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Contra Dance combines dance caller and music

Do you want to dance? Did you learn to square dance in your high school gym class? Whether your answer is yes or no, try contra dancing to the music of Give Us a Break. It's as easy as square dancing in grade-school and more fun.

Give Us a Break, a local band, will be performing a unique repertory for the Contra Dance at the Folk Festival on Saturday, May 18 at 8 p.m. in the EMU Ballroom.

Contra dancing, similar to square dancing, combines traditional Irish, Scottish and New England music with the directions of a caller for a unique dance that looks like "adults playing."

Saturday's band Give Us a Break is known for adopting "contemporary fiddlers' tunes" and "1950's television themes" such as "Leave It To Beaver" and "Mr. Ed" into jigs.

The band developed after a series of random jam sessions and a performance at the Seattle Folklife Festival last year. The band members' backgrounds range from "renaissance and bluegrass to rock n' roll" creating lively string sounds with a strong beat. Recorder, flute, fiddle, mandolin, piano, bodhran, tenor banjo and guitars make dancing irresistible.

Over the top of music, caller Woody Lane, a nutritionist from Roseburg, will guide dancers by calling out directions during the dance. Lane, who has been calling for approximately 15 years, learned his skills while tending his sheep farm in West Virginia. Lane describes himself as "an energetic caller of squares, contras, mixers, and circles, with an occasional waltz and polka."

Jeri Frank, an enthusiastic Contra dance fan, describes the dance as "good, clean, wholesome fun." She said the age group is mixed, ranging from students to people in their 60's. "You meet people from all walks of life" Frank said. "They may have different professions but they all love to dance." Frank also said that Oregon has a "thriving music and dance community" that makes Contra dances quite an event.

In addition, Linda Danielson, fiddler for Give Us a Break, said anyone can learn Contra dancing because "the caller teaches the dance beforehand. It is an event open to the inexperienced."

Danielson has been performing in Eugene for the past 20 years and participated in the first 12 Folk Festivals in various bands. During the day Danielson teaches at Lane Community College.

Other members of the band include Linda Erz, a storyteller who learned the recorder by accident, when she decided to play it during one of her a story performances.



Give Us a Break, with 193 years of musical experience between the members, will provide music for a Contra dance Saturday night in the EMU Ballroom.

Michael Morrow, the bands guitar and bodhran player, manages University of Oregon Footnotes. Morrow brought Jonathan Siegle, an "escaped rock and roll guitar player" into the band after meeting him "while refereeing soccer matches." Siegle plays the mandolin for the band when he is not directing the Springfield High School Theatre Program or Girls' Varsity soccer team.

Tommy Arends of Spectraphysics adds 15 years of flute and re-

corde to the group while Kathleen Nass plays piano. Nass "owns and operates Elemental Press which laser-prints traditional music."

All seven band members and caller Woody Lane will be performing for the Contra dance in the EMU Ballroom beginning at 8 p.m. The dance is free for University students and \$3.00 for non-students. Tickets are available at the door.

—Beckie Daub

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