

# "Old Hoofers Never Die!"



Honi Coles will knock you out with one of his steps. (The floor is his instrument.)

ON MARCH 30 and April 1, 1983, Eugene and Portland audiences (respectively) will revel in the showmanship and legendary skill of five of the greatest tap dancers alive—Honi Coles and the Copasetics. These unusual men, all in their 70s, will be joined by a remarkable dancer in her own right, a former protege of Honi Coles, Brenda Bufalino, who began her stage career at age six.

Each of the Copasetics is a legendary figure in dance history. Each has seen several eras in entertainment come and go and all are enjoying a revived interest in their art. As *Newsweek* (April 28, 1980), reports: "The revival is long overdue. . . . After decades of neglect, tap-dancing is in the spotlight again, thanks largely to the resurgence of jazz in the 1970s, nostalgia for the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers era and the re-staging of musicals like *No, No, Nanette*. Having survived the lean years, some of them as messengers and clerks, these marvelous entertainers are back on view, as astonishingly good as ever."

The Copasetics formed their club in 1949 shortly after Bill "Bojangles" Robinson died. In his memory, the dancers named their club the Copasetics. As the story goes, it was Bojangles who coined the phrase, "Everything is copasetic." "Honi Coles, Buster Brown, Charles 'Cookie' Cook, Ernest 'Brownie' Brown, Henry 'Baby' Phace Roberts, and Leslie 'Bubba' Gaines make sure it stays that way." (Linda Winer, *New York Daily News*).

"Bojangles" made the leap from Shirley Temple to the silver screen. For the most part, though, tap-dancing thrived on ghetto street corners, in black clubs and theaters, and especially the Hoofers Club, the "Harlem paradise of Tap Dancing" (*Newsweek*). Some performed as children in vaudeville teams and all have spent their lifetime developing unique styles all their own.

In a recent visit to Jefferson High School's Dance Department in Portland, guest artist Brenda Bufalino commented on the tap style of the Copasetics. Asked what Oregon audiences might see, she replied, "It will look informal, but it is rarely improvised. Every movement requires great attention to detail and a lot of finesse."

"We play music," she says. (The floor is their instrument). "We're not like Broadway tap. We add

texture and variety to the musician's playing. With the Copasetics (and all good, original tap), everyone is a stylist. And the goal over a lifetime is to develop one's own individuality as a dancer. The steps are very secret and sometimes dancers try to steal steps from one another. There are endless possibilities; otherwise, how could you stay with it for fifty years?"

So, Oregon audiences can expect some very competitive work—exciting challenges between artists. There will be collaboration, too. *Shim Sham*, for example, is a group piece, choreographed by Honi Coles. *Walk Around* is a Cole piece, as well.

Comedy is always a big part of the Copasetic show and audiences will delight at the zany repartee, the singing, and historical anecdotes. But above all, every ticketholder will have reserved a little piece of tap dance history—still in the making.

### PERFORMANCES:

**Wednesday evening, March 30, Eugene:**  
In Eugene, the performance of Honi Coles and the Copasetics is at the Silva Theater, Hult Center for the Performing Arts. Eugene press information: Mona Sturges, 345-8079. Tickets at University of Oregon and Hult Performing Arts Center.

**Friday evening, April 1, Portland:**  
In Portland, the performance is at Civic Auditorium. Tickets at Evergreen Events, Stevens and Son, Lloyd Center, Meier and Frank, Downtown and Salem.



The Copasetics: Charles Cook, Ernest Brown, Bubba Gaines, Bert Gibson and Buster Brown.

## The Incredible Copasetics:

**Note:** The biographical sketches below are so interesting as a group that they are all included. At this writing, Oregon will see Honi Coles who plans to use Bubba Gaines, Cookie Cook and Buster Brown in performance. Protege Brenda Bufalino joins them. Because the group is a club, and because contingencies and opportunities do arise, we may see a substitution, or an addition!

### The Copasetics—a fraternity of Black entertainers dedicated to Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

**Honi Coles,** presently Chairman of the Copasetics, was manager of the Apollo Theater from 1960 through 1976. He performed in the Broadway musical *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, and his first performance on Broadway was in *Helio, Dolly*. Mr. Coles performed with several acts such as the Miller Brothers. He is best known for his partnership with Charles "Cholly" Atkins. Coles and Atkins became legends of the profession when they developed a slow soft shoe style all their own. They were considered "the" class act of their time. Mr. Coles has toured the country with Agnes DeMille and was recently seen on the Dick Cavett Show.

**Buster Brown** toured the vaudeville circuit with the dance team Speed King Trio. He appeared in the movie *Something to Shout About* with Alice Faye and Jack Oakie. He toured South America with the Cab Calloway Orchestra and was commissioned by the United States Department of State to tour several African countries. He gave a command performance for the late Emperor Haile Selassie and appeared in Duke Ellington's Sacred Music Concert.

**Charles "Cookie" Cook and Ernest "Brownie" Brown** both began their careers in vaudeville. They became well-known as the dance team Cook and Brown, famous for their eccentric slapstick comedy style. They have toured with the orchestras of Duke Ellington and Count Basie. Charles Cook appeared on Broadway in *Kiss Me Kate*.

**Leslie "Bubba" Gaines** is a charter member of The Three Dukes, the "international aristocrats of dance." He has had a long

and varied career in show business, working with Cab Calloway and other leading orchestras in such well-known clubs as the Casino de Paris, the London Palladium, the Empire in Dublin, and New York's Cotton Club. After WW II he toured in USO shows. He appears in the Copasetics video documentary, *Great Feats of Feet*, directed by Brenda Bufalino.

### On the same program with the Copasetics will be Louie Sims

**Brenda Bufalino** has performed, choreographed, and taught in the jazz idiom throughout her extensive career in nightclubs, concert and television. She has created a unique form of jazz, synthesized from her training in Afro-Cuban, ballet, jazz, and tap dance.

A pioneer in the resurgence of jazz and tap dance, Ms. Bufalino performed in the Avant Garde as soloist and with her company at colleges and in concert across the country. She choreographed and performed in a television special for CBS, "Love Up and Live," with original music composed by Ed Summerlin.

In addition to her solo concerts, guest artist appearances and company performances, Ms. Bufalino performs in concert with Honi Coles, her early teacher and mentor. Together they have toured America, London and France. They have appeared on BBC Television in England, and on cable for "Atlantic City Live." They choreographed the Morton Gould Tap Concerto and performed the Concerto with the Brooklyn Philharmonia and the Norwalk Symphony.

documentary "Great Feats of Feet—A Portrait of the Jazz Tap Dancer" featuring the Copasetics. This tape, available for distribution, has won several awards and most recently was exhibited at the International Dance Film and Video Festival at the George Pompidou Center in Paris, France. She has published articles on tap dance, and interviewed Honi Coles for WBGH Television's National Feature Archives series.



Brenda Bufalino (left) and Charles Cook (right) and members of the Copasetics will set you on fire with their fancy footwork.

In 1975, Ms. Bufalino received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to direct and produce a two-hour videotape



Brenda Bufalino (left) and Charles Cook (right) and members of the Copasetics will set you on fire with their fancy footwork.

# "Singers' Singer" Carmen McCrae

AFTER THREE DECADES of awards, worldwide touring, numerous albums and awards, one of the greatest female jazz singers of all time, Carmen McCrae, is on the road again and scheduled to perform one concert for Portland audiences Saturday night, April 2, 1983, at the Civic Auditorium.

Carmen McCrae has been called a "singers' singer." She is in constant demand for public appearances by fans both young and old, hip and not so hip. As an established entertainer, she more than satisfies the increasingly critical demands of younger America with such popular concert engagements as those at the Monterey Jazz Festival and the Newport Jazz Festival. Her engagements at U.C. Berkeley brought typical reviews: "The audience didn't want her to leave and brought her back for several encores and a wild ovation."

As for the mature audiences, Carmer has an equally ardent following which takes her to the poshest niteries and concert halls in the world, including Ronnie Scott's in London, the Lincoln Center in New York, Carnegie Hall, the Playboy Club in Los Angeles, the Caribe Hilton in Puerto Rico, the Eden Roc in Miami, the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, along with the Great American Music Hall and the "chic" Mocambo in San Francisco, and the renowned Concerts By The Sea in Redondo Beach, California.

Among her fellow entertainers, her fans are legion—Billy Eckstine, Sarah Vaughn, Della Reese, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Sammie Davis, Jr., with whom she has toured, and many more whose encouragement has helped Carmen to reach the top of her profession.

Carmen has been the subject of feature story in *Time* Magazine, as well as a cover story in the "bible" of the music business, *Downbeat* Magazine, which stated: "The impact of the McCrae charisma is being widely felt: the cult is expanding into popular acclaim."

The road to the top, to success as one of America's favorite ladies of song, was not easy. But, as Carmen says, "The only answer to trouble is to survive it." While growing up in Manhattan, Carmen took classical piano lessons and, after falling under the spell of the great Billie Holiday, decided to become a singer.



Carmen McCrae has been called a "singers' singer."

During the '40s she worked intermittently as a band vocalist (with Mercer Ellington, Benny Carter, and Count Basie, among others), filling in the gaps with jobs as a chorus girl and secretary. By the time a Chicago club hired her as a singer-pianist in 1940, she was so broke she had to borrow money from the owner to join the local union. But in the early '50s, Carmen stepped out from behind the ivories as a solo singer, cut her first records, and the rest is history.

The *Saturday Review* Magazine has stated that "Carmen McCrae today commands attention on her own terms. Songs seem not merely songs to her, but experience, about which she has intimate knowledge. Most important, a delicate balance has been struck in

her offerings. Lyrics, content, time and sound fall together, each one nourishing the other."

"Miss McCrae delves to the heart, touching the listener with her understanding, passion, craftsmanship; her ability to transmit a song into a personal happening." And, as *Time* Magazine put it, when you experience Carmen McCrae in person and she "molds a song's line and beat like a favorite sofa pillow . . . you know you have experienced something special."

In the past few years, Carmen has released many albums. The first, a two-record set for Atlantic is entitled "The Great American Song Book," and was recorded live at Donte's in Los Angeles. For admirers of great jazz singing, this one is a must. The second album is for Temponic Records and is entitled simply, "Carmen." The album consists of original songs written by Bob Friedman and arranged by Benny Carter and his All-Star Orchestra.

On the Blue Note Label of United Artists, Carmen has the following albums in release: *I Am Music, Can't Hide Love, Blue Note At The Roxy*, and *Carmen McCrae At The Great American Music Hall*. And now, Carmen greets the '80s with her debut album on Versatile, *I'm Coming Home Again*, and her most recent triumph, an album on the Concord label with George Shearing, *Two For The Road*, the October 1982 number one album on the Billboard charts.

In the past few years, Carmen has been more in demand than ever with appearances that have spanned the continents, including Japan, The Far East, Australia, South America and Mexico. She has just recently concluded a very successful tour of Europe with George Wien's Newport Jazz Festival. The critics raved at Carmen's recent appearance at the Hollywood Bowl as part of the 1980 Playboy Jazz Festival, and she appeared again at the Bowl recently in the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Jazz Series with Mel Torme.

### On the same program: Ron Steen Trio

OPENING the Carmen McCrae concert will be Portland Oregon's own jazz drummer, Ron Steen, and his trio. He plays the kind of jazz he wants to play without making any kind of commercial compromises. A 33-year-old musician, young in the music business, plays today's music but who is firmly entrenched in the philosophy of purity of jazz believed in by his early heroes.

*The New York Times* Thursday, 12/10/81

### Cabaret: Carmen McCrae by John S. Wilson

The image of a tough, salty lady that Carmen McCrae cultivated for many years has recently been softening. In her performances here, Miss McCrae is singing with more emphasis on thoughtful interpretation and sensitive shading than she once did. And she is a much more compelling singer as a result.

Miss McCrae has not abandoned the basic elements of her style. But her declamatory manner of projecting lyrics which was once curt and flippant, has been slowed down, filled out, given coloring. She is involved in her songs rather than gazing at them coolly from a distance. She has opened herself up, made herself vulnerable and, in the process, changed to one who can get the emotional depths of a song.

She is still using her habit of seizing the words of a lyric, very deliberately, one by one. But instead of throwing them away, she is nurturing them and finding the colors in them. It is a method that she uses with great skill on such ballads as "Too Late Now" and "My Foolish Heart." And when she takes off at faster tempos, she still provides a foundation for mannerisms that never quite work on songs.

### New York Post 12/2/81 McCrae's wisdom is quiet, internal by Curt Davis

You don't go to see Carmen McCrae for stimulation or animation. You go to see her for the quietness of lyrical wisdom and a vocal mobility within a small but well-controlled range. She swings but not always along the melody line. She seems to enjoy some pop but her heart is in her ballads. And that's where her jazz is too.

### Jazz Scene Lynn Darroch, Editor

According to the late Ralph Gleason, "She occupies a place in the hearts of jazz musicians that is very special."



If Carmen McCrae's singing doesn't put you in a good mood, her smile will turn you on. "She makes lyrics live and throb."

Born in Brooklyn in 1922, Carmen had the good fortune to befriend Billie Holiday in 1939, and later appeared at Minton's in the heyday of bebop as an intermission pianist and sometime singer. Both experiences taught her the importance of portraying emotion in her music and contributed to her ability to turn a song into a story, to make it come



Carmen McCrae is one of the greatest jazz singers of all time. Long live the great Carmen McCrae.

Carmen McCrae recorded her first album in the early 1950s, and since that time has had a spectacularly successful career for a jazz musician, with a home in L.A.'s Benedict Canyon and numerous albums to show for it, as well as a continuing string of concert appearances and near-unanimous critical acclaim. But all this has not turned her from the path of truth and jazz. "I don't want a household name like Pat Boone for anything in the world. . . . From where I sit, if that's what you like, then there's nothing I could even begin to say that you'd understand. The Pat Boone way of singing doesn't make you think. . . . For a singer, the only thing that has to be for you to understand is the words. And if you're not going to listen, then what are they offering? Nothing. And if that's what you want—nothing—then don't listen to me. 'Cause I have something to say and I don't want to talk to the air." As Ralph Gleason put it, "She can get a quality of intimacy into a public performance that is almost embarrassing, it's so real."