



SWINGIN' THROUGH HISTORY

Art Form: Dance

Style: Jazz and Swing

Culture: American

Technical Needs

- ❑ two microphones, preferably cordless
- ❑ one small table (large enough to set boom box on)
- ❑ one chair

Meet the Artists

The dancers of **Swingin' Through History** are professional dancers and seasoned performers, who are well-versed in Lindy Hop, Charleston, Collegiate Shag, Balboa and East Coast Swing, as well as the history of jazz music and dance. They routinely teach lessons and workshops in the Chicago area and across the nation. They are featured artists each year at Chicago SummerDance and have performed in many dance festivals, including Dance Chicago.

Film credits include *The Road to Perdition*, Wisconsin Department of Transportation TV commercial, Signcast promotional footage and multiple guest appearances on ABC, WGN and CLTV news shows. **Swingin' Through History** artists strive to capture the spirit of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom back in the heyday of our nation's great Swing Era.

About the Performance

From the turn of the century to modern times, **Swingin' Through History** takes students on a journey through American music and dance, focusing primarily on the 1920s-40s when swing music and dance were at the center of popular culture.

Students will clap their hands and stomp their feet as they learn about the birth of Jazz music and its lasting influences on all aspects of American culture. The artists are energetic and athletic performers who specialize in re-creating authentic and historically based swing and jazz dance styles such as Lindy Hop, Charleston, Jitterbug, Balboa, Collegiate Shag and more.

Contextual Information

Jazz music and dance are said to be the first true American art forms. The birth of jazz was uniquely American because it was here in this country that African rhythms first combined with European instruments and harmonies to create an exciting and groundbreaking new sound. Like the music itself, the early forms of jazz dance were very improvisational in nature, reflecting the free-spirited and rebellious era in which jazz was born.

The earliest style of jazz music came to be known as ragtime, and the new dance that grew up alongside this music is known as the Charleston. As the music evolved, so did the dance and eventually the Swing Era came into full force after World War I. From the beginning, jazz music and dance helped to break the boundaries of racial segregation.

And still today, music, dance and the arts are among the most racially integrated institutions of American society. Eventually, swing was replaced by rock 'n' roll and for a while partner dancing went out of vogue. The disco era of the '70s brought back partner dancing and in the late 1990s, swing music and dance had resurgence in popularity. Today we can celebrate both the old and the new in American jazz music and dance. Even today's most groundbreaking hip-hop artists can find their roots in the rhythms and movement of early jazz.

Vocabulary

Jazz: a musical art form characterized by blue notes, syncopation, swing, call and response, polyrhythms, and improvisation; it has been called the first original art form to develop in the United States of America.

Swing: a style of jazz music and dance and an era of American history

Improvisation: to make something up as you go along; spontaneously reacting to something

Syncopation: varying the accented beats in a piece of music

Social Dancing: a general term for a partnered dance in which one person leads and the other follows; traditionally, male dancers lead and female dancers follow

Vaudeville: a national circuit of theaters at which traveling road shows would perform throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s

Shim Sham: originally a tap dance performed on the vaudeville circuit and later adapted to a “soft shoe” line dance by swing dancers

Ragtime: a very early style of jazz music, characterized by piano and syncopated rhythms

Charleston: an inventive jazz dance inspired by ragtime rhythms, performed both solo and as partners

Lindy Hop: the grandfather of swing dances and the first swing dance to incorporate “air steps”; named after Charles Lindbergh around the time he “hopped” to Europe in the first transatlantic flight

Harlem: neighborhood in New York City where swing music and dance, particularly the Lindy Hop, thrived in the 1930s and 40s

Savoy Ballroom: ballroom in Harlem where swing dancing thrived; no longer in existence

Harvest Moon Ball: famous annual dance competition hosted at the Savoy Ballroom

Bebop: a form of jazz that came after swing and was so unstructured that it became “un-danceable”

Disco: a style of music that came after bebop and brought “social dancing” back into vogue

Rock ‘n’ Roll: the second American form of music evolved from Jazz but differed enough to become its own form