

PRESS RELEASE (3 pages)

Rhapsody In Taps celebrates its 35th Anniversary Season, September 24, 2016

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ONE NIGHT ONLY!

Rhapsody In Taps' 35th Anniversary Season!

Marsee Auditorium at El Camino College

16007 Crenshaw Blvd. Torrance, CA 90506

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2016 at 8:00 PM

\$40 (Hoofers' Circle & Reception with RIT Artists); \$32 (Front Orchestra); \$25 (Back Orchestra)

All seats reserved. Ticket Sales begin August 1st. Online: centerforthearts.org or at El Camino College Box office.

Box Office Hours: M-F, 10 - 6 pm: 800-832-2787 or 310-329-5345. Campus parking is available; permit required (\$3)

Hoofers' Circle Tickets, Information, Adv. Group Rate Discounts, Mail Orders: Carolyn at 310-858-1676

Under the Artistic Direction of Linda Sohl-Ellison, Rhapsody In Taps is pleased to present its 35th Anniversary Season, Saturday, Sept. 24, 2016 at Marsee Auditorium, El Camino College in Torrance, CA. In a retrospective program of tap dance and live music, the company will share its remarkable 35 years of contributions to the diverse heritage and evolution of tap dance. The 35th anniversary program features Linda Sohl-Ellison's choreography plus choreography by great American tap masters Gregory Hines and Eddie Brown. The longest operating professional tap dance company in the US, and hence the world, Rhapsody In Taps is recognized for its choreographic invention and experimentation, its efforts to preserve and present tap's legacy, and for its significant contributions to the worldwide resurgence of tap dance since its beginnings in 1981.

Program Highlights: Gregory Hines' 1990 work for Rhapsody In Taps, *Toeing the 3rd and Fifth* (with archival video footage of Mr. Hines in rehearsal with RIT), *Duet* from *Eddie's Suite*, a classical tap choreography by the late LA tap master Eddie Brown (featured RIT soloist from 1983-1991), and *Nusantara (Bridge Between Islands)*, Sohl-Ellison's 1999-2002 innovative work for tap and live Balinese Gamelan music, a collaboration with Balinese composer/musician/dancer I Nyoman Wenten, his wife Nanik Wenten and RIT dancers. Three sections of *Nusantara* will be performed by a new generation of RIT tap dancers. Daphne Areta, Aaron Chavarria and Hailey Bundrant will dance *Merapi* (an island in Java), accompanied by Burat Wangi gamelan and RIT musicians under the direction of I Nyman Wenten. Sohl-Ellison and Wenten resurrect their mysterious masked tap dance and Balinese dance with fan titled, *Dwi Rupa* (Two Faces). Special tap guest Jimmy Fisher will perform the infamous *Kecak* (Monkey Chant), a compelling, improvised tap solo performed to contrapuntal vocal chanting. A former company member in the late 1990's, Jimmy Fisher rejoins Rhapsody In Taps to pay tribute to the late, great Bob Carroll, beloved RIT tap soloist from 1994-2011 who originated the *Kecak* role in *Nusantara*.

Other works: *Boot Brigade* a rhythmically complex tap, boot percussion and body percussion work performed by the company's 7 dancers with a live African drum score by Monti Ellison; *Drum Thunder*, a fast paced, dynamic bebop piece performed on amplified wooden boxes by dancers Taryn Chavez and Aaron Williams; *Los Coyotes Diagonal*, a moody and driving, tap quartet performed to an original Latin jazz score composed by Jeff Mayor; *Melrose Freilachs*, the exuberant, athletic and vaudevillian men's tap trio (short excerpt from Sohl-Ellison's Klezmer music piece, *Laughing With Tears*) and *Wade*, an intimate duet for Sohl Ellison and husband, drummer/vocalist Monti Ellison, performing an interactive rendition of the gospel song, *Wade in the Water*.

BACKGROUND ON FEATURED WORKS:

Toeing the 3rd and Fifth - In 1988 Linda Sohl-Ellison had the pleasure of working with tap dancer Gregory Hines, star of stage, TV and film on his new movie, *TAP!*, featuring Hines, Sammy Davis Jr. and many of America's veteran tap dance legends. Inspired by Hines' dancing, warmth and "down to earth" approachability during rehearsals and filming, Sohl-Ellison invited Mr. Hines in 1989 to create a work for her company, Rhapsody In Taps. Gregory Hines immediately said "yes!" The following summer (1990), supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the company began two weeks of fun, creative, but also intense daily

rehearsals with Hines at Katnap Studio in Venice California, with follow up rehearsals in September 1990. This was the first time he had ever choreographed for performers other than himself and his brother Maurice, and so rehearsals included a great deal of exploration. Gregory worked with RIT's Music Director of that time, Phil Wright and RIT drummer Clayton Cameron to develop the musical score during rehearsals. He collaborated with Linda Sohl-Ellison on staging and structuring his choreography. These sessions were documented on video for future rehearsal purposes. After Hines' passing in 2003, a monumental tragedy for the international tap community, RIT's rough rehearsal video footage was edited into a short archival video. The video will accompany Hine's choreography at the 35th anniversary season. Here is what renowned tap improviser Gregory Hines said in a 1990 LA Times interview about his inspiration and creative process for *Toeing The 3rd and Fifth*:

QUOTE: "When I saw them dance last spring...they were tremendous. I was just so happy. And then I got nervous. I thought, 'I hope I can come up with something interesting because they have a serious repertory. They are not playing around.' ...One of the reasons I enjoyed working with these dancers is that I've been able to let myself go in front of them. I feel like it forces me to push myself in an area where I rarely push myself which is trying to come up with things and put them in place... I want them to own it and to feel that they can make changes based on how they feel after having done it. I think of this choreography as a gift to them. You know, somebody gives you a gift, you can do what you want with it...because in many ways that is also continuing to be spontaneous with the piece."

Nusantara (Bridge Between Islands), a work that fused tap dance with elegant, exotic world music, was a landmark crossover work when it premiered more than 15 years ago. The 42-minute four part work choreographed by Linda Sohl-Ellison to an original score composed by I Nyoman Wenten for Balinese gamelan, flute, saxophone and cajon, received thumbs up when the company toured the full length work in Bali, New York, Canada, and in local performances in Los Angeles, Valencia, Riverside and Orange County from 1999-2002. Wenten received a Lester Horton Award for his music. This collaborative work was made possible, in part, by two Dance: Creation to Performance grants from the James Irvine Foundation (administered by Dance/US), and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs.

QUOTE: In its premiere the LA Times said: "The tappers, clad in traditional velvet and gold brocade bodices over trousers and tap shoes, had assimilated elements of traditional Indonesian movement—the quicksilver darting, wavelike fluctuations and extended, bent-back-hands. They also became part of the soundscape somewhat seamlessly...Capturing some of the elegant lines and vibrating stillness of Indonesian classical dance, Pauline Hagino Fred Strickler and Rashida Khan (original dancers) began the piece as a kind of pantheon of "tap gods." And in a mesmerizing duet, a masked Sohl-Ellison floated like smoke and seemed to fascinate Wenten, who enhanced his own beautiful score with a purer strain of traditional dancing."

Boot Brigade (from *The Body Speaks*) – Master drummer, Monti Ellison, performs an original African based percussion score using mallets and hand percussion to support Linda Sohl-Ellison's 2015 layered choreography featuring all 7 RIT ensemble dancers in a colorful and complex exploration into polyrhythms. Like a powerful army the dancers execute choreographed counterpoint tap rhythms, boot percussion and body percussion, creating a unified force with contrasting, solo improvisations.

Melrose Freilachs (Men's Trio, short excerpt from *Laughing With Tears*) – Back by popular demand! The lively men's trio, from Sohl-Ellison's five-part RIT signature work blends tap dancing and vaudeville elements with the infectious melodies and rhythms of Jewish klezmer music composed by Russian born clarinet virtuoso, Leo Chelyapov. This work was made possible by a 2006 Dance: Creation to Performance grant from the James Irvine Foundation (administered by Dance/US) and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.

QUOTE: Described by the Los Angeles Times, "*Laughing With Tears* used invigorating klezmer music by Leo Chelyapov for a deft, tongue-in-cheek suite... cheerfully amalgamating traditional Jewish lore and Slavic folk dancing with an arsenal of tap steps."

PERFORMERS:

Dancers: Linda Sohl-Ellison, Daphne Areta, Aaron Pardini, Taryn Chavez, Aaron Williams, Hailey Bundrant, Aaron Chavarria, Hilary Cunningham and special guests: Jimmy Fisher and I Nyoman Wenten.

Musicians: Tim Messina (Music Director/woodwinds), Joe Rotondi (piano), Bruce Stone (bass), Chris Blondal (drums), Bob Fernandez (percussion), Monti Ellison (percussion/vocals), & special guests, Gamelan Burat Wangi

under the direction of I Nyoman Wenten: Nanik Wenten, Loren Nerell, Colby Beers, Kevin Koteles, Eric Heep, Matthew Clough-Hunter, Kynwyn Sterling, Daniel Wingo, Kerri Shank and Gus Gil.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

- "...an absorbing mix of hard-driving tap rhythm and modern dance, flavored with show biz sparkle and humor."--New York Times
- "Pure virtuosity" --The Denver Post
- "They are tremendous... they have a serious repertoire" --Gregory Hines
- "Playing to a packed house, Rhapsody In Taps elicited the kind of fervor usually reserved for jazz greats or a prized athletic team. They created an energy as inexorable as a speeding train, and no less beautiful." --Los Angeles Times
- "Their effortless dancing, their exacting rhythm patterns, their costuming and their obvious pleasure in executing intricate sequences all combined for a special kind of evening." --Redlands Daily Facts
- "The mood was celebratory, the dancing top-notch, and the audience grinning from ear to ear. So much that one almost expected the audience to up and join..." --Orange County Register
- "It's definite where Linda Sohl-Ellison is taking her jazz tap company, straight toward success... Each time the Los Angeles-based company performs, it strides ahead, broadening definitions of tap dance so that it's not just the rat-ta-tat of 10 busy feet we hear, but the metaphorical consequences of that tapping." -- Los Angeles Herald Examiner
- "Sohl-Ellison's "Stroke of the Oarsmen" played to her strengths -- her ability to pair tap dancing's American way with swing and syncopation with the musical complexities of other cultures...Sohl-Ellison laid out dancing phrases that were simpatico with the ambiance and fervent drive of this percussion score, played live by Ellison and Bob Fernandez." --Orange County Register
- "Bob Carroll delivered fireworks with his feet while his face showed an infectious, aw-shucks humbleness. In his "Strokes" improvisation and in his solo work, Carroll alternated between a flurry of lightning fast, grace notes, turning leaps and larger-than-life wing steps. He was on his toes, heels and sides of his shoes as often as he was flat-footed. Like an uninhibited kid, he repeatedly slid the length of the stage, just verging on toppling over. He is a highlight of any Rhapsody concert." --Orange County Register
- "When Sohl-Ellison performs, the tapping begins in her mind and goes all the way to her feet and we can see the dance in its entirety, not just the show of steps. Like the best theatrical dancers in any style, she exudes a sense of unlimited possibility, as if she could do anything in the world and happens to be confined to this particular passage at the moment because the dance demands it. Such dancers as Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire always displayed this sense of the limitless and serendipitous..." --The Weekly, Seattle Washington

BRIEF COMPANY HISTORY

The art of rhythm tap dance, the freedom of live jazz and world music, and an original repertoire make an evening with **Rhapsody In Taps** a unique visual and musical event! Recognized for its choreographic invention and experimentation, Rhapsody In Taps has been a significant contributor to the worldwide resurgence of tap dance. Since its beginnings in 1981, Artistic Director/Choreographer Linda Sohl-Ellison and Rhapsody In Taps' artists have created a vast repertoire, celebrating the tap tradition and exploring new directions in tap choreography. The company has dedicated its creative energy to creating tap dance with a wide range of music: jazz, percussion, Latin, classical, funk, Klezmer and even Balinese gamelan music, all played live by RIT's on stage musicians.

Rhapsody In Taps has an extensive history of producing tap dance events of national significance - performances, touring, festivals, workshops, and presentation and promotion of some of America's greatest tap dance masters. The company's tap dancers, jazz musicians and percussionists have performed internationally and have worked with many of America's tap dance and jazz music legends, including Gregory Hines who created a dynamic tap work for the company in 1990, and RIT tap soloists Eddie Brown, Fred Strickler, Sandman Sims, Bunny Briggs, Bob Carroll, Arthur Duncan and others, plus renowned jazz musicians: Louie Bellson, Cedar Walton, Al "Tootie" Heath, Gildo Mahones, Phil Wright and the LA All Stars Big Band. The company has toured California, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico, Florida, Oregon, New York, Michigan, Mexico, Canada and Bali. RIT has maintained annual home seasons in Los Angeles for 35 years and a special FREE children's program (25 years) for students of Los Angeles Unified School District bused to the Aratani Theatre in Los Angeles or Marsee Auditorium in Torrance.

2016 CREDITS: Rhapsody In Taps' 35th Anniversary Los Angeles Season is co-presented with El Camino College Center for the Arts and is made possible by funding from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. Additional company support is provided by RIT board members, individual donors and the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs.