

John & Karen Sweeney

John & Karen Sweeney live in Ashford, Kent in the UK and dance many different dance styles regularly: Contra, Ceilidh, Barn Dance, Ceroc/LeRoc (Modern Jive), Square Dancing, Argentine Tango, Contra Waltz, West Coast Swing, Blues, Salsa, Latin American, Morris Dancing and more! They run regular dances in Ashford and Maidstone under the name Contrafusion and have danced, taught, called, performed, competed and judged all over the world.

John has been dancing since 1965 and teaching various forms of dance for nearly 50 years.

Dancing has been a passion for Karen since she was inspired by the film "West Side Story" as a teenager. She has danced ever since, and now adapts the many influences gained from ballet, jazz, tap, Latin American, ballroom, salsa, swing and blues into her dancing.

Karen and John have been dancing, demonstrating and teaching together since 2001 and love travelling and meeting dancers who, like them, are still looking for new styles and ideas.

They just want to share their passion for dance and help people to have fun.

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John and Karen visit folk festivals and clubs as often as they can to dance and to discover new ideas, including their annual visits to America where they pick up all the latest American styling and technique points.

John is a qualified dance teacher and this shows in his calling where he unobtrusively includes technique hints and tips, and teaches styling to add more fun to the dancing.

The hints and tips on technique and style cover many areas:

- How to make your dancing look better
- How to make your dancing feel better, for yourself, your partner and the other dancers
- How to make the dances easier to execute

John & Karen constantly get tremendous feedback from the dancers, with lots of comments about how much the dancers appreciate the technique and style information.

Karen is an integral part of the team, encouraging the beginners and suggesting additional style points to the more experienced dancers. She also co-teaches the contra waltz with John.

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For many years now John has focussed on social folk dancing, calling and teaching:

- American Contra Dance
- American Square Dance
- Appalachian Big Set & Running Set
- Playford/Country/Folk Dance
- American ECD
- English Ceilidh/Barn Dance
- Contra/Freeform Waltz
- Polka

See below for some sample workshops.

John has worked with many different bands including:

English Contra Dance Band	Albireo	Stringrays
Notorious	Ladies at Play	Cheap Shots
Stick Shift	Wild Ride	Weston Country Dance Band
Contradition	Bristol Players	Pendragon
Falconers	Fendragon	Keeping Thyme
Kelly's Eye	Double Dichotomy	Momentum
East Creek Union	Orion's Ring	Reel of Four
Skylark	Mourning Glories	

And with many local bands.

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John has called at:

- London Barn Dance Company
- Contra Dance in Paris
- Folk Madness (New Mexico)
- Ashford (Middlesex) Contras
- Broadstairs Folk Week
- Chippenham Folk Festival
- Eastbourne International Folkdance Festival
- Sidmouth Folk Week
- Tenterden Folk Festival
- Phoenix Contra Dance
- Phoenix ECD
- San Diego Contra Dance
- San Diego ECD
- Dare to be Square DMV
- Melrose (FL) Contra
- Gainesville (FL) ECD
- San Antonio Contra
- Austin ECD

John calls regularly at local dance clubs such as:

- Ashford Folk Dance Club (Kent)
- Beckenham Folk Dance Club
- Friday Folk (St Albans)
- Harbledown Folk Dance Club (Canterbury)
- Grafty Green Folk Dance Club

And of course every week at the Contrafusion Tuesday afternoons in Maidstone. John also calls countless barn dances and ceilidhs for anyone in Kent who wants them!

John also teaches many different Cotswold Morris traditions.

Sample Workshops

Dance styles:

- American Contra Dance
- American Square Dance
- Appalachian Big Set & Running Set
- Playford/Country/Folk Dance
- American ECD
- English Ceilidh/Barn Dance
- Contra/Freeform Waltz
- Polka

Themed workshops can be designed for any of these dance styles. Some examples are listed below.

Sweeney Specials: Dances written or adapted by John, featuring a wide range of interesting and unusual moves.

Contras with a Difference

Exploring different shapes and patterns.

Dancing for Fun: Tasters of many styles from both sides of the Atlantic over the last 400 year.

Hints & Tips for all levels. A whirl through 400 years in 90 minutes! A great chance to enjoy an overview of the festival's delights, and get a feel for the various genres of country dances. New dancers will find this a very helpful guide, while experienced dancers will have fun as well and glean useful tips and information.

Contras with Attitude & Style

A look at the countless ways that Americans are adding more style and innovation to contra dances, including flourishes and twirls, with lots of fun dances to practice your new skills.

Contra: How to be a Wonderful Partner

Tips and techniques to be THAT partner! Exploring connection through contra to make the dance more enjoyable for everyone.

Spicing Up Your Swing

We will teach you some of the countless different ways to do a swing, plus some interesting entries and exits. The teaching will be interspersed with fun contra dances to practise these swings. Lots of great ideas because variety is the spice of life!

Flow & Glide Contras

Dances with beautiful flow, connectivity and a smooth, satisfying glide

A Cartload of Heys, Reely! (Can be English, American or Mixed.)

"One of the most pleasing movements in country dancing is what they call the "hey"" ("Analysis of Beauty" 1753). Come and see how many different and fascinating ways there are to do a hey!

Zesty Playford

Every generation has its own way of recreating these wonderful old dances. Some of the key facets of Zesty Playford are up-beat music, lively dancing, improvisation and innovation. Just bring lots of energy and a smile!

From Lovelace to Wilson

A fun selection of English dances from the 1620s to the 1820s.

American "English Country Dancing"

Come and enjoy the best of recent American choreography! Lots of great idea, beautifully incorporated into wonderful, flowing dances.

Big Set

Wagon Wheels, Shoo Fly Swings, Grapevine Twists, Shoot the Owl, Shoot the Buffalo, Harlem Rosettes, Four Leaf Clovers and lots more!

Appalachian Squares/Running Set

A different style of square dancing, with fun moves such as Lock Chain Swing, Back Door Key, Black Snake Twist, Polka Swing, Bird in the Cage & The Dollar Whirl.

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A selection of dances for every number of dancers from one to nine, across all styles.

Dances for Odd Dancers

Dances for 3, 5, 7 and 9 dancers. Innovative ideas to keep odd numbers of dancers happy!

What Did Jane Austen Really Dance?

Dances from the films, plus dances that Jane Austen might actually have danced. You may be surprised!

Set Dances in Waltz Time

Beautiful flowing dances, contras, squares, circles and more!

Introduction to Calling

If you want to try for the first time, or expand your skills, come along and learn about all aspects of calling.

Contra Evolution

A look at how contra dances have evolved over the last two hundred years in America.

400 Years of Squares

A selection of squares from many different genres: Playford, Traditional English, Appalachian, New England and more.

English Ceilidh

Traditional English dances. Bring lots of energy and your smile! Baskets, gallops, dip 'n' dives, chains, weaves, stepping and lots more fun stuff!

See Me Dance the Polka

Basic English Ceilidh Polka plus fun moves to provide variety, plus how to use it in Swing & Change to get around your neighbours one and a half times easily.

Waltz – Freestyle waltzing for everyone

You don't need any previous waltz experience to join in - we will be teaching the basics at the beginning of the workshop. Then, once everyone can walk in waltz time, we will show you lots more variations you can add to your repertoire. It's easier than you think to look great on the dance-floor!

Waltz with Pizzazz!

Add some pizzazz to your waltzing! We will be teaching some easy flashy moves you can have fun with on the dance-floor.

Waltz – Dips, Drops & More

This workshop offers some slightly more advanced flashy moves with some optional dips and drops. Note: drops require lots of practice – we will be covering technique and safety in depth.

Pat Shaw Workshops:

Pat Shaw Taster. Pat Shaw was a man of many talents - musician, singer, dancer, teacher; he was an authority on the folk music, song and dance of many countries and a choreographer in many different styles. We'll dance some samples of his wonderful dances, covering historical, traditional, waltztime, ceilidh, modern country dances and more.

Pat Shaw: Focus on Canons. Pat wrote some beautiful interlocking dances where different dancers are dancing the same moves, but at different times, and somehow it all fits together! We will dance some of these plus some easier dances.

Pat Shaw: Brainteasers! Some of Pat's dances require a little more brain-power and skill at orientation. If you fancy a challenge come along and try some of his more interesting dances. We'll mix in some easier ones so that your brain can have the occasional rest!

Pat Shaw: Focus on Waltz. 22 of Pat's 150 dances are in waltz time. He obviously loved waltzing, so most of the dances in this session will be in waltz time. The good news is that you don't need to know how to waltz! Just come along and enjoy a wide range of beautiful dances to beautiful music.

The Pat Shaw Ceilidh. Pat wrote in a range of different styles, and many of his dances are in style that we now associate with Ceilidhs. So bring loads of energy for baskets, gallops, dip 'n' dives, chains, weaves, stepping and lots more fun stuff!

Dancing Through Time

John & Karen Sweeney introduce you to the wonderful world of social folk dance. What happened in 1651 that had such an impact on our dancing? What are modern contra dances? How many ways can you rant? Did the Americans really invent all forms of folk dance? Did the Irish really write all the best tunes? This is a workshop covering countless forms of dance over the last 400 years, illustrated with dance demonstrations, wonderful musical interludes and some optional audience participation. Come and learn how much fun dancing can be!

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