

What is English Country Dance?

English Country Dance is an old dance form revived for modern dancers. It can claim square and contra dance as descendants. The musicologist and folklorist Cecil Sharp began the revival of ECD in the 1910s, interpreting old texts and living village traditions; we now delight in dances as old as Boston itself, and new dances that use old figures in new ways. Our dances are not solos (like club dancing) or duets (like waltzes) but ask for the cooperation of four, six, or many more.

Why dance without gender roles?

Gender-free dancing includes and celebrates all the dancers, and emphasizes the balance and symmetry of the dances. In dancing with everyone else there, we create community, both on and off the dance floor: our dancers move together to make it all happen. We owe this approach to Carl Wittman (1943-1986), who recognized that dancers didn't need to be divided into male-female couples. English Country Dance, with its attention to symmetries of form, is especially suitable to gender-free dancing: each dancer in every position has an important role to play. We describe movement in ways that de-emphasize gender roles and couples, and use simple cue words based on position.

What happens at the dance?

The "caller" announces the dance by name, and dancers form "sets": often a "longways" set, two lines of people facing each other down the room, but there are other types. There's no need to bring a partner to the evening, or to the dance floor: you find your dance partner across from you in the lines, on either side. The caller explains the figures, and the dancers will "walk through" them (i.e., without music). Then the music starts, and, to the caller's gentle cues, the magic of English Country Dance begins.

Are you a Dance Angel?

A Dance Angel is:

Comfortable with and able to help a beginner

with all of the basic and most of the advanced figures in our core repertoire

Capable of retaining the sequence of figures, pattern or track of a dance

Good at reassuring beginners about their progress

Skilled at assisting and directing a beginner with eyes and gesture, preferably without words

Acute in judging whether a newcomer is a beginner or an experienced dancer from other parts

Able to get the set back on track after a meltdown/train wreck

Willing to approach and welcome newcomers

Accessible to acquaintance by wearing a name tag

Happy to introduce newcomers to experienced dancers and hand them on to experienced partners

A model of respect for the dance by attentive listening during teaching

Unafraid to ask for repeated or expanded explanation if their partner hasn't understood the teaching

Not shy about speaking up and requesting a walk-through if needed

Ready to change sets when that's helpful, or even change partners

Willing to gallantly partner our perennial beginners

Someone who fosters a friendly atmosphere by making sure that everyone who needs one has an encouraging and reliable partner

A host who looks for newcomers at the break and befriends them

Finding us

The First Church of Jamaica Plain is located at 6 Eliot Street, at the intersection of Eliot, Centre, and South Streets, across the street from the monument. It's right on the #39 bus (catch anywhere along the E line, or from Back Bay station), and it's about a 20-minute walk from Green Street or Arborway stations on the Orange line. We're also easy to get to by car, and there's on-street parking in the neighborhood. Check the website or call us if you need directions.

