

Teaching the Beauty of a Tap Melody



Practical Instructions and Impulses
for Teaching Tap Dance

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"Thank you for the beautiful tap melody",
a student tells me after class,
and I remember why I love to teach tap.





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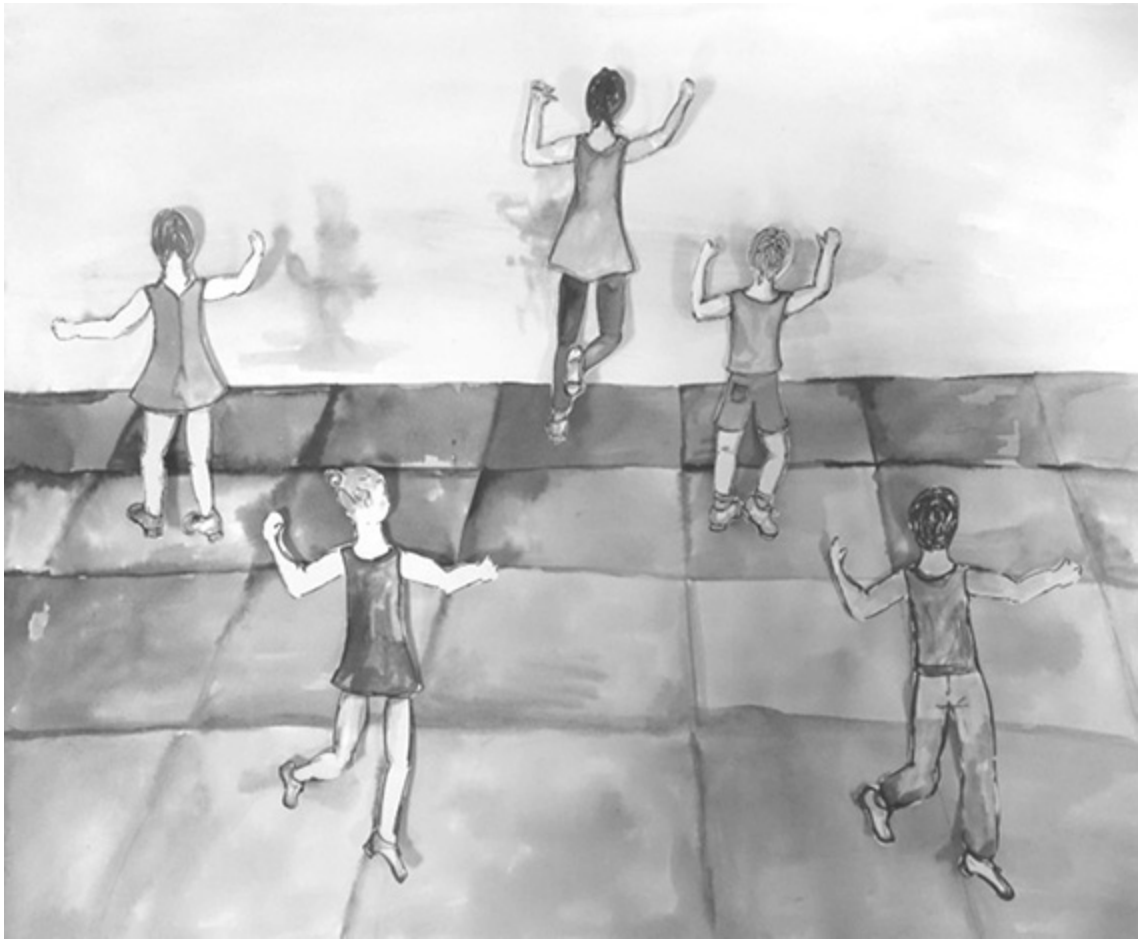
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Preparation



It is shortly before class.

On a good day I have a perfectly planned preparation for class with a fine warm-up and exercises for technique and rhythm. The exercises elegantly lead to new material and at the end of the well-timed lesson we still have time to repeat the material from last week.

On a different day I rush into class, stressed and unprepared. I spontaneously think of a warm-up and the whole lesson will be improvised.

Both of it may work out really well or not so well.

The difference is that I am much better with preparation in the background - I am relaxed, I can also deviate from the structure if, as almost always happens, something goes differently than I had imagined and I am open and attentive to my students.

I have been a tap dancer and teacher for over 25 years, and especially at the beginning of this time I often wished for a book that would have helped me with practical guidance for teaching tap. There are books that have inspired me personally as a tap dancer, most notably Acia Gray's *The Souls of your Feet*, Brenda Bufalino's *Tapping the Source* and

Rusty Frank's *Tap!* Unfortunately, there were none that would have been specifically helpful for my classes, so over the course of many hours of practice, preparation and teaching, I developed my own concept, which I suspect will remain in constant evolution.

When I started teaching, I knew exactly three short choreographies and had had regular tap dance lessons myself for two years. (Many thanks at this point to Irina Maué, who awakened my enthusiasm and laid the foundations for this very special dance form that combines dance and music).

Before I taught a tap dance class for the first time, I didn't know much about music and rhythm - most of it had worked intuitively until then. But now it was necessary to understand what I was doing so that I could explain how choreographies are structured, how music is constructed and how music and steps relate to each other.

I had also only thought about technique as much as I needed to be able to reproduce what I had learned in class as well as possible.

However, coming up with choreographies or exercises myself seemed to be the biggest challenge. I accepted the challenge and started to think about everything that lies behind the steps, combinations, choreographies and exercises.

And I thought about teaching, that is, about how I could bring the participants closer to everything that tap dance is for me.

In this book I try to describe these reflections and my teaching concept, hoping that it can be helpful to other tap dance teachers.

Of course, my concept is not finished - with every lesson, every new group and every new participant, something new happens that helps me to develop. This is therefore my personal interim report for you!

The first chapters correspond to the possible contents of a lesson or workshop. I don't teach every section in every class, but I always start with a warm-up, and there is almost always one or more exercises on technique and/or rhythm. Since we usually work on a choreography, there is almost always a new step combination and repetitions of the material already learned.

I offer improvisation exercises from time to time; in some groups more often, in other groups less often.

Body percussion is a whole area of its own - some exercises are suitable here as a warm-up; but I also teach a complete body percussion choreography from time to time.

At the end of the book I have added a few reflections on music.

Each chapter contains concrete exercises and reflections on the respective topic. The exercises are designed for groups, but can also be done in groups of two or in individual lessons without any problems.

In principle, all exercises practice rhythm and technique (and posture and balance), and most of the exercises can also be used as warm-up exercises.

Some of the exercises I have learnt over the years in workshops, seminars and further training with other teachers in the fields of tap dance, movement and dance improvisation and sometimes modified and/or extended, others I have invented myself. At the end of the book you will find a list of tap dancers, dancers and teachers who have supported me in my development.