



Victor Quijada in rehearsal. Photo: Scottish Dance Theatre

## KELLY APTER meets up with the street dancer who got drawn into ballet

Quijada's interest in choreography, but performance-wise he still had something to prove. "I wanted to fulfil my classical potential," says Quijada. "And Les Grands Ballets Canadiens also had a choreographic workshop, which was very enticing." But any plans to sever his streetdance roots were abandoned upon his arrival in Montreal, a city with a huge hip hop scene. "I reconnected with it and started getting further and further into that world again," says Quijada. "And at the same time, I was getting further and further into the ballet world. It was a funny situation, I was living two lives; one at the ballet studio and one in the clubs, committing a lot to both."

Quijada began formulating his own choreographic style, blending streetdance with a ballet/contemporary crossover. The results caused a stir both in the studio and the clubs, with dancers from both quarters eager to learn Quijada's hybrid dance vernacular. Before long, Rubberbandance Group was formed: "The groups were happening already, in two different worlds, I only had to mesh them together and pull myself out of a full-time job and into a full-time commitment to run the company." But it was while dancing with Les Grands Ballets that Quijada first came to the attention of choreographer Kim Brandstrup, a mentor with the Peter Darrell Choreographic Award.

"Kim had come to Montreal to choreograph *Queen of Spades*, and while he was there he saw some of my work," Quijada explains.

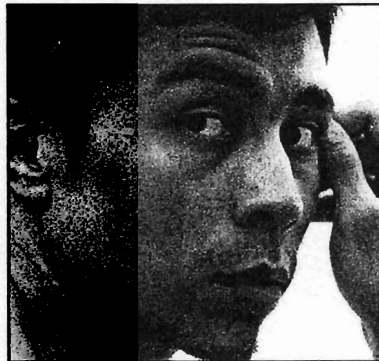
"Almost a year later he gave me a call, told me about the award and said it would be a good idea to send in some work. The rest is dance history." Instead of offering money or medals, the Peter Darrell Trust fund the creation of a new work with a professional dance company. Along with fellow-winner Beth Cassani's *My House is Melting*, Quijada's work, *Self Observation Without Judgement* will form part of a gala celebration in Glasgow this month. Both pieces will then enter the Scottish Dance Theatre repertoire, playing across Scotland and Italy throughout the summer.

As for Quijada, he's still on a path of discovery: "I want to find the same freedom as a choreographer that I have in the circle when I'm improvising. As a hip hopper, there are certain ingrained rules that you follow, and in formal dance there are also these inherent, unspoken rules. What I'm trying to do is take the

Unlike girls, who dream of ballet stardom from toddlerhood, boys often take a circuitous route into dance. And while Victor Quijada's interest in movement came earlier than most, his road to success was no less winding. A recipient of this year's Peter Darrell Choreographic Award, the 26-year-old has just completed a new work with Scottish Dance Theatre, making Dundee the latest stop on a fascinating journey. As a young boy growing up in Los Angeles, it was the buzz and excitement of street dance that first caught Quijada's attention. At the tender age of eight, he began frequenting the hip hop 'circles' in his neighbourhood, slowly building up the confidence and skill to breakdance in front of his peers. A more formal introduction to dance followed at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, before Quijada joined the Rudy Perez Performance Ensemble and a whole new world opened up. "When I was dancing in hip hop clubs in Los Angeles, it was very important to have your own language, your own style," says Quijada. "And then when I started studying with Rudy Perez and learned about the post-modern movement - even learning about artists such as Dali and Picasso - that really influenced me and what I brought into the circle as a street dancer."

After two years with Perez, Quijada headed east to New York, and the studios of Twyla Tharp. But the transition was far from smooth; suddenly Quijada was working alongside dancers who had spent years practising tendus rather than toplocks. He explains:

"When I started working with Twyla, I turned my back on street dancing for a while. I was surrounded by really technical, classically trained dancers and I had a big complex that I was just this street kid. So I turned my focus onto ballet for three years, very intensively, trying to catch up to where I thought I needed to be if I was going to belong in that world." Relief came in the guise of a fracture, a broken foot which forced Quijada to reappraise his situation, and ultimately find a new direction. "It gave me a perspective on what was important," he says. "And I began



# Victor Quijada