



ADAPTING SOLO DANCES: PRECEPTS AND PREFERENCES

By Sharon Green

I am an 80-year-old English country dancer and occasional choreographer. On March 17 of this year, it became clear to me I would be sheltering in place for months, if not years. On March 20, desperate to dance, I wrote my first solo adaptation of an English dance. It was Maiden Alone, a mash-up of Maiden Lane (Playford, 1651) with a signature move from Pat Shaw's Kitty Alone.

In the past four months, I have adapted hundreds of dances. Some of my earliest adaptations dissatisfy me now. My initial preference was straightforward: I adapted dances so that I could move to the music I love. However, as I danced some of my adaptations, I found my muscle memory of the original dances had begun to fade. I felt unmoored. My goal in adapting became to keep my feel for the dances I loved by changing them as little as possible.

Other adapters have other preferences. Some keep the tunes, but change the dances in hopes of improving the flow or adding variety. Others want to invent new movements, or to import movements from other dance forms. Still others find new tunes, and create entirely new dances. They follow their own rules. These are mine:

- Pick a dance you love.
- Trust the original choreographer.
- Make minimal changes. Avoid change for the sake of change.
- Determine who the actual Actives are. (In some dances, the Twos have the active role.) Base your adaptation on the active couple's track. Have your dancers start off every round from that couple's position.
- If the dance has a signature move, do your best to preserve it.
- Go for a smooth transition between rounds.
- Test your dance from both sides. Does it work better danced from one side than danced from the other?
- Check whether your solo adaptation also works well for couples. In adaptations for couples, emphasize opportunities for physical connection. Check whether your duo version provides more physical contact when danced by partners or by neighbors.
- Consider variations for dancers working in restricted spaces.

FIXING SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

1) Lack of Variety

Normally, English country dancing is all about people taking center stage. They take center stage, but they take turns. Here's an example: First Corners, set and turn single; two-hand turn once around. Second Corners, the same. While the Second Corners set and turn, the First Corners have a rest. In solo dancing, however, you don't take turns. For a solo dancer, the dancing is nonstop.

When you have only one person dancing, how can you keep the alternating symmetry of the original choreography without boring people? Some adapters choose to change the direction of the moves. In the previous example, they follow the First Corners' moves "Set right and left, turn single right; two-hand turn clockwise" with "Set left and right, turn single left; two-hand turn counterclockwise." That works, but it does leave the dancers with a change in direction that may not work well with the next move. When I dance both corner positions solo, I keep the original flow but extend my initial two-hand turn so that I end the turn not back in the Left-file, but in the Right-file, in my invisible partner's place. That gives me a little bit of extra momentum to launch myself into the Second Corner's setting and turning to the right. I end the move back in First Corner's place. I've varied my turns, injecting a bit of energy into the dance.

2) Alternating Crosses

Many English country dances include the following pattern: **First Corners cross; Second Corners cross. Circle left halfway.**

How can you adapt this pattern for a solo dancer? You can always have your single dancer cross on the diagonal and stand still for two bars, but solo dancers like to move.

Here are some different fixes you can try. In each case, your dancer will end back home.

Your solo dancer starts in the Left-file [1st Gent's place].

Cross diagonally down; set in place. Circle left halfway.

Cross diagonally down; turn single in place. Circle left halfway.

Cross diagonally down; cross diagonally back up. Do not circle halfway. Instead, set and turn single.

Dance single file clockwise halfway around the set. Circle left halfway.

Base your decision about which fix to choose on the music. Is it bouncy or choppy? Setting may work. Does it flow smoothly from phrase to phrase? Moving from a turn single into a circle may prove satisfying.

3) Need to Return Home

Some adapters like to start each round of a dance from a different position. I prefer to start each round at home, on the original side. Here are some ways to eliminate an unwanted progression, getting the Actives back home inconspicuously.

Simple substitutions to eliminate a progression:

ORIGINAL FINAL MOVE(S)	SUBSTITUTION
Cast down	Turn single away
Meet & lead down	Face down, turn single away
4 changes of R & L	3 changes & turn single
3 changes of R & L	2 changes & cross diagonally home
2-hand turn, etc.	2-hand turn moving up
Cross & go below, 1/2 figure 8 up 4 changes R & L	Cross & go below, 1/2 figure 8 up Cross & go above, 1/2 figure 8 down

Here, in closing, are two solo adaptations that I particularly like. The first is my adaptation of Kelsterne Gardens, which I like because I had to make barely any changes in it at all. The second is Bernadette Culkin's adaptation of Fried de Metz Herman's Winter Waltz (1999), which I particularly like because I know Fried would have enjoyed Bernie's craftsmanship. I have italicized the changes.

CLOISTERED GARDENS, *A Solo Dance Adaptation*

Adapted from Tom Cook's 1975 reconstruction of Kelsterne Gardens (1727)

Recorded Source: Bare Necessities, Vol. 2 *More Favorites of the Boston Centre*

Originally a 3-couple set

- A1 Mirror hey, going down between the 2nd couple's place to begin
- A2 Crossing diagonally down, dance a whole figure 8 across the set, ending home
- B1 Circle left once round
Cast down one place
- B2 [With the bottom couple] Circle left once round
Cast up one place, ending home

Watch Sharon teach and dance this dance at bit.ly/CloisteredGardens.



WINTER WALTZ, *A Solo Dance Adaptation*

Adapted from Fried de Metz Herman's Winter Waltz (1999)

Recorded Sources: The Flying Romanos, *The Flying Romanos Take Off*;
Amarillis, *Blind Harper Dances*

Originally a 3-couple set

- A1 Circle left halfway to bottom of set
½ figure 8 up
- A2 Long diagonal cross to top of set
Circle left halfway [End close]
- B1 Fall back in lines and set
Partners, back to back
- B2 [*Bottom four*] Star left halfway, [*top four*] star right halfway
Ones [*now at top*] dance right-shoulders round



**For more solo dances,
check out these online resources:**

Links and instructions for dozens of solo ECD adaptations (collected by Margaret Talbot Swait on the Carolina English Country Dancers website)

carolinaenglishcountrydance.com/dance-pandemic-list-links

“Corona Inspired Dances,” including videos with music, compiled by Bob Green

dancevideos.childgrove.org/ecd/corona-inspired-dances

