teacher resource guide

schooltime performance series

beats, rhymes and tap shoes

with Maurice Chestnut
about the performance

Explosive, rhythmic, soulful, and beautiful. 

Beats, Rhymes and Tap Shoes with Maurice Chestnut is an innovative journey through tap dance, celebrating the music of the seminal rap group A Tribe Called Quest. Created by Newark, New Jersey native and dance impresario Maurice Chestnut, and with musical direction by Jerome Jennings, this interactive performance highlights the jazz sampling that is part of A Tribe Called Quest’s DNA. The performance by tap dancers and a live band will also explore the social issues of today, which are present in the songs of this classic hip-hop unit.

more on the performance

Creator/Choreographer
Maurice Chestnut

Musical Director
Jerome Jennings

Cast
Brinae Ali* (provided additional choreography)
Emma Bigelow
Kyle Wilder
Asha Griffith

Voice
Mikimari Caiyhe

Light Design
William Fitzgerald

About Maurice Chestnut

Maurice Chestnut has been dancing since he was five years old, under the tutelage of local tap dance legend Alfred Gallman. At the tender age of nine, Chestnut joined New Jersey Tap Ensemble, his first professional dance company, where he is still involved as a principal dancer and choreographer.

He has shared the stage with tap dance great Savion Glover in Bring in ‘Da Noise, Bring in ‘Da Funk, Improvagraphy,

Classical Savion, Tappin’ Into Monk, Invitation to the Dancer, and ABC-TV’s Dancing with the Stars. He has danced at Carnegie Hall, the Apollo Theater (where he was named Top Dog Performer), the Playboy Jazz Festival, and throughout Europe as a featured soloist with Geri Allen, noted jazz composer, pianist and bandleader. He appeared on Sally Jesse Raphael’s My Kid’s a Star, was named a gold medalist in the NAACP’s Act-So competition and was featured on the accompanying TV special. Off Broadway, his credits include Shades of Harlem, The Wiz, and Bubbling Brown Sugar.

In his performances, Chestnut evokes bygone hoofing greats, while infusing his classical rhythm tap training with hip hop, funk and soul.

About Jerome Jennings

Jerome Jennings is a skillful jazz drummer who has played with some of the most prestigious musicians and institutions around the world – over 40 countries and counting. His musical output is grounded in traditional jazz swing, while also drawing inspiration from soul music and hip hop.

He graduated from Rutgers University’s Mason Gross School of the Arts in 2004. In 2007, he earned a master’s degree at the Juilliard School. In 2017, he became the resident director of the Juilliard Jazz Orchestra.

While at Juilliard, Jennings became the first Jazz Studies recipient of the Morse Fellowship, an educational program that enables fellows to teach two classes per week throughout the academic year at New York City schools. Jennings has been named an accredited jazz scholar at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

As an educator, Jennings teaches, leads clinics, and performs educational youth outreach with Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Jazz for Young People (JYJP) program. For Lincoln Center’s JALCYO (Jazz at Lincoln Center Youth Orchestra) programs, he is an instructor and ensemble leader. For Jazz House Kids, a New Jersey community arts organization dedicated to educating children through jazz, he is also a drum instructor and ensemble leader. At NUPAC, Jennings is a teen mentor, ensemble coach and drum instructor.

As a drummer, he has performed at every major jazz club in the New York City area: the Village Vanguard, Birdland, the Blue Note, and Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola. He has shared the stage with big-name performers including Sonny Rollins, Hank Jones, the Count Basie Orchestra, and Wynton Marsalis.

In 2016, he released his debut album, The Beat, which was named one of the top three jazz releases by NPR, garnered a four-star rating in DownBeat Magazine, and was nominated for the prestigious French “Grand Prix du disque” award for Album of the Year.

About A Tribe Called Quest

A Tribe Called Quest (ATCQ) is one of the most storied, respected and admired hip-hop groups in that musical genre’s history. Formed in 1985 by New York residents Q-Tip, Phife Dawg, Ali Shaheed Muhammad, and Jarobi White, ATCQ went on to revolutionize hip hop in the early 1990s by artfully combining skillful, intelligent rap lyrics with jazz and creative sampling, a marked difference from their peers in the rap game, which typically employed cookie cutter soul samples at the time. Many music critics and historians consider ATCQ to be a high point in hip-hop artistry.

Q-Tip, a well-regarded soloist in his own right, is the group’s main producer and an MC. Phife Dawg, who died in 2016 from complications of diabetes, was also the group’s MC. He and Q-Tip would engage in dexterous, fluid vocal interplay as they rapped about love, relationships, capitalism, date rape, and other social issues. They complemented and contrasted against each other, as some music critics have said, with Tip bringing a mellow flow and Phife vibing more street-ready raps. Ali Shaheed Muhammad acts as DJ and co-producer, bringing a laid-back jazzy melodic backbone to their songs. Jarobi White was an early contributor before leaving for a successful cooking career. He was a member of the group for their debut album and contributed to their last album in 2016.

The band has released six critically acclaimed albums, most notably their first album, People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm, and others, The Low End Theory and Midnight Marauders. ATCQ’s debut was heralded as groundbreaking and revolutionary. They brought a laid-back, playful element to rap while widening the vocabulary and emotional landscape that rappers could inhabit. They did not have a tough-guy image compared to other groups and hip-hop artists at the time. The group was having fun and didn’t seem to take themselves too seriously in songs like “I Left My Wallet in El Segundo.” The group also brought in samples from jazz, R&B, and rock artists—like Lou Reed—who were not favored at the time, and spiced in ambient noise like frogs and a child crying.

Many music critics consider their second album, The Low End Theory, to be one of the best hip-hop albums of all time, and it still stands as a seminal influence on rap. The album’s sound is sparse, minimalist and utilizes bebop jazz. It has gone on to influence artists like Pharrell Williams, The Roots, Kendrick Lamar, Kanye West, Common, Frank Ocean, and many more. Throughout the years since its release in 1991, critics list it as one of the greatest albums.

ATCQ was part of the Native Tongues, a loose collective of hip-hop artists who came to prominence in the late 1980s and early ’90s. The artists utilized Afrocentric lyrics and downplayed the harder edged, violent tone of hip hop and rap that were also popular at the time, i.e., gangsta rap. Groups like ATCQ, De La Soul, the Jungle Brothers, Afrika Bambaataa, and Queen Latifah are closely identified with Native Tongues. Some music critics called them alternative rap because the artists rapped about social issues, mundane events, keeping a positive attitude, being bohemian, or just chilling and goofing off with their friends, again a marked difference from harder-core rap.

Beats, Rhymes and Tap Shoes with Maurice Chestnut

njasp.org/education
An interview with Maurice Chestnut and Jerome Jennings

Maurice Chestnut

What inspired you to create a show centered on A Tribe Called Quest? Beasts, Rhymes and Tap Shoes was dedicated to the music of A Tribe Called Quest in honor of their contribution to hip hop but also due to bridging the gap between classic jazz music and hip hop. I also felt like their music was theatrical and thought that tap dance could bring it to life. We use about a half-dozen songs, like “Excursions,” “Buggin’ Out” and “Check the Rhime.” I’ve attended many concerts of A Tribe Called Quest. I never met them, though. Their music is so listener-friendly, understandable and intergenerational.

How is the show structured? The show is structured with five dancers, a five-piece band, a poet and visuals. I’ve known every collaborator for at least five years now. We do wear street clothes, but they’re “put-together” street clothes. Sometimes the audience claps their hands on cue to help us with certain songs and rhythms.

What are the connections you found between tap dance, jazz and hip hop? Tap dance was created and evolved through jazz music. Tap dance is like the grandfather of a lot of American dance; it was the first mainstream dance. And tap dancers were the rappers of their time.

What are the main social themes referenced in the show? We touch on social issues—race, police brutality and gentrification, for example—through classic hip-hop lyrics. In one part of the show, we speak to the negative stereotypes of tap dance’s “coon” image. For a black performer to perform, he had to wear blackface. Also, there was a “two-colored rule” that at least two black entertainers had to perform in front of a white audience. Bill Bojangles was the first to be able to step on stage before a white audience by himself. From this, tap dance adapted the stereotype of “coonage.”

It turned into something different, though. In hip hop, your main objective is to look tough. It was still “coonaging” in a way that it made you think all black people sold drugs or were the toughest people alive; in the days of vaudeville, you had to smile. Nowadays, you just have to look like something you’re not. My thing is that it’s still minstrelsy. There are still remnants of it, especially in comedy and movies.

Do New Jersey and Newark have a rich tap dance history? New Jersey has a special place in the dance world due to Savion Glover and Deborah Mitchell. Savion Glover is a famous Broadway choreographer and tap dancer who was born and raised in Newark. Deborah Mitchell is the founder of New Jersey Tap Dance Ensemble.

Tell us about one of your mentors. The No. 1 thing (about the late Geri Allen, an internationally acclaimed jazz pianist) was that she always gave back. She always encouraged you to keep your art form going. She was never afraid of innovation. Geri was not just a master jazz artist, she was a master teacher.

What aspect about tap dance do you love the most? The aspect of tap I love most is that through dance you can actually make music at the same time. It’s percussion with movement.

What do you hope students take away from the performance? I would love students to leave with a sense of their history and a fresh understanding of the art form of tap—also an understanding that hip-hop and jazz music come from the same place. It’s not about what’s being sold to you. American commercial success makes things different. The art runs way deeper.

What advice do you give to young people who express an interest in dance? Follow your heart, heed what your voice tells you. Don’t try so much to be somebody else. You can’t move that way.

Jerome Jennings

What interested you most about participating in this show? Did you learn anything new while working and preparing for this performance? I have always had an interest in and love for working with dancers. Maurice is a friend, and the concept is awesome. What really hit home for me during this project is how closely dance and music are connected. It’s amazing!

From your experience, how is hip hop in general, and A Tribe Called Quest in particular, regarded in the jazz world? I’m not 100% sure how the jazz community as a whole regards hip hop. Most of the players of jazz today (45 and younger) are of the hip-hop generation—myself included. Hip hop permeated and influenced every part of my life while growing up. I embraced every part of hip hop, not only its music component. I didn’t need to learn hip hop. Jazz I learned from my elders. I embraced hip hop and jazz culture as a kid, and still do.

What are the connections you found among tap dance, jazz and hip hop? Tap dance, jazz and hip hop are closely related. All three come from the African-American experience. Ironically, jazz music and hip-hop music have a dance component informing each art. If you look at tap, and dance techniques of dancers like John Bubbles and the Nicholas Brothers, you’ll have better grasp of the rhythms of bebop. Hip hop producers like Grandmaster Flash and Jazzy Jeff inform the dance and vice versa. Bottom line is jazz and hip-hop music are different branches from the same root.

As an artist/instrumentalist, what is it you love most about jazz and playing the drums? The drums are all about rhythm. I love rhythm and that’s what the drum provides; communication through rhythms. Performing jazz music provides a platform to communicate using those rhythms.

Why is musical education important? Do you see this kind of performance as a way to foster an appreciation of jazz in kids? Music education is crucial these days, particularly in public grammar schools. I am a product of music in public schools. Hopefully, we will be able to turn kids on to jazz music through this performance. Jazz is one of the only musical forms that come out of the American experience.

This is one of our cultural gifts to the world. What do you hope students learn from the performance? What can kids do if they want to get into music but don’t know where to start? Hopefully, the students will become more familiar with A Tribe Called Quest. I hope they would like to further explore jazz music and its great artists. Ultimately, I would like the kids to have a good time. Kids interested in music should go to their local music store and inquire about getting a music teacher for the instrument that they want to play.

https://njpac.org/education
### Teacher Focus

**Prepare for the performance**

In Beats, Rhymes and Tap Shoes, the performers use jazz, hip hop and tap dance to pay homage to A Tribe Called Quest. Let’s start by learning about A Tribe Called Quest.

- **Read the group’s biography on their Facebook page:** Go to facebook.com/ATribeCalledQuest/about and use Biography, click on “See More.”
- **Print copies of the biography for your students:** OR make the Facebook page accessible to them. Also, prepare to show them the “Can I Kick It?” music video, available at the following link: youtube.com/watch?v=O3pyCGnZzYA
- If you’ll be looking at lyrics later: If you want to read the lyrics now, go to azlyrics.com/lyrics/tribecalledquest/canikickit.html

**Experience the performance**

Facilitate a discussion of the show by focusing on “Can I Kick It?” The performers used live instrumentation, a recorded sample, tap shoes, and a mic to create their own version. Help students reflect on what effect those changes had. Also, help them reflect on social issues the performance may have addressed.

**Focus**

Beats, Rhymes and Tap Shoes blends elements of many Afrocentric cultural forms, namely jazz, hip hop and tap dance. Visit azlyrics.com/lyrics/tribecalledquest/canikickit.html to print copies of the lyrics to “Can I Kick It?”

**Originate**

Next, your students will rewrite the lyrics to make their own version of “Can I Kick It?” Decide beforehand if they will work better on their own or in small groups. Also prepare any additional guidelines they may need. Optional: Use Activity Sheet #2 to help students think about their own cultural influences.

**Rehearse**

Guide students in finishing and practicing their verses. You may want to use new instruments or beatboxing. Encourage them to create accompaniment to enhance the song.

- **Schedule a time to share your students’ work:** With the rest of the school at an assembly. Pick a student to introduce the work and give the performance context. Help students reflect afterward by asking how they felt sharing it and what feedback they got.

**Make magic**

Perform your song for your peers at a school assembly. Reflect on the experience afterward.

- **Perform your song for your peers:** At a school assembly. Reflect on the experience afterward.

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### Student Activity

**Read about A Tribe Called Quest and watch the music video for “Can I Kick It?” Based on what you see in the video, what makes A Tribe Called Quest unique? Do their lyrics or style reference any social issues? Answer these questions and more by completing Activity Sheet #1.

**Take your class to NJPAC to see Beats, Rhymes and Tap Shoes.** The show will likely feature a remake of “Can I Kick It?”

**Did you hear the remake of “Can I Kick It?” How was it similar or different from the original? What did the performers add? Did the performance make you think about any social issues? If so, which social issues?**

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**Think about your own culture and history. What are you about? What do you want to celebrate? Work alone or in small groups to rewrite one verse of “Can I Kick It?” to celebrate yourself, your cultures and/or your class.**

**What makes a good performance? Brainstorm criteria and aspire to it as you rehearse. Encourage one another by recognizing the positive in what each person or group does.**

**Perform your song for your peers at a school assembly. Reflect on the experience afterward. (If you are too shy to perform it live, you can record yourselves using smartphones or computers in a one-shot music video.)**

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### NJ Student Learning Standards

**Social Studies**

- NJSS.3.1.14
- 6.2.3.D.5

**English Language Arts**

- NJELA.R.1
- NJELA.R.2
- NJELA.L.4
- NJELA.SL.1

**NJ Arts Standard**

- 1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique

**Critique**

- NJELA.R.1
- NJELA.R.2
- NJELA.R.5
- NJELA.R.6
- NJELA.R.I
- NJELA.SL.5
- NJELA.SL.6

**Arts and Culture**

- NJELA.R.1
- NJELA.R.2
- NJELA.R.5
- NJELA.R.6
- NJELA.R.I
- NJELA.SL.5
- NJELA.SL.6

**English Language Arts**

- NJELA.W.4
- NJELA.L.4
- NJELA.L.3
- NJELA.SL.1

**Performance**

- NJELA.R.1
- NJELA.R.2
- NJELA.R.5
- NJELA.R.6
- NJELA.R.I
- NJELA.SL.5
- NJELA.SL.6

**Critique**

- NJELA.R.1
- NJELA.R.2
- NJELA.R.5
- NJELA.R.6
- NJELA.R.I
- NJELA.SL.5
- NJELA.SL.6

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**Standards**

- Arts
- Social Studies
1. The Creative Process
All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles that govern the creation of works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

1.2 History of Arts & Culture
All students will understand the role, development, and influence of the arts throughout history and across cultures.

1.3 Performance
All students will synthesize skills, media, methods, and technologies that are appropriate to creating, performing and/or presenting works of art in dance, music, theatre and visual art.

1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique
All students will demonstrate an understanding of arts philosophies, judgment and analysis to works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

National Arts Standards

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
2. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
3. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
4. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
5. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
6. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art.
7. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

New Jersey Student Learning Standards

English Language Arts
NJSLSA.R.4.
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

NJSLSA.R.5.
Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

NJSLSA.R.6.
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

NJSLSA.R.7.
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

NJSLSA.R.8.
Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

NJSLSA.W.4.
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

NJSLSA.W.5.
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

NJSLSA.SL.3.
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Social Studies
6.1.2.D.14.
Determine the influence of multicultural beliefs, products (i.e., art, food, music and literature), and practices in shaping contemporary American culture.

Assess the influence of television, the Internet, and other forms of electronic communication on the creation and diffusion of cultural and political information, worldwide.

Cultural Connections
Like many of America’s cherished art forms (jazz, hip-hop, country, rock, etc.), tap dance was created by resourceful poor people who wanted to entertain themselves. Dance scholars have studied how tap came into being: It was born in the crowded urban neighborhood of the legendary Five Points district in 19th century Manhattan, where free African Americans lived cheek by jowl with Irish immigrants and other recent European arrivals. From this milieu, dancers from all ethnicities observed each other’s form of dancing, especially during dance contests. These were extremely popular among people during the mid- and late-1800s and would feature the best. Along the way, dancers studied each other’s techniques and incorporated them, remixing them in such a way as to create a new form, tap dance, a propulsive percussive dance with roots in African tribal movements, Irish jigs and English clog dancing. The father of tap dance is considered to be Master Juba (birth name William Henry Lane), who was born in 1825 and died in 1852. He was such a skilled dancer that he got top billing over white performers in minstrel shows. He developed the foundation of tap by incorporating African dance, Irish jigs and English clog dancing. He won many dance contests in Five Points and became well known in Manhattan for his hoofing skills. He toured England with a minstrel troupe in 1848. He was forced to perform in blackface as well. But his unique dancing caught the imagination of the English and started to make an impact on dance there and in Europe. He settled in England but died an early death in his late 20s.

Since Juba’s time on stage, tap dance has continued to evolve into a dynamic living art form. Tap dancing as we know it today didn’t come about until the Roaring 20s, when dancers started nailing metals to their shoes to create more percussive sounds.

In the early 20th century, vaudeville variety shows became popular with the public. These shows typically featured comedians, trained animals, magicians, acrobats, and of course dancers. Tap dancing spread even further as a cultural force due to these traveling vaudeville shows.

Notable tap dancers in history include Bill Robinson, who was known to tap dance in Shirley Temple movies and for being a black person in show business who was making a considerable amount of money. Gregory Hines, an actor and dancer, brought new relevance to tap in the late 20th century by hoofing in a bold, masculine, assertive style that didn’t rely on nostalgia. He danced to contemporary music, ushering the art form into the modern age, and introduced his moves through popular entertainment like films and television.

In the 1980s and ’90s, Savion Glover, a Newark native and tap dance savant, emerged as a seminal figure in contemporary tap dance. His unique take on tap took influences from hip-hop and funk music and was distilled in his Tony Award-winning show, Bring in ‘Da Noise, Bring in ‘Da Funk. He is known for his ingenuity, precision and skill. He has performed with stars like Gregory Hines and Barbra Streisand.
**Beats, Rhymes and Tap Shoes with Maurice Chestnut**

**Vocabulary**

**Minstrel show**
A racial form of entertainment that came into being in the early 19th century. White performers would dress up like African Americans and put on “blackface” makeup, then pretend to be black by acting stupid, lazy and engaging in other racist stereotypes about African Americans. A show would be made up of skits and musical dance numbers. A few black performers worked in these shows under white managers.

**Native Tongues**
A loose collective of hip-hop artists who came to prominence in the late 1980s and early 90s. The artists utilized Afrocentric lyrics and downplayed the more violent aspects of hip hop and rap in their lyrics. Sometimes called alternative rap, the artists rapped about social issues and more positive-minded messages.

**Rap**
A style of popular music, developed by disc jockeys and African Americans in the inner city in the late 1970s, in which an insistent, recurring beat pattern provides the background and counterpoint for rapid, slangy and often boastful rhyming patter glibly intoned by a vocalist or vocalists.

**Sample**
The act of taking a portion, or sample, of one sound recording and reusing it as an instrument or a sound recording in a different song or piece.

**Tap dance**
A distinctly American dance art form where a dancer taps their shoes to make a percussive sound, like drums. The dance form has its roots in African tribal dance, Irish jig and English clog dancing. Tap dance was born in the mid-19th century in the urban neighborhood of Five Points in Manhattan. Tap was distinctly different from the other step dances mentioned here (which tended to be more rigid in form and favor dancers performing as a group) due to tap’s virtuosity, syncopated rhythms, improvisation, looser movements, and emphasis on solo performances.

**Tap shoes**
Tap shoes used to have wooden soles to produce the dance’s distinctive sound. Nowadays tap shoes have metal plates to create the percussive sound element of this art form.

**Bebebop**
A type of jazz originating in the 1940s and characterized by complex harmony and rhythms. It is associated particularly with Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Dizzy Gillespie.

**English clog dancing**
A form of dancing popular in England and Wales, where people dance wearing wooden shoes or clogs. Dancers tap their clogs against the floor to create a percussive rhythm.

**Gangsta rap**
Hardcore hip hop that prominently features themes about the “gangsta” lifestyle. Came into being in the mid-1990s and became extremely popular in the early 1990s. Rappers would openly discuss their affiliation with criminal gangs, like the Bloods and the Crips, in their lyrics. Called alternative rap, the artists rapped about social aspects of hip hop and rap in their lyrics. Sometimes called alternative rap, the artists rapped about social issues and more positive-minded messages.

**Midnight Marauders**
**The Low End Theory**
**People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths**

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**Midnight Marauders**
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the arts in your school

In-School Residencies: Drama + Social Studies. Dance + Math. It all adds up in NJPAC’s In-School Residencies in which professional teaching artists partner with educators to bring the arts into the classroom. Each 7- to 10-week program culminates in a student performance or an interactive family workshop. All programs address state and national standards. NJPAC is the regional provider in New Jersey for international arts programs like the NJ Wolf Trap Program and Dancing Classrooms Global.

Assemblies: NJPAC presents engaging school assembly programs that are presented by professional artists that invite students into the enchanting world of live performance. NJPAC’s assembly series promotes cultural awareness and invigorates learning by presenting works that are connected to your school’s curriculum.

Professional Development: NJPAC Professional Development engages classroom teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists as integrated teams that combine arts pedagogy, content, classroom management and social behavioral strategies to ignite and inspire arts-rich classrooms. Working as a team empowers teachers to share practice and strategy. Our goal is to inspire artistic and intellectual capacities in students, building competence and confidence in both students and teachers.

study the arts at njpac

Saturday Programs: NJPAC’s Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level—from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in film, contemporary modern dance, hip hop, jazz, musical theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call our education sales team at 973.353.7058 or email artseducation@njpac.org. Visit njpac.org/education

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