



TAPPING INTO THE BY: DEBBI DEE BIG apple

The Big Apple Tap Festival held its second annual Tap Jubilee in New York City this past November. The event, previously known as Tradition In Tap, with a focus on honoring our past and present tap masters, now continues its legacy of tap education with a diverse and unique faculty. The festival's main goal is to educate and expose dance teachers, professional dancers and students of all ages to a wide range of tap styles from some of the best tap masters in the country today.

MILLER & BEN

This year's Big Apple Tap Festival was held at The Alvin Ailey Citigroup Theater - The Joan Weill Center for Dance. Avi Miller and Ofer Ben, the directors of the festival, have a passion for keeping tap dancing and its art form alive by producing, promoting and supporting these types of venues. Miller and Ben's professional backgrounds are extensive. They come from Israel, where they developed their Middle Eastern sound quality technique and toured as *The Israeli Hoofers* with their professional company, Tel-Aviv Dance Troupe. Together they make up this dynamic performance duo - Miller & Ben. If that isn't enough, in 2003 they started to manufacture Miller & Ben Tap Shoes. Now, the shoes are sold worldwide and worn by top tap dancers everywhere. In 2009, Miller & Ben were honored with The Preservation of Our Heritage Award in American Dance by Oklahoma City University, along with Germaine Salsberg, one of the founding members of Tradition In Tap.

THE BIG APPLE TAP FESTIVAL

The Big Apple Tap Festival is all about high energy and well-structured tap classes. In addition, the festival offers a showcase where participants, including some faculty members, perform. The focus here is to come together and give tap dancers from all over the world, and at different levels and styles, the opportunity to perform in a beautiful theater in front of their peers, and feel the love of tap dancing as they share their routines in a non-competitive and encouraging environment.

This year's program was sold out with five studios running simultaneously and excitement building at every corner of the three-day festival. The Sponsor A Tap Dancer program enabled over 20 students to attend classes this year on scholarship. Miller and Ben have a reputation for being both masters in tap as well as prominent festival producers. They bring a well-organized event that offers a little something for everyone.

SESSIONS & PROGRAMS

Each year during the festival a video presentation is held. Professor Robert L. Reed, Artistic Director of The St. Louis Tap Festival, hosted this year's session. Reed brings a wealth of knowledge to this program, along with rare and unique video footage for the students to watch and enjoy. Tap dancing has such a rich history. It is wonderful to see the eyes of the students watching the great tap dancers from long ago, many of which have been to Miller and Ben's events in the past. Reed brings stories, history, knowledge and fun to this event. When listening to him speak, you know that his love for this art form comes from within, and his background is so extensive, if not merely for the fact that he has studied with some of the greatest tap dancers of all time.

Another unique session of the weekend is the Tap History Talks. I (Debbi Dee) have had the pleasure of hosting this segment for the past two years. It gives me the opportunity to talk and ask questions of my fellow faculty. The faculty then has the opportunity to share their experiences as tap dancers, performers, choreographers and teachers. This event gives our audience a look into our world in perspective to the past, the present and a glimpse to which direction the art form is going. It is a time to reflect and share with one another, on a very personal level, how tap has changed and is still changing our lives for the better.

The festival also offers Warm-up and Tap Exercise sessions, which are held at the beginning of each festival day. There is a dedicated and diverse faculty for these specialty classes. They bring their own unique technique, styles and accomplished professionalism to the festival. This year's technique faculty included Mr. Theater himself - Mark Albrecht, former Rockette - Denise Caston (Artistic Director of The Motor City Tap Festival), the classy April Cook (Public Relations Manager at Broadway Dance Center), the talented Hillary-Marie Michael (Artistic Director of The New Jersey Tap Festival) and the elegant Claudia Rahardjanoto.



THE FACULTY

Speaking of faculty, this year's festival had a wonderful and diverse group of practitioners from all walks of tap, who brought their expertise and individual styles to their classes. Along with Miller, Ben and Professor Reed, we had tap legend Bob Audy (assisted by Isabel Glasser and Alan Spaulding), Karen Callaway Williams, Ray Hesselink, Anthony LoCascio, Thommie Retter, Germaine Salsberg, Dianne Walker (*Lady D!*), Sam Weber and myself - Debbi Dee. Each faculty member is known for their differences in style, yet they all have a few values in common. They all teach with precision, passion, experience, knowledge and with the love of sharing their diverse perspectives of the art form of tap dancing. The love, respect and support they have for each other is apparent and addictive, which turns this event into a remarkable weekend.



Next year's event will take place in New York City on Nov. 13, 14 and 15, 2015.

Extensive information is posted at www.TheBigAppleTapFestival.com

You can also contact Miller & Ben through Jazz Tap Center Inc.

P.O. Box 821, New York City, New York 10108

or call the office at 646-383-4949.

See you all at
The Big Apple Tap Festival
2015!

The Tap Community thanks Miller and Ben for this festival and for keeping tap alive.