

From the Mic Episode 7 - Chris Page

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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"

Chris Intro

Mary Wesley My guest today may be responsible for some of your most sublime contra dancing experiences. Caller and choreographer Chris Page has led contras and English country dance as a local caller in San Diego for about 15 years. When calling, his main concern is being serious about dancers not taking themselves too seriously.

As I mentioned, Chris also writes dances, some of which, he jokes, other people have even used willingly. But I can tell you, there is almost always a cheer from the floor when I announce that I'm about to teach a Chris Page dance. With the help of Michael Dyck, he's turned his obsession about the history of contra dance choreography into something productive through the online database, The Caller's Box.

When not calling, Chris lives in Los Angeles with his wife Melinda, helping write Beast Academy math texts for bored elementary school students.

Our interview was such a fascinating look into the mind of this incredible choreographer, and cataloger of dance history. I'm excited for you to hear it. Here's Chris!

Mary Wesley So Chris Page, welcome to From the Mic.

Chris Page Thank you for having me.

Mary Wesley So good to see you and hear you. And this podcast, we're exploring all things caller related, focusing on North American dance calling, contra, square, community dance. I know that you as a caller got started in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and then went to the West Coast. So I'm excited to add some sort of geographic perspective on this topic. Would you mind just starting by introducing yourself as a caller, how did you come to that role and what's also your connection with social dancing at large?

Chris Page Well, I didn't dance any at all, even random dance, until I was over 30 and had a landlady who did SCA [Society for Creative Anachronism] dancing, the Renaissance stuff. And I kind of liked that. I went with her...the person leading it ran a workshop at the Heritage Dance Festival in greater Philadelphia, which was one of the spinoffs from NEFFA. I don't think it exists anymore, and that's where I ran into other kinds of dance. I found some friends I knew from other activities, and I tried English country, I tried Scottish, I tried waltz. I tried to do contra but everybody was booked ahead. And so I then found groups that did English Country and did "mostly waltz" and from there I thought I really should try contra again. This would be about the end of 2001, and tried that and had a good time the first time. I got booked out of almost every single dance the second time but had some friends convince me to try it a third time and that worked.

I liked it. I was interested in the choreography. And that was a dance that Bob Isaacs went to regularly as well and he saw my interest, started discussing it some on the sides. I went to a workshop with Jim Kitch in 2002 where he said the best way to test your dances is call them. And Glenside has this nice thing of...they have like ten or 11 callers so most evenings are open mic, run by one caller where they do the initial three dances and then organize everyone else. So I was able to do open slots, which was important because at that time I was on crutches due to an injury, so I couldn't actually dance. So this was a way of helping as well and starting to learn how to call. And they put up with me patiently for the first four or so and then saw I was serious. So people started intervening, "This is really how you need to learn to do stuff," start with simple dances and that kind of stuff. So I started calling maybe 14 months after I started dancing. So that was an interesting quick transition, but it was because I couldn't dance, honestly.

Mary Wesley That's kind of interesting that that particular circumstance maybe accelerated your path to the caller's mic a little bit.

Chris Page Yeah.

Mary Wesley Can you enlighten me a little bit more about SCA? That's the Society for Creative Anachronism?

Chris Page Yeah, they're a group that recreates, creatively, stuff from 1600s, 1500s and they have a number of groups including sword fighting and crafts and one of them is dance groups. And they do early Italian dances, circle branles from France and a first edition Playford as well.

Mary Wesley Yeah, it's like a totally unfamiliar scene to me. So what was it like and what did you like about it?

Chris Page The dance was interesting, trying these older things and there were some neat patterns there. Some of the storylines...the French dances are branles where you're in a circle, everybody is doing essentially a line dance on their own with various kicks and steps left and right. The Italian dances were court dances so they were very fussy with particular footwork, and they were just two or three people showing off. Ranging from simple to very elaborate patterns, with some introduction to just doing footwork and connecting to music. And the very early set dances from English country Playford like Boat Man, Black Nag kind of got grandfathered in, Heart's Ease, Ruffy Tufty, about a dozen others.

Mary Wesley That's so interesting. That's a path into dancing that I haven't heard yet. But I bet you're not alone that some people have branched out from...

Chris Page Or towards or away, like I ran across...in 2019 I went to a Ren Faire, which is parallel to SCA, same sort of things, but they don't talk to each other much...And they were doing Renaissance dancing and they had picked up the larks/robins terminology from contra dance.

Mary Wesley Oh, wow! So some cross-pollination happening.

Chris Page Yeah.

Mary Wesley Well, I'm always interested in people's kind of formative time coming into a dance scene or dance community and then kind of finding their way to the caller's mic. It sounds like you had a particular influence of being interested in choreography. And who better to cross paths with than the likes of Bob Isaacs...Jim Kitch... So can you talk a little bit more about what sparked your interest there and how that happened?

Chris Page I've always just been interested in creating stuff and so I was seeing these patterns and I knew some of them. People were testing out dances that they said they'd just written or tried so I knew it was an active thing, and I just tried writing some stuff on my own that was really bad. I tended to go towards the unusual. Like I remember one

that I wrote that was like four-facing-four and then a mirror hey-for-four that you go out and promenade. At one point the center four people just stand around for four beats. So, I mean, it's something that's best lost forever.

Mary Wesley I don't know, wow, I kind of love that. Unconventional.

Chris Page Yeah. I mean, doing a mirror hey-for-four sometimes might be nice in a four-face-four but then going into the promenade requires a degree of everybody being in the right place and knowing what they're doing that would not work in most contra dance situations. And then after being interested [at a dance writing workshop at Heritage Dance festival] with Jim Kitch, we spent an hour just writing a dance together in a group and that was interesting just to hear some basic stuff like: 'swing should end at the end of a phrase' and 'don't do too much'...stuff like that.

Mary Wesley So in your early calling days, what was your repertoire and how was your experience? Do you remember the first dance you called?

Chris Page Yeah, it was "You Can't Get There from Here," which I described to Bob Isaacs the week before, because he asked what it was. I couldn't remember the name, but I said it has this neat transition where you swing one person, you circle left three quarters and you swing the next.

Mary Wesley Is that Carol Ormond?

Chris Page Yeah, that's a Carol Ormond dance.

Mary Wesley Is that a twist on a Linda Leslie dance or is that her own?

Chris Page I believe Carol's is first.

Mary Wesley Okay.

Chris Page I am reasonably certain Carol's is first and then Linda wrote "You Can Get There from Here," and then there's "You Might Get There from Here" and "You Won't Get There...", there's a number that spun off of that.

Mary Wesley All of the iterations. Nice. How did it go that first time?

Chris Page I don't remember. That was the only dance I practiced the timing to by counting rather than actually having music. I think it was after that that I actually bought my first CD, which was a contra dance CD of traditional contras from New England and I used that to practice for the others.

Mary Wesley And then how has your role evolved as a caller and a choreographer, how do you see yourself?

Chris Page As a caller and a choreographer and also more historian of right now, just looking at various contra dances. Just because I've looked at so many thanks to this Caller's Box thing where I've gone through like 15,000 or so of them from all sorts of periods of time in different subcultures.

Moving to California

Mary Wesley That's amazing. So will you take us from kind of Glenside to then your move to the West Coast?

Chris Page So Glenside I was regularly calling about once an evening and actually starting to write some dances that were good. And I did two half evenings with Bob and then moved to San Diego for a new job. There was a weekly dance in San Diego with four local callers and they let me do individual slots for another year and then eventually started doing half evenings the next year. And at the second half evening, one caller was too tired to do the second half so I just did the second half without breaking a beat and then I got into the regular rotation there. So that was an interesting thing where you have a dance with five local callers and you might have a visiting caller come through twice a year.

Mary Wesley So a local scene mainly.

Chris Page That was an interesting scene because some traditional dances were called, at least two callers that regularly did dances without any partner swing at all. They had their own very distinctive repertoire. One was the old, more Ralph Page type stuff. One, Martha Wild was like 70 or 80% her own compositions. One was just random, whatever he picked up without looking at it. And one was more standard, what was considered more standard contra repertoire if you go to various weekends and collect the better, easier stuff. And there was me just collecting, writing my own stuff and collecting stuff off of the internet and books.

Mary Wesley So I don't know much about the San Diego scene. How much do you know about kind of the history of that dance?

Chris Page The San Diego scene was actually one of the earliest contra dances of the Dudley Laufman diaspora, started around 1970. At the moment I'm forgetting who started [Joseph Tulane], but by the time I got there, the original person had left. And a couple callers, Martha Wild and JoAnn Kopanny and Harry Browser had taken over the reins in the early 90s. And then two other callers joined in: Graham Hempel, Steve Barlow, and Harry Browser moved away.

It was local bands and the interesting thing was the local bands were usually run by one of the callers, Martha or JoAnne. So they would just look at the dances and pick a tune kind of thing. It was a weekly dance—attendance tended to be anywhere between 30

and 60 people with variance over the years. Some years, up towards 60, towards the end when I left, it was in the 20 to 30 range. It was held at a meeting hall of a Methodist church near downtown San Diego. Because we're isolated from other dances, it was unusual to have a special band or special caller come through.

Mary Wesley What did that mean for your experiences as a dancer and a caller to be very localized...

Chris Page As a caller it meant that I had to have a larger repertoire. Because if you're calling ten or 11 times a year, if you call the same couple of dances, there will be certain people that will notice. So finding a number of basic hey dances, simple dances, unusual dances, that was a thing. It also meant you really got to know the individual dancers. And there was no stage and a wireless mic so you could walk around and help people as needed. It was a small dance kind of situation.

Mary Wesley It strikes me as a unique experience to get to know one one place and one kind of group of dancers over time.

Chris Page Yeah. And it would be very rare for someone from Los Angeles to come down, for instance, because without traffic, that's a two hour drive. And also, the callers were part of the rotation for managers because we needed them. And we were part of the rotation for sound techs because we needed them. There was one really bad evening where people canceled and I wound up being manager, sound tech, and caller and I don't want to repeat that night.

Mary Wesley Yeah, that's a lot of jobs to do at once.

Chris Page I think I left around 1:30 in the morning.

Mary Wesley Oh, my gosh. So it was a very sort of, "all hands on deck" experience. And you also call English is that right?

Chris Page Yup, I did English before I did contra, both with the SCA group, and with the group in Philadelphia, Narberth: Germantown Country Dancers. When I was joining, San Diego was just starting to get up a strong English country group under Ellen Riley. And I joined as a dancer, and pretty soon she had headhunted me as a caller. So in the end I was calling English and contra about as much, evenly split between the two.

It's an interesting scene [English country dance] because people can take it more seriously. And the dances are different in the fact that contra, the timing is pretty much predigested. If you just walk around, you'll get there in the right place. Whereas English country you might have three beats or six beats or 12 beats for a cast. And you have to be aware of that. Also the choreography—since English, at least in the United States, is heavily linked between the dance sequence and the music, you can have a situation where people really like the music but the dance is problematic or vice versa. And so that means for me, I just throw the whole thing [composition] out. For others it means

you do either the dance or the choreography and just endure, make the best of it or enjoy it. Whereas contra you can throw whatever tune to whatever dance for 99 point whatever percent of the dances.

Mary Wesley Yeah. So I'd love to hear more how you...and for this podcast now we're kind of focusing on North American traditions, contras and squares, but of course very friendly to all dance forms. But I'd love to hear how you think about approaching a regular...maybe even thinking about San Diego, just because I'm so intrigued by that local dance scene. How would you approach calling an evening? How would you prep for it?

Approach to Calling

Chris Page The bands usually like the programs in advance even if they were ones that I'd diverge from as things went down, as they always do. Usually I have the dance card on 4x6 index cards because that's how I started, so that's what I'm stuck with, and I just throw them down on the floor. I pull out like 20 or 30 I might like and just try and arrange stuff with the first half and second half and try not to do repeated figures. I actually used highlighter pens to highlight certain moves on my cards with different colors. So like a balance is purple so I get to see where the purple is. Or swing is orange, so where are the swings? It's green circles, allemands...oh are there too many allemands in this stretch?

Occasionally I'd have a pair of, I'll do this dance or that dance, especially if it was a dance that I was looking to test out and most evenings I'd be trying to test between one and five dances. So I guess that was part of the core of [programming] what do I want to test out or what new dance for someone else do I want to try. And then throw it all together and just use Caller's Companion function to create the set and cut and paste all the instructions into a document and email it to whoever the bandleader was.

Mary Wesley What is your interaction with the band? Sounds like there's a pre-planning phase.

Chris Page There's a pre-planning phase. Other than that, it was mostly, "We're going to start now" and three times out and one time out. Once in a while for occasional bands, there might be a speed up, slow down and of course, the "We're dying out here, kill it!" kind of thing. Most of the other interactions...they did the tune choosing.

Mary Wesley Would you have any kind of input or descriptions to give them or would it be familiar bands that you knew them, they knew, you.

Chris Page Know, your bands and knew them. Yeah, I'm not really good...part of this [is] maybe that I'm not practiced with like..."This could be a dreamy or whatever kind of mood thing." Plus it's local bands, so they just tended to play it straight ahead. Their

variances might be one instrument drop out kind of thing. So it was more like, what did the tune suggest as far as balances or that kind of stuff or "We'd like to play this tune" kind of thing.

Mary Wesley I think everybody's approach is different. And there is, you know, this simple fact, I mean, you pointed out the difference with with contras versus English, that there is that formulaic aspect of contra dancing that, if the band is playing a 32 bar tune you can contra dance to it.

Chris Page Yeah and it'll be an interesting experience and you can certainly create ones that are bad. But usually you can even if it's a square peg, you can jam it into the hexagonal hole. I'm not really good with music knowledge, understanding. I mean, people would point out to me the technical differences between a reel and a jig, and if they're really pointing out at the time I can hear it, but I actually can't tell if the band is playing a reel or jig or a march.

Mary Wesley And I mean, everybody has their different areas of resonance and expertise. I'm holding off going super deep into choreography just to talk a little bit more about calling in general but I definitely want to go there.

Chris Page Your funeral.

Mary Wesley Ha ha ha. So you mentioned that often when you're prepping an evening you're also thinking about what dances you want to test out. I should also just acknowledge that, of course, we're in this odd time where dancing hasn't really been happening for over two years and it's just barely starting up. So I know it's kind of odd to talk about it, time is weird.

Chris Page I'm understanding this weirdness. Because if it was happening, or as it was happening right back in 2019, as if that were current present time.

Mary Wesley Right. Okay, great. So I'm just wondering what is the relationship between calling and writing dances for you? Do you call mainly to learn more about how your choreography is writing? Do you enjoy calling in and of itself?

Chris Page I enjoy calling it for itself. I mean, for English country, for instance, I've written maybe four or five dances and they've all been for special events. So I really like the calling. The idea of helping people to do something really cool, being present. I have a certain amount of innate teacher background. I haven't been a formal teacher, but very much the teacher mindset of encouraging people to do stuff. So it's fun to help friends and community do this cool thing and be there up in the microphone and talking and getting to be a big mouth kind of thing without being annoying...but just helping participate and also just my ideas for what might work and what might not, for programming. What about dances looks good and what doesn't. Because I can do that as an individual dancer feeling it [a particular dance sequence], but seeing the whole line, where is it breaking down [in the choreography]? Are the ends [of the sets] just

mosh pits? So I do enjoy calling. It's not just to test the dances out, though, I certainly abuse that privilege.

Mary Wesley Well, I think, we're grateful to you and to the San Diego community and to your other participants who have created a lot of great material that is out in the world for many to enjoy.

Chris Page Because you only get to see the better stuff, they had to see all the stuff.

Mary Wesley Right. Have you gotten into touring or traveling a little bit?

Chris Page Not really. We're speaking pre-COVID. It's hard to figure out really how to get into that scene. I would sometimes call up in Los Angeles, two hours away, and once in a great while, Santa Barbara, which was three and a half hours away without traffic so that was four or five hours. Beyond that, it's been very rare. Occasional guest slot at NEFFA, one of four callers for contra weekend back in 2010. Occasionally calling when I'm visiting family in New Jersey but it's been a rare thing. Ideally it's something I'd like to do some of, but being a touring caller seems exhausting.

Mary Wesley Yeah. Life on the road, definitely there's pluses and minuses. And when you've been in a community other than your home community has it altered anything for you as a caller? How is it stepping in front of like a brand new crowd or a less familiar crowd?

Chris Page The biggest thing is have to do a little more...I can't just look at who's there and figure out how choppy [the dancing will be] or how hard I can get for this program or where I can go with that. I have to do more subtle things like how many people are at the beginner session? How many regular dancers are at the beginner session giving them all the wrong instructions? How did they do with the first dance? And keep the first dance or two, of course, easier. Do "The Big Easy" or something like that or Simplicity Swing, see what happens and then there's, I guess, more programing flexibility.

Writing Dances

Mary Wesley Yeah, so writing dances; can you say anymore about why that drew you in so much?

Chris Page I like puzzles, I guess is one thing. And trying to create a dance is kind of a puzzle. And I also like creating stuff, so that's creating something new. And yes, I guess there is that aspect and also just very much the "What if" kind of thing. Trying to think not what just is contra dance currently, but what could it be given the crowd that's doing it and just imagining kind of stuff. And then there's also the nice thing if you puzzle together something and it actually works out and people either find it okay or in some

cases even like it. There's that nice thing too and eventually you get to see some of your stuff done elsewhere, which is really cool, by people you don't know.

Mary Wesley Absolutely. I think I first encountered your name on some of my dance cards before meeting you at probably some dances in California.

Chris Page Or Ralph Page, maybe.

Mary Wesley Oh, Ralph Page, of course.

Chris Page Yeah. I went three times, once in 2010. I'm going to guess that's.....

Mary Wesley Good call. Yeah, that is definitely a very favorite event of mine and many people, of course.

Chris Page The only downside is it's February in New Hampshire.

Mary Wesley Oh, my gosh. And it always feels like it is always the coldest weekend of the year and like the snowiest, always, always has some like epic weather element.

Chris Page But yes, it's a very good time there. Yeah.

Mary Wesley Where does your interest lie with understanding the historic arc of dance choreography?

Chris Page Well, I got into it because I was collecting contra dances...well, I started with YouTube. I started watching contra dance videos and it got annoying to keep track of it once it got above 70 so I started labeling contra dances.

Mary Wesley You mean in the comments?

Chris Page In the comments, yeah.

Mary Wesley Yes. This is the other place I would run across Chris Page's name is when I would be Googling dances and somebody has identified what dance this is. And then you realize, wait, I think it's the same person across many videos.

Chris Page It's like 10,000.

Mary Wesley It's amazing.

Chris Page Yeah, there was a dump done of all my comments and at that point it was like 8000 or so. And there were a number that I could identify right off the bat or it had the smell of a Cary Ravitz dance so I'd search on his page for the figure. And I figured it would be easier. I'd just gotten Caller's Companion from Will Loving for my own collection so I would no longer have to haul around 700 4x6 cards all through NEFFA.

And I decided why not do a version that has a lot of the online and book dances to make it easier to identify them? Then that got out of control and I just looked for more and more stuff to add and was just interested to see what other dances were out there.

Mary Wesley So you have not only sort of a choreography spark but like a cataloging....

Chris Page Yeah, very much librarian-esque.

Mary Wesley So at first, was it just part of your exploring and finding out what's out there to be sort of combing through these different records, YouTube?

Chris Page For that, it was for myself, it was also just to look at each individual dance and say "use" or "not use" and add a comment field saying why I wouldn't want to use this or "hey, this is cool, maybe I should use this kind of thing."

Mary Wesley I see. So part of this you are serving and building your collection?

Chris Page Yes, partly, though, before this, back in 2006 when I was writing, I went through every dance on the Internet already. But this was more looking into them more in depth and by 2010 when I started this, there were more dances on the Internet too.

Mary Wesley Wow. And you kind of described it but I like hearing the different phases of your cataloging. So initially, were you just keeping your own records in like a spreadsheet or something or how did you keep track of what dances you'd looked at besides notating them on YouTube itself? Did you have your own system or...

Chris Page Basically, I just remembered which books I'd looked through and I just went through the websites in alphabetical order.

Mary Wesley Amazing. And then you kept track of them somewhere, or you just remembered all of that?

Chris Page Well I kept track of the ones I liked, until I went to Callers Companion with listing all the dances. I just wrote down the ones I liked and had, like, a stack of 200 or 300 cards of "I should call that at some point." So yeah, I was very much collecting. When I called dances, I generally called dances that I had not danced, which is unusual and kind of not recommended. But I think I did decently just because at that time, I had a fairly good idea of what made a good dance just from writing some of them.

Mary Wesley I mean, I also feel like that's another advantage of working with a kind of local scene is you build a relationship with your dancers, with your local crew and gain some trust. I would imagine that there is a lot of trust.

Chris Page Yeah, there was some trust there because some of the stuff turned out really well and if something wasn't working, really wasn't working well, I'd kill it and then do something easier next.

Mary Wesley Right. You'd take care of the dancers through that...

Chris Page Yeah I never blamed the dancers for messing up the dance. Sometimes I try it with a stronger crowd, but an advantage of dealing with actual dancers is that tends to select against the very finicky dances that have problematic transitions unless the dancers are really on the ball. And those are less useful contras.

Mary Wesley I'm sure over time, too people came to understand that you're in a process that this was a large part of who you are as a caller, as someone who's kind of constantly surveying and collecting and then figuring out how that broadens what you can offer people.

Chris Page Maybe. They certainly knew about the writing part, I don't think they knew about the collecting part.

Mary Wesley I think I'm like a fellow...I have an urge to to collect and catalog so that just sparks for me immediately. Okay. And so you started with cards...sounds like stacks! How did you keep them? Did you have like a filing cabinet?

Chris Page No. I got from Staples a large...I started with these little things that could hold 50-100 cards and I kind of blew past that and got a large individual thing and then it started breaking. So a friend, Lori Weiss, got a Craftsman tool bag to stick the whole thing in and with that and duct tape kind of held together.

Mary Wesley Wow. Chris is holding up his well loved box.

Chris Page Box with lots of duct tape on it. Unfortunately the screen is fuzzy, but...

Mary Wesley It's not small.

Chris Page No, I refer to it as a "brick" for a reason, but it's more like a cinder block. It's got about 700 4x6 note cards and maybe 20 or 30 dividers and I still use that for local dances. It's just if I'm going somewhere, I leave that at home. It's just an extra 12 pounds of luggage weight that...

Mary Wesley Yeah. That's something to consider when packing for sure. I'm curious what your dividers are, how do you organize your cards?

Chris Page Okay, dividers. Let's see, there's a divider of dances to call that I haven't called yet. There's a large divider of contra dances of other people. There's a divider of contra dances of mine and there's a number of things of unusual dances. Triplets, called squares, uncalled squares, three facing three, slip jigs, grid squares, small set dances, dances without a partner swing, other circle mixers, scatter mixers, triple minors. Those are all small categories at the end. But the big categories are uncalled, called and called that I've written.

Mary Wesley And then within...because I mean that category of dances written by you is pretty big at this point I'd imagine. Do you have any subdivisions?

Chris Page They're alphabetical order and then the dances of other people, I think, are also in alphabetical order by title, if I've called them, and by author if I haven't and I have no idea why I did it that way.

Mary Wesley I know, isn't that funny, however, you kind of first started and implemented a system It just kind of grows around that.

Chris Page But as far as finding dances, I used to have individual note cards that said like all the dances that circle left, or all the dance with a full hey or that kind of stuff. And now I can just search on Caller's Companion, like I'll search for dances I've marked as "easy with a neighbor swing" kind of thing or dances that are intermediate that I'd give a high rating to that don't end with chain, star-left.

Mary Wesley Was that a big move when Caller's Companion came along?

Chris Page Not really. Mostly it gave me security that if I lost my box, I wouldn't lose the collection.

Mary Wesley Yeah, good backup.

Chris Page So mostly that was for backup purposes.

Mary Wesley Well, in this vast surveying of thousands and thousands of dances that are out there is there any wisdom you can share? What have you learned about, in particular, dance choreography?

Chris Page First of all, anybody can write them, so you've got no guarantee the dance will progress.

Mary Wesley Well, right, something to check.

Chris Page Yeah, something to check. And different people have different sensibilities or motifs that they go through. For instance, Cary Ravitz's first will be notated very precisely but you'll often get his thing of like having the partner swing after the neighbor swing leads to interesting contortions of his dances. And he often goes through phases, like there's a phase where he wrote dances, where one partner goes to a different minor set, you do the whole dance and then you get reunited or stuff like that. Bob Isaacs often ends with a ladies chain/star left. He has very interesting choices for like going to [progressing to] new dances with hey, like very much worrying about should you want to start passing by the left or by the right. They're [Bob's dances] more minimalist. So you'll see different callers have different aspects or like Rick Mohr, since he doesn't do swing, gents allemand left once-and-half swing and avoids swing/circle left/swing. It gets some

very interesting dances where it's half a dance leads up to neighbor swing and half a dance leads up to a partner swing and they're both very interesting dances, but they're hard to find.

You also find interesting communities where you say, okay, these dancers are all dancing this particular kind of thing, because this is what the caller does. Very simple dances in one case, another case there's a caller who has an odd mixture of Ralph Page dances and a 1980s modern Western Square sensibilities and she has it that that you have eight slots for a move but let the dancers work out the timing so circle left once and pass through in one dance may be allotted the same timing of a circle left a quarter pass through.

Mary Wesley Huh, so just the dancers take their time?

Chris Page I presume so, yeah. The dancers have learned to adapt to their time. You see interesting ones in some of the British ones. There's no problem with not having a partner swing and there's assumed to be more room in the center of the set so you're more likely to run across a courtesy turn in the center of the set.

Mary Wesley So when you go to something like the Ralph Page Dance Legacy weekend, where there's a greater focus on really kind of like the roots of the New England style of contra dancing and the whole point of that weekend is kind of to maintain some connection to and sort of elevate some of those foundational dances and callers and choreography. When you're there, are you just kind of enjoying being in that space with that focus or do you carry any of that historic knowledge into writing new dances?

Chris Page Well there's two groups. There's the traditional dances they're doing that were written before 1900 and there's the dances from the 1930s to roughly the 1980s. I sometimes think about the traditional ones because those are interesting. The thirties to the eighties, most of the stuff has either become a core thing like I.O.C.A. Reel by Al Smith where that was the big thing of you swing your neighbor on the side instead of finishing where you started, you finished progressed with gent on the left, lady on the right, and that was a big new idea but everyone does that now. Then there's some stuff that's interesting, but I don't see that getting carried over. Like Monadnock Reel has you allemande left your neighbor below and then ones swing in the middle. The issue is that one side is going to have to turn halfway more than the other. So you've got asymmetric speeds or you've got one person waiting for the other. And stuff like that I don't see a good way of working in as contra dance currently exists, and I don't know if there's really a need for that. Part of the interest of those dances, the periods...they were simple dances and there weren't many written. So they were the ones that got done and people did them over and over, so they were able to smooth out any rough edges. Now we don't have a problem with up the hall in a line of four, bend the line, circle left, even though half the people are going in the wrong direction going into that circle left. And they tend to be easier dances, which is good. But then there's not as much of a space

for creating new, really easy dances because many of them have been created or they're just slight permutations on the existing stuff.

Mary Wesley Yeah. How do you deal with that? Because I'll just say that I've never written a dance. I think back when I was first learning to call, I maybe experimented with like one, I can't even remember it. It's just for whatever reason, it's not a piece of this scene that I think I'm called to or have a talent for. Which is why I'm super grateful for the people who do keep creating new material as well as just the many, many existing dances. But how do you... So when I think about contra dancing, it seems mostly like we have a somewhat fixed vocabulary of moves and then we have this container that we fit them into, which is generally the 32-bar fiddle tune. Is that ever limiting or are those constraints just kind of exciting because you are challenged to find new ways to combine those elements?

Chris Page The constraints make it easier, really. I mean, I gotta slap in a partner swing somewhere, I gotta slap in a neighbor swing somewhere. So basically I think of the cool figure, figure out how to get out of the swings and into the swings and I'm done. So yeah, I think it just makes my life easier. And while swinging isn't a constraint necessarily, it is a constraint based on the group of dancers we've acquired. Basically the contra dances we do sort of map [in the mathematical sense of 'map'] on the contra dancers we've acquired so you can get [create] something slightly outside of what they're expecting. But we've really had so many years of being, "the swing is cool," and it is cool, at least for me. There are dancers for who it isn't, especially those that it hurts. And the other thing is you can try writing outside of the constraints, other formations. There are other musics, the occasional band that wants to do something else, an extra long tune. There was a while where one of the San Diego bands liked playing a slip jig set. So I had fun writing like a dozen slip jigs, including a triple minor slip jig contra. Occasionally I've got a challenge, like once there was one musician asked about double length tune, a little more than double length, and "What can you write for it?" And that was an exercise in piece count, just not having too many different figures. So that can be interesting looking outside the boundaries and sometimes you look outside the boundaries or even writing English Country dance, you think that's a cool transition I could then throw in a contra dance and that's how my pousette/swing dances wound up. Like "A Sure Thing" and that kind of thing. I was originally trying to put pousettes into a slip jig. And there's very little time in a slip jig, you've only got 48 beats. So I had to either transition from a swing to a pousette or a pousette to a swing and that's where I got the pousette/swing transition by necessity of cramming it into this smaller package.

Mary Wesley Nice. Is that transition something that...is that yours?

Chris Page As best I know. I came up with it without reading it from anyone else. I don't think anyone else came up with it independently. I'm not positive.

Mary Wesley Do you have other sequences or elements that as far as you know, are ones that you've originated?

Chris Page Probably. But once again, I don't know. I think square-through to long waves in Chinese New Year was original. I thought putting three ladies chain in a triple minor was unusual until I found out Dudley Laufman did it many decades ago.

Why dance choreography?

Mary Wesley I'm also curious whether that's important to you? Are you seeking to kind of break new ground in some ways or are you just having fun?

Chris Page I'm trying to break new ground because for me, breaking new ground is fun.

Mary Wesley Yeah. The thrill, the thrill of discovery.

Chris Page Exploring. I think also like doing a pull by on the side to a courtesy turn on the side might have been new, I'm not sure. Then there may be some more individual things. And I think circulating on a diagonal: a wave of four and you circulate to the other thing [next wave of four] was.

Mary Wesley Which dance is that?

Chris Page "24/7." It's one that I called once at an organized week and it went over well, but it's a hard dance and I wrote a simple version called Kitty Corner.

Mary Wesley I'm super interested in this idea of mapping the dances that you write to the dancers because I think that's a really interesting interplay for callers is you come in as as a leader, in certain ways you have a certain amount of authority to kind of shape the experience of the evening or even longer term of a local dance community and you bring to it your own kind of tastes and interests but then you're always in conversation with those dancers. And sometimes you talk to callers who have been doing this for decades and have really seen a shift in particular regarding choreography, the move away from dances that have inactive couples and things like that. So I wonder what your perspective is on that relationship between what dancers want and kind of what callers want or what they're trying to do.

Chris Page Yeah, that's part of, I think, the generational clash within contra, one of them. Another is Ladies/Gents versus Larks/Robins. One side wanting to do it how they've always done it. The, "I'm used to this, don't bother me," and the new one's wanting to do it their way. I think another, though this is more an older confrontation is the unequal, more traditional dances, the ones that they learned versus the "newer," though we're looking at '90s, more all equal, rotationally symmetric dances. There are certainly groups for which unequal dances would be better. Dancers that want to rest more, chat more, enjoy watching people more or it's what they're used to. You also like what you're used to and after you've been in contra awhile you get used to whatever it was liked when you came in. So you could certainly set up a community where you

started with those dances and people like them. But taking a community that likes the all moving all the time, two swings in every dance and inflicting the stuff like Rory O'More, where the twos do nothing except for all but eight beats or even worse, triple minors. That's not what they're expecting so that's going to go over poorly. That's not the group that would appreciate them. Since the dance is already being all swing all the time I've pre-selected for only those dancers. I think another thing, which some choreographers miss is that contra dance is very much choreography for the participant, it's unusual. Most dance forms are very much also for the observer and this is very much, it's not for the person outside at all. So all these elaborate patterns only mean something if it means something for somebody currently dancing it.

Mary Wesley Yeah, right. Which is why you have to consider the dancers. It's essentially for them.

Chris Page They'll only do what they already want to do or what they would have wanted to do, but they didn't quite know it.

Mary Wesley I just wanted to hear a little bit how you think about a good dance. Like what makes a dance good?

Chris Page What makes a good dance is something where the transitions all make sense. Oftentimes the transition is what you would expect due to dancing it over and over, like going from a chain to half a hey, that's a kind of an expected thing, or circle left into swing or do-si-do into a wave. Or it works well due to body momentum. The dance goes with expectations except maybe in the key interesting bit that you want to emphasize. And given all that, then it should be the simplest possible kind of approach to that. That's not completely true, because if you have a really complex main part, having a somewhat complex thing for the other bits are okay. An example would be a Bob Isaacs dance, "Vote with your Feet," which has Petronella into a grand left and right, which goes into a neighbor swing. In the second half of the dance he originally had circle left three quarters, do-si-do, balance and swing your partner. But for the dancers that could handle the grand left and right, that was a bit too simple. So he updated it to, chain, hey, balance and swing or something like that. I don't think that was quite it but he changed it to something that involved a hey that was fairly straightforward, but still had a little bit more to it. [It's actually gents allemande left 1 & 1/2, half hey].

And just checking to make sure that the B2/A1 transition is good and other things. So there's something distinctive or special about the dance that it does really well, that it's hopefully not overly clockwise, that [it] of course works for all roles, which now is more encouraging of dancers dancing both roles. You rarely get callers who have only danced one role and you can tell it from the dances they wrote. That was the syndrome back 20, 30 years [ago].

Mary Wesley So when you're writing a dance how do you do it? Are you visualizing yourself as a dancer?

Chris Page I'm picturing it in my head and putting it together in my head. For keeping track of stuff I need to know where I am, I need to know is my partner on my side or across for me? And as long as ones and twos are symmetric, you can figure out where your same role neighbor and opposite role neighbor are and if your partner is in another set, the shadow is in the same place your partner would be. So usually I just need to keep track of where I am and where the other person [partner] is. And if I'm using standard transitions, I know they work. I don't have to think through in detail is circle left three quarters, balance, California twirl good for everybody. People have done enough, it is. And I can think through the other transitions. Occasionally I'm wrong, it gets tested on the dance floor, but usually when I'm writing I think about it from both roles: gents/ladies, larks/robins. And often what I'll do is because I'm thinking in my head, I think, well, what if this, what if this, what if that and just try different things.

What if the swing was on the other side? How could I connect things up? And you're just trying to build out from a central piece and then sewing them together. Usually the last thing I do is progression, because it's often easy to add a progression. Like, you can always shift before a circle or slice instead of long lines, or there's a number of ways and sometimes you just get the progression naturally through the dance.

Mary Wesley And do you ever use any external aids? You know, salt and pepper shakers, Lisa Greenleaf has talked about diagramming dances or do you keep it all in your head?

Chris Page I mostly keep it in my head. Sometimes I will diagram, especially if I'm trying to understand an asymmetric dance where you leave your minor set like Cammy Kaynor's appropriately titled, "I Lost my Partner" kind of thing. And there I use what Lisa Greenleaf does, I use M and W for men and women M1, W1, M2, W2 and just track where they go through the whole thing. For four-facing-fours I inherited somehow a set of square dance checkers, which are eight little tiles you can maneuver around and show corner relationships when you line them up. Those are for modern Western Square dance. So yes, sometimes I'll break it out, but for contras it has to be unusual, partly just because I can go, "Okay, so it's like Brimmer and May Reel, got it," or something like that.

Mary Wesley And then of course, there's always the moment of truth where you have real dancers and you have to see how they match up to what's been going on in your head.

Chris Page Yeah, I do the dubious thing of calling it without working in a hands four on the side [before the dance]. I'm usually good enough. It usually doesn't blow up my face. There's two or three times where I've had to edit the dance, rewrite the dance on the floor.

Mary Wesley As you're teaching it.

Chris Page Yeah. Okay, instead of gents allemande left, once in half, we got to have ladies allemande right once and a half to get everybody on the right side. But that's thankfully been a very unusual thing. It's more likely to crash because of more subtle things that I didn't anticipate.

Mary Wesley Do you have a favorite or do you have any particular dances that you've written that you feel really happy about?

Chris Page Oh, a lot of them. I'd say Accretion Reel, which is a scatter mixture, I like a lot.

Mary Wesley Me, too.

Chris Page That was written after a dance I went to in Anaheim where every dance kept crashing over and over, partly because of caller's choice and partly because there were some really weak dancers on the floor and basically figured, "Well, what if I wrote a dance that did crash automatically every time through?"

Mary Wesley Exactly. Accretion Reel is a scatter mixer and there is a moment when everybody is just by themselves walking around the room. It's such a great dance. It's a great teaching dance, a great beginner dance to get people going.

Chris Page Another that I like was a TLC Tempest, which was my putting three ladies' chain in..my breaking [figuring it out] both, figuring out both triple minors and putting three ladies chain in a dance, that was one I was really happy with. And another was True Grit, which is basically just a glossary dance. But the first half is kind of symmetric with ladies allemande right once and a half, swing your partner, gents allemande left once and a half, swing your neighbor, long lines. And it does a cool transition: it's a star right into right and left through like from Rod's Grits. And then that goes into a star left. And then that opens up the ladies for the next ladies to allemande right. So it was just one I feel I was really lucky to find. There had been attempts around that area and even one close hit with Ken Gall's, Ally Oop's Special Day.

Mary Wesley Are new dances always kind of floating around in your head or bits of dances?

Chris Page Not as much. I think I've written a lot of what I want to say, but I've said that a couple of times before. I mean, certainly during the pandemic, writing a couple of those doublets was interesting, singlets and doublets was interesting. It's a different form with the two-person and the four-person dances.

Mary Wesley Yeah. So that's interesting. I haven't talked about that with anyone during the pandemic.

Chris Page This is the history...

Mary Wesley Right. So lots of different people found a lot of different creative ways to stay connected to contra dancing and experience some of that connection and movement over Zoom like, you know, everything went to Zoom and so people started writing dances that were specific to that setting. So that's a totally different, mapping a dance onto dancers who are at home, maybe by themselves, maybe with one other person, dancing with the screen. So yeah, that kind of gave you a whole new setting to think about choreography.

Chris Page Yeah, I was chatting with people who were calling these dances. I couldn't [call] just because I had such a poor internet connection at that time. But, you know, just dancing along with the music by myself and thinking what would feel good kind of thing. So that [choreographing] was very much a doing in the place and also just thinking, okay, well since I can imagine people who could do anything, why not one person or two people just doing a Grand Square like thing. And it was also, you could look at a different set of figures—for instance suddenly half figure eight no longer had the problem that, well, two people aren't moving. Well, those two people don't exist! Or contra corners, what if you're looking for your corner in the wrong place? So what?

Mary Wesley I was blown away, the creativity that came out of that moment. I didn't see it coming.

Chris Page I didn't either. Nobody did, or we would have been in our bunkers.

Mary Wesley Singlets, doublets. I'm curious to sort of see what happens down the line. Will there ever be like historic recreations of pandemic-era Zoom dances or will we want to forget it all?

Chris Page The other nice thing is you have some dances, they're so small here late in the evening you might only have two or four people at the beginning. So those are also useful to pull out for those situations. They're [singlets] mostly dead, not completely dead.

Mary Wesley Yeah. You know, put them in the back of the box, see what happens or the virtual box.

Chris Page Either that or go to a dance weekend where everybody's expecting contras and just call the singlet. Have a good escape path.

Mary Wesley Oh this is so fun, I'd love to hear a little bit more about what it was like, it sounded like you kind of had a mentorship role with Bob Isaacs and Jim Kitch, and I'm just curious...

Mentors

Chris Page Not so much Jim Kitch, but I watched what he did. He did workshop things, which was useful, but I didn't talk to him as much one on one. I was probably intimidated by him. I was intimidated by Bob but he came over and talked to me.

Chris Page You're talking about other mentors?

Mary Wesley Well, maybe hearing a little bit more about Bob.

Chris Page So Bob was interesting. First time we met I went to my first contra dance weekend, Victoria's Revenge, which is an hour and a half drive, like five months after I did [started] contra and we actually carpooled together. It's interesting. I was in with the Princeton group sharing whatever the equivalent of a B and B house was. That's where I first got to talk to him and we talked about what was cool and what wasn't and started talking. And I was, he probably does that to a number of people, but I was probably one of the few people that was interested in talking back to him about that.

Mary Wesley Because he also has...I mean I know Bob a little bit, but how would you introduce him? I mean, I just know that he's written thousands of dances.

Chris Page At least 1000 dances.

Mary Wesley He's just another one who's drawn to that process.

Chris Page Yeah. That's very much his thing, I think even more so than me I think. He'll often write like ten or 20 dances, select one or two of the best ones. He has well over a thousand dances. The book that he's been working on forever has like 300 of his best ones, and hopefully that will come out. But a lot of them are in circulation and they're really good. And he's also just a really good caller as far as understanding the crowd and getting the crowd going. He's also interested in different formations, different ones than I am but he's very much like the grid square, the progressive square, which is really cool. Four-face-four, well, we both do four-face-fours. His dances have one very interesting transition and the rest [of the choreography] is very minimalist around that, everything fits very nicely in it. He'll often explore a motif a lot more than I will. I'll write one or two and then get bored. So like with a vertical hey, where you're weaving on the side back and forth, he'll write a number of those and see which ones work the best. Or Petronella into a weave-the-line kind of thing. He'll explore things a lot more thoroughly than I will. He's cool to bounce stuff off of. We've actually occasionally written stuff together just driving or talking or that kind of stuff and early on I bounced a number of my ideas off of him.

Mary Wesley Have there been other significant mentors for you?

Chris Page There are a number of them in Philadelphia. For my first dance, I talked for an hour or two with Ridge Kennedy about how to call over the phone, that was my introduction to learning how to call. I hadn't taken a workshop or anything like that.

Mary Wesley Part of this is just sort of like general contra dance, oral history. I don't know Ridge Kennedy.

Chris Page Ridge Kennedy is a caller from New Jersey, he's more the traditionalist mindset. He actually started up the trad-I listserv on Yahoo and maintained that. Sam Rotenberg was a mentor that helped some with me focusing on learning easy dances and getting those down. Another big one was Donna Hunt of the Philadelphia/New Jersey area. I had already known her because she juggled. My original waltzing with her was a three count club passing pattern. That's the only thing I knew was a waltz at first. But I talked with her about a number of stuff: how to play an evening, ethical issues, feedback, that kind of stuff. I had a number of help from there. I had some help in San Diego, and also there was a really good caller of squares and contras who really understood the history in Los Angeles called James Hutson. He was also someone I really looked up to. And with English we were fortunate enough to get a caller from the Bay Area, Sharon Green.

Mary Wesley Nice. Well, we're at an odd moment but what's on your list for for the future? You know, hopes and wishes for writing dances, for calling?

Chris Page For calling, hoping that things would get to the point where I feel comfortable calling again. I moved up to Los Angeles five months before the pandemic started. So I just barely started to call dances here and then everything went ka-bloop. So I hope to get back to that, but I'm not as comfortable as some people are so this may be a year or so. Writing, we'll see. I may have written most of what I wanted to, on the other hand, I may get inspired more. There have been several times where I've said I've written most of what I want to and then I've written other stuff. Also probably writing some more in English Country, either researching tunes or knowing musicians who can create tunes kind of thing. I'm certainly always interested in stuff with Caller's Box with talking to people finding out what their dances are. Just did a big order from CDSS about books of American dances from the late 1700s, very early 1800s to figure out what the choreography really was like then.

Making a dance database

Mary Wesley That's really cool. Can you say more about Caller's Box?

Chris Page So, there'd been a [CDSS] survey of contra callers and basically their biggest need was a contra dance database. I was with one or two groups where there were large groups trying [to create a database] and it kind of broke down and then Michael Dyck contacted me because we contacted some before when I was getting impatient with his indexing and just asked, can I go ahead and index these Ralph Page syllabi for you? He knew that I had a large database and asked "Are you willing to try and do something with it?" He's handled the front end and helping me turn the database

into something with regularized terminology. Just like breaking down, here's a file with every single line, every single dance organized by how often it appears. And what should we do about inconsistency of comma versus semicolon, that kind of thing. So we did that for like three years, I think, 10,000 dances, and then put it online. And other people have been very nice to contribute the permissions for their dances. I've tracked down some, trying to track down others and add other dance sources, and that's an ongoing thing but it's been very interesting.

Mary Wesley That's really cool. I just like did a quick Google to remind myself. I'm like, oh yeah, I've definitely seen this and used this. I also haven't thought about it in a couple years. So, you know, I'm also sort of slowly getting back into it. So I'd forgotten that this existed. I definitely remember that survey and people wishing for something like this. I think I don't know that I realized it had come so far. So this is you building on Michael Dyck's indexing work?

Chris Page Yeah.

Mary Wesley And bringing it together with some of your work.

Chris Page Yes, because he hadn't recorded instructions for dances. So he had some sort of personal thing [spreadsheet], but they hadn't been well organized. And so I do the entry and finding other sources for dances, often going into the obscure. I went through Northeast Square Dancer magazine...had a column by Herbie Gaudreau, who did Becket Reel, and he wrote a hundred other dances. And just transcribing those in and actually figuring out how they worked [was challenging] because it's notated very differently. Just poking into all sorts of odd corners and also just emailing people and getting emails from people, "Hey, could you include these dances," getting collections that way. Luke Donforth just gave me his version of Callers Companion and said put them all in.

Mary Wesley Yep, another amazing mind for dance choreography and trying things that haven't been done yet and seeing how they work.

Chris Page I picked up some good dances from that too.

Mary Wesley How wonderful. What an amazing resource. I'm excited to share that. This is the kind of thing where I think callers play a particular role whether they're as deeply involved as you are in terms of kind of being memory keepers. What is it about the caller role do you think that lends itself to being a keeper of sorts of community memory and like the form of contra dancing?

Chris Page Because since you're one of the organizers, you care more, I guess? If you're not a caller, you're not really exposed to details of contra dance sequences. So you wouldn't get the exposure to find out whether you're obsessed. There are exceptions, like Al Olsen is an exception and Gene Hubert was almost an exception, he didn't call much.

Mary Wesley He just wrote.

Chris Page He mostly wrote, is my understanding. I know Al Olson was not a caller.

Mary Wesley But wrote a bunch.

Chris Page Wrote hundreds. He had Larry Jennings to convince other callers to call his stuff. Or maybe he didn't...I don't know which.

Mary Wesley Right. Well, you're the first sort of caller/choreographer that I've talked to. I'm just getting started with this project. But I'm just starting to envision exploring this corner more. You've given me lots of great fodder and things to think about.

Mary Wesley Has your interest ever waned or have you ever felt like you're...

Chris Page I was feeling a little burned out with contra towards the end in San Diego because it was getting to be about 20 dancers. And in every hands-four we'd have like four or five that were perpetual beginners to the point of not being able to end a swing on the correct side and do a swing on the side of the set. So that got very exhausting to put out energy for that. Now, I have had a nice rest period, thank you COVID.

Mary Wesley Maybe come back brand new and fresh when the time is right.

Chris Page Yes. But that's the only time I can think of. Thankfully, I haven't done huge amounts on the road so I haven't had to deal with burn out there.

Closing

Mary Wesley You haven't gotten that, yeah. Well I have three questions that I have been closing these interviews with and one we've actually already talked about extensively, which is to hear about your dance filing system. I'm just enjoying all of the different ways that callers keep records. Are you also a caller who keeps a record of your programs called?

Chris Page Yes. I'm even more obsessive about that. You can find them on my website actually, if you look at the schedule you can find except for the two dances I did in 2003 you can find over on the left programs for every dance I've called. Those are mostly for me, but if anybody else wants to look at it. And including noting occasionally I did a fun program like I did one was the history of contra dance, starting with Jefferson's Reel and ending up with some modern [dance] Bicoastal Contra.

Mary Wesley Nice, yeah. And then another closing question is, do you have any pre- or post- gig rituals like anything that you do to kind of get ready and then wind down?

Chris Page Not much. Pre-gig one thing I do is on the drive over, I usually play contra music and just go through the whole program, just do the calls for each dance. Because I've memorized a lot of dances and I can usually memorize a program beforehand so that I only need the cards for reminders or something. So just going through that as a medley kind of thing. Other than that pre-...just really the standard things, doing the beginner session, opening up the card box, getting a glass of water, fighting for a place on stage if there is a stage. In San Diego there wasn't. At the end of a dance, go home, collapse.

Mary Wesley Nice. And lastly, do you identify as an introvert or an extrovert?

Chris Page Introvert. The reason why I can do calling is because I have a purpose behind the microphone. There's a reason why I'm up there. And I got used to addressing crowds back when I had Boy Scouts. I was senior patrol leader for two years. And I had to outtalk 20 rambunctious kids without a microphone and talk about whatever, so there I got over public speaking. So I'm a shy person, with one exception is public speaking is not a problem. It doesn't make me nervous, for instance, to call at NEFFA where you've got however many 11,12 lines.

Chris Page But no, otherwise, I'm very much an introvert.

Mary Wesley So far in my list it seems like more callers are introverted than extroverted. I often hear something like that. It sort of gives you a defined way to be in a group.

Chris Page Unlike being at a cocktail party and having to do random conversation with random people.

Mary Wesley Yeah, so hard. I also am hardcore introvert so and it is also why interviewing feels like an easier way for me to be with people, too. It's nice to have a little structure. Well, thank you so much, Chris. Any last lingering things? I'm feeling like we've covered a lot of ground.

Chris Page There is one one bit of ground to cover. I think the fact that contra dancing doesn't have a ruling body to decide things like formats or what dances are done or what to call things is a good thing. Because I've seen what happened to modern Western Square where they're so codified in a particular box, it can no longer get out of it. I mean, one time they tried changing the numbers, the order of the various figures they taught for the basic program by the number and got complaints from callers who had organized all their boxes by the numbers in front of them: "Don't you dare change that it will mess me up forever." So I think having a more loose structure is good. And as far as the larks/robins thing, I think that each generation has to take ownership of it [contra dance]. If you want the new generation, you have to give them ownership of the thing and this is something that's important to them. I also don't think it's going to hurt anything. It's not going to damage contra dancing in the same way. I mean, something

that would damage [contra] would be having advanced dances only that would be a way to damage contra dancing. But it's not going to hurt contra dancing, I think some contra dances that have unusual end effects will fade more; will get used less because of which side [of the set] you're on. But if we lose some of the complex dances, that's probably all for the better, speaking as someone who's written a lot.

Mary Wesley Quite a few.

Chris Page Even if half of them go away, that still leaves half and that's almost three digits worth, you know.

Mary Wesley I think that's a really good point about taking ownership and the decentralized nature of this tradition. It's challenging, but it's also so interesting, like the many different pathways that there are for things to continue and to grow and change.

Chris Page And some things happen just through folk process because it's more useful. Most people use neighbor rather than corner.

Mary Wesley Right.

Chris Page "Chain" rather than "half chain."

Mary Wesley As you were kind of finding your place in the dance scene, did you ever feel any moments of tension or feel like you were at a moment where you were kind of making it your own? And were you experiencing any generational, intergenerational tension?

Chris Page The role name things weren't really hitting much in Los Angeles and San Diego. Los Angeles, one group of younger dancers had just created their own dance where they did it. The gypsy terminology versus whatever you replace it with has caused some conflict with the "Why don't you call it what I've always known it to be" but it has not caused serious conflict. No matter what decision you make, you'll have people unhappy. I mean, people that are unhappy that it got changed from raven to robin, for instance, because "I just got used to that way before." But there haven't been any serious breaks.

Mary Wesley Yeah. Those are great reflections to end on and it's been great to just get to know you a little bit more. It's certainly the longest we've ever gotten to chat, so I really appreciate it.

Chris Page Hopefully some time when we're both in the same region again we'll chat again.

Mary Wesley Yeah, both on the same dance floor even! Well, thanks so much.

A big thanks to Chris for talking with me. Check out the show notes at podcasts.cdss.org to learn more about his calling and dance writing! You'll also find a link to the Caller's Box, which is well worth a visit.

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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.