

Prompting Contras for Square Dancers

Educational Seminar presented by Dottie Welch from Nova Scotia
60th US National Square Dance Convention in Detroit, June 2011

Contras are Useful: It is worthwhile to learn to use Contras as part of your Square Dance calling repertoire. Contras allow flexibility in the number of dancers who can participate, they can be used as a teaching tool, they help dancers improve their timing and encourage dancing to the music, and they provide variety in club and special dance situations.

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 phrases which 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 beats of music. Any clearly phrased square dance music with this construction can be considered for use with contras. Adjust the tempo to about 116 to 124 beats per minute.

Contra Descriptions: The distinguishing characteristic of good contra dancing is the continuous close connection to the musical phrase. It is necessary to use music with clear eight beat phrasing and prompters must learn to give the commands so that the dancers can begin each call in time with the music.

The dance listings that follow are written to emphasize the correct prompting. 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. Remember that the dancers must be given 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 the words to be said, not to the dance action. The dance action occurs after the words are said.

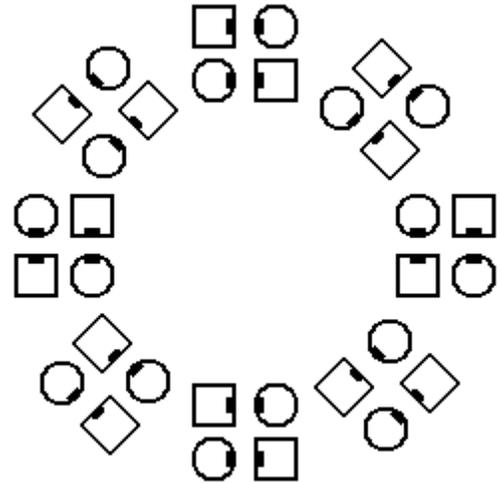
Example: 1-8 - - - - , With your Partner DOSADO

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.

Listen to the music to determine when the first eight-beat phrase begins, and then figure out where to give the first call and how to say it. Practice prompting, each contra and dancing the figure until you are comfortable with the words and timing.

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.



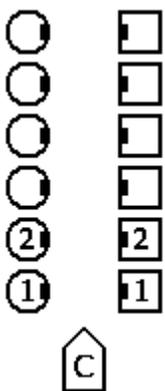
Contra Lines or Longways Sets:

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.

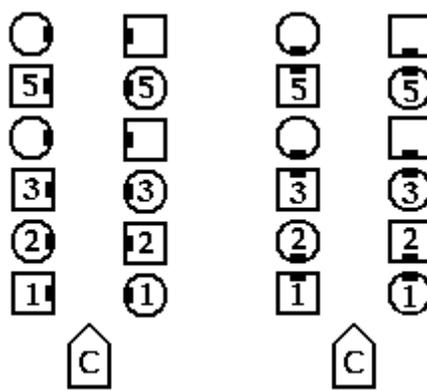
Alternate Duple Contras begin with the first, third, fifth, etc. couples from the top active and crossed over. Sometimes Alternate Duples begin with the couples facing up and down. The Active or #1 couple in each group of four is the one nearest the prompter or the one facing down. Usually dances using 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.

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

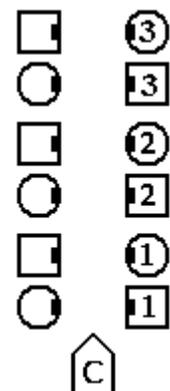
Proper Lines
(Proper Duple)



Alternate Duple
(Improper Duple, Duple Minor)



Couples Facing Couples
(Becket)



Sicilian Circles (These can also be used as Alternate Duples)

SANITA HILL CIRCLE

By Ed Durlacher, described in "Honor Your Partner", 1949

Formation: Sicilian Circle or Alternate Duple facing Up & Down

Music: "Every Street's a Boulevard", Chaparral 3507 (slowed a bit)

- - - - , - - Circle Left
- - - - , - - Circle Right
- - - - , Opposite Dosado
- - - - , Partner Dosado

- - - - , - - Star Right
- - - - , - - Star Left
- - - - , - - Forward and Back
- - - - , - - Pass Thru

BRAVEHEART SICILIAN

By Dottie Welch, December 2010

Formation: Sicilian Circle or Alternate Duple Facing Up & Down

Music: "Braveheart", 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 & Down

Music: "Year End Two-Step & Rollstone"

- - - - , - - Heel, Toe, Out, 2, 3
Heel, Toe, In, 2, 3, - - again
- - - - , Opposite Dosado
- - - - , - - Circle Left

- - - - , - - Circle Right
- - - - , - - Veer Right
- - Veer Left, Two-Hand Right Hip Turn
- - - - , Two-Hand Left Hip Turn

Proper Lines

BARLEY & OATS

By Ken Kernen, Printed in "Dancing For Busy People"

Formation: Proper contra lines of four to six couples.

Music: Ute UR9 "14 Karot" or "Paddlin' Madelin' Home", Blue Star 2455

- - - - , Everybody Forward and Back
- - Gents Arch, Ladies Duck Thru and All U-Turn Back (pass right side to partner)
- - - - , Everybody Forward and Back
- - - - , Ladies Arch, Gents Duck Thru and All U-Turn Back
- - - - , Top Couple Sashay (or Strut) to the Foot
- - - - , Sashay back to the head of the set and separate
- - - - , Promenade single file to the foot (top pair lead down outside own line)
- - - - , Actives Arch (both hands) and others Duck Thru

SPRING IN DUNCAN

From Marian Rose, in "Step Lively 2 – Canadian Dance Favourites"

Formation: Proper Longways for four to six couples

Music: Jigs (SL2 #2) or Reels (SL2 #13)

- - - - , Top couple sashay down the centre
- - - - , Sashay Back
- - - - , Lines Go Forward and Back twice
- While top couple separates and struts down the outside to bottom

- - - - , Long Potato Circle Left (8 steps)
- - - - , Long Potato Circle Right (8 steps)
- - - - , Turn Partner Left Arm around and back to place
- - - - , Turn Partner Right Arm around

SHINDIG IN THE BARN CONTRA

From American Squaredance, Bob Howell's article, April 1986

Music: Shindig in the Barn, Wagon Wheel 921

Formation: Proper Lines, preferably seven couples.

- - - - , - Forward 3 and Clap
- Back up 4, - - Pass Thru
- - U Turn Back, - Forward 3 and Clap
- Back up 4, - - Pass Thru

- - U Turn Back, - Top Couple Sashay (or Strut) Down
- - - - , Arch back up over the Men (Lady in center)
- - - - , Arch down over the Ladies (Lady still in center, or try Men in center)
- - - - , Actives Swing at foot, others move up

Couples Facing Couples

SLIDE RIGHT CONTRA #1

By Dottie Welch, 12/2004

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

Music: "Mandolin Contra" on Lloyd Shaw 332

- - - - , - - Partner Dosado (Ladies)
- - - - , - - Opposite Dosado (Gents)
- - - - , Each 4 Star Right or Claps
- - - - , 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 2, Long Lines Go Up & Back

L.A. SLANT

Dottie Welch, April-May 2008

Formation: Contra lines of Couples Facing Couples (Becket)

Music: Jigs – "Lord Rosslyn's Fancy" on Caledonian Ball

- - - - , - - Circle Left 3/4
- - - - , - - Opposite Swing
- - - - , - - Circle Right 3/4
- - - - , - - Partner Swing

- - - - , Long Lines Forward and Back
- - - - , Slant Left Right and Left Thru (work diagonally ending in other's place)
- - - - , - - New Ladies Dosado (with lady in the new couple across)
- - - - , - - Gents Dosado

DIXIE TWIRL FOR COUPLES

By Dottie Welch

Formation: Contra line of Couples Facing Couples (Becket)

Music: "SLA Contra" on Silver Sounds 163 or "New England March" SS 110

- - - - , Circle 3/4 to a Line facing down (Gent on left pull, Lady on right go under)
- - - - , - - Down in Lines of Four (6 steps)
- - - - , Dixie Twirl - - (Dixie Twirl= As couples California Twirl. All hold on, Lady
- - Come Back, - - Cast Off on right walk under center arch and across to
other side, ending with the whole line facing up)
- - - - , Long Lines Forward and Back
- - - - , Slant Left Right and Left Thru
- - - - , - New Ladies Dosado
- - - - , - - Gents Dosado

Alternate Duples (Neutrals at ends must cross over)

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 (Neutral ends cross over and wait)

- - - - , - - Circle Right

- - - - , - - Star Right

- - - - , - - Star Left

- - - - , Actives down outside 6 steps and turn alone

- - - - , Return to place and into centre

- - - - , All go down Four in Line 6 steps

- - - - , Back up 4, Centers Arch, Ends Duck Thru

GOOD GIRL modified

Traditional dance slightly modified (replaces Ladies Chain with Stars)

Formation: Alternate Duple, begin facing up and down

Music: "Ocean View Reel", Lloyd Shaw

- - - - , - - Corner Swing (Neutral ends swing and put girl on right then wait)

- - - - , Put her on right, Circle Left

- - - - , - - Circle Right

Good Girl (from contra line on prompter's right) lead out to line, Down in 4

- - - - , California Twirl, Come Back

- - - - , Bend the Line, Forward & Back

- - - - , - - Star Right

- - - - , - - Star Left to New Corner

SWIRLING SNOW

By Dottie Welch, February 2010

Formation: Alternate Duple begin facing up and down

Music: "Let It Snow" on Silver Sounds 166

- - - - , - - Dosado to a Wave (Neutral ends cross over and wait)

- - - - , - - Turn Half Right

Gents Turn Half Left, - - Partner Swing

- - - - , Long Lines Forward and Back

- - - - , - - Ladies Dosado

- - - - , - - Gents Dosado

- - - - , - - Circle Left 3/4

- - - - , Balance Four (forward and back) & California Twirl