Hornpipe", and "The Devil's Dream" (all of which appear in Ralph Page's influential 1984 collection). Extensive research by others cited by Blaustein, demonstrates a steady traffic in dance tune notations between England and the colonies, resulting in a considerable degree of uniformity in repertoire extending across the Atlantic.

The violin or fiddle was the preferred instrument by most accounts of the colonial period, and remains preeminent in the current contra dance community. Many dance masters were proficient on the fiddle and gave instruction on this instrument in addition to dance lessons. Tolman notes that various flutes, especially wooden models with keys, were a popular alternative in some ensembles primarily in aristocratic settings (Tolman 1972: 13). In the southern states, following the lead of African-American musicians, who often played for Anglo-American dance events, the banjo and various improvised percussion instruments were also common (Blaustein 1995: 194). Gunzenhauser notes that many New England towns had small wind bands of cornets, trumpets, flutes, clarinets and tuba that commonly accompanied community dances (Gunzenhauser 1996: 6). Given the wide array of audiences for the various types of country dances in this period, tune arrangements and instrumentation may have ranged widely. Some performers, able to read music, could have drawn upon the notations of Playford and the numerous other tune books. Other musicians would have

learned orally, versions of tunes that may or may not have resembled the tunes in the published tune books. Access to expensive instrumentation would have depended on financial considerations. The histories and development of this repertory would constitute a substantial study in itself.

American Country Dance

After the colonial period, the American incarnations of country dance began to take on a character of their own. Furthermore, within the U. S. itself during the nineteenth century, patterns of immigration and settlement contributed to the regionalization of the various country dances. For instance, in eastern urban areas, new dances such as the quadrille and waltz were heavily promoted by fashion-conscious dance masters, leaving less time for country dances, which may have been identified with the less sophisticated manners of the frontier regions in the colonies (Damon 1957: 22-25). Then later, the cotillion-derived square dance tradition "developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by people from a variety of regions with slightly different dance repertoires who mingled in their move westward" (Quigley 1995: 81). Thus, in these regions square dance became the preferred form, while in New England, the longways formation country dances continued alongside the newly popular forms (Blaustein 1995: 196). To the south, as Quigley reports, the Big Circle dance became "emblematic of Appalachian Mountain tradition" though squares were also practiced there (Quigley 1995: 76; see also Spalding 1995: 4). To the extreme north, in Eastern Canada, additional variants of country-type dances were practiced, frequently with French-Canadian musical accompaniment. Such a regional scheme is no

doubt simplified, but the diversity of forms across North America has been well summarized by Quigley:

This dance culture has emanated primarily from various parts of the British Isles at different time periods and undergone adaptation and modification in response to local conditions (Quigley 1995: 77)

As a result the formations that predominated in each region up until the early twentieth century, roughly correspond to the dance formations that were popular when the area was settled.

Some scholars note differences between the urban dance scene and the more rural dances during the nineteenth century, that were partly the result of the more steady presence of dance masters in cities. This arose from dance masters' efforts to maintain a sense of formality in dancing and to cultivate a sense of ever-changing dance fashion, both of which inevitably required their services (Damon 1957: 35). Overall, though there were general changes that began to distinguish the North American country dance tradition as a whole from its English predecessor, beginning from the late colonial period. These changes took place even where attraction to British culture remained strongest, such as along the Eastern seacoast. One early change concerned the overt maintenance of social positioning within the dance itself that was a part of some European social dance contexts. This involved the close correlation of social rank and placement positions within the dance line. In the United States the importance of this was consistently downplayed, even at very formal events. Royce reports: "Places in the figure dances in seaboard assemblies. . . were drawn by lot rather than awarded on the basis of one's social status, as was the case in Europe" (Royce 1977: 129).

Another more important development was the introduction, sometime around 1820-

30, of 'calling' (Kimball 1987: 72 and Damon 1957: 25). Calling refers to the act of shouting out the dance figures for a dance during its performance. In the period before electronic amplification, one person (initially the accompanying dance fiddler) would shout the figures over the music during the dance sequence. Prior to this practice, a given dance was typically already known or was taught to the dancers, and this sort of prompting was unnecessary. This new development brought about two changes. First, dancers no longer had to completely memorize a dance sequence prior to performance; they had only to be familiar with the vocabulary of movements that comprised a typical dance. Lengthy periods of instruction were not necessary, so long as one could keep up with the caller and the dance group. Second, freed from having to follow a pre-composed sequence taken from some notated source, the person calling could improvise and vary the figures during a dance. This required a considerable amount of quick thinking and skill, especially for the caller. Gradually, the role of caller became a solidly differentiated role at dance gatherings. Sometime later, stylized calling, involving a sort of sing-song delivery, with rhyming and nonsense syllables became common, perhaps by the mid to late nineteenth century in America (Damon 1957: 25, Nevell 1977:40 and Kimball 1987: 81).

In Europe, calling never caught on and European travelers witnessing the practice in the United States regarded it with contempt (Damon 1957: 25). It was thought that the proper manner of performing the dances required memorization beforehand. Not only was "composing dances on the spot" considered ungracious and improper, but the very act of shouting out over the music and hall noise was considered rude and detrimental to the dance environment and the dancer's enjoyment (Nevell 1977: 42). This attitude was also

maintained among some dance teachers in the U.S. who maintained a lingering prejudice against calling, even as the practice became more standard. Among the professional American dance masters who had built up successful private salons or dance schools, calling was dismissed as rude and disruptive. Yet dance masters also likely perceived this development as a potential threat to their profession.

Thus the anti-calling sentiment may have been more pervasive among the more affluent audiences in the cities. In more rural areas, where the influence of dance masters had not been as strong, calling may have caught on with less resistance. Bronner reports that besides the dance masters in urban areas of New England, in the early to middle nineteenth century, there were some 'dance leaders' who were "far less formal than the dancing masters" (Bronner 1987: 14). These were often farmers or merchants who would call and/or play fiddle. In municipal halls, fire stations, granges, and the kitchens of private homes, these callers, who often doubled as fiddle players, led community dances called 'junkets' or 'hops' (Blaustein 1995: 195; Damon 1957: 28).

One final development arose sometime in the mid- to late nineteenth century that distinguished the American country dances even further from their English predecessors. This was the incorporation of the 'buzz-step swing' into the active vocabulary of dance figures. This figure still strongly marks the American country dance style from the English and remains, by most accounts, a favored aspect of contra dance (for example, see Dart 1992: 207). Prior to the buzz-step swing, Damon reports there was a form of swinging that consisted of "simply joining hands with one's partner, and revolving once around" (Damon 1957: 38). (This type of swing is still part of the Appalachian set dance tradition.) But the

new swing was much more intimate and vigorous. Resembling a waltz stance, with the left hands clasped together, arms outstretched, and the right hands placed on the partner's shoulder or waist, the 'buzz step' allowed couples to execute several turns in place at a rapid speed (Kimball 1988: 81 and Damon 1957: 39). No source has determined the exact origin of this move, but its resemblance to the stance of the waltz, which had become extremely popular in the middle of the nineteenth century, suggests a possible connection.

The Country Dance 'Family'

The foregoing profusion of styles and regional variation may seem quite nebulous or contradictory, as genres and terms have historically overlapped in usage. As Morrison (1976: 6) writes: "The term 'country dance' has gone through a variety of meanings over the centuries." But the work of Quigley and other dance historians and ethnographers taken together suggests a sort of matrix of formations and figures, from which the various regional repertoires of dance have been derived, all of which can be conceived under the umbrella term of 'country dance'. Contrary to the evolutionary narrative of Sharp, 'country dance' cannot be conceived as a firmly defined body of orally transmitted archetypes. It is more adequately approached as a basis of choreographic and musical composition process with roots in England,⁹ additional influence from France and to some extent Native American and African American dance forms in the North American tradition (Quigley 1995, Spalding and Woodside 1995). The choreographic possibilities of the tradition continue to inspire new formulations to conform to changing preferences as demonstrated recently by Mary M. Dart

⁹ Though Italian dances were a probable influence, the characteristics that came to define the American tradition, including musical accompaniment, were formulated in Britain.

(1992).

By most accounts it appears that by the end of the nineteenth century, country dances (often confusingly described collectively as 'square dance' by writers at the time) including cotillions and the quadrille, were losing some of their appeal. Though dance masters organized a trade association in 1883, through which they united to discourage unauthorized developments like calling and swinging, and thereby reinforce their importance, general interest seems to have dwindled so that a handful of dancing schools were "the last stronghold of square dancing in cities" (Damon 1957: 44). Most sources acknowledge a period around the turn of the twentieth century when country dancing was seldom practiced. For instance, the semi-biographical anecdotal account of dance in New England by Ralph Page and Beth Tolman relates personal awareness of its fading from the few remaining communities that practiced the contra-style dances (Tolman and Page 1937). Meanwhile in the Midwest in, the slight tone of urgency in Henry Ford's revival manual, which somewhat arbitrarily placed the official date of the demise of country dance at 1900, suggests concern about the apparent fading of interest in the 'old-time' dances there (Ford 1926).

Revival

The first quarter of the twentieth century roughly begins the chapter of contra dance history that is conveniently called a 'revival phase' for country dancing on both sides of the Atlantic. This period warrants a discussion of the institutions and corresponding rhetoric of revival that fostered the continued development of the dance in the United States. This is not to propose an arbitrary division between history and revival, a magical line of demarcation

and legitimation of one as an authentic cultural expression and the other as a self-conscious, yet inadequate imitation practiced by the non-folk (see Dorson 1976). Many communities that were part of the revival had experienced the dance already in the past. But it is important to take into consideration the impulses and discourse that surrounded notions of cultural revivalism as a reflexive social mechanism, as they have shaped and continue to shape the environment in which country dancing continues to thrive.

To some degree a common thread of celebration and nostalgic longing has united these recent activist and scholarly folkloric projects involving country dance (i.e., Sharp), a tone of celebration that can be found in published dance manuals from the early twentieth century up until the present (see Page and Tolman 1937; Page 1984). This social and cultural dynamic has been a potent force in shaping the contemporary contra scene, according to published sources and my own ethnographic observations and discussions. To the extent that these trends resemble other manifestations of a more general current of interest, since the romantic and industrializing era of Europe and America, for a communally reinforcing experience of music and dance as a counterbalance to the alienating displacements of rapidly modernizing society, they bear further discussion (see Bausinger 1961, Bohlman 1988, Boyes 1993, Hast 1993 and Cantwell 1996). For the present, I will conclude this chapter with some specific instances in the early twentieth century which generated and sustained interest in the genres of country dance in America. A fuller consideration of the sociology of revivalism will be reserved for the following chapter.

First it is necessary to make clear what I mean by the term 'revival' in the historical sense, as the term has been loaded with nineteenth-century evolutionary ideas of progressive

cultural development and decline. Scholars and participants within the American folk revival have dissected the term as it has been specifically applied to certain forms in the U.S. (see Cohen 1995 and Cantwell 1996) and as it applies to the ideal of cultural conservation (see Slobin 1983 and Rosenberg 1993). In common usage, the term likely retains the notion of reclamation and reinstatement of a cultural practice, presumed to be falling into disuse. As will be seen, what happened, as some have pointed out, was not simply a spirited rescue of a practice from within a group formerly acquainted with the tradition, but was more importantly, a cross-cultural transfusion of an item of Anglo-American culture that brought it increased visibility beyond former boundaries of geography, class, and education (see Hickerson 1995; Cantwell 1996). I use the term 'revival' in this limited sense in this concluding historical overview.

As I will discuss later, a revivalist interest in cultural heritage has been meaningful in terms of the experience for many contemporary dance audiences. In the historical narrative, revival may be productively conceived as instances of creative reclamation, re-imagining and reconfiguring of cultural expression. How did this process facilitate a resurgence of interest in country dance? Was the process less of a momentous energizing than a gentle "reawakening from slumber", recalling the metaphor used by Henry Ford (Ford 1926)? In answering these questions, Georgina Boyes' assessment of parallel developments in Britain may be highly appropriate in an American context:

The emergence of the [English folk revival] movement to foster the conscious performance of first 'folksongs' and later 'folk dances' at the beginning of the twentieth century represented a fundamental change in the treatment of popular culture which has had wide ranging effects (Boyes 1993: 3)

Implying agreement with this assessment, Blaustein argues that the many instances of revival of related Anglo-American music and dance traditions in this century, on both sides of the Atlantic were not coincidental impulses. Speaking of them he states:

Such revivals and inventions of traditional music and dance raise intriguing questions. It is essential that we consider the historical evolution and contemporary revivals of traditional music and dancing in global perspective, rather than thinking of them as isolated developments (Blaustein 1995: 200)

This type of global project is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, guided by the thrust of this thesis, I will draw attention to the overlapping phases of revival that have sustained the tradition up to the present. This will be supplemented with writings from American social and cultural history.

The Revival Phase

Brunvand dates the beginning of an American folk dance revival with Cecil Sharp's founding of numerous formal societies in the first decades of the twentieth century in Britain and later the U.S. (Brunvand 1978: 270). Though Sharp's vision was transmitted through his institutional legacy, the English Folk Dance Society (later renamed the English Folk Dance and Song Society), it was initially of peripheral importance to the American contra dance tradition, as the early focus was on dance and music of the British Isles (Karpeles 1967: 185-193). Despite Sharp's early fieldwork in Appalachia, it was only later, after heated debates among society officers, that the British society concerned itself with American-style dancing (Boyes 1993: 196-207). But the leadership and scholarship of Cecil Sharp were formative for the revival and the types of revivalist societies that began to form at the time. His two-

pronged project of research and activist promotion remained a guiding influence for many years. In retrospect Boyes notes that the overall impact of the societies inspired by Sharp in Britain was quite substantial:

these folk clubs were the generators of the Revival in the late 1960s. . . Through the later 1960s and 1970s, they became a way of life--a major source of a Revival sub-culture. . . The Folk Revival had succeeded, folksongs were known and sung, folk dances of all types danced. . . (Boyes 1993: 241)

Though the institutions may have been a success, they were driven by the precarious romantic-nationalistic program upon which Sharp's scholarship was founded. His early work on country dance was an archaeological reconstructive project guided by speculative study of Playford's collection and his own observations of country dance around the turn of the century in rural England and Appalachia (Karpeles 1967: 104). Like others of the time, Sharp was strongly influenced by evolutionary folkloric theories, and much of his work presumes the existence of archetypal dance and music forms generated by an anonymous community in the past.¹⁰ Over time, these archetypes had been disfigured by misguided manipulation at the hands of genteel dance masters or an upper and middle class public clamoring for the latest in sophisticated fashion. Not only were the forms themselves thought to be corrupted, but the communal spirit that was supposedly inherent to them had been forfeited by needless contrivances (see Karpeles 1967:104-7).

Over a period of nearly 25 years (1900-1923) Sharp published several volumes of country dance notations and dance music that were to become the foundational,

¹⁰ See Porter 1978 for a full discussion of the prevalence of this conception in the writings of other influential folklorists.

authoritative works of the folklore societies he helped form.¹¹ Karpeles (1967) notes Sharp's method of dance choreography editing:

In his choice of dances--he published 158 in four volumes--Cecil Sharp was guided by aesthetic considerations and by the practical problem of accurate deciphering [of Playford's notation] but he gave preference to the earlier versions of the dance in which the traditional element was strongest. . . The question is sometimes asked why Cecil Sharp should have paid so much attention to the Playford dances seeing that they were not of pure folk origin (1967: 106).

This search for the strongest 'traditional element' reveals Sharp's quasi-quantification of folk authenticity. Based on an evolutionary conception of dance development, Sharp had concluded that those dances in which 'the traditional element was strongest' were the circles and possibly the square eighths.¹² These two forms supposedly predominated among 'the folk', before dance masters embraced the longways form for its greater potential for use in the elegant long halls of wealthy households. Overall, Sharp's scholarly approach informed the canons that he devised for the societies for several decades and set the terms for the internal discussions about repertoire and authenticity in these organizations (Boyes 1993).

In England, two societies, The Folk Song Society (founded in 1898), and the English Folk Dance Society (founded in 1911) had merged into a single organization in 1938 (Schofield 1986: 215 and Rippon 1975: 56). American branches of the English Folk Dance Society were formed by Sharp in numerous New England cities in the second decade of this

¹¹ See Karpeles 1967: 204 for a full bibliography; and Boyes 1993: 153-170 for a discussion of this canon.

¹² See Quigley 1995: 75; see also Sachs 1937 for full description of the idea that circle dances were the most primordial dance form in a global evolutionary scheme.

century, most successfully in Boston (Kennedy 1949: 23). From these branches developed what has now become a well known organization for the promotion of both English and American country dancing, The Country Dance Society of America (Karpeles 1967: 127-139). As purveyors of a repertoire of folk songs and dance in the United States, the American branch was initially called the English Folk Dance Society, reflecting its orientation towards British-derived genres. Only in 1940 was the name changed to the current one, indicating a concern with both countries' related traditions (Karpeles 1967: 130). Since then it has supported activities involving both American and English dance (Parkes 1996).

As noted before, several researchers have noted Sharp's scholarly inconsistencies that were linked to his revival gestures. The work of Georgina Boyes, whose critical analysis of the English folk song revival is one of the most comprehensive, suggests that Sharp's activist aims converged with his evolutionary survivalist theories to form his communal-nationalist project of restoring 'authentically' English folk genres (Boyes 1993). Sometimes this led to highly selective field research that was manipulated to buttress his cultural agenda (ibid: 42; Quigley 1993: 74).

Sharp's work may have been an impetus for increasing the visibility of country dancing in the United States, but the twentieth century revival instances of American country dance were not always so narrowly defined by a concern for orthodoxy and fidelity in recreating authenticated repertoires. This may have been due in part to the existence of numerous callers in the New England area who had grown up with the tradition during their youth around the turn of the century and who had a less formal, more flexible approach after

popular interest in the dance form increased (Tolman 1972). This flexibility in the dance and music forms within the American revival is further suggested by the creation of and acceptance of newly composed choreographies and tunes that has continued up to the present. Rippon (1975:55) and Keller (Keller and Sweet 1975: ii) for instance, view the New England callers of this century as the modern counterpart of the earlier European dance masters and direct inheritors of their creative initiatives.

In any event, the certification and standardization that was part of the English Folk Song and Dance Society and also later in the American western square dance clubs, have generally never been a central concern of the contra revival movements in this century (see Boyes 1993 for the English Folk Song and Dance Society; Spalding and Woodside 1995: 6 for club squares). This less restrictive attitude was precisely what would later attract many contemporary dancers and conversely what would discourage their involvement in the related traditions of club squares and English Country Dance, which were perceived as being organizationally rigid (see Flinn 1993: 96 and Bealle 1989: 196).

Henry Ford

The next large scale contribution to the perpetuation of contra dancing in the United States came from the support of Henry Ford for 'old-time' American social dance and music. His well financed promotion of dance instruction and old time fiddle contests in the 1920s served to increase the public's awareness of what he considered a dying tradition. Ford enlisted the services of a Michigan dance master, Benjamin Lovett with whom he co-published a dance manual that emphasized contras, squares and quadrilles, but also included several other ballroom dances (Ford 1926). This manual was so popular that it was in its

fourth edition by 1943. Ford also funded public school dance education, launched a lecture tour to promote the virtues of dance, and sponsored high-profile fiddle contests and broadcasts of old-time music in the late twenties (Levine 1987: 194). Not surprisingly, Bronner (1987: 36) notes that "his imprimatur carried great clout for searching out and supporting old-time fiddlers especially." This author also describes Ford's interest as "rooted in a desire to preserve rural values against the urban, modern culture" (Bronner 1987: 36-9). Blaustein notes that comments from Ford on the cultural life of the period suggest that his program was grounded in anti-jazz, anti-Semitic sentiments and inspired by an identification of old time dance with a pre-industrial Anglo-American heritage (see Blaustein 1995: 199). What partially attracted Ford was the highly stylized manners of nineteenth-century ballroom dances. But he also praised the old-time dances as being more socially integrative than the "one-on-one" dancing he associated with cabarets and jazz clubs (Ford 1926: 8). Echoes of the nationalistic, reactionary attitudes of Ford can be found in some of the recreational dance manuals that were published around the same time (see for example Ryan 1926/1939: 9-11).

Prior to the national 'reawakening' of interest in Anglo-American folk dance that Ford and Sharp had helped initiate, contra-style dancing experienced an interim period of marginal interest in the U.S., as I have earlier noted. Outside of a handful of celebrated callers and old time musicians in the New England area, performing in rural venues such as fire halls, granges, community centers and house parties, contra dance had faded from the larger cities and college towns that once sustained it (Kimball 1988: 78 and Bethke 1974). In Vermont, Pitkin notes that favor for contras had considerably dwindled in the early 1900s

and the increasingly infrequent community dances were more likely to feature quadrilles (Pitkin 1952: 62). In rural New York state, Kimball reports that most public dances at this same time no longer featured country dances at all, except in remote towns, where they tenuously coexisted with more popular couple dance forms like the waltz and polka (Kimball 1988: 75). Newton Tolman, a musician and dancer, in his anecdotal account of country dancing in Nelson, New Hampshire, recalls that during the early decades of the century, public country dances were fairly infrequent in this town, which curiously became a focal point for later dance revivalists (Tolman 1972: 1-21).

Then, in the late twenties and early thirties there was a brief revival of square and contra dancing, the latter centered in southern New Hampshire and energized by recently migrated or touring urbanites seeking out 'country customs' (Tolman 1972: 30 and Brunvand 1978: 263). As Hast reports, there were strong connections between this region and the greater Boston area, beginning a two way traffic that was to increase substantially by the 1960s (Hast 1994: 84-89). Page and Tolman draw attention to this emerging interest of city people in small town dances in southern New Hampshire, optimistically concluding that:

Modern country dancing has been responsible for a friendship of town and country, young and old, beginner and veteran, 'high' and 'low' . . . a workable democracy (Page and Tolman 1937: 23)

In central New York, Bronner reports that with the "revival of old-time dances sweeping the country in the 1920s, dance halls in the industrial towns began sponsoring dances with barn-dance entertainment" (Bronner 1987: 6).

During this period, outside of the New England region, smaller communities in the Southwest and Midwest still supported some type of country dancing, typically square dances

with callers and often live musicians (Tyler 1993: 40; Leary 1984: 79). Over a thirty year period, until the mid 1940s, country dance events progressed from small-scale community events to semi-commercialized activities: from being domestic-household events in the teens and twenties, to public taverns and barns in the 1930s, and finally a commercialized phase with large dance halls, bands, callers and concessions stands (Tyler 1993: 40 and Bethke 1974). Emboldened by Ford's patronage and a post-war public caught up in a desire to celebrate and affirm American heritage, by the mid 1940s a nationwide square dance boom was well underway. The national focus was on the western square dance tradition and southern string band or country and western music. This 'boom' of mass popularity would crest sometime in the early 1950s but its legacy continued in the club-style square dance organizations of today (see Shaw 1939, and Phillips 1973). Key square dance manuals of the time concentrated on the square-type formations and an expanded list of more numerous and challenging figures than those comprising the New England and English country dances. However, some contra-formation dances were included in these works also (see Mayo 1948 and Shaw 1939). Summarizing the formal transformations that occurred in this period, Gunzenhauser writes there was a

grey area during the transitional period of the 1940s and 50s. At this time, traditional figures were being elaborated and supplemented to produce the roots of today's modern Western square dancing (Gunzenhauser 1996: xv).

In New England, the rise of interest in square dance led to a minor rejuvenation of the New England-type country dances. As for the type of music and dance enjoyed during this brief period of interest, Tolman (1972) characterizes it as somewhat unauthentic as the urbanites flocking to rural dance venues conflated repertoires of music thought to be

'country':

dance music, to New England square dance enthusiasts, and to the world at large, seemed to be irrevocably represented by tunes like Darling Nellie Gray, Redwing and Polish polkas (30). . . as for the new generation of square dancers, they had never heard any authentic old music, and so accepted whatever was being played without protest (32)

Though there were still some who could recall a time when "certain tunes went with certain dancers and were never separated," a practice dating at least since Playford's manual, it was also observed at this time that "the more different tunes played while the dances are in progress, the better it suits the young people" (Page and Tolman 1937: 18).

Bronner recounts the development in New England, of popular concern with old-time fiddling during the 1920s renewal of interest in old time music via radio (Bronner 1987).

While fiddlers in the northeast and southeast had very similar dance music repertoires, both being descendants of the "British Isles Tradition", there were some differences, as for instance "quadrilles and jigs in 6/8 time, favored in New England and New York, arise less frequently in the southern Appalachians" (1987: 49). Over the next decades, the regional transformation became more particular, as the "romanticism for the imagined purity and antiquity of the South" led to a "greater commercial involvement that significantly altered the tradition" (ibid). This was in contrast with the situation in New England, where the old-style fiddle music remained tied to dance playing, rather than commercial recording or concerts. There, the style remained attached "longer to the old norms of danceable tempos, clearly pronounced strains and repetitive playing." Overall, the emphasis of the New England fiddle repertoire "remained on the dance tunes" (1987: 39).

Gunzenhauser (1996) speculates that since the ability to read printed music was less

common in the South, southern style fiddle music was subject to a more noticeable transformation. She summarizes the primary differences that arose between the two styles:

compared to Southern dance music, the tunes [of New England dance music] are harmonically more complex, with a relatively high number of chord changes. Tunes--and the two parts of each tune--are fairly distinctive and easy to tell apart . . . both jigs and reels are played. (Gunzenhauser 1996: 6)

By contrast, in southern style music:

often the tunes are less well defined. There are fewer chord changes. . . and the difference between the A and B parts can be less obvious. Jigs are not part of the repertory, and tempos tend to be faster than in New England (Gunzenhauser 1996: 7).

These distinctions, while no longer absolutely territorially defined, are maintained today primarily as stylistic markers. Prior to the revivals of the 1960s, there would have been far less eclecticism than is the case today where many bands have integrated tunes from both repertoires and perform from them for dances.

As the national square dance boom peaked in the 1940s and 50s, the initial flurry of interest in contra-style dances and music waned. Eventually, even in New England "in many places, so-called Western style dancing had supplanted the older New England contra dances, and the music could be anything so long as it had a fast beat, often coming from a record player" (Tolman 1972: 36). Bronner notes a similar situation in rural New York state, but adds that even the intensive interest there in Western-style square dancing was starting to give way to rock and roll dance in the 1950s (Bronner 1987). Even at the annual festival that would later become *the* focal point of the national contra dance audience (NEFFA), square dances predominated. In a summary of the history of the New England Folk festival, Parkes (1996: 3) notes that at the many urban and suburban New England locales where this festival

took place in the 1940s and 1950s, "squares vastly outnumbered contras". It took several years for contras and New England style music to dominate this festival. If this festival can be taken as indicative of the interests of a wide ranging audience beyond the immediate festival event, then it suggests the stage was set for a fresh revival of American folk dance, this time with contra dance in a prominent role.

Contra in the 1960s and 1970s

Around 1965 there began a second, more substantial revival of New England style country dance. This time the interest in the contra dance form was equal to the interest in reviving the companion old-time New England dance music. Once again the revival was energized by visitors and newcomers to rural New Hampshire, Vermont and upstate New York from cities such as Boston and New York City (Tolman 1972: 41). Tolman notes several very active personalities from the Pioneer Valley area in New Hampshire, among them Ralph Page and Dudley Laufman, who began to exert quite a presence on the revival movement. The former was one of the celebrated callers who 'spanned the gap' across the leaner years of contra dance enthusiasm, while the latter was characterized as a "product of this newly emerging national folk-music scene" (Tolman 1972: 37). The prominence of Page has been well established, as he became a national and international figure intimately associated with the renewal of interest in contra and square dance (Nevell 1977: 68-70).¹³

¹³ Ralph Page (1903-1985) is probably the single most cited figure in the twentieth-century repopularization of American country dance. His efforts extended beyond the U.S., and he became a sort of 'cultural ambassador' for American dance forms, as evidenced by a State Department funded trips to England and to Japan in 1956 to teach contra dance (Parkes

These individuals and several others equally as prominent, such as callers Larry Jennings and Ted Sannella, alongside musicians such as Bob McQuillen and nationally famous bands such as Wild Asparagus, began to attract a widespread following of dancers in the New England region and beyond, as they traveled to small town, suburban and big city dances alike (Tolman 1972: 34-39 and Hast 1994: 123). Intimate dances held in outlying small towns became frequented by mobile urbanites and suburbanites often traveling great distances to participate (see Hast 1993: 89).

These callers, musicians and dancers comprise a group of energetic personalities who expended substantial energy promoting dance, helping to give shape to the emergent contra dance tradition. Their influence was felt in large cities and small rural communities. As a group they constitute what Blaustein has described as those who:

bridged the gap between something that was being called a revival (but which was really more like a cross-cultural transfusion) and a genuine grass-roots folk revival. (Blaustein 1993: 259)

In this case, the 'cross cultural transfusion' to which he refers was the exposure to and adoption of country dancing in the late 1960s by college aged urbanites, most of whom were previously unacquainted with the tradition (Nevell 1977, Tolman 1972, Cohen 1995 and Cantwell 1996: 253). This was a two way interaction taking place largely within New England: callers and musicians traveled from small towns to festivals and large dance gatherings in the cities, while suburbanites and students were travelling out to small rural towns to participate in dance events.

Dart (1992) for instance, notes a predominant New England 'youth subculture' in the 1970s, made up largely of white, suburban, college students that would soon carry the tradition to a national audience (286). By her account the infusion of youthful vitality coupled with the continued presence of callers and dancers in scattered New England hamlets gave the American country dance revival a major push (Dart 1992: 286). Many who took part in this situation, whatever their backgrounds, went on to become quite active in the contra dance community on a broader scale, and eventually extended the reach of interest beyond the New England area. Once again, Boston, Massachusetts was a primary center for this revival, in sheer terms of numbers of participants and venues (see Sannella 1982). This was partly due to the healthy public support for dancing in Boston, including state university sponsorship and the support of recreational institutions, such as the YWCA.

But the growth of interest outside of the immediate New England area was gradual. The New England style contra dance tradition, until well into the 1970s, was cut off for the most part from the Midwest and South (Bealle 1989: 114). In the latter locales, long-standing community square dance events coexisted alongside the highly codified Western style club dance tradition. According to Bealle, even by the early 1970s, "few communities outside New England had contra dances" (1989: 116). Over the next 20 years, as the revival of contra dance and music solidified in the northeast, new dances gradually took root elsewhere (see Bealle 1989: 124-125).

From the New England area the tradition radiated outwards, as participants exposed to the tradition in New Hampshire or Massachusetts moved to other regions and established local venues for contra dance. Overall, a national network of callers, dancers and musicians

was taking shape. This network came about through national festival workshops or newsletters but also through the resettlement of individuals from New England. This latest revival then has been a two-pronged development: national organizations with annual festivals, and emplacement and growth of local contra dance communities by those with first-hand experience in the New England revival.

Festivals

From the late 1970s to the present, national festival organizations rapidly became important agents in the contra tradition (Parkes 1996, Dart 1992: 128 and Hast 1994: 91-97). People from outside the New England region have long attended such annual dance/music gatherings as the Country Dance and Song Society-sponsored dance camps like Pinewoods in Massachusetts or Buffalo Gap in West Virginia, and the New England Folk Festival of America (NEFFA) in various northeastern cities. Institutions such as these have sponsored intensive and lengthy assemblies devoted to a variety of folklore activities: country dance evenings, international dance events, workshops for callers and musicians, concerts, dance instruction. The national attraction of NEFFA had gained significant momentum since the mid-1940s, so that in the mid -80s it "increasingly served as a gathering place for contra dancers, musicians and callers from across North America, becoming in effect a 'national contra dance convention'" (Parkes 1996: 6). In comparison with the diverse offerings of the Pinewoods camp, NEFFA has become a contra-intensive festival, making it a key institution in the American contra dance scene.

The histories of these festivals and institutions are complex, involving newcomers to

the tradition, as well as seasoned callers and musicians who were instrumental in the founding of them. As with the myriad other genres that were part of the national folk revival climate that crested in popularity in the 1960s, contra dance and music were sustained in part through the activist programs of these organizations. Even as national, popular interest in folk song and culture passed, many continued to invest significant time and energy in attending or organizing festivals devoted to folk genres. In the waning years of mass involvement in folk music, Rosenberg notes:

many people remained involved with folk music, carrying on the kinds of activities initiated during the boom years through festivals, clubs, magazines, and record companies. Some continued to embrace a variety of forms of folk music, while others specialized in specific types (Rosenberg 1993: 9).

What began as a regional revival was thus picked up and dispersed through a national festival circuit that continues to attract substantial audiences. These remain important meeting places that continue to energize the growth and establishment of contra dance venues within the national network (see Hast 1993: 128 for example). In addition, they offer a public forum for the celebration and affirmation of this tradition and related ones. In this respect they fit in with a larger history of organized folklore celebration and preservation. Of the approximately 70 year old history of American folk festivals in general, Rosenberg writes: "Like collections and public lectures, folk festivals are still intended to educate and to valorize folk traditions" (Rosenberg 1993: 6). Parkes (1996) for instance, citing one of the early aims of the festival organizers, declares the success of NEFFA in its adherence to

its original principles of non-commercialism, high standards of performance and authenticity, and an inclusiveness that has valued participation as highly as performances. True to its founders' vision and the goals set forth in its first bylaws, the Festival has done its part 'to preserve folk traditions in New England and

elsewhere, and to encourage the development of a living folk culture' (6)

The organizational aspect as represented in festivals has contributed to the ongoing tradition but has also generated tensions, as some fear a creeping routinization undermining the formerly free-spirited atmosphere that prevailed in the early 1970s (see Hast 1994: 139-150).

Dance communities outside New England

The establishment of local dance communities, often in urban or suburban contexts, though slightly less formalized or momentous, has been central in the process of perpetuating contra dance. Springing from local chapters of the Country Dance and Song Society, or developed by informal groups of folk music enthusiasts, many of these venues are still going strong, and new venues are constantly being established (see Tomczak 1996 for example). There are too many of these to enumerate nationwide, but the example of one important long standing community may well be representative of the circumstances that existed in numerous other communities. John Bealle has documented the establishment and growth of a vital contra dance community in Bloomington, Indiana, that has been something of a focal point in the Midwest. After two years of experience with contra dance in New England, Dillon Bustin, a musician and caller, was instrumental in establishing a regular dance in 1972 in this small Midwestern college town. He and several friends and acquaintances, some of whom were heavily involved in folk music circles, began holding informal dances in private homes and small municipal halls. By Bealle's account (1989), it was people like Bustin who were instrumental in "spread[ing] contra dancing to communities of young people across the country" throughout the 1970s (1989: 299-300). Although

Bloomington was an exception, during the formative time of many contra communities, many of the founding members “had prior training at the schools associated with the Country Dance and Song Society” (1989: 300). As the dances grew, they tended to attract “those whose social ties were established at folk festivals and coffeehouses” (1989: 282) in Bloomington and elsewhere.

The Bloomington contra dance community has been credited with an important stylistic innovation that has worked its way into contra dances in numerous contexts (including Madison): the introduction of southern style string band music into the repertoire of potential dance music (Bealle 1989: 134). This was facilitated by the fact that the phrase structure of string band tunes fortuitously corresponded with that of the more usual New England dance music: 32 bars in AABB form. Not only the ease of fit with the conventional contra dance format, but also the folk-ish associations of this music undoubtedly contributed to its acceptance. This did not mean the supplanting of the New England tunes, but a supplement to the existing inventory. A result of this infusion was a sort of conflation of stylistic identity, so that music appropriate for contra dance was not conceived as limited to the New England-style dance music repertoire:

Frequently dance music at these events does not reflect the purity of either of these styles; this is accomplished not only by compromise. . . but often because the issue of their contrast does not exist. Much of the time, in fact, a hybrid music is played and enjoyed without stylistic framing (Bealle 1989: 139).

The structural and stylistic ‘fit’ was such that this new situation took on a sense of naturalness by the dancers at the time:

Some dancers who are not also musicians, of course, either cannot distinguish

between the two or cannot appreciate the contrast in experience (Bealle 1989: 139).

The union of old time string band music and New England contra dance are largely taken for granted now in many contexts, such as the one in Madison. There are divergences beyond this repertoire occasionally as when a blues-inflected or klezmer tune is performed. But as these genres are stylistically outside the boundaries of the Anglo-American repertoire, they are more often considered humorous departures from this recent diversification. Participation in national festivals by musicians has also no doubt contributed to the current fluidity of repertoires (Dart 1992: 286). In practice, often the tastes or limitations of the accompanying band may dictate which of the two prevails at many current dances, though many are comfortable in either.

Another important shift in the newly established contra scenes has also been well documented from the Bloomington scene: the increasing preference for new choreographies within the contra format that require both greater skill and more sustained involvement with one's chosen partner for the dance (Bealle 1989: 118). This trend on a nationwide level, was given a full treatment by dance scholar Mary M. Dart. Her investigation into the changing emphases of dance choreography led her to the conclusion that participants at dance events have become more concerned with challenging dance movement, than with maintaining a relaxed social atmosphere. Dance composers and callers have responded with the introduction of dances where dancers are constantly in motion, regardless of active or inactive position. This in turn has contributed to a slight stratification in terms of dance ability, as the level of difficulty for many new dances makes it more challenging for new

dancers to enter the scene and feel comfortable. Other significant changes that have emerged in the Bloomington dances and beyond, over the thirty years, include "Beckett formation dances, multiple progression dances [and] the hey for four," the latter coming to contra from English Country Dance (Dart 1992: 288).

One final feature of the current tradition nationwide should be acknowledged once again, the notation of dances. As in the earlier history of country dance, the continued circulation of new trends in the tradition is partly enabled by the existence of a common and simple choreographic notation. Several manuals are considered 'classics', whose dances continue to be enthusiastically received by contra audiences (see for example, Jennings 1983 or Page 1984). In theory, someone with some dance experience could attempt to start a dance evening him/herself or at least enhance his or her calling abilities by means of these manuals. Not only notated dance manuals, but caller's private index card files constitute a storehouse of dance knowledge. Thus, in the current tradition, these written resources have been important for two reasons: 1) accommodating creative choreographic innovations that can then enter into the extended dance community, and 2) maintenance and transmission of a standardized body of dances variously called 'traditional' or 'old chestnuts' (Bealle 1989: 118 and Page and Tolman 1937).

Contra dance and the Folk Revival

As the audience for contra dance slowly found a nationwide audience, some broader cultural issues are worth noting in closing. As noted above, the generally cited starting point for the most recent revival of New England style contra dance and music is the mid- to late

1960s. This revival had discernable intersections with the wider American cultural phenomenon of folklore revivalism from the 1950s through the 1970s (Jackson 1993, Rosenberg 1993; Cantwell 1996). In turn, this "urban folk revival", according to R. Raymond Allen, was itself "a specific manifestation of a continuing history of at least two hundred years of romantic folk revivalism in the Western world, rather than an isolated historical event" (Allen quoted in Blaustein 1993: 270).

Some folklore scholars have recently begun to investigate these large scale revivals, especially in the context of 20th century American social history. Among them, Robert Cantwell has evocatively sketched a portrait of the political and social climate of the period from the 1940s to the 1970s which generated many of the cultural currents that continue to resonate today in the public image of American folklore (Cantwell 1996). In his analysis of personalities and pivotal events, Cantwell critically examines the larger revival context, arguing that the most recent revival was animated by a post-war counterculture audience striving for an alternative to the creeping hegemony of both commercial and governmental influence:

Like the utopian missionary movements, social and artistic programs, religious revivals and political crusades before it, as well as the liberation movements that followed it, the revival made the romantic claim of folk culture--oral, immediate, traditional, idiomatic, communal, a culture of characters, privileges, obligations, and beliefs--against a centrist, specialist, impersonal technocratic culture, a culture of types, functions, jobs, and goals (Cantwell 1996: 349).

Cantwell here additionally alludes to the cyclical nature of revivalism in industrial society that will be taken up in the following chapter. Formally, the larger movement embraced a stylized American heritage of genres and images that:

had emerged on the minstrel stage and in regionalist journalism and literature, in tent shows, vaudeville, and Hollywood, out of the traffic in human encounter that crosses the intricate network of America's social boundaries, particularly those lying between urban and provincial societies (Cantwell 1996: 351).

Though the popular focus of the movement was folksong, Cantwell briefly acknowledges the movement also encompassed dance. He mentions Margaret Mayo as a central figure in New York City, who had an early and prominent role in exposing young urban revivalist audiences to both square and contra dance (Cantwell 1996: 280). Mayo's dance revival group, the American Square Dance Group, became a well known recreational forum where notable folk and protest singers crossed paths, thus contributing to the association of revived American dance with the emerging counter cultural movement (see Cohen, ed. 1995 especially Young's article). Mayo's work took her back and forth from relatives in Kentucky to New York City, traversing the urban-rural route suggested above by Cantwell.

A similar atmosphere of protest sentiment allied with fascination with rural America was operative in the New England contra revival. Hast, among others, characterized the late 1960s audience for contra dance as part of "an oppositional youth culture" seeking to establish contact with rural ways of life (Hast 1994: 89). Numerous other accounts also portray many newcomers to the tradition as politically active college students encountering the dance and music for the first time (Nevell 1977: 5, Tolman 1972: 37 and Carlin 1995: 233). One striking convergence of each of these strands occurred during the seminal Newport folk festival which Cantwell characterized as the

first and certainly the most influential festival of the urban folk revival (294).

. a cultural dynamo accelerating the circulation of information from arts and entertainment elites into a broader middle class of young people who had discovered in folk music an accessible instrument of dissent inflected at the same time with cultural prestige and legitimacy (1996: 306).

One afternoon a respected contra dance band from Nelson, New Hampshire was featured on the main stage at the festival in front of a crowd of sixteen thousand. A musician in that band, Newton Tolman reports:

I didn't think we played very well. But our little concert drew a big hand. Joan Baez danced into a front row seat and said she thought the music was great. . . in the Sunday newspapers next day. . . [a journalist] described us as having the shortest hair, by far of any group in the entire festival, while playing what was probably the most 'authentic' of all the music heard that evening (Tolman 1972: 47).

Finally, Cantwell takes note of the enduring resonance of the revivalist impulse emerging from instances like those at Newport, as folk music continued to serve as a widely shared point of orientation for many:

Well after the commercial popularity of folksong had faded, many diehard revivalists, now parents and householders, endeavored. . . to create a life that might somehow reverberate morally to folk music, even as the music itself, in the commercial marketplace at least, fell silent. . . a life of participatory, not vicarious, recreation, with a recognition of the importance of small community to such enjoyment (Cantwell 1996: 350).

This effort to maintain an atmosphere of communal ideals energized enthusiasm for participatory folkloric cultural performances, eventually leading to the formation of local and national groups devoted to their continuation. This included American contra dance, New England dance music and the southern old-time string band music which was eventually grafted on to the contra tradition. By the 1970s, each of these elements seemed to be firmly emplaced in the constellation of genres embraced by folk revivalists.

By the 1980s the interest in contra dance had given rise to what one writer describes as a "huge renaissance" (Gunzenhauser 1996: 32). Bronner reports that in New York, in the mid-1980s, a reawakening of interest in fiddle music and dance spurred the opening of venues once again for barn dances, this time around supplemented sometimes with funding and support from administrative arts agencies. He positions this as a reflection of the great resurgence of interest in "heritage" (Bronner 1987: 174-5). In New York, Kimball notes a new outgrowth of interest in contra dance stretching back to the 1970s, tied in with the revival of old-time string band music, the bicentennial celebration and promotional efforts of experienced dance leaders in the region (Kimball 1988). This has resulted in what he calls the 'urban contra club' phenomenon arising primarily at the edge of New England university towns (Kimball 1988: 84-5). The type of 'urban contra club' that Kimball describes is typical of the primary contra dance audience today. As the popularity of the dance has increased, more and more callers and musicians are now on the road, traveling to sponsored dances and regional festivals. According to Dart, "many local callers have become professionals who tour the country for pay, bringing new dances into the repertoire to supplement (and supplant) the old ones" (Dart 1992: 286). With the recent increased circulation of dance callers nationwide there has been a cross-fertilization of regional styles and an increasing "standardization of repertoire" (ibid).

Summary

Contra dance is a social dance formation that is part of a larger realm of country dance tradition which has had a long and discontinuous history. Country dance took shape

in Britain and France and was disseminated across Europe and into the European colonies where it was adapted and transformed. By most accounts its visibility was substantially increased as aristocratic and middle class audiences, intrigued with its supposed rustic character, chose it over the very formalized continental dances, such as the French minuet. In the United States, the dance style and corresponding music tradition gradually took on a character of their own, different from their European predecessors. After a period of several hundred years of tremendous popularity and transformation, country dance, particularly the New England-style contras, had nearly faded from the American cultural landscape by the early years of the twentieth century. Its continuation was largely in isolated rural communities. As has been the case with many genres of American folklore in this century, the re-introduction of the country dance tradition in the U.S. (and England) has been intimately tied to the many institutions and inspired individuals who adopted an activist role in promoting the genre. Numerous committed individuals and organizers have sought to bring the dances back again into circulation among the American public with a variety of implicit or explicit agendas. Some were premised on the idea of rescuing a vital part of a cultural heritage that was in danger of vanishing while others saw the tradition as an 'authentic' alternative to mass-mediated genres.

Since then, prominent personalities, including callers like Ralph Page, in tandem with organized festivals, such as NEFFA, have been crucial in the foundation of contra and square dance as vibrant genres today. These institutions and personalities provide an important part of the recent history of contra dance tradition as they have helped to shape, to some degree, the current context of contra dance ideas and meanings. Before giving a fuller

examination of the practice of folklore revivalism, cultural preservation, and conservation as discussed literature, I will first give a brief overview of a local dance community and dance venues.

Chapter Four

Local Dance Venues

In the Madison area there are several different venues for contra dance that, taken as a group, share much in common with the contexts reported elsewhere in the literature. The emphasis is on the New England-style contra dances and music, with calling mostly by local callers and live music provided by local musicians. The dances are publicly announced in local weekly papers, fliers, or Internet listings and are open to the general public, regardless of experience. Dances are held in public halls on a fairly consistent schedule, usually require a minimal entrance fee (typically ranging from 4 to 10 dollars per person), and attract newcomers as well as a small group of regulars, who attend several dances each month. At the same time each regular dance has its own character, dependent upon the caller, bands and the audience. The character of each dance also reveals traces of the different phases of the recent revival of country dance in the U.S.

At present there are five dances held regularly, known in the contra community by their names: the Fourth Friday dance, and the Tuesday night dances, each named for the day on which it is held; McDuff's Ceilidh Band and Last Gaspé contra dances, named after the bands who sponsor and usually play for the dance evening; and the Wild Hog in the Woods Barn Dances, named for the folk music collective group that arranges the dances. In addition, many dancers who regularly attend these dances also travel to another venue in the vicinity, where contra dances are held on a slightly less regular basis. These latter dances are

held near Dodgeville, a small community forty minutes south of Madison, in a converted farm complex-turned folklore retreat center called "Folklore Village". These tend to be the largest dances in terms of attendance, attracting people from the Madison area but also other states adjacent to Wisconsin, including Illinois and Iowa.

To get a sense of how each of these venues compare with other dances reported in other ethnographies, I will briefly present an overview of each dance, drawing from my own experience as a participant and informal conversations with other dancers in the community. This chapter is not an evaluation of the dances and is only intended to give a qualitative, descriptive summary of the dynamics and general patterns at each, in terms of the music, dance preferences, and atmosphere. It should also be pointed out that these dances are part of a larger offering of dance events in the area in which some contra dancers also participate. Some of these include related genres such as English Country Dance, Morris dancing, Scottish Country dance, English-style clogging; other dances generally designated as 'folk' dances: Scandinavian, Cajun, Balkan dance and International dance; and finally ballroom, two-step and swing dance. The audience overlap extends to other activities as well: Irish music 'jam' sessions, coffeehouse concerts and bluegrass music sessions. For some individuals, these other venues are of greater interest than the contra dances. But there is a fairly consistent group of dancers that show up for the many contra dances with some regularity, and for whom contra dancing is an important social event.

McDuff's Ceilidh band dances are held with some frequency, typically once a month, at varying locations. Named after the band which regularly performs at them, this dance usually features the teaching and calling skills of Norma Briggs who is also involved in a

local Scottish Country Dance Group. Unlike most other regular dance callers in Madison, Norma draws upon a wide array of old and new dances, involving many different formations in the country dance genre, so that often the same formation is never danced successively in an evening. For instance, a big circle mixer may be followed by a square, then a contra in 'proper' lines, then a Sicilian -circle mixer, then an older 'triple minor' dance from the English Country dance repertoire, then a contra in 'improper' lines. All the dances are part of the country dance designation, and draw for the most part on the same shared vocabulary of figures. The band specializes in medleys of Irish, Scottish and some French Canadian fiddle tunes, and the majority of music they perform is from those repertoires, with little of the southern-style string band tunes that are a significant part of the other local contra dance venues. In many ways, the McDuff's dances reveal the New England-area roots of the revival, as well as the relation of the most contra dance revival to the concurrent English and Scottish-style dance revivals. The average draw for McDuff's sponsored dances is in the median range for the contra dances in Madison; around 20-40 or so dancers.

The fourth Friday dances and Last Gaspé-sponsored dances, though having different sponsors, are enough alike that they can be considered together. Except for the larger Barn dances at the Dodgeville site, these two dances consistently have the highest attendance in the immediate Madison area. In both cases, these dances are nearly always held in a large communion hall at Grace Episcopal Church in downtown Madison or occasionally at Fischer Hall in Paoli, fifteen minutes south of Madison. The Last Gaspé is currently the most active contra dance band in Madison and usually, but not always, performs for the dances of the same name. In other cases and in the Fourth Friday dances in general, visiting musicians or

bands are hired from outside the area to come and play. Some of these musicians are well known in the national contra dance community, having considerable performing experience and commercial recordings, such as guitarist Larry Unger. Callers for the dances include a handful of local, well-experienced callers, or visiting callers from other areas of the U.S. With admission at 5 dollars per person, these dances can bring in a substantial amount of money that is used to pay for the bands, the callers and the rental of the dance space.

One reason for the success in numbers of these two dances is the consistently high caliber of musicians and callers who perform. Dancers with whom I spoke agreed that both the calling and music invariably insured a good time. With this reputation, both dances on a good night can draw anywhere from 50 to 90 dancers for the three to four hour session. Sometimes people come from places well outside Madison to participate. Because of the popularity and good reputation of these dances, they often draw many first-time dancers. As many first time dancers have no dance experience at all, a half-hour of pre-dance instruction is sometimes offered. In my discussions with experienced dancers and those who had only attended a few dances, these dances were consistently referred to as the most exciting and inviting, and inspired many to continue dancing. At these dances there is a substantial mix of people with differing levels of dance experience and varying levels of interest in the social aspect of the contra dance community. Callers for these events, aware of the need to accommodate the desires of the more experienced dancers for challenging choreographies and the need to choose accessible dances so that new dancers are not frustrated, strike a balance in selecting appropriate dances for this dance.

In this respect these dances show a resemblance to many other dance venues

nationwide, as reported in the ethnographic literature, where a subtle tension sometimes exists on the dance floor, as good dancers may become bored after a few repetitions of an easy dance, while the new dancers can grow discouraged by the faster paced dances (Dart 1992, Tomczak 1996). A good caller will be fairly selective and pace the choice of dances according to his or her observations of the dancers' collective competence. This requires that the caller be very well acquainted with and sensitive to the difficulty level of each choreography. He or she must also be able to communicate clearly and quickly each of the figures in the sequence, drawing attention to any potential trouble spots during the initial walk-through without musical accompaniment. As a rule, opening dances tend to be easier while the later dances are slightly more difficult. For example, as the 'contra corners' figure is one of the more complicated of the figures, dances containing this figure are nearly always reserved for the later part of the evening. In the course of a dance, a caller may adjust the pace according to their perceptions or confirmations of the dancers' energy level and collective coordination in the course of an evening.

Tuesday night dances are, as the name indicates, held nearly every Tuesday evening at the restored Gates of Heaven Synagogue near the heart of downtown Madison. In existence for just under three years, the dance is organized as a co-op, with members paying a regular monthly fee (currently 30 dollars) towards renting the space. Non-members are asked for a four to six dollar donation. There is no permanently designated caller and calling is done on a rotating basis by a number of experienced or learning callers. The music is provided by a small pick-up band, but is nearly always anchored by Myrtle Wilhite, on fiddle and Matt Kohn on mandolin; typically several other instrumentalists join in on an informal

basis. One thing that sets this dance apart from all the others is its promotion as an "intermediate level dance, with teaching and calling kept to a minimum". One dancer informed me that the Tuesday evening dances grew out of the desire of dancers involved with the other larger dances, for more challenging choreographies performed with a group of dancers having a higher-than-average level of dance experience.

Both Dart (1992) and Hast (1994) regard this type of 'advanced' or 'experienced' level dance as a fairly new development.¹⁴ It reflects, broadly, the latest success of the contra revival, as these dances are outgrowths of the many other opportunities for contra dancing, and co-exist alongside these other more long-lived dance venues. Dart (1992: 215) suggests these new dance settings reveal an intensification of the dance and movement aspect, with a corresponding lessening of the degree of sociability. Thus, like the other 'advanced' dances noted in the literature, callers at Tuesday night dance feature recently composed choreographies that involve a greater degree of participation, with faster paced figure sequences, unusual combinations that demand more concentration, and a near-equal level of involvement by all dancers, regardless of active or inactive status.

The other Madison area dances are the "Wild Hog in the Woods" contra dances, sponsored by the folk music collective of the same name. These are held in a number of venues, including the Grace Church site, and a covered picnic pavilion at Olin Park. These dances can vary widely in the level of planning, compared to other dances, leading some dancers to refer to them as more casually organized or "laid back" in terms of preparation.

¹⁴ See also Tomczak 1996 discussion list on the Internet for lively discussion regarding this recent development and responses from long-time dance callers.

Musicians for these dances are local, and are often pick-up bands or newly formed bands. Over the course of numerous dances, it appeared that these dances tended to draw smaller crowds and fewer first-time dancers than the Last Gaspé or Fourth Friday dances.

Some of the largest dances in terms of attendance and room size are held at Folklore Village, a folklore retreat complex situated on the grounds of a former family farm. This organization sponsors numerous a full calender of events: performances of 'traditional' music and dance by visiting artists, craft demonstrations, workshops, community pot-lucks and several community dances. A few times a year, large contra dances are held in the main 'barn' of the complex. As the hall is quite large, these dances attract the largest number of people, anywhere from 90-120 people, sometimes with up to four 'lines' running the length of the hall. These dances are organized either by a Madison area caller, or through the Folklore Village organization itself. The bands hired are either local bands, such as the Last Gaspé, or visiting bands from neighboring states. While most dances last from three to four hours, with intermission, a few dances at this venue are designated 'all-night' dances. In the case of the latter, a hired band plays from eight to midnight, at which time a pick-up band assembles to provide music for as long as there are dancers to dance. These dances are the only ones at which drinks (coffee, tea, lemonade--no alcohol) and sometimes snacks are provided. One of the popular dances at this location is actually a weekend-long dance retreat, similar to weekend retreats held in other parts of the country. These involve two and a half days of nightly dances, dance workshops (including clogging, contra, swing), workshops for aspiring musicians or callers, meals and camping or lodging in the hostel on the premises.

For these, there is usually a range of registration fees, depending on how many events one desires to attend. The focal points of these weekends are clearly the dances and drew the largest crowds in this area.

A Contra Dance Evening

I offer here a brief account of the usual sequence of events in a contra dance evening. Compared with other accounts in the literature on the most recent resurgence of interest in American contra dance, the format, atmosphere, music and the choice of dances nationally reveal a great consistency with the Madison-based dances (Hast 1994, Dart 1992 and Bealle 1989). Overall, Carlin's (1995) conclusion about the current national contra dance phenomenon seems appropriate, based on my experience and research:

I have come to the conclusion that the issues and trends in Princeton are very similar to those that surface in the contra dance world elsewhere, that geographic location matters less in contra than it does in other forms of traditional dance (Carlin 1995: 222).

This assertion is also borne out by comments from dancers in Madison, who had learned to dance elsewhere before moving here.

Depending on the event, an organization (such as the Wild Hog in the Woods) or a band is largely responsible for organizing the event, including renting of the hall, arranging for a PA system to be set up, and hiring a caller. An hour or so prior to the start time for the dance, the musicians arrive, the caller prepares by selecting a few index cards with dance notations on them, and may assist in adjusting the balance on the PA system. Dancers, after paying the entrance fee, typically between two and five dollars, begin to filter into the hall

and remove jackets, sweaters or change into shoes suitable for dancing. If the dance is one of the larger ones (see above) and there appear to be several first-timers to contra dancing, the caller may elect to give an introduction to contra dance concepts. This demonstration may include a verbal description of the more common and easy figures of the dance, the concept of progression and actual practice of the key figures. During this time, musicians have been warming up or tuning their instruments.

Once a sufficient number of dancers has arrived, the caller then announces through the PA the beginning of the dance and asks the dancers to line up for the first dance. The first dance will likely be either a relatively easy improper contra or a big circle dance (see Appendix Two for common dances). Some callers like to start with a circle, or mixer dance, in order to circulate the dancers among everyone in the hall (recall that for most circle dances, a partner is kept for only one full sequence). This early circulation can be conducive to warming up the crowd and establishing the right atmosphere for asking unfamiliar others to dance later on. It also encourages people to dance together who might not otherwise in the course of the evening. Again, tune selection is completely at the discretion of the musicians, though a musically knowledgeable caller may offer a suggestion that may have worked well in the past. If the first dance is a contra, the pace will usually be quite moderate and will involve a minimum of different figures.

After a walk-through or two, the caller usually gives the name of the dance, alerts the band that the dancers are ready and the dance begins with four counts from the band. The caller then delivers the calls, anticipating their actual execution by a few beats in order to keep the dancers in time with the phrases of the tune. The caller will continue to call out the

figures in this way for the first four to six repetitions of the dance. Once convinced the majority of dancers have 'got it', he or she will stop calling, but continue to monitor the dance floor for any problems that might arise such as forgotten figures, inexperienced couples getting lost, etc. The duration of an opening dance also tends to be shorter (i.e., fewer repetitions of the sequence) than the ones that will follow, usually lasting about 10 minutes.

During this first dance, more dancers usually arrive and wait for the next dance on the sides of the dance floor, socializing or changing shoes. Once the caller decides to end the opening dance, he or she will resume calling the figures for a final time, and notify the musicians that the dance will end then. After applause for the band and brief expressions of thanks among partners, the caller pauses very briefly and then requests the dancers to line up for the next dance. Dancers then wander among one another, seeking out new partners for the next dance. The remainder of the evening will typically be restricted to the duple contra formation dances (and an occasional triple) with one or two squares at most interspersed, if the caller knows them. The expectation and desire to perform mostly contras is such among the dancers, that even if the caller does not immediately announce the formation at this point, the dancers will usually line up anyway in anticipation of a contra. If the next dance is actually to be a square or another mixer, there is often brief confusion or laughter as dancers realize their assumption. A good caller will try and progressively build up the energy on the floor by ordering the dances in this way, saving the most fast paced or complex dances (see Appendix Two for recent 'zesty' contras) for much later in the evening.

Once partners are found and the dancers are lined up, the caller walks the dancers through a new sequence at least twice before the dance actually starts. From here on out,

each dance usually lasts anywhere from 12 to 15 minutes each, with a five to eight minute interval between dances.

After about halfway through the evening, the caller will often announce a waltz to close out the first segment before the intermission. As Chapter Two pointed out, at many contra dances currently, a variety of other couple-oriented dances are sometimes done, including waltzes. Partners are again chosen, and the musicians begin to play. Many choose not to dance and may head immediately outdoors to cool off during the summer, or get a drink of water. Once the waltz has ended, there is usually a fifteen minute break in the music and dancing. Musicians and callers get a chance to step outside, get a drink of water, or mingle with the dancers. Sometimes, before the full band returns to the band area or the caller announces the next dance, a single fiddle player or accordionist may be asked to play or will simply decide to play a Scandanavian dance called the hambo. This dance is a couple dance requiring a bit more coordination than the average contra dance or waltz, and is done mainly by those who have learned it somewhere else and practiced it. On occasion, a swing tune may be played and some couples will come out to two-step.

As the musicians wander back to their instruments and the dancers filter back to the center of the dance floor, the caller takes the microphone and announces the next dance, again usually a contra. By this time in the evening, the crowd is usually at its peak, as some dancers arrived late and other dancers will leave early. Additionally, everyone is warmed up by now, and the dances chosen are slightly more challenging and faster paced. Musicians will reserve some of their favorite tunes or some of the most popular tunes for this portion of the evening, like "Fisher's Hornpipe" or "Devil's Dream".

Importance of live music in contra

One of the most important features of contra dance events nationwide is the presence of live musicians (Gunzenhauser 1996: 4). This holds true for Madison area dance evenings as well. In contrast to several other folk dance events, clubs and other opportunities for dance, live music is nearly always provided either by local musicians or a visiting band. This aspect of the tradition is an especially attractive one for contemporary audiences, perhaps in part because it is one of the few contexts outside of rock clubs where live musicians, rather than recordings, regularly provide the music. More significant in terms of the revival is the premium placed on the immediacy provided by having musicians present, rather than recordings. This is in marked contrast to the situation even at the close 'relatives' of contra dance, club-style square dances and country and western line dancing (see Sannella 1982: 18). In nearly all cases today, announcement of a contra dance event can be assumed to include live music, unless stated otherwise.

During my first few dances, informal conversations with dancers suggested that this aspect was highly valued and that the work of the musicians was an integral part of a successful dance. A few dancers described instances at some of the more informally organized dances, where no musicians showed up and instead recordings of contra music were played. These same dancers were quick to point out that this substitution was not satisfactory, not only because it was difficult to coordinate the dance with a recording, but more importantly because the dynamic of having live music helped to foster and sustain the energy for a good dance. Lacking live musicians, these particular dance evenings seemed to have been memorable only in that they were less successful events.

While contra dance is not entirely analogous to situations in various other cultural contexts worldwide, where music and dance performance are conceived as completely integrated, undifferentiated aspects of a single cultural performance (see Hanna 1979: 18 for a sample listing of these contexts), there is a distinct preference for live music as an integral part of what an ideal contra dance is conceived to be. Herman describes a situation in Los Angeles in terms that could apply equally well for the tradition as a whole across the U. S.:

Performance by live musicians seems to be both an aesthetic and ideological imperative. It plays a large part in defining this contra community and distinguishing it from, for example, square dance clubs. . . musicians, with their presence, help to 'authenticate' the dance for the many participants who feel that live musicians are integral to the contra tradition. . . live, sensitive musicians will engage in ongoing interaction with other dance participants, and everyone present may creatively respond to the ever changing conditions of the dance (Herman 1995: 7).

Thus it is not merely the novelty of having good sounding musical accompaniment, but the presence of a live band as a group of interactive and responsive musicians, that is significant for the atmosphere of contra.

The conceptual unity of music and dance has had consequences for the continuation of the musical tradition itself. As Bronner reports, the New England repertoire has been heavily reliant on dance events for its continued performance (Bronner 1987: 49). In other words, it is primarily as dance music that the New England tradition has been perpetuated. Bealle's work suggests this situation has continued to the present (Bealle 1989: 137). This contrasts somewhat with the other repertoire commonly heard at contemporary dances, the old-time string band tunes. The southern style string band or old-time dance music, whose performance has been frequently perpetuated in non-dance contexts, such as old-time fiddler's conventions or contests, to some extent has evolved into a parallel instrumental

tradition primarily for listening or 'jamming' among musicians (Blaustein 1993).

Though items in the repertoire of contra dance bands may turn up at concert performances or jam sessions devoted to Irish, Scottish or Franco-Canadian music, the dance band setting remains musically distinctive. In this sense, the requirements of playing this repertoire for dancing are specific enough to consider the music as constituting an idiomatically particular genre of 'contra dance music' (see Herman 1995). As Bealle notes, the touring contra dance bands of New England, such as Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra or Wild Asparagus, "have given definition to it as an operating style" (Bealle 1989: 135). Madison bands play mainly for dancers at an organized dance event. The close association of this music with dancing translates into the identification of bands in the Madison area as 'dance bands'.

As with many other dance music ensembles elsewhere, southern style string band tunes have become used for dances, though the New England style repertory remains the most prevalent. As chapter three noted, this repertory has been a recent incorporation into the New England contra dance music context. Bealle reports that this innovation was given a decisive push in the Bloomington, Indiana dance community (Bealle 1989: 211). Likewise in other contexts, reported by Hast (1994), Dart (1992) and Herman (1995), in the last decade at least, this repertoire has become accepted as part of the contra dance accompaniment style.

Summary

In Madison, as in many other cities that support contra dancing elsewhere, there is a series of organized dances held on a fairly regular basis. These dances feature a style of

American folk dance that has become progressively more popular over the last three decades, New England contra dance. A regular feature of most of these dances is live music, provided either by established ensembles, or by less formalized pick-up groups. The predominant dance formation and the choice of musical repertoire is fairly consistent with the types of music and dance performed across the U.S. at post-revival venues. Open to the public at a very low cost, local dances attract a steady supply of newcomers. Though weekly newspapers, fliers and the Internet publicize the dances, many new dancers seem to be introduced to the dances by word-of-mouth from friends. Also attending the dances is a consistent number of experienced dancers. Like other dance communities elsewhere, the large Madison dances have spawned a smaller dance event concentrating on newer, more complex dances. This weekly dance is advertised as an 'intermediate level' dance: callers for the dances tend to choose choreographies that are more challenging than usual, and attending dancers often have considerable dance experience.

Chapter Five

Revivalism, Community and Contra dance

As indicated in the preceding chapters, several writers on the current tradition of contra dance refer to the ongoing tradition as a genre of revived American folklore (Dart 1992: 3, Carlin 1995: 222 and Bealle 1989), though the term 'revival' is infrequently invoked among current dancers, callers or musicians. While many contemporary participants are perhaps not aware or do not often articulate it, the tradition as it exists today has been perpetuated in part because of several formal and informal efforts to re-establish or revitalize the vernacular traditions of American forms of social dancing. Throughout its history, American style country dance, comprising the related traditions of squares and contras, has been understood and practiced as having a variety of meanings: as a forum for highly cultivated display of social manners and chaperoned inter-gender activity (colonial dance masters and Henry Ford), as a survival of authentic Anglo-American culture (Cecil Sharp), as a celebration of American heritage (see Shaw 1939, Page 1977), as a counter-cultural activity (Nevell 1977, Cohen 1995, Young 1995) and most recently as a community-building activity (Hast 1994, Bealle 1989).

Much of the scholarly writing about American folk music revivalism has tended to focus on folk song or instrumental music with only passing reference to the frequently overlapping dance traditions (see Hickerson 1995: 21; Rosenberg 1993). Though Anglo-

American folk dance has been the subject of some ethnographic and historical scholarship, the specific role of dance within the broader revival has only recently been examined. Many circumstances may have contributed to this omission: the ephemeral nature of social dance events as compared to the more durable documentation of commercial recordings and concert performances of musicians; the more expansive audience that was exposed to the music via LP recordings, radio, television and commercial concert venues; or simply the scholarly consignment of dance as a merely ancillary or coincidental adjunct to the musical dimension. What makes the study of folk dance revival potentially illuminating for the study of American folk revivalism is the social atmosphere of the experience that often carries with it the very community-minded values explicitly articulated within the folklore-revivalist community. In this respect, its practice offers a slightly different angle on the folk revival, in that the potency of the messages that were rendered through lyrics, sing-alongs, and a conjured aural landscape of acoustic old-time instruments is, through dancing, further enhanced with an additional 'layer' of socially coordinated bodily movement.

Within American culture, contra dancing continues to be enjoyed by a minuscule audience in comparison to many other contemporary dance styles. This is in keeping with the level of participation in revival genres in general. Aside from a brief period in the late 50s and early 1960s when some folk music genres enjoyed a popularity and healthy commercial life via mass media, folk genres have not figured prominently in mass culture.

Hickerson characterizes the overall revival in a way that could be applicable to contra dance:

The Revival began in earnest in the late 1930s. From the beginning, it was not a mainstream cultural activity; rather it was and still is, primarily an underground, non-mainstream cultural phenomenon that has seen continuous

growth in terms of participants and activities from the late 1930s up through the present time (Hickerson 1993: 15).

Yet numbers alone give no clues as to the intensity of commitment to the tradition or of the energy invested in maintaining contra dance events and communities. That many of the prominent local venues, with little or nothing whatsoever in terms of commercial or institutional support, continue to attract energetic participants, speaks to the strong desire to continue the tradition following the 1960s revival.

A scholarly social history of contra dance and its revival has yet to be written, but there are some resources that examine the most recent history through ethnographic research. The interest in revived 'traditional' dance forms represents a departure from the concerns of prior dance researchers. Royce has noted the shift in dance history research away from linear, formalist narratives, towards a more anthropologically based approach. By her account this is leading researchers to take into consideration a development that is affecting the practice and reception of dance on a global scale: the "reconstructive" impulse that is "becoming more and more common as individual ethnic identities are valued more and more" (Royce 1977: 109). In this process of revival or reclamation, the "traditions are 'new' traditions sometimes in form, sometimes in function, and sometimes in both" (ibid). The 'reconstructive impulse' is important to consider not only as it affects changes in a dance and its music, but also as it shapes the way in which new audiences perceive and appreciate a given tradition.

This shift in research priorities has enriched the literature on contra dance by encouraging a few writers to consider not only the formal aspects of the contemporary

tradition, but also the circumstances and conditions in which interest in contra has been sustained (Bealle 1989, Hast 1994 and Dart 1992). Collectively, this literature considers contemporary contra dance and music in broad terms of modern shifts in meaning and significance as folk revivals garner new audiences. As many have pointed out, in the process of this kind of recycling, certain changes in meaning, forms and contexts are inevitably introduced (Bohlman 1988; Rosenberg 1993). A clear-cut example of this dynamic of change in cultural meaning can be illustrated by reference to the discourse surrounding the use of folklore among political activists in recent American history.

As an example from within the national folksong revival, Cantwell has noted substantial shifts in the meaning and purpose of folklore following its definition and revival by interested and sympathetic 'outsiders' (Cantwell 1996). This shift was most apparent in the paradoxical relationship between revivalists' political stance and the genres they chose to embrace: many performers and listeners, though highly critical of American society and politics, laid claim to a body of cultural expressions, many derived from Anglo-American experience and refashioned it to address the aims of their political project. This in turn led to a sharp reorientation of symbolic meaning for the genres within the communities of origin, but especially in the popular imagination outside these communities:

Political singers. . . embraced folksong because they thought it could raise class consciousness in people not amenable to complex ideological argument. But their focus on ideological lyrics and conventionalized folk signifiers, largely at the expense of the real vernacular outlook. . . was of course a feature of their own educations and socioeconomic backgrounds (Cantwell 1996: 375).

Through this adaptation, many revivalists projected an authenticated American identity

through folk song, but reconfigured this identity to serve as an effective activist tool, both implicitly and explicitly. In this capacity, it served in the national sphere as a provocation for socially reconstitutive ends and, in the local sphere, as an affirmation of social unity against the divisive, impersonal power of the state or commerce. Its oppositional effectiveness was enhanced by the associations of the music with rural or economically marginalized communities, whose way of life incidentally appeared to be more conducive to the kinds of egalitarian social structures esteemed among revivalists (Cantwell 1996: 377).

This kind of understanding of a cultural refashioning can be applied to the specific case of contra dance. In fact, Bealle(1989), Hast (1993) and Nevell (1977) have each described a new dynamic within the contra dance tradition that suggests previously taken-for-granted or incidental aspects of the dance form now stand as a significant point of experience for contemporary audiences. This more recent orientation involves an emphasis and celebration of the communal or socially unifying atmosphere and alternative non-commercial venue that contra dancing is believed to uniquely offer. Nevell noted this trend as early as the 1970s, in his anecdotal, personal account of the contra revival. For instance, he cites a dancer closely attuned to this kind of attraction in the revival:

it still has the qualities of the old town square dance, you know, the Saturday night get together, which I really like. I like to go and see a couple of older people, some young kids, and just feeling that in any other context, like the city or suburbia, the hierarchies of social interaction would be totally separated (Monahon cited in Nevell 1977: 106).

In the recent resurgence of interest in contra dance the centrality of this integrative idea still carries special significance, for current dance events actually do integrate a diverse and wide ranging group of people in performance, people who might otherwise have no contact.

At the same time that a new audience may have been admiring the presumedly rustic character of the tradition, this same informant notes that the revival audiences were slightly altering the formal aspects of the tradition:

bringing something of their own to the contra dance, first a style that derived from their previous dancing experience in rock and roll, and later a desire to work within the old medium, to create new dances (107)

It is the latter point that has become of great interest, especially among callers. Most callers today, after becoming thoroughly familiar with the mechanics of how dances are put together, compose their own dances using the same procedures. But now they are also deliberately inventing novel and challenging sequences. Much earlier, Page and Tolman discerned a new creative energy arising from the experiences of vacationers or resettled urbanites at the small town dances in New England towns (Page and Tolman 1937: 23). Several of these dances have become part of the common repertory, alongside the 'old chestnuts'. For the moment it should be quite clear that over the course of repopularization during the twentieth century, folklore revivals entail a transformation in both substance and meaning of the genres concerned.

Treatment of folk revival in the literature

As scholarly research into revivalist practices in the past was often concerned with the accuracy, source, lineage, and transference of a tradition to an 'other' community, all too often the revival experience was discounted or even maligned as an unauthentic intrusion.¹⁵ In recent work scholars have focused less attention on the adequacy of revivalism in

¹⁵see Bealle 1989: 1-84, for full discussion of scholarly treatments of folk revivalism.

displaying fidelity to supposedly authentic texts and contexts and looked more at the cultural mechanisms of revival and the circumstances of transmission. While this literature does not ignore the crucial elements of continuity and structural change, the primary interest is contextual: What informs the decision of participants to engage in a given musical or dance practice? How has the history and cultural image of a revived practice determined the experience for new audiences, and in turn how has the revived form been reshaped by new audiences? These questions are increasingly being asked, rather than how closely a practice replicates earlier models or how closely the participants fit a 'folk' profile. While the latter pursuits may have some descriptive worth, answers to the former questions offer significant pieces of the puzzle that were consistently overlooked during the course of many acrimonious debates in the scholarly community.¹⁶ A substantial amount of this discussion has been carried on by those within the revival movement (see Baron and Spitzer 1992, and Cohen 1995). In all, an emerging body of literature is testament to the new emphasis on analysis of the processes and social consequences of revival of cultural practices within American society (Rosenberg, ed. 1993, Spalding and Woodside, ed. 1995, Becker and Franco, eds. 1988, Cantwell 1996).

As the current context of contra dancing is historically tied to folk music revivalism, this angle is significant for understanding how various facets of social history and personal experience have converged to perpetuate the tradition. Some have suggested that folk revivalism in general represents a modern response to feelings of social alienation and a

¹⁶ These concerns continue to generate discussion, see Baron and Spitzer 1992, especially Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's essay.

desire to foster and sustain a sense of community through choosing to participate in certain groups (Bausinger 1961/1990: 140-160). Of course, people choose to participate in music/dance events, folkloric or otherwise, for a multitude of reasons: physical exercise, socializing, romantic interests. However, in the course of my dancing experience, as well as in the literature, there is frequent and enthusiastic expression of the idea that a distinct community actively coalesces through contra dance events (Hast 1994, Bealle 1989 and Levine 1987). The solidity of this community is often further enhanced by the fact that the genre conjures images of an 'authentic' rural American folk past in the present. This presents something of a contrast with other group-oriented music and dance events, such as aerobic dance which may be conceived of mostly in terms of physical exercise. The distinction may also apply to many couple dance styles, from ballroom to rock and house music clubs, where the 'one-on-one' emphasis so deplored by Sharp and Ford, contributes to a more couple-oriented atmosphere.

Defining 'revival'

The imprecision of the term "revival" to describe both the mass-mediated popular and local resurgence of interest in folkloric genres was noted earlier. Now I will take up the use of the word as a conceptual category. Rosenberg states that one of the earliest scholarly uses of the terms was by Sharp in 1907 and concludes that "the use of 'revival' with regard to folk culture seems to be a 20th century phenomenon" (Rosenberg 1993: 17). Several have noted a sort of semantic disjuncture in applying the word both to the case of a community recovering some shared tradition it once had held **and** to the case of 'outsiders' who become attracted to the traditions of another community or distant era (Slobin 1983; Rosenberg

1993). As should now be apparent in the case of contra dance, there is ample evidence that both happened particularly in the New England region but in the literature, the concept has typically been applied to the second condition. Several writers have sought to strengthen the analytical precision of the term, and are noted here.

Slobin (1983: 38), in "Rethinking Revival of American Ethnic Music," critiques the common connotations of the word "revival," especially where it implies a "straight line evolution" when often what is created is something quite new. Slobin here is explicitly dismissing the "loss-rejection-revival" model of Sharp and other folklore scholars. He even argues the word revival should be avoided in favor of a less loaded term that merely refers to the critical moments of "reinterpretation" that reshape any cultural expression. Often these moments are directly informed by the knowledge and abilities of key figures having some connection with prior traditions, but not always. In most cases the term may most properly refer to "phenomena that seem to come from a community's impulse to reach back for something" (Slobin 1983: 42). In understanding this impulse, the aesthetic guiding the choice as to *what* to reach back for is of course related to social and economic situations, but also to the more deliberative aspect of "how a group of people more or less arbitrarily decides that a certain self-defined tradition means so much to them" (1983: 42). In this less restricted sense, revival situations can be understood as transplants or transfusions across boundaries of place, economic status, education and race.

This redefinition invokes a very important corollary of revivalism, namely the investment of worth in a specific genre for its evocation of a past reality and the attendant desire for a restoration of what the genre has come to symbolize. This dynamic, while not

wholly new to the twentieth century, has been particularly intensive during this period and extends to many societies globally. Blaustein writes:

The folk romantic movement, or folklorismus, has been a continuously vital aspect of modern life since the eighteenth century. The rejection of the hegemony of urban-industrial-commercial-bureaucratic values and the return (symbolic, periodic or actual) to an idealized rural-pastoral-spiritual-organic community have appeared in various forms, including the development of academic folklore itself (Blaustein 1993: 272).

Scholars have devised numerous terms to discuss this dynamic: revivalism, folklorism, folklorismus, etc (see Voigt 1980). My understanding of these concepts has been shaped largely by two theoretical works, Philip V. Bohlman's *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (1988), and Hermann Bausinger's *Folk Culture in a World of Technology* (1961/1990), in conjunction with Cantwell's socio-historical analysis of folklore and revival in America (Cantwell 1992, 1996).

Bohlman's work argues for a reorientation of scholarly approaches in order to view folk music as a dynamic process of canon formation enacted by community choices, rather than a timeless repertory carried forth to the present. Understood as a process, the continuities of certain performance genres in a modern context have most often depended on an embrace and selective adaptation of extant music practices within a modern framework of group and individual identity construction, national consciousness-building and the creative articulation of the past. In addition, Bohlman notes that as a generic characteristic, folk music styles, especially in modern, mass-mediated cultures, need not be conceived as confined to narrowly defined times and places (Bohlman 1988: 123). He develops this analysis with attention to Nettl's notions of urbanization and modernization. He states that

both contribute to a social reality with which folk music scholarship must contend, and both negate the utility of urban-rural as distinct analytic categories, especially given the tendency to valorize the 'rural' as more "tradition bound" (Bohlman 1988: 127). Thus in many contemporary societies, a plurality of cultural materials impinges from all directions, to be sifted and sorted by specific communities for their own purposes in a unique, modern dynamic. Of this modern trend, Bohlman writes:

By collapsing time and space, modernization encourages new ways of looking at older styles and different repertoires and sets the stage for revival and revitalization (1988: 124).

This definition of 'folk music' posits a *process* that has likely always existed. But, in light of the highly self-conscious efforts at preservation of 'heritage' or culture in the face of rapid social change, it is the *idea* of 'folk culture' or 'folk music' that carries a special meaning, categorically unique to the conditions of modern culture. Bohlman's work seeks to retain the idea of 'folk' as a valid category, while dismantling the folkloristic adherence to notions of an organic, interdependent and cohesive 'folk' community. This latter tendency has all too often led to naïve celebration and idealization of folk cultures as viable antidotes to the shortcomings of modern society. In a more expanded view, there are multiple social bases for folk music, resulting in a fluidity of identification with, and participation in, more than a single defined 'folk' group (1988: 128). His stance parallels the analytic outlook proposed by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett:

following Stuart Hall, we might consider the opposition of folklore/not folklore, not as a descriptive problem or matter or of coming up with the right inventory of cultural terms, but rather in terms of the 'forces and relations that sustain the distinction, the difference' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1992: 35)

Bausinger, in an earlier study of the concept of 'folk' as a discursive construction arising from an anxious modern sensibility, provides a historical recounting of the "rise and development of folk culture in, and as a counterpart of, modernization" in Germany (1961: xii).¹⁷ Though Bausinger's work is based on German examples, some of his findings have broader application for any study of attempts to define and idealize folkloric genres in response to feelings of social fragmentation in modern societies. Bausinger describes a cultural trend he calls "folklorism" that arose from a pastoralist, romantic impulse in Germany.¹⁸ This folklorism relied on idealization of genres deemed more "authentic" and unmediated by the alienating forces of commerce and technology. This ideal has continued to resurface periodically in the social and cultural life of modern societies. In some contexts, many instances of this type of folkloric definition and advocacy became "anti-modernist constructions based on a regressive ideology compensating for the alienation of modern life" (1990: xi). In any case, he charts the interrelationships of society and artistic expression that generated nostalgic "folklorism" in modern Germany, noting that "even in North America folk life and folklore have become nostalgic categories" (1990: x). Informed by an evolutionary conception of cultural development, more often than not, the genres included in this category tend to be those associated with rural populations.

¹⁷ Bausinger published this book in German in 1961. It was translated into English in 1990, and all references here are to this translation.

¹⁸ Voigt (1980: 419) states though the phenomenon of folklorism is not absolutely new, its worldwide visibility has grown substantially: 'Folklorism may be used for commercial, patriotic, romantic, propagandistic and genuinely artistic purposes. It is a growing, world-wide phenomenon, and is not unique to our time.' He also provides a useful bibliography of early writings in various European languages treating this phenomenon.

Bausinger does not invoke the concept of 'revival' as such but instead continues to flesh out the concept of "folklorism". Like revival, folklorism involves a bracketed site of imaginative reconstruction that is always a response to prevailing circumstances even if it critiques those social and political structures. At the same time he stresses the systematic collusion of professional folklorists in this program of recovery and validation, and questions that discipline's "search for preliminary historical stages and regional characteristics" (1990: 4). Though sites of "folklorism" reveal a longing for a genuine experience through connection with an 'organic' folk community, their supposed authenticity is illusory:

On the one hand, it is a 'secondary, administered folk world,' as Wolfgang Brückner characterized it; on the other hand and simultaneously it is effective precisely because it has the semblance of the nonadministered, the original, the spontaneous, the naturally evolved (Bausinger 1990: 152).

While folklorism can mutate into outright anti-modernist regression and chauvinism, there is no essential reason it should. Bausinger divides the folkloric impulse into two streams. The first is optimistic and benign. Of it, he asks:

are there not attempts at humanizing, at a new self-determination and spontaneity, contained in the retreat to forms of former folk culture, which are often preindustrial in origin and structure? This question should not simply be ignored. It definitely renders an essential motif of folklorism tangible -- the need to escape from a world that has become extremely unintelligible and unwieldy into a realm that is intelligible, manageable and familiar. . . but what appears as an enclave of the authentic. . . is in reality most often contrived, organized, prepared, and at the very least 'cultivated' (Bausinger 1990: 260)

This type of folklorism comes close to the more optimistic strains of revivalism. Pursuits of this type are most often restricted to the relatively benign, though personally gratifying realm of leisure time diversion, a hobby.

The second type of folklorism "where it is concerned with values," however, "almost always assumes the character of regression. . . the values thus retained do not offer any answer to today's truly pressing problems; they are mere images of escape, which are continually reproduced" (1990: 153).⁴ In this second category, folkloric practices are circumscribed and maintained as a "mediating agent of antiquated values" (1990: 154). In some of the cases he cites, genres which had fallen into disuse and no longer "possessed an immediately obvious social function," had to be studiously reinvested with significance, sometimes to suit nationalistic and chauvinistic ends. It is instructive to note a parallel situation in twentieth century America. Cantwell (1992) notes that the 1930s commercially fueled florescence of the American folk revival was closely interlinked with fears that the "Anglo-American root stock and its values were threatened with extinction" (1992: 220). In this scenario,

Modernity generally or more precisely, its threat to the cultural hegemony of the Anglo-American middle class, in fact was the enemy, and folk culture, understood as a survival from a more elegant and innocent, but above all more refined and respectable past, might be a bulwark against it (Cantwell 1992: 271)

This attitude was most clearly articulated in the work of Henry Ford, as noted in the previous chapter.

Finally, Bausinger notes a third, slightly different invocation of folk genres: as an artistically inflected radical gesture. Artists who conjured up a folk realm often did so with the object of seeking:

elementary forms of presentation, which still existed aside from established cultural activities. They did not use such elements as pleasant pieces of decoration. . . [not] because they saw in them the comfortable quality of the

antiquated that had ceased to be problematic, but on the contrary because they recognized in them provocation and potential for 'alienation' (Bausinger 1990: 149).

There is much in this last quotation that resonates with Cantwell's perspective on the American situation; young intellectuals tapping into potentially nostalgic folk genres not for some antiquarian purposes, but to give voice to radical political sentiments and to voice provocative social commentary, explicitly and implicitly (Cantwell 1996: 355-381).

As Bausinger recognizes, each of these types of re-creations represented another instance of a recurring tendency to idealize cultural forms stemming from, or at least suggestive of pre-industrial life:

[this] development outlined above could be understood as a sequence of Romantic movements, where each case begins with a specific social stratum seeking an orientation toward certain other, lower ranks. Though done playfully, it assumes the clearly biased attitude that the lower ranks personify a more "natural" state (Bausinger 1990: 149).

Cantwell gives a similar analysis in his measure of the American scene, where he conceives the revivalist ethos as two sided. On the one hand there is the

genteel tradition [that] looks on the life of some dependent group, peasants or workers, and sees in it a picture of human life in its perennial form, as well as a palpable source of life. . . sensitive to the aesthetic and moral dimensions of the folk group. (Cantwell 1996: 373)

On the other hand,

a revolutionary tradition [which] represents and celebrates local life. . . sensitive to what the genteel tradition often is not: the actual social and existential form, as well as the political meaning, of folklife. (Cantwell 1996: 74)

In both cases, such an amalgamation is enabled only by the very real distance between the parties involved in the folkloric transfer, who are removed from one another by social status,

class, race, education, and/or time.

Finally, like Bausinger, Cantwell insists on the absolute interdependence of consciousness of 'folk'-ness and modern technological and social circumstances. This is not only to be understood in the sense that revived folk genres have been frozen and captured for dissemination via a mass mediated culture industry, propelling some genres beyond the geographic confines of their immediate communities of origin. In this assertion of interdependence, the very *concept* of 'folk' is a necessary counterpoint to the 'modern' within a spectrum of cultural self-awareness. Cantwell describes this opposition historically, taking into account the cyclic resurfacing of the folk concept in Euro-American culture:

'Folklore' and 'folksong' and 'folklife' are never things in themselves, but a new cultural perception arising as mysterious modes of hegemony maneuver competing modes to the social margins. . . to bring them into a kind of mutually defining relation -- in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, the relation between literate and preliterate consciousness; in the nineteenth, between industrial and preindustrial production; and in our own age of social deracination, between a nebulized postmodern life and imagined worlds of interdependency and community (Cantwell 1996: 373).

Folklife today frequently constitutes a "touchstone" around which numerous practitioners converge, and against which the quality of contemporary social life is often measured.

While folklore and revivalism draw upon a vocabulary of stock genres, often semi-frozen in form, their continued invocations necessarily constitute new realizations within a contemporary context, charged with meanings derived from that context. As Bohlman suggests, the new folk group often forms with the explicit goal of celebrating a reformulated tradition (see Bohlman 1988: 120-124). No longer a matter of an existing group operating in networks of face-to-face oral transmission of knowledge in folk music, most folk groups

now take part in "media networks" diffusing elements of style and reconfiguring them to suit the tastes of those involved, resulting in a "selective reconstruction of tradition" (Blaustein 1993: 267).

What is most important in all of this is the artificiality of 'folk' genres which is opposite and counter to the supposition of 'folk' categories as more natural, unmediated and unself-conscious. That is, folk songs, dances, crafts are practices that have been dislodged from their original contexts of creation, reconstituted and circumscribed for a wide variety of purposes:

Revival is an overt and explicit act of authentication. The revivalist not only identifies a specific time and place for folk music but is *fundamentally concerned with recreating its value-laden social context*. Folk music should suggest the nature of that social context while filling in some of the specific details to prove that authentication is part and parcel of revival (Bohlman 1988: 131; emphasis mine)

At the same time these traditions in practice are felt to be continuous with practices of the past and representing something of a stable tradition. As with many other cultural practices that are imitated, hybridized, adapted, etc. folk genres are subject to change of structure, place, time and audience. What gives those genres designated 'folk' their modern potency and makes them distinctive is the infusion of them with a sense of past-ness, a better time, a more satisfying participatory ethic of community-spirited music and dance; as Cantwell describes it, a time "when we were good". As the chosen genres have tended to be those of real or imagined rural provenance, the practices fall within the cycles of periodic fascination with the rural 'folk'. In practice, their re-activation recalls but cannot recreate the imagined or real conditions of their prior contexts.

Blaustein (1993) gives a similar analysis of folklore revivalism, again with reference to America. He states that while the nationwide "revitalization movement" in America may satisfy needs or tastes not fulfilled by other mainstream, mass mediated outlets, there is an even larger sociological frame in which these choices are made. He quotes Anthony Smith: " 'Given the dislocations of industrialization and urbanization, what can be more natural than that men should wish to replace the sense of lost community by creating new groups more adapted to the new conditions?'" (Blaustein 1993: 260). Blaustein argues this situation as a vital one for folklore and music scholars to investigate, given the increasingly widespread phenomenon of folk revivalism and cultural preservation as a systematic response to the circumstances of contemporary mass culture:

The emergence of associations and institutions fostering the revival of ethnic, regional, and national folk traditions, especially music and dance, has accompanied the rise of the bureaucratic, industrial nation-state and in many ways appears to be a universal form of compensation for displacement and alienation arising from social change (Blaustein 1993: 263)

By this theorization of revivalism, it appears that the heightened sensitivity to and awareness of "community", as construed by participatory folkloric genres, is part of a much broader cultural trend. Much historical research suggests just such a common thread of community-affirming ideas accompanying the varied instances of American folk music and folklore revival in this century.¹⁹ Here I will consider some of the earlier scholarly discourse around this aspect of the dance, an aspect that later attracted revivalists and continues to attract newcomers: an egalitarian participatory dynamic (Bealle 1989: 104).

¹⁹ See Ford 1926, Cantwell 1988: 172-5, Blaustein 1993: 270-2, Cohen 1995: 31, Jackson 1993: 78-81.

This will offer insights into this important cultural dimension and provide a historical matrix in which to position the contra dance tradition as it exists today, particularly as it continues to be explained and celebrated as an intensive community-enabling context. This will then be correlated with observations of the dance community in and around Madison.

Representations of contra dance

Participants in contra dance are not alone in construing contra dance as an activity especially conducive to ideals of an integrated community. Scholars and dance activists, beginning with Sharp, have also remarked upon the structure of the dance itself as an admirable democratization of experience. In his history of dance, Sharp continually contrasts the exuberant and egalitarian spirit of the original English country dance with the pretentious hierarchy-minded dancing of the French and Italians, who were "treading their measure to grave, serious music" in order to present their superior dance accomplishments (Sharp 1924: 21). He saw the enthusiasm of continental Europeans for the "remedy" offered by English style dancing as a rejection of the more "stilted and affected" French forms that "were in danger of nullifying dance's pleasure altogether" (Sharp 1924: 22). Though Sharp insisted that country dance had gradually been corrupted by the interests of formal dance masters and upper class patronage, he praised the democratic spirit that was encapsulated in the country dances and credits it to the lively English national character: "in no other nation were they developed nor danced by all classes of the community as they undoubtedly were in this country" (Sharp 1924: 20). As discussed in chapter three, he conceived his project as an enlightened restoration of some of the folk-like, egalitarian character lost over the years of

increasing urbanization and industrialization. He was insistent that country dances "be presented and assimilated in their purest and most unsullied forms"(1924: 20). This goal was pursued partly by the founding of folklore organizations in Great Britain and the United States.

As for the American revival, some comments about the project of Henry Ford in the early years of the dance revival are instructive. Dance instructor Benjamin Lovett was a pivotal figure in Henry Ford's national program of old-time dance. Lovett contributed substantially to Ford's 1926 publication and served as the knowledgeable spokesperson and teacher for his well funded promotional enterprise (Blaustein 1995: 199). Like Ford, he saw the dances as an instructive model for learning refinement and social manners, but he also offered praise specifically for the community-oriented nature of the dances. In a newspaper article, Lovett described his motivation for becoming involved in reviving the old-time dances, including *contras*, *squares*, and *quadrilles*:

to keep alive and preserve for the present generation a knowledge of the old-time dances and their music. . . they came to us when our country was young and grew up with us. They have always been, and are today, a great factor in our social life, for they promote friendly relationship, neighborliness, and closer human understanding (cited in Twork 1982: 95).

Ford himself saw the old-time dances as an antidote to the "ultramodern dances" with their "one and one" quality (Ford 1926: 8). He decried the alienating atmosphere of urban (primarily jazz-oriented) dance venues, claiming that:

the group spirit of fun is absent. This character of the modern commercial dances is determined by commercial considerations. The older form of dancing requires room. Dancing that inspires the group spirit of fun requires room (8). . . the modern dances with their lesser demand for skill and spirit, their tuneless music, their tendency to jazz, their essential unsociability, are

losing vogue everywhere. Unless a dance be sociable it cannot live long (Ford 1926: 30).

Ford's intentions faintly parallel Sharp's desire where the latter wanted English country dance to be mobilized as an appealing "remedy" to the social dance culture of Europe. Ford wanted to mobilize country dance and music in order to counteract the modern urban dances, especially since the former offered the "best fit with the American temperament" (Ford 1926: 8). As with Sharp's work, in Ford's well subsidized campaign, the innate sociability of the authentically Anglo-American country dances was offered in an anti-commercial and anti-modernist spirit.

Such sentiments towards country dancing are not limited to high profile figures like Sharp and Ford. Dance manuals themselves often contain such ideas. In fact, there is a remarkable continuity in current attitudes and those expressed in the opening pages of a best selling manual from the early eighteenth century (Wilson 1811). Uncannily anticipating the words of Sharp by well over a century T. Wilson (1811: xvi) writes:

our country dancing, I am proud to say, is an amusement worthy of being copied by any people who call themselves social beings; it is true most nations have dances of their own . . . but none of these are half so social or delightful as English Country Dancing.

He even concludes with a highly complementary statement about the participatory genius of the form, in contrast to other presentational dance forms:

Imagine yourself in the midst of a Country Dance; there, all are partakers of the pleasure, there are no silent envious gazers, no sullen critics to mar the amusement or intimidate its votaries, joy and gaiety animate every countenance, while pleasure beams in every eye; the young and old are equally employed in forming the mazy circlets of the figures

Except for the florid prose of Wilson, one could mistake this type of evaluation that surfaced

much later during the revival phase in Britain and the United States.

Consider some of the introductions to dance manuals of the 20th century revival period and remarks in some more recent manuals (see Ryan 1926/1939, Mayo 1948, Page 1984, Sannella 1982). One example comes from Ryan's *Dances of Our Pioneers*, clearly aimed at recreation instructors and school athletic program directors. Published the same year as Ford's book (1926), the preface specifically affirms the socially beneficial features of the dance form in terms of enhanced national awareness and social integration:

If this contact with the spirit of the past and the spontaneous fun that has already been mentioned are two important values of the folk dance, there is still a further value in the democratizing spirit that is created among the members of the group. There is social significance in this 'we' feeling, in this breakdown of reserve, of caste, of race. The folk dance is truly leavening and for that reason it is an activity which takes on a universal aspect and performs a democratic function (Ryan 1926: 10).

Margaret Mayo, the New York City square dance promoter known among protest and revival singers, wrote an introduction to her instructional dance manual that resonates with many of these same points.

We in America are particularly fortunate in being able to claim our share in this heritage, for we are a many peopled nation, integrating in our own folk culture the characteristics of the many peoples and nationalities who helped found and build our country. . . here is something distinctly American and truly democratic, full of friendliness and good fellowship. Here is the genuine 'social' dance (Mayo 1948: 4)

Dance scholars writing well after Sharp also tended to view the country dance in a similar light. For example, dance scholar Frances Rust, finding something inherently democratic in country dance forms, sought to link their popularity directly to contemporaneous sociological circumstances (Rust 1969). She attributes the 17th century

popularity of country dance in England to the expansion of a middle class newly energized by the loosening of social and class boundaries. By her account, as industrial innovations increased the pace of change, diversifying the economy and disrupting prior social categories, so also the stately, refined and time consuming minuet gave way in popularity to the more lively country dances and cotillons among upper and middle class audiences. Furthermore, she cites an ethic of 'teamwork' in country dance, as an integrative moment where differing social classes were able to engage in a shared activity in which social rank was not always marked (Rust 1969: 58-65). The formerly class-bound stratification of dance traditions also gave way to a more fluid interchange of dances among differing classes and injected some of the democratizing liveliness into court sponsored dances (Rust 1969: 51-2). Curt Sachs earlier imparted much the same character to country dance, citing instances in Elizabethan England where servants and aristocracy danced together, with little attention to rank or status (Sachs 1937: 420).

Prior to Rust, Richardson also took interest in the circumstances of the rise of interest in country dance and its implications for social life (Richardson 1960). He cites the increasing fluidity of social dance traditions in this very same period, as various dance forms circulated across class and geographic boundaries. His analysis, however, is observant of the romantic leanings that engendered a yearning for greater simplicity among well educated, privileged dance audiences. In seeking out formats for such expression, these audiences became enamored of the 'rustic' dances of rural people (Richardson 1960: 41).

More recently, Royce illustrated the sociological connections between the easy accessibility of country dance forms and the idea of a non-hierarchical social environment

(Royce 1977). However, she articulates this connection in broader cultural terms, citing a prevailing pastoralist impulse in England and the colonies. She does conclude that European and colonial country dance forms "were more inclusive, democratic and accessible, reflecting somewhat the emerging Romantic spirit of Europe at the time, which sought in rural 'rustic' traditions, a more democratic social frame for music and dance" (Royce 1977: 99).

Revival and community in the contra dance setting

Until now I have suggested that the currents of revivalism that helped to sustain contra dance and its music have both contributed to its perpetuation and shaped the reception of the current tradition. But how does this aspect surface in current dance events? How have dancers in the recent contra revival understood their participation and attraction to the genre? Is the dance merely taken at face value as just another item on a full calendar of other potential social dance activities? Based on the above analysis, there is much to suggest that a desire to formulate a sort of performed folkloric 'counterworld', to both escape from and critique the conditions of contemporary society, energized the re-emergence of Anglo-American country dance forms during the recent past. To what extent do any of these currents continue to inform participants' experience of contra dance?

Folklorist Alan Jabbour (1993: xii) has posed this type of question to revivals in general: "Do all branches of the revival really stem from the same central impulse, or should we differentiate between movements in different regions or different urban centers". Jabbour does not describe what this impulse is, but his following remarks suggest a nostalgic idealism may have been what was implied. As for the specific case of the contra dance tradition, given the work of Dart (1992) one might argue that whatever unified initial

communitarian thrust the revival may have had, it has diffused and been replaced by subtle tensions in the contemporary scene. This tension is seen as potentially undermining the previous commitment to accessibility that characterized both the form and the social atmosphere of contra dance.²⁰ Dart has empirically investigated the recent shift in choreographic emphases away from a community-minded aesthetic of open participation and relaxed sociability that was a hallmark of many post-1960s dance events. Many contra dance contexts are now marked by a more individualistic desire for very involved choreographed sequences and more intensive and extensive partner-oriented figures, such as the couple-centric swing (Dart 1992: 280-284). This greater degree of difficulty may be leading to less socializing and more concern with the choreography.

Furthermore, experienced dancers in some dance events often tend to actively seek one another out, so that newcomers and less polished dancers are sometimes not as quickly integrated into the group as they ideally would have been. During conversations with dancers in Madison, I have encountered many statements about a similar change in character of the dance events over the last decade, as 'hotshot dancers' make the atmosphere more competitive. Dart argues that this situation has come about as the tradition nationwide has become centered on the dance itself as the central activity for the community, rather than the relaxed sociability of earlier years. This split has intensified in recent years as new dances have sprung up to satisfy the desires for a more 'advanced' audience of dancers. One such venue, The Tuesday Night Dance, advertised as an 'intermediate level contra dance', has

²⁰ See Tomczak 1996 for a lively discussion of this issue.

been in existence in Madison for a little over three years.

Aside from such particularities and stylistic distinctions, though, Jabbour himself recognizes a symbolic cohesion to the movements, however separate, that unites them: "Our revival was not so much a revival of specific artistic artifacts, like the revival of a Broadway musical as a revival of symbolic values, like a religious revival" (Jabbour 1993: xiii). Such an evaluation implies something of a shared quality that may still exert an appeal for folk music enthusiasts, despite the turn to subtle forms of exclusivity. The continuing appeal of folkloric ideals is mentioned by several writers, who recognize some of the unique power that folk genres possess, even given their radical transformation in a current context:

In this world folklife is not the culture of the rude peasant or the rustic mountaineer but a very model of the ways in which we are at this moment learning to reinvent our humanity (Cantwell 1992: 303).

Blaustein has noted the ideals that continue to animate interest in folk genres, aside from the technical transformations. In accounting for this condition, he has invoked the work of ethnomusicologist Nettl:

Nettl believes that revivals of traditional music enable modern people to offset disorientation and displacement by enabling them to periodically regenerate an idealized primordial community that is evoked through particular musical styles. . . alienation, the more abstract form of displacement, accounts for transcultural folk romantic movements like the urban folk music revival in the United States and Britain (Blaustein 1993: 271)

Bealle too discerns a fluid category of folkloric experience, structured less by fidelity to the practices of an identifiable authentic 'other', than the desire to capture the supposed spirit of spontaneity invested in such practices (Bealle 1989). From his observations with the Bloomington old-time dance community, it seems the 'texts' that embody the power of the

'folk' concept may be quite flexible:

Old-time dancers. . . can shrug off authenticity as it relates to texts because they are dead serious about it as it relates to experience. Folklore is engaged because it represents the quintessential model for the grounding of the individual within a group (1989: 286).

This discussion is not intended to suggest that a sort of self-deception or simplistic 'false consciousness' is operative among contra audiences. As Tomczak's electronic discussion list (1996) and others indicate, this is a topic of discussion within the dance community itself. To characterize the contra scene thus would lead once more back into fruitless and essentialist distinctions of folklore vs. fakelore, ignoring the very real personal enjoyment and complex negotiation that takes place during one's involvement with and commitment to the genre. Instead, it is offered to ground the conditions in which the contra genre has been fostered, broadly speaking, in its greater context. Nor is the community aspect by any means the single most important aspect of contra dance today. Dart (1992: 144-153) and Carlin (1995) offer an outline of reasons for attending dances taken from interviews that includes low cost, safe atmosphere, exercise and creative expression. Among conversations with dancers in Madison, similar attractions emerge: meeting new people, finding a quick way into the social life of the city, restoring one's 'emotional balance', an outlet for pent-up energy and flirting, in addition to enjoyment of the idiosyncrasies and idiom of the dance choreography.

Among dancers and musicians within the contra dance community, there is obviously an array of levels of awareness or consciousness of the tradition's historical pedigree or particulars of revival and its placement within the broader folk revival. This awareness

ranges from a vague perception of past-ness to more sophisticated knowledge of the historical development of the forms, dances and tunes. Such attitudes can, for example, be observed during the dance events themselves. To cite one instance, knowledgeable callers often briefly invoke some historical detail surrounding the dance they are about to call. If a particularly old dance, the caller may give the name and an approximate date when it was danced or composed. If more recent, such comments might include the name of the dance, name of composer and place of residence and possibly a comment about the inspiration for the title, all of which may be understood by some as some vague indicator of continuity and perpetuation and by well informed others as a meaningful historical attribution. In many cases, with a very old or very well known dance, such as Hull's Victory, or Chorus Jig, knowledgeable dancers will often comment favorably and acknowledge the qualities that make it an 'old chestnut'.

In my own limited participation in the dances over a two year period, I increasingly became aware of the multi-layered dimension of invoked/imagined history and communal integration. This aspect was prominent in scholarly discussions of the genre, and I wondered why the recurrent foregrounding of this aspect of what was once perhaps only a coincidental attribute of the tradition--intense feelings of belonging or acceptance, a sense of unity from successful participation in a group performance activity, a desire for a detached artistic and creative outlet that served in itself as leisure time activity, away from routinized obligations of work and family.²¹

²¹ See Hast 1993, Bealle 1989, Flinn 1993 and Levine 1987, all of whom specifically address contra dance ethnographically in terms of 'community'.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that through conversations with some other dancers, it was clear that there were those for whom this scene was not always invested with this feeling. In the literature, Hast (1994) devised a phrase, "the problematics of community" to refer to the myriad issues that arose in the course of development of a dance community. In my own experience, I heard critical evaluations from those who were once heavily involved and then curtailed their participation, and those who tried it once or twice and never returned. For instance, during a chance encounter with a person who was initially an enthusiastic newcomer to the Madison area dances, when I asked why he later stopped attending, he commented that he didn't feel completely comfortable with the 'intimacy' of the dance style and that it seemed a bit clique-ish. Recognition of this element also came from practicing dancers. One long time dancer and caller once remarked to me that the tradition, 'a sort of subculture, wasn't for everybody' and that the 'intensity' of the dances often scared some potential dancers away. Another dancer also referred to the 'cliquish' atmosphere at some dances that could be irritating at times.

Yet from comments in the literature and in discussions with dancers, it is also clear that there are very charged feelings of relatedness or connectedness in the dance form and atmosphere that offer something of an antidote to the absence of such feelings elsewhere in life. How did this potent combination of music and movement come to be an effective forum for eliciting just such feelings? In understanding the insistent idea of consciously enacted community as presented in the ethnographic literature and as revealed in my own introduction and responses to experience of a collectivity during dance events, an essay by Fernandez from the collection entitled *The Anthropology of Experience* (1986) has proven

useful.

Fernandez characterizes religious revitalization movements, "perhaps of all religions," as being "fundamentally interested in restoring the relatedness of things" (Fernandez 1986: 162). Fernandez, in examining revitalization movements in some African societies, has described the 'pictorialization of wholeness' that is frequently actualized through ritual music and dance events. Many of these movements accomplish this metaphorically through visual juxtaposition during ritual events that offer a transformative experience for participants:

The consequences of the production and, often, the acting out of these images is cosmological. . . acting out these images restores vitality if only in expressive form to that domain of activity, which has fallen into disrepute or questionable participation. . . the performance of a sequence of images revitalizes, in effect and by simple iteration, a universe of domains, an acceptable cosmology of participation, a compelling whole (Fernandez 1986: 175)

While contra dance is not nearly so comprehensive and is acknowledged as primarily a recreational social experience, his analysis, that describes the 'whole' as "a state of relatedness, a kind of conviviality in experience" (Fernandez 1986: 162) offers a potential understanding of the type of transformation that is said to be enacted in the course of dancing and becoming a part of the community. Fernandez contrasts the concern and desire to envision 'the whole' with other types of cultural realities:

Societies so largely adversarial as the modern ones are, by nature, alienated from the possibilities of such overarching conviviality. . . they neglect the fundamental problem of relatedness (Fernandez 1986: 163).

By such a measure, contra dancing and activities like it might be conceived of as restorative performances that temporarily address the personal awareness of the 'problem of relatedness' within a perceived atmosphere of discontinuity, rootlessness and fractured social

bonds. Through the integrated performance of dancers, caller and musicians, this description fits the contra scene at least insofar as it is a highly participatory activity that, ideally at least, encourages all present to share a common experience that unites the otherwise diverse audience in successful performance. Dancers' awareness of the dance as a contrast to other differently structured areas of life suggest the validity of such an analysis. This might even apply to the overall revival impulse of the last sixty or so years, as described earlier.

Bealle applies the concept of revitalization, taken from Anthony F. C. Wallace, to the folklore revival and related contra dance revival (Bealle 1989: 62). In his estimation it has been re-vitalized in two respects: first in the sense of bringing a genre forward into the present, valuing it for its sense of pastness; and second, in the sense of renewing, replenishing or restoring something to a people, group or community, something felt to be lacking or lost. In revitalization, a societies' need to compensate for feelings of social disorientation is satisfied by reclaiming a certain genre. But Fernandez suggests an expansion of the narrow impulse to view myth and ritual enactment, including revival, as mere mechanisms for satisfying a deeper seated set of finite needs generated by social contradictions. Instead, such participatory revival performance forms may be considered as ends in themselves (Fernandez 1986). Fernandez argues that the necessarily image-bound reality of public enactment of symbolic behavior does not merely express or 'reflect' some deeper idea, but is itself the performed reality of which it speaks (Fernandez 1986: 170).

Euphoria and transcendence

Feelings of euphoria are frequently mentioned in contra dance ethnographies, as

participants report becoming intensively involved in the dance. This is sometimes accompanied by feelings of solidarity with the musicians, callers, and especially other dancers (Hast 1993: 24; Bealle 1989: 177-186). As a dance participant, I too could discern points when a dance was flowing smoothly: dancers are warmed up and keeping together, the musicians are 'hot', perhaps the caller is into a sing-song patter. During this time a sort of 'wave' of energy sweeps across the hall. Difficult to specify quantitatively, this is often discerned when dancers start 'hooting', or stomping the 'balance' figure in such precise unity that it 'sounds like a rifle shot', as one caller put it (Robert Walser, personal comment).²² From the perspective of the dance floor, these are often moments of energetic, spirited playing from the band as each of the lines collectively falls into the 'flow' of the patterns provided the choreography is particularly smooth.

Some scholars have treated this aspect of collective euphoria induced by engagement in musical and dance activities. For example, Blacking theorizes the "affective structures" of some dance forms that "generate certain kinds of social experience that can be had in no other way," so that "ideas and feelings can be expressed collectively through dance and music before they are articulated in speech" (Blacking 1985: 65). Similar scholarly conceptions and ethnographic portrayals of social communion engendered by music and dance often invoke Victor Turner's idea of *communitas*, the "irrefragable genuineness of mutuality" (Turner, cited in Fernandez 1986; see Bealle 1989: 89; Slobin 1993: 41; Spencer

²² The simplest execution of the balance figure merely involves couples facing each other holding hands, stepping towards and then away from one other. The additional loud 'stomping' is optional and typically is done when the dance is at its highest energy level.

1985: 27-34).²³ Not incidentally, some of these discussions also consider the problem of essentializing participation or celebrating the transcendent, socially-solidifying aspect of these activities that have the potential for sinister manipulation.²⁴

Gerd Baumann has quite explicitly addressed the limitations of theoretical admiration of participatory dance and music on this point, while acknowledging the very powerful, pleasurable aspect it can carry with it:

some caution is required in evaluating the affective "power" of music and dance. In describing altered states of consciousness on a collective scale, the ethnographer needs to resist any temptation of a starry-eyed romanticization. . . the fact that music and dance can induce pleasurable affective states does not imply that they are intrinsically liberating pursuits (Baumann 1995: 38)

Such a caution stems from the realization that a communal experience of 'us' usually erects some sort of boundary with a 'them'. Recalling the uses to which powerful state interests have manipulated such affective power to serve destructive ends, Baumann acknowledges the very duality of this 'power' that can be problematic for 'activist' scholarship:

Music and dance appear capable, sometimes at one and the same time, of two seemingly contradictory "effects": they can transport people into elated states of creativity and subjective, and indeed intersubjective, experiences of moral, as well as aesthetic, liberation, and they can induce people to 'buy into' traditional authority, hegemonic models, and self-subjugation. That they have this dual potential, seems to me related to their affective "power" (Baumann 1995: 39)

Conservatism

Though contra dance is not a strictly recreative reconstruction of authenticated past

²³ See: Victor Turner *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

²⁴ See for instance MacNeill 1995, Baumann 1995: 38, and Keil 1994: 98.

practices, musically or choreographically, there is a conservatism to the tradition. The conditions supporting its continuation, as discussed above, are complex and discontinuous, but some sense of perpetuating a tradition is a sentiment found both in ethnography and in my observations (Flinn 1993 and Carlin 1995). However, resurrection and rigid preservation of static or fixed forms is not the aim (as it sometimes has been, for instance, among English country dance enthusiasts), and indeed many participants have faulted other related country dance traditions for adhering to this type of program. Certainly modification in the content of dance, choreography, and musical stylistic innovations occur, and are noted. What is important in terms of the experience, though, is the perception that what one is participating in is 'traditional' with connections to the past, whether this is invoked ironically or seriously.

Definition of the formal boundaries has been fairly constant in recent years, yet within these constraints some variation occurs and striking choreographic combinations are introduced.²⁵ These boundaries, as summarized in Chapter Two, provide not only a formal structure for dancers, callers and musicians, but also provide a frame of reference that is tied to a past heritage of music and dance. Pianists may have introduced jazz-inflected chordal accompaniments, and choreographers may have devised impossibly intricate sequences of figures, but atonal improvisatory flourishes will likely never have a place in a tune, and moves from break dancing will likely never appear in any dance. This is not merely a matter of choreographic or harmonic incompatibility, but is part of the associated continuity with prior forms that continue to define the boundaries within which changes can be introduced.

²⁵ The possible permutations of figure combinations run into the hundreds of thousands.

The predictability of many aspects of the music and dance are a given in most instances.

Stressing this subtle sort of conservation and informal canon definition, however, does not mean falling into the static idealization that Ward (1985: 28) critiques as "the view of society as a stack of subcultural lockers". Clearly the boundaries are not and never have been impermeable, as elements of jazz and rock music and dance have been brought into circulation in the contra phenomenon. But in its conception as a revivalist practice, certain conventional boundaries have been constructed and remain in place. This self-conscious effort to shape, define and maintain is a marker of a modern 'folk' community in Bohlman's concept (Bohlman 1988: 124-132). As contra continues to be based on a choreographic process and musical inventory established a few hundred years ago, and it does not appear as though it will fundamentally alter this structure in the near future, its audience constitutes, by this definition, a folk community, centered on these repertoires and styles. There is a sense of stylistic preservation at work that admits a narrow range of change rather than radical reformulation.

Conclusion

Drawing attention to the dynamics of the revival movements that influenced contra dance in the 20th century, should not distract attention away from the fact that the 'tradition' has now been successfully emplaced, though on the margins, of American culture and is enjoyed by many as what Slobin might call a 'micromusical' tradition. With the relative success of the most recent revival in re-introducing the tradition and defining some of the formal parameters in the last twenty years or so, explicit revivalist motivation is not as prominent as it once was. In Bruce Rosenberg's terms, the dance has been defined in a new

and meaningful way and the overt revivalist aims are no longer expressed, making the tradition one involving a "new unselfconsciousness" (Rosenberg 1993: 4). However, as pointed out in the preceding, certain aspects of the tradition have been intensified by their identification as folkloric. Newton Tolman, active in the Nelson, New Hampshire contra dance scene since childhood, somewhat sarcastically acknowledged the changing social dynamic, and foresaw the role that rustic or quaint imagery would continue playing in the enthusiasm of newcomers to the tradition beginning in the 1930s:

As some of our popular sentimental writers have it, the surviving native families of rural southern New Hampshire are simple, kindly folk, little touched by the world outside. They all get together at weekly square dances in the village hall, and skillfully whirl through the ancient quadrilles and contras, to the music of their ancestors played by some old native fiddler. The further removed from the truth such nonsense becomes, I guess, the better the market for it (Tolman 1971: 19).

Some of the rhetoric that guided earlier revivals resonates to some extent in the values and experiences associated with the contemporary contra dance. While the tradition is no longer as consciously invoked as preservation of heritage or revival, many features of it as I have discussed draw upon revivalist categories: community, nostalgia, alternative to more commercial and commodified cultural choices, and sometimes an affirmation of continuity with the past.

Finally, a recent perusal of the various electronic discussion lists devoted to contra dance revealed a striking encapsulation of many of the features I have outlined in this chapter and elsewhere. The contra dance audience in America currently has a considerable presence on the Internet, including state-by-state dance venue listings, classic and newly composed choreographies, discussion lists, information on dance camps and many other resources. The

following writer, coming from the perspective of a dancer and singer as a comment on the simultaneous rise in participation in contra dance and shape note singing during the 1980s, directly addresses the appeal of these 'folk' traditions in a contemporary setting. I quote it here at length in closing as one example of the way that the issues raised in this thesis are also 'discussed' in a highly public forum:

For a long time I have thought that one reason for the increased popularity of the two activities has something to do with what one recent writer called 'cultural homogenization via the mass media' to which I would add general homogenization of our daily work life. At least among northern singers I know there are a large number of computer programmers and most others of us are increasing our computer work whether we want to or not. We work with machines. Fewer people go out to work with their hands in various ways that primarily result in human interaction. We go to sing shape note music and dance because it primarily involves PEOPLE. We face PEOPLE not machines...we seem to be seeking these activities as an antidote, a healing, a prevention...in order to maintain our humanity. I derive hope in the human species from this...we sing because we can express powerful emotions that our training and our mass media tell us are embarrassing and unacceptable (Kazlauskas 1994).

Chapter Six

Summary and Conclusions

Contra dance is a genre of revived folklore, a genre in the vast cache of traditions that have been reconstituted by several generations beginning with the scholarly or activist efforts of visible public figures like Cecil Sharp and Henry Ford. Contrasting with other revived music and dance genres such as English Country dance, or club square dancing, the latest incarnation of the New England contra dance tradition goes beyond a mimetic restoration of structurally intact models culled from a frozen repertoire. Instead, the conventional mechanics of playing and dancing, as outlined in chapter two, provide a frame within which individual creativity can be accommodated, but the general limitations or boundaries are maintained as a connective bond with a cultural practice of the past, often affectionately remembered.

As ethnographic research on the current contra dance scene has become available, many similarities in the national audience can be cited. Taken together, most accounts suggest a nationwide 'core' of tradition with minor regional variations. Any variation in the dance movement and musical repertoire tends to be slight, rather than constituting completely regionally differentiated traditions. Increased mobility of dancers, callers, musicians and the circulation of dance manuals, music notations and recordings within the fairly small community of contra dance enthusiasts in local events and at national festivals have led to similarities in both the format and the social dynamic in the numerous contexts of contra dancing. Clearly, as the tradition is carried on by individuals who call, perform

music and dance, the range of experiences is vast and regularly scheduled dance events inevitably take on an individual character. Yet my own participation in a local contra dance scene and comparison with available literature does suggest a great degree of uniformity among the many venues for contra dance nationwide. To cite one example, dancers, callers and musicians, after resettling in completely new cities are often 'absorbed' into a local group fairly readily. One dancer in speaking about this aspect of the tradition, referred to the contra dance 'crowd' as an 'instant community' into which one can quickly be absorbed. The most recent proliferation of postings and calendars about nationwide contra dance venues on the Internet (see Tomczak 1996 or Parkes 1996) has injected yet another unifying dynamic into the sprawling contra dance community.

The level of social intimacy afforded by contra dance, both between opposite gender dancers and among the dance group as a whole, is one of the reasons for the appeal of contra dance. Part of the continued appeal of contra dance is the intensely social character of the dance itself, and the exuberance of the dancers and musicians. Under the right conditions, personal exhilaration and appropriate physical and social engagement are kept in balance. Moments of individual and collective euphoria are often part of the experience of dancers, as noted at many points in the ethnographic literature and in chapter four. In my own experience dancing for over two years, and from conversations with other dancers, this euphoric feeling comes about as the dancing intensifies and movements become nearly automatic; the band plays well and there is an efficient flow to the individual figures within the overall choreography.

Within the current context of contra dance revival, the identification of the tradition as

a 'folkloric' one is of equal significance to the purely structural elements of the dance and music in fostering a sense of community. As noted in chapter four, revived folk genres in a modern context are often thoroughly saturated with idealized associations and often arose as recreations of the vestigial practices of pre-industrial societies. In their revival, such genres are often constructed anew, as communities seek to define and actively give shape to cultural expressions. It is the construct of these traditions as folkloric experiences within the sometimes disorienting circumstances of modern life that lends to them their particular potency. As Cantwell writes:

In the modern world, the idea of folklife belongs to the romantic tradition and, like that tradition, is a response to, an instrument of and a phenomenon of modernity. . . in a larger sense, the idea of folklife surely belongs to the long and complex pastoral dream founded in Western civilization's primary myths (Cantwell 1993: xv).

Indeed, the power and emergent emphasis on the special participatory and inclusive nature of genres, such as contra dance, may be dependent on the conditions of life in a highly technological and thoroughly commercialized society, with its continually fracturing social and economic relations. Imbued with rich meanings, folkloric genres are imaginatively constructed as community empowering answers to or sometimes active opposition to these conditions:

The power and authority of folklore consist precisely in the fact that, because it arises where power has lapsed, retreated, or failed, it lies outside all authority and power. Far from a kind of anomaly or residuum, folklore is one of the cultural resources of modern bourgeois civilization, which tirelessly produces it, consumes it and produces it again (Cantwell 1993: 214).

It circulates within a construction that opposes folk culture against elite or official culture:

The construction of folklore consequently demands. . . the radical

decontextualization of the folk-cultural text and its concomitant incorporation with the discourses of its new academic or festival context: the discourse of cultural conservation, say, or . . . a kind of remedialism or counterculturalism (Cantwell 1993: 215)

My impression is that this analysis is appropriate for the most recent history of the contra dance tradition as part of a national revival of American folklore. As a genre within this broad cultural development, contra dance has been embedded within a casual or explicit rhetoric of community and positive social solidarity as well as an exploration of a pre-industrial or agrarian American cultural heritage. By Bohlman's definition (1988) of modern 'folk music' communities as those which actively coalesce around and define the parameters of a genre of music or dance in order to celebrate or perpetuate it, the nationwide contra dance tradition constitutes something of a national 'folk' community. In contrast to the rural communities that sustain or once sustained this tradition, this new development is more of an atomized network of enthusiasts with established venues of dancing in cities and towns nationwide connected through travel, print and electronic publications and festivals.

At the local level, as in the numerous venues for contra dance in Madison, Wisconsin, regular, monthly dances have been established that attract a 'core' group of experienced dancers and continue to bring in new dancers. This loosely bound community is drawn together by the opportunity for participatory dance and socialization. It shares with other communities nationwide a fairly well-defined but malleable dance structure and musical repertoire as well as a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of non-specialized accessibility. Recent developments have led to a slightly greater degree of difficulty and sophistication in the dance choreographies, as dancing itself becomes the focus, rather than

more relaxed socializing. This recent development suggests a parallel with the process that country dance underwent in the aristocratic salons of seventeenth century Europe, as the dance itself became the object of interest.

Yet one of the most compelling attributes of the contemporary tradition remains the ease of access and integrative quality of the choreographic style. Dancers are coupled in opposite gender pairs as happens in many contemporary dance forms, yet during the typical sequence of contra dance figures, dancers have the opportunity to interact at some point with every dancer in their set. This lends to the dance some of its potency as a symbolic enactment of community expression. Furthermore, the successful performance of a given dance depends on the equal efforts of all the dancers; there is no real sense of soloistic display for the benefit of viewers. Newcomers to contra dance, even at the 'intermediate' dances, can be incorporated fairly readily, given the encouraging atmosphere of inclusivity that prevails. To this end, the caller plays a key role in shaping any contra dance event. Possessing considerable communication, memory and organizational skills, the caller sets the tone for the evening. Yet the caller is 'in charge' only in that he or she is responsible for choosing dances and pacing the dance evening. A central concern of many callers today is maintaining an encouraging atmosphere so that novices and experienced dancers alike can feel comfortable participating.

The communal aspect of contra dancing is only one among several attractions of the tradition. The community aspect of dance and its promotion as an effective means of positive sociability have been present in many forms in the dance literature, extending to the earlier days of dance manuals themselves (Wilson 1811). The social discourse about this tradition

has evolved as the dance form was considered in multiple ways: as a sort of ritualized and specialized means of aristocratic display, then as an active agent of middle class audiences' aspirations for social mobility, to a 'traditional' folk genre maintained in rural communities, to a celebration of Anglo-American folklore and finally an optimistic envisioning of cohesive community structure. As noted in chapter three, much of the social character of the dance is considered to come from the very structure of the dance form. That is, the structure of the dance has led to an idea that this dance is a concentrated format for expression of community. Just how the dance came to be regarded and experienced as such is a result of a whole complex of historical and social circumstances, some of which were noted in chapters three and four. Each of these components are important to understanding the contra dance phenomenon and the steadily growing popularity of the tradition, especially as many contemporary audiences look to satisfying participatory alternatives to more commercialized genres of music and dance.

Appendix One-Dance Figures

Here is a brief list of some of the most basic figures in American country dance. In parenthesis immediately following the name of the figure is the number of beats of music typically required to execute it smoothly. These explanations are derived from dance experience and supplemented by dance manuals, such as Ted Sannella's (1982) and Margot Gunzenhauser's (1996). More detailed lists can be found in these sources and others found in the bibliography.

balance (4)-- two dancers facing with hands joined, each steps forward on the right foot (1), bringing the left foot next to it (2), then steps back back on the left foot (3), bringing the right foot next to it. Some dancers, on beat 2 and 4, jump straight up in the air and land on both feet.

long lines forward and back (8)--all dancers join hands with their neighbors in their respective long lines, and walk forward (4 steps) meeting the dancers in the opposite line somewhere in the middle of the space between the two lines and then walk backwards (4 steps) to place.

ladies chain (16)--in their group of four facing in, men to the right of their partner, the woman grasps the right hand of the opposite woman in the middle of the set and they pass right shoulders, taking the left hand of the opposite gent after doing so. Then, following a *courtesy turn*, the process is repeated, returning the women to their original places.

half ladies chain (8)--same as above, except that the figure ends after the courtesy turn, and the women thus are in new positions.

allemande (right or left) (4 or 8)--two dancers extend their arm and grasp right or left hands at chest level

right/left circle (up to 8)--dancers join hands in their circles of four and walk in the direction indicated; a full eight count circle will bring dancers back home, but other multiples of two are possible, to bring the dancers to a different position.

right/left star (up to 8)--depending on the direction indicated, dancers in a circle of four turn and loosely grip the forearm of the dancer in front of them with their right or left hand, thus forming a small 'box' of interlocked arms in the center of the circle, around which the dancers walk, as with the *circle* figure.

swing or buzz step (8)--resembles a ballroom waltz embrace: couple is facing, the man with right hand placed at the small of the woman's back, left arm slightly extended at shoulder height, the left hand holding the woman's right hand, and the woman's left hand holding the man's upper right arm.

gypsy (8)--partners approach one another and lock eyes and circumambulate one another, as if performing a buzz step swing without actually touching each other; usually followed by a *meltdown* and *swing*.

down the hall (16)--active couples join hands in the middle of the set and walk down the center of the set towards the end of the hall, then turn around and return. In a variant of this, all dancers in their respective circles of four form a line perpendicular to the usual long lines and with hands joined go down the hall and back to place.

do-si-do (8)--a pair of dancers walk simultaneously walk around one another, but do so while remaining facing in one direction, so that they walk backwards for part of the figure. Often embellished by current dancers by spinning in circles individually while continuing to circumambulate one another.

cast off (4)--usually done as active couples return from a *down the hall*; upon approaching their original positions in the lines, the returning couple releases hands and wraps the left or right arm around their respective inactive neighbor in their circle of four, and the inactive person pivots around in place to place the actives in progressed position.

contra corners (16)--one of the more complex figures. Active couples meet in the middle of the set, with an allemande right and pass right shoulders to then begin a series of allemandes first with the inactive to the left of the partner, followed by an allemande in the middle once again, passing on to an allemande with the inactive person to the right of the partner, and often finished with a brief *swing* in the middle of the set.

hey (16)--another complex weaving figure, said to be recently reintroduced to contras from the English Country dance repertoire. Within circles of four, both women approach the middle of the set, passing one another by right shoulders, and left shoulders with the gents they then meet on the opposite side, who are following suit, but are trailing one step behind their respective partner; once to the opposite side of the set, each person then turns around and crosses back home, again passing right shoulders in the center and left shoulders on the lines.

sashay (8 or 16)--one of the few stepping figures; a sideways skipping step (to the right or left) typically coordinated with a triplet rhythm in the music so that, if dancing to the right, the right foot swings out to the side landing on 'one' and with the full weight of the dancer, then the left foot is swung into place beside the right on beat 'three'.

right and left through (8)--in circle of four, opposites grasp right hands and walk past one another, passing right shoulders in the middle; upon reaching the other side, a *courtesy turn* turns each couple around 180 degrees in order to face back into the center of the set.

turn alone or as a couple--not an independent figure in itself, a turn is incorporated in the

middle of a *down the hall*, so that dancers face in the direction they will return back up the set. If alone, dancers simply let go their hands and turn around 180 degrees in place and resume walking. If done as a couple, one common way is for dancers to continue to hold inside hands, and execute a *california twirl*, turning both of them around 180 degrees to face back up the set.

courtesy turn (4)--again not an independent figure, usually occurring as part of a *right and left through*, or *ladies chain*. Using a variety of holding positions, and initially facing away from the middle of the set, the couple pivots as a unit on the edge of the set, the man basically stepping in place as the woman is brought around, so that both are then facing back into the middle.

pass through (8)--same as a *right and left through*, except dancers do not join hands with their opposite.

California twirl-- a movement requiring little time to execute; two dancers stand side by side with inside hands joined turn to face one another, then one raises up the hands as the other walks forward passing under the arch thus formed, both dancers turning 180 degrees from their original spot.

promenade (8-16)--using a variety of hand holds, a couple walks side by side counterclockwise around the circle or square.

Appendix Two: Sample Choreographies

In notating dances, while there is no fixed format, certain conventions are observed. The most important information to convey, aside from the names of the figures, is the correspondences between the musical phrases and the dance phrases. This is done with the letters A and B and a parenthesis immediately following the figure giving the number of musical beats required to execute the figure.

1.

This first dance is one of the older choreographies that is still an active item in many caller's repertoire, "Chorus Jig". Though it is in the less frequently danced formation, the proper duple, it remains one of the most common dances. It is uniformly described in several sources (Page 1984, Gunzenhauser 1996, Maddocks 1950):

- A1: Actives down the outside (8) and back (8)
- A2: Actives own the center (8), turn alone and come back (8), cast off
- B1: Actives turn contra corners (16)
- B2: Actives balance (4) and swing partner in the center

2.

This second dance is a more recent choreography, "You Can't Get There From Here," written by Midwestern caller Carol Ormand, and is featured at many of the Madison area dances. It features several fractional figures (i.e. 3/4 allemandes and circles), a novel wavy line formation at the beginning, and a high concentration of figures in each phrase.

- A1: Dance begins in a wavy line, with women in the center and actives facing down
Balance the wave (4)
Neighbors allemande right 3/4 to a long wavy line with women facing in and men facing out
Balance the long wave
Neighbors allemande right 3/4 to short waves with the men in the middle (4)
- A2: Balance the wave (4) and swing neighbor (12)
- B1: Circle 3/4 and swing partner on the side
- B2: Circle 3/4 and do-si-do neighbor 1 and 1/2 to progress

3.

The traditional' dance, "Lady of the Lake", is another 'chestnut' that remains popular among callers. It is often accompanied by the tune of the same name, but like other dances, can work with most 32 bar tunes. Begins in proper duple formation.

A1: Balance and swing neighbor (16)

A2: Active couples balance and swing (16)

B1: Active couples down the center, turn alone (8), come back (8) and cast off

B2: Ladies chain and back (16).

4.

"Beckett Reel", a recently composed popular dance (Page lists it as a 'contemporary contra', 1984: 90), is another dance called quite frequently at dances in Madison, as elsewhere. This dance begins in a less common contra formation, the 'Becket Formation', in which partners stand next to one another (man to left of the woman) rather than across from each other, as in the improper and proper duples. An unusual feature of this choreography is the progression. Rather than progressing up or down the lines, as in a typical duple formation dance, dance couples progress to new positions *diagonally* across the set, in a zig-zag pattern.

A1: Allemande neighbor left once around (8) returning to swing your partner (8)

A2: Ladies chain (16)

B1: Right and left through with couple on the left *diagonal* & courtesy turn (8), right and left through with new opposite couple & courtesy turn (8)

B2: With same couples, left hand star once around (8) then right hand star back to place (8).

5.

"Fairfield Fancy" is another 'standard' choreography, relatively easy and often done towards the beginning of a dance evening to get things started. It begins in the most common formation, the improper duple, with odd-numbered couples active.

A1: Do-si-do your neighbor once around (8) then do-si-do your partner once around (8)

A2: Join hands and circle left (8), then circle back to the left (8) and form a line of four to go down the hall, actives in the middle of this line of four.

- B1: Go down the hall, four in line (8), then actives raise hands to form an arch and inactives pivot around to walk under it, all walking back up the hall (8)
B2: With new couples facing, ladies chain (16)

6.

"Hull's Victory" is another 'classic' contra, supposedly written in the early nineteenth century to celebrate the American victory in the war of 1812 (Gunzenhauser 1996: 85). It begins in a duple proper formation, with odd-numbered couples active.

- A1: Actives allemande right in the center halfway around (4) joining left hands with inactives, to form a line of four in which all balance (4); now allemande left your neighbor twice around (8).
A2: Actives allemande right once around and re-form lines of four and all balance (8), actives swing in the middle of the set (8)
B1: Actives down the hall, turn as couple and come back to cast off with neighbors (16)
B2: Right and left through with a courtesy turn (8) then right and left back to place (8).

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