



SIMON'S **Swing Notes**

Welcome to Swing Notes where I will be musing about life in the swing world, commenting on what's going on and more often than not, the why & how you can get the most out of your dancing.

Diving into the annals of history & traditions that have been handed down to me, the aim is to be educational, thought-provoking & occasionally controversial, sharing my thoughts on the dance, music, history & today's swing dance scene.

Be warned - they will seriously improve your dancing!

Swing Notes Vol 324: Looking back – 2024 SN Highlights! Part 1

Writing Swing Notes as we near the end of the year is my cue to reflect on why I do it and what value they bring. They started as a primarily personal project, partly to have a record of my knowledge and experience as a Swing dancer and teacher, and partly for me to reflect on my life as I was going through some turbulent times. In time however, these Notes have developed into what I hope are useful prompts, to guide you, dear reader, in your development as a dancer and (as dance is a reflection of life) also beyond the world of dance. In the end, it won't be the Swing Notes I have written themselves that will be remembered, but hopefully the legacy they leave behind in the impact they have had on you.

Whether I have been writing about my experiences in the dance world, what has been on my mind at a particular moment in time, or about some technical, historical or community aspect of the dance, I also have been asking myself the question whether these Notes have inspired you, changed your way to look at something, or encouraged you to develop a new and useful habit. If so, I am proud of what they have achieved.

We all need moments of kindness when we know other people are listening to us.

I personally take great pride when someone unexpectedly tells me how much they enjoy reading Swing Notes, because no matter how independent we want to be (and I spent the first half of my life trying to be so independent) as I grow older, and hopefully wiser, I see the importance of being interdependent and part of a wider family/community. Life is about the joy we can share with others and less about possessions (which we can't take with us when we are gone anyway). I have learnt to give more importance to those small, everyday actions that ripple outward, shaping the world around us.

But this older and possibly wiser dog can still learn a new trick or two! Feeling very up-to-date and on the cutting edge of technology (he said tongue-in-cheek), I have asked ChatGPT to help me summarise some of the key points I have written about over the last year of Swing Notes, which you will hopefully find interesting or a useful reminder to revisit the original article.

I started the year 2024 with Part 4 of a four part series based on the musicality workshop taught by myself and my friend and musician [Malcolm Earle Smith](https://www.malcolmearlesmith.com/) (<https://www.malcolmearlesmith.com/>).

Swing Notes Vol 307: Musicality and Styling – Part 4

We delved into musicality and styling in dance, emphasising how as dancers we connect with the music, our partners, and personal feelings we want to express. We talked about the goal to reach a flow state where movement feels intuitive and highlighted improvisation, call-and-response dynamics, and creativity as key aspects of the dance. We reflected on the cultural roots of Lindy Hop, its communal and competitive spirit, and the joy of shared dance experiences. We stressed the importance of active listening, consistent practice, and learning from mistakes to grow as dancers. Ultimately, we encouraged interpreting music uniquely, fostering individuality whilst building connections within the dance community.

Swing Notes Vol 308: Overcoming common challenges faced by beginners.

Here we reflected on the challenges we faced as beginners and shared practical solutions. From mastering coordination, rhythm, and footwork to navigating crowded dance floors, we recalled how patient practice helped us progress. Building confidence and embracing mistakes became vital steps in our journey. We learned to foster partner connection, balance energy with relaxation, and explore different Swing styles. Internalising steps and learning to give and receive feedback were key milestones. Ultimately, we found joy in the journey, appreciating how dance strengthened our community and enriched our lives.

Swing Notes Vol 309: Delivering some happy news, plus: Is your glass half empty

or half full?

This Swing Notes marked a particularly happy time for me as Anna and I had just welcomed another beautiful baby boy into our lives, which inspired reflections on gratitude and perspective. I invited you to shift your state of mind from seeing a half-empty glass to a half-full one and observe how it transformed how we viewed life. We reflected on how embracing achievements over regrets can reshape decisions and deepen self-pride. This Note encouraged everyone to cherish their own journeys.

Swing Notes Vol 310: I Love To Dance

In this Note, I shared how I love sharing the joy of dance, seeing lives transformed by Swing. Teaching isn't just about steps; it enriches lives through creativity, connection, and wellbeing. I have seen students gain confidence, reduce stress, and people finding mindfulness in movement. Dancing builds friendships, cultural appreciation, and holistic growth. Whether 8 or 80, everyone can benefit from dancing. I wrote about how I feel privileged to convert non-dancers into enthusiasts, spreading the magic of Swing while witnessing its profound impact on others and on myself. Truly, I love my work!

Swing Notes Vol 311: History and evolution of swing dance – the Texas Tommy!

That week, in the run-up to hosting a special workshop with dance teacher and historian Richard Powers, I wanted to delve into the fascinating history of the Texas Tommy, a Ragtime dance born in San Francisco's Barbary Coast, shaped by African American influences and the vibrant culture of the early 1900s. We traced its journey from local clubs to New York's vaudeville stages, where Johnny Peters and Ethel Williams helped popularise it. Its hallmark "breakaway" move laid the foundation for the Lindy Hop. Reflecting on researching early styles of dancing without the help of video recordings, I recalled the challenge of teaching solely through words, a skill I was pushed to develop during recovery from an injury.

Swing Notes Vol 312: History and evolution of Swing dance – The Cake Walk

Continuing with our exploration of the roots of Swing dances, we turned to the Cake Walk, a vibrant predecessor of the Charleston and Lindy Hop. Originating on plantations before the Civil War, enslaved African Americans created it as a satirical mimicry of white ballroom dances. With exaggerated high-stepping movements and theatrical gestures, it carried both cultural resistance and humour. After emancipation, the Cake Walk became a celebrated social dance in African American communities, later crossing racial boundaries through minstrel and vaudeville performances.

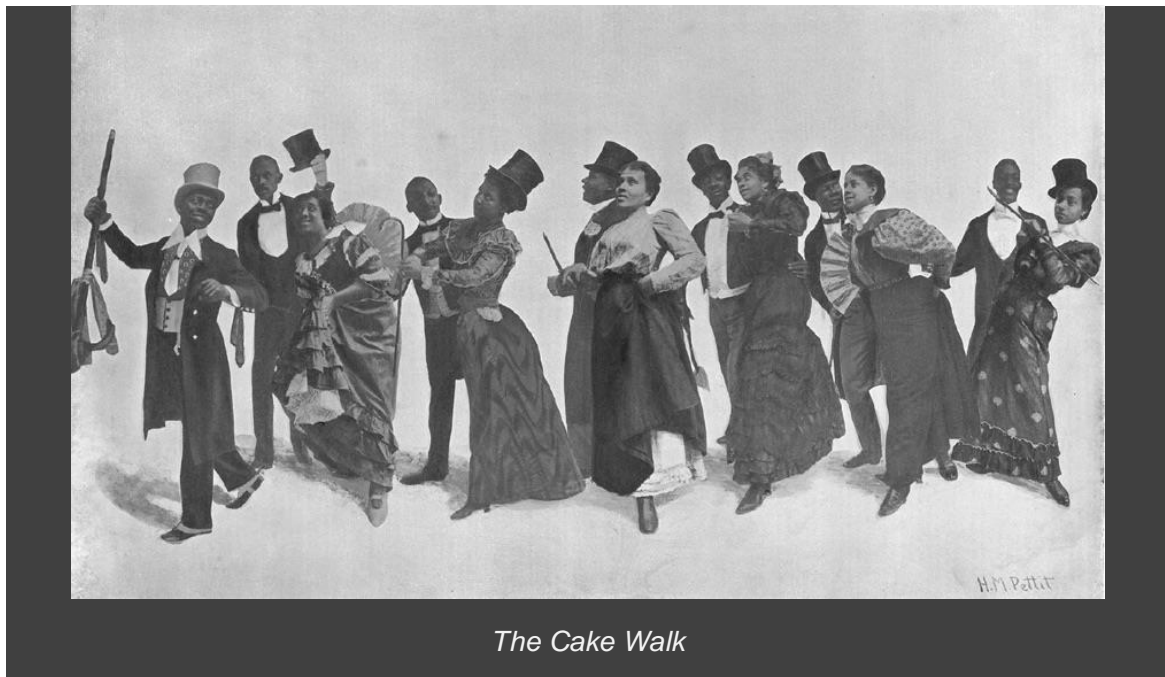
Why, then, should we study the Cake Walk? Apart from its historical importance, its rhythmical movements, its competitive nature, its playful spirit and the theatrical elements that it involves can help a modern-day Lindy Hopper draw inspiration to authentically style their own dancing.

Swing Notes Vol 313: Firsts

This Note was devoted to pivotal “firsts” in our dance journeys. I reminisced about my own “firsts”: stumbling into dancing at a Christmas party, leading me to learn under Warren Hayes, whose teaching profoundly shaped my path. He not only taught me steps but instilled respect for Lindy Hop's history. Early experiences often define us - our first teachers, dance styles, and communities leave lasting impressions. Later on, shifting between styles like Balboa, Lindy, Blues and Shag taught me adaptability, but Warren’s early mentorship cemented my love for Swing first and foremost.

Swing Notes Vol 314: A Brief History of Lindy Hop – A journey from Cakewalk to today

Adopting a historical perspective once more, we journeyed through the history of Swing, tracing its roots from the Cakewalk, a satirical dance created by enslaved African Americans, through Ragtime and Charleston, to the birth of Lindy Hop in Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom. We talked about how in the 1930s and '40s, Swing flourished alongside Big Band music, with films and performers like Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers propelling its popularity. Post-war, Rock ‘n’ Roll reshaped dance scenes, but actually Swing never fully disappeared (with groups including Harlem’s Mama Lu Parks dancers helping to keep the candle burning). The 1980s resurgence, led by groups like the Jiving Lindy Hoppers & Rhythm Hot Shots with their Herräng Dance Camp, sparked global interest. Today, Swing continues to thrive, blending its rich history with modern creativity, uniting dancers worldwide.



The Cake Walk



SIMON'S **Swing Notes**

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