

Abstract

Tap dance, a cultural dance form native to the United States, has continually evolved and drawn influence and inspiration from surrounding cultural dance forms. Through seeing parallels between tap dance's cultural history and my own family's history, this MFA thesis project was a staged production that investigated and presented cultural dance forms. The show's narrative followed a student discussing her ancestral roots with her mother and father. As the parents introduced each ancestor and details about the ancestor's life, a dancer representing this ancestor stepped on stage. The dancer demonstrated his or her percussive traditions, accompanied by supporting dancers and live musicians. As the show progressed, the student discovered how learning about her family history helped her better connect to both her ancestors and herself. The final number combined steps from each form to create something new, alluding to the unlimited possibilities that can come from allowing ourselves to draw from our cultural backgrounds to fuel our creative endeavors. The performance was meant to showcase that the past is a part of who we each are today, and to entertain the audience with the vibrant variety that exists within percussive dance. This written thesis details my research to support the performance, the process of creating the performance, reflections on the performance, and what comes next in my research and creation.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Percussive Roots: Cross-Cultural Connections and Honoring Heritage

by

Jacob Madsen

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

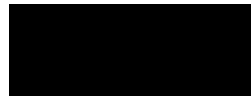
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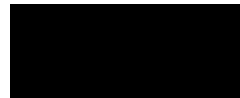
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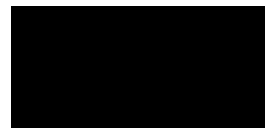
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Montclair, NJ

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Project Introduction

Beginning in my undergraduate degree, ethnochoreology has played a large role in my research within dance. Ethnochoreology is the study of dance through multiple disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography, and ethnomusicology. Throughout my experience with cultural dance forms, I have learned that dance is thoroughly interconnected with culture as a whole. Some aspects of a particular community's language, values, beliefs, norms, and myths can be gleaned through studying the context behind its dance forms. As I began investigating my trajectory for this thesis, I knew I wanted to incorporate aspects of ethnochoreological research to support my project. I began by digging deeper into the cultural history of tap dance.

Tap dance, a cultural dance form native to the United States, has continually evolved and drawn influence and inspiration from the cultural dance forms surrounding it. According to Tyler Anbinder's *Five Points*, during the 19th century, within a rather small and intensely overcrowded community, the residents of Five Points, New York City, faced many challenges. Poor living conditions, crime, and poverty were the norm. The historic Five Points District, although an epicenter of crime and riots, extremely poor living conditions, and rampant disease, was also a vibrant scene of creative energies, driven by the clashing and intermingling of Black and Irish residents. It was in this environment that tap dance started to emerge in the 1830s, with William Henry Lane as the leading contributor to what would become known today as tap dance. Shortly after, in the 1840s, British sailors entered the United States and brought with them Lancashire Clog dance and music, thus shifting tap dance into a new form ("Fascinatin' Rhythm").

Throughout its history, tap dance continued to evolve as dancers encountered various cultural percussive dance forms and incorporated new steps into their repertoire.

As I conducted research during this MFA program, I began to see parallels between tap dance's cultural history and my own family's history. My MFA thesis project, *Percussive Roots*, was a staged production that investigated and presented cultural dance forms relating to tap's history as it connected to my own ancestry. I staged the production at Brigham Young University in the Dance Performance Theater on March 29, 2022. It was just under 30 minutes in length. The show's narrative followed a student's investigation of the cultures represented in her family tree. As the show progressed, the student discovered how learning about her family history helped her better connect to both her ancestors and herself.

For this production, I chose to focus on specific ancestors in my family tree that originated within five specific dancing cultures. I highlighted the similarities and differences between each: La Polka Norteña de Chihuahua, Mexico; Sean-Nós step dancing from western Ireland; Schuhplattler and Ländler from Austria; Lancashire Clog from England; and tap from the United States. The overarching narrative structure was a student discussing her ancestral roots with her mother and father. As the parents introduced the details of each ancestor's life, a dancer representing this ancestor stepped on stage. Accompanied by supporting dancers and live musicians, the dancer demonstrated the ancestor's percussive traditions. The final number combined steps from each form to create something new, alluding to the unlimited possibilities that can come from allowing ourselves to draw from our cultural backgrounds to fuel our creative endeavors. The performance was meant to showcase that the past is a part of who we

each are today and to entertain the audience with the vibrant variety that exists within percussive dance.

Research

I conducted research for this thesis project throughout my graduate experience, starting with the very first Special Projects course with Professor Stephanie Batten Bland. In that course, I investigated some of the earliest history of tap dance into the minstrelsy era. I had very little knowledge of this era and wanted to understand more about the cultural context behind the origin of tap and the origin of blackface. The sources obtained through this initial research, as well as many new sources along the way, were valuable fountains of information as I dove deeper into the cultural influences contributing to the formation and evolution of tap dance. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* by Brenda Dixon Gottschild, provided important context concerning the influences that African dance and culture had on tap. From this research, I desired to learn more about where tap came from and where it started. *Five Points* by Tyler Anbinder, “Tap Dance in America: A Very Short History” by Constance Valis Hill and an Omnibus episode titled *Fascinatin’ Rhythms: The History of Tap* contributed significantly to my research on this topic. From these sources, I gained further knowledge not only of the African influence on tap dance, but also the influence that Irish step dancing and English clog dancing had on the earliest forms of tap dance. Significant sources added to this list were *Step Dancing in Ireland* by Catherine E. Foley and *What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dancing* by Brian Seibert. As I continued researching the historical interactions of these cultures, I discovered that I had a family-

history connection to some of the cultures contributing to the formation and evolution of tap dance. I began to dive deeper into the information about these cultures and the relationship that I had with them.

Within the internet databases of Brigham Young University's library and dance department, there are many invaluable video sources for each of these styles. These proved vitally helpful as I began to choreograph to further analyze styling, movements, themes, motifs, and basic steps. These included performances by groups directly from these cultures, as well as teaching videos, anthropological documentaries, master classes and workshops that took place at the university, as well as local, national, and international cultural dance festivals.

I chose five specific ancestors on my family tree who came from various cultures which had a percussive dance form. The five cultures I chose were: Austrian (Schuhplattler), English (Lancashire Clog), Irish (Step Dancing, specifically Sean-nós style), Mexican (Polka Norteña de Chihuahua), and American (tap and early jazz). For each cultural dance form, I looked at the historical background behind the dance; important dancers within the dance form at the time my ancestor was alive; common steps, sequences, and music present during this time; and the stylistic nuances within each percussive dance form. This allowed me to expand my knowledge of percussive forms. It also helped me provide a variety of steps, styles, and music in my show, while retaining the through-line of family history.

One source that was crucial to this project was FamilySearch.org. This is a database where historians, family history enthusiasts, and descendants can upload and discover information, memories, and documents/photos of individuals who have passed

on. I spoke with several members of my extended family and was able to find many photos and memories for the ancestors I found particularly interesting. I also visited the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and met with experts to discover more information about and memories of each ancestor. This was particularly helpful to the creative structure of the dances. It also helped with the construction of my script, which propelled the show forward through each dance.

Five Points

As lower Manhattan was just beginning to grow, there was a five-acre lake called “the Collect.” In 1802, after the Collect was ordered to be filled in, the area changed rapidly. With the population expanding quickly, there was an increased need for residences. Landowners realized the profitability that this demand presented and leased out portions of their houses, or built two-and-a-half story wooden buildings or much larger brick structures. The demand for housing was so high that tenements, a term coined within this area to describe living conditions that housed multiple unrelated families (Anbinder 18), became overcrowded and a prime location for diverse cultural interaction.

The majority of these newly immigrated residents were of Irish descent. “By 1825, immigrants accounted for at least 25 percent of the area’s population” (Anbinder 16). Fifteen percent of Five Points inhabitants during this time were African Americans. One important African American within this district was Master Juba. Master Juba or “Juba,” whose real name is William Henry Lane, was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1825. Not much is known about his childhood, but it is believed that he learned how to dance from an African-American jig dancer named ‘Uncle’ Jim Lowe (Knowles 88). At

ten years old and despite the intense riots taking place at this time, Lane was attracting attention with his dancing in Paradise Park, an area within Five Points.

Due to a lack of maintenance and the complete overcrowding of each dwelling, the neighborhood's already poor-quality housing deteriorated significantly in the 1830s and 1840s. The living conditions were strikingly sub-par. "Indeed, the American concept of 'slumming' was probably invented there" (Anbinder 2). In fact, the poor living conditions and astonishingly high crime and poverty rates caused this area to gain immense fame. Five Points was an international attraction and became so well known that by the 1830s, visitors from all over the world came to tour the district and observe its depravities.

Even Charles Dickens paid a visit to Five Points. While touring the neighborhood in 1842, Dickens observed a show at Almack's, one of the many Black-run dance emporiums. Noting that this experience was a highlight for him, Dickens describes his exposure to one of the world's greatest dancers:

Instantly the fiddler grins, and goes at it tooth and nail; there is new energy in the tambourine; new laughter in the dancers; new smiles in the landlady; new confidence in the landlord; new brightness in the very candles.

Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooden legs, two wire legs, two spring legs—all sorts of legs and no legs—what is this to him? And in what walk of life, or dance of life, does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound! (Dickens 104)

Although he does not mention this spry dancer by name, it is assumed by most historians studying tap's history within Five Points that this is, in fact, the infamous "Master Juba."

By the time he was 19, Lane was viewed as “beyond question the very greatest of all dancers. He possessed not only wonderful and unique execution, but also unsurpassed grace and endurance. . . . Those who passed through the long hallway and entered the dance hall . . . saw this phenomenon, ‘Juba,’ imitate all the dancers of the day and their special steps” (Winter 42). Juba had a series of dancers that he would imitate, but the last imitation in his act was his only serious rival, John Diamond.

There is one early undated contest listing Diamond as the winner, but in every account of dance challenges thereafter, Master Juba is listed as the victor. Master Juba had earned the reputation of “King of all Dancers” and the one who had beaten John Diamond. As dancing was viewed in high regard at the time, and the anti-abolitionist riots were in full force, this was such an important status to hold.

Although Master Juba is credited with the responsibility of creating tap dance, it was the melting pot of Five Points that provided the ideal conditions for Juba’s interaction with and imitation of members of the African and Irish cultures. The tenement culture of Five Points provided Irish immigrants and newly freed, formerly enslaved African-Americans with affordable housing during the early 1800s. These close living quarters allowed for each culture’s dance style to influence the other, with dancers consistently imitating and borrowing from one another.

Ireland: Sean-Nós

As the Irish peoples emigrated to the United States, they brought their step dancing, now referred to as Sean-Nós dance, with them. Sean-Nós dancing is an “old style” of Irish dance that is most associated with the west coast of Ireland. More relaxed than modern competition Irish step dancing, Sean-Nós is danced low to the ground and is

typically done as a solo performance. As personal style is of high value within Sean-Nós dancing, there is much variety within what is considered a “traditional” Sean-Nós step. “The feet and legs have most significance in step dancing, while the torso remains erect with arms held in place at the sides of the body” (Foley 3). This form of dance has influenced other forms of dance around the world and is considered a precursor to American tap dance. The attire worn by Sean-Nós dancers is everyday clothing of the dancer’s native region and time period. Dancers often wear a hard, leather-soled shoe to accent the groundedness of the dance form. The music accompanying Sean-Nós dancing can vary, but is often accompanied by a form of mouth-music known as litling, jigging, Sean-Nós singing, or diddling. Litling contains meaningless or nonsensical vocables, which emphasize rhythm and tone to melodize traditional Irish tunes.

For this dance, I chose to focus on my great-great-great-grandmother on my father’s side named Adelaide Ford. She lived in Athlone, Ireland, in 1830 and came over to the United States when she was 33 with her husband and their six children. (One child, Hyrum, was born on the journey across the ocean.) They moved to Lehi, Utah, in 1863, and had four more children. Adelaide died in 1909 at the age of 79. A granddaughter recalls that “she was the most beautiful little old lady with big, black eyes, with a crown of black braids around her head. A little stooped, but as active as a young girl. She worked from sun up to sun down every day, but Sunday, which she kept holy. ... She set a beautiful table for company, glass goblets, blue and white china dishes and set them on a real Irish linen tablecloth with large napkins” (“Adelaide Ford History”). Each traditional tune used for this piece had a connection to Athlone: The Athlone, The Bridge to Athlone, The Maid of Athlone.

England: Lancashire Clog

During the Industrial Revolution in 19th-century England, factories became increasingly mechanical. Each machine only required one, often-female, operative. These machines were so overwhelmingly loud that it was impossible for workers to hear one another speak. Needing their upper bodies to operate the machine, the workers tapped their heels and toes in time with the rhythms of the surrounding machinery, creating a cultural phenomena that is still danced today: Lancashire Clog Dancing. As British sailors crossed the ocean and entered the United States in 1843-1844, they brought their clog dancing with them (“Fascinatin’ Rhythm”). The dancers within the U.S. saw these steps and incorporated them into their repertoire. The clog dancers likewise did this with the tap steps they were learning and imitating. The traditional footwear of English clog dancing came from necessity. These raised wooden soles kept the worker’s feet out of the water and filth within the streets of villages and the factories in which they worked (“Fascinatin’ Rhythm”). The costumes arose out of the everyday clothing that workers wore in the factories. The music used for Lancashire clog dancing is traditional tunes often played on a fiddle.

My ancestor Ellen Fielding was born in Lancashire, England, in 1841. In 1848, having emigrated to the United States, her family moved to Salt Lake City, crossing the plains from Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1861, she married William Walton Burton, and they settled in Ogden. She believed that “nothing less than your best will do.” She had a good memory and knew all of the birthdays for the entire family. She loved her family and delighted in keeping track of them (“Memories of Ellen Fielding Burton by Her Descendants”).

Austria: Schuhplattler

In the Schuhplattler dances from Austria, men stomp, clap, and strike their thighs, knees, and the soles of their shoes (schuhe), with their hands held flat (platt). The Schuhplattler can either be danced with just the men on stage plattling wildly, or as a partner dance with couples doing a Ländler preceding the plattler section. If ladies are present during this dance, their role is to turn in their colorful dirndles (dress) while the men showed off their platteln. These two approaches are commonly known as Schuhplattler Proper or Schuhplattlertanz. As the men dance the Schuhplattler, you will often hear them shout a “juchzer,” or enthusiastic whoop, to demonstrate joy and excitement from dancing the Schuhplattler. Traditionally, men dancing Schuhplattler will dance wearing short lederhosen that can either be simple and practical, or highly ornate. Women of Bavaria and Tyrol wear a dirndle dress, which is a plain and practical dress with an apron (Dean-Kraft). By the 1830s, the accordion was a major instrument within Austrian music and accompanied both the Schuhplattler and Ländler.

The ancestor that this dance centered around was John Prosen, from Primorsko, Austria. He was born in 1875. He came to America as a young man and settled in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He then sent for his bride-to-be, Helena, and together they had five children. He was a coal miner and it is believed that he died from Black Lung Disease.

México: La Polka Norteña

Originating In the Czech Republic, the polka was introduced by immigrants to northern Mexico in the 19th century (Guzman). The residents of each of these northern states blended their existing dance traditions with this new dance form to create their own

unique style. Accompanied by Conjunto Norteño, La Polka Norteña is a partner dance in which couples stamp their feet with intensity to the rhythm of the polka to exhibit joy and passion. The typical clothing for this style is men wearing cowboy hats and boots with the women in long, colorful dresses specific to the region from which they come. “Conjunto Norteño music is native to the Mexican states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahula, and Nuevo Leon” (Rivera).

John Earl, Jr., was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1903. Although there is no record of him dancing, his timeline matches with the timeline of the polka arriving from Czech immigrants. Included in the script and program notes, is a story about John Earl from when he was a little boy. He and his family lived out in the countryside in Chihuahua, Mexico. At this time, Pancho Villa was the Governor of Chihuahua and rode through the countryside terrorizing many residents, stealing their horses and cattle. John knew that Pancho Villa would not want a dead horse, so he trained his horse to play dead any time he whistled a specific tune. One day, he was working out in the field and heard the thundering hooves of Pancho Villa and his many bandits. John Earl whistled and his horse fell down. He crawled underneath his horse and Pancho Villa and his bandits jumped right over the top of him. Both he and his horse were safe (K. Madsen).

USA: Tap in 1920s

During the early teens of the 20th century, Americans were caught up in a one-step, two-step and foxtrot dance craze. The syncopated music of the ragtime era was being “jassed up” in New York clubs (Hill, *Tap Dancing America* 52). This more complicated and speedy music encouraged dancers to generate spontaneous movement expressions and enjoy a more rhythmically centered form of social dance. By 1920,

Vaudeville was a major movement in the entertainment business and tap dancers were headlining at very prominent theaters (Hill, *Tap Dancing America* 61). Acts of the Vaudeville era often included accompaniment by a pianist.

This particular section of my thesis performance was centered around my great-grandfather, Roscoe Bassett Glines. I often heard stories of Roscoe dancing in the living room when my grandmother was a child. He was a traveling salesman for J.R. Watkins and would roll back the rug after returning from a long trip. He would tap dance on the floor for my grandma and her sister (J. Madsen). He died when my grandmother was only 6 years old, so this story is very special to my father, his siblings, and all of the grandchildren. This was the first ancestor that I narrowed in on when I started creating my thesis performance. It connected to tap dance, my family history, and part of my performance's theme: dance brings families together. The song that I chose for this dance was "Margie" by Con Conrad and was written in 1920. Since Roscoe died in 1924 and my grandmother's name is Marjorie, I thought this would be an especially fitting song to use. They may have even been familiar with this song, and there is a chance they danced to this in their living room. This story is held especially close to my heart as I am the only male in my family who tap dances, and this is something that I have started doing with my own children. I intend to continue this tradition and hopefully pass on these memories to my descendants.

Methodology

To build my performance, I first needed to come up with a theme or message that I wanted my audience to understand. The main message that I wanted to convey through my thesis performance was that dance brings families, communities, and cultures

together. I wanted the audience to understand that our past is part of who we are today, and this includes our ancestors and the cultures they come from. By learning about these ancestral cultures, we can connect to our ancestors as well as ourselves in a way that is otherwise not possible. To communicate this idea, and being a percussive dancer, I decided that I wanted my performance to follow a narrative format involving a dancer who is learning about her family history through stories told by her mother and father. As she learns about each of these ancestors and the cultures they come from, a dancer representing that ancestor walks on stage and “teaches” or “demonstrates” the dance from their culture in a sort of hollywood-style dream sequence. I needed a dancer who would be proficient in each of these styles and knew exactly who I wanted as the lead.

I first began by reading historical accounts of each dance style during the time that my ancestor was living and experiencing these cultures. This helped me understand more about the styling, costumes, steps, traditions, etc., that would be relevant or important to include in my thesis performance. I watched several documentaries and spoke with some experts in several of the styles to further my understanding of the dance traditions.

To create a show that not only kept the audience engaged but presented a variety of choreographic processes and aesthetics while remaining true to each form, I chose to have different numbers of dancers for each of my pieces. I chose to use the following choreographic structure for each piece: La Polka Norteña for one couple in which the lead soloist traded with my female dancer for the last section; Sean-Nós for a soloist upon a table located on the set, the lead soloist progressively dancing more as the piece went on; Schuhplattler and Ländler for a set of six couples in which my lead soloist danced

with my “ancestor” for the entirety of the piece; Lancashire Clog for a group of six dancers, plus my lead soloist, in which each dancer had a solo or duet within the piece; 1920’s tap and jazz for a pianist and lead tapper to dance with my lead soloist in a sort of “jam-session” kind of environment where the music and dance played off of each other in real time for some parts; “A Product of my Past” as an acapella piece in which each soloist danced a section of their dance in succession, and then danced the same sequence simultaneously to create a new and exciting rhythm to finish out the show.

An important aspect of the choreographic process was the music used. Because this entire performance revolved around cultural dance, I needed authentic music to accompany each section. Traditional tunes from each style were used with exceptionally talented live musicians except for the Polka Norteña. I was able to find a singer for my Irish piece who sang in an old style of lilt singing, which often accompanies older-style Irish dance. For my Austrian Schuhplattler, I spoke with a dancer who I had worked with for years who mentioned he could play the accordion. He was able to pick up the music by ear and even added his own transitions to make it fit with the dance and style that we were doing. This dancer specializes in jazz piano, so when I asked him to accompany my jazz tap dance piece as well, he was excited to learn something within his area of expertise. After I found the tune I wanted to use for my English piece, I spoke with a fabulous fiddler who is remarkably familiar with playing for dancers and is familiar with the work that I do. All of my musicians were fantastic to work with and added an immense presence to the performance. Polka Norteña-style music is specific and nuanced and includes instruments not common in the Utah area; I was not able to find a live musician for this performance.

Choreography and Rehearsal Process

Aside from the lead dancer, each piece included dancers who (initially) only participated in one dance. As I worked on the choreography, I adjusted to skill level and stylistic abilities to attempt at presenting an authentic representation of each cultural dance style. I choreographed each dance and met with each group of dancers separately. Some of them required more rehearsals than others, depending on their availability and experience with a particular style. Throughout the process, I had to replace several of my dancers who were playing the ancestors in each piece and had solos, and even had to replace the mom character a few days before the performance. Luckily, I was able to find excellent replacements for each spot.

La Polka Norteña was the most challenging of all of the dances. It was the one with which I had the least experience, and the one I had to choreograph and teach the fastest. My original plan was to open *Percussive Roots* with a soloist performing Flamenco and connect it with one of my great-grandfathers from Spain. My soloist and I met several times, and had made good progress on this dance. A week before the show, I was doing some intense digging in my family history and felt that something wasn't quite right. After further investigation, I discovered that it was likely that the information we had on him was actually about his son who was born in California. Although my great-grandfather was from Spain, I wanted to present memories and accurate details about his life, and I found myself with less concrete or completely missing information. I decided to change my course of action and focus on a different ancestor from Chihuahua, Mexico, who had a larger amount of memories connected to him. Luckily I knew of a highly skilled dancer (who had some experience with La Polka Norteña de Nuevo León) who

was, thankfully, willing to step into this role last minute. Because this is a partner dance style, I needed a female to accompany him on stage. My wife was already planning on performing in the Austrian piece and was willing to step in to learn this piece as well. I spent a few solid days further researching this style and finding as many resources as I could to support the creative process. I was also able to borrow an authentic polka dress from a local folklórico group for this piece. Both dancers along with my lead soloist learned this style in less than a few days before the show and performed fabulously. I was not exceedingly familiar with La Polka Norteña de Chihuahua previous to this thesis, but I now have an increased desire to further my research on this in future projects.

For my Sean-Nós piece, I was originally planning on collaborating with a very skilled Irish dancer and choreographer to create this section. Her schedule, however, became more demanding and she could no longer commit to helping in the choreographic aspect. She did agree to be my soloist in this dance, and we were able to solidify the choreography. Two weeks before the show, she remembered that she had a prior commitment, and I was forced to find a new dancer. Scrambling, I reached out to another Irish dancer with whom I had worked before. Although this was last minute, I knew that this replacement dancer would be able to pick up the steps and styling quickly. She had qualified to compete in the 2022 World Irish Dance Championships in Belfast, Ireland, which is an immense accomplishment. We met once to learn the choreography, another time to put it together with my lead soloist, and another to add in the lilt singer. Although it was stressful to replace a soloist this quickly, I was extremely pleased with the performance and her willingness to participate, even though she was deep in her rehearsals for the World Championship that took place in April of this year.

I worked with a local cultural dance company called World Dance Company for the Austrian Schuhplattler and Ländler. This dance company specializes in performing cultural dances from all around the world and the artistic director is a close friend of mine. Although the dancers in this group are adults who have a desire to continue working with cultural dance, they only meet once a week and often have professional commitments that take priority. Because of this, we often had to have stand-ins for spots as we continued with learning material each week. Most of the dancers had not done any Austrian dance, but they were very excited for the opportunity. I felt that it would be stronger and more aligned with tradition to make this a larger group dance and settled on six couples. Because of the nature of this dance and how complicated the ländler section is, we met every Saturday starting in February, during their regular rehearsal time, to work on choreography, styling, and cultural context. This was a partner dance, the style was a little tricky to work with, and it was all new to them. We spent a significant amount of rehearsal time reviewing or changing material from previous weeks. This was an incredible challenge as I tried to adjust the choreography and prepare them for the performance.

For the Lancashire Clog dance, I decided that I wanted to use several tap dancers and American clog dancers. I knew these specific dancers would be able to learn the choreography and styling quickly and would be confident and capable to perform the structure that I chose. To keep with tradition and to add variety to the performance, I chose for this dance to have sort of a call-and-response structure in which each dancer could show off their best steps to the group. I chose to have them all dance in unison for the beginning. Then, each dancer was given either a solo or a duet to perform acapella as

a “call,” and the group would “answer” with another step in unison to music. After all dancers performed their assigned steps, the entire group danced a few steps in unison again to finish out the piece. Because of this, I was able to work with the dancers collectively on the unison sections, but then individually on their particular solos/duets. This worked really well for this group as they all had varying schedules and abilities. A few weeks before the performance, I had a pair of twins express interest in performing in this piece. However, they were unable to make it to any of the rehearsals prior to show-week. I sent them videos and they were able to be prepared to perform in the show. This method was not ideal, but I was impressed by their efforts and pleased by their performance.

The tap dance number was the dance I had the least stress about. Both the lead soloist for the performance and the tap soloist are phenomenal tap dancers. Because of the story line driving this dance, which involved my grandma and her father tap dancing in their living room, I wanted this dance to consist of only two dancers and a musician on stage. This created an intimate atmosphere for this piece and allowed me to get into some difficult choreography quickly. We got together a few times to learn the material and to make sure that it felt right. For one of the verses of the music, I wanted my dancers to improvise in a 1910-1920s-style partner social dance. This took a little bit of work to iron out, but I felt confident in their performance during rehearsals. After the performance, I realized that I should have given them specific moves and counts for this section so that they would not have to improvise on stage. Given the pressure of the performance, they started to forget the moves we worked on and just repeated the same steps. Although they still did a good job, it lacked the variety that I was hoping for and that we had practiced.

The final piece of the show took a long time to choreograph. I knew I wanted something that tied the entire show together, but I wasn't sure how to do this. I needed to know what the rest of the show would look like. I went through several ideas of having all the dancers come back out, of having the soloist do a little piece of each dance, of creating something entirely different but using the ancestors from each dance, and so on. When I finally saw the entire show, I realized that I wanted a small piece of each culture to be represented and combined to create something new. I also knew that I wanted it to be an a cappella piece. I decided to pull a short sequence from each dance and had the corresponding ancestor dance it in sequential order according to the show. Then the lead soloist danced something that combined pieces of each of the styles. Immediately following this, all of the dancers danced their sequence simultaneously to finish out the piece. It was simple and quick, but it felt like the most organic way to finish out the show. Because I needed to wait until I saw the show in its entirety before setting this piece, we put this together the day before the show. The dancers were solid in the choreography, but something happened during the performance that misaligned their sections so it didn't quite turn out as I had anticipated.

I am fortunate enough to currently work at Brigham Young University in the cultural dance area of the Dance Department. Through this employment, I constantly interact with talented, dedicated, and eager dancers. There was an enormous pool of willing dancers to choose from and work with. Because of their talents and eagerness to learn about cultural dance, many of them perform with Brigham Young University's International Folk Dance Ensemble. Although I am grateful for the opportunity to work with such talented and seasoned dancers, it also meant that their performing schedules

were terribly demanding on top of an already-demanding academic schedule. They had a week-long tour to Arizona at the beginning of March and a tour to southern Utah and Nevada the weekend before this thesis performance. They also had several other small last-minute performances and outreaches during March. This meant that the majority of my dancers were traveling and performing during crucial rehearsal opportunities and were swamped with homework when they got back. I was forced to constantly reschedule or cancel rehearsals as their schedules changed. Many students made enormous sacrifices, especially my lead soloist, but it was difficult to get even one rehearsal without at least two people missing. Because of their demanding and ever-changing schedules, the Thursday before the show was the first time that I was able to see each piece in conjunction with the rest of the dances. As I had to replace the “mother” the morning before this rehearsal, I did not have my actors prepared for this rehearsal, but it was great to see the show in a much more performance-ready state.

As I look to future projects, I will definitely be clearer in my rehearsal schedules ahead of time and only cast dancers who can commit to the entire process and each rehearsal. Having dancers only present for one rehearsal definitely was a challenge that I will not willingly face again. I also look forward to working with longer timelines on future productions, where I will be able to see a rough outline of the entire show well in advance so I can make necessary adjustments ahead of time.

Performance Results

Percussive Roots debuted in the Dance Performance Theater at Brigham Young University on March 29 at 7 p.m. The audience was about 80 individuals and included colleagues, families of the performers, and students at Brigham Young University. After

a brief introduction to the project given by me, the performance began. On stage, there was a table on stage right with bench seating, a piano up stage left, and a couch with a rug in front of it placed down stage left. A woman was sitting on the couch reading a book and her daughter walked in and told her, “Mom, for one of my dance classes this semester, we are supposed to write a paper about our ancestry. Could you remind me what our family roots are?” They began talking about their grandfather from Chihuahua, Mexico, and during a story about his whistle, we heard a whistle from off stage right. Music started to play as two dancers in traditional Polka Norteña de Chihuahua dress entered from stage right. They began to dance and though the mother was frozen in time, the daughter was observing these two dancers as if in a dream-sequence. She watched them dance and near the end, joined in and finished out the choreography with her ancestor John Earl Jr. She returned to the couch and the mother resumed her story.

Next, the mother relayed information about Adelaide Ford, from Ireland. A dancer and lilt singer entered the stage and the dancer stepped on to the table. She danced to several traditional Irish tunes: first a hornpipe, then a jig, and finally, a reel. Again, the mother was frozen in time while the daughter interacted and danced with her ancestor.

She returned to the couch and they continued discussing ancestry, moving to Austria next. As this dance form includes shouts of joy known as a “juchzer,” I decided to have a dancer off stage juchzer to signal a stop in the story and bring the attention to the ancestor entering the stage. This dance included five couples from World Dance Company, and one couple of my lead soloist (the daughter) and my Austrian soloist (the ancestor) performing a combination of a Schuhplattler and a Ländler. The daughter

watched, learned, danced, and interacted with the dancers throughout the number, experiencing a little piece of Austrian culture.

For the Lancashire Clog dance (next in the performance), I had the ancestor enter the stage followed by supporting dancers and a musician on a fiddle. Each dancer was given a solo or a duet to perform acapella, including the lead soloist.

Because the story supporting the tap piece was significant to me and my family members who were in attendance, I needed to pay extra attention to how the transition worked into this piece. I decided to bring on a father character, who was tasked with recounting the memories of his mother dancing with her father in the living room. The conversation moved upstage to the piano and as the father began to play “Margie” a dancer representing Roscoe Bassett Glines entered near the couch. He set his blazer on the couch and rolled up the rug in front of it. The lead soloist watched this happen and approached the new dance floor as Roscoe invited her to dance with him. They tap danced to the tune played on the piano and afterwards, she helped him unroll the rug back onto the floor before returning to her mother and father at the piano.

To finalize the narrations, the daughter expressed gratitude for all of the newly obtained information, and the mother tells her that, “Understanding where our family comes from helps us better connect to our ancestors as well as ourselves. Family that has passed on is part of who we are today, and I can see how each of these ancestors are a part of you, especially when you’re dancing.” The mother and father exited the stage as each ancestor entered the stage one last time. Each dancer reprised a section of his or her dance in show order. The soloist then did a new sequence made up of steps resembling

each ancestor's style. They all danced their steps again simultaneously, finishing in a grand finale of a shared percussive step.

Results and Implications for the Future

Through this project I have grown as an artist, choreographer, historian, teacher, and producer. I have deepened my love and understanding of anthropology within dance. I have learned how important it is to research my own family history to understand more about my cultural makeup.

My main objective for the dancers within this project was not only to learn steps and sequences, but also to understand the cultural significance that dance played within the communities from which these dance forms originated. My main objective with the audience was not only to experience and see the value in different forms of percussive cultural dance, but also to be motivated to dig into their family's past and see the beauty in learning about the cultures they come from.

I offered two online forms for my audience to offer feedback and thoughts: one for the audience, and one for the performers. I also encouraged my audience and performers to reach out via e-mail, Zoom, or other methods if they wanted to have a discussion with me concerning the project. I had an astounding amount of feedback that ranged from commenting on the structure and execution of the performance itself: "beautiful weaving of modern day person to her links with the past," to appreciating the project as a whole: "I loved how this performance helped me see my ancestors as real people. I really want to start looking into my family history and honestly wish I could time travel to go back and see my ancestors and their time and their dance."

Through the production process, I learned a great deal about constructing and executing an entire production from conception to the final, staged product. Designing the set, script, and overall structure of the show provided me with insight into just how much work goes into each performance. I have always wanted to produce my own show. Now that I have successfully completed my first production, I cannot wait to get back at it and design another. Although I am thoroughly satisfied with this production and the structure thereof, I would love to refocus into researching more styles of dance within my cultural heritage to investigate and include more than just percussive dance forms.

Moving forward, I intend to continue encouraging audiences to research and embrace their cultural heritage and to learn the dances of their ancestors. Because of my love for cultural dance and the cultural context contained within, I aspire to one day combine my love for anthropology and my love for cultural dance to become an ethnochoreologist. I want to demonstrate how dance is an intangible cultural heritage, and I want to study the effects that modern technology has had and can have on cultural dance and its preservation. I would love to become more involved with dance preservation and document, interview, and learn from the major players within some of these lesser-known forms of percussive dance.

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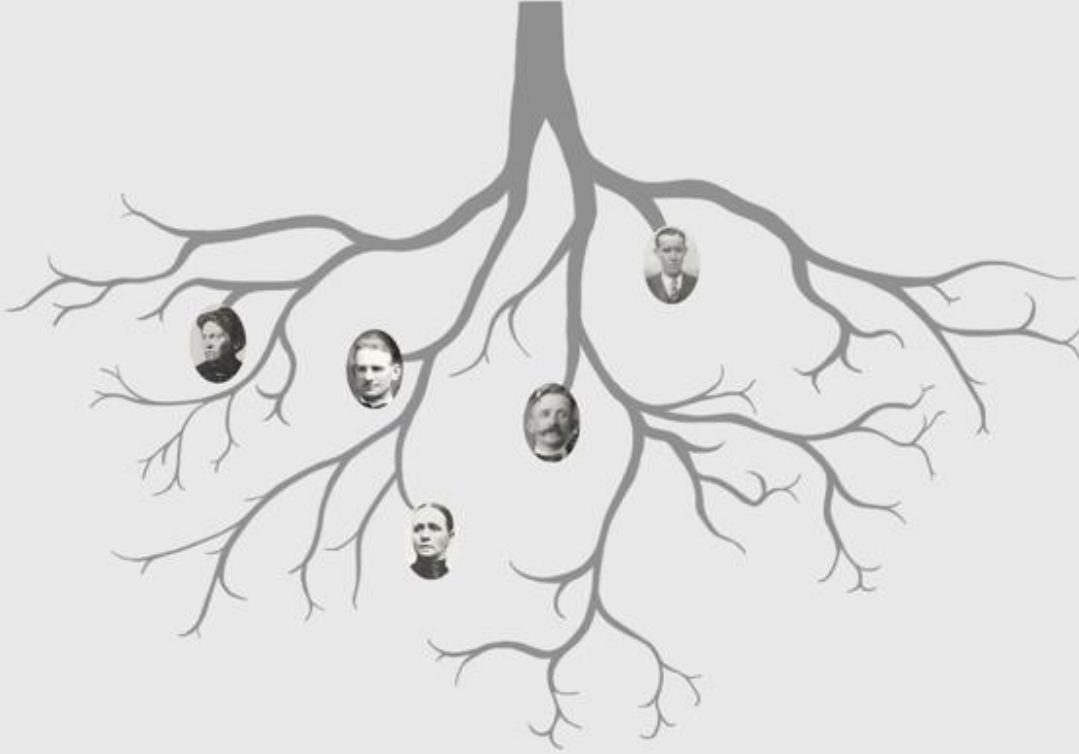
Appendix

Program

MFA IN DANCE THESIS PERFORMANCE

PERCUSSIVE ROOTS

CHOREOGRAPHY BY
JACOB MADSEN



TUESDAY, MARCH 29TH 2022
7:00PM AT THE DANCE PERFORMANCE THEATER
RICHARDS BUILDING
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

SPECIAL THANKS

CAST AND CREW
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
DANCE DEPARTMENT
& PRODUCTION STAFF
INTERNATIONAL FOLK DANCE ENSEMBLE
KATHLEEN KELLEY
WORLD DANCE COMPANY
CLARK DEFRANCO
NESHA WOODHOUSE
DULCE BENJAMIN
FRIENDS AND FAMILY

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO KATIE MADSEN
FOR HER CONTINUED SUPPORT
THROUGH THIS ENTIRE PROCESS

PHOTO CREDITS: BYU PHOTO, CAST, AND PERSONAL FAMILY ARCHIVES

THE CAST



JACOB MADSEN
CHOREOGRAPHER



VICTORIA RIMINGTON
LEAD SOLOIST



ELIZABETH CRANDALL
MOTHER



IAN WOODWARD
IRISH LILT
SINGER



BRADEN DUKE
FATHER
ACCORDION
PIANO



ELLIE GESLISON
FIDDLE

DANCERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

LEAD SOLOIST
VICTORIA RIMINGTON

MEXICO: LA POLKA NORTEÑA
KATIE MADSEN
ISAIAH VELA

IRELAND: SEAN NÓS
BRIELLE ANDERSON

AUSTRIA: SCHUHPLATTLER
NICKY ABRAHAM
AUSTIN ALLEN
EMILY ALLEN
BREANNA DANIELS
TRENTON DANIELS
TAYLOR HAYCOCK
TIA HAYCOCK
CLINT HUBBARD
AUBREY JACKSON
KATIE MADSEN
MATT PETERSON

ENGLAND: LANCASHIRE CLOG
KYE DAVIS
RHEN DAVIS
JAIME DICK
ELISE GLOVER
ASHLEY JEX
TYLER PERSSON

USA: 1920S TAP AND JAZZ
EMMANUEL VALDEZ

A PRODUCT OF MY PAST
AUSTIN ALLEN
BRIELLE ANDERSON
ASHLEY JEX
EMMANUEL VALDEZ
ISAIAH VELA



JOHN EARL, JR.

BIRTH: 23 DECEMBER 1903 CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO

MARRIAGE: 2 JUNE 1928 ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA

DEATH: 7 JULY 1941 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

"WHEN MY FATHER WAS A LITTLE BOY, HE AND HIS FAMILY LIVED OUT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE IN CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO. AT THAT TIME, PANCHO VILLA WAS THE GOVERNER OF CHIHUAHUA AND RODE THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE TERRORIZING MANY RESIDENTS, STEALING THEIR HORSES AND CATTLE. BECAUSE MY FATHER KNEW THAT PANCHO VILLA WOULD NOT WANT A DEAD HORSE, HE TRAINED HIS HORSE TO PLAY DEAD ANY TIME MY GRANDFATHER WHISTLED A SPECIFIC TUNE. ONE DAY, HE WAS WORKING OUT IN THE FIELD AND HEARD THE THUNDERING HOOVES OF PANCHO VILLA AND HIS MANY BANDITS. MY FATHER WHISTLED AND HIS HORSE FELL DOWN. HE CRAWLED UNDERNEATH HIS HORSE AND PANCHO VILLA AND HIS BANDITS JUMPED RIGHT OVER THE TOP OF HIM. BOTH HE AND HIS HORSE WERE SAFE."

- BETTY CHRISTENSEN, DAUGHTER OF JOHN EARL, JR.



MEXICO: LA POLKA NORTEÑA

SOLOIST: ISAIAH VELA

MUSIC: EL TECOLOTE (POLKA) BY NARCISO MARTINEZ

ORIGINATING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, THE POLKA WAS INTRODUCED BY IMMIGRANTS TO NORTHERN MEXICO IN THE 19TH CENTURY. THE RESIDENTS OF EACH OF THESE NORTHERN STATES BLENDED THEIR EXISTING DANCE TRADITIONS WITH THIS NEW DANCE FORM TO CREATE THEIR OWN UNIQUE STYLE. ACCOMPANIED BY CONJUNTO NORTEÑO, LA POLKA NORTEÑA IS A PARTNER DANCE IN WHICH COUPLES STAMP THEIR FEET WITH INTENSITY TO THE RHYTHM OF THE POLKA TO EXHIBIT JOY AND PASSION. CONJUNTO NORTEÑO MUSIC IS NATIVE TO THE MEXICAN STATES OF SONORA, CHIHUAHUA, COAHUILA, AND NUEVO LEON.



ADELAIDE FORD

BIRTH: 22 MAY 1830 ATHLONE, IRELAND
MARRIAGE: 5 JANUARY 1847 KENT, ENGLAND
DEATH: 7 APRIL 1909 LEHI, UT

"SHE WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LITTLE OLD LADY WITH BIG BLACK EYES, WITH A CROWN OF BLACK BRAIDS AROUND HER HEAD. SHE SET A BEAUTIFUL TABLE FOR COMPANY, GLASS GOBLETS, BLUE AND WHITE CHINA DISHES AND SET THEM ON A REAL IRISH LINEN TABLECLOTH WITH LARGE NAPKINS. SHE BROUGHT THESE THINGS WITH HER AND KEPT THEM FOR SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS AS THEY WERE PRECIOUS TO HER AFTER CROSSING THE PLAINS WITH HER. SHE WAS A FIRST CLASS COOK. PEOPLE STILL REMEMBER HER HOME MADE BREAD, BUTTER, PLUM PUDDINGS, FRUIT CAKES, BERRY PIES, AND ROAST TURKEYS. "

- A GRANDDAUGHTER



IRELAND: SEAN NÓS

SOLOIST: BRIELLE ANDERSON

MUSIC: "THE ATHLONE" (TRADITIONAL); "BRIDGE TO ATHLONE" (TRADITIONAL);

"THE MAID OF ATHLONE" (TRADITIONAL) PERFORMED BY IAN WOODWARD

MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT: JACOB MADSEN AND IAN WOODWARD

SEAN-NÓS DANCING IS AN "OLD STYLE" OF IRISH DANCE THAT IS MOST ASSOCIATED WITH THE WEST COAST OF IRELAND. MORE RELAXED THAN MODERN IRISH STEP DANCING, SEAN-NÓS IS DANCED LOW TO THE GROUND AND IS TYPICALLY DONE AS A SOLO PERFORMANCE. PERSONAL STYLE IS HIGHLY VALUED IN SEAN-NÓS DANCING AND ALTHOUGH STAGE PERFORMANCES ARE BECOMING MORE POPULAR, MANY CONSIDER THE BEST SEAN-NÓS DANCERS TO BE THOSE FOUND IN THE DARK CORNERS OF THE PUB. TRADITIONAL SEAN-NÓS DANCE SURFACES INCLUDE A STANDARD WOODEN DANCE FLOOR, A DOOR THAT HAS BEEN TAKEN OFF THE HINGES, A TABLE, A BARREL, OR EVEN THE TOP OF A STOOL. AS THE IRISH PEOPLES EMIGRATED TO THE US, THEY TOOK SEAN-NÓS DANCE WITH THEM. THIS FORM OF DANCE HAS INFLUENCED OTHER FORMS OF DANCE AROUND THE WORLD, AND IS CONSIDERED A PRECURSOR TO AMERICAN TAP DANCE.



JOHN PROSEN

BIRTH: 20 DECEMBER 1875 PRIMORSKO, AUSTRIA
MARRIAGE: 10 AUGUST 1904 PUEBLO, CO
DEATH: 20 DECEMBER 1914 COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

"MY GRANDPA WAS BORN IN AUSTRIA AND CAME OVER TO AMERICA AS A YOUNG MAN, BRINGING HIS AUSTRIAN TRADITIONS WITH HIM. AFTER HE GOT SETTLED, HE SENT FOR HIS BRIDE-TO-BE, HELENA. THEY WERE MARRIED AND HAD FIVE CHILDREN, THE OLDEST OF WHICH WAS MY MOTHER. HE DIED VERY YOUNG, PROBABLY FROM BLACK LUNG DISEASE FROM WORKING IN THE MINES. HE LEFT HIS YOUNG FAMILY WITH NO FINANCIAL SUPPORT SO THEY WERE VERY POOR. HE WAS REMEMBERED BY MY MOTHER AS A LOVING FATHER."
- WILLIAM CHRISTENSEN, GRANDSON OF JOHN PROSEN



AUSTRIA: SCHUHPLATTLER

SOLOIST: AUSTIN ALLEN

MUSIC: "BAYRISCHE POLKA" (TRADITIONAL) AND "UNTERSTIERER LANDLER"
(TRADITIONAL) PERFORMED BY BRADEN DUKE

MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT: JACOB MADSEN AND BRADEN DUKE

IN THIS SCHUHPLATTLER, THE MEN STOMP, CLAP, AND STRIKE THE SOLES OF THEIR SHOES (SCHUHE), THIGHS, AND KNEES WITH THEIR HANDS HELD FLAT (PLATT), WHILE THE LADIES TURN IN THEIR COLORFUL DIRNDLS. DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM THE TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE DANCE, THE PARTNERS LANDLER TOGETHER BETWEEN SHOWING OFF THE MEN'S PLATTELN. OCCASIONALLY, YOU MAY HEAR THE MEN JUCHZER OR "WOO-HOO" TO DEMONSTRATE THE JOY AND EXCITEMENT FROM DANCING THE SCHUHPLATTLER.



ELLEN FIELDING

BIRTH: 9 FEBRUARY 1841 LANCASHIRE, ENGLAND
MARRIAGE: 2 NOVEMBER 1861 SALT LAKE CITY, UT
DEATH: 8 MARCH 1906 OGDEN, UT

"MY MOTHER BELIEVED THAT 'NOTHING LESS THAN YOUR BEST WILL DO.' [SHE] WAS DEEPLY RELIGIOUS AND A MOTHER IN ALL THE WORD IMPLIES. SHE LOVED FLOWERS, AND I CAN REMEMBER WHEN THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE, WHERE WE LATER HAD LAWN, WAS ALL FLOWERS. HER CITY LOT YIELDED PEACHES, PEARS, APPLES, APRICOTS, PLUMS; AND BERRIES OF MANY KINDS -- SUFFICIENT FOR HER OWN TABLE, AND AN OVER-FLOW TO SHARE WITH OTHERS. SHE HAD AN EXTRA GOOD MEMORY AND KNEW ALL OF THE BIRTHDAYS FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY. SHE LOVED HER FAMILY AND DELIGHTED IN KEEPING TRACK OF THEM."
- JOHN F. BURTON, SON OF ELLEN FIELDING



ENGLAND: LANCASHIRE CLOG

SOLOIST: ASHLEY JEX

MUSIC: "CRONIN'S HORNPIPE" (TRADITIONAL)

PERFORMED BY ELLIE GESLISON

MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT BY JACOB MADSEN AND ELLIE GESLISON

DURING THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN 19TH CENTURY ENGLAND, FACTORIES BECAME INCREASINGLY MECHANICAL; EACH MACHINE ONLY REQUIRING ONE, OFTEN FEMALE, OPERATIVE. THESE MACHINES WERE SO OVERWHELMINGLY LOUD THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR WORKERS TO HEAR ONE ANOTHER SPEAK. NEEDING THEIR UPPER BODIES TO OPERATE THE MACHINE, THE WORKERS TAPPED THEIR HEELS AND TOES IN TIME WITH THE RHYTHMS OF THE SURROUNDING MACHINERY, CREATING A CULTURAL PHENOMENA THAT IS STILL DANCED TODAY: THE LANCASHIRE CLOG.



ROSCOE BASSETT GLINES

BIRTH: 4 JUNE 1878 CEDAR FORT, UT
MARRIAGE: 24 MARCH 1915 SALT LAKE CITY, UT
DEATH: 26 JULY 1924 SALT LAKE CITY, UT

"WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, MY DADDY WAS A TRAVELING SALESMAN FOR J. R. WATKINS HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS. WHEN HE WOULD COME HOME FROM A LONG TRIP, HE WOULD ROLL BACK THE CARPET AND SAY, "LETS DANCE!" MY SISTER ELLEN AND I WOULD SIT BY THE FIREPLACE AND WATCH HIM TAP DANCE. O, HOW WE WOULD LAUGH AND GIGGLE. WE LOVED TO WATCH HIM DANCE."

- MARJORIE MADSEN, DAUGHTER OF ROSCOE BASSETT GLINES



USA: 1920S TAP AND JAZZ

SOLOIST: EMMANUEL VALDEZ
MUSIC: "MARGIE" BY CON CONRAD AND J. RUSSELL ROBINSON
PERFORMED BY BRADEN DUKE
MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT: JACOB MADSEN AND BRADEN DUKE

DURING THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY, THE FIVE POINTS DISTRICT OF NEW YORK WAS A VIBRANT SCENE OF CREATIVE ENERGIES, DRIVEN BY THE CLASHING AND INTERMINGLING OF BLACK AND IRISH PEOPLE. IT WAS THIS INTERMINGLING OF THESE TWO CULTURES THAT PRODUCED THE EARLIEST VERSION OF TAP DANCE. WITH THE ADDITION OF OTHER PERCUSSIVE CULTURAL DANCE FORMS SUCH AS THE LANCASHIRE CLOG IN THE 1840S, TAP CONTINUED TO EVOLVE THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY. IN THE LATE 1910S, VERNACULAR DANCE CONSISTED OF THE TEXAS TOMMY, A PRECURSOR TO THE LINDY HOP, AND SIMPLER DANCES SUCH AS THE ONE-STEP. TAP DANCE HAD AN INCREDIBLE PRESENCE WITHIN VAUDEVILLE, AND JAZZ MUSIC WAS JUST STARTING TO ENTER THE MUSIC SCENE.