

Arts
Centre
Melbourne

Cypher



CYPHER

TEACHER RESOURCES

The Arts Centre Melbourne's Schools Program is dedicated to fostering the arts by giving schools the opportunity to see a diverse range of excellent theatre in fully produced form.

These education resources have been created for students in Years 7 – 12 and can be adapted for students at VCE level. The content is designed so teachers can adapt and develop the discussion and activities according to their students' learning needs and individual school contexts.

The resources have been developed with a view to addressing the following:

| LEARNING AREAS | CAPABILITIES |
|--|--------------------------------|
| The Arts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dance• Drama• Music | Critical and Creative Thinking |
| Health and Physical Education | Ethical |
| English | Intercultural |
| The Humanities | Personal and Social |

Resources written and prepared by Katy Warner, Coordinator, Arts Learning.

PLEASE NOTE:

This production of Cypher is a non-seated performance. Audience members will stand and move throughout the performance. Please ensure your students are aware of this before arriving and contact schools@artscentremelbourne.com.au if you have any access requirements for this event.

Arts Centre Melbourne strongly advises arriving at the venue 30-minutes prior to the event start time.

Following the show there will be a short Q&A with the performers. These resources can be a great starting point to prepare your students for this opportunity.

About

CYPHER

A Cypher is hip hop's most important ritual, a circle where style, rivalry and community exist and evolve. Four battle hardened b*boys push the boundaries of their art form using it's movement, gestures and energy to challenge, communicate and celebrate the culture of hip hop.

Backed by an original sound track that shifts between sound design, booming hip hop beats and a pumping party atmosphere. This performance invites you to step to the edge of the circle and witness the raw energy and culture that exists within it.

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Choreography: | Nick Power |
| Sound Design: | Jack Prest |
| Lighting Design: | Mirrabelle Wouters |
| Performed by B*boys | Akorn, Tass, Stevie G and Blue |

Cover Image – detail from Cypher Darwin by Amy Hetherington

About

NICK POWER

Nick Power is a Sydney based b*boy and choreographer. He is one of the leading hip hop dance artists in Australia, working professionally for the past 17 years. Since starting out in Brisbane running his own dance space Nick has nurtured young and emerging dancers through workshop projects with organisations including Contact Inc, Stylin Up Indigenous hip hop festival and Schools Spectacular. He has worked extensively in regional centres and in the remote Indigenous community of Lajamanu on the Milpirri project. Over the past 20 years he has curated grass roots, medium and large scale hip hop dance events working with some of Australia's most significant venues and festivals including Carriageworks, Sydney Festival, Darwin Festival and Brisbane City Council. His dance work has toured throughout Australia, Europe, Asia and Central America and he has worked with companies such as Tracks Inc and Stalker Theatre. Nick was the recipient of the Australia Council dance residency at the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris 2012 which inspired his first full length independent work Cypher. The work premiered at Darwin Festival in 2014 and toured to Europe and throughout Australia in 2015. Currently Nick is developing a new work, Between Tiny Cities រវាងទីក្រុងតូចៗ, an Australian / Cambodian collaboration involving two b*boys and looking at ideas around locality, style and culture.

READ

IN PROFILE: NICK POWER

These excerpts from “**in Profile: Nick Power, b*boy, choreographer**” are reproduced from RealTime magazine with the permission of the publisher, Open City Incorporated. The complete profile can be found at http://www.realttimearts.net/feature/In_Profile/11990

Vision

My vision comes from my background as a b*boy and my long term involvement in hip hop culture. My experience of being a dancer was formed through competing in battles, being in crews and stepping into Cyphers. When I started creating performances I was really going on instinct and using virtuosity to make short, entertaining pieces. I have always been interested in hip hop as a culture with it's different elements of Breaking, MCing, DJing and Graffiti art. My involvement with the Milpirri project in the remote Indigenous community of Lajamanu helped me to start thinking of hip hop as my culture, my way of expressing and telling stories through dance and music. I started to look at the rituals of hip hop such as the battle and the Cypher – the dance circle that forms at breakdance jams. During my Australia Council residency in Paris in 2012 I was exposed to the thriving European hip hop dance theatre scene. I went to performances, battles, festivals, discussions and met and observed some of the leading choreographers in the form. The work I saw seemed to generally fit into two different aesthetics. The first was hip hop showcases, a style that incorporates synchronised choreography, virtuosity and big tricks. The other was using hip hop styles in a contemporary aesthetic, sometimes with a clear narrative, sometimes abstracted. Being exposed to these shows helped to make clear in my mind what I wanted to make. My vision is to create work that is rooted in hip hop culture, that gives an audience insight into the depth of our form using it's rituals, language and energy to communicate and challenge. I want to push the boundaries of my form while coming from a place of understanding and history within it. Breaking was born out of battles, block parties and cyphers, it has a raw and wild energy. This is what I'm interested in.

Dancers

I auditioned the dancers for the show. I was really looking for high level b*boys or b*girls who had lots of experience in battles and cyphers but could also adapt to a theatrical context and process. The dancers I chose, Stevie G, Akorn, Blue and Taz have all won major battles and each have their own unique style and flavour. As the show goes for around 50 minutes and the audience is in the space with the dancers they really get to know them up close and personal. The audience is directly engaged by the dancers throughout the work.

LISTEN

CYPHER: A CELEBRATION OF HIP HOP CULTURE

ABC Radio interviewed Nick Power before his Sydney season of *Cypher*.

You can download and listen to the interview with Fran Kelly here:

http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2016/01/bst_20160118_0852.mp3

After listening to the interview, consider the following prompts with your students.

According to Nick Power, there is a lack of competitiveness in the Cypher, which makes it different from a Battle.

- Have you ever seen a Battle or Cypher before?
- Where were you when you saw these performances?
- Can you describe the experience? What did you see? Hear? Feel?

The Cypher is about the community. Nick tells the interviewer there is still rivalry but the practice is more about sharing and being inclusive.

- Why do you think rivalry is such an important element in b*boying and hip hop?
- How is the Cypher more about sharing? Have you ever seen or experienced this?
- How can dance be an outlet for self-expression?

In a traditional Cypher, the dancers make the circle but in the performance of *Cypher* at Arts Centre Melbourne, the audience create the circle (the cypher) and are invited to "stand at the edge".

- How did it feel to be part of the audience?
- Have you ever stepped into a Cypher before? Can you describe that experience?

LISTEN

NICK POWER ON WOMBAT RADIO

LANGUAGE WARNING: This podcast contains some coarse language. Teachers should listen to the podcast before sharing with students.

LISTENING POINTS: 1:03 to approx. 29:00

You can download and listen to the podcast here:

<http://wombatradio.com.au/nick-power/>

(Recommended until the 29 minute mark. Full podcast is nearly 50 minutes in duration)

You may ask students to respond to these points in a variety of ways; from informal discussion to written responses.

Discussion Points:

Community

- How does community shape Nick Power and his work?
- What is a community?
- What's your community?
- How does (or can / will) community shape you and what you do?
- Nick Power says he needed to "*find a place where what you do fits*". What does he mean by that? Do you feel like what you do fits? Why? Why not? How could that change?

Dance Literacy

- What is Dance Literacy?
- What is b*boy vocabulary? How does Nick Power use it?
- *Cypher* uses gestures that, according to Nick Power, are identifiable only to people who understand hip hop culture. Do you agree with this?
 - What do you already know about the gestures?
 - What did you get from the gestures? What is behind them?

The Audience

- Nick Power talks about the bow at the end of *Cypher* by the performers wasn't worth applause. Why not? What is worth the applause / clap?
- What is engagement? How do you know if the audience is engaged?
- Nick Power says he focuses a lot on the audience when he makes work: "*What do I want them to feel?*" What did *Cypher* make you feel?

The Performance

- What drives Nick Power to make his work?
- What sort of process and preparation does he use? How do you create work?
- Nick Power talks about the different approaches to hip hop performance be it in a Battle, Cyphering, a concert / show, and a theatre performance. What do you think these differences are? What approaches are used in *Cypher*?
- Why do you think Nick Power chose to bring hip hop to the theatre?

Final Thoughts

- The interviewer asks Nick Power – “what is your biggest hope?” Can you answer that question?
- Nick’s biggest hope is to give people a good experience. Do you think he succeeded with *Cypher*? Why? Why not?



Cypher, Sydney Festival, 2016. Photo Credit: Prudence Upton

RESEARCH

DIG DEEPER INTO THE WORLD OF THE CYPHER

Nick Power's *Cypher* is steeped in the history and culture of Hip Hop and b*boys.

Have a discussion with your class about what they already know about it, what they have seen, heard and experienced.

Hip Hop

Split the class into small groups to investigate and report back to the class on the following:

- The origins of hip hop:
 - Where did it begin?
 - How did it begin?
 - Why did it begin?
- What is meant by hip hop culture?
- What are the similarities and differences between hip hop culture in Australia and the United States?
- How has hip hop grown and developed since the 1970s?

b*boys

Split the class into small groups to investigate and report back to the class on the following:

- What are b*boys? Is there a female equivalent?
- Where did b*boying begin?
- What are the characteristics of b*boying?
- b*boying has expanded and is now seen across the world. Consider what b*boying looks like in places like Australia, Japan, France and Brazil (among others).

Resources

ABOUT NICK POWER AND CYPHER

Video

Cypher – Trailer Video <https://vimeo.com/104075235>

Podcast

Cypher: A celebration of hip hop culture - Interview with Fran Kelly, RN Breakfast, ABC, 2016

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/sydney-festival:-cypher/7094840>

Nick Power on Wombat Radio - Long form discussion on contemporary practice.

(Teachers – please listen first. This podcast contains some coarse language.)

<http://wombatradio.com.au/nick-power/> (Listen from 1:00 until approx. 29:00)

Articles

In Profile: nick power, b*boy, choreographer – RealTime Magazine

http://www.realttimearts.net/feature/In_Profile/11990

On the Couch with Nick Power - Interview with Nick Power, Arts Review, 2017

<http://artsreview.com.au/on-the-couch-with-nick-power/>

Hip Hop Connects: Interview with Nick Power – Footscray Community Arts Centre, 2015

<http://footscrayarts.com/news/hip-hop-connects-interview-with-nick-power/>

ON HIP HOP

40 years in from the party where hip hop was born by Rebecca Laurence, BBC

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130809-the-party-where-hip-hop-was-born>

The Education of Hip-Hop by Irvin Weathersby Jr, The Atlantic

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/03/the-education-of-hip-hop/388223/>

A Rolling Shout-Out to Hip-Hop History by Jody Rosen, The New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/12/arts/music/a-rolling-shoutout-to-hiphop-history.html>

History of Hip Hop in Australia

<http://australianhiphopdirectory.com/history/>

ON B*BOYS

Meet the head-spinning b-boys and b-girls of Nicaragua by Rebecca Blandon, GlobalPost

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-05-27/meet-head-spinning-b-boys-and-b-girls-nicaragua>

Photo essay: B-boys of the night by Margaret Burin, ABC

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-12/bboys-of-the-night/6918566>

Twin Cities 'b-girls' hang tough in a 'b-boys' dance world by Sam Harper, MPR News

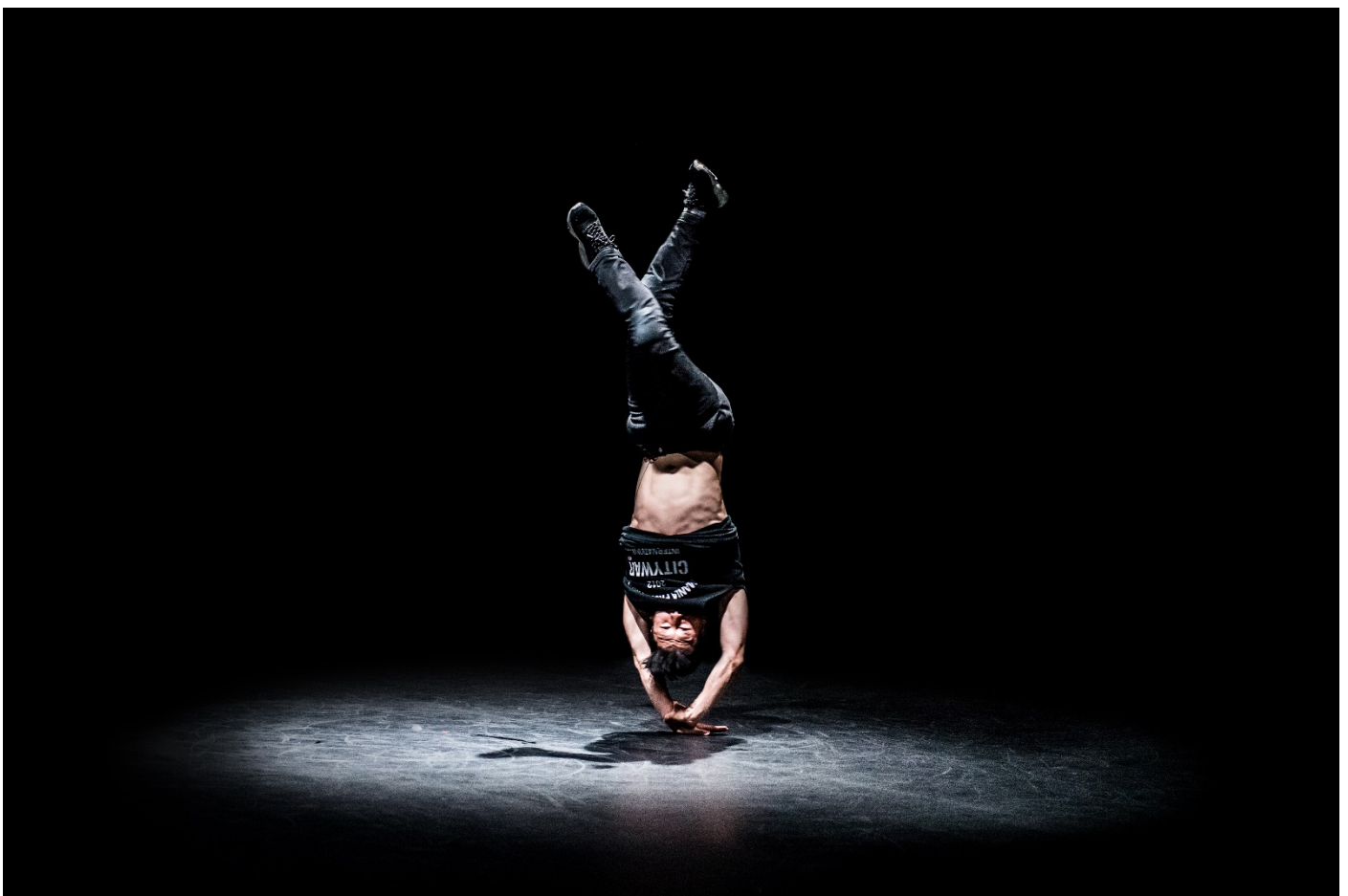
<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/01/05/breaking-dancing-culture-twin-cities-women-compete>

B-Boys of the Bronx, Dancing in the Street, by Claudia La Rocco, The New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/arts/dance/02laro.html>

5 Things You Need to know About B-Boy Victor, Red Bull

<https://www.redbull.com/us-en/the-rise-of-bboy-victor>



Cypher. Photo Credit: Johnny Chiang