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## Bay Area Rhythm Exchange showcases tap dancers

Rachel Howard  
Wednesday, August 13, 2008

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John Kloss didn't discover a burgeoning tap scene in San Francisco when he arrived here in 2003. So he made one.

IMAGES



Eduardo Patino

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balletic side of tap." Channing Cook-Holmes "shoots from the hip with incredible musicality," while Deborah Mitchell, "more of a song and dance person," brings a "Cotton Club flavor," which makes sense, since she appeared in a film called "The Cotton Club."

"I like to put all these dancers in a pot together and see what they cook up," Kloss says.

Sophisticated innovators like Savion Glover and Jason Samuels Smith are driving tap toward an ever-more complex musicality - and a new generation of tap stars are more virtuosic than ever. "The physicality in tap is so spectacular now," Kloss says. "We make jokes about the younger dancers coming straight out of 'The Matrix.'"

Kloss himself is a little more old-fashioned, practicing "classic tap," as he calls it. He says he fell in love with tap at age 16, when he saw Gene Kelly dance to "I Got Rhythm" in the movie "An American in Paris." Kloss, 35, trained in his hometown, Chicago, site of the country's biggest tap festival, the Chicago Human Rhythm Project.

San Francisco isn't about to vie with Chicago or New York as a hot tap town, but it's getting hotter here every year thanks to Kloss, and he sees the city poised to become a crossroads for Pacific Rim hoofers. "There's so much going on in Asia, especially Japan right now," he says. "Incredibly evolved rhythm tapping there. And here on the West Coast, we're geographically prime to bring that to the U.S."

For next year's Bay Area Rhythm Exchange, he hopes to import some of that fresh Asian talent. In the meantime, he says every tap performance he dances reminds him of the excitement he felt when he first saw Kelly. "The feeling of you and the audience both completely in the moment, making it together," he says, "there's nothing like it."

8 p.m. Fri.-Sat. \$19-\$23. **Herbst** Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco. (415) 392-4400, [www.stepology.com](http://www.stepology.com).

- Rachel Howard, [96Hours@sfchronicle.com](mailto:96Hours@sfchronicle.com)

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