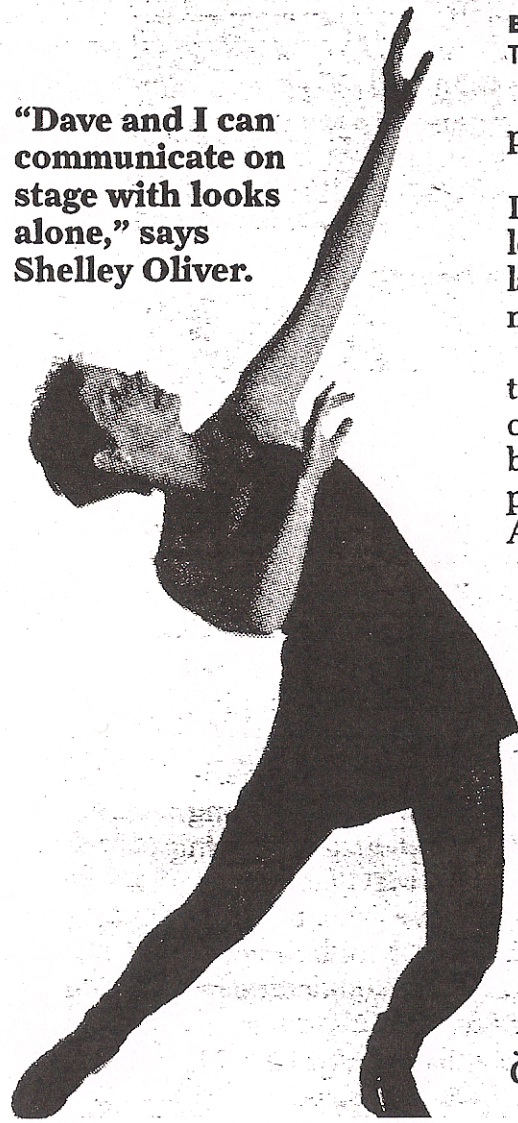


## ENJOYCENTER

# A tappin' and jammin' marriage of the arts

**"Dave and I can communicate on stage with looks alone," says Shelley Oliver.**



BY SUSAN KALAN  
The Express-Times

What's it like to be a working performing couple?

For husband-and-wife musician David Leonhardt and dancer Shelley Oliver of Easton, it's nice to collaborate on projects and tours both national and international.

The couple, at home for this interview, are preparing for tonight's opening of a special performance by the Muhlenberg College Department of Theatre and Dance in Allentown.

The program, which will run through Sunday, is being billed as "The Shelley Oliver Tap Dancers With The David Leonhardt Jazz Group and The Muhlenberg Jazz Tap Ensemble."

The couple will share an energetic evening of rhythm, jazz and choreography with the public.

Canadian-born Oliver, a former "Star Search" finalist, is a jazz tap instructor at Muhlenberg College and artistic director of its

Jazz Tap Ensemble, which tours as an outreach program on performance art for elementary school children. She conducts master classes and workshops in classes and campuses nationwide.

She has trained and performed with legends of the tap world, including Gregory Hines, Savion Glover, Jimmy Slide, Buster Brown, Steve Condos and Chuck Green. She is a founding member of Manhattan Tap.

Jazz pianist and composer Leonhardt and his jazz group, including Tara Okamoto on drums and Matthew Parish on bass, perform as artists-in-residence at colleges and universities. Leonhardt has toured internationally as pianist for jazz legend Jon Hendricks, accompanying such vocalists as Diane Reeves and Bobby McFarren.

He is featured on the David "Fathead" Newman CD, "City Scapes," and on the High Note label, and he is known for his improvised interpretations and hearty rhythms. In 1991, he founded Big

"That can mean hitting the road with a 31-foot RV and a van," Leonhardt said. "It's tons of fun and more like a family vacation than work."

Oliver says she enjoys taking the children along because it takes away the anxiety about them, "except when they were little and wanted to use the pottery right before I was going on stage."

The couple blend so well in their performance art that "we can communicate on stage with looks alone," Oliver says. "That helps me feel secure in my performance."

"Unless I make a mistake, and then the look I get is not so wonderful," Leonhardt inter-

"The best part about working together is we get to travel together," Leonhardt says. "When I tour without Shelley, it can get pretty lonely. The worst part is I don't get paid for writing arrangements for her."

Oliver says the best part about working with her husband is "how natural and easy it is because it is how we related to each other before we were a couple. Plus, I don't have to pay for musical arrangements!"

The couple often travel with five dancers, five musicians, their two children and two pups. A tour can even include some of their musicians' children.

The couple married after a few years and left behind their busy careers in New York 15 years ago for the Lehigh Valley, where they raised their children, Taylor and Sarah. Oliver eventually formed the touring group, The Shelley Oliver Tap Dancers.

"We often travel with the kids, who are old enough now to help backstage and act as quasi stage managers," Leonhardt says.

Together the couple have produced a series of seven well-known CDs called "Tap Music for Tap Dancers," made for tap professionals and students to dance with and use for rehearsals and practice.

Bang Records and released his first CD, "Departure," then "Reflections."

His jazz group released the CD "I'll Be Home for Christmas" last fall, featuring vocalist Nancy Reed and saxophonist Larry McKenna.

Oliver and Leonhardt met in New York when David was the musical director for a tap dance troupe under the artistic direction of Shelley.

"So much for not getting romantically involved with someone you work with!" he exclaims.

Continued from 8

**COUPLE:** A tappin' and jammin' marriage of the arts

| PLEASE SEE COUPLE, 10