

## Lady Di Earns Her Crown By Sue Ceswick

Tap dancer Dianne Walker carries herself like a queen. So it was no surprise that during the sixth annual Vancouver B.C. Tap Dance Society's festival she sported a sparkly tiara all weekend that seemed like her birthright. The entire event was dedicated to Dianne as a tribute, honoring her for the contribution she's made to the art of tap.

The Canadian festival, that happened over the September 2005 Labor Day weekend, featured 42 classes in three days taught by eleven teachers and attended by nearly 200 students. Tappers traveled from Calgary to California and from as far away as Hong Kong to hone their tap chops.

The roster of tap instructors included Dianne, Ernest "Brownie" Brown, Reggio McLaughlin, Dr. Jeni Legon, Acia Gray, Jason Samuels Smith, Tony Waag, Josh Hilberman, William Orłowski, Terry Brock, Lisa LaTouche and Tre Dumas III.

Festival producer Sas Selfjord and manager Anna Kramer not only provided a stellar teaching staff and roomy studios with excellent floors, the extra events made this into a deep tap experience.

The Friday night Harbour Cruise featured a three-piece jazz combo on board, white linens on the table, no-host bar and a fabulous meal. As the sun set, tap dancers dined on salmon in caper sauce, Caesar salad and a delectable cheesecake dessert.

Jason Samuels Smith emceed the tap jam that featured improvised solos, choreographed groups and a free-for-all of youth dancers. Jason worked himself into a lather between guests and Tony Waag might have slipped a disc as he shimmied and shook to the band's funky beats.

Dr. Jeni Legon took the floor and gave out some show biz tips to the tappers. She told those who hang their heads and turn their backs on the audience, to face the crowd and smile.

Saturday evening's event was a showcase of student talent held at a Vancouver jazz club. Brave tappers of all ages presented their work. Oregon dancer Erin Lee and her group performed a piece that she got from her mentor Jeanette Frame, who had learned it from Dianne years ago. Passing the torch of tap was never more apparent.

The grand finale to the festival was the Monday afternoon concert, Rhythm Bound, that took place in the perfect-size-for-a-tap-show Vancouver Playhouse Theatre. Wacky MC Deborah Williams cracked up the crowd while musicians Michael Creber on piano, Danny Parker on bass and Ivan Duben on drums supported the tappers beautifully.

Tap festival concerts are often, by necessity, a string of solo dances. That's why this show's opening number "Jelly's Last Jam" choreographed by Terry Brock was such a treat. Local Vancouver dancers Tap CO shook, shimmied and shuffled through this piece dedicated to Gregory Hines. Later Terry told a funny Dianne story then took her own sophisticated solo turn to "Satin Doll."

Although they didn't teach at the festival, Seattle's tap dancing duo Cheryl Johnson and Anthony Peters delighted tap fans with a song and dance number with new words dedicated to Dianne.

The sweetest piece was The Chair Dance. Recreated by former Copasetic Ernest "Brownie" Brown and Chicago tap icon Reggio McLaughlin, festival tap students sat in chairs tapping like the dancers at The Hoofers club. Well into his 80's, Brownie can still do hilarious pratfalls and even get back up on his feet again!

A slide show of Dianne's showed each phase of her life from babyhood, to dancing with Leon Collins, marriage and family and working in the musical "Black and Blue". Dianne quipped, "I learned some things about myself, that I didn't know!"

It was terrific to see our class instructors in action. Founder of the National Tap Dance Company of Canada William Orłowski, tapped a graceful acapella piece called "Sonata for Tap Dancer." Clad in a turquoise tuxedo, Josh Hilberman, played ukelele and kazoo while dancing. Another dancing couple Lisa LaTouche and Tre Dumas were a smooth duo tapping a piece called "Soul Mates." Acia Gray showcased her jazzy style with All Blues/Take Five. Tony Waag made 'em laugh again with "Crazy Rhythm." And of course Jason dazzled us with improv once again.