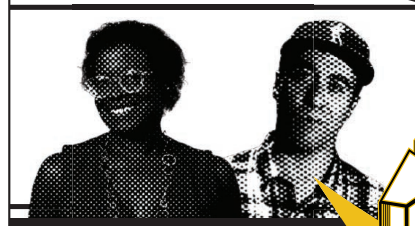




Liner Notes:



Nadine George-Graves
Serouj "Midus" Aprahamian

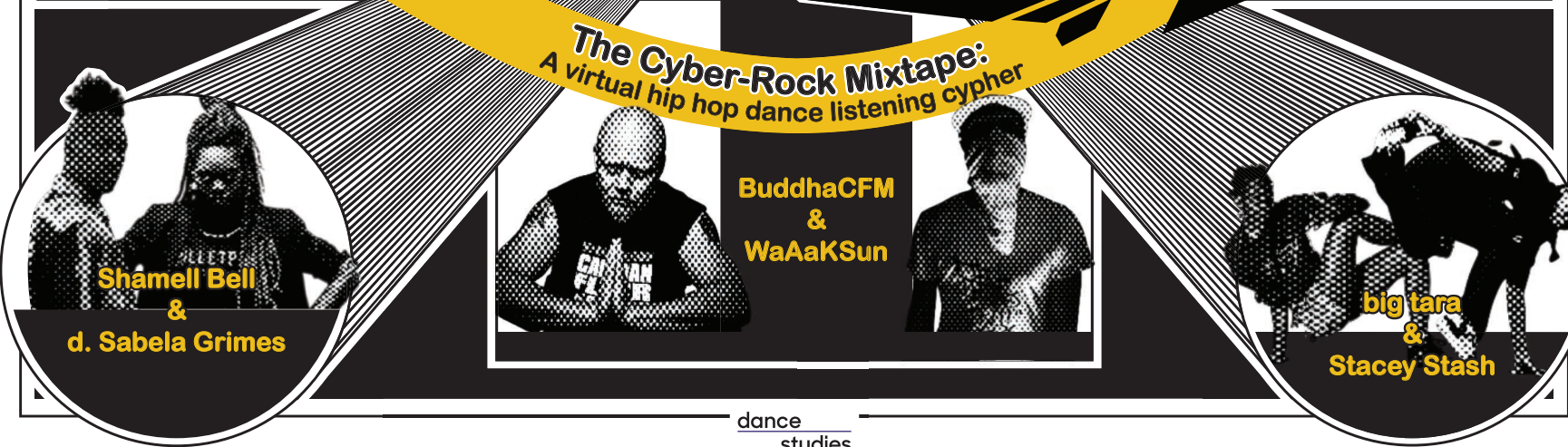
Liner Notes:



Joseph Schloss
Jesse Mills
Imani Kai Johnson

Conversations

Across the Field of Dance Studies



dance
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Transmission—4D Teaching & Learning Hip Hop Dance Styles: Ms. Vee & Buddha Stretch



Buddha Stretch

MopTop/Elite Force Crew



Ms. Vee

EAD/Juilliard/Pace/BDC/LoHH

Transmission: 4D Teaching & Learning Hip Hop Dance Styles, a conversation with Val “Ms. Vee” Ho and Emilio “Buddha Stretch” Austin, Jr. Video recorded and edited by MiRi Park and grace jun, May 3, 2021. Watch the full video here: <https://youtu.be/vYCB-0Yfb6g>

MiRi Park: Hello, welcome, today we’re here with Ms. Vee and Buddha Stretch. Today is Monday, May 3rd. Ms. Vee and Buddha Stretch are joining us in New York and New Jersey respectively and we’re so excited to have you both here for our conversation today. The reason why we wanted to put you both in conversation is because we wanted to hear about your thoughts on the fact that technology has always played a part in transmitting dances and specifically hip hop dances.

When Ms. Vee, and Dr. grace, and I were all younger, we grew up watching MTV, not knowing that we were actually learning your choreography, Stretch, and it was very uni-directional kind of teaching. I think there are a lot of folks who think that this moment, this pandemic moment, and moving—you know, teaching dance online—is this huge monumental thing, when in fact this is something that we’ve kind of all grown up with on two different sides. So we were hoping that you would potentially have a conversation intergenerationally, but also now that you are both teaching on Zoom, primarily. I know Ms. Vee you are now starting to go back in person, face-to-face. I’m not sure about you, Stretch, but, [Buddha Stretch shakes his head] no, not yet.

Ms. Vee: Thanks for the invite. Stretch!

Buddha Stretch: Ms. Vee!

Ms. Vee: Man. I don’t know where—I mean what MiRi said was exactly right, that’s how I started. I—on my VHS machine recorded all—any music videos that had any dancing in it whatsoever. They got recorded and then those were my teachers and most of the moves were, and choreography was, you. I mean not exclusively you, but you know, relationally you. [Buddha Stretch: Right.] In terms of what was happening in the hip hop clubs and in the community, yeah, those were my first teachers: the VCR and MTV.

Buddha Stretch: Well, the funny thing is, we barely had VCRs at the time and our first teachers were television. You know, basically watching TV, seeing things like *Soul Train*, [Ms. Vee: *Soul Train* yeah.] *What’s Happening*¹ and movies, and then you know, trying to do what you saw based on memory. [Ms. Vee: Whoa.] You know, and then hoping that you get to see it again, [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Cuz *Soul Train*

1. 1970s TV series where the character Rerun (Fred Berry, former member of The Lockers) frequently danced on the show. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074071/>

had reruns, of course, all TV had reruns and movies, you know, you would occasionally see it. If it came on once, it will probably come back on, [Ms. Vee: Right.] within another couple of months again. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Unfortunately, back then we didn't have the actual electronic guide, so you could check. [laughs] We actually had to use something called a *TV Guide*. Which was—

Ms. Vee: I remember those, you flip open—[both laughing]

Buddha Stretch: Exactly—the booklet—and you had to scan through it to find out when something was actually coming back on.

Ms. Vee: Oh yeah yeah yeah, that, and they would print it in the paper too, where I'm from. [Buddha Stretch: Yeah.] I would tear that up and highlight, "Okay, these are the shows I want to see and these are the things I want to catch." But also that's so interesting that you say that that's how I—that was my, you know, origin story—the VCR and MTV and I like how you kind of parallel that with the TV and the film that you saw, but also the storytelling that I've been told by a lot of pioneering b-boys and even not just b-boys, like even Archie [Burnett]—that generation not learning actual dance steps but taking influences from like Kung Fu movies. [Buddha Stretch: Yeah.] I remember Ken Swift—the first class I took from him, he said they would go down to Times Square and pay for one movie but stay all day and just go from theater to theater and stay all day and then go home and then try to remember all those moves.

Buddha Stretch: Well, the thing about the movie theaters—

Ms. Vee: And then create from them.

Buddha Stretch: —on 42nd street, the thing about it is if you went in for one movie, that usually it was a three-movie matinee. So if you went in for one movie you could stay and see the other two movies. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] And they would show and then you just

go next door and they had three more movies. And you go down the block and they had three more movies so if you wanted to spend the day watching movies, you could. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] But trying to retain everything that you saw is basically impossible. Imagine you're watching all of this stuff and then when you come out of the movie you feel like you got it down but by the time you get home it's a blur. [Ms. Vee: Yeah, yeah.] Now you don't remember what's what and now you got to just, you know, try to recreate [Ms. Vee: Yeah] what you thought you saw.

Ms. Vee: I even have that experience going to jams or going to parties and seeing people get down and going like, "oh wow, I like what they did there," or "oooo, let me try something like that" and just like, you're mentally cataloguing it, but then you forget everything.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, I mean it's really hard to—[Ms. Vee: Really.] Your memory is—it seems really good at times but it's not what you actually think it is, and especially when it comes to movement—and in particular because you look at something and you think, "That's great. I could do that," and if you have it in front of you, yeah you could probably do it, but try to do it like an hour or so later, you don't remember the mechanics of it. You only have a visual like flash of it in your head so then it's like, "oh damn." You're trying to do something that you think that you saw, and like you said with the advent of the VCR then it was just, the beauty of the VCR and your ability to retain depended on how good the videotape was. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Cuz I remember—

Ms. Vee: And the editing too.

Buddha Stretch: —yeah, when I first got into locking, I was serious about it. Disco Dave² brought me, I think it was literally, like,

2. David Sarul—Disco Dave

10 tapes of The Lockers,³ Electric Boogaloo,⁴ *Soul Train*, and I was literally watching these tapes all night, every night, fast forwarding, rewinding, slow motion [Ms. Vee: Slow motion.] just looking at the tapes over and over and over again, to try to get the nuances. And for me that was my introduction to actually learning locking properly, you know? Prior to that it was trying to do, remember what I saw on *What's Happening*, remember what I saw on *Soul Train*, remember the people that I knew that could actually lock, things that they did, but not actually knowing any of it. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] And then watching these tapes and then learning the nuances of Don [Campbell], of Greg, God bless the dead, of Gogo, of [Toni] Basil, of Shabba Doo, God bless the dead. Watching how each one of them did the same move, but in a different way—[Ms. Vee: Different way, yeah.] and without a VCR, I would've never been able to do that. [Ms. Vee: You can't catch all that.]

Buddha Stretch: It's just impossible. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Without actually meeting them and studying under them, it's no way to know that. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] So that was our original way of learning. I mean the funniest thing about it is, if you look at *Thriller*. *Thriller* is—here is it what, almost 40 years later and kids are still learning *Thriller*. Michael [Jackson]'s been dead over a decade and there are little kids who know every aspect of that video. Because they've been able to watch and learn through video.

Ms. Vee: It's an archive. [Buddha Stretch: Yeah.] These videos eventually become an archive, yeah, yeah. And then there was like a VCR or VHS kind of era I guess, because like, you know, I would, I was trying to get, same thing, I was trying to get my hands on

3. The Lockers crew included "Don Campbellock" Campbell, Greg "Campbellock Jr." Pope, Anthony "Gogo" Foster, Toni Basil, Adolfo "Shabba Doo" Quiñones <https://campbellock.dance/>

4. The Electric Boogaloo Lockers was a crew from Fresno, CA founded by Boogaloo Sam: <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/popping-history-electric-boogaloos-members>

any kind of tapes I could whether it was from, you know B-Boy Summit or I know I have Pro-Am '98 somewhere in my house. [Buddha Stretch: Right.] And then dancers would produce their own tapes—

Buddha Stretch: Like Freestyle Session, like Wiggz's [Mr. Wiggles]—his videos.

Ms. Vee: Wiggz, yeah yeah, all those and you're just trying to get your hands on anything because the technology didn't exist for you to see everybody else, like there is no YouTube, there is no—you had to travel to go to see these dancers dance live.

Buddha Stretch: If there was a place for you to actually do that.

Ms. Vee: If there yeah—

Buddha Stretch: Because B-Boy Summit and all of the—

Ms. Vee: if you had the means to get there.

Buddha Stretch: —didn't start until later.

Ms. Vee: Yeah, and if you had the means.

Buddha Stretch: And if you had the means to get there. Not just get there, but have a place to stay and be able to eat and pay for admission. So it was a tricky proposition. I remember the first B-Boy Summit I went to, we didn't go the first few days. I caught the very last day, the Sunday and that was 2003. I caught the Sunday and then I went to a—what is it—Homeland on Monday. And it was so much fun, you know, getting to, like we have more fun at Homeland than I actually had at B-Boy Summit.

And then the craziest thing about that, we're talking about videos, dancing at Homeland that Monday, I was being followed around by a guy who would actually become a friend of mine,

Nishi, he had his own studio. He was literally following me around with his video camera, recording everything that I did. And when he, that got back to Japan, that made the rounds as a videotape and multiple people got to see, got to see, me dancing at B-Boy Summit and Homeland and that led to a company, ADHIP that does the contest Dance Delight, actually requesting me to come back to Japan to judge. [Ms. Vee: Whoa.] All based on, [Ms. Vee: That guy had foresight.] all based on his videotape, [Ms. Vee: Buddha Stretch Volume 1.] of me dancing, then him sharing it on VHS, you know, and videotape to other people and them sharing it, and then these guys at ADHIP seeing, oh wow, Buddha Stretch is, we got to get him to come back.

Ms. Vee: Wow, wow, yeah. And then I guess the evolution after that was YouTube, is YouTube. When was YouTube?

Buddha Stretch: 2005, yeah. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Yeah, YouTube was a game changer. I mean, having access to, well the ability to upload videos is one thing, but then having access to videos just by searching for them. Stuff that you would imagine or wouldn't think that you would see online and then suddenly it's online and being able to go back and look. Like I've seen footage of shows we did in Japan that I never saw when I was in Japan. [Ms. Vee: Whoa.] And somebody uploaded it to YouTube and it's the same show that I know 'cause we did it, but it's a totally different angle than any other [Ms. Vee: Right.] video that I've seen and I'm like, "Wow, who had this angle? [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Wow, where they at, to shoot this and the same thing I've seen footage of when we were practicing to go to Japan?" [Ms. Vee: Whoa.] And we were with some dancers here in the city and they had a hidden camera and they were filming our practices. Then years later somebody uploads the VHS version of that and puts it on YouTube and I happen to see it like, "Whoa, when the hell did this happen and who had the camera?"

Ms. Vee: Yeah that's crazy. It's also like, my perception of it, because you know, because I came through the VHS/VCR kind of era, and then so like that's kind of my entry point right. So that's how I came to the dance. That's how I discovered the dance, and the music, and then [it] eventually started for me just finding other people in my area where I was, finding other people who also were interested in the dance and doing the dance and just like exchanging with them. We had to teach each other, there were no classes in the early '90s anywhere, and so it was just like this exchange of information. Until classes started popping up kind of in the mid '90s-ish.

Buddha Stretch: But we actually had classes here in New York. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] They had classes at Broadway Dance Center. Ejoe [Wilson] had a House class, I can't remember the name of the studios right around the corner from PMT was.

Ms. Vee: [cupping her mouth to reiterate] I'm from Vancouver, Canada. [both laugh]

Buddha Stretch: Yeah. where PMT was. So we had some classes here, but yeah for the most part, yeah there was definitely, you know, no way to, no place to physically go where there was someone teaching in most of the world, I mean. Thank Robin [Dunn] for that, for you know coming up with the idea here to have class. But I mean it's funny because it's the same way, it's the same concept like how I learned to count and to teach was from watching Debbie Allen. [Ms. Vee: yeah] You know, watching her on Fame, the TV show, and seeing how she ran the class, seeing how she taught. That was my blueprint for how to do, like if I get put in this position, do like Debbie did, that was my whole blueprint and mindset and then to understand that, you know, it's not like I can rewind the TV show so I have to retain all of what I see from Fame each week. I literally have to sit there and study it and keep

it in the back of my mind, because this is what I think I need to know to create what I'm going to need to do as a performer—like watching her run the school and teach—and the counts and placement, all of these are things that I learned without actually knowing that I'm learning. I'm just watching this show and then when I have to, when I get put on the spot of, "Oh we want you to perform at this club and we need you to put a show on each week," and the guy said that "you're the choreographer" and I'm like, "how did I become the choreographer?" "Oh because you know how to count." [Both laugh] And how did I learn how to count?

Ms. Vee: That's how you became the choreographer? I love that story.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, I mean they picked me because I knew how to count. Whenever we would dance together—

Ms. Vee: Right. You said, "5-6-7-8."

Buddha Stretch: Yeah I would be the, okay "1, 2,- 5, 6" like I knew how to count. I knew how to organize us and how to put the movements to music and understand the mechanics, so that made me the choreographer even though I'd never done any choreography.

Ms. Vee: That's, I've also heard storytelling I think it was, it was more than one person. Like I know Skeeter Rabbit said this in the first class I took from him and a b-boy—I think it was even Flo Master maybe—they were like, "We didn't know 5-6-7-8." Greg [Campbell Jr.] said this too, all of them, so it's like this kind of like overarching theme of like dancers, street dancers, they're just like they don't know 5-6-7-8, they just go "ready, go" [Buddha Stretch: Right.] and that was their 5-6-7-8.

Buddha Stretch: But that's the theme from all the way from—[Ms. Vee: All the way back.] Lindy Hop and vernacular jazz. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.]

You know, listen, if you listen to Frankie [Manning] and what's her name, God bless the dead, Norma Miller, they say they didn't do anything with counts. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Everything was just based on movement and timing and off of each other. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] They didn't use counting, they used, they moved on rhythm and timing and that was the thing. When we used to dance in the park and in the clubs, we did the same thing. The only reason I knew anything about counting again is because watching Debbie Allen and figuring out that, okay this is the way that if I want to show somebody what I'm doing, I need to put this in a frame of reference that they can relate to. That was the only reason I knew how to count.

Ms. Vee: It's just a map, a map of the music. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, is just a map.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, and it's only because of watching Debbie Allen I'm sayin'. If I never watched that show I'd be in the same, you know I'd be in that same category of, oh yeah, just you know moving by the rhythm. I have no idea what the count is.

Ms. Vee: Yeah, no, that's fascinating. But do you think, so do you ever get students who like come to your class and then, you know, they come talk to you after and like, oh yeah, you know they look like they know what they're doing, but then you look closely at what they're doing, and you're like, you don't, you kind of have an idea, but you don't really have an idea. I get these students and then they can talk to me and then, you know, I say "oh yeah where have you learned" and they say "um YouTube."

Buddha Stretch: Well, I mean, I went through that for years with, you know, people that have watched videos and then come to class and they're like, [Ms. Vee: Right.] "Man, it was a lot easier on the video." And I'm like, well yeah, I mean you're watching the video and it just seems like yeah, it's really easy, but once you get into class and you get into, you know, actual—the nuance of the

move, because on the video it's one thing, and I've always told that to people. You're trying to capture a four-dimensional action in a two-dimensional image. You're going to lose a lot, you know, unless you can get that information, the other two dimensions you're missing, directly from the person in that video. You're going to always miss. I don't care how good you are, how well you could copy. Copying the feeling of something, you can't do that, you can copy the movement of it, but the feeling is something else.

Ms. Vee: Yeah, yeah, and then there's like, I would say there's like maybe a fifth dimension to it. I would argue that like, so, you know, say somebody's learning your choreography off of a video; that's choreography, that's just a sequence of steps, like do know what those steps are, do you know what that vocabulary is, do you know, that's a different thing.

Buddha Stretch: It's a whole different conversation. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] Well, yeah, I mean that's, with the advent of YouTube that's what used to come up a lot. People saw something on YouTube and they immediately said, "well, this is what it is cause that's what I saw on YouTube. And you know my answer always to that was, "okay, but I was doing this before YouTube, so if that's your answer to it, what is mine, because I was doing it before YouTube existed and this is how we did it." And I would go on YouTube and find the clip of us doing it, prior to YouTube and say "okay here, this is us doing it then, what do you say now that you've seen it on YouTube." Now it's the same thing, it's funny to me because that was the argument on YouTube but now that's the argument for like TikTok. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] You know people see it—

Ms. Vee: It's moving to different technologies.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, moving to different platforms, but it's essentially the same thing that's like—and now you have some things

that are named after what people have seen on television without actually knowing the history of the step—like a what is the, the mom and her daughters⁵ and they do all the hip hop stuff. [Ms. Vee: Yeah I saw that one.] And she has, she calls this the Aunt Viv⁶ [arms bent at the elbows moving up and down] and the Mary J vibe and I'm laughing because those are actual dance steps. But if you don't, if you're not in that, if you don't have that information, you're going to come up with what you can relate to at the time, which is, you know, nothing wrong with that.

Ms. Vee: Cultural reference versus, like [Buddha Stretch: Yeah.] reference that the community uses.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah it's not far off, but it's just, you know, it shows you that people really get into what they see, [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] you know and they really are looking for a reference, [Ms. Vee: Right.] you know, and the only reason you need a reference is because you want to share it, and that's what I tell people all the time. That goes back to the importance of terminology, you know, and in vocabulary [simultaneously]. It's like if you meet someone, how do you introduce them if—they have a name. And that name denotes a history, you know, a person, there's so much behind it, so when you're sharing something with someone, you really need to know the name of it or to have something as a reference that they can relate to. That's why a lot of the names of the steps are named after, you know, characters or TV shows or something like that. It's because that's an easy frame of reference for someone to remember. So I always laugh when me and Uko [Snowbunny] are teaching—

Ms. Vee: So wait a second, what is the Aunt Viv called?

5. Viral video of a mom and daughter dancing old school moves <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UR84WNgwf4>

6. Aunt Viv from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, Dance at 1:27 <https://youtu.be/l22GgsIfba0>

Buddha Stretch: It's the skate.⁷ [Ms. Vee: Ok. Oh yeah I see it. I see it.]
It's the skate, if you're just doing this with it [arms are up and bent
at the elbows, moving them up and down]

Ms. Vee: It's like a different vibe with it, yeah.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, she's just doing her arms with it, but it's the
skate. But I love it, because I remember that episode of Aunt Viv.⁸

Ms. Vee: It's so good. [Both laughing] In the unitard.

Buddha Stretch: And when I saw that reference, I was like ok, I get it,
she's using what Aunt Viv was in the studio getting down, I was
like okay. So now I can't help myself [keeps dancing and laughing]
when we're teaching, me and Uko sometimes, I'll start just—and
hit that Aunt Viv and we just do it anyway because it's just fun to
do. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] And I'll still teach people if they had, like oh
yeah, they'll call it the Aunt Viv and I'll give them the reference
for it but then give them the actual name—[Ms. Vee: The origi-
nal.] You know the original name of it and the history behind it.

Ms. Vee: But she didn't make it up, she was just doing it, she was do-
ing something—

Buddha Stretch:—exactly—

Ms. Vee: —that was being done. In her own way, with her own styling.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, I mean, but that's the beautiful thing about it.
The beautiful thing about it is, it's okay to call it the Aunt Viv, as
long as you know that there was something else that it was called
previous. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] And then the beautiful, really beautiful

7. Buddha Stretch demonstrating the skate https://youtu.be/Wk_Ti4oXa2c

8. The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Season Two, Episode Seven. [https://www.imdb.com/
title/tt0583041/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0583041/)

part is, once you get that information, it makes doing the Aunt Viv even more fun, cause now you start to reference all the things that you know about it. And see, okay, if I do the Aunt Viv okay, if I do it with this, that's the skate. If I do it like this, you know it becomes a whole journey into the information.

Ms. Vee: Yep, yeah, that's something that's something Greg [Campbelllock Jr.] taught me actually. The first time I had a session with him, I was out in LA and he invited me over [makes a surprised face], HUUUU, I'm gonna go to Greg's house. I'm going to learn everything that I'm missing in locking and I'm going to learn all these things, and he, like, I went over there, and he was like, "I'm not going to teach you anything new," and I was like, "what?! What do you mean?" In my heart, I didn't say that out loud, but in my heart, I was, "No, I want you to teach me everything," you know. He's like, "no, no, no, no, you're just going to learn all about all the stories. I'm going to tell you the stories about how this move was invented and why this move is and when you know all that information, what how you do what you do change". [Buddha Stretch: Exactly.] And you know I didn't get it 'till later, and I was like, that was genius. And now when I teach, I just try to share as much information as I can. This is the story of hip hop, or this is the story of the move, or this is the story of this [leans back with arms crossed], what does this mean [places hand at her forehead] you know, like it all has meaning.

Buddha Stretch: And it makes for me, it makes the dance that much more interesting cause it's, now you're moving beyond just the moves, but what that move means, you know.

Ms. Vee: It's below, yeah, if you're just doing the movement, it's just, you're scratching the surface of the thing. It's like it's purely physical and superficial even. [right hand is scratching and moving over the top of her left hand]

Buddha Stretch: Very superficial, you know, but once you get into the story—The funny thing is, sometimes people are more interested in the stories than the actual dance. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] You know when I use, I always use Don Campbell and the creation of locking as a reference point. [Ms. Vee: Oh yeah.] You know, and I tell them that Don wasn't trying to lock, he was trying to do a totally different dance, 50 years ago that no one does now. [Ms. Vee: Nobody.] No one even remembers how to do that dance that way, if you're not from Don's generation or unless you've studied it. But everyone knows what locking is. So that's what you want to do. You want something that you've put into the lexicon of information and movement that we have here in street dance to take a life of its own, to become, you know, to become something so special that it becomes something bigger than the original one. And if you're blessed to do that, then you'll understand just how great it is to do, to take what's there and build on top of it, instead of, you know, people are trying to be so original and for me it's like you're trying to be original only because you're too lazy to learn what's in front of you. That's your excuse now, like, "Oh I'm doing my own style." Well if it's your own style, then what do you call it?

Ms. Vee: I've heard that from younger dancers a lot.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah. I've heard that several times over.

Ms. Vee: And really talented dancers, really, really talented dancers and they'll say things like, "Yeah, I don't know." They don't bother with technique or vocabulary or learning. They're just doing whatever they want and, oh yeah, I mean it's really hard—[Buddha Stretch: But that's the thing about teaching—] Like, from my generation, it's really hard to hear that because when I was coming up and everybody in my generation that was coming up it was all about, "know your foundation," "know your history," know all these things so that you're connecting. So to hear young

dancers who are really, really talented and really good at what they do, just kind of like, “I don’t need that . . . I don’t even call what I do a [style]. I’m just doing me. I’m not doing one style or that style. I’m like, I’m just doing me.” And they are, but it just makes me fearful of, “Okay, is this person going to teach, then? And what are they going to teach if they teach?”

Buddha Stretch: Well see, I don’t worry about that because that all leads them back to me. Because they have—okay you’re doing your thing, and you don’t know what this is, know what that is, “I’m just doing me,” you have five minutes worth of information and you’re trying to teach a 90-minute class. And if you teach more than one 90-minute class, that five minutes of information you maybe can stretch to 15 minutes, but eventually people are going to ask you, “Well, where does that come from? What is it connected to? How does it connect to the music? What’s the culture behind it?” Well, you’re dancing to this music, but you say it’s this style, well there’s a dance that goes with this music and so that all leads back to [me]. I’ll explain this for you.

Ms. Vee: Hopefully, because it really—I feel like it’s really incumbent on the dancer to seek out that information. That’s what I did. I had my entry point, my VCR and MTV, and the people that were in my city, in my community. We exchanged information, but our information was so limited because of the time we were in and so it was really just my entry point. And then when I found Wiggles, and I found other people to learn from, I eventually found you, and I moved to New York, and the reason why I moved to New York is this is where hip hop was birthed. I was doing, I’m still doing, a deep dive. I feel like I’m still in the middle of my deep dive. [. . .] so I feel like it’s incumbent on the dancers to seek out that information and now because it’s so—the entry points, so it went from the VCR to YouTube to now it’s TikTok. The entry point keeps getting easier and easier and easier. And so there’s a wider audience and so because there’s more people involved

in the dance or trying to be involved in the dance—yeah, I don't know. I just hope that there's types of—that there's dancers out there that are just going to seek out the information to do their own deep dives.

Buddha Stretch: Well, that's one of the things that I'm most proud about, is we're in the age of information and so as you said, the technology has changed people's introduction to the dance. But the technology cannot—it can introduce you, but it can't give you a—it's not going to give you—again, it can show you the movement, it can't show you the feeling that created the movement. For that you need oral history, you need collaborative communication between people. [Ms. Vee: Need to go to the parties.] Yeah, well that's what I'm leading up to. You need the original social network, which is the party.

So, [Ms. Vee: Yes.] one of the things that I've noticed since the advent of YouTube and now you know Facebook and Instagram and the Vine and what is it—the other one I can't remember before TikTok. Ah, anyway I can't remember, but with the advent of all of these platforms and technology, it leads people to the same point, because they get to a point where it's like, "Okay I got this," [Ms. Vee: Yeah, now what?] "Is there anything more?" [Ms. Vee: Yeah yeah.] and once they find out that there is more, then that opens them up to search it.

And then once they search and they start to learn, then it becomes an entire different—they have an entirely different perspective of the dance and the culture and then they start to see the connections and then it opens their minds up, which in turn opens other people's minds up that they're connected to, and so it just leads everybody on the same journey. [Ms. Vee: Okay]. It actually—

Ms. Vee: You're giving me hope. Thanks. [laughs]

Buddha Stretch: I mean for me—

Ms. Vee: I'm always wary—of these. [laughs]

Buddha Stretch: I used to feel the same way about like a—like the dance contest like Hip Hop International, all that. [Ms. Vee: Right.] Like, people are doing these contests and it's, you know, becoming basically like a cheerleading thing or gymnastics competition and so people are like, "Oh man. You should be involved in these competitions, blah blah blah," and I'm like, "Naw, it's okay." I don't need to go directly; indirectly I'll just say what I got to do and keep doing what I'm doing. It's going to come around. Because at some point they're going to realize that they're missing something. All of what they think that they're doing is not what they actually think they're doing. Eventually, they're going—something is going to be the catalyst to show them, well, this thing that you're calling hip hop isn't actually hip hop.

And that's what—that for me that's what would actually happen, I just had to sit back and wait and watch and have faith. For me it was really strange at first because I remember Moncell [Durden] and Terry [Wright] and Brian, Brian Green they were all adamant, like, "Naw. We're going to this place and we're gonna—we scream and we're gonna let them know." And I'm like, "Naw I'm not going. Go ahead." And they were adamant in the cr—They were criticizing how it was run, but I'm like, you can critique it, but you can only critique it so far. They can't do what they don't know. They can only go as far as they don't—eventually they'll have to know and if you have patience, it'll pay off.

For me it was totally different in that I didn't take part in any of the competitions but I still took part in it, in that I got called by a group from Trinidad who—they had been in the competition for years and could never get past second place, third and second place. They kept coming up short and they kept wondering why. And so someone told someone else that they needed to get these guys in touch with me, that I had the information to show them what they needed to go on in order to win. And so in my

discussion with them, I was like, "Okay, what do you want me to do?" And it was like, "Well, we need to learn what some of these styles are." They didn't know what popping was. They didn't know what house was. They didn't know what hip hop was. They thought they did, but they didn't. [Ms. Vee: Right.] And so they flew me out to Trinidad and I worked with these guys for a week or so and I literally had to teach them, go through each style. [Ms. Vee: Wow.] We spent one—we spent the first day, like, two hours just, I was just teaching them how to lock. The basics and locking. And they're like, "Whoa." And then I'm teaching them how to pop, and just a technique like, "man we don't—They put these things in the rules, but we don't know what these things are." And I'm like, "Well yeah, that's because they don't know what these things are either, they're just throwing them in there."

And it made me laugh, because when we got to hip hop and I saw what they were doing, they were doing acrobatic stuff but I'm like, "But you guys can't dance." And they're like, "What do you mean we can't dance?" I was like, "You're doing a lot of acrobatic stuff, but where's the feeling of what you're doing? Once you've done that, hooray, and then what else is there? Where do you actually dance where the crowd feels like they want to dance, too?"

And then they started to understand. Then as we went through more and more stuff that—especially when we got past hip hop into house, they were like, "We didn't know there was a dance associated with the music." I'm like, "Well, yeah, now you do know. The music goes back. I mean, there's a dance associated with every kind of music, why would[n't] there be one with this?" So they were astounded and, long story short, the next year they came in second again. The following year, they won the whole thing. And when they won, they just so happened to tell people, "Well, we did train with Buddha Stretch." And that got my name into the Hip Hop International lexicon and people were, you know—Then I got to judge one, I think it was in Poland, and then

judge another one. And then they finally invited me to judge the finals here in the States.

But my point is, it was eventually—as I said before, that five minutes of information is only going to take them but so far and it eventually will lead you back to someone who can actually teach you where this stuff comes from, and then they start to value that information. Because now it actually means something. Because now, the kids that are coming into the competitions, now they're learning online, "Oh. Well, in the rule book it says we need to know what locking is." They've done their research. Locking is from Southern California, Don Campbell and the Lockers, and so they have a reference point. And they have a reference point for popping. They have a reference point for breaking.

So now their parents are demanding like, "Well, where are these people? Where's that information? How to—where can we get to the source?" And it leads them all back this way. So you know that gave me hope much in the same way. Once I got into the whole Hip Hop International thing and that bled into all of the other big competitions, UDL [Urban Dance League] and all that stuff—The same thing, it's like, "Oh, we need to get this guy because he knows, as a judge, he knows what he's looking at, he could judge on the skill level or the performance level and blah blah blah." So for me, it came to the point where everywhere that I'm going, it's like people are like, "No, no, no, no we're good, we do this and blah, blah, blah." Okay cool, do that. And then maybe six months later it's like all of those people are coming back to class, "Umm we want to learn." And I'm like, "So you were doing your thing and now you need to get some of this. Okay. I'll help you, I'll show you."

Ms. Vee: Yeah, how do you feel like your Zoom classes are going, cause now, cause with the pandemic and with Zoom, you don't gotta travel anywhere. You used to—your passport was like 50

pages thick. Stamps everywhere. You were never in New York. You were always globetrotting.

Buddha Stretch: Yep. I'm still globetrotting. Just from my living room. [Ms. Vee: Yeah. {laughs}] Most of my classes are international or basically national also. I'm teaching people from all over. In class today, I had people from Japan. I had some people from—a person from Cyprus, from Boston, from—

Ms. Vee: Oh, I can take it now, the BDC [Broadway Dance Center] moved my class to Tuesdays, so now my Monday is free and we don't conflict anymore.

Buddha Stretch: Okay, yeah. I had a bunch of people from different places from—I had a little girl from Ireland. [Ms. Vee: ohh.] Yeah from the—I had some people from the UK, from Romania. I get all of the places that I've been. Those are the people that are taking my class and I'm getting new students all the time from overseas. For my Saturday classes, I have a group of girls from Denmark I think it is. [Ms. Vee: Great.] Yeah, I've got people from Canada. Got people from the West Coast. I've had people from—I get different people from Japan. I've had—last year I taught a couple of classes in China, which were a real pain in the ass because they weren't on Zoom, but was this other platform they had where they didn't tell me that I wouldn't be able to see the people there, they would just be able to see me. So I was just like, "What?! Okay." It was like Instagram [. . .] teaching the class and people are typing asking questions like, "Can you do that move again?" [Ms. Vee: Ohh.] It was crazy, but I mean, it's been a blessing, just the fact that I've gotten to teach people from all over. It feels like I'm traveling but I'm not traveling, I'm just in house. And I've had to develop a different way of teaching because, you know, it's—

Both: two dimensional.

Ms. Vee: Four dimensions to two dimensions.

Buddha Stretch: —you know, so it's a different skill set but it's been a blessing. I've adapted pretty well and I'm still learning and adapting and trying to make it better. But it's been great. And the craziest thing is a lot of my students are asking since it's about to be the second summer, everybody's like, "Uhh looks like the US is opening up, are you going to continue?" And I'm like, "I'm not going anywhere." I'm not getting on a plane to go anywhere or do anything so it's cool. Even if I do go somewhere, I could still pull up Zoom at any moment on my computer and continue my class so—[Ms. Vee: Yeah yeah yeah.] I remember last year watching Sekou [Heru] teach and [Ms Vee: He's got a good class] Cebo [Terry Carr] teaching and wondering like, "Man, how are they doing this?" And then wondering—Talking with [Henry] Link and Caleaf [Sellers] and they're like, "Naw, we're not teaching online, I don't like online teaching." And I was like, "Ehhh, I don't know." And then having some students of mine from Switzerland and they literally, the day-of, wrote me, "Um, would you be—" "Would you teach us a class on Zoom?" I was like okay, the decision has been made for me, you know there's no debate now. I was thinking about it, but now I actually have a request. [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] And that was my—that was the catalyst for me to start teaching on Zoom. [Ms. Vee: Yeah yeah.] And it was—it's still a trip now, but I'm happy I did it.

Ms. Vee: I remember my first Zoom class I—when I pressed "Leave Meeting," I just collapsed to the floor, it was so exhausting.

[Both laugh]

Ms. Vee: I'm yelling at the computer but they can't hear me but I'm still yelling and I can barely see them. I've really upped my Zoom game. I've got a wireless mic and I connect my computer to the TV so that I don't have to squint to see anyone. I can see everybody and now because I'm on a mic, I can cue over the music and

at the same time which is even more powerful than I found as a teacher than being in a room and the music is blasting and like trying to speak over the music is like almost impossible sometimes, if you want to feel the music, or if you want the students to feel the music. [Buddha Stretch: Right.] So yeah, the mic was a game changer for me and being able to give real-time corrections as they're doing it, as they're moving—yeah, you know, we adapt. We all adapt. It got a lot easier after that first one.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, I mean, for me the game-changer was like you said—For me, it was—I had my what-do-you-call-it, iMac, so I had them on that, [and it] crashed on me.

Ms. Vee: Yeah yeah, you need a bigger screen, yeah.

Buddha Stretch: Mine crashed on me, so I had to literally move that, take my TV out of my bedroom and once I put it on the TV, I was like, even if I fix the iMac, I'm not going back. It's so much better on the TV. [Ms. Vee: So much better, yeah.] Yeah, sorry, correction: [it was] Uko who said take the TV out from the bedroom and use it out here. And I've never—I haven't even tried to fix the iMac since. It's still sitting on the floor. That was the game-changer for me, was being able to DJ my classes live while I'm teaching so I can—The program has a built-in mic, so I can adjust the music, they can hear me, the music's crystal clear and I can teach, I can DJ, I can play different things. I can stop. I can share the screen and show clips so if I'm demonstrating a step or if I want them to see that like a—for today—God bless, it's James Brown's birthday—so I want them to see James Brown doing his version of the James Brown. And then we go into the apple jack and so I can pull up and share the screen and show them that and then go back and then play, go through six or seven James Brown songs.

And so for me that was the game-changer for me, was learning to use Zoom, for the music and sharing the screen and being

able to do it all on the damn TV was so much better. Because like you said, doing this on the screen [leans close up into view] is not fun. [Ms. Vee: No, no.] Even on the iMac it was much bigger and I can see, but it's so much better on the television.

Ms. Vee: Yeah and it does feel like you're in some way, you're there with them, versus just little boxes on your computer screen. [Buddha Stretch: Right.] It does feel like, "Oh, look this—there's people here with me. Okay, cool."

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, the thing that I love the most is you know, being able to share music, seeing people's immediate reaction when I play something and they're like, "Ooo." Then they get hype and I'm like there it is, that's what I'm talking about, you know? Playing songs for Saturday's class—I just went through a bunch of stuff that I didn't normally play. But I was in one playlist and I was like, "Okay, okay, we're going to do it differently this time. Each person I'm going to play different music for." So I'm playing th—it and everybody in the class is like, "Oh oh oh ooo, oh I want this song! Oh I love that song! Oh I miss that song! Oh what is that song?" So for me, that, sharing the music makes up for us not being in the same space.

Ms. Vee: Yeah yeah, so important, the music.

Buddha Stretch: And being able to play the music live and to DJ. I'll be in at the end of my classes—For the last two months, I give them five minutes and I'm like, "For five minutes, you have to apply everything that we learned in the class." And I mix live music and they have to dance to live music. They don't know what I'm playing. They don't know what's coming, and it's the atmosphere like if you're at a jam, or if you're at a party. So you're getting the music and you're in the moment. So that for me is, you know, that was the game changer for me to share—Because for years, I've been telling people like, there's nothing better than being

together in the moment, and now we can't be together in the moment, so what the hell am I talking about? Well, this is what I'm talking about and I'm still able to convey that with the music, so that's the most important part of it for me, but that was the one thing that last year in the midst of starting this thing in the pandemic was, "How do I convey what I've been teaching all this time now through this damn screen?" And I'm—you know, again, it's a blessing to be able to do it and to have done it now for over a year and I'm like, "All right. Well, we're moving pretty well." And I keep saying to people, "Man, when we do get back in the room, you guys are going to be really fucked up because everything that we're doing on here, once we do it live, it's a whole 'nother thing."

Ms. Vee: Yeah. That sounds like some next level shit right there, next level Zooming.

How's my teaching changed? I think I've simplified a lot. It's even simplified my choreography—simplified. I haven't—my structure of my class hasn't really changed, and my structure has always been: there's a good long warm up, half hour to 45 minutes. It's infused with grooves and technique and some drilling in there. And after the warm up is over, I spend 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the class length of doing, drilling vocabulary. So I'll break down some vocabulary steps—whatever they are, the terminology, the storytelling behind it—we'll break that down, we'll drill it, and then only after we've done like this good amount of foundational vocabulary technique-driven things, we do choreography, in which the choreography will have those things that we just drilled in the drilling section. So that's my structure of class. That's never changed and it doesn't change from style to style. I was teaching locking, it's the same thing. If I'm teaching popping, it's the same thing.

Right now, I'm only teaching a hip hop class through BDC, but because the medium is the way it is. I'm not doing any kind of

crazy choreography that's really super complex or, not that I ever was before, but even compared to what I was doing before, it's like completely simplified from there. I would say most of the time my choreography is, I mean it was always very old-school-based but classics like that the party dance era—so the 80's and 90's—and so I've kind of found a niche in that and offering that information, just because I—the kids could teach me what's going on right now. I don't know what's going on, right? I'm not on TikTok. I don't know what's going on right now. So instead of offering the information that's like contemporary and current, I like to go backwards to fill in the gaps of if you weren't born before 2000 and you didn't experience these dances and they're not part of your lexicon, and so I always just tend to go backwards. And part of it is a bias, because that's the age I grew up in, the late 80s and early 90s. Or all through the 90s, really. But also it feels like it's the easier thing to teach, and the more necessary thing to teach too. Just like, "Hey, here's the history and vocabulary behind these dances."

Yeah, I guess that's how I've shifted also because the reason for the simplification of it is because in the beginning, when I was teaching from home, if I face the camera I would have to mirror myself so that they could copy me, right? And then if I turned around my back to the camera, then they could follow. I could do the choreography as it was originally set, but once I turn around because I want to be able to see them do it, but I also want to give them a reference point to do it. So I would have to flip it, all the choreography in my brain. Zoom teaching has seriously maybe given me dyslexia. I don't know my right from my left.

[Both laugh]

But because I had to mirror myself as soon as I faced the camera, I had to make—I had to simplify the choreography, so wouldn't be like, okay, now we're twisting this way, and now we're doing this, and I didn't do any of this stuff. So for me the

easiest thing to do was what was most familiar in my body, which was the dances that I grew up on. [Buddha Stretch: Mmm hmm.]

Part two, question number two, was for you, Stretch. Mariah Carey.

Buddha Stretch: Well, first and foremost, I mean that has more to do with the directors than—[Ms. Vee: Interesting.] I can't take credit for that. It was something that I always suggest when we're shooting videos. I always suggested that if you want to capture the feeling of the dance, you need to show the dance. So that *chop-chop-chop-chop* [editing], you're not going to capture any of the feeling of it. If you show the step, you're going to capture it, because everything that we do is going to enhance the music. We're going to dance like we're dancing in a club and that's the feeling that's going to transfer in the video, if you show what we're doing. So in "Dreamlover"⁹ you see us doing that, the butterfly and the bogle and all that, so you want to do it because it goes with it and they actually show it.

Ms. Vee: That one was on heavy rotation on my VCR. [Buddha Stretch: Yeah, so you know—] Basically, the videos where I could see the dancing were the ones that were on heavy rotation, because I hated those—all videos that were *chop-chop-chop-chop-chop*. And the other thing that I really used a lot was the live performances, like from the Grammys or from the AMAs, because there would be less editing.

Buddha Stretch: Right. And that's the thing. It's like we did that with Mariah but she was one of the very few artists to do that. Most of the artists just allowed the directors—with Mariah, we worked with her from the early 90s all the way to the 2000s, but as you notice by the late 90s, music videos became *chop-chop-chop-chop-chop*.

9. Released in 1993. <https://youtu.be/CqBtS6BIP1E> Butterfly at 1:30, Bogle at 1:34

And so that's another reason why I stopped doing choreography and I got out of doing music videos cuz you're putting in weeks of rehearsal to make up and teach all this choreography and then when they film it you're getting to see, what we called then, a "low-key blink"—blink and you'll miss it. So what's the point of me making up all of this choreography and the only part you're going to see is like [puts hands up and freezes]?

Yeah, so I mean, I can't take credit for that. That had more to do with the suggestions that we made to Mariah and the directors at the time. But as you notice, more and more of her videos later became choppy, and that had more to do with the direction that music videos were going in. It's basically the same with Will.¹⁰ Will wanted to show the dance. So he made it a point to tell the directors, "Figure out how you're going to shoot it because this is what it is." [Ms. Vee: Yeah.]

As far as the question about teaching on Zoom, I had to completely readjust what I was doing because I have been teaching—I had readjusted how I was teaching years ago, and I have specific—what is it?—what is the word?—Dammit, I just had it and I lost, I lost it that fast. I had specific things that I did in the class to demonstrate the specifics of each movement. If I'm teaching a class based on foundation, [. . .] I had exercises to show you what exactly foundation is. Foundation isn't a step. Foundation is what you take to use to build on top of. So having those exercises made it easier to do in studio when I had the people there, so I could just say, "Do this." I could get people together and they could demonstrate off of each other and see.

Now, trying to translate that through two-dimensional imagery with a second or two lag time in the music, that's not going to happen. So, I had to completely rearrange that and how I would teach and come up with newer exercises that went with the two-

10. Will Smith's solo career after DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince. Two of the videos with Elite Force Crew were "Gettin' Jiggy Wit It" <https://youtu.be/3JcmQONgXJM> and "Miami" https://youtu.be/lwBS6QGhH_4 from his album *Big Willie Style* (1997).

second delay, so that I could see. Because for me, it was one of the things that my peers were talking about when they teach is when people you don't know—if the people are on beat or off beat. And I'm like, "No, that's not true." I know if they're on or off beat because I have a specific exercise and I'm watching how they're moving and I'm counting. So since it's a delay, everything, if I start on one, they're on three. Cause there's a two-count delay to what we're doing. So everything, if we end on eight, they should end on two. So, if they're not ending on two, then I know they're off beat.

And so I had to figure that out because there's no way I'm going to just teach a class and people are just running through movement and there's no connection to the music. So that was an entirely different learning curve for me, [. . .] to make sure that what I'm teaching them that they have to be, everything that we're doing, is because of the music. So if they're off beat, then I've completely eliminated the entire reason for us doing the class.

So, I had to really change that because now we're not in the same room. If I'm in the room, I know if you're on or off beat. I'm right there, but on screen is totally different. So having to develop that so that I can keep track of people, and then you know there's also the thing of adapting to different people's level of internet. Cause some people's internet is fast and some people's internet is slow, some people's internet is choppy and it was just like, "Oh god. What the hell?" How do I keep track of some people? You're trying to keep track of them, but they're freezing up and it's like, man, this person's wifi is terrible. But having to figure out that, having to adjust, using specific exercises that I had where everybody's in the same room so I could pair people off. I can't do that on Zoom. They're all in different places, so I have to take those exercises that I was most comfortable with and push them away and come up with new stuff to teach with, because it was just—it was much trickier to do it.

And then one of the things that I will say was easier than it is, with Zoom is, I would do it in class sometimes, that in class if I'm teaching specifics, I will stop the class and pull up something on the computer and walk through the class so people can see the video that I'm showing them. "Okay, this is what I'm talking about. Watch this. Everybody come to me. Look at the screen." On Zoom, I don't have to do that. Now it's like, share the screen, boom, everybody automatically sees it. Now I know what they're looking at. I can fast forward, zoom, slow mo. I can play multiple clips. I can already have this stuff pre-arranged on the computer when I'm ready. So that aspect of it is so much easier. [Ms. Vee: Yeah, you're better at that than I am.] That's one of the things that I love. Also, if I'm talking about something and I don't want to demonstrate it, I can always just pull up the video. And be like, if I'm talking about James Brown, "Okay, here's what I'm talking about. Look at JB . . . this . . . look at what he's doing. Don't do it like I'm doing it. Do it like he's doing. Try to capture that feeling."

Like today in class, we did a step from Janelle Monáe's song the "Tightrope"¹¹ and the step that she's doing and I'm like, "You're like the tightrope. What is that?" Rather than me trying to demonstrate. I've already shown them the step. I just pull up the video. I'm like, "Okay guys, grab your water, take five. Here, watch this. This is what I'm talking about," and they all saw it. They're like, "Oh wow, that's dope." And then referencing James Brown in class, people got it. They're like, "Oh, she's moving like James," and even one person like, "Yeah, her hairstyle's from James Brown." And it's like, "Yes. Now you guys are getting it. You're getting all the references, you're putting it together without me having to say." [Ms. Vee: Yeah.] So that's another thing that is a pro as far as I'm concerned with teaching on Zoom. That was, you know that that's instantaneous, being able to show—it takes it from just a regular class to more like lecture and demonstration.

11. See video at 0:58 and 1:07 and throughout the video <https://youtu.be/pwnefUaKCbc>

Ms. Vee: Yeah yeah. Lec-dem, totally.

Here's the third question, it's for me. My experience traveling, performing with Ephrat [Asherie] bringing social and street dances to the concert dance stage, am I seeing more of an interest in students incorporating that vernacular into their college and academic work. I would say yes. I mean, we tour to a lot of colleges and we're performing at a lot of colleges, so there's a lot of dance students there, but also in my experience with where I'm teaching. I'm teaching at Pace—I'm teaching at Juilliard and Pace, the various different programs. Juilliard is very concert dance, ballet-, modern dance- heavy. And Pace is a full-on commercial dance program. That's what they're called. And they're both conservatory-like BFAs.

When I first started at Pace, you know I was never gonna like it—commercial dance [. . .] what's current in the industry now, what they're aiming to do. And I was never going to go in and teach them that, because in order to make that look good, you have to know what that is based on. So I was always going to do *me*, which was, teach foundation, and teach vocabulary, and teach technique and give them all these—the dances that came before what they know today, right? And I will have to admit that going into the program and knowing that's how I was going to approach it, I was like, "Uhh, they're not going to like me, cause I—" maybe that's my bad in assuming that the young children will—the young kids will only want what's current.

I've actually found the complete opposite. I've found that they are thirsty for learning the foundation and learning the technique and learning the history, even. I get some kids who are like, "How come we didn't learn this in dance history?" And they get really mad and they're super appreciative of learning all that. [. . .] Just last week in my Juilliard class, we were doing breakin' and one kid goes, "Oh, this is . . . contemporary dance is just breakin'," Like, "Yeah. Yeah it is. Contemporary floor work, and that's why I'm doing it with you." It just has a different intention behind it.

The mechanics are the same. How you use the floor and how you transfer your weight and some of the patterns are the same and conceptually it's the same thing. What street dancers do to create something new or to remix something, those concepts are exactly what's used in compositional structures of contemporary dance, transposing something, or retrograding something, or taking something and flipping it around and making it new somehow, and/or combining two things together. Those are all things that street dancers do naturally when we're just fooling around and freestyling. So I've found that the students that I encounter in dance academia are really open and willing to learn all this stuff. If anything, they want more.

MiRi Park: Thank you so much.

Do you have any last thoughts that you wanted to end on? I mean, I feel like you've touched all of the things that we could possibly have touched regarding teaching and transmission of these dances and these dance styles. But I don't know if you have any—

Ms. Vee: What's after TikTok, Stretch, what do you think? [MiRi Park: Direct mind control.] What's gonna be the new TikTok? And gonna be the new VCR?

Buddha Stretch: Listen, I can tell you I was amazed when it was Vine and Snapchat and now it's TikTok, so. . . [Ms. Vee: Right.] . . . who knows? I mean, soon you'll be able to upload something directly from your brain. [Ms. Vee: Something VR, something VR.] Yeah, you don't even have to, you know, even have to physically move anymore, you can just think it and it'll virtually come out.

Ms. Vee: The matrix. [Buddha Stretch: It will be interesting.] Earlier I was gonna say I want somebody to plug into the back of my brain all of Stretch's information and just so I can download it.
[Everyone laughs.]

Buddha Stretch: Then you can [makes noise as he put his hand on the back of his head] you could be like Neo,¹² “I know Kung Fu.”

Ms. Vee: “I know Kung Fu.”

Buddha Stretch: Show me.

Ms. Vee: I know hip hop.

Buddha Stretch: Now the thing that—one of the things that I’ll say is interesting and when you’re talking about teaching at Juilliard and commercial dance. I remember last year I taught—was it UC? —not UC Berkeley, UC something, it was a couple of—I did two different college courses last year and they came up with commercial dance. And I remember laughing because I always broke down commercial dance and explain it to people as, “Okay, what you say is commercial dance, what does commercial denote? Commerce, and commerce means you get paid, correct?”

And so if I’m dancing on the street now, put a bucket or a hat down and people throw money in that, I’m a commercial dancer. If I put a pole here, and put my cheeks between the pole and I make them clap, I’m a commercial dancer. I said, so when we were doing music videos we were commercial dancers, when we were doing concerts we were commercial dancers, when we were doing theater we were commercial dancers. There’s no difference in the dance, you know? It’s not when you say “commercial dance” it suddenly becomes something else, [it] just denotes commerce and it just denotes that you’re making it, I guess, more homogenous for people, whereas street dance is already that. You don’t have to change it for the people.

What you do is, you invite those people into the culture and the culture changes them. One of the things that I always talk about is, as we brought her up earlier, is Mariah. People would

12. Keanu Reeves’ character from the *The Matrix* film series.

always ask us, “Man, you guys worked with Mariah for so long, how is it working with a pop star, and doing pop-stuff?” And I always say we didn’t do any pop-anything. And said, we did hip hop and we brought Mariah into hip hop culture; we didn’t bring hip hop into pop. We brought her into the culture, she immersed herself into the culture. We didn’t change to fit her, she dove into the culture head-first and adapted the culture around her. [Ms. Vee: That’s really cool. I didn’t know that.] So that’s what you’re supposed to do. We didn’t change to fit her, we brought her into the culture. We never changed what we did to fit anything. We make them fit into the greater culture. We are the greater culture. We are pop. We are what’s popular, that’s why they want us in their things. So, we fit them into the greater culture of hip hop and street dance, not the other way around, not the other way around. And that’s how we always looked at it. It’s like, why do I need to change this to fit somebody else’s perspective? How about I fit them into the perspective of this?

This is the dominant culture. We’re going to make this the dominant culture. This is what you think it is, but you want me to rearrange it so it’s less threatening to you and I’m not going to do that. It was never threatening in the first place. That’s you projecting, you need to look in the mirror and come to grips with yourself. When the beat drop, we’re all on the same note.

Ms. Vee: Hopefully. [Buddha Stretch: Well, most of us.] Yeah, yeah.
[Everyone laughing]

Ms. Vee: Shout out to Stretch, for giving me my first job moving to New York City.

MiRi: Oh, really? Can you tell us about that?

Buddha Stretch: Man, it was crazy because I had taught at this festival in Colorado and I believe the gentleman’s name was Tim and he just told me, he’s like, “I have a friend and she’s right up your al-

ley. Look out for her, she's coming to New York. Her name is Val." And I was like, "Oh okay," and he was like, "Trust me." He's like, "Where I'm from, she's it." He was like, "She moves just like you do. She'll fit in perfectly with what you're doing." So I was like, "Okay, cool," and then it was literally—

Ms. Vee: Whoa! I didn't know he said that. He just told me, "Look this guy up when you get there," and I, of course, I had already heard of you. I was like, "Yeah, okay. I'll go take his class." I didn't know he said all that.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, no. He told me to look for you. And he was like, "Yeah she's—where I'm from, she's great. She does exactly what you do you know. She's heavy into street dance." And he said, "And I think she'd be a perfect fit with you," and I was like, "Cool, I'll look out for her," and it was literally like—

Ms. Vee: Timmy Rietz.

Buddha Stretch: —maybe. What, a month? A month or so later and we hooked up and I was like "Oh, this is who he was talking about." I was like, "Okay. Let's go Val. Let's see what you got."

Ms. Vee: Yeah, so I took his class. I went to Steps. I took his class. I didn't say anything. I'm just in the back taking his class, doing the thing, and then at the end of class I go up to Stretch and I was like, "Hey yeah, Timmy told me to come take your class." He was like, "Oh you are Val, yes." And then Stretch says, "Give me your number, because you need to be working." I was like, "What?!" I just moved to New York the month before. I was like, "What? Really? Oh my god."

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, I mean he told me, he was adamant. He pulled me to the side and he talked about you, so I was like, "Cool. If she's who you—if she's half of what you're telling me, cool. So

when I meet her I'll see." But when you came to class, I was like, "Oh okay. You're Val. Cool, let's do it." You know? And I already can see you knew how to dance so I was like, "Cool. Here let's do this, and this is this, and these are these people and let's go."

Ms. Vee: Yeah yeah, I was just so fortunate. Dang.

Buddha Stretch: Well, of course, you know, she rocked every time we did, anything we did she rocked.

MiRi Park: What was the first gig?

Ms. Vee: Yeah, the first job was—it was some charity show and it was—that's how I met Voodoo Ray because Ray did the—and then Mega, b-girl Mega and who else was doing it? Tanisha Scott was doing it too. And Eric—I think Eric [Negrón] was part of the crew too yeah. Yep.

Buddha Stretch: Yeah, I don't even remember what it was. I just remember we did the Hip Hop Fest.

Ms. Vee: And then a few months later we went, we did, and then I met V [Violeta Galagarza] from KR3Ts. Yeah, and then, a few months later, we did the Hip Hop Fest. Yeah, "Din Daa Daa" [sings] that was that piece.

MiRi Park: Yeah, oh my god, I love that! I love it so much.

Ms. Vee: Stretch gave me my big break.

MiRi Park: It's also such a great New York story, too. It's all those names that are just so intensely New York. [laughs] A very specific time in New York. Thank you so much.

Ms. Vee: All right.

Buddha Stretch: Thank you, good to see you guys, be safe.

Contributors

Emilio Austin, Jr. aka "Buddha Stretch" is a Brooklyn-born dancer, choreographer, teacher, and father. Stretch heavily impacted the dance world by bridging the gap between what was termed "Ol' Skool" and "New Skool." His dance style, known as Freestyle Hip-Hop, draws from all aspects of Hip-Hop culture, music, and dance. His career spans from being the first dancer to teach Hip-Hop at Broadway Dance Center in 1989 to working theatrically with Full Circle, and as Co-Artistic Director of MiddleGround Dance Theater Co. Together with his crews Mop Top and Elite Force, he choreographed and toured extensively with recording artist Mariah Carey. He has also worked with Diana Ross, Eric B & Rakim, Thalia, Rah Digga, Heather Headley, and Angie Martinez, among others. His most memorable experience was choreographing and dancing in Michael Jackson's "Remember the Time" video. His choreography for Will Smith's "Gettin' Jiggy Wit It," "Men In Black," and "Miami" have been nominated for MTV Video Music Awards multiple times. Stretch believes that "music is the universal language; dance is its interpreter."

Val "Ms. Vee" Ho is originally from Vancouver, Canada, and started making her mark in the NYC dance scene in 2003. She's had the pleasure of working with distinguished choreographers Buddha Stretch, Rennie Harris, Luam, Maria Torres, Bradley Rapier, and Ephrat Asherie. Among her numerous TV, film, and stage credits, highlights include 'Hideaway' Video by Kiesza, The Detour, *VH1 Dear Mama TV special*, *Step Up 3D*, Rennie Harris' *Legends of Hip Hop*, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Sadler's Wells Breakin' Convention, Guggenheim Works & Process, Lincoln Center Out of Doors, and New York City Center Fall For Dance. Ms. Vee is a celebrated teacher, and on faculty at Broadway Dance Center, Pace University's Commercial Dance BFA Program, and in

2017 became the first hip hop teacher at the world-renowned Juilliard School.

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 transDANCE 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.

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.”¹³ 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.

VCR (videocassette recorder): a device that recorded moving images to magnetic tape and could be used for playback.

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.*

ADHIP/Dance Delight: ADHIP is a Japanese company that promotes various competitions and events. Dance Delight is a street dance competition. <https://www.dancedelight.net/>

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).

Hip Hop International: an annual performance festival started in 2002.

Homeland: a practice session that takes place in Long Beach, CA.

13. 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.

Liner Notes: Joseph Schloss

There are several themes that really stood out to me in this conversation.

First, it is common in Hip Hop Studies to draw a basic distinction—either explicitly or implicitly—between “mainstream” hip hop (generally associated with commercialism and mass media) and “underground” hip hop (generally associated with a more personal, grassroots orientation).¹⁴ But that distinction just doesn’t apply to dance. Not only is this an important conceptual point for understanding these dance forms, but it is also a significant intervention that Dance Studies can offer Hip Hop Studies generally. What kinds of practices, relationships, and philosophies may come into clearer view when we no longer expect them to come down on one side or the other of this false divide?

Second, it is apparent that hip hop dance pedagogy is often a matter of teaching people how to learn for themselves, as opposed to teaching them to follow instructions. This is largely a result of the cultural environment in which hip hop dance developed, and it involves a wide range of perceptual, cognitive, and kinesthetic processes. Buddha Stretch and Ms. Vee both speak at length about how hip hop dance developed in a time and place where resources like video recordings were simply not available. Moreover, even when dancers

14. The “underground” versus “mainstream” distinction emerged from the hip hop community as part of a larger authenticity discourse in the 1990s. As hip hop music became more commercially viable, many artists and fans felt an increased pressure to take a position on whether hip hop should become a form of commercialized popular music or whether it should remain a community-based art form. In this context, self-identification as an “underground” rap artist—or rap fan—was a way to publically align oneself with the latter position. Many academics who studied rap music adopted this distinction, either because they felt that the conversation itself was worthy of critical attention as a social phenomenon (e.g. Rose, 2008; Harrison, 2009) or because the term “underground” served as a useful shorthand for an artistic agenda that emphasized concepts of authenticity (e.g. Belle, 2014; Saunders, 2015). My point here is twofold. First, precisely because the distinction has been so valuable to the discourse around music, scholars may not realize that it doesn’t necessarily apply to other elements of hip hop, such as dance. And, second, that blind spot is itself evidence of how dance and other non-rap elements of hip hop have been marginalized in the academy.

had the means and opportunity to teach their moves to others, they were often unwilling to do so.

As a result, one of the foundational learning tools of hip hop dance is the ability to memorize and reconstruct a movement based on a single viewing. This, in turn, requires what the speakers refer to as “four-dimensional” memory. Students must not only be able to comprehend and remember the move in three spatial dimensions, but they must also understand the way it unfolds over time. Moreover, even if they are able to develop this knowledge after a single viewing, students must still develop the ability to reproduce the movement with their own body. And even once all of that is achieved, the result is still only an understanding of the movement itself as a physical act, stripped of its social, cultural, historical, and emotional contexts. It is not surprising, then, that both Ms. Vee and Buddha Stretch place a great deal of emphasis on teaching this context. Before the widespread availability of hip hop dance videos on various streaming platforms, that was automatically part of any hip hop dance education, simply because there was no way to learn the movements without personally engaging with members of the community. The teaching environment and the social context were one and the same.

Finally, I think it is instructive that rather than reject the use of streaming video on these grounds, both speakers choose to address this issue by thinking creatively about how these new resources can be leveraged to still serve the original goals, such as by providing direct access to archival footage and rare recordings. As hip hop has always done, they choose to embrace new technologies and approaches, and then reconfigure them to suit their own needs. Although the simultaneous embrace of traditionalism and innovation is not unique to hip hop culture, hip hop is rarely given credit for the sophistication with which it balances these two imperatives. This conversation, in my opinion, is an ideal example of how this powerful dynamic is not just maintained but also actively reinforced.

Author Biographies

Joseph Schloss is an interdisciplinary scholar who studies the way people use art—especially music and dance—to develop new perspectives on social, cultural, and political issues. He is primarily interested in hip hop culture as part of a larger complex of expressive traditions of the African diaspora. A past recipient of the Society for Ethnomusicology's Charles Seeger Prize, he is the author of *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (Oxford University Press, 2009) and *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004/2014), which won the International Association for the Study of Popular Music Book Prize in 2005. He currently teaches at Princeton University and the City University of New York.

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