

TAP ON TAP TRANSCRIPT

TAP FADES IN

COLOMBO: To most this may sound like any other tap dancing...but listen closer.

COLOMBO: What if I told you feet weren't making these sounds.

TAP CONTINUES

COLOMBO: That's Mary Six Rupert, founder of the dance troupe Tap on Tap, and inventor of a new, more accessible kind of dance....hand tapping.

COLOMBO: She gave me a demonstration at a studio on the Upper West Side.

RUPERT: So with the feet...

COLOMBO: First she showed me a traditional tap step....

FADE IN CRAMP ROLL TAPPING

COLOMBO: Her Oxford-style tap shoes glided across the floor with the ease of a seasoned veteran.

COLOMBO: Then the same step, this time while sitting down with a bamboo board on her lap.

FADE IN CRAMP ROLL TAPS WITH HANDS

RUPERT - That's my hands.

COLOMBO: What stands out about Mary isn't her two toned red and black eyeshadow or her crimson cap that matches her lipstick.

COLOMBO: It's the black gloves over her hands.

COLOMBO: Attached to the knit gloves are two shiny pieces of metal -

HANDS TAP

COLOMBO: One's you'd typically see on the bottom of tap shoes.

COLOMBO: They're her patented hand tapping gloves she created over a decade ago - to help people with mobility issues get to tap dance.

COLOMBO: Rupert wants to make sure all people get to experience the joy she's felt tap dancing...

COLOMBO: An idea reinforced by the words on the front of her t-shirt - "Tap dancing makes me happy."

RUPERT: It's adaptable it's accessible and people haven't thought of it that way.

COLOMBO: Ruperts used her invention to start the dance troupe tap on tap - an all abilities ensemble.

COLOMBO: That means those who may be disabled are dancing right along with those who may not have mobility issues. Rupert says that merging has led the group to adapt....

RUPERT: In some choreography we have some tapping with hands - tap dancing hands down - and some traditional tapping on their feet. It's a challenge for me and I love it.

COLOMBO: Rupert created the tap gloves Tap on Tap uses through trial and error.

RUPERT: Hands don't work like feet, they're constructed differently, physically, so I took the last 15 years to figure out how to make hands and arms work in a way to recreate the traditional tap sounds that you do with your feet, cuz they're not the same.

COLOMBO: But eventually she was able to make the first pair.

COLOMBO: Tap gloves have one tap over the middle three fingers and another at the base of the palm-

RUPERT: As it turns out, the way hands work, the ball taps from a tap shoe are better than the heel tap so I don't use any heel taps on my hand taps.

COLOMBO: Rupert's love of dance came from a rocky start.

COLOMBO: She rolled off her dad's lap at nine months old, breaking her leg.

RUPERT: So then my parents were worried about my legs developing properly, so they put me in tap dance at two. So I gave my first performance at two and a half, and I have never stopped performing since.

COLOMBO: She's come a long way since then - having a decades long dance career performing in musicals across the world and teaching dance at Wagner college.

COLOMBO: She spent 13 years as a Radio City Rockette -

ARCHIVE: The best of American entertainment for Americans overseas. The hit of the program is the world-famed music hall specialty, the Rockettes.

COLOMBO: Arguably one of the most iconic tap groups in the world.

COLOMBO: Rupert remembers her time with the group fondly, and says while her dance experience made learning to hand tap easier...in some ways it was still like learning the steps all over.

RUPERT: The reason the hand swings are loud is that it's a bamboo board on your lap, there's space underneath.

COLOMBO: Rupert came up with the idea of tap dancing hands down over 15 years ago.

MUSIC FADES IN

COLOMBO: Her mother was also a lifelong tap dancer. She suffered a stroke later in life and became a wheelchair user.

RUPERT: I would look at her because all tap dancers whether you're a dancer or a teacher have tap steps going through their mind all the time. You hear music, what could I tap to? And she was still doing that but she couldn't stand anymore. So I want to figure out a way that she could still tap dance, and so then I decided maybe her hands?

MUSIC FADES OUT

COLOMBO: Rupert says her mother was the first person she showed her tap gloves to.

COLOMBO: Together they experimented with hand steps that are now used in Tap on Tap's performances.

COLOMBO: Since then, Rupert's made it her mission to make sure everyone, no matter physical ability, has access to dance.

RUPERT: I had one student, and you know I teach them terminology and everything and we were talking about it, and I said, was saying, do you remember what this was called and this one woman kept knowing all the terms. And I said wait a minute you tap dance. And she said yes before my injury I was a tap dancer all my life through high school. So she had tears in her eyes that she could tap again.

COLOMBO: The tight-knit group incorporates all skill levels into their performances.

COLOMBO: There are three members in wheelchairs and several former Rockettes.

RUPERT: Everyone in the company must learn to tap with their hands so we're all equalized.

COLOMBO: Mary Kane is a member of Tap on Tap and one of those seasoned professionals. She joined the group in its infancy back in 20-19.

COLOMBO: Kane says part of the group's success is owed to Rupert's leadership..

KANE: Well she's always been a leader. I mean, her mom had a dance studio, so she's been teaching and choreographing since she's a teenager. She's just I don't know one of the nicest people I know and the kindest, and the, she just has a really great way with people. She puts them at ease and draws them in. I just think she's a natural born leader.

COLOMBO: Kane says one of her most gratifying memories with the group comes from when they went to a major tap festival over the summer...

KANE: To be part of the festival this last July which is really great I think that was a big achievement to be included in the tap community.

COLOMBO: Tap on Tap performed alongside dozens of other tap groups at Symphony Space on the Upper West Side.

COLOMBO: It's one of the few venues in New York City completely accessible to wheelchair users according to Rupert.

RUPERT: It was probably 20 tap companies. We were the only ones with disabled dancers. And, here we were accepted fully in the tap community. These top tappers, you know, in the country, were coming up to us and congratulating my wheelchair users for their tap. So that's a big step forward because we will always and want to be connected with the disability community, but we are a tap company.

FADE IN TAPPING

COLOMBO: Rupert says performing at events like these means they're a little closer to being recognized for their group's talent, rather than for its novelty.

TAPPING FADES OUT

MUSIC FADE IN

COLOMBO: Onomatopoeia - Sounds like New York - is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. This episode was written and produced by me, Madison Colombo. Joanne Faryon is our professor and executive producer. Music by blue dot sessions.

MUSIC FADE OUT