

LAMusArt
LIVE!

DANCE:

Versa-Style

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2 STUDY GUIDE





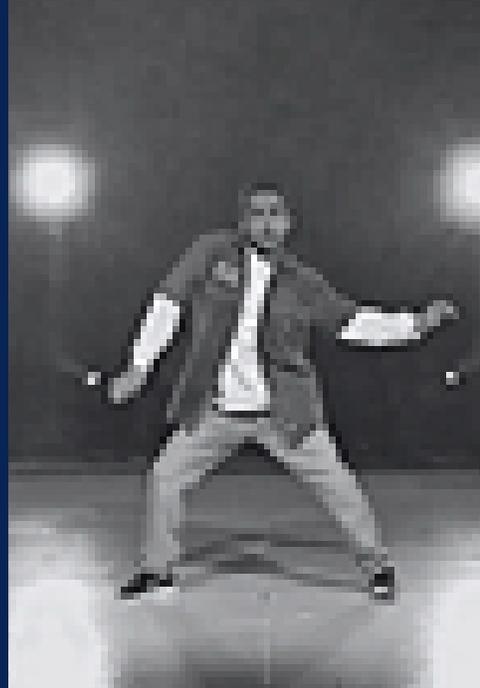
HISTORY OF HIP HOP

Hip hop is a musical, art and cultural form that emerged from house parties in the Bronx, New York in the 1970s. It was created by African Americans, Latinx American and Caribbean Americans and is credited as being popularized by DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican American DJ who using a turn table isolated and repeated musical breaks, laying the foundation for hip hop music.

Hip hop is characterized by 4 elements, rapping, breakdancing, DJ-ing and graffiti. Hip hop soon went from being an underground counterculture whose music was circulated through homemade cassette tapes throughout New York City to getting played on the radio. Sugarhill Gang's "Rappers Delight", released in 1979, is credited as being one of the first hip hop records, and its release help push hip hop into the mainstream.

Hip hop has been and continues to be a powerful medium for youth to express discontent with the status quo, often in relation to legal or government institutions and their impacts on Black and Brown communities.







INTERVIEW WITH VERSA-STYLE MEMBER: BRANDON JUEZAN

By Brenda Jackson

This interview has been abridged for our guide. The full transcript is available at LAMusArt.org.

Versa-Style has been around since 2005 and y'all have seen the changing landscape of dance. How do you think the perceptions around hip hop have changed since beginning Versa-Style?

It's something I talked to our directors about a lot, who are the founders, Miss Funk (Jackie Lopez) and Breeze-lee (Leigh Foaad). They and all of us in general, have noticed that for a long time, there's been a lot of misconception on what hip hop dance is, and what hip hop culture is. And that kind of has changed a bit over time in general.

But now a lot of folks kind of boil hip hop down to, you know, as long as it's upbeat music and it's upbeat dance moves, it's hip hop, and they don't understand that there's actually a specific foundation and there's history, and there's culture that goes behind hip hop, because it was actually developed by specific communities around the country originally in the Bronx, New York back in 1973.

And, you know, we've tried to do our best to even utilize our social media platforms and even platforms where a lot of the youth are like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, to actually share what hip hop dance authentically looks like. Because that's what we want to keep pursuing, presenting and promoting is the authenticity of hip hop and hip hop dance movement.

Do you specifically have any dancers or musicians that inspire you and your dances?

Me specifically, it's hard to say if there's any one in particular because especially with us at Versa-Style, we train in many different types of street dance movement. Like hip hop is technically only one street dance form. So there's certain music, artists that we gravitate to that we love for hip hop dance specifically, but then there's also other artists for every other kind of street dance form that we do. So I would say a lot of our big influences come from late 90s, early 2000s hip hop artists, like Mary J. Blige, Busta Rhymes, Lauryn Hill and A Tribe Called Quest.

I'm also really into the trap sound of a lot of the newer artists. The way their music sounds influences how I move and a lot of our other dancers feel the same. When we do more of our older styles like popping and locking, it's a lot of 90s West Coast hip hop, G funk, also Soul Train era, Motown era music, those are all different areas and genres of music that influence us. For the most part, it all boils down to soul music. You know, most soul music that was developed by a lot of different Black and Latin artists over the past 30-40 years. Just soul music in general inspires us.

How would you define Soul music? As it relates dance?

When we think of soul music, we think of music that carries the stories and the narratives of our ancestors over time, because that's where hip hop comes. So I would say any type of music or genre stemming from communities of color, that carry their stories and carry their experiences, so it could be funk, soul, hip hop, R&B, any of those we would consider under the kind of genre of soul music over the years. What we like to call soul music, is just music that speaks to our soul because we share a personal connection to it.

Key terms:

Freestyle

Improvised Old School routine.

Battle

A competition in which dancers, usually in an open circle are surrounded by their competitors, dance their routines, whether improvised (freestyle) or planned.

Soul Train Era

Soul train was a long running TV show that ran from the 1970's to early 2000's. Its success in the 70's reflected the rise of funk and soul music on the radio. Notably it was one of the first mainstream shows to showcase Black dance and music in a vibrant, exciting way.



Popping and Locking

A combination of two different dance moves that originated in 1970s California that includes contracting and the dancers muscles to accent the beat of a song.

Salsa

A form of Afro-Latin dance that became popular in 1960s New York City and is influenced by Afro-Cuban dances like rumba and mambo as well as African American dances like swing and tap.



Hip hop was once regarded as an unskilled or unrefined style of street dance that was once looked down upon by many dance societies, largely white dance societies. And it's undeniable that this is largely in part due to the fact that it is of African American creation. Do you feel like the practice and promotion of hip hop serves as an act of cultural and creative resistance to forms of racism and misrepresentation?

When it comes to dance that is presented in more professional spaces, like what they consider concert dance, or what they consider institutionalized dance, all have been centered around Eurocentric dances. And those traditionally would have been more accepted as classical, elegant, more technical.

And a lot of the time, folks like to disregard the foundation and the cultural roots of hip hop and where it came from, and how it was built of African and Latin dances that have their own technique. A lot of folks wouldn't say salsa, certain types of African dance or certain types of ballroom dance that stem from Latin communities lack technicality and foundation. But they don't realize that hip hop was built off many of those styles as well. It's an evolution of those styles. So definitely hip hop is a form that has always been a form of resistance and reclaiming our cultural roots and reclaiming the stories of our community because we have been misrepresented in mainstream media and culture since the inception of hip hop.... So most definitely what we do with our company is we use our dance as a form to like, you know, really reclaim the stories of our people that have been lost over the years and really present the stories in a new light to audiences who may not live in those communities, that may not have experienced those same things, or they may not have ever known that this type of culture exists. That's what we use it for. To show the world that, hey, we are still here. And we matter and what we do is important. And our stories matter.

Where do you see your troupe on that spectrum of educators versus artists? And why do you think the combining of both of them is important in the passing on of the cultural legacy of hip hop?

It's hard to say where we fall on the spectrum, just because our artistry in of itself is education. Because the movement that we do we pass down what we've learned from our elders, our mentors, and the pioneers and creators of hip hop dance and the culture. We're not necessarily passing down some brand new movement, concepts or ideas that we made up. So through doing the dances that we do, we are essentially educating because we believe that if you don't know where you came from, and never know where you're going. When we present our dance movement, the history and culture of those movements come with it, automatically. So that's a big part of our mission is we're not only passing down the techniques, we're passing down, where it came from, and why it's important to know this.

The last two questions I have are a little bit more lighthearted. What has been your most memorable performance to date, and why?

I was actually given the opportunity to perform with a couple other Versa-Style members, and it was part of a competition. We were flown out to Italy to do an international competition, which involved both performance and battling. Because even though what we present to a lot of our students and our audiences is that we're performance group, we're all hip hop culture practitioners, and part of hip hop dance culture is the competitive nature and the battle culture, which - even then - is a lost a lot of the times. And the battle scene is a little bit more underground these days. But for this particular event, it involved both performing and then battling as part of the competition. So I would say being able to perform out in Italy on a stage out in another country, sharing what we do with other communities around the world. It was like a crazy experience overall. So that's probably my favorite and most memorable performance so far. I'm happy about winning the competition, too. For me personally, because that means a lot.

What should audiences be looking for during this performance?

The majority of our show, we take from this performance called origins of hip hop, which is our educational school show. The bulk of it focuses around going through the history of hip hop dance. So you're not going to just go into the show and hear a bunch of rap music and 90s and 80s hip hop, that is only one of the pieces that we're doing, we actually take it from the African Latin roots of hip hop dance.

So we have a piece that focuses around African dance, Latin dance, you know, salsa, merengue, cumbia, and we had swing, West African styles that are all kind of mixed into one piece. Then we move forward and also present the Soul Train era of the 60s and 70s, we go over the funk era that led to hip hop, then, of course, we do hip hop, which is what was more known throughout the 80s, and 90s. We also add some elements of freestyle, because freestyle is actually the basis of the hip hop dance, rather than just choreography. And then of course, spread out throughout the show, we also include some more little artistic elements. So we have some pieces included from some of our more theatrical performances like Box of Hope that involve a little bit more acting and more storytelling.

So you, the audience will be able to see one or two of those pieces mixed in as well. The focus of the performance is education, so a lot of our dances and our pieces are going through the history of hip hop dance from its African and Latin roots.

**See the full transcript on :
LAMusArt.org**

PROGRAM

"LEGACY"

Mixed by DJ Jojo Flores

"SOUL TRAIN"

Various Artists

"TAKE IT BACK"

Various Artists

"FREESTYLE"

Warriors Dance by Coflo

"POWERS THAT BE"

300 Violin Orchestra by Jorge Quintero

"BROTHER"

S.T.A.Y by Hans Zimmer

"BLUES BOY" (Breeze-Lee solo)

Blues boy tune by BB King

COMPANY BOW

Warriors Dance by Coflo

PERFORMERS



Anthony Berry



Harry Weston



Brandon Juezan



Leigh Foaad



Cynthia Hernandez



Jessi Pontillas



Ernesto Galarza

ACTIVITY

Try some of these old school hip hop dance moves with your friends and family!



UP ROCKING

Basic up rocking is a two-count rhythmic movement which is always done just before you floor rock. It's sort of like the footwork in boxing: clean and precise.

1. Put your feet together and cross your arms.
2. Pivot on your left foot and cross your right foot over the left while swinging your arms open. This is count one.
3. Return to the first position, this is count two.
4. Do the same movements to the opposite side.



THE ARM WAVE

1. The wave begins in your hand, as if you stuck your hand in a bucket of tennis balls.
2. You try to roll the ball up the back of your arm, across your shoulders, and then down your other arm. And out your hand.



MOON WALK (FLOATING)

1. Start with your feet together.
2. Flex one foot and put all your weight on that foot.
3. Slide the other foot backwards while keeping the heel of this sliding foot down.
4. Now transfer all your weight to the back foot as you flex it and flatten the front foot. Slide front to back.



FLOOR ROCKING

1. Crouch down, putting your hands next to your feet.
2. Pick up your left hand, putting your weight on your right hand, and cross your right leg over the left. This is count one.
3. While transferring your weight to your two front hands and right foot, extend your left foot back. This is count two.
4. Now bring your right foot next to your left. This is count three.
5. With hands still on the floor, cross your left in front of the right knee. This is count four.
6. Tuck your right leg into your left knee. This is count five. Now uncross your legs and bring your left foot next to your right.... you're back to the beginning.



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SEASON OF PERFORMANCES

EASTSIDE MUSIC PROJECT

Benefit Concert featuring the Sounds of
East LA's Latin Music Landscape from 1940 to Today
Saturday, September 25 at 8pm

CABARET: MUSICAL THEATRE & POP NIGHT

Featuring Chris Bona, Paul Rico, Charlotte Mary Wen
accompanied by Richard An
Saturday, October 23 at 8pm

CLASSICAL: AN EVENING WITH ESTHER RAYO

Featuring Esther Rayo and Brendan White on Piano
Made Possible with support from the Colburn Foundation
Saturday, November 20 at 8pm

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LAMusArt

Los Angeles Music and Art School

Los Angeles Music and Art School
3630 E 3rd St. Los Angeles, CA 90063

(323) 262-7734

www.LAMusArt.org

@LAMusArt

Support:



The Los Angeles Music and Art School (LAMusArt) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit arts organization whose mission is to offer the community of East Los Angeles, primarily its K-12 population, with equitable and affordable access to multidisciplinary arts education programs.

The services we provide as a cornerstone of arts education are integral to the community's cultural identity. Since its founding in 1945 by Ms. Pearle Irene Odell, LAMusArt has served over 100,000 students, employed over 200 Teaching Artists, and provided over 2,000,000 lessons.

We believe affordable and accessible arts education programs work to benefit the students and the community by expanding one's world outlook, sharpening one's creative skills, and contributing to one's social, behavioral, and academic development.

