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Conversations

Across the Field of Dance Studies



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Breakin' & Rocking in Williamsburg, Brooklyn: Break Easy & Mighty Mike



Break Easy

Breaking In Style/Dynasty Rockers



Mighty Mike

Scramblin' Feet, Inc./Mastermind Rockers

Breakin' & Rocking in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, a conversation with Miguel "Break Easy" Panzardi and Michael "Mighty Mike" Santiago. Video recorded and edited by MiRi Park and grace jun, April 4, 2021. Watch the full video here: <https://youtu.be/8VLBSEfiLBs>

MiRi Park: Hello, welcome everyone. This is our first conversation in our *DSA Conversations*. My name is MiRi Park and I'm here with Dr. grace jun and Richard "Break Easy" Santiago and Miguel "Mighty Mike" Panzardi. We are excited to have you both in conversation today. To give everyone a little bit of a background: Both of you all grew up in Williamsburg [Brooklyn] and started breaking in your own crews, sometimes against each other, and you [laughs] through the years have both maintained staying in the scene and also mentoring the next generation of dancers, consistently. So part of our interest in having you both in conversation is to talk about, first, your experiences growing up.

What inspired you to get into this dance? And then also what continuously inspired you to stay in the dance and keep fostering, keep teaching in the neighborhood?

I should disclose that Break Easy, I call him fondly Papa Rich because he is the person who taught me from the very, very beginning. And so I learned almost everything that I know about breaking and hip hop primarily from Papa Rich. We've, you know, broken night, in terms of looking at photos, talking through different elements of the culture, including immigration to the area, talks about the, you know, the careers that parents had, why they moved there. Also we looked at photos. He taught me some DJing, which is really hard, digging for letters, so I owe a lot to Papa Rich.

And Mighty Mike I used to see all the time at jams, and battles, at the club. At Spa—because I remember one of your crew—while your crew growing up was Scramblin Feet, Inc.—the crew that I met you in was JBC. So I remember Kryptonik used to throw that that that weekly event at Spa which is—That's what got me, sort of, open as a dancer was to have that experience, but then used to throw a jam called "Chico's Gotta Have His Share" up at Planet 28. And so, and you guys continue to keep teaching, which is just remarkable.

Break Easy: So first, to start off, my name is Break Easy. I grew up in the Northside of Brooklyn. The area is called Williamsburg. At that time, we used to call it just Los Sures, for our particular location, because in the Williamsburg section in Brooklyn, there was two or three parts in that location: you had the Southside and the Northside.

At that moment in time, I was on Metropolitan Avenue—I'm a long-term resident there, for I think 35 years, before I moved out of there, you know? And this was growing up since 1966, you know? I'm 54 years old now. I've been active currently in the scene from '95, you know, offering both breakin' programs—rocking programs—breakin' is more catered to the youth

because hip hop is really all about the youth and it's created by the youth. It's also being recreated constantly by the youth, you know? And then the rocking which weren't aware of this secondary dance that was in that time frame, developing currently now which they want to attach it to hip hop,¹ which is another moment for discussion when it comes to that particular dance, you know? So again, my name is Break Easy. I was born in 1966 from Latino parents: my mother being Japanese-Peruvian and my father being Puerto Rican-Spaniard. Take it away Mighty Mike. Miguelito.

Mighty Mike: Yo, what's up, Break Easy. First of all, my name is Miguel, last name is Panzardi aka Mighty Mike. Born in Puerto Rico, raised in New York. I was living in the Southside during my teen years and I had met a couple of street kids that used to hang out in the neighborhood, you know? And these guys were up to no good and doing bad things out in the 'hood. And I had approached one of those young kids that I had some interest in what they were doing because they were kind of cyphering, kind of footwork, in front of my neighborhood and I took a big interest in that. So I was able to connect with some of the youth at that time.

In the neighborhood around there, there was a couple of DJs during that time. One of them was named Little John. He used to play music outside at the park. They used to bring out their equipment, put it out in the park, steal electricity from the lamp-post. That was kind of like how I started to view what hip hop was at that time. You know, the music that they were playing were a little different because—it was a little more rock and roll, more disco at that time. Just by listening to music it kind of—got me into the groove. But during that time, those kids were just doing footwork. They were trying to do a little bit of backspins, hand

1. Break Easy mentions this to help clarify that rocking preceded the development of breaking and hip hop (as it became formally known). He uses the term "secondary" to refer to rocking as many breakers practice breaking first and then usually see rocking as a dance form that helps inform their primary form (breaking).

glides, maybe a drill. It was just a few little things that they were doing. At that time there was no really power moves to say.

And I approached this kid named Macho, which is Choco's brother. They were rolling with these gangs at the time, you know, [Break Easy: Yeah.] and there was a lot of kids that were involved in the street gangs and he introduced me to his brother named Choco, which Choco happens to be part of, you know, Rock the House, which is an outlaw crew as well. The whole family's outlaw. And I was invited to their house to meet the family and meet the brothers and all that and that's how I got involved into the whole, the whole world of hip hop.

It was crazy at the time, because a lot of kids, you know, were doing a lot of mischief during that time. It wasn't easy hanging out or moving around the neighborhood because, you know, areas were kind of blocked off, as territories as well, so . . . You know, but getting involved into that kinda saved me from getting into those bad habits as well. And that was just the starting point of it. And that was like, early '80s—not familiar with the years—but it was early '80s.

Break Easy: Yes, now, with myself, my introduction to the dancing, it starts—it stems from my parents, you know? Originally, when I was growing up, my mother was very overprotective. My father was like, you know, "Go ahead do your thing . . . you you man now." And mind you, I'm 12 and 13 years old. So we were being reinforced with that particular aggressive attitude from my father. My father's old school, very stern, aggressive, you know? His word was practically law, you know? So he thought. My mother was very more free spirited, open minded, but she was also disciplined and she always made sure that I never got into trouble, you know? With my father is, "If you get into trouble, you man up," you know? With my mother, I was afraid of my mother more than my father, because of the sternness, you know. She would, she would give me *papow*, you know? Take a broomstick, take a

chancla—sandal, you know, and hit you over the head if we did something dumb. So, mind you I'm a 12 year old.

You know, I already was influenced through movement and dancing because of the programs that were offered in the school. I went to a school called P.S. 84, Jose de Diego in the Southside. [. . .] they would have, every year, these cultural activities. So, being Puerto Rican because of my father, I will be dressed with the, with the whole jíbaro hat—the straw hat—with the white gi that I would have, and perform *bomba y plena*² because that was my cultural background. And then another year, take turns, then I'll be dressed in a whole Inca uniform with the whole color for llama and alpaca vest, so I was already involved in dancing.

My parents would always have Pokeno gatherings at the house, you know. For those that don't know, Pokeno—it's like a card game on a board, you know. They would also play Bingo, you know, with the family. And my father used to love playing his ranchero music, you know, on a big furniture system that will play eight tracks and records, and in the center, you will open up, you have your records lined up. And you will have your shot drinks. You know, your rum, your, your liqueur and everything. My father would have his rum, my mom would have her pisco, you know, two classes of alcohol.

So, because of that, I was already instilled in dancing and expressing my thoughts and my energy and the social gatherings to be had in the house. Now, mind you, this is 1978, '79 where, just to add on to Mighty Mike was saying—At that moment in time, you know the Southside was infested with nothing but *títeres*, you know, gangs, outlaws. And it's not to say that sometimes

2. These two practices are often conflated, but dance studies scholar Jade Power Sotomayor clarifies, "Many Puerto Ricans regularly use the metonym to signal generalized festive, folkloric black percussive sound. Though the two share vocabularies and certainly many musicians make a living by expertly playing both—indeed many *bomberos* were first *pleneros*—they are distinct in instrumentation and history." Power-Sotomayor, J. and Rivera, P.L., 2019. Puerto Rican Bomba: Syncopating Bodies, Histories, and Geographies. *Centro Journal*, 31(2), pp. 10. See also Rivera, R.Z. (2003). *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 39.

those gangs were just social clubs later, or they were MCs (which is motorcycle clubs) later, but back then they were just outlaws, a collective of kids gathered together to cause mischief. You know, it just was that—that's just the way it was, you know.

So, at that time frame and stuff, you know, my parents were—had migrated from their own countries to come into a better location. So when they married, they found Williamsburg. And then there is where I was associated with not so much intentional bad people, but the fact that my community was so diverse within the Latino community, you know—we had Cuban, we had, we had Asians from India, you know, I'm being from Puerto Rican-Peruvian background—We had that whole mosh on my block, you know. And we had a local swimming pool.

So on the block there was two individuals that I, actually a few, two individuals and I could state their name. They were from the Unknown Bikers at that time residing on my block. So, if anything happened, those two individuals—which I'll just say "M" for one guy, and "C" for the other guy.

M was a male outlaw and C—well, I can use the alias, "Chunky"—Chunky was a dyke. For those that don't know, a dyke is a lesbian, you know. So, M always looked out for the younger ones. If you were a teenager and above, eh, you're big enough to take care of yourself, but he always looked out for the young ones on the block. The outlaws in my block, yes, they committed their own things, but if you were on their block, those people that were on the block, you were practically a secondary family to them. Of course they kept to themselves but they looked out for their block, 'cause you, there was no way you're going to cause problems on their block, you know? A lot of outlaws were very territorial so that's why that wouldn't happen, you know.

So I used to watch the outlaws in the back alleyways, you know, do their gatherings, you know, and sometimes they'll express themselves through a dance. At that moment in time, I wasn't

aware of the labeling of it, but it was, it was practically just an outlaw dance, you know, later to be known as rock, you know, as, as uprocking, you know. Later I knew it as uprocking but at the early time, I just didn't know what it was called, but that was the prelude of my becoming a Rocker.

But getting back to that is—there was a collective of guys on my block that they were going down to Flatbush Avenue,³ and they were learning a particular dance, and this is 1978-79, from another two guys that were coming from California. I forgot if it's Sacramento or somewhere there because it was the President of my collective group that we originally started as what was later on, to be known to me, is a part of the hip hop culture, cuz back in '78-'79, we weren't aware that there was a hip hop establishment [. . .] or this is labeled as "hip hop." It wasn't until the '80s that acknowledged that. You know? So we formed a collective that were interested in just going [sound effects with gestures] "BA BA BA BA BA" popping, later to be known as electric boogie for the East Coast, but back then, our first group in '79, late '78, early '79 was Popping Unlimited and at the same time, and being on the cusp of the BQE [Brooklyn Queens Expressway] we which is Green Grass, remember Green Grass, [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] Mighty Mike? [Mighty Mike: Yup, yup.] You know what used to be in that tunnel in Green Grass, right?

Mighty Mike: Yeah yeah. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: The Arabian Knights. The Arabian Knights.⁴ So on the BQE since my boy Tito lived right near that location, there was the, the overhead express, and they had a tunnel that will get you from—well, we used to call the real Southside to the other side, which was where Mighty Mike was what we used to

3. In between the Flatbush and Crown Heights sections of Brooklyn.

4. This *NY Times* article from 1983 gives an account of Brooklyn gang life that mentions the Arabian Knights and some of the other gangs/motorcycle clubs mentioned in this conversation: <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/09/27/nyregion/life-in-city-s-gangs-some-things-have-changed-but-it-s-still-a-dead-end.html>.

label at the other Southside. So that's where, in the Southside community, we had already a divide because of the BQE. So if you wanted to go from the Southside to the other side—oh, at that moment in time, it was Los Sures- to the *other* Los Sures, if you went through that little tunnel that goes underneath the overpass- the Arabian Knights—you will go in there with whatever you got, and you'll probably come out either barefoot, no wallet, nothing, cuz they used to, you know stick you up, you know, take whatever they felt you had that was worthy, you know.

So continuing from where I left off, the collective that we were, when I first started was popping. We called ourselves—because of Thomas and Angel, those are the leaders from my collective, was Popping Unlimited, you know? But we were a short-lived group because all we did was pop, you know? It wasn't until I met the guys in the Northside, you know, that they had a group called Northside Breakers because they were already—they're already was initiating the b-boy movement, and they were into that particular collective.

So what happened is like, "Yo. I kind of like that dance," and we were just doing one dance, they were just doing one dance, we merged together and we formed Breaking in Style and that initiated our merger between a popping dance style, and a breaking, or b-boying, dance style to become a much better compact collective now, you know? And we had two leaders, which was Angel Santiago from Popping Unlimited and the leader from Northside Breakers was Vincent Andujar, you know? And Vinny was supposed to be your competitor, cuz Vinny had floats, Mighty Mike. And back then, we didn't know you as Mighty Mike. We only knew you as friggin' Miguelitoo!

Mighty Mike: That's right. That's right. Yeah during that time, it was insane because when I was growing up in the Southside and I attended these park jams, because that's what there was at the time.

Break Easy: Yeah, there were park jams.

Mighty Mike: There was a DJ here with two turntables, mixing back and forth, and then he would drop these, you know, the breaks, you know, and I was like, "What is this?" And then I finally got to see these two guys named Tony and Chaos. You know, these two guys were rocking against each other, and I didn't know what they were doing at the time, but that caught my interest, man. I was like, "Yo, what is this?" And that started to give me a little groove of like what I was feeling, you know?

At the time, I was hanging out with Choco. Choco used to be part of the crew from Coney Island called Furious Rockers, you know? And he was like, "Yo. Let's take a trip to Coney Island," and I was, remind you, I was like 12 years old, 13, and he was like my guidance, you know? So he was like, "Come on, I'm going to take you up there, you gonna check them out. They're gonna be practicing and we're going to try to get down." And we started that for a little while, you know, but I noticed that during that time Joey was the leader of the time and [Break Easy: Yeah. Speedy, right?] Yeah, Joey [Break Easy: Yeah, Furious Rockers.] Yeah, Speedy, he was a little tough. He was always tough, you know? He was always like, [crosstalk] "Yo, man. You got to get that shit." You know? "You got to get that footwork, man. If that ain't right, you know, you can't be down." Like, he was always dissing me instead of helping, you know, instead of coaching.

Break Easy: You know, we always dissed each other, no matter what. I mean, we didn't really have no freakin' names for movement. You know, back then we just called it, like you said earlier—we just had footwork. We didn't have no four-step, six-step, three-step. I mean, we were learning as we battled each other. There was no particular formula to say, "Well, you have to do this, then you have to do that," you know? So yeah, it was crazy yeah.

Mighty Mike: Well, I was practicing hard, man and I couldn't make this guy happy, honestly. I was like, "I'm trying hard," you know? But it wasn't just happening, you know. They wanted an overnight, you know, miracle dancer right away to be down and it kind of frustrated me because I didn't have that technique yet, you know, and I was working hard.

So I remember, I spoke to Choco, I was like, "Yo, man. I don't want to be part of this crew because of the situations. I think that it was better off if we do our own thing." And that's what we did. We just started to practice on the side, doing our own thing.

As we progress, you know, that's when the Roxy's started, you know, to make noise and we were like, "Yo, that's a spot where all the b-boys go," at the time—well, they were calling them break-dancers, at the time, you know, that's what everybody went. It was just like, "Wow. I will love to be a part of that."

Break Easy: Yeah the Roxy's was like the early '80s, or like maybe '81, '82, I think yeah.

Mighty Mike: Yeah, so after training for two years of dancing and then getting involved with this, I was just like, yo Choco introduced me to this guy named Tick and I was like, "Who is this guy now?" So he was like, "Yo, I need a partner, man," and I was like, "What?" He goes, "I want you to transform, you know, from breaking into popping," and I was like, "Man, that's gonna be tough, man."

So I took the challenge, you know? I started to learn how to pop, you know, that was my next thing and I absorbed everything that I was being taught and everything, but it wasn't really my forte, you know what I'm saying? So I was just like, "I tried it. I gave it my best," you know. And we'd done a couple of shows together and all that but I wasn't really feeling it. My thing was more about the beats, the drops, the footwork, and all that, and that's what I stuck to most to, you know, until I was invited to go out to the Roxy's at one time, and when I was in there, it was just—I was blown away, man.

It was an amazing thing to see so many in the community getting down with the diversity of all these people that were involved. At the same time, meeting all these individuals from different boroughs that were all peacemakers and, and having fun cyphering—That’s when the first time I ever saw cyphers because we don’t, we never called it cypher it was just a circle and in the Roxy’s you had many, you know, many, it’s not one. It was like five or six going on at the same time, so—That was my first introduction to being at an event, if you wanted to call it, or club and just being around the surrounding of all these dancers, you know, and for me that was mind-blowing.

During that time, that’s when I first met Dynamic Rockers that were in there, Dynamic Breakers, New York City Breakers. It was Rock Steady. It was so many crews. Break to Dawn, at that time. [Break Easy: That’s “Bandit”] It was Furious Rockers, yeah and all these guys and, and I was just really young and I—for the first time I met Normski in there, too, another kid named Willie. That’s when Fabel and Wiggles used to hang out together, like, and Mr. Freeze—they were always in this trio thing going.⁵ So it was incredible just to have that in one place and it was kind of like that.

I was like a freelancer to say at the time, because you know Furious Rockers, it was a crew that I was rolling for, for a little while but I had interest in staying and breaking, but I wanted to be with a crew that will take you in as a family, but not treat you like an individual- if you’re not good, you know, you’re always to the side and I met Stretch- Stretch from Scramblin’ Feet. I was really nervous to approach him, but I did, and I told him that, “Hey, I like your crew,” because everybody was kinda like just kids just hanging out, dressing however they wanted, nobody was in uniforms, like all the other crews and wearing the same thing. I approached Stretch and I told him, “Hey, yo. I want to—I like your crew, man. I like all your individuals.”

5. PopMaster Fabel, Mr. Wiggles, and Mr. Freeze are members of the Rock Steady Crew.

That's when Float—Valentino—used to hang out with them, too and I was even blown away that he was even part of that crew, because they used to be good friends. He was like, "Yo, if you want to be down, just go ahead, show me what you got, man." And I was like, "OK." And I went down and I got crazy and busy and footwork and everything, and then they liked my style. They were like, "Yo, I want to put you in my crew, man." And that's how I got recruited into the crew [Scramblin' Feet, Inc.], but not given the division yet. I was just a member. That was it, man.

After that, it was just more about, "Hey—" I talked to them about, "Hey, I got like six more guys back here," like, "What do you think?" You know. He was like, "Where you from?" And I tell him, "I'm from the Southside, Williamsburg, you know, Brooklyn." He was like, "Man it'd be nice to do a division out there, man," and I was—

Break Easy: We hated that. We hated that. We hated that. That's what started the friction. Because there was no way that was going to be a chapter from the Lower East Side coming into the Williamsburg section, but you know when that happen—when that happened that started kicking off a lot of b-boys in our community, because I know you from the Southside, too—That started pissing off not only my, my crew Breaking in Style because we were rivals for a short time. You started having Joshua with Spin Masters, you had rockin MixTriX On Feet. You had the Southside Rockers which was, I think, are led by Abdul by South 9—they were like an extension of Unknown. Then you had Together We Break, and stuff, you know, which they were originally a social club,⁶ which is Together We Chill and that's with Little MC and Mousey so that- that kicked off a lot of battles in the area as well, you know?

6. In a follow-up phone conversation with Break Easy on 13-SEPT-2021, he clarified that "when we say 'outlaws' we mean gangs." He went on to clarify that four groups of people can wear patches: outlaws, military veterans, motorcyclists, and social groups. A social group is not an outlaw gang but may have a similar style aesthetic.

I know that when we were in Breaking in Style—this is from '79 going forward—we started off the same way. We didn't have no particular class to attend to say, "Well we're gonna have to top rock, then we'll have to do six-step, then we'll have to do a butt-spin, a back-spin, a kick-out. All these labels later were needed in order for us to be able to communicate to create a system where we can have a fundamental language to teach and that was only for teaching design—the movement labeling was needed in order to be able to share our step with another person, you know. And that was—and that happened not with other crews, that happened internally, you know.

And, just like you, where you started seeing the collective happen in the club later on, for me, the early years was hanging out with my crew, getting into trouble and stuff, finding a personal space that we can say, "Yo, this is going to be our practice space." We used to practice by the waterfront in the Northside. We used to practice at McCarren Park,⁷ but McCarren Park was like open season for like, if you were there, somebody else was going to be like, "Yo. What you guys doing? Let's step in, let's battle." There was no peace there because that was open space until later on, we decided to take over.

But we were always practicing in the Northside by Vinny's block toward the waterfront, you know? And then even there we were worried because you have freakin' the [. . .] freakin' needles from the junkies, the prostitutes hanging out in the area. Come on. Kent Avenue? Back in the day, and Wythe? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] Yo! [crosstalk] And then back then, it was nothing but waterfront piers. So we had to get into one of those spots, get a drum, put some paper and fire, practice a little, get a little cardboard, and then later on, linoleum came into play, just so we can have a private spot to practice closed-in,

7. Located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and borders Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

isolated from everybody. You know? Cuz we didn't want nobody to bite our stuff. [Mighty Mike: Yeah, during that—] It was a big thing. Everybody did the same move. I'm like, "Come on. They didn't even really change one thing"

Mighty Mike: Yeah. Back then, the only way to learn a move was to ask somebody that knew a move, to teach you the move, in order to have the move. So that was basically how it was. We didn't have camcorders. We didn't have cameras or anything like that, so everything you saw you had to record mentally in order to make that happen, yeah [Break Easy: Yeah.] And if you did it wrong, you were going to do it wrong for a long time until somebody else can correct you, because that was the way you were learning.

But it was crazy because that was how we learned how to get our bumps on our backs, our skin burns that we got from windmills and backspins, and our elbows being burnt, and, you know, busting our knees and—There was a lot of injuries during that time that people don't know how we were doing these moves and going raw, because there was times when we would use no hats to do head spins and we were getting bald spots and everything and—

Break Easy: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't know. [crosstalk] I don't have it. I think you have more than I do, on that.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. And it was crazy how that was kind of like the beginnings of what started to launch something big, you know? But we were the first ones in the front lines that took the beating before we could have—could understand the move in order to make sure how—we know how to break it down. So it was much easier to teach somebody—the move after you have went through hell, and you can give them some shortcuts and explain that you can, "Do it like this, and like that," and when it put the hand and all that because during that time we didn't know

what the hell we were doing, so we were just going through our bumps, you know. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: Nobody knew how to do a proper footwork, you know. Everybody had their own presentation of what footwork was supposed to be like, you know? This is what's the beautiful part about it, I guess, from our generation is the fact that because we weren't taught, so there isn't a format that they all follow, not like it is today. Today you have teachers that I can get—I can debate on my labeling of what, how they teach their fundamentals and what they call foundation, you know?

Back in the days, we didn't have that so we were self-creating, self-expressive presenters, learning on the job as independent critical thinker b-boys, because every time I battled for, let's say, you and me saw each other, I was definitely going to look at everything you do, and then if there was something that I wanted, I'm gonna take it, I wanna flip it. I'm not gonna present it the same way you present it. I'm going to add my own twist on, on the thing, you know? And, but there were a lot of guys that you know that if you did it that way, they will come and they will battle you that same way. And I'm like, "Yo! This n**** actually took my footwork flow, my presentation, or my—" like,—If I did four and a half footwork and then did a good freeze that fool is gonna do four and a half footwork and do that same freeze. I'm like, "Really? You don't even bother to change, you don't even bother to change the presentation!" It's like you wearing the same underwear [for] two days?! Papa, change it up! Change it up!" Or give it your own twist, you know? But back then, we were learning by experience. I was teaching him or her, and vice versa, so there wasn't a format presentation, you know. We were learning—we were self-taught from each other's collective. We learned as we battled, you know? If anything, I think I got better because of all those battles.

You know, I used to—I mean, I'm from Los Sures, but even in Los Sures, I had to battle against Joshua—Crash—Joshua's crew, you know I forgot what they called it—The Crash Crew, or something like that? Joshua's Crash Crew. Then you had Mond with freakin' Spin Masters. You have White Rock and Mousey and Little MC from Together We Break, you know. You had Abdul with Rock Smelly from, from the South Nine, you know. You had Mixtrix On Feet. Then you had Scramblin' Feet, Incorporated, y'all fools on the other side and stuff, you know? I remember Densis. Densis used to live right down Metropolitan by, a little bit past Lorimer. [Mighty Mike: Yep.]

I had to go there, because there was a guy on his block called Dragon. Dragon had two sisters and he was a popper, you know? At that time, he was doing tutting style, really cool, you know. So when we used to go pick up Dragon, guess who we'd see there, on the stoop? Frickin' Densis. And I'm like, "Oh man." [Mighty Mike: Yeah.]

And, and not only that, but I'm from, I'm from Metropolitan, Bedford-south side and he's on the other side, so I'm like, I just crossed the BQE to meet my boy Dragon, which is on that side, so now I saw that. I know, I know who started the battle between my crew and your crew is one of our guys, Angelo. [. . .] He lived down on Division and he used to talk a lot of smack. He was the talker in our group and he wanted us like, "Yo. How is Lower East Side and Scramblin' there. They're battling people [. . .] and they're talking shit," and I'm like, "N****, you talk shit, too!" You know? So I'm like, "All right." So it's because of him that he started that friction between your camp and my camp, you know?

Mighty Mike: Yeah, man. I remember that time. I was at the candy store right on South Fifth and Keap. I sent MiRi a photo of me standing there [crosstalk] and [. . .]



Old stomping grounds where Scramblin' Feet Inc. used to hang out. Photo of Mighty Mike, personal collection.

Break Easy: Yeah, I know that one.

Mighty Mike: So Angelo comes in, I remember him coming in with somebody, and he came—he approached me and he was like, “Yo. I hear you guys are talking shit. I told you that, you know, it’s

going to happen. So we're gonna battle. You know, you're gonna have to bring it to the park, to the school yard, that's where we're gonna have it at. And, and I was like, "I don't got all my guys together, but I'll do my best to, to gather everybody up and go." I was still young, you know? I wasn't aggressive like he was because he was—

Break Easy: Yeah, I think you, I think we were 13, 14, 15, I think. This was like early '80s now. I think we started—I think we battled—I dunno sometime after—it was '81, '82 something? I don't know, but some time [. . .]

Mighty Mike: Yeah. And I was like, "Cool," you know, "We'll meet at the park," you know? And we walk—I only had like four guys with me at the time. The rest of the guys were, kind of, out doing other business and stuff. And I remember walking into the park and I see this car coming in.

Break Easy: Ha ha! That was Julio! That was Julio! Julio was our wannabe manager back then. He was a mechanic, a mechanic with a freakin' what is it? I think it was a Dodge with the linoleum on top of the car, coming over the frickin bridge, yeah.

Mighty Mike: Yeah, came in there, parked the car, threw the linoleum on the floor, the radio came out of nowhere, and it was, it was time. And I was just like, "Yo who?" Like, "All right let's do this." Then, you know, the outlaws during that time they were like, "Yo, you guys got beef? What's going on, yo? Yo!" you know, "You want us to kick their ass?" And I was like, "Dude we're just dancers," you know?

So we just decided, you know, to try to keep the peace. Let's just dance and have fun and that's what it was. It was just a straight-up bringing it to your territory, to call you out and because back then that's how it was [crosstalk]

Break Easy: Yeah it was, it was. I mean that, I mean, I was surprised that my crew was down to say, “You know what?” you know, “Let’s kill this *basura*,” you know? “Let’s go over there, let’s—” because it was Angelo. I know Angelo started [it]. He was telling us, “Yeah, these guys talk shit about us, you know.” I know Angelo always wanted a battle. He was always looking to battle crews, you know? He was always the big mouth, you know, but we took care of him once we got home.

But when that happened—I know because I’m like, “Really?” So, then our manager Julio, he was a mechanic, you know, he used to get us some gigs where we would perform. So, all right. So it was Edwin, you know we call him Flip-o-Matic, then it was Vinny, then it was Butchy, Pete, myself, Angelo, um, who else was there? I think—Steve—Omar—Steven, Steven was there, he was, he was the best one in a group. And then the twins, Dennis and David, you know?

Mighty Mike: Yeah, I remember them, yeah.

Break Easy: We went—It’s funny because we got our, we got our team together. Julio has a linoleum, coming in a car, the car—is almost like a little parade, a mini parade of b-boys and stuff. Or like the [. . .] How would you say? Like the freakin’ Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. Seven little boys, “Hi-ho, hi-ho, it’s off to battle we go.” So we’re going down that bridge, going into the park on South Third and Keap. Wha—that was, what? PS 19? No 17?

Mighty Mike: Yep, yes [. . .][crosstalk] Yeah, PS 19.

Break Easy: We get into the school yard, we drop the lino, the boom-box is there. Mind you, no DJ—it’s just a tape, popping in the tape, you know, and then they come out, boom boom boom. And then the people in the area are right there, right behind them like, “Yo, what’s poppin’? What poppin’?” But it’s true cuz he said that—

Back then and stuff, there were you know, there was, there was outlaws out there, so there was outlaws like outside the park just looking [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] I guess they wanted something [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] I think they wanted the radio [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] I think they wanted the radio. [crosstalk] But what I know Julio wasn't having it because he already knew people.

Mighty Mike: Yeah that time it was crazy [crosstalk]

Break Easy: That was a serious battle, though.

Mighty Mike: [crosstalk] Yeah man—

Break Easy: Everybody had to come out.

Mighty Mike: Yeah because the problem is, I already had a manager already during that time, which it was Eddie and that was Adam Ant's brother. And he was our manager and he was the one that was kind of assigning all these trips to travel in the city to do performances at you know, restaurants, and small clubs and all that. He was already booking gigs and my biggest rivals that I had during that time was more LDS, which is Love Disco Style. [Break Easy: Yeah.] And they were a massive, big crew, like, they had, like, over 50 members, and it was insane and they were from Borinquen and you couldn't really travel up there on your own because, again, you're in different territories, you know, [Break Easy: That's right.] but I remember meeting Dr. Love during that time, and he was really fascinated with, with—

Break Easy: Yeah! Dr. Love! That's my boy right there!

Mighty Mike: And he was like, "Yo, you got to come out to 49," you know, "to the park, you know. There'll be peace. You ain't gonna have no problems, you know LDS is out there. They heard so much about you guys and you know, want to see if you guys can have a battle." And we were like, "Yo, OK."

And Mr. T comes out during that time, and he was like, “Yo, let’s take it into the candy store. Let’s have a battle like now,” and we [were] like [. . .] “Let’s do it.” We went in there, man, and we just went at it. It was insane, you know, like having those moments where it’s just spontaneous, when shit just happens, like the spot is crazy.

And sometimes, you know, you battle it out, but the crowd decision is, you know, they are the ones that make that decision, who wins or who, who losses, you know?

Break Easy: That’s true. That’s true.

Mighty Mike: But when you have these two dynamic crews in a circle and they’re battling it out and you’re getting hyped from both sides, man, it’s really hard to tell the difference, who won and who didn’t, but—

They were more like exhibition battles, I will call it, because there was no winners at the time. It was everybody was the winner at that time.

Break Easy: Exactly. You know, I mean, you could say that the community selected who was the winning team in the end, but you know what, at that moment in time, I think the community was aware of what we were doing. As opposed to now, that you have people that have no knowledge of what we do and how we do stuff. But because we were so in tune in our community, they already knew, “OK, it’s another dance,” you know, “You came from us,” you know, “from our, from our collective,” you know. And I [Mighty Mike: Yup.] say that as a community level and stuff. Right now with the social media—which is oxymoronic because well no one’s together no more! You know, send me a picture, eh eh eh—socialize! No, no, back then, we were up in your face—wham! Bam! Or, “I just smoke you!” You know, it was just like that.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. Shit was real, man. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: We were very in your face, you know [crosstalk]

Mighty Mike: Back then—Yeah. Back then, it was like, “I’m going to your neighborhood, I’m callin’, I’m goin’ to your house, I’m gonna knock on your door [crosstalk]

Break Easy: I’m gonna knock on your door!

Mighty Mike: I’m gonna bring you out, and we’re gonna battle right in the corner, and that’s how it was. And at the end, there’d either be a fight, or you get chased outta there, or I guess—you know, that’s how it was—that how—that’s how real it was. But now in these days, things are a little different, you know? I mean, things are a little more organized, but back then, we didn’t have that organization [crosstalk].

Break Easy: I would agree to disagree. Yeah, it might be organized, but then the people that are organizing have no freakin’ idea of who they’re dealing with. You know, a lotta these organizers are like, “Oh we’re gonna get some b-boys. I’m gonna get some b-girls, and we gonna have a good exhibition, but unfortunately the promoter has no knowledge of who they got—who they really have [for] broadcasting or doing the event, you know. “Look at me! Just cuz I have a Kangol hat, I’m a b-boy! Look at me! I can do a six-step, I’m a b-boy! Oh, look at me, I’m a b-girl cuz I have the hat with the bun, and stuff. No, it doesn’t work like that, you know. You have to really be knowledgeable if you’re gonna be a promoter, you have to be knowledgeable about such things, you know.

If you’re going to be a participant in hip hop, you better know what the physical elements and what the non-physical elements within hip hop. Are you a contributor, or you have—or an observer, you know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] This is why—For me, I take it very personal when someone has a, for example, no disrespect to those who have studied some, some of the hip hop texts that’s out there, but when you have someone that declares

himself a, a doctorate in the hip hop—I'm like, how can you be a doctor of hip hop if you're freakin' over 30 years old? Hip hop is designed for the youth. Hip hop was designed for me when I was 30. That's a doctorate. Not the fact that you are now looking into it. Nah! You're out of it! You're out of the loop. That's how come I'm sayin': hip hop is not meant for old guys like us anymore.

Hip hop is now dictated by the youth, because we were about, we were about that, not knowing we were about that, you understand what I'm saying? Because back in the days, if someone was like, "Oh, you down with hip hop?" And I'm like, "No I'm not! I'm breaking!" "You, you're down with hip hop," "No I'm not! I'm popping!" You know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] So back in the days, later on, I was in the '80s, then I was like, "OK, I guess I'm a part of hip hop because of this," you know? So I was, I became self-aware based on someone's understanding of how we're gonna merge the dancing, the DJ, the graffiti, and the rapping, emceeing because back then if I spoke—if I hung out with my graffiti writers and I say, "Yo, you down with hip hop?" They'd be like, "¿Qué carajo, hip hop?" "That's nothing!" You know. Hip hop didn't do anything for me. It pre-existed. B-boying pre-existed. We didn't have nothing to do with hip hop. Later on we brought it together, you know?

Mighty Mike: Yeah [crosstalk]

Break Easy: And I know, and I know that you agree, I hope you agree—if not, we'll battle—the fact that back then, there was no labels that—or codes that we had to stick to, other than that old mentality of Pres., Vice Pres., Secretary, and Treasurer, which stems from what we learned in school. You know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] Or what we learned in gangs, believe it or not. [crosstalk] Hip hop is just another form—the crews was basically another form of gang, which, if you go back further, it's the old gang mentality, you know?

Mighty Mike: Yeah you're right. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: You have to learn how to break away from that and be more aware and restructure and define ourselves and be accountable for ourselves, which it's not happening now, I'm sorry to say, you know. That I don't—like, if I were to ask you—Mighty Mike- a question about—Are there real b-boys today? Yes or no?

Mighty Mike: Real b-boys? Wow. I mean it's hard to say "real b-boys," but I mean—

Break Easy: If you can't yes or no, there isn't enough—there aren't real b-boys, you know? There are—you give me at least two b-boys that actually went over to somebody's house and say, "Yo. Come on, let's battle." Or give me at least one crew that actually did that. There's no crew that does that today.

Mighty Mike: No, no, not in these days

Break Easy: Not in these days, but you can see a thousand of them on the Internet. "Oh, I can do this. Oh, I can do this. I can do the—I'm better than you. Uh uh. Look at me, look at me. Look at my video. Look at it. I choreographed it. Look how edited—it's nice. Presentation sells." No, *puñeta*. Bring it. Bring it. [crosstalk] Back then, you couldn't hide.

Mighty Mike: No. Back then, I tell you I remember witnessing one battle when Ozzy at that time when he was alive—

Break Easy: Which Ozzy?

Mighty Mike: Ozzy—He was part of Dynamic, I believe it was.

Break Easy: Oh Oz-Rock? [crosstalk]

Mighty Mike: Yeah—[crosstalk]

Break Easy: Another one [crosstalk]

Mighty Mike: He shows up at the Roxy's by himself and started to battle Dynamic by himself, you know? And that was the first time I ever saw somebody have all these elements together because, back then, remember, when you was in a crew, you have seven people, right? Seven people: one of them was a head spinner, one was the hand glider [Break Easy: Right, right.]. One was a float, one was a windmills, like everybody had their own signature. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: Right, everybody had a signature move. That, that's why with our group we had that. We had Flip-o-Matic was the flipper. Vinny was supposed to be popping and floats, and stuff. Butchy was supposed to be ticking and waving. You know, Thomas was tutting. Angel was freaking what they call it? Tick, tick, tick, ticking [Mighty Mike: Popping? Ticking. Yeah.] Yeah and then, you had Kid Tick in your crew, Scramblin' Feet, Incorporated [crosstalk] which was funny [Mighty Mike: That's right.] because well, we had—at the day of the battle was—we had Kid Tick's teacher, which is Kid Lock with our crew. He was a big-headed, a *more-no*, Calvin, that he was going Bam, Bam, Bam, Bam, Bam, and Tick was like, "Oh, shit." That's his teacher, you know, like damn, there you go [crosstalk]

Mighty Mike: Yeah. That's how it was back then. It—you know, but for me to see somebody that had everything, all in one that was like the game changer right there because we were kind of respecting the rules of, like, "This is your, your move and that's it," you know? [Break Easy: Right. Right. We were doing that as a crew.]

But then [crosstalk] I started to see the changes that people were kind of involving a little bit about doing everything, instead of just one thing, you know and it was very intriguing to see that, you know, where people would just kind of merging into one. [Break Easy: Yeah.] And now you have one guy that was very powerful that can do every move in the book. [crosstalk]

[Break Easy: Yeah. Yeah.] And there were very few individuals that were very powerful at the time [Break Easy: Yeah.] that will show up at a spot by themselves and be like [Break Easy: by themselves.] [crosstalk] and can tear up a whole crew. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: This is why that—when we first started off the crew, we were just like you said earlier, everybody stuck to one particular groove-move in the collective. Like, in our squad, we had one guy which was the youngest one in our group, which was Steven, Little Omar. And Little Omar actually took the steps to do, what Valentin did, you know Float, what Kid Float was [doing]—but Little Steven, Omar from our group, he was supposed to be our megastar. Like he does the turtles, the floats, the halos, the swirls, the frickin' head spins, the 90s, footwork. So, not only did he learn how to do that and break the rules of just sticking to your own presentation-move and do only combinations that are based on that move, he wanted to do a combination of all of them, you know. That was supposed to be our power guy.

But he also learned not only from within our group. He learned to piss us off and battle our own group and network, because he used to practice with Joshua. I know that he used to practice with some, with some other guys too, in that area. So I think he used to practice with Mondy from—I mean, he was crossing boundaries, trying to learn and merge so he can be better and do exactly that—go to a club by himself and say, “I’m taking all you guys.” You know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] And that was, that was the move that was the move right? Then, if you can master all of that, you know?

Mighty Mike: Yeah. I mean if you look at old footage from back in those days, I mean, even the Rock Steady and the New York City Breakers battle inside The Roxy’s, you can see the whole crew—everybody had their own individual signature move [Break Easy: Yeah, true.] So that’s a perfect example of that.

Break Easy: Yeah.

Mighty Mike: And everybody has something for somebody there at the time [Break Easy: Yeah.] [. . .] That's what made the battle very interesting because, when you hear somebody doing floats, like I was, and I heard so many others that had it, I was nervous to get into contact with somebody that knew how to do this and how many combinations he had [crosstalk] and what I can do, yeah. So there was a lot of practicing at that time—how to have many variations of this sort of move, but just only one move. You gotta have like at least 15, sort of, combinations [Break Easy: Yeah.] [crosstalk]

Break Easy: This is why, when you used to do floats—cuz I remember this cuz when I see Vinny—Vinny used to do first, you know, the little cockroach, and then they—then he would do the little moving turtle. And then he'll do the turtle that walks and then stops over and pees on your leg, you know. And then they started doing spinning turtles, and then you have the 360 turtles that will go around in circles, and then you had the hopping turtles. Then you had guys that would do turtles walking, and then flip and then walk, walk, walk, flip. I mean you have so many variations of that one particular move.

Same thing with windmills. At first it was the basic shoulder-to-shoulder windmill. Then it was forehead windmills. Then it was hand windmills. And there was no-hand. And there was airplanes. There was ragdoll. There's [. . .]—Again, we had a different variety of moves, and, and that's a good point because back then, if you were stuck to that move you branched off and did any combination under that move as your headliner. [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] Same thing with me. I grew up loving handspinning, so I used to do handspins and footwork. Those were my two key moves. I need to do everything for that. I made the footwork. . .

Mighty Mike: For me, I mean I was b-boying or breakdancing all the way to about '87. That's when I kind of gave it up. I had no interest at the time. It was just more about family at the time. It was more about, you know, commitments, jobs and responsibilities. That's what left me to, kind of, stop dancing at that time. But I was a freestyler, to say. Because, I mean, I had that in me constantly, where I would hear music and I just want to dance, and there was—

During that time is when I remember going to Palladium—this was like '94 and—or '95, somewhere around that—and I remember going into Palladium and I ran into Speedy-D at that time, he was in that spot. [Break Easy: Oh wow.] And I was like, "Yo. Who is this funny guy," you know? I mean, they were cyphering and—

Break Easy: He's another *títère!* He's another *títère!* [crosstalk]

Mighty Mike: I was like, "Yo. I'm gonna—I wanna cypher. I want to get in there, too!" You know, I remember my, my six-step and my toprock, you know? I remember getting down and he was like, "Yo. That's dope man. I'm from the Bronx," and he started to introduce himself and everything and that's how I got acquainted with Speedy. I remember going a couple of times to the Palladium and then I got into a battle with, with Cyclone and Miss Twist. [Break Easy: Oh wow.] I was like, I was like, "Yo. Who is these guys?" And we went at it for [Break Easy: Step Fenz! Step Fenz!⁸] at least 30 minutes [Break Easy: Yeah, they were young.] And right there, he was like, "Yo, you got some old skool moves," he told me, and he wanted—he invited me to go to ah, Kwikstep's practice out in Union Square on 14th street, at the PMT it was called.

8. Step Fenz is a crew from Long Island who combined breakin' and house dance before other dancers thought it acceptable to do so. For some background: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1YVOneMFro>

I remember going there and I was like, “Wow!” I just got blown away because I didn’t know they were back doing this again, you know? And that’s how I got back involved in the dancing. Kwikstep was one of my first mentors that he was like, “Yo. You know you got some moves there. I can, I can tweak you. I can fix you,” you know? And that’s how I got back involved into b-boying again. And from there yeah, things just [crosstalk] took off—

Break Easy: Kwikstep said he was going to tweak you—He’s making you into the six million dollar man, “We can rebuild you, we can remake you.”

Mighty Mike: I was like, “Yo. I’m gonna do it,” and that’s how I got involved. I got involved there, and from that point on, I was still partnering up with Speedy-D at the time, and just, kind of, hitting the spots, you know? And that’s what kind of led me to be like, “Yo, man. I think I can do this again and get more involved into this. And I got really involved into, you know, into the b-boy scene really heavy at that time.

And at that time—during that time that’s when I came across, it was with you, King Uprock, at the time and we would just kind of socializing a little bit about the past and talking about all this stuff and—I remember seeing King Uprock for the first time, and I was like, “Yo! What is he doing? That’s some old skool stuff there.” And I remember these two dances never came across each other, but I remember very well from the ‘hood, you know?

As far as that, you know, that’s where it kind of hit me right there on that spot, where you know, this is what I wanted to do from this point on. And at that time I was kind of mentoring a couple of people involved already, just kind of teaching just the basics of these moves because—From what I learned in the past, it was like, I went through my bumps, and my hurts, and my scratches, and my cuts. And I was like, “Man, I can take you and teach you these moves and you’ll learn this in about six months

instead of twelve months, because we already have some short-cuts to how to do certain moves, man," and that's how I got involved into the community of this.

But it was so dynamic. It was just a lot of people involvement. And I didn't know that this was happening underground and once I just got involved into this, it was just like taking off, you know?

I was recruited to be into Full Circle, so I did send you a photo of that. That's when I joined Full Circle, like, I'm not sure like, '95-'96. I remember going to Bushwick [Brooklyn] with them at one point, and they had a rock battle out there in Bushwick. I know that you guys got photos of this. I don't—I still haven't seen them yet, and—

Break Easy: I know that you were already a part of Full Circle in '95, or '94. I know this because there was a footage that I came in that was—that already had you at a Party Hardy which is somewhere in Bushwick that you were there with Full Circle and London.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. I was like, "Yo! This was crazy, man!" And that's true, man, London was another part of my timing as well, but that was further down when—in the years that I wind up joining New York City Breakers, the new division of that, yeah. I started to mentor some of the kids during that time and again, it was only a handful. It was not classes like how we think, because during that time, you're still polishing yourself up, but having people within the community come together because—Remember, back then, there were, practices were in gyms and maybe one individual come up to you and say, "Hey, teach me this, teach me that." That's how you kind of coach them and work with them. It wasn't like a full class where you're the teacher in front center and you're giving out your information, but back then that's what it was. It was more enclosed, smaller practices that you kind of be able to teach kids.

And that's how it all started for me, teaching, but never gave up hope because when it's in the blood, it's in the blood. I grew up in this and that's something that I never forgot, and you never lose and that's how I continue my path as far as a b-boy.

But then the injuries catch up to you, you know? That's when you have to make some decisions of what you want to continue doing. But that was my introduction, at the time it was like '94–'95 when I really got involved again and that's when I started to mentor at the same time. Go ahead, Break.

Break Easy: All right, all right. That's, that, that was a smooth intro, "Yeah, go ahead, Break!" OK.

[. . .] In 1984, I had decided—I was in already in high school, ready to graduate—so I had decided to serve the United States of America. I decided to serve by doing some time with Uncle Sam, enlisting in the United States Marine Corps. September of 1985 I joined the Marine Corps, you know. I signed my way—I gave my life away to the Corps. I don't regret it. I love it. It makes me who I am today. You can see my military haircut, high and tight, as always. So what—

The reason why I had to go away is because at that time frame, Mighty Mike, you know that was the crack vial days and all that, drugs and stuff. We were, we were killing each other off and stuff, you know. The ghetto was the ghetto. So I decided to redirect my energy and focus in that, you know?

We were getting older, you know, this is a phase we were getting through. So I did my time with Uncle Sam, you know. I did a six-by-two: six-year reserve and then two-year inactive reserve. Then I finished my time in '91. After I came out, I was activated again because of Desert Shield/Desert Storm. So I has to do another six months [. . .] until Desert Shield/Desert Storm finished. Then I was a civilian again, so I thought, you know—It was, it's hard to take away years of drill discipline from the corps, overnight.

Now, how I got back into the b-boy scene stems because I was in a Latin club doing my salsa-thing, you know? I'm a dancer just like you are, and stuff and—We just love dancing, period. It's a good way to meet our fair maidens, you know? It was in this Latin club—now they call that Latin spot Trash. Now it's like a bar/dive for Gothic dancers. So, I'm in this dance club, I'm in a two-piece suit with a tie. I'm with my date and in this Spanish club. They're playing salsa, merengue, you know—cuz we had the merengue going, and the salsa at that time frame—and in the corner of this freakin' club, there is a kid doing windmills and I'm like, "Is this guy for real?"

So I go up to the kid, you know, and this happens to be Randy, Randy Ninatanta—you know him [Mighty Mike: Yeah yeah.] because he hung out with my boy Pete, from Breaking in Style, [Mighty Mike: Yup.] you know? So I'm looking at this kid, I'm sayin', "Yo. What?" In Spanish I'm telling him, "What the hell are you doing here?" In Spanish "¿Qué carajo tú 'ta haciendo esto en este locál?" in this location? He's like, "Oh, you don't know about this [. . .] I'm practicing windmills."

I'm like, "But dude. The music! The music, papa! You're not dancing now, you're doing the move." He's like, "I know, but the floor is so smooth, I figure I can work on my spins here and [. . .]" And I'm like, "All right. All right. Now what the hell are you doing? [He's like] "Backspins, windmills." And I'm like, "That's not the way to do it."

So what I do is, I'm taking off my tie, I'm takin' off my blazer and then I'm just with the t-shirt—I didn't wanna dance—I didn't wanna mess up my shirt. My date is actually looking me like, "Yo sé que tú no te va dar vuelta hací! You're not gonna get on the floor like that!" So I'm like, "Give me a second, I just want to show this kid one thing." So then I'm out there and then I'm starting to do windmills, brap brap brap brap brap. I got up, and he's like, "Oh shit! . . . I like that." I'm like, "OK. Cool." So, then I got dressed and stuff and the girl's lookin' at me like, "Are you done?"

Are you done? Done? So I'm like, "One second, one second." I told him, "Where are you—who's teaching that?" That's when I find out that Pete, Pete Rodriguez—Luli—is teaching him at McCarren Park and I guess he must have been there, like '93-'94.

So I'm like, "OK. When do you guys meet? I just want to go over there and check you guys out." So it's because of that kid in '95 that I meet up with Pete and then in McCarren Park and then that's when Randy then sees me and he's like, "Oh, wow. You're Richard from my block." 'Cause the kid lived on my block, at the corner on Driggs. So because of that young kid, I started going and having fun with just dancing with Pete and Randy and buggin' out. And I'm like, you know, I came out of the service—

My first year you saw me with a freakin' orange shirt or a green shirt with military fatigues, with my Reeboks for breaking with these guys. Now, mind you, I was already out of the game for about eight to ten years, you know, from '85 to '95 so I'm like, "All right. I'll—let me focus on myself," just like you did. I had to rebuild myself, I had to be my own self-made six million dollar fool, you know? So I focus on me, retriggering all the mechanics, analyzing my movements, you know?

Then ever since then, '95, I started to redefine myself and start teaching people. Randy and Pete, they may have started their own individual practices, but from '95 on, I religiously started working and wound up developing myself, you know? And then, too, because of the self-development, creating my own b-boy vocabulary to open doors to teach. And then that's in '96, we helped to develop a collective of kids called BREAKS Kru. Then '98, you know, we started another collective, you know, Breaking in Style, the new generation, a remake of my old crew, you know, with the permission of the of the leaders. Then, [in] 2000, Brooklyn Kaos Connection, you know? Then from there, McCarren Park became like a Break Easy Park, BREAKS Kru Park, Breaking in Style Park, BKC Park. Now it's like Papa Rich Park, McCarren Park. It was never—it was never

designed to be just one thing. It started off as being personal to me and my community.

Then globally, it took flame, and everybody was looking at where are all these b-boys coming out? Because first, we had BREAKS Kru. We had a squad of about maybe nine or ten. They started making noise in '99. They started advertising, boom. We were going to the BreakBeats at Hunts Point [Bronx]. Crazy Legs is behind the mic, "And Brooklyn's here again." I mean they have footage of when BREAKS Kru crew versus Rock Steady Kids and stuff. You see Crazy Legs get down, you see me get down, and stuff. You see everyone tryin' to hold me back and I'm like, "I'm goin' in! I'm goin' in!" You know?

[. . .] I remember seeing a video of you in '94, that you have gone to a rock competition that Charlie Uprock was holding, you know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah, yeah.] With DJ Kool. I think I have the video somewhere. It has you, London, Kwikstep, Rokafella, Pete, Randy, but this is a year before I came along, maybe a few months before I came along. I found it strange and I'm like, "Yo. They doing this rocking thing?" To me that was pretty cool because not too many people knew about the real rocking, you know? Everybody was doin' that b-boy shuffle, shuffle down, you know?

Even back then, I would try to battle people in b-boying but because my toprock was still young, I was always rocking, you know? When I used to go to battle, people would say, "Yo. You can't do that cuz that's not what we do here," which I understand, yeah, but rocking is rocking, and breaking is breaking.

But now, today, people want to mash it all together. [They say] "It's the same thing." No, it's not. Back then it never was the same, so how are you gonna make it the same now? So that's how I got back into the scene from '95 to date, actually. I'm still doing, teaching breaking, now open the doors for rocking, you know?

I'm grateful for having the opportunity to share my experiences and that's beautiful that we can do that in this day

[and] age, because—[. . .] a lot of articles have been written from a third person’s perspective, as opposed from the US, the WE, are the hip hop collective of that time frame that developed that. We are the hip hop movers and shakers of that time frame, and we should be able to share and express our thoughts and ideas, if someone is willing to listen to it and take notes of that. Because even to this day, when I read a lot of these textbook material of people’s analysis of hip hop on the economic poverty that these kids were under, or the ability to recreate a new gang, under crews or, oh—it was a safe haven for us, for a lot of us. Yes and no. But it’s being written from a third perspective, as opposed to we—the, the actual participants of the movement. And [Mighty Mike: It’s true, man.] it’s good to be heard. Yeah.

Mighty Mike: It’s true—we mean what—[crosstalk]

Break Easy: Right now we can joke about the battle aspects of it, but there was a lot of some serious shit that went on, serious shit. [crosstalk] I mean hip hop culture, like they say, it’s supposed to be about peace, love, and having fun, yeah, that’s true, but just like in every culture, you have the good, the bad, the ugly, and the [gestures locking up lips to not speak]. If I see you, you die.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. Yeah, man. For me, when I was involved back in the days it was more like when you talked about MixTrix On Feet, I created that crew right there, you know? [crosstalk] I put that crew together and that was my first taste of putting a crew together. And back then, yeah, that was the mentality of that gang stuff [crosstalk]. You had to have your Pres [crosstalk], you had your Vice-Pres—

Break Easy: You had your Pres, [crosstalk] your colors.

Mighty Mike: Come with like, colors [crosstalk]. Everything had to be organized a certain way in how you want the things to look. And back then, wearing colors were a little tough because—[crosstalk]

Break Easy: Yeah, it was tough, woo! Yeah. [crosstalk] The only thing that saved us was the fact that we had a different design. We had stars—we had the Playboy bunnies, the stars, and the lighting bolts. That's what broke us off, but you couldn't wear colors, oh God, no. Couldn't wear colors [crosstalk]. And when we talk about colors- it's patches, not just cuz you want yellow or green or blue or red, you know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] I'm gonna fight you because of a red color or blue color? C'mon. Think.

Mighty Mike: Yeah, man. So that was my first taste as well, you know, creating a crew and getting them together, but it gave me a good aspect of how to, to become a teacher, because you have so much knowledge of all this dance in your head and you want to express this out and share it.

For me, that's what it was, I didn't want to keep all this to myself, man. I want to go out there and express it, and share it, and teach it. That's how all that became about, you know? It's not easy when you're the dopest guy in the block but you don't go and battle. You had to go out and test yourself in order to find out how you was, you know? So I'd taken some losses in the past when—

I remember going to Coney Island and I ran into the Fresh Kids out there and I got surrounded by [crosstalk] yeah, yeah I got surrounded by these guys, man. And we were wearing colors and they were like, "Look, you guys are not going to leave the neighborhood with your colors donned and you're going to have to battle us right now," and they had the radio, the linoleum, and we had to go for it.

I told my guys like, "Yo, we gotta take the loss. We'll flip our colors upside down, you know, shirts inside out. And we're going to leave out of here peacefully, because we are surrounded by

outlaws here." And we got caught on the express you know, with the [. . .] is the express, Polar Express?

Break Easy: The Himalaya Express?

Mighty Mike: Yeah. We got caught right there, man, and we had to go for it. And that's what I mean about finding yourself in places that you shouldn't be.

Break Easy: Dorothy, you weren't in Kansas anymore! Same thing happened to me one time when my crew, we stepped up to go to Erasmus Hall.⁹ You had the crew out there led by Powerful, you know, Black Powerful? He was a gymnast and b-boy? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] And he had a set of twins. So we had gone out there. We went out there. We thought we were cocky. We crashed their spot. We say, "Yo, what's up. We're B.I.S. We're from the Southside. Yeah, we come to battle. Again, we did the same thing we did to you, when we rolled up to you. We battled, but then we left peacefully, you know? But with them, it wound up differently.

We went over there. We got into battle. I say, in the routine battle, we were good, but in the individual battles, I think they took it, you know, honestly, but we had [to] check ourselves. We're like, "N***az. If we freakin' win this battle, we're gonna get a beat down outta here." We started to think about that and we were like, "Oh, dip. Alright so let's leave it where we keep face, a little bit," but we had to give it to them, because if not—

So what happens after the battle—I think we battle for about 30 minutes or—battles were like a little bit longer back then, you know? [. . .] They popped [a] lot of garbage, caca, and then we walk out. It wasn't until we got to the station out there—and it's an open platform station which [. . .], we're taking the train home—all of sudden we hear glass coming down. Pshhhhhh. Then all of the

9. A high school in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn: 911 Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11226

sudden we hear a trash bag coming over. Pshh, pshhh, pshhh, psh. Comin' out- it's that the guys wanted to freakin' beat us down when we were in the station. So we were like, "Oh, dip!"

So what we do is, we get off the train platform, run to the next platform, right? When we get to the next platform, there's the police. They're tryna pick everybody up, thinking that we had jumped and we were making all this ruckus. And we were just trying to get our way home, but we had to go from one stop to the next, because we were going to get our ass beaten. One of our guys got his arm cut cuz he fell on the gravel track. He got caught. Another guy got caught.

It was me and my boy Alex that, when we got out of the platform, we ran through the turnstiles. We get out of the station, because the cops are tryna grab us. All of a sudden, me and him are running down this one dead-end street and we're like, "Damn, it's a dead-end street," because you know the trains, the way they block off—when it's in the outside train, it blocks off certain blocks? So we were like, "Oh, dip. What we gonna do?"

So I'm telling Alex, "Get underneath, hold onto the muffler and jack yourself up." So I'm hugging to—I'm huggin the bottom of a muffler while you see the cops walking around with flashlights underneath, cuz you know how they used to put the light? [Mighty Mike: Yeah, yeah.] So I mean, we—there was some—You had [to] hit and run or hit it and quit it, you know. There was no way you were gonna get away from that. But we had fun because, I mean—Now it seems that we could talk about it, but back then, you know, you pee-peed in your pants a few times.

Mighty Mike: [laughs] It was insane. So Break, let's, let's kick it off with me and you conversating about the rocking at the time and that's how all that started to develop from there. Because me and Break Easy already had started some projects already before that and that's how I got back to hanging out with Break Easy.

We were—There was a guy named Tiny, at the time—what was the other guy’s name, Break?

Break Easy: Hypno, Hypno. Tiny and Hypno. Yeah. [crosstalk] You’ve met them because of Union Square. [Mighty Mike: Right.] But I wanna go a little bit further. You and I hooked up when we started going to Pseudo Radio.¹⁰

Mighty Mike: Right, right. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: Remember the Internet shop? [Mighty Mike: Yes.] That’s where I got to meet a lot of kids from Step Fenz and some of the kids from BREAKS Kru—Chino used to go there, Cyclone, you and me hooked up there a few times. [Mighty Mike: Yeah. Right.] Because that was an Internet hip hop show.

Soon after that—but we were still doing b-boying, but it is because of Tiny, that we did hook up, cuz at that time frame, Hypno and Tiny, Dr. Funk, and there’s one more person¹¹ used to do Union Square gatherings, right? I used to go over there and I used to take BKC [Brooklyn Kaos Crew]. This was a little bit after 2000, you know? BKC- I started taking them so they can get aware of how to break and present themselves as b-boys to the community. That’s why you and I hooked up, because of Tiny Love.

Mighty Mike: Right. So we started to do those projects for—[. . .] “introducing these power move videos,” I remember. It was called, “Step-by-Step”. The other one was “Power Moves”. So that was the project you involved me in and you had told me about after you called me. That was kind of like where everything began, right at that time.

10. Pseudo Programs, Inc. was an early internet content creator community that was founded by Josh Harris in 1993. The Pseudo offices resided at 600 Broadway and hosted internet radio channels like 88hiphop.com, among others. The space was open as a site for socializing, with dancers from the underground scene commonly referring to it as “Pseudo’s”: <https://nymag.com/nymetro/news/media/internet/1703/>

11. Tony Flow

That was kind of at the beginnings when we were like, “Ey, what’s up?” We look back, we were talking and getting involved into this project that we did these instrumental videos of teaching and all that. Which—it was great because those videos made a lot of headlines during that time. [Break Easy: Yeah.] [. . .] A lot of people don’t really know that.

Break Easy: This is why I wanna go back to that. For those that don’t know what we’re talking about, there’s a “How to Breakdance” DVD that was a project that Tane Langton—he’s the editor/producer of that. He was from—what is it? [Mighty Mike: Was he from London? Or Germany?] Australia! Australia, Australia. It was Matthews—Matthews, he was from—from, I think somewhere in the United States. So they were looking to do a “how to b-boy” video. They came to me because of all the students that I had already taught. I have many kids, you know? I actually hired the kids, and they all got paid to do their thing in the video.

At that time frame, I said, “The only person that actually equal me at the timeframe of teaching and directing—” because you’ve had already established Just Begun Crew, you were planning on doing an event, “Chico’s Gotta Have His Share”, and that’s why I’m like, “Hey what—lemme see if I can speak to Mighty Mike, and see if he would like to work on this project, you know, with me.”

[Mighty Mike: Yeah.]

And you were like, “Yeah. Break, is there money?” And I’m like, “Yeah, there’s money there,” you know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] So it was like, “Yeah, why not get paid for teaching?” That’s when you and I worked, because of that b-boying project, you know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] And then the song “Black Betty.”¹² [singing] “Woah, Black Betty, ram-a-lam.” We were going crazy. [laughs]

12. Traditional, Huddie Ledbetter, as recorded by the band Ram Jam. *Black Betty*. Epic Records, 1977. https://youtu.be/4cn_woPvjQI

Mighty Mike: Yeah. We kinda started on those projects, and it was great cuz it lasted for a couple years doing that. We did three videos, I believe we did. We also were able—I was able to do my event that was able to be part of the video as well, and that was kind of like what I was kinda doing. I was promoting and doing events at that time.

I remember crossing again with King Uprock during that time, after the thing that happened in Bushwick and the issues that they had [Break Easy: Yeah.] [crosstalk] during that time with Kwikstep and all that. I remember, there was some issues there. And I already had broke out and branched out, started to do my own thing.

We got back involved in the projects and we started to do all this, and I remember seeing King Uprock back in the scene. He's doing his thing, and it always takes me back to the Southside of Williamsburg, Brooklyn and I was like, "Man, it will be so dope if we can—if I could get more deep into this rocking thing," because I didn't really understand the concepts and things of the dance, but I knew how to break down the mechanics, you know?

And I was saying to myself, "I really want to learn this dance." I remember meeting—we sat in your kitchen and we talked about this, and I was saying, "Yo!" [Break Easy: Yes.] "Let's try to—"

Break Easy: Cuz you had called me up because you want to talk about this rock-thing cuz you wanted to know more about it. And I was like, "But, dude. You, you, you grew up [. . .]" [video momentarily freezes] . . . inner workings of—I was already with Dynasty—well, I was a part of Dynasty at that time, you know? But I was independent. I wasn't a Dynasty member until much later.

But I was already working with Ralph¹³ on that project, because me and Ralph were—practically anybody that would rock, we were shutting them down. We were putting them on check,

13. King Uprock, aka Ralph Casanova.

"What you're doing is not rocking. I'm gonna show you the proper way of execution, a proper way of dancing." But putting that aside, when you and I spoke, your concern was because you had discovered a collective of other individuals that had saw interviews that Tiny Love was posting. [Mighty Mike: Right.] They were concerned that some of this information that was out there was incomplete or not done. [Mighty Mike: Yeah. Right.] But you were worried that, if you were to do that, that you—would you be overstepping King Uprock's toes? And I'm like, "No offense to me." One, we want you to go and pull other rockers because it adds more to the sauce, you know?

Mighty Mike: Yeah. During that time, you guys were already ten years involvement in rocking, or something like that.

Break Easy: Yeah, we were established already. [crosstalk] We were very well established.

Mighty Mike: It was established already. I just kind of walked into this and I was like, "Man, it would be nice to learn this. It would be nice to get involved into this." I remember telling you like, "Yo, what do you think if I could get some individuals to talk to, and all that. Can I do some interviews?"

And you say, "Yeah, do some interviews." And I started that off with some rockers, but during that time, when I was talking to Choco, Choco was like, "Yo. I'm going to bring you to some rockers and you're going to talk to them and ask them these questions and all that. What are you looking for?"

For me, everything just started off as interviews, that was it. I had no intentions to get into the dancing yet, because I just wanted to get some information and that kind of led me to that position to say, "Hey, you want to learn this? Who do you want to learn this from?" and all that. I remember when, when they were filming the *Sures*—during that [Break Easy: The project *Los Sures*,

yeah.] time in *Los Sures*¹⁴—they filmed it on Hooper and right by, I believe it was in South Fifth it was. I remember that I wanted to bring some rockers in there. And I remember Choco was like, “Yo, I’ve got these two guys from over here, from Bushwick, from the Williamsburg area, and they said, “Hey we’re going to bring these two guys named Ringo and Spin. They’re going to do a routine and you check them out,” and all that. And when I saw Ringo, the style and what they were doing, man, that fascinated me and I was like, “Yo! I gotta, I gotta bring this guy to have an interview with,” and that’s how I brought Ringo in and I just had just a few questions for him and all that.

For me, I was thinking, “Man, this doesn’t look too hard to do. I think I could probably do this.” The more I kept bringing more people involved into the interviews kinda led me into it. I remember telling you, *Break Easy*, “Yo, what do you think if I form a crew and put it under the umbrella of that Dynasty?” Remember I told you that, and—

Break Easy: You wanted that, and I’m like, I have no say on that. You can try to do that, but it’s a different realm, I told you. It doesn’t work like the b-boy side of the scale. It’s a little bit more dirty, I’m going to tell you that [. . .] You know.

Mighty Mike: And that’s when I said, “You know what?” You told me, “Mike, just do as an individual,” you know, “Just, let’s keep them separated—their own identity,” and all that. That’s how it started for me in the rocking scene.

I was always glad that this dance has taken its trips, because this dance never made it out of the boroughs, you know? From what I was hearing that King Uprock was traveling and teaching, it was great to hear that because this dance never made it across

14. Diego Echevarria, dir., *Los Sures* (1984; New York, NY: Metrograph, 1985), Film. <http://lossur.es/> For an article regarding a 4K restoration of the film, released in 2016: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/los-sures-film-review-884328/>

the border like that, you know? [Break Easy: Yeah, it didn't. It didn't.] And that's what really got me involved.

For me, I had different ideas with the dance. I wanted to do—I wanted to take this dance and escalate it to where it should be, because it was so old, you know, the dance? It's been from the early '70s and late '70s and I wanted to take it to the year that we're [in] now. In order to do that, it has to escalate how b-boy had escalated in the many years, you know? So that was my vision of what I wanted.

Little by little, talking with all the O.G.s and everything, I remember what these Mastermind guys [said]. They were like, "Listen. If you have any interest just use the name." I remember, I had to talk to a couple of people [from] the crew. I remember Fano and Rubberband, and Dash. They were like, "Listen, we'll bless you with the name. No one's using it. It's been a long time and we're not involved into this, so go ahead. Start it off." [. . .]

That was the first thing I did was use these O.G.s at the time because, remember, there was nobody really rocking in my corner, you know? It was just me and Ringo. I brought in Dash, Rubberband, Fano and that was it. It was a five-man crew at the time. We did a video with Bam Bam up in the BX. It was called "The Mexican"—you can look that up also on YouTube¹⁵—that Bam Bam the Liquid Robot did at the time. They were in the video with us at the time. That was my starting point of that, and, for me, I needed to learn how to rock. I needed to know the reasons why I'm doing this.

Break Easy: Yeah, basically. You better know the reason. If not, I'm gonna spank you down. I'm gonna spank you down.

Mighty Mike: [. . .] I needed to know the formula. I needed to know the foundation: What could be changed, what couldn't be changed. Why do these two individuals stand in front of each other? Can

15. You can see Mighty Mike dancing and the Mastermind Rockers at https://youtu.be/nVilSxtX_X8

they move around? I have so many questions, man, like everybody. [Break Easy: Yeah.] I had to do my homework.

It took me a couple of years to really understand this, because as a b-boy you're never going to lose that energy that motivates you when you hear "Just Begun,"¹⁶ because remember, back then, those songs were for the b-boy part. But now, crossing over into rocking, it was different because you had to change the tempo of your mindset in the speed of everything we're doing. [Break Easy: The mindset, yeah.] That was really what I needed to work on, man. And it took me a long time, but after that man, it was just downhill, from that point, you know? But again, how do we know who became members—[crosstalk] [Break Easy: Downhill? Downhill? You mean uphill!] Well, you know, I'm saying, [crosstalk]

Break Easy: I know, I know. That a lot of [. . .] that we face now, yeah.

Mighty Mike: And then how—if you really wanted to have members—how you wanted to bring them in. We had to teach people. It was a lot of work. But 15 years in—it took me a long time to really start off this whole thing. But that's how with Mastermind [Rockers]—that's how the name—it got established because I was given it, you know? They gave it to me through conversations and talks and meetings. It was one of the best things that ever happened. But it was always nice to have Dynasty there because you also need a crew that's always gonna challenge you—

Break Easy: We were, we were your big poppas until—we were actually—we were your mommy for a while, until we tell you, "[. . .] we have to cut you off, because you need to develop on your own. [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] Then after that, we was a big father, because we took you with us to different events. But then after

16. Gerry Thomas, Jimmy Castor, John Pruitt, as recorded by the band The Jimmy Castor Bunch. *It's Just Begun*. RCA, 1972. https://youtu.be/KY_BBaluTC8

that, like any child, you rebel, and then you want to try to kick this ass and then we've got to go [smacks hands], "bofeta," to spank you, but it's welcome to have that today because—and this is something that I wanted to happen—

I just don't want everybody that comes into rock, all of the sudden, ride the bandwagon and be part of just one rock collective. I need the opponent, and I need the other factor. I need the other pieces to come in. You can't play chess with only the king, you know what I'm saying?

Mighty Mike: Exactly. Yeah.

Break Easy: Yeah. You need that.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. You need that rival [Break Easy: Right.] that challenge[s] every other time, when you guys see each other, you know? Because that's the only way to develop. It was really weird, because we started off something really great because this became worldwide now. Being asked to fly out somewhere to teach rocking was like one of those mind-blowing things because you don't expect that. We hear it a lot from b-boys when they say, "Hey, you know, we got to bring this guy over here to teach," and we're all happy about it because that's dope but rocking is a whole 'nother thing, you know? [Break Easy: Yeah.]

But now, seeing the rocking now, at the level that it is—it took a lot of work from a few individuals like you, King Uprock, Mr. Loose, Charlie Uprock, Ringo, me—it was a handful of people that were able to teach this—

Break Easy: That's a handful! You just named a handful!

Mighty Mike: And that was it. There was no—I could name ten other people that are in the scene now that were never around, and people were trying to take credit for something that we have worked really hard to get at—to this level, you know? [Break Easy:

Correct.] It's sad because, the more people that are getting involved is becoming watered down because they're—They kind of want to do it now, but they're not really learning the format of the stance and they don't really know the history, the culture.

There's a lot of things that we can go into of—because this is a street, ghetto dance that was violent, that was about outlaws during that time, and, and no one seems to talk about that part, and then they—[crosstalk]

Break Easy: This is where I wanna break this down to what—and I know you and I can go into a big discussion about this alone, and I think I have—I think I'll probably be a senior in this—is the fact that the rock dance in itself in its original form and its true form, was a dirty, obnoxious, male egotistical, a physical dance, and I've always stated this many times. In its original form, the rock dance, or what they call the outlaw dance, and stuff was very down and dirty.

It got tweaked over the '70s and '80s, to develop what was later on, to be known as the Uprock. And now [in] today and age, you have a few new dancers that also rock, but they didn't do the outlaw version of it, you know? Cuz the rocking itself morphed into what's presentable today, involving the aspects of the drops, the jerks, the freestyle, which is very key, and the burns.

Unfortunate to [this] day and age, a lotta these kids only practice the one aspect of it, which is the burning-jerk, or the burning-jerk, or the burning-jerk, so you get my point. Now, [. . .] when I see rock—and you could probably argue or agree with me on this—that back in the days when we rocked, there wasn't no gun, that was no knife. It was—I would just give you the finger, I will give you the bird. The girls would do it, the guys do it and it'll be like, "Boom, boom, boom, ah! It wasn't to the extreme, that is now because for us back then, when I was a youth, we didn't take it to that battle aspect of it. It was about showcasing your style and technique. Cuz the Southside, we had, [Mighty Mike: Yeah]

yes, we had some burners but that wasn't our thing, you know? Love Disco Style they were, they were outlaws-slash-rockers but they had style. A lot of rockers like Mousey from Together We Chill, actually Together We Break, as a b-boy, he had style. He would burn you, too, but he had his drops and his flavor. He came out in the documentary *Los Sures*.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. It's crazy [crosstalk]

Break Easy: It's beautiful to see that. My vision when I started doing this rocking teaching—Ralph didn't want me to teach. He's like, "Nah. We gotta take this and just do it for us." I'm like, "Dude. If you're the only one doing it, you're not—we're not gonna have no opposition. We'd have no collective."

That's why I was teaching rocking. You seen me teaching rocking in McCarren Park. You seen me teaching in my house. I used to have a squad of maybe fifty people in my basement, booming system in the backyard, half the guys breaking, another half rocking but not only that—what I mean, you know this and I think MiRi knows it but I guess the audience doesn't know that—that when I was teaching breaking, I was not only teaching you the physical movement of the dance, that one particular dance, but I'm teaching you the origins of why all these steps and moves come from.

When we do salsa—I used to take my students out to the Parkside Lounge¹⁷ and have them freakin' dance salsa and they're like, "What? We're b-boys! Why are you taking me to dance salsa? Oh, I'm a rocker. Why you teaching me [to] dance salsa?" Because I want you to learn how it is for you to feel that groove. It's not so much about the breakbeats like the b-boys want to get

17. Venue located on E. Houston and Attorney Streets in the East Village, Manhattan. The front part of the lounge is a dive bar, and the back room hosts live music events.

into. It's not about just the melody that the rockers want to get into, you know?

But then my kids started learning how to do—I mean, all my dancers, and I'm saying it specifically: dancers- They may have [come] to learn breaking, but they walk out as dancers, cuz they learn how to salsa, merengue, bachata. They learn how to loft. They learn how to disco, to do the hustle. They started expanding their minds because the music. They heard my "Papa Rich stories. Oh my God." You know? Heck, I loved it when I had taken one of the girls—I think it was—oh, Bounce, little Ephrat Asherie. I was there, I dunno if MiRi was there and I think Pauline might've been there, and Ephrat saw this little viejita, an old lady dancing. She's freaking, she's—this is in [Parkside] Lounge—older than me, right? She's like, "Papa Rich, I wanna see you dance with her." I'm like, "All right, let me go dance with her." That lady, she was older than me—I think I must have been like maybe 36, 37—she waxed the floor with me just the same doing the simple moves!

Again, rocking was the same way about learning the origins of the move. And your concern was not only so much about the moves but when you wanted to—you had asked me about changing the game when it came to wearing patches, I'm like, "That's—[Mighty Mike: Yeah.]. . . pretty crossover step. That's a very bold move you're going to try to change certain ethics," cuz a lotta gangs will not allow you to come in trying to change the rules, [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] and then we had a good discussion that you gotta respect—there's a code when you do that.

Mighty Mike: Yeah, yeah. I remember having a conversation with you about patches and all that. And I remember talking to Choco about this and I was like, "Yo—" Because Choco, if people don't know who he is, he is also a graphic designer. [Break Easy: Yes.] He's into airbrushing and he's into calligraphy. He's into drawing, and I can go—he was also a writer.

Break Easy: He was a writer, yeah.

Mighty Mike: Yeah, so I talked to him because his family's been outlaw for a long time, and I wanted to know a little bit. So he kind of schooled me a little bit about the whole patch-thing. The three patches, what they meant, and all that and I was like, "I want to have a patch like the way Dynasty have." This was influenced by Dynasty, and I was like, "Man, I want to have something to represent that," because I think it would be nice to have crews that could represent rocking in a format that is not outlaw but is close to it that it kind of gives us the dance, to represent more of the dance.

By doing so, Choco was like, "Listen, I can make you a patch." And he was the one that designed it, The Mastermind patch. It has to be one single patch, can't be three patches. So he kind of broke everything down for me and that's how I got schooled of how patches are, [. . .] and how to wear them and all that, so I don't get into issues with gangsters and outlaws [Break Easy: That's right.] and MCs. [crosstalk]

Break Easy: You don't wanna get into issues where you're gonna meet real [. . .] outlaws and you have to identify yourself, like, "Who sanctioned you? Who gave you the blessings? Where're you from?" Cuz that's a whole different territory, this is why even in Dynasty, I instruct all my members with the courtesies and etiquettes that you have to have. If you're going to wear your patch, you're going to put yourself out there to be a mark, you know, by both the legal authorities and both by other gang—other patch wearers, not just gangs. You [. . .] have outlaw gangs, may have MC rider gangs, you [. . .] might have social clubs, and other groups that fly patches, but we all still adhere to certain rules, etiquette that we do and that's very key. [Mighty Mike: Yeah.][crosstalk]

And that's something I'm trying to instruct now for anybody that has the idea, or inkling to start wearing patches. It's not

the same thing as when you're wearing crew colors and reping a crew. It's a totally different discipline. [Mighty Mike: Yeah. I think—] You have to grow some [. . .] to do that. You have to grow some. Be mature.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. I believe that's what gave me that edge. It was that we were able to communicate, talk, lay out some foundation. That's what gave me my start and [it] was that. It was great. It was great to get involved into this dance that has grown worldwide and has taken a good trip to where it is now. [Break Easy holds up his Dynasty Rockers vest with patches.] I mean that is—that's awesome, man. Yeah.

Break Easy: You coulda earned one. You coulda earned one.

Mighty Mike: I was there, Break. I was there with you. I know, but it was great. I think that we took the right path. I think that's what made us who we are. And I think that we did an amazing job spreading the love of this dance. I think we have different opinions on certain things, [Break Easy: Yes. Of course.] but it all narrows back down to the same roots. It is rocking and that's what it was.

I think that we did an amazing job just taking it where it is now, and I feel that we—you guys should be credited for that and I hope that down the road you know, in the future that that happens, because we put a lot of work into this to, to take it to that level. Especially King Uprock keeping this dance alive, you know. This isn't wasn't easy for him, as well—

Break Easy: Yes, I agree. King Uprock is the reason why the rebirth is here—I call it the rebirth, not that he invented or founded anything, no. This is where it gets confused, you know? It was, "King Uprock thinks he's the man." He *is* the man. He's the man for the rebirth. That's the aspect we're teaching.

He's not saying that the rocking that he does is the ultimate rocking, no. [What] he's saying is that, "What I'm presenting to

you is the proper way of rocking or is a proper way of rocking. Not the ultimate or the only way of rocking," OK? [Mighty Mike: Aiiight.] That's what he's been saying this whole time, but people read misinformation—think like, "Well, he thinks he's the man." Well unless you can prove him otherwise by battling him or showing a technique of your own that defeats him, then that's fine.

This is where me and him have gone at it before, because I was never a burner-burner, per se, you know, as a rocker. For me rock—I love the freestyle. I love the freakin'- the shoulder, the drop, the jerks, you know? I'm not, I'm not, I'm not much of a burner. I just burn for the sake—I just wanna make fun of you. That's it, you know? But you better dance. And I'm talking about not just dance me—like thirty seconds like b-boys do. Boy, it's what I call—I'm sorry to say this—but it's what I call the minute-man-thing. When you're in love with something, you don't make love to it for a minute. Get my drift? You want to be able to enjoy the whole song. So the same thing is in here when it comes to the rock dance.

So it's not about the burning aspect in the short time. I wanna be able to enjoy the whole song and present what I have in my dancing skills before you, as well as the audience and learn how to humiliate you. You shouldn't have to go to burning, you know?

But my idea was just that—to set up a door where people can learn through my mechanics and this, this was brought forth very hardcore when I was working- was working with Tane Langton. Because I was already teaching kids how to rock, both male and female. There was no—I wasn't selective, "Well, this is a man-thing or this is the girl thing." Like, no. I saw it as, [crosstalk] back in the days, there were female rockers. Back in the day, there were b-girls.

[. . .] and it wasn't like, like, "Oh, because you're a girl you're gonna win. Oh, cuz you're a girl." No. I had foreseen stuff way back then. I had teached this to my kids, that: OK. When two b-boys are in battle, you know what's going to happen? You're gonna have to choose one. What beats a b-boy/b-boy?

B-boy/b-girl. But again, now we're talking that you have to have the skills. OK, so now what beats the b-boy? The b-girl. Now, when you have two b-girls battle, you judge 'em on their skills. What beats a b-girl? Get a little b-boy. OK, now you got a young b-boy. What a beats a b-boy? Do the math again. Get a little b-girl now and now over twenty years later, that's happened already.

At first, we had a wave of where it was b-boys: learn how to get your game up in everything. All of a sudden, you had this wave of the female upbringing—girls coming up to the ring now and competing with the guys. That's beautiful that that's happened but you're still segregating them, you know. Put them on a [. . .] level platform. Show me your skills, doesn't matter. Then all of the sudden, now you have—After that, that girl-thing, now it's the young generation. Oh, you have two b-boys. Oh now you got little girls.

Now you have the Olympics. Now you have people fighting for positions to be like, "Oh well, I'm a good b-boy from the street," and now you have to compete in the Olympics.¹⁸ I'm like, "No. Half of you b-boys are not gonna make it. You know why? Because half of you guys [are] already over 21. The other half of that, that's leftover, you guys are not going to make it. You know why? Drug tests! You gonna fail.

The other collectors- you guys have no mechanics and stuff, no drills, and no charisma for this thing. Three- you guys don't read the fine print when you look at the IOC [International Olympic Committee] and ask dumb questions on the social media, saying like, "Oh but, who's the staff?" It's on their site. "How they're judging?" It's on their site. B-boys are too lazy to do the research on that. They wanna be taught what to do. [Mighty Mike: Yeah.]

18. For further discussion about breaking in the Olympics: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4xzq33/the-battle-for-breaking-on-the-olympic-stage> Li, Rong Zhi, and Yonatan Asher Vexler. "Breaking for gold: Another crossroads in the divergent history of this dance." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36, no. 4-5 (2019): 430-448.

And then, when they're told, they never prove that information. They just recycle and, and repeat instead of letting the whole full wash go through. [Mighty Mike: Exactly.]

This is my gripe with a lot of the young ones, when they just follow—it's the herd mentality. One says that, "I'm gonna repeat it, because it's got to be true." Prove it. You have to do your research and, and I say that honestly and endearingly with a lot of affection and emotion [feigns coughing] that anyone that gets involved in this should be responsible enough to do the research. Just like you did the research when it comes to the rocking, to find out the history. A lot of people don't understand that.

Even myself, I had to check myself and, and make sure that anything that I say doesn't affect—offend someone of my sex genre or not my non-sex genre or because of someone's sexual preference or their religious obligations to their faith, to their culture, or just the fact of cultural differences and/or language differences.

[. . .] I've learned to grow because of the breaking community. Even more, I've been blessed to have so many diverse kids, you know, that I've got to acquire a lot of their good habits and bad habits, as we all do. To be honest, I love sharing my kids, all my students, which I call my kids—

And lemme tell you something—from being a dance teacher, I've learned to really listen. Because a lot of these kids that come to learn this dance, they have their own stories, you know? I can sit here and tell you that, yeah, they come in on a path that they wanna learn how to break, they wanna [learn how to] rock, but then I stop and listen to them.

And alotta these kids come from a non-functional home. A kid that grows up with his father or kid that just grows up with his mother. I've had kids that were abused come before me. I had kids that were illiterate. I had kids that didn't even speak one word of English, but they knew how to say their first word,

“six-step.” I feel like a proud father when I hear that, you know? [Mighty Mike: Right, right.]

A particular story, for example with E-Rock. E-Rock was a Polish kid. He came from Poland and stuff. He didn’t know an ounce of English, and he was just watching us in the park. He comes up and then he’s like, he wants to learn this. I’m like, “Come on over.” So then we started talking on the b-boy vocabulary. It went to such an extent, that one day he introduced me to his mother and he wishes that I will be his father, you know? [Mighty Mike: Wow, wow.] You believe that? Another story- I had a young girl and stuff in one of my classes come down and she openly explained to me that she came from a household where she was molested. You know? Stuff like that. And I took it upon myself to listen to her, just listen. Don’t take any actions yet, because sometimes I don’t want to impose my actions to be like, “I’m stepping in as a replacement for that,” you understand what I’m saying? [Mighty Mike: Yeah, yeah.]

Sometimes yeah we as instructors, we wanna do good, but we want to be like the welcoming superhero, but you can’t do that unless the person asked for help, you know? Because, if not, it’s a catch-22. I had another kid one time and stuff, invite me to his graduation because he had never completed school, so he asked me to come to his GED graduation. So I went there [to] support him.

Like I said—I’ve been hearing both sides of the stories that it’s other than just the b-boy factor, other than just hip hop. Because if you’re going to be true to hip hop, hip hop is not for the older generation. Hip hop is of the new generation, the ones that are creating and speaking out, you know? Sometimes we just have to listen.

Mighty Mike: Yeah. I think that the biggest thing in this, is that we have been friends for many years—we go back to the ‘80s.

Break Easy: Dude! We, been the—OK. Dude. Yeah. We may not have started off really friends-friends by first, first like that. We knew each other from the ‘hood, right? [Mighty Mike: Right.] And you

know that subconsciously I saw you, saw me. We were like, “F, F, F,” you know. Heck, you used to go out with some of the girls that I knew. You know who I’m talkin’ about. It’s crazy.

Then not only was it because of breaking, it’s because when we were lofting. We used to go to the same places to hang out and loft but we [were] just from two different camps. But we were part of the same collective, you know, with Gino, Ultimate, Bishop all those guys lofting. We been in the same ‘hood [crosstalk]

Mighty Mike: Yeah and it’s [. . .] funny because you blessed me with a B.I.S. family shirt [Break Easy: Yup.] which I still have.

Break Easy: [. . .] Who would have thought about that? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] I was like, “Yo, man.” You were from Scramblin’ Feet, Incorporated, which I hated. [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] I hated! That’s a Lower East Side came over. But then because we work together for ooh, quite some many times and stuff. I mean, we argue, and we agree and disagree—that you became—

Yeah, I remember honoring you to come into the Breaking In Style family, [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] because we have the same direction, vision and mentality when it came to that. [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] And you’ve already seen how disciplined I am with my, with my kids. Heck- [Mighty Mike: Oh yeah.] you used to be sitting in the chair when I’m drilling the hell outta this poor girl, “Do it again! Do it again!” She’s like jerking, jerking, jerking, jerking, jerking, jerking.

Mighty Mike: Yeah, I went and saw that, man. It’s great because we have the same vision, yes, you can say that—

Break Easy: Yeah, we do have the same vision. How we get there is our own path, yeah.

Mighty Mike: Right, right. And it’s funny because, if you remember, we wind up battling in rocking in Pro-Am, which was the [crosstalk] first—

Break Easy: That was in 1999—no, no, no, that was 2000. 2000, yeah.

Mighty Mike: No one knows about this because remember it was a very, very small community of rockers and we went to Pro-Am and we wind up battling in there and I remember that I had to do a moment of—I had to take a minute to express myself there, and you know? And it was crazy that we wind up doing it—[crosstalk]

Break Easy: You went in strictly for the rocking and I know that I was there for two different events. I was there for the rockin' event, and I was there for the old-skool b-boy event competition [Mighty Mike: Right, right. That was a very—] [crosstalk] So I had to wear two hats. I had to change to be a b-boy, and I had to change to become a rocker.

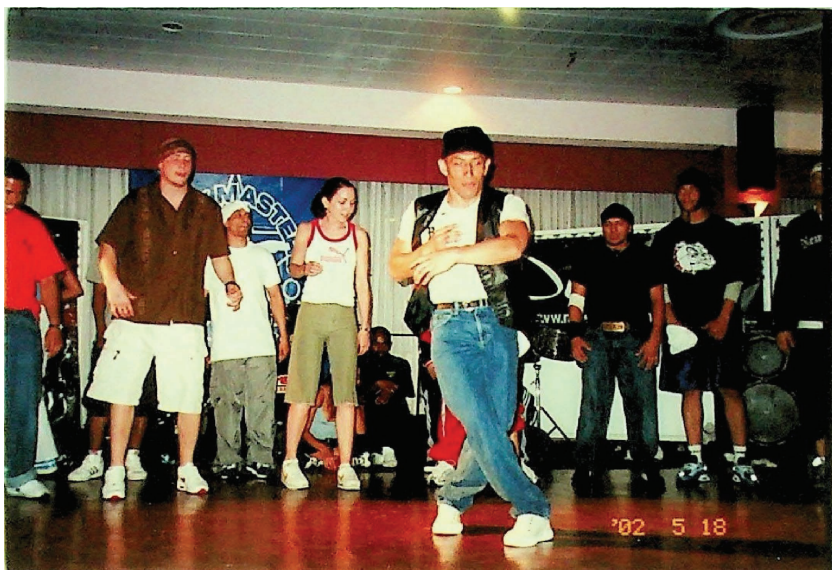
Mighty Mike: And nobody knows about that began—the community was small, so- [Break Easy: Yeah, it was small]. That was the very, very first rock battle in all this time that we was involved, that finally happened there. And King Uprock was the judge, I think it was Mr. Loose, I think there was somebody from Miami that was also a judge, that we wind up in there. I remember Karyn being there.

Break Easy: Yeah, Karyn. Dan Duce—

Mighty Mike: Dan Duce.

Break Easy: I think Tells was there from, from Ground [Zero]

Mighty Mike: Numbers. [Break Easy: Numbers, yeah.] Yeah it was all these names that people never—[crosstalk]

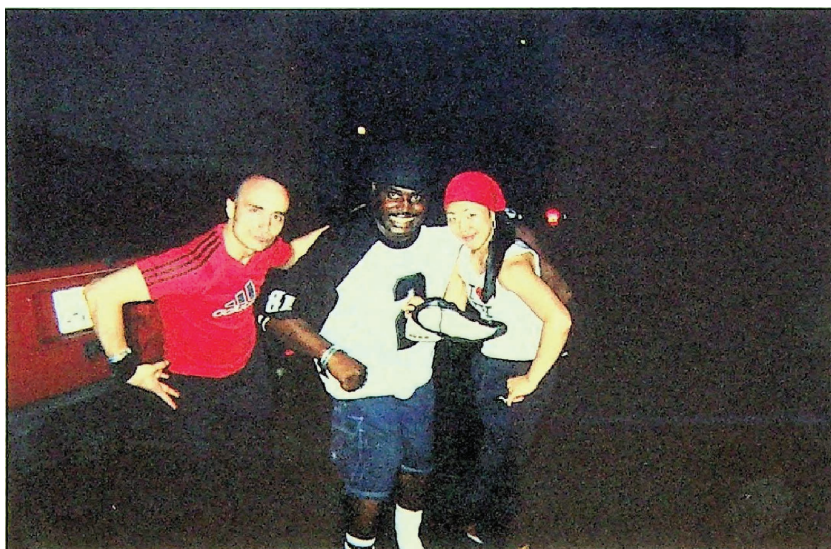


Photos from Bboy Pro-Am 2002. Photos courtesy of MiRi Park's personal collection.

(Top) Break Easy in Rocking Exhibition with Dan Duce (brown shirt) and Karyn Lish (white and red shirt)

(Bottom) Break Easy vs. Mighty Mike rocking in an Apache Line.

Break Easy: Heck, I believe MiRi was there another year [. . .]. I think, oh no—I think [the] following year later, I wasn't there, and she had to help Don Campbellock because he was a little bit ill and people didn't know who the hell he was and MiRi was like, "Oh! Oh! They don't know who this guy is! Oh my gosh!"¹⁹



Photos from B-Boy Summit 2003. (L-R) Tiny Love, Don Campbellock, MiRi "seoulsonyk" Park.

Photo courtesy of MiRi Park's personal collection.

Mighty Mike: So yeah. That was the actual first rock battle that took place in Pro-Am. That was the first event that opened the doors to rocking that—no one ever did. It was Speedy Legs that gave us the opportunity to do that—

19. MiRi: I was at the Pro-Am that Break Easy and Mighty Mike recall. The incident with Don Campbellock occurred at B-Boy Summit in Los Angeles the following year. Campbellock injured his ankle during an exhibition and Tiny Love and I stepped in afterward to assist him with getting first-aid. It's worth noting how memory functions in this story. As I listened to Mighty Mike and Break Easy recall this specific Pro-Am, I had a slow realization that it was the one I attended, but in my mind, it was 2001.

Break Easy: To be fair, the Pro-Am did set off a precedence for that, but, to be honest, it was Numbers who did it independently. It had nothing to do with Pro-Am. [Mighty Mike: OK, OK.] Numbers flew King Uprock in the initial stage in '99 and then I tagged along with Ralph because Ralph was like, "Rich, I'm gonna be alone. Hold my hand." So I'm like, "OK, let me go with you and support you in this," and I was the—[. . .] When something like that happens with Ralphie, I let him take stage and I'm backstage, looking at the audience. That's the way I like to operate. I like to step back and observe what's happening to the environment. So at that time frame, Ralphie was educating the Miami collective about what rocking is. And then a year later, you compete in and I compete in and people now become aware about it, you know?

Mighty Mike: That was, that was it right there. That was the starting point of what became what it is now. To sum it up that's where it has taken us in our path [Break Easy: Yeah.]

MiRi, I want to say thank you for having us and [. . .] taken us down memory lane from back in the '80s to now is great. Thank you.

MiRi Park: Thank you both so much. You both are such influential people in New York City, specifically, but as a result of that, in the entire world, in the entire global breaking scene, because so many people have come through New York specifically to work with you both, in separate ways. [Mighty Mike: Yes.] Our intention with this conversation is to let folx know that there are people out there that you might not have ever heard of but are a really big presence.

Dr. grace shinhae jun: [. . .] Thank you for taking this time. [Mighty Mike: Thank you for havin' us. Yeah.]

Break Easy: No, thank you very much for the invitation to have this and be able to share and, I mean, I could go a lot further and stuff. [crosstalk] For me, I will feel that it's more therapeutic for me to actually speak out on this because there's a lot of stuff that people are not aware of that happened in the late '70s early '80s, you know? [Mighty Mike: Yeah.] We would like to at least share that and have people become aware or become self-aware of themselves through my, through my disclosure of what I've done.

Mighty Mike: Yeah, yeah definitely.

Contributors

Miguel "Mighty Mike" Pazardi was born in Puerto Rico and raised in the Southside of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York. He witnessed the beginnings of Hip Hop dance from watching a few young kids dancing on cardboard outside of his family's apartment building. Since then, he has dedicated his career to teaching and practicing breaking and rock-ing dance styles, as well as holding the local histories of these cultures. He was a member of the Furious Rockers, Scramblin' Feet, Full Circle, New York City Breakers (2nd Generation), and Just Begun Crew, and toured extensively as one of Kurtis Blow's break dancers. Inspired by the work of the Dynasty Rockers crew, Mike began to research rockers he knew from his youth. He reconnected with rockers Choco, Rubber Band, Popeye, and Dash, and in 2009, they established a new generation of the Mastermind Rockers.

Richard "Break Easy" Santiago is a native of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where he grew up dancing with his family and then with his crew Breaking In Style. Upon returning to Williamsburg from service in the U.S. Marine Corps, he reconnected with local b-boys who reignited his passion for dancing. Since then, he has hosted a free practice in McCarren Park which has become a destination for dancers from all

around the world. Break Easy is a member of Dynasty Rockers and has taught, fostered, and mentored generations of b-boys, b-girls, and rockers throughout the past three decades.

grace shinhae jun is a mother, wife, artist, scholar, organizer, and mover who creates and educates on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation. A child of a South Korean immigrant, a North Korean refugee, and Hip Hop culture, she values a movement practice that is infused with historical and contextual education and focuses on community, compassion, and empowerment to encourage rhythm and expression. grace is a choreographer who directs bkSOUL, an award-winning performance company that merges movement, poetry, and live music. She is a founding core member of Asian Solidarity Collective and collaborator with Street Dance Activism. grace received an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and a PhD through the joint doctoral program at UCSD/UCI. Her scholarship on Asian Americans and hip hop dance is forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies*. grace teaches at UCSD, San Diego City College, and with transcenDANCE Youth Arts Project.

MiRi "seoulsonyk" Park is a b-girl, choreographer, performer, producer, scholar, activist, teacher, and mother based in Southern California. She reps New York City, where she spent her formative adult years and learned the art of b-girling and other underground dance forms. MiRi was the associate choreographer of the 20th Anniversary tour of RENT and a lecturer in the newly formed CSUCI Dance Studies program where she teaches dance history and hip hop dance. She is currently a doctoral student at UCLA WAC/D focusing on Asian American corporealities in hip hop dance. MiRi is a recipient of the UCR Christena Lindborg Schlundt Lecture Series in Dance Studies and the CSU Faculty Innovation and Leadership Award. Her writing will appear in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies*. She is a co-editor of a special issue about dance and protest for IASPM and a producer/dramaturg/dancer for *This One Then*, a screendance

directed by Charlotte Griffin. Crews: Breaking in Style (BIS), Tru Essencia Cru (TEC), Fox Force Five (FF5).

Selected Glossary of Terms

b-boy / b-girl / breaker: a person who participates in the dance style widely known as “breakin’.” In the past, this term has also referred to someone who participates in hip hop culture, generally. In reference to the scene from which people who participated in this issue of *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies* come, a b-boy / b-girl / breaker is someone who is both a dance and cultural practitioner of hip hop culture.

Battle / Jam / Event: Battles are when people test their skills against an opponent. They can take place anywhere. Jams are gatherings that usually focus on community building, which sometimes involve battles with judges and awards (usually trophies or small cash prizes). Events are larger happenings that can span a number of days. Events are centered on competition in a battle format with a judging system and awards of significant purses. Increasingly, these events are corporately produced or sponsored and/or funded by governmental agencies.

Biter: someone who copies moves or entire “sets” (a series of moves strung together) from other dancers. In a dance style that values originality, biting moves, sets, or someone else’s style is a most egregious sin.

Breakin’ moves: if you would like to see a demonstration of these moves, there are many tutorials on YouTube/social media. Here are some explanations of moves mentioned in this issue:

Floats—continuous rotations on one’s hands with the body balanced on elbows/upper-arms.

Halos—spinning on the edge of head, not to be confused with “head spins,” which is continuous spinning on the top of the head.

Swirls—spinning on one’s forearms.

Head spins—spinning on one’s head continuously. This is different from a “one-shot,” which is spinning on your head from one whip/push only.

1990s—called “90s” for short. Rotating upside-down on one hand.

Footwork—sometimes referred to as “downrock” or “floor techs.” This is dancing that usually follows toprock and a drop to the ground.

Six-step—a foundational footwork move that consists of coordinating six steps while on hands and feet in a circular pattern. It’s considered foundational as it’s possible to add or subtract steps to it in order to vary footwork patterns.

Windmills—also known as continuous back spins. This is one of the most recognizable breakin’ moves with legs held straight out in a “V” position.

Power moves—dance moves that usually involve continuous spins on a single part of the body. Ex. windmills, 90s, air flares, swirls, elbow spins, etc. Sometimes referred to simply as “power.”

Cat/Kat: a slang term used for “person.”

Crews: a group of people that share an identity and sometimes function as a family unit. In the case of breaking, crews were sometimes defined by neighborhoods, but over time, they were defined by shared values or simply good chemistry between people.

Getting down with a crew, or being put down for a crew—the process in which someone is invited to join, but then must prove they are worthy of being a part of the crew. In some cases, this means “battling in” where the new recruit must battle one or all of the crewmembers.

Cypher: dance scholar Imani Kai Johnson has articulated multiple definitions of “cypher” in her scholarship. First and foremost, it is the physical formation of a dance circle in which breakin’ or other social dances take place. There is a spiritual aspect to it in which the act of “cyphering”

refers to an energy exchange between dancers and/or dancer and spectator, or in her words, “the act of building collectively through the back and forth exchange in the circle.”²⁰ She makes clear that not all dance circles are cyphers. The notion of cyphers and cyphering can also be applied to other aspects of knowledge and energy exchange.

Lofting: a term that loosely refers to dance/atmosphere/ethos that permeated David Mancuso’s Loft in the East Village. Dancer Brahm “Bravo” LaFortune notes that “lofting” does not connote a specific dance style. The dancing that developed at The Loft is characterized by smoother, more lyrical movement than rocking and breaking, which were characteristically aggressive and dynamic. (See Fikentscher, Lawrence, and Sommer’s work included in the “Suggested Reading List” in the Back Matter of this issue.) For another viewpoint on lofting, dance practitioner Jon Malavé has been documenting his findings here: <https://loftstyledance.tumblr.com/>, and additional information about The Loft here: <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/19/807333757/still-saving-the-day-the-most-influential-dance-party-in-history-turns-50>

O.G.: an abbreviation of “original gangster” that colloquially refers to someone who is known to have originated a move, a crew, or, more generally, an elder.

Outlaw: a term used in reference to people engaging in extra-legal activities. In the context of hip hop, it’s often used in conjunction with or as a synonym for gangs and gang activity. The term also sometimes references the one illegal hip hop element graffiti, the culture specific to that practice, and its participants. For more information on the disambiguation between street organizations, refer to the Conversation with Break Easy and Mighty Mike, Footnote 7.

20. Johnson, Imani Kai. *Dark matter in b-boying cyphers: Race and global connection in hip hop*. PhD dissertation. University of Southern California, 2009. p. 5. For an extended discussion of the etymology of the term, refer to pp. 4–5.

Rock dance: also known as “uprocks” or “Brooklyn rock,” which is the dance that has roots in outlaw culture in Brooklyn. This dance is practiced in an Apache Line—two lines of people facing each other. Rockers dance for an entire record, as opposed to breakers, who usually get down to looped breaks in a song. Moves include “jerks,” which is to move/squat rhythmically down to the floor, and “burns” or insults to your opponent. A rocker should not be confused or conflated with “breaker” or “b-boy/b-girl” though there are breakers who also rock.

Tutting: part of the “West Coast Styles” sometimes referred to as “Funk Styles” of dance that loosely includes popping, waving, strobing, dime-stopping, and so on. For more information, refer to Naomi Bragin.

Spanish slang

Basura: Spanish term for “trash.”

Carajo: Spanish term for “shit.”

Moreno: Spanish term for “brown” to indicate hair/skin tone.

Papow: Spanish term that sounds like “powpow,” indicating a spanking.

Puñeta: Spanish term of exasperation that can translate to anything from “wanker” to “fucker.”

Popular Events/Jams and Practice sessions mentioned throughout the Conversations:

B-Boy Summit—now known as “B-Boy/B-Girl Summit”: event started in 1994 by B-Girl Asia One to celebrate all elements of hip hop culture:

The Bboy Masters Pro-Am: event started in 1996 by B-Boy Speedy Legs with Zulu Gremlin in Miami, FL.

Liner Notes: Serouj “Midus” Aprahamian

You have to do your research. And I say that honestly, endearingly, with a lot of affection and emotion. Anyone who gets involved in this should be responsible enough to do the research.

—Break Easy

Since my earliest involvement in breaking over twenty-four years ago, I remember virtually every seasoned breaker, popper, and locker I encountered—many of whom, like Break Easy and Mighty Mike, traced their beginnings to the late 1970s and early 1980s—implore our generation to question mainstream, often distorted, depictions of hip hop culture and to do our own research on the background of the dance styles associated with this movement.

Fast-forward to 2021 and this same emphasis on “knowing your history” comes across in this in-depth conversation between Break Easy and Mighty Mike. Their memories of New York during the height of breaking’s commercialization in the 1980s demonstrate just how far this dance proliferated back then, with stories of b-boys and b-girls from every borough teaching, performing, and competing with one another throughout the city. Unfortunately, most of these stories have never been formally documented as journalists and academics have tended to rely mostly on those who appeared in major film and television programs. Practitioners from areas such as pre-gentrification Williamsburg—let alone Brooklyn as a whole—who did not make it onto movie screens have often been overlooked, as have affiliated dance styles such as popping (electric boogie), rocking (uprocking), lofting, and the hustle. As this discussion illuminates, however, community-based figures like Break Easy, Mighty Mike, and countless others have continued to pass on their local embodiment of these important cultural practices to

generations around the world, despite their general lack of institutional support.

Interestingly, as their conversation moves from past neighborhood experiences to present mentoring activities, both discussants also seem to modify their outlook toward breaking and rocking, accordingly. Their positive remarks about the lack of formal rules and authority in the 1980s give way to appeals for greater structure, compartmentalization, and "authenticity" today. For instance, Mighty Mike talks about gravitating away from the Furious Rockers Crew in his younger years, due to their scrutinizing and discouraging president, in favor of the more horizontal approach he found in the Scramblin' Feet dance crew. The latter's more self-organized approach seemed to allow greater creative exploration and collaboration, something that Break Easy also lauds about his early embodied experience. However, this emphasis on informality begins to slightly shift as we move into their recollections of more recent years, with each expressing concern over properly labeling their dance practices and determining "What could be changed, what couldn't be changed" in each style, as well as admonitions that there are no "real" b-boys anymore and that "rocking" has become "watered down." In line with this insistence on independent research, it would be important to dig deeper into these remarks and explore what factors have affected such conceptualizations. How have institutional, ideological, aesthetic, and socio-economic transformations affected the performance and principles of dances such as breaking and rocking—both among present practitioners and those who trace their roots even further back than the current discussants? This conversation prompts this and many other questions, while also driving home the scholarly imperative of not relying on one or two sources but, rather, gathering as wide a cross-section of testimony as possible. In other words, "knowing your history" is understanding that this discussion is itself only one layer of a much broader social and cultural formation.

Author Biographies

Serouj “Midus” Aprahamian is a long-time practitioner of breaking, popping, and underground hip hop dance styles. In 2021, he completed his PhD in Dance Studies from York University, with a focus on breaking and hip hop history. His scholarly writings have appeared in the *Journal of Black Studies*, *Dance Research Journal*, *Oxford African American Studies Center*, and the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies*.