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Metadata for Called Folk Dances
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Abstract

This document defines metadata tags for describing aspects of Contra, Square, and other traditional called folk dances. These tags are meant for archivists as well as modern day callers of traditional dances.

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1. Introduction

Many traditional folk dances including Contra Dance, Square Dance, English Country Dance (ECD), and others from a variety of cultural backgrounds involve a caller who leads the dance by speaking or singing the choreography in time to the music. The caller will help the dancers perform the choreography until either the music that is pre-selected for a particular dance ends or until the caller decides to stop depending on the dance style.

For archivists or modern callers selecting recordings of called dances there are a number of properties of the music that are not described by traditional music metadata that may be desirable to know. For example, an archivist may want to find all recordings of a specific caller playing with a specific band, but the callers name is not a commonly used metadata tag. Or a modern caller may want to filter out all tracks that have their own calls or are "crooked" (ie. don't perfectly align with the phrasing of the particular dance they are calling) to select recordings to call to when a live band is not available for a dance.

Having a set of standardized tags to describe such dances makes it easier for software meant for callers or archivists to display such information in a standard, searchable, way. The justification for assigned tags in Section 3.1 of [I-D.ietf-cellar-tags] also applies to this document.

This document only aims to cover tags specifically related to called folk dances. More general tags that may complement the tags in this document are defined in [I-D.ietf-cellar-tags].

1.1. Requirements Language

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [RFC2119] [RFC8174] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

2. Assigned Tags

2.1. Called Tracks

The tags defined in the following table describe recordings that include sung or spoken dance calls.

If the recording includes a separate track for the caller or otherwise includes multiple audio tracks (ie. an entire evening of dances in a single file separated with a CUE track) these tags SHOULD set a target pointing to the exact track containing the calls.

Tag Name	Type	Description
DANCE_FORM	UTF-8	The form of the folk dance such as "contra" or "square". Because a large number of different folk dances exist (and because this tag may be broadly useful for dances other than called folk dances) no particular format or list of dance forms are defined. Archivists may choose to be much more particular about this tag, for example listing the specific formation of a contra dance such as "duple minor improper contra" while a caller may simply list the dance as "contra".
DANCE_CALLER	UTF-8	The name of the caller heard in the track. This MAY be the special value "[unknown]" (see Section 2.3).
DANCE_TITLE	UTF-8	The name of the dance being called. This MAY be the special value "[unknown]" (see Section 2.3).

DANCE_CHOREOGRAPHER	UTF-8	The name of the author of the dance being called. This MAY be one of the special values "[unknown]" or "[traditional]" (see Section 2.3).
DANCE_CHOREOGRAPHY	UTF-8	The moves of the dance in plain text format. No exact style is specified. The dance author, choreographer, difficulty, or any callers notes SHOULD NOT be included and should instead be read from the appropriate tags.
DANCE_CALLER_NOTES	UTF-8	Any notes provided by the choreographer or the caller related to calling the dance. For example, many choreographers will provide notes such as "When teaching the A1 part, have the Larks cross over first...". Or individual callers may provide notes on their calling card such as "Beginner friendly" or "Advanced dance". // TODO: is this useful as track metadata? If you're archiving a // calling card maybe it would be better to do it outside the // recording which it's not really related to unless the caller was // using some note from that exact card somehow.
DANCE_ROLES	UTF-8	Role terms used in the calls. For example, "Larks/Robins" or "Leads/Follows" or "Positional" for dances that explicitly do not mention role terms for a partnership. No specific format is defined.
DANCE_LICENSE	UTF-8	Like the LICENSE field defined in Section 4.13 of [I-D.ietf-cellar-tags] except relating to the choreography of the dance being called.

Table 1: Tags for tracks with calls

2.2. Called or Uncalled Tracks

The following tags are generally applicable to tracks that include the caller as well as to tracks that are uncalled but fit the form of a particular folk dance or are commonly used for folk dance. If the file contains multiple audio tracks these tags SHOULD set a target pointing to the track containing the music.

Tag Name	Type	Description
DANCE_HAS_POTATOES	UTF-8	"Potatoes" are a term used to describe the synchronization beats played by the band before the tune starts to get the caller and dancers on time. If set, this key MUST always be the value "TRUE" or "FALSE".
DANCE_POTATOES	UTF-8	The number of beats (not bars), regardless of whether they are traditional potatoes or an introductory phrase, of music before the first time through the dance. If the DANCE_HAS_POTATOES tag is "FALSE" this represents beats in an introductory phrase, otherwise it represents the number of traditional potatoes (normally 4). If the BPM ([I-D.ietf-cellar-tags], Section 4.10) and DANCE_START tags are set, this should be approximately $\text{DANCE_START} / 60000 * \text{BPM}$ rounded to the nearest natural number.
DANCE_START	UTF-8	The start time (in milliseconds) of the first time through the dance. This is where the dancers would start moving, not where the caller would start calling. If the BPM ([I-D.ietf-cellar-tags], Section 4.10) and DANCE_POTATOES

		tags are set, this should be approximately DANCE_POTATOES / BPM * 60000.
DANCE_TIMES	UTF-8	The number of complete times through the dance excluding any intro, outro, or potatoes. The exact definition will depend on the type of dance. For example, a contra dance has 64 beat (32 bar) phrases so the number of times through the dance will be the number of beats of music (excluding intros, outros, and any crooked phrasing) divided by 64.
DANCE_CROOKED	UTF-8	Whether the dance is a "crooked" tune (ie. not in perfect dance form). If set, this key MUST always be the value "TRUE" or "FALSE".
DANCE_IS_SONG	UTF-8	Whether the track is a song (has sung vocal lyrics other than the calls) or a tune (instrumental only). If set, this key MUST always be the value "TRUE" or "FALSE".

Table 2: Tags for any track

2.3. Special Values

Several tags that take free-form text may also have certain special values such as "[unknown]" or "[traditional]" as described above. In software that displays this metadata these values MAY be shown as a different, localizable, string.

The value "[unknown]", where permitted, indicates that the value of the tag should be displayed but is currently unknown. This is different from an unset tag which conveys no semantic meaning.

The value "[traditional]", where permitted, indicates that the authorship of the dance is part of a folk tradition and no particular author or authors can be assigned to it.

3. Use with Vorbis Comments and other tagging systems

Though these tags were defined for use with Matroska files, they may be used in other common tagging systems such as Vorbis Comments [Vorbis] and in systems which re-use Vorbis Comments such as FLAC [RFC9639], Section 8.6 tags. To use tags from this document in Vorbis Comments remove the "DANCE_" prefix and instead use the namespace "DANCE:". For example, the "DANCE_POTATOES" tag becomes "DANCE:POTATOES".

These tag names may be useful in other common tagging systems such as ID3 and APE, however, their exact use in such systems is not defined in this document.

4. IANA Considerations

This memo modifies the "Matroska Tag Names" registry defined in Section 6.1 of [I-D.ietf-cellular-tags] to add the following values:

Tag Name	Tag Type	Reference
DANCE_FORM	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_CALLER	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_TITLE	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_CHOREOGRAPHER	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_CHOREOGRAPHY	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_CALLER_NOTES	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_ROLES	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_LICENSE	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.1
DANCE_POTATOES	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.2
DANCE_START	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.2
DANCE_TIMES	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.2
DANCE_CROOKED	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.2
DANCE_IS_SONG	UTF-8	This document, Section 2.2

Table 3: Additions to the "Matroska Tag Names" Registry

5. Security Considerations

This document does not affect the security of the internet.

6. Normative References

- [RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", BCP 14, RFC 2119, DOI 10.17487/RFC2119, March 1997, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119>>.
- [RFC8174] Leiba, B., "Ambiguity of Uppercase vs Lowercase in RFC 2119 Key Words", BCP 14, RFC 8174, DOI 10.17487/RFC8174, May 2017, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc8174>>.

7. Informative References

[RFC9639] van Beurden, M.Q.C. and A. Weaver, "Free Lossless Audio Codec (FLAC)", RFC 9639, DOI 10.17487/RFC9639, December 2024, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc9639>>.

[I-D.ietf-cellar-tags] Lhomme, S., Bunkus, M., and D. Rice, "Matroska Media Container Tag Specifications", Work in Progress, Internet-Draft, draft-ietf-cellar-tags-23, 26 February 2026, <<https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/html/draft-ietf-cellar-tags-23>>.

[Vorbis] Xiph.Org, "Ogg Vorbis I format specification: comment field and header specification", <<https://xiph.org/vorbis/doc/v-comment.html>>.

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