

# The Sun

By KATE TAYLOR October 1, 2007

## A New Generation of Flappers and Sheiks



New York — some in flapper attire and some in jeans — came out to the Central Park Bandshell yesterday to dance to the Hot Jazz music of Michael Arenella and his Dreamland Orchestra.

Swing is a thriving subculture in New York and other cities around the country. Although the dilettantes pulled in by the "swing revival" of the late '90s have moved on, colleges, the Internet, and popular TV shows continue to attract 20-somethings to the scene.

"Some people are interested in the fashion, and some are interested in the music of that era," an administrator of the New York swing Web site Yehoodi, Rik Panganiban, said. "Some people might have seen [swing] on 'Dancing with the Stars' or 'So You Think You Can Dance.' There's also the motivation to meet people."

Yehoodi, which will celebrate its ninth anniversary later this month, puts on a dance party, called the Frim Fram Jam, every Thursday at Club 412, near Pennsylvania Station. There is a lesson from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. and dancing from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m. Around 200 people usually come, Mr. Panganiban, said — "from [New York University] students to octogenarians, and everything in between." Yehoodi (the name comes from the Cab Calloway song "Who's Yehoodi?") tries to create a close community at Frim Fram, celebrating the birthdays or recent weddings of regulars.

New Yorkers are fortunate, Mr. Panganiban said, to have some of the swing legends still around, like Frankie Manning, who danced with Whitey's Lindy Hoppers at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, and who still teaches classes and recently published his autobiography, and Dawn Hampton, who sang in the Hampton Family band and as the Hampton Sisters before becoming a dancer.

Mr. Arenella's band plays Hot Dance music from the 1920s — music to which people do dances like the foxtrot, the Charleston, the Peabody, early Lindy Hop, Black Bottom, and Balboa. He described the bands of the 1920s as playing "more lightly and softly and humbly" than the bands of the World War II era.

"Jazz had yet to become this pyrotechnical display of prowess," he said. "It was music to be danced to, and entertainment; it wasn't hallowed as this high art."

Mr. Arenella himself transcribes all the band's scores from original 78s. For many of the songs, sheet music isn't available, or if it is, it doesn't include the embellishments the musicians added, which Mr. Arenella wants to be able to reproduce.

Several dancers said that the Internet, and particularly YouTube, have led to cross-fertilization among local styles, which used to be quite distinct.

"Ten years ago, you could definitely say, 'This is a D.C. dancer,' or 'This is a Seattle dancer,'" Mr. Panganiban said. "Now, more people are aware of other styles and trying to learn them."

Mickey Fortanasce, who teaches and competes in Balboa, said that, thanks to clips posted on YouTube, "[e]veryone is able to see what everyone is doing everywhere in the world."

The swing scene is very active in Europe, particularly in Sweden, and some musicians hope to spread it elsewhere. George Gee, who described himself as "the only professional Chinese-American big band leader," is planning to take his orchestra, which plays regularly at the Rainbow Room and the Supper Club on West 47th Street, on tour to China next year.

"There's a hub of swing dancers, both Chinese and foreigners, in Shanghai and Beijing," Mr. Gee said. "But we're doing sort of an ambassador tour of big band jazz and Lindy Hop to concert halls throughout the country."

The great thing about swing dancing, the public relations manager of the Frick Collection — who was at yesterday's concert in a silk georgette dress and a cloche, both from the 1920s — Heidi Rosenau, said, is that once you learn how to lead and follow, "you can dance with anyone on the planet, even if you don't know how to talk to him."