

**Report from the
Smithsonian Folk-
life Festival**

**Reviews of new
recordings**



Fall 1999 –Volume XXV #3

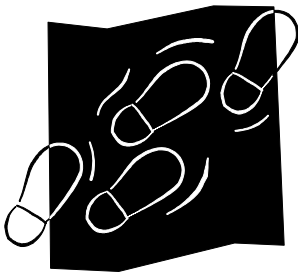
Pretty pictures

**Imaginative typo-
graphical errors**

The Calendar

More!

Feeling



The



Beat

Vicky Bestock

There has been some discussion on dancing to the beat, with several people suggesting that some people don't "feel" the beat, and some hear it "differently."

When I started teaching folk dance full time, I did believe that some people just didn't have a sense of rhythm. I thought that those who didn't hear the beat couldn't learn, and those who heard it, but didn't move to it, could improve, so I started testing students to see which problem they had. In order to eliminate coordination, momentum and balance problems from the mix, I had students clap to the beat and if they couldn't do that, speak or make a vocal noise on the beat. Every single person, including one kid with cerebral palsy, passed. They all heard the beat.

So experience taught me that there are several problems getting in their way, but *hearing* the beat is not one of them. Everyone hears the beat if they listen for it (some dancers think of music as glorified background noise—they could hear the beat if they tried but they don't—this is a different issue).

1) Dancers need to understand that what we mean by dancing on the beat is *finishing* a movement on the beat. Some dancers hear the beat, then move in response. They think they are dancing on the beat because they are listening for it and responding to it, but their footfalls are inevitably after the beat.

They need to change their thinking about what we mean by dancing on the beat, planning ahead to have the foot touch on the beat, instead of starting the movement then. This is more common than you think. Knowing what is expected (ending the movement on the beat) plus practice can fix this.

2) Walking requires leaning forward so you are slightly off balance, moving one leg forward, and catching yourself from falling just on the beat. This takes timing and coordination, and is a learned skill. Most of us have a lot of experience getting the feel of how much lean to do so that we don't step too soon or too late, and those of us who started being exposed to music and dance very young don't realize that it isn't innate because we learned it so young. But some adult beginners are trying this for the first time. They aren't successful initially, but will learn to do it with practice.

3) Some dancers have poor posture and poor body mechanics. They don't have their weight centered, so they can't change direction easily. They are often falling in the wrong

(Continued on page 3)

From the President's Desk

Shelagh Ellman-Pearl



Included, as usual, among the comments in this year's NEFFA Festival evaluations were praise and criticisms of our programming decisions. To those who have questioned the limited programming of swing dancing at the Festival, we have some answers. One evaluation suggested that NEFFA does not consider swing to be a real form of folk dance and music. We do consider swing dance to be a legitimate part of the Festival programming, and would welcome more swing dancing at the Festival. While we consider swing dance a positive part of a balanced Festival program, this Festival doesn't draw swing dance performers to the extent that it attracts, for example, contra dance performers.

The Program Committee, which schedules the performers, relies on applicants to fill performer slots. The committee is limited by the number of qualified swing dance performers who apply. The best way to increase the swing dance programming at the Festival, is to encourage those swing dance performers you know to apply to perform at the Festival. If you would like a particular swing dance performer, or indeed any other performer, to appear at the Festival, encourage them to apply. This can be done by sending their name and address to the Program Committee c/o the NEFFA office or via the NEFFA website [see back cover]. The Program Committee will send an application to the performer. This year's application deadline is October 16, 1999.

The Program Committee devotes much thought to the best balance among the different types of dance and folk music programming at the Festival. In our pre-Festival issue of the *NEFFA News*, that committee will share its thoughts on how it developed and balanced the programming for the upcoming Festival.

Leslie Morrison's tenure as NEFFA legal advisor is ending. I would like to thank her for her many years of service to the NEFFA Board. To those NEFFA members who are attorneys, please consider volunteering some of your time for NEFFA. We occasionally need legal services in the following areas: contract review, copyright, tax, and insurance advice, as well as in other areas. If you have an expertise in any one of these areas and would be willing to provide some *pro bono* services, please contact me at (508) 229-2854 or email me at shelagh@ma.ultranet.com or the NEFFA office at neffa@neffa.org.

My apologies to **Jean Krogh**, whose term as Director I inadvertently shortened in my last letter! Jean is indeed continuing as Director for another year and remains a full member of the NEFFA Executive Board, also serving as co-chair of the Membership Committee. ♪



Editor: Dan Pearl
 Calendar: Jacob & Nancy Bloom
 Mailing: Angel Roman

The **NEFFA News**, a publication of the New England Folk Festival Association, is published four times a year to communicate with its membership and other interested persons. **Send Calendar items** to Jacob and Nancy Bloom, 169 Sylvia St., Arlington MA 02476, or to bloom@gjs.net. **Other submissions** go to Dan Pearl, 15 Buffalo Run, Southborough, MA 01772, or to pearl@sw.stratus.com.

Publicize your events! Display advertising or flyer enclosures are available for qualifying folk-related organizations. For more information, contact Dan at +1-508-229-2854.

Issue Covering	Deadlines	
	Calendar	Editorial
Apr.-Jul.	Jan. 20	Feb. 15
Jul.-Oct.	Apr. 20	May 15
Oct.-Jan.	Jul. 20	Aug. 15
Jan.-Apr.	Oct. 20	Nov. 15

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direction, having to take extra steps to keep from falling forward, or they are starting backwards too late because they haven't adjusted their posture to account for momentum. To change direction, one actually leans (from the ankles, not bending the body) slightly in the opposite direction from the way one is moving, reducing the momentum in the old direction, timing this so that the body comes to a point of balance exactly at the phrase end, and starts falling in the new direction at the beginning of the next phrase. Beginners don't do this. They lean into the direction they are going, and it takes some extra time to change direction—they are late because they are shifting their body weight and overcoming momentum. They go forward a double and it takes 5½ steps before they can start moving backwards. As they gain better posture and more experience, they can work all this out, and they dance in time. For direction changes (e.g. up a double and back) I used to help students speed up the process by telling them to “hang themselves up by the hair” leaving their body more or less where it was, and moving their feet underneath. This image reduced the upper body lurching in each direction and enabled them to change direction more efficiently.

4) Some dancers have sluggish coordination. It takes a *long* time for the signal from the brain to move the feet, so they think about doing the motion, and the beat passes them by before they actually do it. They are likely to take 13 steps on a 16 beat phrase—they can't move fast enough. For a long time I thought this problem was fatal to dancing in time—that it was the one thing that couldn't be overcome. Then Maggie signed up for beginning folk dance. And intermediate. And advanced. She took my class for two full years, dancing 45 minutes a day, 4 days a week.

Maggie was a painfully shy 11 year old with very slow coordination and some learning disabilities. She didn't seem to get anything out of the demonstration and instruction, moving in the correct direction, but not distinguishing what kinds of steps were being used, or seeing which foot to start on. She learned the sequences with many mistakes that had to be slowly unlearned. She was also very slow in coordination, and never danced in time to music. After a year, Maggie could learn dances by watching and listening without help, but her reaction time was still slow and she was usually behind the beat, and she took too few steps per phrase. I gave her the clue of watching the other dancers, and mirroring them to try to stay in time, and this really helped. She started getting the feel of how far ahead she had to plan in order to match her classmates by using her eyes instead of her

ears.

In the middle of the second year she and her best friend, who was a very fine dancer, both fell in love with Irish dancing, (“Vicky we found our village! And it's in Ireland!”) and I taught the good dancer a solo jig to perform at Folklife while the rest of the class changed costumes between dances. She was afraid to perform it solo, though, and asked if Maggie could do it with her. Oy! I had grave doubts about Maggie's ability to move her feet fast enough for Irish jigs, but I said yes, as long as you can look like twins when you do it. They ran off hand in hand. They must have cut classes and lunch and homework and sleep to put in enough practice time, but at the end of the week, two days before Folklife, they were both perfect, and identical. That noontime the good dancer sprained her ankle, and Maggie, who two years earlier had looked as though she was rhythmically hopeless, danced a solo Irish jig with rapid-fire footwork for 400 people, in perfect time! It was a personal as well as a dance victory for this shy, uncoordinated kid. I've never been more proud of a student.

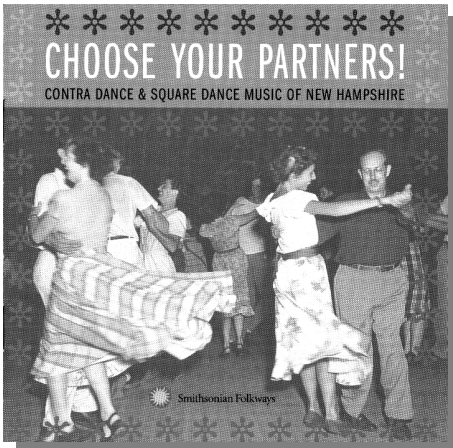
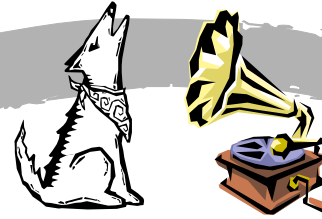
So I learned from Maggie that a “poor” beginner can turn into a good dancer given enough time and motivation and a secure environment where she won't get discouraged. I had just never seen someone initially so poor at dancing stay with it for long enough to get good, so I'd always thought it wasn't possible.

I no longer believe there are people who don't hear the beat. I think there are people who don't listen to it. I think there are people who haven't encountered callers who explain what they need to do to improve. I think there are people who aren't motivated to improve. I think there are people who think moving to the beat means “now I hear it, then I move.” I think there are beginners who need some experience to work on their posture and balance. I think there are people with slow coordination who have to plan far ahead to get through all the movements necessary to take each step, and make it land on time. And I think there are disabled people whose bodies won't respond in a predictable manner and who will never dance on the beat due to damage from stroke or cerebral palsy. But if you have them recite poetry to music, they can. So now I think that everybody *hears* the beat. And almost all of them can learn to dance to it.

Now how do we motivate them to do it? ♪

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Reviews



Choose Your Partners!
Contra Dance and Square
Dance Music of New Hampshire
Smithsonian Folkways
SWF CD 40126

Rodney Miller's New England
Dance Band, Old New England,
Two Fiddles, Northern Spy, Lester
Bradley & Friends, Lamprey River
Band

Reviewed by Dan Pearl

Did you ever wish you had a recording that you could show your non-contradancing friends to give them an idea of what the fuss is about? Here it is. This new release was produced for the Annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival (held on the National Mall in June and July) which selects a state to honor each year. This year New Hampshire was selected.

Some old favorite musicians, most of whom have appeared at NEFFA Festivals or our Thursday night contra dance, are represented in the 16 tracks. They've selected a few reel medleys, some jig medleys, some polkas, and a few waltzes.

Rodney Miller's band showcases Rodney's virtuosity on the fiddle, and with his jazzy licks, and flirtatious slides, presents the most modern and polished sound of any of the bands.

Old New England has a wonderfully straightforward sound which suits the material well. Several Bob McQuillen compositions are included. A nice surprise is a tune that I hadn't heard before, "The Woman Fiddler", by Deanna Stiles – it's quirky and delightful.

Several cuts have calls. Callers Mary DesRosiers, Dudley Laufman, Steve Zakon-Anderson and others call in a way that might be appropriate for dancers with some experience. Curiously, virtually all the initial calls on the called cuts are late, and I don't know why. The contra cuts, save for one (Scouthouse Reel, at 6:51), are too short to be satisfying.

Two Fiddles makes an appearance with Dudley calling a Paul Jones and a Portland Fancy variant. Dudley's manner was evocative of a grange hall dance. It had a refreshing spontaneity about it. The only band that was unfamiliar to me was Lester Bradley & Friends, who called and played for a pair of singing squares.

Northern Spy and Lamprey River Band each have many musicians and present a powerful, traditional sound. As I think of it, all the pianists on the album seem to be either Bob McQuillen, or influenced by his style, and I love it!

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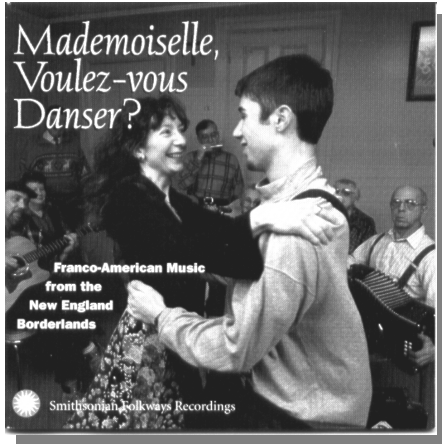
In Memoriam

Judy Anscombe of Voorheesville, NY. Performed Middle Eastern dance at many a NEFFA Festival, usually in the ensemble Desert Places.

Tex Konig of Toronto. Balladeer, storyteller and actor on TV and film. Performed at the 1997 and 1998 Festivals.

Spring Burrington-Reiss of Northbridge, MA. Folksinger, puppeteer. Regular performer at NEFFA in the Spring Theater and Spring's Puppets ensembles.

Martha Pellerin, folksinger and musician specializing in Franco-American material.



Mademoiselle, Voulez-Vous Danser?

Smithsonian Folkways
SWF CD 40116

Rodney Miller, Nightingale, Chanterelle, Louis Beaudoin, Ann Percival, Dudley & Jacqueline Lauman, The Riendeau Family, Les Franco-Américains, Martha Pellerin, The Ouimet family, Maria Perrault, Paul Baril, and others

Reviewed by Dan Pearl

Music, to our benefit, does not observe political boundaries. The musical traditions of the settlers and immigrants of New England and Canada were welcome stowaways. Once here, the musical forms migrated and intermingled.

Mademoiselle, Voulez-Vous Danser? is ostensibly the “first compilation to present the rich tradition of French musical influence in New England.” The 21 tracks run the gamut from old traditional songs to modern compositions, from atmospheric live recordings to pristine studio cuts, and from brave amateurs to polished professionals. It’s a nice mix for a historian, folklorist, or student but it makes for a somewhat eclectic listening experience.

The lyrics are primarily, but not exclusively, in French. Translations are not provided in the booklet, but are available on a website or by mail for a modest charge. The accompanying 28-page booklet is well-produced and contains background information on the performers, the tunes, and the genre. The opening essay contains interesting and well-researched historical information.

A standout on the album is *Entre moi*, an original composition by Josée Vachon, and played by Chanterelle. Its witty tongue-twister lyrics describe a Franco-American culture clash.

We hear two versions of *Growling Old Man*, *Grumbling Old Woman*, one embedded in another Chanterelle song *The Shuttle*, with moving lyrics and nicely sung by Donna Hébert.

The engineering work is a bit uneven cut to cut. Even some studio pieces featuring Rodney Miller and Ann Percival seem to mic the fiddle a bit remotely. The best job is in the Nightingale cut, which is a direct lift from another of their albums.

I highly recommend this for fans of Canadian-American music. ♪

(Continued from page 4)

The lavish album package contains a 28-page booklet featuring extensive notes discussing the history of social dancing in New England. I commend authors Jack Beard, Lynn Martin, and Kate Van Winkle Keller who got it right.

The recording and mixing is first-rate. The calls make for distracting general listening, but it’s a great snapshot of some really talented bands and callers.

♪

(Continued from page 6)

- Being part of a cross cultural forum about instruments and how they relate to our particular music.
- Making a cameo appearance with the French Soiree to play the late Omer Marcoux’ Beatrice Reel.
- Sitting on the Front Porch stage with three other accordionists and realizing that here were three generations of musical inspiration, and I was the youngest.
- Playing for the impromptu but scheduled barn raising with the other contra dance musicians and then meeting the NH Commissioner for the Arts who gave me a big hug and said he was proud of me.

I was honored to be invited and proud to be from New Hampshire. ♪

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival

Sylvia Miskoe shares her experiences representing New Hampshire at a festival in our nation's capital.



**Fireworks at the 1998
Smithsonian Folklife Festival**
photo: Smithsonian Institution

I was one of the participants and would like to share my experience at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival with others. It was truly a wonderful trip.

A Brief Account of the Festival

It was an honor, a thrill and an experience. In March, I received the long-hoped-for invitation to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. I had no idea of the scope of the Festival, only that I would be part of the musical presentations, playing Scottish and contra dance music. The music was a small portion; the Festival celebrated New Hampshire life, traditions, cultures and environment. There were about 45 musicians and over 100 other participants. Since space does not permit me to describe everything, I will recount the musical experience.

The Festival is an annual event on the Mall in Washington, DC. It features one state and two countries. This year's celebrants were New Hampshire, Romania, and South Africa. New Hampshire musicians were selected on the basis of interviews and on one's participation and long term contribution to their musical genre.

The musical genres included New England contra and square dances, Franco-American song and fiddle, Polish, African-American Gospel, Mexican, Klezmer, Irish and Scottish. We played in the 'town hall' which was used for dancing, and on the 'front porch', a small intimate stage built like a front porch. Programs were 45 minutes long with each program featuring one musical genre, but including all the musicians from that genre.

In between our presentations we were free to visit the other parts of the Festival, watch their music and dance programs, sample their food, see their crafts. The South African beadwork, the sculptures made from junk wire, and the energetic dancing to addictive drums and police whistles are three memories. The Romanians built an Eastern Rite Catholic church, danced in the lunch tent, and stayed up half the night dancing and jamming with everyone at the hotel. They had a brass band whose repertoire included The Anniversary Waltz.

We could walk to any of the museums along the Mall for wonderful exhibits and air-conditioned relief. I saw the Hope Diamond, visited the Freer Gallery and its Peacock Room painted by Whistler, viewed an exhibit on microbes and disease, and learned how a cotton gin works. One morning I took a cab to the Roosevelt Memorial, which opened two years ago.

Back at the hotel, after a swim and buffet supper, we would gather in the dining area and play music. What did we play? It depended on who was there. Usually it would be the New Hampshire musicians beginning with contra, square and French Canadian tunes, next the Klezmer band would arrive, then the Romanians would come by. We danced to everything.

I cannot isolate one instance that was more memorable than any other, but here is a sampling of good memories:

- Dancing to the Klezmer band at the Smithsonian Castle during the New Hampshire reception.
- Sitting on the town hall stage, all by myself, playing my Scottish tunes and having the sound man say, afterwards, "I'd forgotten what a lovely tune Maggie Brown is."

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Cal page 2

Cal page 3

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*Memories of Morris &
Sword at NEFFA 1999*



Photographs by
Arthur Ferguson

NEWS BRIEFS

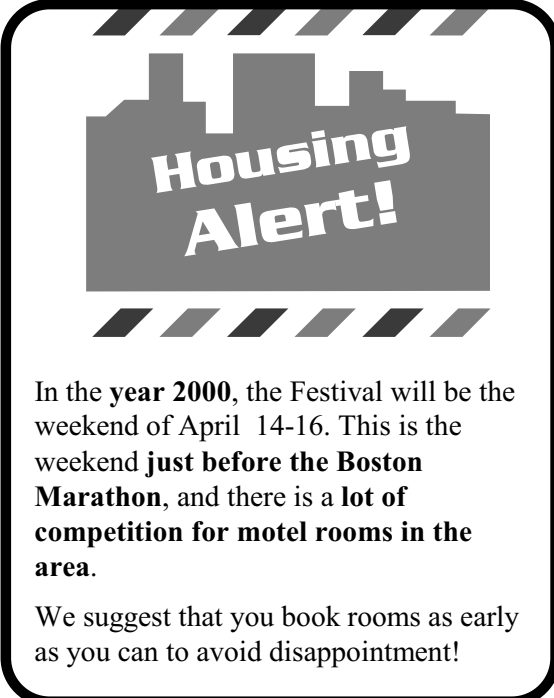
David Millstone writes: "I'm working on a video project about the life and work of Bob McQuillen. To add a historic perspective, I'm seeking photographs and footage, probably home movies, of New England contra dancing from the 1940s on. Ideally, I'd like to locate films taken at dances with such callers as Ralph Page or Duke Miller. Thanks for any footage or leads you can provide."

David Millstone
176 Farnum Hill
Lebanon, NH 03766
603-448-2950
millstone@valley.net

George Marshall reports that the upcoming Tropical Dance Vacation on St. Croix, US Virgin Islands will run from February 9-16, 2000 with Wild Asparagus and The Clayfoot Strutters providing music. George Marshall and Kathy Anderson will be calling the dances.

If you would like more information about the event please check out the web site <http://www.he.net/~bmd/TDV.2000.html> or write him at PO Box 602, Belchertown, MA 01007

Larry Jennings is saying "be my guest" to his first annual 70th birthday dance which will be held on November 14th at the Concord (MA) Scout House starting at 7:15pm. The performers will be Sue Rosen and Last Gaspé and the event is billed as "A Stylish Contradance". Larry has requested no gifts.



Housing Alert!

In the **year 2000**, the Festival will be the weekend of April 14-16. This is the weekend **just before the Boston Marathon**, and there is a **lot of competition for motel rooms in the area.**

We suggest that you book rooms as early as you can to avoid disappointment!

(Continued from page 9)

Visit our website!
<http://www.neffa.org/~neffa>

The New England Folk Festival Association is a non-profit educational and cultural organization, incorporated under the general laws of Massachusetts to encourage, sponsor, and preserve high standards of performance of the folk arts and traditions in New England and elsewhere.

Membership entitles one to voting privileges, publications, and to reduced admission to selected NEFFA-sponsored activities. It is open to interested persons who support our objectives.

Annual Dues are \$7/individual (\$18 for 3 years); \$11/family (up to 2 people over 18) (\$28 for 3 years) Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent of the law. Send check, payable to NEFFA, to the office. Occasionally, NEFFA shares its mailing list for a one-time use by like-minded folk organizations. If you do not want your name and address shared in this way, tell us with your membership. **Please direct all telephone inquiries** to the NEFFA office: 1950 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140 or (617) 354-1340.

Interested persons can get on NEFFA's mailing list for one year at no charge. Send request with full name and address to the office.



Ladies of the Rolling Pin at the 1999 NEFFA Festival. *Photo: Arthur Ferguson*



N·E·F·F·A

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