

# CYPHER ROUND ONE

PRINCE  
THE CYPHER

**PLACE:** Philadelphia and New York

**DATE:** 1963/1964  
through 1988

**TIME:** The early years

**GIVEN BY:** Grace



## **SPECIAL GUESTS:**

Step Masters, Tyrone Proctor, Scanner Boys, Magnificent Force, Dynamic Breakers, Mr. Wiggles, Pop Master Fable, Shalamar, All American, Eddie Vega, and more...

# NORPHILLY, EARLY!

My Name is Lorenzo Harris, according to my mother I was born January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1964 to Doris Teresa Harris and Timothy Long. My mother doesn't remember the time of day I was born nor does she remember what hospital I was born in, and she might have gotten the year wrong. And it's possible that Timothy Long isn't my father (but that's for another book). Oddly enough, now, her lapse of memory doesn't bother me at all. When she told me she couldn't remember the time of day or hospital I was born in, I thought to myself, "Wow! How does anyone forget the time or place of where their child was born?" That question eventually dissipated as I realized I had trouble remembering the time of birth of all four of my children. Eventually I managed to remember the birth hospital of my first and third born. This was only because my third born was born in the same hospital as my first. I get it, there are a lot of things I am supposed to know or remember as an adult but for the life of me I cannot remember the way others seem to remember.

Seemingly, memory loss was already a bit of an issue for me when I was younger. As a young man I'd leave my house and return to my house 3-4 times because I had forgotten my books or papers or something like that. As I got older I'd misplace wallets, keys, passports, money, and had a hard time holding a thought long enough to remember why I walked up the stairs. I assume "normal" people may have the same problem from time to time due to age, stress or a number of other issues, but I was young, I'm supposed to have a memory like an elephant. I have this problem well into my adult life. I've lost my passport so many times the government told me if I lose it again they would revoke my passport and I would have to apply for a temporary passport every time I needed to leave the Country. Finally, when I was older I scheduled a series of tests to see if there was anything wrong, cancer, tumor, early Alzheimer's et cetera. I passed with flying colors! It turns out I have a problem with staying focused (not abnormal these days). I guess if I was a child in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it would be called Attention Deficit Disorder, otherwise known as A.D.D. I also heard that this is not unusual for survivors of sexual assault.

In some weird way it was sort of inevitable for me to become a choreographer. Movement, visuals, things of that nature always

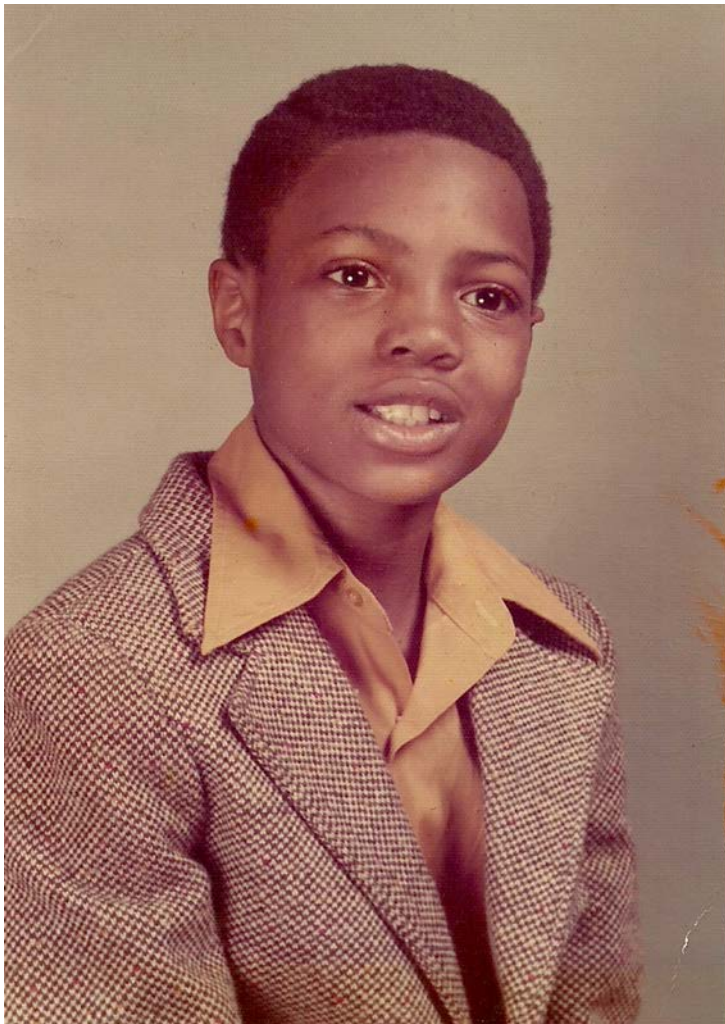
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Early! was slang that meant something to us in North Philadelphia. Like if you put EARLY! at the end of a sentence it was a place of emphasis, like an exclamation point. So when I write NorPhilly ebonically, and then add Early! I am referring to this way we had of speaking to each other.



1965 Lorenzo sitting on the stoop in South Philadelphia with his dog

entertained me. All you have to do is flash a light anywhere in my vicinity and it's a wrap; I'm gonna be distracted. Even though I played organized sports in school and was an amateur freestyle skateboarder, it seems as though I didn't transfer any of the discipline I trained so ardently to have, to my daily life. Whenever standing in line, I find it hard to stand still. When sitting I often rock back and forth. Some psychiatrists may say I wasn't hugged enough or given positive affection. Be that as it may, I like that I'm not focused as most. I like that I have a chance to have ebbs and flows if you will. I see it as an asset to what I do as a director and choreographer. I am able to completely focus when I'm creating and while I may not remember the count or the step I just did, it's good to not worry about having to remember, it keeps me in the zone.



Gesu school picture of Lorenzo Harris in 6th Grade

Raised by a single parent, my mom, my family hails from South Philadelphia, but my siblings and I were raised in North Philadelphia. Like most black families in my community, dance and music was an integral part of my life. Birthday parties, impromptu visits by relatives or friends, church functions, and BBQ's served as a reason to get together. Everyone in my family are good dancers, and dance and music was never an extra-curricular activity in my home. Music was always playing in our house. The radio or stereo consistently invited improvised dance in my home. Like any young boy in the ghetto of North Philadelphia, my brothers and I scoured the streets every chance we could find, looking to create or be a part of whatever mayhem or devilment that presented itself. We were no different than any

This is why the dancer exists, to remember. In my book a dancer is a "physical historian" who remembers the movement of the past and present. They hold the information of every choreographer they so happen to collaborate with, as well as the philosophy and technique of visionaries who've passed on. Brilliant is the dancer who understands their role as physical historian; what an amazing responsibility, being able to receive what is given to them from philosophy to technique. In order to hold all that information viscerally in your body, you have to be brilliant.

of the boys in our neighborhood. We all had the same story or history of having a dysfunctional family which was often paired with a dysfunctional neighborhood. Miles away from our immediate neighborhood, you would find us playing army in Fairmount Park. As boys, my cousins, a few of our friends, and I fantasized about joining the Army when we were older. We saw almost every war film we could possibly watch on Saturday or Sunday afternoons. Running through the woods using twigs for guns, we acted out as many war scenes as we could remember from the films we digested on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Clothed in green or khaki colored pants from the thrift shop, we'd spend hours in the woods of Fairmount Park crawling through the bushes in what we referred to as "Army Man" style. When we were tired we'd make our way home, creating drama or getting into mischief while en route. Breaking windows out of old houses with rocks, throwing dirt into the windows of buses at passengers as it passed us by. We would often climb rooftops and play tag while jumping from roof to roof. "Ding Dong Dixie" was a must before ending our day. We'd ring the doorbells of older people and run as fast as we could. Why we thought that was fun I have no idea. From gangs to crews and clicks; we robbed, stole, and fought our way through the streets of North Philadelphia. The first time I was robbed was in fourth grade when I got jumped by fifth graders right outside the school. We also were very active in street sports from soccer to baseball, basketball, skateboarding, you name it, we did it and we were good at it. With the exception of the Thugs, Gangsters, Hustlers and Drug Dealers, we dominated our neighborhood in every facet, but because we were just kids we weren't seen as a threat to our neighborhood. More than likely we annoyed everyone with our mischief. Dance was one of the things we were really good at, and we quickly became known for our dance skills in the hood. In the rough streets of North Philadelphia, life, death and survival digested yet another ation of its inhabitants. I was just another black boy with the same story, nothing obviously special about me. Well, I guess it's fair to say I couldn't see anything special about me. Maybe someone else did, but I for sure didn't. I would have never imagined I'd become a dancer/choreographer or director not in a million years. I probably would have laughed at anyone who told me I'd grow up to be a Street Dance choreographer, but in 1977, at the age of 13, I began my journey.

1 through-out the text I've found spelling errors that I left in place because it became interesting to me to notice how I spelled the word. To be in a clique is to "click" with people and my mis-spelling shows an inner reasoning that I began to enjoy as I reviewed the writing.

# GESU (JAY-ZOO)

The first time I organized an actual dance group, it included my brothers Billy and “Brainy” (Levi) and me. Our local church, Gesu (jay-zoo or jeh-zoo), was holding a church bazaar in the basement of the school.

We always got excited about the bazaar. It gave us a chance to hang out with schoolmates and make our move on girls we liked, to get out the house and off the block. As you can imagine, when my mother wasn’t working or asleep because she was dog dead tired from working two to three jobs, we weren’t allowed to go off the block. When she was feeling really on it, we couldn’t venture beyond the front of the house. Urban city life is rough. You can’t just wander off around the neighborhood on your own. I mean you can, and we did, but it just isn’t wise if you’re a teenager or little cat. You never know what could happen. It’s not like it’s Mayberry out this piece where everywhere you go around your community someone is smiling and greeting you. Families are feuding with other families, gangs are feuding, spouses are feuding, you just never know what’s going to break out in your hood. So yeah, mothers and parents from the hood were and still are uber strict about curfews and hood itineraries, well let’s be honest, those parents who aren’t caught up in the game. Back then the Catholic church was our world on so many levels. It provided food, shelter, entertainment, everything you needed. When I think about it, our world consisted of home, school, the neighborhood and the Catholic church nothing else was important. Single parent families in my hood relied heavily on the Catholic church. I don’t even think people were actually Catholic or attended church regularly, they just needed a little help to get by. So the bazaar at our local church gave us a chance to socialize in a different environment. It was once a year and always held on Saturdays, so we’d make a day of it. This particular time the priest decided to have a dance contest and award the winner money. I think it was 50 dollars. I’m not sure how I found out about it or why we decided to enter.

At my house, 1824 West Thompson Street, we practiced to the song, “Get Off,” by the Latin dance Disco band Foxy. Get Off was a smash disco hit released in 1978. We rehearsed for days in my musty cluttered basement, braving the dirt, disarray and the saturated smell of dog urine and feces trapped in the concrete floor. We were so excited; it was as if we were going to perform

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Like many Catholic Churches across America the Philadelphia Gesu Catholic Church located between eighteenth and seventeenth from Thompson St to Girard Avenue is modeled after the Chiesa Del Santissimo Nome Di Gesu the mother church of the society of Jesus (Jesuits) Conceived by St Ignatius of Loyola in 1551 is located in the Piazza Del Gesu in Rome. As kids we were extremely proud of how our church looked. Our church was the grandest church in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Our church and building was literally a city block long. I remember how proud it made me feel to be Catholic.

in front of tens of thousands of people. Somehow we mustard<sup>2</sup> up money to buy some accessories to help uniform our mixed matched outfits for the contest. My mom took us to downtown Philly, and we all bought white gloves and suspenders to help unify our individual looks. Ok, yes, that’s how we “mustered” up the money for accessories; it was my mom who paid for everything. I’m not sure what drug I was on but somehow I thought it cool to wear green, pleated, baggy, pinstriped pants with rainbow suspenders, ha ha ha ha I’m cracking up as I’m writing this. I thought of the rainbow as associated with a good rainfall; like a sign we would win. The dance contest was held in the basement of our elementary school Gesu Catholic School-preschool to 8th Grade. The basement used to be an old gym with a recreational pool. Local vendors selling their wares littered the common space of the basement. The church bazaar was held once a year and generally sometime close to Christmas. It was great for kids who wanted to find a Christmas gift for their parents or family members. I think that part of the reason for the bazaar was to raise a few bucks for the church and provide cheap clothes, toys and things for families who couldn’t afford to buy fresh off the rack for Christmas. The bazaar was also fun, the best part was you got to see your friends from school, you could buy stuff cheap and it really just gave us a chance to socialize in a different environment. It was also great for making an unsupervised move on your school crush-that is, if you had the gumption to say something to them. The actual spot where the dance contest took place was in the upstage right corner of the room. There was no stage, just a mic and mic stand and Father Jim. Father Jim was the priest that had a full on “George Jefferson” (balding U-turn on his head) but wasn’t that old. My guess would be he was in his late twenties or early thirties but balding. To us kids if you were bald you were old. Everyone loved him. He played basketball and soccer with us and was the reason why we (youth) remained active members of the church. The other reason was our parents. We had to go to church. To refuse to go to church would be to sign your own death warrant. At the church Father Jim’s presence made it extremely easy for those of us who were having problems with our family.

We walked into the Bazaar like we were superstars. Saying what up to our friends and confirming, “yes we’re entering the contest.” We signed up as quickly as possible and waited patiently as the old people did their old partnering disco dancing. The

<sup>2</sup> Here again, the spelling is intriguing - like mustard is strong and you have to be fortified - not just any old spice

butterflies were building as it was coming closer to our turn to cut a rug. Boom! Just like that we were hearing our name called over the mic. Father Jim yelled out next, we have Cobra III! Cobra III?! Father Jim: Ok Lorenzo you have your song. Me: Yes, here it is, it's Get Off by Foxy. Father Jim's face twisted up as if to say what kind a song is this-it better be clean? Nevertheless, he passed the record to the DJ. I'm not sure who the DJ was at the time, I probably didn't care. Because as soon as I heard the crackling and hiss of the needle hitting the vinyl I was in another zone. Me, my brother Billy aka Dollar Bill and Levi aka Brainy walked out onto that dark gray cement floor with white gloves being the only piece of clothing that unified us as a group like we were on a mission to Mars. When the music hit, we went to town! Doing every move I picked up from Soul Train, the neighborhood and then some. It was the first time my routine (choreography) was seen beyond the front steps of my home. We hit them with a few kick ball changes and a cross spin into a half split-just like James Brown. I'd come up first then pull my brother Billy up by the collar as if he was a puppet and he'd do the same to Brainy however when Brainy came up from his split he'd spin around and fall back into Billy's arms only to be thrust up and forward into his solo. The crowd and my classmates went crazy. Billy slid out from the back into his solo with a few waves and then he'd glide across the floor.

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In our community, it's common to refer to someone you grew up with as a brother, sister, or cousin. Brainy was like a brother to me. He and my actual brother, Billy, were inseparable. We did almost everything together. Brainy lived just around the corner from us and was mostly raised by his grandmother and Aunt Shirli Ann. I'm not sure how he got the nickname "Brainy" or why I only found out his real name was Levi Cooper after he passed away. Perhaps I knew his real name but somehow blocked it from my memory. When Brainy got older he changed his name to Naphese. I don't think he was Muslim or even religious for that matter but it was definitely way cooler than Levi or Brainy. I was in Australia when I received the devastating news of Naphese's passing on the basketball courts of Francesville in North Philly. Witnesses say he was playing basketball and suddenly

collapsed, convulsing and foaming at the mouth on the scorching hot court. Despite the paramedics' efforts, they couldn't save him. He had already passed away before they arrived. Apparently, his wife had been urging him to keep his doctor's appointment for the chest pains he had been complaining about. Prior to Naphese's passing, my brother Billy had encountered him at an event where Naphese was DJing. Billy noticed that when Naphese turned to greet him, his eyes were completely blacked out, like something out of a horror film. Naturally, he dismissed it as a hallucination, but two weeks later, Naphese tragically passed away. It is believed that Naphese succumbed to Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, the same disease that claimed the life of legendary basketball player Hank Gathers from the Raymond Rosen projects in North Philadelphia.

The girls went crazy. Billy is four to three years younger than me. I was tall and Brainy was lanky and looked tall and Billy was shorter than us both. Although Billy and Brainy were around the same age Billy looked like the youngest, and with his afro the girls reacted to him as if he were Michael Jackson himself. Billy ended his waves by tapping me on the head, essentially passing the wave to me. I hit them with the pantomime wall and then the pantomime rope. Then hitting them with my finale move, a split into an alpha hitch-at the time I didn't know that's what the move was called. I saw it on Soul Train and totally bit it. Before I knew it we were done and everyone was clapping and yelling for us. Once everyone calmed down Father Jim placed his hand over the heads of each person or couple that entered the dance contest to determine the winner by the applause of the crowd. Wouldn't you know it, we actually won the dance contest, and that was all she wrote.



## SCANNER BOYS

QUICK MIX PROFILE

**FOUNDER:** Ponzi and Alphonzo  
**LEADER:** Rennie Prince (Rennie Haris)  
**PHOTO:** Scanner Boys Dave the Renegade  
**PLACE:** North Philly  
**STYLE:** Popping  
**OG MEMBERS:** Rennie "Prince" Harris, Lenny "TreeMan" Daniels, Randy "Sir Glide" Robinson, Ponch and Tone, Sharon, Day-day, Anthony "Germ" Garman, and Moochie  
**BREAKDOWN:** All Star crew and known for their well choreographed routines

# STREET DANCER FIRST.

My journey had begun, soon I was drafted into a local G.Q. group called the Step Masters. Before long I was leading a popping crew known to Philadelphia as The SCANNER BOYS which became the most popular group in Philadelphia Street dance history. When it came to the Scanner Boys if there was a block party, we were there. When a rap group performed, we opened the show for them. We were everywhere there was music. Eventually we were studied, documented and researched by the Smithsonian Institution, Philadelphia Folklife Center @ International House, Philadelphia Folklore Project, and featured in British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) the Art of Language documentary. We performed and opened for acts such as Kool Mo Dee and the Treacherous Three, West Street Mob, Super Nature aka Salt N Peppa, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force, GrandMaster Flash and the Furious Five, Dougie Fresh, Run DMC and Jam Master Jay, Newcleus and the list goes on. I was well on my way to becoming what everyone beside myself knew I'd be: not just a successful dancer but a famous one

Again I never thought of myself as a dancer, although by this time the community had deemed me so. Professor Onye Ozuzu, former Chair of the Theater and Dance Department for the University of Colorado in Boulder said to me, while we sat together on a porch, "In some African traditions it's the community that deems you the dancer, singer, musician etc." This holds true within the African Diaspora. Dance is an integral part of African and African American culture; it is a way of life. From young to old everyone's encouraged to dance. I have to agree with Professor Ozuzu, it's only when the community, more often the elders, parents, or in many cases our peers, call out to us in affirmation or specifically single us out, that we are confirmed as a good dancer. When your momma calls you in the living room and tells you to dance for your uncle or her friends. Or when your friends yell for you to come and dance against another dancer. These are the unspoken moments of confirmation in Black culture. Although we Street Dancers/Hip-hoppers are more than confident about our dance

skill in general, it is not for us to claim ourselves. The Street Dancer's armor (confidence) is what gives the dancer the ability to overcome the fear of being in the cypher or on stage, or helps us deal with defeat. Street dancers walk a thin line of confidence and arrogance, but at the end of the day it's the community that confirms you as a good dancer. The tricky part to this "community acclamation" is that your community may be relevant to only your community. Meaning, you may be deemed the best dancer in your neighborhood, your family or what have you, but still you are nothing in the bigger scheme of things. In the end, like rappers or MC's most Street Dancers subscribe to their own brand of "hype"/confidence, especially in the "Cypher".

If it means bragging about how dope you are, then so be it; anything to have the edge over the person you are challenging at the time. I've seen Street Dancers lose a battle solely based on their lack of confidence. This organic process of becoming a popular dancer in your community is more than valid, but at the end of the day there are no words, only movement that defines us as humans. For years my community, my friends and family have claimed me a dancer. In retrospect it is only now that I have come to believe in myself enough to accept what my community and others always knew. However you slice it, Lorenzo Rennnie Harris is a dancer first, choreographer and director last.

The concept of the cypher was made popular by the Five Percent Nation founded in Harlem by Clarence X (1964). Originally known as Clarence 13X, Clarence Edward Smith broke off from the Nation of Islam and founded what some have dubbed the "Five Percenters" who believe ten percent of the world knows the truth about our existence and intentionally keep eighty five percent of the world in the dark and only five percent are enlightened. The term cypher is part of what the Five Percenters call Supreme Mathematics and supreme alphabet.

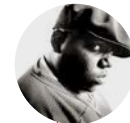
The "cypher" is 360 degrees of complete knowledge. In the Five Percent religion it also means God cypher Divine or God Is Divine. It is no coincidence that in Hip-hop culture where we spell cypher with a Y, the Cypher teaches you life lessons such as perseverance, humility, confidence and collective building and negotiation of time and space etc. It is these life lessons that sharpen our leadership skills. According to Chaldean Numerology the letter Y is symbolic for the sun, the planet of leadership and power.

# ROMAN AND THE STEP MASTERS

A year after the infamous dance contest at the church Bazaar I was off to high school-and like any normal thirteen-year-old, I was excited to start the next chapter of my life. Somehow, I managed to be enrolled at Roman Catholic High School for Boys, aka Roman Catholic or Roman. I say somehow because I don't remember talking to anyone about attending Roman. My mother simply said, "You are going to Roman Catholic in the fall." Me: "Ok, cool." Roman was, and still is, a prestigious Catholic High School within the Philadelphia Catholic Archdiocese. Founded in 1890 by Thomas E. Cahill, Roman Catholic High School for Boys is the nation's first free Diocesan catholic school. Surrounded by a hospital, freeway, and businesses, it is located on the corner of Broad and Vine Street (Philadelphia, Pa), three to four blocks from center city (City Hall). Roman Catholic looks like a castle from back in the day surrounded by progress. Have you ever seen one of those old cartoons where the industrial revolution era would build factories and office buildings around a house that wouldn't sell out to progress? Well, that's what it looked like to me-as a teenager I was still mad imaginative and fantastical. "It was all a dream I used to read Word Up Magazine"-Those lyrics from the song Juicy by rapper Biggie resonated with me in ways I can't describe. Of course, my high school would look like a castle to me. I was that type of cat growing up. Escaping mentally, spiritually and or physically was a constant for me. I loved television and escaping into sitcoms and cartoons.

When I was younger the first half of my Saturday was dedicated to chores and cartoons. The latter part of the Saturday was outdoor sports, snowball fights or if it was summer, it was all about fun in the sun. Man, those summers used to be amazingly long. It's funny how when you get older the summers seem shorter and shorter. And now at 13 my summer seemed like two days. The fall of 1979 I began my freshman year at Roman Catholic. My

IT WAS ALL  
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MAGAZINE



LYRICS FROM THE  
SONG JUICY BY BIGGIE

community was proud of me. Many of my neighborhood friends attended public high schools. My classmates from Gesu Catholic middle school could barely make Gesu's tuition, so attending a Catholic high school was out for them as well. The tuition at Gesu was way beyond anything we could afford either. But my mom managed to get a job as a lunch lady at Gesu. Yes, this was both embarrassing and helpful in many ways. My mother's salary went straight toward my tuition. She also worked at the rectory (where the priests were housed) to make a little extra. The blow back for me was I used to get teased a lot in school about my mom being a lunch lady. One of the many running jokes was that my mother fed us the lunches from school for dinner. Naturally, I'd swear otherwise and often go into a rage (physical fight) when being teased. Mainly because it was true. Later I'd find out being a lunch lady at Gesu was also how she paid my tuition for Roman Catholic-that and a discounted rate for being an employee of the Catholic Archdiocese. In the end my mother got 'er done, and I was enrolled into Roman. Everyone thought of Roman Catholic High School for Boys as second to only one Catholic high school in Philadelphia, St. Joseph Preparatory School for Boys. Therefore, attending Roman was a big deal and was a serious matter-talk about pressure on a teenager. St. Joe's, or as we often

## ***'LIFE'S A BITCH HELLHOUND CHAINED TO A CHAIN LINKED FENCE AND IF IT MANAGES TO BREAK AWAY FROM THAT GATE YOU WILL MEET YOUR DEMISE'***

referred to it, "the Prep," was located two blocks from my home and six-to-ten miles from Roman Catholic High School. No one from the hood was ever successful in passing the test to get into the Prep. It was 99.9% white and seen as off limits to the hood even though it sat right smack center of our neighborhood. There was one year one of us made it into St. Joseph Preparatory. There was a kid who lived across the street from my house. His name was Wayne. Wayne was the first person to have a high enough GPA and pass all testing requirements. The hood lost its mind, no one could believe it; someone from our neighborhood made it to the top parochial school in the city. Wayne was a nerdy-sweet teenager who was from the hood but wasn't of the hood. The nicest kid. Everyone was soooo proud of him. Finally, we were

represented. But as fate would have it, before Wayne would get to start his freshman year he was shot and left paralyzed from the neck down with brain damage. Apparently, the shooter mistook him for someone else-five to six years later Wayne passed away from complications. I can't help but think if Wayne had decided to turn left instead of right, he would be alive today. Life's a bitch hellhound chained to a chain linked fence-and if it manages to break away from that gate you will meet your demise. That's how I feel about life in general. It feels like as soon as you are on the right path you get knocked down and put in your place. This is why I had to have plans in place; A and B options with almost everything I do. What I understood early was that navigation and preparation is a must in my neighborhood. Even when walking to school you aren't safe if you aren't on public transport and even then, you can run into some problems. Now it's my turn to get-down (my turn to go to high school).

Roman Catholic was a bit of a distance from my home and walking to school required thought and preparation especially if you couldn't afford to get on the bus or subway. I'd walk to school in the fall and when winter set in, it was rough and stressful. My routes to school were determined by whether I decided to take public transit or not. My mom couldn't afford to give me bus fare or buy school tokens every week or every day for that matter. When she gave me a few bucks, it was generally 20 dollars, and I had to figure out how best to use it for a few weeks. I had to be smart and be up on the weather- my routes depended on the temperature, snow, rain, or wind chill factor and or whatever madness was happening that day. It determined whether I'd walk and eat lunch that day or rough it and borrow a few bucks from my friends to eat and jump on the warm and toasty subway to school and back. In order to be extra safe, I'd usually walk with a friend of mine "Noh" (nickname). Once we choose a route we thought was the safest for that day, we'd be out and on the move. We often rotated routes so as to not bring attention to ourselves. If the thugs noticed us we'd be in for a beatdown before school. Once in school all bets were off, I could be me, free to walk unguarded and move how I wanted (code-switching my way in and out of my various environments). The first week of school was both amazing and scary at the same time. It was like I was dropped into an ethnic petri dish. It felt like being at the DMV, Passport, or Immigration building where there's a cornucopia of ethnicities, languages, and smells. Until high school, I'd never met or befriended a kid my age whose ethnicity wasn't African American. The white folks I knew or saw in my neighborhood were priests, nuns, and teachers from middle school. At Roman Catholic I met kids of Italian, Irish, Polish, Jewish, and Greek



descent. Sadly, I didn't know there were different ethnicities amongst whites. I thought if you were white, you were just white. The only white kids my age I came across once was when I was chased by a gang of white kids because I accidentally ventured into their neighborhood (I was daydreaming while walking). You can get "caught slipping" or in my case daydreaming while walking in Philadelphia. A comedian once joked, saying Philadelphia was the only city he knew whose gay district was no bigger than two city blocks (true). The neighborhoods of Philadelphia are segregated and can change very quickly. Each day my buddy "Noh" who lived in the adjacent neighborhood would meet me on the corner of my block and we'd walk to school together. Noh was an extremely fast walker. He became the reason why I became a fast walker (well back then lol). Twenty years after high school I found out why Noh walked so fast, this cat was hopped up on cocaine each morning-what the Scooby-Doo?! Maaan, how innocent and naïve I was. The first week of school was amazing, but there was one day of that first week that was the game changer. It was the day I met Franklin, aka "Money" Stewart. Lost like most of the freshman I was making my way through the hallways to find my homeroom when I saw these kids standing around this cat who was dancing in the cut of the hallway. Slowly I walked over to see what was going on. I pushed myself to the front of the cypher to see this cat going in with some fancy footwork I hadn't seen before. When he stopped dancing, he looked right at me (looking at someone or standing directly in front of someone is code for a challenge-they're calling you out) and said "what up?" By this time, the crowd had somewhat dissipated. From the looks of it, this cat looked like he had some loot. He had on a three-piece suit with two-toned Bally's and a gold tie-bar supporting the knot in his tie. Meanwhile, the kid (me) wore a random blazer with slacks that didn't match, a random tie, and black combat boots. Ok before I continue, you have to know I used to wear my shoes/sneakers down to actual holes in the soles, so much so that I had holes in all my socks. Growing financially tired of this my mother bought me combat boots to wear to school instead of buying me proper shoes I'd run through in less than three months-she said my feet had teeth for toes. Ok back to the story: When Frank stopped and looked at me, the now bigger crowd turned to look at me as if to say what are you gonna do? Frank's what's up look was followed with a question; "do you 'ike?" Naturally, I had no clue what he was talking about or what he was asking. Then he said it in layman's terms; "do you G.Q.-do you dance" I was like, of course, and accepted the challenge. I went in immediately. Just like that, we were in a battle in the hallway of Roman Catholic. I went into my back kick ball change pas de bourrée step, I ended my burn with a James Brown half split with mad confidence. Cool

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FYI at this time  
in High School  
my nickname was  
"Disco" cause  
I couldn't stop  
moving-ever!

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as a cucumber Frank crossed his right foot over his left knee and then reversed the move by whipping his foot back around to the nape of his knee and somehow dropping to the floor onto one leg and one hand (think Russian Cossack movement) he then went into a series of alpha hitch kicks, or what me and my friends called "John Travolta's," and froze on the last Alpha hitch kick with one leg crossed over the other while his hands were in a praying position in front of his chest. The crowd's reaction to Frank's last move- Oooooo-wah! Yup, in the first week of High School, my 1824 West Thompson Street Gesu Church Bazaar moves were destroyed! On top of that, the bell rang, which meant I was late for homeroom, you guessed it. The homeroom I had no clue how to find. I would say I started my first year on the best foot, but meeting Frank "Money" Stewart changed my life. Frank and I became the best of friends throughout the first two years of highschool. We'd hang out at his house after school, practicing G.Q. rhythms and listening to the stories of how his older brother Greg taught him to G.Q. Frank told me who was who and what was what in the game of G.Q. He taught me almost everything he knew until I began to get some chops in the style and started exploring my movement vocabulary. Before long, Frank started a group called the "Step Masters" and asked me to be the co-captain/vice president. The members of the Step Masters were Frank, aka Money, Disco (me); Darryl, aka Pretty Boy; Darryl Wilson, aka Foots. Fooks got his nickname because he wore size 14 or 15 shoes.

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The Fletcher Street Riders, also known as the "Black Cowboys of Philadelphia," boast a remarkable century-long legacy deeply rooted in the Strawberry Mansion section of North Philadelphia. This tight-knit community of Black cowboys and farmers migrated from the southern states, bringing along their horses and settling in Philadelphia. They ingeniously utilized their horses not only for transportation but also as a means of self-employment, delivering milk, food, and operating carriages and buggies. Throughout the years, the Fletcher Street Riders and other riding clubs have played a pivotal role in providing a safe haven not just for the horses but also for the youth residing in the vibrant communities of Philadelphia. These clubs

have become a source of pride, fostering a sense of identity and belonging among the young members who find solace, mentorship, and invaluable life lessons in the company of these majestic animals. The Fletcher Street Riders' dedication to rescuing and rehabilitating unwanted horses, often destined for slaughter or auction, has not only preserved a piece of history but also symbolized their unwavering commitment to the welfare of these magnificent creatures. Through their love for horses and passion for horsemanship, the Fletcher Street Riders have cultivated a unique and enduring bond between humans and animals, enriching the cultural tapestry of Philadelphia and leaving an indelible mark on the city's history.

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Finally, there was Eric who was the only member who wasn't from North Philly. The five of us brought it to the Streets of North Philly. We were at every jam, impromptu block party, or gathering. Frank was good about keeping his ear to the ground regarding the hood. What was odd to me is how Frank came about the hood info when he lived in a nice middle-class track home with front lawns encased in cement and trees; a community called Northern Liberties. There was even a horse stable not too far from his home. I could be remembering this wrong, but I believe the Northern Liberties neighborhood was where one the stables of the infamous Black Cowboys of Philadelphia were.

From where I come from, his neighborhood was good living if

Cobra III from left to right: Billy aka Dollar Bill, Brainy aka Levi aka Naphese and Rennie Harris. (home photo 1977-78)



you ask me. It was also in Frank's neighborhood; we saw a cat spin on his head for the first time. It was at a summer jam near Richard Allen projects (not too far from Northern Liberties) in North Philly. I remember it for two reasons; it was a random hot day in August (1980), and when I say hot, I mean hotter than all get out, hotter than Satan's gasoline draws, hotter than project housing heat, yahmean? If you're not from illadelph, it's hard to get a real sense of the heat here. I'm not gonna hold you; you'd think you were somewhere in the south or southwest of the country if you lived here. If it's ninety degrees, it means it's one hundred degrees. You have to add about ten more degrees because of the humidity factor. If that's not enough, if it's ninety degrees during the day, it's damn near ninety degrees at night with a small window of relief between four and six am. Oof! That humidity is a bitch! With all that brick and cement, it's like being in a brick oven. This day was that day, and it was crazy, deliriously hot (if I can say it was hot one more time). Somebody thought it a good idea to throw an impromptu jam regardless of the heat. All of that to say, we were not dressed appropriately for G.Q. The heat is what made me space out and start thinking about what we had on. Normally we'd have a suit or suit jacket, vest, slacks, or maybe white gloves, regardless of the weather. But on this day, Frank wore a t-shirt, a black bowler hat with carefully pressed wide-legged jeans, and Bally's. I wore a t-shirt, a pair of heavily starched pressed blue jeans with a not-so-wide leg, black Stacy Adam shoes, and a wooden cane with a curved handle, no hat. I remember this because while standing in the cypher watching these other cats get-down I had a moment in time and space (daydreaming) where I noticed how Frank and I were dressed and I noticed what everyone else had on. It wasn't just Frank and me who took liberties with the attire due to the heat; everyone else was dressed down too. Some even had velour sweat suits with Ballys and Stacy Adams-if you don't know, Bally or Stacy Adams were the official G.Q. shoes-at least they were for us. Something was off or shall I say afoot, and I couldn't put my hands on it. As I was coming out of my "Lorenzo daydreams in class" note the teacher wrote on my report card to my mom moment, I started to focus in on this cat who was doing a funky, stylized Cha-cha rhythm when all of a sudden, he literally stopped in the middle of the cypher, bent down onto his head (headstand) then using his one leg that was hanging down he whipped his leg propelling his entire body 360-degrees rotating around and back down to the ground into G.Q. floor work and up back into the Cha-cha rhythm. Everyone paused for a moment and, as if signaled by a conductor, broke out laughing. Someone yelled out what we all were thinking, "What kinda shit is that, spinning on your head?!" It's now clear that two things happened that day. The dressing down of

G.Q. with sweatpants and jeans and that head spin marked the beginning of the end for G.Q. and the beginning of something else -Hip-hop culture.

Another page in my chapter turned when I transferred from Roman Catholic to West Catholic High School for Boys fall of my junior year. A new school with new friends and new experiences. West Philly was an entirely different beast than North Philly. It felt more sectioned off than North Philly. West Philly seemed sliced and diced from Mantua (Man-chew-wah) to the Bottom (called the Bottom because it was the lower street numbers of West Philadelphia). Wynnefield (Will Smith's hood). Overbrook (the hood of rappers Steady B and Cool C), aka Brook, Hill Top (Hill Top Hustlers - a gang), and "Parkside" aka PSK (Parkside Killers

## ***'WE WORE BLACK DERBY HATS WITH DOUBLE BREASTED GRAY SUITS WITH A BLACK BOW TIE'***

- another gang or clique), home and hood of the first gangster rapper in the history of rap, Schooly D. Parkside was adjacent to the largest Philadelphia Park -Fairmount Park - hence the name Parkside. No doubt, I had to be on my navigation game for real now that I have to go to school on the West Side. Although some were middle class areas, these areas were also rough neighborhoods not to be taken lightly. Fairmount Park connects to the "Bottom" of West Philly via 30th street (Mantua section) and Girard Ave (North Philly). Noh was still at Roman and so I had to map out my own routes. I came up with several paths to and from West Catholic to be safe. One route was from 30th and Girard over two bridges through Mantua. Another was through Fairmount Park to the Philadelphia Art Museum (home of the Rocky statue) across the Bridge into the Bottom. Those routes were dangerous at certain times of the day. My emergency route was straight down 19th st to Market Street through the center city into West Philly. Again, allowing me to bypass a few of the rougher neighborhoods and gang's to get to West Catholic.

If my memory serves me correctly, it was performing with the Step Masters that originally connected me with the Philadelphia Folklife Center. "GQ", is an indigenous Street Dance to Philadelphia, and our group, the Step Masters, was invited to

perform by the Folklife Center who are preservers of folk culture. Our first performance with the Folklife Center was in the auditorium of the International House, a dormitory for international students that actually looked like a massive hotel or condominium building for the University of Pennsylvania's international students. Our routine was done to none other than "Love the Life You Live" by Kool & The Gang. "Love The Life You Live" was the anthem for many GQ dancers, it was the equivalent of the breakers "Just Begun" by the Jimmy Caster Bunch. Every GQ dancer lost their minds when this song came on.

We wore black Derby hats with our double breasted gray suits with a black bow tie, black Stacy Adam shoes and white spats and a black wooden walking cane with a hooked handle to top the outfit off. Frank and I took the elevated train to 36<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut (international housing building). Skipping 3<sup>rd</sup> period English we rehearsed in our usual spot in school, the fire escape steps -where we created most of our routines. Because we skipped English class to create this routine we figured it was only right to name the routine after Father McGlaughlin-(Mc-Glock-lin) our English teacher. It was our most dynamic routine to date. We called it "The McGLaughlin Special." To say the least, we brought the curtain down with The McGlaughlin Special!

Consequently, this is where I first met Michael Nise (nice) of Nise Productions. At this time Nise was a journalist/professor who taught at Cheney University in Cheney Pennsylvania. After our performance Michael Nise approached us and congratulated us on a great performance and then asked to interview us for some article he was writing. Needless to say we felt like stars! We were high on life, especially since the week before we were special guest performers on a local Saturday kids show called the "Bo Lit" show or something like that. The following spring Frank saw an advertisement in the local paper for dancers. This time we wore cream and blue suits with two toned cream and blue shoes to the audition. We killed it with our endless amount of routines but then they asked us to dance with some girls who were also auditioning. We thought it was strange at first because we thought we were auditioning to perform our routines on television. Some months or so later Michael Nise called us to be on his local TV teen dance show called "Dancin On Air " which eventually became the national show known as "Dance Party USA " that aired on USA Network.

By the time my senior year rolled around, I had shifted from G.Q. to popping and had become the leader of the most infamous Street Dance group in Philadelphia history. The Scanner Boys.

# DIGGIN' IN THE CRATES OF G.Q.

The summer of 2007 I had the honor of meeting Tyrone “The Bone” Proctor. We had about 100 or so students who attended our annual Hip-hop & funk dance festival “illadelph Legends” that summer. True to Philadelphia summers, it was hot, muggy and humid making the studios a haven for the wilted that braved the outdoors. Beaded sweat rolled down his face as he walked in the illadelph studios. Tyrone Proctor introduced himself to me, the name rang a bell but I couldn’t put my finger on it, but then, as if struck by lightning, it came to me. “You are “the” Tyrone Proctor!” Before I could get it out of my mouth he responded, “Yes I’m from Philadelphia”. Tyrone Proctor is the legendary Street Dancer who was the only Philadelphian dancer featured as an original member of the Soul Train dancers aka the Soul Train Gang. Thinking quickly, I asked him if he knew anything about GQ? He looked a bit perplexed as he thought about it. Then I said ok, so do you know “stepping”? He still didn’t know what I was talking about. I also brought up the name “iking” (eye-king). The term iking was yet another name for GQ, specifically in North Philadelphia. Tyrone responded, “no I never heard of that.” Finally I asked him

## ABOUT GQ

TECHNIQUE

Some believe the reason the style that began as Cha-cha eventually became GQ is due to the popular Philadelphia Stepping group named “GQ” who took their name from the Gentleman’s Quarterly Magazine. This became a dance style specifically known to Philadelphia Street Dancers. Evolving from a popular Latin social dance in the late 1940’s, the Cha Cha, the social dance became the foundation rhythm for GQ in Philadelphia. According to historians and scholars, Cuba was a popular vacation spot for North Americans especially on the east coast. Spreading its rhythm and sound to the masses; the dance developed to the new mambo rhythm, danced to the offbeat rather than the traditional downbeat. For this reason the dance was popular mainly with dancers, thoroughly familiar with complex Afro-Cuban music. ... Among the many figures of the mambo was one called “Chatch” which involved three quick changes of weight preceded by two slow steps. By the early 1950’s this time signature developed into a new dance comprised of many simple variations on the basic footwork. The dance acquired the name Cha-Cha; its characteristic three-step change of weight carried the identifying verbal definition. Cha cha cha... The cha cha inherited much of its styling from its parent dances, the rumba and the mambo. Like most Latin dances, it is done with the feet remaining close to the floor. The dancers hips are relaxed to allow free movement in the pelvic section. The upper body shifts over the supporting foot as steps are taken. (Dance Forever). These aesthetics coupled with the cha-cha rhythm are the foundation of GQ Street Dance. GQ is a smooth articulated dance style. Performed in a suit (see Floor Takers photo) with a hat of your choice like a derby, Bowler, or Fedora, this dance style commanded silence and demanded attention whenever done. From head to toe the GQ dancer was always “cleaner than the board of health.” The suit restricted the torso from displaying any obvious internal rhythm while the arms and hands were free to accent footwork rhythms just as smooth and quick as any complicated footwork rhythm patterns. The Latin Cha-cha evolved into what we now know as GQ (Philadelphia). As I understand it, there were a few evolutions of this unique Philadelphia Street Dance style. First there was the original cha-cha that was popular from the 1940’s throughout the 60’s which went something like 1-2 1-2-3 1-2 1-2-3 and so on. In Philadelphia the rhythm evolved to 1-2-3-4’-5’-6’, 1-2-3-4’-5’-6’ while accenting the 4’-5’-6’ with your heel or toe. There was also an adaptation of hoof rhythm, hand jive rhythms, and cane spinning from soul steppers/drill teams, which were also popular in Black and Latino communities. This prompted some of us to nickname the style “stepping”.

### QUICK MIX PROFILE

## TYRONE “THE BONE” PROCTOR



#### STREET DANCE

**STYLE:** Waacking / GQ Pioneer  
**PLACE:** West Oak Lane North West Philadelphia  
**NAME:** Tyrone “The Bone” Proctor  
**BREAKDOWN:** A Philadelphia native, Tyrone, is an early pioneer of the G.Q. dance style originally known as the Cha-cha. In addition, Tyrone was the first and only Philadelphian to become a member of Soul Train and the Soul Train Gang (dance group) when it first aired.

if he ever heard of the Cha-cha! His eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. He said, “Ba-beee, sure, of course I remember the Cha-cha.” Without missing a beat he began to demonstrate the Cha-cha rhythm of his generation. He began his cha-cha rhythm with 1-2-3-4-5-6 with no accents on the 4-5-6 at all. He then finished his rhythm with a continuous rhythm accenting his heel on each beat, 1’-2’-3’ 1’-2’-3’ 1’-2’-3’. He continued to demonstrate variations on top of variations with elegance and style. As he finished up his demonstration, he said the original dance was done with a partner (original Latin Cha-cha) and that Black social clubs in Philadelphia would give parties in which they would often challenge other Black social clubs. Eventually the partnering subsided and the couples began to stand next to each other facing their challenger(s).

The social practice of dressing formally when attending public social events (1960’s) coupled with impromptu cha-cha challenges were the catalyst for the styles’ developing movement vocabulary, which also showed up in the attire. It was common to wear slacks, a shirt with a collar, sweater or blazer, and or an entire suit to an official party i.e. party given by a school, student union and or disco. The early seventies generation took the accepted social attire and bumped it up. Unofficially we (youth) decided that the suit was the clear distinction between a G.Q. dancer and what we called a civilian-a regular person who dressed appropriately but varied its clothing choices. G.Q. Dancers were specific about their style of dress. The bow tie was the tie of choice, Derby or Fedora the hat of choice and Stacy Adam or Old Man comforts were the shoes of choice. This is what I refer to as G.Q. Regalia. It set you apart from the rest of the “Herbs.” The major difference between us and the Black Socialites was attitude. In my opinion they saw themselves as better than most Black folks and made no qualms as they outwardly displayed such heirs<sup>3</sup>. But it was this so-called “air” of the Black social clubs that defined GQ. Always dressed, clean and proper in public. Like fraternities and sororities the Black social clubs had a way of making you feel like an outsider in your own community.

For years this has been my understanding of the Black Philadelphians: conservative and committed to “self-ism” if you will. Fredrick Douglass was quoted (Philadelphia’s Black Elite)

<sup>3</sup> This is another example of where my misspelling points to something underlying - as “heirs” it speaks to our heritage of dressing to impress, being distinctive, as part of survival. We are heirs to the tradition of Black excellence as strategy for living.

When I initially wrote this section, I mistakenly used the terms "heir" and "heirs instead of "air" and "airs." When you think about it there is some sort of inherent attitude carried on from generation to generation. It's fascinating to see how much “social value” or rather social status we’ve (Black folk) place on basic human hygiene throughout history. Since the era of enslavement, we have placed great emphasis on presenting ourselves as clean, both in public and within our homes. This hyper focus on cleanliness carries multiple layers of meaning. Culturally, it serves as a confirmation of societal status, even acting as an excuse for financial limitations. I recall hearing phrases like "at least I'm clean" or "at least my house is clean" as a way to compensate for economic struggles or the inability to afford high-end designer clothing. This systemic mindset permeates various aspects of our lives. For example, consider Rufus Thomas' iconic performance at the Watts Stax commemoration concert in 1965, where he proudly proclaimed to the audience about his impeccable outfit, exclaiming, "ain't I clean!" In Black culture, there exists an unwritten rule that dictates that even

if you are economically disadvantaged, you should never appear as such. At the very least, cleanliness should always be maintained. It's important to remember the historical context, such as people hastily leaving swimming pools when Black individuals entered. This mindset also carried over into Hip-hop culture, evolving into a consumer-driven mentality where one must always strive to be fresh, clean, and fashionable, avoiding repetition in clothing choices. We even go to the extent of using toothbrushes to clean our sneakers and meticulously ironing our pants with razor-sharp creases to give the appearance of being neat and clean. Additionally, it is not uncommon for us to iron our dollar bills with starch before leaving home. I certainly did this. For me a crisp dollar bill suggests that it (dollar bill) came fresh from the bank and moreover it suggested I had a bank account. You can imagine when the ATM became popular that shut down the 52 Fake Out! (a slang we use in North Philly that suggests an action is fake. Example; She gave me the 52 Fake Out. The phrase itself derived from a particular prison fighting style from back in the day called 52 Hand Blocks.

as saying “the Philadelphians were apathetic and neglectful of their duty to the black community as a whole”. Thereby, charging Philadelphia’s Black elite with being too conservative, apathetic and divorced from issues of slavery. Don’t get me wrong my people are the best in the world but we have a few things to work on in regard to promoting our unique Philadelphian culture. But hey, it was this bourgeois attitude that gave birth to the infamous “Philadelphia Sound” as well as the now very popular “Neo Soul” genre. It is this same bourgeoisie attitude that permeates the style and movement itself. We GQ dancers didn’t think ourselves better than our peers as one would have thought. We found a way to be prideful in our manners, look, and dance style while solely focusing on the dance and the community at large. Like the Cake Walkers who mimicked and mocked their master’s uppity gestures and postures, we did the same of the so-called Black Elite “aesthetic” and their social clubs. The difference is we weren’t

mocking the social clubs, we were mimicking them. We were following the protocol that was set before us. The Philadelphia Black social clubs set the precedent for the look and style of the Street Dance we came to know and love as GQ.

To date GQ consists of the foundational Cha-cha rhythm, footwork from Meringue and Salsa, the aesthetic of the Black social clubs and the rhythms, gestures and nuances of tap dance and bits of fraternity step rhythms. There should be no mistake made, GQ dance style is in no way fraternity “stepping” or Chicago Step Dance etc. According to Tyrone Proctor GQ or rather the Cha-cha came out of the Philadelphia Fraternity and Sororities social events. By the time we youngsters learned the dance it became something else (G.Q.). Different in aesthetic, style and technique street step groups, Drill Teams or community dancers also had a hand in creating this dance. We should also note the term “step” dance or stepping practiced in the Black communities nationally, may also differ due to the region of the country. Philadelphians who know of the Street Dance style GQ came to know a vocabulary made up of the variations of Cha-cha and drill team rhythms mixed with hybrid Meringue footwork and Salsa steps, combined with the percussive hands and steps of fraternities and sororities, all of which became common practice via challenges and exhibitions. Most valued its rhythmic foundation and commonly referred to the style as “Stepping” in slang terms. Which on some level seemed appropriate due in part to its adopted step rhythms from fraternities and drill teams - even though for Philadelphians “Stepping” is an entirely different thing than most people think of today. A few of the infamous GQ groups on the streets of Philadelphia were, IFT aka International Floor Takers, The Floor Takers, Chip n Pip (duet), Twins (twin brothers), GQ, The Great Gatsby, Franchise, Rafique and the Stepping Uniques, Disco Kings & Queens. The Step Masters, The Stepping Masters, The Mighty Boom Shakers, The Flamingos, and Dwight, a lone GQ dancer, who some believe to be the one who defined or even started the style. It was these groups and many more who evolved the Latin social dance the Cha cha and traditional hoofing techniques into what we now identify as GQ. Rightfully so, because Philadelphia was the home of famous tappers such as the Nicholas Brothers, Honi Coles, Bill Bailey, and Lavaughn Robinson to name a few. These legendary hoofers and tappers left a strong footwork and rhythm legacy, which also influenced the indigenous Street Dance style GQ.

It is this history that continues to inform the quick footwork and rhythm style of Philadelphia Street Dancers, and it is this style of dance G.Q. that when I thought about it, freed me from tricks and set choreographic solos in a battle or on stage. I think it is the “freedom” of dancing from your core being, free of expectation and critique that is the actual foundation of all dance. In regard to the Hip-hop/Street Dances in general, most have foundational movement and technique that is beneficial to the Street Dancer. The Funk Styles of the West Coast, specifically poppers, adopt the Boogaloo dance style as foundation for various West Coast Funk Styles. House dancers adopt the New York Loft/house dance aesthetic and its various rhythm and grooves as a means of developing foundation and codification. There are a few pockets of Philadelphia Street Dancers who still employ a unique Philadelphia style and perspective to Street Dance styles. Like our predecessor’s, we, the Philadelphia Street Dancers specifically have a need for speed and precision (research Philly quickness). Philadelphia has its own unique brand of “underground” dance & music-from hoofing, tapping, to social dances like the Philly Dog, The Bop, and styles like GQ, Battle Dance and Wu Tang, to its music genre such as the Philadelphia Sound pioneered by Gamble and Huff’s Philadelphia International Records and Bilal, Music Soul Child and Jill Scott Neo Soul. This was evident in the Scanner Boys style of popping. This is what set us apart from our peers. Most of my routines and choreography were based on what I learned as a GQ dancer. I have only but one person to thank. My peer and mentor Franklin “Money” Stewart. Without his guidance and tutelage, I would not have discovered or unleashed my God given talent for dance.

## FRANCHISE

QUICK MIX PROFILE



**FOUNDER:** Ronald Nuesome  
**MEMBERS:** Grand Wizard Rasheen and Ronald Nuesome  
**PLACE:** South West Philly  
**STYLE:** G.Q.  
**BREAKDOWN:** The Franchise were known for having the fastest G.Q footwork style in Philadelphia.

Franchise performing they're GQ chair routine (late 1980's) left to right DJ Rasheen and Ronnie Ron (founder).

# SCANNER BOYS

Later as G.Q. died down I began to learn how to pop. I'm not sure why I gravitated to popping the way I did but it seemed a natural course for me. The Scanner Boys was something new and fresh.

*I may be leaving some people out because my memory doesn't serve me the way it used to, but I will do my best to recall all its members and generations. Here we go!*

The founders of the Scanner Boys were:

- Pontzie and Fonzie (Alphonzo).

These two guys started it, then my brother and his friends took their name, came and got me, because I was an old school style G.Q. dancer, and from then on I was the leader of the Scanner Boys.

The 1<sup>st</sup> generation consisted of:

- myself (and I was in all successive generations)
- my brother Billy aka Dollar Bill
- Tone
- Ponch
- Moochie
- Leonard Daniels, aka Tree Man II
- Randy Robinson, aka Sir Glide
- Day-day
- Sharon
- Anthony Garman, aka Germ

The 2nd generation of Scanner Boys, me, Tree, Sir Glide and Snake were the crew that beat the Philly Floor Takers on live television on a local television program called Dancin On Air in 1981 (see photo The Floor Takers). Of course supporters of the Floor Takers thought it was rigged because the voting results didn't get announced until two weeks later. What they missed is that the show was live, not recorded and the two week delay was more of a marketing ploy to insure viewers. If I'm correct it was "Sweeps" month and the show needed to show the proper viewing numbers in order to not be canceled. Even if that's not true, that moment (Battle) marked the transitioning of the guards.

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One of our first generation members was lured into a house and thrown out the second floor window and then upon landing on the concrete below the first floor window he was shot several times. As I may have mentioned before Street Dancers come from a long line of thug and street life.

G.Q. was on its way out in Philadelphia and Popping was the new craze. Of course we would win. It could have been any Popping group, the time was right and the times were changing from Funk to Hip-hop.

The 2nd Generation was:

- Lenoard Daniels aka Treeman II
- Randy Robison aka Sir Glide
- Carl Griffin aka Snake
- Carl Ashton aka Cisco Kid
- Nathaniel McCray aka DJ Sly (we had our own DJ)

Carl Ashton, aka Cisco Kid, a classmate of mine from West Catholic School For Boys would become the first dancer we allowed in the group after the mass firing (or some of them just quit) of most of the 1st and 2nd generations of Scanner Boys for consistently missing rehearsal and practice. Technically, Cisco was the beginning of the 3rd generation of Scanner Boys but had moved on after graduating high-school. Later he founded a new group called "Latest Image" with other highschool classmates of ours. Latest Image consisted of Carl Ashton, Scott Brooks, Danny, and Hank.

Once Snake, Sir Glide, and Tree Man resigned, there was only me, "Prince of the Ghetto" (my new name - it's vain huh? yeah I know). I recruited Gilbert Kennedy aka "Mut" aka Shalamar from a South West Philly dance crew known as the Break Boys. Shalamar marked the beginning of the 3rd generation of the Scanner Boys to carry on the legacy. First thing we did was create "Oriental Pop". Second thing we did was enter Force 4's annual popping contest in South Philly.

This marked the start of the 3rd generation of Scanner Boys with:

- Gilbert Kennedy aka Mut aka Shalamar aka Kim 3 Love
- Dave Ellerbe aka Dave the Renegade (formerly of Short Circuit-popping group)
- Darryl Wright aka Boogaloo (formerly of Short Circuit popping group).

Then a moment when it was just me, Dave the Renegade, and Shalamar before the 4th generation which consisted of the three of us plus:

- Donald Gonzalez aka China Man
- Chachi aka Hip-hop Kid
- Captain Crunch
- B-boy Psycho
- B-boy Paul Paul
- B-boy WildStyle

5th generation became (all the rest were gone but me, Shalamar, B-Boy WildStyle, and Dave the Renegade):

- Brandon Sherrod/Albright aka Baby Face Brandon aka Brotha Peace
- Regina Brown aka Gi-gi
- Meechie (B-boy)
- Diaper Dan
- Dahlia

Through these generations we all battled our way through the streets of Philadelphia, crushing everyone in our path. Just so I'm fair, I must mention our arch rivals the Pop-Along Kids (North Philly) who were the only popping group that consistently gave us a run for our money or so we thought. Without the Pop-Along Kids and their dancers such as Sugarfoot, Will, Mr Ed, Cat Eyes and China Doll, to name a few, the Scanner Boys would not have progressed in our skill set as quickly as we did. Admittedly, we've never conceded or confirmed a loss to them, to the Pop-Along Kids, but in retrospect I think we all knew when we lost to them (we didn't want to admit it), hence our relentless pursuit to beat them. But, in Street Dance defeat is not something you readily admit. Even if you are judged by your peers to have lost the battle, somehow we never believe it. Maybe the arrogance of Hip-hop culture blinded us from reality or maybe we were over confident-there is a thin line between arrogance and confidence?

But like most youth we were full of ourselves and honestly rightfully so. We were young Black and gifted and our reputation always preceded us and like most we'd get a wake up call but not for some time and not in Philadelphia. It was only in New York that we found ourselves confronting reality as we felt a bit like a fish out of water.

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I think the Scanner Boys believed we won more battles than we did lol-honestly on an individual basis I think the Pop-Along Kids were better poppers than we were-we just didn't see it. Choreographically I think we were better.

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NEW YORK  
BIG CITY OF  
DREAMS

Soon, we were introduced to another field agent of the Smithsonian Institution named Lee Ellen Friedland. Lee Ellen Freidland documented and researched us (Scanner Boys) for a while and then began to research a GQ group from West Philly called the Disco Kings & Queens. Lee Ellen remained connected with the Scanner Boys and often hung out or gave us rides to shows or auditions. I believe she was the one who heard of an audition in New York for a video and offered to drive us there. Before long Lee Ellen was driving us back and forth to New York City for many auditions. She had family in New York (her mom) so it wasn't too much of a hassle. Well for us it wasn't a hassle, because we didn't have any money for gas or food, so I'm sure it took its toll on her more than we knew, especially with me. At that

Yellow Magic Orchestra was one of the pioneering synthesized/techno groups that had a profound influence on Afrika Bambatta, inspiring him to create Electrofunk, which gained popularity among hip-hop artists and its practitioners. Many observers mistakenly classified Electrofunk songs like "Planet Rock" as Hip-hop music. While there may be differing opinions, I believe that Bambatta played a crucial role in introducing synthesized music to Hip-hop culture, thereby paving the way for the iconic synthesized drum sound and samples that originated from popular drum machines like the 808 or SP-1200, shaping Hip-hop music as we know it today. An article by Jayne Tsuchiyama\* in the Los Angeles Times (2016) clarifies that the term "Oriental" is not a racial slur directed at Asians. It is not part of the

derogatory slurs used against them in anger. This is not to say people are not offended by the term. This is simply to say we chose to name our piece "Oriental Pop" as a tribute to the clever wordplay and signifying nature of Yellow Magic Orchestra's name. Just as Burt Williams, one of the highest-paid minstrels, defied the stereotypical content perpetuated by white minstrels about the Black community, an Asian band adopting the name Yellow Magic Orchestra exemplifies a similar assertion. "Orient" simply means "of the East," and the concept of "Popping" in Street Dance is rooted in visualization. It is a style that encourages dancers to use their imagination to create physical illusions, to surpass perceived limitations, and ultimately, to challenge viewers to see beyond what is immediately apparent.

\* [www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-tsuchiyama-oriental-insult-20160601-snap-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-tsuchiyama-oriental-insult-20160601-snap-story.html)



time I took myself very seriously and generally didn't trust or like most people other than my crew -some would probably argue I'm still the same way. I don't know, maybe some people are right. Although I've come a long way I still struggle internally with trust and being around people I do not know. So if you are hoping to have an impromptu conversation with me it's best you kick it off cause I may sit next to you and never say anything. Not because I'm rude but it's a mixture of a few things. Believe it or not I'm still shy in many ways but once I get to know you you may want to go back to not knowing me cause I may talk your ear off. Traveling with Lee Ellen to New York for auditions wasn't our first introduction to Sin City. Our first time was when we performed at the Ritz nightclub with the Dynamic Breakers. We beat every breaking crew in Philly at a club in downtown Philadelphia called "Phillies" (3rd and Chestnut St) hosted by a local radio personality/Rapper known on the rap scene as "Lady B." The winner of the month-long contest got to represent Philly in a battle in NYC. A month later we found ourselves on a bus up to NYC to battle Dynamic.

Ok I just mentioned we performed with the Dynamic Breakers. Well I chose to use the word "perform" because while we understood the sole reason for going to New York was to battle the infamous Dynamic Breakers; we opted out to say we performed on the bill with them instead. We had a secret weapon routine, "Oriental Pop", Oriental Pop was an abstract, popping piece I choreographed after the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation members of the Scanner Boys resigned, it was choreographed to Yellow Magic Orchestra's "Computer Game" (released in 1979). After watching the set Dynamic Breakers executed, we realized or should I say I realized, there was no battle to be had. Oriental Pop got next to no applause at all. I think it was before its time and it was too much to swallow without being spoon fed-as traditional Hip-hop routines were used to doing. Another factor in our loss was the venue itself. It wasn't conducive. The work was created for the theater, not a club with a stage. What we needed to do was a traditional set, do our best to represent Philly with the hope of getting an approving head nod, or moderate applause once we were done. In the end we didn't do that bad, but there was no battle on that day. At best, it was a showcase/performance. After that fiasco at the Ritz Nite club, we found ourselves in another battle at a club called the Red Parrot. It was our first official battle in NYC. After it was all said and done we came in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> place I can't remember. We were devastated of course. We felt we should have come in 1<sup>st</sup> but it was cool, we were out of our territory. Later I found out Buddha Stretch of Mop Top and Elite force fame was also in that contest at the Red Parrot.

# THAT NIGHT AT THE ROXY

We continued to go up to New York on our own. Catching the SouthEastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, aka Septa, to the New Jersey Transit for under or about 10 Dollars each way. Small fish in a big ocean, we were amazed at its beauty, courted by the sounds, smells, tall buildings and accents. We were in love with New York. It was new, fresh and mad different from Philadelphia. One thing we noticed about New York was how no one noticed us. In Philadelphia if we so much as had a rip in our pant leg, a loud color, or dingy clothes, we were looked at strangely, teased and often considered poor, Punk Rockers, or Gay (all of which could get you into trouble). In New York, no one cared what you looked like or what you wore. Some days we thought we'd be funny and see how crazy we could dress ourselves in order to get some sort of reaction from people when we walked down the street. We got nothing. Not one look, glance, or "Oh my God" response. We were insignificant in the hustle and bustle of the City, but in the clubs parks and streets, we began to make our mark through a few battles in Washington Square Park, the Roxy, and some way out places in the Bronx. Eventually we started to become known around a few circles. Mostly it was our style of popping that confused people, especially my dance partner Shalamar. Shalamar was and still is the nastiest popper I've ever seen. Even to this day I haven't seen anything or anyone come close to what I have witnessed Shalamar do as a popper. He had a way of approaching everything from the soul and with a risk that no one would take. Me on the other hand, I had my movement down packed<sup>4</sup> and knew exactly what I was doing at every turn. Thus making me a follower like most. Working out my solo routines before I got in the circle actually worked against me. Once I ran my routine, I was left with nothing. So then what?

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<sup>4</sup> In this case the mis-spelling of "pat" with "packed" speaks to the idea that my I was prepared for battle and all my weapons in my arsenal were prepped and ready to go.



I would have to reach deep inside, if at all possible, to pull something out. In New York dance circles I was Shalamar's dance partner and I wasn't considered much of a threat. Of course, "I" on the other hand thought otherwise. It wasn't until I found myself watching old tapes of my dancing that I realized I wasn't that good of a dancer back then. Of course, I could dance, and in Philadelphia I was considered one of the best. But clearly I wasn't taking too many people out in NYC with my cookie cutter skills. When I really started to think about it, there were a lot of Philadelphia Street Dancers that were better than me. Without knowing it, I hid behind the power and illusion of my crew. When I did look back I saw a lack of clarity in my technique and I never commanded the silence (drama) as some of my rivals learned to do. Ultimately, I'd begin to understand the importance of dancing from one's soul. It was cool when it was just about me doing my

Prince of the Ghetto aka  
Grace with the Fat Boys  
(The Fresh Festival 1983)

own thing. I could dance from my core/soul with no worries. But for some reason when I battled or performed on stage I came at it strategically, and thought that if one were to strategize one could control the outcome. At least that's what I used to think. After a while my battle strategy would be tested and I would get my first lesson in core dancing when battling. The art of connecting to your soul in the cypher is no easy task. The first time this came to light was at the infamous Roxy Club (Roller skating rink & Roller Disco 1978) in the Chelsea section of Manhattan New York. We (Shalamar and myself) were battling cats all night long. Closer to the end of the night we got into a battle with another group of poppers. We went at them with solos and two-man routines. We gave them all that we had. Out of nowhere a b-boy asked if we were from California. I assumed he asked this because our popping technique was clearly different than what he was used to seeing. Proudly, with mad pride in our voices and stance, like

## **'ULTIMATELY, I'D BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF DANCING FROM ONE'S SOUL'**

any respectful "Norph Phillian" (North Philadelphian) I proclaimed "Nawh, we from North Philly!" Clearly, dude was disappointed with my answer. "Philly! Where the hell is that! Yo they from Philly!" he called to his other homeboys as the cypher got smaller. It felt like this cat knew everyone in the club cause it seemed like everyone was lulled to the cypher via his disappointment that we weren't from Cali. The cypher continued to get mad close and tight. This had all the signs of a beat down, but before it progressed, the loud mouth says, "you have to battle every one of us or you're not gonna make it out of this club tonight." Common sense told us to get the fuck out of there. At this point it didn't matter. Whether we win or lose, we were gonna get our asses kicked or worse. As Shalamar and I connected eyes and understood we needed to bolt for the door asap, these cats pulled out "burners," (guns) and it looked like all of them had one. The loud mouth cat said "Yall gonna battle all of us or you're not getting outta here B!" Now, we had no choice but to battle and hope to God we made it out alive. The craziest part is, I remember Shal and I battling these cats one by one and by our standards beating them all (every Street Dancer thinks he beat every battle they were in), but for the life of me, I can't remember what happened

at the end, other than the fact that we didn't get jumped or shot. I learned a huge lesson that night. I had no choice but to dance from my heart. I ran out of moves and tricks. But I was young, and like most teenagers on a quest, that moment of awareness was fleeting. Soon I went back to working out routines and strategizing in the cypher and on stage in my same old way.

The final clarity I had on the matter of dancing from my soul came to me when I connected it to GQ dancing. GQ was hardwired into me, I could move from that space from within my body, I didn't have to think about it, it was already inside me. Unlike when I was popping I was always thinking about it - always in my head. When I made this connection from GQ to popping my free-styling started to be free. As a dancer you ultimately want to dance free; getting beyond the rules and moving clearly into the feeling of the style, then again you can jump outside the style into the thing, and then you're innovating (which may become a whole 'nother style). My love for GQ freed my Popping technique and this saved my life that night at the Roxy (even if it took a bit longer before it translated into my whole dance groove).



The next contest we entered would be the "Swatch Watch" Breaking contest. By this time the rest of the Scanner Boys resigned to Philadelphia, mostly due to family pressures to grow up, get a job, be serious about life, you know the drill. The only Scanner Boys left were Shalamar and myself, taking on New York with a vengeance. I'm not sure when or how we met up with a white Popper from Vancouver, WA (across the Columbia River from Portland, OR) who taught himself to pop from videos. But Steve Glavin was sort of a Godsend for us. He wasn't from NYC and we connected on an outsider level. He'd lived in the city longer than we had, and he had already navigated the streets. We, on the other hand, were fresh out of illadelph, impressed and excited, unable to tell south from north. Steve turned out to be a great friend and taught us a lot without knowing it - we were absorbing from him without either of us realizing how much we were impacting each other. What really amazed us both about Steve at that particular time in the late 70's was that there was very little, if any, video that featured Poppers, let alone Street Dancers. So we were amazed at how good he was given he was learning from fragments of Street Dance featured in videos. Steve Glavin is the kind of guy who is always positive, always bright and would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it. He managed to keep his innocence while sifting out the bad shit of New York. When you think about it, it was an amazing feat. There'd been so many Philadelphians who were swallowed up by "New York City," most thought we were crazy to go there on the regular. Me growing up in North and Shal in South West Philly actually prepared us for New York and its snares. Excited, but not stupid, we contributed to the spirit of New York without missing a beat. Following the footsteps of Street Dancers over 100 years ago, we took a chance. It was our turn to burn and so we did, never sleeping through the night, always in a club, always on a scene. We were doing it! We were becoming New Yorkers. Our walk and our talk began to shift. Slipping in and out of our Philly accent without even realizing it. For a minute Steve, Shalamar, and I became like the 3 musketeers. Steve grounded

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By the time I moved to New York in the early 80's I changed my name to "Prince of the Ghetto." I think I saw a series on TV called "Prince of the Night" with Freddie Prinze (not sure because he was actually on Chico and the Man) and so I took the name Prince and made it my last name for a while "Rennie Prince" and eventually became Prince of the Ghetto- but while on tour, the New York dancers nicknamed me "Grace" because they'd never seen a dude with a "Flat Top" fade which at the time was unique to Philadelphia hair cuts. They'd only seen the singer Grace Jones wear her hair the same way hence they called me Grace.

us and kept us focused on why we were there in the first place. Steve was always focused and driven even though Shalamar and I used to clown Steve all the time because he seemed so innocent and unassuming. Somehow we got it in our minds that he sort of reminded us of “Opie” from the television sitcom The Andy Griffith Show starring Ron Howard as Opie. To us he didn’t look like your typical Street Dancer and he definitely didn’t sound like he was from the street. It was Shalamar and I who gave him his nickname “All American White Boy” today respectfully known as “All American”. It was because of Steve that we decided to stay in NYC. He convinced us to stay so we could go on more auditions. At that time there wasn’t a big demand for Street Dancers. Jazz dance really ruled the airwaves so to speak. We’d crash a Jazz audition with the hope that we would rip it so bad they’d have to choose us to be in the video or perform in whatever show was up for grabs. We didn’t have agents so the way we found out about

## ***SLEEPING ON FLOORS, IN STUDIOS, COUCHES AND CHAIRS OF DANCERS IN THE BUSINESS***

auditions was to hang out at clubs like Latin Quarters, LimeLight, The Cat Club, Red Parrot, Roxy etc. This was a time of very little backbiting and jealousy, well at least in our little clique and circle of dancers. Never knowing where we were going to lay our heads next, we were vagabonds. Staying at different peoples houses (or rather over-priced small ass apartments). Sleeping on floors, in studios, couches and chairs of dancers in the business, and on a few occasions we slept in the Gazebo in the Bronx. Steve eventually invited us to live with him and his roommate in Yonkers, New York. Steve’s roommate turned out to be none other than the superstar Street Dancer who commanded the dance floor in any club he was present. Be it salsa, hustle or early rocking styles he brought it. He was Mr. Eddie Vega himself. Of course at that time, we had no clue of his history, but after a year, we came to know his history and his importance to Street Dance. Influencing, salsa, hustle, breaking, rocking, he is an unsung Street Dance legend of New York. He and his girlfriend Lourdes were unbeatable as hustle dancers. Before he died they won 10 consecutive Star Search competitions. Already a successful street and contemporary dancer it felt as though he was finally about to break through to the next level with his unprecedented appearances on

Star Search. He schooled us on the Hustle, Latin Hustle, Rocking, Salsa, the whole nine. He told us how he taught members of the infamous Dynamic Breakers a lot of their lifts, especially the lift where one person lifts the other overhead with one hand balancing the other dancer in an X position while simultaneously spinning clockwise. From Salsa, Rocking to Disco he told us what was what about the culture and the do’s and don’ts of New York Nightlife. It was in Eddie’s apartment that we named Steve Glavin “All American Whiteboy”. Steve was on a long distance phone call to Vancouver, talking to his brother. Shal and I couldn’t help but overhear his conversation. Without warning we both busted out laughing. We thought Steve sounded like, what we called an “All American white boy”. Today I couldn’t tell you what an “All American white boy” sounds like. With the slang of rappers and Hip-hop culture dominating the fiber of “American English”, who knows what “sounding white” or “Black” for that matter sounds like anymore? Either way, his nickname stuck and for the time being we all were inseparable. We were preparing for The Swatch Watch Breaking competition which was held at the infamous Roxy Club (the same club where Shalamar and I had to show and prove to get out the door in one piece). It seemed like thousands of dancers came from every borough and or tri-state area to compete and we were just a speck on someone’s shoe. The rest of the Scanner Boys, for whatever reason, were not interested in the competition -as stated previously they were back in Philadelphia and moving on. Later on I found out there were even international Street Dancers in town to compete. All American, Eddie Vega, Shalamar, and myself – at that time I was known as “Prince” - created a brother group to The Scanner Boys and called it “A Touch Of Class.” I believe we came up with the name because of Eddie.

We all felt because he was an O.G., versatile in styles of dance and had more experience, that he was the touch of class who smoothed our rough edges as young boah’s. The contest consisted of group, two man (duet) and single(s) in all categories. Which at the time was Popping/Locking and Breaking. Although Campbell Locking and Popping are two entirely different styles most people, at that time, lumped them together. We all contributed to the routine choreographically. When the smoke machines cleared we came out victorious, beating out every breaking crew that entered the contest that night. In the two man popping routines Shalamar and I made it to the end but eventually got cut. In the Popping singles, I made it to the end and eventually I got cut. I was surprised I made it that far. I was dancing with a swollen knee (water on the knee) which I got from playing basketball. Later that year I’d come to find out I tore cartilage and ligaments in both my knees. I’m not using this as an excuse for

being cut from the singles competition. I'm just saying I know I would have done better had I been in good health that day-ok that's an excuse. Shalamar advanced to the finals against Mr. Freeze and lost. In our opinion Shalamar beat Mr. Freeze but it wasn't the opinion of the judges. But that was ok, we still won the entire Group Dance contest. This was the most prestigious battle anyway, because as the crew winners of the Swatch Watch contest we officially became the Swatch Watch Breakers. Winning included appearing in GQ magazine's latest news section, making appearances at a string of Macy's department store events, and many other public and private events. In our minds we had finally made it. Soon we found ourselves auditioning for a rap tour at Pineapple Dance Studios in Soho. Earlier that year we auditioned for a manager who lived in a loft on Prince and Wooster, Ms. Julie Fraad. We chose to perform our theater piece "Oriental Pop" for her which we created in the late 70s or early summer of 1980. It was our most dramatic work (or only dramatic work), which showcased our brand of thinking when it came to popping. *I have to say this work was my first official dramatic abstract Street Dance work for theater if you will.* From costume to style, it was something people never witnessed before. You either loved it or dismissed it because there wasn't anything out there to compare it too. This work was indicative of our individual styles and commanded attention from all who viewed it. It set the standard

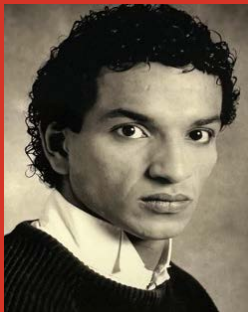
that led to my first dramatic solo piece around 1983 or 1984 "Private Dancer" (Tina Turner) and Shalamar's solo "Misled" (Kool and the Gang). Later it would serve as a template for other pieces that challenged the audience's perception of Street Dance such

## 'AND NOW IT TURNS OUT WE WERE ABOUT TO AUDITION FOR A RAP TOUR; THE FIRST EVER IN THE U.S.'

as other pieces I created like "State Of Mind I & II" and what has become known as my tour de force solo "Endangered Species." After auditioning for Julie, she showed no real obvious response. Maybe it was some of "I'm not impressed this is New York we've seen it all" New York attitude-ish. She spoke to Lee Ellen, still driving us and being supportive, in private and we returned to Philadelphia. We were feeling good since we beat the Swatch Watch breaking competition at the Roxy and were on top of the world and now it turns out we were about to audition for a rap tour; the first ever in the U.S.

## EDDIE VEGA

### QUICK MIX PROFILE



#### STREET

DANCE STYLE: Hustle/Salsa

BORN: May 26, 1965 Bronx, New York

#### RETURNED

HOME: March 12, 1992

#### CLAIM

BREAKDOWN: Versatile in street dance styles like the Hustle, Salsa, Rock dance and Loft. Since the age of twelve Eddie Vega and his partner Lourdes Jones won every contest they entered. To my knowledge he has never lost a dance competition. From Dance Fever to the U.S. Ballroom competition he has always won. Later he and his partner Lisa Nunziella would win thirteen Star Search competitions, with two uncontested totaling a record win of fifteen consecutive wins on Ed McMahon's Star Search. Eddie has worked with actress Jennifer Beal, Brenda K Star, Cher, Cover Girls, Earth Wind & Fire, and many other noted celebrities in the music and dance industry. A pioneer and legend street dancer Eddie Vega was ahead of his time and arguably the first superstar street dancer of our generation.

# FRESH FESTIVAL 1984

When we walked into the audition for the rap tour lo and behold there she stood Julie Fraad. There were some other cats there of which we had no idea who they were at the time. Today I'm sure one of them was Jermaine Dupri's dad. This time it was the three of us, Shal, All American, and myself. I'm not sure why Eddie Vega wasn't with us. Eddie and I were close in age but he was a New York Street Dancer which gave him way more experience than I had. Shit! he was holding down his own highrise apartment in New York he was clearly O.G. status. Established professionally and on the Street Dance scene, he didn't need to chase the dollar the way we did. Or he not showing up for the audition could have simply been the fact that he was focused on his own career and things of that nature and did us a favor by even dancing with us in the competition. Hip-hop wasn't the force it is today and no one had a clue what was about to happen right under our very noses -so it's quite possible he could've dismissed it all together as nothing important. No one else seemed to care that he wasn't there. Maybe I was in my bag feeling vulnerable and out there because we didn't have an experienced dancer with us. It's likely we hit a three-man routine for the audition, but I just don't remember how it went down other than we got the gig. Julie Fraad called us to let us know we got the gig, but there was a small catch, we had to go under the moniker of Magnificent Force. At first we were upset about it. How could someone just come up with a name for us? We didn't realize the name Magnificent Force was already created and used prior to us. In fact we had no idea Magnificent Force was an actual group before us. We were from Philly and weren't familiar with groups from New York other than the breaking crews like Rock Steady Crew and NYC Breakers. Yeah we saw Mag Force in the movie (Beat Street) but didn't realize that was the name of their group. Had we known this was their name we would've protested the using of the name. We quickly got over it, especially after we found out how much money we were gonna make. By today's standards it was next to nothing, we made 2,400.00 dollars a

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The New York Boogie style is a hybrid FunkStyle deriving from the West Coast Funk Style "Boogaloo"-Not to be confused with the Oakland Boogaloo style. Boogaloo as we know it today was pioneered and created by Boogaloo Sam. However, Sam's Boogaloo Style is often referred to as the Fresno Boogaloo as to not confuse his brand of dance with Oakland Boogaloo style.

month. But for the 80's and for us, with no responsibility of rent, children, bills and shit, we was RICH BITCH! It took about 3-6 months for the tour to kick off officially. On our end we had to create a set (routine) with dancers we didn't know, practice relentlessly, and by all means make our set blazing! On their end they wanted to set up a few trial dates before committing to a full-scale tour. After all, Hip-hop wasn't seen as having major drawing power at the time. The name of the tour was "The Fresh Festival" affectionately referred to as "The Fresh Fest" featuring Kurtis Blow, Run DMC & Jam Master Jay, The Fat Boys, Newcleus, Whodini and a host of one hit wonder groups that would open the tour up before the rappers hit the stage-like RJ's Latest Arrival who performed their pop culture hit "Rumors." Meanwhile, as we waited for the startup dates and information we were back on the streets after practice, hitting clubs, parks and anywhere there was music and a space to get down. One night out of nowhere, when we were at the Roxy, there appeared two Puerto Rican poppers we had never seen before. One was about my height and build, the other Shalamar's height, but a lot skinnier. Up until then, we never really battled straight up poppers in New York City. Most were B-boys attempting to pop as far as we were concerned. On the reals there were a few cats who did the New York Boogie style but to us we didn't consider that Popping. This was the first time we ran into Poppers who clearly displayed skill. Even the night we were held hostage by gun point in the cypher at the Roxy the Boogie/Poppers seemed sub-standard to us at the time. But really what it was, was an issue of style. We didn't understand their Boogie style and what they were doing really so we thought of it as not being that good.

Stopping by the Roxy on that night on a hum-bug we found ourselves standing in front of two stone cold poppers: Mr. Wiggles and Pop Master Fabel. Wigs looked like a human puppet, a man made of paper blowing in the wind at will. Fabel had a 1950's pompadour cut with this hair falling over his forehead. Imagine the hair of Egon from the Ghostbusters movie but much more serious and sinister. Every time he popped, his hair would hit on his forehead helping the illusion of hitting/popping hard. If that wasn't funky enough he also had chain links on his wrist, secured with leather wristbands accenting every movement-wearing links around your wrist was popular amongst Poppers in New York in the 80's. It was as though Wigs and Fabe were assassins hired to take us out. Again, just so I'm clear, it wasn't as if we had amassed street credibility or anything like that. Shit this was New York. To build that kind of street cred you have to be in the belly of it, and we were nowhere close. If anything, Shalamar had more of a buzz on the streets of New York than I did. But still we met a

few people, battled a few cats, and were known in our immediate circles. Fabel and Wiggles came at us as if they had a personal vendetta, but they didn't know us and we didn't know them. Bam! on the dance floor, we went at them. I threw lightning waves from my fingers through my arms down my torso, hip, knee, foot and back up over to my left arm warning them both. It was as if the wave was saying "look, you don't want any of this shit. It's too advanced for your New York Boogie style to comprehend." Well, I thought this move was conveying that when I did it, but apparently they didn't get the memo and commenced to doling out the hardest NY Boogie style we had witnessed to date. Shalamar countered with a vicious slow motion wave like I had never seen before, but this didn't stop them. We battled and battled, we thought we smoked them, and they thought they smoked us. Over the years, we'd battle them like there was no end in sight. It wasn't until some time later Shalamar and I found out why they came at us so hard from the gate. Of course we didn't mind the intensity, we were used to battling in Philly and having to rumble afterwards, it came with the territory. The best thing about our battle with Fabel and Wigs was it never escalated to anything more than the dance. In retrospect I have to say I really appreciated that. It made us respect them all the more. It was about the art of the dance, not our teenage physical fighting prowess. We battled for so often for so long we eventually became friends well, put it this way, we became cool enough to actually talk to each other which led to our friendship. Next Shalamar and I found ourselves at the New Music Seminar for a promo of the tour to come. It was a big deal, the Fresh Fest was seen as the first official Rap tour. We finally got the tour dates. The producers of the tour wanted to do a trial tour down South, i.e South Carolina, North Carolina and so on. Ok cool, we were wit it! We met the rappers in a vacant parking lot about 5am in the morning. Loaded our bags on the tour bus and headed out. On the way there, we had the pleasure of witnessing something no one has ever seen other than the people on that particular tour bus at that particular time. Run DMC, Jam Master Jay, Fat Boys, Kurtis Blow and his DJ AJ got into an impromptu freestyle rap battle. This shit was amazing. I remember thinking to myself this is historic, I will always remember this moment. The shows were successful and the tour was on and popping. We toured every major and small city in the U.S. Prior to the Fresh Festival there was a tour that originated from the Kitchen performance space in New York that went overseas with the Rock Steady Crew, Fab Five Freddy, and many of Hip-hops ghetto superstars, but we were first in the United States. Most believe the Kitchen International tour is what planted the Hip-hop seeds globally but it was the national tour (Fresh Fest) that confirmed the power of Hip-hop music. As you might expect,

there was mad drama. From shootings and robbery to beat downs, drugs and rehab, it was no different than any other popular tour in the music industry, and we were having an amazing time. Young, with bright spirits and immense energy, we traveled the country without a care in the world. We were wild and free to live however we wanted. A young rapper, now producer/rapper Jermaine Dupri, opened each concert with a rap that was rumored to have been written and produced by him. Hailing from Atlanta, Georgia he was probably 10 or 12 if not younger, sporting the infamous Jeri Curl he'd rap and do his Atlanta dance that later swept the nation, the "Prep." A group called "Uptown Express" went second and then Mag Force (us) went last. We didn't care for Uptown Express too much, the leader was very arrogant and his crew feared him. I get that, but most of the time he was wrong in his decision-making and responses. So that sort of turned us off. On top of that, we didn't think they were that good, their movement was very juvenile or rather old and outdated. Of course this was according to us at the time. They won a dance-off on some TV show like "Dance Fever" or some dance contest like that. It was hard for us to respect that. We felt we were chosen because of our "street cred" and our raw talent. But, in hindsight we basically were on our own shit judging people. Sometimes a person's ego can challenge their perception to say the least. Who were we to judge how they got there or their skill level? We, they, the whole dam culture was nothing more than a babe in the woods, newbie's, rookies in the game. Later what I thought was arrogance was him being a leader leading his homies the way he's supposed to-with an iron fist case a cat wanna get froggy and jump yahmean? Today, my hat goes off to him as the leader he was and as a dancer who had skill as a popper. I learned later on in life that you have to respect the "hustle."



## MR WIGGLES

QUICK MIX PROFILE

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<b>STREET</b>	
<b>DANCE STYLE:</b>	Boogaloo & Popping
<b>PLACE:</b>	South Bronx
<b>NICKNAME:</b>	Mr. Wiggles
<b>GOVERNMENT NAME:</b>	Steffan Clemente
<b>CREWS:</b>	Rock Steady Crew, Magnificent Force, Ghetto Originals, The Electric Boogaloos.
<b>Breakdown:</b> Also Featured in music videos with Rapper Missy Elliot and movies such as B.E.A.T Street, Wild Style and the Freshest Kids Documentary.	

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Never knock another man's game or hustle, his stick "to-it-ness" every man, woman and child has the right to survive this existence. Today, I give Uptown Express mad props, they were better than I wanted to admit and I was just young, inexperienced and judgmental.

Eventually Uptown Express was no longer on the tour and the B-boy crew the Dynamic Breakers, who often brought their B-Girl crew the Dynamic Dolls with them, replaced them! We loved the Dynamic Breakers -again these were cats we thought we were battling (but did not have the chops to beat at that time) from the Ritz back in the day. They became our Puerto Rican and Dominican brothers straight up and down. The members of Dynamic Rockers at the time were B-boy Kano, B-boy Duce, B-boy Spider, B-boy Flip (not Flip Rock from New York City Breakers) and B-boy Airborn, the leader of the crew. Later B-boy Tiny joined them. Tiny!-this cat was a beast of beasts. The things I see breakers do today I saw Tiny do in the early eighties. I don't know if Tiny was Boricqua or Dominican but he was basically the height of Prince and had a weird Jeri Curl situation going on on top of his head. I believe he also played keyboard and wrote music. This cat was Phenomenal. He reminds me of a 1980 version of B-boy Ivan "The Action Figure" in his prime. On the road we really bonded with Dynamic and the Dynamic Dolls. We often shared the same tour bus to cut down on overhead. We were mad cool. These were in fact one of the best times of my life. I also have to say, Dynamic, The Dolls and Mag Force (us) rocked the Fresh Fest every night! This was the best squad of Street Dancers the Fresh Festival ever had.

# THE FORMAT

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In Philly dance we always used the term "the format" which was the structure for when we performed. So we'd always say, "yeah, what's the format?" That was our early attempt at being educated and creating a vocabulary - terminology for our dance. Just like we called our choreography "routines" before adopting the language like choreography. We didn't have the words for what we were doing but we were making the language for ourselves as we went.

What was apparent about the Fresh Festival tour was it was the last stronghold for the traditional presentation of Hip-hop culture before our culture got appropriated into the commercial industry mix. Even as we toured the music world was changing and the role of dancers were being relegated to the back. When we were younger the format was simple. The DJ spun the records on the table, the MC was next to the DJ rhyming on the microphone and the dancers were in front of the DJ's table free styling, or battling. In some cases like with DJ Afrika Bambatta's breaking crews The Zulu Kings and Queens, DJ's had dancers as part of their crew and featured them in front of the DJ's table. This is what I'm calling the "traditional format" or setup for Hip-hop culture. Later as the MC evolved into the Rapper the Rapper was placed in front of the DJ which eventually led to the dancers being pushed to the back of the Rapper. Of course there are more factors that contributed to this new format for the Street Dancers. For instance it made more sense economically to hire only two dancers as back up dancers than to showcase a crew of ten to fifteen Street Dancers. Two dancers also worked better for smaller stages and venues and overall cheaper to bring on tour with the Rapper. The Fresh Fest tour designers were very considerate and understanding when it came to how Hip-hop culture was presented. The

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MC is short for Master of Ceremony. A person who does introductions for concerts, weddings, and events like talent shows or modern day variety shows like Terry Crews on America's Got Talent or The Masked Singers Nick Cannon. The Master of Ceremony is also referred to as the "Host" or "Announcer." The phrase/term Master of Ceremony is thought to have come from the Roman Catholic Church (15th Century). It is an official Papal Court position in charge of making sure the events and rituals involving the Pope go smoothly. The MC and the Rapper are sometimes spoken about interchangeably. BUT let's break that down a bit more. The MC in Hip-hop culture also

stands for Master of Ceremony but for the MC it could mean Mic Controller or the person that moves the crowd (interacts with the audience). In African American culture this is known as Call and Response, a practice carried over from our African ancestry. In the beginning the MC made the announcements at the party and talked about how amazing their DJ was on the turntables. This evolved into the MC hyping the crowd up (\*Call and Response) and spitting freestyle rhymes off the dome (improvised rhymes) versus the Rapper who writes their rhymes. KRS1 marks the battle between MC Busy Bee and Kool Mo Dee as the defining moment that gave birth to the Rapper.



tour organizers and producers made sure we had our own stage which was 100 ft or so in front of the Rappers stage, placing the Rappers and DJ behind us (traditional format). The order of the show began with Uptown Express, Magnificent Force (us) and then the Dynamic Breakers/Dolls. When Uptown Express left the tour for whatever reason Mag Force then opened the tour. The Rappers stage opened up with the funk/disco band RJ's Latest Arrival, Kurtis Blow, Newcleus, Whodini and closing the night was Run aka Joseph Simmons, DMC aka Darryl Mac and DJ' Jam Master Jay aka Jason Williams Mizell.

***'SO THERE WAS A LOT OF EXCITEMENT AND ENERGY IN THE AIR, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE HIP-HOP HAD ARRIVED AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN'***

**IT POST  
MINSTREL  
DESECRATION  
OF THE  
SACRED.**

Later around 1984-85 ish LL Cool J joined us at NYC's infamous Madison Square Garden. I remember the first time we heard him rhyme. It was on a cassette tape someone from the Dynamic Breakers brought with them on the road a year prior to seeing LL come on stage at the Garden. He didn't have a record deal. He was so good, and had a refreshing young sound, that his tape was aired on the radio without pause. I can't remember the song, I want to say it may have been some rhyme from one of his demo tapes but I'm not sure-see what I mean my memory is on one. Regardless he was the dopest young cat on the come up at the time. We were in the green room of Madison Square Garden chilling out when I caught my first glimpse of him. We all were excited to be back in New York after being on the road for almost a year. Most of us had family, friends and girlfriends we'd gotten passes for. So there was a lot of excitement and energy in the air, especially because Hip-hop had arrived at Madison Square Garden. We saw this as a major accomplishment for Hip-hop. Hip-hop sells out performances, at the Garden, who would have thought it was possible? Ben Cenac aka Cosmo D the brains behind the rap group from "Bed-Stuy Do or Die" Newcleus of "Jam on it" fame manages to get in a major argument with Grandmaster Flash. We, being bored dancers as well as the youngster's on the tour, used to entertain ourselves by watching and listening to the crazy arguments and disagreements amongst the old head Rappers. Often we'd catch good information about how some things got started. Other times we waited for an actual physical fight to break out, it never did. I'm not sure why we thought it was fun to watch the old heads go at it, but we did, and on this particular day as I mentioned, spirits were high, as well as people. We were chilling in the green room and in walks Grandmaster Flash. Honestly it wasn't that deep, the argument seemed to have jumped off because when Flash walked in the green room Cozmo D spoke to Flash and said what-up and Flash tried to act like he

didn't know Cozmo. If you know Cozmo he will pull your card with no problem, no matter who you are. Cozmo laid into Flash and basically told him, "negro I knew you since, don't try to front on me!" We were ecstatic; we couldn't believe it. It was like the clash of the titans up in there, with curious smiles on our faces we braced ourselves against the walls and table for the big one. But just as the argument was getting heated and about to blow we heard another ruckus in the hallway. It was this skinny kid in tight Lee jeans and a burgundy or red terry cloth Kangol hat, cussing this white cat out. We figured the white dude may have been his manager and the young skinny dude was giving it to him about not being able to go on for at least one song. Turned out this was

## ***'IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I SAW A MC/ RAPPER DESECRATE A MICROPHONE. THE CROWD LOST IT COMPLETELY'***

the "ghetto superstar" street rapper LL Cool J. What I could make of the argument was he wasn't officially asked to be on the tour, his people were working on getting him on the tour but couldn't. So they figured they would just straight bum rush it to see if they could get LL on. Ok, so to be straight up and down with you I could be making this all up in my head, you already know how my memory is. But for the most part this is what I remember and how it went down. Flash was mumbling or rather slurring something to the effect that he was God and Cozmo continued to confront him on some real factual shit and soon after, the argument dissipated. Eventually, LL got on and he went on right before Run DMC and Jam Master Jay. Man, can I tell you, this kid lit that thing up. When he stepped on stage, the crowd went berserk. His antics, hand gestures, seemed like an over exaggerated DJ Run but with more finesse and more passion. At the end of his set he slammed the mic down on the stage and the feedback from the mic was crazy. It was the first time I saw a MC/Rapper desecrate a microphone. The crowd lost it completely. It took Run DMC a while to get the audience under their control. It wasn't until Run said to the sold out Garden; "I wanna know one thing?! Who's muthafuckin house is this! I said, whose house is this!?" The fans finally responded back in a manner agreeable with Run. Screaming from the top of their lungs they answered "RUN'S HOUSE!" BOOM! Negro! Run DMC & Jam Master Jay commenced to doing what they do and that was; bring the house down!

I would bet that before that night very few rap fans and practitioner's ever witnessed an MC/Rapper do what LL Cool J did at the Garden with the microphone. And I have a lot of thoughts about this as a defining moment:

- On one hand this was the antics associated with white dudes from Punk to Rock bands; they did that sort of thing to their instruments and equipment. Me and my peers never understood why white cats did that sort of thing to their gear. We chalked it up as white people not appreciating what they had so therefore they had to destroy it. Others thought they could do that because they had the money to replace it. What did we know? We were kids attempting to make sense of the world at large.
- Might I also add, that night at Madison Square Garden was half, if not predominately white. Given our unfortunate history of adopting western culture and all that goes with it, it was only a matter of time before we'd witness another step toward the homogenization of Hip-hop. Homogenization i.e. white American culture.
- Also, the fact he slammed the mic down on the stage confirmed Rap and Hip-hop culture's arrival. Rockers were seen as the top of the food chain when it came to Pop-culture music. So this action of slamming the mic down was read cross culturally and there was a new animal in the jungle and he is starvin like marvin.
- Not only could the Rapper be confident and braggadocious but by now adopting the well known antics of Punk Rockers/ Rockers the Rapper could also embody ownership, anarchy and defiance on stage.

Ladies Love Cool James' defiant act of disrespecting the mic marked another post-minstrel shift where we of black culture adopt western ideals/aesthetics as an attempt to be seen as different or better than our peers. Unfortunately we do so at our own cost. In my eyes, LL desecrating the microphone marked a new era for rappers. At that moment it was clear to me, Hip-hop was about to change again. The MC's who held our cultural practices intact and the Rappers who told our stories were no longer relevant as we marched toward mainstream culture. The rapper was reaching outside of himself in order to confirm his authenticity. One could say, whether conscious or subconscious LL's disrespect of the microphone was disrespectful to the lineage of MC's and those who felt the microphone was and is a sacred tool of the MC.

MOVE  
GET OUT  
THE WAY!!

As we moved forward into the cultural future, Run DMC & Jam Master Jay took on the persona of tough leather wearing Bboys, which was indicative of the street gangs of the 70's (white, Black & Hispanic). Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five embodied the hardcore persona of the streets as they became the bluesmen of the ghetto, painting graphic visuals of the ghetto landscape while Afrika Bambatta "boldly went where no man has gone before," birthing futuristic/sci-fi Hip-hop with his Electro Funk, as he pushed the boundaries and the so called limits of Hip-hop music while Cozmo D's Newcleus forged forward with its new brand of cosmic funk and rhythmic mastery. Yes the Rappers for the most part came from the harsh streets of the United States (and yes the Dance Halls of the Caribbean) and its music, dance and visual art not only reflected their realities but it mocked and signified on the rock and funk culture before it.

HIP-HOP  
"PROPER"  
COMES INTO  
PLAY

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Hip-hop dance consists of popular party and social dances such as the Alf, Cabbage Patch, Nae-nae, Whip and so on. We were Breakers and Poppers both of which are Funkstyles not Hip-hop.

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Touring the country or the world seems like a very exciting thing to my friends and family but in reality there was a lot of downtime in between shows. Sometimes we were stuck on the tour bus for 8-10 hours, stopping only to get food or to wash in the rest room of some funky restaurant. Boredom was always scheduled on our itinerary. We'd battle each other, create new choreography and often tried to imagine what the next dance style would look like. We wondered if it would be better than Breaking or Popping. We couldn't imagine what could ever surpass Breaking or Popping. And then, just like that "presto change-O," Hip-hop dance becomes the new thing. What a shocker, we would have never guessed that the party dances we did for years at social functions and gatherings would become the next mainstream hit. To us there was nothing exciting or dynamic about Hip-hop dance. It wasn't like it was new, these were popular party dances we all did when we were younger. So how was this relevant? The times were changing, we were getting older. Considered old school at 23 (hilarious) the generation below us were coming up strong and fast. The Fresh Festival tour was coming to the end of its run or rather we were coming to the end of our run on the Fresh Festival. It was a successful nationally acclaimed Hip-hop tour. There were rumors of a "Fresh Fest II" but that's all it was at the time. Well until we got the phone call, "Hello can I speak to Prince? Yo, this is Prince. Check it, they don't want Mag Force on the Fresh Fest II." Wow! Just like that we were cut at the knees baby! It was hard getting used to not having free Swatch Watches and free Reebok sneakers. We were sort of the guinea pigs for Reebok and Swatch Watch. If I'm correct, I believe both companies were just coming on the market hardcore in the 80's. I still remember how those Reeboks felt on my feet for the first time. I've never felt anything more comfortable. (They definitely better than Bo-bos) Yeah those days were gone but we were still performing hard nationally and internationally.

# RAPPING UP THIS ERA.

We remained steady on the path while still finding time to hit the clubs and Hip-hop events. Ok, so back onto the New Music Seminar prior to being fired from the tour. The New Music Seminar was basically where cats like Russell Simmons and all the other future rap moguls would push their product-music and in this case “Rap Artist.” Up until this time I hadn’t realized Russell Simmons was Russell Simmons, what I mean by this is, there were many times on the road with the Fresh Fest that we shared small conversations on the side of the stage while watching the rap acts perform. He seemed really calm and easy going and rounded. Meaning most dudes in the rap game whether producers, Rappers or what have you all seem outgoing and can’t wait to tell you this and that about what they are doing and how they are going to change the game yada, yada; Russell wasn’t this type of dude at all. It was common for people to hang on the tour- a cousin, girl or boy friend in the show or with roadies or as a part of the Rappers entourage or crew member and so on. I never thought anything other than he was some dude who was here with somebody on the road. I didn’t put it together until one day I was watching a program like MTV News or BET’s Video Soul with Host Donnie Simpson who was promoting the New Music Seminar and their next guest interview with Russell Simmons. Of course I waited to see and hear him speak; I had no idea what he looked like or how he would carry himself i.e. Hip-hop as a representative of Hip-hop culture. Shocked! I couldn’t believe it. I began to laugh and say out loud “dummy” straight dummy. How could I have not known. Opportunity 1 point Rennie Harris aka Prince nil. All this time I was talking to Russell Simmons on tour and didn’t even know it; man what an opportunity blown. The first time we attended the New Music Seminar we battled the dancers of Whodini in the mens bathroom. Three years later these guys had a hit single called Roxanne Roxanne. Yes UTFO’s Doc, Kangol Kid and the Educated Rapper were poppers first. Thank god they turned out to be rappers cause popping wasn’t really their forté of course they might disagree.

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This is my opinion  
or ego one you pick  
lol.

Right after that battle we found ourselves in another battle with guess who? You guessed it. Mr. Wiggles and Pop Master Fabel. After a year or so of epic battles which ended with the battle at the New Music Seminar we realized why they had it out for us. Apparently, Wiggles and Fabel were part of the original Magnificent Force. Shalamar and I thought Julie came up with that name out of the blue and we had no clue they were the original Magnificent Force from the movie Beat Street. If I remember correctly Fabe and Wigs thought we stole their name and ultimately their gig with the Fresh Fest. Honestly we had no clue and they did what they were supposed to do as Street Dancers when someone takes your name or uses your name; you battle for it. We just didn’t know that’s why we were going at it. Fabel and Wiggles had a falling out with Ms. Fraad so naturally they came at us. Since finding this out we befriended each other and actually did a few gigs as Mag Force together at some point. Today they are dear friends of mine, brothers in life and in the preservation of Hip-hop culture, Street Dance, and its various styles. Although we weren’t hired for the Fresh Festival II we kept it moving as Magnificent Force, traveling overseas laying it down as usual. Street Dance and Hip-hop music was changing rapidly. It was like the quiet before the storm, and just like that the Breaking, Campbellocking and Popping era was being overshadowed by this so-called new brand of dance “Hip-hop.”

Fresh Fest II replaced the old school dancers with Hip-hop dancers like Buddha Stretch and C-Love who became the new dancers for Whodini (if you remember, early on in my battles in New York we battled Stretch’s crew at the Red Parrot nightclub). In a way this marked the end of our days (so we thought). In the



## POP MASTER FABEL

QUICK MIX PROFILE

STREET

DANCE STYLE: Boogaloo & Popping

Place: Born and Raised in Spanish Harlem

NICKNAME: Pop Master Fable

GOVERNMENT: Jorge Pabon

CREWS: Rock Steady Crew, Magnificent Force, Ghetto Originals, The Electric Boogaloos.

BREAKDOWN: Co-Authored and Directed the first two Musicals on Broadway, So What Happens Now and Jam On the Groove. Also Featured in music videos and movies such as BEat Street.



Rennie Harris aka Prince and Uptown Express on the Fresh Fest 84

interim of the Fresh Fest I & II there was a movie call for dancers for a new Hip-hop movie called Krush Groove. We just secured a UK tour when our manager told us producers from Krush Groove were interested in Mag Force. She told us if we were confirmed to be in this movie she would arrange for us to leave for the UK the following week instead of the present week. Unfortunately our manager informed us we didn't get the spot in the movie. Naturally we were upset, especially me. Unfortunately, this would be the last movie representing this particular Street Dance era. Style Wars, Wild Style, Breaking, Breaking II, Beat Street, Body Rock I&II and Delivery Boys were popular movies of the era and just as I expected Krush Groove marked the end of that era and I missed it.

The UK tour was successful and we had a great experience overall. We returned to the states and went back to the business of Street Dance and making loot. While on my way to a rehearsal I ran into our old road manager Delaney. He and a guy named Scott

were our road managers on The Fresh Fest for the first year or so. Delaney, who boasted affiliation with the notorious street gang Casanova's, quit as our road manager and went over to the Kurtis Blow camp and I hadn't seen him since. It was a nice surprise seeing him. It felt like years since I saw him last. The first thing out of his mouth was "Prince, whatsup? What happened to yall? Yall were posed to be in the movie!" You could imagine my surprise, I was floored, I couldn't believe it! Our manager told us they didn't want us for the movie. What Delaney told me next changed my path, my life if you will. He said "Kurtis Blow specifically asked for you and Shalamar, he wanted you to dance beside him while he rapped his hit "If I Ruled the World" but your manager told the producers if they couldn't take everyone then they couldn't have no one." My heart fell to my feet. I was hot. Right then I decided to leave NYC. It felt like everything we were working for was for naught. I mean I understand her rationale as a manager, attempting to take a stance and play hardball. Basically it all comes down to timing, you must know when you can pull that sort of thing. Furious, I hung around for a few weeks and finally left New York, New York, big city of dreams. If that wasn't a kick in the ass, later I found out the Fresh Fest producers originally wanted to hire the Scanner Boys not Magnificent Force but our manager apparently told them she had two of the Scanner Boys so they could take half Scanner Boys and half Mag Force instead of our whole group. I wasn't sure if that was true or not but it didn't help me to hear that at all. Needless to say I said goodbye to the clubs and street dance cats I met along the way Like Peaches, Lock A Tron John, Loose Bruce (White Loose Bruce not the original loose Bruce who I was told was black) Poppers Fame and Fortune, and a host of other breakers and Boogiers and moved back to Philadelphia. I managed to save up 10k but how long would that last me in Philadelphia? In other words I ended the first stage of my career the way I started; broke. For me it was always a matter of economics. I never dreamed or imagined myself as a professional dancer. I was offered money and I danced for it. Nothing more nothing less. Since then I've come to adopt a saying I once heard Dr. Ernie Smith of Ebonics fame say, "Fair exchange ain't no robbery." This was and still is the motto I adhere to. I dance you pay me, no rap this is what it is yahmean. When I moved back to Philadelphia, dance was no longer priority one. I did whatever necessary to survive. I choreographed local singing groups, guest performed in an all star group called "Splinter Group" which was birthed from a residency at an historic Philadelphia theater called the Painted Bride with world renowned tabla player Zakir Hussein. I took any job that was available, from Fezzi Wig in A Christmas Carol to Drossel Myer in the NutCracker to hustling on the street.

This was a low time for me. Hip-hop as I knew it had changed. It seemed like my specific style of dance was becoming extinct. Increasingly there were more slow days than busy ones for me and The Scanner Boys. We weren't getting that much work and soon found ourselves doing after school programs and birthday parties we were digressing back to when there was nothing but the streets, the beat and the dance. You'd think that would be a good thing and in any other circumstance it would be but now we were professional. Dancing for "hood-sake" was no longer the thing. We were seen as grownups now; and had to provide for our families. Eventually I got a job at Tower Records, and went to work for Nise Productions' Dance Party USA on the USA Network. Later I hosted my own dance show called One House Street. After a year or two I was fired from Tower Records, lost my job as the floor producer/director of Dance Party USA and my House music dance show "One House Street" that I hosted was canceled. Basically, I was at my wits end. I had no money, no job and a newborn son-Brandyn Scott Harris.



Rennie Harris as Drossel Myer for the Chester Dance Academy (studio) performance of the Nutcracker early '90s

# AND THERE YOU HAVE IT.

It was at this moment things became clear to me. It wasn't about performing at all. In fact it was good to be raised in the business, but I realized the business was just that, business and performing commercially really wasn't my thing. Don't get me wrong, I would and still am open to commercial work. The difference is I understood who I was and what I was. I was nothing more than a prostitute selling my physical wares. If I was going to be fucked, then I needed to be the one picking out the condom ribbed tip or glow in the dark. I understood on some level I needed to retain more control and power for myself. Although the way I started in this business was in no way self-centered or intentional, I was no different than most kids who entered the business; I got caught up in the illusion of success. I traveled the world, performed for Presidents, Kings and Queens and even Princesses and still I wasn't fulfilled. I was empty and was going nowhere fast. Unlike Atrio in the Never Ending Story (movie) I was in search of the "nothingness," although I always refer to those years as the lost years I thank all the spirits, people and God I was never drawn to drink or do drugs at that time in my life, I doubt I would be writing this book right now. Mine, was and in many ways still is, a dark energy and I can slip in and out of it with ease -scary. Still to this day I'm amazed at how easy it is for me to go completely dark in energy not in an evil sort of way but just down and blue. No motivation or desire to move forward spiritually or physically. When I go there I can feel myself enjoying it in some masochistic way. I Thank God I made it through and found just a little bit of purpose, a small amount of hope in my life made all the difference. Hope afforded me just enough confidence to push my way through all the roadblocks I created for myself. I created illusions of success believing I would be noticed as I waited day in and day out to be discovered. I thought more of myself than what was really the truth of me. I walked around as if I was the next best thing since the invention of the wheel. I named myself Prince of the Ghetto

but really what was that about? Yeah in street-lore that sort of thing comes with the territory but after thinking about it I think it was a combination of youth and the required amount of Hip-hop arrogance. Maybe somewhere deep down inside I thought I was owed something for all the madness I'd been through as a child. Later it became more than obvious that instead of proclaiming myself the Prince of the Ghetto aka madness and chaos maybe it was time for me to deal with me, on the core level. No more lying to myself and others about who I thought I was but rather more or less deal with the truth of truth. But in order to do that I would have to confront some demons head on. I'd have to go beyond my shy demeanor and force myself to be even more outgoing than before. I would have to deal with my claustrophobia of clubs and crowds of people. I would have to deal with my religion and all that I was taught to be true and righteous. But here was the issue at hand; how do you do that? Pray more, go to church, do good things for people, be honest, fly straight-become a square? As far as my hood was concerned I wasn't really that far from being a square anyway; well they'd actually say I was a square if you'd ask them. Either way it was time for "Prince of the Ghetto" to die. And Lorenzo Rennie Harris would have to begin the process of being birthed again but this time with an alert consciousness that would be held accountable for its actions. Looking back at my life, from the perspective of today, I have to say it was as if all I've

done, every experience and all that I've accomplished back then was nothing more than training for what was to come. It set me up to deal with all of those who want to do me harm and those who have no clue how they affect me and my life. Those who say they have my back but put me on front street without question or pause all to gain what little bit of status they think it gives them. Who knows in the end? This business is a lonely one. But regardless, my life back then helped me get ready for my own inward journey and honest/ harsh critique of myself, my work, and the religion of me.

## PHILADELPHIA STREET DANCE GROUPS

Shock Explosion	Popping	The Flamingos	G.Q.
Sword and The Sorcerer	Popping	The Step Masters	G.Q.
The 25 StarJammers	Popping	The Stepping Masters	G.Q.
Cash & Cowboy	Popping	Disco Kings & Queens	G.Q.
Pop A Long Kids	Popping	Chip & Pip	G.Q.
Disco Devils	Popping	Franchise	G.Q.
The Puppeteers	Popping	The Twins	G.Q.
Force Four	Popping	Rafique & Stepping Uniques	G.Q.
The Mighty Boom Shakers	Popping/G.Q	The Great Gatsby	G.Q.
The Scanner Boys	Popping	The Floor Takers	G.Q.
The Scanner Girls	Popping	International Floor Takers	G.Q.
Short Wave	Popping	Untouchables	Hip-hop
Short Circuit	Popping	Sunrise & Sunset	Hip-hop
The Furious Rockers	Breaking	Brandon & Pit Flow	Hip-hop
The Funky Bunch	Breaking	The Twins	Hip-hop
The Break Boys	Breaking	Crystal Clear	Poppers
South Philly Breakers	Breaking	G.Q.	G.Q.
Aeronautical Breakers	Breaking	ICC	G.Q.

## GRAND MASTER FLASH

QUICK MIX PROFILE



NAME: JOSEPH SADDLER  
 BORN: January 1, 1958  
 GROUP: Grand Master Flash & The Furious Five  
 INNOVATIONS: QuickMix/BackSpin- Scratch/Cutting  
 INSPIRATION: DJ Kool Herc, DJ Flowers, DJ Pete Jones  
 HIT SINGLES: Super Rappin (1979), Freedom (1980), The Adventures of Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five (1981)

BREAKDOWN: Born in Barbados Joseph Saddler was impressed with his fathers record collection and often disobeyed his father when told not to mess with his record collection. Eventually he amassed his own collection and as you know became a pioneer in Hip-hop. Founding Grand Master Flash & The Furious Five in the mid 70's they're the first Rap group to be inducted in the Rock N Roll hall of fame -2007. Members include Melly Mel aka Melvin Glover, Kid Creole aka Nathaniel Glover, Cowboy aka Keith Wiggins, Mr. Ness aka Eddie Morris, Rahiem aka Guy Todd Williams.

