

B-girls are flipping it with flare



AND HOLD IT: Nontsikelelo Kubeka, 14, ends her round with a freeze as she dances in the middle of the cypher or circle of dancers. Nontsikelelo started dancing five years ago.

PICTURES: KATE MORRISSEY

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DEFYING the odds, a dance crew from Protea South is training to make history in South Africa.

The crew specialises in break-dancing, but unlike other break-based crews in most of the world, Floor Junkies is made up of all females.

Breaking is a male-dominated dance. B-girls, or female breakers, are rare in most countries, and according to b-boys in Joburg, they are especially rare here.

The girls' coach, Malebo George Thothela, better known in the dance community as B-boy Slice, gave several reasons for putting together a b-girl crew.

"There are no b-girls in Africa, or very few. If they make it big, they will be the first b-girl crew I know of in Africa," he said.

Breaking began in the Bronx, an area of New York City in America, in the early 1970s as a way for pre-teen boys to express themselves amid the poverty and violence that surrounded them.

The dance has an aggressive and traditionally masculine aesthetic.

As it evolved, the movements also demanded an impressive amount of upper body strength.

One move, called a 1990 or ninety for short, required a dancer to put all of his or her weight on one arm and spin upside-down. The dance also incorporated flares from men's gymnastics, where the dancer spreads his or her legs in a V and propels them around his or her body with only one hand on the ground at a time.

Flares are not used in women's gymnastics competitions. Despite these characteristics of the dance, Thothela said he chose not to teach boys.

He said boys had seasonal sports that made it difficult to commit to the year-round four-day-a-week training schedule that he used to teach the art of breaking.

"You teach somebody for two months and for the next two



STOP MOTION: Gontsi Mokoki, 14, hits a freeze at the end of a warm-up routine. Gontsi says freezes are her favourite kind of move.

months, they're not there. "The girls have been loyal," he said.

He also sees breaking as a way to empower girls and keep them from getting into trouble.

"They're very tired when they get home. It keeps them too busy to do wrong things."

The 15-girl squad's ages range from 8 to 17, and the dance experience ranges from a few months to five years.

Despite the variation, most of the girls talked about the feeling of family that they got from their crew.

"They're so welcoming and understanding. Some of the moves are hard for me and they try to help me out," said Khali Mthethwa, 17, who has been breaking for two months.

Gontsi Mokoki, 14, who has been breaking for a year, said when she started the group made her feel comfortable so that she could try the moves with confi-



B-ATTITUDE: Nontsikelelo Kubeka poses in a "b-girl stance", a traditional pose that conveys the defiant attitude of the dance.

dence. "I was scared because I thought I would get broken, but these people were friendly to me. Everything we did with respect and love," Gontsi said.

Nontsikelelo Kubeka, 14, started training with Thothela five years ago.

"If I'm sad or angry or disappointed, I just dance.

"Dancing is my diary. Everything just comes out of my mind," Nontsikelelo said.

Nine-year-old Khanyisile Mofokeng had a simple, yet profound, reason for breaking. "It makes me feel myself," she said.

The girls practise Monday to Thursday at the Protea South Multipurpose Hall, and Thothela said that they would begin doing shows next year.

They can be reached through the Floor Junkies B-girl Crew Facebook page.

@bgirledukate



THE BUILDING BLOCK: Khanyisile Mofokeng, 9, does the six-step, a traditional move that establishes momentum and puts the dancer in position to perform more complex moves.

Forums can't only happen in drought

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PICTURE this: Dry, cracked soil, empty riverbeds and dams, and not a wheat or maize crop in sight.

As South Africa continues to feel the devastating effects of El Niño, these images are no longer at the back of our minds. They are more real.

And if we don't become proactive, there are going to be serious repercussions for South Africans, says Professor Coleen Vogel, a professor at the Global Change and Sustainability Research Institute at Wits University.

"We knew this was coming, we knew the effects of El-Niño would occur," Vogel adds.

She says droughts aren't new to the country.

"I've researched droughts in South Africa going back for the last 150 years. Dry periods in South Africa are normal, heavy rain is actually abnormal," she points out.

"There has been a change from years of good rains and floods to dry conditions, but now we are feeling the effects of El Niño and we have to manage it to the best of our abilities."

The main way to be proactive is to focus on being water wise and educating the public, says Vogel.

"We have to start with young children and enable them to be water wise. We have to raise awareness. The mindset has to change. We take water for granted just because we can turn on a tap and have water flowing out of it."

She says a drought forum,

We must admit we face a future of decreasing water, says prof

as occurred in the early 1990s, where small-scale and large-scale farmers, the government, industry and civic society met to discuss these issues, would be an ideal way to deal with the challenges of climate change.

"There should be a consistent national consultation. Instead of only discussing these issues when we face droughts, we should be making such forums more permanent. We need to be more astute about the fact that we are facing a situation of decreasing water. We need to look at what this means and what can change," Vogel adds.

South Africa, she says, has good water and energy policies, which "we are trying to implement through various processes, including education at universities".

The consequences of the drought are the result not only of atmospheric "drivers", but human causes as well, such as poor infrastructural management, leaking pipes and governance challenges like water leadership changes in government.

According to Free State Agriculture Department media officer Alani Janeke, what farmers in the Free State and surrounding areas are worried about is that the time to plant is run-

ning out.

"A few have started planting in the belief the rain will come, but planting time in the Free State is from the beginning of October to the end of December. The time to plant in the eastern parts is running out, as they have to plant earlier, due to the frost they have in the autumn and winter," she says.

"Some farmers in the eastern Free State planted wheat in winter and are also hoping for rain, as their crops are in a sensitive time of growing, Janeke says.

"Even if it does rain, access to financing is a big challenge for many farmers, as many of them have been struggling for two of three seasons."

She notes that the hardest hit areas are Mangaung, which includes Bloemfontein, Thaba Nchu and Botshabelo, and Nala, which includes Bothaville and Wesselsbron.

"Municipal areas report that conditions are critically dry and that they have big challenges to get hold of feed to buy for their stock," says Janeke.

With regard to dealing with the damage caused by the current drought, Vogel says the situation is concerning but that it's still early days.

"There is still time; farmers need to make adjustments to diversify if they can. An example of this would be to plant a mix of soya beans and yellow maize."

With regard to the losses that have already occurred, Vogel says there will be a knock-on effect which goes all the way down the chain.

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