

# Study Guide For Teachers

## Pat Cannon's Foot & Fiddle Dance Company In *American Footsteps*

presented by  
**Young Audiences**  
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### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

In this high-energy performance, Pat Cannon and her Dance Company engage students in learning about traditional American folk dances and music. The dancers are accompanied by a wonderful fiddler, and have to work hard to keep up! This program provides a real understanding of a variety of American folk dances and their European, African and Native American cultural origins.

**Audience Limit: None**  
**Intended for grades K-12**

### LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- learn the social history and cultural heritage of American country dance and music
- be able to identify the individual dance styles and music that make up the American folk arts legacy
- gain an appreciation for folk arts and ethnic traditions as reflections of cultural heritage and pride

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Country dance and music are far removed from the daily reality of most young people's lives, yet remain a vital and vibrant part of America's cultural heritage. In many parts of the rural South, people still practice the folk traditions of clogging, square dancing and playing bluegrass music (primarily on fiddles, guitars, banjos, and mandolins) for parties, family gatherings, and community events.

"American Footsteps" provides students with a dazzling blend of these traditional art forms, including square dancing, clogging, and tap dancing, while explaining their ethnic roots and social development.

Ms. Cannon and company supply the pieces of the historical puzzle that show how American country dance is truly a melting pot by demonstrating dance forms that combine movements from African-American, Native American, and European cultures.

Students participate throughout this program, learning the rhythmic clapping and body-slapping pattern called a "hambone" and try some basic square dance steps. By using the activities in this guide, students can learn more about these American traditions, and see how our culture is still influenced by them today.

## BEFORE THE PROGRAM

1. Most of the music and dances the Foot and Fiddle troupe performs are based on folk arts that have been passed down and preserved through many generations. Discuss how cultural history and ethnic traditions are protected and handed down within a family. Have students share any stories, songs or special customs particular to their own families or culture.
2. Ask students if when they relate a story from a relative or friend, they "leave their own mark" on it (change or embellish any part of it) before they pass it on. Explain that the same "evolution" often occurs with a dance step or a song — as someone uses it, he/she changes or adds to it until it becomes his or her own. For younger students, you could relate this concept to the game "telephone".
3. Coordinate the arrival of Foot and Fiddle Dance Company with a study unit that explores the cultural history and ethnic roots of some of the people whose folk arts have evolved into American country styles (Irish, Scottish, English, Welsh, French, African), or a unit on immigration.

## VOCABULARY WORDS

**Country music:** a unique American art form that began as regional folk art of southern rural culture. Much of the music has its roots in the folk songs and fiddle tunes of the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon immigrants, which eventually became influenced by the rhythm and blues of the African slaves.

**Fiddle:** the same instrument as a violin — but in country music, played with a different technique and bowing.

**Caller:** the teacher/director of the square dance. He/she prompts the dancers as to what steps and patterns they are to perform by either singing or "patter" calling the instructions. (Patter calling is speaking in rhymed sequences, similar to rapping.)

**Square Dancing:** group dancing done with eight or more people to the accompaniment of country music with the fiddle as the lead instrument. Dancers form circles of four or eight, and are led through steps and figures by a caller.

**Clogging:** rhythm dancing done to country music. Today, dancers who clog wear metal plates or taps on their shoes to accentuate the rhythm of the music; but traditionally, this dance was performed in regular shoes.

**A Cappella:** singing without instrumental accompaniment.

**Hambone:** a rhythmic pattern made by clapping and slapping one's hands together and against different parts of the body.

**Hoedown:** a term used to describe a gathering of country musicians and dancers who are having a good time dancing and playing music!

## AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. Discuss the elements that help make a creative art form stand the test of time. Why has traditional American folk music and dance lasted for so long? What does it still tell us about ourselves?
2. Ask students to decide what current songs and dance styles could be popular with audiences in the years to come. What artists, musicians, actors and dancers do they think will still be popular in the future, and why?
3. See if students can find examples of where traditional American music and dance has influenced our contemporary culture. For instance, how is a DJ or MC similar to a caller?
4. Get the music teacher involved! Have students listen to various styles of country music, explore the rhythms and identify the instrumentation.
5. Get the visual arts teacher involved! Have students explore various American folk arts and their connections to the cultures that influenced them.

## ARTIST INFORMATION

Pat Cannon, founder and Artistic Director, formed the *Foot and Fiddle Dance Company* in 1981. Since then, the troupe has performed with Roy Clark, Ricky Skaggs, Kitty Wells, Bill Monroe and Minnie Pearl. The *Foot and Fiddle Dance Company* has performed at concerts, tours and festivals across the United States. International visits include Scotland, Moscow, and the Biennale de la Danse in France.

## RESOURCES

**Anthology of American Folk Music.** Vols. 1-3. Folkways 2951, 2952, 2953.

**Ackerman, Karen.** *Song and Dance Man..* Knopf, 1988.  
**Cline, Dallas.** *Homemade Instruments.* Oak Press, 1976.

**Duke, Jerry.** *Clog Dancing in the Appalachians.* Duke Publishing Co., 1984.

**Sanders, Scott.** *Hear the Wind Blow: American Folksongs Retold.* 1985