

Factors Affecting the Difficulty of a Contra

Compiled By Dottie Welch

Selecting contras for a given group of dancers requires consideration of numerous factors. Making appropriate choices will help ensure a successful and pleasant dance experience. There are several factors that should be considered.

1) **Dancer knowledge and experience**

Mostly new dancers with no dance experience

Mostly new dancers with some previous dance training

Dancers in tune with 8-beat phrasing but no knowledge of contras or any of the calls

Square dancers who have rarely or never danced contras

Dancers with some previous contra dance experience

Dancers comfortable with typical Alternate Duples

Dancers with knowledge of Contra specific calls such as Heys/Reels and Contra Corners

2) **Comfort Zone**

Adjacent dancers have the same dancers on each side all through the dance (Proper or Becket).

Box of four facing up and down is a comfort zone for square dancers.

Partners standing side-by-side is a comfort zone for square dancers.

3) **Number of New Calls**

All calls described in simple English.

One call which dancers must learn to associate with a specific action (ex. Dosado).

Two or more new calls that might be confused (ex. Ladies Chain and Right and Left Thru).

4) **Forgiving Pairs and Safety Net calls**

a) Is there some call or pair of calls that provide catch-up time if needed?

Ex. Circle Left followed by Circle Right is forgiving because the distance turned doesn't matter.

Similar Forgiving Examples:

Star Left followed by Star Right

Star Right followed by Circle Right

Long Lines Forward and Back

Go Down in Four, Turn Alone and come back

Ex. Long Swings are forgiving because they allow time for a late start

Ex. Circle Left followed by Ladies Chain is unforgiving because if the Circle isn't completed the Ladies may end up on the wrong side.

5) **Swings**

No Swings

Swing with Partner only (a safety net but requires lady-on-the-right ending)

Swing with Neighbor/Opposite/Corner, correct ending necessary for progression

Swing with both Partner and Neighbor resulting in a potentially dizzying dance

Cheticamp Long Potato Simple Variation

Traditional idea from “Step Lively 2 – Canadian Dance Favourites” by Marion Rose

Contra for mostly new dancers, no dance experience, comfort zone is same dancers on each side, simple setup, no gender differentiation, calls are described in simple English, simple progression.

Formation: Proper Duple of Partners Facing (no gender differentiation necessary)

Music: Something with a French-Canadian flavor

Long Potato Circle Left (16 beats) (all dancers make one long, skinny circle)

Long Potato Circle Right (16 beats)

Long Lines Forward and Back

Partners Right-hand Turn Half to Switch Places

Partners Left-hand Turn Half to Switch Back

Top Couple Sashay (or Strut) to the foot

Good Girl Modified

Traditional dance with part B modified

Contra for dancers with some previous contra dance experience, Active Lady lead out to a line is a smooth transition to lines facing down, Star Right and Star Left are forgiving, one Swing followed by Circle Left provides a smooth transition into lady-on-the-right.

Formation: Alternate Duple, begin facing up and down

Note that the active lady is in the right-hand line and facing down.

Music: Jig or Reel with strong 8-beat phrasing

Opposite Swing

Put her on right, Circle Left

Circle Right

Active Lady lead out to line, Down in 4 (6 steps)

California Twirl, Come Back

Bend the Line, Forward & Back

Each four Star Right

Star Left to New Opposite

Neutrals at the ends should California Twirl and wait for the next Swing.

Good Girl Original Part B

The original part B includes Ladies Chain (an additional call that is not forgiving)

Wheel Around, Come Back

Bend the Line, Ladies Chain

Chain Back;

Forward and Back (face corner for the Swing)