

Tony Parkes, well known square and contra dance caller, Gilbert and Sullivan aficionado, loving husband and all-around amazing person, died on Monday, May 6 six months after being diagnosed with glioblastoma. He was 74.

Tony was born and raised in New York City, the only child of Kate and Phil Parkes. They named him Anthony Philip Parkes and raised him in the Greenwich Village of 1950s New York. He moved to Boston in the 1970s to take advantage of its rich folk music and dance scene.

Tony started calling square dances in 1964. Over the years, he added New England contra dances and the folk dances of other countries to his repertoire. He was known for his impeccable timing, clear dance calling and teaching, and deep understanding of the history of American social dance. He was instrumental in the transition of contra dancing into an all-inclusive activity in the late 20th century.

Tony is the author of two major texts on calling: *Contra Dance Calling: A Basic Text* and *Square Dance Calling: An Old Art for a New Century*. He appeared on many recordings as caller, pianist, or both. Although he led dances and workshops for experienced hobbyists in 35 states, Canada, and Europe, one of his greatest joys was working with complete novices.

Tony served on the boards of The New England Folk Festival Association and The Folk Arts Center of New England. He taught at myriad folk-dance camps and events including Pinewoods Camp in Plymouth, Massachusetts, Stockton Folk Dance Camp in Stockton, California, Ralph Page Legacy Weekend in New Hampshire, and The New England Folk Festival (which he attended and performed at every year from 1969 to 2023).

Tony also deeply loved Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. He performed in all 13 of the extant shows, in both leads and the chorus. His dance calling experience made him a crystal-clear singer of Gilbert and Sullivan's fast-paced patter songs. He was especially fond of the enigmatic Nightmare Song from *Iolanthe*.

Tony stage-directed several productions with The Sudbury Savoyards. His knowledge of the shows and their backgrounds was extensive and appreciated by the companies he worked with. No minutia was too small for him to understand and share. In all his theater work, his emphasis was respecting the material and working joyfully as a company. His loving and calm demeanor was seen in everything he brought to each production.

He leaves behind Beth, his wife of 37 years whom he met at a dance camp where he was on the staff and she was a student. (He used to say that she "came for the short course and stayed for the long course.") She is also a dance caller and learned almost everything she knows from him. He also leaves behind his first wife, fiddler Donna Hebert, with whom he maintained friendship as they both moved on to happier marriages.

Tony was guided throughout his life by a deep faith in a loving God as expressed by the Christian Church. He believed in bringing his faith into everything he did in life by caring deeply and loving fully. He believed that the gospel of Christ was not judgment but eternal love, forgiveness, and joy. He lived this fully in his life and death.

A memorial Eucharist followed by a reception will be held at 10:00am, May 25 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 100 Pine Hill Road, Bedford. A memorial potluck and dance will be held the following day in Concord.

Donations in Tony's honor may be made to:

The New England Folk Festival Association
P.O. Box 2789, Acton MA 01720
https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=GR85JEBCSG2GS

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
100 Pine Hill Road, Bedford, MA 01730
www.stpaulsbedford.org/donate