

HEADED FOR VEGAS

The Hip Op-eration Dance Crew

By Jenny Stevenson

'Dance is an expression and there should be no time limit on when we talk' Parris Goebel

Thanks to the extraordinary talents of New Zealand's hip hop mega-star Parris Goebel and others, Aotearoa has in recent years punched well above its weight; as a result, all over the country dancers of every age have been inspired to follow in their footsteps.

Crews have begun their gruelling practices and fund-raising efforts to get to the Regional Championships, the Nationals and then maybe even to Las Vegas for the Hip Hop International 2013 World Championship on August 6 – 11.

On Auckland's Waiheke Island one such crew is gearing up for literally the chance of a lifetime – a once-only shot at fulfilling their dream. Billed as the 'world's oldest hip hoppers', the Hip Op-eration Crew, who are aged between 66 and 96 (with an average age of 76), are determined to make it all the way to Las Vegas in August.

What started life as a PR promotion on YouTube featuring 'the World's Oldest Flash Mob', (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIMd5KFG1vQ>), evolved into a Flash Mob Club and then into an official Hip Hop Mega crew, with the dancers having such a good time that they didn't want to stop. The original recruits for the Flash Mob merged with new members to form a 40-strong group of both men and women who meet twice a week in Oneroa's Morra Community Hall to practise.



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Managed by the indomitable Billie Jordan, who at a mere 43 years of age is too young to qualify for the crew, the group are thinking laterally. Billy says "Hip Hop International, the event organisers of the World Hip Hop Championships, sometimes invite or allow non-qualifying dance crews to perform at the championships. So we are hoping they will let our dancers do a tribute performance at the event to honour the young Hip Hop artists who are participating and to show that, no matter what your age, you can still embrace, respect and celebrate the culture of Hip Hop".

Billy who is trained as a PR consultant and her colleague, Carol Pearce aged 58, act as the choreographers for the group – in the best hip hop tradition, gleaning their moves off YouTube and adapting them to the physical capabilities of the dancers. Neither is a dancer by training but as Billy points out – neither were the original street-dance crews that evolved the dance form.

Seeking a major sponsor to take the group all the way to Vegas is her number one priority. To this end she will be auctioning members off to the highest bidder - in the best Kiwi tradition - on Trade Me, under the Antiques and Collectables section, closing on 20 March. Meanwhile the group already has a camera crew, from the production company Inkubator, filming them and if all goes well there are hopes for a documentary film to be made in the future.

Whatever the outcome it is clear that nothing will diminish the sense of joy that these dancers have discovered through connecting with the culture of youth, putting smiles on people's faces and as Billy puts it "learning the international language of love". ■