

Rockin' in Rhythm! Jazz, Tap, and Improvisational Dance

In this workshop, intended for ages 11 and up, students will learn fundamentals of rhythm jazz and tap dance, and of improvisation within this form. Jazz dancing begins by establishing a relationship with jazz music through *pulse*, a rhythmic drive shared by both dancers and musicians. Musicians tap their feet to keep time as they play; dancers hold the rhythm in their bodies as a baseline to improvise over. This workshop begins from creating and maintaining pulse, and works toward composing movement through the body's "rhythm-makers" – hands, feet, shoulders, hips, head, and eyes – in the moment of dancing.

This warm up works toward establishing rhythm among a group in relationship to music, and introduces improvisational and choreographic elements. Additionally, it acts as an introductory exercise to learn participants' names and build community among the group. The warm up accumulates, and can be simplified according to the needs of each group, ending after the third, fourth, or fifth accumulation.

1. Dancers begin standing in a circle. In time with a slow- to mid-tempo song (approximately 120-140 beats per minute, such as "Shiny Stockings" as recorded by Count Basie on his *April in Paris* album), the leader demonstrates the song's pulse - a feeling of energy cycling through the body from the floor, up through ankles, knees, and hips – which manifests in a light bounce of the body in place. Dancers join in as they find and recognize the pulse. Leader and dancers pulse together in place for approximately 32 counts.
2. Maintaining the pulse, the group begins to step in place on the beat.
3. The group goes around the circle, maintaining the embodied pulse and step, and introduces themselves to the group with their name (or preferred name, such as a nickname), and the group repeats an individual's name back to them. The leader draws attention to the way that their names fall into pattern with the pulse or in contrast to it.
4. The group repeats the above direction. This time, the dancers extend, shorten, or change accents in their names in order to play with how their names emphasize or juxtapose against the pulse. Again, the group repeats each individual's name, this time matching the new rhythm.
5. The third time, as dancers say their names, they also make a gesture with the body's "rhythm makers" – hands, feet, shoulders, hips, head, and eyes – that is synchronous with the rhythm of their name. This gesture should be quick, precise, and easily repeated. The other dancers repeat both their name and their gesture back to them. This round should be repeated the same way at least once, or can be repeated as many times as necessary, until the group is able to perform each dancer's gesture.
6. In the last set, the group stops saying names aloud, and performs only each dancer's name-gesture. The leader encourages dancers to take shorter pauses in between each dancer's gesture until the gestures can be performed sequentially without a break.