

THE VILLAGE VOICE

Digging In

By Deborah Jowitt

Jane Goldberg

The Unhappy Hooper

At the Brecht Forum

December 7 through 15

Why is Jane Goldberg calling one of her informal numbers "Dialectical Hoofing"? Because her one-woman show is taking place at the Brecht Forum, home of the New York Marxist School. But wait, Goldberg provides arguments with her tapping, and one of the definitions of dialectics is "a constantly changing reality with a material base." Tap is her base; the solid skill of a resolute and solid woman laying down clear, strong rhythmic sequences seems to anchor and sustain the rambling confessions of a self-deprecating, ostensibly vague seeker-after-happiness.

Goldberg is funny, smart, and endearing, although I wonder sometimes why, with her tapping so good and her jokes pretty funny, her timing and style of delivery are so resolutely home entertainment. I guess it's because she wants to make the small audience that the Forum can hold feel cozy, and that she does.

Her theme is that she's not a happy hooper—what with life being so screwed up and all. Whenever she's down, she produces her "happy step"—a splayed-out little break that she tells us was invented by Gene Kelly's overlooked brother, Fred. She doesn't make us focus on her feet, however, or draw dark mysteries out of what she terms a "Stradivarius floor"; her tapping has the forthrightness of her persona, with none of the latter's professed neuroses.

Dance

She meditates good-humoredly on life's little dissatisfactions. Career versus family: she used to feel strange longings wheeling friends' babies in strollers; then she realized it was the strollers she craved—to relieve the shoulder strain caused by bushel bags of tap shoes. She went to Hollywood to appear in THE big tap movie, was issued a tacky costume (she has it here to show us, incredulous), and most of her ended on the cutting-room floor. In the process of recounting her woes, she lets us in on the nature of good old steps like the Tacky Annie and the Shim-Sham and the joys of Trading Eights. She relives her square childhood efforts ("My Parents' Basement Greatest Hits"). She provides samples of the Tap-a-Grams you can hire her to perform; the ones she favors us with are political—a sharp foot-words fantasy tapped from Bush to Hussein, say. She runs through the history of tap and the tap revival of the late 1960s: here's a step Charles "Cookie" Cook taught her that had been taught to Bill Robinson by I forget whom; here's a brief, remarkably apt glimpse of Shirley Temple.

She spends a while on a sly story, gleefully studded with jokes-to-groan-over, about how tap dancing was really started by Jewish women. Grinning guiltily: "All that running through the desert gave us a terrific sense of rhythm." She pours crumbled matzos on the floor and claims that this is the origin of sand dancing.

Tap therapy, she's tried that. And Transcendental Tap. She begins to offer a sample of the "tapping while talking dirty" stuff she used to do with Sarah Safford, then sees kids in the audience, and decides to quit. She charms everyone in the place with her smartness and her New York single-female blues and her extroverted feet.