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THE DAILY NEWS • THURSDAY • OCTOBER 4, 2007

## 'Breaking the Cypher' breaks open the history of break dancing

BY SEMHAR DEBESSAI > LA.COM

When you think of break dancing, you may think: colorful hats, Adidas "shell toes" sneakers and a piece of cardboard laid out on a Bronx rooftop circa 1979.

But the history of break dancing (or breaking) extends much farther than the New York City streets, according to Amy "Cat-fox" Campion, artistic director and choreographer for "Breaking the Cypher," Friday night's show at the Ford Amphitheatre honoring the art form.

"A part of our show is a video asking, 'What if prehistoric man accidentally discovered break dancing,'" says Campion, a professionally trained dancer whose expertise ranges from modern to Capoeira (Brazilian martial arts) dance. "It goes with our theory that it didn't just spontaneously combust (in New York)."

She cites early influences ranging from Latin dance styles and African dances to "uprocking," which involves gestures of violence adopted by the local gangsters at the time, whose intentions were much more literal.

But the breaking culture itself is far from violent. For Jacob "Kujo" Lyons, who worked with Campion to put together the show, it was breaking that pulled him away from the nega-



"Breaking the Cypher," chronicling the evolution of street dancing, comes to the Ford Amphitheatre on Friday.

tive activities he was introduced to while a high-school student, 15 years ago.

"It was vastly less violent than everything else that was going on in my world at the time," says the L.A. native. Lyons is also one of the founders of J.U.I.C.E. (Justice by Uniting In Creative Energy), a community organization focused on empowering youth through hip-hop arts, and a producing sponsor of the show.

After spending the majority of recent years traveling, teaching

and judging competitions, Lyons is ready to get back on the stage, along with fellow dancer Campion and about 30 other performers.

### What does "Breaking the Cypher" mean?

**AC:** It (literally) means dancing in a circle. But it has so many different levels of meaning. It also means to break away from limitations, to break the code of hip-hop culture (and) offer hip-hop culture to anyone who's

interested in hearing it; and breaking its mainstream representation as misogynistic and violent.

### What's a positive representation of hip-hop culture out there now?

**AC:** Every last artist in our show.

### How has breaking evolved over the decades?

**AC:** Thanks to TV and movies, it blew up worldwide (and) thrived in Europe. Korean "B Boys" took

### preview >

#### BREAKING THE CYPHER

**> What:** Some of the best in the break-dancing biz today come together to put on a multimedia performance in honor of the history and evolution of the contortive art.

**> Where:** Ford Amphitheatre, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. E., Hollywood.

**> When:** 8 p.m. Friday.

**> Tickets:** \$5 to \$25.  
www.ticketmaster.com or  
www.breakingthecypher.com.

it in a different direction, and it was revived (in America) in the early '90s. It's gone through a process of mutation. Now, it's an established art form. It may not reach the level of respectability as jazz dance, but you have to demand a lot more from your body to execute the moves.

### What can people expect to see in the show?

**JL:** We go through the timeline of break dancing. We take all the influences we've learned, combined them, and created a hybrid style of choreography. **AC:** It's a mix of dance styles, with more emphasis on break. Integrated with the dances is a DJ, poetry, videos. ...

**JL:** ... Professional opera singers (live in show), classical music and avant-garde piano.

### Given breaking's improvisational roots, how do you keep the art form alive and interesting?

**AC:** There are moves that have not yet been created! Back then they thought a back spin was an exciting move. Now, (breakers) have added a level of virtuosity that rivals a gymnast. You can take a tango move and put it in break dancing; it's very open-ended in that way. It's not about doing the hardest tricks — you need to be creative.

### What are some of your signature moves?

**JL:** I'm known for my upper-body strength ... I can stay on my arms for quite a long time (while doing) slow-motion movements.

**AC:** (In the beginning,) I was totally enchanted by the possibility of being upside down ... I (still) tend to do a lot of things on my head.

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