

HEATHER CORNELL

TAP ARTIST | CHOREOGRAPHER | MASTER TEACHER

COURSE OFFERINGS

MUSICAL TAP TECHNIQUE CLASSES

The focus is on the development of tap skills in working with music both improvisationally and choreographically, and on collaborating with musicians. Whenever possible, Ms. Cornell will work with local or her musicians in technique classes. The students will learn music and tap vocabulary, will explore new arrangement ideas, and will be challenged to develop an individual style by exploring weight shifts, musical phrasing, aural and visual dynamics, intonation and counterpoint. As always in Heather's classes, the course will be tailored to the needs of each student.

CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

Through working with local or her own musicians, Ms. Cornell can create a lecture demonstration or performance showing a choreographer in process. This workshop was first created at Simon Fraser University where Ms. Cornell collaborated with three local world musicians for five days and then performed a one hour improvised session showing the beginning stages of the choreographic process - before form takes over.

COMPOSITION

This class is taught through a series of exercises that expose the students to concepts of choreography. In this class, ideas such as music structure and the differences between working with jazz and world music, aural and visual dynamics of music and how that translates to dance and how elements such as pace, theatricality, intonation and space affect choreography.

LIVING TAP/JAZZ HISTORY

Ms. Cornell studied extensively with six of the originators of rhythm tap - Charles "Cookie" Cook (Cook and Brown, Kiss Me Kate), Buster Brown (The Speed Kings, Bubblin' Brown Sugar), Eddie Brown (Bill Robinson's show, The Evolution of the Blues), Harriet Brown (the only female sand dancer), Chuck Green (Chuck and Chuckles) and Steve Condos (The Condos Brothers). She spent 20 years being fed the living oral history of the artform through anecdotal stories and colorful tales. In 1992 Ms. Cornell began collaborating with jazz icon Ray Brown who quickly became one of Ms. Cornell's strongest mentors. He passed to her his first-hand knowledge of the combined history of tap and jazz. She teaches this combined history through discussion and with the integration of private video.



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TEACHING STYLES

This course allows the students to investigate and experience the styles, techniques, history, and cultural influence of tap dance. Students will be introduced to the masterful and idiosyncratic teaching styles of the legendary hoofers, the men and women who invented the dance genre known as rhythm tap. Through rare videotaped documentation, studio dance and improvisational exercises, readings and discussions, the students analyze the ways in which these inspiring teachers passed on their understandings of their art and rescued this American art form from possible extinction. The study of the original teaching styles developed by these artists, many of who had little or no formal education, offer meaningful insights into the process of teaching art. This course was originally designed for Columbia University Teacher's College Masters Program and offered in the summer of 2002.

IMPROVISATION WORKSHOP

The spirit of improvisation cannot be taught but the compulsion to do it can be nurtured. This course focuses on improvisational exercises and games in music and dance that will get the student moving in the direction of self-discovery. (Dancers or non-dancers)

MUSIC FOR TAP/WORKING WITH MUSICIANS

Ms. Cornell has collaborated with many leading musicians both as a choreographer and as an improviser. This course is designed to help the students begin to understand the basics of jazz and world music structure and to then provide them with musical terminology that will be necessary in effectively collaborating with musicians. The students are encouraged to use this knowledge to begin to develop their own unique approach to choreography and improvisation.

VERNACULAR JAZZ

The roots of jazz dance permeate through all of the street dance styles that we see today. In this course we'll start with Hambones, and then lead into technique for contemporary body percussion. We'll study some of the original jazz dancers who were practitioners of styles such as "Legomania" and "Snake Hips" and use improvisation to discover the elements of each technique and discuss where they exist in present day dance forms. Also covered are original swing dance styles and traditional vernacular jazz steps that form the foundation of modern jazz dance.



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MUSICAL CHAIRS: COLLABORATING WITH MUSICIANS

This course was first offered to a group of tap teachers in Toronto, Canada in the summer of 2001. The course utilizes a standard jazz trio and addresses the differences in styles and drive between all the members of the trio. On day one the students work on tap technique, improvisational skills and basic jazz music structure. Day two through four involve working with one of each of the three musicians per day. The students discover the different possibilities available to them by the different personalities of the rhythm section and what they each offer. On day five the entire trio is in class and the students utilize the skills and ideas that they have amassed to create a choreography or improvisation in collaboration with the musicians. This course can be taught with world music as well and can span a longer period than five days if requested.

VIDEO SHOWINGS

Ms. Cornell has extensive original footage of the Masters at work in the studio and on the stage. Because this footage was obtained over the years in private classes and in performances with her company, it is footage that is not available for viewing outside of this context. Also integrated can be tap documentaries such as "Been Rich All My Life", "Women of the Tap Dance Renaissance" and "Women in Tap".

TEACHING ORIGINAL MATERIAL OF THE MASTERS

Ms. Cornell had the unique opportunity of being considered protégé to many of rhythm tap's first generation dancers and went on to perform with all of them. She is one of the few dancers today who can accurately teach many original routines, exercises and performance techniques of the above dancers. Workshops available include:

CHARLES "COOKIE" COOK ROUTINES

Cookie was Heather's first mentor. He was from the team Cook & Brown and was in the original production of Kiss Me Kate. In this workshop you will learn the soft-shoe that Manhattan Tap commissioned from Cookie in 1986, and "Bambolina", three choruses of time steps that are considered early "flash" style.

EDDIE BROWN'S BS CHORUS

Eddie was Heather's second big influence as a mentor. His "scientific tap" which consisted of incredibly complex rhythmic phrases, completely changed her approach to tap and musical phrasing. Eddie always wanted a BS Chorus for rhythm tappers, a dance that everyone could have at the ready for the end of a split bill. So he made one. Heather is one of a handful of dancers that he passed it on to directly, and requested that she teach it to every one of her students, as a legacy to rhythm tappers everywhere.



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EDDIE BROWN LOST ROUTINES

Heather spent hundreds of hours in private sessions with Eddie, and assisting him in sessions in New York, Paris, Portland Oregon, and Los Angeles. In 1989 she commissioned a solo piece from him, which she premiered in a show with Eddie and Manhattan Tap at the Village Gate jazz club in New York. Eddie was a phenomenal improviser who effortlessly generated unlimited material. In these sessions Heather will be creating and teaching routines, constructed from steps he taught her on the way to completing her piece, many of which would otherwise be lost to the art of tap. (10 hours per routine)

EDDIE BROWN'S "HIGHLAND FLING"

This is Eddie's rhythm tap version of the original Scottish folk dance. You have to experience it to believe it -- it is a great routine that everyone should learn.

STEVE CONDOS' "GROUNDED" AND RUDIMENTS

Manhattan Tap commissioned Steve in 1990 to create choreography for the company. During the fifty hours of sessions, the company warmed up on Steve's "rudiments" -- exercises based on drum technique -- for three hours a day. After a week of Steve's "boot camp", their technique had never been better. In this workshop, Heather will pass on one series of rudiments and the choreography "Grounded".

BUSTER BROWN ROUTINES

Buster worked with Manhattan Tap numerous times, and the company commissioned him twice to create choreography. One of the commissions became Buster's well-known "Laura" and "Just Me, Just You." This is the definitive version that he created with Heather, so that they could perform together -- which they did, when they toured with the show Feet First with Decidedly Jazz Danceworks in Calgary, Alberta, Canada in 1996.

CHOREOGRAPHIC COMMISSIONS

Ms. Cornell is a well-known tap choreographer, credited as one of the originators of concert tap. Her works "Gumbo Hump" and "The Tap Suite", both to original music created with bassist Ray Brown, are thought of as classics in the world of concert tap. She is one of the most experienced collaborators with world-renowned musicians in jazz and world music. She is available for commissions for students or professionals.

LECTURE DEMONSTRATIONS

Ms. Cornell can be available to perform lecture demonstration on a variety of topics. These showings would include performance (with live music) and video and/or audio (showings).



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PERFORMANCE PRESENTATIONS

These performances are always with live music. The musicians can be provided locally or Ms. Cornell can bring her musical collaborators with her. Please see her (page of current projects).

STUDENT PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Heather Cornell can create works for students to perform live with her. Performance opportunities can be created on a large or small group of students, tailoring the experience to interface with another workshop, studio time or rehearsals within the residency. Performance opportunities may include students sharing the bill with Ms. Cornell's solo work, or a combination of works created for the students, student-generated work, as well as Ms. Cornell's solo work.

FOR MUSIC AND THEATRE DEPARTMENTS

MOVEMENT FOR ACTORS

The key to connecting the body to the voice is freedom of movement and the removal of tension from the process. In this course we work to define distinctive weight shifts and experiment with how they define personal style. The class is designed to help an actor become comfortable with their physical body as a fluid instrument. We will analyze the movement styles of famous dancers from the Vaudeville era, noting how the aging process played upon their every changing characters and create personal movement studies.

DANCE FOR ACTORS

The roots of vernacular jazz dance hold the key to making physical connection when confronted with the need to dance. We will work on a number of different techniques of dance genres including body percussion, eccentric dance, tap dance, historic jazz dance steps, Motown movement and swing dance.

TAP AND BODY RHYTHM WORKSHOP FOR MUSICIANS

Ray Brown & Lewis Nash were tremendous influences for Ms. Cornell. They both stressed the benefits for musicians to learn to dance. This course explores basic tap and body rhythm techniques, allowing musicians to experience rhythm and produce those sounds not only with their feet but also with their entire bodies. It will be taught from a musician's point-of-view, utilizing musical theory and structure as well as emphasizing how the movement relates to the music.

COLLABORATING WITH DANCERS FOR MUSICIANS

In the tap world, Ms. Cornell is one of the most experienced collaborators with world-renowned musicians in jazz and world music. Students will learn techniques so that they will be able to engage in active collaboration rather than simply functioning as a "back-up" musician.



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