



Jonathan Lee

Music for hip-hop BY RACHEL RIZZUTO

Hip-hop choreographer and teacher Jonathan Lee has worked with recording artists as well-known as Madonna, Britney Spears and Pitbull, but that doesn't mean he can always connect to their music at first listen. "Sometimes I have to take away the lyrics and listen solely to the instruments," he says. But he still tries to remain true to the song's essence: "I approach choreography like a singer approaches a song," Lee explains. "If there are ad-libs or slow runs, I'll incorporate that into my choreography."

This kind of attention to detail also translates to Lee's teaching style, particularly when it comes to beginners. "I can break hip hop down for beginners and make them feel comfortable," he says. "I need to stand out from all the other hip-hop teachers out there, by making my class a no-judgment zone while still challenging my students. I want them to leave class thinking, 'That hurt so good.'" **DT**



Artist: Michael Jackson
Song: "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'"

"I've used this in my warm-up—as soon as I play it, the room goes up. Every time I hear it, whether I'm in the club or it's on the radio, it gets me so hyped. It's timeless."



Artist: Michael Jackson
Song: "Smooth Criminal"

"I first saw the video for this song when I was 5 or 6, and when he did that lean, that was everything for me. I knew right away that's what I wanted to do when I grew up. I've remixed this song so it's slowed-down and more of an a cappella version, and I use it during stretches on the floor in my warm-up."



Artist: Missy Elliott
Song: "Work It"

"Missy changed the game of hip hop. There are so many things you can

find to work with in her music. She plays with house rhythms and break beats, so sometimes I work in a little more popping and locking. It's so versatile."



Artist: Mary J. Blige
Song: "Real Love"

"There's a particular step Mary does in every one of her performances—she has this Mary groove. I've incorporated it into my choreography. I love her cadences as a singer: She has the flow of an emcee but the passion of a soul singer."



Artist: Bob Marley
Song: "Could You Be Loved"

"This song takes me back to my Jamaican roots—my mom was born in Jamaica. You hear that guitar solo first, and then when the reggae beat drops, the song totally changes. I love reggae and dance hall music. I grew up in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and my first parties were all dance hall reggae."