

BRAEDYN HUMPHRIES

A JOURNEY OF LEARNING



PHOTO: STEPHEN A'COURT

From humble beginnings as a shy teenager in Hip Hop class, Braedyn Humphries' dance career has seen some remarkable shifts. His work as a dance tutor for DANZ, his contribution to the mixed ability Hip Hop crew JDK (Just Dance Krazy), and his recent graduation from the New Zealand School of Dance (NZSD), has seen him gripped by dance and dance education.

BY LEAH MACLEAN

Braedyn's first lesson came from watching dance films like *You Got Served* and *Rize*. He dressed in baggy jeans, Timberlands, and initiated Krump battles in the school yard. At the time he didn't see what he was doing as dance, it was just a way to express his formative teenage self, and he just happened to be good at it.

His craving for dance and finding more people like him resulted in Hip Hop classes with Legacy, a Wellington-based group now known as The Company NZ. "I don't know why I became so shy when I joined [Legacy]... I think it was the idea that these people were really special. I was placing them on a pedestal, like they had special powers," explains Braedyn. Shyness aside, by immersing and surrounding himself with like-minded dance enthusiasts and learning from some of the best dancers at the time, it was a seminal turn in Braedyn's journey as a promising young dancer.

Through Legacy he went on to successfully compete in Hip Hop competitions nationally and internationally and worked with artists like Pat Godinet and Tony Moetaua. "I don't know if I learnt much about myself or my body or why I was dancing, but I was just working hard," he admits, which as a young man trying to impress, seems like a learning curve in itself. His hunger for dance never subsided and he found himself using YouTube as a learning tool to develop a more constructed choreographic practice. He also remembers taking photos of workouts from Men's Health magazines and applying them to his gym training.

"I ALWAYS FELT AS IF I HAD TO BE READY FOR SOMETHING BIGGER IN DANCE, I JUST DIDN'T KNOW WHAT A FUTURE IN DANCE LOOKED LIKE, BUT I FELT I ALWAYS HAD TO BE READY."

When he finished high school, like many young dancers, Braedyn got a job working in hospitality as a way to fund his passion. He took dance classes at Whitireia every Monday and was invited by DANZ to teach high schoolers' Hip Hop as part of the Learning Outside the Classroom (LEOTC) programme. He constantly wanted to practise his form and learn something new - however this came with one of his biggest lessons; that there is no challenge like the dance lifestyle.

Despite the sometimes difficult lessons in leading a dance life, Braedyn persisted and has been lucky enough to share his passion and skill with others, as a performer and as a teacher. Possibly his most exceptional dance venture comes in the form of his work with the mixed ability Hip Hop group JDK. There is pride in Braedyn's demeanour when he mentions that his brother, a member of JDK, likely picked up dancing because of him. His work with JDK taught him the power and importance of teaching and communication. It inspired him to nurture those skills and carry them into his future.



PHOTO: STEPHEN A'COURT

BRAEDYN HUMPHRIES, NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL OF DANCE 2018



PHOTO: STEPHEN A'COURT

BRAEDYN PERFORMING WITH LAIFA TA'ALA AND CHRIS CLEGG, NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL OF DANCE GRADUATION SEASON 2018



BRAEDYN'S FIRST BALLET CLASS WITH QI HUAN AT THE NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL OF DANCE IN 2014

"THERE IS A LOT THAT GOES INTO TEACHING; PREPARATION, PRESENCE AND UNDERSTANDING; ESPECIALLY WITH A GROUP WHO MAY NOT HAVE THE SAME VOCABULARY AS YOU."

He explains, that is a lesson on its own, and that reassurance and the ability to push a class in an encouraging way is key to being a successful teacher.

Despite his already substantial track record in dance, Braedyn still wasn't fully aware of what his body was really capable of, or what dance had the potential to be outside of dancing and teaching Hip Hop. It wasn't until he joined Tū Move, a programme established by NZSD to introduce young Māori and Pacific Island men to dance, that he saw the broad spectrum. At the time, Tū Move was led by contemporary dancer and choreographer Luke Hanna, who was also performing in Taki Rua's *Tiki Taane Mahuta*. It was his involvement with Tū Move and exposure to multidisciplinary works

like *Tiki Taane Mahuta* that completely opened up Braedyn's experience and understanding of dance. This in turn encouraged him to launch into higher dance training at NZSD as a student of contemporary dance.

"My time at NZSD was enjoyable; it was also testing and frustrating. The privilege to study at a prestigious school with teachers who are out of this world, who listened and cared for me was life changing," he says. Though, he admits that it was a struggle to adapt to the new level of dance, education and environment.

When reflecting on this he refers back to *You Got Served* and a saying he learned from the film: "what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger". Over time and through various experiences Braedyn says he's learned to accept challenges and to be realistic. And whether it's through traditional education, YouTube videos, early 2000 films, or surrounding yourself with equally passionate people, there is so much to be gained from opening yourself to learning and its various avenues. ■



PHOTO: SEAN AICKIN

BRAEDYN PERFORMING WITH J&K, NZ DANCE WEEK 2018



PHOTO: STEPHEN A'COURT

BRAEDYN IN REHEARSAL FOR JUST DANCE CRAZY SHOW, 2018