

WOMEN OF THE TAP RENAISSANCE

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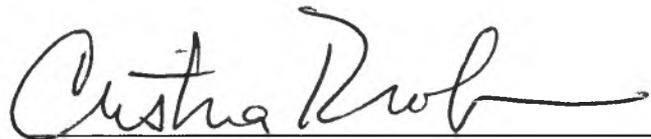
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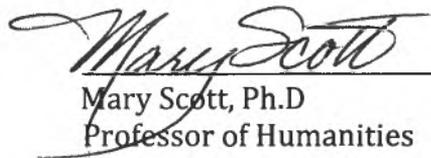
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WOMEN OF THE TAP RENAISSANCE

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2017

Tap, America's own indigenous dance form, has a rich and colorful history that parallels American history. With roots in African and Irish dance and influences from English Lancashire clog dancing, tap thrived in the United States during the first four and a half decades of the twentieth century. The history of tap dance has traditionally focused on the male narrative, often undervaluing or even omitting the myriad contributions of women tap dance artists. The women's narrative, however, is significant and a crucial component in tap dance history, particularly during the 1970s and 80s when female tap dance artists worked to bring tap out of its decline in popularity by saving, transforming, reinvigorating, and propelling tap dance into its future. As a female tap dancer, choreographer, and tap dance educator, I believe it is important that our female genealogy is recognized, chronicled, and celebrated. This thesis works to bring women back into their rightful place in the story of tap.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

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Introduction

Tap, America's own indigenous dance form, has a rich and colorful history that parallels American history. With roots in African and Irish dance and influences from English Lancashire clog dancing, tap thrived in the United States during the first four and a half decades of the twentieth century. Tap was front and center on the stages of vaudeville and Broadway, in the jazz clubs of the northern cities, and in the Hollywood movie musical. Although women always had a steady presence in tap, the art form and its narrative was dominated by men. This thesis works to bring women back into their rightful place in the story of tap.

Following tap's heyday, and for a number of reasons, there was a steady decline in interest in tap dance during the 1950s and 60s. Due to a confluence of factors, tap lost its centrality and became marginalized almost to the point of extinction. In the 1970s and 80s, however, female tap dancers, through various innovative means, brought tap back into mainstream popular culture. This critical moment in tap's history cannot be overlooked, as the art form could have disappeared altogether had it not been for the efforts of these women. The history of tap dance has traditionally focused on the male narrative, often undervaluing or even omitting the myriad contributions of women tap dance artists. The women's narrative, however, is significant and a crucial component

in tap dance history. As a female tap dancer, choreographer, and tap dance educator, I believe it is important that our female genealogy is recognized, chronicled, and celebrated. My thesis, therefore, will illuminate tap's resurgence in American history as a treasured art form through an in-depth study of the women of the tap renaissance. But first, in order to appreciate the context for this resurgence in tap's popularity, my thesis will offer a brief discussion of tap's heyday and the factors that led to tap's decline into obscurity.

Tap's Heyday: 1900-1945

Tap Traditions, Gender, Race, and Disparity in Opportunities

Tap flourished during the early decades of the twentieth century. Male exemplars such as Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, The Nicholas Brothers, Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly were prominent figures on the most prestigious vaudeville stages, in the clubs of the northern cities, on Broadway, and in the Hollywood movie musicals of the 1930s and 40s.¹ During these years, women also played a role in each of these theatrical genres, but clearly defined gender roles that kept women in the background as ornamental chorus girls had been established and, for the most part, were adhered to by both male and female

¹ During tap's heyday, there were many renowned male exemplars of tap dance who became regular performers in vaudeville and in the most prestigious clubs of the northern cities. Of these men, those who will be discussed later in this thesis are: Charles "Honi" Coles, Foster Johnson, Eddie Brown, Leon Collins, and Charles "Cookie" Cook. Coles also went on to have a successful career on Broadway.

dancers alike. Moreover, there were distinct differences in opportunities for African American and white dancers. In New York City, up and coming white dancers, both male and female, learned to dance in studios, such as those run by Billy Pierce, a black tap dance instructor, or Ned Wayburn, who was white. Black female tap dancers learned the art form from black teachers who had established dance schools in Harlem. The most renowned black male tap dancers, however, had no formal dance training. They learned to dance and improve their skills on their own in the streets, dance halls, or in New York City's famous Hooper's Club.²

The Hooper's Club was actually a small back room in an old pool hall near The Lafayette Theater, which served as a bustling hub for male tap dancers, mostly African American, to gather and hone their craft. At the club, these men shared the African American tap dance traditions of *improvisation* and *challenge*. Improvisation is exemplified by a dancer's spontaneous creation of new tap steps or sequences without any formal forethought, planning, or choreography. Challenge sequences begin with a dancer's solo execution of one of his best steps, followed by a partner or fellow participant's accepting the challenge. The second dancer attempts to "one up" his challenger by responding

² Valis Hill, Constance, *Tap Dancing America, A Cultural History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 86, 87

with an interesting variation of the same step or by creating an altogether more thrilling step.

The praxis of improvisation and challenge was vital in the development of this American art form and until tap's renaissance in the 1970s and 80s, these traditions were unique to men. Two of the most prominent male exemplars of improvisation and challenge flourished a half century before tap's peak years: William Henry Lane, also known as "Master Juba" and John Diamond.³ According to historian Tyler Anbinder, Lane was a pivotal figure behind the emergence of tap dance.⁴ He was a free black man who lived and worked as a professional minstrel dancer in the notorious Five Points district of New York in the 1840s.⁵ The district's Irish, Italian, Chinese, German, and eastern European Jewish immigrants shared the neighborhood with significant numbers of African Americans. The streets were lined with saloons, brothels and dance halls and the neighborhood was known for its overcrowded filthy tenements, garbage-covered streets, prostitution, gambling, violence, drunkenness, immorality and crushing poverty.⁶ Historians Marshall and Jean Stearns, report that in 1854, one particularly notorious tenement, the "Old

³ Anbinder, Tyler, *Five Points* (New York; Plume Publishing, Penguin Putnam Inc. 2002) p. 174, 175 and Stearns, Marshall and Jean, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Da Capo Press) p. 47

⁴ Anbinder, p. 175

⁵ Anbinder, Tyler, p.173 and Stearns, p. 44

⁶ Anbinder, p. 1

Brewery," housed some 1,000 men, women, and children and was almost equally divided between Irish immigrants and African Americans who were thrown together by abject poverty.⁷ Mainstream Americans at the time found the Five Points district repugnant, yet captivating.⁸

Lane acquired his dance training from an African American jig and reel dancer by the name of "Uncle" Jim Lowe.⁹ As was common for dancers working in the district's rowdy dance halls and theaters, Lane also observed and incorporated dance moves from other renowned dancers into his own repertoire.¹⁰ To create an interesting spectacle, theatrical agents in Five Points organized dance competitions between the native-born white dancers, Irish immigrants and African Americans. Lane was frequently hired to compete with the Irish-American dancer John Diamond, who was considered "one of, if not the greatest jig dancer that the world ever knew."¹¹ Competing at both the Bowery and Chatham Theaters beginning in 1844, each man was paid a sum of \$500.00 per event, which implies that their challenge dances must have drawn large audiences. Although the winner of each contest was never recorded,¹² the long-lasting outcome of these friendly rivalries was the sharing and

⁷ Stearns, p. 44

⁸ Anbinder, p. 1

⁹ Stearns, p. 44

¹⁰ Anbinder, p. 173

¹¹ Ibid, p. 175

¹² Ibid, p. 175

intermingling of the African American shuffle and the Irish jig. This melding of dance styles and the creation of new innovations were instrumental in the development of tap dance. Lane, who incorporated both the African shuffle and the high-stepping Irish jig into his repertoire, along with a natural and effortless swinging element to his rhythms, is considered by historians to be the first tap dancer.¹³ Dance historian Hannah Marie Winter describes Lane as “the most influential single performer of 19th century American dance,” and states that “the repertoire of any current tap dancer contains elements, which were established theatrically by him.”¹⁴

While Diamond and Lane engaged in the ritual of improvisation and challenge as a means to earn a living in the mid-nineteenth century, these dance customs have always been important artistic agents in tap’s evolution and are practiced today by tap dancers of both genders and all races, who have reached an advanced technical skill level and have acquired a large working vocabulary. Not unlike jazz musicians who improvise within a harmonic progression, tap dancers improvise within the structure of their accompanying music, or, if dancing a capella, within a pre-determined structure before the outset of a given dance. Resistance, resilience, and freedom were and still are inherent values expressed through improvisation and challenge. Throughout the history

¹³ Stearns, p. 47, Anbinder, p.175

¹⁴ Stearns, p. 47

of tap dance, African Americans and Irish immigrants used percussive rhythms as a form of resistance to oppression and poverty; this was especially important for African Americans who endured the tyranny of slavery and later, during tap's heyday, the humiliation and constraints of Jim Crow segregation. These two tap dance traditions have always been vehicles for creating original aural and visual expressions and, throughout tap's history, tap dancers have been drawn to the freedom to create new rhythms. In the early decades of the twentieth century, improvisation and the act of playful competition were still unique to male tap dancers, as they allowed men to continually improve their skills as solo performers and potential headliners, avenues not yet open to most female tap dancers.

From the early decades of the twentieth-century, male dancers working in a highly competitive arena often perfected an idiosyncratic specialty as a signature of their own unique talent. These specialty acts were referred to as *comedy, class, or flash acts*. The comedy and flash acts included comic stunts, acrobatic tricks, and aerial feats. Class acts, on the other hand, paired at least two dancers who moved with synchrony and precision.¹⁵ The high degree of control made their dances appear effortless and magical. The most famous exemplars of the class act were the African American team of Charles "Honi"

¹⁵ Constance Valis Hill, *Brotherhood in Rhythm: The Jazz Tap Dancing of the Nicholas Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 197

Coles and Cholly Atkins. Jam sessions at the Hooper's Club included all the elements of these traditions and often continued all night. When the dancers were on touring circuits, the sessions continue from one city to the next as well. Echoing the competition between William Henry Lane and John Diamond, black and white male tap dancers gathered in clubs and theaters for informal and formal dance competitions where judges sat under the stage to listen to rhythm, in the wings to set the time, and in the orchestra pit to watch for visual style.¹⁶ While the men competed and showcased their talents in solo, duet, or trio performing acts, women tap dancers of this era were usually relegated to the chorus lines. Female chorus dancers in high-heeled dance shoes and flashy attire were a staple in most vaudeville shows and clubs of the northern cities. In stark contrast to the athleticism displayed by their male counterparts, women tap dancers, with few exceptions, were expected to embody femininity and grace. There was an intrinsic expectation that female tap dancers were weaker and less capable than the men.

America was strictly segregated during tap's peak years. Robinson and The Nicholas Brothers had recurring guest spots performing at New York's elite Cotton Club, which hired the most prominent black entertainers but catered to an all-white audience. Renowned African American musicians Duke Ellington

¹⁶ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 87

and Cab Calloway had long-standing jobs at the Cotton Club as bandleaders and hosts for the variety of acts performed by African American singers, dancers and comedienne. The club featured one of the most illustrious chorus lines of the 20s and 30s, comprised entirely of light-skinned, attractive African American female dancers, while the club's black male dancers and musicians could be dark-skinned, signifying a type of color and gender segregation on stage. Dark-skinned male dancers represented athleticism while light-complected female dancers symbolized beauty. Furthermore, performers and audiences were divided along racial lines at the Cotton Club. Whites were not allowed on stage, and blacks were not allowed to sit in the audience. This example of segregation in Harlem was among countless others resulting from the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The court called for separate but equal status for black Americans with regard to transportation, which led to similar legislation with regard to housing and education.¹⁷ This Supreme Court decision opened the door for states to legalize widespread segregation through the Jim Crow Laws, requiring black and white citizens to use separate public facilities such as water fountains, public schools, restaurants, buses, libraries, rail cars, and entertainment venues. During these decades, vaudeville circuits showcased white entertainers who performed for

¹⁷ <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/plessy-v-ferguson>

all white audiences, while the Theater Owners Booking Association, or TOBA circuit, hired black entertainers who performed for all black audiences. While the vaudeville and TOBA circuits were separate, they were far from equal. In fact, as a result of TOBA's notoriously poor working conditions, its nickname became Tough on Black Artists.¹⁸

Due to their virtuosity, Robinson and the Nicholas Brothers transcended many racial barriers and became beloved headliners in both black and white vaudeville and in Broadway musicals. Moreover, throughout their entire careers, they defied the demeaning practice of performing in blackface makeup. After the advent of the Hollywood movie musical, Robinson and the Nicholas Brothers enjoyed success in this genre as well. However, unlike white tap dancers, Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, who were cast in leading roles and had artistic control over their movies, Robinson was offered subservient roles such as butler, bellman, caretaker, and farmhand, and the Nicholas Brothers performed as "specialty acts," with no relation to the movies' plot. Therefore, their scenes could be easily cut when their movies played in racist southern states. Despite their incredible talent, Robinson and the Nicholas Brothers had no artistic control over their work and were subject to the omission of their scenes when deemed necessary by Hollywood producers.

¹⁸ Stearns, p. 78

Male tap dancers dominated the scene during tap's zenith. While headlining in the clubs and starring on Broadway and in Hollywood, men represented power, feats of strength, and a desire to be the best, while female dancers, for the most part, represented beauty, femininity, and a spirit of cooperation and equality among the women in the chorus line. While these gender roles were the established norm in the theater movements of the first decades of the twentieth century, there were notable exceptions. Most extraordinary were the talent and unparalleled careers of The Whitman Sisters, four African American female tap dancers, who performed on both the white vaudeville and TOBA circuits and were also producers and stars of their own successful touring circuit.¹⁹ Other illustrious exceptions to traditional gender roles during this time period are evident through the virtuosic talents and successful careers of Ann Miller and Eleanor Powell, both white, who were featured tap dancers in dozens of Hollywood movie musicals of the 1930's and 40's, and Cora La Redd, an African American woman who, according to Valis Hill, was "not only the most noted female soloist at the Cotton Club in the 1920s and 1930s, but also the most extraordinary jazz tap dancer in those decades."²⁰ However, for the most part, and in each theatrical genre, the male tap dancers were the stars. It wasn't until many decades later, during the 1970s and 80s,

¹⁹ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 59

²⁰ Ibid, p. 92 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljm-fevhbi0>

that women in tap successfully disrupted the mythologized traditions and long-held gender roles in the field of tap dance.

Tap's Decline: 1950s and 1960s

Subsequent to tap's prominence in American popular culture, a convergence of circumstances caused a steady decline in tap's popularity. First, the 1943 Broadway première of *Oklahoma!* changed the course of the Broadway musical, resulting in a change for tap dance as well. Earlier musicals featured large production numbers, novelty acts, and show-stopping tap dances, some with a focus on comedy, but all with the purpose of pure entertainment. *Oklahoma!* was the first of many "book musicals" that incorporated song and dance to enhance the development of the plot. Choreographer Agnes de Mille's ballet not only furthered the storyline, but also evoked complex emotion rather than laughter from the audience. According to Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Oklahoma!* cemented ballet as "the rage" and the change was irreversible.²¹ The Broadway success of *West Side Story* in 1957, with abstract movement infused with ballet, furthered diverted America's interest from tap to both ballet and modern dance.²²

²¹ Stearns, p. 159

²² Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 168

Secondly, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, known in the American tap dance community as the most beloved tap dancer of the first half of the twentieth century,²³ passed away on November 25, 1949. Despite a difficult childhood, Robinson worked his way up through showbusiness channels to eventual success in clubs, vaudeville, Broadway, and Hollywood. Treasured by both black and white audiences, Robinson broke the “two colored rule” of the Jim Crow era by performing as the first solo act in white vaudeville.²⁴ Alain Locke, the first African American Rhodes Scholar and a driving force in the Harlem Renaissance was impressed with Robinson’s Broadway performance in *Blackbirds of 1928*. Valis Hill quotes Locke as he describes Robinson’s dancing: “A Bojangles performance is excellent vaudeville, but listen with closed eyes, and it becomes an almost symphonic composition of sounds. What the eye sees is the tawdry American convention; what the ear hears is priceless African heritage.”²⁵ Writer Langston Hughes, also a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance, describes Robinson’s famous stair dance in *Blackbirds of 1928* as “human percussion” and goes on to detail his dancing as “little running trills of rippling softness or

²³ This is the collective opinion of the American tap dance community.

²⁴ Jim Haskins and N.R. Mitgang, *The Biography of Bill Robinson: Mr. Bojangles* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1998) p. 95, 97

²⁵ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 89

terrific syncopated rolls of mounting sound, rollicking little nuances of tap-tap-toe, or staccato runs like a series of gun shots.”²⁶

Appearing in fourteen Hollywood musicals during the 1930s and 40s, Robinson is best known for his four films with Shirley Temple. While his submissive roles in these movies reinforced racial stereotypes of the era, they also showcased Robinson’s original choreography and highlighted tap dance for American audiences. Gregory Hines, who was the most famous and beloved tap dancer of the second half of the twentieth century,²⁷ reflects on these movies in a YouTube series called “Dancing with Gregory Hines.” Hines describes Robinson as a “a huge star”²⁸ whose on-screen chemistry with Temple is “magic—pure magic.”²⁹ Throughout his lifetime, Robinson was a visible and dynamic presence in tap and when he passed away in 1949, he was mourned by tap dancers and tap enthusiasts alike. 32,000 people lined the streets of New York to pay respect to Robinson, the “Honorary Mayor of Harlem.”³⁰ There were 13,000 mourners outside the 369th Regiment Armory near Harlem where the funeral was held. Amongst the 3,000 who were able to squeeze inside were

²⁶ Ibid, p. 89

²⁷ This is the collective opinion of the American tap dance community.

²⁸²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLxqKTUtsKg>

²⁸²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1gFEiCkbhQ>

³⁰ Haskins and Mitgang, p. 10

Hollywood producers, famous entertainers, musicians, dancers, and athletes including Jimmy Durante, Bob Hope, Louis B Mayer, Darryl Zanuck, Jackie Robinson, Joe DiMaggio, Lee Shubert, Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Danny Kaye, Sugar Ray Robinson, Ethel Merman, and James Barton. Ed Sullivan read from a number of telegrams that had arrived in the days since Robinson's death and according to Haskins and Mitgang, it was agreed that "Robinson hit the lightest taps, but despite the softness of his taps, no performer and very few Americans ever touched the heart of this city, and this nation, with greater impact than Bojangles."³¹ Robinson was far and away the most important and most visible ambassador of tap dance, and his death left a vacuum that no other dancers were able to fill. His stardom was singular, and his loss resulted directly in tap's recession from the spotlight of American popular culture.

Moreover, after World War Two, the immensely popular jazz clubs with big bands and vaudeville style acts were starting to make changes that would further reduce the prominence of tap dance. Drummer Max Roach suggests that the postwar tax levied on dance floors made it difficult for club owners to pay big bands and chorus lines of dancers. Jimmy Payne, a Chicago-based tap dancer and teacher explained that "the cost of stagehands and musicians rose greatly in the fifties because they became unionized. People couldn't afford to

³¹ Haskins and Mitgang, p. 18

put on shows anymore.”³² With vaudeville-style variety acts and big bands slowly dying out, clubs had to reduce in size. In many cases chorus lines had to go and dancers lost work. Many tap dancers hung up their shoes and took work in unrelated fields. Charles “Honi” Coles, known for his virtuosic speed and clarity as a tap dancer, went to work as the stage manager at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. Other featured dancers worked as bellhops, elevator operators, car salesmen, bartenders, and carpenters during this tap drought.³³

Simultaneously, the music scene was changing. In the 1940’s *bebop*, with its frenetic rhythmic shifts, was the rage. Although some tap dancers were able to work in this genre, most preferred the swinging rhythms of the big jazz bands popular in the 20’s and 30’s. *Swing* rhythms are prevalent in jazz music. They are strong propulsive rhythms, usually four beats to a *bar*, which emphasize the off beats or up beats that occur just before and after the down beats. This displacement of the usual rhythmic accent, away from the strong or expected beats, is called *syncopation*. Just as musicians improvise within the framework of a swing composition, tap dancers also improvise, emphasizing up beats, creating rhythmic variation and unpredictability. Swing rhythms leave more open space for musicians and tap dancers to fill in the musical phrases with their own sound, so swing music and tap dance are a perfect synthesis.

³² Ibid, p. 168

³³ Ibid, p. 168

This amalgam is referred to as *jazz tap*.³⁴ Bebop, which was likely influenced by tap dance itself, fills in those phrases and ultimately competes with the sounds and rhythms of the tap dancer.

Finally, during the 1950's, the emergence of rock and roll quickly displaced the musical contexts that supported tap, while the introduction of the television set in American households removed the need for families to seek live entertainment on stages and in jazz clubs.³⁵ The 1952 production of *Singin' In The Rain*, starring Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, and Debbie Reynolds, was the last Hollywood movie musical to feature tap dance. Tap never died out completely, but due to this confluence of factors, tap went deep underground.

The Tap Renaissance: 1970s and 1980s

Following its decline in the 1950s and 60s, tap would reemerge in the United States during the 1970s and 80s due to the efforts of a unique group of women. All across America, young women, primarily college-educated white

³⁴ Jazz tap is a rhythmically complex form of tap dance that matches its speed and rhythmic complexity to that of jazz music. In jazz tap, the rhythms created by the tap dancer are generally unpredictable and often cross over the musical bar line. Jazz tap rhythms, like musical jazz rhythms, emphasize the up-beats, which occur just before and after the more predictable downbeats in a rhythmic phrase. Jazz tap and rhythm tap are interchangeable term.

³⁵ *Honi Coles, The Class Act of Tap*, Directed by Jim Swenson, Produced by Susan Pollard, Narrated by Lena Horne, PBS, Black History Month, 2008

women with backgrounds in modern dance,³⁶ discovered the rhythms of *jazz tap*. These women had come of age during the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement and the sexual revolution of the 60s and 70s. Empowered by these social movements, young female dancers sought to diminish gender, generational, and racial boundaries that had previously defined tap. Although there were many young women involved in tap's resurgence during the 1970s and 80s, the movement was led by five individuals: Brenda Bufalino, Jane Goldberg, Lynn Dally, Linda Sohl-Ellison, and Dianne Walker. Diverse circumstances drew these five women to discover the rhythms of jazz tap, but when they did, they knew they had stumbled upon an American treasure. After chance encounters with male African American tap dancers from the heyday, these young women were intrigued by what they saw and heard. Consequently, they sought out and formed lasting mentor/mentee relationships with these men. Not only did they want to learn their rhythms, they wanted to learn their life stories. These women shared a sense of both rebellion and righteousness in connecting with older African American male tap

³⁶ Modern dance emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily out of the United States and Germany. Early pioneers such as Isadora Duncan rejected the rigidity and constraints of classical ballet's technique, choreography, pointe shoes, and corseted costumes. In response, leaders of modern dance developed a new dance idiom with free flowing hair and costumes, bare feet, and an altogether new technique centered around more physical freedom. Common modern dance movements include contraction and release of the body's core, free flowing arm movements, alternate pointing and flexing of feet, kneeling, lying and rolling on the floor, dramatic jerking movements, and choreography developed as an expression of personal, social, historical or protest narrative.

dancers who, though their careers had waned, still had so much to offer. Once connected to their mentors, these five women independently discovered a common goal: to bring tap back into mainstream popular culture, but with one important distinction: women would now be a vital part of the conversation.

Brenda Bufalino: Trailblazer

Brenda Bufalino, founder and artistic director of The American Tap Dance Orchestra, was born in 1937 in Swampscott, Massachusetts and grew up in a family of musicians, singers, and dancers in the era of the Hollywood musicals. In her autobiography, *Tapping The Source*, Bufalino describes her early tap dance training at Professor O'Brien's Normal School of Dancing. Though O'Brien was a stern taskmaster who made a practice of yelling at his students' parents when he invited them to attend class demonstrations, he gave Bufalino the precise technical training that would serve as a strong base for her later exposure to jazz tap. Her subsequent training with Alice Duffy's School of Dance introduced Bufalino to dance as a theatrical presentation. Echoing tap dances from vaudeville, these routines were rife with gimmicks and props such as canes, jump ropes, pedestals, suitcases and roller skates. Designed as flashy

crowd pleasers, they also included precise articulations of timing and clarity of sound.³⁷

Bufalino's early studio training was consistent with a *Broadway style of tap*, which emphasizes visual presentation, including the feet, legs, arms and upper body. *Rhythm tap, or jazz tap*, on the other hand, emphasizes aural or rhythmic presentation through the sounds made by the feet. While the arms are important in carrying the dancer's body through *air work* and in the facilitation of turns, they are secondary to the rhythms made by the feet. There are further distinctions in the rhythms themselves. The vocabulary and physical manipulations of the feet are similar in both styles, but in Broadway style the rhythms are square and predictable, based largely in European—mostly Irish—rhythmic traditions. In jazz tap, however, the rhythms are swinging, syncopated, complex, and unpredictable and are based in the propulsive rhythms of African dance with influences from American jazz music. Moreover the rhythmic meter generally remains consistent throughout a Broadway style dance piece. For example, if the footwork of a particular dance starts out in a duple-metered rhythm, it generally stays in that rhythm. In rhythm tap, however, the choreographic meter often changes from duple to triplet or duple

³⁷ Brenda Bufalino, *Tapping The Source*, (New Paltz, New York: Codhill Press, 2004) p.17,18, 19, 20, 21

to 16th notes within one measure of music, creating unpredictability and excitement.

At the age of fifteen, Bufalino began her first rhythm tap lessons with Stanley Brown in Boston, Massachusetts. Here she was exposed to a new form in tap and to serious jazz music. Bufalino describes her decision to study at Brown's studio as a defining moment in her life as an artist:

I discovered real jazz when Sandy Sandiford or Dean Earl accompanied our classes, playing hot swing on the upright piano. The little girl from the white sands and blue-green ocean of Swampscott felt newborn and charged with electricity when dancing Afro-Cuban to the poly-rhythmic throbbing of three drummers crowded into the corner of Stanley's studio.³⁸

Brown, a West Indian man, had experienced a successful career in vaudeville and had worked with many well-known black tap dancers who often performed in the school's professional-caliber recitals. The first tap solo that Brown created for Bufalino was set to a tune called, "How About You?" Bufalino recalls that she despised the music choice, as it was lacking in swing rhythms. She cried when she met with the school's musical arranger, Sandy Sandiford, but he assured Bufalino that she would love the tune by the time he was finished with

³⁸ Ibid, p. 22, 23

it. Because of his ability to transform the arrangement into a swinging rendition of the tune, from a square one, Bufalino did indeed come to love the resulting rhythmic syncopations. As she writes in *Tapping The Source*, "It's not always how the tune is written that makes it great. It's how you play it."³⁹ This realization fueled Bufalino's lifelong study of musical arrangements. She voraciously studied those of jazz greats Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie as well as those of her favorite singers, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra and Mel Torme.⁴⁰ Bufalino's experience at Stanley Brown's would have an enormous impact on her future career as a performer, choreographer, and musical composer.

In 1953, at sixteen, Bufalino performed in the Boston nightclub scene with the Bobby Clark Dancers. Boston was a conservative city, and Bufalino was aware that she was pushing social boundaries by dancing underage and in an interracial review. By her seventeenth birthday Bufalino was ready to spread her wings further. At Stanley Brown's suggestion and with both of her parents resigned to the fact that they couldn't stop her, Bufalino headed to New York City to study with Honi Coles.⁴¹ During tap's heyday, Coles had experienced a long and successful performing career, but by the 1950s, with the continuing

³⁹ Ibid, p. 23

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 23, 24

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 25

decline in interest in tap dance, Coles could no longer earn a living by performing. In 1955 he opened a short-lived dance school called "Dance Craft,"⁴² where Coles and Bufalino began a symbiotic relationship that would inspire Bufalino towards her instrumental role in tap's renaissance and help revive Coles' performing career.

Like most African American male tap dancers of his generation, Charles "Honi" Coles learned his craft on the street corners and amateur competitions in his hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Born on April 2, 1911, Coles became known not only for his lightning fast speed, but for his superb elegance and feathery lightness as well. In an interview, actress Lena Horne describes Honi as "making butterflies look clumsy."⁴³ At the age of twenty, he joined the tap team of *The Three Millers*, whose famous pedestal act received rave reviews at The Lafayette Theater in New York. After the act broke up, Coles returned to Philadelphia where he honed his craft by practicing for hours each day for an entire year. He strove for speed and clarity, added more tap sounds to each measure, and experimented with the extension of phrases, crossing over the expected end of a bar line into an unexpected continuation of the rhythm. When Coles returned to New York in 1934, he was a frequent visitor at the Hooper's

⁴² Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p.163

⁴³ *Honi Coles: The Class Act*, Directed by Jim Swenson, Produced by Susan Pollard, Narrated by Lena Horne, PBS, Black History Month, 2008

Club. He teamed up with The Lucky Seven Trio and with The Cab Calloway Orchestra, where he met his friend and future tap dance partner, Charles "Cholly" Atkins. After serving in World War II, the two men formed their famous class act and were immediately hired at The Apollo Theater in Harlem. Dressed in elegantly tailored suits, they performed an act that included fast-paced crystal-clear tap dancing, a swing piece, a challenge dance, or competitive piece in which each dancer trades his best rhythms in an attempt to "one up" his opponent, and in stark contrast, the most famous of all of their dances, a *soft-shoe* entitled *Taking A Chance On Love*.

Executed at an extremely slow tempo, the soft-shoe dance begins as the two men lift the right leg up on the last beat of the musical introduction, and lower it down into a *rond de jambe*, or circular motion. The first two bars begin with a slow *triplet rhythm*, with one single triplet note pause between the two bars. The following two measures contrast a continuous triplet rhythm, with a slower *duple-metered*, or 8th note rhythm, followed by a triplet rhythm turn. The eight-bar phrase ends with the suspension of the right leg in the air for one long slow beat on the count of four, and the precisely controlled lowering of the leg into a gorgeous line on count five followed by three heel drops in triplet rhythm. For the following three measures, the tap rhythm unexpectedly shifts into a swinging *double time*, or 16th note rhythm, only to fall back into the slow

melodic triplet rhythm once again. The controlled turns, scrapes and long legged slides and glides that ensue are accompanied by expressions of raised eyebrows and slight smiles, as if the dancers themselves are surprised by these amazing rhythms. The “slowest soft-shoe dance” in tap, *Taking a Chance On Love* is full of rhythmic variations. One four-bar phrase includes rhythmic variations from a punctuated triplet rhythm *pressed cramp rolls*, with a single triplet note pause between each cramp roll, to a duple metered *flap*, back into a triplet continuation of two brush steps and a *scuff-hop*, to single notes walks, and into a quadruple—or 16th note rhythm, consisting of a playful steps and scuffs. On the single note rhythms, Coles and Atkins simply and elegantly stroll, one step for each count, as though gliding on water. The slow execution of steps requires control and balance. Masters of subtlety and grace, Coles and Atkins execute the piece in an easy, relaxed, and almost magical manner. The sequence ends with a *soft-shoe front essence* in a triplet rhythm, a quick weight shifting *catch step*, followed by two nonchalant *single time* walks, and a triplet rhythm step *ball-change*. On the final musical beat, the men bring their feet together as if the entire dance had been indeed effortless.⁴⁴ Coles’ and Atkins’ world-renowned soft-shoe is one of the most beautiful and elegant tap dances

⁴⁴ *Honi Coles: The Class Act*, Directed by Jim Swenson, Produced by Susan Pollard, Narrated by Lena Horne, PBS, Black History Month, 2008

of the 1940's and the masterpiece has been passed down to younger generations of tap dancers for study and performance.⁴⁵

Coles and Atkins continued to masterfully perform their class act throughout the 1940's, but Constance Valis Hill notes in her book *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* that just as Coles and Atkins had reached a "pinnacle of perfection in their class act," public interest in tap was diminishing.⁴⁶ Due to this decline, the act broke up and while Atkins went on to become the choreographer for the vocal artists of Motown, Coles' dance school created the opportunity for Bufalino to study with him.⁴⁷

Soon after her arrival in New York, Bufalino became Honi Coles' protégé.

In Bufalino's words, Coles "played his feet like a jazz musician":

He was so fast and his arms and legs so stylish that he took my breath away. He started out with a time step, but he never seemed to return to it. His ideas stretched out into long phrases, or he would take a simple step like a cross step and add taps, turns, and slides to it, dress up this plain old step in jewels and satins until it hardly resembled its humble origin. He sang his steps and he sang tunes as he danced. He didn't need any music; he was a one-man band. His manipulations

⁴⁵ Coles and Atkins: *Taking a Chance on Love*, Slowest Soft Shoe
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6f6ewUdHcQ>

⁴⁶ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 162

⁴⁷ *Ibid* p. 163

were varied and exciting, both visually and rhythmically. His feet took on a personality. You could almost see them smile.⁴⁸

In addition to the rhythms and steps that Bufalino learned from Coles, she also explains that she learned *style*: "It's not always the step itself but how you execute it that makes it ordinary or incredible. A simple figure, executed with style, wit, and clear articulation, can become even more effective than flashy turns or complicated *trick steps*."⁴⁹ The pinnacle of Bufalino's tap education came from improvising in the Monday night jam sessions held at Stage Craft. Trading four and eight bar phrases with the greatest tap dancers she had ever encountered left an imprint that would later have a huge impact on her creative process. Bufalino found that her experience with Coles at Stage Craft not only expanded her rhythmic and performance skills but also inspired her to develop her own voice in tap dance even as tap performance venues and audiences were waning. Due to a lack of tap students, Stage Craft closed its doors in 1957 and Coles moved on to work as stage manager at the Apollo. Bufalino continued to study Afro-Cuban, jazz, and modern-primitive dance forms from New York dance instructors and seized every opportunity to perform, though she was hired most frequently to sing, drum, or perform Afro-Cuban or calypso dance

⁴⁸ Bufalino, *Tapping the Source* p. 25, 26

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 27

rather than tap. When she wasn't working, she would spend her evenings in the jazz clubs listening to Charles Mingus, Max Roach or Clifford Brown, or dancing the mambo with Tito Puente, Machito or Joe Cuba's bands.⁵⁰

By the 1960's, not only had tap dance disappeared, but the jazz venues where Bufalino had previously found work were also closing. For a time, Bufalino retired from dance to marry and raise a family. In the countryside of upstate New York, she channeled her creative energy into new artistic forms including poetry, plays, and music. These were the years of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement, and artists all over America were finding new ways to process this turbulence. Bufalino states that she has "always been a renegade with or without a movement,"⁵¹ but the time living in upstate New York allowed her to connect with the land and to create art in a tranquil environment without the half- drunken patrons of the jazz clubs in New York. She was able to pay attention to her own creative process, which led her to create interpretive and avant-garde dances that were a far cry from tap dances. She began performing these new works including a trapeze act in which she climbed around inside a wire cage, with her friend and accompanist Ed Summerlin, who accompanied her with his compositions of synthesized reverberations and screeches. Bufalino later recalled, "Of course I

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 28

⁵¹ Personal email exchange/oral history with Brenda Bufalino, October 13, 2012

couldn't tap dance since everything we did had to be a new idea, and the art world as well as grant organizations were enthralled with technology. Yet I carried my tap shoes everywhere just in case."⁵² The "technology" she is referring to was video/art installations with accompanying synthesized music, which were in vogue during the late 1960's and early 1970's.

Bufalino re-entered tap dance by chance in 1973. While performing her new works at an avant-garde festival, on a boat filled with video installations by the Korean artist Nam June Paik, the electricity short-circuited. Bufalino had her tap shoes in her suitcase and her partner Ed Summerlin had his saxophone. The two began to jam, tap and jazz, at an avant-garde event. In Bufalino's words, "It felt like heresy—outrageous, confrontational. The patrons on the boat, with nothing electronic to view and listen to, surrounded our cage ten deep. We were an acoustic sensation. No one had heard or seen tap dance in fifteen years. 'What a trip! Far out,' everyone exclaimed."⁵³ This experience reignited her passion for tap dance and she began to incorporate it back into her life. After separating from her husband of 14 years in 1973, Bufalino opened her own dance studio to create and practice tap. She also began teaching tap at SUNY New Paltz in the continuing education department. To Bufalino's surprise, her classes were full of enthusiastic young students. She discovered how to begin to

⁵² Bufalino, *Tapping the Source*, p. 35

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 36

break down and teach the complex rhythms of jazz tap to them. Over the course of the next two years, her classes continued to grow. There was great interest in the rhythms of jazz tap and Bufalino began to anticipate a renaissance. At her studio and at the University in New Paltz, Bufalino hosted performances for Honi Coles and The Copasetics, a group of 22 African American male tap dancers who met regularly through the 1950's and 60's to dance in honor of their dear friend, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson who had coined and frequently used the phrase, "Everything is copasetic."⁵⁴

In 1975, Bufalino further fueled the tap revival by producing and directing a documentary, *Great Feats of Feet: Portrait of the Jazz Tap Dancer*, featuring Honi Coles and various members of The Copasetics and funded by a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts.⁵⁵ Each of the men performed his trademark dance routines, interspersed with interviews and tributes to Robinson. Coles recreated some of Robinson's signature steps and recited a tribute to the honorary "Mayor of Harlem." After performing Robinson's famous

⁵⁴ Included in the Copasetics were Coles, Atkins, Peg Leg Bates, James "Buster Brown, Charles "Cookie" Cook, Ernest "Brownie" Brown, Bunny Briggs, Chuck Green and Bubba Gains. Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, 167

⁵⁵ The National Endowment for the Arts is a federally funded organization created by the U.S. Congress in 1965. The NEA partners with other local, state, and federal agencies as well as philanthropic entities to promote learning and creativity in the arts, thus supporting and celebrating America's rich artistic and cultural heritage. During tap's peak years, (the 1920s and 30s), tap dancers did not have this type of support. Later, during the tap renaissance of the 1970s and 80s, the women of tap's resurgence sought out and were awarded NEA grants which helped finance their efforts to resurrect tap dance in mainstream popular culture.

Doin' the New Low Down routine, Coles danced his own combination of improvisation and choreography, keeping the audience breathless in their seats.⁵⁶

After an intense week of performances, interviews, discussions and filming of *Great Feats of Feet*, Bufalino felt privileged to have had the opportunity to document and preserve the work of these great masters of tap. This was the first time that these men and a substantial body of their work in tap had been documented and preserved on film. Before this documentary, the only visual archive of tap dance was the Hollywood movie musicals. While these were significant, they included only a small number of African American tap dancers such as Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, John "Bubbles" Sublett and Fayard and Harold Nicholas who were included as entertaining acts in Hollywood films starring white people. Through *Great Feats of Feet*, Bufalino featured these African American exemplars as the main characters and stars of their own stories. The documentary created new work for the older generation of African American tap masters, chronicled their stories and their repertoire for future generations and brought immediate attention to the art form for younger tap dancers and enthusiasts. These men's contributions were vital to the rich history of tap dance. Bufalino remembers, "I decided then to dedicate the rest of

⁵⁶ *Great Feats of Feet*, Directed, Produced and Narrated by Brenda Bufalino, Documentary Film, DVD, New York, 1977

my life in dance, choreography, teaching, and performance solely to the development, preservation, and performance of tap dance."⁵⁷ This was the beginning of tap's resurgence in American popular culture.

When Bufalino began to create choreography for her first tap company, Dancing Theater Company, Coles was a frequent guest artist and continued to influence her work, though she did not always follow his lead. Coles encouraged her to incorporate her Afro-Cuban and jazz dance forms into her choreographic style. While Coles always performed short pieces, usually one chorus, to jazz standards, Bufalino wanted to create longer works. While they argued their different artistic viewpoints, Bufalino continued to learn and be inspired by him. Through this discourse, Bufalino's goals became clear and she began to find her own voice in tap dance. After her Dancing Theater Company members all moved on to different pursuits, Bufalino moved back to New York City determined to work with tap dancers with professional goals. She was intent on creating new forms of ensemble tap choreography that integrated the tap masters' rhythms and traditions.

Her break came in September of 1982, when the Copasetics, including Coles, Cook, Gaines, Green, and Briggs, were to appear at New York's Village Gate. At the last minute, Briggs had to cancel and Bufalino was asked to replace

⁵⁷ Bufalino, *Tapping the Source*, p. 44, 45

him. This performance led her to make a number of decisions that would help break the gender roles dividing male and female tap dancers. Not only was she the only female among this roster of illustrious tap legends, but Briggs, a master of bebop rhythms, was revered by tap enthusiasts. Bufalino began to worry that the audience would be disappointed in seeing her as his replacement.⁵⁸

Bufalino would perform ensemble routines with the Copasetics in addition to a solo of her own choosing. While Bufalino struggled with this choice, Coles suggested that she select her melodic jazz *waltz*. "You know, Buff, show the versatility of tap dance, show its feminine side."⁵⁹ Bufalino describes her dance:

It was a very good waltz, lyrical, but with long and unexpected melodic phrases, syncopated with accents, hitting just before and after the beat." Bufalino went on to say, "no matter how beautiful the dance, it was still a waltz, sweet and feminine. Everyone would relax. They wouldn't be on the edge of their seat like they would be for Bunny Briggs."⁶⁰

In addition to struggling with which dance to choose, she struggled with the decision of what to wear. She had already discarded the feminine tradition of tap dancing in high-heeled tap shoes. Composing and executing interesting rhythms was her goal and Bufalino knew that high-heeled tap shoes were impeding her

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 69

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 70

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 70

creative process. She wanted to get a heavier bass note sound from the heel taps and a higher treble sound from the toe taps. Bufalino knew she could only do this by dancing in the oxford style tap shoe worn by the men. It wasn't that she wanted to dance like a man. It was the range of sound that could be achieved by dancing in a flat leather soled shoe with a larger metal plate that drove her to toss aside her high-heeled shoes.⁶¹

Bufalino was, in fact, among the first women of her generation to make the artistic choice of using oxford shoes. Her decision influenced female dancers for the ensuing three decades.⁶² Along with the change in shoe style came a shift away from the traditionally feminine costumes worn by chorus girls of the vaudeville and Broadway stages and Hollywood movie musicals. The costumes that went along with high-heeled tap shoes emphasized women's breasts, legs and buttocks. Along with the rhythmic and creative possibilities fostered by the oxford shoe came the liberation of wearing gender-neutral costumes. Stylistically, it didn't make sense to continue wearing costumes that sexualized women while wearing men's flat oxford tap shoes. Women wanted the freedom to create and lay down the rhythm like the men. They wanted to be taken

⁶¹ Personal email exchange/oral history with Brenda Bufalino, October 13, 2012

⁶² I remember when my talented and beloved dance instructor in San Francisco, Lorna Fordyce, returned from working with Bufalino in New York. Inspired by Bufalino, she taught our class in oxford shoes and that was it! We all put our high heels away and have been wearing oxfords ever since.

seriously for their rhythmic and artistic contributions and once costumes and shoes were de-feminized, they could begin that work. Bufalino chose a white tuxedo and white oxford tap shoes for her performance with the Copasetics at the Village Gate. She recalls:

I did my waltz. It was just what they expected. I took my bow to polite applause and Honi bounded on stage. 'Well let's have it for Brenda Bufalino. Even if she's in a white tuxedo she's still a lovely lady. What a beautiful waltz.' I turned abruptly, looked him straight in the eye, and said, 'I'm not finished yet.'⁶³

Bufalino transitioned from her waltz to an up-tempo bebop routine. The audience loved it and began calling out, 'we hear ya, go get it' in response to her punctuated phrasing. The dance was fast in tempo and short in length, but Bufalino recalls:

It was long enough for the audience to finally get it, forget about Bunny Briggs, jump to their feet and finally admit a woman could lay down the iron. When Honi brought me back for my third bow his face was beaming with acknowledgement and relief. Later he said to the guys in the dressing room, 'She can take care of business.'⁶⁴

⁶³ Bufalino, *Tapping the Source*, p. 74

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 75

Shortly after this unprecedented performance in 1982, Bufalino participated in a panel discussion at New York University. The event, moderated by dance historian Sally Banes was called, *But Can She Tap?* When asked the questions, "Was there a distinctly masculine and feminine style of tap dancing? Were there differing images made by men and women on stage?" Bufalino responded, "Rhythm is rhythm, there is no masculine, no feminine. If you don't focus on rhythm, then you are open to the stereotypes."⁶⁵

There are distinct styles in tap dance such as *soft shoe, flash, swing, bebop, Broadway, rhythm, classical, world, world-beat and funk or hip-hop*. Once divided by gender, Bufalino led the women who challenged and overturned the gender roles assigned to different styles of tap dance. Women and men of all shapes and sizes now perform all of these styles with equal skill and authority. Technical training and physical strength are required in tap dancing, but the actual size and shape of the tap dancer's body is not as important as the perfectly proportioned size and shape required of the ballet dancer's body. In ballet, the *pas de deux* requires the female dancer to be slender and the male dancer to be strong. Tap dance has no parallel to the *pas de deux*. With the exception of the famous Rockettes and Broadway chorus line dancers, there is generally no significance placed on body shape. It is rather the costumes and the shoes that

⁶⁵ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 255

signify gender differences in tap. Bufalino went on to perform and teach master classes across the United States and her rejection of feminine costumes and high-heeled shoes has had a long-lasting affect on tap dance. Because of her influence, up until very recently and almost without exception, pants and oxford shoes were the standard attire for serious women tap dancers. In today's tap scene, however, younger women are incorporating costume choices in their own voices. For certain pieces, women choose the standard oxford shoes and pants and for others they choose dresses and high-heels. This phenomenon does not signify a return to gendered roles in tap dance. Instead it signals the strong presence of women in tap who aren't afraid to make their own artistic choices. Through her tenacity, Bufalino led the way for women in tap to make these choices and for audiences to appreciate female tap dancers for their bodies as instruments of rhythm rather than sexualized objects.

In 1978, Bufalino first conceived of the idea of a tap dance orchestra. The dancers would dress in tuxedos and flat oxford style tap shoes that would distinguish the treble and bass sounds of her compositions. The company would perform on the stage as a harmonic symphony, creating tones, textures, counterpoints and fugues. Bufalino's dream was to choreograph, compose, and present her works in a concert format. She wanted to create a body of work that could be studied and passed down to future generations of tap dancers. It took

the development and eventual demise of three companies over the course of ten years before her dream became a reality. In contrast to a traditional ensemble where all of the dancers perform all of the steps in synchrony, each member of her tap dance orchestra had to be able to articulate a precise section of the composition, and each dancer had to be an accomplished soloist who could improvise in cadenzas or open sections of a musical score.⁶⁶ With a group of technically trained, talented and committed dancers including Barbara Duffy, Margaret Morrison, Russell Halley, Neil Applebaum, Lynn Jassum and Tony Waag, and with Honi Coles confidence and support, Bufalino created The American Tap Dance Orchestra.⁶⁷ With her company in place, Bufalino's choreographic works would prove to be groundbreaking.

In 1989, the company was invited to perform on a PBS Special entitled *Great Performances: Tap Dance in America with Gregory Hines*. The American Tap Dance Orchestra performed Bufalino's *The Haitian Fight Song*, a demonstration of Bufalino's innovative work with *interlocking* rhythms and *counterpoint*. Coles had suffered a stroke in 1988 and because he could no longer dance, Bufalino taught the slow soft-shoe, *Taking a Chance on Love*, to both Hines and Tommy Tune. The two men performed the piece in honor of Coles who, while sitting in the front row of the audience, was moved by this

⁶⁶ Bufalino, *Tapping The Source*, p. 102

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 103

beautiful tribute.⁶⁸ This appearance on PBS propelled the company forward and into three years of successful concert tours throughout the United States.

When they were back in New York, The American Tap Dance Orchestra hosted concerts at their company studio, “Woodpecker’s Tap Dance Center and Inter Arts Space—Home of The American Tap Dance Orchestra.” In this space, Bufalino created her American Landscape Concert, a tribute to the mountains, rivers, and creatures of the land and a celebration of Hoagy Carmichael’s music. This concert was the culmination of Bufalino’s background as a jazz tap dancer and a modern dancer, and it showed her reverence for all things in nature acquired during her time raising children in upstate New York. *Touch Turn Return*, also choreographed at Woodpecker’s, was another innovative work created by Bufalino in collaboration with composer and conductor Carmen Moore.

Bufalino places the dancers on stage as actual members of Moore’s orchestra. With their tap shoes and the gorgeous maple floor as their instruments, the dancers watch, pause, and integrate rhythms as written into Moore’s original score. The 22 minute long piece includes different musical motifs including a *shuffle rhythm*, or 8th note triplet rhythm, an up-tempo

⁶⁸ PBS, *Great Performances: Tap Dance In America with Gregory Hines*, NY, 1989

section in 2/4 time, a classical Spanish section, and a *fugue*, which incorporates repeated theme steps danced contrapuntally in an interweaving pattern. In an innovative move, Bufalino and Moore collaborated as choreographer and composer to incorporate the tap dancers as orchestral members. The company's name, The American Tap Dance Orchestra, thus takes on literal as well as metaphorical meaning.⁶⁹

In a 1992 concert at Woodpecker's Studio, The American Tap Dance Orchestra performed Bufalino's *Soft Shoe Suite* with Joe Fona on bass and Darrell Grant on piano. Although a much longer work than *Taking a Chance on Love*, *Soft Shoe Suite's* three distinct sections are reminiscent of the slow tempo, rhythms, nuances, and style of Coles and Atkins' famous dance. Through *Soft-Show Suite*, Bufalino defines a new stage in tap dance, one that integrates the influences of Coles, a mid-century tap master, with her own experiences in tap and modern dance.

The first section of the piece is set to Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood." Dancers Neil Applebaum, Robin Tribble and Tony Waag begin with Bufalino's own version of a *time step*, a step created to set the tempo of a dance. It is usually executed in six musical measures and is followed by a two-bar

⁶⁹ *Two Takes On Tap*, Documentary DVD on Brenda Bufalino and Lynn Dally, Directed and Produced by Sharon Arslanian, 1993

break. She incorporates a classic soft-shoe front essence⁷⁰ into a triplet rhythm rendition of her own creation. This first phrase combines tradition and innovation with the classic structure of a traditional time step, six-bars and a two-bar *break*, but with Bufalino's signature on every beat. The break is considered a "*half-break*" format because it duplicates the rhythm of the last half of the actual six-bar time step. Bufalino repeats the six-bar and a two-bar break format in the second phrase of the dance, this time using another classic, *soft-shoe back essence step*, but ending each essence with a dramatic diagonal line from both the leg and arms of each dancer. This second phrase ends with a surprising rhythmic and visual variation. Whereas the first half of the break is formatted in a triplet rhythm, the final half of the break surprises the audience with a variation on the very last two counts. These last beats are punctuations in both sound and visual presentation as the dancers slide forward on these masterful *chugs*, heel drops that simultaneously slide forward. Bufalino's incorporation of arms creates a feeling of suspension and dramatic line as the dancers seamlessly flow through the intricate rhythms. The bridge of this first chorus prompts a smile from those familiar with Coles and Atkins' work as it begins with their signature—heel-*shuffle*-heel-step—in the same rhythm used

⁷⁰ a soft-shoe essence is a basic step executed at a slow tempo. The dancer is up on the balls of the feet and taps very softly. Historically, soft-shoe dances were performed in soft-soled shoes, on a hard surface, or sometimes even on sand. The word essence is incorporated into the term because the quality or essence of the step derives from a tradition of soft and light dancing.

by the two men. Reminiscent of the musical rests in Coles and Atkins' piece, the dancers drop their heels on the upbeat, between counts 1 and 2.

Simultaneously, the dancers drop their torsos forward as they look playfully at one another through the long musical rest on counts of 2, 3 and 4. The bridge culminates in a masterful preparation for an execution of a difficult step called an *over the top*—where the dancer slides the forward foot, which carries all of his or her body weight, from a position in front of the body, to that of a position behind the body. With the torso almost parallel to the floor, this slide is executed on the outside edge of the dancers' tap shoe.

The first chorus segues seamlessly into the second section of the suite, danced by Barbara Duffy and Margaret Morrison to Neil Hefti's "Lil' Darlin." The duo begins with an elegant single beat walk with their hands behind their backs. As the two women continue, Bufalino uses arms to create uniformity and dramatic line along with the elegance of Morrison and Duffy's punctuating hand movements. The women execute *single pullbacks*, another technically difficult feat, particularly at such a slow tempo.⁷¹ Again, reminiscent of Coles and Atkins,

⁷¹ A Single pull back is a technically advanced tap step. The dancer's full weight is on one foot and he or she uses sheer muscular strength, mostly from the quadriceps muscle, to propel the body upward into the air followed by a landing on the ground. Two crisp sounds are created by a single pull back. Double pull backs are executed from both feet and after propelling the body upward and landing on the ground, four crisp sounds are created. Great muscular strength and control are required to execute pull backs, particularly at a slow tempo as more time is spent in the air.

Bufalino uses a series of simple *ball-heels* executed in a triplet rhythm with Coles' and Atkins' signature incline from right to left of the entire body. Section two displays air work of extreme technical difficulty, along with beautiful lines, that reflect Bufalino's modern dance background. With a backward traveling, ball-heel slide step, the women's legs extend into an *arabesque*—or straight leg extension. Duffy and Morrison are exquisite in executing this magical slide and the move is satisfyingly repeated.

In another seamless transition, Waag, Applebaum and Ribble join Morrison and Duffy for the final segment of the suite performed to Duke Ellington's "Satin Doll." The rhythm of the first step in section three is filled with triplet rhythm, dramatic pauses and swing. Bufalino uses the punctuation of arabesque, and *attitude position*—or bent knee in the air, on the final sound of each grouping of notes. This creates rhythmic variety, visual pleasure and continued tension. In addition, Bufalino uses quadruple time, or 16th notes, sporadically throughout, in stark contrast to the predominant slow single and duple rhythms. She also alternates phrases of rapid triplet swing rhythm with a smoother, more melodic single and duple (8th note) rhythm. Again demonstrating contrast, the orchestration shifts tempo for eight bars. During

this musical shift, the orchestra doubles the meter and while the dancers continue to dance in duple rhythm the musical shift is exciting and markedly faster. On the fourth measure of the eight bar phrase, the dancers freeze for four beats, furthering surprise and tension. The contrasts throughout the piece continue through alternation from airborne balletic jumps and slides to rapid-fire *paddle-and-roll*—or close-to-the floor-styles of tap. In one particularly beautiful section, the dancers slowly move downstage in a thrice-repeated phrase of hop-shuffle step. The third and final repetition serves as preparation for the dancers to execute an inside *pirouette*, or *en dedans*, followed by an outside pirouette, or *en dehors*. Both pirouettes rotate to the left, with the taps landing on the off beats after 6 and 7. The final sequence of the dance is reminiscent of the ending of Coles and Atkins' piece, as the group of five walks down-stage with two single beat, elegant walks, bringing their feet together on the final musical beat, followed by a sophisticated bow.

While Bufalino's *Soft-Shoe Suite* was clearly a tribute to Coles and reflective of the quality and style of *Taking a Chance on Love*, there were also distinct differences between the two works. Coles' original is only one chorus in length and features the two men dancing in synchrony for the entire chorus. Bufalino's piece, while echoing Cole's original in style and rhythm, reflects the modern dance choreographic structure of a longer work with multiple

sequential sections, each including different dancers. Her three distinct musical selections also complement this longer work. The inclusion of dramatic lines, arabesques, air-work, and synchronization of both arms and feet also highlight Bufalino's modern dance background. Coles' influences are evident, but Bufalino creates the masterpiece in her own distinct choreographic voice.⁷² *Soft-Shoe Suite* and Bufalino's other works were rhythmically reminiscent of the shorter routines of tap's heyday, but Bufalino expanded tap's possibilities by developing longer original works for a new performance arena, the concert stage.

Bufalino successfully redirected American audiences to view male and female tap dancers in a more equitable way. Not only were women tap dancers ready for this change, but American audiences were ready to regard tap dance in a more gender-neutral way as well. Through her dedication to tap's revival, Bufalino became the beloved and respected trailblazer for the four slightly younger leaders of the tap renaissance.

Jane Goldberg: Journalist and Producer of The First Tap Festival

Jane Goldberg, "The Tap Goddess of the Lower East Side," was one of these younger women. Goldberg left her mark on tap's renaissance through her

⁷² *American Tap Dance Orchestra*, Performance DVD, Woodpeckers Dance Studio Produced and Directed by Brenda Bufalino, New York, 1992

research, writing, study, and documentation of the work of the older generation of tap masters and most importantly, through her creation and production of the first tap dance festival in America. Born on February 2, 1948, she moved to New York to study tap dance in 1974. Like Bufalino, she studied tap with Stanley Brown and also had a background in modern dance. Goldberg was enamored with the romantic movies of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and thought that perhaps she might find her own Fred Astaire-like partner in New York City.

Instead, Goldberg fell in love with the rhythms of jazz tap at a "Tap Happening," put on by Leticia Jay, in a church basement in New York City in 1974. Jay was an East Indian dancer and tap dance enthusiast who, in 1963, wrote an article for *Dance Magazine* discussing the decline in tap's popularity. "This music, this dance, is in America's bones—and makes one ponder why tap dancing, one of our two really indigenous forms of dance (jazz is the other), is so seldom seen today, why so few young dancers are trained in this, our character dance of the American heritage."⁷³ In an effort to bring tap back, Jay had been producing Tap Happenings throughout the late 1960's and 70's. There, Goldberg encountered African American tap dancers John T. MacPhee, Raymond Kaalund, Rhythm Red and Chuck Green. In her autobiography, *Shoot*

⁷³ Leticia Jay Biography, Library of Congress Performing Arts Encyclopedia:
<http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.music.tdabio.111/default.html>

Me While I'm Happy, Goldberg remembers watching these men perform: "I know immediately I want to join them and get their feet. They play such beautiful rhythms, those feet, and boy do they have a lot to say to me."⁷⁴

Goldberg was particularly mesmerized by Chuck Green and approached him after the show to ask for lessons. Green agreed and while Goldberg drifted off to sleep that night, she was smitten, not with Fred and Ginger, but instead with those rhythms and those feet.⁷⁵

With a college degree in political science and professional background in investigative journalism, Goldberg made it her life's work to search out the masters of tap dance—no easy task, as most of these men were no longer performing. The occasional tap gatherings that did take place were not highly publicized and lessons with the masters were not easy to come by, as most of these men were not teaching in any sort of formal setting. Goldberg telephoned Honi Coles every week for months before he reluctantly agreed to give her lessons.⁷⁶ Her persistence paid off as she diligently sought out, met, interviewed, and/or studied with dozens of tap masters from the heyday, including Coles, Jimmy Slyde, Howard "Sandman" Sims, Cholly Atkins, Leon Collins, Eddie Brown, Henry LeTang, Louis Depron, Bunny Briggs, Leslie

⁷⁴ Jane Goldberg, *Shoot Me While I'm Happy* (New York, New York: Woodshed Productions, 2008) p. 14

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.16

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 25

“Bubba” Gaines, Fayard Nicholas of the famed Nicholas Brothers, Maceo Anderson, Steve Condos, Peg Leg Bates, Lon Chaney, Paul Draper and John “Bubbles” Sublett. Sublett is considered the “Father of Rhythm Tap” due to his generous use of heel drops, amazing syncopation, and musical phrasing that crossed over the standard bar line. Unlike Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, who stayed up on the balls of his feet and used symmetrical phrasing, Sublett used his heels to create a percussive style of tap dancing, and his elongated musical phrasing added complexity and interest to the rhythms he created. Goldberg apprenticed with Charles “Cookie” Cook and after a time began a professional relationship, touring and performing with him. In *Shoot Me While I’m Happy*, Goldberg, who developed her own choreographic voice as a combined tap dancer, choreographer, and standup comedian, describes herself as “addicted to tap.”⁷⁷ She always carried her tape recorder with her in case she wanted to interview someone in her “quest for the Holy Hoof.”⁷⁸ Goldberg notes in her autobiography, “In a sense, this new mission replaced ‘The Movement’ of my anti-war days.”⁷⁹ Initially her new mission was to find these legends and to learn their rhythms in order to improve her own skill as a tap dancer. Once she connected with the men and realized that along with these rhythms there was an important underappreciated history, her vision expanded.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.121

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.123

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.23

By 1980, Goldberg had built up her own “tap hall of fame” and began to dream about all of these older tap dancers coming together to pass on their tap dance heritage. She writes, “My imagination ran wild as I dreamed of hoofers onstage again, great steps being passed down like secret recipes.”⁸⁰ The legends of jazz-tap had never gathered to teach tap in any sort of formal setting, but Goldberg knew that the older masters would be willing to teach if younger tap students showed an interest in learning. She also knew that tap dancers were going to have to initiate the creation of their own jobs if tap were to stand a chance at a comeback into mainstream popular culture.

In 1980, with established relationships with the masters, support from Bufalino, and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and elsewhere, Goldberg’s Changing Times Tap Dance Company produced the first official tap festival in American tap dance history. This historic festival, *By Word of Foot*, was held from October 13 through 18, 1980 and filmed as a documentary, live at the Village Gate in New York City. Goldberg brought together the old masters, mostly African American men, and more than 150 students, mostly white women. These were two very distinct groups who were no longer legally segregated, but had never come together formally as a community of tap dancers. This was a major step in unifying enthusiastic tap dance teachers and

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.127

students from different generations, genders, and races and was instrumental in desegregating tap dance. The participants' common ground was a love of this American art form and the desire to see it survive. Beloved tap dancer Gregory Hines, who was known in the tap community not only for his unparalleled talent, but for his inclusivity and encouragement of all tap dancers, participated in the festival. He paid homage to the masters who had come before him and lauded Jane Goldberg for her vision in organizing this landmark festival.⁸¹ Among the masters who participated were Peg Leg Bates, Honi Coles, Sandman Sims, Bunny Briggs, Leon Collins, John "Bubbles" Sublett (wheelchair bound at that point), Buster Brown, Mabel Lee, Cookie Cook, Marion Coles (wife of Honi Coles) and Fred Kelly (brother of the tap virtuoso Gene Kelly). During this six-day festival, the masters taught, lectured, and explained the nuances of their own choreographic and improvisational styles. Goldberg's festival highlighted the distinctive contributions of African American tap artists and propelled tap further into its renaissance.

While the festival's obvious historical significance drew attention, Goldberg's role in promoting it was, like the other female innovators addressed in this thesis, under-acknowledged. This was in part because of the racial

⁸¹ *By Word of Foot*, Documentary DVD, Produced by Jane Goldberg, Directed by Brenda Bufalino,

politics at play in accounts of the significance of tap dance in the United States. In ushering tap dance back into mainstream popular culture, Goldberg was pushing against established racial and gender boundaries.

Valis Hill notes that in a review of the *By Word of Foot* festival for the *Village Voice*, critic Sally Sommer praised the tap masters themselves while giving only tepid congratulations to Goldberg, Bufalino and other organizers of the event. Sommer states:

With the exception of Fred Kelly, all the teachers were black; and except for only a very few, all the students were young white women. This has got to change, if this unique black dance art is going to survive with vigor and integrity. If it isn't passed on to large numbers of young blacks, the tradition—as it now exists—will simply erode. If the form changes, I for one will mourn the loss of those brilliantly etched black rhythms. It's not that I want the young white women to fade away; it's because of their aggressiveness and their hunger to learn that these dancers were 'brought out of mothballs' ... Because of them, grants have been written... and awarded. And for that, they deserve our gratitude, admiration and respect. But it's time for young blacks to come forward with the same aggressiveness, to partake in this special dance information, pick it up, and do it.⁸²

⁸² Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 250

Her critique continues with a statement that the white women, though good dancers, “put the ac-CENT on the wrong syl-LA-ble.”⁸³ Many people took issue with Sommer’s insinuation that white women dancers would somehow degrade the rhythms of jazz tap and perhaps overshadow the African American roots of the dance form. Her critique of the festivals producers appears to be an attempt to police the boundaries of tap as black, just as people tried to claim jazz for blackness. Valis Hill notes that Jan Leder, a white jazz musician from Yonkers, responded to Sommer’s critique:

Jazz isn’t dying because white women are doing it, it’s growing, evolving, and it’s something to be proud of. The cross-cultural roots of the art are being expressed, and all Ms. Sommer seems to see in the whites is ‘grants’ and ‘funds’ ...I would not worry about jazz’s erosion. Jazz music and its sister, dance, are still very alive, black and white and everything in between, and if we could put our fears and prejudices aside, maybe it will continue to evolve.⁸⁴

Leder’s remarks highlight the evolution of tap as an amalgamation of African and European—primarily Irish—dance forms. From the earliest recognition of tap as an American art form it began and continued to develop as a result of cross-cultural challenge, borrowing, and improvising new ways of dancing. Like

⁸³ Ibid, p. 251

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 251

jazz music, tap's rhythmic roots are deeply embedded in African music and like jazz musicians, tap dancers create rhythms as expressions of freedom.

Author and historian Burton W. Peretti offers historical context for a debate on race and culture with respect to jazz music in his book, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race and Culture in Urban America*. Peretti asserts that before 1940, jazz musicians fought against subservient minstrel stereotypes "by using jazz, with its unique cultural and intellectual properties, to probe, assess, and evade the 'dynamic of minstrelsy' on and off bandstands."⁸⁵ Peretti also notes that while "scholars are demonstrating the abiding strength and centrality of African-American traditions among blacks from slave times to the present," he gives "space and attention to the considerable influence of European-American traditions, especially 'classical' music, on early jazz musicians."⁸⁶ He points out that he may be "accused of perpetuating what Dizzy Gillespie has called a 'whitewashed look to our music,' that is going to 'ooze off as much as they can to other whites.'" ⁸⁷ In response, Peretti contends that "Black music had always been influenced by white styles and instrumentation, but even the limited exposure jazz's creators gained to northern white urban musical culture ensured that jazz would be particularly enmeshed in this dominant culture. It

⁸⁵ Burton W. Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) p. 210

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 7

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 7

casts no discredit on the great black folk tradition to note that it was under constant seige.”⁸⁸ Peretti adds that by the 1930s “the solidifying sense of group professionalism among jazz musicians, however, gave some of them enough mutual respect and resourcefulness to initiate some color blindness in their ranks.”⁸⁹ Mirroring the ethos of the tap dance community, Peretti highlights the fact that “this fraternity was unique, insular, and atypical in important ways, but its characteristics and travails also made it deeply representative of the American experience...”⁹⁰

The issue of white women in tap was revisited in 1981 in an interview between Sommer and Honi Coles. Coles noted that while touring the United States in *Bubblin' Brown Sugar*, he taught master classes in almost every major U.S. city. His classes were 99% filled with white women whom Coles admired for carrying tap forward. When Sommer expressed her own desire for tap to be brought back into the black community, Coles responded:

I have sort of a unique feeling, as far as this is concerned. Being black, I don't care what color you are, I just don't want it to die...I think that the old saw about blacks can all sing and dance is just not true. There are a lot of white kids that can really hoof and with feeling, that same kind of feeling. I'm

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 7

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 9

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 9

open-minded as far as that's concerned; I just don't want it to die. I'm happy to teach anyone.⁹¹

Coles' remarks were extremely important in validating the crusade of the women of the tap renaissance. He was an African American male legend of tap dance, who was happy to teach anyone, regardless of color, gender or age. Like Hines, he gave his unequivocal support not only to white women, but also to anyone interested in keeping tap dance alive.

Goldberg continued her tap activism with *By Word of Foot II* in 1982 and *By Word of Foot III* in 1985. She continues to write about tap dance for the *International Tap Association Newsletter*, *The New York Times*, *Dance Magazine*, *The Village Voice* and the *Soho News*. Goldberg's contributions to tap's resurgence have been praised in newspapers and magazines including *The New York Times*, *New Yorker Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, *Vogue Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Miami Herald* and countless others.⁹² Goldberg received the 2004 Preservation In Tap Award. She continues to dedicate herself to the history, preservation and promotion of tap dance. Her *By Word of Foot* festivals were the template for all future tap festivals in the United States and abroad. These festivals have

⁹¹ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 251

⁹² <http://www.janegoldberg.org/press.html>
<http://www.janegoldberg.org/>

allowed grass roots tap teachers with large student bases an opportunity to study with this older group of amazing tap legends, passing on this information to new generations of tap dancers. To this day, these festivals are the primary vehicle for connecting tap dancers of differing generations, races, genders and choreographic styles.

Lynn Dally: The Jazz Tap Ensemble

Among the participants at Goldberg's first *By Word of Foot Festival* in 1980, were Lynn Dally and Fred Strickler, two of the three founding members of a Los Angeles Based jazz tap group called the Jazz Tap Ensemble.⁹³ Lynn Dally, Artistic Director of the *Jazz Tap Ensemble*, was born on December 3, 1941 in Columbus Ohio. Her father and mother, Jimmy Rawlins and Hazel Capretta, directed the Jimmy Rawlins Dance Studio, established in 1933. Her father, her first tap teacher, taught a graded curriculum with routines that increased in difficulty. Not only did Rawlins teach his students proper technique and vocabulary, he also taught his students a great deal about rhythm. He would ask students to close their eyes, listen to a given rhythm and recreate it using steps of their own choosing.⁹⁴ This technique was not only training for rhythmic

⁹³ *By Word of Foot*, Documentary DVD, Produced by Jane Goldberg, 1980

⁹⁴ *Two Takes On Tap*, Documentary DVD on Brenda Bufalino and Lynn Dally, Produced and Directed by Sharon Arslanian 1993, and Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 265

acuity, but it also fostered creativity and beginning improvisational skills. As a gift for her fifteenth birthday, Dally was given a branch of the family dance school to direct on her own.⁹⁵

In 1959, as a freshman at Ohio State University, Dally attended an audition for the university dance company. She brought her tap shoes with her, only to find that everyone in the room wore cut off tights and no shoes of any kind. She ran back to the locker room to hide her shoes and for the next ten years, they remained hidden. Through the newly formed modern dance department at OSU, Dally immersed herself in the techniques of Martha Graham, Jose Limon and Merce Cunningham.⁹⁶ In the documentary film *Two Takes On Tap*, produced and directed by Sharon Arslanian, Dally explains that while her parents were always supportive, her father did wonder why Dally was not studying and performing tap dancing. "He began to see the work that I was doing and he got behind that. My tap shoes were in the closet for ten years but I was so excited about modern dancing on a daily basis that I didn't exactly notice it."⁹⁷ Dally excelled in her newfound form and was asked to teach at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she eventually received a Master of Arts in Theater. She subsequently spent time in Europe and was hired as a professional

⁹⁵ Personal email/oral history with Lynn Dally, November 1, 2012

⁹⁶ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 265

⁹⁷ *Two Takes On Tap*, Documentary DVD, Arslanian, 1993

performer in a Greek modern dance troupe. Ohio State beckoned Dally back as a member of their dance faculty in the late 1960's and by the early 1970's Dally knew the time was right to "get my own dance company going, whatever that was going to mean."⁹⁸ She relocated to San Francisco to study modern dance with Margaret Jenkins and soon thereafter began her first all female modern dance company, Lynn Dally and Dancers.

During this time tap reappeared in her life. While studying with Jenkins, she met another tap dancer, Camden Richman, who became the third founding member of The Jazz Tap Ensemble along with Dally and Strickler. Through Richman, Dally was asked to teach tap at Everybody's, a school in Oakland. Richman also introduced her to the African American tap virtuoso Eddie Brown.⁹⁹ While studying with Brown, Dally learned more about the roots of rhythm tap. Hearing the rhythms, evaluating the sounds as one would evaluate the sound of an instrument, had an effect on Dally. As she recalls in Arslanian's documentary, "All of that began to have real meaning. I was only in San Francisco for one year but so much happened that year. There was the

⁹⁸ *Two Takes On Tap*, Documentary DVD, Arslanian, 1993

⁹⁹ Personal conversation/oral history with Lynn Dally, November 5, 2012

beginning of a modern dance company, there was teaching tap, and there was meeting Eddie Brown.”¹⁰⁰

As a young boy, Eddie Brown, born on August 7, 1918 in Omaha, Nebraska, learned to tap dance from his uncle, a flash dancer. Flash dancing is a very fast style of tap that uses flashy or showy tricks such as splits, slides and acrobatics. Brown describes his early training and style in *Eddie Brown's Scientific Rhythm*, a 1990 documentary produced by Sharon Arslanian. “Everything I did was up-tempo, home again and down, and I could do twelve choruses.”¹⁰¹ Brown’s protégé Patti Meagher explains that bringing a dance “home” refers to wrapping it up or finishing a chorus of a dance routine. Performing twelve choruses “home again” is a reference to Brown’s incredible stamina.¹⁰² At sixteen, Brown heard that Bill “Bojangles” Robinson was coming through Omaha to perform and sponsor a contest for up-and-coming tap dancers. Brown obtained an audio recording of Robinson performing his famous *Doin’ the New Low Down* dance. Although he had seen Robinson perform it only once, Brown was able to duplicate Robinson’s dance beat for beat. Robinson, impressed, asked Brown’s parents for permission to bring their son with him to

¹⁰⁰ *Two Takes On Tap*, Documentary DVD, Arslanian, 1993 and Personal conversation with Lynn Dally/oral history, November 5, 2012

¹⁰¹ *Eddie Brown's Scientific Rhythm*, Documentary DVD, Produced and Directed by Sharon Arslanian, 1990

¹⁰² Personal conversation/oral history with Patti Meagher, tap dancer and protégé of Eddie Brown, December 8, 2012

New York to perform. His parents refused, but they were unable to stop him from hopping a freight train with his tap shoes tied around his neck.¹⁰³

Once in New York, Brown worked in the Bill Robinson Revue at the Apollo Theater from 1933 to 1939. In addition to his work with Robinson, Brown often worked as a guest tap dancer at a club called Small's Paradise. There Brown saw dancers who were performing to slightly slower swing tempos, and he began a drastic transformation in his style as a tap dancer. He realized that by using slower swing music, he would be able to insert more sounds into a given musical bar, allowing for more interest and rhythmic variation. In Arslanian's documentary, Brown recalls that he "woodshedded" (meaning to lock oneself away to practice) for three weeks and during this time "found that rhythm dancing was flash dancing cut in half."¹⁰⁴ As Brown continued the development of his new style he became the consummate exemplar of complexity in rhythm tap. His musicality, continuation of rhythms crossing over the bar line from one measure to the next, unusual phrasing, and generous use of heel drops created a form unparalleled by other rhythm tap dancers. Brown's improvisational performance style facilitated an endless rhythmic stream that was never repeated in exactly the same way.

¹⁰³ *Eddie Brown's Scientific Rhythm*, Documentary DVD

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*

Starting in 1970, Brown worked for five years as the featured tap dancer in Jon Hendrix' San Francisco production of *Evolution of the Blues* at the Broadway Theater. Brown continued living in the Bay Area and in 1978, he and Dally established a harmonious professional relationship.¹⁰⁵ With his melodic syncopations and improvisational skills, Brown would go on to become an enormous influence on both Dally and Linda Sohl-Ellison, another young woman of tap's renaissance. Relocating to Los Angeles in 1982, Brown became a mentor, teacher, and beloved friend to both Dally and Sohl-Ellison. He later became a featured performer in both women's tap companies.

In 1979 Dally, who had also relocated to Los Angeles, joined forces with Camden Richman and Fred Strickler, an accomplished modern dancer who had also been a tap dance student of Dally's father in Ohio. Richman connected the tap trio with her jazz quartet, which included percussionist Keith Terry, pianist Paul Arslanian and bassist Ted Dannenberg, to create The Jazz Tap Percussion Ensemble, later renamed The Jazz Tap Ensemble. They were the first company in the United States devoted to the preservation and further development of two American art forms: tap dance and jazz music.¹⁰⁶ In Arslanian's documentary, *Two Takes On Tap*, Dally reflects, "One of the central forces that

¹⁰⁵ Personal conversation/oral history with Lynn Dally, November 5, 2012

¹⁰⁶ Personal conversation/oral history with Lynn Dally, November 5, 2012 and <http://www.iazztapensemble.org/about/> and <http://dancemotionusa.org/exchanges/jazz-tap-ensemble/>

brought us together was we all believed that tap dance is a very valuable art form and that it deserved to be on the concert stage. It deserved that kind of attention and so the concert stage became our goal.”¹⁰⁷ With funding from The California Arts Council and The National Endowment for the Arts, the company began to create tap works derived from the combined influence of the three dancers’ backgrounds in modern dance, and the rhythm tap influence of masters like Eddie Brown.

Dally explains in *Two Takes On Tap* that most of the company’s pieces evolved from a collaboration between the dancers and the musicians. Counterpoint was used to highlight both the visual aspect of modern dance and the aural rhythms of rhythm tap dance. The company grew from producing small informal studio performances to sold-out concert halls in Hawaii, San Francisco and Paris. In April 1982, The Jazz Tap Ensemble was invited to perform at the Smithsonian Institute in a tribute to Honi Coles.¹⁰⁸ The company continued to gain momentum by creating new work, touring, and presenting the African American legends of tap dance as featured soloists in their concert tours. Throughout these years Dally continued to study and deepen her friendship with Eddie Brown.

¹⁰⁷ *Two Takes On Tap*, Documentary DVD, Arslanian, 1993

¹⁰⁸ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 266

In 1984, Richman and the company's three jazz musicians all moved on to other pursuits and in 1987, Strickler also left the company, leaving Dally as the sole artistic director and primary choreographer. Dally continued in the original spirit of the company by creating visually modern works based in African American rhythms. Eddie Brown's virtuosity as an improviser is reflected in much of Dally's work. Her pieces are structured and contain sections of unison choreography, but there are always sections of solo improvisation, adding interest and different voices to her narrative. Additionally, when staging the movement patterns in her ensemble pieces, Dally always works in three-dimensional space with dancers facing toward all sides and corners of the stage. In *Two Takes On Tap*, Dally explains:

It's become a very natural thing for me to move and tap at the same time. Those have become blended in a sense in what I do and in what I'm interested in. Along with that—and this is something that comes from my modern dance background, there's no question about it—is my interest in moving in space, in three-dimensional space. That is something I've trained in and that is one of my great loves. Space and turning—I'm in heaven. Give me those two things and that's great! So in this work as it has become natural to make rhythms with my tap shoes on and move and sometimes gesture and sometimes involve my whole body and whole torso doing things, I'm also always in three-dimensional space.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ *Two Takes On Tap*, Documentary DVD, Arslanian, 1993

While Dally continued to forge new possibilities in tap, she also aspired to establish a timeless body of work, to be passed on from one generation of company members to the next, leaving a jazz tap legacy for future generations of tap dancers. Dally's synthesis of Brown's rhythms with her own modern dance training and choreographic vision was instrumental in pushing against tap's boundaries and propelling tap further into its renaissance. Her full-length work, *All Blues*, set to music by Miles Davis, is one example of her innovative choreography that fostered a new appreciation for tap dance in American popular culture. This was originally performed in 1993, at The Joyce Theater in New York City by Dally, Sam Weber, Dormeshia Sumbry Edwards, Derrick Grant and Lainie Manning. It was revived by Dally and performed by a new young group of Jazz Tap Ensemble Company members for an African cultural exchange tour sponsored by the U.S. State Department in 2012. The company members, Kenji Igus, Maya Guice, Sandy Vasquez and Bijon Carter-Burnell, performed and, along with Dally, taught in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The following description is based on footage of one of their final rehearsals at UCLA before leaving for Africa.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Personal conversation/oral history with Lynn Dally, November 5, 2012

With the musicians *vamping*, or repeating a melodic phrase, to the score of *All Blues*, dancer Kenji Igus enters from stage left with a running slide and a *pencil turn*. Igus says, "Hello ladies and gentlemen. We are The Jazz Tap Ensemble. We are happy to bring you two of America's great traditions: jazz music and tap dancing." Igus introduces musicians Jerry Kalaf on drums, Doug Walter on piano and David Dunaway on bass, then introduces the other three dancers as they enter. The four dancers begin in a small cluster in front of the musicians where they set a *rhythmic groove* or *pulse*, in counts of 6, locking perfectly within the 6/4 time of Davis' 12-bar *blues structure*. The bass player repeats a harmonic *vamp* throughout the piece and several of the 12 bar choruses are separated by an additional 4-bar vamp. After establishing the rhythmic groove, the four dancers continue the same tap rhythm as they travel to center stage, simultaneously creating more space in their cluster. They begin turning, sliding, and moving through the stage space as an ensemble, but their steps and turns are individualized. Their tap rhythms vary from quarter notes and eighth notes to very rapid triplet rhythm sequences. Coming together in unison, the dancers use *rhythm turns* and *riffs*, with accompanying arms lifted into a high V shape, as well as turns and *floor scrapes* as they travel. Reflecting Dally's modern dance training, the ensemble members execute an *outside pirouette, en dehor*, with the outside leg in *attitude*, or bent knee position, again

with arms elevated to a high V position. Dally creates her own choreographic vamp to intermittently accompany Davis' vamp with a unison sliding step, which travels fluidly from stage right to stage left. A diagonal line from upstage left to downstage right is established as a home-base formation that the dancers return to throughout the piece.

Once the rhythmic groove and unison choreography has been established, dancer Maya Guice solos for one chorus. While Guice uses single, duple and triplet phrasing along with dramatic musical rests in her improvisational section, the other three dancers simultaneously move to the upstage left corner of the stage with a contrapuntal sliding step. The contrast of Guice's incredible rhythms against the silent but visually pleasing slides of Igus, Vasquez and Carter-Burnell create visual and aural interest. The dancers shift back to unison dancing for the next chorus, displaying five sequential aerial rhythm turns. The precision of the dancers' arms opening to *second position* and closing to *fifth in front*, in addition to their meticulous head *spotting*, shows incredible skill. Carter-Burnell's improvisation in the next two choruses is musical and dynamic. Using a melodic *waltz clog time step* as a base line rhythm, Carter-Burnell creates suspense through his *toe stands*, beautiful musical phrasing, *skating steps* and series of rhythm turns. He ends his solo improvisatory section with a sequence of heel drops, which build to a simultaneous crescendo with

the musical orchestration. A short musical and tap dancing rest follow Carter-Burnell's solo, creating a mood of excitement and anticipation for the audience.

As Carter-Burnell folds back into the ensemble, the bass vamp disappears and the musical accompaniment is sparse and open. The two female company members, Vasquez and Guice, execute a duet for the next eight measures. Their arms swing fluidly from below their waists to above their heads, dropping down and swinging back up again. With these arm movements, they twist and turn their torsos from upstage to downstage, again reflecting Dally's modern dance expertise. The duo taps out a light duple rhythm sequence up on the balls of their feet as they travel on a diagonal from downstage right to upstage left. The duet is followed by the four dancers' simultaneous demonstration of virtuosic turns. Guice performs eleven sets of *triple pirouettes*. Each set of three is executed *en dedans*, or as an inside pirouette with the first set turning to the right; she reverses the direction of each subsequent set. Guice's graceful arms and precise spotting are exquisite and she never strays from her metronome like tempo. At the same time, Vasquez delivers eight *tour jettes*, or leaping air turns. Her legs are in *attitude* position as she magically propels herself up into the air, lands and reverses the direction of the subsequent turns. Simultaneously, Carter-Burnell and Igus execute *rhythm turns*, also changing directions after a series of three in each direction. Through this individualized

turning sequence, Dally creates a beautiful juxtaposition that highlights her combination of rhythm tap and modern dance. While the women's turns are a pure visual delight, the men's turns also have an aural element with tap sounds meticulously placed in each *rhythm turn* sequence.

The dancers momentarily exit the stage, leaving the musicians to play a featured musical section of Davis' score. Upon returning, the dancers begin a series of exquisite turns beginning with six touch steps, followed by a *double chainé air tour*, or chain of turns executed in the air. The beauty of the turn itself combined with the precise synchrony of the dancers is truly spectacular. The piece ends with the dancers returning to the home base diagonal formation with arms in a high V position. As the musical accompaniment softens, we hear the technical director cue the lights to fade to black. After the blackout, the lights come back up and the ensemble members walk hand in hand, downstage, for a bow.

All Blues is important for several reasons. Dally's innovative ensemble choreography, along with Miles Davis' music, represent the quintessential American combination of tap dance with jazz music. Combining her two biggest influences, modern dance and Eddie Brown's rhythm and improvisation, Dally juxtaposes the fluidity of modern dance movement—turns, slides and swinging arms—with driving rhythmic syncopations. The improvisational sections

performed by Guice and Carter-Burnell juxtapose featured soloist and ensemble background dancers, also a staple of modern dance choreography.¹¹¹ Dally's *All Blues* is a choreographic masterpiece, both visually and rhythmically, which will undoubtedly be passed down for future generations of tap dancers to study and perform. The premiere of *All Blues* in 1993, along with Dally's other full-length works, exemplified her commitment to bringing jazz tap to the concert stage. Through the USIA 2012 State Department tour, Dally brought tap dance and jazz music to Africa, where the Jazz Tap Ensemble company members shared performance workshops, and classes with the citizens of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹¹²

Along with creating new possibilities for tap, The Jazz Tap Ensemble has been instrumental in preserving tap's rich heritage. During its thirty-three year history, the company presented and worked with many legends of tap dance, including Jimmy Slyde, Honi Coles, Steve Condos, Harold Nicholas and Eddie Brown. Dally created work for these artists, and, in many cases, resurrected their careers. In 1991, just one year before he passed away, Eddie Brown created a choreographic work, *Doxy*, for The Jazz Tap Ensemble. This complex

¹¹¹ *Jazz Tap Ensemble*, DVD, Rehearsal Footage, August, 2011

¹¹² USIA State Department Sponsored Tour: Jazz Tap Ensemble in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wdq35SmeEw&list=PLD08FE0D072CB2916>

and melodic choreographic work exemplifies Brown's rhythmic vocabulary with his syncopated time steps, punctuated *ball-heel crawling steps*, exciting rhythmic shifts from triplet to double time rhythms, and his unparalleled use of continuation over the musical bar line.¹¹³ Dally also brought in male and female artists from younger generations, including Dianne Walker, Brenda Bufalino, Gregory Hines and Savion Glover to work with her company. Dally's commission of choreographic works by these talented tap dancers will ensure that the unique style, form, and contribution of each master and mentor will be preserved through The Jazz Tap Ensemble repertoire and film archives.

Dally's original choreographic works have been funded by multiple grants from The National Endowment for the Arts. She received the prestigious Irvine Fellowship in Dance award in 2000 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2001. Dally appeared in the award winning film *Tapdancin!* and has been the subject of several documentaries, including Sharon Arslanian's *Two Takes on Tap*, and Jenai Cutcher's *Thinking On Their Feet, Women of the Tap Renaissance*, and Dally's own documentary film *Gotta Move! Women In Tap*.

Gotta Move! Women in Tap records a historic conference conceived and produced by Dally, held at the University of California, Los Angeles from February 8-10, 2008. The conference brought together several generations of

¹¹³ UCLA Pau Hana, *Performance Footage of Doxy* by Eddie Brown, DVD, June 2011

female tap choreographers, teachers, students, historians, writers, and academics to celebrate the history and future of women in the field of tap dance. The three-day event included classes, workshops, and panel discussions and culminated in an all-female performance showcasing not only choreographic works, but also featuring improvisation and challenge sequences highlighting athleticism and feats of creativity and strength by contemporary female tap artists including Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Chloe Arnold, Michelle Dorrance and Josette Wiggan.¹¹⁴ As a direct result of the tap renaissance, these contemporary female tap artists are carving out their own rhythms of resistance against the traditional male-dominated narrative that women are non-competitive, weaker, and therefore less able to improvise and challenge one another. These young women are living proof that there has been an authentic change for women in tap, who are now joyfully expressing newfound musical and rhythmic freedom.

Dally has also produced tap festivals connecting the most respected tap professionals in the world with tap teachers and students seeking new technique and inspiration. As a teacher in the World Arts and Cultures/Dance Department at UCLA, Dally continues to inspire and teach a new generation of enthusiastic tap dancers. Through her love and respect of tap's heritage, her

¹¹⁴ *Gotta Move! Women In Tap*, Documentary DVD, Produced and Directed by Lynn Dally, 2008

innovative talent, and tireless efforts, Lynn Dally has personally ushered tap through its re-birth and helped elevate the art form to one of high acclaim.

Linda Sohl-Ellison: Rhapsody In Taps

During the past three decades many celebrated dancers worked as *Jazz Tap Ensemble* company members. One of the most illustrious was Linda Sohl-Ellison, who worked with the company for a short period from January of 1984 through the fall of 1985. Sohl-Ellison replaced Camden Richman as one of the company's primary dancers while she continued to work with her own Los Angeles-based tap company, LTD Limited, which later became the world-renowned *Rhapsody In Taps*.¹¹⁵ Like Bufalino and Dally, Sohl-Ellison would become an esteemed leader of the tap's renaissance.

Sohl-Ellison, born on April 26, 1953 in Cleveland, Ohio, received her early dance training at The Charlotte Teller School of Dance on Mayfield Road in South Euclid, Ohio. She began ballet lessons at the age of six and upon starting tap lessons at age fourteen, Sohl-Ellison remembers, "I loved tap. I loved making noise with my feet. I have memories of sitting at the kitchen counter tapping out rhythms with my fingers on the toaster. My mother would say, 'Will

¹¹⁵ Personal conversation/oral history with Linda Sohl-Ellison, November 9, 2012

you stop that already?"¹¹⁶ Teller quickly recognized Sohl-Ellison's talent and before long put her in charge of drilling the studio's younger students in preparation for recitals.

At sixteen, Sohl-Ellison was assisting in ballet classes and teaching her own tap classes at Teller's school. She went on to attend Ohio State University on a full dance scholarship. During her time at OSU, Sohl-Ellison, like Dally, studied modern dance, earning an MA in dance and graphic design. Like many university dance programs, the Ohio State program focused on ballet and modern dance. Sohl-Ellison was the first person hired by the university to teach tap dance.¹¹⁷

Sohl-Ellison relocated to Los Angeles in 1976 and earned an MFA in Modern Dance from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1978. While teaching part-time at Orange Coast College and collaborating with fellow dancer Toni Relin on their own choreographic works, Sohl-Ellison attended a 1979 performance at UCLA's Royce Hall, where she heard the riveting jazz tap rhythms of Foster Johnson, Sandman Sims, Honi Coles, and the Nicholas Brothers. Excited by what she heard, Sohl-Ellison noticed in the program that Foster Johnson lived and taught in Los Angeles. She made her way backstage

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid

and asked Johnson when his next class met. He replied, "When would you like it to meet?"¹¹⁸ This was the beginning of Sohl-Ellison's exposure to the rhythms of jazz tap. While her early studio training was good and included all the fundamentals and basic vocabulary used by tap dancers, she found Johnson's rhythms syncopated, complex and challenging. She had hit a plateau in her study of modern dance and the time was right for her to soak up something new. When she saw Johnson execute complex subdivisions and *rattling thirds* in their sessions, Sohl-Ellison asked:

'What is that? Does that have a name?' She reflects, I got really excited about what I saw him do. He was introducing me to a very different tap language. I was hungry for this challenge, this new direction. I became excited, obsessively excited and I wanted to tap dance all the time. Foster danced close to the floor, using *paddle and roll* rhythms that traveled beautifully. His movements were fluid with a balletic and lyrical quality, but he also sparsely integrated strong punctuations such as *single foot wings* for effect.¹¹⁹

Valis Hill's book *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, includes this description of Foster Johnson in a 1980 performance by music critic Kirk Silsbee:

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ibid

Johnson slid gracefully around the stage, dropping accents with his heels and clapping occasional after-beats for emphasis. Unlike the rhythm tappers of his generation, he didn't stay in one small area with his head down, concentrating on his footwork... Foster tried to make it all look easy... He used the stage space like Fred Astaire. He had a background in ballroom dance—unusual for tappers—that informed his concept of stage movement. As the applause died down after the number, Johnson called for a repeat of the tune. Then he doubled the meter, springing forward, galloping sideways, and back pedaling like an elegant Sugar Ray Robinson, smiling all the while. It was a tour de force that had the crowd hollering and stomping.¹²⁰

During tap's decline, Johnson found employment teaching tap at a dance studio, and when the studio phased tap out of the curriculum, he quickly took up and began teaching ballroom dance. Johnson's ability to travel fluidly while dancing was unique among African American dancers of his generation, who tended to dance in smaller, more defined spaces. His ability to travel while he tap danced had a huge appeal to Sohl-Ellison.

Sohl-Ellison studied and performed extensively with Foster Johnson during 1980 and 1981. Johnson created a rhythm tap waltz for her and himself in 1980 to a tune called "Fine and Dandy." They were about to perform the duet at an Orange Coast College dance concert when Johnson said, "No matter what I

¹²⁰ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 268

do dear, you just keep on dancing.”¹²¹ While Sohl-Ellison performed the choreographed waltz, Johnson improvised, dancing circles around her. While Sohl-Ellison was nervous and taken aback, she later reflected, “This was when I first thought about the choreographic concept of counterpoint.”¹²² Her time with Johnson was short-lived, as Johnson passed away unexpectedly in 1981, leaving Sohl-Ellison and his other students with his legacy of treasured stories, history, and amazing rhythms.¹²³ Sohl-Ellison reflects on her time with Johnson in a 2007 *Los Angeles Times* article by Kirk Silsbee:

Foster didn't just teach steps. He taught the history of tap and jazz music. He'd *scat* the steps first, and then he'd show you how they went. When we had our lessons, I'd go over to his place, and he'd put the masonite down on the floor to dance on. Then he'd bring out his records and talk about which ones were good for tapping and why. He took me under his wing and introduced me to a whole new world of tap dancing.¹²⁴

Sohl-Ellison worked with Toni Relin on a repertoire that included modern dance, rhythmic exploration, political dance-theater works, and tap dance. They presented their first full dance concert in Santa Monica in 1981 and subsequently named their company LTD/Unlimited. In 1983, the pair

¹²¹ Personal conversation/oral history with Linda Sohl-Ellison, November 9, 2012

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, Performing Arts section, Kirk Silsbee, Oct. 25, 2007

presented a three-night tap concert in honor of the eighty-first birthday of John “Bubbles” Sublett, where Sohl-Ellison premiered her first large-group tap choreographic piece, *Tap Rhapsody/Part 1*, a suite of contrasting choreographic works for five women dancers including herself¹²⁵ Valis Hill’s *Tap Dancing America, A Cultural history*, quotes dance critic Lewis Segal: “The easy interplay in ensemble sections avoided all the mechanical-unison clichés of troupe-tap and suavely complemented the elegant live accompaniment.”¹²⁶

In 1984, Relin left LTD/Unlimited; Sohl-Ellison became the sole artistic director and she later renamed the company *Rhapsody In Taps*. She continued to create new compositions for her company, blending jazz tap with her own modern dance background. Sohl-Ellison fostered new possibilities for tap that were often accompanied by original music inspired by cultures from all over the world. In a 1987 review of Sohl-Ellison’s *Crossroads* in *The Los Angeles Herald*, dance critic Sasha Anawalt wrote, “Each time the company performs, it strides ahead, broadening definitions of tap dance so that it’s not just the rat-a-tat-tat of ten busy feet we hear, but the metaphorical consequences of their tapping.”¹²⁷ Sohl-Ellison explains that the title of the piece, *Crossroads*, is a

¹²⁵ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 269

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 269

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 270. I emailed Sasha Anawalt for clarification of her quote. In the first half of the quote, it is clear that Anawalt commends Sohl-Ellison for pushing the creative boundaries of tap dance,

metaphor for the intersection of modern dance and tap dance as well as for the choreographic patterns in the piece. According to Sohl-Ellison:

Crossroads was unusual, sort of a breakthrough tap piece for its time. I wanted to choreograph a dramatic traveling dance in 7/4 that did not stay positioned center stage like most tap pieces. Our music director at the time, Phil Wright, wrote the score specifically tailoring it to my dance structure. A quartet for Pauline Hagino, Monie Adamson, Beverly Scott, and myself, Crossroads was all about urgency and traveling, and mostly crossing or focusing on the diagonal. It was costumed by a great theater designer, Shageru Yaji. We wore raw silk belted cloaks, tops and pants of various shapes in earth tones and teal and maroon that he designed and sewed—very layered. The dance had a feeling of a caravan crossing the desert at some points, but it also had a strong intensity and a driving 7/4 beat. The musicians had a tough time keeping track of the score at times. With modern dance kinds of extended shapes, slides and lunges, it was definitely ahead of its time.¹²⁸

Sohl-Ellison was encouraged by positive reviews but was also keenly aware that not everyone felt that rhythm tap should be blended with anything new and interesting. During this time period, Sohl-Ellison was studying with African American tap dancer Leonard Reed. Initially, Reed disapproved of Sohl-Ellison's creative license. He told her, "If you're going to hoof, hoof—and if

but Anawalt could not remember what she meant by "metaphorical consequences." Sohl-Ellison explains in the quote that follows Anawalt's.

¹²⁸ Email from Linda Sohl-Ellison, December 9, 2012

you're going to do all that other modern stuff, then do that—but don't put them together."¹²⁹ His admonishment didn't deter her, but she was thrilled when in 1989, at the premiere of her piece entitled *Piru Bole*, which combined Indian drumming and chanting with Sohl-Ellison's magnificent tapping, Reed jumped up from his seat in the front row of the theater, yelling "Bravo!"¹³⁰ Sohl-Ellison felt liberated by Reed's endorsement because she had been nervous about how Reed, Coles, Brown and even her first mentor, Foster Johnson, would have viewed her experiments. Sohl-Ellison comments on Reed's approval:

It was liberating because I was so careful. I did not want to offend. This was an art form I was studying from older black men who were my mentors, who were teaching me this material. And for me, to take it to such a different direction, I was concerned they would be offended. So, I felt like I needed some little approval—even though, I was gonna do it anyway.¹³¹

The last portion of this quote is important: while Sohl-Ellison was cognizant of the rhythmic gifts she was given by her mentors, she was a creative and independent woman with an artistic mission. Although she

¹²⁹ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 271

¹³⁰ *Thinking On Their Feet, Women of The Tap Renaissance*, Documentary DVD, Directed and Produced by Jenai Cutcher, New Filmmakers, New York, 2010

¹³¹ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 271

deeply appreciated Reed's approval, she was going to compose in her own artistic voice, with or without his approval.

Not surprisingly, around this same time Sohl-Ellison, like Dally, began working in Los Angeles with Eddie Brown, who became an enormous influence on her future work. While studying with Brown, Sohl-Ellison noticed his unusual rhythmic phrasing. As she put it:

I became aware of Eddie crossing over the bar line. I was not aware of this before and with Eddie, I also started to improvise. My prior experience with improvisation was focused on finding choreography that I liked, but with Eddie, I began to really improvise, to jam. I did my best improvisation when Eddie played the piano.¹³²

While Johnson was Sohl-Ellison's first influence in rhythm tap, she and Brown had a long-lasting relationship based in both professional respect and deep friendship. "Eddie was so pleased that we wanted his material."¹³³ Sohl-Ellison reflects, "As our relationship progressed from teacher/student to a friendship, Eddie and I would go out to clubs to hear jazz music. There was nothing like hearing jazz music through Eddie's ears."¹³⁴

¹³² Personal conversation/oral history with Linda Sohl-Ellison, November 9, 2012

¹³³ *Thinking On Their Feet, Women of The Tap Renaissance*, Documentary DVD, Produced and Directed by Jenai Cutcher, New Filmmakers, New York, 2010

¹³⁴ Personal conversation/oral history with Linda Sohl-Ellison, November 9, 2012

As an artist and entrepreneur, Sohl-Ellison knew how to bring Eddie Brown's talent to the concert stage, use mainstream media to publicize Brown as a featured soloist in her company concerts, and obtain funding to pay him for performing. In addition to presenting his solo work, Sohl-Ellison created pieces for the company that integrated elements of Brown's improvisation with ensemble choreography. By presenting Brown as a *Rhapsody In Taps* soloist from 1985 through 1992, Sohl-Ellison ensured that Brown received the recognition he deserved for his immense contribution to tap dance. Brown continued to work with Sohl-Ellison and *Rhapsody In Taps* until his death in 1992.

Influences from rhythm tap masters Honi Coles, James "Buster" Brown, Gregory Hines and especially Foster Johnson and Eddie Brown, along with Sohl-Ellison's modern dance influences mark *Rhapsody In Taps'* diverse repertoire. Like many modern dance company full-length works, *Rhapsody in Taps* is funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Sohl-Ellison also obtained funding from the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. With this funding, Sohl-Ellison has created more than seventy-five works all performed with live music. One work (1999-2000), a two-year collaboration with Balinese gamelan musicians I Nyoman and Nanik Wenton, resulted in a

forty minute, four-section work entitled *Nusantara*, meaning Bridge Between Islands.¹³⁵

In 2005, Rhapsody In Taps won two Lester Horton Dance Awards for Outstanding Choreography and Outstanding Performance for *Stroke of the Oarsmen*, a tap/percussion collaboration with Monti Ellison.¹³⁶ Sohl-Ellison's inclusion of music from all over the globe inspires her to create unique works in her own voice with complementary percussive rhythms and body movement that both enrich and expand the possibilities of the art form.

In 1997, Sohl-Ellison choreographed a dynamic and innovative full-length work called, *BEAT! Percussion Discussion* which features dance company members as both tap dancers, and conga drummers.¹³⁷ Monti Ellison, the company's featured percussionist, anchors the musical accompaniment throughout the piece as the six additional company members seamlessly transition in and out of their roles as both tap dancers and drummers. This particular work is not only an homage to tap's African roots, but it is also an example of Sohl-Ellison's commitment to experimenting with music from around the globe. Through *BEAT! Percussion Discussion* we also see Sohl-

¹³⁵ Personal attendance at Rhapsody In Taps Concert, Japan American Theater, 2000

¹³⁶ Personal conversation/oral history with Linda Sohl-Ellison, November 9, 2012

¹³⁷ Personal attendance at Rhapsody In Taps Concert, Japan American Theater, October 1997, Los Angeles

Ellison's continued expansion of tap's boundaries through original music and choreography, combining her mentors' rhythms, style, and sensibilities with her own modern dance training. *BEAT! Percussion Discussion* was re-staged with a different cast of dancers in 2008 and the following is a description from the company's 2008 concert at the Japan American Theater in Los Angeles.

The piece begins on a dark stage with Sohl-Ellison and dancer Daphne Areta spotlighted on either side of an enormous hexagonal conga drum positioned upstage right. The two begin the piece with mallets in hand, alternating sparsely drummed rhythms as if they are quite literally having a discussion. Their interplay picks up in both tempo and rhythmic intensity as Sohl-Ellison and Areta begin simultaneously playing a beautiful rhythm, each drummer contributing individual but interlocking drum beats. The five remaining company members, Mindy Millard Copeland, Gabe Copeland, Monti Ellison, Brittney McBride and Bob Carroll are staged in a diagonal line on stage right. Each dancer is seated, with a smaller conga drum between his or her legs, oriented partially toward both the audience and to center stage. These five drummer/dancers join the musical dialogue with Sohl-Ellison and Areta, as they alternate in their roles as featured drummer and ensemble or background drummer. The group of seven create a *canon*, or sequence of individual beats, as if they are completing one melodic sentence. They finish this first section by

drumming in synchrony, creating an up-tempo propulsive African rhythmic derivative that continues to drive the piece forward.

Tap dancing is added into the second section of the piece. Copeland trades solo tap rhythms with the drummers, followed by a duet of Sohl-Ellison and Areta trading next. Carroll trades rapid-fire 16th notes, followed by Sohl-Ellison and Areta who alternate 16th notes with a beautiful slower paced triplet rhythm. This rhythmic contrast also has an effect on the mood of the piece. The 16th note sequences create excitement whereas the triplet sequences shift the aura to a graceful ethereal experience. Throughout this section the drummers alternate playing sparse open measures, allowing the tap dancers to generate the rhythm, with playing measures filled abundantly with drumming, complementing the complex rhythms created by the tap dancers. The synchronized turns, slides, and accompanying swinging arm movements echo Sohl-Ellison's modern dance training. The dancers' arms swing upward, creating an angular V shape above each dancer's head. This upward swinging arm motion propels the dancers' bodies through each turn, and at the completion of each turn, the arms fall back down by the dancers' legs. As three company members continue to play the conga drums, four tap dancers change positions moving past each other in diagonal lines. Foster Johnson's fluidity in simultaneously traveling and tapping inform Sohl-Ellison's moving in three-

dimensional space. Each of the four tap dancers takes a solo for four measures, followed by an aggressively fast paddle-and-roll combination, performed in unison. This quadruple, or 16th note rhythm, is reminiscent of Eddie Brown's rapid, close-to-the-floor style. As this section continues, Copeland and Carroll trade immensely difficult air-work in the form of wings, slides, toe stands, and turns. Sohl-Ellison and Areta join the two men to complete this section with a series of rapid *closed-thirds*, and *traveling cramp-rolls*, reminiscent of Johnson's work, followed by a stamp and the dramatic contrast of complete silence.

The third section uses both visual and rhythmic counterpoint as Millard Copeland and McBride dance slowly and fluidly with small drums affixed to their hips while Carroll and Copeland play the large hexagonal drum in the background. The women tap in both single and duple rhythms, which starkly contrast the previous sections quadruple metered sound. The women scrape the edge of their tap shoes for two long counts while they fill the measure with the rhythms played on their small hip drums. The rhythmic and visual sensation continues as the women dance for three measures followed by a measure of dramatic silence during which they sink into a deep *plié*, or bent knee, while the free foot extends into a graceful *développé* leg extension to the side.

Following the two women, Carroll and Copeland begin by trading tap and drum rhythms with mallets on the large hexagonal drum followed by a rapid sequence of unison *rhythm turns* with a punctuated drum hit on the last beat of each measure. This pattern is repeated three times. In a variation Carroll plays the drum while Copeland does a rhythm turn, followed by Copeland playing the drum while Carroll does a rhythm turn. The men alternate this pattern three times creating a visual and aural counterpoint that recalls Foster Johnson. The tempo picks up once again as Millard Copeland and McBride return from the group of seated drummers to join the two men, once again with smaller drums affixed to their hips. The four dancers alternate single, duple, triplet and quadruple rhythms as they fill the drummer's *stop-time*, or open measures. The dancers travel from upstage to downstage using synchronized *barrel roll*, or windmill-like arms, and their single and double wings have an authority like Foster Johnson's. The unexpected rests escalate the tension throughout this section.

A rhythmic shift to swing follows in the next section. The dancers travel through each other in diagonal lines and horizontal lines, orienting to all corners and sides of the stage. The five dancers in this section alternate unison dancing with solos and duets. Patterns are repeated, but always with a variation of rhythm, shape or direction. While one phrase ends with a

satisfyingly silent *rond de jambe*, or circular motion with the leg, one expects the repetition that follows to conclude the same way. Instead Sohl-Ellison crosses over the bar-line into the next musical phrase. This rhythmic complexity reflects Eddie Brown's musical phrasing and choreographic influence. Sohl-Ellison's final section brings all six dancers back to the drums, re-joining Ellison, who has masterfully accompanied them throughout the piece.

BEAT! Percussion Discussion is further testament to Sohl-Ellison's importance in the rebirth of tap dance in America.¹³⁸ While creating innovative full-length works, *Rhapsody In Taps* continues to honor tap's heritage through the company's concert tributes to the great rhythm tap masters. In 2001, the company paid tribute to Eddie Brown and in 2007, the company performed three works choreographed by and in tribute to Foster Johnson. In addition to the company's long-term association with Eddie Brown, other featured soloists have included tap legends Charles "Honi" Coles, Sandman Sims, Bunny Briggs, Steve Condos, Arthur Duncan, Leonard Reed and Frances Nealy.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Personal Attendance at *Rhapsody In Taps* Concert, Japan American Theater, Los Angeles, October 1997 and *Rhapsody In Taps Concert*, Performance DVD, Japan American Theatre, Los Angeles, 2008

¹³⁹ Personal conversation/oral history with Linda Sohl-Ellison, November 9, 2012

Sohl-Ellison's relationships with her mentors were built upon mutual respect and these affiliations are important for several reasons. Not only are the tap masters' influences reflected in Rhapsody In Taps' footwork, but the company enabled these tap legends to resurrect their work in a new arena, the concert stage. By including the legends of tap dance in her concerts Sohl-Ellison has helped educate young dancers and the American public about the enormous contributions these masters have made to this art form.

Remembering and honoring this heritage alongside and within Sohl-Ellison's innovative choreography has furthered tap's evolution. Sohl-Ellison brings Rhapsody In Taps concerts into the Los Angeles County School district each year, providing youth with an exposure to American tap dance, jazz music, and projects inspired by cultures around the world. These unique intercultural collaborations are due to Sohl-Ellison's vision. She has taken America's indigenous dance form and combined it with music from all over the globe, creating endless rhythmic possibilities for tap dance.

2016 ushered in Linda Sohl-Ellison's Rhapsody in Taps 35th Anniversary Concert. Sohl-Ellison produced a retrospective program of tap dance and live music where the company shared tap's heritage and their own contributions to the evolution of tap dance in America with their audience. A September 24, 2016 press release states:

The 35th anniversary concert features Sohl-Ellison's own choreography plus choreography by great American tap masters Gregory Hines and Eddie Brown. The longest operating tap dance company in the US, and hence the world, Rhapsody in Taps is recognized for its choreographic invention and experimentation, its efforts to preserve and present tap's legacy, and for its significant contributions to the worldwide resurgence of tap dance since its beginnings in 1981.¹⁴⁰

As a full-time member of the dance faculty at Orange Coast College, Sohl-Ellison has sponsored tap festivals bringing together the best tap teachers, choreographers, and performers in the world to inspire a younger generation of tap students. Tap dance has not only survived, but has evolved, expanded, and risen to new artistic acclaim due in large part to Sohl-Ellison's work.

Dianne Walker: Tap's Social Worker

Dianne Walker, an African American woman who had no modern dance training and did not start her own tap dance company, has been just as influential in tap's resurgence as Bufalino, Goldberg, Dally, and Sohl-Ellison, but in a very different way. Walker, born on March 8, 1951 in Boston Massachusetts, had excellent early dance training with Mildred Kennedy of the The Kennedy Dance School. Kennedy had enjoyed a successful career as a tap

¹⁴⁰ http://www.rhapsodvintaps.com/2016_RIT_Press_Release_35th_Anniversary.pdf

dancer on the New England and New York vaudeville circuits. When Walker was ten, her mother remarried and the family relocated, interrupting her dance studies. Returning to Boston in 1968, Walker married and began raising a family.¹⁴¹ In 1978, while working as a clinical social worker on the staff at Boston University Hospital, Walker attended an event at Prince Hall Masonic Temple where she met Willie Spencer, an African American vaudeville tap dancer.¹⁴² After Walker expressed interest in reviving her childhood tap experience, Spencer sent her to study with Leon Collins, another African American tap dancer. Walker remembers:

I walked into the studio and I see this little man sitting at his desk with a screw driver adjusting his shoes, and he says, 'Hi Dumplin', I've been waiting for you—Willie called me and told me you wanted to learn to dance.¹⁴³

Walker then began to learn Collins' vast repertoire of increasingly difficult routines. As she says:

Each of the routines were four-chorus routines, which had no repetitions. The rhythms were beautifully and seamlessly joined and made so much sense musically and they were fit to standard jazz music—so it's your basics, the foundation, the alphabet.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 279, 280

¹⁴² Personal conversation/oral history with Dianne Walker, November 14, 2012

¹⁴³ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 280

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 280

These routines were unique and important in that—unlike other African American tap legends—Collins and his accompanist, Joan Hill, documented the routines, step for step, through written notation, ensuring that his enormous body of work would be remembered and passed down to future generations of tap dancers. Walker was so adept at Collins' material that she quickly became his protégé and a member of his school's faculty. In addition to teaching his routines, Collins also taught his students and protégés much about launching a performing career. According to Walker, "He taught me everything I know about show business." In 1982, Collins formed a small performing company with Walker, Pam Raff, C.B. Hetherington and pianist Joan Hill.

During that same year, Walker attended Jane Goldberg's second *By Word of Foot* festival in New York City where she noticed that, while most of the teachers were African American, there were very few black faces amongst the student participants. According to Walker:

I came to that festival for one day... and I was shocked that there were so few black dancers. Seeing so few black dancers in Boston I could understand, but how could I be in New York City at a major event and see so few black faces?¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Personal conversation/oral history with Dianne Walker, November 29, 2012
Walker corrected quote from Valis Hill's, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 282

White students, particularly young white women, were the ones interested in the information and the rhythms that the older African American men were sharing. Dally's explanation of this phenomenon is that African American parents did not want their children tap dancing because they perceived it as a form of Uncle Tomism.¹⁴⁶ Sohl-Ellison added that young black dancers were not interested in tap dance for this same reason.¹⁴⁷ Valis Hill agrees and states, "In the 1960's and 70's, the black urban generation had turned away from tap dancing—seeing it as a form of Uncle Tomism in its tradition of shuffles and flashy smiles, as Bill "Bojangles" Robinson had been depicted in Hollywood films."¹⁴⁸ Walker acknowledges that at one time there was a backlash within the African American community against tap dancing as Uncle Tomism, but she ascribes the low number of African Americans involved in tap during the 1970s and 80s, to shifting priorities. She explains:

The idea of Uncle Tomism comes from an earlier time period. During the 1930's and 40's, African American tap dancers were not given the same opportunities as white dancers in the Hollywood movie musicals. It angered John Bubbles that African American dancers were offered subservient roles such as janitors, waiters, and porters in movies. Bill Robinson was famously featured as a butler and a farmhand. There was some criticism of black folks accepting these kinds of roles. That was when Uncle Tomism came into tap dance. For my

¹⁴⁶ *Thinking on Their Feet, Women of the Tap Renaissance*, Documentary DVD, Cutcher, 2010

¹⁴⁷ Personal conversation/oral history with Linda Sohl-Ellison, November 9, 2012

¹⁴⁸ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 311

generation in the black community, we had nothing but respect for the older guys in show business. Uncle Tomism was an old term. It was never a part of my reality. For my generation the emphasis was on education, rather than the arts. This was the 60's and 70's and one outcome of the Civil Rights Movement was an increased interest and opportunity in education for the black community. Black Americans availed themselves of the social programs put in place to help black youth get to college, some as first generation college students. Education was first and foremost. Our afterschool programs consisted of tutorials in academics, not the arts. Along with the 'Black is Beautiful' feeling of the 60's came a deep sense of awareness that education was 'where it was at.' No one was saying we don't want our kids to dance or be in show business. That just wasn't the priority. Tap dance just wasn't on our radar at that time.¹⁴⁹

Walker remembers leaving the 1982 *By Word of Foot* festival, quietly saying to herself, "Oh man, we got some work to do."¹⁵⁰

Walker returned to Boston, and with the perspective of a clinical social worker she made it her mission to try to connect young people, particularly black young people, to tap dance. According to Walker:

Young people did not relate to the older generation of tap dancers. They may have enjoyed them but the older men weren't making kids want to jump up and buy tap shoes. Most young kids, black and white, did not know Honi Coles, Leon

¹⁴⁹ Personal conversations/oral history with Dianne Walker, November 14 and 29, 2012

¹⁵⁰ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 282

Collins or Eddie Brown. We were reaching other middle-aged women, but we weren't getting young people to consider tap dance. It was clear to me that if tap dance was going to survive, we needed a young person to be the 'shot heard round the world.' As a social worker, it was in my nature to fix things.¹⁵¹

Dianne Walker identified the eventual "shot heard round the world": Savion Glover, who was an eleven-year old boy in 1984 when he auditioned for the Broadway role of Willie in *The Tap Dance Kid*. After a successful yearlong run, Savion Glover had mastered the choreography of Danny Daniels, whose Broadway style of tap dance was rooted in Irish dance and Lancashire clog tradition.¹⁵² Tap was gaining worldwide momentum and by the mid-1980's tap festivals modeled after Goldberg's first *By Word of Foot* festival were produced around the globe. In celebration of his Broadway success, Glover was invited to perform at Rome's 1985 International *Tip Tap Festival*. Walker was invited to teach and perform as a festival soloist and in keeping with the theme of celebrating *The Tap Dance Kid*, she was also asked to bring five of the best young dancers from America's tap scene. Walker chose three of her own students—all African American boys—Dwayne Jones, Rashaan Burroughs, and Derrick Grant, along with two girls from Arlene Kennedy's school in Los

¹⁵¹ Personal conversation/oral history with Dianne Walker, October 13, 2012

¹⁵² Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 284 and my own experience studying with Danny Daniels, 1980's, New York

Angeles, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards and Cyd Glover. These five young dancers, unlike Savion Glover, had been trained in the African American tradition of rhythm tap.¹⁵³ In addition to recalling the thunderous applause they received from the entire audience in Rome, Sumbry-Edwards recalls Glover's astonished reaction to seeing the young dancers from the East and West Coasts. "Savion saw that there were other kids who were doing this... in other places, and he said, 'Oh my God, I wanna do what they're doing.' Because he wasn't hip to any of this, he was just not familiar with this approach."¹⁵⁴ At this point, Walker took the eleven year-old Glover under her wing. According to Walker:

During the Tip Tap Festival in Rome, Savion stuck to me like glue. He watched the Hoofers and the Copasetics perform while he was clinging to me in the wings. He was definitely inspired. He never stopped asking questions. This was what distinguished him from the other kids. He was hungry to learn everything that he saw and heard at this festival. While the other kids had some down time and played like normal kids, Savion wanted to hear everything again and again. He soaked it all up like a sponge.¹⁵⁵

Four months after the conclusion of Rome's Tip Tap Festival, Walker and Glover were reunited as cast mates in the Paris production of *Black and Blue*.

¹⁵³ Personal conversation/oral history with Dianne Walker, October 13, 2012

¹⁵⁴ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 283

¹⁵⁵ Personal conversation/oral history with Dianne Walker, October 13, 2012

The all-black musical revue was conceived and directed by Claudia Segovia and choreographed by Henry LeTang, a renowned African American tap dancer and teacher. Legends Bunny Briggs, Jimmy Slyde, Lon Chaney, Ralph Brown and George Hillman were featured male tap dancers. Dianne Walker was cast as the principal soloist and Savion Glover represented the younger generation of tap dancers. The production received rave reviews in Paris and its originally scheduled twelve-week run was extended to eight months.

Glover's time performing with Walker and these masters in Paris became a life-changing apprenticeship for the twelve year-old boy. According to Walker, "Glover never left my side for ten months. We would all hang out together in the theater and in the jazz clubs in Paris. Savion became a fierce little dancer during this time."¹⁵⁶ Glover recalls:

Black and Blue was when I realized I could create my own kind of dance. During the show I'd go out and do double time steps, trying to please the audience, and then afterward I was hanging out with Slyde and just by watching them, I saw it wasn't about pleasing an audience, it was about expressing yourself. ¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 285

Three years after the Paris production closed, the 1989 Broadway production of *Black and Blue* affirmed tap's steady ascendancy in mainstream popular culture. Fayard Nicholas, Henry LeTang, and Frankie Manning received Tony Awards for best choreography in a musical. Again the virtuosic rhythm tap dancing of Walker, Glover, and the legends of tap received rave reviews. Glover went on to become an internationally known tap phenomenon who collaborated with George C. Wolfe and Reg E. Gaines in the 1996 Broadway production and subsequent national and international touring companies of *Bring In Da Noise, Bring In Da Funk*. As choreographer and star performer in the musical, Glover, along with Wolfe and Gaines, chronicled tap's history, paid homage to its mentors and masters, and ushered in a new hard hitting hip-hop style of tap. *Bring In Da Noise, Bring In Da Funk* won Tony Awards for best musical, best choreography, best original score, best featured actress in a musical, best lighting design, and best direction in a musical.

Besides receiving critical acclaim, Glover excited and inspired young people, ushering in a new generation of young tap dancers, both black and white. Walker deserves credit for identifying Glover as the needed "shot heard round the world" and as a social activist, Walker saw what needed to be done. Through her position as teacher and caretaker between two generations, she

introduced Glover to rhythm tap and in doing so, facilitated the introduction of an entire new generation to this art form. Walker reflects:

I took him (Savion) by the hand, and the guys—even though I love the ground they walk on, and I miss every one of them this very day in my heart and soul—are not the ones who grabbed these kids by the hand and taught them. It was the women who did that.¹⁵⁸

Walker refers to the women who are the teachers, the advocates, the mentors and the transistors of tap's history, but Walker herself deserves much of the credit for keeping tap alive and propelling it forward as it continues to evolve as an American vernacular art form.

Conclusion

Following tap's heyday in the first four decades of the twentieth century and its decline in popularity during the 1950's and 60's, a group of women emerged who saved, transformed, reinvigorated, and propelled the art form into the future. Due to the success of these women in bringing tap back into mainstream popular culture, upending traditional gender roles, and creating a secure place for female tap dance artists, women in tap are flourishing today.¹⁵⁹

Brenda Bufalino, Jane Goldberg, Lynn Dally, Linda Sohl-Ellison, and Dianne

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 284

¹⁵⁹ See Afterward

Walker were the leaders of this movement and while moving tap forward, they took great care to preserve and document its rich and colorful history. Various circumstances led these five women to their individual mentors; but when they heard the rhythms produced by these masters, the women reacted unanimously. Walker speaks for all of the women when she describes her reaction to first hearing the rhythms of jazz tap: "That's what I want, right there."¹⁶⁰ The women were captivated and inspired by what they were hearing and seeing and they were not afraid to go after it, learn it, and incorporate it in their own way. They were all looking at new ways of dancing and new ways of defining their own voice in dance. Goldberg explains the impetus and passion felt by these women. "We all came out of the civil rights movement and the sexual revolution and the women's movement, and so we had to save the art—we didn't have a choice."¹⁶¹ The social movements of the 1960's and 70's empowered these women to push against gender, racial, and generational ideologies as they sought out this older generation of African American male tap dancers. While they had been prominent in tap's heyday, these men had never reached the level of fame and stardom of their white counterparts like Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. They had not been offered the same opportunities as Astaire and Kelly, and, while the women of the tap renaissance knew they

¹⁶⁰ Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, p. 230

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 230

could not change history, they were compelled to right this wrong by resurrecting their mentor's careers for a new generation of Americans to appreciate. Not only were the women excited by their newfound rhythms and the transformative possibilities they presented for tap's future, they were also proud to be part of the revival and preservation of this American art form. The American populous had also lived through the social and cultural movements of the 1950s, 60s and 70s and these five women were correct in believing that American audiences would now be ready to appreciate tap as more than a subcultural commercial form of entertainment. Due to their efforts, tap is now respected as a national art form with a strong female presence.

Impassioned by this cause, these women knew how to organize. They were college- educated entrepreneurs who had the knowledge and access to publicity through mainstream media and funding through grant writing. During tap's renaissance, Bufalino, Goldberg, Dally, and Sohl-Ellison were all awarded grants from the federally funded National Endowment for the Arts. Because the NEA, created by Congress in 1965, did not exist during tap's peak years, Brown, Coles, Robinson, and other tap dancers from the heyday did not have access to this type of funding and had to make a living commercially without this type of support. By the 1960s however, the federal government saw the benefits of

supporting the arts and prioritized participation and creativity in the arts. The agency's mission statement declares:

Through partnerships with state art agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America.¹⁶²

Because of this new-found support for the arts, Goldberg used NEA grant money to subsidize the *By Word of Foot* tap festivals and Bufalino, Dally, and Sohl-Ellison used NEA awards to create new works and pay their mentors and company members for rehearsal and performance time. Due to this financial support, the women of tap's renaissance presented and honored their mentors as featured dancers in their company concerts and expanded tap's possibilities through incorporating their incredible rhythms into their own choreographic works.¹⁶³ These innovative works were the first full-length pieces in tap, often using multiple sections, solo and unison choreography, improvisation, and counterpoint. Through Sohl-Ellison's experimental use of music from around the globe and Bufalino's work with classical music, tap dancers were inspired to

¹⁶² National Endowment for the Arts Website
<https://www.arts.gov/about-nea>

¹⁶³ In a personal conversation/oral history on November 9, 2012, Sohl-Ellison said that she also used her own personal funds to produce concerts so that her mentors could be seen and appreciated.

expand tap into new musical genres, creating boundless possibilities for aspiring tap dancers and choreographers.

Goldberg, through her background in investigative journalism, sought out, interviewed and studied the tap rhythms of dozens of men from tap's heyday. Through the creation of her 1980 *By Word of Foot* festival, Goldberg brought these men together to teach and share their rhythms with a younger generation of tap dance students. The *By Word of Foot* festivals became the model for the thousands of tap festivals that have followed. Produced all over the world, these festivals are the primary methodology for bringing tap teachers and students of all races, colors, genders, and generations together to pass on both the renowned choreography of tap's African American masters and the innovative works of the leaders in the field. Goldberg's vision and creation of the tap festival has been instrumental in uniting the tap community, preserving tap's history, and furthering the development of the art form.

Walker, a dynamic teacher and mainstay on the current festival scene, contributed to tap's resurgence through her mission as a social activist. With her talent, her genuine interest in young people, and her deep understanding of what it was going to take for tap to thrive, she took young African American dancers under her wing and inspired them to carry the torch forward. Through mentoring and bringing the talent of Derrick Grant, Dormeshia Sumbry-

Edwards, and especially Savion Glover into mainstream popular culture, Walker succeeded in inspiring young people to become interested in tap again. Through their presence as dancers, choreographers, and producers of Broadway and concert stages as well as their prominence in the tap festival scene, Grant, Sumbry-Edwards, and Glover have ignited a youth revolution in tap dance. Through new dance companies, myriad festivals, and the dedication of grass roots tap teachers across the country who inspire their students with the rhythms of jazz tap, there has been a proliferation of talent that continues to grow each year.

During the unique social and cultural circumstances of the 1970's and 80's, these special women of tap's renaissance managed to save the dance form from possible extinction. Had it not been for their love of tap, tenacity and dedication to connecting with their mentors, and documentation and transmission of tap's history to future generations, this art form could have been lost forever. Empowered by their own unique experiences and new-found liberation, the women of tap's renaissance effected positive change. Due to long-established gender roles, women who lived and worked during tap's peak years, with few exceptions, were not given the opportunity to headline, improvise, challenge, choreograph, or create their own rhythms. Bufalino, Goldberg, Dally, Sohl-Ellison, and Walker deserve recognition and credit not

only for leading the movement that brought tap back into mainstream popular culture, but especially for disrupting the older male-dominant narrative and creating a highly respected place for female tap dancers. These five women worked to honor the history and the life-work of their African American mentors while simultaneously creating spaces such as festivals, companies, schools, and documentaries that made possible both the preservation and continuation of a tap archive, and the promotion of a gender-neutral, interracial, and intergenerational community of dancers who continue to create expressions of freedom, thus ensuring the continued evolution of this American indigenous dance form.

Afterward: Women in Tap, 2000-2017

Due to the tremendous success of tap's resurgence in American culture, women in tap have been flourishing for the past two decades. As a female tap dancer, teacher, choreographer, and performer, I am one of the beneficiaries of the progressive culture carved out by the women of the tap renaissance. As the founder and director of Happy Feet Dance School in Mill Valley, California, I have taught tap and its cultural history to thousands of young people over the past three-plus decades. The pinnacle of my own performing career occurred in 2000 and in 2003, when along with my two partners, Sheri Bechelli and Patti Meagher, our tap trio—The Step Sisters—had the honor of opening for tap luminary Gregory Hines for sold-out concerts at the Marin Center Veteran's Memorial Auditorium. *The Mill Valley Herald* describes the first event and quotes Hines in the paper's April 3, 2000 edition.

““The stage is vibrating,” revealed the Marin Civic Center’s main attraction Gregory Hines on Thursday, March 30 to a massive crowd in the sold-out, 2000 seat theatre. The well-known actor, singer and dancer was speaking in reference to his opening act, The Step Sisters, for whom he added, “It’s an honor to be on stage after them.””¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ *Mill Valley Herald*, April 3-9, 2000: “Locals share the Civic Center Stage with Gregory Hines” p. 1-2

Gregory Hines was a champion for all races, genders, and generations in the tap community. He was a huge supporter of the women of the tap renaissance and it was a great honor and distinction for us—three female tap dancers—to be personally selected by this tap legend as his opening act.

As further testament to women's prominence in tap, I was honored to be included as one of twenty-six female and fourteen male tap dance artists chosen to teach original choreography on Fred Strickler's 2010 *Masters of American Tap Dance* website.

In keeping with the traditions established by the women discussed in this thesis, I, along with my daughter and assistant director, Caitlin Bechelli, hosted a tap dance festival on January 22, 2017 for San Francisco Bay Area tap dance teachers and students. African American tap dance legend Arthur Duncan taught his enthusiastic students original choreography from his long and successful performing career. He is renowned for his seventeen-year stint as a regular on the Lawrence Welk Show, a popular variety show which aired on major television networks from 1951 to 1971. Mr. Duncan was also a featured tap dancer in the 1989 feature film, *Tap*, with Harold Nicholas, Steve Condos, Sammy Davis Jr. , Jimmy Slyde, James "Buster" Brown, Gregory Hines and Savion Glover. Mr. Duncan is the last living legend from the movie's famous tap challenge scene.

Amongst the current younger female leaders in the field of tap dance are Michelle Dorrance, Chloe Arnold, and Sarah Reich. These three women are known throughout the worldwide tap community as innovators in the art form.

The New Yorker describes thirty-seven-year-old Michelle Dorrance as “one of the most imaginative tap choreographers working today.”¹⁶⁵ Dorrance is a 2015 MacArthur Fellow and a 2013 Jacob’s Pillow Dance Award winner and was also a recent guest on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, where she taught Colbert the Shim Sham, also known as the national anthem of tap dancers.¹⁶⁶ As the artistic director of Dorrance Dance, Michelle teaches, choreographs and performs throughout the world.¹⁶⁷ I recently attended Dorrance Dance’s concert, *The Blues Project*, at San Francisco’s Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Chief of Program and Pedagogy at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts explains that the program’s message was to, “...celebrate the legacy of the body in resistance through art forms that permanently changed the structure of Western music and the architecture of

¹⁶⁵ Michelle Dorrance Website
<http://www.michelledorrance.com/>

¹⁶⁶ The choreography of the Shim Sham, also known as the national anthem of tap dancers, is credited to tap dancers Leonard Reed and his partner Willie Bryant, but it was likely influenced by the Whitman Sisters as Reed and Bryant toured with the Whitman Sisters show on the TOBA circuit in the 1920s and 30s. The one-chorus routine caught on in New York, was codified and intended as a closer for vaudeville shows. This tradition continues as the Shim Sham is frequently performed by tap dancers across the globe at the culmination of today’s tap shows.

¹⁶⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyAc_GqTrSs

black dance in America.”¹⁶⁸ Choreographed by Dorrance—who is white—and Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards and Derrick Grant—who are black, the nine-member multi-ethnic ensemble consisted of five women and four men, who provided the audience with the most skillful and exciting tap dancing I’ve ever seen.

Chloe Arnold, a Columbia University Film School graduate, has performed and taught tap all over the world. Most recently, Arnold and her company, Syncopated Ladies, won the first Crew Battle on Fox Broadcasting Company’s, *So You Think You Can Dance*. In 2013, Arnold released an all-female tap dance video entitled *Tap Dance Salute to Beyoncé*, and when Beyoncé posted the tribute to social media, the clip became a viral sensation. On November 8th, 2016, in celebration of Hillary Clinton, the first woman to run for the office of president of the United States, Arnold released a tap video entitled *Rise Up*. The all female Syncopated Ladies tap group dances in celebration of women’s rights and is accompanied by singer and musician Andra Day. The tap dancers, dressed in white, with red oxford tap shoes powerfully tap out rhythms and hold signs reading: Rise up for Justice, Rise up for Change, Rise Up for Humanity, Rise Up for Love, and Rise Up for Equality. The spoken word voice-

¹⁶⁸ Joseph, Marc Bamuthi, Chief of Program and Pedagogy, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, program insert for *The Blues Project*, March, 2017

overs pay tribute to Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, America Ferrera, Hillary Clinton, and Debbie Allen for empowering women through their words and actions.¹⁶⁹

Sarah Reich, a twenty-seven-year-old tap dance phenomenon, has emerged as one of the new leaders in tap dance. In 2004, Reich was named by *Dance Spirit Magazine* as one of “20 Hot Tappers under 20” to watch and in 2009 was named again as one of “25 to Watch.” Since then, Reich has performed, taught, and choreographed for tap dancers in 40 countries. Reich is currently the featured solo tap dancer with musician Scott Bradlee’s group Postmodern Jukebox. She is also a featured performer in Chloe Arnold’s Syncopated Ladies tap group. In addition Reich has her own tap companies entitled Tap Music Project and Sole Sisters.¹⁷⁰

Throughout tap’s history, audience exposure to the art form was limited to those who could pay to see tap through live performances in theatrical genres such as minstrelsy, vaudeville, Broadway, Hollywood movies and live concerts. Due to the advent and increasing popularity of social media, audiences and aspiring tap dancers all over the world have the opportunity to see these

¹⁶⁹ Youtube clip of Chloe Arnold’s *Rise Up*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9T2BH8KQ-A>

¹⁷⁰ Sarah Reich’s Website:
<http://www.sarahreich.com/>

powerful young women break ground through their innovative and inspiring works, thus ensuring the continuing evolution of women in tap.

Glossary of Dance and Musical Terms, In Alphabetical Order

Some of the terms listed below are related only to tap dance while many others are general dance terms used in ballet, modern, jazz, musical theater, and tap dance.

Air Tour refers to a dancer's turn which is executed in the air/off the ground.

Air Work refers to technically advanced tap steps that involved great physical strength. A tap dancer must be able to propel his or her body up into the air in order to execute air work steps. Examples of air work steps are single and double pull backs, single and double wings, over the tops, trenches, and toe stands and leaps.

Arabesque is a position of the body where the dancer stands with full weight on one leg while the other leg extends behind the body. Both knees are straight and arabesque can be executed with the extended leg on the floor or in the air. The standing leg can either be flat or in relevé, or up on the ball of the foot.

Attitude Position is a position of the body where the dancer stands with full weight on one leg while lifting the opposite leg up into the air with a bent knee. Attitude can be performed with the extended leg in front, to the side, or in back of the standing leg. The standing leg can be flat or in relevé position.

Ball is the portion of the foot just below the toes. A step with the ball of the foot is a step that transfers weight from one foot to the other using only the ball of the foot.

A **Ball Change** is a basic unit taught to novice tap dancers, consisting of a shift of weight from the ball of one foot to the ball of the other foot. It is used frequently in tap dancing.

Ball-Heels consist of two sequential sounds. The first sound is created by stepping on the ball of the foot and the second sound is created by dropping the heel of that same foot.

Ball-Heel Crawling steps move the dancer in a forward motion transferring his or her weight from one foot to the other through a series of balls and heels. Ball-heel crawling steps are performed close to the floor and in a small, defined space.

A **Bar** is the unit of music contained between two bar lines. A bar and a measure are interchangeable terms.

A **Barrel Roll** is 360-degree turn that is accomplished by the dancer using his or her arms in a windmill like fashion. For example if the right arm is positioned in front of the body, the dancer will use the right arm to swing up in the air, helping to propel his or her body through the turn. Barrel rolls can be performed while staying on the ground or while propelling into the air.

Bebop is a style of jazz music made popular in the 1940's. Bebop rhythms are fast and frenetic, with asymmetrical or unpredictable phrasing.

Blues Structure is music usually formatted in 12 bar phrases.

A **Break** is a two bar phrase used to finish a six bar sequence, creating a complete eight bar step. A **half-Break** is a two bar phrase which repeats a portion of the previous four bar phrase. A half break is generally executed during measures five and six of an eight bar phrase.

Broadway Style Tap Dance is primarily visual in presentation with equal importance placed on the dancer's feet, legs, upper body, arms, head, and torso. Broadway style tap rhythms tend to be based in European, particularly Irish, rhythmic traditions and its rhythms tend to be square and predictable.

A **Catch Step** is a quick shift of weight from one foot to the other. This is sometimes executed for practical reasons, as the dancer needs to have the opposite foot free to continue with a given sequence. It is sometimes practiced for a visual, rhythmic, or playful effect.

A **Chainé Turn** is a series, or chain, of turns performed by stepping from the ball of one foot to the ball of the other foot.

Double **Chainé Air Tour** is a series of two chainé turns with a slight leap into the air between each sequence of two turns.

Closed Thirds are similar to flaps but instead of executing the two sounds of a flap, a closed third incorporates a third sound which occurs between the brush and step of a flap.

A **Challenge** sequence is a dance or routine where a portion of the routine is used for trading a tap dancer's best steps. With each ensuing trade, the dancer attempts to "one up" or best his rhythmic opponent with a technically challenging step.

A **Chug** is a forward sliding motion with the ball of the foot, followed by an immediate, almost simultaneous, drop of the heel on the same foot.

Class Acts are a style of tap known for elegance, grace, smoothness, and crystal clear precision.

Classical Tap is tap dance performed to music played by a symphony orchestra with string, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments. As opposed to swing music, classical music does not involve improvisation. Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky are famous composers of classical music.

Comedy is a style of tap characterized by humorous gimmicks and tricks, which are intended to provoke laughter.

A **Cramp Roll** consists of four sounds, two from the balls of the feet and two from the heels of the feet: Ball, ball, heel, heel. A Cramp roll can be executed in any metric structure.

A Pressed **Cramp Roll** compresses the sounds of the cramp roll into a smaller rhythmic time frame. More than four sounds can be contained in a pressed cramp roll.

Traveling **Cramp Rolls** incorporate the same four sounds as a cramp roll but are more difficult as they require the dancer to travel while executing the four crisp sounds of the cramp roll.

Counterpoint is the use of two or more choreographic fragments with differing use of space, time, visual, or rhythmic elements. When the fragments are used simultaneously they create interest, which adds to the choreography as a whole.

Développé is a leg extension whereby the working leg begins in a bent position, usually at the height of the knee of the supporting leg. The working leg then unfolds, or develops, out into a straight leg. Développé can be executed to the front, side, or back of the dancer's body.

Double Time denotes the doubling of the established rhythm of a given dance sequence. If a dance begins with an 8th note rhythm, double time would be a subsequent sequence using 16th note rhythms.

Duple Rhythm denotes 8th notes. A tap dancer would vocalize a duple rhythm by saying: and 1, and 2, and 3, and 4. Each duple note grouping is of equal value in terms of time.

Fifth Position arms are positioned in front of the dancer's body. Fifth in front, refers to arms that close in front of the dancer's torso.

A **Flap** is one of the first basic tap steps taught to novice tap dancers and is used frequently by tap dancers of all levels and styles. The flap consists of two sounds, a brush with the ball of the foot, followed by a step with that same foot. The weight shifts completely from the standing foot to the flapping foot upon completion of a flap.

Fugue is a term used for individual harmonic lines in music, or different interlocking rhythms in tap dance, which interweave, or are used simultaneously to create an interesting harmonic sound.

Funk is a musical genre that blends soul, rhythm and blues and jazz music. It de-emphasizes melody and harmony and instead emphasizes a percussive pulse or groove.

A **Heel drop** is a percussive drop using the back portion or heel of the foot.

Hip-Hop is a musical genre that is related to funk in that it also emphasizes a strong percussive or rhythmic groove. Hip-hop music can also have components of rap in its accompanying lyrics. In tap dance, funk and hip refers to a hard-hitting percussive style of dance.

Improvisation consists of executing spontaneous musical variations or choreography within a structured musical time frame. There is no formal forethought choreographed or planned when one improvises.

Interlocking Rhythms are individual rhythms, which complement each other when performed simultaneously.

Jazz Tap is a rhythmically complex form of tap dance which matches its speed and rhythmic complexity to that of jazz music. In jazz tap, the rhythms created by the tap dancer are generally unpredictable and often cross over the musical bar line. Jazz tap rhythms, like musical jazz rhythms, emphasize the up-beats, which occur just before and after the more predictable downbeats in a rhythmic phrase. Jazz tap and rhythm tap are interchangeable terms.

A **Measure** is the unit of music contained between two bar lines. A measure and a bar are interchangeable terms.

An **Open Third** is similar to a shuffle with the addition of a heel and that extra heel sound is placed between the two brushes of a given shuffle.

An **Over the Top** is a technically advanced tap step where the dancer leans forward with full weight over the forward foot, steps backward to shift weight, slides the forward foot in a backward direction, while simultaneously bringing the back foot up and over the sliding foot. In examples of extreme virtuosity this sliding motion is executed on the outside edge of the tap dancers shoe.

Paddle-and-Roll is a style of tap dance, which consists of close to the floor, rapid tap dancing, using a series of balls, heel drops, heel digs, and small brushes. Paddle-and-roll movements are purposely kept small so that they can be executed at a fast tempo.

Pas de deux is a French term that literally means “step for two.” It is an integral part of classic ballet dance performed as a duet by a male and female dancer. It includes an adagio or slow section, solo work by the male and the female and a coda or conclusion performed by both dancers. The pas de deux requires the male dancer to be extremely strong and the female dancer to be strong, yet petite.

A **Pencil Turn** is a 360-degree turn that is executed with both feet on the floor. The feet/legs start about shoulder width apart. The dancer pushes slightly against the floor with one foot, bringing the two feet together. That pushing motion propels the body around to complete the turn.

A **Pirouette** is a 360-degree turn performed with one leg bearing weight and the other leg in the air.

A **Pirouette en dedans** turns inward towards the weight bearing leg.

A **Pirouette en dehors** turns outward or away from the weight bearing leg.

Triple Pirouette is a series of three consecutive 360-degree turns with one leg bearing weight and the other leg in the air.

Plié refers to bending of the knees in dance. A plié can be executed on one leg only or on both legs simultaneously.

A Single **Pull Back** is a technically advanced tap step. The dancer's full weight is on one foot and he or she uses sheer muscular strength to propel the body upward into the air followed by a landing on the ground. Two crisp sounds are created by a single pull back. Double **pull backs** are executed from both feet and after propelling the body upward and landing on the ground, four crisp sounds are created.

Rattling Thirds are executed with a very loose ankle. They are similar to shuffles, which have two sounds, but rattling thirds or open thirds, have three sounds. The extra sound is created with the addition of a heel and that extra

heel sound is placed between the two brushes of a given shuffle. The term **rattling** refers to a loose repetitive motion.

Relevé is a movement where the dancer rises up to the ball of the foot, or the tips of the toes.

Rhythmic Groove is a term for the rhythmic feel or pulse of a particular choreographic work.

Rhythmic Pulse is an interchangeable term with rhythmic groove.

Rhythm Tap and jazz tap are interchangeable terms. Rhythm tap is a rhythmically complex form of tap dance which matches its speed and rhythmic complexity to that of jazz music. In rhythm tap, the rhythms created by the tap dancer are generally unpredictable and often cross over the musical bar line. Jazz tap rhythms, like musical jazz rhythms, emphasize the up-beats, which occur just before and after the more predictable downbeats in a rhythmic phrase.

A **Rhythm Turn** is a 360-degree turn, which is filled with rhythmic sounds.

A **Riff** is a tap step that includes at least two sounds but can include many more sounds. It is generally executed close to the floor and when repeated over and over again, it creates smooth traveling steps, full of rhythmic sounds.

Rond de jambe is a circular movement of the leg, which can be executed with the foot touching the floor, a terre, or in the air, en l'air.

Scatting refers to chanting or singing a rhythmic phrase with nonsensical syllables. These syllables match the sounds of the rhythmic phrase. Many tap teachers use scatting as a tool to help students memorize a given rhythm.

A **Scuff** is a brush executed with the heel of the foot.

A **Scuff-hop** is a brush executed with the heel of the foot followed by a hop on the non-working or standing leg.

Second Position arms extend straight out to either side of the dancer's body.

A **Shuffle** is generally the first tap step taught to novice tap dancers and is used frequently by tap dancers of all levels and styles. The shuffle consists of two sequential sounds, both made by brushing the ball of the same foot. A shuffle can be executed in any direction, but the first basic shuffle is generally taught with the shuffling, or moving foot, in the air behind the standing foot. The first brush propels the foot forward and the second brush propels the foot back to the original starting position.

Shuffle Rhythm is an 8th note triplet rhythm where the middle triplet note is silenced. In music, this would be counted: 1 and a, 2 and a, 3 and a, 4 and a, but there would be no musical accompaniment on the “and” note in each phrase. The tap dancer however, may make use of the middle note by creating a rhythmic sound to accompany the middle note.

Single Time usually refers to the slowest rhythmic unit used in executing a given rhythmic sequence. In 4/4 time, single time refers to applying one sound to each quarter note. If a sequence begins with quarter notes, then moving to **double time** would mean moving into the use of 8th notes. If the originally established sequence is in 8th notes, then double time refers to shifting into 16th notes.

Sixteenth Note Rhythm denotes 16th notes. A tap dancer would vocalize a 16th note rhythm by saying: 1 e and a, 2 e and a, 3 e and a, 4 e and a. Each 16th note grouping is of equal value to one-quarter note.

Skating is a tap dance term that describes a smooth gliding movement from the ball of the foot to the heel of the same foot. All of the dancer’s weight is on the skating leg.

Soft-Shoe is a style of dance performed in a slow 4/4 time. Soft-shoe dancing was originally done in leather-soled shoes and often on a hard surface covered with sand. Later, soft-shoe dancing was done with metal taps affixed to the shoes, but the steps and style are similar to the original form.

A Soft-Shoe Front Essence is a standard tap step, used in soft-shoe dancing, consisting of a series of side-to-side flaps and steps all executed on the balls of the feet. The moving foot crosses in front of the standing or weight-bearing foot. Soft-shoe steps are executed at a slow tempo. Historically, soft-shoe dances were performed in soft-soled shoes, on a hard surface, or sometimes even on sand. The word essence is incorporated into the term because the quality or essence of the step derives from a tradition of soft and light dancing.

Spotting is a term used to describe the action of the dancer's head during the execution of turn. A dancer must spot his or her head in order to keep his or her balance.

Style is a term used in dance to define a particular way of dancing. For example a soft-shoe dance could be described as exhibiting a graceful style. A flash dance could be described as exhibiting an athletic style.

Swing is a style of jazz made popular in the 1920's and 30's. Swing rhythms are strong propulsive rhythms, usually four beats to a bar, which emphasize the upbeats or off beats that occur just before or after the steady predictable down beats of a measure.

Syncopation is a temporary displacing or shifting of the regular metric accent. In tap, a dancer syncopates a rhythm by placing accents unexpectedly on the upbeats, which occur just before and after the more predictable downbeats in a rhythmic phrase.

A Time Step was originally a step executed by a tap dancer to set the tempo and feel of his or her dance for the benefit of the accompanying musician. A time step is usually executed over six measures and is followed by a two-bar break. After the dancer executes the time step a capella, the band or musician comes in, knowing the right tempo and feel for the ensuing tap dance. Certain time steps have become standardized in tap vocabulary and can be used as part of tap choreography without the intention of setting the time for the musician.

Toe Stands are technically advanced steps where a dancer is balanced on the tips of his or her toes, similar to the position of a toe dancer in ballet.

A **Tour Jeté** is a turn that incorporates a large leaping movement executed in the air.

Trading Steps is a tradition where two or more tap dancers trade equal measures of tap rhythms back and forth with each other or with a musician. This can be done informally or as part of a challenge dance.

Traveling Cramp Rolls incorporate the same four sounds as a cramp roll but are more difficult as they require the dancer to travel while executing the four crisp sounds of the cramp roll.

Trick Steps are steps that appear to defy gravity. These can be acrobatic or aerial steps of extreme technical difficulty.

Triplet Rhythm denotes three notes played in sequence. In 4/4 time, triplet notes are called triplet 8th notes. A series of three triplet 8th notes is of the same value as one quarter note. A tap dancer would vocalize triplet notes by saying: 1 and a, 2 and a, 3 and a, 4 and a.

Vamping is a musical and dance term where a musical or rhythmic phrase is repeated as a theme step or as an interlude between sections of a composition.

A **Waltz**, in music, generally refers to a composition written in 3/4 time. In dance, a waltz step is generally counted in six: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and in rhythm tap, the measure may consist of rhythmic variations such as: a1, a2, and a 3, a4, and a 5, and a 6. Tap waltzes are generally slow and melodic but with room for rhythmic variation within the 3/4 time structure.

A **Waltz Clog Time Step** is a standard tap step performed in 3/4 time. It consists of flaps, shuffles, and ball changes.

World Beat is a genre of music that refers to blending of western pop music with music of traditional world music.

World Music refers to a category of music from all over the world, traditionally non-western music.

Double **Wings** are a technically advanced type of air step. The dancer stands with his or her weight on the balls of both feet. Then the dancer uses muscular strength and ankle flexibility to scrape the outside edges of the tap shoes outward, away from the center of the body, and into the air. The dancer then brushes the balls of the feet back towards the center of the body, landing on the balls of the feet. Double wings can be done one time or repeated in a series.

Single Foot **Wings** are technically more difficult than double wings. All of the dancer's weight is on one foot while executing the scraping, brushing and landing requiring extreme muscular strength.

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