

The New York Times

## Devotees of Tap Dance Kick Their Heels

By LEE EDWARD STERN

**A**S soon as I heard about this festival I hopped a bus from Baltimore," said Michael Tiranoff, a maker of documentary films who calls himself Toes Tiranoff when he performs with a ragtime guitarist, Barrelhouse Billy. "I've never seen anything like this before — all the old-timers, so many chances to learn and talk."

"It's like a tapper's fantasy come true," said Eleanor Wolton, a legal secretary from Manhattan.

More than 400 tap-dance addicts, in all shapes, sizes and ages, from rank beginner to seasoned professional, converged on New York University and the Lower East Side early this month for two days of virtually nonstop talking and tapping.

The lure was "By Word of Foot II," organized by Jane Goldberg, a dancer who is founder and artistic director of the Changing Times Tap-Dancing Company, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of jazz tap-dancing.

During the two days legions of the faithful took lessons from and talked with such legendary performers as Honi Coles and his wife, Marian; Steve Condos, and Leon Collins. They watched films and heard discussions of comedy in tap, and they paid tribute to a neglected tap pioneer, Albert (Gip) Gibson.

An enthusiastic dance teacher from Brooklyn shepherded his young charges into a crowded studio where Honi Coles and Brenda Bufalino were leading a class in improvisation. After the class dispersed, two of the Brooklyn students, 11-year-old Cherie Harper and 12-year-old Tammy Watson, joined Hilary Alexander, 11, and Mr. Coles in a charming impromptu shuffle routine. Hilary had come with her mother, Amy Duncan, a pianist and journalist who divides her time between Boston and New York.

"Take it nice and easy — just follow me and relax," Mr. Cole said.

In a few minutes the small group was moving together fluidly and with style.

"Best backup line I ever had," Mr. Coles commented.

Jay Berman, a theatrical photographer, fulfilled an old dream when he demonstrated a buck and wing alongside his idol, Mr. Coles. At the same time Andy Tierstein, a New York University graduate student who appeared as an acrobat and tightrope walker in "Barnum," struggled through a few steps with the aid of his girlfriend, Sharon Leahy Cooper, an Appalachian clog dancer.

Betty Weinscek, a dance historian from Washing-



The New York Times/Fred R. Conrad

Honi Coles dancing with Hilary Alexander, left, and Cherie Harper.

ton who came to gather material for a book on Marian Coles's experiences as a chorus-line dancer, participated in every class and watched every demonstration and film.

"Look at all the people here," she said. "Everybody's tap-dancing. You never know who's going to be putting on tap shoes."

Rebecca Eichelbaum, a Virginian, said: "Tap is growing more popular every day in Richmond. Sometimes I think everyone is taking lessons. But this is my very first opportunity to see and work with so many artists in so many different styles."

"I still feel like a young man," said Mr. Condos, who has been at it for 63 of his 67 years. "That's another thing people don't realize about tap-dancing. The older you get the better you get. It's not like

ballet or football or tennis, where you're considered an old man at 40. Outside of swimming it's about the best exercise there is. Bill Robinson kept on dancing until he was in his 70's, and he was at his best then."

"The tap-dancer's world is beautiful," he added, "and it's rubbing off on these kids. They're better than we were. More people have more chances. What took us 50 years to learn we can teach them in one month."

"That's the advantage. There are plenty of places to learn, plenty of people to learn from. The disadvantage is there's no place to show what you can do. In the old days there were five or six circuits featuring tap-dancers. Today there are none. There's plenty of talent but no outlets."