



Photo: Matheus José Maria

FLEXN

2020 TEACHERS

RESOURCE

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New Zealand
Festival OF THE ARTS

Curriculum Links

Dance, Social Studies, History, Culture

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CAST AND CREATIVES

A collaboration of **Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray**, **Peter Sellars**, and members of **the Flex community**

Light Sculpture and Lighting Design **Ben Zamora**

Costume Design **Angela Wendt**

Music Mix **Epic B**

Associate Director **Charlotte Brathwaite**

Production Manager **Andrew Lulling**

Stage Manager **Betsy Ayer**

Company Manager and Assistant Producer

Abena Floyd

Executive Producer **Park Avenue Armory**

Consulting Producer **Diane J. Malecki**

Producer **Avery Willis Hoffman**

Company:

Android Martina Heimann

Banks James Davis

Brixx Sean Douglas

Cal Calvin Hunt

Dayntee Deidra Braz

Doc Aaron Frazier

Dre Don Andre Redman

Droid Rafael Burgos

Karnage Quamaine Daniels

Regg Roc Reggie Gray

Scorp Dwight Waugh

Shellz Shelby Felton

Slicc Derick Murreld

Tyme Glendon Charles

Commissioned and produced by
Park Avenue Armory.



Peter Sellars and Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray

Photo: Stephanie Berger, courtesy Park Avenue Armory

“The beginning of flexn was about storytelling. It was about giving the ultimate stories with our bodies that people understood. What we did was go back to that. Moves and tricks isn’t really what we’re about. It’s good for battles but for this level it’s deeper. Peter (Sellars) and I connect on a great level. We both have a great deal of respect for each other’s work, that’s what keeps everything stable. He’s been a great mentor throughout this process.”

- Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray

ABOUT THE SHOW

Characterised by pausing, snapping, gliding, bone breaking, hat tricks, animation, and contortion, flex is a form of street dance that has evolved from the Jamaican bruk-up found in dance halls and reggae clubs in Brooklyn.

This electrifying phenomenon is showcased in a touring project that confronts issues of social injustice, with the dancers exploring personal narratives through their own unique movement vocabulary in post-modern dance. Created in the era of unrest following rulings on the murders of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in New York City, this powerful new work is made in collaboration with a crew of flex dancers from the very neighbourhoods where the Black Lives Matter movement first took shape. Performing both as individuals and in groups to choreography created by the ensemble itself, the dancers utilise their breathtakingly beautiful movement to tell deeply human and sometimes heart-wrenching stories that address the troubling issues of our time.

Moderated by Reggie (Reggie Roc) Gray and Peter Sellars, each performance is accompanied by a 20 minute public conversation with a range of guests, engaging cross-disciplinary discussions that provide a unique lens through which to view the performance.

“When I dance, I think, ‘How can I make somebody feel what I feel? How can I bring them to my world?’ I usually just think about things that are going on, my life – whether good or bad’ – and I try to express it.” Karnage (Quamaine Daniels)

“Flexn is being yourself. You can only be yourself when you flex. There's no rules, but be yourself. Or, sometimes you've got to become yourself. You've got to find yourself.” Slicc (Derick Dashawn Unique Murreld)

“I’ve been in a transformation this whole time personally, but my favorite moment on tour was in Italy, the audience didn’t speak English but they understood our stories and they were able to relate, that meant a lot to me.” Shellz (Shelby Felton)

“Like anything in life, experience makes you grow as a person; over the last five years many experiences have allowed me to grow as person and I express that growth on stage.” Dayntee (Deidra Braz)

Genre

Flex dance has its roots in early 90’s Jamaica however, developed in Brooklyn, New York. The flex scene started with a 1992 public access show called “Flex N Brooklyn” a talent showcase for performers across a range of genres and cultures including reggae, cheerleading and Harlem Shake dance teams. After the performances, the cameras followed the audience, who had a chance to show off their moves. After several iterations the name flex dancing stuck - “It was named by the kids out in the street, we had no control over it,” Regg Roc explains. “They'd say, 'Hey, you guys do the flexing!' I didn't know what the hell they were talking about.” You can watch the premiere episode of Flex N Brooklyn here : youtu.be/m4FTIJmSreA

FLEXN is also an example of social activism. A core part of their performance is the panel discussion, bringing different voices into dialogue together around a range of social justice issues.

FLEXIPEDIA

FLEXN Created by Rocky and Sandra Cummings and derived from Flex N Brooklyn, a cable-access show that was established in the early 1990s that showcased flex movement.

B.A. A celebration of a great move.

BOGLE A dance created by Gerald "Bogle" Levy, who later on became the creator of many dances in dancehall reggae. His style consisted of a lot of fluidity in his movement (which we call body grooving today).

BONE-BREAKING (Pioneer: Nugget) A style that looks like its name: the illusion that a person's bones are breaking. Usually the dancer makes it look harder and more difficult to do bone-breaks and uses a larger amount of flexibility to create illusions and tell stories in all directions using arms and body.

BRUK UP A dance started by George Adams, aka Bruck Up, originally from Jamaica. His style consisted of character and popping of the shoulders, and is the foundation of flex along with the dancehall style.

CONNECTING (Pioneer: Gutta) A style that links together different concepts, body movements, foot placements, and flex genres in a consecutive flow with dance moves seamlessly creating different ways of physical storytelling. Hand-based connecting is when a person uses angles, puzzles and shapes as their way of linking and flowing things together.

DANCEHALL A genre of Jamaican popular music that originated in the late 1970s; a more sparse version of reggae than the roots style which had dominated most of the 1970s.

DIRTY Not to be messed with; extremely skilled

FINESSE/JETTE ADORE Good vibes; a calm modd

FOUNDATION The beginning; the secret scrolls to becoming a full flexer

GET-LOW (Pioneer: Reem) A style based on using crouching, knee pivots, knee glides, hand/body to floor moves and movements, animations, and illusions in relation to the floor.

GLIDING (Pioneer: Brian) A style that is based on the concept and illusion of air-walking, sliding, and floating using different patterns, foot placements, body movements and hand gestures; creating stories using different alternating upper and lower body movements and patterns.

HARD The power of a move

HAT TRICKS (Pioneer: Gutta/Popcorn) A style that uses the hat to do flips, spins, finger illusions, animations, flows, rhythms, concepts, and also uses any part of the body to manoeuvre and make moves with the hat. The style is usually done with fitted caps and moves are usually blended with other flex styles.

ILLUSION Expansion of your imagination through movement

INNOVATORS The ones who adopt the genre and its originality then further the style with their own creativity and skills, thus enhancing the way the style is done, adding to its history.

ITS OVA/ZODDED/CHEWED/CHOMPED/ MASHED/FIXED/SENT TO MARS You can't come back; you got beat; a very bad loss

LABBIN' Experimenting; working on your craft; can be both physically and mentally; chemistry

LET'S GET IT! Let's get to work

MODD (THAT'S MODD) Something spectacular; it's mazal tov; exciting; eye candy; oh he's goin' modd

O.D. Overdose move

O.G. A pioneer in the flex community

PAUZIN (Pioneer: Regg Roc) A style that looks like the original inspiration for the concept: pressing play and pause on dance moves and movement. A person exaggerates different effects and animates stories with an added pauzin effect. The pauzin look is usually honed to become extremely hard with every pause, but can also be done lighter with a softer beat becoming mini-pauses.

RAW Something natural; raw talent; something organic

RIDIN' Going with the beat of the song

SHOTTA A dancehall dancer

SMOOTH Calm movements

SWAG The way you carry yourself; your definition; your style

WACK Corny

WAVING When your body is waving, or you're waving certain points of your body, or the wave is going from one point of your body to another point of your body – like a wave

WORD In agreement; I agree

PRODUCTION AND TECHNIQUES

MOVEMENT

The flex dance vocabulary is characterised by sharp, rhythmic contortion, pausing, snapping, gliding, bone-breaking, and animated performance, movements documented in the Flexipedia (reproduced above).

Dance moves also come from the performer's personal experiences. Some of the dancers are self taught, learning moves from family, friends, the street. Others have also been through traditional dance training and bring in movements from modern, ballet, African and reggae dance styles. Facial expression and animations help drive each story's narrative. The dancers are freestyling – improvising and creating their own moves in the moment in every performance, every night.

"FLEXN helped me live as a dancer and go deeper into my flexn style. The project keeps challenging me, because it's freestyle and not all choreographed. Reflects what's going on in my life." Android (Martina Heimann)

LIGHTING

The lighting design by Ben Zamora dominates the back wall of the stage. The jumbled lines of light almost look like cut up letters FLEX. Pulsing in the background they mimic the movements of the dancers, stopping and starting to the beat of the music. Lighting also creates effects such as prison cells, giving each dancer a cell of light to perform in.

SOUND

"A lot of the songs I have in FLEXN are a mixture of reggae and dance hall – and some dramatic cinematic feeling, like music scores that you would hear in a movie." Epic B, Music Mix, FLEXN

The music for FLEXN is layered and consists of beats, rhythms and sound effects as well as recognisable songs. The lyrics reflect the themes of FLEXN adding another layer of narrative and storytelling to the performance.

THEMES AND CONTEXT

"FLEXN pushed me to a limit I didn't think I could go. I built my performance and social skills even more. It enables me to be free. People change so the dancing changes. Always being real." Brixx (Sean Douglas)

"Growing up, I was always angry. I was angry with everyone, but I kept it to myself. I feel like I had a bunch of rage in my body – I just never let it out. Now, as I understand myself better, I'm able to express myself and keep the anger out – and just let people feel my emotions in a positive way." Dre Don (Andre Redman)

"Real is real. You can portray where you come from, because that's you. That's who you are." Droid (Rafael Burgos)

A 20-minute panel discussion moderated by Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and Peter Sellars gives context to each performance. The panel format gives agency to a range of different voices and perspectives including young people, cultural figures, educators and law enforcement. Past discussions have included racial inequity, police brutality, neighbourhood safety, prison reform and mass incarceration, restorative justice, and the plight of immigrants and refugees.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND READINGS

WATCH

Explore the videos on the FLEXN playlist from Park Avenue Armory:

youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7MGCoP-mG3IDspw2NtP_5dNXPvYrRHD

Watch members of FLEXN group D.R.E.A.M (Dance Rules Everything Around Me) perform at TedxTeen: youtube.com/watch?v=KOrS5x02Vnw

Take a look at old episodes of *Flex N Brooklyn* and see where the dance style began:

youtube.com/watch?v=rt0vyaSMVmQ

READ

“Part protest, part dance party, part collective autobiography” Read a review from the New York Times: nytimes.com/2015/03/28/arts/dance/review-in-flexn-street-dance-gets-a-grand-stage.html

"If it wasn't for the brukup, we wouldn't have created what we did." Find out about the origins of the Flex dance movement: pitchfork.com/features/article/9864-flex-tunes-brooklyns-own-dance-music/

LISTEN

Plug your ears into FLEXN music producer Epic B on soundcloud: soundcloud.com/immortal-instruments

GO FURTHER

FLEXN tells and addresses stories of social injustice. During rehearsals for the first performance the deaths of two young black men, Eric Garder and Michael Brown occurred. Black Lives Matter is an activist movement that campaigns against violence and systematic racism towards black people. Find out more about the Black Lives Matter movement here: blacklivesmatter.com

Read the article “Staging a revolution: can theatre be an effective form of activism”:
theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2016/mar/23/theatre-effective-protest-activism-change-debate

What social injustices face young people in New Zealand? Take a look at the National Library’s topic explorer on ‘Teen Issues’ where you’ll find articles, videos, images and audio about the issues young people in Aotearoa face today:

natlib.govt.nz/schools/topics/591d05548d2a4e46dd00b33d/teen-issues

“Part protest, part dance party, part collective autobiography FLEXN rails against social injustice, from police brutality to the prison system’s failures in America. By turns tragic and playful, we see the dancers at war, at work, at home; these situations are evoked with a mind-boggling repertoire of quaking, pretzeling, rippling freestyle moves.”

[New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com)

PROVOCATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

PRE-FESTIVAL

Read through the information you have on FLEXN. What are your expectations of the performance?

What are the themes that you expect might be explored during the performance? What do you know about them?

Talk about how the performing arts can be a vehicle for social change. Can you think of any other performances that tackle social (in)justice? What about visual artworks? Songs or pieces of music?

AT THE FESTIVAL

What sense of energy do I feel in the space?

What captures my attention in the space? The dancers? The set? The music? Why?

What questions do I have about the piece? What are the dancers trying to communicate?

How does the panel discussion effect my experience of the performance? Make note of any questions you have during the talk to discuss in class.

AFTER THE FESTIVAL

What was your overall reaction to the performance? Did you find it compelling? Confusing? Powerful? Challenging? Unique? Explain your reactions

How did the production design support the performance?

How did the discussion moderate your experience of the performance? Did you learn anything? Did it change your expectations of what you were going to see?

Choose one of your favourite dances in FLEXN. Was there a theme or issue explored in this piece? What do you know about this theme or issue? What can you find out? In the performance how did the dancer(s) communicate what they wanted to say? What movements and techniques told the story? How did the music choices support the narrative? Was this dance a solo or group dance? How did this come together and make you feel?

Think about an issue that is close to your heart. How could you tell a story about this? What movement, music and production techniques would you use to tell this story. What emotions would you want to provoke in your audience?

Did the stories they shared translate to a New Zealand/Aotearoa context? How are their stories relatable? Were there any local topics that it made you think of?

Need something more? Contact your SchoolFest team with any questions about the performance.

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