

# Hoofer helps old-time tap keep clicking

By Wynne Delacoma

**J**ane Goldberg is a nice Jewish girl who by rights should be a Gold American Express Card-carrying yuppie by now. She protested and marched during her college days in the late '60s and early '70s, studied political science and gave serious thought to becoming a reporter for the Washington Post.

So what's a nice girl like that doing with her own tap-dancing troupe? Blame it on Miss Maxine, the tap-, toe- and hula-dance teacher in Silver Spring, Md.; Fred Astaire, and an extraordinary modern dance teacher at Radcliffe College.

Goldberg, who has been a one-woman dynamo in the drive to save old-time tap-dancing from oblivion over the past decade, brings her "Shoot Me While I'm Happy: An Evening of Jazz Tap Dancing" to the Goodman Theater beginning Tuesday and running through Sept. 15. The format is a revue with her troupe, the Changing Times Tap Dancing Company, featuring Ernest "Brownie" Brown and Charles "Cookie" Cook, a legendary team from the '20s and '30s who began their careers in Chicago; James "Buster" Brown, and veteran Chicago-based tap-dancer Jimmy Payne.

The new generation will be represented by Sarah Safford, Dianne Walker and Goldberg with a trio of jazz musicians. The program includes improvisations, a detective story centering on stolen tap shoes and a grand finale in which audience members are



Charles "Cookie" Cook and Jane Goldberg will tap-dance at the Goodman Theater starting tonight.

welcome to come on-stage and hoof along with the professionals.

Goldberg sounds surprised as she describes her obsession with tap-dancing and the drive to make contact with the greats from tap-dancing's past.

"I remember Miss Maxine's silver shoes and a red cape," she said in a telephone interview. "I was 4 years old and I thought they were wonderful. But after a little while, my mother pulled me out of that school and took me to a modern dance teacher. It was the '50s; that was the big thing to do."

Goldberg forgot about tap-dancing until almost 20 years later when she saw a Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers movie. She was attending Radcliffe and had begun studying modern dance seriously with Claire Mallardi.

"I wanted to dance with Astaire," said Goldberg ruefully. "I didn't want a partner like Astaire; I wanted Astaire."

Many dance teachers would have laughed Goldberg out of the studio when she was smitten by the the tap bug. Serious students of the art of the dance do not truck with such trivial forms as tap, which grew up on the corners of America's black neighborhoods and flourished in vaudeville houses.

But Mallardi was no ordinary teacher. She, along with tap-dancers Brown and Cook, appeared in "Kiss Me Kate," which was choreographed by respected modern dance choreographer Hanya Holm. Mallardi had worked in vaudeville, Goldberg said, and her Friday afternoon modern-dance improvisation classes at Radcliffe were done to jazz music.

"She helped me with my tap," Goldberg said. "She was a crossover artist, as were Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. She listens to the blues. She pushed me; she understood I had to tap."

After college, living what she calls "a great alternative life-style—the whole thing, boyfriends, food, no one dancing."

# Hoofer set on keeping tap alive

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Goldberg started searching for old-time tap-dancers. Onstage tap-dancing had been dormant for a few decades and she treasured the casual conversations or telephone numbers scrawled on scraps of paper that eventually led her to the men who became her dance teachers.

She found Stanley Brown in a little studio in Boston where he was teaching a few students. "I didn't know what I was doing, but I was learning good stuff," Goldberg said.

With the successful revival of "No, No, Nanette" on Broadway in the early 1970s, tap was going through something of a renaissance, and Goldberg began to make the connection between jazz, emotion and tap-dancing.

Brown, who had not talked much about his art, probably because he figured his students just wanted to pay their money and learn the steps, opened up tap's mysteries to Goldberg.

"You really had to want to know before he'd give you the gold, but I was getting the gold," she said. "He started getting into the tradition of tap. I was really getting the truth."

With the Changing Times Tap Dancing Company, Goldberg is trying to get the truth out to a wider audience. She writes about tap, maintains an archive of video tapes and oral tap history, and has put on two festivals called "By Word of Foot: Tap Masters Pass on Their Tradition."

Like ballet historians racing against time to record first-hand accounts of the Russian Imperial and Diaghilev eras as the legendary dancers die out, Goldberg also is facing a deadline.

"It's a fact; they're dying," said Goldberg of the dancers from vaudeville days. "I try to make the opportunity for young professionals and closet hoofers to make contact with them."

The Changing Times Tap Dancing Company performs Tuesday through Sept. 15 at the Goodman Theater. Tickets are \$16-\$22; call 443-3800. The Sept. 7 performance is a benefit for the Illinois Arts Alliance. For information on the benefit, call 855-3105.