

From the Mic Episode 10 - Chrissy Fowler

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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.

Chrissy Intro

Mary Hello From The Mic listeners! I hope you're somewhere warm and cozy today - somewhere like Chrissy Fowler's living room in Belfast, Maine, which is where I recorded this interview.

Chrissy Fowler grew up in the shadow of Maine's highest mountain, Katahdin and as an adult settled in Belfast. In 2005, she co-founded a local dance series which has evolved into a thriving participatory arts nonprofit - [Belfast Flying Shoes](#) or BFS. This fall I was in town to call the first indoor BFS dance since 2020 and it was SO FUN. I went to visit Chrissy the day after the dance.

Chrissy describes herself as an organizer, leader, dancer and cheerleader. In addition to BFS events Chrissy has been a big part of [Puttin' On the Dance](#), a conference for Northeast dance organizers (we actually first met as co-organizers of the FIRST Puttin' on the Dance conference in 2011!) Besides acting as Director of BFS, Chrissy [leads dances](#) at other dance series, schools, weddings, camps, conferences, reunions, and more. She has danced in several states, including suspension and euphoria. Since 2008, she's been cheering on her son, with whom she has danced Maine's unofficial state contra—the Lady of the Lake. Chrissy once wrote a sermon on dance as spiritual practice, and her favorite dance to call is whatever is working well for the folks she's leading in the moment. If she had to choose just one, the circle mixer version of Heel & Toe Polka would be at the top of the list.

We covered a lot in our conversation, beginning with Chrissy's early days discovering the rich traditional dance scene around the New Hampshire seacoast and her home state of Maine. We followed the trail of her widespread and inspired efforts to bring the joy of dance to as many people, in as many settings as possible. More than anyone I know, Chrissy has also tied her work as a caller and organizer to her family's livelihood. She's been self-employed since 2008 and by the time 2020 rolled around, she was earning most of her income through dance leadership of one form or another. As she saw gig after gig canceled, her emotions took a deep dive. As we settled in for our conversation, still aglow from the return of the first indoor BFS dance, she expressed deep gratitude for the pandemic unemployment benefits that were extended to self-employed persons during the

early pandemic. This safety net helped her single-parent family of two get through that incredibly challenging year.

I'm so eager to share our conversation with you! Let's dive in.

[*musical transition*]

Mary Hi, Chrissy!

Chrissy Hi, Mary! I'm so excited you're here.

Speaker 1**Mary** I'm so excited because I'm like, here, I'm in your living room.

Chrissy We're looking at each other! We could touch if we wanted to, we're so close.

Mary Because I drove over from Burlington to Belfast last night to call the first Flying Shoes...

Chrissy ...indoor dance in 32 months. Whoa. Yeah, it was epic. I can't believe...As I said, I was thinking, who could do this dance? Oh, I'm really glad it worked out that you called.

Mary I was so happy to be there. So happy to be there, and that we could arrange to do an interview for From the Mic.

Chrissy Yeah, one of my favorite podcasts.

Mary I'm super, super honored that you're a regular listener and you've been on my list to talk to as I'm talking to callers across the country about this thing that we do, North American social dance calling. There's so many, so many different approaches. When I first got to Belfast last night and I parked and I got out of my car and I heard your voice calling out to the sounds of the Flying Shoes All Comers Band and it really made me happy. And yeah, I'm so excited to hear your backstory and to hear how you think about doing this work.

Chrissy Awesome. I'm excited to talk with you. And I will say it was a really happy moment for all of us last night. Nice little stream of positive things.

Mary Absolutely.

Chrissy So, where do you want to start?

Mary Let's start at the very beginning.

Chrissy It's a very nice place to start.

Beginnings

Mary Tell me about your way into this world of social dance and music. How did you start dancing yourself?

Chrissy Well, I've been thinking about it, actually, and I think I realized I have a certain trajectory. I started in college. I had good friends who were really into Irish music and I quite enjoyed it and went to Ireland to visit and to go to some sessions. I lived in London a little bit after college in a part of London called "County Kilburn", loved hearing music sessions, went to some ceilidhs, had a great time there. And when I got back, I started getting introduced to contra dancing. And I'll just take a step back and say that when I was in college, my cousin George Fowler, who lived in Brooklin, Maine, on the coast near Blue Hill and played in a dance band in Blue Hill, knew that I loved Irish music, as did he. And he said, "Gosh, if you like this music, you should really come check out this thing that we do on the first Saturday in Blue Hill." And down I went one weekend, must have been in the summer, and went to a dance and thought, "Oh, that's really fun and what a neat thing they do here in Blue Hill." And didn't give it much more thought. And then, as I said, went to England, lived there, did some ceilidh stuff, came back, had an epiphany there that I wanted to be an educator and get my education degree.

Went to UNH, the University of New Hampshire in Durham, which is on the seacoast. When I was in the seacoast, I started connecting up with that New Hampshire seacoast scene, which was Peter Yarensky and Claire Mattin at the time, calling for the Lamprey River Band, which was sort of like an all comers band, really. There were a core bunch of musicians, but they always welcomed sit-ins and they had a Thursday night dance, first Thursday of the month, and they welcomed people sitting in to play, but they also welcomed callers to sit in and do a calling thing...introduced me to that. And when I was doing my teaching internship in Deerfield, New Hampshire, it was the same town that Marianne Taylor lived in. And she is, and was an amazing mentor. If you knew Marianne, she had incredible posture, this huge smile, and she was definitely in charge, which I appreciate as a person. I like to do that. And so I went to this dance. I'd go teach and then we'd go to the dance in Deerfield. I think it was the first Saturday of the month that their dance was. But I really started dancing a lot in the New Hampshire seacoast, that was my beginning.

Mary I didn't know Marianne Taylor, although I hear her name invoked.

Chrissy Yeah, she's evocative and we would invoke her name to evoke a whole bunch of things because she was incredible. What a leader, a leader of so many kinds of dancing. And her daughter, Andy, if you know Andy at all, I mean, just amazing. So Marianne Taylor ran this dance in Deerfield and she played piano, and I would go with my teaching chums. And then also some of the families of the students that I had that were teaching... So it was the sort of dance that was a real community dance. There were a few people who were "contra dancers," but mostly it was the Deerfield community, people who just would come to that dance. At the same time, I was also dancing all around the seacoast at all these different dance venues, like venues that you had to watch out that you didn't dance too close to the wood burning stove that was in the middle of the dance hall. Crooked Stovepipe got played a lot. And these dances that the Lamprey River Band did at the Dover City Hall. I also got connected up with the Downeast Country Dance Festival and the Downeast Friends of the Folk Arts through the newsletter they had and going to that festival and realizing like, "Oh, people do this in lots of different ways." And around that same time, I don't remember exactly how, maybe I went to NEFFA first, or maybe I started going down to the Boston dances. It's all very foggy, once you're in middle age, things get a little gray. I could give you some sort of version of how it all came together but the basic gist is that I was living in the seacoast doing these dances with Peter Yarensky, who was greatly influenced by Dudley Laufman. One of his mentors is Dudley. I was dancing in

Boston, which was greatly influenced by people like Lisa Greenleaf, Sue Rosen, Linda Leslie, Larry Jennings, who was an organizer. Tod Whittemore was sort of like a second generation influence, I would say, because he had organized dances there. And so there was this whole rich culture of dancing, different sorts.

Mary Right. The Boston scene is much more zesty contras...

Chrissy Yeah, and there's so many more people that it's not about the community because there's thousands of people, hundreds of thousands. It's not about the local community. It's about the community of people who come together to do the dancing. So I was having these dance experiences...going to NEFFA, really loving that. And then I started to become an organizer. I had a housemate, Timm Triplett, who's the piano player in Swallowtail, and I lived in Newmarket with Timm in this beautiful house, beautiful house. We would have music parties and we had friends who loved dancing and we decided that we wanted to do a dance series in Dover, New Hampshire, in this gorgeous town hall—just incredible place to dance. And we wanted to have a variety of different bands, so, not a house band. We wanted to have a variety of callers. And so we founded this dance series. And really, first I loved the music, then I loved dancing, then I loved organizing. And then a few years after that, Peter Yarensky, again, major influence, said "We need more callers in the seacoast." I can't remember exactly how he put it, but it might have been something like "You like to tell people what to do, you have a loud voice, you can order people around." Like, that's the memory I have. I'm sure he didn't say that, he's much more polite, but the gist of it was, "I think that you could do it. So here's a dance: learn it and call it next week." In Kensington or Kingston, and, or maybe even Kittery. And that was kind of how it started. He would give me these, one little dance, that I should call a slot, I should choose a dance, and things evolved from there.

Mary Do you remember what you thought when he said that? What you felt?

Chrissy Oh, it was such an ego boost. It feels really great to be like, "Oh, you'd be good at this. I'm choosing you." Right?

Mary Totally.

Chrissy Oh, yeah, totally. And Peter Yarensky is such a sweet man and so quirky and delightful. And I really have to credit Peter for so many influences for me as a dancer. Because I lived in the seacoast, and because of his influences, I could do a triple minor with my eyes closed.

Influence of the Ralph Page Dance Legacy Weekend

Mary Right.

Chrissy I knew how to do Money Musk like the second year that I started dancing. I also went very early on in my dancing life to the Ralph Page Dance Legacy Weekend every year, and that is its own amazingly rich and deep culture. Marianne Taylor was on the committee for that. Peter was...a bunch of other people, lovely people, and also Patrick Stevens. Patrick Stevens lived in Portsmouth and was a dancer and also an organizer, big

influence. So early on, again in my organizing life, I was organizing this dance series, but I also joined the committee for the Ralph Page Dance Legacy Weekend, and that was hugely influential because in part I got connected up with people like David Millstone and David Smukler, who ended up being just big inspirations for me as well.

Mary Around what time was that?

Chrissy I moved to the New Hampshire seacoast, I think in 1991, and I started graduate school then, started dancing, so probably the times that I was going to the Ralph Page weekend were like the early 1990s, not long after it started.

Mary That's what I was wondering.

Chrissy Yes, very early on. Ted Sannella would call all the time, [and] George Hodgson, this really lovely, super lovely person. You know, they would have all these people come who were legendary, like Tony Parkes and Ted Sannella and Lisa Greenleaf, Linda Leslie, just luminaries in the dance world, but also people who had been calling for a really long time and who were deeply rooted in that tradition. Musicians, of course, like Bob McQuillen—he'd always be yelling and making jokes, and I just got to dance with a lot of great people, but also got to be inspired by the calling. So many people with so many skills and really inspiring.

Mary It sounds like you are having this whole, like, pastiche of different kinds of dance scenes, you know, community dance, like, the Boston scene. Then Ralph Page is interesting because it's like this legacy weekend. So it has this element of intentionally carrying on certain traditions. So, like, was your dance landscape like, did you see it as a whole? How did you fit together the different parts?

Chrissy Oh yeah, it was totally integrated. I mean, it's like being in a family. It felt like the Ralph Page weekend was like family reunion. You could go...I remember sitting in the archives at UNH, which are a great place if you're a caller or a musician or an organizer. Check those out. The New Hampshire Library of Traditional Music and Dance, I think, is what it is. It's in the basement of the Dimond Library at University of New Hampshire.

Mary I've spent some time in there.

Chrissy Yeah, I mean, it's such a gift. And so I just remember sitting around a table, and Roland Goodbody at the time was one of the archivists, and he pulled out all this stuff. All these photographs, and he was trying to identify them. And so I was sitting there kind of like the kid or the grandchild, and Marianne Taylor and somebody else were going like, "Oh, that's so-and-so, oh, that's so-and-so. That's about this time of year." It was totally like being at a family reunion. And a lot of the things that were valued, like listening to the music, great timing, caring for each other in the set. Like those were all super important, but they weren't irrelevant to the other dancing I was doing. It wasn't like it was disconnected from the local dance scene or when I would venture up to Maine to dance up in Maine, or festivals like Downeast Country Dance Festival and NEFFA. I went to NEFFA a lot, slept in my car in the parking lot. Oh, I miss my Mazda 626. So I think, you know, like being in a family, you have these different parts that you go to, but you're all one integrated whole. So it didn't feel like compartmentalizing I would say.

Growing as a caller

Mary All right. So, Peter got you up at the mic a little bit? Where did you go from there?

Chrissy Into a web of chaos. I've heard you talk about with other callers about their first experiences. A couple are pivotal. One, I did a dance for newcomers. I was trying to do chains with a group of newcomers. Maybe I even thought I would do a hey-for-four? What a mistake! But that's what happens when you're (a) young, (b) new at something, (c) a little bit, you know, arrogant, perhaps a little full of oneself. And so that was a total disaster. But, you know, we got through it. And then another moment was calling at the Kittery Grange and I had written down a dance wrong. So number one, it was probably the wrong dance to do with that crowd. I didn't know it very well, started calling it and it didn't progress but I wasn't able to look at the dancers and be like, "Oh, they're not progressing." I just kept doing it over and over again. And my sister was dancing and she came up and said, "That was the worst experience of my life."

Mary Because she was just in one...

Chrissy Yeah she just was in one thing, she never progressed and it was like a total...I just kept trying to do it for minutes upon minutes. I mean, yeah, it was a disaster. But I would say that I had further mentoring too. So I mentioned Lisa Greenleaf earlier as being somebody whose calling I admired and I was really fortunate to have some early on conversations and connections with her about leading dancing. At the time, the Boston dance scene, they had the Thursday night NEFFA series that had evolved from the Tod Whittemore series and that series had like, not an open mic night, but a night of multiple callers, like a multi-caller night and pretty early on, Lisa invited me to do that. I got to call at NEFFA with the festival orchestra or in the medley, just little slots and started calling around the seacoast a little bit too, in New Hampshire, southern Maine.

Mary Did it just feel like adding another piece to your toolbox, you're dancing, you're organizing...

Chrissy Yeah. I had this interesting conversation with Alden Robinson, who's a musician here in Maine, whom you might know. He plays in Riptide and Dance Panther and a couple other great dance bands, amazing fiddler. And I was saying, it's really interesting. I don't often think of myself as a "caller." Like in some ways I just sort of do all these other pieces that are connected up to this community of people who enjoy doing this thing. And so it was sort of like adding another outfit, maybe, you know, into the wardrobe of things that I was active and involved in as part of that community. I don't know if that makes sense, but yeah.

Mary I mean, it seems like you wanted to be able to pull together all the things that are necessary to make dancing happen.

Chrissy Yeah, and I think...just... What eventually evolved was that I really enjoyed doing dances for regular, zesty series, monthly dances and that sort of thing. But my real excitement, and I think it might stem from these early experiences and commitment to organizing, is doing community dances or dances for people who aren't really, "dancers." Like maybe they're in a wedding or a family reunion or at a summer camp, or they go to a yacht club and they want to do dancing as part of that integrated experience at the wedding, at the yacht club. Their summer experience being in Maine, boating, you know

the dancing is just one other aspect. But, I like organizing that experience. I like facilitating that experience for those people. Also in schools, I really love doing this kind of dancing in schools, a little bit as a vehicle for all these other great things that happen when we dance. You know, you're connecting, you're building community. You're doing things you don't expect. Maybe you're touching people and you don't usually get to do that. Maybe you're making eye contact and then you're just, like, raging with endorphins because you're moving to the music and all that stuff, right? So that's where I've evolved I think, as a caller, that's my jam.

Mary And it sounds like you are tying it to maybe those early dance experiences where there was that element of...there was already some cohesion and then dancing is the layer on top of it.

Chrissy Yeah, it's just like another thing that we do here in our community. My dear friend, my child's fairy godmother said one time, "This is just what we do here in Belfast." She and I and my brother and my now sister in law started the local dance series, Belfast Flying Shoes. I remember being at a meeting, and Phyllis, Theo's fairy godmother, said, "Yeah, this is just what we do in Belfast on a winter night. We come together and we dance." And I think that kind of sums it up.

Mary Well, yeah. And so it's nice that, I feel super honored that I got to be at this at this kind of a significant moment...

Chrissy Hugely significant, no "kind of" about it!

Mary ...in the arc of your dance series. So can you share a little more about how Flying Shoes came together? When did you start it?

Chrissy Yeah, David Millstone, he's the one there, I'll give him credit for that part. I lived in New Hampshire for a long time, loved my dancer community, loved calling.

Mary Where was that, Newmarket?

Chrissy Newmarket, New Hampshire, which is in the very tiny seacoast of New Hampshire, quite close to Durham, where UNH is, Portsmouth, that area. I lived there for many years, most of them at Timm Triplett's house. And then in 2003 things were sort of changing around and I thought, "Oh, I'm ready to move." I moved briefly to western Massachusetts. And, great dance community there, great agriculture community, I was doing some agriculture, did a little teaching, spent a year there, and then for various reasons thought about moving back to Maine, which is where I grew up. I remember having this conversation with David Millstone in his garden in Lebanon, New Hampshire, at the top of a beautiful hill. We harvested mint from their mint patch and then we went out to the garden and I was moaning in my little way about, "I don't even know if I should go to Maine, all my people will be gone, what will I do? I'll be so far away!" And he said, "Well, just do what Ted Sannella did and start your own thing when you're there." Because Ted Sannella retired from Boston to Maine near Whitefield, he retired to Wiscasset, which is not too far, started this incredible dance series in Whitefield with some musicians who are dear friends. And I said to him, "I am no Ted Sannella," which I'm not, but I'm Chrissy Fowler, and it was a little seed. I have to say, David Millstone, he's an incredible seed planter. He just tosses them out there and then he might throw a little compost on too, just to kind of get it going a little better.

Starting the Belfast Flying Shoes dance series

And yeah, so I came back up here to Maine, and my brother and his wife Annadene who had met dancing at the VFW, and they were living nearby and they both, especially Annadeene who loved contra dancing. And then we had another friend whose daughter went to college with my brother. She was a fiddler and a dancer, lived locally and had been involved a little bit in the dance scene here in greater Belfast as a musician and a dancer. We spent some time just thinking about this series that we would found here, and drew a bunch of elements from a lot of different people. Stole the name "All Comers band" from David Kaynor, the amazing David Kaynor, oh, what a person. But David's concept of having an All Comers band where everybody could be part of it, he did that a lot in the Montague Grange. And there had been a tradition of open bands here in Maine. There's always traditions of open bands. People forget that you know, people forget that there's like a tradition that you can sit on the stage and play, or that anybody can join.

Mary Right. Because it was not...it's a newer thing that there are contra dance bands.

Chrissy Yeah. But David Kaynor's All Comers band was a key element. And we wanted to have a really accessible dance that families could go to. And so we started with this two part thing with a community dance, not just families, but adults as well, who maybe wanted to go for an hour with music by an open All Comers band, and a couple of leaders facilitating. And at the time that was Phyllis and Tom, my brother. And then we hired visiting callers and musicians from throughout Maine, New England, and a little bit outside the country and had this contra dance. I think that the reasons it worked really well were a couple of things. One, and this was an influence for me early on as a caller, was the musicians that I got to connect with. Nat Hewitt and Larry Unger, I would not be a caller without the two of them. I don't know why they kind of took me under their wing in the way that they did, you know? Not really, neither of them is like an auntie, but they did a lot of gigs with me and they were such incredible musicians and taught me a lot about calling. Nat Hewitt would do things, like I would say, "Oh, I want this kind of tune and then la la la da da" and then they'd launch in and Nat would choose like, an entirely different thing, or he'd be playing Bei Mir Bist du Schoen for Galopede. I was like "What are you doing?"

But gosh, it really worked well. And so that was a huge lesson, like learning on the fly. Like, number one, the musicians are really the more important people in the room. I can try to pretend I'm in charge, but honestly, it's the musicians that make the dancers feel so amazing. And they were willing to come up and do this dance for a very tiny amount of money as a guarantee and just kind of started it off on the right foot. I think that the community dance helped really fill the need of people in the community to dance together all ages, especially. And the contra dance part fit the need of people to have, like, mind blowing music and calling from different places, but to have what one of our board members called...well, he called it a magic elixir. Like this little thing that we would want to bottle up. But he also talked about just the total sensory overload, which we experienced last night. Whoa. It's a loud room. But even at the Legion hall where we had our dances for many years, if you got 200 people in that room, not super committed to dancing perfectly, so a very chatty, very loud, a lot going on, lots of whooping and hollering it was like sensory overload and the sound. But one of our board members said, like, "When you're in that experience, it kind of sends you to a different place." It really charges you right up, you know? So for me as a caller to be able to sit on the stage and watch this stuff happening, I'd be like, "Wow this is amazing." Is, and was, very gratifying.

Mary Yeah. And to see it happening where you live.

Chrissy Oh yeah, with people you see in the street or you see it over in another place or they say, oh, I'm coming to the dance, like you run into them all the time. Yeah.

Mary Can you talk through the structure of a Flying Shoes dance for people who don't know?

Chrissy Sure. The first Friday series is pretty much now what it was initially. We began the series with a 6:30 to 7:30 community dance. We specifically called it "Community Dance" because we didn't want to make it feel like it was just for families. We wanted anybody to be able to come. And again, that open All Comers band was huge. Sometimes we'd have 30, 40 people playing in the band and that's a lot of people. It's a lot of people of all ages and all skill levels. Then after that hour of dancing, there'd be a little half hour break so that the musician and callers who were doing the contra dance could tune, do the soundcheck, get ready. And then the contra dance would be from 8:00 to about 11:00. We had initially, this is David Millstone's suggestion because in Denmark they always have food. He said, "You have to have food." So we had this "tasty treat potluck," sweet or savory and that went for a few years, couple three at least. And then it just became more and more challenging, there were more people. It wasn't really meeting our needs. It was not serving us and it was kind of a pain to clean up so we phased out of that.

Mary That's a lot of components.

Chrissy Oh, there were a lot of moving parts. That's kind of how I roll. I just try to do too many things. Yeah, it all came back last night. Oof! I actually called about half of the contra dances, which I think also was an interesting model because on the one hand, I was the host caller, I knew all my neighbors and friends. I knew the people, I knew from month to month who was showing up, what people needed, what kind of support. I knew how the floor slanted so that I had to adjust the sets, but it wasn't only me. We had other people coming in and calling, which was great for me because I could dance to those other people and be like, "Wow, they are so incredible!" Like-minded people who valued community but who had amazing chops and just great repertoire and skills and talent as leaders, not just callers, like not prompting, but like as leaders who were helping us become better people through dancing. I have such deep admiration for that. So I think having that mix was important for our local scene and we went merrily along until March 2020. Whew! Thank goodness we had that dance. I was a little bit pouty, like, "We're not going to cancel the dance. This is like, this is overblown." Well, what did I know? And I'm really glad we didn't cancel the dance, because it would have been... It was just a great evening.

[Clip of [Chrissy calling at the Belfast Flying Shoes Community Dance](#) in 2015 with music by the All Comers Band.]

The Maine way

Mary So, you have been describing a lot of these different parts, that your caller is sort of one one outfit, as you said. Is that...do you think that is a Maine thing?

Chrissy Well, it's one of those...is the word trope? I don't know what the word is, but that's one of those perspectives is that when we're here in Maine, you just have lots of different jobs. You do them all. You maybe you cut your own wood, maybe you grow your own food. Maybe in the winter you make wreaths, maybe in the summer you dig for worms. I mean, there's all these little pieces. And, like, that's kind of not a stereotype, but that's one image of people from Maine, is that they've got all these different parts that integrate. Maybe they're a musician and they're also a web developer. Maybe they're a teacher, but they're also a farmer, you know? You don't just have one thing and then a lot of leisure time.

Mary That's like, in Vermont we have "Moonlight in Vermont, or starve."

Chrissy Yes, exactly. So it's not really a Maine thing, but, yeah.

Mary Well, it's. No, I love how each state has their own...

Chrissy We claim it's all us but... It's a thing. It's just a thing people do.

Mary There's also the economy...

Chrissy It's just so many pieces, like you have to have all of it integrated. I think in some ways that's why I ended up doing the kind of calling that I do. Mostly it was partly the organizer piece, but it was also partly because I was a teacher. I love the power of dancing and singing and moving together in classrooms. I loved doing that sort of thing with my preschool students when I was teaching pre-K. I loved doing it with my fourth graders the two years that I taught in public school before I said, Oh, I don't think I can do it anymore." I grew up in a household full of educators. My parents were teachers, my grandparents were teachers. My grandfather was a superintendent, you know, aunts and uncles who were professors, lots of teachers. So that's why when I went to graduate school, it was a little bit of a like, "Wow, I didn't think I would do that." But I realized I'm so passionate about education, at the same time, I came in with a lot of baggage about the negative downsides of public education, in particular. I did it for two years in public school, but then really found my niche in early education, in early childhood, kindergarten and preschool. I loved doing education that was not necessarily in the public school classroom. So, I had a farm camp that I organized up, did it for a couple summers, had a like science enrichment, art enrichment that I did for a while as a freelancer, and then integrated things into the classroom. And so actually, I was teaching preschool here in Maine when I decided to become a single parent. So yippee. So I was really happy that all came together. But at that time I thought, wow, I really am excited to be a mom and I don't know if I want to have my child be in childcare. So I wonder how I could make that work because I can't teach and parent, you know, connect with my kid, the way I want to connect...and just evolved this career.

So I developed this kind of wild career path of being a dance leader and getting most of my income through dance leadership and part of that was doing school residency work. That probably stemmed from a local person who has a family foundation and had grant money and loved what we were doing with Belfast Flying Shoes. The fact that we were bringing together people from all these ages, that our contra dance was packed with young people, like teenagers and grade school kids and young adults, like a lot of young people. I just loved that and granted us some money, which we didn't really need. So we said, "Oh, well, let's start doing school residencies." And I think that might have been one of the early nudges—like the stone in the stream that kind of pushes it one other direction—was having that. And then the things that come to you, you know, once you make a decision to

pursue one little thing, then suddenly other people step in. So I was hearing about the New England Dancing Masters, like Andy Davis and Peter and Mary Alice Amidon and Mary Cay Brass, huge influences on me, like gigantic.

So I started having this career where I did dance residencies and I would do special dances like weddings or things for conferences. I mean, really just finding your way. It's like going through a maze and then it's like dark corners and you're like, "Oh, maybe I'll go that way and oh, okay, well, that was a little weird, but I look, I found this other place to go." And ended up doing dances every week in the summer at a family camp nearby here in Maine. They just wanted to have a barn dance and did that to recorded music. And again, was part of the integrated part of that community. We'd go and have supper. Theo would go, he was there. I've been doing it since I was pregnant, before I was pregnant, and so a long time, long connections with the people, year after year they go to the camp. They love the barn dance. Did a yacht club for many years, and again, same thing. Like the kids would grow up, they'd become teenagers. Then they're like teaching sailing to the kids and they name the boats after dances, like the "VA Reel" is one of the boats.

Mary Wow, what a nice integration.

Chrissy So, to be part of these traditions where, again, just like at Ralph Page, generations of people have been doing it. Yeah, kind of crazy.

Community Dance Calling

Mary Well, I love it. I feel like when I think about you, you just have this amazing way of getting people moving. And especially in those community dance settings where people might be walking in with no experience, there might be people of all ages, kids are doing their thing. How do you do it? When you go in there can you identify some of your foundational principles when you're going in? What, what can make that work well?

Chrissy Boy, that's a good question. I think maybe there's two parts of it, there's the skill part, there's the material or what somebody might call your "schtick," like things that you use, the language you use over and over again that's useful that you find is effective. But there's also the attitude part of, "I just think this is really fun and that everybody should be doing it." It's a little evangelical, like slightly evangelical in tone. I've been called on that before! And it's also why I do some of the calling that I do with Flying Shoes. Flying Shoes has been great for me, because it's like a vehicle for doing all this other stuff. So, our dance organization evolved pretty seamlessly into what's now a nonprofit and it's a participatory arts nonprofit, music and dancing, but in lots of different places. So, we have this monthly dance series, which is like the core program, but we've done all this other crazy stuff just because it's like, "Oh, well, that would be good to do." We talked earlier about adding things on and like complicating the mix. That's like my impulse. So I heard about Keith Murphy playing the part of Dudley Laufman in Larry Siegel's "Dancing Master" program. I was like "Well, I can't get to Vermont to see that, but hey, they'll come here, no problem!" And they did. They came to us and did it and that was a Flying Shoes program, right? We just wrote a grant for it. Or oh, these people are coming, well, let's do a workshop, let's have Genticorum do a music workshop, and then do a concert and we'll add on these special things.

So as an organizer, I like doing that, but then as a caller, I've also been able to build on that vehicle of Flying Shoes and to say, "Oh, well, where else do I want to lead this kind of thing? What else would be fun?" Schools, for sure. Pre-K: let's do a whole pre-K thing with outdoor classroom stuff that we can do music and dancing outside. Or how can I integrate with teachers at my son's school? Oh, great. I'll do this, I'll write a grant. Or I want to work with older adults. How could that work? Let's do some moving and dancing in an assisted living facility, great, so fun. And then I also got connected up with this local corrections facility. It's called the Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center and there's a restorative justice project locally that does a lot of restorative work versus punitive, in terms of getting to a place of justice or equity or harm reduction through restorative practices. They had this program at this reentry center, which was designed to help men, because they're all men, transition from being in prison to going back to their communities. So just in the months prior to their release, they go to this reentry center, which is still a corrections facility, but has sort of staged levels of privilege. And we started dancing at the reentry center and so we brought in community people, John Pranio and Toki Oshima, hugely influential musician friends, we are on the same page, and Bill Smith, who, he and his wife, Sarah Gregory Smith, who was a caller, they lived in Salem, Massachusetts, I think, dear friends of Davis Smukler and Laurel Sharp...

So all these things link up together, you know. Sarah would come and dance with us at the reentry center, and she's blind, so that was a whole level of stuff, because you'd have these guys at the reentry center who didn't know what to do but yet here's Sarah, who's pretty much "in charge", in this horribly resonant room so she can't echo-locate, and they're trying to help her, but they don't really want to, they're not sure how they can help her. And the whole scene was incredible. And a dear friend, Julia McDonald-Plumb, fiddler in Velocipede, had said multiple times, "This is my favorite dance ever. Like I would come here every single month." Because it was so joyful. Like these guys who would never in a million years step into the first Friday dance series of their own volition were dancing at the reentry center. But then when they also got at, expanded privileges, and could be out in the evening independently, they would come to our dance. It was crazy and so fun, just so fun.

Mary Well, it's I mean, it's like you said, you think this is really fun and you think everyone should be doing this.

Chrissy If they want to! They don't have to. But I think it has to be accessible to everybody. And I think that's one of the interesting conversations that we're having in the "traditional," our version of traditional, dance world, is like, what does it mean to be accessible and what does it mean that it's open to anybody who wants to come? And how does that happen?

Mary I think these acts of bringing dance into spaces and seeing if it can work, if it can be of service, is a big part of that.

Chrissy Oh, yeah, that's my thing. That is definitely my thing. That's the important piece to me, is having entry points, having access and entry points so that you can say, oh, I did this thing at a wedding and it was really fun and, oh, look, now they're doing it over there. Or I love going to family camp because every Wednesday we're going to do a barn dance. Or one of my favorite parts of going to Maine in the summertime is going to the yacht club dances. And that's just like a piece, like another seed, I guess maybe. It is a way for people to find this thing and to do it however they want, you know?

Staying Engaged

Mary Is any part of this proliferation of dance in your life, are you also keeping yourself interested? You know, because it's your social life, it's your community, it's your job. Is there any element of burnout or just wanting to keep it fresh a little bit? Because I feel like you have this essence that is fueling it, that this really is, like, super important to you. You have this strong belief and I see that fueling a lot, just on the practical side, is there also an element of needing to stay engaged because there's some repetition in this?

Chrissy Oh, for sure. I go through low periods. I think everybody does, right? You go through a low period and you think, "Oh, I'm so sick of that dance," or you're not really putting the work into it that you should, and maybe you're getting a little rote or you're just going through the motions maybe. I think that can happen at any kind of calling that you do, any kind of leader, any job, let's face it. I think, for me, one thing that re-energizes is just being there with people. The last few years without doing dancing, but just trying to do organizing work or trying to help things happen for other people, like to help music stuff happen, other people leading it. John Pranio did music lessons at the Reentry Center, we were figuring out how to do things for Flying Shoes. Those were hard times because we weren't getting together every month and being like, "Oh, this is a beautiful thing." As a group of organizers. I wasn't able to be facilitating programs because the stuff that I was doing was not going to happen. So I wasn't getting back, that like, "Oh, look at this kid who is really struggling with reading, but has memorized the song! Or look at this kid who is pretty socially awkward, who is reaching out and joining hands within 1.5 seconds with the neighbor person."

Like that is exciting for me to watch. Or just to see the smiles or to see how people navigate things, to laugh about the awkwardness of all this ridiculous stuff that we do. And so that feeds me, that keeps it fresh for me, which probably is another reason that I love working with people who don't do it very often, because they're not jaded. They're not going to be critical saying, "How come you did that dance Cherokee Shuffle? That has two balance-the-rings in a row. That is so boring." Like, that's not my favorite thing; that makes me jaded.

But, also, the second piece, besides just getting it like from the floor, you know, you're getting it back from the floor, there's that feedback loop, which then makes me want to be a better caller because I'm feeling this like joy from the people who are there. The other piece besides that is the colleague connections. I will say that especially early on when Theo was younger, and before I had Theo, when we were doing the dance here in Belfast, I hosted a lot of people. And connecting with the musicians and the callers and just talking about why we do what we do and why we love it, that's huge. Yeah, I think taking a break, honestly, the pandemic was in some ways, as hard as it has been for the last few years, just having that break to do a little re-set is good.

The Caller's Role

Mary I want to get in a little bit more to the role of the caller for you and kind of like the nuts and bolts. Again, I just feel like your skill set is really around... and I mean, this is true of all callers, but when you're working in such varied settings, getting people to move

their bodies and organize in space, using words, like mostly only words. Like some demo but the words are really important. How does it feel for you when you're directing people? Do you experience anything in your body as you're trying to like, compel people to move around through space? Take us inside what's going on for you when you're in that space of getting people going.

Chrissy I think there's a few things that happen. Sometimes I tend to be a little overconfident, a.k.a. arrogant, and I just assume that everybody is going to do what I tell them to do. That's a real problem when you're a parent, like having that attitude really doesn't pan out. But in a classroom, like teaching in a classroom, you just assume that the students are going to, because that's the structure that they're in. And when you're at a dance, they've hired you to tell them what to do. It's like an amazing job. It's kind of great for somebody who wants to be directive and a little bit of a know-it-all, a little risky, too. So I kind of go into it assuming that they're going to do what I ask them to do, for the most part. But also honoring that, like also not taking advantage of that position, because that's an interesting position to be in when somebody has asked you to direct them. We don't often hire our leaders, right? Our direct leaders, like we don't hire our supervisor. So, you have to be mindful of that.

So you were asking about what the nuts and bolts are of starting, like if you're at a dance situation, what are the nuts and bolts? Well, I pre-think it a little bit. I have my tried and true things. I always like to start in a circle if it's a bunch of new people, or even if they've been doing it for a while. The Belfast Flying Shoes Community Dance always starts with a variation on La Bastringue. Some could call it a rut, some could call it a groove. I think it's really helpful to all be facing in toward each other, to start and to be like, "We're all in it together. It's not just me and my partner." It makes clear the truth about this form of dancing is that we are all in it together. It's more obvious when you're standing facing into a circle than if you're in longways sets or in scattered foursomes or even a Sicilian circle. So I like to always begin with a circle. It lets me talk to everybody at once and it lets me see everybody at once. That's really helpful.

Some of the nuts and bolts are, what kind of program is it? Like at a wedding, you're going to do three dances and have a little break. And then the dances that you choose totally depend on how many people want to dance. If six people want to dance, guess what? You're not going to do a Sicilian circle. Haste to the Wedding is not your option. But if 60 people are dancing, poof, Haste to the Wedding is your dance. I also like to think about what are the most tricky parts of it? So on a contra dance, or on something like Haste to the Wedding, the pass through is the tricky part: pass through and quickly reconnect with the new people. So I might teach that and then I might say, oh, now this other thing, and you build on, and then finally do the whole dance. It's super important to me that people feel comfortable and ready to go. I probably err a bit too much on the side of over prompting, prompting too long. But it's okay for me, I get more comfortable with it.

So the nuts and bolts parts of the contra dance calling are different than the nuts and bolts parts of the community dance calling. They're slightly different in terms of the preparation and in terms of the things I think about. At a contra dance mostly you can make a plan and just stick with it, especially if you know your scene. Like, I danced for such a long time in the Boston area that I could go down and call in Concord and be like, "Oh, this is what I'm calling and I'm not varying it." I don't have to vary it. But that's not true with community dance calling, not true at all. And so it's more like having a bunch of ingredients that you might pull from. Kind of like having a garden and being like, "Oh, what's ripe now? Like,

what will I take now and what would be a good fit for this particular circumstance with these people?"

Nuts and bolts for me is also the attitude part. Making sure people know this is *social* dance, we are getting together because we want to have fun. This is not about somebody watching you do it perfectly. It's not about being a performer, like Baryshnikov. We're not glorifying our dance. And it's also not about doing it exactly right, which some people forget because they love it so much they forget that it's actually not about that. There would be no negative consequences if we don't do it exactly right. Right? The rain will still fall...or not! But those are like possible trouble points. Like some people think it's all about me and performing. And you've got to remind new dancers that there are these different things that can happen. But, really, the reason we're here is that we want to get together, to dance together. This is a social event. Like for me, it's social. The name of your podcast is about social dance. It's not about perfection in the execution. It's not about the complicated figures that we all can do. It's not about the puzzle. It's really about the people and how this vehicle can bring all those people together.

[Clip of [Chrissy calling the dance The Baby Rose](#) by David Kaynor at the Concord Scout House in 2010 with music by Crowfoot.]

Mentorship

Chrissy So thinking about the kinds of calling that I do, you know, all these different little threads. And another thing that I have done a lot is introductory things, so introducing people to this dance form. And some of it started probably at NEFFA. They often have a session like Contra 101 or Intro to Contra Dancing. I love those because you can go, and again, it's all about making people feel comfortable and feel like they have the tools that they can then take to the main hall to do the giant 500 person contra room session. I like that. I like introducing people to the basics of it. Again, instilling what I think are the core values, which is that we're here to have fun, here are some tips and tricks. Here's ways to connect comfortably and safely, here's ways to keep from throwing up if you get dizzy.

Mary It's so important.

Chrissy It's so important, that eye contact, man. And here's why it's not so weird that we're making eye contact, because it's a tool for connecting, but it's also a tool for anti-nausea. But I also started doing these classes, because people wanted to take classes in contra dancing, which is such an odd thing, but yet was lovely. Like adult ed classes in contra dance and a six week session. They come every week, we do a few different things. And some of them come and do dancing regularly, would come to the community dance, or not. Some people, it just was a really fun way to spend time with their partner and a few other people. I think that's all tied into helping people integrate it into their lives. Another piece that I really enjoyed over the years, similar, is helping to introduce callers or potential callers, people who are interested in this sort of work, helping them introduce them to some of the nuts and bolts, or some of the things you might think about. Or even helping people realize, as I did, "Oh, how can I figure out to call on the last four counts of the phrase?" There was a caller, Ron Buchanan from Pennsylvania. I went to a workshop of his at NEFFA that blew my mind. He said, oh, you just walk forward and

back. Okay, so "One-two-three-four, *this is-where-you-make-the-call*, forward, two, three, four, *then-you-say-the-ladies-chain*," and it was unbelievable. He was like, "You're dancers. You know how to do this, but let me show you how." So, helping just disseminate those bits of wisdom and those pieces that you might garner from other places, or maybe you invented yourself. I think that's so exciting to have those aha moments like, oh, well, a ladies chain usually takes eight counts but an allemande could be a million different things, right? I love the Aha moment. That moment of awakening or oh, if I'm teaching dancing, or if I'm teaching ways to think about calling, or really anything. You know, how to hold a hammer, if you're with a bunch of pre-K kids and you're making some project with your hammer. You know, oh, red and yellow make orange, look at the crayon melting and mixing. The aha moment is the great one.

And I've had, again, just lots of great influences on that front. John McIntire, who's a local caller, did a bunch of workshops and was greatly mentored by Ted Sannella when Ted moved back to Maine and beforehand. And John also was on the Ralph Page Dance Legacy Weekend committee with me. He had this great tradition of doing caller workshops or doing multi-session caller development work, caller development, really and dancer development, I think. I love that stuff. I love providing opportunities to learn new things and find out new stuff. Again, I think it's why I like to work with younger people and I think it's why I like to work with new dancers, people who haven't done it before. I did once go on tour.

Mary Once?

Chrissy Once! When Theo was very little. I went with Frigate, which is Glen Loper, a local Maine band: Glen Loper, Fred White on guitar, and Steve Muise on fiddle. Steve is a force of nature, he teaches music in Mount Blue, in Farmington. A huge influence. Maine Fiddle Camp people, all three of them. We went on this tour of the East Coast, did a lot of the big stops. But Theo was a year and a half old, I think, maybe two.

Mary That is ambitious.

Chrissy Yeah, there were some epic moments. But I kind of integrated, and was inspired by people like Beth Molaro who called with her child present, and the Gawler family whose kids all grew up sleeping under the tables. I think that's part of the whole integrating it into the rest of my life. It's not a separate thing. I wouldn't have my kid go to a babysitter, I would have them come and sleep in the back of the stage. I think that was a little bit of a turning point for me, realizing this is really wonderful, but I don't know these people. I feel much happier doing it in my local, more local community. I think for some people touring is really exciting and I know there are lots of different ways to approach this leadership. Which I think is leadership, right? Doing this kind of work is not about choosing the material and teaching it the most efficient way. I think sometimes we want to get out of the way of the interaction between the musicians and the dancers. We want to not be in the way of that connection and that inspiration that happens where the dancers are inspired by the music and their expression of that inspiration in turn inspires the musicians to greater heights of glorious-ness. Right?

Mary Yes.

Chrissy But I think sometimes we forget that, as you have said many times, we're the one with the microphone and we have the capacity to lead, and to lead in a direction that we think is important. I think that's a big responsibility and one that I hope that continues to be

emphasized. That we are not just doing the nuts and bolts, but that we're helping people move to new places in their relationship to this kind of music and dance.

Mary It's such a great job, isn't it?

Chrissy We're so lucky. We're so lucky because you just look out there, you see all these people having some sort of joyous experience.

Mary Yeah, that's my favorite part.

Chrissy Not everybody's happy all the time, right? There are some weird things are happening, and sometimes I'll get right down on the floor and say, "Hey, you don't have to dance with that person," or "Hey, just be careful," or whatever, or "Don't pick that person up just because they're three! They don't know you."

Mary Nope! Keep their feet on the ground.

Chrissy Yeah! But I think that just watching all this, just watching what can happen and being a little part of that, it's quite beautiful. We're lucky.

More about the Ralph Page weekend

Mary I can't decide...well, I'll just ask...this is just my own personal wondering. I'm so curious by your involvement in the Ralph Page dance weekend. This has also been a big influence on me. And, you know, it's just a curious thing because neither of us knew Ralph Page.

Chrissy Definitely not.

Mary But, of course, the people who organized it were really influenced by him and then it's like we're being influenced by people who are influenced by this person, it's like what's what's going on there? It feels like it's one piece of continuing the traditions. That happens organically in so many ways. I think what I find interesting about that weekend is it's particularly intentional and it is stemming from one person, but I think it is about more than just Ralph Page, that's an umbrella.

Chrissy Absolutely. Definitely.

Mary So, maybe even from your perspective on the committee, how do you kind of define what Ralph Page weekend is trying to do? What are the pieces of the legacy?

Chrissy Well, I think Ralph Page was a major influence and he was a kind of a powerful person. Ralph Page was given a platform which he used very effectively. He was a leader. He had super strong opinions and he was deeply appreciated in a variety of different environments—dance community environments in New Hampshire, but also in Boston and had a big influence there. Much in the same way that Dudley Laufman had his own particular intense influence as one individual leader. I think that the Dance Legacy Weekend maybe began as a way of...I don't know the early parts of it because I wasn't around, I wasn't dancing then. But the sense I had from being on the committee for the

duration of the time that I was, and being involved in making the weekend happen, it wasn't about celebrating one person. It wasn't about thinking about Ralph Page himself, like the person, and all of whatever he did. It wasn't about glorifying the Ralph Page as the individual. It was more about celebrating the fact that Ralph Page was part of sustaining a tradition in a particular region, and without his great influence and hard work, it might not have sustained itself. It might have died out. It might have become obsolete. So sort of celebrating that, I think, became the focus, at least for us, when we were on the committee. It was about honoring and appreciating the traditions that we did, just like a family reunion. Like you love the aunties and uncles, and the ancestors who maybe first came to the place that your family grew up, and honoring that, but not diving in deep and staying there. And saying, oh, well, here we are, a part of this longer thread, and here's how we're developing and doing these other things. It's so great to go to Ralph Page and do Money Musk and have people just get crazy about it or to balance beautifully on...the Old Ironsides one. What's that one called?

Mary Hull's Victory.

Chrissy Hulls Victory! Would you like to see how Hull's Victory can work with all those different turns and the balancing and the different places, and to have people just know how to do a triple minor. Like that is really exciting. But it's also exciting to think about "What directions are we going? And why do we do what we do?" Like the little workshop sessions. I've learned a ton in them.

So I think "legacy" is the word. Like, here's this person who was an influence, but what's the legacy that we're taking forward with us? That we're in, now, and taking forward. I think they have something on the website now like, "Appreciating the past, looking to the future," something like that. But that sort of a message, like we're all part of a continuum here. And, what I love about the Ralph Page weekend is that. You discover something and you think like you invented it. Like there's a lot of that around. Like, "Oh, I created this thing." Well, guess what! We didn't. I can get that way about Flying Shoes, which has been a major thing here in our local community, but hey, it came from all these other places. There were open bands in Maine. There had been dance series here for ages, contra dance series here for ages, all over the place. So many dance halls around. We're just part of the continuum.

And so what I love about the Ralph Page weekend is that it's super clear and really shining a spotlight on the fact that we are part of a continuum, and that, yes, we are carrying it on, but we're doing it with deep roots that have been nourished by people like Ralph Page or all the people that get celebrated. The old timers who danced with them, who've been there and passed on. I just think of so many, so many beautiful people who care so deeply about it, and that to me is the legacy of that particular weekend. It makes it distinct and special. Not to mention the syllabus, which is like this incredible resource that you can get anywhere you want.

Mary So good, the syllabus which just assembles all the materials that have been called with notes, it's a really important document.

Chrissy Unbelievable. All available online. Pretty magical for anybody who wants to geek out about dancing. It's a variety, it's a mix. It's not all chestnuts, but boy when they're done, they're glorious. They are glorious.

Closing

Mary It's been so fun to talk to you, Chrissy.

Chrissy I just love being with you, Mary Wesley. It's really, really good. I can't wait 'til you come back again.

Mary Oh, well, you probably know what I'm leading up to is I have three questions that I usually close with. So the first one is tell me about your dance notation system. Do you keep cards? Do you use a database?

Chrissy So I have cards, many of them very dog-eared and a little bit oily, like the ones that I really love, I tend to flip it with my thumb when I'm calling it. So the ones I like a lot, I hold it like a security blanket. And I have them sorted out. Very early on when I was first learning how to call contras, I started color coding them by figure. So stars, hey for four, waves. Petronella, balance the ring, which I love: Pink! I had a lot of them, and that served me fine. But then as I started doing more community dances, I have this whole separate box now. It has a little section of easy no fail contras, and circles, mixers, different formations, squares, singing games like Alabama Gal. And so I have two boxes. The one I probably use the most is the community dance one—it's littler. I have a little quote by Rumi in the other one, and I have a picture of Billy Bragg, one of my favorite musicians is in there, too. And as I was saying, I've been re-looking at some of them and thinking, why do I even have that in the box? Or why don't I clarify that? And actually, I want to switch a bunch of them because I've done a lot of no gender role calling as a community dance leader. Like why would you even introduce roles for most of them? And when you do, I'm not going to talk about ladies and gents so much, because that can add a whole other layer. And so I want to switch them around so that my card reflects what I'm actually trying to use for language and I don't have crosses out and scribbles and have to interpret. And yeah, so it needs refreshing. But I have cards, and they're in this nice little bag with my fans, because another favorite dance is the fan dance.

Mary Oh, yeah, nice.

Chrissy David Millstone gave me that. The dance that you're embarrassed to admit you use, but is, like, so spectacular.

Mary Can you describe it in case people haven't heard of it?

Chrissy It could be the broom dance or the hat dance. You've got two lines of people. If you're at a wedding, you have the wedding couple and one other special person sitting in three chairs at the top, and the person in the middle of the three chairs gets the fan and they choose one person, left or right, that they're going to dance down the middle with, just a sashay or a waltz or a frolic or whatever, while everybody else claps and admires. As soon as they dance down the middle, they give the fan to the other person who hops to the middle seat and the top people in each line jump into the two empty seats, and it goes for a long time from there. There's different variations, in some communities like this yacht club it evolved to like the prize was not getting to dance down the middle, the prize was getting the fan. So, there'd be all these negotiations. But yeah, so simple, but again, a great way to just be together with music, the fans.

Mary The fan dance, classic. When you're going to a dance, any of your varied dance gigs, do you have ways that you kind of prepare? Pre-gig rituals, post-gig rituals?

Chrissy I think chocolate is really kind of an important thing for me. It can be a little boost. Oftentimes the musicians I work with bring the chocolate. That's really nice. Got to have your water. I like to make my nest. Like I run late a lot. But when I'm calling, I really want to get there early, especially if it's for a kind of more high stakes dance event, like a wedding. I want to be there hours ahead of time so I can set up my nest in a way that feels like, okay, I'm comfortable here. I've got what I need. I do not love arriving at a gig and the band has set up in a way that I feel like I don't have enough room or that the instruments are in a place, like in my way. It's important to me to have a little nest and I try to be early so that I can make sure I claim my space. I like having a chair and I like having a little table. I got excited when I got my own microphone, that was a thing, a wireless microphone is really empowering, that's a great thing. And before a gig, I would tend to look things over and think about it again. If it's a school thing that I'm building on, stuff I've done before, I'll just look at what I've done before, think about where I want to go next. I might even write out the kinds of language I want to use when I'm trying to help the kids move to this new place in whatever sequence we're doing. I might sequence things. I've called a lot at colleges, so I might write down all the dances that I've ever done at the programs in the margin of the page that I'm going to then record what I did that night.

Mary Nice.

Chrissy So I would have all the stuff that I remembered did work or didn't and then I can draw on that in the moment. I have a lot of varied rituals, but they're all rituals.

Mary I love it. How about winding down?

Chrissy Oh, yeah. At the end, it depends what I'm doing. If I'm driving by myself, then I might make sure I have salty things or salt and vinegar chips or a place to stay. I really like combining calling work with social stuff, like visiting friends and being with people. So if I have a potential to do a dance in a place that I know I'm going to be able to connect with people that I love dearly, then that is going to be something I do, so I might work that into the equation.

Mary Yeah, nice. And last but not least, introvert or extrovert?

Chrissy I don't know. I've been thinking about this a lot. I'm not sure. I love this question in the podcast and I've been reflecting, thinking and of course I didn't really research what it actually means.

Mary That's why I always say, if you know.

Chrissy Because I think that in some ways I could be an extrovert because I really like being around other people. It's really important for me. I always had housemates, always, up until I moved back here to Maine, that was in 2004. So now it's been a long time now, it's been almost 20 years with no housemate. But in some ways it's a little bit dark being on one's own as a single person in a home or as the only adult. But, on the other hand, like at a party or at the contra dance, like I sometimes am not in the mix. Like I like to step back and just watch, and I think that's more of an *introvert* kind of thing to do is to just not really be quite as engaged. So I don't know, I think I'm both. I'm a Gemini, so really, that's what the story is.

Mary That's what it comes down to. It's totally a spectrum, I think. I always think it's an interesting thing to learn about callers because we're right in the fray with a lot of people, but it seems to be a space that can work for both introverts and extroverts which I think is fascinating.

Chrissy Absolutely, totally. Yes, I do, too. I think sometimes you get fooled, you know? I think you might look at how a certain caller behaves and think, oh, they are so extroverted. But then to be like, wow, I didn't know that about them. They're super shy and feel socially awkward.

Mary Or they seem to just disappear after the dance is over. Where did they go? How did they do it?

Chrissy Yeah, totally. Oh, Mary, this is so lovely. I love your podcast and I just love the work that you're doing to document that too, because that's another important thing. That's another part of the Ralph Page weekend, is the documentation. In the archives they're all collected, everything's collected. You've got all of Ralph's dances and programs. I remember looking at... Ted Sannella had done this Halloween dance, and he did a blindfolded square and it talked about the blindfolded square, what he did to do it. And then in the margin of the notes, because he wrote all these programs, in the margin, he said, "Too dangerous! Do not repeat!" I love that that's there, that you can find it later. I think that the work that you're doing with the podcast is so great because, maybe it will be temporal, but it's just another way to connect up with the fact that we're part of this long line of tradition, building from all these different places and different influences, and yet it's still being propagated. I think it's valuable to have it as a resource.

Mary Well, thank you! Of course thanks to CDSS for making it happen and thank you for letting us hang out in your living room on a sunny Saturday.

Chrissy Yeah, it was so good!

[Clip of [Chrissy calling the Sicilian circle dance ZOM Out](#) by Zoey Phillips, Olivia Padovan-Merhar, and Molly McCracken (published in the [New England Dancing Masters](#) book Listen to the Mockingbird) at the Belfast Flying Shoes dance in Oct 2019 with music by Cedar Stanistreet, Jon Cannon and Ness Smith-Savedoff.]

Mary A big thanks to Chrissy for talking with me. Check out the show notes at podcasts.cdss.org to learn more about her.

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Visit podcasts.cdss.org for more info.

Happy dancing!

[AUDIO]

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