



# Talking

# Tap Tap Tap

By Jo Scanlan

## THE WORLD TAP DANCE CHAMPIONSHIPS 2008

### Part One

**While at The Tap World Championships in Germany in November 2007, if someone had mentioned to me that I would be returning a year later with the first England tap team to compete, I would have said that they were mad or that it was nigh on impossible. However that is exactly what happened.**

My visit to the 2007 competition came about completely by chance after emailing Rachel Jackson-Weingartner, who now lives in Germany and manages a successful tap company, regarding a Tap Attack workshop. Rachel invited me to the championships and having never heard of them I was of course very intrigued and curious at what some of the other countries would be like.

Due to teaching commitments I was only able to attend for two days to watch the children's categories and was blown away by the sheer number of tap dancers. Over the two week event there are approximately 3500 dancers that attend. Many of the countries will have qualifying rounds that will eventually decide who will be representing their countries; others will audition dancers to become part of their national dance team. The easiest comparison to make is to the Olympics, this is really our equivalent. So many countries were there - Canada, Russia, Croatia, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, South Africa, Hungary, Ukraine, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Estonia but yet again no England!

The judges and organisers from the International Dance Organisation were extremely welcoming and also very encouraging that it would be great to have an England team there, and so being someone who likes a challenge I returned home eager to find out more!

Upon return I contacted the newly formed England IDO office. There had already been several emails from Germany to let them know I was attending and about the possibility of forming a team. In April 2008 I was invited to a general IDO meeting to discuss all codes of dance, competitions and more importantly how could more English dancers be included.

It became apparent very quickly that with the guidance and support of the Vice President of IDO England, Ansell Chezan, forming a tap team was now looking like a real possibility.

From our Tap Attack workshops one thing that was apparent was the number of young tap dancers that were emerging who wanted to do more. There are associate classes for dancers to further their training in ballet, jazz and musical theatre but tap always seemed to be the one that was missing. Having spent a lot of time working in America I knew how valuable youth training could be to a young tap dancer.

Fate may have played its part but having spent considerable time planning how to incorporate a youth company into Tap Attack and receiving so much support from the IDO it seemed an ideal opportunity for the country's young tap dancers.

I was also not alone in my thinking. One of the regular faculty members of Tap Attack was forever going on to me "What about the kids!"

Tarik Winston, a New Yorker, found fame early on Broadway in shows such as *Porgy and Bess* before replacing Savion Glover in the lead role of *The Tap Dance Kid* and then starring in *Black and Blue*. While growing up and performing on Broadway he was fortunate to work with the likes of Jimmy Slyde, Bunny Briggs, Diane Walker as well as taking direction from legends such as Henry Le Tang and The Nicholas Brothers.

Ask him and he'll tell you that it was these influences early in life that have moulded him into the tap dancer he is today. Tarik continued to work in shows and then in 1994 was asked to choreograph and star in the original production of *Riverdance* which he toured in worldwide before settling in England.

After several meetings, we had decided what we would like to achieve and how we could do it. We arranged a series of three auditions and hoped we would be able to find the dancers to match our goals.

June 22<sup>nd</sup> was our first audition date, where we were

faced with 40 tap dancers from the ages of 10 - 20, all bristling with the sheer energy and enthusiasm for the dance. This was followed by a second audition date and after many hard decisions we short listed the handful of dancers to come back for the final audition.

We'd managed to pick 30 dancers that would be suitable for the company. By the time the dancers had reached the final audition they were more comfortable with what was happening and also the style they were expected to do. I can honestly say all of the dancers were suitable but I knew initially I had to keep it small and not get out of my depth. As well as tap, they were also assessed on how they integrated within the group. For me it was just as important to get the right blend of personality, height and look as well as pure tap ability.

A week later the final decision had been made, the dancers notified as to whether they had been successful or not and the first rehearsal date set for 18th August. So with the youth company all in place all we had to do was choreograph the numbers and overcome the small detail of how to finance our world championship adventure.

**To be concluded**

