

## Lisa Ullmann Report

Destination: New York City

Dates: July 7<sup>th</sup> to September 11<sup>th</sup>

Purpose: 'To train in Breakdance and Mambo in order to improve the delivery of Mambo in the UK'

### Introduction:

I went to New York for two months to train with B-girl Rocafella founder with Bboy Kwikstep of Full Circle Productions, and Angel Ortiz mambo dancer and previous member of Eddie Torres (the founder of New York Mambo on2).

All year I had had suggestions- from friends, from my dance teachers (including Angel Ortiz and Rocafella), even a self-confessed wise-man on the tube that I would learn a lot in New York, and now I understand why they told me this. The experience has enriched me in so many ways.

After much time planning and discussing my application with my peers, it was such a great surprise and honour when I found out my application had been successful.

Whilst in New York my aim was to immerse myself in the Mambo and Breaking scenes and train with my two mentors and other teachers in the city to learn, grow in strength and technique, and to bring mambo back to the UK to teach.

Over the two months I kept a blog, excerpts of which are below, or which can be read in full at [www.elementdance.co.uk/ellamesma/blog](http://www.elementdance.co.uk/ellamesma/blog)

I had an incredible time whilst in New York training with Angel Ortiz, with whom I attended class, and took private lessons, and spent many hours discussing the history of mambo in New York.

I also trained and shadowed B-girl Rocafella at four training spots a week, and for shows, a Hip Hop festival in Philadelphia. I found Rocafella incredibly inspiring because she is so dedicated to her art and so inspired and hard working.

I also attended classes with the founder of Mambo Eddie Torres, with breakers and in Christopher Park with Rocafella and Kwiksteps students- whom I believe are amongst the best breakers in New York. Additionally I went to Mambo events and training with the Souljerz crew in New Jersey.

Whilst in New York I visited some of the sights, but mainly, I danced and danced and danced! And I had such a fantastic time! I met some incredible dancers. The dancers are on another level compared to the UK in my opinion and it was great to have so many excellent role models! (Some of the classes I attended are explained and written about below in my blog).

### Whilst I was in New York I attended classes with:

Mambo: Angel Ortiz, Yamulee, FrMambo: Angel Ortiz, Yamulee, Frankie Martinez, Eddie Torres, Griselle Ponce, Shani Talmor, Ismael Otero, Anara Piers Frank, Baila Society, Yasenia, Magna Gopal

Breaking: Rocafella, Kwikstep, Kid Flash, Atomic, Ironman, Blend, Full Circle, Ken Swift, Pavan, Souljerz, Suitcase.

### Thoughts on reflection before I left New York:

There is so much more technique involved in Mambo On2 than is appreciated and taught in London.

I have been developing my own class to build the necessary strength and control needed for mambo. There is so much to learn I feel like I could stay here another year!

Abakua- they have opened my eyes to a whole new genre- the fusion of Salsa and Contemporary Dance....and they also mix funk...which made me think maybe it is possible to combine the two styles I love! Breaking and Mambo! I never thought that could be possible before!

I love breaking! I feel I could stay another year....there is so much to learn!

It was incredible to be immersed in the scene, and the history. I felt so lucky when I was training in Christopher Park

I was so moved to see that for Rocafella, the teaching is about the cause, about spreading a history, the feeling as well as the moves. Kwik only shares with people he feels are really passionate, who he believes in, he is always testing and pushing his dancers to keep them on their toes. Both Rocafella and Kwik are generous with their time, energy, faith, and practice. They truly live breaking, and they truly love their practice. It was beautiful to watch.

### Highlights of my trip:

#### Mambo best bits:

Breakthroughs in my training with Angel, and him asking if I would be interested in partnering him if I returned to New York. Auditioning for Shani Talmor's company (I got in!), Auditioning with Abakua – their style was just beautiful! And dancing the night away and feeling on fire!

#### Breaking best bits

Finding my own way in Breaking. Gems in understanding breaking, such as the importance of strength overall and learning Kwik and Roc's training regime, Toprock breakthrough...understanding the strength even in Toprock, Footwork drills with Kid Flash, Watching footage of Kwik and Roc back in the day, their choreography.

#### Highlights in general:

Sitting in the park with Rocafella and talking about life. The trip was it turns out, not just about my experiences dancing, but was a spiritual experience, I learnt about how to live a healthier less stressful lifestyle, I gained confidence in myself.

#### How I feel on reflection and outcomes of my trip....the follow up story:

My dance experience was fantastically rich. I learnt so much about the importance of history, the background, the people, and whose story is being told.

#### How far is your purpose of your trip achieved:

Since I have been back, I have begun teaching Mambo on 2 classes. I have a regular class at Embassy in Soho, London, and I have also taught a master class at El Grande in Vauxhall.

My Mambo has greatly improved and I feel much stronger and confident.

My Breaking has also noticeably improved, I feel much stronger, confident to dance in front of people, train with people, and to jam, and throw down (dance) whenever invited to.

I have been invited to dance onstage with the Furious Five at their Leeds gig. I have been invited to perform as a B-girl with a new crew in London.

#### How the trip achieved more than the original purpose:

Two of the teachers I have met are now coming to the UK to teach and I will continue to train with them.

In New York I saw shows of and took class in Contemporary Latin Jazz, in particular I loved the movements of Franky Martinez, Seikou Miller and Abakua, and was so influenced I developed my own contemporary Latin Jazz class which combines many of the training elements I used to improve my mambo technique and routines choreographed in New York.

As a result of my class, I began putting together a bigger show, using both Contemporary Latin Jazz, Mambo and Breaking. I have confirmed a venue for this show on March 13<sup>th</sup> at Move It Festival in The Barbican.

I have seen the influence of my breaking training at college at the Place where I am studying for an MA. I am currently choreographing a solo partly influenced by my experience travelling alone to New York, and there are many breaking movements fused with my contemporary dance.

Rocafella and Kwikstep's love of Breaking, passion for keeping true to the style, to preserving the history of breaking, to the culture, the stories of the people in it moved me deeply. They were so passionate, true to the style, and taught me so much of the elements of Breaking, that I have deepened my understanding. At the recent Breaking Championships, I saw and understood why the US crew won over their opponents who had many gymnastic tricks because of their deeper knowledge of the history of the dance and their aptitude in every element of the dance. I saw how many of the audience didn't understand the true essence of breaking.

My confidence overall on return from New York has grown. This could be the experience of travelling alone in a city has made me 'harder' I found newfound determination, independence and confidence.

In terms of dance, the sternness of the teachers, and their positive encouragements has made me stronger, and able to look more positively at myself as a dancer. And this in turn has had an affect on my dancing all round.

The trip has deepened my love for dance and music.

Creatively I have been extremely inspired upon my return, applying for things, choreographing, out dancing. I have been able to bring my new experience to every aspect of my dancing career.

I have also been successful auditioning for the new Salsa Musical sacred Flame, with a cast of fifteen dancers. Unfortunately the project has been put on hold due to funding issues, but should start up in the New Year.

#### Conclusion:

I gained lessons not only in dance but also in life. The experience gave me new direction, and a new lease of life. I learnt the importance of the history, the people, and to pay my respects to the founders of both dance styles.

I feel that my aims were achieved and more. Not only did I manage to seek out and understand the history behind both dance styles, I achieved stronger technique in salsa and breaking, and I learnt how much depth there was to both styles.

I was humbled by the high level of dancer and filled with creativity and a new sense of drive seeing the high level in my role models.

I gained confidence from the kindness given by my mentors, by their enthusiasm and willing to share their knowledge and from their constant encouragement, and from the 'American approach' (much more positive!)

I discovered and was exposed to new styles and performances and as a result re-assessed the directions I want to go in my work.

I have reached higher levels than I imagined through my training, and now I know I am capable of going even further.

I have learnt so much that I feel confident and passionate about sharing my experiences and deep learning, both physically and in the history which goes much deeper than mere style, and could only have been learnt by travelling to the heart of these two styles and training amongst the founders.

Ultimately, Thank you and god bless Rocafella and Angel Ortiz, whose passion, conviction experience has given me a new dive and directions, and who I will remember always, always pay my respects to, and return to revisit one day.

Thank you so much Lisa Ullman for this incredible experience!

#### Suggestions to future applicants:

Be open to everything, the most surprising opportunities may arise and the most surprising things may inspire and make an impression on you! Be sure to know whom you are visiting and try to plan and prepare for what you are doing! Make as many contacts as you can before you arrive!

#### Blog entry quotes

'Training in New Jersey with the souljerz crew.... I was really nervous at first, there's only one lino, and everyone takes it in turns...at first I hesitate, but eventually I get over it and get into it...they cool guys.... in fact I think this is good for me!'

'kwiksteps training session- I know I need to prove myself just like I did with the souljerz crew on Wednesday, but I'm intimidated by the high level, unfriendly faces.... everybody is doing their thing...which is why we are all here...but struggling'

'Eddie Torres class- really hard to keep up with the shines, couldn't see, didn't get his flow, so much information to take in, mind felt blown!'

'abakua audition- wow what beautiful movement! I love his style even more!'

'Anara Frank- Meta movements- training (salsa, Joel- valuable lessons!) Met Yasenya, (Cuban dancer) and we discussed training together!'

'Angel- first training session- we work on spins, turn pattern positions, understanding the follow.... great session!'

'Demo (mambo on 2) with Marlon international at the studios where mad hot ballroom and the Antonio Banderas dance film were based on...the track was real fast!'

'Lincoln centre- full circle performance- I watch, as a story unfolds, really show every element, proud to see them show everyone true hip hop, lots of nice shows....'

'Women of hip hop festival Philadelphia- so inspiring to hear women of hip hop talk! Practiced windmills. Watched rocafellas film! Its great to see b-girls represented'

'Souljerz crew breaking session.... in a library! Drilled more mills.... held an invert loooooong! Baby to baby chair roll overs (octopus).... handstands improving.... can do 10 seconds!!'

'Imperial salsa club- run by Marlon international. I most enjoyed my dance with one Latino.... so many spins.... I'm feeling so much stronger in my core for spins! So excited! All the lovely abakua crew were there...they are like the knowledge and wisdom of salsa!'

'Pavar's class at pmt dance studios- I love this guys style and the way he pushes us... The set was so full of movement! Tops, stomach roll, chair thread over knee to stab, coin drops and more! All in an hour and a half! Love his teaching style!'

'Everywhere hurts! (Breaking with full circle)...taking it easy...have one Jake the peg leg, lump on my spine, wrists weak...stop moaning! Lol! Trained my hollabacks, one hand chair, roll back to headstand, elbow freeze'

'55 (free salsa club on 55th) first dance...a merengue...but whereas normally I hate to dance merengue I'm enjoying this one.... and then the night continues.... I'm on fire.... where has this come from?! Every dance (almost) a good one and lots of nice compliments from the older salsa crew! Hooray! Good salsa scene in this club...small and friendly...I like this vibe. '

'Kwik's session.... so tired by this point...training mills, and other mini power moves.... but feeling wiped! 8pm....go outside to try bring myself back to life.... and then return and train up my sets.... going better.... so quiet tonight.... barely anyone turned up...9.30pm we finish early.'

'Eddie Torres class- the shines...suddenly I feel like I have time to put in extra bits, put my own twist on every movement! Then we move to the two hour shines improv...and the same.... suddenly I can actually keep up...and almost know what's coming next...as if by taking his class long enough you develop and Eddie sixth sense!'

'Library training spot (yes a library training session!) With the souljerz crew.... Ironman drilled me hard!'

'Class with bboy ken swift..Two gems.... how you listen to the music, and the feeling of toprock....'

'Today I took Griselle Ponce's ladies styling for salsa workshop- she is the Beyonce of salsa!'

'Today I took an abstract breaking class with suitcase.... and discovered I'm very flexible!'

'Breaking jam in grand.... Some great dancers...but no one as strong as full circle...and kid flash entering.... Then footwork.... I like abstract.... And then the groups....'

'This class was so hard (my legs were shaking 2nd exercise in) but always I wear a big smile. Joan looks so regal sitting with a wooden carved stick, giving us directions to the constant beat. So much pain- back bends beyond my imagination, splits agony.... bit so good.... after I look like I've been horseriding for a week! But feel good!'

'Today I trained a four hour bboying session at pmt dance studios with Rocafella and full circle. Trained footwork using kid flash's drills then scratched out a new kick outs sequence before moving to back spins-forgotten what I learned again.... this is crazy! Then windmills.... relearning with sweep to baby and folding my arm properly.... and then... I finally did it....the one that has been making me moody because I couldn't doo it....! Headstand to handstand! Finally! Did it ten times....then on 11th i fell straight on my head...lol! Ouch! Then toprock.... Love kwiks toprock.'

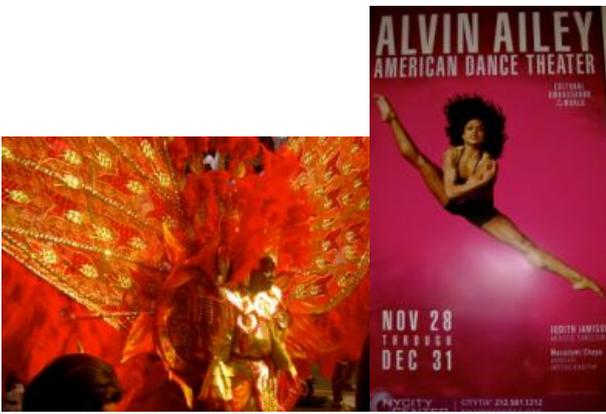
'watching full circle's 'inna views', an honest real piece about Kwikstep and Rocafella's lives in dance'

Saw a salsa show Cali style (Colombian salsa) beautiful! I love it! And then...out came Eddie Torres!- Eddie did two shows- one with Melissa Rosario, and presented an award to his wife Maria Torres, but the best for me, his solo- the piano one...i already saw it at cache, but this one for me was so moving, after hearing him speak about love marriage, reality, then seeing the piece- him 60 years old and out-dancing so many of the other performers.....i was filled with love, with all my memories from NYC, all the generous people i have met here, who have shared their lives with me, and how lucky i am to have had this opportunity, through the Lisa Ullman scholarship trust, to come and learn, to be outside my comfort zone, to grow, to be challenged, to gain confidence, independence, and to realize my potential. :-)

'I spent my last evening in New York watching Eddie Palmeri at the salsa congress. It was beautiful! My favorite dance was a cha cha'

#### Images around New York





Salsa in New York



Breaking in New York



