

CABARET

Graffiti Rock/Live at The Kitchen/Oct. 2, 1981

Picture this: On a screen behind a stage slides of painted subway cars are being projected. A DJ is working two turntables, while a beshaded man is rapping a mile a minute. On the stage two groups of young male street dancers are falling, spinning and strutting in competition with one another. The SoHo arts center is SRO with a decidedly white audience smoking Js and showing off bad posture. Quick, what have you got? Give up? It's "Graffiti Rock," of course.

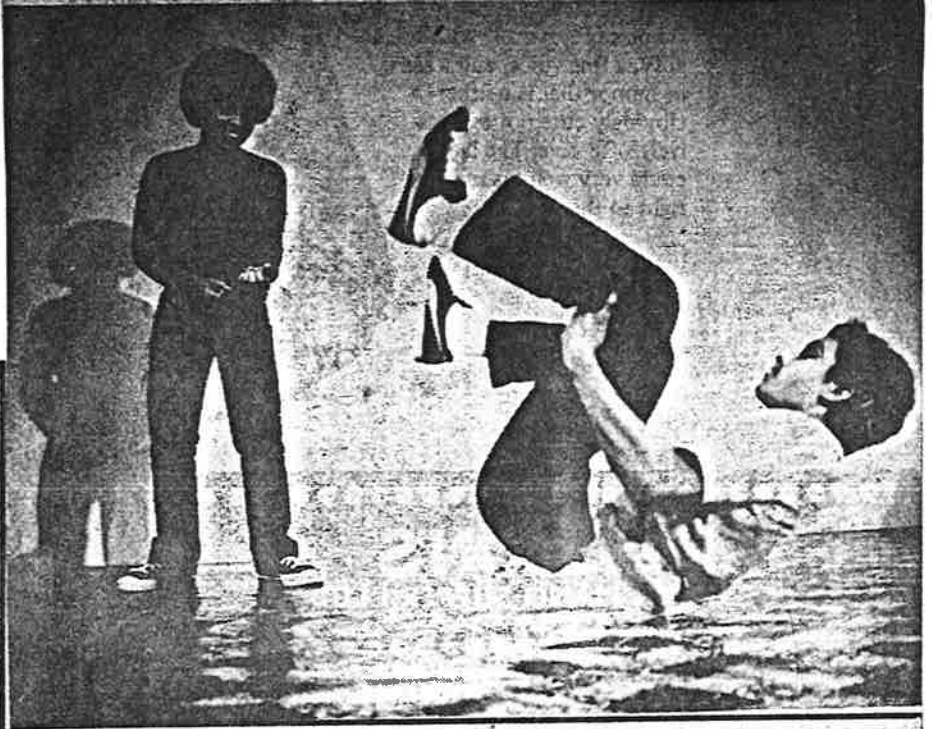
Give credit for this new phenomenon to one Frederick Braithwaite, a/k/a Fab 5 Freddy, who began his career as a visual artist. After exhibiting his work in Rome, Milan, Times Square, P.S. 1, Club 57, and the Mudd Club, Freddy collaborated with Debbie Harry and Chris Stein of Blondie to bring rap music to a whole new audience.

Freddy proved himself to be a premiere rapper at The Kitchen, and his performance proved to be the highlight of the evening. Whether he was reading from prepared street poems or ad-libbing, the flow was steady and always enhanced by the DJ. During the competitive dancing, Freddy's rap transformed into a rhythmic play-by-play that seemed to inspire the dancers into more daring and intricate moves.

The competitive dancing is called "breaking" or "B-boy," and on this occasion the two groups were The Rock Steady Crew vs. The Swift Kids Crew. They faced off against one another, taking turns showing off to Freddy's rap. Although the press release claimed that "breaking" is as much sport as it is art, the competitive aspect was played

BREAKING at THE KITCHEN.

Photo by Paula Court



down because of the setting. In fact, Lenny Len, a member of The Swift Kids Crew who appeared to be older than the rest of the boys, showed up a little toked-up and provided suspense as the audience held their breaths wondering if he was going to hurt himself. But, to be fair, the groups featured some excellent, if undisciplined dancers. Some of the head spins (yes, they spin around on their heads cushioned by their Afros) were dazzling.

The two groups of street dancers have previously performed at Lincoln Center Plaza, Spin Easy Roller Rink, Common Ground, The Ritz, Nagriel, The Hudson River Revival, the Bronx Graffiti Roller Rink and Lehman College. So it seems that they have had little trouble getting work.

The slides were taken by Henry Chalfant, Martha Cooper and Wesley. They included the subway graffiti art of Dondi, who has worked painting scenery at the Winter Garden Theater, Duro, and Lee, an old friend of Fab 5 Freddy's, who has painted five murals on the Lower East Side.

At five bucks a head, the show only lasted a little over an hour, over well before 10 o'clock. And the audience didn't even get to pick the winning crew with its applause.

THE KITCHEN