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Danny Daniels: A life of dance and choreography

Louis Eric Fossum

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DANNY DANIELS:

A LIFE OF DANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies:
Theatre Arts and Communication Studies

by
Louis Eric Fossum

June 2003
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A LIFE OF DANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY

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Louis Eric Fossum
June 2003
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ABSTRACT

The career of Danny Daniels was significant for its contribution to dance choreography for the stage and screen, and his development of concept choreography. Danny’s dedication to the art of dance, and the integrity of the artistic process was matched by his support and love for the dancers who performed his choreographic works. His career should be a template to future choreographers, and dancers in that he was always true to himself, and never disrespected the intelligence of his audience. His visionary work matched his own personality in that it was always forward driven. Danny Daniels was truly ahead of his time, and his work survives as a testament to his talent.
DEDICATION

In Theatre a common experience of performers, stage managers, stage hands, conductors, directors, and choreographers is to cross paths only once, while others may work together many times over the span of a career. Fortunately, my association with Danny Daniels, an award winning Broadway, film, and television choreographer, would be the latter experience. My first audition for Danny Daniels occurred in 1975, for Edwin Lester’s Los Angeles Civic Light Opera production of Wonderful Town, starring Nanette Fabray, George Gaynes, Marty Rolf, Mary Wicks, and Leroy Reems. In the ensuing years I found myself working on seven more projects with Danny and his son Daniel (D.J.) Giagni on both stage and television. It was Daniels’ great talent, concentration, and dedication to the art of dance that kept me coming back for more.

This biography of Danny Daniels is dedicated to all of the dancers, including Danny Daniels, who so admired the artistry of Fred Astaire, and experienced with Danny Danniels, the quest for theatrical excellence. This thesis is also dedicated to his family, and especially his wife Bea, for their unwavering support for his career. To the
many Broadway audience members over the years that have experienced the thrill that I experienced at the Broadway opening of *The Tap Dance Kid*, when the house leapt to its feet in a thunderous ovation for Daniels’ choreographic symphony of syncopation in the “Fabulous Feet” number.

Lastly my biography of Danny Daniels is dedicated to the future dancers, and director-choreographers who may benefit from an Emmy and Tony award winning career that has spanned over sixty years. May this retrospective of Danny’s career allow young dancers to stand in the wings as it were and learn how dance is lifted from simple staging to a profession, and an art.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The career of Danny Daniels spans over seven decades. Beginning his dance training as a child, Daniels was gifted, and had what tap dancers, (hoofers), would call great feet. That is the elasticity of the ankles to produce syncopated rhythms at controlled rapid speeds. It is a sound that is exciting, and elicits an immediate response from an audience. Danny's talent continued to flourish with early training in classical ballet, that expanded his technical skills as a dancer, and this ballet training would serve him well as a future choreographer. As Danny would readily admit, he was lucky that he studied tap dancing first, and not the other way around. Danny's style of tap dancing is into the floor, as opposed to the classical ballet technique that is pulled up out of the floor. In ballet, the training is to appear to defy gravity, (the term for this is ballon). In the Daniels style of tap dancing, the feet not only must work the pounding rhythms into the floor, but the entire body must be included to produce movement that is interesting for the audience to watch. His early dance training allowed
him to utilize his entire body to dance at a level that few dancers ever achieve.

Danny's dance skills alone would yield a full career for most dancers, but he was also blessed with a capacity for visual learning that allowed him to cross over, as it were, becoming a choreographic talent. Danny was eventually able to visualize what dance should look like on stage, and then transform that vision, utilizing the physical skills of dancers executing the choreography. This visual skill was learned over many years of choreographing dancers. Eventually the two processes began to develop into a personal style.

To notate that style, Danny developed a notation process that is different from the Rudolf Laban dance notation as described by Jean Newlove in her book, "Laban For Actors and Dancers." Where the Leban method notates from the bottom up, the Daniels notation is the opposite. Danny places the meter of the dance at the left margin, and a series of three lateral squares names each step to correspond to the meter in the left margin. In this way Danny was able to catalogue his choreography for rehearsals, or future performances, and to develop his own unique style of conceptual theatrical dance movement.
There have been many choreographers over the years, but only a select few have transcended dance, by moving beyond mere patterns moving through space, to create within the conceptual sphere of dance. This is dance that tells a story, dance that has meaning, and dance that is holistic at its core. Those choreographers who immediately come to mind in considering conceptual talent are Agnes DeMille, Jerome Robbins, Busby Berkeley, Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly, Michael Kidd, Bob Fosse, and Danny Daniels.

Without committing the mortal sin of explaining art, and risking banality, I would describe the Daniels conceptual choreographic technique as complete and pure concentration. All theatrical factors are focused into a single dance number. These factors are dance, music, acting, story, rhythm, physical patterns, and always the Daniels trademark, humor. A Daniels number starts with a core step, or rhythm pattern; from this the number begins to build upon other corresponding rhythms that sound individual but are in fact related to the core step. The musical term for this is contrapuntal rhythm.

As the dancers execute an opening dance segment, the Daniels concepts begin to appear as storyline. Simplicity is key to this building process. The concept must be
encompassed in the amount of musical bars used for the
dance sequence. This is where Danny's musicality comes
into play, for he must climax the dance as the music
dictates, so as to close out the concept, and to allow for
the audience to experience the maximum emotional lift.
This is the Daniels style; building contrapuntal rhythms,
and pressing the dance forward, without stopping the pace
of the show, makes the dance become an integral part of
the overall narrative. It is within this framework that
Danny's conceptual choreography is expressed.

The dream ballet from Oklahoma by Agnes DeMille, the
"Two Lost Souls" number from Damn Yankees by Bob Fosse,
the opening Times Square urban ballet in Guys And Dolls by
Michael Kidd: these are all fine examples of Broadway
conceptual dance. In film, Busby Berkeley's urban ballet
in 42nd Street, Gene Kelly's 17-minute ballet in An
American In Paris, Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's
"Broadway Rhythm" ballet in Singing In The Rain, are all
fine examples of conceptual film dance. With
choreographers like these as your contemporaries, some of
whom choreographed the longest running shows in Broadway
history, the artistic level of dance on stage was
enormous.
With the exception of *The Tap Dance Kid*, all of the Daniels Broadway choreography was exhibited in shows that didn’t have lengthy runs. Finally having a hit show to gain maximum exposure was not only key to this show’s success, but *The Tap Dance Kid* also earned Daniels his first Tony Award. Had Danny accepted Jerome Robbins offer to co-choreograph *West Side Story*, perhaps the Daniels style would have gained prominence three decades earlier. Perhaps not, considering that Jerome Robbins didn’t give Danny credit for the numbers that he staged for *Gypsy*. It was ironic considering that Arthur Laurents in his autobiography, “Original Story By Arthur Laurents,” noted that, “The kiddie numbers in the show were a smash, though the only part that was.” Unfortunately, Laurents neglected to mention that the smash choreography belonged to Danny Daniels. Unlike Gower Champion, who insured his notoriety by hiring a press agent, Danny was only interested in the creative process and not in competing for public awareness.

In the 1960s there was competition enough, when the choreography of Gower Champion, Onna White, Bob Fosse, and Jerome Robbins to name a few were considered yearly for the Tony Award. When you are nominated in such prestigious
company as that, the five other Tony Award nominations that Danny received are reward in themselves. Danny's way of thinking would never even consider worrying about what might have been; his concentration was always on mounting a future project for the stage.

Having had the good fortune to be cast by Danny Daniels for stage and television, I began my experience with his work with three conceptual numbers in the 1975 production of Wonderful Town, starring Nanette Fabray and George Gaynes. Danny's first conceptual number in the show was a new piece written for the show, and entitled, "Hey, New York," followed by "Christopher Street," and then "Swing." The first number that was rehearsed for the production was "Swing." Daniels had cast me as a singer/understudy after hearing me sing one song at the first audition. I was told that rehearsals were the following Monday morning at nine o'clock.

A few days later in rehearsal, Danny's peripheral vision caught me off to the left side, doing all of the steps that the chorus dancers were doing. He asked me during a break if I was a tap dancer, and I told him that I had tap danced since the age of nine. That answer was enough for him to insert me into the number as a dancer.
For the rest of the show I would run from one side of the stage to the other, dancing 16 bars on stage left, and running to begin a new step for 16 bars on stage right, before culminating in the final 32 bars of the climatic ending of the number on stage left. The rhythm patterns of the tap dancers as they began the simple core step with Fabray surrounded by 6 male dancers, compounded so that, at the close of the dance, the number of dancers expanded to became 30 male and female dancers, at the climax holding a cinematic style freeze frame, while the audience cheered for several minutes. Needless to say, I became hooked on the Daniels style.

What was it about this man who looked so serious? Danny would be standing with his New York cab driver’s cap pulled down just to the top of his glasses, looking across the room, and somewhere beyond the back wall of the rehearsal room of the Music Center Annex building, he seemed to see something. What? Constantly jingling coins in his right pants pocket, Danny had a deep crease between his eyebrows that was interpreted by a few as a sour personality.

Not unlike his choreography, Danny is a person who possesses many layers. The surface is the only thing about
him that might appear tough, but just below the epidermis is someone loyal, smart, funny, and very shy.

In contrast to the concentration of Broadway choreographers such as Lee Theodore, or Joe Layton, both of whom frightened me during early rehearsals of their stage shows, dealing with the Daniels form of concentration didn’t frighten me, but drew me in. That was also the way his choreography effected the audience. Hermes Pan, who choreographed fourteen of Fred Astaire’s films, admitted to Svetlana McLee Grody, in her book “Conversations With Choreographers,” that he was never prepared before the rehearsal of a new show, unlike Danny Daniels who has always been prepared with a broad choreographic concept before the dancers began rehearsal whether for stage, or film. He has always sketched out his visualization of the movement for the maximum artistic effect in the musical genre.

Danny is creating a utopian ideal that never forgets that there is an audience viewing the work. As Richard Dyer would say in his essay “Entertainment And Utopia,” “What it lacks in theoretical bite it makes up for in accessibility and use value.” It is Danny’s respect for the audience that is crucial to his character.
Respect for the dance translates into Danny's respect for the individual. The Daniels approach to life revolves around mutual respect. If a performer executes the choreographic concept with respect, then the performance translates that self-respect, into audience respect and professional respect. On the other hand, a performer who steps out of the concept, because of a lack of concentration, and respect regarding the choreography, loses the respect not only of their peers, but also of the audience, and the choreographer. If a performer is respectful to the choreography and the audience, they will develop a professional working relationship with Danny, that may last for years. If the performer chooses not to respect the choreography and the audience, then they breech the trust factor and the end of a Daniels show will also be the end of their professional relationships with him.

Danny's methodology fosters the audience's empathy. That live factor that makes the connection between it and his concept. It was Danny's work in the theatre that made for such a powerful reaction to his film work on Pennies From Heaven. Says Jane Feuer in her article, "Spectators And Spectacles," "The Hollywood Musical worships live
entertainment because live forms seem to speak more directly to the spectator.” The Daniels style in particular is in sync with the audience, even without an audience present for the shooting of the film’s 14 numbers, because of Danny’s years of theatrical experience. The performances are part of the narrative, and conceptually they are also the voice of the protagonist speaking his inner thoughts through the numbers. As Feuer also says, “...whenever any number commences in any musical the world becomes a stage.”

In Pennies From Heaven, the director, Herb Ross, even inserted a stage into the “It’s The Girl” number, as an homage to the show-within-the-show style of the early 1930s film musicals. While the rest of the Daniels concepts in the film omitted the ubiquitous proscenium of the early musicals. Danny nonetheless presents the fantasy world of the protagonist as a cinematic reality. The dance sequences are intended to appear vividly real to the film’s protagonist, desperate to make his dreams come true in the real world of the Great Depression. As Allen Woll noted in his book, “The Hollywood Musical Goes To War,” that a curious schizophrenia of the 1930s musical was that they were dependant upon the logic of the real world, but
the content is not. This split between the Great Depression setting of *Pennies From Heaven*, and Danny’s fantasy choreography, is true to the 1930s form, with the exception of the title number, in which a homeless man dances as the sky rains down golden coins. As Woll might described it, the bulk of the Daniels choreography achieves what Lorenz Hart wanted musicals to become fifty years earlier, that musicals should be written for the camera. Danny’s choreography achieved this goal in that is was conceived by the shot, with total respect for the period depicted, as well as acting as a utopia for the spirits of the film’s protagonist.

Danny’s deep respect for the dance also pushed for perfection. As he would admit, he has just never stopped, either as a dancer, or as a choreographer. Some cast member was always destined to cry during rehearsals that required so much drive, and determination. Away from the theatre at Danny’s dance school, he perfected students’ tap technique, but with a more nurturing methodology. Lacking the pressure of a theatrical deadline to meet, he reversed the approach, allowing for the students to push themselves to stay up with the steps and routines. I learned this firsthand after the run of *Wonderful Town*. 
The Daniels technique begins at the ballet bar using classical ballet carriage and arm movements for simple warm up exercises, for a flexible ankle, that then incorporates the whole leg for a simple shuffle step. A cramp roll step has four distinct sounds moving counterclockwise from toe to toe, and heel to heel. Even with years of tap training, I had never been trained to make such clean sounding steps. To execute the Daniels technique, I had to set aside my previous training, and fully commit myself to this new technique. When stepping away from the bar, students execute a series of line formations across the room to sound out the draw back steps, with an emphasis on dancing into the floor. Danny incorporates all of these floor exercises into a 32-bar dance routine that students perform to end the two hour class. Once the students master all of the steps at one level, then the students are promoted to the next level of difficulty.

The prime motivation of students who trained with Danny Daniels was the hope that their feet had just some of the perfection of rhythm that Danny’s feet possess. I had never heard a pair of feet before like those of Danny Daniels. The closest to come to them were the Riff taps of
Steve Condos in Gower Champion's production of *Sugar*. The Condos style is brilliant, but the physical carriage is downward, as if listening to the rhythms pounding into the floor. The Daniels style offers more than pounding into the floor, it is emotional, and it is the classical ballet component that allows the physical carriage to lift up, as the choreography soars. As Peter Wollen described in his book, "Singin' In The Rain," regarding classical ballet's influence on Gene Kelly, "In dance terms he was so to speak, determined to be upwardly mobile, adding ballet carriage and arm movements above the waist to tapping feet below." This could easily apply to the Daniels style of dance.

It is quite amazing to consider the Daniels style's great contribution to theatrical and cinematic dance over the years. He also worked to record famous hoofers from the past for the Library Of Congress, an almost equally important contribution to the history of tap dancing. His efforts to found the director's and choreographer's union, (SSDC), in 1962, to protect the artistic work of all stage professionals in the future is still appreciated. What Danny was able to do in the late 1970s would rekindle an interest in tap as a dance form, with
his great choreographic achievements with The Tap Dance Kid, and Pennies From Heaven. Even Gene Kelly gave Danny credit for bring back the interest of the public and dancers in tap dancing. It was credit that was earned by hard work, training, and great dedication.

The lesson to be considered by future dancers and choreographers deals with conceptual dance, dance that has meaning, and dance that does more than fill musical phrases. What should be focused on is the melding of personal and choreographic integrity. The future dancers and choreographers should note that another collaborators experience doesn’t always require a deferential response. There is never a throw-away number in any show, because all of a choreographer’s work should be treated with respect. This respect can then be transmitted to the cast and to the audience. There should always be a reason for the choreography, a subtext for the dance. The dance should tell a story, complex, or simple. It was a form that emerged from a man whose story is right out of the American tradition of hard work and fair play, evolving into a successful life, no matter how humble the beginnings may have been.
CHAPTER TWO

BEGINNINGS

The dream of starting a new life in America, where hard work made for success, was the dream of all the new immigrants that came to the United States in the early part of the 20th Century. Leaving the social structure of the older European society for the newer and freer American society was a magnet for the Giagni family, as well as for my own. America was a land of the possible, and starting a family in this new world, a first generation in this new land, was a testimonial to that promising future.

Danny Daniels was born Daniel Giagni, (pronounced; Gee-ahn-yee), in Albany, New York, in 1924, and was the oldest of two sons, Daniel and Vincent, of Italian immigrants. Danny's mother, Mary Bucci, was born in Canada, in 1904, moving later to Gloversville, New York. His father, Daniel Giagni, was born in the town of Potenza, Basilicata, Italy also in 1904. Danny's first artistic influence was his father, who was a professional banjo player, making a good living performing in Albany, and touring with bands. After his wife asked him to stay
at home, Giagni Sr. became a self-taught barber with his older brother, Vincent, in a shop he ran in Albany, where his son, Danny, made valuable contacts for his early dance performances.

When Danny began learning tap dancing at the age of five around 1929, he studied with a Broadway dancer named Tommy Sternfield, who was performing with a fellow chorus boy named Archibald Leech, who later changed his name to Cary Grant, in the Broadway show, *Present Arms.*

Danny soon became Sternfield's prize pupil and his father began using the barber shop contacts to book the young dancer all over Albany every Saturday night. From age 6 to 8 he and his father would make the rounds from the Elks Lodge, to the Lions Club, and eventually end up around 2:00 A.M. at a local beer garden. Danny's father would tell the band in each place to play two choruses of "Bye Bye Blues," while his son entertained in full costume. Mary Giagni, having been a professional seamstress since the age of 12, made all of her son's costumes; the sailor suit, the pair of black corduroy trousers with rhinestones on the creases, a sequined belt, and white peasant blouse that made him look like Rudolf Valentino.
Danny's first conceptual choreographic moment could be traced to one of the late night performances. Young Danny was singing some old song with the lyric; "I'm broke, I'm busted, I haven't got a cent." As usual, Danny reached into his pocket to show his empty pocket lining, when instead, out fell a quarter dollar. The crowd responded by tossing more quarters towards Danny's feet. After this night Danny's father made sure for that number that there was always a quarter in Danny's trouser pocket. The result being that Danny could make around $6.00 on a Saturday night, about one third of the weekly salary of a working man at the time. Rain, or snow the father and son duo worked the Albany area until Danny's father felt it was time for greener pastures, which occurred when Danny was 9 years old, his father packed up the family to move to New York City, the center of musical theatre, where Giagni Sr. hoped his son's career would encounter greater opportunities. While Danny went to P.S. 78 in the Bronx for the next year, his father earned a living selling magazines, until he could realize his next vision of Danny's future, Hollywood.

This time his father sold off all of the family possessions, packed everyone into a 1931 Studebaker, and
headed along Route 66 to the land of orange trees, sunny beaches and movie stars. One night in the Arizona dessert, Danny's father had a dream urging him to change his son's name. Influenced to do this by the example of the popular French actress, Simon Simone, the young Danny Giagni became Danny Daniels. 4 Even though Danny hated the name, he found work so quickly under it that he knew better than to change it back and have to start all over again from scratch.

Danny's film career began shortly after the family arrived, when his father saw an audition in the trade papers for a Paramount picture, The Star Maker, with Bing Crosby in the lead role. Leroy Prinz, Dance Director, (The term choreographer wasn't used until later in the business), signed Danny up for a seven week contract at the amazing adult salary of $75.00 per week. Bing Crosby and the young dancers performed their songs and dances to a pre-recorded track, later Danny dubbed his solo taps in a Looping booth. 5 Looping the sound of taps is quite difficult. The dancer must watch the photographed image on a screen, and try to match the steps in tempo, while dancing on a small dance floor under a boom microphone. A beeping sound is heard at the beginning of the frame, and
the dancer must begin the musical phrase as it was shot, and end the phrase the same way. The same dubbing process is used for singing and dialogue, but matching tap dancing is more difficult. This film alone paid off all of the family debts and launched Danny's cinema career.

The film was also a film debut for six year old Darryl Hickman. Hickman was the baby among the young tap dancers, but his training with famed Cotton Club hoofer, Willie Covan, allowed him to just keep up with Danny and another soloist named Dante Di Paolo, who were so good. Hickman also remembered how dance director, Prinz, assisted by his brother, Eddie, rehearsed the newsboy's number in the rehearsal bungalow, (all of the Paramount musicals used this space), for three weeks. The number was shot on a large sound stage at Paramount, recreating the look of a vaudeville theatre for their number in the film. The director, Roy del Ruth, used a giant crane for many of the shots used in the number to allow the camera to follow the dance laterally. Both Daniels and Hickman remembered how wonderful Bing Crosby was to work with; he fed Hickman lines to say and turned him towards the camera for his takes. Overall Crosby showed great kindness to all of the young performers.
Afterward his father enrolled Danny in the Mar Ken Professional School on Franklin Avenue. A short time later he auditioned for Station KECA, (NBC’s Blue Network). Daniels was cast in a leading role on the radio drama, Jerry At Fair Oaks, for which he was paid $5. per transcription, each on a large glass record, with the capacity to play an entire 15 minute episode. In his free time, he studied dance with Edith Jane at the Falcon Studios on Hollywood Boulevard. It was at Falcon Studios that Danny learned ballet, and also took advantage of free space to stage his own dance numbers. This early acquired staging ability would serve him well in the future. The family stayed in Hollywood long enough for Danny to graduate from Le Cont Junior High School in 1939 and finish one year at Hollywood High School, before Danny's father had another career vision. Back in the car, the family returned to a better Bronx neighborhood, but this time with their possessions in tow.
CHAPTER THREE
BROADWAY BOUND

This move back to New York City was pivotal in connecting Danny to his future on the Broadway stage. As is possible even today, young dancers can audition for a chorus job and find themselves working with the top people in the theatre. The chance to be seen by professional stage directors and stage choreographers in a Broadway show was the goal of young Danny Daniels.

Upon returning to the Bronx, Danny enrolled at Evander Childs High School. However after finishing his Junior year, Danny landed an audition for the Broadway musical Best Foot Forward, and was hired for the chorus at age sixteen in the Summer of 1941. He turned seventeen during the run of the show and left school to make his living in the theatre. The twenty-nine year old Gene Kelly was the dance director, and George Abbott was the director. The cast included June Allyson, Rosemary Lane, Gil Stratton, Marty May, and, written into the show, a newcomer named Nancy Walker who performed the song "Just A Little Joint With A Juke Box." (This number would be performed twenty years later when Danny cast another
newcomer for the same role named Liza Minnelli). Gene Kelly used this song as a second-act ballet, but later it became a solo for Nancy Walker, who stopped the show. *Best Foot Forward* was Danny's first experience at performing large production numbers and group tap choreography. The show played a year, a big hit for its time. Danny earned $35 per week in the chorus, as did another teenage chorus dancer named Stanley Donen.

Danny learned some valuable lessons from the director and stage manager in how to handle young cast members. The chorus antics back stage got more outrageous as the run went on. The male chorus were basically all teenagers, and their favorite antic, was to wait at the top on the backstage stairs to the dressing rooms and drop paper bags filled with water on unsuspecting cast members down below. The furious stage manager was rapidly losing control of the unruly male chorus. Finally, in anguish over yet another water bombing backstage, the stage manager called an 8:00 A.M. rehearsal for all of the chorus members. Today, Actor's Equity wouldn't allow such a rehearsal on a matinee day. The chorus arrived on time and for thirty minutes did the staging for the show's big production
number "Buckle Down Winsocki," before all were dismissed. This cured the backstage water bombardiers.

Another problem with such a young cast was getting the males to cut their hair as short as cadets in a military school would wear it. Finally, George Abbott handled it with military precision. Mr. Abbott, (he was never called by his first name), called all the male chorus together, and informed them that anyone at rehearsal the next morning without the proper haircut would be fired. The cast reported for rehearsal the next day properly skinned and ready for duty. (Danny repeated this haircut threat with the same effect during the production of Wonderful Town, in 1975).

Even though eager after this first show to do more than chorus work on stage, Danny was talked into one more chorus job as Hal Le Roy's understudy in Count Me In, a typical support-the-war effort sub-genre about soldiers going off to war and leaving their sweethearts behind. Le Roy playing the role of an air raid warden. This proved to be a difficult assignment for Daniels since Le Roy was such a famous tap dancing vaudevillian that the director never bothered to have Le Roy rehearse his solo number until final dress rehearsal night in Boston. The producer
finally stopped the rehearsal, and asked Dance Director, Bob Alton to show him the number, but Alton admitted that he had never seen the number either, and had no music for it. Le Roy looked down to Eddie, the conductor in the pit, and asked for two choruses of the playoff of the hit song of the show, "The Fair Sexes." Le Roy then waved off the orchestra at a point during the second chorus and finish the number in a rhythm solo. Needless to say, Danny found it hard to know what to understudy. The show opened the next night, and Le Roy was very popular in his hometown of Boston. In the second chorus of the song when Le Roy waved off the orchestra, he slowly brought down the tempo of his rhythm taping until his taps faded out, and slowly turned to stage right and walked into the wings. Le Roy's last minute number stopped the show! The audience went crazy, and made him return to dance some more. The trouble was, Le Roy never repeated his solo step for step. Le Roy had four applause steps that acted as the glue of his solo, and as the crowd would applaud, Le Roy would nod his humble appreciation, and dance another step. Danny watched him dance a different solo every night for the run of the show, and received a great education in showmanship. What could have been a frustrating
experience was always a treat for this young understudy but also always a surprise for the audience.

A new dance couple were featured in the show by the name of Gower and Jean. (This was before Gower Champion met, and later married Marge Belcher). Gower and Jean were featured in a nice dance concept that Gower had worked out, in which he talks to his partner Jeanie as they dance, saying farewell to his sweetheart. This type of talking dance number hadn't been done before, and the critics were very sarcastic about Champion's work. They thought he was a good performer, but that he should learn to dance. Needless to say, Champion didn't fade from the dance world over those reviews. Another talent that didn't fade away after this was dance director, Bob Alton, who went out to Hollywood to work as a film dance director for MGM, and was later helpful to Champion in his film career.

After this show closed, Danny returned to Michael's Dance Studio at 47th Street and 7th Avenue in the Mayfair Theatre Building. A favorite rehearsal space for many varied talents, the main room had a long dance floor that for $5. a month you could rent space, but it had to be shared with others. Many times Danny would be at one end of the space rehearsing, while in a far corner there would
be a juggler, and in another far corner a unicyclist would also be sharing the space all simultaneously. This studio also acted as a living Variety newspaper, with everyone offering information about current auditions. It would be at this time that Danny was given his most valuable piece of information by Sally Mars, Lenny Bruce's mother. Danny was introduced by Mars to a young ballet student named Bernice (Bea) Grant, and they began to date with each other. Danny kissed Bea for the first time just outside the entrance of a women's hotel where she was staying in New York City.

In the meantime, the Second World War began to pull all able-bodied men and women into the armed forces for the fight against fascism. Danny was headed to the Army. Hearing of what was then called an Army Opportunity, he enlisted in the Signal Corps, where he learned to read and communicate code. This allowed Danny to be deferred from the draft for nine months. Danny joined up, and as a civilian he was able to learn code in the mornings and perform in clubs at night. His last performance at the very swanky New York night club called the Versailles, lasted until 2:00 A.M.; then four hours later he was off
to Ft. Dix for Army orientation. After this he headed for Camp Crowder, Missouri, for basic training.

The Army forms stating what your civilian profession was interested the Army in Danny, as well as in other professional performers in the camp. Daniels was put in charge of a recreation hall, as part of Special Services, entertaining the troops in camp. Danny quickly got to know the other performers in camp, Lon McCalister, Shelly Keller, and Carl Reiner. Danny applied for a transfer to an overseas unit of Special Services, but the war with Germany was coming to an end, and the Army immediately began to cut back on troop levels, and Corporal Giagni was separated from the Army.

Danny returned to New York looking for dance jobs, and heard about an audition for Comden and Green's, *Billion Dollar Baby*, with music by Morton Gould, and choreography by Jerome Robbins. Starring Joan McCracken, Mitzi Green, and David Burns. Daniels was teamed with Shirley Van, as well as asked by Robbins to stage his number with Van, and it was very successful. Another stand-out dance was a drum number, where Danny both played the drums and danced. He had created this number at Camp Crowder, and it appealed to Robbins so much that it was
interpolated into the show as Danny's solo. During the run of this show Danny received a note from Bea, with whom he had lost contact, and now they began to date in earnest.

After the close of *Billion Dollar Baby*, Danny landed an audition for a new musical version of the play, *Street Scene*, based on the book by Langston Hughes, starring Anne Jefferies, with music by Kurt Weill, with choreography by Anna Sokolow. Danny was cast in a small speaking role, and was partnered with Sheila Bond in a duet dance that stopped the show. (Broadway choreographer, Onna White, was so impressed with Danny that she remembered his dancing in this show nearly fifty years later).¹⁴ Anna Sokolow saw how inventive Danny was in staging the duet, and she was the first to encourage him to choreograph in the future. Though the reviews were wonderful, the show only played four months at the Adelphi Theatre. All of these jobs helped Danny to be nominated for a Tony Award as Best Dancer the first year of the Tony Awards in 1947. Danny was also photographed by Life Magazine in a two page spread of his dance number with Bond in "Moon Faced Starry Eyed." During the run of *Street Scene*, Bea landed a show that was playing in Boston. On a Sunday off from his show, Danny flew to Boston, and
proposed to Bea. It would be a stormy start to their relationship when Danny tried to return to New York on the following Monday evening. A torrential rain storm hit New York, Danny's plane circled La Guardia Airport so long that Danny's understudy went on for him, and that was the first, and last show that he ever missed in his life.

Danny and Bea were married on November 29, 1947.

Danny still needed a steady income for his off the stage periods. So, he went to the Jack Stanley Dance Studios, and asked Jack if he might teach private lessons. Stanley was delighted, and Danny began a three year relationship with the studio. Danny also began studying ballet seriously at the Jack Stanley Studios with Jack Potteiger, followed by Vincenzo Celli, who coached the famous ballet team of Antin Dolin and Alicia Markova.

Danny studied ballet twice a day for the next ten years with teachers that also included Madame Anderson, Muriel Stuart, and Vladimaroff of the American School of Ballet. This strong ballet technique would pay off when Danny choreographed the Tap Dance Concerto concert piece.

Several of Danny's private students would later become successful. One student was Christopher (Ronnie) Walken. He and his brothers would travel in from Queens to
study at the Professional Children's School, and take private tap lessons with Danny. Thelma (Tad) Tadlock who arrived in New York from Port Arthur, Texas in 1949, also took classes at Jack Stanley Studios. She was following the talented dancer, Helen Wood, also from Port Arthur. Tadlock had to work harder than Wood, but ended up lasting longer in the business. Danny staged a song and dance number to "I've Got The World On A String", and it landed Tad her first Broadway show, Make A Wish, starring Nanette Fabray in 1951. Tad learned from Danny that tap is never ordinary, but must always be special. Walken remembered the Jack Stanley Studios as being on the fourth floor of a wooden building that also housed a penny arcade, old style barber shop, a hand made cigar shop, McGirrs famous pool hall, and the original Roseland Ballroom, where Walken, and his brothers, Glen and Ken went after tap class, to sneak a view of the dance couples. Walken went on to win the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for The Deer Hunter, while Tadlock became a well known choreographer in industrial shows, night clubs, and television shows.

Danny also took on dance jobs wherever he could find them. For example, he was asked by Burt Shevalove to dance in the first Industrial Show, The Motorama, for General
Motors. The show was performed at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, and lasted two weeks, performing six shows a day.\textsuperscript{19} This began a pattern for Danny to double up on dance performances and teaching classes for several years, before his choreographic work in television.

Danny was also contacted about this time by choreographer Lee Sherman to perform in the new hit musical \textit{Make Mine Manhattan}, starring Sid Caesar, and veteran actor, David Burns, at the Broadhurst Theatre. Sherman allowed Danny to stage his own numbers with Sheila Bond.\textsuperscript{20} The show ran a year, and Danny was again nominated for a Tony Award. A tour was scheduled for the New York metropolitan area after the Broadway run, but Danny couldn't lose his dance students, so the role went to Bob Fosse, and his wife Mary Anne Niles took over for Bond.\textsuperscript{21} It was during the run of this show that Danny had to leave in the middle of a show to get Bea to the hospital in time for the birth of their daughter Anna Mary, November 9, 1948.

In 1949, Danny was cast in \textit{High Times}, starring Patsy Kelly, and Jack Albertson. Rehearsals began at Dance Players Studio, and they were told not to worry about rehearsal space at the theatre. This show made its way
around the summer stock circuit beginning at Sacandaga, but no rehearsal space materialized as promised, so the cast rehearsed on the nearby shuffleboard court. Also in the cast was Gabriel Dell, of the "Dead End Kids" fame.\(^{22}\)

Dell liked Danny so much that he visited him at his home in White Stone, Long Island. The trouble was that the car was a two-seater from Europe, and there was no place for Dell to sit except rolled up in a rug tied to the roof of the car. Dell rode all the way to the house that way and returned the same way back over the Tri-Borough Bridge.

After this show Danny found it harder to find roles for a leading dancer to do. He kept teaching at Jack Stanley Studios while working a show at night, but he was looking for steady, and most importantly lucrative work. This came from a new medium, television.

Television was in its infancy in the late 1940s, but in the 1950s it began its Golden Age. Television proved to be important for Danny, the only question was how to become involved in it. It was during this time, 1950, that he got together with producer Bob Maxwell to develop a pilot idea of Danny's, based on *Pinnochio*. They cast Jack Albertson, and Danny played the title role. The songs were written by Danny, and the project got only as far as a
live audition at the network. Later the De Castro Sisters recorded one of the songs, "I'm Bewildered." Following this disappointment he was contacted by his agent to stage an act for two ballet stars who had just escaped from behind the Iron Curtain in Hungary. The sensational dancers were a hit, but they only paid half of what they owed him and then mysteriously disappeared. Luckily a television choreographer, Ted Cappy, asked Danny to perform on television for the first time. Danny loved this new medium, and saw that, although he had only one week's work, Ted was going to be working in his position week after week. This was when it dawned on Danny that he wanted a job like Ted's. He did a second television job, this time on the Danny Thomas Show, and that convinced him that television was the wave of the future. About this time Danny's son, Daniel Joseph, (D.J.), was born on December 3rd, 1950.

The major break in his dancing career came shortly afterward in one of the first shows to run beyond the usual 9 to 12 months cycle, was Cole Porter's Kiss Me Kate, starring Alfred Drake, Patricia Morrison, Harold Lang, and Lisa Kirk. The show was choreographed by Hanya Holm, assisted by Ray Harrison. Though a fine ballet
dancer, Danny would have to work harder during this show than any before it. Ballet takes great stamina, and to replace Harold Lang, Danny created a routine for himself to get him through a long run of the show. He began with ballet class in the morning, followed by teaching private tap classes at Jack Stanley Studios, then a sandwich for dinner, an hour's nap on a cot at the theatre, and then his performance each night in *Kiss Me Kate*. This routine continued for a year. He needed to marshal all of his confidence in his abilities, because as a Broadway replacement late in such a long run, he was not given an orchestra rehearsal until his opening night. He even had to learn his singing harmonies by listening to the cast recording. This was where experience added to confidence, and the result was excellent notices for him, but if he found himself in the same position now, he'd want the orchestra rehearsal. (He played opposite Lisa Kirk until she was replaced by Betty Ann Grove, opposite Alfred Drake until he was replaced by Keith Andes, and opposite Patricia Morrison until she was replaced by Anne Jefferies). Now the show was reviewed again, and sketched by Hirschfeld of the New York Times. The show played
another year through 1951, and was a high point in Danny's life.

After the show Danny looked for music to perform his own concept choreography. He went to Morton Gould, with whom he'd worked on *Billion Dollar Baby*, and explained what type of music he needed. Danny was hoping for a trunk number, (music written for a show that was never used on stage), but Gould got a sparkle in his eyes, and asked, "How would you like to work on a tap dance concerto with me?" Although Danny had no idea what Gould meant other than new music, and a chance to dance on stage. Danny readily agreed. What Gould wrote was a concerto much like that for piano, but it was for percussion. The rhythms were all charted out musically, and Danny would provide the percussion with his taps. Danny created choreography that matched the rhythms, and this became a wonderfully interesting concert piece that Danny performed for over eleven years, with many symphony orchestras, led by conductors such as Leonard Bernstein, and concerto composer Morton Gould.

The year 1952 saw the beginning of Danny's choreographic work. He paid for space at the Y.M.H.A. to perform it, and got Peter Gennaro and others to dance for
him. This in turn led to his work with Agnes De Mille, and a reunion with Morton Gould, who had written The Tap Dance Concerto for Danny.

Danny performed a number for his concert called; "Lecture and Demonstration of the Evolution of TIGER RAG", music by Jelley Roll Morton, with choreography by Danny's mentor, Anna Sokolow. The number was a hit, and Agnes De Mille who had been in the audience, hired Danny for her dance tour. DeMille didn't want to pay for the rights to the song Tiger Rag, so Arthur Kleiner worked up other music for the number, and the title of the piece was changed to; "Lecture and Demonstration of the Evolution of Rag Time," with DeMille's assistant, James Mitchell narrating. It was a success on a tour that crossed the country on a bus, playing one night stands. Produced by Sol Hurock, the tour covered 60,000 miles and Danny only lasted for 40,000 miles. James Mitchell recalled that much of the tour was in the northern plains states, in the dead of winter. "The costumes were loaded onto the bus still wet from the previous performance, and when the bus would arrive, many times only an hour before a performance in the next town, the costumes were frozen from the dancer's perspiration." Many times even the make up was frozen.
The sets would arrive at times just minutes before the curtain was to go up. This was a very tough bus and truck tour for everyone.

By the time the tour reached Seattle, Danny had discovered that DeMille was cutting Danny's solo material for performances in the large cities like Houston, and Los Angeles, but he was very well received in all of the other cities and towns, much to Danny's surprise and delight. Finally, in Seattle he was too lonely for his family, called DeMille, and asked to leave the show. She understood, and Danny returned home.

With the DeMille tour behind him, 1952 marked the beginning of Danny's concentrated work on his famous Tap Dance Concerto with Morton Gould. The entire piece is conceptual, but Danny took it to a higher level than merely using taps as orchestral instrumentation. The concerto is divided into four movements, with the second and third movements showing Danny's innovative style of performing ballet and tap together as if they were one integrated form, and never forgetting theatricality. An entire movement is done as a mime tour-de-force. The degree to which Danny elevated tap dancing in this concerto can be attested to by the fact that anyone trying
to perform this work does not perform the second and third movements. It's one thing for someone to be able to dance what Morton Gould wrote out in the score, and it's another to make all of the rhythm patterns interesting to watch. Danny rehearsed long and hard to make sure that the concerto was theatrical as well as artistic. This concept would develop into a marvelous concert piece, that Danny performed with many symphony orchestras over the next 11 years. (The orchestra surrounded a wood parquet floor on which Danny was to dance as a percussion soloist). In 1998, Danny was contacted by his son, Peter, with the only copy of The Tap Dance Concerto, that was ever filmed. Peter's wife, Joan, pulled a few strings in Germany, and a tape called, "Step Dance," featured the Stuttgart Symphony playing as Danny performed his famous concert piece.

To get into condition for this much solo dancing, Danny became an early proponent of jogging around Central Park. It paid off for the first performance of the concerto on November 21, 1952. Before the opening, Bea Daniels urged Danny to contact John Martin, the premier dance critic for The New York Times. In a rehearsal room at Nola studios on 57th Street, Morton played, and Danny danced the entire piece. Martin loved it, and wrote his
review before the opening in Rochester. The response to this dance symphonic dance piece was tremendous, and today other tap dancers may attempt to perform it, but not always in its entirety. In the middle of all this activity Danny and Bea did manage to increase the family by one more, on July 10, 1953, Bea gave birth to their son, Peter Vincent Giagni.

In the Summer of 1954 Danny began his first work as a theatre choreographer at Camp Tamiment in Pennsylvania. The producer at Tamiment was Moe Hack, who was introduced to Danny by a friend of Morton Gould's named Sol Berkowitz. This was a well known theatre for new works, that used new talent to experiment and to create. Tamiment had launched the careers of Jerome Robbins, Sid Caesar, and Danny Kaye. In Danny's first year there, other newcomers were Bea Arthur, Larry Kert, Dick Shawn, and Arte Johnson. The pay was $500.00 per month. The work was hard, but people from the Broadway theatre came to see what new talent was performing, and better yet, who was excelling. Each week a complete original review was performed, much like live television, except that it had been done at Tamiment for many years. There were song, and sketch writers, directors, and cast. Every show would end
with a big production number. No children were allowed, but Bea would hide them in the back seat under a blanket, so as to keep the family together for the two summers that Danny worked there. An agent from the William Morris office named Bernie Seligman saw Danny's work the following summer, and became his agent. This was a turning point in Danny's career, with an important new agent to represent him, in a new medium called television, waiting for choreographers able to keep up with its rapid pace.
CHAPTER FOUR

LIVE FROM NEW YORK

Camp Tamiment had been very important for the evolving Daniels choreographic style. Being able to handle the pressure of creating dances quickly for a review show would allow for the incorporation into another new medium called television. In 1954 television was very much like the camp Tamiment review show format. The pressure of presenting a new show with the addition of cameras would mean that theatre choreography would have to adapt to the camera, and also the clock would be a major factor with a live show being confined to a set amount of minutes, and no room for going overtime.

Not long after Danny arrived home from Camp Tamiment, he received his first call from Bernie Seligman. Danny was to replace an alumni of Tamiment, Herb Ross, the choreographer of the “Martha Raye Show”.26 Ross wanted to leave to do a Broadway show, and Danny was very available. The whole idea to hire Danny had been Ross’, because of Danny’s talent. The “Martha Raye Show”, written by Norman Lear, was part of the “Colgate Comedy Hour”.27 Martin & Lewis, and Abbott & Costello rotated shows with Raye, so
that her show came on every three weeks. Danny's salary was $750.00 per show. In one month he could make as much as he had made the entire Summer at Camp Tamiment. Karl Hoffenberg, producer of the show, had a special contract for this new choreographer. It allowed for one show, with an option for two more shows, followed by an option for three more shows, and then Danny could do the rest of the season. As Danny would say, "My option came up every twenty minutes." This would become the first steady money that Danny had ever made, excluding Broadway. The Broadway show that Herb Ross had choreographed closed shortly after it opened. Ross was a favorite of Martha Raye's, and she had him hired as a consultant for several weeks until Ross found a longer running choreographic job.

Ross didn't consult on the choreography, but knowing Danny's dance ability, he did suggest that Danny actually dance in a number that Danny also staged for Matt Maddox, and Jacques D'Amboise. The suggestion turned into a great three minute number. It was the other suggestions that Ross made to a dubious Norman Lear, about adding something funny here and there in the script for Martha to do, that didn't go over as well for Lear, but eventually led to Ross becoming a successful director.
Danny admired how successful Raye was at quickly learning her material. Especially her quick wit, like the time they had Raye and Danny doing a sound dub together on the stage of the Colonial Theatre. The crew set up a booth by stage right, made from 4' sections of scenery flats that were covered in black velvet to keep out extraneous sounds. Martha had one microphone for her dialogue lines, and Danny had a microphone for his taps. As they were finishing the dub, they heard the director shout over the PA speaker, "Hey Martha you and Danny have been in there for quite a while. What are you two doing in there?" She quickly shot back into her microphone, "Nothing. Nothing. But I'll tell you one thing. He ain't Jewish." The crew laughed hysterically. To Danny, Raye was like a computer, she was so fast.28

The rehearsals for the dancers were also fast, consisting of only five days, and then camera rehearsal day. All the music had to be given to Irv Kostal, musical arranger, to score by the third day of rehearsal. (Kostal was famous for being the fastest arranger in the business, with a technique to be able to score music writing alternately from left to right, and then turn the page of music, and score it from right to left). Raye was so busy
with her sketch work that her musical rehearsal time was far less than the dancers, but she was letter perfect no matter how many changes she was given. In television in the early days the show was live, and on the clock. If the show was running over, a line in one sketch was cut, and another line, or two was cut in another sketch to trim the time needed from the show. To trim dance was not so easy. Raye and the dancers were staged to music. To cut even 30 seconds was a major problem, because it affected not only the placement of the dancers, but also the staging for Raye, and most importantly the orchestration would have to be cut. The timing of the show became crucial on the camera blocking rehearsal on Monday, before the Tuesday night show. The issue of cutting music instead of jokes came to a head in the middle of the season.

Raye had been choreographed by Danny in an elaborate 3 minute pantomime number, based on a character created for Raye by Herb Ross, called "The Little Kid". After the Monday camera blocking rehearsal, Danny came home and fell asleep in complete exhaustion. Three hours later, Karl Hoffenberg, the producer of the show called him and told him they were in trouble with the show, and cuts had to be made. Danny was asked to cut 30 seconds from the pantomime.
number to help bring the show in on time. Danny told them
to just cut the pantomime number entirely, but he wouldn't
cut the 30 seconds, and ruin the number. Danny hung up. At
midnight Norman Lear called him with the same request.
Danny was now even more dug in with his feelings about
cutting the number, and told Lear to just cut the entire
number. The last call came at 3:00 A.M. from the producer,
again begging Danny to cut the 30 seconds off of the
pantomime number. Danny refused.

The next morning at Dress Rehearsal the mood was very
sour when Danny arrived. The rehearsal went well, and the
time was cut from the dialogue. That night the show went
well, until the assistant director, who's job it was to
use a stop watch to monitor every minute of the show,
shouted, "We're short, we're short! Stretch! Stretch! The
cast then had to stretch out the rest of the show to fill
the time. A few weeks later Norman Lear told Danny that he
had been right not to cut the pantomime number. This would
be a valuable lesson for future shows. Danny had learned
to stand firm when he knew he was right. (Danny would work
again for Lear doing television specials, and the film,
The Night They Raided Minsky's.)
Now the shows began to roll in. Danny's next assignment was a Sunday television show called Washington Square, starring Ray Bolger. Danny was now earning $1,000.00 per show, and the show came on every other week. He had 12 dancers, six men and six women. The unions were asking for more money for television dancers. The producers were reticent to pay the extra money to the dancers, so the rehearsal time was shortened to compensate for the pay raise. It was one thing to rehearse for five days and shoot a show, but another to eventually end up with only three days of rehearsal. The result was that the numbers were not as tight, and the performance level would suffer for it. Even with a great television director like Clark Jones, choreographers always wanted more rehearsal time.

Jones was an unusual television director, in that he was a painter, and being a visual artist made Jones approach television not as much a slave of the clock. Jones was also musically inclined. This last quality worked well for Danny. He choreographed to the camera shot, and staged the shot to the musical bar measure. Jones would have an assistant count the bars of music in the booth as Jones would call out the number of the camera
to bar #5, bar #10, bar #24, and so on. This made the
dance numbers meld perfectly with the camera shots. This
was evident during the last show of the 1957-58 season of
the Patrice Munsel Show. The last number of the show was
set around Patrice leaving from Idlewild Airport (JFK), at
the new international terminal. The number was shot with
dancers on the escalators, hallways, and even at the base
of the ramp to a waiting jet on the tarmac. It had been
raining heavily during the interior shots, and as the cast
moved out to the waiting jet the sky suddenly cleared into
a bright sunset, as wet faced dancers waved good-bye to
Patrice Munsel, as her jet taxied away. All of this was
shot live, as if it had been edited on tape. 31

It was during the Patrice Munsel Show that young
Peter Giagni got a thrill hearing the dancers come up to
the camera during a live broadcast and say, "Hi Peter!"
That, and riding an elephant in a circus number on another
show was amazing for a five year old. 32 This same season,
Bea got an interesting reaction towards Danny's chosen
profession. One afternoon while in their backyard hanging
up laundry to dry on the line, she got into a conversation
with a neighbor over the top of the fence. The sort of
conversation that neighbors have to get acquainted. After
the usual pleasantries, the conversation turned to what each husband did for a living. The neighbor's husband worked at some plant, and Bea said that her husband was a dancer. The neighbor smiled politely, and asked, "That's nice, but what does he do for a living?" It took a bit of convincing to get the neighbor to understand that Danny was a professional dancer-choreographer, and not some hot fox trotter, who spends money every Saturday night to dance at the Roseland Ballroom in Manhattan.33

It was also around 1957 that Danny was asked by Jerome Robbins to co-choreograph a new Broadway show with music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim called West Side Story. The offer was tempting, but after being out of work for two years in 1949 and 1950, Danny didn't want to give up the tremendous income that television had provided. Danny was grateful to Robbins, but he would have to pass. Two years later Danny was overloading on television when Jerome Robbins called him again to stage numbers for another Broadway show with music by Jules Styne, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, called Gypsy. Robbins needed two tap numbers for the show, the newsboys number called "Extra, Extra", and "All I Need Is The Girl" for Paul Wallace. Danny was now ready to do
this show if he could be released by the television show he was doing for Firestone.

The Firestone Show was entirely a dance and singing review show, with Glen Osser conducting a 30 piece orchestra. The show refused to release Danny, but he staged the two numbers for Gypsy, on his time off, and also agreed to do a Bob Hope special, all going at the same time as The Firestone Series was shooting. In that week Danny would run from rehearsal to rehearsal keeping track of what each show was doing choreographically. First he would do Firestone, then Gypsy, then the Bob Hope Special, with Ethel Merman, and Paul Wallace. At the end of that week he made more than he'd ever made in his career, but was never credited by Robbins for his work on Gypsy. It also taught him a lesson to learn to say no to his agent. He was also learning that he was not doing the kind of artistic work that he knew he was capable of doing. As Danny told Bea one night after this incredible week, "I am becoming the world's best hack choreographer in the business. If I don't get back to the theatre soon, it will be too late for me." Danny would have to wait a bit longer for a Broadway show to come along, but the vision was firmly planted in his mind.
Danny finally got his feet back on Broadway, if only briefly, when he was called by producer, Al Seldon, to replace the choreographer for his show trying out in Philadelphia. The show was called The Boys Against The Girls, starring Bert Lahr, Nancy Walker, and newcomer Dick Van Dyke. The director was also replaced by Bob Fosse, who was just beginning his directing career. When Danny arrived, Seldon asked him when he wanted his party. Danny thought that Seldon must be crazy, because there was no time for parties with a show in trouble. The show pulled together, and was very funny, but was panned by the critics, and played only briefly. Dick Van Dyke recently described the show as, “Running for a smash couple of weeks I think? Danny had me doing a pantomime piece in the show. He saw me in that, and liked my moves.”

About this time Danny was contacted by the William Morris office to stage a night club act for Arthur Godfrey. The agent at the Morris office warned Danny that Godfrey could be more than a little difficult to work with. He could be sadistic to his employees. Danny told them, "A leopard can't change his spots. I am, what I am. He'll like me, or he won't." Danny then met with Godfrey, and it went fine. The show was to play at the famous
Blinstrub's night club in Boston. Godfrey was a pilot, and he flew the entire cast in his customized World War II cargo plane, that could seat fifty people, including a bar. The cast rehearsed at a hotel by the club.

The first bit of staging was for a barber shop quartet, The Buffalo Bills. They had just finished doing The Music Man on Broadway. Danny began showing them a simple number consisting of walking three steps beginning on the right foot, then sway to left and sway to right, and then walk back starting with the left foot, followed by the same sway and sway in place first right, and then left. (This movement was questioned by each of the singers). Danny gave the first step, and he began to be peppered with, "The right foot? You want us to start with the right foot?" Danny would respond, "That's right." Then he'd give another direction, and this would be followed by; "You want us to sway left? Left?" After 20 minutes of this Danny told them to just do the choreography, and if they didn't like it, to tell their boss, and find another choreographer. Danny called a break and went to Arthur Godfrey's hotel suite. As Danny sat down he boiled over his frustration about the four singers downstairs. "Arthur those are four of the dumbest sons-a-bitches I've ever
worked with!" Godfrey howled with laughter, and said, "Danny you're absolutely right!"  

From that moment on Danny and Godfrey were pals. Godfrey even came downstairs with his arm around Danny to secure the cooperation of the Buffalo Bills for good. After that the four singers would have walked on their hands if asked to by Danny. Godfrey's musical talent was playing banjo and ukulele, which allowed Danny to stage him with six women in several numbers.

When it was time to return to New York, Godfrey offered to fly Danny back. Danny accepted, but instead of the luxurious plane that he had arrived in, Godfrey boarded a small plane (two seats). Danny was a bit frightened to fly in a plane that came up to his chin, but he boarded it anyway. It turned out to be a clear evening all the way to New York at 1000 feet, and a fantastic experience.  

Then it was back to television with the Revlon Review. This was followed by a call from Leland Hayward, who was producing a television special called The Fabulous Fifties. The show, directed by Norman Jewison, needed a good song and dance man, and Danny recommended Dick Van Dyke. Leland balked at what Van Dyke's agent was asking. Danny told Leland, "This guy is going to be a major star,"
and you should hire him anyway." Leland grumbled, but paid
the huge sum Van Dyke’s agent had asked for. The show was
a hit, earning Danny his first Emmy Award. Danny staged a
memorable conceptual number where Dick van Dyke did a mime
character of a wallflower who wanted to dance, and tries
to keep up with the latest dance craze by taking private
lessons. As soon as Van Dyke’s character learns a new
dance another dance has become the latest craze. In the
end Van Dyke’s character cannot keep up with every new
dance, and as Van Dyke described the ending of the number,
“Danny turned me back into a wall flower.” 41 The way Danny
did this ending was to have Van Dyke costumed in a shirt
that matched the wallpaper of the set. When the final zoom
in on van Dyke takes place, the acting, body position,
costuming, and set all are a visual trope for Danny’s
concept.

The only sour notes during production were having to
cut a terrific children’s number by Stephen Sondheim
titled, "One, Two Three, Four", because the show was too
long. The new process of not performing live to an
orchestra, but to a tape track was also a sour note.
During the orchestra recording session there was a
technical problem with the recording equipment. Sound
technicians descended on the scene, and for ninety minutes the thirty-five musicians sat while the technicians worked out the problem. As they were running out of time the orchestra finally got to Danny's dance number music, but in his nervous frustration to finish rehearsing in the allotted time, the conductor made the tempo too bright to dance to, so when the first take was finished, the conductor released the orchestra with only the bad take to work with. Leland Hayward was contacted, and it was decided to transfer the number to an acetate disc record, and play it at a slower tempo. The music didn't match the quality of the video track, but the number was at least danceable for Dick Van Dyke and 32 dancers in the special.42

Danny next did a Danny Kaye special for NBC, and the family headed out west in a Morris Minor station wagon. Somewhere in the mid-west, Danny and Bea stopped to stretch their legs, and let the kids play. While the parents got a cup of coffee, young Peter noticed how dusty the little station wagon had gotten, and he decided to write his name on the side of it. There was no schoolroom chalk to use, so Peter picked up a stone and slowly wrote his name on the car. By this time the caffeine had hit
Danny almost as hard as the sight of Peter's name that was not only written, but carved into the paint of the station wagon. Danny hit the roof in anger. The intensity shifted from Peter to Daniel, and then to Ann for not supervising Peter better. Finally in frustration Danny turned to the kids in the back seat, (with a face that was similar to Margret Hamilton's as the Wicked Witch of the West, in the Wizard of Oz), and said, "Gimme all your pennies!" In some strange way this would balance out if there was no candy purchased for a while. Of course the kids would go to Bea for sanctuary, and sweets when the coast was clear. For now, three crying, penniless kids, were heading to California, and plotting a vendetta.

The chance came for Peter in a motel, about two days later. The family was staying in a motel that had a novelty for the time, the "Magic Fingers" coin operated beds. This bed was designed for the weary traveler to get a vibrating massage after a long drive. The whole family tried it out before running down stairs to dinner. Peter got back to the room first, and put coins in the slot of Danny's bed, and when everyone returned to the room told his father that the machine must be stuck because it was still running from before they left for
dinner. Danny laid down on the vibrating bed as the three kids were in hysterics watching their father try to figure out what was going on. He had to wait to fall asleep until the bed finished a very long fifteen minute massage cycle. 

(It should be noted that Peter, who was always good with money, had moved from pennies to quarters, perhaps Danny should have taken all of their wallets as well).

Later in California it was like a dream when the family was taken to lunch at Bob's Big Boy Hamburgers by Danny Kaye. Danny Kaye had a reputation for being difficult, but he seemed to love Danny and his family. Especially after Peter told him that he had just seen him at the Fox theatre in On The Double, and thought that he was pretty good! Kaye said, "Was I?" Peter said, "Yeah."

Kaye called the waiter over at that and said, "Give this boy another hot-dog!"

After the success of this television special Danny returned to New York, and was ready for Broadway, with the time necessary to create dance in an environment that would be conducive to its development. The opportunity came in 1962 in the Broadway musical, ALL AMERICAN. The show starred Ray Bolger, and Ron Hussman. Originally Tom Bosley was considered for the role, but the director,
Joshua Logan, wanted Ray Bolger. Danny could tell that this was a mistake, because Bolger didn't project the scholarly personality of the character. The next mistake came during general auditions for the show. A young woman walked on stage to sing for her audition. Her energy was so intense that she dared you not to listen to her. She focused her gaze on the production staff sitting in the dim lighting of the theatre, and after singing just a few bars Danny could tell that she was a real find, and should be written into the show. Once again the director refused. He told the young woman that she was fabulous, but that there was nothing in the show for her. The young singer looked over her shoulder as she was about to leave and said; "You'll be sorry." The young singer this show had turned down had been Barbra Streisand.

About this time Danny was discovering that working with big names, who had big reputations, didn't mean that they couldn't make big mistakes. Mel Brooks had written a great script for All American, and the meetings were so funny to attend with Brooks and Logan. Danny was so intimidated by their talent and track records that he didn't speak up. Danny felt that the set designed by Jo Mielziner that was truly wrong for the show. It was a
futuristic rendering that had nothing to do with a small Southern college at all. The trouble was that this was a good show in the wrong setting, with the wrong star, and a director that didn't have the right touch.52 Danny was so used to television dance that he made the choreography technically too difficult to do eight shows a week, and had to tone it down for the dancers. The show opened on Broadway to mixed reviews. Five months later Ray Bolger was asked to take a pay cut for two weeks to allow the producer to do an ad campaign to stimulate business, but Ray refused, and the show closed. When asked 15 years later about working with Ray Bolger, Danny took a moment and replied, "The nicest thing that I can say about Ray Bolger is that I didn't like him."

1962 also saw the creation of a union for all professional stage directors and choreographers. Agnes DeMille was a major force behind the formation along with Sheppard Traub, and Mary Hunter. Other top choreographers such as Bob Fosse and Michael Kidd were recruited, but they met with resistance from Gower Champion and Jack Cole. Jerome Robbins remained neutral, but not Danny. Agnes was only paid a buy out of $1,500.00 for her work on Oklahoma, and for years afterward productions would
recreate her work, but she received nothing from the other productions. Knowing that what happened to DeMille could happen over and over, Danny volunteered to strike during All American. (DeMille never forgot how brave it was for a relative newcomer to Broadway like Danny to take such a risk).\textsuperscript{53}

The new union was taking on the powerful League Of New York Theatres. The union hired a tough lawyer named Irv Feldman, a veteran negotiator of the I.L.G.W.U. (Garment Workers Union). Danny traveled into the city for all of the negotiation sessions, and watched Irv Feldman verbally beat the producers to a pulp for weeks. In the end the union was accepted, but had to promise to wait twenty years to negotiate the contentious issue of artistic ownership of a show's choreography. Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin were the first producers to recognize the new union. Sadly, to this day the issue of artistic ownership, (Property Rights), still hasn't been resolved, but the top choreographers are able to negotiate individually to own their own work. Danny was elected president of the union, The Society Of Stage Directors and Choreographers, (S.S.D.C.), and held the post from 1968-1971. Danny's work
under Actor's Equity was prior to a pension plan, so the S.S.D.C. provides his only theatrical pension today.  

Also in 1962 Danny was asked to direct and choreograph a revival of his first Broadway show, Best Foot Forward. Ben Bagley produced, with casting by Joan D'Incecco, (who later cast All My Children for over 21 years), with an assist one day by a member of the cast named Christopher Walken. Christopher had been in acting class at the Actor's Studio with a 16 year old actress that he thought would be wonderful in the Nancy Walker role as the blind date. Danny auditioned her, and hired the newcomer named Liza Minnelli, for her first stage musical. (Minnelli, Walken, and Daniels would work again over twenty years later in films). Minnelli and Walken did a backer's audition at a record company owned by Archie Blier. After Minnelli sang, Blier jumped up and shouted, "Who is that girl?" Blier then wrote a check for $25,000.00, the show's entire budget. 

The cast was paid $50.00 per week, (Walken was able to qualify for unemployment insurance afterwards). Marvin Laird and Buster Davis provided the piano accompaniment.

Arthur Godfrey came to opening night of the show. Danny was so glad to see Godfrey that he grabbed a reticent
Archie Blier to introduce them. Unknown to Danny, Blier had been fired on the air by Godfrey some years earlier. (Godfrey always loved Danny's innocent quality). Judy Garland didn't attend the opening to give her daughter the focus of the press. The show was a success at Stage 73, (also known as the Bohemian Hall, for the restaurant that was located in the front, where the cast ate duck, potatoes, and sauerkraut before the shows), where it opened on April 2nd. The lesson that Danny learned from this show was how hard it is to wear both hats as director, and choreographer. He didn't like the experience, but admired Bob Fosse who could do both very successfully.

Following this in 1963, Danny was back in television choreographing the Judy Garland Show. He liked California, and was beginning to fly out to work on television shows regularly in Los Angeles. It would be over six years before he would move the family west. Danny was hired for eight shows, with an option to finish the season. Danny rented a house, and brought the family out to Los Angeles. He would have to miss the first three shows due to a final performance of the Tap Dance Concerto, to be performed at Lincoln Center in New York.
City. During the first Garland shows, Danny was reunited with Liza Minnelli from Best Foot Forward, performing with her mother, (During this number Minnelli surprised Garland when she picked her up, and cradled Garland like a baby in her arms). 61

When Danny returned for the fourth show, he went to Garland's home in Brentwood for the usual rehearsal to pick out songs that the music arranger, Mel Torme, played for her selection. The next day Danny would start rehearsing the selected songs at CBS. Sometimes at the end of the first day of rehearsal a call would let Danny know that Garland had decided on a different number, and Danny would have to lose a day's rehearsal for the new number. Since there were only three days to rehearse before the show was broadcast coast to coast, this could make it tough to make a clean performance of the new material. This process continued until the sixth show.

The rehearsal at CBS went smoothly with Dick Shawn and Nat Cole guest starring. Danny went home that night. A short time later he received a call from a young woman that he didn't know, informing him that he didn't have to go to rehearsal at CBS the next day. Danny was shocked, and said, What do you mean? I've got to finish the numbers
for this weeks show." The young woman quickly told him, "I'm just supposed to tell you that you're not to come to rehearsal tomorrow. Thank you." The young woman hung up. Danny made a call immediately to one of the writers, Johnny Bradford. He told Danny that he would get right back to him. Bradford called back to tell Danny that they both had been fired. Danny was angry not to be fired, but fired by a total stranger, and not at least the producer.\textsuperscript{62}

The next day when Danny went to CBS to get his dance shoes, he saw members of the staff saying hello to him, but no good byes, as if nothing had happened. As it turned out the entire creative staff had been fired except for Mel Torme, and Gary Smith. The show told Danny's agent that they wanted to buy him out of his contract as a settlement, but his agent replied, "Settlement schmedelman, he has a contract, and you owe him three shows." They paid. Danny was replaced by Peter Genarro. (Danny observed that when moments from the show were replayed on PBS, they usually played moments that he had choreographed).\textsuperscript{63}

About this time Danny and his family were socializing with Morton Gould's family at the Gould home on Long Island. Daniels and Gould were close friends since their
collaboration on the *Tap Dance Concerto*. One day a friend of Gould's came over to the Long Island house. The friend was Benny Goodman. Goodman liked Danny, and had just been asked to tour the United States before continuing on to the Soviet Union as a sort of good will ambassador. Goodman asked Danny to come with him to the first stop in Philadelphia as a sort of director to make sure that everything went smoothly. Danny agreed, and packed his bags to help Benny Goodman get the tour organized. As it turned out Goodman didn't need a director, but he did need a stage manager. Goodman liked Danny, and he had him continue in his unofficial director's capacity from city to city, across the entire country. Finally, just before Seattle, Goodman offered to work out some sort of payment to compensate Danny for all of his efforts. Danny agreed, and in Seattle the turning point was reached. Goodman had been changing a special jazz number written by Bob Prince in a more modern style of jazz than Goodman had done before, a good number to introduce the various members of the band by their respective sections. In Seattle, Goodman completely changed the arrangements to sound like his favorite Fletcher Henderson style arrangements. This made it a completely different number.
Bob Prince, was quite upset, and Danny went to ask Goodman why he had changed what was working, and also a very good number. Goodman turned to ice as he responded, "You're trying to tell me about arranging music?" Danny told him that was not what he was doing at all, but Goodman ended the conversation as if he had switched off a light bulb. Danny finished preparing the lights for the show that night, and figured the new arrangement was permanent. That night the usual introduction came over the public address system after the theme "Let's Dance" was played, but no Benny Goodman was seen entering from Stage Left. After the crowd, that had now formed at the foot of the stage, waited for three, or four minutes, began shouting, "Benny. Benny. Benny." The famed band leader walked out sullenly to the center of the stage, clarinet in hand, and stared down the audience for three excruciating minutes before the crowd again began to talk up to the stage, "Okay, Benny, Let's hear some music Benny. Come on, play some music." Goodman was so intoxicated that he was on Cloud 9 and a half. Finally he put the clarinet to his mouth and played a brilliant performance. His mind wasn't necessary to play because his reflexes knew how to play just as well. That was the
night that Danny contacted Dwayne Camp, a stage manager who had done *All American*, and told Goodman to hire Camp as stage manager for the rest of the tour. Danny returned home, and is still waiting to be paid for the United States part of the tour.

After the Soviet tour, Camp told Daniels a story about an incident involving the lead trumpet player, who hated Goodman, and fearing a physical altercation, had finally had enough. The trumpet player had a pre-arranged signal set with his Japanese wife. His wife was to receive a telegram from him saying; "Send me the telegram." This would signal her to send him one wherever he was at the time to the effect that it was imperative that he return home at once on the next plane. His wife's English skills were not quite up to the task, and the telegram he received read, "Come home at once. Everybody dead." Needless to say this story became a legend among musicians who knew Benny Goodman.
Leaving the Benny Goodman experience behind, Danny needed to flex his creative muscles. As fortune would have it, he would be offered an opportunity to excel in television, and on the Broadway stage. Ten years after starting his television career, Danny found himself ready to handle dual assignments, and stage some of his best work to date. Danny would work with talented dancers, some of whom, (Michael Bennett, Bernadette Peters, and Christopher Walken), would become choreographers and stars in their own right.

In 1964, Danny was hired to do the choreography for the Perry Como television show. Danny learned right away that what you saw on screen was exactly what Perry was like, (a wonderful person). He was like a brother to Danny, and they did three seasons together. Also at this time Danny was contacted to meet with Sir Noel Coward, to choreograph the musical adaptation of his famous comedy Blithe Spirit, now titled High Spirits. The music was by Hugh Martin, and Timothy Gray. For Danny going to a production meeting was like seeing a show starring Sir
Noel. Timothy told Sir Noel that everyone on the production staff was gay except Danny, and Sir Noel said, "Well we should have at least one (straight) for luck."

The musical was a major success. In New Haven the show began out of town try outs. The cast stayed at the Taft Hotel across the street from the theatre. Bea Lillie & Sir Noel had rooms next to each other, and the only argument that they had was in the hallway outside of these rooms when Bea was furious that Sir Noel was quoted in a paper stating that Lillie was 72 years old, when she was merely 71! The shouting was so loud that when Bea Daniels tried to leave her room after about 40 minutes of this extended shouting, by creeping quietly along the hall, out popped Bea Lillie, who then flung Sir Noel's door open, and threw a large stuffed pillow at him before returning to her room. Definitely a couple of characters, on and off stage.

A character of a different sort was Tammy Grimes, who starred opposite Beatrice Lillie in this show. Tammy had her role down solidly from the first performance. Grimes was in charge of the scenes with Bea Lillie, who had a terrible memory her entire career, and at age 71, it wasn't any better. As the show played out of town Lillie
began to learn more and more of her part, and developed more and more funny business to go along with the improved memory. By the time the show was in Philadelphia, Lillie was now dominant in the show. The focus had shifted from Grimes to Lillie. This was partly due to two hit numbers that Danny staged for Lillie with Christopher Walken and Gene Castle, "Something Is Coming To Tea, and "Go Into Your Trance". The latter was originally a bright, (2/4 tempo), that Danny finally had changed to a slower, spooky feeling number, that used balsa wood furniture attached to fishing lines to make it appear that spirits were moving it, and even a floating ghost chasing the cast around the stage. The result was a comic number for Bea Lillie. Danny also staged a big flying number for Tammy Grimes at the end of the first act, that had Grimes flown by a special harness that had been used by Mary Martin in Peter Pan, and it was also a big hit.

Another comic bit that Danny put into another number that called for Ann Wallace, Danny's assistant, to double for Bea Lillie, and be thrown over the heads of three dancers, and be caught by three others, who would turn to exit stage right, where Bea Lillie would immediately enter from the downstage right wing huffing and puffing as if
she had done the stunt. This bit turned out to be frightening to the audience, so Danny had her enter five bars earlier, and see her own double exiting. This change produced hysterical laughter, and Lillie milked it for all it was worth. 71 (This number received a six minute ovation from the audience every performance). Sir Noel was so thrilled with the number that he took Lillie, Castle, and Walken to dinner, where they ordered tuna sandwiches, which Sir Noel Coward ate with a knife and fork. 72

One morning after this Danny came down to the lobby of the Taft Hotel where Walken was sitting and Danny just looked at him with his far horizon look, while jiggling his change in his pocket, saying, "Ronnie, Ronnie, Ronnie, Ronnie, Ronnie..." Walken was worried, and asked if something was wrong. To which Danny replied, "No, I'm just saying hello." 73

It was Tammy Grimes who thought something was wrong, and was so upset by these recent show changes, that she took to a sick bed for several days, and requested a new director that wouldn't give all the good scenes to Bea Lillie. 74 Gower Champion was called in after just finishing Hello Dolly, and he wondered why he was there with a show in such good shape, but Champion did manage to restore
Tammy's confidence. Although Tammy did walk off the stage in the middle of her dance number on the Broadway opening night, claiming that her breasts were falling out of her costume, the show opened to rave reviews, and played for over a year in the 1964-65 season.75

Sir Noel wanted to take the show to London. Danny arrived with his family for what should have been a long stay. Finella Fielding was cast in the Tammy Grimes role, but Sir Noel didn't like the way she looked when they used the Foy flying rigging that had worked so well for Grimes on Broadway. Sir Noel commenting on Fielding, flying across the stage; "She looks like a stuffed sausage." His friend Marlene Dietrich, talked him into hiring another actress for the role named Marti Stevens.76 Stevens looked fine for the flying, but it was bad casting politically. The problem was that this bit of casting would not fly for the London critics. Stevens was an American living in England, and Fielding was the girlfriend of the top critic in London at the time.

As the show played the provinces from Oxford to Manchester in the north, Sir Noel tried cutting a great number that Lillie did in New York called the "Bicycle Number." It turned the show back into a play, and didn't
work. Sir Noel promised Danny that he would put it back if it didn't work, Yes dear boy, I will put it back." He didn't, and Danny flew back to London. Timothy Gray called a day later, and told Danny that the number was now back in the show, and to please return to Manchester. Danny did, and neither he, nor Sir Noel ever mentioned it again. All the while the critics laid in wait in the West End. The cast never saw it coming. This included Danny, and Sir Noel.

The reviews weren't just bad, they were progressively more poisonous in each of the three major papers. The show closed in a week. Before the opening, Danny had told his daughter Ann, that if the show was a success the family would tour Europe, if it closed early they would all go to Paris for a three day blow out, and that they did. Returning to New York with two sons sporting Cockney accents! (The sons said years later that the Cockney accents came easily to a Brooklyn, or Queens accent, since all are quite similar. To this day D.J., Danny's oldest son, takes on any strong accent that he is around). While Danny was in England he received his third nomination for the Tony Award, for the choreography of High Spirits.
Danny's next stage adventure would take him back to his Italian roots, when he accepted an offer to go to Rome to choreograph Ciao Rudy, based on the life of Rudolf Valentino, starring Marcello Mastroianni. Danny asked if he could use his real name, Giagni, instead of Daniels. The producer refused because being an Italian production, they needed an American name on the billing. It seemed that after thirty years since his father changed his name in the Arizona desert, it was still going to be Daniels, even in Italy.

The show was great fun, but the rehearsals were extended again, and again. Danny asked Mastroianni if this was the usual in Rome, to which he calmly replied, "When we are ready, we will open." Danny thought Mastroianni was a great guy, and the women in the show were all in love with him. He loved to dance, even if he wasn't a dancer by profession. When Mastroianni wasn't rehearsing his dance number, he'd watch the dancers rehearse. Danny staged a comic tango number for him and a dancer named Marisa. It was a big hit, with Mastroianni holding a kiss with Marisa for an entire dance sequence. It wasn't a hit with a member of the chorus named Octavio. The producer called Danny to his office to ask him to remove the kiss from the
number. Danny was speechless. The producer explained that Marisa had just gotten married to Octavio, and if the kiss remained in the number it would wreck their marriage, but if they just replaced Marisa it would also ruin the marriage. Danny refused, and only saw one performance before the opening night, when he was called back to New York to return to his work on the Perry Como Show. Back in New York after the opening of Ciao Rudy, Danny received a call from the producer telling him that the show had done well, and the kiss was in.

In 1965, a new show based on the play and film, Picnic, was mounted. Danny was hired to choreograph the musical version called Hot September. Joshua Logan directed, Leland Hayward and David Merrick produced. Once again there was a bad combination of talents that made the show suffer. The cast was lead by Sean Garrison, Eddie Bracken, and Kathy Hays. The audiences didn't seem to like Garrison, but they did like Hays. They also liked the dance numbers built around Kathy. To fix this problem Joshua Logan fired Hays, figuring that a harder looking actress would make the audience accept Garrison more, and then Logan began fixing the show stopping number, "Who
Needs Men." This had exactly the opposite effect that was desired, and the show closed a few days later in Boston.

A better experience was the 1966 Lincoln Center production of *Annie Get Your Gun*, starring Ethel Merman, Bruce Yarnell, and Jerry Orbach. Irving Berlin wrote a new song for this revival that was titled, *Old Fashioned Wedding*, which was well received by the audience. After the show had been open for a time Merman asked the Stage Manager, Bill Ross, what was wrong with Jerry Orbach in the Brevort Hotel scene. She felt that he was doing some strange things in the scene. Ross went to Orbach and asked him what was going on. He told Ross, "I don't know. I'm just reacting to her lines!" Ross went back to Merman to tell her what Orbach had said, and she angrily replied, "Oh yeah? Well you tell him that I don't react to his lines, so stop reacting to mine!" So much for the Actor's Studio version of *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Another memorable Merman story had to do with a change in her follow spot gel. She was sensitive about her age and noticed that something was different about the color tone of her follow spot. Once again she went to Bill Ross to personally ask the follow spot man way up in the back of the house what was going on. During her solo, "I
Got Lost In His Arms", she felt that her spotlight had been changed. Peter Hunt was lighting designer, and he told Bill that he thought that the solo would look better with a brighter pink gel on the follow spot, and he removed two gels. Hunt thought that she'd never know the difference. Merman knew the difference.  

The revival had many musical numbers to stage, and Danny really enjoyed staging "I'm A Bad Bad Man" for Bruce Yarnell. It is normally done with the character of Frank surrounded by many girls, and just the vocal, but Danny tried it with one very short girl who swoons over Yarnell, and is picked up, and they dance together. Irving Berlin liked it so much that he told Danny that it was the best that the song had ever been staged.

Another number was a wild west number that he staged as a rodeo show with dancers twirling ropes, Indians wrestling, and all the elements of a live rodeo show. Finally it was Merman's number, "I've Got The Sun In The Morning And The Moon At Night", that was the hardest number for Danny to stage. It was just this happy number that utilized forty cast members and Merman singing. The other numbers had a theme to focus and build on. This was just a happy number that seemed to go on forever. It
turned out to be a favorite with the audience, but as
Danny said, "It was a bitch to stage."

Danny was then called to come to California to do the
Dick Van Dyke television special. Van Dyke was now a
major television star on his own weekly series. Danny
accepted, and drove his family to California in a new
Cadillac, (a step up from the 1931 Studebaker), and found
a lovely house in Brentwood to live in for the summer.
Once Danny arrived at CBS to start work, he received a
contract that was a buyout, leaving him no residuals if
the special was rerun in the future. Danny never had that
sort of clause in his choreographer's contract, and it
would be quite costly to agree to waive the equivalent of
his full salary for a rerun in the future. Danny told them
no.

At the same time Bob Fosse had just turned down a new
Broadway show called Walking Happy, and told the producer,
Cy Feuer to call Danny. Fosse was exhausted getting Sweet
Charity on stage, and he and Danny went back many years.
Cy Feuer called Danny, and sent him the script. The script
was a gem, and Danny said yes. The musical was based on
the famous play Hobson's Choice, with music by Sammy Cahn
and James Van Heussen. The show was a great success
starring Norman Wisdom, and George Rose. Danny created a clog dance to be interpolated into the pub scene, and he designed the shoes as well. This dance was later recreated by Lee Theodore's American Dance Machine company, and has been seen all over the world.

The New York Times critic, Clive Barnes, reviewed Walking Happy originally, and didn't mention the number in his review. He changed his mind 15 years later when he saw the American Dance Machine perform the number, and praised Danny's work. John Chapman of the Daily News did review the choreography, when he wrote, "The title might be Dancing Happy, for it reaches several peaks of enjoyment during several novel and captivating dance numbers staged by Danny Daniels." Danny received a fourth Tony nomination for his work, and a fifth for Annie Get Your Gun, both in the 1966-67 season.

This season allowed Danny and Bea to leave Baldwin, Long Island, and buy an apartment in the famous "Dakota", at 72nd and Central Park West. Luminaries such as Lauren Bacall, John Lennon, Yoko Ono, and Leonard Bernstein have lived there. It was a five room apartment facing towards 73rd street that was Danny's new base in town. The commute from Long Island on the train had gotten so congested that
many times Danny could not even get a seat all the way in to the city. The Dakota was centrally located, even if Hippies were living in Central Park, and in the Summer the smell of dog excrement was powerful before the Pooper Scooper Laws of the late 70s went into effect. As always, as soon as the family got comfortable in New York, it was time to fly to Los Angeles for work.

This time it was a new show called Love Match. Based on the life of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Hal Linden was the star. Danny directed and choreographed. To help with the highland dancing, Danny called Agnes DeMille's assistant, James Jamison. The dance numbers were some of the best moments in the show. The problem was that the composers, David Shire, and Richard Maltby, hadn't written a good score for the show.85 Danny went to Phoenix for a tryout before the show went to Los Angeles's Ahmanson Theatre. In the lobby before the opening in Phoenix, Danny overheard a member of the audience tell a friend also attending the show, "I'll meet you here at Half Time." This was a sports town, not a theatre town. (Danny and Bea remember the experience as sort of "jump ball" with Danny Daniels).
The show got mixed reviews, and an English director, Noel Willman, was brought in to direct. By the time the show got to Los Angeles, the new director wanted Danny to cut one of the show stopping dance numbers. Danny told them to write more songs, but to keep the number that was getting the only response from the audience. The director was adamant, and so was Danny. Finally Danny was called to a production meeting, and he brought his principal dancer, Fred Albee, as a witness. If they were going to get rid of Danny, they would have to fire him. This would mean according to the choreographer's and director's union contract, that he would have to be paid his full royalty. If Danny quit he was out, with no further weekly royalties. They asked him again to shorten the dance numbers, and Danny refused. They said he was no longer needed for the production, and he was paid in full. The show closed out of town, before the Broadway run.

Danny would return to Los Angeles in a year to work with Edwin Lester, who saw Walking Happy on Broadway, and Love Match before the musical numbers were cut. This would be the beginning of a great working relationship for the next 12 years, with one of the great gentlemen of the
theatre, but before that Danny would choreograph a film for Norman Lear. 87

The film was The Night They Raided Minsky’s starring Jason Robards, Elliot Gould, Britt Ekland, and Norman Wisdom. The "Perfect Gentleman" number went so well for Jason and Norman, that they both approached Danny to stage the burlesque sketches. Danny said he'd be glad to, but that they would have to get the director's permission first. Danny had done this type of material in Detroit years before, and could easily handle what the film director wasn't familiar with. As it turned out the director, William Freidkin, asked Danny to do it. 88

The numbers in the film were a fictional retrospective of how the first striptease took place. Britt Ekland's character ends up on stage trying to please Jason Robard's character, and as she reaches out to him in a dramatic gesture the top of her dress falls down, exposing her breasts to the audience. This sequence was carefully staged by Danny, and he even stood off to camera left, to allow Ekland to follow him through her routine. (Bea, who was watching from the back of the house said that watching Danny do the routine off camera, was more interesting than what was on camera). 89 When the moment
came for Ekland to reach for Robards, after dropping the shoulder straps of her dress, Ekland stopped and said, "Oh, I'm not going to expose my boobs in front of all these people." (The theatre was packed with extras). Danny said, "But we rehearsed it." To which Ekland replied, "I always thought that the double would do it." Norman Lear quickly covered by having a different sequence shot while they called casting to send three actresses down to the theatre immediately to audition for the body double. Danny took the three to the basement and told all of them to drop their dresses, and he had to pick the prettiest pair of breasts. He picked one actress, and came upstairs, she put on Ekland's dress, and was shot from the neck down, as a cover shot for the strip sequence.90

During an interview for AMC, hosted by Dr. Harold Brown, Jason Robards mentioned Danny fondly, giving him credit for how well the numbers went.91 There was some confusion about the musical numbers being shot in 16 mm, but it wasn't the case. Everything shot at the 2nd Avenue Theatre, (formerly the Yiddish Theatre), was on 35 mm film.92 Danny's daughter, Ann, came to the theatre after morning classes at NYU, to watch Danny shoot a number, and was amazed that people off the street were coming into the
theatre to watch. The only way she could tell the street people from the extras, since the clothing was similar, was that the extras never paid any attention to the show while off camera, and the street people were mesmerized by the show on the stage. 93

Danny had set up the theatre with an orchestra in the pit, and filmed his sequences like a live burlesque show. When the scene of the raid was shot there was great confusion downtown around the theatre because the New York Police uniform of the period, and the present day uniform hadn't changed that much, with the exception of the hat which was round in shape. The real police stopped traffic for the exterior shots, but the actors in uniform were also directing traffic to clear the streets in the scene. The civilian drivers were so confused that they didn't know if they were coming, or going! Danny's great disappointment was when Bert Lahr died before he could perform his solo number. Lahr had been mistakenly known in the business as a hypochondriac, but it wasn't until this film that his chronic back pain was discovered to be bone marrow cancer of the spine. He had complained to Danny about his back killing him during The Boys Against The Girls, and it finally did kill him. 94 Danny felt that it
ruined the ending of the picture not to have this solo number by the only cast member who'd performed in Burlesque, as a button, (a closure of the previous action), for all of the musical numbers that had been staged. Even so, Danny's choreography in this film contains so much of his trade mark humor, that was so appreciated by his next producer, Edwin Lester.

The Los Angeles Civic Light Opera was founded by Edwin Lester in 1938. It was the only resident theatre company in Los Angeles for many years. His right hand, and head of operations was Miss Eleanor Pinkham, along with Dick Drew, as his left hand. His anchor, in the person of his Technical Director, Dick Rodda. Mr. Lester had done revivals, operettas, and several original shows that went to Broadway, including Kismet, Song Of Norway, and Peter Pan. The latter would gain Dick Rodda a Tony Award for flying Mary Martin, as Peter Pan, in 1955. By the time Danny worked for Mr. Lester, (as he was known to everyone), the Civic Light Opera had an 85% subscription, and a million dollar profit each season. 95 Not bad for a non-profit company, in a city not known for its theatre. Mr. Lester had been a rehearsal pianist before he began producing, and understood the voice better than any
producer of his time, with a great love of the dance. This would make working with Danny Daniels a good marriage of skill, and respect.

Their first project together would be a new musical by Meredith Willson called 1491. It was based on Christopher Columbus trying to get the backing of Queen Isabella & King Ferdinand for his expedition to Asia. The show starred John Cullum, Jean Fenn, and Chita Rivera. It was Danny's work with Rivera that was a stand out in this show. Danny didn't care for the script, but wanted to work with Edwin Lester. (John Cullum described the show as being about shoes, hats, anything other than Columbus discovering America). 96

Meredith Willson had worked on the show for a long time, but was unable to make changes in rehearsals. Danny was forced to write additional lyrics for Chita Rivera to make one of her song and dance numbers work. Danny offered them to Meredith, and asked him to write his own, but Meredith never changed them, and Danny's lyrics remained in the show for one of his favorite dancers. Though the show closed out of town, it set the relationship with Mr. Lester for the next decade.
In 1971 the Giagni family sold their apartment in the Dakota, and with the profits on it were able to purchase a home in Santa Monica where they live today. With the surplus, they found a space at 310 Wilshire for a dance school. Danny and Bea signed a ten year lease, and the school took about a year to gain momentum. It was so slow the first six months that Danny thought of closing the school until a wonderful pair of identical twin sisters, Maggie Bishop-Danielson, and Mary Bishop showed up and were so much fun to teach that Danny held on for six more months, until the school took off. Maggie and Mary would tour with Danny's own dance company in 1977.97

This was a good period for Danny and Bea, running a successful dance school, and with Danny still earning a good living as a choreographer. During this period Danny filmed Piaf, starring Bridget Ariel, two Milliken Industrials Shows, wrote and directed a children's show titled Stuff & Nonsense, choreographed three John Denver television specials, (won an Emmy for one, but the producer would not pay for the Emmy award plaque), choreographed and danced with Gene Kelly on a television special, and twice performed with Kelly in Atlantic City. Danny staged and helped conceive a one woman show for
Nanette Fabray. He choreographed two Broadway shows, *Lolita* starring Dorothy Louden, and John Neville, and *I Remember Mama* starring Liv Ullman, and choreographed two shows for Edwin Lester; *Wonderful Town, On A Clear Day*. He started his own dance company that toured the United States, and staged a Las Vegas act for a former Edwin Lester protégé, Mitzi Gaynor.

From 1968-72, Danny staged an act for Mitzi Gaynor. He staged her Las Vegas act three times using four dancers. Bob Sidney had originated the act with Alton Ruff, and Randy Dowdy. Danny then developed the concept of four dancers with Gaynor, adding Stan Mazin to the cast, and staged the act over the next four years. Each version of the act (75 minutes running time), had four weeks of rehearsal, then the act was opened in Vancouver, Canada, at "The Cave" nightclub. After this break in period, the act opened in Las Vegas, at the Riviera Hotel. Afterwards the act then toured for a year. One of the acts toured for two years before Gaynor changed her format, and choreographer, to a chorus of 18 dancers and singers, sort of a "Young Americans" look to the act, with twenty costumes changes provided by Bob Mackie, and choreographed by Tony Charmoli.
A favorite experience of his during this last period of time was the production of *Wonderful Town*, starring Nanette Fabray, George Gaynes, Marti Rolf, Mary Wicks, and Leroy Reems. Taken from the book *My Sister Eilene*, with music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, original dialogue and direction by Jerome Chadorov, and conducted by Richard Kaufman.\(^{100}\) The rehearsals lasted four weeks. Additional music was provided for the opening scene of Manhattan, titled; "Hey New York" by Bernstein, Comden, and Green.\(^{101}\) The sets by Bob Randolph were of the skyline of Manhattan, and matched in color the 1930s style clothing by costume designer, Frank Thompson. The two principals were in vivid red, and blue dresses to accentuate their being from out of town in every way possible.

Danny staged the entire company in tightly integrated patterns during the musical breaks in the lyrics of this opening number, then the ensemble would freeze on a specific bar of music while Nanette Fabray, and Marti Rolf sang the lyrics with the mass of New York humanity as a background. At the completion of the number the set revolved to become the west side of Greenwich Village, by the corner of Christopher Street. It would be the one
number in the show, ("Christopher Street"), that Danny would spend hours of rehearsal time trying to give an accurate representation of life in Greenwich Village in 1935. Jerry Chodorov put back all of his original dialogue from the original, and Danny had to continue to edit the number again, and again, to trim it back down to a manageable length.\textsuperscript{102} (According to D.J. Giagni, the problem with the number was that all of America now looked like Greenwich Village, especially after the 1960s, and no matter what Danny tried to do to make the Village characters look odd, they appeared commonplace in 1975).\textsuperscript{104}

Daniels had Fabray prepare for the show by walking miles each day through Will Rogers State Park while singing the songs, to get her wind up, and tone her legs for all of the dancing she would do. After three weeks of this she then came to his 310 Wilshire Blvd. studios to learn her steps, and rehearse with her future partner in the show, Alton Ruff. This was very helpful to her, because the rehearsal period with the cast would go quickly. Except it seemed, for the "Christopher Street" number.

Fabray and the cast would watch Daniels, his hands in his pockets, jingling whatever change he had between his
fingers, looking out on some distant horizon in his mind that had the right look for this number.\textsuperscript{105} He had the familiar deep concentration crease between his eyes, wearing the ubiquitous New York cab drivers cap set a bit forward on his head. The cast had to learn how to be quiet during these moments when, as Danny would say, he was doing "Broad Strokes." Oliver (Woody) Woodall, a dancer in the chorus remembered, "Danny always standing in a modified third position, with his hands in his pockets, counting his quarters, and being such a perfectionist, that someone would always cry from the exhaustion of trying to get it just right."\textsuperscript{106}

Just before the opening in San Francisco, Danny lost his favorite hat. The cast all chipped in the money to buy him a new one for opening night. Larry Dean, the stage manager, organized a cast photo on a street corner in front of the theatre, under a sign that read; CHRISTOPHER STREET. Danny was quite moved by the gesture.

Fabray was taken with the way Daniels was sensitive to her personal needs, Fabray had recently lost her husband of almost 17 years, as a performer, and how brilliantly capable Daniels was as an editor of material.\textsuperscript{107} "Danny choreographs a number for you, I cannot
turn to the right, so he staged the number to the left. I am deaf in one ear, and he placed the drums in the center of the orchestra pit to keep me on the beat for my numbers." Fabray considers herself a tap dancer, who is also a funny actress. Knowing that Fabray had studied with Bill Robinson, Daniels staged her numbers to focus on those strengths, and was a great person for her to draw strength from as a friend, and soul mate.

One number provided a great chance to show off Fabray's dance talent and was quite comical and exciting. A combination of tap and Jitterbugging, it was called "Swing". Danny conceived a contrapuntal symphony of rhythm. This was a seven minute, full out dance number. Built around Fabray and six male dancers, that grew eventually to a point that there were forty people involved, dancing to the final bars of music. Then in the last four bars, the boys, holding the hand of their girl dance partners, spun the girls down to the floor like a child's top, rocked them back on their behinds in preparation for the girls to leap up into a split jump, holding the waists of all of the boys between their legs, then shouting the final lyric, "Swing!" This number
stopped the show for a four minute ovation, that night, and every performance of the fifteen week run.

"The key to Danny's construction of a number is that you don't notice the construction at all."\textsuperscript{109} He builds the rhythm patterns, and traffic patterns of the dancers to a crescendo. Most of the dancers in this show had trouble mastering quickly the intricate rhythm patterns, but all had a good tap technique, except Oliver, a former percussionist, who loved the rhythms, but had to really work on the technique.\textsuperscript{110}

The only sour note came the day after the San Francisco opening during a clean up rehearsal, when Alfred, an older dancer in the chorus, complained about how long he was having to hold his partner after the number. He complained of being really tired waiting for Fabray to feel the applause peak, and then signal the ensemble to break for the scene change. Danny was incredulous as he said to Alfred, "You've just worked for seven minutes to get that applause Alfred. What else are we doing it for?" As the run went on, Alfred would unobtrusively set his partner down before Nanette gave the signal, but being so far upstage, and being short in height, he managed not to kill any applause that he had
earned for seven previous minutes. Otherwise the mood of
the cast could be summed up by Danny, "Working for Ed
Lester was really one of the joys of being in Show
Business for me." 111

The only time Danny and Mr. Lester had a disagreement
was when Danny had finished with 1491, and flew home from
San Francisco. He got a call from Mr. Lester asking him to
fly back to fix something that Mr. Lester wanted changed
in a number. Danny didn't want to go back because he had
finished his assignment, and wasn't getting paid the usual
director’s and choreographer’s weekly percentage of the
gross, but Mr. Lester told Danny, "Danny I try to be nice
to all of my directors and choreographers, I don't want
you to treat me like this. I've asked you to come here,
and I want you to come here." All Danny could say to a man
like that was, "Ed, I'm on a plane tomorrow." You just
couldn't refuse him anything. Mr. Lester called you, and
talked to you directly. He was a real “stand up guy.” 112
Danny and Mr. Lester worked on projects up until Mr.
Lester had to retire at 92 years old. He passed away at
the age of 95, in 1989. A legend in the theatre on both
coasts, and the last true gentleman theatrical producer.
Danny's last project for the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera, was also its last full scale season, *On A Clear Day*, starring Robert Goulet, Joanna Gleason, and Rod Loomis. The Light Opera was now under the direction of Cy Feuer, and Ernie Martin. Burton Lane was brought in to work on new music for the show, such as the one and only performance of "Don't Tamper With My Sister", featuring D.J. Giagni, Neil Schwartz, Oliver Woodall, and Jason Kincaid in San Diego. (The theatre had no real rehearsal space, so this number was rehearsed in the carpeted lobby of the theatre). Another number was the "Exercise Number", a spoof of the aerobics craze of the time.

Joanna Gleason has a vivid memory of this latter number as being terrific, and performed by fantastic dancers. Danny only talked to her in dance terms, as he would any other dancer. Gleason had been a lead in a Broadway show, *I Love My Wife*, and had done some movement for Onna White, but Danny was placing Gleason in a very rigorous number. She at one point during rehearsals at the Debbie Reynolds, (DR), Studios went home in tears. She felt that she had to catch up quickly, and that Danny expected her to do as much. She wasn't able to do what she did the best right off the bat, and Danny was not going to
waver, or compromise with what he was going to do. This was an actress-singer being thrown into a great number. Danny never yelled at her.

As with Onna White, Danny encouraged, and pushed her to be capable of doing the dance numbers well. She came back to her next rehearsals determined to rehearse at home and at the DR studios, if that is what it would take to master the number. Which she did, and the number was definitely an accomplishment for both Joanna and Danny. A few years later when Joanna was cast in Stephen Sondheim’s Into The Woods, she had an understanding of the dance vernacular, changes of weight, and a strong sense of rhythm that she learned from Danny. In that production she was always the first to learn the numbers set by Lar Lubovich.114

The hard work payed off, and Gleason became a star of the show, she also felt like one of Danny’s dancer family, and loved to see the cap that Danny always wore, was a little jauntier when the number finally was right.115 The mannerisms that Gleason had in the acting scenes for the role of Daisy were incorporated by Danny, into her musical numbers. Once again, “Don’t dance it the way I dance it, dance it the way you dance it.” It took her weeks to
understand what Danny meant by that. The young actress
first heard, "You're never going to be as good as me.",
but implicit in his words were, "You dance. I can see the
dancer in you."116 Gleason just had to hear it the right
way.

On A Clear Day was great fun, and also right for its
star Robert Goulet, who was in the best vocal condition
that anyone could remember. Though he would have an
occasional lapse of memory when singing his lyrics to
"Come Back To Me", in which the lyric would turn into,
"From a boat at the docks. Have some bagels, have some
locks..." (cast member, Alton Ruff, remembered him doing
the same thing five years earlier in Camelot, starring
opposite Carol Lawrence, with Goulet rhyming the word snow
with Cameloe...?) 116 Goulet claimed in July of 2002 that
he just never stops singing lyrics, correct, or not.

It would be during the run in San Francisco, that
Danny would show one of his very few calm moments in a
panic. His son, D.J., was having friends over for drinks
at his hotel on the company day off, when he saw just
across the street, black smoke coming out of Danny's
hotel. In a panic he rushed to the hotel, told the front
desk to call the fire department, and took the elevator up
to his father's apartment. After frantic banging on the door finally got Danny to answer, D.J. tried to pull him into the hallway, but Danny calmly looked at all of the smoke, and then said, "Wait a minute. I want to get my magazines!" Finally Danny was dragged down the fire stairs, as the smoke got thicker and thicker from a mattress fire in the basement. The firemen passed them on the way down, with Danny and his magazines in hand.

As it turned out the fire was symbolic of the fate of the Light Opera. After beginning in 1938, it closed down in 1980 after four seasons under the new directors. As Onna White remembered the founder of the Civic Light Opera, "Mr. Lester was a doll." He was everyone's favorite, but his day was over, and so were the good theatre times in Los Angeles for local musical productions, that for over two decades after this Los Angeles would be just another stop for national touring companies.
CHAPTER SIX
KEEPING TAP DANCING ALIVE

At the end of the Edwin Lester era in Los Angeles, a beginning of a new Daniels era was on the horizon. As a preserver of the art of tap dancing, Danny would save on tape at the Library Of Congress, for generations to come, many of the surviving tap dancers of the past. Danny was always looking to the next project, would now have the opportunity to meld his choreographic technique for the Broadway stage, with that of the motion picture screen. He would have the opportunity to work with his son D. J. as his assistant, rekindle his working relationship with Herb Ross, and cast Bernadette Peters and Christopher Walken in the last genuine major studio film musical of the 20th century. Danny would also finally have a hit Broadway musical and gain the long overdue recognition of his choreographic work.

At the end of the 1970s Danny applied for a grant from The National Endowment For The Arts, (NEA), to interview some of the great tap dancers. He received $5,000, and, because he didn't own his own video equipment, he was forced to use professional studios for
the interviews. This pushed costs beyond what he'd anticipated, so Danny had to use some of his own money to finish the project. The tapes which can be viewed at the New York and Los Angeles public libraries include interviews with Fred Kelley, (Gene's brother), Jack Williams, Nanette Fabray, Louis Dapron, Hal LeRoy, Fayard Nicholas, (of the Nicholas Brothers), as well as Danny himself describing their techniques, and demonstrating them. It was truly a fine tribute to the great dancers of the past.

Some of Danny's fondest memories from the Civic Light Opera in Los Angeles, was his work with pianist and arranger, Harper MacKay.

MacKay met Danny during 1491, and Danny was crazy for him until the day MacKay died at the age of 70, in 1996. MacKay was one of the great vocal arrangers, and singer accompanists in the business. "A truly gifted man, and great fun to work with." His music lives on in recordings that MacKay made for Danny's tap dance instruction tapes, and the work that he did in many film musicals, culminating with his work on the 1981 film Pennies From Heaven.
This film *Pennies From Heaven* was also a joint venture for Danny with his son, D.J. Giagni, who worked as his assistant choreographer. After being cast as a chorus dancer on *Wonderful Town*, Giagni would assist his father in his stage, screen, and television projects until his own Broadway choreographic career began to take form in the 1980s. (Giagni danced in France with the Lyon Ballet before studying tap dancing).¹²⁰

"Assisting my father was pure hell in the first two weeks. Giagni recalled how Danny has such panic that he thinks he will not have enough time to finish all of the musical numbers in time. He works like a demon for five hours, and then is exhausted for the rest of the day. By the end of the first week he has laid out a good chunk of all of the dances. By the second week he will have a basic sketch of what was left over. So, by the third week he has the show down, and can fine tune for the remainder of the rehearsals. It is this third week that I love the most, when it is fun, and my father and I go to lunch, and all of the great show business stories are told."¹²¹ When Giagni started choreographing later on, he was grateful for his working experience with his father. "No matter what else I do in my life, nothing is harder than
choreographing a show. You are forced to be creative in a room full of strangers. An artist, writer, or composer work alone in their rooms, and can change things in private. It’s that a choreographer can only create with people doing his creation. It is only then that it comes alive artistically.” He learned great respect for Danny’s work when he did his first piece for the San Diego Ballet, and had to overcome the fear of being on the line for what the dancers would ultimately perform. In 1981 he would collaborate with his father on the last major film musical of the century.

The film Pennies From Heaven, which also brought together Danny, Herb Ross, from the Martha Raye Show, and a former student, now Academy Award winner, Christopher Walken. This film, starring Steve Martin, Bernadette Peters, and Jessica Harper, was the last authentic Hollywood film musical shot at the old MGM lot. This was the same lot that had seen the likes of Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire starring in classical musical films during the 1940s and 1950s.

Daniels was quite lucky to have a star like Steve Martin, who had no tap training before the picture but a great deal of desire to learn. Danny and D. J. Giagni gave
him classes every day for weeks before shooting began. During the shooting Giagni would warm Martin up to get his feet loosened up for each of the numbers he had to do. The result was much more believable by Martin, than was done by Richard Gere in the 2003 production of Chicago. This was also the reason that there are such long sequences of Martin dancing full body, and not using close up shots of just his feet. Unlike doing rapid two second cuts in an MTV style of rock video dancing, this is where real dancing pays off. Danny firmly believes that the longer the camera stays on the subject is equal to the greater level of musical talent there is for display.

As Danny would say, “It was also lucky that Steve Martin had never had ballet training before he learned to tap.” According to Danny, training in ballet makes it impossible to be a good tap dancer, because in ballet the dancer must use the entire leg to do a beat, whereas tap dancers have great flexibility in the ankle that allows for the flap beat. Danny had the occasion many times over the years to try to teach ballet dancers how to tap, but they never really acquire a good technique. The Daniels style of tap is into the floor, but ballet is muscurally pulled up out of the floor. The only ballet trained dancer
he was able to teach was his son, D.J., who had a great deal of Ballet training in New York with Charlie Black, Madame Pereoslavic at the Ballet Theatre School, and a good tap technique from Danny's long time assistant, Ann Wallace. All of this training in the late 1960s and early 1970s would come in handy for Giagni's work on Danny's style of orchestrated tap choreography.\(^{124}\)

While watching, and listening to Danny's style of choreography, the observer hears a cacophony of rhythms that individually sound interesting, but then are blended to make one complete rhythm. Danny says, "The more people you have in a number, the less they have to do to look good. This way the soloist is enhanced." This technique of small pieces making up the larger whole, took Danny years to figure out. He had to form the picture in his mind of how a dance is supposed to work, and then make it happen that way on stage. He first learned this at Camp Tamimint where he had no time restrictions, and then developed it over the next ten years. Danny calls it contrapuntal rhythms, as he first saw it in the film *Broadway Melody of 1940* in the "Begin The Beguine" number with Fred Astaire, and Eleanor Powell, where one rhythm is answered by a counter rhythm.\(^{125}\) This was the basic form that Danny
pioneered on stage, and then brought to his films. Danny used groups performing it, sometimes as many as three groups at one time, the way he had staged dances on Broadway for *Walking Happy* and *The Tap Dance Kid*.

His son, D.J., gained a greater appreciation for Danny's approach to choreographing by doing it himself and returning to assist his father. "My father is a great editor. He edits as he goes along, (as in"Broad Strokes"). First he develops the ideas or concepts and some of the vocabulary for the numbers in pre-production. Then when he has the people there, he develops the structure of the numbers. By the time you see the finished product, it is a very exciting experience head on, and even more exciting from the balcony to see all of these patterns coming at you." Many times in rehearsal, Giagni would tell his father how great something was, but his father still would think it was no good and toss it out. As Giagni learned, it was funny that Danny always would come up with something even better. Giagni was told many times by his father that ideas in a number are what's most important. "Anybody can do good steps from television awards shows to the Laker's Cheerleaders, but the numbers are stupid because there are no ideas."  

If choreographers have
ideas they don't even need sets, as exemplified by the retrospective of Jerome Robbins work in, Jerome Robbins' Broadway, which utilized just a painted traveler and the various characters, but there were ideas on the stage.

Danny says that to choreograph a dramatic piece, you require more than the arrangement of the dance steps. The dance steps are only a means to the end of fulfilling an idea, a concept for the whole. A dance piece that isn't a dramatic idea, but is just dance steps executed by a group of dancers, is not real choreography. The real thing still must have a thematic idea that can be formed into a beginning, a middle, and an end to be deserving of the title choreography. This shaping process involves several phases that the choreographer must go through to complete a piece. First a choreographer has to be a very good dancer, not necessarily an outstanding soloist, but have a very accomplished, and well trained background. In Danny's case he started tap dancing as a youngster, and by the age of eleven was a very accomplished tap dancer. Ballet was his second love, and, for over ten years he studied with the best teachers in New York. Next he went through his teaching phase, which also prepared him to move on to the next phase, that of actually choreographing. Danny
augmented his knowledge of dance by studying Spanish, modern, and even some Asian dance forms that gave him as much command of the associated dance arts as possible. With this dance vocabulary to draw upon, he learned at Camp Tamiment to choreograph weekly variety shows, with original material, and a cast of twenty singers, dancers, and actors. That experience became his introduction to moving groups around, and devising group dance pieces. It was exhilarating but also bewildering. He would get ideas for a ballet or dance piece that had a thematic idea, but when he got finished staging it, it did not look the same as the dance he had pictured it in his mind.

That was when he realized that visualizing it in his mind, and making it happen on stage with real people was, to say the least, not easy. It took ten years to learn how to make the mental concept happen on stage. Visualize the concept first and then realize that concept on the stage with a group of dancers. This he says is the art of choreography.

An early example of this was a number from The Tap Dance Kid, called the "Little French Number" performed in the workshop of the show. However the song wasn't very good, and the women's high heel shoes were hard to dance
in. A concept was developed after Hinton Battle grabbed a pair, put them on, and began to dance in them just for laughs. D.J. Giagni told his father that might be a good idea for a number. Danny saw it also, and the song was dropped, but the concept was developed into a fun number for Hinton's character to do just that. The rehearsal pianist, Peter Howard, told Danny that this had happened to Michael Kidd in real life during the rehearsals of *Guys and Dolls*. After the show's workshop, Danny and Giagni were walking down the street, and bumped into Kidd, who confirmed that it really did happen to him. Kidd's assistant told him she couldn't do the choreography in the heels, and he put them on and did the number. (Kidd's assistant was Onna White). This is one example of how a show business anecdote developed into a conceptual number for *The Tap Dance Kid*.

Danny brought his style of concept choreography to the MGM film *Pennies From Heaven*, based on Dennis Potter's BBC television hit, set in the 1930s with original music from the period. For example, the stars would break into an old song, once sung by Bing Crosby or Kate Smith, right in the middle of a depressing scene, to transport the audience into the fantasy world that the characters lived
in. The set would alter into beautiful colors, and elegant costumes in each of the fantasies, as well as large-scale musical numbers shot brilliantly by Gordon Willis, and magnificently choreographed by Danny. Danny reflected that having Herb Ross direct was a dream come true after bad television directors such as Marty Pasetta, who always did master shots on dialogue, and close ups on the dance numbers.\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Pennies From Heaven} was a tap musical; and Herb, being a former dancer, knew how to shoot dance. Drawing on Steve Martin's devotion to authenticity in his tap dancing though Danny would dub all of the soloist's taps, Danny was able to have Martin dance all of the steps that were in the film. (Graciously, Martin gave credit for his success in the film to Danny at the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary screening of the film at the Academy of Motion Pictures in 2001).

Another joy for Danny to work with was Bernadette Peters because she had been on Broadway many times, was a trained tap dancer, and had worked for Danny on television. For Peters the feeling was mutual in her recent comment on Danny's style of choreography: "It impressed me so the way he could make tap an expression of emotion. There is no one like him."\textsuperscript{129} This notion that
there was emotion in tap choreography was a surprise for someone who hadn't danced for Danny before, and a bigger surprise came with the casting of Christopher Walken.

When Herb Ross and Danny worked together to cast the film, they agreed that they needed a dancer for the role of Tom. (Walken's agent had been contacted for him to play the vagrant who kills the blind girl, but the agent turned it down, though Walken was unaware of this offer). Ross was not aware that Walken could dance. When Danny suggested Walken for the role of Tom, the pimp, Ross told Danny no. Then Danny gleefully told Ross that not only could Walken dance, "I taught him how!" Ross then contacted Walken, and Walken accepted. This would turn out to be a great reunion for Danny and Christopher Walken, and the "Let's Misbehave" number became a standout.

This number takes place in a rundown bar in the city that is populated by very rough characters. Herb Ross arranged for Danny to rehearse the number on the set, which almost never occurs on a film, and with a core group of dancers that Danny always prefers to use to work out the choreography beforehand, the number was quickly set. Then, when Walken rehearsed with Danny and the dancers, he learned the number so fast that he even offered
suggestions for the number that Danny readily accepted. Ross asked to see the number performed on the set from start to finish, and afterwards Walken was glad that he didn't have to do it again, because he couldn't have physically done it, due to the athletic nature of the number.\textsuperscript{132}

The shooting of this number went very smoothly, as did all of Danny's numbers. To insure this, D. J. Giagni would continue to rehearse with Steve for 30 minutes each shoot day to warm him up, and keep him loose. Giagni would also rehearse the other stars as well, except Tommy Rall, and Walken. One for reasons of age, and one who had learned after years of doing films to save performance energy for when you need it. Rall had been in classic films of the 1950s such as Kiss Me Kate, My Sister Eileen, and Seven Brides For Seven Brothers, and had not danced in a long time.\textsuperscript{132} He was to execute an acrobatic move called a "Butterfly" in the It's The Girl number. Rall managed to duck Giagni, who was always busy with other people needing to rehearse, and Rall managed to do the number in one take with Steve Martin and Bob Fitch. When Giagni told his father that he'd been having a terrible time getting Rall to rehearse, Danny told him, "That's all

110
right. He probably didn't have another "Butterfly" in him.¹³³

This same number also taught Giagni a valuable lesson in film performing. Whereas Walken knew how to save his energy for the camera, Bob Fitch didn't. Fitch was such fun to work with, always joking, performing his eccentric dancing for the cast and the crew, and did all of the rehearsals full out. The problem was waiting for the camera and lighting set ups for the "It's The Girl" number took a very long time. By the time they were ready to shoot the number, Fitch had used up all of his fresh energy off camera.¹³⁴ (According to Nanette Fabray, this was a problem also for Sid Caesar, who was very funny if not over rehearsed).¹³⁵ The result was that Fitch didn't come off as good as he was capable of, and Steve Martin and Tommy Rall were crisp. Moreover, since Fitch wasn't the star of the film, it was cut, print, and no second chance the next day.¹³⁶

With Christopher Walken it was different. He was an experienced film actor-dancer surrounded by the best dancers Danny could find. The scene in the bar begins with Lulu, (Peters), entering, and having a lemonade, paid for by a pimp named Tom, (Walken). The scene lasts 8 minutes
and 44 seconds up to the closing line by Lulu, "Oh Arthur." The dimly lit set adds to the heavy mood. The costumes are dark, the color red is used on the walls of the set, and heavy make up is used for the women characters. The atmosphere players all look as if they have dirt under their fingernails. That is, except Lulu and Tom. They are the focus of the scene. The camera angles are shot down to make Lulu look vulnerable. The shots of Tom are tilted up to give him sexual and evil power. Tom's hair is slicked back to give him a severe quality. The musical number is an exaggeration of reality. As Tom dances the pin up photos of women on the walls increase in size from 5"x 7" to 4' x 6'. Herb Ross used only 100 separate cuts to form the scene and number. The dance used 42 cuts in all, a limited amount for a dance number. With the use of long focus, as developed originally by Greg Toland in the 1930s to showcase Walken's dancing ability Herb Ross took great care directorially 137 Danny choreographed by the shot. He didn't need rapid montage to create a dance number, as in MTV videos, or the 2001 film version of Moulin Rouge. Walken could do it "In One," and his performance could have been easily transferred to the stage.138
The number's only disappointment for Danny was Walken's stunt jump off the bar to a trampoline that vaulted him back onto the bar. Herb Ross used a cut that made Walken look as if he couldn't do the jump. Danny said it looked like a cheat shot, whereas the rest of the number came off as it was conceived. When the film played in New York City, the reaction to this strip and tap number was electric. The audience in New York, applauded after this number. (When was the last time you heard that happen in a movie theatre responding to dancing on film)? For Walken it was special to work with Danny again, as well as with dancers like Toni Kaye, who Walken knew going back to his days in Summer stock in New York. Other memorable numbers from the film include Let's Face The Music, Love Can Handle Anything That Ails You, It's The Girl, My Baby Says Yes, and Pennies From Heaven.

The final number in the film was almost an afterthought. Herb called Danny to have him stage a number to give the film a more upbeat ending to what was at that point not the typical MGM happy musical experience. The final number also had to match the big opening number of the film. MGM had also run out of money budgeted for the film, and could only shoot for one more day. Danny had one
day to audition dancers, and cast 120 for this last number, "That's The Story Of Love." The only number that wasn't original material from the 1930s. Staged on a gigantic street set, designed by Ken Adams with the steel work of an elevated train overhead, The set appeared so authentic to Danny's daughter Ann, a former New Yorker, that she felt afraid of being mugged walking down its lonely alley while visiting her father one day. In the final number that same street set would be filled with female dancers doing synchronized kicks, and dissolves that were an homage to Busby Berkely.

The audition took one day, and so, because of the time problem, all were warned to arrive exactly on time the next day to rehearse, be fitted for costumes produced miraculously in a week by Bob Mackie, and, on the following day, be ready to shoot the number. One of the dancers who had wanted to be in the film but hadn't made the audition cut, arrived on time the next day and was hired because one of the dancers hired for the number was twenty minutes late for rehearsal. Danny needed those twenty minutes in this situation, as well as a dancer who was more eager to perform. (In Danny's opinion it would be hard to find 120 tap dancers in a day due to the lack of
jobs for trained professional dancers in Los Angeles today).  

Typically Danny had worked out all of the other numbers in the film well in advance. The playback would not be the usual tinny sound of the click track but a tape of the song lip-synched by the cast, with dance music recorded by Harper MacKay on piano supplemented by bass and drums. The use of the trio was great to dance to, since the film had yet to be scored. Danny would later dub all of the solo taps, and use Giagni, Toni Kaye, and his other core group of dancers for the production numbers dubbing with the Foley editor.  

It had been 25 years since MGM had done a major screen musical. All the people who had made the magic possible in the studio's heyday were retired. Film had become quite sophisticated in 1981, unlike the first films of Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers, who would dance to a live orchestra off camera, with bleacher seats set up for studio people to watch them perform on camera. Later film became more polished with the use of separate tracks for orchestra and vocals. Gene Kelly would mouth his lyrics, and dub his taps later, or his assistant would dub them. By 1981 the sound editing was so sophisticated that it all
was done to perfection. In *Pennies From Heaven*, Danny played it safe, and returned to view the finished product on the Movieola, (No longer used for editing review, the Movieola was a small green colored machine that had the rough film on a reel that was mounted on its side, with a small speaker in its base to hear the sound that was added by the Foley Editor). Danny was horrified by what he viewed. The Foley Editor had tried to make the tap sounds sound natural as if you were doing a dramatic film. Matching the sounds of a person walking down the pavement. This is where the sound begins with the toe touching the ground at the toe, and ends with the heel. This made all of the tap sounds off, as far as rhythm was concerned. In no uncertain terms, Danny told the editor to put all of the rhythm back, otherwise what was the point? The sound was corrected, and the end result is a fine example of a genuine Hollywood film musical, done in the same style that honored the great performers, directors, and choreographers of the past.

This film project was followed by Danny’s 1982 workshop production of *The Tap Dance Kid* in Michael Bennett's rehearsal studios at 890 Broadway, starring Hinton Battle, Sam Wright, Hatie Winston, Alfonso Ribiero,
and Allan Weeks, and directed by Vivian Matalon. There weren't many young African-American children who knew how to tap dance any more, so Danny developed a training program to prepare the young males to play the title role in the show. One of whom was Savion Glover. Glover later cast all Danny's original young dancers for his own Broadway show, *Bring On 'Da Noise, Bring On 'Da Funk.* Danny taught Glover how to tap, and later Gregory Hines became an influence on Glover's emerging tap style, a style that Danny truly admires.

After the workshop, Danny received a call from Steven Spielberg to do the choreography for the film *Indiana Jones & The Temple Of Doom.* A former dancer of Danny's from the Perry Como Show, Michael Bennett, had recommended Danny for the film, the same way he had recommended him for the Millikin Show in 1970. When Danny arrived at the London studios and went to lunch at Spielberg's table, the lunch room was empty until this tall gentleman sat down at the table across from Danny. Danny got up to shake hands, and introduce himself, afterwards asking, "And you're?" The gentleman responded, "I'm Harrison Ford." Danny was more embarrassed than Ford was, but Ford was completely gracious.
Spielberg wanted a number that would make the audience think that they had come into the wrong theatre to see a musical instead of an adventure picture. The number was to be to the Cole Porter song, "Anything Goes" sung in Chinese, by Kate Capshaw. It was to be developed into a big dance number. Danny was called into rehearsal with Capshaw, and a pianist. All they had was the music, and Capshaw looked to Danny as if he was going to teach her Chinese! The film hired a student to translate the song into Chinese, and Danny schooled Capshaw by the bar phrase to learn the song.

All went well until one day at the London studios when Capshaw’s beautiful bugle beaded dress was rolled on a wardrobe rack past a baby elephant being used in another scene. The elephant reached up with its trunk, and snatched the dress off the rolling rack. The dress was half eaten before the elephant could be stopped. The dress would have to be duplicated by the woman costumer back in New York, who had to contact a seamstress in Connecticut to match the dress exactly. (Danny’s ancient Chinese proverb says, "If you have beautiful dress, and hungry elephant, be sure to have second dress in the closet.").
The number involved forty of London's best tap dancers to play chorus girls behind Capshaw. As he had done in *Pennies From Heaven*, Danny used numbers pinned to the dancers to help keep them in the right places. Bea Daniels would make a list of where each group of numbers would be at a certain bar of music. One chorus dancer did not like wearing a number, and every morning Bea would have to give this dancer a new number so that Danny would not lose track of her in the number. (This dancer quit the business afterwards, because show business in her opinion was too impersonal). The rest of the cast, and star fared well, and it was another successful number that Danny brought to the screen. (Broadway choreographer Thommie Walsh thought this number was so exciting when he saw it in New York, he jumped right out of his theatre seat).

Spielberg came up with two ideas for the number. The first involved each dancer wearing a top hat, with a live dove under it to be revealed at the end of the number. Danny loved the idea, but it was cut from the film because the doves had no toilet training, and at the cue to reveal, the dancers had dove poop on their heads every time. (This may be the other reason the dancer with the
missing number quit show business). The second idea was to reverse the film after the women dancers did the splits, as a cheat shot of them returning to their standing positions. Spielberg treated Danny like royalty, and the per diem was so large that he couldn't spend it all, so it became extra salary.\textsuperscript{156}

Back in New York \textit{The Tap Dance Kid} was headed for Broadway. Vivian Matalon and Danny had auditioned many actors for the show. Originally they had contacted Gregory Hines, but Gregory was getting many film offers after he finished his run with \textit{Sophisticated Ladies}, and he had to pass on the project. His brother, Maurice, didn't pass on it and was set to audition. This audition still stands out in Danny's memory.
CHAPTER SEVEN
THE BROADWAY HIT

It was Vivian Matalon’s practice to interview actors before they had to read and sing for him, so as to get a feel for them as people. Matalon met with Maurice Hines, after he had sent the entire script to him, as well as all of the other actors auditioning for principal roles. He wanted to allow them to see the progression of the characters through the play’s narrative. Most directors don’t send actors more than a few pages, known as “sides”, which tell an actor nothing but a snapshot of the emotions expected of the character. A short time later when Maurice Hines came to audition at 790 Broadway for the lead in the show he stated that he had read the script, and listened to the music. Matalon and Danny were very interested in him for the role, and Matalon thought that he was perfect for the part. However, no sooner had they both greeted Hines, when he began to tell Matalon that he had changes that he wanted in the music and didn’t agree with the script’s treatment of his potential character.

Danny was quite shocked, but Matalon, being English, kept a stiff upper lip. Matalon told Hines how wonderfully
talented he was, and that, though he was sure that the criticisms that Hines wanted to make were carefully thought out, Matalon didn't want them to influence his direction of the show. Matalon told Hines that if he heard any of them they might cause him to be unduly influenced, and lose his own perspective. Hines asked if he should read for him, but Matalon told him that they might never make a script that would have met with Hines' expectations. Then Matalon thanked Hines for coming in to audition and saw him to the door. After the door closed, Matalon turned to an incredulous Daniels and said, "Not with a barge pole!"158 (American translation; "I wouldn't touch this guy with a ten foot pole"). Hines never even danced a step, sang a note of music, or read a single line of dialogue.

This was quite different from Danny's experience during the auditions for All American, when a young Barbra Streisand came in and knocked everyone out, only to have been rejected by a foolish director. Matalon was a smart director, who graciously rejected a foolish actor. This was unfortunate, because Hines would have been wonderful in the part.159 The actor who wanted the role, got the role. That actor was Hinton Battle. However, after opening
night when the reviews were mixed, Battle's true character began to surface.

The first reading was a shock because Battle could hardly read. Nonetheless Matalon and Danny remained in his corner, and, though the producers had no faith in him, they trusted the judgment of the more experienced director, and choreographer. Both these judgments would be reversed after the show opened and Battle began walking through the role. According to Matalon, "It was shameful how Hinton later began to sing the songs as he pleased, didn't do the steps set for him, and even began talking to the audience out of character." The result was unfortunate, because this role seemed perfect for Battle.

The workshop went well, but the producers were having trouble lining up enough money to take it to Broadway. They brought in Michael Stewart, a former dancer, to help with funding, but he had his own agenda. Stewart wanted to direct this show, but Matalon was hired by the producer, Stanley White, to direct the Broadway show. Slowly dissent was sewn with the writers, composers, and all of the producers, except Stanley White. Stewart waited until White left town for a week, and called Matalon at home with more of what Matalon called ridiculous notes. The
next day Matalon was called in to see the producers, minus White and Stewart, to be told that he was fired for a lack of consultation with the staff, (meaning Stewart), and none of the show's leads came to his defense. 163 Daniels wasn't told until after Matalon was fired.

Stewart's first day of rehearsal was a one hour breathing exercise. 164 It went down hill from there. In five days the show was falling apart. 165 Then producer Stanley White returned and couldn't believe what had happened. This may be a first, but a fired director was hired back. Matalon now felt that he had no power in the show, but he only returned out of respect for Danny Daniels. 166 (Later in the run, Matalon even had his Playbill program bio changed to just say: "The nicest thing in my life has been to work with Danny Daniels." So, without the power to fire, or even the threat of it, Matalon had no way to control Battle, or redirect the show. 167 It would only be the sheer determination of both Danny and Matalon that brought the show to the stage on opening night.

Nonetheless the highlight on opening night, the big tap number, "Fabulous Feet", that stopped the show for a four minute ovation. Danny and D.J. Giagni had created a
new tap innovation for this number, the tap tennis shoe.\textsuperscript{168} Since at one time Giagni had worked as a dance shoemaker, he was able to mount taps on the rubber soles.\textsuperscript{169} It provided a great effect for a number that had only been a vocal number originally, but had been developed by Danny into the hit dance number of the show. This sort of process development also occurred with Sam Wright's big number in the second act, by the perseverance of Matalon extending it 30 seconds at a time until it became an African-American's soliloquy, though Matalon stated that the credit was claimed elsewhere.\textsuperscript{170}

Though the show received mixed reviews, the producer, Stanley White, kept the show open, believing that the audiences would come by word of mouth, and they did.\textsuperscript{171} Danny and even the creative staff took a cut in their percentage of the gross to help while the show picked up momentum. It was the television commercials that brought the audiences downtown from Harlem, and kept the show open.\textsuperscript{172}

The Shuberts asked Michael Bennett to view the show to see if he thought that they should risk keeping the show open. Luckily, Bennett saw a Thursday performance, and as it happened, Battle was on for that show, and there
was almost a full house, (after opening you could shoot deer in the balcony of the Broadhurst the ticket sales were so light). Bennett reported back to the Shuberts that he thought the show was a hit, and that they should keep it open. \textsuperscript{173} They kept the show open, and didn't charge the show theatre rent for three months until they moved the show to the Minskoff Theatre, but later charged the show back rent. \textsuperscript{174}

The pay off came at the Tony Awards of 1983. Danny was in competition with Scott Salmon, the choreographer of \textit{La Cage Aux Folles} The dance legend, Gwen Verdon, was the presenter. Her voice cracked as she read, "And the winner is... Danny Daniels, for the \textit{Tap Dance Kid}!" Danny was sure he wouldn't win, but he seemed to dance right up the steps to Verdon, and breathlessly accepted the Tony. The grin never left his face right into the wings with Verdon. Back in Los Angeles, Peter and Ann Giagni watched, and screamed together as their father accepted his award. It was too crowded for D.J. Giagni backstage, but he also watched it on television a few blocks away. \textsuperscript{175}

It was a bitter sweet moment for D.J., all the while remembering how Danny should have won it the year he was nominated for both \textit{Walking Happy}, and the Lincoln Center
revival of Annie Get Your Gun, but all of the votes for both shows canceled each other out, and the third highest vote count won.\textsuperscript{176} Today it would be a tie, and both of Danny's shows would be winners. For Daniels it was wonderful, even though he had the flu, and a 102 degree fever, he danced up those steps to the stage as if he were dancing in Street Scene again.

Ironically, Danny had almost turned down Tap Dance Kid. He was in New York trying to get his own tap show on tour. Stuart Ostrow, the producer of Pippin, and 1776, was working with Daniels to put that show together. Stuart wanted to have an original score written for the tour show, but Danny didn't like the idea.\textsuperscript{177} Danny was also having major disagreements with his son, D.J., over the show. At one point both were not speaking to each other for three weeks. Each would call Ann Giagni, and vent about what the other had said in the heat of creative argument, leaving Ann in the middle.\textsuperscript{178} The project was in limbo when Danny got a call about The Tap Dance Kid, and read the script and liked it, but wanted to turn it down because he had come to New York to do his own show. Vivian Matalon called Danny to invite him to lunch, and made it clear there was no other choreographer for the show other
than Danny Daniels. Matalon said, *The Tap Dance Kid* is your show, and no one else should do this show." Danny realized that Matalon was right, and he accepted.

Danny called D.J. Giagni to ask him if he would be interested in assisting him, and Giagni turned him down. Three days later Giagni called, and accepted, after realizing that he was turning down a Broadway show, a major reason that he had come to New York. He knew how his father worked, and though the first two weeks would be hell, it would be fun when Danny had gotten the show's dance numbers worked out, and the lunches and storytelling would begin. They had both worked together for so long that during pre-rehearsal sessions, the two could begin dancing for several hours, and not speak more than a sentence to each other, the comfort level was so established. It hadn't always been this way with them. (Danny fired him as a rehearsal drummer for *Hot September*, when Giagni was a teenager).

Now they could rehearse, or more likely Danny would do a step all the way around the edge of the room, over and over, and at first Giagni used to follow him around as Danny got it to what he wanted. By this time Giagni knew how to wait, and then Danny would say, "Try this." Then
the notation would begin, and the dances would begin to form. It would amuse Giagni during the first full cast rehearsals to watch the "eager beaver" dancers follow Danny around the room, until one by one they figured out that Danny was creating, and not setting anything at first.

As Giagni reflected, "Danny is a concept choreographer, not someone who just puts a series of steps together." The choreography is character driven. The dance must suit the character, and the performer doing it. After The Tap Dance Kid opened on Broadway, Danny was never able to get his own tour show developed after winning the Tony Award. This was a shame since the tour would have featured clog dancing, tap dancing, toe tapping, (A ballerina with taps set in her toe shoe points and actually tap dances), pantomime, and a duet with Danny and son, D.J. doing ballet as Danny performed tap to "Me And My Shadow".

The national tour of The Tap Dance Kid came out to Los Angeles, and Danny saw that the show was not the same after the death of the original producer, Stanley White. Jerry Zaks, directing his first big musical, had worked a new opening for the show, and had Danny do a novelty
number in the second act. Zaks asked D.J. Giagni about the dancing kids they had ready to do the role, and D.J. recommended Savion Glover, but Jerry cast Dule Hill as the kid, because Dule was smaller, with a higher voice, and a brighter smile and stage presence. (Danny wasn't able to change Zaks' mind).

The real problem by this time, was one that began in New York with Hinton Battle, and had grown into a lack of effort on his part to do the show as originally directed. Danny felt that Battle was probably bored with the show, but continued to perform at top form it seemed, only when the critics, or important people in the industry showed up to see the show. Danny went to the other producers, to put a stop to this, but Evelyn Barron thought that Battle was wonderful anyway, and his changing the songs to a gospel style of delivery was not a problem. Daniels realized that inexperience was talking for the show now, and with Stanley White gone, there was nothing that could be done. The Los Angeles Times published a letter in the Calendar section by an audience member that validated what Danny had said about Battle walking through the performances. Danny felt that Battle was a wonderful talent, but very unwise in his approach to performing. It
was ironic that both Danny and D.J. Giagni had been warned about Battle by Tiger Haynes, who had played opposite Battle on Broadway in The Wiz. Haynes told them, "You're gonna have trouble. He is very talented, but doesn't know anything about performing. He'll get bored quickly, and walk through the show." According to Giagni, "If Hinton had been of the performing caliber of Tiger Hayes, the show would have turned out better." 

Another problem for Danny was with the producers not paying the royalties that he was contracted for. In San Francisco Danny made it clear that the show was to pay the full royalty to him, and they did until the show reached Los Angeles. Danny finally had to contact a lawyer to get his proper payments. The dispute continued until the show was to open in Detroit. Danny's lawyer informed the show that as soon as they failed to pay the royalties in Los Angeles, the company didn't have a valid contract with Danny, and all the choreography was owned by him, and could not be used. The theatre in Detroit was informed by the lawyer, and they informed the producers that without the choreography the show was canceled. The royalties were returned to Danny, and he built a dance studio onto his house with the proceeds.
Danny's career seemed to be proceeding along in high gear until the day of the 1983 Tony luncheon for all nominees at Sardi's. Danny had in his pocket a letter from Stephen Schwartz, firing him from the Workshop production of Rags, that he, Stephen Schwartz was directing. (Bea Daniels and D.J. Giagni had been at the last performance of the workshop production and afterwards collected Danny's equipment, and could feel that the energy in the room wasn't right, the production staff was whispering around them, and not even thanking Danny for the free use of his equipment).\(^{190}\) People that Danny had known for thirty years didn't have the grace to even call him to fire him. They sent a letter. Danny called the composer, Charles Strouse, and told him that if he wasn't right for the show that was fine, but a letter? He finally closed the conversation with, "You know, we have all known each other for 25 years, and you're all Jews, but there isn't a mench among you!"\(^{191}\) (The expression mench is Yiddish for a human being). The show quickly faded.

The piece de resistance, was when producer, Lee Guber, asked Danny to come back after firing two more choreographers who used Danny's concepts for the dance numbers in the show. Stephen Schwartz had bowed out for a
new director, who agreed with the producer, Lee Guber, that Danny should return to the show. Danny was invited to breakfast at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and he just had to bring Bea Daniels along to witness what would sound incredible otherwise. Guber told Danny some story about how his, (Danny's), firing had all been a misunderstanding, and that his numbers were all staying in. Danny said, "Thanks, but no thanks." He would later do Annie 2, with Charles Strauss, who's wife even asked Bea Daniels to tell Danny to do the kind of steps that he used in the "Cross-town" number for Tap Dance Kid. As if Bea would tell Danny how to choreograph a number.192 Danny finished the show in Washington D.C. but turned down the show at the Goodspeed Theatre. He didn't have confidence in the show, and it closed out of town. As Danny reflected it was the same with All American, some combinations work well, and others that should, just don't. Everyone involved had great track records, but the creative forces melded like oil and water.193

Afterwards, Danny was contacted for the film Zellig, directed by and starring Woody Allen, who needed a new choreographer to stage a number called the "Chameleon."194 The previous choreographer didn't come up with a number
that Allen liked, and Gordon Willis, the cinematographer for *Pennies From Heaven*, had recommended Danny.\(^{195}\) Danny put the number together for the film in two days.

Woody Allen had not worked with Danny since the 60s in Miami, on the Perry Como Show. (In that show, Allen had to sing an old operetta song with the lyrics, "Girls to the right of me, girls to the left of me..."), and Danny surrounded him with beautiful dancers, performing to a live audience of at least three thousand people. Another guest star was Connie Stevens, who howls to this day remembering how the intro to Allen's number had no chords in it to keep him in the proper key, and though Danny had warned the conductor, Nick Perrito, that Allen was great in rehearsal, but the notes would elude him with just a vamp. Perrito ignored Danny's warning, and sure enough, as Allen began to sing, with the chorus girls dancing around him, indeed he was a third too high, and killing himself to sing the song.\(^{196}\) Danny believes that Allen never knew that he was in the wrong key. Luckily it was live, and as far as Danny knows, no copy exists on Kinescope or tape.

In 1985, Henry Kreiger, the composer of *Tap Dance Kid*, was doing a show in Leicester, England, called *Fat Pig*. Danny was hired to do the choreography. This show had
been done in Paris, and was translated into English for the Leicester production. Mark Bramble was the director. The show was about animals on a farm. Daniels thought it was a darling show, and popular in Paris, but it wasn't successful in England.\textsuperscript{197} This made it possible for Danny and Bea to return to New York, where they had taken over the lease on Vivian Matalon's apartment, (by being \textit{grandfathered} onto it), and to decide what to do next. For Danny it was clear that he missed their home in California. New York had ceased to be home for them, and once again the Giagni duo headed west...
CHAPTER EIGHT
REMINISCENCES AND REUNIONS

There were so many trips from coast to coast for Danny to remember. All the television shows, stage shows, and films that had brought him out to Los Angeles. The first time as a young dancer in the 1931 Studebaker car, and this time in the 1980s, as an award winning choreographer. He had reached a career high, and was looking to relax in his beautiful home in Santa Monica. He had come a long way in life, and could fondly remember the shows, the performers, and his family’s many trips over the years.

This trip west was different from the last cross country trip that Danny and his daughter took when he rushed back to New York in three days to choreograph Walking Happy. In that adventure, from Los Angeles to New York City, he had his daughter, Ann, share the driving to allow for the maximum travel time. Being on a trip with Danny is spontaneous, and Ann didn’t know the highways well since she had just that day gotten her driver’s license from New York in the mail. Bea handed the license to her, and told her that she was on her way to New York 136
with her father that day! Just out of Los Angeles, Danny decided to take a little detour to Las Vegas. When they arrived he wanted to check out the Lido show, but Ann called her mother to make sure it was all right for Danny to see naked women on stage. Bea told her it was okay. He wasn't going to see the women, he was there to see the show.198 (It turns out, that for years, to make ends meet in his early choreographer days, Danny was the king of the stripper choreographers).

This time at the end of the 1980s, the trip was relaxed, and there would be no rehearsals to start. Danny and Bea were about to spend the 1990s in their comfortable home in Santa Monica, only seventeen blocks away from the Pacific ocean, on a large corner lot. The Spanish style two story home has beautiful trees, flowers, and a pool. The garage has an apartment above it that Danny's parents used to stay in when visiting. It was home to his son, D.J., and wife Pamela, and their children Annie, and Dylan for four years, when they moved back to California after Danny and Bea returned. (When someone asked Pamela how she could live with her in-laws for six months, she told them it was great. Pamela has been described by Bea as another Danny in many ways).200 The house has been expanded to
include a beautiful rehearsal studio for Danny to do pre-
production work, (not quite the same as his old basement
studio in Whitestone, Long Island with a low ceiling,
where he rehearsed the Tap Dance Concerto in the 50s), but
a home that Danny and Bea missed a great deal.

As always, when Danny gets comfortable at home, the
phone rings for him to head off to the far horizons. This
time it would be a reunion with Liza Minnelli, for the
film Stepping Out. Danny's son, Peter, then a
theatrical agent, had approached the producer, John Dark,
and told him that if the choreographer that was being
talked about for the film didn't work out, Danny Daniels
would be right for the project, and had given Minnelli her
start in the business. Three weeks later Peter got a call
from John Dark, but the money was too low. Peter told them
that the offer was an insult to a Tony Award winner, and
that they would either meet Peter's price, or get someone
else, who would be mediocre. The haggling went back and
forth, but Peter was firm, and even had to calm his
father's fears of losing the project, but Bea thought
Peter was doing fine. In the end the producer came up
with the money that Peter wanted for Danny, and after the
contracts were signed, Peter told John Dark that he was
Danny's son. Dark was angry that he paid so much, and only then understood the reason why Peter was so tough. Dark also told Peter that if he'd known that he was Danny's son, he wouldn't have paid as much. Peter told him that was the reason he didn't tell him up front.⁷³ (Having the name Giagni finally paid off for Danny, not to mention having a great agent in Peter).

Frank Mancuso was heading production at Paramount when the picture began, but was replaced by Brandon Tartikoff, who wanted nothing to do with the three film projects left over from Mancuso.⁷⁴ Consequently there was no promotion for Stepping Out. The economics of the film business in 1990 was quite different from Danny's first film in 1936. Until quite recently, the studios made a profit by producing enough bad pictures to write off for tax breaks against their hit films. This way the studio wouldn't make too much money, and it kept its stockholders happy with higher dividends. As Peter explained, "The studios were really more interested in the television market with eternal syndication reruns of their hit shows, that in ten to twenty years can make the studio a billion dollars in profit."⁷⁵ In the case of Stepping Out, the way to insure failure was to release the picture in nine
theatres nationally, and then go directly to video, and cable. It played for two weeks in 1991, and quickly disappeared.

The cast was terrific to work with, and Liza Minnelli was completely open and accessible to everyone. Several cast members had to learn tap dancing from scratch. One was Julie Walters of Educating Rita fame. Walters after the first day of dance rehearsal went to the director, Lewis Gilbert, and tried to bow out of the film. Carol Wood told Bea Daniels she was so tired after the first day that she thought she had been hit by a truck, and didn't have the energy to call for room service, or an ambulance. Danny worked with both actresses, and the others to build their confidence, and managed to get a good opening number out of all of them. The cast even worked on Saturdays to help retain the material.

Danny always tells a performer not to do it the way he dances it, but to dance it the way they would dance it. This approach relieves stress, and allows the performer to add their own touches to the dance. (Carol Burnett remembered this technique very well, "Danny was the first choreographer who pointed out that I had two left feet, and somehow made it sound nice.").
Another factor was star quality. "If the star is a bitch, or a S.O.B., it filters down, and everybody fights with each other. Thanks to Minnelli, this cast was a love fest from the first day."\textsuperscript{211} The opening number looked so good that the producer, John Dark, was worried that Danny would not be able to top it for the finale number. Danny assured them that the cast would be up to it when the time came. The finale was even better. Though Danny had not cast the performers in the film, he was delighted with all of them, that included, Liza Minnelli, Julie Walters, Shelley Winters, Bill Irwin, Carol Wood, Andrea Martin, and Jane Krakowski.

The film could have been a disaster considering the attitude of John Dark, the producer, who told Danny that all actors can tap dance, and Danny told him that in reality most actors cannot tap at all.\textsuperscript{212} The film had a three week rehearsal period. It was very generous of Lewis Gilbert to give Danny the time to stage the numbers. (It turned out that Gilbert's parents had been Vaudeville performers, and he appreciated the rehearsal process).

After the film Minnelli asked Danny to stage her new act, opening at Radio City Music Hall, but he was so tired after the film, and Minnelli's manager gave Danny a tough,
take it, or leave it kind of approach that didn't help. Besides Danny hated the way New York looked at the time, "It looked like Babylon, not New York." Also Danny had a bad history with her producer, Fred Ebb, dating back to the 70s, and didn't feel that he could do his best work for Minnelli.\textsuperscript{213} After rehearsals started for the act, Minnelli called Danny to tell him how she missed him on this project. To which Danny told her, "Liza, listen to me. She's, (Susan Strohman), probably scared to death working with you. It's her second big choreographic job. She's nervous. Give her confidence. Let her see that she has your best attention, and do everything to the best of your ability. She'll do a wonderful job."\textsuperscript{214} The call turned the corner for Strohman and Minnelli, and the act turned out fine, which also included Danny's solo number for Minnelli from \textit{Stepping Out}.

Danny did gain back enough energy to stage a number for Dick Van Dyke for his television show, \textit{Diagnosis Murder}. Danny went up to Vancouver, Canada, and staged a scene where Arthur Duncan and Van Dyke did a tap dance together. In the scene Van Dyke's character gave Duncan's character free medical treatment for tap dance lessons. It was a nice musical break at the end of a dramatic show.\textsuperscript{215}
A few years later Danny was approached to take over the choreography for a new show based on William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The music was by Duke Ellington. The choreographer, Mercedes Ellington was being replaced, though Danny loved the show down in San Diego. The cast was very talented, but if Danny did the show he made one condition, that they keep Mercedes on. He had replaced choreographers in the past, and never felt good about it. After Danny met with Mitchell Maxwell, the producer, and Sheldon Epps, the director, he thought they were hiring him. He left San Diego, went home, and never heard from them. The show opened briefly, and closed in New York.

Peter Giagni found out later that the cast, all African-American, didn't want a white choreographer. The choreographer that was hired wasn't a tap dancer, but the cast got what they wanted. Unfortunately the show faded quickly, but not before Mitchell Maxwell signed up actors for the road tour before the show opened in New York. Naturally the tour never occurred.

These days all of the producers that Danny had worked with are either retired, or dead. The young producers don't know him, and Danny is very selective as opposed to
the days when he would say yes to every call that he got from his agent. So his work on tap dance instructional tapes (13 in all), had taken three years to perfect, and his brother, Vinnie, has now taken on this project to sell the tapes not to dance teachers, but market them for students, and anyone who would just love to learn how to tap dance at any age. (His brother, Vinnie, after selling his own home, bought Danny a new Honda Accord to show his confidence in the tape series). Dick Van Dyke even offered to do the introduction for the tape series, and stated, "It's the greatest thing that I've ever seen on the subject."\(^{217}\) This tape series is still available to the general public on Danny's web site: sales@dannydaniels.com

Working on stage shows for a live audience is still a favorite of Danny's. He was called by Herb Ross about directing a production of *Bermuda Avenue Triangle*, by Rene Taylor and Joe Bologna.\(^{218}\) The play was finishing a run in Beverly Hills with Rene Taylor, Joe Bologna, and Bea Arthur. There had been a rift between Bea Arthur and Rene, so Bea Arthur was leaving the show, and needed to be replaced.\(^{219}\) Danny hadn't directed a show in a while, but Ross knew he could do it. Danny met with Taylor and Bologna, and hit it off. A casting call went out in New
York, but no one seemed right to play the Italian lady in the show. Back in Los Angeles, Brenda Vacarro seemed right, but Vacarro and Danny didn't seem to click.  

Finally, Danny got the idea of casting against type, and had Nanette Fabray called in to meet Rene Taylor, and read for Herb Ross. Fabray and Taylor luckily hit it off. Fabray went to Ross' hotel to read for him, and the first thing that Ross said when Fabray came in the door was, "You don't remember me do you? I replaced Jimmy Mitchell when you were starring on Broadway in Bloomer Girl."  

Fabray was tickled to have Ross working with her again. He asked if Fabray could do an Italian accent. Fabray told him she didn't do accents. Ross sent her to a dialect coach, but when she came back to read, Ross and Danny could tell that she was right about not doing accents. They asked her what her nationality was, and Fabray told them that she was French and Irish. Ross asked if she could do an Irish accent, and for the first time in her life she began talking with a rich Irish brogue, and got the part.  

Taylor was the producer, and had creative control over every aspect of the show. Her manner was overpowering to Fabray, who finally had it out with Taylor in the wings.
one performance, refusing to do any more of Taylor's changes without Danny there to supervise them. Fabray didn't realize that Taylor always called Danny in Los Angeles whenever she wanted to call a rehearsal. Fabray mistakenly thought that she was protecting Danny's work. It got so heated in the wings that the stage manager out front asked if Taylor and Fabray could hold it down since it could be heard out front by the audience. Taylor respected Fabray for holding her own, and both became friends.

Because of Fabray's dance background, Danny even put in a bit where Fabray teaches Bologna how to do an Irish jig. It turned out to be a big hit with the audiences Off-Broadway, at the Promenade Theatre. The show was successful, but it had to close because the theatre was booked with another show ready to open. The show could have easily run a year longer.

After the closing of Bermuda Triangle, Danny got another call from Herb Ross. Ross was to direct a sequel to the hit dance film, Dirty Dancing, retitled Beach Dance. This film would feature a Latino cast, possibly starring Ricky Martin. It was to be shot in Miami the summer of 1998, as soon as the producers signed Patrick
Swayze to return is his original role from twenty years earlier. Ross told Danny that he would be staging sixteen numbers! *Pennies From Heaven* had fourteen. Danny told Ross that he had turned down the original film because he didn't think that he was right for that project, and Salsa dancing was really not his style either. Ross told Danny to think about it, and to get back to him the next day. Danny made a call to Ross' Production Manager, Scott Hornbacher, and told him to tell Ross that he didn't think that he would be right for the project, but thanks anyway. An hour later Ross called him and said, "You panicked didn't you?" Danny admitted that he had, but Ross persuaded him to do some research before making a decision to take on the project. For several weeks Danny auditioned Salsa dancers at his studio at home, he liked the movement, and decided to do the film. He could see the relationship between Salsa, and 1940s Jitterbugging. With the help of coaching from Luis Vasquez at The Conga Room dance club on Wilshire Boulevard, where Danny danced after 11:00 P.M. on Saturdays when the club was really jumping.

A former dancer from *Wonderful Town*, Carolyn Dyer, told Danny that she had video tapes of Salsa dancers from a project that she had worked on called *Shut Up And Dance*,
and sent the tapes to Danny. After viewing those tapes, Danny realized he could do the project. (Danny has always choreographed from his body, the dance has to come from him. There are choreographers that can take a little from here, and a little from there, like patch work, but not Danny).\(^{228}\)

Though the budget for Beach Dance was small, Danny would bring two of the dancers that he worked with here, and the rest would be local talent from Miami. Unfortunately, Ross called three weeks after Danny started pre-production, and told him that the producers weren't able to come up with a script that Patrick Swayze liked. The project had to be shelved when Swayze rejected the script.\(^{229}\)

This project was followed in 1998 by a Broadway show in development, about the history of Burlesque. Danny had a great deal of experience in the form with staging acts for strippers for many years, thanks to Lou Walters (Barbara's father), of the Latin Quarter, and his work on The Night They Raided Minsky's, two television specials, Ann Coreo's This Was Burlesque, and HBO's Baggy Pants Review starring Will B. Able and Arte Johnson.

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For the HBO Special, Danny would take Bea to Las Vegas to see strip shows, and then send Bea backstage first, so the women wouldn't think it was some horny man looking for romance. The problem was that they assumed that Bea was a lesbian who was looking for action. Soon she would get it all explained, and Danny would come backstage to introduce himself, and invite the women to audition for the HBO special. The auditions were held during the off hours at their Wilshire Boulevard studios, and it was a good thing since strippers never wear anything more than a G-string. Finally Danny found four strippers for the show, and it was a success for HBO. Danny was getting famous as the television strip choreographer, and around this time turned down the Broadway show *Sugar Babies*, when offered by producer, Harry Rigby, because Danny thought the script wasn't that good.²³⁰

The stripper's hot line did ring recently and Danny was asked to direct and choreograph an Off-Broadway show, produced by Ben Sprecker. It was Ralph Allen who called Danny, because Allen had tried twice before to get Danny to approve of his scripts. So, after twenty years he had to say yes, and Lewis Allen wants to produce the show with
Ben Sprecker. This project titled *Scandals*, opened to wonderful reviews at the TVA, (Theatre Virginia), in Richmond, Virginia starring Dick Van Patten. Danny was given one week of pre-production to set the dance numbers by producer, George Black. His assistant for the show was Melissa Giatino, and with Bob Fitch, he set the numbers a week before the three week rehearsal of the show. It was very unusual to have so much time for a show that is out of town.²³¹ Ralph Allen was the associate director, who worked with Dick Van Patten on the sketches, while Danny rehearsed the dances numbers.

Daniels thinks Van Patten is a sweetheart, and was very funny in the show, but he had a slight problem with Van Patten. It seems that Van Patten is unmusical, with two left feet, and has no natural rhythm, (a triple threat).²³² Danny had to stage a number for Van Patten where Bob Fitch and the other performers blew whistle commands for Van Patten to turn this way and that, as they did the number. Danny has choreographed many stars in his long career, but feels his greatest accomplishment was to get Van Patten just to sway with the music.²³³

Danny wanted to get the show mounted immediately for a tour, but the funding didn’t materialize right away. The
project is still alive, and Danny will make it his final choreographic project. He would like to title the show More Sugar Babies. (On a sentimental note, Danny would love to have Christopher Walken do the show, but understands that Walken is so busy doing films that it would be impossible to get him).

In development since 1998, covering the history of Burlesque, this final project is a Broadway review style show, using Burlesque running gags done in threes, a bells number, crossovers down “in one,” (performing in front of the curtain for scenery changes), a tap dancing fan dance, set up and joke routines, split second changes, and patriotic act closing numbers, just like old time Burlesque. It has a chorus of 40, with 16 dancers, and 16 singers. A return to the classic large chorus shows of Danny’s early career.

The career of Danny Daniels has spanned seven decades, and touched the lives of many performers through his desire for perfection of the dance medium, bringing emotion to dance, or his personal humanity. Those who have had the delight of dancing in one of his numbers will always remember the sound of the audience, as they responded to the tremendous effort that Danny has put into
his form of concept choreography. There is nothing as electrically charged as the sound of a live audience laughing, and cheering after the final bar of music, and that sound rushes over the cast is the same warmth that they feel towards a very shy man standing at the back of the house, wearing a New York cab drivers cap, standing in a relaxed third position, probably with his hand in his pocket, jingling his loose change, while checking his pocket metronome for dance tempos in the other hand. Just look over your shoulder on an opening night, and that remarkable man at the back of the house could just be the one and only Danny Daniels.
CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

When remembering Danny Daniels standing at the back of a theatre, viewing his work on stage, the truly remarkable thing was that he was there after a show had opened. So many choreographers never return to see their work after the reviews are in, but Danny always relied upon his own eyes. Danny took care of his creation by recording all of the dance numbers on opening night, then using a pocket metronome, kept the dance tempos consistent for the run of the show. It was his personal consistency as first president of the Society of Stage Directors & Choreographers, that allowed for the protection of the work of other creative artists of the theatre. It stood to reason that Danny would never let a show down by just receiving a royalty check for his work.

There was something about dancing for Danny Daniels, or watching him dance that was akin to a royal experience. After the sheer exhaustion of doing a full out number for him, there was always the feeling of accomplishment. If he set a number, and you as a dancer could execute it to his satisfaction, then you were a good dancer. So many
choreographers would pat a dancer on the back, telling them how good they were during rehearsals, but not Danny. His approach was simple, if he hired you, then you were good. Otherwise you’d be taking class somewhere, and someone else would have the job. This was not universally appreciated, but a dancer always knew where they stood with Danny.

After three decades of performing in the theatre, it was so refreshing to work for someone who was straight with you as a person. Danny didn’t need to lie about his work, or himself. As he said about himself in regards to Arthur Godfrey liking him, “A leopard can’t change his spots...” Danny was always showing his true self no matter who he was working with. Danny was always all business, and his word was as good as gold. In a theatre world full of people worrying about public perception, and telling performers whatever they thought would be popular, Danny was a breath of fresh air. His entire reason for being there was to create.

His creations are what truly matter. His early work in television began a style that could travel easily in the world of the theatre, or the camera. It was a Daniels style that transcended both worlds. To the Daniels mind,
there is no barrier between dance forms, as was attested by his brilliant conceptual choreography on the Tap Dance Concerto, in which he seamlessly combined tap, ballet, and mime, in a performance so exceptional that only the first and fourth movements are danced today by other performers of the concerto. Danny’s Emmy winning conceptual work with Dick Van Dyke in The Fabulous Fifties, where costumes, sets, choreography, mime, and music all were synthesized to tell a story was truly fabulous. His use of comedy in Bea Lillie’s number from High Spirits, where he sensed the anxiety of the audience, and turned the tension into a laugh, was a testament to his common sense approach to presentational theatre. Danny’s personal homage to burlesque, and all of the stripper routines that he staged as a young choreographer in The Night They Raided Minsky’s, where his dedication to the authenticity of the period, outweighed a cheaper and raunchier approach. The marvelous years working for Edwin Lester in Los Angeles, that culminated in his triumphant contrapuntal rhythm creation for the “Swing” number. The honor of having Gene Kelly introduce Danny on a television special, as the man who single handedly, or footedly, had revived the art of tap dancing in America. Only to be followed a few years
later by his sensational work on the film, *Pennies From Heaven*, where he choreographed to the shot, with a cast and director talented enough use long takes, to showcase the dance and the dancers. This was followed by Danny’s long overdue Tony Award for his choreography on *The Tap Dance Kid*, in which Danny excelled in staging contrapuntal rhythms for the “Fabulous Feet” number. It was a life of dance and choreography, of respect for craft, love for the performer, and the creative process.

Danny Daniels is right at home in the middle of the creative process. Even to this day, Danny is working on his concept for his last choreographic project. Looking for the right star to headline this project, an homage to Burlesque. It is part of the charm to be around him as he describes the ideas he has for the show, and how his eyes light up when a new idea comes up during any conversation about the project. He’ll look to his wife, Bea, and she’ll make a note of it, and that idea will show up on stage some day. It is Danny’s forward looking perspective that never stops. If his biography has any value at all for the future choreographers, it is Danny’s refusal to compromise his creative process, because he is that process.
It is my hope that this biography of one of the icons of Broadway, screen, and television choreography, will serve as an inspiration to future young dancers and choreographers. Being allowed to write about Danny Daniels, a remarkable dance talent, and sharing Danny's insights to some of the greatest talents of his generation of performers, writers, choreographers, and directors, was a task of love and respect. It was also a crusade to spread the word about Danny's great contribution to conceptual choreography, dance history, and the future of tap dancing. The Daniels style of concept choreography is so important to preserve in an age of instant visual gratification, and forgettable dance movement. For example the dancers of the future will have the opportunity to view Danny's contribution to the conservation of tap dancing at the Library Of Congress due to Danny's own love for the tap dance form.

Unlike choreographers who only worked on the stage, the Daniels choreographic style lives on in films such as The Star Maker, The Night They Raided Minsky's, Indiana Jones and The Temple Of Doom, Stepping Out, and the remarkable Pennies From Heaven.
Danny may not have had the good fortune to choreograph for the big long running Broadway hit shows of Lerner and Lowe, or Rogers and Hammerstein, but his choreography on All American, High Spirits, Walking Happy, Annie Get Your Gun, and The Tap Dance Kid, are remembered by those fortunate enough to have danced the Daniels style, or who may have witnessed these performances in the audience, while Danny watched from the back of the theatre. His story is the story of an American art form, tap dancing, and Danny's name should always be high on the list of dancers associated with it. His story is also a history of the Golden Age of Broadway, and live television, where his choreographic talent not only preserved an art form, it transcended the two medias, in an holistic approach that should be emulated by the dancers and choreographers of the future. It was a career, as well as a legacy, steeped in technique, dedication, love, concentration, and respect that should be preserved.
APPENDIX A:
TAG LINES
"I want people to know not just how talented he is, but what good company he is."
(Christopher Walken - Actor)

"Before I met you I was a famous comedian, now I'm a tap dancer."
(Steve Martin - Actor)

"If only I had directors that talked to me like Danny did. He just watched the way you moved. Which tickled me to death. He was so marvelous to me. He had me doing things that I didn't believe I could do."
(Dick Van Dyke - Actor)

"Danny was the first choreographer to tell me I had two left feet, and somehow made it sound nice."
(Carol Burnett - Actress)

"There is no one like him."
(Bernadette Peters - Actress)
“Danny choreographs numbers for you.”
(Nanette Fabray - Actress)

“Danny is just great!”
(Darryl Hickman - Actor)

“The key to Danny’s construction of a number is that you don’t notice the construction at all.”
(Oliver Woodall - Dancer)

“It is the third week of rehearsals that I love the most, when it is fun, and my father and I go to lunch and all of the show business stories are told.”
(Daniel Joseph Giagni - Choreographer)

“We have to honor these icons.”
(Thommie Walsh - Choreographer)

“The nicest thing in my life has been to work with Danny Daniels.”
(Vivian Matalon - Director)
"He was a very talented young man."

(Onna White - Choreographer)

"As a dancer he reminded me of Paul Draper, and Fred Astaire."

(James Mitchell - Dancer)

"He has enough faith in you to know that if he's putting this dance move on you, he knows you can do it. You can see when the dance number went well, the hat on his head was worn a little jauntier."

(Joanna Gleason - Actress)
APPENDIX B:

CREDITS AND VIDEO MENU
VIDEO REEL MENU

(THESIS VERSION)

THE STAR MAKER- 1936

THE MARTHA RAYE SHOW- 1954

WALKING HAPPY on THE PERRY COMO SHOW- 1966

THE NIGHT THEY RAIDED MINSKY'S- 1968

GENE KELLEY SPECIAL- 1976

DANNY DANIELS' DANCE AMERICA (Wilshire Ebel Theatre)- 1977

BAGGY PANTS REVIEW (HBO)- 1978

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN- 1981

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM- 1982

TONY AWARDS- 1984

JACK PAAR SPECIAL (Liza on Tonight Show)- 1962
As Performer:

THE STAR MAKER- Paramount, 1937
Starring: Bing Crosby, Louise Campbell
Director: Roy del Ruth
Producer: Charles R. Rogers
Dance Director: Leroy Prinz

As Choreographer:

THE NIGHT THEY RAIDED MINSKY'S- UA-Tandem, 1968
Starring: Jason Robards, Elliot Gould, Norman Wisdom, Harry Andrews, Britt Ekland, Bert Lahr, Joseph Wiseman
Director: William Freidkin
Producer: Norman Lear
Writer: Arnold Schulman, Sidney Michaels, Norman Lear

STILLETTO- Berkely-Pathe, 1969
Starring: Barbara McNair, Alex Cord, Britt Eckland
Director: Bernard Kowalski
Producer: Norman Rosemont
Writer: A.J. Russell

PIAF- 1973
Starring: Bridgitte Ariel
Director: Guy Caseril
Producer: Cy Feuer, Ernie Martin

TOM SAWYER- UA-Reader's Digest, 1974
Starring: Jody Foster, Tommy Whitaker, Celeste Holm
Director: Don Taylor
Producer: Arthur P. Jacobs
Music: Richard & Robert Sherman

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN- MGM, 1981
Starring: Steve Martin, Bernadette Peters, Christopher Walken
Director: Herb Ross
Producer: Herb Ross, Nora Kaye
Writer: Dennis Potter

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM- Paramount-Lucasfilm, 1982
Starring: Harrison Ford, Kate Capshaw
Director: Steven Spielberg
Producer: George Lucas
Writer: Willard Huyck, Gloria Katz

ZELLI G- Paramount, 1983
Starring: Woody Allen, Mia Farrow
Director: Woody Allen
Producer: Rollins-Joffe
Writer: Woody Allen

STEPPING OUT- UIP-Paramount, 1991
Starring: Liza Minnelli, Julie Walters, Shelley Winters, Bill Irwin
Producer: Lewis Gilbert, John Dark
Writer: Richard Harris

BROADWAY SHOWS OF DANNY DANIELS

As Performer:

BEST FOOT FORWARD- 1941
Starring: June Allison, Rosemary Lane, Marty May, Nancy Walker
Director: George Abbott
Dance Director: Gene Kelly
Music: Hugh Martin, Ralph Blane
Theatre: Barrymore 11/41

COUNT ME IN- 1942
Director:
Dance Director: Bob Alton
Libretto: Nancy Hamilton, Walter Kerr
Theatre: Barrymore- 10/8/42

BILLION DOLLAR BABY- 1945
Starring: Joan McCracken, Mitzi Green, David Burns, Bill Tabbert
Director: George Abbott
Choreographer: Jerome Robbins
Music: Morton Gould, Lyrics: Betty Comden, Adolph Green
Theatre: Alvin - 12/21/45

STREET SCENE - 1946 *(Tony Nomination)
Starring: Anne Jefferies, Brian Sullivan, Polyna Stoska
Director: Charles Freidman
Choreographer: Anna Sokolow
Music: Kurt Weill  Lyrics: Langston Hughes
Theatre: Adelphi - 1/9/47

MAKE MINE MANHATTAN - 1948 *(Tony Nomination)
Starring: Sid Caesar, David Burns
Director: Max Liebman
Choreographer: Lee Sherman *(Danny Staged His Own Numbers)
Music: Arnold B. Horwitt, Richard Lewine
Theatre: Broadhurst - 1/15/48

KISS ME KATE - 1950
Starring: Alfred Drake, Lisa Kirk, Patricia Morrison, Harold Lang *(Replacements: Keith Andes, Betty Ann Groves, Anne Jefferies, Danny Daniels, Bob Wright)
Director: John C. Wilson
Choreographer: Hanya Holm
Music: Cole Porter
Theatre: New Century - 12/30/48

As Choreographer:

THE BOYS AGAINST THE GIRLS - 1958
Starring: Bert Lahr, Nancy Walker, Dick Van Dyke, Shelly Berman
Director: Bob Fosse
Music: Richard Lewine  Lyrics: Arnold Horwitt
Theatre: Broadhurst  9/58

GYPSY - 1960
Starring: Ethel Merman
Director: Jerome Robbins
Choreographer: Jerome Robbins, *(Tap Choreography By Danny)
Music: Jule Styne  Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim

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Theatre: Broadway- 5/21/59

ALL AMERICAN- 1962
Starring: Ray Bolger, Ron Hussman, Eileen Herlie, Anita Gillette
Director: Josh Logan
Music: Charles Strouse  Lyric: Lee Adams
Theatre: Winter Garden- 3/19/62

HIGH SPIRITS- 1964 *(Tony Nomination)
Starring: Bea Lillie, Tammy Grimes, Edward Woodward, Louise Troy
Director: Noel Coward
Music: Hugh Martin  Lyrics: Timothy Gray
Theatre: Alvin- 4/7/64

WALKING HAPPY- 1966 *(Tony Nomination)
Starring: Norman Wisdom,. George Rose
Director: Cy Feuer
Music: James Van Heussen  Lyrics: Sammy Cahn
Theatre:Lunt-Fontanne- 11/26/66

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN- 1966 - Revival *(Tony Nomination)
Starring: Ethel Merman, Bruce Yarnell, Jerry Orbach
Director: Jack Sydow
Music: Irving Berlin
Theatre: Lincoln Centre- 5/31/66

I REMEMBER MAMA- 1978
Starring: Liv Ullman
Director: Cy Feuer
Music: Richard Rogers
Theatre: Lunt-Fontanne- 5/31/79

THE TAP DANCE KID- 1983 *(Tony Winner)
Starring: Alfonso Ribeiro, Hinton Battle, Hattie Winston, Sam Wright
Director: Vivian Matalon
Music: Henry Krieger  Lyrics: Bob Lorick
Theatre: Broadhurst- 12/21/83
RADIO SHOWS OF DANNY DANIELS

JERRY AT FAIR OAKS- 1938
Location: KECA (NBC Blue Network) Vermont Studios, Los Angeles.
Cast: Danny Daniels, Elliot Lewis, Buddy Duncan (Jerry also played by:
Linsay McCarry, Howard McNear, James Seay, Joe Duval, Joe Kearns).

TELEVISION SHOWS OF DANNY DANIELS
(OVER 300 SHOWS STARRING)

GENE KELLY
BOB HOPE
DICK VAN DYKE *(Emmy Winner)
JUDY GARLAND
PATRIC MUNSEL
RAY BOLGER
MARTHA RAYE
PERRY COMO
DANNY KAYE
DEAN MARTIN
JOHN DENVER *(Emmy Winner)
CHITA RIVERA
WOODY ALLEN
MITZI GAYNOR
NAT KING COLE
CYD CHARISSE
VINCENT PRICE
LANA TURNER
ZIZI JEANMAIRE
CONNIE STEVENS
STEVE LAWRENCE
EYDIE GORME
BING CROSBY
RISE STEVENS
BEA ARTHUR
JOE STAFFORD
PEGGY LEE
SHARI LEWIS
BERNADETTE PETERS
CAROL LAWRENCE
JACQUES D'AMBOIS
ARTHUR GODFREY
MARGARET TRUMAN
PETER GENNARO
BERT LAHR
JACK ALBERTSON
SHIRLEY JONES
ARTE JOHNSON
JAYNE MEADOWS
CELESTE HOLM
SID CAESAR
JACK JONES
LESLEY UGGAMS
TOMMY STEELE
ANGELA LANDSBURY
MATT MATTOX
PAULETTE GODDARD
ABBE LANE
XAVIAR CUGAT
EDIE ADAMS
FLORENCE HENDERSON
RUTH BUZZI
DICK SHAWN
ROBERTA PETERS
PATSY KELLY
MOLLY BERG
PETER LAWFORD
MOLLY PICON
JILL ST. JOHN
BOBBY VINTON
MARIA KARNILOVA
FRITZ WEAVER
MILTON BERLE
JACK CASSIDY
ROBERT MORSE
GEORGE GOBEL
MARGARET WHITING
NORMAN WISDOM
and
LIZA MINNELLI


Gassman, Larry & John. Provided 1938 radio recordings of *Jerry At Fair Oaks*. 

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APPENDIX D:

PHOTOGRAPHS AND DANCE NOTATIONS
**Finale Act I**  
*This Was Gurogge*

### Last 8 of Song
- End of DBL Bin

### Give My Regards
- Tenor & Soubrette Sing
  - in front of Grrs.
  - X \( \rightarrow \) Point fr.
  - Point Bk
  - \( \xrightarrow{\text{End of Yankee Dandy}} \) For last 8 Bars

### Tell all the gang on way to Whisper of How
- Give My Regards To Cll

#### End of Chorus
- Tag - Repeat last 8 Bars
  - 4 Bar Tag

### And say that I'll be there as long
- walk US to straight line
- 4 Bars: End of Chorus
  - 2nd 8 Bars

### 3rd & Bars
- 4th 8

### 5th 8
- (Tenor & Soub, Singing)
- \( \xrightarrow{\text{Move Rotardy}} \)
  - (Movie Rotardy)
  - (Extended ending)

### 8th 8
- \( \xrightarrow{\text{Point fr, Point Bk}} \)
- \( \xrightarrow{\text{Cross Cross - Change direction}} \)

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**Formations**

**Scandels - Finale Act I**

1. **Intro** - Enter & weave through circle & repeat & end & straight

2. 

3. 

4. Yankee Doodle Dandy

5. Swing or 2 Bars Jump in place - face from

6. 1st 5 Bars

7. 2nd 8 Bars

8. Walk to 2 lines

9. Keep walking to straight line

10. 2 Bars

11. 2 Bars

12. Face U.S.

13. 2 Bars

14. 3rd 8 Bars

15. 4th Bar - end of 2nd 8

16. All turn front

17. Walk forward

18. Interlude - 4 Bars

19. 2 Bars

20. 2 Bars

21. Walk U.S. 4 Bars

22. 3rd 8 of chorus

23. Credit Yankee Doodle

24. Start then walks to SL
TAP 2 - SOFT SHOE

1st STEP

L  R

1  fl

sh sh

a

3  ch

slide fwd

a5a6a7  ./  SS from Top

4  fl

5  sp, step

step

2  step

bop

3  hop

step x bk

4  hop

5  step x bk

6  fl

7  fl

8  chug

4 Bars

4 Bars

./. OS from Top

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