

## Talking tap



sought out old masters (all of them black and male) who were in their sixties and seventies and apprenticed herself to them. Charles Cook, Chuck Green, Honi Coles... When she studied-rhythm tap with John Bubbles, he was paralyzed and in a wheel chair. He taught her using the first two fingers of one hand!

Most of my teachers have died in the last five years," said Goldberg with a great sense of loss. "What got lost is really the vernacular, the story telling. As a genre tap is heading more into a direction of modern dance."

In 1978 after studying it for a few years and teaching it, she did her first show — "Its About Time — an Evening of Jazz Tap Dancing." In terms of the media the show was a great success. That was a beginning, specially for women like her, "academically oriented, college educated, not leading towards a tap life, who were finding these masters... (Later I started doing all women tap shows because I was so tired of being ignored. It's not easy for women to come up as tap dancers. They don't get jobs. Gregory Hines will talk about how women need more role models, but he's not going to hire

century." In addition she is an Associate Professor of Dance at the New York University, teaching technique and history of tap.

Today, Goldberg is not interested in making tap mainstream anymore. "Right now what I'm doing is trying to make it my own — which was always the lesson of the masters. Its just an extension of the tap tradition which combines humour with tap — to talk about today's issues. It has become a personal journey which involves me as a woman trying to live today and treat an art form as a way of life." She calls her talking tap shows "Rhythm and Schmooze." "I still have a long way to go to really get into the state of the art — with people really listening to both the voice and the tap. It is demanding on an audience because they have to hear on two levels, the two languages operating. Tap dancing is like the beat side of my down beat issues. Feet on their own talk to people, I add comedy words to it because I think comedy is important to make people laugh, to get some perspective on life." In her low-cut swiny dress as she begins to tap, she jokes about the history of tap — about the Jewish women who developed the particularly insistent

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any. He's excited by men dancers! She did a small role in his movie "Tap!"

The next milestone was a festival called "By Word of Foot" which brought the "old master" to New York to teach tap to the students and to choreograph new dances with it. The same year she set up her own dance company — the Changing Times Tap Dancing Company. It is not a straight dance company that goes out and performs. It has a Board of Directors and Gregory Hines is on it. "I started it so I could get money to get the old masters to teach the students. The most you could get as an individual was \$1,800, whereas I could get \$15,000 to \$20,000 if I became a non profit corporation... I also own a Tap Archive of the history of tap and the tap greats of this

rhythm while waiting for Moses to come down from Mount Sinai. She taps against racism and sexism. For her the personal is the political.

Coming to India was not at all easy. She had to turn somersaults before she could get a Fulbright grant under the Indo American Fellowship to study the Foot Cultures of the world. "And, I've already spent more than that in telephone calls trying to make contacts with India and in therapy to try and not go crazy over this trip." Now that she is here she is happy and has a much better perspective on tap dancing. She was in Pune teaching tap to Kathak dancers and drawing parallels between the two forms. "There's something about the way feet speak, like voices dont... When I saw Kathak I started crying. I felt such a kindred spirit with those dancers. Culturally Kathak comes closest to tap."

The hospitality Godberg enjoyed in India went further in giving her a new lead. "In Pune I was told tap can be traced back to Kathak. Gypsies from India went to Spain during the Armada and tap spread from there. Do you think its possible that tap started in India?" ■

Jane Goldberg

— her tap shows

talk of today's issues

hear your own music as you tap it out. It dates back to nineteenth century and the streets of New York when Irish immigrants exchanged steps with freed negro slaves. During the early part of the twentieth century it emerged fully blown in vaudeville and musical comedy, tapped by greats like Eddie Reactor, John Bubbles, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson etc. From then it passed on to the feet of star dancer Fred Astaire and his partners Joan Crawford, Ginger Rogers, Judy Garland...

Then came the Fifties and Sixties when tap dancing really lost out in America — probably because the dancers had stopped innovating and contemporising the form or because they were not getting work anymore. Rock 'n Roll had taken over and the big hands in Jazz. Twenty years later, with a new generation of performers like Gregory Hines, Tap started going

through a revival in the Seventies. It has managed to make a comeback (of sorts) into the mainstream and has begun to be taken seriously as an art form, as part of America's cultural background. However it needs to be revitalized and refashioned for the present times. Hierarchy still treats it as something you can get on Broadway or TV shows.

When Jane Goldberg began tap dancing in the mid 1970s, she was not "show-biz" but a major in Political Science with strong feminist marxist views and was working as a journalist and teacher. She wrote about Tap, the old school and the old "hoofers." "I became a student of it and a journalist of it. I realised Tap wasn't getting documented or preserved, so I was telling people — these are great masters, why aren't you paying attention to them!" She

WHEN you have been tap dancing for twentyfive years and when you are white, Jewish-American and female, you begin to look for new venues, new floors and certainly new audiences. That is part of the reason why Jane Goldberg journeyed to India and followed the axe of Parasurama to the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. More than the grand old building or the flower spangled lawns what vivified her there was the "striking" humanity that thronged the place. There were flags and banners of all political shades: there was slogan shouting and song singing and abuse chanting. Goldberg admits she had never seen anything quite as primed as that for "talking tap."

She moved a little closer to the seat of Government and began to dance with a verve and ardour that was contagious. Grouses were forgotten, so were political differences. The

*For Jane Goldberg tap dancing has become a personal journey which involves "trying to live today and treat an art form as a way of life." She taps against racism and sexism. For her the personal is the political. The dancer, who was in India recently talks to ELIZABETH ROY on the art form and her work.*

protesters laid down their flags and swarmed around the "strangely clad American woman." The mildly anxious security who were as appreciative of her performance as the crowds were, moved closer to her. "Madam, no dance please, only "samaram" (protest)." The city was gearing up for a BJP hartal the next day. An inspired Goldberg announced her intention to dance for the occasion. That's when the security force drew the line on freedom — to tap dance!

Tap Dance is America's own development, a blending of the traditional clog dance of Northern England and Irish and Scottish jigs, reels and flings with the rhythmic foot stamping of African dances. It involves rapid tapping of the toes and heels on the floor (preferably wooden) with shoes fitted with taps (cleats or metal plates) to emphasise the beats. You can