

BEYOND THE SCORE

ISSUE EIGHT

JAZZ & MUSICAL
THEATRE

THEY'VE GOT
RHYTHM:
THE
GERSHWIN
BROTHERS

THE HISTORY OF
TAP DANCE

TAP LEGENDS

JAZZING THINGS UP PART 2

A CLOSER LOOK AT MUSICAL THEATRE

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"An improvisation measures a jazz musician's artistry - and the improvisation varies every time. When a jazz ensemble plays, performers take turns improvising on the same borrowed material, each person handling it in a unique fashion. Knowledgeable listeners appreciate the pressure that each soloist faces - to produce a compelling performance "on the spot". "

- Musical Theater An Appreciation, pg. 171

JAZZ &

MUSICAL THEATRE

The style of jazz music is absolutely evident in musicals then and now. It's important to note that I specifically stated "the style of jazz", not "jazz music" itself. This is because the art of "real" jazz isn't necessarily presented in musical theatre. "Real" jazz is full of musical improvisation, while musicals follow a set score. When creating a jazzy style musical, composers will often use swing rhythms, musical chords, and instruments to give a song that jazzy feel. However, there is no improvisation.



THEY'VE GOT RHYTHM
THE GERSHWIN BROTHERS



TIMELESS TUNES

Have you ever experienced the rousing beat of “I’ve Got Rhythm”? Or felt the sweet melody of “Someone to Watch Over Me”? Perhaps you’ve listened to “Rhapsody in Blue” with curiosity and interest. Most likely, you have heard a Gershwin song sometime in your musical life. That’s because George and Ira Gershwin are among some of the famous writing duos in musical and musical theatre history.

MAKING A MARK

ON BROADWAY

George’s innovative musical compositions paired with Ira’s clever lyrics were what landed them their first Broadway show, *Lady Be Good!* This show hit the stage in 1924 starring Fred and Adele Astaire, who tap danced their way to fame because of their performance. Later these brothers would write another show, *Girl Crazy*, which would later be the inspiration for the new Gerswhin musical, *Crazy for You* which premiered in 1992.

Click on George to hear one of his most famous pieces, “Rhapsody in Blue”.



JAZZ INFLUENCE

There are so many things that can be said about the Gershwin brothers. Their influence in music and in the theatre has left a long-lasting effect for good. The jazz style that George Gershwin implemented in his musical scores reflects a lot of how we view jazz in musical theatre specifically today.

THE HISTORY OF TAP DANCE

While tap dancing began with wooden soles to make the percussive sounds, by the 20th century this was replaced with metal plates, or what we call “taps” today. Tap dancers began to collaborate with jazz musicians during this time and were able to improvise and create cool rhythms. Vaudeville and Broadway also saw a lot of tapping and it quickly became a very popular form of entertainment.



Always wanted to learn to tap but weren't sure if it was for you? Check out this video and try it out! You don't even need tap shoes to follow along with the instructor! Just click on the tap shoes!

"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."

- University of Michigan, Universal Musical Society

TAP

LEGENDS

An accomplished dancer and choreographer. He won a Tony Award for Best Choreography for the 1996 musical *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*. He also starred in the musical *The Tap Kid Dance Kid*.



SAVION GLOVER

GREGORY HINES

This talented actor and dancer was known for his intricate tap rhythms and improvisations. He won a Tony Award for Best Actor in the musical *Jelly's Last Jam*, and was in numerous films and television.



JENI LEGON

First black woman to become a prominent tap soloist in the 20th century. She would wear pants in order to do complicated movements and dances. She was a trailblazer for women in the tap world during a time where the dance form was male-dominated.



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