

RE: Letter of Offer for The Hothouse 2005

I saw conkers fall yesterday and brassic from the demands of fresh school uniform, I knew that September and the new Autumn term were imminent. With Baldrick-cunning, we delayed the beginning of SIN Cru teaching term to accept the offer from The Place Artist Development Manager, Nao Black, to take part in The Hothouse 2005.

We had applied to the project and been called for interview back in July. The Hothouse promised ten days intensive coaching, designed specifically to support the artistic development of Hiphop choreographers.

In my jumble-sale brain, The Place is home to London Contemporary Dance School and Richard Alston. With balconies soaked in natural light and beautiful refurbished studios, I wondered what ancient Chinese torture methods of persuasion were in force to risk Hiphop past the congenial, suited and booted security....

The answer was in German but although I only lasted two weeks in my German class, I didn't need that GCSE to understand why.

I put it down to a personality clash with the teacher - the letter home said it was bad attitude, and then my Dad told me a not very funny joke about a man in a bar who has his hat chewed. Language, accent and the right salt in your soup.

Berlin-based **Storm** has been an important and constant part of the european Breakin' scene for time, blowing up to international recognition with his performance at **Battle of the Year '95**. In recent years there have been many rumours on the graffiti'd gossip columns that, plagued by injury, Storm was no longer breakin'. Although Storm has succumbed to several medical mishaps, including a very close call with his neck, he is still breakin' and is also locking and poppin', as well as researching the roots of these dance styles. Storm's energy is currently directed from battles to the theatre, and with a history of Hiphop Theatre shows and tours successfully under his name buckle, he is here, leading The Hothouse 05's investigation.



Standing at the bus stop with cocoa buttered south London rude-gal-school-girls, my pencil case and exercise book, I reread the letter from Nao; SIN Cru had been invited to attend The Hothouse 05 theory sessions and we were expected to participate in discussion to question ourselves and the other participants. We had a timetable and everything - forget Jack Black and School of Rock, I was going to study Hiphop! “BRAP!”

Storm looked different to what I expected -



I think that was because he was in real life and sitting opposite me at a table rather than spinning around my tv screen with all the tracking interference you get on old videos. **Remady** had been waiting for this moment ever since she met Storm when he judged her battle in Berlin, August 2004. Posing for a sneaky paparazzi shot, **Ben Jammin'** noticed that Remady and Storm have the same teeth.



I had to abort my dentist disguise to join the introductions alongside **Jonzi-D** and his collaborator **K.T.P**, **Frank Wilson**, **Nikki Geismar**, and **Zoo Nation**. We spent Monday morning sharing experiences of the creation process, and Artist/Audience communication.

The Familiar v. Invention

Dance technique is learnt through copying and imitation but the style (and dancer) only survives through re-invention.



As an artist, you have to contribute with something new otherwise you become nothing more than a biter and the style stagnates. Here Storm compares dance to language, as a living reflection, a documentary on development and growth. To ensure that everyone understands your vernacular, there has to be an element of familiarity, a historical and recognisable skeleton upon which to hang your personalised Dappa Dan sweatsuit. Storm suggests we create work which discusses where we have come from, but does not define where we are going to. We revisit the foundations from which we innovate.

The task for the day was to create a piece of work from a theme of our own.



As we had only been invited to take part in the theory sessions, we did not have access to studio space; however, we had been invited to present work at the showing later on in the course. So undeterred, via Pizza Express and Damon Albarn inspired, we navigated our way through David Bellamy's undergrowth to find a grass stained rehearsal pitch at Regents Park(life).



Rather than revisiting existing themes and material from our repertoire, I wanted to use Hothouse to challenge our working procedures and explore new practices. Together we decided on “Ladders” as our theme which developed into a game of Snakes and Ladders. Lise led some contact improvisation exercises using the Snakes and Ladders structure of under/over, sliding/climbing, which in retrospect, and much much Stain Devil later, probably wasn’t the best on a lawn, in Evisu and Nikes!

As if that wasn’t enough exercise, we chaperoned Remady, The Amazing Walking Bag, to her hostel; The Generator. Instead of conjuring wholesome images of girl guides and families in Lederhosen, I imagined a late 80s rave in some dodgy disused Carpet City warehouse, and felt for Remady, when desperate for sleep, she is approached by another sweaty bloke, chewing his rotten teeth as he tries to hug her....



But when we arrived, there was a placid quiz in the bar and the smell of clean laundry. The only mushrooms on offer were in photos of the hearty, homecooked english breakfast and instead of Voodoo Ray, the speakers were pumping out Westlife. I left confident with the knowledge that The Amazing Walking Bag was not about to be unzipped by a guy called Gerald.

The next day we were given studio time. We were looking at staging and spatial awareness, and teamed up with Nikki Geismar to create dynamic formations which would lead the audience’s eye.

As bBoys and bGirls, we are conditioned to dance in quite tight circles. Breakin’ was spawned in packed parties and jams where you often had to use your toprocking to clear a space. The signature rotational moves and circular footwork are synonymous with performing in the round, therefore the big open and flat space of a traditional theatre can be quite daunting. Storm explained that being able to use the stage is a whole artform in itself. He advises that no matter what ambience we are trying to create, it is important to spend as much time on spacing as on the actual material. We should use spacing so much that it becomes part of the dance technique.

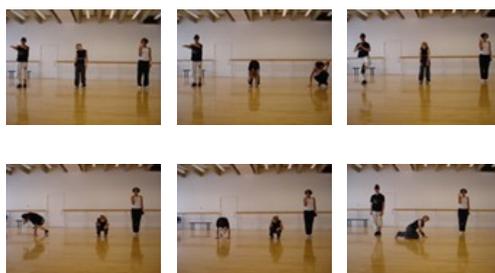
Confessions of a Hater

By my own admission and as a Taurean, I hold grudges and am a stubborn, argumentative fully fledged member of H.A (Haters Anonymous). Hothouse was my therapy and my crew were proud of me, I was behaving. Nao had requested that we enter into the project with open minds and a sense of humour, which I was doing and although my lip was bit on several occasions, I was grateful for this opportunity to network with other artists. At each mini showing, we shared a different feeder to our final story. I very much enjoyed the presentations from the other participants and using the arena as a testing centre for our new responses to Storm's theory sessions, I valued their feedback on our work.

Back at my London lodgings, I noticed a framed collage of photos that my friend, Polly had hung in her hall. Among these images was one of me in 1988 on the school French exchange. This was the trip when Polly and I persuaded all them Frenchies that we were famous rappers by reciting Jungle Bros lyrics at the school disco, whilst our accomplice, 13yr old **Baloo (The Nextmen)** span records. It made me think about history and although, unlike many heads, I don't think it is necessary to have throwdown at Covent Garden (or the Roxy), or to have been gassed at the Onyx concert, Hammersmith Palais, I do believe it is vital to know about it. We all have a responsibility to further the artforms but I believe it is immature to think that this is possible by ignoring the history and culture, la raison d'etre.

Returning to the source is also an important part of researching particular movement quirks in terms of Story and Character. Storm concedes that it can be sufficient to create a show from Theme only, and that by his own admission, being a bBoy is theme enough. However there are pitfalls: If you are only working from a theme, the audience will look more closely at the technique, whereas if you have a story there are many more layers for the audience to concentrate on. Thorough research will give you, as choreographer, new ideas and inspiration for movement vocabulary appropriate to your story and character. It will also provide the audience with something familiar that will help them follow and understand your expansions.

We had developed our theme of Snakes and Ladders into the story of a Race. After sneaking into an empty studio, we decided to start by building our characters and relationships.



The informal showings at the end of Week 1 clearly demonstrated this need for character. As audience, I was totally engaged by Frank Wilson's thoroughly researched, character-based performance. There was a story to follow rather than just a mild anticipation of the next movement phrase. Jonzi and K.T.P's performance provoked discussion on meaning. It was crystal that Jonzi was creating with a particular structure and storyline. This started me thinking again about meaning...

1. The creator has a narrative that they are working to. Does that narrative have to be understood by the audience for the Work to work?
2. Is appreciation and aesthetic enjoyment enough?
3. Could narrative just be a tool for the creators to explore their visions, and if the idea is missed by the audience, does it matter?

Tight, flawless and faceless dance routines are perfect for the commercial industry. They provide a quick fix of neutral strength, designed as a tool to support an "artist" (Top of the Pops/ music videos etc), or promote a product = A visually entertaining, low risk backdrop. However, when I go to the theatre I want that and more. Emotional investment must come hand in clammy hand with the dancer's sweat, in order to provide some depth. I want to leave the theatre with (50 sense) something to say and 21 questions.

Sam likes light, first and foremost. Light is his passion and on Friday afternoon he led us through basic lighting design. In this very condensed session, we looked at different lighting states and discussed the importance of state changes as well as getting to know the capabilities of various lights.

I had found the problem, the sticking point and reason why I didn't feel committed to our piece. We had the theme, and had an idea of spacing and structure. But no feeling. Nothing that I could develop emotionally. Usually when I begin to consider a show, I start with a reason that personally means something, just as Storm finds that there is an autonomy within his work. He discovers himself subconsciously exploring problems and issues he has been dealing with in other parts of his life. Jonzi is influenced by the society that hip-hop comes from and exists in, by artists such as Public Enemy and KRS-1, by a socio-political standpoint. I realised that I needed to use the story of a Race as the means, not the reason.

The next few days were confined to the studio, experimenting with the theory to expand our own practice. By now we had squatter's rights over the supposedly haunted studio upstairs, and if served with an eviction notice, we made the most of the beautiful balconies.



Pausing from our choreography, we soaked up practical technique sessions led by Storm. He introduced us to the complexities of House dancing and as I continued to tangle my laces and trip over my kicks, Storm explained that as a concept, House can be quite hard to grasp if you are used to Breakin' because the House accent is up on the beat, whereas breakin' is all down. On more familiar ground, Storm inspired our footwork with creative text and gave Remady one to one on belly mills. Then we all ate cake in celebration of Jonzi D's birthday!



Standing in the lunch queue, once again with my mind on my tummy and my tummy on my mind, I was cornered by Nao to ask if we would present first at the final showing. 10 minutes later, unprepared and still chewing, I briefly introduced our methods of working and our piece. I explained that we had decided to

translate each day's theory teachings into our exercise for a new way to work and that the piece we were showing was based on snakes and ladders, within the context of a race.



We performed a series of links which explored the relationships between the different characters as we formed temporary alliances only to serve our goal of winning. Storm and Ben Jammin' demonstrated the **8Ball** technique - a footwork structure which can create exceptional floor patterns depending on how many dancers are used at any one time.



Nikki Geismar followed with her thoughts and feelings about how valuable and supportive she has found the whole project. Undeterred by technical hitches, Zoo Nation screened images of their work-in-progress from rehearsal footage. It was interesting to see how Jonzi-D's piece changed by using Sinstar Soopa J in place of K.T.P and I wondered if the dancers' different genders made a difference. Frank Wilson had expanded his solo to include group work. He explained that when this piece goes to theatre, the additional cast will be seen only on projection but I also enjoyed the live aspect and the immediate support or intimidation of the other dancers.

Every day the struggle up to the top of Cypress Hill got harder as my weary legs plotted with my 90's to try and make me miss my bus. My pilgrimage to find fresh resources for innovation was far too momentous to be held back by a pair of lazy chicken drumsticks and for the first time ever, I was not late once! On the very last day we discussed articulation with Storm and Nao. We role played a selling exercise and revised the Business Plan as well as learning new training procedures such as Swot and Pest Analysis. When asked "who

are your audiences?” Nao advised not to try to appeal and reach everyone but to have faith in our artform and be able to articulate the value of our work. We ended the two weeks in Nandos and as pioneers for UK Hiphop Theatre, we look to innovate and design new possibilities.



report by **TrubL Roc**/ Autumn 2005

www.theplace.org.uk

www.stormdance.de

www.generatorhostels.com

P.S. Since taking part in Hothouse, we have kept in touch with Storm and met up with him at Battle of the Year in Germany. Unfortunately Remady was unable to pass on the custard and ribena- next time. We are also waiting to hear the result of an Arts Council bid which will enable us to collaborate with Jonzi D in the new year, and we have been invited to perform in a triple bill at The Robin Howard Theatre, The Place as part of Resolution! on 17 January 2006.



Props to Nao Black, Storm, Jonzi D, K.T.P, Frank Wilson, Nikki Geismar, Zonation and the Maunders x

www.sincru.co.uk