

Dianne Walker

Dianne "Lady Di" Walker, a pioneer in tap dancing's resurgence has a 30 year career spanning Broadway, Television, Film and International Jazz Dance Concerts and Festivals. United States Artists has recently announced Ms. Walker as the recipient of the USA Rose Fellow 2008, Dance. Ms. Walker has toured with the show, "The Souls of Our Feet", produced by Acia Gray, and funded in part by the NEA, American Masterpieces Program. She has been dubbed the "Ella Fitzgerald" of Tap Dance. Savion Glover and his contemporaries affectionately call her, "Aunt Dianne," acknowledging her unique role as mentor, teacher and confidante. Ms. Walker holds a Master's degree in Education, and has taught at Harvard, Williams College, University of Michigan, UCLA, Bates, and Wesleyan. She serves on the board of several tap organizations, and served 10 years on the board of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Grant awards include The National Endowment for the Arts, Massachusetts Cultural Council, Jacobs Pillow, and New England Foundation for the Arts. She received Oklahoma City University's 1998 "Living Treasure In American Dance Award," adding to a long line of awards and lifetime tributes recognizing her contribution to the art form and excellence in teaching. She began her dance training in Boston with Mildred Kennedy-Bradic and later, Leon Collins, Jimmy "Sir Slyde" Mitchell and Jimmy Slyde. In 1979, she began a professional dance career under the watchful eyes of her esteemed mentors. She is grateful to many musicians and tap dance legends that have given to her so generously throughout her career such as Gregory Hines, Honi Coles, Cholly Atkins, Tina Pratt, Barry Harris, Max Roach, Alan Dawson, Ruth Brown, Nicholas Brothers, Peg Leg Bates, Arthur Duncan and many others. Leon Collins passed away in 1985, leaving Dianne to continue as one of the Directors of his school. It is with a great sense of pride that she continues to share this rich legacy with her students. Dianne is Artistic Director of "TapDanZin, Inc." (Boston), and is currently collaborating with schools in Minneapolis and Tokyo.

About the sessions with Dianne Walker:

In the 1970's tap dance began to experience a revival. Numerous masters came out of retirement and began to teach, including the late Leon Collins. Leon and three of his students, Dianne Walker, Pamela Raff, and "CB" Hetherington opened the Leon Collins Dance Studio, and formed a company with Joan Hill (pianist). They performed until his untimely death in 1985. He was known for his work with jazz, bebop, and classical music, in particular, his rendition of "Flight of the Bumblebee". A documentary produced by David Wadsworth, Songs Unwritten, was filmed about Collins and released shortly after his death.

The masters pass on the art of Tap from one generation to the next. Traditional dances are taught, along with wisdom, philosophy, and history. Dianne Walker is the only current day master who worked intimately with Leon Collins and has full knowledge of his body of work. She has spent over 25 years dedicated to his legacy, sharing information and developing his work. Holding a Master's degree in Education, she has taught at Harvard, Williams College, University of Michigan, UCLA, Bates, and Wesleyan. Grant awards include The National Endowment for the Arts, Massachusetts Cultural Council, Jacobs Pillow, and New England Foundation for the Arts. Dianne received Oklahoma City University's 1998 "Living Treasure In American Dance Award," adding to a long line of awards and lifetime tributes recognizing her contribution to the art form and excellence in teaching.

Leon's body of work includes:

- Routine 1
- Routine 2
- Routine 3
- Routine 4
- The Military
- The Waltz
- Routine 53
- Routine 8
- Tap-a-pella

The work is sophisticated in it's musical composition and phrasing. It is methodical in that each routine is a development of the previous, both in musical subtlety and technical complexity. The dancers' musicianship is developed congruently with technical ability. The landscape of the body of work is complete, as it covers numerous musical feels and time signatures including straight time, swing, military, and waltz. It can serve as a solid syllabi to educate the beginner through to the advanced tap artist.

LISA LA TOUCHE (proud tap dancer, choreographer, director and mom) Originally from Calgary and also a New Yorker, Lisa's career as a performer, solo-artist, choreographer and director has reached great heights. One of her greatest credits includes being an original cast member of SHUFFLE ALONG on Broadway choreographed by Savion Glover and directed by George C. Wolfe. With such an all-star cast, she performed at the 70th Annual TONY Awards, was a recipient of the Fred Astaire award for "Outstanding Ensemble in a Broadway show" and the A.C.C.A. Actor's Equity Award for "Outstanding Broadway Chorus". She was also both Off-Broadway and on tour for multiple years with the production STOMP directed by Luke Cresswell and Steve McNicholas and later then toured with Savion Glover and his production of STEPZ. In film/television, some of Lisa's credits include Amazon's Original TV series Z- The Beginning of Everything starring Christina Ricci with choreography by John Carrafa, the Maya And Marty show c/o NBS and Secret Talents of the Stars with Maya Harrison c/o CBS. Some of her previous overall performance highlights have also included being in the original ensemble of Dormeshia's "Sophisticated Ladies" performing weekly at The Cotton Club in Harlem, being a member of Jason Samuel Smith's company A.C.G.I., Max Pollak's Rumba Tap, and Barbara Duffy and Co. Her foundation as a professional tap dancer truly began in Chicago as part of the legendary M.A.D.D. Rhythms (founded by Bril Barrett and Martin "Tre" Dumas III), which had her Direct M.A.D.D. Rhythms Canada in her hometown, Calgary, and then later continue great works working with The Chicago Human Rhythm Project with Lane Alexander's BAM! and Martin "Tre" Dumas' company JusLisTeN. As a guest artist and choreographer, Lisa has appeared in venues such as Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Royal Albert Hall in London c/o Michele Drees' Jazz Tap Project, and with bands such as the Revive Da Live Big Band, and both Marcus Strickland and E.J. Strickland in NYC's jazz scene. She founded her own company TAP PHONICS in 2009 and has been commissioned to present for such organizations such as The Brooklyn Museum, 92Y, Gibney Dance and Fall For Dance North. Some of her most sought after choreographies include "Love Me Or Leave Me", "So" and "Fragile" to name a few which can all be found online. As an ever evolving artist, Lisa continuously immerses herself in studies and has trained in Meisner and Method based acting via Matthew Corozine and Susan Batson Studios in New York. She works with vocal coaches Shelton Becton and Susan Eichborn Young to continue her singing training, and loves the journey of rising to new discoveries as a performing artist. On the platform of Education, she currently is on faculty at PACE University in Manhattan and the University Of Calgary, and teaches for Rosie O'Donnell's "Rosie's Kids"; a New York youth-outreach theater program. She has appeared on faculty at Broadway Dance Center, Steps on Broadway, The American Tap Dance Foundation, taught residencies at institutions such as The School at Jacob's Pillow under the direction of Dianne Walker and at the Hinton Battle Dance Academy in Tokyo, Japan. She has been invited as guest faculty at NYU and Juilliard amongst other reputable colleges in North America and on top of these great institutions, she has been blessed to reach an abundance of dancers as well worldwide via the dance and tap festival circuit. This includes reputable festivals like Tap City, The Chicago Human Rhythm Project's Rhythm World, RIFF/ Woodshed, Tap Kids, Third Coast Rhythm Project, North Carolina Tap Festival, and the likes across Canada and in Brazil, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, China, and the UK. She now currently hosts her own series of courses online at tapclasswithlisa.teachable.com and offers an online after-school program called "Tap For the PPL". She believes whole heartedly, to quote the great Maya Angelou, "when you learn, teach" and that the journey is infinite and full of fascination if we trust those nudges of inspiration. Please visit www.lisalatouche.com for further info.

Jessie Sawyers

Jessie is an author, speaker, coach, and force of positivity who has traveled across 6 continents to over 10 countries. She has been teaching tap dance for 18 years and working professionally for 22. Her artistic expression is melodic, powerfully rhythmic, graceful, and exudes a deep love for improvised music collaboration. Her studies began under the tutelage of Ginger Roberts who then connected her with Cheryl Johnson and Anthony Peters in Seattle. Jessie has had the honor of studying around the U.S. and internationally with late tap greats Cholly Atkins, Ernest Brown, Harold Cromer, Fayard Nicholas, LaVaughn Robinson, Jimmy Slyde, Prince Spencer. At 16 years old, she was invited to share the stage with the late great Gregory Hines, and at 19 worked with Savion Glover as part of the Seattle Theatre Group's DANCE This concert. She often has the honor of assisting living tap legend Dianne Walker in passing on the late great Leon Collins' body of work.

Jessie's first professional work began at 13 years old as a tap dancing clam mascot in a commercial for the Seattle seafood restaurant, Ivar's. She continued doing promotional events at their restaurants and sports stadiums for 7 years. As an educator, Jessie has been on faculty at numerous international tap dance festivals including Australia, Brazil, Calgary, and Vancouver, and was a principal dancer with Tapestry Dance Company in Austin, TX, in 2014 for their 25th Anniversary Season. In 2015, Jessie was a guest performer at the Harare International Festival of the Arts in Zimbabwe, collaborating with the band Mokoomba and Iranian cajon player Ramin Khalatbari.

At 24 years old, Jessie produced Flow, her first evening length concert with a quartet of musicians and guest dance artists including Mark Mendonca, Travis Knights, and VAM Performance at the Triple Door in Seattle to a sold out crowd of 300. Five years later, Jessie was hired as Creative Director for the Women In Tap concert presented at the Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival. She organized and led the monthly Seattle Tap Jam event for years at music venues around the city, welcoming dancers of all ages, abilities, and all dance studio affiliations. In 2016, she released a global music video called Music of Humankind, which involved taking a solo trip around the world and collaborating with over 100 dancers and musicians she met along the way.

In addition to tap dance, Jessie is a published author with works including her first book, Getting Unlocked, and two volumes of her anthology book, Stories of Humankind. You can also catch Jessie on vocals. In 2018, she collaborated with GRAMMY-Nominated pianist and producer Josh Rawlings to create their first album of sound healing music, for which she sang and included tap dance on some tracks as a percussive element. The music was originally created as a supplemental tool for clients in her signature Self-Expansion Unlocked™ coaching program, but she and Josh have plans to share the full album and more with the public in the future. You can find their song, "I Will Rise" on all major music streaming platforms. To learn more, visit www.JessieSawyers.com.

Tasha Lawson

Tasha Lawson is an established International dance artist with 25 plus years as a vibrant and successful visionary spanning festival producer, educator, choreographer, artistic director and performer.

Ms. Lawson is the founder, producer and artistic director of Calgary's Tri-Tone Rhythm Ensemble and Rhythm, Body and Soul Tap Festival, with a focus on preserving and promoting tap dance and percussive arts through education and presentation.

Ms. Lawson, is recognized for developing well rounded dancers, providing the foundation needed to pursue a professional career. Students have been accepted into prestigious schools including Jacob's Pillow in Massachusetts and Escola Luthier in Barcelona, and performed with acclaimed companies such as STOMP and Dorrance Dance.

Passionate about education, Miss Lawson developed Tri-Tone Teacher Training Program's in Rhythm Tap and Pre-School Creative Dance, sharing methodologies that integrate technique, musicality, artistry and history while inspiring creativity and self discipline in students.

Tasha toured the US and Japan in 2010-2011, as Assistant Artistic Director of Cirque Du Soleil's, KOOZA, maintaining show quality and artist integration. She has delivered body percussion workshops for the Cirque casts in Las Vegas, and for the International Body Music Festival's in San Francisco and Paris.

From 2002-2008, Tasha performed and toured with Tapestry Dance Company in Austin, Texas, under the direction of Acia Gray. During this time, Tasha also served as Artistic Director of Tapestry's apprentice company, Visions In Rhythm, directing the creation of six full-length concert presentations.

Tasha has guested at numerous International Festivals in North America, South America and Europe. She was on faculty at Jacobs Pillow for its inaugural Professional Tap program and has been artist in residence for Capilano University, University of Texas, Decidedly Jazz Dancework's PTP Program, Harbour Dance Center, Vancouver's, ITP Program among others.

Tasha Graduated with advanced standing in Dance Teacher Training and Dance Performance, from Grant MacEwan University, with a focus on pedagogy in modern, jazz and classical ballet and pre-school creative dance. She later attended the Modern Dance Program at Simon Fraser, then re-located to New York, immersing in rhythm tap and music studies.

Grateful for the many opportunities afforded to her, Tasha strives to share her experiences as a guest artist, educator, choreographer, program consultant, and festival adjudicator.

Most recently, Tasha launched Lawson Percussive Dance Arts Company. Supported in part by the Calgary Arts Development Authority, the a multi-form dance and live music company premiered at the National Music Center of Canada May 21 & 22, 2022.

*For more information visit www.rhythmbodyandsoul.com or www.tashalawson.com
Instagram - @Tritonetapyyyc & @RBStapfest*

Kristian Alexandrov

Born and raised in Sofia, Bulgaria, Kristian is an accomplished pianist, percussionist, composer & producer who has made Canada his home since 1995.

Growing up in a family of musicians, music was revered and celebrated. At six years of age, Kristian was accepted into the prestigious L. Pipkov School of Music where he completed twelve years of intense training as a pianist and percussionist. Kristian's natural ability, extensive training and passion for performance enabled him to tour across much of Europe by the age of nineteen.

Onstage Kristian has worked alongside some tremendous Canadian and International artists, including: Randy Brecker, kd Lang, Eric Marienthal, Allen Vizzutti, Alain Caron, Bob Mintzer, Jackie & Kim Richardson, Wycliffe Gordon, The Canadian Tenors, Tommy Banks, All Star Brass and Order of Canada Big Band. Kristian is a long-standing musical director for acclaimed trumpeter Jens Lindemann, Decidedly Jazz Danceworks, Youth Singers of Calgary and R&B/Soul recording artist Shannon Gaye. Kristian is also a frequent pianist for the pops program of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

Recent career highlights include performances at the Eilat Chamber Music Festival (Eilat, Israel), Sochi Music Festival (Sochi, Russia), Bulgarian Embassy (Washington DC and New York, NY), Vibrato's Jazz (Los Angeles, CA), International Trumpet Guild (Grand Rapids, MI), Brassfire at Benaroya Hall (Seattle, WA), All Star Brass (Banff Centre, AB) and the Order of Canada Big Band at Koerner Hall (Toronto, ON).

On the recording studio front, Kristian is definitely in demand. He's been a part of three Juno-nominated CD's, playing piano for the live recording of Lauren Spencer-Smith's Unplugged Vol. 1, (nominated 2020). He contributed percussion and piano on Sweet Canadiana recorded by the Order of Canada Soloists (nominated 2017) and played Hammond B3 and percussion on Legacy Live (nominated 2016) recorded by Jens Lindemann and Tommy Banks. He also co-produced and recorded piano & drums on Shannon Gaye's latest CD Songs of Joy & Peace. Kristian and Shannon are back in the studio writing and producing demos for their next collaboration.