Contra Pulse Episode 23 – Tony Parkes

**Julie Vallimont**

Welcome to Contra pulse. This is Julie Vallimont. This episode we talk with caller and musician Tony Parkes.

Tony Parkes has been calling square and contra dances for more than 50 years. The first Baby Boomer to take up the profession, he learned from many of the leading callers of the day. Dancers in 36 states, Canada, and Europe have enjoyed his clear calling, excellent timing, and positive, reassuring teaching manner. He has beginners doing real dances within seconds, but can keep experienced dancers entertained with a bit of challenge or elegance.

Using traditional basic movements, Tony has composed over 90 square and contra dance routines, some of which have become modern classics. He is the author of a standard text on calling and two collections of dance material. Several recordings feature Tony as caller, pianist, director, and/or producer. He has taught dancing and calling skills at major week-long music and dance camps and at innumerable state and regional weekend festivals.

Tony and his wife Beth, also a caller, live in the Boston area. They divide their calling time between appearing at weekly and monthly dance series throughout (and beyond) New England and presiding at corporate, civic, and private events.

In this interview, Tony shares how he got started first in square dancing and then in contra dancing. And how he ended up as a caller learning alongside Ted Sanella. Tony has deep roots in square dancing and shares a lot of detailed history and stories about squares at their prime decades ago. We also talk about the heyday of the Yankee Ingenuity dance in Boston. And he shares the joy he finds in calling community dances and other events.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, hello, Tony Parkes, and welcome to Contra Pulse.

**Tony Parkes**

Hi, Julie. Good to be here.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's lovely to see you, are we at your home right now?

**Tony Parkes**

Yes, this is this is the dining room, where I do most of my recording.

**Julie Vallimont**

I am also in my dining room since COVID. No dining happens in my dining room anymore. It is now podcast central.

**Tony Parkes**

That way you can leave the equipment set up.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, it's great. So do you live in the Boston area? You just outside Boston?

**Tony Parkes**

We're right on the Bedford, Billerica, line about 20 miles northwest of Boston, just outside Route 128.

**Julie Vallimont**

How far is that to the Scout House?

**Tony Parkes**

Seven miles.

**Julie Vallimont**

Seven miles. It's a trip you've probably made many times in your life.

**Tony Parkes**

The proximity to the Scout House was one of the factors that that got us buying where we did.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's great. That's commitment. I remember hearing you call. I remember working with you a few times, which I was really fortunate to get to do. I don't know a lot about how you get started calling or playing piano or anything. I'm excited to just dive in and find out some answers to these questions.

**Tony Parkes**

I'm probably one of the few people who's still living who was active in square dancing in the 1950s. I'm able to say that because I was very young at the time. What some of your listeners, but maybe not all of them might or might not be aware of, is that square dancing was a national fad after the Second World War. It was a real craze, not quite on the level of say, the hula hoop, or certainly not the Beatles. But everybody knew what square dancing was, just about everybody, if they didn't do it themselves they knew somebody who did. When a city recreation department would announce a square dance class, people would line up around the block to sign up. Sometimes they had to find a second caller and a second hall to take care of the overflow from the class. Literally millions of people were square dancing across the United States and Canada. I have always felt like somehow I was meant to be a caller, a serious caller, because I was in the right place at the right time on so many occasions. There were a lot of callers who had been really active during the boom years, late '40s, early '50s, who were coming to the end of their careers about the time I was beginning mine, and they were so overjoyed that somebody under 50 was interested that, far from trying to freeze me out, they gave me all the help they could.

**Tony Parkes**

And then of course, I was in on the ground floor when the big contra revival started in the mid '60s... by then, I was firmly committed. I did my first square dancing in grade school at the age of six. It was a private progressive school in Greenwich Village in New York. It started off in the 1920's as an experiment within the public schools and then it got cut loose and it's still going, Little Red Schoolhouse and Elizabeth Irwin High School, still there, still in the Village, still using some of the original buildings. They had a serious folk music and dance program that everybody was involved in. It wasn't an elective. You just did it. We had a music teacher who would call from the piano some of the time. Some of the time she would put on records with calls, which, again, were of some of the top square dance callers that were made during those boom years. So we were doing some pretty sophisticated stuff for 6, 7, 8-year-olds. That's where I got my first taste of square dancing. I don't think any of the kids ended up hating it the way you know...there's a common thread through American culture that kids are exposed to square dancing, sometimes forced to do it in gym class and they end up hating it. We didn't have that, it was part of music rather than phys. ed. It was handled pretty well, and I do think that some of the kids thought it was kid stuff, that they weren't going to go back to it because it was something they had in school, but I don't think they ended up hating it. I certainly didn't. At that point, I liked it, although I liked a lot of other things, too.

**Tony Parkes**

What really turned me on to it was the second summer camp that I went to was the Farm and Wilderness camps in Vermont. A lot of other callers and musicians can point to Farm and Wilderness as one of the sources of their interest. They had up to a 10-piece band, it depended on who was there that summer, but the band was all made up of camp counselors, it was 6, 8, 10 pieces. At age 12, they let me play piano in the band. I had had some piano lessons, classical, and never really stuck with it. But I knew how to pound out the rhythm, oompah, oompah or boom-chuck, boom-chuck. When I was 12, I was the piano player in the camp square dance band for the whole summer except for a couple of the dances that were past my curfew, because there would be I think five square dances a week at the camps for the different age groups, and then one after hours for the staff, which I didn't get to stay up and play for, I don't know who did. It's hard to know what to pick out of there to tell you about because it was all wonderful. We had about three different callers in the time I was there. The most prominent caller was a fellow named Jon Lurie, who I think is still alive in New Jersey. He'd be probably 90-ish by now. He had a very dominant personality and he would basically shout into the mic and bounce up and down as he called, very charismatic character. What I like to say these days is I saw 100 kids on the floor all doing the same thing at the same time because he said so, and I said, I want to be him. I didn't quite put it in those words, at age 10, 12 ,14. But that's how I felt inside, that this was something I wanted to be part of, the three-way interaction between the caller and the musicians and the dancers. It was like magic. It was much more exciting than the square dancing we'd had in school, although there was nothing wrong with that. When I was 14, the summer I was 14, Jon Lurie took me aside and said, next Thursday night, or actually, I think this was Tuesday or Wednesday, and he said, tomorrow night or Thursday night, at the big lodge square dance with the big lodge being the intermediate age group, you're going to call "Golden Slippers" and I said, "Gulp, I am?" He had his eye on me, he saw me kind of mouthing along with him on the floor. He knew I was interested, he knew that this whole thing turned me on.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's amazing.

**Tony Parkes**

"Golden Slippers" is one of the easier dances for a caller to remember... "first old couple go way up town, bring that other couple down" and so forth. I did it and my voice cracked about three times because I was at the age, my voice hadn't quite settled down. I think actually, he may have been watching me for a couple of years and waiting for my voice to decide that it wanted to be a baritone instead of a messy soprano. I got out there and my voice cracked three times. I think I remembered all the words in the right order, it is a little tricky because you have to call each couple twice, otherwise the same lady is active all the way around and no other lady gets to be active. Even with the one I started with, there was a little bit that I had to remember. So that went okay, and then a week or two later, he had me call my first patter call, which was "forward six and the left hand lady goes under," and that's still one of my favorite calls. I don't remember how much calling I did. I think it may have been only those two, or maybe another one. When I got back to New York, I looked around for whatever square dances were happening in New York. This was, as I said, the tail end of the square dance boom, and a lot of the dances had closed down. There was one at Columbia University Teachers College, the grad school, that was every Friday night and run by a fellow named Dick Kraus. I knew him by name and by reputation because he had written one of the standard textbooks on square dancing, which I had. He had also made a set of five albums for RCA Records, mostly with calls with a few numbers without calls to practice to. I knew who he was, and I knew he was really good. I went to his dance, and during one of the breaks I went up and introduced myself and said I had done a little calling that summer and he said, well, why don't you bring a record next week and we'll see what you can do. This was a record dance, there was very little live music in the New York City area at the time for dancing. So the next week, I brought a record, and for several years I brought a different record every week, and he let me practice on his group, which was very generous of him. It did a lot to help me along, because the most important thing in learning to call, just as in learning to play an instrument, is practice.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely. What were some of the records that you used?

**Tony Parkes**

Well, again, this being just after a big boom in interest in square dancing. There were hundreds and hundreds of square dance records without calls that were marketed to these clubs that got together for the purpose of dancing. Most of the records would be released in two versions, one with the calls and one without. I had been buying records without calls to practice to at home and a few records with calls. I wish now I had bought more, because it's a documentary of what was going on. I have managed to pick up some of the old records with calls since then, but mostly I was buying the instrumentals so that I could practice in my room at home. I don't remember the exact titles of the ones I was using, but just about every major record label had square dance records, because the activity was so popular... RCA Victor, Columbia, Capitol, Decca, and some of the smaller companies too. In addition, there were about 30 small companies that were organized for the sole purpose of making square dance records. Windsor and MacGregor were the two biggest ones, but there were quite a few others. Just about any popular song, whether it was Steven Foster or Gay '90s, Roaring '20s, the Great American Songbook, if it was a song that people would know and it was anywhere near march tempo, somebody would make a square dance. They would write a dance routine to fit the song, and they would make a record of it with and without calls. About half the dances that we did, both at summer camp and in New York City, were singing calls, and so things like Alabama Jubilee, My Little Girl, Golden Slippers, Climbing up the Golden Stairs, Jingle Bells, I don't think I ever called to it but it was a very popular song to put square dances to, because it wasn't a religious song and it was just the right tempo for square dancing. And on and on and on. Of course, the other half of the dances were patter calls, and you can do them to any fiddle tune. So things like Arkansas Traveler, Mississippi Sawyer, Flop Eared Mule, Rakes of Mallow, [Ragtime Annie](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_cQuBSo_jk), which I think I heard for the first time at summer camp the year I was playing piano, and ever since then that's been my absolute favorite fiddle tune. My second favorite is Crooked Stove Pipe, which not many people know outside the Northeast and also western Canada. St. Anne's Reel.

**Tony Parkes**

Very early on I discovered the Canadian traditions of fiddle music. Cape Breton, not so much, because it wasn't as adaptable to the kind of square dancing that I knew, but the very, very clean kind of slick contest style fiddling... sort of Nashville north, with fiddlers like Don Messer and later on Graham Townsend. Don Messer, of course, was sort of the Lawrence Welk of Canada. He had a very straight-laced white bread kind of variety show on radio and later TV, with guest singers and a group of precision dancers and so forth. It was very much like Lawrence Welk, except that Don Messer was a fiddler rather than an accordion player. There would always be a few fiddle tunes and a little bit of exhibition square dancing. He had a couple of wonderful piano players who had a very strong left hand. So on Mississippi Sawyer, for instance, instead of going [sings a simple oompah bass line], they would go [sings a more complicated bass line], and so it may be partly because I'm left handed, but I started imitating their technique. At summer camp, even, I think as early as age 12, I was doing this. Jack Sloanaker, who was a driving force in the square dance music at Farm and Wilderness, encouraged me and he loved that piano style. I think he was the one who put me on to what he called rolling tenths, which is where you put your thumbs a third apart, and then you play octaves in both hands. So for instance, your left thumb will be on the D below middle C, and your right thumb will be on the F sharp for a D chord and your pinkies will be doing the octaves and you'll go up [sings scale degrees] 1, 2, 2#, 3... and similar runs all over the place. I was getting what had become a traditional technique in the Northeast, even at that early age and doing more than just oompah oompah.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's great. I've thought of that moving tenths kind of sound as being associated with French Canadian piano, like I remember learning that from Rachel Aucoin. Did Jack say where that came from? Or it was just a sound that he liked to hear?

**Tony Parkes**

I think he I think he did refer to it as French Canadian, but it was also on the Don Messer records. It was something that was known and practiced, I think, all through Eastern Canada, whether the people were Anglophone or Francophone, it was one of those things that they had in common. Especially, that just as in New England, the piano was the core of a square dance band, the fiddle was the lead, but the piano was definitely the center of the band, the way the accordion or the guitar might be in another part of the continent.

**Julie Vallimont**

Isn't that funny, that the piano was central to a square dance band at one time, and now I think people think that guitars belong in square dances and pianos don't, in a lot of places.

**Tony Parkes**

I think it depends on which tradition of the squares we're talking about. The southern old time string band tradition, I don't think it ever formally included the piano, although I suspect that the piano came into play wherever there was one. But of course, the piano wasn't... as far as I know, the piano wasn't a common thing in small towns and way out in the boonies. There would be pianos in the big cities, even in the South, and they would do formal balls, at the same time, all through the 19th century, at the same time as people were improvising music in the back country, there would be formal balls with formal orchestras in the cities like Charleston [South Carolina] and Atlanta [Georgia] and so forth.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's interesting, I mean, clearly, I don't know a lot about this, except as a piano player, I get asked to play different kinds of squares and a caller would say, well, this is a Northern square, or this is a Southern square. I want to ask you what you think of the differences between those, but to me, it means tempo. Like, Northern squares go slower, and it means Northern squares, we can play French Canadian tunes, we don't have to play Southern tunes, and it changes the way I play the piano a little bit. As a working musician, I mean, I know more about it than that, but that's the gist of how it affects my job. So I'm curious what you would say about that.

**Tony Parkes**

Sure. Well, there are certainly two big strains of dance that combined to make what we think of now as square dancing. I think of them in terms of choreography. The Northern tradition is where most of the dancing takes place across the set, where the head couples will do something and the side couples will do it. The Southern tradition is more circular, first couple out to the right and do something and then go on to the next, and eventually, the next couple follows up. The music does, I think, tend to be, on average, faster in the South. There's certainly some overlap there. There are Northern villages, so to speak, in the North, where they'll dance as fast as a lot of Southern groups would dance. But on the average, I'd say, Northern slower, Southern faster. It's getting harder and harder... ever since about the 1940s, it's getting harder and harder to find a pure square dance tradition anywhere that's not affected by cross currents. Because during those times when square dancing was a national craze there were a lot of books published, there were a lot of recordings issued. And so, unless it was a very isolated community, the people who taught and called the dances, and even the people who played the music, would be influenced by what they heard and what they read from other areas. Just as one quick example, I have two editions of a big book on square dancing that was issued by the Chicago Park Department, one in 1940, and one in 1950. The one in 1940 is fascinating; it shows the repertoire of the square dance callers in Chicago at the time. It's almost completely the kind of dances that anybody in the North central states would have known, but nothing from the South or from the West and then the 1950 book looks similar, but when you get into it, if you really look at the dances, there's a lot of Southern and Western influence. I think that was true everywhere in terms of both the choreography and the music. I think it's still true that Northern dancing tends to be a little slower, especially with the squares, Northern slower, Southern faster, but it's not set in stone.

**Julie Vallimont**

That makes sense. So, we were in the midst of your origin story, so to speak. I think we left you at Farm and Wilderness in your teens.

**Tony Parkes**

There's so many threads to pick up, let me think. I spent six years as a camper at Farm and Wilderness, and then I went back for one year as a junior counselor, and I was also the assistant caller. This is when I was 18. The main caller that year was, his name was Dave Fuller. He was also an accordion player. I hired him a few times, I think, after I moved to Boston, and I called and he played, he was a carpenter and he ended up in a wheelchair for his last few years, because he had fallen off a roof and got paralyzed from the waist down. But he kept playing right up to the end. He was a real sweet guy. There are stories I could tell but they're off topic. I got some more calling practice that year. I didn't do a whole lot, but a fair amount. Let's see, late '60s, that would have been, I was going to every dance I could find in the New York City area where I lived. There used to be a whole series of dances in the New York City parks. One of the biggest was in Central Park. The caller was [Ed Durlacher](https://squaredancehistory.org/items/show/145), who was also famous for putting out recordings that have been used by hundreds of schools and fascinating that they are, I think, the only square dance records that have never gone out of print since they were first issued in I think, 1949. They've been available as 78s, as LPs, as cassettes, as CDs, [and now they're available as downloads](https://edact.com/high-school-adult-education/dance-high-school-adult-education/). They've never gone out of print anyway. He was famous for... he said, square dancing, it should be an activity for the many and not for the few. When other people were organizing into clubs and seeing how tricky the dances were that they could follow, he was taking everything apart and putting it back together to make it as easy as possible.

**Tony Parkes**

He called for literally thousands of people at a time on the central mall in Central Park. He would have a thousand squares, dancing at one time. That's not a thousand people, that's a thousand squares. That's eight thousand people. I didn't believe it but I looked at Google maps and looked at the size of the mall. I don't think those numbers are exaggerated. I think he actually could have had that many people dancing at once. He had dances all over the place, Uptown [Manhattan], Downtown [Manhattan], the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, Long Island, and one of his dances was the summer series at Jones Beach on Long Island. When he died, his son Don Durlacher took over. I danced, for about three summers, I danced with Don Durlacher at Jones Beach, and that was important too. To get back to the New York City parks, by the time I came along in the '60s, Ed had died, and his son Don wasn't working in the city. So there was a couple, Joe and Alice Nash and they had a demonstration group called the Park Promenaders, and they kept up some of these dances. They did them at the skating rink in Central Park during the summer when it wasn't used for ice skating. There would be dances in the outer boroughs too. Sometimes the Nashs would be running the dances, and sometimes members of their display team, the Park Promenaders, would split up and go and call the dances. I didn't call those dances, but I did get in more dancing practice, and I got to hear different callers and decide what I liked and didn't like about them.

**Tony Parkes**

I remember one of the team, not the Nashs, but one of their apprentices was really bad, especially a really bad teacher. There were near fistfights on the floor over how to interpret some of the calls because he just didn't know how to explain things. He would just repeat the calls over and over during the walkthrough. If people didn't get them, he would square them up and repeat the calls again. I was looking for every chance to square dance that I could. I also did a lot of international folk dancing. [Michael and Mary Ann Herman](http://www.socalfolkdance.org/master_teachers/herman_mm.htm) were the gurus of international folk dance in New York. They had their own building with their own hall on West 16th Street in the Village called Folk Dance House. Not only did I join the teenage group there, which met on Saturday afternoons, but that's where I met Ralph Page, if I remember right. Ralph had basically retired from regular calling. He had an every week dance in Boston from 1943 to 1967. So, about 23 years that he never missed, except when he was on tour. He had retired from that and from most, like calling private parties and such but he still, if somebody wanted to bring him to their town for a workshop, he would go. So the Hermans, once or twice a year, would have a Ralph Page day, where he would do an afternoon workshop and then everybody would go to dinner and then he would do an evening dance.

**Tony Parkes**

I'm pretty sure that was my first exposure to Ralph and my first exposure to contra dances. I sort of knew what they were, with the books and records that I had bought, but I didn't really get a chance to dance them until I started going to Folk Dance House. Actually, that would have been around 1964, because in '65 at Farm and Wilderness that summer, Dudley Laufman came and called a dance for the teenage group at camp. A couple weeks later, he invited some of us to his house in New Hampshire, for a house party where we did some dancing there. That was my second exposure to contra dancing, which was not a big thing at that point. Dudley was just getting started with his weekly and monthly dances, mostly around New Hampshire. I remember trying to introduce contra dances at Farm and Wilderness and failing miserably. People wanted to do the squares. That was pretty much it, when I got interested in contra dancing, mid to late 1960s, my mid to late teens it was like pulling teeth to get anybody to do a contra dance in New York City as well, where a typical evening would be half squares and half international folk dances. Some of the folk dances would be circles with no partners, like Balkan dancing, Israeli dancing, and the other folk dances would be things with a partner, like Scandinavian or English or Scottish. People gave all the same excuses then for not liking contras that they give now for not liking squares. They're too hard, they're too easy, they take too long to set up. I have to laugh when I remember that because it's all in what you're used to. The reason that it took too long to set up was that people weren't used to them and had to be made to understand the progression and so forth.

**Tony Parkes**

Eventually, in the few years after that, as we all know, contras got more popular and squares started getting less popular. It was not long after that I started going to the NEFFA festival, 1969, when I was 19, was the first NEFFA that I went to. That was at the old Natick [Massachusetts] High School, and I wasn't driving then, so I would take the bus or the train from New York to Boston and then there was a commuter bus that went out Route 9, and I got off in Natick, where Route 9 crosses Route 27. Then I would walk a few miles down Route 27 to the high school. Somebody probably gave me a ride back the bus when the weekend was over. Oh, I do remember where I stayed. At least some of those years, there was a group house in Cambridge called Old Joe Clark's. It was owned jointly by several people who were in the music and dance scene. I was able to crash on their living room floor along with several other people. I had forgotten about that. I was actually hired. A lot of people don't know this, and some people have denied that it ever could have happened, but I was there, and I know that NEFFA used to pay musicians. This was back before name bands. In the Boston area, just about all the dances with live music were done with pickup bands. I don't think there was a single band that promoted itself with a name. The Festival Orchestra was just anybody who felt like playing anywhere from five or six up to 20 people on stage in the dance hall at one time. They wanted to make sure... because playing the music wasn't the kind of universal activity that it has become. There were very few people who were interested in playing the music at that time for squares and contras, so the people that were running NEFFA wanted to make sure that they had a core, just as now for the Festival Orchestra they will pre-book a conductor, a first fiddle, and a piano. They did the same thing in those days but they paid the pianist and I think the lead musician. For my first three NEFFAs I was the festival pianist, and I got $12 a session, I think they raised it to $15 my last year of doing it. There were three sessions, Friday night, Saturday afternoon, and Saturday night. I got $36 for the whole weekend, which more than paid my bus fare to get there from New York. I don't think I learned a whole lot at NEFFA about playing or calling, but I did make a lot of friends. That's where I got to know the Boston crowd.

**Tony Parkes**

I was attracted to the Boston area, even before I went there. Because a lot of the people from Farm and Wilderness were in Boston during the winter, either they went to Harvard, or they'd been to Harvard, or they wanted people to think they went to Harvard. There was a lot of crossover between the Farm and Wilderness camps and the Boston, Cambridge music scene. One thing led to another and it was my parents sending me to Farm and Wilderness that got me interested in the Boston scene. I started, as I say, going to NEFFA, and actually, a couple of times, even when it wasn't festival time, I would take the bus or the train up to Boston and stay somewhere and I would go to the local dances. I have tapes of some of the Boston area callers doing their regular weekly dance. After a few years, I decided I just had to move to Boston, because the dance and music scene was a lot more vibrant. A lot of the dances had live music. In New York, the only dance that had live music was the CDS dance, the Country Dance Society. I think it was a Tuesday night, but it was on a weeknight and it was Marshall Barron on fiddle, if I remember right, and Phil Merrill on piano. These are names to be reckoned with in the English country dance world. It was just about all English on the weeknight, except that Phil Merrill would call one contra from the piano sometimes. Then they would have Saturday night dances too, CDS, in New York. Sometimes it was all English, but sometimes it was all American, they would get a local caller to do an entire evening of squares and contras with live music, so that was fun. All the other dances were record dances.

**Tony Parkes**

I learned to appreciate the old records, and I got a lot of my calling practice, as I said, with these instrumental records that were made specifically for caller backup. But still, what was happening in the Boston area was a lot more exciting, just as, what was happening at Farm and Wilderness was more exciting than what I had in grade school. The more the merrier, and there were more people interested in the music and more people playing the music and more live music dances. In the fall of '73, after a number of other adventures that I won't go into, I pulled up stakes and moved to Cambridge. Once again, the callers were so overjoyed, that's the only word I can think of, that somebody under age 45 or 50, was actually interested in calling that they went out of their way to help me. By then, thanks in large part to Dudley, there were a lot of young people who were interested in playing the music, even though they weren't necessarily organizing into name bands yet. They were still largely pickup bands, but the music was in good hands, everybody could see that. They weren't worried about the music dying out, but they were worried about the calling dying out. So again, there were maybe somewhere between half a dozen and a dozen callers in the Boston area at that time doing mostly squares but certainly a lot of contras and [Ted Sannella](https://squaredancehistory.org/items/browse?advanced%5B0%5D%5Belement_id%5D=39&advanced%5B0%5D%5Btype%5D=is+exactly&advanced%5B0%5D%5Bterms%5D=Ted+Sannella) was probably the first among equals.

**Tony Parkes**

I think people did look to him as the "dean" of Boston area callers, even when Ralph Page was still alive, because Ralph had cut way back on his activity, and he still had the title of "dean." Not that it was ever an official title. I don't think people started calling Ted the dean until Ralph died. He was certainly the Boston area dean, and he was a great caller, a great choreographer. He was a lot of people's chief mentor, because he really believed in the activity, he wanted to see it thrive. So he went out of his way to help a lot of people, but specifically me, he would talk shop for hours and he would let me tag along to his dances. At least once he let me go with him to a private party, where normally you don't get in unless you're a member of the group, because he wanted me to see how he dealt with people who didn't know anything about square dancing. Of course, so-called "one night stands" or private parties or hay bale gigs have been my bread and butter over the years. I think fully half of the gigs I've had in my 50-plus year career have been private parties where nobody knows what they're doing. I love them. I love beginners, they have nothing to unlearn, no bad habits. It's a different kind of fun, because I love it when everybody knows what they're doing and everybody gets in a groove, but I also love seeing people light up for the first time and go, hey, I can do this.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's wonderful, and knowing that you're sharing these cool traditions with people and bringing them to more people has got to be a nice bonus.

**Tony Parkes**

Oh, yeah, it's the way people feel about a religion, it's something that guides them, it's something that that gives them a reason for being. It's something that nurtures the urge to connect with other people, the urge to give of what you have and not keep it all to yourself. I think we all have that, but it gets stifled in some people, and being turned on to something like this and having a little talent for it keeps it from getting stifled, and it encourages that side of you, the giving side. I think we all need something to do that, and I'm thankful that for me, it's music and dance.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely. So how did you start calling regularly in the Boston area?

**Tony Parkes**

Okay, a new chapter. The first thing that happened was that CDS Boston, which was basically a separate group from CDS New York, I won't go into the politics of it. CDS Boston had a weekly dance that had been going on for decades. They called it the drop-in dance because you didn't need to take lessons. And of course, the kind of square dancing that a lot of people were doing, you had to start in September and take a number of weekly lessons and then you would join a club. The drop-in name meant that this was not a club. This was an open dance that anybody could come to and not know anything and get pulled through by the experienced dancers. At the time I moved, it was a different caller every week. There was a group called the North of Boston Callers Association, which of course, I joined. In fact, they made me president my first full year in Boston, because everybody else had been president and nobody wanted the job. I didn't know what I was doing. There would be a different caller every week, and the music was violin and piano. I say violin [and not fiddle] because it was in a very kind of clean, classical style by the book, reading notes from a lead sheet and not doing anything with the bowing and it was pretty tame. Some of the callers were past their prime and the average attendance was two squares. That's how callers figure attendance or used to, by the number of squares.

**Tony Parkes**

So on a typical weeknight, we'd get two squares. Ted Sannella would call there in rotation about every couple of months. Attendance, when it was his night, was five squares, because everybody knew that he was the good caller in the area. Though I say it, who shouldn't, attendance on my nights, because of course they put me in the rotation right away, attendance on my nights was a little bigger than the average, although nowhere near what Ted's was. I think it was the fall of '75, because I moved in the fall of '73. I met Donna [Hébert, then Hinds] in the fall of '74 and immediately she became my go-to fiddler for hiring for one nighters. But it was in the fall of '75, that CDS Boston decided they needed to do something to rejuvenate that weekly series. They basically fired all the callers, which was not a cool move ,because the person in charge of making up the rotation had already hired several callers for that fall. That's neither here nor there. What they decided to do was just make the whole thing more exciting. The first thing they did was approach Ted Sannella and say, You're obviously the best caller in town and you draw the best crowds, would you like to call this dance every week. Ted said, I don't think I want to commit myself every week, but I will call every other week, and I suggest Tony Parkes as the other caller. I think he suggested me not because I was necessarily the best of the other callers, although I think I was pretty good, but he said it was because I was the caller whose style and philosophy were closest to his, so there would be some continuity from week to week. Just as an aside, the continuity wasn't quite there for the first couple of months. Right away, they got complaints that the quality of the calling wasn't the same from week to week. I never got better so fast as I did that first fall, because I knew that this was my big break and I didn't dare blow it.

**Tony Parkes**

I don't actually remember how I studied, but I remember that the complaints fell off after two or three months, people stopped complaining and the attendance was consistent from week to week. They knew they needed to do something about the music too. So at the same time, as they approach Ted and Ted said yes, he would do it if I did it too, they approached Donna, because Donna had been doing some of the weekly dances in rotation with one or two other fiddlers and again, they saw that her music was a lot more exciting than the other musicians' music. So they asked her to be music director and to do the fiddling and asked her to put together a band. We [Yankee Ingenuity] played for that dance, the CDS Boston dance, for I think it may have been three seasons. I know that attendance was so high that they had to move from the Cambridge YWCA, where the dance was when I started there, to the Brimmer and May School gym in Chestnut Hill, which held about 300 people, and they would just about fill it every week. That was the first big dance in the Boston area. The first one since the square dance boom, around 1950, when the Harvard Outing Club would sponsor dances in Memorial Hall and it would be several hundred people, and the dances were pretty wild. There's hardly anybody alive now who remembers them firsthand. Max Newman has done some research on those Outing Club dances in the '40s and '50s and could probably tell you a lot more about them. Anyway, there had been a period of 20 or 30 years, maybe 15 years, when there were no big dances in the Boston area. It was the CDS dance being rejuvenated in the mid 1970s that started the big contra boom in the Boston area. Thanks to Dudley the smaller towns around New England were doing lots of contras by then. It wasn't till the mid '70s, I think, that it really took off in Boston, with two or three hundred people at a dance at the same time. So after about three seasons we had some differences with the management, and Donna and I left and we were already running some dances of our own at the Concord [Massachusetts] Scout House at that point. We didn't discover the Scout House, it had been used for square dancing ever since it was converted in 1930 from an old barn. It was being used more and more for dancing in the '60s and '70s, and so it was a natural location for us. We actually had a dance in the summer, even though it wasn't air conditioned. CDS shut down for the summer if I remember right, and so we ran a dance all summer for several years. Then we had a dance for experienced dancers only on Mondays, and that didn't work out too well. There weren't enough people to keep it going, so we changed it to every week and made it open to everybody. CDS was running on Tuesday, we were running on Monday, and we quit the CDS dance and put most of our energy into the Monday dance. Gradually, over a period of several years, attendance grew at our dance and dwindled at the Tuesday dance. People went where the music was exciting. And of course, it's the snowball effect, eventually people go where they know their friends are going to go. And so, the dance is big, because it's big. If attendance has fallen off and if the dance has a reputation for being dead, it's going to be really hard to get back to those conditions. It was about the early 1980s that were the peak years. That was the end of the CDS era, the beginning of the Yankee Ingenuity era for us. We had the Monday dance, and we also ran special dances on the weekends where we would have special themes or guest callers or guest bands. I think you asked me the other day in preparation for this interview about some of the musicians that guested with us over the years. I looked back at the dance programs and some of the flyers. I came up with more than 50 musicians who sat in with us or were hired as guests from time to time from the mid 1970s up through the late 1990s, is when I was calling at the Scout House. We had at least 50 guests, the list reads like a who's who of dance musicians.

**Julie Vallimont**

Wow. We'll take that list and put it in the podcast notes. Why don't you share a couple names from it now? You don't have to read all 50 names, share a couple now, and then we'll put the rest in the notes.

**Tony Parkes**

We had, of course, people who lived nearby. People like Carol Kaufman, who's now Carol Bittenson, Roberta Sutter, Ed Pearlman, Amy Richardson [Larkin]. We had people from out of town when they were passing through, like Cathie Whitesides from the West coast. Allan Block from New Hampshire, whose daughter incidentally was my first square dance partner in grade school in New York, but that's another story. George Wilson and Selma Kaplan from New York State, David Kaynor and Van Kaynor from Western Mass. You get the idea. Just about anybody we could grab. Some of them were with us so often that they were honorary members, like Bill Tomczak on clarinet. He was on our second album, but I don't think he was ever a full-fledged member. Right about the time that Donna was leaving the band and moving to Western Mass, Mary Lea had been playing with us for a year or two, and she took over as fiddler and de facto band leader.

**Tony Parkes**

Joyce was with a member for a while if I remember right, she certainly played with us a lot on hammer dulcimer. I don't know if you caught her when you were dancing.

**Julie Vallimont**

I was probably a typical dancer and didn't notice very much.

**Tony Parkes**

Some people don't even notice who's calling. This has happened to a lot of callers and a lot of musicians where I'll be down on the floor during the break and somebody will ask me for the next contra to dance with them. I'll say no, sorry I've got to gotta go call and they took another look at me and said, oh! Because you know when I'm at a dance like the Scout House, I don't dress up the way I do at a hay bale gig. I try to dress neat and clean and you know, the button down shirt, but you can't tell me from one of the older dancers.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, that's great. That happens to so many of us, it's kind of wonderful because it means the dancers are just there having a good time. I feel like, as a musician, they don't have to pay attention to me. But of course, as you start, you go for the dance and then you go for friends, and then you realize it's more of a community. Then you realize, the musicians are part of the community, which might not be obvious when you first get there as a dancer. Then you realize, like, I remember as a new dancer and then it was Bob Fuller, who said, oh, you should go to NEFFA. Talking to him, I started to realize these deep connections that people had among each other, all the musicians knew each other and had played together so many times and all these amazing friendships. Even now, doing this podcast, it's still continuing to unravel. The depth of the relationships that people have in the dance community. It's really, really cool. You can never know everything, because there's always more to find, it feels like this infinite well of humans to me, which is really cool.

**Tony Parkes**

I agree 100%, there are people that I see at NEFFA that I only see once a year, but our friendships go back so many years that I feel like they're really solid. There have been years when it was something like that that would keep me going, or years where I felt really out of it from day to day, where it would be my music and dance family, my family of choice that would give me a reason to go on, just putting one foot in front of the other. Community theater has been like that for me, too. When I lost the Monday dance at the Scout House, in 1997, I joined a local community theater group. That family has also helped keep me afloat. It's something about the arts, something about creative endeavors that goes really deep. I think people who get to know each other through the arts, I don't know if it's that way with other interests but it's certainly a very real, very tangible thing, the connections that you make through the arts.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely. I don't think I could say it any better than you did.

**Tony Parkes**

I felt like you said it all for me and I was just saying the same thing in different words.

**Julie Vallimont**

Can you talk a little bit about your calling and musical life during the time that you were sharing the dance with Ted, and I imagine learning a lot from him, and honing your personal style? You say you had a few months to kind of figure it all out, could you talk a little bit more about what you were learning or what dances you were adding to your repertoire and how that happened?

**Tony Parkes**

Well, I honestly don't remember what I was doing to improve after the complaints that I wasn't quite up to Ted's level. Ted had a very eclectic repertoire. He loved all kinds of dancing. I think if it had been up to him, he would have led some folk dancing or some sequence couple dancing during those evenings. He didn't do a lot of that because there were so many things that we wanted to put into the program. When he ran his own dances—because over the years before that time, he had several monthly dances around the Boston area—I think just about all of them were half squares and contras and half folk dances, couple dances. I know his dance in Porter Square, Cambridge was like that and the last series that he had, where he was the program person was the second Saturdays at the Scout House which ran, that was one of the longest running dances in history, because that started before Ted. That started, I think, in the '40s when it was a one-time church dance and then they liked it so much they had Ted back for another one and then it turned into a monthly dance, not Ted, whoever the caller was at the time. This was back before Ted was active. Ted took it over in I think 1959 and ran it, I think, until he moved to Maine when it would have been too much of a commute. So that was about 30 years doing a once a month dance that was half square and half folk. The CDS dances, the Tuesday dance, we didn't do a whole lot of things other than squares and contras. But as I say, Ted loved everything. He became well known of course, for Ted's triplets, which are three couple long ways. Those, he consciously based on an English country dance, Fandango, because he was always an enthusiastic English country dancer and he knew a few English dances that he would teach, although he didn't do many of them, if any, at the Tuesday dance. He was not a singing caller. By his own admission he didn't think he was much of a singer, and I wouldn't disagree. By choice he stayed away from singing squares, which other people have made a shtick out of. I did a few, I think I did a few at those Tuesday dances, I certainly did more when I struck out on my own at the Scout House. Most of Ted's squares were what some people call quadrilles. They were formatted a lot like contras, where the calls would be prompts, you would give the call just before the musical phrase, and then people would do what you told them on the phrase. He would also put in some pattern. When I think back, I think most of my influences on my calling style were the commercial recordings. Ted certainly would have had an influence on me just from my being exposed to him so much. The weeks that he was calling, I was playing piano, so I was only listening with about half an ear to what he was doing. I couldn't hear him too well over the house speakers when I was on stage playing, so I didn't actually hear as much of him to influence me as you might think. But certainly, even if I didn't get the exact words or the exact notes, I got the overall gist of what he was doing.

**Julie Vallimont**

It leads me to another question, which is that I especially enjoy talking with musicians who are also callers or callers who are also musicians. I would just love to get your thoughts on your favorite dance tunes and how they fit with the dancing repertoire and the kind of dances you were calling, and your thoughts on contra dance music that you've gotten to play and also call to over the years.

**Tony Parkes**

I do have some biases that I can't do much about. Just like Dudley Laufman, I like tunes in major keys. He has said that, I think, more than once... you know, he likes happy tunes and doesn't know quite what to do with minor tunes, by and large. My favorite tunes all tend to be major. Irish is not my favorite genre. I can enjoy Irish music when I hear it, whether it's played in concert or for dancing. I find it very hard to chord on the piano. I don't find it as easy to call to as some other genres. I love Québécois, I love Southern old time. The band that I've worked with most often in the last few years is the [Dead Sea Squirrels](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRgGr1mhpFA), Cathy Mason on fiddle and Craig Edwards and Henry Yoshimura on frets and also part-time fiddle. They are the perfect band for hay bale gigs because fiddle, banjo and guitar is what people expect if they don't dance, and I love the kind of music that just goes and goes and goes and you just get into a groove. I get into a groove calling with them, and it's like I become another instrument in the band. I said, there are two kinds of square dancing and there are two kinds of music, to oversimplify. You've got old time Southern where the music just keeps going [sings a perpetual rhythm]. A lot of the Northern tunes sound as if they have a beginning and an end. Like the old tunes for the chestnut contras, like Petronella, Hull's Victory, not so much Money Musk, that feels more like a Southern tune in that it just keeps going and going and going. But a lot of the tunes, the hornpipes, they come to a close at the end of the tune, at the end of the routine, and then they start over again. A lot of the dances are like that too, you say goodbye to one couple and then you say "oh hello" to the next couple. Northern squares tend to be more like that and Southern squares, as I say, you get in a groove, the music just keeps going and going and going, and if the caller is on the ball the figures just keep going and going and going. So, as I say, I love to call with an old time band, but I also love the French Canadian and the Anglo Canadian, the Don Messer kind of tunes, where they're like, single jigs, jigs that are very melodious, as opposed to the [sings a jig with a lot of notes] that are what some musicians call double jigs, and polkas, and two-steps, tunes that have fewer notes and go all over the scale, which is not to say I don't like other kinds of tunes, I love them all.

**Julie Vallimont**

What context would you play a polka or a two-step in?

**Tony Parkes**

Well, for starters, there are a few squares and contras that actually have a polka step in them. I would also use one as a change of pace for just an ordinary, say a Northern square, one that has a figure where just as with a contra you can tell when the first figure is ending and the second figure is starting. Anything with really sharply defined phrases works well for a Northern square as well as a contra.

**Julie Vallimont**

So you would play them at more of a contra tempo, not at like, Irish polka tempo, which is very fast.

**Tony Parkes**

Right. Yankee Ingenuity used to play Kerry [Irish] polkas, and I would have trouble holding them down to what I thought was a danceable tempo. They would play them sometimes between sets if people wanted to dance and even then I thought they might be playing them a little too fast. There's a fairly narrow range of tempos that I like for dancing. I've found over the years that my internal metronome runs at about 116 [beats per minute] unless I'm consciously doing something else. When I do a Victorian ball and call The Lancers for instance, which is a fancy square, we might play it at 112. If I'm doing a Southern set, I'll go up to, say, 124. I won't go as fast as some of the places in the South would do. Missouri, in my experience, at least from the videos I've seen, is the point they play the fastest. There are some videos on YouTube of Missouri fiddlers, I think some of them were actually playing for dancing, going up in the 140s ,150s. By and large, I've always worked between about 112 and 124.

**Julie Vallimont**

What's your favorite kind of music for contra dancing? Are you a fan of medleys, are you fan of one tune? I know Dudley has often talked about one tune is good enough for most dances, what's your personal preference?

**Tony Parkes**

I think Dudley borrowed that from Ralph Page, that saying, "if a tune is good enough to play at all, it's good enough to play through the whole dance." I know that Dudley has always felt that way, that you can really get into a tune and do different things with it if you if you're playing it 5, 10, 15 times. I'm used to medleys because I've worked most of my career with bands like Yankee Ingenuity, who enjoyed putting together medleys. But if a band wants to play the same tune all the way through, it doesn't bother me. Dead Sea Squirrels, being an old time string band, is used to playing the same tune all the way through. When I do a hay bale gig, I almost always end with Virginia Reel, which is a longer dance than the other dances that I will do at such a party. I always tell the band, this one's going to run long, you may want to have a second, third, even fourth tune in reserve in case your fingers get tired or whatever. The Squirrels, I'm not sure they play one tune all the way through, but I don't think they play more than two tunes for the Virginia Reel and they play one tune and for just about everything else. So I'm fine, I'm comfortable either way, and I don't really have a preference. In a contra context, as opposed to hay bale gigs where I don't do contras, in a contract context I'm used to medleys, but I wouldn't insist on them. It's important to me that the band is comfortable and the band is playing things that make them happy.

**Julie Vallimont**

How much of the time would you call in a contra dance dances that had a tune that went with them? I forget what you call it, is it bespoke? I don't think so. But, you know, like Petronella or La Bastringue, or you know, circle dances or chestnuts, that kind of thing.

**Tony Parkes**

Chestnuts is the usual word these days, I think, for the classic contras that have their own tune. It depends. For contras, it's the chestnuts, which if you define chestnuts broadly, you get about a dozen dances that have stood the test of time and a couple that had been revived, died out and were revived, that are all from about 1800 to 1850. [Most of them have a known tune that we generally use for that dance](https://www.cdss.org/programs/cdss-news-publications/cdss-online-library/cracking-chestnuts/cracking-chestnuts-videos). With Yankee Ingenuity, they would play medleys even for those dances. They would start with the title tune but they would switch to a second and maybe even a third tune that they thought fit the dance, like for Hull's Victory, they would play other hornpipes—Hull's Victory is basically a hornpipe. They would play something like Fisher's Hornpipe or Saratoga Hornpipe. For Money Musk there are a couple of Irish tunes, I think, that have three parts. If we're doing the three part version of Money Musk, they might switch to one of those. Chorus Jig, we would always switch to Opera Reel because that's the one tune that has the climax in the same place as Chorus Jig, it goes A, B, C, B and C is the most exciting part of the tune in both of those tunes. There are tunes you can get away with for medleys when you're playing chestnuts, although occasionally, we would have one of the older dancers come up and say, it hurts my heart to dance that dance to any other tune. But the more modern contra dances, most of the time, I don't have a preferred tune for them. I do have a preferred flavor of tune. This ties into what I did all through those years with Yankee Ingenuity and what I do with most bands, I think of tunes in terms of flavor, with reels, it's bouncy reels, smooth flowing reels, driving reels, and with jigs, it's single jigs that are more melodious and a little more laid back, double jigs which are a little more driving and where the rhythm is more noticeable than the melody. I'll say I want a Southern tune for this one because it feels Southern even if it's a contra, it has these figures that are more circular and blend together and I'm more comfortable with the Southern tune. Sometimes I'll do a dance with an older, more formal upright feel, so I'll ask for marches and so on. The band has a tune list that's sorted by flavor. So I get what I want, which is the type of tune I want and the band gets what they want, which is to be able to pick the specific tunes, so everybody's happy.

**Julie Vallimont**

Sounds like you found a system so that you didn't have to tell the band what to play, but you could give them just the right amount of guidance to get what you need and then also give them that freedom that you're talking about. Were there any tunes where if the band started playing them, you would just be so happy, like just tunes that you love to hear or to call to?

**Tony Parkes**

Oh, sure. I have favorites. As I say, Ragtime Annie is my all-time favorite tune and I had to make sure not to overuse it, not to ask for it too often. There are a couple of other three part Southern tunes that I liked for specific dances, let's see, Texas Gals in C and Bull at the Wagon in A, sometimes the band would play a medley of those two tunes for one or two specific squares that I do. That's a three part square, so that's an exception. Even with your typical two-part tune, AABB, I have some tunes that I really love. There's a tune in A, some people call it Reconciliation, and some people call it Olive Branch, which, interesting that the names have a similar theme, that's another one of my favorites. And St. Anne's, there are probably several dozen tunes that I light up when I hear the band go into. I could probably make a list given an hour or so. You get the idea that there are some tunes that I just kind of put up with and there are tunes that really turn me on. There are very few tunes where I would ask the band not to play. Sometimes I'll ask the band not to play a certain tune for a specific dance because I think it really doesn't fit that dance, or the band will be putting together their sets for the night and I'll look over their shoulder and see that they have one of my favorite tunes on the list that they've already matched with a dance and I'll say, can you actually play that tune for a dance I'm doing later in the evening because it really fits that dance. And so they'll humor me, but for the most part, I enjoy anything they come up with.

**Julie Vallimont**

Those tunes you mentioned, they're all major happy tunes, a lot of them in A, which is great for fiddles, because there's a lot of double stops and things you can do. They're just great tunes to harmonize with, they're great tunes for double fiddle. l feel like a lot of modern contra repertoire isn't necessarily built for that in the same way.

**Tony Parkes**

Interesting. I've been kind of out of it, even before the pandemic, I wasn't calling as many regular, meaning weekly, monthly contra dances as I used to. An increasing percentage of my gigs have been hay bale gigs, one-offs, schools, churches, lodges where nobody knows how to dance. I haven't been out as a dancer as much as I used to. I actually haven't heard a lot of the present day repertoire. I know it's a lot broader than it used to be, there are several styles, several genres and thousands upon thousands of tunes to pick from. So each band will have its own favorite list. My impression is that people have gotten away from what used to be the standard repertoire, I don't think there is a standard repertoire anymore. Keys are important to me; each key has a different feel. D, I think of as really, really joyous, especially on the B parts when the fiddle gets up above high C, the C above middle C. G, I think of as straight ahead, kind of laid back but happy. In fact, when I'm doing a one-nighter, a hay bale gig I will often ask the band to play in G for the first dance because I think it gets the crowd up, it gets them in an up mood without being a real screamer. Tunes in A can be real screamers. I've noticed, with Yankee Ingenuity, there would be three tunes in almost every medley. The third tune would often be in A, to make the dancers wake up and start screaming. I think contra dancers tend to zone out about halfway through, or two thirds of the way through a contra, they'll kind of go on autopilot. I found that when experienced dancers goof, it's almost always two thirds of the way through a contra. It's just a thing, it's a phenomenon that I've noticed. Putting a tune in A really makes them aware of the music again. Calling in A is a little harder for me than calling in G because, I am a musician and my voice tends to fall on a musical note rather than just be spoken. G is the easiest key for me to call in. If my voice is on the G on the one of the scale, that's about my sweet spot in terms of it's right in the middle of my best octave. A is a little high for me. I don't like to use tunes in A if I'm calling a square and it's a patter square so I'm talking a lot. I don't like to use A until later in the evening when my voice has warmed up, otherwise it hurts my throat.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, a lot of considerations like that. I know, working with Nils Fredland, he's also asking for certain keys, especially in squares, when he's partly singing the calls. I'm interviewing him soon, and I'll ask him about that. There are a few callers who like to sing and I think that that musicality is important. It's a fun collaboration when that happens. What are some of the ways that you saw the music change during the time that you were calling contras for that 20 years span, or however you define it?

**Tony Parkes**

When I got started as a caller, and as a musician, I got the impression that there was a standard repertoire of maybe a couple hundred tunes that everybody knew and of course, there weren't that many people playing the music at that point. So it was a smaller community. It was a smaller kind of in group of people who swapped tunes the way old time musicians swapped tunes. It was a completely different, almost completely different set of tunes from old time string band music. I'll try to get you some of those titles. What happened, I think, in broad terms, was that people discovered other genres, other repertoires and added them to the contra repertoire, for instance, Irish tunes. Nobody was playing Irish tunes when I got started in the '60s and early '70s. Some Scottish, almost no Irish. Irish tunes were something that people played in sessions, not for dancing. Little by little they discovered—Donna, for instance, all the time I was working with her discovered Irish tunes or learned them from other people who were playing them mostly in concert. I think she was one of the first people to play them for contras. Rodney Miller, of course, did some of that and Randy Miller, but there were only about half a dozen fiddlers I think, who were taking other genres and plugging them into contras. They were more of the Québécois tunes. There were a few when I got started, but not many used for dancing in the States. That became more of a thing as we got to know musicians from Québec. I think the biggest single thing that happened was that things got a lot more eclectic over those first few years. Again, with the old time Southern tunes, you wouldn't hear them used for squares and contras in the Boston area much until we started playing them with Yankee Ingenuity.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's an interesting balance, I think, because it's fascinating and wonderful, this blossoming of repertoire, musically, for contras in the last 30, 40 years and people writing vast amounts of tunes and picking tunes from all these different genres and really experimenting with what the tradition can be. I mean, bands putting out albums all over the place, a lot of growth in contra music. I think that one of the magic things about contra music is when you can have a bunch of people who have never played together before get up on stage and play for a dance. That's how it used to be a lot more, you talk about even the early days of NEFFA when they didn't have name bands. You can't do that without a common repertoire of tunes. I feel like we're culturally at this very in-between stage like when we were running events in Boston as part of BIDA. We wanted to have open bands so that people could learn how to play. Jeff Kaufman and a few other board members and I put together a list of common tunes that people would play and we all know all those tunes. And yet, if any of us were going to play for a contra dance with our bands, we probably wouldn't play most of them. So you get two separate repertoires of the band's tunes and then the everybody tunes. That's kind of an interesting in between place, I hope we don't lose that shared repertoire. Some of these tunes have become classic contra dance tunes for a reason. They're just so great, like Reconciliation or St. Anne's Reel or Fisher's Hornpipe, they're just always great for any dance at any moment.

**Tony Parkes**

I hope we don't lose that, we've already lost the dances, the choreography which is too bad, by and large. I'll get back to that in a second. As for the tunes, I know the way they handle that at NEFFA for the Festival Orchestra is they pick tunes out of the Portland Collection and I think also the Randy Miller, Jack Perron book, I forget what it's called, just like New England traditional music or something. [It's the "New England Fiddler's Repertoire."] But they do try to keep it to tunes that a lot of people know. Because they're using books, anybody who doesn't know the tune but who reads music can follow along. I do think that one of the dangers is in losing that common repertoire and having contra music become something that you have to be a tight, professional level band in order to be accepted playing. I know that at dance camps, dance weekends and weeks, the callers have to be the hot callers on the traveling circuit and the bands have to be the hot bands. Depending on where the campers come from, they may or may not be used to that kind of music and calling at their local dances. Sometimes I wish I could go around to all the parts of the country and just dance. I've wished this for years, not just because of the common repertoire disappearing, this is something I've always wished I could do, would be to travel around the country as a dancer and just see what the calling and the music were like in all the different communities. I couldn't afford to most of the time, and when I did travel, I was traveling as a caller, so I didn't get to hear the local callers. I've always valued the camps, the weeks and weekends and the festivals like NEFFA as a place where the only chance I got to hear other callers. They love what I love, and I want to get to know them as people, as well as get to know their styles. Normally, we're busy on the same nights and I don't get to hear them, so when I do get to hang out with other callers, it's a rare treat.

**Tony Parkes**

As for the dances, the common repertoire, just as with the tunes, I'm sorry to say that except for about three or four chestnuts the common contra repertoire has disappeared. Everybody's writing their own stuff now and feels like if you do what somebody else did, or what you did six months ago or a year ago, that's old stuff and we want something new. This ties into a broader complaint I have, or a lament, let's say, rather than a complaint, I'm not pointing fingers, just saying this is something that happens and I don't know what to do about it. I see a lot of things happening in the contra world in the last 20 or 30 years that happened in recreational square dancing about 75 years ago. As I said, there was a big square dance boom, it was a national fad, everybody started square dancing. You could take six lessons and learn everything you needed to know to join a square dance club. There was a common repertoire of dances that just about everybody did all across the country. There would be, maybe a dozen or a couple of dozen singing squares, there would be three or four dozen patter calls that that everybody had to learn in order to be an accomplished square dancer. While you were learning the specific dances, of course, you learned a lot about how to move and how to handle transitions from one move to the next, and how to recover from mistakes and so forth so part of it was learning dances and part of it was becoming a dancer. What happened, was a lot like what's happening now, where callers wanted to get their name in print and they wanted to be sought after for gigs and for money, even. So they wrote their own dances, they recorded, they found songs that nobody had used for singing squares. They also started writing new routines that took extra training, extra lessons to be able to do. The dancing got more and more complicated.

**Tony Parkes**

Eventually, about 15 years into this, about 1960 it got to the point where nobody was doing the classic dances, they weren't doing Alabama Jubilee, they weren't doing Forward Six and the Left Hand Lady Under, they were just doing hash, they were doing a little of this little of that. The gap between what a seasoned dancer knew and what somebody new coming in off the street, the gap got wider and wider as the seasoned dancers spent more and more time together. The number of lessons you needed to join a club went up from 6 to 12, to 24, to 30 to 40. It stopped being a craze, it stopped being something that anybody could do, and it got insular, it got to the point where there were all these people in their little clubs competing to see who knew the most calls. I see a little of that in the contra world. I see even callers coming up not just with new routines, new combinations of moves but actually new moves with new names. It's the thin end of the wedge, it's the top of the slippery slope. One thing that has kept the contra world from going as crazy as the square dance world did was the fact that we still dance to the phrase of the music. Not doing that is just something that you wouldn't dream of doing. The fact that the dance and the music are tied together means that they're not going to write new moves that take an odd number of steps to do which is common in the club-style squares. I think also there is a kind of feeling among the callers that we don't want to go too far off the deep end with this. I think most callers are trying to preserve at least the feel of the traditional dances and not change their personality that much. I do think that we're losing some of the basics. We're losing some of the old straightforward tunes also, the kind that Dudley likes. The kind that somebody can just sit in with the band and play along with, something like Bobby Shafto or Galopede, otherwise known as Yarmouth Reel, or My Love is But a Lassie, tunes that go [sings a solid rhythm] instead of [sings a tune with more notes]. They all have their place, but I think we are losing some of the simpler ones, just as we're losing some of the simpler dances and some of the real classic dances, and I miss them.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, me too. I'm your typical person who plays a lot of contra dances. I've probably played more than a thousand contra dances. I didn't know two out of those three tunes that you mentioned. I know Galopede. I've tried, I'm not a student of it, but I've tried to play with older musicians and sit in and I've played at festivals and camps. I think it's just a sign that if I haven't randomly run into these tunes in my everyday life, they're not out there in the places that I've been going to, and the places that I go to are a lot of places where up and coming or new contra musicians go to. There have been times when I want to learn these old tunes, where do I go to find them because I love them and I want to keep playing them. Sometimes, if you go to Maine Fiddle Camp, especially on Dudley's night—they have a barn dance every night—and Dudley calls and picks the tunes. That's a great place to sit in and play these old tunes. The NEFFA Festival Orchestra, the leader of the orchestra which right now is Charlie Pilzer, will pull out these old tunes that everybody's supposed to know but some of us younger or newer musicians don't know them, and it's a great place to learn them, or like playing at David Kaynor's tune sessions at Ashokan and things like that. I would love to make a list of some of these tunes, because there are musicians out there, younger musicians now too, who are trying to bring back some of these tunes and doing research. I'd like to make that more common. There's a great scene around Belfast, Maine, where they do kitchen junkets there. Folks like [Benjamin Foss](https://benjamin-foss.bandcamp.com/album/the-old-favorite) are really interested in doing research about these tunes and bringing them back. It seems weird to research a tune and learn it from a book when there's still people around who know it and I would rather learn it from the people who know the tunes.

**Tony Parkes**

Well, sure, if you can. If you don't happen to cross paths with somebody, there's nothing immoral about learning it from a book. I'm really glad to hear that some people are making a conscious effort to keep the old tunes going, because I wasn't fully aware of that. I was just thinking before you said that that it's something that I would love to do, but it's not my place to do that. It should be people who are more actively into playing the music. Although one of the projects, waaaaaay on my back burner, not high priority through the years, has been putting out a book of very simple tunes. My primary purpose in doing that would be to enable musicians in areas that don't have contra dancing to start to put a group together and play live music, so that they don't have to rely on recordings to start up their dance. I thought it would help if we had a repertoire of tunes where the bowing doesn't matter as much, where the idea is just to get the melody out there. Because something like Ragtime Annie for instance, just to take a name that comes to mind, is nothing without the bowing. I must have about 20 recordings of Ragtime Annie and the fiddlers vary from very classically trained to they obviously learned by listening to other old time fiddlers, and so forth, and you can tell the difference. I think that some of the tunes that rely on bowing for their effect, I think some beginning musicians find those tunes intimidating. To my mind, as a listener or as a caller who has to work with them, some of the tunes fall flat. They don't make you want to dance, if they're a tune that relies on bowing and the fiddler is just sawing their way through them. So there are tunes, I think, that as long as you articulate well, you don't have to worry about what's an up bow and what's a down bow, just play the notes and they'll sound good. Something like, My Love is but a Lassie [sings]. If they had a dozen or two dozen of those tunes, they could play for an evening and make people want to dance, give them that lift that the good dance music has to have.

**Julie Vallimont**

They're also accessible to more instruments, fiddle can be hard for beginners to play but if you've got a penny whistle or something that's.......

**Tony Parkes**

Exactly, I forgot to say that, that was part of it. No matter what instrument you play, the tune should sound good when you're playing the straight melody.

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, you're giving me ideas. I'm gonna have to percolate about this for a while, maybe a place like NEFFA would be a good place to...... wouldn't it be cool if there was a jam session of just, like, classic contra tunes? I know that they've had these before, there's many great jam sessions at NEFFA. But something that really tries to, like, when you define classic contra tune, who's doing the defining? The things that I grew up playing as a classic contra tune are very different than the tunes you're talking about. It depends on what timespan, what decades you're talking about. So maybe you could get a couple people to lead it and have some of these older, former classic contra tunes that we want to bring back along with some of the ones that are really common today like Coleman's March or Road to Boston are really common classic tunes today. I would love to go to a jam like that and learn some of these older tunes. There's just something magical about playing a tune with people where everybody knows the tune. It's just magic. When the tune is accessible to everyone, and you're not worried about the technical skill, and you're not worried about what you're doing on your instrument and you're just there making music together, and you're not worried about are the chords cool enough for, you know, it's just magical.

**Tony Parkes**

I miss jamming. I haven't jammed as much as I'd like to through the years, because there can only be one piano player at a jam, by and large. I don't want to hog the piano all the time. Yes, it's a really precious quality, that feeling that anybody can join in and that this is something that we have in common, it's a common language. I think this is a good idea to let percolate a while and try to figure out what we can do with it. Most of the jamming at NEFFA, of course, is spontaneous in the hallways, but I wouldn't mind seeing a scheduled jam and just say, this is going to be dead simple tunes. Tunes, either because they're really really simple or because they've been standard tunes for years, or used to be standard tunes, but just put together a list and say, okay, we're going to play these that are really accessible.

**Julie Vallimont**

Yeah, and maybe there would be some, like polling of people, that would happen first, because if I were leading a jam session at NEFFA, I only lead what I know. I would want to get someone there who also knows these older tunes and can just play them, and we can all learn them together. You do a jam like that for a few years and then you build up a group of people who all know these tunes and start playing them again. It's not necessarily that hard. It would be fun to take a poll of like, what are some of the tunes that used to be really common in dancing, and have just kind of gotten forgotten about, not because they're not good. We don't have to bring everything back just for the sake of nostalgia, but the ones where, oh, the world was a better place with this tune in it.

**Tony Parkes**

I have the makings of a list for you tunes that speak to me. Jack Sloanaker put together a chord book back in 1969. And then 10 years later, I helped him enlarge it, so it had chords for 500 tunes. That would have been the standard repertoire in the Boston area and even in a lot of New England at the time. Some of the tunes I don't even know that well, and I don't think lend themselves to this kind of project, but a lot of them do. I think I may go through that book and make a list of the ones that say it for me.

**Julie Vallimont**

That would be so exciting, I would be genuinely excited to see that and then anything you send to us, we can also add to the podcast notes as well, or we'll make a post on the Contra Pulse website or something, so stay tuned.

**Tony Parkes**

I'm making notes.

**Julie Vallimont**

That's wonderful. For those of you who are listening, there are many folks who are listening who have way many more years of contra experience than I do. I'm just a humble interviewer. I would love for you to write in with your stories and ideas and we can start to compile some of these things and share them with everyone.

**Tony Parkes**

I'm in the middle of writing a book on squares right now, to go with my book on calling contras. This is a book on how to call squares. The way I did the contra book was for about 10 years, I guess it was, whenever I thought of something and said, yeah, that should go in the book, I would jot it down on a little scrap of paper. I would drop the scrap of paper into a manila envelope. And then at the end of 10 years, I took all the scraps out and sorted them by topic. Then it took me another two years to actually do the writing. That's sort of what I'm doing now, except that when I jot something down on paper about the squares book at least a couple times a week, I take those pieces of paper and I type them into the computer where I've got several chapters going at once and make sure that I only have one or two pieces of paper out at any given time. I find that writing a nonfiction book like this on a on a specific topic, a lot of it has to do with grabbing those thoughts as soon as I have them and making sure that that I write them down or type them before I forget them. It's like the old phenomenon that everybody has experienced of having a dream and thinking you have the solution to all the world's problems. Maybe you wake up in the middle of the night and you write something down and then you wake up in the morning and look at what you've written and it's total gibberish, either it's just a scribble and it's not actual words or else the words don't make sense, so I want to guard against that.

**Julie Vallimont**

Absolutely. I think, with smartphones now a lot of musicians find them a handy tool because you've got this little recording device in your pocket. So we can do that equivalent of singing something and there's times when I wake up in the middle of the night feeling like I've written a tune. I wake up in the morning and it's just toneless gibberish. I can't even tell what I was singing.

**Tony Parkes**

Same idea, but with notes instead of words. I haven't gotten in the habit of using my phone as a recorder. You would think that that would come naturally, but I'm still exploring all the cool things that my phone can do.

**Julie Vallimont**

I think there's something really tangible about pieces of paper and being able to move them around and look at them.

**Tony Parkes**

That too. And of course, I'm old enough that I'm used to working with paper rather than computers. I was organizing my dance repertoire for something like 20 years before personal computers were a thing.

**Julie Vallimont**

Did you do cards in a box? What was your system?

**Tony Parkes**

I did make some cards early on but I never really used them, my go to method has been putting about eight dances on a letter size sheet of paper. And then I have a notebook, a letter size notebook that has clear plastic pages. On one half of the book I'll have the clear pages with my repertoire and then the other half will be a flap that holds pieces of paper. I jot down what I do at each dance, each program, each evening that I call I make a complete log of what I use so I don't repeat myself too often or so I can make notes on how such a dance went, whether people liked it or whether it was awkward and I need to rewrite it, that sort of thing. I've always been afraid that if I use cards, I'll misplace some of them and then I won't have those dances in my repertoire. Of course, nowadays, you can do what Beth [Parkes] does, which is she has them in her computer and she can print them out either as multiple dances on a page to use at an evening or to give to her musicians. She can print them out, multiple dances on the page, or she can print them out as three by five cards or whatever. I just never got into using cards and by the time computers came along I was just hooked on my own method of doing this. Memory is one of my strong suits, so most of the dances that I use the most often, I don't have cards or pages on, I just do them from memory. I have long lists of titles. If I see the title, then I know the dance. If I didn't have the titles in front of me, I might not think to do such and such a dance at a time when it would be a good fit because it would just be out of sight out of mind. I have about a hundred squares and a hundred contras in my working repertoire. I would say about half of those I know from memory and the other half I have to look at my notes during the walkthrough, but I don't look at them when I'm actually calling.

**Julie Vallimont**

That'd be an interesting side conversation to have among fiddlers and callers and other musicians. The act of having a repertoire and organizing it and being able to access it is one of the important skills about being a dance musician or a caller that's kind of an invisible one. That's a really interesting conversation. I'm curious if you remember, you were mentioning some of these common contra dances that sort of fell out of the repertoire and you started mentioning a few names of some of them and I realized I didn't recognize any of them. I don't know if I ever got to dance any of them. Are there any more names that come to mind?

**Tony Parkes**

Oh, sure. The ones that have lasted the longest are Chorus Jig, surely you've heard of Chorus Jig?

**Julie Vallimont**

Oh, totally.

**Tony Parkes**

Okay, because the first couple of times, and this was probably 20-30 years ago, the first couple of times that I was working with a band I hadn't worked with before and said do you play Chorus Jig and they said "Huh?" This was not an old time string band, they called themselves a contra dance band. It was a shock to me to find people that called themselves a contra band and didn't know Chorus Jig, that's the quintessential chestnut, if people don't know any other standard contra dance they know that one. That's true of dancers too. The routine is so straightforward that dancers can remember it even if they're not callers. I'm not saying it's easy to dance you have to know contra corners. It's easy to remember the sequence, down the outside, down the center, contra corners balance and swing. It's about the simplest in terms of piece count, the number of pieces you have to remember, it's about the most straightforward dance out there. So at a party, say a house party where there's no caller, people can still dance Chorus Jig because they don't need a caller to remember it. Money Musk is kind of that way, it's a little trickier as a piece of choreography but enough people have done it enough times that they could probably do it without calls. So Chorus, Jig, Money Musk, Hull's Victory and Petronella, I would say are the big four. Those are the dances that have survived the longest, that have their own tune that it would feel emotionally hard for people to do those dances to any other tune. It's just something that's it's not typically done. Then there are probably about five or 10 other dances that are in that same broad category of dances written before 1850, some of which have survived and some of which have been revived, Sackett's Harbor which is one of my favorite contras. British Sorrow is a dance that had died out and Ralph Page found it in an old manuscript and started using it with folk dancers. It's not something that you want to do at a hot shot contra evening because there's a lot of standing but it's one of the favorites at places like the Ralph Page weekend because it's sort of formal but it keeps a lot of people moving a lot of the time and it's a nice change from some of the more frenetic dances. Rory O'More, of course, I mustn't forget Rory O'More. I'd say there are five really core chestnuts, Chorus Jig, Hull's Victory, Money Musk, Petronella, Rory O'More, I would say are the all-time favorites. Then there are dances like Lady of the Lake and Lady Walpole's Reel, which aren't quite as closely tied to a specific tune but date from that period or a little later. They were some of the first improper dances where you could swing the one below or in modern terms swing your neighbor without having to cross the set to get there. Lamplighter's Hornpipe is another one of my favorites in the same feel as Hull's Victory, but maybe a little trickier. I could probably name half a dozen more. Very interesting piece of dance trivia, from about 1840 or 1850, up to about 1940, there were no contras written. That was a period when contras were out of fashion. It's just funny how these fashions come and go. From about the late 1700's to the mid 1800's there were hundreds of contra dances written. And then for about a century, there were absolutely none written until people started doing contras as part of the square dance revival in the late 1930s. I think the first new contra dance was something like 1936 or 1938, Ralph Page put together and then people started writing them a little bit more. After about 1970, that was the deluge where almost every dance, except for something like Money Musk, almost every dance number that you would encounter at an evening today will have been written since 1970. Of course, there are literally thousands of dances that have been written in the last, what is it, 50 years. The contra dance database has something like 6,000 titles in it now.

**Julie Vallimont**

It's so fascinating to hear that perspective. Thank you so much for sharing your perspective with us. Especially now as we're in this lull, this kind of pause that none of us chose, this break in dancing because of the pandemic that we're going through. I think when things are at their peak, when there's contra dances everywhere, like in Boston, you could dance on four or five nights of the week. When something is so popular, you kind of just think it will be around in this form forever. It's worth keeping an eye on the things we love and making sure that they're healthy for the long term and learning from some of these trends that have happened to other dance forms and knowing that contra dancing itself has kind of had ebbs and flows and peaks and valleys in the past, interesting perspective.

**Tony Parkes**

The one thing that I want to keep in mind for myself, above all, is to keep it accessible, the way we were talking about coming up with a list of tunes that new musicians can latch on to quickly. I think it's important to have events where new people feel welcome. Not to have the be all and end all of contra dancing be the camps and the festivals where were the hot shots try to see how tricky a dance they can get through. That's what killed square dancing as a common recreation and turned it into something people did in little clubs. I don't think it's gonna kill contra dancing, but I think we can help keep it alive and help keep it healthy by looking out for the new folks and making sure we have plenty of events where they feel completely welcome and don't feel frozen out from getting a partner, for instance, because nobody knows them. That's one reason that I love my hay bale gigs. I can do a whole evening, I could probably do at least three full evenings of dances that anybody can walk in off the street and do without repeating myself. So if people want to have me back the next month or in six months or a year I can give them some of the stuff they know and some stuff that will be new to them. But it's still from that broad general repertoire of things that anybody can do. I find actually, in the last couple of decades, I find that my interest has tilted more and more toward the easy stuff. I've seen a couple of other callers go through this where they went through the hot shot stage and just either burned out or got disgusted with the way the activity was heading, where it was becoming something for a little in-group, and they decided consciously to cater to the masses as best they could. That's part of what I've been trying to do. I love a good tricky square whether I'm dancing it or whether I'm dancing it to a hot caller, or whether I'm calling it myself. My object is not to stop the floor, my object is to pull people along with me and see how few people I can lose. There was a great caller during the boom years in the '50s named [Ed Gilmore](https://squaredancehistory.org/items/browse?advanced%5B0%5D%5Belement_id%5D=39&advanced%5B0%5D%5Btype%5D=is+exactly&advanced%5B0%5D%5Bterms%5D=Ed+Gilmore) and he was one of my primary influences, one of the three or four people I've gotten my style from. He had a saying, because in those days it was fashionable to see how tricky you could get and how many squares you could get to break down. So he said," Any idiot can stop the floor, it takes a caller to keep them dancing." I've always tried to take that to heart. Another little story, if we have time, that there was another caller I admired a lot in Rhode Island named Dick Leger. He actually did a workshop at NEFFA the first year I went to NEFFA, and he was sort of a switch hitter, he catered mostly to dancers in square dance clubs where people dressed up, wore full skirts and matching shirts and took lessons and joined the club and used modern music, but to that modern music he was doing correctly phrased New England style choreography and just didn't bother to tell anybody. He believed in keeping the complexity level down to where a lot of people could do it. A couple times I ran a week long callers workshop at dance camps. The first day, the first session of the caller's workshop, I would play little 30 second clips of commercial recording callers. This was to get the students used to critiquing so that eventually they would critique each other later in the week. I would play callers that I had selected because there was one thing wrong with their calling. I would ask the students to pick it out what was wrong. The first one that I played, he couldn't even call on the beat. There was one who was right on the beat but he was only allowing half as much time as the dancers needed to do the moves, and so on, there was something wrong with each one. Then without telling them that I was going to make a change, I played a little bit of Dick Leger who wasn't doing anything wrong. You could feel the sense of relief, you could hear the sigh among these 10 or so student callers. Somebody said, it's like he's running after you were the safety net. That's what I try to do, that's what I've always wanted to do, is hold the dancers in the palm of my hand, so to speak, and let them know with my voice that I'm not going to let them down, that I'm here to help them, that I'm not going to ask them to do anything that I'm not positive they can do. That's true right from the get-go. That's true right at the hay bale gigs where I just have people form a circle and have them start walking in one direction and then the next and one bite at a time, just doing things that they already know how to do and before they know it, they're dancing to music.

**Julie Vallimont**

I think that gets at the heart of what, to me, is one of the most magical special things about contra dancing, is that anyone off the street can just walk in and you find yourself doing it. There's been times where we would literally pull people off the street or you have the doors open to the dance hall and people are walking by, they hear music, they come in and next thing, they've got a partner and they're on the floor. I think it's easy for us to have a lot of like cachet with these big festival dances and dance weekends. These smaller dances that you're talking about get overlooked, like wedding dances or parties or whatever. For many people, that's their first exposure to contra dancing and it may be the first time they've danced with other people in their whole life and ever really enjoyed it.

**Tony Parkes**

A lot of what you might call regular dancing nowadays, dancing that people will do at parties, you don't touch anybody. Sometimes you don't even have a partner, like four or five girls will get up in a sort of circle and they'll just move together but they won't be touching. Our kind of dancing has more opportunities for real human contact, both with the physical touching and with the eye contact. Some people feel threatened and then there are some people who don't know the boundaries, but we deal with that when we have to. But in general it's a feeling that is very rare in our society, and it's really valuable. I think something we have to cultivate and maintain the value of is not just the one-offs, the weddings, the church dances and so forth, but the small local contra dance series where you might get 30 or 40 people and you might have two or three musicians who are not top notch and you might have a caller who's working hard to stay one jump ahead of the dancers. If you don't have dances like that, in 5 or 10 years, you're not going to have the people to populate the hot shot dances and the camps and festivals. You don't have no beginners and eventually you won't have no dancers. I tell people wherever I go when I do a guest dance, when I'm hired to call out of town. I tell them, hang on to this dance, treasure it, support it. Especially you hot shots, you people at the upper end of this group. Keep coming, even as you get better, as you get more accomplished, keep supporting your local dance and your local musicians and your local callers because this is the heart of the activity.

**Julie Vallimont**

Well, thank you so much, Tony for being here. It has been so wonderful to talk with you. I really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

**Tony Parkes**

Thank you for having me. Callers are notoriously long-winded, at the drop of a hat we'll talk shop for hours so thank you for giving me a chance to sound off.

**Julie Vallimont**

The pleasure is all mine. Thank you so much.

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