

Arts & Entertainment

On Tap in the Gallery Lounge: Tap Team Two & Co., Inc.

By Stephanie L. Kardohely
Capital Times Staff

When Robert F. Burden Jr. conducts his ensemble it's not with his hands, but with his feet. Burden is Artistic Director of Tap Team Two & Co., Inc., a Philadelphia based dance company which recently performed at Capital College, Harrisburg Campus as part of a six campus tour through the Penn State System.

Performing in the soft light of the Gallery Lounge a charismatic Burden and his vibrant "orchestra" of feet dazzled the audience with an energetic display of hoofing or street tap dance.

Unlike many other dance companies Tap Team Two performs with no music. All that is heard are the sounds of the feet. Assistant Artistic Director Corinne Karon dubbed this performance style "tap a cappella." In the absence of musical cues, strict attention to counting aids the company in attaining seamless lines of rhythm.

Surprisingly, the tight rhythms often become melodic. In the opening number, Ali, the youngest company member at age 13, taps a rhythm as one by one, others add distinct rhythmic patterns creating a texture of parallel strains. The effect is a wash of interconnected "melodies".

Explaining how the physicality of hoof-

ing translates to music Burden says, "Hoofing creates music with the feet and you become part of the music itself". While Performing Burden "sings the dance" to himself. Burden and other Company members lend an easy air to their performance by ad-libbing songs and joking with each other as they perform.

Assisted by company member Amy Browne Smith, Burden traced a short History of tap steps from flat-footed steps, to toe steps, to steps combining the use of heel and toe. "I like to entertain and educate at the same time," says Burden.

During performances Company members also field questions from the audience regarding tap and the background and experience of the Company members.

Preserving the history of tap is an important goal for Burden. Plans are in the works for a tap museum in Philadelphia. According to Burden the museum will ensure that "the artform will have life even after the greats are gone".

Burden points out that since the Big Band Era tap has figured prominently American society. "What many people don't realize is the integral part tap has had in American culture," says Burden. He adds that once, "Tap dancing was a major form of dance. Moms and grandmas in the kitchen knew how to tap dance. There were clubs for tap dancing. Tap was the dance of the lower and middle class." In addition to preserving the past, keeping pace with pop trends in dance is important to keep the company growing artistically. Referring to a hip hop



FATENTED PHOTOS

number, Burden comments, "That is one number that is fun to watch even more than being in it. I like the different styles of hip hop incorporated in the dance."

The hip hop number along with "Funk Laid Back" which includes both house and hip hop steps are favorites of Company member Corinne Karon. In addition to performing newer dance steps, Karon, having just returned from two months of studying dance in Ireland, added yet another dimension to the program.

Her distinctly Irish solo served to remind the audience that tap is also well rooted in Irish history and culture.

So what is Burden's all time favorite piece? "J.B. (a tribute to James Brown)" says Burden. is a piece that, has a distinctive style. According to Burden, the piece has been evolving for years. The steps are often subtle, relying on flat-footed steps rather than the sharper toe steps. Says Burden, "It keeps getting better. New things are always added. I literally become James Brown in the number."

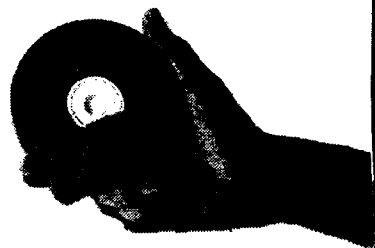
One of the Company's goals is to perform in Africa. To meet this goal Burden stresses the importance of daily practice, but adds that the future of the Company lies in working with youth to continually broaden the Company's creative base. "This Company is always learning about each other and society. Working with youth, that's going to keep us going," Burden adds.

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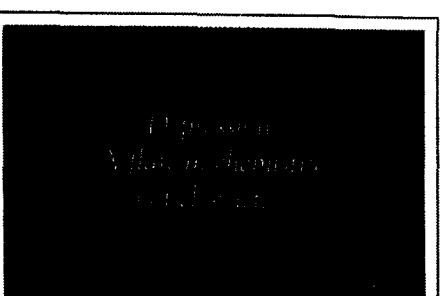
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