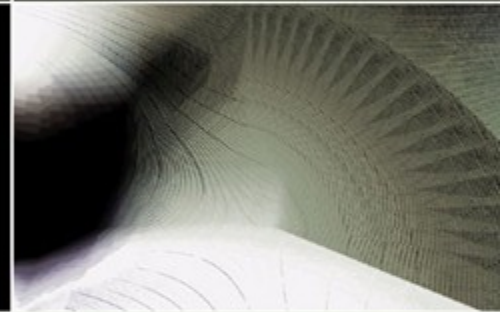


Along the Way to Tap

Precursors to African America Tap, 1700s-1800s



Introduction

- ▶ Tap dance is enjoyed by people throughout the global community.
- ▶ This dance style is seen on film and on the live stage.
- ▶ It became so popular that it earned its own category in the dance world.
- ▶ But popularity aside, understanding its history will provide insight into the multifaceted experiences of Africans in the Diaspora.



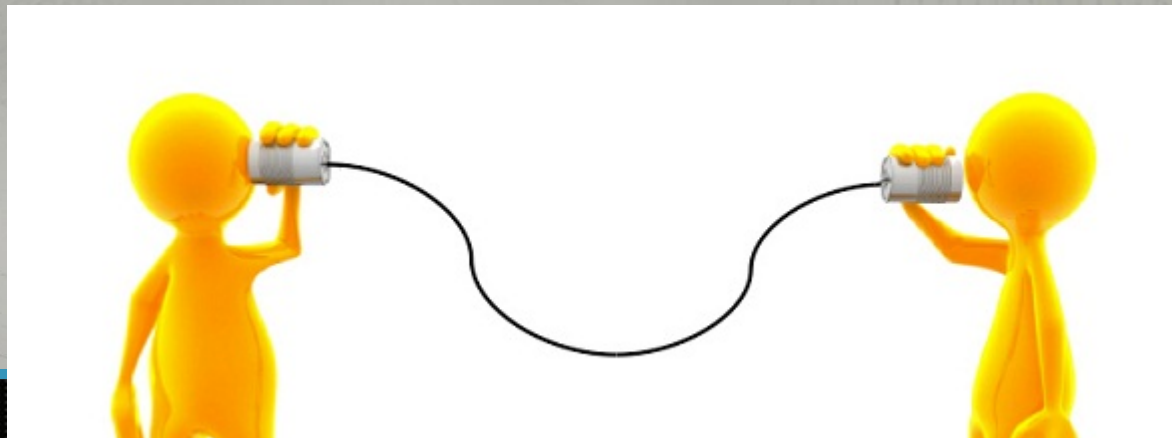
When It Started

- ▶ No one woke up one day, put taps on their shoes and began to tap dance.
- ▶ Tap dance as a genre of dance took centuries to evolve.
- ▶ The events that led to this dance style began in 1739.



Before 1739

- ▶ Prior to 1739 drumming in African American slave communities had diverse uses.
- ▶ Obviously, drumming was used for dancing.
- ▶ But it had other very significant purposes as well.
- ▶ Drumming was used for communication.



- ▶ Different drum rhythms had distinct meanings.
- ▶ Inquiries, comments, and news of coming events were communicated with drum rhythms and were responded to with specific drum rhythms.
- ▶ Invitations to broom jumping weddings, news of deaths, and clandestine plans for escape, were all conveyed through drum rhythms.
- ▶ In 1739 things changed.

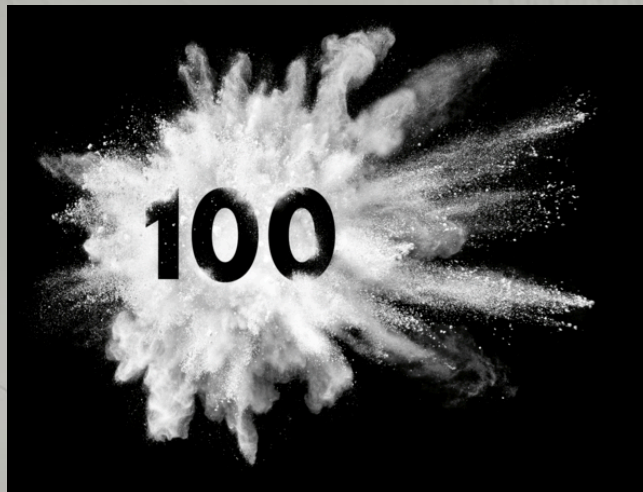


The Stono Rebellion

- ▶ The Stono Rebellion took place on September 9, 1739.
- ▶ It occurred near the Stono River in South Carolina.
- ▶ The rebellion was organized by a slave named Cato.
- ▶ Therefore, the Stono Rebellion is sometimes referred to as the Cato Rebellion, or the Cato Insurrection.



- ▶ A large group of slaves marched down the street drumming to summon other slaves to join the group.
- ▶ The group began with 20 slaves and grew to over 100.
- ▶ They burned plantations, killed slave masters, etc.
- ▶ Slave owners and other officials became extremely frightened.
- ▶ This was the largest slave revolt in the history of the British colonies.





BANNED

- ▶ As a result, that same year (1739), drumming was outlawed.
- ▶ First in South Carolina, then throughout America.
- ▶ The ban on drumming had a profound effect on African American dance systems.

- ▶ After drumming was outlawed, enslaved African Americans had to turn to other forms of percussion for their dance systems.
- ▶ As a result, foot percussion in dance increased tremendously in the African American dance community after 1739.



The Dances

- ▶ Several African American dances emerged that relied heavily on foot percussion for both the movements and the music.
- ▶ For example, the jig was a highly percussive dance.
- ▶ While performing the jig, percussive polyrhythms were created with the feet.
- ▶ Initially, it was a communal dance.
- ▶ It included community involvement.
- ▶ Competition and improvisation were also elements of the jig.
- ▶ Later, the jig was performed as a solo.



A COUPLE DOING A JIG,
19TH CENTURY



The Ring Shout

- ▶ Many of the percussive foot movements that are witnessed today in tap dance emerged before 1739, and could be seen when Africans in the Americas performed the Ring Shout dance.
- ▶ The Ring Shout was brought from Africa during the slavery era.
- ▶ It was practiced among slaves in the United States.
- ▶ Descriptions of the Ring Shout given by eye witnesses provide evidence of the percussive nature of the dance.
- ▶ Thanks to these witnesses, we now know that extensive heel and foot taps that were executed in the Ring Shout are used today in tap dance.

The Ring Shout & Juba

- ▶ The Ring Shout was also transported to the Caribbean during the slave trade, but it was known by its other name, Juba.
- ▶ Juba was the African name for the dance.
- ▶ In the United States the dance was called Juba in some areas as well.
- ▶ Descriptions by eyewitness accounts from the United States and the Caribbean provide overwhelming evidence that Juba and the Ring Shout was initially the same dance.



Juba/Ring Shout – In the Beginning

- ▶ Initially Juba/Ring Shout was a circle dance.
- ▶ The circle moved counterclockwise with someone dancing in the center.
- ▶ Another person, usually of the opposite sex, entered the center.
- ▶ There was friendly competition.

From Sacred to Secular

- ▶ Call and response singing.
- ▶ And when the two left the circle someone else would enter.
- ▶ Juba was a sacred dance in Africa but became secular in the Americas.



Juba's Exception, the Bahamas

- ▶ After the ban on drumming, Juba's percussive movements increased in the US.
- ▶ It garnered the name "patting juba" and began to include stomping, clapping and slapping of arms, chest and thighs in the US.
- ▶ In the Caribbean, the extra percussive elements were not added to the dance except in the Bahamas.
- ▶ Why do you think that is?

The American Revolution, 1776-1783

- ▶ To understand why the Bahamas is the exception in the Caribbean, we must turn our sights to the American Revolution, in 1776-1783.
- ▶ In the American Revolution, enslaved African Americans participated.
- ▶ 2/3 of the African Americans that participated in the American Revolution fought on the side of the British.
- ▶ Why?



Juba in the Bahamas

- ▶ When the British lost, they retreated and took the slaves who fought for them with them.
- ▶ They transported them to Nova Scotia, and to the Bahamas.
- ▶ Since the American Revolution occurred after the drumming prohibition, Juba practitioners in the Bahamas brought the highly percussive movements of the dance with them from the American plantations.

- ▶ In America, Juba and the Ring Shout split.
- ▶ In time, the Ring Shout began to only be done in churches or directly after church services.
- ▶ Thus, it became a sacred dance.
- ▶ But Juba and other African American dances with similar percussive foot movements remained secular.
- ▶ On the whole, African Americans increased the use of, and intensity of, percussive foot and body movements after 1739.



Percussive Foot Movements

- ▶ People in the African Diaspora were not the only ones to invent percussive foot movements in their dance styles.
- ▶ The Irish and the British also had foot percussive traditions in their dance styles.
- ▶ Because of this, many dance scholars state that African Americans learned tap dance from the Irish.
- ▶ But tap dance in the African American dance community existed before large numbers of the Irish entered the US.

Enter The Irish



- ▶ The Irish had a percussive foot dance tradition.
- ▶ But they did not enter the US in large numbers until the mid to late 1840s.
- ▶ African Americans have been performing their version of foot percussive dance for at least 100 years (1739-1845) before they were extensively exposed to Irish dancing.

The Potato Blight



- ▶ A crop disease that affected potatoes occurred in Ireland in 1845-1850.
- ▶ It caused starvation, disease, and over a million deaths.
- ▶ As a result, over 500,000 Irish migrated to the US between 1845 & 1850.
- ▶ In America, the jig was the name of an African American foot percussive dance before the Irish came to America.
- ▶ The Irish jig was named such to distinguish it from the African American jig.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN JIG & THE IRISH JIG

<i>African American Jig</i>	<i>The Irish Jig</i>
Involves all parts of the body	Legs and feet do all the rapid work of the dance
Loosely forward stance with bent knees	Vertical posture, torso erect.
Posture angle toward the earth in instances	Always vertical posture, eyes always held straight ahead. Skyward orientation
Done to Polyrhythmic music	
Closeness of feet to the ground in shuffling and sliding steps.	Legs involve upward movements
Involvement of hips	Hips are quiet, no involvement of hips
Arms are fluid and percussive simultaneously	Arms are held stiff
Acrobatic moves	
Always improvised	Steps were initially standardized, but improvisation was incorporated after contact with African American jig.

English Clogging and African American Dance

- ▶ English Clogging — the name of the dance comes from the clog shoes.
- ▶ In the early 19th century (1800s), English mill workers developed percussive style dancing by striking the wooden soles of the clogs onto hard surfaces.





African American Dance Styles

- ▶ By the early 1930s African American percussive dance movements and styles were being incorporated into European immigrant's and white American dance styles.
- ▶ Among other things, the vertical orientation so prominent in the Irish and the British dance styles began to be loosened.
- ▶ Improvisation was added.
- ▶ Additionally, Irish & British dance was standardized until they began dancing with African Americans in their traditional African competition circles.

The Buck Dance

- ▶ These dance circles included friendly competition.
- ▶ The Irish had to begin to improvise in order to effectively compete.
- ▶ An African American solo percussive dance that emerged as a result of the 1739 drumming ban was the buck dance.
- ▶ The buck dance was similar to the jig and other African American foot percussive dances.

Movements in the Buck Dance



King Rustus Brown
Early 20th Century

- ▶ The feet were kept close to the earth.
- ▶ There were shuffling steps.
- ▶ It also included, sliding movements, and an African based stance.
- ▶ But most significantly, the buck dance also contained audible or pronounced heel and toe taps, and sometimes sand was sprinkled on the floor to enhance the sound of the steps.
- ▶ The greatest buck dancer in the first two decades of the 1900s was King Rastus Brown.

The Evolution of Tap Dance

- ▶ All things considered, African American tap dance began with the Ring Shout & Juba and evolved through a combination of the jig and the buck dance into what we know today as tap dancing.
- ▶ Make-shift metal taps had scattered use before 1900, but manufactured metal taps became common by the 1920s.

