

A Brief History of Clog Dancing

by Jeff Driggs, Editor of the Double Toe Times Clogging Magazine]

Clogging is a truly American dance form that began in the Appalachian Mountains and now enjoys widespread popularity throughout the (United States and around the world. As the Appalachians were settled in the mid 1700's by the Irish, Scottish, English and Dutch-Germans, the folk dances of each area met and began to combine in an impromptu foot-tapping style, the beginning of clog dancing as we know it today. Accompanied by rousing fiddle and bluegrass music, clogging was a means of personal expression in a land of newfound freedoms.

Clogging is a dance that is done in time with the music - to the downbeat usually with the heel keeping rhythm.

As clogging made its way to the flatlands, other influences shaped it. From the Cherokee Indians, to African Blacks and Russian Gypsies, clogging has enveloped many different traditions to become truly a "melting pot" of step dances.



For the most part, clogging evolved as an individual form of expression, with a person using his feet as an instrument to make rhythmic and percussive sounds to accompany the music. At the turn of the century, many cloggers began to add this developing step dance to the square dances that had been enjoyed in their communities for decades. One of clog dancing's most renowned founders, Bascom Lamar Lunsford of Asheville, North Carolina, helped to popularise the art of team clogging by adding it as a category of competition in the annual Mountain Dance and Folk Festival held in Asheville during the late 1920's. A group called the Soco Gap Cloggers won the competition with a routine featuring precision mountain figures accompanied by freestyle step dancing. The Soco Gap Dancers became well known for their energetic style. In a performance for the

Queen of England, it is reported that her majesty remarked at the footwork as very much like "Clogging" in her country. The term stuck, and the media used the term in documenting the performance. The step dance emerging from the Southern Mountains became known as "clog dancing".

In the mid 1930's, another innovator emerged to help propel mountain style dancing to national prominence. Dr. Lloyd "Pappy" Shaw, a teacher and Superintendent at the Cheyenne Mountain School in Colorado, and an avid collector of dances, steps and square dance calls formed an exhibition team from the dozens of high school students he taught and began to tour the United States, sharing his knowledge of dance with all who were interested. His 1939 book, "Cowboy Dances", is considered by many to be one of the finest historical collections of early American dances ever printed. After World War II, Dr. Shaw began to offer classes at his Cheyenne Mountain School in the instruction of old time dancing.



As Americans became more mobile, and interstate highways offered the opportunity for dancers to travel from area to area, the popularity of square dancing as a national activity increased. During this period, the need for standardization in square dance calls became increasingly evident, and a number of callers began to work on standardized names for the movements and figures that had developed independently of each other in hollows and communities throughout the country. As square dancing began to evolve as a structured activity, the emphasis focused on the execution of the figures, and the step dancing footwork that had accompanied earlier dances was replaced by a gliding step. Clogging once again was relegated to solo expression, with only certain areas of Appalachia and the Ozarks continuing to dance the old-time calls with clogging

footwork. During this period, Bill Nichols, of South Carolina, taught clogging and old-time squares at the Fontana Resort in the Western Carolina mountains and built a legacy of instruction that has branched out to include teachers from all parts of the United States. He is considered by many to be the "Grandfather" of modern clogging.



During the late 1970's, a new means of clogging expression began to gain popularity -- the line dance. Propelled by the catchy beat of country and pop tunes, teachers such as Tandy Barrett and JoAnn Gibbs of Georgia, Gloria Driver of Texas, Lucy Johnson of California and others wrote sequences of steps to accompany phrases of a popular tune. These strings of steps were performed to a particular song, with step cues prompting the dancers through each section. Also during this time, the Green Grass Cloggers were formed in North Carolina. The group combined old time steps with high kicks to create a uniquely stylised clogging form that endures today.

Sheila Popwell, of Georgia, is credited as one of the creators of the first standardized cueing and terminology methods. These generally accepted forms of notation made it possible for cue sheets to be produced for dance routines, giving dancers the opportunity to learn new material without having to travel to workshops or conferences.



Clogging today is less impromptu and more complicated than the simple rhythmic dance begun by our ancestors. New influences are creeping into the dance because of popular culture. Tap dancing, Canadian Step Dancing, Irish Hard Shoe and even street dancing and hip-hop influences are being seen to bear on the style of steps and dances performed by cloggers today. Performing teams wearing brightly colored costumes, calico or sequins have sprung up everywhere, providing entertainment with impressive precision footwork. Clogging Competitions across the country bring together teams from East and West to vie for trophies, honours and cash prizes.

In the 1980's a dancer named Burton Edwards of Maggie Valley, North Carolina began winning competitions with his "buck" style of clogging where the weight is carried on the ball of the foot and a pitter-patter is produced with the heel clicking the floor and

returning to the ball of the foot. While the style had been around in the Appalachians for generations, Burton's smooth style made it the "must-learn" style and drag-slide competitions began recognizing dancers who did the heel-toe buck style with winning marks. In the 1980's as well, Ottawa Valley step dancer Judy Waymouth of Ontario, Canada made an appearance at the Possum Trot Workshop at Fontana Village, North Carolina and did an exhibition of Canadian Step dancing. The hop-double-hop style and double-doubles made jaws drop and teachers around the clogging workshop world embraced the fast paced style. The styling shift was the most dramatic the modern clogging world had seen to date and it opened the door for more percussive influences such as "Riverdance", syncopated tap dance and other dance styles. Amazing freestyle dancers who topped the competitions and workshops through the 1980's and 1990's also helped to infuse styling changes into the modern clog dance, including Brent Montgomery, Sherry Glass-Cox, Bobby Revis, and many more. Clogging teams like the Clogging Express began to showcase tightly precisioned hand moves and jazz work to line dances. Today, teams like the Dynamic Edition, The Southern Belles, The Clogging Sensation, Final Destination and many more infuse modern clogging percussive footwork with intensive jazz and formation work to make competitions a high-energy mix of incredible foot and body movements. A new generation of solo dancers like Mark Clifford and Brandon Norris have continued to influence young dancers to push the envelope and continue to shape this melting pot of dances. Many competitions today offer both traditional and modern clogging categories, and organizations like America's Clogging Hall of Fame and the National Clogging and Hoedown Council work to promote and preserve the important traditional aspects of clogging. In 2003, clog dancing was included as a competitive dance sport in the AAU Junior Olympics. Clogging group "ALL THAT" placed second in the nationally-televised talent contest "America's Got Talent," and cloggers are now being spotlighted on television and major motion picture projects.

As with any form of expression, I hope that clogging will continue to put us in touch with ourselves and our heritage, and render upcoming generations with the same joy it has provided us. The Double Toe Times magazine is dedicated to preserving the heritage of this art form and also share its innovations as it continues to grow.

Understanding Terminology and Step Notation

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The National Clogging and Hoe-down Council adopted the "Eight Basic Movements" of clogging on May 13, 1978 as a means of standardizing teaching methods, cueing and step notation. These standards were soon adopted as well by the Clogging Leaders of Georgia (now known as C.L.O.G., Inc.) and throughout the years much has been done to further standardize the way in which clogging teachers teach, cue and abbreviate step descriptions. Sheila Popwell, the former editor of the Flop-Eared Mule and a renowned clogging innovator, did much to popularise the Basic Steps and Terminology which is still widely accepted today. Through a column known as "Clogmunication", Kevin Sellew of Alabama also has done much to help provide a forum through which standardization could be discussed and developed.

For the sake of understanding, "Clogmunication " divided the understanding of movements between "Traditional Clogging" movements and "Contemporary Clogging" movements. Later, Buck Dance Terms were added to further describe movements.

TRADITIONAL CLOGGING TERMINOLOGY

All traditional clogging steps are made up of some combination of the following basic movements. The movements themselves fall into two groups -Toe Movements and Heel Movements. Each Toe Movement occurs on an upbeat of the music and is followed by a Heel Movement which occurs on the downbeat of the music. There are no silent or syncopated beats in Traditional Clogging. The rhythm of the dance is kept by the heel. Anytime the heel is sounded, the knee is flexed and then straightened on the following upbeat, resulting in the characteristic up and down motion of the dancer's body. The word "click" is used in the descriptions below to indicate that a tap has contacted the floor. All clicks should have a sharp, clear sound, not scuffed or muffled.

HEEL MOVEMENTS These fall on the downbeat (or bass beat) of the music

HEEL

The weight of the body is already on the ball of the foot when the HEEL movement is done. Snap the heel down, producing a sharp click, and flex the knee downward, distributing the body weight along the entire length of the foot.

STEP

Place the entire foot flat on the floor, producing a click with the toe tap and the heel tap at the same time and transferring the body weight along the full length of the foot while flexing the knee downward.

SLIDE

A down and forward counterpart of the up and back motion of the DRAG (see TOE MOVEMENTS). With the foot flat on the floor and the knee straight, roll your weight up onto the ball of the foot, letting your knee begin to go slack. As the weight of your body begins to drop forward and down, let the instinctive tightening of your thigh muscles save you from a fall by sliding your foot forward (bout the length of your foot) and then letting your heel snap down, producing the click and redistributing your weight along the whole length of your foot. At the end of the SLIDE the knee will be in a flexed position. (Also can be done with both feet on the floor in the same manner.)

TOE MOVEMENTS These fall on the upbeat of the music

TOE

The ball of the foot produces a click while the heel remains out of contact with the floor. TOE implies that the body weight has been transferred to the ball of the foot. The knee should be basically straight.

DOUBLE TOE

Two clicks are produced in the space of on upbeat of music. The ball of the foot strikes the floor during the forward motion of a short kick and the knee straightens (ankle is relaxed and foot angles downward). The knee bends upward immediately and the same foot swings backward with the ball of the foot striking the floor again in the same spot. The heel should not touch the floor. The two motions of the foot are considered to be one movement with no hesitation between them. Normally, the clicks occur slightly in front of the body, but they may be done in other directions as well.

ROCK

A click is produced by transferring the weight onto the ball of the foot slightly behind the body's center of gravity. The knee is in a flexed position at first, causing the body's weight to "rock" back slightly as the center of gravity changes. The opposite foot is always lifted off the floor during a ROCK. The heel of the foot doing the ROCK does not touch the floor, but the knee does straighten.

BRUSH

The foot is allowed to swing from the knee with a pendulum action. The ball of the foot produces a click by striking the floor and continuing in the direction of the swing (which may be to the front, to the rear, or crossing in front or in back of the opposite leg). Movement comes from the hip and the knee joint, and the knee of the BRUSHing foot always bends upward following the click (at the same time as the following heel movement).

DRAG

The foot is flat on the floor and the knee is flexed when the DRAG begins. With a springing motion which moves the weight of the body up and back, straighten the knee allowing momentum to lift your heel slightly off the floor and drag your foot back about half the length of the foot. The weight is distributed along the length of the foot at the end of the movement and there is no distinctive click. (This can also be done with both feet on the floor in the same manner)

NOTE: Much of what is considered to be "traditional" clog dance styling depends on the part of Appalachia the definitions come from, but the following points are frequently raised:

Smooth flowing motions with a constant DRAG-SLIDE incorporated into the footwork- no head bobbing, no arm waving, no jumpy or jerky body actions.

Feet no more than 6 to 8 inches off the floor- no one but the floor should see the bottom of your clog shoes. No silent or syncopated beats -toe movements are executed on upbeats and heel movements on downbeats.

CONTEMPORARY CLOGGING TERMINOLOGY

Since clogging is a living folk dance, part of what the dance is will be defined by what folks are dancing at any given time. Accordingly, new movements and new ways of using traditional movements are constantly being developed. As well, liberties are being taken with the "rule" of toe movements on upbeats and heel movements on downbeats. At the same time, however, try to remain aware that there is a distinction between what is traditional and what is contemporary so that you can keep your students informed (as well as happy!).

With the above points in mind, the following are the Contemporary Clogging Movements you'll see around the clogging floor these days:

HOP

An extension of SLIDE used in describing any upward motion that causes both feet to lose contact with the floor. The hop occurs with the upward motion taking place on the upbeat of the music and the click produced on the bass beat when the foot comes back into contact with the floor. The knee is flexed downward as you land. Landing after the hop may take place on the same foot that did the push off into the air, or the HOP may be used to change the weight to the opposite foot depending on the demands of the step being done. A foot designator L or R beneath the word HOP on a cuesheet would indicate the foot change.

SLUR

Feet will be slightly apart when a SLUR begins. On the upbeat, draw the toe tap along the floor (giving a slurred tap sound) toward the weight-bearing foot (usually ending across in back). Drop the heel to the floor producing a click on the bass beat. Originally SLUR was separated from the following beat, but today most choreographers assume that you will automatically include the heel sound when using the term SLUR.

CLICK

Describes a motion where the sides of your clogging shoes are touches together. As with slur, most choreographers assume that you will click your heels together on an upbeat and then sound a heel tap on the following bass beat. Several varieties of CLICK exist today and are further defined by the styling terms provided with the step.

KICK

A variation of the BRUSH that simply omits the sound of the toe tap by eliminating any contact with the floor. Leg motion and action is the same as the BRUSH.

STOMP

A strongly accented flatfoot step taking the full weight of the foot.

TOUCH

A term used to imply the same sound and motion as that of a TOE, but the foot is immediately picked up again without transferring the body weight to that foot.

STAMP

A flatfooted TOUCH

BREAK

The entire side of the foot has been turned sideways and away from the other foot to become flush with the floor. Weight is borne by the other foot.

PIVOT

Describes a motion on the ball of the foot in a given direction. Usually occurs on the upbeat and does not necessarily include dropping the heel on the following bass beat. Therefore, the next intended movement should be written out as well.

PULL

Indicated that the dancer will "scrape" the tip of the clogging shoe along the floor usually toward the other foot. Can be done from the rear, from across in back, from across in front, etc.

BUCK DANCE TERMINOLOGY

Buck Dancing has come to be recognized in clogging circles as a specific style of dancing that differs from flat-footing in that a buck dancer keeps his weight on the balls of the feet and produces clicks by the interchanging of heel and toe movements to make what has been described as a "patter" sound. In the mountains of West Virginia, where I come from, the term "buck dancing" is used to describe any solo freestyle dancing - whether it be traditional clogging, flat-foot or otherwise. By the same token, dancing with a partner is known as a "buck and wing" dance. .

The terms outlined below are used to described movements used in the heel -toe dance style commonly known as "buck dancing":

BALL

The transfer of the body weight in a stepping motion to the ball of the foot with the knee bent slightly.

BOUNCE

The same as BALL, but with a hopping motion instead of a stepping motion. You may BOUNCE on the same foot or use it to change from one foot to another .

DIG

A step (transfer of body weight) onto the hack edge of the heel.

FLANGE

A term used to indicate that the dancer has completely turned the foot over and outward to bring the area of the shoe which covers the last two toes flush with the floor. The heel is aimed upward and weight is borne by the other foot

FLICK

A short back BRUSH of the toe tap (usually following a heel sound from the same foot)

HIT

A touch of the back edge of the heel tap to the floor without any transfer of weight to the floor

POINT

A touch of the tip of the shoe (NOT the ball of the foot) to the floor behind the body (or across in front or in back of the opposite foot, etc.)

SKUFF

A short forward brush with the heel tap striking the floor. Normally, the front portion of the heel tap is the area which produces the click.

SKUFFLE

A short forward and back brush which produces two sounds from the heel tap in one beat of music (&a).

SLIP

A forward chug on the ball of the foot only -no heel tap sound is produced.

SNAP

From a foot flat on the floor (normally done as a part of the DRAG on the same foot), the toe of the foot is raised slightly and then immediately dropped again to produce a sound of the toe tap.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN STEP NOTATION

Listed below are the most commonly agreed upon abbreviations used in the notation of steps on cue sheets. In the early 1980's a movement was afoot to use one letter abbreviations for the eight basic movements used in traditional clogging. Some have been accepted, but most of the movements are more commonly recalled using two letter abbreviations. I have listed the abbreviation most commonly used for each movement.

Traditional Clogging Movements

(most commonly used abbreviations)

Term Most Commonly used 1 letter or other Abbrev.

Brush BR (B)

Double Toe DT (D)

Drag DR (G)

Heel H

Rock R

Slide SL (E)

Step S

Toe T

Contemporary Clogging Movements

(most commonly used abbreviations)

Term Most Commonly used 1 letter or other Abbrev.

Break BRK

Click CLK

Hop HOP

Kick K KIK

Pivot PVT

Pull PULL PUL

Slur SLUR SLR

Stamp STA

Stomp STO

Touch TCH

Buck Dance Movements

(most commonly used abbreviations)

Term Most Commonly used 1 letter or other Abbrev.

Ball B (BA)

Bounce BO

Dig DIG (DG)

Flange FL

Flick FLK (FC)

Hit HIT (HT)

Point PT

Skuff SK

Skuffle SF

Slip SLP (SP)

Snap SNP (SP)

Directional Designators

(written in parentheses following the movement in a horizontal format and to the outside of the movement in a vertical cue sheet format)

b back

f front

o out

s side

x uncross (usually follows xif or xib)

bs beside

ib in back

if in front

in toward the weight bearing leg

up raising of the foot

xib across in back

xif across in front

out away from the weight bearing leg

ins inside (beside the instep of the weight bearing foot)

ots out to the side

o&b out and back (as a BRUSH starting from an xif position)

oba out, back and around (foot makes a horizontal semi-circle from front to back)

xba across, back and around (foot makes a vertical circle behind the body)

Foot Designators

(written beneath basic movements)

L for Left foot

R for Right foot

Separation Designators

(written between basic movements)

On a CLOG Standard Cue Sheet:

/ indicates that the movements on each side of the "/" are done simultaneously

S / H(F)

L R

On a Lined Score sheet (Developed by Bill Nichols, Adapted by Jeff Driggs, Simone Nichols)

Movements appearing in line with each other above and below the step line are done simultaneously

L S

R H(F)

Timing Designators

(written beneath the foot designators)

e marks a 1/4 count

& marks an upbeat (1/2 count)

a marks a 3/4 count

1 - 8 numbers a bass beat (full count)