

The Secretary (reports)
LUTSF,

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: LUTSF – Ciana Skeete Report – Lindyhopping and Authentic Jazzing in NYC – May 2014

I am writing to submit my report for the LUTSF after undertaking and returning from my trip. I visited New York City from 22nd – 26th May 2014 for the Frankie 100 event which was held within these dates.

In my application to the LUTSF I said that I wanted to do dance training, to develop my teaching skills, to learn material for choreography and to see practice in another country. I think all of which I achieved in this tightly packed 5 day trip which taught me and gave me so much in return. The fact that I learnt a lot whilst at the festival and that a lot also happened afterwards as a result of the networking at the festival meant that the goals in the application were met.

Highlights of my trip were talking with the 'old timers' and listening to their knowledge of the dance 'back in the day', attending historical lectures, being present at the inauguration of world lindyhop day and the social dancing of the event which took part every night of the festival.

As this trip formed part of my Jazz Chick Dance tour, I would suggest that future applicants try and be creative about their applications, not only for it to stand out but also to make it into an adventure for themselves too. My tour for me was an exploration and development of my dancing, giving it a name helped to add a bit more excitement around it.

I plan to incorporate this into my blog which I use to share with people about what I am doing and where I am going on the Jazz chick tour:

<http://jazzchicklondon.wordpress.com/author/jazzchicklondon/>

I also use social media in terms of facebook and Instagram in my bid to share information about what I am doing with friends, family and followers.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the LUTSF for your support in this project and for helping me along in this adventure and making it possible for me to attend the Frankie 100 event. It was truly a life changing experience and I have come back richer in knowledge and with a renewed sense of passion for Lindyhop and Authentic Jazz.

Kind regards,

Ciana Skeete

Lindyhopping and Authentic Jazzing in New York City

May 2014

Written by Ciana Skeete

The way I see this project is that has 2 very important parts to it....the 'me' part and the 'adventure part'. I'll start with the 'me' part as it adds a bit of history to my journey and how I became to be fortunate enough to be have my project supported by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund.

In October 2013 I attended an event called the European Swing Dancing Championships which was held in London and concentrated on the African American dances of the 1930s. For this event, I held a voluntary managerial position, attended all classes, competed in 3 competitions and danced my heart out until the wee hours for 4 days...needless to say I was a little bit tired afterwards. At this event, I came 2nd in the open Jack and Jill Competition and got awarded the highly sought after EuroStar prize also known as the 'Spirit of Lindyhop Award'.

The Eurostar award is described as follows:

"The annual EuroStar Award for exceptional performance is given to one European leader and one European follower at ESDC, who have exemplified the spirit of the dance throughout the weekend. As well as a trophy and inauguration into the EuroStar Hall of Fame, the winners will also receive free passes to swing dance events around the world, to encourage them to pursue their love of dancing" Reference: <http://www.eurofdc.com/specialawards/>

The Eurostar award has given me the gift of pursuing my passion of swing dancing. I am always on a mission to better myself and become a better dancer which this award so far this year has facilitated. As a result of this award, the 'Jazz Chick dance tour' was born as a bit of fun to record my trips that I went on as a result of this award and also sometimes trips that were not a part of the award. The Frankie 100 festival in New York City was part of my EuroStar adventure and is definitely one of the highlights of journey so far.

The 22nd – 26th May 2014 saw 2000 swing dancers from all over the world descend to New York City in celebration of the man who made the dance 'Lindyhop' what it is today, and that man is called Frankie Manning.



Gordon Webster Band on stage at Frankie 100. Photo by Tamara Pinco

“No one has contributed more to the Lindy Hop than Frankie Manning, as a dancer, innovator and choreographer. For much of his lifetime he was an unofficial Ambassador of Lindy Hop. Originally touring as a dancer and choreographer with Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers in the 30's and 40's, he helped spread the popularity of the Lindy Hop through three continents. Once again, since the swing dance revival that started in the 1980s, Frank Manning was a driving force worldwide with his teaching, choreography and performance. His own love of swing music and dancing was contagious as his dazzling smile” Reference: http://www.savoystyle.com/frankie_manning.html



Frankie Manning in 1930s (L) and in 2009 (R)
(http://www.savoystyle.com/frankie_manning.html)



You can see Frankie dancing in the film ‘Hellzapoppin’ which has one of the most famous lindyhopping clips from the 1930s:



Frankie Manning - Hellzapoppin' (1941) - Whiteys Lindy Hoppers w_ Dancers' Names.mp4

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSAOV6XEjXA>). This shows Lindyhop at its fastest and wildest with an abundance of airsteps which Manning created for the dance, these are still widely used to this day. Another popular clip is from Keep Punching which displays the Big Apple which is a solo jazz routine which is also still being danced on social dance floors (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfgKMfexdPQ>).



Frankie Manning - The Big Apple Routine in Keep Punching.mp4

Frankie 100 was put together as a tribute to Frankie Manning who not only created the dance but injected his special brand of joy and spirit into the dance which made many swing dancers globally fall in love with him and Lindyhop itself. I started dancing after he passed away in 2009 but I have done a lot studying of the dance and it’s the philosophy of this man who I feel more at home with. When I dance I have been told I harness the spirit of the dance and it is what contributed to my winning the spirit of Lindyhop award which was a great honour.

During this event I was a volunteer which meant that in exchange for the time I spent working on the event, I received entry into the event. I spent this time carrying out administrative tasks prior to the event such as writing and distributing letters for those in need of visas. I also carried out some research for a commemorative booklet which was put together for the event.

During the event I worked on the merchandise stand, as a manager and carrying out those volunteering duties helped me feel part of the team in the background which I loved as it gave me insight into the work involved with organising and running an event of that scale, and also the considerations that are given to dancers in order to make it an enjoyable and authentic experience. It also helped me think about the considerations I would make if in the future I chose to organise an event, obviously not on that scale but it certainly gave me some interesting ideas.



Lindyhop classes during Frankie100 at Alvin Ailey. Photo by Ciana Skeete

It also gave me access to some world class instructors whom I took lessons from, my favourite lesson with Sakarias Larsson who is a member of the world famous Lindyhop dance troupe 'Harlem Hotshots' whom I took the opportunity to help him demonstrate class content at the end of the lesson which was an exciting opportunity. All classes took place at the world famous dance school in New York City Alvin Ailey which was an absolute honour to be in.

The building was very mesmerising and I also took opportunities to sneak a peek at the other dance lessons taking place which was beautiful to witness. From the lessons with Sakarias I took away inspiration and a fresh perspective on my solo dancing. He drew inspiration from a particular video called 'The Spirit Moves' which is a collection of old videos from the 1930s which it has encouraged me to purchase and to study in order to benefit my own dancing as well and sharing the knowledge with my students back in the UK.



Me dancing with Sakarias.MOV

There were also talks and lectures regarding the history of the dance and the infamous figures, the one I particularly enjoyed was a screening of previously unseen footage of Frankie Manning's dancing. I remember sitting down at 6pm and being very surprised at 8pm when it had ended as I was so drawn in and mesmerised by the footage that I had no idea that 2 hours had gone by. Still in theme of the history, because New York City was the birth place of the Lindyhop, there are lots of living and breathing dancers who were there at the time and who are still living in NYC and lots of historical places to visit. Amongst those people I spoke to was a lady called Norma Miller who was actually danced in Whitey's Lindyhop with Frankie Manning and a man by the name of Sonny Allen who danced with Frankie during the 80s revival.

I visited the Savoy plaque which sits in Harlem in the spot where the Savoy Ballroom used to be. The Savoy Ballroom was the place in which all the kids used to go to dance in the 1930s and also used to be where all the Jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Ella Fitzgerald and so on, used to play live. Frankie Manning's grave was also a site I visited during my stay.



Me & the Savoy Plaque. Photo by Ciana Skeete



Me & Sonny Allen (Old Timer). Photo by Ciana Skeete



Parade through Harlem on World Lindyhop Day. Photo by Ben Heikel

Steeping myself in the history of the dance which was really nourishing and enriching to be standing there where it all once took place and meeting the people who were there and who were able to give me verbal accounts of Harlem and the dance scene back in the day was so amazing. I was also part of history as the 26th May 2014 saw the inauguration of World Lindyhop Day in New York City which we all celebrated at the savoy plaque with the Mayor of New York and then a by marching through the streets of Harlem to live Jazz. Personally for me that was the highlight of the trip, to be there and part of that celebration of it being the first of its kind

In addition to all that I gained via being immersed in the history, learning from the world's best and being involved in the organisational aspect of the event. I also benefitted from one of the most important features of being at an event like that.....dancing! There was the opportunity to dance

until 4am every single night for 5 nights with people from all over the world. I learnt to dance for this reason, and that is to dance with everyone and anyone. I danced until I couldn't feel my feet anymore; it was some of the best social dancing I have ever experienced just because of the variety of people that there was to dance with. This in turn also provided numerous networking opportunities, not only to dance with people from all over but to meet and connect with people. This in turn extended my social network and lead to other opportunities after Frankie 100 which included me attending Herrang Dance Camp and being in the all girl authentic jazz dance troupe 'Herrang Dance Camp Chorus Line' throughout July 2014 which is an opportunity which I might not have had, had I not networked at the Frankie 100 event. As part of the Chorus Line, I got to perform twice a week solo routines which were faithful to the female dancers of the 1930s, we were training every day and studying videos to try and adopt the authentic vibe of the routines.



HDC 2014 Chorus Line - Tranky Doo.mp4

This in turn has expanded my solo dancing repertoire as well.

Being at Frankie 100 also lead to other performances and working with other people at Herrang Dance Camp which contributed to an amazing July.

Now that a couple of months have passed since I returned from NYC and the Frankie 100 festival, whenever I reflect on it my heart swells with pride that I was there to soak up the atmosphere and experience this unique festival. The emotions I feel when I think back are still quite powerful and I feel emotional when I think back to being in a room with 2000 other swing dancers sharing a passion for the music and dancing that we love.



The atmosphere on the dancefloor on the last night of Frankie100 (I am in the black dress with the red flower). Photo by Tamara Pinco

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It has given me more ambition and drive to be more active in my local london scene and also to put into practice all the ideas I have from working with all of these talented people, in order to improve myself as a dancer and a teacher but also to make a contribution to the london swing dance scene in an area that I think it is lacking.

My project has helped me to grow technically and personally as a swing dancer and by networking I have built global contacts for future teaching projects abroad which is something I am looking to branch into in the close future.

Thank you to the team at the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund who chose me to have this amazing experience which hopefully I have articulated satisfactorily how much this has benefitted me.