

REMEMBERING BOB BENNETT

In September I reported that Bob Bennett was missing, last seen August 1. I'm sorry to write now that Bob was found dead near that site on November 11. He's survived by his wife Judy, and by his parents. If you'd like to send a card, Judy's address is:

Judy Burkett
 1304 Butter and Eggs Road
 Hazel Green, AL 35750

In memory of Bob, what follows is an article he wrote for the January 2006 newsletter

BOB HEARS THE MUSIC

By Bob Bennett

About a year before my divorce, I took up guitar lessons. My instructor introduced me to the blues, and I was electrified. Here was my life in music. I played the basic 12 bar progressions until my fingers bled. I listened to all the greats, Buddy Guy, Johnny Winters, Muddy Waters, and many others. And just when I thought it couldn't get any better, I discovered Stevie Ray Vaughn. I couldn't imagine the guitar played more perfectly or with more heart. In a span of two weeks, I purchased almost all of his albums. His music was in my head constantly, and that was a very good thing.

I was star struck, and read everything I could find about him. For most of the 1980s he was just an obscure blues guitar player with a small cult following. But on August 27, 1990, he arrived. He had secured a place on stage with the living greats; Eric Clapton, Robert Cray, and Buddy Guy. After decades of struggling, he had reached his dream. Having achieved true star status, he was given the luxury of a helicopter ride to begin his journey home. He never got there. The helicopter crashed, killing all aboard.

They say we idolize people to make up for deficiencies in our own lives, and so as I wept for a man I never knew, I was really weeping for myself.

During my first couple of years as a dancer, I didn't hear the music. All my concentration was focused on not making mistakes. When I would tell people I was traveling to a dance, they would ask, "Who's playing?" And as always I would reply, "I don't know." Then they would say, "Oh. Well, who's calling?" And as always I would reply, "I don't know." I was the only contra dancer I knew who didn't have a favorite band.

And then one day, as I was dancing along, I heard it. A guitar. It was driving the rhythm in a way that burned through my insecurities and got my attention. The pace was furious and the playing was masterful. It seemed as though I could hear every note of every chord. I came to the realization that I was supposed to be dancing to music and that the band was not a metronome. After it was over, I glanced up at the stage and got a bit of a surprise. I had imagined the player would be soaked in sweat from the effort of pouring out all that physical and creative energy, but he was not even slightly ruffled. In fact, he appeared serene.

Some months later, it happened again, but this time the riffs were undeniably borrowed from the blues. For the first time, the joy of the music superseded the joy of the dance. The greatest joy of my present life had just been connected with one of the greatest joys of my past life. I will never forget it. And again, I got a surprise: It was the same guy. A few questions later, I learned his name is Roger Gold.

Up until now, the people who made the music I loved were above and beyond me. But as a dancer they are a part of my life. I see, speak, and dance with them on a regular basis. It occurs to me that in many ways our community is a complete community; everyone we need is already a part of us. We are self-contained. I don't have much use for wishes these days, but I do have a few, and one of them is that Roger Gold never takes a helicopter ride.

You can see some of Bob's excellent photography at <http://www.pbase.com/bobbennett>

HUNTSVILLE CALENDAR

• Huntsville dances are the 1st & 3rd Saturdays of each month in the gym at Faith Presbyterian Church, 5003 Whitesburg Dr., (corner of Whitesburg Dr. & Airport Rd.). Beginners Workshop is at 7:00 PM, then the regular dance is from 7:30 – 10:30 PM.

• Admission is \$7 (\$6 for members), \$4 for teens, free for ages 12 & under.

Remember to bring comfortable, **non-scuffing shoes** for dancing. Bring someone new to a dance this month!

• For more info Contact Bryan Walls (256) 837-0656 or email: bwalls@pobox.com or visit <http://secontra.com.NACDS.html>

DECEMBER 1 : HUNTSVILLE

CALLER — JANET SHEPHERD

BAND — ED BAGGOTT & ELSIE PETERSON

DECEMBER 15 : HUNTSVILLE

CALLER — CIS HINKLE

BAND — PLAIDGRASS

AREA DANCE GYPSY CALENDAR

DECEMBER 1 : ATHENS, TENNESSEE

ART CENTER IN ATHENS CONTRA DANCE

CALLER — TBD

BAND — TBD

DECEMBER 7 : NASHVILLE

CALLER — KENDAL BROADIE

BAND — PATRICK ROSS & FRIENDS

DECEMBER 8 : CHATTANOOGA ANNUAL HOLIDAY DANCE

CALLER — BOB DALSEMER

BAND — FRANCES CUNNINGHAM AND LYNDA ANDERSON

DECEMBER 8 : BIRMINGHAM FOOTMAD GHOST OF CHRISTMAS DANCES PAST, BLUFF PARK COMMUNITY CENTER

CALLER — ARCHIE FAULKNER

BAND — ED BAGGOTT & ELSIE PETERSON

DECEMBER 8 : ATLANTA, GA

QUICKSILVER COUNTRY DANCERS, INC. CONTRA DANCE

CALLER — SETH TEPFER

BAND — TIM AND FRIENDS

DECEMBER 9 : NASHVILLE COUNTRY DANCERS

ENGLISH DANCE AT FRIENDS MEETING

CALLER — EMMA RUSHTON

BAND — MEETING HOUSE

4-6:30 PM AT FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE FOR DIRECTIONS GO TO DANCENASHVILLE.ORG

DECEMBER 10 : CHATTANOOGA

CALLER — JANE EWING

BAND — KALEIDOSCOPE

DECEMBER 14 : SEWANEE

MISTY MOUNTAIN DANCERS CHRISTMAS DANCE

CALLER — TBD

BAND — TBD

DECEMBER 15 : SAUTEE NACOOCHIE CENTER

CALLER — SUSAN DAVIS

BAND — SCOTT RUSSELL AND FRIENDS

DECEMBER 21 : NASHVILLE

CALLER — SUSAN KEVRA

BAND — CUMBERLAND TENDERFOOTS

DECEMBER 24 : CHATTANOOGA

CALLER — VICKI HERNDON

BAND — NASHVILLE WEATHER

DECEMBER 28 : NASHVILLE

CALLER — EDDIE DOSS

BAND — SMALL TIME STRING BAND

DECEMBER 31 : BIRMINGHAM

CALLER — SUSAN KEVRA

BAND — FOOTCAPE

FoOTMaD (Birmingham) dances 2nd Saturdays at the YMCA, 3rd Ave & 23rd St, 7:30 PM. <http://www.bamalong.com/bcnds.htm>.

CTDS (Chattanooga) dances 2nd & 4th Saturdays at All Saints Academy, 310 E. 8th St., downtown, 8:00 PM. Contact Steve at (706) 937-4991, Claire & Bryant at (423)876-7359 or <http://contranoooga.org>

Misty Mountain Dancers (Sewanee, TN) dances at the Legion Hall in Sewanee, TN, 8:00 PM. For details, call (931) 598-0814 or check <http://mistycontra.zoomshare.com/>

NCD (Nashville) dances almost every Friday at 8:00 PM at NEW LOCATION – Second Presbyterian Church on Belmont Blvd one block south of Woodmont – on the corner of Graybar. Contact Chrissy at (615) 210-6808 or John, email: DanceFools@aol.com or <http://dancenashville.org/>

Flat Creek dances – 2 & 4th Tues, Flat Creek Community Center – seven miles south of Shelbyville, TN. <http://www.nashvilleoldtime.org/Dances/flatcreekcontradances.htm>

ANNUAL HOLIDAY DANCE

Please note that December 15 is the annual Huntsville Holiday Dance! The caller will be Ciss Hinkle, and Plaidgrass will provide the music. This is always a fun dance, and there are opportunities for you to help make it a success this year:

- You can help decorate the hall
- You can bring extra food for the dance
- You can solicit donations for door prizes or contribute some of your own
- If you would like to participate in any of the preparations, please come to the pre-dance meeting December 1 at 6:00.

The Walls will host an after-dance party December 15, and I encourage you both to attend the party and to ask Bryan or Dianne how you can help

A TIME TO DANCE: AMERICAN COUNTRY DANCING FROM HORNPIPES TO HOT HASH

Tony White found the following article on the internet and forwarded it to me:

Most of us remember folk dancing with terror. Who does not have bad memories of folk dancing from middle school or gym? But those of us who contra dance have crossed that line. We come to dance, week after week, dancing a form of dance that is both very old and very new. We dance a living tradition that grows and changes with each new dance.

To the new dancer though, the lexicon of the dance is bewildering. The calls are ancient sounding, yet the dancers can follow them. Combined over and over into new dances, they are a limited language capable of limitless combinations. Yet where do the terms “swing” or “allemande” come from?

150 years ago, the swing was unknown. Probably invented in the late 19th century, it became possible only when societal mores allowed (against protest) a dancer to hold a member of the opposite sex in close proximity. From the Internet, I have read that there are 28 possible positions for the swing. However, the nose to elbow swing should only be tried by trained professionals!

The “Balance” that precedes some swings is just that, a balancing of the weight on the right foot, then the left.

The “circle” and “star” are self-explanatory. Even the hands across star and the hand to wrist star still form a four-pointed star in the middle.

“Forward and back” also needs little explaining. It is a move that is thousands of years old; universally existing wherever there are line dances. American Indians were doing a forward and back in their line dances long before contra dancers ever surged forward and back in America.

“Ladies Chain” may have started its life as “ladies change” which is exactly what the women do.

“Twirl to Swap” is perhaps purely descriptive. It may be an “invented” term to cover the “Box the Gnat”, “Swat the Flea” and “California Twirl.” Research is ongoing as to the origins of those terms.

The gypsy may be a corruption from Flamenco or Gypsy move.

Other terms show the French influence on dance. “Do Si Do” or “Dos a Dos” is French for back to back, a description of the move itself. “Promenade” is French for walkway, where you would strut or promenade your stuff. “Sashay” is from the French “Chassez”.

Some moves get their name from the dance that first used them: the “Petronella” and “Rory O’More” being the best examples.

Yet other moves remain intriguing. “Allemande” means by the hand in French. Interestingly enough, there is a dance called the “Allemand” which is a spiral dance formed by two lines of dancers that do a right and left grand move. It is descended from a ritual dance celebrated at the festival of Al-monde. Al-monde was the almond dance, a dance connected to women’s fertility. A thought to consider next time the caller calls for an Allemande.

The calls date back hundreds of years, yet are re-combined constantly into new dances. And that is part of the definition of tradition, the ability to change and adapt to new styles. You are dancing a new dance, full of old moves. Consider that next time you step into “Balance and Swing” your partner.

References:

Richard Nevell, “A Time to Dance: American Country Dancing from Hornpipes to Hot Hash”1977, St. Martin’s Press, New York:

GET CONNECTED, STAY CONNECTED

Visit the NACDS web site:

<http://secontra.com/NACDS.html>

There is an announcement list for everyone and a Yahoo Group discussion list for those more involved. E-mail nacds@pobox.com if you'd like to be on either.

Yahoo group:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NACDScontraCommunity/>



North Alabama Country Dance Society
162 White Elephant Road Grant AL 35747

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