

Swing Time

Music rebounds into pop culture

BY SARAH BAKER
Senior Reporter

Swing is more than just a Gap advertisement; it's a lifestyle.

And it's beginning to jump, jive and wail its way into Nebraska.

The history of swing began in the late 1920s, but the trend failed to gain popularity until the mid 1930s. Originally it started as a form of music backed by a large, instrumental band divided into sections.

Swing dancing began as an offshoot of the music and started in Harlem at a club called the Savoy Ballroom. The original form of the dance is known as the Lindy Hop and was widely recognized by the work of Frankie "Musclehead" Manning, the first swing dancer to incorporate air steps into the dance.

Once people saw the dance performed, swing became a worldwide dance craze and grew into many different styles, including the West and East Coast Swing, Rock and Roll and Boogie Woogie.

According to Amy Castro, owner of Dance Sport USA, 237 S. 70th, the 1990s revival of swing has much to do with an image.

"I think there's a wide range of reasons swing has become popular again," Castro said. "The music comes from a time when life was good, and swing is really fun and energetic."

"Music shows a lot about where a society is at and what people's mindset is," she added. "Swing is about wholesomeness expressed in a positive way."

Dan Bauer, general manager of the Rogue's Gallery, 122 N. 11th, said he was considering starting a swing night at his club, but nothing had been finalized.

Bauer said he thought a swing night would be successful for one main reason: it was something new.

"For about 109 years, people have been pummeling themselves in mosh pits," Brauer said. "It's just a matter of time until the swing movement hits Lincoln."

Brauer said he thought swing was something college students were going to be interested in.

"Young people want new things," he said. "Even though this is something old, they're going to want to be the first ones to pick it up again. Kids are going to be into this."

Castro said she felt the popularity of the 1996 Mirimax film "Swingers" also contributed to the resurgence in popularity.

"I think what people liked about 'Swingers' was the theme that went along with the music," she said. "I think there is a potential for swing to get really big in a college town like Lincoln."



COURTESY PHOTO
BIG BAD VOODOO DADDY, one of the bands responsible for the resurgence of swing music in American pop culture, performed at Omaha's Sokol Hall Monday night.

Castro started teaching swing lessons at her studio three months ago, and said the response had been amazing so far.

"I get two to three calls every day concerning the classes," she said. "There are many different types of swing, and I teach them all."

She said some people had the misconception that swing dancing was too hard for them to learn.

"The lessons are really fun, and a lot of people in the classes end up saying 'this is not as hard as I thought,'" Castro said. "The dance can be adjusted to anyone's level, there are no physical or age barriers. I have students ranging in age from 20 to 60."

Castro said she was excited to see the revival of

swing.

"I think we're on the tip of something big," she said.

Brauer agreed, and said he thought the time had definitely arrived for swing to be back in style.

"It's come of age," he said. "It's time for people to learn to really dance again."

Swing classes take place Wednesday nights at 8 p.m. at Dance Sport USA. For more information, call Dance Sport USA at (402) 484-7255. Beginning July 6, classes will also start in Omaha at the American Dance Academy, 7631 Cass St., Mondays at 8 p.m. For more information on these classes, call (402) 393-0455.

Band surprised by neo-swing's popularity

BY SARAH BAKER
Senior Reporter

Swing wasn't a success overnight.

Neither was Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, one of the bands at the forefront of the neo-swing movement, has been playing their jumpin' swing since 1992.

And according to saxophonist Andy Rowley, they never thought their act would come this far.

"Our success seems immediate, but it's really not for us," Rowley said. "We've been touring for six years and in the process also went through two vans."

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy took the stage Monday night at Omaha's Sokol Hall, 2234 S. 13th St., and played a two hour set to a sold out crowd.

The band recently released their third, self-titled, album, which is also their first on a major record label. Their first two self-produced albums, distributed on the indie label Hep Cat, were equally well-received.

Rowley said the band had always been popular with audiences of all ages.

"We've always worn the suits, even when we played at cowboy bars and backyard parties," he said. "People would see us and freak out because it was something new and they didn't know what to expect. It still is new to a lot of people."

Rowley said the band's appearance in the 1996 Mirimax film "Swingers" opened their act up to a much larger audience.

"We did the movie as a favor to Jon (Favreau, actor and screenwriter for 'Swingers.),'", Rowley said. "We shot it on a regular night that we played at the Derby. We had no idea what it was about, we just did it."

Rowley said everyone in the band had some background in swing music, whether it was formal education or just family members who listened to jazz.

"My dad was a huge fan of jazz," he said. "This kind of music attracts people of all ages, from 8 to 80."

Rowley said he hoped people left a Big Bad Voodoo Daddy show feeling like they got their money's worth.

"I want it to be a night they're going to remember, or at least the best night they've had all week," he said.

Many see the revival of swing as just another fad, but Rowley said he didn't necessarily think that was the case.

"The music has always been there, it just got neglected," he said. "Good music stands the test of time, and it will still be around even if people aren't dressing up and doing the dancing."

"We try and put everything we have into our shows," he said. "When we get an audience that includes three generations: grandparents, parents and kids, that's something pretty cool."