

OPEN LETTER TO LAKE CITY CONTRA DANCERS:

I had the opportunity to attend Next Generation Dance Camp. It was a powerful experience, as well as tons of fun! The camp was aimed at youth, but was also open to older dancers; the vast majority were young, and there was a large number of LGBT dancers. Gender-free language, including “larks & ravens”, was used the entire weekend. [For more info see http://www.nextgendancecamp.org/larks_and_ravens.html].

Through discussions (both on the program and on the sidelines) I’ve gained a better understanding of many current issues regarding community, personal communication, safety, and gender identity. We are seeing that A LOT of people in the general population and in the dance community (especially women & LGBT individuals), have been hurt, abused, stifled or demeaned, physically and/or emotionally.

The terms “ladies role/gents role” are not just words; they are significant barriers to those who have struggled to not “play a role” associated with a gender label that might fit their appearance but not their true identity. Those labels are often not just uncomfortable, but outright painful. It’s wonderful that we as a community have grown to accept/embrace people dancing whatever role they want to (even switching roles during a dance) – but it’s not enough.

*Many dancers have found that separating the dance role from gender labels has other benefits!!! Lessening mistaken assumptions that someone is in the wrong place based on appearance makes it **less confusing for new dancers**, and makes it **easier and more fun** for experienced dancers to switch roles. It’s also helpful for those recovering from injuries to choose a role that hurts less. **Plus, a majority of younger dancers prefer gender-free terminology.***

*Among alternative terms, “larks & ravens” is gaining the most traction in contra communities, especially on the west coast. (Of all dances with websites that use gender-free terminology, all but two are larks/ravens.) The # of syllables correspond to accustomed terms, and the **first letters** clearly indicate the dancer’s position: **LARK** = (the person on the) **LEFT**, and **RAVEN** = (the person on the) **RIGHT** of the couple.*

Change vs tradition:

- *I believe the **CORE VALUES** of our beloved tradition **ARE inclusiveness, cooperation, + love of music & dancing**. One doesn’t need to join a club, take lessons, wear a particular costume, or be part of a certain social strata to join in; as long as they don’t hurt anyone they are welcomed.*
- *In all life, things change; **things either evolve, or they wither & die**.*
- *Our **tradition always has been evolving** – for example, the old dance call “balance & swing the one below” became “neighbor balance & swing” – so much better!*
- ***Dancers can transition** surprisingly quickly and smoothly with callers who are competent and comfortable with alternative terminology.*

Using new terms for dance roles will remove barriers. It will open our doors wider and enable us to share our love of music & dancing with more people (many of whom are eager to dance – and fun to dance with!)

It’s time for us to be part of the positive evolution of contra dancing.

On Thanksgiving Eve, Wednesday Nov 21st, **Lindsey Dono** will call the Lake City Contra Dance using “larks & ravens”. Other larks & ravens dances will follow, as dancers and callers are ready. Stay tuned!

- Sherry