

Boogie in the Berkshires

The Board of Directors of the New York Swing Dance Society has announced "Boogie in the Berkshires" a swing dance weekend of dances and lessons to take place at Club Getaway in Kent, Connecticut on September 22-24, 1989. Please remember that early bird registration up to August 28 is \$175 per person after August 28 \$185. Tentative lineup of bands

includes Bill Conway's Swing Express Quintet, Swing Fever and The Harlem Blues & Jazz Quintet; teachers--Frankie Manning (you *will* learn the shim-sham), Margaret Batiuchok, Teddy Kern and John Lucchese. And of course, there's sports activities from canoeing to volleyball to eating. A \$25 deposit is requested. Bus transportation available. Register by phone: 212-935-0222 (MC & Visa accepted) or by mail: Club Getaway, Box 606, Lenox Hill Sta, NY, NY 10021.

continued from page 1

cream of the Lindy Hoppers would show up and dance with each other. Harry was on the floor the next Tuesday. And that was the time he first saw Frankie Manning.

"I'll never forget that moment," Harry says. "First, there was that smile, and second, that perfect rhythm. But mostly it was the way he made simple things look beautiful. At the exact instant I first saw him, he was standing with his partner, feet shoulder width apart, and the two were swaying to the rhythm; first down, then up. No footwork, and he wasn't on his toes or anything--he was just swaying back and forth, with that huge grin and that endless vitality. I was stunned. I thought, 'Good God, this guy is doing nothing and it looks brilliant!'"

"That night, I went home, looked in the mirror, and said to myself, 'Harry, one day you are going to be the best damn white Lindy Hopper on the planet!'"

Whitey moved Harry right along on the road to becoming a Lindy Hopper. First he asked Harry to compete in the Apollo Lindy contest. Then he had Harry come up to the Savoy in the afternoons to witness rehearsals of the Lindy Hoppers. Soon Harry was practicing with them--the Lindy Hoppers' first white member. "It was hard work," he says. "We worked hours and hours each afternoon, getting the steps down and evolving new ones."

One day, a trio of Whitey's dancers were scheduled to perform at the Club Fordham, Harry's old stomping grounds. Whitey made a last-minute substitution and sent Harry and Ruth in for the third couple. It was his first performance as a Lindy Hopper. "You can't imagine the reaction," he says. "Many of my friends were in the audience, but they didn't know I had been dancing with Whitey. When Ruth and I came

out, first there was a hush--they were transfixed. After a few seconds everyone roared. Nobody could believe that a white guy--even me--was doing Whitey routines. I was thrilled."

At that time, Harry entered what he called his black period. "I'd spend all my time in Harlem. I stayed there with friends, hung out with blacks, danced with blacks, had a black girlfriend." He continued to perform with Ruth in Whitey's 'third string' group. "I was a sensation. It was not just that I was a good dancer--it was also that it was usually the first time that the audience had seen a white person dance black. And Whitey knew that that could be good show business."

One time, for instance, Whitey took the trio down to Small's Paradise to see an act by his rival Shorty Snowden, a first generation Lindy Hopper. After Snowden's group left the stage and while the band was still playing, Whitey sent his couples out on stage, one by one. "They cleared the floor, of course. But when I went out, the audience was dumbfounded. The message to Snowden was, 'Even a white guy can cut your ass.' He was furious, and got into a big fight with Whitey afterwards. He accused Whitey of deliberately trying to make him look bad."

Harry continued to worship Frankie, and the two often had friendly competitions. One evening, the Apollo had a "black and white" Lindy Hop contest, in which a top white competitor and a top black competitor would be chosen, and then each would compete against the other. Frankie won the black, Harry the white contest. As the band struck up a fast number for the final competition, the two found themselves dancing against each other on the same stage.

The song ended, and the audience roared equally loudly for each contestant. Apollo emcee Ralph Cooper declared a tie and called for a

dance-off. Again the two tied, and another dance-off was called. "This time," Frankie says, "I tried a new step I'd been working on--the slow-motion--that no one had seen yet, not even Harry. The audience loved it, and I finally won."

In October of 1941, with war on the horizon, Harry joined the armed service and left the Lindy Hoppers. After the war, he decided to enter dental school, and changed his name from Rosenberg to Rowe. "I was told that they had a quota for Jews, and I didn't need that kind of handicap." He graduated in 1951, entered private practice, and eventually wound up in Seattle. Rowe continued to have an appetite for the unorthodox, and even while pursuing a career as a dentist took time out to become, in turn, a massage therapist, comedian, alcohol rehabilitation counselor, political speechwriter, and delegate to the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

But there was no greater thrill than the moment at Nishi Noho, not long ago, when he finally met Frankie Manning again for the first time since both were Lindy Hoppers.

"Somebody pushed me in front of him," Harry says, "and there he was with that same wide smile, and all I could do was grab him by the shoulder and say, 'My name is Harry,' and then we hugged each other. I got all choked up."

FOOTNOTES

July-September 1989 Vol. 4, No. 2

Editor: Gabrielle Winkel

Senior Writer: Robert P. Crease

Production Editor: Stewart Newfield

Staff: Dan Hermann, Lianne Lynch,

Duncan Maginnis, Cynthia Millman,

Rebecca Reitz, Trilby Schreiber

Illustrations: Carl Winkel

Copyright © 1989

The New York

Swing Dance Society