
THE SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCER

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I love this time of year!

No, not for the February storms, nor the odd rainy day, but for the dances!

Like a convergence of planets, there is such a wonderful variety of dances this season: beginning in early February, Portland held their monthly dance party, followed the next weekend by our Annual Dinner Dance in Vancouver. And now this past weekend, Portland held their annual Workshop and Ball.

And this doesn't even mention the March SCD events up and down the I-5 corridor from Seattle down through Oregon.

Have Ghillies, will travel!

And speaking of the Vancouver Dinner Dance: what a great time we all had! A great round of applause should go to our musicians, **Lisa Scott** and **Linda Danielson**, who kept us hopping the entire evening; to our harpist, **Jennifer Pratt-Walter**, who played so beautifully; to **Valerie Moore** for the decorations and flowers, celebrating the centuries of dance; to all those who helped with the setup and cleanup of the facilities; and finally, to all you dancers, for the camaraderie and sportsmanship which make the dance so enjoyable!



Our New Web Site!

Yes, the Vancouver USA Scottish Country Dancers are now official denizens of the web. The URL (web-speak for "address" -- stands for Uniform Resource Locator) is **www.VancouverUSA-SCD.org**. We will be using it primarily to "publish" up-to-date information concerning our dance classes and local events.

Please, check it out and let us know what you think. We have been receiving many great suggestions for additions and improvements, from far and wide (even Hawaii!) -- so just drop us a note or an email.

And a great big Thank You to all those whose contributions made it possible!



A Briefer's Eye View

By Liza Halpenny

Well, we've done it again. Pulled off a delightful winter dinner dance -- an evening of delicious food, rollicking music, and camaraderie with our friends from Kelso, Portland and beyond. I just love us, don't you?

As you may have noticed, there were a number of us trying out our wings at the art of briefing dances. It was an interesting (is that how you spell *nerve-wracking*?) activity, and I thought I'd share with you some of the thoughts we newbies had afterward:

John (who actually was on his second flight): "You mean, the way my life flashed before my eyes while I was looking for my lost briefing notes?"

Susan: "I learned never to announce ahead of time, 'This is going to be easy.' Also, the biggest danger is to start them off down the wrong path because, even after making corrections, things are never quite as clear in people's minds after that. Actually, though, it was fun."

Liza: I enjoyed it, too -- probably because I like bossing people around.

Something I did notice, though: in the days before the dance, I thought about my briefings, how to explain things

in a way that would help people understand and remember the figures. I made notes on my printed-up dance descriptions, numbered my comments to help me keep on track, etc.

Then, when I was actually giving the briefings, I looked up and saw that the people doing the walk-throughs were getting ahead of me because they already knew the dances. That threw me off and I found myself trying to keep up verbally, missing some of the things I had meant to say. I suspect my detailed descriptions would be better suited to the classroom than the dance floor. (Note to self: they call it a BRIEF-ing.)

In any case, I enjoyed myself, and hopefully didn't muddle people up too badly. It is always eye-opening to see things from the other side of the lectern, giving me all the more appreciation for our dedicated teachers.

Thank you, Everyone, for making it such a splendid evening!

[Another humorous view of "Briefer's Angst" may be found on the next page - Ed.]

A Briefer's Tale

By Tom Halpenny

I was enthusiastic when Lisa asked us all to sign up to brief one or more of the dances at the February Dinner dance. I selected the Kelloholm Jig, which I enjoy doing because it is one those "scrambling" dances in which the dancers' relative positions are massively rearranged, only to reassemble perfectly at the end with the desired progression.

I had attempted to memorize the briefing. However, the knowledge rapidly flew from memory when it was time to deliver the briefing in front of the supportive group of people. So I quickly reverted to the prepared text. Everything went fine, except that Liza told me later that I looked to be a little nervous.

A week afterwards, I had a dream that I'm still trying to figure out. When it was time for me to brief the dance, I picked up from the table an envelope that the teacher had provided, which had marked on it the name of the dance, and that it was "a simple dance". I opened the envelope to reveal the instructions. What I found was a pack of about ten pages. I rapidly flipped through them, looking for the desired dance title, and couldn't find it. Meanwhile, the room was silent. I turned to the teacher, who was by now rolling her eyes, since this was the first time I had attempted to learn the dance. I woke up with a sigh of relief!

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"Dancing is so Mathematical!"

We've all heard that from time to time, that dancing, particularly SCD with its 8-bar phrases and geometric figures -- "circle-round-and-back", "square set", and omigosh "double triangles"! -- has an intriguing mathematical aura beneath the action and joy of the dance itself.

While surfing the Web recently, I came across the web site of The Mathematical Association of America. One page in particular caught my eye: "Contradancing and Matrices", by Ivars Peterson. According to the article, Bernie Scanlon, a mathematics instructor at Bakersfield College in California, became very interested in contradancing about 10 years ago, and has been dancing just about every weekend since.

According to Mr. Scanlon, a remarkably high percentage of contradancers are highly educated, often involved in mathematics, computers, or engineering. "The appeal seems to lie in its being a kind of 'set dancing' where one's position relative to others while tracing patterns on the dance floor is paramount."

Doesn't that sound familiar?

The article describes how Mr. Scanlon introduced both the mathematical and performance sides of contradancing to attendees of the 2nd Annual Recreational Mathematics Conference, held early in 1997. Not only did he present a sort of mathematical description of contradancing, he also taught the session participants the "CMC-3 Reel", which he devised for the occasion.

The web address of Mr. Peterson's article is printed at the bottom of the first page.



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You can contact me in any of the following ways:

By mail:

John Shaw - SCD
PO Box 2438
Battle Ground, WA 98604-2438

By email: bcjs@pacifier.com