

CLOGGING and ME

by Monika Zöller

Once upon a time there was a wish to dance – to dance in any way possible. Even when I was a very little girl my parents allowed me to take ballet classes, which at that time was a most unusual thing. But something that started off so hopefully, finished almost tragically- for I simply grew too tall. What was I to do? Most unhappily I gave up dancing and started to learn piano. This enabled me to remain in the world of music and to get to know many of its technicabilities. I'd never make it as a concert pianist - sitting still was not my thing and anyway the lessons were quite expensive. But like it is in life, all that we have ever learnt remains with us and enriches us. But how did it actually start?

In 1982, by chance I went to see a Square Dance demonstration here in Munich. It was put on by 2 sets of squares from the Dip-N-Divers with their Caller Tommy Morgenroth and they gave out invitations for an Open House evening, which I then eagerly visited. Naturally, I registered immediately for a class with Tommy and completed this in March '83. For homework purposes, we were given a little brochures in which the mainstream figures were explained. In time I'd read this booklet right through to the end and couldn't believe my eyes, there were a couple of lines of text entitled CLOGGING. At this point in time I had been tap-dancing for about 5 years, so I was most enthusiastic to learn about Clogging. I felt this would be a challenge for me; and so it was too.

It turned out to be much more difficult than I had imagined. Nobody in the Munich area of SD had ever heard about Clogging, nor seen it. It was as if bewitched. In vain I had telephoned around and had asked many, many questions without success. I was almost ready to give up, when I came across an article about Shelia Popwell. Shelia had also learnt Clogging through SD and had started with it in Atlanta in 1968. At that time there were no rules, no terminology laid down, and the teaching idea was „See this – like this – dance this“. So everything for everyone was a bit chaotic. This caused Shelia to get together with some other teachers from North Carolina and surrounding states, in order to talk about their problems. Thus they founded the independent organisation THE NATIONAL CLOGGING AND HOEDOWN COUNCIL. Within this framework the terminology was developed and the eight basic steps were written down and documented. To this day, there remain the basics of Clogging and so it is possible to dance worldwide over all borders.

Shelia was delighted to receive a letter from Old Germany and was immediately prepared to help me. Amongst other things she had published a brochure entitled EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT CLOGGING, and she sent me this along with several other items. Straight away I began to translate this and that which I could translate I tried to dance. The fact that I could already tapdance made learning Clogging easier. Nevertheless, at the beginning it was not easy to execute the Up and Down Movements, we don't have these rules in tap dance and there was no video of this around to look at. As far, as I can remember the greatest problem was learning the Brush-back across. „The heel leads the foot“, Shelia had written in the directions, but I just couldn't picture this. It is always much easier to learn by being shown something, rather than reading it out of a book.

Once again, lucky chance came to my rescue. In Summer '83 an International Folk Dance Festival took place in the Löwenbräu Keller (a very large pub which then burnt down a few years later). A Clogging group from Ella Cart, Texas, took part and their teacher, Marian Hackney, was able to explain to me and demonstrated

the Brush-back across. How easy it is, when you know how!!!! After meeting these people, my decision was absolutely final – I must become a Clogger. I was still a enthusiastic Square Dancer at the Jolly Joker SD Club in Munich. It became possible for me to use their dance floor and so in Summer '84, my son Mike, several friends and myself started up our new Clogging adventure. I remember it still today – the first dance we chose was Popcorn, naturally choreographed by Shelia Popwell. We got out of our depth totally with this dance for we had no idea or knowledge about Easy, Intermediate or Advanced. Gracious me! We had to work very hard but we actually managed it, and were very proud of ourselves.

Gradually, people began to hear about us and other dancers became curious about what we were doing. So much so, in April '85 I started up a Clogging class. In the meantime Petra Willm from Zwingenberg got in touch with me; she had seen Clogging in Baltimore, USA, and so we shared our experiences of the dance. She had likewise grounded a little group with a few friends. In Feb. '86 our first Graduation took place at the Jolly Joker Club. We were now eight dancers and so we decided to start up our own Clogging Club. On Aug. 1st 1986, we were registered as the very first Clogging Club – our name being COUNTRY CLOGGERS MUNICH. We managed to find a hall of our own to dance in and went to work with much joy and fortitude. In March '87 we celebrated our Clogging Special Dance Premiere in Garching Community Hall. There we met the Cloggers from the SD Club Die Hards, Schweinfurt. Three similar events followed on from this, each one going very well and being successful.

At the 1987 Wolfratshausen Round Up, we had our first ever opportunity to present ourselves at such a large event. It was actually here that I got to know Becky Kraft, who had meanwhile started up a small Clogging group with the Bavarian Stompers SD in Augsburg. She became a very nice friend of mine.

In 1988, the Caramella Dance Group from Prague visited us in Munich, then one year later we had as guests the Fire-On-The-Mountain Cloggers from Justen, Texas, with their leader Linda Carolan. This same year of 1989, our group travelled to Prague, and we all got sore feet from so much Clogging there. Between times we had had very many performances at many varied events, even one in the Money-and-Love TV-Show. Our friends from Prague visited us many times over and we journeyed twice more to their Golden City.

In 1991, together with Anette Lieb and her Renegades Quicksteppers, we took part in the 8th Annual Clogging Convention in Nashville., Tennessee. It was a real experience. We were greeted very warmly and admired by all. We were the first Europeans at such an event and everyone wanted to get to know us. It was something extra special for me, because now I was able to put a face to each person with whom I had only had telephone contact and now I could get to know them personally. Meeting Steve Smith was a special honour for me. Right from the beginning in 1985, as I received my first cue-sheet (Get back to the country) from him, and still to this day, I have been a fan of his. Some times ago he told me, he was no longer able to dance but luckily he is now back on the Clogging stage again and hopefully many dancers will have the happy opportunity to clog with him again.

In 1993 there were 45 memers of the Country Cloggers Munich Club. We were well established, with regular shows and we had a loyal fan club. As their instructor, I had reached a point of change. I had learned a great deal, had regularly been on instructors courses and had gone over to the USA several times. I had learnt Buck and Canadian Style (most from Claudia Collier and Jay Dumcam) and I had a strong feeling I should now be going in a different direction. My wish was to lead a

smaller group and to concern myself mainly with choreography. My son Mike then took over the Country Cloggers Munich Club as their new instructor.

My way was now free!! In January '94 I grounded the CITY CLICKER DANCE GROUP MUNICH. We were 13 members and became a loyal, successful dance company. Meanwhile the Iron Curtain had fallen and so in 1995 the 1st Clogging Convention was able to be held in Prague. Joyfully, I came across Steve Smith and Jay Duncum there again. On the evening show, he and Jay were on stage to dance freestyling. Oh what two great guys!!! To be able to see both on stage together was the best I ever saw. In the following year, we naturally took part again in the 2nd Convention. After that though, The Caramellas never called another convention. It had been very interesting to see how the dancers had progressed each time. No dance had been too difficult for them, and no steps too complicated that they couldn't master them. They wanted to learn, learn and learn again. As an instructor I truly enjoyed their enthusiasm and it had inspired me to push forwards, because it corresponded to my own disposition.

There are so many things to report about, so many people to name and visitors to mention, that it would break this story. But finally on this way, I would say Thank you to Claudia Collier. She is a very lovely person, a great dancer and a wonderful instructor. She gave me her friendship and her help.

At the end of the year 2000, bad luck hit me like an earthquake. My back wouldn't work any more and I was forced to hang up my Clogging shoes. I just couldn't clog any step. Isolde Busl and Ulrich Selzle, who have both been dancing a very long time, took over the City Clickers for me. In addition, a small group was started up in Munich called The Munich Cloggers, this was led by a very enthusiastic dancer named Monika Knerr.

At the time, I would never have guessed that I would ever dance again. But this has indeed become possible. Mia Ruf invited me to come and teach in Bad Wörishofen. I was also encouraged by Herbert Köhler, a longtime clogging-friend from way back in 1984, to try it. So I did venture and I gained – I managed it! This first teaching workshop took place after my 1 ¾ year-break from Clogging – for me this was just as an exciting thrilling challenge and experience as my very first venture into Clogging had been all those years ago.

Clogging was and is more than just a hobby for me. I am fascinated by it – and it is wonderful to see how the participants enjoy the dancing; how they moan and groan at the hard work, but then how happy they are at the end when they have successfully mastered the workshop.

Clogging awakes a passion in me, my soul and my entire body are always with it. For me, it's a thrill to feel the rhythm of the music, to be able to play around with these rhythms whilst choreographing, and then in addition to be able to enthuse the dancers and spectators with it. It was always my aim in life to be able to arrange music so as to express it in dance and Clogging has helped me achieve this. It has enabled me to make the acquaintance of very many people of different nations and to be able to find new friends near and far. I wouldn't want to have missed even one single clogging-minute of the past years.

And in this vein, I wish us all further HAPPY CLOGGING!!!!!!!!!!

