



GHS Dance Department

TAP HISTORY

1650–1900: From Clog to Soft Shoe

- The fusion of British Isles clog and step dance with the rhythms of West African drumming and dancing in colonial times created an ever-evolving art form that continues to flourish today.
- Slaves in the southern U.S. imitated the rapid toe and heel action of the Irish Jig and the percussive sensibility of the Lancashire clog, and combined them with West African step dances that were known as “juba” dances and “ring shouts”.

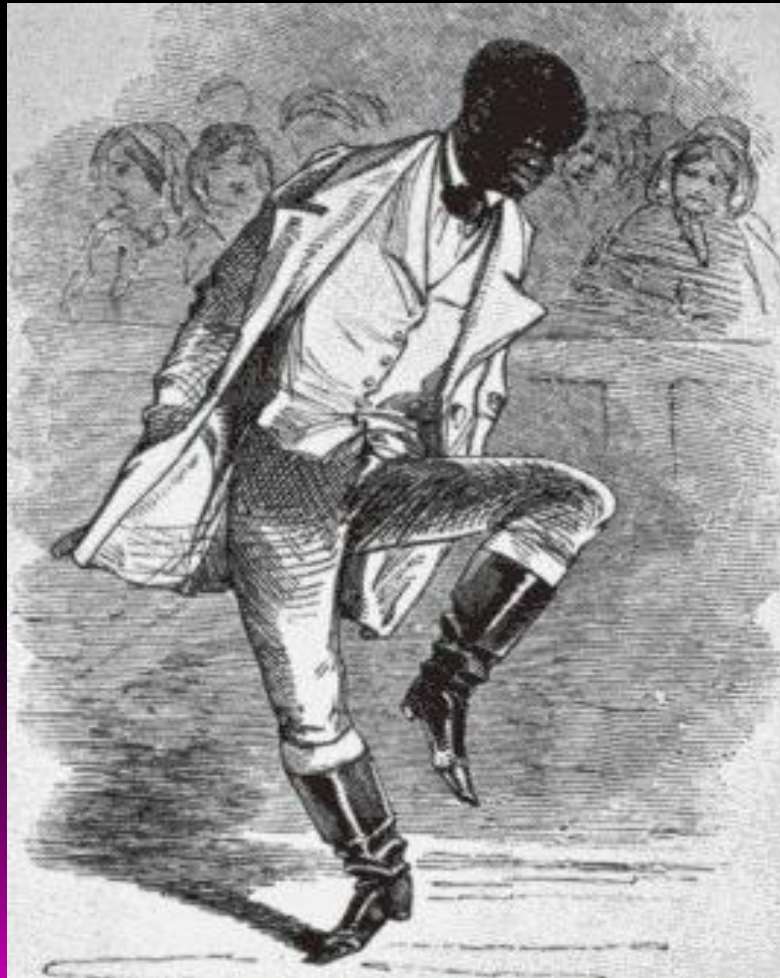
1650 – 1900: From Clog to Soft Shoe Cont'd

- African dance styles became more formal and diluted, while European elements became more fluid and rhythmic, eventually resulting in a uniquely American tap hybrid.
- Tap didn't become a stage dance until the rise of the minstrel show in the late 1800s.
- From 1840 to 1890, minstrel shows were the most popular form of American entertainment, featuring a variety of jokes, songs, dance and music in a loose format.

1650 – 1900: From Clog to Soft Shoe Cont'd

- Before the end of the Civil War, black and white performers were rarely allowed to appear on stage together, with the exception of Master Juba (William Henry Lane).
- Born a free man in 1825, as a teenager Lane became a well-known dancer in New York City.
- A superb Irish Jig and clog dancer, Lane created such rhythmically complex dances that he was declared the champion dancer of his time.
- He even had featured billing above white dancers on the circuit.
- After the Civil War, many black or minstrel companies were founded.

Master Juba (William Henry Lane)



1900–1920: The Birth of Tap

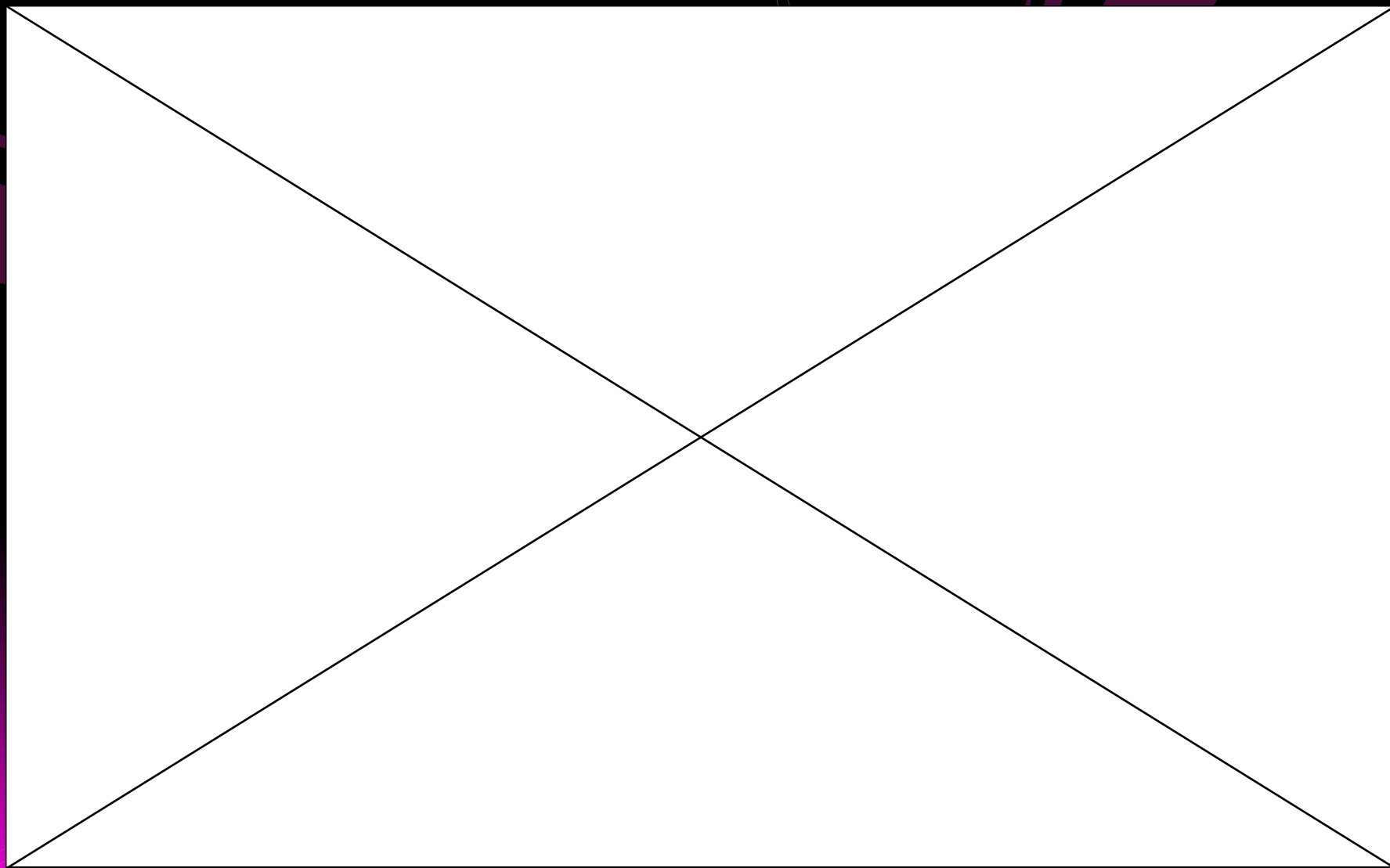
- The term “tap” came into popular use as late as 1902.
- In the 1800s, the dance had been referred to as “buck-and-wing,” “buck dancing,” or “flat-footed dancing.”
- Metal taps attached to shoe bottoms weren’t commonly used until after 1910.
- Before then, most shoes were made of leather uppers and wooden soles, while others had hobnails or pennies pounded into the toe and heel.

1920–1935: The Harlem Renaissance

- Tap was the most popular of all the stage dances from 1920 to 1935, at the peak of the Harlem Renaissance, black Broadway, the nightclub and vaudeville.
- The best known tap dancer of that era was Bill (“Bojangles”) Robinson, who performed on stage as well as on film.
- Lauded for his clean footwork and for dancing up on his toes with minimal heel taps, his dances were graceful and nuanced.
- His patterns also set new standards, and his phrasing is still considered the classic structure of tap.



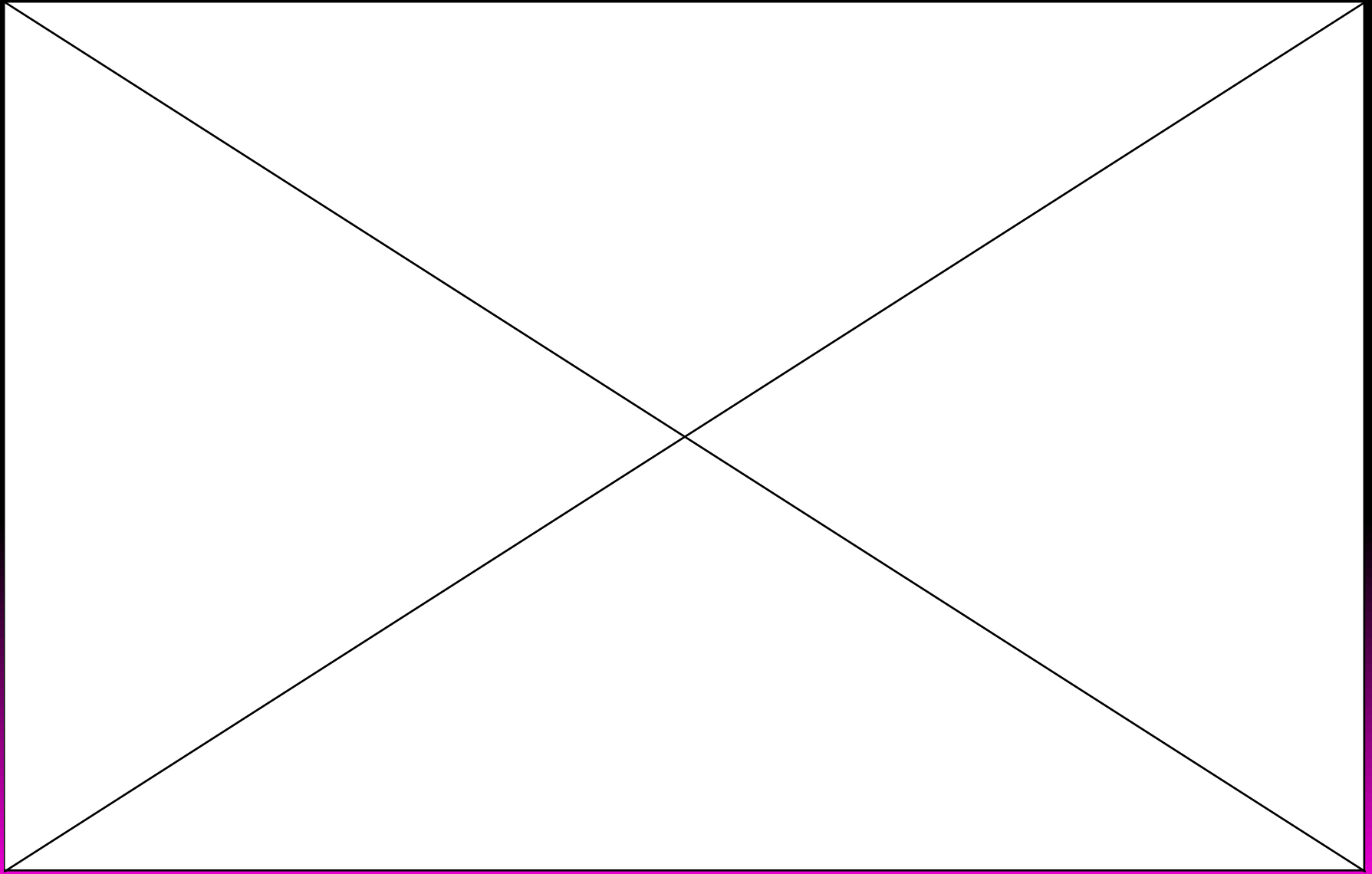
Bill (“Bojangles”) Robinson



1920-1935: The Harlem Renaissance cont'd

- John W. Bubbles (John “Bubber” Sublett) is known as the father of rhythm tap.
- Bubbles brought tap down from the toes by slapping his heels against the floor like a drummer.
- He added a new range of syncopated accents to his rhythmical lines, freeing tap from the classic eight-bar phrase ending in a two-bar break by “running” the bars, or hooking together longer non-repetitive phrases.

John W. Bubbles

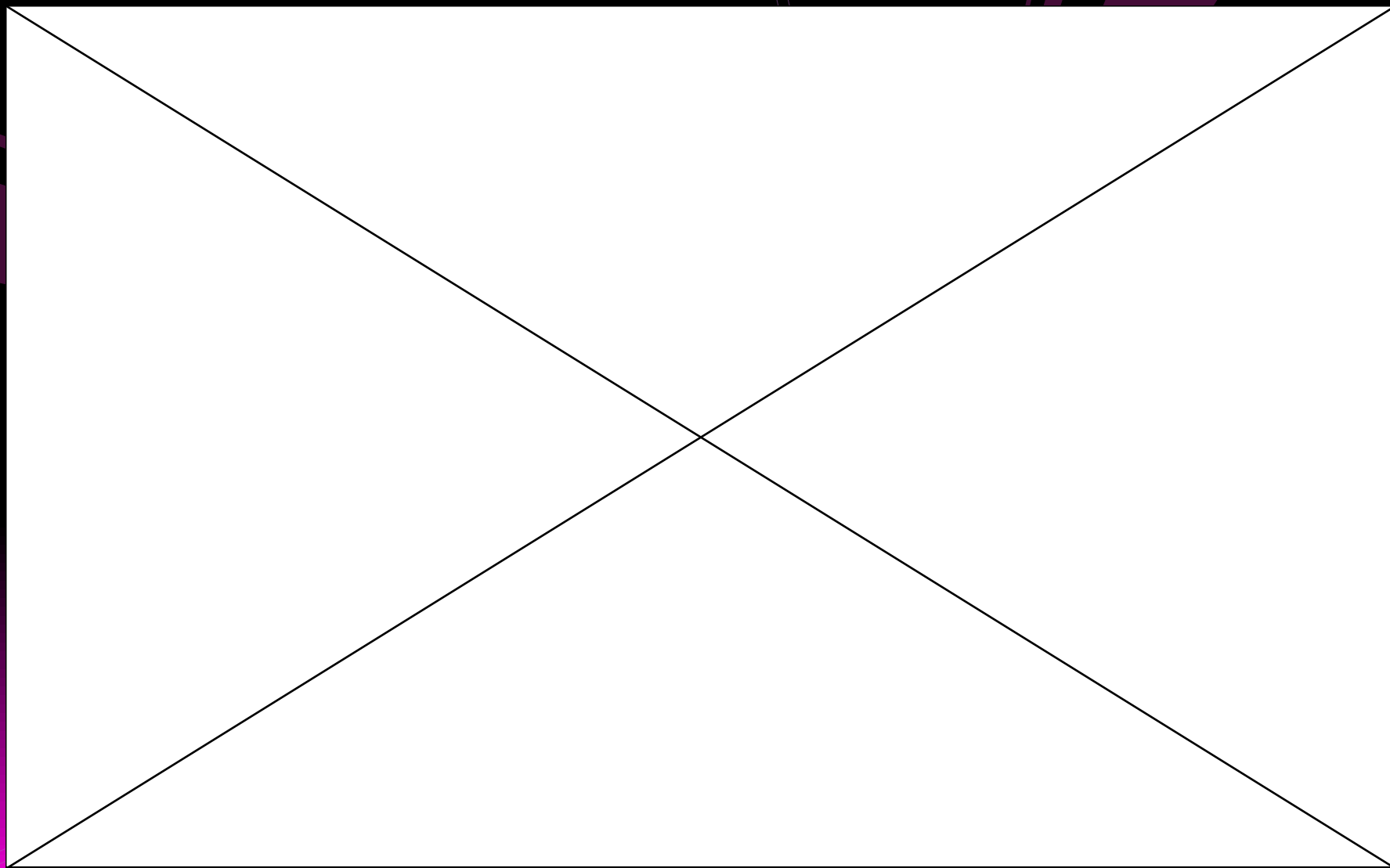


1920-1935: The Harlem Renaissance cont'd

- With the rise of film and the demise of vaudeville during the 1930s, performers turned to flashier tap routines with increasingly dangerous acrobatics.
- The Nicholas Brothers (Harold and Fayard Nicholas) were the most respected tap performers who used flash techniques.
- Flash tap refers to spectacular tricks incorporated into tap phrases.
- Leaping from platforms and stairs as high as ten feet, they would land in full splits, bounce up, and continue tapping.
- Flash and acrobatic tap entails timing each foot precisely so that the rhythms of the dance are uninterrupted.



The Nicholas Brothers

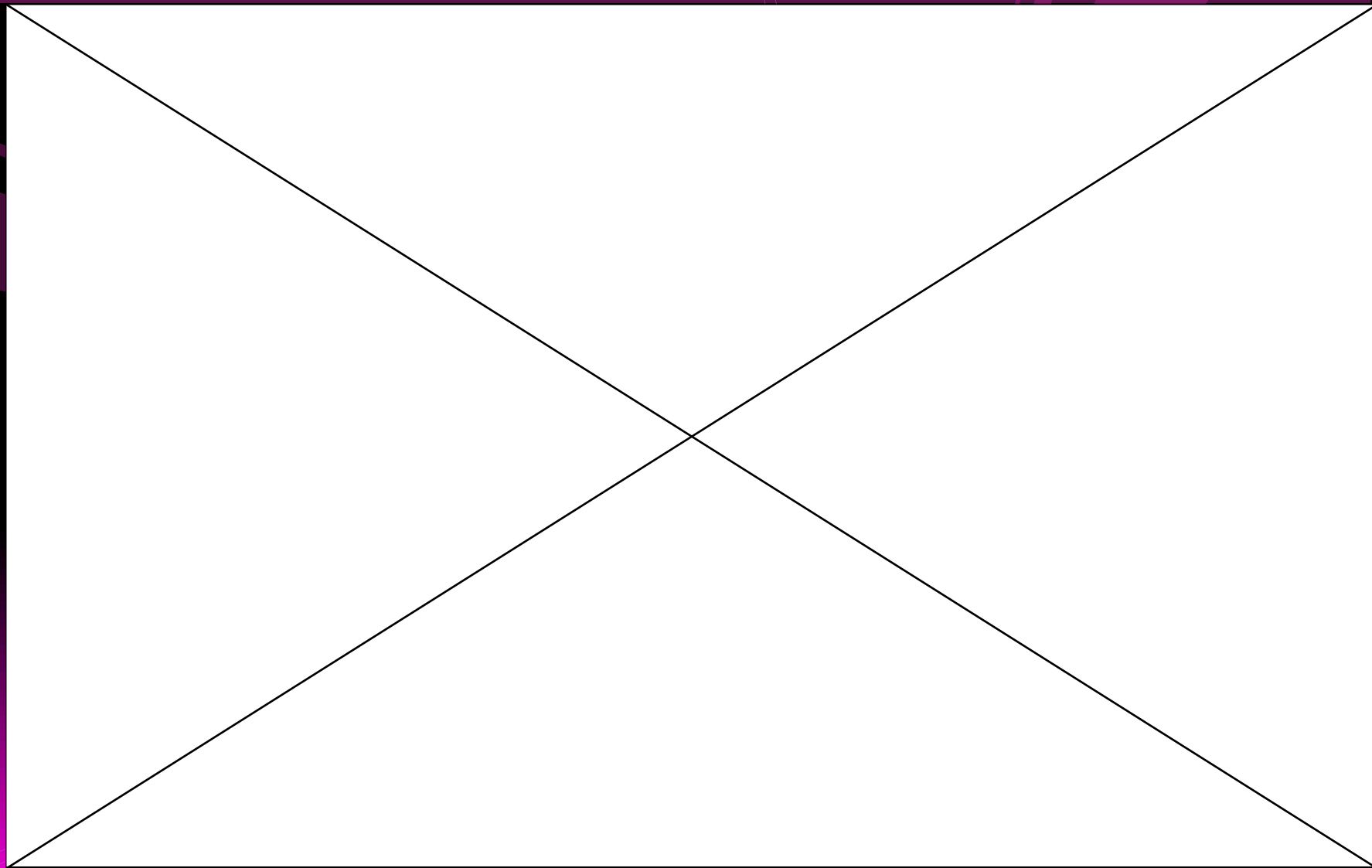


1935-1970: Shuffling Off to Hollywood

- Some of the finest tap dancing could also be seen on film through the talents of Hal Leroy, Ann Miller, Buddy Ebsen, Ray Bolger, Eleanor Powell, Donald O'Connor, Vera-Ellen, Ginger Rogers and Gene Kelly.
- Smooth and athletic, Kelly incorporated movements from modern dance and ballet into his dances.
- Fred Astaire, America's most famous tap dancer, undoubtedly extended the life of tap dancing through the popularity of his films.
- Otherwise, tap all but disappeared from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s in the U.S.

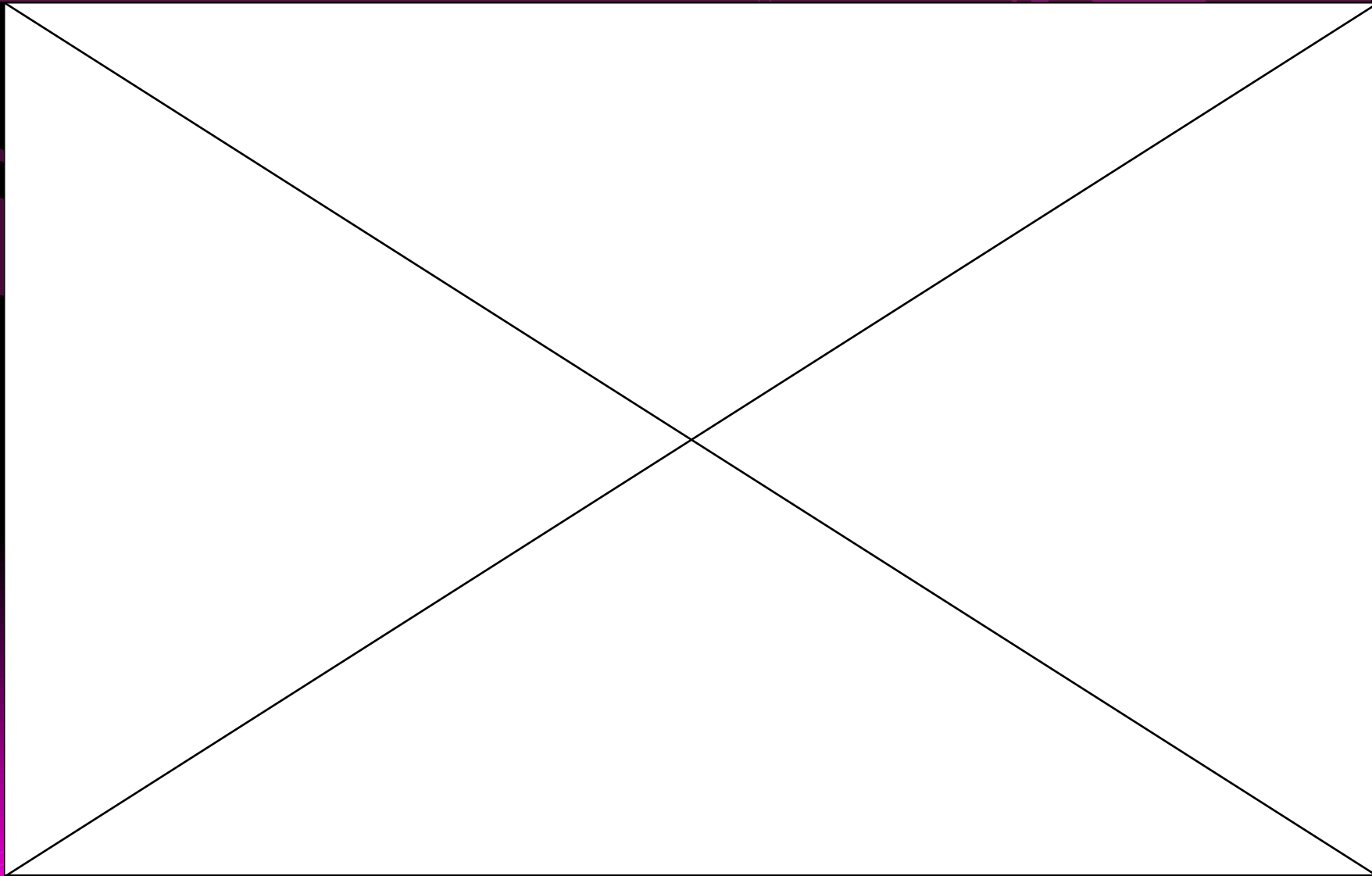


Gene Kelly & Donald O'Connor



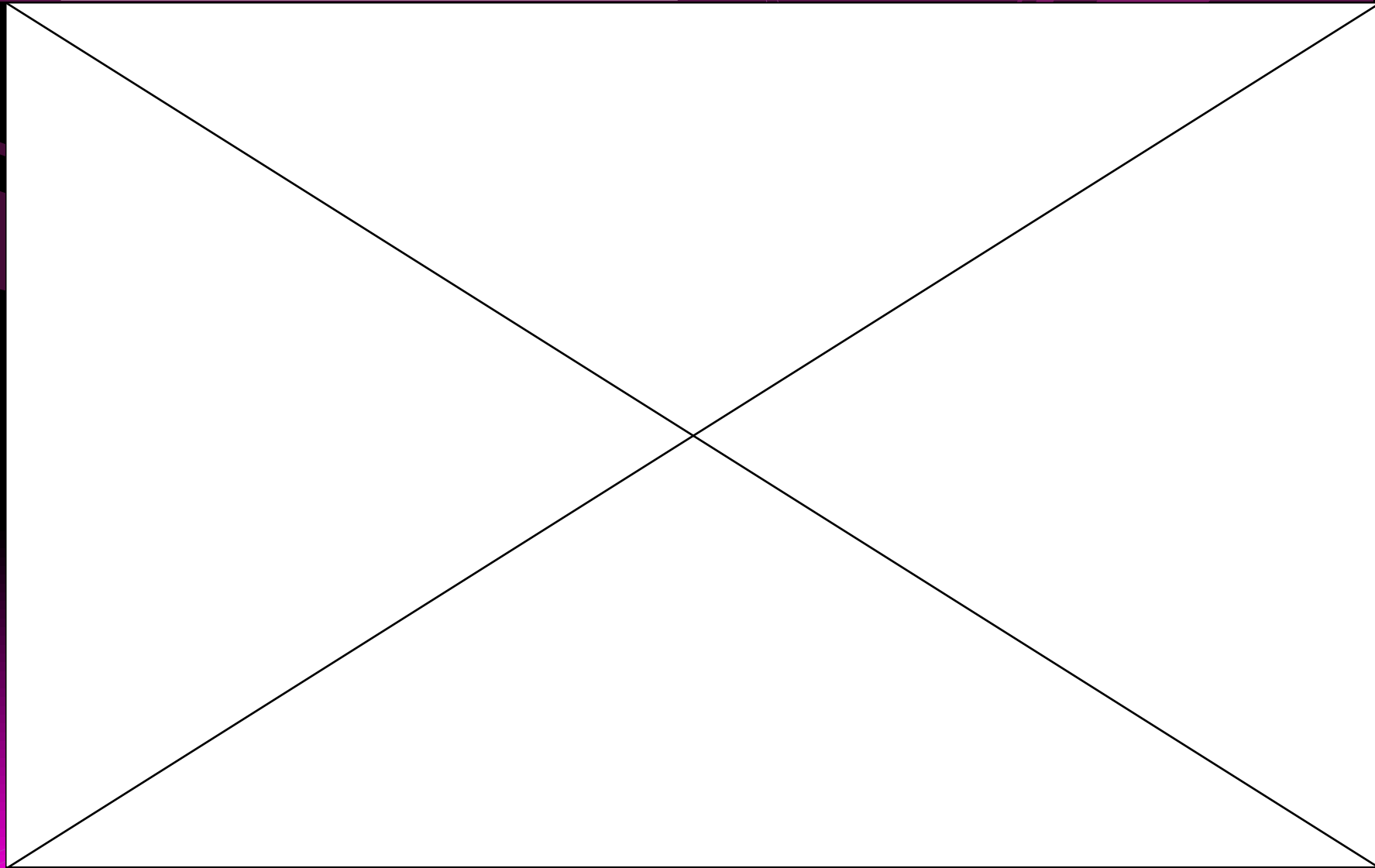


Vera Ellen





Fred Astaire

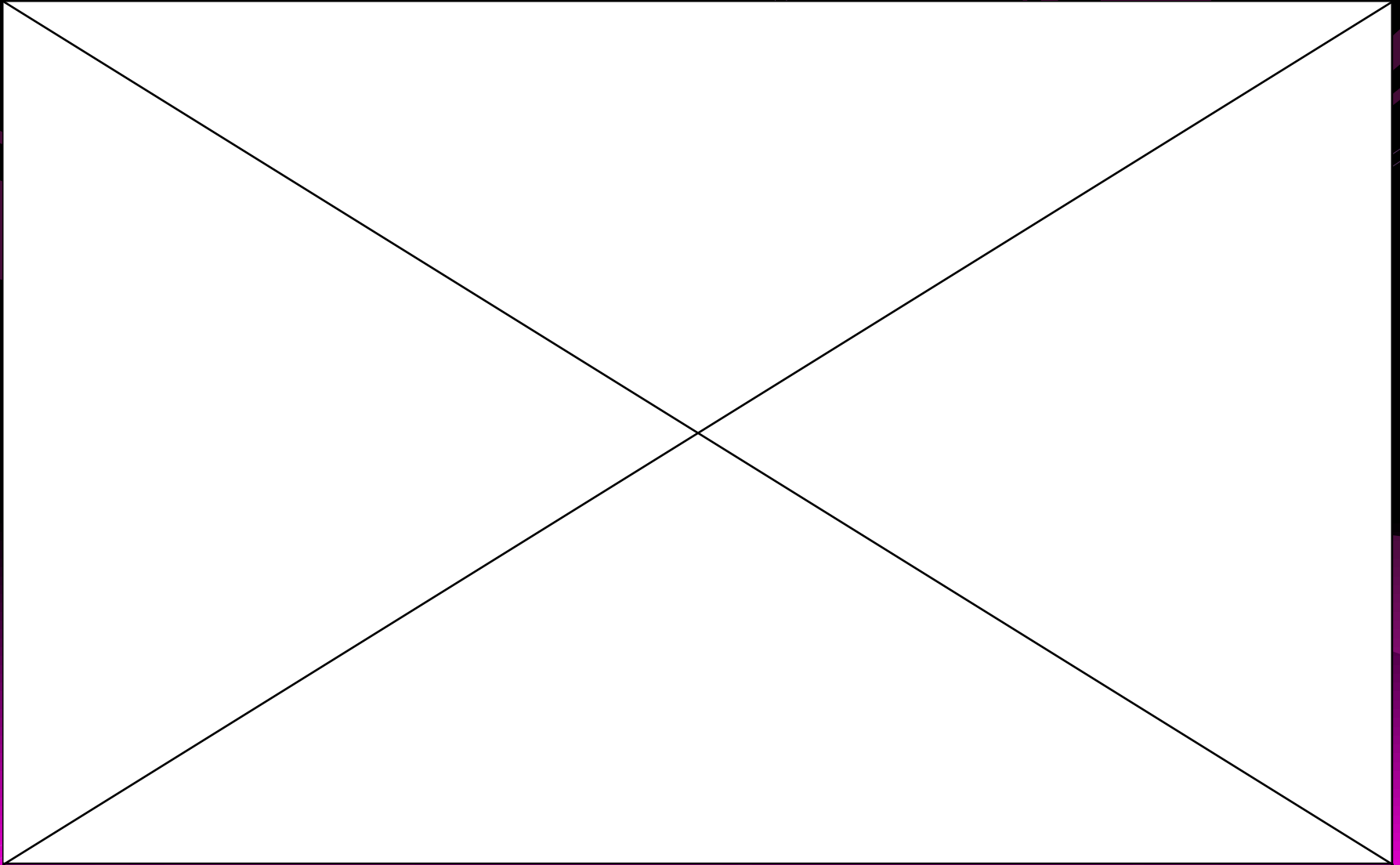


1970-1985: Tap's Rebirth

- Fortunately, tap experienced a revival on Broadway in the 1970s and '80s, with shows like *The Wiz* (1975), *Sugar Babies* (1979), *42nd Street* (1980), *Sophisticated Ladies* (1981) and *The Tap Dance Kid* (1982).
- Tap was also being performed in modern-dance concert halls, gaining new audiences and new respectability in the dance world.
- Tap had always been treated as entertainment, but now it was being considered as art.



“42nd Street”



1985 to Present: The Hip-Hop Influence

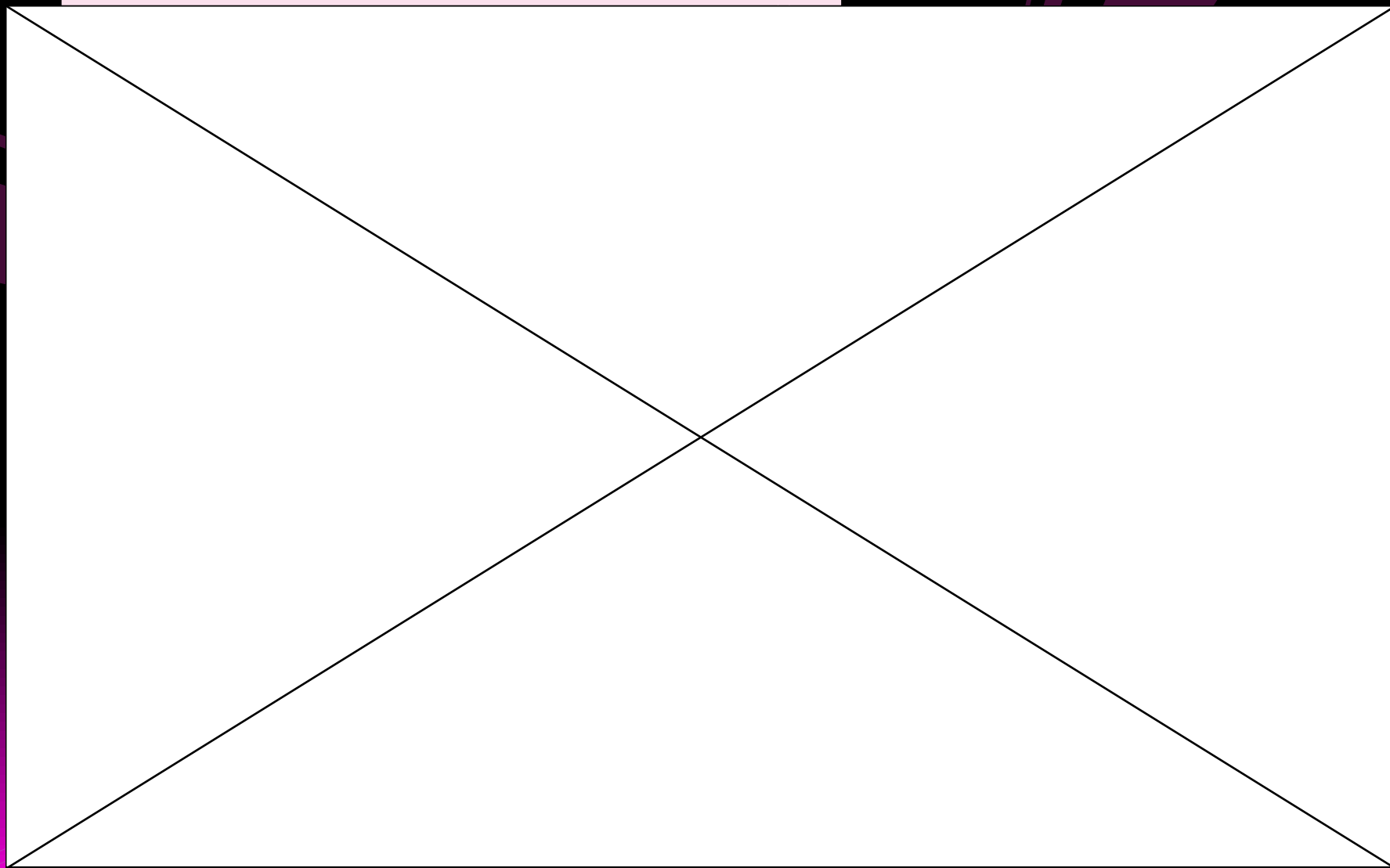
- At the end of the 1980s, inspired by the Broadway success of *Black and Blue* (1989) and the tremendous talents of Gregory Hines, who starred in *Sophisticated Ladies* (1983) and in Jelly's Last Jam with Savion Glover, as well as in the movies *White Nights* (1985) and *Tap* (1989), many young African American male dancers became interested in tap again.
- The most influential young hoofer is Savion Glover, who has become the leader of a new generation of rhythm tappers.
- His hip-hop-funk tap has caused a stylistic revolution within the field and brought tap in line with modern music.

1985 to Present: The Hip-Hop Influence cont'd

- Sometimes called “power tapping,” this style is distinguished by dense, hard-hitting rhythms.
- Eye contact is rarely made with the audience, as the focus is on “finding the groove.”
- This masculine, heavy and fast style was seen in the wildly popular Broadway dance drama *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk: A Hip Hop Discourse on the Staying Power of the Beat* (1996) by Glover and George Wolfe.
- Today, tap continues to evolve into a varied cultural tradition that is both intergenerational and multicultural.
- No longer considered mere entertainment, tap is finally receiving its due as a dynamic art form that encompasses a range of eclectic and individual styles.

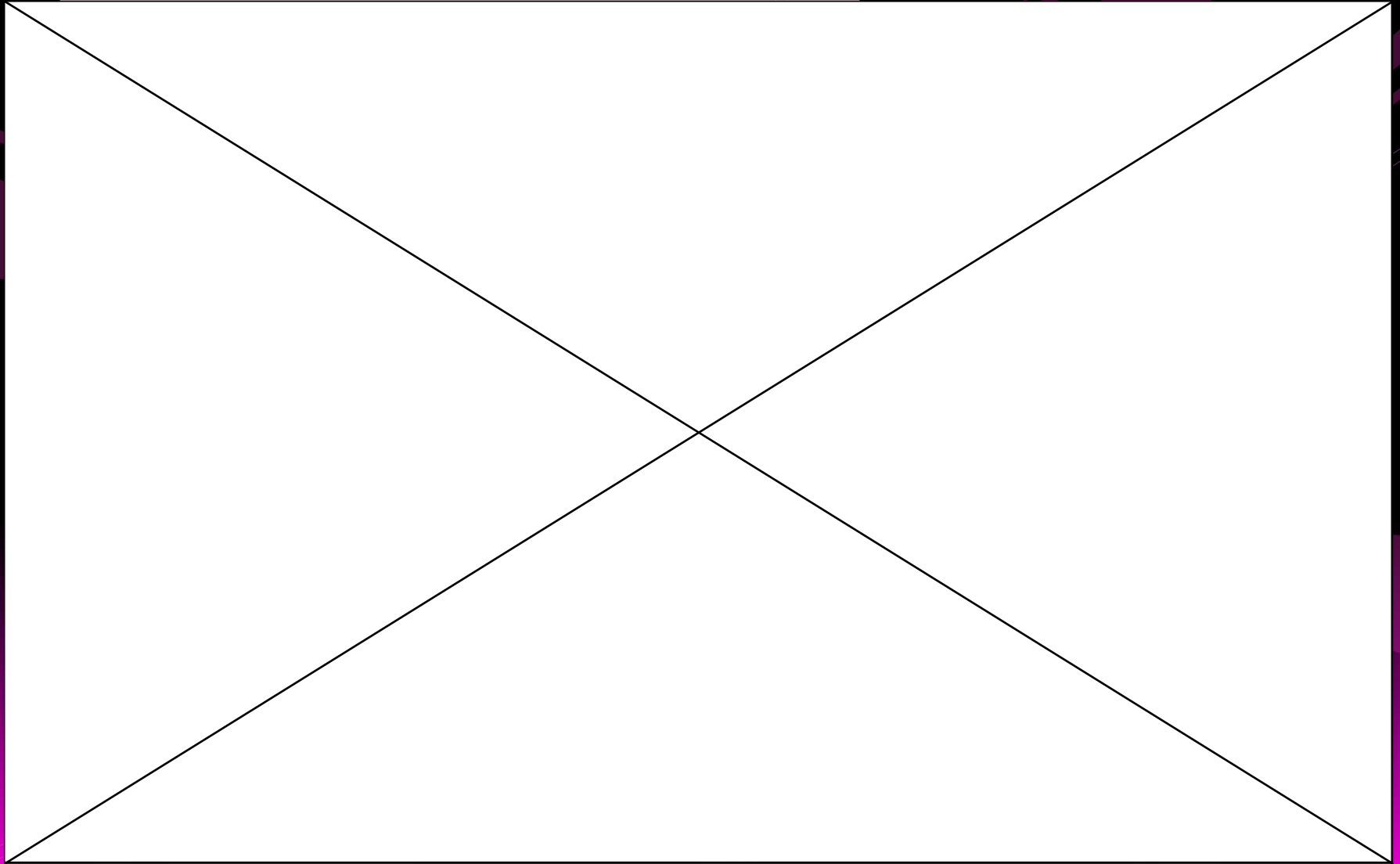


Savion Glover



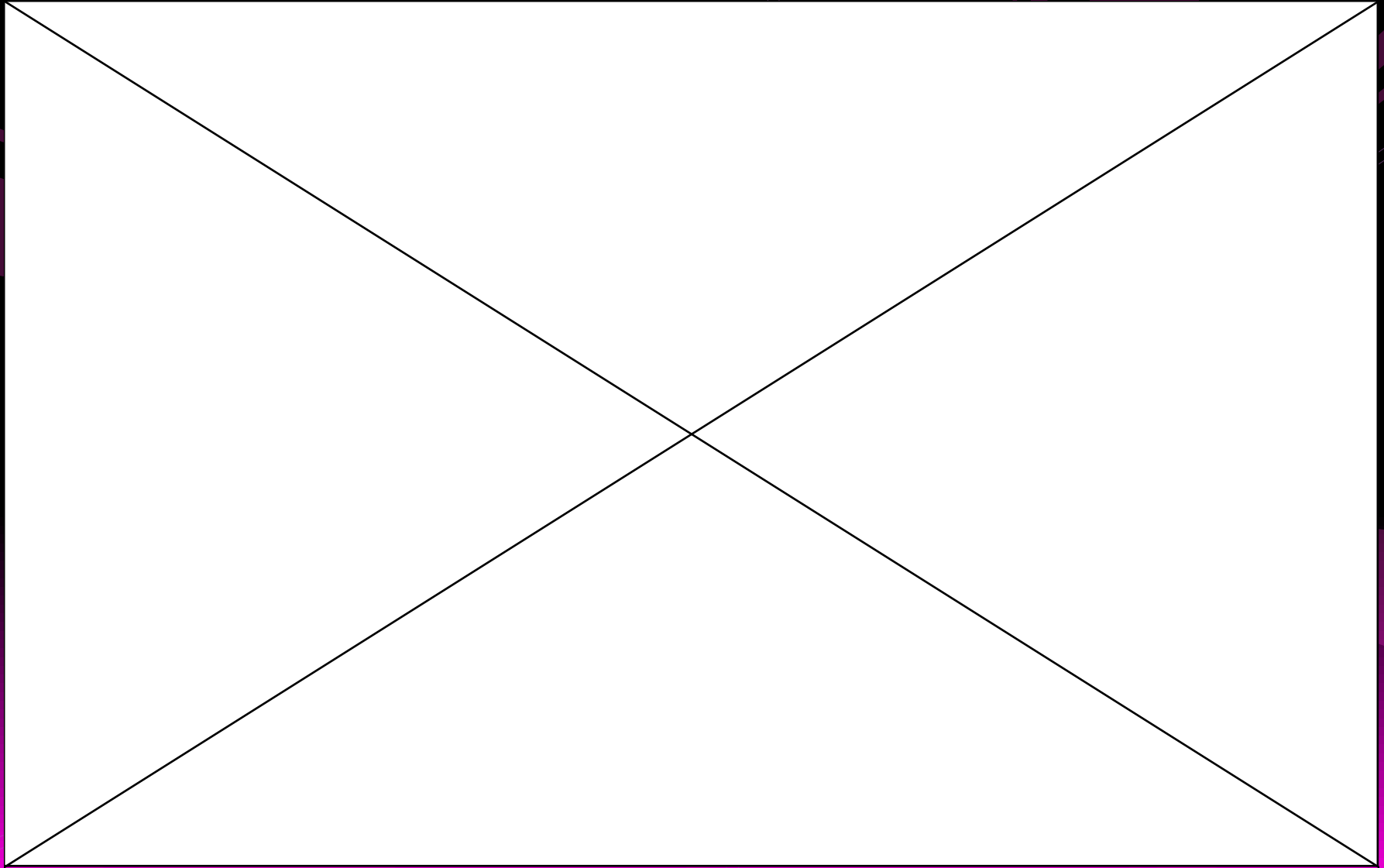


“Happy Feet”





“Singin’ in the Rain”





“Anything Goes”

