

SHUFFLING THROUGH HISTORY: THE STYLE AND
INFLUENCES OF TAP DANCE

by

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SHUFFLING THROUGH HISTORY: THE STYLE AND
INFLUENCES OF TAP DANCE

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ABSTRACT

As a tap dancer of twelve years, I wanted to create a creative-based, departmental honors project that stretched my limits and knowledge of tap dance while also developing my choreography skills. To do this, I looked back at the history of tap dance in America. In narrowing down the project, I decided to research seven important influences of tap dance and how their styles evolved into tap as society knows it today. Within this research, I chose to focus on Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, The Nicholas Brothers, Broadway, Gregory Hines, Savion Glover, and the Syncopated Ladies. After researching each person/group's specific style and history, I then choreographed a one to two minute tap dance influenced by that person or group's specific style and contribution to tap dance on stage. The project culminated with a live twenty-minute performance of the choreography with eight tap dancers in the Buschman Theatre at Ed Landreth Hall at Texas Christian University on March 27th, 2022. Through this project I learned about the importance of these seven influences and their contributions to tap dance and American culture, pushed my skills as a choreographer, and developed a deeper understanding of teaching dance to others in preparation for a final performance.

In the realm of dance, tap dance is one of the only styles in which the dancers are responsible and required to provide additional sound to the music. The unique style is appreciated by many for its different skill sets for technique, intricacy of steps, and pleasing final product to audiences. As a tap dancer of twelve years, I wanted my honors project to expand my knowledge of the history of tap dance and the people who influenced it, create a space to professionally develop my choreography by growing my vocabulary of tap dance and creating multiple dance pieces in different styles, and work on my skills as a teacher through developing my skills working with students and adjusting my teaching style in accordance with how students differ in learning preferences. To accomplish these goals, I created “Shuffling Through History: The Style and Influences of Tap Dance Through History”. This performance-based project was a culmination of the research of seven important influences of tap dance on the stage from the 1920’s to present day and dance pieces choreographed by myself that reflect the styles of those influences. The project was performed by eight tap dancers on March 27th, 2022 in the Buschman Theatre at Texas Christian University.

The style’s origins can be traced back to times of slavery. Whenever slaves were transported to America during the middle passage, they blended their own style of African-American dance known as “Djoubé” or “Gioubé” with feet stomping and rhythms due to their lack of drums available. The transition to tap on the stage came with minstrel shows, performance put on by white performers in black-face, often imitating black slaves and their dancing style (Tap Dance in America). However, one man, William Lane Henry, also known as Master Juba, was able to keep the integrity of the African-American style on the minstrel stage (Peters). His level of skill and talent was unmatched by any other dancer at the time, and he blended the dance style with another sound-based style of dance at the time, the English-based

clog. He became the first African-American man to perform with the otherwise all-white minstrel troupe (Tap Dance in America).

With the basis of the origins of tap dance, we jump forward to the 1920's to begin my project. I decided to focus on tap dance as it has been known in a mainstream view with metal taps on the soles of the shoes which did not come into place until the 1920's when the toes and heels of shoes had "Taps" nailed/screwed onto the soles (Britannica). Before then, pennies and hobnails were placed on the soles of shoes to create the metal-like sounds on dancers' feet (Katemopoulos). With this in mind, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson was the first tap dancer I decided to focus on. Representing the 1920's, Robinson was known for his light and crisp feet with buck-and-wing style tap dance. His fame came to him on the Vaudeville circuits in the early 1900's. At this time, he was one of the only black performers on the stage. His fame grew in Hollywood and internationally after he did multiple dances on television alongside Shirley Temple including their famous stair dance. Bill "Bojangles" Robinson's style was known for being delicate and articulate. His crisp sounds were filled with bucks, time steps, and syncopated rhythms carrying him across the stage (History of Tap Dancing).

Moving into the 1930's, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers came into the spotlight as an iconic dance duo. However, they were not necessarily each other's main dance partners of the time. Fred started dancing at a mere four years old alongside his sister, Adele. They were a vaudeville duo and made their Broadway debut when Fred was only 18 years old. Adele was more popular than Fred and considered to be a better dancer. However, Adele retired young, and Fred was determined to continue performing. Although being told by many Hollywood executives that he could not sing, act, and could barely dance, he still was cast as a featured dancer in a Joan Crawford movie (Biography of Mr. Fred Astaire). Once he broke through on the

screen, Fred flourished. Ginger Rogers, on the other hand, was originally born Virginia Kather McMath began performing at age 14 in vaudeville acts. She quickly realized her acting skills and performed on Broadway and in many movies (Ginger Rogers). Fred and Ginger's first time performing together was in the 1933 film "Flying Down to Rio" in 1933 where the pair stole the screen from the stars of the movie (Aurora). They were an immediate hit. The pair went on to make ten movies together. The duo brought a blend of the gracefulness of ballet and the intricacy of tap dance. Their steps were seemingly relaxed, light, and effortless. Fred also had a large influence over the way that dances were shot on screen during this time. Rather than the popular special effects, chorus girls, camera cuts and edits, Astaire insisted on a full figure shot of the dancers with as minimal camera angles/edits as possible ("Fred Astaire" [Britannica]).

Next, the 1940's features the Nicholas Brothers. Fayard and Harold Nicholas popularized a highly acrobatic and athletic style of tap. The sons of musicians, the brothers had the opportunity to be around the stage very early in their lives and see many other popular dancers of the era. The boys would try to mimic these stars' dance moves and end up blending them into their own style. They found success at a young age being known first as "The Nicholas Kids" performing around their hometown, Philadelphia, and quickly traveling to New York and debuting at the Lafayette Theater. They then began performing in the Cotton Club, a popular nightclub in Harlem in the early 1900's, while still in their teens (Admin). Their choreography combined tap dance with jumps, leaps, splits, and more. Their blend of dance styles was unmatched by others in their time. This full body tap dance played great alongside big bands such as Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. The brothers were able to uniquely balance a classy feel with a comic and eccentric energy with their moves. The duo went on to perform in multiple Hollywood movies, on Broadway with the Ziegfeld Follies, Babes in Arms, and more, and

headline all over the world. The Nicholas Brothers have also won many awards including the Kennedy Center Honors from their contribution to American Culture (The Official Nicholas Brothers Website).

Tap dance then made a decline during the 1950's and 1960's. This was for many different reasons. One was the end of vaudeville and variety style performances. There was also a shift towards ballet and modern dance on the stage. The style of music also began to change from jazz to a more modern rock and pop style (History of Tap Dance). The rise of television also proved a challenge for many tap dancers because dancers were constantly challenged to create new and fresh routines since a single routine could be broadcast all over the nation in one night rather than having different audiences come see their performances on different nights over months of shows. The 1960's also saw the "free love" movement which pulled tap dance even further out of the spotlight ("Tap Dance" [Encyclopedia]).

During the late 1970's many tap companies were formed in an effort to bring in younger audiences and travel around to colleges. This included the American Tap Dance Foundation founded by Brenda Bufalino, Tony Waag, and Honi Coles and the Jazz Tap Ensemble founded by Lynn Dally ("Tap Dance" [Encyclopedia Britannica]). However, the real resurgence of tap dance began in the 1980s when Broadway brought *42nd Street* and *Black and Blue* onstage (Tap Dance in America). These musicals prominently featured tap dance and provided a new style of tap dance unlike the rhythm and buck and wing tap we have previously seen. This new style of tap was clean, presentational, and filled a theatre with sound as a large chorus tapped together in show-stopping numbers.

While tap began to reappear on the Broadway stage in the 1980's, one man solidified tap dance's place in the late 20th century – Gregory Hines. He brought back rhythmic tap through

modern music of the times. He and his brother, Maurice, began dancing at a very young age under famous choreographer Henry Le Tang. Hines, his brother, and his father went on to perform across the US and Europe for quite some time until Hines left the trio to form a jazz-rock band (Gregory Hines). However, he found himself back in the spotlight with his Tony-nominated performance in the Broadway musical *Eubie!* This performance also helped bring tap dance back to life for many as a prominent and exciting style of dance. Hines went on to star in many more Broadway shows and famous movies featuring tap dance including *White Nights* and *Tap*. He also continued to bring tap to the spotlight in many ways including a PBS special titled *Tap Dance in America* that featured many famous tap dancers and brought the style to mainstream entertainment (Gregory Hines: Tap Dance in America).

One of Gregory Hines' students, Savion Glover is one of today's most popular tap dancers. Glover began his career very early when he was cast as the title role in "The Tap Dance Kid" on Broadway at age ten. Glover also appeared in the movie *Tap* alongside Gregory Hines. Throughout his training and career, Glover developed his own style which he labeled "free-form hard core" ("Tap Dance" [Encyclopedia Britannica]). Lots of his style has roots in funk and hip-hop. Glover is a trained drummer, so his musicality in tap dance comes from viewing his tap shoes as a set of drums. He is known for his improvisation skills and unique rhythms on stage. As well as being a performer, Glover is a decorated choreographer having won a Tony for his work on *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* in 1996 (The History of Tap Dancing). Recently, Glover choreographed the Broadway revival of *Shuffle Along* starring Audra McDonald and Brian Stokes Mitchell. Many performers note Glover's unique style of teaching tap as well which relies on "beatbox" style vocalization of the steps rather than the typical "shuffle hop step on 1

and a 2". When Glover is onstage performing in solo shows, he is often found performing acapella allowing for endless options for rhythm.

So far, the majority of influences have been male. While women did tap dance before this, and made their living doing so, there sadly were not too many women who were recognized and praised for their contributions and work in the style during their time onstage. However in 2008, the first national Women in Tap Conference was held in Los Angeles. The conference was founded by Lynn Dally who was mentioned earlier as having founded the Jazz Tap Ensemble in 1979. This Conference gave women the voice and recognition that they deserved for a very long time. One woman, Chloe Arnold, has created an empire in the world of tap. The actress and choreographer first became known internationally after her time on Season 11 of *So You Think You Can Dance*. However, from a young age she was already on stage and had performed with Savion Glover in DC when she was just 10 years old. She also worked with and studied under Debbie Allen (Syncopated Ladies: The Official Website). Even through the COVID-19 pandemic, Chloe Arnold has found ways to continue sharing her love for tap including a collaboration with pointe dancer Tiler Peck. Arnold's style blends hip-hop with tap dance, and she can often be found choreographing to modern artists such as Beyonce and Megan the Stallion.

With the history portion of the project complete, it was time for me to delve into the performance and creative aspect of tap dance. Although I only researched seven influences, I choreographed eight pieces; the final, eighth piece was a full ensemble number that featured my own, personal style of tap dance. The choreography was uninfluenced by any other tappers' style to show that I am one of today's current tap influencers creating my own journey with tap dance.

The first step to creating my choreography was selecting the music for the project. To go about this, I listened to around eighty different song options before settling into my final seven choices. To find these options, I searched for songs by the tap dancer if they had released music, soundtracks from movies that the tap dancer had appeared in, songs from their decade, and rabbit holes from many of those avenues. The song choices I chose, in order of the project, were “Doin’ the New Low Down” by Lud Gluskin Orchestra, “I Won’t Dance” by Fred Astaire, “Jumpin Jive” by Cab Calloway, “Opening: That’s Dancing” from Stairway to the Stars London Palladium Cast, “That Girl Wants to Dance With Me” by Gregory Hines, “Upgrade U” by Beyonce, and “Pierre” by Ryn Weaver. To note, there are only seven songs used even though there were eight dances performed, because the Savion Glover piece was performed a capella.

With the songs chosen, I then had to edit the music, because I was only wanting to choreograph short one to two minute works rather than full numbers. This was so the audience could get a small taste and understanding of the choreographer's style, and also to make the process slightly easier for the dancers involved in the project. I edited the dances using GarageBand. This process involved cutting and arranging the dance to have a clear beginning and end to the dance (making sure the musicality and counts of the song stayed intact) and adjusting the tempo of a few numbers to work better with tap dance (avoiding to slow or too fast of a tempo).

At the beginning of choreographing, I anticipated that it would be one of my favorite aspects of this project because I would have a chance to explore and learn while being on my feet and creating something new. This proved to have the opposite effect at times unfortunately. Preparing to choreograph involved watching as many clips of the dancers as I could find. Thankfully, we have film and YouTube that is able to preserve the work of these dancers so that

we can see their influence today even though many of them are no longer with us. While it is not fully the same as being able to experience the artists onstage and in real life, it is the closest that we can get to their performances. I watched around fifty hours of various movies, YouTube clips, specials, and performances of these dancers to gain a sense of their style. I found that the easiest way to go about researching and watching videos was to focus solely on whatever dance I was currently working on. For instance, if I was choreographing the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers piece, that is when I would delve into the videos of the duo. This helped my brain separate and focus on the style at hand rather than learning and reviewing all of the styles at once and trying to separate them while I was choreographing the different dances.

The process of choreographing tap has always been an interesting experience for me. I often find myself improving while the music plays and seeing what I like, or I go the route of finding what rhythms I naturally hear first in the music and choreographing based off of those rhythms. This project had its own challenges because I was not only trying to choreograph naturally, but I was choreographing in a manner that showed an influence from another choreographer's style. Within this, I was trying my best to avoid copying exact steps and sequences of that dancer. In discussion with one of my committee members, Susan Douglas-Roberts in the dance department at Texas Christian University, she said something about choreography that helped change my process entirely. When discussing my challenges of riding the line between my dances being influenced and inspired by an artist versus copying their steps, she encouraged me to look at the dancers' performances and see what words come to mind when I watch their dances. For instance, when watching Fred and Ginger dance together, I thought of the words "sweeping", "elegant", "story-based", and "light." With these words in mind, I could

go and choreograph a number that also represented those words rather than watching and copying their steps that created that imagery and language for me.

After each session of choreography, I journaled any lingering thoughts or feelings that I had during the session. Looking back at these, I found myself filled with an even mixture of satisfaction and excitement for the number and frustration and a sense of “choreographer’s block.” My favorite and easiest numbers to choreograph were the Broadway number and the Bill “Bojangles” Robinson number. The Broadway number was easy because it is a style of tap that I am very used to dancing being a part of the music theatre realm. Broadway-style numbers have a hand-full of steps that are commonly used in the style such as time-steps and trenches. The steps are also often repeated for at least a full eight count which makes the time pass quickly in the song. The Bojangles number was similar in the fact that I have worked with buck-and-wing style tap and found that he repeated steps multiple times as well. Both numbers contain a balance of original eight count and rhythms that are fairly easy for the ear to hear which also lends to an easier time choreographing.

The numbers that filled me with the most frustration were those inspired by Savion Glover, Gregory Hines, and The Nicholas Brothers. Glover’s piece was definitely the most challenging and stress-inducing due to the a capella aspect of the piece. It required complete choreographers control which was actually very hard to work off. Because I had no music, it created so much of an open end that I was very indecisive. This makes sense in terms of how I normally choreograph numbers as mentioned before. It was also challenging because I decided to make it a duo number. During Glover’s acapella performances with other dancers, he creates choreography that overlaps rhythms and steps to create an intricate blend of sounds. Choreographing two different sets of tap steps that sounded good together without having any

music to base the choreography off was a huge challenge. I also did not know if the piece would work until I was in the room with my two dancers and they could put the multiple rhythms and steps together. Gregory Hines' number was a different challenge due to Hines' unique taste for rhythm within his choreography. Rather than "filling" an eight-count of music, he would find odd breaks within the choreography. This was a more fun challenge to combat because it forced me to alter how I heard the music and break it up in non-traditional ways. Finally, The Nicholas Brothers' dance was a challenge due to their athletic style of tap dance. While I am used to turning in tap shoes, I am not as accustomed to adding leaps and jumps and splits into the mix. The stamina required for this piece was highly advanced, so I found myself having to take a number of breaks while working on this piece since I would repeat the choreography so often while creating it.

As I began creating and choreographing each piece, I kept a notebook with all of my choreography written in it to help myself remember the choreography as I teach. Tap is a very difficult style to transfer from ones feet to paper. Here is an example of two eight counts of choreography from my finale number written out in words (To Note: "R" means Right and "L" means Left): "Paradiddle RL Dig Brushback R Heel L Shuffle R Heel L Toe Heel R Scuff L Heel R Dig L Back Flap Heel RL Shuffle R Heel L Stomp R Hop L Shuffle R Step R Shuffle L Step L Shuffle R Ball Change RL Shuffle R Ball Change RL Heel RL Back Flap RL Shuffle R Hop L Step R Stomp L. These two eight counts takes up only ten seconds of music. Writing down choreography, especially in tap dance, is difficult because it transcribes to a seemingly long sequence on paper. Taking the writing and translating it back to the feet can also be a challenge because of how long it seems on paper versus the flow one feels in their feet. Oftentimes tap dancers do not say each step in their head as they are tapping; it becomes a

muscle memory sequence, because to say each tap step takes more time to say than the step itself lasts.

Another challenge that I faced while choreographing was simply finding the space to work and choreograph each piece. Within Ed Landreth, the home of the theatre department, we have two performance classrooms – Ed Landreth 217 and 301. Of these two spaces, only one (301) is suitable for tap dance due to the flooring in the room. Since tap shoes have metal tap soles, they can easily scuff certain floors and wear down the finish, so we were not allowed to tap in Ed Landreth 217. The challenge posed with making sure my reservation was solidified due to most of the department also looking to reserve our few spaces available for their own projects and rehearsals. A conflict that constantly arose was having the space reserved, but then being contacted that the Theatre TCU show that was currently in rehearsals suddenly needed to rehearse in 301 although not previously anticipated. Unfortunately, I often had to surrender my reservation last minute to the creative team working that evening as they had priority of our spaces. This posed a challenge to my creative process as I then would have to either tap at home without tap shoes and a mirror (a difficult and not ideal challenge) or simply cancel and postpone my choreography to a later date.

At the beginning of the 2022 Spring semester, I held auditions for tap dancers to join the project. For this, I choreographed a short thirty-second tap routine to teach the auditioners so that I could see how they pick up dances and their skills with tap. To note, as an advanced tap dancer, I wanted the choreography to be inspired by some of the greatest tap dancers in history, so I did notify the auditioners that the project would lend itself towards an intermediate/advanced level of tap dance. This audition helped me find the advanced dancers so that I could focus more on the

choreography rather than teaching and helping tap dancers grow their tap skills immensely for this specific project.

After the initial audition, I had ten dancers selected for the project. With this set, I began creating the arrangement of which dancers would be in what numbers. I did my best to create an even mix so that dancers would not be overwhelmed with the project. Each dancer ended up being in two to three numbers – each creating a mix of duos, for the most part, with the addition of an all-girls number, an all-guys number, and our entire-ensemble finale. With knowledge of who was in what, I then had to create the rehearsal schedules. Creating these schedules proved to be a large challenge due to many factors. The biggest one was simply conflicting schedules of who was available when and finding times that people in the same number had schedules that aligned. Lots of dancers had other rehearsals within the theatre department at the time, so this ended up requiring us to start rehearsals late at night around 10:00 PM. I was fortunate to have willing dancers who came into the rehearsal room that late with great attitudes even after having just finished other long rehearsals.

Right before we began rehearsals for the project, I had two dancers reach out to me that they were no longer able to participate in the project for various reasons. While I understood the conflicts and was not mad or upset, it did require me to rework multiple numbers because of who was in what. Once it was settled, we were truly ready to step into the rehearsal process.

This part of the process was definitely my favorite because I now was able to see the tap steps in another dancer's body and view it from an outside perspective. It was also wonderful to see when the steps worked and clicked with the dancers and have them enjoy the choreography that they were performing. Dancers learn and pick up choreography in very different ways and time frames, so it was nice that they were more “small group” numbers with fewer dancers. This

allowed for more time to make sure that each dancer understood and felt not only comfortable, but confident in the choreography. I found that the Broadway number and the Syncopated Ladies numbers were the easiest for the dancers to learn throughout the process. I think the Broadway number made sense because many Musical Theatre based performers are more familiar with this style of tap, so it was easier to learn. I was surprised that the female small group (Syncopated Ladies) picked up the choreography so well. I think this had to do with the fact that it was to a song that the entire group was familiar with, and the dance style is blended with hip-hop which many of the dancers are also accustomed to.

This rehearsal period was condensed into a two-week time frame. This choice was made because many of the dancers were also involved with other shows and rehearsals and had heavy school and work schedules, so I wanted to do my best to keep this low stress for them seeing as they were volunteering their time and talents for this project. Over the two-week period, each dance rehearsed two to three times depending on the number. This allowed for time to teach the choreography and clean/refine any part of the dance. This process also included a dress rehearsal the day before the project on Saturday, March 26th.

The show was presented on March 27th, 2022 in the Buschman Theatre on Texas Christian University's campus. The public was invited, and I promoted the event mainly through the theatre department. I made programs for the event describing the show, noting who the dancers involved were, and listing the numbers for the audience. The performance ran around twenty minutes long overall. The order of the show involved me relaying a little bit of history and research about each person/influence of the decade so that the audience learned about their style and legacy, and then, they were able to see a dance number to display that specific style.

With the performance done, I had time to reflect on the entire process and what I felt was successful and less successful throughout it all. In terms of successes, I believe that I executed each style well through the choreography. Many audience members gave me feedback that they could see each distinct style and recognized the differences for each decade. The atmosphere that I created for the dancers throughout the process was also a point of success. I was nervous that the dancers would be run down and tired coming to rehearsals so late. However, many dancers noted that even though they did have long days, they were able to enjoy rehearsals and be excited about the numbers that they were learning. They always noted that they felt supported and encouraged throughout the process which is so vital in the rehearsal room. The dancers also noted that they felt that they had time to learn in the rehearsal room and that I made sure to explain the steps in a way that they could pick them up whether it was breaking it down very slowly, showing the sequence over many repetitions, or clapping the rhythms for them to hear. As a choreographer, I am very proud and humbled by the fact that my dancers felt this way throughout the process. Lastly, I felt that I created a very successful and educational experience for the audience members during the actual performance. Each decade contained a fairly equal share of research and history versus actual dancing. Audience members mentioned that they were able to learn about these people and groups in a way that they could understand and remember the information but not be overwhelmed by so much research. Many noted that it also enhanced their experience watching the dances since they knew about the performers life and style that led to their time on the stage.

Looking back on what was less successful, I think that the length of the rehearsal process could have been longer. As mentioned earlier, I kept it shorter to avoid adding too much stress to my dancers' schedules. However, I think that it would have been beneficial to have a full month

of rehearsals rather than only two weeks of rehearsal before the performance. This would have allowed for much cleaner dances in the end and more comfortability with the numbers for the dancers. Watching the footage of the project, there are quite a few moments of mistakes that could have easily been fixed with more rehearsals. Starting earlier in the month (rather than just holding longer rehearsals times over the two weeks) would have allowed for that cleanliness to happen seeing that the mistakes through memory would have been less likely.

After reflecting on the project as a whole, I realized many other challenges that crossed my path. The first has to do with the choreography side of tap dance. I often struggled to make sure that the tap steps were staying fresh and new. After a while, I had so many different rhythms and steps in my mind that I found myself repeating certain rhythms or steps. I had to consciously stray away from certain patterns. It was also a challenge to change from one style into the next, because I had focused and researched on one style for so long that it took a moment for that style to leave my brain and body. As mentioned before, there was also a challenge in the amount of time that it took for tap dancers to learn the choreography. This, as mentioned, could have been alleviated with a longer rehearsal period. Even before the performance, some tappers were constantly going over moves and steps making sure that it was fully in the brain and committed to memory for the show.

One major challenge that was prevalent throughout the project is the sheer nature of tap dance as a style in comparison to other dances. Earlier, I noted what two eight counts of tap steps look like written down and how it only accounts for around 10 seconds in music. When viewing other dancers' styles such as jazz, ballet, or hip-hop, one often sees around 6-10 moves filling an eight count of music. The styles are much more fluid, require full body moves, and usually account for a single beat in the music per move. However, the percussive nature of tap allows for

a single sound to fill a sixteenth of a beat. This means that if one fills an entire eight count of music with continuous tap steps, they can fit thirty-two different steps or sounds into the music. Tap does not always utilize each count in an eight-count to allow for different rhythms to occur, but the capacity for it is astounding. For example, the Bill “Bojangles” Robinson number required a style that mostly filled each eight-count with tap steps. The entire song was only one minute and two seconds long but accounts for 23 eight-counts, or approximately 730 tap steps.

Continuing with challenges, the academic aspect of the honors project has proven to be quite a challenge as well. While pursuing a creative project, this was always meant to be performed and watched on a stage. Reading this essay, one can infer and imagine what each performer and style is like and how the performance went, but there is no way to actually experience the choreography that I created. Even writing out all of the steps in this essay would not allow someone to experience the dance because there is no rhythm or quality to it. Writing “shuffle step ball change” on paper says nothing of the rhythm, the accents, the quality, or the emotional content of tap or any dance in general. In the same way that English words on a paper have a sense of meaning, how one puts them together and present them, often aloud, one can declare a war or break a heart; the same is true with sound. It is an experience. Writing the steps down does not provide that same impression of what a performance provides. This paper is what the project and the process means academically, but the performance created reactions and filled the room with a unique energy only available to those in the room. My research and history contributed to this project and what the final result was, but it was the choreography and the performance that created the essence of this project; that cannot be translated to an academic paper. The full recording of the performance can be found on my personal YouTube page, which

is the closest one can get to viewing the live performance now that the date has passed, similarly to videos of performers who have passed away (Bishop).

While developing and completing this project, I have come to appreciate the fast development of tap dance throughout history. From the 1920's with tap dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson to The Syncopated Ladies today, my knowledge and understanding of multiple styles of tap dance have expanded. I have also learned how people have pushed the limits of dance tap throughout history and continue to do so today. My skills as a choreographer have also been stretched, and I have seen a transformation in determining what my specific style of tap dance is for my future as a tap dancer and choreographer. As a truly American art form, tap dance continues to astonish audience members and the performance of "Shuffling Through History: The Style and Influences of Tap Dance" was no exception.

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