

A top dancer in full swing

THE SAME WAY folks like George Gershwin and Irving Berlin personified the golden age of popular songwriting in New York, Frankie Manning personified the golden age of swing dance.

Manning died last month, a few weeks short of the 95th birthday, but his presence remains vivid in this new documentary by Julie Cohen, which features one of his last interviews.

While he remained modest about his achievements, he clearly loved what he did, and "Never Stop Swinging" would be a winner if it only revived vintage film of the young Manning in action, at the Savoy Ballroom in the 1930s and in the 1941 film "Hellzapoppin'."

The dancers in that film, including Manning, formed the core of the famous Whitey's Lindy Hoppers troupe. Watching them fling their bodies

around the stage, performing complex acrobatics with amazing precision at warp speed, can produce only gasps of admiration 68 years later.

It wasn't all good. Cohen details some of the racism that plagued the era, including the brutal irony that the Lindy Hoppers could earn a lot of money for Roseland by performing on its stage, but weren't allowed to sit in its audience.

Manning's own story is woven into the film — how he grew up in Harlem dreaming of dancing himself and came of age just as Count Basie and

swing music arrived. He danced for some 20 years, took a job in the Post Office for the next 30, then retired and danced for another 23.

He never got the mainstream glory. He doesn't seem to have missed it. He still died an American cultural treasure, and this film explains why.

David Hinckley

★★★★★
**FRANKIE MANNING:
 NEVER STOP SWINGING**
 Tonight at 10:30, Ch. 13