

Breakin'

through





Credit: Mickael Marso, Riviere

For Romanian-born, West Midlands-based hip hop dancer, teacher and event organiser, **Andrei Roman** Breakin' opened up the world. Here, he interweaves his personal journey with background and insights into the dance form's debut at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Andrei Roman, Red Ink, Wayward Thread Dance and Physical Theatre. Photo: Vladimir Gruev.

From my earliest years, I felt an inexplicable pull towards a world of artistic expression. As a child, I was drawn to the mesmerising allure of sports, movement and dance and it was in the small city of Bacau, Romania, in 2005, that I embarked on a path that would shape my identity as an artist.

At first, I tried various sports such as swimming, football, tennis and many more, however, I couldn't find a sense of meaning or representation in them. It seemed repetitive after a while until I finally found Breakin'. So my journey began as a young and enthusiastic dancer, driven by an insatiable thirst to explore the limitless potential of the human body in motion.

Those initial steps were just the foundation of a lifelong commitment to the world of dance. I was very quick to understand that you can never know everything in the artform of Breakin'. With the amount of vocabulary the dance offers you, it's almost impossible to be able to learn everything and, to make it even better, we must also add our own creativity and character to the dance, which leads to even more opportunities and versatility in this style.

In 2011, my artistic odyssey took a significant leap forward when I ventured to the United Kingdom for university studies. This new chapter in my life provided me with invaluable opportunities to expand my horizons. It allowed me to engage in theatrical shows and dance competitions providing a window to the global dance community.

My experience now extends to teaching and leading workshops, where I've had the privilege of sharing my passion with others. From conducting classes open to all levels, to working as a Breakin' teacher in lots of primary schools. I've honed my abilities in not only dancing, but also imparting knowledge to students of diverse age groups and skill levels.

As time has gone on, I have transitioned into the role of an event organiser. I took on the responsibility of orchestrating major dance competitions, such as the National Breakdance Competition, Summer Hazard in Bacau, Romania. These events brought together dancers from across Romania and beyond, fostering the spirit of healthy competition and camaraderie that Breakin' always tries to create.

My journey as an executive and artistic director led me to found and manage initiatives like The Breaking League CIC (Community Interest Company) and the Kids Breaking Championships. These platforms aim to provide opportunities for both young and seasoned dancers to shine on national and international stages. They reflect my commitment to nurturing emerging talent, supporting the growth of the UK Breakin' scene, and creating spaces for collective imagining. From 2017 >>

until 2023, these two projects have led to over 25 national events, 35 workshops with highly influential dancers from across the world and five International events.

My artistic endeavours extend to choreography, with works such as Irreversible (2013). This performance explored the intricate concept of time and its irreversible impact on our lives. This choreography challenged traditional notions of time and sought to create a unique and immersive experience for the audience. With the help and trust of JonziD, I have emerged feeling able to choreograph with a deeper understanding of my art and vision. From then until now, I have been a part of some incredible projects and performances, choreographing and co-choreographing with highly reputed artists in the UK. Some names I am proud to have collaborated with are Sampad, Company Decalage, Critical Mass, Wayward Thread, Moving Spaces, and BreakDots.

So much for the past. On to the present and the future!

It's an interesting moment to be a part of HipHop culture and its dance styles right now with the introduction of Breaking (1) at the 2024 Paris Olympics. This year HipHop celebrates 50 years since its creation and Breaking has now made its way all the way from the streets of The Bronx, New York to the Olympic stage.

Some are still reluctant when it comes to inclusion of Breaking in the Olympics, as they do not see it as a sport. They're advocating for it to be an art, solely, however, Breaking as a culture always had that competitive element behind it. The Breakers



Andrei Roman, SHIVA. Photo: Mendi Mohinder, Digital Manipulation by JR.

mentality was to train, battle, dress fresh and 'earn your stripes'.

Breakin' is the result of the traumas, depressions, racial abuse and crimes happening in the late '70s urban USA, a culture created by young African American and LatinX kids that were looking to stay away from the gang activity and violence that they were constantly drawn towards.

They created Breakin' with simple rules: we battle to earn our stripes/respect; no touching; we leave it on the floor. Once you'd earned your stripes in your neighbourhood, you would then move on the next neighbourhood in order to call out/challenge the best Breaker there, to earn respect in that area as well. This gave people a sense of self-esteem and helped them stay out of trouble as they were suddenly recognised for their skills.

Nowadays, Breakin has become hugely popular worldwide, huge business and the opportunities that come with it can be... endless really! From being

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Andrei Roman, Freewe. Photo: Marius Mates.

able to perform in HipHop Theatre productions representing Breakin' as an art, to busking on the streets, to going to castings and/or touring with some international figures, to competing worldwide, teaching classes and workshops, all the way to representing Breaking as a Sport. The opportunities are limitless right now and it's only the dancer's mindset that will either hold them back or help to elevate them.

The inclusion of Breaking in the Olympics will definitely help highlight it to the whole world, which will potentially lead to a new wave of youngsters being inspired by it – and hopefully starting to Break. We all need to understand that the cultural side and the competition side of Breakin are two completely different things, which require different training, mindset and targets, culture and traditions.

I believe that the Olympic wave will create a new generation of Breakers attracted by its sporting



Andrei Roman battling in Italy. Photo: Soto.

element and its 'wow' factor. However, also, the history, culture, knowledge and cyphering (2) will still be found at Jams (3) and Battles (4) all around the world. I, for one, am excited about it and curious as to where this will lead. In the meantime, I will continue to create work and nurture the UK Breakin' scene's development opportunities and battles for the Breakers across the UK to help shape their growth and development.

The journey from my beginnings as a dancer in Bacau to my current role as a multifaceted artist, educator, and organiser has been marked by unwavering dedication, consistency, exploration, and a desire to contribute to the world of dance and art. It is an ongoing journey and I look forward to the continued evolution of my artistic path, always embracing the ethos of questioning, collective imagining and decentering the traditional ways in which hiphop events and hiphop artists are seen in my work.

References

1. The Olympics refers to 'Breaking'. Sometimes it can also be referred to as Breakin' or Breakin.
2. Cypher - when B-boys and B-girls (dancers who do Breakin) form a circle and, one after another, enter into the middle and dance. A cypher has a lot fewer restrictions than a battle does.
3. Jam - an event where HipHop artists of different genres/ styles come together, dance, vibe and exchange. A jam doesn't always involve a competition element.
4. Battle - turn-taking dance competitions between two or more individuals or dance crews judged by experienced dancers in relation to creativity, skill, execution and musicality.

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