

## MJP IRISH DANCE SHOE GUIDE



### SOFT SHOES

Girls will need either black ballet slippers or Irish Poms (also called Ghillies or Light shoes). The soft shoes are a small slipper with a little leather sole on the bottom and long laces that criss cross on the front of the foot. The extra length of the laces is tied around the dancer's foot, not around the ankle or leg.

Black ballet slippers are a suitable, cheaper alternative for class and for shows but dancers who wish to compete will need to purchase proper Irish Poms.

Boys will need either jazz shoes or a boys Reel shoe. The boy reel shoes are similar to a jazz shoe in that they have a soft leather upper and a soft leather sole on the ball of the foot. The difference is that boys Reel shoes have a hard heel on them that makes a clicking noise when they hit their heels together. Although these are the proper shoes for a competition, they are quite costly so, until they dance their first feis, boys may wear jazz shoes instead.

Ballet slippers or Jazz shoes can be purchased at any dance store in town and sometimes at Walmart or Payless shoes. If you intend to purchase Irish dance shoes, please do not buy them at the ballet shops around town as they will sell you Highland dance shoes instead of ghillies which are similar but are the wrong shoe. Steele Celtic Dancewear (address below) carries Irish dance shoes or you can purchase the shoes online or at a feis.

### HARD SHOES

Dancers that know their Hard shoe dances will need Hard shoes or Heavy shoes but most dancers don't start to learn these dances until half way through their second year.



Once a dancer starts learning their hardshoe technique in class, the sooner they get into the hard shoes, the better. The shoes are strange for beginners to get used to and are a lot more difficult to balance in than softshoes. Dancers need to have strong legs and ankles and good softshoe technique before beginning hardshoe. That's why we usually wait a year to start teaching hardshoe in class.

Although we like students to wear hard shoes as soon as possible, we understand that they can be expensive. So, if your dancer is about to go into their yearly growth spurt or is currently in one, we recommend waiting until after they grow so that their new shoes last as long as possible.

## **AT A SHOW OR FEIS**

If your shoes are older, you may want to replace the shoe laces before a show or a feis to ensure they won't break at a critical moment. Always be sure to have an extra pair of laces in your dance bag.

To make quick shoe changes easier at shows, elastics can be treaded through soft shoes, hard shoes or both instead of shoe laces. The elastic can be bought at fabric stores or at Zellers or a similar store.

Be sure to polish both pairs of shoes and repair any holes well beforehand so that they are shiny and new looking. Please remove any colored tape from your shoes. If you need to have your hardshoes taped to keep from slipping, please use black tape.



## **HARD SHOE SIZING TIPS**

If you know your Irish or UK size, this is generally the closest match as most Irish dance shoes are manufactured in Ireland.

Many shoe boxes in regular shoe retail stores print both the American and UK size right on the box. So, go into a store, try on shoes until you find the correct size, then look on the box for the corresponding UK size.

All leather shoes stretch. Hard Shoes may stretch up to 1/2 size with a lot of use, and Soft shoes may stretch even a bit more. Therefore, at the time of purchase, the fit should be as snug as tolerable. That being said, if you are trying to decide between two sizes, you probably want to err on the side of the smaller shoe.

The exception to the last rule is for younger dancers who are growing very fast. You'll want to leave some room for growth, which can usually be accomplished by going with a size that is a bit roomier to begin with. But don't go too big. It can lead to looking sloppy and bad habits. Us dancing teachers and adjudicators like a nice tight, neat look. So we recommend that you never buy a shoe more than 1/2 size larger than ideal.

## **WHERE TO BUY**

New shoes can be purchased at any feis or at: "Steele Celtic Dancewear" <http://www.irishdanceshoes.com/>  
576 Coach Grove Rd SW Calgary, AB (403) 686-3514

You can also check out our MJP used shoe exchange by e-mailing: [mjpshoes@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpshoes@hotmail.com)