

TAPESTRY DANCE COMPANY

# PASSING IT FORWARD

*The American Dream?*

## Study Guide



### Passing It Forward - The American Dream?

Rhythm: from the heartbeat of life we all share to the arhythmic noise of conflict, racial divide and miscommunication, Tapestry Dance Company takes a diverse and dynamic look at "The American Dream". How does our individual uniqueness take this journey through the eyes of race, culture, gender identity and equal rights? How do we seem to recycle this place of racial tension and prejudice? How do we get to the dream from here?

This critically acclaimed work by Artistic Director Acia Gray featuring the spoken word artistry of Zell Miller III poses these questions through a tapestry of unique individual voices. Through historical traditions and new works of tap dance set to a diverse musical score of hip-hop, jazz and cultural music of many ethnicities, Tapestry sets a rhythm of communication, hope and healing in our "what's politically correct?" world.

### From the Director

When developing **Passing It Forward**, our country was in the throws of one of the most important Presidential elections in history. From distrust to the threat of deportation and building walls, America seemed to be moving backward into a time of segregation and separation. Flashes of historical events of voting rights, The Civil Rights Movement and Japanese internment camps as well as our current #BlackLivesMatter, it seems we are all moving further away from each other rather than celebrating what makes us all American: **our individual and unique differences.**

Passing It Forward listens to all of our unique voices and shares a way to listen to each other through all of our individual colors, history and rhythms.

We all do in fact share a strong common rhythm: our heartbeat.

## *Tapestry Dance Company*

Founded in 1989 by rhythm tap dancer Acia Gray and ballet/jazz artist Deirdre Strand, **Tapestry Dance Company** is the only full-time, professional repertory tap dance company in the world. Programs include seasonal multi-form tap concert premieres in Austin, TX, The Annual Soul to Sole International Tap Festival, community outreach programs such as *Rhythm, Dance, Music & You!*, numerous master classes and workshops in modern, jazz, ballet and rhythm tap as well as touring residencies throughout the US and abroad. The company is also proud to have hosted numerous international dance and music artists such as Fayard Nicholas, Arthur Duncan, Brenda Bufalino, Gregory Hines, Sarah Petronio, Bill Evans, Dr. Harold Cromer, Keith Cross, Dianne Walker, James Clouser, Tina Marsh and the Creative Opportunity Orchestra and many others. As member of The Texas Commission on the Arts, The Mid-American Arts Alliance and Heartland touring programs over the past 21 years, the multi-form choreographic works and training of Tapestry Dance Company have been lovingly woven throughout the U.S. and abroad to include Cyprus, Britain, Austria, the Czech Republic, Spain, Ireland, Canada and China. Having premiered over 150 original works, the company has also been honored by numerous "Best of" awards by The Austin Chronicle as well as Best Dance Company, Best Dance Production and Best Ensemble by the Austin Critics Table Awards. Tapestry's Artistic Director Acia Gray is also a premiere member of the Austin Arts Hall of Fame. The company is proud to have toured the award winning National Endowment for the Arts: Masterpiece Production of Acia Gray's *The Souls of Our Feet – A Celebration of American Tap Dance* throughout the USA, Canada and China.

## The History of Us

**Passing It Forward** takes the audience on a journey of individual expression from all walks of life. Racial, ethnic and personal experiences of life are the foundations of the strength in our shared American experience. It takes ALL of us!

### Video References of Experience

#### The Promise: Different But Equal

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0kN07KgZ3s&feature=youtu.be>

#### The Jewish Journey

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-jtAB8D26U&list=PLiyuZTKhe51s0cR6NayEp1qDMjLr\\_nEx&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-jtAB8D26U&list=PLiyuZTKhe51s0cR6NayEp1qDMjLr_nEx&index=2)

#### Japanese Internment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mr97qyKA2s>

#### Black Indians

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qdF211h9pA>

#### Mixed Race

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21H91A6MLHM>

#### America's Immigration History

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BJcqxl7kas>

#### Kid President's Pep Talk

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwIhUcSGqgs&list=PLzvRx\\_johoA\\_WPDDTvUaVG7o2L50tzGb&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwIhUcSGqgs&list=PLzvRx_johoA_WPDDTvUaVG7o2L50tzGb&index=4)

# It Takes Time. Tap Dance is Music!

Music is the foundation of tap dance. It is also a language all its own!

When listening to tap dance, it should sound like a beautiful percussive and melodic experience. Each part of a dancer's foot creates a unique tone and dynamic as well the uniqueness of each individual dancer!

### Musical Definitions & Notes

Tap dancers utilize music the way a drummer would since we are striking the floor as would a percussionist and unlike a piano player who can hold a note in length.

The basic and most utilized notes that we work with are the following. Note the "fruit salad" that can help hear the difference in how the

notes sound! The quarter note is our basic count off (downbeat on 1 & 3 and off beat on 2 & 4) creating a basic measure or bar.

**Quarter Note:** Pear / 1 2 3 4

**Eighth Note:** Apple / &1 &2 &3 &4

**Dotted Eighth Note:** Parfait  
(a1 a2 a3 a4)

**Triplet:** Pineapple / 1&a 2&a 3&a 4&a

**Sixteenth Note:** Watermelon  
(1e&a 2e&a 3e&a 4e&a)

### Exercise

Have your students stand in a circle and have them "walk" in place with quarter notes as they utilize their hands either clapping or striking their legs with each of the notes for 2 bars.

4 Pears, 4 Apples, 4 Kiwi, 4 Pineapples, 4 Watermelons!



## I Am

Throughout the **Passing It Forward** concert, the artists share personal statements of their life truths. The truths that they may share with others and details of their lives that make them who they are. Whether founded in the negative or positive, each statement is a vital thread in their unique American voice.

### Exercise

Have each student write down ten "I Am" statements that help define their own voice in this world. This will start with their first name and can also include who they are ethnically or racially, what foods or activities they love, negative events of being bullied or isolated,

exciting and positive things that they think about and last but not least that they are "The American Dream".

### One Step Further

Challenge the young "life artist" to express a few of their "I Am's" through their body. How does each statement make them feel? Sad? Happy? Mad? - How can this be expressed through movement?

Elements of these feels can be expressed through use of levels, speed, focus, sound, repetition and even silence.

Help the student create a "sentence" of feelings through movement with a beginning, middle and end.



Tapestry is the only full time, professional repertory tap dance company in the world!

## Tap Dance History

Tap dance is an indigenous American dance genre that evolved over a period of some three hundred years. Initially a fusion of British and West African musical and step-dance traditions in America, tap emerged in the southern United States in the 1700s. The Irish jig (a musical and dance form) and West African gioube (sacred and secular stepping dances) mutated into the American jig and juba. These in turn became juxtaposed and fused into a form of dancing called "jigging" which, in the 1800s, was taken up by white and black minstrel-show dancers who developed tap into a popular nineteenth-century stage entertainment. Early styles of tapping utilized hard-soled shoes, clogs, or hobnailed boots. It was not until the early decades of the twentieth century that metal plates (or taps) appeared on shoes of dancers on the Broadway musical stage. It was

around that time that jazz tap dance developed as a musical form parallel to jazz music, sharing rhythmic motifs, polyrhythm, multiple meters, elements of swing, and structured improvisation. In the late twentieth century, tap dance evolved into a concertized performance on the musical and concert hall stage. Its absorption of Latin American and Afro Caribbean rhythms in the forties has furthered its rhythmic complexity. In the eighties and nineties, tap's absorption of hip-hop rhythms has attracted a fierce and multi-ethnic new breed of male and female dancers who continue to challenge and evolve the dance form, making tap the most cutting-edge dance expression in America today.

### Legendary Dancers to Research

Bill "Bojangles" Robinson  
 Sammy Davis Jr.  
 The Nicholas Brothers  
 Gregory Hines  
 Charles "Honi" Coles  
 Jimmy Slyde  
 Jeni Legon

### The Artists & Crew of PIF

#### The Director

The person who designed the concept of the show and makes sure everything is clean and ready for performance.

#### The Choreographer(s)

The people who make up the steps and rhythms of what you see on stage.

#### The Dancers

The people who dance the steps and rhythms of what you see on stage.

#### The Spoken Word Poet

The person who adds vocal language to the story to help define the dance you see.

#### The Production Designer

The person who designs the lights and the visual effects and set of the show.

#### The Stage Manager

The person who makes sure the cast (in this case dancers and poet) are where they should be!

What do these feelings look like utilizing your entire body?

- Sad
- Frustrated
- Alone
- Excited
- Questioning
- Hopeful
- Worried
- Helpful
- Inspired

## I Will - Making a Difference

Along with the "I Am" statements, each student's voice is important in how we all move forward together as a community. Even though we are all different, we share a common bond as humans and as Americans.

Most importantly, we all share the life thread of a heartbeat.

In utilizing the RHYTHM exercises listed in this Study Guide, guide the student through a list of "I Will's" in time. Have each student write down five "I Will" statements and not unlike a rap, vocally express them in a rhythm circle! Have all students keep the 1 2 3 & 4 by stepping on the "downbeat" of the 1 & 3 and holding the 2 & 4 just like one would do by swaying to a piece of music.

Have each student take this one measure (or bar) of music, or perhaps two and vocalize one of their "I Will" statements in rhythm. Continue around the circle giving all students a voice and continue on with their next statement. Play around this the different kinds of notes!

# Let's Find Yourself & Dance!

## Warm Up

Start with your students/dancers in a circle.

1. Quickly pat body parts starting with the head and moving down the body; "waking up" the head, shoulders, chest, hips, thighs, shins and feet. Repeat from the bottom up.
2. Shake awake the hands, right first then left. Follow with the legs, bottom, shoulders, one leg with one arms and switch. Get creative by combining body parts and playing with levels: shake high, middle and low.
3. Ask the students to walk around slowly around the room in any direction without touching anyone. Ask them to speed up and slow down following your directions. Change levels, walking slow and rising high. Add in freezes at different levels. Finish by freezing them high, low and fall to the floor. Rise slowly curling through the body.
4. Ask the students to identify four movements that they can perform while standing in a circle. These movements must be completed in four counts, for example: jump four times in place, or touch toes twice - down, up, down, up. Once the movements have been identified, clap four times and do the first movement. Define four

different movements and create a sequence by alternating movements with clapping. Clap four times, movement 1, clap four times, movement 2 etc. You can combine and use different rhythms (see rhythm section) and be creative with movement choices: Triplet, Triplet, 1 2 3 or utilize simple nursery rhymes.

5. Try the movements and rhythms using other choreographic devices such as unison, mirroring (facing each other), shadowing (facing back to front with the front person leading the movement).
6. Explore patterns in the performance space using diagonals, lines (single or multiple), crosses, circles and semicircles. Explore as well a canon (one after the other). The canon can be done visually or on individual beats or counts as like a "call & response".
7. Explore The Name Dance. Have each student utilize space, levels and rhythm to dance through the letters of their name. Example: Mark - March, Aggressive, Rise and Kick. These dance tools can include nouns and verbs.
8. Explore emotion through dance tools. What does sad, frustrated, happy or lonely look and feel like as danced by each student. Have the

students not only create but be able to recognize these in each other.

9. Ask students to identify 5 simple movements and assign them a letter. Create an algebraic formula with addition and multiplication. Numbers can equal the number of times a step or movement is performed. For example:  $(2a + 3b) \times 4 + 2c - a = \text{step}$ ,  $b = \text{spin}$ ,  $c = \text{jump}$ . For an individual student, first practice the  $(2a + 3b)$  2 steps then 3 spins. The full sequence is: 2 steps then 3 spins 4 times then jump twice. Work to incorporate rhythm then utilize that rhythm to create a canon between groups or individuals. You can also create different moods by changing the focus of the pattern. i.e. - are you sad? Are you happy? How does this change the way the dance looks and feels?
10. Discover trust by using dance to examine weight and balanced force. Have the students do trust exercises by taking each others weight. Organize the students in pairs standing front to back. The student in back stands with one foot in front of the other to maintain balance and places hands on the others back or shoulder blades of the student in front. The front student slowly leans back allowing the one in back to take as much weight as possible. Graduate this sequence to a trusted fall.



## We Can Make A Difference Together

**It takes all of us to make the world we want to live in. It takes all kinds of souls of different ethnic backgrounds, colors, shapes and sizes and perspectives. What we all need to do is communicate, even if we don't agree. The most important lesson of Passing it Forward is to listen. Just like tap dance and music, we need to listen to each other and come together with what we share in common: our heartbeat and our love.**

### Exercise

Choose a topic of conversation that involves a current national topic such as racial divide, bullying, stereotypes or if your students are old enough, safety and gun control.

Set up two chairs in the middle of a circle facing each other. Have the students pick a topic that is important to them and have one of the

students communicate in a couple of sentences how they **feel** about it to their partner using descriptive words. Have the student THANK their partner for listening. Have the second student THANK the first for sharing and then recite to the first student "what I think you said was..." in their own words.

Have the students in the circle join in with "I Will" statements that can move the topic to a positive and forward moving way. For instance, in the topic of bullying, statements may include "I will take my time to listen to you", "I will take a breath before I say something negative", "I will take the time every day to say something nice to someone I don't know", "I will be brave enough to ask if I can help" or "I will ask questions if I don't understand".

We are all different and it takes everybody in their own unique way to dance together in our own beautiful colors, opinions and background.

Listen to each other and make a difference in this world together!