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After Three Decades, Raphael Xavier Still Break Dancing Strong

By Christopher Arnott, Contact Reporter | February 21, 2017



Raphael Xavier in his show "Point of Interest," which is Feb. 24 and 25 at the University of St. Joseph in West Hartford.
(Bicking Photography)

Raphael Xavier feels that he's taking break dancing to places it has never been before. "I'm still a breaker, man," he says in a recent phone interview.

"As a 46-year-old breaker, I'm not supposed to be doing it the way I am now. What I'm doing has never been done, because it hasn't been around that long."

Xavier brings his stage show "Point of Interest" — which he conceived, choreographed, composed original music for and performs in alongside four other dancers — to the Autorino Center at the University of St. Joseph for two performances on Feb. 24 and 25 at 7:30 p.m.

The multithreat talent has previously performed in Connecticut as a member of pioneering hip-hop choreographer Rennie Harris' troupe Puremovement, began choreographing his work about 15 years ago and now tours regularly with his work.

"From 1983 to 1993 I was just breaking. From 1993 to '97 I was exploring a lot of things. In 1997 or '98, I got involved with Rennie Harris. One day, in 2001, I did a seven-minute piece at a festival and people really liked it. I started my own company in 2002."

Besides touring his shows, Xavier occasionally performs with Puremovement. He also teaches three times a week at Princeton University. He's also a writer, photographer and recording artist.

Xavier was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for choreography in 2016. He's juggling several projects, in several different media.

"I never know what's coming next," he says. "It's stuff I do to keep busy. Once this show is done, I don't go out again for a while. So I'm working on music projects, side projects. I also paint."

While not precisely autobiographical, "Point of Interest" explores what it is like to be a "maturing" break dancer — not just from the perspective of how a dancer's body changes, but how the hip-hop dance scene has changed through the decades. Xavier, originally from Willimington, Del., Xavier composed most of the music for "Point of Interest," but used existing hip-hop records (and in one case, a sample from the metal band System of a Down) for some of the pieces.

Xavier talks of the intense dance battles that happened when he began in the mid-1980s, but then how "there was nothing, no battles, from 1985 to '93. Even then, I was in my 20s and I was already one of the older ones." Now in his mid-40s, he's performing with dancers who are around half his age.

"The scene is thriving. I can't compete on the level of those guys, but I love to do it, so I do it in show form. The young guys are flying, man, but they are also still trying to keep up with me. I like to push my body. I have to be smarter though."



It took a spinal injury in 2007, he says, for him to start "thinking of my body in a different way. Ultimately, this is really about the maturing of a practitioner in a form that's associated with youth. you have to throw out all the ideas of what a breaker is, what a breaker is supposed to look like. I'm not a kid anymore."

Xavier's new perspective about his body and his career led to revelations about why he continues to dance at all.

"I learned that you don't owe anybody anything. You owe it to yourself. If you want to do something, you find a way to do it."

RAPHAEL XAVIER'S *"Point of Interest"* is performed Feb. 24 and 25 at 7:30 p.m. in the Autorino Center for the Arts, 1678 Asylum Ave., West Hartford. Tickets are \$25, \$20 for seniors. 860-231-5555, usj.edu/arts.