

Flying Shoes Podcast - River Road

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Flying Shoes Radio Hour, contra dance music, River Road, Sarah-Hadley Yakir, Kristen Planeaux, Jesse Ball, Connecticut River Valley, band origin, dance musicians, traditional tunes, original compositions, community radio, dance culture, musical arrangements.

SPEAKERS

Sarah-Hadley Yakir, music, Kristen Planeaux, All, Chrissy Fowler, Jesse Ball



Chrissy Fowler 00:11


Hi there. This is Chrissy Fowler welcoming you to the Flying Shoes Radio Hour, a podcast featuring music and conversation with the musicians who play for contra dances. This show is produced by Belfast Flying Shoes and the Country Dance & Song Society, in cooperation with WBFY, Belfast Maine's low power community radio station. The Flying Shoes Radio Hour was created to highlight the roots and branches of the contra dance music that we love, the musicians who play it with and for others, and the dancers of all ages that it inspires. The weekly show on WBFY usually features music from the station's digital library, but sometimes the show features an in-studio interview with contra dance musicians whose talents catalyze joy and connection wherever they play, including here in Maine, where this program was recorded. This podcast is born from those conversations, and in each episode, we get to hear the musicians' sound up close and personal, as well as stories about their history and approach to playing. Enjoy the show, and thanks for listening.




Chrissy Fowler 01:26


This third episode of the Flying Shoes Radio Hour Podcast features River Road, a trio from the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts. It was terrific to spend some quality time with Sarah-Hadley Yakir (who plays fiddle), Kristen Planeaux (who plays piano, flute & accordion) and Jesse Ball (who plays mandolin & guitar and also does foot percussion.) In February of 2025 we got together in Northport, Maine in the late morning after their first time playing for the Belfast Flying Shoes First Friday dance series. Our chat was wide-ranging. We talked about their individual paths into contra dance culture and what that community has meant to each of them over time. They explained the genesis of their ensemble, as well as the significance of their band name. (As they note on their website, River Road is a winding way tucked between Sugarloaf Mountain and the Connecticut River in South Deerfield, Massachusetts – which is a gorgeous part of the world with incredibly fertile soils. When the three musicians became a band in 2022, River Road was the route connecting their households.) As we lounged on comfortable chairs looking out at Penobscot Bay, Sarah-Hadley, Kristen & Jesse shared a variety of anecdotes and personal perspectives related to their experiences as friends, dance


musicians, and as dancers! They provided a bit of the back story on the music, including the tunes that Kristen and Jesse composed. We even heard a little bit about their lives beyond the contra dance subculture. It was all quite jolly and relaxing, but when it was time to play, that's when their focus as a band came fully clear. They moved their chairs and instruments into a tight circle around the recording device, and launched into their planned sets with palpable energy, communicating with facial expressions, head gestures, and plenty of eye contact. We loved listening to their arrangements in person and on the recording, and it was a pleasure hearing their stories. We hope that you enjoy this River Road episode just as much as we did!


 **music** 08:35
tunes


 **Chrissy Fowler** 08:41
All right. River Road! Here we are!

 **All** 08:43
Here we are.

 **Chrissy Fowler** 08:44
It's so nice to have you all here! Well, for our radio listeners, if you could just introduce yourselves and say where you're from, where you're living. That would be great, and then we'll just launch into our chat time.

 **Kristen Planeaux** 08:57
Okay, I'm Kristen Planeaux. I play piano, flute and accordion in the band, and I am from Montague, Massachusetts, in Western Mass.

 **Sarah-Hadley Yakir** 09:08
I am Sarah-Hadley Yakir. I play fiddle in the band, and I live in South Deerfield, Massachusetts.

 **Jesse Ball** 09:16
Thanks for having me back. I'm Jesse Ball. I'm playing mandolin and guitar and feet in the band, living in South Deerfield, Massachusetts.





Chrissy Fowler 09:26

Nice. It's really good to have you all here on a snowy, we're looking out at an expanse of snow



Kristen Planeaux 09:32

It's so beautiful here.



Chrissy Fowler 09:33

With water and blue sky with a bit of floaty clouds, which is nice, and it's great to have you. You were here in the area, playing a dance, really fun, and I was thinking, as I was listening, I thought, "Well, I wonder what their origin story as a band is. How did they come to become an ensemble?" So, just chat.



Jesse Ball 09:53

Oh yeah, that is



Sarah-Hadley Yakir 09:54

I feel, I maintain that it was your, Kristen's idea.



Kristen Planeaux 10:00

Well, you, Sarah, you and I had started playing some English country dance music together, very loosely, just sort of like, play some tunes.



Sarah-Hadley Yakir 10:08

We were friends



Kristen Planeaux 10:09

English tunes?



Sarah-Hadley Yakir 10:10

And then we were like, Oh, we both play instruments. We should do this while we hang out.



Kristen Planeaux 10:14

Yeah, yeah. So we had started playing and, and we were really enjoying it. And then I think you had also started learning some tunes, because you're, you come from a classical violin background.

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 10:28

Totally.

K

Kristen Planeaux 10:28

And so you were starting to learn fiddle tunes from Jesse.

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 10:31

Yeah. And we were posting, during the pandemic, Jesse and I were posting videos online, yeah, like, of just, like, here's something to brighten your day. We called it the self, what...

J

Jesse Ball 10:41

The Self Quarantine Sequence of Superb Quality Tunes.

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 10:45

It was very silly. But I think you had maybe heard Jesse and I playing together, so you knew that Jesse and I played together.

K

Kristen Planeaux 10:52

Yes. And I was like, oh, that sounds really fun. And like, Jesse seems like a good musician too, and like, we should just play together sometime.

S











Sarah-Hadley Yakir 11:01

Yeah. I remember walking out of a dance and all three of us were, like we were just there as dancers, and we all looked at each other and we went, "I think we're a band."


A

All 11:05


(laughter)

-  Kristen Planeaux 11:05
Yeah. We had never played together, like all three of us, we had never played together.
-  Sarah-Hadley Yakir 11:05
I think we're gonna be a band.
-  Kristen Planeaux 11:05
I think we're going to be a band.
-  Sarah-Hadley Yakir 11:08
I think we're going to be a band.
-  Kristen Planeaux 11:17
Jesse, what do you remember?
-  Jesse Ball 11:20
Not much different, really. I remember we, for lack of a better term, I remember we had some cameo appearances for each other at various gigs we were all doing.
-  Sarah-Hadley Yakir 11:33
Yeah, later on,
-  Jesse Ball 11:33
Three moments we had like that, that one time at Pinewoods, there was that one time at the Grange after a dance in Greenfield that was
-  Kristen Planeaux 11:42
Oh, yeah.
-  Sarah-Hadley Yakir 11:43
Oh right.


on right.

 Jesse Ball 11:43

Very late night definitely past local zoning laws. We had at least one or two of those.

 Kristen Planeaux 11:53

Yeah, we, so our friends were playing at a Pinewoods week, and we were all there, and we um

 Jesse Ball 11:59

I was actually there with another band.

 Kristen Planeaux 12:01

You were there with another band.

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 12:02

You were on staff.

 Kristen Planeaux 12:03

Yeah you were on staff, that's right, Jesse. And then we we played a set together as a band, and we were like, Yeah, this is working. This is good. Yeah, that was fun.

 Chrissy Fowler 12:12

I love it. Good, good origin story. Good roots.

 Kristen Planeaux 12:16


Yeah. Very organic actually.

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 12:18


And we all live like, like, within 15 minutes of each other.





Chrissy Fowler 12:22


 Chrissy Fowler 12:22
Yeah, pretty close.

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 12:22
So it's really, it was very convenient to start a band with each other.


 Kristen Planeaux 12:28
Yeah, lots of bands like, they're like, Well, my bandmate's four hours away, we get together when we can. And we actually had, like, weekly practices for a long time.


 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 12:37
We still do.


 Jesse Ball 12:38
We still do.

 Kristen Planeaux 12:38
We still do, yeah, yep.

 Chrissy Fowler 12:40
Yeah. Montague and South Deerfield are not far apart.

 Kristen Planeaux 12:44
No, it's like, I mean, I live on the far side of Montague now, so it's kind of, you know, it's like, 17 minutes. It's a commitment, but it's really convenient. It's really okay.

 Chrissy Fowler 12:54
That's good! I love that, that it was so kind of easy. And like, Oh, we're friends. Oh, but we all play music too. Maybe we should play more, and oh, that person

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 13:04
I will sav. also. Kristen and lesse were. have both been dance musicians for a verv long time.

...and, like, fifteen and, just like, more than ten years ago, and, like, and, and you had both been hired bands at a weekend in different bands.

J Jesse Ball 13:14
That's right. Yes.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 13:14
So, you knew each other sort of as colleagues that way, a little bit.

K Kristen Planeaux 13:17
Yeah.

J Jesse Ball 13:17
Yeah, five years ago this weekend, actually.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 13:19
Wait, really?


J Jesse Ball 13:19
Yeah.


K Kristen Planeaux 13:20
Yeah. We played at a weekend in Knoxville, Tennessee.


J Jesse Ball 13:23
Knoxville, Tennessee, Cabin Fever,


K Kristen Planeaux 13:25
In 2019,


J Jesse Ball 13:26


 Jesse Ball 13:20
2020.


 Kristen Planeaux 13:27
2020, oh, yes. This was February, so it's right before everything happened. So we, you know, didn't become a band anytime soon to that.


 Kristen Planeaux 13:36
But that's when I really, like, met and talked to Jesse was when we were both on staff at this weekend. And I knew all of his other band mates, and I was like, "Who's that guy? What's his deal?" And so


 Jesse Ball 13:36
No.

 Jesse Ball 13:37
That's a great assessment.

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 13:37
I remember Jesse came home from that weekend. He was like, "Kristen, she's good."

 Jesse Ball 13:38
Yeah.

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 13:38
She's like, cool.

 Kristen Planeaux 13:38
That's the same thing I thought about Jesse. Exactly. I just don't think I told anybody, but I was like, cool guy, yeah. Good.

 Chrissy Fowler 14:06

It's a really positive beginning. And you guys have done a bunch of different things. Do you, do you play for English as well? Am I remembering that? Or? No?

K

Kristen Planeaux 14:14

We can. We can. We have. We can, it's rarer, but yeah, but Sarah and I particularly like to, and we are trying to get Jesse into it, I would say.

C

Chrissy Fowler 14:24

Yeah, it's good.

J

Jesse Ball 14:25

Yeah. They are trying to

C

Chrissy Fowler 14:26

Stretching (?)

K

Kristen Planeaux 14:27

Yeah, growing.

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 14:30

I think it's fun. Like, I think sometimes when we do it, it's really enjoyable. Especially if it, like, sort of cuts a weekend in a, in a nice way, or, like, breaks the contra, not, I don't want to call contra a slog, but if it's all contra for the entire weekend, and then there's just like an hour of English, that can be really fun for us. It just sort of, uh

C

Chrissy Fowler 14:51

Like a sherbet.


S


Sarah-Hadley Yakir 14:52

Exactly, yeah, a palette cleanser, yeah.


C


Chrissy Fowler 14:53


 Chrissy Fowler 14:55
Speaking of delicious, we didn't even talk about those first tunes that you played.


 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 14:58
Oh, yeah.


 Chrissy Fowler 14:58
So can you tell us about their little, just a little bit about them, or


 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 15:03
Sure.


 Chrissy Fowler 15:04
We tend to do mostly trad or originals on this program, and maybe you can tell us about the tunes?

 Jesse Ball 15:10
Yeah, trad tunes first. Two Irish jigs, the first being the Rolling Wave. Well, I guess there are two very, two tunes by that name.

 Kristen Planeaux 15:19
Sure.

 Kristen Planeaux 15:20
Yeah. It's also known as the Lonesome Jig by some folks.

 Jesse Ball 15:24
I only know that from you. That's such a, I wonder if,

 Kristen Planeaux 15:27
Well, when I saw Hozier say that and then play it on his little whistle, and so I was like, okay, that's official.

J Jesse Ball 15:33

So according to Hozier, it's the Lonesome Jig, the first one. The second one we learned from a fiddler in the Boston area named Julia Connor: The Hole in the Hedge.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 15:47

That was really fun because we were at a dinner with a friend of mine that I went to conservatory with, and we both studied like classical violin there, and we've both migrated over to fiddle. She still plays a lot of, a lot more classical than I do, but we had her over for dinner. We were all hanging out, and we were sort of tune swapping, and she was like, "Oh, how about this tune?" And all three of us, we were already a band at that point, and we all kind of like, looked at each other, we were like, "Oh, this is a great tune." And I do feel like that middle tune is what set up this set for us. Like we found the Hole in the Hedge, and we were like, "Oh, we can make a set with this, yeah."

J Jesse Ball 16:23

Yeah. And then the last tune is Lucy Farr's Barn Dance, is the, I think that's an optional part of the set.

K Kristen Planeaux 16:33

I think we might put that on the recording right is that on like,

J Jesse Ball 16:37

There's at least one record with it on, I mean, I can think of two, the second of which is Maine musician, Owen Marshall, actually recorded it on his record "Through Line." The other version I knew of is on Scottish pipes. It's very loud. Yeah. I like our version.

C Chrissy Fowler 16:58

I liked it too.

J Jesse Ball 16:59

Yeah.

C Chrissy Fowler 17:00

Not that I don't love Scottish pipes.

J Jesse Ball 17:02
Oh, no. Of course.

C Chrissy Fowler 17:03
But speaking of tunes, though, can we hear, we're gonna hear another set, and I think that they're both gonna be Jesse's tunes.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 17:11
Yeah, is this, we're gonna do Point Roberts now?

K Kristen Planeaux 17:12
Yeah.

C Chrissy Fowler 17:13
And Hiccup.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 17:13
Yeah, yeah.

K Kristen Planeaux 17:17
Yeah.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 17:18
That was, the, Point Roberts is the first... Is it? I think it's the first tune of yours, and maybe the first, like, quote, unquote fiddle tune that I, that I learned.

J Jesse Ball 17:29
Right? Oh, maybe, it is, yeah.

K Kristen Planeaux 17:31
Oh, Sarah's first tune!

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 17:32
It's the first tune, that's my first tune. And I have a recording of me playing it from way back when, like pre pandemic, and it sounds very classical. I play it differently now, but yeah, that's Point Roberts, and then

J Jesse Ball 17:47
Point Roberts and then the second one is Hiccup. Yeah,

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 17:52
Where did the name come from for Hiccup?

J Jesse Ball 17:54
There is an unofficial competition between myself and the accordionist Rachel Bell to write the most tunes in the key of E flat. It is extremely unofficial. If she's listening, she might have just remembered about it.

C Chrissy Fowler 18:12
But you haven't forgotten.

J Jesse Ball 18:16
So she has a jig, the name of which currently escapes me. I have Point Roberts, the march in E flat. And eventually we were like, well, someone's gonna have to write the reel, eventually. And then this one showed up, and then I sent her a recording. I don't remember which one of us said it kind of sounds like a hiccup when you play certain notes, and it kind of does.

A All 18:40
(Deedling the tune, and laughing)

J Jesse Ball 18:49

Yeah exactly. You know, as is often the case, titles just stick. So

C Chrissy Fowler 18:54
It's perfect

J Jesse Ball 18:55
One, one less tune I have to name now, right? Yeah,

C Chrissy Fowler 18:59
Totally, right? Well, let's, uh, let's get to those tunes.

M music 24:49
Tune

C Chrissy Fowler 24:49
I just love having the music right here, two feet away from me, when I can really focus on it. It's just fun to hear the arrangements when I'm not concentrating on, like, what figure's next, or helping a new person.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 24:49
Mmm. Yeah, that one was really fun to arrange. We didn't really know how to put these tunes together, or, like, how we wanted it to feel for the dancers, and we were sort of Jesse and I, especially, while Kristen was there in rehearsal, we were sort of playing it. And then Kristen started playing this like "dah dum, dah dum, dah dum" thing on the piano that now we call Buddha Buddha Buddha. And it turned into this whole thing now, that we like, we turned the ending into that, and we use it in so many different ways through the set, and I really feel like it answered all the questions.

K Kristen Planeaux 25:07
Yeah, it's interesting how it became a theme. So, I think the way that we often approach arranging is sort of like, what little ideas can we take, repeat, expand. And it just like, I feel like it makes the sets really special and memorable and like, easy to sink into, because, like, it's such a simple thing. Dah dah, dah dah. It's like a very simple little rhythmic motive, but it just gives the tune some drive, gives it a little of a special thing about it.



Jesse Ball 25:41

And we got pretty lucky, because that was the first thing we tried.



Sarah-Hadley Yakir 25:46

And we love it.



Jesse Ball 25:48

Like we still, we, as does any group of musicians, you know, we have material that we are still agonizing over what exactly we're going to do with it. It's pretty rare that we get to, we get to land on the right solution the first time. And so



Sarah-Hadley Yakir 26:06

That was all you Kristen.



Jesse Ball 26:08

Yeah. We're not complaining about that result.



Sarah-Hadley Yakir 26:11

Remember, we called you and left voicemails? Buddha buddha.



Kristen Planeaux 26:14

Buddha, buddha.



Sarah-Hadley Yakir 26:14

We were so pleased.



Kristen Planeaux 26:15

It was very sweet, very sweet.




Chrissy Fowler 26:16

It's fun to hear the backstory of the thought, you know, that gets put into the sets and how

it's fun to hear the backstory of the thought, you know, that gets put into the sets and now you're going to play them. And like you mentioned, you know, how's this going to work for the dancers? We want it to be a, yeah, that's key, because you are dance musicians, for those dancers of all ages.

 Kristen Planeaux 26:37


Yeah, yeah. Like, how can we make this interesting, but actually not too interesting. How can we make it so people can sink into it, feel really grounded by it. That's always in my interest.

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 26:49

For the people in their bodies.

 Kristen Planeaux 26:50

Yes.

 Sarah-Hadley Yakir 26:52

Yeah, really like sink in.

 Kristen Planeaux 26:54

Yeah.

 Chrissy Fowler 26:56


Mmm. Yay. About halfway through the show, I usually like to have a waltz.

 Kristen Planeaux 27:04


Cool. Oh, lovely. We got one of those.


 Chrissy Fowler 27:06

Even though people might be listening in their car, we just talk about swaying in waltz time,


 Jesse Ball 27:12


Not in their lane, I hope!

 Chrissy Fowler 27:14
Exactly. No swerving.


 Jesse Ball 27:15
Yeah.

 Chrissy Fowler 27:17
And we're gonna do a waltz that you wrote, right, Kristen?

 Kristen Planeaux 27:19
Yes. It's called the Friendly Clarinetist. And, my first contra dance band was called the Ripples, and we operated mostly out of Cincinnati, Ohio, and we ran a

 Kristen Planeaux 27:19
Yes, yes. Later on, our fiddler was from Louisville, but that was where three out of four of us lived at the time, and we ran a Kickstarter for our first and only album, and we offered that I would write waltzes for a reward. And so one of them in particular, I really loved. It's called the Friendly Clarinetist, and it's written for my very old friend, Travis, who played the bass clarinet behind me in the El Camino College community band in Torrance, California. And so, he was just such a wonderful person, who, he was in college while I was in high school, playing in the band, and was just such a good friend, so wonderful, so lovely. And he bought that, he donated for that reward. And so I wrote that waltz for him, and I really love it. And he really loved it. He was like, I play it for my, I think he said his little nephew, like, it's very like, much like a little lullaby. And so, yeah, it stuck with us in our repertoire, and we've arranged it pretty differently a couple times, but this is what we've landed on. So we're excited to play it for you.

 Chrissy Fowler 27:35
Was that where you were based at that time?

 Chrissy Fowler 28:19
All right. Well, radio listeners, put on your dancing shoes if you're in a safe place to do so and enjoy the waltz.



M music 32:47
tune

C Chrissy Fowler 32:48

Belfast Flying Shoes is a participatory arts nonprofit with a mission to build community and cultivate well-being through the joy of traditional music and dance for people of all backgrounds and identities in Midcoast Maine. In addition to this radio program and podcast, we produce concerts, workshops, a monthly community and contra dance series, other dances, school residencies, and programs for incarcerated men and older adults. Learn more at belfastflyingshoes.org. We are also a proud affiliate member of CDSS, the Country Dance & Song Society, an organization that connects and supports people in building and sustaining vibrant communities through participatory dance music and song. To find out more about their camps, affiliate services, other programs, and resources for music and dance throughout North America, visit cdss.org. Let's get back to the show.

C Chrissy Fowler 33:52

Well, welcome back after the break. I loved that waltz, and I just love thinking about the, we were talking earlier, just about the focus on, you know that you really think a lot about the dancers who are there and and that you, I'm getting inklings that you all kind of came to this contra dance music in different paths. Maybe you could hear a little bit about that from each of you, back and forth and all that kind of thing.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 33:52

Do you want to go first, Jesse? Because yours is the is the most origin of origins, I think.

J Jesse Ball 34:25

Well, so I am the result of the Peterborough Snow Ball, which is where my parents met, at the second one, I think, in 1995. Here I am. So thank you, Steve Zakon-Anderson, I guess.

K Kristen Planeaux 34:25

Steve Z-A's dating service, the Peterborough Snow Ball.

J Jesse Ball 34:49

So my earliest dances were in a sling on my mom's shoulders. The time I remember starting to dance again was it in, I think it was the first dance of 2014 in Greenfield. That's when I started to get back into dancing. And I went, I was at a performing arts high school. And so music was happening all the time, everywhere, but I was mostly playing jazz and R & B and other things. At some point in my high school career, if that's... career?

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 35:27
Yeah, sure.

J Jesse Ball 35:28
At some point in high school, I ended up deciding that jazz is stupid, and I don't remember why I came to that conclusion. I, oh, actually, I remember why. I remember playing a gig at a deli in Amherst, realizing

C Chrissy Fowler 35:48
Jazz in a deli?

J Jesse Ball 35:49
Yeah

C Chrissy Fowler 35:49
A deli, D, E, L, I?

J Jesse Ball 35:50
D, E, L, I, like a deli and sit down place. They also did coffee. That's probably why people sat there. I remember playing at this deli and realizing no one in the room other than who was playing had any idea what was going on, and that sort of killed it for me. And I remember thinking about, what am I going to do that people can understand? And it's pretty hard not to look at the dance community as an ideal, as an ideal scenario, because, it's not to say that playing for dancing is simple. I don't think it is. But it is an incredibly apparent medium as to whether or not what I am playing is intelligible, and that is, I haven't gotten bored of it yet.

C Chrissy Fowler 36:46
Like the feedback is really, yeah, that makes sense.

J Jesse Ball 36:49
If, if people aren't connecting to the music, you'll know.

C Chrissy Fowler 36:52
Yep, and when they are, you know, right?

J Jesse Ball 36:56
And I also appreciate the not all of the eyes staring at me, like is the case in a concert. Which you know people are, if people are moving, then I'm doing something right. Maybe not everything, but at least something right. And here I've been ever since, yeah, playing for dances all around.

C Chrissy Fowler 37:27
The music that, yeah, the dance, just the music inspires totally, hmm, yeah.

K Kristen Planeaux 37:33
You're a part of it. It's like, we're all a part of it. Everyone in the room is like, contributing.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 37:38
It think it's all, it like a, the there's, like, a triangle that's really important. It's, and they're all equal, of equal importance. Caller, dancers, and musicians. And it's, if one of those things is off, the experience isn't working. Which is kind of great, especially coming from classical music, where, I really loved the feeling as a classical musician, when you know, if I was on stage alone, performing, where I could feel the audience with me. Where like I could sort of dictate what was happening in the room in this really nice way and make sure everyone was feeling comfortable. And like I got this. I'm not going to make a mistake. Everyone can relax, you know? But I think, I think there's a responsibility that dancers have, like they have, as much of a responsibility as I do as a player, to make this an experience for everyone. And that's really amazing to me. Like

C Chrissy Fowler 38:43
Like they can't abdicate the, the requirement of connection.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 38:46
Yeah. They're not just sitting there and observing and, and, you know, the best classical audience members know this as well, like they have a job to be present and listening and all of that, because you can feel that as a performer, but, but I think dancers really know it and feel it and and they're there and they're present and they're, they feel that responsibility, which is wonderful,

C Chrissy Fowler 39:05

I wonder if there's something about the fact that they have to physically res- I am loving this conversation, yeah, but I want to keep hearing from you guys. But yeah, that, yeah, I wonder if it's because they're like, they have to move, that they can't, there's no option to just passively consume it.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 39:26

Yeah.

K Kristen Planeaux 39:27

I think when you see a dance that has a lot of newer dancers and they can only take in so much, you see that ratio kind of change a little bit as to how much you can get, how much they can contribute to, like, the energy of the room because they're so busy figuring out what to do. But even even in dances with newer crowds, like you can, yeah, you can feel... Is it, you know, positive energy? Is it confused energy? You know, like, what's, what are you getting from them? And, yeah, yeah,

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 39:57

Mhm. There's that thing that we say, like, as a band, our favorite thing to see is all heads bopping in the same way, kind of like a wave. And not, I'm doing something with my fingers that no one's gonna be able to see, because this is podcast, right?

C Chrissy Fowler 40:11

It's radio

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 40:12

But it's, it's very like, you know, smooth and

J Jesse Ball 40:17

Kind of oceanic.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 40:18

Yeah, very, very much that they're in their bodies, they're present, and they're listening, and they're energetically with us.

C Chrissy Fowler 40:26

And they can hear what you're trying to say, yeah.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 40:28

Yeah. And they're saying something themselves. You know they're they're doing as much as we are. Yeah, and the caller has a huge job also, yeah, to be sort of the go-between and to also do many other things.

C Chrissy Fowler 40:41

Yeah, it's definitely everybody in it. So you came to it from classical music.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 40:42

I came to it from classical.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 40:43

I'm like, so I am ridiculously classically trained. It's not even it's ridiculous. I started when I was four. I've done it forever. But I was, I was at NEC, and I was

C Chrissy Fowler 40:43

New England Conservatory?

C Chrissy Fowler 40:43

How did you?

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 40:47

New England Conservatory, yeah, and I was not in the CI program. A lot of dance musicians that are from, that have gone to NEC, are from the contemporary improvisation program, which is not called the contemporary improvisation program anymore, but I forget what it's called. And I was taking a semester off, either in undergrad or in my grad program. I can't remember. Maybe end of undergrad, early grad. And I ran into Eric Boodman, who is in one of Jesse's bands. I didn't know Je-, you know, I didn't know any of these people yet, but I knew Eric because we randomly shared a friend from Brooklyn, from my childhood. And I had told myself that I really wanted to try new things when I was taking this semester off. I was like, at a house

concert. This is something I would never have had time to do, but I had gone to this house concert with my roommate, and he was there. And it was like, what is happening? I remember I was also trying to find the best Indian food restaurant in Boston. That was another one of my things I was trying to do. And then he said, "You know, I'm doing this thing tomorrow." I told him I was trying new things. He said, "I'm doing this thing tomorrow, which is, I'm, I'm leading the open band at BIDA, which is a contra dance that happens in Cambridge."

C Chrissy Fowler 42:20

Boston Intergenerational Dance Advocates, again, for those of you who might not (?) little area.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 42:25

Yeah, and, and he said, "You know, that's a new thing. Try that." And I said, "Okay." He said, "You know, you might want to bring a mandolin, or, like, you know, you can bring a violin." And I was like, "No, I don't want to bring a violin. I want to be doing new things." So I brought, I brought a mandolin, and I went and I saw them teaching the like beginners lesson or, and then I saw people setting up on stage, and I thought, I don't want to be playing music. I want to be dancing. And I sort of dropped my mandolin on the stage, and I never went back to it. I took the beginners class, and then I danced the entire night. And my first thought with, how can I do this again? And so I went two weeks later, and then I thought, how can I do this, like, every week? How can I do this maybe every night of the week? It was the last new thing I tried. Like there was no, I didn't need more. I mean, I tried maybe English country dancing. And then I, you know, I've expanded my dance repertoire, but I didn't really try anything new until the pandemic hit, and I played the, started playing the fiddle. But I just became such a such a dancer. I loved, loved, loved it. It became sort of my whole life. And I did end up going back and finishing maybe two degrees. I don't remember which degree I was in, but I did go back, and I sort of felt like I had two lives for a while, and I was this dancer and I was this classical violinist, and then the pandemic hit. At that point, I had started living with Jesse, and we were stuck in a house together during the pandemic, and so we wanted to play music together. And so that's when I started playing the fiddle. So that's how I came to playing the music.

C Chrissy Fowler 44:02

Wow. But you were a dancer before you became a dance musician.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 44:04

Yeah. And I was really a dancer. I mean, I still, in my heart, I'm a dancer.

C Chrissy Fowler 44:11

Wow. These are two great stories.

K

Kristen Planeaux 44:14

I'll chime in. I'll try to keep it brief.

C

Chrissy Fowler 44:16

Ohio maybe figures into it a little bit.

K

Kristen Planeaux 44:18

So, oh yeah. So I was an elementary music teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I had been teaching music for a year, and I went to an Orff Schulwerk certification course, for all of those elementary music ed nerds out there. I was, you know, sort of doing this approach to elementary education. And of course, they're teaching folk dances as a part of it. And so I'm doing these folk dances. I'm doing, you know, simple stuff. And I'm like, I love it. I love the right hand turn. I love the galloping down the middle. I'm so into this. And they, you know, teach us some harder dances. And I'm like, wow. Where can I do this with other adults? This is, I don't just do this with kids. I want to do this like this is so much fun. And I, and so some of the people there, this was at George Mason University, which is near the Glen Echo contra dance. And so some people said, you should try the contra dance. You know, the same people go every week, and they're really into it, and like, I think you'd like it. And so I kind of thought, like, oh yeah, I'll try that. And then I kind of forgot about it, and I went home. And eventually I'm like, oh yeah, I did want to do something. And so I get online, and I google "Cincinnati folk dance", because I had forgotten about contra, and I see the international folk dancers page that looks like it was updated in 1993 and I see the contra dance page, which is like, we dance every week. We've got a slick website that tells you everything about what's going on. And I was like, "Yeah, I'm going to that." So I go by myself. I'm wearing jeans. I'm like, I don't know what's going on. And Dugan Murphy gets out of a car, because he's living in Cincinnati at the time, and my friend Kelly, who had given him a ride. And I'm like, these people like to know, and they're like, they see me, and they're like, oh, want to help us carry stuff in, because I'm new and I'm shy, and so I help them. There's no lesson. It's a Saturday night. It's just like, I get thrown into it, like my heart is pounding. It's like, I'm gonna die, but like, I'm like, this is really cool, but I don't know if it's for me. Actually, it might be too hard. And a guy there is like, oh, you should try the English country dance. You're new, aren't you? Come to that! And so I go to the English country dance for a while, but honestly, it's really the young people in Cincinnati who were like, we like you. You should be our friend. You should keep coming back. And I was like, "Yeah, I need friends. Yeah, I will keep coming back." And so for me, it was a little bit of a slow burn, but once I really understood the dance and wasn't dizzy, I was like, "Oh, I'm obsessed." Kind of like Sarah. And I was like, I'm going to Berea. I'm driving to Lexington. I'm going in carpools. I'm going to Columbus. I'm doing this, I'm doing that. And there was a guy there, Chris Wood, who's a friend of mine now, and he said to every single new person, "Do you play music? Are you a musician? I'm looking for people to join a band. Let's make a contra dance band. I've got ideas." And I'm like, "Okay, I play piano." He's like, "Well, I play piano too." And so we go through this whole, well, we'll jump to the future, but we go through this whole iteration of like, who's going to be in our band? We need a fiddler. My friend Gabrielle was a singer, and so we asked them if they want to come and learn how to do percussion and just add something to the band. And so we create this band. But it was just very much like I loved folk dancing, and then I kind of

stumbled into the rest of it, and then it's just become such a big part of my life. And I moved out to Western Mass to really be close to it, and to be near my friends, who are deeply ingrained musicians too. So I think that's most of my story.

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 48:00

I've realized I've started telling new people, "This totally changed my life." And I maybe have to stop telling new people at dances that, because the look in their eyes is like, "I'm just at a dance. I'm just, like, here after dinner. What are you talking about?" And I realized, like, I have to, like, cool it. Let them have their experience.

K

Kristen Planeaux 48:21

Yeah, I think we're similar in that way that we just really caught the bug. Yeah

C

Chrissy Fowler 48:28

Wow. Um, well, I think, um, maybe some more tunes.

K

Kristen Planeaux 48:35

Yeah.

C

Chrissy Fowler 48:36

Um, I think you're gonna play a Glen Loper tune next? Glen Loper, a great Maine musician. Here in Maine we do love Glen dearly. And then a Jesse tune after that. You wanna tell us about those?

K

Kristen Planeaux 48:49

Yeah, so I heard Water in the Attic either live, when Glen's band Riptide came to Cincinnati, and I got to know them and ferry them around a little bit. And it was really fun getting to know them, but I got their album and I heard Water in the attic, and I was like, "Oh, this is so beautiful, and I wonder if it would kind of fit in with our style." So that's where Water in the Attic came from.

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 49:12

Starlit Skies is one of the Self Quarantine Sequence of Superb Quality Tunes tunes.



J Jesse Ball 49:18
Yes.

C Chrissy Fowler 49:19
Starlit Skies.

J Jesse Ball 49:20
Yes, yeah, that um, I don't remember.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 49:27
Is that an older one?

J Jesse Ball 49:28
It's an older one.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 49:29
I know how we found it. I occasionally will go through, with Jesse's permission, I will go through his computer and find old tunes that he's forgotten about. And I think this is how that one came about.

J Jesse Ball 49:41
I think that's right.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 49:42
Yeah, there's two tunes of ours, that River Road plays that are some of my favorite tunes, that Jesse had completely forgotten about, and was like, "Eh. I don't know about that. Who knows? I wrote it years ago." I think that's how we found this.

J Jesse Ball 49:57
Yeah, I'm trying to remember why I wrote it. That's, that's a, that's a dangerous, yeah. I better not, yeah,

—

C Chrissy Fowler 50:02
Let's play the tunes.

J Jesse Ball 50:03
Yeah.

C Chrissy Fowler 50:05
All right here, coming up next Water in the Attic, by Glen Loper and Starlit Skies, a Jesse Ball original.

M music 54:06
tunes

K Kristen Planeaux 54:06
Yeah, that was like, I can't play at this slow.

C Chrissy Fowler 54:12
Oh, I'm just so enjoying this chat again. So great. Wow. Here we are on the couches. Well, we're getting, we're getting toward the end of the show here, and I am still, you've talked a little bit about it, but I'm still curious, like, what, what are the things that make it special? We heard a little bit from Jesse earlier about what makes it special to play for contra dancers, as opposed to other kinds of playing that you can do, you know, like on the stage as a classical musician or or in a classroom. And, yeah, just so maybe a few thoughts about that, and then to continue the conversation. Yeah.

S Sarah-Hadley Yakir 54:52
I know I the thing I could add to what we've already said is that I think the first weekend I played was we were playing English. Kristen and I were playing English at Youth Dance Weekend. And we were playing with our friend Eleanor, Eleanor Lincoln, and we were, it was like, halfway through the weekend, and we were playing something. And I just remember thinking, this is, like, while I was playing, this is such a vivid memory for me, "This is the most fun I have had holding my instrument ever in my entire life." Like I, did I tell you that?

K Kristen Planeaux 55:31
No.

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 55:31

Yes, I've just, I remember having that thought. It was a full hall. They were all so present and with us. And the English at that weekend is so, like, everyone is so excited for English. I mean, it's like, it's a whole thing. And so maybe, maybe that's just my own personal little, little, you know, instrument reason for loving it. But I just remember thinking, "This is the most fun I could possibly be having, holding my instrument, hands down."

C

Chrissy Fowler 56:00

And why not have more of that?

S

Sarah-Hadley Yakir 56:01

And why not have more of that? Yeah.

K

Kristen Planeaux 56:04

Yeah, that's making me think of like my first dance weekend that I attended, which was the Pigtown Fling in Cincinnati that, I think I'd been dancing for three or four months, and Great Bear was headlining it. And so I was dancing, and I was like, I think it's the same. I was like, "This is the most fun I've ever had in my entire life" was dancing to that music that I just felt like so connected to. And I was like, "I'm on a roller coaster. I'm on a high. I'm having a great time." And when I started playing with the Ripples and realized, like, "Oh, I can really take people with me on this journey." And I think that, like I, the way that my style has developed, I'm just really enjoying this arrangement so much from our band, and just really feeling like when, when we're really locked in, and the dancers are with us, and the caller is also enjoying it and really with us, it's just like flying. It's just a really incredible feeling. Yeah,

C

Chrissy Fowler 57:11

Yeah. We are pretty lucky, I think, in our little in our little niche of contra dance music and dance and connecting and community. And new people that we're, that come in. And as you were saying earlier, we were chatting a little bit at the break, just about how it's so meaningful for us, sometimes we have to kind of rein in our enthusiasm for folks who are new, who might have those sort of saucer eyes when you, when you start talking to them about how incredible it is. But I think, I think those people even are having a great time too. Even if they're just, even if they're just brand new, and maybe aren't as locked into the tunes, because they're trying to figure out what to do, there's a fair amount of joy, which is, we're lucky. Before I let you play the tune, can you tell us what it's going to be?

J

Jesse Ball 58:00

It is. I despise any other impressions, a waltz, though running shoes are recommended for this

it is, it, despite any other impressions, a waltz, though running shoes are recommended for this one. It's a pretty fast, it's a pretty fast waltz. It's called the Valley Flyer. It's named for a very, very small train that runs through Western Massachusetts, that at least you and I have been on. Or, you know, it's pretty alarming going, riding the train through South Deerfield at 80 miles an hour

C Chrissy Fowler 58:34

Home town, watching it fly.

J Jesse Ball 58:35

Yeah, that's the when we were going to the train, I remember there's a level crossing on the way to the station in Greenfield. And remember, we watched the train go by and we like, what is that? Two cars and a locomotive going 50 miles an hour across the, it was, it was pretty cool. And so that's the train we ended up on, and that's what this waltz is named for.

C Chrissy Fowler 59:02

All right. Well, before they play the Valley Flyer, I'm just reminding you, as your host, Chrissy Fowler, that you have been listening to, and I imagine deeply enjoying, the Flying Shoes Radio Hour. This show has been with the band, River Road. What a treat it's been! We all want to remind you to keep supporting community music, community dance, and especially community radio.

M music 59:29

tune

C Chrissy Fowler 59:29

Thank you for listening to the Flying Shoes Radio Hour Podcast. Go to cdss.org/podcasts, for show notes for today's episode, where you'll find info on the musicians and the tunes, a transcript of this show, and links to other CDSS podcast episodes. Thank you to Great Meadow Music for the use of tunes from the album Green Mountain by Mary Cay Brass and friends. Please note that the views expressed in this podcast are of the individuals and do not necessarily reflect those of CDSS, Belfast Flying Shoes or WBFY. This podcast is produced by Ben Williams, Kathleen Wing, and me, Chrissy Fowler. Until next time, keep on supporting community music, community dance, community radio, and especially your local community arts organizations, who, like the Country Dance & Song Society and Belfast Flying Shoes, help sustain musical traditions like these.