



## *Capital English Country Dancers*

### *Callers and Musicians for 2024 – 2025*

**Capital English Country Dancers brings you a wonderful variety of callers and musicians from the East Coast. We appreciate their contribution to our dances.**

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### **Melanie Axel-Lute, caller and choreographer**



**Melanie Axel-Lute** called her first English dance for North Jersey English Country Dancers in honor of Sharon Green's move to California. After several years of working with Mary Jones and Tom Amesse, she began calling full programs. She has been a contra dance caller since 1998 and is a regular at dance camps and dance weekends, where she divides her time between ECD and contra. She is known for careful teaching and eclectic programs, so come enjoy old favorites and unknown gems.

Melanie lives in the greater Capital District of NY.

### **Karen Axelrod, piano**



**Karen Axelrod** is highly regarded for her creative and rich piano accompaniment. She left the classical world of music over 20 years ago, and has found her home in the folk world. Her improvisational playing is lyrical, yet is touched with humor and whimsy. Karen plays for English, Scottish and American dancing, and has been on staff at numerous places including Pinewoods Dance Camp, Ogontz, Buffalo Gap, Berea Christmas Country Dance Week, The John C. Campbell Folk School, Monte Toyon, and frequent dance weekends and balls. Karen also plays accordion for the renowned longsword team, Orion.

Karen comes to us from Brattleboro VT.

### **Margaret Bary, caller**



**Margaret Bary**, a lifelong dancer and dance educator based in NYC, teaches English Country Dance at CDNY and other dance communities in the region. She has a background in Modern Dance, holds an MFA in Dance, and is a Certified Movement Analyst. As a member of Half Moon Sword, she performs at NEFFA and other dance festivals. Margaret served as Program Director of CDSS Campers' Week from 2014-2016, where she taught rapper and longsword, and led dances for all ages. Underlying all of her work with children and adults, Margaret believes that participatory dance experiences foster joy and self-expression, and bring us together as a community.

## **Don Bell, caller, choreographer**



**Don Bell** is a Troy-based dance organizer and English Country dance teacher, caller and choreographer. He managed the Rensselaer English Country dance series for over 20 years and taught beginner workshops at the Flurry Festival and the Troy Victorian Stroll. Don served on the Flurry Festival Committee and the DanceFlurry Organization Board for many years.

You can see his collection of English Country dance videos at: [www.youtube.com/user/donwfbell/playlists](http://www.youtube.com/user/donwfbell/playlists).

Don is from Troy NY

## **Rachel Bell, accordion**



**Rachel Bell** grew up playing the piano and spent her college years studying music education and classical piano. As a college freshman, she surprised even herself when she picked up a piano accordion and “accidentally” fell in love with it. Rachel now enjoys a busy gig schedule playing concerts, contra dances, English country dances, French dances, and festivals.

Rachel’s bands include Alchemy, Peregrine Road, Old World Charm School, Seaglass, Eloise & Co. and a slew of other combinations. She plays tunes from France, New England, Scotland, Ireland, England, Quebec, and beyond, as well as songs, original compositions, and even crazy roots-rock arrangements. Recently, Rachel has been collaborating with Susan Kevra to compose new tune/choreography combinations to send out into the English country dance repertoire.

Rachel comes to us from Brattleboro VT

## **Eric Buddington, violin**



**Eric Buddington** switches effortlessly between fiddle and violin. He excels at Argentine tangos, waltzes and milongas; he also joins Spare Parts for Regency balls, Ragtime balls, and English country dances, as well as contras. He performs with Spare Parts on The Regency Ballroom CD. Formerly with the Flying Garbanzos, Eric currently performs with Spare Parts (tango, regency, ragtime, contra, English), CoinciDance (contra), Poke in the Eye (traditional and original fiddle & guitar) and Woodbinde (medieval music). Visit his WEB site at <http://eric.buddington.net/>

Eric comes to us from North Adams MA.

## **Cedar Waxwing: Aaron Marcus, Sarah Babbitt Spaeth and Jonathan Werk**

### **Brad Foster, caller**



For over 40 years, **Brad Foster** has been calling and sharing his love of dancing with people of all ages. A caller of English country dances, contras and squares, Brad is known for his clear and concise teaching as well as his community building. Brad started country dancing while in high school in Pasadena, CA. Soon thereafter he started teaching, and has been at it ever since. Brad travels extensively, holding workshops throughout the U.S.,

Canada and overseas. A frequent staff member at many North American dance weeks and weekends, Brad is now Executive and Artistic Director Emeritus of the Country Dance & Song Society (CDSS) after serving for 28 years.

Brad comes to us from the Northampton, MA area.

### **Elizabeth Freedman, caller**



**Elizabeth Freedman** began English country dancing thirty five years ago, and has taught and performed both English country dance and Scandinavian couple turning dances for at least 20 years. She is a regular caller at CDNY and has called sessions at various week-ends at Circle Lodge. She has been a caller at CD of Westchester and Stockbridge ECD and travels to Albany to call for Capital ECD. She has also taught English country dance workshops for the New York City chapter of the Jane Austen Society of North America and has called dance parties for Germantown Country Dancers in the Philadelphia area.

Elizabeth Freedman comes to us from the NYC area.

### **Eileen Nicholson Kalfass, violin**



**Eileen Nicholson Kalfass** began studying classical violin at age four. She grew up contra dancing throughout Pennsylvania, New York, and other areas in the northeastern United States with her father, caller Bob Nicholson.

At twenty, Eileen started playing for contra dances herself. She currently plays with musicians Rachel Bell, Jane Knoeck, Andrew VanNorstrand, Eric Anderson, and more, in multiple combinations such as Seaglass, Continental Drift, New Brew, and more.

Eileen plays for both contra and English country dances throughout the United States and Canada. With Seaglass and New Brew, she also plays for French bal folk dancing. She really enjoys playing for dancing at weddings and parties, too.

Eileen's classical technique and rich tone truly compliment her fiddle style. She enjoys playing Northern, Quebecois, Scottish, Irish tunes and more. Her energy, enthusiasm, and love of music combined really keep feet moving on the dance floor.

Eileen's solo album was released in September 2018. It features Seaglass, Continental Drift, New Brew, and Shelly Campbell and Allan Dewar from Cape Breton, NS. Her album, Crossing Bridges, recently won the 2019 SAMMY Award for Best Americana Recording.

Eileen comes to us from the Syracuse NY area.

### **Dereck Kalish, caller**



**Dereck Kalish** has been dancing regularly in New England since 2005. In 2011 he became both a caller and a sound engineer, with a focus on providing the best service possible to make for a fun and successful dance. He has provided great sound for weekly dances and larger events such as Pinewoods Camp, Tropical Dance Vacation in St. Croix, Peterborough Snow Ball, NEFFA, Boston Playford Ball, and CDS to name a few.

Dereck can be seen calling English and contra dances throughout New England. Dereck has a strong background in the arts, having studied classical piano, and earned a degree in fine arts. He serves as the Chair for the NEFFA Thursday Night Dance Committee in Concord, MA, is a director on the board, and is a member of the Sound Committee for the annual festival. He also serves on the English Dance Committee for CDS Boston Centre.

Dereck lives with his partner, Sarah, in Wakefield, MA.

### **Jane Knoeck, piano**



Jane Knoeck's musical beginnings were in classical piano and vocal studies. Upon moving to New York State in the early 1980s, she was introduced to instrumental folk music with hammered dulcimer and soon after left the classical world behind to begin playing piano and accordion for contra and English country dancing.

Over the past 35 years Jane has developed an improvisational, lyrical and strongly rhythmic piano style and has been part of many music ensembles. She has played piano and accordion for contra, English country, Scottish, Scandinavian, Breton and Bal Folk dances at numerous festivals, dance weekends and weeklong camps across the US and in Canada, England, Europe and the Caribbean. She enjoys leading participatory dance piano workshops.



Jane has been a part of seven recording projects, including two popular albums with the Groovemongers and an album of hammered dulcimer music. She currently plays for contras and English country dances with Eileen Kalfass as the duo “Sister Haggis” and also enjoys working with a variety of other musicians from the central NY region.

Jane comes to us from the Syracuse NY area.

### **HeartsEase: Diane Bell, Vonnie Estes, Patricia Kernan, Marilee Urbanczyk, Gail Griffith**



**Heartsease** is an English Country dance band located in the Capital District. This all-women band has been together for over 20 years and has played at the Dance Flurry, at the Victorian Stroll and for re-enactor events in the region. They were the house band for the monthly Rensselaer English country dances held in Troy for many years. Musicians include: Diane Bell on violin; Vonnie Estes on piano; Gail Griffith on concertina; Patricia Kernan on flute, whistle and clarinet; and Marilee Urbanczyk on pennywhistle and percussion.

The band drew its name from an English Country Dance of the same name. (Heartsease is an old word for pansy or violet and has a long history of use in folk medicine.)

Members of Heartsease live in the greater Capital District of NY.

### **Marnen Laibow-Koser, violin, viola, flute, recorder**



**Marnen Laibow-Koser** has been playing music for country dances since the age of eleven. As a member of The Flying Romanos, he has toured in England, Canada, and Japan, and has also played for dances throughout the United States with other bands including The Moving Violations and Squeezology.

Outside the country dance world, Marnen plays music ranging from Javanese gamelan to opera. He has appeared on stages across Europe with guitar virtuoso Ritchie Blackmore as a member of the Renaissance-folk-rock band Blackmore’s Night, and frequently plays for musical theater and ballet throughout the Northeast and elsewhere.

Marnen is also active as a composer, with a special interest in chamber and vocal works; his compositions are available at <http://www.marnen.org/composition.html> .

Marnen comes to us from Randolph, MA, in the Boston area.

## **Aaron Marcus, piano, concertina**



**Aaron Marcus** draws on a rich background of musical traditions including New England contra, classical piano, English country dance, West African, and old time.

Well known from coast to coast for his performances with Giant Robot Dance, Frost and Fire, Gift of the Marci, The Turning Stile, and Cedar Waxwing, as well as several other combinations, Aaron brings exuberant energy and sublime harmony to the stage, whether he's vamping on piano or squeezing tunes from concertina.

Aaron divides his time between Hancock, VT and Montpelier, VT, where he works as an endangered-species botanist.

## **Val Medve, caller**



**Val Medve** is known for her selection of English country dances both vintage and new. Her calling style is clear, easy to follow and laced with good humor.

Val's interest in dance began with Polish folk dancing when she was a young girl in southwestern Connecticut. In the early 1980s, she caught the contra dance bug. She soon added many other traditional dance genres, performing with Gwiazda Polish Folk Dance Ensemble, Reel Nutmeg, Sleepy Hollow Morris, and The Green Mountain Volunteers (a troupe that represented the U.S. at international dance festivals in Canada and abroad).

Locally, Val called for the Stockade Assembly in December 2017. She calls regularly in northern Vermont for the Burlington Country Dancers in Colchester and Jericho. Val has taught/called ECD at NEFFA (New England Folk Festival), the CDS Boston Center, the Flurry Festival, the Adirondack Dance Weekend, the Strafford Ball, Champlain Valley Folk Festival, Jane Austen events in northern Vermont, as well as dance events in Troy, NY; Rochester, NY; Amherst, MA; White Plains, NY (for Country Dancers of Westchester); Ridgewood, NJ; Norwich, VT; Kingston, RI; Philadelphia, PA; Ann Arbor, MI; Pasadena, CA; and the Big Island of Hawaii.

In the summer of 2013, with the help of coffee (which she had forsaken for almost a decade), Val booked and powered through a 2-week ECD tour with her husband Tom and the Seppelers, where she and Dan called to music by Barb (sometimes accompanied by fine local musicians). Val is a member of a hard-working and devoted committee that runs the Burlington Country Dancers's annual "Across the Lake" English Country Dance Weekend (usually the second weekend in June).

Val comes to us from Essex VT (near Burlington).

### **Britany Orlebeke, violin**

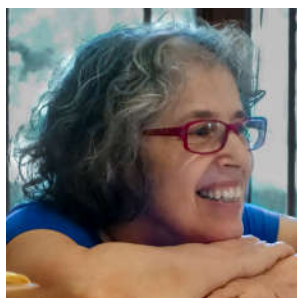


**Britany Orlebeke**, an Albany native, has been playing for English and contra dances since 1994 and she especially enjoys the spirit of the English repertoire. A classically trained violinist, Britany joins groups of various sizes and configurations at Capital English Country Dances. She was a founding member of the contra dance band, Beverwyck and the English country dance band, Three Muses. For many years she regularly played for our dances. As family and career became busier, her appearances at our dances became less frequent. We are overjoyed that she is able to join us again this season and hope she continues to grace our dances with her beautiful music.

Britany lives in the NY Capital District.

### **Peregrine Road: Karen Axelrod and Rachel Bell**

#### **Robin Russell, piano**



**Robin Russell**, is a former contra and ECD-obsessed dancer, Robin fell in love with playing for dance after a band workshop in which she played woodblock! She revels in the musician's ability to move dancers physically and emotionally. As pianist of the Flying Romanos, she has toured in England, Canada, and Japan and has recorded four CDs of dance music. She's been playing for CDNY's English dances since the 1990's, and is the lead musician and organizer of the North Jersey English Country Dancers in Ridgewood NJ. Robin is also a member of several contra and ECD bands in the NY metro area.

Robin comes to us from Ridgewood NJ.

### **David Smukler, caller, choreographer, dance organizer**



**David Smukler** is a dancer, caller, choreographer, and organizer of contra dances and English dances. Early this year he became the president of the Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) Board. He is the author, with David Millstone, of *Cracking Chestnuts: The Living Tradition of Classic American Contra Dances*.

David leads contras, squares, English country dances, family dances, school programs, and special events. His teaching is gentle, clear and supportive. His taste in dances is eclectic, and you can expect a wide variety of dances in his programs, which often blend old favorites with new gems. David calls extensively in upstate New York, and has often traveled farther afield, including gigs on both coasts, Canada, and the Czech Republic.

David comes to us from the Syracuse NY area.



## **Laurel Sharp, winds**



**Laurel Sharp** grew up playing the oboe in band and orchestra. She is in great demand in central New York State playing multiple sizes of whistles and recorders for English country dances — and the oboe still appears from time to time. She plays with such bands as Trillium, Red Oak, and Whimsey, adding sweet harmonies and imaginative solos.

Laurel comes to us from Syracuse, NY.

## **Sarah Babbitt Spaeth, violin, viola**



Sarah Babbitt Spaeth is a classically-trained violist with a special interest in chamber music and small ensembles. She is an avid English dancer and loves the range of the ECD musical repertoire. Other musical influences include Irish, Scottish, and Swedish fiddling styles, as well as a new interest in Renaissance- and Baroque-period performance styles.

Sarah is a resident of Burlington, VT, works remotely for CDSS as Programs Coordinator, and wishes she had more time for weaving and pottery.

## **Cedar Stanistreet, violin**



**Cedar** grew up playing both classical violin and traditional fiddle music, and studied violin performance at the Crane School of Music. For the past fifteen years he has played for contra dances across North America with bands including Nor'easter, Cardinal Direction, Maivish, and Cloud Ten. His spirited, rhythmic playing and clear tone keep dancers on their feet.

When not travelling, Cedar can be found at home in Putney, Vermont, working on his land, baking bread, and birdwatching. He also repairs violins, violas, and cellos.

Cedar comes to us from Putney, VT.

## **Alan Thomson, piano, recorders**



**Alan Thomson**, being the multi-genre pianist many have come to know, is an active performer at numerous festivals, dances, and concert settings involving Classical, Jazz, Swing, traditional Contra, English country dance, and musical theater. Holding a Master's degree of performance on piano from the College of St. Rose, he incorporates his longtime performance background on recorder to provide music for English Country Dances. As a piano instructor he teaches in as many styles as he performs.

Alan is founder and leader of The Alan Thomson Little Big Band and is one of the founding members the contradance trio, Border Bandits.

Alan lives in the Capital District.

## **Tricia vanOers, recorders**



**Tricia vanOers** graduated with high honors in 1998 from the Conservatory of her native city Rotterdam, the Netherlands, with a Teacher's and Performer's Degree. She did graduate work at Indiana University's Early Music Institute, where she received a Performer Diploma with high achievement in Early Music Performance. She then worked making and testing recorders at the world-renowned Von Huene Workshop in Boston.

Based in Connecticut, her activities include performances with Trinity Wallstreet Baroque Orchestra, New York Early Music (Fred Renz, dir.), Four Nations Ensemble, Ars Antiqua, Emmanuel Music (Boston), Cantata Singers (Boston), Concert Royal (NYC), the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia.

She has performed as a guest soloist with Tempesta di Mare, Musica Sacra, the Chamber Music Society of Central VA, Amor Artis, and the Bethlehem Bach Festival Orchestra, where she was Artist-in-Residence during the 2017 annual Bethlehem Bach Festival. As a founding member of the Rotterdam-based recorder ensemble Scarabee, she recorded at the Great Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, France. Ms van Oers teaches privately, and regularly coaches at workshops and recorder societies in the Northeast and across the U.S.

Tricia comes to us from West Cornwall CT.

## **Larry Wallach, piano and harpsichord**



**Larry Wallach** has a long tradition of playing English country dance music for local series. He has shared his music with Capital English Country Dancers (CECD) since the first year in 1989 and, prior to this, he played for an English country dance series in the Berkshires. He taught dance band workshops in the early years of CECD to foster musicians interested in playing English country dance music. Since 1995, he has been on the staffs of early music weeks at World Fellowship Center, New Hampshire and at Camp Pinewoods, Massachusetts as pianist and harpsichordist. Larry enjoys playing English country dance music on his new harpsichord and, in 2009, his interest was the inspiration for a afternoon of Historic 17th century dance and acoustic music at CECD. It is now a much loved annual tradition for us.

Larry is also a composer whose recent works include "Berkshire Morris Madness" for wind quintet based on eleven tunes danced to by the Berkshire Morris Men, of which he has been a member since 1984. His orchestral composition "Berkshire Rhapsody" was premiered in April 2017 in Milford, Massachusetts and his more recent orchestral work "Species of Motion" was recorded in the Czech Republic in December 2020. He is a devotee of the music of Charles Ives and has performed the sonatas for violin and piano with a variety of violinists and fiddlers.

Larry is retired and is Faculty Emeritus in Music at Simons Rock College, where he chaired the program for many years.

Larry Wallach comes to us from Great Barrington MA.

## **Jonathan Werk, oboe**



**Jonathan Werk** is a Montreal oboist who grew up immersed in the folk music community, which ultimately led to the unusual situation of playing oboe for traditional folk dances, including contradance, balfolk, and English country dance. Jonathan has performed for many dance events around Canada and the United States, including dance camps such as CDSS's English Week, Dance Music & Spice, and BACDS's Hey Days. Jonathan volunteers extensively in his local Montreal dance community, as organizer, sound technician, and often caller. In addition to oboe, Jonathan also plays accordion, Irish whistle, hotel bell, didgeridoo, and bombarde.

Jonathan comes to us from Montreal, Canada.

## **Michael Wood, caller**



**Michael Wood** has been participating in English and Scottish Country Dancing since he was in college many years ago. He has danced at balls, socials, and workshops up and down the east coast as well as in the Bay Area and Seattle. Michael is enthralled by movement related to music in a social setting, and particularly enjoys expressing a wide range of feeling in social dancing.

In the Philadelphia area, he calls for Germantown Country Dancers, and jointly leads an English-Scottish class in Arden, Delaware. In addition to leading and participating in country dance, Michael is an organizer serving as President of Germantown Country Dancers and Treasurer Elect for Country Dance and Song Society. He wishes that everyone could relish the joy of participatory dance.

Michael comes to us from the Philadelphia, PA area.