

## Some thoughts of playing for English Country dance

I have been playing in this genre for twenty years or more, much of it under some the past grand masters of it...Leah Barkan and Marshall Barron...who were themselves taught by Phil Merrill (who also taught Kate Barnes and Jacqueline Schwab).

Though I would say, as one person did, that my sense of the music was not so much taught as caught ...over the years. Others may differ

As I have come to feel it, the spirit of the music is to play lovingly, to *sing* the tune expressively with a sort of flowing, yet lightly articulated, legato. Hear yourself; listen to yourself and to the other musicians.

### Concertinas and ECD

- Concertinas have immense power; for ECD, they should be played with a lighter, caressing touch. Watch the volume.
- There's a trick to getting people to listen to what you're saying: wait until there's a gap in the conversation, then speak into quietly. People will hush to hear what you have to say. Do that with your concertina
- Don't snap notes and don't snap endings! Your laying should flow, yet be articulated.
- Backup:
  - Listen more, play less
  - KISS (Keep it simple, Stupid).
    - If the melody is busy complex, the backup should generally be dead simple
    - It is more important to be on the beat, if only the root of the chord played simply, than to do something fancy lagging the beat.
    - If playing off the chord, articulate that to the feeling of the music
  - you must not overpower/obscure the melody
- Adjust to the nature of the piece: rarely let it rip as you might in a piece like Wibsey Roundabout
- Don't HOG the music

### Additional thoughts:

- The tempo must be rigorously maintained once set by the caller (though s/he may discretely change it as needed)
- The piano keeps the beat...and owns the chords...and may wish to change them from what's in the sheet music.