



Photo: B. Blasko/Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

## STORIES OF TAP FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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**Crazy (and Magical) Counterpoint  
at the American Tap Dance Foundation's Gala at Symphony Space  
New York City  
April 15, 2013**

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**Veronica Hackethal for *The Dance Enthusiast***

(for more Tap on The Dance Enthusiast click here for TDE ASKS [Brenda Bufalino](#))

On Tuesday, April 9, [The American Tap Dance Foundation \(ATDF\)](#) held its annual gala at the Leonard Nimoy Thalia Theater at Symphony Space to raise money for the [Gregory Hines Youth Scholarship Fund](#). The evening began with a cocktail reception and silent auction, followed by a special tap dance version of *From the Horse's Mouth*, a famous celebratory dance series created by Tina Croll and Jamie Cunningham fourteen years ago. In this production, artists share stories of their experiences in the dance world while performing and improvising together. Since its founding, *From the Horse's Mouth* has been produced across the US and Canada, and has been performed by over 1,000 dancers of all ages dancing in a wide variety of styles. Tonight it was all syncopated stories.



American Tap Dance Foundation Director, Tony Waag & Jason Samuels Smith; Photo © Wallace Flores

### **Tales of Tap :**

Members of the Tap City Youth Ensemble, the Tap City Junior Ensemble, and ATDF Youth Program students, Paget Berzins, Ronan Berzins, Adrianna Valentin, and Jaylyn Watson danced alongside the seasoned professionals Brenda Bufalino, Debi Field, Felipe Galganni, Susan Hebach, Kazu Kumagai, Toni Noblett, Max Pollak, Claudia Rahardjanoto, Randy Skinner, Jason Samuels Smith, and Tony Waag.

Theo Hill accompanied on piano with excerpts from jazz and Broadway favorites : *42nd Street*, *Spiritual State*, *I'm Just Breezing Along with the Breeze*, and *Shadow of Your Smile*.

Kazunori Kumagai, also know as "The Japanese Gregory Hines", shared his story about growing up in Sendai, Japan. Kumagai was so inspired by watching Gregory Hines tap dance on TV that he used to tap dance everywhere. His friends thought he was crazy, and his teacher told him to study and "get a real job." But the pull of tapping was too strong, and Kazu headed for NYC.



Kazu Kumagai with ATDF students in the background; Photo Photo © Wallace Flores

A member of the Tap Dance youth ensemble, Adrianna Valentin , spoke about feeling shy and nervous at her first audition. Tapping helped her overcome her fears. It taught her that she could go into an audition with confidence and not beat herself up for making mistakes. Jaylyn Watson's story revealed the struggles of male dancers. He described being teased for liking tap and not sports. He was about to quit, but came back to tapping when he found an ADTA class with three other boys.

Jason Samuels Smith, whose cherry-red tap shoes hit the stage like thunder and lightening, had a similar story. At age 11, under peer pressure to participate in sports, he gave up tapping, but re-discovered it in the Bronx, when an injured friend was unable to perform and Jason was convinced to take his place. He has since danced on Broadway in *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*, as a special guest star on *So You Think You Can Dance*, and in London at Sadlers Wells and the Royal Festival Hall.



Tony Waag, American Tap Dance Foundation Director & Jason Samuels Smith; Photo Courtesy Photo © Wallace Flores

The young tap students took the stage wearing black pants and black t-shirts emblazoned with "Tap City." They dueled in syncopated duets, alternating with joyful solos. Smiles all around accompanied loose-limbed, light-hearted tapping that felt like a spring romp in the park. The virtuoso masters played with the younger generation, sharing their personal reminiscences of how they became hooked on tap and what the art means to them. Performers underscored words with the emotive force of their taps—a light-hearted shuffle-ball-change with a stomp, to accompany joke; a wing or a shuffle-hop-step, to indicate joy and accomplishment, and all manner of improvised variations in between.



Claudia Rahardjanoto, Randy Skinner, Jason Samuels Smith, Toni Noblett & Susan Hebach; Photo © Wallace Flores

Brief dance segments separated the verbal stories. Brenda Bufalino's taps whispered across the stage, only momentarily resting so that she could tell the audience that tap dancers are musicians with their feet. Max Pollack expanded on this by making music with his entire body: clapping his hands, slapping his upper arms, and singing in Spanish what seemed like a mysterious chant straight out of the *selva* - all accompanied by the percussion of his feet. Susan Hebach, noted tap dance teacher and author, shared a childhood story about how she'd been practicing her steps in school when an annoying little girl classmate interfered, asking why she wasn't tapping with wild abandon. Back then, Hebach said that she thought that tapping was all about learning the steps. Later, in a master class in New York City with Gregory Hines, she realized that the bothersome little girl in grade school actually had a good idea of what tap was all about - a crazy counterpoint duet of improvisation. This was an excellent take home point for the entire evening.

The performance ended with the entire cast circling on stage in a joyful frolic.

#### More about the American Tap Dance Foundation

ATDF is a non-profit organization founded in 1986. Among its many activities, ATDF works to preserve tap dance as an American art form through the development of The Gregory Hines

Collection of American Tap Dance Archives at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. ATDF offers educational programs for all ages through its Tap Dance Conservatory, and has specific programs for youngsters. The Youth & Teen Training Program is for children and teens ages 3 1/2 – 19. Through the Tap City Youth Ensemble, intermediate and advanced tap dancers ages 10 to 18 have the opportunity to work with professional choreographers and learn classic and contemporary tap repertory. They also perform in various venues across New York City, including The New York City Tap Festival each July. ADTA also has a partnership with the Middle School Jazz Academy at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

The gala raised funds for the Gregory Hines Youth Scholarship Fund which offers scholarships based on needs and artistic merit for serious tap students ages 4 – 19. The program offers training and performance opportunities to youth who may otherwise be excluded due to financial circumstances, and encourages pre-professional students to continue their dance education.

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