

# The Evolution of Tap Dancing: Tapping Through the Eras



## Origins and Early Influences

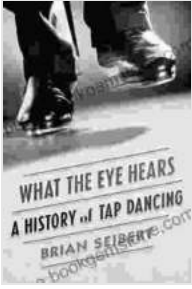
Tap dancing, a vibrant and rhythmic art form, traces its roots to the early 1800s in the African American communities of the United States. It emerged as a synthesis of African polyrhythmic footwork and the rhythmic traditions of Irish and Appalachian clog dancing.

### What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dancing

by Brian Seibert

★★★★★ 4.7 out of 5

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Irish step dancers, who had immigrated to the US, showcased their intricate footwork at social gatherings. African American dancers, inspired by these performances, began to incorporate elements of Irish stepping into their own percussive dances. This fusion gave birth to a new style known as "buck and wing" dancing.

### **Buck and Wing: The Precursor**

Buck and wing dancing, popular in the 1840s-1860s, involved complex footwork and elaborate arm gestures. Dancers would perform syncopated rhythms, tapping their feet on wooden floors or metal plates. This style emphasized quick, percussive steps and improvisational elements.



## **The Evolution of Tap Shoes**

In the 1890s, a pivotal innovation transformed tap dancing: the invention of metal taps. Originally, dancers attached metal plates to the soles of their shoes, but these proved cumbersome and noisy. In 1896, the first patented tap shoes were created by William Henry Lane, an Irish-American vaudeville performer.

These shoes had small metal plates called "taps" attached to the toes and heels. They allowed dancers to produce a wider range of sounds and rhythms, enhancing the percussive aspect of the dance.



## **The Golden Age of Tap Dancing**

The early 20th century marked the "Golden Age of Tap Dancing." Vaudeville and Broadway stages became the platforms for tap dancers to showcase their skills. Performers like Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers popularized the art form.

Robinson, known for his lightning-fast footwork and improvisational brilliance, became a legend in the entertainment industry. Astaire and Rogers mesmerized audiences with their elegant and sophisticated tap routines in films like "Swing Time" and "Top Hat."



## **Tap Dancing in the Modern Era**

The popularity of tap dancing declined somewhat after the Golden Age, but it continued to evolve and find new expressions. In the 1950s and 1960s, jazz tap dance emerged, fusing jazz music with tap rhythms. Performers like Gregory Hines and Savion Glover pushed the boundaries of the art form.

Today, tap dancing remains a vibrant and versatile dance style. It is taught in dance schools worldwide and is often incorporated into musical theater, film, and television performances.

## **Regional Variations and Substyles**

Over the decades, tap dancing has developed regional variations and substyles. Some notable examples include:

- **Harlem Tap:** Originating in Harlem, New York, this style emphasizes syncopated rhythms and complex footwork.
- **Chicago Tap:** Developed in Chicago, Illinois, this style is known for its fast tempos, improvisational solos, and "shuffles" (sliding steps).
- **Rhythm Tap:** This style focuses on precise rhythms and intricate foot patterns, often accompanied by music.
- **Jazz Tap:** Fuses jazz music and tap rhythms, incorporating improvisation and syncopated steps.

## Legacy and Influence

Tap dancing has had a profound impact on the world of dance and beyond. Its rhythmic vitality and expressive power continue to inspire performers and audiences alike.

The legacy of tap dancing is evident in various aspects of popular culture, from musicals and films to television shows and music videos. It has also influenced other dance styles, including jazz, hip-hop, and funk.

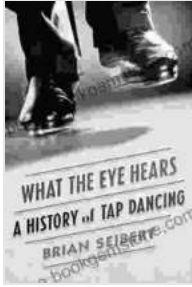
As a testament to its enduring popularity, tap dancing remains a beloved and cherished art form, captivating audiences worldwide with its intricate footwork, rhythmic expression, and timeless appeal.

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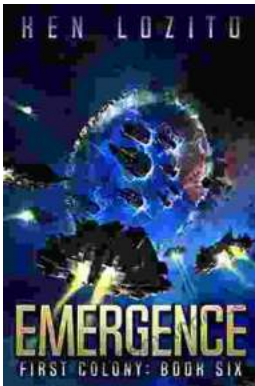
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