

About the Presenters

Bill Alkire (M.S.W.) has provided dance leadership for over 50 years from Alaska to Denmark, including Dancing Bears of Alaska, Bay Area Country Dance Society, Berea College Christmas Country Dance School, Oglebay Institute Folk Dance Camp, Folklore Village, Pinewoods Camp, Maine Woods Folk Dance Camp, and the Silkeborg 1994 Spring Dance Festival. Bill is artistic director of the Cedar Valley Cloggers, who perform black-shoe traditional clogging. As a retired director of community mental health, Bill sees dance as a key to good mental and physical health and to strong organizations, families, and communities.

Susan English (Ph.D. Education) fell in love with international folk dance in the 1960s and taught her first dance class on a rooftop in China in 1980. With experience also in African and competitive swing dance, Susan has called monthly square and contra dances since 1990. She has served on staff at the Wheatland Traditional Arts Weekend and multiple years at Cumberland Lakes Dance Camp, Terpsichore's Holiday, and Michigan Dance Heritage. When not leading dance, Susan teaches graduate courses in education and conducts program evaluation as an independent consultant.

Bill and Susan, as a married couple since 2000, dance through daily life together in Wooster, Ohio. Besides historical dance, they offer workshops in traditional squares, contras, international folk, Appalachian clogging, storytelling, and personal growth.

Bill Alkire & Susan English
(330) 345-7308
senglish@umich.edu
www.umich.edu/~senglish/dance.html

MINUET to MACARENA*

A Historical Revue of Couple Dance 1800-present

I. Waltz

In Europe of the late 1700s, the courtly minuet was gradually being replaced by the older English country dance and by the new French quadrille. While more active than the minuet, these set dances still kept everyone in their proper places.

On a hot summer day in July, 1789, after successfully storming the Bastille, French peasants danced themselves dizzy in the streets of Paris. The word "revolution" takes on a new meaning when we consider this day as marking the liberation of turning or rotating couple dances, which had been banned for centuries. Within ten years, nearly seven hundred dance halls could be found in Paris alone.

In parts of Europe farther east, dances like the "waltzen" had continued to revolve and evolve without interruption. German-speaking peasants developed increasingly complex moves to create the "Landler." In Vienna of the early 1800s, the Hapsburg rulers danced at huge balls that were open to the general public. Smooth dance floors and the banning of hobnail boots allowed for a smoother, faster waltz, a fact that caught the attention of a talented father and son named Johann Strauss.

II. Polka

Legend tells us that, one day in 1830, a peasant girl in Bohemia invented a new dance step. The "polka" may also have evolved from the galop or galopade, with its repetitive chasse or sashay.

Whatever its origin, the polka was formally introduced in Paris by a dancing master in 1840. The news spread quickly across ballrooms in Europe and the Americas. This exciting, new dance was to leave its mark on popular culture, from music to the fabrics used for women's dancing costumes--the polka dot.

As the polka traveled west across the American continent, it was adapted to the music and styles of different cultures, becoming La Jessuscita or Jessie Polka in the American Southwest. Sometime before the Civil War, African Americans danced polka steps to a song about a particularly clever slave named "Cotton-Eyed Joe."

III. Ragtime

A smoother, easier step emerged in the 1880s and reached its peak during the "Gay Nineties." The two-step could generally be managed by women in even the tightest of corsets. John Philip Sousa's 1891 composition "Washington Post March" became a favorite tune for two-stepping in America and in England as well. In Brazil, a Latin cousin of the two step was born, the Maxixe.

Early in the 1900s, the syncopation of African American music began to enter the mainstream of popular culture. City people went crazy for the ragtime music of composers like Scott Joplin and a new dance from the coastal city of Charleston. The quicker ragtime tempos allowed for a more energetic dance, and women, as they cast off their corsets, shortened their skirts, and bobbed their hair, demanded it. The one-step was born. Dances with animal names emerged, like the Horse Trot, Chicken Scratch, Duck

Waddle, and Grizzly Bear. In their 1914 book Modern Dancing, Irene and Vernon Castle wrote of dances like the galop, waltz, polka, schottische, and Varsouvienne, "Practically none of these dances [are] seen nowadays. For this we are duly thankful."

IV. Tango

In the poor barrios of Buenos Aires of the 1880s, Creole and immigrant musician-poets began improvising songs about the dark side of their lives and the women they both loved and despised. As they sang, others danced. This new art form made its way to Spain and France and, sometime around the turn of the century, back to Argentina as the Tango.

By 1914, "Tango teas" provided wealthy New Yorkers with a temporary escape from the social norms of their time. North American interest in the Tango eclipsed after 1914, but with the coming of radio and film, enjoyed a revival in the 1930s.

V. Swing

In 1926, the Savoy Ballroom opened in Harlem, bringing together dancers of white and black cultures at a time when segregation was the norm. When Charles Lindbergh made his transatlantic flight the following year, one energetic and sometimes acrobatic dance became known as the Lindy. By 1936, swing music was being played every Saturday night on the radio, and big bands were playing live in dance halls across the United States. Evolving into new styles with names like jive and jitterbug, swing dance remained popular well into the 1950s.

Also by the early fifties, the older fox trot, introduced back in 1918 by vaudeville performer Harry Fox, was being danced faster and faster. In 1952, a 45 r.p.m. record bearing the label "fox trot" made a splash. It was called "Rock Around the Clock."