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This Joint is Still Jumpin'

U Student Club Carries on Swing Dance Tradition

By Tate, Laurelin

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In the old days, when the lights dimmed and the band started to play, the dance floor was filled. Nowadays, the slow song shuffle and the popular head-nodding dominate the dance floor.



Media Credit: Tada, Dave
 Mike Cuomo and Trista Petersen dance at a Swing Kids activity in the Naval Science Building.

When swing became popular for a second time in 1997, the Associated Students of the University of Utah sponsored club, Swing Kids, was established.

The members of Swing Kids dance the East Coast Swing, Savoy Style Lindy Hop, Hollywood Style Lindy Hop, Jitterbug, West Coast Swing, Collegiate Shag, Balboa Shag, Charleston and Jive.

The main dance step that the group focuses on is the Savoy Lindy Hop. Bryce Beattie, president of Swing Kids and a computer science major, said the Lindy Hop is more difficult than other dances, but it is most fun.

James Jensen, second vice-president of the club and also a computer science major, said that a beginner should start with the East Coast Swing because it is easy and fun.

There are two main Lindy Hops, the Savoy and the Hollywood. Both are said to be creations of "Shorty" George Snowden. Snowden came up with one of the first swing dance steps in the Savoy Ballroom in

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- news
- opinion
- sports

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- chrony alumni
- contact us

- events
- archive
- letter to editor
- publishing policy
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Harlem, N.Y.

His step is called the Savoy Lindbergh Hop, commonly known as the Lindy Hop, named after Charles Lindbergh. Snowden is also credited for inventing the Texas Tommy dance step in 1913.

The Hollywood Lindy Hop was a derivative of the Savoy version that is usually shown in the movies.

Dean Collins, a choreographer, brought Lindy Hop from the Savoy and modified it into a slower, smoother step. This later sprouted the modern West Coast swing.

The difference between West Coast and East Coast swing is not just geographic but also rhythmic.

West Coast step has eight counts to one step. The East Coast has a six-count step closer to the ballroom waltz.

The Swing Kids club meets every Thursday at 8:00 p.m. in the Naval Science Building. Members have an hour's worth of lessons, and then the rest of the time is spent dancing.

Adam Sadler, a senior in mechanical engineering, said, "I finally found a dance club that fits my college budget."

The club has free membership.

Every year, the club holds a Lindy Exchange, a big dance gala that even attracts out-of-state enthusiasts. Mary Hopkins, vice president of the club and a biology student, said that people come to the event from Colorado, Arizona and Washington.

About a year ago, the Swing Kids club had less than 20 club members. Since then, major efforts have been made to increase membership.

Beattie said that having a regular time and place to meet was one of the first steps in gathering membership. Other aspects that helped improve membership are better music and more regular instruction. The club has also advertised more.

Beattie said, "My friends and I are gung-ho about inviting people." Through word of mouth, membership is now up to about 75 people. "Every week we have had more [attendees] since the semester started," he said. In the future, the club plans to start bringing in bands.

Beattie said that the club is important because it preserves American dance and art. Beattie said that swing dancing is an obsession for him and that it just latched onto him and can't get rid of it.

Kristen Evans, a U alumnae, said, "It's the funniest club ever. You get to dance and you don't have to know someone to dance with them. It's not as 'cliquey' as other dance clubs."

In addition to the social aspect, swing dancing can be very physical

with all of the lifts and flips involved. But the Swing Kids club does not allow aerials. They are prohibited because the club usually dances on cement floors, which makes them too dangerous to perform. Aerials were invented by Frankie Manning to beat Snowden in a contest in the 1930s.

Officers of the Swing Kids club said that they would like to move to a wooden floor, but cannot find one open weekly that they could use for free.

Some of the serious dancers in the club go to swing at the Tropicana, a restaurant and dance club in Salt Lake City, on Fridays.

On Saturdays, the club meets at the Murray Arts Center or joins another swing dance club in Provo.

Carl Wecker, a sophomore in bio-engineering, is known for swing dancing in his bare feet. He said that everyone should learn to swing dance because, "Swing is cool."

James Jensen joined the Swing Kids club last January. He was recruited by vice-president Mary Hopkins, and after three weeks, he was made an officer. Jensen said he had no idea what he was doing, but now he is more confident.

"Once a week, I can release anxieties from work and school and let my muscles work out their problems," he said.

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