



Rhythmic Circus
“Feet Don’t Fail Me Now”
School Show Study Guide

Wells Fargo Center for the Arts
Friday, April 27, 2012

Feet Don't Fail Me Now!

Study Guide

This material is intended to assist teachers in preparing their students for a production of **Feet Don't Fail Me Now!** It also provides topics for discussion after they have seen the performance. This study guide in conjunction with a **Feet Don't Fail Me Now!** performance will serve as a starting point from which to connect standard curriculum such as American History, Theater, Music and Physical Education to an exciting and fun filled event. This will help to arouse student's interests as well as to assist the teachers connect the curriculum to the students everyday world. Most of the sections have been designed for *elementary* students. However, with a little creativity, they can work with *middle* or *high school* students as well.

Section 1: What is tap dancing?

- Tap dancing was THE most popular form of dance the world had ever known between 1900 and 1930. Before the invention of radio, movies and television, most theaters around the country presented variety shows that often included tap dancing. Everybody wanted to see it, everybody wanted to hear it and everybody wanted to do it! Tap dancers performed solo, in duets, trios or in small groups. The dancers molded their skills into original acts, using music, costuming, dialogue and their own personalities to enhance their presentation.
- Tap dancing has evolved a lot since back then. Today, tap dancers consider their art to be found not only in entertaining audiences with their style and grace of movement, but in their musicianship as well. Tap dancers literally use their tap shoes as instruments of rhythm and, just like a drummer or other percussionist, take their responsibility to stay on beat very seriously. They study long and hard at their discipline in order to be confident in their ability to add interesting rhythm patterns and accents to the songs they dance to.
- Some of the most famous tap dancers of recent years have been helping bring tap dancing back into American mainstream pop-culture. The late, great Gregory Hines starred in the movie *TAP* which helped show tap dancing could be blended with modern music and wasn't just a dance form of the past. Savion Glover is today's undisputed best tap dancer. He choreographed and starred in the hit Tony Award winning Broadway show *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* and he recently created all the footwork for the character Mumble in the smash blockbuster hit *Happy Feet*. Tap dancing will exist as long as dancers keep using their creativity to share their love and passion for the art form.

Section 2: Where and how did tap dancing originate?

- Tap dancing is truly an American art form. It was born in the 1800's from the meeting and meshing of a wide spread of ethnic percussive dance styles brought to the United States during that time, predominantly African, English, Irish and Scottish. In the years to come, the great music revolutions of ragtime, jazz, swing and bebop all played a tremendous role in the evolution of tap dancing.

Section 3: Who tap dances and how do you become a tap dancer?

- Tap dancing is for everyone! All it requires is an aspiration to create rhythms with your feet and a desire to laugh and have fun! There are many dance schools that offer classes you can take in order to learn the basic steps, but the real fun comes in when you take those steps and put them together to create your own rhythms. Tap dancing can be very physically demanding, especially if you decide to dance to fast songs, but the plus side is that it keeps you in great shape!

Section 4: Learn your theater terms.

- Theater has many different jobs that people do. It also has specific terms or words that help people work in a theater more effectively and consistently. Some of the jobs that people fill are:

The Producer: This person runs the business, hires the staff, creates the promotional material and manages the money.

The Director: This person hires the performers for the show, creates the material for the performers and runs the rehearsals.

The Choreographer: This person creates all the dances and movement that the performers execute on stage.

The Musical Director: This person is responsible for all the music in the show.

The Dancers: They are the performers you see executing the dances on stage.

The Musicians: They are the performers creating the live music on stage.

The Stage Manager: This person manages the technical aspects of the show. They schedule rehearsals, check lights and sound, and helps the director, dancers and musicians with whatever they need.

The Lighting Designer: This person is responsible for planning all the lighting patterns you see throughout the show.

The Sound Engineer: This person is responsible for mixing everything that can be heard in the show so that it sounds the way that the director intends.

The Crew: They are a group of people that work offstage to help the final show run smoothly. They operate the sound and lights and help move props on and off stage.

- To be consistent in theater there are special terms for the stage, curtains and the lights that the crews use. These terms are also used to help the performers set up quickly and consistently. The terms and directions are from the perspective of a performer standing on stage facing the audience.

Upstage: The part of the stage that is farthest from the audience. In old theaters, the stage used to slant down toward the audience so that the viewers could see the performers better. This is called a *raked stage*.

Down Stage: The part of the stage that is closest to the audience.

Stage Left: This is the part of the stage to the performer's left.

Stage Right: This is the part of the stage to the performer's right.

Center Stage: This is the center of the stage.

The Wings: These are the sides of the stage that the audience can't see.

The Legs: These are the short curtains that hang on the sides of the stage that the performers enter and exit from.

Main Drape: This is the curtain that closes in front of the stage.