

# CONTRAS 101

Compiled by Dottie Welch for the BDPLS 2013 in Raleigh, North Carolina

**Contras are Useful:** Contras are a valuable option for Beginner Dance Parties because they can be danced by any number of couples. The simplest contras are proper lines. They require very little teaching and can be learned by dancers age six and up. Although contras have traditionally been danced to jigs and reels, they can also be danced to many square dance singing calls.

**Contra Music:** Standard contra music is composed of sections which themselves are split into subsections. Just like a modern singing call, it usually consists of 64-beat sections. Usually the 64-beats are made up of two 32-beat melodies, which are divided into two 16-beat phrases, which in turn are made up of two 8-beat phrases. 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 steps (one section). Any square dance music with clear 8-beat phrases and 64-beat sections can be considered for use with contras. Adjust the tempo to about 116 to 124 beats per minute. Choose your contra then try dancing it with various pieces of music to find a satisfactory match.

**Contra Description by Dance Action:** One way to show the choreography for a contra is to separate it according to musical sections. 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.

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.

**Contra Description by Prompts:** Another way to show contra choreography 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 to indicate which syllables should be called on the down beat of the music. Remember that the dancers must hear the call before they are supposed to dance the call in order to have time to hear, think, and react. Sometimes beat numbers are included. In this case the numbers refer to beats when the words should be said, not to the dance action. The dance action occurs after the words are said.

Example: Intro or 57-64 - - - -; Long Lines FORWARD and BACK;  
1-8 - - - -; With your Partner DOSADO;

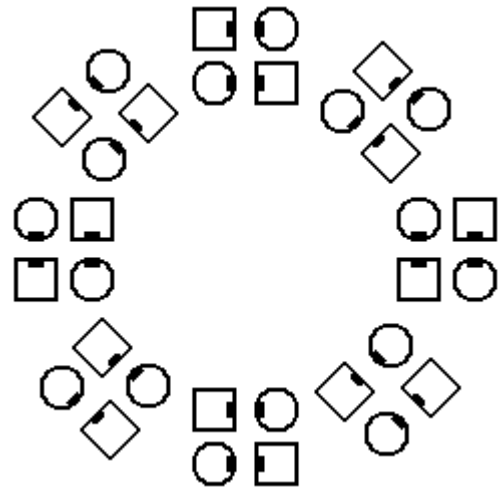
"Intro or 57-64" shows that the prompts must begin during the last beats of the musical intro or the last beats of the previous section. During beats 1-4 the prompter is silent. During beats 5-8 the prompter says "With your Partner Dosado". Emphasize "With" on down beat 5, "Part" on down beat 6, "Do" 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", which is all in capitals. The dancers begin dancing the Dosado on beat 9.

**Contra Selection:** Good contras for beginning dancers usually have three properties.

1. Simple calls such as Circles, Stars, and Dosado.
2. Forgiving choreography such as Circle Left followed by Circle Right.
3. Obvious Progression such as "Pass Thru and move on to the next".

## 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:

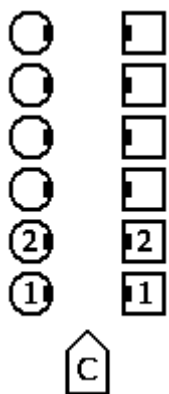
**Proper Contra Lines** have partners facing each other with all the Gents in one line and all the Ladies in the other. They can be set up from a big Promenade by designating one couple to march forward to line up couples one behind the other facing the front. All turn to face partner and back away one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

**Proper Duple or Triple Lines** are proper contra lines in which groups of two or three couples dance together. They begin by grouping "Hands four from the top".

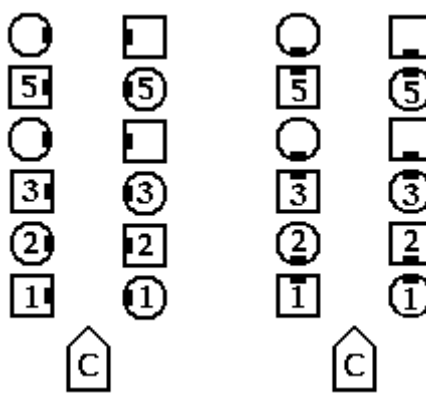
**Alternate Duple Contras** begin with the first, third, fifth, etc. couples from the top active and crossed over. Sometimes Alternate Duples begin with the couples facing up and down. The Active or #1 couple in each group of four is the one nearest the prompter or the one facing down. Usually dances using the Alternate Duple formation have a Neutral couple at each end during every other sequence. These neutral couples must cross over (each move to the opposite line) and wait for the next sequence. At the top of the line they become Active, at the bottom of the line they begin to dance the action of the #2 couples (Inactives).

**Couples Facing Couples Contras** have partners together on one side facing another couple in the other line.

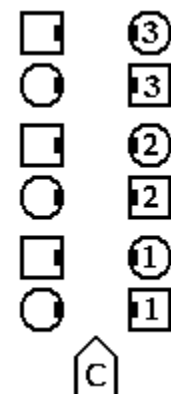
Proper Lines  
or Proper Duple



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;

- - - -; Once and a Half 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

### **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;

### **BEAVER POND SWIRLS**

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 (8 steps);
- - - -; Long Potato Circle Right (8 steps);
- - - -; Turn Partner Left Arm around;
- - - -; Turn Partner Right Arm around;
  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back with a "Whoop";
- - - -; Top couple lead big Promenade loop; (usually counter-clockwise)
- - - -; All the way around and back to place; (Leaders catch up to the tail)
- - - -; Leaders become the tail and end at the bottom; (2nds become the Top)

## 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;

### **SLIDE RIGHT CONTRA #2 (Switch)**

By Dottie Welch, June 2005

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

Music: Jigs or Reels or "Neutron Dance" on Chaparral 321 (slow a bit)

- - - -; Two hand turn opposite half to switch;
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back;
- - - -; Two hand turn opposite half to place;
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back;
  
- - - -; - - Circle Left;
- - - -; - - Circle Right;
- - - -; Let Go, Slide Right to New Spot; (move all the way to next couple's spot)
- - Face New 2; Long Lines Forward and Back;

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

Dottie Welch, April-May 2008 (Originally Right and Left Thru for 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 Half Promenade; (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 and Alternate Duples

### **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)

### **ONLY THREE-QUARTERS**

By Dottie Welch, January 2011

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

Music: "January 7th Jig" on Lloyd Shaw 318

- - - -; New four Circle Left 3/4; (end circle with gents facing up)  
- - - -; Gents Split Two and Separate;  
Around partner to line facing down; Lines of four down the hall (eight steps);  
- - - -; Turn alone and Come back;

- - - -; Slow Cast Off to facing lines; (girls forward around pivoting gent)  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and Back;  
- - - -; Each Four Circle Left 3/4; (end facing up or down along original line)  
- - - -; Balance Four then turn to new group; (face partner across and new two)

### **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;  
Come back - -; - - Cast Off 3/4; (Cast Off slowly using eight beats)  
- - - -; Long Lines Forward and each turn to face new group;