

# Cracking Chestnuts—Rory O’More

by David Smukler

## Rory O’More

Duple proper

Tune: same

- A1 Actives cross the set, go down the outside below one neighbor;  
Cross back as you come up the center, cast off proper and step into the center giving right hand to your partner and left to the next active person to form a wavy line of actives down the center of the set.
- A2 Balance the wave to the right and left, give a little tug to slide face-to-face past your partner, and give right hands to the next and left to your partner;  
Balance that new wave to the left and right, slide left past your partner again back to where you came from.
- B1 Turn contra corners.
- B2 Actives balance and swing, end proper.

The words “Rory O’More” may have different associations for you, depending on cultural context. Besides being one of our favorite chestnut tunes and contra dances, Rory O’More is the name of a bridge in Dublin, a mixed alcoholic beverage, the roguish protagonist of the song quoted below, and (probably the origin of all of these) one of the ringleaders of a plot to capture Dublin in October of 1641.

If other dances have “story lines,” we think of Rory O’More as a novel, with each A or B—part a different chapter:

Chapter I	In Which Couple One Goes on a Long Journey
Chapter II	The Ever-Popular Rory O’More Balances
Chapter III	Turning Country Corners
Chapter IV	The Thrilling Climax, In Which We Successfully Swing Our Partners

During the 1960s, it became briefly popular to try to kiss your partner on the balances in A2. Thankfully for the insurance policies of dance organizers, this aberration has faded, but it’s remarkable how many people remember Rory O’More for those kisses.

Here are a few style opportunities to consider. First, we prefer to end the final swing proper, but still connected to (and facing) partners. The beginning of A1 then becomes a “pull by” to cross. We have also seen people end the swing improper, so that no cross is necessary, but to us this lacks both the “propriety” and zest of the more traditional style. The goal of the rest of A1 is to set up the wavy line of actives in the middle of the set. Getting there on time by hook or crook is worth the effort.

The figure in A2 is closely identified with the dance Rory O’More. Contra choreographers have borrowed this distinctive figure for many recent compositions. Thus, one often hears dancers being instructed to slide right “as in Rory O’More,” but many have never done the original dance! In any case, you will enjoy the springy momentum you create if you make each balance move *toward your partner first*. Thus, the first balance starts to the right and the second one to the left. Because of that momentum, instead of simply sliding, many dancers prefer to add a pirouette as they move past their partners. To do so, twirl over the same shoulder that faces your partner; in other words, the first spin is clockwise (over your right shoulder), and the second is counterclockwise (over your left

shoulder). Do not try to go around your partner as you twirl. Your body is always on your side of the set, and the wave is always formed with you facing the same wall as you faced when you lined up for the dance.

If we had to choose one figure (other than balance and swing) that epitomized New England contra dancing, it might well be contra corners, sometimes referred to as “contry corners” or “country corners.” If you’ve never done a dance with contra corners, don’t fret if there is a bit of confusion the first time or two. It will sort itself out quickly. First make sure you understand how to identify your corners. You will find them in the opposite line—a gent’s corners are two ladies, and a lady’s corners are two gents—and they are either on one diagonal or the other. Your first corner is a bit to your right (that is, a little below you for gents and above you for ladies), and your second corner is to your left (below for ladies and above for gents). Once you know who your corners are, let the ones do all the moving and the twos do all the thinking (thanks to caller, Bob Nicholson for that insight). The sequence has four parts: ones turn about halfway by the right, all turn first corners by the left far enough to send the ones back to the center, ones turn just a bit more than half by the right to find that second corner, and all turn those corners by the left until the ones can meet in the center once more for Chapter IV. In other words, the ones are alternately turning their partner by the right hand and a corner by the left, while the twos help by facing slightly on the diagonal (first to the right and then left) with their left hands up and an encouraging smile on their faces. Please note that all of the turns in contra corners are allemande turns; gent number two should avoid the temptation to courtesy turn that corner lady.

As with many of the classic contras, Rory O’More was originally a triple minor dance. In the older version the actives go down the outside *two* places, which gives a little more space for the crossing up the center action in A1. Then actives take right hands with their partner in the middle, but the next active dancer to the left is simply too far away to connect with. In that version, the balance and slide (or spin) past is just about you and your partner.

Like Chorus Jig and Money Musk, Rory O’More has a memorable tune with which it is strongly associated. We advocate using this tune if at all possible; dance to it once and you will understand why. Most fiddlers willing to play in jig time will not find Rory O’More overly challenging and should be glad to add it to their repertoire.

We would like to end with a pep talk for the twos. Couple two, you will be greatly appreciated in Rory O’More for playing your support role well. We used to call the second couple “inactive,” but the truth is that a lot goes into that support role. People are coming at you from all sides and you will want to be ready for them, because the other couples are dizzier and may have no idea about which way to go. By making sure you know who to cast off with each time and which contra corners will be looking for your helpful left hand, you will be earning a glorious ride down the set when you become couple one at the top.

*“Rory O’More” is the fifth dance discussed in the Cracking Chestnuts series, and appeared in the CDSS News, issue #183, March/April 2005. The column also is posted on [www.davidsmukler.syracusecountrydancers.org/](http://www.davidsmukler.syracusecountrydancers.org/).*