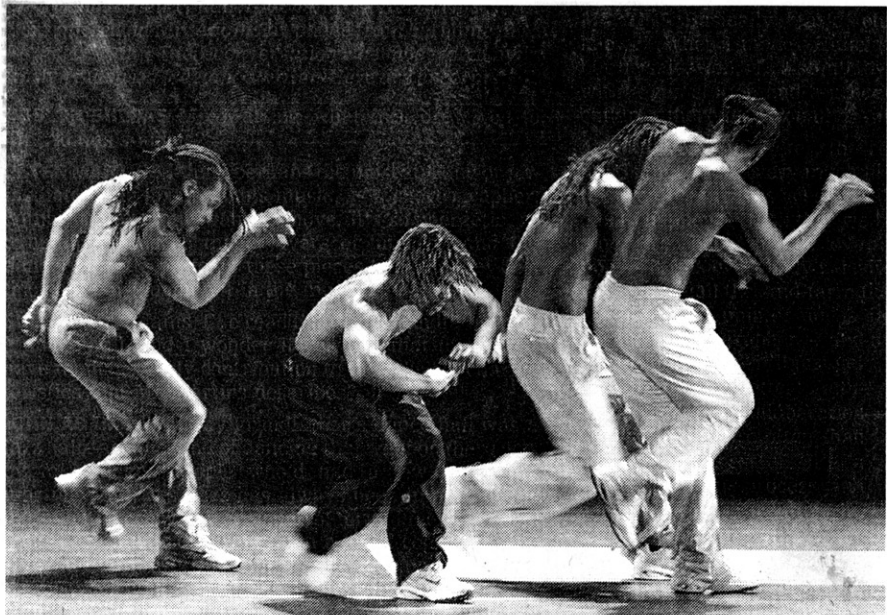


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DANCE



Photographs by Stefano Paltera for The New York Times

In "Facing Mekka," above, Rennie Harris, far right, uses hip-hop to build a full-evening work. His company performs it beginning this week at the Joyce Theater.

THIS WEEK

A New Way To Make Dance Speak Hip-Hop

RENNIE HARRIS has been extending the boundaries of hip-hop ever since establishing his dance troupe Puremovement in 1992. In pieces like "Endangered Species," he turned the virtuosity of hip-hop into beautiful, well-constructed choreography. He also showed, with his dance drama "Rome and Jewels," that hip-hop could sustain the narrative of a full-evening work.

Now, in "Facing Mekka," Mr. Harris, 39, combines hip-hop with other movement styles to create a completely original dance language. "To me, 'Mekka' means self or dance," he said during a recent rehearsal at his headquarters in a community center in Philadelphia. "It's about my coming to

terms with who I am. I traced the lineage of hip-hop from aboriginal, Brazilian and African ceremonial dance all the way to our current urban styles. There's Japanese butoh in there, too, to help me tell my story."

Mr. Harris's 10-member company will present "Facing Mekka" at the Joyce Theater in Manhattan, beginning on Tuesday. The piece is set against a huge backdrop on which images of racism, violence and dance are projected. The score, composed by Darin Ross and several collaborators, calls for cello, tabla, conga drums, berimbau and vocals and will be performed live by four musicians and DJ Evil Tracy.

A large man with an easy smile, Mr. Harris began the rehearsal by focusing on a sequence with three female dancers who were swaying side to side to the mambo rhythms. In the past, he always asked the women to copy his moves; this time he wanted their interpretations. "They are the heart of the piece," he said of the dancers as they traveled across the studio, lifting their knees high and pinwheeling their arms.

Then two male dancers came forward, sparring like boxers. Dropping to the floor,



they spun first on their hands and then on their heads. "If I stopped them from improvising," said Mr. Harris, "I'd take the soul and spirit out of the work. The foundation of hip-hop is to constantly flip the script and make something new."

Mr. Harris often receives calls from hip-hop dancers hoping to join his troupe. "I started my company," he said, "because I knew hip-hop deserved a life in theater, outside clubs, revues and music videos." In his solo, "Lorenzo's Oil," which concludes "Facing Mekka," he blends the robotic movements of hip-hop with the contortions of butoh. "This time around I'm encompassing a world of cultures," he said. "I had to try it." **VALERIE GLADSTONE**