

FEATURES

Street dancing makes its move

Katherine Nguyen
MCT WIRE SERVICE

Ask hip-hop dancers to describe what they do and they might have a hard time. Instead, ask them to show you.

There's a new school of hip-hop dance that is evolving beyond '80s-style break dancing or the moves you see on MTV. It's new enough that it has yet to form a solid identity.

Another difference is diversity. What used to be a primarily an urban art form has jumped to places like Orange County, Calif., particularly among Asian Americans.

It's also no longer underground. This year, urban dance has popped up in movies such as "Step Up 2" and in reality TV shows such as MTV's "America's Best Dance Crew" and "So You Think You Can Dance?" "It's not a fad," said Elm Pizarro, founder of Boogiezone.com, a social networking site devoted to hip-hop dancers. "It's a culture, a way of life."

Pizarro picked up hip-hop dancing as a teen while living in Seattle practicing in his back yard, at the clubs, anywhere but inside a studio.

"For me, it was the '90s when hip-hop dancing emerged, right around when I started watching music videos for MC Hammer, Kwame and Public Enemy," said the 33-year-old, who now lives in Aliso Viejo, Calif. "A lot of my dancing now is still rooted in that basic style."

When Pizarro moved to Orange County about five years ago, he was surprised to find a thriving hip-hop and street dance scene with collegiate and exhibition teams performing in an established competitive circuit.

There are an estimated 15 to 20 urban dance crews in Orange County now, from various teams at the

University of California, Irvine like the Chinese Association Dance Crew and Common Ground, to exhibition teams like Mavyn Entertainment and Breed, which was formed by Pizarro to market the Boogiezone site.

The first was UCI's Kaba Modern, founded in 1992 by Arnel Calvario. As a UCI freshman, Calvario joined the campus' Kababayan, or Filipino student organization. Every year, the club sponsored a culture night, an event that drew a crowd of 1,500 to 2,000 for a showcase of traditional Filipino dances and performances.

Calvario — who had been dancing hip-hop routines with his friends at high school talent shows and at house parties — wanted to add hip-hop dancing to the event.

"I thought it would help blend the traditional with the more American aspects of our generation," Calvario said. Calvario was approached by so many students who wanted to dance that he started Kaba Modern and modern hip-hop routines became a regular part of the culture night.

From there, the group performed at import car shows and other community events. Soon, other Filipino student organizations in California followed suit, forming groups like Cal State Fullerton's Team Millennia and Cal State Long Beach's PAC Modern.

That eventually led to annual competitions like Vibe, which draws some 3,000 spectators and some of the best collegiate hip-hop dance teams from all over California to vie for trophies and notoriety. Stage shows are elaborate and consist of co-ed teams of 30 or more dancers performing choreographed routines.

Today, there are at least four major events in the competitive collegiate dance circuit, including Prelude, in both Northern and Southern California, Fusion in San Diego, Vibe in Irvine and Body Rock in San Diego.

"The scene is definitely exploding," Calvario said. "I think it's a good thing for the dance community to grow and for more people to recognize hip-hop dance as an art form."

Riding the top of the wave right now are six members

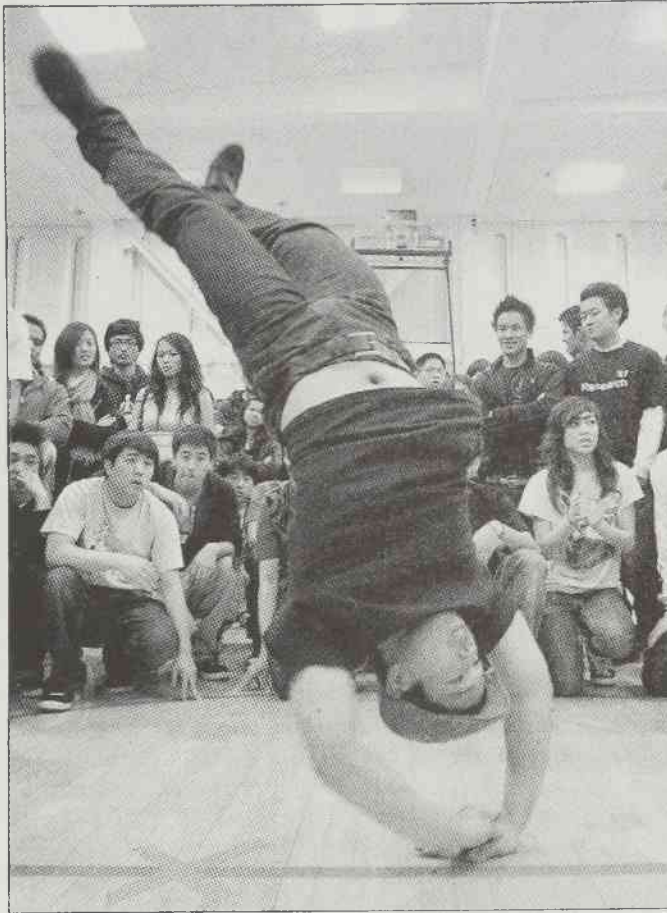


Photo courtesy of MCT Wire Service

Shows such as "Step Up 2," have brought dancing back to the forefront of the mainstream.

of UCI's Kaba Modern dance team. They are one of several groups across the country vying to win the title of "America's Best Dance Crew" on MTV and a \$100,000 cash prize.

In the early 1990s, when guys like Calvario and Team Millennia founder Danny Batimana started, hip-hop dance styles were less complicated.

Batimana, who's trained in jazz and funk, said he didn't even get into hip-hop dancing until junior high.

"We'd get all dressed up in our Hammer pants and creepers and go battle," recalled Batimana, who co-owns Team Millennia Dance Center in Fullerton. "Back then it was all about energy and entertaining the crowd ... it wasn't so difficult."

Today, hip-hop dancing is so versatile that it blends elements of more classical forms, including jazz and ballet. Any hip-hop or street dancer can spout off a mind-bending laundry list of current dance styles:

breaking (break dancing), krumping, whacking, bucking, popping, locking, house, tutting, old-school, waving, grooving and then some. All basically stem from street styles of dancing that emerged in the '70s.

"It's having a certain pos-

ture, bending your knees right, how you control your body, how your face looks and how you execute the moves," said John Abas, who danced with Team Millennia in 1994. "I know it when I see it."

Today's almost-anything-goes vibe lends itself to what's being called the new school or new-style hip-hop.

The goal now is to innovate new ways to move or contort the body in manners that don't always resemble dance. The emphasis is to be different from everything else that's out there. Smaller, more controlled and intricate movements also are popular.

"People out there might not realize how diverse hip-hop dancing can be," Calvario said. "Some of the best b-boys and b-girls (break dancers) are ballerinas and gymnasts, because breaking takes a lot of discipline and poise. And popping is so difficult to do because you have to isolate every muscle in your body."

Instead of going by counts for steps, many instructors now go by beats, too. So instead of the traditional "5-6-7-8," instructors can now be heard vocalizing the beats to teach the steps: "Crack, boom, crack."

For less-educated workers, good jobs will be harder to find

Tony Pugh
MCT WIRE SERVICE

WASHINGTON

The steady loss of "good jobs" by less-educated workers has left them more vulnerable to recession than at any time in nearly 30 years, and signs are mounting that a recession is either already here or coming soon.

High-school dropouts and even high-school graduates who lack specialized job training have seen their already limited employment prospects steadily decline during America's decades-long shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service economy.

Not long ago, Americans who were unable to attend college could count on finding local factory jobs after high school. The lucky ones landed in muscular industries such as aviation, steel and automobiles, while others found work on assembly lines building durable goods.

These and other "good jobs" were the signature byproducts of a robust economy that once was the envy of the world. The jobs provided stability and decent wages that allowed families to buy homes, provide for their children and retire in modest comfort.

The Center for Economic and Policy Research defines a "good job" as one with health insurance, a pension plan and earnings of at least \$17 per hour. That works out to about \$34,000 a year, the inflation-adjusted median income for men in 1979, when U.S. manufacturing jobs numbered 19.6 million, an all-time high.

Since then, however, the economy has lost nearly 6 million manufacturing jobs 52,000 in February alone. Among them were many of the 3.5 million "good jobs" lost from 2000 to 2006, according to John Schmitt, a senior economist at CEPR.

As those jobs disappeared, many blue-collar workers were forced to take jobs with far less pay and benefit security.

This caused the share of high-school graduates with good jobs to fall from about one in five in 1979 to one in seven in 2005, Schmitt found. For those who didn't finish high school, the decline was even steeper. The share of these workers with good jobs fell from roughly one in seven to one in 25 over the same period.

With a recession certain to accelerate job losses, experts say that less-educated workers who lack marketable job skills likely will have the hardest time holding onto their jobs and the toughest time finding new employment.

"People in the middle and at the bottom (of the wage scale) are going to be the bulk of the victims in a recession," Schmitt said. "They're proportionally going to take a much bigger hit."

In Groveton, N.H., where papermaking has long been a part of local life, Murray Rogers was among 300 workers who lost their jobs in December when the sprawling Wasau Paper mill on the Upper Ammonoosuc River shut its doors after more than 100 years of operation.

A 50-year-old pipefitter and welder, Rogers was a year out of high school in 1976 when he began working at the mill. Over his 31 years at the plant, his wages had swelled to nearly \$21 an hour.

As president of the local steelworkers union, Rogers took a one-year job with a group that helps find jobs for displaced mill workers. Most are taking pay cuts as they try to find new careers without the higher education and specialized training that the new job market demands.

Helping fuel the loss of good jobs has been a decline in union membership, industry deregulation, increased outsourcing of state and government services and economic policies that focus more on containing inflation than on maintaining full employment, Schmitt said.

As good jobs become harder to find, bad jobs have become much easier to get. In 1979, 41 percent of workers who didn't finish high school held "bad jobs," those with no health insurance or pension plans and paid less than \$16.50 an hour in inflation-adjusted wages. By 2005, that number had grown to 61 percent, Schmitt found.

David Meza of Beaverton, Ore., is struggling to escape that trend. Meza, 47, worked 14 years assembling heavy-duty trucks for the Freightliner truck company. But when most of the production operations were moved to Mexico, he was laid off in March 2007.

An 11th-grade dropout who taught himself to read and write, Meza never earned his General Equivalency Diploma because he was making \$21.50 an hour without it. He didn't realize his mistake until he started looking for a new job.

"I had a lot of experience. I ran a forklift, worked at canneries in Alaska, been a truck driver, but none of that matters unless I've got a GED. So I'm pushing myself as hard as I've ever done in my life to get it," he said.

As the job search continues, Meza longs for the days when overtime was plentiful and employers interviewed job applicants in person, instead of reading their resumes online.

"Those were the good ol' days," he said.

'Good jobs' disappearing

High-paying U.S. jobs with benefits are down, especially for workers with little education.

Workers with good jobs
Pay at least \$16.50 per hour (in 2005 dollars) with benefits*

	1979	2005
No high school diploma	14.8%	3.9%
High school grad	21.0%	14.0%

Workers with bad jobs

Pay less than \$16.50 per hour, no benefits

	1979	2005
No high school diploma	40.8%	60.6%
High school grad	29.3%	36.3%

*Health insurance fully or partly paid by employer; pension plan with worker participation
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Source: John Schmitt, Center for Economic and Policy Research (U.S.)
Graphic: Judy Treake

Historically black colleges are struggling, educators tell Congress

Halimah Abdullah
MCT WIRE SERVICE

WASHINGTON

Financially strapped historically black colleges across the country are at a crossroads.

Cutbacks in federal and state spending and competition from mainstream institutions for the best students, educators and academic programs have taken a toll on schools that were created to educate African-American students after slavery, said presidents from some of the nation's top historically black colleges on Thursday.

Now, critics are questioning the relevance of historically black colleges and universities, commonly known as HBCUs, in a post-segregation era, and some decry the use of taxpayer dollars to pay for them.

"I am often asked as the president of a historically black university whether HBCUs continue to be viable. The answer I give is a resounding yes," Mary Sias, president of Kentucky State University, told members of the House Education and Labor Committee. "HBCUs are and continue to be needed and are as vital now to the educational system in America as they have ever been."

"KSU and other HBCUs take the terror of poverty, hunger, fear and

hopelessness and turn it into hope," she said. "With a little more money and capital we can do even more."

The Princeton Review listed KSU as a "Best Southeastern College"; U.S. News and World Report listed it as part of its "America's Best Colleges 2007."

Still, the school is facing a \$3 million cut in state funding, and Sias said she's fighting an uphill battle when it comes to helping some of her school's nonterminal degree graduate programs become eligible for a federal competitive grant designed to help schools that serve large minority populations.

Historically black colleges represent only four percent of all higher-education institutions, but roughly 40 percent of all African-American students graduate from them, said Dorothy Yancy, the president of Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, N.C.

Fisk University, a school in Nashville, Tenn., with a student population of less than 1,000, graduates more black students who go on to earn doctorates in the natural sciences than any other school in the nation, according to a National Science Foundation study.

However, historically black colleges and universities face huge financial

and social hurdles.

According to a study by Education Trust, 60 percent of the nation's students complete their undergraduate studies in six years. For an African-American student enrolled at a historically black college or university, where 70 percent of students are low income, the odds of completion are even lower, Sias said.

Over a lifetime, the average American with a bachelor's degree will earn roughly \$2.1 million, while an African American with the same degree will earn \$1.7 million, the college presidents told the panel.

Over the past two decades, at least seven historically black colleges have lost their accreditation. While some schools were able to regain their accreditation status, others, such as Knoxville College and Morris Brown College, remain open without regional accreditation.

In fiscal 2005, six percent of the nation's top mainstream universities received more federal funds for research than 79 historically black colleges and universities combined, according to a report by the National Science Foundation.

"We've always been able to wash clothes without washing powder," Yancy said.