

Contradance Seeds

Maia McCormick for ESC 2021

a.k.a.: “Why Write a Dance?”

1. To Fit a Tune — to pair with a certain tune and the moves/transitions/moves/etc. it suggests.
 - a. e.g. “The Wizard’s Walk” by Ruth Unger was written to pair with the Jay Unger tune of the same name
2. To Fill a Program Niche — to slot into a certain part in a dance program, lesson, workshop, etc.; to give dancers a specific experience or fulfil a pedagogical purpose. Subtypes include:
 - a. To teach a certain move
 - i. e.g. Tom Hind’s “Thanks to the Gene” was written around a R/L through *with your neighbor*—many glossary dances have you do this move with your partner, but if you and your partner are both beginners, you potentially never learn to do it right, whereas with a neighbor you get to practice with experienced dancers.
 1. I did the same thing with a lark’s right-hand chain in my dance “Hellooo Nurse!” (i.e. made sure that the larks chained to a *neighbor*, not to their partner).
 - ii. Bob Isaacs’s “Early Evening Rollaway” (as the name implies) was intended as a simple dance to program early in the evening to introduce the rollaway move
 - b. To fit in a certain program slot, e.g. opener or closer
 - c. To showcase a concept (this might bleed into category 3, “Choreographic Seed”)
 - i. e.g. I wrote “Neighbor, Neighbor On the Wall” for a workshop on Contra Communication because I needed a dance that had multiple swings with the same neighbor
3. Around a Choreographic Seed — to explore some move/transition/constraint/vibe that the choreographer is interested in. Subtypes include:
 - a. To jam on a transition/move combination
 - i. e.g. I really like the promenade > circle R transition, and have written a number of dances riffing on it (most notably “Barack Me, Obamadeus”)
 - ii. e.g. Will Mentor’s “Mad Robin Landing” puts a spin on an existing move: taking advantage of the fact that a mad robin is a loose figure, he tacks on an additional “cross the set” for a really neat and novel transition into long wavy lines
 - b. To introduce or explore a new move
 - i. I had trouble tracking down examples here, though they surely exist.
 - ii. In “10 Steps to Writing Your Own Dance”, Bob Isaacs says: “Generally speaking, coming up with a new figure that can be readily done by most normal dancers is hard. Possibilities for new transitions are more numerous and easier to find.”
 - c. To vary an existing dance (can be “I really like this one part” or “I really like this dance *except* for this one part” or anything in between)
 - i. “I really like this one part”: my dance “Treasure of the Soda Bar” borrows the A1 from James Hutson’s “Treasure of the Sierra Madre” and goes from there
 - ii. “...Except this one part”: my dance “Gluten-Free Petronella” arose because I really liked the vibe of Chris Ricciotti’s “Greenfield Petronella” and the CA twirl > new neighbor swing transition, but wanted a single progression version
 - d. To fit a choreographic constraint or challenge
 - i. e.g. Bob Golder wrote “Fun Dance for Marjorie” for a dancer friend mobility limitations, including only moves she could do comfortably
 - e. To break the rules/defy expectations

- i. e.g. Lindsey Dono was inspired to write “Straighten Up and Slide Right” by a Facebook discussion on whether it was possible for dancers to intuitively slide right along the set
 - ii. e.g. Cary Ravitz plays with progressions in “Reflections”, which alternates single and double progression (averaging out to what he calls a “1.5 progression” dance)
 - f. To achieve a feel or vibe
 - i. Maybe you want a really stompy dance! Maybe you want a really slick flirty dance!
- 4. To Fit a Narrative
 - a. e.g. Ron Blechner’s “Captain Tightpants” has an extended chase sequence written as a reference to the chase sequence in the pilot of the TV show “Firefly”
 - b. e.g. I have tried and failed to write a dance for a friend called “Straight and Monogamous” in which you don’t ever touch a dancer of the opposite role and only swing your partner. (It’s *hard*. Maybe one day.)
- 5. To Match a Title
 - a. e.g. *someday* I’m going to write a dance called #NotAlleMande
 - b. e.g. Chris Page’s “Roll Reversal” plays with the robins (née “ladies”) “leading” many of the figures (he says: “maybe the only dance I’ve written from the name”)
 - c. e.g. Chris Page’s “Left Turn at Albuquerque” (a reference to a Bugs Bunny line; friends of his who were moving to Albuquerque asked if there was a dance of this name, and so obvious Chris had to write one for them)

Dance Examples

The Wizard's Walk by Ruth Ungar (Improper)

A1: Circle left $\frac{1}{2}$ and balance in the ring
repeat to get home

A2: In your rings of four, starting on the side: grand chain 5 places, partner left-shoulder round

B1: Partner balance and swing (ending facing away from the couple you have been dancing with)

B2: Wizard's walk[1]

[1] 1s separate and go down outside 2s, meet and continue down to split next 2s; 1s now separate and back up outside those 2s, meet and back through previous 2s ready to form the circle to start the dance again
the 2s should oscillate in and out to make room

Thanks to the Gene by Tom Hinds (improper)

A1: Neighbors balance and swing

A2: Right and left through
Robins chain

B1: Robins right-shoulder round 1x
Partners swing

B2: Long lines go forward and back
Larks allemande left $1\frac{1}{2}$, then turn around to face a new neighbor

Author's Notes: In many dances, the dancers do a right and left through with their partners. Beginners who dance together often repeat the same mistakes, especially when doing the courtesy turn in a right and left through. Therefore, this dance was written so that the dancers courtesy turn with their corner.

Early Evening Rollaway by Bob Isaacs (improper)

A1: neighbors balance & swing

A2: right left through
robins chain

B1: balance the ring and larks roll neighbor across the set (with half-sashay)
partner swing

B2: circle left $\frac{3}{4}$ and pass through up and down
next neighbors do-si-do 1x

Neighbor, Neighbor On the Wall by Maia McCormick (improper)

A1: long lines forward and back
(new) neighbor swing

A2: robins chain (to P)
half hey (robins pass R)

B1: partner balance and swing

B2: larks allemande L $1\frac{1}{2}$
(same) neighbor swing

Mad Robin Landing by Will Mentor (improper)

A1: N b&s

A2: mad robin (clockwise) and larks cross to set to long waves[1]
bal. and box circulate

B1: bal. & box circulate
P swing

B2: robins chain (to N)
LH star 1x (to new Ns)

[1] larks cross set & robins shift left into long waves (RH with partner, larks face out/robins in)

Treasure of the Soda Bar by Maia McCormick (improper)

- A1: neighbor RH balance and box the gnat
larks allemande L 1 1/2
- A2: half hey (pass P by R on the side)
partner swing
- B1: circle L $\frac{3}{4}$
neighbor swing
- B2: interrupted square through (and look along the side for a new N)

Gluten-Free Petronella by Maia McCormick (becket L)

- A1: balance the ring and spin right
balance the ring and lark roll neighbor robin away (with a half-sashay)
- A2: balance the ring and Nevada twirl[1] partner (to face new Ns)
swing this new N
- B1: robins chain (to P)
half hey (robins passing R)
- B2: partner balance and swing
- [1] a Nevada twirl is just California twirl that starts with the lark on the right/robin on the left

Fun Dance for Marjorie by Bob Golder (becket CW)

- A1: circle left $\frac{3}{4}$
neighbor swing
- A2: long lines forward and back
larks allemande left $1\frac{1}{2}$
- B1: partner balance and swing
- B2: larks pass R sh. to change places (4)
robins pass R sh. to change places (4)
hands-across right-hand star 1x and larks lead along the set to new neighbors

Straighten Up and Slide Right by Lindsey Dono (becket CCW)

- A1: circle left $\frac{3}{4}$
neighbor swing
- A2: long lines
robins chain
- B1: CCW mad robin (robins in center slide L) (6)
circle right 1x (8)
slide *right* (robin in lead) (2)
- B2: next larks allemande left 1x (6)
partner swing (10)

Reflections by Cary Ravitz (improper/reverse improper, double/sing prog.)

- A1: Neighbors balance and swing
- A2: Gents allemande left 1+1/2
Partners swing
- B1: Promenade across (8).
Robins chain across (8)
- B2: Pass through across (4), 1s look up/2s look down
Circle left 1 (8)
Neighbors pass by the right to meet new neighbors (4)

Captain Tightpants by Ron T. Blechner (becket CCW)

- A1: Long lines
Ravens chain on the right diagonal (to new neighbor)
- A2: Star L 1x (8) (with N, not with P) [1]
Single File Along Set, (until across from P)
Single File Across Set (8) (robins lead across, N larkFollows)
- B1: Robins turn over R sh., N right-shoulder round 1½
half hey (robins pass L, PR, larks L, NR)
- B2: robins pass L (2)
Partner swing

[1] The A2 starts a sequence of moves where the Gents will chase the N Lady (the one they chained with) through the B1, until finally in the B2 the ladies "escape" to reunite with their partner.

Roll Reversal by Chris Page (improper)

- A1: Neighbor right-shoulder round
Neighbor swing
- A2: Circle left 3/4
Shift left with partner (robins in the lead) to next neighbors (N2)
Circle left 1
- B1: Partner swing
- B2: Larks left-hand chain & robins roll away lark after courtesy turn [1]
1/2 hey (robins L, partner R, larks L) & face same neighbor (N2)

[1] There's a quick hand change between the courtesy turn and roll-away. Robins need to change from the right-to-right and left-to-left handhold of the courtesy turn into a handhold of their left hand and the lark's right hand, still standing side-by-side. This should lead naturally into the robin rolling away the lark. This is similar to the hand change larks do with the robins chain and roll-away transition in other dances.

Author notes: This dance started with the name, a pun bad enough that I had to come up with a dance to match. What makes this dance hard is the change in gender roles of [larks] leading and [robins] following. In my mind, it's a good thing, but it can push this dance into the "difficult" level.

Left Turn at Albuquerque by Chris Page (improper)

- A1: Neighbor right-shoulder round & swing
- A2: Slide left[1] and circle left ¾ (with shadow)
Balance the ring, CA twirl neighbor
- B1: Partner balance and swing
- B2: With partner, promenade across[2]
Circle R ¾ and pass through across (pass partner left)[3]

[1] With your neighbor shift left one couple until you're across from your shadow.

[2] Ideally done quickly in only about six counts, but if it take eight counts, the timing in the A1 is forgiving.

[3] After the circle, all are across from partner. Pass through across the set, passing partner by left shoulders, and then curve to look for new neighbors.

Author notes: Written for Jennifer Crawford and Mike Heitzman, who spent three years in San Diego before returning to Albuquerque, New Mexico. The day before they left, they sponsored the contra dance, which I was calling. Jennifer asked if there was a dance called "Left Turn at Albuquerque." I told her there could be, and wrote the above for them.

Since it's a classic Bugs Bunny expression, it needed to involve making wrong turns. I tried to do it in a somewhat controlled/forgiving manner. I first wrote the B2, then patched in the A2 from Dan Pearl's dance, "Cal and Irene." It turned out the rest of "Cal and Irene" was fairly similar to this dance.