



Debbie Dee

Tap...Talk... and Technique with Debbie Dee

by Fallon Star Gechter

With over 25 years on the job experience, Debbie Dee is a fixture in the tap world. She will forever be immortalized as a true tap legend. She has finally found a way to share her incredible technique with teachers around the country.

I had the pleasure of attending the 1st Annual Debbie Dee Tap Intensive, held in Boca Raton, Florida this past October. The weekend was designed with the dance teacher, assistant teacher and advanced student in mind. This was the first intensive I personally have ever attended, and I found the weekend to be one of the most educational and learning experiences of my dance career.

In the past I have attended many conventions, and will continue to do so, however, there is something extremely valuable in an

intimate studio setting. It is a warm and very comfortable way to learn.

The weekend included 10 hours of classes. The classes ranged from progressions to technique to turns and choreography. Of course, the main reason I attended was to learn all the different aspects of the Debbie Dee Technique. We were each given packets filled with notes, choreography, and technique. One teacher was quoted as saying, "I was there to keep abreast with some of the latest styles of both traditional and contemporary tap, with a teacher that can not only define the two but accurately teach it with style."

In between each class was a break for open discussions as well as a lunch break. An unlimited amount of water, snacks and lunch were provided. On Saturday evening, we were treated to a tap talk seminar, where styles of tap, music, and more were discussed. During this class we were all treated to cheeses, dessert, and wine after a long day of classes. As a teacher it was a whole new experience being treated so well. "I honestly felt like this could be the beginning of how this American Art Form (Tap Dancing) can be preserved and passed down in the correct way from generation to generation. Thank you Debbie Dee," the same teacher was quoted as saying.

I am sure all who attended will agree the 1st Annual Debbie Dee Tap Intensive was a huge success, and we all look forward to attending next year.

I had the opportunity to sit and talk with Debbie to discuss the intensive:

Fallon Star Gechter: What was the turning point that made you decide to put this workshop together?

Debbie Dee: I have been asked by teachers for years to do something like this seminar. So it has been in the thought process for years. It was just finding the time to put it all together. I also felt it would give teachers and advanced tappers who wanted to study with me outside of a convention platform and on more of an intimate level.

FSG: What made your parents sign you up for dance class?

DD: I don't really remember first starting dance. I am told that besides being a little

clumsy, that it was also a good outlet for my unending energy.

FSG: When did you realize this was something you wanted to pursue as a career?

DD: I fell in love with dance instantly. It has been a part of me for so long I can not remember not participating in some aspect of the Art form. My professional career started at age 13 years old, so I guess you can say that my career found me.

FSG: At a young age you were surrounded by phenomenal talent. Were you aware of how important to the dance world your teachers were/are?

DD: My parents looked for the best in our area, but to answer your question No. I didn't know how good I had it until I was around 13 or 14 and by then I had already turned professional and new doors opened for me as far as my teachers. My teachers are part of my soul, and I am so grateful I've had the chance to say my thank-you's to most of them. My original tap teacher Curly Fisher passed away before I had the chance to tell him how much he was appreciated.

FSG: Is there anything involving the dance world you have yet to accomplish?

DD: The list is endless so for now I'll just say I'm

still working on it.

FSG: Back to the Intensive...Can anyone participate?

DD: Yes, providing they are a tapper who wants to further their education in tap and in teaching tap.

FSG: Does the material in your workshop cover all ages?

DD: This year the material covered was put into a broad beginner intermediate advanced category. In future workshops by request we will also focus on a syllabus for all ages of my technique.

FSG: Is there a limit to the amount of people that can attend your workshop?

DD: Yes. We decided to do a small setting so that we could keep it in a studio with mirrors and so that when someone attends they feel a part of a learning atmosphere. As a matter of fact, some teachers are interested in hosting the Tap Intensive in their areas, and I am delighted to bring the Debbie Dee Tap Intensive to new areas throughout the U.S.

FSG: With this past workshop, what was the feedback?



DD: We gave our attendees a survey to fill out, and I am delighted with the positive response. It was funny that they all loved different classes. While one loved the ABC's of the Debbi Dee Technique, another teacher liked the Time Step Class. Yet, all agreed that the variety of work and the book of notes will keep them busy for many years to come. With those kinds of comments, I feel good about the Intensive and feel we covered enough material to make everyone feel satisfied.

FSG: Do you have lesson plans for teachers to purchase?

DD: Yes. My heart has been in teaching teachers. I have been making educational videos and CD's for the past 20 years. I had my own dance studios for 12 years in Upstate- N. Y., so when I started creating these educational materials for teachers, it was because I know how hard it is to find the time to create. I wanted to give something for teachers to have so that they can refer to the material I have filmed for them.

FSG: How do you pick songs for your CD's?

DD: My CD's are geared with the Dance Teacher in mind who specializes in tap education. So I look for good quality Big Band, Swing, Theatrical, and of course Jazz. I favor instrumental music vs. vocals so that the tap instrument can become a part of the music.

FSG: How do you decide which routines get to be videotaped?

DD: My videos specialize in technique. The material I choose to put on the videos comes from years of trial and error. As far as routines, my Tap In Action series is devoted to Wartt-Up Routines with 15 volumes already filmed with 45 routines to choose from.

FSG: Where can teachers/students purchase your merchandise (videos, CD's, etc.)?

DD: Teachers can purchase any of my videos/cds/written material through me by calling us for a catalog at 561-736-3052.

FSG: You hold teaching positions in many different platforms. How do you keep it from getting repetitive?

DD: The key is to keep learning and experimenting with your craft. Also music helps me. I try to be open to many different stylizations.

FSG: You are currently working on the Debbi Dee Technique Dictionary and Manual. What made you decide to put this together? What will it include?

DD: My book will be more of a manual. There are many wonderful tap dictionaries, so I am concentrating on the thing I know best, that is my technique and how and why it works for me. I want to pass that on to teachers. The Debbi Dee Syllabus so to speak.

FSG: How would you rate this past workshop experience?



DD: For me...I had a GREAT time! I loved the teaching; I loved getting to know the teachers and advanced students on a more personal level.. I loved sharing my gift with them and having them share their gifts with me. It was a win, win situation.

FSG: Were workshops of this sort available to you when you were a teacher?

DD: Well I am in my 37th year of teaching and LEARNING is a great part of my teaching. You never stop learning. I always attended educational seminars, conventions, and took private lesson after private lesson so that I could get better at my craft. For me the smaller Intensive did not exist, so I studied privately, it is in that format I learned the most.

FSG: What is the main thing you want teacher's to leave with at the end of the workshop?

DD: I want the teachers to walk away from the intensive feeling that 1: they accomplished something new for themselves, something that maybe they could not do before and can do now. And 2: That they feel that they learned something new (hopefully a lot) that they can use in their studios. New ideas. New life lessons that they will be able to use for the rest of their lives.

FSG: When will next year's intensive be?

DD: The next intensive will be October 22 & 23, 2005. I chose October keeping teachers in mind. The summer is for conventions/competitions, August is for registration and getting back to classes, and December is busy with holiday performances and by January starts costume ordering. So I wanted a month that wasn't so busy for teachers, something just for them.

FSG: You are a strong advocator and participant in National Tap Dance Day. Do you have plans for this year?

DD: My plans this year are still up in the air, but I do know that I would love to see National Tap Dance Day more recognized and observed. I try to bring as much awareness as possible to dancers. By the way National Tap Dance Day is May 25.

FSG: Finally, does anything surprise you with today's tap classes?

DD: After teaching for 37 years.. not much surprises me.

For more information on next year's Intensive, please contact Debbi Dee's Office at 561.736.3052, or write to Debbi Dee Productions 9280 Sun Pointe Drive, Boynton Beach, Florida 33437 •