



## Puttin' on the Dance Session Notes

### “Carrying on the Traditions: Cultivating New Callers and Musicians”

with: Mary Wesley and Linda Henry

Transcribed by: Susan Bunting

#### What are some groups doing?

Linda Henry: Community dance series in Amherst, MA provides monthly music sessions for any musicians in community to play together and gather a common repertoire. At dance events, there is an open band with a hired fiddler; musicians are encouraged to join in through evening, especially during medleys

Mary Wesley: Established Mad Robin Callers Collective in Burlington to create opportunities for (mostly younger) callers to learn and practice their calling. Then set up their own dances series

Peggy Dempsey (Rochester, NY): Smaller community depended on a core of callers and musicians. As core has shrunk, especially because of people moving away from area, need to replace, especially callers. They have a monthly gathering of wanna-be and experienced callers; the wanna-bes are solicited mainly through announcements at dance events.

Merry Shernock (Mountpelier, VT): Local standard for musicians was 140 beats a minute. They wanted to create a group of new musicians to train up to this standard. Group practices together and has a yahoo web-group

#### Other groups/Individuals:

- \* monthly gathering of callers at individuals' homes
- \* Dance collective modeled on Mad Robin Collective
- \* disappointing experience trying to mentor ECD callers; not enough resources

#### Callers' discussion:

Mary: What works ?

- \* a community dance series specifically for new dancers
- \* workshops for learning callers with regular dancers invited to dance
- \* these dancers bring support back to main dances as they have seen newbies' learning process
- \* matching new callers with seasoned musicians (rather than new callers with new musicians)

Peggy:

- \* designated one dance a month (in a bi- or tri- monthly series) for beginner calling

- \* 15 minutes of gathering with evening's theme; experienced callers can try out new dances; beginners get to practice with a live musician and with a mic; experienced callers able to offer positive feedback
- \* greater dance community started to appreciate the work involved in calling
- \* mostly contra, but some "students" want to try English too; musicians who came also have to try playing in both styles

Mary:

- \* Mad Robins, mostly newer callers with less than 1 year's experience, offer peer support
- \* have been able to host callers' workshop sponsored by CDSS
- \* "lab format" to learn and practice
- \* New York (CDNY) have a formal apprentice program but so many current callers there is not enough opportunities for all; they are not encouraging to new or younger callers

Merry:

- \* caller workshops offered at weekend dance camp but what afterwards?
- \* need follow-up, long-range vision and opportunities to call
- \* as series is dying and needs to be rejuvenated, will people come out to dances with only new callers?

Whole group discussion:

- \* How can we improve/develop local musicians into DANCE musicians not just tune players?
- \* we can compile resources from others who have done this : a starter kit or on-line resources (or forums?)
- \* building space in dance community to accommodate
- \* a caller or musician apprentice mentor (supported by CDSS?) who can go to groups to help; especially important for bands who don't think they need this
- \* local workshops with a strong resource person/dance musician
- \* different reasons for learning/teaching calling:
  - want to call more - establish a new dance series
  - or
  - need to build up caller base
- \* depends on the dance community:
  - larger dance community - caller saturated
  - or
  - smaller community - fewer dancers, fewer potential callers