

## TEACHERS' FORUM MEETING/WORKSHOP

It's finally happening! The date is February 3rd and it will be at my house in San Leandro. All interested NCCA members are invited to attend. We'll have an informal meeting and go over some important points for clogging teachers. Everyone will also have the chance for questions and sharing ideas. See the separate ad in this issue.

## PRESENTATION

*By Lois Elling*

No, I'm not talking about using Power Point; I'm talking about how you, as a leader, present yourself and clogging to the dancers. Presentation is very important and has a lot to do with how well they listen and learn from you. You want to give a good impression so they will respect you and follow your directions. But the presentation is also important to get the information across. If it is not presented in a proper manner, it will not be learned.

One of the first things that the dancers will notice is your clothing. I know, we're not supposed to be that

shallow, but the truth is that how you dress does give a certain impression to others, either good or bad. I'm not insisting you dress in your finest, but just avoid those items that could be a turn-off to some, such as tank tops, ripped or torn jeans, even if they are the current fad, too short skirts or shorts, and bare midriffs. You can wear what you want at other times, but these aren't appropriate when on stage. Of course, what is proper depends on your situation. A group that meets to practice every week may be more informal than a local convention. Whatever you wear, be sure it is clean and neat looking.

Before you even start to teach, make sure you have the dancers' attention. Don't start mumbling about the steps if nobody is listening to you. Look at them, ask for their attention, and let them know that you will start when you have their attention. Don't assume that people are listening to you just because you are on a stage. It's also a good idea to introduce yourself first, unless an emcee already did that. Then you can introduce the dance. Tell them one little thing about the dance (no long talks, please) and this will help let them know that it's

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time for them to pay attention. There are always those people who are having a conversation and don't want to stop right away. Give them the chance to finish by letting everyone know that you are starting. When they hear a strong voice or the music come over the speakers, they'll tend to gradually quiet down and shift their attention. Don't expect them to give you their attention if you just stand on the stage, however. Sometimes all that's needed is to speak a little over the mic or play the music for a few seconds. Never be rude, of course.

While on stage, stand up straight, smile and look friendly, and don't keep your hands in your pockets. Think about how you hold yourself on stage; are you hunched over like you're cowering, or do you stand straight with confidence? Look at the dancers now and then, but don't stare or keep your gaze on any one person too much. Even if you need to read a cue sheet, be sure to direct your attention to the dancers often.

Perhaps the hardest part is to act confident, especially when you're not. Remember, you are there teaching to them because you know more than they do, at least in this instance. Act like you have confidence, and you will feel more like it. You will also command the dancers' attention better. If you do slip up, don't fret about it. Correct your mistake, apologize if necessary (and don't make excuses), keep your head up high, and then continue. Speak out directly to the dancers and with confidence.

Some people were born with

stronger voices than others, but no matter what type of voice you have, you can use it to the best of your ability. Practice at home with the goal of projecting your voice. Stand in front of the mirror, look at yourself and give a few clogging cues. Try it in your normal voice, then try it as if you were a great leader. OK – that sounds corny, but it really can make a difference. Speak OUT to the dancers by projecting your voice to them, rather than letting the sounds get swallowed. This doesn't mean shouting, by the way, which is rude and a turn-off to the dancers.

When you talk, be careful not to mumble. Enunciate the words so the dancers can distinguish between words that sound similar. Don't drop off the volume at the end of a word or sentence. Practice saying the cues as clearly as you can. Don't rush your words. One way to keep from going too fast is to emphasize the hard consonants, such as d, t, k, etc. This also makes your words easier to understand. If you're nervous, then take a deep breath and speak carefully and clearly. Chances are more likely you'll speak too fast rather than too slow. Also, be sure you use inflection in your voice so that you don't sound like a robot. You can change the pitch, tone and even rhythm to sound more interesting. Avoid using ums, uhs and ers, etc. The best way to check for some of these is to tape yourself and listen very critically.

When using a microphone, be sure to speak directly into it and keep it close to your mouth. Most micro

phones used by callers and teachers are designed to pick up sound from straight in front of it. If it's not close to your mouth you will have to turn the volume up so they can hear you, and then you will start to have feedback problems. Never blow into a mike to test it (that's bad for it); say "testing" or count instead.

Give clear, distinct directions, not vague ones such as terms that may be misinterpreted. Do your homework ahead of time so you already know the best words you need to use. Put these on your cue card so you won't forget them.

Think about the kind of message you are sending to the dancers during your teach. Are you acting like it's all a chore, or are showing them that you're having fun, too. Don't be afraid to demonstrate your enthusiasm for clogging, the dance, the music, or even one particular step. If it uses your favorite step, let them know that. If you just love the drum section of the song, tell them and let your voice convey the same feeling. You don't want to sound like Eeyore. Make sure you are upbeat in your words, speech, and actions.

One of the most important things you do for a positive presentation is to smile. Smile at the dancers, but also smile while you are just talking or cueing. This can actually affect how the words come across to the dancers. It takes work at first, but comes easier with practice. If it helps you, put a smiley face on your cue card or pick out a friend in the audience or on the floor whom you can smile at.

Remember that the entire time you are on the stage you are giving the dancers a certain impression. Make sure it's a good one!

**DANCES FROM LAST QUARTER**

The one workshop this past quarter in Northern California was Late Harvest Stomp hosted by the Redwood Country Cloggers. Here are the dances presented at that workshop.

**Late Harvest Stomp  
Santa Rosa – Oct. 21**

- Bing Bang (Ramirez) .....El
- Black Horse & Cherry Tree (Mason/ Adams)..... El+
- Chain Hang Low (Willyard).....I+
- Coalmine (Ellinger).....I
- I'll Take You Back (Hill).....I
- Life Is a Highway (John-Smith).....El
- Me and My Gang (McDow)..... A
- Rag and a Fiddle, A (Guenette).....I+

**Clogging Jamboree - addition**

My apologies for ommitting this dance from the list of dances taught at the Jamboree in September.  
Black Horse & Cherry Tree (Enriquez) ...I

**COMPUTERS AND CLOGGING**

I started teaching clogging in 1976. At that time we didn't have a home computer. In 1984 we got our first computer, an Apple Macintosh (the second generation, or "Fat Mac"). It wasn't long before I started using it for clogging-related work. Over the years I've continued to use the computer (all my successive versions) in many different ways. I recently thought about all the ways we, as

clogging instructors and leaders, can and do use our computers for clogging. Things have changed a lot since those first days!

Most of us use our computers for writing up cue sheets and cue cards. Following are some of the ways we use them these days.

1. Writing cue sheets and cue cards, which we can then email to others or print out multiple copies. The computer replaces my old typewriter and the copy-shop.

2. Put together club and organization newsletters to keep our dancers informed.

3. Use email to keep in contact with other cloggers, including taking care of business that we used to have to use snail mail or the telephone for.

4. Learn about all kinds of clogging related topics on the Internet. This replaces going to the library for information on clogging.

5. Music – collecting the songs we use, burning them to CD, editing them for special routines, etc. All those digital files are now on one (or more) hard drive or a few CDs. The same amount of music would be several pounds of 45 rpm records or large cases full of cassette tapes. Man! Those were the olden days!

6. Keeping track of dances and steps taught to our classes. I also use spiral bound notebooks for night-to-night notes, but keep a summary or listing of what I've done on my computer, and find it much easier to refer to that than my notebooks.

7. Making handouts for classes.

8. Keeping track of clogging expenses, which becomes useful around April each year. We still have to locate

those clogging-related receipts, but the computer helps tally and categorize them. If you're really good about keeping track, then you list your expenses as they happen.

9. Keeping a list or roster of current and past club members. One of my clubs will be having a 30-year anniversary party this year and I'll be referring to those old lists of contacts soon.

10. I keep track of all the past clogging workshops and the dances taught at them. With this database I can quickly find just about any cue sheet from the past 20+ years. This may be a bit excessive for some, but I've found it to be more useful than I expected when I first started it years ago.

11. Digital photographs of our dancers, which can easily be shared on the web or by email. Remember using film and going to the drugstore to pick up your latest group of photos? Sometimes it took weeks or months before we got to see the pictures we took, now it can be just minutes after we take the shot.

12. Create and print forms: registration forms for new dancers, NCCA forms for convention, membership and the Dictionary, and other things.

13. Create and print fliers for special events. We'll also email fliers to others.

14. Catalog collections of clogging videos, music, photographs, workshops, and more.

I use my computer for several other things related to clogging and I can't imagine what I'd do without it these days.