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Tap dancer hopes renaissance will close generation gap

By RACHEL HART
IJN Staff

Jane Goldberg is stunned. She sinks slowly into a chair at a downtown Boulder cafe. She has just been hit with the news of Fred Astaire's death.

While the news is sad for most everyone, it is especially so for Ms. Goldberg, a vanguard of what she calls the Tap Renaissance. "I feel like I should be home sitting shiva or something," she sighs. "He's the reason I got into this, you know. It's like losing a member of my family."

Goldberg, dressed in a sheer, lacy, flowery dress, high-heeled purple tap shoes with the taps removed, and sparkling purple socks, has the ethereal look of a dancer. But behind the bohemian appearance is dancer who is also a critic, scholar, journalist, and businesswoman. She is a moving force behind the tap renaissance, a contributor to many newspapers and the founder of the Changing Times Tap Dance Company, Inc.

Goldberg and her colleagues have been expecting and dreading Astaire's death for a long time, and while the actual event is a shock, she has already thought out the implications of the loss enough to see "a silver lining."

Fred Astaire's death will inevitably stimulate a revival of his movies, which can only increase the American public's exposure to and interest in tap. And Ms. Goldberg knows that the Tap Renaissance depends on such exposure.

Jane Goldberg, the dancer and

the critic, is in Colorado to participate in the Colorado Dance Festival's conference, "Translating Tap Into Words," the first critics' conference ever held focusing on the art of rhythm tap. The conference will be capped by "The Great Tap Reunion" at the Casino Cabaret and the Paramount Theater in Denver.

"You see a lot of 70-year-olds performing these days, and a lot of 30-year-olds. But you don't see much of the generations in between," she says. It is up to the younger dancers, she feels, to learn as much as they can from the older ones, and to "get the form in some sort of decent order" before they lose their teachers. With a firm foundation of form, she believes, the younger tappers can innovate and change the image of tap without changing the essential nature of the art.

Today tap dancing is also a legitimate artistic discipline, with a history worthy of academic scrutiny. Ms. Goldberg, who probably knows more about rhythm tap than anyone else, leads the formal study of the art. The preservation of tap depends on this type of formal study, but, Ms. Goldberg points out, the academic approach poses its own types of threat.

"If it gets too self-conscious and serious," she says, "it's no good for tap." If the defining element of the art is "the fun of it," those who are working for the survival of tap in the 1980's need to be conscious of maintaining that fun tradition.



Jane Goldberg

There is also a very Jewish component to the tap tradition, Ms. Goldberg points out. Rooted in the vaudeville era, tap is also comedy, based, in part, on "a Jewish sense of humor."

Above all, tap is "a truly American art. There are all sorts of cultural components that go into it," according to Ms. Goldberg. If there are more whites than blacks in the younger generation of tap dancers, Ms. Goldberg feels, that is all right, it is simply the path of the art's evolution.

Jane Goldberg's approach to tap, and to life, is the product of the late 1960's campus experience. She graduated from Boston University with a political science degree in a time of great social unrest and political action.

Although she was a modern dancer and has had little experience with tap since her fourth birthday, she threw herself back into it in 1973, at age 26. "Anything was possible in the late '60's," she recalls. "You could change if you wanted to. I believed that, and I changed." She moved to New York to study dance, persuaded and convinced the tap greats to take her on as a protegee, and got "enough lucky breaks" to be recognized by the critics. Her first show, which was performed in a New York loft, was lauded by a *New York Times* critic, who said, "Break down the

doors if you have to, but see this show."

As far as being a Jewish woman in an unorthodox career, Ms. Goldberg points out that her involvement is not as non-traditional as it appears to be.

"Jews have an incredible thing about culture as an important part of life," she says, "and about preserving culture. I found that when I started to deal with the arts people in New York they were all Jewish men. And traditionally, Jewish women have been involved behind the scenes in tap." In fact, a Jewish woman, Sally Sommers, was instrumental in bringing tap to town as part of the Colorado Dance Festival.

For information or tickets to the Great Tap Reunion, contact the Colorado Dance Festival at 442-7666, or the Paramount Box Office.