

The Lindy Hop

A TRUE NATIONAL FOLK DANCE HAS BEEN BORN IN U.S.A.

One evening in 1927, after Lindbergh's flight to Paris, some young Negro couples began improvising eccentric off-time steps in a corner of the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. On the sidelines a connoisseur of dancing named "Shorty George" Snowden watched critically, then muttered, "Look at them kids hoppin' over there. I guess they're doin' the Lindy Hop." Today, after 16 years of evolution and accretion, the Lindy Hop has become America's national dance.

In content, the Lindy Hop encompasses hundreds of individual steps, breaks and mutations

originated by Americans inspired by American music. With the exception of the tap dance, it is this country's only native and original dance form. All others, "square" or "round," are importations and derivations from European prototypes. American dancers, however, have always been gifted with an aptitude for improvisation. And American jazz imperatively demands more exuberant responses than traditional dance steps can provide. Out of American impatience with the restrictions of conventional forms, the buoyant choreography of the Lindy Hop was born.

To elders the gyrations of jitterbugs may appear disordered and vulgar. It is true that as recently as three years ago a jitterbug was anyone who bounced, wiggled and jumped in time to hot music without any particular knowledge of what he was doing. But the accomplished jitterbug of the present does the Lindy Hop, a dance still in a phase of transition and growth, but whose basic steps have crystallized into recognizable patterns. Of these, the most important and spectacular are shown on the following pages in high-speed action pictures taken by Photographer Gjon Mili.





CHARLESTON REVOLUTIONIZED DANCING IN 1925



FIRST ELEMENT OF LINDY HOP WAS THIS SIMPLE BREAKAWAY



THE SHAG BECAME POPULAR IN U.S. COLLEGES IN 1927

Floor Steps

Although the Lindy Hop did not receive a name until 1927, elements of it were visible as early as 1924, in the Broadway and Harlem "mooch" and "sugar." In 1925 the Charleston revolutionized American dancing by freeing partners from the stylized vis-à-vis position of the fox trot and waltz. The Lindy Hop picked up where the Charleston left off, with the first swing-outs, break-aways and "shine steps" added to a basic off-beat two-step.

In its early days the Lindy flourished only in lower strata of society. Negroes were its creators and principal exponents, and Arthur Murray would no more have taught the Lindy Hop than Rachmaninoff would have given lessons in boogie-woogie. But with the renaissance of swing the Lindy climbed the social scale. New steps like Suzy-Q, Trucking and Jig-Walk were invented and absorbed into its expanding framework. And as they spread across the land, invading colleges and dance schools, the Lindy Hop attained respectability as a truly national dance. On these pages Gjon Mili's camera records some of its most characteristic floor steps as demonstrated by Stanley Catron and Kaye Popp, both 17, both of the Broadway musical, *Something for the Boys*.



MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF LINDY IS THE SWING-OUT. IN THIS SIMPLE VERSION, 1) THE BOY STEPS BACK



THIS IS PECKING, A BREAK FEATURING HENLIKE MOVEMENTS OF HEAD



CHARLESTON IS IMPORTANT PART OF LINDY. MODERN VERSION INVOLVES VIGOROUS KICKING FORE & AFT



JIG-WALK IS A BASIC FLOOR STEP INTRODUCED ABOUT 1930



THE TWIST, AN EARLY INVENTION, GIVES GIRL A CHANCE TO "SHINE"



JOCKEY IS A TEMPO-SETTER AND PRELUDE



WITH LEFT FOOT BUT DOES NOT SHIFT WEIGHT; 2) BRINGS LEFT FORWARD, PIVOTING ON RIGHT; 3) SWEEPS RIGHT AROUND BEHIND LEFT AS GIRL STEPS AWAY; 4) COMPLETES SWING-OUT



THE TRIP JIG-WALK IS A FANCY MANEUVER SUITABLE ONLY FOR CONTEST OR EXHIBITION PURPOSES. FUNDAMENTALLY IT IS AN ADAGIO VARIATION OF BASIC JIG-WALK SHOWN ABOVE

Shine Steps



THE TIP IS AN OPEN STEP WHICH FAINTLY RESEMBLES THE OLD-FASHIONED CAKEWALK

WITH RIGHT HAND UP, THE SHUFFLE CALLED "TRUCKING" CONVEYS REPPRESSED EC



THE SUZY-Q APPEARED IN 1937, SPREAD FROM HARLEM ACROSS NATION

FAST SWING-OUTS CAN BE JUST AS GRACEFUL AS BALLET PIROUETS WHEN THEY ARE PROPERLY PER



THE BOOGIE IS CHARACTERIZED BY SINUOUS HIP ROTATION SUGGESTIVE OF HAWAIIAN HULA VERTICAL LIFTING MOVEMENTS OF SHOULDERS FEATURE THE SABU OR SHORTY GEORGE



IN THIS VARIATION OF JIG-WALK, BOY SHINES BY INTERPOLATING A KICK WHILE HIS PARTNER TWISTS, BOY GOES INTO A KNEE-DROP, A STIRRING CLIMAX FOR A HOT BREAK

Air Steps

In ballrooms and night clubs Lindy Hoppers for the most part keep their feet on the ground. But professionals and competitors in Lindy contests distinguish between "floor steps" (as shown on the preceding pages) and "air steps" like those demonstrated here. It was during the late 1930's that the Lindy Hop took to the air. In entering new realms of creative invention, it is following the evolutionary cycle of all dances since the beginning of recorded time: first the rhythmic, primitive folk dance, sprung from the spontaneous responses of humble people to musical inspiration; then the social dance, popular with all classes and defined by fixed and basic patterns; and finally the classic form, far removed from proletarian origins and ornamented with complex flowery figures attainable only by those who spend years in their practice.

The Lindy Hop is now in the second phase. But while its accepted ballroom characteristics are still unfolding, its greatest exponents advance into new domains. It may be that the Lindy Hop 25 years from now will be as intricate and stylized as the ballet. On these pages its most florid evolutions are interpreted by Leon James and Willa Mae Ricker, superlative performers who have exhibited their art throughout the world.



AMONG AIR STEPS, NONE IS MORE SPECTACULAR THAN THE "ROUND-THE-BACK," ANALYZED IN THE SEQUENCE



LEON LIFTS WILLA MAE HIGH IN THE AIR AND KICKS BETWEEN HER STRADDLED LEGS IN MODERN CHARLESTON MUTATION



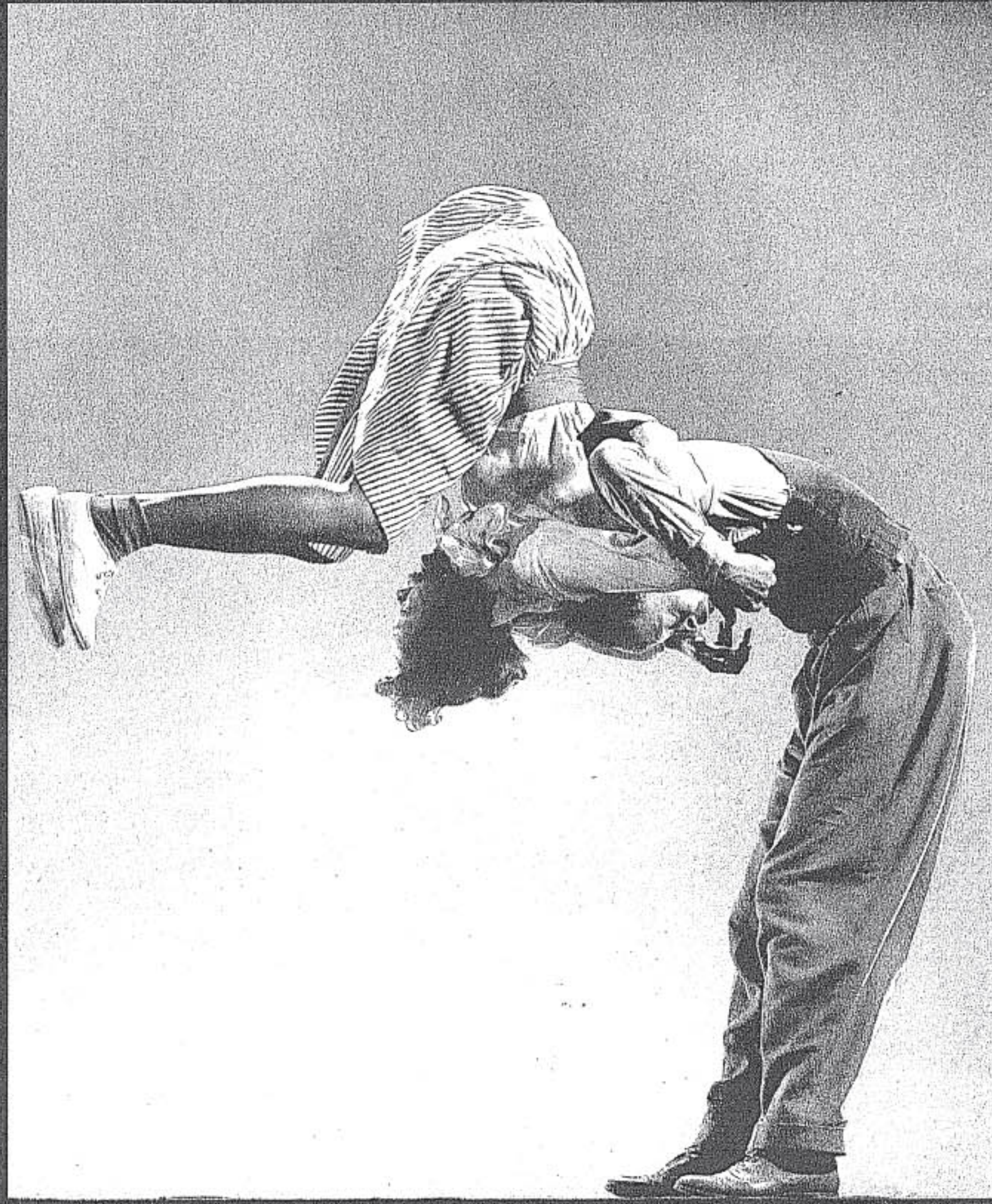
WHILE WILLA MAE TWIRLS, LEON DOES A REVERSE JUMP.



THE ABILITY TO LEAD A PARTNER UNERRINGLY INTO DIFFICULT FIGURES LIKE THIS, IN THE COURSE OF FAST IMPROVISATION, IS THE SUPREME ART OF THE MALE LINDY EXPERT



HAVE INVENTED MANY NEW LINDY HOP STEPS



FOR THIS FIGURE PARTNERS STOOD BACK TO BACK, LOCKED ARMS. LEON BENT FORWARD, ROLLED WILLA MAE UP AND OVER



BORROWING FROM BALLET REPERTOIRE, LEON JAMES EXECUTES A PIROUET. FIRST HE KICKS TO PICK UP MOMENTUM, THEN SPINS BACKWARD TO HIS RIGHT, PIVOTING ON HIS HEEL



LEON GOES INTO A SLIDE, STEADIED BY WILLA MAE. THIS IS HIS SPECIALTY. UNDER PROPER CONDITIONS HE CAN COAST LENGTH OF BALLROOM FLOOR POISED ON HEEL AND TO



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LIFE'S COVER: Kaye Popp and Stanley Catron, both 17 and both professional dancers, are currently appearing in the Broadway hit, *Something for the Boys*. Here they illustrate the fall-down Jig-Walk, a dramatic "shine" step in the Lindy Hop. This difficult step is seen more often in contests and exhibitions than in ordinary ballrooms. For demonstration of the Lindy Hop, see pages 95-103.

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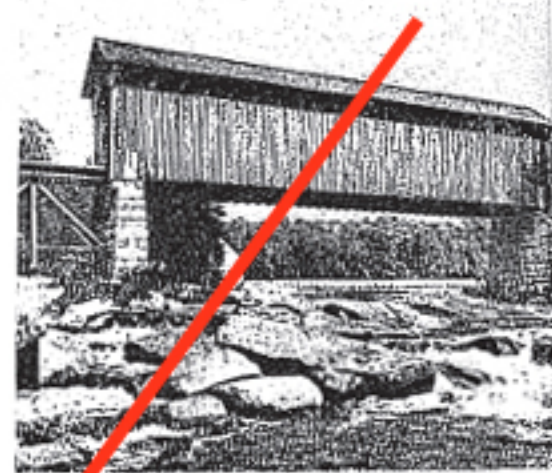
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