
THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

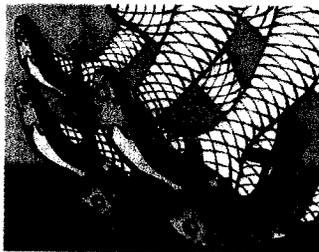
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THE NEW YORKER, JULY 24, 2006

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK KEEP ON TAPPING

Tap is probably the only form of American dance that doesn't throw you out when you hit forty. Bertye Lou Wood, Cleo Hayes, Marion Coles, Fay Ray, and Elaine Ellis were all, in their youth, chorus girls in Harlem, at



places such as the Cotton Club and the Apollo. When the bottom fell out of the tap scene, after the Second World War, they took other jobs. One was a bartender; one worked on the Alaska pipeline. In 1985, an energetic manager, Geri Kennedy, brought them together, and they hit the stage again, as the Silver Belles. This group is the subject of a documentary, "Been Rich All My Life," by Heather Lyn MacDonald, now playing at the Quad Cinema. The movie has marvellous archival footage. You get to see the chorus girls at the Apollo, tapping away in white shoes with pretty white bows. It will also improve your character to see the Silver Belles—all in their eighties or nineties, one with a pacemaker, another with a crutch—riding buses and subways for hours to get to their rehearsals. But the film's real treasure is the footage of the Silver Belles dancing today. "We mug now more than we used to," Coles says. They don't have to. They still swing.

—Joan Acocella
