



Press Release

Tap, Step and Clog around the Globe in Wiesbaden, Germany

Music and dance build bridges between cultures and continents in a way that nothing else can. At the *Fiddle and Feet School of Dancing* step dancing in all its forms now has a permanent home in Wiesbaden.



“The exciting thing about the school is that you can see how everything links together,” says dance teacher Natalie Westerdale. “So many percussive dance forms go back to the old style Irish stepdancing, but Cape Breton stepdancing, English clog dancing and African influences have also left their mark.”

Walking around Wiesbaden, Germany, outsiders might be surprised to find that the city is fascinated by percussive dance. It all began back in the 1920’s when Egon Bier (1902-1996) travelled to the Ned Wayburn School in New York where he learned jazz tap with a certain Fred Astaire – who according to one talent spotter famously “couldn’t act, couldn’t sing, could dance a little”. Not that it stopped him from becoming one of the world’s most famous dancers.

In the 1990’s it was clear that Egon Bier’s work had borne fruit with up to eight tap dance teachers at different schools in Wiesbaden – remarkable for a fairly exotic dance form in one small city. Natalie Westerdale together with German

Tap, the association for promoting tap dance in Germany, organised several successful shows which brought together all the local dance teachers and their students for a celebration of percussive dance.

Since the success of the big Irish dance shows, Wiesbaden has also developed one of the most active Irish dancing enclaves in Germany.



In April 2005, the *Fiddle and Feet School of Dancing* opens its doors under the leadership of Natalie Westerdale, Senior Instructor of the Irish National Folk Company Dublin and their official representative in Germany. She is one of the most versatile stepdancers in Europe, having travelled widely to learn Irish stepdancing, jazz tap, Cape Breton stepdancing, Appalachian flatfooting and French-Canadian Stepdancing. Her colleague Tanja Cibulski is also an INFC certified dance instructor – as well as a judo expert. So no messing around in her lessons!

A few weeks in the school are enough to show anyone that there’s a lot more to percussive dance than you might first imagine. Alongside the two best known forms of percussive dance, Irish dancing and American jazz tap, there are also classes for their less well known but

no less fascinating counterparts: Appalachian Flatfooting has grown up out of old style percussive dance forms in the mountain regions of the American South East. The old time music to which it is performed gives it an incredible freshness and originality. Its foot technique still shows a historical link to sean nos dancing. Cape Breton Stepdancing came from Scotland originally, where it has almost died out and is now being reintroduced. In Eastern Canada, where Scottish emigrants came to live, it is to this day a most popular form of dance for people of all ages.

Of course, wherever there is Irish dance, there must also be céilí dancing. So what else but an evening céilí party could be a more suitable opener for the *Fiddle & Feet School of Dancing!*



After a six year absence, there will also be another tap and step dance show in Wiesbaden – planned for the 3rd of December. And to keep up the history of tap dance, Egon Bier’s granddaughter, Gila Seidel, will give a tap workshop at the *Fiddle & Feet School of Dancing* in the autumn.