

Lovely Ladies Chains

The Tip:

On the ladies chain, gents should move forward and meet the lady, to scoop the lady up and around, as opposed to just standing there twiddling their (*whatever*)s, waiting for the lady to do all the work.

The Benefits:

- The figure is less rushed, leaving more time for the lady to twirl (if desired and if it's safe) or just commune with the gent during the courtesy turn (social interaction!)
- For the gents, preserves the momentum of the dance, trading stop-&-go for move-&-flow, which as everyone knows (or should know) is the secret to dance nirvana.

This tip-of-the-month was suggested to BFS by Cindy Larock

The Tip of the Month feature in DEFFA Newsletter comes from the archives of Belfast Flying Shoes, the first Friday dance series in Belfast, ME

Smooth & Satisfying Swings

Here are a few tips for contra swings smooth as glass and satisfying for all. We've gathered them from various callers and dancers over the years.

Both Roles:

- Use flat palms
- Hold yourself up
- Offer connected but springy support
- Imagine the opposite of a hug (holding your partner while maintaining space between you)
- Place right hip closer to partner's right hip (only slightly closer – avoid dramatic tango positioning)
- Use eye contact to reduce dizziness & be social
- Walk or Buzz Step forward (toe first) in clockwise direction (both moving on a circular track/path)
- End swings with Lady on Right (and Gent on Left)
- Adjust your style to respect and consider the varied needs of each neighbor or partner you swing
- Keep elbows and “club”-like clasped hands tucked in, especially when it's crowded
- Communicate positive feedback and constructive criticism – with a smile!

Gent Role:

- Right palm near middle of lady's back
- Avoid 'kidney jab' or 'lifting off the floor'

Lady Role:

- Left palm on gent's right shoulder blade or upper arm, Avoid 'hanging' off the gent
- Avoid 'clamping' your left elbow down on gent's arm
- Avoid the 'Vulcan nerve pinch'

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Dance with your hands!

Here's what we mean...

When you connect with other dancers,
use your hand(s) to “push-pull”.

Aim for a feeling of pushing or pulling with
equal & opposite force.

This “push-pull” is also called “sharing weight”
or “giving weight,” which helps dancers
create a firm dance frame.

Establishing a firm dance frame is especially great for
Swings, Allemandes, Circles, Lines, Wavy Lines, Balances

When you **Balance before a swing**,
you can use “push-pull” as follows during the
4 Counts of Music: Forward - PUSH - Back - PULL

These handy hints courtesy of caller and dancer Diane Silver

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Enjoy “Ouchless” Allemandes

YES, PLEASE !! 😊

Wrap your hand – no squeezing - around the
other person’s hand, with gentle connection. 😊

Keep your hand in line with your arm. 😊

Let all of the tension remain in your upper arm. 😊

NO THANKS. 😞

Don’t bend your wrist. It will bend the other
person's wrist. Ouch! 😞

Don’t use the dreaded “thumb-lock.” Ouch! 😞

Don’t use flat hands. It may inspire desperate
grabbing. Ouch! 😞

These hints courtesy of caller and dancer Sue Rosen

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Remember the **Golden Rule**
in word and deed toward...

Your Partner: Invite/accept dances cheerfully and politely ~ Dance w/ pleasant interactions ~ Express gratitude ~ Be graceful with closure (and refrain from abrupt abandonment in your rush to find a new partner!) ~ Adjust to meet your partner's dance style ~ Consider asking directly about their preference for flourishes

Other Dancers in Your Set: Take hands four promptly ~ Be on time for your "appointments" and ready when it's time for each figure ~ Migrate to another set if yours is overcrowded, especially if you were among the last to join

All of the Dancers in the Hall: Be mindful of space ~ Seek partners in all corners ~ Use less than your share of the dance floor, especially w/ embellishments ~ Dance safe, **and** fun!

The Performers: Pay attention to their offerings of music, calling, and sound ~ Appreciate them vocally, and often

The Organizers: Wear clean-soled shoes ~ Help clean up ~ Remember all your possessions ~ Come back next month!

Yourself: Enjoy what happens to your dance experience when your positive intentions circle back to you.

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"Small is Beautiful: Contra Dance As if People Mattered"

When the late influential economist EF Schumacher takes up contra dancing in the afterlife, he'll re-write his classic book to how "thinking small" is useful on the contra dance floor.

Keep the limbs close to the trunk!
(Tuck in your "wings" on promenades, courtesy turns, and stars!
Step with your feet under your body!
Elbows and legs in! Just say "no" to flailing!)

Shrink your 'personal dance zone'!
(Use less than your allotted square footage!
Leave space for others!)

Be aware of what you can't see!
(Tiny steps for the "back" of Long Lines
or Balance or Box the Gnat)

And overall...

"Wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology [*and contra dancing!*] towards the **organic**, the **gentle**, the **non-violent**, the **elegant** and **beautiful**."
~ **EF Schumacher**

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Circulate!

Before taking a partner, **circulate among all of the different dancers!**
(It's the social thing to do!)

Before choosing a set, **circulate around the room to fresh territory!**
(It's the spicy, as in variety, thing to do!)

During couple dances, **circulate** the floor
in a **counter-clockwise direction!**
(It's the safe thing to do!)

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Join DEFFA!

DownEast Friends of the Folk Arts ~ Maine's statewide dance organization
deffa.org

Help DEFFA **promote Music, Dance & the Folk Arts**
throughout our fair state of Maine!

Enjoy discounts for the **DownEast Country Dance Festival** &
other DEFFA events, like the annual Fun-Raiser Dance!

Vote at DEFFA's annual meeting/election/dance party!

Get the **monthly newsletter** delivered to your door!

Connect with other folks who share your contra-folk values!

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Just Wait!

...for the music, to keep on the phrase!
...for other dancers, patiently!
...for the caller, to lead the dance!
...to ask a new partner, until after you
have had time to graciously thank your
current partner!

But, **don't wait to dance!**

(This is especially relevant for new dancers. The first dances in the evening will be among the most accessible, so get on the dance floor at the start.)

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Pay Attention! Tune In!

Read non-verbal cues from
each dancer you meet.
As you cultivate your mind-
reading skills, be willing to be
direct (to confirm that you're
reading the cues correctly!)

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Be Versatile & Flexible!

Use your varied dance skills to dance
with styles of different dancers.

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Smile!

Smile when it's fun!
Smile when it's challenging!
Smile when you mess up!
Smile when someone else
messes up!

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Be a Mathematician!

Count to 8!

("8 to get ready and 1 to go!")

Well-timed moves are crowd-pleasers!

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Remember, it's Social Dance!

Enjoy the friendly, low-pressure, collaborative dance form of contras.

Remember social dance is

- **not a ritual** requiring perfect and exact execution every time.
- **not a performance** all about you, the superstar dance genius.

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Carry Your Own Weight!

Connect with intention, while you hold **yourself** up – especially for swings, allemandes & circles.

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Cultivate your Peripheral Vision!

Notice small movements at the edge of your sight, be more aware of your surroundings, and be ready to react to things other than those directly in front of you.

For safety and skill in a crowded hall, channel hockey great Wayne Gretzky!

Here's why...

"Gretzky's intelligence and reading of the game were unrivaled. He was adept at dodging checks from opposing players, and he could consistently anticipate where the puck was going to be and execute the right move at the right time. It's been said that he "seems to have eyes in the back of his head" and had a knack of "rolling with a check"

Umm...Not that contra dancing is hockey, but the skills could transfer!

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Move with Poise

These excerpts from Contra Dance Calling: A Basic Text by renowned caller Tony Parkes clarify how to carry oneself:

“Stand erect and lean slightly forward so that the weight is over the balls of the feet.

“Steps should be taken with confidence.

“Imagine the body as gliding smoothly forward, always on the same level, with the feet merely coming along for the ride.

“Lead with your heart and your feet will follow.’

“A dancer must be ready to change direction at a moment’s notice. A long reaching step in one direction will unbalance the body. Instead, the dancer needs to maintain the feeling of poise over both feet, like a baseball fielder who is prepared to chase the ball either way even before it’s hit. Knees should be kept unlocked to delay the onset of fatigue.

“Keep your feet under you, knees unlocked, and take small steps.”

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Dance Zen: Practice Non-Attachment

Know that contra dance is neither ritual nor performance, and imperfect execution is ok now and then.

Relax your mind.

Refrain from imposing your standards on others unsafely.

Release your expectations:
let it go!

And remember, no matter how it went, try to be fully present in the moment. It’s “on to the next!”

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