

## FTM Ep 31 - Ang DeCarlis - Transcript

**Mary Wesley** Hello From the Mic Listeners. I'm back to share another caller conversation with you. Today we're going down south to the swamps of North-Central Florida for a visit with Ang DeCarlis (featuring a special appearance from Albacore...is she a Greek muse? Is she a cat? Stay tuned to find out!)

Ang has been calling contras since 2012. Whether onstage at a dance or as a studio art instructor, they find a lot of joy in the process of clear and careful teaching. Their often-melodic calling style always responds to and resonates with the music.

In our interview we hear about Ang's full circle journey dancing with the GODS in Florida, discovering a wider community of contra dancers and callers in Philadelphia, serving on the board in the early days of BIDA, the Boston Intergenerational Dance Advocates, and their return to their lush, green homeland outside Gainesville. While nurturing their Florida roots and local dance communities, Ang is also keeping active ties with the larger dance community, traveling to tour and call at dance weekends. We'll also hear about some of Ang's dance compositions and take some fun side quests into embodied practices and urban line dancing! Here's Ang!

**Mary Wesley** Hello, Ang DeCarlis, welcome to From the Mic!

**Ang DeCarlis** Hey there, Mary, what's up?

**Mary Wesley** You know, just psyched to talk about calling with you.

**Ang DeCarlis** Nerding out for fun? Of course, let's do it.

**Mary Wesley** This is what we're here for. Yes, I'm psyched. Would you start by just introducing yourself, telling us where are you speaking to us from today, and tell us a little bit about how you got into calling and this whole social dance world from which we know each other?

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, so my name is Ang, Angela DeCarlis, either one. I use they/them pronouns, and I am speaking to you all from the swamps of North Central Florida, just outside of Gainesville. I'm almost tempted to go out onto my porch for the comedic effect because there's a pileated woodpecker just going ham out there right now. It really sounds like the jungle outside.

**Mary Wesley** Wow, Woody Woodpecker out there saying hello.

**Ang DeCarlis** Absolutely. I've been calling for a little over a dozen years at this point. I'm from Gainesville originally, and my first dance community was the "Gainesville Old Time Dance Society," or the GODS. I moved to Philadelphia for college and became a member of what was then the Glenside dance community—now it's Mount Airy. And I learned to call while I was in Philly. It's a little bit of an interesting story. So my very first dance at Glenside, outside of Philadelphia. I walked in the door and I remember the person at the door—Phil, I remember it was Phil, shout out Phil—said, "Oh, welcome to the dance. And by the way, here's the signup sheet for Bob Isaac's two week callers workshop intensive." This is my very first time in this community, no one had ever seen me before. And it just happens that Bob Isaacs was running this big deal workshop. I didn't know what any of

that meant and I declined. I did not sign up for Bob Isaac's workshop at my first Glenside Contra Dance.

But what happened was, you know, about 20 other people did. And the influx of new calling talent in the sort of Princeton, Philadelphia, Delaware communities meant that those three dances, the Princeton dance, the Glenside dance and the Delaware dance all shifted a little bit how they hire callers to accommodate this new talent that was coming through the system. And at Glenside, what they decided to do was each of the regional callers was given two nights and it's...you know, in that mid-Atlantic area there's a lot of regional callers. You have Bob Isaacs, Rick Mohr, Scott Higgs, like all of those folks are right there. Each of those folks gets two nights: one of those nights they could have to themselves, the other night. they were encouraged to share with at least one of the up and coming callers.

Many of those regional callers opted to do these big collective events where they would send out an email to all of the upcoming callers and say—"Hey, everybody can call one. We have 14 slots. What do you want to call? Send me your dance. I'll put you in the program." And it was so much fun. So even though I wasn't in that workshop with Bob Isaacs, there was this infrastructure to support up and coming callers at my home dance. And I was friends with a lot of the people who were in that workshop. Julian Blechner is a product of that specific workshop. That's where they learned to call. And yeah, it was...my cat is interjecting here. Hi, honey. Here she comes.

**Mary Wesley** Hi, Kitty. What's her name?

**Ang DeCarlis** Her name is Albie, it's short for Albacore.

**Mary Wesley** Albacore?

**Ang DeCarlis** It's um it's spelled like Albecore, we just pronounce it like she's a Greek goddess.

**Mary Wesley** Albacore! I love it. Well, for our listeners who can't see, Albacore is making her presence known.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah.

**Mary Wesley** Amazing.

**Ang DeCarlis** I'm sorry, everybody. She's a ham and a superstar and a legend. And she uses the human toilet. And I'm very proud of her.

**Mary Wesley** Wow. Did you teach her how to do that?

**Mary Wesley** I did. Listen, if you can teach a bunch of randos how to contra dance, you can teach your cat how to poop in the toilet. You've heard it here first. Okay, so anyway, yeah, I joined the Glenside community kind of right at this amazing moment where new caller-ship was being really specifically nurtured. And I was able to kind of hop on the wagon. And...

**Mary Wesley** Do you mind saying what time period is this? Just so we have the picture and for the record?

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, this would have been around 2012. So kind of like the dawning age of techno contras were just starting to come into their own around that time. There was this really vibrant community of folks who drove great distances for day long or special events. We would regularly carpool from Philadelphia to get to like... Montpelier for a Giant Robot Dance thing. Like, the distances we would drive for kind of like almost normal events, like not usually a regular weekly event, but anything that was even slightly a big deal, we would get like, there would be five or a dozen people carpooling three hours or more to get to these things. It was a really wild time to be coming up into contra dancing.

And I had just arrived from Florida, which has a very different contra dance scene than the Northeast. And I just thought this is what it was like all the time. I was like, "Oh my goodness, like, this is great. Who knew that contra dancing could be like this?" I thought it was some dorky thing that I just thought wasn't terrible when I was in high school. Like "Oh, I'll do this. This is like a nice way to experience live music." There weren't really young people in my home dance community, particularly. It was mostly...I was one of like two high schoolers who did it at my home dance. So it's a little bit of an unusual thing to do. And the fact that I even sort of got into the Glenside dance community is another sort of weird, happy accident in a way. It's another story.

But I think that, you know, going back to sort of my caller origin story, the first dance I ever called actually was organized by Julian Blechner. Julian had put together an event at the Princeton Dance Hall for new callers and new choreography, and set it up such that if you were a new caller, the band would just play five times through. You didn't have to worry about starting or stopping or counting. You just called five times though. And it was a way to showcase and give experience to new callers, but also to workshop new dances; Julian was getting into choreography already at that point. And I practiced, I rode the train from Philly to Princeton and I rode this train all the way up and I was practicing. I was listening to a Crowfoot album and I'm like calling under my breath on the train, like, you know, practicing. And I got up and I called and I did it and it went fine. And it was so not a big deal. And I was like, wait, why did that feel so familiar?

And I think the last piece of my caller origin story is that throughout high school, I was a coxswain for a crew team. I actually like went to a master's nationals where I was at a pretty high level of coxing for crews. And it turns out that there's a lot of skill overlap. When you're directing people in movement, regardless of whether it's in athletics or recreation. being clear on a microphone, any of that sort of thing. I was like, "Oh, I've been doing this for five years already. I got this." And then it was just game on. I was just in with that crew of people who had been in the workshop like I hadn't missed the workshop. I just jumped right in and never stopped.

**Mary Wesley** And what motivated you to try calling? You just saw friends who were doing it you kind of just hopped on the bandwagon, as you say?

**Ang DeCarlis** It's probably a bunch of things. I've always been competitive but especially like, college Angela was like—anything you can do I can do better sort of a young human. So I think when I had friends who were doing it that was probably a incentive was to like also do it. I also, I think this probably happens for a lot of beginning callers is, I was that person on the dance floor where I got to that point where I was helping people mid-dance by calling, like recognizing in the moment and being able to communicate to the people around me to help keep the dance moving. I think that if you notice yourself doing that as a

dancer, there's a pretty good chance that you have the chops, you like have the instinct to do it from stage.

**Mary Wesley** You might be a future caller if...

**Ang DeCarlis** You might be a dance caller if you're bossing everybody around while dancing.

**Mary Wesley** Amazing. And so what did it look like to continue down that road? I mean, it also seems like you were kind of in the right place at the right time.

**Ang DeCarlis** I really was in the right place at the right time. And I think that like any organizer who's listening to this: just setting up the infrastructure. It's 'build it and they will come,' right? I think again, I wasn't in that workshop, but the fact that there were spaces for me to call one dance every week. It's a weekly contra dance series and every week almost, unless we had Mary Wesley traveling through or, you know, somebody from further afield coming through having a whole evening. With those exceptions, it was every week you could call one dance until eventually someone said, "Would you like to do a half evening with me?" And then eventually someone would say, "Would you like to do your first full evening? I'll be sort of there to watch you..."whatever.

It was very, what those boards did during that time, the Princeton board, the Arden, Delaware and Glenside, they really were deliberate and amazingly unselfish. Especially, I mean, you have to remember that I've sort of mentioned some big name callers that are from that Philly/Princeton area: Bob [Isaacs] and Rick [Mohr] and Scott [Higgs], but you also have folks who call quite a lot, but only in that region. So Donna Hunt and Jim Kitsch and Sam Rosenberg, and, like there's all of these folks who are, uh...Jan Alter. Folks who choreograph, like some of these names, you might know if you're a caller, not from that region, you might know some of these dances, right? Jim Kitsch dances are everywhere. Even if you haven't necessarily ever heard Jim call, right. So There's a lot of callers who wanted to be heard.

I think that a lot of callers get really addicted to calling. So the fact that they were even willing to prioritize sharing, I think was a really beautiful thing. I think there are other communities where the experienced callers love calling so much—and who can blame them? I love calling so much, we all love calling so much it's hard to imagine, even me. Like even if I had like someone who I was mentoring here in Florida. 'Oh, would I really want to share an evening? Oh, what I want to give up my gig?' You know, probably not. I wouldn't want to, but they made the effort to do so. And that was incredibly generous of them.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah. I mean, it's impressive. I've never heard the description of how that was structured across dance series and with the involvement of, sort of local and regular callers, and that infrastructure was made so clear. I mean it also seems like "sharing the weight" there a lot to make that happen. So nobody had to, you know, share too much, but a lot came out of it.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, and I don't know the extent to which any of these series are still following those forms, it was really it served that moment. And I'm sure that that the experience is now there where, if they needed to return to that kind of format they could easily do so.

**Mary Wesley** That makes a lot of sense. I love seeing all those, the different models for that.

**Ang DeCarlis** The other reason it worked great, come to think of it, is just, again, because of the high concentration of choreographers in that area, the dance community— like the actual dancers themselves—are really accustomed to nonsense. They have a lot of...

**Mary Wesley** They're testing their latest thing or?

**Ang DeCarlis** Right, yeah, like you know all of the Rick Mohr dances that you know and love, but do you know the Rick Mohr dances that didn't quite get picked up? You know, the more experimental things, you know? And any choreographers are probably laughing. I'm thinking about when Luke Donforth was trying to see whether dancers could do "long lines back and forward," and the answer was "No!" You know it's like, oh, that's so loopy. And they just don't quite...um, but yeah, that Glenside dance community was really able to accommodate new callers because they were so used to having whatever ideas thrown at them. Whether it was, um hash calling, or I think Rick called it stream-of-contraness or something. But like they were up for anything. Those dancers could, you could throw anything at them and they were down.

**Mary Wesley** They were part of the whole organism, which I think makes for such a healthy dance community. I mean, I was really lucky to come up in Vermont with a similar kind of community that just understood that being supportive from the dance floor meant, you know, continuing to have new tradition bearers and folks like, come up into the community and keep. keep the whole organism going.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, it's having that buy-in from every corner of the hall.

**Mary Wesley** So good. And so what do you remember like, picking up or absorbing? What was kind of your learning arc as you got more and more into that scene?

**Ang DeCarlis** It's so long ago now. I mean, there were just so many people to learn from, right? There were a lot of people who were eager to teach, also. Folks who were to mentor. And I think that as a learning caller, I really had my pick of the litter of like, learning what I wanted to learn, from who, what I felt the strengths of the different mentors were and what different teachers were good at. I mean, I learned so much from all of them, right? I learned from so much everyone there, including the folks who really don't call outside of that one home dance, right. You learn from all those people. And I returned to that area on tour this past year, and it was my first time calling back in that area for like a decade. And the support that those folks still had for me, the sort of like, hometown pride almost was really touching. Like I'm sort of getting a little welled up here thinking about it. But the way those folks still came up and said, like, 'Wow, look at you now!' Like, 'I remember when,' you know. That I've been gone for so long, but that I'm kind of always a part of those folks experience of that community. They're always a part of my experience of that community. I mean, that's what community is, right? I'm not like, touching on anything particularly unique here. But it is magical. Nonetheless, it still feels amazing.

**Mary Wesley** Totally. Totally. That's beautiful. Do you remember kind of where you saw yourself going with it? You know, I mean, sometimes it's just sort of organic. We just get carried along. But were there any points when you were like, "Oh, I want to do this regularly or I want do this outside the region where I happen to be living?" You know, did you start to kind of set your sights on any kind of experiences as a caller?

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah. It's a good question. I just loved it. I think that—my father's a jazz musician and I grew up with music in my house, not folk music. Jazz musicianship is by nature pretty exclusive. You know, it's very much like a boys club, first of all, and then it's also a cool hip boys club. It is very difficult to get into that kind of music in a community oriented way. So when I joined contra dancing in the first place, right? Having that live music connection where there wasn't any kind of hierarchy or the hierarchy didn't matter socially, right? Like you still had the top performers in contra dancing like we do now, we still have those top performers but those top performers are still like your buddies. Or like they can be your buddies, they wanna be your buddy. And I think that having the access to perform something musically—while getting to teach, which is another part of like who I am at my core, right? I am a teacher. I love teaching. I'm, you know, enough of a diva that I love calling, I love being on the stage, right. I think everything about it just is so fulfilling. I love facilitating that much joy. I love the craft of it, I love the art of it, I love the experience of it. I think a lot of callers will talk about it like, "Oh my god it's like a drug, you just get in it and it's...how could you ever stop how could ever not do this?"

**Mary Wesley** Oh, yeah. That's a great, that's just a great description of, you know, finding a way to actively participate and just sort of step into that, that different scene. And I...you've said so many, so many things just now that I want to follow up on...

**Ang DeCarlis** I mean, and to the note of just the participatory component of calling, as my body has gotten older—and I'm 30 something now, I think I'm about to turn 32—I have connective tissue issues. I have a sort of hypermobility related thing that sometimes means that I can't participate fully as a dancer anymore. And I think that I'm really grateful for calling in this era of my body, because I know that regardless of how well I'm able to be on the dance floor, I know I can still enjoy a weekend without totally physically crashing as a caller, right? I think that's a really beautiful part of calling is just. It's another way to be included.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, no, I love that. And I don't know, for me, even though calling is different than dancing in terms of how you use your body, I find it such an embodied experience? I don't know if you feel that way?

**Ang DeCarlis** Oh, man, I mean, listen, I think you just activated my grad school sleeper agent code because like, my MFA degree is about, so my master's in fine arts, I got because I researched figure models who pose for life drawing classes.

**Mary Wesley** I am looking at a painting behind you.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, that one actually is one of my thesis paintings. It's a big 2x4 foot vertical oil painting, figure painting.

**Mary Wesley** So beautiful.

**Ang DeCarlis** I'm really interested in embodied practices in general, because they have been scientifically shown to improve things like body image and self worth when you engage in these kinds of practices. And there are a lot of different ways you can be engaged in an embodying practice, whether that's dance or acting or sports or like yoga, you know, any of these things that are obviously like, I'm doing a thing with my body, right? Figure modeling, modeling for artists, very clearly falls into this category. You're doing a thing with your body. Contra dancing is one of these as well.

The thing I'm really fascinated about about the life drawing ecosystem is, it turns out there was this one paper published a few years ago, where it was determined that life drawing, the practice of drawing from a live model, reaps the same benefits you would expect from an embodying practice. And that is not the case if you are painting a still life or a landscape. So if you were drawing...

**Mary Wesley** And who reaps the benefits?

**Ang DeCarlis** So, everybody, as it turns out. So here's what I mean, right, like if you are doing the embodying practice, if you were modeling or dancing, you get those benefits. If you are watching a stage performance, if you're in the audience watching a dancer, you may or may not get that kind of benefit. The interesting thing here is that artists who are drawing a human body, a live human body... it turns out are also participating in an embodying experience. I sort of think of it like astral projection. Like you get to live in and borrow the experience of the model when you are the artist drawing from them. And this doesn't happen if you're doing the same activity...you could be sitting there drawing from life, but you're drawing a banana or like a bowl of fruit or whatever, you don't get the same benefits. You don't get the body positivity and the self-worth and the et cetera.

So just what you were saying about like, how you feel the embodiment of calling is really interesting to me because it's totally plausible. This idea that when you're not only just watching a dance performance on stage when you are calling, you are creating that dance performance in real time. You are not only facilitating it, you're orchestrating it. You're the conductor of the orchestra, right? So it makes perfect sense that your brain would be kind of lit up in some of the same ways that the dancers' brains are lit up. Just from, again, like we went down this insane grad school tangent, which is I'm sure exactly what you always want when you're running a podcast.

**Mary Wesley** I love it.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, really interesting. I've never thought about it like that, but it makes perfect sense based on what I know of adjacent research.

**Mary Wesley** Well, OK, I'm excited. Maybe we'll just have a separate podcast that's all about that. But I'm excited for you to like, write a paper or like make us a zine about it, because it's something...and I sometimes ask people about it because I mean, everything you said just resonates so intensely for me. But I've never really had, it's a hard thing to put into words. And I often ask other callers about it because I'm curious. I'm like, "Do you have this thing..." where, you know, I definitely feel like I'm experiencing something in my body. There's like a feedback loop happening between me and the dancers. And I, and I think I feel it a lot when I'm watching any human do a thing in front of me. I feel like my nervous system is tuned in in a particular way. But calling, like what you said, the act of like...

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, you're doing it too.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, having that connection to bodies moving through space, that's so interesting. Well, that was a fun little tangent. Feel free to fast forward if we've lost you, or rewind if you want to relive it again. Well, you mentioned so many different things that calling is and does for you. And so you started dancing in your home state of Florida, went away, kind of got swept up into this different but related scene, and stepped into this role of

being a caller. And then, as you said, now you're back in Florida. I don't know if there were other stops along the way. How has your relationship to dancing and calling changed as your geography has changed?

**Ang DeCarlis** Oh my god, yeah, wildly. So yes, from Gainesville, Florida, a few years in the Philadelphia community, and then I moved to Boston, largely because of the dance community. I had been to enough dance events in Boston. Again, this was the rise of techno contra. This was like Buddy System galore everywhere, right? Like... moved to Boston, became involved with the BIDA dance board, helped to run BIDA. I'm so proud of BIDA!

**Mary Wesley** The Boston Intergenerational Dance Advocates. We love BIDA!

**Ang DeCarlis** I'm so proud of them. Every time I go, I cry now. But you know, not like, there have been so many people who have served on that board, but it still feels like, you know...I made that sign when I go it's like, "Oh, I drew that sign!" You know, it's like a little pieces of me are here and I love it. And I'm so grateful, so grateful to have been a part of that. And now they're just such a big deal. They're like maybe maybe the most successful dance in the country right now. I haven't been to every dance in the country, but I know BIDA's in that very top tier right now, and I'm so proud of them.

And then I came back to Florida, and COVID happened. I came to Florida for grad school, and because I missed being here. Listeners, when I tell you, I look out my window and it's just green. I live in the deepest, deep swamp. I can see far more foliage than I can see sky from any part of my house. I am enveloped in palmetto and oak and magnolia and sweet gum. I missed it here a lot. I've missed being in a place with this much nature and I needed to be here as much as I loved the community in Boston. I was missing a huge part of who I am. So I came home, went to grad school, COVID happened. The Gainesville dance community lost its dance hall because it was a city building that was being evaluated during COVID. The city was like, oh, as long as we're not able to run events, let's go ahead and do a quick survey of our assets. Oh, there's like devastating damage in the roof of this building that nobody knew about. We need to close it down. That building has still not begun restoration, but it is slated to be restored hopefully soon. Florida being very politically blended didn't automatically embrace COVID precautions during like sort of late lockdown to get back to dancing. There was a little bit of schisming in the community for that reason. Moreover, the Florida government had actually made it illegal to require any kind of asking for vaccinations at public events. Part of the community went to a privately run dance space that Mary's been to, Dancing Fish. And part of the committee was dancing in some smaller spaces.

We really don't have, I mean, we don't benefit from that kind of classic New England town hall or grange. We don't have that here. That's not a part of the kind of, architectural history of this area. So dance halls are very hard to come by where we are. It's very difficult to find spaces to do this thing. So what does that mean for me now? It means that my tolerance for "contra-elitism" has really declined steeply.

When I return to places in New England or when I visit the Pacific Northwest and folks are complaining about this little thing or that little thing, it just makes me kind of crazy. It's like, you know, oh, Seattle, you have two weekly dances in two beautiful halls and like, you're gonna complain about anything? How dare you? You know, like, and which isn't to put down, you know...their very real concerns about how they could improve. Like anytime you're complaining, you're seeing room for improvement. I'm not saying that there's no



room for the Seattle dance community to improve. But living in Florida where we dance a couple times a month regionally, not even locally regionally, where the halls aren't necessarily beautiful even if they might be functional, right? It's like, okay this one has bad lighting, but good floors. This one has good acoustics, but bad lighting, and like whatever it is, right? We don't really have beautiful places to dance. The caliber of musicianship here is very different from musicianship in Seattle or in Boston, both of which are communities that are influenced from so many traditions, right? Like whether it's Quebécois and Scottish and Irish and old time and all of it coming together to make contra dance repertoire. The New England repertoire or the Portland collection, right, like these amazing, deep repertoires of dance music. We don't benefit from that in the South. We have old time, basically. We might have a little bit other stuff, you know, you might have a band that does Irish or something, but we don't have that rich milo, milieu?

**Mary Wesley** Milieu?

**Ang DeCarlis** I don't know how to say that word. Speaking in French. Right, we ain't got no French down here, y'all, um but we don't benefit from all of these things that these other communities benefit from and it feels uh really intense when I visit and people have anything to complain about. It's like you should be nothing other than grateful. I actually lectured the Glen Echo community a little bit when I was there on tour. No one warned me that they don't really clap very much!

**Mary Wesley** Oh, yeah, that is a phenomenon.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, no one warned to me about it. And at the break, I thought about it really hard and I decided, you know, I'm not, it's not convenient for me to come call Glen Echo. It would be like a big tour stop for me ever make it here. I'm like a good enough...like I have enough of a reputation as a caller where I think that these people are listening to me. And I think I don't care if I don't get invited back. So I'm just gonna go for it. And I got up on stage after the break, Mary, and I told them, you now, this was right after Hurricane Helene had taken out a lot of the dance spaces in the Asheville area as well. And I told them like, "You all have such a beautiful hall. I mean, the Spanish Ballroom, come on. You must feel so lucky to get to dance here every week. And I'm thinking a lot about the Asheville community, and my community lost its hall in early COVID, and you all must feel so lucky. And you have such great musicians who come touring through here all the time. You must feel so lucky..." And I was just sort of like, you know, "You must think that you can't have it any better, but there's one thing you can do to make everything even better. And that's like, show some appreciation!" You know I tried not to be too patronizing.

**Mary Wesley** Put your hands together!

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, I was like, "Let's practice a little bit, like, I'm curious how loud you can get. I know that this hall is so beautiful, but it also swallows a lot of sound. I know it's like hard to get loud in this space. And I recognize and appreciate that. How loud can you get?" You know and we did a little of practicing. I was like, "Let me just hear them cheer for a second." I made them cheer. And I said, "That's awesome. Do that more. It will make everything even better than it already is for you." And I just decided like, you know, there are gonna be some people who think I'm being a total, you know, things I can't say on podcasts right now, probably, but who think that I'm very rude.

**Mary Wesley** You know, I'm hearing that you invited a collective gratitude practice.

**Ang DeCarlis** We did. That's exactly right, Mary. I invited a collective gratitude practice. And the organizer did write to me later and said, like, "Yeah, nice. You tell them!" And I was like, cool. I didn't get kicked out of Glen Echo this time. But I mean, yeah, it's just...communities that don't clap or communities that don't hoot and holler or communities that complain because they have musicians who are maybe getting older and having a harder time doing it. It's like, let them keep playing man! Like you are so lucky that you have these people who have been playing for your dances for 50 years! Like how dare you like suggest that they need to move on, or whatever. These are just some of the things I've experienced that I just have so little appreciation for now. I think that, you know, I probably used to be a bit of an elitist when I was in Boston maybe, you know, it's like a little bit of that culture in that area too. I get it. I'm not there anymore. I'm so not there any more.

**Mary Wesley** Well, it's the classic thing. We don't always see the water that we're swimming in, and that is the benefit to having the opportunity to travel around or live in different places and see these contrasts and then integrate them all.

[ [Ang calls the dance The Magpie and the Seal by David Zinkin with music from Sycamore \(Cedar Stanistreet, Samuel Foucher, Michael Sokolovsky\) at the Mt. Airy Contra Dance in October 2024](#) ]

**Mary Wesley** I want to hear a little bit more about Florida, but I also want to jump back just because BIDA was clearly so influential to you. And I'd love to just hear a bit more. So you were an early board member? And you know, what was that like?

**Ang DeCarlis** I wasn't on the founding team, but people who were on the founding team were still on the board while I was there, if that makes sense. I was, my sense is that if I had to like, sort of name it, I guess I would be something like second or third generation board member, if I had to kind of put a number on it. I mean, I was on the BIDA board for things like, 'let's invent something called the safety team. What does the safety team do? What do we do about interpersonal conflicts between dancers. How do we keep people feeling safe here,' right? BIDA was one of the first dances to adopt a kind of formal safety practice. And I was very involved with that. Some people listening might know that I was involved with a pretty negative safety experience in the Princeton and Glenside dance communities that ultimately resulted in a dancer being banned from those communities. But it was after I had already left, I was sort of a....I hate to use the term victim, but I was a victim of that circumstance, certainly. And so I take the issue of safety at dances very seriously as a result. Like I had to leave a whole city because of the situation where I was unsafe. So, yeah, that was hard and new and weird.

I was also on the board for the early days of gender-free calling. There was a big sign that I made about, like I made this big, beautiful artsy sign explaining the new terms: "Larks and Ravens." We weren't quite yet at larks and robins. We had said ravens for the time being. And that sign must still be somewhere. I guess they probably don't use it anymore now that the ravens been turned into a robin,

**Mary Wesley** Oh, I hope they have it for the archives somewhere.

**Ang DeCarlis** It's somewhere it's...yeah like Mary the archivist is like, 'Where's the sign?' Yeah, no it's probably still somewhere. It's probably in, I don't know, like Jeff's basement or something."

**Mary Wesley** Well, yeah, and I mean I mean it's right in the name, like the "Intergenerational Dance Advocates" have very much emerged to sort of make an intentional space and container through which to filter this process of a new generation of dancers and callers and musicians coming into and upholding the scene.

**Ang DeCarlis** And a new generation of priorities too. Like how much do we care about safety? Like, how do we feel about the "Fireplace set?" You know, because that was a big part of what I think made BIDA, BIDA. Now I think that, you know, especially post COVID with BIDA drawing numbers at a dance like we've basically never seen at a regular dance series anywhere, right? It's just a huge dance now. While the Scout House, which used to be sort of king of the hill, to my sense, I think that it's had to step back a little bit. And I think that, I imagine that that's in no small part because of a move away from cultures that supported sort of an elitist mindset of like, 'let's have the fireplace set.' Let's have, sort of have two dances in one dance hall because we think that some people are more worthwhile to dance with than others.

**Mary Wesley** Right, the "Fireplace set" being kind of an example of certain, supposed caliber of dancers kind of congregating in one space in the dance. For some unwritten, untransparent sort of rules in the space in which the dance was happening. And I feel like...

**Ang DeCarlis** I love, like a few callers and I have talked recently about how now we have to explain what we mean when we say the words, "the Fireplace set."

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, I know it's funny I hadn't thought about it for quite a while.

**Ang DeCarlis** It's great that we haven't thought about it in a while. It used to be the only conversation.

**Mary Wesley** Well, yeah, I mean, as a dancer and a caller, you know, really affected the whole puzzle.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah. And then there's another set somewhere like Appalachia that has a similar name. Like I don't remember what it was, but the fireplace, that was the New England one. There are examples elsewhere in the country where that...

**Mary Wesley** Center Line Syndrome.

**Ang DeCarlis** Centerline syndrome, right.

**Mary Wesley** That's why we had to call it the fireplace set, because it wasn't in the center.

**Ang DeCarlis** It was on the set side of the hall with the fireplace listener, you guessed it. Yeah. I think that it's really wonderful. I think it's wonderful how BIDA has really worked hard to put these new best practices into practice as they arise. There's no twiddling thumbs and waiting to see what happens. They are the ones who try first. And it's clear that that pays off. Like, I think that at this point, we can all point at BIDA and say, "Looks like gender-free calling worked out. Looks like it brings in young people. Looks like we don't want a fireplace set. Looks like, you know, we want inclusivity. Looks like want open bands. Looks like family dances, looks like a safety team...like, looks like this all works, y'all." This is all good stuff happening over there. Nothing is wrong. Like, nothing is scary if you're a younger dancer or if you are a dancer that's a little more trepidatious about trying

new things, about moving. Like now we can point at BIDA finally and say, "Here's a 10 year legacy of success around this kind of movement, culturally."

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, I love the BIDA dance. I haven't been down in a little bit, but it just seems to be thriving. And there's a dance weekend that they're running now, too, the Beantown Stomp. Good stuff. I wonder, you know, the last time I called at BIDA, I had one person who was older come up and share that she was experiencing feeling less welcome on the dance floor. And this is, it's all part of the puzzle of generational shifts. But I wonder how much the circle just comes around in terms of who is feeling supported and then the change that is needed and how does it affect, you know, all people. And so, yeah, I wonder how, if you've encountered conversations like that, where there's overwhelmingly positive changes in bringing new people in and then maybe folks who feel like the intergenerational piece isn't, you know, for some people that they're not feeling included in that. You know, it's just the ongoing puzzle.

**Ang DeCarlis** It is, yeah, the pendulum swings. I think, you know, I'm glad you brought that up because it is something I've been wondering about. I'm no longer involved with the BIDA scene directly, but last time I called there, I remember looking out at the floor, and we had a huge turnout and I recognized almost no one. It's been only like five years since I lived in Boston, right? You would expect, you know, I called it the Mount Airy dance, which I haven't been at in 10 years and I recognize, like a third of the dancers, right? So I'm like, what is going on with BIDA? Is it just that Boston is more of a migratory place and people have moved to other locations? That's certainly true in part, but it also did look a lot younger at BIDA than it was when I was there. When I was on the board, it really was very, it felt very balanced in terms of its intergenerationality. And I do wonder if it's now skewing much younger. And that brings up the question, like, is that a problem or is that just something that is? Ageism is tricky. It's probably the only -ism that goes both ways.

And it's one, I try to think a lot about ageism without ever trying to get into it too much because it's hard. It's hard for everybody. It's hard when you're like me, the only high schooler in a dance of mostly older folks. And it is hard when you are the only 70 or 80 year old in a hall full of people who wanna dance like they're 20 because they are, you know...like that can be exclusive too. I think that it would be interesting to know whether BIDA is thinking about this actively and whether they're running workshops about how to dance with neighbors at whatever level they're at. I think, that that's always a really brilliant strategy is to help folks build skills. designed to accommodate the people around you.

Actually one of my anecdotes, one of caller anecdotes comes from BIDA when I was dancing with a blind dancer—and I share this anecdote every beginner's lesson I teach. I say, different people...everybody wants to help you. Everybody wants to you succeed, but different people will have different ways of being helpful. And I usually put that in air quotes like, "helpful," right? You know, a good example is people who talk over the caller who's trying to explain something from the microphone, and they're working so hard to help their partner and it's like, "I appreciate that you're helping down there. Let me say the thing. Let me say the thing so that everybody can hear it." So I was dancing with this dancer at BIDA, again, this would have been 10 years ago almost, but this dancer was totally blind. And the number of people, I tell y'all, who were pointing to where this man needed to go. And it's like, little things like that, where sometimes your help can be coming from a good place, but it's inaccessible, right?

**Mary Wesley** In this case, literally.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, literally inaccessible, but sometimes it's just sort of a bad match for how that person's brain wants to learn, right. It might just be inaccessible to them because they are thinking about the fiddle or they're distracted by someone's shiny dress or whatever, right, like. I ended up...I was dancing with this dancer as a partner and I ended singing on the tonic with the music anytime because I think there was a hey or a half hey into a partner swing and I needed to help my partner get to my side of the set to where I was. So I would just sing on the tonic rather than being like, "Over here, come this way," you know, like whatever. I just sang a note that was relatively unobtrusive singing with the music and he would just make his way over to me and then we'd do the next thing and it was great. Pointing did not work. So, I don't know, I hope that any community that is dealing with folks feeling exclusive, considering the idea of how can we teach our dancers to help at the levels of the people needing help. How can we sort of give our dancers more tools in their health toolbox other than pointing, right? Other creative help tools.

**Mary Wesley** Well, we haven't talked too much about the contra dance tradition as you engage with it and carry it on. So how do you think about contra dancing as a tradition? And, you know, do you call other dance formats and styles? And how do you think about repertoire and sort of, tradition and innovation?

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, I mean, certainly the kinds of things I call now that I'm back in Florida are very different from the things I called when I was still in New England. I mostly call, I organize my dance card box with the easiest dances in front and they get more challenging as they go back in the box. I've been calling from the front half of my box largely since I've in Florida. We don't have as much of a culture of experienced or advanced dances here. So that's one piece, um, that's led me to doing a lot more work to collect dances, which are less difficult, but more interesting. You know, a dance that is all glossary moves, but it's reverse progression, for example, like that's the new thing we're doing. Or a dance with a really out-and-back, quick shadow interaction. You're not doing some big thing where you chain on the diagonal to your shadow and you do a hey, and then you balance the ring, and then you find your partner, right? None of that sort of stuff where the sort of lowest level of dance skill has to be a little bit higher to do those in a way that's fun for people. Because that's the thing, like, it's not just about whether your dancers can do it, it's whether your dancer can do and have a good time. Right? So trying to figure out where that level is, collecting at that level.

I've also been calling a ton more one night stand gigs, little barn dances for college students or for community festivals or what have you. And those have become really fun for me. I think that I used to kind of dread those gigs when I was in New England because it's a totally different repertoire. I've gotten much more into that repertoire and the thing that I love about calling these 'one night stand' dances now is very much like, the really deep joy that a lot of these gigs can provide, where this is such an unusual thing for everyone on the dance floor that it becomes like...especially calling for like college students or something and having to tell them like, "Okay now y'all are young and I know you want to run and jump and skip and everywhere do some of that for sure but like, you can bring it down a couple notches." Like having to actually tell them to have a little bit less fun, you know? That's the kind of level of joy you're dealing with at these gigs where they're having so much fun that you're a little worried. And you actually have to like, gently dial them back a little bit. Like try doing it like this. But I've gotten to really love those like dip and dive, peel the banana, run down the middle sort of things. I think that there's so much fun.

Um, I also like, this is a whole other thing that I've gotten into during COVID, during early lockdown, when contra dancing was basically impossible. My family, which is my mother, my now husband and I got into urban line dance, which is a whole other tradition. It is largely, sometimes it's also called "soul line dancing." It's largely a black community, it's a black tradition, American black tradition. You have done the electric slide. You have the cha-cha slide. You have done the Cupid Shuffle. These are urban line dances. These are dances that became so popular from the urban line dance repertoire that they have permeated our larger American culture. They have become, you know, like middle school and high school prom dances and bar mitzvah dances and wedding dances, right? For everyone, not just for the African-American community. So some urban line dance communities across the country really are affinity spaces. Like I think that they are for black people. You probably can't, like as a white contra dancer you probably can't just like roll up to any given urban or soul line dance and expect to be kind of brought in. But it happens that the Gainesville community really does have the same kind of inclusive mentality that many contra dances do of like, we don't care what you look like, we want you to come do this with us. The community here also raises money to send kids to STEM camps. I mean it's like it's just a cool scene. We started doing it during COVID, and we all got kind of hooked to a point where we do probably more urban line dancing now than we do contra dancing.

**Mary Wesley** Amazing.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, and I've, James and I, my husband and I have started writing some urban line dances. We choreograph for them now. A lot of the traditions are very similar to contra dancing. You have a set kind of repertoire of basic moves. There's a little bit of wiggle room to invent new moves kind of within the parameters, within the kind of scope of what's expected. It's a bit like English country dancing in so far as that each dance belongs to song. You play this recording, and then you do the dance that goes with it. So unlike contra dancing, more like English dancing.

There's no partners and there's no contact in line dancing. You are dancing by yourself, which allows for a lot of individuality and a lot of flourishing, which is a lot fun. You know, the sort of stuff that really attracts people to practices like blues or fusion partner dancing, where you get to really kind of swim in your own dance space a little bit. You get that in, in line dancing. Another thing that's different is that the leadership of the line dances gets passed around. So rather than there being one person who's leading, like at a contra English or square dance, the microphone gets passed around on the floor. Typically, you know, the DJ throws something on and it's like, "Oh, wait, like you're holding the microphone cause you just did the last one. You're like, I don't know this one. Who knows this one?" You hold up the mic and whoever knows it comes over and takes the mic from you and you trade off who's "calling." They don't call it calling, they call it "leading." Who's leading that dance?

And it's so much fun. It's like, James and I are total outliers in our community. Our community is mostly middle-aged black women. And there's a few black men and there's a few older white women and there are a few young black folks and then we are the only young white folks and. James has a nickname, he is "Big Game" when we go to Smooth Flavor, they say, "Big Game is in the house," and we're just part of the community. I love it. We love it, it is so much fun. I have one more anecdote about urban line dancing, which is that I was just, I mentioned this tour where I lectured Glen Echo. I was on tour with Sycamore.

**Mary Wesley** Who is Sycamore again?

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, Sycamore is Cedar Stanistreet, Samuel Foucher, and Michael Sokolovsky. So they're an awesome little band. We were touring and I was so excited. I'm a little bit starved for that caliber of gigs since I'm in Florida. As much as I love doing the sort of more intro level and barn dance sort of gigs here, I do miss calling for the back half of my box as it were. The middle of my box a little more. So I was so excited to be on this tour. But my brain and my heart were really with line dancing that week too. I was just like, all I could talk about was urban line dancing. The whole time, you know, we're on tour so we're in the car a lot. And I'm like, "You guys, urban line dance, you just gotta try it!" And they're like some Vermont boys basically, they're all like not at all in a realm where that's gonna be... You're like, I'm in the South, there's plenty of black people line dancing everywhere. It's not the same as Vermont probably...

**Mary Wesley** I will say we have a rising queer country line dancing community popping up and I'm really excited about it.

**Ang DeCarlis** So yeah, country line dancing is getting totally taken up by the gays. Like I haven't been to a queer country line dance yet.

**Mary Wesley** It's outstanding.

**Ang DeCarlis** All the rage. It's everywhere right now. So anyway, I'm telling these Vermont boys about urban line dance and we're driving from Glen Echo back up to Swingin' Tern. We're driving north and we stop at a gas station in New Jersey for a break, get off the road for a bit, stretch our legs. We park behind this gas station and we open up the doors of Cedar's car and I put on "The Wobble," which is like one of these line dances that maybe you've encountered at a party before. And I'm teaching these boys how to do the Wobble. And a lot of these dances are what they call "four wall dances," where you face one wall, you turn 90 degrees, you face the next wall and you rotate. Each time through the dance, you're facing a different wall. We turn to face the last wall, we're facing the fourth wall, it's the gas station. And there is a woman who works at the gas stations who is out behind the gas station on her smoke break. You know, she has her milk crate in her pack of cigarettes or whatever. across the parking lot she is doing the Wobble with us. I like run across the parking lot we like fist bump we like hype each other up like, "Girl look at you, I see you girl! Yeah girl!" You know like whatever, we're hyping each other up and I got back in that car you know and I told those guys, I was like listen if we were walking through some nerdy choreography idea I had or if we were practicing some English dance, if we're doing any of the shit we normally do in this parking lot, that wouldn't have ever happened.

Like the fact that urban line dance is so much more a sweeping cultural touchstone that is based on popular music, which means that your access to making connections with other humans is greater. And I went on that whole tour and that was maybe the highlight of my tour was dancing with that lady at the gas station. And we're living in a moment right now that very excited about, maybe you've seen this dance "Boots on the Ground" that's like taking over TikTok and Instagram right now. That's an urban line dance. You know, I think it's easy to just mistake it for like a TikTok dance, which is just like a little bit of choreography that people put together and do for a couple weeks. Boots On the Ground is an urban-line dance that has become so viral. It's like, living in the moment when the electric slide was new. Right now, Boots on the Ground is that. You know, it's going to be that new thing. Boots on the Ground is gonna be in our lives forever. And we're living in it this month. Like, you know this month Boots on Ground. So learn Boots on the Ground! It's

not just a TikTok dance. It's part of a whole other tradition of choreographed, repeating dances that are a lot like contra dancing. They're cousins, right?

**Mary Wesley** Go get it, folks. You know what social dance is for. We need it.

**Ang DeCarlis** You know what social dance does! Go learn Boots on the Ground. Like, take it seriously. You know, and I'll say that I think that some of those party dances can feel hokey, like cha-cha slide or whatever, because those are the easiest ones, you know, like when you hear "Turkey in the Straw," and you're like, "oh, old time music,." But it's like, there's this whole repertoire of great old time songs, and it's just this easy one percolates to the surface. Keep in mind that even if you've encountered some of these urban line dances that I've mentioned, you're just experiencing that very topmost, easiest kind of baby cakes-ist layer. And you might find some stuff deeper down that you can really engage with. It's wonderful. It's just another thing to do. It's another different thing to you. You'll meet different people than you meet contra dancing. Try both, try them all.

[\[ \*\*Ang calls their dance Golden Girl with music by Gus La Casse on fiddle, and Pepin Mittelhauser on guitar and mandolin at the BIDA dance in July 2024\*\* \]](#)

**Mary Wesley** Oh, boy. Well, looking to the future and in all that you do and but particularly as as a caller, what do you see? What do you see for yourself as, you know, continuing on your calling journey? And what do you hope for contra dancing, writ large?

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, that's interesting. I would love to get more weekend gigs. I'm excited to get back into that scene. I am trying to be a little bit more promotional, self promotional, especially since I'm now kind of out of sight from a lot of communities where organizers might be booking for things further afield. Trying to get on more tours, trying to go on more adventures will be really soul-filling for me. If I can figure out how to stay in Florida, call Florida gigs, but also get to call elsewhere, to sort of tap into that energy that can be found different places, bring some of that energy home, right? I mean, that's kind of it. I'm working on a 3D printing project right now. I'm making a new box for my calling cards.

**Mary Wesley** Oh, that is so cool!

**Ang DeCarlis** Listen, Mary, you and I have the same box, right? We have that little pink thing.

**Mary Wesley** A little lucite thing. Yeah, I think I got it at CVS.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, it's like, I got at like Office Depot or something, It's too small. Do we agree it's too small?

**Mary Wesley** Yes, I've had this problem for a long time.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yes. So, callers everywhere are probably like sort of rolling their eyes, right? It's like, for whatever reason, they don't make index card boxes that are the right size for being a serious contra dance caller. The only boxes are either like about half as big as you want them to be, or like four times as big. Yeah. Um, and different callers get around this by doing different sized cards. Like I know that Lindsay Dono uses 5x7 cards turned vertical. The lines are across the short dimension instead of the long dimension. And I know that Beth Malaro uses business card size blanks and she writes her cards really little



and she puts them in a business card binder that she found. So like different callers do different things but for the majority of callers who are using three by five inch index cards, there just isn't a box that's the right size. So I said, I'm over it and I made my own. It's on my dad's 3d printer right now. I'm hoping that the print comes off good so I can bring it to this weekend next week. But yeah, it's like sometimes we just got to take matters into our own hands.

**Mary Wesley** It's true. I mean, anyone I know who who uses 3x5s and is committed to cards, like has some kind of either like a handcrafted thing or like something they found in an antique store. Like a sort of one shot, unique vessel that they had to search high and low for. So yeah, but that'll be the first 3D printed one that I've heard of!

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, well, if it goes well, then I can potentially help other callers get a 3D printed box, right? If it works, we'll see. But I don't know, I'm just sort of trying to invest some time in both promoting myself, like trying to cold call weekend organizers and camp week organizers, trying to get on the national circuit again a little bit more. And that includes like just making sure that good videos and photos are taken of me while I'm gigging, which I never remember to do because I just wanna be calling. I hate doing the promotional part.

**Mary Wesley** Do you also write some dances? I mean, it sounds like you've written some some urban line dances, but you have written some contra dances too, I believe?

**Ang DeCarlis** I have, I've written some contra dances. Yeah, there's a couple that I call a lot actually. The first dance I wrote was called, "Come at Me Bro." This sort of dates the dance a little bit. It was from when that was like a pretty funny thing to call a dance. But the hook of that dance, it's a pretty glossary dance, but the hook is that the progression happens when the larks cross the set on the diagonal to do a right shoulder round with their next neighbor. So, the dance is just like, right shoulder around. And then there's like long lines, Hey, something right. It's like a pretty normal dance. It's got a full hey, but it's that progression that's unusual where you look on the diagonal and the larks have to go to their new neighbor. And I end up calling it as my first hey of the evening dance a lot because it's a pretty glossary, accessible hey dance, but it's got this weird thing that experienced dancers haven't encountered before. I feel like that progression could totally get worked into other dances. I think it's neat little progression that's kind of fun.

Especially as we round out the other side of renaming right shoulder rounds—you've probably talked with other callers about the phenomenon of like, since renaming that move and since prioritizing safety, there's been a de-prioritization of the value of eye contact in contra dancing—that now people are kind of working back into it. Like actually at this queer contra dance camp, there's a camper who's going to be leading a whole hour long workshop about eye contact and contra dance. It's sort of coming back into Vogue again. People are sort of missing it. And I think as we ride that wave back into eye contacts return to contra dance, having that kind of, cause you make the eye contact across the set and the Robin can like sort of draw the lark toward them, right? And it's really kind of a fun dynamic to play with. That's "Come at Me, Bro." That's on my website. And then the most recent dance I've written is called "Golden Girl." And the kind of hook of that dance came to me in a dream. Have you ever been visited by the choreography fairy in your sleep, Mary?

**Mary Wesley** Oh, I have had so many calling dreams, but I don't...I'm not a dance writer. And the choreography fairy seems to skip me over in favor of like, stress dreams. So I'd

love to hear about that. It's usually like...I can't find the card. The choreography fairy sounds more fun.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, yeah, and in the dream I was doing a floor demo of this figure. I mean, the whole hook of it basically, is to do a skater style promenade where you have your hands crossed in front of you, and you're doing this promenade around the set, and then to turn, to promenade back, you just sort of flip your hands so that the larks stay on the outside and the robins stay on the inside. You just do a little 'whoop,' rather than rotating the whole promenade. And it's just this nice little connected moment where you kind of turn your shoulders, your other shoulders toward each other and then you go the other way. And it's not necessarily a wild thing to do, but trying to get...the interesting thing about writing that dance was trying to create the choreographic excuse that required the skater style promenade, right? To write in something that's stylistic is always a little tricky, especially when you're calling it in a community where the promenades style is over the shoulders instead of in front.

**Mary Wesley** So how do you get people there?

**Ang DeCarlis** Out of a star. To start the dance, you slide left to new neighbors and the two robins do a right shoulder round in the center, once around. As the Robins are just about to pass their partner on the side, the larks fall behind their partner and all four make a right hand star. It's not a hands across star, it's a regular star because you wanna have that contact with your neighbor, not with your same role opposite. You take that right-hand star around and when the larks are back on their home side, you keep that right hand with your neighbor, who for the lark's is now behind you, right? Because your partner's in front of you. If you're a lark, your neighbor's behind you. You keep right hand with that person behind you and you join left hands, and then you promenade that same direction clockwise around the ring, with the larks on the outside, the robins on the inside of the promenades. You flip your promenade, larks stay on the outside, robins stay on inside; promenade back until you're across from your partner.

And then what I say here on my note is sort of unfold so that the robins are back to back in the center and you have a right handshake grip. So then the rest of the dance is relatively glossary. You balance right with your neighbor, box the gnat, neighbor pull by right, robins pull by left, partner pull by right, lark's allemande left once round, back to your partner. And you can just do a long swing there or you can do a right shoulder round and swing sort of whatever you and your partner decide you have time for. I've written it right shoulder, round and swinging but the person I wrote it for, my friend Abigail Holden who was my demo partner in the dream, when she danced it, she and her partner just did a swing and they didn't do any of the right shoulder round at the end. I was like, well, listen, you're allowed to do whatever you want. It's your dance, do what you want. Yeah, so that's the most recent one I've written, but I think it's fun and it's pretty to watch from the floor. It's pretty to watch those stars turn into promenades.

**Mary Wesley** Nice, I love that, and a hey with hands, like it's very connected, which is great for new dancers, too. Just so reassuring.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, I really like a pull-by-hey. I think that it's one of those things where it's just a nice thing to, I don't know, I've always liked it. I love Give the Scout a Hand. I love all of those dances that have pull-bys hey's. They're so nice.

**Mary Wesley** Totally, and box the gnat into a hey is, again great for beginners because you just are right there. Ah I love it. Well, is there anything....I have a few questions I usually close with, but is there anything I missed that's on the tip of your tongue?

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, I mean, it's nice to have not gotten to this in a way, because I feel like most of the conversations I have about calling these days are about my identity as a non-binary caller, around gender role terms, which is an ongoing conversation. Much to my surprise, frankly, it feels like we've been in this conversation for a long time at this point, so I don't need to get into all of that necessarily, but I think that... Something I do want to be really public about in terms of my own impression is that as a caller living in Florida—who is non-binary, right—I believe that my job is to help the dancers have fun, whatever that looks like for that community. I like to meet communities where they're at. I like show up to those communities as myself. I don't ever hide who I am in terms of my gender at one of these dances. But, if someone really wants me to call with "gents" and "ladies," I will. That's not a problem for me, personally. And I think that...so really interesting story was, apparently during lockdown, there were a few callers in the Pacific Northwest who got together on Discord and sort of made a little community group to chat in. A few contra people were talking about various contra nerd stuff in a Discord. They probably still have this Discord open. And apparently I was the topic of one of their conversations because I had written to the Shared Weight listserv the choreography for a dance and I had used the terms gents and ladies in my email, which my feeling there is like, if you write it out with gents and ladies everybody will know how to translate that. If you write out with larks and robins not everybody's gonna actually be able to access that as easily. And I just want it, when I'm sharing choreography, I just want it to be that sharing. I don't want to limit who has access to that act of sharing. So I just write it with gents and ladies.

Um, apparently they saw me, this group saw me write out this dance with gents and ladies and they said, "Ang just used gents and ladies on the Shared Weight listserv. Why would they do that? They're non-binary. They're trans. Aren't they in favor of gender-free dancing? They must be in favor of gender-free dancing, but, oh, you know what? They live in Florida, and we bet that it's that they feel unsafe using "larks and robins," and that they must be using gents and ladies because they feel unsafe. And oh, isn't that interesting? Oh, we should really be more mindful about people's safety. And, it's sort of...it's this classic liberal dilemma of having your heart in the right place and coming to just the wrong conclusion.

And it was so interesting for me to hear this story later, like years later after it happened. It's like, no, I use gents and ladies because of the two reasons I mentioned: that I think it's my job to meet a community where they're at, to facilitate the experience that they're interested in. And I also think that gents, and ladies, when you're talking to a wide audience is the most accessible option. I'm all in favor of callers who are boycotting dance weekends that won't switch to role-free terminology. I think that that's great, but it's just not where I'm at. I am from Florida. It's my home. This is the thing I want to scream at the top of my lungs every other news cycle lately. It is really difficult to have your home, your magical home be kind of diminished to a color on a political map.

More queer people live in the American Southeast than in any other region in the US. We are very gay down here, in fact, but our politics don't reflect our safety. I recognize that that's an ongoing concern. But to leap to the conclusion that I must feel so unsafe in a place that I deeply feel is my home is hard to hear. And it's an interesting thing that happened. And I wonder how many other dancers...I might be in a fairly unique situation here, I don't know how many others dancers are kind of feeling this as acutely as I am. But

I guess I just wanna sort of speak from where I am because I know that there aren't too many...there are an increasing number of trans and non-binary callers and musicians, right? As folks transition or as new folks join the scene. But I am part of this first wave of trans and non-binary contra-dance performers who exist and who are out here and who have different feelings. I'm not trying to speak for all trans folks. Steve Zakon-Anderson and I were talking about a member of his community who really wants to return to gents and ladies because she's a trans woman and she's worked hard to be a woman and doesn't want to be called a "robin," she wants to be called a "lady" because she worked hard to get there, right? Like we're all gonna have different outlooks. The trans contra dance universe is not a monolith. But be very careful when you make assumptions about anyone else, right? Like, assuming that someone feels unsafe in their home is really quite a leap and it's hurtful in a way. I love my home. So it's really interesting. It's an interesting time right now with larger national politics and with a lot of the kind of geographical fear-mongering in media about...all these maps about "do not travel to" lists for trans people, like never travel to this country or this state under any circumstance. And it totally leaves out the fact that there are people happily living in these places. It's very weird, it's a very weird time and it totally gets reflected in the contra dance dialog right now I'm finding.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, and I mean, I've always said how much I appreciate having that space in which to work through some of these larger social, cultural, political things just because it is a microcosm in many ways. But it's also a community that thinks about and understands tradition and, you know, tradition is all about grappling with how to meet the needs of the current moment with the people in the room or in the place. And so I super appreciate you sharing, you know...I always with this podcast, I try...you know I can only do one episode per month, but I try to talk to people from, you know, all over the continent and from different generations and different perspectives and identities. And I think it's so valuable to hear from a localized perspective and then also to think how it's connected to our larger ecosystem, which is also our community. So, great thoughts and great invitations to step into the gray area and also check in and ask people before...be brave enough to invite a conversation before making assumptions.

**Ang DeCarlis** Nuanced opinions are hard to have loudly. It's so hard.

**Mary Wesley** It's so hard. Yeah, nuance is hard. We want it to be simple, but the process has a lot to offer if we're willing to step into it.

**Ang DeCarlis** Mm-hmm. Yeah, and I guess, you know, I did mention that I'm all in support of callers who are now boycotting gigs at weekends that are only calling with gendered terminology. And I do support that. I also think that, like, consider how much more impactful and revolutionary it is to show up with your queer self, or with your ally self into that space and say "Yeah, you know, I'll call your weekend. Can I do a one-hour workshop session about role-free terminology?" Or can I, you know, like show up and call all gender role term dances, but like throw in a bunch of larks' chains? You know, there are ways that you can shift the paradigm more by being there in some cases than you can by not being there. Your absence won't be felt by anybody but the organizers, really. And it is important for the organizers to feel that. Like, to be very clear, organizers need to know that this is a priority for younger performers as generations are shifting through the spotlight. But the communities are really where a lot of this is going to count and thinking about what you can do for them. It's an interesting thing. I mean, I'm not trying to persuade anybody in any direction. I'm sure a lot of the callers who are opting to boycott have given this all a lot serious thought, but just sort of adding my two cents there.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, that's what we're here for! Thank you. Well, to wrap up, I have, as I said, a few closing questions and you've already given us a peek into the first one, which is I always like to ask people how they keep their dance collection. How they notate dances. And so we know your very exciting new card box is going to be hot off the presses soon, but it sounds like you've been cards from the start?

**Ang DeCarlis** I've been cards from the start. I like having the physical things, especially for programming. Everything about how I keep my cards is in an effort to make programming less horrible for me. I hate programming, which is a tragedy because I love English dancing and I wish I could become an ECD caller. But after talking with a number of really generous ECD callers, the conclusion I've arrived at is unless I can find love for programming, there's just no future in ECD for me as a caller, right? Beyond kind of like, I have one program that I can pull out sometimes. I just don't like programming, which is another great thing about my ecosystem right now of mostly beginner level dances is I can do a lot more sort of off the cuff programming.

So everything about my box is to make programming and organizing my cards as easy as possible. So on the top edge of my cards, I bend over stickers so that they're visible from the top of the stack. And there are four colors of stickers and they will be in one of five positions along the top-edge of the card. The four colors—it's like pink, orange, yellow, and green or something—they indicate what I call the disposition of the dance. So how balancey or smooth is this choreographically, generally with a pink dot being like, oh yeah, this is Tica Tica Timing. This is like a hella balancey dance, the whole point of this dance is to be bouncy. And with green being like a stray or any Jim Kitsch dance, the smoothest smooth dances, nary a balance or long lines to be found, right? So I organized them. by the color like that, and then the position on the card is generally how difficult the dance is.

So I can quickly be like, oh, the last dance was a really balancey easy dance. I wanna do something harder and smoother, but not necessarily super duper smooth. So that means I'm gonna go from position two to position three, and I'm going to go from pink to yellow, right? Like I can really quickly find the kind of dance I want next for sort of impromptu programming. I can also do the thing that many callers do where I pull out all the dances I want to call, lay them out on the table and see like, oh, four of these dances I've pulled out have green stickers. I need to fill out the rest of my program with orange and red stickers. That's the way I organize my box. It's an ongoing system. There's some quirks and issues with it still, but it's the latest version of a system I've used for a long time. Anyway, I could talk about a whole nother hour about how I keep my cards.

**Mary Wesley** Amazing. Well, and I always ask folks to send in a few photos. So I hope we'll get to see your new box and your stickers.

**Ang DeCarlis** Oh yeah, I'll have to send you those photos after the whole thing is revamped, so that'll be in a couple days.

**Mary Wesley** Awesome. Yeah. And then I always ask folks about stepping into and out of the caller role. So do you have any pre gig or post gig rituals or things you do?

**Ang DeCarlis** That's really interesting. I still sometimes get like, butterfly based anxiety before a regular gig. I try to eat well beforehand. I'm not really like a ritual person. I try to improve myself, I always tell myself I'll program before I get there, which never happens. I'm always either programming on the road in the passenger seat or I'm programming like

during sound check. Like, I'm just not that person. Again, I wish I could be an ECD caller, you guys, I really wish I could.

**Mary Wesley** Good to know yourself.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, listen. And then afterwards, I don't know, I almost never feel fatigue during the gig itself. I am riding that wave so hard. And then as soon as the gig is over and I'm back in the car, it's like crash out. I just like time to be a puddle for a little while. And I've been really lucky to have partners who know what that is in me, because it's not just when I'm doing calling, it's when I am organizing art events or any time where I'm kind of at the helm. And you have that like big social energy for hours straight. And then you get to take off your, "I'm in charge" hat and... I think like one little ritual maybe is sort of on the same note, like the last waltz. Doing the last waltz, usually with my husband if he's there, but you know we we often swap roles, and in our usual life if anything I lead a little bit more than he does he he really prefers to follow. But after a dance you know, I'll hop down off the stage and find him for the last waltzes and he'll always be like, "You want to lead or follow?" And I'm like, "Follow." Like, do not want to be in charge of anybody's anything anymore. And he says, "You got it." And then he leads the last waltz. That's our little ritual, I think.

**Mary Wesley** That's so perfect. Yeah, I relate to the feeling. Awesome. And then I've been asking folks kind of where they fall on the introvert/extrovert spectrum because I'm interested in that. I'm just taking a little survey of callers.

**Ang DeCarlis** I feel like the hypothesis would be like, they're all extroverted introverts. Like, I know that that's true of a lot of the big ones. I'm just extrovert. I don't really have much of an introverted streak. Yeah. But I do, I know a lot big callers who seem like extroverts, but they're really super duper not.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah.

**Ang DeCarlis** So I imagine that's a trend.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, you know, I really, like I've now...I think this is the third year of the podcast and I really should go back and take a tally. I'm obviously not being terribly scientific about this. And so I can't even...it always, it seems to run the gamut. And, you know, obviously, I think it's a spectrum and everybody's working from their own point. But definitely have talked to a lot of folks who feel who fall more towards the introvert side and feel like this is a structured way that I can be with a lot of people.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah that's just contra dancing, right?

**Mary Wesley** Yeah, exactly. I mean...

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, that's how that's how a lot of people show up is, I'm not an asocial being, but I need a really consistent and reliable structure in order to feel ok. Yeah, absolutely. That's super common for contra dance.

**Mary Wesley** Awesome. Well, and thanks so much. It's been really lovely to catch up a little bit. And you know, I'm always amazed even with caller and dancer friends who I feel like I've known for quite a while, I always learn so much when we get to sit down and really dig in.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, it's been so nice seeing you and it's totally true. It's like we've known each other for years, but the extent of our relationship has been like, a week at a time at Pinewoods or whatever, right? Like random weekends. So it can be that way for sure.

**Mary Wesley** Exactly. Wonderful. Well, have fun out there on all your dance floors and we'll definitely share your website and some of your dances in the show notes. And everyone look out for Ang coming across the country here soon.

**Ang DeCarlis** Yeah, I'm moving around!

**Mary Wesley** Awesome.

## Conclusion

**Mary Wesley** Thanks so much to Ang for talking with me! You can check out the show notes for today's episode at [cdss.org/podcasts](http://cdss.org/podcasts). You'll definitely want to see photos of Ang's shiny new 3D printed card box and some of their amazing artwork.

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

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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