Contra Pulse Episode 9: Kate Barnes

**Julie Vallimont**

Hi everyone, and welcome to contra pulse. This is Julie Vallimont**.** Today we speak with Kate Barnes, a mainstay of the contra scene for decades. Her piano stylings are legendary, and she also plays flute and guitar. Kate has played in many seminal bands over the years and appears on over 70 recordings. Kate plays for many styles of dance in addition to contra dancing, and is also well known for playing in the English country dance band Bare Necessities. She has written books about contra piano, English country dance music, couples dance music, and more. On the contra stage these days you can find her with the improvisatory contraband, Latter Day Lizards, and a bunch of other combinations.

Kate is the 2020 recipient of the CDSS lifetime contribution award. Kate was selected in recognition of many years of performance and teaching at CDSS programs, the international importance of her publications, her generosity of spirit when running music workshops, and her contributions to current and future communities. It was wonderful to speak with her about her beginnings in contra dance piano, her experiences over the years, and her thoughts as a diverse musician.

**Julie Vallimont**

Hello, Kate Barnes, and welcome to Contra Pulse.

**Kate Barnes**

Thank you! Honored to be here.

**Julie Vallimont**

I am so happy to have you here — the honor is really all ours. I like giving people weather updates at the beginnings of these interviews.

**Kate Barnes**

That's good, because I don't really know what it's like outside.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, right. We're again on my porch; it's 85 and humid and beating down sun, but we're in the shade. And we'll make the best out of the weather today. And I'm so glad to see you here. I haven't seen you for months.

**Kate Barnes**

I know! I think last time I saw you was in Atlanta.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. Yeah. Oh, remember dance weekends?

**Kate Barnes**

Vaguely.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, you know you're someone whose playing I've known for years. Like when I learned how to play contra piano, you were one of the people who was my biggest inspiration.

**Kate Barnes**

I didn't know that.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh yeah, I was dancing in Boston at the Scout House and I went to the Yankee Ingenuity dance every week. And then I spent a lot of time with your book "Interview with a Vamper", which has a lot of fun things in it. I mean, I photocopied things and cut them out and brought them to the practice room and did things like that.

**Kate Barnes**

Wow. When was this?

**Julie Vallimont**

Fifteen years ago, maybe? Around then. I'm so excited to sit and talk about piano with you today.

**Kate Barnes**

Ironically, if I had to play, if I had to sightread my transcriptions, I probably couldn't do it.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's interesting. Different parts of the brain for sure. So, I would love to hear anything you want to share about how you got started playing for contras, and how did it all happen? You've had such an interesting journey through the contra scene.

**Kate Barnes**

It is funny, I started as a dancer, this friend of mine in college with whom I did coffee houses on guitars had a summer place up in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire. So he invited me to a contra dance. I'm like, my God, that sounds like a nerdy activity. Not that I was the coolest kid on the block anyway, but I went and I danced up in Fitzwilliam to Duke Miller. And it was okay, but it wasn't great. I thought, I don't know. But he didn't show up. So the next week, he said, I'm sorry, I didn't show up. I'll show up this time for sure. So I go all the way up to New Hampshire, I didn't drive, I had to hitch a ride with Ernie Spence. And that time, I think it made me think that if you get someone to go to a dance twice, you've got them hooked, because I did get hooked. And then after that, I would hitch a ride with Ernie up to the Fitzwilliam dance. And I would watch what the pianist was doing. Because I started as a pianist when I was a kid, that was my first instrument. And I thought, hey, I could do that, and this music is so great. Because if I ever wrote a tune even before I ever discovered contra dance music, it turned out to be like a reel or polka. I just have the bent that way. So anyway, there I am as a dancer and I'm thinking, you know, I could probably do that on the piano. And then, once during the break, I sat down and played with someone, might have been April Limber, and the guy who ran the dance, Jim Kennedy said, hey, you can play and then he started hiring me. Oh, but the real thing that got me started was Bob McQuillen. Because I was playing, I brought a flute along and used to play at the side of the hall. I don't know if you've heard this story or not.

**Julie Vallimont**

I haven't.

**Kate Barnes**

And he saw me one night, there playing my flute on the side shyly. And he said, you get up here, as he would do. So I was I, I ulp-ed and then I walked up on the stage and he said, sit right here and he banged his accordion place. Now play. And I did and it was like, the greatest moment of my life. And from then on I was hooked. So I guess I started on the flute, in contra dance music and then moved to the piano later.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. How old were you? What decade was this when this was all happening?

**Kate Barnes**

Well the summer after the freshman year in college, so 71-72 maybe?

**Julie Vallimont**

So that's like a time when your life is normally changing a lot anyway, but this is probably actually life changing for you.

**Kate Barnes**

It was, it was.

**Julie Vallimont**

Looking at how your life has gone now.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I'd be a badly paid coffeehouse singer by now instead of a badly paid contra dance musician.

**Julie Vallimont**

Lucky for us.

**Kate Barnes**

Lucky for me, I guess.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. So you started playing piano then, and who was the piano player there? Do you know?

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. Sometimes Mac would play the piano, but more often he was on accordion. And there was a woman named Janet Paolitti, who was a piano player. And often she and this fiddler Roger Pinard??????? would play. And it was a great classic New England sound.

**Julie Vallimont**

Wow. And then, did you have other influences when you were learning, or did you just kind of make it up as you went?

**Kate Barnes**

I kind of made it up. I knew how to do oompah because after listening to Lester Flatt of Flatt and Scruggs.

**Julie Vallimont**

Wow.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, that's where I got my basis in the basic boom-chuck feel and the importance of bass runs.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, your left hand is a creative beast. Wow. So then you started playing in Boston at some point?

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I was playing up in Fitzwilliam and once Donna Heinz back then she's Donna Hebert now. She heard me play and said, Oh, I'm starting a dance in the fall in Boston. It was the Brimmer and May contra dance. This might have been 77 and she said, I'd love you to come and play piano. Which I was like, oh, man, a gig! So yeah, that fall I started playing at the Brimmer and May contra. I would alternate actually, I think It might have been at the Y in Cambridge in Central Square back then. And I would alternate with Tony Parkes on piano. Well, I gotta say, who also was one of my huge early influences.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely. Tony's piano style is great. It's a very, like New England style. And I really love that.

**Kate Barnes**

I think it's kind of French Canadian-esque.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, that's true, maybe that's what I think of as the New England style. I just mean it sounds traditional. It doesn't sound like jazz chords and hits and syncopations everywhere, but maybe....

**Kate Barnes**

What does my style sound like?

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, gosh, your style sounds like everything. [Kate laughs] But I think I think your style is rooted in New England playing probably. It's rooted in in oompah. But it goes all over the place, wherever your whims tend to go.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. Well, when I started it was always was the case that there was just one rhythm player. So I really had to hold down the rhythm.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. How did that change your playing?

**Kate Barnes**

Well, it made my left hand pretty dominant. And it made me know that If you ain't got rhythm, baby, you ain't got nothing.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's right. I think to quote a legendary contra pianist, Kate Barnes, I think it's better to play the right thing at the wrong time. No wait , I said it wrong!

**Kate Barnes**

Better to play the wrong thing at the right time than the right thing at the wrong time.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's better to play the right thing at the wrong time. No, it's not, it's better to play the wrong thing at the right time than the right thing at the wrong time. Somebody quoted you saying that and it's very true.

**Kate Barnes**

The quote I usually get back of mine is oh, I love it when you stop playing, regarding rhythm breaks.

**Julie Vallimont**

They never say, oh, we love it when you come back in do they?

**Kate Barnes**

I know. But luckily the crowd response does it for you.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely. I mean, it's implied. Right. So you played then in the Boston scene for many years and eventually I think Yankee Ingenuity, maybe that coalesced with......

**Kate Barnes**

Probably until Jeanne and I moved to Western Mass. Fifteen years ago whenever that was.

**Julie Vallimont**

That was when I was a new piano player, because I went to the last Yankee Ingenuity dance. I remember that change. So now, what do you play for contra mostly? You have the Latter Day Lizards.

**Kate Barnes**

Right and you know, various pickup things. Sometimes I'm very happy to be asked to sub with Moving Violations.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, fun.

**Kate Barnes**

When he can't make it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, Eric Eid-Reiner.

**Kate Barnes**

Eric, yes, right. I don't know, things here and there sometimes local gigs like college freshmen, introduction dances or various weddings which I love. I love the variety. But yeah, Latter Day Lizards is my main contra dance band. Love those guys.

**Julie Vallimont**

It just seems like you're all having endless fun up there.

**Kate Barnes**

Well, that was officially the beginning motto of the band, because we'd all been in bands that weren't fun. So, so we all decided to form a new band under the premise that it had to be fun for all of us.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's great. And that's you and Dave Langford and Bill Tomczak. And then sometimes a bassist when you...

**Kate Barnes**

Often augmented by Corey DiMario or Mark Murphy are current favorites.

**Julie Vallimont**

How does playing with a bass player affect things for you?

**Kate Barnes**

It frees me up.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, interesting.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. So my right hand can do a lot more sometimes to the frustration of bass players, because I can't wean myself away from wanting to provide a solid bass foundation, even when the bass is there. Now I will say with the band, Big Bandemonium, probably the most fun band I've ever been in. There was a guitar player and a bass player. And that somehow, that freed me up I did all kinds of right hand stuff, which is great. I started getting into these pseudo-montuno...Latinesque...

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh fun, those are the things that go like [singing].

**Kate Barnes**

Exactly.

**Julie Vallimont**

Syncopated. Where they anticipate the downbeat is...so do you that with your thumb on your right hand?

**Kate Barnes**

No, what I found is you can get that perfect Latin sound, not the technique but the sound by playing two octaves apart in unison. on the higher end of the piano.

**Julie Vallimont**

Okay with both hands, you're gesturing with both hands.

**Kate Barnes**

Right. So obviously, it's good to have a rhythm section. Doing what they need to do.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. That's interesting because when you say guitar and bass, I instantly think oh, that is a cage. It really depends on where you want to express your freedom is it chordally, or is it texturally?

**Kate Barnes**

Yes. Right.

**Julie Vallimont**

Like, if you don't need to express yourself chordally as much if everyone just kind of playing the chords that go with the tune, then that gives you a lot of freedom.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, and you know, we all have mouths, you can always say let's do this progression. Most of us.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right, although it's funny to watch fiddle players talk while they fiddle some of them can do it and some of them cannot.

**Kate Barnes**

I know. Rodney Miller has gotten much better in that regard, I used to have great fun trying to talk to him while he played.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's fun. So if you were going to describe your piano style, how would you describe it?

**Kate Barnes**

I suppose you might say grounded in solid rhythm, but endless variety, just to keep myself entertained.

**Julie Vallimont**

I think boredom is an underrated creative force.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. I always say boredom is the father of invention.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, interesting. Yeah, it's just the sheer number of hours you spend on stage and trying to....

**Kate Barnes**

It's the best training there is to have a regular gig. That and listening a lot to other styles of music. Because I think my biggest influences have been like, Irish guitar players, and blues pianists. Because there weren't a lot of pianists around when I was starting, just Mac pretty much.

**Julie Vallimont**

What did the other bands have? Did they have guitar?

**Kate Barnes**

What other bands were there then?

**Julie Vallimont**

Just all the same piano player? Or how does that work?

**Kate Barnes**

There weren't a lot of bands then. it was mostly a pickup thing. I can't answer that question because I don't know who another band around the early 70s would have been.

**Julie Vallimont**

But even like in terms of pickup groups, did most of the dances you went to have piano players at them?

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, yeah, it was rare to find a guitar player.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, yeah, that was what I thought. Yeah, now it's not that way anymore.

**Kate Barnes**

Yes, the the tide has turned. Which is unfortunate because the piano is such a great arrangement instrument. It's like you can do so much great arranging on the fly, because of its massive power in the bass end. And also all the all the right hand high stuff you can do while guitar, it's a little more limited in range.

**Julie Vallimont**

So that you can do things that then steer the group that you're playing with.

**Kate Barnes**

Exactly. Exactly.

**Julie Vallimont**

You've a lot of power as a piano player.

**Kate Barnes**

Don't you feel that as a piano player?

**Julie Vallimont**

Yes. I try to wield it responsibly.

**Kate Barnes**

Of course, but if you have to run roughshod, you can.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely and it's got this tone that carries very well in a dancehall, a fuller tone than most guitars have. Just the way the notes are created. And the biggest dynamic range, and because it's a percussion instrument, it can be very rhythmic.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

The one thing I wish I could do on the piano is having the rhythmic variations that strumming can do like that kind of chugging...

**Kate Barnes**

I know, I know. Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

Which is why I'm a big fan of piano plus guitar together.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I know. I know what you mean. Fills a nice hole in there. I try to fill that with the inner voicing though.

**Julie Vallimont**

How do you do that? Is that like a third hand thing with your thumbs? Or is that....

**Kate Barnes**

It's your right hand, thumb and sometimes index finger are part of the downbeat, and the rest of your hand gets the offbeat chord.

**Julie Vallimont**

So in that sense, you can really do three things at once, your left hand.....

**Kate Barnes**

And it's a nice kind of tenor line in the middle of the arrangement. Because no one else is there really.

**Julie Vallimont**

And where your thumb sits, it's usually around like the middle C or the A below it in that range, which is usually a little bit below the fiddle tune.

**Kate Barnes**

I'd go as low as like an F sharp below middle C.

**Julie Vallimont**

So it doesn't really get in the way of the tune that much.

**Kate Barnes**

Hopefully, you can ask the melody players what they think.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, somebody told me the story of when they would play with fiddlers, if they took their right hand above, much above middle C the fiddle reached over and slammed the piano lid.

**Kate Barnes**

Yes. That was John Campbell. This Cape Breton piano player.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. Get out of my way. If you play above here I will chop off your fingers.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, literally.

**Julie Vallimont**

Wow. How do you think your style has changed over the years?

**Kate Barnes**

It's funny. Well, I think when I started I was I mean, McQuillen was my model. So I pretty much tried just to do that. And I think then syncopation crept in, probably due to the Irish guitar influence and then my bass runs got more and more ornate and then I discovered the boogie woogie bass run. You know, [sings a bass line], you know, 1 3 5 6, flat seven and back down. I learned about rhythm breaks so playing up high and leaving the bass alone for a while or laying out all together. Now my thing is I think a lot of syncopated right hand chords, while just doing a simple drone in the in the left hand and these are all as kind of breaks from the normal rhythm, which I also try to maintain with a good bass line.

**Julie Vallimont**

So what would some of these syncopated rhythms be like?

**Kate Barnes**

[sings syncopated rhythms]

**Julie Vallimont**

So they're really like little motifs.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

Do you ever take solos?

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, once in a while. I'm a little uncomfortable doing that. But yeah, more and more, I think. Yeah, cuz hey, at my age what the heck, I got nothing to lose.

**Julie Vallimont**

Soloing is an art all in itself. But soloing is also like accompaniment in a way where a lot of solos, especially for beginning soloists, they're just combinations of riffs and licks and things that you play.

**Kate Barnes**

Isn't that what tunes are anyway?

**Julie Vallimont**

Exactly. So in that sense, the interesting thing is how do you combine them in novel ways? And it's like how we talk, you know, we're talking using common phrases. We're not trying to reinvent new phrases every time we say something.

**Kate Barnes**

[Jokingly] I'm sorry, I don't understand. [Laughter]

**Julie Vallimont**

So you know, soloing can be mystifying but to get to that place where you feel like really inspired like you've really said something that's a different place.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I feel that maybe 1% of the time.

**Julie Vallimont**

Do you feel inspired when you play? Like, when do you feel inspired? I always used to ask, When do people feel inspired? But then I talked to someone who says their brain doesn't work via inspiration at all.

**Kate Barnes**

Wow, who is that?

**Julie Vallimont**

I'm sure he wouldn't mind but my dear fiddler bandmate Noah VanNorstrand. His brain doesn't get like, "inspired." He's just always the same amount of great. And you can, he responds so like, if I play something, he'll react to it and that sounds really inspired. But like, I have days when I'm inspired and not inspired.

**Kate Barnes**

Isn't that inspiration? I mean, come on.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, right. It's interesting, but I have days when I'm like, oh, I'm not feeling creative today. Or I am feeling really creative today and he doesn't have those oscillations. He's always the same amount of creative unless his mood or body isn't, you know,

**Kate Barnes**

Well, I, I don't have periods where I feel creative, but it's more like, I do get inspired by some, usually something someone else in the band is doing. But also the crowd, if they're into it that's inspiring. If I discover a new way to do something that inspires me. Because I really I don't like playing unless I'm working on something. Know what I mean?

**Julie Vallimont**

Interesting. Yeah. You want to feel like it's......

**Kate Barnes**

It's like constant on the job training.

**Julie Vallimont**

You mean you also play for other kinds of dancing as well...

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, right. I was thinking though there have been several times in my career when I thought, man, this music is really really boring. And I get bored. And then it's like, God, what am I gonna do? I can't do anything else. And then I discovered some new technique or a new sound or a new progression and I, you know, I milked that for all it was worth and it keeps me going.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, 'cause you can get an idea. But I'm really into getting an idea and then trying to take it like as deep as possible, like, just explore the hell out of it. Maybe I don't get that many ideas. I don't know. Or just maybe an idea worth having is worth exploring to what I find to be its end.

**Kate Barnes**

It's like when I go to a foreign country, and I learned one word. I will f\*\*\*ing use that word everywhere. Because it's so gratifying.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right.

**Kate Barnes**

And it inspires you to learn more.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, it's your first step. And that's the great thing about bandmates is that when you have an idea, they can help take it deeper and they can add their own takes on that idea and then everyone feeds on everybody else.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, both the Lizards and Bare Necessities are good that way. In fact, I don't think I belong to any band where improvisation isn't the modus operandi of the band. I wouldn't like it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. I mean, that's a lot of your language, and just your way of operating. So that makes sense. I mean, it's always fun dancing to your music, because you just never know. It's like dancing to a constantly streaming river of ideas.

**Kate Barnes**

This is why the Lizards rarely play more than one tune. We don't do medleys very often because we have so much fun, just wringing every last bit of fun out of a tune.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. And if you had a second tune, you probably would just kind of never get to it.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, that's what frequently happens.

**Julie Vallimont**

Let's see, where can I go? I was going to ask you a big question, but maybe I'll ask you a smaller question. But I'm curious, like, how do you think the contra scene has been changing in the years that you've been in it?

**Kate Barnes**

Well, when I started it was very much a, like a village affair. People of all ages went. Yeah. So you know, there are old people, young people, kids, all kinds of people. And this is true up until, I don't know, maybe 1980 or something. And there started to become this movement among people my age at the time, where it became much more focused on the dance and less on the community experience. At least from the view of the band, it seemed that way. And so the age range narrowed. And that's also when a lot of bands started up. I don't know if that's related or not. So the feeling, the feeling of the dance changed and sometimes it would feel, I think Tod Whittemore would echo this sentiment, like, people were just going to the gym, like an exercise thing. Because a dance would end and bang, people would be booking the next dance there's very little talking or socializing. This is not to say that outside the dance scene these people didn't get together, but being an incredibly shy introvert, I never would have known about that, anyway.

**Julie Vallimont**

I remember when I first started dancing in the Boston scene, I didn't know that booking ahead was a thing that happened. And, you know, not coming from this. Not having done anything like this before where you had to ask for partners. I'd often just end up sitting out and then I would finally work up the courage to ask someone to dance. But I would go on to the floor to find a partner and everyone just all disappeared in all their different directions. Because I didn't realize they were already booked ahead. So my experience as a dancer was I would walk onto the floor and everyone parted away from me like and all went to find their own partners.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I know. It's weird.

**Julie Vallimont**

And if it weren't for a few folks who would dance with me, I don't think I ever would have learned to dance, which would have meant I never would have learned how to play for dancing. You know, Bob Fuller was somebody who always would ask me to dance in the Scout House, and he basically taught me how to dance every Thursday, he would dance with me, and he didn't care if I messed up. And that was really a gift. So do you know like, what circumstances were happening around that shift or what might have...

**Kate Barnes**

I think contra dancing got really popular among that age group. I'm not sure why.

**Julie Vallimont**

And then that changed how people were acting on the dance floor?

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. It became much more about the dance and people would get bored if they did a dance, which was like the previous one or something. I mean, when I started, the program was pretty set. Every day, every dance, they'd be Money Musk after the break. And there's a certain cycle of dances that Duke Miller would go through every week. And it was fine. It was great. And it allowed us all to kind of socialize with each other more. And nowadays, choreographers, I don't know if it's true lately, but every dance had to have a partner swing and a corner swing in it, it became about the swinging. And also musically bands, you know, they got more and more complicated with their arrangements and started adding more and more members and I think somewhere in the 80s or maybe 90s the groove phenomenon happened, where it was less about banging the rhythm in and more about a very even, I'm sure you know what I mean by this. Which I'm not casting aspersions on it because that's fine. We do that too, but it was definitely a change in the in the approach.

**Julie Vallimont**

Do you think that changes how people relate to each other on the dance floor?

**Kate Barnes**

I don't know, why would it? Tell me?

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, I don't know. I'm just wondering, like, I always wonder, partly what I'm interested in is does the kind of music affect how we dance? And how we relate to each other as a community?

**Kate Barnes**

That's interesting. I haven't thought about that. What do you think?

**Julie Vallimont**

I don't know. I don't have data, I'm a scientist at heart, well, not at heart, in mind. I'm a scientist in mind and a piano player at heart. So we don't have data about it. But I just wonder. It seems like there's this phenomena that happened, where there's this blossoming of choreography and a lot of innovation in choreography. There's also a lot of innovation in musical styles and arrangements and more bands and less pickup bands, which is what facilitates all these arrangements. And then also some of these things happening on the dance floor where the reason that people are dancing is a little bit different.

**Kate Barnes**

Well, that'd be a great paper.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. And then they all feed each other, you know? When there's more complicated choreography, then the callers have more requests of the bands. Like I remember, like as a new band, starting out my first contra band. We're like, okay, we have to make sure we have some slinky jigs. Okay, we need some rags and we need reels, and that you have to be able to play eight different genres as a contra band and then a hambo at the break. I didn't know how to play hambo, I was terrified.

**Kate Barnes**

Well, the sad thing is when I started, there are all kinds of couple dances done after break. You know, varsovienne, and the Gay Gordons and I don't know, all kinds of things, Boston Two Step and then David Kaynor popularized the hambo and that became the dance at the break.

**Julie Vallimont**

Is that where that came from?

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's a fun dance.

**Kate Barnes**

If you can do it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right, it's not the most very beginner friendly dance. And so when you have new people at your dance if that's the only couples dance, you can accidentally leave people out.

**Kate Barnes**

Right.

**Julie Vallimont**

Although it is just fun to watch and it's a good excuse to stand around and talk to your neighbor. If you can't dance it and you're looking at the people who are.

**Kate Barnes**

It's true. I'd rather do a Zwiefacher.

**Julie Vallimont**

A Zwiefacher, for those listeners who don't know, a Zwiefacher is kind of like a waltz but with different amounts of...like you have waltz and pivot steps, so they're not always in three. How would you describe a Zwiefacher?

**Kate Barnes**

Just like that, just like [sings a Zwiefacher] so that's two measures of three and two measures of two, two waltzes and then two pivots.

**Julie Vallimont**

[Sings]. Delightful.

**Kate Barnes**

And they can get very thorny, the arrangements.

**Julie Vallimont**

Would they post the format of the Zwiefacher somewhere?

**Kate Barnes**

Usually, like a caller would have a card with the formation written on it, or just say it verbally beforehand, if it's not too complicated.

**Julie Vallimont**

I remember the varsovienne. I had never seen that dance before. And it's funny because these are the things that you kind of came up dancing at all your dances. And then at Maine Fiddle Camp last year, Sylvia Miskoe taught it to our accordion class and so we all played the tune and then we danced it with our accordions on. It was very sweet.

**Kate Barnes**

That's great. That's great.

**Julie Vallimont**

I would love to bring some of these things back at some of our dances.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, me too. Me too.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, I was talking with Arthur Davis in a previous interview about how evolution happens and innovation happens, and it's not always intentional, it's just accidental. Sometimes we just sort of stopped doing things and nobody knows why.

**Kate Barnes**

Well, don't you think if you do something too many times, if you're worth your salt at all, you're gonna come up with some other thing to do.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right.

**Kate Barnes**

In other words boredom is the father of invention,

**Julie Vallimont**

We all love new things. Like now it's like, you can watch it happening like the hambo was the cool and exciting thing. But now it's like slangpolska, or doing French dances at the break, or mazurkas or bourrée. Those are the things like ooh, we're doing this at the break now.

**Kate Barnes**

It's pretty cool.

**Julie Vallimont**

And then someday, those would be the institutionalized boring things. "Oh, we gotta do another bourrée. Here we go. It's so hard." And then maybe something else will happen.

**Kate Barnes**

This is why I think tradition doesn't really exist. Because I think musicians a thousand years ago, as well as nowadays, if they play something often enough, they're gonna find a way to change it and make it more fun for themselves. So saying that this is the way they did it at any certain time is a little dicey. Because I think musicians are always innovating, well, the good ones anyway. Interestingly, the ones who complain about a new sound or a new tradition are often not the best musicians. I'm gonna get a lot of hate mail about that one.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, this is a place of conversation. There's no right or wrong in Contra Pulse, just ideas.

**Kate Barnes**

Hang on to that naïve attitude.

**Julie Vallimont**

Till I get the emails. Well, that's what I strive to create. So that's my out. I can just tell people, nope. But I think it's worth considering these things. I mean, I think if you if you aren't innovating, If you're not one of the ones who is, then it can feel threatening when things change.

**Kate Barnes**

Oh, absolutely.

**Julie Vallimont**

Or you might actually just prefer it the way it was. And you might not like the innovations in the directions they're going in, which I think is legitimate.

**Kate Barnes**

Because I kind of feel that way. I mean, I would adapt my style to whatever the current fad was. And lately, it's like, ah forget it. I like my style. You know?

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah.

**Kate Barnes**

Now I have the luxury of being old and a little established so I can have that attitude. I think if I were younger, I'd feel like I better adapt or sink, you know.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. I mean, there is the thing it's like, I feel like the contra scene isn't the most competitive scene and mostly it's very cooperative and community-based. But I think bands do feel like they have to differentiate themselves and prove themselves. Especially if they want to get on the the nationwide dance weekend circuit.

**Kate Barnes**

Only makes sense.

**Julie Vallimont**

You know, you have to kind of have a sound and almost kind of a certain kind of sound. There are some very good bands that don't get hired. Because they don't have whatever these dance organizers and dancers want for a dance weekend.

**Kate Barnes**

What do they want, novelty?

**Julie Vallimont**

Excitement. I don't know. Yeah, novelty, excitement.

**Kate Barnes**

So it's a good band, you're talking about a good band that doesn't have excitement?

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, it's more of a modern sound versus a more traditional sound.

**Kate Barnes**

Oh, yeah. Would you put the Lizards in that category?

**Julie Vallimont**

I think you're kind of in the middle.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I think you're right.

**Julie Vallimont**

I think you're all very good at what you do, that's special. Because your roots are in traditional [contra], but it's so improvisatory. That's magic, and there aren't as many bands that do that style anymore. I think a lot of the dance weekend bands are more about arrangements.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, in fact, there's another popular band whose name I won't mention, they arrange everything before they go on tour and they pretty much play the same program every gig. It's like we would die if we had to do that.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. And I just think how can you adapt to the moment, like my favorite thing as a musician is creating a unique moment with that caller and those people in that hall at that time. And if you're coming in every time... when we were newer, especially callers would want to pre program with us. And because we didn't have a lot of repertoire, we would happily do it. But it never feels right. You know, because you can't put things in the order that they feel right and you can't read the hall and decide....

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

And like, there's just a lot of instinct... like when I play with Buddy System, I pick all the tunes because Noah doesn't. His brain is just like... [implying that Noah can't think of a tune to play] nothing.

**Kate Barnes**

He never gets inspired.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, his brain is different, right? I'm glad I'm interviewing him later. Everyone who heard me talk about Noah, please don't take it literally. Let's hear from him. And we'll wait a few weeks for my interview with Noah to be continued and we'll explore his brain. But I think there's some people who don't know how their brain works, they just play. And you don't have to be able to explain, which is why not all great musicians are good music teachers, because they can't always put into words what they're doing and being able to break it down. And then there's people like me who are like overly verbal [laughing] and can verbalize everything they're thinking and doing, much to the detriment of everyone around them.

**Kate Barnes**

That's funny. Yeah, I don't know how analytical I tend to get about my own playing. I think Lao Tze, the the Taoist philosopher, said, if you examine something too much, it'll die. I've always been worried about well, if I look at it too closely, will the magic disappear?

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, that's something I should keep in mind in this podcast for sure. This isn't a musicological study. It's just interesting stories and interesting conversations and personalities. Do you have favorite moments that you can remember on stage over the years? I know your website used to, I haven't been to it in a while. But your website used to have all these great gig stories. Gig horror stories and everything. But do you remember some just great moments when you are feeling like.....

**Kate Barnes**

I remember the great moments, not the horrible moments.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, right. When you're like, I love this.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I mean, it happens a lot when when everyone on the band, everyone on the stage seems really in sync and people are into it and and the rhythm is spot on, and I'm able to do a lot of improvisatory stuff. It's like, man, I just love those moments. It's like just totally in the in the pocket. Sometimes the Lizards are lucky enough to play with both, like Corey and Pokey.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, wow, that's a rhythm section.

**Kate Barnes**

I know. And it's awesome. I mean, it really changes the band. We have to adapt to the sound of a drum, but man, those are great moments.

**Julie Vallimont**

So this is Corey DiMario on bass and "Pokey" Mark Hellenberg on drums. And I mean, Pokey has been like the number one drummer like the contra dance drummer for so long.

**Kate Barnes**

The only contra dance drummer?

**Julie Vallimont**

There's a few others, but he's definitely the most ubiquitous.

**Kate Barnes**

Oh, man, he flies somewhere 52 weeks a year?

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. And he lays down the Pokey groove.

**Kate Barnes**

No drummer does anything like it. Too many drummers make it sound like a Sousa march.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, interesting.

**Kate Barnes**

And he also is someone of constant variety which is great.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. Do you feel like he'll follow you on your......

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, we follow each other.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. A lot of in jokes as well.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, he literally has a lot of bells and whistles and so do you in your playing, so it seems like a good stylistic match.

**Kate Barnes**

Our favorite thing to trade back and forth on stages, ethnic musical stereotypes which I won't go into or you'll get more hate mail.

**Julie Vallimont**

I mean, you're the kind of person who slips in a lot of quotes while you play.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah

**Julie Vallimont**

That kind of thing.

**Kate Barnes**

I was inspired to do that by this pianist Phil Merrill, who was one of the early English dance players, a great guy, very funny, and was always slipping quotes into his backup playing. He used to play organ for silent movies.

**Julie Vallimont**

Wow. What a fun job.

**Kate Barnes**

I have a picture of him on my wall.

**Julie Vallimont**

Really? Still?

**Kate Barnes**

Him and Mac and Helena Cornelius.

**Julie Vallimont**

Are in a picture together on your wall?

**Kate Barnes**

No, that would be a rare meeting indeed.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, who were your other like influences or idols as you were learning?

**Kate Barnes**

Jeez, I can't think of the names because it's more like the band's Planxty early Irish band. The rhythm section for Sharon Shannon, the Irish accordion player. Of course Lester Flatt of Flatt and Scruggs. Any blues player, I think I've really, and people have said this, that I'm very gospel and blues influenced in my style. It could be because I grew up as the son of a minister listening to hymns every Sunday. But you know, my idea of heaven would be a piano player in like, a black gospel group. Like, I love that sound.

**Julie Vallimont**

Me too.

**Kate Barnes**

What was your question? I think I digressed.

**Julie Vallimont**

The only point of the question was to just have you say interesting things. So it was successful. I think I was just asking, like, tell me about some moments on stage that were exciting for you.

**Kate Barnes**

So many. It's such a broad question. I can't really think, it happens almost every time I play at some point in the evening or other.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, yeah. That's the thing. It's like every time you're playing, you get those moments of spark.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, sometimes it's just like the perfect moment when all the notes are falling into place and they're at the right time and people are into it. And I don't know, I live for those moments which happen rarely, but enough to keep me coming back.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. Have the kind of tunes you play over the years changed, like, what are the some of your favorite tunes in like the Lizards' repertoire?

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah that changed a lot just for me personally, I mean, of course, first it was the New England classic repertoire. And then every band, and we were no exception, and Yankee Ingenuity started doing heavily Irish-oriented repertoire. And also, there was a French Canadian big boom that happened, probably somewhere in the 90s.

**Julie Vallimont**

I know Donna has been into French Canadian music for a long time.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, that's her heritage and her love. And after that, I mean, we've also been inspired by popular music. We've always like put TV themes in and popular songs and people love that kind of stuff.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely. I mean, I think that's one of the great things about chestnuts is that you're dancing to a tune that everybody's kind of familiar with, it feels familiar.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I'll say one of the most blissful moments in my career was playing Money Musk at the Ralph Page weekend, I think Frank Farrell and Dave Surette were playing. And we played a long time because that crowd loves it. And the caller said, stop, and I just said, nooooo. So we danced that dance for, I think, half an hour and it became kind of legendary saying, Oh, my God, we did Money Musk was for half an hour! And I loved it, man. I love that tune. And Frank is a great player and Dave provides a great rhythm so I don't have to totally focus on that. It was great.

**Julie Vallimont**

He's on guitar.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, yeah. Guitar and mando.

**Julie Vallimont**

The rhythm of Money Musk, I find Money Musk very fun to accompany the way the measure lengths are in the B part, the way the whole tune comes together. So great.

**Kate Barnes**

I know, the phrases of the dance. They run across the phrases of the music.

**Julie Vallimont**

Do you change how you play to emphasize like where the balances are?

**Kate Barnes**

Absolutely, not all the time, but......

**Julie Vallimont**

Especially with the first set of the waves of three. I feel like I have to help it a little bit.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

And then once the dancers get it, they don't need the help anymore but if there's people learning in the hall

**Kate Barnes**

Well, callers notice, if you do that, actually, the dancers notice if you can do that as well. It's a big pleasure to accentuate the balances.

**Julie Vallimont**

I think that's one of the things that I gravitated to about your playing as a dancer. I remember learning how to dance and being completely lost.

**Kate Barnes**

So were we all. About you, I mean. No.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, I'm sure they do. I was .....

**Kate Barnes**

I went through that too.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. I mean, it's great that everybody does, right? We all have that in common. But for me, maybe because I was already a musician and had been one for a long time, I would anchor myself to the basslines as a piano player, as a dancer, and that's how I kept my orientation. And your bass lines are phrased and varied and very melodic.

**Kate Barnes**

Thanks.

**Julie Vallimont**

And then these gospel voicings, you know, I was a church organist.

**Kate Barnes**

Wow, I didn't know that.

**Julie Vallimont**

I started when I was 14 doing that professionally. Well, as professional as you can be as a 14 year old organist. I would like oversleep in the morning and show up late to church but I did my best. I also enjoyed those big open fat piano chords like inverted sixths and like those fat gospel voicings. That's why Bruce Hornsby is one of my favorite piano players. Bruce is a great piano player with a deep well, but he also uses a lot of those gospel influences.

**Kate Barnes**

Oh, I got to look him up.

**Julie Vallimont**

And his fingers are fast, fast, fast fingers. But I had a point before I went off on this. It's so hot. I think my brain is just melting out here today. I misquoted you twice with you sitting there. Oh, my God. I know why did I bring this up? Piano styles? Bass lines? Thank God we can edit.

**Kate Barnes**

Gospel influence?

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, one the other things that really grabbed me about your playing is the way you interact with the dancers and that you're watching the dancers on the floor and kind of playing to the dance.

**Kate Barnes**

Oh yeah, a lot of my inspiration comes from them.

**Julie Vallimont**

What are some of your favorite ways to support the dancers or interact with them while you're playing?

**Kate Barnes**

Beyond the obvious one of rhythm and like accentuating the balances?

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah.

**Kate Barnes**

You are asking me to be analytical about my style.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, you don't have to be. The nice thing is that you have already written a book about this. Your past self may have already done a lot of the work.

**Kate Barnes**

Thank God it's over with.

**Julie Vallimont**

I recommend that everyone read "Interview with a Vamper" even If you're not a piano player.

**Kate Barnes**

I recommend that everyone buy "Interview with a Vamper."

**Julie Vallimont**

Yes, buy it, don't read it.

**Kate Barnes**

Just buy it for God's sake, this year!

**Julie Vallimont**

Buy three copies and don't read any of them.

**Kate Barnes**

A good clear introduction is necessary. Definitive endings, building up and you know the ways to build up excitement in a dance. But if you're playing a tune 15 times you can't....... they have to build them up and then let them down artfully, instead of having it just be a loss of energy. And what I usually do then is go high.

**Julie Vallimont**

Like high on the piano high and droney. Yeah.

**Kate Barnes**

And then you can you know, do these waves of excitement among dancers.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. What do you know what tempos you play at? Do you pay attention to the tempo much or is it just internalised?

**Kate Barnes**

I know that the Lizards tend to play too fast. But I don't know the number.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, you probably just get excited and go with the flow.

**Kate Barnes**

Absolutely.

**Julie Vallimont**

There you go.

**Kate Barnes**

Except on what they call sexy jigs.

**Julie Vallimont**

Ubiquitous sexy jigs. Were there sexy jigs when you started dancing?

**Kate Barnes**

No, no, there were just jigs.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. I mean, I've noticed that some callers, who have been calling for a long time, would often come up to us as a band and I was learning and they would say, okay, we want jigs for this dance. And so we would, most of the times when people ask for jigs, they would ask, they would mean smooth sexy jigs, so we would play that.

**Kate Barnes**

Right.

**Julie Vallimont**

But I think jigs used to be bouncy.

**Kate Barnes**

Oh, yeah, absolutely.

**Julie Vallimont**

Like they're balancy dances and I'm like, how did that happen, that jigs became what you play for smooth and sexy?

**Kate Barnes**

Well, I think it probably has a lot because jigs, the time six eight has a lot in common with blues and the shuffle feel. So [sings], if you slow it down, those kind of licks fit very easily into that pattern and then then it's a natural jump to do halftime grooves because blues players do that.

**Julie Vallimont**

[Sings], you know those kind of halftime grooves.

**Kate Barnes**

Like [sings], yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. And people have written official sexy jigs.

**Kate Barnes**

Really?

**Julie Vallimont**

In the Portland Collections.

**Kate Barnes**

You think that adjective would be in the eye of the beholder, not the composer.

**Julie Vallimont**

You had an interesting quote about tradition. And I'm gonna misquote you again. This is a fully professional interview right now. But it was something like the inverse rule of tradition. Would you like to paraphrase.....

**Kate Barnes**

It's the Barnes inverse law of geographical traditionalism. Which is an effect I noticed both with contra dance music and with when I started to play English and Scottish music. That the Scots, for example, could do anything with their music and it would be slavishly followed by everyone in the States, like Alistair Fraser is a great example. He started off playing, you know, in a traditional style, and he got more innovative as time went on. And people in the States said, Well, he's Scottish so it must be okay. You know what I mean? And I remember once, Rodney Miller, I know we were playing out I think in Seattle, probably in the 80s sometime and we took a break. And then this New England band, quote, came out and said, yeah, we're gonna play some New England tunes. And it was so it was so traditional and so staid. It just didn't seem to have any life at all to it because they were trying to imitate what they thought New England music was like but we felt like we could do anything with it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right.

**Kate Barnes**

Like that album Airplang. It's like we were we were quite out there on that album but we felt like, hey, we're New Englanders we can do it, I don't think was even conscious. It's like, this is our tradition. Of course, we can mess around with it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. It's like you don't even think about tradition while you're doing it. It's just what you're doing.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, right. So that's the law. It's like the further away you get from the source of a tradition, the more conservative you are with it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, I see that. I remind myself a lot of that with English country dance music. Because there's definitely the do-it-right contingent here in the US of like, you have to do it right.

**Kate Barnes**

Well, the question is, is doing it right doing what Bare Necessities does? Which is an American band.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right.

**Kate Barnes**

That's a question.

**Julie Vallimont**

It is a question.

**Kate Barnes**

For you.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, you're asking me? Well, you know, I think it's okay for us to talk about English music because these trends happen in all these traditions and.......

**Kate Barnes**

And all the best contra figures are stolen from English anyway.

**Julie Vallimont**

The Mad Robin and the hey. I think that a lot of organizers, when they're looking for English dance bands, their mental model is what Bare Necessities sounds like, for better or for worse. I mean, you've created this wonderful, wonderful thing. You've literally defined what American English dance music sounds like.

**Kate Barnes**

For better or worse is a good way to put it because, you know, I think that's true. It's just become the right way to sound and I think that's not necessarily a great thing.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's a great inspiration. You know, it's just, if you hold everyone to that model, then no one else can be as good at Bare Necessities as Bare Necessities. You have to let everyone else be good at what they're going to be good at, and contribute to the tradition in their own way.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. I would hate to imagine that we came up with a style that's so strictly bound that no innovation could happen anywhere with it. That's terrible, in my view.

**Julie Vallimont**

I've played for English dancing for years and I love it. I think as a classical pianist originally, I just was drawn to the music and the variety and beauty in it, just different key signatures and time signatures and the age of some of the tunes, and just the whole thing.

**Kate Barnes**

it's pretty cool.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's a really wonderfully diverse set of music, but it was very easy to kind of take it very seriously and get I was terrified. You know, like the, the dancers because they all know the tunes and the dances together. They would know the right dance tempo, but I didn't always, it's a lot to learn. And then, finally, I did it enough that I became comfortable with most of the common dances and I know them by heart now, and that's a lot easier. But then, a couple years ago, I went to England with Buddy System. And we were playing for contras over there, which is so fun. I mean, they were so excited to see us and they dance differently over there. You know, like their bodies move differently. And I got to hear some of their contra bands and they're wonderful.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, yeah, lately. That's true.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah and they sound different from us. They feel different from us. And so, but I thought this is glorious. I never went over there and thought they're not doing contra right. And then I was like, Oh my God, I've been so uptight about English music I just have to stop.

**Kate Barnes**

Like stop playing or stop trying to adhere to the......

**Julie Vallimont**

Stop worrying about adhering to something when I didn't even know what my goals were. I didn't even know what right was I was just afraid of not doing that, whatever that was. And, you know, we don't have to be true to Playford. As you know, it's more commonly called over there. They don't call it English dancing. Like they call contra American and we don't call it American. But it's just this wonderful thing where you take a tradition and you take it overseas, and then it becomes a new thing all on its own. And so I love the fact that contra dancing has spread to other countries and it has its own inflection.

**Kate Barnes**

So where does cultural appropriation fit in this?

**Julie Vallimont**

That's a great question. I'm not an expert on these things. So please write if you have thoughts about this.

**Kate Barnes**

Because I think cultural appropriation, if that were enforced as much as people want it to be, no one would learn anything from anyone else and music innovation would die.

**Julie Vallimont**

Not having analyzed this, and I feel unqualified to really talk about this, but I think having some kind of power dynamic, and even exploitation.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, that's true.

**Julie Vallimont**

It'sa definitely a big difference.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, that's it, it's that aspect of it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Like if they're playing contra music in England, that doesn't hurt us. They're not taking our music and then profiting from it at our expense. And they're not taking the credit for it from us and pretending that they invented it, which a lot of American forms have done.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, like rockabilly in the 50s.

**Julie Vallimont**

Exactly, we've stolen all these things. Blues, rock, Elvis, you know, it's all......

**Kate Barnes**

Would we really want that not to have happened?

**Julie Vallimont**

That's a deep question. There probably was a better, more inclusive way to do it at the very least. Like, like, you know, traditions, people go to other things and they get inspired and, you know, we are inspired by food and all these cultural things migrate all around the globe. But there's one thing between taking something and profiting off of it, and then making that original thing suffer as a result versus including them. So, you know, I think it could have been great to incorporate all these forms into our own music, but maybe do it with more inclusivity and cooperation and even permission, just asking someone, how do you think about us doing this? But it wasn't even a thought. And it's interesting now, we have to do some reckoning with our traditions and their history.

**Kate Barnes**

It's, it's interesting I once played with J.P. Fraley. I don't know if you'll know that name, classic, old timey fiddler. When he was on tour up in New England. I think some great group of old timey musicians brought him up and we played a dance together and I was on piano and he f\*\*\*ing loved it. Which was, which was true of anyone older I'd met. You know, like real roots, musicians. It's like, they were happy to have someone innovate with their tradition.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah,

**Kate Barnes**

And then I think people got purist and often as the people who adopted this style later in life they became purist about it. It's an interesting phenomena.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. And then there's often like this folk revivalist thing where something dies out on its own, then when you bring it back, then you define what it was. You know, like a lot of the 70s folk revival, but even like, I'm also not an expert in Irish music, but the fact that DADGAD guitar and bouzouki are now so ubiquitous that they're the new traditional.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I know.

**Julie Vallimont**

Where piano had a very — I get opinionated about piano things. But piano had a very traditional home in Irish music for a long time.

**Kate Barnes**

Well, that's cool.

**Julie Vallimont**

And even in like old time music. It's the piano has been kind of defined out of old time.

**Kate Barnes**

That's true. Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

But in a lot of really organic traditional music people are playing whatever they have.

**Kate Barnes**

Yes absolutely.

**Julie Vallimont**

You know, you play whatever you have in your house. If it's an old piano, whatever it is.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah. After a day's work, go off and take the piano off the wall, tune it up a little bit.

**Julie Vallimont**

Are there any other things you'd like to talk about?

**Kate Barnes**

I will say in this time. I think over the course of years, I've griped about compensation. Because we're in kind of a poor paying art form and what I've discovered during this time is that the dance community is actually incredibly generous. They're supporting all of us. And there's been a lot of dance weekends that reimburse us, even though they can't go on. And a lot of that is supported by the dancers who even though they can't come still contribute something. I was like, God bless this community. it's the best. It's tolerant. You know, I had no trouble coming out. And they're very, very supportive. I love them. Both English scenes and the contra scenes.

**Julie Vallimont**

I think about that too we have to innovate like to keep a tradition healthy. You can't talk about what it was you have to talk about what it can be. And there's just so many more ways we can be inclusive in our dances still. And you know, there's been talk about pronouns in contra dancing.

**Kate Barnes**

Right.

**Julie Vallimont**

I just feel like the more things we can do to make everyone welcome, the better it is.

**Kate Barnes**

Ironically, from where I sit, the tendency to eliminate pronouns in dances, for me, if I'm dancing the woman's role, it comes across as kind of a lack of affirmation.

**Julie Vallimont**

Interesting.

**Kate Barnes**

It's like I used to enjoy dancing a woman's role and saying now the ladies do this. And if that goes away, it's kind of like, oh, there's that tiny bit of affirmation gone, you know.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. And so there's a lot of different viewpoints and ....a lot of valid feelings.

**Kate Barnes**

I know a lot of very strong viewpoints.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, yeah. But I think, how can we change while having a place where people feel included?

**Kate Barnes**

Exactly.

**Julie Vallimont**

And not lose the traditions that we've grown to value.

**Kate Barnes**

Well good luck that's a pretty complicated....

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, that's not my problem. [laughs] You know, like, we do the best we can, but I feel like music is the same way. You know, like, I feel like as tempos have increased over the years that there are some dancers who are left out.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I've heard from them.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. They prefer the older, slower tempos.

**Kate Barnes**

Not to mention some musicians who were left out.

**Julie Vallimont**

And so, you know, we have enough diversity in our tradition that it becomes a vote with your feet scenario. You know, there are wonderful gender free dances. But I'm not saying that everyone who wants to dance gender free should have to go to them. I'm not trying to imply that but.....

**Kate Barnes**

Which has bearing on innovating like an English country dance backup or arrangement. It's like market forces will prevail.

**Julie Vallimont**

If we have a healthy enough community to support all these different varieties of things, if you only have one dance in your town, you don't have as much flexibility. That's what you can do. I'm glad that you've sort of mentally said, well, I'm just gonna keep being the best Kate Barnes I can be on the piano.

**Kate Barnes**

And you're saying this?

**Julie Vallimont**

I'm saying that it seems like you have decided that your piano style, like it kind of is what it is and you don't have to try to like.....

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, it doesn't mean I'll stop innovating. But it means I'm not going to innovate in the direction of what's currently popular.

**Julie Vallimont**

Exactly. That's what I was trying to say badly. Again, it's very hot out here. I think that's really important. Because you're the only you.

**Kate Barnes**

Thank God for the world!

**Julie Vallimont**

You have all these wonderful things to offer.

**Kate Barnes**

Thank you.

**Julie Vallimont**

And it's really great and I hope that the sound and style lasts for a long time.

**Kate Barnes**

Well long enough for me to pay my bills anyway.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right? I mean, it's interesting being in like a, we're in a pseudo professional, like it's half folk, half professional where we do these things for a living, but they don't quite pay us enough to really make a living from it for what we might require for a comfortable life.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, I've been I've been able to do it for forty years now. You know, look at my car, 2008.

**Julie Vallimont**

I guess that's what I mean. We all make sacrifices.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

But the paths are really wonderful.

**Kate Barnes**

It's not too much of a sacrifice I don't think.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, that's great.

**Kate Barnes**

Jeanne and I often look at each other, you know, we're doing pretty well. We have a roof over our heads. We got food. We got friends.

**Julie Vallimont**

You have a vast publishing empire.

**Kate Barnes**

Ka-ching! Do you know I was born in this state? This is my native state.

**Julie Vallimont**

In Vermont? I didn't know that. Where?

**Kate Barnes**

Unlike almost all my friends who live here now. Yeah, up in Milton, north of Burlington.

**Julie Vallimont**

What brought you to Boston?

**Kate Barnes**

My father. He moved.

**Julie Vallimont**

Did you grow up there? Did you spend your.......

**Kate Barnes**

We moved out of Vermont when I was six. But my parents had a summer home in Post Mills, Fairlee, Thetford, Vermont area. And that was essentially our family home. So we were up there as much as possible.

**Julie Vallimont**

Ah, sounds wonderful.

**Kate Barnes**

So I hold this state dear in my heart.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. And it's so close. And it's nice. I'm glad you were able to chat with me on your way to visit Mary Lea, Another prominent Brattleboro resident. Have you been making much music lately?

**Kate Barnes**

I have. Like I said, I did this home recording which was great fun because I learned all about multitracking, that kind of stuff. I sent it up, actually, to Burlington to be mastered, someone's working on the cover art. Whether CDs are still around as a viable commercial option I don't know. I'll probably also stream it. And, you know, various little Facebook videos here and there. Yourself? Anything? No, you can't play.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, I've been enjoying this podcast.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, it's a cool, it's a great contribution.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's been fun to kind of hit pause on doing things and just think about them for a little while. Like I wouldn't ever choose to do it. Like, this is the summer when we would all be at camps like that's why I had seven weeks of camps booked this summer. You know, now I'm at home. It's an interesting if you make your best out of it. Like, we're going through the archives and digging up old videos and old recordings and that's also fun.

**Kate Barnes**

Yeah, yeah, it is. I imagine.

**Julie Vallimont**

It'll be great when we can do it again. Well, thank you so much, Kate, for joining us.

**Kate Barnes**

Thanks for having me, I'm honored.

**Julie Vallimont**

So wonderful to talk with you.

**Kate Barnes**

Thanks.