

Tony Waag's Tap City: The New York City Tap Festival

The travel cost of this project was supported by the
Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund

July 2003

New York City Tap Festival consists of 10 days of innovative programmes, tap films, performances, lectures, and tap jams that take place across Manhattan. Dancers of all ages and nationalities join together in a celebration of this uniquely American art form.

The festival presents an important platform for pre-eminent tap artists from around the world; teaching, performing, exploring and collaborating. The 2003 New York City Tap Festival celebrated this wonderful genre with exclusive showcase performances led by some of the great tap artists, including Ernest "Brownie" Brown, Brenda Bufalino, Sarah Petronio and Jimmy Slyde to name a few.

All those attending the festival shared a unique passion for tap coupled with a strong desire to preserve its history, so that future generations will be able to enjoy and learn from the work of the many great masters to have influenced the development of tap over the years. Throughout the festival there was an ongoing desire to inspire future generations, and to celebrate the sheer diversity inherent in this art form. Although room has been found for more experimental work, the festival provided a strong reminder of the roots of tap, and reinforced the need to draw from its essence. Everyone involved greatly improved their knowledge of the dance, of where and how it all originated, and of the great dancers that paved the way.

Each day consisted of numerous master-classes introducing a wide variety of techniques such as rumba tap. Lectures looked specifically at the history of tap, bringing together writers, historians, performers and collectors presenting a wide selection of tap dance on film, including some well-known signature pieces and rare footage from private collections. Tap City showcased exciting, vibrant performances heralding from all over the globe, united under a shared love for jazz, for tap and for a desire to see it remain popular and accessible. Many of the younger companies were keen to push the boundaries of experimentation, fusing music, indigenous culture, and dance forms together with spectacular results. Alongside this innovative work, the audience was treated to the likes of Savion Glover's tribute to Dianne Walker, Ernest "Brownie" Brown's performance of '*There'll be some changes made*', and Gregory Hines paying homage to the contribution made by Sammy Davis Jr. Those attending the festival left with a strong sense of the inventive and the traditional, of the swing era generations and of the new school, and most importantly the need to assure tap retains its rightful place in America's cultural history.

I personally have gained immensely from this experience. As well as being an excellent refresher course it has enabled me to establish numerous contacts around the world. The trip has led to discussions between musicians and dancers with a view to future collaborative ventures at jazz venues in England. Plans are already evolving toward a series of jazz nights featuring performances by tap dancers, jazz pianists and renowned session musicians.

Attending the NYC Tap City Festival and seeing such original work was hugely inspirational. The mix of rumba and tap excited me, as did the combination of Latin, jazz and Afro-Cuban music. Following this introduction I have made contacts with a view to attending a tap festival in Cuba in

the near future. I took a number of photographs documenting the NYC Tap Festival that are included with this report, and have written an article to submit for publication in the *Dancing Times*, as well as other magazines and dance newsletters.

First and foremost I now look forward to passing on my skills and experiences to my young students. Thank you once again for this wonderful opportunity.

*Nikki
Northover*

September 2003

