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The Bond Between the Nicholas Brothers

Many performance groups are ephemeral for many reasons. Reasons include; one member wants to be the star and goes solo, or the members break up because of friction between them and there are other reasons also. Examples of the broken group can be seen in groups consisting of family members and groups made up of friends. For example the R & B girl trio, Destiny's Child is composed of three friends, but now each girl is concentrating on their solo albums. Also the Jackson 5, a family band, was also separated by the youngest, Michael Jackson becoming a solo star. Both of these groups were together for no more than ten years before they began to go solo. There are many other groups also, but there are also some groups who stayed together until death did them part. For example the Nicholas Brothers was a duet "Class Act" or Flash Act" made up of two brothers Harold and Fayard Nicholas. They were six years apart in age but they were still honored as a team until the death of Howard. The bond between Harold and Fayard was phenomenal because it kept them together despite the human nature to want to 'be on top' or be the star. This phenomenon was not pure luck but it stemmed from different things that were attributed to them. The strong bond between the Nicholas brothers was constructed by their upbringing, displayed in their performances and maintained in their later years. The Nicholas Brothers were always brothers first and fellow performers second and that prioritizing gave their relationship a firm foundation that lasted a life time.

The bond that kept the Nicholas brothers together was constructed by their upbringing. The Nicholas Brothers grew up in Philadelphia around black Vaudeville performers in the 1930's because they were sons of musicians. Fayard the oldest brother had seen Alice Whitman, Bill Robinson and most of the other great Vaudeville acts and as a young child he would imitate these acts for the neighborhood kids and eventually Harold, the younger brother began to imitate and make up his own dances and acrobatics also. Growing up around black dancers and being children of musical performers paved the way for them to get into performing. Performing was a part of them because of this also. Therefore for them to be a great flash act can clearly be linked to the performers and Vaudeville shows they grew up around, but why they stayed together can be linked to their parents. Their father was a drummer and their mother was a pianist in their own band that played at the Standard Theatre in their hometown. The fact that their parents were a performing partnership most likely had influence on the brother's relationship because a foundation is usually built at home. Therefore Fayard and Harold's performance came from watching and being around other performers but, their bond came from watching and being around their parents.

The synchronized dancing of the Nicholas Brothers displayed the bond that was between them. The Nicholas Brothers made up three routines together by the time they were hired at the Lafayette Vaudeville showcase and from the Lafayette they opened at the Cotton Club in 1932. They worked at the Cotton Club for two years with famous performers such as Duke Ellington, Ethel Waters and The Stepping Brothers. "Their steps combined a little of everything with unifying punch and elegance (Stearns)." In the film *Down Argentina Way* the Nicholas Brothers ran and climbed two steps up a wall and did

no hand backflips then landed in the splits and up on the beat. They did all this step on time and together. In *The Great American Broadcast* the two brothers jumped from a moving train and waved bye at the same time. In *Stormy Weather* the brothers climb several stairs by jumping and landing in the splits and tap dancing in between. The Nicholas Brothers were most famous for their open splits and coming right back up in the dance routine. The Nicholas Brothers were known as “flash acts,” because of their spins, flips, splits and other acrobatics coupled with their smooth air tapping. They also entertained by telling jokes or funny stories as they danced. Sometimes Harold would sing while Fayard continued to dance and use his beautiful hands to pretend to orchestrate a band. Flash Acts are somewhat choreographed but they also include ad lib acrobatics that are inserted with no preparation. For this reason it is amazing that the Nicholas Brothers were able to be in sync with each other through out their dances.

The bond between the Nicholas Brother’s was maintained throughout their adulthood. Although the Nicholas Brothers separated from 1958 to 1964, they rejoined and continued to dance together. They appeared on the *Sammy Davis Show*, *Hollywood Palace* and *Bell Telephone Hour* and they also performed in Las Vegas. The Brothers stopped performing together in the 1960’s, but they still were receiving awards together. They received the Kennedy Center Honors and Dance Magazine awards in the 90’s. The Nicholas Brothers were performing together for over four decades and even after that their relationship as brothers lasted forever and in 1998 there was a Nicholas Brother’s Gala. The Brothers sung and danced together at the Gala and were remembered as the most elegant tap ensemble. Then only two years later Harold died of heart failure. The

love and bond the Nicholas Brother's had for each other was exhibited all the way until Harold's death.

It is not always that groups stick together for as long as the Nicholas Brother's did. It was a combination of their upbringing, performance and later life that exemplified this bond. The bond between Fayard and Harold Nicholas was as strong as marriage vows. They were brothers and even fellow performers until death did them part.

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