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Trina Hoaks
Everyday People Examiner

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American dance legend, Frankie Manning, dies at 94

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One of the greatest American legends, [Frankie Manning](#), died Monday at 94 years old of pneumonia. He is responsible for creating the "air step" that has since become a part of many styles of dance. He originally incorporated an air step, or aerial, into Lindy Hop during its heyday. Never mind that he was part of the reason that Lindy Hop, which is touted as the first American dance, rose to the top of popularity in the early 1900s.

In the early days he was a staple at Harlem's The Savoy Ballroom. At the time, The Savoy was the only club in the area that was racially integrated, and it very quickly became a hot spot. That was back in the 1920s. Many talented people got their starts there, including [Frankie Manning](#), who first went into the Savoy in 1933. He was a part of Whitey Ford's Lindy Hoppers, which originated at the ballroom. The group went on to star in films, including *Hellzapoppin*, in 1941. You can see Frankie in the mechanics outfit in the video below. As a Lindy Hopper, I can tell you, it takes a great deal of athletic and dance ability to pull this off at a normal pace, but to do it to music this fast really takes a great deal of talent. (Article continues below video.)

I met [Frankie Manning](#) a couple of years ago when the swing dance troupe I was in, Swingtastic, performed for him. During the weekend, Frankie taught a couple of workshops. And, although his aged body limited what he could do, he remained inspiring, positive, and charming. He was a great dance teacher. And he loved to dance because, according to him, "you can't be mad when you're dancing." And as a testament to that, he had a smile on his face the entire time he was teaching, watching our performance, or talking to random people about dance. (article continues below video.)

After serving during WWII, Frankie tried to get a dance group going, the Congaroo Dancers. It was short lived because dance was changing. He had a family to support so he started working for the Post Office where he stayed until he retired 30 years later. Then one day he was approached by a group of dancers who were interested in bringing swing dance back. They pulled Frankie out of retirement and the swing revival began.

Frankie went on to win a Tony for his part in the choreography of the Broadway hit *Black and Blue*. He also worked on other projects, including *Malcolm X*. His book, [Frankie Manning: Ambassador of Lindy Hop](#) made it #7 on Amazon's Bestseller list in May, 2007



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Frankie Manning was an innovator in the dance world. He was kind and passionate. My son and I agree that we are happy that we had the chance to meet him. His positivity was infectious and he was truly inspirational. He was one of those people who was so full of life that you think they'll never die... even though you know better.

RIP Frankie - May 26, 1914 to April 27, 2009

A Weekend with Frankie Manning



I met Frankie Manning two year ago in Orlando during "A Weekend with Frankie Manning."

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Author: Trina Hoaks



Trina Hoaks is a National Examiner. You can see Trina's articles on [Trina's Home Page](#).

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Comments

Angie Whitworth Pace says:

I moved to Salt Lake City a year ago, but I was lucky and honored to have known, learned from, performed and taught with Frankie for 15 years in New York City. He was an incredible, talented man with a heart as big as his laugh. I will miss him.

April 28, 3:45 PM

Elizabeth9 says:

You've written a wonderful tribute to him. The dancing is amazing, they could compete in the athletic section in the Olympics!

April 28, 5:51 AM

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