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MEN AND
WOMEN WHO BRING
STORYTELLING
TO LIFE

PROFILES

**DANCER AND COMEDIAN
JANE GOLDBERG'S
MOUTH IS AS FAST AS
HER TAPPING TOES.**



THESE FEET ARE MADE FOR TALKING

NEW YORK CITY'S JANE GOLDBERG SAYS she is often asked, "What's a nice Jewish girl like you doing tap-dancing?" But Goldberg claims she's not a cultural aberration. "It's more unusual now," she says, "for a black woman to be tap-dancing than for a Jewish woman to be."

The general public's naive view of tap used to upset her. But not anymore. Goldberg tackles the nagging question head-on in her tapping-and-talking performances, which she bills as "Rhythm and Schmooze." Here's her tongue-in-cheek revelation of tap's obscure roots:

"My mother told me it was our great ancestor Bathsheba Goldberg who started tap." After an adroit stage pause, she continues: "When the men were up on the mountain with Moses getting the law, we were standing around waiting. [With her head cocked and a hand on a hip, Goldberg taps her foot heavily, with exaggerated impatience.] We were the forerunners of sand dancing; we called it matzo dancing.

"Finally, Aaron, Moses' brother, came down and said, 'Girls, I've got a gig for you,' because he was so impressed with our matzo dancing, and he started the Golden Calf Cafe. Then we began our act called the Wandering Shoes."

Search Exodus all you want—the tale's not told there.

And that's the point of Goldberg's revisionist history, which she says pokes some pointed fun at stereo-

types. "Black people tend to love my [Jewish origins of tap] act when I do it since they're all too aware of the stereotype," she adds.

If it hadn't been for Fred Astaire, Goldberg might still be a muckraking journalist and dance critic in Boston. Though she liked tapping and had had formal dance training, she had hardly planned a tap-dancing career. But in 1973 she was captivated while watching reruns of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies.

Once Goldberg connected with the art form, she sought out the black tap masters for interviews. She talked with, tape recorded, and wrote about such great dancers as the late John Bubbles, Charles "Honi" Coles, Sandman Sims, Charles "Cookie" Cook (who became Goldberg's tap mentor), and even Ginger Rogers for *The Village Voice*, *Ballet Review*, and other publications.

She produced "By Word of Foot" tap festivals that returned many of the masters to the stage, and she appeared in and was the tap-dancing consultant to Gregory Hines's film *Tap*. These and other efforts allow Goldberg to claim legitimately to have pioneered the tap renaissance in America in the '70s and '80s and helped her accumulate a huge modern-tap archive that she hopes will be a useful research resource someday. Of all the materials in the collection, Goldberg says, the interviews are particularly appropriate to tap's art form because tap is taught "in the oral tra-

dition—it's all passed on foot to foot, step to step."

During her historical inquiry into tap, Goldberg began to get out on the dance floor with the masters. "I wanted their feet," she says. She started studying tap more seriously, refining her technique, developing her style, and performing.

But ultimately Goldberg started feeling out-of-step with jazz tap,

although she still liked to tap and was interested in carrying on the humor of the old school. She's always enjoyed a good joke. So she combined tapping and talking into her nearly nonstop movement-and-monologue routine.

Her humorous treatments of present-day problems often hit close to home (a sample from a career-versus-family bit: "My biological clock is ticking so loudly now, I can hardly

hear myself tap-dancing"), but that's the way she wants it. "It really matters to me whether I'm connecting with the audience, because the material I use is personal."

Goldberg admits she's still trying to identify her market. "I'm lucky my act can go anywhere," she says. Like her great ancestor Bathsheba, Jane Goldberg is still wandering.

—Larry Pike