

Grants Far and Wide: Ashland Community Dance and Song Weekend

by Brooke Friendly, Ashland, OR

When a group of us in Ashland, OR, wanted to create a new weekend of family and community dance, music, and song, we turned to CDSS and applied for (and received) a community outreach grant. The Ashland Community Dance and Song Weekend was born! Held January 12-13, 2019, in Ashland OR, the event was also a way to encourage more youth involvement and help build a collaborative relationship among several area organizations — Rogue World Music (RWM), the Ashland Country Dancers (ACD, a branch of the Heather and Rose Country Dancers), Southern Oregon Contra Dance (SOContra), and Creekside Strings.

About 130 people total participated in the various events, with folks coming from Southern Oregon and Northern California. Participants included contra dancers, English country dancers, international folk dancers, singers with Rogue World Music and other local choirs, Irish dancers, and a French music group.

On Saturday, the 12th, we had two singing workshops, followed by a family dance that I called to music provided by Creekside Strings fiddle students. The event was attended by 24 - 30 people, and included a performance during the break by a trio of teens.

I also called the evening community dance (a mix of English, contra, ceilidh, Scottish, Irish, and Breton dance), this time to music by the internationally-known band Roguery (Anita Anderson, Dave Bartley, Shira Kammen, and Jim Oakde). At the break we had a performance by Rogue Morris and Sword and a song led a Rogue World Ensemble singer. A local group of folks who play French music joined us and played some bourées and waltzes. This was hugely successful, with more than 80 people in attendance. On Sunday, the 13th, we closed with a community meeting and potluck.



Afternoon dance at the Ashland Community Dance and Song Weekend (photo by Brooke Friendly)

Some comments on the music/singing improvisation workshop:

- “I feel so much more comfortable and inspired to take risks with my singing.”
- “I feel like I had a small breakthrough in my singing.”
- “I learned I can listen and then trust I can create a sound I want to hear.”

And here’s what one of the participants had to say about the community dance:

“So much FUN! I was a total newbie and was wonderfully welcomed and taken care of. I had a blast!”

We now have a successful model. Ashland Country Dancers hosted another community dance on April 5th (with marketing help from RWM and SOContra), and we are talking about options for another family dance.

This event could not have happened without financial assistance from CDSS. We may not be able to again bring a full band from outside the region for something like this but we will continue to cultivate our local musicians and build on the connections made with this collaborative project.