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*Paula Woods reports on the Sidmouth Folk Week*

I thoroughly enjoyed the dancing at Sidmouth Folk Festival this year. I came across a new American caller, Wendy Graham, who called squares and contras and introduced us to some new terms such as 'family', 'paddle', 'silent clapping', and also how to 'play' (i.e. partner swapping with consenting partners). She even told us jokes! I attended lots of American and Contra workshops and dances with her and also Rhodri Davies. There was a lovely community spirit throughout the week and this was highlighted not only by the folk guru (Wendy) but also Rhodri. Both reminded and asked us to consider what our dance partner thought about dancing with us. Did we hold them correctly? Did we hold them too tight? Did we give them enough support? Did we make the dancing experience with them pleasurable? They both showed / reminded us about hand grips, swinging partners, twirling (with consent and without cranking), about eye contact and how to maintain connection. At one workshop we had to give feedback to our dance partner about dancing with them and we were reminded to be honest, but kind.

In addition, Rhodri asked us to 'think outside the box' and we danced to dances that had tricky end positions. I went to his afternoon workshop on Lloyd Shaw Square Display figures and we learnt three figures. During the evening dance with him, on a pre-arranged cue we made up at least two mixed squares of people who had attended the afternoon workshop. The emphasis was not on timing but we managed to dance it to the music, which was an achievement and a brilliant feeling.

Frances Richardson's workshop on Playford dances, -Jane Austin style was enjoyable. She had watched the film and gave us an account of the interaction between the main characters of Elizabeth and Mr Darcy, before and during the dances. The music was played by Masquerade and was absolutely lovely.

The benefits of the Season Ticket are that you can go from one workshop / dance to another and I did just this on one evening. The first half of the evening I enjoyed American dances with Rhodri Davies and The English Contra Dance Band. The second half of the evening I danced to lovely sedate English dances with Trevor Monson and Masquerade. Both sessions were so good that I can't say which was better.

There was slightly less dancing on Saturday afternoon and on Sunday due to the church halls being unavailable. However this gave me the opportunity to pace myself and have a rest and I did this by watching the morris displays and the John Gasson Memorial Jig Competition. It was nice again to also be dancing at Midday dances in the Blackmore Gardens Marquee and here and on other occasions I attended English, Scottish and Contra workshops called by Frances Richardson, Trevor Monson, Mike Courthold, and Adam Hughes. There was lots of lovely music throughout the weekend from English Contra Band, Masquerade, Pendragon, Stick Shift, Vertical Expression and 3D and yet again I have come away with another brilliant CD to listen to.