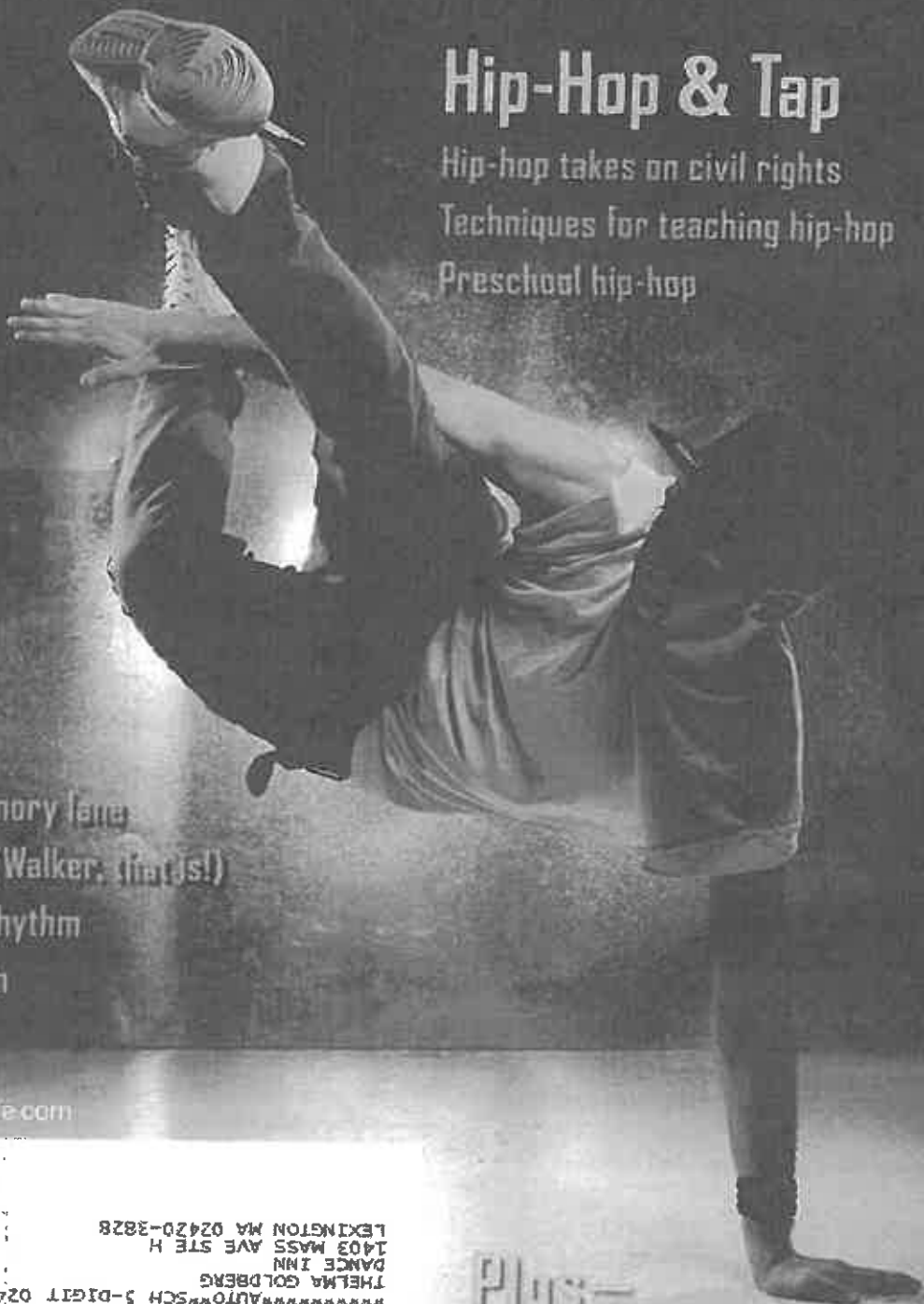


dedicated to quality dance education

# DANCE Studio LIFE

December 2013 | Volume 16 Issue 10



## Hip-Hop & Tap

Hip-hop takes on civil rights  
Techniques for teaching hip-hop  
Preschool hip-hop


Tap's trip down memory lane  
Chatting with Chet (Walker, Jr.!)  
New syllabus: Tap Rhythm  
Tapping into emotion

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Plus—  
What *not* to say on social media  
Making ballet fun

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# welcome!

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**about this magazine** *Dance Studio Life*, a magazine with a back-to-basics approach, is a division of the Rhee Gold Company, whose mission is to be at the forefront of dance and education by promoting the highest possible standards in teaching. *Dance Studio Life* understands the soul of the teaching field.

# DANCE Studio LIFE

dedicated to quality dance education

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Member



## From Injury to

ASPIRATION

How a tap syllabus was born and what it can do for tappers everywhere

In 2004, doctors gave David Wynen a 30 percent chance of ever dancing again. Fortunately, he beat the odds. But from his long and frustrating period of recovery came the inspiration for Tap Rhythm, an interactive online tap syllabus he hopes will become a one-of-a-kind resource for his students and for tap dancers around the world.

Wynen, now 44 and a veteran performer and professor of dance at the University of Ballarat in Ballarat, Australia, developed plantar fasciitis in his right foot while choreographing for the University's Arts Academy. Dancing on an unforgiving floor, he also ended up with deep posterior compartment syndrome in both legs, a painful condition caused by rising pressure (typically from overuse) in a muscle group in the lower leg.

His injuries required five operations over the next five years. But he was determined not to let them slow down his career.

"My injuries made me rethink how to move more effec-

tively and learn more safely, in a way that was more natural and healthy for the body," Wynen says. "I wanted to teach tap better, without risking injuries for myself or my students."

He continued teaching his classes with one leg in a cast, demonstrating steps with his good foot. When that wasn't enough, he supplemented his lessons with instructional videos from master tap teachers. But none of them were appropriate for his students, who were musical-theater majors with little dance experience. The videos did not share a common vocabulary, progress logically through exercises, or exhibit consistently professional production values: the video quality was poor, the music was uninspiring, and there were few or no close-ups of the demonstrator's feet.

"They were almost like Jane Fonda workout videos,"

*Above: The process of recovering from serious injury made David Wynen rethink the way he taught tap.*

"I started exploring tap in more of an acoustic sense, rather than just visually. I felt that I could use some elements of rhythm tap to complement what I was trying to do in my musical-theater classes." —David Wynen

Photos by Jodie Hutchinson



Wynen enlisted musician and composer Christopher Prank to supply the soundtrack for *Tap Rhythm*.

Wynen says, revealing a sense of humor that contrasts with his strict demeanor in the classroom. "They were too style specific, and the teachers didn't take time to explain anything. I couldn't break down any of their material for my students."

Sensing a gap in tap pedagogy and feeling determined to learn better methods for teaching his students, Wynen attended the Portsmouth Percussive Dance Festival in New Hampshire on a research scholarship in 2006, only eight weeks after his final leg operation. There he studied with renowned U.S. tap dancers Brenda Bufalino, Josh Hilberman, and Thelma Goldberg, who introduced him to rhythm tap.

"They opened my eyes to a broader spectrum of tap that was not represented in Australia," he says. "I started exploring tap in more of an acoustic sense, rather than just visually. I felt that I could use some elements of rhythm tap to complement what I was trying to do in my musical-theater classes."

Tap in Australia, Wynen explains, is based on an exam system that comes from English tap. "The weight shifts are different. It's very straight, with almost no swing or syncopation, and it's done mostly on the balls of the feet. It's this style or *Tap Dogs*, and nothing much in between," he

says, referring to the all-male touring show that debuted in Sydney in 1995, created by Australian dancer and choreographer Dein Perry.

According to Wynen, Australia does not offer much for serious tap dancers, focusing mostly on recreational and competition classes. He hopes to help bridge that gap with his syllabus. "I'm trying to do it intelligently and visually, using the best of what I've been taught by master teachers," he says. "I don't think it should ever replace class; it should be a supplement."

After the Portsmouth festival, he went to New York City to study with jazz master Luigi, who developed his own jazz technique in the 1940s to rehabilitate himself after a car accident. Luigi was a great inspiration to Wynen, who was still recovering from his own injuries and seeking a way to dance and teach dance in a way that could prevent injury for himself and his students. Wynen later became certified to teach the Luigi technique.

Upon returning home, Wynen was spotted by a talent scout who encouraged him to audition for *Billy Elliot*. He went on to dance in more than 500 performances of the hit musical in Sydney. Through the show, he met Tom Hodgson, the Australian production's resident choreographer, who helped produce the *Tap Rhythm* launch and offered many ideas for the syllabus.

"Tom had worked with the boys in *Billy Elliot* and knew the value of a system that could accommodate different dancers through one mode of learning," Wynen says. "He brought another perspective, having worked a lot in the U.K. and Europe, and offered ideas about how I could make skills appropriate for musical-theater students."

Hodgson, who is also on faculty at the university, says, "I have seen firsthand how quickly Ballarat students have developed with the syllabus. The exercises are ordered in a safe, logical way, enabling them to feel ready for each new step they are introduced to. There is a real confidence to their tapping because they have a solid base to fall back on, and because of the comprehensive coverage of vernacular and rhythm, they are also versatile and quick to pick up new steps. *Tap Rhythm* is one of the most stimulating syllabi out there."

Wynen's own experience performing in *Billy Elliot* furthered his motivation to create a tap syllabus geared toward his students, most of whom were trained singers. They could learn steps but lacked the musicality and dynamics necessary to perform them.

"Working with children and adults from all different

"I asked David what he hoped to achieve with each exercise and then tried to develop a style and phrasing that would complement the exercise or improve the form."

—Christopher Prank, composer

theatrical backgrounds made me realize that there had to be a better way to get students up to speed and on the same page," he says.

Wynen developed material for the syllabus in his classes, and the students he worked with from then on went on to perform in international productions like *Anything Goes*, *West Side Story*, and *Cats*. Due to the obvious success of his methods, The University of Ballarat agreed to fund Tap Rhythm as part of Wynen's research for accelerating student learning and creating resources for dance students.

Wynen approached Christopher Prank, a pianist and dance accompanist with whom he had frequently collaborated, about composing live music for the syllabus—another inspiration from Luigi, whose warm-up series is set to an original soundtrack.

"My goal was to create music with life and energy for the dancer to feed off of," Prank says. "I asked David what he hoped to achieve with each exercise and then tried to develop a style and phrasing that would complement the exercise or improve the form. I wanted to compose music that would help people enjoy the process of learning."

Wynen celebrated the launch of Tap Rhythm in spring 2012 with a university-sponsored festival, featuring a

feet from two different angles. Below the clip, as with most of the exercises and combinations in the syllabus, users can click to reveal the sequence written out in words. Some of the steps are also written out in musical notation: the actual words of the step, whenever possible, are written below the music notes, and when needed, *R* and *L* appear above the music notes to clarify when the right or left foot should be used.

Each level features a progressive warm-up series comprised of more than 10 exercises, at least 15 longer combinations, and an original routine. Wynen's original material, featuring his own series of spansks, shuffles, time steps, wings, and more, covers a wide range of technical vocabulary that students can click through in any order; the dictionary's drop-down menu is readily accessible. Filmed from multiple angles, the videos are accompanied by more than 20 songs, available as downloadable MP3s, that Prank designed for that level. Some songs are originals, while others are Prank's take on jazz standards like "Tea for Two" and "Love Me or Leave Me."

Wynen plans to release several advanced levels of the syllabus, including one that will include classic routines from master tap dancers like Bufalino and Hilberman. He

"I'm trying to do [the syllabus] intelligently and visually, using the best of what I've been taught by master teachers. I don't think it should ever replace class; it should be a supplement."

—David Wynen

lecture-demonstration at Her Majesty's Theatre in Ballarat and a week of classes and performances for the university's 180 undergraduate musical-theater and acting students. Hilberman and Goldberg were special guests.

The Tap Rhythm syllabus is currently available in two levels, beginner and intermediate (\$300 each, or both for \$500), and are accompanied by an interactive tap dictionary. Once purchased, all materials become accessible on the website via a unique login and password. Some of the music, as well as custom apparel, can also be purchased separately.

Wynen chose to make the syllabus available online after deciding that DVDs are not as practical and involve copyright issues.

"Anyone can make copies of a DVD and sell them or give them away, and DVDs cannot be updated," Wynen says. "As I retine the syllabus, I can add new exercises and routines or modify existing ones without having to issue a new product."

The dictionary allows users to click on a term and read a written definition, which is accompanied by a short video. Wynen pronounces the term phonetically and then demonstrates it in a brief pattern; a split screen shows his

is also developing a multiplatform Tap Rhythm app for iPhones, iPads, and other devices.

Earlier this year, Wynen won a 2012 Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council for his contributions to teaching and learning. This grant, earned "for achieving international recognition for leadership in performing arts by developing original resources which accelerate student learning, enabling them to succeed nationally and internationally," will allow him to travel to Europe next year to research and promote Tap Rhythm.

Although he designed it with his own students in mind, Wynen would like to see Tap Rhythm reach students, teachers, and dancers around the world. He would like other tappers to help him create more chapters of the syllabus—one on funk, for example—and have guest teachers who will sell their original routines online through Tap Rhythm, as a new way to present their work. He also hopes to offer teacher certification for the syllabus through the University of Ballarat at a later date.

"I want Tap Rhythm to become a product that can be used globally," Wynen says. "Not only in colleges, but everywhere." 4

## *Bollywood Meets Tap*: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

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*David Wynen has appeared extensively in theatre and television and his training has included all facets of dance, drama and voice. He is currently dance/movement lecturer at the University of Ballarat. His specific research interests are centred on tap, and dance as a form of rehabilitation.*

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How do you respond to a dance commission when the choices are driven by limited resources and the brief from a client? For a start, a piece driven by creative rather than commercial forces is likely to have a different process and a different outcome. There are times when a commissioned choreographer may accept work out of financial need rather than creative interest and have to accept that a blank canvas is different to one with a pre-existing template. This is what I had to face when I received a brief to create a *Bollywood* style piece for a Commonwealth Games event in Ballarat; I had the template, but I knew little about it.

As a choreographer, where should I start? At the beginning? In the middle? Or where I find the first response to the story or the music? Do works only happen in a linear fashion? This would assume a beginning and an end, and a plot that can be followed. Are they divided into sections? Or can choreographers merely join together disparate steps? Do they work on each motif or narrative section and then move onto the next? There were many issues I had to consider.

Prior to undertaking this commission the work practices I had instinctively used were parallel to many other dance makers. I had learnt to choreograph through watching and working with others, not consciously choosing to work in any fashion other than the one I was shown. The search for knowledge to formulate *Bollywood Meets Tap* created an artistic tension between the knowledge I had previously inherently used when choreographing and the knowledge I had to search for and acquire to create this piece.

The commission came with varied constraints, as is often the case with commercial work, including: the work's duration; the amount of rehearsal time available due to the voluntary nature of the performers; the overall tight timeframe; and, a small budget to cover, wages, workshop expenses and the hire or making of costumes. An initial briefing by the Ballarat City Council and the Commonwealth Games Live Site representatives was followed by

## *Bollywood Meets Tap*: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynn

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guidelines set out for the production: the piece was to run for 20 minutes and be suitable for a broad audience. The production needed to encompass tap and Indian dancing, plus music evoking *Bollywood* and its style – an unusual and disparate combination of dance styles.

Final agreement on the terms of the piece did not occur till mid-December and the students were to participate in eight to ten part-time days of rehearsal in late February for performances scheduled for mid-March. I had six weeks beforehand to acquire what information I could to formulate a concept for *Bollywood Meets Tap* and have it ready for the rehearsal stage. This is an account of how I dealt with this commission, how I worked within its constraints and resolved some of the challenges I encountered.

To begin, it was essential to decide what *Bollywood* meant to me and how much further my knowledge could be broadened through research, given the limited creative development period available. My specialisation is in Broadway/Musical Theatre tap, a style originally formulated by the likes of Astaire and Kelly. This style was developed for the stage and then taken to the screen utilising more of a ballroom look and ballet training. It is the most common style in mainstream American culture with the best examples of this in Broadway musicals like *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*<sup>i</sup>.

In recent years I have worked with American rhythm tap practitioners, such as Brenda Bufalino<sup>ii</sup>, Jason Samuels-Smith and Josh Hilberman<sup>iii</sup>. Such rhythmic tap dance is louder, has more rhythm and is more grounded than Broadway style and it requires much stronger footwork, often in *âcapella* fashion.

I decided that some preparatory research would help conserve both the limited rehearsal time and restricted financial resources of the commission. It was necessary to examine and define both tap and *Bollywood*, as well as further explore the concepts of narrative, abstraction, form and genre.

*Bollywood* dance is a fusion of traditional Indian classical dance and modern dance, a style often found in film clips. It has traditions in relation to its style, type of music, and dance sequences. Importantly, a code of modesty is paramount in *Bollywood* dance. I was aware of the cultural implications that the piece would have; however, upon further reading of *Bollywood: a History* (Mihir 2006) it became evident that the only major considerations were the constraints of modesty and the fact that *Bollywood* performers do not kiss or show any sexual intimacy. Divia Patel depicts the flavour of *Bollywood* as:

HOME NEWS THEY'VE GOT RHYTHM - TAPPING UP A STORM AT BALLARAT UNIVERSITY

# They've Got Rhythm – Tapping up a storm at Ballarat University

Erin Jacobs Follow @ErinEJames No Comments Yet

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**Witnessing a hooper performing a well executed tap routine is just about as good as it gets. There is something so sexy, so suave and so exciting about the way a really great tap dancer moves...**

If you have ever wanted to learn to tap, or just brush up on your skills, a brand new tap teaching tool will be on the market from this Friday 20 April, and it's all thanks to one man – David Wynen.

David Wynen, lecturer at the The University of Ballarat's Arts Academy will launch his new project *Tap Rhythm* - an new innovative tap dancing tool for the music theatre market - this Friday at the historic Her Majesty's Theatre, Ballarat, in a showcase set to burn the floor.

"Some years ago I was injured and could not teach, so I looked at other videos and courses to fill the gaps my students needed" Wynen explained.

"The instructional videos out there offered little inspiration", he lamented.

*Tap Rhythm* was created out of a need to unleash the secret of learning tap and refining a complete warm up technique system inspired by the best.

"I started working with Jazz Musician Christopher Prank on ways to unleash the music skills so many theatrical performers have. The results have been outstanding. So we then decided to release it as an online dance program- the first of its kind", said Wynen.

From 16-21 April, masterclasses and performances from USA tap stars Thelma Goldberg and Josh Hilberman as well as rare performances from Wynen himself will take place in Ballarat to showcase the exciting new *Tap Rhythm* Syllabus. Masterclasses are open to students, professionals and dance enthusiasts.

Wynen describes *Tap Rhythm* – which will launch its interactive website on Friday 20 April to coincide with the special showcase launch concert – as "a frequently updated complete learning tool".

For more information about the special Tap Rhythm showcase, presented by the University of Ballarat, or to learn more about the brand new interactive online program visit [www.taprhythm.com](http://www.taprhythm.com)

To book tickets to the concert visit [www.hermauj.com](http://www.hermauj.com)

For more information on the Arts Academy view their showcase



David Wynen

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Arts, Ballarat Uni, Dancing, Music Theatre, Tap, Training, University

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Wednesday 12th September, 2012

Mr David Wynen  
University of Ballarat

Dear Mr Wynen,

**2012 Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning**

On behalf of the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT), I am pleased to advise that your nomination for a 2012 Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning has been successful. Please accept my congratulations.

Your Vice-Chancellor and Institutional Contact Officer have also been notified of your success.

An email inviting you to the presentation ceremony for your region will be sent to you shortly. The email will provide details of the presentation ceremony, the number of guests we can accommodate at the ceremony and how to register your attendance.

Thank you for the time and effort you devoted to preparing your nomination and congratulations once again on your success.

Yours sincerely

**Marguerite de Sousa**  
A/g General Manager

