

# the village VOICE

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Tap Fest Redux

## SHOOT ME NOW!

BY EVA YAA ASANTEWAA

After his second successful year as producer of "Tap City," Tony Waag—always tickled by foreign names—can confidently call New York "la città del tip tap" and "Claquettes-ville," and did so, on the festival's official T-shirt. Over nine days in July, the tap community—dropping in from as far afield as Japan and Slovakia—converged for classes, performances, and special events, delighting some of the warmest dance crowds I've ever seen.

First stop was Chelsea Studios, site of numerous classes—from Jane Goldberg's "Rhythm & Schmooze: Steps and Stories From the Masters" to Ayodele Casel's "Straight—No Chaser," a drill session with little talk, just the insistent telegraph of taps. As usual, I followed my bliss to Brazil. An army of roughly 30 women and men warmed up their feet for Valeria Pinheiro's "Brazilian Tap" class. With her piercing whistle, Pinheiro cut through that merry thunder, calling the troops to order, and made them remove their shoes. To her drummers' soulful rumble, the dancers darted and dodged. "Don't keep on your feet," she called, meaning: Every part of you can samba on the air; you can whip around from

anywhere. Students swarmed, bubbled, lunged, and pranced as Pinheiro advised them to breathe so that they could "receive the *orishas*."

Divine spirits doing the shim-sham? Unfortunately, the students, now slipping on their shoes, were shy. "It's more than the sound," Pinheiro said. "You have to communicate." She then proffered steps inspired by fishermen casting and pulling nets. Set to a double-speed version of the powerful *maracatu*, a Candomblé rhythm from Brazil's northeast, this forceful sequence helped the dancers release more energy and pleasure.

Public events at the Duke on 42nd Street reflected racial, cultural, generational, physical, and stylistic diversity that much of the dance world would do well to emulate. Shows celebrated tap's history, its worldwide reach, and the influence on choreographic fancy of everything from postmodernism and social satire to classical music and Latin jazz.

One program ("Tap Youth/Tap Future") featured ensembles, duets, and soloists aged five to young adult. Washington's confident DC Artistry Tap and Drum (in Casel's *Ayo*) made tap feel up-to-the-minute without forcing a stale MTV-style production upon us. The high fliers of Brooklyn's Fulton Feet Express used their whole bodies, moving through space with great dynamism. If you happened to spy teen soloist Kendrick Jones II in the lobby or watching a show from the catwalk, he'd probably be trying out a lick he'd just seen. A taste of the models, from the lineups of other shows, available for gifted kids like Jones: Evie Ladin, whose mellow banjo-playing evokes a West African *kora*, searching her shoes for intricate, gentle rolling, trotting, and galloping sounds.

Israel's exciting Sharon Lavi and his sharp, abstract jazz improvisations. Kazu Kumagai, by turns wildish and subtle in his music, a Japanese Gregory Hines. Roxane Butterfly of France and her chattering, nonstop feet. Lanky, very blond Alexander Ivashkevich of Estonia nailing the slippery steps in his tribute to Buster Brown. Acia Gray of Austin, Texas—the tapping tornado—being funny, sexy, real. Lynn Dally and Sam Weber, masters of ease and sophistication, duetting in *Daahoud*, owning the floor. Jimmy Tate, with his furious, spastic style, looking a bit mad while his sound says he's boss. Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards's profound musicianship. Jenny Lane, recalling the precision and charm of Eleanor Powell in *Begin the Beguine*, right down to those outrageous, sparkling spins. Sarah Petronio, surrounded by devotees like Gray, Lavi, Barbara Duffy, and Margaret Morrison, painting the space with the deep, lush colors of John Lewis's "An Afternoon in Paris." Preserved on tape: Gregory Hines, Buster Brown, and Honi Coles in a classic showdown at the Village Gate; the Nicholas Brothers making jaws drop with their every perilous drop into splits; and vastly under-recognized women like marvelous Jeni Legon, Bessie Dudley, and Florence Mills, plus a host of UFDs (sadly Unidentified Female Dancers).

One afternoon, Dr. Jimmy Slyde—like some of the veterans, he's been awarded an honorary degree—remarked that "Nobody is more important than the art." But tap truly is each person who embodies it—with his or her sensitive ear for music, skilled feet, big heart, and eternal power over us. In one video clip, a young, chipper Jane Goldberg asserts, "Tap is not dead," leading Coles to disagree. "Tap is dead," he says. "It's dead right for everybody!" Yeah, baby! Shoot me while I'm happy! ☑