

ENJOY

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Dancer Shelly Oliver works with the cast of the Muhlenberg Summer Theater musical, *Of Thee I Sing*.

E-T photo/PETE PAOLICELLI

Politics is just a tap dance at Muhlenberg

By JANIE WELKER
The Express-Times

ALLENTOWN — "One, two, three and four."
Shelly Oliver calls out a steady rhythm and leans in close to the two groups of dancers who are sidestepping each other in an upbeat soft-shoe, grinning fatuously as they pass.

"They're the press secretaries," she says, pointing to the lead pair. "They tap-dance everywhere."

Oliver, who is choreographing Muhlenberg Summer Theatre's new production of the 1931 musical *Of Thee I Sing*, stops and grins.

"It's kind of like, life in the White House is one big tap dance," she says of the satire, which skewers presidential politics.

In this election year, tap-dancing politicians serve as a metaphor for our times, but for Oliver, tap-dancing is a way of life.

She steps into the group and makes a small adjustment to the dancer's movements, and suddenly the staccato taps of their toes and heels find the swinging rhythm of the lush score by

George and Ira Gershwin, providing the perfect punctuation to the music.

Nine years ago, the Canadian-born dancer moved to New York to study modern dance with Merce Cunningham. Instead, Oliver found herself caught up with one of few truly American dance forms.

A founding member of the troupe Manhattan Tap, Oliver has danced her way from Manhattan to China, and appeared on television programs like PBS' *Dance in America*, and as a two-time winner on *Star Search*.

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