

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

A GUIDE TO CREATING HIP HOP DANCES

Hip Hop dancing can be as complicated as learning how to B-boy/breakdance or as simple as putting on your favorite Hip Hop track and freestyling. Whatever style within Hip Hop you're using, there are guidelines for helping you to put together a choreographed dance. Choreography is important when you are dancing with a group and need to be synchronized, when you are hired to create a specific piece, or when you are dancing alone but want to be specific in your expression. In this lesson, we will share with you a basic system for putting together a dance in any style you wish.

Although what you will learn here today can apply to any type of dance, we are going to specify how each step can work with Hip Hop dancing in particular. As such, it may help to quickly review exactly what constitutes Hip Hop dancing. Remember, Hip Hop dancing is either movement set to Hip Hop music which expresses the song's style and meaning or movement from any style within Hip Hop dance (e.g. Waving, Tutting, New Jack Swing, B-boying) set to any type of music or even no music at all. To state it more simply, you need either Hip Hop styled movement or Hip Hop music and preferably both.

Therefore, when you begin creating your dance, you need to decide whether you're going to start first with style or music. Do you want to choreograph a Locking style dance or do you want to put something together to that new Lupe Fiasco song you just heard? Maybe you don't have a specific Hip Hop style in mind yet but you know the mood you want to dance to have. In that case, your next step is to start hunting for a song that will express the mood for you. For example, perhaps you have decided that you want to choreograph an aggressive dance with big, powerful movements. You could start by looking for some Crunk style music which is known to have a good combination of hard hitting beats and hardcore lyrics. A couple of recording artists that also put out music that might fit this type of dance are Christian rapper, Tedashii or Bay Area favorite, E-40. If you do have a specific style already in mind (e.g. Boogaloo), picking music might be a lot easier. Funk style movements go very well, of course, to funk music and sometimes disco. B-boying fits break beats, electro-funk and rap. If you already have a song in mind but don't know how you want to move, your best bet is to listen to what the song is talking about and/or feel the mood of the music and choose moves to match what you're hearing and feeling. Some songs may instantly make you want to start stepping, gliding or popping. Other songs will just make you want to freestyle dance in a particular way. All of this is useful when you start putting your dance together.

Once you have chosen your song and style, unless you are planning to choreograph movement to the entire song, you need to choose the section of the song to which you'll dance. Hip Hop music can vary greatly from verse to verse. For example, right now a popular group in Hip Hop is Slaughterhouse. This is a supergroup composed of four already popular solo rappers who decided to come together to make music none of them could make alone. They often each have an individual verse to rap on their songs. Even though it is one song, having four rappers on it, each with their own verse, can make the sound of the song change up quite a bit from verse to verse. This can have a dramatic effect on the kind of movement you create. If you choose to dance only to the chorus of a song, your dance may look a lot different than if you dance to the break down of the same song. Choose the section of the song that will best allow you to express what you want for your dance.

Hip Hop music is often composed in layers of sound and thus the next step in the creative process can be a lot of fun. Very often, you need to listen very carefully to Hip Hop tracks because there is usually much more going on musically than you may realize at first. As you know from previous lessons, Hip Hop music often uses sampling to create its sound. A producer may start with a heavy bass sample and then layer in other drum samples like snares or cymbals, followed by melodies in the form of synthesized instruments like horns, flutes, violins, guitars or pianos and then finish with vocal samples from other famous songs. Any of these different sounds can be chosen for choreography as each presents different possibilities for expression. Maybe your dance starts with movement that strictly follows the first layer of heavy bass from the aforementioned hypothetical song. From there, your dance can switch to movements that imitate the sounds of the horns before moving on to movements that synchronize perfectly to the vocal samples. The more you can specifically express what is happening in the music through movement with your body, the more gratifying the dance can become both for you and your audience.

The lyrics are a major part of every non-instrumental song. They convey the message of the song and provide sound for movement. Even if you were dancing to a song in a language you did not understand, you could still create movement to perfectly synchronize with the sounds of each syllable. However, if you do understand the language, you can not only dance to the sound and rhythm of the words but also the lyrical content. This affords you much more room for creativity as you can now move specifically as the words command. For example, if the song frequently features the word "stop", such as in the actual song "Stop" by Jay-Z, your movement can freeze every time that word comes up. You can even go so far as to act out the lyrics in the song through your movements. Of course, you do not have to be so literal, but you can instead stylize your movements according to the attitude or overall message of the song. The important part is to do something to relate your

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movement to the music in a way that is significant, creative and expressive. You have much to choose from in Hip Hop music and your dances will improve the more you learn to work with the totality of what the song offers.

A few final things to consider when putting together a dance. If you are choreographing for a group, consider the abilities and limitations of each crew member. You want your moves to look good on everyone or else the dance will suffer. If you have members of your group who are capable of unique tricks or other physical skills, you may want to include those into your dance. If many of your crew members are tall, you may not want to include a lot of moves that only work well on much smaller bodies. Also be sure that your dance expresses your personal style. Everyone has something unique to bring to the table when it comes to Hip Hop. Choreographing a dance gives you the perfect opportunity to put your creativity out into the world and you don't want to waste it by making a cookie-cutter dance. On another note, though there are no hard and fast rules, Hip Hop is usually about making a splash and exciting a crowd. Showmanship is a big part of the Hip Hop style. If it fits what you want to express, you are connecting with a decades-long history of show-stopping performances by choreographing a dance that gets the crowd out of their seat. Lastly, remember to keep trying new things as your choreographer. Combine genres of music and movements in ways that respect the history of Hip Hop dance while moving it forward in new and creative ways. Who knows? The dance you create today may inspire the next dance craze or even a whole new subgenre of Hip Hop dance.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Lampin/Postin: To hang out somewhere, as one might who stood idly by a lamp post.

EX: "I was lampin over at my boy's house and my sister was posted up at her friend's."

Act Right: Much needed discipline or correction.

EX: "That kid better calm his crazy self down or I'm gonna have to serve him up some act right!"

What's Crackin? Get it Crackin! : What's happening? Let's get something happening.

EX: "When's the party starting? Right now, yo! Let's get it crackin!"

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

1) Create eight 8-counts of a dance using the guidelines given here. Write a paragraph about your process. Explain how you made the decisions outlined in this lesson which led to the creation of your dance.