

AMERICAN CLOGGING STEPS AND NOTATION

A Review of Ira Bernstein's Booklet by

Alice Metherell

I met Ira Bernstein at a festival in 1981 and learned several Appalachian clog steps from him. I was therefore very interested to see this publication.

The booklet is not designed to teach people from scratch, but provides a notation of basic steps as well as some more advanced ones. Ira Bernstein uses a version of the columnar notation used by the Newcastle Notation system. He has defined the terms he needs for American Clogging and if you know this style the notations are quite easy to follow. The layout and the print are both clear and easy to read. I also like the way he gives names to each step - not traditional as he explains, but useful for identification.

To sum up, I can recommend this booklet as a must for any budding or experienced American clog dancer. Available from the Folk Shop at Cecil Sharp House, or direct from the author -

Ira G Bernstein, 85 Dogwood Ave, Malverne, NY 11565, U.S.A.

WORKSHOPS SEPT - DEC 1985

SEPT

20-22	Bromyard Folk Festival PO Box 6, Ledbury. tel 053183-593	Pat Tracey
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29	M1 Folk Day D Rutherford 2a Pilgrims Cl, Harlington, Beds	Alex Boydell Gill McNab
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OCT

5	Reading Day of Dance	Various
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NOV

8-9	Amber Folk Festival M Peat tel 077385-2428	Not Known
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16-17	Newcastle Weekend Ed Wilson, 7 Dodsworth North Greenside, Tyne & Wear. 091-413-4633	Peter Clifton A-M Hulme Ivy Sands Doreen Kerr Peter Brown Mrs Marhoff
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No 16

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EDITORIAL.

Well, I've had a good summer, damp but good. First a week at Sidmouth, stumbling about in wellingtons (does anyone know a gum boot dance?) followed by a week in Cornwall.

What I was able to do was to meet several teams from the "deep south" who were new to me. I even made use of the Instep list of teams and went to one club's practice night. I gather that others on holiday have done the same thing and that this team is quite used to odd faces turning up from time to time. There must be something about clog dancers which makes them friendly, at least all the ones I met were most welcoming. I remember from my morris dancing days that one could well go to a club for two or even three weeks before anyone really acknowledged that you were there. Not the case I am pleased to say with clog dancers! We even camped out on one team member's sofa overnight.

I confess that I didn't do any collecting, but I did obtain a copy of Troyl III (see review later), which throws up some very interesting questions worth a good deal of investigation.

I've also been sent some information on the elusive "Mendip step dancers" and have started a little investigative journalism in that direction. Watch this space.

On the gossip front the Mrs Marhoff video is now available. The premiere will be at the newcastle Weekend in November. I also hear that there have been developments on the "Son of Pat Tracey" film. The information reaching me is that this is to be split into two separate films. One of about 15 minutes devoted solely to the "Lancashire Irish" steps, and a further offering covering Pat's hornpipe steps. Out next year I believe.

And now it's wrist slapping time. I have got my Colins mixed up. In Instep 14 I reviewed Colin Robertson's excellent class on the Earl of Erroll. Unfortunately I gave the instructor as Colin Smith who in fact has the dubious task of teaching me highland dancing in Newcastle. Sorry Colin (R). Much grovelling and so forth.

NEWCASTLE CLOGGIES WEEKEND OF CLOG DANCE

16-17 NOVEMBER 1985

Ivy Sands Sailor's Hornpipe.

A version of this dance form in clogs. Intermediate.

Dartmoor Stepping.

Steps from Leslie Rice and Bob Cann.

Doreen Kerr's "Oh You Beautiful Doll"

An old-style tap routine. Advanced.

Mrs Marhoff's Single Hornpipe.

Beginners/Improvers Dotted Hornpipe.

Children's Workshop. Beginners aged 6-10.

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French Social Dance Workshop

Ceilidh with ROSBIF and many guests.

Collectors forum, Displays, Videos, Craft Stalls.

Further information from Ed Wilson, 7 Dodsworth North,
Greenside, Tyne and Wear. tel 091-413-4633

On 17th August I happened to be returning from a holiday in the South West and had heard that the Reading Traditional Step Dance Group had organised a day's workshop with Pierre Chartrand, a step dancer from Quebec. A slight detour en route to Newcastle and I was there. And a very fine end to a fortnight's holiday it was. Monsieur Chartrand is both an excellent teacher and a most charming personality. Not only that, but the material at his disposal is both relatively simple to learn and visually appealing to perform.

The style is essentially free-phrased but built up of distinct two or four bar units.

Most of the day was spent learning "reel steps", although the Canadian music for these was essentially similar to that used for Norfolk step dancing rather than a true reel.

Pierre also has steps in 3/4, 6/8, 4/4 hornpipe and - wait for it 6/4 time. We did not see any 3/4 but the 6/8 stepping was basically of an "Irish" type, whereas the hornpipe style, known in Quebec as "clog dancing" bore a most startling resemblance to Lakeland stepping in content. Now there's an interesting research topic for someone. It was the 6/4 stepping which I found most fascinating. I have been looking at the old style English 3/2 hornpipe with a view to writing some steps in that rhythm and here was a chap showing me steps in a very closely related time signature. These used a three beat shuffle, rather than the standard two beats. Sounds like a bit of a challenge for Newcastle Notation!

Pierre taught in tap shoes but told us that all styles were danced in ordinary leather soled shoes. Individual step units come from different parts of Quebec, the 6/4 style for example being typical of the area around Lac Saint Jean.

The only unfortunate thing about the whole event was the news that Pierre was on his way back to Canada. He has promised to come over again however so watch out for any workshop announcements.

And my personal thanks to RSTDG for an excellent day.

A Review by Chris Metherell

The third volume in this series (for reviews of Nos 1 and 2 see Instep 8) this booklet contains notations for ten dances, the format being essentially similar to the previous two offerings. The booklet is well produced although the layout does create a rather cramped impression.

It must be said immediately that this booklet appears to be aimed at the more popular end of the dance market rather than the serious enthusiast. Of course anyone with an interest in things Cornish would find this publication a must.

The three volumes in toto contain some 30 dances within almost as many pages. The Fletts' book, Traditional Dancing in Scotland gives 27 in 300 pages. This gives some idea of the detail contained in the Troyl series. This is not intended as a criticism, but should be borne in mind by anyone reading the booklet. The information on background is most interesting but must represent a tiny fraction of what has been collected by the authors. It must have been difficult to prune this material into a few short, pithy sentences but the authors have managed this admirably.

Some dance notations are stated to be "aides memoires" only, which is a sensible admission. One could not hope to cram into such a small publication anything like a full notation of every dance step. One hopes however that the collectors will make available their full notations in due course if the original form and style of the stepping are not to be lost.

Of most interest to readers of this magazine will be the "Boscastle Breakdown" - a solo clog dance. The notation given is in the aide memoire category and is a little opaque. I understand that a film is however available.

One or two other dances - Mr Martin's Reel and the Four Hand Reel contain possibly interesting steps and there is a rather interesting description of a Weeding Paddle Dance, although the music is a reconstruction. I was interested to see that all the dances had Cornish names, although the quite lengthy song given with the latter dance is given in English. It would be interesting to know whether this is a translation by the collectors or whether Mrs Rowse's (the informant) knowledge of Cornish was limited to the name of her dance.

All in all a booklet worth having, although I look forward to the day when the collectors feel able to make available the material upon which this brief booklet is based.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Instep 4 (April 1982) featured a list of references of interest to clog and step dancers. The list then published was based on a reference sheet kindly supplied by A-M Hulme. Instep 4 is now out of print and much new material has been published since 1982. In addition, many older publications have been recently bought to my attention and this seemed an opportune moment to publish an up to date list. My thanks to all those who have told me of references missing from the 1982 list.

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Clog Dancing.
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English Dance and Song
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Julian Pilling

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Vol 23 (1959) p85

Buck and Wing
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Vol 23 (1959) p25-7

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Pat Tracey

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Vol 23 (1959) p39-41

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Julian Pilling

Folk Music Journal
Vol 1 (1967)

Memories of a Lancashire Clog Dancer
Eddie Flaherty

English Dance and Song
Vol 30 (1968) p42-6

The Hornpipe
George Emmerson

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Vol 2 (1970) p12-34

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Geoff Hughes

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