

Reading Contras

(CONTRALAB Workshop in Oklahoma City, June 2013, Dottie Welch, page 1)

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. Each part is 8 bars or 16 beats. Part A is played twice and then Part B is played twice so 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 may actually be several notes (often two or four for a Reel and three for a Jig). The dances are designed to repeat after 64 beats of music.

Contra Dance Action Listings: Contras are written in several ways. Here are the two most commonly used systems.

Part A and Part B Listing:

One way to write a contra is to list four sections: A1, A2, B1, and B2.

In this system A1 refers to the dance action during the first 16 beats.

A2 refers to the dance action during the second 16 beats.

Together A1 and A2 make up the dance action during the first 32-beats.

Usually the musical melody changes at this point.

B1 refers to the third 16 beats which are the first 16 of the new melody.

B2 refers to the fourth and last 16 beats which are the second 16 of the second melody.

Together B1 and B2 make up the dance action during the second 32-beats.

Prompting Listing:

Another way to write a contra is to indicate when the prompts should be called.

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. This system helps the caller prompt the dance so that the dancers can hear the call, think, and react in time to begin dancing the call on the correct beat of the music. Sometimes beat numbers are included. In this case the numbers refer to the words to be said, not to the dance action. The dance action occurs after the words are said.

Example: 1-8 - - - - , With your Partner DOSADO

Beats 1-4 the prompter is silent.

During beats 5-8 the prompter says "With your Partner Dosado".

Emphasize "With" on down beat 5, "Part" on down beat 6, "Do" on down beat 7, and the second "Do" on down beat 8. The rest of the words are squeezed in on the up beats.

After the dancers are familiar with the dance it may be possible to omit the clues "With your Partner" and simply call "Dosado". The dancers begin the Dosado on beat 9.

Description:

A complete dance description usually lists the action and prompts using one of the above systems. Often additional details are useful to correctly interpret the intention of the choreographer. These details may be provided in a "Description" section, or some extra details may be included with the action list either in parentheses or a different font.

Modifying Contras

(CONTRALAB Workshop in Oklahoma City, June 2013, Dottie Welch, page 2)

Modifying a Contra:

In the search for contra choreography that is appropriate for your group, you will sometimes find a promising contra that has one call or a section that might cause problems. Rather than discarding the contra as unusable, you may be able to modify the contra by replacing the call or section with other choreography. In order to do this, you must ensure that both calls have the same effect on the location of the dancers and require the same number of beats. It is also wise to consider the beginning and ending body flow to ensure smooth transitions.

Sample Zeros:

Contra calls that move the dancers for 16 beats and bring them back to the same location:

- Circle Left (8), Circle Right (8)
- Star Right (8), Star Left (8)
- Ladies Dosado, Gents Dosado
- Ladies Chain over and back
- Right and Left Thru, Right and Left Back

Here are minor changes - - goal is to reduce the number of Courtesy Turn actions:

Contra-Action by Ken Kernan	Contra-Action Modified
Alternate Duple	Alternate Duple
----, With the corner Dosado	----, With the corner Dosado
----, -- Corner Swing	----, -- Corner Swing
----, Straight across Right & Left Thru	----, Straight across Right & Left Thru
----, -- Right & Left Back	----, -- Right & Left Back
----, -- Two Ladies Chain	----, -- Two Ladies Dosado
----, -- Chain Back	----, -- Two Gents Dosado
----, Same four Circle Left	----, Same four Circle Left
----, -- Star Left	----, -- Star Left

Here are major changes – goal is to give more time for the lines to go down and back and to remove the Ladies Chain:

Big Sombrero Contra	Big Sombrero Modified
Alternate Duple	Alternate Duple
----, With your corner Dosado	----, With your corner Dosado
----, - Same Lady Swing	----, - Same Lady Swing
----, Four in line down the set (4 steps)	----, Four in line down the set (8 steps)
-- Wheel Around, -- Come Back	----, -- California Twirl
-- Bend the Line, -- Opposite Dosado	Come back --, End Man pull in & Circle Left
----, Make a Right Hand Star	----, -- Circle Right
----, Two Ladies Chain	----, -- Star Right
----, Two Ladies Chain back	----, -- Star Left

Writing Contras

(CONTRALAB Workshop in Oklahoma City, June 2013, Dottie Welch, page 3)

Writing a Contra from Scratch:

- Set up the standard structure of 8 calls or actions each taking 8 beats of music.
- Decide on the starting formation. Let's use a Becket (Couples Facing Couples).
- Consider how to make progression. Let's use a Couples Slide Right.
- Include something special: Gordon's Outbound Plane idea of Lines arch over.
- Fill in the remaining time with a Zero or two.
- Give the dance a name.
- Try the dance with some likely music.

Oklahoma, OK

Becket (Couples Facing Couples)

Music: Oklahoma, Red Boot 229 (slowed)

- , Left line arch over (right side couple Dive Thru or Pass Thru and U Turn Back)
- , Left line arch over again
- , -- Ladies Dosado
- , -- Gents Dosado

- , Each four Circle Left
- , -- Circle Right
- , Let Go and Slide Right (each couple moves to the spot of the couple on their right)
- , Long Lines Forward and Back

Name: _____

Formation: _____

Music: _____

Intro _____, _____

1-8 _____, _____

9-16 _____, _____

17-24 _____, _____

25-32 _____, _____

33-40 _____, _____

41-48 _____, _____

49-56 _____, _____

57-64 _____, _____

Writing and Using Sicilian Circles for Square Dance Classes

(CONTRALAB Workshop in Oklahoma City, June 2013, Dottie Welch, page 4)

(From Teaching Outside the Box presentation for 2012 CALLERLAB Convention in Nashville)

Set up Sicilian Circles by directing the dancers to make a big circle of normal couples facing in Promenade direction. Then designate one couple to turn as a couple to face the couple behind. Ask every other couple to do the same. Demonstrate how Pass Thru will move couples forward in their current facing direction to a new couple.

Teaching Right and Left Thru

Teaching Flutterwheels

<p>After Setting up the Sicilian Circles and explaining the progression, teach the action of Right and Left Thru. Then use one or more of the following kind of sequences. These increase in difficulty.</p>	<p>After Setting up the Sicilian Circles and explaining the progression, teach the action of Flutterwheel and Reverse Flutterwheel. Then use one or more of the following kind of sequences. These increase in difficulty.</p>
<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Right and Left Thru ---- , -- Forward and Back ---- , -- Right & Left Thru ---- , -- Forward and Back ---- , -- Opposite Dosado ---- , -- Pass Thru, Move On and Bow</p>	<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Gents Dosado ---- , -- Right and Left Thru ---- , -- Two Ladies Chain ---- , Ladies Lead Flutterwheel ---- , -- Opposite Dosado ---- , -- Pass Thru, Move On and Bow</p>
<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Right and Left Thru ---- , -- Right and Left Back ---- , (Left hands in) Star Left ---- , -- Star Right ---- , -- Opposite Dosado ---- , -- Pass Thru, Move On and Bow</p>	<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Gents Dosado ---- , -- Ladies Dosado -- Gents Lead with left Reverse Flutterwheel ---- , -- Two Ladies Chain ---- , -- Opposite Dosado ---- , -- Pass Thru, Move On and Bow</p>
<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Two Ladies Chain ---- , -- Chain Back ---- , (all go) Right and Left Thru ---- , -- Right and Left Back ---- , -- Opposite Dosado ---- , -- Pass Thru, Move On and Bow</p>	<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Ladies Dosado ---- , -- Gents Dosado ---- , -- Right and Left Thru ---- , Ladies Lead Flutterwheel ---- , Gents Lead Reverse Flutterwheel ---- , -- Pass Thru, Move On and Bow</p>
<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Right and Left Thru ---- , -- Two Ladies Chain ---- , -- Right and Left Back ---- , -- Ladies Chain Back ---- , -- Opposite Dosado ---- , -- Pass Thru, Move On and Bow</p>	<p>---- , -- Circle Left ---- , -- Circle Right ---- , -- Star Right ---- , -- Star Left ---- , -- Right and Left Thru ---- , Ladies Lead Flutterwheel ---- , Gents Lead Reverse the Flutter ---- , -- Veer Right and Veer Left, Move on</p>

Here is the Contra we wrote during the workshop:

Sooner Slice

By CONTRALAB workshop attendees, Oklahoma City, June 26, 2013

Formation: Becket (Couples Facing Couples)

Music: Québec Reel, Reel St. Blondine, Pacific Slope
From "Any Jig or Reel" CD, 2005

----, -- Slice and Ricochet

----, Gents Allemande Left 1 1/2

----, -- Opposite Swing

----, -- Forward and Back

----, Ladies Allemande Left 1 1/2

----, (Begin right shoulder) Half a Hey

----, -- Partner Balance

-- and Swing (12 beats), ----

Description:

Begin in a Becket formation. If there is an extra couple, place them at the foot in the right-hand line.

Slice and Ricochet: Look toward the couple diagonally to the left, move diagonally forward towards each other until nose-to-nose then ricochet directly backwards into the same line having made progression. Couples on the left end of their line should Slice toward a phantom couple and ricochet as the spare couple. They then move to the other side ready to join in again at the next Slide and Ricochet.

Allemande Left 1 1/2: Using a pigeon wing hold, the designated dancers turn by the left arm once and a half around to end facing the dancer who was directly across from them at the start.

Half a Hay: Begin by passing original partner by the right shoulder pass. Gents pass each other by the left shoulder in the middle while the Ladies loop to their right. Opposite genders now pass each other by the right shoulder. Gents loop to the right as the Ladies pass each other by the left shoulder in the middle. Everyone should now have moved across the center of the set and be facing their partner ready to Balance and Swing.

Sooner Slice was successfully danced by the workshop and also successfully danced on Friday evening (prompted by Dottie Welch).