

THE FINANCIAL TIMES

July 19, 2016 5:56 pm

From the Streets to the Stage, New York — ‘Loping lyricism’

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Kid Break (left) and Marcski of Future All Stars

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The first time I saw a SummerStage show at St Mary’s Park — a sprawling oasis of hilly greenery in the South Bronx — three youths from inner Brooklyn under monikers like Ghost and Rain proceeded to turn their limbs inside-out with underwater slowness. A couple of years later, tortuous double-jointedness went viral under the term “flex”. The documentary *Flex is Kings* showed nationwide and opera director Peter Sellars packaged the form for the Park Avenue Armory. But SummerStage, the Bronx edition, was enough of an outlier to get there first.

This year for a casually excitable crowd that eventually stretched far past the rows of foldout chairs, New York street-dance veterans Ana “Rokafella” Garcia Dionisio and Gabriel “Kwikstep” Dionisio had assembled acts that tilted towards the young. The novelty in *From the Streets to the Stage* lay less in the steps or choreography than in the style and spirit.

A newfound ranginess emerged. Rather than hunkering down to dominate a patch of sidewalk, dancers such as Kester Estephane moved out. This member of the New York City It’s Showtime crew devoured space with a loping lyricism fit for a grassy field. Likewise, Richard James, director of Brooklyn’s DysFunktional Solez, moved with a juicy capaciousness that hosted contrary impulses — his “locking” arms staccato while he flung his legs high and swished his hips with a voguer’s voluptuous delight. Hip-hop began as protest art, among other things; these twenty-somethings expressed defiance by unfettering their steps.

The Future All Stars comprised a still younger demographic. Ranging from post-tot to late teen, the breakdancers swung from loosely playful to pristinely logical (as children do). When Kid Break, age seven, spun on his back, you thought ladybird, not cog in an inhumanly fast machine. His older brother Marcski, though, turned head-spins into drama by executing them so cleanly that you watched the scything legs advance on the torso until the two were perfectly in sync.