

Transcript - From the Mic Episode 20 - Susan Kevra

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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.

Susan Intro

Mary Wesley Hi everyone - welcome back to From the Mic. My guest today is a dance caller, musician, singer, and scholar who makes her home in Nashville, Tennessee, it's Susan Kevra! Dancers on both sides of the Atlantic appreciate her diverse repertoire of singing squares, Western patten calls, contras, and English Country dances. Susan is noted for her warmth, clear teaching, and lovely voice.

Susan Kevra burst onto the contra dance scene in the early 1990s, quickly emerging from the rich dance soil of the Pioneer Valley in Western Massachusetts as one of the most in-demand dance callers in the country. Her innate musicality pushed her towards square dance calling, allowing her to feature her beautiful voice in singing squares and her spot-on rhythm in Southern and Western squares. She has also taught English Country dancing since the mid-1990s.

She is a member of the recently hatched English Country dance band, "Constellation" with Rachel Bell, and on piano, either Dave Wiesler or Jacqueline Schwab, who also perform bal folk and French café music. When not on stage at dance events, she is a professor of French and American Studies at Vanderbilt University, where she teaches a class, "American Social History through Dance."

It was such a pleasure to catch up with Susan. Here she is!

Mary Wesley Hello, Susan Kevra. It's so nice to see you. Welcome to From the Mic.

Susan Kevra Yeah, it's nice to be here, Mary. It's great to see you too.

Mary Wesley Well, I'm really happy that we're getting to catch up like this, like many caller friends, we cross paths now and then and have gotten to have some lovely connections and conversations, but I'm excited to have a little bit longer to chat and learn a little bit more about your caller story. I also know that you are a dance historian and scholar in many ways, and so I'm excited to hear that perspective from you as well. Where are you speaking to us from today?

Dance Beginnings

Susan Kevra I am in Nashville, Tennessee, been here for 21 years and I used to be where you sit, I used to live in Vermont. Vermont, France and then I thought, where can I move to that would be as different as possible from those two places and I thought, well, Nashville,

Tennessee. Truth be told, I met a guitar player and fell in love and he coaxed me down here and now I've lived in Nashville longer than I've lived anywhere, which is crazy.

Mary Wesley Well, a good reason to move to Nashville, I would say. They're lucky to have you. Well, I often start kind of at the beginning. So you said you used to live here in Vermont, and that's maybe where your story with dancing and calling began. So would you just maybe tell us a little bit about how you got into this scene?

Susan Kevra Yeah. My twin sister Karen was involved in playing flute for contra dances in New Jersey, and she actually dragged me—and I almost mean that literally—to my first dance. I stood in the back petrified and thought, “This is just the weirdest thing I've ever seen, get me out of here.” And so I don't even think I went in the first time but I did try a second time. And it was, I hope the Middlebury language police are not listening in on this podcast, because I was at Middlebury for a summer in, oh my goodness, this was during my master's degree program. So that was like 1988, I think. So I was in Middlebury for the summer and I was dutifully studying French and had signed the document to say that I would *only* speak French during my six weeks there. But I happened to be walking in downtown Middlebury one night and I heard fiddle music coming from an open door, and I just followed my nose and went inside. And it turns out that Becky Tracy was actually playing for that dance and I think Mike Quinn was also there. And I went in and it was a tiny little dance, there weren't that many people. I didn't know that at that point, I had no judgments about, is this a happening scene or not? I was just curious about it and I'd had that first point of connection with my sister and I decided I want to just try this out. So I went in and I danced and I had a really great time and went to a couple other dances that summer. And then when I returned to graduate school in the fall in Michigan, in Ann Arbor, I discovered the Ann Arbor dance community. And for me, that was just, when I think of those days now, that was my—oh, I *couldn't wait* to get to the dance. I looked forward to it all week long and I didn't have a car back then, so I had to rely on people to get me to these locations. And, you know, to this day, I still think about the Webster dance it was called, which at that point was outside of Ann Arbor, it felt like it was in the country. For all I know, it may be housing developments at this point, but it felt very rural and you had to go up this creaky staircase to go to the second floor where the dance was and it was so much fun. I met all these great people and I think my love of square dancing, in addition to contra dancing, started there because there was this caller, Rich McMath who used to play for the dance and I loved his vibe. I wasn't thinking at that point I want to become a caller. I just knew that I loved the scene that he created and the feeling in the hall and the kinds of dances that he did. So that was really my start and I just went to as many dances as I could locally. Went to my first English country dance in Cleveland that somebody gave me a ride to, that Bare Necessities was playing for. So it was kind of opening this door for me to go back to the Northeast. And then I did, in fact, move to New England to start a Ph.D. program, it was in 1990, I think.

Mary Wesley And what part of New England did you come back to?

Susan Kevra I initially lived in Burlington. I got a job working at UVM for a year, and that was after I'd finished my master's and I wasn't sure if I was going to continue on and do any more graduate work. So I taught in the French department at the University of Vermont for a year, and all my colleagues said, “You really need to get a Ph.D., you should just do it.” So a year after that, I moved to western Massachusetts and started a Ph.D. program at UMass Amherst and found myself in this hotbed of contra dancing and great traditional music at the same time that I was starting a rigorous Ph.D. program, which ended up taking me about eight years to finish because I was being pulled in two

directions. I think it actually kept me sane to have that balance in my life, even if it took a very long time to finish my PhD.

Mary Wesley So those two directions were your studies and the music and dance world? Kind of counter balancing...

Susan Kevra Exactly. I kept them very separate for a while. I mean, this was before there was really much social media, maybe there wasn't even. And in a way, I kind of didn't want my professors and graduate students to know about it because I thought they might think I wasn't being a serious enough student, which I probably wasn't because I was spending so much time going to dances and then learning to call and playing for dances and whatnot. But eventually the word got out and in fact, one of my professors at UMass Amherst started coming to dances and she was on my PhD committee and she was also on the dance floor. So it was kind of a cool overlap and then I realized this isn't such a bad thing for the two sides of my life to overlap that way.

Mary Wesley Nice, you know, it's really encouraging to hear that story of, you came to your first dance and you weren't so sure. But even just having had a little touch, a little context, the next time...you know, I'm just thinking of all the beginners that I've taught at lessons and you just never know how it's going to go. But sometimes...it doesn't always have to be the very first time that you're hook, line and sinker.

Susan Kevra You make a good point about—the first experiences as a dancer and I often think about how many people did we maybe lose who would have gone on to become incredible dancers or incredible callers or incredible musicians but something happened at that night where they didn't feel welcomed. That was not the case for me, I was just bringing my own issues to the table. But yeah, it's something I think about a lot as a caller and as a dancer when I go to dances. I see newcomers and I think, what can I do to make this person's experience more enjoyable to increase the likelihood that they're going to come back? It's not for everybody. I'm just grateful that I didn't decide that it wasn't for me and gave it a second chance because the directions in my life would have been completely different. I would not have met my best friend nor my husband were it not for the dance world in addition to all the other people.

Starting to Call

Mary Wesley It's a great connector and an amazing community. Okay, so then how did you start calling in the midst of all that? I'm excited to talk to you because on this podcast, I mostly talk about American, sort of North American social dance traditions, mainly because that's what I myself am familiar with, but I love to hear about any and all perspectives. I know you're involved in a lot of different teaching, a lot of different dance forms, but how did you first dip your toe into leading and teaching and calling dance?

Susan Kevra Well, I was living in Burlington and I think again, it was my sister who said to me, "You know, you're a natural teacher and you're a musician, and I think you'd be a good caller." She was actually playing briefly for dances back then. She's an extraordinary classical flute player, lives in central Vermont, runs a highly successful chamber music series, Capital City Concerts. And this was prior to that where she just had this point in her life where she was doing like the back to the Earth thing and got involved in contra dancing. So she was the one that kind of planted the seed for me. While I was in Vermont, Dan O'Connell, have you ever met Dan O'Connell? He might have been before your time.

He was calling a lot of dances in the Burlington area. Another really great caller, you should try to dig him up if you can!

Mary Wesley Okay, noted!

Susan Kevra Yeah, and just a super generous guy. I had very innocently asked him a question once at a dance about calling, and he was so great. He just said, "Well, you should call a dance sometime!" I thought, "Uhhhhhh, maybe." But somehow he convinced me and I called a single dance at one of his dances. It was either Burlington or Bristol, Vermont. And it was right around this time that I met my first husband, Bill Tomczak, a very established, to this day contra dance musician. And so he also was really supportive in kind of fostering my interest in calling. You know, it ended up being a very, very nice way to be able to start calling and working with great musicians because he's a great musician and worked with wonderful players that sort of opened that door for me. But I think my first calling gig, full night, was in Northfield, Massachusetts. Cammy Kaynor had a dance that he was running for years and years and he couldn't make one of them. I guess he had heard that I was starting to call and so he asked me if I wanted to do it and I said yes. This is tied in a little bit to our conversation before about dancers who come as beginners and will they come back? For me, this was beginning calling and it could have stopped my career in its tracks because what happened that night was, I started the dance. I was very well prepared for it, and I did the first couple of dances and felt like I was ramping up the level and was able to teach and start to move towards more complicated stuff. And then all of a sudden there were a whole bunch of people who arrived and they were in the back of the room and the Northfield Hall sort of had this...like an overhang so that the back of the hall was dimly lit, and I couldn't see who was there, but I just knew that there were a bunch of people that walked in and they joined on the bottom of the set. And they were not understanding and it was kind of a disaster. And I remember one of the organizers came running up and she said, "You know, if this is too hard for you, Michael McKernan is here and he could take over if you want." And I was this close to just saying, okay, but I didn't. And as it turned out, the issue was that the people who joined in the back of the hall were all Japanese exchange students who spoke no English.

Mary Wesley So it didn't really matter who was up there.

Susan Kevra It didn't matter who was up there, and somebody fortunately came up and explained the situation and I regrouped and said, let's do a mixer. I think I called La Bastringue and it was fine. And the other dancers, of course, did the good thing and took the newcomers by the hand, and the evening was salvaged. But it really could have torpedoed, but it didn't. But, you know, all of us have those moments of feeling very vulnerable where you get just this curveball that you could not have predicted and how do you respond to that? And they continue to happen even if you've been doing this for 30 years, they still happen. But when they happen when you were a young caller and you're vulnerable...and I was really young. I think I called my first dance when I was maybe 28. So yeah. Crazy.

Mary Wesley Yeah. And how did you go from kind of pinch hitting or getting up to call one or two dances to...So you said you were calling a little bit when you were with Bill and his music was a vehicle. But where else did you want to take it?

Susan Kevra Well, I was fortunate that living in the Pioneer Valley, there were some opportunities for calling open mic sessions. We used to have a dance right in the center of Amherst in the sweetest little space, this beautiful space—crummy acoustics, but beautiful

setting right downtown. And it was an open mic thing so musicians could come and sit in and Paul Erik Smith was running that. He was always so incredibly supportive and generous. If I said I wanted to call a dance, he would say, "Call two." If I said, "I think I'm ready to do half a dance," he was like, "I think you're ready to do a full evening." So that was a really, really important step in giving me the confidence and hearing other callers. But it was actually Cammy Kaynor was the one who...this is the early 90s, he had gotten married and started having children, and his family moved off to the Boston area. So he had been running one of the Greenfield dances and he didn't want to do it anymore. He asked me and Bill if we wanted to take over doing that dance. So pretty quickly, I think it was maybe less than two years after I started calling, I was doing this. I think at that point it was a twice a month dance in Greenfield. So quick growth! It felt like high stakes situation, calling at the Greenfield Grange in a place where people have high expectations; I think they still do. But I also had opportunities to go and dance in South Amherst and get to dance to Swallowtail and George Marshall's calling and all these other amazing people. And David Kaynor who probably more than anyone, I think gave me opportunities and was so unbelievably supportive and a real cheerleader. I think back to that period as...I feel sort of starry eyed when I think about it, because it felt like all of these friendships blossomed and these musical connections were made. So Susan Conger, fiddler, who still lives in the Pioneer Valley, Susie Secco, a piano player, the three of us got together and formed a band called "Susarama."

Mary Wesley That's awesome.

Susan Kevra We did fifth Saturdays at the Munson Library in South Amherst and it was so much fun. And I think for dancers, it was kind of this cool thing because it was three young women on stage in little black dresses trying to find our way musically and calling-wise. But it was a really, really fun scene. So between that dance and the Greenfield dance, that gave me a lot of opportunities to really, really work on my craft.

Mary Wesley What did you love about it, what was so compelling?

Susan Kevra Umm, I'm trying to put my mind back 30 years ago, what was so compelling about it? You know, for one, it was just getting to call to really, really great music. It was just that kind of magic of being able to facilitate an evening and the challenge of all of those balls that you have to juggle as the caller and make it work. So your programming decisions, the kind of social engineering that has to happen from the stage and just feeling the sense of knowing when you have a new interest that you're excited about, kind of being aware of your growth as it's going on, and that generates more enthusiasm for what you're doing and it sort of catches fire. I was just really immersed in that world for, I would say, 5 or 6 years of really, really working on my contra dance calling and scrutinizing it. I made a study of it. So this was back before, you know, we had our cell phones and we could easily record or video events. So I would take a tape recorder with me everywhere that I went and I would ask callers if I could record them. I have got probably, who knows what state they're in now, but a whole bunch of cassette tapes in my basement of people like Tony Parkes, of Steve Zakon-Anderson. And I would listen to those over and over again. Tony's *Shadracks's Delight*, a recording that he did. I listened to that in my car until the tape broke and got a second copy. And there are times even today when I hear myself calling and I realize that I was completely ripping off Tony Parkes. And who could be a better person to rip off in terms of vocal qualities than Tony, you know? And not just listening for the vocal qualities, but also people's teaching and really scrutinizing how they would explain things. And then I did the same thing for my own calling and would record myself and listen to it and realize, "Oh, well, no wonder that dance fell apart because now

that I have heard again, what I said, that was completely confusing.” So yeah, just a really kind of analytic approach to it. And lots and lots and lots of listening. And not just contra dance callers. I kind of became obsessed with square dance calling and listening to old time square dance callers. And then really, I think maybe most key for me in my development as a caller was, I went to Augusta. I wonder what year this was, maybe like 1995 or so when Larry Edelman had been doing every year a square dance callers class. I knew I wanted to do more square dance calling. I was already doing singing squares and sort of more New England style quadrilles. But I wanted to do more with it, but I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do. So I took his class and it was amazing. It was just mind blowing. There were a dozen or so of us in the class and it was every day for, I don't know, 4 or 5 hours a day and then calling at the evening dances there. Larry was really great about helping me figure out what I should be doing. He said, “You think you want to do Southern squares, but you live in the Pioneer Valley and you're calling for contra dancers and they don't want to do Birdie in the Cage. They want to do stuff that moves along. So I took this deep dive into a modern western square dance kind of those vintage years like in the 1950s, and started learning those and I still do them to this day. It's one of the things I enjoy most about calling is those fast patter calls and just the thrill of being off script. Contra dancing is a great entry point for becoming a caller because it's very scripted and predictable. But it was super fun to kind of take the training wheels off and start calling squares and realize that you can improvise breaks and you could really play with the dancers in calling squares, you know what I mean?

Discovering Squares

Mary Wesley Yes, I'm nodding along and I can totally remember that because I had sort of the same progression of calling contras first and then there is such that moment as a contra caller when you realize you can bust out of this, you know, AABB repetition, which is so comforting and can do so much for the dancers. And it's also just a whole other playground to go into the freedom of squares and patter squares. I'm also kind of enjoying a fun full circle moment or something, just hearing you talking about listening to recordings of Tony in the car, because I can remember listening to *you* in the car and listening to your *Susan Kevra's Full Swing* album singing “Good Bye, My Lady Love.” There's few produced recordings, especially of contra calling that I'm aware of anyway. I think it was probably when I was learning to call and I actually drove to the CDSS store, which is not really a thing. It was like I just went to the office because I just heard it was a place with a lot of resources and I bought your CD there and a bunch of books and everything, so...

Susan Kevra Well, you know, it's a “million seller.” I have a million of them in my cellar.

Mary Wesley [laughter] Amazing. Well, if you don't have a copy, listeners, you should write to Susan. It's a great recording. And was that made during that time when you were in the Pioneer Valley area?

Susan Kevra Yeah, it was. It was right before I left. In fact, Pat Baker, I don't even know if his company exists anymore. He did a whole bunch of recordings for a lot of people in the Pioneer Valley. Rodney Miller and...

Mary Wesley Is it Great Meadows Music?

Susan Kevra Great Meadow Music.

Mary Wesley Okay, yes.

Susan Kevra And so he and his wife, Betty Ann came to me and they said, you know, I think there's a place for a recording that would be almost more of a pedagogical tool where people could use dance-length recordings for dancing. But where there would also be some booklet that would come with it that you would talk about calling or that might have some dances in it. So we took on that project and it was right before I left New England for France. I just attach it to a really kind of wistful time in my life because I was at this professional and emotional crossroads and wasn't sure exactly what was going to happen in my life. But I still can kind of see the studio and working with Mary Cay Brass and Stuart Kenney and Mary Lea and a few others and doing those... There's not a lot of calling, as you know in the recording, there's only like 3 or 4 dances that are called. But it was kind of a fun project to be involved in. I hear from people a lot who say, "Oh, I love that recording." I can't listen to it anymore, I just kind of cringe but you know how that is.

Mary Wesley Yes.

Susan Kevra I hear what's wrong with it.

Mary Wesley Of course. Of course. Well, I'm definitely among them that I still enjoy it and attach it to a certain moment in my journey with calling too. So, the rest of us are grateful that it's out there.

[Susan calling the singing square dance Goodbye My Lady Love on the Great Meadows Music recording [Susan Kevra's Full Swing](#)]

Mary Wesley Well, I would love to hear more about your love of square dance calling and kind of where you've taken that. I feel like it's been a little while since I've interviewed someone who's quite in depth with square calling. Would you talk a little bit more about that?

Susan Kevra Well, you know, living in Nashville, there's actually a pretty established square dance scene down here. It's separate from the contra dance scene. I call from time to time—there's a CSA here in town, they've got a little farm. It's about 15 minutes from downtown Nashville, but it's in the country and they put on these square dances and it's one of the most fun gigs to call. You have to get adept at being able to call for dancers who don't have their left hand free for an allemande because they've got a glass of beer in their hand. But it's super fun and the music is always totally great. It's such a cool scene, like they grow vegetables by day and they sit around and they play old time music when they're not involved in farming. So that's been fun and you know it's the sort of gig that translates into just community dances and calling at colleges or parties and weddings and stuff like that, which is always fun to do. My start, so my first start square dance calling really was singing squares and that was due to Ralph Sweet.

Mary Wesley Ralph!

Susan Kevra Yeah I was so lucky to be able to live in the Pioneer Valley and be around him. He was another one of these people who was just so unbelievably generous and generous with praise when I probably didn't deserve it. Like at the time, I'm sure it made me feel really good and I thought, "Oh, I must be good." I think there was a lot of—I want to bolster this person or I want to give them feedback and confidence. He ran a singing square workshop out of his barn and a bunch of us took the class including Ann Percival of Wild Asparagus and George Marshall. I think at that point Ann was threatening George

and saying, "If you don't learn to call singing squares then I'm going to do it." And I don't know if George went on and did singing squares but it also formed this really great relationship between Ralph and Wild Asparagus and the recording that they did of Ralph's singing squares. But that felt like a natural bridge from going from contra dance calling to square dance calling where, you know, singing squares you're singing a song. It's not, of course, that simple because you're not *just* singing. You've got to still shoehorn in those calls as well but it was really fun to do. And Bill Tomczak was able to notate the music for all these different singing squares and come up with some cool arrangements and work with musicians who were great improvisers to do that. So that was really, really fun.

Mary Wesley And it sounded like part of your interest in squares, too, is that you really use your voice differently...or a lot more as a square dance caller, is that true in terms of your interest?

Susan Kevra Yeah, I remember that caller's workshop I mentioned before the square dance workshop that I took with Larry Edelman, that one of the things he said to me, which I'll never forget, is he said, "You know, you have a beautiful voice, it's a nice calling voice," and he said, "But you need to listen to Patsy Cline. You need a little more grit and just a little more attitude in your calling." And that was really important for me to hear, that I think I just needed to work more on having a lot more rhythmic emphasis in my calling and just play around with it a little bit more and make it pop more. If I did unearth those cassette tapes in my basement and they were actually functioning, I'm sure if I listened to those early ones, I would hear exactly what I just described to you. And in some ways, you know you're who you are, you can only work with what you've got. I'm never going to be Patsy Cline but there are little elements you take from different people. You end up being sort of a composite of them and in essence you're still yourself. But those little reflections I think every now and then catch the light and if someone's listening hard enough they might hear it.

Mary Wesley Was part of it that you are a singer outside the context of calling? So do you feel like you had a sense of how to use your voice and how to learn and hone your voice as an instrument?

Susan Kevra Well, yeah, I took some singing lessons here in Nashville right before the pandemic because I felt like it's time for me to really stop messing around. Because I never took voice lessons, ever. I sang in choirs and stuff when I was in high school and in college, but I never studied it really seriously and I felt like I should and I ended up only doing a few lessons and then the pandemic happened and stopped. It was good food for thought. But now I am finding myself in situations more where I'm singing in concert situations, and that's really different from a singing square, where everybody's dancing and distracted by the music. Now here they are all sitting in their seats and listening to your every word and knowing if your intonation is off. So if I could insert a couple more hours every day into my schedule, I would work more on my singing. I should work more on my singing, but perhaps that'll come.

Continuing to learn

Mary Wesley There's plenty of time. It's interesting to hear you talking about having more things to work on. Because I was going to ask you, just compared to that earlier time you were describing when you were making such a study of how to call, which is, I think how you just get confident, how you reach a point where you can do it without being so analytical. Or it just starts to live in you. And that's such...it's like, I miss that time in some

ways. And I sometimes wonder about how to keep learning and how to keep pushing to a new place with anything, really. But, I was just curious if you think about that, too, and if there are still ways that you work on being a caller.

Susan Kevra Yeah. Well, I think what you said is spot on. I think both of us have gone through this in our lives as callers where you feel like, "Okay, I've made a lot of progress!" And then you kind of feel like there's got to be a next step. That this isn't enough. And so for me, it's a question of upping the ante. So going from contras to singing squares and then singing squares to patter calls and then throwing English country dance teaching in along the way. And then French dancing, teaching French dance where, I don't know, maybe I'm just a little ADD, but I feel like I need those other things to keep growing and to feed different interests. They're very related, and yet they're pretty different. Different skills that are involved in those. Honestly, right now, a lot of my energy is going into *playing* for dances even more than calling. I call for our local contra dances and one night stands and stuff like that. I don't do a whole lot of contra dance calling any more, ever since the pandemic. I think the last dance weekend that I called for was the Atlanta weekend and whatever that was 2019. And I called a little bit at the Flurry right before everything shut down. So primarily it's just local dances for contras and squares. But my heart really now is in wanting to play clarinet for different kinds of dancing and mostly for English country dancing and for French dancing.

So Rachel Bell and I do a ton of stuff together and that has been super rewarding. It's super rewarding and it's also, after all these years of calling and being on stage, as you know, it's sort of a strange place to occupy. Because there we are all alone, we're the only ones in the room that are doing what we're doing. We're so responsible for coordinating and making everything work and it can be exhausting. Particularly exhausting nowadays when there's so much tension between groups in the dance world. One of the first gigs that I did after the pandemic was at Set for Spring, the English Country Dance weekend in Dallas, and I was hired as a musician. So Rachel Bell and Dave Wiesler and I were the band, and David Millstone was calling. And I can't tell you the number of times that weekend I sat there and was like, "Oh, I'm so happy that I'm in the band! This is so easy!" And he's up there sweating and having to work with a bunch of dancers, too, who were still kind of rusty after the pandemic and he had to program a million dances. It was one caller for the whole weekend. And yet I say that and I've just agreed to be their caller for next year. So I still love doing that, but I feel like my heart is pulling me a little bit more towards the music side of things.

Working with Music

Mary Wesley Yeah, it's nice to just keep finding the different layers that are there for us to explore and contribute to. Being a musician, does that inform your calling in any way? Just sort of having that full picture experience and knowledge? And how do you think about pairing dances and music?

Susan Kevra Well, I think from a calling point of view, I think the caller ideally should be part of the band. Not to upstage the band, but that there should be an effort to think about what you're doing musically. What you're doing in terms of the rhythm of your calling, where your voice sits, how that meshes with the music. It's always something that, for me, just came naturally. Like I will hear a tune. I maybe never heard it before and I just know where my voice is supposed to go. It's kind of like the same thing when I play clarinet for English dancing or for contra dancing. A clarinet is not in the same key as fiddles so you have to transpose and so the chords that you see on the page are not in the key that

you're playing in, and yet I feel like I play through the tune a couple of times and my fingers know where to go. I would never be able to teach a workshop in that because I just don't know how it happens. It sort of baffles me that my brain works that way. And it's not as if it works 100% correct because there are often wrong notes, but by and large there's a kind of melodic and harmonic understanding that feels like it's just innate. And so I think that gets conveyed in my calling. But as far as dance choices and music choices, I think I used to be a lot more exacting about it when I lived in New England and would talk more with bands about, oh, this is the kind of tune that I want. A lot of times the bands that play for our dances down here in Nashville play only reels, so there's never going to be a question about playing a jig. And most of the time the conversation I have with them is about tempo. That's the extent of it. And the music is incredible because we have these guys that are pickers on the Grand Ole Opry. They're unbelievably great musicians and anything that they're going to play is going to be great to dance to. Now, it doesn't have the kind of variation that you're used to when you go to, you know, so many of the bands I'm sure that you work with all the time in New England where you really have different terrains that you explore musically. So you might have a dreamy sounding jig versus a cool French-Canadian, very percussive sounding thing. And it's fun to still get to do that with bands, but it doesn't happen that much down here.

Mary Wesley So down there, it's more drawing from the old time music scene?

Susan Kevra Well, bluegrass, actually, even more so. A lot of the bands that play are more bluegrass musicians. The very first dance that I went to in Nashville, I remember walking in the hall and hearing a dobro and feeling like, "Oh, Dorothy, you're not in Kansas anymore." It actually made me feel really sad because I had a year before that, left New England, and was so used to the sound of New England contra dance music and it felt so foreign to me to hear a sound like that. And as it is, I don't think I have heard a dobro anytime recently down here in Nashville but it's just kind of a reminder of you're living in a different part of the world now, and that's just how it is.

Mary Wesley Yeah. I mean, one thing I'm interested in and I am making an effort through this project to talk to people in a lot of different places because these traditions, while at least contra dancing is very rooted in New England but has a whole sort of diaspora, so to speak. And then when talking about squares, that draws from so many different regional traditions and styles. And so I always like to hear about people's dance communities where they live. Are there other things that you notice regionally there in Nashville or the Appalachian region in general, whether it's in the contra dance scene or the square dance scene?

Susan Kevra I mean, just like I was saying before there's been this interesting funnel of musicians into our dance that came primarily through one fiddler who started bringing his friends to come and play for the dances. And a lot of them are just, they play a lot of bluegrass music and they're really, really great musicians. Nashville is one of these cities that has this crazy burst in population, there are so many people moving here. So you get a lot of really young, talented musicians. They move into East Nashville, they live in houses together and invariably they show up on the stage of the Nashville Country Dancers and play for our dances. The music is often just exceptional. A lot of double fiddle sounds, real rhythm bass. There's rarely a piano player at our dances, but it's just great. It's really great dance music. What I realized the last time that I called there, one of the musicians had a recording of *Full Swing* and he said to me, "Can we do Goodbye, My Lady Love?" And I was surprised that he even knew of it and then reminded me that he had the recording and I had stopped calling singing squares down here because I just felt

like, I'm just going to let the band do what they do. These guys mostly just, you know, they're happy to just play 32 bar fiddle tunes. But he specifically wanted to do it. So I said, "Okay, let's do it," and then after we finished doing Goodbye My Lady Love that night, one of the fiddlers came over to me was like, "Do you do any more of those?" And I said, "Yeah, we should talk about that at some point, maybe we can program more of them." And then at the next dance right after Goodbye my Lady Love they played, as one of the tunes, "Red Wing." And calling the dance to Red Wing and just thinking aahhhh...there's so much interference in my brain because I just want to do the Red Wing Square. And then after that he did Lady Be Good!

Mary Wesley Oh, my gosh, so they just kept playing Singing Square tunes!

Susan Kevra Yeah. And I don't think he realized that those were singing square tunes, but I was completely cracked up by it.

Different Dance Styles

Mary Wesley Yeah, I guess maybe currently, but also kind of reflecting on from when you started dancing up to this point I'm curious about changes you've seen in dance styles. I think there's a lot of talk about the separation of contras and squares and as someone who loves both, did you experience that tension? I heard you mentioning Larry Edelman kind of maybe providing a little coaching or sort of support to help you pick squares that contra dancers would like. But I'm just curious what your experience is around those two formations and navigating the changes in style and preferences.

Susan Kevra Right. You know, we talk about the "contra dance community" or the "dance community" and communities are still made up of people that don't necessarily agree on things. And I found that, you know, I think especially as a young caller, that people were more inclined to want to give me their point of view. I met with a lot of resistance when I had my Greenfield dance because everybody else that called there, it was exclusively contras so David Kaynor only called contras and George Marshall only called contras and so I was bucking a trend. There was some very painful moments of dancers who...I remember being invited to the home of a couple for dinner, where they then proceeded to tell me all the reasons why I shouldn't be calling squares. One of the most indigestible meals of my life was really, really kind of painful.

Mary Wesley Oh, I'm so sorry. That does not sound fun.

Susan Kevra Yeah, I know it comes from a place of people wanting what they think is best for the community. I had to keep reminding myself of that. But all I could say is, you know, you have other choices, you can go to dances and not do squares, but I wish you would give it a try. And there's nothing more gratifying than the dancer who comes up and says, "You know, I hate squares, but I really liked that!" I got to a point where if organizers said to me, "Our dancers don't like squares," I would say, "Well, then don't hire me." It just was not interesting for me to go off, get on an airplane, travel across the country to call a whole weekend of contras. You know, for a few years that was fine but then I had other needs. There are people who are willing to do that and are happy and excited to do that so there's a place for them to do that. But now I think people know what I want to do and what I'm not willing to do. So I gravitate to those places where I can just do a mess of things. So I'm at Ashokan for a northern week every year, and it's one of my favorite weeks of the year because I get to do French singing, French dancing, English country dance calling, playing for English, a little bit of contra dance. I just love getting to do that variety of things.

Mary Wesley Yeah. And it's nice that there are those spaces where they can accommodate in both directions. People who really want to stick to contras and then spaces where there can be more variety. I mean, I think that's often the answer and it's nice when we can live and let live about it.

Susan Kevra Yeah. And Nashville is a community where people are happy to do anything. You know, occasionally I'll get a grumpy face from someone when I say, "Find a partner for square." But generally speaking, people will do whatever you ask them to do and it's sort of more about, well, we're all here to have a good time and we'll just dance whatever you want us to. And I love that. I love my dance community. I would not trade the Nashville dance for anything at this point, even though when I walked in those doors and heard the dobro music 20 something years ago, I thought, "I want to be back in Greenfield." It's okay. I've found my place.

Mary Wesley Yeah. And it's nice to get to that place of just knowing what's going to make make a good experience for you as the caller and as the leader. Because it's that balance between sort of being of service, and offering something and wanting to please a crowd, but also it's your thing that you're doing and you want to have fun, too.

Susan Kevra Yes.

Mary Wesley I'm just thinking back to your experience and feeling like maybe as a younger caller people would feel, maybe I would use the word a little more "entitled," to offer advice or feedback. When you were getting started as a caller did it impact you at all, the fact that you were on the younger side and also that you were a female caller? And what was the landscape in that respect?

Susan Kevra I think for a while I wrote it off as, "It's because I'm a woman," that people, it tended to be older guys, would want to rescue the damsel in distress. I don't know how much it really had to do with gender. I think it was just, I didn't have a lot of experience yet, and as I gained experience, that stopped happening. So, I mean, maybe gender factored into it some. Because these memories, as they're flashing in front of me right now, I'm seeing in my mind's eye guys who would come up more so. So maybe so.

Mary Wesley Yeah, I know, it's a balance between everybody is sometimes new and a beginner at something and one of the things I really appreciated in taking Lisa Greenleaf's caller workshop is she would talk about when and how to offer feedback and to think about how you want to receive it and kind of give you some language and tools as a caller to maybe set some boundaries around that. Or sort of say, "Thank you very much," or "Could you talk to me at the end of the night, I need to call the next dance." Because it is the tricky thing being the caller, you are this major focal point in this whole ecosystem that's happening in the course of the evening of dance.

Susan Kevra Yeah. One of my favorite memories is of your, I guess, former housemate? Adina Gordon?

Mary Wesley Adina Gordon! Yes, still neighbor, but not in the same house.

Susan Kevra I remember being somewhere with her and somebody rushing up to the stage to give her feedback. And what she did was she just put her hands straight up and said "Stop," or said "Not now." I can't remember exactly what it was and I just thought, that

is awesome. That is exactly the thing to do there because the person that is rushing up there is not being particularly gracious and storming the stage that way. And you don't have a lot of time to have a conversation with someone as this is going on. The clock is running and people are impatient and she just carried on. Everything was fine, it was super clear. I don't know if she talked with them afterwards, but it did offer to me a model, I think, for how to deal with those kinds of situations. And it's okay to use just a few words or a hand gesture.

Mary Wesley Right, be direct.

Susan Kevra Be direct, exactly.

[[Susan calling the dance As If by Jesse Edgerton](#) at the *Chattahoochee Contra Dancers and Atlanta Dance Weekend Contra Under the C (CD)* with music by *Eloise & Co (Rachel Bell, Becky Tracy, and Owen Morrison.)*]

Dance Choreography

Mary Wesley So you call, you teach, you play for music. I think you also write dances. Is that something that's always been part of your practice as a caller?

Susan Kevra Yeah. And it's often born of a desire for a dance that meets a need that other dances haven't filled for me yet. So it may be that I'm envisioning a dance evening where I know there's going to be a lot of beginners, and so I need an easy dance for it. In fact, there's an English dance that I wrote called "Ransom Note" that I never intended to get out into the real world. It was just going to be for one of these 50-forward classes. So essentially for people, 50 [years old], retirees who were learning English country dancing and so I needed a really easy progression. I needed to build on some of the basic figures that we'd already covered before. I wrote this dance and thought very little of it, it had its function, but somehow Brad Foster got a hold of it and now it's been released into the wild and people are calling it all over the place, which is still a little bit surprising to me because I just think of it as this kind of throwaway beginner dance. But yeah, even with contra dance, the first contra dance that I wrote was, I only think I'd been calling for a few months at that point.

Mary Wesley Wow.

Susan Kevra And it was having seen a figure in another dance that I wanted to put into a dance and make it a little bit easier. So to use that as the seed around which the rest of the dance grows. So it comes, I think, from a place for me of being a teacher and wanting to have material that is going to meet a need. And then also you know, the puzzling out that comes from writing contra dances or whatever kind of dance that is that I'm working on. But these days, and I know this strays a little bit from a conversation about contra dance calling.

Mary Wesley That's okay.

Susan Kevra Yeah. So Rachel Bell is one of these people, rare people who writes just countless beautiful tunes and she wrote a tune for me back in 2014, I think it was, or 2015 after visiting me in France. I was living there for the year and she wrote a tune called "Voyage de la Diabline" and I wrote a dance called "Trip to Provence," and that was our first joint dance. And since then we've written together almost 14 or 15 and Rachel is going

to divorce me if we don't publish a book soon, because we really should. It's been one of the most fun things. My approach for writing dances is I hear a tune and there's a piece of it that says to me, "this figure has to happen here," and then the rest of it is the puzzle and you kind of work from there, you know, from the front end, from the back end—hope for a progression ideally. But to have it really be respectful of the music, the music really gives rise to the figures and it's been really fun doing that.

Mary Wesley That's wonderful, and so is Rachel writing the music and you're writing the dance, or are you also involved in the tune composing? Or do they influence each other?

Susan Kevra Yeah, for the most part, she writes the tune and says, "Does this suck or is this good?" And usually it's good and then, "Do you want to write a dance to it?" So it starts most of the time with the music. There have been a few times where I've said to her, can you change this figure...or change the end of this phrase where this really needs to build into the start of the B1. But for the most part, I use what she gives me. There's a Dave Wiesler tune that he wrote that I wrote a dance to that is one of my dances that I'm most pleased with in terms of how the music and dance work together. David Millstone told me he taught that dance—it's called Bel Canto—he taught that dance someplace in the last couple of years and Dave was playing for it and he looked over and Dave was sort of teary eyed, which is the greatest compliment of all. You made your composer cry!

Mary Wesley Yes.

Susan Kevra So that's been really, really fun. It's another one of those examples of, "Okay, where do I go from here?" It's still connected to dancing, but it's a different thing. It's puzzle solving and figuring out the connection between music and dance figures.

Mary Wesley I love it. Well, I'm excited for that book to come out.

Susan Kevra Okay.

Teaching Social Dance History at Vanderbilt

Mary Wesley Well, yeah, thinking of the many different corners you've pushed into. I think I also read that you teach at Vanderbilt and you teach a class that involves teaching social dance. Is that right?

Susan Kevra Yeah, it's an academic course, it's called American Social History Through Dance. It's referred to as a "designated writing course." Not a designated dancing class, but a designated writing class. So a lot of universities have these courses where you spend a lot of time working on student writing. But faculty is free to come up with any topic that you want in order to teach that material. So for me, I talked before about these two competing and seemingly different poles in my life between my academic work and my dance life. And this was this great occasion where the two of them have overlapped. I was lucky that at that point in my career the department chair in American Studies was someone who knew a lot of my musical friends in town, was really interested, specifically actually in minstrelsy. In American folk music from the end of the 19th century or early 20th century. So we met somewhere and got to talking and I said, "You know, I always had this idea that it would be really fun to teach a course that would somehow involve social dance." And he said, "Well, why don't you go ahead and write up a proposal and I'll take it to the curriculum committee and see what they say." And they came back and they said, "Yeah, why don't you do this and here's some money to do research." I know, it was great!

So I taught that, oh my goodness probably over a span of about ten years. And it came at a point in my teaching career where I needed to shake things up. Where I felt like I was getting a little bit stale. And here was this class where we were teaching writing and there were lectures and there were exams and that sort of thing, but there was also dancing. When I first conceived of the class, I had a great conversation with Tony Barrand about it because he had taught a similar class at, I think at BU. And I said, "I don't know if I can convince Vanderbilt students to dance, you know, this isn't crunchy granola New England, this is a very different place." And he said, "They have to dance! You have no choice in the matter, you have to have them dance." And I was so glad that I listened to him. So the course functions chronologically, so we start essentially with Native American dance and then go all the way through hip hop. There are five, I guess, five different dance classes that happen during the semester—they happen during the regular class hours, so everybody's there for it. So I have someone who comes in and teaches an African dance class because that's key to understanding all different forms of jazz dance. I do the square dance class or I bring in a square dance caller to do that. Somebody does a swing dance class, I have them attend our contra dance.

Mary Wesley Nice.

Susan Kevra Yeah, write a response piece to that and then I think there's one other one. It's an amazing class because where else in a traditional college environment are you going to touch your professor or your fellow students? So there's a community in that class that I have not experienced in other classes, and it's always a real treat to teach that.

Mary Wesley That's so cool. Yeah I was just curious if there is what it is to kind of study social dance, and are you looking at the ways that dance form reflects society and vice versa?

Susan Kevra Yes, definitely. I'm looking over here on my bookshelf trying to find a copy, here it is.

Mary Wesley Ooh, we have a reference.

Susan Kevra It's called *Swinging the Machine* by Joel Dinerstein and it's such a fun book. So he's looking at...The full title of it is *Modernity, Technology and African-American Culture Between the World Wars*, and he is all over the map in this book. So he's not just talking about dance and music, but he talks about art and architecture and factories. It's so fun to read his interpretations, not that I buy all of them, but I think it's a really fun way to think about how dance and music reflect societal changes. And how dance and music can actually go the other way and affect society. So this has been a really fun book to consider when thinking about jazz era dances. But yeah, you know, this course, it covers so much ground. To talk about in the same course Native American dance and tap dancing and square dancing. I mean, all of those could warrant a course on their own. So it's really meant to be a kind of overview just to give the students something to dip their toes into, but then to get them to think about, okay, how do we get from point A to point Z in the course of the semester? What are the connections between these? Are they completely unrelated? And why is it that we can have this kind of study in a place like the United States? Well, for a whole bunch of reasons. So it's a really fun class to teach.

Mary Wesley Yeah, I wish I could take it. It sounds wonderful.

Susan Kevra I have had people ask me that before, like, "Can you teach it online?" I wish I could, but Vanderbilt's resistant to that.

Closing

Mary Wesley Well, we'll definitely want to put the title of that book in the show notes if people are curious. Wonderful. Well, I have a few questions that I always close with. It's been so fun to catch up with you and hear some wonderful stories.

Susan Kevra Yeah, you too!

Mary Wesley So yeah, I mean, we touched a little bit on choreography, but I'm also interested in how callers are kind of keepers or, you know, have to be archivists to a certain extent in terms of gathering and organizing dance notation. I'm curious in your various forms, how do you collect and keep dances? Do you use cards? Are you in some kind of device, digital setting now with your dance collection?

Susan Kevra So my contra dance collection is in a bound book that I update every so often. I found that cards didn't work for me because I would lose them in the middle of the gig. I would forget where I put the card down, which is a horrible feeling. So this way I'd have to lose the whole book in order to lose my dance. And so there was a database that I used, and would just enter the different dances and I would leave pages in between so that I could handwrite new ones in and then update it. So it's kind of a dinosaur form, but it's worked pretty well for me. The only time it didn't work well was when I left the book of dances on the airplane on the way to a dance weekend.

Mary Wesley That's terrifying.

Susan Kevra And didn't realize it until about a half hour before the gig was going to start. It's amazing, though, how much you remember. The first night was fine and then I had the next morning free and I scrambled and went online and just found a whole bunch of dances. Ugh, so anyway, that's where the contra dance stuff resides. The square dance stuff resides up here in my head, so much of it. And that is so great and so freeing because for me to be able to learn how to do square dances was to just make it like saying the alphabet. That it just had to be in there in order to be able to teach the dance as well and to be able to call well, although I have to every now and then go back and look at this collection of dances to remember, "Oh, there's one I haven't called in ten years, I should dust that one off again." For my English dances. I've moved everything online and I have it on Dropbox and that works really well as long as your device is functioning properly.

Mary Wesley There's always that.

Susan Kevra So, you know, even though I've got my iPad and all the stuff is on there, I generally, for English country dance weekends, I print everything out and just bring it in paper form as well. But I do love the ease of being able to search for terms that way. I've created a database on Excel so that I'm not constantly recreating the wheel when I'm trying to come up with a program so that I can search by key signature or by time signature or by formation. So that's been really handy. So that technology I certainly appreciate. But it is fun to see people like Sarah VanNorstrand, doesn't she? She still has cards.

Mary Wesley Yeah, as do I. Yeah, I'm still on cards. So is Adina, Adina is kind of famous for spreading her cards all over. I kind of do the same thing. I sort of like to be able to physically move them around and arrange them. Do you have a backup copy of your contra book or did you get that one back off the plane? I'm like, that's haunting...

Susan Kevra Yeah, I got it back after the gig and I had all this stuff on a computer back at home.

Mary Wesley Good.

Susan Kevra Yeah. It was a real lesson about being better organized and less sleep deprived. That was one of the more horrible moments in my calling life, that realization. Man, is that a punch in the gut! It's one thing, if it's a one night stand, but it's a whole other thing when it's a dance weekend.

Mary Wesley Oh, yeah, travel is hard. It's always hard to keep track of all your things. But yeah...you know, ever adaptable as the caller but that's a big thing to adapt to. I hear you're not calling as many gigs lately but, so I guess for any kind of gig do you have any kind of pre- or post- gig rituals or things that you kind of do to enter into the space of getting on stage and calling and playing and then go back into the world afterwards?

Susan Kevra A lot of times the pre-dance ritual, like if my husband had a dollar for every time I said this, he would be rich now. So the pre-dance ritual is, "I don't want to do this!" Do you have this?

Mary Wesley I do, and many people do, judging by asking this question and talking with people. It's a funny thing.

Susan Kevra And then you get there and you start and it's like, oh, yeah, I really love this. But it's partly getting up the energy to get out the door, you know, prepare for it. And for me, I'm not doing this full time and so it's always been that juggling act where during the academic year I'm teaching usually Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and then I hop on an airplane and fly someplace and I'm at a dance weekend and I'm having late nights and then I fly home and the next morning I'm back in the classroom. That's another reason why I'm not doing as much of it, it's just gotten harder as the years have gone by. So that's one of the pre-dance rituals...[laughter].

Mary Wesley But then you have that moment where you're like, "Oh, this is why I came!" But yeah, sometimes the space between those two can feel very polarized.

Susan Kevra Yeah, when I first started calling, I spent a lot of time on programing and then I felt like I went through a period in my life where I was more into winging it. And now I feel like I've come back to that place of, I want to feel better prepared. One of the great situations I have right now is—we have a Monday night English dance here in town and you never know who you're going to get, you never know how many people are going to show up. Oftentimes it's kind of small and it's to recorded music, which I am not used to. So I'm having to fumble around with my phone and make sure I've got the right tune and it's at the right tempo. But it requires so much flexibility and a really profound knowledge of the dances to be able to think, "Okay, we only have four couples. So what four couple dances can I teach now?" So that's been a real lesson for me in trying to make these English dances just like the square dances that are in my head. There's a lot of them, though. They're not all in it. At least to have a bunch of them that you just know really,

really well and are confident teaching. So the post-dance rituals? It's coming home and eating nachos and cheese with hot sauce is often a fun thing I reward myself after the dance. I think as the years have gone by, I sleep better after gigs than I used to. I used to just process and over process after the gig, and that's not so good for sleep. But I wish I had...I should do this, this is good that you're asking me this question to be more thoughtful after the gig about really maybe the next day, even writing down observations about the gig and what worked and what didn't work. I almost never do that and yet I have this crazy file, like of all the dances I've ever called, where I write out on a piece of paper during the gig what I've done. Have I ever gone back and looked at those as a study of some sort? I've done that for dance weekends, but I've never done it for just regular gigs.

Mary Wesley That's so great. I love that idea. You've mentioned several things too, that like, I work in an organization that has an archive. And so you just keep mentioning things, like your tape recordings too where I'm like... "Ooh, you should save those somewhere somehow." I love that next level of kind of, again, like archiving, documenting what you did over time could be super interesting to look at someday. And I'm curious why so many of us...a lot of callers write on the back of their card. If they do have a card, you know, they'll write when they call the dance. There seems to be some overlap there with callers kind of wanting to notate and kind of track things in different ways.

Susan Kevra Ted Sannella was the master of that. I remember him talking about how he would not only, you know, the more obvious things that you would notate, but he would write down the band and the tune that they played for a dance, so that if you worked with them again, if he really liked something, you could suggest it. And I think that's a way to endear yourself to the band.

Mary Wesley Yeah, just to notice and appreciate. Absolutely. Well, my last question is my own little bit of research or just curiosity that I've been asking everyone who comes on. If you know, whether you're an introvert or an extrovert?

Susan Kevra I'm going to give a wishy washy answer: both.

Mary Wesley Yeah.

Susan Kevra You know, for one, I'm a twin.

Mary Wesley That's right!

Susan Kevra So I think there's that desire to always be with someone. And that's certainly been the pattern in my life where even in relationships, there's very little gap in between them. That I feel like I need to have a partner. And yet big crowd situations I find difficult. When they work well, it's amazing and like we've been talking about, all the things that a caller has to do in order to make an evening work is that challenge. And it always feels to me like, I've never surfed, but I find myself thinking that it must be like surfing where you're up on your surfboard and all of a sudden, here comes a wave and are you going to be able to stay upright? And if you don't, how do you get back on top of the surfboard again? And that I think can be really challenging. I find that oftentimes at the end of a dance week, you know if you go into an Ashokan or a CDSS camp and you know you're going to be there for the week and you're thinking, okay, so I have six times...I have eighteen meals this week and I want to try to sit with different people and get to know people and there's this person I've seen for years, but I've never talked to them and I want to. And then the week rolls around and you realize you've maybe had a meal with three of those people. Why

does that happen? It happens because you just need to get away and you need to recharge your batteries or you just need to be with a couple of friends in order to be able to have that energy to do the good work that you have to do while you're at the camp. So it's hard. So how's that for wishy washy?

Mary Wesley I don't think it's wishy washy at all. I think it's pretty widely accepted that that's also a range. The introvert/extrovert thing is not really...I should ask the question in a different way to imply that it's not necessarily an either/or. But I just find it interesting, as people who put themselves in the position of being kind of at the center of what can be usually a pretty big group of people. You know a center of a lot of different colliding energies and inputs center. It's interesting, I mean the answers are varied. I haven't done like a tally yet, I'm not that scientific but it's cool to think about.

Susan Kevra I thought you were going to say, "to find yourself at the center of the crosshairs!" I went immediately to add to that image because let's face it, it does feel that way sometimes.

Mary Wesley Yes!

Susan Kevra Where you feel like you're the logical person to nowadays be attacked, either because you're using gendered or non-gendered language, or whatever the issue happens to be. I think it's one of the reasons why I've been loving playing music so much lately, because it feels like you're in this little pod with you and your two musicians and it's safe back there. And especially with something like English where you don't have to come up with tunes, you just play what they tell you to play. It's like this glorious world to inhabit when you're back there.

Mary Wesley It sounds so lovely. I've also gotten to be on the dance floor when you're playing and I love it. And I'm excited to see what other areas you continue to reach into. I just think it's amazing just hearing a little bit about the different ways that you kind of shifted focus and explored and discovered new things. We didn't even get to delve into French dancing too much too, that's a love that I share, too. So, Susan, thank you so much for sharing all of that.

Susan Kevra It's fun to talk about. It is fun to see you after way too long.

Mary Wesley Way too long.

Susan Kevra When was it? It was a while ago.

Mary Wesley Yeah, well thanks so much and keep doing what you're doing, it's amazing!

Susan Kevra Thank you so much Mary.

[Musical Transition]

Mary Wesley Thanks so much to Susan for talking with me! You can check out the show notes for today's episode at cdss.org/podcasts.

This project is supported by CDSS, The Country Dance and Song Society and is produced by Ben Williams and me, Mary Wesley.

Thanks to Great Meadow Music for the use of tunes from the album Old New England by Bob McQuillen, Jane Orzechowski & Deanna Stiles.

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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