

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

HOW B-BOYING BEGAN

James Brown. Martial Arts movies. Funk music. Block Parties. Street gangs. The Bronx. What do all of these things have in common? Each of these things played an instrumental role in the formation of the most fundamental form of Hip Hop dance ... the style known as b-boying.

You may know b-boying by its much more popular name, breakdancing. If you break this term down to its most basic components, it is not at all incorrect. In fact, the dance was originally done specifically to the break sections of popular funk music of the 1970s. Therefore, these dancers were dancing to the breaks or, break dancing. However, this term was created by the media nearly a decade after the dance style began. Those who originated the form in New York called it b-boying.* To them, b-boy meant "break boy" or "Bronx boy" or even "boogie boy" but it still described those people who were dancing to the break sections of the songs the DJ played. If you've been following our lessons, you remember that breaks are common in popular (especially funk) music and describe the part of the song when the vocals and melody lines drop out, leaving only the most basic percussion. The DJs came to realize that the breaks attracted a certain kind of dancer and therefore came up with techniques to extend the break sections of songs to keep these dancers on the floor longer. DJ Kool Herc originated the technique, but other DJs like Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa helped advance the technique and take it to a whole new level.

The actual dance style of b-boying had multiple influences in its formative years. Though most people imagine fancy floorwork, powerful moves and spins when they think of b-boying, it actually didn't start with any floor moves at all. The first moves that contributed to the development of b-boying were above the floor. One of the most important early influences was the "Good Foot" dance by James Brown. This dance had a lot of fancy foot moves, slides and kicks and became so popular that you couldn't hardly go to any party without seeing someone trying to imitate and build on this dance. As dancers got fancier with this already fancy dance, they added drops to the floor, spins and very simple floor moves. As you can imagine, once a few people dropped down to the floor and showed off with flashy moves, others immediately tried to follow suit. This led to not only the obvious imitation, but serious innovation.

At this point, it is important to mention the importance of street gangs in the development of b-boying. The Bronx area was thick with street gangs in the 1970s. These gangs fought over territory and were constantly in a battle for street supremacy. As some of them tired of violence, they sought out other ways to settle their rivalries. Many found this alternative in street dance. Instead of fighting with fists, they battled with dance. But how did this influence the development of b-boying? As the early b-boys showed off their moves at block parties and street corners, it created an atmosphere of competition. This competitive environment was the perfect outlet for the frustrations and tensions of the gang members. These warring groups would show up to parties and work out their differences through their moves. Each tried to outperform the other and be declared the best. Reputations and respect were built upon the skills that b-boys showed in dance battles. Increases in competition brought out more creative and impressive moves. Therefore, what started out as simple footwork in imitation of James Brown became fully developed, crowd-dazzling combinations that evolved into an entire dance style. As these gang members would likely have been fighting if they were not dancing, many fight-like moves made their way into the style. This is why martial arts movies played a big part in the development of the style. B-boys imitated Bruce Lee and other movie fighters to make their moves look hard and stylish. Of course, it was not only gang members that moved b-boying forward. Many ordinary street kids who simply loved to dance played a huge role in creating the style.

The basic components of b-boying are rocks, drops, floorwork, power moves and freezes. Rocking was the first style to be included into b-boying. The Brooklyn Rock, Apache and Uprock combined stylish standing footwork with hip rocks and aggressive arm movements. We highly recommend looking up videos of Rocking to fully understand the style. Rocking gave way to drops which is how the b-boy made his way to the floor. Once there,

* In fact, many people within Hip Hop culture today insist that b-boying is the only correct term and contend that only outsiders would use the word breakdance.

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the b-boys extended their rocking steps to the floor. This is the floorwork we so closely associate with b-boying today. In those days, however, it was known as downrocks and included moves like the 6-step, CCs and Zulu spins. As b-boys stayed on the floor longer, they came up with more creative moves. These are what we call power moves and include swipes, broncos and windmills. The b-boys also found ways to create sensational spin moves like the backspin, hand spins and headspins. Freezes are the way most b-boys end their sets. This is when they pause their body at the end of a move and hold it there to punctuate the combination. Some popular freezes are the baby freeze, head freeze and chair freeze.

As b-boying became more popular, it eventually hit the mainstream. In 1983, b-boying was featured in the feature film "Flashdance". This movie became an international success and brought Hip Hop dance to the world for the very first time. This helped Hip Hop culture to become a worldwide phenomenon and even today you can see b-boys and b-girls in almost every country. In fact, some of the very best breakers on the planet are from outside of the United States. Today, you can even see international b-boying competitions where the most amazing moves are still being imagined despite the style being in its fourth decade now.

As a final note, though we use the term "b-boy", it's important to clarify that there have ALWAYS been b-girls. B-girls played a very important role in the development of Hip Hop culture as a whole and b-boying specifically. For example, Headspin Janet from the world famous Rock Steady Crew and Mama Maribel from Rockwell made a strong impression on the breaking world of the 70s and 80s and are still recognized as pioneers of the culture. Today, we have b-girls like Asia One, Rockafella, AB Girl and Honey Rockwell who still represent strong for the culture. The point here is that breaking belongs to both genders and all races and all ages. There are no limits. It is for everyone who loves the culture to participate and innovate. Hip Hop is for everyone and that is why it is one of the strongest cultural influences in the world today.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Sick: incredibly awesome. Something so cool that it can take you out like an illness.

EX: "That beat is so sick, I need some Robitussin for my ears!"

Bump: loud music, especially the sound of bass.

EX: "I just got back from the car stereo shop and they put some serious bump in my trunk!"

Fresh: completely new, original and amazing.

EX: "I saw some of the freshest moves of my life at the international b-boy competition in Germany."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name two 1970s b-boy crews NOT named Rock Steady.
- 2) Name 3 power moves not named in this lesson.
- 3) Name a famous international b-boy crew.