

2003-2004 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

Rennie Harris Puremovement: *History of Hip-hop*

October 10, 2003

11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teachers:

We hope that you will find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for the Rennie Harris Puremovement: *History of Hip-hop* school matinee that they will see at Mondavi Center, UC Davis. This CueSheet, which is intended to complement the enclosed Curriculum Guide, provides background information on the performance as well as a review of theater conventions and audience protocol.

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Rennie Harris Puremovement: *History of Hip Hop*

**“Words splatter out like machine-gun fire, but never blur;
feet threaten to trip each other up, but spin free as if invisible hands had untied a knot... this
African American form plays hardball.”**

The Village Voice

An inventive dance company that has pushed hip-hop to its limits, Rennie Harris Puremovement was founded in 1992. Since then, it has toured globally and dedicated itself to preserving and disseminating hip-hop culture through workshops, classes, long-term residences, mentoring programs, and vibrant public

performances.

History of Hip-Hop is a lecture-demonstration of movement, rhythm, sound, and image, featuring a cast of dancers, live percussion, riveting vocals, and video-collage projections. The performance illustrates how hip-hop has its roots in African tradition and culture as well as Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Cuban, and Puerto Rican cultures from the early 1960s until today. The program also includes a question-and-answer period for the audience.

Dance legend Rennie Harris, who choreographs and directs the performance, is fluent in the vernacular of hip-hop and its attendant styles – B-boy (breakdancing), house dancing, and stepping – which have emerged spontaneously from the urban inner-cities of America, such as the North Philadelphia community where he was raised. He has brought these “social” dances to the concert stage, creating a cohesive dance performance that finds new appeal in the theater.

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But Rennie Harris is more than a hip-hop artist. He is the interpreter of hip-hop as a cultural ritual, one that celebrates his community’s core values and heritage, and invokes its innate spirit, says scholar and dance critic Suzanne Carbonneau.

“Harris continually reminds his audience that hip-hop is an extension of traditional African dance and culture, the latest in the succession of American vernacular forms including the cakewalk, animal dances, the Charleston, the lindy hop, rhythm tap, bop, funk, and disco, that are derived from an African aesthetic,” Carbonneau has written. “As such, hip-hop must be regarded as a spiritual endeavor. In Africa, dance is the medium through which human beings communicate with the gods...In Africa, there is a saying that goes, ‘Without dance, there would be no gods.’”

Rennie Harris is also a powerful spokesman for the significance of “street” origins in dance style. Intrigued

by hip-hop's adaptability, he seeks inspiration from the other arts, dance forms, and performance art. As a pioneer in performing, choreographing, and teaching hip-hop, he has traveled the globe with America's first hip-hop tour, the *Fresh Festival* starring Run DMC, Fatboys, and Kurtis Blow. He has also worked with such noted hip-hop stars as Kool Moe Dee, West Street Mob, and Salt 'n' Pepa. Since age 14, he has taught workshops and classes at schools and universities in the United States and internationally. Among his numerous recognitions are the 1996 Pew Fellowship in the Arts for Choreography, awards from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, three nominations for a Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, and Chicago's 2001 Black Theater Alvin Ailey Award for best choreography. At 38, Rennie Harris is indeed the world ambassador to hip-hop.

This CueSheet was written by MERLYN POTTERS, Undergraduate Program Coordinator, Department of English, UC Davis.

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);

Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;

Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;

Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;

Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;

Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;

Please do not use flash photography.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.