

Too Many Couples Dances?

From Ken Avner's website: <http://www.israelidance.com/playshop/>

Note: this was written in response to a comment at a workshop that we were teaching too many couples dances, although the point is applicable beyond the workshop setting. It's been slightly expanded here.

While the issue of couples dances is and shall always be with us, people need to realize that Israeli folkdance is what it is, not what they want it to be. So much of what's in the corpus of IFD is in couples; period. To not teach these dances is to ignore the world. As for people who say "we don't do couples dances in my group so don't teach them", I'd ask what if we got a comment from someone who said "we don't do debkas in my group so don't teach them". Or "fast dances". Or "dances with a lot of turns" (we hear this a lot from seniors' groups.) Should we limit what's taught based on what *some* groups do or don't do? My other problem in limiting couples dances is this: OK, we don't teach any couples dances, you don't learn any couples dances. So what happens when the sky splits open and 10 people of the minority gender at your session (often this means men, but the scenario works the same when it's women), good dancers all, show up at your session wanting to dance with you? You can't! You're completely unprepared and you have to send them away. You don't know couples dances to dance with them, you can't teach them couples dances you don't know - you've succeeded in keeping couples dances out of your session. And you've kept *yourself* from ever dancing couples dances, at your own session or elsewhere, in perpetuity.

Here in the United States contra dancing is very popular. Unlike Israeli folkdance, where women typically outnumber men, at most contra dances the men are in the majority and the women are the scarce resource. And **all** the dances require a partner. Would anyone even think to suggest that contra dancing should be stopped, because not every guy can get a partner of the opposite gender? No, it's ludicrous. Everyone going to a contra knows that it's in partners, everyone know the gender ratio, and they all go and dance. Ditto for Israeli folkdance, and anyone dancing for more than a month who claims to be shocked, shocked! that this is allowed to continue unaddressed is either sadly naive and unrealistic, or has some other agenda.