



PCDC Footnotes

November-December 2023

Second Thursday Community Jam Session November 9th

By Betsy Branch

The 2nd Thursday Tune Session on November 9 will be an open community by-ear jam session. We will play tunes learned at the September and October tune sessions, as well as tunes from previous sessions and some of the tunes to be featured at the New Year's Eve dance on December 30 at Norse Hall. If you'd like to prepare for the jam beforehand (since we will be playing by ear), visit the [Jams](#) tab on the [PCDC Dance Tune Session website](#). We'll post some tunes (including recordings) that are likely to turn up at the jam session. The website also contains recordings of hundreds of fantastic dance tunes as taught over the years by George Penk, Dan Compton, and Betsy Branch.

The November session will be held at Betsy's house in SE Portland. For the address and info, please email Sharon Allen (sharonjeanallen@yahoo.com) and ask to be added to her amazing Tune Session email list or email Betsy at fiddlefrau@gmail.com.

Special Contra Dance Tuesday, November 14, at Polish Hall

By Kelly Tabor

When: Tuesday, November 14

Where: Polish Hall, 3832 N. Interstate Avenue

Who: George Marshall with the Faux Paws

What time: 7 pm for newcomer/refresher lesson, 7:30 pm for dancing

George Marshall, of the well-known contra dance band Wild Asparagus, is teaming up with The Faux Paws for this special Tuesday night dance. George Marshall was introduced to square and contra dancing in the early '70s while working as a summer trail crew volunteer in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. George's specialty is teaching and calling the New England-style contra dances he has collected throughout the country. He is renowned for his knack of matching music to dance and for his smooth, concise teaching and presentation.

A Faux Paws live show takes you on an explosive roller coaster ride. Virtuosity on fiddle, mandolin, guitar, and saxophone, sure, but you can also expect vulnerability, personal lyrics, tight harmonies, playful interplay, intricate arrangements, and soaring improvisations.

The President's Corner

By Kathy Story, PCDC Board President

This month, we debut two new columns: The President's Corner and On the Dance Floor. In The President's Corner, I'll be sharing interesting news about our dance and music community, recent board and committee activity, and other good stuff. Let me know if you've got a topic you would like to see covered. In On the Dance Floor, dancers and callers will be sharing tips on style, technique, and etiquette to make our dances more fun and enjoyable for everyone. Again, if you've got a topic or question you'd like to see addressed (or write about yourself), let us know! Send ideas for topics and questions to newsletter@portlandcountrydance.org.

There are so many things I could write about for this inaugural column: the highly successful Northwest Passage ECD weekend in September, our new sound apprenticeship program, the exciting new format for our contra Tune Sessions, the Portland English Ball, George Marshall with The Faux Paws coming on November 14, and Raindance registration starting January 1. But these are covered elsewhere, so I'd like to tell you about something you might not have known: PCDC hosted the Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) Executive Committee meeting here in Portland in October! One of the ways CDSS carries out its mission to "connect and support people in building and sustaining vibrant communities through participatory dance, music, and song traditions" is by holding its Executive Committee meetings in local communities. We hosted the Executive Committee in the 1990s and were pleased to welcome them once again. One of our own, Norman Farrell, is currently on the Executive Committee and many other PCDC members have served on the CDSS board and committees over the years. PCDC is an affiliate of CDSS.

The Executive Committee met during the day and danced with us in the evening. Both our English and contra dances were well attended and a lot of fun. On Sunday, 17 local organizers, dancers, musicians, callers, and volunteers joined the committee for a community meeting. The committee asked us to talk about our successes and challenges, and the conversation was productive. I was impressed by CDSS's commitment to being a resource for dance communities around the country. We learned about some specific grant opportunities for some of our programs and other possible support for our organization. CDSS learned that we have great programs and innovative initiatives, information that could benefit their other affiliates. The committee members recognized the vibrancy of our dance and music community and were pleased to be a part of it, if only for one weekend. Many of the committee members, including the chair, told me that their meeting was very successful and that our hospitality was wonderful.

Thanks to all the PCDC folks who hosted committee members, loaned cars, set up the brunch, brought food, and helped in other ways. Many, many thanks to David Macemon and Cynthia Stegner for organizing and coordinating the entire weekend and hosting meetings in their home. Please take a minute to thank them for their hard work and generosity!

New Year's Eve Eve Celebration Returns!

By Kelly Tabor

When: Saturday, December 30 (New Year's Eve Eve)

Where: Norse Hall, 111 NE 11th Ave, Portland, OR 97232

What time: 7:30 newcomer lesson; dancing from 8:00 to 12:15

How much: \$15–35 admission fee gives you access to all three floors of dancing

Do you remember our mega-bashes of New Year's past? Contra has teamed up with Waltz Eclectic and Blues to bring back three floors of dancing at Norse Hall this year! Per tradition, contra will have the main floor with two bands and two callers. Olympia's Contra Quartet and our own Rich Goss will open the evening at 8 pm, followed by Seattle's Tom Wimmer with local music headed by Betsy Branch, George Penk, and Sue Songer to carry us through midnight. Mark your calendars for Saturday, December 30 (New Year's Eve Eve), an evening you won't want to miss!

Play for the NYEE Dance: Open Band and Workshops

By Betsy Branch

Betsy Branch, George Penk, Sue Songer, and Bill Tomczak cordially invite you to play in the second half of PCDC's New Year's Eve Eve celebration dance on Saturday, December 30, at Norse Hall. All levels and instruments (except piano) are welcome. The setlist will include tunes George and Betsy have been teaching at the free Second Thursday tune sessions.

You can find the setlist and recordings of the NYEE open band tunes on the [PCDC Dance Tune Session website](#). In the weeks leading up to the dance, there will be two free workshops, one a play-through of all the tunes, and the other a horn (or "horn-style") arrangement workshop led by Bill Tomczak. Any instrument can play Bill's horn arrangements; they are designed to add a special shimmer to the open band.

To receive announcements or sign up for the dance and workshops, email Sharon Allen at sharonjeanallen@yahoo.com or Betsy at fiddlefrau@gmail.com. Many thanks to PCDC for subsidizing these fabulous community learning opportunities.



The Portland Roadhouse needs fresh volunteer energy!

By Mike Richardson, Dave Hamlin, Gordy Euler, and Will Brown

The Portland Roadhouse, an annual fundraiser for Northwest Folklife, is at a crossroads. The current Roadhouse Board has been involved since its conception in 2009 and the first Portland Roadhouse dance in 2010. We ran ten great all-day dances, kept the Roadhouse alive through the pandemic, and rebooted with a shorter dance in 2023.

Now it is time for us to move on. Portland Roadhouse needs new organizers if it is to continue. We are looking for enthusiastic people in two areas:

- We need at least five new Board members to run the 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. This is not difficult, but does require attention to reporting and some formal procedures.
- We need volunteers to help with all aspects of production, including coordinating the Cascade Promenade, potluck, setup, cleanup, stage management, and house management. It is helpful if volunteers in major roles (Cascade Promenade, stage management, house management) are also Roadhouse Board members.

NOTE: You do not have to live in the Portland area to get involved!

To support an orderly transition, the current Board wants to work with the new Board and volunteers starting in late November through the March 2024 Portland Roadhouse.

If you want to help, or just have questions, please contact Dave Hamlin at davehamlin01@gmail.com.

What is the Portland Roadhouse?

The Portland Roadhouse is the culminating event of the Cascade Promenade, a week where dancers up and down the I-5 corridor experience the diverse dancing that the PNW has to offer. Joyride kicks off the event with their Wednesday dance, followed by Seattle's Lake City and Phinney dances, English Country dances, and other regional dances. Saturday shifts focus back to Portland, where the Portland Megaband performs for hundreds of contra dancers from the I-5 corridor and far beyond. Out-of-town dancers bunk with locals and spend all day Sunday dancing to multiple callers and bands at the Portland Roadhouse. It's a great way to meet other contra dancers and build a more cohesive regional community.

Raindance Rides Again

By Kim Appleberry

Hey Dad, are we there yet?

Hold your taters, Timmy. We'll be there at the end of April. In the meantime, keep a look out for January 1st, when registration opens.

We haven't had a Raindance in many years, not since the darkness fell across the land. But 2024 is the year—the return of just good clean fun—forget your troubles, c'mon get happy.

Welcomed back from exile, Portland Raindance will once again challenge the structural integrity of Norse Hall in Portland, OR. Always on the 4th weekend of the 4th month, it's April 26–28, 2024.



The Stringrays

Photo by Sonya Sones

The last few years have been very hard on bands. The **Stringrays** have come through the tunnel with no loss of momentum. When the **Stringrays** flood the room and fill the spirits of those within, dancers experience that peak high—the best that music and moving bodies and life and teamwork can offer. Playing together for years has produced a tight bond and a multiplying Wall of Sound effect. No distinction between your hearing it and your feeling it.

Drive Train

Photo by Sonya Sones

When you buy a new car, it comes with a long warranty on the major parts that make it go—all the components that transfer the force from the engine to the wheels and propel you forward. The transmission, drive shaft, differential, axles—all work together to push you up over the Big Rock Candy Mountain and down into the lush Valley of Rain, where you may dance all night. This fine collection of auto components is called the drive train. It reliably transports you to extravagant places, much the same way the band **Drive Train** will transport its abundant power to *your* driving wheels. Be sure you start out with a full tank of gas.





Will Mentor and Lisa Greenleaf

Photos by Sonya Sones

Lisa Greenleaf is a queen of callers. With grace and elegance, she will conduct all in her care to be just where they need to be and when they need to be there. Then she will quickly release them to gambol on their own and add a personal lilt. She also has a whimsical sense of humor.

Will Mentor has an exciting, driving delivery at the microphone. Like a great coach, he will add to your performance. With skill and zip, he calls carbonated dances that put bubbles in your shoes. Best put rocks in your pockets so you don't float.

"Dancing is like bank robbery; it takes split-second timing." —Twyla Tharp

All this (plus bananas) available to you at Portland Raindance 2024, our 13th year. Cost is \$180, and for dancers under 35, it's \$100. There is a family rate as well. If you would like to register three or more members of the same family, please email us to get the details.

Registration is online only and opens **January 1st**. There will be a lottery for all those who register by midnight, February 1st. Registrations entered after February 1st go on a waiting list.

More details and registration are on the Raindance website, at www.PortlandRaindance.org. And for a preview, take a look at the [Videos](#) tab.

The Reviews Are In: Accolades Abound for Northwest Passage 2023

By Sharon Gavin

Autumn is upon us and Northwest Passage 2023 is officially on the books—and oh, what an enchanting chapter it is! Fabulous music by Goldcrest and our own Fine Companions; delightful dancing with callers Brad Foster and Orly Krasner; wonderful workshops; and, of course, a serene setting in which to commune with nature and connect with community.

But don't just take my word for it. In fact, don't take my word at all: I wasn't there, due to being called away for work! Instead, here are actual comments from evaluation forms returned by some of the 100+ people who were there. These answers are responses to the question, "What did you like most about NW Passage?"

"The fabulous music, lovely dancing, friendly people, relaxed atmosphere, and gorgeous location. The callers did a wonderful job of fostering a community feeling."

"The music was inspiring. It really lifted me up, even when I was tired. I had a wonderful dance experience. The concerts were very special and well-timed after dinner and before the evening dance."

"Music and the dances were very good. I thought the food was excellent in both choice and quantity. The weekend also felt very organized and completely thought-out."

"Being in community with people who also enjoy the same thing was lovely. The music is always good but this year was transcendental! I enjoyed the variety in the workshops."

"Synergy—2 bands, 2 callers (you choose great variety), skilled and friendly dancers, beautiful location, great floor, great food."

"I loved this camp!"

Friends, dancers, community members—the people have spoken and even as I type, the Northwest Passage Committee is already at work planning for Northwest Passage 2024. Who's going to be there? Graham Christian and Jenna Simpson will be calling; Trio Con Brio (Jonathan Jensen, Elke Baker, and Paul Oorts) and Night Heron (Karen Axelrod, Audrey Jaber, and Shira Kammen) will be providing the music. And YOU will be doing the dancing!

We'll have more info for you in 2024, but until then, Happy Twirls to You!

On the Dance Floor: Swing, swing, swing!

By Kathy Story

On the Dance Floor is a new forum for dancers to share tips on style, technique, and etiquette to make our dances more fun and enjoyable for everyone. We welcome guest writers, whether for a question, a paragraph, or an entire article. Send ideas for topics and questions you'd like to see answered to newsletter@portlandcountrydance.org.

This month's column from Kathy Story covers contra dance swings, a topic near and dear to most of us.

I love to swing during a contra dance! My favorite dances have both a partner and a neighbor swing. I love to swing fast. And when I'm dancing the Robin role, I love to spin out of it with a big flourish. But I know not everyone enjoys all that, so I always check in with my partner: Do you like to swing quickly? Are you okay with swinging somewhat close? Do you like twirls and flourishes?

No matter how you like to swing—walk-around or buzz step, fast or slow, close or not, twirls or no twirls—one thing is always the same: you need to support yourself and you need to support your partner! No Lark wants to feel like they're dragging the Robin around in a swing, and no Robin wants to feel like their back is in jeopardy. Neither dancer should be doing all the heavy lifting. When you support yourself and your partner, swings are so much more satisfying, comfortable, and safe for both dancers.

So how do you provide that support during a swing?

Providing support during swings

Let's begin with the dancer's frame, that powerful upper body position in which you can feel the air pushing up from below your arms and energy flowing from the middle of your back right out your fingertips. If you can't quite visualize that, consider these points:

Larks: Your right arm gives your partner support when you place your flat hand (no claws please) on or just below the Robin's left shoulder blade, or as close as you can get to the shoulder blade. Your hand should not extend across the center of the Robin's back: this restricts movement and can be too close for comfort. Nor should your hand be positioned high on the shoulder or inches below the shoulder blade: neither of these hand positions give support and the latter can actually hurt the Robin's back (ouch!) or feel a bit creepy. The height of your elbow depends on your relative heights. Hold your right arm in a strong way—if someone came over and pushed down on it or tried to pull it away from the Robin's shoulder blade, there should be some resistance.

Robins: Your left arm is just as important for supporting you and your partner as the Lark's right arm. Don't do the dreaded "hang-on," where you grab the Lark's arm and pull down to hold yourself up, or the equally awful "pinch," where you push down so hard with your arm that it pins the Lark's arm to their side. When I'm Larking and my partner swings like this, my arms and shoulders ache

by the end of the dance. (Ouch again!) Instead, support the Lark by placing your hand on their back as high as you can reach. Keep your elbow lifted and hold up your upper body with your own strength.

All roles: When you both support each other, there's no need for either dancer to lean backwards—another thing that makes my arms and shoulders ache when I'm dancing either role.

Giving gentle feedback

When we gently give and take feedback with each other, we become better dancers for every partner. When a Lark doesn't support me, I politely request their hand be moved into the proper position to do so. If they don't understand, I ask if I can take their hand and put it where I need it so that I don't get hurt. If they don't honor my request, I might avoid dancing with that Lark again to protect myself. When a Robin doesn't support me, and hangs on or pinches my arm, I politely ask them to hold themselves up and give me a little support. If they don't understand, I try to show them what I need. If they don't honor my request, I might avoid dancing with that Robin again to protect myself.

A few additional tips:

- Positions and technique depend upon the relative height, proportions, strength, and experience of each dancer, as well as any injuries. It's helpful to practice a swing or two when you line up, before the caller begins the walk-through. It's easier to figure out the most comfortable position for your swings then, rather than during the frenzied madness of the dance.
- Please, no bouncing, hopping, or skipping during a swing! You can perform a smooth swing even with a buzz step. If you let your knees absorb the up-and-down movements, you can keep your head level, which in turn keeps your partners from getting dizzy.
- Larks, if you want to twirl the Robin at the end of a swing, do not crank the Robin's arm—another ouch! The Robin should be directly under the Lark's arm, not forced to lean backwards. The Lark should guide the Robin into the turn without gripping the Robin's hand.
- Do pay attention to timing. If there's not enough time for a twirl or flourish, don't attempt it. Otherwise, one or both of you may be late for your next move, throwing off the timing for your foursome or maybe the entire line. (Of course, even if there is time, the Robin can refuse the twirl by not lifting their arm.)

We all want to have a great dancing experience and we want to do it with as little effort (and pain!) as possible. We also want folks to dance with us—to actually look forward to dancing with us! When both dancers support themselves and their partner, there is magic: effortless and satisfying swings. What could be more fun?