The History of Hip Hop Dance

DEFINITION:

Hip Hop is not just a form of dance; it is a culture - a way of life. Hip Hop consists of four main elements: b-boying(breaking), dj-ing, graffiti art, and mc-ing(rapping). Hip hop dance as we know it today evolved from three underground dance styles: b-boying, locking, and popping. It then fused with the ideas and choreographic elements of jazz dance to create a hybrid dance form.

BRIEF HISTORY:

To understand hip hop dance, you must investigate the history of the three dance styles from which it evolved.

**Locking** was the first professional street dance. Creator, Don “Campbellock” Campbell, stumbled upon this new dance in the late 60’s in Southern California while trying to do the funky chicken. He was clumsy; he would fall, slide, and point, but people loved it. He soon formed his own performing group called the Campbellock dancers, a name that would soon be changed to The Lockers. They were invited to perform on all of the popular talk shows of the time, including the Dick Van Dyke Show, the Tonight Show, and the Carol Burnett show. They were also regulars on Soul Train. Soon everyone was doing this dance. The Lockers’ most famous members were Tony Basil (who recorded the hit, “Hey Mickey”) and Rerun (from the show, What’s Happening). Locker attire includes knickers, suspenders, marshmallow shoes with matching striped socks, and appleboy caps.

**Popping:** In Fresno, California, 1975, a young man named “Boogaloo Sam” was inspired by The Lockers and started to put together movements that would become the boogaloo popping style. Popping consists of snapping the legs abck and flexing muscles continuously to a beat to give a jerky, snapping effect. The boogaloo style combines the elements of popping with a smooth style that utilizes angles, and incorporates fluid movements to make everything flow together, often using rolls of the hips, knees, and head. Boogaloo Sam started the famous dance group, the Electric Boogaloos, who still perform and teach to this day. Other styles of popping include waving, robot, ticking, strobing, hitting, and puppet style.

Locking and popping are called the “funk styles.” They are both danced to funk music and were developed during the West Coast Funk Era. These dance forms were adopted into hip hop, but have purely funk roots.
**B-Boying** (better known as breakdancing, a term given by the media) began evolving in the late 60’s/early 70’s in South Bronx, New York (the birthplace of hip hop). At one of his famous block parties, DJ Kool Herc noticed that some of the partiers would wait until the break of the record (the part with no lyrics, just funky beats) to jump on the dance floor. He revolutionized dj-ing by finding a way to prolong the break by using two of the same record and switching them back and forth. He named these dancers, *b-boys* and *b-girls*, which stands for break boy and break girl. In the beginning breaking only consisted of only dancing “on top,” which is called the *top-rock*.

This toprocking was very spontaneous, incorporating postures, poses, and challenges. It wasn’t until 1974-75 that the *b-boys* took it down to the floor. The first *floorwork* was very sporadic and jerky with moves like the *Russian, swipes, CC’s, and freezes*. Before long, b-boysing was brought to the streets. It started as an African American artform, but soon other nationalities became involved. Puerto Ricans, especially, took to the dance. Soon, more acrobatic moves were added. *B-boy crews* began to form. They would *battle* each other for turf, fame, and bragging rights. Whoever had the illest moves and the most creative style would win.

Breaking brought new ideas to the world of social dance: full-body contact with the ground was okay; spinning and other moves were possible through the careful manipulation of the body; fighting moves could be a part of dancing. Dancing is now freer, more pumped up, and less controlled because of this.

Before long, these three dance styles, locking, popping, and breaking, began to merge with the organized elements of jazz choreography. Music videos, especially, began to show choreography with a hip hop flare. Hip hop dance has taken on a life of its own and now thrives independently from the strict vocabulary of jazz, locking, popping, and b-boysing. Hip hop dance varies in style depending on your location, ranging from a more pop music/ jazzy style to a rougher or booty-shakin’ style.

Today, hip hop and breakdancing are thriving more than ever. Crews like the Jabberwokies, Quest Crew, Fanny Pak, SuperCrew, and Xtreme (from local Naperville) are gaining a lot of popularity. The recent movies *Step Up* 1-4, *Honey* 1-3, and youtube icons les Twins, Philip, Twitch, Cyrus, Comfort, and Fiction arguably make hip hop dance a permanent fixture in American society.