

Lifetime Contributor 2017 Sandy Bradley— How She Got Started

Dancing was the first thing I remember wanting to do. From about first grade on I made sure dance had a role in all of our backyard games. Whether it was “cowboys” or “circus,” everybody had to learn the dance. My farmer relatives contrived to have me “help my cousins with the haying” but really, they dropped us off at the dance festival in our makeshift costumes. It was the highlight of the year for me. I had an uncle and a cousin who were square dance callers. We learned square dancing in fourth grade from Bob Hager, but I never got enough. My parents wouldn’t let me do any extracurricular dancing. They didn’t think it was a good path. Puzzling. I looked in the classifieds, and there seemed to be lots of jobs for dancers. I understand now that those jobs would not have been very satisfying for me, but at the time it looked like job security.

Since there was no dancing available, I excelled in school. Between my junior and senior years, I spent a year as an exchange student in Germany, and that’s where I was first pressed to call a square dance—in German. That went okay.

Went to the University of Washington to study Anthropology. I figured I could squeeze some dance into that. Indeed, my senior thesis was about transformational grammar in Balkan dance. I barely had time to study because I was busy dancing at least every night. There were no squares or contras available, so I took what I could get, and loved it. A few of us started a dance troupe which did Balkan choreographies, and added some American repertoire when we toured Europe with 50 in 1968 and 1970. With the Southern dance repertoire came old time string band music, so I fell for a fiddler (Hank Bradley) and we moved to rural Kansas for a couple of years. It was at one of our grange dances I realized I knew how to play backup piano. It was just like when I used to play chopsticks with my dad. Easy! Hank taught me seven chords on the guitar, which is all I ever seem to need. We took summers off and went to fiddle contests in the Appalachians.

Back to Seattle, about 1973, I fell into the Gypsy Gyppo String Band as the guitarist. We played a lot every week, and in between gigs I wrote my master’s thesis (“The Social Context of Buck Dancing in North Carolina in the 1940s”). Mike Cogan of Bay Records

decided to record us. We were playing up to three nights per week at a tavern downtown (The Inside Passage) which had a dance floor. Young people between beers would jump around and wave their hands to the music. They didn’t know what to do. I yelled “Circle to the left!” and they did. I improvised a bit, then made a plan. I invited two musicians and eight dancers to my house and tried out the calls I had figured out. The Gyppos had taken a gig for music and square dancing, so I took the dancers along to the gig to help grease the wheels. My dad was in the front center square, which was not helpful, but we got through it. Everybody danced.



Back to the Inside Passage. Teaching and calling there was a different situation. Dancers were not always sober. Two things made it work. One: the Gyppos played really fast and tight and the tempo was compelling, so people stepped in time with it, which added the ingredient of centrifugal force to the figures. That was fun! Two: to call, I used the voice you would use to get your three-year old to dodge a speeding truck. It wasn’t a polite request, it was an urgent command. Everybody did what I said, and at the same time, so the figures worked. Still a musician, I placed my voice inside the

music. I didn’t really have a role model, but I guess I just expanded on how I taught kids in grade school. And I really wanted them to dance, and I believe that urgency came out in my voice.

Andy Wallace got me to call at the 1975 Smithsonian Festival, which was really blazing hot. I saw some of the musicians I had met at festivals on the West Coast, and Tracy Schwarz took me to one of Bob Dalsemer’s dances. The next year I got a call from Pinewoods [CDSS], and told them they had the wrong person. I’m glad they persisted, because I had a wonderful time there for several years at American and English weeks. Joan Pelton of Alcazar Records invited me to make a record with lots of calls and a few songs. I realized the implied responsibility to sell enough records so she wouldn’t go broke on the project. I was motivated to book myself. That recording is available online with liner notes and all the calls and instructions, <http://stickerville.org/potluck/>.

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(CDSS Sings—Song on the Times, cont. from p. 8)

of Parliament. The movement was unsuccessful at the time, but eventually these demands became reality and in many ways are now taken for granted in democracies. One of our songs, “The Chartist Anthem,” states: “A hundred years, a thousand years, we’re marching on the road. The going isn’t easy yet, we’ve got a heavy load.” Singing this song, knowing these histories, it really brings home for me the idea of fighting for things beyond one’s own lifetime.

We wanted to bring these messages of the past 400 years of dreaming and fighting for a better future to our world today, with a few updates. In mid-2016 we started planning a songbook and EP, collecting a few more songs, working with a visual artist to create beautiful illustrated worksheets, and writing about the history and movements.

The US elections made the project feel more relevant, and made us decide to use half the profits of the book sales to support social action. We started recording, and in January we launched an Indiegogo campaign, hoping to raise \$5,000 to print the books. The campaign started off well, reaching our goal in just a few days. We were thrilled, and already planning on how we could make the books by hand for over 100 people who had ordered them. A week before inauguration day, we were in NYC doing a gig when we decided that we had to stop by Trump Tower to sing in protest and make a quick video of one of our songs and put it on Facebook. Much to our surprise, the video went viral, with over one million total views. From a little community campaign, our project ended up raising almost \$77,000 from over 2,600 people in all 50 states and 22 countries. We quickly realized we had touched a nerve, and that our original plans of hand making books was not going to work. Luckily, with this support, we were able to expand the seven songs to eleven, and are working on professionally publishing the book with illustrated sheet music as well as guest essays by a great group of activists, singers, and scholars including Tony Barrand, Eliza Carthy, Larry Gordon, Mike Harding, and many others.

We have decided to devote more of our time in the coming year to bringing these songs to people across the country, from touring and performing, to giving workshops, from singing in support of marches and protests to distributing sheet music for free to school choirs. Of course we would love to have you join us!

Growing up with CDSS, I came to a strong belief that singing is powerful—as communities, in performance, with friends, or with strangers. Today it is important that this power is something that we consider—that we can draw upon in other parts of our lives. Music and art are not neutral; songs can give a voice to those

who have none, and can sometimes change hearts, even when minds are made up. We who are already familiar with this power of song must lead the charge. Sing at protests, organize a songswap or concert to support an organization doing good, write a new song and teach it to your friends. Stand up, and Sing out!

In song and solidarity, Jeremy Carter-Gordon

You can find more info on the project at igg.me/at/SOTT/, and more about Windborne on Facebook or at Windbornesingers.com. Windbourne (photo p. 14, l to r): Jeremy Carter-Gordon, Lauren Breunig, Will Rowan, Lynn Mahoney Rowan.

Jeremy will lead two classes at American Dance & Music Week, August 5-12: Songs of Social Struggle and Harmony Singing, <http://www.cdss.org/programs/dance-music-song-camps/camp-weeks/american>.

(Sandy Bradley, cont. from p. 2)

When I was at Pinewoods and other camps, people would ask me to come call in their town. I told them I’d never get there, but to give me their address, anyway. When I got enough addresses in an area, I would send out a mailer detailing which three to four weeks I would be in their area, and people would get back to me right away. I was usually calling with their local band. My drivers during these tours included Kate Charles, Molly Tenenbaum and Paul Brown. We mostly did a dance every night. I published the itinerary and contacts so other callers could do it.

In London, Bernard Chalk insisted I meet Laurie Andres. When I did we had a musical explosion! The Pacific Northwest dance musicians needed to hear his dynamic phrasing! So I talked him into touring westward with me. He lives in Seattle now. Another auspicious pairing for dance music was getting to play guitar on both New England Chestnuts recordings with Rod and Randy Miller. Also Sandy’s Fancy with Alan Jabbour and Tommy Thompson.

Playing with the Small Wonder String Band (Greg and Jere Canote) was also a great adventure. We could do a dance one night and a concert the next night in the same town, which can be an almost efficient way to be on the road. And then came our NPR show: Sandy Bradley’s Potluck, which went on for 13 years, locally and nationally.

Sandy Bradley of Raymond, WA will receive the CDSS Lifetime Contribution Award in Seattle, WA on September 16, 2017.