STREETDANCE AND HIP HOP - LET'S GET IT RIGHT!

Article by David Croft, Freelance Dance Artist

OK - so I decided to write this article after many years studying various styles of Street dance and Hip Hop, also teaching these styles in Schools, Dance schools and in the community. Throughout my years of training and teaching, I have found a lack of understanding, knowledge and, in some cases, will, to really search out the skills, foundation and blueprint of these dances.

The words "Street Dance" and "Hip Hop" are widely and loosely used without a real understanding of what they mean. Street Dance is an umbrella term for various styles including Bboying or breakin (breakin is an original Hip Hop dance along with Rockin and Party dance - the word break dance did not exist in the beginning, this was a term used by the media, originally it was Bboying. (Bboy, standing for Break boy, Beat boy or Bronx boy)......for more click here

Conquestcrew

Popping/Boogaloo Style was created by Sam

Soloman and Popping technique involves contracting your muscles to the music using your legs, arms, chest and neck. Boogaloo has a very funky groove constantly using head and shoulders. It also involves rolling the hips and knees. Locking was created by Don Campbell. This involves movements like wrist twirls, points, giving himself “5”, locks (which are sharp stops), knee drops and half splits.

(Popping/Boogaloo and Locking are part of the West Coast Funk movement). House Dance and Hip Hop. With Hip Hop coming out of the East Coast (New York) and West Coast Funk from the west (California) there was a great collaboration in cultures bringing the two coasts together.
All these styles have a foundation, a history, and a story of their own. Street dance as a style does not have a foundation - as we have mentioned, it's a collective term to cover these different dances. Hip Hop is a CULTURE, a way of life, not just a dance or a craze that the youth of today go through. Originally Hip Hop was about celebration, partying, dancing and having fun......not drugs, jewellery, money, cars etc as portrayed today in music videos etc. There’s the misconception that if you dress in baggy clothes, wear a bandana and cap and hi top Nikes that you’re suddenly hip hop!! (The baggy loose clothing was actually influenced by dancers on the West coast).

So how did these street dances come about? Well they are the few styles of dance that were not born in a studio in front of a mirror. They were created in the club/party, back yard, on the street. They were raw. They were social/party dances first and foremost.

Social dance does not exist for a lot of Hip Hop/Street dancers today. Along the way it’s been lost. Before the social and the party dance it was about two stepping and swaying from side to side to the sounds of Motown and James Brown. Two stepping to a song you love is the most natural thing in the world.

Unfortunately nowadays, in a lot of cases, Hip Hop/Street dances have become studio based dances built on routines and often not even to the music that influenced these dances. The music influences how we move; if the music changes, the dance changes. The heart and soul of these dances are about being free, creating your own language, flavour and twist on things. They say if you can’t be free, jam, freestyle or get down you ain't hip hop!!

The lack of knowledge is surprising, I believe the knowledge behind the dances - the history, the pioneers, the timelines, the what’s and why’s is paramount to
understanding the dance and to being a good teacher. First and foremost it's a DANCE so you have to be able to move before tricks and flips (as impressive as they are!) come into play. You should be able to ask your teacher what's this step/move called?? Where's this from?? etc not settle for just a set of movements thrown together to make a routine that makes no sense to you.

This brings us onto YouTube. Access to battles and competitions all over the world can be found and watched in seconds. It's a wonderful thing to have, no doubt. No waiting for DVDs or videos to be released or trying to catch that music video on MTV with the freshest dancers in. There is a lot of helpful information and knowledge available out there but on the other hand also a lot of badly practiced dances, a watered down version of the original, leading to the wrong information/knowledge being passed on and uninspiring dances with no soul being created. Worst of all, some will then take that to class and teach it!!.

Is it a lack of respect why people don't put the time in to research these dances? An ignorance that says we can just throw a few moves together and say its street dance or Hip Hop?? Unfortunately, in a lot of cases it seems that way. How can you choreograph or teach a class if you don't have the foundation or knowledge in any of these styles - it doesn't make sense. It's like learning a foreign language - if you aren't taught the basics in vocabulary then you can't create a sentence. These dances are just like any classical dance, whether its ballet, contemporary, or jazz etc. They have roots, they have a history, and a story to tell.

The fact that hip hop has no agreed standards means it can be hard finding the right training and quality teacher. I say this through personal experience; the Hip Hop scene in Liverpool is very, very small, in some elements nonexistent. It's frustrating. There's nothing worse than training/practicing, thinking you're doing something right then you get some quality instruction and find out you're a million miles away! For me, to learn these dances I had to travel to source the original Pioneers/architects of these styles - It's taken me from London to Los Angeles, Las Vegas to New York.
Which brings me on to Dance in the education system. It's something that really interests me and an avenue I would like to explore. Now you can't get a degree in Hip Hop, Popping or Bboying etc so it can be difficult when applying for work as most applications or vacancies ask for a degree in Dance. However most Streetdance/Hip Hop artists have trained hard for countless hours, they have travelled and spent a lot of time and money to learn these dances, in most cases, with the intention to pass on their skills and knowledge to the next up and coming generation.

As Streetdance and Hip hop are very popular right now, schools and dance schools advertising their version of street dance or hip hop classes is becoming more common. Colleges and universities have also followed suit by including modules as part of their course or degree, however, as it's not the main focus of the qualification, it doesn't get the same time or attention as the other styles. That's understandable but in most instances instead of bringing someone in with the knowledge to teach these styles properly they will settle for a watered down version. I can't help but feel this is a lack of respect for the dances and culture I believe in and all it would take is a little time to do some research. I wouldn't dream of teaching a class I had no knowledge or foundation in, in respect for that dance and for the students I teach. They pay to come to class to be instructed and educated with the right information.
A situation that often arises is that schools see a performance or a piece of choreography on the TV or the internet and want their children/young people to master this. While the exposure that Streetdance is receiving on TV is great, what has to be understood is that these dancers, dance crews etc have studied their craft and this takes time, they have learnt their styles so when they perform a Streetdance piece everything is on point from their Bboying to their house dance to their locking.

This article is about giving people a little insight into Hip Hop and all these beautiful styles that fall under the Street dance umbrella. These dances are so enjoyable and interesting to learn and take part in - remember they started in the club/ the party so they are about celebrating, feeling good and having fun! And now, hopefully after reading this, people will say ................ - Streetdance and Hip Hop - Let's Get it Right!!

David Croft is a freelance dance artist, living in Liverpool, and he was referred to Cheshire Dance by Ruth Spencer. David has trained in the United States of America and has in depth knowledge of popping, boogaloo and locking. David has experience of outreach work with young people, which is where his interest lies.