

VALLEY LIVING

Wednesday, Nov. 11, 1998

Let's Go Do the Hop!

Swing makes comeback as newest dance craze in Verde Valley

By PAMELA WILLIAMS and PAULA BLANKENSHIP
Staff Reporters

Some dancers shuffle in while others bounce brightly through the entry doors.

Fresh youthful smiles mingle with older, more nervous faces. Together they gather to celebrate a "retro renaissance" in the Verde Valley. Welcome to Swing Fever.

If You Go ...

What: Lindy Hop Lessons

When: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Where: Camp Verde: Chamber of Commerce Bldg., Tuesday; Cottonwood: Recreation Center (Old Town), Wednesday.

How much: 6 lessons, \$40 per person or \$30 per person with high school or college ID.

More info: <http://www.dancecorner.com/dance/> or 1 800 834 2788

For six weeks, dance master Leon Raper is prepared to heat up autumn nights throughout Northern Arizona with the Lindy Hop. You don't need a partner,



Staff Photo by Pam Williams

Precise movement of your feet is the most critical part of any dance. Raper recommends that dancers don't look at their feet while they dance.



Marc Nielsen
Seniors Report

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the Lindy Hop. You don't need a partner, penny loafers or saddle

shoes to rock step your way into the groove. The lessons are progressive. The instructor is professional.

Raper started dancing in 1967 on the West Coast. While in California, his love affair with swing began. Raper has strutted his stuff in over 400 dance contests. The World Championships at Hollywood's Paladium in 1973 provided the venue for Raper to professionally hit the parquet, swing style.

Raper is one "hip cat." He founded the Flagstaff Swing Dance Club and maintains membership in such dance organizations as the World Swing Dance Council, Los Angeles Swing Dance Club, Greater Phoenix Swing Dance and others.

On a cool fall night, "swing kids" can learn the basics of the Lindy Hop. Amateurs are welcome but quick studies with poor concentration may want to note that Raper takes his dance seriously.

Swanky Swing wannabes pay close attention to minor details and good basics because Raper assures them that these are the keys to professional looking dance style results.

The Lindy Hop is primarily a creative, expressive, jazz rhythm dance and an official social ballroom dance. Kids often rapid pace their way into syncopated beats with the Lindy's fundamental six-and-eight-count steps.

Experienced dancers demonstrate their own expressive movement during break-aways that allow for divergent improvisation by both women and men. This type of swing is for the savvy professional. Before an Everyday Joe can hip roll or leg shimmy his way into the spotlight he has to loosen up with the warm up.

The lesson begins with newcomers



Staff Photo by Pam Williams

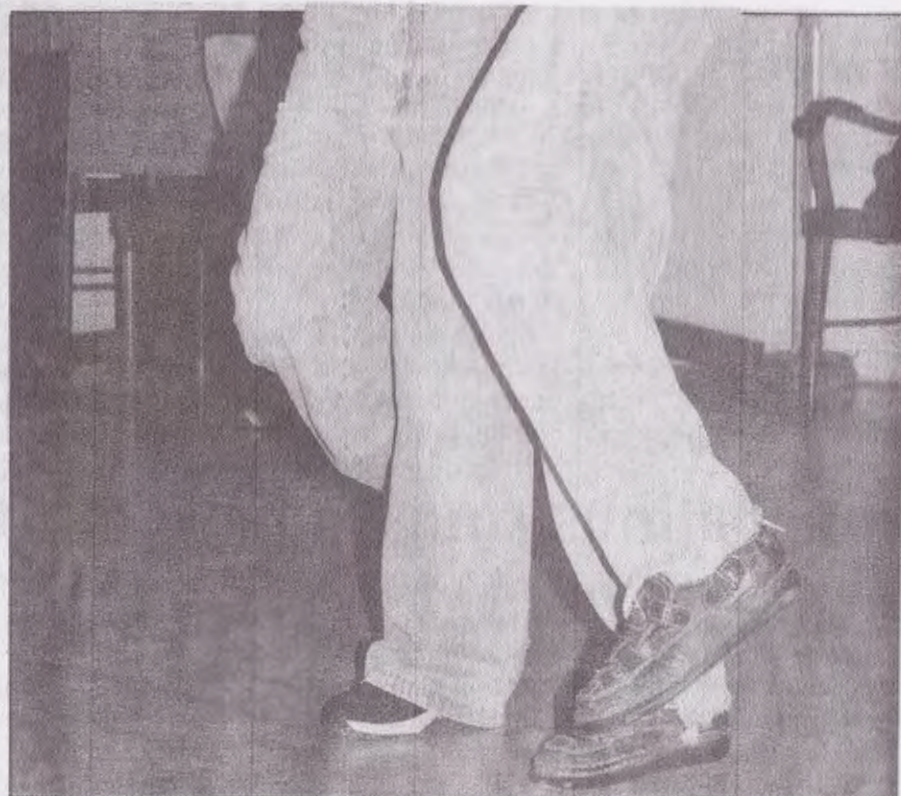
Leon Raper and Monica Vanhook demonstrate a kick step for the class. The kick step is similar to those used in, another couple's dance, the Charleston.

stage commanding the attention of more than 60 mostly young participants. He effortlessly demonstrates each movement while his voice complements every step.

Smooth gestures and easy laughter glide the dancers through progressive components that in their entirety will make up the Lindy Hop.

Alone, each participant can individually concentrate on each step and turn. Traditional wallflowers may feel more comfortable dancing solo because it allows for private left feet to go unnoticed. However, an individual's flamboyant execution of a routine is not the mainstay of the Lindy Hop. Harmony in a couple's dance requires the cooperation of both partners.

During Wednesday's lesson, both the hesitant and the assertive select partners



Staff photo by Pam Williams

Noah Cooley and Kim Jamison, Camp Verde High School Students show the class how to swing! They are shown here picking up the step to a 280 beat.

ners, little time to familiarize with a partner's misplaced rhythms and sparse moments to romantically gaze into each other's eyes.

Nervous energy echoes through the big band rhythms resonating against the Cottonwood Recreation Center's wooden floor. The rapping of heals and the sliding of tennis shoes provide a percussive addition to the swing flavor of every tapping tune. Raper's confidence, enthusiasm and choice of big band music provide the energy that motivates participants at lesson time.

Duke Ellington, Glen Miller and other big boys in big band are the traditional sound flavors of swing. Today, both teenagers and young adults have caught the fever of this high speed couples dance. Today's swing stylists enjoy the

any remnants of gangsta suits and crepe dresses that move to the music.

Adults are ordering martinis, shaken not stirred, and swing nights are being served up all over the country. If Raper has his way, a weekly evening of swing just around the corner for Verde Valley teens.

Raper is lobbying Valley Parks and Recreation Departments to sponsor a weekly swing night for young adults.

According to Raper, "I've seen dance improve the lives of teens and adults. It's turned people's lives around."

So if you're one of the hundreds in the Verde Valley who've caught the fever, then Leon Raper has the cure.

Don't be shy, just swagger in from the cold autumn air and join the old