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Tap Dance for All: Adapting Instruction for Disability and Mobility Impairment, by Victoria Moore and Joan Gerrard. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2022. 249 pages; $39.95 (paper).

Tap Dance for All: Adapting Instruction for Disability and Mobility Impairment, by Victoria Moore and Joan Gerrard, has expanded my view of who can and should tap dance, and even what tap dance is. The book is written informally with love and enthusiasm, and includes stories of students and performers who I previously had not considered able to tap dance. The authors had extensive careers as professional dancers on Broadway and elsewhere, and as master tap instructors.

Chapter 1 introduces inclusive tap dance classes in which some students dance with their hands wearing tap mittens designed and made by Victoria Moore, and others dance with their feet while seated or standing. Chapter 2 documents research that demonstrates the benefits of dance for everyone, especially as we age; the authors make a potent argument for broad access to tap dancing. They review research since 2003 that concludes that dance is more effective than other healthy activities—such as exercise, puzzles, and reading—to help prevent Alzheimer's and slow the progression. Learning rhythmic movement combinations creates new neural pathways and contributes to the brain's plasticity. Chapter 3 offers valuable basic information on different diseases and conditions, as well as teaching tips for working with them.

The book provides detailed advice on teaching any tap class such as the importance of (a) choosing appropriate music, (b) including both Broadway and rhythm styles, (c) sharing stories from the history of tap dance, and (d) teaching improvisation as well as steps. Included are a chapter on basic improvisation games from Barbara Duffy's book Tap Into Improv: A Guide to Tap Dance Improvisation, and six chapters that meticulously notate combinations from beginning level through advanced. While impressive in their detail, I found these instructions challenging to follow.

What I find the most moving and transformative part of the book are the four in-depth interviews with professional dancers, choreographers, and teachers with various disabilities. I learned so much from their frank descriptions of their disabilities and what it was like emotionally and practically to develop a disability. They each have horror stories of touring, including lost chairs by the airlines that they likened to losing their legs, and the inability to climb stairs in non-accessible theaters. Lindy Dannelley is particularly frank, and also funny. After spending her whole life in the theater, she began to develop her disability at age forty. She then performed and toured for ten years with Full Radius Dance, a company for dancers with and without disabilities. She describes conquering stairs to get on the stage: "Sometimes I would throw my chair off, shimmy my rear end up the stairs, grab my chair and pull it up with me. I'm a professional, and this was where we had to go and what had to be done" (182). Her interview also offers perspective on the sensitive use of language. "One of the gimp rules is: If you don't know my name you don't get to ask what my disability is. I do not owe you my disability story. I'm just here to pick up my Chinese food" (183). (And she is very clear that only people with disabilities are allowed to use the word gimp!). All the interviewees describe how, despite the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, people with disabilities still can't go into many public places, and how important it is for people without disabilities to advocate for them.

The book ends with instructions and photos on how to make tap dance mittens and a carrying case for small tap boards. The authors cover every detail so that dance teachers can feel fully prepared to teach accessible classes.

One statement, in particular, gave me pause—that most of us will someday have a disability. Let us hope that many dance educators read this book so that dance participation in all venues—including K-12 schools, colleges, studios, community centers, and performance spaces—become accessible, and more people can experience the benefits and joys of tap dance.