

ENTERTAINMENT

Swing

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or dance floors.

Miller took her place among the second wave or generation of swing dancers at the Savoy during the 30's. She had no formal training. Dancing was just what teens did at the time, she said.

Herbert White, a bouncer, selected the best swing dancers and packaged a show combining swing with acrobatics into a performance dance style called the Lindy Hop. Miller, already a dance contest winner at age 14, was among the original members.

The Lindy Hoppers toured as the opening act for Ethyl Waters. The rest is history.

The energy of swing dancing and of the big bands that jazzed even more life into the art form exploded the popularity of social dancing. Ballrooms and dance competitions sprang up all over the country.

Swing dancing soon melded with the nuances of the nation's different regions. Western swing evolved in the southwest, while back East, the Lindy Hop spawned swing variations such as the Suzi-Q, the Shag and the Jitterbug.

In between tours, the Lindy

Hoppers appeared in the Marx Brothers movie "A Day at the Races" in 1937 and in the 1944 film "Hellzapoppin'."

After World War II, be-bop music began to replace big band jazz, ushering in the decline of the swing era. Miller then formed her own group, the Norma Miller Jazz Dancers, and took them on an East-West tour.



CHESTER WHITFIELD

She has subsequently appeared in "Malcolm X," "Captiva," and other films. A foray into stand-up comedy led to a 10-year relationship with Redd Foxx; the two teamed to

author "The Redd Foxx Encyclopedia of Black Humor." Miller's international tours included an extended visit, as a comedienne, to Vietnam during the war.

An Emmy nominee for her choreography in the CBS movie "Stompin' at the Savoy," Miller has been the subject of various television documentaries and radio shows.

Her newest endeavor is an autobiographical memoir about the Harlem Renaissance, "Swingin' at the Savoy," co-written with Las Vegas Evette Jensen and published by Temple University Press.

The book coincided with the international revival of swing music in discos and its increasing appearance in recreational and school-based classes, in movies and on stages.

Miller assembled an international troupe of swing dancers for the Gold Coast show, which will travel across the country for a final performance at the Apollo Theater.

The next generation of swing—a group of high school swing dance devotees—was on hand for the four-day event.

The group came from South Carolina.

On the first morning of the convention, Miller poured over the roster for the evening performances with her producer and long-time friend Harry Seybold while keeping one eye on a dance clinic session being filmed by movie producer John Bufar's camera crew.

"She's 79 years old, and she still busts her butt. She's done it all; she's a legend," said Seybold. Bufar, who earlier cast Miller in a movie, recalled how they met at the Debbie Reynolds hotel.

"She was hanging out with a couple of 21-year-old studs and telling dirty jokes," he said. "And then I figured if we could get her to be her(self) in a movie, it would be successful," Bufar continued.

Miller respects Bufar. "Young minds create, and they've got the spunk and tenacity to carry it through," she said. "You've got to keep reinventing; if not, you're going to be sitting on the sidelines."

Miller appears ready to ride the cresting wave of swing dance into the next century.

A press release for the Gold



Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard

Internationally known dancers Smooth and Cozy perform a silky high step during a routine at the Gold Coast Hotel.

Coast event included this baby, and the hep cats are quotation by Norma Miller: groovin' like they never have before. "It's Swingtime in Vegas, before."

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