Poems, Old and New

Hands Four

by Steven Howland (2013)

Hands four from the top,
Bow to your partner,
Bow to your neighbor,
With your neighbor balance and swing.
Boy, she has cold hands.
All join hands and circle to the left.
With left hand in neighbor's cold right hand
Notice how warm your partner's hand is.
Does that mean my hands are warm to some
And cold to others?
And my next neighbor in the line has hands that
Are sweaty, the next cold and dry,
Then soft with youth, then calloused with age,
The next hand a rock solid grasp
To make up for an unstable body.
I'm focused on hands tonight at the dance
So many wonderful hands to hold my hand
So many light, firm, finger, palm touches, each
For seconds at a time yet sharing The wisdom, energy, and intimacy of life.

I've always found this a hard subject to write about, but this came into my head the other night after a wonderful night at the Greenfield (MA) Contra Dance. ~ S.H.

photo by Stewart Dean

The Ballad Of William Sycamore *(excerpt)*

by Stephen Vincent Benét (1922)

I can hear them dance, like a foggy song,
Through the deepest one of my slumbers,
The fiddle squeaking the boots along
And my father calling the numbers.

The quick feet shaking the puncheon floor,
And the fiddle squealing and squealing,
Till the dried herbs rattled above the door
And the dust went up to the ceiling.

There are children lucky from dawn till dusk,
But never a child so lucky!
For I cut my teeth on "Money Musk"
In the Bloody Ground of Kentucky!

Contra Dancers

by Harvey J. Gardner (2012)

Smiling through the waiting game
youths and seniors, swift and lame
contra goddesses and gods.
caller checks the card then nods,
fiddler spins a spidery tune
to weave a web around the room.

With sparkling eyes and glistening skin
like God's own galaxies we spin
to give His gravity the slip
while hoping He can't break our grip.

Feet and hands and hearts keep time
in a transcendental climb
to swing into familiar grooves
distilling Life to contra moves.

We end the dance as half-spent jewels
dispersed celestial molecules
to reassemble in four-mations
of stellar contra constellations.