

Carl taught folk dance at Rogue  
Community College in Grants Pass.

This collection of instructions, for English,  
Scottish and several other ethnicities,  
was the first source for non-gendered dance  
terminology.

A dancer up in Eugene chose the  
paragraphs highlighted for a lovely  
calligraphed piece that ended up framed  
and hung on many walls in the NW; and  
later, after Carl died, all over.

As with the Gay Manifesto, he put  
an eloquent finger right on a throbbing  
pulse.

## INTRODUCTION

COUNTRY DANCING is the term for the form of dances  
most commonly found in Great Britain. Country dances  
differ from most other folk dances in one major way:  
groups of people cooperate to form geometric patterns.

This family of dances probably stems from pre-Christian  
Celtic culture, and in England and Scotland it devel-  
oped most extensively. But Ireland, New England,  
Scandinavia, Brittany, Wales, and north Germany all  
have similar dances. The different national dances  
vary in the way the body is carried, the footwork, and  
kind of figures, and most of all the music.

This manual is designed to help students in remembering  
the various figures and dance patterns; it can also be  
used by teachers as a source for dances to introduce.  
The dances include a fair selection of newly (20th  
century) choreographed dances in traditional style, but  
the bulk are from the 17th and 18th centuries, that  
grand period when the middle classes took up the  
peasant and court dance motifs and created COUNTRY  
DANCING as we know it. A smattering of Irish, Welsh  
and New England Contras are included along with the  
much larger number of Scottish and English dances.  
Each section contains an index of the dances. No  
attempt is made here to introduce the basics of styling  
and footwork, although the peculiarities of particular  
dances are mentioned.

It should be noted that these dance descriptions make  
no reference to gender. Throughout the 17th and 18th  
century apparently it was obligatory to dance as  
couples, with the men in their appointed places, leading  
their women partners. This was a reflection of the  
complicated etiquette and rigid sex roles of the time.  
Country dancing had its origins in an earlier period,  
where the spiritual and community aspects of the dance  
were at least as important as the courtship aspect.

These dance descriptions, then, attempt to encourage  
the 'groupness' of the dances, rather than the coupling;



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this is very much in the spirit of the folk idiom: dancing has always taken on the contours of the times. And the verbal descriptions of dances in our day ought to assume our philosophical attitudes: that one need not be married, or escorted, to take a place on the dance floor; that we accept each other as people, and for the moment at least leave behind the labels of men & women, child & old person, heterosexual & homosexual, single or married. All of us have a birthright to these dances; terms which are used in the enclosed dance descriptions are written with that foremost in mind.

The country dance form can be thought of as an exquisite vessel, in itself beautiful in shape, highly abstract. We can choose to fill this vessel with whatever meaning we like. If we like, we can pursue a particular friendship; we can rejoice in a sense of community; we can see in the music and dance the highest of spiritual values; we can see it as good fun.

The dance is all of these, and greater than all of them. And as teachers and dancers, we must strive to perceive the dance in its most abstract and neutral form, so as not to impose our particular meaning onto others. The wonderful treasure which has been passed down to us is the spirit, the infrastructure. This has manifested itself in various ways through the centuries, and continues today in this new form.

#### FORMING A SET

The following are suggestions for a contemporary etiquette on the dance floor: the intent is to create an atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to dance, where competition and self-consciousness gives way to cooperation and warmth.

"Longways" are dances with two files of dancers, one facing the other. The caller or teacher announces a "longways for as many as will", and everyone finds themselves in one line or the other. Then, from the top of the set (those closest to the music or caller)

the line divides into group-lets of four or six: "hands four from the top". The person who ends up across the set is one's partner. The person next to one in the sub-set is one's neighbor, and diagonally across the sub-set is one's diagonal. The dance is ready to begin: someone can usually be drafted if the set is one person short. And latecomers should, of course, join in at the bottom of the set.

Many dances are for a prescribed number, rather than 'as many as will'. The caller can say "the next dance is for groups of six (or eight, etc). Form yourselves into a longways." Or if the set is a circle, the group can quickly establish who is one's initial partner by pairing off once the circle is established.

This manner of forming a set avoids all the anxiety of having to ask or be asked to dance; everyone who wishes gets up, and then the sets are formed. It also guarantees that we will dance with an ever-changing stream of faces, and the group will come together as a community rather than breaking up into cliques. No wall-flowers, no most popular's, no competition. And of course, if one has a desire to dance this one with a special friend or spouse, others will respect that.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the dancers and dance teachers of Western Oregon for their role in reworking these dances into their present form. Changes in folk culture occur slowly, and only when the times are ready.

Credit, too, is due to the staff of Rogue Community College in Grants Pass, for their support of the folk dance program and their work in publishing this manual.

by Carl Wittman  
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