

## Juba! Masters of Tap and Percussive Dance Review – A Grand, “Grand Finale”

By Debra Davy

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Sam Weber photo by Nathan Keay

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On July 31st and August 1st, as part of its 25th anniversary-celebratory dance festival, **The Chicago Human Rhythm Project** ( CHRP) presented “Juba! Masters of Tap and Percussive Dance” at and in association with **Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art** (MCA). The program included music performed by the **Vijay Tellis-Nayak** Trio,(piano, bass and drums), dance solos and four choreographed pieces, featuring CHRP’s BAM ensemble and ten young guest artists from Japan, among other stars. The program was introduced and presented throughout by **Lane Alexander**, Founder and Director, himself, an acclaimed rhythm artist.





Bril Barrett photo by Matt Glavin

The festival, "Rhythm World" ran from July 6th through August 2nd at three different venues in Chicago, and the final week featured Rhythm Worlds virtuoso master artists. The JubaMasters was the program's grand finale at the MCA's **Ellis Neeson Theatre**, a terrific venue with wonderful acoustics and plush easy seating. Spectacular solo performers included **Sam Weber**, **Cartier Williams**, **Derek Grant**, **Tre' Dumas**, **Yukiko Misumi** and others and new works by Choreographers **Star Dixon** and **Zada Cheeks**. The amazingly spry and smooth performers featured a variety of ethnic groups and cultures, particularly black male soloists who were uniformly stunning both in athleticism and execution. Indeed, the program included the following note: "No one is born hating another person because of the color of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People learn to hate, and if they can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than it's opposite"... Nelson Mandela. There was certainly no hate in the auditorium the night I attended...the applause was boisterous, and the show was sold-out - as it was throughout the run.

*calendar*

**Thursday September 24th**  
 1:00 PM |  
 5:30 PM |  
 7:30 PM | Hooked World Premiere  
 9:00 PM | Comedy Palace  
 11:00 PM | RAWsalt + Ryman Arts present BACK TO SCHOOL, a juried exhibition open exclusively to Students and Alumni of Ryman Arts!

**Friday September 25th**  
 2:00 PM | Love, Sex and the I.R.S.  
 7:30 PM |  
 7:30 PM | Hooked World Premiere  
 8:00 PM | CONSCIOUS GETTING UNSTUCK HOMELESS TO HOLLYWOOD  
 8:00 PM | SIBLING RIVALRY  
 8:00 PM | ISAAC BABEL AND THE BLACK

*Feature Article*

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Lane Alexander photo by Noah Stern Weber

The word “Juba” refers to Juba dance, or Hambone, originally referred to as Pattin’ Juba. This is frequently referred to as an American style of dance, but the Juba dance is originally West African and evolved into an African-American dance performed by slaves. It includes stomping, as well as, slapping and patting the arms, legs, chest and even cheeks. Pattin’ Juba was used to keep the time for group dances, such as the Walk-Around. It was danced by a circle of men around 2 other men who performed various steps to the clapping of hands and to a rhythmic call.



Daniel Borak photo by Andreas Gamperle

However, Juba was also a real person; Master Juba was the inventor of American tap dancing-his real name was **William Henry Lane**. He was born a free man and began his career in the first decades of the nineteenth century as a performer for minstrel shows, playing the banjo and tambourine, innovating and ultimately stabilizing the dance form, and, in the process, becoming internationally famous. **Charles Dickens** toured the United States in 1842, saw Juba, and wrote about the experience in his book “American Notes”:

“Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross- cut, snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man’s fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wire legs, two spring legs- all sorts of legs and no legs- what is it to him”.



Nicholas Young photo by Guido Manzoni

After observing the The Juba Masters performance, this reviewer would add sliding across the stage in unbearably graceful movements of the arms; beating, tripping lightly and joyous drumming of the feet; beautiful heads and faces nodding, turning to and from and keeping to the beat of luscious jazz; the whole performance almost extravagantly stylish and joyous!

For the past 25 years, CHRP has attempted to, and succeeded in reviving American tap dance throughout the world, and its annual festival, "Rhythm World" is THE largest festival of American tap and percussive dance in the world. Although "Rhythm World" is over for this year, the CHRP presents year-round performance programs, as well as teaching students of all levels, providing scholarships, like the ones given in prior years to the Japanese students who returned to perform at MCA on July 31st and August 1, and creates and commissions new works constantly. For information on future programs and/or on how you can participate in the CHRP mission, contact the Chicago Human Rhythm Project website



Star Dixon photo by Peter Wocniak

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