

# Thursday Night Contra Dance

## Glenside, PA

### Welcome!

An energetic and fun evening of lively dance and music is in store here for people from all walks of life. The style is casual, the attitude is friendly and the dancing is easy.

We dance every Thursday evening from 8:00 to 11:00PM, except Thanksgiving and when other major holidays fall on a Thursday. Occasionally a dance is cancelled due to inclement weather. A lesson for new dancers is offered at 7:30 before each dance. Each year three of our dances are festive in nature, with refreshments provided. They are the New Year's Eve dance, a Valentine's Day dance, and a Halloween dance, where many dancers come in wild and crazy costumes.

The seven-member Thursday Night Dance Committee manages the dance. It meets every five or six weeks to plan special events and to discuss and act on dance community issues. Three or four committee spots are open for nomination and election every September. Your suggestions and concerns are always welcome. Feel free to approach committee members at any time with your thoughts, or voice them at community meetings, which are held at least once a year before a dance or during the mid-dance break.

Holding the weekly dance may look easy, but that's because many volunteers are contributing time and effort, often behind the scenes, making sure that everything goes smoothly. Except for callers, bands and sound engineers, we are all unpaid volunteers. Expenses are paid solely from admissions. We need your volunteer efforts to maintain a community-oriented, successful dance. Some of the ways in which everyone can be helpful are bringing chairs out and putting them away, sitting out a dance at the admissions desk, putting away sound equipment and sweeping the floor.

The Thursday night dance originated in the 1970's and for many years was held at Summit Presbyterian Church in Mt. Airy, Philadelphia. It moved to Glenside Memorial Hall in the fall of 1996. We are an affiliate of the Massachusetts based Country Dance and Song Society, a nonprofit organization founded in 1915 to promote English and Anglo-American folk dance, music and song.

Online information about the Glenside dance, including the schedule, and contra dancing in general, can be found at: [www.thursdaycontra.com](http://www.thursdaycontra.com)



### What is Contra Dancing?

Contra is traditional New England folk dancing. Americans have enjoyed contra dances since Revolutionary times. They combined ideas from French and English country dancing with their own way of having fun and came up with contra dancing. It's a social dance akin to square dancing which has retained its simple, open, community-oriented spirit.

Contra dancing is great exercise and great fun, enjoyed by people of all ages and life-styles. It shares some elements with square dancing such as "swing your partner" and "do-si-do", but the couples form long lines rather than squares. It involves mixing with the other dancers as each couple performs a short routine with another couple before progressing to a new couple and repeating the routine.

Contra dancing is easy, mostly involving a smooth walking step. Most people learn the basics after one to three evenings. Each dance is

composed of a different sequence of figures, so the sequence is "walked through" with the assistance of the caller before each dance begins.

Musicians from near and far provide lively music for our dance. The reels and jigs played for contra dancing trace their origins back to the folk traditions of the British Isles. Most evenings will include a few other kinds of dances such as squares, circle mixers, waltzes and other types of couple dances.

### General Information

Dress is casual and comfortable. Shoes should be comfortable, supportive and soft-soled. To protect the dance floor **do not wear** street shoes or high heels. This will help us maintain a good relationship with Cheltenham Township, from whom we rent the hall.

It is not necessary to attend with a partner. It is customary to change partners after each dance and for women to ask men to dance as often as men ask women. At the end of a dance we thank our partners respectfully. People of the same gender often dance together as well.

People look at each other while they dance and we refer to this as "eye contact". It is a way of maintaining contact with and acknowledging your partner as you dance. It also may help you from getting dizzy while swinging.

*Glenside Memorial Hall*  
Waverly Rd. & Keswick Ave.  
Glenside, PA

*Inclement Weather &  
General Information*  
215-643-4397

[www.thursdaycontra.com](http://www.thursdaycontra.com)

# Helpful Hints and Etiquette for Contra Dancers

## Especially for New Dancers

**Top five styling tips.** *Smooth and Gentle:* Move with an easy walking step. *Timing:* Dance each figure within its musical phrase. *Giving Weight:* Keep arms firm to support each other through the figures. *Alert:* Be sensitive to others' needs and preferences. *Eye contact:* There's lots of eye contact in contra dancing. It's more fun and it reduces dizziness during swinging.

**Less experienced dancers are encouraged** to ask those whom you perceive to be more experienced to dance with you. You will learn faster, and it can be flattering for your partner to be identified as someone you can learn from. They'll help guide you during the dance, and accelerate the learning process.

**Learn the basics before trying to put in the extra flourishes.** Notice the smooth dancers who help those around them to look good and enjoy themselves. This will help you develop your sense of what good dancing is. A smooth courtesy turn is more satisfying than an awkward twirl (twirls may be inappropriate at times but a courtesy turn never is). Points of style can be absorbed gradually while you enjoy the dancing.

**If you make a mistake or miss a figure, don't worry about it**—it's all in fun! Smile, and instead of rushing through the botched figure, skip it and go on to the next. That's what the experienced dancers do. It is more important to the people you are dancing with that you be ready for the next figure than for you to complete each figure.

## Especially for Experienced Dancers

**Experienced dancers should welcome newer dancers** into our community by asking them to dance, and helping them to have a fun, satisfying evening. Refrain from extra twirls, spins, swings, etc. This can be disorienting, slowing the learning process for your partner, as well as for other less experienced dancers around you who are watching for clues as to what they should do next.

**The goal is to help newer dancers face the right direction and smile!** Keep verbal instructions to an absolute minimum. Point, tap on the shoulder, use other signals or call their name. It is hard for newer dancers to listen to you, other dancers, the caller, and the music all at the same time.

**Twirling** the lady is a common and popular embellishment in contra dancing. The man typically leads the woman into a twirl, but it is the *woman's prerogative* to follow the lead or override it, or, if followed, to limit the number of twirls. Some women love to twirl, others may not. Newcomers who are unaccustomed to twirling may be prone to motion sickness from lots of twirling and swinging. The man should not try to force her to twirl if she signals otherwise.

## For All Dancers

**Dancing should be fun and enjoyable.** If your partner is doing something that hurts or makes you uncomfortable or embarrassed, don't hesitate to let them know. If needed, ask the caller or dance manager for further assistance.

**When the caller is teaching,** be courteous and give your full attention. When the caller asks for hands four, this should be accomplished as quickly as possible to avoid confusion and later regrouping.

**Mistakes are OK.** When helping other dancers, keep the atmosphere light. New dancers will relax when they sense your enjoyment and that you are more interested in being part of the flow than in perfection.

**There is no pressure to accept a dance request.** Everyone has the right to decline to dance without feeling guilty or having to explain why. If you are turned down for a dance, take it in stride and seek another partner.

**Couples join the line at the bottom,** rather than inserting themselves in the middle or the top.

**Long line, short line.** Nobody's happy when a line is too crowded to dance comfortably and freely. Don't squeeze onto a line that is already full. Ideally, couples will automatically join the shortest line, or start a new one and ask others to join it. If during the course of a dance you wish to drop out of a line (because it is too crowded or for any other reason), do so when you reach the top or bottom because dropping out midline is disruptive to everyone else in it. If you find that you must drop out midline, warn the couple you and your partner are currently with so they can drop out at the same time, allowing the line to continue intact. The couple that dropped out with you can go to the bottom of the line and join right back in.

**The importance of hands and giving weight.** Let your partner's hand rest lightly in yours. Give just enough weight with your arms (or your hands) to keep your connection while you move through the contra figures. This requires mutual sensitivity and adjustment. Don't squeeze too tightly or bend your partner's wrists. In figure such as circles, contra corners, allemandes, chaining and hands across stars, partners give equal weight.

**Finding partners.** When looking for another partner after a dance ends, thoughtful dancers will look to the sidelines to see if there is someone who sat out the last dance who would like to dance the next. Generally, dancers wait until a dance is over before asking someone for the next dance. Other dancers like to line up a partner ahead of time (booking ahead) for the next dance--or even subsequent dances. Either way, it's your option, but don't feel obligated to accept when someone tries to book ahead with you.

**Contra dancing can be quite aerobic,** and, especially during the hot weather, some dancers work up a good sweat. If you perspire please bring an extra shirt.