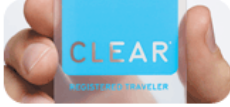


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Lindy Hop Pioneer Dies



Frankie "Musclehead" Manning, 94, a Harlem dancer and Tony Award-winning choreographer who became widely celebrated as one of the pioneers of the "Lindy Hop," a breathlessly acrobatic swing dance style of the 1930s and 1940s, died April 27 at New York's Lenox Hill Hospital of pneumonia.

Mr. Manning became a star attraction of the Savoy ballroom in Harlem starting in the mid-1930s. Ebullient and effortlessly nimble, Mr. Manning helped define the Lindy Hop by inventing the "air step" move that included hoisting and flipping a female partner so she shoots over the male's head.

Mr. Manning was recruited to join Whitey's Lindy Hoppers, a dance performance team that appeared in Hollywood movies such as "Hellzapoppin'" (1941). Here's a dazzling example of his work, with Mr. Manning in overalls:



In 1989, Mr. Manning teamed with other dance legends Fayard Nicholas, Cholly Atkins and Henry LeTang to choreograph the musical revue "Black and Blue," which ran two years on Broadway. All the choreographers shared the Tony that year. Mr. Manning went on to compose dance steps for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the Spike Lee film "Malcolm X," in which he taught the Lindy Hop to actor Denzel Washington.

By Adam Bernstein | April 27, 2009; 3:33 PM ET | Category: [Adam Bernstein](#)
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It is difficult to write about a personal friend and dance icon so soon after his death. His long life was filled with accomplishments that few could ever equal. As an innovator, he gave Lindy Hop (jitterbug) the airsteps that would make it world famous. His swing dance choreography remains the gold standard (he won a Tony award). He was a bona fide war hero, having a Silver Star awarded for service in WWII (a fact he rarely mentioned). Long after most men would be in retirement, Frankie toured the world as the ambassador of lindy hop. Without his tireless efforts, I doubt that lindy would have returned to the social dance landscape and be exposed to a whole new generation of dancers around the world. Dancers of all ages around the world mourn his passing. On a more personal note, Frankie was one of the kindest, upbeat and generous humans I've been privileged to know. His only mission was to spread the joy of the dance. "Ah one, ah two, you know what to do...."

Posted by: [danceman](#) | April 28, 2009 1:28 AM

danceman speaks for me.

My fondest memory was helping to arrange a visit for him to the Duke Ellington School for the Arts for a workshop with the dance master class. He began the class with some warm-up exercises, then stopped.

"You all dance so beautifully and gracefully. But this is Lindy Hop. It's time to get funky!" he said.

The dancers laughed, immediately relaxed their perfect postures, bent their knees and loosened up completely.

On a more personal note to you, Adam, I was on the e-mail chain that attempted to get information to you. Thank you for the hard work on your end to get the word out about this wonderful man, as well as so many others who also deserve to be remembered.

Posted by: [mdreader01](#) | April 28, 2009 11:02 AM

I had the fortune of being Frankie's driver for two trips to Baltimore. Imagine that- a white driver for the man they wanted to keep from seeing Billie Holiday sing in Las Vegas because he was black..? Even Frankie would have to say things have changed a bit. Frankie always seemed to look right past people's differences- race - dance styles- whatever and bring them together. What a positive life force!

I'll miss Frankie's laugh the most. Last night to honor him my girlfriend learned the Shim Sham from scratch watching his video over and over. She wanted to do it with us in his honor. All I could hear was his constant laughter as she re-wound the tape over and over. Frankie just does that to people.

Those of us who met and knew him have a special burden now. We cannot let his love of people and dance fade. My laugh may be different- I'm sure it's not as infectious- but you will be hearing it alot more now. Thanks Frankie.. for giving me that!

Posted by: [Candyman37](#) | April 28, 2009 12:35 PM

The "Lindy Hop" was Jitterbug on steroids - dance taken to a whole new level. Pass well onto the next level, Mr. Manning - RIP.

Posted by: [BinM](#) | April 28, 2009 1:49 PM

My all-time favorite movie is "It's a Wonderful Life", because it really makes you think about the difference your life has made in the lives of others.

As I looked around Chevy Chase Ballroom last night, I was not only struck

by the vast numbers of people that Frankie directly or indirectly touched as dancers, but also the huge number of people who owe their partners/spouses, close friends and livelihoods to him. If it hadn't been for Frankie, we would not have experienced the sheer joy that is dancing the lindy hop and our measure of laughter and happiness from times spent with good friends would have been much, much smaller.

So, Frankie, based on the number of people whose lives you changed for the better, you truly did have a wonderful life. And thank you for enriching mine more than you can know.

Posted by: lindylady1 | April 28, 2009 4:42 PM

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