

Profiles of Original Lindy Hoppers: Pal Andrews

by Robert P. Crease

On September 30, 1950, Herbert "Whitey" White, manager of Whitey's Lindy Hoppers, the greatest Lindy performance group ever, passed away at his home in Oswego, New York. One of those at his side was Pal Andrews, a Lindy Hopper who had moved with White to Oswego.

Louise Andrews was born on February 13, 1924, in Newark, New Jersey; she acquired the nickname from her godfather, who called her his 'pal.' Her parents separated when she was a few years old, and she moved to Manhattan with her mother. Manhattan was a culture shock. She could not play in the streets; and while in New Jersey schools she enjoyed running and track, in Manhattan they promoted dancing instead. But she quickly adapted, learning to enjoy dancing and even staged shows on the roof of her tenement building.

Andrews used to hang out after school with friends, including two sisters named Mickey and Sales, at a candy store on 126th and St. Nicholas, where they'd feed nickels into the jukebox and dance. The owner, a man named Dorkins, liked the group and opened an upstairs room in a nearby building studio, which he supplied with booths, tables and another jukebox, and sold sodas and hot dogs. The dance steps Andrews and her friends saw at the Apollo and the Harlem Opera House would be practiced later at Dorkins'.

Dorkins' acquired a reputation, and members of Whitey's Lindy Hoppers, a group of dancers managed by Herbert White which operated out of the Savoy Ballroom, occasionally cruised the joint seeking agile, young partners for contests. Andrew's friend Mickey was recruited in 1938, but she and Andrews continued to be friends and to go out dancing together. One day early in 1939, Andrews saw Mickey perform at Loews State Theatre. While sitting around afterward, another of Andrews' friends asked if she might be interested in joining the Lindy Hoppers. Andrews demurred, claiming she wasn't good enough. The others, who had often seen her swing out, insisted. She showed up for rehearsal the next day.

"It was a special group of people -- like joining a fraternity," Andrews says. "No drinking, no reefer -- and whatever you learned there you had to keep to yourself and not show outsiders, or there would be trouble."

One of the dancers, Johnny Smalls, took her aside and taught her all of the group's Lindy routines so

that she would stand a better chance of landing a gig. Her first was at the "Calvalcade of Dance" at the Savoy Pavilion of the New York World's Fair, which opened in the spring of 1939. The group danced every hour for six hours a day, with only a few minutes in between shows.

The job was grueling and the pay low. "But I didn't mind -- I was dancin'!" Andrews said. Still only 15 years old, she was the youngest of the crew and idolized the other dancers, who included Norma Miller. She noticed, however, that they often spoke about an ace crew of Whitey's dancers who were in Australia with a show called the Hollywood Hotel Revue.

One night in July 1939, the group started their show as usual -- a cakewalk, a shake dance, a Big Apple, and then a Lindy number called "Mutiny," newly-choreographed for the group. "It had one air step after another, and we kept flying around changing partners, and if you were in the audience you couldn't tell *what* was happening," Andrews says. This time, the performers noticed a group sitting off to the left who started wildly hollered and stamped their feet during that number. They were the Australia crew fresh off the boat; a reunion took place in the dressing room, and Andrews met Frankie Manning for the first time.

Partly due to injuries, the Savoy Pavilion closed before the end of the fair. But Andrews landed progressively better gigs. She worked at the Roxy and in 1940 went on a road trip to the Midwest with a new Hollywood Hotel Revue. Her new partner was Snookie, who had been on the Australia trip; the other two couples were Al Minns & Willamae and Esther & Billy. In March 1943, Andrews went to California to dance with Pepsi Bethel in the show *Born Happy*, starring Bill Robinson. While her life as a Lindy Hopper flourished, she often put her dancing career ahead of her personal life. She was briefly engaged to White's son Alan, but after a few weeks returned the ring. "I loved dancing and didn't want anyone tagging around behind me," she says.

In the meantime, White himself had moved to Oswego, an all-white town in upstate New York on Lake Ontario, to start a bar for black soldiers stationed at a fort there after the outbreak of World War II. But he continued to manage groups of dancers, and several Lindy Hoppers shuttled back and forth between Oswego, the Savoy, and various road trips. Andrews was one. She helped White out

in the bar, taught dance at a local college, and performed with other Lindy Hoppers around town. "Whitey treated us well," she said. "He bought us all bicycles and we'd pedal around town, with him following behind in his famous Buick."

One night White, Andrews, and a few others went to a nearby town to hear Louis Armstrong. Afterward, they stopped to eat at a diner before returning home, where they sat around talking until about three in the morning. Suddenly White got up and headed for the bathroom; a moment later he staggered into the bedroom and lay down, calling out for Andrews to get help. Whitey died before it arrived -- of a cerebral hemorrhage, doctors said.

Andrews was devastated, and called the Savoy to speak to manager Charles Buchanan. Buchanan made arrangements for her to bring the body by train back to New York where he was buried in the Savoy plot at Woodlawn Cemetery.

Having no more reason to be in Oswego, Andrews moved back to New York and worked at the Savoy, in the checkroom and box office. When the ballroom closed in 1958, she worked at a number of stores; in 1960, she married James Perry. She never danced again, but will never forget her days as a Lindy Hopper with White. "He always tried to keep us on the right track," she says. "He never let anyone say anything bad about us and taught us how to walk tall."

continued from page 1

Lloyd

growing recognition of the importance of this kind of dance in the city and the country -- in his contribution to these quite material and concrete and visible and exterior things, George will never perish.

-Robert P. Crease

The New York Swing Dance Society is deeply indebted to Alan Rocoff for his help in arranging George's service at the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

FOOTNOTES

Spring 1991

Vol. 6 No. 1

Editor: Gabrielle Winkel

Senior Writer: Robert P. Crease

Production Editor: Stewart Newfeld

Staff: Duncan Maginnis, Cynthia Millman,

Rebecca Reitz, Trilby Schreiber

Illustrations: Carl Winkel

Copyright © 1991

The New York

Swing Dance Society