

# Two Dancing Queens Take Princeton By Storm

by Katherine Sanden

Hi! My name is Kat, and I'm entering my senior year at Princeton. This past spring, I had one of my big desires fulfilled—let me tell you about it.

I love contra dancing and wanted to share this wonderful gift with my classmates in a fun and accessible location. I felt that having a free dance on campus would rope in more of my peers and allow students the flexibility to drop in at any point during the night.

I was introduced to contra dancing through my friend Eleanor Fahrney, twenty-nine, a caller who has a passion and skill for sharing traditional dancing with young people. On a backpacking trip in Colorado, we were cooking up beans and rice...and then we cooked up an even better thing.

"Eleanor," I said. "Let's hold a contra dance at Princeton!"

We settled on Spring 2008. Thanks to Eleanor's experience at Pinewoods, she was able to give me some phone numbers for band contacts. The seed was planted.

Having Eleanor's support proved to be key in organizing the dance. She connected me with the Contraptions, a Philadelphia-based contra dance band. We wanted band members who were young and able to relate to college students. We were thrilled when the Contraptions agreed to do the gig, even before we had solidified a venue and

funding. The date was set for April 18, 2008, and we began our quest to work out the details.

This quest turned out to be quite an adventure.

I explored multiple possibilities for funding, such as clubs and student organizations. At first, nothing seemed to work. I was learning a lot about navigating the bureaucracies of college funding sources. April rolled around, and I began to get scared and frustrated.

A week before the event, I had some leads, but not enough money had been secured. I was nervous that the whole thing would be a bust. You can imagine that I was afraid Eleanor would fly out from Colorado, and the Contraptions would block out a night of their weekend, for nothing.

So I called Eleanor—she is one savvy dance diva. We talked through it, and she helped me brainstorm some steps we could take, to make the dance happen. We knew we had an awesome idea that couldn't be choked. That afternoon, we both made some phone calls to ask for more money, and were amazed at the way it worked out.

We got enough funding to pay for the caller, band and sound gal, while meeting our initial goal of offering a free — and spectacular—event. Our main sources of funding were CDSS and Butler College (a residential college at Princeton). Butler College provided us with a venue, and we finalized our dance: Friday, April 18, from 10 pm



Top left: Princeton undergrad, Tao Tao Liu, has a great time; center: the Contraptions (Nora, Bill and Chloe); left: undergrads and grads dancing in Wu Café; above: Eleanor clogs while calling. Photos courtesy Kat Sanden and Eleanor Fahrney; used with permission.

to 1 am in Wu Café (a spot on campus).

It seems like several ingredients went into the elixir that brought our success. The first was the camaraderie and dynamics between Eleanor and me. We had an “anything is possible” attitude that ended up proving true. Eleanor arrived the morning of the dance and I was able to introduce her around campus during the day. My friends were intrigued by our synergy and many came dancing that evening. In addition to the venue, free snacks and funding we got from Butler College and CDSS, the flexibility and dedication of the Contraptions was a crucial ingredient. It was a pleasure to work with them and we can’t wait to do it again.

The final ingredient in our elixir was the support of the Princeton Country Dancers (PCD). They helped us create a lively, friendly atmosphere during the dance. PCD advertised the event to their younger dancers (some of which were students at the University).

When we mixed the experienced PCD dancers with the thirty or so newcomers, the result was pure magic. The sounds coming from the crowd included stomping, hollering and cheering. It was fulfilling for me to watch a lot of my classmates, many of whom had never even heard of contra dancing, jump into the dance and enjoy themselves.

For a moment, it was overwhelming to have so many beginners flooding the room, but it was no problem for Eleanor. She engineered some perfect beginner dances, which got everyone involved. She brought an enthusiasm that was able to match the energy level of the crowd.

Later in the night, Eleanor began whipping out some more complicated contra dances. During these dances, the experienced PCD folks, interspersed among the group, provided a safety net—they helped beginners follow the calls and dance patterns. One of the highlights for me was beat-boxing\* with the band during one song—it added even more excitement to an already excited crowd. The Contraptions and I are looking forward to integrating beat-boxing into more dances.

Eleanor and I are so happy with our first on-campus contra dance. Thank you, CDSS!

We look towards the future with bright eyes, open arms and a tune on our lips. Our goal is to do a similar event—a free, on-campus dance—next year. Until then, we’ll be pretty busy. I’m working on my final coursework, and Eleanor is organizing her fifth annual dance

weekend in Buena Vista, Colorado, entitled Stellar Days and Nights. It’s scheduled for February 19-22, 2009. Check it out!

\* making percussive sounds with your mouth

*Princeton Country Dancers hold contra dances on Wednesdays and fourth Saturdays, and English country dances on second Saturdays; see their website for more information, [princetoncountrydancers.org](http://princetoncountrydancers.org). Stellar Days and Nights is sponsored by Arkansas Valley Music and Dance; see [www.stellardaysandnights.org](http://www.stellardaysandnights.org) or call 970-309-3175 for details. When Kat does another dance at Princeton University, we’ll let you know!*

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