

TRANSCRIPT

ONOMATOPOEIA

EP: Germaine Goodson: Tapper Extraordinaire

[TAPE] Beginner tap warm-up. Keep rolling under intro.

ANASTASIA JOHNSON: For newcomers to tap dance, that may sound like a final showpiece. For tap master, Germaine Goodson? That's a warm-up. Specifically, the warm-up. In her beginner tap class.

Germaine has been grooming tappers for years. She's been an adjunct dance professor on both coasts of the United States. She's worked with legends like Tony Award-winning tapper Henry Le Tang. She's toured the world. Performed on Broadway.

And now? Germaine lends her talent to the future of Broadway.

I'm Anastasia Johnson and this is Onomatopoeia—a podcast about the people and places of New York City. In this episode, I sit down with a master tapper. Teacher. Time-keeper extraordinaire.

[TAPE] Flap, heel, flap, heel, heel. Flap. heel, flap, heel, stamp.

AJ: I had the pleasure of meeting Germaine in the Summer of 2021. By meeting? I mean sneaking in and standing at the back of her tap class in sheer terror. Why? Because Germaine was good and I? I was out of practice. I hadn't tapped in years because of the pandemic. Germaine, on the other hand, had.

[TAPE] Germaine: I started dancing when I was three. I had a combination of ballet and acrobatics together. They would give us pliés and relevés on your toes and little turns and I'm still dancing. So that's like 65 years of, you know, just putting in my time.

AJ: Sixty-five years. And still Germaine's fire burns within. I'm stunned to learn she's 68 over Zoom. You wouldn't know it. Not from her fit frame seated cross-legged on the floor. Nor her wit. Nor the tap shoes she's wearing. At home. On a Friday at 8pm. But funny enough, Germaine didn't always dream of being a

professional tap dancer or being on Broadway.

[TAPE] Germaine: My dreams of going to Broadway didn't happen until after I was in graduate school. I went to undergraduate school with the intention of being a child psychologist. I love psychology and children and I also love sociology. So that's what I really focused on. But I just wanted to have dance classes on the side. So I started taking tap classes again and the teacher told me I was better than her. She's like, you need to be teaching.

AJ: Dance runs in Germaine's family. Her aunt in Philadelphia owns two dance schools. Growing up, Germaine got her extra tap experience there. By the end of grad school, Germaine was teaching at her very own studio. She was ready when Broadway called--scoring a role in Duke Ellington's *Play On*. But she couldn't have predicted this:

[TAPE] Germaine: On stage on Broadway, I fell into the pit because it was a blackout and my back was facing the audience. I went to lean back and I fell back. I fell backwards into this--like I hit a chair on my way back and then this man grabbed me he was like, "this is so awesome," he was so excited. I was like "no, no, no, I'm not supposed to be with you."

AJ: She's had other close calls too - like when the curtain caught on fire during another Broadway show.

[TAPE] *Germaine: I was still dancing and they're like Germaine you have to get off stage. The curtain's on fire, the drummer was smoking a cigarette, so we have to get off.*

AJ: Germaine did get off stage. But in a special performance at UCLA, she had an accident that nearly ended her dancing career. It happened at an outdoor performance.

[TAPE] Germaine: It was for a modern piece and modern is barefoot. It was on a black marley floor, so the sun got too hot. So I was dancing. I had a solo and I was just really doing my best. So when I finished, I just laid on the ground because I just couldn't walk.

They took me to the hospital and they said you probably won't be able to dance. And I was like no, I have to dance.

AJ: Germaine had suffered third degree burns to the bottom of her feet. She spent nine months recovering. All the time reciting? Positive affirmations. In time, she was able to stand. Then walk. Then run.

[TAPE] Germaine dancing fades in.

AJ: Then dance again. Now, knowing well that anything can happen on stage, Germaine urges her students to anticipate and be alert through choreography.

[TAPE] Germaine: One, two...And four...Two. You see? And my weight's on my right foot. I do the same thing left. Left, two...and four. And seven, eight.

Emily: I'm so sorry!

AJ: That's Emily from Sweden. She's been dancing seriously for a number of years. She's great. But even for a professional dancer, mastering tap can be hard.

[TAPE] Emily: When you're learning to tap—especially for me, learning to tap at the age of 18/19—it's very easy to get stuck in your feet.

AJ: Engaging parts of the body other than the feet is one thing Germaine has helped Emily with most.

[TAPE] Emily: I love Germaine. Her energy is just like—you feel so safe. Her personality brings the whole class up.

AJ: In class, Germaine has fun. She jokes around. Throws jabs at a longtime student then circles back to technique.

[TAPE] Germaine: I love my students and it doesn't matter how long they study with me. If they're just there for one day, they'll never forget me because I will go out of my way to make sure that you know what you're doing because my work is complicated, it's a

challenge. But I want you to have fun in that challenge.

AJ: At a time when most dancers are hanging up their tap shoes - Germaine says she's got another Broadway show left in her.

[TAPE] Germaine: They're hiring younger people, but they don't have the same spirit. They have energy. They're technically brilliant but it's not from the heart and I think that's what's missing.

AJ: This episode of Onomatopoeia was created by me, Anastasia Johnson. Onomatopoeia is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Original tap choreography by Germaine Goodson. Original theme music by Lee Feldman. Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. Our graphic was created by Sunni Bean. Special thanks to Columbia Digital Librarian Michell Wilson.