

Men in three-four time



The interview with Franz-Josef Heinle was conducted by Rebekka Antoniadou

Men dance the *Schuhplattler*, which means shoe slapping. One of the men who has been doing this for 50 years is Franz-Josef Heinle. He is 62 years old, a farmer and master carpenter by profession and since a long-time *Vorplattler* in the Thalkirchdorf local history club:

Mr. Heinle, why is the dance called the Schuhplattler?

Platteln means slapping your shoes. But it is much more than that. You rhythmically slap your thighs, the soles of your shoes at the front, the back and across and stomp your shoes on the floor. There are twelve different ways to slap in the *Schuhplattler*. Those who dance a little better are the *Vorplattler*. You dance and the learners try to copy the sequence of steps.

At what age do you learn to platter?

Already three-year-olds start with simple figures. One is called the "Three Leather Stockings". The boys slap their thighs and clap their hands, then they alternately give each other their right and left hand and in between they turn. Then, over time, the *platteln* is added.

What is special about the Schuhplattler?

The change from the pair dance with the women to the solo of the boys. When this change works well, it's a wonderful feeling. And that we *platter* in our traditional costume. That connects. The women wear their beautiful dirndls and we wear our lederhosen. And when we loudly cheer while dancing and the audience joins in, then it's very special.

What is the most difficult thing about this dance?

A good *platterer* should have a good sense of tact and rhythm. You also need a good physical condition, coordination and agility. When you *platter*, you alternately hop from one foot to the other, turning your feet up every now and then to slap your shoes. That can be pretty exhausting. But over time, the more you practise, the easier it gets.

What do you wear to dance?

We wear traditional costumes. Each community has their own. Since the dancers also come from different communities, our local club in Thalkirchdorf equips the dancers with uniform costumes for their performances. In our case it is the Allgäu mountain costume. We are wearing short black deerskin lederhose. When we slap the leather, it makes a better sound. In the short trousers we can bend our knees better. We also wear suspenders made of green fabric with hand-embroidered edelweiss, a white shirt, grey knee-high socks and a loden hat decorated with tuft of chamois hair. With the leather brogues you can stomp wonderfully loudly on the ground.

Where does the dance come from? Can you tell us something about the history of the dance?

It has been danced since the mid-19th century. Originally it was danced by a couple, with the male partner improvising and slapping to impress the female partner. Since then, women and men dance it at local history evenings, village and mountain festivals, club anniversaries of friendly neighbouring clubs, at May festivals after the maypole had been erected, but also at private celebrations. One usually dances in clubs until getting married, but some continue after that, like me as a *Vorplattler*. Tourism has revived the dance even more. Everywhere in the Allgäu more and more *Plattler* groups have emerged.

Mr. Heinle, do you think that the Schuhplattler is actually an important cultural asset worth protecting, or is it now purely a show dance?

It is a dance worthy of protection as a cultural asset, because it connects people across generations. Young and old meet to practise, celebrate together, travel to other communities to dance. Being on stage in the traditional costume while the audience wildly cheers is an overwhelming experience. This is pure joy of life. This motivates many young people to join the club, after which they are captivated by the dance and the tradition is preserved