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CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY

CHANGING TIMES TAP DANCING COMPANY

at the Goodman Theatre
September 4-15, 1985

The Changing Times Tap Dancing Company also does a form of jazz dance, but stays within the

DANCE

perimeters of tapping, in which the feet do the talking, walking, skipping, and running. Their revue, *Shoot Me While I'm Happy*, is the brainchild of Jane Goldberg, a modern dancer and writer who was seduced into tap dancing about 12 years ago by a Fred Astaire movie.

Goldberg, a capable tapper who won't ever replace Eleanor Powell or Ann Miller, is nevertheless a beguiling personality onstage, accompanied by four great old veterans of vaudeville and Broadway and by two young women.

To give the show some sort of continuity, Goldberg set the dance numbers into the framework of a silly plot about the theft of tap shoes from a tap hall of fame museum. This naive, amateurishly acted plot turned out to be an endearing way to introduce various styles of tapping. Better yet, it

introduced Charles "Cookie" Cook, Ernest "Brownie" Brown, James "Buster" Brown (no relation), and Jimmy Payne to a public that, for the most part, had never seen these great tappers in their heydays, or even known of them.

Age has slowed the four men when they walk, but those feet can still tap up a storm with charm, style, and ease. If they conserved their energies in the way they used their bodies, they were still a revelation of how light, exhilarating, and complex tap can be in its infinite variety of sounds and rhythms. Brownie Brown even took some hard falls in an old vaudeville routine he did with Cook, but he always came up smiling and asking for more. And Buster Brown's *David Danced Before the Lord*, from a Duke Ellington cantata, was a reminder that tap could be tender and reverent as well as bouncy and brash. I'm grateful to Goldberg for allowing us to enjoy their talents.

At the conclusion of the formal show I saw, Goldberg invited any tappers in the audience to join the troupe onstage. Now families and friends crowded the stage. It was a lively, high-spirited affair, a family party in which Brownie's sisters showed that age and weight hadn't withered their own tapping talents. A stunning visitor from *A Chorus Line* joined the party, as did some unidentified young local tappers. It was one of the happiest, friendliest shows I've seen in ages, and I hated to see it end.

Praise must be paid to music director Jim Roberts, a brilliant jazz pianist who led his small combo with musical wit, imagination, and exciting pianistic licks. I could have listened to him all night, for he brought a touch of sophistication to the otherwise naive but highly infectious performance.