

**Youths on the
Loose!**

**NEFFA Membership
Changes Afoot**



Spring 2009 – Vol. XXXV #1

**Don't Miss the
Festival April 24-26!**

Be there! Aloha!



September 12th, 2008 marked the culmination of four years of dreaming, planning and organizing as a hall full of dancers kicked off the first annual Youth Dance Weekend. There was contra, there were squares, there was English country dance, there was swing, and that was all just in the first hour of the Friday evening dance. The rest of the weekend held much, much more in store for the eager participants. YDW was a blast for everyone involved, and also an organizational and logistical success, and we (the organizers) want to give you a taste of the highlights of the weekend from both perspectives.

YDW

Report from the

Youth

Dance

Weekend

YDW took place at Farm and Wilderness, a cluster of residential Camp facilities nestled beside a lake in the rolling hills of central Vermont. Farm and Wilderness has a long history of connection to traditional music and dance, and with lots of cabins, a beautiful lakefront, a great dance hall with a nice floor, and a well-equipped kitchen it served as an ideal setting for our weekend. Somewhat to our surprise, YDW turned out to be something of an international gathering, with plenty of participants attending from the Northeast and mid-Atlantic states, several from the Midwest, a van-load from North Carolina, a contingent from Canada, and a few dedicated folks from California, Hawaii, Arizona, and Montana. Of the 170 or so people in attendance (including staff and organizers) 42% were age 18-22, 43% 23-28, 9% 29-35, and 6% 36 and over. We didn't accept Campers under 18 for reasons of liability and insurance, and we were grateful for the participants of all ages who added a lot to the weekend.

We were fortunate to have the brassy sound of Elixir - one of a handful of hot young bands becoming popular with dancers of all ages - headlining YDW this year, along with stellar calling by Nils Fredland. They were joined by fiddler and singer Naomi Morse, who sat in on contras, English and swing, as well as leading shape note singing and playing for couple dancing. Sam Weiler made the trip all the way from California to call for English dances, and a plethora of talented campers helped out with music and calling for other events. A tremendous amount of camper talent allowed us to augment the hired staff and have dancing continue late into the night. We had camper photographers and videographers, a huge group of camper callers who helped make the caller workshop a tremendous success, lots of musicians jamming all over the place at all hours, some massive singing sessions (scheduled and

The material in this article has been condensed from a previously published article in the Country Dance and Song Society News.

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unscheduled), an awesome Morris performance by a handful of Maple Morris attendees during the Saturday night dance, campers and staff playing for Kerry Sets at 1:30 in the morning on Saturday...the list goes on and on. We asked each Camper to do one hour of volunteer work during the weekend, and some did much more than that. The weekend was not without its logistical glitches, but things got done, problems got solved, and people figured things out. We're totally grateful for that participatory spirit.

In order to build community and encourage our dancers to try things they might not otherwise have tried, we deliberately did not to over-schedule ourselves. Throughout most of the weekend we planned only one concurrent event. To help facilitate the aim of community, we also had only one main hall, directly adjacent to the kitchen, where we danced and ate meals. Although this meant a bit of work moving tables and benches on and off the floor, the proximity of everything gave the weekend a cohesive feeling, allowed the kitchen crew to enjoy the music as they cooked, and gave us the chance to overlap meals with dance sessions. During the early morning waltz and Scandi sessions we moved about half of the tables away, giving folks the option to eat, listen, dance, sip tea, or hang out.

On Saturday morning we woke up for a 10:00 AM English dance session, where Sam Weiler led a selection of English dances to music by Elixir. Many of the dancers at the weekend had never tried English dancing, and it was important to us to create a setting where they could have fun trying ECD for the first time. After a sampling of English during the Friday dance, we were excited to see three full sets, perhaps around 100 people, waking up to give it another try.

We also made swing and blues dancing a part of the weekend, with an hour long set before the Saturday evening dance, and selections sprinkled in to the other dances. We knew that a good number of our participants were great swing dancers, and that both Elixir and Husetop (the vocal trio of Naomi and Erica Morse and Anna Patton, with Owen Morrison) could offer great swing dance music. This was a nice compliment to the contra and English dancing, but turned out to be something that a good number of people didn't know how to do. Next year

we plan to offer a swing dance workshop at some point, so people can pick up some basic skills and enjoy this part of the program.

The Saturday afternoon advanced contra dance session featured an energetic rendition of Money Musk, introduced by an original poem by Nils extolling the virtues of the dance, to a kickin' version of the tune with three fiddles and horns playing an arrangement by Owen Morrison. The packed hall of youngsters whooping their way through this classic dance (with no swinging!) was quite a sight.

On Saturday afternoon we held the Bread and Butter discussion session, so named because it was central to our sense of the purpose of the weekend. We estimate that 80% of the weekend participants attended the session, and we spent about an hour together considering the challenges that our various dance and music communities face. We posed questions together (such as "How do you get contra dancers interested in other styles of dance?" or "How can we help others dance under control?"), which we wrote up on large pieces of paper taped around the room. We passed out markers for people to write down their ideas, and set everyone free to brainstorm. (You can find the results, which include a lot of great ideas, at www.youthdanceweekend.org/bnb). The large colorful pieces of newsprint remained up on the walls all weekend for folks to add to, comment on, and discuss.

Bread and Butter was followed by concurrent callers' and musicians' workshops, giving aspiring performers a chance to discuss, share ideas, and learn from the staff and committee members. Rebecca Lay ran the calling discussion, while Ethan Hazzard-Watkins facilitated the musicians' group. The calling discussion was attended by about 35 aspiring and/or current callers of Contras, Squares, and ECD. Much of the discussion focused on how to get started in calling. Topics included How to Get Hired, What/How to Practice, Where to Find Material, How to Find Calling Buddies, and much more. Everyone left the group with new connections and new ideas about all of the various aspects of leading traditional dance. About 12 people attended the musicians' session, where they learned a tune together by ear, discussed band interactions and how to arrange music for dancing, and talked about ways for young musicians to

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Editorial Review: Robert Golder, Shelagh Ellman-Pearl, Lisa Greenleaf, Robert Johnson												
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NEFFA Membership by Beth Parkes

What does it mean to be a "member" of NEFFA?

- It means that you get this newsletter
- It means you support the goals of the organization
- It means that you enjoy the weekends and dances that the organization runs, especially, or perhaps solely, the annual New England Folk Festival.

If you have looked at the NEFFA website lately or picked up a membership form at the Ralph Page weekend, you may have noticed that we have made some changes in NEFFA memberships. The board had decided to move to a tiered membership system which allows people to decide how much they would like to support NEFFA financially. In addition we have done away with multiple year memberships. While many members have found it convenient to renew only every few years, it has placed a burden on the membership committee and is not standard for nonprofit organizations.

In addition at the April annual meeting (held at the Festival) you will be voting on a new set of bylaws for NEFFA which, among other things, defines membership duration in a more realistic manner. The previous bylaws indicate that all memberships expire in July following the Festival. Our new bylaws make memberships expire just before the next Festival *after* the Festival following when you join. In other words everyone who joins NEFFA will get a discount at one Festival, but not more than one. (If you join at the festival, it is assumed that you have gotten a discount for that festival). These changes were worked out after much consideration of many different options for membership renewal, and we hope they are a positive change. In fact, the membership committee has been acting as if this was the rule for a number of years and the change brings the bylaws into line with actual practice.

To all our members, both new and long-time, we deeply appreciate your support of NEFFA. Your membership, additional contributions, and volunteer service make the Festival and our other events possible. We look forward to sharing many more years of great music and dance with you!

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get gigs and find mentors. A group of musicians from the Boston area discovered each other and started brainstorming about putting together new events in their area.

We organized the Youth Dance Weekend (YDW) with three goals in mind, and we were successful in meeting each of them. First, we organized an event that young people attended in droves, and where folks had a great time dancing, singing, playing music, and hanging out together. The camp was more than full, over 80% of our 170 participants were 28 or younger, our price structure was accessible to young dancers, and we still ended with a surplus. Plus, the weekend felt like a continuous, vibrant, smile-all-the-time kind of party. Second, we encouraged networking, leadership development and discussion of important issues in the broader dance community to be big parts of our event, and we know of many young people who went home excited about getting involved and organizing things in their local dance communities. Finally, we documented the steps we took over the past year putting

together YDW, and we plan to compile a manual that will be help other folks to organize similar events.

One of the things we found most exciting about the weekend was the sense of an evolving network of young dance and music leaders meeting each other, exchanging stories and experiences, and forging connections. People went home feeling like an important part of a national movement - a movement to promote music and dance traditions, to make sure young people everywhere get excited about this scene, and to ensure that our intergenerational communities thrive and grow. We look forward to another great weekend next year, and to continuing these conversations and connections. YDW '09 will take place September 25-27. For more info on the weekend, keep an eye on our web site: www.youthdanceweekend.org.

The organizers: Ethan Hazzard-Watkins, Brattleboro, VT; Sarah Pilzer, New York, NY; Brian Gallagher, Northfield, MA; Julia Nickles, Gill, MA; Rebecca Lay, Brattleboro, VT; Maggie Zander, Ashfield, MA

Festival Volunteers Needed!

Hello NEFFA Volunteers!

Once again, it's that time of year again to start planning your Spring contra dance events. And, once again, the New England Folk Festival is looking for volunteers.

To sign-up, visit:

<http://www.neffa.org/volunteering/>

The website is now accepting applications. Sign-up deadline is March 25th. If you don't have access to the website, please call Bethany at 413-256-6739 to sign-up.

New things this year include a change in the number of volunteer hours to earn admission to the Festival. For various reasons, we have decided to restructure the volunteer schedule. After a period of serious discussion, the NEFFA Board has decided

to increase the amount of work required as follows:

Friday session 1 hour

Saturday (one session) 2 hours

Saturday (both sessions) 3 hours

Sunday 2 hours

For many of you who have worked for four or more hours and have attended the entire Festival, this change increases the minimum number of hours to six.

All other aspects of volunteering will remain the same. And remember, the earlier you sign up, and the more flexible you are in terms of hours and assignments, the easier it is for us to fit you in where you'd like to be. Please note that you must have a ticket for the session you're volunteering in.

Looking forward to volunteering with you this year!

Thanks,

Bethany Seeger and the volunteering committee

Concord Contra Challenge

For the 2009 NEFFA Festival we are inaugurating the Concord Contra Challenge. If you know about the Iron Dancer series, this will be similar but built around the Scout House dances and the NEFFA weekend. Dancers completing a specified 5-day series of the Thursday dance before NEFFA, plus a majority of the NEFFA Festival contra sessions and the Scout House Monday dance will be recognized in a ceremony on the Monday. Are you up for the challenge? Further details are available at <http://mondaycontras.com/challenge> .

— *Don Veino, Robin Humes and John Wasser*

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

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 \$20/individual, \$38/family (up to 2 people over 18). Contributions beyond these basic amounts are welcome and tax-deductible to the extent permitted by 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 inquiries** to the NEFFA office: PMB 282, 1770 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140 or (781) 662-6710, or via email: neffa@neffa.org

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

I'm writing to you during the third week of February. It's an exciting and challenging time, two months before the start of the 65th annual Festival. Important preparations are under way. Earlier this week, I spent an evening with several of NEFFA's dedicated volunteers, wandering the empty hallways of the Mansfield Public Schools and peering into the classrooms and gymnasiums. We're serious about improving our operations each year, so we arrange to visit Mansfield to walk the school hallways and go through each room. We study the facilities, and plan new and better ways to use the school buildings and grounds, in order to prepare for you the best possible Festival experience in April.

The list of NEFFA Board candidates to be placed on the ballot was also finalized this week. I am very pleased by the slate of candidates that the Nominating Committee, led by Beth Parkes and Julia Nickles, will present for your consideration. The Board continues to add younger people whose enthusiasm for the traditional folk arts is complemented by their familiarity with the innovative twenty-first century technologies that are increasingly required to produce a Festival that can host thousands of attendees in safety and comfort. The Board also retains a number of knowledgeable veteran members, whose involvement with NEFFA is more easily counted in decades rather than years. Among these Board members is Angela Taylor, a founding member of NEFFA who was present at the very first New England Folk Festival and who, with Jane Breede, makes the arrangements for the Folk Bazaar. Each of the members of the Board brings an impressive array of skills and life experiences to the task of making NEFFA a vital and joyful experience for all.

The Board's work is not solely directed at making final preparations for the April Festival – far from it! In less than two weeks, we will host our first NEFFA Medley Benefit Bash. By the

From the President's Desk

Robert Golder



time you read this article in the NEFFA News, the Benefit Bash will have been concluded, and the Board will know whether all its hard work on this innovative fundraiser resulted in a financial success. There is certainly good reason to be optimistic about the outcome. A number of people are buying tickets in advance, and many have contributed more than the stated admission price, in order to maximize the success of this event. Other people have donated many wonderful items to the silent auction.

As I wrote to you in the last issue of the NEFFA News, the Board decided that there would be NO INCREASE in ticket prices for the 2009 New England Folk Festival. That is why the Board, led by Terry Huffaker, developed the Benefit Bash fundraiser as a creative way to build financial support for NEFFA. Every dime raised by the Benefit Bash will go toward support of the April Festival. I thank all of you who have contributed so much to NEFFA's success through your participation in the Benefit Bash.

Oddly enough, as the recession deepens, I find more reason for optimism about NEFFA's future. Although our organization is impacted by the pressures and concerns of our times, we have an advantage because we exercise the New England traditions that the Festival has always celebrated. Those traditions include a realistic but essentially positive outlook on life, and a reliance on community-building through volunteer activity and support.

There are some extremely important ways that you can participate in this process of building the

NEFFA community. The 2009 Festival is an ideal event to invite your friends who are new to folk dancing. The Program Committee, led by Linda Leslie, has carefully and deliberately scheduled multiple beginner-level events throughout the Festival weekend. At NEFFA 2009 there will be frequent sessions dedicated to giving joy to your friends, family, and guests. Thanks to Dan Pearl, the full schedule for the Festival is now posted on the NEFFA web site. In advance of the Festival, you and your guests can visit www.neffa.org/grid to find out when and where all the introductory sessions will be held.

As your guests enjoy the Festival, please encourage them to become NEFFA Members. Volunteers at the Membership table in the high school lobby will be eager to assist them. You are probably a NEFFA member already, but don't let your membership lapse! When the time comes, please be sure to renew your own membership – perhaps during the Festival, while you're thinking about it. Your continued membership in NEFFA is a vital part of supporting the joyful activities and community that we all cherish.

As the weekend draws near, please visit

www.neffa.org often for the latest updates on planning for the 65th Annual Festival on April 24-26, 2009.

Once the April festival has concluded, please keep in mind our other programs, such as the Ralph Page Dance Legacy Weekend in Durham, New Hampshire, coming in January 2010. In the Greater Boston area, enjoy the Family Dance Series and the Thursday Night Contra Dance Series in Concord, MA. And as always, thank you for helping NEFFA to create joyful celebrations of music, dance, arts, and crafts for the New England folk community.

Bob Golder
President, NEFFA



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New England Folk Festival Association
PMB 282, 1770 Mass. Ave., Cambridge MA 02140
Phone: 781-662-6710 FAX: 781-662-6730
www.neffa.org