

Tap and the Deer Head Inn prove to be a perfect match

By MARTY MUNSON

Considering that rhythm tap dance is really just jazz with your feet, and considering that the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap is a premiere jazz spot, then there's just one unanswered question about that venue's first tap dance night last weekend: "What took so long?"

And as the Dec. 5 performance showed, tap and the Deer Head were a perfect match, harking back sometimes to the days of vaudeville and the small club act. It was an intimate setting, perfect for the understated footwork of the

evening's headliner, tap great Buster Brown. Brown toured with Count Basie and Duke Ellington, and, at age 84, is still hoofing it with fast taps, some soft shoe and a body that glides along on top for the ride.

In between riffs, Brown would pause for jokes or to tease the band. While in the rhythm, he looked like the cabaret stage was life for him. If you've ever seen a ballerina in the wings, flat-footed and maybe slouched for a minute, you're struck by the contrast between on stage and off. But for Buster Brown, his "cool cat" demeanor is the same on stage and

off. Those complex patterns coming out of his shoes are like breathing to him.

Joining Brown on the program were dancer Shelly Oliver, the Dave Leonhardt Trio and the Muhlenberg Jazz Tap Ensemble.

Oliver opened the program and showed a different kind of cool. A one-time star student of great tap dancers like Charles "Cookie" Cooke, she is a hooper through and through. But her style is more exuberant, more explosive and more expansive than the old style of tap. At the Deer Head, she showcased the more lyrical, soft-shoe style as well

as some lightning-speed footwork. She was playful here and there, too.

During its debut, the Muhlenberg Jazz Tap Ensemble, a group made up largely of students at Muhlenberg College and directed by Oliver, performed made-for-the-theater-type piece on the Deer Head's tiny cabaret stage and handled the space challenges like pros.

At the 7 p.m. show, I got the feeling the performers could have gone on all night. But alas, the 9 p.m. crowd was huddling outside the door.

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Jazz tap-dance revue set at Lafayette

Five world-class tap dancers and the David Leonhardt Trio will present a Jazz-Tap Revue at 8 p.m. Wednesday in the Morris R. Williams Center for the Arts at Lafayette College, Easton.

Veteran dancers LaVaughn Robinson and Buster Brown will perform with new-generation artists: Herbin Van Cayseele, Shelley Oliver and Germaine Ingram.

Jazz pianist Leonhardt will be joined by drummer Bobby Durham and Lynn Seaton on bass.

Leonhardt and Oliver will give a preview presentation at noon Wednesday in Room 123 at the center. They also will show a videotape of historic styles of American tap dancing. Admission is free; lunch will be available for \$3.

Leonhardt is Lafayette's 1994-95 Alan and Wendy Pesky Artist-in-Residence. He has performed throughout North and South America, Europe and the Middle and Far East and has produced, arranged and performed on numerous recordings, including his recently released CD "Departure."

Brown and Robinson are recognized as landmark performers in U.S. tap dance. They have been tap dancing professionally since the 1940s and have shared the stage with the likes of Cab Calloway, Tommy Dorsey, Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Maynard Ferguson.

Winner of the 1989 National Heritage Fellowship Award, Robinson has received two Choreographers Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as a Pew Fellowship. He and his dance partner Ingram appeared in the PBS tap special "Gregory Hines' Tap Dance in America."

Ingram has danced across the United States and Europe. She has choreographed for musical theater as well as tap and in 1993 was commissioned to create a piece for Manhattan Tap in New York City.

Oliver is former artistic director and is choreographer for Manhattan Tap. She toured internationally with the ensemble from 1986 to 1991. A graduate of York University, Toronto, she later developed dance programs and workshops for children in New York state schools. She was a Star Search dance champion in 1985 and toured China with the Talmage Dancers in 1989.

Van Cayseele has performed on CBS television with Gregory Hines, toured Europe with Jimmy Woodie and appeared at Lincoln Center with Billy Higgins and Barry Harris. He has been seen tap dancing on Sesame Street and on Samsonite luggage commercials.

Revue tickets are \$12 and may be reserved by calling the Williams Center box office at 250-5009. Box office hours are from noon to 2 p.m. and 4-5 p.m. weekdays.