

History of Country-, Contra- and Square- Dancing

demonstrated with selected examples
at the ECTA- Convention 2004 / Oberhausen
under the tutoring of Heiner Fischle, Hannover

You can only speculate about the ancestry of Country Dancing. The oldest touchable root is a small book:


The English Dancing Master:

OR, Plaine and easie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances, with the Tune to each Dance.

L O N D O N ,

to be sold by *John Playford*, at his Shop in the Inner Temple neere the Church doore. 1 6 5 1.

The first dance in this first book is

| Upon a Summers Day | Longways for six | ⊙ ⊙ ⊙ ☾ ☾ ☾ |
|--|---|----------------|
|  | | |
| Leade up all a D. forwards and back, set and turne S. <u>•</u> That againe <u>∴</u> | The men take all hands, and the women hands meet all a D. back againe; the first on each side goe under the others armes on their owne side, and meet below <u>•</u> Hands againe, and the next Cu. as much <u>∴</u> Hands againe, and the next Cu. as much <u>∴∴</u> | |
| Sides all, set and turne single <u>•</u> That againe <u>∴</u> | As before <u>∴∴</u> | |
| Armes all, set and turne S. <u>•</u> That againe <u>∴</u> | As before <u>∴∴</u> | |

Formation: Three couples in a lane (Triplet)

This dance has a scheme of **Verse and Chorus**. The verse (part A) changes with every sequence, the chorus (part B) remains the same.

A1: Take your partner by the hand, walk four steps toward the audience, and four steps back. Face your partner, **Set** (step right and close, step left and close; often danced as a Pas-de-Basque) and **Turn Single** (walk four steps in a small circle around your right shoulder). Repeat.

B1: Men #2 and #3 form an arch. Men #1 goes down through the arch and joins the line at the foot. Lady #1 dances the mirror image at the same time. Lines go forward and back. Couples #2 and #3 dance the same pattern. (I follow the suggestion by Pat Shaw to dance first through the arches, then forward and back.)

A2: Walk toward your partner, until right shoulders are close together, and back; set and turn single. Repeat with left shoulders; set and turn single.

B2: as B1

A3: Right arm turn with partner; set and turn single. Left arm turn with partner; set and turn single.

B3: as B1

The first edition of the English Dancing Master contained dances in many different Formations. There were also some dances where two couples face each other, e.g.

| Cuckolds all a row | | For foure | ⊙) (⊙ |
|--|---|-----------|------------|
| | | | |
| <p>Meet all forward and backe <u>•</u> That againe <u>∴</u></p> | <p>Turne back to back to the Co. We. faces againe, goe about the Co. We. not turning your faces <u>•</u> Turne back to back to your owne, faces againe, goe about your owne not turning faces <u>∴</u></p> | | |
| <p>Sides all with your owne <u>•</u> Sides with the Co. <u>∴</u></p> | <p>Men change places We. change places, hands all, goe round <u>•</u> We. change places, men change places, hands all and goe round, to your places <u>∴</u></p> | | |
| <p>Armes all with your own <u>•</u> Arms with the Co. <u>∴</u></p> | <p>Men put the Co. We. back by both hands, fall even on the Co. side men cast off to the right hand, your We. following, come to the same place again <u>•</u> put them back again, fall on your own side, men cast off to the left hand, and come to your places, the We. following <u>∴</u></p> | | |

Formation: Two couples facing each other (Mini-Square)

This dance too follows the scheme of verse and chorus. But here are three different choruses given. Probably this was intended to entertain an audience. If you dance just for fun, it is probably true enough to dance the second part B all three times.

A1 Forward and beck, twice.

B1 as **B2**: Men pass right shoulder and face in (swap), ten the ladies. Join hands and circle left once around. Then the ladies swap, the men swap, and again circle left once around. (You may turn both circles just halfway around, if full around is too fast.)

A2 Face your partner, dance forward until right shoulders are close together, and back. Face your opposite, dance forward until left shoulders are close together, and back.



B2 see above.

A3 Turn your partner right arm once around. Turn your opposite left arm once around.

B3 as B2

The following dance form from the English Dancing Master disappeared from Europe completely. But it was kept alive in remote valleys of the Appalachian Mountains, where it was discovered in 1917 by Cecil Sharp. It has become the Appalachian Big Circle Dance and the Kentucky Running Set. The Kentucky Running Set came across the Mississippi and became the Cowboy Dance - the forerunner of today's Patter Call. But this is a wide field, and it would need another 90 minutes to do justice to the theme of Traditional Square Dance.

Here now is the sample from the English Dancing Master:

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| Up Tailles all | Round for as many as will |  |
|  | | |
| Lead in all a D. and back again, set and turne S. $\underline{\cdot}$ That again $\underline{\cdot}$: | | |
| First Cu. lead through the 2. Cu. cast off and meet within, clap hands and Armes $\underline{\cdot}$ And so forward to the next, the rest following in order $\underline{\cdot}$: | | |
| First Cu. lead through the 2. cast off and meet within, clap hands all foure, hands a crosse all foure, and round to your places, and so forward, &c. | | |
| First Cu. lead through the 2. cast off and meet within, clap hands all foure, and hand round all foure to your places, and so forward, &c. | | |

Formation: Any number of couples in a circle. One couple is designated as the **active couple**.

Einleitung: Into the center forward and back; step right and close, step left and close, dance with four steps a small circle around your right shoulder (set and turn single). Repeat.

First Figure: The active couple split the next couple, separate, come into the middle. Actives clap hands, turn by the right arms around. Go to the next couple and repeat, and so on, until you are back home again. The other couples dance the same figure around the circle.


Second Figure: The active couple split the next couple, separate, come into the middle. All four clap hands and give right hands across to a right hand star. Turn the star once around. The actives go on to the next couple and repeat, etc.

Third Figure: The active couple split the next couple, separate, come into the middle. All four clap hands, then circle four once around. The actives go on to the next couple and repeat, etc.

The second couple must not wait until the first couple is back home again. It may become active as soon as the first couple dances with couple #4, provided all couples know that they must take their place in the big circle and become inactive, as soon as they reached their home position again. (There should be a gap in the big circle to accommodate them.)

In England, long lanes with an unspecified number of couples (**Longways for as many as will**) became most fashionable. Two or three couples danced for one sequence together. The active couple or later the active couples) moved down the set with every sequence, so that everyone had his/her turn to lead the dance from the top. A nice example is

Zephyrs and Flora Longways for as many as will ⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖
⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖



Note, Each Strain is to be play'd twice over.

The 1st Man and 2d Wo. go Back to Back, then give each other their right Hands, and then their left Hands across, and holding so change Places •. Then the 1st Wo. and 2d Man do the same :. The 1st Cu. being in the 2d Cu. Place improper, cast up and figure round the 2d Cu. which brings them into their own Places proper •. The 2d Cu. being in their own Places improper, do the same, which brings them to the 1st Cu. Place :.

Twenty Four Country Dances (Walsh), 1715

Second Book of the Compleat Country Dance Master (1719)

Formation: Contra Lane Proper Duple Minor

First man, second lady Dosado

They give right hands, then left hands, and change places.

First lady, second man Dosado

They give right hands, then left hands, and change places.

First couple cast up (face out, up, and come in above the 2nd couple. Then dance a half figure eight through that couple. This brings the 1st couple back to its original place.

Second couple cast up (face out, up, and come in above the 1st couple. Then dance a half figure eight through that couple. This brings the 2nd couple to the place above couple #1 (Progression).

These dances became popular in France too, where the generic name of **English Country Dances** was translated as **Contre Danses Anglaises**. But most popular in France were such dances where two couples faced each other. Soon two more couples were added at right angles to fence off the dancing space. This became at the end of the 18th century the

French Quadrille

In its classical Form it is an Arrangement of 5 dances: **Les Pantalons** (The Trousers), **L' Été** (The Summer), **La Poule** (The Hen), **La Pastourelle** (The Shepherdess), **Finale** (Ending). Music was taken from any sources - Opera til Folksong - everything 's grist that comes to the mill.

Les Pantalons

Formation: Four Couples in a Square

| Begrüßung der Damen | Grand salut | Honor the ladies |
|--|---|--|
| (Kopfsaare) Englische Kette (hin und zurück) | (Les premiers quatres) chaîne anglaise | (Head couples) right and left thru (over and back) |
| : Vor und zurück : * | : En avant et en arrière : * | : Forward and back : * |
| Damenfette (hin und her) | Chaîne des dames | Ladies chain (over and back) |
| Salbe Promenade | Demie queue du chat | Half promenade |
| Englische Kette zurück | Demie chaîne anglaise | Right and left back |
| Seitpaare wiederholen | Les autres quatres ... | Side couples repeat |

* According to Hillgrove's Call Book and Dancing Master (New York 1864), instead of forward and back the active couples galloped 8 steps across the set and 8 steps back. Since other books of that time warned, that it was insulting to gallop through or around another set, this must have been common practice.

Ete is mainly known to solvers of crossword puzzles.

La Poule

| Begrüßung der Damen | Grand salut | Honor the ladies |
|---|--|--|
| (Kopfsaare) mit dem Gegenüber rechte Hand herum | (Les premiers quatres) main droite | (Head couples) turn your opposite by the right |
| Linke Hand herum, festhalten | Main gauche | Turn by the left, hold on |
| Rechte Hand zum Partner, pendeln rechts und links | Balancez quatre sans vous quitter la main | Right hand to partner, balance right and left |
| Salbe Promenade | Demie queue du chat | Half promenade |
| (Gent 1 und Dame gegenüber) Reverenz | (Les premiers deux de vis-à-vis) grande reverence | (First gent) and opposite lady bow down low |
| Diese Beiden Dos-à-dos | Les memes dos à dos | Same two dosado |
| (Kopfsaare) vor und zurück | (Les premiers quatres) en avant et en arrière | (Head couples) forward and back |
| Englische Kette zurück | Demie chaîne anglaise | Right and left back |
| Seitpaare wiederholen | Les autres quatres ... | Side couples repeat |

The basic **Ladies Chain** from the Quadrille obviously was very popular. But you cannot do it in a "Proper" contra set. Here is an early attempt to include the Ladies Chain in a contra dance:

NEW CENTURY HORNPIPE

First couple balance, swing once and a half round; ladies chain; first couple balance again and swing once and a half round to place; right and left four.

The Description comes from the book *American Dancing Master, and Ball-Room Prompter / Boston: Elias Howe (1862?)*. The name, however, suggests that this dance was written in 1799. And here is, how it is understood today:

Formation: Contra Lane Proper Duple Minor
 Active couples go forward and back
 Two-hand turn partner once and a half
 Ladies chain (start half-sashayed)
 Ladies chain back
 Active couples go forward and back
 Actives two-hand turn partner once and a half to the proper side
 With the couple above slow square thru
 (then face in)

By the way, the book titles of Hillgrove and Howe show, that the Caller or Prompter was a normal institution in America, though it seemed strange or even funny to European visitors.

The something terrific happened: the **Swing** was invented. To "swing your partner" meant to circle (as in the sample above). But when in Europe the waltz stormed the dance halls, in America some brave souls dared a closer hold with the partner. And Scandinavian immigrants added their *Hurretrin* - the Swing was born!

With the Swing, in more and more Contras the active couples crossed over to the other side right from the start. This was considered improper, but it was more fun. Here is another example from the book by Elias Howe:

LADY WALPOLE'S REEL

First couple cross over, 1st lady balance to 2d gentleman and turn (at the same 1st gent. balance to 2d lady and turn). 1st couple down the centre (on opposite sides), back, cast off, ladies chain, half promenade, half right and left.

It is told that Lady Walpole was estranged to her husband, but for social reasons found it necessary to attend dances in his company. At that time, the lady of the top couple had the privilege to select the figure of the dance, When it was Lady Walpole's turn, she always choose this dance, where she had very little contact with her partner. The following variation exaggerates this point even a bit:

Formation: Contra Lane Improper Duple Minor
 With your neighbor balance and swing (16 counts total)
 Four in lines go down; wheel around
 Come back; cast off
 Ladies chain
 Ladies chain back
 Half promenade
 Right and left thru



In Traditional Square Dance - especially in the Singing Calls - quite often you danced the Swing only with your partner. For Example:

Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight

Music: Windsor 4115 / Tanz EP 58 703 (Lizenzpressung)

Aufstellung: Square

(First) couple lead right, circle four hands 'round

Pick up two more, circle six hands 'round

Pick up two more, circle eight hands 'round

There 'll be a hot time in the old town tonight.

Allemande left with the lady on the left

Allemande right with the lady on the right

Allemande left with the lady on the left

Grand right and left, hand over hand around

When you meet, you do a dosado

Take her in your arms, swing her 'round and round and now

You promenade her home, she 's the cutest gal in sight

There 's a hot time in the old town tonight.



But some wanted to swing with every lady, as in a Contra Dance. And at first, this great idea was exaggerated a bit:

Alabama Jubilee

Music: Windsor 4144 / Tanz SP 23 103 (Lizenzpressung)

Aufstellung: Square

Figure:

Four ladies promenade inside that ring

Come back home and swing your partner, everybody swing

Allemande left your corner, bow to your own,

Swing your honey round and round, any old way but upside down.

Four boys promenade inside that ring

Home you go and dosado, but your corner swing

Swing with that corner and you promenade with me

To the Alabama Jubilee, oh yeah,

To the Alabama Jubilee.



The following singing call means something special to me: With this singing call I learned the Basic **Square Thru**. During the 60s, we learned new basics in the framework of a certain dance.

Just Another Polka

Music: Bogan 1157

Opener, Break, Closer:

You allemande left your corner; dosado your partner,

Go back, swing that corner twice around.

Join hands and circle; go hand in hand.

Girls roll away, now weave the ring, it's in and out, go 'round the land.

Hey! when you meet your partner, turn a right hand 'round your partner,

Allemande left; come back and promenade.

This is just another polka, but Holly Smolka,

Oh what a girl in my arms!

Figure:

(Heads) square thru four hands around the world,

Hey! swing that corner girl, yes you swing and you whirl.

Allemande left new corner; come back and box the gnat.

Four little ladies promenade, it's once around the inside track.

Swing that same little lady, boys, swing her twice around,

Hey! promenade this lady, take her home and settle down.

She's got you dancing like you never thought you could,

Arthur Murray never had it so good.

**When I prepared the minidisk for this Seminar, one point became very obvious to me again:
In the past, there was a close relationship between music and dance.**

Now it is up to you, how this will be held in the future.

Yours squarely

Heiner Fischle

If someone was interested to have this time-travel repeated as a club night or special event, I could easily extend it to two and a half hour.

Heiner Fischle

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