

Clog dancing fit for a Duke



David dances to the tune of his dad, Bob.

Coming up against a variety of challenges during the pandemic, enthusiastic dancer David Baldwin, 18, thought of a folkie solution to complete his Duke of Edinburgh Gold award. Having initially undertaken archery for the physical section of the award, which he was unable to do in lockdown, he replaced it with clog dancing – and is now well on his way to completing the award, as he tells us here.

I was doing archery for the physical section of my Duke of Edinburgh Gold award, but it had to stop for each lockdown. I come from a folk family and have been step dancing since I was seven. So, when we were looking for something to replace the archery, it seemed natural to choose clog dancing – which I've been able to continue to learn online – as an activity which is actually much more physically demanding than archery.

My school's a centre for running the Duke of Edinburgh award, so they approved the change from archery to clog dancing. I'm pretty sure nobody has done clog dancing before for their Duke of Edinburgh award, though some people may have done other forms of folk dancing.

Kerry Fletcher kindly agreed to be my assessor for the award. I performed my chosen dances for Kerry, which she recorded – Pat Tracey's Old Lancs A, The Whitby Toesday Hornpipe and Waltz, both written by Melanie Barber, The Sam Sherry Waltz and The Sam Sherry Hornpipe. The last two I learned online in the spring during lockdown. Kerry had to write an assessment of my skill, ability and fitness and how long I'd been working on the dances.

I've always loved folk dancing. My first folk festival was the Inter-Varsity Folk Dance Festival (IVDFD) in Sheffield in 2003, when I was two months old. I took up Appalachian clogging when I was seven with Appakella at the children's workshops at Sidmouth Folk Festival, taught mainly by Jenny Read and Zoe Davies. I did that for a few years, plus going to adult workshops at IVDFD, and then joined Kerry Fletcher's Appalachian classes in Holwell when I was ten. With this dance team, I've performed at Unicorn Ceilidhs in Baldock and at the Dance Around the World festivals at Cecil Sharp House.

I started 'flatfooting' when I was about 13, learning from Jake Jones and Dan Eccles, amongst others. When I was 16, I took up English clog dancing, again learning it at workshops at Sidmouth and IVDFD, and I was lucky to be able to go to the Lancashire Wallowers Clog weekend in February 2020. I also took part in the Stepping Sessions at the Rugby Club at Sidmouth Folk Festival; I would recommend any step dancer to go to those.

I really enjoy English clog dancing because I love dancing to live musicians. For me, it's like I'm playing a musical instrument; the sound of the dancing is like we're part of the music the band is playing – we're the percussion section!

If I see a dancer doing a complicated step which impresses me, I want to learn that step so I can impress myself. It's nice performing something complicated that audiences appreciate. It's a fulfilling experience, as long as I get it right.

My father, Bob, plays the tunes for me on his banjo – you may have seen us busking on the Sidmouth promenade during the festivals – look out for us in the future!

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