

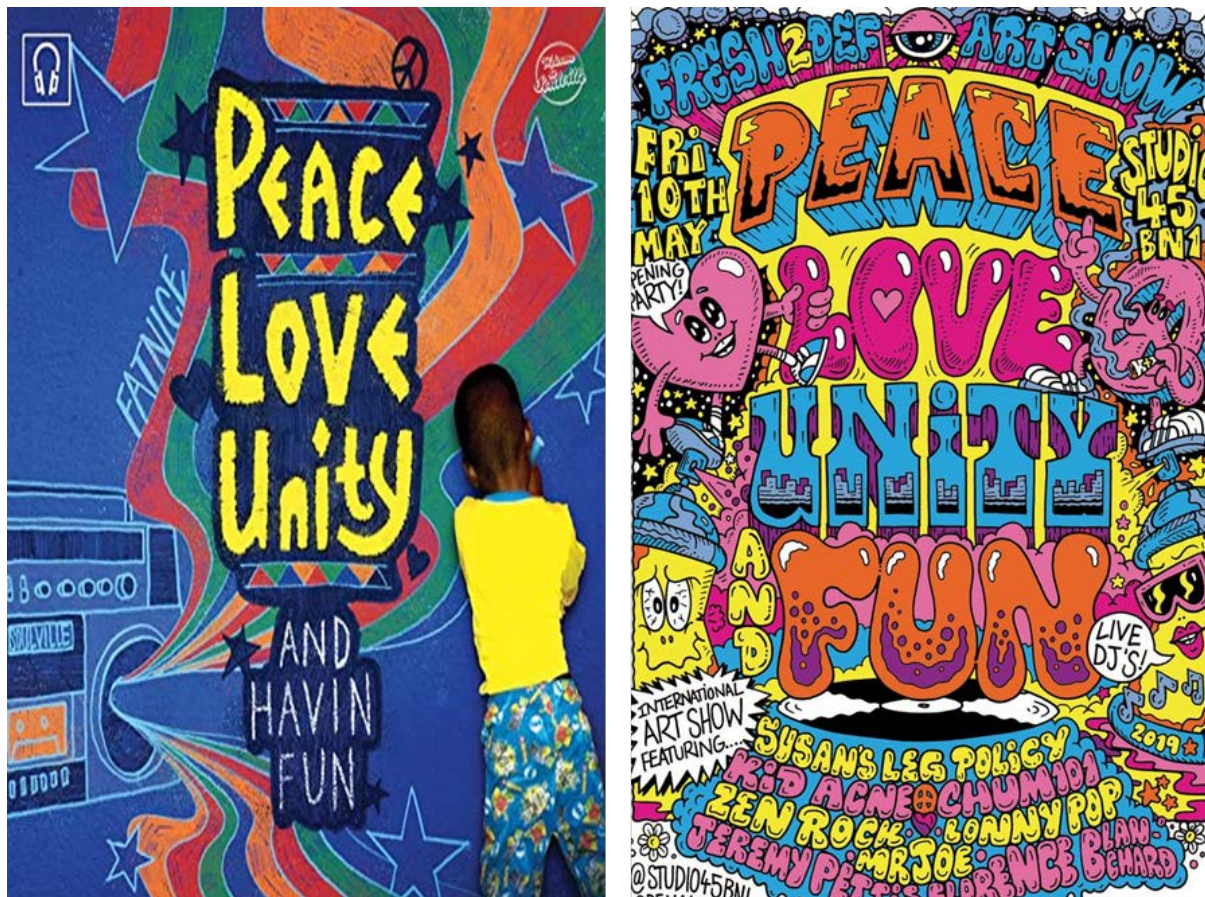
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Physical Education Unit
Elective Physical Education Course - Hip-hop Dance

Hip-hop culture

Hip-hop is a street pop culture that originated in the United States during the 1970s among African American and Latino youth in the Bronx, New York. Since its inception, hip-hop has since gained immense popularity and taken the world by storm. The term hip-hop originally referred to a street dance characterized by movements of light twisting and swinging hip, but it has since evolved into a broader cultural concept. Hip-hop culture encompasses various elements, including but not limited to rapping, deejaying, graffiti art, and hip-hop dance (originally known as breaking dance).



During the 1970s, New York City was plagued by company bankruptcies, mass unemployment, drug abuse, theft, and gangs violence, leading to dire social conditions. The young, especially African American and Latinos, felt hopeless and trapped in this environment. With the emergence of hip-hop culture, some individuals made a conscious decision to leave gangs and become law-abiding citizens. Kelvin Donovan, a high school student, founded an association called The Organization, aimed at providing an outlet for social pressure through graffiti art, thereby reducing gang participation. Inspired by the unyielding spirit of the native Zulu people, he changed his name to Afrika Bambaataa, the godfather of hip-hop culture. He founded the Zulu Nation, an international organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the concept of hip-hop culture. Since then, young people used rapping, graffiti art, deejaying, and hip-hop dance to express their social dissatisfaction, reducing their involvement in gang activities. Afrika Bambaataa's experience has made him appreciate the value of peace, love, self-expression, respect, unity, and innovation, which have now become core values in hip-hop culture.



Hip-hop dance

Hip-hop dance is widely recognised as one of the core elements of hip-hop culture and currently stands as the most popular dance form worldwide. It encompasses a series of street dances performed to hip-hop music. Unlike other dance forms such as modern dance, ballet, Broadway, or Hollywood jazz dance, hip-hop dance draws its roots from African folk-dance styles, emphasising impact, improvisation, and a sense of community. Choreography in hip-hop dance is often influenced by the choreographer's personal, social, cultural, and environmental experiences, and the movements hold specific meaning and value.

Hip-hop dance can be broadly categorised into two main styles: breaking dance and hip-hop social dance. Breaking dance, also known as breakdancing, is a technically demanding dance form that focuses on individual style. Dancers specialising in this style are known as B-boys or B-girls. The breaking dance originated as a form of dance performed during musical breaks at parties. It involved dynamic floor movements with rapid rotation and tumbling, and intricate movement around the head, shoulder, back, and knees, often in the context of dance battles. On the other hand, social hip-hop dance is not centred around battling but rather emphasises precision and teamwork on stage. It encompasses various spin-offs, including locking, popping, waacking, and krumping dance. As hip-hop dance is a collection of street dances, the choreographic style has evolved over time, often incorporating elements from different dance styles multiple dances such as freestyle hip-hop dance.



(Upper left: breaking; bottom left: locking; upper right: waacking; bottom right: krumping.)

History and Development of Hip-hop Dance

Origin

In 1967, a DJ nicknamed Kool Herc immigrated from Jamaica to the South Bronx ghetto in New York. He regularly organized parties for young people and played rap music, allowing dancers to showcase their skills in the middle of the event. This marked the beginning of hip-hop rhythms and the concept was still in its early stage of development.

The 1970s

In 1974, Afrika Bambaataa, the godfather of hip-hop, popularised the term hip-hop and proposed the core elements of hip-hop culture: rapping, deejaying, graffiti art, and hip-hop dance. He also founded the first-ever breaking dance team with the aim of promoting the dance form among young people. As hip-hop culture rapidly gained popularity, the number of breaking dance teams grew exponentially, reaching several hundred by the mid-1970s.



(Right: Kool Herc; Left: Afrika Bambaataa. Photos are from The Source Magazine.)

The 1980s and 1990s

On September 21, 1982, the Village Voice magazine published the first-ever media coverage of hip-hop, featuring Afrika Bambaataa. In the 1980s, hip-hop social dancing proliferated due to its group-oriented nature, which helped to improve dance group cohesion. In 1984, the United Street Force Dance Company was formed and invited to the White House for President Reagan. This paved the way for hip-hop dancers to start endorsing brand products frequently. In the late 1980s, the first commercial hip-hop dance teachers emerged, and one of the legendary masters was Buddha Stretch. By the 1990s, hip-hop dance had become a mainstream dance style, enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds.

21st century

In the 21st century, hip-hop dance became increasingly commercialized and emerged as a widely popular dance form, particularly among young people in booming hip-hop dance schools. Hip-hop teaching can be broadly classified into two styles: Old School and New School. The former emphasised the movements from the origin and development period, categorised by free, improvisational, relaxed yet energetic movement styles. The latter draws inspiration from the early commercial years of hip-hop dance, incorporating the best moves from the old school but with a tendency towards technical, complex, and choreographed routines. In addition, the emergence of international competitions became a critical phase in the development of hip-hop dance. These competitions brought the concept of dance battles and live performances to the global stage, featuring groups such as Jabbawockeez, Quick Crew, Mos Wanted Crew and AOV. These groups have gained worldwide recognition for their exceptional performances in competitions, becoming household names among hip-hop dance enthusiasts.



(Upper left: Jabbawockeez; upper right: Quick Crew; bottom: Mos Wanted Crew)

Benefits of Learning Hip-hop

Learning hip-hop can have various benefits, including:

- Providing a means to express emotions and relieve stress.
- Allowing individual to identify and explore personal characteristics, preferences, and styles.
- Improving communication, cooperation, critical thinking, independent thinking, innovative thinking, and problem-solving skills.
- Enhancing motor skills, concentration, memory, coordination, and physical fitness.

Basic Hip-hop Dance Skills

Musical skills

Dance is closely tied to music, beginners should aim to develop a fundamental understanding of music in order to excel in dance.

Notes

Note are the fundamental elements of music, serving as the smallest unit of music rhythm. The duration of each note expresses the music's rhythm, with longer durations indicating slower tempos and shorter duration indicating faster tempos. The table below shows the various categories of notes and their corresponding number of beats.

Notes	Name		Value
	Semibreve	Whole note	4 beats
	Minim	Half note	2 beats
	Crotchet	Quarter note	1 beat
	Quaver	Eighth note	½ beat
	Semi-quaver	Sixteenth note	¼ beat
	2 quavers	2 eighth notes	1 beat
	4 semi0quavers	4 sixteenth notes	1 beat

Eight beats

In general, the music structure choreographing hip-hop dance often follows an eight beats pattern. This eight-beat structure divided the music into equal segments, with a consistent time interval between each beat. Additionally, there is a half-beat between each beat, represented by “&” in notation. The figure below illustrates the counting method:



• Beats

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8

1	2	3	&	4	5	&	6	7	&	8

How to listen to music

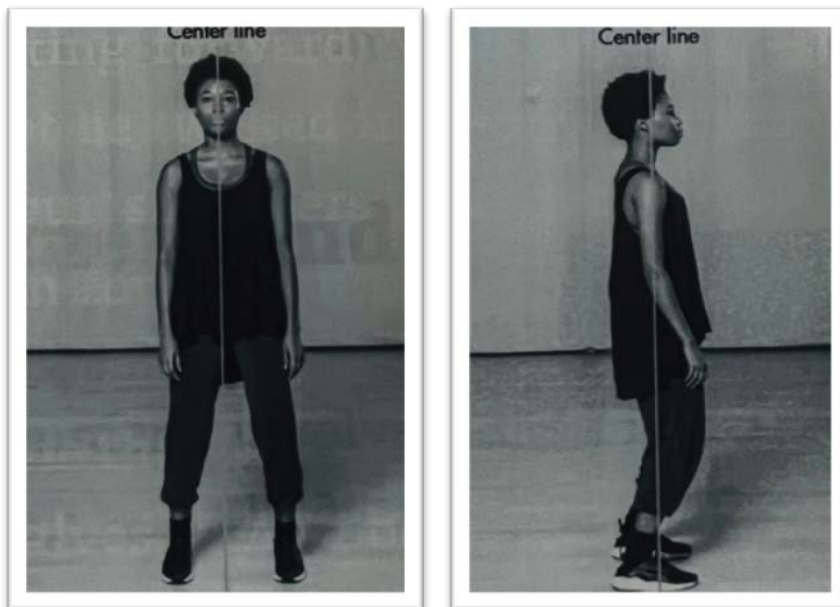
When listening to music, beginners should not only focus on counting the eight beats but also analyse other musical elements such as lyrics, loops, layers, and sound effects. Since hip-hop music often contains multiple rhythms, it is important to distinguish the different rhythmic weights within music. This can help to identify corresponding movements that match the music's rhythmic qualities, including any accompanying sound effects.

Movement skills

Hip-hop dance is an art form that allows individuals to physically respond to music and express themselves creatively. As such, beginners should focus on mastering the fundamental skills of body movements when learning hip-hop dance.

Stance

To start, it's important to stand with your feet shoulder-width apart or slightly wider. Bend your knees slightly without letting them pass the tips of your toes, then point your feet forward without twisting. Ensure that your shoulders are straight and aligned with your hips, dividing your body's centreline into the left and right sides.



Groove

Hip-hop dance is rooted in the groove, where the body moves fluidly in synchronise with the rhythm. It is crucial for the body's movements to align with the music's acoustics. On a physical level, the groove encompasses a range of motion involving the neck, shoulders, rotation, elbows, wrists, hips, knees, and ankles. On the auditory level, groove movements express notes, timing, power, rhythm, pitch, phrases, and special elements present in the music.

When learning to groove, beginners should start by relaxing their bodies, and following the rhythm of the music, allowing themselves to freely dance. Once comfortable with the rhythm, they can incorporate specific groove movement. It can be helpful to tap toes or clap hands to keep time with different rhythms. Avoid being stiff while grooving; instead, relax the body and keep moving to your polyrhythmic and polycentric movements.

Isolation

Isolation is a fundamental groove in hip-hop dance and serves as the basis for other grooves. It involves individual body parts in isolation while maintaining stillness in other parts. When practising the multi-joint isolation, it is important to keep the head vertical rather than using the chin or head to guide the movement. Additionally, strive to maintain fluidity in the movement without pausing between each joint's motion. The specific movement of each joint varies due to differences in physiological structures, as shown in the table below.

Joints	Movements	Ways
Neck	Pushing, pulling, moving side, rolling	Forward, backward, leftward, rightward, circle
Shoulders	Bouncing, rocking, rolling	Forward, backwards, up, down, circle
Breast	Rocking, rolling	Forward, backward, leftward, rightward, circle
Abdomen	Rocking, rolling	Forward, backward, leftward, rightward, circle
Hips	Rocking, rolling	Forward, backward, leftward, rightward, circle
Knees	Bouncing, rocking, rolling	Forward, backwards, up, down, circle
Counterflow	All above	All above

Other grooves

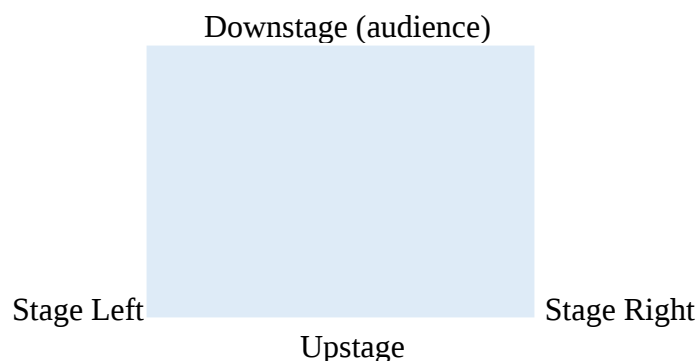
Hip-hop dance features a variety of grooves, including bouncing, rocking, rolling, waving, and skating. These grooves serve two main functions: form the foundation of hip-hop dance aesthetics and aid in movement fluidity and transition. The specific grooves can be broken down as follows:

- Bouncing, which includes up bounce, down bounce, and double bounce.
- Rocking, which can be executed in the front, back, left, or right direction.
- Rolling, which consists of a forward loop and a reverse loop.
- Waves, including body waves and arm waves.
- Skating, which includes both single skating and double skating techniques.

Stage Performance Skills

Stage direction - Square stage orientation. The stage is divided into sections, including the front of the stage (nearest to the audience), rear of the stage, left side (facing the left side of the audience), and right side (facing the right side of the audience);

Stage direction - Circular stage orientation. It allows for more flexibility in positioning. Dancers can perform anywhere at the front of the stage, depending on the context of the performance. For example, dancers may face the referee in a competition, whereas in a battle, they may face their opponent.



Emotional performance. Emotion is the underlying intrinsic energy that drives dancers' fleeting actions. Music has the power to evoke a wide range of emotions, and dancers can harness this emotional power to not only their dance but also enable the audience to grasp the attitude and emotions conveyed through the performance. Dancers convey their emotions through facial expressions, strength, and the amplitude of their movement.



(The photos are from Pinterest)

Stage aesthetics. Aesthetics encompasses a set of ideals centred around cultivating a visually pleasing appearance and appreciating the beauty that arises from the fusion of music and the human body. When learning hip-hop dance stage performance, beginners can focus on expressing their beauty and self-confidence through dance movements, attire, hairstyles, props, and overall appearance. For example, dancers may assess whether the colour, hair, cosmetics, and props harmonise with the background, lighting, and overall colour scheme of the performance stage.



(The photos are from Pinterest)

Choreography

Movement and music

Choreographers may select a piece of music and then creating dance movements to match it, or by choreographing the dance routine first and then selecting and editing music accordingly. The principles that guide the relationship between movement and music for hip-hop dance choreography include:

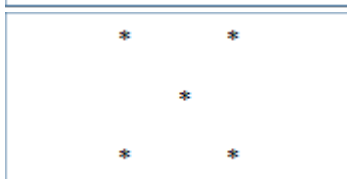
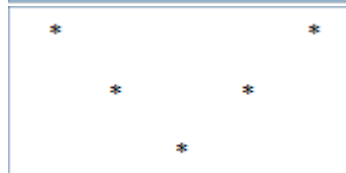
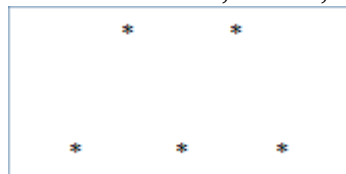
- i. Expression of rhythm: The movement of the spine, the arrangement of the muscles, and the flow of breath are used to express the rhythm such as bass, drums, piano, and guitar. Conversely, the choreography can also be influenced by the rhythm of the music.
- ii. Utilising low tones: When the music features low tones, like a heavy bass or kick drum, it presents an opportunity to incorporate low or grounded dance moves into the choreography.
- iii. Exploring higher notes: Higher notes on the scale or wind instruments, such as a flute, which create a light or airy quality, providing a chance to explore tall, floating, or jumping movements in the choreography.
- iv. Incorporating Lyrics: Lyrics are the words sung by the vocalist, also referred to as "the melody". Choreographers may choose movements that are related to the lyrics, and vice versa. However, it's important to note that the lyrics are the easiest to distinguish but may present complexities to distinguish in counting because they may not always align the structure of 8-counts.

The choreography of hip-hop social dance

Hip-hop social dance, also known as hip-hop precision dance, is a group dance that involves choreographing not only the dance movements but also the formation, hierarchy, poses of the team, and the ending pose.

Formation

When creating choreography for hip-hop social dance, choreographers can arrange the formation of the dancers based on the characteristics of some certain movements and the number of people involved to achieve aesthetics appeal. For a team of five dancers, common formations include various arrangements such as lines, circles, or geometric shapes:



Layer

Hierarchical choreography is often utilized in hip-hop social dance. Choreographers can structure the dance movements in a sequential manner, with the front-row dancers executing the movements first, followed by the back-row dancers. Additionally, choreographers may also incorporate height-based hierarchies, such as arranging dancers from back to front, utilising half-squatting positions, or incorporating kneeling positions.



Poses

Incorporating static or dynamic poses that synchronize with the rhythm and sound effects can enhance the visual impact of the performance, leaving a lasting impression on the audience. These eye-catching static or dynamic poses can create moments of impact and effectively complement the dance movements.



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