

The Washington Post

January 6, 1979

Jane Goldberg: Tap Dancing Her Way to a Homecoming

By Alan M. Kriegsman

What's a nice Jewish girl like Jane Goldberg doing as a tap dancer? Her father wanted to know.

"My folks," says Goldberg, who'll be performing tonight with veteran hoofers Charles "Cookie" Cook and Leslie "Bubba" Gaines in two performances at the Dance Exchange, "were totally opposed to the idea. It was bad enough when I was in modern dance—what kind of security is there in that, they asked. But tap dancing? They couldn't believe it."

Goldberg didn't start out with tap in mind. Although she'd had some dance instruction as a kid, at Boston University she majored in political science. Gradually she became more and more immersed in modern, experimental dance, both as a performer and as a critic, writing reviews for the Boston Phoenix and other publications.

Then, around 1973, she was bitten by the tap bug. First it was the Astaire-Rogers revivals that turned her on, but the more she delved into it the more she felt she had to do it herself. So she began seeking out the old tap masters, men like John Bubbles, Stanley Brown (of the Brazilian Nuts), Honi Coles of the Coles and Atkins "class act," Sandman Sims, Chuck Green and Charles Cook—the ones who'd reigned supreme in the tap heyday of the '20s, '30s and '40s, bringing an American dance genre to its peak of popularity and excitement.

Goldberg moved to New York, where she interviewed the hoofers for the Village Voice and Ballet Review, and persuaded them to become her teachers. Last year she "came out" in public, doing jazz tap concerts in a Soho loft, at the Museum of Modern Art, at Jacobs' Pillow in Massachu-



Jane Goldberg, by James A. Parcell

setts, and at the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C. And now, Washington.

It's a homecoming. She was born and raised in D.C., and her parents will be at tonight's performance, seeing her dance on stage for the first time.

"I did have tap lessons when I was 4," she recalls, "with Miss Maxine. It was one of those typical second-floor studios. Here, I still have pictures of myself in my silver shoes and red velvet cape. No, I take it back, I won't show them to you."

Soon afterwards came modern

dance lessons with Erika Thimey and Batya Heller. "Batya used to do extravaganza musicals for the kiddies—I was the lead guppie."

At college she dropped her dance interest for a while. "I became very active in the anti-war protests—that really freaked my dad out. Oh yes, I did one thing—I made a film for a poetry class in which I did a dance to some e. e. cummings."

In her senior year, she began to study dance in earnest again. Then Arlene Croce's book on Fred and Ginger spun her in the direction of tap. "When I took my first lessons with Stanley Brown, I had to relearn everything from scratch, I didn't remember a thing from the Miss Maxine days."

For Goldberg, perpetuating and extending the art of jazz tap has become something of a crusade. "I realized I was fighting time," she says. "Most of these great tap dancers are in their 60s; some have died. And there isn't any center for tap study, as there is for modern dance or ballet. Someone had to reach these people soon, to get their stories, to learn their techniques."

Goldberg is opposed to regarding tap as a relic. "People tend to think of tap nostalgically, as a revival. I really want to get away from that, as much as possible. I think of it as a living form, that can be done today and even extended." The competitive aspects of tap dancing were always a spur to individual creativity, and that spirit lingers on in Goldberg. When she once interviewed the great John Bubbles and suggested to him what the world needed was another Bubbles, his reply was: "Please don't think like that. You've got to surpass me, darling. Not just do me, but surpass me."