

# The impact of rennie harris



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When one imagines the dance style of Hip-Hop, what most likely comes to mind is either a group of young men and women gathered in an alley, forming a circle and watching someone move their body to the beats of fast spoken rap lyrics, or one might envision the scenes of a 50 Cent music video with young women shaking their derriere in the camera. Rennie Harris, known by many as the ambassador of hip-hop community brings something very different to the table. Rennie Harris is more than a hip-hop artist.

He is the interpreter of hip-hop as a cultural ritual, one that celebrates his community's core values and heritage, and invokes its innate spirit, says scholar and dance critic Suzanne Carbonneau. In 1992 Harris founded Rennie Harris Puremovement, in his hometown of Philadelphia. Harris uses his style, referred to on RHPM's website as "hip-hop dance theatre," to be an activist in the community and promote dance, particularly hip-hop, to all ethnicities as an outlet for human expression, attempting to cleanse the genre of its stigma in today's society.

One thing that is truly impressive of Harris' work is that he has created, perfected, and maintained a style, that continues to rise above the negative stereotype hip-hop is sometimes painted with in the media. In doing this he is maintaining the sophistication of the art of dance. As mentioned on his organization's website, In a society where hip-hop is often portrayed as a violent, undisciplined counterculture, RHPM deconstructs popular perception of this medium, expanding and challenging the boundaries and definitions of hip-hop in general.

As hip-hop continues to be chosen as the modern generation's medium of expression, RHPM works to honor its history, explore its ideas, and further its

contributions to the surrounding community. (RHPM. org) The notion that this art form is being preserved is having a huge impact on the dance world. Harris has won numerous awards including, but not limited to, three Bessie Awards, a Herb Alpert Award, and an Alvin Ailey Award. These prestigious honors are just a few recognitions of Harris and RPHM's impact on the community.

Along with choreography, classes, and performances RHPM also offers lectures and demonstrations created with a "vision for sharing an appreciation for diversity and is dedicated to preserving and disseminating hip-hop culture" (RHPM. org). Harris is also very involved in education. Taking dance to new level in the classroom. Focusing mainly on education systems in New Jersey, Florida, California, New York, and of course, Pennsylvania, Harris provides lecture/demonstrations and zestful way to grasp the attention of students. One of their most popular lecture. demonstrations is entitled "History of Hip-hop. An interesting lesson that comes along with this is the lesson of theatre etiquette, teachers are sent an informative packet illustration the rules and proper behavior in a theatre to share with their students. Phrases like "The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively" (Cue Sheet 4) This is passing along the enjoyment of art and proper manners to students even if they are not physically dancing. This creates a very educational experience for the students.

The work that has been done by Rennie Harris is admirable to say the least. Dedication and passion like his are unmatched in other hip-hop

choreographers of our time. This is a genre that is only going to continue to grow and become more popular, and thankfully there are groups like RHPM to continue to educate people on the unique artistic values of the hip-hop dance style. From encouraging people in the community to stay fit to taking urban street performers and turning them into refined performers of the fine art of dance, Rennie Harris has truly impacted not only the hip-hop community, but the dance community, as well.

## **Works Cited**

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3. Rennie Harris Puremovement. " Rennie Harris Puremovement: History of Hip-hop. " Letter to Teachers: Wells Fargo Schools. 10 Oct. 2003. MS.
4. " Rennie Harris Puremovement. " Stanford Lively Arts. Web. 26 Apr. 2011. . RHPM - Rennie Harris Puremovement. 2011. Web. 26 Apr. 2011.