



10 YEARS DANCING ON 'THE STREET'

IDENTITY DANCE CREW



BY JESS LOH

In 2016, Street Dance New Zealand (SDNZ) celebrates their 10 year anniversary. Having participated at the very first SDNZ Nationals competition held in 2007, Jess Loh examines the 10-year evolution of SDNZ and the success that has grown out of this organisation for the street dance community in Aotearoa New Zealand.

I waited in the wings, dressed in a white and gold oversized tracksuit, wearing a white and black bandana on my head and baby phats on my feet. With some last minute stretches and recaps of the routine I was still unfamiliar with, nerves invaded my body. After weeks and weeks of training, it all came down to executing the next two minutes perfectly. MC Dean was getting the crowd going at the Vodafone Events Centre, and we walked onto the stage for what was the debut of the SDNZ National Hip Hop dance competition.

Ten years later in 2016, the nostalgia is still exactly the same. The competition has passed through the generations, with younger siblings and students having the liberty to experience the same adrenalin filled saga we all felt 10 glorious years ago. SDNZ Nationals is the calendar event of the year for all hip hop and street dancers in NZ.

For the last 10 years, SDNZ has provided a platform for young dancers to strive for excellence, and has played a pivotal role in helping NZ forge a glittering reputation for hip hop and street dance on the international scene. SDNZ

was created in 2007 in South Auckland and aimed to provide opportunities for "young people to grow through a shared dance experience". With its affiliation with Hip Hop International (HHI), who host the international world competition annually, SDNZ has been the root of many opportunities and international success for generations of NZ hip hop and street dancers. New Zealand has held multiple gold, silver and bronze medals at the world competition, and continues to be one of the largest delegations at the international event considering the small size of the country.

What started out as an Auckland dominated event has now turned into a truly national affair with managers in Northland, Waikato, Hawkes Bay, Wellington and Nelson charged with the responsibility of delivering regional competitions leading to Nationals. In the beginning, street dance consisted of very few crews, mostly represented by church youth groups. The interest for street dance grew rapidly, as teams like Fearless, Dziah, ReQuest and Sweet and Sour returned from the world stage with golden success.

People started to believe, and dreams of being number one in the world quickly turned into reality. It took just four years before NZ almost completed a clean sweep of the international competition, coming away with three of the four gold medals on offer. It was here that the rest of the street dance world started to learn our long and extensive national anthem... both versions. New Zealand street dance was well and truly on the world map! Today more crews are coming out of dance schools and studios, all contributing to the phenomenal growth of the street dance community in NZ. Swarm from Christchurch took out the Adults division at SDNZ Nationals this year, the first time



REQUEST DANCE CREW



DZIAH DANCE CREW



ALLISTER SALAIVAO

ALL IMAGES FROM SDNZ 10TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT
NINA GASTREICH, NINAGPHOTOGRAPHY

a crew from the South Island has been crowned national champs, but the impact has been wider than just a growth in the number of dancers and crews.

Parris Goebel has an enormous international following, which started out with the humble beginnings of SDNZ. I still remember competing against Goebel and her group, ReQuest, at SDNZ Nationals in 2007. ReQuest, made up of five friends who trained for fun after school came second, but they were extraordinary even back then. Now Goebel has built an invincible empire with The Palace Dance Studio. Career pathways have been created for dancers from her crews who are in hot demand internationally, and securing contracts dancing with Cirque de Soliel, J Lo, Madonna and Justin Bieber.

The Cesan brothers have created numerous platforms in the sector for Auckland youth. Known for their flips, tricks and isolations, Andrew and Richie created their crew TMC in 2006 and entered the first SDNZ competition in 2007. The family tradition has continued with youngest brother, Joshua, who has taken street dance to international heights with his crew, IDentity, and company IDCO. Richie is currently choreographing Auckland Theatre Company's upcoming season of Billy Elliot and Andrew has started a production company.

Allister Salaivao, who helped organise the first competition in 2007 with his crew DZIAH, has transferred his skills in street dance to the classroom as a teacher at Manurewa High. He returned to SDNZ in 2016 with his students and conquered the schools section.

Pathways in event administration and management have also been created with some dancers becoming highly respected organisers and judges. Joel Gallarde founder of

Triple8Funk is now heavily involved as an international judge, and running dance events globally. Stephen Grey, founder of Fusion Dance Company and 2011 national champions Vogue Dance Crew is the SDNZ National Head Judge, a member of HHI Internationals Judging Panel since 2010 and was made an International Elite Judge at Worlds in 2015.

Jacqui Cesan was the force behind this year's 10th year anniversary event held in Auckland on 27 April. As a leader who has supported, maintained and observed the evolution of street dance in the last 10 years, Jacqui sees street dance opportunities growing even more. "Last year we were granted charitable trust status and this will open doors for us to be an even better support for our community and youth. With the Trust we can now look towards developing youth programmes and supporting dance education in outlying areas and also developing programmes that see dance being accessible and affordable for all."

SDNZ's vision of "Igniting Potential" in the street dance community will generate even more interest and provide opportunities for the next generation of street dancers for years to come. You would think that something this good wouldn't last forever, but SDNZ and the young talent of NZ dancers are a force to be reckoned with. It's a force that is almost untouchable on the international stage, and it's not going away anytime soon. With 10 extraordinary years under its belt, the next 10 years will no doubt see more success that will extend well beyond the street. ■