

## MAJOR FIGURES IN JAZZ DANCE, MUSICAL THEATRE, AND TAP DANCE

Jazz dance, including tap and musical theatre, are art forms that had their beginnings in America. Here is a partial list of artists that have had a major impact on this vernacular dance.

### Leading to the Minstrels and Beyond

**John Durang** (1768–1822)—Durang is known as one of America's first show dancers. Although he was white, he knew much about black dance. He was an expert at "hornpipe" dancing (a type of folk dance from England), although his version had many elements of African-American style. He was also the first white dancer to perform in blackface.

**Thomas Rice** (1808–1860)—Better known as Daddy "Jim Crow" Rice, this performer was another white dancer who borrowed from the black culture. He made the song and dance number "Jump Jim Crow" immensely popular and it became a fad dance of the time. His performances paved the way for the minstrel shows to come.

**William Henry Lane** (1825–1852)—Better known as "Master Juba," Lane combined Irish jig and African movements in his dancing during the 1840s. Because he was black, he was not allowed to perform on stage with whites and performed for other blacks and Irish immigrants. He eventually became more popular than most white minstrel performers and toured with them for a while. He is also said to have influenced the tap dance movements created during his era.

**George Primrose** (1852–1919)—A star of both the minstrel and vaudeville shows, Primrose popularized a style of tap dance known as the "soft shoe." The soft shoe is performed very gracefully, with the feet skimming rather than loudly tapping, the floor.

### The Vaudeville Era

**Florenz Ziegfeld** (1867–1932)—Ziegfeld was a producer who, in 1907, created the *Ziegfeld Follies*. The *Ziegfeld Follies* were a showcase of American "beauties," song and dance numbers and comedy routines. These shows were similar to the revues of the French *Folies Bergere*. Ziegfeld produced a new follies each year until the Great Depression of the 1930s.

**Ned Wayburn** (1874–1942)—Wayburn was one of the most famous dance directors of the vaudeville era. He

also opened several dance studios that trained dancers for his shows. He focused on several types of show dancing, including musical comedy dancing, tap dance, ballroom, acrobats and modern ballet.

**Bill "Bojangles" Robinson** (1878–1949, see Figure 9.7)—One of the great tap dancers of the Vaudeville era, Robinson may be best remembered as the person who danced with Shirley Temple in the 1935 movie *The Little Colonel* and the 1938 movie *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. He was also one of the first black performers who presented artistic dance on the vaudeville stage. He had a graceful and delicate style that he perfected throughout his career of sixty years, which included work on Broadway and in movie musicals.



Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Shirley Temple in "Just Around the Corner."

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**Vernon Castle** (1887–1918) and **Irene Castle** (1893–1969)—The Castles were a ballroom dance team introduced to the public by director Ned Wayburn. In addition to being dancers, they were also educators and introduced the public to ballroom dance through stage productions and classroom instruction. The Castles were immensely popular and set the standard for the way people dressed, acted and danced. They were in their heyday from 1912–1918. After Vernon’s death, Irene continued to teach and even made educational dance films.

**Ray Bolger** (1903–1987)—Best known as the actor who played the scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, Bolger was one of vaudeville’s best-loved stars. His specialty was comic dance and his long, lanky frame added to his comic ability.

**Margot Webb** and **Harold Norton**—Known as Norton and Margot, this duo was one of the few African-American ballroom dance couples of the Vaudeville era. Although they adopted a “white” dance vocabulary (or a dance style “reserved” for whites), they were not permitted to perform in the major vaudeville theatres. Nevertheless, their contribution to black dance and elevating the stature of the black artist has not gone unnoticed.

### Broadway and the Movie Musical

**Eubie Blake** (1883–1983)—Blake was a composer and pianist who, together with other artists, created the Broadway musical *Shuffle Along* (considered to be the first African-American musical) in 1921. This production was popular with both white and black audiences and gave validity to the black Broadway artists.

**Albertina Rasch** (1891–1967)—Originally a ballet dancer, Rasch was a dance director who helped to popularize “fancy dancing.” Originally, fancy dancing was comprised of acrobatic tricks, high kicks, splits, etc. Rasch, however, used ballet movements and syncopated dance steps that were set to modern music. She directed a company called the *Albertina Rasch Girls*, who performed worldwide.

**Seymour Felix** (1894–1961)—Felix was also a dance director who was concerned with the storyline of the musical. Beginning with the Rodgers and Hart musical *Peggy Ann*, produced in 1926, Felix was insistent that the dance numbers relate to or enhance the plot of the musical.

**Busby Berkeley** (1895–1976)—Berkeley was a dance director known for his use of “beautiful girls” in his productions. Often the women in a Berkeley number were costumed to look exactly alike. He moved them around on stage in intricate patterns and provided audiences with aerial shots that produced a kaleidoscope effect.

**Bobby Connolly** (1895–1944)—Another dance director of the 1920s, Connolly is best-known for his choreography in *The Wizard of Oz*. He is also credited with bringing “swing” dancing into popularity in musicals.

**Robert Alton** (1902–1957)—A popular dance director from the 1930s to the 1950s, Alton was fond of tap dance and employed it in several of his musicals, including *Anything Goes* and *Pal Joey*. Alton choreographed over thirty-two musicals.

**Josephine Baker** (1906–1975)—Baker began her career during the Vaudeville era and eventually became a protégée of Eubie Blake. In 1925, she performed in Paris and became an instant success. In 1926, she performed at the *Folies-Bergere* and brought the jazz craze in Paris to an all-time high. She is credited with introducing such dances as the Charleston and the Black Bottom to the European audience.

### The Masters of Yesterday and Today

Several ballet and modern dance choreographers (previously discussed in ballet and modern “Major Figures”) have created some of our best-loved jazz, tap and musical theatre choreography. For example: **George Balanchine** (*On Your Toes, I Married an Angel, Babes in Arms, The Boys from Syracuse, Song of Norway and Where’s Charley?*), **Agnes de Mille** (*Oklahoma, Brigadoon, Carousel and Allegro*), **Jerome Robbins** (*On the Town, Fiddler on the Roof, High Button Shoes, West Side Story and The King and I*), **Katherine Dunham** (*Pins and Needles, Cabin in the Sky and Stormy Weather*), **Helen Tamiris** (*Annie Get Your Gun, By the Beautiful Sea and Fanny*), **Hanya Holm** (*Kiss Me Kate, Out of This World and My Fair Lady*), **Valerie Bettis** (*Beggar’s Holiday*), **Twyla Tharp** (*remakes of Hair, Singin’ in the Rain and Movin’ Out*) and **Bill T. Jones** (*Spring Awakening and Fela*).

**Fred Astaire** (1899–1987) and **Ginger Rogers** (1911–1995)—One of America’s most popular dancing couples, Astaire and Rogers combined tap, ballroom and ballet to create some of today’s most memorable dance sequences. Rogers is said to have been a perfect part-

ner to Astaire, who possessed a quality of grace and elegance in his movements. **Hermes Pan** (1910–1990), a Hollywood choreographer, frequently collaborated with Astaire to produce choreography for his dance sequences with Rogers, as well as his solo dances. The magic of Astaire and Rogers can be seen in such movies as *The Gay Divorcee* and *Top Hat*.

**Gene Kelly** (1912–1996, see Figure 9.8)—Kelly also combined tap, ballroom and ballet in his dancing. But unlike Astaire, Kelly was much more of a “physical” and acrobatic dancer. One of the most famous tap dance sequences known today was performed by Kelly in the movie *Singin’ in the Rain*.

**Eleanor Powell** (1912–1982)—Powell began her career in tap dance as a performer in Atlantic City nightclubs, and eventually worked her way to Broadway and later Hollywood. Her tap dancing was defined as “machine-gun footwork.” She was mainly a solo performer, but also danced with Fred Astaire. She was one of the many stars of the great MGM musicals of the 1930s.



Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse on the set of “Brigadoon.”

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**Jack Cole** (1913–1974)—Cole began his career as a dancer with Denishawn and Humphrey-Weidman. The exposure to East Indian dance, introduced to him by Ruth St. Denis, had a lasting effect on him and his choreography became a mixture of jazz and world dance. One example of this unique hybrid is *Kismet*, which is one of Cole’s most popular musicals.

**James “Buster” Brown** (1913–2002)—Buster Brown’s career spanned over seven decades, beginning as a tap dancer in vaudeville shows and ending as a dancer on Broadway and in movies. He is the 1998 recipient of the American Tap Dance Legend Award. He performed with Gregory Hines in the film *The Cotton Club*, and was also a beloved tap teacher and choreographer.

**Frankie Manning** (1915–2009)—Manning was a Harlem dancer noted for being one of the pioneers of the Lindy Hop, a social dance popular in the 1930s and 40s. Manning is credited with creating the “air step,” in which the female partner was thrown in the air and landed in perfect timing with the music. In 1989, Manning co-choreographed the Broadway show *Black and Blue* (along with Fayard Nicholas, Cholly Atkins and Henry LaTang), and won the Tony Award for Best Choreography. Manning went on to create dances for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and other companies.

**Fayard Nicholas** (1919–2006) and **Harold Nicholas** (1924–2000)—Better known as the Nicholas Brothers, they were a tap dancing act that performed many acrobatic movements in their dance routines. They performed in such movies as *The Pirates* and *Stormy Weather*.

**Michael Kidd** (1919–2007)—An outstanding musical theatre choreographer, Kidd won Tony Awards for his choreography in *Finian’s Rainbow*, *Guys and Dolls* and *Can-Can*. One of his best-loved movie musicals is *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, with choreography that combines square dance, folk, ballet and modern with highly stylized acrobatic movements.

**Gower Champion** (1921–1980)—Before becoming a noted choreographer and director, Champion was a dancer and appeared in several musicals with his wife and dance partner, **Marge** (b. 1923). As a director, he was an expert at “musical staging,” which linked the acting and the dancing. Some of America’s best-loved musicals that Champion choreographed and directed include *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Carnival*, *Hello, Dolly!*, *I Do! I Do!* and *42nd Street*.

**Charles “Honi” Coles** (1921–1992)—Coles is credited with creating high-speed rhythm tap and was known for his complex rhythmic patterns and movements. He was partnered with **Charles “Cholly” Atkins** (1913–2003), who was known as a master of the soft shoe. Together they performed around the country for over twenty years, building their act into a comedy and dance routine. After their duet broke up, Coles and Atkins still performed sporadically for several years at benefits and reunion concerts. Atkins went on to become a choreographer for the groups at Motown Records. Coles was “rediscovered” in the late 1970s and choreographed on Broadway for performances such as *Bubbling Brown Sugar*.

**Cyd Charisse** (1922–2008, see Figure 9.8)—In the late 1930s, Charisse was a resident ballet dancer for MGM studios and is famous for her frequent pairings in movies with Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. One of her most famous dance sequences appeared in the film *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), in a section known as the *Broadway Melody* finale. Fred Astaire referred to her as “beautiful dynamite.”

**Sammy Davis, Jr.** (1925–1990)—Sammy Davis, Jr.’s career began as a young child, when he danced on the Vaudeville stage. Davis became a famous singer, dancer and actor and performed in all facets of the theatre on Broadway, in movies, nightclubs, etc. He is considered one of the best tap dancers and all-around entertainers ever known in this country.

**Luigi** (1925–2015)—Another master teacher, Luigi, who was based in New York City, developed a technique and style that was uniquely his own and is studied by students all over the world. It includes the use of specific arm and hand positions, as well as shoulder, upper torso and hip movements.

**Gwen Verdon** (1925–2000)—Trained in ballet, Verdon came to jazz dance after seeing Jack Cole perform. She worked with Cole for many years and was his assistant. She also worked with Michael Kidd, as well as Bob Fosse, whom she married. Also an outstanding actor and singer, Verdon appeared in several plays and movie musicals, including *Can-Can*, *Damn Yankees!*, *Redhead*, *Sweet Charity* and *Chicago*.

**Bob Fosse** (1927–1987)—One of jazz dance’s foremost choreographers, Fosse’s choreography is recognizable by its angular shapes, undulating hip and shoulder movements, hip isolations and turned-in legs. Fosse has provided the choreography and direction for some

of America’s best-loved musicals: *Pippin*, *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, *Dancin’*, and *Sweet Charity*, among others.

**Jimmy Slide** (1927–2008)—As a tap teacher, Slide stresses the importance of learning the foundational movements of tap and for also learning to slide the taps close to the floor. His innovative tap style that blends tap and jazz has given him the reputation as an outstanding dancer and choreographer. In 2003, he won a Guggenheim Fellowship for Choreography. He has danced in films and on Broadway, and received a Tony Award nomination for his role in *Black and Blue* (1989).

**Gus Giordano** (1930–2008)—One of today’s leading jazz teachers, Giordano developed the Jazz Dance World Congress, an organization created to preserve and expand the world of jazz dance. Based in Chicago, Giordano has had a jazz company and school since 1962.

**Chita Rivera** (b. 1933)—Rivera has appeared in the choreography of Michael Kidd, Jerome Robbins, Gower Champion and Jack Cole, to name a few. Her outstanding singing and acting ability has made her one of musical theatre’s biggest stars. In 1992, she wowed audiences in the Broadway musical *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

**Shirley Maclaine** (b. 1934)—For many years Maclaine was a “chorus girl.” She eventually became one of the most famous dancing and acting stars. One of her most popular roles was in the movie version of *Sweet Charity*.

**Brenda Bufalino** (b. 1937)—Bufalino is the artistic director of the American Tap Dance Foundation, one of the few dance companies that dedicate themselves exclusively to tap dance. Her choreography is complex, with movements that are syncopated and dynamic.

**Tommy Tune** (b. 1939)—Best known for his outstanding tap dance ability, Tune is also a choreographer and director, as well as a performer (one of the few artists who has been able to combine so many facets of the theatre into his working life). He has choreographed and directed some of Broadway’s most popular shows, including *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, *A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine*, *Cloud 9*, *My One and Only* and the re-make of *Bye Bye Birdie*.

**Lynn Dally** (b. 1941)—Although she grew up studying tap, Dally began her career as a modern dancer, but eventually moved to Los Angeles and in 1979 founded

the Jazz Tap Ensemble. This company is one of the leading jazz and tap companies in the country and features both dancers and jazz musicians. Dally is interested in showing different cultural influences in her choreography.

**Michael Bennett** (1943–1987)—One of America’s most famous Broadway choreographers, Bennett created one of Broadway’s most popular musicals, *A Chorus Line*. He began dancing as a child and at the young age of twenty-three won a Tony Award for his choreography in *A Joyful Noise*. Several more Tony Awards were awarded to him throughout his career. Among his choreography and directing accomplishments are *Company*, *Follies* and *Dream Girls*.

**Gregory Hines** (1946–2003)—Paired with his brother Maurice, Hines began tap dancing at a young age. Much of the resurgence of popularity that tap has enjoyed since the 1980s can be attributed to the many outstanding tap performances done by Hines. These performances can be seen in such movies as *White Nights* and *Tap*.

**Lynne Taylor-Corbett** (b. 1947)—Taylor-Corbett has created many dances for modern and ballet companies, but she is best known for her work in theatre and film. She choreographed the films *Footloose* and *My Blue Heaven*, as well as Disney’s stage show *Aladdin*. In 2000, she received two Tony Award nominations and a Drama Desk nomination for her direction and choreography for Broadway’s *Swing!*, and also choreographed *Chess* and *Titanic* for the Broadway stage.

**Danny Buraczeski** (b. 1949)—Buraczeski studied ballet and modern dance before landing on Broadway. His choreography is directly linked to his use of jazz music, in that both are rhythmically and dynamically complex.

**Wayne Cilento** (b. 1949)—Cilento has worked in national commercials, music videos and on the concert stage. He is also one of Broadway’s best choreographers, and created the movement for *Sweet Charity* (revival), *Wicked*, *Aida*, *The Who’s Tommy*, among others. He has also done staging for pop and rock stars, such as Alicia Keys, Barry Manilow, Billy Joel, Donna Summer and Pete Townshend.

**Billy Siegenfeld** (b. 1949)—As the artistic director and main choreographer for the Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, Siegenfeld is concerned with showing the strong connection between jazz dance and jazz music. His choreography depicts all of the rhythms, flavors and com-

plexities found in jazz music. He has choreographed on companies such as the José Limon Dance Company, Joffrey II and Gus Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago.

**Debbie Allen** (b. 1950)—Best known for her role on the television series *Fame*, Allen is not only an outstanding dancer but also one of today’s best-known jazz dance choreographers (also one of the few women recognized in this field). With both television and Broadway experience, Allen is also respected as a director.

**Susan Stroman** (b. 1954)—Stroman is one of the few women who both choreograph and direct for movies and live musicals. She is best known for her choreography and direction of the “dance play” *Contact*, which won the 2000 Tony Award for Best Musical. She has also collaborated with writer and actor Mel Brooks, and worked with him on the musical version of *The Producers*. In 2005, she made her directorial debut as a feature filmmaker with the big screen adaptation of the show. In 2007, she again collaborated with Brooks, as director and choreographer of the Broadway musical *Young Frankenstein*. She is also the director and choreographer of the musical *Happiness*.

**Rob Marshall** (b. 1960)—Marshall began performing as a child and continued to dance as an adult until an injury (while performing in a production of *Cats*), made him make the decision to go into choreography and directing. He is best known for his choreography and direction of the movie version of *Chicago*, starring Renée Zellweger and Catherine Zeta-Jones, which received six Academy Awards including Best Picture. For Broadway, he has choreographed *Cabaret*, *Damn Yankees*, *Company* and *Victor/Victoria*.

**Kathleen Marshall** (b. 1962)—Younger sister of Rob Marshall, she is also an outstanding choreographer and director. She has choreographed more than ten Broadway shows, and won two Tony Awards for *The Pajama Game* and *Wonderful Town*. She was seen as a judge on the reality show *Grease: You’re the One That I Want*, which she choreographed and directed for Broadway after TV viewers selected the two lead characters.

**Casey Nicholaw** (b. 1962)—Nominated for Best Choreography for *Spamalot*, Nicholaw then went on to direct and choreograph the 2006 Broadway hit *The Drowsy Chaperone*. Before he began choreographing and directing, Nicholaw starred in eight Broadway shows, including *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Seussical: The Musical*, and *Saturday Night Fever*.

**Adam Shankman** (b. 1964)—Many people know Shankman as one of the judges on the television show *So You Think You Can Dance*. Shankman, however, has a long list of movie credits that includes bringing the Broadway hit *Hairspray* to the big screen. For many years, he was known as one of the best music video choreographers, creating music videos for such artists as Whitney Houston, the B-52's and Stevie Wonder.

**Acia Gray** (b. 1960)—A rhythm tap dancer and choreographer, Gray is also the co-founder and artistic director of Tapestry Dance Company. She works to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary tap dance. She sees tap as a form of communication and has said that tap dancing is just another way of talking.

**Herbin "Tamango" Van Cayseele** (b. 1965)—Tamango is an award-winning tap dancer and the artistic director of Urban Tap, a company that performs tap, *capoeira*, African dance and hip-hop. A former star of the show *Riverdance*, Tamango has gone on to thrill audiences with his diverse group of energetic dancers and unique choreography.

**Napoleon D'umo** (b. 1968) and **Tabitha D'umo** (b. 1973)—Tabitha and Napoleon are a married couple who choreograph together and are often said to have developed a new style of hip-hop, called lyrical hip-hop. Working together since 1996, they are best known for their choreography on the television show *So You Think You Can Dance*. Napoleon and Tabitha are also choreographers for MTV's *America's Best Dance Crew*.

**Andy Blankenbuehler** (b. 1970) is a choreographer who won the Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for his choreography for the Broadway musical *In the Heights*. He also created the choreography for *Nine to Five*, *The Wiz*, *Bring It On: The Musical*, and *Hamilton*.

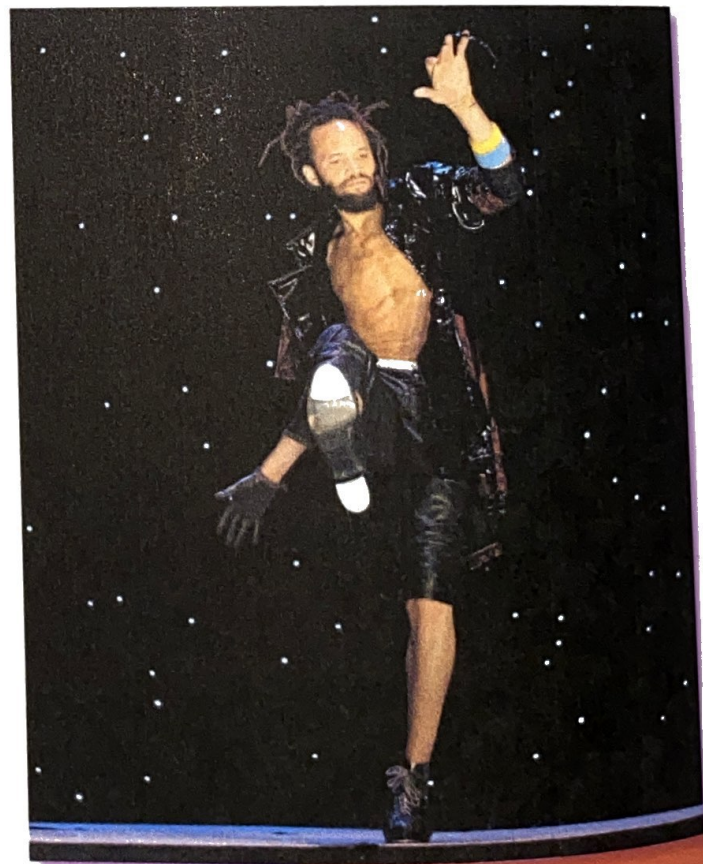
**Keith "Tyce" Diorio** (b. 1970)—Diorio is best known for his work as a choreographer and guest judge on the television show *So You Think You Can Dance*. He has choreographed for and performed with some of the biggest names in pop music, such as Paula Abdul, Janet Jackson and Jennifer Lopez. He also played a lead role in the Broadway production of *Fosse*.

**Savion Glover** (b. 1973, see Figure 9.9)—As a child, Glover starred in *The Tap Dance Kid* on Broadway, which led to parts in other plays such as *Black and Blue* and *Jelly's Last Jam*. He also starred in the movie *Tap*, with Gregory Hines and Sammy Davis, Jr. Glover has since starred in and choreographed *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* on Broadway, which depicts the African-American struggle through tap, rap, hip-hop and funk.

**Ayodele Casel** (b. 1976)—A dynamic tap dancer, Casel was the first female to dance with Savion Glover's company Not Your Ordinary Tappers. She was featured in a classical concerto written by composer Rob Kapilow, where she, as the tap dancer, was the "musical" soloist. She continually performs before sold-out audiences and is one of today's leading tap dancers.

**Sonya Tayeh** (b. 1978) is a dance teacher and jazz and contemporary choreographer, best known for her choreography on the television series *So You Think You Can Dance*. In 2013, she was nominated for an Emmy Award for her work on season nine. Tayeh has choreographed for pop stars such as Madonna, Florence and the Machine and Kylie Minogue, as well as dance companies such as the Los Angeles Ballet, Martha Graham Dance Company and the San Jose Repertory Theater.

**Jumaane Taylor** (b. 1986)—Born and raised in Chicago, Taylor is best known for his tap dance style in which he keeps the feet very close to the floor, producing intricate and quick sounds and rhythms. He is one of the rising stars of tap dance.



**FIGURE 9.9**

Savion Glover is a popular "rhythm tapper" who brings attention to intricate and percussive footwork.

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