

Tips & Tricks for Better Stage Presence

Clogging is a performing art. Therefore your duty, as a dancer, is to **entertain an audience!** Besides the joy that dancing brings, your reward is the gratitude the audience expresses in their smiles, tapping toes and applause! But what does it mean to entertain? **It's about grabbing someone's attention and keeping it!** Audiences are mesmerized by talent and synchronized movement. They gravitate toward songs they like, rhythmic sounds as well as positive energy and emotion. But a crowd's attention is quickly lost when there is too much distraction, or a lack of talent or energy.

"S.T.A.G.E." helps you remember the keys to a great performance:

- S** - Sound
- T** - Timing
- A** - Appearance
- G** - Gestures
- E** - Energy & Enthusiasm

Here's an in-depth look at each principle:

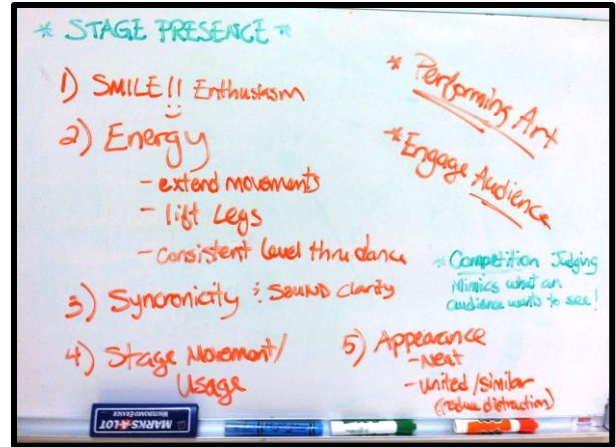
Sound - First, you must have a great, catchy **song**. It needs to grab the audience's attention, and have a beat and tempo that is easy to clog too. If a song is too fast, slow, or lengthy, some minor sound editing can make it better. And because clogging is a "percussive dance" – strive to make your team's **tapping** sounds as loud, clear and synchronized as possible.

Timing – Not only does the choreography of your clogging steps need to keep good time with the song, each dancer needs to stay **on-beat** and closely match each other's movements. When dancers move at different times, it's very distracting and destroys the routines' sound!

Appearance – How you and your team *look* does matter! The audience picks up on *every* detail, and elements of **the way you dress and carry yourself** can either add to the entertainment value, or be a detriment. Routines can be enhanced by a special costume that matches and enhances the theme of the song. On the contrary, a costume that clashes with the song (or is ill-fitting) is a grave *distraction*. Whatever the case – *matching team costumes* are absolutely ideal! That does not mean they have to be expensive, but put effort into the details. Colors, hemlines, fit, even hairstyle keep your look "together." **A great trick for skirts/shorts:** Despite differing heights, people's kneecaps tend to be very close to the same level from the ground – so aim for a skirt/short that measures a certain number of inches above the knee. The audience will see a nice clean line at the knee level and divert focus to the team's feet! Maintain your good "appearance" off of the stage as well. Your behavior and demeanor must be that of positivity, respect, sportsmanship, professionalism and courtesy. Sloppiness, poor sportsmanship and/or arrogance is not fun to watch or be around.

Gestures – Clogging is, of course, primarily about the *footwork*. Droopy feet and lazy legs are boring. On the contrary - **BIG, sharp movements look more exciting**, but also generate a more precision tap sound and it make it easier to synchronize with your teammates! Low, odd angles are hard to match...but a knee lifted to 90*(hip level) or arms up at 45* angles are a snap to synch. An audience is *even more* entertained by the addition of *engaging* techniques like **arm movements, usage of the stage and lively facial expressions**. Whatever gesture you add in, make sure your team is synchronized in timing and style. Watch details like the *angles* of your arms including finger placement. Same goes for your legs and toes! Remember, any gesture not done right is either a drag or a distraction! If you opt *not* to do hand movements, it's critical to decide on a uniform placement such as by your sides, or on hips. In traditional clogging costumes, "swishing" a fluffy crinoline and circle skirt is a natural looking way to invoke an energetic look while helping keep your balance.

Energy & Enthusiasm – **ENGAGE** the audience...You are there for *their* ENTERTAINMENT! The crowd feeds off of your energy, so **SMILE** - hoot and holler if the routine warrants it! Have **FUN** and so will the crowd! Keep your head *up* to look confident as well as give eye contact to the crowd. The best way to convey energy is to **PICK UP YOUR LEGS!!!** (see above) Also don't get stuck in one place....use the whole stage! It conveys energy, and draws you nearer to different parts of the crowd.



“Drag-Slide” Clogging Technique

Inject excitement and rich sound into your dancing to thrill audiences – or judges!

You don’t have to be “All That” to put on a great show...

Traditional style clogging is easier than some of the contemporary stuff popular today, yet it is just as entertaining and fun!



Features of Traditional Clogging:

- Country & bluegrass music
- Enthusiastic clapping, hootin’ & hollerin’
- Square-dance inspired attire like button-down shirts, full skirts with crinolines
- Group routines that include circle and square dance interaction and patterns
- White shoes with thick, solid soles and “buck-style jingle taps”
- No elaborate, choreographed hand movements
- Clear, spaced-out tapping sounds (no syncopation)
- Deeply-bending and straightening knees
- A distinctive bouncing, up and down motion of the body
- A very rich, deep drumming sound achieved by the **drag-slide** movement



What is “Drag-Slide”? All traditional clogging steps are made up of some combination of Toe Movements and Heel Movements. Each Toe Movement occurs on an upbeat of the music and is followed by a Heel Movement which occurs on the downbeat of the music. There are no silent or syncopated beats in Traditional Clogging. **The rhythm of the dance is kept by the heel. Anytime the heel is sounded, the knee is flexed and then straightened on the following upbeat, resulting in the characteristic up and down motion of the dancer’s body.**

In most traditional clogging, the constant DRAG SLIDE motion of the foot flat on the floor is considered to define the dance itself. Most beginners are taught the basic movements of clogging without the DRAG SLIDE, that is, with minimal knee flexion and a simple heel click to keep time. Experienced dancers frequently REPLACE THE HEEL CLICKS with a heavier “chugging” heel sound. This sound comes from a vigorous DRAG-SLIDE action on the weighted foot generated by deep yet quick bending and straightening of the knee. The deeper the bend and stronger the straightening, the louder and richer the “chug” sound becomes. This drag-slide motion is most clearly seen on kicking steps where the weighted leg is exposed and has the opportunity to slide back and forth freely.

General Tips & Exercises:

- *Strengthen your knees and get used to the sliding motion:* Stand with both legs together, feet flat on the floor. Bend both knees together, and then sharply straighten them. Repeat at an even rhythm until you begin to “chug” back and forth.
- Try the same exercise, but on just one leg at a time
- Try the one-legged chug exercise, but at the same time perform a kick/brush up on the leg in the air
- **Both knees (of weighted and non-weighted leg) should ALWAYS bend & straighten at the same time!**

**** Suggested Practice Routine: “High Horse” by *The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band* (National Dance List) ****

*Clogging is ever-evolving. The integration of exciting rhythms and movements from Irish dance, Jazz and Hip-Hip have opened up clogging to a fresh look and sound, as well as musical versatility. But the danger is that clogging’s Appalachian-American heritage is in danger of becoming extinct! There is nothing wrong with contemporary clogging, but **there is a look, feel, sound and excitement that is unique to traditional, “drag-slide” clogging.** Give it a try – you’ll love it! **And help keep our clogging heritage alive!***