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Far left: SunSun. Photo: Martha Cooper.
Left: Flowzaic. Photo: Cleveland Arron.
Right: Yami 'rowdy' Lofvenberg.
Photo: Paul Hampartsoumian.

Breakin' it down

British bgirl **SunSun**, aka **Sunanda Biswas**, reveals why young women in hip-hop deserve and want to sustain their own festival

On Easter weekend in April 2010 b.supreme, the UK's only festival for women in hip-hop, returns to the Southbank Centre for a fourth year.

With over 100 amateur and professional female performers from across the planet taking part, bgirls really have a chance to make their mark.

Before I go into that, a few words about me. I was interested in hip-hop music and dance from quite a young age. When bboying was around in the 80s I'd watch the movies. Also my brother had a lot of electro and hip-hop records, and in the early 90s we used to do the swingbeat/old school dances such as running man, bop and so on. I always wanted to break but was too busy training for the Olympics as a gymnast. It wasn't until 1999 that I really found bboying and I never looked back. I'm now part of what was one of the first - and still one of the few - professional female crews in the UK. Flowzaic was founded in 2005 by myself and Yami 'rowdy' Lofvenberg with the help of Judi McCartney of Independence and DJ Renegade. There were a few budding bgirls around, and we created a session specifically for them to practice and express themselves. It wasn't something I initially intended to do, but given the idea I guess it was a chance to give us some 'girl-power' and representation.

It was Judi who had the idea of doing an all-female hip-hop festival. In 2006 she asked me to give her some contacts for bgirls around the country and the world so she could make it an international event. I then had some meetings with her where we discussed her ideas for different battles and performances.

I've seen so many girls get involved in bboying in the last ten years. This is because of events like b.supreme that directly support young women to engage with the art form. b.supreme is a celebration of women in hip-hop. It's a chance for females - whether they're dancers, MCs, DJs or graffiti artists - to show their skills and be in the limelight, maybe perform, battle or take part in a workshop and learn new styles from other women around the world. Because other hip-hop events tend to be male-dominated it's especially important for women to have a platform to share moves and stories, and hang out with females who are involved in the hip-hop world and have the same problems or jubilations.

I think women play a big part in hip-hop, not in the stereotypical image of a 'bitch' in a bikini dancing around the MC star to make him look 'pimped out' which is what a lot of people think, but as a positive role model that young people can look up to as they're growing up. Even from

my experience as a teacher I have young girls looking up to me because I'm doing things that men do mostly, and this is good for some 'non-girly girls' to see - a strong woman 'representing' and not just shaking their booty!

Since 2006 the festival just keeps getting bigger and better. In 2007 I won the solo bgirl battle, which was amazing. In 2009 we all had a chance to battle some of the best bgirls in the world who were brought over especially from countries like America, Holland, France, Russia and Finland. There were two on two, crew battles and also a 'Bonnie and Clyde' battle which is boy + girl against boy + girl. This lets bboys who'd been negative about the festival before see how great this event actually is. And by giving them the opportunity to perform as well it made them more positive about the whole thing. It's also great that it is open to anyone who wants to come, not just your hip-hop heads but people who've never seen a battle or a hip-hop show before. It can challenge people's perception of what hip-hop culture is all about.

In 2009 Dare2Dance took place, a UK-wide competition that invited groups of young women (aged 13 to 22) to lay down some moves on the floor of the Clore ballroom at Royal Festival Hall. 92 female dancers competed but only the members of six



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crews - Esteem, Retaliation, Trinity Movement, Caution, Essence and 2Hypa – were selected as finalists. Each of these groups was then paired with and mentored by a professional hip-hop company – Avant Garde Dance, Unity, Boy Blue Entertainment, Aphrodite, ZooNation and us at Flowzaic – to help them develop their five-minute routine on the theme of iconic women during an intensive three months. Finally in October the six groups performed in front of a panel of industry-specialist judges. And the winner was... Retaliation! These three bgirls from Wandsworth won a professional management contract with Flying Feet Urban Arts Management and a £1,000 training budget. To top it off the Lambeth crew Essence came such a close second that the judges decided to offer them a contract too.

Which just goes to show that the more of these events we do, the more young women will get involved and maybe find a talent they never knew they had.

b.supreme is at London's Southbank Centre 2-4 April 2010. For more details on how to get involved contact holly@bsupreme.co.uk or Jessica. hemming@southbankcentre.co.uk

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