

LORENZO RENNIE HARRIS P.H.D.

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Creative Philosophy

It's Paris. It's 1913. It's Stravinsky's music to Nijinsky's groundbreaking new choreography. It's too much for the audience, and a riot breaks out. It's Philadelphia. It's 2011. It's Stravinsky's music mixed with Arvo Part's and funneled through the millennial mentality of Darrin Ross and, to top it off, the always new choreographic genius of our own Nijinsky, Rennie Harris. Audiences have seen so much since 1913 that nothing starts a physical riot. Nevertheless, Harris's genius sets off a riot in our minds and souls. As the choreographer continues to redefine hip hop with new movement invention and conceptual ideas, he also redefines what we call concert dance. We are invited into a world of myth where the tables are turned and the young virgin to be sacrificed is a beautiful b-boy. The power and agency of women doing this movement vocabulary opens up another level of truth and beauty and turns us around. We must see with the eyes at the back of our head.

–Brenda Dixon Gottschild-2011

Born and raised in North Philadelphia, I am a dancer, choreographer and director of dance. I've danced, taught, lectured and performed professionally since the age of 14. At an early age I worked for the Smithsonian Institution teaching and lecturing about street dance i.e. Hip-Hop. Through the Smithsonian Institution and the Ronald Reagan administration I toured as part of the American Embassy good will tour. Later, I was invited by the Clinton administration to help celebrate and recognize other artist who were contributing to their communities. In addition, in the world of Hip-Hop I was part of the first Hip-Hop dancers to tour nationally and internationally introducing the world to African American expression. In 1992 I was strongly advised not to start a company due to the lack of grants and private donor funds for dance. Of course, I didn't listen and I created work without funding. To my surprise, I was also told not to call myself a Hip Hop dance company, and of course I didn't listen, I specifically marketed my company as a pure Hip-Hop dance company with an unorthodox approach to Hip-Hop on the concert proscenium stage. Twenty years later we are now noted nationally and internationally for being the innovators and pioneers of Hip-Hop concert Dance & Theater. My focus was merely to push street dance vocabulary, it's aesthetic

and texture if you will. Hip-Hop vocabulary, traveling through space and time with ease and intention was not part of its original structure. Soon, I realized I wasn't responding to the environment but rather becoming the environment by way of its vocabulary. This process gave me a very unique perspective, allowing me to define and explore Hip-Hop's vocabulary and aesthetic in a way it had never been done before.

Using multi media, poetry, script, live musicians as well as Hip-Hop musicians such as the Human Beat Box, Bucket player and a Dj, the sky is always the limit. This is what I teach my students when choreographing a Hip-Hop work. There are no rules, everything is fair game, the sky is the limit and take no prisoners. With the motto set, I teach students to create from inspiration while simultaneously employing method and technique. The first phase of creating a work with students begins by creating movement vocabulary and movement phrases. It's my belief that the movement reveals the work, it determines the aesthetic of the work. Once the movement and vocabulary phrases have been created we begin the process of blocking and spacing. Finally we work on characterization if needed and cleaning and adding the final movement and/or movement phrase. Researching and theorizing about a new work isn't part of my methodology. I teach students to create from their core, on the spot. This promotes acknowledgement of choice, voice and individuality, extending beyond Hip-Hop, as it addresses humanity in the most simplest way. Live each moment, embrace each moment and always be present in the moment as it is in these moments that we experience universal truth. The term Hip-hop means to "open your eyes" or "re-open" your eyes. It's because of Hip-Hop that I've been able to choreograph on the Denver, Pennsylvania and Memphis Ballet companies. Needless to say without this new insight I would not be in the position I am today. I see my work as acknowledging moments of clarity and forging through old structures and rules of engagement, when choreographing. Without acknowledging these "moments of clarity" I doubt I would have been able to create the one work that took the dance world by surprise "Rome & Jewels," a Hip-Hop adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. Winning many awards, and specifically the William Shakespeare Award for classical theater, it was the longest running Hip-Hop theater production to date. This work confirmed the importance of Hip-Hop as a cogent and viable dance form. In closing, I've created work that changed lives and that is what is most important to me. Creating work that matters. I didn't set out to become a choreographer or director but I have accepted my calling and I am loving every moment I'm able to enlighten someone with my work with my teaching and with my vision.