

eTalk Readers,

As we start the New Year, I am determined to turn over a new leaf, or at least some extra bits and bytes for you to enjoy. I've sent out about a baker's dozen emails to folks you love to listen to ask them to contribute to eTalk. Let's hope this works! Otherwise, the button vampire will be knocking on your door.

This month I'd like to share the world of 3RFS dance with you by way of the words of own Cindy Rakowski, who is now a member of the Three-Rivers Board Folklife Society of Directors.

Before I do, a brief confession that shares my roots in dance. Even before I started hanging around Washington Square Park (Greenwich Village, NYC) to sing and after a while try to pick a guitar, I was addicted to international folk dance and eastern style singing call version of square dance. In my high school and college days, I dance with both the Israeli dancers at the 92nd Street "Y" and at the Universalist-Unitarian Church in mid-town Manhattan. There were some of the few places where this six-foot tall 135-pound intellectual could do anything physical without "standing out" in a crowd. I went on in graduate school to dance in the chorus (the back of the stage, if not the wing) of the University of Illinois modern dance company and to teach Israeli and Russian folk dance there, much to the dismay of my chemistry professors. Tired of my strange ways I was rewarded in 1956 with a Ph. D. in Chemistry and cast adrift in the world of science to earn a living.

Enough said about me. Check out the contra dance doings at the Community House, at the Tumbleweed Music Festival and the North Stage. The Tri-Cities is a community that is rich in opportunities both to tap your feet or better yet to swing them and yourself around to the music. In addition to our own Contra Dances on the last Saturday of the Month, the Richland International Folk Dancers, often a part of the TMF, who dance at the Richland Community Center on Thursdays evening · 7:00-10:00p... check them out.

Finally, before I pass you off to Cindy, it TMF volunteer time. Give Mickie Perry a call and help us in organizing out 10th BEST EVER TMF.

Cindy Rakowski is a hydrologist at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, but wears many other hats as well. When she's not at work, you can find her out with her family or her Girl Scout troop, or perhaps you'll find her taking her favorite form of recreation, entertainment, and exercise: contra dancing. Although there are monthly contra dances in our community, you'll find her traveling to La Grande, Walla Walla, Yakima, and Portland to satisfy her dancing needs and fancies.

So tune in, start dancing with Cindy and the rest of our folks... you'll wonder why it took so long to find you hidden joy and talent.

Harry {doc} Babad <etalkeditor@3rfs.org>
eTalk Editor, 3RFS

Contra Dance in the Tri-Cities

By Cindy Rakowski

Let's start by clearing the air. Let's talk about what contra is not. Contra dancing has nothing to do with South America or Oliver North. In addition, contra dancing has absolutely nothing to do with country line dancing. In addition, we don't wear funny dresses or costumes...except, perhaps, at Halloween.

But what is it? Contra dancing is spending the evening in a room full of people interested in having fun interacting with each other and dancing to live music. It is said: "if you can walk, you can contra dance."

Here are some tidbits used to attempt to define contra and are applicable to our community:

A caller, working with a group of live musicians, guides new and experienced dancers alike through a variety of dances.

A dancer and his or her partner dance a series of figures, or moves, with each other and with another couple for a short time. They then repeat the same figures with another couple, and so on.

The figures are similar to those of old-time square dancing. The figures are combined in different ways for each different dance.

The caller teaches each dance before it is actually done to the music. This gives everyone an idea of what to expect so the movements can be easily executed. The caller leads the dances while they are being done to music, so dancers are able to perform each movement to the music. Once the dancers appear to have mastered a particular dance, the caller may stop calling, leaving the dancers to enjoy the movement with music alone.



Contra dancing at Lady of the Lake on the shores of Lake Coeur D'Alene. Lady of the Lake Dance Camp (www.ladyofthelake.org) has summer weeklong dance camps (one for families, one for adults) and a fall dance weekend. Look carefully; you might see a familiar face!



The Contra dance at TMF 2003 – We love going around in circles with our friends. No one here has two left feet.



Tumbleweed 2003—The caller is Dan Clark. The band is Phil & Vivian Williams and friends. You've heard them on stage come dance!

People of all ages and lifestyles, including children, are welcome. Contra dances are a place where people from many walks of life come together to dance and socialize.

Children as young as seven can participate in adult dancing; your mileage may vary. As long as parents are responsible for keeping non-dancing children out of harm's way, everyone will enjoy everyone else's presence.

First-time dancers will likely find experienced dancers extremely friendly and helpful. If this does not seem to be the case, talk to the dance organizers. They need to know!

An evening that includes contra dancing might be called a Contra Dance, an Old-Time Contra Dance, an Old-Time Country Dance, a Barn Dance, or similar. Most contra dance events will include a few dances of other kinds: traditional squares, waltz, polka, swing and other types of couple dance.

At most dance events in North America, we dance with a different partner for each dance, although dates who attend together and significant others might dance with each other more than once.

This is 2006. Women can ask men to dance. At a contra dance, this is certainly true and has been for some time. It might be just as common as men asking women, or more so. Women will sometimes dance with women, and men will sometimes dance with men. In general, especially for the men, this happens only when a gender imbalance exists in the hall (men tend to be real chicken about dancing with other men otherwise).

Contra dancers make eye contact whenever possible. This adds to the

connectedness of the dance, and helps reduce dizziness, especially during the swing. It is also uncomfortable for some. Don't let anyone tell you that you must make eye contact, but give it a try even if it's a little uncomfortable. Expand your comfort zone. You might get used to it and even like it. Remember: they're gazing into your eyes not because they love you but because they want to make the connection, and they don't want to throw up on you.

Another definition: Contra dance is a form of dance that thrusts a different person of the opposite sex into your arms every 30 seconds or so.

Actually, this is only true sometimes. It might be more prudent, but less whimsical, to say that contra dance is one of the few dance forms where by the end of the evening you are likely to have danced with everyone.

Did you know that we have contra dances here in the Tri-Cities? There's a small and dedicated group of dancers who make sure we have a caller

and a band ready for a dance at the Kennewick Grange starting at 7:30 pm on the fourth Saturday of every month between September and April. In addition, we would sure like to have more friends come out to play with us! Our bands come from as far away as Sandpoint, ID (Out of the Wood) although we get to enjoy our local band (Growling Old Women) and some "almost local" bands from Walla Walla, Yakima, and La Grande. These communities also have monthly contra dances and are home to the "almost local" callers who travel to the Tri-Cities to call dances. Our local band and caller (I'm the latter) also travel to these communities to play and call their dances as well.

I've been contra dancing since about 1988. A friend in Fort Collins, Colorado invited me along to a dance one weekend and I was hooked. I've since danced in Fort Collins, Boulder, Denver, Kalamazoo, Logan (Utah), Portland, Seattle, Walla Walla, La Grande, and Yakima. In addition, everywhere I've danced, I've found a fun-loving community of people of very diverse interests and backgrounds. I also find dancing almost addictive. The joy I get from contra dance is described so well by Greg Rohde

(<http://www.thecommonspace.org/2002/06/games.php>) I'll let you read



The picture above is of Contra dancing with several hundred of my closest friends at Seattle's Folklife Festival to Out of the Wood. Out of the Wood will play our March 2006 dance and conduct a caller's and musician's workshop as well.

descriptions more elegant than mine. Contra dance is a great combination social interaction, exercise, eating dessert (always!), and getting to hear great live music in a family-friendly atmosphere.

Information, lots of content, and a sense of humor were lifted, with permission, from <http://www.sbcdds.org/contradance/whatis/>.

-Cindy Rakowski