

THE BOSTON Phoenix

MARCH 31, 1989

Late one evening in the waning days of the Women in Theatre Festival '89, a curly-headed, unassuming-looking woman named Jane Goldberg tapped onto the stage, set her feet a-shuffle, and announced, "People think that tap dancers are happy. Happy people, happy feet. Well, let me tell you, I've been tap dancing for 15 years and I'm still depressed."

I cracked up. Here was this irreverent Jewish stand-up comic in kelly-green tap shoes throwing a wrench into a festival thus far heavy on solemnity. Sure, Goldberg made her share of despairing comments too, but lacking the obscure, expressionistic feel of many festival offerings, her act was extremely accessible — she came off like a cross between a frumpy Bette Midler and Woody Allen after a sex-change operation. The other performers in *Women on Tap!* were no less appealing, especially black grande dame Harriet Browne in sparkly sequins, cutting loose with a gentle soft-shoe shuffle, and wacko accompanist Amy Duncan sporting a purple velour jumpsuit and a wicked set of percussion sticks. The New York tapsters, all pioneers in the movement to keep tap — and women's contribution to tap — alive, presented a show bubbling with energy and caprice.

Women on Tap! was a turning point in my festival-going experience. As the final weekend drew to a close, things got zanier and zanier; Boston's month-long celebration of women's theater began to make sense to me as a truly fresh and explorative amalgam of multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary events. According to festival organizers, who understandably kept expressing dismay at the current threat to the Massachusetts arts budget, the annual Women in Theater Festival is committed to a vision of the arts as a way to expand cross-cultural communications and awareness. Indeed, though this year's festival offered perhaps fewer performances by international companies than in a better-funded world would be ideal, it did showcase women of color, old women, lesbians, hookers, the disenfranchised, and the downright eccentric.

Stages of woman *A theater festival that's festive*

by Elizabeth Pincus



Jane Goldberg: depressed?