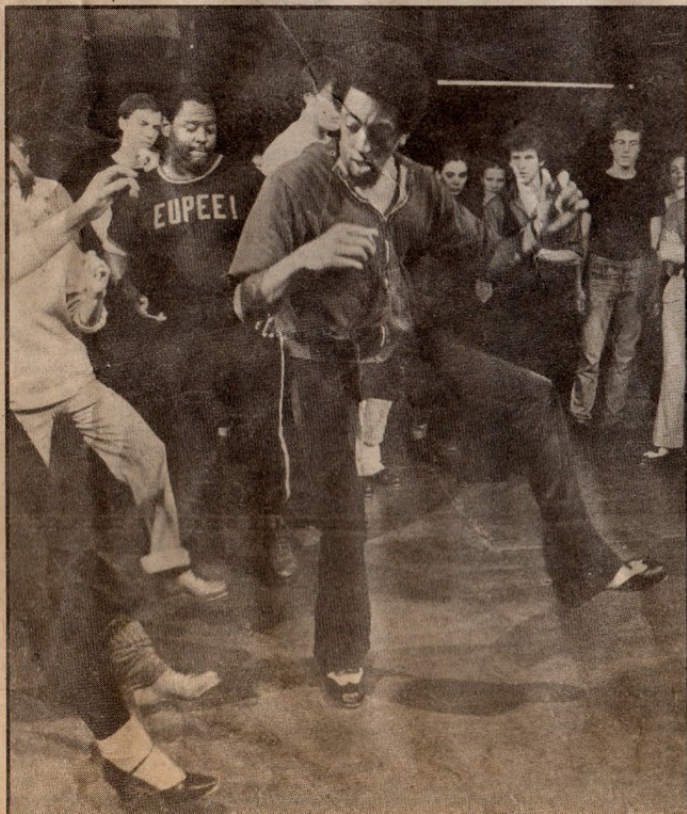


# SOHO NEWS

## D A N C E



goodly dose of expert shimmying of those fabulous shoulders. When he can't recall a certain step, Cook ambles back to fill in the missing link. That's called teamwork. The two finish with a slapstick routine that has Brownie falling and sliding across the floor like a 10-year-old kid.

Peg Leg Bates strikes me more as a tap icon than a teacher. You see, Peg Leg, who's been dancing for 52 years, has only one leg. The other "leg" is a black crutch fastened to his thigh by a large leather band and buckle, enabling him to shim sham shimmy along with the best of 'em. "Life means do your best with what you got," this big, friendly man tells us. "I ain't sorry that I lost my leg. Don't sympathize with me, cuz I enjoy my peg." With a cane in one hand, and his flesh and wooden legs moving in perfect accord, Peg Leg provides inspiration for any dancer.

Marion Coles represents the backbone of the vaudeville circuit — the chorus girl. In her heyday, this beautiful lady in purple pants and red headband stood at the end of a chorus line ("The girl on the end, she's got a job!") that performed with all the big bands, and learned routines from "the boys" on street corners (women weren't allowed inside the Hoofers Club). Her session at the Gate concentrates on a careful breakdown of a chorus girl-created precision routine known as "For Dancers Only."

Bunny Briggs, of the huge doe eyes, fluid arms and invisible, conversational taps, is the moralist of the bunch. This polished performer has come not only to pass on technical advice but to counsel prospective tappers on the perils of the professional life. "If they see you love

Lanky Leon Collins, wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with a huge shoe, incorporates his boxing and jazz background into a lesson devoted to both flash and class tap. Buster Brown, the "snake hips" pro, gets the whole room hula-hooping around to a wild rendition of "Ballin' the Jack." Elegant Leslie "Bubba" Gaines talks about gimmicks (dancing on ice skates, on dice, or with a jump rope) and explains how to transform one basic rhythm into a number of styles. George Hillman offers a crystal-clear example of the Bill Robinson style and beautifully demonstrates a buck and wing and over-the-top. Albert "Gip" Gibson rolls his wild eyes, juts out a well-padded hip, and bumps and swerves through a wonderfully sleazy routine. Fred Kelly (yes, Gene's brother) drives his class through an array of traditional styles and cracks a lot of jokes. And the "younger generation," modern-jazz-influenced Brenda Buffalo and sexy, funny Gregory Hines, send their troops through improvisatory exercises. (Sadly, I had to miss three great teachers in action: Honi Coles, Alfred Gustar and Mae Belle Lee.)

Though the teaching came first, there were other delights: an impromptu tap Charleston by a little old man known as "the dancing dentist"; tap producer/writer Leticia Jay reminiscing about her unearthing of these long-forgotten hoofers during the early '60s, and John Bubbles' stories and songs and sheer presence. (One student rose and pronounced him a "national treasure.") Nor can I forget the musicians — pianist Jim Roberts, Ramirez and Hyman, drummer David Yoken — the technicians, or the or-