

An Introduction to Clog Dancing in the North East

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Newcastle Series

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NORTH EAST

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is intended as a brief introduction to clog dancing as it was and is found in the North East of England. It is based on research undertaken by the Instep Research Team in the counties of Northumberland and Durham. This is not intended as an academic work, but as an aide memoire for those beginning to learn to dance. These notations are no substitute for learning from a good teacher. The notation system used is the Newcastle Notation, and a booklet describing the system in full is available.

So what is this clog dancing?

Clog dancing is a solo step dance performed in wooden soled shoes. This form of dancing seems to have reached its peak in the North East during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during which time it was not only an entertainment but also developed a competitive aspect which has survived to this day. Clog dancing never died out completely in the area, there being a resurgence of interest in the years just prior to W.W.2. Great efforts were made by the Ellwood family to keep the dance alive during the 1950's and '60's, and Johnson Ellwood ran many classes and organised competitions for his pupils at a time when otherwise the dance would have been forgotten.

Because of its solo nature, each dancer tends to perform in his or her own unique style, although many dancers use the same steps. It is tempting, perhaps by analogy with other dance forms, to compartmentalise clog dances into area groupings. Thus people talk of the 'Lancashire style' or the North East style. This is perhaps rather misleading, it being better to talk of 'steps' as coming from a particular area, rather than a particular style. Many of the steps in this booklet are however not unique to the North East, they are found all over the country wherever people clog dance. Every dancer will however dance them in his or her own style though the steps themselves remain the same. It is for the individual dancer himself to decide whether to copy a particular style or to develop his own, although as a beginner you need to start somewhere. This booklet provides a number of steps, all found in the North East, which if practiced will give the dancer a good grounding from which to progress further. The foot positions (the A,B,C etc. in the right hand column of the notations), are intended as a guide only and do not represent the style of any particular dancer, although the steps themselves were all taught by members of the Ellwood family. The notations are only

a reminder, you need someone to show you what to do and how to do it. Names and addresses of teachers are available from Instep magazine.

Some points are common to learning all types of clog dancing and these may be of help:

- 1) All the beats should be crisp and sharp, and all of the same volume.
- 2) The weight is generally taken on the balls of the feet, the heels being off the ground.
- 3) Try to keep a constant speed throughout a set of steps. If a good musician is not available, and a bad musician at the beginners stage is worse than no musician at all, dance to a metronome, alternatively a kitchen timer makes a reasonable substitute.
- 4) Practice is all. Practise as often as you can. If you are not used to wearing clogs, wear them around the house during the day or in the evening, you must get your feet used to them
- 5) Break the steps up into their component parts and practise them.
- 6) Use both feet. Whatever the left foot can do the right must be able to do as well and vice versa.

Most dancers in the North East finished a set of steps with 'Double Shuffles', although there were several different forms of this step. This probably results from standardisation due to competitive dancing, but it is none the less a good step to end a routine.

All steps were normally performed off both feet, beginning by stepping onto the left, and the whole step repeated stepping onto the right. We call this 'off the left' and 'off the right' respectively.

The normal format for a step is six bars of 'step' and two bars of break (often called a cast off or shuffle off). All steps are of eight bars length.

We have not named any of the steps, nor any of the units from which the steps are built up. This is because each dancer would use his own name for a given step (if he had a name at all, most did not), whoever teaches you will doubtless have their own names too. All steps are in 4/4.

Regarding music, any dotted hornpipe will do. We give two - the first was the favourite of Jimmy Ellwood and is known as the 'Champion Hornpipe'. The second is the 'Clog Hornpipe' which is perhaps the commonest tune in use by clog dancers today. It was in fact hardly ever used by dancers in the North East, but was common in Lancashire. The speed is up to you. A good way to end a practice session is to dance the steps just fast enough so that you really have to concentrate, but not so fast that you have to miss beats.

The Champion Hornpipe

The Clog Hornpipe

Step 1

1	<u>step</u>	}	shuffle	A:	:C, C'
a		}		A:	:A
2		}		A:	:A
a		}	<u>step</u>	A:	:A
3	<u>step</u>	}		A:	:A
4	<u>hop</u>	}		A:	:A

Six times through off alternate feet and break with the left.

Step 2

1	<u>step</u>	}	shuffle	A:	:C, C'
a		}		A:	:A
2		}		A:	:A
a		}	<u>step</u>	A:	:A
3	<u>step</u>	}		A:	:A
4	<u>hop</u>	}		A:	:C, C'
&		}	shuffle	A:	:C, C'
a		}		A:	:A

Six times through off alternate feet and break with the left.

Notes:

Step 2 is a simple progression from step 1, the difference being the addition of a further shuffle at the end of the step, giving two extra beats for the same amount of music. This is a common feature in clog steps, where a simple step is taken and a series of extra beats added to make it more complex.

Step 3

1	<u>step</u>	)	shuffle	A:
a		)		:C, C'
2)		
&		)	<u>step</u>	:XC'
a		)	<u>drop heel</u>	:XC'
3	<u>step</u>	)		A:
4	<u>hop</u>	)	shuffle	A:
&		)		:C, C'
a)		

Six times through off alternate feet and break with the left.

Notes:

This step represents a further progression from step 2.

Step 4

A				A:
1	<u>step</u>		<u>heel swivel</u>	:C, C'
a				A:
2	<u>step</u>		<u>step</u>	:A
3				C, C':
a	<u>heel swivel</u>		<u>step</u>	:A
4				
B				A:
5	<u>step</u>		<u>heel swivel</u>	:C, C'
a				A:
6	<u>step</u>		<u>toe swivel</u>	:B, B'
a				A:
7	<u>step</u>		<u>heel swivel</u>	:C, C'
a				A:
8	<u>step</u>			

AB AB B B and break
L R L R L

Notes:

This step represents a family of steps all of which use the same pattern of repetition. Most of the rest of the steps in this booklet use this pattern.

Step 5

A				A:
1	<u>step</u>		<u>heel step</u>	:C
a				A:
2	<u>step</u>	)	shuffle	:C, C'
&)		
a		)	<u>step</u>	:A
3		)		C:
a	<u>heel step</u>	)	<u>step</u>	:A
4		)		C, C':
&	shuffle)		
a		)		A:
B		)	shuffle	:C, C'
5	<u>step</u>)		
&		)	<u>step</u>	:A
a		)		C, C':
6		)	shuffle	
&	shuffle	)		A:
a		)	<u>heel step</u>	:C
7	<u>step</u>	)		A:
a		)	<u>heel step</u>	:C
8	<u>step</u>	)	shuffle	A:
&		)		:C, C'
a)		

AB AB B B and break
L R L R L

Notes:

This is a rather more difficult step than the previous ones. Take care that the heel step sounds as a beat, and that teh shuffles do not become rushed.

Step 6

A				
1	<u>spring</u>	↑		A: D↑
2	↑	<u>spring</u>		RD↑: A
3	<u>spring</u>	↑		A: D↑
4	↑	<u>spring</u>		RD↑: A
B				
5	<u>step</u>		shuffle	A:
a	)	)	)	: C, C
6)))	
a	<u>hop</u>		tip touch	A:
7	)	)	)	: RD
a	<u>hop</u>		heel touch	A:
8	)	)	)	: C/D

AB AB B B and break
 L R L R L

Step 7

1	<u>step</u>			A:
a	<u>toe swivel</u> click heel (R)	click toe (L)		A, A: RB↑
2	<u>drop heel</u>			A:
a	)	)	)	: RXC
3	<u>step</u>		shuffle	A:
4	<u>hop</u>		)	A:
&	)	)	)	: C, C
a)))	

Six times through off alternate feet and break with the left.

Notes:

This step, while returning to the simpler rythm of step 2, introduces the added complication of hitting one foot against the other. This should be practised until the beat is loud and crisp and also in time with the music.

Step 8

A				
1	<u>step</u>	)	shuffle	A:
&	)	)	)	: C, C
a				A:
2	<u>hop</u>		<u>step</u>	: A
3	)	)	)	C, C:
&)))	
a	shuffle		<u>hop</u>	A:
4	)	)	)	: C, C
B				
5	<u>step</u>	)	shuffle	A:
&	)	)	)	: C, C
a				A:
6	<u>hop</u>	)	shuffle	: C, C
&)))	
a				A:
7	<u>hop</u>	)	shuffle	: C, C
&)))	
a				
8	<u>hop</u>)		

AB AB B B and break
 L R L R L

Notes:

This is a very difficult step to dance well, but is included here as it is worth practicing for the control which is required. All the beats should be of equal strength and the rythm should be precise. Take especial care to sound the hops well as these tend to become muffled or lost. This step will repay the time spent in mastering it.

Step 9

a	tap)	lazy	|	A:
1	<u>step</u> )		|	A:
a	)	shuffle	|	:Ċ, Ċ
2	)		|
&		<u>step</u>	|	:A
a		<u>drop heel</u>	|	:A
3	)	shuffle	|	Ċ, Ċ:
&)			
a		<u>step</u>	|	A:
4		<u>drop heel</u>	|	A:

Six times through off alternate feet and break with the left.

Notes:

This step introduces two common units found in many steps from the North-East, the 'lazy shuffle' and the 'shuffle, step, drop heel'.

Step 10

1	<u>step</u>	|	A:
&	)	shuffle	:Ċ, Ċ
a)		
2	<u>hop</u>	|	A:
&	)	shuffle	:Ċ, Ċ
a)		
3	<u>step</u>	|	:A
&	)	shuffle	Ċ, Ċ:
a)		
4	<u>hop</u>	|	:A
&	)	shuffle	Ċ, Ċ:
a)		

Six times through off alternate feet and break with the left.

Notes:

The notes to step 8 apply equally to this step. Universally used as the final step of a sequence.

Shuffle off, or break

1	<u>step</u>	|	A:
a	)	shuffle	:Ċ, Ċ
2)		
a	<u>step</u>	|	:A
3	<u>step</u>	|	A:
a	)	shuffle	:Ċ, Ċ
4)		
a	<u>step</u>	|	:A
5	touch	|	XC:
6	<u>step</u>	|	A:
7	touch	|	:XC
8		|	

Notes:

This is used as the last two bars of each step. The method of dancing even this simple break varies from dancer to dancer, and many other more complex breaks exist. Many old dancers have their own special break which is unique to their own clog dance style, others use different breaks with different steps.