

FALL 1992

LEAD



SHEET

OLD TOWN
-SCHOOL of-
FOLK MUSIC



This linoleum block print by Inara Cedrins will grace the cover of the new OTS Songbook. See page 6

"The first time I walked into the Old Town School I couldn't believe the warmth and friendliness I felt." So said Bonnie Koloc in a recent interview that will be part of a special broadcast on WFMT 98.7 FM on September 26 and 30. Bonnie will be joined by a host of other folks associated with the School throughout its history during this two-part edition of the Midnight Special.

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—Mardi Gras Galore!*

Our 35th Year 1957~1992

HISTORY OF PERCUSSIVE DANCE

by Paul Tyler

Most people think of clogging as mountain dance and imagine for it an ancient folkloric origin lost in the mists of history. The truth is even more fascinating. Clogging, as we know it today, is a percussive style of solo dance that grew out of a mixture of at least three separate dance traditions. On the one hand, there were the Irish jig and the English hornpipe, both rural styles of solo dance. While the fiddler played, village dancers—especially the most virile young men—would beat out interesting rhythms with their feet. On the other hand, a variety of solo percussive dance forms thrived among the African populations of the Americas. These various styles, the exact nature of which we will never know, may be collectively referred to as 'juba. They were the rural precursors to black jazz dance, that is, tap dancing.

One thing all three of these traditions share in common is a strong element of competition, or at least of attention-getting display (often an advantage in courtship and affairs of the heart). In the multi-ethnic cauldron of the Americas, the Irish, English and African styles of step-dancing merged into a single choreographic idiom adopted by whites and blacks alike. But step-dancing was not simply a quaint, rural pastime. It was also found in urban society and was given a special boost by the mid-eighteenth century emergence of blackface minstrelsy, America's first popular theatre.

In the last years of the seventeenth century, this mix of percussive stepping appeared on the American stage. John Durang (for whom a still popular fiddle tune is named) performed in Philadelphia a piece that included such steps as the "double shuffle," the "heel

and toe," "cut the buckle," and the "pigeon wing." In the first half of the eighteenth century, a series of celebrated dance contests took place in New York and Boston between John Diamond (a white man heralded as "one of, if not the greatest jig dancers that the world ever knew"), and his black peer, William Henry Lane, also known as 'Master Juba.' Presumably their styles of dancing were similar enough that judges could compare the two in head-to-head competition.

As the twentieth century dawned, the Irish, English and African traditions went off in separate directions. The Irish jig became more strictly stylized into an intra-group competitive art form. One variant of this form requires the use of special hard-soled shoes that enable the dancer to beat out audibly complex and visually astonishing rhythms. The English hornpipe developed into a variety of styles of clogging—the best known of which is Lancashire clogging—in which dancers wore the wooden-soled shoes (called 'clogs') favored by factory workers in England's industrial north. African-American jazz dance became highly polished and more urbane. The hoofers who became stars of stage and screen looked down on the older jigging or juba, which was seen, at best, as a poor country cousin, and at worst, as a degrading remnant of slavery days and the plantation system.

Among whites, clogging (also known as jigging, flat-footing and buck dancing) survived and changed not only in the rural nooks and crannies of the Appalachians and Ozarks, but also in the lumbercamps and towns of the north woods. (Come to the Resource Center to see the videos *Talking Feet* on southern

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WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Robert Cotton Fite	Bonnie & Mark Miller-	Margaret Wheatly
Russell Drewry	McLemore	James Wilcox
Thomas Duvall	Frank Muschal	Cecilia Williams
Kathy Flotz	Kathleen Newell	Glenn Wittman
Mary Gilmore	Mary Lisa	Donald
Steve Hunt	Weimers	Yoshida
Elizabeth Iehl	Elaine Wessel	Joyce Young
Abe Kaplan	Martin	Katherine
Tom Kimball	Wetterhorn	Zabel
Colleen Loughler		

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solo dance and *Medicine Fiddle* on Canadian style step-dancing among the Indians of the Upper Midwest.) Ira Bernstein's Ten Toe Percussion Ensemble brings together once again the historically related styles of jig, hornpipe, and jazz dance.

The Old Town School will present the Festival of Percussive Dance on Friday, October 23 at 8:00pm, at Centre East, 7701 Lincoln Ave. in Skokie. **Ira Bernstein** will be featured along with **Liam Harvey** (Irish Step Dance), **Manolo Rivera** (Flamenco) and **Jimmy Slyde** (Jazz Tap). Tickets are \$20, \$17.50 and \$15, available at OTS or Centre East, (708)673-6300.

“Many years ago I had attended an Italian wedding reception at Aldine Hall, 909 West Armitage, and whether it was the vino or the beef sandwiches, I recalled the atmosphere as being congenial, and it was for sale at a moderate price.”

Win Stracke, in OTS Newsletter, March 1969



909 W Armitage, August 1968