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Hip Hop 360: Rubberbandance

What a stretch

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"You need to know the rules to break the rules." That's Rubberbandance Group founder Victor Quijada on how his classical ballet technique spurred him to take street dance to the stage as dynamic contemporary dance. Anyone who saw RBDG's sold-out performance at last year's Canada Dance Festival came away not only with goose bumps but a resonant holographic sense of the human body moving through space.

Then again, Quijada has always broken the rules, beginning in South Central L.A. where he began breakdancing at age 8 - not easy for a Chicano when breaking was black. By age 16, he was a busy back-up dancer for rap artists and traveling with a couple of hip-hop groups in L.A. "Those were the days," laughs the acclaimed 30-year-old choreographer. "I was in heaven, but I wasn't being an angel or anything."



Rubberbandance offers an elastic perspective

He might have stayed in the hip-hop groove were it not for what was happening to him by day at the by-audition-only L.A. County High School for the Arts. "I was exposed to so much else... music, theatre, dance, visual arts. It really changed the way I saw what I could do in the world and I felt that I had only touched the very tip of the iceberg."

He began taking theories of minimalism and abstraction learned by day and testing them in the clubs by night. "It was the beginning of me searching: going into the cyphers, the freestyle circles, and not moving, doing minimalistic expression in the middle of all these b-boys, challenging what hip-hop was, what it could be. I no longer felt that the circle was big enough for those ideas and I had to leave it."

Three years in N.Y. with legendary dance maven Twyla Tharp stretched his dance and his worldview, but Quijada craved technique. In 2000, he joined Les Grands Ballets Canadiens as a dancer, performing in everything from Balanchine to that Christmas warhorse *The Nutcracker* at the NAC. "There's such a similarity between ballet and break - the bravado, the flow," says the dancer who formed Rubberbandance while still with Les Grands.

As the theatrical kick-start to Hip Hop 360, Rubberbandance's six dancers will perform *Elastic Perspective*, an hour-long program that concludes with *Hasta La Proxima*, his award-winning work about "manipulation and the games that we play with each other."

As for Quijada, he'll likely stay way ahead of the game, continuing to challenge audiences and himself. "For me the essence of hip-hop is creating, out of nothing, something new." Rubberbandance presents *Elastic Perspective* on Wednesday, June 20, at 7 p.m. at the NAC. For more info, visit www.canadadance.ca.