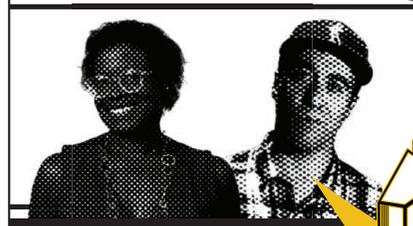




Liner Notes:



Nadine George-Graves  
Serouj "Midus" Aprahamian

Liner Notes:



Joseph Schloss  
Jesse Mills  
Imani Kai Johnson

# ASX Conversations

Across the Field of Dance Studies



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## B-girls Worldwide: Hanging with Stash & big tara



**big tara**

Heartbreakerz/Anomalies/MAWU



**Stash**

Heartbreakerz

B-girls Worldwide, a conversation with tara “big tara” chrichlow and Stacey “Stacey Stash” Earsman. Video recorded and edited by MiRi Park and grace jun, April 6, 2021. Watch the full video here: [https://youtu.be/hScyqN8\\_4fM](https://youtu.be/hScyqN8_4fM)

**MiRi Park:** Hello, welcome. This is our conversation between B-girl tara and B-girl Stash. My name is MiRi Park, otherwise known as B-girl seoulsonyk. And we are going to have a conversation today with the two of you. As two dancers in a global b-girl crew known as the Heartbreakerz, we’re most interested in hearing about your experience in the scene. tara and I have known each other for a very, very long time and in many ways, tara is synonymous to New York. And also as hip hop is also synonymous to New York, for me, tara equals hip hop equals New York.

And Stash—I have just recently met—and has been very active as a b-girl in the Middle East and now resides in Australia. Is this where you grew up, Stash?

**Stacey Stash:** No, I grew up in New Zealand.

**MiRi Park:** A-ha. OK, so I'm sure that you all will get into all that. So I think—While hip hop, a Black cultural form, has become a shared youth culture among multicultural, multi-generational people, what's often missing from these spaces in these conversations is the acknowledgement of race, gender, ethnicity and nationality, so we welcome you to tell your stories about how you got into breaking and explore your observations about the scene.

I was also hoping that maybe you could tell us about how you all found your way into Heartbreakerz, specifically, and could also name check your other crew members as well. Dr. grace, would you like to add anything?

**Dr. grace shinhae jun:** I'm just curious—and adding, particularly as women, what that means to you to be in the space. And I think tara, specifically—Black women are often erased from hip hop and breaking scenes, specifically. I think about if young Black girls want to go learn, where are they going to go or who are they going to reach out to when there's a lot of erasure? And then MiRi and I both [have] been talking about invisibility of Asian Americans and their contributions, and balancing that invisibility, but also not erasing Blackness on the account of—So just thinking about that, but I'm sure you all have some amazing stories that we're excited to hear.

**big tara:** Wow. This is cool. I would really love to know how you got into breaking and stuff. In general, I feel like when I think of anyone in our crew, everyone has like a hardcore tomboy streak but you know—How did you get into breaking?

**Stacey Stash:** You know I don't actually even think a lot of people know when I first started, which was in New Zealand in Auckland and I signed up to this summer school and they had—it was probably when I was about 15 or 16, initially. It was like a performing arts school. I didn't even want to be in a theater show. The only thing I went there for was because they had a breaking class, so I'd only turn up to that. And then I got kicked out because I wasn't going to anything else.

And then I found out where the guys that were teaching me were down at a youth center. Then I would go down there and just train all the time, by myself. There were no other girls there at the time, breaking.

That's how I first got into it and I would just train on my own and keep going, like every Friday night by myself and—Yeah, that's how it first started, in Auckland.

It was just something, I just like, I saw, you know, you see, you saw it on TV or you saw it like—And I was like, “Oh wow, I wanna do that. That looks dope.” Then also growing up in the hip hop scene with my brother being older, and he was into the music and everything and the culture, and my father, so it was—initially, it was all really there but the dancing, I hadn't been introduced to until I'd seen it on TV. Then I saw the guys at the school for the performing arts group, and then I went there and then it was just like OK, “I'm going to keep doing this.”

**big tara:** OK, and where does Melo<sup>1</sup> fit in this story?

**Stacey Stash:** After I ran, *She Got Game*. We met after [crosstalk] so well later.

**big tara:** Wow I really thought y'all I grew up together, that's how tight y'all are.

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1. Fellow crew member b-girl Melo, with whom Stash co-owns Migrant Coffee.

**Stacey Stash:** She ran a jam up in Queensland—so I moved to Melbourne, maybe in like 2000? 2001? And then she was up in Queensland at the time, and she ran a jam—This was before *She Got Game*, and she invited me out there to judge, to be a judge. We weren't initially friends then. I just went there to judge and then I came back to Melbourne. And then we met at *She Got Game*, but [we] still weren't really tight then.

And then she happened to be in New York at the same time I was for *Rock The Bells*. So we all went to New York for *Rock The Bells* and *Rock Steady Anniversary*, the 30th, 30th anniversary. Yeah. A mutual friend was like, "You need to meet up with Melo." And I was like, "Yeah, all right." And this is when, you know, mobile phones and the Internet didn't really exist, so we'd have to get on a pay phone and be like, "Yo, I'm at this corner. I'll meet you here at like, in an hour." [laughter]

**big tara:** Wow.

**Stacey Stash:** After that, she moved down to Melbourne.

**big tara:** Wow, OK.

**Stacey Stash:** Maybe two thousand—what was that? 2007? 2008 maybe? I don't remember when the anniversary was—what year it was.

**big tara:** Yeah, that we can look up.

**Stacey Stash:** Even I didn't even know you then.

**big tara:** Yeah I didn't meet y'all until we were at Freestyle Session? Yeah, I think we were at Freestyle Session—This was the Freestyle Session when a lot of us were there. Beta was there, Aruna was there, Honey Rockwell was there—It was just a lot of people at this particular Freestyle Session. I was out there to perform

because [b-girl] Emiko [Sugiyama] was having the J.U.i.C.E./Hip Hop Fest. So that's what got me out there.<sup>2</sup>

But yeah, that's so cool. Like you and Melo's story sounds very similar to me and Aruna's story where we really bonded—We met in New York, but we really also bonded over Rock Steady Anniversary, and all the jams. All the stuff that would be kind of complementary to it.

Yeah, and like hanging out around the City having to leave a message and whatever.

**Stacey Stash:** Did you and Aruna meet when you were both already in Heartbreakerz or in New York [big tara: no] and you connected?

**big tara:** Before Heartbreakerz even existed, we were cool. Yeah we— This was a super long time ago. We recently celebrated maybe— we're friends, 25 years now. Something like that—We met at a party that Invincible<sup>3</sup> had invited me to because this DJ Jackie was spinning, and I got there, and Invincible was like, "Oh, that's another b-girl," and I was like, "Uhhh, what? Maybe I should battle her." [laughing, crosstalk]

**Stacey Stash:** I feel like you know—That was like when I was—When I saw Melo and she invited me to judge. I was like, "Uhhh. . ." Like everyone had this attitude. Now it's so much more uplifting. I see the changes with women in the scene—with other women. [big tara: True.] But back then, it was [. . .] like, "Yeah, pffft. Yeah, I'll just battle her." You know? [big tara: Yeah.] "I don't know you. I don't wanna get to know you."

**big tara:** "This is my territory." Exactly that. I remember that instinct and I remember being glad—I always am glad I didn't act on that

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2. Beta, Aruna, Honey Rockwell, and Emiko are all b-girls who are still active in the scene in varying degrees.

3. Invincible is an MC in the Anomalies crew that includes Pri The Honey Dark, Helixx C, big tara, and DJ Kuttin Kandi (<https://emergencemedia.org/pages/invincible>).

first impulse and I was just like, "Oh, calm down." Like, "Let's make friends," and that's one of my best friends now, so you know [Stacey Stash: Yeah.] Yeah.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah, Aruna!

**big tara:** Yeah. Yeah, Heartbreakerz—I feel like Heartbreakerz came after Rokafella created that documentary, *All the Ladies Say*. I feel like it was a spin-off of that because Beta was like, "I'm doing my own thing," you know?

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah.

**big tara:** So yeah. [. . .] How I got into breaking [. . .] The first time I got into breaking was just because it was the one of the things to do around the neighborhood- an activity that was, you know, a fun activity like double-dutch, like, "Oh, go break." And I remember, I was super hype that I figured out how to do a hand spin. I was like, "Yeah! I'm doing it! I'm official!" You know—my family's like, "Whatever," but—

Later on, I took it—I took it on again because I was in my crew The Anomolies and we really wanted to represent all four elements of hip hop so—I was MCing—we were all MCing—we had Kuttin' Kandi our DJ. So we were like, "All right. We need the other elements." So I was like, "OK. I'll break," you know? So I went to start training with Crazy Legs.

That lasted for like, just like a few months because I just always knew that wasn't the place for me to grow—like, no shade to him. And, seeing how things have turned out nowadays, I really am glad I trusted my instincts.<sup>4</sup> But—I just knew, like, that wasn't the space where I would be nurtured properly for me to be the kind of b-girl I wanted to be.

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4. In December 2020, Crazy Legs admitted to committing sexual misconduct within the breaking scene. <https://www.okayplayer.com/culture/crazy-legs-sexual-misconduct.html>

Then I ended up with Rokafella—training with Rok and Kwik[step], which is awesome. They're really great with foundation, and they had an awesome practice session at this African dance studio which was really cool because that had the Africa-vibes. But—

**Stacey Stash:** So it's such a [. . .]. It's such a huge difference because in New Zealand there wasn't any other outlets or other people to go to. It was like one space, and that was it. And if you weren't really accepted there, there was nowhere else for you to go. You didn't have other options, you know?

I remember, because I was going to school when I was living on my own and all that. [I was like,] "Damn. This is like literally, the only thing I can do that I don't have to pay to do. Like, [big tara: Hip hop.] can play music, I can do it on the street, I can do it at home," as an extracurricular activity that you don't have to spend money on because everything you do now is—you have to pay a fee. You have to pay, you know, a membership fee. You have to pay to get into the studio, or the youth center, or—you know?

And it was like, "Ah well, shit, if these guys aren't going to accept me here, I just have to go home and do it by myself." So that's the thing you have when you're in New York—you had other options.

**big tara:** Yeah. I feel like at the time—it was really—I was really lucky. That happened to be the time when like breaking was just starting to make a resurgence—in '97—I don't know exactly why, but I remember, I went to the Zulu Anniversary jams, which were so awesome—It's a shame, they don't have like—there's nothing like it anymore, but—It used to be three days. It would be at an armory, a huge building. It would have all the elements—Tribe Called Quest would perform, Wu Tang Clan, George Clinton would be there. There'd be Muslims with all

the bean pies and publications. It was just a mix of all different types of black culture that connected with hip hop. [. . .] It was a really nice, big flourishing community [. . .] None of that really happens now.

That was also when crews started coming out—like, more people started coming out. Pro-Am started that year, which was like—I feel like because we didn’t have social media, Internet, it was even more exciting when you saw other people in person, like other breakers and, like, other b-girls. And like, “Oh wow, y’all. This is—that’s the flavor of Miami.” Or like, “Oh, that’s the flavor of Chicago.” Or like, “Oh, that’s the flavor of Toronto.” Just seeing—They have some people in person, because, [it was] really the only way we could see other people, besides that was, like, VHS.

Like, sending people a VHS in the mail—trading a VHS like, “Oh, you have Battle of the Year? I’ll trade you for Freestyle Session ’97,” you know? And mail it to each other. Like yeah, used to be cute. Now you can just watch stuff on YouTube.

**Stacey Stash:** Everything on YouTube. I think when the Internet started happening, and you’re on dial up, you know, when it was connected, but to a phone jack?

**big tara:** [laughing] yeah.

**Stacey Stash:** And I would go on this website—can’t even remember it was called—it was probably like, breakdance.com or something, I dunno—But I, that’s how I learned how to do the six-step properly, but it was written in a Word document, so you had to read. [big tara: Woooow.] [crosstalk] I used to work in this real estate—as like reception and—it’s closed, but I would be there. So I would get on their dial-up and then print out the Word document and then just practice in the real estate [. . .]

**big tara:** [laughing] That is so cool.

**Stacey Stash:** Alright, cool. So you'd be like on the floor in the position to start your six-step and I have a Word document right in front of me, and I've moved it here, but OK. And then I'd be like—

**big tara:** I love that!

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] it was just in a Word document of, "How to Six-step." [laughs]

**big tara:** Wow. That is so dope. Like, it has never occurred to me to learn from reading a document, so that is—wow. Well, you did that.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. No one was teaching me in New Zealand, initially, you know? So I was, like, Word document it is.

**big tara:** So, how did you get to where you were gonna throw a jam? How did you get there?

**Stacey Stash:** Well, after I moved from Auckland to Melbourne—[. . .] I was breaking when I got to Melbourne—That was a disaster. Like, initial disaster, but the crews that were here—and there weren't a lot of women that were dancing then. I remember going to my first jam by myself. I would watch, and kind of just see what, you know, what everyone was up to and just observe and then I was like, "All right, cool." Went to the cypher they had one night at the bar, called, I think it was Everland—and I always remember this—and it was like one of Australia's, like, best b-boy crews Fresh Sox were there. And I remember coming out into the cypher but I was just absolutely shat on, like, I was spat on, you know, by a dude, like a specific dude—and I won't name names—but I—and I remember that time and I was there and [. . .] it was like, "What the fuck?" You know? "What the fuck you doing?" Like, "This isn't your—this isn't for you!" And I was like, "What the fuck? All right." I was like, "All right, cool. OK, no problem. Fuck you, you, you, you." And then I just walked out.

And I remember I hired—probably for like six months to a year—I hired this hall. And I had to catch a train with my boombox that fit in a bag—it was like this big [gestures size with hands], with a cord, you know, you had to plug it in. And [big tara: OK.] I would go train by myself for hours on end, with whatever spare time I had because I just wanted to come out with more determination and into another cypher without that happening again, you know?

**big tara:** I feel you.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah and then I went out, I met a girl, a woman called Demi, B-girl Demolition and—[big tara: OK.] [. . .] and we were just chilling. We were just dancing, and she was like, “Yo. Come on, show me your shit. What have you got? Let’s go! Let’s just do it together!” So she was a real motivator as well.

And that’s how I got my b-girl name, because then I came out—I was like, “Yeah, I think I’m ready now.” You know? And I came out and she was like, “Yooo! Where have you been stashing your shit, bro? Like, that’s your name—Stash! B-girl Stash!”

Then I went to more jams with her and coming out—And then, it just took years to kind of build that, I guess that respect in the scene—just [to] know that there was a woman who was in the scene who was dedicated—It wasn’t just a phase. It wasn’t just, “I’m gonna hang out at a jam, maybe break a little bit and show you guys a couple of things,” and then not be involved.

So I just made sure that I was very present for a very long time, regardless of what people would say I do, and I think people just got bored of, like, giving me shit because [they thought] “Ahh, well, she’s not going anywhere.” [laughter] And, and then it just kind of snowballed from there.

I ended up being in Fresh Sox, which were a huge inspiration, I think, for sure. They definitely made a lot of who I am as a b-girl. Without them, I don’t think I would be [. . .] where I was or where I am now. They definitely built a foundation and made me a lot stronger. [. . .]

With that [. . .] I was put into Zulu Kweenz. And then I guess with that status and that recognition, and having been to jams, and having respect throughout Australia, and having traveled a lot, I was like, "I'm going to run a jam." There's never been a[n] international b-girl jam in Australia. I don't think there were even many b-girl jams at all. And I was a bit—

It was controversial at the time, because there was that whole thing about being, you know, having equality within the scene, and—If you want to be a b-girl, you should be up to battle with the b-boys, which I know at the time—of course, I believed in it as well and that's why I was going by what—[I] would always compete against b-boys 'cause to me, it didn't bother me at all—but I wanted to be able to give women in the same opportunity to battle the best b-girls at the time in the world and put that on the map and see that they're girls out there, women out there, who can be just as good as you, if not better. You all just haven't seen it because you're stuck in Australia being like, "Well, you know, why am I going to travel around the world?" There was a lot of this mentality of men or boys in Australia, where they'd go, "Well, why would I travel across the world to be the worst—when I'm the best at it here?" Which blew my mind. I was like, "How's that—?"

**big tara:** Mediocrity?

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah, right? I was like, "Why would that—How is that possible? Like, why would you not want to travel to get better, to battle people, to be in a cypher with people that are—you know, that you've looked up to?"

**big tara:** hmmm.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. That was a trip. But then I got—then I was like, "I'm just [gonna] run a jam, and I'm gonna put a lot of my own money into it. I can get some loans. Fly people out and just do it."

**big tara:** All right.

**Stacey Stash:** I'm a doer!

**big tara:** Yes, I'm down to do one. I'm coming to the next one.  
[crosstalk] [. . .]

So two parts of what you said really struck a chord with me: One, because, after a point of being around Crazy Legs, then learning with Full Circle, then for a while rolling with Twist and Kmel—I also was like, "I'm going to do this by myself." And I would go to the local gym and train for four hours a day, just by myself. Yeah, like, "Fuck that." And it was also definitely to feel a certain way, empowered in my own—dancing in my own identity within the scene, not that I needed to be attached to anyone, [. . .] or have to compromise to accommodate other people's kind of ways of boxing me into a certain role that I'm supposed to play.

So that—I definitely remember having a time just being in my own zone, like, "I'm just doing this breaking stuff and I'm just going to get in my own little zone." And when I would—when I came back out from being away quietly, then I entered some battles and I did a lot better. You know, I smoked a few people, and I was like, "OK, this is fun." But I definitely feel like [you] should have some time to yourself to discover your own voice.

But I also feel like within this scene it's, it's helpful for b-girls if they have a b-boy boyfriend, or husband, or a counterpart. I feel like a lot of b-girls who are well-known—part of it is because of their being part of a "power couple."

[. . .] I know you also haven't been specifically attached to one dude and [. . .] platform. [. . .] You did it—Word. [Stacey Stash: No.] Oh, my goodness. [laughter]

Oh, my gosh. Wait, it's so funny because the other day, someone said that to me—he was like, "What about y'all in Heartbreakerz? Look at the name of your crew! You're a bunch of Heartbreakerz. You treat guys like—" And I'm like, "I don't know

what to say [. . .] You're just getting a taste of your own medicine. [crosstalk] A lot of times, y'all can't handle it when it comes from b-girls." [laughter] Oh, my goodness. Yeah. We really are a girl-gang, though.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. [. . .] very strong.

**big tara:** People get intimidated. I feel like that summer that you stayed in New York was so awesome.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. I was there for a minute. I just kept extending my—[crosstalk] "Ah, another week. Another week." Then it turned into, like, six weeks or something completely ridiculous.

**big tara:** Yeah. [. . .] I love that—I just feel like our independence, either as Heartbreakerz or as b-girls, in general, it definitely is intimidating because a lot of b-boys are so immature or—I mean, it is misogynistic [in] a lot of ways within the scene. [. . .] I do feel like in my journey—there were times I thought, people were like, "Yeah, let's practice," and I'm like, "Awesome." And then we're going to practice and then they're like trying to hit, and I'm like, "Awww. Yeah, no. I actually really just wanted to practice. I don't like you like that." You know?

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah [. . .]

**big tara:** So, like Heartbreakerz definitely offered a bit of a safe haven for alpha females. [laughter]

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] Yeah I think a lot of b-boys just get like real butt-hurt—Just real ego hurt, you know? When it's not—what they, what they expect or what they want, or—[. . .] there's a fair few [. . .] that are not like that, you know?

**big tara:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah, without mentioning any names, I will say I really admire the way you've handled certain people in

the scene, who had taken a liking to you, or—[laughter] I always respected your gangster with that.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. [. . .] no time for that. [laughter]

**big tara:** Exactly. Yeah. How, how did you get to that space, though, because, like I do feel like there are a lot of b-girls—Like, being a b-girl, sometimes you can feel that you need to overcompensate in certain other ways to show you're feminine. Or accommodate a certain narrative in order to prove that you're still a woman or something. How do you really maintain your independence the way you have? Cuz you travel everywhere, you do whatever, you throwin' jams, [. . .] you date whoever or not, you know?

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] I think from a very young age, I had to learn very quickly to be independent, regardless if I was with somebody or not, if I had family or not, you know? And I went to a lot of different schools—I've entered, like, 15 different schools. I lived in five different cities. Three different countries [big tara: Wow.] So it was very quick and easy for me to also detach from things because I knew a lot of my life wasn't permanent. So it was very easy to just go, "Well, on to the next thing, cool that's happened, adapt, that's what's happening now." And if I didn't do things for myself, it was never going to happen. I couldn't rely on other people. [. . .] That whole independence came with me—[. . .] it's still there now because I don't rely on anybody else. I don't expect that I'm going to be able to get what I need from somebody else.

[. . .] It does make me feel whole, if I can do those things on my own and not have to rely on other people, you know? If I do, I'll totally reach out to someone if I need help, but majority of the time it's like, "Nah. I'm good this way, thank you." And for, say, [. . .] a man—if I like him—I want him to be part of my life, [he] would have to be pretty strong and pretty independent for him to be able to maintain a relationship [with me], because

otherwise it wouldn't work. So, if he doesn't fit into what I need, I'm like, "See you later." [. . .]

**big tara:** Word.

**Stacey Stash:** So yeah, I guess it's just something that I've had—yeah, I learned very quickly to just carry forward and not care too much about what I need from somebody else, because I get everything I need from me. You're just a bonus.

**big tara:** Mm. Mm. OK.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. So, very happy with my friends and my family. They provide all of the things that I need, you know? For sure, one day I'll get married, [. . .] have some kids, but—I'm a strong woman [. . .] really chill and relaxed, but if there's a dude that can't—[hang] with a tomboy—because we were saying about women, especially in Heartbreakerz were like super alpha—[. . .] Like I was saying, boys get butt-hurt, you know? Like, they don't [like that] a girl that can break better than them, who can skateboard better than them, or snowboard better than them—[. . .]

**big tara:** Exactly.

**Stacey Stash:** You know? So it's hard to, like—[. . .]

**big tara:** Exactly, yeah. Like I feel like I've seen b-girls kinda dilute themselves to fit into their couple and you're like, "Awww." And no shade, I'm a name a name—like when I think of, for example, like AT—she was totally one way when she was [. . .] with Focus, but once she broke it off with him, she was like, "Ahhhh!" [. . .] What? She, she posin' with her butt in the picture. I was like, "Oh, shit! Wow! You givin' us panties?" AT's comin' out!

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah!

**big tara:** That's a whole new woman finding herself. [. . .] I feel like, maybe even like—that's how—sometimes—even grooming happens within the scene, you know? Like just trying to really box, the way that women are represented within hip hop. I love that we're kind of against that grain. [Stacey Stash: We're different.] Yeah.

**Stacey Stash:** Heartbreakerz, as well, is a very, very, very, like very different style—very different—everybody has a feminine side to them as well, but it's still very raw, you know? We don't play off, like, one particular, not style, but form, I guess, in a way? Because we all add our own personalities into our dance, you know, I think. [crosstalk]

Roxy. I love Roxy—watching her break. Yo, you're, like, such a lady, but she's so [. . .]

**big tara:** So raw! Yeah. It's a perfect example. She'll bust out some head spins and crazy hollow backs and hop around, and then pop up, and give you a little pose, [Stacey Stash blows a kiss] a hair toss, and a spin off, like—yes, with a twirl. Exactly, yeah.

**Stacey Stash:** Yes [. . .] right. And most girls wouldn't want to do that because they think there's a[n] expectation from b-boys that you have to be like a gangsta. You have to be straight and narrow foundation, all g'd out. There's no femininity about it whatsoever, you know? But it's like, yeah—

**big tara:** Like you're supposed to totally erase any parts of you that even looks the tiniest bit feminine and just move like a man.

**Stacey Stash:** And they all start calling you a man and then you're a lesbian. So it's like, bro, can you even win here?

**big tara:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Stacey Stash:** It's ongoing. It's so stupid.

**big tara:** So stupid. [. . .] When a bunch of us were at IBE—it was me, Melo, Aruna, Beta, Ladie, Candy, and Roxy—[. . .] To witness how people—Because obviously, we were just going to stay together, and just go around, and do stuff, and talk shit, and laugh, and be ourselves, and be excited to see each other in another country—But people’s reaction to us was like, “Oh, my goodness. Who are they? What’s going on? Is that a—Is that a crew of b-girls? Why are they so loud?” and “Oh, they don’t care about us,” and like, “I think she just hooked up with one of the guys and then didn’t care about him after!” [laughter]

Just to see [. . .] wild women who are also still united, I think, is a scary thing for a lot of people [. . .]

**Stacey Stash:** And they’re dope b-girls! You know? On top of that, too!

**big tara:** Yeah, and just not gushing over the people, people are sweating like, “Oh, my goodness, so-and-so is here!” We’re like, “OK.” And we’re excited to see each other, though, you know. [laughs]  
[. . .] I remember you have mentioned something—I can’t remember the exact story—but you had went to a jam in the Middle East and you couldn’t even enter the battle? Like, what was that?

**Stacey Stash:** Well, I moved there [. . .] in 2010, 2011. I was like, “Yeah, sick. I’m going to be able to—” Also I had no idea about the country—I didn’t even know where it was. I had to get a map of it, “Oh! That’s where I’m moving to.” I had to read about it, you know? And when I got there, I was like, “Oh, dope. Like, I’m going to be able to train and I’ll be on my own. It’s gonna be sick and—

I reached out to a guy, Hakoomy, on the Internet, like emailed him. I was like trying to find a b-boy or some type of breaking thing happening there. And we linked up and he’s dope—he’s still my friend to this day and he’s awesome. He was—him and his

crew, they're Mighty Jokerz, were breaking. I was training with them for a bit, but women weren't allowed to dance in public there. Not even today, unless you're at a hotel bar, the bar that's attached to a hotel, or something like that. But barely that either because—Yeah, it was horrible. [big tara: Wow.]

You weren't allowed to dance in public. So there were jams—a lot of the jams were held in a community center, or in public at a park, or at a shopping mall. Yeah, and you weren't—women weren't allowed to dance at all. If you're caught dancing, you're deported. See you later. Yeah.

**big tara:** Like, for real, for real? Deported? Deported?

**Stacey Stash:** It's no joke. You can go to jail, and you can get deported.

**big tara:** For dancing.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah.

**big tara:** Wow.

**Stacey Stash:** As a woman. Yeah.

**big tara:** Wow.

**Stacey Stash:** In Qatar.

**big tara:** That's hardcore.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. So I remember my friend, he was, "Ah you could probably get up and have a jam on the stage—" this is, Tyrone was there as well. [big tara: OK.] So it was on stage—it was all, "Just tuck—" he was [like], "Oh, get your ponytail, put it in a plait. Tuck it into your hood, put your hood on." [Stash puts on her hood] And then to start, you know, just breaking. So I did that, and the next minute I get a tap on the shoulder by the CID, which is a local

police, on the stage—[big tara: Wow!] They're like, "Yeah, you need to get off the stage. You need to not be dancing."

So I was like, "All right, cool." So then I stood next to Tyrone on the stage as he was DJing, and [the CID was] like, "No woman on the stage at all. Get off!" It wasn't even allowed to stand on the stage, you know? So I think when I initially thought I would be breaking a lot there, it kind of died off for me there. The only thing that kept me connected to breaking while I was living there was traveling.

So I got to see you guys in New York, or I was traveling to London, I got to see some of the Zulu Kingz, Kweenz, and you know? That was kind of the only thing that still kept me connected to breaking because I wasn't—It was depressing! Like imagine going to a jam and it was poppin' off and you can't go dance because you'll get deported. [laughs]

**big tara:** Ughhh! I can't even imagine. Oh my gosh [Stacey Stash: The music—] I would be so mad. I would be so mad.

**Stacey Stash:** The music's dope and it's just, like, everyone's having a great time and you're standing on the edge like [. . .] I just—stopped going to jams there, because I was like, "This is stupid—I can't not—" Yeah.

**big tara:** Wow.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah and it's not—there's nothing you can do about it, you know?

**big tara:** Yeah that's what I was gonna say. There's no measures you can take to try to shift—Wow. Wow. But, did you encounter any other like secret b-girls out there, or—?

**Stacey Stash:** Not one, no. Not in Qatar.

**big tara:** Damn.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah.

**big tara:** Wow. That's crazy.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah I don't even know even to this day—like a few b-boys in Qatar, but not a lot. I mean, there's a lot of stuff happening in Dubai and Bahrain. But—I didn't know a lot of women. I didn't know one woman that's breaking there. I make it sound so sad. [laughs]

**big tara:** No. I mean that sounds—you know—

Honestly, like quarantine—not being able to dance so much was torturous enough. I can't even imagine being someplace and I'm not allowed to dance. That's even [. . .] more aggravating.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah.

**big tara:** [. . .] So there was a question of what, like, racism within the scene. Have you experienced racism?

**Stacey Stash:** I haven't so much. I think—[. . .] I feel like New Zealand—growing up there—You know, majority—it's all pretty—equal—Everyone in New Zealand is raised—

There's a Maori culture, which are the Indigenous people of New Zealand, and that is still very significant to this day there, it is a priority for the country so there's never been—as an adult anyway, you know—grown up, as an adult I hadn't seen it.

As a child, yeah. Kids that bully you because you couldn't fit into a specific way because I'm half-Maori, half-Thai, but growing up, I didn't look either, so I didn't fit into any specific group or ethnicity. So I was either teased because I looked more Asian, and then if I tried to join the Polynesian, kapa-haka group, which is [the] Indigenous dance of New Zealand group that schools have, I wouldn't fit in there either. And that as a child, I think a lot of—I found it worse [. . .] probably as a child than I do as an adult. Just bullying and things like that it's not as—I don't know.

I feel like a lot more people in New Zealand are more educated about it—treatment of others—but in school it's like a given—Like, it's school, you know? Kids are just little assholes.

**big tara:** Pretty much. Pretty much.

**Stacey Stash:** Which I see now is happening around the world with adults and I'm like, "Fuuuuck."

**big tara:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] In the scene I haven't experienced racism, or anything like that. Have you?

**big tara:** I mean, I've experienced it as like—Like I can say that I'm very sensitive because I'm a native New Yorker and my experience of hip hop is not like, "Oh, the first time I saw it was on this TV show and this movie." It's, it's actually my Indigenous culture until I do a DNA test and—

[. . .] Yeah, I definitely have experienced erasure, or just [. . .] people not wanting to deal with the inconvenient parts of the culture and just wanting to deal with the fun parts like, "Oh, I want to dance and go to parties and meet other dancers, and get some clout." You know? But, like the work-part of being part of a culture—you know, having the uncomfortable conversations, actually participating in activism—[. . .]

I really was reminded of it last year because—They started having interviews of the first generation b-boys from Kool Herc's parties. That whole [. . .] having them just tell their story—a lot of people got angry and upset and [said,] "You're tryin' to take away the contributions of Latino/Latina/Latinx people!" [. . .] Just by hearing the stories of pioneers? That's a threat like that? So there's that.

And then just certain people like saying n\*gger, who—I'm like, "Why are you even—? You shouldn't be saying that word. Like,

I don't care how cool you are. I don't care how dope you dance. You actually shouldn't be saying the N word."

So you know, like microaggressions like that, where people want to put on—It's like they want to put on your—put it on like a costume and then try to out-hip hop you, so—

I'm still learning the language to express it in a very calm and verbose way—And not just curse people out [. . .] I've definitely over the years just witnessed a lot of stuff. I was like, "Oh that was wack." Or like, "Oh, let's actually give that person props for what they contributed or—" Stuff like that everywhere—  
[crosstalk]

**Stacey Stash:** I remember I would travel to New York and I had friends, you know boys, I was over there with, you know, from Australia and a lot of them would mimic—you know how you basically see people in front of you, and then you start mimicking [big tara: Mm-hmm.] their behavior, and their characteristics, parts of their personality, and they start talking like them.

There was one dude—We understood why as well—and he put this durag on—which he didn't even need to have one on—and you know, saying the N word, and all this around us [. . .] and I was like, "Yo, why are you—?" It was so [. . .] "You're talking about being from the ghetto—" Mind you, this guy grew up, like, by the beach in a two story house, and it just made no sense to me. I was like, "Why are you trying to be somebody that you are not? Just don't—Like, just break, and like, you know, be good at it." There are no—

Is it whether or not boys feel like they're going to be accepted if they act and behave the way that their mentors do, or that they look up to do—? Is that not—? I think that's such a big difference with—well, women that I know anyway, and our friends and the crew that we're in, is that we don't feel like we have to be somebody else to be accepted. [big tara: That's true.] [. . .]

You don't like it? That's cool. Like, whatever. We do [crosstalk] We're at IBE. We don't care, you know? We're not going to try and be that. Like, that's not—which I feel a lot of people in this scene do to be accepted and—[big tara: Mm-hmm. {crosstalk}] Yeah.

**big tara:** Definitely [. . .] I love that our crew actually is one of the crews that respects the whole idea of being original and not being a whole biter. [Stacey Stash: Yeah.] Everyone really works hard to be their own individual self, you know? And you know, we've seen each other all grow in all these different ways and just become awesome people, because we've been together for a while now.

Recently a lot of stuff has been coming out in terms of sexual assault within the scene and just [crosstalk] making it safe. Even recently, B-girl N'tegrity came out with naming the names and was like, "This person raped me."<sup>5</sup> [. . .] I think they really coming for people, because the Olympics is a huge platform for breaking<sup>6</sup> and we can't just have—Well, we just can't—we can't go out like that. We can't have people who have issues with boundaries, and sexual assault be our ambassadors for the world stage [. . .] That's like a terrible way to start.

[. . .] I'm really glad that we're continuing the dialogue until we can really address it in a healthy way within the community, because we have not—We have not been able to even from when that first time Afrika Bambaataa was accused, and it was just like, limbo.<sup>7</sup> Nobody knew how to resolve it, so—

At least now the conversation is really being had even though it's awkward and uncomfortable, you know?

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5. B-girl N'tegrity shares her story on sexual assault on her blog. <https://www.ntegrity-inmotion.com/blog>

6. Breaking will make its official debut in the Olympics in Paris 2024 (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/07/sport/breakdancing-olympics-paris-2024-spt-intl/index.html>)

7. In 2016, Afrika Bambaataa was accused of sexual abuse. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/8xx5yp/afrika-bambaataa-sexual-abuse-zulu-nation-ron-savage-hassan-campbell>

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. I mean it's still awkward and uncomfortable for b-boys in the scene who are gay, right, as well.

**big tara:** That's true. That's true. That's true for, just like, [crosstalk] people don't know how to [. . .] just let them be. [Stacey Stash: Yeah.] That's true. That's true and—

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] compare it—like, no comparison, but in terms of just like wanting to be accepted and not—[big tara: Yeah.] Sucks.

**big tara:** Yeah. It's just that the b-boy mentality has to mature and grow up. It can't be so hyper-masculine that it's toxic. You know? It needs to be able to—In real-life, hip hop is supposed to be a safe space where we can all go and jam out, so I'm glad that we're finally working on making that a reality [Stacey Stash: Yeah.] more so than before. Because, yeah, it did seem like a breeding ground for, you know, potential predators with, like, power dynamics. [Stacey Stash: Yeah.] Sometimes people are so caught up in being able to battle and conquer and that's the only way they know how to engage with people. They don't know how to actually just have an equal exchange.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. But even an equal exchange outside of breaking, too—[big tara: Right.] There are people that I'm still friends with, to this day, from traveling, but breaking wasn't the only thing—I mean, yes, that was what initially connected us to becoming friends, but then I could sit with them all for hours and not even speak about breaking at all, you know? And that's like, where I have found a lot of my good friendships have come from, because [. . .] breaking initially connected us, but then we can still have conversations about basically anything else to do with life, other than breaking, you know, which I love as well. It's not just, "Yo, let's watch footage! Yo, let's do this! Let's go break! Let's go do this!" [laughs]

**big tara:** Exactly. Yeah. There's more to life. Yeah. That's awesome, there's more, yeah yeah.

**Dr. grace shinhae jun:** . . . just really thinking about like both of you talking about [. . .] breaking not just being an activity that you do, but it really being about your life. So how are you still connected and—especially, where it feels like right now—Maybe in preparation for the Olympics, that it's all about the battles and if you're not in a battle, or you're active in the battle, you're not relevant as a breaker, or a b-girl? So maybe just [. . .] What are you doing to stay connected? Or what's your practice now?

**Stacey Stash:** Well, I'll quickly talk about Auckland and breaking there. So just as a timeline [. . .] Well I'm 37 next week! [crosstalk]

**big tara:** That's right! Aries season!

**Stacey Stash:** So 37 next week, so—Initially first saw breaking when I was fifteen [years old]. Moved back to Auckland, and that's when I first started. Then it dropped off, and in 2000, 2001—So, like seventeen? Yeah, because I was still—I was still at school, so I would have been like, 16, 17, 17? And then when I was going to this jam, it was Black Attack—this crew called Black Attack—

It was one b-girl I remember, B-girl Tweak but I never saw her, because she lived quite far away. And it was me—learning was observing. It was—I did it quietly. I just—I would go, I would observe. I would go home. I would practice my headstands on a towel. I remember getting teased for doing that, quite often, actually.

There were no VHS circulating, not through my hands anyway. And then, it was the—going online and getting Word documents, and that was it. I would—Yeah, that's how I first learned and just watching the b-boys in Auckland at the youth center. [. . .]

Tryin' to think if I did anything else. I didn't have—there were no, not any jams really that I went to in Auckland that I can remember. There may have been one in Wellington but

I can't actually remember what that's called now. I didn't really see many b-girls down there from memory. But that's going back so long ago. I remember I got a lift with a friend of mine, and then I had to hitchhike all the way back out, which was like a 10-hour drive. Yeah. [big tara: Wow] Yeah [. . .] Body Rock! How did I forget that? Body Rock! That was what it was. B-girl Chic ran it, who's actually in Melbourne now, who I'm still friends with, to this day. She was down in Wellington so—Yeah that was dope, actually. That was a really good jam. Actually she's thinking of holding one here, soon. She wants to get me involved. We've been speaking about it, funnily enough. Yeah.

**big tara:** What is your practice now? Your breakin' practice?

**Stacey Stash:** Literally, not much at all. I'm not making—It's not that I don't have the time, I'm just not making the time for it because, Melo and I opened our business<sup>8</sup> and the main focus is really just to get that up to—to get that popping off, so that we—her and I—can earn some money more than what we are now. Staying relevant—We're still friends with everybody that we've been friends with in the scene for a long time.

I also don't know of many jams that are happening like they used to, where there are cyphers and it is just super raw, and it's—I don't even know who's in the scene in Melbourne. I know a few kids that are in, like the—maybe from five years ago or so, but also, I left the country for nearly eight years, so I never saw new up-and-coming b-boys or b-girls.

The guys that I was still friends with are still in the scene now but I wouldn't know who's new. I don't hear of any jams that are happening because they just don't happen much anymore.

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8. Migrant Coffee shop, founded by B-girls Stash and Melo <https://migrantcoffee.com/>

I don't know what happened to the generation after ours in Australia. [ . . . ]

For me, and I don't know if it's for anybody else, but I just—or it's because I'm not online as much, or I'm not—[big tara: Yeah.] So I just don't think a lot of these jams are happening. I know there's one that happened, like, a couple of weeks ago around with Lava Rock, who's still doing his thing. But other than that it's—I don't see much of where that, where the line was drawn, where it dropped off, or how it dropped off, and why it dropped off.

Speaking of B-girl—Tweak earlier [ . . . ] She's here in Melbourne now, and she had the Body Rock in Auckland, sorry, Wellington in New Zealand, which she wants to run again, and it was the same thing we're talking about earlier, where are those authentic kinda jams, where they're all elements? It's like, breaking, and graff writers over there, right? That just doesn't happen anymore.

**big tara:** Yeah. Those are the jams.

**Stacey Stash:** I want to go to those jams! Where are those jams now in Australia? That would make me be able to go out and have a—break for fun and not feel tied to having to compete to go to a jam, you know?

**big tara:** Yeah [ . . . ] For me, I totally relate to that. I was in the scene and then the more it started to become not jams, but full-out competitions, with people traveling from other places, and charging \$20 at the door, \$25, to sit and watch—You're not even getting to dance—The more it moved into that, the less, I was wanting to go out and be part of that. Plus, I really love the clubs anyway, so I just got more and more into house [dance]. Currently, in terms of the breaking scene, I spoke on a few panels last year on Zoom, but even—like at IBE and other places—basically about creating safe spaces whether it's as a

Black person, or a New Yorker. Or being able to hold space for the LGBTQ community within the breaking scene. So I've been doing that kind of work.

I also teach breaking in university and in my community. And I try to kind of look out for younger generation[s] within Heartbreakerz and a few Black b-girls like Pep-C, Macca. I've made more of an effort since last year to actually kind of support them, and be in solidarity with them, even though we're not a crew, per se. Just keeping in better support of them as future generations. And because there's really still just a handful of us, still. Even though the breaking scene has pretty much exploded. [. . .]

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] You mean the breaking scene exploded internationally? Or are you just talking about, in the States? Or?

**big tara:** Both [Stacey Stash: In general] Especially now that the Olympics is in the picture, more people are like, "Oh, that's a real accolade," or like, "Oh, now I can really take it serious because I have this big goal that's a possibility," and it's like from countries all over the world, so like—More people are getting excited about it. Even like O.G.s are coming out the woodwork who have been moved on from breaking and were doing other things. But they're now wanting to speak out in terms of sharing whatever they feel about breaking being part of the Olympics, so—[. . .] The scene is so much bigger now. Especially also because we have social media. We have online battles. [crosstalk] Online classes. Online trainings. There's like an airflare machine, like, an airflare machine. [crosstalk]

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] how the generations now would just go down that Internet rabbit hole, you know? I would be nuts!

**big tara:** Yeah. I just don't like that they're biters. They're like, "Oh, I like that throw down. I'm just going to do it." Or, "I like that

move." [. . .] The struggle of having to rewind a VHS or reading it off a Word doc, you know? That's the real shit! [crosstalk]

**Stacey Stash:** You're like halfway down and you're like, "Dammit, I missed the last move!" [. . .]

**big tara:** I can't even imagine.

**Stacey Stash:** Like, whoever, whoever wrote those Word documents—mad props because that would have taken forever!

**big tara:** Yo. That is dope. They were like, ". . . and then this, and then that" [Stacey Stash: Step 1, 2] [both laugh] I love it. I really would like to see that six-step Word doc.

[. . .] Was there anything else MiRi and [crosstalk] grace wanted us to answer?

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] put down into Heartbreakerz and what was the process?

**big tara:** Ohhh- Aha ha! You know what? Yo. Heartbreakerz is like a firecracker crew—Initially,

I think it was like how real crews start, where people happen to just chill together and then they're like, "Yeah, let's do this. Let's make it official. We're committed to each other," you know? And then, it just expanded, like, because I feel like, what expanded it—so Rokafella's documentary *All the Ladies Say*—she had a little tour-thing, I forgot what she called them, but from that crew—Aruna and Beta were in that crew—and I remember through that crew Aruna got down.

And then I remember, Beta flew up to New York. She's like, "Yeah, let's go to this party," like, "Yo, we want you to be down with Heartbreakerz," and I was like "Hell Yeah!" You know? [. . .] I just remember those stories. Some people battled in—some people battled-in like hardcore. Some people

Beta just put down. Some people Beta put down and the crew was like, “No,” and then they left. Then, we realized as a crew, we all have to be part of the process of putting people down. So it’s shifted from hardcore like, “Unnnhhh! Battle! Yeah!” To now, “Let’s have a conversation. Who are you feeling? Send us her Instagram. Let’s see what we think? Ahhh! We don’t like her!” or, “Oh yeah, yeah, yeah,” You know? But yeah—How did you get down Stash?

**Stacey Stash:** Man, I’m trying to figure out the timeline of when Rocksteady Anniversary was, the year, and whether it was before *She Got Game*, or after.

**MiRi Park:** I looked it up. Rock Steady 30th Anniversary was 2007.

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah. Cool so, then what date? Do you know the date it was?

**big tara:** July.

**MiRi Park:** Yeah, usually July—

**big tara:** It’s usually at the end of July.

**Stacey Stash:** OK, so then [. . .] I had Beta—I mean, the girls that I flew out to *She Got Game* that year were Beta, Vendetta—

**big tara:** Vendetta was in that crew, too, that Rokafella had. Yeah.

**Stacey Stash:** Taya, AT, Narumi, Shie Chan.<sup>9</sup> So I had all the different continents [crosstalk].

**big tara:** Yes! That’s a jam!

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9. B-girls Taya and AT are from Flomo Crew in Finland. B-girls Narumi and Shie Chan are from Japan.

**Stacey Stash:** Anyway, like you said, we're all partying and whatever and Beta and I got along really well. So then that year I went up to New York for Rocksteady. Beta had spoken about me being down with the crew. Ricochet was there, Kaya was there [big tara: Yeah] Yoma—I dunno if Yoma was there. Zoey was there.

**big tara:** Oh, wow. It's a throwback.

**Stacey Stash:** [. . .] I remember Ricochet, she was like, "Yo, Beta told me like you want to get down in the crew, or whatever." And I like, I'm just chillin like, it would be cool to get down. It would be cool not to get down, like, whatever. And she's like, "Well, throw down!" So she made me go jump into the cypher with them and they—I think they still weren't sure about it.

So then after New York, I went to Miami. And that's when Jillian was there, Yoma, and we went to this club. And I remember, I was like, "Oh, yo. Beta wants to put me down," and she was like, "Well, I don't. So get down!"

**big tara:** Ahahahaha!

**Stacey Stash:** And I was like, "Well, all right, well, here we go, then!" So I had to battle with her at the club as well. That was fun. And then from then it was like, yeah, cool. And then after that, Jillian—Yoma—came up to me and was like, "Yeah, dope. Down." So—

**big tara:** Yaay. That's what's up.

**Stacey Stash:** That was '07. Wow. Wow. Yeah.

**MiRi Park:** I just realized that that is the summer that I think for exactly that jam, Beta sublet my—not sublet, but crashed in my

apartment in Harlem, because I had to go away [. . .] And then, when I got back to my apartment, they had left me a bottle of Hpnotiq as a thank you. [laughs] Because it had to be blue liquor, right?

**Stacey Stash:** Yeah, yeah. Of course.

**MiRi Park:** So I was like, “Oh yeah! I think I’m actually connected to this story somehow!”

**Stacey Stash:** I was thinking that’s how I met Melody at *She Got Game* and we found out that we were going to be in New York at the same time. I was friends with Beta from the jam. Yeah, and then it just—  
Yeah.

**MiRi Park:** And tara, you have known Beta for how long?

**big tara:** Yeah, I’ve known Beta since’97. Yeah, we recently posted a picture on our IG. We look like babies. Beta’s like—what do you call it? A shapeshifter. So I’ve seen Beta in so many different shapes.

I remember her really tiny and quiet, and then I remember one time going down to Florida—cuz I went—I started to frequent Florida after September 11 cuz I was like, “Maybe Imma move here, because fuck this.” One time, I went down there, and she was thicker, and she had blue dreadlocks. And then she came up and she [. . .] had her hair all wet, slicked back. She was workin’ the twins and with a leather jacket, and I was like, “Oh shit!” So just seeing her grow up, you know? Yeah, I’ve known Beta super long, and her brothers, the whole family and—Ground Zero, yeah, yeah.

**MiRi Park:** Yeah and also just to shout out that her initial crew was Floor Angelz with Candy, [Stacey Stash: Yeah.] right?

**big tara:** Well, Floor Angelz came out in '98 to Pro-Am. We [Beta and I] did not know who they were. We were like, "Who are these people? Cool. There's twins." And then we're like, "Aww, they're wack!" So we didn't like them at first. I was actually like, "Oh, you're getting down with them? Cool." But I was also surprised like, "Wow." There was a friendship that developed because initially we were mad snobbish about it. We stuck with like the O.G. b-girl thing, like, "Arrgh! Who are those girls?" [Stacey Stash: Yeah.]

**MiRi Park:** All right, well, I think that—I mean, you both covered so much ground. I keep having this image of you guys doing foot-work, like, all over these topics. [laughs]

**big tara:** Yes!



*big tara and Stash at Epstein's in LES (Lower East Side).*



*big tara and Stash at Soul Summit.  
Photos courtesy of big tara.*

## **Contributors**

**tara “big tara” Crichlow** is a New York City native. She is a pioneer in the world of hip hop, best known for her contribution to the art form as an international teacher, performer, and curator who specializes in breaking, hip hop, house, waacking, voguing, lindy hop, and pole dance. big tara is a founding member of the Anomalies

Crew and a member of MAWU, HeartBreakerz, and the 2006 We B\*girlz Championship squad, Fox Force Five. Her career highlights include performances at the Apollo, BB Kings, and Lincoln Center, with Run DMC, the Roots, Erykah Badu, and LL Cool J, and at the events DMC World Championship, Bgirl Be, Ladies Hip Hop Get Down, Under the Radar Festival, Ladies of Hip Hop, J.U.I.C.E. Hip Hop Dance Festival, and Howl Fest. As a member of the U.S. State Department Next Level 3.0 team, she helps to create bonds of peace through hip hop-centered culture and education. She consciously uses her platform to empower women, people of color, and other underrepresented communities.

**Stacey “Stash” Earsman** is a member of b-girl crew Form One Lane, Heartbreakerz, Zulu Kweenz, and previously Fresh Sox. She is the founder of the international b-girl competition *She Got Game*.

Stash started breaking in late 2002. She made an impact on the Australasian b-boy scene as a strong and influential b-girl. *She Got Game* was created in Melbourne in 2007 and hosted again in 2008. In 2010, it was held at the legendary B-Boy Summit, produced by Asia One in Los Angeles. This groundbreaking collaboration was the first time in history that an Australian competition was held internationally in conjunction with an overseas event. Stash relocated to Qatar in the Middle East in 2011, where she worked as a private flight attendant for the royal family up until her move back to Melbourne in late 2018. During her time in the Middle East, Stash travelled extensively throughout the world and now resides in Melbourne, where she co-owns Migrant Coffee with her best friend Melodee Malazarte.

**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, MA American Studies, Columbia, and BFA Dance and BA Journalism, UMass Amherst. 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—for example, windmills, 90s, air flares, swirls, and elbow spins. Sometimes referred to simply as “power.”

**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.”<sup>10</sup> She makes

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10. 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.

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.

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

*\*This list is inclusive of events that are mentioned in this issue of Conversations, and is by no means a comprehensive list of all breaking/street dance battles, events, or practice sessions.*

Battle of the Year (BOTY): event started in 1990 in Hanover, Germany, by Thomas Hergenrother (*Planet B-Boy*. Directed by Benson Lee, 2007, Mondo Paradiso Films.).

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.

Freestyle Session (FSS): started in 1997 in San Diego, CA, by B-boy Cros1 (Christopher Wright).

J.U.i.C.E (Justice by Uniting in Creative Energy): a hip hop culture collective that also holds breaking practices, along with instruction in the other elements.

The Notorious IBE: started in 1998 in the Netherlands.

Rock Steady Anniversary: an annual hip hop event thrown by the Rock Steady Crew that included performances, battles, and exhibitions.

She Got Game: International BGirl Competition founded by Stacey Stash in 2007, held in Australia.

Zulu Anniversary Jams: these are annual jams hosted by the Universal Zulu Nation (UZN). For more information about the significance of UZN, refer to Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. St. Martin's Press, 2005.

## Liner Notes: Imani Kai Johnson

The conversation between b-girls big tara and Stash begins with a not-unexpected reference to a “tomboy streak” and quickly gives way to a rich interweaving of their particular lives from completely different parts of the world. However, the resonances in their experiences signal that they’re b-girls of a similar generation. Both foreground the culture, personal growth, and developing relationships. And though the word “misogyny” doesn’t come up until midway through their exchange, and “racism” even further along, their stories nonetheless activate the nitty-gritty of their gendered, racialized, and classed experiences. From being spat on for entering a cypher to racial epithets thrown around in unchecked minstrelsy, Stash and big tara talk about these experiences with a casualness of everyday life. Yet it is also clear that such incidents animate their narratives as watershed moments that motivated them to stand more firmly in their practice. Their responses share a sensibility: to elevate their craft and maybe their hustle, and offer a hearty F.U. to anyone standing in their way.

When I first came to the interview, I brought big tara and Stash on a walk with me, allowing their voices to fill my headphones. Then I replayed their conversation with background music and sat with them as if we were hanging out. I laughed and mm-hmm’d along, and they used the doublespeak of an in-group conversation held in front of outsiders. For example, both b-girls were cautious to not “name names” in a manner that might instigate drama. In fact, they only named people to give credit. In the end, *so much went unspoken*. Yet I also understand that I never feel totally in the know because I’m not meant to. Both purposefully (publicly) under-articulate certain discussions—for example, tara’s brief reference to predatory behavior—because they are also ambassadors of a culture about which the public still has a lot to learn. And you need much more skin in the game and in the cypher for such disclosures. I appreciate that kind of stance. You should too.

## Author Biographies

**Imani Kai Johnson** is an interdisciplinary scholar whose research focuses on African diasporic ritual cultures, Hip Hop dance in global circulation, and intersections of race, nation, and gender. Her manuscript on breaking cyphers and their epistemological possibilities is forthcoming with Oxford University Press and is titled *Dark Matter in Breaking Cyphers: Africanist Aesthetics in Global Hip Hop*. She has published articles in *Dance Research Journal*, *Alif*, *Women & Performance*, and the *Cambridge Companion to Hip Hop*. Dr. Johnson is the founder and conference chair of the "Show & Prove" Hip Hop Studies Conference Series. She is also the co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies*. She is Assistant Professor of Critical Dance Studies at the University of California, Riverside.