

let's talk

TAP

with Christine Donny
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TODAY LET'S TALK ACCENT!

Hi Guys. Today we will talk about some of the ways you can **improve the sound of your tapping**. In other genres, we usually focus on how the dance looks, but in tap dance, we also have to think about how we sound. Here are some subtle techniques that we can use to make a huge difference.

What can you do to spice up your rhythms and make sure they are nice and clear with a good level of dynamics? The answer is simple... ACCENT!

LIGHT AND SHADE IN SOUND

When you are tapping, it is important to give all your rhythms **light and shade**. That is, in every rhythm there should be the **louder or accented sounds** but also the **softer, lighter sounds**. This creates a nice natural sound that has a relaxed and easy flow.

If your tapping only has loud sounds then it tends to sound very forced and listening to it is like being hit over the head with a frying pan. If all your beats are very soft then the routine will sound bland, uninteresting and lack lustre. The key to a good sound is making sure you have a good mix of both heavier and lighter sounds.

IMAGINE YOU ARE PLAYING A DRUM KIT OR RATHER YOUR FEET ARE THE DRUM KIT

The heel digs are going to be your kick drum and the ball beats are your snare drum. The mixtures of sounds make the tapping look and sound exciting. The audience enthralled by all these different sounds coming out of one pair of feet. Using well-placed accent is one of the most effective tools a good dancer can have in their kit to assist in creating rhythmic dynamics.

Knowing where the accents fall in a rhythm also helps you make the rhythmic variation in a routine clear. If you have cross phrasing or syncopation (A syncopation or syncopated rhythm is any rhythm that puts an emphasis on a beat, or a subdivision of a beat, that is not usually emphasized.) in the choreography, then it is imperative that you anchor the rhythms with a clear accent or they run the risk of sounding very unclear and muddled.

For instance a 3-count step that is repeated 4 times to a 4/4 piece of music as follows:
1&2&3 Spring shuffle ball change (r)
4&5&6 Spring shuffle ball change (l)
7&8&1 Spring shuffle ball change (r)
2&3&4 Spring shuffle ball change (l)
5 6 7 8 Runs x 4 (r|l|)

If you place a strong accent on the first spring of each repetition, the rhythm will be crystal clear and you will have created some very effective syncopation and cross phrasing in the routine. If however, the accent is missing, then there is a chance that the rhythm will be unclear and you will have missed the opportunity to add this extra dynamic to your routine.

Accent is one of the skills a good tapper uses to anchor all the rhythms in a routine and to give it nice dynamics and oomph, which makes it interesting to listen. Accent is the hidden element in your tap performance that gives your sound that extra edge and clarity.

When working in a group it is also the grounding force, which can help to keep all the tappers in perfect time, as it provides a reference point for the more complex rhythmic patterns. Like punctuation in a well-written piece of literature, accent gives everyone a focal point where the rhythms are either heading to or leaving from, enabling perfect unison in a group.

LIGHT AND SHADE IN HOW WE LOOK
Now we have created great dynamics in our footwork with accent, **we also need to mirror that visually**. That is, we need to have light and shade or dynamics in how we look as well. We need to have some moments when our arm lines are really sharp and strong and then other moments when our arms relax. If all our arm lines are sharp we will tend to look forced, tense and stiff. If all our arm lines are relaxed, we will look untidy and wishy-washy. **The key to good dynamics both rhythmically and visually is having a good balance of strong and relaxed, light and shade, loud and soft!**

REGARDLESS OF THE STYLE ALL TAPPING REQUIRES THIS USE OF DYNAMICS WITHIN THE GIVEN GENRE. TRADITIONAL, BROADWAY, FUNK, STREET, BLUES, RAGTIME – NO MATTER WHAT THE STYLE OF THE CHOREOGRAPHY OR THE STYLE OF MUSIC TO WHICH YOU ARE DANCING THESE DYNAMICS NEED TO BE APPLIED.

You will also find that changing the accents in your footwork can totally change the sound and feel of a step. You can try this out yourself with a few different steps you are currently learning and you will see that by applying the accent in a different part of the step the rhythm develops a different character and personality.

For example:

1&2& Heel dig R, brush up R, step and heel drop R
Try the accent on the first heel dig on the count of 1 = 1&2&
Now try it on the final heel on the count of & after the count of 2 = 1&2&
Now try the accent on the step, on the count of 2 = 1&2&

This is a simple example and you can try many more at home.

Remember to check out the Melbourne International Tap Festival from October 15th – 20th. There will be heaps of cool classes and shows. So check out their website: www.mitf.com.au

Till next time – have fun – and keep trying out those handy tips on adding dynamics to your steps and routines!
Happy Tapping

Christine

For more tapping tips check out Christine's fantastic new DVD series www.tapatak.com.au