

Theatre

Transcendental Tap: Rhythm and Shoes

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Tap Dance is a uniquely American art form, and at the 2007 Bay Area Rhythm exchange last Saturday at Herbst Theatre, the all star lineup proved just how much of a rhythmic musical instrument tap-shoe clad feet can be. Accompanying the unique "voices" of the tap-dancing artists were a three piece jazz band which included Channing Cook-Holmes on drums (himself a phenomenal tap dancer), Marcus Shelby on bass, pianist Sista Kee, and two special guest stars: Carlos Aguirre of the group Felonius with beat-boxing/vocal percussion, and The Unique Derique performing his own Hambone body percussion.



Bay Area Rhythm Exchange Festival Director John Kloss brought together an unrivaled and dazzling array of tap and musical talent that invoked an appreciation of tap's history while inspiring an excitement for tap's present and future. This year's Festival was definitely one of the most upbeat experiences to witness. Unlike flamenco, which can sometimes get heavy-handed in the wrong pair of shoes, these tappers showed unparalleled rhythmic patterns that took everyone to another level of experience. Kloss' own very impressive skills came out in the astounding "contest" of rhythmic wills number between himself and Carlos Aguirre's stunning beat-box/vocals.

What is most amazing is how easy the dancers make difficult steps look. From the smiling, sensuous, classic "song and dance" style of Deborah Mitchell — who did a smooth rendition of Sunny Side of the Street in her intro number — to the intensely improvisational, expressionistic style of Dormeshia Sumbry-Edward, who riffed back and forth with drummer Cook-Holmes. Both these New Jersey women created primal yet transcendental rhythms with their feet. Ms Sumbry-Edwards was particularly trancelike and hypnotic, and exciting to listen to and watch.

Equally talented and extraordinary was the tall, commanding, Fred Astaire-like presence of Sam Weber in his solo My One and Only Love. Handsome in a blue silk shirt, this technical wizard executed graceful pirouettes while riffing at top speed with drummer Cook-Holmes — who also danced with stunning precision later in spite of his earlier warning that he might not be able to because of an injury.

While the first half of the show comprised primarily of solo numbers, the second half began with the humorous neon effect of day-glow accessories in the dark in an ensemble piece with each artists given an additional opportunity to show off their individual styles. A highlight of the second half was the Stepology Electronic Tapology music created by The Unique Derique who really did "play" his body which was wired somehow to the machine so that each time he tapped part of his torso, a different sound emitted. He even asked a member of the audience to come up and join him in a demonstration. The young man he chose did a great job himself and appeared to be schooled (self- or otherwise) in the art.

Completing the experience was the invitation to all "tappers" in the audience to join in what was called a "shim-sham" finale where the stage was filled with talented tappers of every size, age, and level of talent, all of whom obviously enjoyed stepping forward and tapping their and our hearts out in a true celebration of this uniquely transcendental art form. Presented by Stepology, this year's Bay Area Rhythm Exchange was an obvious toe-tapping success!

For more information about Stepology's concerts, performers, the Bay Area Tap Festival, future programs, and workshops, visit www.stepology.com.