

history of the lindy hop

history of the lindy hop traces the origins and evolution of one of the most dynamic and influential swing dances in American culture. Emerging in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Lindy Hop combined elements of jazz, tap, breakaway, and Charleston to create a new, energetic style of dance. This article explores the cultural and social contexts that gave rise to the Lindy Hop, its key pioneers, and the dance's growth in popularity through the Swing Era. It also examines the decline and revival of the Lindy Hop in later decades, highlighting its ongoing significance in dance communities worldwide. Through a detailed look at the dance's stylistic features and historical milestones, readers will gain a comprehensive understanding of the history of the Lindy Hop. The following sections provide a structured overview of the Lindy Hop's origins, development, and legacy.

- Origins of the Lindy Hop
- Key Figures and Influences
- The Lindy Hop During the Swing Era
- Decline and Rediscovery
- Modern Revival and Global Impact

Origins of the Lindy Hop

The history of the Lindy Hop begins in the vibrant cultural setting of Harlem, New York City, during the late 1920s. This period was marked by the Harlem Renaissance, a flourishing of African American arts, music, and social life. The Lindy Hop was born as a fusion of several dance styles popular at the time, including jazz, tap, Charleston, and breakaway. It was initially danced to the upbeat rhythms of swing jazz bands, which were gaining popularity across the United States.

Cultural Context

The social atmosphere of Harlem was integral to the emergence of the Lindy Hop. Dance halls such as the Savoy Ballroom provided a space where people of diverse backgrounds could come together to express themselves through dance. The Savoy was unique because it was one of the few integrated venues during the era, allowing both Black and white dancers to share the floor. This environment fostered creativity and innovation in dance styles.

Musical Influences

Jazz music, especially swing jazz, was the driving force behind the Lindy Hop's development. Bands led by Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Chick Webb provided the infectious rhythms that inspired dancers. The syncopated beats and improvisational nature of swing music perfectly matched the energetic and spontaneous characteristics of the Lindy Hop.

Key Figures and Influences

Several influential dancers and choreographers played a crucial role in shaping the history of the Lindy Hop. Their innovations helped formalize the dance and spread its popularity beyond Harlem.

“Shorty” George Snowden

George Snowden, known as “Shorty,” is widely credited as one of the Lindy Hop's originators. He was a regular at the Savoy Ballroom and known for his distinctive style and footwork. Shorty's improvisational flair and charisma helped define the early Lindy Hop's playful and athletic nature.

Frankie Manning

Frankie Manning is perhaps the most iconic figure in the history of the Lindy Hop. Manning's inventive aerial moves and smooth style contributed significantly to the dance's evolution during the 1930s and 1940s. He also helped codify Lindy Hop techniques and was instrumental in its resurgence during the 1980s revival.

Other Influential Dancers

- Norma Miller – Known as the “Queen of Swing,” she was a prominent Lindy Hop dancer and ambassador.
- Al Minns – A key figure in preserving and teaching the Lindy Hop during the dance's revival.
- Leon James – One of the original Savoy Lindy Hoppers who contributed to popularizing the dance.

The Lindy Hop During the Swing Era

The Swing Era, roughly spanning the 1930s to the mid-1940s, marked the height of the Lindy Hop's popularity. During this time, the dance became a central part of American social life and entertainment.

Social Significance

The Lindy Hop was more than just a dance; it was a social phenomenon that brought people together during the difficult years of the Great Depression and World War II. Its joyful, improvisational style provided an outlet for self-expression and community bonding. Dance contests and performances featuring the Lindy Hop were common, further increasing its reach.

Appearance in Film and Media

The Lindy Hop gained national attention through its inclusion in films and stage shows. Movies such as "Hellzapoppin'" (1941) showcased Lindy Hop performances that impressed audiences with their athleticism and creativity. These appearances helped solidify the dance's place in American popular culture.

Technical Developments

The Swing Era saw the introduction of complex aerials and partner routines, elevating the Lindy Hop to a high-energy, acrobatic dance. These innovations required significant skill and training, making Lindy Hop performances both thrilling and artistically sophisticated.

Decline and Rediscovery

Following the Swing Era, the popularity of the Lindy Hop declined as musical tastes shifted and new dance styles emerged. However, the dance never disappeared entirely and experienced a significant revival decades later.

Post-War Changes

After World War II, the rise of bebop jazz, rock and roll, and other musical genres led to changes in social dancing preferences. Big band music, which had been central to the Lindy Hop, became less dominant. Consequently, the dance faded from mainstream visibility during the 1950s and 1960s.

Preservation Efforts

Despite the decline, dedicated dancers and historians worked to preserve the Lindy Hop's legacy. Original dancers like Frankie Manning continued to teach and perform the dance, ensuring its survival. Archival footage and oral histories from the Savoy Ballroom era became valuable resources for future generations.

Modern Revival and Global Impact

The history of the Lindy Hop took a new turn in the 1980s and beyond with a global revival that brought the dance back into the spotlight. This resurgence was fueled by renewed interest in swing music and vintage dance culture.

1980s Swing Revival

The Lindy Hop revival began with a group of dancers and enthusiasts in New York City who sought to rediscover and revive authentic Lindy Hop techniques. Frankie Manning's involvement was crucial in this movement, as he taught new generations the original style and spirit of the dance.

International Spread

Today, the Lindy Hop is danced worldwide, with vibrant communities in Europe, Asia, Australia, and beyond. International dance festivals, workshops, and competitions celebrate the dance's rich history and evolving practice.

Contemporary Lindy Hop

Modern Lindy Hop blends traditional techniques with contemporary influences, allowing dancers to innovate while respecting the dance's heritage. The use of social media and digital platforms has also expanded the dance's reach, connecting enthusiasts globally.

Key Elements of Lindy Hop

- **Swing Out:** The foundational partner move that defines Lindy Hop.
- **Aerials:** High-flying acrobatic moves introduced during the Swing Era.
- **Improvisation:** A core aspect allowing dancers to creatively interpret the music.
- **Connection:** Emphasis on partner connection and communication.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Lindy Hop?

The Lindy Hop is a swing dance that originated in Harlem, New York City, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It combines elements of jazz, tap, breakaway, and Charleston and is known for its energetic and improvisational style.

Where did the Lindy Hop get its name?

The Lindy Hop was named after Charles Lindbergh's famous 1927 solo nonstop transatlantic flight, which was popularly known as the 'Lindy Hop.' The dance was named to capture the excitement and novelty of this achievement.

Who is credited as the founder of the Lindy Hop?

While the Lindy Hop evolved from various dance styles, George 'Shorty' Snowden and his partner Mattie Purnell are often credited with pioneering the dance at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem during the late 1920s.

What role did the Savoy Ballroom play in the history of the Lindy Hop?

The Savoy Ballroom in Harlem was a crucial venue for the development and popularization of the Lindy Hop. It was an integrated dance hall where dancers of all backgrounds came together, fostering creativity and innovation in the dance.

How did the Lindy Hop influence other dance styles?

The Lindy Hop influenced many later swing dances such as East Coast Swing and West Coast Swing. Its emphasis on improvisation, partner connection, and energetic footwork helped shape the evolution of social and performance swing dances worldwide.

How did the Lindy Hop evolve during the 1930s and 1940s?

During the 1930s and 1940s, the Lindy Hop grew in popularity through performances by groups like Whitey's Lindy Hoppers and appearances in Hollywood films. The dance incorporated more acrobatic moves and aerials, showcasing its athletic and theatrical potential.

Why did the popularity of the Lindy Hop decline after World War II?

After World War II, the popularity of the Lindy Hop declined due to changing musical tastes, the rise of rock and roll, and social changes. Many venues closed, and swing dancing was largely replaced by other dance styles in mainstream culture.

What sparked the revival of the Lindy Hop in the late 20th century?

The Lindy Hop revival began in the 1980s and 1990s when dancers and historians rediscovered original Lindy Hop footage and sought to recreate the dance. Communities grew globally, and the dance regained popularity through festivals, workshops, and social dancing.

How is the history of the Lindy Hop preserved today?

The history of the Lindy Hop is preserved through archival footage, oral histories, documentaries, and dedicated dance schools and organizations. Events like the Herräng Dance Camp and various swing dance festivals help keep the tradition alive and educate new generations.

Additional Resources

1. *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Lindy Hop Revolution*

This book explores the cultural explosion of the Lindy Hop during the swing era, focusing on the big band jazz scene that fueled its popularity. It delves into the origins of the dance in Harlem and its evolution through the 1930s and 1940s. Readers gain insight into the key figures and venues that shaped the Lindy Hop's distinctive style.

2. *Harlem's Rhythm: The Birth and Rise of the Lindy Hop*

A comprehensive history of the Lindy Hop's roots in Harlem, New York City, this book highlights the social and artistic environment that gave rise to the dance. It examines how African American communities and dancers like Frankie Manning contributed to the development of the Lindy Hop. The narrative also addresses the dance's impact on American culture during the swing era.

3. *Frankie Manning: Ambassador of Swing*

This biography chronicles the life of Frankie Manning, one of the most influential Lindy Hop dancers and choreographers. It traces his journey from the dance halls of Harlem to international stages, showing how he helped preserve and revive the Lindy Hop. The book includes personal anecdotes and insights into the dance's technical and cultural significance.

4. *Lindy Hop: The Dance That Changed America*

Focusing on the transformative power of the Lindy Hop, this book examines how the dance broke racial and social barriers in the United States. It covers the dance's origins, popularization in Hollywood films, and its role in fostering a sense of community. The author also discusses the Lindy Hop revival movements from the late 20th century onward.

5. *Jitterbugging Through History: Lindy Hop and the Swing Era*

This work situates the Lindy Hop within the broader context of jitterbug dances and swing music's golden age. It offers a detailed look at the technical elements of the Lindy Hop alongside its historical development. Readers will find interviews with veteran dancers and analyses of iconic Lindy Hop performances.

6. *The Savoy Ballroom Story: Heartbeat of the Lindy Hop*

Centering on the legendary Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, this book highlights the venue's crucial role in the evolution of the Lindy Hop. It recounts the competitive dance battles, innovative choreography, and vibrant social scene that defined the Savoy. The narrative captures the spirit of the era and the dance's enduring legacy.

7. *From Harlem to Hollywood: The Lindy Hop's Journey*

This book traces the Lindy Hop's path from its origins in Harlem to its depiction in Hollywood films and beyond. It discusses how the dance influenced and was influenced by popular culture, including movies, music, and fashion. The book also examines the challenges faced by African American dancers in mainstream media.

8. *Keepin' the Swing Alive: The Lindy Hop Revival*

Documenting the resurgence of interest in Lindy Hop from the 1980s onwards, this book highlights the efforts of dancers and historians to revive and preserve the dance. It features profiles of key revivalists and explores the global spread of Lindy Hop communities. The book emphasizes the importance of historical accuracy and cultural respect in the revival.

9. *Dancing Through Time: A Social History of the Lindy Hop*

This book provides a social history perspective on the Lindy Hop, examining how it reflected and influenced race relations, gender roles, and youth culture in America. It discusses the dance as a form of expression and resistance within African American communities. The narrative connects the Lindy Hop's past with contemporary social dynamics in dance culture.

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