

MAKING BROADWAY DANCE



LIZA GENNARO

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This book is dedicated to my father, Peter Gennaro, who loved to dance.

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Introduction

I come to my interest in musical theater dance genetically. My father, Peter Gennaro, was a Tony Award winning choreographer and star dancer/choreographer on Broadway and television variety shows. My mother was a ballerina-turned-Broadway-dancer who danced for Bronislava Nijinska, Agnes de Mille, and Michael Kidd. My father, before becoming a choreographer in his own right, danced for Katherine Dunham, Hanya Holm, Michael Kidd, Bob Fosse, and Jerome Robbins. My parents were voracious dance and theater goers and I spent my childhood and teenage years seeing great dance and theater that included Judith Jamison in the premiere of Alvin Ailey's "Cry," Mikhail Baryshnikov's first performances with The American Ballet Theatre, the premiere performance of Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering*, the premiere season of *Dance Theatre of Harlem*, The Stuttgart Ballet's *Eugene Onegin* and *Taming of the Shrew*, the Joffrey Ballet's recreations of *The Green Table*, *Parade*, and *The Rite of Spring*, as well as *An Evening with Josephine Baker* at the Palace Theatre (1973), the original productions of *Oliver!*, *Henry Sweet Henry*, *The Wiz*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pippin*, *Chicago*, *Irene*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *A Chorus Line* at the Public Theatre which, with its focus on dancers, solidified my fascination with dance in musicals.

I love musicals, scenes followed by song followed by dance, but I am a dancer first and dance is my truest love. Consequently, my experiences viewing musicals has always been from a dance perspective and I have always enjoyed the puzzle of thinking through how the dance world impacts the theater world. My parents gave me a regular diet of pure dance alongside musical theater thereby offering me the opportunity to process performances without the imposition of restrictive binaries such as art *vs.* kitsch, highbrow *vs.* lowbrow, commercial *vs.* legitimate. To my young eyes it was all dance, and it was all theater and distinctions never occurred to me.

Throughout high school I trained as a dancer at The American Ballet Theatre School and with a variety of exceptional ballet, jazz, and tap dance teachers. Shortly after graduating from The Professional Children's School, I became a founding member of Lee Theodore's American Dance Machine, a company devoted to the preservation of musical theater dance. There I learned

2 Introduction

dozens of musical theater dances created by some of the greatest Broadway choreographers of the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, I became a regular visitor to the Research Division at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and immersed myself in the history of dance and musicals. I continued to perform on and off Broadway, eventually transitioning exclusively to choreography. After a very long break from my formal academic education, I completed my undergraduate and graduate degree in Dance Studies. I reveled in the opportunity to examine choreography in an academic setting but I was surprised by the lack of study opportunities focused on Broadway dance. My academic experience prompted me to write this book and examine the role of dance in musicals.

As I began my research, I quickly realized that dance analysis alone is inadequate for understanding the methods and processes used by musical theater choreographers who, unlike ballet and concert dance choreographers, almost always enter into the predetermined universe of the libretto in which the where, when, why, how, and who of the musical production are dictated by book writers, composers, lyricists, and directors. I found it essential to my study to consider musical theater dances dramaturgically in relation to placement (what occurs before and after a dance number), as well as why the dance number exists, why it is necessary to employ dance, how character is developed through movement, and how a choreographer's choice of movement vocabulary informs the story-telling. I also realized that to fully understand the development of musical theater dance I needed to position it within the broader study of dance history. Exploring Agnes de Mille in the context of the American modern dance mavericks, George Balanchine in the context of American jazz dance as experienced in Europe, Katherine Dunham in relation to the African diaspora, Jack Cole in relation to dance Orientalism and modernism, and Steven Hoggett's relation to the Judson Church choreographers provides a rich history to an unexamined dance form.

A portion of my research was spent unravelling the mythology and overstatement that often defines the history of musical theater dance. My examination moves beyond a simplified analysis that heralds de Mille for integrating dance into the libretto while Balanchine is barely mentioned; touts Cole as the "father of theatrical jazz" while dozens of Black choreographers, including Lawrence Deas, Charlie Davis, Buddy Bradley, and Katherine Dunham are forgotten; and dismisses 1920s–1930s dance directors as a monolith that created mindless *divertissement* with untrained dancers rather than acknowledging them as creative collaborators who considered how dance could enhance storytelling.

When I began this project, a major challenge was recovering/reconstructing the dances that I planned to analyze. Most had been lost to time, buried away in a dance captain's garage, water damaged, discarded, and, even when available, fairly indecipherable due to lack of universal dance notation systems. Most Broadway choreography was deemed disposable and never properly notated or recorded. However, in a few cases I got lucky. The Popular Balanchine Dossiers, available at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, proved a treasure trove of information about Balanchine's Broadway choreography. Beautifully documented it includes dance descriptions, interviews, dancer training practices, scripts, photographs, and reviews. The *Jerome Robbins Broadway* rehearsal tapes available at New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Theatre on Film and Tape, were another excellent source of information that I never tired of watching. Robbins' meticulous rehearsal practice, the way he worked with dancers, and his dance demonstrations were familiar and helped me gain confidence in my embodied knowledge. Another invaluable source was the De Mille Project, spearheaded by Anderson Ferrell representing the de Mille estate and dance scholar Barbara Barker. The project reconstructed and recorded several examples of de Mille's Broadway choreography and is a wonderful source for understanding how she worked in musicals.

In some cases, Hollywood adaptations of Broadway musicals were extremely useful and I am eternally grateful to Ed Sullivan for his devotion to presenting numbers from Broadway musicals on his weekly variety show. When I was lucky enough to find a film or television clip, I stood up from writing and taught myself the choreography, experiencing it on my own body to better understand styles and dramatic intent. In some cases, I had learned choreography as a member of *The American Dance Machine*. This was the case with de Mille's *Carousel* dances, "June is Bustin' Out All Over" and "The Hornpipe," which I was taught by de Mille's longtime associate Gemze de Lappe and coached in the dances by de Mille herself.

Production photos were another great source of information. I discovered that my highly developed eye honed over decades of observing, performing, and creating dance enabled me to glean considerable meaning out of production photos. I considered the glance of an eye, the tilt of a head, an interesting distribution of weight or hand placement, and combined it with my knowledge of the dancers I was examining. Knowing which dancer in a photo possessed the best execution of a given choreographer's style proved invaluable. I also relied on interviews with original cast members, many of which I conducted myself; stage directions; scores; dance arrangements;

reviews; New York Public Library clipping files of shows and choreographers; lyrics; scripts; audio recordings; costumes sketches; set renderings; production photos; biographies; autobiographies; magazine and newspaper articles; and books about productions, composers, directors, and choreographers. Louis Horst's journal, *Dance Observer* and *Dance Magazine* offered some of the richest information I discovered. I compiled accounts from these multiple sources, made timelines, and consulted with musical directors to fully understand the music that accompanied dances. I double- and triple-checked dance placement in scripts and scores, danced around my writing space, and wrote as I experienced myself gaining a grasp of what a dance had been. The process was exhilarating!

In this book I hope to share my passion and understanding of musical theater dance as a unique, artistic form created by an exceptional group of dance and theater artists. I hope to dispel the perception of musical theater dance as kitsch, disposable, and created minus artistic methodology. I demonstrate that its mass appeal does not negate its artistic value, and through close analysis and research I endeavor to acknowledge the choreographic methodologies and dramatic processes present in the form. This book aims to identify musical theater dance as a unique, distinct genre in the history of American dance.

Chapter One, "Musical Theatre Dance Training and Choreography in the 1920–1930s" is an examination of how Broadway dancers were trained, the introduction of jazz dance to Broadway, the 1920s gradual move away from unison line dancing in favor of the individuated chorus, and how a few dance directors began to consider dance in musicals in relation to the libretto as an integrated and meaningful addition to the musical play. The common practice of Black choreographers pushed aside while white choreographers claimed credit for their work and the essential role Black dance teachers and coaches played in training white dancers for Broadway is discussed here. Examinations of choreographic works by dance directors Lawrence Deas, Charlie Davis, Seymour Felix, Sammy Lee, Albertina Rasch, and George Balanchine establish a historical basis in preparation for the innovations to be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two, "*Oklahoma!*: Americana and Dance Modernism," considers how Agnes de Mille's dance innovations in Rodgers and Hammerstein's groundbreaking musical *Oklahoma!* (1943) altered the function of dance on Broadway. This chapter will consider de Mille's project in relation to Broadway dance in the 1930s and her role as a proponent of Americana dance. A reassessment of her contributions as a modernist, women's advocate, and a dramaturgically astute dance maker who manipulated librettos to convey her point

of view will be offered. De Mille's early Broadway failures, her tenacity, and how she made Broadway a place to present expressive, narrative dance is considered. Her employment of modern dance methodologies primarily taken from techniques developed by Martha Graham and Louis Horst, with whom she was closely associated, made the commercial theater a venue for dance innovation.

Examination of de Mille as an innovative dance maker continues in Chapter Three, "Agnes de Mille on Broadway: 1943–1945." A close interrogation of her choreographic trifecta: *Oklahoma!* (1943), *One Touch of Venus* (1943), and *Bloomer Girl* (1944) reveals an ideological shift in the production of dance on Broadway and the development of a paradigm for making dances in the musical theater. This chapter further explores de Mille's ability to employ dance as a medium for presenting social commentary, developing character, and creating a space for female spectatorship. Her artistic project required dancers who were not merely technicians but rather actor-dancers capable of embodying character and expressing legible story through dance. Displacing the stable of Broadway chorus men and women, de Mille introduced the actor-dancer to the commercial stage, thereby developing some of the greatest dance talents of the twentieth century including Joan McCracken, Bambi Lynn, Sono Osato, Robert Pageant, and James Mitchell. Selected dances from *One Touch of Venus* (1943), *Bloomer Girl* (1944), and *Carousel* (1945) are analyzed.

Chapter Four, "Jerome Robbins on Broadway: 1944–1951" acknowledges Robbins' surpassing of de Mille as the primary and most influential choreographer of his period. His training with Gluck Sandor and actors from the Group Theatre exposed him to Constantin Stanislavski's early acting methods and his creative years at Camp Tamiment honed a brand of humor that he would use throughout his Broadway career. I consider Robbins first musical, *On the Town* (1944), developed from his ballet *Fancy Free* (1944), in the context of de Mille's Broadway success and argue that he was at first imitative of her but ultimately found his voice and surpassed her in terms of success and output. The chapter includes analysis of selected Robbins' choreography in what I consider the first phase of his Broadway career: *On The Town* (1944), *Billion Dollar Baby* (1945), *High Button Shoes* (1947), *Look Ma I'm Dancin'* (1948), *Miss Liberty* (1949), *Call Me Madam* (1950), and *The King and I* (1951). I explore how Robbins developed a system for creating dance in musicals that employed the early acting technique of Stanislavski, as well as Lee Strasberg's Method Acting. Both techniques embraced theatrical realism and informed Robbins' creation of dances that were seamlessly embedded into musical theater librettos. His meticulous attention to the where, when, and why of his

dance creations and his comic sensibility established a model for generations of choreographers that followed him.

Chapter Five, “Taking the Reins: Emergence of the Director-Choreographer,” explores the genesis of the present-day director-choreographer starting with de Mille’s role as director-choreographer on Rodgers and Hammerstein’s ill-fated *Allegro* (1947). How she employed dance as a narrative and metaphorical device in support of the allegorical structure of the libretto, and how her artistic vision conflicted with her collaborators is investigated. De Mille’s directorial oeuvre is considered in the context of the male-dominated world of Broadway. Robbins’ ascendancy as the most influential director-choreographer of twentieth century musical theater is examined in a close analysis of his choreography for and direction of *Pajama Game* (1954 [co-directed with George Abbott, co-choreographer Bob Fosse]) *Peter Pan* (1954), *Bells Are Ringing* (1956 [in which he collaborated with Bob Fosse]), *Gypsy* (1959), and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964). *West Side Story* (1957) will be discussed here as an anomaly in Robbins’ musical theater career. I argue that Robbins’ interest in movement innovation in relation to his choreography for the “Jets” in *West Side Story* (1957) differs from his previous musical theater works. In addition, I will examine Robbins’ *West Side Story* collaboration with co-choreographer Peter Gennaro.

Chapter 6, “Broadway Dance: Post de Mille/Robbins,” describes the move away from modern dance and ballet to jazz dance as the prominent movement lexicon employed on Broadway. I examine Katherine Dunham and Jack Cole’s influence on a generation of choreographers and Bob Fosse’s fusion of the dominant paradigms established by de Mille and Robbins. I give special attention to Fosse’s choreographic influences including his early exposure to nightclubs and strip joints, and dancers Joe Frisco, Fred Astaire, and Jack Cole. Beginning with his work in *The Pajama Game* (1954) under the mentorship of Robbins, and examining selected works from *Damn Yankees* (1955) and *Sweet Charity* (1966), I study Fosse’s choreographic development. My close reading of the musical number “Big Spender” reveals Fosse’s dramaturgical process. I examine the number in relation to the 1960s sexual revolution, representations of the female dancing body in both commercial theater and concert venues, and in relation to de Mille’s “Postcard Girls” from her *Oklahoma!* dream ballet, “Laurey Makes up her Mind.” I also consider Fosse’s post-*Sweet Charity* objectification of the female body, his late career disregard for the precepts of time and place in relation to character, and his formulation of a distinctly identifiable movement lexicon—the “Fosse Style.” The chapter closes with three more influential director-choreographers: Gower Champion, with his innovative cinematic approach to stage musicals and his

use of standard showbiz dance lexicons undisturbed by modernist methods; Michael Bennett, a strict proponent of Robbins' methods and the inheritor of the Robbins' mantle; and Donald McKayle, one of the few Black director-choreographers working in the mid-twentieth century Broadway arena.

Chapter Seven, "Broadway Dance: A Plague and The New Millennium," acknowledges the 1980s HIV/AIDS crisis, the deaths of hundreds of would-be choreographers and the trauma experienced by the dance and theater communities as a defining moment in the history of Broadway dance. I examine the advent of Broadway outsiders, namely, post-modernist Bill T. Jones (*Spring Awakening* [2006]) and physical theatre practitioner Steven Hoggett (*American Idiot* [2010], [2012]; *Once* [2012]; *The Last Ship* [2014]) onto Broadway and assess the diminishment of systems created by de Mille and Robbins. I also analyze Broadway insiders Savion Glover (*Bring In 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk* [1996], *Shuffle Along: The Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 And All That Followed* [2016]), Andy Blankenbuehler (*In the Heights* [2008], *Hamilton* [2015]), Sergio Trujillo (*Memphis* [2009], *Hands on a Hard Body* [2013], *Ain't Too Proud* [2019]), and Lorin Latarro (*Waitress* [2016]). I investigate how these four negotiate the systems of Robbins and Fosse while at the same time absorbing the influx of ideas coming from physical theatre. Finally, the chapter looks at contemporary dance choreographer Camille A. Brown, who possesses an exceptional ability to discover fresh interpretations of time-worn dance vocabularies and to tell stories with invented movement. I contend that Brown is the latest choreographer using Broadway as a vehicle for dance and setting a new standard of dance excellence and innovation in musical theater.

For everything I have included in this book there is much I have not included. Modern dance choreographers including Hanya Holm, Helen Tamiris, American Ballet dancer/choreographers Michael Kidd and Herbert Ross, and several prolific mid-twentieth century female choreographers, including Onna White, Patricia Birch, and Gillian Lynne, require investigation and examination beyond what I have included.

Even though tap dance has always been included in the Broadway dance lexicon, my examination does not include it. I have chosen to focus my study on the body of Broadway choreography that emerged from ballet, modern dance, and jazz dance. Tap dance is a highly complex, sophisticated dance form encompassing many styles and approaches. Its inclusion in musicals is rich and varied and beyond the scope of this book. Many excellent books have been published about Tap dance including *Jazz Dance* by Marshall and Jean Stearns, *What The Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dancing* by Brian Siebert, and *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* by Constance Valis Hill. I leave it to future scholars to continue the study of Tap dance.

In addition, I offer only minimal examination of the extraordinary dancers who populated Broadway stages and gave life to choreographic creations: Bambi Linn, Joan McCracken, Gemze de Lappe, James Mitchell, Robert Pageant, Carol Haney, Buzz Miller, Peter Gennaro, Chita Rivera, Gwen Verdon, Lee Theodore, Matt Mattox, George Martin, Ethel Martin, Baayork Lee, Steve Boockvor, and many more deserve thorough examination. I hope that other scholars of dance and musical theater will consider these artists.

Even though this book offers critical analysis, my documentation of the history and development of musical theater dance from 1921 to 2021 is ultimately a love letter to the choreographers who make Broadway their home. It is informed by my life-long immersion into dance and theater and my particular passion for bodies moving in space. My intent is not to impose a didactic, finite lesson, but rather to illuminate the role of the choreographer and choreography in Broadway musicals and to prompt further consideration of musical theater dance.

1

Musical Theater Dance Training and Choreography in the 1920–1930s

Musical theater dance in the 1920s and 1930s is hazily remembered as a fluffy confection of beaded and feathered chorines smiling and kicking in unison precision lines. While that foggy image isn't far from the truth, it is largely unexamined in terms of how dance directors developed dances on Broadway in the early twentieth century. Standard musical theater accounts generally ignore 1920s–1930s Broadway dance in favor of attributing the advent of artistic dance employing integration and narrative to Agnes de Mille and her choreography for *Oklahoma!* (1943). The crediting of de Mille as the sole creator of a new approach to dance in musicals had the effect of halting pre-*Oklahoma!* investigation of Broadway dance innovations and promoting a history absent of scholarly rigor. In this chapter I aim to expand the history of Broadway dance by examining where musical theater dancers trained in the 1920s–1930s, how *Shuffle Along* (1921) and the introduction of jazz dance came to dominate the Broadway dance lexicon, and when dance began to function as a narrative tool rather than divertissement. I explore the dance directors, both men and women, who pushed musical theater dance in new, innovative directions and I examine jazz dance in the context of embodied storytelling.

Musical Theater Dance Training

One of the most outstanding characteristics of 1920s Broadway choreography was the enormous variety of dance styles presented. Ballet, tap, eccentric, acrobatic, precision lines, jazz, and exhibition ballroom were among the most popular styles dominating stages and dancing schools from New York to California. Studio advertisements in *The Dance Magazine* in 1926 confirm the variety of dance instruction offered nationwide: The Andalusian Academy of Dance featured “Spanish Dancing, Tango Argentine and Castanet Playing and Heel Dancing.” The Billy Pierce Studio promoted itself as “The School of Perfect Rhythm . . . Creator of the Black Bottom . . . Musical Comedies, Revues

and Acts Staged.” The Florence Doughty School of Dancing advertised “Day and Evening Classes . . . Ballet, Interpretive, Tap, Musical Comedy, Acrobatic and Ballroom Dancing,” and Joe Daniels’ full-service studio at 1544 Broadway offered “Acrobatics, Musical Comedy, Tap and Step, Ballet—Toe, Pantomime and Acts Staged—Routines Arranged.”

Ballet was a staple of musical comedy dance training and was available for study in several techniques, including Italian, Russian, and American. Many teachers of quality were practicing, including Luigi Albertieri who, with a bold quote from internationally famous Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, advertised as “By far the best dancing school I know of in America.” Porta-Povich School of Dancing offered “Daily Classes in Russian Ballet Technique” and Veronine Vestoff, member of the Pavlova-Mordkin Company, and creator of the “Vestograph,” wrote:

Learn to Dance by this Wonderful Motion Picture Method . . . In your own home, no matter where you live—you can now learn classic, toe, ballet, eccentric, and costume dancing. The famous Vestograph, the invention of M. Veronine Vestoff, world’s foremost ballet master, will make every detail of dancing technique as clear to you as though the master himself were there to guide you with the aid of this amazing invention, and M. Vestoff’s series of fascinating lessons.” *The Dance Magazine*, November 1926

Employing film technology, Vestoff pre-dated the home video market with his home study dance training technology and tapped into American’s growing demand for dance training.

Among the most influential dance educators was Ned Wayburn who, along with being a highly successful dance director in the early twentieth century, ran a successful chain of dancing schools and developed a “Home-Study” course. He was among the first to codify a system for training Broadway dancers with a method rooted in American Delsarte, military drills, and the hierarchical systems of nineteenth-century ballet spectacles.¹ Focusing on six categories of musical theater dancing, Wayburn standardized the Broadway dance lexicon of the 1920s and 1930s: Musical Comedy Technique, Toe Specialties, Exhibition Ballroom, Acrobatic Work, Tapping and Stepping, and Modern Americanized Ballet (Stratyner 1996: 8).

Defining his “Americanized Ballet” as different from European Ballet “in that the work is condensed and concentrated so that one need not spend years

¹ For further information on American Delsarte please see Stebbins, Genevieve. *Delsarte System of Expression*. New York: Dance Horizons, 1977.

and years studying before giving public performances,” he rejected the time required to perfect the rigorous, technical requirements of classical ballet and promoted a fast-track approach (Stratyner 1996: 8). While some classically trained Russians and Europeans living and working in America despaired over the disregard for pure classical training, others opened themselves to dance that was new and uniquely American and sought to incorporate American indigenous dance into their choreography.

Imperial Ballet soloist Mikhail Mordkin, who danced with Diaghilev and toured America as partner to Pavlova, was among a growing group who appreciated the distinct qualities of jazz dance and recognized its potential in the concert realm. In 1924 he envisioned a fusion of ballet and jazz

that will achieve the emotional effect of an animal's cry—a primitive wail—a woman's scream—a ballet that can be interpreted by animal movements, epitomizing perfection of the lithesomness and graceful bodily action in faultless rhythm. I want a jazz ballet that may be interpreted by jazz movements—entirely new renditions where the dancer indulges first in the imperceptible hesitation (so characteristic of American 'jazzing').” (Zeller 2016: 28)

Mordkin's sexually charged, animalistic description is racist in tone; however, his ability to recognize one of the most powerful characteristics of jazz dance—“imperceptible hesitation”—demonstrates a sophisticated eye for movement analysis. Echoing scholar Robert Farris Thompson, who employs the term “Afrikanische Aufheben” to describe the “suspending of the beat in art and dance in Africa,” Mordkin identified a complex movement idea with perceptive enthusiasm (Thompson 1974: 10).

Despite Mordkin's interest, many ballet purists remained incapable of perceiving jazz as an art form, among them internationally known Stefano Mascgano who served from 1918 to 1925 as Principal Ballet Master for The Normal School, part of the American National Association of Masters of Dancing. Mascgano insisted that “Jazz dancing has no relation to real dancing” (Zeller 2016: 27). Mascgano adhered to the supremacy of European dance, namely ballet as the height of movement expression, and was incapable of appreciating jazz dance as an equally valuable dance form. Audiences disagreed and in 1921 *Shuffle Along*, produced, written, and performed by Black theater professionals, exploded with exciting, fresh dances that captivated Broadway. As reported by Marshall and Jean Stearns, “The most impressive innovation of *Shuffle Along* was the dancing of the sixteen-girl chorus line . . . they started a new trend in Broadway musicals . . . musical comedy took on a new and rhythmic life, and chorus girls began learning to dance jazz” (Stearns 1968: 139).



Photo 1.1 *Shuffle Along* (1921). White Studio. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Jazz Dance on Broadway

As used here, jazz dance refers to a style of dance rooted in the African diaspora and developed in Black communities alongside jazz music. The appearance of Black dance directors and dancers on Broadway introduced white audiences to the manner in which jazz rhythm translated on to bodies, the use of asymmetrical body shaping, multi-varied and densely packed movement dynamics, polyrhythm expressed on the body, use of the floor as a place from which to draw energy and express rhythm, fluidity in the body combined with suspension and sparks of staccato physicality, and a tradition of improvisation that keeps performances fresh and in the moment of creation, all combined with a performing style stemming from competitive call and response traditions. Jazz dance is an embodied expression that, in its freshness and vitality, is thrilling to witness; however, visceral thrill is not its only outcome. Jazz dance is unique in its ability to express a full range of human emotions and characteristics including joy, exhilaration, pain, anger, pathos, grit, desire, resistance, humor, and survival. It is a rich declaration of human experience

that remains current as it morphs through the decades, maintaining a profound and consistent presence in Broadway dance.

Tap dance evolved alongside jazz dance but, with a musician's aptitude for rhythm, the tapper uses their body, specifically their feet, to create complex sound symphonies. The history of tap is rich and diverse and, while related to jazz dance, should not be lumped together with it. They are separate and distinct dance forms with separate and distinct trajectories in Broadway dance.² In musical theater, white choreographers regularly employed tap dance. For Rodgers and Hart's *Boys From Syracuse* (1938), George Balanchine created an *Adagio* for principal dancers George Church, Heidi Vossler, and Betty Bruce that represented the internal struggle of a man in love with two women. The women's sexuality was illustrated in their dance vocabularies: Vossler dancing *en pointe* represented "the delicacy of conjugal love" while Bruce, in tap shoes, represented a "steamier . . . carnal" attraction (Hardy Box 35–36). Balanchine's sexualization of tap, as opposed to the tamer example of love and desire presented *en pointe* with the vocabulary of classical ballet, indicates Balanchine's susceptibility to racist impressions of dance. Ballet was perceived as pure, high art while jazz and tap were perceived as sexual, low art. At the same time, the trio dance demonstrates how Balanchine's choices of dance forms, movement vocabularies, and styles were dramaturgically based and were chosen to represent character and support plot.

Appropriation

While critics and audiences responded with exhilaration to the fast paced, jazz-infused movement lexicon that had developed in Black musicals and Theatre Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A) productions, a vaudeville circuit for Black performers, white producers regularly paid off Black dance directors, removed their names, and replaced them with white dance directors who took the credit. The task of discovering which Black dance directors choreographed which shows is often impossible due to their erasure from the historical record. The pioneering research of Marshall and Jean Stearns' invaluable book, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*, sheds light on the racist inequity of the period and the actions taken by white producers in relation to appropriation of Black dance directors' creative work. The book

² See *What the Eyes Hears: A History of Tap Dancing* by Brian Seibert and *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches* by Lindsay Guairino and Wendy Oliver. See also Stearns, Marshall, and Jean Stearns. *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

is rife with examples of theft of creative property, a commonplace practice that robbed Black dance artists of equitable monetary remuneration and artistic legacy.

As reported by the Stearns, *Shuffle Along* dance director Lawrence Deas was replaced by white dance director Walter Brooks to give the show that “Broadway touch.” Charlie Davis was replaced by white dance director Julian Mitchell on *Chocolate Dandies* (1924) (Stearns 1968: 137). The Charleston, a dance that had a long history in Southern Black communities, first appeared on Broadway in *Liza* (1922), danced as a duet by Maude Russell and Rufus Greenlee (of the vaudeville team Greenlee and Drayton). No credit exists for a dance director; however, white dance director Walter Brooks received “staged by” credit, which I suspect means he staged the scenes and supervised the dances but did not create choreography. The Charleston enjoyed further popularization when it was danced by a group of “Dancing Redcaps,” in *Runnin’ Wild* (1923), produced by George White. According to Marshall and Jean Stearns, the dance was inspired by a trio of uptown street dancers discovered by Flournoy Miller, who brought them to a rehearsal where they danced for Willie Covan and his partner, Leonard Ruffin. Covan and Ruffin liked what



Photo 1.2 *Runnin’ Wild* (1923). White Studio. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

they saw and “[a]greed to develop the step into a routine.” They convinced Black dance director Lyda Webb, who was also a cast member, to include it in the show (Stearns 1968: 145,148).

The Black Bottom, attributed to white performer Anne Pennington who introduced it in *George White’s Scandals of 1926*, was in fact taught to Pennington by Black dancer Freddie Taylor. Black dancer Henry “Rubberlegs” Williams remembered dancing it around 1915 and was quoted as saying, “The dance is as old as the hills . . . done all over the South” (Stearns 1968: 110). And in the *Little Show of 1929*, white performer Clifton Webb created a sensation dancing in a number called, “Moanin’ Low,” created for him by Black dance director Buddy Bradley, borrowing Black dancer Earl Tucker’s Snake Hips dance. Bradley received no program credit and audiences assumed the dance was Webb’s invention (Stearns 1968: 161). In *Chocolate Dandies* (1924), Black dancing master Charlie Davis, engaged in an interesting cross-pollination improving upon the style of the British import Tiller Girls (known for precision dancing and kicks) by removing the kicks and adding taps. He then “drilled them until they could all do it together” (Stearns 1968: 147). Davis is not credited as dance director, but he was a cast member. He excelled in all variety of dances, but his specialty was Buck and Wing and Flash: “On stage, the sheer speed and endurance of Charlie Davis staggered the audience” (Stearns 1968: 134). Later he danced in other shows, toured abroad, choreographed a few specialties for *George White’s Scandals*, and (financed by Carl Van Vechten) opened his own studio where he taught many white dancers (Stearns 1968: 134). Black businessman Billy Pierce also ran a successful dance studio on West 46th Street with a staff of instructors including Buddy Bradley and his assistant Herbie Harper. They charged \$250 per routine and Bradley explained that the dances he and other Black instructors were teaching were the dances that they took for granted while “most white people couldn’t begin to do any of them” (Stearns 1968: 165).

Musical Theater Choreographic Methods, 1920s

In the late 1920s, change and innovation in Broadway dance included not only jazz-infused expanding movement vocabularies, but also changes in how dance functioned in musicals. Two of the most successful white progenitors of functional change were Seymour Felix and Sammy Lee. Felix trained at the Edward Neuberger School of Social Dance where he would have learned dances made popular in the 1910s Dance Craze, such as the Fox Trot, Bunny Hug, Grizzly Bear, and more, while Lee claimed to