

PERFORMANCE

Sweet Feet

By John F. Szwed

SOLE SISTERS. Presented by Changing Times Tap Dancing Company at Greenwich House (June 26 to 28).

With the sound it generates as its defining feature, tap dance may seem to be an art with a very narrow scope. But its variety is enormous: in addition to the iron-on-the-floor stompers, there are dancers who work with light, barely audible ballroom effects, while others, such as soft shoe dancers, are conceptual tappers, their art coming from the sound we know *might* have been there. Even taps that strike the floor vary in pitch as well as rhythm: you can hear rim shots; horses' hooves on stone; stuttering; dentist-drill whines; and dropped silver chains of sound.

Sound is only one dimension of tap. The personae adopted by its dancers are complex and varied. Among others, there are brisk, efficient hustlers; drummers surprised by their own rhythm figures; challengers overflowing with sass; fastidious specialists studying their own feet for flaws; as well as the flirts, mimes, inge-

nues, klutzes, and suicidal acrobats. And—typical of Afro-American artistic practice—tap provides the potential for switching persona in a single dance.

What I particularly liked about Changing Times Tap Dance Company's "Sole Sisters" revue last month was the way it played with these variations and saw the possibilities of their permutations. Producer Jane Goldberg and Sarah Safford's "topical taps," for instance, set the key for the evening. These taps with near-raps (concerning, in this performance, their relationships with men) were especially affecting in the way they toyed with political incorrectness and self-pity, seeming always about to stop the dancing and begin a melodrama. Goldberg has developed a very personal style from a mix of ballroom, tap, and comedy, and she was in wonderful form in a piece on the dilemmas of career versus family, accompanying herself on colander and spoon. Yet she can dance straight ahead, too, and her reading of Chick Corea's "Spain" was exceptionally witty and graceful. Safford's humor is broader and more physical, as when in her own "Post-Partum Blues" she schlumped her way in front of a chorus line with her own recently born child on her hip and head.

Following Changing Times' custom of celebrating and learning from older dancers, "Sole Sisters" featured Marion Coles (once a member of Restina Banks's Number One Chorus Line), who recreated a

couple of numbers from the old Apollo Theater. Coles herself, little and low, built up from the ground, did a creditable "Shiny Stockings," full of sweet eccentricities and sudden angles. Harriet Brown sand-danced, and Mabel Lee, a brassy lady who filled in the few slow spots of the evening with her salty spoken obligatos, did some high-heel tapping and sang a very warm and assured "How Am I To Know" with the chorus tapping while seated in chairs behind her.

Brenda Bufalino's appearance on stage was abrupt and stunning, not merely because she interrupted a weird suite of hora-tap, Irish step-dancing, and Appalachian clogging, but also because she works with attitude received from black male dancers of the past. In contrast to the whimsy and lyric nostalgia which preceded, she cracked out crisp aggressive accents, modulated the tone of her taps, hurled out challenges, and generally let it be known that she prefers an atmosphere of risk and high energy.

On the evening of the benefit, guest dancers ended the performance, the last of whom was Gregory Hines. Energized by all that had come before, he enacted, deadpan, a parade of social types and stereotyped characters which evoked old movies, after-hours clubs, and city promenades, all against a tapped history of drumming, from high school drill team to late bebop. ■