

# Tucson Friends of Traditional Music

## Step-by-Step Guide to Contra Dancing

Welcome! This guide explains how to get started contra dancing. But remember, the main point of contra dancing is to relax and have fun. Other dancers are usually happy to help you as you're learning, and soon you'll be assisting others too!

### Find a Partner and Get in Line

The best way to start is to get out and participate. Don't wait to be asked to dance; ask someone to be your partner. Women do the asking too! Even if you're a beginner, try dancing with different partners, and not just with other beginners. After you have a partner, get in a contra line and stand together facing the band (*up the hall*), with the woman to the man's right.

### Prepare the Lines for the Dance

The caller begins by telling you where each person starts that dance. "*Take hands four from the top*" means the first couple in the line turn around to face and join hands with the couple below them. The process of forming groups of four repeats itself all the way down the line. In each group of four, the couple closer to the music is called the *top couple, the active couple or couple #1*. The other couple is called the bottom couple, the inactive couple or couple #2. In your group of four, you will have two persons of the opposite sex. The one you agreed to dance with is your *partner*, the other is your *neighbor*.

"*Top couples cross over*" means that the members of each top couple in the line, (now facing *down the hall* or away from the band) change places with each other so that the top woman is again on the top man's right side. This is known as an *improper formation* and is a very common way to start dances. In a *proper formation*, the active couple remains where they started so all the men are in one line and the women are in the other. For a *Beckett formation*, each top couple crosses over, then each group of four forms a circle and moves one place to the left.

### Learn the Dance

Each contra dance consists of a repeating sequence of moves. Some common moves are described on the next page. The caller tells the dancers what the dance sequence will be as they *walk through* the steps. This gives the dancers a chance to familiarize themselves with the dance moves before the music starts.

After each repetition of the basic dance sequence, every couple is *progressed*. You keep your partner, but your neighbors change. Each active couple is now further down the hall and each inactive couple is further up the hall. (In a Beckett formation, couples starting on the left side of the line (when facing the band) move up the hall and couples on the right side move down the hall.) When you reach the end of a line, your progression reverses. In an improper dance, the man and woman change places at the ends of the line so that she is again on the man's right. An active couple will now become inactive and begin progressing up the hall and vice versa. If you did a move on one side while going down the hall, you will do it on the opposite side when going up the hall.

### Dance the Dance

As the music begins after the walk through, the caller gives the first direction and the dancing starts. Try to remember the moves because the caller may stop calling after the dancers have repeated the sequence several times. Keeping time to the music is key for the dancers. Each move should be completed within a certain number of beats and listening to the music can help you keep your steps in time with everyone else. If you finish too early, just pause and wait before starting the next move. If you are late completing a move, skip or shorten the moves and catch up with the music as quickly as possible.

### Keep Coming Back

You'll learn a lot the first time you contra dance, but it takes practice to get familiar with all the moves and variations in the dances. (J.P. says it'll start to click after the third time.) We hope you enjoyed yourself and will keep coming back. Please join us again for the review at the beginning of the evening the next time you come.

## Contra Dance Moves

For simplicity in the descriptions below, partner refers to whatever person you are doing the move with. The caller will specify who actually does the move. It might be two men, two women, two neighbors, or you and your partner for the dance. Where a move can be done to the right or left, it is described here only for the right. For the left move, just change directions or hands.

Always try to **step in time to the music**, one step for one beat. Many moves take 8 beats, or some multiple of 8 to complete.

**Give weight** (resistance) to your partner during swings or moves where you join hands. To give weight, lean slightly away from your partner to produce a slight tension in your arm, hand and fingers (but don't SQUEEZE!). This helps you move in unison.

**Circle Right**- Join hands with your group of four. Step to your right and walk counterclockwise as directed by the caller.

**Long Lines, Go Forward and Back** (8 counts) - Form a long line down the hall by joining hands with the dancers on each side of you. Facing the opposite line, walk forward 3 steps and stomp, back up three steps and stomp.

**Do-si-do** - Face your partner. Walk forward, passing right shoulders with your partner. Once past step sideways to the right to pass back to back, then back up to pass left shoulders. Step sideways to the left to return to your original place.

**Allemande Right** - Face your partner and clasp right hands at chest level. Give weight as you walk clockwise in a small circle.

**Promenade** - Stand beside your partner, join right hands and left hands together (rights above lefts). Walk forward together.

**Balance** (4 counts) - Join hands with your partner as you step forward with your right foot (1). Tap your left foot (2), step back with your left foot (3), and tap your right foot (4). Many variations can be done on counts 2 and 4. Usually followed by a swing.

**Swing** - Get in ballroom room dance position: Partners face each other, the woman puts her left hand on the man's right shoulder; the man puts his right hand behind the middle of the woman's back. Clasp free hands at shoulder level and give weight to your partner. Walk clockwise in double time in a tight circle around a common center. Always end with the woman on the man's right side. It helps to unclasp the hands first as you end the move.

**Gypsy**- Face your partner as you walk clockwise in a small circle. It's like an allemande but you look at each others eyes instead of joining hands. Usually followed by a courtesy turn.

**Pull by** - Face your partner. Join right hands in a handshake position. Pull as you walk toward your partner. As you pass right shoulders, let go.

**Ladies chain** - Two women walk toward each other, join right hands, pull by, then join left hands with the man in the opposite line. Usually followed by a courtesy turn.

**Courtesy turn** - Begin with the woman to the right of the man, left hands joined. The man puts his right arm around the woman's waist and steps backwards as they walk in a small counterclockwise circle back to where they started.

**Right and Left Through** -You and your partner walk toward the two people across from you. Each of you join left hands with the person across from you, pull by, then turn toward your partner, join left hands, and do a courtesy turn.

**Star Right** - In a circle, dancers turn slightly to the left and put right hands in the center. Each dancer clasps the right wrist of the person in front of them, locking all the hands together as they walk clockwise in a circle.

**Hey for 4** - Face the couple across from you. Women: Start across, passing right shoulders. Veer to the right and continue across, passing left shoulders with the man in front of you. Turn left to turn around and go back across passing the woman on the right, man on the left. Men: After the women pass each other, pass left shoulders with the woman approaching you and continue across, passing right shoulders with the other man, left shoulders with the next woman, then turn left to turn around and go back across the same way. You end up where you started, so if problems arise, just go back there. (Can also be started by the men or neighbors, etc.)