

Ben and Jill Sundberg
Logan, Utah
December 6, 2007

Swing Jam
Folkdance

Informant:

Ben Sundberg is studying business at Utah State University. He's been dancing for 10-11 years, or since middle school, when some friends dragged him along to a swing dance at Skyline High School in Salt Lake County. Ever since then, he's been hooked on swing dancing, and has introduced as many people to swing dancing as he possibly can. He's been living and swing dancing in Logan since 2002, two years of which he spent serving an LDS mission in Germany. He is currently the president of the USU Big Band Swing Club, and a member of USU's performing swing dance team, Swingcopation.

Jill LeFevre Sundberg is studying math education at Utah State University. She started dancing at the Murray Arts Center in Murray, when a guy she was dating took her dancing there. She continued to dance there even after he left on an LDS mission, and met Ben there when he came home from his mission. After Ben and Jill got married, she transferred from the University of Utah to USU and moved to Logan with Ben. She has been swing dancing for four to five years, two years of which have been in Logan. She is currently the publicity chair of the USU Big Band Swing Club, and a member of USU's performing swing dance team, Swingcopation.

Context:

I interviewed Ben and Jill at their apartment in Logan. We sat at their kitchen table and had a relaxed, easy conversation over soup and graham crackers. Ben mimicked dance moves to show the excitement of a swing jam, and he closed his eyes and shook his head to an invisible beat to show what he meant by jiving. Swing jams occur at the regular weekly swing dances that the USU Big Band Swing Club holds, at big swing dancing events across the country, or any social dance involving swing dancing. Even though swing jams are usually spontaneous, at least one swing jam usually occurs at some point during the night at any scheduled swing dance. Swing jams can be announced, but they usually happen when a circle forms around one couple. Everyone gathers around to watch and to egg the dancers on. Swing jams usually form during fast songs with lots of energy.

Text:

Ben: In Logan, well, they, first of all, someone, there's a couple of things dealing with swing jams. Sometimes they have been announced, saying, yeah, we're gonna have a swing jam. Sometimes people gather together around somebody that they just think is just a hot dancer and just having, they're just having so much syncopation and just jivin' with each other, so then they start clappin', of course, on the two and the four [the second and

fourth beats of the music], and just keep goin', and a circle around that person builds up and they start jivin' with each other and then they decide, whew, this is gettin' too hot for me and they jump out and somebody else jumps in and they start jivin' with their, you know, their stuff..

Jill: However, Logan's swing jam scene has a consistently biased jam, because the only people who go into the jams are the ones who have already been... Another problem is that every time a fast song comes on there is kind of an expectation that it's going to be a jam. And that's not necessarily the way that I would hope a jam to go because sometimes I wanna just dance to a fast song.

Ben: And there's also the point is that most of our swing jams in Logan are fast. We rarely, there are some very rare occasions where we put a slower song on for a swing jam, or a circle forms in that type of swing jam. But I think that has a lot to do with energy too.

Jill: Most of the time in Logan our swing jams are just, go in there until somebody kicks you out. But the way someone gets kicked out is other people will, what you wanna do if you wanna go into a jam is with your partner, you kind of bounce a little, you gotta, kind of, Ben: Jockey Jill: up and down movement, it's called a jockey. And in order to get into the circle before someone else, you jockey and you look around and you make sure no one else is planning on going in, and then you kind of draw attention to yourself and then you do a cool move out to really make sure the attention switches from the person in the jam to you.

Ben: And also the person that's in the jam, he notices also the person who wants to come in, so he is expecting to leave and he may leave even before the other person gets in, cause sometimes you just get tired.

Jill: If swing jams were run a little better, or, a little differently, people would listen to the music and go in when the music says to, and go out when the music says to, but not very many of us understand music all the way.

Ben: So this is kind of Logan's tradition.

Jill: It's Logan, just go in and have fun. [laughs]

Texture:

Since lifts (dance steps where one or both partners' feet come off the ground at some point) are strictly forbidden on the social dance floor, swing jams, where only one couple is dancing in the middle of the circle at a time, are a good place for dancers to show off some of their wilder tricks. Swing jams are usually loud and rowdy. In addition to clapping along to the music (always on the second and fourth beats, clapping on first and third beat is considered aggressive), everyone yells and slaps the floor whenever someone does something particularly impressive. Also, the couples dancing in the middle of a swing jam aren't always necessarily a man and a woman. Sometimes two men or two women will enter a swing jam, this is considered socially acceptable and usually the crowd laughs in response and cheers them on.

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