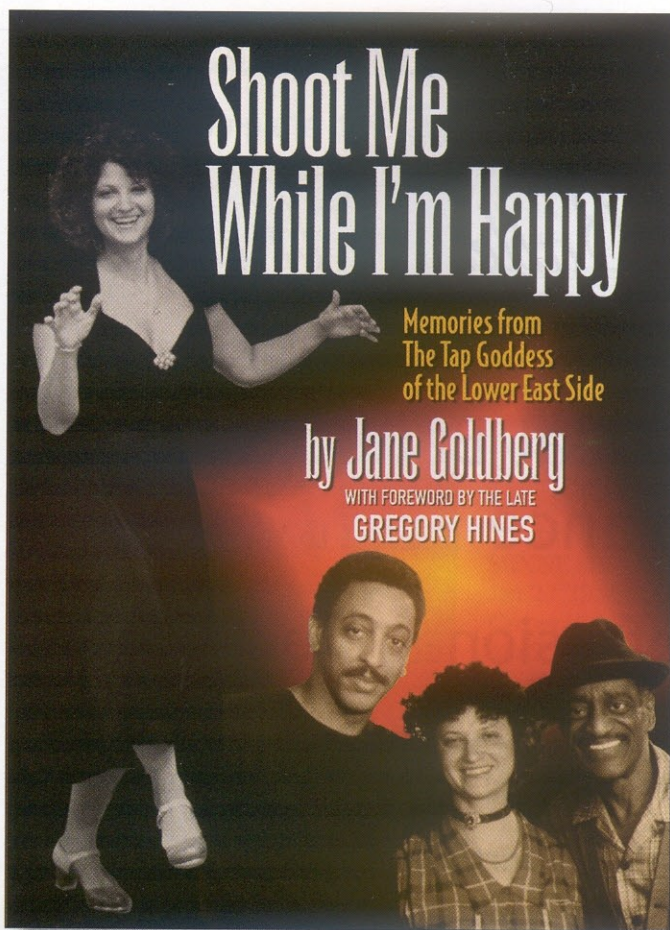


Shoot Me While I'm Happy

Memories from
The Tap Goddess
of the Lower East Side

by Jane Goldberg
WITH FOREWORD BY THE LATE
GREGORY HINES



Shoot Me While I'm Happy.

By Jane Goldberg. Published by Woodshed Productions, Inc. 306 pp, b&w illustrations. \$25.00 (US) for paperback plus DVD, \$40.00 for hardback without DVD. Order directly from janegoldberg.org to obtain the DVD. The book can also be ordered online from amazon.com but will not include the DVD.

When Jane Goldberg was a little girl in the 1950s, she plastered her bedroom with pictures of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, first pasting a photograph of her own face over Ginger's. Any dance-mad child might do the same, but few pursue their dreams with Goldberg's single-minded determination. As an adult, she set out to learn both *about* tap and *to* tap from the legendary performers whose dancing helped define their art.

An informal and informative document of

her quest and achievement, densely illustrated with engaging snapshots, *Shoot Me While I'm Happy* is a book about dedication, hard work, community and collaboration, alliances and rivalries, feminism and race. Goldberg is a white, Jewish woman; most of the legends she brings to life here are black men, many years her senior, who were dancing only for and with each other, if at all, until she introduced their dazzling skill to an unsuspecting public.

During the 1950s and 1960s, as rock and roll replaced bebop and swing, there was a "drought" of tap, during which the black stars of the preceding decades disappeared from sight. The jazz drummer Buddy Rich explained the drought to Goldberg this way: "When vaudeville died out and nightclubs started putting in *thirty girls thirty* and Radio City put in sixty Rockettes,

where was the tap dancer? It was a dying art."

Determined to uncover the "stories about what killed tap" and totally committed to "finding the hoofers... interviewing them, studying with them, making tap happen again," Goldberg followed her "addiction" across the US and even to Europe, into church basements, dusty rehearsal studios and nursing homes.

She found Honi Coles, who, as a young man, had rehearsed for a year in the room where he lived – practising alone is called "woodshedding" – and emerged with "the fastest feet in show business". She studied with Jimmy Slyde, who listened to her lessons in the dark with his eyes closed, the better to concentrate on the sound and precision of her feet.

She tracked down John Bubbles, who "taught Fred Astaire for \$400 an hour", Sandman Sims, who danced on sand and told everyone he'd invented it, and Mable M. Lee, who played the London Palladium for 18 months in the 1940s and was still tapping in her eighties.

She became their attentive chronicler and fervent pupil, and from 1980 their producer, staging

tap festivals and revues to show them off. She worked up a solo act of tap and talk for herself and a show called *Sole Sisters* entirely for women tappers, and she taught for 20 years at New York University, inviting the great Buster Brown to give a masterclass every term.

Many people had never heard these names or seen these artists until Goldberg and her colleagues dug them out of enforced retirement and displayed them anew. However, younger tap dancers such as Gregory Hines, a close friend of Goldberg's from 1979, and Savion Glover – who also feature in these pages – revere the expertise and creativity of the old guard; during Sandman's memorial, Goldberg reports, Glover slipped a pair of tap shoes into his coffin.

Buddy Rich claimed that "People who write about jazz know nothing about it," and the same could be said for most people who write about tap. But Goldberg's authority on the subject extends from her head to her feet; her knowledge is vast, her writing is fast, lively and colourful, and she can tap too. Her book is essential reading for anyone who cares about any kind of dancing at all. ■

BARBARA NEWMAN



Jane Goldberg
with Charles Cook.
Photograph ©
Changing Times
Tap Archive.