

Profiles of Original Lindy Hoppers **Sandra Gibson**

By Robert Crease

Strong as a bull and extremely sexy, Sandra Gibson was one of the most striking and talented of Whitey's Lindy Hoppers. Born in Atlanta in 1919 as Mildred Pollard (she later changed her name), she came to New York at age 5. Her father was minister at Jerusalem Baptist church; he had his young daughter, blessed with a rare and beautiful bass voice, sing during services.

At church, Sandra met three neighborhood kids, Al Minns, Joyce James and Joe Daniels, and they formed a singing quartet; Sandra on bass, Albert on tenor, Joyce on soprano, Joe on baritone. The four also learned to Lindy Hop, and it wasn't long before they went to the Savoy Ballroom, home base for Herbert White's Lindy Hoppers. It was 1937.

"When we first met," Sandra says, "it was Saturday, when the Savoy had regular contests which were supposed to be won by the Lindy Hoppers. But Whitey and his crew were all out on jobs. Al and I took first prize that night, and the next, and the next. Brownie (Clyde Brown), whom Whitey had left in charge, told Whitey about it, and Whitey told Brownie that if the four of us didn't join his group, don't let us enter the contest no more. That's how we started."

When Whitey returned, he was delighted with his new talent. Sandra played the Apollo, then went to California with a group including Frankie Manning and a 400 pound dancer named Tiny Bunch. There they made two movies: Everybody Sing! an MGM musical with Judy Garland (the Lindy Hop scene was cut after Whitey argued with the director) and Radio City Revels, an RKO comedy with Bob Burns and Jack Oakie.

Sandra was known for her sexy wiggle, which is exploited wonderfully in the latter film. "In our scene,



Courtesy The Daily News

1938 Harvest Moon Ball winners Sandra Gibson and Al Minns doing the Peckin'during the semi-finals at the Savoy Ballroom

Tiny Bunch was a chef. So they had me take a tray from him, loaded with food, and dance from one side of the room to the other with my behind sticking up in the air, truckin'."

Her best partner was Al Minns. The two were well suited, Sandra with her boogie-woogie wiggle (her nickname was "Boogie"), Al with his sensuous leg movements (his was "Rubberlegs"). Sandra was also extremely strong; she was the first female Lindy Hopper to pick up and flip her partner.

In the 1938 Harvest Moon Ball, for instance, she had Al jump into her arms at the climax. "Nobody in his right mind would have agreed to do it but Albert," she says. Whitey was watching from the sidelines; he covered his eyes. When he didn't hear a crash he looked up; Sandra was holding Al in her arms, and both were grinning widely. They took first prize.

She and Al worked six months at the Cotton Club. "We played with the whole

list of Cotton Club stars: Cab, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Nicholas Brothers, the Dandridge Sisters, Timmy and Freddie, the Berry brothers--and way down at the bottom of the program you'd read, 'Al and Millie, 1938 Lindy Hop Champs.'"

She and Al danced in the Hot Mikado on Broadway; she also did a shake dance for the waterfall number, an erotic scene in which she wore a skin color leotard with flowers in the strategic places.

She left the Lindy Hoppers in 1939 in a dispute with Whitey. "When I stopped Lindy Hopping I did exotic dancing, sang and did comedy. You name it in show business--I've done it." In 1965, she met Albert Gibson at a party thrown by Mura Dehn; the two married the next year. Although Albert lost his right leg, he still choreographs a show, "the Mad Gibsons"; Sandra sings in it and does comedy. Both she and her husband continue to be important talents in show business.