

The Evolution of Dance

Often people wonder how everyday things in life get started. Like dance—how did this become so popular and why have so many people taken part in it? While people have surely be asking these questions for many years before, the evolution of dance became a popular idea in the early 2000s when motivational speaker Judson Laipply made and posted a YouTube video of himself dancing through the past few decades. Since then, many others have made their own versions of the dance that can be found on YouTube as well. Laipply's dances go back to the 1950s as he performed each decade of dance—from Elvis to the Backstreet Boys. While his dance is fun and shows sixty years of dance, it still leaves people asking questions. What happened with dance before those sixty years? How has it evolved since the beginning of time?

Dance is first recorded being performed as a ritual. Dancing was a way that many ancient civilizations would use to worship their gods. In fact, *History World* even says that in some civilizations, dance would be used as an expression of mourning when someone died. In ancient Greece, dance was used almost as a form of ecstasy. Drunken and frantic dances would be used in their festivals for Dionysus, the god of fertility and wine. However, the entertaining dances that are performed today date all the way back to 1400 B.C. These dances that were specifically performed for an audience to watch became widespread and eventually would lead to many of the dances seen in society today.

The oldest known dance that is still being performed today is ballet. It started in France in the early 1400s. While each culture was still busy discovering new ways to dance, many of those dances have faded out. Many of the other dances that are still being performed today, such as Tap Dancing, the Fox Trot, and the Argentine Tango, did not show up throughout the world until the 1800s.

As seen in Laipply's video, the 1900s were a very rich time for dance. From the Charleston to the Jive; from Line Dances to Disco; from the Jitterbug to Hip-Hop, these dances exceeded the known spectrum of dance. Although many of these dances through the decades were at one time or another either banned or censored for being too sexual, people refused to stop dancing. In fact, many of these dances eventually became so popular that they are still being performed today.

Featured Dance: Breaking

One good example of this is what is called breaking or b-boying. This dance is what many people have come to know by the term *breakdancing*. The dance has become a popular hip-hop dance that originated in the early 1970s and has since grown in popularity over the past twenty years. Breaking is a very intense form of dance. In fact, its origin was a way for rival gangs to settle disputes. Nowadays, breaking is for a combination of an athlete and a dancer. The term “breakdancing” was coined in the media in the 1980s, but as Ted Sutaphong, Joshua Rowlette, and any other b-boy (a practitioner of the dance) will say, breaking is the much preferred and proper term for this popular way of dancing.

Ted Sutaphong and Joshua Rowlette are both active b-boys from Fort Wayne, Indiana, and the two gladly agreed to answer some questions about breaking and their involvement with the exciting dance.

What does breaking mean to you?

“Breaking becomes a way of life for people because it's so intensive that it can't be a hobby. Because it is an integral part of one of America's only native cultures (hip-hop), it becomes an all encompassing endeavor that you must think about and practice day and night, forcing you to integrate it into your daily life. Most of B-boys incorporate the principles used in breakdancing in other aspects of their life such as their job or personal relationships. In short breaking is a way of life to me...” –Ted Sutaphong

When and how did you get involved in breaking?

“I started breakin’ as a kid in the early ‘80s simply because it was the thing to do back then. But it died out and was labeled a fad. I started back up around ‘92-‘93 when nobody in the State of Indiana was doing it whatsoever. I was already doing various early ‘90s and late ‘80s Hip-hop social dances like you would see in a Big Daddy Kane, MC Hammer, or BBD video, so when I noticed various older samples being used in Hip-hop music, I gravitated towards an older dance style, which was breakin’. I also was poppin’ around ‘92-‘93.” –Joshua Rowlette

“When I was a freshman in high school, I saw a KRS ONE Video, "Step Into A World". It had B-Boys in slow motion. I thought it was awesome, and decided that I was going to teach myself how to do what they were doing.” –Ted Sutaphong

What is different about breaking from any other type of dancing?

“What makes breakin’ different is the amount of expression one is able to do within the style. By definition, breakin’ means to go off, or in other words, to let loose. Most dance styles you can’t really do certain things because it would be out of the boundaries of said style. Like in tap or ballet, you won't see a tap dancer spinning on their head or upside down on the backside of one's hand. It's just not acceptable within those styles just like many others. But with breakin’, it's encouraged to go to the extreme! It's encouraged to have no boundaries and to push the body to places it's never been before.” –Joshua Rowlette

“Breakin' is street dance. It's not choreographed, it's not routine based. It's organic. Its form changes based off of its environment—the music, who else is around, the type of interaction with other dancers, and countless other things. Although there are moves that have been perfected, they're only words in a conversation.” –Ted Sutaphong

What is your favorite part about breaking?

“My favorite part about breakin is the community of it. There’s nothing else like it.” – Joshua Rowlette

“My favorite thing about breakin' is the vibe between dancers. It's like you get in a zone with people. That vibe transcends language and culture. It's its own thing and it's universal. I'd also like to point out that aside from communicating through movement, B-Boys push the boundaries of what human beings are physically capable of. Nobody else in history has ever accomplished the physical feats that breakers have.” –Ted Sutaphong

Breaking has become popular all over the world. It is being performed on streets and stages pretty much everywhere. These impressive moves the b-boys perform only require two things—the ground and their bodies. Breaking is a dance that can be performed in groups or solo, but either way, the dancers must be committed to the dance. Maybe a combination of the flexibility and wonders of the dance is what makes it such an intriguing and popular dance.

While dancing has definitely evolved over time, there is no chance that it will be going away anytime soon. Who knows what dancing will look like in five, ten, or even twenty years from now. But any dancer would agree that Ted Sutaphong said it right. No matter the dance, dancing is a way of life.