

September 2008

Dear LUTF,

The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund allowed me to attend the 31st Rock Steady Crew Anniversary, on the last week end of August in New York City.

That weekend was an eye opener for me. It made me realise that going back to the foundation of the art helps its evolution. I have met very inspirational dancers and I feel I have learnt a lot. I feel it has opened new horizons to explore within my dancing.

The trip was extraordinary but the highlight for me was the event on Friday called "Frenemies". It was great to get involved in this and dance with or against people. I felt part of the experience. Sharing skills and knowledge with dancers I had never met before was truly unique.

As a 10 year old practitioner of dance, it is clear to me that New York is a must go for anyone interested in Hiphop. It is where the movement was born and the local dancers try to keep the traditions and the foundation alive so it is not lost in the evolution.

I have been travelling extensively in the UK and I have already shared my experience with other dancers. I am also teaching in Yorkshire so the skills and knowledge I have acquired will be passed on to my pupils.

#### LISA ULLMANN TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP FUND REPORT

The Rock Steady Anniversary is a four-day event that celebrates the birth of one of the most influential breaking crew. The Rock Steady Crew has just celebrated its 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary. It was born in New York in the late 70's and became influential in the 80's being featured in several movies released all over the world (i.e: Beat Street, Style Wars, Wild Style, Flashdance).

Nowadays, the Rock Steady Crew is still active. Some of the old members are still practicing the art and some other ones have left the crew or passed away. Younger members have joined the crew in the 90's or more recently.

The four day festival includes:

*Thursday: Concrete Battle.* The Concrete Battle is the only free event of the anniversary and really brings the community together. It is held outside on a Basketball ground on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This event is held on concrete to pay tribute to the original breakers (that started the dance in the early 70's). Indeed, back when the dance was not known and the foundation was still being created, the



pioneers would practice and battle on concrete.

Nowadays, most events are in dance studios or gymnasiums and have lost the original atmosphere. The fact that the jam is outside and free really brings the community together and has a nice "old school" vibe to it.

*Friday: Frenemies:* Frenemies is a one on one battle. It is a strictly cipher event. The cipher is the name given to the circle formed by dancers and in which a breaker does his solo and freestyle. In the circle, a dancer can express him/herself freely. It is also the place where dancers can test their skills by confronting someone and dance against them. This event is held in the large hall on 101 Sixth Avenue. When the music starts playing, several circles get naturally formed and everyone dance and battle.

*Saturday: 5on5 crew battle:* This is the main event of the anniversary. Crews (groups) from all over the world come to prove they're the best on the day. This competition is held at the same place as on Friday but is a lot more organised with official judges, timetable, registration etc... This is the day where one can witness worldly recognised artists. This day was very inspirational as the people

dancing were very advanced. I learnt a lot by watching and talking to artists. Crews came from all the over the world: USA (New York, Boston, Miami, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles), Canada (Toronto), Europe (France, UK, Italy, Belgium, Spain) and Japan.

Spy Award: B-boy Spy is an original dancer from the 1970's. His understanding of the foundation allowed him to evolve and take moves from other b-boys and redesigned them to make them his own. An award after his name is presented to two dancers who have a complete understanding of foundation and that have had an influential style. This year Bebe from Miami and AB Girl from San Francisco received the award.

Sunday: Free Concert with Hiphop Legends: Music is very important in Hiphop dance. Pioneers of Hiphop music performed for free in a park in Newark, New Jersey. This concert was a Tribute to Frosty Freeze. Frosty Freeze was an original member of the Rock Steady Crew that passed away from a long term disease in January, his style and character have influenced a whole generation of dancers.

Rest of the week: Training at McArren Park: Practicing with other dancers is very important in breaking because it allows us to meet each other and share in a more relaxed atmosphere. Sometimes, jams that focus on competition can have a negative/aggressive vibe to them because people go to win and to show they are the best. It is also a great way to meet the local dancers and witness the local style and the local trends. The training session takes place in a park in Brooklyn on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 8pm to 11pm. It is held outside a sport centre.



The person in charge is called Breakeasy and is very respected in the breaking scene, he has been dancing for more than 20 years and has been teaching for decades. He is very friendly, welcoming and also very helpful.

The place isn't only for breaking; all the other styles of Hiphop dance are also practiced. Were represented rocking, popping, house dance and wacking. It is great to see everyone gathering to dance, people teaching and helping each other and sharing knowledge.

To conclude: the trip was an eye opener. Only now I am realising how much I have learnt. New York is the birthplace of Hiphop and is a very arty. The dancers in New York City are very proud of where they live and really try to keep the tradition alive (which is not the case anywhere else in the world). This city is truly unique as it is the only place you can meet the originators of the dance. These people do not travel much and can only really share their knowledge to the dancers visiting The Big Apple. I had the chance to meet and discuss with Ken Swift, Trac2, Lean, Lil Lep, all big names in the 70's or 80's.

The only problem with the trip was the fact that the video cameras weren't allowed. I don't understand that because I know they will not release a DVD and they never gave any information about that. Video cameras are important to show the footage to the community back home.

As for the recommendations, for a dance trip, I'd advise dancers to get in touch with local practitioners before going to the place (on blog sites such as Myspace or on internet forums) so they know where to train and where the events would be.

Finally, I really feel this trip was beneficial for me as I have learnt so much in the space of one week. My knowledge and my skills have improved a lot. I also got a lot of contacts all over the world from this trip which is good for future projects. I hope I will be able to pass on what I learnt to the community. The Rock Steady Crew keeps the tradition alive which can be very hard when the new generation does not really respect the pioneers. The evolution of the dance cannot be stopped but it is good to keep the original practice alive. No other jams try to respect the pioneers as much as this event and this is priceless.

Florent Gonthier

