

Features

Not-so-scary contra dancing

By Ryan Hunter
Staff Writer

For the past few months, the Grey Eagle Tavern and Music Hall has hosted contra dancing every Monday night. A full night of contra dancing can be enjoyable for anyone who wants to come, be they beginners or old pros.

Before I go any further, I would like to take this moment to explain what contra dancing is. Remember back in elementary school gym class when they would force all of the kids to line dance? Contra dancing is what happens when the joker next to the record player turns the speed up to 75 revolutions per minute.

My previous contra dancing experience was not so cheerful. Everyone on the dance floor, except yours truly, had apparently been dancing for some time, and I could not figure out why I was not as good as they were.

During the course of the two dances that I took part in, I was thrown into the wrong line, I stepped on toes and in return had my toes stepped on. I collected a lovely array of really mean looks from my fellow dancers.

With an experience like this to draw on, it seems redundant to say I had little hope for any poor beginners that thought they might try their hand, or should I say foot, at this new dance. As



The Grey Eagle features contra dancing every Monday night.

PHOTO BY SARAH LACY

I said before, I was pleasantly surprised. Wild horses could not have dragged me onto that dance floor, but it did not take me long to discover a fellow beginner. She was wearing a sweater vest and a look that told everyone around her that she had absolutely no idea what she was doing.

The way the dancing was set up, there was a Barker yelling out all of the things that they would be doing, and then the dancers did them. That was unusual when the chaos began, especially for the woman in the sweater vest.

When the crowd moved left, she moved right when they walked forward, she walked backward, and when they spun around, she just stood there.

I thought she was going to be killed by the other dancers, but that was not the case at the Grey Eagle. When she was turned the wrong way, someone always took the time to stop and point her in the right direction. When she was about to wander off, someone was always able to read her in, and they always did it with a big grin on their faces.

It honestly seemed like everyone was out there just to have fun. What a novel idea. However, even with the calm tempers and gentle manner of these people, the dances are very fast and can become complicated. Especially when the crowd grew so much that they were forced to go from one line to two.

From the safety of my little booth, I looked on in amazement at how these people were moving. They were not necessarily all together—the woman in the vest was not the only contra rookie—but at least making an attempt at togetherness. I kept waiting for a hand to fly up when it shouldn't and for someone to lose an eye or worse. But again, my fears were never realized. I believe that I did witness a few toe stappings, but that's to be expected.

Monday nights really are for anyone interested in contra dancing. If you've been thinking of trying it out but are afraid that you would just be making a fool of yourself and be in everyone's way, now is the time. Go on down to the Grey Eagle. They will take good care of you.

Doc Watson a living bluegrass legend

By Martha Ball
Staff Writer

Doc Watson played to a packed house Nov. 20 at Grey Eagle Tavern and Music Hall, and he was fantastic. I was thrilled for the opportunity to see a living legend perform right here in my own hometown.

I don't even count bluegrass and mountain music as one of my favorites, but Doc Watson was just incredible to watch. At 76, he can pick a guitar better than anybody I have ever seen. He is truly the real "unplugged" acoustic master. On top of all that, he's been blind since infancy. His talent was enough to make me appreciate bluegrass.

Doc Watson is a local musician, born in the Deep Gap community, east of Boone. He has won five Grammy awards and received the National Medal of the Arts in 1997.

He played with his grandson Richard Watson at the beginning of his set. Richard Watson is the son of Merle Watson, Doc's son and previous partner, who was killed in a tractor accident in 1985. An annual music festival, Merlefest, in Wilkesboro now bears his name.

The show started out simple and homesy. The announcer just came out on the stage and said, "This is Doc and Richard. No screaming 'Hello, Asheville!' at this concert. Watson prefers to play in

informal settings. He joked that he would rather be in his living room performing, though he didn't think we would all fit. He shies away from the fancy stuff, as he calls it, and it is obvious in his show. He wore a blue plaid shirt, and plain brown pants. It was just him and Richard Watson sitting on the stage with their guitars. It was very cozy, and felt like being with family.

They opened with "March-Box Blues" and went into "Trainwhistle Blues." The second piece had some serious guitar picking in it. The man moved his fingers so fast it was unreal.

I found it impossible to just sit still during the show. I had to either tap my feet, clap my hands, or bob my head in time to the music. I wasn't the only one in the music hall either.

The only downside to the whole show was midway through the performance, some loud-mouth behind me kept talking about inane things to this young woman. He seemed to be trying to pick up.

You grew up in Richfield? Shut up. No way." Shooting him dirty looks did no good. He prattled on and on about how he locked his keys in his car, got a coat hanger and shoved it through the win-

dow stripping. By then, I was ready to shove him through a small opening.

I never understood why people pay for concerts they have no intention of paying any attention to, and why they insist on ruining it for others, especially when it is someone like Doc Watson, who deserves respect and attention. Thankfully, Watson's wonderful voice and playing made up for the man behind me. Watson also liked to tell jokes between his songs and even came up with some on the spot.

The second half of the show featured Jack Lawrence, who harmonized with Watson beautifully, especially during a piece called "Storms on the Ocean."

After one song, Lawrence remarked to the audience that they might have noticed he kept his eyes closed the entire time. "I really get into it," Lawrence said. "Either that or I don't want to see any suffering."

Watson jumped in, bragging that he never has the problem of seeing his audience suffer. Watson often tells stories about the music he plays, whether it's to summarize the plot behind the song or to explain why it has special meaning to him.

I enjoyed this style, making it easier to appreciate each and every piece he performed. The music was kind and gentle on the ears.

Watson knows how to play guitar. He didn't need to compensate for a lack of talent by playing extremely loud or screaming into a microphone.

Review

By Megan Wood
Staff Writer

Tap Dogs, a six-man Australian tap dancing group, will perform on Dec. 6 at the Asheville Civic Center.

The show is billed as, "A unique theatrical experience—part theater, part dance, part rock concert, part party, part construction site, a rough, tough, and rocking reinvention of tap dance for the '90s."

Tap Dogs has been described as both, "Australia's answer to Irish Riverdance," and "Testosterone tap."

The idea behind the show is to

take traditional notions of tap dancing and turn them around into an experience that has modern overtones.

The show is set in a construction site with six men tap-dancing in a way that dispels any notions about tap dancing being only for little girls who are wearing frilly dresses.

The show has become so popular that it has expanded into three, simultaneous touring companies.

During each show, the dancers construct the set out of aluminum grinders as they perform.

In addition to constructing a set every night, the cast of Tap Dogs also dances in water and upside down, while suspended in harnesses.

The costumes that are worn during the performance are pretty unconventional, considering that most dance performances are formal events. Rather than performing in normal tap shoes, the Tap Dogs perform in Blundstone Boots, Australian workboots with metal taps attached.

The set is designed to resemble a construction site. It is mobile enough to move and change with the performers.

The show became both an international, critical and public sensation, winning numerous choreog-

raphy awards for its unique style. The show has also won an Olivier Award in London, United Kingdom's equivalent of a Tony Award.

Tap Dogs first premiered in Australia in January 1995 at the Sydney Theater Festival. Since this time, the show has played sold-out engagements in over 150 cities around the world.

Although all of the original members of the show were Australian, the group now includes dancers from Australia, England, Canada and the United States.

The production was created by Dein Perry, the only choreographer that has won an Olivier Award in two consecutive years, and Nigel

Triffitt, a director who is acknowledged as a leader in visual theater in Australia.

According to the press release, Perry got inspiration for the show from his own background. Before working as a choreographer, Perry worked as an industrial machinist. After receiving a government grant, Perry formed Tap Brothers, the predecessor to Tap Dogs.

From this, Perry was offered the chance to choreograph the West End musical, *Hot Shoe Shuffle*, which brought the group to London and earned Perry his first Olivier Award in 1995. A subsequent offer from the Sydney Theater Com-

pany led to the collaboration with designer Nigel Triffitt, which resulted in the creation of Tap Dogs.

Tap Dogs made its North American debut in Montreal in 1996. Since this time, the show has been featured on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno," and is currently making its first run on tour through the United States.

The show is usually around 90 minutes and does not include an intermission.

Tickets are on sale at both the Highsmith Center and at the Asheville Civic Center. The price is \$5 for students and \$22 for faculty and staff.

Review

Tap Dogs bring construction show to Asheville

Upcoming

The third annual UNCA Christmas party for Hillcrest Headstart children will be in the Highsmith Center lounge on Dec. 3. The event was organized by Sisters of Spirit, Brothers Unified and Achieving, the literature club and the Student Fellows. Sodexo-Marriott Dining Services is providing bagged lunches for the children and participating students. Students and faculty are welcome to attend the event between 11 a.m. and noon when there will be storytelling, games and other events. Charles James will appear as Santa Claus.



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