

OWN COVERS THE EXCITING JAZZ SCENE WITH RICHARD M. SUDHALTER

Neglected art of jazz tap gets a weekend revival

As it happens, they're all names of tap dancers. Jazz tap men. Hoofers. Members of a once-revered music elite and a vital part of jazz history.

In Harlem during the golden years of the '20s and '30s they reigned supreme alongside the stride pianists, the promethean tenor men and all the rest. But for many reasons, only some having to do with music, they are all but forgotten today.

Not for Jane Goldberg. For her they're still gods — and if she has anything to do with it, their art will not long remain history's neglected step-child, ever in search of a home.

"Where does it belong? That's really the question," she said amid preparation for "It's About Time," an appropriately named series of jazz tap evenings she's staging this weekend at 537 Broadway, between Spring and Prince Streets in SoHo.

"There's so much of it that hasn't even been explored. Since the old days, with the big stage reviews and things, it just hasn't had a chance as an art form. People don't even know what it is."

Jane Goldberg, at 30, knows what it is because she believes in it and has worked hard at learning about jazz tap both as a historian and performer. She's a trained, knowledgeable dancer, determined and very serious.

But public understanding is unlikely to come easily. Jazz tap, in which the dancer extends with his feet the rhythmic and melodic complexities explored by instrumentalists, never has been widely understood—even by other dancers.

Even so enlightened a pioneer as the late Ted Shawn decried tap dancing in 1937 as "the scourge of the dance world today... an invention of the devil bequeathed to us by St. Vitus."

Some early Harlem hoofers, chief among them Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, gained a following among the wider—that is, white—public.

But jazz tap by the masters only became generally available last year, with the release on Irv Kratka's Classic Jazz label of an LP recorded in 1959 by the late Baby Laurence.

The record is a marvel in

its diversity of rhythms and textures. Laurence's creativity and sense of shading resemble those of a great jazz drummer — with the same technical virtuosity.

"It amazes me, you know, that people still have this flaky idea that tap dancing is easy, that it's just shuffle, heel, flap flap," said Jane Goldberg. "But the

musicians I have always known. Buddy Rich, Philly Joe Jones and others actually started as tap dancers. Men like Max Roach and Jo Jones have always known it and respected it. Jo Jones even devoted a whole LP side to it on his history of jazz drumming album."

As part of her research into jazz tap, Jane Goldberg

sought out and learned from as many of the surviving veterans as she could find. Some were wary, others downright hostile.

The bitterness stems in part from a simple fact of show business life—that big name entertainers, usually white, have come to see what the tap artists had going, absorbed it, then made big money for themselves off it.

One hooper who hasn't become bitter is "Cookie"—Charles Cook, once half of the Cook and Brown slapstick dancing team. He's taking part in this weekend's doings with Jane and her colleague Andrea Levine.

"It's About Time" will be presented tomorrow, Saturday and Sunday at 8 p.m., and Sunday at 3. Admission

is \$3. For tickets call 533-4356 or 226-0652.

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Tomorrow night promises another sort of important comeback—that of Stan Kenton to the city for the first time since suffering a nearly fatal cerebral hemorrhage 10 months ago.

The 19-piece Kenton orchestra is scheduled for an 8:00 p.m. concert at Pace University's Schimmel Center for the Arts, on Park Row opposite City Hall.

"He's feeling much better," a colleague said of the once controversial pianist-band leader, who turned 66 Sunday. "The best tonic for him is getting back in front of the public. It's done wonders."

Tickets priced at \$8 and \$6, are available at the door.



Jane Goldberg and Charles Cook: Soho hoofers.

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