Contra Pulse Episode 17 – Gordon Peery

**Julie Vallimont**

Welcome to Contra pulse. This is Julie Vallimont. This week, we talk with Gordon Peery, piano player from New Hampshire.

Gordon Peery started playing contra dance piano in the late 1970’s. He was fortunate to be in the neighborhood of Bob McQuillen, who was an inspiration and mentor. Though Gordon quickly evolved his own style of playing, he was permanently influenced by Bob’s commitment to providing a solid bass line for dances. In addition to his traditional New England influences, Gordon’s playing is flavored by jazz and 1960s rock’n’ roll, creating his unique piano sound.

Gordon was the piano player for the band Fresh Fish, (with fiddler Kerry Elkin), which became a nationally prominent contra dance band. They toured the country extensively between 1985 and 1995. During that time Gordon also played with the New Hampshire Fiddlers Union, with Rodney Miller, Randy Miller, and Skip Gorman.

Around 2010 Gordon enjoyed a couple of great years with a band of young musicians, Trip to Nelson. Gordon has been on the staff at many dance/music camps, including Pinewoods, Ashokan, and Augusta, Camp Backup, and Maine Fiddle Camp.

In our interview, we talk about Gordon’s roots in New Hampshire, at places like the Nelson dance, and talk about some of the musicians he interacted with, like Bob McQuillan. We explore his piano style and influences, and a few gig stories. He goes into detail about his years working with bands such as fresh fish with fiddler Kari Elkin.

Gordon also muses about tradition, and how we can pick elements of a tradition that we would like to continue, but also allow them to change. Hope you enjoy.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well hello, [Gordon Peery](https://www.gordonpeerymusic.com/), and welcome to Contra Pulse.

**Gordon Peery**

Oh, so nice to be here on this lovely day.

**Julie Vallimont**

It is a beautiful day. It's the middle of October, but it is unseasonably warm. It's like one last glimpse of September again, it must be 70 outside already. So lovely, looking at the fall colors and the trees. This is like, the time of year when... this is why we all love New England, right? This is why we're here. It's apple picking season, I've been going down to the farmers market and getting fresh apples every week.

**Gordon Peery**

I have a special feeling about this time of year... I had grown up in Connecticut. But when I was in my second attempt through 10th grade, I came up to go to High Mowing School, which is a small Waldorf school over in Wilton (New Hampshire). And that turned out to be a very transformational experience for me. So whenever... well, September, and then moving into October rolls around, I'm just put back in my mind to those first few weeks at High Mowing, I had left home, I was living in this very small community, there were just 80 students in the high school. We were way up on top of a hill in Wilton, and that's really what brought me to New Hampshire. If I'd stayed in Connecticut, things definitely wouldn't have been the same, or if I'd gone somewhere else. It's not far from where I live now in Nelson, that was back in 1968. Just to set the record straight you know, you're talking to someone that's now considered one of the old timers.

**Julie Vallimont**

Does that feel weird to you?

**Gordon Peery**

It does. It does actually, the first time that came up was probably about eight or 10 years ago, we were just forming the band [Trip to Nelson](https://www.gordonpeerymusic.com/trip-to-nelson), which, except for myself was all a bunch of high school kids. And Lizza Backes, who was a flute and whistle player was maybe 16 at the time, and I was sitting next to her at the [Nelson Monday night dance](https://monadnockcenter.org/dancing-forever-in-the-nelson-town-hall/). And she was kind of shy at that time. And she said, Well, Gordon, I'd like to ask your advice on something, I was very moved, you know, this young lady would like to ask my advice. I said, sure what is it? She said, well, I'm doing a paper about contra dancing for a school project. And I thought I should talk to some of the old timers. I said, oh, so we chatted, and eventually she joined the band. I don't know what she's doing now, I've sort of lost track of her. But that was, like, the first time where I realize, you know, then I was moving into that area. And of course at the time McQuillen was still alive; after he died you know, I guess moved me and a bunch of other musicians up closer to whatever it is. But it's a good thing. I feel just as young and foolish as I ever have been.

**Julie Vallimont**

So that's great. Yeah, it's like, none of us set out to be old timers. Not that I am, but it just sort of happens accidentally whether you want to or not. Well, so you currently live in Nelson, New Hampshire. You've lived there for a long time.

**Gordon Peery**

Let's see. I've lived there since the early 80s. I actually first came to Nelson in 1975 to visit someone. The first time that I drove into the town, I thought: this is where I'd like to live. And between then and when I actually moved there, I lived in about 10 different places, in just about every town in the Monadnock region. But yeah, that's where I am. It's a great place to be. And as we know, there's a fabulous music scene there. Not only from the dances, but Apple Hill Chamber Music, which is, you know, a string quartet but also summer long music camp. And it's a really creative community. There's no stores, no post office, nothing except the creativity.

**Julie Vallimont**

I love that. Nelson is a legendary town in the contra dance world. And it's a beautiful little town, you go to the Town Hall for the contra dance, and there's this little town square and you park there and that's it. It's a special place. And you know, it's easy for us who live there to say that. But there are a couple of experiences I've had there. One is going back many many years ago, I was involved with hosting some of the concerts there for the [Monadnock Folklore Society](http://www.monadnockfolk.org/). And we would have musicians come in from Ireland, Scotland and so forth, and they would step into the hall. No one was in there, coming in for soundcheck, they'd walk into the hall and they just felt right away that there was, you know, whether it's the wood had absorbed so much over the years of town meetings and dances or whatever it was. They just knew that that was a unique place. And the other thing is when I had been traveling to play dances, I've had it happen on many occasions, I'd be out in Seattle or somewhere in the West. Where are you from? Nelson, New Hampshire. "Ohhhh!" You know, there's a sort of reverence. And I do have to say that some of the things about Nelson are sort of more mythological and not necessarily true. But we don't try to dispel that. People want to believe certain things about it, like we've been dancing there for 700 years, you know, and stuff like that. We don't discourage that kind of thinking. How long has the dancing going on in Nelson? Is this a controversial question?

**Gordon Peery**

It is. It is. It's funny. I don't know if this is still true, but it used to be, until fairly recently, there was an annual guide to the towns that came out from the Keene Sentinel, and in the Keene Sentinel, every year, it would repeat that the contra dances have been going on in the Nelson Town Hall, since practically colonial times. And, in fact, I probably helped to perpetuate that because many, many years ago, this has got to be in the early 80s, I was interviewed on a program for New Hampshire Public Television. And there was a date on the Town Hall, I think it was 1787, or some old date like that. I just assumed that that was when the Town Hall was put there and that dancing had been going on since then. Well, it turns out the original meeting house was up the hill in what is now the cemetery, it's about a half a mile from the current site. And when they constructed the current town hall they used some of the timbers to build the new Town Hall. So technically, it's some of the same building, but somebody decided they would put that old date, the date of the original meeting house, up on the top there. That's since been taken down because people realized it was sort of misleading. But here am I on this TV interview, say, you know, we've been dancing in the hall since 1787. And the hall in its current form was built, I think, in 1848, or 1853, sometime mid 1800s. There's a little bit of evidence to suggest some dancing in other parts of Nelson before then, but you know, to disillusion anyone that might have been hoping that there was this long long history, you know, the earliest that there would have been dances there is in the 1850s. I think it's, it's probably been like, and this is true in many places, especially in New England, the dances go strong for a while, and then whoever's organizing them dies or does something else. And so they stopped for a while, and then they start when they stop. I became involved in the early 80s. And it was with what later became the Monadnock Folklore Society. The dances in Nelson were in hiatus. Ralph Page had kind of come and gone, he was still alive but he really wasn't calling anymore. [Dudley [Laufman]](https://www.cdss.org/contrapulse/podcast/dudley-laufman/) was too busy all over traveling around the rest of the world and seldom came to Nelson. And there weren't other callers around. So then someone started the Monday night dance, which was actually in Harrisville when it first started. And it started as a kind of blend of singing sessions and English country dances and a few contras and then it evolved and it eventually moved to Nelson. But while it was still down in Harrisville, we decided we would like to revive a Saturday night dancing in Nelson. So we went to the selectmen and asked them if we could please rent the hall once a month for $10 and they agreed. There had been an organization called the Nelson Square Dance Association that was chaired by Holly Robinson and Bonnie Riley. They had just, they had run out of steam, or maybe the market wasn't there anymore. But they agreed to turn over the savings that they had, which I think was around $500 to the Folklore Society... just said here, you guys can run the dances, here's a little seed money to get things started. So we started a Saturday night series and then by the time that ran out of steam, the Monday night dance was established in Nelson. That in itself has had a few years where it was just a summer dance and of course now it's in complete hiatus. Who knows, you know, these things come and go.

**Julie Vallimont**

Because of COVID specifically.

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah. But you know, one of the things people fear that the dancing is going to disappear. And just in the short time that I've been doing this, which is like 40 years now or whatever, I've seen it ebb and flow a lot, just around here. I don't think we need to worry about the dancing disappearing. It's just going to evolve. There may come a time, soon or later, where the Nelson contra dance dies again, but it doesn't mean that it's all over, something else will happen, something else will go on in the hall there. So, yeah, there's a couple more things about the hall I'll weave in later on.

**Julie Vallimont**

Wonderful. In those times that the dancing has come back, after these little lulls, what are the things that usually bring it back? Is it a person stepping up and organizing it? Or?

**Gordon Peery**

Well, that's really key. I mean, you've got to have people and preferably a team of people. I have to say, I've played a lot, especially around New England and there are people who have been doing this for 30 or 40 years, you know, running the dances. Man, it takes a lot of work, and it takes more work now, because marketing stuff has become more complicated with the internet and everything... you really have to be, you have to put a lot into it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Like in terms of having a website and a Facebook page?

**Gordon Peery**

We used to make dance posters. At one point, the Folklore Society was having dances in Greenfield, New Hampshire, and Dublin, and Nelson. I don't remember where else... there was a Francistown dance at one point. I remember some of the old posters that just said, there'll be a contra dance didn't say who the musicians were, who the callers were, it was a much simpler thing, you just said, we're gonna have a dance, people would come, and whoever was playing was playing. It just kind of worked, so that has really changed too in terms of, you know, bringing in bands, and bands preferably that have a reputation and callers, callers who have a reputation. But it does take people to organize... it also takes, obviously, the audience, and if the audience isn't there, it's not there. I suspect what happened in the sort of late 60s, early 70s is that some of the dancers that had been following Ralph Page and other callers just got old, they got tired or they died or something happened, the market wasn't there as much. I wasn't witness to this because it was happening just before my time. But I just know from having been around now for a while that that Dudley was significantly responsible for a lot of the, what is even still... the current revival. He had lived in Nelson for a short time. So Nelson became one of the first places where he started calling and his style sort, you wouldn't know this nowadays, but his style really facilitated more sort of freeform dancing, you know, young barefoot hippies coming in and giving more expression to the dance than had been previously tolerated. I remember after several years of dancing this way, where a balance figure was often executed by people leaping up into the air and coming down and in making as much noise as they could as they landed, and giving a good kick, and then another kick, resounding kick. I just had one opportunity to hear Ralph Page, he was brought out of retirement, he was calling in Nelson, and it was halfway through the night before he even called the dance that had a balance in it. He said, okay, and now you balance, and I don't care how you do it. But I don't want to hear it. He was actually a wonderful teacher, in that way he could tell you what he wanted without actually, you know, he didn't say don't stomp your feet, he just said I don't want to hear it. And it was polite, people complied, and it sort of worked. But my first images of dancing are people in a lot of loose clothing and sometimes very little clothing and spinning around the wrong, barefoot kicking and doing things that some of the older dancers maybe frowned upon. Some of them didn't. But that was a change of style. I know just from when I was traveling more, I would say in the mid 80s to mid 90s, swing dancing started to become popular in the contra dance world. And so you'd see people dancing with these various swing moves happening up and down the line. I think that kind of has taken hold as well. I am not a dancer myself. So unless I'm playing, I don't go to dances, so I don't feel like I can address what's going on on the dance floor very well these days. But those are the things, the evolution as I've seen it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Wow, so many stories in there. Well, let's talk about your little place in all this, not little, but I just mean one person's place. Let's talk about how you got started playing piano and how you found your way into the dance scene.

**Gordon Peery**

Well, anyone's story about this, you could write so many novels about this. I guess the extreme background was that my mother was a classically-trained pianist. She had great aspirations for me, which were very unfulfilled. I did have several years of classical lessons and considering how many years I had, I was really bad. I wasn't a good reader. I wasn't interested in the theory parts of it. I loved listening to music. I would sit and noodle around on the piano and she, 'course, just wanted to pursue the classical repertoire, anything else wasn't serious music. I knew my way around the keyboard. When I was a teenager, I started playing guitar and I did that completely by ear. So I was a folk guitarist. And I never got very accomplished on that but I could do coffee houses and write songs and stuff. And then I was in my early 20s and I started working as a cook at the [Folkway](https://www.sentinelsource.com/news/local/the-folkway-it-was-a-community-former-peterborough-venue-remembered/article_6d6634e2-6995-5c5e-aaa9-b1f91d22dcc6.html) restaurant and coffee house in Peterborough, which had just started. It was a wonderful place, it became actually a major stop on the national folk music circuit with wonderful, wonderful musicians coming through there. And so I worked there for three years, from '75 to '78. During that time there were big names like Tom Paxton and Odetta, and wonderful, wonderful, well known musicians, as well as musicians who kind of established their career there, such as Lui Collins, who I think is familiar to a lot of dancers. And then there were also the occasional dance musicians coming in, [Rodney](http://www.rodneymiller.net/) and [Randy Miller](https://www.fiddlecasebooks.com/), they had an album, nobody had an album of this kind of music, that was so exciting. So I was hearing the music, I was aware that there was such a thing. In fact, a couple of years before that I had lived for a very short time down in the Berkshires. And a friend of mine who was living up this way, had been following Dudley Laufman around and he said, oh, you've got to come to this thing called a contra dance. So he brought us to a dance in Lenox, Massachusetts, this was probably just 10 or 12 years ago, I played down there and I recognized the hall. You had to walk up a set of stairs to get to the hall, I said, oh, this is where I came to my first contra dance. Dudley was calling and I don't remember anything else about it. So I knew it existed, but I wasn't really paying much attention to it. I was starting to hear the music and working cooking at this restaurant. I fell in love with one of my colleagues, she was a baker there and it was inconvenient, because at the time I was I was married to my first wife. But eventually things evolved and eventually I sort of confessed my affection. She played the fiddle, not very well, but she played the fiddle. And so to have an excuse to spend time with her I would play along with guitar and then eventually I thought well, I should be able to figure this out on the piano. So that was really my motivation, it had less to do with the music and more with trying to pursue this relationship. And what I didn't realize at the time was that one of the reasons she was not reciprocating my affections was that she was secretly in love with somebody else, who was a fiddler.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's why she was learning fiddle?

**Gordon Peery**

Right, exactly. Eventually everything sort of passed, you know, and I got over things, we remain friends... but during that time it brought me into the music scene more. And in addition to the music I was hearing at the Folkway, there were a lot of parties at Nelson with various people. I would get to meet Harvey [Tolman], I'd hear Harvey play, and I would hear these people that were playing with him.

**Julie Vallimont**

[Harvey Tolman](https://www.gordonpeerymusic.com/harvey-tolman)?

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah, I think people know his name. He plays sort of Cape Breton-style fiddling, and has really put that on the map down here and is a main figure, or has been a main figure at the Nelson Monday night dance. So I would play with Harvey. But often times somebody else was playing piano with him, there were a couple of different players that would play with him. I just knew that there was something that, I shouldn't say it wasn't right about it, but I didn't think they were good accompanists and that's a judgment, but I stand by it to this day, they were making a good effort. There was nothing wrong with that. But they weren't hearing the music in a creative way. They were just providing this fundamental backup. At least that was my experience of it. So I eventually started playing, and people gave me advice. One person said, you never want to go above middle C if you're playing piano for contra dances. Well, that didn't last very long with me. Eventually, Peter Temple who lived in Harrisville, started the Harrisville Monday night dance. Since no one was getting paid for it, he couldn't hire anyone but I agreed to play piano. There were various people that would show up to fiddle and various people that would show up to call. That dance, which later became the Nelson Monday night dance was responsible for many, many musicians, including the band Trip to Nelson that I mentioned, just a few years ago, young people coming in having a chance to sit in and play, and many dance callers. Steve Zakon-Anderson, Mary DesRosiers and others, you know, they cut their teeth at the Monday night dance. So for me, it was a chance to go and play because no one else was going to. I just didn't subscribe to the idea that there should be rules about how I should play, some of that was maybe arrogance and naivety. But it also really, I think, allowed me to hear something about what I wanted to do that, for some reason people recognized and appreciated. I think Harvey's influence was really important at the time, I didn't listen to many recordings of Cape Breton music. So I didn't know there was such a thing as a Cape Breton style of piano playing, which is defined by a certain exuberance in the right hand. But I was doing that. And so, just his playing the tunes in the Cape Breton style somehow inspired me to play the piano in a way that turned out to be the Cape Breton style playing the piano. People would come up to me and it kind of baffled me at first, they would say, oh, you've got a really Cape Breton style about what you're playing, I said, oh, okay, then eventually, I think undeliberately, eventually I started working in other influences. To me, actually, the main influences have not been contra dance musicians, I mean, they do in a certain way. And the wonderful fiddlers that I've played with influenced me, but when I'm playing and thinking about how I'm going to be voicing chords and kind of orchestrating the piece, I think about like, Beach Boys, the harmonies that the Beach Boys would have, the energy of Beatles songs, the sort of... I don't know, I don't have the right word for it, but the jazz playing of Oscar Peterson, and it's not that I'm trying to sound, say, like Oscar Peterson, but there's just something in his voicings and how you make this happen. That those are the things that still, to this day, drive me when I'm playing it. The most meaningful compliment that I ever got was someone came up to me in Nelson after a dance and they said, Gordon, you make it sound like you're playing for a movie soundtrack. I realized that is unconsciously what I've been trying to do, to provide some theatrical backdrop, some sense of drama, some suspense, some pure joy. So in the course of even a single set of tunes, really working with a lot of mood shifts and just try to respond to the dancers too, seeing what's going on on the dance floor. You know, from being a musician, there's nothing more fulfilling than playing for a dance. And you're maybe half, three quarters of the way through the dance and the band comes together on something and the dancers just start hollering and grinning. And you know, there's this thing that happens that is just a result of the fusion of the music.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, it's amazing when that happens. Let's talk about this Cape Breton idea. Because Cape Breton tunes are often played for contra dances. The Cape Breton piano style is world-renowned. It's a very unique style, it has a lot of syncopation in it. And like you were saying, a lot of stuff going on in the right hand, where you have your two hands spread pretty far apart, and your right hand is playing a lot of moving bits that are higher in octaves than your traditional New England boom-chuck style, where it might be boom-chuck and the right hand is more rhythm. But in Cape Breton piano, it might be [sings a syncopated arpeggio], but like all these little syncopations and higher up in the octaves, and some players love it for contra dances. Some players do more of a New England style. But I think, like, Harvey Tolman is one of those folks who has brought Cape Breton fiddling into the contra tradition. Especially in New Hampshire, it seems like there's a large pocket of that. And so it's interesting that you accidentally stumbled upon that style just through your own instincts.

**Gordon Peery**

I think it says something about how we learn, for me, at least, I'm not an academic learner. If someone had said, okay, Gordon, you know how to play the piano, now we'd like you to start playing in a Cape Breton style, I wouldn't have known what to do. I didn't listen to that many recordings, I would occasionally hear Cape Breton players. And in fact, remind me to come back to a story about Jerry Holland for that. It was a more subtle thing than that. There was something about the way that Harvey was phrasing stuff and voicing stuff and the embellishments that just kind of made me want to do something. And so who knows, I mean you could write a thesis about how the Cape Breton style is and what causes it to be. I don't really care about that. I'm just, I just like, playing. I don't consider myself playing in the Cape Breton style. But I would say there are elements of Cape Breton piano that I incorporate.

**Julie Vallimont**

Cape Breton music has this relentless groove to it, very deep groove. And a really swingy kind of groove that allows for a lot of syncopation. I could imagine you feeling that in his fiddling and playing off of that. And then with your other musical influences, it's funny for all of us, like we take these traditions, and then we end up filtering them through our own vocabulary of our influences and for a lot of people it's the Beatles, for a lot of dance musicians these days that's a main subconscious influence. The Beach Boys. And I've also I know that feeling like I've been influenced by certain piano players, like for me, it's Bruce Hornsby and a lot of his voicings, which is rooted in some gospel voicings. I used to be a church organist and so that stuff just resonates with me subconsciously. We all take these things about ourselves and bring them to the tradition. When you were learning, you spent some time around Bob McQuillen.

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah. If we had 10 hours, I could touch the surface about Bob McQuillen. But I'll try to touch on a couple of the highlights. He was the old timer when I started into this scene in the late 70s. At the time, he was still he was still teaching at ConVal High School. He was picking up kids in his van and bringing them to the dances, he was just this presence, this amazing presence. From the very beginning, as soon I would show up at dances, I might have a guitar for a short period of time, I had an accordion, I got over that in hurry. He was always so supportive about playing but he also knew the protocols, I would come up, "Do you mind if I sit in?" "Well ask the fiddler". He made it clear that there were certain unwritten rules that you had to go by, but he was so encouraging to me and so generous in spirit, not only about music, but about anything. I think that really wore off on people and that's why he had so many people that just consider him a mentor. He had his whole school scene too where there were all these kids that had nothing to do with music, but he influenced them as well. When it got to the point where I would be playing, it might be a set at the Monday night dance, or it might be somewhere else, and he would hear me playing, he would always come up and make a point of complimenting me, not just to be nice, but it was a very genuine thing. Very quickly, I figured out that I was not going to be a boom-chuck player. I think there might have even been a few years where I thought, oh, well, Bob McQuillen just does this boom-chuck but there's all this other stuff. Eventually, I came to realize that I would never ever tire of hearing what he was doing. There was some magic in his playing right up till the end. I would say in his later years, he maybe got a little bit more inventive with embellishments but pretty much he stuck to the boom-chuck. He knew how to do that in a way that no one else could. Plenty of players tried to do that and they could make it work for a dance. But he brought something to it that I can't define, whether it was like a minute timing thing, or I think it was just his energy, the energy that he put into it. But he was a major influence on me and I always felt so blessed that he wasn't really judgmental about anything, if there was rarely something that he didn't like, he would just keep his mouth shut and maybe give you a look with his eye. But most of the time, he was just so supportive of musicians and what they were doing. Towards the end of his life, we became pretty close. I feel anytime I'm playing the piano for a dance or a concert, any situation, that even though I'm not doing boom-chuck stuff, usually, that he is the fundamental inspiration and the fundamental force behind it. I actually have to say, in many ways, I don't miss him because I just feel like he's there. If I'm opening up a contra dance the first four potatoes that I play for the beginning of an evening are for him.

**Julie Vallimont**

He certainly had an influence on many, many people, you know, myself as well. Do you think at the time, like I imagine him as the old timer and you as, like, the young pup doing these kinds of new, exciting newfangled piano things. Did he have a sense that his playing was like, "traditional" and that yours was "modern"? Do you think he thought about things that way?

**Gordon Peery**

Well, I think, to some extent, he did. And this may be an arrogant thing to say, but I'll say it anyway. I think he felt that what I was doing, and what other people were doing, some other people were doing was, was not how he had been taught and what he did, but that it was serving the dance, it was serving the music. And so he really honored that, and from comments that he would make over the years, he would come up, and he would tell me something about my playing, and I knew that it was beyond being polite. He was believing in what we were doing. Occasionally, there would be players that were so involved in their own playing and embellishments, that somehow it didn't serve the dance, and I could hear that, and other people could hear it. I think probably most of those pianists didn't go on to spend a lot of time in the contra dance world, but you'd hear players doing things. He would never say oh, their playing really sucks. I don't like it. But he would just sort of nod and you would know that that was not resonating with him. But it was his absence of judgment that was just so fabulous, both about music and about anything else, such an inspiration. There were certain bands that he really liked, there were certain bands that I know he didn't care for that were doing innovative things, but I think for him was whether it really served the music and whether it served the dance and we don't know how this kind of music sounded 150 years ago, 200 years ago, we do know that a lot of contra dances were... the music was brass bands or combination brass and strings and so forth. But we don't know what sort of embellishments there were. We don't know how much boom-chuck there might have been, so I think it's easy to look at things and say, oh, this is the tradition, we've got to preserve it. I never really felt that way. I thought, I'm gonna play the piano how I like to play it, and if people want to hire me to play for dances, great. And if fiddlers want to play with me, great. I've been so lucky over the years that people have wanted to hire me. I've worked with the best fiddlers in the country. It's pretty exciting.

**Julie Vallimont**

I mean, perhaps in a way, Bob felt that way, too, about his own playing. That's the thing, it's easy when we elevate someone to old timer status and then we elevate them to, like, super status. Especially after they passed, it's easy to say, well, that is what was traditional when there's a lot of nuances of how someone actually functioned at the dancing while they were alive and in it as a living tradition. It sounds like, if Bob were going to talk about tradition, now please correct me if I'm wrong, because I knew him only peripherally, I never got to spend a lot of time with him. But there's a way to say, well, traditional is the way I do it, which is the way it was done before me. Or you could say, traditional is anything that supports the dance, and the music. In that sense, traditional isn't as much about the sound, it's about the spirit and the way that you play.

**Gordon Peery**

I think that for Bob, it was kind of similar to what I just said about myself. He was taught to play the piano a certain way, and he decided to adhere to that. But he would never say to anyone, this is how you would play it. He would say, this is how I was taught and there's a difference there. The name of his first band was New England Tradition. So the word tradition was important, the idea of the dance as a social event, as a tradition that was important. I think that he just played what he felt and it was such a pure experience. There was no one who wasn't honored to play with him. I think that says something too, you take a fiddler like Rodney Miller, for instance, who's one of the most innovative musicians I've ever known and had the opportunity to play with. He's done stuff all over the place, stuff that moves into sort of rock and roll and jazz and so forth. I think I can speak for him that he would always be thrilled to play with Bob, whenever there was an opportunity there. He knew it wasn't going to be a chance to really do a lot of flamboyant things, but that was all right, and I felt the same way just about listening. I'd just occasionally show up backstage at a dance and Bob would be playing and I could just listen for hours to what was not flamboyant stuff. It was just solid.

**Julie Vallimont**

Bob enjoyed playing with Rodney. There's another thing I was just saying, when someone has made this beautiful contribution to the sound of our music it's worth hanging on to that and keeping it traditional, like his music, there's the simplicity and kind of the elegance, it feels weird to use the word elegance about Bob McQuillen. But there is an elegance to his playing, the phrasing of his bass lines and the left hand, just the absolute solidness of his rhythm. And it's kind of how he functioned as a person, like real tradition is respecting the community and the spirit which is why the dance is there in the first place, so in that sense his playing is an extension of who he is as a community organizer and this welcoming spirit, and really being somebody who draws people in. I remember when he used to drive around in his truck with the piano in the back and he was everywhere.

**Gordon Peery**

When I've been teaching music workshops, most recently up at Maine Fiddle Camp, I talk about McQuillen and of course, people who are taking piano workshop for the first time, probably don't know of him.

**Julie Vallimont**

They might not have heard of him.

**Gordon Peery**

But one of the points I make early on, we teach the boom-chuck, and I say, if you don't do anything else, this is totally fine. There's nothing wrong with just doing that and it's better to do that and nothing else than to do else and not that. If your soul isn't playing the boom-chuck, and your right hand is off doing something else or you're throwing in jazz chords, or this or that, but if you aren't hearing in your mind the boom-chuck it's not gonna work.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, I remember watching him teach those piano classes at Maine Fiddle Camp, my first couple years there, and it's kind of almost drill sergeant like at times, I think some of the little kids were intimidated by him. He would school them on I, IV, V [chord progressions] and if you didn't learn those things, you didn't get to learn fancy stuff. I think that's a really great way to learn is like, learn the foundations first. Yeah, what a character.

**Gordon Peery**

I have just a couple of stories from the Folkway days, is now a good time to jump into that? So it was such a wonderful experience working there, I'd be cooking dinner Friday and Saturday night and there would be these amazing musicians who would come and play there. I got to hang out with them and some of them would come back every few months and play, and so I got to be friends. I remember when Stan Rogers, who was a wonderful folk singer that I think many people will still remember, he died in an airplane crash in the mid 80s just sort of as he was becoming ultra-famous... fabulous songwriter. He came to play at the Folkway and he had these wonderful songs that he'd written and his brother Garnet Rogers, who's still a well-known musician, played fiddle, and they had a bass player with them. So Stan had played there and I had been listening to his music and I had figured out a bunch of ideas for piano accompaniment for his music. So he was coming back to the Folkway and I thought, oh, this is great, because after hours, we always jam. I'll be able to play these piano accompaniments behind his songs and he'll be impressed. So sure enough they finished their concert, sold out house. "Yeah, let's, let's hang out, let's play some music." So I slid over to the piano bench and said "Well, I'm ready." They spent the rest of the night playing '50s rock and roll. That was what they wanted to do, which is fine. You know, I could pick up on that. But that was a story I remember from Stan and that was probably the last time I saw him before he died. The other story has to do with a Canadian performer named John Allen Cameron who came down and played. He brought with him this young Fiddler named Jerry Holland. he was maybe a teenager at the time.

**Julie Vallimont**

For those folks who don't know, Jerry went on to be a legendary figure in Cape Breton fiddling.

**Gordon Peery**

So it got to be after hours and John Allen Cameron, he was kind of an aloof guy, he did a good show but then after the show, he didn't want to hang out. So he went next door where he was staying. I just kind of got my nerve up and said, well, Jerry, should we play some tunes? I play you know, contra dance piano stuff and he said, sure. And the next thing I knew the sun was coming up. We just stayed up all night and played tunes and of course, I didn't realize, well, no one knew, he didn't either, that he was going to become one of the most prominent fiddlers and composers of tunes. So I look back on that experience and think, well, I got to spend the whole night playing tunes with Jerry Holland. Many other wonderful experiences at the Folkway too but that's again, another 10 hours of history we won't go into now.

**Julie Vallimont**

Did Jerry ever play, I mean, he must have played a lot for Cape Breton dancing but did he ever play for contra dances? Was that on his radar?

**Gordon Peery**

I don't know. I know he played annual concerts in Nelson for many years. I didn't really know him during that time. I might have a couple of times gone up to him after the show and said, oh, I remember playing with you after the Folkway one night years ago. I don't know if he remembered that or not. I'm not aware that he played for dances, but I think there's a decent chance he must have.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, I wonder. He's another of those people with this big expansive, welcoming, encouraging personality. It just built community around him.

**Gordon Peery**

This is a good segue to another story that starts in the Nelson Town Hall, having to do with musicians who don't normally play for dances. There was a school in Ireland called the Baker's Well, that was to teach young kids how to play traditional music. One of their teachers was Sean Potts, who had previously played with The Chieftains. I get a call from this Irish lawyer in Boston, saying, well, we see you guys do some dances up there and some concerts. Can we bring these young kids up to do a concert in the Nelson Town Hall? I said, sure, that would be fine. So they came up and they played and they were good musicians. I mean, an Irish teenager is usually pretty well-schooled. And then there were Sean Potts and another flute player. So they played, that concert was fine. About a year goes by and my phone rang. I pick it up. Oh, this is Paddy Moloney of The Chieftains, and my friend Sean Potts told me, he came to this town hall and had this wonderful experience, I was wondering if me and some of the band could come and play there, we'll be touring, and we can't be billed as The Chieftains, but we'd like to come and play, because we heard about this hall. I was having a hard time understanding him through his accent, so it didn't really register at first what was what was going on. Oh, okay, he wants to come with some of The Chieftains and play in the Nelson Town Hall, this could be a good thing. They came, they did a concert and after the concert, we said, let's have a dance. And they said, well, we don't know anything about this. We should just play some reels, play some jigs. Mary DesRosiers called some dances, and they played, and I might have jumped in on the piano, I don't remember exactly what happened. But it was a significant experience for them, and then later, we went to somebody's house across the way and stayed up half the night playing tunes. So I thought, well, that's great. I got to meet Paddy Moloney and Seán Keane, and I don't remember there was one other maybe Matt Molloy, the singer, and flute player. So then another year goes by, and phone rings... "hey this is Paddy Moloney, remember me? Well, we're doing our March tour and we were wondering if you could put together [a group of dancers to come out and dance on stage with us for a couple of numbers](https://www.gordonpeerymusic.com/the-chieftains)." This was like, six weeks away from when they were supposed to do this. So naturally, I said, yes without thinking about how we would do this, and he said, oh, good, this is great. Our first gig is at Symphony Hall in Boston and then we're playing in Portland, Maine, and then Fall River, and then we're playing at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center. I said, Oh, okay.

**Julie Vallimont**

Small casual venues.

**Gordon Peery**

So I got off the phone and called Mary, and called the best dancers I knew. And I said, here's this opportunity to do this project. And so we did, we showed up at Symphony Hall and they were rehearsing, we had time for just a very quick run through, okay, you play one set of jigs in the first half, a set of reels in the second half, and we'll do a dance that sort of goes along with that. That was that was an amazing experience for many reasons. But it was also kind of a good lesson for the dancers. A lot of them were very enthusiastic about what was happening. But they didn't realize that when you're performing contra dancing, it's very different than just being out on the dance floor doing that. There was makeup involved. In fact, one woman refused to continue with it because she wouldn't wear makeup. There was makeup involved, there was dress up involved and there was presenting the dance as the audience would see it in Symphony Hall, but it was a wonderful time, and we got to hang out with them over these four nights. I got to join them at Avery Fisher Hall playing the piano for the dance numbers, which was a pretty cool thing. So I thought, well, that was it. That's our experience. About a year goes by, the phone rings. "Hey, this is Paddy Moloney. We're playing in the Colonial Theatre in Keene. And we're wondering if you could get the dancers up there with us." At the time, the Colonial hadn't been renovated yet, the stage was about eight feet wide. I said, well, we can't do that but we could bring a bunch of local musicians to come and join you for a finale at the at the end of the show. So we did and then they came back one more year after that and then we just sort of lost contact. But there was this, like, four-year connection with them that started because the Nelson Town Hall was this magical place that they'd had this enchanting experience.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. They remembered being there. So they were interested in having contra dancers dance with them.

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah. They did all sorts of out of the box things. So they would often have an Irish step dancer with them, which they did as part of this, but they wanted to present this thing that they thought maybe a lot of their audience hadn't seen but which was a New England tradition. And so they presented it that way. It was cool, it was really a wonderful thing. The next couple of years after that they were playing, like, with Roger Daltrey and the Rolling Stones and so forth. They went off in a different direction. In fact, I heard they just were going to be doing their farewell tour this year. Several of the members of the band have died and the others are pretty ancient, but they were doing a farewell tour and I don't know if that got cut short or not.

**Julie Vallimont**

Do you know if any video exists of those performances of The Chieftains with contra dancers?

**Gordon Peery**

I don't think so. And of course, you know, cameras were more of a novelty then. We do have a few photographs. But I seriously doubt whether there's any video. I mean, it may be that their agency or maybe down at Lincoln Center they archive all these things, but it's just a memory at this point.

**Julie Vallimont**

Fun memory. I would like to talk about the beginnings of some of your bands, like [Fresh Fish](https://www.gordonpeerymusic.com/fresh-fish) and the transition from playing in like pickup bands and playing at a regular dance to having a band and how that came about.

**Gordon Peery**

Well, I had signed up to go on a five-week European tour with the Green Mountain Volunteers, which was a dance performance group that would travel around Europe at various folk festivals and other things. They would do sort of demonstrations of New England and Appalachian folk dancing, some French Canadian stuff, and so forth. So this particular tour was five weeks, there were about 50 dancers and there was a supporting cast of musicians. I actually brought an accordion with me, but I mostly played piano. Randy Miller was on that trip playing accordion. I'm not remembering all of the rest of the band, but it included Kerry Elkin the fiddler and Tom Hodgson, guitar player. Over the course of the five weeks, I got to play with Kerry some, and of course, it was all material that was part of the program. We didn't have that many opportunities to do spontaneous stuff, but we kind of hit it off musically. And then we got back, this would be in the summer of '85. We got back here and Steve Zakon-Anderson, at the time just Steve Zakon was also on that trip as a dancer. Steve had some private school dance that he was calling for and he asked Kerry and I if we would play for that and so we thought it was a gig, you know, probably 50 bucks or something and we'll go to that. We just decided that we wanted to start playing together and have a band. We invited Tom Hodgson, who was also a guitarist on that trip to play with us.

**Julie Vallimont**

Where was Tom living at the time?

**Gordon Peery**

I think he was in Massachusetts. He was like, Amherst or Northampton.

**Julie Vallimont**

Is he still in Ithaca now?

**Gordon Peery**

I think so I've, I've really lost touch with him. But anyway, we, we decided to have the band and we had a dance out in Martha's Vineyard. And Kerry had access to a house up there. I don't remember the details. But we spent the weekend brainstorming about a band name. We came up with all sorts of names, most of which are completely gone from my mind. And someone, probably Kerry, had the name Fresh Fish. And I really didn't like it but I was outvoted. And so we went with that name, and it turned out to be the most fabulous name. Everywhere we would go, we'd be at a dance weekend somewhere, people would print up t shirts with fish motifs. There would be fish themes for the dances and we just we got a lot of miles out of it and of course, many layers of puns that Steve could present as the caller. So we started playing, at the time, I'm not sure if I realized what a brilliant fiddler Kerry was and of course, he got better during that time. But he was already at a level that was just very unique and powerful. And he wanted us to practice and I said, practice, I've never practiced this music. You just get up and play it. It's spontaneous. If we practice we're going to lose that spontaneity. He said, well, if we're going to have a band, and if I'm going to play the fiddle, we're going to we're going to rehearse. So we would have rehearsals and he would point out certain things that he liked or didn't like, he wasn't shy about saying either way. What I realized pretty quickly on was that we did not lose the spontaneity. The practice brought our music to a higher level and then from there, we would have this whole new spontaneity that was just fabulous. So we were very lucky that, I think Kerry had some good connections in the music world. It was a wonderful band, we were able to create some good music. Eventually, I think probably within even the first year, Tom left the band and then there was always, quite often, there was a rotating cast of musicians who would come in as third or fourth, or sometimes fifth musicians. And so over the years, there have been people like Danny Noveck, you know, who could play anything and who could play a tune having heard it just once. Dirk Powell, is a very prominent musician, played bass or guitar or fiddle with us, David Surette, Ann Percival for a while, was travelling with us. So she played guitar, or once in a while, we'd switch off and I play guitar, and she played piano. There probably were a bunch more people, but wherever we would go, if the gig would support it, we would invite other people to play with us. So we were a good band, we just had this amazing energy. We had this sort of vision that Kerry was able to articulate, sometimes not that gracefully but he really provided a standard that was so helpful for me, not only in my music with him but in anything else that I did. There is a funny story that I will tell, there are many, many Fresh Fish stories. We were on the road a lot and doing music camps and so forth. But there's one story I enjoy telling. We were playing a dance in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

**Julie Vallimont**

I love that dance.

**Gordon Peery**

Kerry knew that Ralph Gordon, the bass player was going to be there. He revered Ralph, Ralph was known as being, like, THE bass player for this kind of music. Kerry was so nervous that we would make a good impression on Ralph. So he was talking about this, we've really got to sound good tonight because I heard Ralph Gordon was coming to this dance. So a couple of dances go by, and we're playing okay. We're just about to start this set of tunes, which began with a sort of slinky jig set. It started with just some guitar stuff capoed up. This is kind of high-pitched guitar, [sings], kind of thing and then Kerry would come in, and the piano didn't come in until a couple of times through the tune. It was very dramatic, because there was this lovely sort of tinkling of guitar and then the fiddle comes soaring in over that. So we're just about to start that and who's in the back of the hall, Ralph Gordon, so Kerry sort of tightens up and says, "Well, this is it at least we have this good set of tunes to play." So Tom starts playing and he plays a couple of measures of music and then Kerry comes in. Tom had put the capo in the wrong position. And there was nothing we could do. Sometimes you can rescue your way out of a situation. We had to stop. Kerry was mortified, absolutely mortified. It was a couple of years later, we were in a music camp somewhere, Ralph was there and I was telling him that story. And he said, "Oh, I thought that was pretty funny". You know, he wasn't in judgment of it at all. But Kerry was just absolutely mortified.

**Julie Vallimont**

I mean, we've all been there. Sometimes someone just starts in the wrong key or you think you're playing a different tune than you actually are, or the capo I mean, I'm sure Ralph has been through it. Right?

**Gordon Peery**

Of course, yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

But Kerry had such a desire for quality and excellence.

**Gordon Peery**

We played together for 10 years, we became a pretty famous band. I mean, we were traveling outside of New England most of the time and we weren't getting rich, because that's not the nature of the business. But we were having a wonderful time.

**Julie Vallimont**

What decade is this?

**Gordon Peery**

From like... '85 to '95. And then probably the main thing that happened, I think things would have evolved anyway, but I ended up getting a job that involved not being able to travel as much, and I'd kind of gotten tired of the traveling, even though it was fun. So I just said I'm sorry, I really can't do this very much anymore, and so the band pretty much came to an end, the band was Kerry and I and whoever happened to be playing with us. So once I was out of the equation, he went on to play with a bunch of other bands and became really well known as a teacher as well as a fiddler. I didn't really realize that until after he died, and I started reading and hearing what people had to say about him. He was a very important person in my life but also in the dance world. It was also during that same decade that Randy Miller had this idea for a recording project he wanted to do of this music of John Taggart, who is a fiddler in Sharon just south of Peterborough, whose memoirs he had discovered. So these were tunes that hadn’t seen the light of day, no one had heard them before. So we produced a cassette recording under a group called the [New Hampshire Fiddlers Union](https://www.gordonpeerymusic.com/randy-miller), which was Randy, and Rodney, and Skip Gorman. So here I am, playing with these three amazing fiddlers this unique music that had never been heard of, let alone recorded before. We did our cassette recording, we also managed to get booked to play the 10th annual Shetland Folk Festival, which was a wonderful experience in itself. Shortly after we got back from that things kind of fell apart. So we didn't continue that, although it did bring me into playing more with all three of those fiddlers individually. Since then I've done a lot of work with Randy, a lot of work with Rod, and a lot of work with Skip. After I stopped traveling to play music, what I discovered was that other pianists had come along, and they had taken up all the New England gigs. So no one was calling me anymore and I had other things going on in my life, too. I had my job, my family and the music was not as important as it had been, the music and dance. So I had 11 or 12 years where I might have played five dances during that time. I wasn't going to the Monday night dance. I wasn't playing, I was playing other kinds of music. My son was turning into a blues guitar player. So I was kind of getting into that a little bit, and doing other things. And then sometime, I actually wrote this down because I knew I wouldn't remember it. So it was on June 29, in 2007 and two or three months before that Rodney had called me up. And he said, well, I know you're not playing for dances as much anymore but I'm desperate. I'm wondering if you could play for this dance in Dover, Tod Whittemore's calling, and David Surette is going to be playing with me. I thought, well, how bad can that really be? So I went and played, and it was just an amazing, amazing thing. I realized I'd like to be playing more. I was very fortunate at the time that Rodney was doing a lot of work that he asked me to join in with, so I got to play with him a lot. I've had various opportunities over the years to play with David Surette. In fact, he was a guitarist on the Fresh Fish recording that we did. And so that brought me back out, and then I met the young kids who formed the Trip to Nelson band. I know there's a lot of young musicians who I don't hear now, partly because I don't go to dances really, very often unless I'm playing. But I know there's a lot of fabulous music out there. I feel like I've kind of expanded into different kinds of music, and not as strictly focused on the contra stuff as I used to be. But that's really at the heart of anything that I do. You know, I'm always thinking in those terms. Oh, I know. I wanted to tell this story because it happened right here in Brattleboro, which is the most powerful musical experience that I've ever had. Fresh Fish was playing it was probably Danny Noveck and Kerry and myself. Steve was calling. This was like the last shift [of the Dawn Dance], so it's like, five or six o'clock in the morning. Most people, including myself had been up all night. We're playing, you're sort of dazed, playing at that hour. I don't remember what this set of tunes was, but something came into the air. It was like we were zapped by this continuous bolt of lightning or something and I had tears in my eyes, my cheeks were wet from, from these tears because what we were playing was so beautiful and so powerful and the other musicians felt it. The dancers felt it, and you knew that they were feeling it. I mean, this happens to anyone who's played for a dance, and that was probably sometime in the early 90s. These many years later, I could still just have that feeling of this, this energy going through and it was like, if it had gotten any more intense, I probably wouldn't have survived it. You know, a beautiful, beautiful experience.

**Julie Vallimont**

Magic, it's just magic. When you were starting to play with Fresh Fish, were there other bands? Was it common and normal to form a band? Was it unusual?

**Gordon Peery**

I think it was less common. Well I know it was less common. There was Wild Asparagus and we were a very, very different kind of band. But of course, Kerry ended up playing with them a lot. There was a lot of intersection and Ann [Percival, of Wild Asparagus] played with us and so forth. But we really approached the music differently. McQuillen had his band, which was originally New England Tradition and then after that, after Pete [Colby] and April [Limber] died, he formed the Old New England with Jane [Orzechowski] and Deanna [Stiles], I think it was probably during that 10-year period that I was playing with Fresh Fish that it became more common for bands to have names, and some of them were really hilarious. Some of them were weird but it's hard to think of a band name.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah. I mean, still, the contra band names have not improved over the years.

**Gordon Peery**

I mentioned earlier that when I was first doing this, you'd have a poster promoting a dance and it wouldn't even say who was playing for it, it's just we're doing a dance. Eventually it became more common to list the musicians, it's much easier to list a single band name than it is three or four musicians. There's nothing I've ever read, which shows that there was a lot in terms of naming bands before that. I mean, there might have been orchestras that played, Ralph Page and his Orchestra or something like that, but it was it was more fluid.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, certainly there have been bands before but this sounds like the wave of new, like, nowadays, a lot of organizers almost expect bands for a lot of dances. Dancers won't come if it's not a band that they know.

**Gordon Peery**

I've run into this before where I've wanted to play for certain dance, you know? And they'll say, well, unless let's this is gonna be a draw, you know, we can't do it. Which I understand because I've run dances before too.

**Julie Vallimont**

The organizers have to pay the rent.

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah, then the band is expected to do part of the marketing through social media and all this, and so forth. I used to pay attention to that. Now if someone wants me to play for a dance, I'm happy to do it. But I'm not trying to market myself. I think at a certain point, that's what happens. You know, it's like McQuillen didn't market himself because he just answered the phone. I'm playing enough, and as I said, I’m doing different stuff, different kinds of music. I had for several summers, playing in this sort of jazz and blues band with Paul Klemperer, who's a saxophonist prominent in the Austin music scene, but who summers up in Nelson. So we put together a summer band with my son Spencer playing guitar, and a bass player and drummer and singer. We had some fabulous gigs and we had a really big summer lined up this year, that of course collapsed. I'm doing an American Songbook program with a friend of mine who is technically an opera singer but who's venturing out into the jazz world. She's an opera singer, I'm a contra dance piano player, but we're doing this George Gershwin, Irving Berlin kind of program and it's really, really fun. So we're looking forward, we had actually sold out two nights of a show for early April, but we never got to do it.

**Julie Vallimont**

Maybe someday.

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah, I think we will.

**Julie Vallimont**

So if you don't mind, I'm so interested to hear a little bit about this time in your musical life of, like, Fresh Fish and Kerry and how that has shaped your approach to playing for contra dances. It seems like Kerry had this real vision of what he wanted a band to be at a time when a lot of music wasn't elevated to that level necessarily. What were the things that he felt the most strongly about that affected the way that Fresh Fish sounded?

**Gordon Peery**

Well, I think... two very important factors for Fresh Fish. One was that we worked almost exclusively with Steve Zakon-Anderson, who is an incredible caller. That was in the early part of his career, too. So he was learning, so it was good for him to have a good band, but it was good for us to have a good caller. Kerry had actually started out as a caller so he knew about the choreography of dances. He had a very quick mind and an encyclopedic mind. So he could watch the dance being taught. And he would know what set of tunes, out of the thousands that he knew, what tunes would go with that dance. Some fiddlers pay attention to that, some don't, but he was really good at finding tunes that were well-suited to a dance. Once we found those, we would make them solid in our repertoire. So Steve knew that if he was calling a particular dance, we were going to be using specific tunes to go with that dance. So especially as we got later in our career, we would do a dance that might, again, appear very spontaneous, but it was actually orchestrated to be effective. And conversely, if a set of tunes didn't work, Kerry would make note of that, and we wouldn't use it again for that particular dance. So I think that was a lot of it. His phrasing was brilliant and his intonation was fabulous. This is something that I think is sometimes overlooked, it's pretty easy in folk music, to think that maybe you can get away with less intonation. There are a lot of very energetic and otherwise good fiddlers who are just maybe slightly off, and not even at a point where other people would necessarily hear it, but somehow affects the overall thing. Kerry just knew how to land on the notes. I mean, you know, we didn't... very minuscule fraction of accuracy. So in the course of an evening of dancing that would really have an impact on people, I think I think those were the things, those combination of things. I think that I was so inspired by working with him, that it really allowed my piano playing to improve as well. I was able to put a drive into it, that people would respond to and that would make me feel good. I mean, if you're playing an evening of dance and somebody comes up specifically and talks about your piano work, it makes you feel good. One of the most wonderful compliments I got, somebody came up after a dance and said "Wow, your style is kind of like barrel house Irish". Well, I don't know quite what that means. But it sounds good, sounds good to me. Kerry would comment on that too, that he appreciated the sort of embellishments that I was bringing into it. But he always came back to anchor the beat. I think I was able — because of McQuillen's influence and because of the discipline that Kerry imposed on us — that I was able to pretty much always honor the basic function of the piano, which was the beat. And if that wasn't solid, then nothing else would matter.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. It's kind of like, fundamentally, we have one job, right? A lot of little jobs, but the main job is the most important one. What were Kerry's thoughts about repertoire for dances? What did you guys play? Yeah, he knew so many tunes. And one problem is that I have a very poor memory for the names of tunes. I mean, even to this day there are tunes that I played for decades. If I heard it, I can't tell you exactly what it was. On my website [I recently posted mp3 files for the entire Fresh Fish album](https://www.gordonpeerymusic.com/turning-of-the-tide), which was the closest that I could get to making this public. After Kerry died we were able to, no, it was before he died actually, we got his permission to do this. We were able to do a reissue of the Fresh Fish CD "Turning of the Tide." That sold out, he died, there were complications, and so it's just not possible to commercially market this and of course, there's no market for stuff anyway these days. So the tunes are not downloadable, but they're there so if somebody wanted to hear Kerry and the Fresh Fish repertoire, I've got a page on my website with those audio files. It's really fun to listen to, I can still listen to it and get excited. My son, who was quite young at the time that we were playing, he's 33 now, and he still puts on the Fresh Fish album. He says, that is music, that was so inspiring. He's otherwise not into this kind of music at all. Some of his friends, they'll come over and they never listen to contra dance music. They may not even know what it is and they'll say oh, Fresh Fish, I remember that. So that's kind of a cool thing. What was David's role... was it more guitar or mandolin?

**Gordon Peery**

David Surette? Probably some of each and some mandocello or bouzouki, or whatever those other things are that he brings around. David is a class act. He is an incredibly competent musician. He is also... he's relaxed, yet he's disciplined. He is always just so much fun to work with. One of my favorite musicians to work with, he’s always got a smile and he can just do stuff. I don't remember him ever introducing anything, saying, oh, let's try this too and let's try that too. It was much more of a supportive kind of thing.

**Julie Vallimont**

Seems like he knew that was a good role for him. Did you work together as a rhythm section, or were you mostly kind of holding down the fort with your big piano style? No, we did have to communicate. I mentioned that Tom Hodgson played with us for the first year or so. Tom was also a fabulous guitarist, and more than anyone else I ever played with, Tom and I had this intuition between us. This was exciting for me, because I really hadn't played in many bands before in a serious situation. So we could be playing along. And somehow we both knew that the next time through the tune, we were going to do this little shift in what we were doing, this little embellishment, and we wouldn't usually even talk it out. We just knew somehow, or, you know, you get to a point where you're going to stop and have a measure rest, where normally you would sound the chord. That happened over and over again. So that really put me in touch with the importance of collaboration. I don't specifically remember because it was so long ago, but I'm sure David and I, there's some of that intuition as well there. But there are times that, you know... this is the value of rehearsal. Okay, the third time through this tune, we're going to do, you know, block chords on the second beat, or whatever it is. So that's really fun, I would often learn a lot from him, he would do some things in open tunings. And so the piano has to really be careful about what's going on there. But we tended to work pretty well together. I'm not shy about having charts in front of me if I'm playing with a guitar player or other rhythm players, it's pretty vital. Because, as you know, in these tunes, there's oftentimes many different interpretations of chords you can do. There's not a right way or wrong way but if somebody is playing an E minor, and another person's playing the B minor or something at the same time, it doesn't work. Did you have a lot of arrangements? Or is it more of having some of these things like chord subs that you can go to? I would say there was a modest amount of arrangement. When I look now at, say, when [I've been playing with the Klemperer band](file:///C:\Users\Margaret\Downloads\Gordon’s%20work%20with%20Paul%20Klemperer), doing jazz stuff, we would have to really define the arrangements a lot more carefully because the nature of the music is different. I don't recall that we had hard arrangements. I mean, it might be like, oh, this time through the guitar will drop out, or the piano will drop out or something. We would have arrangements to that degree. And oftentimes, it would be on the fly, like you're playing and I would just feel like it would be really good for the piano to drop out and have the guitar heard or something else. You know how this is, you lean over, and you say, I'm going to drop out this time. And they think oh, did he just say we're switching to the key of G? Yeah, I've been there. So, those kind of communications are important. I had this moment with a fiddler, where he leaned to me and said, I'm going to drop out. And what I heard was drop out, at the same moment we both stopped playing and there was no music. That was amazing.

**Gordon Peery**

Which can be okay.

**Julie Vallimont**

And then, of course, we both hastily came back, and the dancers are like, what? You learn those little tricks in communicating, right? I think, especially when I was playing with Trip to Nelson, these wonderful kids who are all stellar musicians, we would tend to do a lot of novelty things. I know on at least one occasion we just stopped playing an entire time through the dance, you have to warn the caller that you're going to do this, you're just gonna say, okay, the dancers are not going to have music for this time through. They have to keep going, we have to watch the dance and then be ready to come back in again. How did the dancers know not to stop, does the caller come back in?

**Gordon Peery**

The caller would have to say keep dancing, keep dancing, then so that they would do that. In Trip to Nelson, Matt and Lizza will be playing pennywhistles, it would be Chorus Jig, and they would go out and they would be dancing, they would start at the top of the set and they would dance through chorus jig, playing their pennywhistles. They'd have their whistles in one hand and be doing whatever they could with the other hand and somehow it worked.

**Julie Vallimont**

I can't imagine doing contra corners while playing the pennywhistle. I'm not quite sure how they did it but it worked. That's amazing. I could never do that with the piano for some reason. Yeah. I don't know why. I guess you could get an accordion... a melodica, and bring it out on the floor.

**Gordon Peery**

That would scare people off.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, right. I would think the dancing to the pennywhistle player would be bad enough. What are your thoughts when you're playing for a dance, what are the things you're thinking about as a piano player? What are your thoughts about matching tunes to dances or how you accompany them, any of that stuff?

**Gordon Peery**

I usually don't express an opinion about that. First of all, I feel it's up to the caller to specify the kinds of tunes, if not the actual tunes that they want. Some callers are good at that, some aren't, or they don't care. It's up to the fiddler what they want to play and some fiddlers are tuned into what the dance might be, like the caller might say to the fiddler, "There's a lady's chain in the first B" and that's supposed to be meaningful to the fiddler for the type of tune we think. For some fiddlers it is, but many..."Okay, so what?" I tend to not really have a thought about that. I can usually tell once the dance is going, how well it fits — and in some cases it doesn't. I remember one of the early Trip to Nelson dances, we were playing over in the eastern part of New Hampshire. And they were obsessed with the tune Chorus Jig and they really wanted to play it and the caller was not calling Chorus Jig, they called some other dance. And they said we're gonna play the tune Chorus Jig anyway. It is so familiar to so many dancers that the dancers got totally confused by it. So that never happened again. There are some things that I think myself or any piano player can do to kind of rescue a dance. Sometimes it just might be, the phrasing might be off with a tune or something. Sometimes the piano might have to do more in terms of defining the phrasing, or sometimes they need to do less. It's important to watch the dance and kind of see what's going on and follow that. So if I'm playing for dance, I am paying attention to that but I wouldn't say that's using 100% of my processor. You know, it might be like 10%. And otherwise, I love to look at people, study people out on the dance floor, make up stories in my mind about what their lives are like, you know, if I don't know them. It's funny, and of course over the years, less so in recent years, because I haven't been that much a part of the Monday night dance. But for years, I would watch as a couple would come to the dance every Monday and then they would break up. What was going to happen? Well, first maybe the girl comes back and starts dancing regularly. And then the guy comes back, and they're civil to each other, but you're watching as they're moving up and down the dance line. And when there's that inevitable swing or something, you know, some reason for them to have contact, or even more exciting is when one of them has a new partner. So, the old partner and the new partner are doing a cast off or something. It's just kind of entertaining to see that. Also a really cool thing to see that so often the dance wins, they don't stay away from the dance, they just come back and they say, okay, I'm gonna deal with this social confrontation but I still want to dance. So it really works out.

**Julie Vallimont**

I do that too. Especially in some smaller communities the dance is the social scene for the town. You could lose the connection with your social scene and your other friends if you can't go to the dance.

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah. No, it's very sort of... incestuous, I guess, would be one, one word.

**Julie Vallimont**

Interwoven.

**Gordon Peery**

It's also, some places I'm playing I just think about the building that I'm in, there's some fabulous halls. I think about the years that I've played there and what's gone on before, I never get tired of being in the Nelson Town Hall, that's my home place. I played with Fresh Fish and also with Rodney down at Goff Hall in Rehoboth Massachusetts. I just look at the architecture there and there's a wonderful tune that Dan Lanier wrote called Goff Hall. It's one of my favorite tunes. So there are certain places to play. And then of course, you get into these big places like Glen Echo, down in Washington [DC].

**Julie Vallimont**

Spanish Ballroom.

**Gordon Peery**

It's an amazing place to play... it's actually a terrible place to play, at least it used to be, because the acoustics are so bad. You can't really hear what you're doing. You just have to hope that you're in sync with the fiddler, because you can't really hear them.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's hard to describe in words how big this hall is, it's enormous. I found it can be hard to connect to the dancers, because the sound of the dancers doesn't always come back up onto the stage. They're great dancers and very enthusiastic. But it's also hard to cheer in a large cavern when your sounds don't come back to you.

**Gordon Peery**

Well, also, I think, we developed a theory about urban versus rural dances. The first time this happened, we were playing, Fresh Fish was playing down in Washington, DC, it was not at Glen Echo, some other venue. We were getting very anemic applause throughout the evening. We'd been on tour for several days, we knew we were in good shape, you know, we just kept trying to rev it up, rev it up. It just seemed like no one was responding. We talked to whoever we were staying with afterwards, we said it didn't seem like people really liked what we were doing. "Oh they love it. It's just that they're not that expressive about it." And then we began to see that oftentimes, in the dances in the cities, where people are subject to this barrage of sound and lights and constant stimulation of city life, that there was just there was kind of like a buffer almost, with the music and they were experiencing it in a different way. Whereas we go to a little dance, like the Shepherdstown dance, or Nelson or wherever, and there would be this huge enthusiasm. So we tested out this one night, it was with a different band I was playing with, Steve was calling, Nat Hewitt, I think, was fiddling, and a couple of other people. We were playing the Cambridge [MA] dance, which was sort of a city dance. We knew that the Cambridge dancers didn't tend to pay that much attention to the band. So a few days before we recorded on cassette, because that's what you had, in those days, we recorded a set of tunes, that would be for the length of a dance. We brought that up and plugged it into the sound system. And so partway through the evening, we told Steve we're doing this, partway through the evening, he said "Okay four potatoes", somebody pressed play. We were just air playing up there on stage. But after a couple of times through the tune, we got off one by one and started mingling with the dancers. So there was no band on stage, but this music, which was us was still coming through. People were saying, “Get out of the way, get out of the way we're trying to have a dance". And at the end there was this sort of applause. I think very few people noticed that there was no band up there. You know you couldn't do that in Nelson, but, you know, it kind of made the point.

**Julie Vallimont**

In Nelson, they would recognize you on the floor and they would notice that you weren't on the stage. I've often fantasized about doing experiments like that. You could also take the same set and play it for several different dances and see where you get more applause. I think that is a pattern that I've also noticed, as well. Something about that. Just the difference between, like, is it entertainment, is it a community where people are coming to have fun, is it both? What are the expectations? There's just so many different factors. And then you talk about, like, city life and how that affects what you want as a dancer, I guess. It's kind of interesting to think about. Do you have thoughts about tempo? Ha, ask a piano player if they have thoughts about tempo.

**Gordon Peery**

Well, obviously, I feel that the tempo should be maintained consistently, unless you're shifting from a jig to reel or something, or whatever. But I know that I'm guilty of speeding out, it just happens, you know... it's really hard to do that. I cannot play with a metronome. I can't even get started with a metronome, it just doesn't work for me. I am pretty responsive to callers, who will give me some indication, either you should slow down, or you should pick it back up and so that can happen sometimes. It really is the caller's decision, how fast it should be going. And in some cases, we're playing at a normal speed, but the dance really requires a little bit more space, and so it should be slightly slower. In some cases, it seems to me like it might be too fast, but the choreography of the dance will allow for that. And so I'm going to sign, you know... pick it up a little bit. Sometimes, if it's a beginning group, especially, we might start a little bit slow and then the caller will indicate to pick it up. Renn Tolman, who played whistle would come to the Monday night dances, he was adamant about the speed that he wanted to play at. He would have this metronome and he'd set it on the piano and he expected me to watch it or listen to it. I couldn't... just like a light thing, you know? It didn't work for me.

**Julie Vallimont**

Do you know what tempo he set it up?

**Gordon Peery**

So I think it tended to be pretty fast. And in his case, it had nothing to do with what was right for the dance, it was how he wanted to play it. The piano player, technically, if there is a piano, the piano player technically is responsible for starting the dance and therefore having an appropriate tempo for the for the particular dance. There are occasions where, there's one fiddler, who I won't name, but who I have worked with on occasion, who really likes to play the tunes more slowly. And I'll say, Okay, I'm going to control the scene here and so I start, and they just start where they want to be. There's nothing I can do about it. Other fiddlers might pick up to where I am. But in this case, I have to adjust to where they are. I think it's something that you have to be mindful of. I think there's probably a tendency to play things pretty briskly now, a lot of the tunes really want to clip along. It's kind of up to the caller, I don't pay that much attention. I know that metronome settings are like, you know, 110 or 120, or 130, or something like that, and sometimes the caller will turn and say, this should be at 130. You know, okay, it's 7:30 now, we have quite a ways to go. [laughs] The tempo is important, but the main thing is just to be to be solid with what you're doing and not float around that much. I haven't had that much experience. There are occasionally some bad fiddlers who just can't keep the tempo in spite of the piano, but they don't get many gigs, so it works out.

**Julie Vallimont**

It sounds like you don't think about tempos numerically very much. It sounds like you maybe just have, like, this internalized instinct for how fast the potatoes should go.

**Gordon Peery**

Right, yeah.

**Julie Vallimont**

And then you just start there. I remember when I was a new piano player for dances, I had to learn to internalize that, I had no idea how fast a potato should go in the beginning. It was terrifying. It's so much pressure. I had to have a metronome with me. While the caller was doing the walk through, I would pick a number, like, I asked Lisa Greenleaf, and she said, 117, try that. I would set that and then I would keep tapping my foot until it was time to do the potatoes, turning the metronome off, because you don't want to play to a metronome. Nowadays, there's apps for that and stuff. But over time, I did internalize that sense of tempo. I imagine the kind of fiddlers you play with would really affect your tempo, because the tempo affects is affected by what the dancers want. It's a style of tune that you're playing, some genres of tunes want to go faster than others. But also, some tunes have like a lilt to them or a groove to them, they just have a speed they want to go at, which really depends on the fiddler. So I feel like some of the tempo questions are really fiddler specific. I agree with you that we piano players don't always have a lot of control over that. I used to play with an accordion player who really would rush when he got excited. I was trying to be like, okay, I'm going to... I'm going to hold it back. I'm going to hold down the fort and keep him from rushing, because the caller would always look at us with this panicked look in their eyes. And so I was like, whatever he does, I'm not going to speed up. Next thing I know he's a full beat ahead of me and the dancers like what's going on? I'm like, oh, no. You have to kind of wiggle around a little bit. Yeah, I had no choice until a very wise fiddler friend told me, here's what you have to do if you're out of sync, first, you have to lock in together, you have to meet them wherever they are and then you can slowly gradually affect the tempo. But if you're not locked in, you can't do anything because you're just at odds with each other. So I was like, oh, I was doing this the wrong way. Ironically, you have to speed up or slow down to match them and then maybe you can nudge it a little bit. It's funny, our instruments are so powerful, but then there's times when we're so powerless. Have you had anything like really go off the rails for you? I mean, I'm sure we all have at various points.

**Gordon Peery**

Well, yeah, I mean, not in a hugely embarrassing way, there are a couple of musicians, and this goes back a long time ago, a couple of musicians who would occasionally show up for the Monday night dance in Nelson, and they knew the tunes but for some reason, they didn't always play the correct number of beats in each measure. This one fiddler in particular, he would be playing and he would just be dropping out notes here and there. I would have to follow along with that because, as you mentioned before, I could try holding it, but he's oblivious to that. I would just kind of follow along. Usually, it wasn't a significant amount, it might be one or two beats here, one or two beats there and usually I would get sort of this knowing look from the caller and then they see what's going on. Some of the dancers might be aware of it, some of them might not. So that's pretty challenging because you really have to adjust, you have to be prepared to adjust for every measure of music. It's kind of like slip jigs, except not on purpose, sometimes more beats, sometimes less beats. I don't recall a time where things have totally fallen apart, although it's possible that I'm just putting it out of my mind. I have had those experiences, and it's interesting to me that someone could hear a tune and not realize that they were skipping notes on it, because I'm thinking so much in terms of, 1234, 1234 or 123456 or whatever, and to have stuff missed like that is weird. It's a different situation where you have fiddlers who will drop an A part or a B part.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, that happens often.

**Gordon Peery**

That's less critical but it still can kind of spiral out of control a little bit.

**Julie Vallimont**

Right. Sometimes you don't notice and the caller tells you. Other times, you have to add in an extra part. Some fiddlers, they realize what's happened and they can they can repair it, others can't repair it. You don't know where it's gonna go and suddenly it's time to end. Do you end at the end of the second B or do you end where the caller is telling you? If the caller is savvy about what's going on, they'll give you the cut your throat sign, which means they want you to cut your throat or........[laughing] Stop right now whatever you're doing. So wonderful to hear all your stories... is there anything else you'd like to talk about today?

**Gordon Peery**

You had said in your notes, kind of wondering about the future of dancing and all that stuff. I remember, when I was traveling more to play music often we would be staying with people who would be sort of pillars of the dance community. There would be these very serious, late night discussions about the importance of maintaining tradition and why we dance and this and that, and so forth. Quite frankly, I would always be really bored by that. Even in my own community with a lot of emphasis on the tradition and preserving the tradition, I understand where that's coming from. But to me, we do it to have fun. People didn't start dancing to establish a tradition, they started dancing because it was entertainment. There weren't that many choices for entertainment, and as we continue having contra dance or other things as part of our social and cultural life, the real motivation for doing this should be that it's fun. I can respect that some people take a more academic approach to it and want to understand the tradition and why we do it and certain turns of phrase that you use in the music or the calling and so forth. But that has never been that important to me. I think that the dance has been evolving quite a bit anyway, I'm less a part of the scene than I used to be. But I could still, you know, I could see that there are some really young creative musicians coming up with some fabulous hybrid stuff that has a lot of global influences. And I think, after this hiatus that we're in now, and this is true of so many parts of our life, not just music, we need to be really open to looking at and experiencing things in a completely different way. I was having a conversation with Lisa Sieverts, who's a pretty solid scholar on dance stuff, as well as a great caller. She was reflecting on the white European-ness of the dance tradition and with the perspectives that we're trying to nurture now, where that really fits. I don't know, but I think that at a contra dance, or it might even not be called a contra dance 10 years from now, it could look a lot different in terms of the kinds of dancing we're doing, and the kinds of music that are being played and the demographics of the dance community. I think people want to dance, they want to play music, they want to hear music, and we're going to find ways to do that. It will be possible a generation from now to trace links to the Irish tunes, to the Scottish tunes, to the Cape Breton tunes, and to people like Bob McQuillen, and other mentors like that, but it's going to be a really different sound. Hopefully it will be making people just as happy as it always has. Because to me, that's what it's all about. If you do something for the sake of preserving a tradition, you're kind of putting it in a glass jar. I know that there are people who would strongly disagree with that who take a more sort of academic approach to it. But to me, it's just kind of been about having fun. I've been very fortunate that when this person advised me early in my playing time, "Oh, you on the piano, you would never go above middle C.'" I'm really glad that I just completely ignored that because it's allowed me to have a pretty satisfying time playing music. I hope to have a good many years yet and I hope to be doing stuff that I can't even imagine now, in terms of the kinds of musical innovation that we do.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's a really great perspective. If the sound of Bob McQuillen style of piano playing, or the piano as a contra dance instrument at all, if those things disappeared, how would you feel about that? Or what's your perspective on that?

**Gordon Peery**

Well, as long as people having the kind of experience that a contra dance satisfies exists, then it probably doesn't matter. Contra dancing is a little bit special in that it's a community sort of thing and even though people travel far and wide to dance, it still kind of reflects a regional community, wherever you are. I think it's different than, say, a disco club, or whatever else happens. It's not to say that other things are bad, but I think that the unique thing about the dancing is this community. If that can be nurtured, then that's the important thing. I think the piano's survival is somewhat ensured by the development of digital keyboards.

**Julie Vallimont**

Instrumental, pun intended.

**Gordon Peery**

Or key.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yes, key in the survival.

**Gordon Peery**

That's made a lot of difference in terms of gigs that I could accept and also the kinds of music that I can play. Occasionally, if I'm playing for a dance, for the last waltz, I'll throw in some strings, synthesized strings or something, it gives you more possibilities with that. I think fiddles will be around as they have, but you could look and say, well, this is the long tradition, but you can also look and say, this is a pretty short tradition. You know, fiddles have been around for a few hundred years, pianos have been around for less. So it will evolve in ways that we don't know about but it's less about the music and more about how the music serves the community. Whether Celtic music or whatever we want to call it will be serving the same function, 10, 20, 30 years from now, who knows, but I think the possibilities are pretty exciting, because we have more global communications than we ever have. Unless we have total armageddon, that's probably not going to go away so there'll be opportunities for people to mix a lot more. I remember being somewhere in what was then Czechoslovakia with the [Green Mountain Volunteers](https://vermontinternationalfestival.com/organizations/green-mountain-volunteers/) and they came to our performance that we did. Afterwards, there were a bunch of musicians that showed up with guitars and banjos and they wanted to play bluegrass. They couldn't speak English, but they knew the English words to all these bluegrass songs. And so we're just kind of playing along with them and having a blast. That was something that was really not part of their tradition, but it kind of mixed it up. That was a long time ago, stuff that people are doing now brings in music from all over the place. So who knows? I tend to not really worry about it that much because I think people are gonna play music.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's more about the spirit of coming together as a community, in your mind, and then what the community needs is different from community to community. There might be more communities who want more traditional music, whatever traditional is, sounding like it has and there are other communities who are working on inclusivity being one of their most important goals and finding ways to remove barriers to making it a truly inclusive activity.

**Gordon Peery**

Yeah, I think that's important. I do think there will be some evolution in the dance community in the contra dance community with that, I don't know what form it will take. And we live in New Hampshire more so even then, than here but we live in a fairly narrow demographic and that may evolve over time. I've never spent time in any cities or any other parts of the country where there are probably influences that we don't really get up in New Hampshire, or don't experience as part of our daily life.

**Julie Vallimont**

I've heard from people of color around here where I live who don't go to the local contra dances because they just don't feel comfortable there for vague reasons that you can't even always put your finger on it, just doesn't feel right. I think a lot about accessibility, and I think people forget that. Just because you can't dance doesn't mean you don't want to be a part of the dance community, and making our halls and spaces accessible is a big challenge. A lot of halls were designed back when nobody thought about accessibility. If you were in a wheelchair, you just had to be locked up for the rest of your life and making accessibility to different socioeconomic backgrounds, as well. I think, maybe a lot of dances were kind of working class or farmers, but some dances are expensive and only the people with money can go to them. What kind of community do you have when you're excluding people? It's an interesting question. What do you think music would sound like in 50 years? Who knows?

**Gordon Peery**

It's easy for someone of my vintage and experience to look at the broader musical world of popular music. I could say something like, well, there's never been anything like the Beatles, that was the last great innovation in rock and roll. I don't believe that, but it's something that you hear a lot of people say, there's never been anything like it. But the thing is, there are these breakthrough things that happen periodically. What happens if there was a Beatles level experience, but with Celtic music, that all of a sudden, opened up people's hearts and imaginations. The more that I learn about different kinds of music, the more I realize, I really am pretty ignorant about most of it. I'm familiar with dance music, although even there not at a level of many, many scholars. I know a little bit about blues, I know a tiny bit about jazz and stuff. I have gotten more exposure to classical stuff. Yesterday, I spent an hour listening to some Schubert Lieder [secular poems set to music], which I never thought I would do, as I was walking through the woods, on a guided program. There's always new stuff to learn. I would hope that what I got to the end of my run, I could look ahead and say, wow, there's some really cool music that is going to be coming here that's gonna be exciting for people. We can't help making music, we just can't. So people are going to do it.

**Julie Vallimont**

We can't help dancing. You know, and other dance styles will come into our dancing traditions as well as they already have and will continue to.

**Gordon Peery**

So you might not recognize a contra dance 50 years from now but it doesn't mean that the influence isn't there.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's probably more likely to survive if it stays relevant to people while also not losing what it is that makes it magical in the first place and honing in on that. Well, thank you so much.

**Gordon Peery**

Oh, thank you. This is a really cool thing, just to be able to sit here on this nice warm day and chat and then to have it recorded for posterity. 50 years from now someone can listen to this and say, man, Gordon was really full of shit.

**Julie Vallimont**

They're gonna say that about me too, don't you worry. Well, thank you so much, Gordon.

**Gordon Peery**

My pleasure.

**Julie Vallimont**

Take care.

*Transcript may be edited for clarity. Apologies for any typos. Thanks to Ellen Royalty and Margaret Youngberg for their help in preparing this transcript.*