

Contra Pulse Episode 38 – Dave Bartley

Julie Vallimont

Hello, and welcome to Contra Pulse! In this episode I sits down with Seattle musician Dave Bartley. Dave picked up the guitar at age 11, having started as an orchestral percussionist at school. Since then, he has played in rock, swing, Balkan, Greek, French cabaret, Israeli and International folk dance, Ballroom dance, English Country dance and World Music ensembles, as well as performing on solo classical guitar. He also plays mandolin, cittern, and a long list of other stringed and percussion instruments. All this filters into his dance music and the nearly 400 tunes he has written!

Dave currently plays contra dance music with KGB, Contra Sutra and Bag o'Tricks (as well as various other combinations of musicians), English Country dance music with Tricky Brits and Roguery, ballroom dance music with Valse Cafe Orchestra, traditional Celtic music with Keltoi, electric Celtic music with The Irish Experience, and French cabaret music with Rouge.

In our interview Dave and Julie explore the myriad influences that have woven their way into Dave's musical style and repertoire. He shares his perspective on the Pacific Northwest dance and music community and even shares a few of the secrets behind the magic of KGB. Enjoy!

Julie Vallimont

Well, hello, Dave Bartley, welcome to Contra Pulse.

Dave Bartley

Hello, Julie. It's wonderful to talk with you. I feel I'm joining august company in being a guest on Contra Pulse.

Julie Vallimont

It's so lovely to have you here. We're on opposite coasts. Are you currently at home? Where are you located right now?

Dave Bartley

I am home right now. I'm sitting in what is nominally a music room. I bought this house like 34 years ago, and this room initially was a recording studio. We had the windows boarded over and all of that and I've taken the boards off, but it still exists as a music room. In those days, I had a housemate who had a 16 track machine so we did lots of multitrack recording down here.

Julie Vallimont

Like reel to reel?

Dave Bartley

Absolutely.

Julie Vallimont

That's how I started recording. I still have some old tapes that I can't listen to anymore.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, same here.

Julie Vallimont

Lord knows what's on them. I'm looking forward to chatting because you're out on the West Coast, and I'm on the East Coast. And while we ran into each other at a dance weekend here and there, I've never really had a chance to just sit down and have a conversation with you.

Dave Bartley

Same here. I've been a fan! I think Nor'easter was at a couple of weekends that I played with maybe with [KGB](#) and... I remember dancing to [Buddy System](#) at one point at the Seattle dance and really enjoyed your playing.

Julie Vallimont

Well, shucks, I mean, I was busy fangirling on you at all the dance we were at. I'm just so excited to just to talk about everything. So maybe let's just start from the beginning. Which is, how did you end up playing music and choosing your instruments? And how did you eventually end up playing for contra dances?

Dave Bartley

Well, I was born in Seattle. So pretty much my permanent address has always been within the greater Seattle area, though I've traveled quite a bit and did live on the east coast briefly years ago. I'm the youngest of five kids and my parents loved music. My dad, I think he played a little bit of harmonica and he occasionally sang bass in a barbershop quartet. But neither were really musicians per se. I have two older brothers, two older sisters, and both of my older brothers played guitar. They actually both played in rock bands in the 60s. I think as long as I can remember, I've always had music running through my head. We listened to a lot of music at home, it would be you know, folk music and pop music, rock, blues, some classical, things like [the Clancy Brothers](#) also and the [Limelitters](#) and just a whole lot of different styles of music. So that was kind of filtering into my head. I didn't really play much of anything besides poking around at the piano that we had until fourth grade when it was determined that I should choose a musical instrument to play in orchestra in grade school. I ended up choosing snare drum. I briefly flirted with clarinet or flute, both of my sisters had played the flute, but ended up, I think a neighbor kid said, oh, play drums, they're easy. I was lazy enough that that sounded like a good idea. So I played snare drum in grade school. The other thing was at that time, my oldest brother's band was practicing in my parent's basement. The drummer actually left his drum set there because it was difficult to get in and out of the basement and they were playing stuff like the Byrds and the Beatles. This was the mid 60s when I was in grade school. My ambition was to be a drummer in a rock band. I really wanted to do that. But I think, much to my mother's delight, I ended up starting to play guitar in sixth grade, and sort of drifted away from drums although I continued to play timpani and other things through high school, in orchestra and concert band. I think my mother didn't really want to have somebody perpetually banging on the drums in the basement while she was home so I started playing

guitar and my next older brother sort of gave me my little launch. They taught me my first 12 chords, maybe. I remember having a lesson on fingerstyle, just playing what they called Travis picking at the time or claw picking and learning the blues pentatonic scales, so I could improvise basic rock and blues. I would just go off and listen to recordings, I was mostly self taught, but I was exposed to a lot of guitar playing, and we would have music sessions in our living room, some evenings and we would play a lot of folk stuff. Both of my brothers were really big fans of Gordon Lightfoot. There are dozens of Gordon Lightfoot songs, but also you know, Ian and Sylvia and some traditional things, stuff like the Cutty Wren and so that was how I came to play guitar. I had a best friend who played guitar, we started putting together kind of a garage rock band, we weren't very good. The other thing that happened around then is my oldest sister's husband at the time, played classical guitar. My dad had bought a classical guitar for my brother for when he was in high school choir and it was still laying around the house. The thought was, my mother, who had played a little bit of guitar when she was young might start playing it. But really, it just sat around the house, along with this method book. I just started learning everything in the method book, just playing through it on the guitar, it just seemed interesting. I was also playing classical guitar while I was playing electric guitar in this rock group. So that's kind of the beginning of it. I went on to, in the mid to late 70s, I played in a series of bands that through a booking agency, we're playing high school, fraternity, junior high dances, like twice a week, like every Friday and Saturday. I'd go to high school, or college during the week and then Friday evening, we'd head off to somewhere in western Washington and play a dance and then another one on Saturday night. So playing a lot of top 40 music of the time, everything from the Guess Who to Led Zeppelin to, oh, just a whole laundry list of bands.

Julie Vallimont

I mean, that's a fun decade to be in a cover band at least.

Dave Bartley

You could still actually play live music for dances. I mean, DJs had not yet taken over that space. So yeah, I was blessed to be doing that at that time.

Julie Vallimont

Wow. How did you stumble across contra dancing?

Dave Bartley

Well, so after the rock band period, I got more serious about classical guitar, actually took lessons, I studied with somebody for a couple of years, the only time I ever took lessons on anything, really. I ended up having a singer songwriter period along with the aforementioned multi tracking that I was doing in this house. Through some friends I ended up going to a contra dance in I guess it was 1988. I don't remember who the band was, I do remember who the caller was, Suzanne Girardot, who's one of our local callers for a long time. I had a great time and I didn't go back. But I had a co- worker, at some point in college, I decided rather than trying to be a professional musician, I ended up getting a degree in electrical engineering and I took a job right out of college. I'd just play music for my pleasure, on the side was the idea. I ended up working with a guy who was into both Balkan music and also kind of the fiddle tunes scene in the Seattle area. We started playing together at lunchtime, he persuaded me to bring my guitar in. He played fiddle, but he also played clarinet and trumpet and a whole bunch of other

stuff. At some point, he said, I'm playing in this little Balkan group. And then I ended up playing for the Folklife Festival, the [Northwest Folklife Festival](#) in Seattle for the first time, in I think, around '88 in an Italian folk band, where his girlfriend played guitar, so I played mandolin, and that's actually where I learned to play mandolin was in that band. I was playing the Neapolitan Tarantella, just these Italian folk melodies on mandolin, I got my start there. We also, by the way, played in a group that had been formed to play an Appalachians suite for a Balkan performance group called Radost out of Seattle. They called themselves to Carpathian Ridge Runners, which I think is a great name, but they had a gig at Folklife, but pretty much all the other members of the band bagged out before the weekend. So he was left looking for somebody to play with, so he and I played as a duo. And it was all this music that was kind of shoving Balkan rhythms and fiddle tunes together. So we played Cluck Old Hen as a [Daichovo](#) and 9/8. I mean, it was just stuff like that. He had this medley of Kitty McGee and Sweeping the Town which are pretty similar, jig and reel. And then we'd play the same melody in 7/8 as a ruchenitsa. So anyway I did those two things. And then shortly after he said, I'm playing in this pickup Balkan band, we've got a gig and we kind of need another member, would you be willing to play bass with us? My housemate had a Fender Precision and so I just borrowed it from him. I said, sure, I'll do it. The accordion player was this woman named Mary DeFelice in that group and that is how Mary and I met. She was going regularly to...there were three dances, contra dances in Seattle at that time. But the big one was on Thursday nights at the Ballard Eagles, it was a building that doesn't exist anymore so I started occasionally going to the dances with her. She also persuaded me to join this English country dance performance group called Nonesuch. I'd never heard of English country dance, I'd never done it. The first thing I did was memorize all these dances and then perform them on stage. They had to live music and the musicians at some point, some of the dancers would go back and forth between playing and dancing so I started doing that. The fiddle player at that time was a woman named Shaun Hubbard, who was the original member in a group called Scotsbroome that had played for the first Saturday dance. There were also Saturday dances in Seattle at that time, they were owned by various bands, Salmonberry and so on and their mandolin and guitar player was leaving the group and so she asked if I'd join and so I started playing for contra dance.

Julie Vallimont

What instrument did you start on?

Dave Bartley

Well, I was playing, Julie King was in that band. We can get to the point of sort of listing my band history, but Julie was also I think, playing for the English, for Nonesuch, but she only played half the time. And so when she was playing with the group, I played mandolin. And when she wasn't playing with the group, I played guitar as the backup player so basically it was both. So I got to learn the ropes kind of as both a backup player and a melody player alternating months.

Julie Vallimont

Which was more difficult to learn or more challenging as you were a new contra musician? They each have different things you have to learn.

Dave Bartley

My next older brother John played bluegrass in the 70s. He actually played at the first few Northwest Folklife Festivals with a group called Mountain County Co-Op and he and I would play bluegrass together. He played mandolin in that group, although he's mainly a guitar player so I would play guitar with him. I kind of I'd learned boom chuck from that time. At some point, we learned a just a small number of fiddle tunes as a melody duet. I think it was like the Swallowtail Jig, and Off She Goes, or Haste to the Wedding, I can't remember and so I was familiar. I'd been playing fiddle tunes with this friend from work who introduced me to Mary subsequently. But to actually play for dance, I don't recall that one was more difficult than the other. I mean, I was more familiar with guitar as an instrument because I've been playing it for longer and there were two other melody players in the group. Actually three others, there was Shaun and then Mike Richardson was playing fiddle with that group. He's known more as a dance composer I think these days. There's a couple of his dances that show up pretty regularly in programs. Star Trek and Monday Night in Ballard, and then melodeon player named Phil Katz was also in that group. And so as a melody player, I was one of three melody players. Their approach to the music was pretty traditional, really. Mike was writing some tunes, Phil was often collecting things, he always went to like Ralph Page Legacy weekend, and he'd collected a bunch of stuff in Newfoundland and various other places. But it was all pretty traditional, you know, Shetland, Cape Breton, New England. I learned all the chestnuts in that group and love them to this day. We danced to Chorus Jig at my wedding reception. Mary had these great memories of it, and I love dancing Chorus Jig, it's just so much fun. I think I was learning as I went, I could read music, which was helpful. I was certainly learning the styling by listening to who I was playing with. Sometime around that same time started playing in a second group called [Apple Maggot Quarantine](#), another great band name, was a fiddler player named [Steven Trampe](#) who played in [Childsplay](#) and always went to [Fiddle Tunes](#). So we were getting a lot of the latest stuff that was coming to the northwest through the staff at the Northwest Festival of Fiddle Tunes, and a flutist named Arne Reinert who also played in Scotsbroome and then Julie [King] was in that band. So I was getting this big influx of music and I was listening to groups. The dance that really opened my eyes to contra dance music was around, I think, was probably 1989, around the time of the [Festival of American Fiddle Tunes](#). The Bay Area band, the [Hillbillies from Mars](#), played with [Rodney Miller](#). I think they had this drummer from Ghana, anyway, it was like, oh, my God, there's all this non-traditional treatment of tunes and it was danceable. Because I had a pretty varied background, that interested me a great deal, and I found that that gig was just really exciting. Of course I really still enjoyed playing traditionally but I sort of filed that away as oh, this would be really fun to do.

Julie Vallimont

Like these things are possible and something sparked a kinship with you and your eclectic nature and desire to explore these things.

Dave Bartley

I remember around that time, there also was a group that played about once a year, I think, it was the [Canote twins](#) [Jere and Greg].

Julie Vallimont

Oh, I love them.

Dave Bartley

Well, they're so great. They're the life of every party they're in and [Sandy Silva](#), when she was still living here on percussion, [Dave Cahn](#). They called themselves Boom Boom Room. They basically played Afro-pop contra, like Afro-pop treatments. I think Jere was playing a Octopad you know, one of these electronic eight pad things and he had each of them set to a different marimba note. So he was basically playing a digital marimba. Dave Cahn was playing electric guitar and playing kind of that dry South African style. Anyway, that was another like, oh, this is really cool. I mean, all the jigs are really slow, but for the right dances they were...

Julie Vallimont

What was Sandy's role in the band?

Dave Bartley

She played conga.

Julie Vallimont

Oh, wow. Cool.

Dave Bartley

Did she do any dancing? Not in that band. I certainly saw her do a lot of her style of kind of merging clogging with others, you know, like Hungarian and all these other styles of physical body percussion dance.

Julie Vallimont

For our listeners, we'll put a link to some videos of Sandy dancing. It's worth watching if you haven't seen her before.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, she later danced with [La Bottine Souriante](#) when she was living in Québec. I think she may still be living there.

Julie Vallimont

She came to Boston a couple years ago with a cool video dance project [\[Migration\]](#) she was doing and I got to see her there, really neat stuff. So we'll link to some of her things. Because, you know, it's another form of, like rhythmic accompaniment for music like step dancing.

Dave Bartley

She has her own really unique amalgamation, her own style that comes from a lot of different influences with real soul, though, too.

Julie Vallimont

So, you started playing in a band that was kind of more traditional, like straightforward contra fare, it sounds like and tunes collected from a variety of different traditions. And then it seems like you had a few different inspirations of other ways that things could be. How did KGB come about? It? Sounds like

you and Julie have been playing together since your start playing for contra dancing way back in the beginning.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, pretty much. So Mary and I got married in 1991. I think around that time, there used to be, I think Mike Richardson organized this ski dance weekend at Mount Rainier once a year, so I can't remember, it was obviously, in the winter at some point. Mary and I went one time, and Claude [Ginsburg] and Julie were the music staff for it. They were playing together. This was maybe 1990. We ended up having breakfast with Claude and Lynn, Mary and I did, on the last morning. We just got to talking and you know, connected and time went by. I remember going to another gig it was Claude and Julie and Laurie Andres, I think played a New Year's dance. I heard them play together a number of times. At Folklife in 1992, Claude approached me and said, Would you be interested in joining Julie and me for a recording project? We're planning to record a cassette because that's what you did in those days. Yeah. It happened that Mary and I had decided we were going to rent our house out for a year and travel around the country. So I said, I'd love to, but I'm not going to be here. Because we were leaving in August, and that was about when they were going to start. I said, let's play when we get back. And so we got back in the following summer. I think it was Mike, organized a special dance upstairs at an old elementary school on an incredibly hot night it turned out, and Claude, Julie, and I played for it. We didn't have a name, it was just the three of us and Mike called. And that was a revelation. I had spent, in my youth, had spent a lot of time jamming with people. That was probably incredibly boring to listen to, but it was fun to do. You know, we would play some I don't know we were playing tunes by late '70's bands but then I'd get to play a guitar solo for 10 minutes, pretend I was Carlos Santana or something. I'd learned you know, I'd memorized a lot of like Jimmy Page solos and all that kind of thing...I got really into progressive rock. So I was learning, Steve Hackett and Steve Howell and guitar players from Genesis and Yes and all of that stuff and Greg Lake's solo from Karn Evil 9, Part 1 by Emerson Lake and Palmer all that, so I jammed a lot. And the way we approached contra dance music, we were playing tunes like you know, Walker Street or whatever, even traditional stuff. We would just go off and improvise. Claude and I would just improvise back and forth at each other through the course of the dance while maintaining enough structure so the dancers knew where B1 was, but Julie really was our anchor. We just had the funnest time and the thing was, I was relatively new to contra dance, Claude had been doing it since the '80's. And Julie been doing it since the '80's and they were good at watching the dancers. I was learning that through my time with Scotsbroome, but I was still pretty new to it then. We had so much fun we said we got to keep doing this. I started writing tunes a bit too and it was a great vehicle for my early tunes, many of them maybe had a few too many ideas and you know when you sort of start writing you...anyway. I think one of the the earliest ones that I still play is Trip to Sofia, conceived as a Bulgarian Irish reel and it's an A Hijaz, I wrote, I think, a year before Larry [Unger] wrote Beth Cohen's but it's kind of in a very similar vein and so we started playing things like that. I think Julie came up with the name. Like BLT was a group in those days, [Kate Barnes](#), [Mary Lea](#), and [Bill Tomczak](#). And Mary said, well, we could be KGB, with our last names King, Ginsburg, Bartley. We said okay, we'll use that until we come up with a better name. But we can never agree on one so and then by the time we played our first dance camp, and then we were gonna record a CD and it's like, well, I guess we're KGB and that's that.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, looking back on it now, would you rather spend your musical career in a band named after a sandwich or after a Russian spy organization?

Dave Bartley

Well, I'll say the sandwich is less controversial. Our first gig was in 1993. And it seemed kind of funny then because, you know, the Berlin Wall had come down and the Soviet Union broke up, and it seems a little less funny now. But you know, we're stuck with it. I suppose if Facebook can change their name to Meta, I suppose we could change your name, but we don't quite have the branding money behind doing a shift in our name. So we probably won't.

Julie Vallimont

I feel like after a while, most names just become what they are and they stop being associated with the original thing, you know? People just know you guys as KGB, I don't think they get you confused.

Dave Bartley

It also provided fodder for tune names. I would not have conceived of Vladi on the Trans-Siberian as a riff on Paddy on the Railroad, but you know, Russian version, if I had not been in KGB.

Julie Vallimont

I can't believe it never occurred to me that of course, that's where that tune name came from. It literally never occurred to me, of course.

Dave Bartley

I mean, the tune itself is not even vaguely Russian, I was trying to write sort of a Cajun zydeco contra tune but I didn't have a funny Cajun zydeco name.

Julie Vallimont

It ended up being this kind of great syncopated poppy, catchy, contra-y tune. That's a true a modern contra tune as any, right?

Dave Bartley

I think so. Yeah. It got legs when I think [Rex Blazer](#) recorded with [Lift Ticket](#) and then of course [Perpetual e-Motion](#), I think were the group that sort of propagated it to the world, which I greatly appreciate. You never know, when you write tunes, you always hope that there'll be a tune that people will start playing and it'll go beyond you and maybe people won't even know who wrote it and for me, I think that's the main one.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, I mean, that tune, it's singable, it's catchy, it's fun, it's got everything you need.

Dave Bartley

It does kind of have this Chugga chugga chugga chugga thing going in the A part. So I guess having it having a railroad name isn't that inappropriate.

Julie Vallimont

So when you started KGB and started kind of exploring all the different musical directions that the three of you wanted to go in what was like the context for that? Were there other bands doing that? Was it common at contra dances? Did you get a reaction at first from people like you were the first ones doing that?

Dave Bartley

Well, we were early, but I don't think we were the first. I mean, certainly, you know, [Wild Asparagus](#) was broadening and [Swallowtail](#) before them had broadened the scope a certain amount. I had heard the Swallowtail LP and heard along with like Foregone Conclusions and the New England Chestnuts and a lot of recordings. [The Hillbillies from Mars](#) were definitely an influence. I don't remember exactly when I heard them, but the [Clayfoot Strutters](#) did a lot of different, really, I love the [Going Elsewhere](#) album. That was one that I listened to a lot and so I was hearing a certain amount of that. But the other thing was, I was in parallel with playing contra dance music. I was also initially playing in an international folk dance band that had grown out of an Israeli folk dance band. In fact, Mary and I played together in that group initially. And then I started playing in a Balkan band that was playing primarily Bulgarian and Greek stuff. I was exposed to all of this music of the Balkans, which I hadn't heard when I was younger. I'm trying to think what else was going on. So there was that, and then Claude had all these other influences, he was, and still is, really into Argentine Tango. I mean, he actually went down to Buenos Aires few times to study down there. He also played Brazilian parade samba for a while, and he and I just had these parallel backgrounds, like I played in all these rock bands, he also was playing like acid rock and jazz fusion when he was in college, back in Baltimore was where he was in those days. So we both brought a lot of different genre kind of to the game. I think we just both gradually inched in a bit at a time. I'm trying new things, I would listen to something and go God, I wonder if that would work for contra dance. There were other things like TV theme songs and classical tunes and jingles. You know, I mean, people have used a lot of those things and we have as well. The only one I think we recorded was using squaring up of the habanera Love is a Fickle Bird from Carmen by Bizet in a medley with Frenchie's Reel as I recall.

Julie Vallimont

That's funny. Frenchie's being one of those old workhorse kinda tunes.

Dave Bartley

Exactly. It's a nice contrast from this happy B flat to this D minor, D Major kind of dramatic thing and so there was a certain amount of that. I remember adapting the hoedown from Rodeo Suite one time we did that. And then I heard [Rum and Onions](#) version of the entire thing at [NEFFA](#). I think I went, oh my god, that's the last word. But yeah, so first was the idea of using Balkan tonalities but contra dance rhythms. And just over the years, we just kind of worked in a whole lot of other influences while still playing traditional stuff. I mean, we've got a bunch of French Canadian tunes we play there's, you know, we'll play like Ross's Reel #4 with Batchelder's I think and that kind of thing. Still, I'm all about variety. I like this set can't be anything like the last set but it still has to fit the dance. But it's like what can we do now that you know the last one was moody and minor now this is uplifting and major or whatever.

Julie Vallimont

So when you play tunes like Ross's Reel and Batchelder's so are you treating them more in that traditional kind of New England-y sort of sound? Are you playing the tunes and then doing whatever you want to them?

Dave Bartley

In KGB, mostly. I mean, both we'll vary the melody and of course, Claude and I just sort of have this loose rule, we typically just alternate times through, then we don't have to think, you know. I mean, when we record something, we kind of follow the arrangement and pad it out as needed for the full 17 times through or whatever that the dance is...ends up being. But what the other person is doing, we've played together for so long now. But even fairly early, we achieved a rapport where we could kind of sense where the other one was going. We kind of just go there...play something to compliment or to reinforce. But those, typically, we do them a little more traditionally, and somewhere along the way I learned to do foot percussion. Claude, actually, on the very first KGB recording Contra Intelligence. We did a French Canadian medley that included like Reel to Montréal and Claude did the foot percussion because I'd never done it. But so I learned after that, I think at work I'd be typing at the computer keyboard and doing Québécois feet while I was typing to kind of get the independent way to practice. So yes, we'll do those traditionally, generally. When I'm one of the melody players, I don't tend to have as much flexibility to take things way off in another direction. Unlike another group I'm in, [Contra Sutra](#), I'm the backup player along with a percussionist and I'm pretty unabashedly interested in doing something. I'll come up with some concept, like one of my favorites is doing a disco funk version of the Growling Old Man and the Grumbling Old Woman.

Julie Vallimont

So what kind of groove is that?

Dave Bartley

I'll go grab a guitar see if I can do it.

Julie Vallimont

Oh fun.

Dave Bartley

If we're lucky this will be remotely in tune. It was tuned at the factory so I'm optimistic and actually played a live contra dance, I don't know, recently.

Julie Vallimont

In person?

Dave Bartley

Yeah, masked dancers. There were like 75 dancers and as far as I know, nobody got sick.

Julie Vallimont

This is early November now, 2021. It's been a year and a half, no contras.

Dave Bartley

I think so maybe something like this and I'd have my octave pedal on of course for this [Dave plays a funk riff]. But that would be the idea. I think it was like Saturday morning at Cabin Fever and I was thinking the energy was kind of sagging a little. I thought we needed to do something to pick this up. And that group had a medley of Growling and Grumbling and then Dancing Bear actually was the other one. So I kind of turned it into this sort of a theme from Shaft kind of thing.

Julie Vallimont

I mean, tunes like that are great for a treatment like this, because they're pretty repetitive, which is what makes them kind of trancy. They don't have a lot of chord changes, the rhythm is built into the tune, in a way.

Dave Bartley

Yes it is.

Julie Vallimont

So you just have to change the groove that you play the tune in and then you can do all these things.

Dave Bartley

Right. And sometimes, because the thing I used for direct boxes and effects, is a zoom effects box that actually has a 32-second looper in it, too. So I would loop that part sometimes so I could do something else with it. But also, we had a percussionist, a drummer. So that meant I didn't have to fill all the rhythmic space as well.

Julie Vallimont

Right, which is fun if you want to do some groovy things as a rhythm player, because you could take a solo, you can be really sparse, let the drummer fill it out. I feel like a groove like that, it's best with a rhythm section where you can really lock in and get into this deep pocket, which is what makes the groove really satisfying.

Dave Bartley

Yes, absolutely. I'd heard other groups introduce African elements, Caribbean, sort of Afro Caribbean things. My tendency, we can talk about tune writing at some point, but as a tune writer, sometimes melodies come to me but other times, I'm just trying to fill a gap or solve a problem. It's like, you know, we don't have enough tunes with balances in the B, I'm going to write some, because I remember KGB played this dance camp early on. And by Sunday morning, we were working with a caller who did lots of balances, just most of the dances they called had balances in them, we were running out of things that are set, you know, I'm just going to write some, I mean, I know we could go find them. There's thousands and thousands and thousands of tunes. But it was sort of like, this is an assignment, I remember doing that once when we used up our slinky jigs at a weekend and the caller said, I'm gonna call this great set that needs slinky jigs this afternoon. But anyway, another thing I would do is come up with a concept and say, I want to write like an afro pop tune that would fit contra dance. Rather than

adapting something from the genre, I would try to write something in the style of the genre, but had the kind of the, 32 bar...works well between 112, 120 beats per minute, phrases that are discernible and so on.

Julie Vallimont

Sometimes that's the best way to do it rather than trying to shoehorn a tune from another tradition into contra.

Dave Bartley

That's what I found I had forgotten about this, actually, but I played in a number of groups with a fiddler named [Deb Kirkland](#) locally. I don't know that she's toured. So you might not be familiar with her. But she had this conception of having kind of string quartet contras. And we played one or two dances, the Thursday nights at Ballard Eagles with a cello player. And I think maybe a viola player. And then I was kind of the second violin on mandolin. And she had sort of figured out a 30 to 32 bar phrases from like Haydn and Mozart string quartets. And we would play like a regular contra dance tune until the dance was established. And then we go and do this classical, you know, period thing, or baroque period. And then go anyway, it was a thing. We didn't have a whole night of them. But it was an interesting idea. But that was probably the greatest stretch of adaptation I've run across.

Julie Vallimont

In something like that. Where does the dance rhythm come from? Is it like arpeggios in the music itself? Is it kind of like, a counterpoint, a fugue feeling?

Dave Bartley

Well, you know, a lot of the 'style galant' and early classical music in the quartets, often somebody would be going do doo do do there was enough rhythm going on. We were adapting from kinda like the rondo movement, or maybe if the it's not allegro the first movement was at the right tempo, you could use it. I don't know, she was the one doing the adaptations. I was just playing second fiddle, as it were.

Julie Vallimont

It's fun when someone else does all that thinking work, you just get to go along for the ride.

Dave Bartley

I remember playing [Misirlou](#) I think, for a contra at one point, the Greek tune, and various other things. So we did our share of adaptation, but a lot of times I found it easier to start from scratch.

Julie Vallimont

Isn't Miserlou also the famous surf guitar track, didn't they adapt that for surf guitar?

Dave Bartley

Oh yeah that one [Dave plays an impression of the surf guitar version of Misirlou]. My double picking...I'd have to warm it up.

Julie Vallimont

Just thinking that's where our listeners are probably most familiar with that tune. Wasn't that like, on the [Pulp Fiction soundtrack](#)?

Dave Bartley

That's right. That version, I mean, there's the the original and the international dance version. You know is more like... [Dave plays a slower groove]. It's about that speed. This surf guitar player by the name of [Dick Dale](#), who I think was I of, I can't remember, greek extraction? Anyway, he was the one who recorded that back in the surf guitar days and I guess Quentin Tarantino was familiar with it.

Julie Vallimont

One of my favorite things is movie directors who have an eclectic taste in music. It just makes the movie so much better for me.

Dave Bartley

Me too. Speaking of odd fusions, Mary and I saw this movie, it was with Rupert Grint, he was in the Harry Potter series as Ron Weasley. But he was playing this other character in this kind of a coming of age or romance thing. But it was set in Scotland as I recall, and they had this one scene where there was a band playing in the background. It's this group called [Salsa Celtica](#) that's comprised of traditional Scottish instruments, a side of full salsa percussion and brass section. So you've got pipes and fiddle and tenor banjo and it's a really interesting fusion. But I heard that and I've got to learn about this group. So I've got a couple of their recordings. But I digress, but that was because the director, I think, had heard them and decided to have them play in the background they were out of Glasgow, I think.

Julie Vallimont

That's fun. When you look at your list of bands that you've been in, they're all so eclectic. I just feel like the word eclectic keeps coming up over and over again. You do a lot of different things.

Dave Bartley

It's kind of my strong point. I think my technique, especially because I don't rehearse much, practice much, is middling. But I've done a lot of different things over the years and still do. You know, in the first 10 years, I did play in a number of other groups. I actually played in a band with [Sue Songer](#), Ellen Roberts and Phil Katz called Northern Lights for a while and played in a band with Cathie Whitesides, along with Bruce Reed and also have played all along, almost as long as KGB, in a group called Bag 'o Tricks, which has an English alter ego Tricky Brits, with [Anita Anderson](#) and Sandy Gillette and Betsy Cooper plays in the Tricky Brits. That is much more of a tune oriented group and they've played a bunch of my tunes. But we tend to stay on the melody more like a traditional contra dance band would and that's fun. We've traveled around a bit, not as much as KGB or Contra Sutra, which is the group I'm in with Marni Rachmiel and [Ryan McKasson](#) or Brandon Vance. We have two different fiddle players and then we have a whole binder full of percussionists. Originally it was Russell Shumsky out of Vancouver, then he wasn't able to come to the US for some years. We've worked with [Ness Smith-Savedoff](#) and Julie Bennett, anyway we've worked with a number of other percussionists over the years. They're all eclectic, I'm happy to fit in with something that is narrower in scope but if left to my own devices, I tend to bring in the kitchen sink.

Julie Vallimont

As a rhythm player, as a piano player, I've played with various drummers. I love playing with drummers. I feel like they bring out different things in my playing that I forget to do, or that I forget to know to do or that I don't know how to do and then I try to follow along. I just love that game of listening to each other and trying to feel each other out. Because with every new person, there's a different groove lock that you get and the different way they play and how do different drummers bring out different aspects of your playing when you're playing guitar?

Dave Bartley

That's a good question. I tend to be the one doing the driving a lot of the time and then they fit in with me actually in Contra Sutra. Russell, of course, is more of a African percussionist, his background. And then, Ness is more coming from, well, he was playing in a heavy metal band, as I recall as well as playing with [Gallimaufry](#) and various other groups like Cloud Ten, he's got a number of bands he's playing in these days. I think, mostly, they've been versatile enough that we've been able to go a lot of the same places together. And you know, a lot of is just listening to each other in the moment.

Julie Vallimont

Because you have an existing band, and also, if you have different fiddlers, it sounds like you and Marni being like, the consistent anchors of the band, and so you kind of lay it down and the drummer is there to kind of play with what you've got basically.

Dave Bartley

I mean, we've really, as Contra Sutra, we've only had two fiddle players, sometimes under different names. We played some with [Ben Schreiber](#). Oh, yeah. And we...that band had another name, Uncle Sutra.

Julie Vallimont

Oh, of course. Uncle Farmer plus Contra Sutra?

Dave Bartley

Exactly. Ryan McKasson was the fiddler. But of course, he plays in this other band that's in fairly high demand and he had other projects besides the [Syncopaths](#). He had a lot of other projects too. So we weren't always able to get him for things and he recommended Brandon, they both have a Scottish National Fiddle Championship from age 17. Brandon's a bit younger, but they played together a lot. Brian was from the Tacoma area and Brandon was from Washington but near North Anacortes. They're both classically trained, so they both read music. And so it was pretty easy to go back and forth from one to the other. They have a lot of the same skill set. And so the band didn't change much in character with one or the other of them, which helped as well. Although Marni is the one who put that group together so she's kind of the primary shaper of the repertoire and so forth.

Julie Vallimont

Where does she pull repertoire from?

Dave Bartley

Oh, all over. She's written some great tunes, in particular is a waltz of hers, Violet, I think that everybody should play. We get things from the Portland Collection, she hears things and goes, oh, I want to play that. I've brought things in, there are tunes of mine that only Contra Sutra plays, because I feel like, I need to control the backup part to make it work. Not everything, there's just certain particular things. I had this idea of writing a tune inspired by Kirtan by the sort of the yoga chanting, where they have like tabla and harmonium. I had this idea for like an ostinato, long melody within a sort of Irish fiddly sounding thing over it. It just would be really hard to teach to a piano player and to coordinate it, whereas having a percussionist, it was perfect. So that particular tune, I've pretty much have only played in that group. I have field recordings of it and maybe that'll be one of the things I'll send. I have one from Folklife from 2017 that was originally a video, but I pulled the audio. But Contra Sutra has yet to release a CD. And anyway, Marni is living in England now so we are a little more geographically challenged that we used to be.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, it's interesting, thinking about tune writing, which we can get to as a topic of its own. But there's sometimes, especially some modern contra tunes, they're great dance tunes, but they need a little support. It's almost like you're writing the groove and the tune and the chords at the same time. There's some tunes that need the phrasing of the accompaniment as a part of the tune, or else they don't work for dancing.

Dave Bartley

Absolutely. I think the tradition was, a fiddle player could be the music for all night and the rhythm was built in to all of those tunes that were played back in the day. But we've gotten accustomed to being in a band and having bands play them and there's all these resources you can bring to bear in that situation. But it does mean, the melody can be a lot less substantial.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, sometimes you're dancing more to the groove and to the chord progression than you are to the tune. The tune's also important but it's not like a reel, which has all the rhythm and all the phrasing that you need, even an unaccompanied reel by itself. I think that a lot of modern contra tunes, you know, tune writers have felt free to step aside from that way of thinking where the reel has to be the one thing you dance to, but like you say, you have to know like, there are tunes we did in Nor'easter and Buddy System too where we're like, well, this tune, I wrote, but it only works if I accompany it this way. And I tried accompanying in that [other] way and it did not work and everybody got confused. Like halftime tunes, or bringing in tunes from other traditions like Breton tunes. Some of them, the phrasing can be confusing for dancers, or they have half the notes and so you have to work with the rhythm to support them.

Dave Bartley

Absolutely, tunes that have whole notes in them or something.

Julie Vallimont

Exactly. That's where a percussionist can be so fun, because that space doesn't have to be taken up with notes. Like as a piano player, I always wish I could mute notes the way the string players can do

and just do something percussive. Everything I play is a note whether I want it to be or not, so sometimes I would play clusters of notes to make them sound less like a note and more like a crunchy sound. You know the [Nightingale Flying Tent](#) where [Keith Murphy](#) is doing this chicka chicka, chicka up high on the mandolin? I've just always wanted to do something like that and never could.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, the whole rhythmic strumming aspect. I mean, there are plenty of things piano can do that it's extremely difficult or impossible on guitar.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, two-hand independence, baby.

Dave Bartley

That's right. One of the fun things I like to do in recent years is occasionally play, in the English country dance world, be the backup player for English country dance. A lot of times I'll play classical guitar for that. Then I can do a bit of that melody and chords at the same time...thing that is challenging with a pick. So, of course the notes have to be within a certain range of each other since you know my fingers can only go so far up the neck.

Julie Vallimont

Right. What are some of the craziest musical experiments? I mean, how can you even remember all the things that you've done? If someone asked me that, I'd be like, well I don't know! Can you think of any especially far out things that you've done that you've also considered successful? I mean, we all try things and then maybe don't repeat them.

Dave Bartley

That just reminds me of a story from Scotsbroome, that was the first band I played with and they told me this story were in a previous season of contras they rehearsed every month, the setlist didn't change much, but they would get together rehearse two or three times. They worked up this thing where they were going to have a bodhran solo. It's like, they're gonna play and then the bodhran would play and they did it. They got to the end of the tune, dropped out, the bodhran went on, and all the dancers stopped and clapped.

Julie Vallimont

Maybe the only time everyone's clapping for a bodhran.

Dave Bartley

I think they thought the tune was over. Well, I can tell you just some of the concept tunes that I've done, that still occasionally get done. There's there's one, I wrote something called the Bollywood Reel. That was after seeing Lagaan and Bride and Prejudice, I can't remember, a number of movies with Bollywood soundtracks. And I thought I bet you could get that feel and especially if there's this kind of hip hop, kind of hip hoppy kind of swingy reel kind of, that kind of feel in it. I wrote this tune goes...[Dave plays his tune] et cetera, et cetera, that it has actually four different, it's got an A a B and a C, and a D but it adds up to 32 bars. When we first played it, every time we played it, we would slow way down. It

took a while to get it up to kind of contra dance speed because we played in a medley with something else. We be going along cooking along at 116 and then we'd go down to about 104. The dancers, at least subliminally, noticed. But that one, actually we've done it successfully. The first few times it was pretty tricky. And so there was that. I'm trying to think if there was something like really, really crazy that didn't work. I'm a little bit stumped at the moment. I'll have to think more about that. Something will pop out I'm sure. I mean, the string quartet thing was marginal, I'm not sure we repeated it, we might have repeated it once.

Julie Vallimont

Sometimes those things are fun and they're fun for the dancers as like a variety, but they don't necessarily reach peak danceability.

Dave Bartley

In the end, the dance really is primarily for the dancers, the band should have fun, because if the band is having fun, it's more fun for everybody and it generates. On the other hand, having fun at the expense of the dance experience is not the best way to go about it, I think. So it's good to remember that. If they don't know where they are then they're not going to be listening to the music, they're going to be trying to figure out what the hell the caller is trying to...are we at B1 right now?

Julie Vallimont

Right, exactly.

Dave Bartley

It's like people are doing a forward and back four beats apart.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, the experimentation is only fun if the foundation is there of everyone dancing. Once it gives way to confusion, then A) that ruins the musical effect you're trying to create and B) everyone's attention gets put back on trying to fix the dance and not on the moment you're all trying to have together.

Dave Bartley

Exactly.

Julie Vallimont

But it's fun. Sometimes I feel like you can only find out where those boundaries are by occasionally going past them and the secret is to just observe so that you know when you're going past them and can come back. I have seen bands who don't notice or don't seem to care when they've gone past those boundaries of what the dancers want to comfortably dance to.

Dave Bartley

I remember learning one thing from, it's not the only thing, but one thing I learned from [Great Bear Trio](#). We were playing, I think it was one of the Arizona weekends, I think I was there with Contra Sutra and I was dancing to them and there was some point where it was just Andrew on guitar for like two or three times through. I was thinking, yeah, you can do that. He was making it clear when he was in one part of

the tune and another part, I mean, he was just playing a groove. But it wasn't a tune, where it was always the same chord all the way through. So there were harmonic gateposts, landmarks that you could latch on to. And you know, you do something different in the A and the B or whatever, you create some kind of contrast, that just doesn't happen to be the melody. And with experienced dancers, that all kind of subliminally clicks in with a kind of a sense of, oh, I do this for eight beats and then I do this for four, and then this other thing for four, without actually counting. I think there was some tune that I started doing where I would just, with Contra Sutra, I would just say, okay, I'm going to start by myself, you guys come in at like the second time or third time, whenever you feel like it. I would just set up this groove and the chords had enough movement in them so it was pretty clear where you were and that was fun. It was a great thing to learn, variety, always good to have more tricks up your sleeve.

Julie Vallimont

How do the callers that you work with like those kinds of things?

Dave Bartley

I think in general we haven't had too much issue with that. I mean, the caller is our customer in a way. I want to make sure that they're happy and getting what they need to do their job while providing interest for the dancers, an excitement and propulsion. Sometimes we have to sort of give advance notice of doing something. I've remembered one kind of train wreck that happened. It was actually a set that we had done successfully before. You were talking about halftime tunes and at some point, I had this idea that I really wanted to write the kind of smooth, dreamy dance where you play like dreamy jigs. That's when you kind of pull out something like the Orphan or it's like a dance that may have like a mad robin into a hey, it's a very kind of a romantic contra dance. I thought I want to have something that's not a jig for that so I wrote kind of a bossa nova and the melody is one that really needs a backup. Because the melody is kind of, I was modeling after the Beatles tune And I Love Her, which I think is maybe more a rhumba. But anyway, but it's just in A minor, goes... [Dave plays a snippet of the tune] Anyway, it goes on like that. and we started a medley with that. We were working with a caller, I think it was for a Seattle dance. And he had taught the dance and we went, boom, boom, boom, boom, and started doing this and he went, "Wait, wait, where are we? What are we doing?" Because he was expecting like more of a fiddle tune. I actually don't typically don't do that as the first tune of a set anymore. There's another halftime tune I wrote called Waimea that we do in front of it, that's more like Childgrove as D mixolydian. Kind of, I don't know. Anyway, it has a very different feel from Childgrove but it starts [Dave sings melody]. So that one was a bit of a train wreck that time. And so we learned, you have to kind of put it in the right place. A lot of medleys where we're doing something unusual, often the first tune will be more straightforward. It's like, while the dancers are getting the dance into their feet it's best to be clearer. It's sort of like that fundamental rule, either the more complex the dance, or the more beginners, the simpler the music should be. As the dance has become simpler, and the dancers become more sophisticated, you can do more with melody and arrangement, and have it be a good experience.

Julie Vallimont

I remember realizing that, kind of a little to my chagrin, when we started playing for the advanced contra dances, at least in Boston there's like a little extra hoop to jump through to get booked for those, they don't book just anybody for the advanced contra dances. And so it's like, we're gonna get to play

all our cool show offy tunes. All these really good dancers will be able to find the phrasing and these weirdo things we want to play. But it was the opposite. Because the dances were so complicated often the caller never drops out at times. They're calling the whole time and our music actually had to be simpler than we would on a normal night. I don't mind that, I'm happy, my role is to serve like we talked about but I had to change the hat from oh, we're going to unleash this crazy music on the dancers to oh, we're going to be subservient.

Dave Bartley

Their brains are busy. It's like if you see a lot of diagonal heys or something. Oh, yeah. Okay. Yeah.

Julie Vallimont

Or something with like a high piece count and the timing is really important from one move to the next or the dance falls apart. Like if you got a shadow on a corner that you're chaining to and if your shadow's late, the whole thing falls apart.

Dave Bartley

If you're going into an ocean wave, and then there's an allemande and this other allemande...

Julie Vallimont

All of a sudden, we find ourselves playing like our sturdiest tunes and arrangements.

Dave Bartley

It's time to bring in the French Canadian repertoire.

Julie Vallimont

Exactly. I just got this idea. It would be fun to do an advanced dance but the dancing isn't advanced. The music is advanced, whatever that means. Why don't musicians throw in an advanced contra sometimes?

Dave Bartley

There you go. Yeah, it's our turn. I kind of think like, the ultimate example of that is Dutch Crossing. For Dutch Crossing you are a metronome with phrases.

Julie Vallimont

You just sit there most of the time and you don't even play for the first hour.

Dave Bartley

It's like the old Steve Martin routine about what's it like to be a musician for the quiz show Name that Tune, [sings four notes]. "To Dream the Impossible Dream!" You don't get to play the rest of it.

Julie Vallimont

I also feel that about grid squares, relying on us just to be solid.

Dave Bartley

Yeah. Any kind of squares in general, really, I mean, not Québécois ones, but like Southern squares. And it's not about the melody at all. I mean, you might need phrases, but you are there to provide a backdrop, strong, solid propulsion. And that's fine. I love doing grid squares as a dancer. So I'm happy to see people having that fun.

Julie Vallimont

I love that moment on the floor when it all comes together, and they magically get back to their spot or whatever. And everyone's like whoooooo. But I think it would be fun in an indulgent way. But perhaps the dancers would enjoy it to like pick some hard music to dance to. And the musicians tell the caller, now this one is going to have kind of a bossa nova groove so we need you to call something with balances on the beat, kind of reverse the roles a little bit.

Dave Bartley

Occasionally callers will ask, what would you like right now and we'll say, we do have this set we'd like to do. So, for instance, the first kind of Afro Caribbean tune I wrote is called Tropaganda with a T. So it's, like tropical propaganda, anyway, it's slightly a KGB spin, I suppose on that name. And actually, it's on Laura Light's solo CD, I think. I haven't recorded it with any group but it's got this thing in the B2. It kind of is this [sings syncopated tune] and it's in ABCD kind of like, oh, I don't know, Chorus Jig's ABCD. But anyway, it's got different eight bar parts. The last eight bars starts with this [sings a phrase with long notes.] And it's great having like a forward and back there, or balance or something. So we'll say, we've got this set that if it's got something in the B2, that would be ideal. So some kind of punctuation.

Julie Vallimont

We were talking about this, like modern tunes, where you need the groove under it to support the tune. They are also modern tunes where you need the right dance for them to work and I know we've had tunes where if there's petronella balances, in the A, then the dancers have this inherent rhythm in their bodies, and they can keep it going maybe over the syncopated A part or something. But if you try to put a hey there, it just totally falls flat and everyone ends up confused.

Dave Bartley

That is a way that modern tunes sometimes differ from a lot of traditional music, where I think I remember hearing on another Contra Pulse podcast the notion you can take any tune and make it like if you're playing traditional music, you can take any tune and play it, make it work for the dance that's in front of you. I remember early on playing with Laurie Andres who's one of the long standing contra dance figures along with, with Sandy Bradley and some of the other Northwest early people who formed the contra dance scene here in Seattle, and Penn Fix was another one in Spokane. I played with Laurie and I was talking about we should think about do we have like, good tunes for balances and this and that He said, you can play any tune for any dance. Like, yeah, that's right really, it's just more effort, you know?

Julie Vallimont

Yeah. I mean, as a rhythm player you can massage most grooves under tunes to fit any dance.

Dave Bartley

But as a fiddle player, a melody player too, you can sort of shorten... can kind of make things more lyrical or more choppy if need be in some spot.

Julie Vallimont

Add notes, take out notes. It is interesting to me that all of us are starting from this tradition where the tune is just the workhorse for the dance and you don't try too hard, you just dance Chorus Jig, you have a good time. The concept of any tune to any dance, we're just kind of pushing that to its limits in all sorts of ways.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, that's true. You just end up having a longer setlist I guess.

Julie Vallimont

I mean, it's true. I remember Nor'easter [had a large repertoire]...and we were only eight years as a band...that's not even half the longevity of a band like KGB.

Dave Bartley

I was just thinking, we're old enough to drink now. Let's see we started '93. So yeah, that's closing in on 30, I guess 28 years now.

Julie Vallimont

So think about all the repertoire that you have piled up after all that time together.

Dave Bartley

I actually have our setlist sitting here. I was thinking through ideas but I'm the keeper of the setlist. Bag 'o Tricks and KGB both have a secretary and it's somebody who writes down everything we played, every dance we've ever done. Julie has these notebooks going back to, you know the '90's. I've borrowed them on occasion just to see what we actually did. Because some things get onto the setlist, I mean, we've got, oh, I don't know I'd say we've got maybe around 40 or 50 medleys on here, plus a bunch of individual tunes at the bottom that can be cobbled into medleys or substituted. We know a lot more than what's on, this is on 8 1/2 by 11 sheet of paper, it has the reels and marches on one side, and then jigs and jig-to-reel stuff on the other side. There's probably 70 or 80 medleys all together. But there's some we've hardly ever played and there's others we play a lot. Sometimes it's interesting to go back and look at what we've done.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, I remember the first time Nor'easter played for five day, six day music camp, like a week long event where we were playing like three to five hours a day some days. And I was like, I want to go through the whole week and not repeat anything.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, absolutely. It's a point of pride.

Julie Vallimont

Exactly, and we could do it. We actually saved some of our, you know, you always save your favorite sets for the last of the night of the last dance or something. We saved too many things. The week ended and we hadn't played some of our favorites sets because we were saving them because we assumed we would run out.

Dave Bartley

It's Sunday afternoon, and we've got 12 things we want to do.

Julie Vallimont

Exactly, uh, caller? Can we decide your program for you so that we can fit all these in please?

Dave Bartley

Pacing is always tricky.

Julie Vallimont

But it takes a while with a new band, you know, these bands that are out there playing dance weekends, it takes a while to accumulate that kind of repertoire. I remember when Noah and I did the same event, as a new duo, even though he and I both been playing contras for a while and with each other for like two or three years, we still didn't have enough repertoire to get us through a week. And so I'm like, Noah, write a tune, quick. Go. Being in a duo it's a little easier to make up things on the fly and it doesn't always end well.

Dave Bartley

But it often does, serendipity.

Julie Vallimont

Sometimes you talk about like giving yourself self commissions of like, oh, we need this kind of tune for this kind of situation. Like being put in this whole variety of situations with a variety of choreography and stuff is part of the thing that nudges musicians to create more and more kinds of tunes for different situations, and so adds to the diversity that way.

Dave Bartley

And it is good to kind of look at a list and scrutinize it and say, well, okay, what do we run out of, like, I mentioned the balances in the B part kind of tunes. But also, different kinds of moods of tunes too I think, especially, I don't know, would you say this is a trend? It seems like there are more smooth dances than there used to be?

Julie Vallimont

Probably, yeah.

Dave Bartley

With the adoption of, for instance, the Mad Robin figure and, and there are some more and also the hey becoming more and more popular as a part of dances.

Julie Vallimont

And even jigs being perceived as things that were smooth when I feel like they used to be perceived as things that were bouncy.

Dave Bartley

Well, it's pretty hard to play the St. Lawrence Jig as a smooth jig. There's definitely... Dang it, there is a place for bouncy jigs! I think, and the way I think you can make bouncy jigs cool is to emulate English Ceilidh bands.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah.

Dave Bartley

I went over and played for the Chippenham festival. I guess I've done it three times with various groups. And we always go check out the English Ceilidh bands because they all kind of sound like, well some of them sound like Blowzabella. If you remember them, the just amazing British European influence group with hurdy gurdy and so on. But some of them sound like that, they always either have like a slap bass player or a drummer, and they were more centered around melodeon than around fiddle. But they would just play this great modal music but also play things are really bouncy jigs. But they would make them sound more like, I don't know, like a blues shuffle kind of thing. Just [sings a bouncy jig rhythm]. I think that's just a great feel for contra dance. It's not [sings a smooth jig rhythm]. There's a place for both of those things. And it's nice to have those moods available. So that's my brief soapbox about bouncy jigs.

Julie Vallimont

I love bouncy jigs and the only reason why I didn't emphatically scream about bouncy jigs is because I'm trying to not interrupt you as the interviewer, but I love bouncy jigs. I feel like we just have to embrace their dorkiness and they're fun to dance to. Really not cool. I feel like they're not cool these days. But it is so fun to dance to. There are a lot of dance moves that I feel like are almost better to a bouncy jig than to a reel, even Petronella balances or wavy lines or down the hall. There's all these great moves that are just so fun.

Dave Bartley

Rory O'More! Rory O'More!

Julie Vallimont

Case in point, literally.

Dave Bartley

I would say that and I was going to say something based on what you said and it's gone, somewhere. I don't see it up on the ceiling. I don't know. I've written a few bouncy jigs. I remember giving myself the challenge of writing a B flat jig because there aren't very many of them. I called it The Boathouse, which was actually named for a place you could stay at this lovely, it's not really retreat, but it's up on

Vancouver Island called Yellow Point Lodge and Mary and I went up there two or three times and one time we stayed at a place called The Boathouse because it used to be the boathouse there. It sounds like a good name for a jig. So the cadence at the end of the B part is such that Claude would usually sing Barnacle Bill the Sailor, that's how the rhythm went, and it was like the dorkiest of dorky jigs. We've played it off and on over the years. But also, there's so many good ones already, like Broken Lantern or whatever. There's some great bouncy jigs out there.

Julie Vallimont

You're kind of reminding me I was on a quest for bouncy jigs for a while. It's a fun role for me. Like in most of my other bands, I've been in bands with great fiddlers and other melody players who love to collect tunes and already know tunes. But then I was in Buddy System, now that doesn't mean that Noah is not a great fiddler but Noah doesn't collect tunes in the same way. He's secretly a pop musician. I think...not necessarily in his body, but in his brain.

Dave Bartley

Part of his secret to success, I think.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, I think so. But, so, but I love collecting tunes. I never got to have that role as much. I just loved finding most of the repertoire for Buddy System, just looking everywhere. I was really inspired by things from the UK and ceilidh bands and the jigs that they choose. I remember we played this jig from the Isle of Man that was just super cool because it was bouncy but in, like a cool modern way as opposed to like a Little Burnt Potato kind of dorky way. I don't know, something you can really dig your teeth into kind of minor and driving, it's fun. Jigs, jigs, the unexplored frontier. Let's go back to jigs some more, they're so great.

Dave Bartley

Absolutely. Have you listened to much Galician or Asturian music?

Julie Vallimont

Yeah!

Dave Bartley

I get the...there. They often have these extended pickups that make them a little harder to figure out the phrasing. Where the one really starts at the beginning. I'm trying to think, I'm in this group Roguery so all my side projects, so KGB is actually become as much a couple dance band as a contra dance band over the years, we play for a lot of just like mostly waltz couple dances. We did an in person one actually in September outside at Squared in downtown Seattle. Claude and I play a lot of swings, so we do swing dance and I actually took Borodin's Polovtsian dance and turned it into a rhumba and we do that and then we play tango, we have foxtrots. So we've played the spectrum of ballroom dance, but I'm also in this group called [Valse Cafe Orchestra](#). We've got a guy who was an honest to god orchestrator in the group who plays accordion and piano. He actually has a degree in orchestration, focusing on polka from Cornish Institute of the Arts, this guy named Toby Hanson. So we play Strauss waltzes, and also a lot of music of the kind of the big band era. I've got all these other projects, but Roguery is a

band that was put together by Brooke Friendly and Chris Sackett to record companion CDs for their books of English dance. They have this wonderfully eclectic taste in the music they choose for their dances. The group consists of Anita Anderson and me from Seattle, and then [Shira Kammen](#) and [Jim Oakden](#) from the Bay Area. We've recorded seven CDs together now, but we also are on occasion a contra dance band. I think we've done a muiñeira because Jim will have all his instruments along so he'll pull his gaita out and we'll do it in a medley with you know, some other jigs. It's fun to bring in tunes, I remember there was a band from Asturia, [Tejedor](#), I think was the name of the group. I grabbed a couple of tunes off one of their CDs that were pipe tunes and gaita tunes. They didn't work that well for dancing, but it sure was fun transcribing them and trying it.

Julie Vallimont

I remember playing for English dances and sometimes the dance leader will give you a 'not in Barnes' tune and I'm like, this is gonna be something fun if it's from this. So if it's one of Brooke and Chris's dances, there's some quirky tunes, some really fun modal things and lots of interesting things.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, it's true. A few of the things that they've used to find, some of them were written originally for contra dance. Cottonwood is one that the dance has gotten around quite a bit, but I actually wrote it. Have you ever played the Banshees Wail over the Mangle Pit? It's a great tune name, G minor jig, traditional.

Julie Vallimont

I don't know. Doesn't ring a bell but that doesn't mean I haven't played it, I guess.

Dave Bartley

We had a set with that and then we did Sean Ryan's jig in A minor after it. And then we go into a tune of mine called In From the Cold which is this very dreamy, very positive uplifting A major jig. I just thought so many people have recorded Sean Ryan's I'll just write a tune to substitute for that, just another A minor jig and it ended up being Cottonwood. I was thinking about that kind of Irish jig that almost sounds like it was a blues tune. Where you can do like a sharp fourth, I say flatted fifth kind of thing. The blue note a little bit, that was where it came from.

Julie Vallimont

It's been a while since I've played any English dance because none of us are doing anything these days. If I remember Cottonwood right, I remember having this like quirky moment in it where you're like, "oooooh, where did that come from?"

Dave Bartley

Yeah, I wrote in a little E flat as an ornament in one spot, just as a hint, like what you could do elsewhere. People say it's a hard tune, I wrote it on a mandolin. So it's probably harder on fiddle. I never write anything on an instrument ever. But then I play it to check it on an instrument and I had mandolin in mind.

Julie Vallimont

I wouldn't know, I'm a piano player, everything's a little weird and easy and hard all at the same time.

Dave Bartley

That's right, the challenges are different.

Julie Vallimont

I remember the process is you see the tune for the first time for the dance and you you're kind of sight reading through and then you come across a weird moment and I'm like, who wrote this? Dave Bartley, oh okay.

Dave Bartley

Oh, of course.

Julie Vallimont

Now, I know where this came from. It all makes perfect sense.

Dave Bartley

I do occasionally write normal tunes. But there's so many of them out there like the normal tunes I write are kind of lost in the noise or in the grass, whatever. It's more the ones that have some unique element that will stand out, I think.

Julie Vallimont

I mean, maybe that's one of the hardest things to write is a really good normal tune that just has legs and is just one of those great tunes. Right? They're hard to write.

Dave Bartley

[Larry Unger](#), I think, has done that a lot. I think Keith Murphy, I mean, there are definitely writers who have been very adept at doing that. Actually, Anita Anderson with Bus Stop. There's the story of...I heard Bus Stop played on the Paris Metro by buskers, because it totally works. But it is a pretty traditional sounding tune. So, you know, I've written some like that, they just mostly haven't...It's hard as a tune writer, as you know, you put them out there, and hopefully they get legs, but so many people are writing great tunes.

Julie Vallimont

I would love to hear a little bit about your tune writing process. It sounds like you pull inspiration from a lot of different places.

Dave Bartley

So for me, well, one thing I used to, occasionally when Larry and I were at a dance camp together, we would sometimes co-write, or sorry, co-lead a tune writing workshop. Part of that was just talking about our process, because we are so completely different. Now, mind, you, his obviously is more effective, because he's written over 5000 tunes, and I haven't hit 400 yet in terms of quantity. Also, he's written a lot of great tunes that have gotten out there, obviously, I've played a lot of them, I really like a lot of them. A tiny percentage of what he's written, but still a lot. But he writes at an instrument, he'll say,

Door County Number Two, I wrote that on the banjo, or wrote, It's Too Hot on the piano, at [Pinewoods](#) on a hot night. And mostly, to me, I'm like taking a walk or just riding or driving in a car, or just some moment, something will occur to me or I'll just kind of sit there if I have like a self-commission or a commission, but I don't tend to pick up an instrument and play things. I tend to run them through my head and often the harmonic structure is there sometimes, and sometimes it isn't, it's just the melody. Especially early on, I would try to put every possible chord you could play. That was really silly, I'd say you can play a G or an E minor, or a C in this spot. When really, it's better, I think, just to have one chord thread, and then most accompanists will start substituting things that sound good to them. So I'll do that, and the genesis, sometimes is I just have a melody in my head and sometimes it happens really quickly. I remember doing a hike with a friend who just been at Fiddle Tunes [Festival of American Fiddle Tunes] and she said, I was in the Québécois band lab and suddenly, this idea for tune came into my head, which, I admit I had a name that I'd written down a while before that I really want to use this. And that's La Poutine Souriante. So that's the name for it. But basically it's a bit like the Telephone Tune in the sense that the A part is in kind of a mixolydian. Like A mixolydian, then it goes to D except in my case the B part starts on a B minor so it's slightly different that way. And of course, the melody is different. But it's the same idea where there's this tension building in the A part resolving in the B. But yeah, that wrote itself in five minutes. Other times you labor over them for days and days and go..."god this still isn't...."

Julie Vallimont

And you labor over them in your head? How do you remember them? Can your brain hold on to them, play around with them?

Dave Bartley

When I was first writing tunes that was a test. If I could remember them then they were memorable enough to be...I often write down, and I learned the ABC notation, the computer letter and symbol and number notation, because I never have staff paper with me and drawing five parallel lines is just, by the time I've done that, I've forgotten what it was going to write. So I'll write it down in ABC if I have pencil and paper. I've tried the dictating thing, but either I'm driving and it's just not practical, or I remember trying to do it on a hike one time. I had this great idea, I was going up this hill and I thought, I'm just going to use voice memo on my phone and record it and so I stopped. I was too out of breath so that really didn't work. So I've sort of given up on the dictaphone concept. But so usually, I'll just note down like just enough of it so I'll remember, because sometimes I'll have like, here's an A part or like here's like the first three or four bars and then the next three or four bars will be similar, but they'll resolve, and then the B part will go start on this other chord, and I'll figure out what it is later. So sometimes it's just the seed of a tune at that moment and then I'll sit down later and start filling out the rest.

Julie Vallimont

Do you keep a pile of random half finished ideas lying around?

Dave Bartley

Yeah, I have, and every once and awhile I'll go back. But I don't tend to revisit them all that often. A lot of tunes I've written have come out of I mean, there have been some that were auction tunes. Where like with Brooke and Chris we would auction off a dancing tune to the highest bidder at the fundraising

auction, say at [BACDS](#) English Week [Hey Days](#) or, also had waltzes commissioned or whatever. And then we sit down with whoever it is, and get some constraints, like what kind of a thing would you like for this? Do you want it to be major, minor, you know, like, six, eight? Because constraints are good for the creativity process often. Or I'll have a self commission, for instance, I mentioned, Cottonwood was a self commission to write an A minor jig, that would work in a certain place. Otherwise, sometimes it's a genre, it's been a number of years now but one of my most recent, bringing in a completely different genre into contra dance, I thought the cha-cha is a great rhythm for contra dance. Rather than adapt some of the classic ones, I wrote three contra cha-chas. Most of them, at the time, most of my career, I was living in Seattle, and working at a company about 20 miles away and I was in a van pool. For a fair period, I would actually bike to meet the van. It'd be like a 10 minute bike ride in the morning and then I would ride back from a different place, it was somewhat longer. I remember, I wrote some of the cha-chas while biking to meet the van and then I'd put the bike on a bike rack and take it to work. It was just this time when I just had 10 minutes of where you know, I had to watch for traffic but otherwise, I could just have in my head some concept. And so we have this medley of three cha-chas that I do occasionally, particularly in Contra Sutra, because to get that cha-cha feel with percussion really helps. Ideally, cowbell, you know.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, your bike commute cha-cha series.

Dave Bartley

Yeah and of course, they all have silly names. I think my favorite is Evil Haze.

Julie Vallimont

So it sounds like for you tunes kind of finish themselves when you write them.

Dave Bartley

Sometimes, and I go through long fallow periods, too. I think the most I've written in a year is probably 40. I've written almost 400 tunes, but I started in 1989. So it's been stretched over a lot of years. I've literally only written one tune this year and actually it's called Remembering David, a memorial for David Kaynor. It's a pretty straight ahead G reel actually. I put it up on Facebook, actually with the recording at the time, which I could probably scare up. So I'm in a fallow period right now. It's not like I don't have time, I've got time but somehow the muse comes and goes. What was the question?

Julie Vallimont

Oh, it doesn't matter, we're just talking about tune writing? What is the question?

Dave Bartley

The genesis comes from various places. I do, actually, as much as keeping a list of tune ideas, I do keep a list of tune names, although the problem is lot of them, somebody will say, oh, there was something today and I can't remember the phrase now. Somebody would say something, "That would be a great tune name." And sometimes it is and sometimes it's, you would have had to be there, it's going to require so much explanation and sometimes I've used those but anyway. But The Dancers of Teeth, that was another one. Actually, Giant Robot Dance played that one. It had to do with an early

auto translator, I took a paragraph about KGB and fed it in and out of each of the languages, it was called Babelfish, it was a very early auto translation program. And then I would translate into say, Portuguese, then back to English. And then I would take the result, direct directly and translated into French and then back out and then into Spanish and back. By the time we got to the end, it was unintelligible, it was just nonsense. I got three tune names out of that and The Dancers of Teeth was one of them.

Julie Vallimont

That's great. Jimmy Fallon should give you some money, because he's got this bit on his late night show now where they take a well known pop or rock song, translate it through Google translate, translate it back to English and then sing the new words to the pop song. It's funny, but like you were doing this way before.

Dave Bartley

I was doing that back in the day. We did that by banging rocks together in Morse code.

Julie Vallimont

While fighting off woolly mammoths.

Dave Bartley

Exactly.

Julie Vallimont

Where did Ring of Kohala come from?

Dave Bartley

Oh, that's kind of fun. I'll tell the whole dreary story if we have time. It's actually not that long. There's a dance camp in Montana called [Bear Hug](#) that I did like four or five times. One of the times I played there with KGB, the other band was the Avant Gardeners. That particular incarnation was [Laura Light](#), [George Paul](#), and [Dave Wiesler](#) was there as the third, which is great. They were traveling with [Nils Fredland](#) as the caller and he was a pretty new caller then. I mean, this was way pre-[Elixir](#), I think. They were coming to Seattle to do the Thursday night, Seattle dance and so they ended up staying with us and they stayed with us for about a week. One of my memories from that is we had This is Spinal Tap the movie on DVD. It turned out that Nils had never seen it and so I said, you've got to see it. So we were present at Nils seeing This is Spinal Tap for the first time. But we also jammed together and I think I'd just written Ring of Kohala. And so I guess Nils took it back to Elixir. The only thing about it, and I love their version and I had to tell them, there's actually two different A parts that alternate and they just used the first A part, which is fine. KGB actually had recorded it with both A parts, the other one's kind of in a minor key and it's very in contrast, but then then you go back to the B which is kind of like the chorus of a pop song. And in fact, somebody locally said it's a lot like "Is She Really Going Out With Him", that's not what I was thinking of. I wanted to write something that it was like a pop tune for contra dance with having a chorus, a really like memorable B chorus and the A part was just kind of setting it up. I must have written it after I played for a dance week in Hawaii on the Big Island with KGB. We spent some extra days and at the north end of the island there's what's called the Kohala

Peninsula. That's a quite lovely place, we drove around the island and stayed a few nights in various places after the dance camp was over. I was thinking of the the Kerry Peninsula. It's not the name of it, but it's called the Ring of Kerry on the west coast of Ireland. I just put the two together, the Kohala peninsula with a road and Ring of Kerry with a road and said Ring of Kohala. So that's where the name came from. That was one of those, just in the moment, popped into my brain as a name for it. I have no further explanation to that. I love playing that because that B part is really nice for like a balance. It's one of those where that the A kind of leads up to the B. In addition, because it was a pop tune, I wrote a middle eight for it, sometimes it's called the bridge, or whatever, but a lot of pop tunes have verse and chorus, and then they have this other thing.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, like a prechorus or a bridge or something else.

Dave Bartley

It has another 16 bars that we literally play the last time, just like you might be playing a song...and then finishes out on the chorus again. So that was how the Ring of Kohala came about. I do have a pretty ordinary waltz in Waltz Book 4.

Julie Vallimont

Congratulations.

Dave Bartley

Yeah. It's called Alpenglow. We were up in Alaska, actually at Denali. The thing about Denali in the summer is the mountain itself is in the clouds most of the time in the summer in particular, the best time to see it is late spring, I think or early fall. People go there and they'll spend days at the park and never see it. I played at the [Fairbanks Dance Camp North](#), the Fairbanks group weekend and afterwards we borrowed some camping equipment from friends who were living there and I don't know how we got to the park, we took the bus back I remember because we had to stop for moose crossing. But we went in and camped at Wonder Lake for like three nights. I remember the first day was just torrential rain all day and it was cloudy. The next morning, the clouds lifted, and our camera broke. We had this amazing clear hours long sunset, watching from the campground. Everybody else had their tripods out and so Mary wrote, and I wrote a tune, and it was Alpenglow.

Julie Vallimont

Maybe you had the better experience instead of trying to capture it in the camera, you could just enjoy it.

Dave Bartley

Well, it's true. It's easy enough to find photos online.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, there's plenty of photos of Denali.

Dave Bartley

Say, yeah, I took that.

Julie Vallimont

I feel like the first time I went to Alaska, I took like 5000 photos.

Dave Bartley

Where'd you go?

Julie Vallimont

The first time I went, I used to do environmental education trips. I was leading and they sent me along as their field naturalist. And I was like, I've never been to Alaska before, there are a lot of birders who do this, where you just study and you memorize the field guides to a place and then you go and so I was like guys, I'm not an expert in the local flora and fauna. I've actually never been here before. But as an ecologist, I can try to help you understand how some of these ecosystems work. So we went to things that were off the beaten path, like Wrangell St. Elias National Park and stuff. The other times I was there, I was really grateful to get to see some of the dance community in various parts of Alaska, like you did, like in Fairbanks and Anchorage, and it's just lovely. They're just wonderful people, the dance community is.

Dave Bartley

There are so many great communities. That's one of the wonderful things about being in this world, the contra dance world. You go all over, even outside the country to England and Australia. I know that there's communities in France and Denmark and but also just throughout the US. Just wonderful people everywhere, just had so many great experiences staying with people and at dance camps.

Julie Vallimont

Absolutely, I remember in Fairbanks, I just felt like it's one of those places where some people really need the contra dance, and there was this guy who's like, Yeah, I've been in the bush all week. He lives off grid by himself in a cabin and all week he had been using his sled dogs to cut lumber and drag it back to his cabin and then he was saying he goes to the contra dance and that's like, the only time he sees people.

Dave Bartley

Wow. Yeah, this is the socializing experience here.

Julie Vallimont

Of course, I don't want to generalize. It's not like that for everyone who lives in Alaska. I don't want to make a stereotype of like, they all live out in the woods and never see other people. I feel like it happens with other kind of rural or small town dances or it just feels like a community. You know, you all know each other, you put tables on the side of the dance and there's room for kids to play. It's not only about the dancing, it's about the whole thing of like, coming together and seeing people.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, it's a social event. This isn't done as much now, but dances have potlucks, we would often have potlucks beforehand. The Olympia dance did that, the Tacoma dance. Not everybody went, but enough people kind of started with that, and you visited and then you all went off to dance afterwards, sometimes, in my case, to go play.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, that's a nice feeling. I would like to ask you a question that I'm trying to figure out how to phrase it. So we can attack it from several different directions. The thing I'm curious about is, as someone who plays so many different kinds of music, and has so many different eclectic bands, and has tried so many different things for contra dancing. What do you think of as your core identity as a contra dance musician?

Dave Bartley

I think a lot of it is simply the dreaded word eclectic. I think it is about flexibility. I'm willing to play a night of straight ahead, old time or Québécois or New England situated tunes. I'm actually now playing in a Scottish Irish traditional group called [Keltoi](#). They do a lot of songs, but also play some Cape Breton and Shetland, medleys and that kind of thing, I'm playing cittern in that group, that's sort of my third instrument after mandolin and guitar. Ten string, octave mandolins is the long name. I think I'm sort of a chameleon in some ways that I'm often not the person who formed the group, I think KGB is kind of the closest to that in some ways. I can just bring in sort of an element that's needed, or maybe an element that kind of broadens the group in some way.

Dave Bartley

So I think some of my playing is informed by the fact that I started as a drummer so I think rhythmically, as much as I think melodically or harmonically.

Julie Vallimont

You have that like rhythmic vocabulary from playing different kinds of grooves and understanding how they work.

Dave Bartley

I tend to play with kind of an authority that comes, you know what I mean, you can kind of play a melody or you can play the melody, or play the rhythm. I think that translates out to the dance floor. So I might be thought of as a bit iconoclastic just because, as a dancer, I would think about, this is a different thing that I haven't heard, but I think it would work for dance. I can imagine dancing to this and so I just said, why not just bring it in, try it out. That's all pretty much every genre of music we know now came from the combinations of other genre that hadn't been tried together before. A lot of times it was an organic process, because people emigrated from somewhere and these other people immigrated from somewhere else, and they were in the same place and their music kind of combined. But we now have the opportunity to hear anything from anywhere in the world, it's an embarrassment of riches. I think one of the beauties of contra dance is it's a living tradition and I wouldn't want to lose where it came from. But I also wouldn't want to go back to just where it came from, I think, because you can have a wonderful experience of doing a night of going from [French Four](#) to doing a traditional circle mixer and then Petronella but it's nice to have all this other richness that we have in this world, brought

in, as long as it still makes for an enjoyable and exciting contra dance. I think that's kind of where I've come from. I've been in these various groups that I've also toured with other people. And there are some other projects kind of, like when Rodney Miller was living here, I started playing with him more. He and Anita and I have a group called Spin that occasionally plays...we're of course geographically challenged too because Rodney's in Sonoma now, but we actually have a gig theoretically in the books for the [Lady of the Lake](#), June week, next year. So fingers crossed for more in person things coming on, that would be June of 2022.

Julie Vallimont

So when you're doing your contra thing, and being in bands and playing tunes and writing tunes, do you think about whether or not it's traditional? Or do you worry about that? Is that something that crosses your mind? Do you ever wonder, should I be more traditional? I'm not trying to say that you should. This is not a leading question. I'm just trying to explore what this modern tradition is these days.

Dave Bartley

I kind of want to remember where we came from. I hope that we always I would. If I had my druthers, contra dances would be more like they were when I first started where there would be a mixer and maybe a square or two and there was more diversity of configuration. I think that the modern urban contra, the dances are fun, but it's like the music's gotten more diverse. But the dances in a way have gotten less diverse. I mean, there are some new figures. But the formations, nobody does triple minors or triplets or, I mean, David Millstone does. I mean, there are people who do and you know, bless them, I'm glad that those things are still being done. But they've kind of evaporated out of the repertoire in so many places.

Julie Vallimont

A lot of the dancers aren't interested in them for whatever reason or at least enough who are vocal, there might be a lot who don't say anything. And so devil's advocate, what about, say you're like a hotshot new band who has worked on all your repertoire and cool tunes and cool arrangements and then the caller is calling a circle mixer, and then a triplet and you can't play any of your cool sets, how do you feel about that?

Dave Bartley

Well, it depends. So yeah, that is true and then there should be some contra dances as well. It just doesn't have to be that all night.

Julie Vallimont

No, exactly. I mean, I love circle mixers and those kind of things. I love being in that musical mode, where again, you're just going back into the mode of supporting the dance, and you're not trying to wow anybody. It's just, you're supposed to be fun, you're supposed to be festive. You're supposed to just play music that makes people come together as a community and have fun, whatever that is.

Dave Bartley

And of course, it's like if you're hired as the band to play for say, a wedding reception one that isn't all contra dancers and you know, they want a contra dance in quotes. But in fact, teaching progression

and switching at the top and all that, it's difficult, so contra dance is more likely to be a circle mixer, and a square and maybe Virginia Reel. It's not about you as the musicians. So for that evening, that's when you pull out the straightforward, traditional. Well they don't have to be traditional as long as they are straightforward with clear phrases.

Julie Vallimont

Maybe that's what traditional is these days.

Dave Bartley

A tune like President Garfield's Hornpipe might not exactly fit that.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, that's true.

Dave Bartley

But, but yeah, that may be at least the perception anyway because I'm sure there's hundreds, thousands of tunes that were written back then that didn't make the cut, and so we don't remember them. The ones that have come to us are the strongest and in many cases, that's because they did work well for dance and weren't particularly difficult to remember, learn. I know that discussion has been made about learning by ear versus reading music. It is true that getting it in your head by ear, I think it settles in more. You sort of own the tune more, whereas if you read it, you kind of know the tune and in time playing it long enough, then it can settle into the same place. But especially a tune coming from a tradition the dots don't tell you really how the phrases are put together and where the ornaments go unless you're really already pretty familiar with that tradition.

Julie Vallimont

You have to be able to get to the place where you can grok the tune, where you could just get it. It's just hard to do that off the page.

Dave Bartley

That's true. I mean, after a lot of tunes and a lot of time, it gets easier, I think. That takes doing a lot of your work at jam sessions or whatever and off recordings. So, I guess, I hope that tradition holds, but I think also tradition broadens with time. I mean, if you look back at the 70's, the notion of playing a Scottish tune, or an Irish tune for contra dance was pretty controversial in some circles or Québécois, and now, they're all considered traditional, it's part of the tradition so one can imagine that continuing to broaden. It isn't necessarily that we're going to be playing, I don't know, Okinawan tunes or something. But just the notion that you could bring in more of a pop element, because folk tunes were the popular music at one time. Now we have this other popular music that's kind of parallel with what we call folk tunes and so there's a legitimate case for seeing that kind of converge into the tradition. I think there's a place for both, and I hope that continues to be.

Julie Vallimont

As a player, you say you always want to try to hold on to the roots of where it came from, even while you're innovating. How do we hold on to that, as a community and as musicians?

Dave Bartley

I think part of it is to continue to play some of those tunes and even some of the newer ones, you know, they've kind of become classics that have gotten around. A lot of the things in the Portland collection, for instance, it's kind of the lingua franca, I think now of contra dance, much as the Barnes books are for English country dance. I know, when I'm writing something that is non traditional, I'm still keeping in mind, I try anyway, to keep in mind the essence of what contra dance needs. I think there's still a trace of reels and jigs and marches in things that nominally have kind of a Balkan sound or Latin American sound or whatever. So you know, we haven't brought up the topic of techno but I think that's a topic I know you can address well. I'm less experienced, I've danced to techno on occasion. I think part of the beauty of contra dance is that it's something that can be done to the music that is used for techno contra dances.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, all sorts of, we could call them electronically infused music.

Dave Bartley

In some cases, the caller has to call for longer, because there isn't a band there. In your case, like with Buddy System, when you're doing your techno thing you are there. But in a lot of cases it's a DJ who's doing it. It's just a different kind of experience. In a lot of cases, the music has been structured to reinforce that 32 bar, kind of phrase nature, but not always. The thing probably I love most about contra dance music, is that it is very flexible. You have certain rules that you need in tempo and phrase structure that have to be there, or else it's not going to work. But once you satisfy those, especially with an experienced dance crowd that doesn't need a melody there all the time, for instance, there's so much room for free improvisation, especially when you're playing with people you've played with for long time and you're all dancers. So you're kind of mindful of not losing the place but going as far as you can, while still keeping a certain amount of landmarks and structure in place. That's just so much fun and you get this instant feedback from the dancers. I think I started answering a different question there. I think that having the tradition broaden and embrace more of that, I think is a fine thing as long as we don't replace...with the new shiny stuff...replace the older tried and true things that have worked for contra dance, at least for decades, if not centuries, it depends.

Julie Vallimont

So how do we do that when there's no one dance that does it all? Some communities want modern dances and modern tunes and there's other communities where they do older dances, and they do chestnuts every week. You don't always get the same dancers who go to both.

Dave Bartley

It's a challenge for a band, I think. Go ahead and finish your thought.

Julie Vallimont

Well, I was just saying, I think there's a little bit of the onus on a new dance musician, or a new caller to seek out all these different kinds of things and try to understand them and get to the root of what is

traditional contra music. So that even if you don't play like that, it is the foundation of your playing somewhat.

Dave Bartley

I mean, it's no longer compulsory, but it's important to have played at least the basic chestnuts and I probably throw Money Musk in with that, but Petronella, Rory O'More or Chorus Jig, maybe Lamplighter's Hornpipe. There's some others that aren't done as much, I'm sure I'm missing a few. But just so that when somebody says do Chorus Jig, maybe even have Opera Reel as the switch tune or whatever, it doesn't matter. There's lots of other good switch tunes for Chorus Jig. Because it's nice, it's like that's a path back to the sort of a connection to that tradition. You can take traditional tunes, like I was mentioning sort of a disco funk, Grumbling Old Man, you can treat them in different ways, as opposed to playing new tunes. But it's also fun just to go back to that straight ahead channeling Bob McQuillen kind of style.

Julie Vallimont

It's like as much as being able to play some of these traditional tunes, but also to be able to do that New England inspired contra groove, that kind of boom chuck groove. There's a story, I'll change some of the details, but things that aren't bands, I call them clumps, like contra clumps, where you're like an ensemble of people that play together once in a while but you're not a band.

Dave Bartley

Yes, like you all know each other.

Julie Vallimont

You play together occasionally but you don't try to make it a thing because you're all too busy. But I had a clump and I wasn't available for one of the gigs that they wanted to do so they got a different piano player. He was younger and newer, but not totally new, he had played a lot. And they said, okay, can you play boom chuck for this tune? And he's like, "Boom chuck?" So they had to teach him in the rehearsal, how to play boom chuck on the piano. He had played contra dances, a lot of contra dances in various places and didn't know boom chuck. It's totally possible now to be a musician and not get exposed to this and not play it but I think it's worth seeking it out. I'm not saying you have to, like you said, it's not a requisite, but it's worth seeking it out.

Dave Bartley

Absolutely. Boom chuck is something that appears in so many different genres too. It's like Serbian music. I mean, there's a lot of places where you can end up with that, you know, Oktoberfest stuff, or whatever.

Julie Vallimont

Oh, that reminds me full circle, it reminds me of polkas. You mentioned in your bio, I think that you like Brave Combo. That's fun.

Dave Bartley

Oh my goodness, yes.

Julie Vallimont

Yes. I'm a big, big Brave Combo fan.

Dave Bartley

Yeah, that's, I think Mary's favorite group in particular. We got to see them once or twice. Yeah, Brave Combo and another favorite of mine was 3 Mustafas 3, although they're not together anymore, they're both really world music. They draw from a lot of places, but Brave Combos, utterly shameless, which I just love. They have these brilliant, treat something in some completely different way.

Julie Vallimont

Yeah, very irreverent.

Dave Bartley

I'll do the hokey pokey to Brave Combo, to their disco funk version of it anytime.

Julie Vallimont

Well, this has been so fun to talk to you. I feel like we could just talk about music all night. Sadly, I can't keep you here forever. Is there anything else that you'd like to touch on while we're talking today?

Dave Bartley

I was trying to think about that. I think we've covered a lot. You were talking about, kind of tying the tradition to new things. I remember one of the bands that I really admire, and I think to this day is probably my favorite, although Clayfoot Strutters up there, but Nightingale, they had a definite sound and they had an eclectic background, but they could be just solid as a rock. I think that's kind of an example of a group that sort of integrates the new with the traditional. I think that's kind of a good example, going forward. I think a band starting out, definitely should be taking a look at other bands and who they want to emulate. And I do think, learning the traditions is definitely a key thing, but also kind of deciding and it can happen organically but what is your place in this world as a band? There's plenty of room for bands that are like other bands, of course. But a lot of times there's an opportunity to do something new just because of what you bring with you to the party.

Julie Vallimont

Well, in your case, you've brought a lot of things to the party for many years and given a lot of people a lot of fun.

Dave Bartley

I hope so. That's what I love to do, want to do.

Julie Vallimont

It's been so wonderful to talk with you. Thank you so much for your time today.

Dave Bartley

Well, thank you. You're a great listener. I feel like I've talked a lot.

Julie Vallimont

So many things we could talk about forever. It's fun to listen to. Thank you so much, Dave.

Dave Bartley

Thank you.

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