

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Forge Mountain Cloggers of North Carolina Cloggers Don Sneakers to Shuffle in New Dancers

By Lindsay Lancaster
Times-News Staff Writer

It almost sounds like thunder at the Old Home Place in Mills River, but it's not the weather. Instead, the noise comes from the Forge Mountain Cloggers stomping and stepping along with the beat of the music at their weekly class.

The cloggers, sporting eye-catching Converse shoes that jingle when they step, let out a hoot. Instructor Melissa Orr, who founded Forge Mountain Cloggers four years ago, just told them she's going to put on "Little Red Riding Hood." The song and routine are favorites among the cloggers, who range in age from 5 years old to senior citizens.

A clogging dance usually incorporates footwear with taps. The footwork in the dance enables dancers to beat out the rhythm of the music.

"Basically, you're making music with your feet," says Orr. Clogging, a style of step dancing,

originated in the Appalachian Mountains and dates back to the 1700s.

"In the mountains, this is our mountain heritage," Orr says. "We're just trying to bring it back here in the mountains. ... Clogging is something that can be passed down from generation to generation."

The Forge Mountain Cloggers work to preserve the dance's tradition, but they also break some of the clogging stereotypes. Their shoes, outfits and music are all unique.

DANCING IN CONVERSE SHOES

Traditionally clogging has been associated with bluegrass music, old-fashioned frilly dresses and an older crowd.

"Modern clogging today is very different than it was many years ago," says Orr, who's a certified clogging instructor.

It's time to give clogging a chance, urge the Forge Mountain Cloggers.

(Continued on page 10)



Clogging in Converse

(Continued from page 8)

"Before you even have an opinion about it, watch it," says Orr's daughter, Kendra, 15. "It's not what you think it is."

Gone are the froufrou dresses and matching men's outfits. Each of the Forge Mountain Cloggers wear a team T-shirt with shorts or jeans.

"To me, the footwork is more important than the look," Melissa says.

And bring on the Converse.

High top or low top, patterned or solid colors, each clogger purchases their own style of Converse shoes for clogging.

Orr and husband, Bryan, attach the taps to the shoes for their students. The dancers sport shoes in glittery gold, light and hot pink, orange, yellow with fluorescent green and pink laces, plaid and more.

"It just kind of really sets apart each individual personality of the dancers," Melissa says. "They're unique."

Not to mention, the shoes are comfortable and fashionable.

"They're cooler looking than the regular ones," says Melissa's son, Levi, 13.

MORE THAN MOUNTAIN MUSIC

The Forge Mountain Cloggers dance to all kinds of music, including pop, country, rock, gospel — and songs like Elvis' "All Shook Up," the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's "Fishing in the Dark" and Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock 'n' Roll."

Kendra and her brother, Levi, enjoy clogging to pop music like "Poker Face" or other songs frequently heard on the radio.

"We try to mix it up and do everything just so there is something for everybody," Melissa says.

The dancers often perform as a team in exhibitions each year and at clogging conventions, community events, nursing homes and at the state fair.

In a recent homeschoolers' talent show, Kendra clogged to "Life is a Highway" by Rascal Flatts.



Twin boys Conner and Hayden McAbee, 13, plan to perform the clogging routine "Little Red Riding Hood" June 8 at Rugby Middle School. If you go, you might tell them apart by their clogging shoes: Conner wears blue and green Converse and Hayden wears neon orange ones.

The routine is a favorite among cloggers, including Mackenzie Keel, 11, of Fletcher. Keel's been clogging for about a year.

"It's fun, you get to do fun songs," Keel says. "It just sounds cool."

Says Conner: "It's really easy to pick up."

Hadyn likes that clogging is a way to express himself. Rudd Orr, 12, agrees: "There's like so many cool moves."

And although females outnumber the males

— out of roughly 70 dancers, nine of them are males — the guys know clogging isn't just for women.

"It's a man's sport," Hadyn says.

BURSTING AT THE SEAMS

Melissa and her daughter, Kendra, began clogging when Kendra was 9.

"We just fell in love with the dance," Melissa says. "You never run out of things to learn."

Four years ago, Melissa, who homeschools her children, decided to begin a clogging group for homeschool students. The group started out in the barn at her Mills River home. But the group

(Continued on page 12)



Clogging in Converse

(Continued from page 10)

continued to grow and soon had to find space to accommodate all the dancers, which expanded to include children who attend public schools. The cloggers moved to the Old Homeplace in Mills River at the end of 2008.

"The atmosphere of the barn is just really cool," Melissa says. And the whole Orr family, Melissa, husband Bryan, and children Kendra, 15, Levi, 13, and Rudd, 12, clog. Kendra hopes to attend Mars Hill College when she graduates and try out for the school's award-winning Bailey Mountain Cloggers.

She's hooked on the dance.

"I like the challenge," Kendra says. "I like being able to dance to the music I want to."

Ashley Whitaker, 16, of Fairview, likes the fitness aspect of clogging.

"It's great exercise and it's fun to be around other kids," Whitaker says.

If you question how much exercise you get from the dance, give it a try.

"It's a sport, as well," Melissa says. "It works every muscle in your body."

For information about clogging in converse shoes or about the Forge Mountain Cloggers, call Melissa Orr at 891-2487 or 388-1708 or visit www.forgemtncloggers.org or e-mail forgemtncloggers@yahoo.com.



The Forge Mountain Cloggers take a break during their clogging classes at the Old Homeplace in Mills River, Western NC.

GLUING ON TAPS

from the original SHOE GOO website

Some manufactureres make glue on taps without nail holes. If your taps have nail holes, you must first turn the taps over and cover these holes with small rounds of tape so the glue does not bleed through. Also put tape over the back of the rivets so that the glue does not "freeze" them, or come through. Lay the taps on the shoe and draw an outline to know where to work and to glue.

To glue taps on, clean shoe sole of any debris. Roughen the sole of the shoe inside the tap outlines drawn on shoe and apply glue to those areas. Tip: Whatever glue you use, be sure to allow the full curing time. Glue will not hold properly if disturbed before the full setting time has elapsed. The taps should be cured at room temperature. Surface should be clean, dry and free of dirt. For best results, roughen surface before use. Best when used between 70°F (21°C) and 85°F (29°C).

Puncture seal at the top of the tube using the pointer cap.

Always test a small area to ensure proper application technique and dry time. Prolonged exposure to warm water may cause discoloration and possible loss of adhesion when exposed to chemicals used in hot tubs and pools especially in outdoor locations. May be weakened by contact with certain highly plasticized materials.

Apply SHOE GOO directly to both the shoe surface and the back of the tap. Allow SHOE GOO to partially cure, 2-10 minutes, before bringing surfaces together. SHOE GOO hardens by solvent evaporation and forms an immediate bond that is difficult to reposition after both adhesive-coated surfaces are placed in contact with each other and sufficient pressure is exerted to establish full contact.

Allow the glued on taps to dry for 24 hours. Various materials will require different drying times. Cure time increases with lower temperatures and decreases with higher temperatures. Depending on the materials and the temperature, maximum strength may not be reached for 48 to 72 hours.

Keep threads at the neck of the tube free of SHOE GOO residue. To ensure easy cap removal, apply a thin coat of petroleum jelly to the threads of the tube before replacing the cap.

Clean uncured adhesive with small amounts of acetone and paint thinner. The adhesive will ball up and brush off. Cured material may be removed by cutting or scraping.

Store unused SHOE GOO at room temperature with cap tightened.

NOTE: SHOE GOO may damage finished surfaces. Avoid such contact until SHOE GOO is completely dry.