

From the Mic Episode 6 - Sue Hulsether

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Mary Wesley: Hey there - I'm Mary Wesley and this is From the Mic - a podcast about North American social dance calling.

Through conversations with callers across the continent we'll explore the world of square, contra, and community dance callers. Why do they do it? How did they learn? What is their role, on stage and off, in shaping our dance communities? What can they tell us about the corner of the dance world that they know, and love, the best?

Each episode we'll talk to a different caller, but they all have something in common - a spark, a desire to lead, to share joy, to invite movement, to stand in that special place between the band and a room full of dancers (or people who don't yet know that they're dancers), and from the mic say "find a partner, let's dance"

Sue Intro

[*Clip of Sue calling the contra dance Forgotten Treasure by Beth Parkes with music by Betsy Branch, Sue Songer, and Eric McDonald*]

Today we're traveling to southwestern Wisconsin to meet dance caller, teaching artist, flatfoot clogger and musician Sue Hulsether. Since 2003, she has traveled from coast to coast to lead dances in dance halls, schools, barns, and community centers.

Sue and I have never met in person so we spent some time getting to know each other before and during our Zoom interview. Of course we discovered mutual acquaintances in our interconnected dance worlds as well as mutual interest in talking to and learning from callers, as you'll hear in the interview!

As I say in the show intro, this podcast explores the worlds of square, contra, and community dance callers and Sue is well versed in all three of those forms. She brings

special insight and expertise to the arena of community dance. As a professional teaching artist she has years of experience bringing dance into community and school settings. Sue has put a vast amount of thought into how to make the dance traditions we love accessible to all ages; so much in fact, that she's just published a book about it called "Join Up Hands!" I was excited to talk with her about this work as it's not something that's been discussed on the podcast thus far. But Sue is equally tied into calling at regular dances. She's a self-described square dance enthusiast, with a particular love of old-time squares, which grew out of her initial entrée into folk dance as a member of the Wild Goose Chase Cloggers in Minneapolis. Her calling repertoire includes squares, contras, circle dances, longways whole-set dances, and play parties.

When not traveling to call and dance, Sue spends her time growing food and cooking it for others to enjoy. She lives on a 20-acre farm in Wisconsin with her spouse and a crew of shy barn cats. I can't wait for you to meet her!

Meet Sue

Mary Wesley: Hello to Sue Hulsether, welcome to From the Mic.

Sue Hulsether: Hi, Mary. It's so nice to be with you from across the miles.

Mary Wesley: Yes, so you're speaking to us from Wisconsin. Where in Wisconsin are you?

Sue Hulsether: I live in a small community in southwestern Wisconsin called Viroqua Wisconsin. It's nestled in the hilly bluff country area near the Mississippi River, really close to Iowa, really close to Minnesota, really close to Illinois. It's a gorgeous part of Wisconsin, and if you're interested in geological history it's the unglaciated part of Wisconsin so we've got some interesting rocks below us but it's beautiful farmland here.

Mary Wesley: Really nice. You and I have never actually met in person, although I think we've determined we've each heard about each other in different ways as one does in the very friendly and connected social dance community. We have mutual friends, which is nice, but I'm really excited to get to know you, at least in this way, until we can maybe be on the same dance floor sometime. So I'd love to just hear a little bit about how you got started dancing, how you found your way to the caller's mic...maybe just a little general introduction to Sue to get us started.

Sue Hulsether: Yeah, well, I'm really thrilled to be a part of this project, this exciting project you're doing, and have this time to just chat about what I love, what we love. I started dancing in my thirties, so I didn't grow up dancing. I didn't grow up in the dancing

community, although I did grow up in a musical family and grew up as a musician. I actually started dancing in my thirties when I found myself newly single as a 30-something adult. I was living in Minneapolis at the time. I had previously lived in Washington, DC, and did not dance at all there but I had a friend, an older friend of mine that I rode back and forth with to go to a choir that we belonged to. She was an active contra dancer. She told me all about contra dancing and kept saying, "You would love it! You would love it. You should try it." It just wasn't right in my life at that time. But after I moved to Minneapolis and found myself 34 and single, I thought, "I'll give this a try." So I went contra dancing at the Tapestry Folk Dance Center and fell in love with it and never stopped. So I became a very avid contra dancer. A few years after I started contra dancing, there was an Appalachian style clogging troupe from Minneapolis/Saint Paul that came and performed at the intermission of a contra dance. And I said, "That's what I want to do." And so I sought out and started taking clogging lessons and from there I discovered a very active and wonderful old time square dance community that also existed in Minneapolis/Saint Paul. I started going to square dances. A bunch of those people also were active Cajun dancers, so I started showing up at Cajun dances too. So I just sort of went from not dancing at all to dancing all the time.

At the time I was teaching music. So I really come to my calling as a dancer and as a music teacher. I really am not a contra dance musician or a square dance musician, but I do play instruments. But I was a music major in college and I was teaching music for about 13 years during this timeframe. So I was an elementary music teacher and a contra dancer and a square dancer, and I was surprisingly dense that I could learn to teach dance. I don't know, I saw the callers as some like god-given ordained leaders up on a pedestal. I thought, right, oh, they must have been chosen to do that. It didn't really even dawn on me that I could learn to call, despite the fact that I was teaching music and I was dancing all the time. But about a year into when I started dancing, it was a midweek dance in Minneapolis, and there was someone there that I'd never seen before. I was regular enough that I knew that it was somebody new and so I just introduced myself and I said, "Oh, you must be from out of town." And this person said, "Well yeah, I'm from Duluth, Minnesota." I said, "Oh, what brings you to Minneapolis?" "Well, I do residencies in schools in dance." So I'm like, "Oh, I'm a music teacher, you should come to my school." And he says, "You get the money, I'll come to your school." The name of this person is Terrance Smith, who's a legendary caller from Duluth. Anyway, I got the money together, brought him to my school, and that's when it dawned on me like, "Oh, I could be doing some dances like this with my students." And then I started paying more attention to what the callers were saying at the dances that I was going to. There was some moment, and this was about in '95, maybe I'd been dancing for a year or so, so a long time ago now but...I found myself at a dance one day looking at the caller thinking "I don't know how to do that, but if I can learn how to do that, I think I would be good at that." And so I started pondering in my head, is this something I can learn to do? And sort of at the same time, I started calling some of the dances that Terrance had done in my school, I started doing them with my students. I think one of my very first gigs was I got asked to do sort of a daddy/daughter dance for the local Girl Scout troop. And bit by bit I'd go to the adult dances and I'd think, could I learn this? So then I'd go to my school and I teach the kids a bunch of dances, and pretty soon it

melled together and I thought, no, I want to learn how to call. I remember one day I was at a dance and there was one of the contras that night that I really loved. It turns out it was Shadrack's Delight [by Tony Parkes] and I went home that night and I wrote down the sequence. And I thought, "I think this means I'm trying to figure out how to call." And the next time I saw that caller, I very shyly went up to them, and I'm not a shy person, but I was shy about this and I went up to them and said, "I think I wrote down this dance, is this right? Did I remember it right?" He said, "Oh, yeah, that's totally right." And so from then, I sort of did a deep dive into learning how to call. So that was my start.

Mary Wesley: That's amazing. I love that moment of realizing that there's a pathway into something that seems like it might not be accessible to you or just a deep demystification of something that you've been participating in. And then there's like a little piece that you can pick up and then it leads you to the next thing. So what was it like as the world of calling started to open up a little bit for you?

Travel Study Grant - Caller Tour!

Sue Hulsether: Oh, it was just so stimulating. I just wanted to gobble it up. But I also had this reticence, I still had that picture of...these people were sort of special and god given...it's all hoey, right? Now that I know, of course, we're all just normal people that like talking on a microphone and giving people instructions. But as I started to gobble it up, I was pretty intentional about it. And so I approached one of the other callers in our community, Carol Ormand. She was in Minneapolis, I was in Minneapolis, and I very shyly went up to her one day and said, "I was thinking about maybe trying to learn how to call." And she said, "Oh, great!" And I said, "Will you help me?" And she said, "Of course!" And I went away that night saying, "Oh, I'm sure she noticed on the dance floor that I'm a really good dancer." And I asked her later, "Why were you so enthusiastic??" She said, "Because you asked. I would be enthusiastic about anybody who wanted to call." But she really paired with me, kind of took me under her wing and I don't know how I got the idea. Oh, a clogging friend had written a grant to a local foundation in Minneapolis/Saint Paul, that had a travel study grant for artists. I got the idea that maybe I could get a travel study grant to travel around and meet callers all over the place and talk to callers all over the place. And, I was working for a school district, K-12 school district that still gave sabbaticals. So I figured out that I could get a sabbatical from my school district, take a year off, maybe get this travel study grant and travel around and meet callers. So I did that. Again, I still had a little reticence but Carol was like, "Here, I'll give you names of people, you write these people and say, Carol said you should talk to me." And so I did two trips, I did a...I got the sabbatical, I got the grants and in the school year of 1999-2000, which now is 22 years ago, I did a six week trip in the fall down into the southeast, and I went to dances and met with callers and invited myself to have a cup of coffee with people and took notes on what they said and gathered dances. And then in the winter of 2000, I did the same thing in the Northeast and went to NEFFA and I went to the Flurry...I have my whole list of all the people I met

and it's just thrilling to remember it. I have several notebooks, journals that are this size, about an inch thick that are filled with my notes of dances and the interviews.

So I went from sort of thinking I didn't deserve it to like really diving in and trying to learn really fast. Oh, a part of my sabbatical year too, that summer I did Larry Edelman's square dance course course at Pinewoods. So I was pretty engrossed both in the contra dancing community and the square dancing community in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. And unlike many cities I think, there's a little more bleed between those two communities in Minneapolis and I think there still is. Some callers do both, some bands do both, or some musicians do both, a lot of dancers do both. And then of course, there are plenty who just contra dance or just square dance. So anyway, that's what it was like for me, deep dive into learning.

Mary Wesley: And what a dream, that sabbatical and that grant, that's just wonderful. I think you're not alone...I mean, I think it's just the positioning. The caller at the mic...I find it a strangely visible and invisible position at the same time, because you are the centerpiece, you're kind of directing the movements of the people in the crowd and you're 'the loudest voice in the room', I always say. But then your job is kind of to get out of the way of the dance and the music. So also the caller can have this way of just kind of disappearing at the end of the night. You know, we all have the story of going down off the stage at the break and someone saying, "I didn't see you all night where have you been?" You know, you're like, "On stage." The thing that I'm getting to, what I feel like is a lucky, lucky thing that I'm getting to do in having these conversations with callers is I love I love tracing ...there's so many different pathways to learning to become a caller. And at this point, there's a lot of stuff written down. Many different callers have created guides, there's people who teach workshops. But you really undertook like a research project that was kind of person-to-person. I think each caller is really shaped by the first few and then all the consecutive people that they talk to as they start figuring out, okay, what is going on up there and could I do it? And you had, I would say a wider breadth than most getting to undertake that process. Can you share a little bit of what you learned and what unfolded for you, especially as you kind of launched yourself from your local scene and having really mentorship with Carol to then really broadening your sources and in a pretty extreme way, what started emerging for you?

Sue Hulsether: Oh, so many things, little tiny bits and pieces of wisdom. I was thinking about this as I was getting ready to have this conversation with you. It's not unlike some of the questions that you have asked other people that you have had on this podcast...[these] were some of the questions that I ask people like, how did you get started as a caller and what do you think is important...

Mary Wesley: I know, this is like a little meta. I'm interviewing you about interviewing callers, but I love it, it's great.

Sue Hulsether: Well, when I first started out, I felt very undeserving. I think my transformation through these two different trips, I felt more like, "No, this is an oral tradition, this is what happens." Originally I felt like, oh, I'm not really even a caller. I

shouldn't be meeting with these people, they shouldn't be wasting their time on me, I'm really not a caller. And now I realize, and even then, by the words that got repeatedly said to me by person after person after person: "You absolutely are the right person to have these conversations and how great that you're traveling around." Some words just stick in my head that different people said to me. I will say that I made the choice not to audiotape any of the conversations. And some... I think originally it was because of that weird, undeserving thing that I had going on, I just didn't want to be so forthright to say, "May I also tape this conversation?" But I would intentionally then that day or the next day sit down after I'd had the conversation and write down everything that I can remember about the conversation and that's why I have so many journals. So it was almost my own dictating to myself of what I said and what they said. And so I was already sifting out what they said. About halfway through my first six week trip, I sat down with Bob Dalsemer and I said, I just don't know, what about what about all this information that I'm gathering? And some people say, "Oh, you could do a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology if you only had the coursework..." And he just said, the information will tell you what to do with it. And that was a really a heartwarming, wonderful way of affirming my journey and affirming my travels. And so that's one thing I learned from Bob is to just go with the process of just absorbing all this information.

I got to see so many different callers in such a short amount of time. I just went to dances and then I met with some of the callers the next day so they could talk about what that night was. Or I had one very, very late night Waffle House encounter with Fred Park, until 2:00 in the morning or something like that. And it was just great. It was after his dance and we just talked and talked and talked and I got to hear history and I got to hear anecdotes and that was wonderful. I also got to be a visitor in lots of dance communities. And that was really interesting for me because I wasn't really calling a lot yet, but I got to experience, even though I was an experienced dancer, I got to experience what it's like to be new in a dance. I learned some interesting things that still inform my choices as a caller now about how to be welcoming and what things aren't welcoming. I got to see regional differences in how people dance. When I traveled through the Southeast, I knew I was going to be going to the Northeast in a few months so I got to ask every single caller, "Well, who do you think I should talk to when I go to the Northeast?" And so by the time I headed up to the Northeast and not only had all the names that Carol Ormond had given me, but all the other names that all these other people had given me.

I think the most memorable thing I learned is in a conversation with David Kaynor, and I wrote this up and submitted it to Sue Songer when she was putting together the book for David and it ended up as a little story in there. But I was chatting with David and listening, talking about the choices that callers make and I said something like, "Well, after all, everybody's there to have fun!" Which was in my head, that's why I go to a dance, right? So I assume that's how everybody else is, why everybody else is there. And David said, "Oh, no. We don't know why people are at these dances. Some people are there to have fun; some people are there because they like getting it right; some people are there because it's the only time in their week that they can get something right; some people are there to find a mate; some people are there to escape their mate

and get out of their relationship; some people are there to stay sober. He said, "We don't know why people are there, and yet we call to all of them. And that's our job." And that's the thing that has stuck with me all those years. And I actually didn't even remember that it had been David that had said it to me until he got ill. Sue Songer and I were talking about David because I didn't really know him. That was just really my only encounter with him as someone from the Midwest that only met him then. But I look back in my notes about my encounter, my time with David, and I realized that that quote that I had remembered, all these 20 years, was David's quote. So I'm eternally thankful to him that he had tea with me in his house and showed me around his town and told me that wisdom that sticks with me.

Mary Wesley: Wasn't he a wonder? I just love how many different people David was willing to sit down over tea and share his many gems of wisdom. That's just beautiful. Does anything else stand out about your northeast circuit?

Sue Hulsether: Well, I stayed with Dudley Laufman and Jacquelyn when Jacquelyn and Dudley were together. I visited them and I stayed with them. I think I stayed with them two different times. And again, it was my lovely mentor, Carol Ormond, who had done a lot of traveling through the northeast and had a lot of great relationships with people. I never on my own would have probably got an invitation to stay at Dudley Laufman's house. And I stayed with them a couple different times and Dudley and Jacquelyn took me to one of their school gigs with them. As an elementary music teacher, I was really also very thrilled to go with them and see what their school gig was like. And he's like, "Well, you play piano, you can play piano for us." And I said, "I am not a dance musician, I've never played for a dance, I've only gone to dances." And he's like, "Well, you know the chords, don't you?" And I'm like, "Yes, I think I could follow the chords," and so I played piano with Dudley and Jacquelyn all day long at the school. That's probably my only. yes, possibly still to this day, my only piano gig I've ever done at a dance.

Mary Wesley: That was a good one!

Sue Hulsether: That was super, super memorable. The other thing is, both in the southeast trip and the Northeast trip, I really tried to see a variety of different types of dances. So I went to a small community, a small family dance that Steve Hickman and DeLaura Padovan were doing where I acquired what has now continued to be the version of "Here We Come Zudio." There's about 15 different versions of that play party and that's where I sort of decided I liked that one the best. I met with Mary DesRosiers, I went to Nelson, I looked at the dance hall, even though I didn't get to go to a dance there but I already knew it was a legendary place. I also met Ralph Sweet at his home, at his barn, and saw his fife business, but then later met Ralph at one of his square dances that he called in a little community. I can't even remember the name of the community. That was such a memorable night because it's definitely a small town community. Everybody came with their own spouses and danced all night with their own spouses. Very different than an urban contra dance. I came in and everyone stared at me. I'm from small town America, so I wasn't surprised, I just didn't know how I was ever

going to get on the dance floor. And then after the first tip of three squares, Ralph hopped down off the stage. I had already met him like the week before at his barn, but at that dance he hopped off the stage after the first tip and waltzed with me. And from then on I got asked to dance whenever the wives wanted to sit down and the husbands came and snatched me up. But I got to experience that kind of dance as well. It was just all great. Just even getting out my list and looking at my tour, I think I need to reread all my journals again now. Because it would be very interesting to look back at what Sue the beginning caller took in that now that Sue 20-years-worth of calling and a lot of that is my full time job. You know what I feel about what I wrote down then and what they said then and what I would want to say now.

Mary Wesley: What a wonderful document or set of documentation to have. That's so great

Sue Hulsether: I did think of one other thing I got, and this informs how the rest of my life has gone. I was happy being a school teacher, happy learning to call, happy being a regular dancer in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. But what that year of traveling did give me was this vision that there's so many people out there that are doing music and dance and making ends meet. So they're doing what they love and they're finding enough work either doing that or doing other things to make ends meet. And so I really came back to my life as a school teacher and started moving in this direction of moving out of the city, thinking about ways I could make calling more full time work. I also had an inkling to move to the country, which is another whole side story. Because I was an elementary music teacher and learning to call I had this vision of doing...and the guy who had come to my school originally was a model of someone doing residency work. So I sort of came back from the sabbatical thinking, I'm going to try to figure out a way to make this more of my profession. So about three years later, I left my teaching job. I moved to the country and I started doing calling as my full time work. Primarily the way it became close to full time work is that I have made a living doing residencies in schools and calling on weekends. But with that, I moved 200 miles away from my regular contra dancing and square dancing community. I did move to a community where there is a regular community dance, and I maybe didn't realize it at the time; I was moving, I was launching myself right out of a regular contra community into a different type of dance community. Since 2003, I've been living in this rural community, which is about 200 miles from Minneapolis and about 100 miles from Madison. So those are the two closest contra dancing communities to me, and that's pretty far away. So anyway, I've been traveling and the majority of my work has been traveling to schools to do school residencies.

Community dance

Mary Wesley: It's amazing. Part of this work, I hope, is exploring so many different settings in which American social dance traditions happen. I think you're the first one who's so centered in sort of a school residency model as well as I think what we would

call "community dance" setting. So I wonder if you could you define for us a little bit what those settings are, what they look like for you?

Sue Hulsether: Well, my main model of regular community dance is the dance community that I'm a part of now and it was already existing before I came here. So my town, Viroqua, the town itself is 5000 people, of course there's a rural area. It's in a corner of the state where it's very hilly. And back in the '80s, when the very first farm crisis happened, a lot of back-to-the-lander people discovered that there was cheap farmland in this corner of Wisconsin. I mean, people have moved here and people continue to move here for sort of an alternative way of living and those same people, back in like '87 started a monthly square dance in a neighboring town: Gays Mills, Wisconsin, which is even smaller than Viroqua.

Our regular dance is a monthly square dance. I think it's like people envision the olden days to be like. So whenever modern contra dancers talk about, "Oh, well, I've heard that in the olden days people used to have dances where everybody came..." and that's what we do every month. It's a monthly second Saturday of the month where it's open mic and open band. So there's just sort of one or two of us in the community that make sure we have enough musicians that are coming and enough callers that are coming. And even in a small community, we have a handful of 4 to 6 people that can call dances. It's very chill. It's very loosely organized. People come, people dance, some people come that don't dance at all. They sit on the side and chat and maybe do one waltz with their partner before they leave. Kids are there running around, you know people are stepping in and out of the band to call or stepping in or out of the band to dance and that's just the way it is. And no one wants it to be fancier than that, no one wants it to be more organized than that.

Just like everywhere else, we totally missed each other and missed dancing with each other through all of COVID and the pandemic just got started in the spring, and I think it'll start up again in the fall. But to me, what I love about that is it's open, it's welcoming, it's relaxed, it's all ages, it's all figures. So that's squares, there's longways, whole set dances, the circle mixers, there's a few contras, there's usually at least one schottische, usually at least one polka, a waltz at the end of the night. In your interview with Phil [Jamison], I heard him talk about a dance community versus community dance. I remember hearing different people, Phil and others speak of that way back in 2000 when I did my travels and it really is what I experience here. The same people that come to these monthly square dances often have a potluck and dance in the living room. So, you know, Dudley talked about kitchen junkets, we tend to have living room junkets around here. I was just looking through some old pictures on my phone today and found one in my very own house of my husband rolling up the rug before we started to dance and sometimes we put the sofa on the porch to have room, and in my living room we can fit two squares. So then the band is smashed into the corner and there's people in the kitchen that are still eating the snacks. So I mean, that's common around here and where I miss being a regular part of the contra and square dancing community in Minneapolis, I also have this sort of rich and accepting community that I'm part of

here. So that doesn't really speak to how the school residencies fit into it but that's sort of what my dance community is like here.

Mary Wesley: Yeah. And different different ingredients go into it, it sounds like. I'm assuming most of the callers and musicians and dancers are all local, so it really is, that's the community, community dance.

Sue Hulsether: That's right, exactly. Some of the things that stick in my heart the most is, I've been here almost 20 years and watching children grow up and, you know, they come to the dance with their parents and first they're in the in the baby carrier and then they're on the hip and dancing with the parent, and then they're running around for a few years, running around the outside, playing with the other children. And then there's that moment where they get lured in the dance and they're dancing independently for the first time. I still remember to this day, a dance in my backyard when I first moved here and watching a second grader, a friend, who's now in college but as a second grader, the first time she was in a dance doing a grand-right-and-left independently. It's only because she'd been pulled through it and carried through it all those years that as a second grader, it was no big deal that she was independently dancing and, you know, probably not even tickled with herself because it was just a part of what happened. So, yeah...

Mary Wesley: Sounds wonderful!

Sue Hulsether: Yeah, that's the thing that makes me...well, some days I want to do zippier dances than we do but then it's like that is too wonderful of a quality that we have in our community. I've been around here long enough to watch numerous kids sort of go through that cycle of being the baby and then dancing independently and then being the teenager who doesn't come to the dances anymore and then coming back from college and bringing their friends to the dance. I haven't necessarily seen all of that, but I've seen portions of it, it's pretty cool.

[*Clip of Sue calling the square dance Tea Kettles, by Ron Buchanan at Timber Ridge Dance Camp in 2016*]

Mary Wesley: I think you certainly point out this, this big difference in the way a caller at a more urban contra dance would think about their job, often it's a single caller evening and so you're kind of mapping out the arc of of like a three hour dance and you're thinking about maybe how to introduce figures in a sequential way and you kind of you have this this holistic view. But at a community dance or in your community dance, you're just stepping up to the mic for your moment, for your piece of the pie. So, you know, when you step up there what is going through your mind? How do you choose your offering for that night?

Sue Hulsether: Some things that I would use to make my choices is what has been done so far, what figures have the other people taught? What formations have the other people taught? Have there or have there not been mixers or not yet? If no one has done

a contra yet, I might do a contra because I have a few more in my repertoire than some of the other callers do. But mostly it's like, who's stepping up? Who's dancing now? Again, it's a small enough community, are there brand new people out there that have never done this before? Were they confused in the last dance? What dance can I choose that would help them with what they were confused about before. Or if it's all a lot of the old faithfuls at the end of the night and the beginners have left, then it's like, okay, is there a square dance that I haven't called ever, or for a really long time that I can bring it out? And again, it's enough of the sort of repeat customers that sometimes do you all have any favorites that we haven't done for a while? And then people have favorites that they are calling out that they're wanting to do. Or if it's somebody's birthday, then we do their favorite dance, you know? So those are the things I keep in mind. I pay attention to what the other people are doing. I pay attention to who's on the floor, and I pay attention to make a variety of figures because we do really alternate between circles, longways of different varieties, squares, and it's a small enough and forgiving enough community that there can be grand experiments that happen. One of my most hilarious moments is when I was trying out a new dance that I had done with, I think I had tried it with third graders at a school and it had worked. And so I told this whole crowd, you guys will be fine.

And there was something where there had to be some unwinding through the arches. But as I called it that night, I taught it wrong, and it became actually almost impossible for them to unwind. But I had introduced it by saying that these third graders had done it the night before. And they're like, "Oh, my goodness, we can't even do what the third graders had done!" And then I think it was like halfway through the dance, it was actually something that was doable if people, like, were really willing to talk to each other and unwind in the right way. Halfway through when they were doing it, I started to laugh very loudly in the microphone because I realized I had taught it incorrectly and it was really my fault and not theirs. So, I mean, that's one of those happy moments that when people aren't coming with huge expectations about what kind of dances are going to be done...they're just there to be dancing with each other and learning new things and welcoming in people that they haven't seen at a dance for a year but there's still people they know from down the road. Then something like that, that doesn't matter. In another dancing community it could have been like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe I was, A) such a slacker in that I taught it incorrectly and B) chose something that wasn't going to work. And it just made for a better story that night, actually. So, yeah, that was one of my favorite moments in recent years.

Mary Wesley: I love it. Yes. Oh yeah, I think there is nothing like getting confused together. And, you know, in this case, literally untangling from the confusion can be a great bonding experience. Well, so you are also steeped in this community dance scene, but you're also really like a full time caller it sounds like. So can you talk more about your residency work or how you have shaped that career path for yourself when, as you saw it open to you from meeting so many people around the country who are doing it in different ways.

School residencies

Sue Hulsether: Yeah, I intentionally launched it. I left my teaching job and moved away from Minneapolis to this community and I was real public about it. I wrote an email to every single person I knew and said, "This is what I'm attempting to do, can you pass on my information to any school, grandchild's school, friends, child's school that you know? Are you willing to send my name out to people?" And I got a few jobs from people and it just has grown and grown and grown and grown and grown. Most of my residencies are a week long. Most of them are in the upper Midwest, somewhere I can drive to in a half a day to a day. I haven't really pursued doing them all over the country. It's hard enough to be gone from home for six days at a time and I have done a few that have been other places, but I haven't really pursued them. I'm really, really lucky that so many of the jobs I started out doing ended up being yearly jobs or every other year jobs. So I have a couple schools that I've done 15 or 16 years in a row minus the pandemic. I just go every year and it's like it's dance week this week and it's become this tradition in the school.

So I usually see 300 kids a day in groups of 50 to 60, two adults in the room, at least, and many to most of the schools will culminate at the end of the week with a family dance and then I bring in a live band. So I do my week with recorded music and I do a family dance with live music. I would love to do my week with a live musician, but I decided early on if I was going to try to make a living at this, I had to do it in a way that schools could actually afford. So I am hauling sound gear, hauling an iPod. I still use an antique iPod because I like it, it holds the most music and it has the best volume controls. Over time, I've added a sampling of traditional instruments that I can play well enough to demonstrate to children, but not play well enough to play for a dance. So I bring a banjo, an accordion, and a ukulele. I do a few play parties and stuff with guitars. So, that said, I can't do it four weeks, a month. It's too much energy, it's vocally too hard. It's physically too hard. It's logistically too hard. So it's not as many days of a school year as a full time worker would be but then I'm managing all the communication, it's a lot more communication that goes into figuring out a school residency than going to be a guest caller at a contra dance or square dance. So I love it. I'm getting tired. I've done it now for 19 years, but I'm mostly not getting tired of the kids and not tired of the family dances. I'm sort of a little more tired of hauling all the gear and being away from home a lot. So I'm tweaking it as I look into this next chapter for myself. But I love it, I mean, kids say the most wonderful things. They come in so skeptical and leave so happy. All these schools that have had me year after year after year, it's just a tradition, they just remember. I only saw them two times the year before but they still remember what it was. Yeah, I could go on and on but that's the basic.

Mary Wesley: I love it! So what happens at a residency and how are you presenting what you're doing? Because obviously you have steeped yourself so much in kind of the wide array of traditions that inform this dance repertoire. So what's your pitch when you're bringing your residency into a school?

Sue Hulsether: Right. So I have chosen to call it “folk dancing.” Now, I know international folk dancers and contra dancers would split hairs about what is folk dancing and what is not. But I am seeing these kids twice. It's not really “wham, bam, thank you, ma'am,” but it's close, it's like it's got to be good if it's going to happen twice. So my goal is that they learn that dancing can be fun and that dancing can be social. And my basic definition of a folk dance to them is: folk dances are dances that have been passed on from person to person or from generation to generation. I have little flip cards and I present it and that's what they walk away from me as a memory of what a folk dance means. Then I say, “Well, we're going to do some dances that have been passed down over hundreds of years.” Like, we're going to do a dance that was done in the time of George Washington. I mean, again, all the time I'm painting with a really wide brush. And I say, “And we're going to do a dance that really has maybe been passed on on a playground,” because folk dancing isn't just old stuff, it's actually stuff that you learn from someone else. So I would say in a given dance session, maybe 65% of the time was spent doing some sort of set dance, a longways whole set dance, a square dance, a circle non-mixer or a circle mixer. And occasionally a gender free contra like family contra or something like that. And then maybe 5% of the time I'm talking to them about the context. This is what folk dancing is, or this is where this came from. I always say to the kids every dance I teach you, I'm going to be able to tell you where I learned it from and where it came from, so that's just a part of the deal. And then maybe 10 to 15% of the time is some sort of singing game of some sort with movement. Some of them are more modern, some of them have been around for a while. And I'll say, “This is the kind of thing that you just learn on a playground or from a camp or from a camp counselor and you can teach this to your friends.” The biggest reward is when I'm at a school that they keep doing it on the playground. And then I hear that they're arguing about which of the dances was the best dance to do on the playground. I'm like, okay. I am thrilled, you know? And then maybe 5% of the time is me showing something. I have a limberjack, an instrument...And then if there is a family dance, I'm spending some time talking about prepping their parents for the dance. We're going to invite our parents. Won't it be fun to send the parents through the tunnel. And this is what you need to go home and tell your parents because we're all going to dance together. Because there's nothing worse than having a gym full of kids where all the parents are sitting on the sides not dancing. And there's nothing better than being in a school gym where the kids are luring their parents onto the dance floor and the parents are loving it.

So, yeah, a longways whole-set dance, squares, circles. Play-parties and demo of instruments is kind of my shtick. I really want it to be fun and dancing right away. So the other thing that I think has developed over time for me, and I wrote about this a lot in my book is you don't have to teach a dance, especially to kids or to any dancer for that matter, from the beginning of the sequence to the end of the sequence. Like with kids, I find the part of the dance that's going to be the easiest to teach first and teach that and do that for a while. Then stop the music and say, “Let's learn a little bit more,” and then add another part in and add another part in. So I don't want the kids to be standing there forever hearing me saying, “And then you're going to do this and then you're going to do that, and then you're going to do that. Okay, now we learned everything, now let's turn on the music and dance.” So I really try to chunk it and piecemeal it so they're dancing

right away and then I like to choose the part that has the best lure for the kids. Like if there's a dance with a tunnel in it I teach the tunnel first and I teach the allemande last, because the tunnel is what's going to draw them. The distinct advantage of traveling around to all these schools is I always have a new audience to do a dance, and I really have totally been able to hone my repertoire. I don't get tired of any of it because it's always new children, it's always new acoustics, it's always new something. There's always something to pay attention to above and beyond the audience. And that wouldn't appeal to everybody but it really does appeal to me, so...

Mary Wesley: Yeah. I think it'd have to, in some way to do it for as long as you've been doing it. Why do you think this is important to bring into schools? What do you think is the takeaway for students and families?

Sue Hulsether: Oh, some of it I think the takeaway is about the socialness of it, the interactiveness, the community building pieces of it. I think they invite me in thinking, "Oh, it's good to have folk dancing, it's good to have movement, it's good to have physical education and music together, it's good for these kids to learn these dances." But what the kids take of it is, they learn to make eye contact with someone, they learn to ask a partner. They've learned to do an elbow swing without whipping someone on the floor. They learn to do something that's cooperative. They've learned to notice the whole group. So I talk about it as the "human curriculum," but like with kids, I really take the time to teach them, this is how we're going to ask someone to dance. And I have a little formula and I demonstrate it and then we do it. And if they're uncomfortable, I say it might be a little uncomfortable, but I think you can handle it. I think you can be this person's partner for a couple of minutes and you'll be fine. I'm not super enforce-y, but like, "This is how we're going to do it," and I think that's really important. I think actually I've only done a small amount of residencies since the pandemic. I think it's more needed now. We've gotten tired of staring at screens but really, if you're in second grade, you spent half of second grade and all of first grade and half of kindergarten learning from a screen. And so I think we all need to learn to get along. But kids need to learn how to interact. And the more we're looking at devices in our culture the more it is really helpful to have kids learn to look someone in the eye and work with another partner. So a lot of it is just social skills training and...it doesn't fly real high if you're making your elevator pitch to a school, but that's what I'm doing. And that's what's rewarding to me, is seeing the kids with each other.

Mary Wesley: How has it been different as you've gone back into school since the pandemic, are you seeing a big difference?

Sue Hulsether: I'm seeing interesting differences. It depends upon the school. The biggest difference is that I've found it's this odd and small thing but kids don't have a good group sense. Like, "make a circle." Like, "Look right and look left and try to make your lines straight." Like they just haven't done as many group activities and even when they were back together, they were so distanced from each other that it's the sort of "group noticing bits" actually that have been the biggest surprise to me. There's a little bit of behavior stuff that is maybe a little harder than it was before, but mostly it's about the group noticing. I'm real process-y with the kids. Instead of telling them exactly what

to do we might make mistakes for a really long time and then stop and talk about it. Like instead of immediately telling them when the top couple goes down, then you have to step up, I'm much more likely to have them do a dance where they don't step up and they don't step up and they don't step up and they don't step up. And then we stop and realize, "Oh, the set has moved all the way down across the floor. Why did that happen? How can we fix it?" I like to help them notice what's going on so that they can learn how to do it independently. I'd rather them make mistakes lots of times in a row and us *not* fix it until they know what's going on.

The caller's role

Mary Wesley: Sure. I mean, someone just sort of ushering them along kind of takes them out of their own learning process. That totally makes sense. And I don't know if there's more that you can say, just like your philosophy as a caller, maybe in a more abstract sense. Or are there other things that you think about in any setting, whether it's a school or community dance? How do you see your role? What are you trying to do up there at the mic?

Sue Hulsether: I think this sort of ends up spreading across to all of my calling. I mean, I also call contras occasionally and squares a lot actually, and to adults. So I mean, it's almost like the school residencies is my day job and all the other calling is like all the other callers. I think some of the other people you've talked to have said the same thing but I really think my job is to connect the people to the music and the people to each other. Whether that is kids, or families, or a wedding dance, or a family reunion dance. I think as the caller I see myself as the circuit box, like you're not the center of attention, but you actually are in the middle of all the energy. I especially feel that after I've done a big family dance at a school as the culmination of the week because it is just this big mass of energy and happiness and sometimes it's a mess and sometimes it's not and everybody's thrilled, right? And I'm sort of in the middle of all of this, almost chaos, not quite chaos, of happiness and loving that they're dancing to live music. When I do an adult contra dance though, even if people know what they're doing, I still think it's the caller's job to connect the people to each other, and to the music, through the figures. Sometimes I think we forget the "to each other" part in contra dancing. Not always... sometimes. In squares also, you know, "to your square" and connect to the band. As a square dance caller, you have a different role because you're kind of a part of the band.

I have this view of when you're a contra dance caller you're kind of winding the clock correctly and setting it, you're teaching it right and getting everybody going and then eventually getting out of the way. And that's a great role but when you're square dance caller, you're kind of more a part of the band and so it's definitely a different feel. When I'm doing a family dance, especially at a school, I'm much more just like the giant-sized sheepherder, you know...not the sheep herder but the dogs, the sheep dogs. Like, I'm just ushering people around to connect and have a good time, but always wanting to connect them up to the music and to each other. I don't cry anymore but I used to hardly be able to get through a school family dance without getting teary because it's so lovely

to see these kids that I've been seeing all week long showing their parent how to do a do si do or showing their parents where to stand or showing their parents how to form a square. And the parents are just beaming and the kids are just beaming. And that's the same parent who walked in the door looking like this is the last place in the world they wanted to be, and sitting at the side staring at their phone until the dance started. And then the kid, the student lured them out and they just end up hugging each other and walking out the door hand-in-hand. I mean, it's just the best. But that's no different than the clock-setter. It just is your job to connect the people. So anyway, that's how I see my job as a caller.

Mary Wesley: Really beautifully said, I feel that and it's and you know, when you really sink into that description, it's just how much we've missed it and how nice it is to be working our way back towards that. And you said your local dance has started up again?

Sue Hulsether: It started up in April, we just do it during the school year. So they had an April dance, in May we have a little, little tiny folk festival and that did happen in May. And then there's been a few house dances and just last weekend somebody had a dance in their barn...so just gathering a few times in people's homes throughout the summer, and I think it'll start up again in the fall. I know the contra dances in Minneapolis have been going on, and in Madison, too. So it's starting to happen. And I've started to have a few jobs, wedding jobs, church, barn dance jobs are starting. So it's starting to happen. And I'm so happy I didn't forget how.

Mary Wesley: I know, we all thought we would, but it's in there it just needs dusting off a little bit.

Sue Hulsether: Yeah. I mean, obviously, my school residencies were completely stopped as soon as the pandemic hit, but I was already sort of up to my chin or close to my nose in a book project at the time that the pandemic hit. So I really spent the first nine months of the pandemic finishing my book. And so I don't feel like I was away from the calling as much as I might have been, because I spent that nine months doing the final touches on my book. And my book is dances and it's significant quantities of teaching tips and is aimed at a beginner caller or someone who wants more material for community dances or for school teachers that want to teach their kids to dance and they might not be a part of a dancing community. So it's similar in scope to some of those wonderful, wonderful books that the New England Dancing Masters have put out. It has a lot more reference material and teaching tips for every dance, which, as any caller knows, as soon as you commit to giving out more of your tips, then there's no end to the wisdom that you can impart to other people. So the challenge of the book was just to figure out what tips can I write out in a way that are going to be helpful? But the other thing that I have in my book is a few essays that I wrote that are unrelated to teaching at all, but just little mini, like a blog post about beautiful little moments that have happened here and there in the dance. Because I really wanted the book to be not only dance material and resource material, but a reminder of, *this is why we do it*. Like this is the golden moment that can happen when we dance together.

To the future; writing “Join up Hands”

Mary Wesley: Wow. What was it like to be writing those during a time when dancing wasn't happening?

Sue Hulsether: Well, I was kind of far enough into the project that at first it was like, oh, thank goodness there was a pandemic, it's allowing me to finish this project. And thank goodness I have this project because it's giving me purpose when I'm locked up at home for months. So it was almost harder after it was done because then I did decide to release it when no one was dancing. And of course, we thought it would be over any time now, you know, and it just wasn't ever over for another year. So it was a little depressing to have this new project that I was releasing at a time when it wasn't being used and I'm still sort of climbing out of that because even this last school year, we haven't been doing that much dancing and people haven't been doing church barn dances and the one off gigs haven't been happening and certainly teachers haven't been allowed to dance with children in school until the last couple of months. So the book is now over a year old, but it's just finally starting to launch.

Mary Wesley: And what's it called?

Sue Hulsether: It's called *Join Up Hands*. It's available at the CDSS store and other places. West Music, which is one of the major publishers of books for teachers, music teachers and I can sell it direct too, so there we are.

Mary Wesley: Great. Well, congratulations.

Sue Hulsether: Thank you.

Mary Wesley: That's so exciting and I'm glad it's at a moment where I think it's so needed right now, so thank goodness you got it out there.

Here's a little sample of Sue working her magic on the *Join Up Hands* CD that accompanies her book.

[*Clip of Sue calling the traditional square dance Chase That Rabbit from the Join Up Hands CD*]

Mary Wesley: Well, I feel like maybe you're winding down, but I'm wondering how's the future looking from here? And, the pandemic aside, have you been seeing changes in your local dance scene in other places? What's your view on that? Has there been a shift over time? Are things sort of staying steady?

Sue Hulsether: Our local dance probably hasn't seen too many changes over time. As some of us have gotten older, maybe we've had less house parties at our houses. So in that sense, I'm anxious for things to get rolling again and I think the energy...but that's not really your question and with kids and school, definitely this is something we have

talked about in this interview or this conversation. Definitely in school the majority of work I've done with kids is there's no gender roles in dancing and I've been that way all along. But I am much more intentional about it now, even in the language I use when I speak to kids. Like, I just don't even say boys and girls when I'm talking to children anymore and that's been just a really wonderful brain challenge for me. When kids come into the dance hall, I used to call them by their shirts. Well, Mr. black shirt and Miss stripy shirt and now over the last two or three years, I've changed their title from Mr. and Miss to professor. So we have professor black shirt and professor stripy shirt, and all the teachers get to be called professor by me. It's really empowering for me to change my brain in that way, and especially for the repertoire I'm using. I already was doing positional calling. I was already doing line one and line two. I was already doing inside circle and outside circle. I had already found ways to call the kids without anyone ever needing to know that maybe once upon a time this was a gender role issue. But just the additional step for me language wise and just talking to humans without using gender has been really interesting. And of course, that's coming in different ways to our adult dancing communities. I don't know where it's going to go with square dancing because the majority of the squares that I call are southern squares that are patter squares and I think it's a trickier issue when you have all this poetry that exists, not just some of it was sexist, but just that there's a lot of lady/gent stuff and I just don't know...

I'm really curious about where that's going to go for me and for other square dance callers. A number of people who do community dancing and I have done a couple of Zooms where we've been starting to talk about how to use positional calling and gender-free calling in community dances. We're going to have a supplemental conversation where we talk about it in squares, in community dancing, and how positional calling or non-gendered language can work in squares. So that it definitely is a change. I think the whole thing about safety and consent that's happening in a lot of square dancing communities is interesting when you translate that to schools and kids. Because I was teaching kids to say, "You always say yes when someone asks you to dance," and I'm not sure how that will go. I'm kind of just keeping my ears and eyes open to how the teachers in the school respond to that as I do it. But when I do one-off gigs and "one night stand" gigs, I used to always say, "This is how you find a partner. You look someone in the eye, you say, 'Will you dance with me?' and they usually say yes." I used to say, "And they say yes," and now I say "And they usually say yes." I simultaneously feel it's important to leave the opening for that safety thing. But I also feel in a one off gig, it's important to actually state how you find a partner, because I think there's a safety thing. When people come to a dance they've never been to before, they don't even know how they're supposed to find a partner. So I think the issue of consent is sort of something that's changing in dance, the issue of language. It's all so interesting. The other thing, and it goes back to that whole thing about the caller as the person that's mixing the people up. We live in a really polarized society and. I mean, it's a little woo woo and a little touchy feely, but I just think even more does the caller at the mic need to remind people, "It's about "us," it's not just about you." And it's easier for me to do that in the types of gigs that I do. But even with square dances and contra dances, I think it's important. I think there's some sort of leadership that the person at the mic has to keep reminding everybody that we're all in this together.

Mary Wesley: Yeah, and in the context of a dance that's such a palpable experience of the interplay between the group and the individual and that totally resonates with me how much that consciousness is needed in our larger world. The dance floor is a good place to practice it if we can, when we can.

Sue Hulsether: It's a long time ago now but I remember one thing in the big contra hall at NEFFA, so it's quite a few years since I've been at NEFFA, but I remember the caller saying, "In this dance you can actually keep eye contact with your partner throughout the whole sequence." That's a wonderful challenge but then my experience as I went down the hall is I never made eye contact with any of my neighbors because my neighbors were all so busy looking at their partners. And that was just one of these experiences that stuck with me as a caller. Like, "Yeah, that's a cool challenge but I ended up...I didn't have a partner that I wanted to keep eye contact with the whole time. So I ended up feeling like I was sort of dancing with none of my neighbors because they were all just, like, eyeballing their partner. And I see both sides, but it was like, that's one of those things I love about contra dancing, is I get to have a partner and I get to have these 30 second relationships with people as I go up and down the hallway. So when I choose my repertoire, I often choose repertoire that I'm coaching people on where the connection points are with everybody.

Mary Wesley: These are just, you know, the considerations of callers. Again, it goes back to this question of kind of visibility. I think that's part of the fun of learning to be a caller, is you get to start to unravel all these other things that are happening at a dance that as a dancer you're kind of on the ride. But callers have this really unique role of kind of designing the ride and there's so many different things to consider and so many different ways to approach it. But I really loved hearing, especially from your perspective, which so far is unique on this podcast. I think it's really great to hear from someone so steeped in community dancing and also bringing dancing to schools. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that's just on the tip of your tongue?

Sue Hulsether: I did...it's not really about the dance...my seeing the future of the dance community, but my seeing my future for myself as a caller in not wanting to haul my sound gear to zillions and zillions of schools anymore, is I'm really wanting to move in the direction of seeking out ways to teach teachers how to teach dance. So both with having the book and just having more of a desire to sort of think about legacy in a different way is starting to move in the direction of seeking out clinician work, and I'm really excited about that as sort of my final career chapter. I'm sure I'll continue calling dances even past all this time, but I'm really excited about now, as I've found ways to teach children how to dance and teach beginners how to dance, I'm really looking forward to challenging myself, to continuing to learn to teach, learn how to teach teachers how to dance. Teach teachers how to teach dance, actually.

Closing

Mary Wesley: I love that. Because as you describe these residencies that you've had in an ongoing way over the years, that repetition really builds a culture and a foundation for dance to happen in the school and what better way to ensure that and then have teachers be able to do it themselves? That's brilliant.

So, I'd love to wrap up. I've been asking everyone that I talk to three questions to close and the first one is to hear how you keep your dances, your collection of dances. I use index cards myself, I have a box of cards. I know you call in some different settings and maybe you have multiple systems, but what's your dance notation system?

Sue Hulsether: Well, I have multiple systems. By and large I keep them on cards too. 4x6 cards. Actually, for my square dances I came up with a system I love, which I keep the figures on 4x6 cards and the breaks on 3.5x5 cards that are colored. Because with many square dances, the figures and the breaks are mix-and-match. So I can ruffle through my figures and ruffle through my breaks and then match them in and so I have those to refer to. Most of my dances are on four by six cards. I have a huge tackle box, like a recipe box didn't work and I have a tackle box. I found a beautiful leather hatbox, an antique hatbox that my tackle box fits in. So I look pretty classy when I go to the gig because I can walk up with this cute little antique hat box and inside is all my cards. However, that's not my only method. So long ago, my wonderful spouse digitized them all for me in a database, which, if I was good at keeping up with it, I can keep track of my gigs and my correspondence as well. And at some point in time when I started traveling more to do dance weeks, I didn't want to take my box with me. So I figured out a way to print out the database in a way that they felt like cards. So then I have them in binders and it also then is a backup. And then for my school and community events, gigs, it's a much smaller sort of quantity of dances that I would need. So I've just created, using a photocopier, created binders that I can just grab when I'm going to a school, it will have pretty much everything in there that I'm going to use at the school. So, yes, cards, and a tackle box is my go to and I just love...some of them are practically falling apart because I've called the dance so many times. When I first started calling, I kept track on the back and the back side of the card every time I used it and then when that particular card filled up I stopped keeping track. But yeah, cards, cards and a hatbox.

Mary Wesley: Cards and a hatbox, I love that, or tackle box in a hatbox. Nesting boxes. And then do you have any pre- or post-gig rituals or anything you kind of do to step in and out of the caller space?

Sue Hulsether: Caffeine. Caffeine, definitely. A lot of times, especially in schools and a lot of the community dance events that I go to or one shot deal dances that I go to, I'm also bringing the sound. So whereas I'm not always the most prompt person in the world, I usually try to get there in ample time because I don't like setting up sound in a hurry. So the other ritual I have is just really forcing myself to have ample time to prepare. So when I do a wedding gig, I like to get there really early so I can just figure out what the people are like, talk to the caterer, talk to the guests, like just figure out what is the gestalt of this event. And even when I'm a traveling caller in a contra or square dance I just like to figure out, like, what's the scene? So time. I guess time and

caffeine are my best things. Post gig, carbohydrates usually are important. I get real ravenous for snacking on my way home. Often it's real emotional, like I spend the first hour in the car debriefing everything that had happened. But then I sometimes have a real...it's that whole circuit, circuit backed thing that I was the center of attention and so there's an emotional release. So I drive a long way to a lot of gigs, and I think the drive is important to transition back to regular life. My spouse isn't usually with me for gigs and I want to come home and be ready to be a spouse and have done all my processing. So there's a little bit of the gear up with the carbs and then gear down the emotions and ready to be regular Sue again, when I get home. Yeah, definitely snacking is a part of it.

Mary Wesley: I can't believe how hungry I am after gigs sometimes, even if I've just eaten 3 hours prior. It's like I need a whole other meal.

Sue Hulsether: Absolutely.

Mary Wesley: Awesome. And then my last question is my little sociological experiment I'm conducting. I'm just curious whether you identify as an introvert or an extrovert, if you know.

Sue Hulsether: I generally identify as an extrovert. I think it's changing as I have come through life. I mean, some people used to say I was the most extroverted person they knew and I have changed over time. I mean, I live on a dead end road with an introverted person. And I have this sense, especially in my work, where I travel and the residency and I see so many people that I spend my extroversion in the gig and then it's depleted by the time I get home. So maybe that is the sign of a true introvert, I don't know. But yes, I would say if 50/50 was in the middle, I would fall on extrovert side, but not as far to the end of the scale as I used to.

Mary Wesley: Yeah. It can really go both ways, I think, in terms of how you hold on to yourself in the midst of that big organism that is a dance ecosystem. It's been so great to talk to you Sue and get to know you.

Sue Hulsether: Thank you. It's been a treat, I've been honored to be a part of it and it's been wonderful to get to know you this way. And, you know, it's always great to talk about what we love to do.

Mary Wesley: Yes. That's my favorite part of this. All right. Thanks!

Sue Hulsether: All right. Thank you!

[*Clip of Sue calling the dance Sweet Potato from the Join Up Hands CD*]

Many thanks to Sue for speaking with me! There are a few bonus clips from our interview that you can find in the show notes at podcasts.cdss.org. You'll also find a link to Sue's website where you can buy her new book, Join Up Hands.

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Happy dancing!

Ben Williams: The views expressed in this podcast are of the individuals and do not necessarily reflect those of CDSS.