



Walton Arts Center

Performance Guide



Dorrance Dance



Photo Credit: Hayim Heron

MacArthur Fellow Michelle Dorrance has changed the world's conversation about tap dance with her innovative choreography and rhythm tap style. A leader in a historically male dominated field, Dorrance has renewed interest in this quintessential American art form. Focused on musicality and improvisation, contemporary tap dance is part of the jazz tradition continuum. Dorrance Dancers heat up the stage with a collective spirit and exuberant fun!

Ideas for Curriculum Connections

Arkansas Learning Standards: Fine Arts Standards

Music: P.6.5.3; CRA.SL.1; R.7.6.1, R.7.7.1, R.7.8.1; R.7.6.3, R.7.7.3, R.7.8.3; R.8.6.1, R.8.7.1, R.8.8.1; CN.10.6.1, CN.10.7.1, CN.10.8.1; Cn.11.6.1, CN.11.7.1, CN.11.8.1, CN.11.6.2, CN.11.7.2, CN.11.8.2. Fine Arts Standards Dance: R.1.DAP.1, R.1.DAP.2, R.1.DAP.3; R.2.DAP.1; CN.5.DAP.1; CN.5.DAP.3; CN.5.DAP.5



Photo Credit: Matthew Murphy

The Artist

Michelle Dorrance is an internationally renowned tap dancer and choreographer, known for simultaneously revering the form's roots while pushing it into new territory. Dorrance, whose mother was a professional ballet dancer, began studying ballet at the age of three and quickly gravitated toward tap. Tap dancers consider themselves to be musicians as well as dancers and as she said, "to be able to be a dancer and a musician at the same time, there's nothing like it."

Dorrance believes that tap is a uniquely American art form like jazz, worthy of acceptance in the academy and on the concert stage. At the same time, she is connected to tap's history and origins in the devastating conditions of slavery. She considers it a very transcendent form, born of some of the most oppressed people our country and culture has known, yet able to find its way to joy.

The Company

Today, most of our awareness of tap comes from movies and musicals, leading some to dismiss it as less artistically potent than other forms of modern dance. Dorrance founded Dorrance Dance in early 2011 to help audiences view the old jazz form of tap dance in a modern, dynamically compelling context. The company includes 15 dancers who also collaborate with musicians and other choreographers. Her approach to choreography involves complex movements and frequent collaboration with musicians, other choreographers and audio engineers. Upon awarding Dorrance a 2015 "Genius Grant," the McArthur Foundation wrote, "Dorrance maintains the essential layering of rhythms in tap but

choreographs ensemble works that engage the entire body: dancers sweep, bend, leap and twist with a dramatic expression that is at once musical and visual."

The Origins of Tap

Tap dance originated in the United States in the early 19th century at the crossroads of African and Irish American dance forms. When slave owners took away traditional African percussion instruments, slaves turned to percussive dancing to express themselves and retain their cultural identities. These styles of dance connected with clog dancing from the British Isles, creating a unique form of movement and rhythm. Early tap shoes had wooden soles, sometimes with pennies attached to the heel and toe. Tap gained popularity after the Civil War as a part of traveling minstrel shows.

In the early 20th century, it was an important feature of popular vaudeville variety shows and a major part of the rich creative output of the Harlem Renaissance. Tap dancers began to collaborate with jazz musicians, incorporating improvisation and complex syncopated rhythms into their movement. From the 1930s to the 1950s, tap dance sequences became a staple of movies and televisions.

Today, tap continues to be an important part of American vernacular dance. Modern tap dancers are informed by the traditions, movements and styles of their predecessors while continuing to push the limits of their art form. Tap is also gaining long-deserved recognition on the concert stage, at major dance festivals and in university classrooms.

Learning Activities

Before the performance

Research famous American tap dancers.

Compose a Tap Biography Poem comparing dancers.

- Fred Astaire
- Eleanor Powell
- Gregory Hines
- Bill "Bojangles" Robinson
- Savion Glover
- Shirley Temple
- Gene Kelly
- The Nichols Brothers
- Ginger Rogers
- Sammy Davis Jr.
- Ruby Keeler

Writing Activity

Write a short biography poem about the dancer you researched. A biography poem gives information about who we are and what makes us unique. Imagine you are in the world of the tap dancer. Complete the bio-poem form (this page) and use the words from your form to compose a poem. Think of words in a rhythm. Read and rehearse your poem. Use percussion instruments to accent the rhythm of your poem.

Poem Format

Name of Tap Dancer:

Four Adjectives:

Who feels:

Who needs:

Who likes:

Who would like to:

Who likes the rhythm of:

Author's name:



Photo Credit: Matthew Murphy

Post Performance Learning Activity

Choreography is the series or combination of movements that creates these fundamental patterns in time and space. Like words in a sentence, the individual movements are just as important as the product of their combination. Tap dances are comprised of different combinations of basic moves. Here are some options to explore as you think about tap dance. Find video examples online and ask students to try them.

- Toe: Strike the floor with the toe
- Heel: Strike the floor with the heel
- Heel Tap: Strike the floor with the heel, immediately followed by strike of the toe
- Brush: While standing on one leg, sweep the other leg forward across the floor (known as a "spank" when the free leg sweeps backwards)
- Scuff: Similar to a brush, but hitting the floor with the heel instead of sweeping the shoe
- Shuffle: The combination of two brushes
- Flap: Brush forward and a step (similar to a walking step, only done on the ball of the foot, the heel does not touch the floor)
- Ball Chain: A transfer of weight from the front foot to the ball of the back foot.



Photo credit: Christopher Duggan

Reflect and Assess

Help students develop and expand their responses to concert dance.

- Describe the performance of one dance in as much detail as possible.
- How was the dance organized? (Simple or complex floor patterns? Movement sequences? Pantomime representation? Solo or ensemble?)
- Describe the characters. Who were they? What were they doing? Why?
- What choices did the choreographer make that you noticed?
- What did you like most about the live performance? Dances? Costumes? Set? Props? Music?
- How did movement elements of body, energy, space and time convey mood?
- How did the music help tell the story?
- Can you connect your own experience with any movement in the performance?
- Did the artists express a universal feeling or idea?

Learn More Online

Official website of Dorrance Dance

www.dorrancedance.com/

Official website of Michelle Dorrance

www.michelledorrance.com/

Tap Dance in America: A Short History, from the Library of Congress

www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200217630/

Volume 15 Number 11

Colgate Classroom Series performances help students meet Arkansas Learning Standards.

Learn more at:

www.waltonartscenter.org

Walton Arts Center

Learning & Engagement

Laura Goodwin, *Vice President*

Dr. Patricia Relph, *Arts Learning Specialist*

Mallory Barker, *School Services Specialist*

Meghan Foehl, *Engagement Coordinator*

Sallie Zazal, *Learning Coordinator*

Juniper Patel, *Learning & Engagement Intern*



Find us on Facebook!

Walton Arts Center

Learning & Engagement

Walton Arts Center **2018/19 Learning programming** is **generously supported** by these funders, sponsors and benefactors:

Education Sponsors:

Colgate-Palmolive
JB Hunt
Tyson
Unilever
Saatchi & Saatchi X
Walmart

Education Grantors:

Arkansas Arts Council
Bank of America
Baum Charitable Foundation
The John F. Kennedy Center
for the Performing Arts
Walmart Foundation
The Walton Family Foundation

Education Partners:

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
UA Center for Children & Youth

Additional support for arts education programs comes from all *Friends of Walton Arts Center*.

Become a Friend!

More than 900 *Friends of Walton Arts Center* support arts education programming with their annual support. Become a *Friend* today and help Walton Arts Center continue to serve even more students over the next year.

For more information on the *Friends of Walton Arts Center* program, please call **479.571.2784** or visit **waltonartscenter.org/donate**



Walton Arts Center