

Dance 2367H

December 3, 2019

Paper 8

### A Study of Swing

My roommate asked me to go a swing dancing lesson with her recently. I enjoyed myself immensely, so she asked me to go with her again. In order to better understand the dance form, I decided to write a detailed description of a jazz solo competition.

A woman in the red skirt begins to loosen her body to the rhythm of the swing music. Her legs seem disconnected from the rest of her body as she kicks one high in front and then opens and closes her knees. Her arms swing in their full range of movement, uncontrolled like a ragdoll. Then she begins to kick her legs behind her as the audience claps her on. She kicks her right leg in front and swings it back, using the momentum to leave the ground with both legs behind her. The audience goes wild at this weightless trick. As she lands, she does not miss a beat and immediately swishes her skirt and sways her hips. She gives way to the first contender dressed in a black suit. His shimmying, however, is no match for her natural ability to play with the music, and thus the judges give her the round.

The next contestant is a woman in a grey dress. The woman in the red skirt immediately calls the attention to herself as she lazily lets her bent leg hinge loosely at the hip. She lets her hips sway to the slow tempo and occasionally kick out her leg to add syncopation into the rhythm of her dance. Then she lunges towards the floor, her torso facing the audience and her straight leg sliding out to the side. She lets her arms reach for the ground and then snake around her head. This step emphasizes the length of her elegant arms and legs. She does a bit of leisurely

Charleston and then to the surprise of the audience sinks down into the splits. She rises up and moves her hips as if they were hula hooping. And with a spin she gives the floor to her contestant. The woman in the grey shoes her component of the stage with her hips. While her movements are natural, they lack the gracefulness and intricacy of the woman in the red skirt and so, unsurprisingly, she loses the round.

The final contestant actually seems to have a parallel amount of skill. He faces the woman in the red skirt for the entire duration of his dance, making it seem that with each move he is challenging her. He slides as if he were wearing silk slippers instead of dress shoes. Then after a couple rhythmic steps he begins a strange walk with his head bobbing forward as if he were a chicken. He lets the strange walk develop even further, circling his shoulders and hips and letting his arms float like wings. The woman in the skirt chases him off the stage with her arms pointing into the air in a playful, yet competitive manner. She kicks her legs forward, as if to clear the stage completely after that cocky display. She twists her hips and knees towards her center while flinging her arms in and out, agitating her flowy skirt. Then she steps out and begins to let her feet shuffle back, her head and torso following simply because they are attached. She claps her on her way back and get close to her competitor. In a joking manner, he puts his hand in his shirt and exaggerates his beating heart. Then the two begin partner dancing before the host cuts them off. The judges can't decide and two refuse to vote, one points to the male contestant and thus the woman in the red skirt is dethroned.

From observing this heated contest, a few things become clear about the culture swing dancing. Looseness in the arms and hips is valued, unlike in ballet where body part is elegantly taut. Unique dance moves with disjointed movements are also applauded more. There seems

to be a base set of movements upon which variation is encouraged. The more creative the dancers were with the movement, regardless of the aesthetic quality, the better the dancing was deemed. In addition, even though the dancers were not dancing together they still communicated and created dialogue with each other through their dancing. This dialogue made the dance more interesting to the audience. Overall, swing is upbeat, and humor seems to be built into the dance form.

Video:

“Harlem 2011 Solo Jazz Contest”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oopvldSStnU>