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## Tapperina's tales

Jane Goldberg hoofs her way through

By MARCIA B. SIEGEL | August 13, 2009

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The frontispiece of *Shoot Me While I'm Happy* reproduces a poster for a New York Tap Fringe Festival performance in 2005. Jane Goldberg, the self-styled Tap Goddess of the Lower East Side, is pictured as a sketchy figure with a big scribble of hair who promises to "Belly Tap for World Peace!" Goldberg, a feisty, funny character and long-time tap crusader, has written a remarkable memoir. When I met Goldberg, in 1972, she was based in Boston and was writing about dance for *Boston After Dark*, predecessor of the *Phoenix*. She'd taken modern-dance classes with Radcliffe's Claire Mallardi (just this spring she appeared in a performance celebrating Mallardi's 80th birthday), but Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies had convinced her that tap was the route to ultimate romance and fulfillment. Goldberg connected in Boston with her first serious tap teacher, Stanley Brown, and soon emigrated to New York, where a tap revival was getting up steam.



MAGIC FEAT: In relating her experiences with tap stars like Gregory Hines, Goldberg herself becomes a compelling character.

At the end of the 1960s, a generation of great dancers, mostly African-American and male, started to resurface after decades of what Goldberg later called the Drought. They'd been featured in movies, theaters, and clubs, but their careers had gone into eclipse when tastes in entertainment changed. Now, banded together as the Hoofers and the Copasetics, they were doing shows again. Critics had become less finicky about distinctions between high art and popular culture, and suddenly these old guys were reclaiming the limelight.

As soon as she hit the Lower East Side, Goldberg started tracking down the master tappers, getting them to teach her their steps and tell their stories. Eventually, she knew them all, from the most famous — Honi Coles, Gregory Hines — to unsung role models Chuck Green and Sandman Sims and lesser-known individualists like Leon Collins and Jimmy Slyde. She put together an act with Charles "Cookie" Cook and they toured for six years as an improbable duo: the 60ish, caustic tap-comic Cook and the Jewish bohemian Goldberg, trading jazz riffs and insults, surrounded by an assortment of guest dancers, musicians, and friends.

Later, or maybe along the way, Goldberg developed a persona as a talking tapper and did solo shows. She also organized the Sole Sisters, a showcase of veterans like Frances Nealy and Dianne Walker and younger women like Brenda Bufalino doing old routines and inventive contributions to the tap renaissance.

Goldberg recounts these adventures and a lot more in *Shoot Me While I'm Happy*. She doesn't boast about her writing career or her flair for the wacky rubric, but the book reveals how good she is at verbal performance. Over the years, she's written important articles on her mentors and the history of tap, but this book is more informal. She seems to be chatting with you, reminiscing, dropping names. But in fact she's creating a literary character and projecting her own quirky humor and anxieties with practiced self-deprecation. She relates her triumphs — getting to dance with icons — with modest matter-of-factness.

**Shoot Me While I'm Happy: Memories from the Tap Goddess of the Lower East Side** | By Jane Goldberg | Woodshed Productions | 324 Pages | \$25

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The success of the Metropolitan Opera's "Live in HD" experiment augurs well for dance on the big screen. Simulcast at select theaters, with tickets priced higher than for a movie but much cheaper than for a live opera, these events generate a sense of anticipation.

■ **REVIEW: ALEXEI RATMANSKY'S STARTLING NEW NUTCRACKER** | January 07, 2011  
The greatness of Alexei Ratmansky's new *Nutcracker*, which American Ballet Theatre premiered on December 23 at Brooklyn Academy's Opera House, lies in two famous scenes, both recognizable yet reconceived and reanimated by the choreographer. The snow scene and the grand pas de deux are usually staged as climactic showpieces for acts one and two, in this most familiar of the old Russian ballets. With characteristic humanism, Ratmansky makes them something more.

■ **THE BEST BOSTON DANCE STORIES OF 2010** | December 22, 2010  
Some of the past year's most interesting dance events recaptured iconic moments in our history, either as usable texts for today's dancers or as a springboard into reinterpretation, parody, and nostalgia.

■ **A DANCE CRITIC'S TAKE ON BLACK SWAN** | December 14, 2010  
WARNING: This article contains spoilers regarding the

She plays down her ingenuity and daring as a promoter. And she describes her misjudgments in excruciating detail, like trying to bring the message of tap to feminists in deepest India or senior citizens hunkered down in Florida.

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ending of Black Swan .

■ **REVIEW: BALLETROX'S URBAN NUTCRACKER** | December 14, 2010  
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<p>■ <b>COUNTRY STRONG   SOUNDTRACK</b> This steaming pile of songs is emblematic of the state of mainstream country music — all artifice, no heart, calculated anthems written to formula and meant, like the film itself, to do no more than capitalize on the genre's current success and rob its indiscriminating fans.</p>	<p>■ <b>COMIC: THE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF BOSTON'S FUTURE, 2020-2100 AD</b> We approached this future-Boston project as a sort of moderated "jam comic." Result: post-singularity MBTA robots, Menino clones, Citgo aliens, and donut zombies.</p>
<p>■ <b>11 FICTIONAL GLIMPSES OF THE BOSTON OF TOMORROW</b> The history of the future is not long.</p>	

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