



What is Contra Dance?

Contra Dancing is a form of American folk dance in which the dancers form a set of two parallel lines which run the length of the hall. Each dance consists of a sequence of moves that ends with couples having progressed one position up or down the set. As the sequence is repeated, a couple will eventually dance with every other couple in the set.

Is Contra Dancing Similar to Square Dancing?

Many of the basic moves in Contra Dancing are similar to those in square dancing (swings, promenades, dos-à-dos, allemandes). A square dance set comprises only four couples whereas the number of couples in a Contra Dance set is limited only by the length of the hall. If you have danced squares, you will enjoy Contras immediately.

What if I Have Never Danced Before?

In Contra Dancing, your feet are never asked to do more than walk to the music. Each dance is taught by the caller before it is danced. The caller continues to prompt the dancers as needed. Because the pattern of moves of each Contra Dance is repeated often, Contra Dances are easy to learn. Both beginning and experienced dancers happily share the same set.

Why Should I Dance Contras?

Contra Dances have a relaxed, family-like atmosphere where the emphasis is on dancing, a welcome relief to noisy and smoky dance halls. The patterns of the dances are fun and Contra Dancing is excellent exercise. Above all, Contra Dancers form a community of friendly, active people and they welcome new dancers, be they youngsters or seniors.

What if I Don't Have a Partner?

No problem. Many people come to a Contra Dance alone. Dancers are encouraged to dance with many different partners throughout the evening. If there is an excess of one gender, it is customary for women to dance men's parts (and vice versa) to form couples and extend the set.

Do I Need to Wear Special Clothes?

No. Contra Dancers tend to dress informally. Most people dress for comfort and in anticipation of vigorous exercise. Ladies prefer loose, light dresses or skirts; men wear lightweight slacks, jeans, or even shorts. Be sure to wear soft-soled, comfortable shoes.

What Is the Music Like?

For many dancers, the live music is the great attraction. Traditional jigs, reels, and marches from the Scots-Irish tradition on both sides of the Atlantic form the basic repertoire. The fiddle is often the lead instrument, but keyboard, bass, guitar, mandolin, flute, and even trombone and didgeridoo can be heard at a contra dance.

Do I Have to Join a Club?

No. You may come and go as you please. But often you can join your CDSS affiliate group and help support your local Contra Dance community. Admission is charged to pay for the hall, the caller and the musicians. You can dance all night for less than the cost of a movie.

Adapted by Peg Hesley from the text of Les Francey and Farrell Boyce, Hamilton Country Dancers