



# THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

## Two top tap troupes: for the millions, or the hundreds

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Tap dance is riding on a long wave of popularity that started when the form resurfaced in the 1960s. First the old vaudeville and variety tappers came out of involuntary retirement to bring their exuberant, unpredictable virtuosity to audiences in clubs and small theaters. They began teaching their routines to younger dancers, mostly white women. At the end of the '70s, downtown dancers

acquired enough tap to incorporate it in their "new vaudeville" collages.

Now several companies have appeared that specialize in a rejuvenated

species of tap, all trying in their own ways to preserve the form's original spirit. Two groups that played here recently showed just how fertile tap's inspiration still is. Both the Jazz Tap Ensemble and Jane Goldberg's Changing Times Tap Dancing Company use a variety format, combining dance numbers in different styles with live music and guest artists. But the differences between the groups are greater than the similarities.

Jane Goldberg studied and shared the black hoofers' tradition, and had a partnership with Charles "Cookie" Cook, one of the surviving tap masters, before developing the show she now calls Sole Sisters. Perhaps above everything else, she appreciates tap's potential for ingenious embellishments. Her performances are a succession of rhythmic, stylistic, verbal, and witty surprises. In Sole Sisters she corrects the old misconception that tap is a man's dance.

Gregory Hines had a separate section of the show, complete with a wood floor, specially miked to get echo effects. Hines did one of his "improvisography" pieces, a free-form tap monologue, where he changed moods and gave himself a demanding repertory of speeds and textures to pull off. He treated the surface of the floor like a drum, which he not only beat and rapped on, but craped, clacked, slid, slapped, and galloped across.

With a cast featuring "tap's grandes dames and prima tapperinas" at La Mama E.T.C., Sole Sisters opened with Goldberg in a tapping and talking monologue about the hardships of being a tap dancer. To the music of "Some Day My Prince Will Come," Goldberg lamented that she was still seeking fame, fortune, and romance. "I need a partner," she complained. Suddenly six women in tails and top hat appeared and danced a chorus line reconstructed from an old Apollo Theater routine by Marion Coles.

The rest of the show arranged itself loosely around this goofy Cinderella theme. Harriet Browne, putting on a pair of spangly shoes, explained, "Those were your step sisters, and I'm your Fairy Godmother." She proceeded to do a sand dance, shuffling swiftly in a three-foot-square box, hardly picking up her feet while she created soft, urgent rhythms. After that, the show went on to regular tap numbers, like Brenda Bufalino's suave but hard-driving tribute to Fred Astaire, and Frances Nealy's fast assault on a miniature flight of stairs.

Sole Sisters' wonderfully broad definition of tapping included Josephine McNamara's Irish clog dance and a South African boot dance, in which Miriam Greaves-All led the ensemble, all wearing brown and yellow Wellington boots with bells draped around the ankles. There was also room for the "Post Partum Blues," in which Sarah Safford, clad in a frowzy housedress, explained

I had a good time at the Jazz Tap, too. But, while I can admire its tight, slick format, I can't get personally engaged, as I do with the Changing Times company. One group represents tap tailored for the millions, and the other taps for its intimate friends - a few or a few hundred, no matter.

the woes of a dancer who had to combine career and family.

Sole Sisters was funny and endearing. I love the fact that it's all women, that the women are of all ages, sizes, colors, and national origins. But I especially love it that, though their dancing ranges from accomplished to extraordinary, their style is understated, almost extemporaneous. I think somehow the real spirit of black tap lies in the contradiction between the ability to dance dazzlingly and the reluctance to appear to be showing off in any other way.

**In her group Sole Sisters, Jane Goldberg corrects the old misconception that tap is a man's dance.**

The Jazz Tap Ensemble seems historically grounded in white tap, or Hollywood-style tap, which is understandable since the group originated and is based in Los Angeles. With Lynn Dally as founder-director, the company has two other dancers and three musicians, and appeared here at the Joyce Theater with Gregory Hines as a guest artist. Jazz Tap's style is polished, precise. It also has its variations, but in a refined way.

Dally's solo, "Gershwin," displayed her tap abilities, with a slow, casual beginning ("How Long Has This Been Going On?"), a fast-stepping "But Not For Me," a searching "My Man's Gone Now" (where she hardly moved her feet at all but extended her upper body to yearn into space), and a windup to "Embraceable You" that started and ended in silence. Dally combines the rhythmic elegance of tap with a more introspective use of the whole body that she gets from her training in modern dance.

New company member Terry Brock smiles a lot and taps showily, as if she wants the audience to see her feet as well as hear them. Sam Weber, who has also recently joined the company, is a "classical" tapper in the style of Paul Draper.