

FTM ep 27 - Diane Silver - Transcript

Mary Wesley Hello From the Mic listeners, welcome back. It's great to be here with you ready to share another caller conversation. This month I was lucky enough to speak with Diane Silver of Asheville, North Carolina.

Diane has been a die-hard contra dancer, swing dancer, and flat-footer for nearly 30 years. With a penchant for hot modern contras and everyone-active squares, she loves sharing high-energy dancing that allows everyone to “play” with the band. Diane values calling for beginners and community dances, to share the joy of dancing and to help bring new dancers into the fold, and she also loves calling for dance camps, weekends and festivals, where the occasional advanced dance can challenge long-time experts. She has been noted for her clear, efficient teaching and calling, creative medleys, spirit of community building, and friendly, welcoming tone.

Diane danced for several years with the Cincinnati Lindy Circle, a performance swing dance troupe. She has called dances and led workshops in contra, clogging, swing, and other couples dances at hundreds of evenings, festivals, and workshops across the U.S. and abroad. She also plays the fiddle and is a member of the Green Grass Cloggers, in North Carolina. As a caller, she draws from southern Appalachian and New England traditions, depending on the audience and the band. Here's Diane!

Mary Wesley Hello and welcome to From the Mic, Diane Silver. I'm so glad you're here.

Diane Silver Oh, gosh. Thank you so much for inviting me. And I'm just tickled me too.

Mary Wesley And we were just chatting that somehow, although we've heard each other's names many times, we've never actually met. So it's extra special to get to chat with you today.

Diane Silver Indeed, that's because musicians get to mix and match who they play with and can perform with lots of different people. And callers—usually there's only two at an event, if that, and so it's a lot further for us to cross paths with each other when we don't live in a nearby community.

Mary Wesley It's so true. We're often kind of the lone caller or sometimes, right, one other person. So there's lots of people who I just have to hope that someday we get hired for the same weekend or we go to the same weekend. Right?

Diane Silver Right.

Mary Wesley And where are you speaking to us from today?

Diane Silver I live in Asheville, North Carolina.

Mary Wesley Yeah, great. So that's sort of the other end of the Appalachians, I guess. Technically the Green Mountains in Vermont are part of the same mountain chain.

Diane Silver They are part of the Appalachian chain. And we are here near the southern terminus, which is in Georgia, technically.

Mary Wesley Right. Well, since we're just getting to know each other, I'd love to hear a little bit about how you discovered dancing, social dancing, you know, whatever flavor of folk music and dance you're into. And then how did you find your way to the callers mic?

Diane Silver Sure. That's always such a fun get to know each other question because I think everybody has their origin story, right? So mine is that I have always been a folk music fan. I grew up on Peter, Paul and Mary and Pete Seeger. My parents were big folk music fans and so we had records in the house. So I've always loved folk music. In the...I guess, early 90s I was working in the Cuyahoga Valley in the Cleveland area and I was working in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and they had a folk music concert series that I just loved, because it was part of the cultural heritage of that valley. And once a year they would collaborate with local caller Carol Kopp who had a dance in Richfield, Ohio and they would invite her to do a dance on the old covered bridge in the park.

And so a colleague of mine knew that I loved these folk music series' and they said, "There's this thing happening on the covered bridge next week, you should go. You would like it. I'm going to go. How about I pick you up?" And that is what did it. And I think that that's so true for so many people that when you're trying to encourage somebody to give it a try the first time, if you offer to pick them up and bring them with you it just makes it feel a lot safer. So I went to that dance, I loved it, had the best time. And at the end, she said, "What do you think?" And I said, "It was great." And she said, "Well, you should come next week, where we actually dance in the church basement where the floor is flat!" Because the bridge was crowned and it had this ridge line down the middle, and it was really hard to dance on.

So I started going to the regular Richfield dances, and my local callers were Carol Kopp and Becky Hill, and Paul Balliet and I just dived into contra dancing. So I was a diehard. I became a diehard pretty fast and then a couple of years later, I had moved to Cincinnati and I was dancing with that wonderful community and I got interested in calling. There was a regular weekly dance, and I just felt like I was ready for more challenge. And when I started thinking about the dance from..."How would I call this dance?" Like trying to call in my head while I was dancing and listening to the caller and thinking about what's working well, about the way they're doing this walk through, or would I say it differently? It just gave me a whole different level of stuff to think about and it made the dance more interesting, more fun. And so that's kind of how I got into it.

And so I started going to the callers workshop that often is offered at a dance weekend. You know, there's one little one-hour callers workshop. So I would go and listen to the shop talk, and then had the benefit of having some local callers who were willing to work with me a little bit in first getting me started. Actually I had a little tutorial with a friend in her living room with a CD. You know, where she literally said, okay, repeat after me: "Put your left hand in, make a left hand star." And I would say it after her. And you know, I learned one dance and that's how you start. You learn one dance and then you learn a second dance. So that was my on ramp.

Mary Wesley I love it. Do you remember the first time actually getting up at at the mic with a band? Getting out of the living room and calling?

Diane Silver Gosh. I actually don't remember exactly when that very first one was. I know that it was the Monday night dance in Cincinnati and I'm pretty sure that it was, Darlene Underwood, my good friend Darlene is from Cincinnati. Shout out to Darlene. She was super supportive of me when I was first starting, and so I'm pretty sure that it was probably

her night. And she said, "Sure, why don't you come call your one little dance sometime on my night." And she allowed me to do that a couple of times until I was ready to do an evening on my own. So thank you, Darlene.

Mary Wesley Yay, Darlene! Nice. So it sounds like once you got that one dance you were excited to learn another and kind of keep going. So where did it go from there?

Diane Silver You know, I guess I was aspiring to be able to call a whole evening on my own. And so I started collecting dances. At that time, and for my whole calling career, I always have pretty much built my dance collection from writing down dances as I dance them. When I dance something new and I have that moment of, "Oh my God, that was really fun. That was a great dance. I want to call that dance," I had a little notebook. This is before the days of cell phones where people would just...now we just take a picture of the card, right? I had a little notebook and I would write down the dance during the in between, when everybody was milling around finding partners. I would get my next partner and I would tell them I might miss the walk through, but I'll be there for the dance. And then while the next dance was being walked through, I was scribbling in my little notebook.

So I would capture it, and then I'd run over to my partner and be like, "I have no idea how this dance goes, but let's dance." And I think that was actually really good training. I kind of tell people now, you know, if you want to call, I feel like you ought to be able to dance pretty much anything as a no-walk-through. You need to have a super, super solid understanding of the dancing if you want to call it well and teach it well and be able to troubleshoot and fix things on the floor. And so I think that without even intending it, that was really good skill building for me because I was dancing a lot more dances as no walkthroughs because I was busy during the walkthrough writing down the previous dance.

So I started building my collection and as I said, I had really great support from the Cincinnati community in being offered opportunities to get up on stage and just call a dance or two. And then ultimately, like, 'how about you take the first half or the second half,' which is usually easier than the first half? And so I was able to scaffold it over time until I felt like, "I think I could do a whole evening." And then they were really kind in being willing to take a risk on me, you know, and schedule me for a whole evening. And I know that those early days I would go home at the end and beat myself up over all the mistakes I made and, oh, I should have done this and, oh, I should have done that. You know, but it was a really, really supportive and kind community for getting started. So big thanks to all the Cincinnati dancers out there for helping me get going.

Mary Wesley Isn't that lucky? That's great. And, so what took you out of Ohio?

Diane Silver Well, I think it was a natural progression. Once I was calling a whole evening of dancing at my local community then I started seeking opportunities in the neighboring communities. And so there's a nice little circle around the Cincinnati area where you know, Lexington, Kentucky at that time had the first Saturday dance, and then Cincinnati has the second Saturday dance, and then in Indianapolis has the third Saturday. And, you know, so there was a dance every Saturday night, but in different communities. And so I started calling up those communities and asking if they would consider having me for their dance. And I was willing to drive.

One of my early out of town gigs was in Athens, Ohio, which is a smaller community. And so I think it was a little bit easier for a newer caller to get hired. They were glad to have

somebody new and different. And that was amazing because the house band for the Athens dance at that time was the completely unknown Hot Point String Band. And so I had this fabulous band, which is so supportive when you're a new caller. Having a really good, solid band makes the calling easier. And so I had great support from them. And then of course they blasted into the contra dance universe and became a hot national band. So it was fun getting to watch all that happen.

Mary Wesley That's amazing. And what was keeping you going? What did you find that you enjoyed about calling? And so much so that you were ready to go out to other new communities and take to the stage?

Diane Silver Good question. I think it's two things. So one of them is really really selfish. I'm a total wannabe. I am a wannabe musician. I want to be in the band. I play the fiddle at home in my living room and I play when there's a slow jam. And sometimes I'm brave enough to get up on the stage when there's an open band if I can hover in the back and not play on the mic, but I really need the support of a lot of instruments around me. And I just get really stressed out if I'm the only fiddle player. I do not want to be the sole fiddle player in a band with the responsibility of carrying the dance. I have so much admiration for musicians who do that. But I really wanna be! And so I call.

On the other hand, public speaking is something that I do a lot. I do a lot of public speaking in my work and I don't know why. But that's apparently a skill that I have a little bit of natural...like I have no natural talent as a musician. Every little bit I have worked and sweated and bled for in playing music. But in public speaking I think it comes a little bit more naturally to me, which is lucky. And so it feels like a much easier onramp or like a comfort zone for me. And so being able to be on the stage with a role, a really important role, and feeling like I can do it well and really and be part of the group of performers on the stage, and I get to engage with the band. It's my way of getting to be part of the band, which I can't be as a musician because I just don't have that skill set. So I think that's a huge part of it.

And certainly at the beginning that was probably what motivated me to keep going with it. And then as I got to do it more and more I really started to feel a level of gratification in terms of facilitating the dancing and seeing what I could do to spread this joy to others. Like it's it's very, very gratifying to me to teach a beginner lesson and to show brand new people how to be successful. Like, come on in! We are a totally low pressure environment. If you screw up, nobody cares. Teach them how to dance, teach them some mechanics and take them through the evening. And by the break they're dancing! And to see them getting it and having those moments of, "Oh my God, this is so fun," that is just so, so satisfying to me.

And I think that's what has kept me doing it is helping to spread this to more and more people, and then being the facilitator—bringing the dancers together with the band and then being able to step out. I love that moment when I can stop calling, when you can pull back, pull back, pull back, and ultimately you're not calling anymore and the dancers are just dancing to the music. And I have a little moment of, "I facilitated that and it wouldn't happen without the caller." And that's just fabulous. So those are the things that I think are what keep it satisfying for me and keep it meaningful and fun.

Mary Wesley Wow, that's really beautifully put. I so resonate with the 'want to be in the band' feeling. It's exactly how I got sucked into...I was like, "I just kind of want to stand up there next to the band!" It's great. So it sounds like you start going farther afield and

started calling weekends. Catch us up to how you came to live in Asheville. And I would love to hear more about what your local dance scene that you've been involved with more recently is like.

Diane Silver Okay, yeah. How did I get to Asheville? Well, it starts with how I left Cincinnati, which was one of the hardest things I ever, ever did I will tell you, because the Cincinnati community is so wonderful and is so near and dear to my heart. And I have many, many good friends there. The city of Cincinnati didn't feel like the right match for me for my entire life. I'm kind of a mountain girl and Cincinnati is a little bit flat. They have many hills but I was just...I was kind of missing the mountains. And I also felt like Cincinnati was a little bit conservative for me and I was looking for a little bit more of a politically progressive community and also a little bit smaller city.

So there were those three components of...I don't know that I really want to buy a house and live there for the rest of my life. I had gotten there...you know, various things pull you when you're young. When you're in your 20s you kind of go where there are opportunities. And so different things had pulled me to different places. And I felt like, at that point I'm ready to decide where I want to be for a sense of place and go there and put down roots and then build a life. And so that's why I left in the first place and I kind of narrowed it down to a couple regions, and left. And the first place I went didn't work out as much as I hoped, although it was a good experience. And so then I had a short list of cities and Asheville was on the short list and the other four got eliminated for various reasons. I was like, okay, I guess I'm going to move to Asheville. I was like, I don't know anybody, I don't have a job, but I think this is where I want to be.

Asheville got on my radar initially because I came to the Swannanoa Gathering for a week for old time week a couple of years previously. And that was the first time that I had been to this region, and I really fell in love with the region when I was at camp. But I actually never went to downtown Asheville. I kind of bypassed downtown Asheville or went straight to Warren Wilson College where the Swannanoa Gathering takes place. And I was there for a week, and it's just beautiful and so I had this great week of music and camaraderie and dancing and no sleep and...you know, camp. And it was great.

So then when I had it on my list as maybe I really want to go there, I did come back, for a visit before committing and I was able to stay with some friends and kind of go walk around downtown and get a feel for, like, what is the city actually like? And I did some looking in the paper, newspaper at that time in the classifieds to look at apartment listings, you know, are apartments available? What do rents seem to be running? Does this look on par with other places that I might live? The one thing that was a lot more risky, I think, was the job market. I wasn't 100% sure about getting a job, but I felt kind of entrepreneurial, and I don't know, I was overconfident at that time. I don't know that I would have the guts to do it now but I was...maybe I was young and stupid then, I don't know but it paid off.

Either that I was either young and stupid, or I was young and brave. I don't know, I could spin it either way. But I managed it and that's basically the extent of it. I came for a visit to make sure that I felt like I would like it, and I did go to, local dance during that visit to actually like, go to the local contra dance and see what that felt like. And it was fun and great and like, "Okay, this is good. Check."

Mary Wesley Amazing. And then were you able to find your way into the dance community? And did you start calling right away? Where did you take it from there?

Diane Silver Yeah, I plugged in right away in terms of just going to the dances and attending and, you know, in order to get to know people and to dance, because that was a huge reason why I wanted a good dance community is—I love to dance. And as I got to know people, then, yeah, I figured out who the bookers are and I contacted them and asked, "What does it take to get on the rotation?" And at that point I had been calling long enough, I think that I felt like I had a little bit of cred that I could lean on to say, you know, I've been calling for some number of years and here's a list of various dances where I've called. And I had moved around a lot and I had toured enough at that point that I had a good, decent list of different cities that I had called in for the local dances like you do when you're on a tour. But at least it gave me kind of a little bit of a decent looking resume as a caller.

And so I was able to say: this is what I've done and I had some references. I said, "Here's some folks who you could call and ask them what they thought." And so it took a while to get booked mostly because the schedule was already booked out, you know, some some months in advance. And so they're like, "Well, you know, we could get you six months from now. And I was like, "Okay, you know, put me down for later in the year" and eventually six months will roll around. And so that's what happened is I got booked a bit far out. But eventually the time came and I got to call and then I think I was a solid enough caller by then that I was able to make a good enough impression that people were like, "Well, okay, she's all right. We'll have her again." And so I was able to get on the regular schedule as a local caller.

Mary Wesley Nice, and what was the regular Asheville dance scene? Dances were happening at Warren Wilson where the Swannanoa Gathering is. Were there other local dances as well?

Diane Silver Yeah, Asheville is incredibly blessed to have two weekly dances, which is remarkable. So there's the Thursday night dance at Warren Wilson and there's the Monday Night dance, which at the time was at a bar called The Gray Eagle, which I think some listeners will be nodding their heads being like, "Oh yeah, the Gray Eagle!" Unfortunately, eventually we got priced out of that and so the dance moved to a church, in West Asheville, a very progressive, welcoming, church. And so it's still going strong. Meredith Yeager runs that dance now, shout out to Meredith. And it's a wonderful community and the two dances have different vibes.

It's really nice because I feel like they fill different niches in the community. The Monday night dance is a little bit smaller but that gives it a nice intimate feel. I think it feels like a really safe space for beginners to come. And the Warren Wilson dance I think is also very welcoming and a very safe space but it's bigger and just has a little bit more of a frenetic feel, which is super fun for the advanced dancers. And I think that's part of why people love it. It's like, oh my God, the energy at the Thursday dance. But the flip side of that is if you're a beginner, you know, it can be overwhelming and a little bit harder to be brave and break in. Like, you just gotta dive in and that's hard for some people. And so I feel like it's a really great complement. The two dances really complement each other nicely. And we also have a really great community in that experienced dancers go to the Monday night dance and they help those new people along. There's a really nice community feel. So I just, big kudos to the folks who are running both of those dances now and keeping them going.

Mary Wesley Nice. Sounds like you just landed in just the right spot.

Diane Silver I did.

Mary Wesley Did your research and...

Diane Silver I feel really lucky. I have a great home community.

Mary Wesley That's wonderful. And so what's your more recent calling life like? And you know, recent can be past decade. When I first started this podcast we were kind of still in the pandemic. So it was a funny time to... You know, there wasn't a lot of dancing happening. And now we're sort of back at it. So you know if you want to talk about any of that before, during, after, you know...what has your more recent calling life been like?

Diane Silver Where I feel like I had kind of an on ramp, and upward. If you drew a graph of how many gigs per year that graph went up, up, up, up, up, up, up, up for a while. And then I think sort of flattened out at a peak at some point and has actually declined a little bit now only because I've gotten super busy with other things. And so I'm not like, I'm not touring really anymore. I think at at some point, especially like earlier on when I was still trying to build a reputation as a caller, you know, you pay your dues and so you, you know, like go out on tour and it's like you're going to drive, as they say, hundreds of miles for tens of dollars, as we all know. And so I did that and so I had a lot of gigs, you know, in a calendar year when I was booking tours more assertively.

And now, I'm just spread really thin and I don't have the time...well, I have the time, but I'm not choosing to spend time doing that now and I'm satisfied kind of calling what comes to me. So I call weekends and I call, you know, our local dance here in Asheville. When my turn comes around a couple times a year, you know, I get on the schedule. I could probably call more often here at home, but I really want to make space for other local callers. I get lots of opportunities to call, and so I am happy to let others have that space, but happy to like, jump in if there's nobody booked, you know, if it's like we don't have anyone, I'm like, sure, I'll come call for dance.

I also—we have a family dance here in Asheville that I started, in the early 00s when I first moved to Asheville. It was a niche that was not filled. That was the one niche that I felt was missing in Asheville and I wanted a super beginner friendly dance that would also be very family friendly. So, you know, again, that environment on our Thursday night dance—for all of its energy and fun and everything, it's an adult dance. And Asheville also, especially at that time, this is a good 20 years ago, had a little bit of a sleazy reputation. The sleaze dancing was kind of a thing in Asheville and some people are into that, some people are not. I have no judgment about that.

I do have judgment about it when it's without license. That became a whole thing and I think was a big part of a lot of, of the early awareness of sexual safety issues on the dance floor. I think Asheville has been a big part of that whole issue. I think that we have had some of the problems, I'm going to be honest, some of the problems were at our dance, but also we worked really hard on solutions to that. I think that Asheville has been a leader in figuring out how to address those kinds of problems, and I'm very proud of that work. But it made the dance not all that appropriate for families with children and so it was not a super family friendly dance and I wanted that community environment. And so I started a family dance in Asheville and it had a number of iterations. Sometimes piggybacking with an adult dance beforehand and sometimes standing alone on its own. And it ran for a number of years. I don't know, like seven, eight years.

We did it for a while and then ultimately I got burned out and kind of said, I need a committee to help me do this and nobody stepped up. You know, it just wasn't the right time. And sometimes that happens. And so I said, you know...I didn't want it to be like an ultimatum of if nobody steps up, we're going to close the dance. I didn't want it to be like that, but it was just kind of...this might be the natural close to this. And that's what happened. And so it closed whenever that was, 2011-ish, because I just couldn't do it by myself anymore.

And then a number of years went by and then another member in our community was at the right place in her life where she said, "I want to have a family dance!" She had young kids. They were old enough now that they were the right age. She grew up in the dance community. This is Pearl Shirley, shout out to Pearl! And she said, "I want a family dance for my kids." And so she got a hold of me because I had run it before and so we started it up again. And when I say "we," I mean mostly Pearl. She has really carried it and I've been a part of it and now we actually have a nice circle of callers who take turns calling for the family dance. So it's not just me. I'm not the only caller and that has made it easier for me. And so I'm just thrilled that we have a family dance, and I have a small part in it now. But I'm really proud of having been a part of it initially. That's another element is that I call a couple times a year for the family dance, which I just love.

Another really lucky aspect of Asheville is we have great musicians. And we have a lot of at home musicians, kind of similar to me. We have a really terrific open band community, which is not just one group, but there's a nice community of people who play and they play mostly for fun and mostly for themselves, but they like to play with other people. Some of them you know, aspire to be in a band and are even starting to form a band. But others are just like, I'm happy just going to the open band and going to jams and playing with friends, god bless them. They come and play for the family dance for free. That's our music for the family dance is we just run it as an open band. Pearl leads the open band and whoever shows up, that's our band. And it's always a handful of people, sometimes different people different times. But it's enough to fill the space. We get great music.

[[Diane calls the dance Roll Around by Cary Ravitz](#) with music by Steamshovel with the Chattahoochee Country Dancers in Atlanta in 2014]

Mary Wesley I'd love to hear more from your perspective, you know, the Asheville dance scene, it's certainly one that was on my radar, you know, as just even just having two dances a week is, you know, that was in my early days of traveling around to different dances. That just kind of blew my mind that a community could sustain that. You see that in, in a few other places, you know, Greenfield, Massachusetts has multiple weekly dances, but you need a solid base for that and it's really amazing. And, you know, if you're willing to share a little bit more of some of the work that's been done in Asheville. You know, I certainly have heard of there being a lot of crossover between dance genres, which maybe led to sort of moves coming in from swing dancing. You know, you brought it up that there was this phenomenon that maybe had a rise for a bit in Asheville and then led to what sounds like a community response. And if you're willing, I would love to hear your perspective of what that looked like for you as a local. You know, I always think it's better for things like this to hear from people on the inside.

Diane Silver Sure. I think it started before I actually moved to Asheville. So the beginning, my understanding is hearsay. So there could be people listening who will say, "that's not how it happened!" And if that's what you're thinking in a minute, feel free to set me straight

or call Mary and correct me. Correct the record. My understanding is that it started with the fact that the movie *Dirty Dancing* was filmed in part in this region.

Mary Wesley Oh my gosh.

Diane Silver But most of it I think was actually in Virginia. But a bit of it was filmed at Lake Lure, which is about a half hour outside of Asheville. And I think that people were just really kind of proud of that connection. And obviously the movie was a big hit, and especially among dancers, people who like to dance themselves, you know, it's sort of inspiring. You watch this great dancing on the screen. And so I think that that might have been kind of the beginning, the impetus of it, that there just became a little bit of a joke among regular dancers who knew each other super well. You know, at that time, the community was small enough and tight enough that everybody was friends. And so it felt like a very safe space where you could kind of hustle you up to somebody. You know that while you're swinging, you could pull a friend into a pivot swing and you know, do a little, sort of satirical dirty dancing and everybody understood that it was a joke and that it wasn't a real come on. And you know that that catchphrase of like, "I dance, I flirt, I sweat, I go home," you know, it's like, this is strictly on the dance floor. This is not bleeding off the dance floor. I'm not trying to get together with you like it was understood that it wasn't to come on. And so it felt fine between friends.

But then you have the problem that new people come in and, you know, imitation is a norm of human behavior. If you're joining a new activity, you come, you stand on the sidelines, you suss it out and you kind of see what the norms are and then you adapt. And so when you see this behavior, you think, "All right, well, I guess that's how things roll in this activity." And so new people would start doing this behavior and they didn't maybe understand the underlying context. And it's like, you only do that with people you're super good friends with. You know, where you already have an established rapport. You don't do that with a stranger. But all of it was unsaid, all of it was unspoken and so this doesn't get explained to new people. And then there became a problem of new people would come and would be the victims of that, you know, people who didn't understand the parameters would be trying to sleaze dance with everybody. And so then they're sleaze dancing with a total stranger, and that person is in turn new to the community and new to the activity. And they're like, "Oh my God! You know, and it feels like these people are all over me. And then they wouldn't come back. And so it evolved into a problem.

I think it started out very innocent and nobody intending anything malicious, but it evolved into a problem. So then we started talking about "sleazing without a license." I kind of referenced that before; it became a little bit of a catch term of like, "no sleaze without a license," you know, which meant you have to get permission. And this is way before the MeToo moment of 2017. This is in the early 2000 and '00s. And so verbal consent was not yet a thing. It was actually like, that would be very awkward to like to actually ask somebody out loud, "Is it okay if I twirl you? Is it okay if I do this? Is it okay if I do that?"

Mary Wesley "Is it okay if we dance really close," right?

Diane Silver "Is it okay if I pull you in like this?" That is a norm that has been established since 2017 and kudos to all of the people who have done the hard work of changing societal norms, like amazing, amazing work that's happened in these last years. But before that, you wouldn't say that out loud. It would be very awkward. And so we had to try to educate people about how that permission gets communicated through unspoken communication. And so I wrote a whole big essay on "sleazing without a license," or I think

I called it the "conversation of the dance." You know, this idea that you don't just go up to a stranger in a bar...like imagine it's not a dance, it's a bar. You don't just go up to somebody and say, "Hey, baby, want to get it on?" Like, that would be completely inappropriate. If you're going to flirt with a stranger in a bar like you start small right? You sort of look over at them and you see if they're looking back at you, and maybe you smile at them and see if they smile back and maybe you give them a questioning look like that conveys, "Can I come sit with you?" And, you know, maybe they tap the bar stool next to them.

Like there's this whole progression of: you make a gesture and you see how they respond, and if it's possible then maybe you make another gesture that's maybe a little bit bigger gesture. And you see how they respond. And if that's positive, then that's permission, if you will, to take another step. But it's these little incremental step-by-step, you know, until maybe you finally get to the point of asking this person out on a date. And then if you ultimately...you go out, you get to know this person, you become friends. Maybe it's romantic, maybe it's not, but only it would only be somebody who you're good friends with. Like, contrast that with walking into a bar and seeing a super good friend who you have a whole history with, and you guys understand each other. They're sitting there and you come up behind them and you say, "Hey baby, want to get it on?" And they're shocked for a minute, and then they turn and they see that it's you and they're like, "Oh, hello. Hey, how are you? Good to see you." Right? It's a completely different context because you have that rapport.

So it was this whole essay of trying to explain to people the difference between when you have a rapport with someone and when you don't, and how you build that rapport step by step by step. And the same thing has to be done through all these unspoken gestures in the dance. You know, you start out doing a dance with the standard swing in the standard frame with the standard spacing, and then maybe, you know, if it's someone you're dancing with for the first time, you might invite them to twirl. You know, you could raise your arm and invite them to twirl. And if they accept that invitation and they do the twirl—this is presuming a lead/follow situation—then maybe you can invite another twirl, or you could potentially do a swing dance move that that puts them into a cuddle for a split second and then takes them out of it and see how they react. And if they smile and they look like they enjoyed that and that was okay, you know, then you could put them in that cuddle and turn it around once or twice. So you're in that close, intimate position for a little bit longer and see if that goes over well. And if at any time it doesn't, if at any time they sort of resist or they push back or they give you a look like, "What the heck then like, don't do it again," you know? Read the signs!

So it was this whole huge effort to try to educate people on that skill, which is really a pretty...it's a bit of, apparently a sophisticated social skill that not everybody has naturally, and it has to be taught. So we put a lot of effort into trying to educate the community about that sort of thing. We did some announcements from the mic for a while along the lines of, "If she's young enough to be your daughter, dance with her as if she is." Trying to...because some of a lot of the complaints that we were getting were from younger women who were feeling uncomfortable from older men. I don't want to generalize, obviously not applicable to everybody. So we tried that tact because, you know, we were getting complaints from younger women. But I have to say that backfired on us because what happened is it alienated older men, and it especially alienated the older men who were not the culprits. They were the ones who had a lot of self-awareness. And so when we started doing these announcements from the mic, they started second guessing themselves, and they were like, "Oh my God, am I putting people off? Am I doing something?" And I have friends, you know who would ask me, who I knew well enough

where they would say, "I got to ask you, am I doing anything?" And I was like, "No, it's not you, it's them!" You know, but we lost a good handful of those older men in our community who just felt like—I don't want to be second guessing myself, and I don't want to potentially be offending anybody. And they just they stopped coming, and I felt so bad about that and tried to get them to come back. Some did eventually, but... So we stopped that. We tried it. Bad idea. Don't do that.

We tried doing training sessions. In our beginning workshop we had the beginner workshop that was about just about dance skills, and then we had what we started calling the "Intermediate" dance workshop, which we couched it as, we're going to teach you how to do twirls and and dips and all those cool moves that you see the hot shot dancers doing. But it was a ploy to try to get people to come to learn the moves. And then we could teach the moves with a context of, "Don't do this with others and, you know, trying to slide in there the education about, you have to have permission and how do you perceive whether you have permission or not.

So we went through all these iterations of trying to manage the problem. And then 2017 arrived and the MeToo movement happened. And when that blew up it was so relevant to the dance community, you know, where all of a sudden, because there was this conversation in larger mainstream society about I'm not going to keep my mouth shut anymore. I'm going to speak up and tell my story of what happened to me. All of a sudden, people suddenly felt that they had permission to speak up. And as organizers, we started getting lots of reports all of a sudden of things that were making people uncomfortable on the dance floor. And so then we felt like, okay, we need to have a response policy. We got to figure out how we're going to respond when people complain or report when people report. And so we formed a committee.

So I chaired a committee...what did we call it? We didn't call it the "safety committee," we called it the "Complaint Response and Procedures Policy Committee" or something like that. We were trying to figure out: what is the procedure going to be when somebody initially reports something. You're the volunteer, god bless you, who's sitting at the door that night and you get this information. What do you do? Or you're a board member you know, there are 7 or 8 people on the board. And so the answer is the volunteer gives it to the board. They do not have to deal with it. They just have to pass it on. Okay, great. Now it's in the hands of the board now, what does the board do? And so we have a whole procedure on it and people can find it at Old Farmer's Ball.com. Scroll down to where it says "dance safety" or something like that and it's on that page. And it's a big long document that I hope is a good model for other communities as well. We really worked through a progression of responses where basically it's like a great big flowchart you know, of how we're going to go to the person who's been named and bring this problem to their attention and see what they have to say about it ,and based on that response, then the next step, you know, is an either/or. If they are like number one, "Oh my God, I had no idea. Thank you so much for telling me." That's great. Then it goes down one path. If they are, "Screw you. Don't tell me how to dance," then it goes down another path and then a series of, like, how many chances are we going to give people?

If we start getting...how do we document these reports so that we have a history so that we will know when somebody makes a report. Because there's multiple people on the board, it's not always the same people getting the report. You know, there would be a history where we would be able to see, wow this is the fifth time that this person has been the subject of a complaint. Let's go talk to them yet again. And then, you know, we're farther down in the policy of like okay, this is the fifth time we've had to talk to you about

this. Obviously, these little conversations are not working. So now we need to talk about what are we going to do to help you change this behavior and start talking about some consequences. And ultimately if this behavior does not change, we can't have you at the dance. If this keeps happening, like the ultimate consequences, we have to ask you not to come back. As you know, it's not that we're banning you as a punishment. It's that we have to ask you not to come for the safety of the community and for the good of the whole. And, you know so it was that kind of a progression. It was a lot of iterations, a lot of conversation, but I think it was really significant. I'm very proud of the work that that committee did. And I hope that it's a useful resource for others.

Mary Wesley Yeah. And we'll definitely link to some of these documents and resources that you're mentioning in the show notes. And, thank you for just sharing about that, that process.

Diane Silver You're welcome. You know what's interesting is that I think people like what they initially learn, like whatever the style or culture is when they first started dancing, that's what they get used to, and that's what they like best. And so I have found that when people from other communities that have a different culture than Asheville has, when they come to Asheville, they find it...not everybody, huge generalization here, but some people find it off putting or they feel like, "Oh my God," Asheville. Like God, I couldn't get...you know, it's hard to get a partner, or I couldn't break into the crowd or they just felt like it was too frenetic. It was too much and sometimes it had to do with the, with that sleaze dancing culture that was different from the way they danced in their home community. I find the reverse also true. People who started contra dancing in Asheville and this culture is what they learned and that's their notion of what contra dancing is supposed to be. And then they go travel, or they move to a different region and they go to the contra dance in a different community, and it's a different energy. In my mind still good, still fun, I love it, but it's a different kind of energy. And they're like, "Wait a minute oh, wow. Like, this isn't what the contra dance is like where I'm from."

And maybe they adapt and maybe they don't, but it's a feeling of like, this isn't what it's supposed to be. So everybody's notion of what it's "supposed" to be, I feel like stems from whatever it was when they learned when they were a beginner. That's how they got trained. That's what they like.

Mary Wesley Yeah. We're humans and change is hard!

Diane Silver Yeah, change is hard, which is interesting. The other thing is that the Asheville culture has definitely evolved over time. I feel like, as I said there were some elements that were problematic. At the same time, I love my community. I love the people in my community. They are all fabulous people. It's a function of group dynamics. Every individual is individually a fantastic person. It's somehow the group dynamic creates a situation that got to be not okay. The good thing that I'm so proud of is that the Asheville community, I think, has really turned that around, especially coming back after Covid. There was kind of a sense of clean slate and let's be really intentional about the kind of culture that we want to have. And I feel like it's really healthy right now. It's still vibrant, it's still exciting, that energy is still there. But I feel like especially coming off of the MeToo movement and just in this whole new environment of having a culture of consent, I think that that has done wonders. And Warren Wilson College has done a lot with culture of consent on their campus, regardless of the dance. But the students bring that to the dance floor. And so I just want to do a shout out to my home community. Great people and great

dancing. And if you've heard warnings about Asheville, I would say that's the old days. Come on out, visit us and give it a try.

Mary Wesley Come on down, I love it. As I'm listening to you I'm thinking, you know, you start as a caller and you're teaching dances and you're helping people dance, and then you know...what you just described as like a whole different but related thing. And I wonder, you know, how has that evolved for you? And do you see taking those different roles, and what I would describe as leadership roles in the dance community...does that sort of come naturally? Is it something that you enjoy participating in? And what does it mean for you? Because it sounds like you jumped right in.

Diane Silver Yeah, I mean, that is definitely an organizer role. That's not I mean, we've got right off on a great big tangent now of my role as an organizer rather than as a caller. So it's definitely two different hats, right? And I think it's important to distinguish them. I don't think that all of that work is the work of a caller. So I don't want to put people off if people are out there, you know who have been thinking about like, I might like to try calling. I don't want them to listen to this and be like, "Oh my God, I had no idea that being a caller meant dealing with all of this!" No.

Mary Wesley Right, that's a great clarification.

Diane Silver Yeah, I joined the board because the dance community for me has really been my primary community for many, many years of my life. It's, you know, some people say "this is my church" and that is true for me. This is the community that is "my people." And this is who I, this is where my friends are. This is who I turn to when I need help. My network of support is the dance community. And so yeah, I definitely felt...I don't want to say "a calling," because that just feels to woowoo. But I felt that I should give back, and so I joined the board. You know, we're always looking for people who are willing to put in the time and work to be on the board. And so at some point, somebody asked me and I said, "Okay, yeah, I'll do it."

So I joined the board and I was a board member and then eventually I did a term or two as president. And then coming off of that, you know, when I was sort of a past president, then I had a position, I guess, in the community enough that when this when this safety stuff started coming up and we were forming this committee, I guess I got called in to deal with reports and issues as they came up all along. Especially because often it was better to have a woman to talk to young women who had concerns. And so I did that as a board member. And then even when I wasn't on the board, I was still happy to do that. You know, we had like a dance buddy program, like a lot of communities have. And so I was a dance buddy. And so it was just kind of a natural progression, I think, for me to say I could lead this committee. And, you know, I'm certainly not going to do it myself. It needs to be a committee process, but I could organize it.

So I did that and then the end of the story is I've served on the CDSS board. I'm just in my last year of my second term. And my primary work on the CDSS board has been chairing the Community Culture and Safety Task Group for CDSS, which also formed out of the need that came out of that MeToo movement. In 2018-ish CDSS was also getting lots of inquiries from communities all across the country about, how do we deal with these issues that have suddenly come up? And the truth is, it's not like the issue has suddenly come up. It's only suddenly that it's being talked about out loud because forever it has been hushed up and brushed under the carpet because we just grit our teeth and bear it, because that was the culture. The MeToo movement changed the culture. Now people are willing to

Speak up, thank God. And so now communities all needed to figure out how are we going to respond to this.

And so I have chaired that committee. It's been a couple of years of work of putting together a whole toolkit of resources to support communities, we hope, and the the whole philosophy behind those is we do not tell anybody in their local community what they ought to do. The aim of these tools are to help leaders in a similar position that I was in, to not have to reinvent the wheel. We tried to gather as many resources as we could find from communities across the country, synthesize them, eliminate all the duplication so that other people don't have to sift through a hundred different examples to find what will work for them. We tried to pull out the best nuggets from everything and put it all together in one succinct, you know, in one place so that you could get kind of the best of everything is a one-stop-shop. And then pick and choose what seems to be best for your community, and use that as a tool to craft your own policies, whatever you want your policies to be for your community. So some of those resources are already up on the CDSS resource portal. And the ones that say "TBD" are indeed coming soon, I hope by the end of this year. We need to go through a final round of getting them edited and formatted and such. The content work is complete, and we just need to get them into final format and get them up on the website. Also, I appreciate this opportunity to kind of say all that out loud, because we haven't had the opportunity yet to really market the tools and so I'm glad to at least start getting the word out. I hope it'll be helpful.

Mary Wesley Well so much experience and time has been put into it. So that's a gift. And like you said, this is really a hugely important conversation that I think is happening in communities across the country. It's so important. Invaluable. And I often think that within our dance communities is such a good venue for us to have conversations about culture, and relationships, and behavior that then really have so much bearing on the rest of the world, you know, outside the dance floor, too. But it is lucky to have this community and space to start these conversations. And it's so great that these resources exist.

Diane Silver Thanks. I will say that I think it has been helpful to me wearing those two hats, being a caller and also doing that organizational work. Because as a caller I get the mic and I have a platform, and so I was in a position of being able to nip problems in the bud. You know, when you see something happening, unfolding on the floor, I've got the mic in my hand and I can do gentle reminders to make sure that if you're dancing with someone who you've never danced with before be sure to check in with them about what they enjoy and what they don't enjoy. Just give that tip.

When I can see that that person over there is doing the thing they do and you say it to everybody, but it's aimed at them. And it's, you know, it's harder if you're the organizer but you're not the caller, because then you have to go up and like ask the caller, "Hey, could you make an announcement about blah, blah, blah," and it just a little harder. And the caller might feel like, I don't know how to say that. I'm calling the dance, you know that's not their comfort zone. And so it's been lucky for me, you know, that we're doing both roles. They complement each other. Being a caller gives me the platform to do that education. And having done the organizing work, I'm comfortable with the content. And so as a caller, I'm able to do that announcement, make that little comment, and it comes naturally and it doesn't have to be a big deal.

[[Diane calls the dance Silver Anniversary by Jim Kitch](#) with music by Steamshovel with the Chattahoochee Country Dancers in Atlanta in 2014]

Mary Wesley What other things are you thinking about when you're at the mic as a caller? What are some of the nuts and bolts? You mentioned loving to work with beginners. What's your process for that?

Diane Silver I love working with dancers of all levels. I mean, I'll admit that I love working with beginners, but I also love just calling a dance weekend with experienced dancers and being able to pull out that Saturday afternoon challenging contra dance workshop, you know, where you get to pull out those crazy advanced dances that you only can do in that context. I mean, that's fun too. So just to put it out there.

My process, I think, is to try to research what I think the audience is going to be, to check with the organizers, to do my homework and as best as you can predict the level of the crowd and program for that. But then obviously to have those back up options ready, especially for the most challenging dances. I definitely program with an arc, usually with kind of a double arc, you know, so on a progression of difficulty. And then I come back down and then a little bit more difficulty later in the program, and then finish it out. And so especially those most difficult dances of the program I always make sure to have backups, just in case I was overly ambitious and the crowd just isn't isn't as experienced as I thought they might be. Or obviously, you've got a whole program and then a busload of, you know, beginners shows up and you have to toss out your entire program and just do a beginner program.

I think at this point I have enough years under my belt that I can do a lot of that on the fly. If I have to reprogram I can just pull out my book of dances and find something that'll work, and then it's fine. Earlier as a caller I did a lot of homework. I spent a lot of time prepping for any particular gig and I probably did three programs for the one evening that was like the easy, the medium, and the hard...although not discrete programs. It was one program, but it was okay for my first slot. This is what I think I'm going to do. But if it's too hard, then I'll do this one. And then, you know, as the program progresses, here's what I think I'm going to do. But if that's too easy, you know, then then I'll do this one. If it's too easy, I'll do this. But if it's too hard, I'll do that.

And so in the middle of the program I would have three options. And then as I got further along, I'd probably be back to just two options. But I did a lot of work of looking at the difficulty level, trying to make sure for whichever option I choose, then I want the next dance to have good variety. Like I don't want to repeat...I program with signature moves in mind. I organize my dances by categories of what I think of as a signature move of the dance. So I don't want to do two hey-for-four dances in a row, and I don't want to do too many of them in the whole evening. And the same, you know, Petronella spins or Rory O'More balance and slides, butterfly whirls, wavy lines, mad robins you know—all those kinds of things they are a category in my dance collection. And so as I'm going through the program, I'm looking at, okay, well, if I do the easy one, it has this move. Basically I have the same signature move. And then, you know, a dance that's an easier one with that signature move and then a dance that's a harder one with that signature move. So that either way, that's the spot, you know, that's the Rory O'More dance.

And I also want the mood of the dance to be the same. So I'm thinking about what am I going to be telling the band, that I'm what I'm looking for to go with the dance. And for that I think in terms of mood. At first it was "smooth" and "bouncy," and that's all there was. This is smooth, this is bouncy. Then as I progressed, I got more nuanced with it. And so you know, there's smooth, but there's like silky, dreamy, smooth, there's sweet, melodic, smooth. There's also bluesy, jazzy, smooth, you know, slinky smooth. Bouncy there's like,

hard core old time stomping, hooting and hollering, bouncy. But there's also like [hums a jaunty tune], right? There's playful dance bouncy, there's flirty, you know, I try to come up with words to convey differences, and I don't know how much that's meaningful to the band. I've had conversations with musicians about this. It's like, does this mean anything to you? I think some say yes and some say no.

And I've actually had fun kind of putting together a workshop for musicians and callers together to have that conversation, to talk about this stuff. To say, how do we find a common language for the caller to describe the dance and for that to be meaningful to the musicians. For them to interpret that and pick tunes or play the tunes a certain way. I mean, you can take one tune and play it a bunch of different ways depending on the skill of the musician. So how do you take one tune and play it flirty, and then play it and hollerin', and then play it dreamy? You know, maybe you can do all that with one tune. Maybe not, I don't know, but we're like, "What do you look for in a tune? What makes a tune dreamy versus flirty?" "Yeah, I don't know, good question," ...for a musician workshop.

So I worked up a workshop of this with one of our local musicians, with the idea that we would do it together and I haven't had a chance to do it very often, but it's in my bag of tricks that I've always thought would be a fun workshop. So anyway, that's what I have in mind of, like the mood. As we're going through the evening I want to be able to guide the band for the ebb and flow of the mood of the evening. I want this dance to be like this. I want this one to be like this. And so whether it's the hard version or the easy option I'm looking for dances that have the signature move in common and lend themselves to the same mood.

Mary Wesley And you just led right into the question of working with musicians. Is that another area where you're able to indulge your "musician wannabe" side too? And just really kind of get on the inside of the musical landscape?

Diane Silver Yes. For sure, everything I just said. I definitely think that being a musician, even just at an intermediate level, not a great musician—but I play and I think that has definitely given me an understanding of the music in a way that is helpful as a caller. Very, very helpful as a caller. I see other callers struggling when they are not musicians. I mean I teach caller workshops, I have a callers week that I do every couple of years at the John C Campbell Folk School and it's a topic that we talk about a lot and I can see callers who also play music just innately have a different understanding than callers who don't. So I would encourage callers who are developing, if you don't play an instrument at all, you know, to try to figure out how to get that music side of your understanding. I mean, short of taking up an instrument, which is a big ask and I'm not saying you have to do that, but, you know, play CDs. Listen to the music in a different way, to listen to the music in an intentional way. Have conversations with musicians and try to wear their shoes a little bit, get into their skin a little bit.

And the same thing for musicians. I mean, I've heard lots of people say musicians who also dance approach playing for dancers differently than musicians who don't dance. I think there are a few exceptions to that. I can name a couple of really great contra dance musicians who, frankly, don't dance all that much, but they just they just get it. And that's just because they're incredible musicians. But as a generalization, I would say as a musician, get out there and dance to understand what the dance needs from the music. How the music guides the dancers and what they do. You know what makes them stomp hard? What makes them not stomp hard? Like, for the love of God, we need to rest!

So when the caller says this needs to be a restful dance, this needs to be gentle and restful and soothing because we've just come off of two in a row of hard, frenetic whatever...understanding why that's so important for the dancers and how to do that with the music. And that doesn't mean play slower, right? The music is 118 beats per minute across the board. But you can make that 118 tempo feel soothing and gentle or feel frenetic. And that difference is really important. So I think having that understanding from dancing and playing music, I think is helpful as a caller in my programming and then in the way that I'm trying to guide the musicians without dictating what tune to pick, you know, that's their domain.

Mary Wesley Yeah. And the conversations are so important, and that's the fun of it too is that like, the answer is a little different every time. You know, like there's conventions and things but it's part of the recipe, you know, which band you're working with that night. And it's funny to think of, to be in the realm of finding words or language for things that are experiential and sort of expressive and artistic. So like to me, that's just endlessly fascinating to be like, how do we communicate about this?

Diane Silver Right, right. And I will say anecdotally, that is one of the great joys of going on tour with a band. Because you get to know each other really well and getting to do a bunch of gigs in a row together you start to build that common understanding, you have common experience. So one thing is you can say, okay, remember the dance two nights ago in blah blah city when this thing happened? I want to repeat that; whatever it was you played for that I want to do that again. Can we do that? And you're like, oh yeah, sure. So you can be intentional about it later on because you have that shared experience from the past. But I also found we were able to create vocabulary.

I was on tour with one band, this is such a magical moment. We at some point in the program I wanted a dance that was going to be very bluesy. Like I was trying to encourage that kind of sleaze dance feel without being inappropriate. It was the moment of the evening where I said, I want to give the dancers an opportunity to be a little bit more flirtatious. So I'm looking for something maybe a little bluesy, swiny. Do with that what you will. And so they said, all right, we'll see what we can do. And they tried something and they nailed it. They just picked the exact right tunes and they played it exactly right. And the dancers ate it up. And at the end of that particular dance as we were finding new partners, somebody came up to the stage and said to one of the musicians, they were like, "Oh my God, I think I need a cigarette." A classic line. And so then when the dance is all over, the musician shared it with the rest of us. And so from then on it became a thing for us. And I had to turn to them and say, "It's time for the cigarette dance," and they knew what that meant, and with just one word because we had that shared experience. It gave us this level of communication that you don't have without that shared experience. And so that was just super fun for the whole rest of the week you know, we had these little...I don't know like, not memes, but you know, we had these...

Mary Wesley A little shorthand.

Diane Silver Shorthand. Yes. Good word. Yeah. We had this little shorthand together that was super fun. And it made it tighter. It made the programming, you know, really tight because they were able to deliver on exactly what I wanted. And they also got to know my programming flow. They got familiar with it and they're like, oh yeah fourth sense. It must be time for the blah blah mood. So yeah, super fun times.

Mary Wesley So great. What's on the horizon for you with your calling and dancing life these days?

Diane Silver I'm going to England in a couple of weeks. I've been very lucky, I had an opportunity way back when I had a lucky connection with a dancer from England who had come over to the States to dance, and we ended up sitting in the bleachers and having a conversation. And he was an aspiring organizer, and he wanted to bring American bands and callers over to England. And so, you know, I said, "I'll go if you can help cover my costs. I don't care if I don't take any money home in my pocket. I don't need to make money. I just need to cover my costs." And so that was the beginning of it. And so he helped set that up for me. And I went over and then being there, I was able to meet people, make connections and whatever. And so I've been super lucky to have the opportunity to go back every couple of years. Sometimes it's a longer interval, sometimes shorter. I feel super lucky. So I'm going in a couple of weeks to do a week at a venue called Halsway Manor. Some people have heard of it. And then I've got some gigs on both sides of that week, so we'll be there for a couple of weeks.

Mary Wesley That's wonderful.

Diane Silver Looking forward to that. And I'm trying to think what else is on the horizon. Mostly local stuff the rest of this year. And then we'll see what gets on the calendar for next year.

Mary Wesley And looking to the future, it sounds like this is part of your life. You're all the way.

Diane Silver Oh, for sure, for sure. Like I said, I haven't been booking super assertively right now. I'm not out there knocking on doors saying, hey how about having me for your weekend? I'm happy to take what comes at me if people want to invite me. I'm delighted to call, I just haven't been pursuing all that much lately just because I've been busy. But as I said, as things ease up, you know I've got a couple of obligations that have a light at the end of the tunnel. And when those are off my plate, then maybe I'll have a little bit more space. Maybe I'll start making phone calls again. We'll see. But I definitely, it's something that I love. It has added so much richness to my life so I'm just grateful that it's an activity that I get to do.

Mary Wesley Well, and we're grateful for all that you've contributed. And it's just so fun to get to hear more about your work and your energy and enthusiasm.

Diane Silver Thank you. Yeah.

Mary Wesley I always want to pause and ask, is there anything that I missed, that you're like, "Well, I wish she asked me about this?"

Diane Silver I just want to really do a thank you to all of the organizers. I feel like bands and callers get all the glory and the organizers do all the hard work. And granted, learning to play an instrument and getting good at it takes years and years and years of work so I'm not minimizing that. And calling takes years and years and years of work. Organizing it is the hard work that feels like it doesn't have that glory payoff at the end. And you get a little bit of clapping at the end of the night, thank you to the organizers, thank you to the door volunteers. But really it's the organizers who make these events happen and keep them going all year round. The people who serve on boards and are keeping local communities

running week after week, month after month, and those committees that put on a dance weekend every year, there's a cycle of forming the committee, planning the event, the event happens, and then the follow up. And then it's only a month or two later it's time to form the committee again. It's a year round job practically, and there are people who do it year after year after year. There are some people who do it once. Regardless, huge thanks to all those people who are really the heroes who make this dance world happen for all of us.

Mary Wesley Amen. Yeah it is such a beautiful thing and so, so much work. And often those invisible structures are really the strongest. They form the foundation, so it's good to make them visible.

Diane Silver Yeah.

Mary Wesley Wonderful. Okay. So my closing questions, and you've mentioned this a little bit, but one thing I'm curious to hear from every caller is a little bit about how you keep your dance collection. You know, part of calling is this sort of collecting mentality and notation of dances and then, you know, being able to reference that collection in some way as you're programming. So how do you keep your dances, you know, once you've written them down in a notebook. Do they get moved to a card or are you on a digital platform these days? What's your dance collection mode?

Diane Silver It's a good question. Initially my mode was index cards, so I had a little notebook that I would scribble them down in, in the moment to collect the dance, and then I would go home and transcribe it onto an index card. And in the early days I did some scripting. Later on, I started developing a shorthand, you know, that makes sense to me so I could glance at it and not have to read a bunch of words. I was trying to not be so in the card, you know, my face in the card. I was trying to have it be a cheat sheet, but really be able to be looking at the floor and seeing what's going on and just using it as a reminder. So for a long time I had index cards, and I also keep a program log. I have a log of every single program I've ever called for 25 years. I don't use all that much, don't reference it all that much, but it is nice to have it.

I make notes on the back of the card, especially in the early years when things would go wrong. That whole beating myself up at the end of the evening, a big part of that process was sitting down and saying, "Oh my God, this fell apart. Why did it fall apart? What should I have done differently?" And I would make notes on the back of the card. You know, I would highlight the A2 and with an arrow, turn the card over, on the back would be like: A2 walkthrough, be sure to tell the dancers to look for whoever, or you know...right here before you do A2 make sure to make sure to introduce the shadow so that in B1 when they need to find the shadow they know who they're looking for! You know things like that. I would make those notes. Then a lot of years later, I'd say, God, how many years ago? I don't know, maybe 8 to 10 years ago I switched and I put all of that into a great big word document. Because I started being okay with even shorter shorthand. Like, I've been doing this for 20 years now, and I have it enough in my head, I guess, I just don't need all those words on the card anymore.

And this great big box of cards was a lot to travel with. The other thing is I started doing more gigs that required plane travel. Traveling with this great big box of cards was a lot to carry in luggage. And so I wanted to slim it down. And so now I have a book that I've made, it's 8.5 x 11. I don't know how many pages. But I have like 20 dances on a page. Each dance, it's a table, you know, cells of a table. And each dance is 4 or 5 lines. I mean,

it's A1, A2, B1, B2. And every now and then one of those parts requires a second line to wrap around. But that's it. And so I can get about 20 dances on a page. They're organized according to those signature moves. And then I printed the whole thing out, and I put it in a three ring binder, with tabs for those signature moves. And so I can tab easily to, like, okay, I need a wavy lines dance, and I can just open it up to wavy lines. And I have a couple pages, again 20 dances on a page, I don't know, it's 2 or 3 pages per signature move. You know, that's 40 or 60 dances for that signature move. That's plenty. You know, at some point, like enough. Time to start culling. So that's what I use now and when I program, I have the book. So I travel with that paper copy.

I don't like I don't like calling off of a computer on the stage. I'm just worried, like in the moment, the battery is going to die. It's not going to boot up like I don't want that risk. It stresses me out. So I have my paper book that I know is available. But what I like is that it's this giant word document on my hard drive, which is also backed up on an external drive. And so if I ever lose my book I can just print it out again. I also have that entire document as a PDF on my Google Drive. So if I'm traveling, if anything happens to my book, I can go to a copy place and actually pull it down off my Google drive. I might even have that PDF on my phone. And I can at my host's house I can plug in a thumb drive, take it to a copy place, print out a whole new copy if I have to. Or I can actually pull it up...if I had to, I could pull it up on my phone and it would be a lot of scrolling, I do not recommend that. That's my safety backup. But that's not how I usually use it.

But when I program I sit down at my desk on my laptop and I open that Word document, and I'm looking through the hard copy book, thinking about what do I want to do? But when I've made my choices, then I go on the computer. I can control F to find the keywords, find that dance in this massive many pages document, copy/paste, and I can do a separate word doc for the program. So I'm not actually flipping through the book on the stage. I've got it all printed out in the order of what I think I'm going to do. And then obviously, if I'm in that moment of, "Oh, crap, this is too hard, I need an alternative," I have the book and I can flip to that section and find, you know, find an alternative dance if I need to. I love it. So that's how I do it now. I don't know if it would work for other people.

Mary Wesley Nice! That's what's so interesting. Everyone has their own system. And yeah, they've all evolved based on our needs.

Diane Silver I like to be able to see my options in front of me all at once. I tried using, like some of the online, some of the apps that are out there. But what I didn't like is that I could only pull up one dance at a time right? And I like to physically spread the cards out on the kitchen table. I was like, "Okay for this one I'm looking for a hey-for-four dance," and I would pull out that section of cards and I would spread them all out and sort of glance around them and be like, what am I looking for? This one, this one, this one here? And I need to be able to look at them all at once like that. And so now I can do that because I have 20 on a page.

Mary Wesley Yeah, yeah. You can have that overview, sort of a browse function.

Diane Silver Yeah.

Mary Wesley Love it. Okay. And then when you're headed to a gig, do you have any pre-dance rituals and then post-dance rituals, ways that you kind of get ready to go and then wind down afterwards?

Diane Silver Oh, no, I'm not very ritualistic. I don't do that. I have my pre-dance, my pre-event planning. I have a whole template email in my email that's in my drafts or whatever. And whenever I have a gig, I can just go to that email and copy/paste and be like: here are all my pre-dance questions. And it's evolved over time you know, including things like "Are there any unusual features of the dance hall, such as pillars in the middle of the room that would be useful to know about?" Didn't know to ask that until the night it happened, right? I was calling wherever that was. It wasn't that Levi Jackson dance hall, which is the famous one with pillars in the middle of it, but there was some other dance hall that had pillars smack in the middle of the room. So it's like, what the heck? So I added it to my planning list. You know, will you have a callers monitor? Actually, I really like to have a callers monitor, so if it's not your norm could you do that for me? Do you have a mic or do I need to bring my own mic? A lot of callers don't have their own mic. At some point I bought my own so then that became a question. You know, what's the level of your group been lately? You know, do you have preferences that you want to make sure I do? Obviously these days a big question is do you have a role terminology preference that you would like me to use? Things like that. So I have that. But in the moment, yeah I don't have like a psych up thing. The after dance is really just about milling around with people and chatting. And if it's a dance weekend, you know, if I call the first half, then I get to dance the second half. That's kind of my celebration.

Mary Wesley Yeah, that's the bonus of dance weekends. To actually get out there.

Diane Silver Get to dance as well as call. Yeah.

Mary Wesley Nice. And then my last question, which is pure curiosity you know, as a caller who works, interacts with groups of people, where do you fall in kind of the introvert/extrovert spectrum...if you know?

Diane Silver Excellent question. When I was starting out, I was definitely an extrovert. And I think that's probably a big part of why it was appealing to me. And, you know, again, it's that, you know, "musician wannabe," I want to be on the stage, I want to perform, I like performing. And I would thrive off of that. So the energy of doing that was supportive. As I have gotten older, I have definitely become more of an introvert. Which is not to say that I'm quieter or I've become shy or anything like that, it's just that the energy that you put out to do it, now feels more draining. And I need quiet time and alone time to recharge from that. And that's probably another reason why going on tour is a little less appealing now. Like, today the notion of going on tour, it feels exhausting. I think that's because I've become more of an introvert as I've gotten older and I'm just like, if I'm going to put out all this social energy...like teaching that beginner workshop, I put out a ton of social energy of trying to have my voice be engaging and fun and supportive. I'm trying to create a tone that feels welcoming and non-pressured and all through the evening I'm trying to keep that up with what I'm doing with my voice and my energy to build the energy of the room. And so at the end of that I'm like, oh my God, I need to go be a couch potato.

Mary Wesley Yes. Power down.

Diane Silver That's changed over time.

Mary Wesley Yeah, yeah. Totally changes. Wonderful. Well, Diane, thank you so, so much for making time! I know everyone will be thrilled to hear from you and we will link to a lot of the great things that you mentioned in the show notes. Thanks again, what a pleasure!

Diane Silver You're welcome. Thank you so much for inviting me to do this. And it has been such a fun evening to chat with you. And so nice to finally meet you.

Mary Wesley Yes, at long last.

Diane Silver This is just very fun. I hope that we will meet in person someday. Save me a dance.

Mary Wesley Absolutely.

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

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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