



TAP Workshop

with Ryan Brown



A Brief History of TAP

1660's

- British Isle clog and step dancing collided with the rhythms of west African drumming and dancing when the English brought the African people over to “the new world” to be slaves
- Once a day the African people would be given time for exercise and since they no longer had drums, (taken away by the English because they were thought to increase their power) they began to imitate the British clog by using their body to create sounds
- Slaves imitated the “heel toe” action of the Irish Jig and the Lancashire Clog
- African movement became more formal and diluted and European steps became more fluid and rhythmic
- Result was a unique African tap dancing

Tap Dancing in America link <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200217630/>



1800's

- Late in the century, tap became a “stage dance”
- Tap was referred to as “buck and wing”, “buck dancing”, “flat-footed dancing”
- Performed by white dancers who blackened their faces and the performances were based on who could do the best interpretations of the Africans
- White performers competed to see who had the most “authentic” material



Buck and Wing



- **Minstrel Shows** were loosely formal and featured jokes, songs, dances, and music
- Minstrel Shows became the most popular form of entertainment (1840-1890)
- Before end of the Civil War, blacks and whites couldn't perform together
- After the Civil War, many mixed minstrel groups were born
- The movements were often referred to as “soft shoe”



1900 – 1920's

- The term “tap” dancing began in 1902
- Metal taps came after 1910, before they were leather and had pennies attached to the toe and heel
- Mostly segregated audiences with separate theatre circuits
- Became prominent in Vaudeville shows
- Considered a men only dance style



1920 – 1935

- Tap's most popular time on stage was during the Harlem Renaissance – peak of black Broadway
- This time was considered a golden age in African American culture, manifesting in literature, music, stage performance and art.
- Tap was a favourite as the “talkies” came in in the 1930's
- Until this time, black performers would appear in Minstrel show musicals, rarely seen in serious stage work
- Black musical revues moved to Broadway, expanding into the white world.

1950 – mid 1970

- Tap was in full swing and became popular in the movies
- Except for **Fred Astaire** and **Gene Kelly** movies, tap almost disappeared

Click on the link below for the five best tap dance routines in the movies

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2015/feb/04/clip-joint-five-best-tap-dancing-scenes-movies-fred-astaire-chicago-the-artist>



1970 – 1990

- Came back on Broadway in 1975 with the production of “The Wiz”
- No longer just entertainment, now considered a well respected art form
- 70s & 80s Choreographers were white women with modern dance backgrounds taught by older African-American tap masters - mixed traditional tap-jazz with modern
- **Gregory Hines** established National Tap Dance Day May 25th in 1989 (Bill “Bojangles” Birthday)



1990 – 2000

- Resurgence of percussive forms and an evolution of the Afro and Irish music and dance traditions were two musicals on Broadway, *Bring in 'da Noise* and *Bring in 'da Funk*.
- In 1996, *Riverdance* transformed, overnight, how traditional Irish dancing was seen.
- Michael Flatley mixed traditional Irish step dance with sensuous Flamenco rhythms
- New technologies for amplifying sounds and embellishing rhythms offered a new generation of tap artists to forge new styles.



The New Millennium

- First decade, Tap was regarded as a National Treasure with tap festivals, from 3 days to 2 weeks celebrating Bill “Bojangles” Birthday springing up all over North America and beyond.
- All forms of media were acknowledging tap artists such as Savion Glover and Brenda Bufalino with Capezio tap shoes and Bloch dancewear became familiar names.
- Women being celebrated in a historically male-dominated field.
- *Fusion*, the blending together of musical and cultural mixes exploded in tap dance and other dance styles and continues today.

FAMOUS TAPPERS - 13 of the BEST Tap Dancers of All Time

Gianluca Russo, July 19, 2019

www.dancespirit.com/best-tap-dancers

1. **Bill “Bojangles” Robinson** (1878-1949) - most famous for the “Staircase Dance” with Shirley Temple in “The Littlest Colonel”, known for tapping on his toes with few heel sounds
2. **John W. Bubbles** (1902-1986) - “Father of Rhythm Tap” invented the “cramp roll” and brought back heel sounds
3. **Eleanor Powell** (1912-1982) - known as MGM’s top dancing stars during the Golden Age of Hollywood, recognized by Dance Masters of America as the World’s Greatest Tap Dancer in 1965.
4. **Charles “Honi” Coles** (1911-1992) - developed high-speed rhythm tapping with intricate choreography on tiny platforms. Routinely danced with “Cholly” Atkins for 19 years and rebuilt his career in the 1970s with another amazing dancer, **Brenda Bufalino**.
5. **Ann Miller** (1923-2004) - famed for her speed to tap, press releases claimed she could tap 500 times/minute
6. **The Nicholas Brothers** (1914/21-2006/00) - artistry excelled with acrobatic technique known as “flash dancing”, considered greatest tap dancers of their day with dances like *Jumpin Five* from 1943 movie, *Stormy Weather*
7. **Gene Kelly** (1912-1996) - known for his energetic and athletic dance style, he is credited with making ballet commercially acceptable to film audiences and his many innovations that transformed the Hollywood musical.
8. **Fred Astaire** (1899-1987) - film and television career spanned 76 years, he took the genre of tap dancing to a whole new level with his uncanny sense of rhythm, perfectionism and innovation.

9. Ginger Rogers (1911-1995) - 73 productions (musicals and drama) to her credit but best known for performing “backwards and in high heels” with Fred Astaire. Highest paid female dancer of the 1940s.

10. Gregory Hines (1946-2003) - danced with his brother, studied with **Howard “Sandman” Sims** & the Nicholas Brothers, an avid improviser, he created a new black rhythmic tap that he aligned with jazz and postmodern dance.

11. Savion Glover (1973 -) - Broadway debut at 12, youngest Tony nomination/winner for dance & choreography, credited in bringing many young African-American boys back to tap, would throw hip hop into his dancing

12. Chloe Arnold and her Tap Ensemble, Syncopated Ladies - started her professional career at age 10, danced with Savion Glover, worked with **Debbie Allen** as a performer, choreographer, director, producer; SYTYCD crew winners.

13. Michelle Dorrance (1979) - performer, choreographer, teacher, director; her choreography has been described as “dynamite”, “brilliant”, “a marvel” and “a delight”, she pays homage to tradition yet does everything differently.

FAMOUS and other notable CANADIAN Tap Dancers to research:

- 1. Joey Hollingsworth** (1937 -) - from London, Ontario, mentored by Bill “Bojangles” Robinson in the 1950s, a regular on Canadian television; dancing salesman on Mr. Rogers; still an amazing dancer in his 80s. **And, Ruby Keeler, Jeni LeGon, Brock Jellison, Travis Knights, Heather Cornell, Joel Hanna, Tasha Lawson, Danny Nielsen, Matt Shields, Dayna Szyndrowski, Ryan Foley, Everitt Smith**

Tap Dance Movements

- Ball change
- Heel, step
- Toe dig, step
- Brush, forward or back
- Brush step (flap), forward or back
- Flap ball change, forward, side or back
- Shuffle
- Shuffle hop step
- Shuffle ball change
- Stamp and Stomp
- Skuff
- Cramp roll -
- Maxi Ford
- Waltz Clog

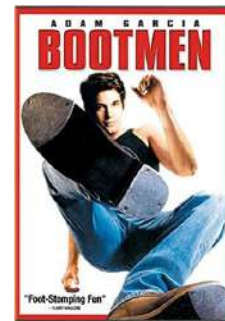
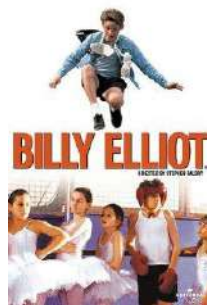


Movements stressed in **Ryan Brown's** Choreography:

- Paradiddles
- Irish, forward or back
- Bombershay
- Essence, forward or back; single, double
- Time Steps - single, double, triple
- Draw backs
- Paddle turns

TAP Assignment:

1. **What is your favourite film that includes tap dancing?** If you haven't watched one, choose one to view. Identify the choreographer of the film. (*This maybe someone you wish to research for the Choreographer Assignment*) Describe the role of dance within the plot and the types of Tap movements and other Elements of Dance you saw in the film?



2. **Choreograph a tap composition** recognizing that this dance style, like others, are always creating new movements that blend a variety of styles, use a high level of athleticism, increasingly advanced tricks, and incorporate all the Elements of Dance: Time, Shape, Space, Energy and Relationship. So, **what will your new tap moves look like** as you continue to apply the Principles of Composition: Variety, Transitions, Sequencing, Climax/Resolution, Contrast, Development, Unity, Balance, Repetition, Formations, Levels, Tempo, Dynamics and Qualities of movement.

Choose Your Own TAP Choreographer

3. Choose one of the following influential TAP choreographers:

Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire, Gregory Hines, Savion Glover
Chloe Arnold, Michelle Dorrance, or your teacher's suggestion.



Research the following:

1. Their birthplace and where they grew up.
2. When and where they started to dance.
3. Their dance experience, challenges and start professionally.
4. Their TAP style and unique contributions to the artform of TAP dance.
5. Musicians, videos, concerts, television shows, and/or movies they have performed with or choreographed for.
6. Awards or other special accomplishments they have made in their career.
7. A photo of the choreographer.

