

GOT RHYTHM!

Art Form: Dance and Music
Style: Tap
Culture: American

MEET THE ARTIST:

Channing Cook Holmes is an extremely gifted native of Inglewood, CA, whose talents have taken him around the world. Channing began dancing and studying drums at an early age. Now, he is an accomplished tap dancer, drummer, vocalist and actor. His performances include principal company dancer with *Jazz Tap Ensemble*, principal dancer on stage with *Riverdance*, *The Tour* and on *Broadway*, principal actor in Gregory Hines' *Bojangles*, and actor/tap dancer on the big screen in Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*. Holmes recently showcased his skills as a drummer/percussionist as the assistant Music Director and performer, in the tap show *Imagine Tap*. Channing's talents have been recognized by the prestigious Princess Grace Foundation/USA, awarding him a 2002 Emerging Artist Fellowship, and a Special Projects Grant to develop his children's program, *Lil' Chan Can Tap Dance* which premiered at the West Angeles Performing Arts Theater in 2007.

Channing is joined on stage by up-and-coming tap dancer *Josette Wiggan*, a recent graduate of UCLA. She has appeared in the movie *Idlewild*, and with the Baker-Tarpaga contemporary *African Dance Project*. Providing the music are energetic instrumentalists *Jay Durrias* (keyboards), *Lamont Keller* (bass), and *Junior Strong* (drums).

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Got Rhythm! is a captivating dance and music performance based in the indigenous American art form of rhythm tap dance. Channing Cook-Holmes, tap dancer and drummer extraordinaire, presents rhythm tap in its purest form with live instrumentation. It is a contemporary look at the origins of tap dance and the masters of the art, featuring drums, bass, and keyboards. Channing, along with the ensemble, interacts with and engages the audience in rhythm making, encouraging each person to discover the tap dancer or musician inside.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Forms of tap and clogging were introduced by the Irish and the English, but it was the creativity and innovation of African slaves that brought forth the indigenous American tap invention. Slaves, who were not allowed to participate in their traditional and ceremonial rhythmic dance and song forms, began to express themselves through the accepted social forms of European step dancing, such as the jig and the clog. This cross pollination of cultural forms continued to develop in New York City, where poor Irish immigrants and freed Blacks shared tenement housing. A refined blending of juba (African) and jig (Irish) forms evolved into American tap dance.

The form grew dramatically during the middle 19th century when minstrel shows were the popular form of entertainment. Most of the minstrel material was drawn from African American song and dance forms, but was performed by white performers in "black face." Vaudeville came in the early 1920s, but heightened racism resulted in a separate vaudeville touring circuit for black performers. This segregated situation produced clear differences in the performance styles of the white and black tap dancers. Bill ("Bojangles") Robinson transformed 'Buck' dancing - a flat-footed form of tap done by

early African Americans - by taking 'Buck' to the balls of the feet. John Bubbles, another tap dance pioneer, introduced 'rhythm' dancing by dropping the heel and cutting the tempo in half so that more taps could be done within each bar of beats.

Rhythm tap dancers were regarded and respected as percussion musicians and were called "jazz tap percussionists." They began to influence the musicians, as well as responding to the musicians' interpretations and rhythms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What most impressed you about the performance? What words would you use to describe your impressions?
- Have you seen tap dancing before? If so, what seemed similar to what you have seen, and what was different?
- Can you recall the different rhythms and styles of tap dance you saw? (Shim-sham, Swing, Latin, Funk) Select two styles to compare and contrast.
- Describe what you observed in the interplay between the musicians and the dancers. Who led the way? Did the role of leading and following ever change?
- Describe the main characteristics of tap dancing, as done by the members of *Got Rhythm!*. (rhythm, sounds, patterns, responding and working with live music, expression, energy, focus on the feet and legs, etc.)

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - MATHEMATICS:

Make the relationship between music and mathematics; both are logical and use addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. Introduce the musical concept of different note values by clapping to the time value of quarter notes (4 beats to a measure of 4 counts), eighth notes (8 beats to a measure of 4 counts), half notes (2 beats to a measure of 4 counts) and whole notes (1 beat to a measure of 4 counts). Start by clapping 4 even counts (clap on counts 1, 2, 3, 4). Then double the amount of sounds by dividing each of the four counts in half (1& 2& 3& 4&). Clap every other beat, so that each sound or beat is worth 2 counts (clap 1, hold 2, clap 3, hold 4). Clap only on count 1 and remain silent for counts 2, 3, 4. Then rest quietly (no sounds) for 4 counts. Repeat this exercise and do two sets (or measures) of 4 counts for each note value. Once this has been done with clapping, ask students to repeat the exercise walking in place or traveling in a circle, using their feet to create the different note values on the floor. Ask older students to decide how many different ways 4 beats can be divided or multiplied into different patterns.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Both tap dancers and jazz musicians work with rhythm to find different patterns and variations to influence each other. Have different leaders clap simple rhythmic patterns that can be echoed by the group. If possible, have everyone in class create one. Rhythmic patterns of simple word combinations can also be used. (e.g. “Today is hot!” or “Cloudy Weather.”)
- ▶ *Got Rhythm!* features dancers working with a musicians to create rhythms that one or the other either echoed or played with. Working with a partner, one create the rhythm pattern and the other respond. Then switch roles. First echo the rhythmic patterns with your hands, then with your feet. This is an African musical and dance form called “Call and Response.”
- 🌀 In the Funk style of tap, rhythm was produced in a variety of ways. Clap 4 counts on the beat; then add or subtract sounds within the same amount of time. Continue clapping 4 counts plain and 4 counts of a rhythmic pattern, but add snaps, clicks, shuffles and stamps so that the rhythms are made with other forms of body percussion.
- ❖ Tap dancers learn from each other, sometimes imitating steps and patterns and sometimes building on each other’s ideas. Ask if anyone has taken tap dancing lessons. Have them show a couple of dance steps or combinations and then teach them to the class.
- ⇒ There are special terms used to describe tap dancers and their dance steps. For example, ‘buck’ and ‘rhythm’ dancing were described earlier. Another term, ‘hooper’ means “tap dancer.” Think of a sport or hobby you know and list all the special terms used within that activity.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Ackerman, Karen. *Song and Dance Man*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY: 1988. (Caldecott Award Winner)

Sterns, Marshall & Jean. *Jazz Dance, the Story of American Vernacular Dance*. Schirmer Books, New York, NY: 1979.