

Cadences of Choreomusicality:

Investigating the Relationship
Between Sound and Movement
in Staged Performances of
Popping and *Animation* in the
United Kingdom

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Abstract

This practice-led doctoral research explores the relationship between staged performances of popping, closely related movement practices such as *animation* (in dance) and music in the United Kingdom. Through an experiential, choreographic and critical methodology, I consider the ways that popping artists are able to shift, bend and distort perceptions of their performances through complex uses of musicality. Popping is a dance form that is included under the umbrella of street dance, which encompasses a wide range of dance practices with their origins in social and vernacular contexts. I scrutinise the musical trends and characteristics of popping and *animation* specifically, despite street dance forms usually being considered as a collective. This extensive focus reveals a range of selective rhythmical and textural nuances that engage the spectator in a world of choreomusical play.

Placing practice at the centre of my investigation, I carry out a series of choreographed projects and reflect on these experiences from the position of dancer/performer and choreographer. Additionally, I consider the work of other popping artists in the field, presenting extensive choreomusical analysis of a selection of their work. Drawing from interviews that I conducted with nine UK street dance artists, I use a range of practitioner-led terminology to demonstrate the metaphorical vocabulary that they have employed to articulate their choreomusical practices and complicate notions of musicality.

Drawing from the fields of choreomusical theory and Animation (in film) studies, I explore the value systems that frame ideas of the music-dance relationship in dance studies, developing an appropriate analytical lens which privileges close relationships between popping, *animation* and music on stage. I interrogate the anxieties that infiltrate close choreomusical relationships, in order to privilege the complex skill and musical sensitivities that poppers develop through their craft. Given intrinsic connections between *animation* and Animation, I utilise

perspectives from the latter field of study to explore the illusionary potential of the moving body on stage. This, I argue, blurs distinctions between the real and the artificial and ultimately contributes to choreomusical tension and resolve. Through extensive analysis in a range of performance contexts, I contend that this specific, detailed investigation of popping and *animation* can inform and contribute to the fields of choreomusicology and dance studies.

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Glossary of Terms

“Animation” - refers to film animation techniques.

“*Animation*” - in italics refers to the style of dance inspired by stop-motion techniques that is often considered a sub-genre of (or a close relation to) popping.

Cypher - A circular dance jam, which is a common way to practise and train for a range of street dance forms. Usually made up of dancer-spectators, one dancer enters the centre of the circle and ‘throws down’ (performs) whilst the rest of the circle engages with what is happening. It is considered to involve the exchanging of energy between people in the circle.

Dimestop - A ‘stop’ achieved by tightening the muscles suddenly to create a rigid, robotic affect.

Drop - “A drop in popular music, especially electronic music styles, is a point in a music track where a switch of rhythm or bass line occurs and usually follows a recognizable build section and break” (Infogalactic planetary knowledge core, 2016).

Egyptian Twist - A travelling movement by alternating between the heels and toes with the feet together whilst also rotating the wrists so that the hands mimic the feet.

Fixed point - Refers to a “set or stationary” (Schrader, 2005: 56) joint or body part that forms the point from which the rest of the body can move.

Freestyle - A term used by street dancers to signify moving freely, often in response to music and within a particular technique. The term is used similarly to improvisation.

Groove - The basic physical response to the feeling of the music.

Master-flex - A movement that involves isolating and rotating the legs and torso with a low centre of gravity to create an illusion of disconnection and a half turn.

Neck-o-flex - A movement that involves rotating the head and the rest of the body alternatively to create an illusion that the two are unattached.

Old Man - travelling movement that works in a circular motion, that imitates a stereotype of an older person side stepping whilst resting on a walking stick that involves the rotation of the legs, hips, torso and head.

Popping/pop - The action of the pop refers to tensing and relaxing the muscles in the arms, legs, chest and neck. Popping refers to this in different positions and in time with the music with an underpinning groove.

Puppet - imitating the physicality of a puppet, with floppy/relaxed hands, head and legs.

Reverb - An effect that is added at the end of a movement in order to produce a vibration or physical echo.

Roman Twist - a movement that travels from side to side by shuffling both feet (alternating quickly between the heels and toes) whilst bringing the arms up to a diagonal extended position.

Romeo Twist - A movement where one hand mimics the movement of the foot that alternates between the pattern of the shift of weight between the heel and toe, with an underpinning groove.

Scarecrow - Dancing in the style of a scarecrow character, by imagining that there is a pole across the arms keeping them straight with floppy extremities (head and hands).

Strobing - Breaking up a movement into several smaller parts that stop and start, in order to create an illusion of a strobe light being on the dancer.

Slow motion - The whole body moves as if time has slowed down.

Ticking - breaking up a movement into several smaller parts and popping on each one, so that the muscles tense and relax at a quick pace in close succession.

Toy Man - Imitating the character of a 'toy man' with rigid movement that mimics where the hinges on the toy would be.

Tracing - Following the direction or flow of a movement with another part of the body. Often used simultaneously with *waving*.

Trigger/Prep - A preparatory movement that takes place to activate or set up another movement that follows. This is prevalent in popping technique and vocabulary (e.g. the preparatory movement before a walk out).

Twisto-flex - A movement that involves isolating the head, torso and arms in turn to create an illusion of disconnection and a quarter turn.

Walk Out - A travelling movement involving stylized walking where one leg crosses over the other whilst engaging the upper body in a 'lurch' or 'krump' position (achieved through relaxing the chest).

Waving - The art of making the body look as if it has no joints and appearing as if a wave transverses through a part (or all) of the body.

Introduction

Some of the things are really difficult to explain, do you see what I'm saying, with us the funniest thing is, most people who do this dance do it from an internal perspective, so unfortunately for us, they can show you more than they can tell you...

(Folkes, 2015)

The above comment epitomizes my motivation for conducting a practice-led investigation for this doctoral research. Instigated by the dancing body on stage, I explore the relationship between music and dance in UK popping and closely relating movement practices, such as *animation*. Focusing on London, I examine a range of theatrical popping activities, and consider artists who are pivotal in the conservation, dissemination and development of this dance form.

Contextualising the Form

In its simplest definition, popping involves the contraction and release of the arms, chest and neck muscles and extension of the legs in time to the music. Originating in Fresno, California in the middle to late 1970s, the Electric Boogaloo (EB) popping style was initiated by Sam Solomon (Boogaloo Sam) (The Realness Dance, 2016).¹ Popping is traditionally danced to funk music, where the pop is emphasised and articulated on the backbeat (count two and four) of each musical bar. Although there are a number of web based resources containing historical information for dancers,² only a small collection of scholarly sources discuss popping in-depth specifically (Rajakumar, 2012) (Miyakawa and Schloss, 2015) (Chang, 2008) (Guzman-Sanchez, 2012), and the form is often grouped together under the term 'hip-hop' or 'street dance' and considered under the banner of popular dance.³ Historical, contextual information is generally passed on informally from mentors and teachers to students, although

¹ Some sources claim that popping started before this, in the late 1960s.

² Examples include wizgee.biz (2011) that was set up by Mr. Wiggles (member of the EB's) and Slusser (2016).

³ My observation is that material documented in a USA context tends to use 'hip-hop' as the term to encompass popular and social dance forms such as popping, locking, waacking, house, and breaking (amongst others). Comparatively, the UK seems to use 'street dance' for this.

popping is occasionally taught in more formal educational settings.⁴ Although I acknowledge that the term “popular dance” is somewhat problematic and “historically contested” (Dodds 2011: 3), I have chosen to use this term throughout my investigation. Popular dance signifies a multitude of dance practices that are “distinct from ‘art culture’” and “art dance” forms (Dodds 2011: 63) that are usually based on ballet and contemporary, and are given more scholarly attention than popular dance forms (Dodds 2011: 19).

Although it is beyond the scope of this investigation to present a comprehensive, historical study of the form, basic contextual information will aid a choreomusical understanding of popping on stage. The form exploded in popularity in the 1980s, due to its transmission via mass media through Hollywood film. Popping featured in *Beatstreet* (1984) and *Breakin* (1984), amongst others, showcasing the skills of poppers such as Bruno “Pop N’ Taco” Falcon and Michael “Boogaloo Shrimp” Chambers (Slusser, 2016) alongside other dance styles, such as breaking. Consequently, ‘breakdancing’ (as it became known through the media) became a global craze with popping mistakenly featured in this category. ‘Breakdancing’ in fact, “was actually an amalgam of various dance styles, each with their own distinct histories and geographic contexts” (Slusser, 2016), but it was common for dancers to share and learn more than one style. Another pivotal performance of popping via the media includes the Electric Boogaloes (EBs) on *Soul Train* (1979) (steve3ri, 2012), featuring members Sidric “Creepin Sid” Williams, Sam “Boogaloo Sam” Solomon, Dane “Robot Dane” Parker, Marvin “Puppet Boozer” Boozer and Timothy “Popin’ Pete” Solomon. Additionally, members of the EBs also frequently worked with Michael Jackson, who was well known for incorporating popping inspired movement in his music videos.⁵ The EBs worked on a number of “live shows and music videos”, including *Thriller* (1982) and *Beat It* (1983) (ScannersInc 2013).

UK Context

⁴ In the UK, for example, formal, weekly popping classes take place at Studio 68 in Southwark, and students also study popping as part of the BA (Hons) Dance: Urban Practice course at the University of East London.

⁵ Examples include the backslide (commonly known as the moonwalk), gliding, robotics and other forms of *animation*.

UK poppers had a more challenging task in accessing the form, which was evident from the interviews that I conducted with nine UK dance artists. Some were reliant on dancers from the USA visiting the UK to perform and offer workshops, such as the EBs performing at Breakin' Convention in 2004; an international festival of hip hop dance theatre at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London. One artist, Vicky "Skytilz" Mantey (Skytilz) (2015) commented that this was the "first time I really probably even saw the dance form in its fullest rawest form". Another popping artist, Fred Folkes (2015), told me about a VHS tape with snippets of footage featuring the EBs that was passed around by a small circle of hip hop dance enthusiasts in the early 1980s. Regardless of the time period that they started their training (1980s, 1990s or early 2000s), many of my interviewees described that initial opportunities to see and learn the form live were limited and it wasn't until later that popping increased in popularity in the UK.

Hylton (2015) and Folkes (2015) both told me about an influential performance by Jeffrey Daniels that was televised on Top of The Pops, BBC1 in July 1982, which was among the first instances that they encountered popping. In this performance to *A Night to Remember* (1982) by RnB group Shalamar, of which he was a member, Daniels performs a solo that features identifiable movements from popping vocabulary (SoloFlows, 2010). The basic *pop*, *old man*, *waving*, aspects of mime, *animation* and the famous backslide (or moonwalk, as it became known) are all included in his performance. As Folkes (2015) confirms, this would have been the "first major exposure of that style" for many people in the UK.

Interestingly, as a result of the appearances of popping in films such as *Beatstreet* (1984), *Breakin* (1984), and *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* (1984), there was a misconception about the music that they were dancing to. It appears in the film that they are performing to electro style music, which is in the featured soundtrack, when in fact they were dancing to funk music (Folkes, 2015). Consequently, as the electro style of music was popular at the time, many dancers initially practised to this musical genre. As Folkes (2015) confirms, "we didn't know that the music that accompanied those films was not the music they were dancing to on screen". As a result, many UK

dancers didn't start dancing popping to funk music until the early 2000s. From the period of the mid 2000s until the present day, there has been a surge of popping activity in the UK; particularly in London. Through a combination of live performances, classes, events, training courses and workshops, popping is now widely available for students wishing to study the form (see Chapter One for an extensive exploration of UK popping activity).

My investigation focuses on presentations of the form on stage, drawing from projects that I have choreographed and performed in from my own practical research, in addition to examples of staged work by other UK poppers in the field. I consider a flexible definition of 'staged' to encompass a wider range of performances that are framed by their environment in a similar way to a proscenium arch (Brooke's solo that I analyse in Chapter Five, for example). There is also a rich collection of work that continues to flourish in other performance contexts, emerging from organised battle competitions that have an international remit and are based on *freestyle* performances of the form.⁶ This area requires its own in depth study, as I acknowledge the profound, creative impact that it has on many of the artists who feature in my investigation.

Methodology

As a choreographer, dancer, and student of popping since 2005, I intend to allow my embodied knowledge to guide this investigation. During this time, I have trained with teachers of popping including Vikkie Steege, Robert Hylton, Shawn Aimey, Rajib "Holistik" Manandhar, Vicky "Skytilz" Mantey, Timothy "Popin Pete" Solomon, and Fred Folkes. I have also studied a range of other dance forms, including hip-hop, house, tap and jazz. Additionally, I undertook a BA (Hons) Dance and Culture at the University of Surrey from 2005 to 2009, where I studied release-based contemporary, African and Caribbean dances and dance composition. This eclectic range of dance experiences

⁶ Examples include *Juste Debout*, (since 2001) and the *World BBoy Championships* (since 1996).

have undoubtedly shaped and influenced my artistic choreographic voice. Between 2012 and 2016, I collaborated, choreographed and performed in a range of different works that explore different aspects of the relationship between music and dance on stage, drawing specifically from popping and closely related movement practices. I discuss five works, including *deConduct* (2013), *Body Stories* (2013), *Interpretari* (2014), the *Unusual Force* (2015), and *Drug* (2016) (see Chapter Four). Footage of the process and performance of these works can be accessed using the following web link: <http://figshare.com/s/565cccf97f4ad41c765d>. These videos are catalogued numerically and referred to throughout this thesis. A practice-led research methodology is therefore the catalyst for this investigation, defined as “research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners” (Gray cited in Haseman 2010: 147).

I also intend for my practical knowledge to speak through my analysis of other popper’s choreographic work, drawing from short practical examples throughout with more extensive analysis in Chapter Five. To further support the value of practice, I refer frequently to the interviews that I conducted with nine UK dance artists: Shawn Aimey, Isaac “Turbo” Baptiste, Fred Folkes, Robert Hylton, Yami “Rowdy” Lofvenberg, Vicky “Skytilz” Mantey, Brooke Milliner, Bly Richards, and Kenrick “H2O” Sandy MBE. I benefitted from an existing working relationship with many of the artists, allowing me to ask informed semi-structured questions. In the interviews, I asked the artists about their work and their thoughts about musicality and the relationship between popping and sound (see Appendices A-I for full transcripts). I have known many of these artists in various artistic and professional dance contexts, many of them having mentored and/or taught me classes and/or workshops. Permission was sought from each of the artists for the interviews, and the artists understood that they could choose for something to be omitted if they so wished.

In order to scrutinise the relationship between popping and music, I draw from choreomusical studies to support my analysis. Choreomusicology can be defined as “the study of the relationship between music and dance”, which “allows a structural, functional and contextual comparison of musical and movement elements” (Mason,

2006: 62). ⁷ A range of scholars have developed this body of theory, including essential contributions by Stephanie Jordan (2015, 2014, 2011, 2007, 2000), Paul Mason (2012) and Inger Damsholt (2006). I also draw from other scholars who have focused on music-dance relationships, including Juliet McMains and Ben Thomas (2013), as they devised a useful metalanguage for choreomusical analysis. They also consider the perspectives of both musician and dancer, identifying the troublesome nature of music and dance where some concepts do not translate effectively from one art form to the other (see Chapter Two). I also frequently address the work of composer Barbara White (2006), who published an imperative study of the value of “Mickey Mousing” in dance performances.

Animation film has close links to popping, specifically due to inspirations in 1950s Ray Harryhausen stop motion animated films (see Chapter Three). Dancers copied the movement styles of the characters in films such as the Cyclops in *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958). In light of this, I employ animation and cartoon theory in this doctoral research. Guided by the work of scholars such as Joanna Bouldin (2000), Daniel Goldmark (2002) and Leslie Bishko (2007), I investigate the connection between the Animated body on screen (in film), and the live *animated* body on stage (in dance). I have used the presentation of Animation, and *animation* throughout, to distinguish between their meanings. I also consider the work of Ken A. Priebe (2011), as one of the few scholars who specifically explores stop motion animation, which is an art form that requires a very physical approach that requires bodily manipulation, in a similar way to dance choreography.

This investigation demands a combined methodological approach, due to the differing aesthetics that are at play when analysing popping on stage. Popping has African and Latin diasporic roots, where close relationships between music and dance are crucial to artistic intent (see Chapter One). Due to several tensions surrounding choreomusical studies that I explore in Chapter Two, sole application of this theory will not serve popping. Animation theory contributes a malleable approach, which also recognises the intricacies of the movement-sound relationship (Coyle, 2009) as an

⁷ The term choreomusical was originally developed by Paul Hodgins (1992).

integral part of the form. The performances that I draw from are often presented in a proscenium arch style theatre setting, and many are influenced by compositional techniques from contemporary dance. This is where the art dance aspects come into play, such as the use of compositional structuring devices and abstract music (see Chapter One). The frameworks and vocabulary located in choreomusical studies therefore, offer a rich language through which to pinpoint aspects of my analysis (see Chapter Two). Additionally, through the interviews that I conducted, I am able to add useful artist-initiated terminology to this collection; uncovering the methods that poppers use to convey different music-dance relationships in the process of making and performing work.

Rationale for Research

An encouraging, ever-growing number of scholarly sources that are dedicated to popular dance forms have now been published (Malnig, 2009; Blanco-Borelli, 2014; Dodds and Cook, 2013; Dodds, 2011) in the field, but this is still disproportionate to the number of scholarly studies that focus on ballet (Vaganova, 1969; Au, 2002; Anderson, 1992) and contemporary dance (Cvejic, 2016, Nadel and Strauss, 2012, Burt, 2017 and Bremser and Sanders, 2011). Furthermore, there are few studies that prioritise staged forms of popular dance; instead preferring to consider the role of popular dance in vernacular, informal contexts.⁸ There are scarcely any sources that focus on popping or street dance forms on stage in a UK context, despite the fact that many UK choreographers working in this genre are embarking on successful choreographic careers in the theatre.⁹ Additionally, as a result of a major Arts Council Funding injection into hip hop dance in theatres, companies such as Boy Blue Entertainment (BBE) and ZooNation Dance Company have become National Portfolio Organisations (NPO's) (The Dancing Times Limited, 2017), receiving significant

⁸ A notable exception includes Chang's (2006) discussions of hip-hop theatre in the USA in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*.

⁹ Examples include Kenrick "H2O" Sandy, Botis Seva, Kwame Asafo-Adjei, Kloe Dean, Tony Adigun, to name a few.

funding for their West End theatre productions.¹⁰ This influx of activity evidences the demand for more scholarly attention, and provides a clear rationale for my research.

Through this investigation, I aim to interrogate existing bias towards Eurocentric preconceptions of music-dance relationships within dance studies. I have encountered this in numerous ways through the duration of my dance training and education, in different aspects of scholarship, my role as a choreographic mentee, and from the position of student/lecturer in UK Higher Education institutions (see Chapter Two). It is widely acknowledged that popular dance forms foster close relationships between dance and music (Dodds and Cook, 2013), but there is a significant lack of informed critical analysis of the complexities and intricacies involved. Perhaps “the understandable dread at the prospect of sorting out the impact of one upon the other” (White 2006: 66), may engender some avoidance of conducting analyses of popular dance forms that are insistently bound to their musical counterparts. Most choreomusical studies focus on choreographers predominantly situated in Western concert dance, such as Mark Morris (Jordan, 2007) and George Balanchine (Jordan, 2000).¹¹ There are very few choreomusical enquiries that are dedicated to non-Western dance forms, with the exception of a few scholars linked to ethnomusicology, such as Mohd Anis Md Nor and Kendra Stepputat’s (2017) edited collection *Sounding the Dance, Moving the Music: Choreomusical Perspectives on Maritime Southeast Asian Performing Arts*. I confront this lack of scholarly attention through this doctoral research; proposing that the analysis of close relationships between popping and music are complex, nuanced and can make a substantial contribution to choreomusical scholarship.

Through a combination of artist-led language and the central position of making and performing throughout my research, I intend to privilege the popular dance practice of

¹⁰ Boy Blue Entertainment created *Blak Whyte Gray* (2017), *The Five and the Prophecy of Prana* (date) and *Pied Piper* (date). ZooNation Dance Company have created *The Mad Hatters Tea Party* (2014), *Some Like it Hip Hop* (2012) and *Into the Hoods: Remixed* (2015).

¹¹ I do acknowledge however, that Mark Morris draws from an eclectic collection of social dance forms in his choreographic work, and also privileges close music-dance relationships, making him an anomaly in many respects (Jordan 2007).

popping throughout. Additionally, Animation is also a popular art form that struggles for legitimacy in a scholarly context, and speaks against classical, elitist frameworks. This has assisted me in finding an appropriate analytical lens through which to conduct my investigation, allowing the value of the popular to speak through my analysis.

Practice-Led Postulations

Based on my commitment to a practice-led investigation, I have made several decisions that impact on the presentation of this thesis. Firstly, if a practitioner has a well-known artist name other than their birth name, I have chosen to use this in place of their surname throughout. This makes them more easily identifiable to readers with knowledge of popping and the UK street dance scene, and is the dance identity through which they are known. Additionally, where possible, I draw from emic terminology that is used in the popping and street dance community, aiming not only to privilege this language in a scholarly context but also as part of my intention to make the project as artist-appealing as possible, aiming to lessen the gap between theory and practice in popular dance studies.

When referring to the spectator, I often consider the response and reaction of the dancer-spectator, who has a significant amount of previous knowledge of popping. Often, audiences at many of the street dance events that feature in my investigation are comprised of fellow street dance choreographers, poppers, and popping and street dance enthusiasts. I acknowledge this, as their familiarity and previous knowledge of the London street dance scene generates a level of expectation for each performance.

Structure

The thesis is divided into five chapters; each with a different focus. Although I have sections dedicated to the extensive analysis of performance work in Chapter Four and Five, snippets of practice are woven through consistently throughout all five chapters. Chapter One presents a mapping of popping activities in the UK, examining the conditions that are in place that impact on the choreographic work that is created by popping artists. As part of this, I consider the influences of the Africanist roots of the

form, in conversation with contemporary choreographic aesthetics that many artists draw from in their compositional methods. Chapter Two explores choreomusical theory, drawing from the extensive body of literature that tackles music-dance relationships. I focus specifically on devices such as “Mickey Mousing” (White, 2006: 66) and “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas, 2013: 210), interrogating the apprehension that surrounds their application. I investigate the connection between Animation film and *animation* as a close relation of popping in Chapter Three, considering the principles of Animation and how they can be applied in my analysis. I also consider the relationship between the live dancing body and the illusive, artificial world that belongs to Animation, complicating the relationship between the imagined and the actual and how this informs choreomusicality. Chapter Four seeks to explore my own practical, choreographic work with a focus on process, drawing from reflective notebooks that were kept throughout the process of this doctoral research. Critically reflecting from the position of choreographer/collaborator and performer, I consider the journey from process to performance of each project, focusing on different aspects of the music-dance relationship. Finally, Chapter Five focuses on the analysis of two short solo works by artists Brooke Milliner and Isaac “Turbo” Baptiste, specifically chosen due to their effective, complex choreomusicality. The analysis in this chapter focuses on the final performance of the works. Utilising the methodological approaches from Chapters Two and Three, I carry out detailed choreomusical analysis of their work.

Chapter One: Contextualising The Form

I went to contemporary college naively, because I was dancing and I got in, and I'm like yeah, ok, let's do it... (Hylton, 2015)

This chapter traces the development of popping practices on stage in the United Kingdom, contextualising the wide range of activity that contributes to the growing popularity of this dance form. Focussing on London, I will consider the aesthetics that shape and develop the way that popping is presented in theatrical settings, particularly in relation to choreomusical trends and traditions. I will also explore the institutional and educational conditions in London, reflecting on the professional, choreographic training that might be on offer to poppers, and how pursuing this potentially affects their work. This will be examined in relation to the individual artist experience, drawing from interviews that were conducted with nine UK dance practitioners. Aspects of their training (whether formal or informal) along with the events, projects and performances that they participate in and contribute to, all make pertinent contributions to the choreographic voice that they have developed. An exploration of the different artistic, aesthetic and compositional influences that shape their work become instrumental to understanding theatrical presentations of popping, in light of choreomusical and Animation theories that are explored in Chapters Two and Three.

Drawing on the ideas of Brenda Dixon Gottschild (2003, 1996) and Halifu Osumare (2007) amongst others, I intend to explore the Africanist/Latin diasporic roots of popping, with specific consideration of Black British hip-hop dance cultures through which UK popping has developed. Through a discussion of some of the projects and initiatives that have been established, musical values and trends will be uncovered as integral parts of the form. As many of these projects are funded by mainstream UK arts and dance funding organisations which historically and disproportionately supported Western “traditional” styles of theatre dance,¹ I will begin to consider how ‘art dance’ conventions impact on popping on stage. Interestingly, many artists who

¹ The Arts Council's £45 million Strategic Touring programme was launched in 2011, which saw Breakin' Convention receive funding for an extended tour of the festival in the UK (Arts Council England, 2015).

work with popping on stage in the UK have accessed some form of vocational or institutional contemporary dance training. The interview data with some of these artists facilitates a discussion about how the artists view the contribution of these choreographic experiences, and how (if at all) they consider them to be useful in the creation of their work.

As a consequence of the intertwining of contemporary and hip-hop dance aesthetics, choreomusical tensions begin to emerge in relation to differing and somewhat opposing value systems. As these systems of choreomusical value are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two, here I remain concerned with the way that popping artists manage the theatre space and persistently hold on to their artistic and choreomusical values when they present their work, despite challenges. As poppers negotiate their place in the choreographic field, new compositional and choreomusical traditions begin to emerge as a result of an eclectic choreographic methodology.

1.1 At the Root of the Form

In order to grasp the complex relationship that exists between popping and music, it is vital to bring the African and Latin Diasporic roots of the form into the forefront of discussion. Miyakawa and Schloss (2015: np) define hip-hop as a “group of Afro-diasporic dance forms, characterized by a competitive orientation and a close relationship with hip-hop music and culture”. Popping is considered as one of the dance forms in this cluster, alongside others such as locking and breaking. Furthermore, the relationship between dance and music is implicit in many other definitions, with their close association underpinning all presentations of the form. Popping “involves contracting the neck, chest, arms and extending the legs in time to music” (The Realness Dance, 2016) and in this way the presence of music is made explicitly relevant from the outset. This is synonymous with other definitions of the style. Miyakawa and Schloss (2015: np) explain that “the desired effect is that of a dancer whose body virtually explodes with a mysterious internal energy to the rhythm of the song.” The importance of rhythm is reiterated by Rajakumar (2012: 17), when

he describes the way that poppers demonstrate muscle control “in fast rhythmic isolation”.

Originally danced to funk music in the 1970s, popping became a physical, embodied expression of a musical culture. In fact, “rhythm remains the central core to any expression of African culture and consequently the centre of any analysis that is conducted” (Asante cited in Burt and Adair, 2017). Rhythm is a vital component of “the African Aesthetic” (Gottschild, 1996: 13), and is consequently crucial to popping and other street dance practices. Comparatively, art dance models carry an alternative set of compositional and musical principles, creating a combination of contrasting aesthetics when popping is presented on stage. The following quote summarises the disparities between what Gottschild describes as “European” and “Africanist” aesthetics (Gottschild 1996: xiii-xiv): “Although they are fused and interwoven in many aspects, they also manifest distinct, discrete, and somewhat opposing characteristics and lend themselves to discussion as binary opposites, if not separate streams” (Gottschild 1996: xiv). I acknowledge the limitations in condensing this debate to create a binary opposition,² but as Gottschild complicates and emphasises the value of rhythm and the close connection between sound and movement in Africanist popular dance practices, it makes a crucial contribution. As I will reveal through the work in Chapter Two, a resistance to the popular is presented in choreomusical scholarship. This reduces and simplifies the close relationship between music and dance, due to suggested anxieties about Europeanist theatre dance practices and “the link with ‘other’ culture” (Jordan 2015: 83). Gottschild’s work on “the African Aesthetic” is therefore useful in my quest to value the general musical trends and historical traditions within popping practices, partly because of her in depth discussions of the complexities of rhythm.

² Mark Morris’s commitment to close music-dance relationships is one exception, and an example of a choreographer who works in the field of contemporary dance who deviates in certain aspects of his work from modernist Europeanist choreomusical principles. Having said this, it is also acknowledged that Morris frequently draws from non-Western and Eastern European folk influence in his work (Jordan 2015: 26), which is likely a contributory factor.

The professional, institutional dance training that is available to dancers in the UK is largely based on Europeanist artistic values and choreographic methods, with a foundational basis in contemporary dance forms and/or ballet.³ As part of this, the training for choreography also falls in line with a contemporary dance language and compositional principles. This includes departing from working closely with music, as I explore extensively in Chapter Two. Many poppers and other street dance artists attend these institutions to undertake full time training,⁴ and others work on projects with mentors with this background.⁵ Consequently, an interesting dialogue between popping and its choreographed context in the theatre emerges, permeated by the tensions of partially conflicting value systems.

Increasingly, artists who specialise in popping and other street dance forms are developing professional careers as theatre choreographers,⁶ involving a complex combination of aesthetic influences. Although it is problematic and somewhat essentialist to separate these aesthetics, I hope to identify the value and significance of the “Africanisms” (DeFrantz 2002: 15) in the staged performances of popping that I analyse in this investigation, with a particular focus on rhythm. This is because they have a tendency to be overlooked, and consumed by the choreographic traditions associated with Western art theatre dance. Additionally, although they draw from Western theatre dance compositional tools, I argue that the artists in my investigation have created their own choreographic methodologies for making work for the stage, which I explore later in this chapter. These approaches are certainly influenced by modern dance principles, but alternatively privilege the Africanist roots of popping and other street dance forms. As the choreomusical value systems of popping and

³ Examples include London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS), Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance, Trinity Laban, and Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD). University dance degree programmes also deliver training in principles of contemporary dance composition.

⁴ Robert Hylton attended NCDS, and other professional street dance artists in the UK attended LCDS including Jonzi D and Frankie Johnson.

⁵ Mentors on the “Back to the Lab” project by Breakin’ Convention have included Jasmin Vardimon and Jonathan Burrows.

⁶ Robert Hylton, Brooke Milliner and Kenrick “H2O” Sandy are examples of successful theatre choreographers who specialise in popping, animation and other street dance practices.

modern dance theatre traditions are potentially conflicting, the way that artists negotiate these challenges in the creation of their work will aid my subsequent, extended choreomusical analyses in Chapters Four and Five.

1.2 (Poly)Rhythm(s)

Popping has a number of rhythmic choreomusical principles that are bound to all performances of the style, such as the emphasis of the repetitive snare drum or 'clap' sound in correspondence with the *pop*. The dancer uses a combination of *groove* and codified set movements from a wide range of vocabulary (refer to Glossary) in conjunction with the pop. They contract and release their muscles and highlight the kick drum and the clap in a repetitive, cross-rhythmic, cyclical structure with added variations. As Osumare (2007: 46) notes, the rhythmic variations can take many different forms. "The surprise invoked by the variable unit, whether a holler of James Brown or the slap of a monster Senegalese djembe drummer, creates anticipated innovation within the rhythmic conformity". This not only sets up a repetitive rhythmic cycle, but also creates tension and the expectation of change. Both the movement and the music follow in this format, with polyrhythmic aural and visual surprises that disturb spectator expectations at different points within the performance (Osumare 2007: 46).

This is not to propose that Western theatre dance performances don't also play with rhythm in interesting and thought-provoking ways. Memories of watching the repetitive embrace and fall to the floor in Pina Bausch's *Cafe Müller* (1978) (TOFROUTO, 2011) for example, are automatically triggered from my own dance studies education in response to this. Rhythmic repetition can certainly be understood as a widely used choreographic device in dance, used for emphasis of memorable motifs, creating patterns and compositional structure. The polyrhythmic potential of the body in popping and other Afro-diasporic dance forms however, is what is particularly remarkable in this instance. As popping features "a democratic equality of body parts" (Dixon Gottschild 1996: 8), multi-layered rhythms can be produced from several different parts of the body simultaneously. Artists experiment with their skilful

ability to isolate different parts of the body at the same, through distinct articulation. Poppers do this within a polyrhythmic musical structure, creating simultaneous aural and visual polyrhythms.

As an example, during Turbo's solo performance at *Breakout - The Solo's* (2011), he performs a series of small runs on the spot from 00:27-00:40, whilst simultaneously introducing different isolations with parts of his upper body such as the fingers, elbows and his left shoulder (JTorresProductions, 2011) to reference two different parts of the music. As I reveal in my extensive analysis of this solo in Chapter Five, Turbo frequently uses visual polyrhythms to demonstrate his detailed understanding of a range of choreomusical features.

The significance of a "democratic equality of body parts" (Dixon Gottschild 1996: 8) in comparison with modern dance principles became evident in *Body Stories* (2013), created and performed by Caroline Lofthouse in collaboration with myself. During the process, we worked with structured improvisation (or structured freestyle) to build and shape material using our individual movement styles and our response and connection to each other. When we came to create set phrases from the improvisations, we decided to use the same movements as each other but perform them whilst being informed by our differing training. As I have been training in popping for several years, this became the main influence on the way I performed movements, and the articulation of a broader range of body parts was evident.⁷ At 03:59 for example, we perform a rocking motion with the arms in opposition. Lofthouse moves her whole body, and her head follows in conjunction with the movement of her torso. My movement is similar in the sense that my whole body also moves, but there is a disconnection between the head and the torso, and so my head moves independently. Other instances that highlight the differences in our approaches to the movement are discussed in Chapter Four.

⁷ It is important to note that I trained in release technique as part of my dance training from 2003 to 2009, whereas Lofthouse had no embodied experience of popping. So we were both informed by a shared contemporary dance aesthetic and knowledge in this sense.

The “Africanist aesthetic is often in direct opposition to Western philosophical principles” (Osumare 2007: 26), and therefore the frequent exchanges between popping artists and the theatre space become somewhat convoluted. As the investigation continues, I reveal the way that these tensions manifest particularly in music-dance relationships and choreomusical studies. Despite this, poppers create choreographic work for the stage, adhering to the technical principles of the form but drawing selectively from compositional structuring devices from art dance theatre traditions.

1.3 Bringing it Back to the UK

As my investigation is based on UK popping, it is helpful to shift the focus to this perspective. Adewole (cited in DeFrantz 2016: 68) highlights the way that UK choreographers working with African diasporic dance forms might have to consider “tactical ways of working”, in light of funding and support structures in the arts. As hip-hop and street dance forms still struggle for legitimacy in the context of the wider Arts field,⁸ it is interesting to consider the ways that popping artists have managed to thrive in the UK arts system, developing a unique choreographic voice in the theatre. In our interview, Robert Hylton (2015) discussed the difficulties for hip-hop and street dance forms when borrowing from the formula of a full-length narrative classical ballet. He comments that it is taxing to fill a whole show in terms of the length of time, “unlike ballet where you can do it in two hours because they have all that movement that the audience accepts”. The theatre codes and traditions of ballet are being highlighted here, and as hip-hop and street dance forms have their roots in the vernacular, equivalent conventions are not as easily discernible in this performance space. Undeterred by these challenges, many choreographers have adopted this full-length linear narrative formula to create successful large-scale productions. Examples include *Into the Hoods: Remixed* (2015) and *The Mad Hatter’s Tea Party* (2014) both

⁸ It was not until 2015 that the Arts Council England significantly increased funding for hip-hop theatre in the UK, awarding over £4.8 million to ZooNation Dance Company and Breakin’ Convention (Doerfel 2015).

by ZooNation Dance Company, and *Pied Piper* (2009) by Boy Blue Entertainment (BBE).

More recently, choreographers are also drawing from a shorter, episodic structure that relies less on telling stories and more on the choreographic exploration of abstract concepts and themes, such as *Blak Whyte Gray* (2017) by BBE.⁹ This format is akin to many contemporary dance companies who present their work at major London theatres, such as *Barbarians* (2015) by Hofesh Shechter company at Sadler's Wells and *to a simple, rock 'n' roll... song.* (2016) by Michael Clark Company at the Barbican Theatre. Loosely based on the "experiences of contemporary life" (Boy Blue Entertainment, 2017), *Blak Whyte Gray* (2017) is different to BBE's previous works that focussed on the aforementioned linear narrative structure. Intriguingly, this led to intense praise from dance critics such as Sanjoy Roy (2017), who considered it a "striking achievement" for the company and even that "it may be time to drop that last word [entertainment] from their name". The distaste for obvious virtuosity or 'entertainment' as the company name indicates is evident here, and the work is uncomfortably described as more "artful" (Roy, 2017) as a result of its contemporary influences. As the codes and conventions of staged presentations of popping and other street dance forms are still being formulated, dance critics seem quick to appropriate them to be neatly placed alongside mainstream art dance theatre models. In the meantime, artists are becoming increasingly conscious of potential implications as a result of their creative decisions to reject or align with different art dance traditions. As Hylton (2015) observes "So you make that choice when you make that kind of work, that it's not a popular piece it's not pop theatre, so you either care or you don't". Hylton (2015) refers to "pop theatre" to describe a model that appeals to mass audiences. In this statement, he indicates his understanding of the potential consequences of working against these conventions, resulting in attracting a smaller audience. This awareness allows artists to selectively align with dance theatre models, in order to serve a particular project or stimulus for creating work.

⁹ *Blak Whyte Gray* (2017) is an example of a work by hip-hop dance company Boy Blue Entertainment, which follows a three part episodic structure. The work premiered at the Barbican Theatre on 12th January 2017.

Furthermore, if hip-hop artists are to compete for funding and support opportunities, and their work receives impressive reviews as a result of aligning with art theatre dance performance, financial pressures build for them to coincide with their longstanding competitors.

How artists might claim their own structural model for presentation of street dance forms in theatre contexts is an emerging question; a format which involves less compromise for the sake of art dance traditions that involve entirely different principles. In order to receive funding or support for a full theatrical production in the UK, artists continue to fall under increasing pressure to borrow from various art theatre dance traditions. This could be in terms of the length and structure of the work as discussed, but also the associated choreomusical traditions.

I am particularly interested in the way that popping artists often select from unusual music genres that deviate from its funk roots. They use this music in resourceful ways, facilitating close music-dance relationships and the centralisation of rhythm.¹⁰ This is ironic, due to the fact that many contemporary choreographers aim to use abstract music deliberately to digress from synchronising movement with music (White 2006: 69).¹¹ Many popping artists deliberately choose contemporary classical music, whilst using choreomusical approaches that stay firmly within the musical traditions of the form. Examples include a section from *Blue Eyed Vision* (2015) (see Video 5) choreographed by “H2O” Sandy MBE, where the meandering melodies of Max Richter’s “November”, are physicalised through waving technique both in terms of pitch (translating to high or low level in relation to the body) and rhythm. During the interviews, the artists also mention using music from contemporary classical composers such as Arvo Part (Hylton, 2015) and Michael O’Suilleabhain (Turbo, 2017). Borrowing from classical music genres seems to be a recurring theme in relation to popping on stage specifically. Pieces that feature popping, *animation* and

¹⁰ When using the term abstract in this context, I am referring to musical choices that do not fall into the basic traditions of popping or other street dance forms.

¹¹ There are of course many exceptions, such as the work of Mark Morris, explored extensively by Jordan (2015). Michael Clark is another example, with works such as *Come, Been and Gone* (2014) that featured music by David Bowie.

classical music that have been performed in UK theatres include *The Dream of Gluby* (2009) by Salah, *Out of the Shadow* (2008) by Nobulus and *Klockz* (2011) by Boy Blue Entertainment. I have also been drawn to exploring classical music in my own practical projects, including *deConduct* (2013), *Body Stories* (2013) and *Interpretari* (2014), which I explore further in Chapter Four.

Popping artists have developed an inclination for classical music, which is a curious pairing in many respects. As Turbo (2017) describes, this genre of music simply “resonates” with him, even though he struggled to explain the reasons for this. As many of the examples I have mentioned are of a contemporary classical style, there are often modern, popular influences involved. Max Richter is well known for the “meeting of contemporary classical and alternative popular music styles” (wikipedia.org, 2017) for example, evidencing the confluence of these genres. Due to the meeting of popping and contemporary compositional approaches in the theatre, a similar, mixed aesthetic that includes the popular and the formal is presented visually through the movement. Perhaps this similar blend of influences is what draws popping artists to this genre of music when making work for the stage; their attraction to an aural counterpart that reflects the dual values of their choreographic work. This allows them to create interesting and complex pieces, which are permeated with an unsettling blend of the popular, the contemporary and the classical.

When considering his experience during his vocational dance training at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) Robert Hylton considers the way that the use of abstract music has actually intensified his curiosity for rhythms.

I think as far as accepting that even though I use abstract music, or Billy Biznizz scratches, which were kind of very abstract... Say be-bopish or Charlie Parkerish... I was still trying to dance to the changing rhythms and beats.

(Hylton, 2015)

Hylton expresses that he was committed to the physicalisation of rhythm, regardless of how abstract or unusual the music was that he was exposed to through his training.

He elaborates on this exclaiming, “I like new rhythms. There’s a kind of thirst for new rhythms to experiment with. Which again engages your body differently. And then there’s a potential to change physically, basically” (Hylton, 2015). Interestingly, Hylton highlights the way that he has used these experiences as an opportunity to further develop his commitment to the choreomusical value systems associated with popping, through a commitment to rhythm. He emphasises the way that he is driven by the new rhythm in different musical genres, and does not compromise this for the sake of the compositional approaches to which he was exposed through his vocational contemporary dance training.

Hylton (2015) stresses the fact that he had to make an “adjustment” in order to consider the use of abstract music in relation to hip hop dance forms for the stage. Although he does not discuss what this adjustment entails in depth, he describes his experiences of some artists who have a strong preference to stay within the historical musical traditions of the form with which they are working. This may be because they are not interested in the idea of presenting hip-hop dance forms in the theatre altogether, but it could also be that they have not been exposed to contemporary choreographic training or mentorship. Or if they have, they may have made a conscious decision to reject these ideas. Fred Folkes (2015) states that although he appreciates many of the works that feature popping to classical music, there is a particular value in its musical traditions. As he emphasises “I can’t frown upon it but the thing is when you see it, when you see it done to the music that it was made up to, it’s very special”. In spite of their curiosity for experimenting with unusual music, poppers display notable appreciation for the form when practised to original funk music.

There are a small, developing number of institutions offer courses that advocate for the popular and value dance forms that are situated outside of the canon and in the non-traditional realm.¹² Professional, institutional dance training in the UK however,

¹² BA (Hons) Dance: Urban Practice at the University of East London is one example of a dance course that privileges the practice and study of popular, social, urban and non

remains predominantly centred on the choreographic principles of contemporary dance.¹³ In spite of this, popping artists find interesting and exciting ways to navigate their training and careers in the dance sector. Although undertaking this training often requires them to temporarily deviate from the form, it also offers valuable skills and knowledge that contribute to the development of their craft. The synonymies between improvisation and *freestyle* for example, include a shared theme of “freedom” (Goldman 2010: 1) of physical expression. Poppers are used to moving freely within the structure of the style, often in a *cypher* context, but this is always within the structures of the popping vocabulary and technique. For the most part, the training seems to offer new movement opportunities for consideration, that they can explore through the popping form. This interview response encapsulates the unique position that Hylton took as a result of following contemporary choreographic training and the way he thinks about the “black box” theatre space:

I think that experience allows you to accept the black box, and shows you that it's free, that it's yours to make your own rules. Or break away from the ones we were given at Contemporary. But I think that's quite an important... Kind of level of information about our backgrounds, about why we went to the black box and why we weren't afraid to use it in the way we wanted to.

(Hylton, 2015)

Popping artists have claimed their space to create exciting choreographic work in the theatre. Many artists have an awareness of contemporary choreographic aesthetics, which they draw from in unique ways in their work. They also, however, use this understanding as a basis to claim back the value and traditions of their art forms. They achieve this through the use of abstract and contemporary classical music, juxtaposed with a choreomusical methodology that works closely with rhythm and movement-sound relationships, a key principle of the roots of popping and other hip-hop dance forms. In the chapters that follow, different manifestations of these ideas

Western dance forms. Other institutions that offer aspects or pathways include Kingston University and the University of Bolton.

¹³ London Contemporary Dance School, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and Northern School of Contemporary Dance, to name a few.

emerge through analyses of a range of choreographic works that feature popping on stage. Through navigating the dance theatre space and experimenting with Western choreographic traditions in astute ways, popping artists still privilege the Africanist roots of the form. As a consequence, they make compelling and innovative work that earns them respect amongst their peers, dance critics and audiences, whilst managing to destabilize traditions and expectations of dance in the theatre.

1.4 Breakin' Conventions

Breakin' Convention, an annual festival of hip-hop dance theatre, takes place at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London under the artistic direction of Jonzi D (Breakin' Convention 2014). Beginning in 2004, the festival has continued to grow and develop each year through touring, education work and additional projects.¹⁴ It continues to be one of the most influential opportunities for popping artists to showcase innovative choreographic work in a major London theatre, and the festival also tours various theatres in the UK. As international companies also feature in the festival programme, UK popping artists have been able to exchange ideas and inspirations with international popping artists in this context. Some of these works have left a lasting impression on the artists that I interviewed and on me, particularly some of the earlier work such as *Drop It* (2007) by Frank II Louise, during the earlier stages of the development of the festival where fewer UK artists were working with the form in a theatrical context.

Exceptionally, the festival completely transforms the traditional theatre space of Sadler's Wells and gives it an intense injection of hip-hop culture during each UK bank holiday weekend in May. Outdoor spaces on the way into the theatre feature graffiti demonstrations and workshops. The theatre foyer spaces are filled with hip-hop dancers (both professional and amateur), hip-hop dance fans and enthusiasts. *Cyphers* with live DJ's and semi-structured workshops for young people take place in all of the breaks from the main stage performances, which create a starkly contrasting atmosphere to the interval breaks during contemporary dance performances that are

¹⁴ *Open Art Surgery* and *Back to the Lab* are two examples of Breakin' Convention projects that are dedicated to the development and growth of UK choreographers working with hip-hop dance forms in the theatre.

usually programmed at Sadler's Wells. Large-scale theatre pieces are shown in the main auditorium while more intimate performances take place in the Lilian Baylis studio theatre. By the end of the weekend, an audience member who attends the weekend festival would have had access to thirty (or more) hip-hop dance theatre works from different companies around the world.

The impact of this festival on UK popping artists has been of great significance both in terms of the significance of the work that is performed and the choreographic development of artists. It has also increased opportunities to see a range of live work choreographed by international popping artists. The Electric Boogaloos (EBs) showcased their work at the festival in 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2013 and, as they are based in the US this was a rare opportunity for many UK artists to see them perform live rather than via screen.¹⁵ In each performance, they demonstrate original popping and boogaloo techniques that they pioneered.¹⁶ In one short clip of the 2005 performance, movements such as the *neck-o-flex*, *old man* and *twisto-flex* are demonstrated using simple choreographic devices such as unison and accumulative canons. Skytilz (2015) referred to this performance in her interview, commenting that this was “the first time I really probably even saw the dance in its fullest rawest form”. She emphasises that experiencing this work live on stage was pivotal to her understanding and investment in the form.

Another hugely influential performance was *Drop It* (2007) by French choreographer Frank II Louise, which was not only showcased in the London Breakin' Convention festival but also joined the UK tour of different theatres in the same year. The piece featured six dancers with elaborate costumes that resembled futuristic robot characters (cali3000, 2008). The movement has a mechanical, robotic quality, featuring complex isolations in polyrhythmic patterns. There is a remarkable clarity and precision in the dynamics, such as sudden changes between fluidity and sharpness. The soundtrack features a range of mechanical sounds in the opening

¹⁵ *Soul Train* was a television show that featured new acts that “acted as the musical curator for the community” (Cannon cited in Questlove 2013: 13) The Electric Boogaloos are famous for their appearances in the 1970s.

¹⁶ They refer to this as EB style, to distinguish from other styles such as the Bay area style (Slusser, 2016).

sequence that correlated directly to the dynamics of the movement. Short, synchronised musical and movement motifs are layered using accumulation so that the complexity of the visual and aural rhythmic patterns gradually increases. The use of staging, choreographic devices and spacing contributes to the innovative nature of the work, giving it a timeless feel. Sound and movement motifs are repeated and developed as the piece progresses, including a memorable moment where the dancers lift their elbows up in line with their shoulders to create a right angle sharply, but keep their wrists relaxed to create a *puppet* effect with the hands. They do this at the same time as a sound in the music that is like a zip being pulled up suddenly, creating “closure” (Duerden 2005: 26), making it look like the movement caused the sound. This piece has definitely been influential in my practice, and I remember copying and practising some of the isolations from the opening sequence with other dancers at the time. I also had many discussions with other dancers about the piece and its impact, and the artists that I interviewed echoed similar sentiments. Kenrick Sandy (2015) admits that “when I saw that, it empowered me to do what I’m doing”, and Hylton (2015) said that the piece “still hits the mark...” and hasn’t “been beaten” since. The synchronisation between sound and movement was remarkable in this piece and incredibly detailed, with considerable attention to the texture of the sound and how this might be embodied and layered to create a structure of repetition with variation.

There are many other notable performances from the festival that have featured popping or styles closely associated with the form. In 2008, Mr Steen from Denmark showcased extraordinary strobing and isolation skills to an unusual soundscape featuring eerie minor chords with an intermittent recorded spoken narrative (Breakin’ Convention BCTV, 2010). Plague are a UK dance company who have made regular contributions to the festival over the years and always work with popping amongst other hip hop dance forms. In their adaptation of *War of the Worlds* (2013), Nicholas Marvel showcases his expert *animation* skills to an electronic soundtrack in a section at 06:13 (Breakin’ Convention BCTV, 2013). The archive that the festival has

developed (known as BCTV), allows artists and fans to revisit and study excerpts from many of the companies that have showcased influential work.¹⁷

1.5 Popping Activity

A number of other annual UK festivals and events have contributed to the development of popping in the theatre space. The B Supreme festival is an example of a festival that has showcased a number of dance companies that have focussed on or incorporated popping techniques in their choreographic work. The Funkamentals, for example, are a dance company under artistic direction of Yami “Rowdy” Lofvenberg and Sunanda Biswas who presented works that featured long sections of popping (b.supreme TV, 2011). The festival has been running since 2006, and the aim is to celebrate women in hip-hop (BSupreme, n.d), featuring a main stage event along with a range of education and community projects. Many female artists have been showcased and supported by the festival, which makes a notable contribution due to the disproportionate amount of men to women who practice the dance form.

‘Collabo’, developed by choreographer and Artistic Director Tony Adigun, is another example of an annual event that has given many popping artists the opportunity to develop innovative new work that explores music-dance relationships and musical/choreographic collaborations. Collabo “invites the UK’s finest hip-hop choreographers and performers to collaborate and create innovative dance hybrids or to provide dance interpretations of music produced by Mikey J Asante (Tamassy, 2017). The event has given artists the chance to think more deeply about the relationship between their choreography and musical soundtrack. Historically, one piece of music is created by a DJ each year and sent to all the choreographers who choose the music interpretation option. As a result, the audience is exposed to several different uses and visual interpretations of the same piece of music during the final performance. Having taken part in this event as a choreographer and dancer in 2013 at Stratford Circus Theatre in East London, it was inspiring to see a range of

¹⁷ The full archive can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIdbOEp30byP9mSGhynzb6w>.

different musical interpretations of the same track. Although the pieces varied immensely, the embodiment of sound and rhythm was central to choreographic intent.

There have also been spontaneous music-dance collaborations at this event, such as a performance by Boy Blue Entertainment choreographed by Sandy in 2011, where the dancers used *freestyle* to respond to a piece of music created by Michael “Mikey J” Asante. During this piece, the dancers interpret the music in the moment of the performance, as they have not previously heard it (JTorresProductions, 2011). This produces a fragility and intensity in the nature of the stage performance which is unusual in this style of showcase where works are generally tightly choreographed to set soundtracks that are well known by the choreographers and dancers. Notably, Tony Adigun is a ‘Work Place’ artist for The Place, one of the major vocational contemporary dance training centres in London, meaning that they support his work as a choreographer. He is also widely known for advocating “against the grain” and his ethos “innovate, never replicate”, which is linked to his hip-hop dance company, Avant Garde (Tamassy, 2017). Therefore, his abstract approaches to hip-hop dance filter into the event through structured improvisation. It is interesting that once again a hip-hop dance space is influenced by contemporary dance aesthetics, creating dynamic innovative staged performances.

The ‘underground scene’ is crucial to the development of popping as a dance form in its own right in the UK. This term is used in the dance community to refer to a group of dancers who focus on training their freestyle and technique in a range of street dance forms, often with a focus on battling and *cyphering*. They usually specialise in one form, dedicating themselves to hours of practice both with others and individually. Many of these dancers use their training to prepare to battle and/or compete in organised regular competitions such as the UK Juste Debout¹⁸ and the UK B-Boy Championships (annually since 1996) where popping is one of the categories of entry. Although some of these dancers teach their own classes in dance studios in addition, the majority of their practice takes place at free training spaces or informal locations in

¹⁸ The event was conceived in 2001 and has toured to the UK since 2012.

London, such as Charing Cross Station Exit 9 and the Southbank Centre. Previously, a space at London Trocadero was the primary location, but this was closed for renovation despite petitions in 2014, leaving the dancers to seek alternative spaces.

Typically, more experienced dancers act as mentors to younger inexperienced dancers in an “each one teach one” format,¹⁹ informally teaching and supporting them as they train. Events or gatherings for popping in London are organised through Facebook groups and through other social media adverts, often with a DJ to provide music of the appropriate style (eg. funk music and other popping beats for an open popping session). There is no doubt that this activity contributes to the development of popping as a UK dance practice, as many of the dancers who invest a great deal of their time training at these spaces go on to compete and win frequently at national and international competitions. They may also go on to be invited back as guest judges for these events, which becomes an indicator of their expertise and skill level. Many of the dancers who focus on freestyle and battling also form collectives and/or companies and have made work for the stage. Brooke Milliner and Shawn Aimey are both members of Plague, which is a dance company originally founded by Mukhtar Omar Sharif Mukhtar in 2000. Although there is a definite crossover between popping in the theatre and in battle/cypher contexts, the dancers see these aspects as very different parts of their dance careers and refer to them as separate worlds in their interviews (Aimey, 2016; Brooke, 2017).

Specific educational projects have also made a significant contribution to the development of popping in the UK. *Popin’ Pete’s Pop Shop* (2013, 2014, 2015) was a project conceived and produced by Kate Scanlan which featured a week of intensive workshops, jams and practice sessions with Popin’ Pete from the EB’s. Scanlan formed the idea after watching the music video *Yeah 3x* by Chris Brown (ChrisBrown VEVO 2010) (ScannersInc, 2013). At 02:30 in this video, the front of a shop appears with the sign ‘Popin’ Petes’, and Chris Brown and Popin’ Pete perform a popping

¹⁹ This is an African proverb that originated in America during slavery times, based on an informal passing on and sharing of knowledge and skills from one individual to another. More information can be found at <http://www.eachoneteachone.org.uk/about/>.

duet. Scanlan brought this concept to life, which has now become a repeated event that takes place at a temporary shop or gallery space. As a dancer and participant on the 2015 course, I observed that the fluidity of exchange and sharing of knowledge and skills between dancers is a key focus of the event. Participants are encouraged to study the technique of the dance form, whilst exploring individuality and freestyle within it. This project allows students to gain first-hand information from a pioneer of the dance style, and provides an opportunity for UK poppers to have discussions, make connections and exchange and share their practice with one another. The organised, daily workshops with Popin' Pete are central to the project, but the informal practice sessions and jams that take place before and after are also invaluable. It is here that the dancers explore the skills that they are learning during the project, through cyphering and dancing with other participants. There are also workshops for younger dancers, marketed as "petite poppers", to support the younger generation of dancers who are interesting in learning the form. The initiative is funded by Arts Council England along with a number of local UK arts organisations, signifying the growing interest and support for the art form (ScannersInc, 2013).

Similar educational popping projects have included *Breathe the Beat* (2012) featuring French dancer Salah and led by DanceXchange in partnership with Regional Dance Agencies Dancefest, Dancescape and Dudley Performing Arts (breathethebeat, 2012). This was a digital project that took place through a number of video tutorials by Salah with creative themes such as "The Music of Life" and "Snake in the Water" (breathethebeat, 2012). These are taken from PABE (Popping, Animation, Boogaloo and Effect), which is how Salah defines his unique style of dancing. The project was set up as a competition where entrants had to watch the online videos and create a one-minute freestyle solo that was inspired by some aspect of these tutorials. Salah is a hugely popular international entertainer and dancer, having won numerous competitions such as *La France a un incroyable talent* (2006). Consequently, this is yet another example of a creative project that allows UK poppers to draw inspiration from an internationally recognised and renowned dancer.

There are a growing number of weekly popping classes that are available in London scheduled in public dance studio spaces. They are offered at venues such as Studio 68 in Southwark (with Shawn Aimey) and Pineapple Dance Studios in Covent Garden (with Mechanikool and previously with James Painting). Other teachers who teach classes in different dance studios across London also include Fred Folkes, Vicky “Skytilz” Mantey, and Jonathon Jutsu. These classes are usually based on a drop-in, pay weekly structure, with many students committing to attending a class with a particular teacher long term. Typically, a class will feature a combination of exercises and ‘drills’ in the technique and foundations of the dance form, taught sequences or short movement phrases that link different movements from popping vocabulary, and opportunities to develop and train in freestyle and structured improvisation. Many of these teachers also regularly travel across the UK (and internationally) to offer workshops as part of a range of educational, vocational and community dance based projects. Festivals such as Breakin' Convention also contribute to the wider UK scene considerably, with performances, workshops and other projects that feature popping reaching areas such as Brighton, Nottingham and Southampton (Breakin' Convention 2014).

The steady growth of popping projects and classes indicates the growing interest in the form, leading to the development of popping as an increasingly recognised dance practice. Additionally, popping is also frequently staged within reality television competitions such as *Got to Dance*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Britain's Got Talent*, and *Alesha's Street Dance Stars*.²⁰ Popping artists have also been showcased in a theatrical context as part of the *BBC Young Dancer* competition (BBC 2), which began in 2015 and takes place biennially with the final taking place at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London. The competition features four categories of dance: Contemporary, Ballet, Street Dance and South-Asian open to participants aged between 16 and 21. Intriguingly, many of the semi-finalists and finalists for the Street Dance category have been poppers, including Harry Barnes and Jodelle Douglas who

²⁰ Popping artists who have featured on these shows include Nicholas Marvel, Natalie McParland and Kieran Lai.

were both finalists in the competition. Dancers are mentored and judged by specialists in their chosen dance style; thus far Nicholas Marvel and Brooke Milliner have both been involved as judges and choreographers/mentors. This national competition presents another theatre space for young dancers to showcase their technique and skill in popping, where the dance form is recognised alongside others as an established theatre art form.

1.6 Conclusion

There is a diverse, developing range of projects on offer to popping practitioners in the UK, with a concentration on London. This takes the form of regular classes at dance studios, performances, informal training spaces, educational and community projects and social dance events. Although only a part of the wider hip-hop and street dance community, popping has a unique presence both in theatre settings and other performance contexts. As a consequence, it continues to flourish and artists who specialise in the form are committed to creating interesting and varied choreographic work.

Due to an unusual synthesis of aesthetic influences, poppers are able to work with the form in exciting and innovative ways. Driven by the value of rhythm and musicality as Africanist aesthetic influences, these remain the foundational pillar of the work that they create. This is particularly evident in the relationship between movement and sound, regardless of the genre of music that is being used. Despite how abstract or unconventional their music choice may be, they work closely with this to highlight a distinctive choreomusical relationship that is further explored in Chapter Two. As many popping artists encounter contemporary choreographic methods, either through their training, through participation in projects or mixing with other dance artists, this influence is present in much of the theatre work that is generated. A combination of aesthetics are present when popping artists present work in the theatre, both through compositional structure and movement content, and often also through musical choices. The accepted art theatre dance conventions create imprints on the work, but do not impose on the underpinning foundational principles and values of popping.

Popping artists are carving out a new space for their work in the theatre, remaining open to the many conventional composition devices that the stage has to offer and seeing this as added value to their work. They are, however, ready to reject these principles or arrive at a compromise that emphasises the essence of popping. Often, this is through working with abstract music choices but in *their way*, creating new choreomusical potential that is explored in subsequent chapters. In this way, popping in theatres is developing a unique dance identity. A vibrant eclectic choreomusical methodology is being created by popping artists, which borrows selectively from art dance theatre traditions. This contributes to a developing analytical lens that serves popping, and many of these approaches are discussed by exploration of practical work in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Two: A Curious Choreomusical Canon. Exploring Theories of Music-Dance Relationships.

*People forget that somebody actually choreographed
what Mickey Mouse does.
(Morris cited in Acocella 1994: 177)*

This chapter explores the existing body of choreomusical theory that can be employed to analyse relationships between sound and movement in popping practices on stage in the UK. Choreomusicology is defined as “the study of the relationship between music and dance”, which “allows a structural, functional and contextual comparison of musical and movement elements” (Mason, 2006: 62). An exciting body of existing choreomusical literature includes the crucial contributions of Jordan (2015; 2011; 2007; 2000), who particularly focuses on choreographers such as Mark Morris and George Balanchine and carries out a number of detailed analyses of their works.¹ Jordan’s (2015) recent work on Mark Morris as a “Musician-Choreographer” is particularly insightful as it provides theoretical perspectives on the way that a dancer’s musical background deeply and profoundly impacts on their choreographic choices. She also highlights the ways in which a dancer can develop musician-like skills and approaches through the craft of their choreography and dance. The work of Damsholt (2006), Mason (2012) and a collection of ideas from the *Sound Moves* Conference (2005) also make useful contributions in relation to this topic.

Significant limitations of the existing collection of choreomusical literature in dance studies include the tendency for contemporary, ballet and Western art dance practices to be at the centre of the investigations. This results in a somewhat Eurocentric, narrow vision of music-dance relationships. Furthermore, it continues to perpetuate a bias towards the value systems and musical traditions that exist in art dance theatre practices, as I intend to reveal and investigate through the work in this chapter. Having explored the

¹ Examples include analyses of *Mozart Dances* (2006), *Dido and Aeneas* (1989) and *Agon* (1957).

value of (poly)rhythm in Chapter One, I further consider the aesthetics of popping by drawing upon the ideas of Stone (2000) and how privileging close dance-music relationships can inform choreomusical studies.

There are a small yet crucial number of academic choreomusical enquiries that have considered much broader examples of dance practices, which have become paramount in this thesis. I will consider work of McMains and Thomas (2013) for example, as an important point of reference, due to the inclusion and referencing of popular dance examples and vocabulary as part of their study.

Another crucial contribution to this chapter is the work of White (2006), who tirelessly advocates for the popular and challenges hierarchical thinking in dance-music relationships in her article, "As if they didn't hear the music, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Mickey Mouse". White (2006) seamlessly unpacks and interrogates preconceptions and anxieties about close music-dance relationships such as the use of "Mickey Mousing" as a choreomusical device. This article is imperative to my research, given the value and significance of devices such as Mickey Mousing in popping practices. Popping artists use this device, amongst others, in complex, multi-faceted and multi-layered ways. Furthermore, White (2006) writes from a musician's perspective but makes reference to dance and film throughout her investigation. She therefore spans three of the main disciplines upon which I draw in this thesis.

Additionally, I will engage with a small number of online sources and ideas that focus on musicality with reference to popping and other street dance practices: such as *Inside the Music, Inside the Beats* (2014) a documentary produced by Openends Productions. Although these online sources have a more practical artistic focus, they highlight and firmly position the complexity and intricacy of the skill of musicality as a fundamental requirement for a cohesive understanding of a range of different popular and social dance

forms. Detailed choreomusical discussions based on popular and social dance forms in an academic context are sparse. When they are considered, they tend to try and encapsulate the music- dance relationship in an entire piece through a brief, broad analysis. The online sources also highlight the extent of the critical, insightful discussions that frequently occur amongst practitioners and form a deeply embedded part of the dance community.

I begin the chapter with an exploration of the term ‘musicality’, which has a complex, yet crucial meaning in the popping and street dance community. It also represents a highly desirable and respected level of mastery and skill. I then explore a range of theoretical ideas that have been developed in order to articulate choreomusical devices and concepts. Particular attention is paid to the anxiety and avoidance that is created when considering “close” music-dance relationships. I consider the ways in which this evasion prohibits an in depth understanding of dance forms such as popping, and I reveal a potential world of choreomusical discovery once the intimacy of dance-music relationships is celebrated and fully comprehended.

Although I conduct more extensive analyses of practical works in Chapters Four and Five, practical examples are embedded in this chapter where appropriate. This assists in illuminating the wide range of choreomusical features that are present in popping performances and continues to place practice at the centre of my investigation. In this chapter, I explore and build a range of useful terminology that can begin to provide a format for the analyses in subsequent chapters.

2.1 A Meandering ‘Musicality’

In basic terms, musicality means simply to possess “musical talent or sensitivity” (Oxford University Press, 2017), and, as it is often associated

with instinctive and ‘natural’ human processes and behaviour, it is difficult to define and measure. Notably, there is a scarcity of discussion about the meaning of the term in a dance studies context despite it being frequently used in the field. The majority of the available literature in relation to the term tends to have a scientific focus, such as explorations of the development of musicality during infancy.² Most references to musicality in a dance studies context curiously involve referencing the rejection of musicality as a principle of post-modern dance (Banes 2011: xxii) rather than any detailed discussion of the term itself, its application or uses. Intriguingly, the avoidance of choreomusical discussion is a recurring theme in dance studies, which I explore more extensively later in this chapter.

A key process in popping and other street dance practices is the ability to translate lucidly different aspects of what a dancer hears through their body, to their audience. This should be clear to the extent that the audience are able to hear new patterns, rhythms and sounds as a result of watching the dancer. The illusion produced is often so convincing, that it appears as if they are generating the sound. This term is also referred to as the moment of “closure”, where “the movement could, almost, be the cause of the sound we hear” (Duerden 2007: 74). The sounds that are revealed or highlighted may well be aspects of the music that would not be initially noticeable when listening to a piece of music. In this sense, it involves educating the audience to hear new details through the dancing body. Sandy (2015) calls this “sound surfing”, and uses this term regularly in his teaching and work with his dance company, Boy Blue Entertainment (BBE). This is an interesting metaphor, highlighting the constant, sometimes unpredictable or delicate negotiation that is involved between the two art forms in a moment of performance. Throughout the course of my research as a practitioner, I have noted a number of different terms and images that are used by practitioners and artists to articulate their ideas in relation to various aspects of musicality. Dancing “in the pocket of the music” (Folkes, 2015), is also a term that is

² Examples include Malloch and Trevarthen (2009); Trehub (2003).

used frequently by pioneer Popin' Pete from the Electric Boogaloos and is also mentioned by Folkes (2015) in his interview. When training with Popin' Pete as part of *Popin' Pete's Pop Shop* (2016), he would regularly use the expression in his instructions during solo freestyle tasks and shout "in the pocket!" whilst we were dancing. Popin' Pete used this phrase frequently to emphasise the need for a very precise use of timing and sensitivity to the beat, as an absolute requirement for a popper. Professional dancer Yugson Hawks uses different imagery to describe the way that different dancers relate to their musical accompaniment. When describing a friend (Mamson) and fellow member of his crew Serial Stepperz, he describes the sensitivity of his relationship to music and says, "he touches the music" (Openendsproductions, 2014). Prominently, many practitioners use imagery and metaphor specifically to tackle the complex nature of "musicality", in order to make it more tangible and relatable to their students.³ Although a rich bank of choreomusical language and terms exist in the academic world, it is my aim to also draw from this artist-led language as this is the way practitioners are able to communicate the complexities of musicality in popping. An artist-led metaphorical vocabulary also places emphasis on the embodied experience of artists who specialise in popping, to drive explanations of seemingly impenetrable concepts. Furthermore, the language and imagery that have been developed by artists respond to the slippery nature of musicality.

The broadness and somewhat vagueness of the term "musicality" causes frustration amongst many practitioners. This is because artists define and position musicality as a complex skill that requires several dedicated years of craft to master, yet is often used sweepingly. It is also often a subject that receives intense attention within the hip-hop and street dance community. Social media has become a catalyst for much of this dialogue, giving dancers from around the world a shared space for exchanging and offering ideas on platforms such as Facebook through organised groups such as

³ Other examples include "inside the music" and "run after the music" used by Yugson Hawks in his interview as part of the documentary (cited in Openendsproductions, 2014)

“What’s Poppin” (facebook.com, n.d). As musicality is often part of the criteria for judging in battles⁴ and staged competitions⁵ (amongst other commercial and educational settings), it is frequently subject to scrutiny and debate. The nebulousness of this term is constantly illuminated by its varied uses and meanings. Consequently, there is confusion when musicality is also positioned as a compulsory intrinsic skill for learning and mastering so many dance forms. Breaking the term down into two different parts: “receptivity” and “creativity”, is one attempt that has been made to differentiate between the different aspects of the term:

Musical receptivity is ones ability to receive, comprehend, be sensitive to, and have a working knowledge of musical concepts like rhythm, tempo, phrasing, and even mood.

Musical creativity (or musical artistry) is the ability to connect with accompanying music, interpret it, or phrase and add movement dynamics that relate to music even in the absence of accompaniment, in a way that is unique or interesting.

(Nichelle, 2010)

Examples such as this illustrate the attempts that artists make to deconstruct this term and create a wider bank of useful terminology for talking and thinking about musicality.

I suggest that the uses and abuses of the term musicality in a dance context could result from the lack of relevant, specific terminology that can be used to describe *the way* that a popper dances musically. From a musician’s perspective, there is a range of terms on offer to describe the musicality and intention that they play with. Legato,⁶ staccato⁷ and vivace⁸ are examples of

⁴ Juste Debout is an example of an international battle event with a 2vs2 popping category. Refer to <http://www.juste-debout.com/> for more information.

⁵ UDO is an international organisation that includes staged dance competition where competitors are marked on musicality. Although not specifically a popping competition, many companies/crews and individual dancers use popping in their performances. Refer to <http://www.udostreetdance.com/> for more information.

⁶ Meaning smooth and flowing.

classical musical terms that can be used to indicate *the way* that music should be played. This extends beyond basic aspects such as rhythm, timing, pitch and melody. Although there are ways to describe movement quality and dynamics in dance such as through Laban Movement Analysis,⁹ there tends to be a scarcity in specific language that denotes different kinds of relationships or intention to the music. Consequently, the notion of “dancing to music” or “dancing musically” becomes a vague concept that disregards the detailed, nuanced and complex ways in which dance and music have the potential to meet.

When asking each of my interviewees to give their definition and understanding of “skilled musicality” or to identify when a dancer possesses “skilled musicality”, some commonalities emerged from their responses. Many of the artists fundamentally agreed that it involves being able to ‘show’ a detailed understanding of the music through the movements of the body, which is evident in the extracts below:

Musicality is being able to build rhythms inside the music (Aimey, 2016).

So hearing something, and being able to describe it is difficult. Hearing something and being able to show it, I would say is skilled musicality... With emotion (Folkes, 2015).

If you were in a battle situation, you would wanna show your opponent that you understand every instrument in that song (Hylton, 2015).

It’s completely their own journey on the dance floor, and it makes us wanna dance because we can see what they see. We can see what they hear. You know, finding things that we didn’t even hear, that is an absolute skill of a dancer (Lofvenberg, 2015).

⁷ Meaning sharply detached and separated.

⁸ Meaning lively and brisk.

⁹ Laban Movement Analysis provides a basis for analysing the intention or effort that a movement is performed with.

So I think there's more to musicality than simply going *on* the beat it's doing it the *way* that the music does it as well (Skytilz, 2015).

I would say to make yourself look like an instrument, that is not like one you can hear already (Brooke, 2017).

They bring you into the music to hear things that you wouldn't normally hear (Richards, 2015).

I call them a sound surfer. A sound surfer in the sense of like, when you're watching someone who does surfing, they're not forcing what they're doing. There isn't a force it's not fake, it's honest. The wave is moving. You can't predict how a wave is gonna be. You can only look at it and feel it. Same with music (Kenrick, 2015).

Being able to play with all the instruments. That's one side of it. The other side of musicality for me, is understanding how that music makes you feel, and delivering that to an audience to make your movement and the music fit together, to make the audience say, "that makes complete and utter sense" (Turbo, 2017).

The use of the word "show" and other similar language that describes embodiment and visualisation of sound is a commonality in their responses. It emphasises the importance of a clear translatable process between the dancer and their spectator(s), as a part of understanding and appreciating musicality in their practices. Indeed, the importance of musically educating spectators was a common theme throughout the interviews in general. The artists not only found ways to describe bringing particular sounds to the attention of an audience, but also articulated the need to show the textural, dynamic and rhythmic sensitivities of those sounds through the moving body. A fastidious commitment to embodied musical clarity and creating a shared choreomusical experience is a fundamental aspect of performing for many of the artists. Turbo (2017) explains this in our interview, demonstrating his desire to inform the spectator. "I basically show you everything you can hear, is what I do. I want to show you as much as I can with what you can hear. So you can see what you hear".

The common use of onomatopoeia and making beatbox¹⁰ sounds is another method used by popping artists to contend with the ambiguous nature of musicality. Recurrently featuring in my interviews, the artists used this approach when struggling to explain their ideas. Sounds and words such as “boom” to indicate the bass drum, “kat” for the snare drum and “tsk” to represent the hi-hat were frequently vocalised to create drum patterns to illustrate examples when answering questions (Lofvenberg, 2015; Sandy, 2015; Aimey, 2016). When I asked Skytilz (2015) to elaborate on a response that she gave about moving the same way as the beat for example, she said “I’m gonna have to like, make some sounds!” After inviting her to do that, she offered the following explanation:

So if the beat goes “tat tat kat tat tat tsk-kat” that “tsk” means you’re gonna move a little bit different than how you move on the “tat tat”, so the movement might go “stop stop stop stop stop mmmerrr stop”.

(Skytilz 2015)

Expressing the sounds with her voice assisted in the differentiation between the texture and subtle accents in this context, as the rhythmic pattern itself did not vary as an even set of *quavers*. It also evidences the system that is used in popping, where certain movements are “actually built on these particular sounds” (Folkes, 2015). Additionally, this onomatopoeic approach assists artists when thinking about the process of translating an unusual sound into movement, which Turbo (2017) described:

So, if a sound is really sharp and it’s got like a pingy kind of sound to it, it’s like [makes pingy sound noises three times] like twinkly but really really sharp. I’m thinking ok, what movement can resemble that twangy, twingy sound. Do you know what, when someone

¹⁰ A technique of vocal percussion used to recreate the sounds of a drum kit/machine. Beatboxing is a part of hip-hop culture, and specialist artists such as Marv-ill Superlungs have featured in Breakin’ Convention’s artistic and educational projects (breakinconvention.com 2014).

pokes me in my side, when I'm ticklish, I get a little electric shock, like twingy [does physical impression of action].

(Turbo, 2017)

Turbo offers insight into the images and sensations that are evoked for him when hearing a particular sound, evidencing the rigorous choreomusical process that is involved for artists when creating work. Substantiated by an unfaltering commitment to clarity and precision for their audiences, this technique functions as another method of embodying sounds, which demonstrates profound attention to musical detail.

The subjective experiences that can emerge when listening to and moving to music present challenges when attempting to explain choreomusical processes in the moment of a performance. Yugson Hawks¹¹ seamlessly captures the ineffability of the “sensations” that are involved when a dancer is “inside the music” (Openendsproductions, 2014). He is often lost for words when trying to explain certain concepts that he uses to describe musicality. He regularly uses the term “inside the music”, and when the interviewer asks him what it means he often pauses for some time, and at one point concludes that it is “impossible to explain this”. He introduces the idea that he consciously aims to recreate the “sensations” that he experiences when dancing in a club setting in the middle of the night, whenever he is training in a dance studio. He describes this state as a kind of “black out” where he forgets everything and is lost in the music, and describes that the consequences of being in this state involve an acute sensitivity to sounds and movement. He stresses the idea that the majority of this process occurs inside his body, rather than externally through thinking or training in dance movement. This is of course led by improvisation, “a practice that values

¹¹ Yugson Hawks is a renowned hip hop and house dancer, and is part of “Wanted Posse” and “Serial Stepperz”.

surprise, innovation, and the vicissitudes of process rather than the fixed glory of a finished product” (Goldman 2010: 5).¹²

The importance of feeling and individual interpretation is a common theme in this discussion; almost as if this ‘inside’ space allows the dancer to let the music do the ‘thinking’ for them. Each dancer will not only hear the music differently, but will move uniquely in response to an “an unsteady landscape” (Goldman 2010: 5). Improvisation has a very similar meaning to *freestyle*, a term used in a range of popular dance practices to describe dancing freely to music. The ability to *freestyle* to music is a fundamental part of popping, and many of the performances that feature in my investigation are based on this choreographic approach (*Body Stories*, 2013; *Solo at Breakout by Turbo*, 2011; *Jammin’ by Brooke*, 2014). As Goldman (2010: 5) denotes, the emphasis on “spontaneity and intuition” in discussions of improvisation can be misleading, and imply “a lack of preparation”. In actuality, poppers spend extensive time training their approaches to *freestyle*, which also features as an important part of their choreographic methodology. During this training, the aim is to reach a state of freedom where conscious thinking stops and feeling takes over. This emerged from several interview responses, when I asked the artists what their thought process was when navigating music that they hadn’t heard previously in a freestyle context. Brooke (2017) confirmed that, “it wouldn’t be so much of a thought process. I guess I would try and feel it more”. The insistence on personal feeling in response to music accentuates the distinct complexity of musicality in this instance, signalling its ambiguity despite frequent uses.

As music and dance are both personal, potentially emotional and have much to do with feeling, the relationship between these entities is somewhat slippery. It is imperative to acknowledge this as I move forwards with my investigation, as this personal connection between popper and music/sound

¹² *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies, Volume 1* By George. E. Lewis and Benjamin Piekut (2016) explores improvisation studies extensively.

is part of what creates such rich and nuanced choreomusical relationships. I argue, however, that acknowledging and understanding some of the intangibility that is associated with musicality can assist in investigating the relationship between music and dance in popping. Complicating the term and scrutinising its uses and function in relation to a specific dance form generates more consideration and discussion of a specific dance culture in relation to its meaning, function and significance. I am suggesting, therefore, that it is useful to consider the meaning of the term 'musicality' and indeed 'choreomusicality' in relation to popping practices alone, distinctive and unique in comparison to other dance forms. Although there are definitely similarities in its importance with reference to other popular and social dance practices, specific investigations into each of them would be necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding.

Thus far, the choreomusical analyses that are based on or make reference to social and popular dance practices tend to speak broadly, drawing from a range of different dance forms (McMains and Thomas, 2013). Although valuable in deciphering collective value systems of dance-music relationships that differ from art theatre dance forms, the lack of specificity can still cause vagueness in the approach to the dance-music relationship. Furthermore, as I will reveal in my investigation, choreomusicality can vary immensely in popping alone, with practitioners working with vastly different stylistic and musical choices.

It has been evidenced that musicality is regarded as an extremely advanced, complex skill that dancers should aim to practise and master within various hip-hop and street dance communities. Additionally, I argue that a better understanding of terms derived from practitioner-led language such as the potential to be lost "inside the music" (Openendsproductions, 2014), to be "in the pocket" of the music (Folkes, 2015), and "sound surfing" (Sandy, 2015) create a basis for discussion of aspects of musicality that are specific not only to a particular dance style, but also to individual moments within a

performance of that style. This range of terminology contributes to a meta-language that can be used in the analysis of popping performances in Chapters Four and Five.

2.2 Music and Dance: Push and Pull

Rooted in explorations of modern dance and ballet, early choreomusical scholarship tended to focus on music and dance either working together or against each other, creating a binary format through which to analyse the relationship.¹³ Terms such as “parallelism” and “counterpoint” (Jordan 2007: 12) were commonly used to depict music and dance doing something similar to each other in a deliberate way, or something in complete contrast from each other. More recently, choreomusical research has moved on from this, and it has been acknowledged that the relationship is far more complex and nuanced. White (2006: 68) emphasises the limitations of this binary structure, in suggesting that there are many different ways that music and dance work together, many ways that they can oppose each other, and even have the potential to do both simultaneously. This creates more scope for complexities within relationships between the two art forms. The “non-relationship” (Jordan 2007:12), was a conventional feature of modern dance, which was made particularly famous through the “Cage-Cunningham crutch” (White 2006: 69). This was based on the idea that music and dance deliberately had no relationship to each other in a moment of performance and therefore emphasised the autonomy of dance as an art form that did not need to depend on music. Since then, it has been noted that Cage and Cunningham “were not necessarily attempting to disconnect dance and music”, and were rather “searching for new relationships that might emerge through their chance alignment” (McMains and Thomas, 2013: 199). Furthermore, Jordan (2007: 11) highlights the fact that there is always a relationship (even through each deliberately ignoring the other) and we (as spectators) naturally search for it. The history of binary opposition in

¹³ Examples include Jordan (2000) and Hodgins (1992).

choreomusical research was also discussed in the *Sound Moves* conference at Roehampton University in 2005.

Not so long ago, talk about music and dance seemed stuck in an anthropomorphic groove: the two arts were partners behaving well, behaving badly, or even behaving as though at war with one another.

(*Sound Moves* 2005: 1)

At the crux of this debate, is the notion that music and dance “mean differently” (Duerden in *Sound Moves* 2005: 26). Consequently, most terminology that is developed to describe the music-dance relationship is never without challenges. White (2006: 74) brings this idea to light in her declaration that “dance cannot ‘say’ what music ‘says’”. An obvious disciplinary difference that is presented is the way that music has the capacity to fit more into time than the dancing body is physically able to. As John Cage (cited in Hodgins 1999: 70) suggests, “fingers don’t use the same time-lengths legs do”. To oppose this line of thinking, I would suggest that the case is different in a dance form such as popping, due to a very different kind of movement potential. The intricate characteristics and potential for small, quick movements with individual body parts and joints (e.g. *waving* through the fingers and knuckles) mean that there is significantly less (arguably, if any) time differentiation between the (illusion of the) speed of movement and music. Moreover, due to the prominence of different illusions that are frequently created by poppers (see Chapter Three) they have the potential to defy the boundaries of movement and distort our perception of time. This is of great significance to my investigation, as it reveals additional points of analogy between popping, *animation* and music.

Incompatibilities between the aural and the visual do create potential tensions when attempting to examine relationships between music and dance, but it must also be noted that they have several similar natural points of interaction. As “musicians use movement to create sound, and dancers

make noise when they move” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 198), both art forms involve a combination of the aural and the visual which creates obvious common ground. The problem with this, however, is that it is “rarely fundamental to the artistic intent” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 198), which is partly why I began intentionally to explore a musician character as a deliberate choreographic choice in *deConduct* (2013), which I examine in greater depth in Chapter Four.

McMains and Thomas (2013:198-205) respond to the problems of disciplinary differences through the presentation of a model of analysis that emerged from the dialogue between them (as a dancer and musician). They invite scholars to edit the chart in accordance with their own specific, choreomusical investigation and the dance or musical form in question. This editing option widens the potential for understanding choreomusical relationships, as the model is malleable and caters for different dance forms with different musical and movement characteristics. This also acknowledges that different forms of dance and music (with different vocabularies, cultural roots and value systems) will have unique and varied relationships between them.

They offer examples of dance movement vocabulary that spans ballet, tap and popular dance forms including “battement, plié, moonwalk and time step” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 205). To offer an example that could be used in my own investigation, a strobing effect performed during a snare drum roll in the music could be an interesting point of analogy. McMains and Thomas (2013:196) acknowledge the lack of common terminology between music and dance as a “major impediment to greater integration of music and dance scholarship”. Their work goes some distance to begin to fill this gap and offer a rich, yet adaptable language through which to conduct detailed choreomusical analyses across a range of dance/music contexts.

Through studying the work of McMains and Thomas (2013: 209-210), there are three theories of choreomusical enquiry that will be useful in my own choreomusical investigations: “isolated conformance, isolated opposition and reorchestration”. These terms are linked to both “amplification”, and “emergence”.

1. Isolated conformance – “dance that mimics the music very closely for an isolated period of time, preceded and followed by dancing that may be aligned with the music on some points but does not attempt such a direct physicalization of it” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210).
2. Isolated opposition – “the inverse of isolated conformance. That is to say, a period of radical disjuncture between music and dance is framed by passages of greater alignment” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 211).
3. Reorchestration – “the actions of the dance cause the audience to hear differently than they would without seeing the dance, bringing certain instruments that would otherwise be experienced as background to the forefront of the aural experience” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 211).
4. Amplification – “where a musical idea can highlight choreography or vice versa in several different ways” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210).
5. Emergence – where the relationship between music and dance “can produce new meaning that does not exist in either medium alone” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 213).

I argue that these concepts allow for a more nuanced and detailed understanding of relationships between movement and sound in popping practices. The terms allow space for potential subtleties involving the shift of audience perceptions of aural and visual aspects, such as hearing differently as a result of reorchestration. They also move away from binary oppositional thinking, creating a multi-layered framework through which to understand detailed aspects of choreomusical relationships that are required for my analyses. This is a useful model for choreomusical analysis, which allows

space for the complexities of music-dance relationships and references to popular and social dance forms and their specific musical principles.

The undeniable connection between music and dance is also acknowledged in the interdisciplinary work of Nicholas Cook (1998: 78) who stresses natural “iconicity between music and other media”. He describes the way that listening to music prompts “that kinetic excess” (Cook 1998: 78) that leads to movement and dance as a natural response. It emerges that although music and dance need to be considered independently in adherence with their distinctive modes of expression and artistic features, it is also important to find ways to appreciate that something extraordinary can happen when they join together in certain ways.

2.3 The Trouble with Mickey Mouse

“Mickey Mousing” (Damsholt 2007: 8), is a concept that is used to describe dance and music closely “mirroring” (White 2006: 67) one another, with a particular focus on rhythm. The term was developed specifically in film/cartoon/Animation studies, and was given its name due to sound and music being directly synchronized with movement and image in original Mickey Mouse cartoons. In choreomusical studies “Mickey Mousing is usually invoked to indicate close coordination of music and a visual or choreographic element” (White 2006: 82). Early Mickey Mouse cartoons in the 1930s feature endless examples of this. In one episode, Mickey can be seen quickly climbing up a ladder holding a skeleton, directly correlating with an ascending scalar pattern on tuned mallet percussion at the same speed as his movement. The sound directly correlates to the footsteps of Mickey whilst the timbre of the instrument makes reference to the bones of the skeleton knocking against each other (cartoon station, 2009). Despite its frequent use in choreomusical scholarship and other art forms involving movement or moving image (a range of popular dance forms, film, animation

and cartoon for example), Mickey Mousing is riddled with negative associations.

White (2006) explores the tension surrounding these devices in great depth, uncovering the anxiety surrounding accusations of Mickey Mousing as a choreomusical device. She describes a casual discussion in her career where she was asked questions such as “you’re not Mickey Mousing are you?” (2006: 66). White examines these seemingly offhand comments, revealing a more serious undertone about fearing its use. What White (2006: 66) uncovers is a resistance to interdisciplinary ideas about music and dance working closely together and the “understandable dread at the prospect of sorting out the impact of one upon the other”. This also seems to be far more demanding if sound and movement are aligned intimately. Additionally, the “loudness and intensity” (White 2006: 66) that can be experienced when music and dance meet is potentially overwhelming for the spectator, overloading them with information to process. Because of this fear, White (2006: 67) calls for the reinvigoration of “our understanding of interdisciplinary signification”, and proposes that it is this anxiety that heavily contributes to the negativity and scorning of these devices.

My sense is that the concerted but often unconsidered effort to dispel the shadow of Mickey Mouse stems in part from fear about what happens when dance and music partner each other, whether or not Mr. Mouse’s corporeal self is present.

(White 2006: 67)

In light of this, there seems to be a great deal of scope for the reconsideration and detailed exploration of Mickey Mousing and other choreomusical devices that privilege close music-dance relationships in choreomusical analyses. More specifically, the analysis of dance forms that foster a close relationship between dance and music and frequently use Mickey Mousing devices in a range of ways, such as popping, have the

potential to divulge an array of choreomusical discoveries that have previously been overlooked or deemed not complex enough for in depth analysis. It is indeed strange that Mickey Mousing is discussed as if it were a “normative practice against which artists have suddenly chosen to rebel” (White 2006: 67). White (2006: 67) describes this norm as “elusive and, perhaps, non-existent”, as there is a lack of evidence to argue that it was previously a device consistently used or relied upon within dance and choreographic practices.

It is curious that there is an avoidance to deal with close relationships between music and dance to the extent of Mickey Mousing being discussed “as an absence rather than a presence” (White 2006: 67). This perpetuates tensions, where choreographers and composers seem to be confident in announcing that they are *not* Mickey Mousing, which avoids the need to have a complex discussion about what is really happening when music and dance meet each other. White (2006: 67) calls for us to “examine these reflexes” and reconsider how this might impact on the way interdisciplinary approaches and close music-dance relationships are understood and explored.

Along with White, I argue that the negativity associated with Mickey Mousing is often used as a mechanism through which to avoid close scrutiny and complex deconstruction of choreomusical subjects where Mickey Mousing devices are at play. This represents a wider issue where the value systems that underpin popping and other street dance practices are misunderstood and devalued. It also represents a lack of knowledge of the potential complexity of the music-dance relationship. It is for this very reason that White’s (2006) work has become such an important contribution to my own thesis, because it aims to destabilise and criticise this mode of thinking.

Not only is it useful to consider the existence of this anxiety as a potential reason for disregarding the device as a choreographic practice, but also to

consider some of the other arguments in existence that criticise its use. McMains and Thomas (2013: 210) note that when Mickey Mousing or “continuous conformance” happens unceasingly, it “often seems simplistic or naïve”. To expand on this, I concur that when used as a continuous device, Mickey Mousing drastically loses its value and ability to highlight subtle or otherwise specific musical features or ‘moments’. When used in this way, I argue that the spectator is drawn into a kind of unintentional passivity in the way that they engage with what they see. This mode of watching and listening becomes inactive, where the “difficulty of ingesting dance and music at once” (White 2006: 80) is too intense and the spectator experiences a “loudness and intensity” (White 2006: 66) of music and dance together. This leads to an impossible challenge in identifying any particular witty or clever choreomusical moments, as there is limited space to register them. It also takes away any element of surprise, where the dancer has the ability to suddenly draw the spectator towards impressive moments of choreomusical playfulness. When used too much or too frequently, the spectator may not be able to hear a less prominent layer of music or subtle sound, and the dancer is unable to expose these moments with enough time before and after them to be identified as significant. When Mickey Mousing or conformance is used continuously, I propose that the spectator becomes quiescent and struggles to be as active in their discerning of choreomusical relationships. In turn, this becomes detrimental to the performance, even in cases where the intention might have been to demonstrate or explore synchronisation, complex musicality and its effects. Ironically, through an intention to show the advanced skills and exciting effects of Mickey Mousing/closely synchronised music/dance relationships, if the choreographer/dancer does this incessantly rather than selectively, it is likely that the effects are ambiguous and lose their value. Consequently, I explore this creative decision making process extensively in my own practice, and in the choreographic work of other artists in Chapters Four and Five.

When considered by judges or spectators that poppers are overusing Mickey Mousing in their performances, a similar sense of frustration emerges. Artists have their own terminology to describe this practice, including “beat matching” (Aimey, 2016) “beat freaking” (HeeroExe cited in ProDance TV, 2013) and performing a “blow up” (Lofvenberg, 2015). As an example, a social media conversation was sparked between Youtube users after a battle at the UK BBoy Championships popping final in 2013 between Brooke Milliner (UK) and Hoan (Korea) was uploaded. A comment from one user stated “Brooke for once in your life can you please stop beat freaking and just DANCE!!!!” (HeeroExe cited in ProDance TV, 2013). A number of different comments also indicate this sentiment, which is an unusual juxtaposition to the positive comments of appreciation for his dancing that are also listed. Furthermore, in the actual video of the battle, there is a moment at 00:54 when Hoan mocks Brooke by gesturing along in the same rhythm as him, to show that he had predicted what Brooke was about to do through the use of beat matching, and that he was following a predictable pattern in this instance.

This idea also emerged in my interviews with several artists, who emphasised the importance of varying musical approaches and refraining from beat matching or Mickey Mousing too many aspects of the music. When I asked Brooke about how he started training his musicality as an artist, he explained that he is mindful not to depend on this device:

At first I was doing, what people call “being a slave to the beat”. Renegade¹⁴ actually says that, “don’t be a slave”. When you pick up on every instrument and every break in the music and actually dance to it. It’s too obvious, it’s quite an immature thing to do.

(Brooke, 2017)

¹⁴ DJ Renegade has mentored a number of UK poppers including Brooke Milliner and Shawn Aimey, and is also a successful DJ (soulmavericks.com 2015).

The fact that this attitude is also shared by popping practitioners is unexpected considering that vernacular dance practices are accused of its overuse (White 2006: 82-83). This feeling was reiterated in many of the other interviews with comments emphasising the need to be “able to show something else” (Aimey 2016) in addition to beat matching. Lofvenberg (2015) discussed the way that dancers wait for the blow up, which can have a detrimental effect on their performance. This, she concluded, is perpetuated by recent music that is being created for *blow ups*, peppered with these heightened musical moments. She discussed the way that too much focus on the *blow up* can make a dancer look like they are just “spending time” (Lofvenberg 2015) in the moments preceding. There was a general consensus amongst the artists that overusing Mickey Mousing becomes platitudinous, and their sensitivity and selectiveness becomes evident through a range of subsequent analytical examples.

Far more sinister than simple overuse, I argue that a “righteous aesthetic high ground” (White 2006: 68) is often imposed on dancers who specialise in street dance forms. The prevalence of Mickey Mousing devices and “close rhythmic relationships” (White 2006: 82) found consistently and frequently throughout recreational dance, music video and reality television competition formats transmitted through mass media is another factor that contributes to this anxiety. This presence creates associations with more commercially driven presentations of dance that are often considered to be lacking in intellectual or critical focus. White (2006: 82) suggests that this “may contribute to choreographers’ resistance to presenting them on the concert stage”. At the turn of the twentieth and twenty first centuries for example, many street dance groups that found fame through UK reality television competitions such as *Got to Dance* on Sky 1 and *Britain’s Got Talent* on ITV heavily relied on this device. The all male dance crew Diversity used edited soundtracks filled with sound effects such as smashing glass and explosions that were synchronised with high-energy moments in the choreography such as somersaults on *Britain’s Got Talent* (Spiritmanproductions, 2009).

Although this idea did not start from this context, it was here that it became a trend and was popularised through mass media. This was much to the frustration of other parts of the street dance community who developed their craft in smaller, subcultural spaces away from the media as they felt that their art forms were being misrepresented (DanceMadnessTV, 2012).

As I move on with my investigation, I position Mickey Mousing as a multi-faceted, complex and sophisticated choreomusical device. It demands thorough attention through my own choreographic work and the in depth analyses of work by other UK popping practitioners that follow. I deliberately continue to use the term Mickey Mousing despite the controversy that surrounds it, especially to pay homage to the associations between popping and Animation/cartoon that I explore extensively in Chapter Three. As previously presented through the work of McMains and Thomas (2013: 210) and their development of the term “isolated conformance”, it is apparent that there are several different ways that Mickey Mouse can be present. Isolated conformance happens for an “isolated period of time” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210), which is established as a very different way of using the device as opposed to continuously. The “selective alignment” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) of dance and music can be used extremely effectively to surprise the spectator, highlight subtle sounds or less prominent layers of the music (or the dance), and to build a sense of anticipation and uncertainty that is (usually) eventually and satisfyingly resolved. I will also reveal that decisions about when and how to use this device are informed and strategic rather than arbitrary. In depth explorations of instances like this in practice can be found in the analyses in Chapters Four and Five. In addition to this, to revisit White’s (2006: 68) suggestion that music and dance do not only synchronize/not synchronize “in close succession”, but they can happen “even at once”, potential is available for simultaneous harmony and disharmony, complicating and challenging the terminology and ideas through which music/dance relationships have previously been explored.

2.4 Musician-Dancer Skills

The Eurocentric focus of scholarly work on music-dance relationships emerges as a result the number of choreomusical investigations into staged presentations of contemporary dance and ballet. This serves only a narrow group of principles, exclusive to Western art theatre dance models. Underpinning this framework is the idea that “dance is an art of the body whilst music is an art of the mind” (Goldman 2010: 88), and this notion dominates “much of Western critical theory” (Goldman 2010: 88). Through an exploration of the value of rhythm in popping practices in Chapter One, I emphasised alternative value systems that underpin the form, and as Stone (2000: 7) outlines, “singing, playing instruments, dancing, masquerading and dramatizing are part of a conceptual package that many Africans think of as one and the same. Many other scholars also make brief reference to this in non-Western dance cultures and it is acknowledged that this combination is a “well-articulated phenomenon both within and outside of ethnomusicology” (Mason 2012: 5).¹⁵ Despite this, there is a scarcity of full choreomusical analyses of dance forms that extend beyond Western art dance traditions and privilege this dual role.

The majority of the literature that has been explored thus far makes a deliberate separation between musician/music and dancer/dance, but these skills and talents are often much more entwined. The recent work of Jordan (2015) on the work of Mark Morris as a “Musician-Dancer” is an exception as it considers the value in the joining of these skills and roles. In her work, she considers the way that Morris has developed professional musicianship skills through his work as a choreographer. Morris is now a choreographer who is also considered a musician in his own right, and has regularly taken the role of conductor, despite no formal training in music.¹⁶ As Jordan (2015: 64) describes, “undoubtedly, the act of making choreography also affects his relationship to, and understanding of, the music, a point rarely considered”.

¹⁵ Examples include Mason (2014); Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2015).

¹⁶ Image of “Mark Morris conducting *Gloria* at BAM” (Jordan 2015: 18).

This is synonymous with popping practices, as many of the poppers who perform and compete at International level also become DJ's and music producers reciprocally.¹⁷ Additionally, it is common for artists to show interest in musical practices through playing an instrument as an amateur or professionally, which was evidenced in my interviews:

Playing drums even has made my musicality in a sense sharper, dancing before I played drums people would go "your musicality is really great!" and I'd say "ok yeah cool", but when I started playing drums if you hit that drum slightly off the beat, it's a lot more apparent than if you dance slightly off the beat because you can hear it's really off. So playing drums has made me a bit more sensitive to the beat so it's more acute. I really try and get right on the beat when I dance now because I play drums. (Skytilz, 2015)

That's when I really got into music and I used to play the violin as well. (Sandy, 2015)

Basically my Dad plays the organ, so since I was little I'd always have a little mess around on his electrical organ, so then at school I took music as one of my GCSE's to do, so I did music and I chose piano. I did wanna choose the saxophone at first, but it was too expensive to get a saxophone. (Richards, 2015)

The artists mentioned an eclectic range of instruments, demonstrating the broad range of musical influences and experiences that affect their work. The significance of dancers who also possess musical abilities is similarly emphasised by Jordan (2015: 72) in her discussion of Mark Morris's choreographic work:

It is crucial that Morris has developed a group of dancers who are also, in their own way, musicians, able to think musically, to hear and

¹⁷ UK DJ's/music producers who are also poppers include Legend da Beatslaya, DJ Renegade and Frederick Folkes, amongst others.

embody detail, and to nuance their relationship with music in many different ways.
(Jordan 2015: 72)

Similarly, the artists in my interviews and analysis exhibit acute musical sensitivities. Regardless of whether they played an instrument, they all frequently referred to their musical backgrounds and demonstrated a passionate interest and investment in a broad range of musical genres. As dance and music are thought of “as one and the same” (Stone in Nannyonga-Tumusuzza 2015: 82) in Africanist practices, it is interesting to consider the ways that this speaks through their performances from a choreomusical perspective.

There is a small collection of scholarly material that focuses on embodiment and movement in relation to musicians and musical performance, such as the work of Le Guin (2005). Other examples include references to musical practices such as drumming as “dancelike” (Nannyonga-Tamusuzza 2015: 82), a reminder of the physical rhythmical act that is involved when playing an instrument. These ideas particularly come into play in live collaborations between musicians and dancers, such as my choreographic work that is explored in Chapter Four (*deConduct* 2013; *Interpretari* 2014), where live musicians are part of the performance.

Although many of the performances of popping that I analyse in Chapter Four and Five are danced to recorded music, I contemplate the ways that poppers still make reference to musical practices and musicianship. They do this, not only through technical musical skills that they may have developed, but also as a result of the ways in which they simulate and reference the playing of instruments through exciting movement potential and extraordinary use of illusionary imagery. This work is carried out in Chapters Three, Four and Five, creating scope for a wide range of choreomusical discoveries.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore existing choreomusical frameworks, highlighting some useful methodological approaches for the analyses that follow in Chapters Four and Five. It also intended to call existing hierarchical values of dance-music relationships into question, revealing an uncomfortable bias towards Western art-dance practices that privilege a separation between dance and music as autonomous art forms. Consequently, this attaches deep anxiety to intimate choreomusical relationships that manifest in many street dance forms. This has been perpetuated to the extent that Mickey Mousing devices are often considered simplistic and not worthy of study, even when implemented in highly sophisticated and selective ways (White 2006).

Reaching beyond this limiting perspective, a world of choreomusical analytical potential is exposed. Beginning with questions such as how, how often, in what ways and why music meet and align (Jordan 2007: 12) I avoid a rudimentary approach to popular dance analysis through the specific focus on popping and *animation*. I argue that these art forms present specific unique choreomusical characteristics in the analyses that follow, through a combination of distinctive and complex musical sensitivities that the artists acquire.

Through the work in Chapter One, I discovered that many poppers who present work on stage are influenced by contemporary compositional approaches to making dance. As a result, traditional choreomusical approaches do lend themselves to analyses of the form to an extent, but the principles of popping require a modified analytical lens. In light of this, I will next consider metaphorical and phenomenological aspects of popping and its fascinating connection to illusions of the Animated body and cartoon/Animation studies. This will offer a rich collection of terminology that

allows consideration of the illusionary *animated* dancing body, and how this contributes to the choreomusical complexity of popping on stage.

Chapter Three: “Animating the Real”.

“I like the illusion of it. It makes the body look as though it’s doing something that it’s not capable of doing. It defies gravity, for me...” (Sandy, 2015)

This chapter sets out to explore and define distinctive connections between Animation and cartoon (in film) and *animation* as a style of dance that has a close relationship to popping. I intend to reveal a range of interesting synonymies, and explore methodological approaches that will form pivotal contributions to the choreomusical enquiries in subsequent chapters. I argue that Animation theory has great potential for scrutinising the detail and nuances that are rooted in popping and *animation* practices. Furthermore, as Animation-sound relationships are scrutinized and valued in terms of their complexity and synchronicity and are also embedded in the popular, there are pivotal links to my choreomusical analyses.

The number of popular dance scenes, phrases and motifs that are included in Hollywood Animation feature films are perhaps a clear indicator of how well dance lends itself to this genre. A myriad of examples include the use of tap dance in *Happy Feet* (2006), large ensemble popular dance scenes in the *Madagascar* collection (2005) and similarly in the Shrek Collection (1-4), *The Whole Story* (2010). These are just a few examples of the large collection of globally successful Animation feature films that have included choreographed popular dance scenes explicitly and deliberately.

Animation film is a broad term to describe a wide range of different techniques, approaches and formats that produce varying effects. Three of the main techniques used include cel Animation (each frame is drawn by hand) computer generated imagery (CGI) (Wells 2006: 7) and stop-motion Animation. Stop-motion technique “requires a person to literally place a puppet in their hands and bring it to life, frame by frame” (Priebe 2011: xvii), and probing this technique will be an important part of the chapter due to its remarkable relationship to the dancing body.

Popping and *animation* have a number of acknowledged influences from the mid twentieth century Animation and cartoon world. The connection between

Animation and dance is well documented by many Animators and scholars, typically due to both art forms being universally understood as “a way of representing motion” (Cholodenko 1991: 18).¹ Some artists surpass this, proposing Animation itself as “a kind of dance” (Prendergast cited in Coyle 2009: 5), with its stylised, organised movement principles and structural framework. I collate this evidence, enabling explorations of a more specific connection between stop motion Animation and *animation*, investigating the ways that Animated characteristics are embodied in live dance performances.

The intricate, pedestrian and gestural aesthetics of popping and *animation* allows not only for the consideration of deliberate dance content within Animated film, but also the everyday movements and gestures of a particular character in their Animated world. This is the way in which a character moves in exaggerated and reactive ways, specific to their characteristics, form and personality. Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010), for example, goes through a number of contradicting emotional states in response to leaving and disobeying her mother in one particular short scene (ChouTVs, 2013). Her movements range from turning multiple cartwheels and rapidly rolling across the grass whilst exclaiming “I am never going back!” which is quickly intercepted by another shot where she is laying face down in stillness with her body sunken into the grass whilst saying “I am a despicable human being”. This continuous juxtaposition of elation versus despair through movement and speech happens several times during the scene, creating a choreographed, rhythmic and dynamic movement pattern.

Animation film “references (and simulates) ‘reality’ and yet surpasses it, presenting scenarios that we recognise as simultaneously other and the same” (Coyle 2009: 5). This creates a curious relationship with the spectator where the status of the real becomes somewhat slippery. Conversely, when *animation* effects and techniques are used with technical precision and skill in live dance practices, they produce what I suggest to be a fascinating similar, yet inverted effect. Instead, the dancer “references (and simulates)” (Coyle 2009: 5) the surpassing of reality from the position of ‘real’ performance and the live dancing body. I argue that when engaging with theatrical performances of popping and

¹ The connection between dance and animation is also discussed in the work of Aloff (2008) and Purves (2008)

animation, similar tensions between the real and the artificial are present. Consequently, I unravel the mysterious characteristics of the *animated* body that contribute to the complexity of the rhythmic structures and choreomusicality of the dance form. This work will then contribute to the analyses that follow in subsequent chapters.

I will firstly trace a collection of references where a strong relationship between Animation film and *animation* and popping is acknowledged, drawing from resources and discussions in the popping community (Wigzee.biz, 2011). I will also explore more general connections where Animators discuss the importance of dance and choreography (Aloff, 2008) in their work. This will be followed by an exploration of tensions between the 'real' and the 'artificial', calling upon ideas by Bouldin (2000), Goldmark (2002) and Coyle (2009) to support my discussion. I then focus specifically on the way that the 'artificial', Animated body manifests in the live dancing body, drawing from a range of Animation/cartoon methods and principles to support my exposition (Bishko, 2007). Throughout this chapter, I embed mini analyses to explore particular characters and dancers, including the 'Army of Skeletons' from *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and 'Oh' from *Home* (2015), as examples in practice. I intend to explore the complex relationship between Animation, popping and *animation*, which can inform the analyses of choreomusical interrelations through the discoveries that follow.

3.1 Dance and Animation

The explicit relationship between Animation and dance has been frequently enunciated in the film and Animation world and is particularly emphasised in texts and resources dedicated to the study of stop motion Animation. Purves (2008: 194) refers to Animation as a "relation of dance", and frequently draws comparisons in his book: *Stop Motion. Passion, Process and Performance*. Similarly, Prendergast (cited in Coyle 2009: 5) refers to Animation itself as a "kind of dance", which implies its potential for analysis in a dance studies context. Purves (2008: 194) also refers to the stop motion Animator as requiring a "performer's sensibilities" and suggests similarities between the role of an Animator and a choreographer. An Animator will often collaborate with dancers

and/or choreographers when working on a Hollywood feature film, such as choreographer Casper Smart working on *Home* (2015).²

In the case of stop motion Animation, there is a robust foundational association with dance and choreography. In this context, an Animator is required to physically move, manipulate and choreograph the character in a particular space using their hands. This is similar to the way that a choreographer might direct a dancer to move in a performance space in specific ways. Animators and dancers “carve out movements in time, rhythm, and space” (Aloff 2008: 11) and stop motion requires this with a moving, hands-on approach. The following comments were made by stop-motion Animator Bronwen Kyffin in relation to stop motion Animation and its resemblance to dance:

To me, animation is essentially dancing - very slowly. I think figuring out your animation timing is very similar to choreographing dance moves and the counts that they fall on. In stop-motion you are just choreographing on a microscopic level. Where a dancer may break down a piece of choreography into individual steps, an animator needs to break down those individual steps into individual frames. There is also the additional fact that stop-motion is all done with straight-ahead animation, which is also similar to dance. You can figure out, or rehearse, a scene in smaller chunks, but when it comes time to animate, or perform it, you just have to start at the beginning and do it.

(Kyffin cited in Priebe 2011: 235)

According to Mr. Wiggles (full name Steffan Clemente) (Wigzee.biz, 2011),³ *animation* involves the imitation of stop motion Animation characters and their movements. Specific documented influences include the collection of Ray Harryhausen films that feature the 1950s/60s “Dynamation” style. These form some of the original and popular sources of inspiration for early poppers and *animators*. Examples of these films include *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) (characters include the cyclops, dragon and sword-wielding skeleton) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) (characters include the seven-headed hydra and an

² Other examples include Tony Gonzalez who choreographed parts of *Despicable Me* (2010), and Betsy Baytos who specialises in eccentric dance and choreographed in *Pete’s Dragon* (1977), *The Emperor’s New Groove* (2000), and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009).

³ Mr. Wiggles is an original member of the Electric Boogaloos.

army of skeletons). Some dancers actually referred to the style as “Sinbad dance” (dancespirit.com, 2014), to make direct reference to the characters from the film. Mr. Wiggles offers the following instructional guide to dancers when learning *animation* techniques.

- 1- study one of these characters in these movies
- 2- first follow the body movements and it's style, but stay relaxed
- 3- now try these movements again, but this time tighten your muscles really tight. This will create a more animated movement that will almost simulate the character. Also apply some stop motion to totally create the illusion.

(Wigzee.biz, 2011)

The assumption is that the dancer already possesses a certain level of technical skill and has an understanding of the dance form when approaching this instructional guide. The website appears to be designed for dancers who already have a budding interest in popping and associated styles: such as *animation*. Interestingly, Mr. Wiggles instructs dancers to “apply some stop motion” (Wigzee.biz, 2011), which infers that the live dancing body is able to personify Animated principles. Furthermore, as *animator* and dancer Brian “Chibi” Gaynor describes: “when you’re animating, you’re pretending to be an inanimate model that’s trying to move like a human” (dancespirit.com, 2014).

The stop motion characters in a range of 20th Century Ray Harryhausen films directly influenced original styles of *animation*. Harryhausen evolved a unique style of presenting these characters, which was the style that was later called “dynamation” (ElectricDragon505 2014) in the 1950s. This involved mixing live-action and Animated characters “seamlessly” (ElectricDragon505, 2014), so that they could appear together in the shot. It was achieved using a complex process whereby the projection of the Animated character would be ‘blacked’ out in the part of the shot that would be in the foreground where the live-action would take place. The reverse process would then be carried out; the Animated character is blacked out and put the foreground in position, in order that both could appear in the shot simultaneously. Consequently, stop motion Animated characters could appear to fight and interact with the live-action characters in the film. The two

worlds collided as a result, creating a blend of artificial and real that would have been fascinating to audiences at that time.

A famous group of characters from Harryhausen's films include the army of skeletons in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and the fight scene in which they feature (Aladan57, 2013). Here, the skeletons appear to grow out of the ground one by one in a canon sequence. Their bodies uncurl and unfold through the spine so that their head is the last to move, which brings them to a neutral standing position. There is a slightly jerky quality to their movement, where "proof of the artist's hand through the inescapable mistakes made" (Priebe 2011: ix) is visible. After being instructed to "destroy them!" and "kill!" the skeletons start walking forwards towards their human opponents in unison. There is a distinctive quality to their walk cycle,⁴ which is already exaggerated as their joints and bones are exposed, creating mechanical movements. As the weight shifts from one foot to the other, there is a slow motion quality, which is then interrupted by the heavy shift of weight for the next step. When something is Animated using stop motion technique, it appears to be moving of its own accord. To "apply some stop motion" (wizgee.biz 2011) then, is a curious direction to give the live dancer. In order for the dancer to look like they are moving as a stop motion character, they will ironically need to appear to be Animated, and therefore artificial. In the same way that the aim of the Animated character in film is to pass as believable, the aim of the live dancer in this case is to appear as a make-believe character, trying to pass as real.

The live dancer is required to Animate particular movements, in order to master the technique and this is clearly evident in the work of UK popping artist Brooke Milliner. In one performance (a judges' showcase at the UDO British Championships), he starts to exit the space by casually walking in a relaxed way (cali3000, 2014). He then interrupts this at 02:58, adding stop motion or *strobing* technique and *slow motion* in between the frames. *Strobing* is defined as "short stop motion type movements done generally with out [sic] a pop, but more of a subtle stop between each movement. Imitating the illusions of movements under a strobe light (Wizgee.biz, 2011). This is the same effect that is created by

⁴ Walk cycles refer to the pattern of frames that create a stylistic walk for a character in Animation. Slight changes in the frames will result in a different style of walk that is appropriate to that character.

Animating using stop motion. Both performances of *animation* and stop motion Animation take place in real time. Priebe (2011: 206) describes this as the “liveness”, due to the fact that the animator is unable to “fix it” in the way that is possible with CGI techniques. In both cases therefore, the desired effect is permeated with reminders of reality, as it does not usually happen seamlessly. There is visible proof of the method itself, or in the case of the dancer, proof of their real body carrying out these effects. Even if a dancer does produce a seemingly believable *animated* dancing body, the moments preceding the performance serve as a reminder that it is an illusion that we are about to witness. This discussion has evidenced various relationships between Animation and choreography, highlighting several points of exchange between stop motion Animation and *animation* specifically.

3.2 The Real and the Not Really

In order to fully explore notions of the ‘artificial’ and the ‘real’, I must firstly define the parameters of these terms in this context. When using the term ‘artificial’, I am referring to the movement qualities, style and physicality of Animated characters on screen. This often involves exciting and unusual movement potential that is beyond the realms of possibility for the live dancing body. A character might be able to fly,⁵ have hyper-flexible limbs,⁶ or move and stop at rapid speeds that would be impossible for the human body.⁷ When referring to the ‘real’, I am concerned with live-action movement, and the parameters of the live, human body, which has “more flesh and substance” (Bouldin 2000: 48). It is both difficult and somewhat contentious to separate what is real/not real in the case of Animation, because the very purpose is for characters to appear ‘realistic’ and take on live-action qualities. I would also suggest that it is this specific combination of realistic principles and the pretend, which leads to the emerging magic and enchantment of watching Animation film. I propose that this similar blend of the ‘real and the not really’, is also at play when watching *animation* and popping live on stage.

⁵ ‘Buzz Lightyear’ in *Toy Story* (1995),

⁶ ‘Elastigirl’ in *The Incredibles* (2004).

⁷ ‘Dash’ from *The Incredibles* (2004).

According to Bouldin (2000: 48) “animation... is always negotiating its place between the real and the really made up”. A character may simultaneously have several features, a particular physicality or certain behaviours that mimic that of real people. They may also have characteristics and capabilities that exceed or stretch the boundaries of what is possible in the real world. In physical appearance, they may have long hair of several metres that can be used as rope (such as Rapunzel in *Tangled*, 2010) or have very thin, long limbs that can move and stretch in hyper-flexible ways (e.g. Mike Wazowski in *Monsters Inc*, 2001). The status of the real is obviously immediately affected by the physical appearance of a particular character in each Animated film. How ‘real’ or ‘artificial’ they appear to be, is largely dependent on whether they are presented as human, superhero, animal, or some other anthropomorphic being. This is already being negotiated before the character even starts to move. Nevertheless, it is possible that a character could appear fairly non-human in appearance according to biomechanical principles, but perform other aspects of human physicality and behaviour, gestures and movements, such as ‘Oh’ in *Home* (2015).

Through an analysis of *Betty Boop’s Bamboo Isle* (1932) (DarkCreek Videos 2007), Bouldin (2000) explores issues of race and the real in her article ‘The Body, Animation and the Real’. She highlights that the “material and sensuous connection between image and original is maintained in Animation, albeit a complicated, morphed and multiplied connection” (2000: 48). In ascertaining that the real is still at play in Animation film and isn’t an entirely separate world, we can understand that “actual material experiences are an intimate part of our understanding of animated ones” (Bouldin 2000: 49). In this case, “actual material experiences” refer to the physicality and movement language or choreography of the Animated characters in the film. These characters often perform movements that are directly inspired by human movements. In some cases, they are human movements that are captured and then embodied by and placed on the character.

In order to deepen an understanding of the relationship between the “real and the fantastic” (Bouldin 2000:49) in Animation, it is helpful to consider some of the processes and methods that are used to create and develop the movements of a

character, in order to give them realistic movement languages. The rotoscope played a key role in beginning to transfer human movements to the Animated world. Invented in 1915/1917 by Max and Dave Fleischer, the rotoscope was “designed to facilitate the production of fluid, lifelike animation” (Bouldin 2000: 50) through the following process. The rotoscope “projects original live-action footage frame-by-frame onto a transparent drawing board, thereby allowing animators to trace each frame of the motion, securing the realism of their animated segments” (Bouldin 2000: 50). The “uncanny, jarring quality” (Bouldin 2000: 50) of animation developed using this method maintained the complex nature of the relationship between the Animated and the actual. This is partly challenged through the development and prevalent use of motion capture, and also where the rotoscope was replaced by the use of advanced computer software. This is because it is possible to achieve a very high quality of Animation, which can appear extremely realistic and arguably flawless, as there is no evidence of the artist’s hand and it is based on real movements. Motion capture is defined as “a human motion snatched from one realm and secreted off into another” (Bouldin 2000: 51) and it has the potential for the exact movements of a live actor/dancer to be captured and transmitted to a character to ‘perform’ in their Animated world. The traces of the method and the presence of the animator’s hand are considered a part of the original charm and appeal of the form, so motion capture interferes in this process.

3.3 An *animated* presence in Animation

There are a growing number of Animated feature films with specific references to street dance forms.⁸ *Home* (2015), follows the story of the unlikely friendship between a creature from another planet called ‘Oh’ and a human teenage girl called ‘Tip’. Throughout the film, Tip teaches Oh a number of different things about human behaviour and experience, many of which are unfamiliar to him. In one scene Tip plays popular music (*Dance in the Dark* by Rihanna), which Oh hasn’t heard before and says that he does not enjoy. What follows is a series of his involuntary, physical responses that develop into a full dance sequence (DreamWorksTV, 2015).

⁸ Examples include ‘Lucy Wilde’s’ reference to a stereotype Krump in *Despicable Me 2* (2013) and ‘Oh’ performing *animated* isolations in *Home* (2015).

It begins with Oh tapping each of his tentacles/legs in time with the beat, until he starts to move his head and show the beat moving through his entire body. We could identify this as the *groove*, and the way that he “can’t help” but show a physical expression of the feeling of the music. He looks alarmed by this, as if he isn’t in control of his movements. Shortly after, he performs a sequence of movements and some of this content closely resembles movements from popping technique. Firstly, a *neck-o-flex* effect, where he rotates his head to the right and holds it there (creating a *fixed point*) whilst twisting the rest of his body around. This appears as if the head and the body are playing a game of chase. Secondly, he performs a series of isolations with the head, torso and shoulders, producing a robotic effect. Finally, he performs *waving* technique with his arms and then later his long ears. All of the movements are performed as if Oh has lost control of his body; where his body is dancing and he cannot stop it. This is demonstrated through the script and is clearly evident from his facial expressions. Whilst certain parts of his body move, others appear stiff and restrained, as he tries to suppress the movements unsuccessfully. This creates a curious dialogue between the real and the artificial, specifically through the use of dance. From a choreomusical perspective, it also references the idea that music has the potential to ‘move’ him. In this sense he is “inside the music” (Hawks cited in Openendsproductions, 2014) a practitioner-led term that was explored in Chapter One. The combined characterisation, dialogue and choreography reference the idea of an infectious beat that takes control of his body, limb-by-limb.

I am particularly interested in the way that the meanings of Animation and the *animated* are parodied in this scene, through the presentation of an Animated character simulating the real in this distinctive, unusual way. Oh is an Animated character from another planet who has landed on Earth, so this already generates irony in that planet ‘Earth’ in the film is an animated representation of the real. Oh also has a mixture of human and non-human characteristics. He can speak English, although his speech is grammatically and structurally incorrect and muddled (“can I come into the out now?” for example). He is bright purple in colour and he changes colour whenever his mood or feelings suddenly change (yellow for fear, green to show he is lying, blue to represent sadness, red for

anger, and pink to show love). When Oh starts to dance, he demonstrates a natural response to music that is associated with basic human behaviour and experience. As the spectator witnesses Oh's first encounter with popular music, his movements look strange and uncomfortable, as if his body moves of its own accord and he cannot stop or control it. Although they are actual dance movements, they are exaggerated through speed and hyper-flexibility. Ironically, this Animated character performs *animated* movements as an involuntary physical response to popular music. This creates a comic and unusual relationship between the Animated, the *animated* and the actual.

3.4 Animated *animated* Principles

The "12 Principles of Animation" (Bishko 2007: 24), were developed at Disney Studios during the 1930s, and created the "benchmark for "good" animation" (Bishko 2007: 24). These are described below, along with a suggested interpretation where appropriate (*in italics*), to suggest how this might be translated to the dancing body on stage.

- 1) Squash and Stretch - "This action gives the illusion of weight and volume to a character as it moves". *After showing impact through a step or transference of weight, the dancer may 'squash' their body so that it appears to be more compact. They do this by jutting their head forwards, whilst simultaneously lifting their shoulders and chest. This is particularly significant for dancers when moving "in between" (OTIS FUNKMEYER, 2016) frames or movements.*
- 2) Anticipation - "This movement prepares the audience for a major action the character is about to perform, such as, starting to run, jump or change expression". *In popping and animation technique, the dancer will often prepare (prep) for the next movement. One example of this is to prepare on count eight ready for the movement to happen on count one, in a walk out, for example.*
- 3) Staging - "A pose or action should clearly communicate to the audience the attitude, mood, reaction or idea of the character as it relates to the story and continuity of the story line". *If using the puppet character, you would need to make sure that your physicality reflects this eg. Relaxed wrists and the illusion of strings. This aspect is involved with*

ensuring clarity of an idea (OTIS FUNKMEYER, 2016).

- 4) Straight Ahead Action and Pose to Pose - "Straight ahead animation starts at the first drawing and works drawing to drawing to the end of a scene". "Pose to Pose is more planned out and charted with key drawings done at intervals throughout the scene".
- 5) Follow through and Overlapping Action - "When the main body of the character stops all other parts continue to catch up to the main mass of the character, such as arms, long hair, clothing, coat tails or a dress, floppy ears or a long tail (these follow the path of action). Nothing stops all at once. This is "follow through". "Overlapping action" is when the character changes direction while his clothes or hair continues forward. The character is going in a new direction, to be followed, a number of frames later, by his clothes in the new direction." *A similar effect is created when the dancer uses their body to create a stop, but the arms, legs and head will continue from the previous movement. Similarly, the dancer can start a new movement or series of movements whilst still finishing the previous ones, creating a similar overlapping effect.*
- 6) Slow In and Slow Out - "As action starts, we have more drawings near the starting pose, one or two in the middle, and more drawings near the next pose. Fewer drawings make the action faster and more drawings make the action slower. Slow-ins and slow-outs soften the action, making it more life-like. For a gag action, we may omit some slow-out or slow-ins for shock appeal or the surprise element. This will give more snap to the scene". *The dancer can suddenly intercept a series of movements with a completely different pose or style (this often corresponds with something suddenly changing musically), so a sudden surprise effect is created.*
- 7) Arcs - "All actions, with few exceptions (such as the animation of a mechanical device), follow an arc or slightly circular path. This is especially true of the human figure and the action of animals. Arcs give animation a more natural action and better flow". *This idea is particularly relevant when working with concepts such as fixed point where the dancer keeps one part of the body stationary and uses it as an axis to move around.*
- 8) Secondary Action - "This action adds to and enriches the main action and adds more dimension to the character animation, supplementing and/or re-enforcing the main action." *Detail will add to the effect created by the movement, such as following the*

direction of the wave through the arms and body with your head/eyes.

- 9) Timing - “The basics are: more drawings between poses slow and smooth the action. Fewer drawings make the action faster and crisper. A variety of slow and fast timing within a scene adds texture and interest to the movement.” *Dancer frequently uses contrasts in their timing and dynamics of movement eg. Simultaneous smooth and sharp qualities.*
- 10) Exaggeration - “In feature animation, a character must move more broadly to look natural”. *Popping also involves exaggeration of character and form to be mastered.*
- 11) Solid Drawing
- 12) Appeal - *Characters such as ‘scarecrow’, ‘puppet’ and ‘toyman’ have a particular likability that appeal to an audience.*

(Bishko 2007: 26-27)

Many of these principles lend themselves to *animation* owing to the fact that the dancer is aspiring to achieve a similar aesthetic from performing their movements, (often) becoming a character and aiming to make their performance believable.⁹ Dancers who specialise in *animation* have begun to explore connections between these principles and the *animated* dancing body (OTIS FUNKMEYER, 2016), emphasising their effectiveness during training. In this video, the artist makes the connection between understanding the twelve principles and how this can help with “feeling” the dance and making it “beautiful”, beyond the basics of mastering the movement from a technical perspective. Understanding the way that the Animated principles are manifested in the *animated* dancing body is certainly a useful tool for my analyses that follow in subsequent chapters.

Useful methods that are specific to the process of creating cartoons are also of great significance. Similarly to Animation, it is acknowledged that cartoon characters “can, by definition, do things that we can’t (or shouldn’t) do” (Goldmark 2002: xiv). There are many similarities in this sense to Animation, but a feature that is specific to the genre of cartoon is the formula of short episodic structures and a “rapid succession of movement” (Goldmark 2002: xiv), along with the obvious two-dimensional effect in this genre. Although characters also

⁹ These principles of Animation have been extended and developed over time, and Walt Stanchfield later expanded the collection to 28 principles (Animation Meat, 2007).

often move rapidly in other forms of Animation, there is a consistent quick pace in cartoons, which is similar in staged presentations of *animation* and popping.

A notable technique is called “the take” (Bishko 2007: 27), which is defined as a “moment of extreme surprise”. This is a common device used in popping and *animation* performances by dancers such as Brooke Milliner. In the solo showcase at the UDO British Championships (ProDance TV, 2013), Brooke interrupts the flow of his movements dropping suddenly to the floor, sliding along and popping on one knee at 01:11. This happens in synchronicity with an interruption in flow of the music, creating an unexpected visual and aural effect. In the moments approaching the take, Brooke is dancing in a standing position, but when he comes to prepare for the drop, he compresses or squashes his body position to create a seamless shift.

Concepts such as “the hold” (Priebe 2011: 206) can also aid a deeper choreomusical understanding in relation to the timing and rhythm of the *animated* body. In Animation, this is understood as a moving object or character becoming static for “more than one or two frames” (Priebe 2011: 85). When working with 24 frames a second, the general principle is that “it takes 6 frames to feel something, 8 frames to see it, and 12 frames for it to really register in the mind” (Priebe 2011: 85). This indicates that if a dancer holds their movement for half a second or more, the moment will be more memorable for the spectator. This can then be further highlighted when it happens at the same time as a short pause in the music. When *animating* the body, the pauses are important in order for the spectator to process and absorb the illusions that are being created. Other intricate timing issues are highlighted through the principles of cartoon and Animation, such as the idea that when a character starts moving, the first part of their movement will be slower as they gain momentum so many drawings or photographs in close succession are required. This principle is called “slow in and slow out” (Bishko 2007: 26-27). When translated to movement in a dance context, this assists our understanding of the intricacies in the timing and musicality of the *animated* dancing body.

3.5 Tracing the Animated Body in the *animated* Body

Animation technique involves a wide range of concepts such as *fixed-point*, mime, *strobing* and *slow motion* that have been discussed and explained in Chapter One. Many of these effects create an illusion that, when mastered, empowers the body to take on “animated characteristics” (Maranan 2005: 32) in a performance. Maranan (2005: 40) suggests that when a dancer is able to “present something different to the audiences [sic] perception of how the body works and moves”, an illusion is created. This suggests that something out of the ordinary appears to be happening from the spectator’s perspective, or something “fantastic” (Bouldin 2000: 49). When “all elements of the animated illusion are unified” (Bishko 2007: 25) we are able to “suspend our disbelief” (Bishko 2007: 24). This means that we believe in the Animated world that is created for a short time, allowing us to invest in the performance. When this concerns the live dancing body, the timing, precision, clarity and performance of the movement amalgamate. As a result of the intricate detail that is required, “movements are separated in time” (Maranan 2005: 32) and considered limb-by-limb. It is helpful to break movements down into smaller parts: micro-movements or frames perhaps, in order to understand the illusions that are created.

Separating movement according to musical counts is often an approach that is used to analyse dance but as many important *animated* movements can occur in one count of music, the approach lacks the detail that is required.¹⁰ Alternatively, I propose that it is more useful to consider *animation* in relation to frames, which stems from the number of frames per second (fps) that are used to create an Animated film. This ranges from approximately 12 fps for standard web quality, to 30 fps for higher quality cinematic animation. When a character is Animated at 16 fps for example, it means that there will be 16 sequential photographs for every one second of film. Although it is not always possible for the human eye to process this much movement consciously in one second of a live performance, the essence of the approach is to break down movements limb-by-limb, in smaller parts than counts where possible. When a dancer is using *animated* techniques, their body control and articulation is paramount to the overall illusion. If the body part that has moved to produce the *fixed-point* effect slightly waivers when the rest of the body follows for example, then the effect or illusion will lack

¹⁰ The use of quavers (half beats), semi quavers (quarter beats) and demi-semi quavers (an eighth of a beat) are also useful concepts in relation to rhythm.

total believability.

In a judges showcase performance by Brooke Milliner at UDO British in 2013 (ProDance TV, 2013), Brooke Milliner demonstrates the precision of the *fixed-point* technique from 01:30 - 01:36. He places his left arm, flexed at the elbow out into the space in front of his torso. He keeps it there, completely still, whilst simultaneously performing hip isolation movements. This presents an illusion that his left arm is 'stuck' or resting against/on a surface. It interrupts the idea that the body moves as a unit, and creates an illusion of disconnection where different body parts begin to develop their own, separate movement or "Animated characteristics" (Maranan 2005: 32). Brooke moves around the *fixed point* with fluidity and ease, making his left arm look almost as if it doesn't belong to him. He is therefore able to take on "Animated characteristics" (Maranan 2005: 32) in these moments.

Michael Jackson's movements and choreography also provides an important point of discussion, particularly because of the way he regularly references popping and *animation* techniques within his performances.¹¹ Jackson is described as "unnaturally or extraordinarily great" (Johnson cited in Takiguchi 2013: 4) and his dancing skills are often discussed in relation to this claim. His performances are often described using language such as "enchanted" (Rhodes 2011: 1) and "magic" (Takiguchi 2013: 2), which suggests that a complex illusion is at play. It indicates that his movement abilities extend beyond what is considered as normal or possible, and that he reaches a status that is understood as 'other than' the live dancing body. Takiguchi (2013: 5) explores the moonwalk; one of Jackson's signature dance moves, which was originally called "the backslide" and comes from popping vocabulary (Wigzee.biz, 2011). Its origins are often associated with Jackson in popular culture, although many earlier references exist including footage of Bill Bailey performing it in 1955 (steve white, 2010). In order to master the movement "one must smoothly shift one's weight between alternating balls of the feet and skilfully manipulate the ball and heel of each foot while sliding alternating feet backward" (Takiguchi 2013: 5).

Takiguchi (2013: 5-6) then notes that it is not only a physical and accurate re-

¹¹ The use of the *dimestop* in *Dancing Machine* (1973), for example.

enactment of the above description that will achieve the desired effect. It requires precise control of the upper body simultaneously, mastering the movement with ease and fluidity. Takiguchi (2013: 9) proposes that it is through skilfully executing movements like this, that Jackson appears to be “bionic”. I propose that this is another instance where the Animated, artificial body is present during live performance using *animated* approaches.

The live, moving body is also explored through the movements/choreography of Charlie Chaplin in the work of Goldmark (2011). Charlie Chaplin played a significant role in the silent film era (1894-1929), and more emphasis was therefore placed on choreography and movement to drive the narrative and comedy during this time. Chaplin’s performance is described as “cartoonish” (Goldmark 2011: 168) and his performance “offers us the illusion that a live performer’s body may be as elastic and protean as that of a cartoon” (Goldmark 2011: 168). In a scene in a Lion’s cage from *The Circus* (1928), we see Chaplin walking around the cage using an exaggerated movement quality, trying not to wake the sleeping Lion. He suddenly stops himself as he runs into the cage and notices the sleeping animal, almost losing his balance in the process, which he demonstrates through wavering on one foot with his arms floating in the air behind him showing how suddenly he stopped (creating a follow through (Bishko 2007: 26-27) effect). He then takes long strides away from the sleeping lion, where his upper body appears to be separated from his lower body. There is a definite use of “exaggeration” (Bishko 2007: 26-27) here, in his attempts to walk quietly. As he steps onto one foot, his upper body then shifts over to transfer his weight fully so that there is a delay to complete each step, creating a strange repetitive thrusting motion where the head and upper body (manufrakass 2007) jut forwards. The exaggerated quality in the walking cycle along with the sudden change in speed when stopping creates the “cartoonish” (Goldmark 2011: 168) effect that was described earlier. It is even noted that the movement language and modes of expression that Chaplin developed were “profoundly influential in developing the specific conditions of animated film” (Goldmark 2011: 18), evidencing a reverse relationship where traces of the Animated in the actual influenced the Animated in film.

Charlie’s black-and-white iconic styling translated readily into cartoon representation, but his strategic

motion as a performer equally underpinned the choreography of animated movement and its implied narrative and meaning in cartoon form.

(Wells in Goldmark and Keil 2011: 21)

The popularity of Chaplin during the 1920s and 1930s period of modernity contributes to the discussion about the relationship between live performer and Animated image, demonstrating that the live and the Animated have a close relationship both when the subject is the live performer and the Animated character on screen. Another similar Animated presence is found in 1920s and 1930s performances of Eccentric dancing. This style, popular on the music hall and vaudeville stage and later in film, was an umbrella term to signify dancing in which live bodies moved in extraordinary ways, and the boundaries of reality were stretched and extended. In this style of dance, the movements “defy our normal assumptions about human anatomy” (Goldmark 2011: 168), which made the body appear to look artificial in some way. A specific style in the 1920s developed congruently with Jazz music, which at the time sounded strange and unusual (Harker 2008: 70). There are frequent references to a “rubber legs” (Harker 2008: 71) quality, which can be seen in the dancing of Ray Bolger as the ‘Scarecrow’ character in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and similarly in cartoon on screen in *The Skeleton Dance* (1929). The outcome of this style of dancing was that although the very nature of it “departed from conventional techniques” (Harker 2008: 71), it created its own set of principles and a distinctive, recognizable style.

Although vastly different from the movement style and quality seen in *animation*, the eccentric dancing body is a useful reference point when considering the potential of the live dancing body when there are aspects that appear to be artificial, and how these seemingly impossible movement characteristics may be categorized and stylized for audiences to fully grasp and understand them. I would suggest that a more detailed investigation into other traces of the Animated character in the movements and choreography of the live performer is needed. This would, in turn, allow for further insight into how these two worlds may have influenced each other in their parallel developments.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have discovered that the relationship between Animation/cartoon and popping and *animation* is both profoundly complex and intimate. I uncovered a range of examples where the Animated principles have a transient, momentous presence in the live moving body, and this has been documented through the analyses of some of the most iconic performers in popular culture histories. Both the real and the artificial play an important role in the functioning of Animation film, and similarly they both also contribute to the curious effect that is produced in the performance of *animation* on stage by the live dancing body. When watching Animation and cartoons “we suspend our disbelief and engage with the character; there is no question of the character’s aliveness” (Bishko 2007: 24) and their physicality and choreographed movement/body language contributes to this engagement. In both ‘*Animations*’ (in film and dance), “all elements of the animated illusion are unified” (Bishko 2007: 25), leading to the credibility that is experienced through watching the character.

When watching popping and *animation*, the spectator suspends their disbelief (Bishko 2007:24) and invests in illusions that are being presented, in the same way as when watching Animation film. The live, dancing body appears somewhat artificial, but the spectator is always safe in the knowledge that what they are watching is in fact live in real time. In this way, similar tensions between the artificial and the real are at play as an inverted process. Both mediums “plays with and blends different registers of the “real” and the fantastic” (Bouldin 2000: 49), and this is a striking similarity between the genres of Animation and *animation*. I propose that this curious relationship has the potential to exaggerate the very specific and effective choreomusical effects and devices that I uncover and explore in this thesis. Thus, I take the principles of Animation forward in my investigation, embedding them into the analyses that follow in Chapters Four and Five.

I suggest that choreographic analytical approaches have much to offer in terms of understanding the way that movement functions in Animated feature films, in the same way that theories of Animation can inform and shape choreographic analysis. A significant proportion of the humour and appeal that manifests in Animation feature films comes from intelligent and unique use and presentation

of choreographed movement or physicality, and this is something that demands further attention and study from dance studies. Overall, this chapter has provided a basis from which to employ ideas from Animation/cartoon studies in relation to musicality, to inform and shape my choreomusical methodological approach to analysis.

Chapter Four: An Exploration of Practice-Led Research.

This chapter explores and supports a selection of the practical research that I undertook as the leading part of this investigation.¹ Firstly, I will discuss the process of creating *deConduct* (2013) which was a solo piece choreographed through the *Open Art Surgery* project devised and performed at Breakin' Convention in collaboration with DJ Psykhomantus. This piece was performed at the Lilian Baylis Studio, Sadler's Wells Theatre on Saturday 30th March 2013. A documentary of the process and performance stages of the project was filmed and edited by Alasdair Purkis and Lukas Salna, which captures many of the points of discussion (see Video 1). *Body Stories* (June 2013) is the next work that was created and performed in collaboration with Caroline Lofthouse, as part of the Kingston Connections festival. The creation and performance of this piece sparked the research questions discussed in Chapter One, particularly in relation to dialogues between popping and contemporary dance practices (see Video 2). I will then discuss *Interpretari* (2014), a collaborative project and choreomusical experiment in partnership with musician and conductor Anna Tabbush and The Dance Movement. This piece was performed and recorded at G Live in Surrey on 7th May 2014 (see Video 3). Each of these pieces is explored with a focus on the role of choreographer and collaborator, with an emphasis on the creative process of making and devising the work.

I then draw from a more recent collection of choreographic projects in which I have been involved as a company dancer for Boy Blue Entertainment (BBE) under direction of Kenrick Sandy since May 2014. These experiences stimulated my research including performance and creative contributions to pieces such as *Drug* (2016),² *Blue Eyed Vision* (2015) and *Emancipation of Expressionism* (2017), as a result of the complex choreomusical approaches and systems that are employed by the company. The analyses of these works focus on the role of creative contributor and dancer/performer. Each project had a differing brief and

¹ All footage can be accessed using the following web link: <http://figshare.com/s/565ccccf97f4ad41c765d>. Any lettered videos that are not mentioned in the text include footage of the rehearsal of the piece (often filmed from an alternative angle and in a studio location) and can be viewed in support of the final performances (e.g. Video 5a).

² Performed as part of *Artists 4 Artists*, which is an artist led network supporting hip-hop theatre artists in the UK. The performance took place at Redbridge Drama Centre on 13th October 2016.

artistic focus, but the commonality was an investigation into the relationship between movement and sound. Creating work with complex musicality is a fundamental principle of the company. Kenrick Sandy works with music producer Michael “Mikey J” Asante on each project and as dual Artistic Directors, they challenge each other to create innovative choreography and soundtracks. BBE regularly utilise aspects of popping and other closely associated movement techniques (such as waving and *animation*) in their work, along with a broad range of other hip hop and street dance forms.

Choreographic notebooks were kept for the duration of all the choreographic projects, and I intersperse these short reflective passages in my discussions of *deConduct* (2013) and *Interpretari* (2014). Through this method I intend to capture some of my critical reflection in relation to the process at the time of devising and performing the works. In my exploration of *Body Stories* (2013) and the work of *Boy Blue Entertainment* (BBE), I have chosen to interweave ideas from my reflective notebooks into the main text. All of the artists and organisations involved in these projects are invested and interested in music and dance relationships in exciting and varied ways, which instantly created a thought-provoking format for discussions and exchanges. Through the examination of work in this chapter, I will reveal some of the choreomusical challenges and discoveries that emerged through my experience of creating and performing in this repertoire.

As a consequence of my practical work as a dancer and choreographer, my critical thinking has shifted significantly in the period between 2012 and 2017, in relation to choreomusicality and popping on stage. I hope to unravel some of this throughout the chapter and provide insight into each choreographic project, in order to highlight significant aspects of choreomusicality that emerged. I aim to apply scholarly and artistic choreomusical concepts that were explored in Chapters One, Two and Three to support my analysis. As I have made conscious decisions to explore some of the tensions that emerged from my theoretical explorations in Chapter One and Two (such as dialogues and exchanges with contemporary dance practitioners in *Body Stories* (2013) and *Interpretari* (2014)), it is my intention to investigate the way this was encapsulated by my moving

body on stage. The accompanying videos that document these works demonstrate this more fully and this chapter should be read in conjunction.

4.1 deConduct (2013)

The Open Art Surgery (OAS) project is an intensive one-week residency at the Sadler's Wells Studios and Lilian Baylis Studio in London. Throughout the project, artists have the opportunity to explore new ideas, focusing on developing their artistic practice with mentorship from Jonzi D (Artistic Director of Breakin' Convention) and a second mentor (in my case theatre director Anthony Ekundayo Lennon). The week culminates in a live, public performance as a work-in-progress sharing at the Lilian Baylis Studio, London hosted by Jonzi D, where the audience were invited to give feedback to the artists after viewing the work. I was invited to take part in the project in March 2013, and created choreographic work that used a combination of classical and electronic music mixed by DJ Psykhomantus. The following passage reveals some of my initial reflective thoughts about feeling drawn to classical music for this project.

***25th March 2013** Due to a personal interest in playing and listening to classical music, I knew I that I wanted to experiment with this genre in relation to popping. I have been inspired after seeing other choreographic works where the juxtaposition of classical music and popping vocabulary had allowed an interesting destabilization of traditional music/dance associations.³ I am drawn to classical music, perhaps as a result of my father regularly playing this genre at home throughout my childhood, in addition to learning to play the piano and the flute. I regularly took ABRSM (The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music) graded examinations where students are required to select and learn a number of set works, many of which are rooted in the classical. Despite these associations, I do feel there is something else about popping that draws me to this musical genre. There are so many intricate, decorative patterns... Layers and layers of different sounds... Strict rules and principles in terms of structure... This lends itself superbly to the movement vocabulary of popping.⁴*

³ Please see Chapter One for examples and further discussion.

⁴ Please refer to the Glossary for a list of movements.

The choreographic process involved daily independent studio rehearsal, group workshops, and opportunities to receive feedback from mentors Jonzi D and Lennon. I worked alongside two other solo artists (Mo'Stef and Mo Sean) who devised their own solo works during the first two days of the project. At the beginning of the week, we were encouraged to explore our creativity through a series of exercises and tasks focusing on the complexities of working with thematic material, improvisational techniques and the relationship between dancer and spectator and how this can be taken into consideration when making choreographic work for the stage. This was delivered in the form of a series of games and other improvisation exercises that were flexible in their structures and left open to interpretation. The theme and stimulus for *deConduct* (2013) came out of a group improvisation task (with myself, Mo'Stef, Mo Sean and Jonzi D participating) where we were asked to respond to a piece of music. During the task, I began to experiment with the movements of a conductor, realising quite spontaneously that this was a strong reference to music through movement and a physical embodiment of sound.⁵ The way that the exercise emerged was quite unexpected, after Jonzi D started playing a piece of music that he seemed excited about, which had a range of unusual sounds and an unpredictable structure. Somebody suggested that we should all participate in a group improvisation task to it. The exercise was playful, and at times very humorous, which allowed me to reflect on my connection to the music and the following memory emerged.

***25th March 2013** I was suddenly reminded of my school days, conducting the junior flute choir that comprised of younger students in 2002 at the Brentwood Ursuline School. I didn't have much experience in conducting at the time, but having learnt from my father, I knew the basics. Being a dancer, I was not only aware of this role in a musical sense but also in terms of the movement, the different ways of beating a 4/4 bar: smoothly, heavily, sharply... I was very aware of how the intention and quality of the movement could directly impact the sound that was created. As the students were mostly only beginner flautists, I was surprised at how much I could influence the way that they played: bigger, fuller, or softer... I was suddenly transported back to this memory during the exercise after I started to experiment with pretending to conduct an imaginary orchestra,*

⁵ This is also reminiscent of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (2007) by Xavier Le Roy.

realising that it felt like a harmonious image in which dance and music are both deeply entrenched. Not only this, but I also became aware of how comfortable I felt in this position of using my dancer and musician skills simultaneously in an exploratory movement exercise in a studio space.

I initially selected the *Violin Concerto in G Minor, Summer: Presto* (1723) movement from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with which to begin working, specifically due to its driving speed, complicated rhythmic patterns and varied dynamics. I spent time listening to different pieces of classical music and thinking about its creative potential for choreography. It wasn't until a few days into the OAS project that I began to work closely with DJ Psykhomantus, which offered new potential to explore an active connection between musician and dancer on stage. I thought it could be interesting to integrate classical music, DJ'ing and popping inspired movement to create an eclectic music/dance combination. Inspired by the movements of an orchestral conductor, I began working with beating in 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures, starting and stopping (an imaginary band or orchestra), changing the speed or dynamics, and controlling different (imaginary) groups of instruments (strings, brass, woodwind etc.) simultaneously. All of these arm and body movements had interesting movement potential, in relation to the physical shape and direction of the movement but also in relation to dynamics, speed and texture. I noticed that the size, direction and shape of the movement almost always altered according to the dynamics, speed, timbre and rhythm of the music, so an integral relationship between the two was established in the early stages of the process. As the role of the conductor is to control and lead the music, "amplification" (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) occurs, where the choreographed movements amplify a musical idea. One example of this is at the start of the piece at 06:55 (see video 1), where I cue the start of the music. A *tremelo* strings motif begins, with small pauses in between. To embody this, I shake my knees as I am reaching with my upper body in a smoother, sustained way, creating a polyrhythmic structure. As I cue this to start and stop each time, a repetitive pattern emerges during the pause moments and a feeling of anticipation builds. Each time the tremelo strings repeat, I appear to physically cause this sound through movement and create "closure" (Duerden 2007: 74).

During the first section of the piece, DJ Psykhomantus and I worked with developing a series of interruptions to the movement and the sound in order to highlight and explore how we could introduce more live, interactions between us in the space of a set piece in a theatre setting. These interruptions were eventually choreographed and rehearsed both to facilitate and emphasise the relationship between us and to ensure the translation of this to an audience, although we did experiment with doing this spontaneously in the creative process.

27th March 2013 I have started to realise just how many different and interesting movements Mantus (DJ Psykhomantus) actually uses when playing. His hands often overlap and twist, his body position and physicality often change according to what he is doing. It is interesting in the moments that we rely on each other to “cue” certain movements or certain things to happen. Sometimes it is me that leads this, and other times it is him. It feels difficult to identify exactly how we decide in each moment who needs to lead and who needs to follow and why, but we seem to agree without having a conversation about it and it just feels right.

In one instance, he stopped the track completely and I simultaneously stopped dancing mid-phrase at precisely the same time, as if the performance had been frozen in time. After a long pause, I then took the lead and indicated (through conductor gestures) for the DJ to restart the track, as a conductor would cue a musician to begin playing. A simple narrative began to evolve as a result of the exchange, the interruptions and the constant shift in leading and following between the DJ and me during this section. As a result, a struggle of leadership between musician and dancer, movement and music emerged. This struggle was multi-layered and involved a number of aspects; the relationship between the DJ and me, the incongruent relationship between popping and classical music, and the discordant relationship between the classical track that was being manipulated by a DJ (having associations with hip-hop/popular culture). Consequently, a world of choreomusical play became conceivable.

During the creative process, I was conscious to let music drive movement decisions on particular occasions, and let movement drive music on others as described above. This was initially because I was interested in the following idea

that had come out of many experiences of working with contemporary dance artists who expressed anxiety about working too closely with music.

Perhaps most insidiously, the intractability of sound recordings may have an ill effect on a choreographer's ability to make requests of the music: since the music is fixed, it may seem to dominate, to *determine* the dance more than one might like.

(White, 2006: 70)

At the time of making this particular piece, I was conscious to try to experiment with the power balance between music and movement, particularly whilst I had the privilege of working with a live musician. I made deliberate choices in order to respond to this, through methods that were not possible in other choreographic projects with pre-set recorded music. I aimed to experiment with the ways that this illusion of "liveness" could position the music and choreography as equal, separate entities, yet create an engaging dialogue between them.

The second section of the piece (Video 1 from 10:06) aimed to further deconstruct the relationship between the DJ and me. During the creative process, we sampled different individual sounds such as the snare drum/clap, crash cymbal and various melodic motifs. These sounds were extracted from another recorded track called *Brim* by Olafur Arnalds, which has an electronic experimental style with influences from classical music. By selecting movements from popping technique, I focussed on the way that each sound signifies a particular movement response, such as a clap or snare sound signifying a contraction and relaxation of the muscles (or a *pop*). Equally, the DJ was familiar with what each movement signified in terms of sound, creating a common language between us. As the sounds were laid bare with brief periods of silence in between, it allowed me to emphasize the texture of each sound and how this might be visualised through movement. This created a "sound surfing" (Sandy, 2015) effect, where I produced a physical, embodied representation of each sampled sound. Other examples include atmospheric elongated melodic sounds that started softly, built in pitch and volume and then faded away. In order to capture this through movement, I used *waving* technique that started at the fingertips, travelled across the arm joints and body to become bigger and then decreased in size, and ended back at the fingertips.

A key finding from this interactive process was how the roles of dancer and musician were completely intertwined. Through the image of the conductor as a conceptual starting point, I was able to embody musical features physically through movement in my performance. Equally, the DJ had a mixture of overstated, exaggerated movements when interrupting and cueing me to start and stop, but also performed a series of “natural” movements in his role as a result of physically manipulating the records. The result in the final performance was quite comical at times, where it appeared uncertain as to when he would next interrupt my performance or when I would interfere with his. In these moments, a cartoonish effect was created, and we used rapid, explosive phrases of movement and sound that were interrupted by uses of the “hold” (Priebe 2011: 206) to create suspense. This allowed us to create an exciting, unpredictable and at times humorous performance through the development of this relationship in the theatre space.

4.2 *Body Stories* (2013)

This project was developed and performed in collaboration with Caroline Lofthouse at Kingston University. It arose as a result of a mutual fascination with the other’s movement language, and how our different movement styles impacted on our response to structured improvisatory (or freestyle) tasks. Lofthouse trained at London Contemporary Dance School, and specialises in release based contemporary dance. Although I have some level of training and experience of this dance form through my studies at the University of Surrey, my dance training falls more predominantly in popping and hip-hop dance. We shared a joint interest in the synonymies and differences between our dancing when performing together as a duet, and the differences in our physicality as a result of our training.

During the devising process, we set a number of structured improvisations and recorded them to analyse and compare our responses (please refer to Videos 2a-2g). Through this process, a number of patterns began to materialise. My movement had more frequent, abrupt changes of tempo and dynamics, such as moving quickly and suddenly from sharp to smooth (see Video 2a from 01:30-

02:00). Lofthouse tended to move her body as one holistic unit, and when one body part led the movement other body parts followed cohesively. This contrasted with my movements, which tended to focus more on isolation and polyrhythm (see Chapter One). In Video 2c from 00:43-00:57 for example, Lofthouse leads with the pelvis and the rest of her body moves in reverberation, whereas I use my head and shoulders, separating them in isolation. Another clear example can be identified in Video 2g, from 10:17-10:47. In this section of the improvisation, we both explored the same motif that began with pushing the hands in a downward motion alternatively, but this translated onto our bodies disparately. My movements often disconnected at the joints and showed articulation through the spine. This initiated a series of incisive isolations, in contrast with a sense of nebulousness that was conveyed by Lofthouse. She allowed her torso to move more freely as a result of the pushing motif, creating gentle reverberations and echoes with the rest of her body. When considering the analysis of my movements in frames, an illusion of disconnection emerges, and “body parts begin to develop their own, separate movement or Animated characteristics” (Maranan 2005: 36).

Stylistically, another distinction between us was the way I incorporated illusions that created a sense of detachment between my gaze/facial expression and body. Contrastingly, Lofthouse’s gaze followed the direction of her movements and she appeared to be immersed in the physical effort of the performance. In Video 2g for example, we both experimented with a shaking, rumbling effect using different body parts from 09:40. I tended to be disengaged from what my body was doing, in the sense that my gaze was directed towards the camera or an imagined spectator. In comparison, Lofthouse allowed her gaze to follow the direction of movement (towards her right foot as she kicks at 09:48 for example).

Musically, I was driven much more by different sounds and rhythms that were in each of the pieces of music that we used for the improvisations. I was much more concerned about which piece of music we chose, knowing that it would have a significant impact on what I produced. Lofthouse was more relaxed about this, and we identified this as a difference in our approach, most likely as a result of the comparatively diminished role of music in an improvisatory context in her practice in comparison with mine. When it came to creating set phrases, we

studied the footage of the improvisations and each created two phrases that we taught the other. Our task was to select a mixture of movements from the structured improvisations, with an aim to combine our movement styles. I was responsible for the phrases in Videos 2h and 2j, which are performed to pieces of electronic music with a steady beat. Lofthouse created the phrases in Videos 2i and 2k. In 2i, we perform to a soundscape and a steady beat is absent. In 2k, there is a regular beat, but we dance across it, using the impulse of the breath to signify the rhythm and tempo.

Although the entirety of *Body Stories* (2013) was not strictly speaking a choreomusical enquiry; the project allowed me physically to explore the distinguishable aesthetics of contemporary dance and popping. Part of this was the way that I approached the structured improvisations differently to Lofthouse, being heavily influenced by the music. This was evident in the final performance (see Video 2) as there are some moments that are tightly set to beats in the music (the section starting at 01:42 for example). The piece sparked many of the ideas explored in Chapter One and became a physical, embodied exploration of a dialogue between popping and contemporary dance aesthetic influences. In addition to the contrasts and differences that have been discussed, there were also some notable commonalities. Our creative capacity to improvise or freestyle in response to conceptual tasks was consistent and we were able to inspire each other in a call and response format. I was struck by how evocative this was of a *cypher* experience in those moments of creative exchange. There was freedom in both of our movement styles, which meant that we could draw from endless movement possibilities that were inspired by each other but interpreted in a personalised movement style, thus maintaining a strong individual performance identity.

4.3 *Interpretari* (2014)

Interpretari (2014) came about as a result of musician and conductor Anna Tabbush who was struck by the large number of choreographers that she encountered who were working with pre-recorded music. Coming from a background of playing live music for traditional English folk dances, she had concerns about the future of employment for live musicians. She also suggested

how working with pre-recorded music is creatively limiting for choreographers in some ways due to its fixed structure (Palmer, 2014), and wanted to challenge this idea through making a piece. This project was commissioned by The Dance Movement⁶ and supported by G Live, Guildford.⁷ I was approached as a choreographer and performer to work with Tabbush on this project.

In this research project the conventional roles of musician and dancer were switched; instead of the dancer creating the dance to a set piece of music – the music was created as a result of the dance, and was directed by the dancer in the live performance.

(The Dance Movement, 2014)

This essentially captures the main focus of the project, which was particularly interesting to me because some of Tabbush's concerns were similar to my own thinking as a result of my scholarly research.⁸ As a choreographer I have always been used to creating movement drawing on thorough knowledge of the musical accompaniment. Often, it has been the music that forms the initial idea and inspiration for the piece, which is very common amongst hip hop and street dance artists working in London and a process that became apparent in many of the interviews that I conducted with artists who have been hugely influential to my practice (Sandy, 2015; Skytilz, 2015; Richards, 2015).

An initial research day with Tabbush resulted in our creating an agreed template of gestures and movements from the way she conducted her choir. Between us, we discussed the various instructions that she would translate to the choir through movements in the body. I then wrote a brief description of each movement, including which part of the body is moving, the direction, and the dynamics.

18th March 2014

Pitch – High centre of gravity and hand/arm movements in relation to the rest of the body to indicate higher pitch, and lower centre of gravity and hand/arm movements in relation to the rest of the body to indicate lower pitch.

⁶ See <http://www.thedancemovement.co.uk/> for more information about this organisation and their work.

⁷ See <https://glive.co.uk/Online/> for more information about this organisation and their work.

⁸ Please refer to Chapter Two, section 2.4 .for an exploration of White (2006).

***Breath** – Slight rise on demi-pointe with heels coming away from the floor to indicate taking a breath in.*

***Volume** – Palm up to the ceiling and tension in the fingers to indicate loud or getting louder; palms down to the floor and relaxed fingers to indicate quiet or getting quieter.*

This facilitated creation of a common language, and is interestingly, (albeit on a very personal, small-scale) version of what McMains and Thomas (2013) also offer in their article, 'Translating Pitch to Plié', which I did not actually come across until after the project. In the preparatory stages of the project, a crucial aspect involved our evolution of this shared language through which to understand each other and successfully translate from musical terms to dance/choreographic terms.

The project brief required me to generate movement without working with any music. This alone was a significant challenge for me, and notably goes against a number of the conventions and traditions attached to popping and other street dance forms where the movement is developed as a direct response to and reflection of the music. I could have still chosen to devise my movement to music, but I made a conscious decision not to. If I had choreographed to music, it would have been very difficult to avoid making choreographic decisions based on musical features, which would not be there when the piece was performed to the unseen piece of music that Tabbush composed. I also wanted to be true to the aims and focus of the project, where my movements and choreography were supposed to be solely inspired by the movements of Tabbush as a conductor.

Tabbush gave me a series of videos of her conducting her choir, from an array of different angles. I was asked to create movement inspired by her conducting in these videos, along with the conversations and framework that we had created together during the research day. When I began to work alone in the studio, I found working without music challenging.

***9th April 2014.** I am trying to experiment with creating imagined musical rhythms, as I am finding that the easiest approach to this stage of the process is to imagine that music is there even though it isn't. I am discovering that I am trying*

to predict what I think that Anna will create musically, which will obviously be entirely different in reality. I am also finding that I am subconsciously trying to dictate what I would like Anna to understand from my movement rhythmically and musically, by emphasising particular accents, the use of breathing and flow of movement. This seems to be impossible to avoid, and something that is deeply etched in my practice.

My struggle to work in a way that destabilized the traditions of the forms and my experiences as a choreographer is apparent in many of the reflective passages in my notebook, such as the excerpt above. The experience was quite isolating at times, and after discussions later in the process it became clear that both Tabbush and I had felt on reflection that it would have been more productive to work together on both the music and the dance earlier in the devising stages. Certainly, the most stimulating part of the project was when Tabbush and I worked collaboratively in the studio to put the piece together. It was at that point that we were able to focus on details and nuances that were impossible to navigate whilst working independently. This was particularly true after the decision that Anna would be on stage and part of the choreography in the piece. Essentially, we were two moving bodies in space and therefore needed to work collaboratively to create this duet. Furthermore, as Tabbush was interested in movement and I am invested in the musical perspective, it became counterproductive to consider musician and dancer as two entirely separate entities.

Tabbush was also extremely sensitive to the timing and dynamics of my movements. I was unprepared for just how closely she had studied the intricacies in my movements, and I was also quite unaware of some of the small details of my movements and affectations (often at the beginning and end of movements) that I include when I dance. She drew my attention to any moments where I did something that was slightly different to what I had sent in the original recording, but when I heard the piece of music that she had created, I found that I had an urge to adapt some of my movements in order to respond directly to it and the way that I would naturally have the urge to interpret it. Understandably, Tabbush wanted to keep the movement exactly as it had been when I had sent the recording.

1st May 2014 *Now that I have heard the piece and seen Anna sing it live, I keep wanting to change aspects of the choreography in order to give a response to what I am hearing and how it makes me feel. I am struggling to find a strong connection to the music because I have not had an opportunity to produce my own, personal movement response to it. I knew that this was an important part of the way I generally work with music as a choreographer, but this process has emphasised that to me all the more. I feel that this process has made the choreography the equivalent of a recorded piece of music, in the sense that it feels quite inflexible, fixed even... I imagine that this feeling is an equivalent to the ambivalence that some musicians feel about dancers using pre-recorded music for choreography and performance.*

The most exciting parts of the collaborative process were where we considered and developed a series of different moments of connection between us. We developed a common movement/musical language between us on stage through the use of breath, in order to build an introduction to the piece. This became a particularly interesting feature of the piece, as we realised that controlling and using the breath is an important part of our performances as dancer and musician and is therefore common ground and a shared experience. We used breathing to emphasise the feeling that something is about to happen, to create suspense and a sense of unity between us. We took several deep breaths in as if we were both about to start performing, but would release the breath at the last moment each time. This would increase in terms of the size of the breath; to build a sense of tension until suddenly Tabbush lets out a long high note and I conduct this using movement. The upbeat was the movement equivalent to the breath in, and I discovered that I always took a breath in along with Tabbush when performing this movement. I would not only lift my arm to cue her, but I would also mimic the use of breath and take a big, deep breath in so that my whole body and physicality had the feeling of rising and preparing for something to happen, that would then be released.

We experimented with the use of pitch, both in terms of changing from higher to lower pitches suddenly, and also sliding up and down in pitch. The way that this tended to correspond to movement was from high to low in relation to my body,

so that reaching up above my head would signify higher pitched notes and on a lower level (below my hips) would signify lower notes. This lends itself to the points of analogy described by McMains and Thomas (2013: 201) in relation to “register” and “use of space”. *Fixed-point* became a particularly interesting technique here, as it permitted me to establish a relationship and an illusion between different parts of my body (such as my hand being fixed in one place but the rest of my body moving around this point), and not only between my body and the performance space. The way that Tabbush interpreted this was to use a sliding effect where the pitch would ‘bend’ and waiver to correspond to the movement around the *fixed-point*. In this instance, Mickey Mousing was applied but not in the general fashion. Rather than the dance Mickey Mousing the music, Tabbush created a musical score that Mickey Mouse’d my dance.

We also had many enlightening conversations about some terms that are used differently in choreographic/dance contexts and musical contexts in the process. One example was the term dynamics, which carries a different meaning in each medium. In music, this traditionally refers to the volume and how loud/quiet a sound is, but in dance terms it refers to the quality of the movement that is performed (e.g. sharp or smooth, for example). This kind of dialogue is also present in the work by McMains and Thomas (2013), who created a system through which to consider different types of music-dance relationships through a collaborative model.

4.4 Boy Blue Entertainment (BBE)

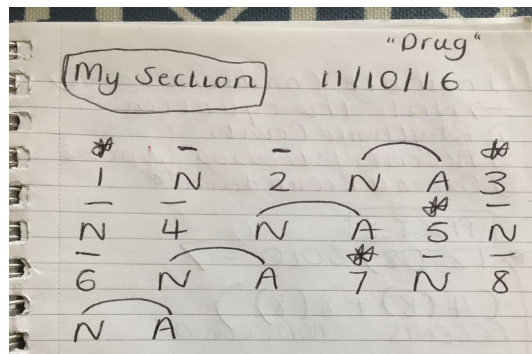
In this section, I will explore aspects of the choreomusical approaches that are used by Boy Blue Entertainment (BBE) when creating and developing choreographic work for the stage. As a company dancer, my experiences of working with BBE’s methods have significantly impacted on my practice and in turn, contributed to the scholarly work in this thesis. Theatre projects in which I performed that featured aspects of popping include *Emancipation of Expressionism* (2017), *Drug* (2016), *Blue Eyed Vision* (2015) and *A Night With Boy Blue Entertainment* (2015); all choreographed by Artistic Director Kenrick “H2O” Sandy with soundtracks created by Co-Artistic Director Michael “Mikey J” Asante.

In each of these projects, a detailed, structural understanding of the musical soundtrack became essential in the early stages of the creative process. Sandy provided a ‘musical breakdown’ for each project, which consisted of a document divided into sections that indicated the timings of the music that corresponded to a description of what was going to happen choreographically. We were expected to study this in preparation for each rehearsal, which created a common understanding of the potential structure of the piece. Sandy (2015) highlighted the importance of thoroughly “dissecting” the music during our interview.

When studying music, it's to break down the music. No, how to break down music. You know, you've got your different parts of the beat. You've got your [Makes sounds of the different parts of the drum, kick, snare, hi-hat. Then gives different vocal examples of different parts of that that you might choose to hit]. So I'm not thinking about that [makes hi-hat quaver sounds], that little accent there. And if there's a melody coming [KS beatboxes to show the beat and the melody together] what am I trying to play with? And then if there's words in there [KS demonstrates] am I trying to hit all of that as well? But it's dissecting. One way is about dissecting, so the word I was trying to say is dissecting the music to the nth degree. And just play with that bit, then just play with this bit, then that next layer, then that next layer, then that next layer.

(Sandy, 2015)

Considerable time is dedicated to understanding music as part of the rehearsal process. Consequently, there is a collective musical understanding amongst the dancers, enabling them to learn and embody material very quickly. Sandy has developed a form of notation in order to dissect complex and intricate rhythms, for his own understanding. I was given one solo section of this nature when performing in *Drug* (2016), and a pattern of counts in the image below:



(Read, 2016)

The symbols above the counts refer to the different accents on each beat. This is included in the notation so that I could translate the way each beat sounds in addition to Mickey Mousing the overall rhythm. The timbre of sound is just as important as rhythms in the work of the company. The colour and quality of the sound is indicative of a movement dynamic that correlates. The star symbol on count 1,3,5 and 7 represent the emphasis that is put, for example, on each of these beats in the music. This makes them sound louder and more prominent, and to highlight this I used the *pop* for two bars with moments of relaxation in between (see video 4 01:36-01:42), which has a sharp dynamic and involves tensing a range of muscles in the body to create a similar emphasis.

At the beginning of the solo, I was instructed to write this rhythmic pattern on a blackboard as part of the piece (see Video 4 from 00:12). The character brief was based on an archetypal professor, who was working out an equation (which was in fact the actual counts of the music) on the blackboard. The idea developed as a result of conversations between Sandy and me about my doctoral research. We discussed the detailed process through which we travel in order to decipher the music as dancers, and how it might be possible to make this a part of the final performance. This went beyond the typical uses of "isolated conformance" (McMains and Thomas 2013: 211), "Mickey Mousing" (White 2006: 67) and other terms that have been used thus far to describe different kinds of mirroring between movement and sound. In this instance, I notated the music as I performed the piece, creating a choreomusical instructional guide for the spectator.⁹

⁹ Other choreographers who have developed scores include Jonathan Burrows (Burrows, 2010) and Deborah Hay (Motion Bank, n.d).

The illusion that I created was an ability to predict the next change in the music, each time a new layer of sound was added, before it actually happened. This created a sense of anticipation and gave the spectator an insight into the choreomusical decisions that were being made in real time. At 01:01 for example, I wrote “ADD SOUND” just before a new continuous electronic sound occurred whilst I performed a *waving* sequence. As the sound was continuous, the sustained, smooth quality of *waving* demonstrated its embodiment. In order to make this successful, I was required to study the structure of the music to know exactly when each aspect started and stopped. As the section developed, I experimented with different aspects of the music in this format, eventually bringing them together to form a duet with Sandy (from 02:44).

As a consequence of this solo section, I could bring the spectator into my choreomusical thought process. I created illusions in order to embody the sound through the use of “isolated conformance”, as a common feature in popping practice. Additionally, I was able to share my dissection and understanding of the music with the spectator, instructing them through the section live on stage.

Waving is a technique that is used frequently by Sandy,¹⁰ to create illusionary images in his choreographic work. It was used as the main movement vocabulary for the trio in which I performed in *Blue Eyed Vision* (2015) (see Video 5), which is an adaptation of a duet that forms a section in *Emancipation of Expressionism* (2017). The trio in *Blue Eyed Vision* (2015) was a collaboration between Kenrick “H2O” Sandy, Vicky “Skytilz” Mantey and me. It featured as part of this studio show performance, with a mixture of dance and spoken word/theatre that was curated and directed by Sandy at Studio 68 on 11th October.

The music used for the piece was “November” by Max Richter (2002), which is contemporary-classical in style and features orchestral strings. It has consistent, meandering melodic phrases and patterns, creating an unsettling and mysterious feeling of suspense throughout. The piece is in a minor key and features frequent dissonance, creating sustained tension. The aim of the piece was to capture and embody the mood and energy of the music, whilst also paying attention to its structural and rhythmic features.

¹⁰ Although he Kenrick Sandy’s dance name is “H2O”, which responds to his water-like movement, inspired by *waving* technique.

As a trio, we utilised the relationship between us in order to exaggerate the illusions that we created with our moving bodies on stage. As *waving* creates an illusion of an electric current passing through the body, it has the potential to look like it is happening to the body, beyond the dancer's control. This illusion is exemplified in the piece through the relationship between us, and specific musical features. In the opening section of the piece (see video 5) the main melody is played on the high pitch register, whereas the supporting instruments play in the middle register. This creates a mysterious atmosphere, with the melody being far removed and distant from the rest of the orchestra. A series of solos feature in this section, where we pass the electric current around our bodies in different directions and to and from one another. We each use the rhythm and pitch of the melody to influence the direction and level of the *wave*.

Additionally, this was emphasised through the performance intention that we took on throughout the piece. Sandy directed us to focus on the movement of the waves for the duration. This meant that during my solo for example, Skytilz and Sandy would watch, following the direction and flow of the movement with their gaze in addition to me watching this on my own body. This was sustained throughout the piece, by maintaining a fascination and curiosity in our gaze and body language by moving slowly around each other and around the space. It felt as if we were exaggerating what the spectator might be experiencing, and drawing them in to invest in our world. In these moments, not only were all elements of the illusion unified (Bishko 2007: 25), but were amplified significantly. The enigmatic, remote nature of the musical melody in addition to the enticing performance quality maintained throughout, added to the "suspension of disbelief" (Bishko 2007: 24) that is created through mastering waving technique. Furthermore, the impression is continued until the performance is finished, forming what could be described as an 'un-ending'. In these moments, we keep the performance intention, as we gradually exit the performance space to join the audience that surround us.

As a dancer in BBE, my thinking is consistently challenged and inspired when it comes to the music-dance relationship. The discussion above highlights a few aspects of the innovative approaches of the company. Sandy consistently works

with intricate choreomusical approaches when making work for the stage. He does this, not only through ingenious use of devices such as “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 211) and “sound surfing” (Sandy, 2015), but by reflecting on how this might be translated to and perceived by the spectator. He is fascinated by imagery and illusions that can be created through movement, and uses these effectively to create clarity and exaggeration in music-dance relationships on stage. When performing in his work, an understanding of the intention and energy that is required is paramount to mastering the complex musicality. This is developed in each rehearsal period, through the creation of an illusionary world. When this is added to the choreomusical technicalities that are a baseline requirement in each performance, an innovative, world of choreomusical play is created.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored a range of the practical work that has played a leading role in undertaking this research. It documents a range of collaborative processes that led to an eclectic collection of choreomusical methods and approaches. Each project has enabled a unique presentation of the music-dance relationship through methods such as live collaboration, reversing the choreomusical process, creating a musical score for a dance, and making the process of deciphering the structure of the music a part of the overall performance.

There were challenging aspects involved in these processes, particularly in relation to *Interpretari* (2014) where my usual approach of choreographing to music was completely destabilised. Although this did not feel ultimately successful and felt like it deviated too far from the principles of the form, it was a stimulating process from a research perspective. It encouraged me to think more about intention and imagery in my creation of the piece, as I had to rely on my imagined musicality due to the absence of real music in the process. Imagery and intention are certainly recurring features in all of the projects undertaken. The way that this was used and transferred on stage had a profound impact on the choreomusical relationships that were created. The next chapter explores further manifestations of this, through analyses of works by other artists.

Chapter Five

“Elastic, Fantastic Dancing Bodies” Case Study Choreomusical Analyses

*Dancing to me, is my body giving answers to the
questions of music...*
(Turbo cited in Gottodancesky1 2011)

This chapter analyses two solo pieces of choreographic work created by London based artists, Isaac “Turbo” Baptiste and Brooke Milliner, who create work using popping and *animation* techniques. Through an in-depth study of two semi-structured and semi-improvised solo pieces: *Turbo [Breakout-The Solo’s]*¹ (2011) choreographed and performed by Isaac “Turbo” Baptiste,² and *Bob Marley We’re Jamming* (2014) choreographed and performed by Brooke Milliner,³ I examine complexities in the relationship between movement and sound.

The UK street dance scene has a wealth of innovative and exciting performances that offer effective choreomusical interrelations. In this chapter, I have selected two examples that are particularly revolutionary and require in depth scrutiny, each featuring an abundance of choreomusical intricacies, which are exemplary in further complicating the music-dance relationship.

Drawing from methodological approaches in the fields of choreomusicology and Animation studies that were explored in Chapters Two and three, I carry out detailed analysis of two UK practitioners who are widely respected for their skilled musicality. I have specifically selected two pieces that depict multifaceted and unusual relationships between music and dance. Throughout the chapter, I also refer to interviews that were conducted with both artists, which illuminate their artistic intention and choices in the creation of the work.

Isaac “Turbo” Baptiste (Turbo) is a dancer, musician and entertainer, best known for his specialism in house dance. He teaches his own weekly class in East London, although he has also trained in many other styles of dance, having started with popping and breaking (Turbo, 2017). Turbo was a finalist on Sky 1’s

¹ The piece is untitled, so this title refers to the youtube video title.

² JTorresProductions (2011) *Turbo [Breakout – The Solo’s]* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWEJ1TQL3G8> [Accessed 2 February 2015].

³ ProDance TV (2014) *BROOKE solo to Bob Marley ‘Jamming’*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcZSWjoEC3c>, [Accessed 10 February 2015].

Got to Dance in 2011, where he impressed audiences with his musicality.⁴ He has also appeared in many other productions including a lead role as the ‘Mad Hatter’ in *The Mad Hatters Tea Party* (2016-17) at the Royal Opera House by ZooNation Dance Company. He often teaches “musicality” workshops, helping students to break down elements of music and use their understanding of this in freestyle in improvisation tasks.

Brooke Milliner (Brooke) is an expert in popping and locking. He is the choreographer of Plague Dance Crew and Pro-Motion; a dance team who focus on *animation* techniques. An internationally renowned competitor in the battle scene, he regularly adjudicates at competitions such as the *BBC Young Dancer of the Year* (2015). Brooke is also highly regarded for his musicality. His creativity and mastering of popping in a battle context has resulted in successes in popping battles such as the *UK B-Boy Championships* (2017).

5.1 Turbo’s Solo

Breakout – The Solo’s is an event that was established in 2010 by Deja Vu Entertainment.⁵ The aim of the event is to give artists the opportunity to perform short solo pieces of work on stage, focusing on expressing their talent and creativity as individuals (deja vu Ent, n.d). Established dance artists in the UK (either as individuals or through a company or crew of which they are a part) regularly participate along with emerging artists. The event is usually staged in small theatres in London, but it has also previously taken place on the South Coast of the UK in Bournemouth (dejavuent.co.uk, n.d).

A recording of *4 Mains* composed by Wim Mertens is the soundtrack for this solo, which features piano played by four hands (JTorresProductions, 2011). It has minimalist stylistic influences, including a melodic foundation where small motifs develop through repetition and variation throughout. Although there is a consistent melodic pattern to follow in the track, the use of timing and frequent cross phrasing rhythmic patterns provide added complexity. Turbo used the

⁴ Many viewers comment on his ability to “beat kill”, referring to his ability to move precisely on the intricate beats (*Got to Dance Sky1* 2011).

⁵ Deja Vu Entertainment also produce other dance events and platforms including *Dancers Delight* and *Set for Set*.

entire three-minute long track in the performance. The movement style is difficult to categorise in this piece, as there are notable influences from popping, hip-hop and house, but there is a consistent use of isolations and *animation* throughout. Turbo creates a series of illusions and imagery, and the presence of the *animated* body heightens and exaggerates the choreomusical complexity.

Turbo performed this piece with an effortless, relaxed performance quality, evident from his relaxed facial expression and casual approach. This is juxtaposed with his use of complicated polyrhythms, fast rhythmic footwork and expert body articulation and control. Consequently, a remarkable contradiction emerges where there is no trace of the physical exertion or effort required. The spectator is left to believe that his execution is conducted with ease, established from the opening moment of the piece. As Turbo enters the space from stage left when the music starts, he takes off and leaves his jacket in the wings, straightens and pulls down his white, loose-fitting T-shirt, and walks into the beginning moment of his performance. He seems to arrive exactly at the moment that the high-pitched melodic line starts in time to perform the first of his choreographed movements at 00:12: the timing is impeccable. There is no pause or moment of preparation between this entrance walk and the opening series of choreographed movements that follow. He shifts seamlessly between his 'everyday' self and the moment of performance in less than a second. Even his outfit is understated, with nothing about his entrance signalling a mode of performance that is different from his everyday self. The dominant melody is fast approaching as he walks towards centre stage, which he must be aware of, but there is no visible sense of anticipation in spite of this. His aloof entrance makes this start all the more surprising and engaging, setting the tone for what follows.

From this starting point, Turbo embodies the dominant melodic line through the use of complex isolations and polyrhythmic patterns. He employs his body as a toolbox; isolating and utilising a range of different limbs and joints. It is often unclear as to whether what we are witnessing is improvised, or pre-choreographed; a mixture of the two seems probable. Turbo demonstrates a skilful ability to isolate parts of his body where there is an extensive movement range in the joint, such as the hands and fingers. This enables him to illustrate the way that the rhythms are contained in every part of his body. A democratic

use of the body is quickly established (Gottschild 1996: 8), where even the knuckles, pectorals and tongue are isolated in the performance. Evident remarkable detail is involved in this, especially when he shakes the joint or body part with precision, in correspondence with the trill in the music in the section from 00:13. This musical motif repeats eight times in total using different melodic notes, and Turbo shifts the location of this 'embodied trill' to different limbs and joints to coincide. He often uses the fingers and hands to create a *tracing* affect in order to exaggerate the part that is being articulated, almost as if an invisible string is attached between his hand/fingers and other parts of the body. A pull and push on this invisible string triggers the heel of the foot to be released and pushed back to the floor at 00:23, for example, appearing as if the hand and fingers are physically manipulating and taking control of the other body parts. Attention is drawn to each body part, as the spectator is invited to follow the pattern of movement around the body. This guide functions similarly to "secondary action" (Bishko 2007: 26-27) in Animation film, enriching and emphasising the illusion and embodiment of the trill that he generates. Safety and predictability reside in the repetition of rhythm in both the movement and the music, but melodic changes and different body parts create variation.

Turbo skilfully uses isolated conformance to Mickey Mouse the intricacies of the music in engaging and effective ways. A layer of further complexity is introduced when polyrhythm comes into play. During one phrase at 00:27 seconds, he mimics the fast repeating semi-quaver patterns in the lower pitched bass notes by marking the rhythm out with the balls of his feet. This produces a very gentle, controlled jog on the spot (without changing the level of the rest of his body so that his lower legs appear to be quite isolated or moving of their own accord). He simultaneously isolates one part of his body on the basic (crotchet) counts of the music with the upper body, using the *tracing*, body manipulation technique. At 00:36 for example, he brings his right hand up to his right cheek and chin to physically turn his head to face the audience whilst his body faces stage right. Besides the movements occurring in synchronism with the music, they are also held for the same length of time. Consequently, whenever the note is pressed down and held, the movement is also held or sustained. This use of polyrhythm demonstrates Turbo's comprehensive understanding of the music, as he uses isolated conformance to embody two layers of the music simultaneously.

As a result of Turbo's effortless, relaxed performance quality, the spectator's reading of the moving body enables anticipation of what might happen next, rather than facial signals. The use of the *trigger* or preparatory movement is commonly used throughout the piece to create a sense of choreomusical anticipation (Bishko 2007: 26-27). Turbo uses movements of the chest and torso through controlling his breathing pattern in order to build suspense at the point that a new phrase or section is about to begin. This is akin to a singer controlling breath to prepare for singing. An example can be found at 00:40, where the shoulder rotates and the chest lifts as he fills his lungs with air, just before the next section begins. A brief, alternative performance intention emerges here. He appears to feel and experience the movements more fully or deeply, and even briefly glances in acknowledgement towards different body parts in use. There is a sense that the body moves more as a unit rather than the disconnected parts that are dominant in other sections. This is further emphasised later in the piece in a similar section from 02:31 where he closes his eyes and appears to be deeply immersed in the movement and at one with the music. Here, his head moves in congruency with the rest of the body, in conjunction with the pathways and curves that the movements take. The change in expressiveness is similar in the music at this point, which is evidenced by an increase in volume (whilst Turbo's movements are bigger, and with the whole body), an extended melodic line (whilst he performs a longer succession of movements) and a repeated climbing and falling melodic line. As the spectator, we imagine that this part is played with more feeling and expression, and this is confirmed by Turbo's expressivity. This combination creates fullness and connectivity in the performance, which is different to his nonchalant, relaxed facial expression that featured previously. I suggest that this functions as a switch from the illusion of disconnection that is created earlier, to a more integrated performance that presents his body as one whole, expressive unit.

A structure of repetition with variation is consistent both in the music and movement throughout the performance. There is one section from 00:54 seconds where the melodic motif is repeated eight times between two different keys (one higher and the other lower in pitch). During this time, the rhythm in the music remains constant and so do the rhythm of his movements. He gradually works his

way down to the floor to hold a position on one knee facing stage left, and with each repetition he becomes more creative and experimental with his movement choices. Turbo begins to incorporate everyday gestures, such as resting his hand on his hip. By the seventh repetition, he has his left elbow resting on his left raised thigh and his chin in his hand and uses a jittering movement (with a *strobing* effect) of his elbow along his thigh to his knee. This elicits some applause and sounds of appreciation from the audience, as he complicates what originally began as a simple repetitive motif, both in terms of movement and musicality.

A skilful combination of complexity and simplicity, both in terms of music and movement is used in the piece consistently. Just when the spectator's gaze is fully engaged and tuned in to absorb what is happening (such as in the complex repeated motif discussed above), there is an interruption by a comparatively minor movement. The sudden shift is evident from a combination of the speed of the melody (much slower in tempo), the rhythm of the melody falling on the basic whole counts, and the simplicity of the gesture being performed. In one instance, at 01:08 he presses his hand to his head, triggering him to gradually move his head and upper body off centre towards the left side. At another point at 02:44, he uses only the fingers on his right hand in isolation, which immediately follows the most expressive section where the whole body is in use. This sudden switch from the use of the whole body performing fully integrated whole body movements with more expression, followed by the sudden use of only the fingers on the right hand with an aloof expression, in a stage context produces an amusing and quirky effect. Again, this is in line with what is happening musically, where the expressive melody uses a wide range to create a sudden shift to a softer, lower pitched motif with a much smaller range. These moments create what might be described as a choreomusical anti-climax, starting by gradually building complexity and ending in sudden simplicity. The suspense that is created generates an expectation of a climax, but what follows is in fact a simple everyday gesture performed to one long melodic sound. Here, tension is built to create an expectation of a *beat-kill*, but interrupted in a playful manner. As the spectator becomes embroiled in a cycle of choreomusical tension and resolve, their expectation is mocked in this instance and they are reminded of the unpredictable aspect of the live performance.

A comedic, cartoon and Animated effect is used frequently throughout the piece, creating humour, which evokes laughter and sounds of amusement from the audience. Sometimes, this is created with subtlety through the use of choreomusical anti-climax as noted, but at other times it is more deliberate or overstated. He often showcases the extent to which he can control and articulate parts of his body, by isolating unusual parts of the body in a dance context. He even uses movements such as popping his pectoral muscles (01:47) and on occasion moving his mouth/tongue (02:50) in time with the music. In addition to the 12 principles of Animation (Bishko 2007: 24), concepts from cartoon studies are particularly useful in deciphering these *animated*, comic choreomusical aspects (see Chapter Three). There is frequent use of “the take” (Bishko 2007: 27), to produce unexpected moments of “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210). This occurs during the aforementioned subtle movement of the pectorals, which isn’t noticeable upon first glance. In the moments preceding this, Turbo performs a series of fast gestures with the hands, arms and legs, then suddenly relaxes in a standing position with his gaze directed over his right shoulder; seemingly disinterested in his body. It is at this moment that he performs the series of alternating pectoral isolations in a rhythmic pattern that mirrors the music. By the time this is fully noticeable, the moment has ended and he resumes movements with other parts of the body. In this instance, he demonstrates the extensiveness of his bodily control. He performs this in a way that Animates and *animates* his body with ease.

The deployment of *animation* and an Animated, cartoon quality consistently highlights and stresses moments of choreomusical acuity during the piece. Turbo frequently uses “exaggeration” (Bishko 2007: 26-27), through moving joints and limbs in unexpected and surprisingly flexible ways. He also uses a cartoonish posture at 02:03, a position which takes him some time to get his body into. This posture involves a wide stance where the feet are slightly turned in, the shoulders are rolled in and forwards, the head extends out so that the neck is elongated, and the hips jut out to the back. Turbo holds this posture whilst performing movements with the arms and hands, employing waving technique to extend out towards the audience and back four times. The strange contorted shape of his body seems to draw more attention to the movements, and this is heightened by

the way that the movement synchronises with the music along with the satisfying repetition in both the movement and music. He also uses a *strobing* effect from 02:17, where the pace of the main melodic line is suddenly slower and follows a series of even quavers (half-beats). During this short sequence, Turbo breaks down his movements into equidistant smaller actions. It takes eight movements to bring his hands up the front of his body and t-shirt towards his hat, for example. This creates an illusion of slowing down time, due to the stop/start effect of the *strobing* technique that looks like a film that is being paused and played continuously, along with the slower rhythmic high-pitched pattern that is played over the faster bass riff. The overarching tempo doesn't actually change, as the supporting layers of the music continue at the same speed and rhythmic pattern. It is a combination of the even quavers in the melody blended with the *strobing* effect that momentarily appears to stretch and extend time.

Pauses and syncopation are used intelligently in several places in the piece. At 01:56, Turbo uses three small runs to travel towards stage right and after this he simply lets his weight shift backwards; almost as if he is catching his body up with his feet to create "overlapping action" (Bishko 2007: 26-27). The moment after the syncopated running (during the weight shift) creates space to allow the spectator to process and appreciate the choreomusical moment that literally just occurred, through "isolated conformance" (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210). There are other similar moments where it is almost as if he is tripping himself up through catching the syncopated rhythms. He creates suspense as he transfers his body weight over his toes as if he might fall forwards, and then catches himself in time with the music using what could be considered as a pedestrian run. The rhythmic, musical synchronicity of this frames it as choreographed, danced movement. He often uses (albeit slightly exaggerated) pedestrian movements, performing them with a casual quality that is humorous when timed perfectly to syncopated aspects of the music.

Turbo uses textures in order to highlight the detail in the performance of a particular note and the way that we might imagine that it is played. In fact, the use of imagery to portray playing the piano is used recurrently during the piece. At 01:36 for example, he employs arm gestures with a rebound effect where he presses the air down with his hand and it bounces straight back up again, directly

corresponding with the stress or accent on the second note that is played in this particular melodic motif. He also does this in other ways, such as at 00:42 seconds where he stresses the last note in the melodic motif by continuing the movement with a floaty, weightless quality to represent the echo that follows the pressing of the key on the piano. This amplifies the musical idea (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) as the echo and remnants of the note are embodied. Although Turbo is consistently and impressively accurate when mimicking rhythmic patterns in the music, the extra detail in the physical manifestation of the way the sound is played creates layers of further choreomusical complexity in the performance.

Similarly, Turbo embodies not only what we hear in the musical score but also re-imagines the live performance of it in other parts of the performance. He captures a sense of “liveness” in the performance, through frequent musical references that encapsulate him as a dancer-musician (Jordan, 2015). Turbo confirms his musical background in our interview, having been influenced by his father (who was a musician), and playing drums as a child (Turbo, 2017). He epitomizes this through employing gestures or movements that are connotative of a musician in a live performance. Examples of this include the finger movements that occur at 00:19 seconds, which is a similar movement to playing a trill on the piano (which is what actually occurs musically in this moment). A very similar example occurs at 02:44, when he actually positions his hand so that it appears as if he is deliberately miming the action of playing the piano in time with the melody. This initiates a closer connection between sound and movement, and creates new illusionary meaning through “emergence” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) where Turbo appears to produce the sound with his movements. As a spectator, the presence of the piano is implied as a result of hearing it and seeing the imagery created, and therefore establishing the connection.

For the majority of the piece, Turbo experiments with the dominant melodies, but there are also parts where he references other layers of the music that have a supporting role to the melodic line. One example, is at 02:56 when he references the three bass notes by pressing his right foot three times into the floor whilst keeping his arms and upper body in a fixed angular, grounded position. His foot presses into the floor almost as if he is pressing the note himself, again creating

“closure” (Duerden 2005: 26). These three bass notes occur consistently throughout the whole track, but it is only at this moment that our attention may be suddenly drawn to them. The musical idea is therefore “amplified” through this movement (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210). Furthermore, it seems to happen unexpectedly, with no apparent precursor. His body position is cartoonish with a curved spine and elongated neck, that seems to emphasize and indicate the extremely low pitch of these three notes; again reminiscent of “the take” (Bishko 2007: 27) as an Animated cartoon device. He seamlessly switches between his intricate hand and body part isolations that follow the main melody and the aforementioned three bass notes. He then immerses himself immediately back into the melody, directing the audience’s attention to one of the many other musical lines that coexist in the music.

In conclusion, part of the appeal of this piece is the juxtaposition of the genre of music with the style and format of the dance. The unlikely combination working closely and effectively draws attention to how unusual, yet compatible the meeting of the two is. There is also a sense of character “appeal” (Bishko 2007: 26-27), where Turbo is consistently witty yet understated in the performance. He shows aspects of his everyday self; from the opening moment of entering the performance space, inviting us to enter his choreomusical reading of the track. Through the skilful mastering of his own body and the demonstration of expert body articulation and control through complex *animated* isolations, we are able to identify the numerous ways that Turbo experiments with an extensive range of musical features. Turbo’s detailed, seamless interpretation of the track is effective due to the multi-layered rhythmic and dynamic subtleties that he is able to embody consistently throughout the piece, with grace and ease.

5.2 Brooke’s Solo

This piece, filmed by Cesa Zuniga, and produced by Pro Dance Agency, is three and a half minutes long and showcases Brooke Milliner outside Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Pro Dance Agency is based in the UK but represents some of the most powerful and influential dancers in the world, also acting as the official artist agency of the UK B-Boy Championships World Series. Along with providing dancers for commercial, educational and corporate events, the agency

regularly promotes artists through short films that showcase their talents (Urban Fed Ltd, 2009). Brooke Milliner has featured in several of these short films, and this particular solo is one in this series.⁶

In this piece, Brooke Milliner dances to *Jamming* by Bob Marley and the Wailers; a very popular reggae track that was released in 1977 as part of their album; *Exodus*. This is an unusual choice for a popping piece in some respects, as it has a much more relaxed and laid back quality to it than most of the music to which popping is traditionally danced (with an absence of a hard snare sound on the 2,4,6,8). Nonetheless, because there is still an accent on the backbeat in this genre of music (on the 2,4,6,8), it could still be considered a compatible choice of accompaniment.

Brooke is well known in the dance community for his musicality. It is no surprise then that he manages seamlessly to embody the relaxed, laid-back groove of this song, whilst simultaneously presenting a crisp, sharply executed and detailed understanding of all the subtle layers and musical features that exist as part of the track. Throughout the performance, he shifts between exploring the vocal, melodic line, bass line, drum kit and special effects with ease and skill. There is no question that this is a popping piece, with strong foundational vocabulary being demonstrated and varied throughout including frequent use of the *pop*, *walk-out*, and *twisto-flex*. Brooke also explores everyday movement, using *animation* and *boogaloo rolls* to create impressive illusions with his body. Although the piece isn't set in a proscenium arch theatre, the camera is static throughout and the building and monument behind him frames and stages his performance.

The piece begins with Brooke sitting on the wall, showing his appreciation and enjoyment of the opening of the track through movements of the head and legs in time with the basic beat of the music. This then develops to incorporate the shoulders, arms and whole body as a unit, gradually taking him to a standing position, then travelling downstage towards the camera. Brooke demonstrates an

⁶ Others include *Shawn-Plague-Popping Solo* (2014) and *Greenteck in London* (2012).

uncanny ability to perform his connection to the song, whilst simultaneously drawing the viewer's attention to many of the subtle small sound effects and layers of the music that are not immediately noticeable to the listener. He uses a mixture of "amplification" and "isolated conformance" (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210), casually interchanging between various layers of the track with playful images to reference the lyrics, embody detailed fast-paced drum breaks and performs tiny detailed movements to sound effects.

Brooke reveals a distinctive ability to sustain a fluid, relaxed movement quality and performance intention throughout the piece, whilst additionally achieving sharp lines and stops. It is arguable that some of his movements could be described as concurrently smooth and sharp, creating an uncanny misapprehension of the two movement dynamics together. It is not physically possible to be sharp and smooth at exactly the same time, but he moves so quickly between these qualities that this is the illusory effect. It is partly the unusual juxtaposition of sharp and smooth that derives its impact from a choreomusical perspective. This is evident in several sections of the piece where Brooke experiments with *fixed-point* technique. At 02:10, for example, he uses his flexed left arm as the fixed point and the rest of his body orbits around it. The *fixed-point* stops suddenly and clearly, so that there is a right angle at the elbow. At this moment he uses a combination of *tracing* (with his right arm that moves freely and with his head), and rolls with the hips. The sudden 'stop' of the *fixed-point* limb acts as the trigger for the other movements, and also corresponds with the music's basic beat. He rides the lyrics through the fluid movements, which therefore enables him to reference two parts of the music simultaneously.

The subtle sound effects in the song become prominent and obvious when watching this piece of work, as Brooke highlights details that many would not notice on listening alone. He highlights the importance of this in our interview, explaining that a dancer should be able to become a musical instrument and "show" the music (Brooke, 2017). There are a myriad of examples, such as the two 'shaking' sounds occurring at 00:20 where Brooke isolates and shifts his torso towards stage left. At 00:32 seconds he twists his torso along with the dull triangle sounds, a sequence immediately follows with a bounce in the body followed by a wave down the arms to the two electric guitar sounds. These

sounds are initially detached and then the echo continues; Brooke embodies this by moving sharply and immediately into a smoother, floating dynamic to match the echo. Again, at 00:51 seconds he uses intricate, detailed twitching isolations with his head and right knee from a still pose where his weight is shifted over to the left side. This happens during the short melodic fill by the electric guitar, which releases tension due to the moment of stillness before it. The suspense and resolve magnifies the employment of “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) here. This moment of stillness draws attention to the impeccable timing that follows where Brooke catches the electric guitar sounds without any indication that he is about to move. All of these moments take place in the first minute of the piece. This is not to imply that there aren't other similar moments consistently throughout, but the opening section is densely populated with such examples. I argue that this not only very quickly captures the attention of the audience, but also helps them to develop a very acute and detailed approach to watching, listening and engaging with the piece. Raising awareness of the multi-layered aspects of the piece right at the start sets a precedent for what is yet to come. As it is likely that the spectator will notice these sound effects for the first time despite previous knowledge of the song, Brooke is able to instill a new mode of acute listening, through showing the spectator visual interpretations of subtle sounds.

This piece is generally technically and choreomusically complex, and consequently the short moments where Brooke's movements are more simplistic and playful are satisfying to the eye and the ear. This happens after a *slow motion* section starting at 01:35 for instance, which builds suspense before a complex drum break where he uses *waving* technique to embody every sound of the drum kit that occurs. During this section, the basic beat is absent until 01:50 and this functions as the *drop*. To reference this, he returns to the basic groove in time with the first six beats to re-establish the basic groove. This is also evident in his movement response to when the word “jamming” is sung, several times during the piece. To “jam”, refers to dancing freely and intensely, with a sense of *groove*. He often performs two small bounces with his body that appear more relaxed, simultaneously referencing the meaning and the rhythm of the word. He also sometimes uses two small pops for this, as in the section at 02:34 where the phrase “we're jamming” is repeated several times in quick succession. Although

there is still a great deal of technical skill required to articulate the pops in this way, the simple repetition included in these moments is a welcome respite from the previous density of movement.

Other moments of simplicity include the use of the “hold” (Priebe 2011: 306), in order for the complex choreomusical moments created through *animated* illusions to fully make an impression. He does this either after a particularly complicated moment, or just before it occurs to create suspense. At 00:49 for example, he arrives in a position with his weight shifted over to the left side with the arms outstretched in a table-top ‘V’ position. He holds this position for a brief moment, long enough for the spectator to register the stillness, before using a series of syncopated small isolations in time with the electronic sound effects. Another example is at 03:14, where he momentarily holds a low level position with his arms stretched in front of him, his palms raised and his face smiling, looking to camera. In this moment, he creates a moment of comic simplicity, which gives the spectator time to process what they have seen. As the majority of the piece features a fast-paced flow of movements, these short “hold” (Priebe 2011: 306) moments briefly pause the performance, helping the spectator to absorb what they have witnessed.

In terms of performance intention, Brooke’s fluid and relaxed approach to the piece is highlighted by a generally relaxed facial expression throughout. There are times when he appears to be a casual observer of his own body, perhaps because his limbs are often taking on “animated characteristics” (Maranan 2005: 32). This requires skilled coordination, with several different movements happening at once, which demands intense concentration on movement alone. Despite this, the complexity is rarely expressed through the face. There are certainly times when his body appears to have a mind of its own, as Brooke looks on. Examples include 00:43 seconds where Brooke watches a *wave* that travels down his arm, and similarly during the section at 02:10 where he uses *fixed-point*. This is another way that he is able to guide the spectator towards where and when they should focus for each moment. He rarely looks to camera, and his focus commonly drops towards the floor. This could be due to shyness and the fact that he is dancing primarily for his own enjoyment, but it also allows the movement to speak for itself rather than being driven by showmanship or an

eccentric performance style. The other occasional change in his expression is when he smiles or laughs, showing mild amusement through his facial expression, creating a sense of character “appeal” (Bishko 2007: 26-27). This happens at 03:14 towards the end of the piece, for example, and we are left uncertain as to whether he is amused by his own movement or by the reaction of somebody involved in watching/filming him, which we cannot see. Either way, it only heightens his relaxed approach to the performance and the expert skill that he possesses. It also highlights the playful nature of the performance, suggesting that much of it is improvised and that comical moments happen organically through freestyle. Brooke confirmed this in our interview, when he stated that to his knowledge, all of the available recordings of his performances are structured freestyle (Brooke, 2017). He then said that he of course knew the song well, which he thought gave him a significant advantage, but the movement itself was created on the spot. Brooke’s composed and calm demeanour exaggerates his masterly skill and ability all the more. He cleverly deconstructs a popular song, deviating from its familiar features selectively to explore understated musical features through the moving *animated* body.

5.3 Conclusion

Through the analyses of the choreographic works in this chapter, I have revealed a multi-layered, complex relationship between dance and movement in both of the solos by Isaac Turbo Baptiste at *Breakout* (2011) and the solo by Brooke Milliner (2014) to Bob Marley, *Jamming*. Both artists are highly skilled performers, presenting a sagacious ability through deft use of *animation* techniques and demonstrating a meticulous understanding of the music. In both cases, the performance intention and energy remain in conflict with the labour and skill that is required to achieve the illusions that they present, which appear disparate in the context of the performance. This does, however, contribute to the overall illusion, where the *animated* dancing body deciphers a range of choreomusical features and guides the spectator through different layers of the musical soundtrack. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that due to the extensive, long term training that they have both undertaken, it may well be that their relaxed performance quality is a result of the movement being mastered and

embodied to such a high professional level. This makes their performance all the more impressive, where we can fully admire their virtuosity that seems inhuman, in the knowledge that they have the same human body that we do. Brooke is nicely selective about which aspect of the music he embodies and as a result, he guides our attention to the tiniest, subtlest sounds in the track. Similarly, Turbo creates such an impressive array of illusions connected to the performance of live music, that we “suspend our disbelief” (Bishko 2007: 24) and enjoy the spectacle of “closure” (Duerden 2005: 26) that is presented.

The ability to satisfy, make and break tension, play, and skilfully shift the perception of what we see and hear is prevalent in the two choreographic works. Both artists are able to demonstrate impressively accurate rhythmic connections with music, which are carefully selected and timed. Furthermore, they also physicalise the dynamics, pitch, timbre and texture of a range of sounds, paying careful consideration to the imagined mode that they might be played by the live musician. In this manner, Turbo and Brooke become musicians themselves, creating an illusion of liveness to their chosen recorded tracks. As the musical tracks are multi-layered, the artists carefully select a combination of hidden layers, subtle sounds along with important highlights and climaxes within the music to choreomusically enlighten and engage the spectator in an *animated* world of play.

Conclusion: Cadences of Choreomusicality

I don't know what it is with regards to this genre of music - with the piano or the classical side of things - but it just resonates with me. When it comes to creating something to that type of music, I picture and feel what that music is giving to me. What can I do, what do I see, what do I hear, what do I feel, or what do I taste... To a particular sound.

(Turbo, 2017)

In response to the lack of scholarly attention to UK street dance practices, this research has explored relationships between dance and music, focusing on staged performances of popping and closely related movement practices in the UK. Each chapter facilitated a distinct area of discussion, using a combination of methodological approaches to probe different aspects of the close alliance between popping and music. Through a commitment to embodiment, and including the experiences of UK popping artists who create choreographic work for the stage, I have consistently prioritised practice in my investigation.

Chapter Discoveries

In the course of this thesis I have unravelled the ambiguity of musicality, a term used extensively in a range of dance practices to designate various meanings and functions. Specifically in popping practices, I discovered that the term 'musicality' indicates a close connection between sound and movement where the dancer is able to present a selective, comprehensible and multi-layered embodiment of sound. The dancer enacts this selectively, employing Mickey Mousing devices to make informed decisions to generate compelling cycles of choreomusical tension and resolve. In order to articulate their practice and confront the scarceness of specific choreomusical terminology, poppers utilise a range of metaphorical, image-based phrases and terms to make ideas about musicality more tangible. Examples include "in the pocket" (Folkes, 2015), "sound surfing" (Sandy, 2015) and "beat matching" (Aimey, 2015), allowing artists to intelligibly describe pertinent aspects of their musical approach.

As a result of the compositional traditions of the theatre and the agenda of UK funding structures, poppers are constantly negotiating their practice as choreographers for the stage. In order to present work that is dedicated to the

musical principles of the form as a result of its Africanist roots, they choose to follow some of the compositional approaches from contemporary dance, but reject others. This includes aspects such as structure and spacing, but departs in the case of the music-dance relationship. Artists apply the musical, compositional principles of popping when they select music from genres that might not be usually associated with the form. The Africanist foundations of popping are therefore present in staged performances of the form, regardless of abstract music choices. I identified a strong attraction to classical music, where artists dissect the music with the same choreomusical investment as with a piece of funk music. Consequently, an unusual juxtaposition of aesthetic values come into play, with choreomusical approaches that are associated with many popular dance forms, compositional structuring devices from contemporary dance practices, popping vocabulary and classical music. As I revealed later through my own practical projects and my analysis of Turbo's solo, this precipitates humour and captivates the spectator through an unusual synergy, where it is the choreomusical approach that seamlessly blends these aspects.

The striking relationship between Animation and *animation* exposed a curious connection between the imagined and the actual during *animated* performances of the dancing body. Stop motion Animation was a particular choreographic inspiration to poppers who studied and copied the way that the characters moved, aiming to take on "animated characteristics" (Maranan 2005: 32). Through the application of Animated principles such as "appeal" and "frames" (Bishko 2007: 26-27) instead of counts to my analyses, I explored the illusions that are created in the presence of the *animated* body, and the way that this has the potential to stretch, delay and freeze time. In the same way we are able to "suspend our disbelief" (Bishko 2007: 24) when watching Animation film, I conclude that the spectator is able to do this similarly when watching performances of *animation*, through a reverse process. They provisionally forget restrictions of human movement, in order to fully appreciate the work. Investing momentarily in the physical illusions that are being performed, the spectator remains temporarily convinced by the presence of an Animated dancing body.

Considering poppers as "musician-dancers" (Jordan, 2015) aided further choreomusical discoveries, exploring the ways that they commit to educating

spectators musically through embodied listening. Many poppers play(ed) a musical instrument and/or spent considerable time in the company of musicians in their youth (Turbo, 2017; Richards, 2015), which manifested through movement imagery associated with music production in their performances. The role of the conductor emerged as a common influence on my work for example, enabling the prevalent use of “closure” where I appear to physically cause the sound (Duerden 2007: 74). Different methods of dissecting the music feature in BBE’s work such as ‘notating’ the music live on stage in *Drug* (2016), presenting a musical breakdown of the track that Sandy composed and produced himself. In Turbo’s solo, he performs physical gestures that are associated with playing an instrument, such as using intricate finger gestures to mime playing the piano. Similarly in Brooke’s solo, he displays playful interaction with the lyrics of the song through a range of connotative imagery presented in connection with the word “jamming”. Through the analysis of a range of performances, the theme of musicianship emerged as a commonality. Popping artists develop the ability to showcase musician skills through their craft, paying homage to the value of music as part of the form.

Choreomusical Agents

Poppers become choreomusical agents in their performances, presenting their understanding and interpretation of the intricate detail in the music that they select. They physicalise what they hear, presenting this to the audience with clarity and precision. Their embodiment of sound involves their careful attention to the type of sound; the texture, timbre, and how this can be embodied or shown visually. This process necessitates the deep study of the music that the artists choose, requiring them to engage in profound listening. It allows them to “dissect” (Sandy, 2015) the music, in a manner similar to a process of sampling that a music producer might undertake. They extract specific sounds, in order to show the audience “what they hear” (Turbo, 2017), inviting the audience to partake in their choreomusical journey. As a result, a shared experience is created, where the artist guides the spectator through their deciphering and decoding of the music.

I positioned “Mickey Mousing” (White, 2006) and “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) as multi-faceted, complex devices; closely bound to the value systems of the form. Poppers are dedicated to sharing the way that they hear music with their audience, and achieve this through a commitment to physicalising less prominent sounds in the music. Furthermore, their application of “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) entails a skilful, selective decision-making process that gradually develops the spectator’s choreomusical understanding throughout the performance. Popping artists create a cycle of choreomusical expectations as a result of building tension, which they then release, creating satisfying resolve. Through the analysis of *when* they do this, *which* aspects they select, the *way* they do this, don’t do it when you *think they will*, and do it when you *think they won’t*, poppers create an enticing world of choreomusical play. In this world, they are able to alter our perception of the music, drawing attention to sounds and nuances that we might never have noticed in the music alone.

Animated *Animated* Aesthetics

I argue that the choreomusical processes that have been discussed above become further pronounced as a result of the incorporation of *animation* techniques, inspired by Animated film. Mastering techniques such as *fixed-point*, *waving* and *strobing* create the potential for striking illusions, inviting the spectator into an *animated* utopia. These skills create endless movement possibilities for artists, permitting them to select almost any everyday gesture or pedestrian movement and transform it so that it appears to extend beyond human movement capabilities. Additionally, through the analysis of *animated* techniques using the 12 principles of Animation, the “shifting, often ambivalent status of the real” (Bouldin 2000: 48) was called into question. In a similar way that traces of the live moving body are present in Animated film, I propose that the Animated body is present in live performances of *animation*. This distortion adds clarity to movements in popping performances, as dancers delay their timing and utilise the “hold” (Priebe 2011: 206) to emphasise illusions, thus creating exciting, detailed choreomusical potential.

The use of character “appeal” (Bishko 2007: 26-27) manifests specifically through the performance intention of the artists; their gaze often appearing to be disengaged or separate from the complex movements that they perform using an extensive range of body parts and joints. This style of performance was particularly evident in Turbo’s solo (JTorresProductions, 2011), where his facial expression is nonchalant for long sections of the piece. This relaxed approach highlights the “relationship between the possible ordinariness” (Wells 2006: 45) of Turbo (his everyday self and the parts of his personality that he shares with the audience), and the “‘exaggeration’ of the events he participates in” (Wells 2006: 45) comparable with cartoon films, which in this case, are the movements and illusions that he performs throughout the piece. In this sense, the artist is able to perform a series of polarities; the space between the real, live dancing body and the Animated (or *animated*), and the divergence that emerges between his movements and the outward facing expression with which he performs.

Poppers may also create character “appeal” (Bishko 2007: 26-27) through a different intention, such as studying with mild curiosity the part of their own body that moves, as if the movement is happening to them. This energy is encapsulated by Brooke in his solo piece, *Jamming* (ProDance TV, 2014), and also in *The Unusual Force* (2015) by Kenrick, Skytilz and me. In these instances, the artists steer the spectator’s gaze, offering a visual guide that indicates where to look, what to hear, and when. They use this method to translate their understanding of the music, where they appear as a casual observer of their own body, appearing to experience the performance in real time along with the spectator. In actuality, the artist becomes the choreomusical agent of the performance, shifting and interrupting the expectations of the audience through selective decision making based on a comprehensive, in-depth study of their chosen music.

Making Music Move

The physical, metaphorical presence of music has become an overarching theme in many of the performances that feature in my investigation. Dancers who specialise in popping and *animation* consistently create imagery to reference the bodily playing of musical instruments and the conducting of music on stage.

Using “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210) in remarkably precise timing, the performer is able to make it look as if they are playing or “causing” the sound through “closure” (Duerden 2005: 26). In Turbo’s solo, for example, he regularly performs isolated, *animated* gestures to mimic playing the piano, which features in the music. This generates an illusion of liveness, where it is imagined that the music is being played live, when in fact it is a recorded track. The precise timing and use of *animated* musical gesture work conjointly to create this choreomusical illusion, and the spectator momentarily suspends their disbelief (Bishko 2007: 24) to invest fully in the performance. Analogously to the way an artist embodies a sound and creates a visual representation of it, dancers are able to create aural signifiers or imagined musical ‘echoes’ through their movements.

Choreographic Quandaries

The process of creating and documenting practical projects for this doctoral research revealed several anxieties that had permeated my training and education in dance studies. In my early choreographic investigations, I experienced a lack of curiosity from some of my peers in contemporary dance when I explained that I wanted to explore close music-dance relationships. I became anxious to ensure that my choreographic work was intellectual and worthy of study by academics, heightened perhaps as a result of my formal training being based on the compositional principles of contemporary dance. It impacted on choreomusical decisions that I made during the creation of *deConduct* (2013) for example, where I purposefully deviated from uses of Mickey Mousing in the second section of the work. I felt pressured to consider “non relationships” (Jordan 2007:12) between music and dance, despite this being in conflict with the aims of my investigation.

As I progressed with my doctoral research, I departed from these anxieties as a consequence of a growing confidence to grapple with the hierarchical structures that are bound to music-dance relationships in the academic field of dance studies. Through the interrogation of preconceptions that surround close music-dance relationships in popular dance practices, my unwavering commitment to the musical principles of popping and *animation* are more evident in my later

work. A good proportion of this confidence was instilled through my work as a company dancer with BBE; collectively dedicated to working with an extensive range of musical genres. The company explore musicality in all of their pieces, as an inherent principle of a range of street dance forms with which they work.

I made the decision to include a selection of practical works that exemplified this journey; spanning instances where choreographic influences from contemporary dance practices are more prevalent, right through to later work that is entirely dedicated to the choreomusical characteristics of the form. Debates and discussions that have been captured in written form (see Chapters One and Chapter Two) have therefore additionally been manifest in practice, through the dancing body.

Popular Analysis, Popular Narratives

A common fascination with classical music that emerged in this research however, is one that should not be ignored. Although requiring further, specific exploration, it is evident that the tight structures, complex layers and sharp clarity that characterises much of classic music is highly desirable to popping artists. In a curious contradiction, the artists often deliberately select and work with classical music in a range of performance contexts. In the process, they inscribe the choreomusical principles of popping and *animation*, embodying nuances, complex polyrhythms and textures of the sounds through the dancing body. In addition to devices such as selective “Mickey Mousing” (White, 2006) and “isolated conformance” (McMains and Thomas 2013: 210), they also use humorous illusions that blend our distinctions between the artificial and the real. This light-hearted, casual approach creates a stark contrast with the serious, elitist quintessence of the classical. Consequently, the choreomusical illusions that are created seem more extraordinary, distinctive, and create humorous commentary; destabilising the value systems that separate the art forms.

As a result of this doctoral research, it is my hope that more in-depth choreomusical analysis of a broad range of popular dance practices will be conducted. I call for further, similar investigations that are considered through an appropriate analytical lens through which to explore popular dance forms. By

examining popping, a complex and technical dance form with a fascinating relationship to music, I hope to provoke the field of choreomusical studies to consider a range of hip-hop, street dance and popular dance practices. I intend to encourage the analysis of more intrinsic dance-music relationships, by exposing a myriad of subtleties that emerged from the careful consideration of the value systems of popping and its musical counterpart. Through a combination of choreomusical studies, Animation and cartoon theory, and extensive exploration of practice I have uncovered the hypnotic charm of the popper's dancing body, captivating audiences in a world of choreomusical play.

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Appendix A

Interview with Vicky “Skytilz” Mantey (SM)

30th July 2015

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Skytilz, could you start by telling me a bit about how long you’ve been dancing for?

SM: I started dancing very young, probably from about the age of 5, but I would say professionally from the age of 15.

JR: Do you remember when it was that you started learning popping specifically, and perhaps also what it was that made you want to start learning popping?

SM: I think I probably started learning it before I really knew what it was, because I used to copy (like we all did as kids) music videos and dancing on the music videos so I’d already started doing it, I wasn’t aware of what it was to me but it was just dance at the time because it was just ‘oh I like that dance I’m gonna do that’ and if it was a bit of choreography or whatever that was in the video, more specifically probably Michael Jackson at the time when he used it more than anyone else.. and so I guess I started learning it, like I said before I knew what it was. And then when I got a bit older, the first company I ever danced for has always been Boy Blue and it still is, and I started learning a bit from Ken, which at the time some of the stuff we learnt then still wasn’t in a sense correct so I had a bit more identification of what it was, more so than when I was a kid, but not entirely in terms of the whole dance. And so it made it more specific to me in terms of the technique of what popping was when I learnt from him, cause I think he learnt a bit from “Flexy Stu” and I can’t remember who else. But in terms of the technique it made a bit more sense so then by the age of fifteen I knew ok this is popping *technique* wise, but not necessarily *dance* wise - it wasn’t until a few years even after that that I learnt that this is popping, the *dance*. When I knew the technique it doesn’t necessarily mean that’s the dance it just means

that's the technique. I can learn Krump and I can learn a "stomp" and that doesn't mean I'm doing the dance if I just walk around and stamp my feet. So it took a lot of stages over a long time.

JR: And when you talked about there being specific music videos, could you give me any examples of what the music videos actually were, or if there was one in particular?

SM: Oh my gosh, anything that he did! [laughs] But my favourite of all time is *Remember the Time* I always used to do that one, and there's not really so much popping in that. There is a lot of tutting, which is a similar style, it doesn't fall under the banner of popping because popping (like I always say) is a dance in itself, but it is closely associated because people use them together. That would be the one that I did top to bottom, the whole choreography from outside the living room door when they do all the clicks [clicks fingers and JR laughs]; that was probably my favourite of all time [SM laughs].

JR: Could you describe what your work and involvement is in the dance world, specifically in relation to popping?

SM: I guess first, it was something that I just really enjoyed to do, and then I started noticing that it was more male dominated when I started doing it. A lot of people would go "oh my gosh that's a girl that's a girl, she's really good I can't believe that's a girl!" So then I started noticing, wow, I must be the only girl. And for a long period of time back in the day when I was I guess maybe fifteen to about seventeen/eighteen I probably was around here. I can't think of any other girls (I might be missing people out). Now there's quite a lot, but back then not really. So I didn't even really teach popping, it wasn't really in my mind to go 'I'm gonna teach the world popping' or whatever. Until I know something inside out, I won't teach it until I know exactly what I'm doing, cause the last thing I want is for someone to come to the door of my class, and go "this is wrong" and for me to go "is it?" I should know already whether it's wrong or whether it's right, I should already know I shouldn't be in that situation. So I didn't start teaching it for a long time, although people were always saying (because I was good at it) "Ah you should teach a class you should teach a class!" and I was always like "yeah

yeah” [unconvinced tone] but I just never did it. Then eventually I was like ok, I think I know enough now that I can start teaching it, and I started just before I did Pioneers¹ with Popin’ Pete and that was really my first class ever (popping class), so I’d already been doing it for years before I’d even ever set foot in a popping class. What was really interesting is that when I did Pioneers there were some things that he did in the class, and some techniques of teaching, where I did exactly the same thing. So that started to confirm to me that I knew what I was doing when I was teaching it, because I had never taken his class before and yet he was teaching in some of the same ways that I was. When I started my class, I initially started it just for females as well, because I was one of the only girls doing it. So initially when I started it, it was just for girls. And all these guys were like “oh what about us?!” and I was like “no it’s just for girls” and then eventually, because girls did become more interested in it then I opened it up and I said “ok now guys can come” but then it was cool cause a lot of girls felt alright to come and even though guys were there they weren’t worried about it because they’d got comfortable enough with the style that they were like “cool ok guys can come as well” whereas if it was open initially I probably would have had a lot more guys there than girls. I’m not saying “it’s because of me that girls pop!” I’m not saying that, but I would say I guess they felt more comfortable eventually to have guys come in. So I never really had a plan of teaching it to the world, but one day my friend Bruno actually said something to me. That’s when I was like “ok”, that’s when I realized I had to do something. He said, you know there’s always a lot of controversy about these styles and where they come from and who creates them and what they actually are and what they aren’t or whatever. Bruno once said to me, he kind of twisted my arm into teaching because he said “But Skylitz you know the dance and you understand the dance and so, if there’s a problem, it’s sort of your responsibility to help” and I was like “you’re right”. So then I continued obviously teaching and sharing and stuff, and it’s true they say ‘knowledge is useless unless you share it’ and it’s true. If I just die with the knowledge I know, then what’s the point in it existing.

JR: Sure. And can you give me a bit more detail about the types of work you’ve done as a dancer, that involve the stage and popping?

¹ A Breakin’ Convention project at Sadler’s Wells that took place in 2008.
<http://www.sadlerswells.com/screen/video/32006601001#>

SM: Oh my gosh, that's many years. I mean lots of Boy Blue theatre productions, and the most recent one I would say is *The Five*² where I had a Kung Fu martial arts style that matched popping as well more specifically. I did the ballet piece, a collaboration with a ballet choreographer, but that was specifically them wanting to put popping and ballet together so they just threw us together, I think that was for East London Dance³. I guess that was choreography but I did dance in it as well. Just a lot of street dance and hip hop shows we've done I've been renowned to do popping. As soon as people hear that funk track and it's Boy Blue on stage they're like "where's Skytilz?" I've had people go "go on Skytilz!" and been in the audience watching the show I'm not even on the stage, just because they've heard the music and expected me to be there and they sort of already know what's coming. In terms of popping obviously I've done other stuff like choreograph for the Olympics and stuff and I danced in it as well but I don't think I did any popping in it. *Pop Shop* obviously I've performed there, *World of Dance*, I put a little popping piece together that we did for that. Lots of workshops, as a dancer... Pretty much any time I've hit the stage I've probably done popping at some point. But I'm trying to pick out the most profound ones I guess like I said with *The Five* because it's a bit more specific.

JR: Can you tell me a bit about your musical background, and that could be in relation to dance but it also could be independently of dance?

SM: Of course being a dancer I've always loved music from a kid, and I think even the kinds of music I listened to, the range is very huge, very eclectic. Probably because my Dad used to play a lot of different things from like funk like James Brown, Michael Jackson, to Western like Willie Nelson, Patsy Klein to just... Every kind of music you can imagine, Nat King Cole. Even now growing up you end up going "let me listen to that old song" and to you it's like really nice, it's way before your time. So my range and taste in music is huge. As I got older, I guess about the age of maybe seventeen/eighteen I started getting interested in playing drums. I started playing more when I got to about twenty four/twenty five, and then that made my taste in music even bigger because now I like Rock music to play drums to, but not necessarily to dance to. So this widened my

² *The Five and Prophecy of Prana* (2014) a Boy Blue Entertainment hip hop theatre production at The Barbican

range of music that I liked, cause I might hear a track and go “oh I really want to play drums to this” but might not necessarily want to dance to it. Playing drums even has made my musicality in a sense sharper, dancing before I played drums people would go “your musicality is really great!” and I’d say “ok yeah cool”, but when I started playing drums if you hit that drum slightly off the beat, it’s a lot more apparent than if you dance slightly off the beat because you can hear it’s really off. So playing drums has made me a bit more sensitive to the beat so it’s more acute I really try and get right on the beat when I dance now because I play drums. A lot of the dance I do is heavily on the music. Sometimes, when you do certain jobs and they go “I want you to choreograph this” but they may not have the music yet, and I’m like “ummm what do you want me to do if I don’t have the music I can’t really do much”. Sometimes I’ve been in jobs where I’ve had to do it that way round and it just means that now I have to make my choreography very generic, and it has to just be on 1&2&- I can’t do anything on any other bits of music or instruments that I may have wanted to because I don’t know what they’re gonna be. And so I can choreograph without the music but it means that it’s going to be generic and it’s not going to be a feeling anymore, it’s just going to be “we can do this to anything”. Even then sometimes the music isn’t even in four counts sometimes it’s in three’s, and then you’re going to be in trouble then. So it’s always easier I think, personally, to work with the music first, and then you can get a feeling of what you want as well.

JR: You’ve talked about it a bit anyway, but could you summarise how important the relationship between dance and music is to you, in your practice as a dancer?

SM: To me, it’s paramount it’s like poetry in motion in dance and music. Really to me, when I dance I am enhancing the music, so it doesn’t make sense for me to go against it. If the beat is (like I say when I teach popping) more powerful, strong, bass(y), then the way I dance if I was doing popping is gonna be stronger. If it’s quite light and its maybe like an old school funk beat, then the way I dance is going to be slightly different. If the music flows the dance is gonna flow, if the music stops the dance is gonna stop with it- whatever the music does, is what I do [laughs]. If I don’t know it, then it’s gonna be an educated guess as it goes because you’re listening to the music as you go. So if there’s a certain pattern

that the music does every four-eighths every two-eighths or whatever, I'm gonna try and remember that and then I'm gonna go "ok, I'm gonna pick out sounds and I'm gonna move on those sounds that come every so often" in the music but whatever the music does is what I'm gonna try and do.

JR: One step on from that, can you talk about why it's specifically important for popping?

SM: I think that the action, the technique of popping is so quick as well in the contraction of the muscles. To me, I don't know, it's just weird if you do that off the beat because it matches the music so perfectly that it just doesn't make sense to me to go against it. It shows a lot of artistry in popping I think, and a lot of thinking ahead as well, until you know the dance well enough that you don't have to think ahead. I guess if you're just dancing anyway to anything and going against the beat what's the point in the music being there. It might as well not be there, you might as well do a little dance to silence and film it, and put whatever music you want on top of it.

JR: As a choreographer, when you create a piece how do you go about choosing or selecting music? Could you talk a little bit about what that process usually involves?

SM: First of all it depends if there's a theme or a concept that goes along with it, if it's something maybe sad or whatever I might pick a slower tune or a deeper or bassier tune. And then I guess it's going to boil down to what makes you move, music is emotive, something that makes you feel and that comes through when you dance, so if the music doesn't make you feel anything then it's going to be difficult to choreograph something to it. First of all I think it has to be something that you feel, whether it be because of the feeling of the track as in the mood or the emotion of the track, or whether it be just because the music makes you feel a certain way, like you want to groove. I think that has to be there already.

JR: Do you ever have a dance idea that comes first, before you then find the music, or is it usually that you find a piece of music and then the idea for the dance comes out of that. Or can it be both?

SM: It can be both, sometimes it happens one way sometimes the other, but usually it is me listening to music and then I'm like "ah I wanna do this I wanna do that". Sometimes life experience makes you want to choreograph something, and so you may have an idea and want to make a piece about it but you might not know what music you want yet. So sometimes it can be the other way but I would say, probably 90% of the time it's because I hear music first and then I decide right I'm going to choreograph to that. Obviously sometimes you get into situations where you've got a job and they give you the music and they say you're going to choreograph to this, because this is what we need. Sometimes you get lucky and you like the song, and sometimes you don't- but then when you don't feel the song it's do-able, but it's probably a little more difficult because it doesn't have as much feeling as if you picked that track yourself-whether you picked the track before or after, if you've picked it yourself you know it's something you're gonna feel. If it's given to you, it's a little bit more difficult yeah...

JR: Could you tell me about an example of a piece that you've made recently and how you selected music for that?

SM: If I go back about a year, when we did *World of Dance*, I think we used the Kaytranada remix of Missy Elliot. And that was just for me, literally I picked that song because I've always liked Missy Elliot and I've always liked that track. But I actually really love Kaytranada and Shashu and the way they remix stuff, because they remix it in a cadence that matches the style of popping. Every music has its different cadence- you hear certain funk beats that make you want to lock or certain songs that make you wanna krump. It's not necessarily locking music or krumping music or popping music, it's just the cadence in the beat gives you the feeling to do that dance. I already liked that Missy song, and I like the power that he put behind it to give it that cadence of "ok this makes me want to pop". But it didn't really have a theme or anything, it was just sheerly for the feeling, why I chose that song.

JR: Yeah, I loved the Janet Jackson one as well...

SM: Oh my gosh I forgot about that one. That was only because I wanted to do something different, and maybe do something a little bit more feminine with the style, and something that people wouldn't normally expect me to do.

JR: Sure... Could you describe or define what "skilled musicality" is? If you're skilled in musicality what does that actually mean to you?

SM: Do you mean as a dancer or just as a person?

JR: As a dancer...

SM: As a dancer... Like I said it means moving or doing what the music does, and sometimes you've got to be quite acute and quite sharp and quite tuned into it because sometimes you can feel like you're doing what the music does, but because you know the music, you might not necessarily be stopping right on the beat you might feel like you are, but then you're doing it now for somebody else's eye to see it. So I think you've got to be quite sensitive and quite acute to the beat. Also just using different parts of your body, if there's certain parts of musicality, you've got to be able to I guess spread it round your body it shouldn't always be the same part of your body that hits that certain musicality. Again, there's different techniques... It's not as simple as just moving on the beat, because it's moving on the beat the way that the beat sounds as well.

JR: Ok... Could you give me a few examples of how that might be different? So...

SM: [Both laugh] I'm gonna have to like, make some sounds!

JR: Yeah, that's ok [whilst giggling] yeah...

SM: So if the beat goes [makes the following sounds] tat, tat, kat, tat, tat tsk-kat. That "tsk" it gonna be, you're gonna move a little bit different than how you move on the "tat, tat", so the movement might go "stop stop stop stop stop mmmerrr stop". Do you get what I mean, you're gonna move a little bit different. I mean, if that same beat going tat, tat, kat, tat, tat, tsk-kat. If I move, and the way I move

goes tat tat tat tat tat tat, I still moved on the beat, I've not gone off beat, I just haven't done it the same way that the music has done it. So I think there's more to musicality than simply going *on* the beat it's doing it the *way* that the music does it as well.

JR: Ok brilliant... How would you describe the difference (I think you have touched on this anyway), but how would you describe the difference between dance and music in popping compared with other street dance forms?

SM: I think in most dances if you're using musicality you're gonna move the way that the music does and to the beat. I think that what makes it a little bit different is that every dance has got a different technique, and that's what makes the way you move to the music slightly different because each of these dances have their own moves and even their own grooves. You can do a simple groove and you can change it slightly to make it hip hop, you can change it slightly to make it locking, you can change it slightly to make it popping. But either way it could be a simple groove it could just be your shoulders, and like I said the cadence in the music is gonna make you do it... Slightly differently because it gives you a different feel.

JR: Ok, so I'm gonna move on to teaching for a little bit. So in your teaching, you talk quite a bit about different ways of playing with basic musicality and you give us exercises... For example I'm thinking of the one where you've got number one, two and three and the first ones two grooves, the second one is a dimestop and a groove, and the third one is two dimestops. So could you maybe talk about what that helps you to do as a student, in more detail?

SM: Yea, well, see popping is more the dance anyway, so usually I'm more focused on the groove than anything when I teach. The reason why we drill that is so that it gets set into people's bodies, to be able to chop and change from one to the other, as and when they need it. If you can only groove groove groove all the time, what happens when the musicality changes and it's different. If the musicality stops now you can't stop with the beat, because you only know groove groove groove groove. If you know how to dimestop as well, now you can incorporate that in when the music changes, you can use that as well. And so it's

just, I guess, drilling them... It just really sets them into your body because I don't think you're ever going to consistently do one of those three all the time, unless the music stays like and that's how it is consistently but even if it does stay like that there's gonna be other sounds you don't have to stay on one sound in the music, you're going to pick different sounds. It just makes you able to decide what the music is doing, and how you want to use it, but first you need the vocabulary to be able to do that.

JR: Could you give any other examples of exercises that you might use to help students develop their musicality? I'm remembering one in a circle...

SM: Oh my gosh that's one of my favourite ones, that I made up myself. That one was one of my favourites it's just in a circle, and the first person picks *one sound*. Not the bass and the snare, just *one* sound so if that be the bass drum, and they do something... There's two levels to this and the first one, is being able to first of all identify *one* sound only in the beat. And know when it happens and when it doesn't, that's the first part of the musicality. The second part is finding the move or something that you can do on that beat, that makes it very clear, to everybody else, what it is you're listening to. Because if you can hear a beat, and you do something, and everyone goes "oh I'm not sure what is that on? I'm not sure what you're doing" that means you know what you're trying to hit, but in your movement that you're doing it's not very clear, so you may understand the musicality, but your body is not really showing it well enough that people can see what it is your doing. Obviously when it gets to the next person they now need to find something else in the music, that hasn't been done yet. So obviously the further it goes, the more difficult it gets and the more you have to listen for something that hasn't been used yet and obviously eventually you'll run out of things... But there's usually a lot more, than people realize. You get to about three or four people, and then people get stuck and there are normally more than three or four sounds in a track. Especially for the sort of music that we'd use for class there's gonna be a whole lot of stuff, it just means you've now got to listen harder and not just hear the music, you have to *listen* for something in it. That exercise I think, it pulls you out of just hearing the music, and actually physically really you see peoples face change because they really try to hear what else is in the track.

JR: So would you say that that is a different kind of listening?

SM: Yeah definitely but I think that's the kind of listening that we should always be doing... Because initially if you're hearing a song for the first time you're just going to move to what you hear first [pauses], because you don't know the song you haven't got a chance to hear it, if you've got to start straight away you start straight away. But at the same time, you might just move on the basic beat on the one two three four, because that's something that's consistent and you're aware that that is always going to be there. And while you're moving to that, you're listening to what else is there, that I can hit and all of a sudden bang, now you've moved to something else because you've heard something else in the beat. At the same time you've been keeping consistent with the beat before hand, because if you're just popping or dancing on the tempo on the beat that's always gonna be there unless you have one of those random songs that all of a sudden starts speeding up and slowing down, which doesn't usually happen. But that beat is always going to be there so I always say to people "if you lose the musicality, go back to that" because musicality is not only hitting everything that there is in the beat it's also staying on the beat, and so if you're trying to hit a hundred and one things you can't hit everything at the same time [SM giggles]. Sometimes you got to pick out certain bits and just focus on that because if you try and do too much, now it just looks like you're off beat completely. So just pick out certain things and if you lose it if you think no I'm losing it I'm doing too much go back to bam two three four [SM clicks rhythm with fingers at the same time as saying it] because that's always going to be there.

JR: Could you talk a little bit about how you train your own musicality as a dancer, in your own practice?

SM: Initially, I would say probably with that exercise of using both dime stops and grooves. Also with the speed of how you release your pop because if you can't release it quick enough, if you decide I wanna pop on a beat that has all of a sudden a really quick tempo, if you can't release it you're not going to be able to pop that many times quickly, unless you can release it. So a lot of just practising the tempo of popping, and how quickly you can release it and if you

can release it quick it means you can pop again. Even to this day I still do leg drills because I'm quite dominant on my left leg... I don't know why, but I am.

JR: Yeah I noticed that, and I'm the opposite... So it's really good

SM: You're the opposite... [both laugh] So now I try it and home and I try and do leg drills to try and get me to use my right leg a little bit more, I don't even know why I'm not even left handed I'm right handed so I don't know why...

JR: That's interesting...

SM: Yeah and anything that I would normally struggle with for example a little bit of a different style but waving is an example where I had a really good wave from my right to my left hand but not from my left to my right and so I would drill that side consistently until I had it down so I just do a similar thing with popping if there's something that I can't do very well on one side like, maybe old man or whatever... I can do it on both sides, but it doesn't feel the same on the left side as it does on the right although I can do it. So that's the side that you need to drill more, the side that feels really awkward. So anything like that I would normally drill, yeah. Definitely legs... And sometimes just popping to different music, because then there's a bit of a challenge to maybe use something slow or something that does necessarily have a beat so even though we're talking about musicality, it doesn't need to have a beat to be musicality. It can be just vocals it can be just strings, it still has a musicality even without a beat. So I may challenge myself to maybe [SM pauses] dance on the lyrics or pick something else or pick a song that doesn't have a beat that's maybe an acoustic song.

JR: So this question follows on really nicely from what you were just saying. How do you think that working with popping and other genres of music that wouldn't traditionally go with popping (for example classical or experimental) affects the relationship between dance and music?

SM: I think if you don't understand it, it can affect it drastically [SM giggles]. If you understand the dance in its entirety, then I don't think it's a problem at all. Like I said, music is sound and it's rhythmic sound, most songs if you're doing

popping are going to have a beat... A drum beat. It doesn't mean that you can't dance to something that doesn't have it it just means you got to find something else in the music, that has a rhythm. The lyrics have a rhythm, there could be strings that have a rhythm. Like there is so many other things in music that have rhythms than drums. Sometimes there are songs that do have drums but maybe the sound might be a bit more electronic or a little bit different for example, when myself and Ken did a piece to a song called Utopia. When we did that everyone was like "aghh you can't do that, you can't use this, this isn't popping music", and this was *years* ago, years and years ago. But then when they see a pioneer to do something to another song, [???] "ah now it's cool!"

JR: What was the name of that piece- that you're talking about?

SM: It was called Utopia, I can't remember who the track was by [pauses] I could probably tell you...

JR: Sorry, was that the name of the dance?

SM: Yeah the dance and the track, yeah, we just called it the same as the... We did it at Breakin' Convention I can't remember what year. Maybe it was the third year of it. When we initially did it though it was way before Breakin' Convention and people were just like "no you can't use this it isn't popping music that's not popping", because the track wasn't specifically what they may have called popping music or a funk track, now doing it is not even popping as well?! Then when they see pioneers like Pete do a solo to something else – "Oh yeah I can't believe he danced to that!" Ok so we can't do it but sometimes people won't accept it until they see other people do it and I'm not saying we were the first to do it at all. I'm just saying maybe the people that made those comments, maybe we were the first people that they saw do that and it took them to see someone else do it to go "oh, ok so you can use other music" [SM giggles]. Like and music is music!

JR: Yes... And what did you feel that it added to what you were doing? Did you feel that it added something new? The fact that you'd chosen something that wasn't what you would expect to hear for popping?

SM: Yeah, I think because it makes you dance differently as well because it's something else, like Ken chose that track and sometimes he has in other shows chosen tracks that he'll go "yeah I want you to pop to this" and I'm like [SM makes noise to indicate uncertainty]. Because it might sometimes be a bit of an awkward one to do – doesn't mean I can't do it but it's just means that I don't have the *feeling*. And so because I'm now forced to pick something else in the track, it may not have a similar sound to anything I'm used to it may be a completely different sound. Because I move the way the music does, now I've got to move differently. But still remaining in that style. So then it makes you move... Or come out with slightly different things like I've seen sometimes people have said to me "you know you danced different when you did that" and it's because the music is different. I'm not gonna dance the same to every track that I hear it's always gonna be different. But I guess when it's more difficult, when the beat is not so systematic in particular, that's when you have to think sometimes a little bit more outside the box. But I say outside the box but it's still inside the style [SM giggles].

JR: Sure, that makes sense. So, do you have any idea or prediction about the way that poppers may work with music in the future in theatre spaces? So anything that you can see happening or anything you would like to happen in your practice?

SM: I think it's gonna depend on how many people are open minded into the theatre perspective, because some people are dancers and dancers of many styles, and sometimes when you embrace many styles it makes you a bit more open to the theatrical side of it. And sometimes when you just stick to the underground things like the battles you're a bit more like "no, it doesn't go" like that and so it depends on I guess how many dancers we have in the future that are open minded to the theatre perspective of things. Dance in general in any style is story telling, and so why can't you do that with popping, like you can do with other styles like the video that I did. It's more like storytelling rather than a bit of popping, because even the way I danced in that was slightly different because the music was different it didn't have so much of a beat at the very beginning. I like to see a bit of storytelling in dancing, especially if it can be done in popping

I've had plenty of ideas actually of things. It took me a while to even get that first video off the ground and running because I'm always busy doing stuff but I've got plenty of ones that are specifically just popping and storytelling, by video, of just that style so hopefully I'll get them off the ground [SM laughs].

JR: Yeah and just referring to that video that you made and the fact that you were producing the beats and dancing to them⁴, did that strengthen the relationship in some way – and what was that experience like?

SM: I suppose it probably does strengthen the relationship a little bit because there's one thing listening to a beat and knowing it and hearing it, but if you can play it, you know that beat inside out and exactly what's going to happen at exactly what time because although drumming is a different action – you've already moved exactly on the beat. It's just that you're just doing a different action because you're playing drums. So if I can move exactly on the beat and I know exactly what's going to happen as a drummer, then I can do it as a dancer it's just that the movement is now different. Actually I did a class on musicality, and I brought in my drums. I brought a bass drum and a snare drum. If the beat goes “boom boom boom boom-kat” [SM makes sounds vocally] you're gonna just change from one drum “boom boom boom boom-kat”. Some of them couldn't do that right on the beat, and they could hear that it was slightly off. So if you can't do this action of just hitting a drum on the beat, then how are you doing bigger movement and dance on the beat – that means you're probably slightly off when you dance as well. If that was choreography and I gave you that, you would have been off beat, and it's the simplest action you're arm is going up and down and just hitting a drum. So I think that being able to drum and dance, specifically for that and even just in general... It's made me really sensitive to being right on the beat because even if it's a song I haven't played on drums before, my mind and my body knows how to play it – if I can hear it I can probably play it. If I can play it, I've got to be right on the beat to be able to play it, and if I can play it then I can dance it.

⁴ *Tired* (2015) features Skytilz playing drums and popping throughout.

JR: So to flip things round, (I guess because drums is physical and it's kind of choreography when you look at it like that) to what extent do you feel like your abilities as a dancer feed into your drumming?

SM: Wait say that again [SM laughs]

JR: So you talked quite a lot about your music, and about demonstrating the music through dance and showing the music or the layers of the music. So when you're playing drums do you think that your dancing filters into that in any way and the physicality of the way that you play?

SM: I would say initially when I started learning yes, because I had to understand things like "one and two and" and then "one-e and a two-e and-a" and that helped, in terms of rhythm. But I would say even though I started dancing many years before I started playing drums, that the drums has probably helped the dancing more, than the dancing has the drums. Because the multitasking of it is [SM pauses] ... is levels! [JR giggles] Think about it like this, if I'm playing a beat and I'm doing one thing with my right foot, which is the bass. I'm doing one thing with my left foot, which is opening and closing the hi-hat, my right hand may be on the hi-hat, and my left may be on the snare – and every so often I may use my arms on the toms as well, right? So I'm executing a heck of a lot of musicality at one time, now if I tried to show that much musicality all at once as a dancer, no one is gonna see it because it's too much all at once. I could probably do it, because I do it on drums, but it's not really gonna read, because it's too much stuff at once that's why I say when you're dancing it's slightly different sometimes you have to isolate a certain sound, if I isolate a sound when I'm drumming that's all you're gonna hear and that's all I can dance to. That's why I would say that my drumming has probably helped my musicality in the dancing more, even though I had it slightly, it's more on point now that I play drums. I'm more aware of how many things and what things I can do at what speed. If the beat goes [SM vocalizes complex drum rhythm with combinations of bass, snare and hi-hat]. I can play all of that, but I can't dance all of that. I might have to just dance to [SM indicates part of the music she would hit] then I can hit that in between. I can't pick that hi-hat out every single time because it's going to be too much to do. Even then that's just me doing the drum beat, on top of that in

music you've got the bass, you've got the guitar, you've got the piano. As much as all that sound comes at the same time you can't dance it all at the same time because then to the eye, we're just seeing a mess and you have to make people see the sound. The only way they can see it, is if you pick it out. If you try and do everything at once they're not seeing the one sound that you're doing they're seeing everything. Sometimes certain things happen at the same time, like the hi-hat and the bass. If there's a simple bit and it just goes [SM vocalizes drum rhythm], there's a certain time that the hi-hat and the kick go at the same time. There's a certain time that the hi-hat and the snare go at the same time. And so if I just go on the [SM vocalizes single sound], who's to say it's on the snare or the hi-hat because they're at the same time, does that make sense? [JR makes sounds of agreement] That's why I say, the hi-hat sounds like that [SM makes hi-hat sound] the snare goes [SM makes snare sound] so the way that I hit that beat, will identify which one it is.

JR: And last question, to finish. Could you talk a bit about any particular pieces specifically in popping that you think musically have been inspiring or interesting to you?

SM: Probably every time I've seen Electric Boogaloo's [SM giggles]. More so probably the first time I saw them, so it would have been Breakin' Convention 2004 I think was the very first one. Everyone was making this big hype about Electric Boogaloo's and I didn't really know who they were then. So I was like eyes peeled watching and so that was the first time I really probably even saw the dance in its fullest rawest form ever was probably that day. Although I'd seen it before, not like that. That was the first time I'd seen it properly. That sounds like it was so recent as well, obviously I'd seen bits of it, but I mean when you're looking at it in its rawest form

JR: Yeah, and live as well!

SM: Yeah, that probably would have been the first time I'd seen it. So that definitely sticks out in my mind. And then the one they did I think also at the 10 years Breakin' Convention with the silver suits on as well. Then there was a solo I think that Brooke did to Bob Marley. That was really interesting because again

he's picked a different track, but there's still musicality in it. If there was a popping battle they're probably not going to play that, but there's still musicality in that. That probably sticks out to me more than anything... Some of the (I guess it veers a little bit more on the animation side sometimes) but Mr. Steen and Josephine, some of the stuff they've done musicality wise is just insane. Legend Beatslaya also he is very much into musicality but he also produces music and that is probably another reason why when he dances... I mean there's not a specific video that I can give you but just certain things that I've seen him doing like a solo or freestyle – sometimes it's to a beat that he's made, so he knows that inside out. I think when you produce music or when you make music or you play music, it gives you a whole different understanding of it, you can still understand it as a dancer, I'm not saying every dancer should become a musician, but I think you'll never know how much more musicality and on beat you can be until you make music, or you play music. Not to say you can't be on beat and you can't understand that if you don't play it but I think it just tunes your mind in even more than what it was already because I was still dancing on beat before I played drums. I guess you're a bit more aware, that's what it is probably, like I'm also a driving instructor and when normally drive I concentrate for myself and I'm fine like I drive along. When I'm teaching somebody, now I've gotta concentrate for you so now I've got to be more aware and I've got to notice things further ahead and say things earlier and pick them out earlier so you've got time to do it. I think the difference in that is the same difference in me listening to music as a dancer and listening to music as a musician or someone who makes music. I'm a little bit more aware of exactly what I'm doing on the beat if someone was like "that was offbeat" I'm like "no", I'm just more switched on.

Appendix B

Interview with Yami “Rowdy” Lofvenberg (YL)

4th August 2015

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Yami, could you start by telling me how long you’ve been dancing for?

YL: I’ve been dancing for about nineteen years, I started in 1995 so I think that will become nineteen years now.

JR: And could you tell me when you first started learning popping, and where you learnt it from?

YL: I first started popping in 1995 [YL giggles], with a guy called Damon Frost also known as Mr. Rubberman. He was one of the more famous dancers at the time, in street styles such as boogaloo and popping and locking, and that was in Sweden... Stockholm, Sweden.

JR: Could you tell me what it was that appealed to you about popping, and what made you want to learn it?

YL: I guess the fluidity of the movements and the way of controlling your body in certain angles to the music, and the illusion of doing something that might not even be construed as normal, I think was kind of interesting for me – and also I guess I always had the influences of Michael Jackson and all that stuff and I think he used a lot of that in his videos so seeing Taco and seeing Popin’ Pete and everyone in the videos... Seeing snaking and seeing the movements that they used in the Thriller video and in the Ghost and everything like that. You created this illusion you created this other type of movement that was interesting to me.

JR: You mention Thriller as being one of the music videos that was inspiring, are there any others?

YL: Yeah, I mean Ghost, is it called Ghost? The one when he's dressed up as a ghost and he's dancing in a mansion and there's almost like a short movie to it? With all the kids and all that...

JR: Yeah I think so...

YL: I think it's Ghost. Ghost of Jealousy!

JR: There we go!

YL: Yeah Ghost of Jealousy. Who else did I enjoy at the time? [YL pauses to think] I was into a lot of techno trance music and they always use hip hop movements like MC Hammer and all that stuff they always do stuff like that. It was just that whole era of MTV rap's and stuff.

JR: Cool... And could you describe your work and involvement in the dance world?

YL: Today?

JR: Yeah, and before.

YL: Ok. So I started dancing and I started teaching in 1999. I mostly taught street dance as a general, overall you know with influences of popping and boogaloo and locking and obviously hip hop at the time. I worked my way up to move to England in 2003 and I started in a little bit more of a b-boy circle, and I became more known as an all round dancer because I used to battle a lot, and I became an all styles battler. And got quite successful in that sense I was a girl, I was quite rowdy [both laugh], I was quite out on the scene a lot so a lot of people knew me because of that. I guess in that sense people knew me but then also started realizing that actually I was quite good at leading and teaching. So I started to get asked more and more to teach, and a girl that really helped me out at the time was Sunanda Biswas who is a famous b-girl here in London. She kinda mentored me in terms of giving me classes that she couldn't do and helped

me get into that scene. So I started teaching, and then I met a few American boys that were very into hip hop and breaking and locking and popping (which were from Philly), so that's when I moved to Philly for three months and I worked with a guy called Clyde Evans Junior. He was from the famous Rennie Harris Puremovement, so he taught us a little bit more about the history about locking and popping and I just became much more involved in the funkstyles than I was before, whereas I was more of an all styles dancer. So from there I moved back to England, and I got to know a guy called Fred. And me and Fred did a programme called Pioneers with Sugapop and Popin' Pete, which was a two week programme each, and there I just basically got to know a whole different level of the stuff that I was doing. I thought I was doing it really good but it was not near what I could be. So I got a whole new education and with Fred we taught ourselves, talking to the originals, talking to the pioneers... Learning more about the culture, learning more about the history. I was very lucky to meet Greg Campellock Jnr, who is one of The Lockers. He took me and Fred under his wing and taught us. Through the years we became really good friends, and I became really good friends with Popin' Pete and Sugapop and Wiggles, and most of the pioneers we considered good friends because we had good communication with them. So in that sense I got more and more excelled in my style, and I became more known as a locker and popper in the UK, even though I was still competing at the time I started to judge more competitions because I was more well [???] in the actual basics. People started acknowledging that and so I started judging a lot, and doing a little bit more master workshops. Then after the pioneers and after years of researching my own history and the history in locking and popping, I started becoming more of a figure to go to when it comes to locking and popping in terms of knowing what's going on and more of a lecturer... Then I was offered to come and assist Fred in the University of East London a couple of years ago when it first started in the other place. I was assisting him because obviously we had a company called The Realness where we taught beginner classes and taught beginners, intermediate and advanced classes, which I was teaching as well alongside him. I was teaching my own class alongside with him under the umbrella The Realness. So for him it was an obvious choice to bring me in to assist him. Then through the years I've been assisting and started to get more of my own role at the University so for two years now I've been teaching my own class here alongside with Fred – as well as becoming more involved in hip

hop theatre, and less battling I don't battle anymore but I do judge and I do hip hop theatre. I try to use these two styles, locking and popping in more of a theatre setting, and so that using the language and using the movement to talk about something more important to my heart and something that feels right, and not just the breaking and not just the hip hop but using funkstyles to portray stories.

JR: Great... Could you tell me a bit about your musical background, and that might be in relation to dance or it might be independently of dance?

YL: Well I actually have a learning disorder called dyscalculia, which is the same as dyslexia but with numbers. So anything with numbers. So I didn't really have good school years, but dance was the place where I felt I really excelled and that was not because I could count, it was because I heard the rhythm. And I forced myself to feel the rhythm, and my first dance teacher told me it don't matter if you count, what matters is if you feel it inside you and if you feel the bass and if you feel the internal and external music. So that became something that was very important to me so kind of distinctive, and see what the difference was. And what followed me and what lead me. It was very much that I rarely missed a beat because that was the only thing I was listening to when he was counting. You know this is on a six this is on a five, make sure that you hit that on the eight. For me it was on the [YL vocalizes rhythm] "boom kat de-da boom kat, boom". So, I learned through the years to literally follow that religiously, and the way I teach because I know that there's a lot of kids that have learning disorders that might not know that they have it or might not wanna talk about it. The way I teach is I always teach along the rhythm so I would hum the rhythm, and I try to count as well and always point out certain points in the lyrics or places where you can potentially move your body. So music and rhythm, for me, was essential for learning.

JR: Sure... And you could you talk in a bit more detail about the types of music that inspired you along the way?

YL: Well I mean I started like everyone else with Michael of course. But actually I'm very eclectic so I've always liked different types of music I always liked

Metallica, which is really weird but I did. But I also liked Eurotrash [YL and JR laugh]. Growing up in Sweden, you know, you cannot not like Eurotrash basically it's just what we lived to so it was very fast paced music like, 'Culture Beat' you know... Tune Limited... Music with a rap bit in it always seems to appeal to me, before I knew that I actually like hip hop. But I liked the kind of dancey fast paced rhythm that they had. Then later on I discovered The Fugees and became obsessive with the Fugees, and like... biggest fan. And kind of got into Wu Tang Clan, and then it became heavier and heavier and heavier... Until when I discovered Funk, and that was later in the years, when I discovered James Brown and now obviously I love Funk music, because of the difficulty in the music. There's so many things going on. As a dancer it's exciting to have a lot of things going on. Today's music is just one kind of rhythm, and it's a little bit harder. Also discovering funk music that was particularly made for popping, that's also very interesting. But I think my favourite type of music is that which conveys some sort of movement in my body. I'm not really in to crazy trance music because it doesn't really give me anything, but I love Rock music and I love Funk music and I love hip hop, but I'm not confined to one specific genre.

JR: Do you remember the first time that you saw popping on stage in a theatre space?

YL: On stage... I can remember the first time I saw popping but on stage...? I guess it was probably the first time we had a school performance, in the dance school that I went to. I think I saw *Bounce* – it was a very very big street dance company in Sweden they were the biggest one, and they had girls and boys in the group that performed locking, popping and street dance and I think I saw a performance of theirs for the first time, yeah.

JR: Ok... Could you talk a bit about the nature of the relationship between popping and music as a dancer.

YL: For me, it stems from a very far background in terms of obviously locking came first so, you know, lockers inspired the poppers to move. They saw them moving to the different parts of the music such as the horn or the drum beat or the bass guitar was a huge deal. So the way that the lockers move and the way

the 60's and 70's social dance... You did not do something just to do it. It wasn't just "I'm just going to go in here and do all my biggest moves and then get out". It was always a reason why you for instance went down [YL demonstrates] or if you went up [YL demonstrates] and it wouldn't make sense not to do it that way. So the poppers, they would see this and they would relate to this, and they would move their body like for instance there's a move called the jerk where you put your arm and you push your arm downwards where your chest collapses downwards as well [YL demonstrates]. Now the poppers seeing this, just repeated the same movement but instead of going downwards, they would push it upwards and accent the last two. So for instance, if you did it on locking you would go one two collapse on the two but on popping you went one two and hit it up where you isolate your body. So they just changed a pattern of social dancing, and adapted it and isolated their body. So it was the same concept of moving to the music and that particular movement, but just accenting differently so that the connection has always been the social dance and it's always been the smoothness and the hard from one end to the other either or, hitting that same beat if, that makes sense.

JR: Yeah that does make sense. Could you tell me about some popping pieces that you've created for the stage?

YL: I used to have a girl group, an all female girl group who did locking and popping called Funkamental. One piece I'm very proud of is a piece that we did for B Supreme...

JR: I think I saw it. Was it 2009?

YL: Yeah! I think so. This particular piece was a longer piece but the actual piece that I was most happy about was the piece to Michael Jackson's *Human Nature*. It was a new version of it like a popping version of it so the accent was a little bit different to the original version. They added some beats in there, but the way we moved was that we wasn't moving fast at all we were moving very slow for popping in that sense. I made sure that for that piece every single beat we were doing something to the music. It was one of our most known pieces, so yeah...

JR: As a choreographer, how do you go about selecting music for a stage piece. So do you have an idea for a piece and then you find music, or do you find music and that inspires you for the dance... Could you talk a little bit about that process.

YL: I think as a dancer I would probably want to say yeah both, but that's not the truth at all. I think the truth is, I normally have a concept, so for instance the piece I just did recently in Bristol. My concept was that I wanted to do a celebration to soul train, so I knew that that was what I wanted to do so I went out of my way to basically try to find sound bites and music that related to Soul Train at the time. I'm not so keen to maybe pick the most popular songs, but I'm keen to educate because I always want to educate when I'm on stage. So sometimes I actually use songs to educate at the same time as I perform. So there'll be songs that kids never heard before just to show them that this a style that I do, exactly the same thing that you see on a rap video, you know popping or rap video or whatever. But it's done to this type of music, because it's very easy to go and do popular music you know Bruno Mars Uptown Funk or something like that so people can relate and clap along. But it's also very important for me and as a lecturer and as someone that is seen to know what I'm doing, to make people understand that this is why we did this, you know. So sometimes I am a little bit naughty [JR laughs] and I'm picking songs that I think people should be hearing.

JR: Could you give me an example?

YL: I think sometimes we don't know about a lot of songs like Fred... What's his name now... He does songs like he basically gives you the names of the moves... His name is Fred but I can't remember the second name now... It's not Fred Folkes but it's Fred [JR and YL laugh]. He does like walk the dog, and do the break down, so he tells you what to do and it's the same thing today you know Soulja Boy... They all tell you what to do, but they did it before so people need to know Beyonce didn't wake up and start inventing this stuff. She gets inspired as well. I think sometimes I do pick songs like that to kind of educate people, yeah. And obviously James Brown... Prince... [YL giggles].

JR: How would you define skilled musicality?

YL: I would describe it as knowing your internal and external beat without even a shadow of a doubt. To know when to be able to be still, in a moment, and just have a relaxing time! Because a lot of people are chasing the rhythm, it's like a horse race they're trying to get to the end and get to that amazing blow up... Hopefully it comes but sometimes it never comes, and then you can see in their eyes you know in a battle for instance... You can see it in their eyes that they missed it, they missed that blow up and they weren't really sure what to do with themselves, so they start inventing movements and go on and on and that's when you see the dancers go on for five minutes because they don't know what to do, they don't know what to do with the music. Someone that has skill – it wouldn't matter what music you put on, they will always find something internal or external that they can show us... A picture on the dance floor. Show us a story, show us who they are and their own personality, not taking from no one, and not copied. It's completely their own journey on the dance floor, and it makes us wanna dance because we can see what they see. We can see what they hear. You know, finding things that we didn't even hear, that is an absolute skill of a dancer. And obviously Popin' Pete has completely owned this concept.

JR: For sure... And you talked about internal and external structures, could you give me a bit more detail on that?

YL: External is what you obviously hear, so like let's take a Beyonce song [hum's tune] – what's that song?

JR: Crazy in Love!

YL: Yeah Crazy in Love right... So you can hear [hums the main motif of the melody] you can hear it because she's stomping. She's stomping to the beat, so even if you were blind you would know that this is a powerful thing, or deaf, you would know it's a powerful thing because she's stomping to the beat. Then, underneath, there is horns [YL makes horn sounds] ok... If you was only hearing [YL repeats main motif], that's what you would dance to, that is exactly what you would move to. Now if you were doing your internal beats you would hear that [YL repeats horn sounds] horn section, you would hear that there's drum sections in there, you would hear that there's bass sections in there. It's only when she

goes “and bass” [YL makes bass sounds], that’s when you go “there’s a bass in there!” [JR laughs] “wow I didn’t even know there was a bass in there!” yeah? So Beyonce actually tells you what to listen to. You know, like James Brown will tell you, “Horn!”, they will tell you “listen to this listen to this” because these are all the things that’s happening in there. Internal is things that you might have to look for, think of a CD cover, you see the CD cover you see the glamorous bits and you thought “yeah I wanna buy this” but you don’t know what the hidden tracks are inside, you need to find the hidden tracks, the extra track that they added on there.

JR: How would you describe the difference between the relationship between popping and music compared with other popular and social dance forms and music? So what makes the musicality in popping particularly original?

YL: I think I would have to compare locking and popping I guess for two different reasons. I would say in locking it’s more about the character and story that you’re trying to do. It’s all about pointing at people, and acknowledging people... Who are you as a character, are you playing a drug [???] lady, it’s all about the storyline, because that’s how they made up the move they made it up because of a storyline. Whereas popping, there was never a storyline as such there was never you know “I’m gonna go over here”, cause then we come in to animation and then we come into miming, which is obviously way back, and that’s the only time you actually see a storyline within popping, but you cannot maintain that for as long because of what you’re pushing your body through. Tensing and releasing your body, you can’t maintain for a long time, animation. So what I’m trying to say is the way that we use popping is more that we are accenting our hands and our bodies and our feet in different angles, so it’s not so much of a story, it’s more “how can I twist my body, how can I transfer my weight, so that I can push it up here and push it up there”. So in locking and popping we tell more of a story in locking, and we want to use our body a little bit more in terms of the music and show different weird angles in popping.

JR: As a popper, how do you vary your musicality? Could you give me some examples of how you show different aspects of musicality?

YL: I think when it comes to performance and theatre, that's a perfect timing to do that. I like to use a lot of voice over, and sometimes I don't even use music like I said I use voiceover to describe what I'm trying to do and I might use popping I might do an arm wave to someone laughing and it will be still the same movement to if I was doing an arm wave to a prince song. Personally I like to just use the basics in the styles that I have to emphasise something that I'm trying to say. I have danced to rock music I have danced to pop I've danced to funk I've danced to slow, I've danced to classical. As long as you keep your basics and as long as you keep your internal feeling of what it is, I don't think it really matters but obviously it was made for funk so funk is always gonna highlight it in the best way.

JR: In what ways do you train or develop your musicality as a popper?

YL: Going out, because going out is the best way to train because you never know what the DJ is gonna play. You never know what the next track is gonna be so it will always keep you on your toes. It will always keep you engaged and also the environment of going out and exchanging with other people... They might see something and hear something completely different to you, and so that will challenge you in the way that you're thinking and going "ok, I didn't hear that at all but ok I'm gonna go with that". So I think going out, and exchanging and obviously when I was younger going out and training with other people and meeting other people from other countries because a lot of times when you meet people from other countries they have a whole different way of moving. The way that they move in popping might be completely [different to] the way we move in England. I used to travel a lot I used to travel to jams and battles and you have that exchange and it's fun because it's not aggressive it's not bad vibes, it's always good vibes and it's always like "ok you know I did not know that that's the way you do it there but you always get a way" and that's why I think that when people say that they go away and they're coming back and they have so much in their mind it's because, they're being fed a completely different way of listening to music.

JR: Could you talk a bit about what the difference would be if you were approaching a track that you knew and you were dancing, compared with approaching a track that you didn't know.

YL: Well, listening to a track that you know you start to think about this whole thing that I said – racing, racing the horse. You wanna get the blow up, you know that that's the bit that everyone is gonna know so everyone will want to see how well you do that little bit. I would take the example Busta Rhymes when he goes "Stop!". If you don't stop there [JR laughs], it's all over, you might as well go home, the party is done. But I'm always kind of thinking right, ok what would happen if I did something completely freaking crazy dope in that bit [JR giggles]. You would just make people blow your minds, so for instance all the kids want to learn Uptown Funk and they want to dance to Uptown Funk and there's only so many times you don't want to shoot yourself in the head! So you have to be like ok what can I do... You know what's coming, you know what's happening, so I guess for me when I choreograph to something that I know, it's more about challenging myself – what can I do that would not be obvious in this bit. Whereas when I don't know the song, that's a challenge for myself in terms of like, right, I don't know the song this can go either way this can go really good [YL giggles] or this can go really bad. But it also makes me creative because it makes me think of movements that I might not have specifically thought about. Whereas the known track I know – that goes with a Scooby-doo that goes with a boogaloo roll, that goes with that whereas with the new track you never know what could go so you might try out different things... you don't know.

JR: Could you just describe the blow up?

YL: Ok, I'm trying to think of songs now... You can see dancers waiting for this... The stop in the Busta Rhymes song. You can see them waiting for the stop, so everything that they do up to that point, might just be wishy washy. It might just be like, spending time... You can see them thinking and it's almost like, if you're not as experienced as a dancer it's almost like you stop. Just a tiny second before that happens, so that you can prepare yourself. For instance in popping if you do Cult 45, which is like when you spin your leg around and then you end up in a W. You kick your leg around and you end up in a W. You want to do that

when the beat drops and that will be amazing. But it's almost like you can see sometimes dancers waiting for that moment so they will do everything they can to prepare their body for the blow up. So they might not be doing a low move just before that because they need to be standing up. So you can see that a lot in b-boying, they do the blow ups obviously because that's what they do, but a lot of b-boys that's not experienced in footwork, they will do the whole indian step side to side, a lot of pointing a lot of showing it's coming it's coming it's coming for you now, a lot of running around and then the blow up comes and then they prepare and they do a windmill or whatever. That's what I'm saying like there's a lot of people waiting for that moment to happen, the blow up happens and either you're successful or not, and then afterwards you feel like your job is done and you can go out. But that makes no sense at all because I'm thinking what happened to the rest of the song [JR giggles] – are you done now are you clocking out from your job, ok alright and a lot of people and dancers think that that is all that they need. In terms of dance life they need to be the blow up, they need to have that one blow up, win that one battle, do that one show, and they think they're gonna stay on top forever. They're always going to be this person that did a blow up and guess what, tomorrow there's someone else doing another blow up.

JR: So do you think that in terms of trends in musicality is that becoming...

YL: Yes! Because now they're making music *specifically* for blow ups. Like trap music and stuff like that. And trap music and dubstep music is very much about [YL makes sounds to demonstrate rhythms and style of the music] you know what I mean it's all about the blow up, they're waiting for that moment. You know you're in a club, and you're waiting because everyone's building up everyone's building up and here it comes here it comes... [YL makes explosive sound] and it's like a bomb, and that is what they're making music, for you to have that feeling, for you to have that blow up. We always move our bodies in terms of how the music, and so if that's what the music is doing, naturally everybody is gonna be starting dancing like this, everyone's going to be milling around you know when you were in the raves and you were waiting for it to happen, and it's like you're jogging on the spot and jogging on the spot [JR giggles] and there it comes and then you hit it. That's how we are trained now in music so that's what we're gonna be trained to do in life, and that's why a lot of young people believe

that this is the only way that you can go and they train that way. They don't train to last a whole song like how we used to do, we used to train for a whole song and find new things. Here they train for a certain amount of time waiting for the blow up and then they go and sit down and say well I'm done now, I've done my thing.

JR: Very interesting... Cool. You talked about this a little bit anyway, but how do you think that working with popping and other genres of music (other than funk) affects relationships between the dance and the music?

YL: I think there's always been collaboration between styles and movements. Obviously breaking and contemporary works really well together. Waacking and locking seems to morph into one style now for some reason... And voguing. But I believe that... You know I'm not an inventor of any style, but I see a lot of old styles such as dancehall that's getting big again, voguing is getting big again. I don't know if there's a connection between popping and any other style but in every style there's popping. You can't do street dance and hip hop without popping. So the fundamentals is always there.

JR: And what about if popping is put with other music choices?

YL: Yeah. I think there already are [JR makes sounds of agreement] I see people doing classical music with popping all the time...

JR: Yeah, sorry, so what I'm asking is what does that create, does that create something new..?

YL: Yeah, I mean it creates more depth, you know, if you see popping to a slow jams song like a Phil Collins song. A) you get people that have never seen popping in that way before so it opens their mind to, maybe they can try different music. B) it makes you see the movements because it's not fast, you know, everything is so fast now. So slowing down would make you see what the actual movements are [JR makes sounds of agreement]. And it also puts the pressure on the artist to be more inventive, to be like hey well I can't move fast so what have I got to do with my body in order to slow it down, and really develop my own

style. So I think in that sense, I think some people start to develop their own ideas of like ok I'm bored of doing just this music now I wanna push to this music and I wanna see what I can do in my ability to another song. So I think in that sense there's always gonna be people that's pushing, that music boundary of what is right and what's wrong music.

JR: Yeah, cool. Could you pin point or suggest any trends or patterns that you think are developing (and you've already talked about one), but if there are any others in relation to the way that people are practicing popping. And that could be from a freestyle perspective or more performance on stage...

YL: Well um... Krumping! It was obviously a big movement that's happening now. And a lot of krumping movement stems from popping. You know, isolation of the body, hitting at the certain points of the music. So I think in terms of what I see on stage, I see a lot of times popping and krumping going together. Not necessarily the same type of music I would say, because krumping music is a little bit more unorganized in terms of popping music. But I see them two kind of collaborating and also voguing was in the funk era, in the end of the funk era. So voguing always had isolations and manipulations and tutting that they're using with their body so also I'm seeing voguing and popping potentially working together as well. And for stage, you know, all that stuff works. So these are two styles I think could work.

JR: Cool. And could you talk about any popping pieces that you might have seen, and I'm thinking with reference to Breakin' Convention and how many different international companies that they've staged over the years. Could you talk about a piece that have inspired you with particular reference to musicality and popping?

YL: I would say Frank II Louise... It's probably everyone's favourite piece. I think the way they executed themselves and the style and the music, and the costumes! It was on another level I think, in terms of what I've ever seen.

JR: Could you talk a bit about it?

YL: You know it was such a long time ago just trying to remember. I can only describe the beginning when you see them in kinda like some alien suits and they're isolating their... You wouldn't even think that they are real because they're isolating their bodies to the music to kind of mechanical music. So it's not even so much music, but it's the... noise that they're making and using their body in terms of like the isolation, with the mechanical... Makes them look like they're not human and makes them look like they've taken us on another dimension of what the body can do. It's visualizing something that is not potentially human and for people to see that, I think that that means you have now pushed your body to the extreme... And to ... noise, I would say, is it dance? Yeah! Because you're taking it to another level! That's the only thing I kind of remember now in the beginning, but yeah.

JR: Any others?

YL: Maybe not at Breakin' Convention but there's a piece... It's basically a piece with this guy in chinese hats, and they're wearing chinese outfits red and it's only three of them. They're in a spotlight... They're called Three something... They're whole piece is so synchronized to the music, it's like they're a cartoon, it's like they're not real. They're moving their hat to the [makes high pitched sound effect] and they're moving their hat really fast, and at the same time someone can just drop "Boom" into a position, a low position and then they would rotate like 360 without even moving their feet and then come up, I mean it's, it's extraordinary! And only that you can do with isolations and popping. You could not do that with any other style, there's no way. That's the only way you could do that. In that way, popping is very unique because you can completely create the illusion, with music.

JR: ... And I think we'll end on that note, thank you very much!

Appendix C

Interview with Kenrick “H2O” Sandy (KS)

10th August 2015

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Kenrick, could you start by telling me how long you’ve been dancing for?

KS: Oh gosh. Um... Ok you can help me calculate this [JR laughs]. 2018 will be 20 years... So... 17? Yeah, 17 years.

JR: And could you talk about when you first started being aware of popping as a dance style, when you first saw it, and how you first started learning it.

KS: So when I first started dancing, I was, not told but it made me aware that there were three key styles that we needed to learn. Which was popping, locking and breaking. So for me my first inspiration of popping was from *Breakdance* the movie. And watching Popin’ Pete, Popin Taco, Boogaloo Shrimp and... I can’t remember the other guys name, what’s his name?

JR: Not sure, those are the ones I remember...

KS: Ozone Turbo.. But yeah. That film was the one that was my first inspiration. And I remember fast forwarding and rewinding and looking at the way that they would do their combinations and that was my inspiration.

JR: Cool. And could you talk a bit about what appeals to you about that dance form particularly?

KS: Mmmm. I like the illusion of it. It makes the body look as though it’s doing something that it’s not capable of doing. It defies gravity, for me... There is something about the dance or the technique, and when I mean the technique I mean like umbrella of popping so, the popping the boogaloo the animation the

waving etc etc.. There's just a beauty about it that I can't really explain. It's always been in my top three of styles. I find when I do it I feel very liberated when I'm doing the style. I find myself putting myself into this void, where it's just me and the music and the technique. And I would say the dance... Yeah.

JR: Could you talk a bit about what your role is in the dance world...

KS: Oh gosh [JR laughs]...

JR: Many things [both laugh]

KS: You know what I mean! I think, the way I see myself, I'm just another guy doing what he needs to do and just helping to push the scene and taking that responsibility of just being around and helping to nurture. What my proper title is I am the co Artistic Director and the main choreographer of Boy Blue Entertainment. I think for the scene, I know people have said that I've inspired a lot of people, I've empowered a lot of people. From a conceptual point of view maybe our generation maybe one of the pioneers of bringing the UK out, and really pushing it in the sense of the artistic side of things and using the technique and the dance. As a way to not only just perform but just a language as well as a way to express yourself and to get certain emotions and ideas and ethics across. I've always been that rebel, from day one, a lot of people kind of sometimes I would say, look at our work and may not like it or not necessarily may not like it, may not feel that it's the proper way of doing styles especially when it came to popping we used to get a lot of grief about that. But we used to play and be rebels, because of just straight boredom. It gets to a certain point where everyone's using the same music, everyone's dancing the same way, and there's no innovation. And there's a lack of creativity. So for me I would find a track which may not be popping related, but we'll still pop towards it, and emphasise the technique even more. Cause I think the dance is the dance but I think there's a way in which to really enlighten the technique, and I think you have to juxtaposition it, and you can really find some exciting, innovative ways of using the technique.

JR: When you say that that reminds me of the opening of, was it called... *Emancipation of Expressionism*?

KS: Yes mmmm.

JR: I think that was one of my favourites, especially the duet... Yeah, and we can talk a bit more about that in a bit.

JR: Could you tell me a bit about your musical background, and that might be in relation to dance or it might be independently to dance.

KS: When I grew up I wasn't really into music funnily enough. When I was into music it was more into soca calypso, and reggae dancehall because of my upbringing. I wasn't really into hip hop and electro beats and break beats and all that stuff. It's not until... I turned maybe fourteen/fifteen/sixteen, that's when I started to get into jungle and alternative music, and garage. That's when I proper got into my music I remember buying... And I was into a lot stuff like Prodigy and stuff like that. I just liked that hard hitting kind of sound. That's when I really got into music and I used to play the violin as well.

JR: Aah, ok.

KS: So I had an idea of music and an understanding of it, I just didn't really have any interest of having a proper full on relationship with music if you know what I mean.

JR: Mmmm, sure... Cool. Do you remember when the first time was that you saw popping on stage in a theatre space?

KS: The first time was the Electric Boogaloos. I think that was 2003? Or 2004... One of the two.

JR: At Breakin' Convention?

KS: Yeah...

JR: 2004.

KS: Yeah, Breakin' Convention started in 2004 didn't it.

JR: Yeah...

KS: So it was the same year that we did it, the first year that we did it. And I never knew who they were. Funnily enough it's not until they came and I looked at Popin' Pete and I was like hold on a second, you're the same guy that's in *Breakin The Movie*. And I put two and two together and I was like completely in awe. Cause when we saw them obviously we was doing our thing, but we didn't realize the *extent* of what popping was until we saw them, and they was just like, oh my gosh. It was amazing. But it was not until the Electric Boogaloos, at Breakin' Convention 2004.

JR: And as far as you are aware was that really the first time in London that popping would have been staged?

KS: I don't think so. I know for a fact popping has been around for time.

JR: Yeah.

KS: We know it's been around before I even started. And from talking to some of the old school cats, the Electric Boogaloos did come over to London before that.

JR: Oh ok.

KS: I think they were just in and out, kinda jamming and doing some stuff, I don't think they were necessarily on stage with it, but I know there was interaction. And I know the likeness of Jonzi and especially Benji Reid, was using techniques in popping and animation with their hip hop theatre work. So, it being on stage... And also Robert Hylton too. So I know them cats were using it in their particular way.

JR: Could you talk a bit about how you view the nature of the relationship between popping and music. So if you were going to describe that relationship, how would you do that?

KS: [makes thinking sounds and pauses] Music and popping goes hand in hand. I think it's a bit of a gift and a curse. Hence why I like to use sometimes music which is not "popping music" or regular beat. Once the beat is on, you have no choice but to be completely intertwined you immerse yourself in the music. So the major thing you have to in order for it to really look good is to be on beat. Then you have to listen to the different accents and the different points, then you've got to start looking at the contrast and the tone within the beat. You know to make sure that the relationship you're having while you're dancing to the beat... has clarity, and has interest. The relationship between popping and music... One has to lead and the music will lead you. Popping is like a salsa, to me. The music has to lead you, allow the music to take you where it wants to take you. Or while you're doing it you then bring the finesse, you then bring the contrast and tone to make it interesting.

JR: Mmmm, cool. Could you tell me a bit about (and I know they'll be many) but some examples of pieces that you have created for the stage that have used popping in some way? And maybe a bit about the creative process?

KS: Mmmm. Wow that's quite a lot [JR laughs]. Ok, we've done it in a couple of different ways. There's three different ways we've used it. If I'm doing a standardized street dance set, I know for a fact we'd pretty much put popping in there in quite a lot of our sets. Because it's one of our favourite styles we tend to put it in, a lot of animation stuff and recently a lot of popping. If we're looking at it from a conceptual point of view, I would say the stuff that we've made under the name of "Unusual Force", me and Skytilz duet that we did, I can't remember what year it was in Breakin' Convention...

JR: Ah, yeah I saw it the other day I can't remember either...

KS: Can't remember what year that was...

JR: It's in the archive I think...

KS: Yeah. *Mad World* I did animation for *Mad World*... At Breakin' Convention. We made another piece called, *Emotion Motion Music* (EMM) which was very conceptual and that had animation, and waving and slow motion and ticking and everything in that. We also did... I would say our piece *Clockz* had some stuff in their [JR makes sounds in agreement], especially the animation and the isolation work. There's a couple of solo's I think I've done, which has definitely had popping and stuff like that. Me and Skytilz have definitely done quite a lot of duets. We did another one which was quite a lot of waving, we did it for... East London Dance, I think was it "Two's Company" or something like that? With Hakeem and that. Then quite a few of our productions as well, our hip hop theatre productions we've incorporated popping. *Pied Piper* had some animation hand combination stuff going on in that as well as some of the solos were popping orientated. Then with *The Five* we had some popping in that as well, but we mixed that up with animal technique, so we used the snake animal technique and incorporated popping and waving and tutting and stuff with that. I think I use popping... a lot. I think at least... 70% of my work, has had popping in it, and animation. At least 70%.

JR: Yeah, yeah... Cool. When you're creating a piece, what usually comes first for you? Do you need to find the music and work with the music or do you normally come up with an idea and start generating movement and then find music?

KS: I think it's a bit of both, I think when I hear a certain track, I see a vision and when I see a vision, then I decide what style of movement, or what dance style am I going to use. When I've done stuff from a popping point of view, I find that the music has warped me and taken me some next place. And automatically my body starts going into this popping animation space. When I have a vision or an idea, and the music's not first, it's most probably because I've just been having a jam or I've been playing with some ideas and then I see this movement I see this vision. And then, I may go and search for the music. But more time I would say eight out of ten of the times that I'm making pieces it's because of the

music. It's definitely cause of the music it's the inspiration in the music and I hear the music and all of a sudden I see this picture this vision I start painting this picture in my head. So it is, I think eight of ten of the time.

JR: Ok, great. If you were talking about somebody who had skilled musicality, how would you define what that is? ... Or even good musicality.

KS: Good musicality? [pauses] I call them a sound surfer. A sound surfer in the sense of like, when you're watching someone who does surfing, they're not forcing what they're doing. There isn't a force it's not fake, it's honest. The wave is moving. You can't predict how a wave is gonna be. You can only look at it and feel it. Same with music. Some music you can't predict, yes you can predict a standardized rhythmic flow, but accepting that you have to move on impulse, to me is the best way of musicality. No assumptions, you can't assume the music, and you can't predict. It's about just being there, immerse yourself in it. An acceptance. I think what tends to happen when I'm watching people dance is they got too many assumptions of how the music is gonna be. Or they've got so much movement, they're just throwing it out. And they're not allowing themselves to go, just allow the body to just... Sit on it.

JR: Yeah [in agreement]

KS: Just immerse. So, for me some of the best practitioners of musicality are the ones who are not even questioning the music. There's no question. It's like, it's just pure faith and risk. It's just having a leap of faith, as opposed to "I need to know exactly what it is". And even when I'm watching battles, for me the best battles are the ones where people don't know the music.

JR: Yeah, it's funny because I was talking with Yami the other day and she was saying how she feels that there's this pattern where people are racing ahead because they want the blow up, cause they know the moment that they're gonna do their trick with the high point of the music, and that it has this quality where it's trying to get to this bit that they know is coming...

KS: Not being consistent. Allowing it to be what it needs to be. With most tracks you find every two eights or every four eights, there's a standard thing that comes in.

JR: Yeah

KS: So if you know that's there, it's not that that's important. It's everything else before that point. So you're gradually taking us on a journey, so that when it does come to this it makes it even more better. As opposed to a hundred and one moves for no reason, and because you got your moment there then you try and make it big. You're not giving us no lead up towards it, you're pretty much just going fire fire fire fire fire fire fire then try and go ok here's more fire [JR giggles]. No, allow it to just be what it is, do what you need to do, be creative and then all of a sudden it just goes like that [KS makes sound effect of something taking off] just flies up and it hits a nice arc.

JR: Yep. How would you describe the difference between the relationship between popping and music, compared with other dance forms and music. So is there anything that you can see that's original about it, or different about it?

KS: I mean, with each style there is a particular way in which you have to do things. So, with popping one of the major things is you're doing your hits, where the weight is you need to make sure if you're gonna hit the leg you have to make sure that the weight is on top of the leg as opposed to it's not on top. So, for me the beauty of popping with music is the way that you're actually trying to make sure that you're able to maintain the hits consistently on the beat. As well as the actual biomechanics of the body being able to hit and still dance. I think for a lot of people might think that popping is easy, popping is not an easy style to do. And I think it takes time, to really get into it technically. It's the same with locking, most of locking has a limited amount of moves. To be able to actually fulfil the full detail of the moves is a hard thing to do. So for me I find when it comes to popping, or even not in popping when it comes to waving, doing sessions and seeing people wave. If you are not allowing the technique to be that illusion in your mind, then you're gonna forever just be doing it in an average Joe way.

JR: Sure

KS: And, when it comes to that relationship with the music with popping. I think there also needs to be an understanding of space, time, distance, do you know what I mean. Just allow yourself to... to go. Go global, 360 degrees translate the direction. But what happens is because we were born in this choreographic age, a lot of peoples minds are fixed upon a hundred and one moves, because they learnt a hundred and one moves in the choreography. And when it comes to doing the technique they wanna go fast they feel as though doing everything fast makes you look brilliant. But for me the best people are the ones that can put on a slow jam, and pop to a slow jam [JR makes sounds of agreement], and it's nice and clean and you see every single move, every single nook and cranny.

JR: Cool, thank you... When you're training, in what ways do you train your musicality. Can you give me some examples? I know some from working with you but is there anything specific that you would do to explore musicality or to push yourself in different ways?

KS: I think it's to break down the music. When studying music, it's to break down the music. No, how to break down music. You know, you've got your different parts of the beat. You've got your [Makes sounds of the different parts of the drum, kick, snare, hi- hat. Then gives different vocal examples of different parts of that that you might choose to hit]. So I'm not thinking about that [makes hi-hat quaver sounds], that little accent there. And if there's a melody coming [beatboxes to show the beat and the melody together] what am I trying to play with? And then if there's words in there [demonstrates] am I trying to hit all of that as well? But it's dissecting. One way is about dissecting, so the word I was trying to say is dissecting the music to the nth degree. And just play with that bit, then just play with this bit, then that next layer, then that next layer, then that next layer. I think, challenging yourself is playing music you've never heard before, and trying to see what it is. It's like you're dancing blind. What you're trying to do is you're trying to enlighten your senses and be like dare devil. So that when the beat comes in it comes this way, you catch it, like you're trying to

catch a bullet in the air. And that's what it is. So there's been a lot of battles where I've not known the music and I'll just dance and I keep on dancing. And then slowly but surely I find there's a rhythmic pattern, there's a reoccurring moment, so well if there's a reoccurring moment I'm just dancing and still doing my thing, staying on beat, making sure everything's fine. When that moment comes, then I just go.

JR: And that's with music that you don't ...

KS: Yeah and that's dancing on impulse. That's allowing my heart beat, and the beat of the music, to do that. So I tend to dance from the heart a lot, as opposed to dancing from the mind. Because I don't want to dance from here [KS gestures to head], I want to be able to use this as a distribution of moves, so it goes down the conveyor belt and then my heart is feeling a certain thing and then it goes you know what I need something like this and then it just subconsciously does that.

JR: Mmmm, cool. So this leads quite nicely onto this question. How do you think that working with popping and other genres of music (when I say other I just mean not your typical funk/popping track), so maybe classical music or experimental music... How do you think that that might shift or affect the relationship, when you present that in a theatrical context?

KS: I think there's two different ways. I think there is having music in the background, for background sake, whilst you're doing the technique. And then I think there is using the music, juxtaposing (because you're using something completely different) but taking it to the next level. So if I'm working with some kind of ambience, and I just literally want it in the background because I want to emphasise emotion and feeling and the psyche. Then, I don't have to dance on the music. I'm just creating a space, which is quite a contemporary thing to do. However for me, I prefer that when I listen to a classical beat, I grab every single thing, I may not understand the timing, but the rhythmic pattern. If I dance from the heart, then I'm gonna understand the rhythmic pattern because it's gonna be the same like my heart beat. So I study the music even more. And then I find that once I'm playing with that, I can then take it to another level emotionally as

well. I find if I'm dancing to just popping music I'm having fun, and I'm enjoying myself but once I put on another beat, it gives me aims it gives me objectives it gives me incentive. It makes me feel more conceptual.

JR: Could you talk about a piece that you've particularly enjoyed the creative process of, because you talked about quite a few before but is there any that was specifically interesting for you, any that stood out?

KS: ... That's hard. Very very hard. I think still today, *Til Enda's* one of my favourite pieces, I've made. And it's developed over the years it's now five years old I think. I did it in 2010 I think? So that's definitely one of my favourites. I think I would really like to re-do *Mad World*, I've always had an idea of making it into an ensemble piece.

JR: Oh wow...

KS: So that's something that I've always really wanted to look back on. I'm forever kind of thinking of ideas with regards to just the whole "Unusual Force" abstract way of thinking about popping. But I think *Til Enda* definitely has to be the one. *Mad World* is something I'd like to go back to. *Emotion, Motion and Music* is something I'd definitely like to go back to cause I feel it's a relevant piece now. When we did it, a lot of the pieces that we did back a day, I don't even think we was even ready for those kind of pieces [JR laughs]. Cause I think we was way before our time. So there's a lot of stuff now that we can do now, that I think people would be just like "what is that!?". What else... Redoing *Clockz* was good, really happy with the way we did *Clockz*.

JR: That was 2011...

KS: Mmmhmmm.

JR: I really liked the piece that you did, the opening to "Legacy" about your choreographic notebook.

KS: Oh ok... Yeah.

JR: I thought that was really clever. It was quite short, because obviously they were all bitesize weren't they [KS makes sounds of agreement]. But that was really interesting as well.

JR: Cool. Could you pinpoint any trends or patterns that you feel are developing in relation to the way that people are using popping and music on stage?

KS: I don't think anyone's really pushing it. There is a trend, I don't think there's much innovation. Groups that do the competitions like UDO and IDO they put it into their pieces and there's not really anything creative about it. It's just "ok we're gonna put a popping piece or a waving piece or an animation piece that's done". There is a lot more battlers and poppers, I mean the only time I've seen anything really interesting... The likes of Brooke when he recently did the Bob Marley thing that he did that was interesting to see how he used that, Dickson is quite interesting when he takes the technique of it and he incorporates it into his contemporary way of moving, it's really interesting because with popping because there's a really powerful technique and way of doing it, and the hits and stuff like that. You have to really understand the body. And he understands his body so then to have the contemporary mind and the contemporary movement as well, some crazy stuff! But I think no ones really pushing it. I think no ones really pushing it. I mean I haven't really done anything that's just popping by itself for a while. But there isn't really anyone who's kind of taking it and going you know what we need to be really really super creative with it. Everyone's really fixed on this, let's do my choreography, let's do a conceptual video when it's clearly just choreography being filmed. As opposed to really being conceptual.

JR: Is there a particular piece that you've seen over the years that's been inspiring for you, it could be a UK company or an International company?

KS: Popping or just general?

JR: Well, I think generally maybe.

KS: Frank II Louise, when they did that piece. When I saw that, it empowered me to do what I'm doing. To me, when I watched it, it had so many different elements and attributes of hip hop and breaking, to popping to waving... It just had so much different things inside it, that it said to me "Ken whatever you're doing, do it". What's his name, Sebastien Ramirez and, can't remember what her name is... What is it something sixty six?

JR: Yeah... Clash 66.

KS: Yes... All day. Companie Revolution? Who else... Bboy Yaman, some of the work that he's doing. Cause he's a bboy but there's this waving stuff that he likes to do, and this animation stuff that he does and he just makes his body into this creature and it just looks amazing.

JR: Mmm, I'm just thinking of Mr Steen as well.

KS: Mr Steen.. Ah, if you're talking about other people like that then Mr Steen, Robbo-Z, Two-Face, them three? Definitely. Mr Wiggles... Popin' Pete, Electric Boogaloos. I'm really interested in B-boy Cloud, just the way he moves, he has this fluidity.

JR: Cool. Could you talk a bit about what you would like to see happen in terms of some idea about the direction that you'd be interested to take your work in, in popping and animation forwards, in terms of kind of theatrically.

KS: I think I would definitely like to do the piece called *Emotion Motion and Music* again at some point. It would really work on both technique of the dance, but also technique in the theatre the theatrical side with the acting side of it. I think with a lot of dancers and a lot of performers they don't have the theatrical side to them. Or, they're not aware of that theatrical side of them. Which is something I would definitely like to look on and work. Right now I'm in a space where I wanna be more conceptual. I wanna play with more hip hop theatre. And I know for me, popping, animation, waving, tutting etc etc is definitely tools that I will use because I've been using them for so long, but it's just a matter of how I use it. [long pause] Yeah, I think I'll just be using it conceptually and just

keep on pushing, pushing the UK hip hop scene, pushing the conceptual part the theatre part.

JR: And then just one more question to finish, from a teaching point of view so slightly moving from a choreographic perspective, although they're still linked, how do you try and educate other people in valuing musicality in the way that we do as dancers. So how you try to support and educate others in that?

KS: I think there's different ways. When I'm teaching a regular class and doing standardized choreography, the way that I choreograph, it forces you to really listen to the music. I don't stay on one particular beat I may go on the words I may go on the beat I may go on the words and beat, and I'm forcing you to go on this journey. It's an irregular pattern within a regular feel. So I think it's important, because if you're just doing this [demonstrates movement] it just gets boring, you have to understand musicality I'm gonna hit beats that you think "what are you listening to?" but when I dance to it then I make you see the sounds that you can't hear. So that's a whole philosophy around sound surfing. It's to make people see the sounds that they can't hear. From a conceptual point of view if we were training and doing freestyling, I'd put on a track and say "listen to this track, and go". Have a play with this track, what is coming up? And I'd test people I'd maybe play the track and go ok, how many times did you hear that particular beat. Just to see if you're actually studying the track. Most times if I'm training and I'm doing popping, I'd play two to three different types of music. I'd play standard popping tracks, electro beats, I play a juxtaposition like a classical beat, and then I might just put on an ambience track, which has no regular stuff in it at all it's just sounds. The reason why I would do those three when I'm training, is one so that I know from a battle point of view or from a standard way of popping I'm on beat, I know what I'm doing the musicality is right. Then taking it and being more conceptual with it I know that my technique is still strong whilst hitting the classical beat, staying on point, staying within the rhythmic pattern and understanding another level of how to work the technique and the dance. Then when I do something that's complete ambience, it could be white noise, it could just be anything like that. The reason why I put that on is because I wanna work on just technique. I don't care about the musicality I just wanna work on technique and allowing the body to have that freedom. As much

as I love having that relationship with music, sometimes music can restrict you, so I understand why some contemporary cats may feel as though there shouldn't be any relationship between music and the dance. But there needs to be an understanding, there needs to be a relationship between the two, because it enforces that energy. And if it's done right, it's amazing. When the musicality is right, clean, it's amazing, and it's proper like you wanna clean, real clean collaboration.. Clean marriage like that.

JR: Thank you!

Appendix D

Interview with Robert Hylton (RH)

10th August 2015

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Robert, could you start by telling me how long you've been dancing for?

RH: If we're talking popping?

JR: Dancing generally, and then popping...

RH: Dancing generally meaning dancing generally professionally?

JR: Yeah

RH: If it was popping generally then it would be from '87/'88 as a club dancer, I started performing in '89. Popping from '82.

JR: '82... Ok. And can you tell me a bit about how you came to start learning popping, so what was it that inspired you to learn, or how did you go about starting to learn it?

RH: Because I'm of a certain age, myself and the rest of the country were watching Top of the Pops one evening in 1982 I think it was in July when Jeffrey Daniels from 'Shalamar' came on and introduced us to popping. And so myself and the rest of the country were attempting to moonwalk and various popping moves and they stayed and when Malcom McLaren Buffalo Gals came on, you had Rock Steady and associated poppers like Mr. Wiggles, Fable, [pauses] the guy his name slipped me so the Rock Steady group Buffalo Gals so it was all 80's films Flashdance, Wildstyle, Stylewars, Breakin, Beat Street, so that as a teenager.

JR: Yeah. And what was it about popping that made you wanna learn it, what attracted you to it?

RH: It was popping and breaking. I kinda did everything. You have to think, people the kids don't get it these days, that literally we didn't expect it. And if you're a kid being a kid maybe you do the robot and you like dancing and jumping around and being on a BMX, and climbing trees. And next minute you see these cool kids from America, cause America them days pre youtube, was like wow you're from America. It was like the thing. Kids spinning on their heads being cool you were just completely drawn to it. It was a kinda no brainer. If you were a kid and you had physicality, the whole clothes, style, music – it was quite easy.

JR: Cool. Could you describe to me what your work and involvement is in the dance world, and that might be several things [JR laughs whilst saying it], but just talk to me a little bit about what that is...

RH: It's lots of things.

JR: Ok.

RH: Regarding my original roots as a street dancer. I still jam in clubs. As a performer... Contemporary, hip hop. But then, because I dance for myself, kinda dance for other people from when I left Northern school... I trained in contemporary from '91 to '95, I worked doing contemporary and then I danced with other people until about 2000. I started doing my own stuff in '99. So from '99 I kinda produced my own work as solo as group work, doing contemporary and hip hop based dances breaking and popping.

JR: Was that under Urban Classicism?

RH: Yeah. Abstract and experimental if you can call it that word. And now also a commercial choreographer for my sins, but you know... And an educator. Not so much workshops now but mainly teaching at YDA Swindon Urban, for talented young kids.

JR: Ok, great.

RH: And a mentor...

JR: Yeah... As I know well [both make sounds of amusement] Ok great, could you tell me a bit about your musical background, so that might be in connection with dance or it might be independently of dance...

RH: Because initially I'm a club head that's how I kinda got it from '82 to '86, well it kind of died off in '85. It was kinda that era of breakin', Rock Steady Crew, Afrika Bambaata, Electro. From '86 onwards, I got a job and had my own money so I went to clubs, so '86/'87/'88 was soul clubs you play jazz, hip hop, funk, soul... So I was kinda lucky that I would go out and listen to house, jazz, abstract really heavy duty jazz. As well as soul, reggae. So that was a kind of big introduction to music whether it was Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie or Blakey or a guy called Gerald, or Marva Whitney or whoever soul heads. So it was broad, very broad musical education, along with my friends, well when you made friends with DJ's those days, to get into the club for free, basically, so it's kinda get into the club for free, meet girls, dance and that was the kind of initial starting point, it's all I wanted to do basically. But then when I started performing, we would dance jazz so it could be Flora Purim, and then when I went to Northern School of Contemporary Dance, obviously I was introduced to yet another set of music. Whether that be classical or modern music. So by the time I'd left Northern in '95, I'd experienced the strange weird and wonderful of music, not just hip hop. So when I did start doing my own solo work initially my first contemporary dance choreography was to Gil Scott-Heron, 'the revolution will be televised', that was also because it was part of the Golden Era of hip hop, so Public Enemy and you're getting introduced to Malcom [???] and Gil Scott-Heron, so it was much more political time of hip hop. And when I did my first solo it was to Amiri Baraka, Black Sugar in music too he was similar ilk to Gil Scott-Heron. So that had come in from the Golden Era, but also the Bill Cosby, which I can't do anymore for certain reasons [RH laughs]. And when I met Billy Biznizz he would scratch over it, and we'd have a little scratch interlude, so to me his kind of scratching is a little be-bopy anyway, cause it changes rhythm and I like the challenge. The 4/4 beat

is good to a point, but when you're doing a twenty minute show or an hour show it's, how much can a 4/4 beat deliver a kind of theme/concept or a story narrative? It's very difficult to use pre-recorded music, so then that kind of jazz and experimental brings different kinds of noises or tempos or rhythms, to me that point because of the jazz and because of being open to more modern and classical music wasn't a problem.

JR: Ok, yeah

RH: It was accepted. Some would say that I was experimental, and I probably would have said I was experimental in '99/ 2000. But actually, it was more experience than experimental, because it was such an eclectic musical upbringing. I'd also say by that time I had an eclectic physical study through popping, breaking, everything. So I stopped using the word fusion a couple of years ago and started saying its an eclectic vision.

JR: Mmm, and it sounds like a result of what you did

RH: Yeah, it was a result of 1999, essentially that's nineteen years of study, basically. So it's not like I kinda fused it, so yeah it's that eclecticism, of just being in these situations. Cause of contemporary I went to contemporary college naively cause I was dancing and I got in, and I'm like yeah ok let's do it [JR giggles], but there were a lot of dancers at the time anyway, like Pheonix, so there was very strong dancing and spinning and so on. And there was a lot of dancers would come to clubs, where I was from. Macmillans which was in Darlington, you'd see some of the Northern dancers... Spinning, doing box splits and all that. It was a kind of again, a mixture.

JR: Do you remember when it was that you first saw popping on stage in the theatre space in the UK?

RH: If I was aware of it it would have been because of Benji Reid. Who I didn't meet until mid 90's, but I was aware of him because he had a reputation as a popper. I would see him and Banksy on "Hit Man and Her" which was Pete

Waterman and Michaela Strachan and basically they went to night clubs pre youtube and kinda filmed night clubs and bands and stuff so you're getting it from a clubbers about 3/4 o'clock in the morning. Mostly in the North West so you're getting it 3 o'clock in the morning and it would be different dancers from Manchester, Benji cause that would be more of a showcase. They'd have a prison suit on and do their thing, in masks. So that was a kind of showcase performance but then I saw the way that Benji's work was in Northern in Nadine's office, there was always a picture of Benji in her office, a portfolio shot. So you kind of see his face every day and you'd hear about his work. So he would have been the first. [pauses] Again I would have seen him perform mid 90's to late 90's, '95, '97. I'd heard of Jonzi in '95. Because I was at Phoenix at the time as an apprentice, and Godiva Marshall was in the company and she'd been working with Jonzi. So I'd hear these echoes of a performance but I didn't see him until about '96/'97.

JR: Ok... Ok. Can you talk a little bit about how you would describe the nature of the relationship between popping and music

RH: Popping is essentially inspired by the snare the two... The two four six and eight so it's that sharp... Shall I click so that you got extra writing [both laugh] that [RH makes sound of kick and snare] as opposed to maybe breaking or locking which is on the one, which is more funk James Brown orientated... And Cameo and so on. But initially when we started to pop it was to Electro, so it was Planet Rock it was quite different sound we got the New York version. So in 2000 when I connected with the Boogaloos I was kind of redirected towards its initial format. But yeah it's essentially the two four six eight.

JR: Ok, great. I know you've made a vast number of pieces for the stage over time, could you tell me a little bit about one or two examples of pieces that you've made with popping for the stage? Any particular ones that stand out or that you enjoyed creating...

RH: I think one of the most popular pieces was *Landscapes* in 2001 which is a trio, which was popping, breaking, contemporary... Billy Biznizz made the music so it was an electronic score, but it had a nice narrative flow to it with different

kinds of rhythms and so on, and actually for one of the end six minutes, Billy did a version of Planet Rock. So he got the kind of beats and used that as a format to change it. But it was electronic it was a 23 minute piece, I think the first version was 30 minutes and it ended up at 22 minutes? So it was having an electronic score but really finding a device and this is where you can use a DJ or a producer, who can cut the music, and can use that 4/4 well-I'd always kind of intro maybe a minute have a graph a minute, so I'd divide the 20 minutes, into maybe 10 sections/8 sections... Of how we could see the music would change, so there'd be a nice flow and narrative and changes. Because the dancers I was working with at the time Frank Wilson who was already a popper, Katie Pearson who wasn't necessarily a popper at the time but when we would kind of teach first and foremost is class is important, because it's the training at that particular time, class maybe two hours two and a half hours. Cause you'd do contemporary dance techniques for the feet and the pli , just to check the lines and so on and then you do popping techniques, then breaking techniques, and at the end the travelling that you'd usually have in contemporary dance, would turn into handstands and floorwork and then it would go into freestyles. That's when we should have been an hour and a half but two hours, maybe two and a half, cause we were just pushing the freestyles.

JR: And that was every rehearsal?

RH: Most of the time it got that way. It would usually be two hours, because we were working hard, we were young. But that was a kind of template so already in class, which probably people don't see is your feeding that physical pallet into the choreography, so when it comes to the creative work then that particular dancer has a choice of whether they want to focus on popping within the creative source, or breaking. So part of the choreography that I gave them had popping in, but then again they had creative choice, basically. So I think with eclectic or you can call it fusion, the preparation is class if there's no preparation, then you haven't kind of identified what particular physical form that you're gonna use, and class is just checking up on it to see where it's at.

JR: Yeah.

RH: See if everything is still working and positions. Then the creative is the creative. Unless if you're doing just popping then obviously you're doing a popping class, then you're defining it that way. And then, the thing about music again because I have such an eclectic experience of music. Because it's on stage and it's not in a club, I've consciously made the choice... Another piece I used, some Iranian drumming music (**Artist: Ramin Rahimi & Tapesh Trsck: Excitement**). Which is incredibly complex. It's 5 minutes and I couldn't even count it it was just bonkers, so I used that specifically because the rhythm was so challenging, that could be like two and half beats eight and a half beats twelve and a half beats I don't know. Every time I danced to it, it got trickier. But that was specifically I made the choice [???] stage so I'm gonna test myself rhythmically. How the dance works or if I use Arvo Part one of his piano tunes, how can this dance fit into that?

JR: Ok.

RH: Because it doesn't have to be 4/4 beat all the time. If there's a melody it's ok I'm going to dance to a melody. I might have to adjust but that's it when I'm making for stage, and that's my choice basically. If you're choreographing, I mean some b-boys especially, if you make that choice to use different kind of music they may hesitate, because they haven't made that adjustment. And I think the point of hip hop dancers, who haven't had that same experience as me. Myself, Benji and Jonzi who were said like, the 3rd... I'll say it like Jonzi, Benji, in order [said with amused tone], and myself who were seen as the kind of, the first wave...

JR: Yeah

RH: All came through contemporary dance as well.

JR: Yeah, so you had that experience.

RH: We kind of had performance experience, and we've kind of understood the level of permission.

JR: Mmm. And do you think you always draw from that experience?

RH: I'm not sure if maybe they would agree but I think that experience allows you to accept the black box, and shows you that it's free, that it's yours to make your own rules. Or break away from the ones we were given at Contemporary. But I think that's quite an important... kind of level of information about our backgrounds, about why we went to the black box and why we weren't afraid to use it in the way that we wanted to.

JR: And can I ask you following on from that... So obviously the relationship between contemporary dance and music, and I'm speaking too broadly here really, cause... Define contemporary dance but if we're talking generally, the set of aesthetics in terms of the relationship is very different for poppers, so can you talk a bit about that?

RH: I think as far as accepting that even though I use abstract music, [???] or Billy Biznizz scratches which were quite kind of, very abstract... Say be-bopish Charlie Parkerish... I was still trying dance to the changing rhythms and beats.

JR: Ok.

RH: Whereas I think what you're saying in contemporary dances that they'll ignore the music?

JR: Sometimes...

RH: Cage and Cunningham... It's justifying its background. I think for me, I choose to stay and dance to the music, whether it's an easy melody to follow or not. I think that's part of the research... My curiosity. Even when I went to the jam yesterday at The Bridge, I hear the old tunes but I don't particularly want to dance to them anymore.

JR: Ok, that's interesting.

RH: I like new rhythms. There's a kind of thirst for new rhythms, to experiment with. Which again engages your body differently. And then there's a potential to change physically, basically.

JR: Ok, yeah. And because you said that you made a kind of conscious choice, knowing that there were differing ways that you could consider that relationship and you made a choice to stay in it regardless of how experimental you were being.. How was that received from a theatrical point of view on the contemporary dance side? Was that ever commented on?

RH: I think when I first came out I was such an enigma, because I came from nowhere, so it was like wow. I think it was a case of them having to readjust to me. Rather than me readjust to them.

JR: Yeah.

RH: So I think because the performers were so good, as well. So you have the music, again with the [???] with the Bill Cosby which was a big solo, which did very well, which was the Bill Cosby monologues.

JR: What was the name of the piece?

RH: Um... 'Two Steps'

JR: Ok.

RH: So we'd tell stories, domestic stories, so I kind of, not that I was miming but I'd do little gestures to go with it, and then I'd dance and then with Billy Biznizz scratching in between. So you had this whole... visual narrative that they hadn't seen before. With the physical narrative and the performance narrative, with the music. So I was given room to let it breathe. Obviously everybody was like, well what's happening Robert? What's this? Because when I say [JR laughs], in '99 when I did my first solo I was immediately contacted by the British Council and they took me to South Africa in March in 2000. And I found the records the Billy

Cosby monologues in Johannesburg. Benji had put an evening together called "Illness", which was the first full popping evening at Lilian Baylis.

JR: Ok, and when was that?

RH: I think that was March... It was just after I came back so it was March/April 2000. No it was April 23rd I think, 2000. And Benji said ah ok, give me like a fifteen minute piece. I came back and I say I'm gonna use these Billy Cosby monologues he's like... "Doesn't make sense". So I said ok, I'll make sense of it. That's when I hooked up with Billy, and then when I made it people liked it, and that kind of expanded and toured for two or three years. Again, maybe some people in the hip hop community didn't like it, but then you also had the spoken word community, 'Apples and Snakes' which was kind of big at the time. So they hooked into it. So you had the different communities, you had the contemporary dance community, the spoken word community, even that time the hip hop community... Cause even with *Aeroplane Man*, the show it just wasn't Jonzi, it was a big show. You had Benji who was part of production, but then you had b-boy Banksy you had Frank Wilson you had Little Tim, you had Colin you had Mark, there was a lot of underground London dancers who had already been in the theatre. So they were kind of interested in it. So you make that choice when you make that kind of work, that it's not a popular piece it's not pop theatre, so you either care or you don't.

JR: Ok... As a choreographer, how do you go about deciding what kind of music that you wanna use for a stage piece and I'm interested to know for you, is that usually you have an idea and then you create music or find music that works or is it the other way round?

RH: It depends, with *Landscapes* and *Verse and Verses* Billy Biznizz made the music, so if there's a strong theme and there's enough time for budget and production, then we'll put the music together. Because it's a lot easier to be in a studio with the performers and for the producer, hip hop call him producer you can call him composer I guess it's the same with Mikey and Kenrick. Billy would be in the studio and we'd talk through ideas and I would give him some sounds, and give him a structure. When I say structure it's about well, this section should

be five minutes, this section should be ten minutes so if it's an hour piece it's how I see it breaking up to try and make it interesting. And then pass it over to Billy, and then have drafts coming backwards and forwards, but for any recorded piece I just collect music and categorise it.... I'll show you [gets laptop out]...

JR: It's gonna come in handy now [said with amused tone]...

RH: It's just collecting because if you think oh I've got a piece to choreograph I need some music, it's pretty tricky. It was harder when it was just CD's [JR agrees, laughing] cause you literally had to be in the CD shop.

JR: Yeah, I remember doing that!

RH: I would try and buy some [???] music and spending money, and it's like, this is not very good.

JR: I remember that, I can't remember what that shop was called that was CD's...

RH: Fopp?

JR: No even before that... What was the place where it always had all the charts all the way to number one and they had the headphones and you could request any... What was the name of that store?

RH: HMV, Virgin...

JR: No even earlier than that, I'm talking like, in the 90's... I can't remember.

RH: These days, I categorize music. So now showing Jo my work music collection [whilst showing me]. Choreography, b-boy breaks, classical, contemporary, disco, electronic experimental, experimental pop, funk, hip hop, house, interesting beats, jazz, latin, music for film... So if I go to contemporary, I colour code stuff.

JR: Oh wow, that's really ordered!

RH: So that, I've already pre-listened to it [RH plays a track as an example]. So I've already colour coded it, so if I'm looking for a particular...

JR: And what does your colour code refer to? What do the colours represent? [pause] I didn't even know you could do that! With the coloured dots...

RH: Yeah. See this like purple/blue is like "code red" or code purple which is great, code red is hot. Amber's like, so-so, green is go, so like here I have orange and purple. So I have two blues [RH plays one of the tracks]. So I guess now it's different learning the lesson from having to go through the CD store and buying music and being stressed even if it's a youth piece and stuff, it's like ok I've got this particular piece... What have I looked at already, and then I will narrow it down. I was talking to Katy P actually the other day when you used to have to go and teach or choreograph and you'd have a separate bag for CD's [JR laughs] and you could kind of scramble so I said I'm taking that bandage off computers and digital media, cause I have everything in my computer. So sometimes I spend a day, two days, going through.

JR: I remember when I started teaching I was later but I had one of those MP3 players but it only held about 10 songs [said whilst laughing] [both laugh].

RH: Basically there's this computer and I have a hard drive with a lot of other music on it as well. So now if I get music, I pre-look at it, listen to it, and understand if it has a particular feel or a sound, whether it's classical, modern or hip hop, it's all in there. Whether I use for stage, or again if I was to work with Billy I'd say, like any producer, Mark Ronson and other producers would go to [???] and say listen to this, listen to this, listen to this. This is kinda what I want.

JR: Ok... Ok, great. If you were to define what skilled musicality is, how would you describe that?

RH: It is dancing to the music and as you say popping its dancing in the pocket of the music. So it's not just the one two three four, it's the off beat, it's the kick

drum, the melody. And being a master of all the hi hat, like ticking is the hi-hat. And when I teach the kids at YDA, I make sure that they recognize the different musical instruments. If you were in a battle situation, you would wanna show your opponent that you understand every instrument in that song. And if you see for instance, your opponent misses the hi-hat, you would tick and make sure that they know and that the judges would know that you understand all the instrumentation. So I think as a popper that would be musicality is understanding every musical instrument, every sound. As well as the harmony and the beat, basically. And going in and out of it. You may dance to one instrument, you may dance to two instruments, so that would be what I call musicality.

JR: Ok, great, thank you. Following on from that, how would you describe the relationship between popping and music compared with maybe other popular and social dance forms.

RH: I just think because it's social, so if it's hip hop music especially the golden era there are certain social dances that just come with it. Or there's a certain groove. Because popping has a certain groove, locking has a certain groove, krump has a certain groove. So it's that initial bounce and groove. And what comes on top of that, are the party dances, whether it's the running man, roger rabbit, even with the shamrock and so on and popping and the ummm.... [demonstrates move] what do you call that?... Saccing.

JR: Oh saccing, yeah. You taught me that!

RH: Certain social dances, that kinda tie in to, they become techniques. So again it's the groove, it's the particular groove, of a particular music. If you think funk music from the '60's/'70's had a particular groove, which fed into locking. And then '75 onwards with electronics that snare, had a particular groove, which lay the techniques onto it and then with breaking and that break, and that repetitive sound would give a certain feel of movement to feed into it, so it is the music and the groove, a particular genre of music if you like.

JR: Mmmm, ok, great.

RH: I think people, it's the kind of groove of the music and the technique is secondary, they're layers. Without the groove it becomes more forensic, sterile if you like? Because you're in a white room and there's no kind of blood, or emotion. The groove is the blood and the emotion if you like.

JR: You've talked quite a bit about your music collection and the fact that you work with an eclectic mix of music, and I just wondered if you could talk a bit when audiences would see a piece that was using popping techniques or aspects of that with music that perhaps they weren't used to seeing that to – could you talk a bit about how you think that affect the relationship when it's placed with music that you don't expect...

RH: I think you have to be more appreciative of the audience that they're kind of intelligent. They know they're not coming to a night club they're going to a theatre. If they're gonna see a Robert Hylton show they would have heard something. Sometimes it's that word hip hop, how we manage the word hip hop in our blurb, in our press. Maybe they haven't heard of Robert Hylton, they just saw hip hop so they kind of tied it to a more generalized or popular notion, commercial notion of hip hop. But usually audience are intelligent these days, or more informed, so they know that this is the theatre space so they're not really sure what they're gonna get. So that's kind of part of it. So I just have this, I deliver to the audience, hopefully they'll like it... Because then you've the, initially it's a contemporary dance audience that will come into my shows, with a few hip hop heads. But then that kinda changed. Now I think because of the success of hip hop theatre, there's more people in hip hop who are audience members who know exactly what the techniques, the history are. So even if you're doing an experimental piece, if you're doing bad popping with it, they're probably like... Well you're doing bad popping. So it doesn't matter what you're doing, basically. But if you have some music and some good dancing, and again initially in my early work it was the performers and the dancing was very good as well, which led it through. As long as the dancing is good, then there's more of a bridge of communication, basically. And I think that's a point – no bad popping...

JR: Yeah, in a nutshell... Could you talk about any pieces that you've seen that feature popping in some way on stage that inspired you or that you think were notable, I'm just thinking for example of all the International companies that have been showcased at Breakin' Convention over the years that it's been running.

RH: I think Frank II Louise still hits the mark.

JR: Yeah, absolutely... I agree

RH: I don't think much of that has been bettered. I first saw it in Amsterdam in '97 I think... '98.

JR: That piece?

RH: Yeah

JR: Wow!

RH: Jonzi and the guys were doing a show over there. Frank, Jonzi, Benji. They didn't do *Aeroplane Man* but they did some of the other work. So I just went over just to hang out, basically. And that's when I first saw Frank II Louise in '97, and we all stayed on his barge, it was a bit mad [JR laughs]. That's when I first saw it and then I saw it again in what was it, 2003?

JR: 2007

RH: 2007

JR: When it toured, that was when it toured.

RH: I saw it then, and I don't think it's been beaten really.

JR: Can I ask with that piece, I know they were working a lot with technology, did they have motion...

RH: No they did another piece after that

JR: Ah it was a different piece, ok, I thought so...

RH: Yeah a different piece after that. They're like kind of...

JR: Cause there's not a lot of information, I've done some research...

RH: No because I think it was quite tempestuous, there was kind of break ups and stuff. Cause I think they had to be convinced to get back together.

JR: Ohhhh, ok.

RH: Which was unfortunate. But that was when they had the Robocop adverts.

JR: Yeah.

RH: But the dancers were all kind of first, second generation b-boys...

JR: Oh ok!

RH: David Collas, Meech...

JR: Ah, was it really?!!

RH: These were all like first, second generation proper b-boys and poppers, underground dancers. Which is why they were so good. And they were very committed. From when they started onstage, they were complete as dancers, their bodies didn't lie, they were completely committed. So they delivered everything, the funk the dance, the theme. It was just well done, basically. Because they were great underground dancers and they were ahead. Because they were coming from, if you think '97, '96, the show [???] made in '96, '97. A lot of people had stopped breaking by '96, '97, so you're looking at a generation who came back to breaking in the early '90's. If it was the same as us you get that point in the early '90's where breaking and popping had been taken away from

you, you've kind of got a job and gone to study and be normal, but I think by the early '90's we were like, I just wanna break, or I just wanna pop. So they were part of that generation who were building the scene, which is why they were so brilliant at it, basically. So I think yeah Frank II Louise is pretty unbeatable. And I think it's timeless as well.

JR: Yeah, I know cause it's so ahead of its time, I was watching a clip of it the other day and even now...

RH: No it is it is. It's ahead of its time, I think they worked with a director as well...

JR: Yeah, cause the way it was staged was so interesting...

RH: But I think it was those particular dancers, were real dancers. Others... Oh god. Oh Skeeter Rabbit, I mean the Electric Boogaloos yes, and Skeeter Rabbit did the robot solo. Skeeter Rabbit was just a hundred percent committed, what I would call a complete body. Complete as in funk, soul, technique, ability to be on stage and perform. You don't see the thinking in the eyebrows or whatever. They just do it, so that. If I watch a popper, I don't want to question their technique on stage, and I don't want to have to start analyzing why they're not in the music. Bad technique, is not being in the music as well as physically bad technique. There's a lot of street dancers, when they do pop they're kind of not complete cause they haven't research it enough to have that completeness. So for me those particular dancers have that completeness.

JR: Sure, cool. And then one last question to finish really. I just wondered if you could talk about if you feel that there are any kind of trends or patterns that you can see with the way that people are staging popping. Maybe that's not the case but is there a direction or anywhere that you'd like to take it?

RH: I think as far as stage and performance, more so some of the European companies which again a lot are more dramaturgies, directors. So you're seeing hip hop work presented on stage but with a kind of contemporary dance finish, if that makes sense. So it's been a lot more produced by them. It's the one... I can't

remember. I think in the UK, let's say Yami, she's telling stories with it now and that all routes down to Jonzi and that kind of, particular thing, that generation. I think this generation, they're telling more stories. When I say this generation, Yami even though she's been around for.. Ivan Blackstock and Birdgang, Kenrick... It's telling more stories as opposed to the street dance stuff, that he would first do. So I guess they've come to tell their stories, which makes sense, because their world is shit here and ours was in the late '80's, do you know what I mean especially with tuition fees and all this kind of crap. So I think that the way that they live their lives it makes sense to tell stories. So I guess I'm seeing less pure dance and more story telling, basically. I'm not sure how many poppers can tell a musical story for an hour...

JR: Yeah, that's a problem isn't it.

RH: There aren't that many. Well actually there are, but it's building the structure to make that happen. When I say structure it's having the mind set, the class system and so on, to build the quality of movement and authenticity in the body to carry whatever that musical narrative may be, basically. Unlike ballet where you can do it in two hours because they have all that movement that the audience that accepts. It's having a big enough vocabulary.

JR: And a structure as well, that's in place.

RH: A structure and a vocabulary to carry it through that the audience will be happy with. If you do a Fresno and so on it's either you're doing the form and you're doing brilliant technique of Electric Boogaloo technique with great patterns and so on... Kind of like a Richard Alston-esque [???], this is form and structure. Try to do the form really well, or experiment with it. Some people are doing it, but again it's having the dancers to change but I think that will come. But at the moment it's more story telling.

JR: Ok, cool. And what about any ideas or anything that you'd like to do with popping?

RH: I wanna make brilliant films but I need about three million quid [JR laughs], basically.

JR: So you're moving more into that side of things now, yeah.

RH: I'd do it on the stage. But I think even to do an hour with the dancers, I don't think six week rehearsal is enough or a two month rehearsal. I think you need a longer playing field of six months to kind of mould not just the body but the mindset of a particular dancer, like the way that we worked together [JR agrees] – it's as much as what you're thinking, that's how your body moves. And that's between five minutes, and an hour. And I think that's one of the things, you can go in and you can choreograph five six seven eight, but then you have that old system this has to be right, it has to be right, which you're not necessarily gonna get the personal story from your dancers. And I think choreographing the mind and when I saw a complete body, it's the mind knowing and the body, so that takes longer, it takes a few months. Maybe a year Jo... [JR laughs].

JR: Thank you.

Appendix E

Interview with Bly Richards (BR)

9th September 2015

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Bly could you start by telling me how long you've been dancing for?

BR: I have been dancing exactly half my life... 16 years.

JR: Cool, and do you remember when it was that you first started learning hip hop specifically? Or house, hip hop and house.

BR: When?

JR: Mmm, like what year?

BR: It was... [BR looks at JR in a way that indicates he needs help calculating].

JR: [Pauses to think] 1999?

BR: 1999!

JR: And how did it come about that you started learning those dance forms and where did you start from?

BR: It came about because, my cousin really. We started to get close, found out we both like Michael Jackson, and then we was round his house watching videos, practicing some moves. And then he mentioned that there was a place that taught b-boying in our town, and he was describing the guy and I'd been to this place before to try and do film making, and I thought oh maybe it's the same place. So anyway we went there and then we spoke to him, and he was like "yeah we do classes", there's actually one tonight, which was like in four hours or

whatever. So then we went home and then came back and then started with breaking and popping at this place.

JR: Ok, cool. And you mentioned that you watched videos that inspired you initially and you mentioned Michael Jackson, can you name any specific videos or examples of videos that particularly inspired you or that you particularly copied from?

BR: From Michael Jackson ones?

JR: Yeah, or generally it doesn't have to be that.

BR: Other than the Michael Jackson ones, it was Run DMC *Its Like That* with the guy with the afro when he does the gliding, along the side I remember I was always trying to do that and a bit of waving. But even with Michael Jackson there was *Thriller* where there's a popping section and we were just trying to work out what it was they was doing, before we knew anything. But that's the part that we liked. It was the popping part.

JR: Cool. Could you just describe your work in the dance world and I know you have quite a few different roles but could you just outline your involvement in dance... Over the last 16 years.

BR: My involvement? [pauses] Well yeah at the place I was I was a student at first, and then I became a teacher because some kids wanted to learn but my teacher was too busy to start a new class so I started teaching. And then I started teaching more, had a little school which kind of grew, so then I had some students that I then trained up to be teachers under me. And one of my students entered a competition and he wanted me to come and support him so I ended up going to London to support him. Ended up entering, winning that, and from that I got to be on "Vibes" agency it was called back then which was the best one in the UK apparently. I got to work for... My first job was for Rachel Stevens, doing the UK tour and then I just thought why not jump on this wave that is happening which was quite different because I was at university doing film making. So I ended up moving to London to be a professional dancer, doing auditions, working

for artists as normal, and then I still wanted to teach so I applied to teach at Pineapple Dance Studios, got a class there. Then started doing workshops in schools and then started teaching at Studio 68 and yeah, mainly teaching.

JR: I know that you've done quite a bit of performing as well in more recent years, can you talk a bit about that? I'm thinking of the stage performing that you've done.

BR: Stage performing?

JR: Yeah... Plague.

BR: Oh! [BR laughs] Oh yeah...

JR: [laughs] You forgot about that!

BR: After I started teaching basically I got into a style called house by seeing a dancer from France called Clara and I was in her group *In Da House* then I kind of started to excel in house, and that's when you could say other dancers started to recognize or acknowledge me in London. And then I got approached by Mukhtar to be in the group Plague. And then the first thing I did with them was a performance at Breakin Convention and then we started doing sets for corporate work and things like that. So with them we've done loads of shows, they've won "Hip Hop International" twice, we did a show in San Francisco, and we had a theatre production show in Blackpool called "MJ Timeless" which was really good first six weeks.

JR: Cool. Can you talk a bit about your musical background, so that might be in relation to dance but it also might be completely independently of dance.

BR: Basically my Dad plays the organ, so since I was little I'd always have a little mess around on his electrical organ, so then at school I took music as one of my GCSE's to do, so I did music and I chose piano. I did wanna choose the saxophone at first, but it was too expensive to get a saxophone.

JR: Ahhh yeah.

BR: It was like £300 or something. So yeah I chose the keyboard and piano, and yeah so I studied music before dance.

JR: And do you continue to learn music now?

BR: When I have time and yeah lately I've been cause youtube is so accessible now watching videos of tutorials of certain songs that I like on the keyboard, and then any time I see a piano in the room I just have a little play on it.

JR: Could you talk a bit about what types of music you like to listen to? And maybe what types of music you like to dance to is quite specific to the forms, but aside from dancing.

BR: I guess everyone says it but I do like all types really, but, I really love garage music. I remember when it first came out I thought yes this is the music it's never gonna die, but then it kind of, did die.

JR: What do you like about it?

BR: Just the vibe, the tempo, the feel. I don't know, I just love it. Obviously I love house music and I specifically loved funky house cause to me that was the new flow of garage, basically funky house is really similar to garage. But I like classical music, obviously through piano pieces that I used to learn as well, R n B I really like, that was my kind of era. Yeah they're the main ones really.

JR: Cool. Can you describe the importance of the relationship between music and dance in your practice as a dancer...

BR: The importance... I don't think there would be dance without music. So it's the life of dance. So it's very important.

JR: And can you give me a bit more detail on how you demonstrate its importance through the dancing that you do? So how do you show that relationship?

BR: Well that's the thing, you dance because of how you feel to music. So it's the music that's telling the story. I see dance as a physical representation of what music would be.

JR: Yep, great. So if you're choreographing a piece or you're making a sequence, how would you go about choosing the music? Maybe you could talk about whether you have an idea for a dance piece and then you find the music or the other way around.

BR: No I always just find a song I like first. And then just, press play, start to dance, and then if I do something I like remember it. And then build and build from there.

JR: So is it quite a freestyle like, so you're improvising.

BR: Yeah, everything is just from whatever happens when I'm listening to the song. Hardly ever.. I guess sometimes there might be an idea of some kind of movement I have in mind, but generally it's just... I'll do whatever and yeah, I like that and just remember it and tweak it maybe a little bit.

JR: Can you talk a bit about a piece that you've either danced in or created (it doesn't matter either way) that you think had a particularly interesting relationship between dance and music?

BR: [pauses to think] I think the first thing that springs to mind is a piece that I did with Plague where it was a piano piece, but our outfit was like a waistcoat and on the back of some of us was white and on the back of others was black so basically we was the piano keys. And we would crouch down so, we'd all have a different timing or note and we would pop up to show that key is being played in time with the music. Yeah, that was a really interesting piece.

JR: Can you remember the name of that piece and when it was and where that you performed it?

BR: I only remember it was for Breakin' Convention, and there is footage online so I can find out when it was.

JR: Do remember roughly what year?

BR: No... Cause we've done Breakin' Convention so many times it's hard to remember which one

JR: Yeah, nearly every year, ok, cool. Could you describe the relationship between popping and music compared with other street dance forms.

BR: I think it's easy to say that popping is probably the most intricate style. So you can pick out a lot more in the music. You can in other styles but say with house, you're more riding the heart of the beat and picking out other instruments but yeah, with popping you can be really specific with certain sounds and accurate because you can be so clean with a movement that its obvious. Whereas with a style like house or hip hop cause you generally have a flow with it it kind of disguises the movement whereas with popping sometimes it can be really static so you can really emphasise the tiniest detail

JR: Can you give an example?

BR: What do you mean?

JR: Just like any old example I mean like what you could do in terms of intricacy, just to bring it to life...

BR: Hmm, depends on what you want to pick out in the music, but say if there's the hi-hat, the snare and then a melody you can easily jump from one to the other but still make them all really obvious. Whereas in house maybe I'd be doing something with my feet and then something else on top but it's not that

obvious cause there's a lot more... I don't know cause it's really difficult to say. But I think popping is one of the styles that I prefer watching the most because it does show musicality, really clear.

JR: Ok, cool. Can you remember when the first time was that you saw popping in a theatre space?

BR: Yeah I do actually, it was in Huddersfield at the Lawrence Batley theatre, and I was watching a piece by Jonzi D and Benji Reid called *Aeroplane Man*.

JR: Great, and do you remember what year that was even if it's rough...

BR: I would have to say... 2000?

JR: Ok, cool. And can you talk a bit about your reaction to when you saw that piece?

BR: I can't remember if we actually did, but I know that it must have been in the evening or night time, but as soon as we finished watching it we wanted to get to the studio and practise.

JR: Ahhhh, that's cool... How would you define skilled musicality? So if you were going to describe a dancer as having skilled musicality, how would you break that down?

BR: I would say, someone who's not so skilled would pick out the obvious tempo of the music, just the generic tempo whether that's the kick, hi-hat and snare. Whereas someone that is more skilled, will listen deeper into the music and pick out sounds that you may not be aware of unless you really focus and try and find them with the music. So yeah someone that's skilled, they bring sounds to your attention, so when you watch them you're like "ahhhh I never heard that", or "that was clever". So yeah they bring you into the music to hear things that you wouldn't normally hear.

JR: Ok so would you say it changes the experience of listening

BR: Yeah, definitely.

JR: So this could be within popping but it can also be within house and hip hop or whatever you want to speak from, but how would you train your musicality as a dancer? Can you give me some examples of what you would do to improve your musicality or work on it. Or, do you think it's something that you can improve?

BR: Oh yeah definitely. I remember when I did music at school and one of the tasks was to write down all of the instruments you can hear in the song, and yeah, I couldn't hardly hear anything if I'm honest I think I picked out the drum maybe and the snare or something, something really obvious. And then it turns out there was the guitar in there, there was the bass, there was so many things but I just, couldn't hear them. So until you have it in your conscious decision to listen and try and pick them out then you're not really aware of it but, it's definitely something that can be trained. And it's just about putting your focus and trying to understand and listen further, so yeah, definitely something that can be trained. Some of the things I would say is firstly, to just do that, just listen to music, and listen to everything that you can possibly hear in the song. And then what I would do is pick out one instrument, and just dance to that instrument only, so just dance to the kick, then I would do it with the hi-hat then I'd do it with the snare, then I'd do it with the bass or some kind of melody, or the vocals. Just literally pick out everything, but I would dance to just that so I fully understand it, and then I see it as like a playground, so you have these different types of rides. So then when you want to mix it all together you can jump from the bass to the hi-hat to the vocals back to the bass to the kick to the melody and literally, yeah just have fun in the playground.

JR: So as a teacher and from a teaching perspective now, what kinds of things might you do in a class if you wanted the students to be thinking about musicality.

BR: I would do, basically all of that but normally I would have a song in mind that demonstrates a certain sound that might be really obvious but it's not one of the

base sounds in the song, like the core sounds, and get them to try and pick it out, whether they do or don't then we would do an exercise on that sound, so only dancing to that sound. Which then brings them more awareness of that sound. And then I would play another song and get them to try and pick out something else that they should be able to pick out because of what they practised on the previous song.

JR: Ok. Could you talk about a particular piece that you feel particularly inspired you, with particular reference to musicality and popping.

BR: I know what you're on about... Talk about the piece or...

JR: Just give me an example of a piece...

BR: It would be a piece that was at Breakin' Convention by Frank II Louise, where they was dressed as like, robot alien things you could say, and every movement had a like a mechanical sound and then it was turned into like a routine, and then the mechanical sounds actually formed a rhythm or a song... And yeah every movement just coincided with the sound effect and, it's hard to tell what was causing what whether the sound was causing them to move or whether they were causing the sound.

JR: And do you think is that why it was inspiring... For that reason?

BR: It was inspiring for that reason, also I love robotics and robot sounds but because I love things like stomp, where basically sound effects are then put together to create a song or something musicality. It kind of had a story to how it built up into this full on movement song, so that as well.

JR: Cool. And is there any other piece that you can think of as well that's been inspiring in terms of musicality and that doesn't have to be popping specifically?

BR: A piece on stage?

JR: Yeah on stage.

BR: Because I went recently, so it rings a bell. I went to see *Lord of the Dance*. It was onstage but not on stage, but the guy who created *Lord of the Dance* at the end he had a projection of himself doing tap dance, and he had multiple images of himself so one of him would do something then the other would do something else, but yeah, I think that was inspiring because again, I wish I learnt tap, because of the relationship with sound and music and you can literally hear what the movement is, but yeah what he did was really amazing.

JR: And aside from dance pieces on stage in terms of musicality and uses of music and movement are there any other places that you find inspiration from?

BR: Apart from on stage?

JR: Yeah.

BR: Just every day. Wherever you are. If I'm walking, or people are walking there's a woman and you can hear her shoes or whatever clacking, then normally I'll maybe mess around and add a little clap in there or something [JR laughs] to create a rhythm. But yeah, it's just sounds yeah.

JR: Cool. Can you identify or pin point any trends or patterns that you think are developing in the way that companies and dancers and artists are working with music?

BR: A pattern?

JR: Yeah, or just anything that you think has changed over time or similar ways that people are presenting musicality on stage in dance?

BR: At present, I think it's harder to say, whereas a few years ago I think there was definitely similarities in dance groups I can say in London, and how they

wouldn't just use music as a soundtrack but they would just use, like sound effects, random sounds effects like maybe a cymbal, a whoosh or some kind of explosion. And then their soundtracks would be more like sound effects rather than music, so then everyone was really tweaking their routines to go to these sound effects which I think Plague was one of the groups that first started that movement, and then yeah there was just a correlation of loads of other groups basically doing the same thing, so they all looked really really similar. Whereas nowadays that's kind of fizzled out and people are using whole songs so... To find a trend isn't so obvious.

JR: Ok... So you think people are going back to using one song...

BR: Yeah, full music yeah.

JR: What about types of music, in terms of style or do you think it's quite varied?

BR: In terms of groups or?

JR: Doesn't have to be groups, just generally...

BR: I don't know because again it depends on what area you're looking at. Because with the dance competitions, they're quite varied in terms of, people are using different styles like house, funk songs, hip hop songs but they're referring to songs from the past that may have been popular. But for that reason as well, a lot of the groups are doing that so they are quite similar, even though they're trying to have variation to what they're playing but they're all doing that thing of playing popular songs that was back in the day.

JR: Ok. And you do have any kind of predictions or ideas about what you think might happen next or what way you think it's going to go, in terms of the way that people are using and selecting music?

BR: I think that potentially it may kind of do a full circle and go back to when people was creating them sound effects in random parts of the music to enhance movements, but rather than them do it I think a lot of music nowadays is getting

quite intricate and almost like that anyway, so rather than being a general song that just has the same timing same tempo, there's... I forgot what style it is. There's a new style of music you could say that's coming out that I heard quite a lot, and then I heard it the other day at my friends house and I asked it about it and he said that he's got a playlist of this type of music. But it's almost like what people would have produced to create dance routines to, back in the day, but that is the norm for this type of music nowadays, which isn't aimed at dancers but it's something that I think a lot of dancers are gonna start using that style of music.

JR: Ok... When dancers or choreographers use music that wouldn't necessarily be traditionally be associated with the dance form that they're using how do you think that impacts on what is seen from an audience point of view?

BR: It's a tricky one because it can be seen two ways. On one side, people don't really get the full understanding of the style of dance because that style of dance was created or how its done was because of the style of music it was done to. So together they're like a complete package and it makes sense. So I guess some people don't get that full understanding if it's then danced to something else. But at the same time dancing to something completely different to what the style was created to, gives it a whole new feel and energy through the way it's done. So therefore it's being innovative and completely different and unique.

JR: And can you think of any examples where you've seen that happening?... Where you think that's done successfully or... Interestingly.

BR: Well, because you showed me, because I just watched it recently the piece that Turbo did to some piano music where he was mixing like every street style that he knows in there, hip hop, popping, krump, house.. But everything was yeah to the piano piece. So that really stood out. But at the same time it works, and you can still see... His krump wasn't... Some people could say it wasn't krump, because it wasn't done the way krump is done but you could still tell it was krump or krump influence but put to a piano piece. It made it very different but it was still really interesting to watch, and it made you wanna watch the whole

piece or story, because he was switching from different styles but on the same kind of music so it made it interesting to watch.

JR: And do you think that can be done successfully with all types of music or do you think particular types of music work better than others if you're gonna pick something that isn't, that doesn't... Like if you're gonna pick popping and you're not gonna pick a funk track you're gonna pick something else, do you think there's some types of music that pair nicely or more nicely than others.

BR: Yeah definitely. For one I don't really listen to rock music anyway, but I don't think that would pair that nicely with it. Whereas I think maybe cause I have a love for it as well but I think house music kind of pairs with a lot of styles, or you can easily do styles to house music.

JR: Why?

BR: Maybe the tempo and maybe the flow of the beat, just the constant kick. A lot of funk music, disco music it was all quite similar and evolves around that same kind of 4/4 timing with a constant kick, so it's quite easy to do popping to it, locking to it, hip hop to it, obviously house to it. So I think yeah for that reason of tempo and the kick, the kick and the snare, it's quite easy to drop anything on it.

JR: And do you have any particular ideas or things that you'd like to do in relation to dance and music and creating in terms of choreography, is there anything that you'd like to make?

BR: There's loads of things, I guess I would like to do a short film involving dance inspired by the music so the soundtrack. Kind of like, not a... musical. Is it a musical, them films where you sing along?

JR: Yeah! That's a musical, yeah.

BR: Yeah, nothing cheesy like that. But I guess kind of on that scope, but with urban styles and urban music. Yeah I think something like that would be cool.

Incorporating that into a short film, don't know if you've seen Birdman? But the way they did their soundtrack was really interesting they had, have you seen it?

JR: no...

BR: They had a drummer, but he was placed within the film so there might be a scene walking down the street and we can hear music being played, which sounds like the soundtrack but then we would go past an actual drummer who's actually playing what you're hearing. So the way that they incorporated the visuals with the music into the story of the film I think was really interesting. So that's what I kind of want to do for a dance piece somehow.

JR: And the fact that you play piano, and that you've got a background where you've played music, how much do you feel that that influenced your dancing? Or did your dancing influence the music?

BR: I would say I did the music first, so I would say the music influences my dancing yeah. I think one of the things I do ask a lot when I teach, is how many people have actually studied music, and hardly ever have dancers studied music which I find really bizarre if they have such a love for dance they should have a love for music so why wouldn't you study music. I think it helps a lot, and like I said even the way I listen to different layers of music and understand different timings is because of, I studied music, and I think that shows through the way I teach as well... And my freestyle.

JR: Mmm. And do you feel like you can tell quite quickly, if you're teaching students or watching dancers, is it quite obvious?

BR: Who studied music and who hasn't?

JR: Yeah maybe, or how musical people are.

BR: I think it's difficult to tell who has studied music and who hasn't because you don't have to study it to really understand it you just have to have a love for music, but I think it's quite obvious to who's musical and who's not. Like within

the first few seconds of watching someone I can kind of tell how good they are at musicality, or if they just dance to the basic tempo of a song.

JR: How do you tell that in a few seconds?

BR: By what they dance to. If they're still dancing to the same instrument, or if they're jumping and picking out different parts of the song.

JR: Oh I see, ok. Thank you.

Appendix F

Interview with Fred Folkes (FF)

3rd November 2015

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Fred, could you start by telling me how long you've been dancing for?

FF: Since I was a little kid, since I was five years old, four years old at home. My introduction to it is very social in terms of people coming over the house, or going to a party with my parents or something like that. Watching, more than doing. But it's very much a part of our culture, our history, to dance or to enjoy music with dance.

JR: Sure. Could you tell me when you first saw popping, and how you came to get to know about popping...

FF: First time I saw popping was probably around 1981, maybe '82. A group of friends, all around the same age, so we would have been nine, nine or ten something like that. And my friend's brother, older brother was in a dance crew called “Sidewalk”, and they popped and they locked, and they were one of the first London crews actually. There was a VHS video that had loads of little clips on it, video clips, and it's interesting because this is when the whole video era really started with the videos to popular music. There was some videos that were done to music, and some of them were interviews that were on documentaries so this tape just had... His brother we'd call his brother “T” right, so it was called “T's tape”, and only certain people saw this tape so everyone in T's circle, and they the original UK hip hop people, they all had this tape, and it went around, and because my friend was T's little brother he's sneak us into the house and be like “yeah my brothers not in watch this tape”

JR: Oh wow

FF: And that was my first time that I saw Electric Boogaloos, footage of Sugapop and Popin' Pete, Skeeter Rabbit, and there was a guy, there was a video, and the guy who was dancing on it and this is actually on youtube, his name is Captain Hollywood, and he's dancing to a song that was popular at the time called "Packjam" which is by the Johnson Crew, and what he was doing on that video was just ridiculous. It was full on, I mean at that time, backslide, that's the first time I saw that. And this is round about the time that Jeffrey Daniels came here, if you know about Jeffrey Daniels.

JR: Yeah...

FF: But the problem with that was, Jeffrey Daniels came on Top Of The Pops and did his backslide and did a bit of popping, but this tape had people that were better than him at it, do you understand what I mean [JR makes sounds of understanding] so when everyone was going mad about "Ahhh did you see Jeffrey Daniels!" we were like "really". It was cool but, we've seen the tape. So yeah this tape had loads of videos on it, Gladys Knight and the Pips was on there, what else, I can't remember... There was loads of stuff on this tape, and that was my first exposure to it. Then Jeffrey Daniels did his whole performance, he came over here to perform on Top Of The Pops and various other shows and he was doing like the Backslide and just little bits of popping, and that was the first major exposure of that style to this Country.

JR: Ok, wow. And can you remember when you first saw it on stage live?

FF: Probably when we were doing it! [both laugh] Well [pauses to think], my experience goes hand in hand with the UK or the London hip hop experience, because the London hip hop experience encompassed art, music and dance, and the dancers in particular were mainly first popping and locking and then breaking. So it's, I would say between late '81 to '83. The first time on stage, what happened was you had a lot of kids doing it in parks and youth centres and so on and so forth, and then they wanted to do competitions. So the first time on stage would probably be like '82 in the competition. Some of the bigger crews, the older guys that were well known, they were doing shows. So Sidewalk did shows, and then when that disbanded then London Allstar Breakers they did

shows. So the show thing was more, you had to be at a particular level to want to do that. With the group that I was in after we started to win quite a few things for our age category, then we started to do shows. But in order to get anyone to want to watch you, you had to be someone first, so you had to have battled some people, or won some competitions as a crew before you could step on the stage and say “yeah we’re gonna do a show”, you couldn’t just do that, you had to earn it [both laugh].

JR: So when you started to learn the style, what kind of music did you dance to?

FF: Electro, straight up. It was not funk, we didn’t know anything about that. Even though I had heard funk music because my parents played it, and the music that they played, my Mum was into James Brown, but they were into reggae and in Jamaica they started to experiment with funk in reggae, so I was familiar with it. But I didn’t know there was a dance to that style of music, do you understand what I mean. So, electro was big at that time, and we were dancing to that.

JR: And roughly when was that?

FF: This was early ‘80’s... ‘83. And then of course ‘83 when Breakdance came out, Beatstreet and these type of things, we didn’t know that the music that accompanied those films was not the music they were dancing to on screen. When they were doing their battles they were dancing to something else. So we then took on that music as “oh my god, these fantastic dancers are dancing to these songs – these must be the songs to dance to”, so we totally was going in the wrong direction. So those songs became popular, which was great for the film makers, and the electro. There was an album that was around at the time called “Street Sounds”, and they did “Street Sounds Electro” “Street Sounds” did various different genres of music, but there was “Street Sounds Electro”, I think it went from one to eight, so it was “Street Styles Electro 1”, “2” and then they kept putting these albums out, and they had you know, the latest electro tunes on, and then you had radio shows as well that were playing.

JR: Ok, and when did it swap, when did you start dancing to funk music?... And why?

FF: Not until, not until like the 2000's. Because, you gotta remember we were doing this dance from lets say, lets say from '81 to late '85, and then it wasn't cool anymore.

JR: Ok

FF: And then from say, from '86 to '90 was the golden era of hip hop music. So then the dance changed into more what we call the hip hop party dances. So no one was popping anymore, do you know what I mean, not really. It wasn't a popular dance to do so we started doing that style of dance, so yeah. So basically so, from '86 to '91 it was about these hip hop dances, and then it stopped. People still kind of did it, but it wasn't the thing anymore. And then it went kinda quiet, yeah. And then...

JR: Did you ever dance to new jack swing?

FF: Yeah, yeah. But that was at that time, yeah. Then the next thing that hit was in the late '90's, was the speed garage, that hit. And I was involved in that because my friends were producers of those songs. So no one was thinking about popping then, it was gone. And then what happened was the same friend that introduced me to T's tape, his little brother, contacted me, he just lived round the corner from me and said to me that he's got a DVD, it could have been a DVD or a video... Of Electric Boogaloos. And I was like, shut up, they're not still dancing, no way. And he brought this thing round and it had Taco, Sugapop, Wiggles, Skeeter Rabbit doing a show, and it was dumb. Because you know they were better, than when I had seen them when I was a kid they were better they were older, and the stuff that I saw then was crazy. And then what was happening was Mr Wiggles was putting out DVD's, instructional DVD's, so really the person that really got me back on this was Wiggles, seeing Wiggles. And at that time I didn't know him. So yeah, he really broke down in his DVD's that there was a style, there was a fashion, there was music and so on and so forth, and then round about that time I met them, and that was it.

JR: You were hooked [JR laughs]

FF: Yeah, yeah. Well they taught me... They taught me so.

JR: So could you just briefly describe your work and involvement in the dance world?

FF: Ok first of all my, aside from dancing my background is in fitness. I started working in fitness in 1990 and finished working in the industry in 2010. In 2002/3, was when I started to learn from Electric Boogaloos. In 2005 is when I started teaching that style. 2006 or 7, 2007 is when I met Campbellock Junior, and then I assisted him, and managed him in Europe. So I handled his affairs when he was travelling from America to Europe to teach, and assisted him. And my job in his class was to teach the importance of training, because that's the background that I came from. But because I had an interest in the dances, I was very much interested in learning, so I was learning from him whilst working for him. As far as Electric Boogaloos are concerned when I first met them I was very interested in how they managed to stay doing this dance for this long without injuries.

JR: Oh yeah!

FF: And they were really surprised as to why I was interested in that, cause no one had ever asked them about their knees or their back. So, when they realized the background that I had in training, it was more like an exchange, because I talked to them about glucocyminesulphate and [???] and stuff like that and then I was taken in, Sugapop and Pete.

JR: Cool, cool. Could you talk a little bit about... big question actually, but could you talk about the importance of music when you're learning popping?

FF: Ok, this sort of goes on from the last question as well. Because of my fitness background I realized how important preparation was for everything, yeah, and that came purely from a fitness perspective. When I then met these guys who had still been doing it all that time and spoke to them, I realized that, Skeet and Pop were heavily into sport, heavily into training. And they were the people that didn't have any problems.

JR: Ah, interesting, yeah.

FF: Yeah... So I put two and two together. So the funny thing about teaching was, I actually didn't wanna do it. All I wanted to do was use the knowledge that I had to get myself back into something that I loved, right. When I started doing it, certain people that were around me would come, they'd be like, "oh can I come down" so they'd come and we'd do some kickboxing and then we'd do some dancing, right. I used the teaching ability that I had through training people in training people how to do certain things within popping, yeah. Now one of the things that I learnt from the guys that was everything to this dance was music, yeah. Was the understanding of the different sounds, was the understanding of the drum, was the understanding of the connection with certain movements, to that particular sound. A lot of the things that we do a lot of the techniques are actually built on these particular sounds like ticking on the hi-hat and so on and so forth. Without the music, the importance of dancing on the one wouldn't be there, we would just dance for no reason do you see what I'm saying.

JR: Yeah...

FF: Now, within the Electric Boogaloo style because it leads to one person, which is Boogaloo Sam, right, and then when you hear what Boogaloo Sam says when he talks about dances that were done to a particular style of music that preceded him, so then he takes it back to the '50's and '60's.

JR: Sure.

FF: And certain songs and certain music and certain dances that influenced him to create that style, do you see what I mean...

JR: Yeah...

FF: So, to answer the question music is everything. Without it, the dance doesn't exist. Technically, we can contract and release our muscles, it doesn't necessarily mean we're doing this dance, do you see what I'm saying, because

actually everything we do is a muscle contraction so [both laugh] but we're not all popping.

JR: So you're popping right now [laughs].

FF: Exactly, so...

JR: Ok, great. Could you describe what you would define skilled musicality to be, so if you're describing a dancer to have skilled musicality...

FF: Being able to embody what they hear, mixed with what they feel... Yeah.

JR: Yeah.

FF: So hearing something, and being able to describe it is difficult. Hearing something and being able to show it, I would say is skilled musicality... With emotion. So having an emotional connection to your movement, inspired by the music.

JR: Great. When you create work could you talk a bit about how you go about thinking about which music you would choose and how you make decisions about music.

FF: Ummmm, it depends on which platform you're gonna do it on. I mean it's quite funny when people see what I'm doing at the minute. It depends on, if it's on TV or if it's on the stage it's slightly different. It depends on the audience. If you're gonna do a performance for a hundred people you know, or you're gonna do a performance for 14 million people it's kinda different, do you see what I'm saying. TV's a whole different beat. Looking at what I'm doing now with the whole OMG thing we look at certain songs and how well they did the chart at that particular time. So we know that if we use that particular song it's gonna trigger the emotion in these people, that know nothing about dance. So it's a different ball game. If I was doing a popping show, in front of an audience that understood popping it would be a whole different ball game. What I would do on Britain's Got

Talent and what I would do on.. You understand what I mean. So it really does depend on the audience, it depends on the music again going back to music, and it depends on what the story, what is it that I want to achieve on that stage, what is it that I would like the audience to experience or to feel. And then this would then make me think about the musical choices, that would help me.

JR: And obviously with popular and social dance forms there's often a very profound relationship to music, but could you talk a bit about what makes the relationship between popping and music quite unique compared with other dance forms.

FF: Because we do certain things on certain sounds.

JR: Ok...

FF: If a particular sound isn't there, we generally don't do a certain movement. But you can, it's kind of a bit weird. For example the hi-hat, usually we would do ticking on it, right. But if that wasn't there you could still use that to fill the space in between the kick and the snare, do you understand what I mean it's kind of hard to explain. So there's so many different ways of looking at it or understanding the music. Some of the things are really difficult to explain, do you see what I'm saying, with us the funniest thing is, is most people who do this dance do it from an internal perspective do you understand what I mean, so they unfortunately for us, they can show you more than they can tell you. You have to really sit down and think about why you did something, and sometimes you don't remember, if you see what I mean. But I think the connection with music, even though a lot of people that you speak to may not say this or understand it, but I think the power of the drum is something that has been around for centuries and has been used in many different ways. Whether it be war, or fighting, or joy, or religion. So I think there's something in that as well. You know what I mean. There's something that seems to get into our soul when we hear certain sounds, and I think that's very difficult to understand why, but I think there's a very deep reason as to why the drum moves us so much.

JR: Sure.

FF: Do you see what I mean?

JR: Yeah, absolutely.

FF: When a lot of us pop it's not to show anyone anything. If I hear a song and it moves me, I do that, it's almost instinctive, yeah.

JR: It's like, seeing the music I guess.

FF: Yeah, yeah yeah. It moves you and when I teach the students I often try to explain this, and I do it by getting behind them and resting my arms on their back, and I say this is what it feels like when you hear music and I just walk forward and they have to move cause I'm usually bigger than them [said whilst laughing], and I'm like, it just moves you there isn't anything you can do you just go with it, and we tend to express ourself with this particular way of dancing.

JR: Sure...

FF: If I could do ballet maybe I'd do that but I can't.

JR: And I think, kind of very closely following on from that, as a teacher and a dancer how do you think that you can train musicality. Because it's so connected to a feeling, and also how in the same sense, is it possible to teach that?

FF: Right ok something that I said today in my class right. The guys were doing something, I asked them to show me something that I had taught them, and they did it pretty well. And one of the comments that I said to them was "we need to try and find a way for you to dance this now. You've got it, you understand it, but you're not really dancing it" and they was a bit puzzled and I said, "I wish I could take you to the club". I wish I could take you to the club, and then I looked them and I said "but no alcohol" [JR laughs] and we just dance all night, good music and we just dance all night. In terms of how to teach it, what I tried to do, because I'm a DJ as well, what I try to do is to move them. I try to create that atmosphere in the classroom, of hearing something that just moves you, you

know. And I play a lot of different styles of music, a lot of different music and watch their reactions. And then if they react, like today I was playing a lot of late '70's early '80's funk, and it went down really really well. Before they even popped, I put the song on and they were grooving, so I knew that we were in a good place. The people who usually are quite stiff and rigid, loosened up a little bit more. So I knew I was in the right place, so it has to be, even though there's so much information and there's set things to learn and so on and so forth, I always try to get them by the experience, they have to experience the joy of this particular music.

JR: Ok

FF: If you go to a popping class, and you hate funk, you're in trouble [JR laughs]. If rock music is your thing, you're in trouble. Even though it's so diverse, maybe we can find something cause I've got some funky Jimmy Hendrix, do you see what I mean. But to teach it, I think they have to experience it in real life, by being more social and if not, and I have ran into students who completely are studio based, and they're very hard to teach. Because you know, if you don't want to dance with somebody, if you don't want to have fun, if you don't want to smile and laugh and sometimes be a bit silly, if you don't want to tell a story, if you don't want to be a scarecrow [both laugh]. If you're mind can't think about what that is and how it looks and how it would move, and what is it trying to say, if you can't go on that journey then you're in trouble. So it's about their imagination.

JR: Following on from that with the kind of characters and the imagination side of the dance, could you talk about the influences that you've encountered maybe a few examples connecting to things like cartoon and character...

FF: Well I mean this particular dance comes from black culture, yeah. In this country our influence was Carribean more than it was America. Now, maybe America but originally it was more the Carribean cause my parents came from the Caribbean. In America, a lot of the people there didn't have a connection to the Caribbean or to Africa; they're just like American, or African-American. But, the connection is cool. So when you're looking at breaking or you're looking at popping or you're looking at locking and you're looking at the Latino community

and you're looking at the Black community, it's very much about learning something and making it look easy. Putting it over in a very, I wouldn't say relaxed but...

JR: Quite aloof maybe...

FF: Yeah, it's look at me, this is easy, but it's really hard.

JR: Sort of effortless.

FF: Yeah, effortless, yeah. It's all about that. It can be very sexual, because actually I was talking to Tony Basil and she was like first of all the dance is very very black in the sense that the guys at that time were very cool. And they wanted to be very cool and they were very stylish, and they were very interested in women and very interested in showing off. If you don't understand that it's gonna be hard to learn it, do you understand what I mean. If you're doing this for a trophy, you know, I just did class and we were doing glides and slides, so we were doing front slide back slide side glide, and everyone was doing it dadada. And I put on a very cool, sexy RnB song, and partner danced with one of the girls, doing those moves, and it blew them away. Went up to her and danced around her, linked her arm, front slide with her spun her around and did the backslide and they were, jumping up and down going crazy. And I was like, this is normal, you see what I'm saying because...

JR: It's the same movement.

FF: Exactly! It's the same movement, just a different emotion do you see what I mean so there's certain things that, if people don't get, if you're not prepared to... We say to people all the time you need to go to the club you need to go to the club, students go to the club go to the club, and they don't do it, and it's something that they're missing, cause when you go to a club and, it doesn't matter who it is, but you pick up on a vibe with someone else and you start dancing with them, you can't learn that in the classroom. And if you don't experience that, I'm not saying you can't learn the dance I think it would take you a lot longer to learn the dance, do you see what I'm saying

JR: Sure, yep.

FF: When I'm creating something, it's right when it feels right. There's a feeling that you have, I know how boogaloo is supposed to look. I understand the character, I understand the music and the feel, and the style. And I use those things to guide me, when I'm being creative. If it feels a bit wacky... When I'm around Pete we always laugh about it, he'll do something in his class and I'll start laughing and I'll say that's that Fresno swagger, and he'll be like "yeah you know what I'm talking about!" like "yeah yeah yeah yeah!" and everyone else is like what? Because there's something that Sam does, that is very Fresno, and that's kind of a little bit country yeah. There's something that they have, this swagger, a way that they do certain things, that is very much Electric Boogaloo. And how do you teach that? It's the moment where you show a move to the class, and it's not technically difficult, but they flip out, because it's so stylish.

JR: Ok, ok.

FF: And that's what it is.

JR: So it's not necessarily the technical movement but what's going on ...

FF: But the thing is, the thing that makes it a little bit difficult, is why did you do that. Do you understand what I mean it's understanding what was it in the music that made you wanna do that at that particular time.

JR: Ok, ok...

FF: Yeah. Now if I'm in the club if me and you were in the club and we're, you know chilling and maybe there's someone that I've got a problem with from a dance perspective and I wanna go and settle that. Or, maybe I see someone that I like, you understand right then and there why I did what I did.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

FF: Do you understand what I mean...

JR: Sure.

FF: Why I look back on my walk out, why I you know, snarled or whatever you understand but in the classroom, I have to set that up. It's difficult, it's not impossible but it's difficult, so for me I'm thinking about these little things all the time. How am I going to get this across. If we were in the club, it would be kind of easy, you know, or if I was just goofing around it would be easy because, you understand it because of the setting, yeah.

JR: Yeah, that makes sense.

FF: But the studio has a dead setting, and we have to go and create the vibe, the environment for them to learn in.

JR: Ok, yeah that makes sense... Could you comment on popping being used to all kinds of genres of music (I'm just thinking of some of the work we've seen in breakin' convention where that often happens), notably a lot of classical music... Could you comment on what you think that presents?

FF: I understand why this has happened. A lot of the innovators and pioneers of the style have from the '80's played around with these things. Dancing to classical and so on and so forth. I think from a theatre and show perspective, I think it's kind of important to show that it does have that cross-over. Even though it's not about that. But I don't have a problem with it, I've seen some very good work to different styles of music. Because music's always changing, you know, fifteen years ago there was dubstep.

JR: Yes.

FF: Okay, so if you listen to dubstep and the way that they programme their music, then you understand why something that was done in the '80's vibrating that disappeared is now back, because the sound is there. So I couldn't say locking and popping should only be done to funk, because I don't know what's

coming out tomorrow. And some of the movement is now (which is weird!) is inspiring the musicians, it was never like that. So you have people who are making popping beats.

JR: Yes...

FF: Yeah, and they've got [makes buzzing sound effect], they've got this type of movement in there because of what they've seen. So I can't frown upon it but the thing is when you see it, when you see it done to the music that it was made up to, it's very special. You know what I mean, because you know there was other music around at that time, there was other popular music around, but this particular sound, these movements were made on these sounds. So I think that if there was a ruling saying, from now on popping can only be done to classical, I think that the flavour, there's an essence that would be lost. And it would probably start to become something else, and actually I've seen that happen, with a lot of the music that's being used now, the competition popping looks different

JR: It looks different, yeah!

FF: If you look at b-boy champs 2005/2006 and look at the popping contest, people were turning up and they had suits on, and they had hush puppies and hats and so on and so forth. So they danced a certain way. Now, that's not really happening so much, and the music is faster, and it doesn't really have, it's not complex... And it's very straight because it's done on the computer, so it's very straight. The tempo stays the same throughout, the style of dance has changed, it's different. But, you know music... We'll always follow that so.

JR: Yeah, I mean it made me think of the pop shop and Popin' Pete was experimenting with all kinds of music and then one of the girls, she was into folk and he said "I'll dance to anything" and she brought in this crazy folk music, and I don't know if it was in seven, or something like that [FF laughs], and he danced a straight 12 minutes to it [JR laughs], and everyone was like "what the heck!"

FF: But the thing is again, to really experience exactly what you just said, what you have to do is get him to dance to that song, and then put something funky on. And I'm sure that he danced phenomenally to that song, but when you bring him back on that funk, it's just something else. You're gonna see something else.

JR: It's just something else, yeah! For sure [both laugh]. And then, can you describe any patterns or trends that you maybe feel might develop in the future or are starting to develop between ideas of dance and music.

FF: wow...

JR: Maybe more specifically, could you talk a bit about this idea of the blow up in battles, and how dancers kind of wait for this, moment...

FF: The thing is... wow this is a big one. [FF pauses] I think a lot is being lost because of that. People who know nothing about the history, and they're not learning about it. And they're seeing these battles. And they're seeing this blow up on this particular sounds and dadada. I think that if you don't have the people who are there, who are teaching history within music and that sort of stuff, then I think the style's just gonna get smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. Looking at it on the surface, my next birthday I'm 44 years old, right. I'm not about to go be in no battle, yeah. But I will be in the club. I will be dancing with my kids. I will be doing this dance as a form of expression, yeah. What you're gonna experience in that context and what you're gonna see on the stage or even what you're gonna see in the battle is totally different, and I think even though those things have their place, I look at them as... They are a door that invites people in. Because there's so much more, you know. In terms of if anything's gonna come in new or, I don't know. The dance a lot from what I thought it was when I first saw it. What I saw, and what we did was two totally different things. And now I understand when I go back and look at the footage, I understand that they're funk dancers, do you get what I'm saying. Even though when Electric Boogaloos came over here in '83 and they performed at Notting Hill Carnival, they gave them an electro song to dance to, do you understand what I mean. That's what they gave them. But that's not what they were dancing to, do

you see what I mean, so. I think the music can only answer that question. In ten years time I don't know what the music will be, if it's funky then.

JR: Hopefully the dance will be funky [laughs].

FF: Well, yeah, I mean if it's funky then it will change. The younger dancers now who are really funky, who are really good at popping, they're not dancing to the old songs. They're dancing to new songs but the new songs are funky, do you see what I mean. So as soon as that funk and that soul is taken out of it, I think the dance will change and become something else. And as well you see a lot of people who are popular who are good at movement but they're not funky.

JR: Yeah.

FF: And that's cool but it's, yeah. I think that sometimes it's starting to look like something else. And people say "yeah man I'm popping", and I'm like "really?" cause to me it means soulful and funky and expression and dadadada. Not finger tutting.

JR: Yeah. And sometimes if you take the movements away, actually there's nothing left

FF: 100% That's a fantastic point. If you take the pop away, it should be funky.

JR: There should be a dance left.

FF: There should be a dance, there should be a groove. And if there isn't, I'm not gonna say that's bad, it's just not what this is. It's something else. Finger tutting, Jay Smooth is one of the best finger tutters in the world, and if he sits here and does it it will blow your mind. But he can do it with no music on, and it will blow your mind. And he can put music on, and it will blow your mind.

JR: Yeah.

FF: It's fantastic, it's clever, but it's not boogaloo. It's not what Sam does. And I respect both things, but they're different things. And for him to say this is popping, it's not called finger popping it's called finger tutting for a reason. You know what I mean. So, I think there's gonna be a lot of new things coming out, because the human body can do great things. Breaking is so different now. But if you see someone, who really knows that dance they're doing all the beautiful new things, but it's still a dance. Or you'll see people who can do air flares, but they're not dancing at all, and it looks more like gymnastics. It's still fantastic, but it's not what that is. You know, so I think that as long as there are a bunch of people that preserve what it is, then what happens over here is cool, cause that's natural, people to take and create and you know, but as long as there's still like an essence, keeping it real. Then it's all good [both laugh].

JR: And we'll stop there [both laugh], thank you!

Appendix G

Interview with Shawn Aimey (SA)

8th September 2016

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “umm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Shawn, could you start by just telling me how long you've been dancing for?

SA: I've been dancing since the year 2000.

JR: And then can you tell me how you first got interested in popping and the first time you ever saw it?

SA: The first time that I saw popping or something related to it in person, would have been at a party, actually... Yeah. A local guy from where I used to live, well, where I still live around my area. He used to be like, the guy back in the day he used to do loads of gliding and floating and waving and like, vibrating. He was the only person in the South renowned as a dancer. Back in the day he used to be that guy so he was the first person that I saw doing stuff that was kind of like popping. Obviously, before that there was Michael Jackson on TV.

JR: Cool, and when you say Michael Jackson, can you remember specifically if there was a particularly music video or any particular songs that stand out?

SA: Speed Demon.

JR: Ok

SA: Yeah. Also *Moonwalk* the film as well. Speed Demon was my favourite video and then the Moonwalker film, had all the different elements.

JR: Cool. Could you just briefly describe what your work is in the dance world, and the different roles that you have?

SA: A choreographer, from time to time. An artist, a teacher, a lecturer... I would say a mentor as well.

JR: And can you tell me a little bit about when you first started getting into popping seriously. Maybe a bit about who taught you, and how you came to learn the style?

SA: So beside those things that I mentioned already, I started teaching myself. This would have been towards the end of 2004 I would say. I started it with my crew who I was with at the time.

JR: What were they called?

SA: Hazard. Yeah, they were like a South London dance crew. So I basically started popping and locking together, just trying to mess with them. My first time watching famous dancers... I used to go on the Electric Boogaloos website before there was youtube, they had little 5 second clips that would take, like, 2 minutes to load.

JR: [laughs]

SA: And there was another website, I can't remember the name, but it was the first time I learnt about styles like popping, scarecrow – these type of styles. There was this Canadian popping group, and they each had their speciality for popping – their style. So they would have one guy and they'd have a description of his name underneath, like this guys speciality is Scarecrow or sacking or snaking. And that was the first time that I started seeing the difference, the different names of different styles. So that was the first time I started to recognize the different names of different styles within this kind of popping thing.

JR: Cool, yeah. Can you remember when you first saw popping in the UK on stage?

SA: I think the first time I saw it on stage was Kenrick and Skylitz doing their duet back in the day. They did the waving duet, I think it was to Utopia.

JR: Oh yeah.

SA: That might have been... between 2005 and 2007 between those years.

JR: If you were going to describe the relationship between popping and music, what would you say about it?

SA: Popping and music... Yeah let me think about this... [pauses] Well I mean, besides the music we can think about the instruments and how they relate to popping... So you know like the snare, the drum, the hi-hat. These are different instruments that can be slightly connected to different styles of popping. So you know the hi-hat, that can be connected to ticking or the snare can be connected to dimestopping. I'm just trying to think of more things that are specific to popping...

JR: Don't worry, we're gonna break it down more anyway... Let me ask you this, if you were gonna describe someone to have skilled musicality in popping, what would that look like? I'm really interested in the way that this term musicality is used so much by dancers, and what it means to different dancers...

SA: Yeah well there's a confusion, there's a bit of crossed wires when it comes to that term. People call beat-matching musicality, and beat-matching is just beat-matching. Just like, being able to adjust to what's happening in the music and follow the pattern of what's happening, which to me is not musicality. Musicality is being able to build rhythms inside the music, so if you've got like a [makes four kick sounds] you can put like a [repeats kick sounds and adds a double snare sound in between each one] you can put different things within that time frame. Being able to put different rhythms inside the phrase, I think this is what musicality boils down to.

JR: And when you say inside the music, can you talk a bit more about what you mean by that?

SA: So you know you've got four bars and you've got 1,2,3,4 [marks out the basic beat] and then inside that 1,2,3,4, you have 1&2&3&4. Or you can have 1&2&a3&a4, you can put like, different amounts inside this four bar. It's the same for the eight or sixteen, however way you're looking at it.

JR: So they wouldn't necessarily be things that you can hear in the music they'd be things that were possible in that frame...

SA: Yeah so things that you can hear in the music are obviously the instruments or the vocals or whatever it may be. Reacting to that is being able to adjust to the music or to beat-match.

JR: Yeah

SA: But that doesn't mean there's musicality. So musicality is not only being able to do what the beat is saying, it's being able to go with the same direction of the music and also be able to show something else at the same time.

JR: Ok. As a dancer, how do you train your musicality, is there anything specific that you do to work on it or practise it?

SA: I mean musicality and the way I know it, I don't necessarily train it. I think it just comes from just from dancing itself so not necessarily with a style. So I think one thing that it's important is to be able to just dance, sometimes without a style attached. A lot of people find that tricky, especially poppers. They practise yeah, they practise all this stuff. But then, if they don't have a good basis of dance underneath it you always see some flaws in what they are doing.

JR: So as a teacher, when you're trying to... (obviously I'm talking with an awareness as your student as well...)

SA: Yeah.

JR: There's different things that we've done in class or training sessions in the past where you've tried to show that even when you're using the beat you can use it in different ways. You can catch it, you can arrive on it, you can delay your timing.

SA: Right, right, yeah.

JR: Can you talk a little bit about that? Like what you might do to get those kinds of things across...

SA: So again, those things are kind of related to the rhythm and musicality again. Because you can change the speed of your movement, or you can have a consistent [makes kick sound rhythm that starts in the simple four beat pattern and increasingly gets more complex by adding other rhythms with it]. This kind of stuff is how you build rhythms inside the music so you're always going to have the consistent [makes basic kick and snare drum pattern sounds for one bar] and then, it's just what you do around it.

JR: Yeah... So would you say the first thing when you're teaching someone popping, the first thing that you would do, would it be to get people how to understand how to sit in the music.

SA: It depends where they are at, each dancer is a bit different. Some people, the first time you meet them they can't even follow the rhythm of the music. So you might need to spend longer on that. Some people already have worked that out they're past that. So they're ready to focus on maybe what's after that, kinda depends on each person. I think the first thing, that's really key is being able to do the basics, which is just to hit the boom, kat, boom, kat [makes basic kick and snare sounds] just to be able to dance on this: 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, and then you kinda build up other things around that. So that's kind of like the really basic level is being able to listen to this and being able to stay on that.

JR: Can you talk a bit about the importance of that, compared with how it is for other dance forms. Is there anything different about it, even though we know the music is integral with all of those styles.

SA: I think every style, the way I see it, you should be able to dance on that. You should be able to follow this tempo of the music, just the basic metronome [makes the basic four bar kick and snare pattern] this is kind of like basic. It doesn't mean you need to hit all of that every time but your movements are guided by that at least.

JR: Could you tell me a bit about Plague... You've done a lot of popping on stage in that context and I'm just thinking, could you talk about some of your favourite projects in terms of musicality and popping with them...

SA: Some of my favourite things... Well I'll tell you the events and the performances first. The Move Like Michael Jackson TV show we did – we did some popping routines in that. We had our show we did in Blackpool which was running for two months, it was called 'MJ Timeless' it was like a Michael Jackson tribute show. We did some of the classic MJ routines and then we also revamped them and made some popping remixes. So that was pretty cool.

JR: Cool, and all your solo work as well...

SA: Yeah, besides shows with Plague I've done a lot of competitions and battles on stages or in cyphers – popping based.

JR: And what's that like in terms of musicality, if we're thinking of a battle as a kind of performance.

SA: Yeah right. So for me musicality is still the same because it's just like, the way that you dance. The way that you interpret the music. So even if you get music that you don't know... When your style has been matured you're able to do it to whatever music is playing. Especially when you get to the point where you really know yourself with what you do. You're able to do it to any type of music.

So the musicality thing is not too much of a problem. The only problem with music that you don't know is beat-catching, because it might take you like, ten fifteen seconds to get this song. For me when I compete, and I get some new music, I have to give myself the first five seconds before I jump into it. You might see me pacing around on the floor...

JR: [laughs]

SA: ...trying to get to grips with the music. And then I'm ready to go, so, yeah.

JR: And do you prefer music that you know or music that you don't know?

SA: Both. I like music that I know, because if it's my favourite song then yeah of course! But if it's music that I don't know, it gives me a weird journey, like, a good weird journey. If it's a song I don't know and I'm like, what the hell is this song?! It's so good! If it's like that then I love music I don't know. But when it's music that I don't know that sounds horrible then it's a different thing, yeah.

JR: If you don't feel it, if you're given something and you don't feel it, you don't like it... What is that like, having to dance through it...

SA: That's where your experience has to come alive [laughs], cause you have to know how to cover it up. And how to deal with it, and not to kind of show the 'I hate this shit' kind of thing.

JR: [Laughs] Yep... Can you tell me about any piece that you've seen on stage that uses popping that you found particularly inspiring or interesting over the years?

SA: I remember a Frank Ejara piece that he did at Breakin' Convention. I can't remember what year it was, it might have been 2007. Yeah he did a solo show and his body was making different sounds. So basically there was loads of different weird sounds, which were related to which part of his body he was moving. So he would move his arm, and then you'd get like a squeak, he'd move

his leg and it would be a drum... I remember he made a popping show and it started off really show and then by the end of it he was moving all the parts of his body and he was creating all this music. So his head would make something, his arms his chest his legs... And by the end of the piece he was going full out and creating the music... you know what I mean. So that was sick.

JR: And that was at Breakin' Convention...

SA: Yeah. Yeah, Frank Ejara.

JR: Anything else?

SA: Another one is a Plague show that we did at Breakin' Convention 2008, where we wore all white.

JR: Furious Angels you did it to – the piece of music, wasn't it?

SA: I think so.... Oh yeah yeah yeah right! Yeah so we did different popping styles in that one.

JR: Yeah, I'll never forget that show!

SA: Yeah, we did scarecrow...

JR: Yeah and you had the voice over as well!

SA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then toyman, puppet, yeah.

JR: That was cool.

SA: That was my first time doing anything like that.

JR: Was it?

SA: Yeah.... So yeah, you asked me about where I learnt. I was self-taught from 2005 up until 2008, and then I started learning from Suga Pop, Greg and from Fred.

JR: And with Suga Pop did you have to travel to him or was it when he came over here?

SA: Yeah so that was the first year where teachers started travelling over to the UK. So before that no one was teaching here. So everybody was self-taught up until that point, unless you'd gone out there to train.

JR: You spoke about a really interesting thing about everyone beat-matching and thinking that is musicality, and do you think that in not only the battle scene but also in theatre scenes do you think that is a pattern or a trend?

SA: Beat-matching?

JR: Yeah.

SA: In theatre?

JR: Yeah...

SA: In competitions, it's short lived. So people feel like they need a blow-up. Cause you only have thirty to forty seconds. You might do a round, you get forty seconds, you wanna be remembered so you're gonna try and do a blow-up. I don't think it's the same in theatre because normally theatre is more, trying to tell a story about something. I don't really see it being something that's done in theatre. It's more like, for instant reaction whereas theatre is more of a journey. If you're doing a performance it's gonna be fifteen, twenty minutes... Yeah.

JR: I've written a bit about your solo video demo that you did for Pro Dance Agency. When you're doing work like that and preparing for that kind of project, is it freestyle or is structured or is it a bit of both?

SA: It's different. Some of them are just, just do it. Some of them I want to try and do more than just freestyle. I might want to try and have a slight story line. Normally when I do videos like that, solo videos or with other people, normally its just freestyle. I also like to have little concept with them sometimes. So there might be a message or a bit more of a meaning to it than just freestyling. So it differs.

JR: If you think about the way that people are using music and popping now, do you think there are any new trends or patterns developing. Where do you think it's going to go next? I'm just thinking about the fact that people, DJ's make music for poppers now...

SA: I mean, I always feel everything does a full circle. Even if it takes a hell of a long time. I feel like if you look at music now, it's slowly starting to go back towards funk. Some of the producers now. There's still people who are doing that catching the beat producing. But you've got people like Temu, who's making modern funk now, so it's got the feel from the 70's but it's with the modern instruments and the music sounds more modern. And people like Mofak too. So if more people like this are coming out then it means we're going back in the direction of funk so we're kind of taking the sound from the 2000's which is all the [makes electronic sound]. They're kind of taking that, but they're putting it with the funk now. So you're kind of getting the best of both. These guys, they're probably the two best for me right now – producers. If people follow their lead, then it will start going back towards the funk.

JR: Do you think then that if there is more funk and groove in the music, do you think that will change the dance?

SA: Yeah for sure. Definitely. The only thing is people will try to look funky sometimes, and it's like, you don't need to force it. You're either funky, or... You don't need to be funky if you're not. You don't need to force that. I think being funky, is just, something that is inside you. To do it in the way that you are raised and everything. If you've been brought up on a certain type of music, then that is inside you from young. You can't start learning popping at a certain age and you

have never been around any type of funk music or nothing soulful. You can't just switch it on it's not a choice. It will always look like you're trying [JR making sounds of agreement]. When being funky, is just what you do. It's not something that you need to try and do, yeah.

JR: Thank you so much!

SA: We're done!?

JR: Yes...

SA: Yeaaaah.

Appendix H

Interview with Brooke Milliner (BM)

21st January 2017

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Thank you so much first of all for fitting this in, I know you're really really busy. The first question... Can I ask you, if you were to define skilled musicality, how would you describe what that is?

BM: I would say to make yourself look like an instrument, that is not like one you can hear already. I don't want you to follow, like you have the kick drum, the piano – I don't want you to follow that. I want you to keep the beat, but do something else as well, but keeping the beat. So if I was deaf, I would see what sound you're dancing on, even though the sound isn't there, you know what I mean... So if you had [makes one bar of rhythmic kick and snare sounds] and you have [makes one bar of piano sounds], you'll be moving on the [makes four bars of different rhythmic sounds that change pattern for each bar]. It's still on beat, and it's clear to see that you're not following something completely. I mean you'll hit certain bits the same which is fine. But to show me the music, even if that particular parts not there... And it's still musical.

JR: Great... I can't wait to transcribe that [both laugh].

BM: It probably won't make sense...

JR: No it definitely will it's great... So, if you are going to dance to a track and you've never heard it before, and you're going to freestyle through it... Can you take me through what your thought process would be. The music starts playing, you've never heard it before, what's your thought process, how do you make sense of it?

BM: It wouldn't be so much a thought process. I guess I would try and feel it more, obviously you are thinking as well though...

JR: Ok, yeah...

BM: I'm not trying to say you don't think at all...

JR: Is it more subconscious?

BM: To be honest it depends on what I'm doing. If I'm just literally dancing, then I just dance. If I feel like there's a piece of music that can accent, cause you know when we're battling or whatever we need to up the person that just went or the person we're gonna go against. So I might need to really listen to every instrument so I can accent it. But really, I need to get the bass, just hear the one two, if that's there that's nice and easy I don't need to worry about that. Some beats have some weird stuff and you don't want to get caught out there. So you have the one two [vocalises sounds of the bass and snare] and then really, you can do what you want. As long as it's rhythmical. Like I said depending on what environment we're in, if its specific to a battle for me personally I wanna pick up on stuff... Like the hi-hat, synthesizer or something. Obviously if it's a choreography you need to listen to all the different details in the song so you can do it. So it just depends really...

JR: Cool... And how does that compare to dancing to music that you know?

BM: It's a bit more interesting. I think when you know a song [pauses in order to say goodbye to workshop participants], when you know a song, it's cool, don't get me wrong it might be your favourite song. I guess it's just not as risky, you know what's coming up, you know what's happening so it's more like you know what you're doing whereas if you don't know the song... You're literally freestyling. For me it's more exciting, I know a lot of people like when they hear the song they know, they're like "aghhhh!" But yeah, if it's a good song, I'll be like "aghhhh" too! [laughs].

JR: One of the things that you're known so well for is musicality...

BM: Really!?

JR: Yeah, really...

BM: I did not know that [both laugh].

JR: I was just wondering, when you first started training in popping, what kinds of things did you do to train your musicality?

BM: At first I was doing, what people call “being a slave to the beat”. Renegade actually says that, “don’t be a slave”. When you pick up on every instrument and every break in the music and actually dance to it. It’s too obvious, it’s quite an immature thing to do.

JR: Sure...

BM: Like when you start popping you can see a beginner if they do that. But if you’re dancing and you can fully see that someone knows they’re on beat and they’re aware of what’s going on... They’re hitting little bits every now and then. But on top of that they’re just doing that every now and then. For the most part, they are their own musicality, they are their own instrument. So yeah, syncopating, doing different stuff [pauses to say goodbye to participants]... Where was I?

JR: You said syncopation...

BM: Yeah, even if you make the sound with your voice [vocalizes syncopated rhythmic pattern] – it’s basic but if the beats not doing that and you’re doing that you’re still on beat. And it looks good, it’s an extra thing. So just listen to music I guess as well and if you drums make a little drum pattern, I do tap as well so we have to do that stuff all the time. Imagine if we were tapping just to the beat [makes tapping sounds on the basic beat with feet] it would be dry. You have to go [vocalizes a more complex rhythm on the semi quavers for each beat followed by syncopated rhythmic pattern to finish].

JR: Sick!

BM: Yeah.

JR: Ok cool. There's a number of different images or phrases that I've picked up from different people just from doing their classes, for example Popin Pete always says "in the pocket, in the pocket!" Like in the pocket of the music for example. Each teacher seems to develop their own... Do you have any images or terms that you use when you teach that you're aware of?

BM: Not that I'm aware of no... I say, if you wanna pop, what you need to do to be popping is to hit and to be on beat. That's the basic of popping. Even, there's a lot of disagreements in popping, one of the things that everybody does I think is be on beat and contract their muscles...

JR: Sure... You keep with those...

BM: Yeah. I might have some terms... Maybe, you can tell me cause you were in the class!

JR: Yeah...

BM: [laughs] Don't think I have any...

JR: I think you show it a lot of times, like when we did that exercise where we were using the same beat, but in different ways. But you tend to make the sounds to be honest.... You vocalize it and then show it.

BM: Ok

JR: So maybe that's your.... Human instrument.

BM: [Makes sounds of agreement]. I'm real hip hop, I'm trying to do the beatbox and everything.... Graffiti...

[Both laugh]

JR: The whole lot! And then finally, out of the solo pieces that you have done that have gone out on youtube, some of them are freestyle ones to a track.... Actually I don't know how organized they are? Sometimes they look really organized but I don't actually know if they are? Are they choreographed? Or are they structured freestyle?

BM: I don't know if there's any that I've done that have been choreographed, at the moment I can't think of any that are. I'm pretty sure they all are....

JR: Wow!

BM: But like, with the ones I do online, most of the time I know the song... so it's easier.

JR: Ok.

BM: Yeah, and they're freestyle.

JR: And which is your favourite?

BM: Music wise, it was the one that you spoke about earlier – the Bob Marley, obviously. Me, I like to dance to old music a lot of the time. Not as many people can relate to it so it might not get as many hits, you know what I mean? But I feel it, especially dancing to reggae, it's not what you see a lot, so... that was fun.

JR: Yeah, cool...

BM: But it's a good few years old now, I haven't watched it in a while it might not be that good [laughs].

JR: It's sick!

BM: [laughs]

JR: It's really sick! Thank you so much!

BM: No problem, it's all good!

Appendix I

Interview with Isaac “Turbo” Baptiste (TB)

8th July 2017

Interviewer: Jo Read (JR)

Note: Sounds like “uh”, “hmm” and the like are omitted; inaudible speech is indicated with [???]; stammers and false starts are also omitted.

JR: Turbo can you start by telling me how long you’ve been dancing for?

TB: I have been dancing for, I can say, thirty years. Professionally for twenty-two years.

JR: Amazing, and could you briefly describe your role in the dance world, and what kind of things you do.

TB: My role in the dance world is to teach, train, push, encourage and support other dancers, within the styles of house and hip hop - mainly house just to make people feel comfortable. But that’s what I am here for, in this industry, as well as to compete and showcase as well.

JR: Could you tell me a bit about your musical background, the types of music that you grew up listening to, if you ever played a musical instrument - anything like that?

TB: I was very fortunate with regards to my upbringing with regards to music in my dance scene, as my Dad was a drummer for a Reggae band, a group called “Coptic Roots”. They had very well known Reggae artists actually come over to our house so we’d have Gregory Isaacs, we’d have Bim Sherman, we’d have so many well known respected artists come through. I would hear music from Reggae to Ragga, also known as Bashment, also known as Dancehall. All the way down to “Coldplay”, jees, James Brown, J Dilla, to Nas, to Minnie Rippleton, Nina Simone. The genres of music is very very vast, so I grew up on a lot, a lot a lot a lot of styles of music.

JR: And did you ever learn to play an instrument?

TB: I did learn to play an instrument actually, so as my Dad was a drummer I was also a drummer myself, so it was in the family. I have a younger brother who also produces music and is also a drummer himself an amazing on the keyboard. My Mum was actually a dancer, so she was the dancer that kicked everything off, but yes I played an instrument, drum kit - a little bit of the keyboard but that's like, at, lower beginner basic level?

JR: [laughs]

TB: My brother is the key genius behind that.

JR: Cool. If you were going to describe what skilled musicality is from a dance perspective, how would you define that?

TB: Ask that question again?

JR: Sorry, yes. So, I'm just thinking of this work "musicality" and the fact that it is quite a broad term. So I'm just wondering, if someone had skilled musicality in your opinion, what kind of things would they be able to show?

TB: Ok. So for me, this is how I've broken down things like musicality. I feel it has been taken way out of context when I hear it nowadays. Because people see someone hitting a beat, or hitting a sound or a particular rhythm or a pattern... They would say its musicality. Technically it's not musicality, you're hitting accents, cause you're picking out a particular sound in the song to hit. If you start to hit more than one sound, then you're obviously going through a range of instruments to hit. Whether you've gone from the piano to the drums, to then go to the xylophone to go to the kettle drum, whatever it is... You've figured out how to transfer your movements from one instruments from another and get the audience to see that. So for me, that, in a way is musicality being able to play with all the instruments. That's one side of it. The other side of musicality for me, is understanding how that music makes you feel, and delivering that to an audience to make your movement and the music fit together, to make the audience say "that makes complete and utter sense"

JR: Ok

TB: "I get it. The songs making me feel a certain way, the way you're dancing to the music. I'm a hundred percent relating to how you're dancing to the music. I get it." Musicality is how you go with that music, that track. Each song has its own flow, has its own feel, has its own history to how the song was made. To some people it has its own emotion. Usually you see a contemporary dancer dance to a slow song, and it hits you, because the movement is fitting with the music. It's going, it fits as one if you saw a music video of it you'd be like, "that fits, that makes sense". For me, that's musicality, you've made your dance fit with the music, and it makes sense. If you wanna start hitting beats and stuff, you're hitting those accents. Hit the accents.

JR: Yeah because something that I've noticed from doing my analysis of your piece is that it's not only the timing of the sound, but it's about the texture of the sound... Almost like how we imagine the sound to move, that's the way that you move...

TB: Yep, exactly.

JR: Cool, so could you talk a little bit about the piece that you made for "Breakout The solos" in 2011. How did you come across the track, and what appealed to you about it?

TB: To be a hundred percent honest with you I cannot remember how I came about the song. I heard it somewhere, I'm not sure if I Shazam'd it [both laugh] or if I asked someone, I cannot remember. Did I ask someone? I actually can't remember but what I do know is I went on youtube, forgive me, downloaded it and I had a crazy idea to just dance to the track. Prior to that I actually danced to other classical songs, I think its Michael O'Sullivan? A very famous pianist.

JR: I remember you did one for Collabo as well, I can't think what that was...

TB: Yes. I've done a few, and I don't know what it is with regards to this genre of music. With the piano or the classical side of things, but it just resonates with me. When it comes to creating something to that type of music, I picture and feel what that music is giving to me. What can I do, what do I see, what do I hear, what do I

feel, or what do I taste... To a particular sound. So, if a sound is really sharp and it's got like a pingy kind of sound to it, it's like [makes pinging sound noises three times] like twinkly but really really sharp. I'm thinking ok, what movement can resemble that twangy, twingy sound. Do you know what, when someone pokes me in my side, when I'm ticklish, I get a little electric shock, like twingy [does impression of action]

JR: [laughs in agreement]

TB: Right! So now I've put that move to that sound. Alright. I understand the sound to the movement, now can I change the movement to make it even clearer for the audience to understand. So that's what I do, I listen to the sound and the sound will make me feel something, or the sound can make me want to act something out. Hence why I would say taste, if the sound makes me think of food or it sounds like I don't know, I've crunched something or I've eaten something - I will put that gesture to the sound to make the audience go "Ah, I get it".

JR: You do something in the piece, yeah [demonstrates the gesture from the piece]

TB: Right. So it's playing the piano, I'll play the piano. But then I can be intricate, and say I'm not going to give you any story I'm not going to show you a picture of me ironing or cooking, I'm just going to freestyle now, and do some crazy intricate moves. But the intricate moves, make sense to the music. So the audience get it, they're stuck in a frenzy and they're just hooked. I've grabbed them, and they're like "I want to hear everything that you're hitting". Basically, let me put it all in one, I basically show you everything you can hear, is what I do. I want to show you as much as I can with what you can hear. So you can see, what you hear. Is my thing - you see what you hear.

JR: So, off the back of that, there's some really interesting moments in the piece. There's those three bass notes that keep coming back and it's not until near the end and you do [demonstrates what he does with foot tapping motif] with your foot. Obviously that's there all the way through, but there's a only a certain moment later in the piece where you do that. And obviously it's clever because then you realise it's always been there but you've not really consciously heard it until you've shown

it. Then it suddenly feels like it's louder but it's not, it's just that you've drawn attention to it... Because you're being selective with those moments, how do you feel that you make the decisions about which bits to extract and when...?

TB: That is a very good question. Once again, to be honest with you I play the song as many times as I can. Literally, whatever happens on stage happens on stage. I do take in account of the patterns and the arrangements that I've been listening to whether I've been on the train, walking to work or whatever, I absorb it take it in, and the moves always change. But how I deliver the move, how I execute the move to the particular sound, will always have that same impact, as far as I'm concerned. So it could change, but it will always make sense. When it comes to hitting particular sounds, to draw out the sounds to make the audience understand what I've hit, sometimes I prolong it. So you might hear the pattern go [vocalizes rhythm] then I'll hit the third one [vocalizes rhythm again]. So I want you to take in that sound I want you to know that you've heard it. You'll hear it the first time, you'll hear it the second time. The audience, I'd say about sixty/seventy percent of the audience are thinking, are you going to hit that sound, subconsciously, are you going to hit that sound. When I do hit the sound the third time is when you're like ahhhhhhhh!

JR: Satisfied!

TB: Exactly. He did it! He hit that sound, I get what he is doing. And also with that move that you're talking about as well, just to go down the performance side of things. That move came from a group called "Retaliation", and a guy called Dwain "Talent" used to own that group. He had a particular move that he did that he would groove out [demonstrates a movement that is similar to the one we are discussing from his solo]

JR: Ohhhhhh

TB: Hence the reason why in my classes I'm always saying to students, "keep your heads up, look up, look up", because you're performing to the crowd, and also you never know what piece of influence you can get from the audience there and then on that spot.

JR: Right... So that was a nod to that?

TB: Exactly. Especially if you're freestyling. So I've looked up, I've looked at him, "oh my gosh, Dwain's there... I missed the first one [vocalizes the music] and then I hit it. He's gone crazy, "oh my god he did that move". But that's all to do with keeping my head up, looking in the audience, giving them my performance. I want you to feel like when I'm on stage, you could possibly join me on stage as well. It's open, so come and join me. With your eyes, with your body, with your claps with your cheers. Whatever it is, join me on that stage.

JR: Cool, yeah. Ok, so there are two more things I want to ask you.

TB: Go!

JR: One thing I've noticed from watching you, is that your face is so relaxed all the way through. You walk up the steps and you take your jacket off, and you look so relaxed, is that intentional?

TB: It is intentional, I'm not going to lie. If I'm again, one hundred percent honest...
INSIDE [says with a feeling or terror] [both laugh] Inside, my soul, my being...
There's nervousness rattled all about.

JR: Really

TB: It still happens. But I've learnt how to adapt to that now. I'm not going to get nervous and freeze up. I've got a job to do, I've got three minutes, I've got to nail it. Whether I know what I'm doing, whether I don't know what I'm doing, I'm going to give you something. What I don't want to give you, is a sense of nervousness that makes you feel like I don't know what I'm doing. And some people they can come across a little bit arrogant or cocky, a bit egotistical like some people. It's literally as a lot of dancers would say "getting in the zone", "getting in the mode, I've got something to do, relax, focus". And also I'm not going to lie, I say this to myself and it really helps, a really great affirmation. "I'm going to give you guys a great show. I'm going to show you why I enjoy this music. I'm then going to hopefully maybe

some way down the line have you influenced so much that you're probably not even going to download the next Kendrick Lamar album. You're going to look for Michael O'Sullivan you're going to look for another classical song that's going to relax you in the car when you're going to work, and spark off ideas in your head. It could calm you down when you had a stressful day at work or your kids will be getting on your nerves. That's the power I'm trying to give out. Listen to it, absorb it, take it, use it.

JR: It's interesting because you talk about the feeling that you want the audience to get, but actually there's only one or two places in the piece where you show that in your face. It's interesting because it's almost as if you want them to read it through your body, rather to read it from there...

TB: Yep, yep, exactly.

JR: And finally, could you talk about how much of your work you structure or pre-set, and how much is improvised?

TB: Very good question again, you're killing me with some killer questions! Some pieces are structured, and this I learnt from Kenrick a long time ago. Called structured freestyle. So there's certain elements or certain points, where I would have two counts of eight of set moves to a particular sound. Now it can change, but I know that particular two eights, there's a particular way of moving to that part of the track. I would do it in and out, so it might be like two eights, I do something spectacular or that I know is coming, and then freestyle for four eights. Another two eights are coming, here's that next bit, then I do that set piece. So I kind of structure it in that way sometimes. Sometimes I'm not going to lie, if I feel like dancing to a random track, whatever happens happens there and then. Happens there and then. My Got to Dance audition - freestyle. The semi-final - freestyle. The final - freestyle.

JR: [laughs] Bet they loved you for that!

TB: Everything was freestyle. They actually wanted me to structure it

JR: I bet they did!

TB: They wanted me to structure it they did not understand it, and that's another thing that I don't get with TV. We understand you're the cameramen and you got to portray something you've got to give something off to the audience. But we're the dancers, so we've had to work hard on our craft to actually help the audience see what we're trying to do. When you try and change it with your camera angles, flipping hell you've missed it you've gone to that side. Most of the time you hear dancers say, one camera, focus on the front, that's it. We want you guys to see what we're trying to deliver. We want to give you guys a story, and you've got to look at it a particular way. Look at it this way, bang. Unless you're like, camera 1 the first four eights I'm here, next ones I'm over here. And that's what was difficult for me, especially for Got to Dance was, structuring my freestyle in that way because I wanted to be absolutely free.

JR: [sounds of agreement] Cool, and with that particular piece for Breakout... Was it also more freestyle?

TB: It was more free, and part of it was structured. There's a bit I do when I'm down on the floor I get lower and lower and lower, and I hit the elbow

JR: Yeah [demonstrates movement]

TB: Yeah, that bit there - I literally tried that move out probably about a couple minutes before I went on. I was running through stuff and I was like what can I do and I was like oh my god [vocalizes the rhythm and demonstrates the movement] oh my god! This works! Then I did it and people were like "ooooooh! I ain't seen that before!" For me, that felt good, and even that was structured. That was a build up in itself as well, you can see that going down down down down. There's so many little moments, even the little camp bit where I might go [makes pinging sound] and hit a move there.

JR: Your pecks ... [laughs]

TB: My pecks! It's silly, it's a gimmick, but you get it. It makes sense. Like, you know I'm giving you a performance, you're enjoying it. I'm giving you all flavours. You're not going to come to my restaurant and just get chips, no no. You're getting

rice, you're getting salad, potatoes, coleslaws, yam dasheen plantain fried chicken
stewed fish oxtail... all of it sweet potato yam, you name it it's going to be there
[both laugh]

JR: [whilst laughing] I can't wait to transcribe that part

TB: [whilst laughing] Oh man!

JR: Thank you, thank you so much!

TB: You are welcome!... Sick!

