

*The*  
**Portland**  
COLLECTION

*Contra Dance Music  
in the  
Pacific Northwest*

**REVISED EDITION**

by Susan Songer  
with Clyde Curley

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*The Portland Collection, Rev. Ed.*

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## *Preface to the Revised Edition*

Welcome to the revised edition of *The Portland Collection*. As purveyors of contra dance music, we face the paradox of promoting tradition while using modern and quickly changing technology. For this ninth printing of the book, we were required to completely recreate the book's electronic files to make them compatible with today's computers. This gave us the opportunity to make the following improvements:

**Tune Titles:** In the years since 1997, when we first went to print, we have discovered additional alternate tune titles. With each subsequent printing, we have added these alternate titles to the "Alphabetical List of Titles and Alternate Titles" appendix in the back of the book. We have also discovered errors in seven of the tune titles as we originally published them. For five of these tunes, we identified composers and learned that they had given their tunes different titles than the ones in our book. In two other cases, we were just plain wrong. In this revised edition, we have retitled these seven tunes, altering their alphabetical order and the pagination for all the tunes in the book. The title changes are listed in two separate places in the book—on page 20 up front and in the "Tune Title Changes" appendix in the back.

**Music Notation:** In many instances, we don't play these tunes the same way we did when *The Portland Collection* was first published. We may have learned a new lick, found an ending we prefer, reinvented a tune in a slightly different way, or changed our minds about chords. In other words, this music has been enjoying a natural, folk-processed life. However, we have resisted our strong urges to change the notation in this edition to match the way we now play the tunes. They remain on these pages the way we played them in 1997. We have, however, corrected outright mistakes in the notation—forgotten repeat signs, timing errors, chord omissions, and in a couple of cases, reversed A and B parts. We have posted a full list of these corrections on the [Errata and Addenda](#) page at [www.theportlandcollection.com](http://www.theportlandcollection.com).

**Alternate Versions of Tunes:** We relocated alternate tune settings and alternate chords from the "Notes on the Tunes" section in the back of the book to the "Tunes" section in the front of the book. The alternate version is now on the same page as the original tune. The composer's version is the first version of the tune, and the way we play it in Portland is the second, alternate version. In some cases, we did not feel that the alternate settings merited a half-page of space in the "Tunes" section, so we omitted those alternates from this edition.

**Notes on the Tunes:** We updated the "Notes on the Tunes" section to incorporate the changes listed above. In keeping with earlier printings of the book, composers and musicians who have passed away (alas, too many!) are noted. Other information describing musicians and bands was current in 1997 but might not remain so in this 2011 revision.

**New Quotes:** The updated layout leaves more room for quotes from dancers. The new quotes were collected July 2, 2011, at the first Saturday contra dance at Fulton Community Center. They are responses to the same question asked of dancers fourteen years ago for the first edition: “What do you like about contra dancing?” Some responses matched nearly word for word the remarks made years ago by other dancers. This small test of time suggests that contra dancing and its music will continue to thrive in years to come.

**Finally:** We hope that those who have enjoyed the first edition over the years will find the improvements here helpful. We also hope that musicians coming to *The Portland Collection* for the first time will find our book useful and pleasurable and will be inspired to get out those fiddles (and other instruments) and play these wonderful tunes. It’s what it’s all about!

Susan Songer and Clyde Curley

### *Acknowledgments for the Revised Edition*

The revised edition of *The Portland Collection* has benefited from the contributions of these musicians and friends:

Music Editor: Betsy Branch

Production Assistant: Michael Kuhn

Editorial and Layout Assistance: Lori Shaffer

Computer Consultant: Steve Towers

Music Research: Lisa Ornstein, Elvie Miller, and Denis Liddy

Proofreader: Anita Mortimer

## Abe's Retreat

The musical score for 'Abe's Retreat' is written on four staves of music. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: A, G, E, A, G, A, A, G, A, G, A, G, A, G, A.



*There's something about the music that stirs  
my inner self and makes my body move.  
I could say that dancing is good exercise,  
and I like the company, and it makes me smile.  
But behind all that, it stirs the core of my being.  
When the music is good, no matter how tired  
my body is, it still goes.*

CAROL ROBISON

*Blackberry Blossoms*

Musical score for "Blackberry Blossoms" in G major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a G chord. The second staff includes G, D, and G chords. The third staff includes G, D, G, D, and G chords. The fourth staff includes G, D, G, D, and G chords. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

*Blair Atholl*

Musical score for "Blair Atholl" in G major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with an Am chord and ends with a G chord. The second staff includes Am, G, and Am chords. The third staff includes Am and G chords. The fourth staff includes Am and G chords. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

*The Blind Man's Reel*

Musical score for 'The Blind Man's Reel' in F major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first two staves are the main melody, and the last two staves are a variation. Chords are indicated above the notes: F, Dm, C, F, Dm, C, F, F, Bb, F, C, F, Bb, F, C, F.

*The Bluejay*

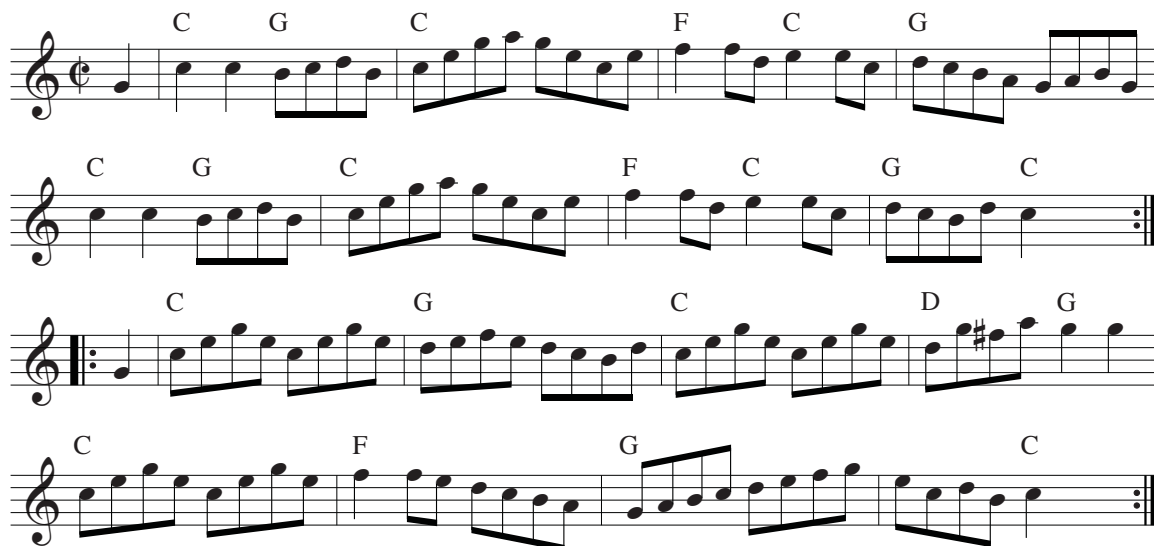
by Creighton Lindsay

Musical score for 'The Bluejay' in A major, 6/8 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first two staves are the main melody, and the last two staves are a variation. Chords are indicated above the notes: A, D, G, A, G, D, E, A, G, D, E, Em, D, G, D, A, G, D, Em, D, G, A, Bm, A, G, E.

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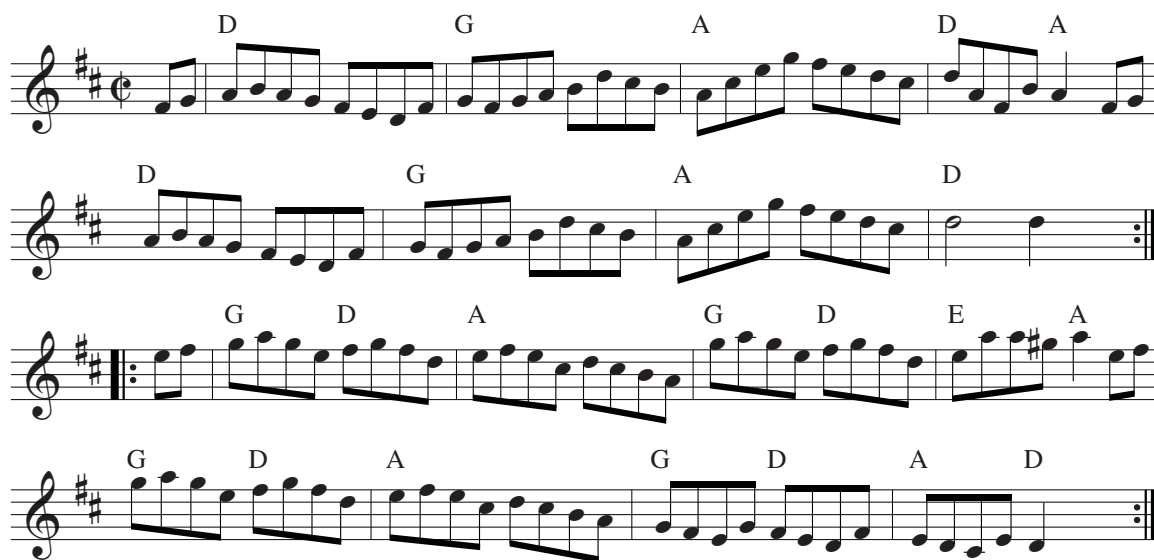
*Dominion Reel*



Musical score for *Dominion Reel* in C major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff has chords C, G, C, F, C, G. The second staff has chords C, G, C, F, C, G, C. The third staff has chords C, G, C, D, G. The fourth staff has chords C, F, G, C. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

*Don Tremaine's Reel*

by Graham Townsend



Musical score for *Don Tremaine's Reel* in D major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff has chords D, G, A, D, A. The second staff has chords D, G, A, D. The third staff has chords G, D, A, G, D, E, A. The fourth staff has chords G, D, A, G, D, A, D. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

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## Hundred Pipers

A  
D  
A F#m Bm E

A  
D  
A E A

A  
D  
A F#m Bm E

A  
D  
A E A



*When I call, I like getting the flow going with dancers and music—creating a whole roomful of energy and fun that is so much greater than the sum of its parts.*

MARY DEVLIN

## *Notes on the Tunes*

by  
Clyde Curley

**Abe's Retreat** – This old-time tune is phrased especially nicely for contra dances—meaning that the melodic phrases occur in fairly discrete units of two measures. This is a feature to keep in mind when looking for old-time tunes (or any tune, for that matter) to use for contra dancing. I first learned the tune from mandolinist Paul Kotapish of Berkeley, California, in Corvallis in the '70s. He may have learned it from the Red Clay Ramblers' album, *Stolen Love*, where this tune is traced to a recording of the West Virginia fiddler Emory Bailey. The modalities (A to G chords) here are very “West Virginia,” so this piece falls neatly on the five-string banjo with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of fun.

**Reel des Accordéonistes** – Dan Compton learned this wonderful tune from Sara Hiebert of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. It has been recorded by the Québec band La Bottine Souriante sandwiched as instrumental breaks in a song (“La Parente”) on their album *Tout comme au jour de l'an*. La Bottine is a creative and energetic group of musicians active on the international music scene. Their recordings, alas, are hard to come by in this country. Nonetheless, for about 20 years they have been a reliable source of the beautiful and sturdy dance music that issues from French Canada. This tune is the composition of Marcel Messervier, the accordion maker and player from Montmagny, Québec. He composed three tunes (see “Hommage à Edmond Parizeau” and “Reel Ti-Mé”) that have landed in *The Portland Collection*, all of them written in the summer of 1981 for the Mariposa Festival in Toronto. “Reel des Accordéonistes” was written as a tribute to all musicians. Don't be fooled by the title. It goes well on the fiddle too!

**All the Rage** – Larry Unger of Massachusetts composed this tune after playing for a dance in Madison, Wisconsin, with Seattle fiddler Ruthie Dornfeld. Larry says, “Ruthie kept picking jigs in the key of E major, which I thought unusual until she told me that jigs in E were all the rage. So I decided that I'd better write one.” The tune has been recorded by Larry's band Uncle Gizmo on their album of the same name, and it is included in Larry's tune book *The Curvy Road to Corinth*.

**All the Way to Galway** – Good contra dance marches are an important part of a dance musician's repertoire. This tune, as played by George Penk, is a classic. He learned it from former bandmate Dennis Rothrock, artiste of the accordion, who lives just outside Dallas, Oregon. The noble Duke of York, he had ten thousand dancers. He marched them up to the top of the hall and he marched them down again.

**Asher** – Rodney Miller of Antrim, New Hampshire, is a contra dance fiddlers' fiddler. He helped disseminate some great music nationwide through two classic albums recorded in the early '80s, *New England Chestnuts* and *New England Chestnuts 2* (along with some other fine musicians,

including Randy Miller, Laurie Andres and Sandy Bradley). This is only one of his tunes in our collection that is grounded in tradition while soaring through the empyrean. He named this tune after his son, in his words, “honoring the next generation.” Much of the dance energy comes from the tune’s major/minor juxtapositions. George Penk and I both learned this tune separately from Rodney’s album *Airplang*.

**Atholl Highlanders** – Seattle accordionist Laurie Andres and Olympia fiddler John Culhane brought this tune to Portland in 1989 when they were hired by the late Jim Howe to lead the music at the first Spring Festival. This four-part jig caught on immediately and has been a staple at Portland dances since. You can almost hear the skirl of highland pipes coming through the West Hills on this one! Failing that, you can hear the tune on *The Piper’s Broken Finger* by Boys of the Lough.

**Bad Hair** – Rodney Miller says of this jig that he wrote: “A tune inspired by a title. My daughter, Elvie, age five at the time, commented on seeing a mannequin with spiked and frazzled hair at a mall, ‘That one has BAD HAIR!’” Rodney can be heard playing the tune on the Rodney Miller Band’s album *Greasy Coat*.

**The Banks of the Allan** – Locally, this tune goes back to Fiddle Head Rock, a band from the mid ’80s with Heather Pinney, George Penk, Lefty Head, and Dennis Rothrock, the accordion player from whom the band learned this jig. It has since become a Portland classic. Dennis went on to help form (with Lefty) the Cajun/Zydeco band Blackfish, but his musical legacy to the contra dance scene lives on. He tells us he got the tune from *Stand Easy*, an album by Scotland’s Battlefield Band.

**The Banshee** – I first heard this old standard (also known as “MacMahon’s Hornpipe”) from the Irish dance tune repertoire played by Robin Banks in Astoria in the early ’70s. Robin and her accordion lived in a quaint little house that always seemed to be in danger of falling into the Columbia River. After moving to Portland, Robin helped form a band by the name of Banshee, and a fearsome lot of spirits they were too. Portland musician Maria Falasca learned the tune from *Barde*, an album of Irish music recorded in the ’70s, which is primarily where this version comes from.

**Basket of Yarn** – Randy Miller, of East Alstead, New Hampshire, was the pianist on the *New England Chestnuts* records. But he is a fine fiddler too. He wrote this classic-sounding reel and plays it on the fiddle on his cassette recording *The Lore of the Fingerboard*. George Penk taught this to the Portland band Jigsaw, for whom it has become a favorite. It is a versatile tune in the way it quickly and easily knits together a good medley.

**Batchelder’s** – This quintessential New England-style reel, played by most Portland bands, was recorded on the *New England Chestnuts* albums. Laurie Andres has played this tune in some

of his forays south of Seattle, which is how I learned the tune. Lanny Martin got it from Charli Meacham of Juneau.

**Bay of Fundy** – Though recently composed, this tune sounds as if it has nested in the deep center of the folk process since music and dance first formed their marriage. It was written by Bill Guest, of Goodlettsville, Tennessee, whose inspiration must have grown out of one serious tap root. It is published in his tune book *A Hundred Favorite Fiddle Tunes*. For a while, it seemed as if “Bay of Fundy” was being played at every dance in Oregon. It’s been recorded on *Swallowtail*, an album by the band of that name.

**Reel Béatrice** – As pure musical composition, this tune is a cut above most others in this collection. I first heard it when Deborah Lindsay of Corvallis brought back a tape she recorded at the Maine Festival of some wild guys from Québec playing the tune. I had never heard true-vine Québécois music before. I’ve been doing everything humanly possible to hear more of it since. Fiddler Lisa Ornstein of Maine told Sue Songer that this tune may have started as an Italian tune, which just goes to show how true-vine French Canadian the tune may be! Notice that because this is a three-part tune, it must be gutted (one could say disembowelled) to make it work for a conventional contra dance, which brings up the issue of the esthetics and ethics of this kind of major surgery (butchery?) in multipart or crooked tunes. Many musicians wince (at the least) or set up howls of protest (at the most) when such operations are suggested. Others shrug. It’s all a matter of musical taste. Laurie Andres says, “I find it unsatisfying to square this particular tune up. I would encourage musicians to use it for the rare three-part contra dance.” It is hard to disagree with Laurie here. There is a reason “Reel Béatrice” is in three equal parts: that’s the way the tune goes! It has great integrity and an almost monumental presence when played like this. On the other hand, it’s hard to save a great tune like this to be played only at sessions or for the concert stage. On the other hand, it would be madness and true Yahoo bad taste, in my opinion, to take a crooked gem from the old-time tradition like John Salyer’s “Rose in the Mountain” and square it up just to play for dancers. On another hand (do we have any hands left?), the crooked Wade Ward rendition of “Mississippi Sawyer” stands right alongside the conventionally structured versions of the tune and has for many years—and none of the versions is worse for it. Ah, well. Round and round she goes! For a spirited, true-vine rendition of “Reel Béatrice,” (with all appendages attached) give a listen to Lisa Ornstein and accordionist Denis Pépin’s album *Danseries de la Belle Province*.

**Been to the East, Been to the West** – The intermountain fiddle player Ron Kane used to camp out regularly at the Weiser fiddle contest in June and play music through the night and into the morning. He played this tune often, just as often singing the words. I confess I was his most ardent, hushed admirer as tune after beautiful tune poured out of his blond fiddle, absolutely precise, pure, and lovely as sin. Each of us has a corner of our being, like a little closed room, where we keep memories of powerful and sweet music. Weiser is that room for me. A contra