

## CONTRA MUSIC AND CHOREOGRAPHY DESCRIPTIONS

(Contra Prompting Workshop, 64th National, Springfield, June 2015, Dottie Welch)

### Contra Music:

Standard contra music is composed of sections which themselves are split into subsections. Usually it consists of a tune that is 32 bars or 64 beats long. Tunes usually have two distinct parts called A and B which are each repeated. Each part is 8 bars or 16 beats and the sequence is AABB to make the full tune. A beat is the time a dancer uses to take one step. For the musician this dancer beat may actually be several notes (often two or four for a Reel and three for a Jig). The tune is repeated as many times as desired or sometimes smoothly changed once or twice to a complementary tune or tunes that are also 64 beats long. Usually the tempo is between 110 to 124 beats per minute.

### Contra Dance Choreography:

The choreography for a contra dance is a sequence of calls that are intended to take 64 beats or steps of dancing. Most calls require eight or sixteen steps, but some require four or twelve steps. The sequence is designed to be danced by a certain group of dancers and usually ends with a change in the grouping of the dancers. The sequence is then repeated for the new grouping.

### Contra Dance Descriptions:

Contras are written in several ways. Here are the two most commonly used systems.

### Part A and Part B Listing:

One way to write the choreography for a contra is to separate it according to the actions danced during each musical section. The four 16-beat sections are designated as A1, A2, B1 and B2 where "A" indicates the first melody and "B" indicates the second melody. Often there will be a number in parenthesis to show the exact number of beats for an action.

Example:

- A1 (8) Join both hands; begin with outside feet, Heel, Toe, Side, Close, Side, out and in.
- (8) Repeat the Heel and Toe out and in.
- A2 (8) Same dancers Dosado.

### Prompting Listing:

Another way to write a contra is to indicate when the prompts should be called. The dancers must hear the call before they are supposed to dance the call in order to have time to hear, think, and react. That means the caller must prompt the action before the place in the music when the action should occur. This method of listing is designed to aid in this process.

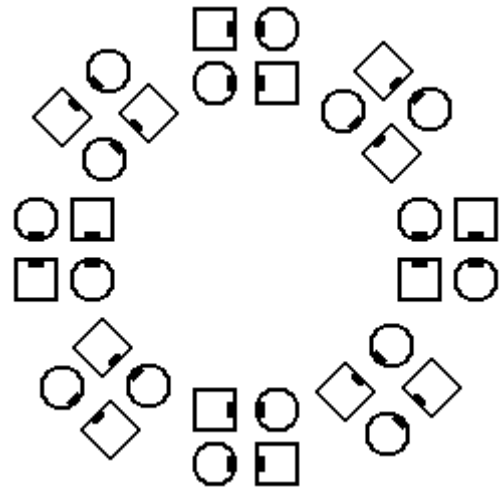
In this system, dashes are used for beats of caller silence. Words or parts of words are sometimes underlined or highlighted to indicate which syllables should be called on the down beat of the music. Parts not underlined are squeezed in during the up beats. Sometimes beat numbers are included. In this case the numbers refer to when the words should be said, not to the dance action. The dance action occurs after the words are said so the Circle Left would begin on the first beat after the introduction.

Example: Intro or 57-64 - - - -; Long Potato Circle Left;  
1-8 - - - -; - - Circle Right;

The prompter begins the first call four beats before the musical introduction ends. During beats 1-6 the prompter is silent then prompts "Circle Right" during beats 7 and 8.

## CONTRA FORMATIONS

**Sicilian Circle:** From a Promenade, designate one couple to hold on to each other and turn as a unit to face the couple behind. Then ask alternate couples around the hall to do the same. Usually four dancers will dance together for 64 beats and then move forward to the next couple coming towards them.



### Contra Lines or Longways Sets:

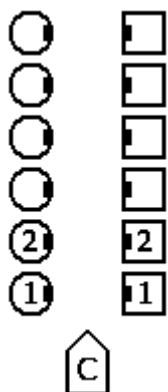
**Proper Contra Lines** have partners facing each other with all the Gents in one line and all the Ladies in the other. They can be set up from a big Promenade by designating one couple to march forward to line up couples one behind the other facing the front. All turn to face partner and back away one step. These are Proper Contra Lines with Ladies all on the prompter's left and Gents on the prompter's right.

**Proper Duples** are proper contra lines in which groups of two couples dance together. Proper Duples begin by grouping "Hands four from the top". The Active or #1 couple in each group of four is the one nearest the prompter. An active couple continues to be active for each repetition of the 64-beat sequence until they reach the foot of the line. When couples reach the end they will be neutral for 64 beats (32 beats if the dance is a double progression). When another couple joins them they change from #1 to #2 or vice versa and begin moving along the line in the other direction. To help the caller may say "Active on at the top".

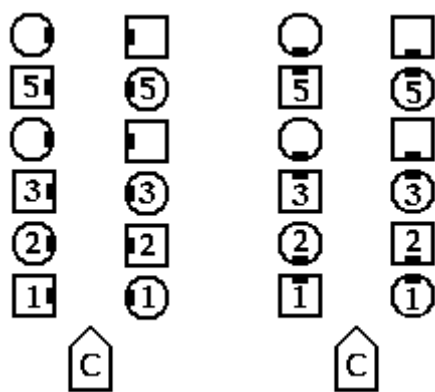
**Alternate Duple Contras** begin with the first, third, fifth, etc. couples from the top active and crossed over ("take hands four from the top, the couple nearest me cross over"). Sometimes Alternate Duples begin with the couples facing up or down. The couples progress the same as they do for Proper Duples except that when a couple reaches the end of the line they must cross over while they are neutral (each dancer moves to the opposite line).

**Couples Facing Couples Contras** have partners together on one side facing another couple in the other line. This is also known as a Becket formation. Couples progress along the line.

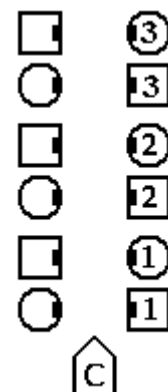
Proper Lines  
or Proper Duple



Alternate Duple  
(Improper Duple, Duple Minor)



Couples Facing Couples  
(Becket)



## Sicilian Circles

(These three can also used as Alternate Duples)

### **ICY ROAD**

By Dottie Welch, February 2010

Formation: Sicilian Circle or Alternate Duple facing up and down

Music: "Pushed in a Corner" on MacGregor 2411

- - - -; Each Four Circle Left;

- - - -; - - Circle Right;

- - - -; - - Ladies Dosado;

- - - -; - - Gents Dosado;

- - - -; - - Star Right;

- - - -; - - Star Left;

- - - -; Partners together Veer Right;

And Veer Left -; New opposites Two-Hand Turn; (Circle to Left once around)

### **BRAVEHEART SICILIAN**

By Dottie Welch, December 2010

Formation: Sicilian Circle or Alternate Duple facing up and down

Music: "Braveheart" on Global - GMP 507

- - - -; - - Opposite Claps; (knees, knees, hands, hands, opposite 1, 2, 3)

- - - -; - - Partner Claps;

- - - -; Each 4 Make a Right-Hand Star;

- - - -; - - Left-Hand Star;

- - - -; - - Circle Left;

- - - -; - - Circle Right;

- - - -; Opposite Dosado;

or Partner Swing;

- - - -; Once and a Half and move on;

Pass Thru and move on;

### **GEORGE & AMBER'S WEDDING**

By Dottie Welch, September 2010

Formation: Sicilian Circle or Alternate Duple facing up and down

Music: "Year End Two-Step & Rollstone" on Southerners Plus Two

- - - -; - - Heel, Toe, Out, 2, 3; (Join hands, begin with gent's left & lady's right)

Heel, Toe, In, 2, 3; - - Do it again;

- - - -; - Opposite Dosado;

- - - -; - - Circle Left;

- - - -; - - Circle Right;

- - - -; Partners together Veer Right;

- - Veer Left; Two-Hand Right-Hip Turn; (New opposites turn with right-hips close)

- - - -; Two-Hand Left-Hip Turn;

## Proper Lines

### **CHETICAMP LONG POTATO SIMPLIFIED**

By Dottie Welch, December 2012 for Forest Heights Dance

**Formation:** Proper Longways for six to eight couples

**Music:** "Galope Malbaie / Picnic / Rare" (Reels) on Any Jig or Reel CD

- - - -; Long Potato Circle Left (16 steps);  
- - - -; - - - -;  
- - - -; Long Potato Circle Right (16 steps);  
- - - -; - - - -;

- - - -; Turn Partner Left Arm around;  
- - - -; Turn Partner Right Arm around;  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back (with a "Whoop");  
- - - -; Top Couple Sashay (or Strut) to the foot;

### **LOCKEPORT STRUT**

By Dottie Welch, March 2012, for Lockeport Elementary School

**Formation:** Proper contra lines

**Music:** "Donegal Jig" on Kalox 1216

- - - -; Forward 3 and Stomp;  
- Back 3 and Clap; - - Partners Switch Places;  
- - - -; Forward 3 and Stomp;  
- Back 3 and Clap; - - Partners Switch Places;

- - - -; Top two strut down the center (others clap to music);  
- - - -; Next two strut down the center; (all 4 dancers rejoin their lines at the foot)  
- - - -; All Solo Turn to the right once around (right hand up);  
- - - -; Solo Turn to the left once around (left hand up);

### **RIGHT SIDE ARCH**

By Dottie Welch, October 2008 (idea from Barley and Oats by Ken Kernen)

**Formation:** Proper contra lines

**Music:** "Aunt May's Canadian Jig" on Folkraft 1438

- - - -; Long Potato Circle Left;  
- - - -; - - Circle Right;  
- - - -; Everybody Forward and Back;  
- - Right Side Arch; Others Duck Thru (right side to partner and all move forward);  
  
- - all Turn Alone; Everybody Forward and Back;  
- - - -; Right Side Arch, Others Duck Thru (all move forward);  
- - Turn Alone; Top Couple Sashay (or Strut) to the Foot;  
- - - -; Next Couple Sashay Down;

## Couples Facing Couples

### **SLIDE RIGHT CONTRA #1**

By Dottie Welch, December 2004

Formation: Contra Lines of Couples Facing Couples, spare couple at bottom ok

Music: "Mandolin Contra" on Lloyd Shaw 332

- - - -; - - Ladies Dosado; (or Opposites Clap - knees 2, hands 2, opposite 3)
- - - -; - - Gents Dosado; (or Partners Clap)
- - - -; Each 4 Star Right;
- - - -; Each 4 Star Left;
  
- - - -; - - Circle Left;
- - - -; - - Circle Right;
- - - -; Let Go, Slide Right to New Spot; (move all the way to next couple's spot)
- - Face new two; Long Lines Forward and Back;

### **FRACTION CONTRA**

By Dottie Welch, 2005

Formation: Contra Lines of Couples Facing Couples, spare couple at bottom ok

Music: Jigs or Reels or "Snow Deer and Golden Slippers"

- - - -; Long Lines go Forward and Back;
- - - -; - - Corner Allemande Left;
- - - -; Partner Dosado (or Partner Swing);
- - - -; Face In, Circle Left;
  
- - Once around; - and a Quarter More;
- - Balance Four; - - Opposite Dosado;
- - - -; - - Right Pull By;
- - Left Pull By; Each 4 Star Right 3/4 to Lines;

### **L. A. SLANT**

Dottie Welch, April 2008 (May replace Right & Left Thru with Half Promenade)

Formation: Contra lines of Couples Facing Couples (Becket)

Music: Jigs or "Mexican Love Songs" on Rhythm 175 (slow a bit)

- - - -; - - Circle Left 3/4; (end facing up or down)
- - - -; - - Opposite Swing; (put the lady on the right and face in)
- - - -; - - Circle Right 3/4; (again end facing up or down)
- - - -; - - Partner Swing; (put the lady on the right and face in)
  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back; (prepare to Slant by looking diagonally left)
- - - -; Slant Left Right & Left Thru; (couples go diagonally ending in other's place)
- - - -; - - New Ladies Dosado; (with lady in the new couple across)
- - - -; - - Gents Dosado; (music has an extra two beats)

## Proper Duples

### **DIAGONAL DILLY**

By Dottie Welch, November, 2009

Formation: Proper Duple

Music: Jig ("March to May & Bonaparte" on Kitchen Chair CD)

- - - - , - - Forward and Back  
- - - - , Look Diagonally Right and Turn by Right (at ends us phantom)  
- - - - , Look Diagonally Left and Turn by Left  
- - - - , - - Forward and Back

- - - - , - - Actives Swing  
- - - - , Put her on right, Actives Center Down in 4  
- - - - , Centers California Twirl, others Turn alone  
Come Back - - , - - Cast Off

### **JEFFERSON'S REEL**

By Dud Briggs (idea from Jefferson and Liberty, a traditional contra)

Formation: Proper or Alternate Duple, begin facing down (Actives) or up

Music: "March St. Timothy" on Lloyd Shaw 338

- - - - ; - - Circle Left; (If Alternate Duple, neutrals cross over and wait.)  
- - - - ; - - Circle Right; (If Proper Duple, neutrals wait until after next Duck Thru.)  
- - - - ; - - Star Right;  
- - - - ; - - Star Left;

- - - - ; Actives down outside six steps and turn alone; (all actives go single file)  
- - - - ; Return to place and into centre; (between others who turn to face down)  
- - - - ; All go down four in line six steps;  
- - - - ; Back up four steps, Centers Arch, Ends Duck Thru; (move on to new four)

### **EASY EIGHT**

By Dottie Welch, November 2011

Formation: Proper Duple (group into fours from the top, when neutral just wait)

Music: "Mandolin Contra" on Lloyd Shaw 332

- - - - , Actives Center, Lines of 4 Down the Hall	<b>Half Figure Eight:</b>
- - - - , Turn Alone and Come Back	<i>Active lady move up between the</i>
- - - - , - - Slow Cast Off (3/4 to long lines)	<i>Couple above and around the</i>
- - - - , - - Forward and Back	<i>inactive lady into the spot just</i>
	<i>below the inactive lady. The</i>
- - - - , Each 4 Circle Left	<i>Active gent immediately follow</i>
- - - - , - - Circle Right	<i>up between the couple above,</i>
- - - - , Actives above Half Figure Eight	<i>around the inactive gent and into</i>
- - - - , - - Actives Swing (lady on right)	<i>the spot just below him.</i>

## Alternate Duples

### **ASPEN AND SPRUCE**

By Dottie Welch, 23 August 2012, Prince Albert National Park, Saskatchewan

Formation: Alternate Duple, Begin facing up and down

Music: "New Waterloo Reel" on Caledonian Ball

- - - -; (new 4) Star Right; (Neutrals at ends crossover and wait for next Cast Off)  
- - - -; - - Star Left;  
- - - -; - - Circle Left;  
- - - -; - - Circle Right;

- - - -; Gent #2 pull out to line; (Gent #2 is the Gent in the line on the right side.)  
Fours go Down - -; - - Turn Alone; (Line forms with Lady #2 on the left end.)  
Come back - -; - - Cast Off 3/4; (Cast Off slowly using eight beats)  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and each turn to face new group;

### **ARDOISE SWINGS**

By Dottie Welch, February 2012

Formation: Alternate Duple, Up & Down

Music: "Mouth Tobique & John Howett's" (Reels)

- - - -; - New Opposite Swing;  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back;  
- - - -; - - New Gentlemen Dosado;  
- - - -; Ladies Dosado 1 1/2; (or Ladies Crossover)

- - - -; - - Partner Swing;  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back;  
- - - -; - - Circle Left 3/4;  
- - - -; Veer Left and Veer Right;

### **SCOUT HOUSE REEL**

By Ted Sannella, Alternate Duple

Formation: Alternate Duple (begin with Actives in center, all facing down)

Music: "Laura Susan Reel", or "Indian Reel & Dublin Hornpipe"

- - - - , - Down the Center 4 in line  
- - - - , Turn alone, Come Back  
- - - - , - - Circle Left (make sure they go full around)  
- - - - , - - Ladies Chain

- - - - , - - Ladies Dosado 1 1/2  
- - - - , - - Opposite Swing  
- - - - , Long Lines Forward and Back  
- - - - , - Actives Partner Swing