

## RIVERDANCE

### **READ THE TEXT**

Irish step dance is a wonderful celebration of the arts and Ireland's unique culture. Since this performance dance became a part of pop culture with the success of Riverdance, it has captured the hearts and imaginations of many fans and dancers.

#### **The Origins of Step Dance**

Perhaps nothing is more easily identified as part of Irish culture than step dance. With its strength of rhythm and grace in execution, Irish immigrants brought the dance with them wherever they settled, including North America and Australia.

The cultural dance of Ireland started with the Celts and came along at the same time mainstream Christianity was introduced by Saint Patrick during the 5th century. Many written documentations of the dance steps themselves were destroyed during subsequent periods of political unrest, but the Celts' rich music and dance traditions continued to be passed down despite these challenges.

#### **Irish Step Survival**

Returning to the politics of Ireland, perhaps one of the few reasons Irish step dance survived is thanks to an Anglo-Irish parliament that passed a law to establish that only native Irish were allowed to associate themselves with the unique traits and traditions of the nation. For this reason, dance was isolated as a special and cherished activity, and the Irish were still able to celebrate despite the dynamic climate of their government.

Soon schools of dance were erected all over the country, and teachers were paid well for their services. It was originally danced by men, but now, both men and women perform it. Step Dancing even took on the form of a contest for the first time during the 1800s in which dancers competed for a cake prize. The local religious rulers often tried to ban dance from Ireland, but they were obviously unsuccessful as Irish dance continues to thrive today.

#### **Steps Into Today**

Rising up from its ancient roots, modern Irish step dance started shortly before the turn of the last century. Step dance performances were moved to more sophisticated venues such as theatres or outdoor stages, and official competitions were formed. Today, Irish dancers are encouraged to utilize all space of a stage, while in prior centuries this was discouraged due to a lack of ample room to dance. Modern roomy

performing arts venues have opened doors to difficult, more impressive looking steps, such as flying jumps.

The way dancers are trained has also changed. Many start out much younger than what was previously considered acceptable. A dance tradition that was once predominantly male is now almost exclusively female, including solo performances which were extremely rare until during and after the 1920s. The jovial dance scene is also more diverse, with top dancers of many ethnicities.

The style of dance itself has also evolved, as modern day Irish step dance involves stiff and precise movements. Before this development, many dancers were more relaxed and daringly carefree. Many Irish historians argue that the evolution into stiffer arms and legs came out of Catholic church demands as an attempt to maintain modesty.

**Answer the questions:**

1. What is Irish traditional dance called?

Riverdance

Step Dance

2. American Tap Dance (claqué) has Irish origin

True

False

3. This Irish traditional dance

was introduced by the Christians and St. Patrick during the 5th century

was made by the Irish natives during the 5th century

4. Documents explaining how to dance were kept by politicians before people burnt them.

True

False

5. This dance is a clear example of how traditions and stories can be transmitted through popular inheritance.

True

False

6. Irish dance was:

a dance everybody could dance, Irish and non-Irish people

danced only by Irish people, because it was protected by law.

associated to Irish people only, because Irish politicians allowed them to.

7. At the beginning, everybody could dance it.

True

False

8. During the 1800s

A cake was given to those who danced the Irish dance

Religion allowed the dance

There was a dance competition

9. Modern Irish dance arose at the beginning of the 20th Century

True

False



10. Tick the sentences which are true:

Old Irish dance was performed in theatres

Due to the performance room, modern Irish dance has improved

Today only men can dance it.

There are competitions today

Nowadays, Irish people can learn Irish dance from early ages.

Old Irish dance was more complex than the modern dance.

Catholics demanded humility, and that is why arms and legs are so rigid.



TAP SHOES

THANK YOU!!

