

# HIP HOP

## DANCE ALMANAC VOL.2

Edited by  
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**FEATURING:**

Simone Sistarelli

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# COPYRIGHT

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# SIMONE SISTARELLI

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**IA: Can we start at your inclusion in the Hip Hop Hall of Fame for Popping for Parkinson's? How did that come about, and what does that mean to you?**

SS: I got contacted by the Italian chapter of the Universal Hip Hop Museum; obviously, the actual physical museum is in the process of being built but the organisation and people has been there for a while. They found out about the project by friends of friends on Facebook and by Red Bull doing the video... somehow, they found me. They got in touch saying hey this is great, let's talk about it, because obviously they can't just give awards right... so, I had a chat about it and the reasoning behind it. They said right, we would like to give you this award and to put this project into the system, into the Hall of Fame because it deserves recognition from the community as a whole. I think obviously it's an honour because what's better than that? In the Hip Hop world, I don't think there's anything better than that. I say Hip Hop with the general wording and meaning. This is a problem that I have - not with the award - I always have this issue with what is Hip Hop? It's the million-dollar question; if I ask you you're gonna answer in a different way. There is a massive difference between

Hip Hop and Zulu Nation. In the history, it was Zulu Nation that said enough with the killings, enough with the bullshit, it is peace, love, unity and having fun. That was Zulu Nation not Hip Hop. Zulu Nation is an integral part of Hip Hop culture...and representative of what we do today...but the idea of Hip Hop at its very roots, at the very beginning is...you have nothing. The only thing you have is killing, drugs, poor lifestyle, bad quality of life, bad surroundings, bad everything. Literally you have nothing. Hip Hop was that. But people still met and gave value to themselves, by giving themselves names, by empowering themselves, and turning the negative shit that they have into something positive and artistic to get out. So, in a way yes, I got the award for the Hip Hop world, for the culture. But actually, I think the project represents the values of Hip Hop and the values of Zulu Nation. The project started from nothing - we had nothing, no funding, nothing. We just met, did the class and everyone came out with a smile. The tremor became... we embraced the tremor and used it to our advantage rather than our disadvantage, we used it as an artistic tool rather than a disability. So in that sense the project is Hip Hop and in terms of the Zulu Nation principles - peace, love, unity and having fun. Because

it is fun and it is upbeat. Of course it is much more deep than that. It's not 'Let's have a little bit of fun.' But Zulu Nation said stop the killing and stop the violence. But the idea is about being proactive, and changing perspective. 'I have parkinson's.' Before Zulu Nation it was 'I have parkinson's, life is shit.' I'm not saying it's understandable and I'm not trying to diminish or devalue that phrase...but Zulu Nation comes along and says let's stop crying, let's do something about it, let's be proactive, let's use the energy we have and instead of putting it out there as a negative thing, let's make it a positive thing. Short answer is the award was great, it was a great honour and I hope this is a start for the Hip Hop community to - oh I don't wanna say this...I do wanna say this - I hope it's a wake up call for other Hip Hop heads to do things their own way. To do Hip Hop in their own way. They don't have to do my way, they have to do their own way, a way that is true to them, honest to them, resonates with them. Detach from the business...

**IA: What does 'detach from the business' mean?**

SS: It means, if we bring it back to Zulu Nation, with the problems Zulu Nation has with Bambaataa - the accusations and stuff. The business of

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Zulu Nation and their CEO are having some legal issues. That's the business. But what about Hip Hop? That's the reason we need to separate Zulu Nation and Hip Hop because then I think we can separate what's the business side and the actual side of it. In

I hope my project is a wake-up call in that sense. To me it's about saying enough with industry music, enough with the mainstream, or so-called mainstream Hip Hop music, we want to care about why we fell in love in the first place. That's history repeating itself...The

**"Let's be real. That's the struggle I didn't say earlier, but let's be real. I am from Italy, I am a very White ginger guy from a nice place in Italy, from a nice neighbourhood. I can't pretend to be a ghetto Bronx boy because that would not be me, that would be fake. How can I be...how can I express myself in the Hip Hop culture?"**

dance it could be the dancing and the dance industry - it's awful. That's a massive thing. Everyone can dance and everyone should dance for sure. No doubt about that... it's a human instinct, it's a reaction to life, to rhythm, to sound. Movement is life. The business side of it - when I say this now, I mean in the dance world in the dance industry - there's no money, very little money and you work super hard, no pension, no future, no nothing. Even when you work in the best places with the best organisations...you might be lucky for a few months, six months, a couple of years if you're really lucky. It doesn't exist any more apart from very, very specific cases. It's about how you manage yourself in the industry. How do you manage the desire to dance.

Sugar Hill Gang was the same thing, it's the business not Hip Hop. That's fundamental and the project is exactly about that. Saying fuck the business side, let's be real. That's the struggle I didn't say earlier, but let's be real. I am from Italy, I am a very White ginger guy from a nice place in Italy, from a nice neighbourhood. I can't pretend to be a ghetto Bronx boy because that would not be me, that would be fake. How can I be...how can I express myself in the Hip Hop culture? By expressing what I'm most passionate about, in this case the popping dance, to the community that makes sense, which is the parkinson's community to me. That is why I had to have a day job, the class started as my hour a week of free...I don't want to say charity...I did not

do this because of charity or volunteering in that sense; it is obvious that I give my one hour a week to this project for the teaching. It is in a way charity work. But I did not do all of this to do one hour a week of charity work, I could have done so many other things. It all started with my way of 'What is my way of giving back to the culture?' All this bullshit we hear all the time, how do you translate that in real things? What am I giving back? Can I give back the Bronx attitude of a Black person? No. I can give you popping...I can give you popping and then I specifically found this community which had almost nothing. The little resources the parkinson's community has are definitely not rubbish but are at a certain level. A certain standard. There's not enough, it's as simple as that. Whether it's resources, pills, drugs but especially activities. All activities are underfunded and are spread all over the place with no central information. We're getting there - don't get me wrong - I'm not saying everything is negative, we're getting there with social prescribing and the VIPs like Michael J Fox but there's so much more that needs to be done. Unfortunately my project is not considered a priority in the big scheme of things of the world...

#### **IA: Within Hip Hop or within medicine?**

SS: No no no. Within the big scheme of things in the world. There are wars, hunger, people are corrupt, morals are terrible. There's depression, mental health and so many...I wanna say real problems; what can my project do in the big scheme of things in the world? But it has to be there because the parkinson's

community benefits from it. I do this, and someone else can do something else and we benefit. We tackle different areas. Can I stop Trump from building a wall? Me, Simone now? Probably not. But I can give a group of 15 students a smile through dance, through hope, through popping by empowering them, making them feel good about life, making them feel in control of their lives and in control of their bodies. They're learning to dance...which is feeling in control of their own life and the skill is transferable to other parts of their own life and that's incredibly important and necessary.

### **IA: Where did you meet Hip Hop?**

SS: I was 10. We had a flyer of a dance club and my mum said, why don't you try it. You don't have to do ballet, you can do Hip Hop. I was doing martial arts at the time.

### **IA: What martial arts?**

SS: I was doing Tae-Kwon-do. I started when I was four and I did it for 11/12 years...I did the whole until black belt... but as soon as I got the black belt I stopped. I struggled with fighting on a personal level. When I got the black belt I had a match, and the first thing that happened was I kicked the opponent. It was a friend of mine, a female friend and the first thing I did kick, boom. I kick her in the face and she goes to the ground. I actually hurt her. It was in the rules and stuff, don't get me wrong, but I saw that I could actually...that I actually hurt her and I didn't want that. Yes I won, I got the black belt, thank you very much, but I didn't give a shit about that. I felt so bad. I was like OK, enough. The future in

the business side of martial arts would have been fighting only and I was not interested in that; that comes back if we talk about battles as in Hip Hop battles. Anyway, I was sent to dance class tired. It wasn't even a Hip Hop class it was something like 'Funky...' I don't know, whatever. Suddenly I was like OK I had no clue over what Hip Hop was or what dancing was. It wasn't Hip Hop music thinking about it...I mean it was Craig David with What's Your Flava? I clearly remember dancing to What's Your Flava? as my first memory of Hip Hop dance and I never stopped. I kept studying dance and it's about having the teachers that tell you, this comes from, this is part of that and listening to the actual music. 'What's Queensbridge?' If you Google Queensbridge, who's from there? Nas. Then it was about being curious and doing research about what I was doing. To be the good student of Hip Hop culture I tried to do all the disciplines. I still produce beats, which is not a discipline in itself, but part of the different elements that make up this Hip Hop thing. I tried rapping and I'm shit at it. I tried drawing, definitely not my thing. Tagging...my dad is a cop and it's not in my family to be illegal in that sense. So I just can't...even the legal one...I can't draw. I did a little bit of DJing but I was always more of a Scratch DJ - that's more a taste thing...I haven't scratched in 10 years because my turntables are back in Italy. So it was the dancing what got me through. That's how I had this encounter of what Hip Hop was and you just go from there. Within Hip Hop dance, I always did standing dance. I did study breaking and I loved it - to this day I love watching battles, the energy and the creativity - sometimes I do

get bored of stand-up battles and shows, but B-Boying oh my god, oh my god. I studied it but first of all I wasn't as good and then I just felt like popping was the one to keep and it really resonated with me. Maybe it's because of the martial arts with the punch, the kick, the impact and the readiness. I have to say I really struggled with B-Boying in the first place. Again, I'm a very White, ginger boy from a nice place. I can't just be in the streets breaking because to me, it didn't feel me. It felt a bit ridiculous. It felt as if I was pretending to be somehow in the Hip Hop culture. So I said to myself, let's stop pretending, let's be me and to me that meant embracing popping. Even though it's not a Hip Hop technique as such, but is included in the umbrella term of what Hip Hop is.

### **IA: What was your first battle?**

SS: My first battle was...I was probably about 15/16 in Italy. It was OK. But again it's the idea of the fight...I can't stand that. I started dancing because I loved it and started dancing to the music. I don't give a shit about being a better technician than someone else in 30 seconds. I don't care. What does that give me? I won a couple of things. A couple of regional things. But again it didn't feel it was me. Again, it's business. That's the issue. I say popping but I think that's in all the battles. With the Olympics coming up...we could discuss this for days. The business side of the battles is you pay, you dance for 30-45 seconds, if you go through you dance, maybe quarters, semi, final. Four - plus selection - maybe five minutes in an event that is between four, six or eight hours. What for? My heart

cannot be done in one minute. Expressing yourself in one minute? What can you do in one minute? By the time you enter, you need to leave. Again, it's about adhering to the rules of the business of the battle. There's a judge who looks for x y z and it's different for every judge...but that's another story. I enter, I know I have to do x y z very nicely and be better than my opponent. That's a game and I don't like playing games. I dance because dance is playful without being childish, it's not about playing a game. Battles do not resonate with me at all. I understand that they do for other people, but not for me, that's my feelings. As a dance professional one of the only ways to get some money out of your dancing is through battles, but we have music videos, commercials and touring with a singer or something. Theatre is now slowly and surely coming up. There're many ways you can make money as a Hip Hop dancer in the industry. But for a long time it was battles only. So I understand that you have to do that. I understand the need for battles and they have the great side too. If it wasn't for Bruce and Juste Debut a lot of people wouldn't be dancing Hip Hop...before Bruce, I have never met Bruce personally, if it wasn't for that sort of event a lot of people wouldn't be doing Hip Hop. Me included. When I was a kid I went to Paris and it was the one thing. It was before all the other big events. It was the thing and the energy was awesome. I have to give props to that. I see why someone would start to battle in the first place but the down side is limiting the artistry into 30 second rounds. It's a child game. In Italy there's a real lack of culture when it comes to Hip Hop...with a lot of things

but Hip Hop specifically. So if anyone wins that becomes a thing...I understand that. Not in terms of trend that happens everywhere. So Salah, one of the best performers of the 20 years. His presence, his everything was just...boom. Incredible. Is he popping? We can argue about that. Yes he is popping but in the umbrella sense, with other styles, plus the characters and his flavour. But the problem is that that becomes the definition of popping for the next year... and that means people train popping and they do what Salah did. Then the next year - I don't know who won the next year - but someone else, it could be literally anyone else wins, and then oh shit this is popping now. So there's a lack of culture in that respect. Salah deserved to win yes, because his presence and his character and his level was the top. But that's the thing and that's the downside of battles especially when they go that mainstream.

#### **IA: An imitation of sorts?**

SS: Yes. He did that. He won the biggest event. So that means that is the correct thing to do. That is popping and that means people for one year people train to become a new Salah rather than new poppers. If it's not Salah, it's Nelson, or one of the Korean guys. I'm not saying that their level is not good and I'm not saying that they're not popping, I'm saying that the problem with the business side of the battle is that whoever wins becomes what that is.

#### **IA: Where do you like to dance?**

SS: I'm going to say it...this is boring but cyphers...cyphers as a moment of exchange. We

put the music on and we dance together. Let me see if I can do something as good, let's see if I can do something better. It's an exchange and then we come out of it. If we dance for half an hour or one hour...we put some music on and it's a constant exchange. After that time we both happy, we both grew, we both improved our technique - or whatever you wanna call it - but on some level we improved. We danced it and we enjoyed it. Boom. That's the best thing. I'm not gonna say the club, because I'm not a club kind of guy. Again, I'm very White and ginger...I can't go to the club and act Black, it's not me. By myself...but that's everyone loves being by themselves and dancing...with no rules and just having a groove.

#### **IA: Who are the three people that you go to?**

SS: Oh, shit this is very very hard. When you say you go to, what do you mean?

#### **IA: It could be to be fed, for support...but there are people we think of as these are my people.**

SS: Oh...OK. First of all this is a really hard question. What I'm gonna answer today is not what I'm gonna answer tomorrow. So. One has to be...I would say anyone from the Electric Boogaloos probably Pete just because I...yeah probably Pete out of all of them; he was there when they started and he has been dancing from the beginning until now, non stop. His understanding of the technique and his understanding of the industry is very deep...and he's very approachable and a lovely guy so...I would go to him for any popping related questions. On a spiritual level. Brian



Green. He fucking changed my life. When I was 17 or 18 I was in a week long workshop in Italy in the summer and he was there. I was going through a really shit phase on a personal level and now I can't even remember why... but something was wrong and I was depressed...I was still dancing and studying and I was in high school probably... yeah I was in high school. I was a teenager. The discussion I had with Brian Green was life changing. I don't remember the actual words that he said, but he really touched me on a spiritual level. That gave me the confidence and a piece of soul to keep going. I remember having three or four conversations with Brian in that week and he is very Christian. I'm a Christian as well...he didn't convert me and we didn't talk religion in that sense...Walid was saying the same thing in his language and in another tradition. I was like 'Oh shit. These two men who come from two different parts of the world and have two different religions are telling me the same thing...that on a spiritual level I can be OK with myself and embrace who I am and in a way be Hip Hop'. OK. I am a very White, ginger guy and I can embrace me and give my very best to the community.

**IA: So Pete, Brian...who's the third?**

SS: It has to be parkinson's because of the project. For parkinson's knowledge...Peter Lovatt and Sara Houston. They're both researchers that I admire and they did a lot of actual scientific research into what dance for parkinson's actually is. Their knowledge of dance for parkinson's is great. What I really admire is their curiosity and their

genuine interest in this from a human perspective. They are scientists or psychologists... they're doctors, but their curiosity is oh my god. I have to mention David Leventhal, the guy who basically invented together with his company, dance for parkinson's. He came to my classes and danced. Even though he is the creator of the field, and he came to my class and danced.

**"I was depressed...I was still dancing and studying and I was in high school probably...yeah I was in high school. I was a teenager. The discussion I had with Brian Green was life changing. I don't remember the actual words that he said, but he really touched me on a spiritual level."**

He is in New York, but travelling the world all the time. If you ask me tomorrow, it's someone different. There's so many people that are in my network that are really inspiring, helping, giving me information, giving me support. Today this is my answer.

**IA: You mentioned mental health earlier; how do you practice self-care and look after your mental health?**

SS: I'm rubbish. I'm rubbish at self care. Popping for Parkinson's is my baby and if I need to do stuff...there's always an email to send or a reply to make. I had a phone call from BBC last night. I was at dinner with my girlfriend and the phone went - it's the

BBC can we have a meeting? It's great, but it's really, really hard to take the time for self-care and my own mental health...whatever that means. I know I should do more of that. I know what to do, but it's about doing it. I know it's about breaking the habit, but it's really hard to do that. I quit smoking last year after 10 years. I knew smoking was bad since I started, but for 10

years I was like this is shit, but I keep going. I smell, but I keep going. My girlfriend doesn't like it, but I keep going. Then one day I was like...enough. It was hard...it's not about it being easy, but I knew exactly what to do. It's about doing it. I felt stupid and then you feel guilty because everything is ready and you're still not doing it. It's the same with mental health - I'm aware of all that but I'm missing the last step. This is me on a personal level. In Hip Hop dance, there's a representation of mental health in the theatrical format. I'm not one to judge that. Is it relevant? Yes. No. It's not my place to say. Would I do it? I'm doing something else so... is there a need to talk about mental health? Yes. Within

the Hip Hop world mental health needs to be talked about. I believe it comes from the industry - I'm sorry I'm saying this a lot today and it sounds like the industry is the devil - but the thing is what I think fucks all of us is this detachment. We fell in love with an art form, with the music, with the dancing, with

but still no one buys records any more, it's about streaming. Everyone loves music but the industry destroys the benefits of the actual art form. We hear contemporary dance the same thing...

**IA: It exploits it for financial...**

SS: Absolutely. Exploitation.

**"There's something incredibly satisfying about popping your muscles to a beat. Do I know why? No. You hear a rhythm or a beat and you pop to that. That becomes somehow meditative. Usually beats and songs in the Hip Hop world are built from loops, something that repeats itself over and over again. It's like a Buddhist chant. It repeats itself over and over and over again."**

an art form on a wall, with a fascination with the DJ. That gave us life and positivity. A job in the most generic sense is where all this other stuff is shut down...the initial desire to express yourself. That's what I can see. Dancing is awesome and gives you life...but in the sense you are a performer, a professional performer in an industry which is not supporting you. It's a shitty life to be frank. If you're a musician I don't know...there's more places for music, you listen to music every single day, you don't watch dance...

It's a constant. Black people were exploited - I'm not going to go into African slave trade - but somehow it is. It's about exploitation and it's a capitalist world. There's a notion of if you do what you love you don't work ever in your life. That's totally bullshit. Because if you do what you love, the love disappears because the industry kills the love that you had in the first place. There's no security in any job so if you do something you like, you might be unemployed but at least you're doing something you like. That's rubbish and it's

even worse, because you are unemployed and in an industry that has no space for you. So not only you don't succeed... you lose the love you had for it in the first place. You're destroyed by an industry that kills dedication, and then you become a puppet you know. Why are we saying this? Because of mental health. Instead of focusing on mental health I would focus on changing how the industry works otherwise it's putting a patch on an open wound. Or however you would say...

**IA: A plaster?**

SS: A plaster. Thank you. A plaster doesn't do anything... so let's look at the wound.

**IA: When you pop, tell me about your relationship with your body?**

SS: I feel alive. Short answer but best answer. I feel alive. It's that oomph. It's that oomph and there's something incredibly satisfying about popping your muscles to a beat. Do I know why? No. You hear a rhythm or a beat and you pop to that. That becomes somehow meditative. Usually beats and songs in the Hip Hop world are built from loops, something that repeats itself over and over again. It's like a Buddhist chant. It repeats itself over and over and over again. Or like a prayer from Christianity. You enter that state or that level to be a bit deeper, a bit more sophisticated. It's about this other space, this other level of consciousness...of understanding another level I don't know what it is...but you enter this other dimension, this world. It's the repetition of the beat and the repetition of the pop. Through the repetition you can find a freedom in the frame of the loop. It's

incredibly satisfying for me to pop on the beat. There must be something in the brain...but I can't tell you what it is, but my body feels alive. After 12 years of proper popping and I say proper because I'm 27 so, 17 years of dancing and 12 of actual popping it's just like eating. You don't think about it because there's a rhythm and the body responds to that rhythm. Even in its lightest form; I'm not saying I go around the dance floor and am cool and all that bullshit - that's just showing off. It's natural and it happens, it becomes a natural reaction. For me it's like eating and for me it's natural to pop to music. So in the brain, there must be some dopamine released, that's what people with parkinson's lack - the dopamine. Maybe there's something there, if only we had the resources to have a look at it and have scans while dancing. One day.

**IA: Tell me about Popping For Parkinson's. You were inspired by your grandfather who had parkinson's and it's a weekly class in Wimbledon for 15 or so people. What is it that still makes you want to do it?**

SS: Them. It's them. I go there as a class and my approach to them is the same - it's not exactly the same - but my general approach is I'm going to teach a popping class to them. It's not 'Oh my god they have parkinson's so I'm...' I don't go with that spirit. I'm teaching adult beginners and for me the smile at the end of the class is everything. Especially considering their faces are sometimes frozen... because of parkinson's they lose their ability to express themselves through facial expression. If they smile on the outside, inside they are

exploding. It's their hunger as well, they don't give a shit about becoming professional dancers or performers they come here because they enjoy it, they like it and they can feel the benefits. You feel it in their energy. For someone who lives 24/7 with it, having one hour a week is... you can breathe for an hour. You can see it in the way they breathe and the way they dance. I'm not going to list all the benefits because you can find the benefits on the website; I would love to see it from a scientific point of view, because that's my thing. I think there's a lot of work that has to be done within that field and if we can prove with a scientific method then we can bring it to the world a little bit more easily. It's not 'Oh you need to believe me, they feel great.' They still have the benefits but if you have that piece of paper saying it...that piece of paper is necessary to make people outside the dance world, outside the parkinson's world understand what we do. We might understand it if we talk about the project because you might have an understanding of Hip Hop or because someone else of parkinson's or whatever. But if I have to explain the project to someone who has no clue about Hip Hop or parkinson's or dance or how can I talk to this person? Then science comes in. I'm doing the scientific research with my masters in exactly this to speak to as many people as possible. So I can reach as many people as possible and if I talk science as well as all the other things that are there...I can reach all the other people who might be a bit scared or a bit sceptical.

**IA: What are the findings and research you've found so far?**

SS: I'm in the process of collecting data and the research is in progress so I cannot give you an answer to that yet. I'm looking at mood and quality of life. The way we research stuff is another topic. Unfortunately the research done so far in the dance for parkinson's world is you have parkinson's, I measure you now, you do 10 classes of dance, one class a week - like as if it was a pill basically - and let's see how you feel. What they measure is mostly physical traits, such as balance or length of stride. The issue with that is, if you have a degenerative disease, in 10 weeks if nothing happens, you will be worse. It's a degenerative disease. Dance is not magic. One hour a week is not going to do anything, especially on a physical level. It's better than nothing but the main issue here is one hour of dance is not going to give you better balance. If I want better balance I go to the physio who is going to give me specific exercises for better balance. The benefit of dance is not specifically measurable. How do you measure empowerment? Happiness? The feeling of being in control of your life? How can you measure social bonding? The tools we have at the moment are not good enough or not specific enough for what we want to do. So mood and quality of life are the only aspects that I can measure on a scientific level that are not complete nonsense. If I started looking at balance as a result of dance interventions... it would be like me saying start playing the piano because it treats my arthritis in my head. If it does it's a plus. And if it's there and we discover that it's there awesome but that does not mean we should all play the piano to treat arthritis. We

play the piano because of the music. What's the question?

**IA: It was about the research.**

SS: It's very funny that you mention it because they found themselves in a community because of parkinson's... whether they like it or not

**"They found themselves in a community because of parkinson's...whether they like it or not right? Instead of being a minority, they become a crew...do you know what I mean? The moment they come to dance, they become a crew and this shift of perspective is incredibly empowering to them."**

SS: Oh yes. So, the thing I'm measuring at the moment is quality of life, because it's the only thing I can do scientifically. There's a lot of work that is relevant in terms of qualitative research. All the research at the moment is quantitative - how long does it take you to go from here to there. You can measure that and that's what they do. But the power of dance is not that. If you do not improve your balance or coordination after your dance classes...you have a shit teacher because that's an integral part of the dance class. Dance is balance and coordination. So of course, yeah, you're going to see an improvement in that. Is that the reason why we dance? No.

**IA: One of the things in Hip Hop is this idea of alternate kinships, crews and families you choose, rather than blood families. You've mentioned the family that comes to your class, are they an alternate kinship?**

right? Instead of being a minority, they become a crew... do you know what I mean? The moment they come to dance, they become a crew and this shift of perspective is incredibly empowering to them. For example, a month ago I couldn't teach for the class on one day...but they still met; they met before class, had a drink and chat...then they did the class by themselves. I don't know what they worked on but they were there, they danced and they were there afterwards. They were a crew. They showed that they want to be part of this family and that's really empowering. It's really fundamental. I was talking about jams recently. 'Oh there's no more jams any more...only battles.' When I grew up jams were not there already. Maybe they were but I was too young to find them. Once I had an understanding of the culture, and I could travel independently there was no jams as such for me to go to. I think it's silly to bring back

jams for someone who has never experienced one. Jams now don't happen because the society has changed. The idea of the jam is we meet because we are hungry, we have a need to learn and the only way I can learn is if we all meet at the same place and same time. If you are there, then you are part of the culture...you meet, you share and you do stuff. Then you go home and practice. If you're not there you're screwed. You are not part of the culture, you're not contributing and you're not learning. Now we have access to everything on the internet. I don't need to go to the jam to listen to new records or to see the latest battle...I can just stream it online. I don't need to learn the history of someone by meeting his crew for example. I see graffiti everywhere and I can Google graffiti. There's DJ apps on my phone if I wanna learn. So there's no need for the jam and we don't need to meet any more. My project is the only real jam that is available now...in the sense that people with parkinson's gather in one place at one time. They are hungry to learn and hungry to contribute. If they're not there they're not there, they don't have access to that particular thing. So not only is there a sense of a crew who become a family there's a sense of being a jam in terms of a meeting point where they have a culture and learning whatever that thing is.

**IA: What is troubling you at the minute?**

SS: Many things including project related future funding. Luckily, I am funded now, thanks to Sadiq Khan - thanks to the Mayor of London and the Big Lottery Fund. But only until June 2020. I always need

to apply for funding for this class and I'm in the process of applying for funding in Italy for the class that's already happening as well as a class that's happening in September.

**IA: In Italy or the UK?**

SS: There's two in Italy. One that is already happening and one that is early stages. We're discussing one in Switzerland as well. It's always about money because again it's about reaching as many people as possible; if the project is free of charge - if it's just me - I can donate my time for free...but if its people teaching the method Popping for Parkinson's, I can't ask them to teach for free. If they want to do it for free, that's another story but I can't ask them to teach for free. I also need a physical space which needs to be paid for. The money is not a lot...we don't need a lot of money, but it's still difficult to find. That's always the struggle.

**IA: With the expansion of the class into different places, is there a lesson plan, syllabus, a framework to follow?**

SS: Yes. The class is designed in a specific way and it always includes certain elements. Basically the idea is it is a popping class, but the way it's performed, executed and studied is in a very specific way to avoid injuries; when I say injuries I don't mean injuries everyone can have in a popping class but specific parkinson's related injuries. I need to make sure the students are stimulated to their best within the safe practice. For example if I teach kids I would have a different methodology, I would have a different warm up and I would teach them different things. I

might for example - they don't risk falling as much as people with parkinson's - if kids fall then they roll and stand up... it is about a method. I'm not here setting steps.

**IA: Is it like Zumba?**

SS: The idea is Zumba-like. Whether you go to a Popping for Parkinson's class here or in Italy, you will always find the warm up in a certain way. The warm up is in a circle and it's a stupid thing, but it comes from the dance for PD registered method in New York. It has a reason for it and the warm up is done in a specific format. Then there's a section. It's not steps, it's sections. That's the only way I make sure that the people with parkinson's are engaged in a similar way across the world. They all share the same knowledge popping wise and so we all agree on the same methodology to teach and to share; because unfortunately there's not one popping book and so we all need to agree that we talk the same language first. The I make sure they deliver the class the same as me - methods wise - of course the steps and attitude are different, so the class will be different, but not substantially different. I teach popping teachers; I can't teach it to people who aren't popping teachers...what I teach is the knowledge on parkinson's; first I say what parkinson's is, second this is why popping is relevant to parkinson's and third the safe practice and benefits offered within the limit of one hour a week.

**IA: If you were a stick of rock and we broke you in half - what would be the words running through you? What are your core values?**

SS: Same thing as before, what I answer today is different to what I'm gonna answer tomorrow. But today I'm gonna say consideration. I always try my best to be considerate and with time I'm way more aware of consideration...because a lot of other people aren't and that's why I notice it. Honesty is another one. Honesty and being genuine. I don't know... how different they are, but the idea of being honest with myself and other people as well as being genuine with myself and other people. The last word is curious/driven. Driven to be curious or curious to be driven - a combination of that. It's about curiosity, being considerate and being honest.

**IA: I've got two questions, but is there anything that you want recording or putting down? A memory, an exchange?**

SS: It's a shout out moment. There are two shout out moments that I have to do because they are not here when the project started, but they were here before that and I think they influenced me without me even knowing; I look back now and think, that was really influential. One was Lorenzone, an Italian B-Boy. Top rock champion and historic Italian B-Boy. It was the beginning of Facebook, say 15 years ago and one Christmas he brought a pandoro - the Italian Christmas cake - to homeless people. I don't know lots of cakes, lots of Christmas cakes from the trunk of his car; here you go. That's it. He helped a community. That was his way of being Hip Hop and helping the people around him in the world. At the time I didn't understand how Hip Hop he was; it didn't click that it was the same thing, it shares the same ground. The



other shout out is ILL-Abilities. They are top class people and their disability is their strength; they embrace their disability fully and then they break. We do the same with Popping for Parkinson's; we embrace the tremor and use it. The same with Lazy Legs, his crutches are there anyway, so he might as well use them. They are two things that are really influential.

**IA: You've mentioned your race, class and privilege a bit. What role does race and class play in your work?**

SS: When it comes to the Popping for Parkinson's there's no such thing. I'm only aware of my race, my class and my background. I mean I'm always aware of my background - my race and my privilege as a White male in a First World country. I'm always aware of that. I haven't encountered the problem of race within the Popping for Parkinson's project. If I teach here, I have mostly White people because it's a predominantly White area. When I taught it last year in the Bronx I had mainly Black people. They both enjoyed it equally. I don't encounter race as a problem in my project. Everywhere else, yes. From the smallest thing as a very privileged White male I look at auditions for dancers for contemporary Hip Hop dancers; most of the time I cannot apply for stuff because they are looking for Black people, Asian people or other ethnic minorities.

**IA: What's your strongest memory of dance?**

SS: Strongest memory of dance...what comes to mind now? First thing that comes to mind is studying with Greg Campbelllock Jr...it was his last...just before he died. It

was wow. It was mind blowing to see this fat, sick, basically deaf guy sitting on the chair and teaching us. He was so fucking inspiring.

**IA: Why was he inspiring?**

SS: Because the energy in his eyes and it fucked up his voice because he was sick...then he got up and danced. He did everything and wow. That was something that I really cherish. I know it's not popping related, it's locking but you see...again you see in the eyes, the love of what it is and not the business of it. That's what comes to mind. I talk a lot I'm sorry.

**IA: No, this is for you to talk and to document those primary experiences.**

SS: For me it's always hard to find the moment to sit down and talk a little bit more, and be like 'Popping for Parkinson's was born. I do interviews all the time that are like...if you just read the website we wouldn't be here like...please...I have probably said something that I will regret, something that is not politically correct. But fine. I'm happy for you to take out the swearing if...

**IA: When will you complete your research?**

SS: I need to finish by November 2020. I'm collecting in September and I'm finishing up the actual tools...I will do a workshop in June if everything goes well here with my class and in September I will go to New York, to Italy and one in Germany maybe. By October hopefully the data collection will be done and I will have a year to write it all up. But in the meantime I need to pay rent, I need to find funding and it's a lot of work. In the future hopefully this will be my

full time paid job...not my full time unpaid job. To be the one travelling around the world giving the classes.

**IA: Like David?**

SS: Exactly like David. He's the model. He's the boss. He's been doing this for 15 years and in 10 years hopefully I'll be in that position. It's what I really want to do and hopefully we will get there. I have to express my frustration when it comes to the Hip Hop world because of this business stuff that I was saying. The lack of support is ridiculous, the focus is on battle and not on the real thing. It makes me appreciate people like Wilkie because...

**IA: Wilkie's investment in TOM was...**

SS: Fucked up. That got to the point that it was fucked up...I mean the production was...I've never seen any dance film to that level. It's the best dance film but he sacrificed a lot yes and that's fucked up.

**IA: Why should you have to sacrifice so much?**

SS: I was watching something last night before I went to bed, some fucking QI and they did a massive study on monkeys and their ability to use sex and porn for food and other jobs...people are spending millions on pounds of research into monkey...

**IA: Monkey porn?**

SS: Yet they can't find me five grand a year to pay for a space and pay a teacher. It is ridiculous...but then there's Trump, Brexit, knife crime and then there's parkinson's. If you go to the Parkinson's UK website...I went to a workshop last month and David and Sara

were there with loads of other people...in the Parkinson's UK statement on their website they don't mention anything arts related. They don't. They recognise that people are doing something to help people with parkinson's. Not even a thank you...they don't acknowledge that we exist.

**IA: Have they ever been in touch? Even after the Hall of Fame?**

SS: Never have I got a call from someone at Parkinson's UK. Even though I told them, this is what I'm doing, here is a workshop...I was in Parkinson's UK events, by people linked to them...we were in an event at Sadler's Wells last week, loads of people in the field, and not one Parkinson's UK representative. They ask did you invite them? Yes. Did they come? No. That's why I feel guilty...that I'm very White in a sense. Because with all the shit that's happening...

**IA: But you're making a difference to a community...**

SS: ...and that should be the only thing - not the only thing but the main thing we should focus on, not how do I deal with knife crime. Honestly, if the kids - instead of hanging out on the streets and giving each other a rough time - wanted to come to a popping class, if they want me to come to a community centre and do it. If they don't have money, fine I'll do it for free. The world is fucked up but I guess what we do is we try to make it better in whatever way we can.





