

# CDSS Supports FIRST Contra Weekend in France!

By *Laurette Tuckerman*

As an American living in Paris since 1993, I was often asked what I missed from the United States. At the top of my list was contra dancing, which I kept up by attending CDSS family camps at Buffalo Gap/Timber Ridge/Camp Louise and occasional trips to London barn dances. Eventually, with a great deal of encouragement from contra dance friends in the U.S., I started planning a contra dance series in Paris. Thanks to the financial backing from CDSS, we held the first contra dance in Paris on May 31, 2014.

In the five years since then, the group known as Paris Contra Dance has become very successful. By publicizing in other dance communities (Irish, Scottish, English, Breton, Balfolk) and in American expatriate communities, we now attract 80–120 dancers to each dance. Dancers also come from other parts of France and neighboring countries (Belgium, Germany).

A dedicated student folk club at the École Normale Supérieure helps us attract young people. Also, Paris Contra Dance was invited to organize an afternoon workshop and evening dance during the annual Royal Scottish Country Dance European youth weekend in Paris last Spring. This introduced American contra dance to a new international set of like-minded young dancers.

For our Paris contra dances, we now hold five dances per year, January, March, May, September, and November. To accommodate dancers from outside of Paris, our dances are held on Saturdays, usually from 4 or 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Each dance has a fair number of newcomers. However, a large number are regular attendees, who enjoy each others' company at the potluck buffet dinners we hold midway through each dance. Fortunately, we've been able to find subsidized venues for our dances by cultivating municipal centers and cultural organizations, which enables us to almost break even.

We now have two offshoots. American expatriates who attend the Paris Contra Dance have started contra dance series in Strasbourg (Alsace) and Karlsruhe (Germany), which are attended almost entirely by French and German dancers. Contra dance has now become an established part of the Paris folk dance scene and is being brought to parts of Europe where it was previously unknown.

With this increasing growth of contra dancing in our region, the time seems ripe to organize a contra dance weekend. To increase our sense of community, our main target audience is the people who regularly or occasionally attend the Paris Contra Dance. The weekend will also be open to contra dancers from the U.S. and the U.K.

I've reserved a venue in the Normandy countryside about an hour from Paris that accommodates 60-70 people. The event will be partially subsidized by the Ministry of Culture, which will help to keep the weekend affordable. Also, I've chosen a three-day weekend, starting with a mid-day lunch on Saturday and ending with lunch on Monday. To keep the mix of ages similar to our Paris dances, I plan to have lower rates for youth attendees (perhaps offering work scholarships).

Like the first Paris Contra Dance, this first contra dance weekend is an exciting experiment. We'll see if enough people sign up to cover our costs. It will be helpful and encouraging to have CDSS funding as a safety net.

To learn more online search for "**Paris Contra Dance**" on Facebook, and Google-search "**American Contra Dance in Paris**". Those interested in attending the weekend should email [Laurette.Tuckerman@gmail.com](mailto:Laurette.Tuckerman@gmail.com).



**Above:** Paris Contra Dance held as part of the Climate Festival of the 18th arrondissement of Paris. Photo used with permission from the Author.