

COVERING LETTER FROM ANNETTE WALKER:

A Trailblazer's journey: Thinking, planning and doing

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Publicity

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REPORT

Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund Report

The project outline

The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Award enabled me to undertake the international travel element of my Trailblazer Fellowship (Sept 2009- Nov 2010), which was awarded by The Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD). My Trailblazer Fellowship project involved professional development in my career as a tap dancer. The aim was to develop skills and experience to work more closely with musicians in order to fully integrate tap into a jazz band. As well as ongoing tap training I was also developing my musicianship by training as a musician and had begun working more closely with a jazz trio for tap dance performances prior to the project. Travelling to New York was a key element of research in the relationship between jazz and tap, and training in tap dance.

Dates of travel to New York USA, July 1st – August 6th 2010

Planned activities

- Attend Heather Cornell's *Manhattan Tap New York City intensive*, 12th–23rd July 2010

- Research archives at *The Lincoln Center: New York Library for the Performing Arts*

Additional activities

My previous experience of travelling to New York City enabled me to be prepared for the many opportunities that appear in a short space of time. Below is an outline of tap and jazz related events that were either recommended or I found out about whilst in the city. There were also many other events and social activities related to dance and music that contributed to the purpose of my trip.

- *The World of Tap Dance: A two-day celebration*, 6th – 7th July 2010 (Conference)
- *Tap City: The New York City Tap Festival Awards* ceremony, screening, show, 8th-9th July 2010 (Festival)
- *Savion Glover's SoLE PoWER*, 8th July 2010 (Tap/Dance theatre)
- Tap Jam at Smalls, 4th & 25th July 2010 (Tap/live jazz show)
- Heather Cornell's BBQ & jam, 17th July (Tap/live music show and jam)
- Barry Harris Trio at the Vanguard Village (Live jazz show)
- Malika Zarra at Bar 55 (Live jazz show)
- Roxane Butterfly's tap performance, 31st July 2010 (Tap/live jazz show)
- Cotton Club Swing Dance Night, 2nd August (Live entertainment: tap, big band and social swing dance)
- Lafayette Harris Jr Quartet at Zinc Bar, 4th August 2010 (Live jazz show)
- Choro Ensemble at Zinc Bar, 4th August 2010 (Live jazz show)

How far the purpose of the project was achieved

As far as the trip to New York it matched my expectations and provided the grounding and experience I was aiming for. The two-week tap intensive was challenging but in very supportive environment that helped ensure it was an enjoyable experience. It was particularly grounding to be amongst other professionals and share knowledge and experience of tap and jazz. When I returned to London I was pleased to find musicians relating to me as a musician as well as a dancer since this was one of the purposes of the project.

As indicated by the list of additional activities above, I was able to attend numerous events and jams in New York. The only element of my trip that could have improved was to have more time for research at the Lincoln Center although I managed to see some archived footage of tap dance and live music theatre shows as I had planned.

Highlights

There were so many interesting events happening while I was in NY but some great moments have to be the impromptu dinners and informal discussions with an eclectic mix of people from the international tap dance community. I made good connections with other international professional tap dancers and New York-based musicians. Working with musicians during the intensive was a great experience as it enabled me to realise my existing skills and build confidence as a tap dancing musician.

Another highlight was my surprise to see AboutTime, a British tap dance group I'm part of, included in the *World of Tap Dance* conference during the segment of tap dance in Britain/ Ireland.

Suggestions for future Awardees

It helps to allow for flexibility within a planned schedule. I had tentatively planned to attend a tap dance festival during my first week in New York. It turned out I was too unwell to do the festival classes during the first few days but I was able to attend tap conferences, screenings and shows, which turned out well, if not better than planned.

Always plan rest time. I was fortunate to be able to extend my trip in order to cover further research elements since I was so exhausted after the intensive!

A Trailblazer's journey: Thinking, planning and doing

Introduction

EXCERPT FROM MY ADAD TRAILBLAZER FELLOWSHIP INTERIM REPORT
(APR 2010)

Research trip – July 2010

With the support of the Trailblazer Fellowship I'm fully signed up for a two week workshop in July 2010 – Heather Cornell's 20th Anniversary NYC Rhythm Tap Intensive Workshop: Back to our roots – Jazz intensive. This 20th Anniversary Celebration will be the last one and is limited to only twenty participants. As the title suggests, it will be rooted in jazz and there will be musicians to work with. It will be a great opportunity to learn new material, brush up on technique and develop ways to work with musicians, all of which work towards my project goals.

EXCERPT FROM MY ONLINE BLOG ABOUT MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
(POSTED 28TH JUNE 2010)

Gearing up for travel...

On Thursday 1st July I fly to the Big Apple for a month of all things tap related. Although I'm not signed up for any TAP CITY (<http://www.atdf.org/tapcity.html>) classes I've been browsing the website and thinking about doing one of the 4-day intensives. But I'll have to wait and see how it goes. I've noted down the events that are happening and plan to attend talks, films and perhaps a performance. There are so many things to do in NYC so I know I'll have to pace myself in order to make the most of it.

The real focus of my trip to New York is to attend Heather Cornell's 20th Anniversary NYC Rhythm Tap Intensive Workshop with live music and do research at the Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts. With two solid weeks of "Back to our roots – Jazz" the intensive is just what I've been looking for. And being in New York it is also the perfect opportunity to catch up with friends and relatives, and put some faces to those Facebook tap acquaintances!

Research and professional development supported by LUTSF and ADAD

<http://www.annettewalker.co.uk/2010/06/prenyc/>

Hotfoot magazine article

AS A FEATURED IN ADAD'S HOTFOOT MAGAZINE (SEPT 2010)

What are the benefits of your experience?

The most immediate benefit of my experience that comes to mind is what I've been doing most recently. I have been on a self-directed, tap dance professional development plan in New York City for the last month. The original plan involved a two-week intensive, networking with other tap

dancers, researching the archives for tap performances at the Lincoln Centre, attending live tap and jazz events, and generally soaking up the vibe.

What it has turned into is an amazing mish-mash of planned and unplanned activities all related to tap. The two-week rhythm tap intensive by Heather Cornell went according to plan and fulfilled my expectations. The focus coincided with my main aim – working with musicians for live performances – and it certainly lived up to the packaging as *an intensive* since I had no time to do anything else. It was the mental and physical workout that I've needed and has left me brewing with new ideas to work with when I'm back in London.

Whilst I'm no stranger to New York and it's high-octane pace I had forgotten the many facets there are to the city. The tap scene bubbles under the surface, mostly hidden away from the average lay person, but there appears to be an endless fibre of connectivity within the community – everyone is connected in some way. This even applied to a musician who I randomly met at a jazz club.

But it's the social activities with other tap dancers in New York has been an invaluable experience. Tap dancers can talk passionately for hours on the "state of tap", who's doing what and share opinions on shows and activities. Discussions highlight the similarities and differences *within* the tap community *across* the world and help reinforce the sense of community. Most tap dancers I have met in New York are not native New Yorkers, but wherever a tap dancer is from they are welcomed into the growing, albeit slightly dysfunctional tap family. Of course I'm most remembered for being "that British (or more precisely Black British) tap dancer".

The greatest benefit of my experience as a Trailblazer has been the opportunity to put my project ideas into practice with the support of ADAD. It can be challenging to have full responsibility for an ambitious project that has many parts, but it is rewarding to be able to see ideas unfold and grow. The experience has not only helped me to grow as a tap dancer but to also recognise myself as a musician and trust the creative direction in which I am headed even though others might be going in different directions.

Have you faced any challenges as a trailblazer?

There have not been significant challenges as a Trailblazer per se, but that's not to say there have not been any challenges during the project. The overall project is to create a working tap and jazz trio and is made up of smaller "mini" projects. There has been the challenge of planning and prioritising each mini project so that they do not lose momentum and that they remain interconnected regardless of any shifts in the scheduling. But overall I have been fortunate that my hard work has paid off. I was also grateful to be awarded a Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund (LUTSF) to support the travel section of my Trailblazer Fellowship.

How has the experience shaped you as a dancer/practioner?

Many people go through periods of doubt of their abilities and battle with their confidence and self-esteem. For performing artists the challenge is that this can impact on the progress of their career and development as an artist. The experiences during my Trailblazer journey have helped me to recognise and utilise existing knowledge and experience in order to

strengthen me as a dancer/musician. The biggest impact has been how to relate to working with musicians. This has come through a wide combination of activities including working with a jazz trio in London, being part of and attending the London Tap Jam and Hooper's Lounge, experiences in New York through the intensive, jams and watching performances. Generally I feel more grounded *within* myself as a tap dancer and I am looking forward to returning to London with a refreshed outlook on my Trailblazer goals.

Do you have any experiences you would like to share?

There have been so many great experiences emerging out of my Trailblazer project. But what I want to share is the experience of the process on how I got here.

When I think about the earlier stages of my project I see that the work had started even before I realised what the project would be. There had been months of scribbled down (and forgotten) ideas, outlines of plans, plans of plans and a seemingly mysterious accumulation of research in various areas of tap and music that seemed barely related to each other at the time.

I cannot remember the precise time in which the overall project emerged from its early development but I do remember battling to find a way to tie the various mini projects down on paper even though it made perfect sense in my head. So the process towards a viable Trailblazer project – developing further as a tap dancer, finding a suitable tap floor, beginning work with a jazz trio, learning jazz through piano and theory – has been a process of rediscovery of my ideas and finding different ways in how it all interrelates. I am still amazed at how things have been coming together. My project started simply with a passion. This led me to organise my thoughts and put together a plan that was doable. The support from ADAD and LUTSF has helped me stay focused and keep track of my progress.

Annette Walker