

Tap dance : The Happy feet from African - American's slave culture

Madhuri Sharma

(PhD scholar)

Dance & Dramatic department
Banasthali University (Raj.)

The word tap means making sound with tapping your feet. The main characteristic of this dance style is to make a rhythmic sound with the tap of your feet and to bring out this sound the dancer wear shoes which makes rhythmic patterns along with different instruments. In the earliest days tapping was done with leather-soled or wooden soled shoes but nowadays it is done with closely-fitted metal taps fixed on a tap shoes. From the earliest days tap have been a percussive dance with different catchy rhythms and referred as a percussive dance.

oxford dictionary of dance define tap dance as "An American dance born characterized by rapid foot – tapping movement. The dancer wears special shoes with metal cleats (plates) so that when the toe or heel is tapping on the floor it makes a distinctive percussive sound. Tap routines encompass complex rhythmic patterns and syncopated phrasing, and can be performed to a wide variety of musical styles, but most especially jazz."

there are two types of tap dance style -

Rhythm jazz tap style

Broadway tap style

Jazz is a western music which originated in African American culture. Rhythm jazz tap is more musical and professional and tap dancers consider themselves as a part of this jazz culture. In Rhythm tap the dancer dances with tapping his feet and there is very less use of hands. This Rhythm Tap became part of slave's life in America.

Later 'Show tap' accepted widely by audience because in show tap hand movements had equal importance as foot movements so audience found it more effective. It later known as Broadway Tap style which is more focused on dancing.

History - This dance style originated due to the effect of different western dance cultures. It is difficult to say when it started but the origin of this dance style belongs to African slaves. Tap dance started with African slaves in America, who used to dance with British to entertain themselves and to appreciate each other for their arts to avoid the emptiness of slavery. Gradually with this exchange of culture Tap

dance came into existence. So in America, African slaves mixed Irish jig, Lancashire clog and step dance (joova dance) and the combination of these style became tap dance.

African and British fusion started in 17th century. Valis hill in his book "Tap dancing America a cultural history" claims that this style originated in 16th century when Irish and African slaves encountered each other and blended their dance culture, they kept performing in southern America but later in 1800 African Americans and Irish Americans started performing also in northern cities of America. So this dance style was the consequence of three hundred years exchanging musical, social and cultural aspects.

Tap dance didn't become a stage dance until the rise of minstrel shows. Thomas Dartmouth was a white tap dancer who used to perform with blackened face everywhere in America so people named him "father of ministry" because he redeveloped this style with "minstrel shows". he also started culture of jigging, shuffle, limping and ending up the rhythm with jumping. Even black tap dancers embraced this culture in their dance, they also started painting their face black while dancing.

For long time this dance remained only as a social dance of these African and Irish slaves, they were not allowed to perform on stage as black people were not considered equal to white in American culture. In fact before the end of the civil war black and white performers were not even allowed to appear on stage together. While the time of slavery they people were not even allowed to follow their own culture so they mixed all their cultures and used it only to entertain. For decades it was not even considered as an art but after civil war many black or mixed minstrel founded and the popularity of minstrel shows testifies the increasing interest in black culture in US.

In 1902 the term "tap" came into existence, before that this dance was known as "buck and wing", "buck dancing" or "flat footed dancing". Till 1920 wooden sole shoe (buck & wing) and soft shoe (lather sole style) remained in tap

dance culture but metal plates brought a revolutionary change.

From 1930s movies gave this dance a new way. Fred Astaire with his tap dance films *Gray Divorcee* – 1934 and *Tap Hot* – 1935 did show amazing performances which were full of stunts. From 1920 to 1930 black tap dancers started making it more creative and with dangerous stunts. They used to jump from even ten feet without stopping tap and tapping on stairs also became favorite of dancers from this time period. Harold and Fayard Nicholas were most famous dancers of this time who invented flash technique. 1950 to 1980 classical ballet attracted more to viewers and tap dancing started to lose its charm but in 1980's tap dancers revived this dancing by giving big hits in cinemas. Media has played a big role for tap dancing to gain more fame and to establish in dance world.

William Henry Lane, Bill Bojangles Robinson, Nicholas Brothers, Ann Miller, Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Ginger Rogers, Donald O'Connor, Gregory Hines are the famous tap dancers of all time. For long time tap dance was considered as a man's game there is long list of male tap dancers, participation of female dancers was less but Vera Allen, Ruby Keeler, Jeni Leagon, Ann Miller, Eleanor Powell, Jane Powell, Shirley Temple were few female tap dancers who appeared in films and became tap dancing stars.

Music - most of time jazz musicians accompany a tap dancer with different instruments like piano, guitar, bass, trumpet, saxophone, trombone, drums and vibes. But a tap dancer can perform solo by creating musical sound through tapping his shoes as each part of shoe makes a particular sound and beat so the dance is music in itself.

Expression and costume - This dance style developed in hard times of slaves and it was a seek of happiness so the theme and expression most of the time is based on humor, fun, comedy and happiness. Costumes option does not have a wide range so generally dancers wear formal attire but there is freedom for a dancer to wear a costume of his/her choice. Tap dance has become a famous dance style worldwide and has special existence in dance world, in 1989 President George Bush signed in to law the national tap dance day in United States on birthday of renowned tap dancer Bill Bojangles Robinson so now people celebrate national tap dance day on 25 May.

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