

CLOGS, JIGS AND REELS – OTTAWA STYLE

Ottawa based fiddler and step-dance teacher Chad Wolfe has brought out two versions of his album, *Clogs & Jigs & Reels ...Oh My!* Seán Laffey finds out why.



Seán: “Who did you have in mind as your main audience; listeners or dancers?”

Chad: “The original album was created for dancers, with 28 tracks and a wide range of tempos. Early on, I realized that with some remixing and a few alterations it would make a nice listening album as well. The listening version blends the tunes into 19 medleys and also includes a bonus track, *There’s No Place Like Home*, an air I wrote with Mark Allen, the co producer, and pianist on the CD. We actually recorded it 12 years ago, but didn’t have an opportunity to put it on an album until

established, its structure is still the same: 32 bar clog, 48 bar jig, and 96 bar reel. As long as the melodies have a lift, and they are played with drive, they are sure to spark the dancers’ feet. As they say around here, ‘Just Giv’er!’”

Seán: “Who should we look out for in the Ottawa Valley Step Dance tradition?”

Chad: “Familiar to Irish audiences, April Verch and Jon & Nathan Pilatzke are fantastic! I grew up with them on the contest circuit. Definitely watch for the Pilatzkes’ show, *Step Crew*. Also keep an eye out for The Fitzgeralds, Leahy (& the Next Generation Leahy), and Natalie MacMaster/Donnell Leahy & their children, all are incredible fiddle groups which feature Ottawa Valley step dancing.”

Seán: “How does your own teaching and dance work, inspire, sustain and enhance the tradition?”

Chad: “Last year, I celebrated my 25th year of teaching. I just can’t believe it’s been that long! I think that teaching is one of the most rewarding professions, and I couldn’t be prouder of my students. Over the years, some have won national titles, recorded their own albums, and pushed the boundaries of tradition. The aim of this new album is to inspire and support dance students and also to deliver a good ol’ Ottawa Valley fiddle party to a wider audience.”

Seán: “Was Covid a problem or an opportunity when it came to making the album?”

Chad: “Covid was oddly an opportunity. Since it took away performing and other activities, which would have distracted me from this project, I was able to focus on it and get ‘er done!”

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now! The response to both versions of the album and support from dance teachers, students and the Canadian fiddle community has been wonderful.”

Seán: “Do I detect a Yellow Brick Road theme in your track titles?”

Chad: “Ah, yes indeed! Since the album is comprised entirely of clogs & jigs & reels, *The Wizard of Oz’s*, *Lions & Tigers & Bears ...Oh My!* immediately came to mind, and the theme stuck. After listening to this album which contains over an hour of music and 60 different tunes, I think even Dorothy herself might say ‘Oh My!’”

Seán: “Can you tell us about the solo step dance tradition of Ottawa?”

Chad: “Ottawa Valley step dance is an energetic style of dancing most commonly performed with fiddle music that uses free flowing arm movements, strong, complex footwork, and high lifting legs, almost “rubber-like” in appearance. It stems from Irish & Scottish dance from the late 18th century. While working in lumber camps and building villages, early settlers used their music and dance culture as a source of recreation and relaxation after long days of hard work.

“The clog-jig-reel is the standard routine currently done at regional competitions. Its origin is a bit of a mystery. It likely began at competitions in the 1960s to compare dancers’ variety of steps, ability to dance to various tempos, and of course, endurance.

“The repertoire of tunes is quite eclectic and draws from traditional and contemporary Irish, Scottish, American, and home-grown Canadian compositions. Although it isn’t clear how this format was

“I worked with several other musicians on this album and just can’t thank them enough for sharing their incredible talent on this CD. Each one has a different musical background from traditional folk to classical, jazz, & musical theatre. This helped to create a fresh and exciting interpretation of the music. Mark Allen is an amazing producer & musician, who really understood and supported my vision, and had invaluable input each step of the way. And I really have to thank my family for their love and support since the moment my 8 year old self first declared, ‘I wanna fiddle & step dance!’”

Find out more about Chad’s Clog Jigs and Reels at www.chadwolfe.com

