

# Dorrance Dance

October 22, 2019



## Applause Series Inquiry Guide

# Performance



The Blues Project - Dorrance Dance featuring Derick K. Grant and Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards with Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely

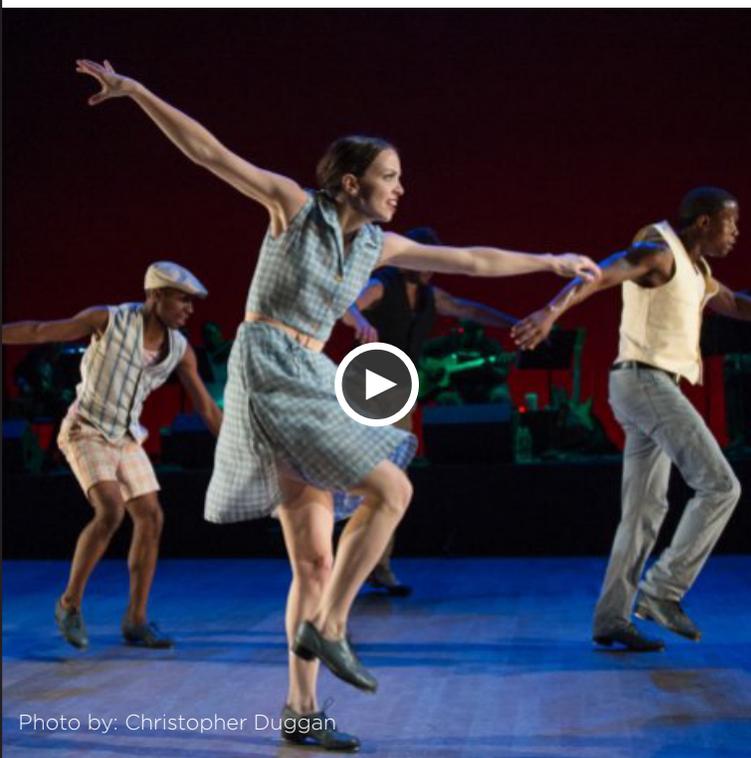
[Click here for a preview of the work.](#)

New York City-based Michelle Dorrance and her company Dorrance Dance have changed the world's conversation about tap dance with her innovative choreography and rhythm tap style. A leader in a historically male-dominated field, Dorrance has renewed interest in this quintessential American art form. Focused on musicality and improvisation, contemporary tap dance is part of the jazz tradition continuum. Dorrance Dancers heat up the stage with a collective spirit and exuberant fun!

Michelle Dorrance is an internationally renowned tap dancer and choreographer, known for simultaneously honoring the form's roots and history while pushing it into new territory. She believes that tap is a uniquely American art form like jazz, worthy of acceptance in the academy and on the concert stage.

# The Line Up

A preview of the planned repertory for the Applause Series performance



## Jungle Blues

Choreography: Michelle Dorrance

Music: Branford Marsalis

“The world premiere of *Jungle Blues* unleashed undulating torsos, rolling hips, and shimmying shoulders. Knees and feet swiveled side to side like well-oiled levers, and dancers slid across the floor and balanced on toes. Chris Broughton showed off acrobatic splits and flips.”

– Karen Campbell, The Boston Globe

## Three to One

Choreography: Michelle Dorrance  
Music: Aphex Twin, Thom Yorke

“Three to One put a tap-shoed Dorrance in between two barefoot dancers, Scott Nicholson and Mishay Petronelli. Stark lighting highlighted feet that skittered, knees swiveling in and out, bodies twisting side to side, casting the contrast between bare feet and hard shoes into sharp relief.”

– Karen Campbell, The Boston Globe



Photo by: Kevin Parry

# The Story



Photo by: Dana Pleasant

Today, most of our awareness of tap comes from movies and musicals, leading some to dismiss it as less artistic than other forms of modern dance. Michelle Dorrance founded Dorrance Dance to help audiences view the old jazz form of tap dance in a modern, dynamically compelling context.

As both a tap dancer and choreographer, Michelle Dorrance finds the complex and racialized history of the genre to be important to modern understanding. She explains how tap dance reflects social movements within the United States by saying, "To be a professional tap dancer is to be a historian. It's something that my generation, we, I think, hold very near and dear to who we are as practitioners of the form."

## Watch and Learn

-  Watch this clip from PBS News Hour about Michelle Dorrance and the foundation of Dorrance Dance.
-  Watch this video to see Michelle Dorrance on how tap represents social change.
-  Watch this video from the MacArthur Foundation about Michelle Dorrance's Genius Award.

# Five Things to Know

01.

Dorrance and another dancer, Nicholas Van Young, developed Electronic Tap Music (ETM), a digital interface that enables dancers to switch on musical samples by stepping on electronically enabled boards. Their first piece, ETM: Double Down also features live musicians. Check out this video to see ETM in action.

02.

Michelle's mother, M'Liss Gary Dorrance, a ballet dancer, founded and directed the Ballet School of Chapel Hill. Her father, Anson Dorrance, the women's soccer coach at the University of North Carolina, led the U.S. women's soccer team to the World Cup in 1991. Put those two together, and you sort of get a tap dancer.

03.

Winner of a 2015 MacArthur "Genius" award, Dorrance loves to bring tap to the academic and the mainstream worlds. Appearing on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Dorrance taught Colbert a simple tap sequence. Watch it here.

04.

In 2010 Dorrance founded her own tap company. The company includes 15 dancers who collaborate with choreographers and musicians to create original works.

05.

Michelle spent four years as one of the drummer dancers in "Stomp."



Photo by: Stephanie Berger

# Inquiry 01

What is the origin of tap dance in the United States?  
How has the style of dance evolved?

## Research: What

Read from *Margins to Mainstream: A Brief Tap Dance History*, an article from University of Michigan, to learn more. Find the article [here](#).

## Research: Who & When

To learn more about the history of dance it is important to know notable figures in the genre.

Research WHO came before in American tap dancer to understand the foundation of Dorrance Dance.

Fred Astaire • Gregory Hines • Savion Glover • Gene Kelly • Ginger Rogers • Ruby Keeler • Eleanor Powell • Bill “Bojangles” Robinson • Shirley Temple • The Nichols Brothers • Sammy Davis Jr. • Sandman Sims

 Watch this video compilation of tap dance footage from film and television

## Research: Why

Michelle Dorrance on the history of tap:

“It’s such an important part of the tradition — and I say important in part because it reflects the great oppression and racism present in our culture and is of course reflected in the form. And the history of the form really reflects a history of the United States in a very strong way. . . . The one thing you can own inside of that is your innovation, your rhythm. Your artistry lives inside of that form purely even if what your affectation is is not something that feels right in your spirit, or that is right in the world. . . . I think tap dance is an incredibly transcendent form. It is born of some of the most oppressed people our country and culture has known and, you know, finds its way to joy.”

-Michelle Dorrance. *All Things Considered*, 2015

[Read it here.](#)

 Watch this video on how tap represents social change.

Use the graphic organizer on page i to guide students’ research.



Photo by: Kevin Parry

# Inquiry 02

How do the basic steps of tap work?  
What are the parts that make up the dance?

## Research: How?

In Motion

Choreography is the series or combination of movements that creates fundamental patterns in time and space. Like words in a sentence, the individual movements are just as important as the product of their combination. Tap dances are comprised of different combinations of basic moves.

Here are some basic moves to explore as you think about tap dance.

- Toe: Strike the floor with the toe
- Heel Drop: Strike the floor with the heel
- Heel Tap: Strike the floor with the heel, immediately followed by strike of the toe
- Brush: While standing on one leg, sweep the other leg forward across the floor
- Scuff: Similar to a brush, but hitting the floor with the heel instead of sweeping the shoe
- Shuffle: The combination of two brushes
- Flap: Brush forward and a step (similar to a walking step, only done on the ball of the foot, the heel does not touch the floor)
- Ball Dig/Ball Heel: A transfer of weight from the front of the foot (ball) to the heel of the foot.

 Click here to watch a video of the basics.

Find a space in the classroom to spread out and try some of the basic steps yourself.



Photo by: Christopher Duggan

# Inquiry 03

What is biorhythm? Are some people born with an internal rhythm while others are not?



Photo by: Kevin Parry

## Research: Connect

DORRANCE: "I think tap dance is the ultimate art form, at least for me. To be able to be a dancer and a musician at the same time, there's nothing like it. There's nothing else like it. You're equally responsible for your movement as you are for your sonic communication. And I don't know. There's something that's really organic in your footfall. There's something organic in your biorhythms, your heartbeat. And to be able to demonstrate that inside of a moving form is phenomenal."

What does she mean here by "**biorhythms**"? Have you thought about or noticed your own internal beats - heartbeat, pulse, footfall, even the strike of the keys on a keyboard directed by your fingers?

Learn more about beat deafness and the synchronization of movements by clicking the links.

Use the graphic organizer on page ii to guide inquiry thinking and research.

# Reflection

Use this chart to connect the elements of dance to what you see on stage. Choose one aspect to focus on or take some mental notes of the style of movement to reflect on after the performance.

## THE ELEMENTS OF DANCE

The elements of dance—easily remembered with the acronym BASTE: Body, Action, Space, Time, and Energy—can be helpful guides in watching or thinking about dance.

<b>BODY</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>SPACE</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>ENERGY</b>
<b>PARTS:</b> Head, eyes, torso, shoulders, fingers, legs, feet	<b>NON-LOCOMOTOR (AXIAL):</b> stretch, bend, twist, turn, rise, fall, swing, rock, tip, shake, suspend	<b>SIZE:</b> large, small, narrow, wide	<b>METERED:</b> pulse, tempo, accent, rhythmic pattern	<b>ATTACK:</b> sharp/smooth, sudden/sustained
<b>INITIATION:</b> core, distal, mid-limb, body parts	<b>LOCOMOTOR (TRAVELING):</b> slide, walk, hop, somersault, run, skip, jump, do-si-do, leap, roll, crawl, gallop, chaîné turns	<b>LEVEL:</b> high, medium, low	<b>FREE RHYTHM:</b> breath, open score, sensed time, improvisation, cued	<b>WEIGHT:</b> Heavy or light
<b>PATTERNS:</b> upper/lower body, homologous, contralateral, midline		<b>PLACE:</b> on the spot (personal space), through the space (general space), upstage, downstage	<b>CLOCK TIME:</b> seconds, minutes, hours	<b>STRENGTH:</b> push, horizontal, impacted
<b>BODY SHAPES:</b> Symmetrical/asymmetrical, rounded, twisted, angular, arabesque		<b>DIRECTION:</b> forward, backward, sideways, diagonal, right, left	<b>TIMING RELATIONSHIPS:</b> before, after, unison, sooner than, faster than	<b>FLOW:</b> Free, bound, balanced, neutral
<b>BODY SYSTEMS:</b> muscles, bones, organs, breath, balance, reflexes		<b>ORIENTATION:</b> facing		<b>QUALITY:</b> flowing, tight, loose, sharp, swinging, swaying, suspended, collapsed, smooth
<b>INNER SELF:</b> senses, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, intention, imagination		<b>PATHWAY:</b> curved, straight, zig-zag, random		
		<b>RELATIONSHIP:</b> in front, beside, behind, over, under, alone, connected, near, far		
		<b>FOCUS:</b> Where a dancer looks		

## Discuss

Use the elements to talk about what you saw on stage.

## Reflect

Listen to music while responding to these questions in whatever format makes sense to you - writing, drawing, recording a video or a responding with technology.

What do you see? What was your favorite part?

What did you hear? How could you draw it?

What did you imagine? What idea came to your mind?

What do you wonder about?

We love to hear from you. Please send any of your responses to the performance to us at [education@dmpa.org](mailto:education@dmpa.org). We'll share the responses with dancers and Applause Series donors.

# Guide Sources

## University of Michigan Guide

<https://issuu.com/umsnews/docs/0043-0191-learning-guide-dorrance-da>

## All Things Considered NPR Interview

<https://news.wjct.org/post/michelle-dorrance-i-just-knew-i-would-never-stop-tap-dancing>

## New Yorker Article

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/05/a-tap-dancer-like-no-other>

## From Margins To Mainstream: A Brief Tap Dance History

### University of Michigan

<https://ums.org/2019/06/21/from-margins-to-mainstream-tap-dance-history/>

## Art is Justice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGr2cdlWjb0>

## PBS News Hour Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NILOLuUe7g4>

# Additional Resources

A backstage talk with Michelle Dorrance on her creative process:

<https://youtu.be/hKw3PicQ0zg>

What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap and Tap Dancing by Brian Seibert

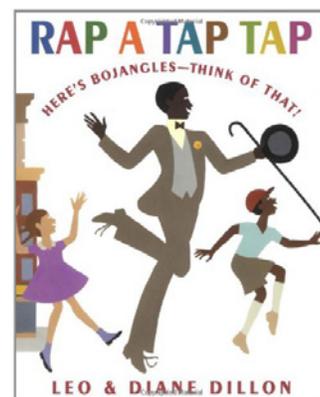
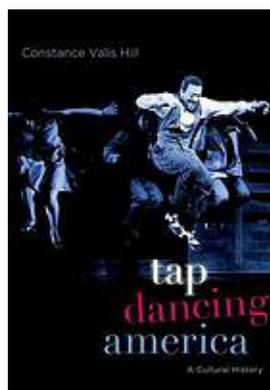
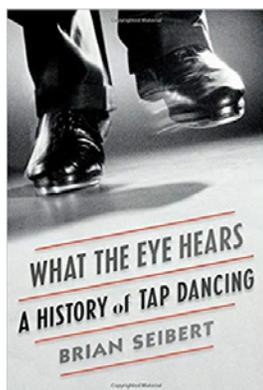
*What the Eye Hears* offers an authoritative account of the great American art of tap dancing.

Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History Paperback by Constance Valis Hill

A vibrant, colorful, high-stepping story of tap—the first comprehensive, fully documented history of a uniquely American art form, exploring all aspects of the intricate musical and social exchange that evolved from Afro-Irish percussive step dances to the work of contemporary tap luminaries.

Rap a Tap Tap: Here's Bojangles—Think of That! by Leo Dillon and Diane Dillon

*Rap a Tap Tap* describes the dancing of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, one of the most famous tap dancers of all time.



# Inquiry Organizer (PAGE 5)

What is the origin of tap dance in the United States?  
How has the style of dance evolved?

New Learning	Source	Connection to Inquiry

# Inquiry Organizer (PAGE 7)

What is biorhythm? Are some people born with an internal rhythm while others are not?

what do you THINK	what did you LEARN	what do you still WONDER