

6-24-2019 Contra Dance Members Meeting regarding Calling Terminology

- Meeting opened at 6:30 pm by Debbie Barrett
- Vote whether to Start Now (16 votes) or Wait 5-10 minutes (9 votes) "Start Now" has it.
- Charlie summary: explain a 501c3. Based on statute of Ohio, having a 501c3 allows us to do business taxes and buy insurance that covers everyone. We have to file federal income tax. We are part of CDSS as an educational organization of traditional dance.
- Working together, we can get where we need to go. We are all allowed to vote. Rules we follow at this meeting are posted around the room in multi-color.
- Deb opened an opportunity to opt out if don't agree to rules. All stayed.

Dancer 1: The First time I walked into that room downstairs and saw the smiles, the eye contact, the touching, I said "I have found my tribe." I didn't even know I was looking for a tribe, but you are my tribe. Contra is one of my life's chief joys.

Now this argument threatens my tribe.

We come here to dance. It is a safe space where all are welcome. Nobody asked for my political affiliation, they just invited me to dance. I love that and it hurts my soul to think we could be turning into two camps that call each other names.

Cincinnati is not a vanguard city. We are a bit slow to accept change, and that's just so and it's ok. Can we please vote to do more research on this subject and revisit in 6 or 8 months?

And I urge you, as strongly as I can, to vote for caller's choice. We can even suggest to the callers that our dancers might be more comfortable with only two dances per evening being Larks and Ravens, and those announced ahead of time.

Voting for callers' choice will allow all of us to slowly and gently learn how to dance as a Lark or a Raven. We can continue to dance, touch, swing, look into each other's eyes, and be happy dancers.

I don't want to lose any of my tribe. All tribes have a few weirdos, like me. All tribes have upsets now and then. But we are here to dance and smile and feel good. Let's not lose sight of that.

Dancer 2:

I don't have much to say.

I'm not sure all of you can see this. These are actual size, actual color images of a lark and a raven.

Now I have nothing against larks or ravens, but when paired together, as they are for calling, the terminology is not neutral.

The terms are not balanced, they are racist and insulting.

If the goal is to be more welcoming, these terms fail.

Thank you. (See attached poster titled, "Lark and Raven Poster scalable version")

Dancer 3: My name is -----; my pronouns are she and her. I'm a longtime Cincinnati caller, musician, organizer and dancer.

I enjoy dancing both roles. I do not enjoy being called a man or a gent, and I also stand for those who do not identify with gendered terms and for whom being called a woman or man is uncomfortable or traumatic. Again, I am a Cincinnati contra dancer who strongly prefers gender neutral role terms and I am not the only one.

Callers who use gender neutral role names have made the decision with considerable thought and effort towards inclusion and I think the community should let us do what we believe is right. Thank you.

Dancer 4- This speaker emphasized that the current practice prohibits callers from using gender-free terms. One of our callers used forbidden words as a protest and he was removed from the calling list. This is unprecedented in this speaker's long history of dancing.

Deb Barrett clarified that during the members' meeting on 4-8-19, members voted to call Ladies and Gents in the meantime as we decide this matter. Ryan was removed from caller's rotation until such time as he would follow directives from the Members.

Dancer 5: The board needs to be abolished, 501c3 as well. I cannot believe anyone here is allowed to have power over other people.

Dancer 6: After dozens of conversations on this topic over the last several months, I've changed my mind about this.

The decision of what language a caller uses should be left up to the caller. Like other innovations occurring over the years that have changed the way we dance today this one should be allowed to grow or not grow organically. There was a time when every other band had a dulcimer and number one couples did the fun stuff and twos stood and watched. It wasn't until the 80's that equal action for ones and twos came about. People from our group (the old people who were the young people then) traveled around and picked up new ideas from other groups. They brought these ideas back and introduced them to the community. The dancers tried new things and they either caught on or they didn't. These decisions were not made collectively, by a majority vote or a board or a process. They were made autonomously.

If a caller announces they are going to call a lark & raven dance then dancers can decide to get a partner and do the dance or take a break. We are not all going to agree on this and we don't have to. Maybe we just need to let it happen and see how it goes. We've spent an enormous amount of time and energy arguing about something that most of us have never even tried. Rather than putting forth a bunch of rules, why don't we just let it evolve like role switching, pivot swings and men in skirts? What is the harm in trying it? If we're as inclusive as we say we are, we will be dancing until the end of time no matter what words we use to describe ourselves.

Dancer 7: I know I'm not the only one that's become disheartened. I'm not so interested in a fight, but I am interested in coming to some kind of understanding. In the meantime, though, I want you all to know that outcome proposal 8, merging the two existing dances, is no longer on the table. I intend for the GF dance to remain independent.

Right now, all around the country, people's eyes are on our group. It's important that we make decisions as a community that will benefit us. Right now, our biggest focus should be on how to come to a compromise. This community is important to all of us, or we wouldn't be here. I'll have you know that I don't know a single person who wants the entire dance to change to Larks & Ravens overnight. We all know that's unrealistic, so let's try to relax into the reality of the situation. Compromise. I believe caller's choice is the best option for our group - it will help individuals become familiar with a variety of terms, and perhaps we can settle into a healthy groove.

Don't forget that many of the proposals for outcomes as well as processes require additional work. Polling dancers, adding evenings, requiring dancers or callers to adhere to new rules; all of this entails someone to spend time and energy enforcing and enacting these policies. Perhaps people who vote for a particular policy should be ready to put in the legwork it takes to carry it through. If that sounds like too much work, you can always vote to let the callers decide.

Next section of the agenda: Darlene's report of what she learned as member of CDSS Board.

Darlene Underwood: Nothing in this do we get to interpret as her opinion. It is a summary of her general experience as she travels across the country at various communities.

Darlene's report: Dear Cincinnati Contra Dance Community:

I had hope to come back with an answer to what are other folks doing and how did they make the decision? Here is what I know.

Louisville has not changed the language in their dances on Monday and 3rd Saturday. Bob Crawford has put together 2 additional Larks and Ravens dances.

Indianapolis has one Larks and Ravens dance a month.

Dayton: still using Gents and Ladies

Columbus: still using Gents and Ladies

Lexington: still using Gents and Ladies

Berea: still using Gents and Ladies.

Portland Maine which is Dugan's dance (he owns it): using Larks and Ravens

Boston (Lisa Greenleaf home dance): still using Gents and Ladies

Amherst MA just went to Larks and Ravens

New Albany New York: still using Gents and Ladies

Toronto Canada is going to Larks and Ravens in October

Owen Sound Canada: still using Gents and Ladies

Lansing Michigan: still using Gents and Ladies

Blacksburg, VA: using Larks and Ravens

St Paul Presbyterian Church San Francisco: still using Gents and Ladies

Oberlin: using Larks and Ravens

What I was surprised to find out was most of the communities are not set up like ours. Meaning they don't have a board of many nor elections yearly. What they have is a small group of people less than 5 doing all of the invisible work, making the groups decisions. I will state this is not a cross the board statement. It is a generalization.

CDSS has no formal policy; not to say that within the organization folks do not have their own opinions.

What I didn't come across, was any community allowing the decision to be the caller's choice. If some of you know of a community that does allow this I would like to know.

I'm not saying that the community doesn't make an exception for a caller to come in and call Larks and Ravens. However, that is not the caller's choice.

Most of the groups that I spoke to said when your group has made its decision, they would hope we would post it so that other groups could use it as a guideline. **End of Darlene's Report**

Dancer 7 added Glenn Echo gave her the choice to call as she wanted.

Dancer 8: can he call "Men and Women"? This is tabled for another discussion at another time.

Dancer 9: suggested that "gents and ladies" is just a place holder; not an implication of gender.

Dancer 10: asked about the CDSS Safety Committee and their purpose. Darlene answered that the CDSS organization holds no policy regarding gendered or gender-free calling.

Dancer 11: I heard Darlene say there are some national collective dance communities around the country who are paying attention to the pain and discomfort that Cincinnati is going through. They want to know how we deal with it. They are watching. It is a great compliment to our group. And these other communities seem to have faith in us here in Cincinnati to reach the right decisions, for us, while being considerate of all parties involved and perspectives.

Debbie Barrett: there are a few more processes to add, compared to our Process list at the last meeting. They've been on our website for a week, and they're on the posters on the wall.

Do we limit ourselves tonight to choosing one process, or 2 -3 simultaneously? If we choose just one process, use RCV. If we choose multiple processes, we'll vote a different way. If two processes are really closely related, maybe we'll combine them.

Preliminary Vote:

- Narrow down to one process: 28
- Vote for two or three: 21

Dancer 12: most of the non-conflicting processes will require volunteers.

Regarding item G: 1-3 full evenings of test gender free dances.

Dancer 7 – regarding item D: A group who would dive into exploring other communities and their processes and report back to the community. Dancer 7 reminded the group that with any outcome, we can always vote again.

Dancer 2 regarding items E and F: Let people vote with their feet. Either come or not come – over time we will see what people prefer.

Charlie Wallner: regarding item A, this is what started contra dancing – having questions, research is exactly what we’re supposed to be doing. The world is looking at us.

Dancer 8 asked if we are voting on outcomes. Deb Barrett replied, the only outcome voting happening tonight is for how callers will call in the interim while a decision is being made.

Dancer 10 – In regard to a proposal that was something about polling a young age group of non-dancers and asking what terms they would like used. Why limit age to 13-30?

Dancer 12 – K is philosophically about looking outside the dance environment and we could do it for all ages. We can talk more about this before the final vote.

Dancer 7 – uncertainty – Establish benchmarks. Once we choose a process – we will need to discuss how it works.

Dancer 13– The gist of what I said at the meeting was that I was concerned about the proposal that would add new GF dances on different dates, rather than the one that would change existing dances. The concern is one of scheduling. Personally, I made arrangements in my classes schedule for the fall semester so I could go to contra dances each week on Monday nights. If dances were added on different days, I might not be able to make it and thus couldn’t “vote with my feet” so to speak. And I suspect I’m not the only one who would be put on a similar situation.

Dancer 14– It’s been a few months since I’ve been here, though I’ve been watching online and I’m concerned with the discussion. I am a teacher who works with children. I see kids who say “No”, I don’t want to try that, then, later are surprised that they enjoyed it.

Dancer 15– no perfect world. We can’t force people to try something. We just have to try getting as close as possible.

Dancer 16– thankfully, it only costs \$1 for membership and the people here are mostly dancers. It’s a very trying thing that outsiders who know nothing about us have a chance to vote. And this \$2 student thing. How about something for seniors? We have supported this group for 35 years without challenge. Now we have drama people stirring things up. We have always accepted everyone here. We used to have community. Don’t make this not fun for the people who have been coming here for years.

Debbie Barrett – it is now time to vote for process:

- We will use RCV. Run down the list of processes and mark # 1 on your favorite. Then go back through and vote on #2 and #3 for your chosen best processes.
- Then, your fearless leader along with helpers will count. If any process wins by majority – great. If not, whichever options received the fewest votes, we cross them out. For all the ballots who did pick the one crossed out for their favorite; their #2 becomes their #1. If we have no majority yet, we’ll go through it again and repeat that process. Debbie passed out a handout for ranked choice voting that we could share if needed.

Dancer 10 proposes to just do a show of hands at least one round through.

Charlie – When a decision is brought up about voting, we have to consider the proposal.

Dancer 1 – Raising our hands could be further divisive.

Dancer 17– what if a voter only votes for #1? Debbie Barrett responded that all other items would be considered not important to that voter.

Dancer 7 - asked why Dancer 10's suggestion to vote with a show of hands is being considered when the addition of new proposals deadline has passed. Charles clarified that this is not a new proposal for outcome, it is just a voting proposal.

John McCain – I was helping set up sound; where are we? Debbie Barrett confirmed that we voted to adopt one process for making the decision.

- **Debbie Barrett** - shall we do a preliminary vote by using show of hands –
 - Show of hands – 9
 - No show of hands – Majority – overwhelmingly.
- **Motion on the floor by Ryan – Are we going to amend K to remove the age restriction? – Vote:**
 - 48 in favor
 - Keep the youth restriction in there: 2
 - Amendment stands. Remove the age restriction and the word, Youth.
 - Where does research take place for K? Debbie answered they would go to rec centers, parks, pools.

Charlie made the following motion -

Time Limited Policy and Procedures for Dance Callers

Time of Implementation – between the general membership meeting of June 24, 2019 and the immediately-following general meeting.

Policy, for the time period stated, experienced callers will be allowed to choose dance terminology (terminology for this policy is to mean gendered or gender free language).

PROCEDURES

- 1) Callers who are hired are to be informed of the sensitivities and discussions among the membership of the Contra Dancers on the issue of gender free calling
- 2) The board of the Cincinnati Contra Dancers, at least one week in advance, will post on website and social media, the callers hired for that dance and the terminology they will be using to lead the dances.
- 3) This policy is no longer in affect after the general membership meeting immediately following the June 24, 2019 meeting.

Dancer 18: Add to the policy, when the caller tells us what language they will use, let them know it doesn't have to be binary. They can mix it up, doesn't have to be one or the other (gender free or gendered).

Vote

- Allow callers choice – 44
- Not allow callers choice – 0
- Callers can decide how they want to call until a decision is made. Callers need to give one week notice to the board on how they will call. This will be posted on the website and on Facebook as soon as possible.

Time of adjournment: 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Christine Armstrong.