



FLEX IS KINGS

a feature documentary by Deidre Schoo and Michael Beach Nichols

2013 / USA / English / Documentary
83 Min / HD / 1.78 / 5.1

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LOG LINE

A riveting look at Brooklyn street dancers battling for supremacy in the world of 'flexing.'

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Flex is Kings is a riveting and awe-inspiring look inside the world of Brooklyn street dancing known as 'flexing.' Directors Michael Beach Nichols and Deidre Schoo take audiences along on the emotional journey of several young dancers; dancers who vie for a chance to make something of themselves by battling it out through this DIY art form.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Flex Is Kings takes place in the Brooklyn neighborhood of East New York, where high crime rates and diminished opportunities have left the young men growing into adulthood few choices and fewer resources, pushing so many to lives dependent on crime and gangs. Yet there is a large and growing group resisting the notion that their prospects are limited to a powerless existence. On these streets a dance community rose, eager for an avenue of expression and determined to create a positive force in their neighborhood. "Flex" is the name of the dance style – it involves dance battle competitions that are at once flights of fancy as well as poetic evocations of the streets – gun battles, romantic interludes, run-ins with authorities. The film is structured around a season of *Battlefest*, the central organizing event of the Flex movement, and focuses on some of the community's key personalities.

Flizzo, an unconventional dancer and charismatic showman, brought the house down and cemented his place in the Flex community when a zebra finch flew from his mouth for a "punchline" during a show. His attempts to juggle dancing with a new baby and dismal job market cast doubts on the practicality of continuing his craft and resisting his old ways as a member of the Bloods, the life he left behind to devote himself to dance.

Jay Donn, the individualist auteur, faces frustration after competing on *America's Best Dance Crew* and returning to Brooklyn to find higher status with no real reward. Jay gets a paying job in a more traditional baroque-modern dance company that exposes him to new possibilities as he travels to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to star in a new adaptation of *Pinocchio*.

Reem, the creator and organizer of *Battlefest*, the ultimate DIY dance showcase in Brooklyn, is a budding mogul. He struggles to do everything on his own while managing the dancers and coaching them to capitalize on their skills in the professional world. Reem is a consistent and steadfast force and serves as a backbone to the community and the film.

SELECT PRESS

"*Flex Is Kings* and its inspirational look at Brooklyn's Flex dancing movement has been one of the standouts of this year's Tribeca Film Festival. It's **a film with enough grit to attract indie crowds and enough uplift to delight a more mainstream audience.**" – The Wrap

"(An) **enjoyable character-driven performance film.** It should be embraced at fests and by viewers seeking the cutting edge in body-moving styles." – The Hollywood Reporter

"***Kings* brings the "flexing" underground movement to mainstream audiences, who should be enlightened by the passion and ability of its main players.**" – Indiewire

"I've seen flex dancing on the streets, in the subways, but never really got it. ***Flex is Kings* gets it, and it effectively demonstrates that it is an art form, a cultural mode of expression that is as beautiful and honorable as any other.** The difference is that it is very raw, and it's blowing up right now." – Tom Roston, PBS's POV Doc Soup

"**Gorgeously shot and edited, with an excellent soundtrack...and it looks fantastic.** Now that is independent filmmaking." – Jenni Miller, Film.com

"There is...an undying focus on positive community enhancement and collaboration [in the film]...**Viewing *Flex is Kings* is as liberating and enchanting an experience as the very act of dance seems to be for the film's characters.**" – John Jarzemsky, Twitchfilm.com

"The filmmakers do an incredible job of **weaving the dancer's personal lives in with staying true to the core of the movie, the dancing itself.**" – Screen Invasion

"It's a criminally under-acknowledged and wholly DIY movement, and **[FLEX IS KINGS] delves into just how far these artists are willing to go, both to express themselves and to escape their environment [...]** It feels like a throwback to the dirty New York of the 80s; that whole Wild Style/Beat Street Basquiat feeling of making the urban taste of the city into your OWN party." – Superchief.tv

"**A charmer of a movie:** slick, funny, compelling and awe-inspiring, it's that rare documentary that manages to be interesting and thought-provoking without leaving its audience depressed." – Morgan Davies, vimeo.com

"There's a movement taking place in the parks, basements and recreation centers of one of Brooklyn's most dangerous neighborhoods. Instead of turning to crime, young people in East New York are embracing a dance style unique only to that area: flexing. This phenomenon is explored in **one of our favorite documentaries at Tribeca Film Festival: the invigorating, fierce *Flex Is Kings*. The heart, creativity and drive of its players spill from the screen,** endearing you to their plights and leaving you yearning for a continuation of their stories. **You'll sport goosebumps for the entirety of the film, which eloquently immerses you in another world, then endears and inspires you with its human struggles and triumphant spirit.**" – Katie Calautti, Movies.com

DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS

While on an unrelated journalistic assignment in August 2008, I witnessed Saalim Randolph dancing at St. Nick's Pub in Harlem. The dance was fundamentally unique. I approached Saalim and found that his street name was Storyboard Professor and he was a celebrity among a vibrant, tight-knit community located in the poorer and predominantly African-American sections of Brooklyn. Storyboard offered to show me East New York and the variety of styles "flexing" comprises. I began to spend time shooting stills at an event organized by one of the dancers called *Battlefest*.

It was the movement that drew me in - flexing has no rules and is a wild combination of contortion, mime, stunts and illusion with an emphasis on individual style and character. But, it was the community that kept me steadily attending *Battlefest* and what led me to realize that this was more than just a new kind of street dance – this was a lifestyle that kept a group of young men (and women) strong and out of trouble in an "at risk" neighborhood.

Making a film about a community is incredibly challenging. There are too many stories for one film or one film crew. I wanted to be everywhere all the time. As it went, we followed more dancers than could be cut into the final film. It's not possible to tell every story *and* make a watchable film.

I'm thrilled that the film is ready to have a life of its own and grateful to the dancers and my collaborators whose generosity made *Flex Is Kings* possible. Every dancer in the flex community is a phenom and I hope this film brings them the exposure and opportunities they deserve.

- **Deidre Schoo**

I stumbled into the world of Brooklyn flex a couple of months after moving here from Florida. I'd come to New York to work in documentary film, something I'd just finished studying in grad school. A friend of mine was helping a photographer colleague shoot portraits of street dancers at a club in way-out Queens. He invited me to come along. "It's crazy," he said. "You'll be into it."

What I witnessed was unlike anything I'd ever seen before. In a ring squared off with yellow caution tape, young men were at war. Bodies folded back, limbs contorted at impossible angles, hands mock-pulling hearts from chests. An MC kept momentum between battles, calling dancers into the ring, declaring winners, cracking jokes. Entire families were gathered to watch these performances; kids ran around between battles practicing hat tricks and connects.

Towards the end of the afternoon a heavier dancer entered the ring to a chorus of "B-A"s, a flex chant of approval. He was shirtless, his stomach a canvas of tattoos. Next to him was a kid who couldn't have been older than 10. His stomach was sharpied to replicate the older dancer's artwork. A mini-version. They clearly had a routine, a synchronized dance of boxer-like jabs and exaggerated facial expressions. At the end, though, things took a turn for the sublime. The mini-dancer knelt down, and as he stood back up he opened his mouth and a zebra finch flew out, into the rafters. The audience lost it. I was floored.

Over the next year I ended up becoming friends with the photographer and accompanied her to several more dance events, called "Battlefests." One evening she asked me to meet up for a drink to discuss an idea. She'd been taking photos of the dancers for a couple years, but felt like still images weren't doing justice to the movements. "I want to make a film. Are you in?"

Something exciting was happening in East New York. I didn't hesitate. We could seek out a story of wild creativity in a neighborhood known more for its unemployment statistics than its cultural innovations. So that's when Deidre and I partnered up to make *Flex Is Kings*.

- **Michael Beach Nichols**

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Deidre Schoo (director/producer) is a photographer and filmmaker based in New York City. Her film projects include BKLYN FLEX, a series premiering in 2012 commissioned by Thrash Lab - a programmer of original content on YouTube. She's also director, producer and cinematographer on Flex is Kings, a forthcoming documentary on Brooklyn street dance that is represented by Visit Films. She spent much of the fall documenting Kuduro acts from Angola as they toured various European cities. In addition to her film work, she is a regular contributor to the New York Times. Deidre's work has been recognized by various organizations and publications, including Photo District News and National Geographic.

Michael Beach Nichols (director/producer) is a Brooklyn-based documentary filmmaker. His first feature documentary, *The Man Behind the Curtain*, had its premiere at the Globians Doc Fest in Berlin. He's served as Associate Producer/Editor on several projects for Blowback Productions and Brick City TV, including *Brick City*, the Peabody Award-winning 11-part Sundance Channel documentary series and HBO's *Prayer for a Perfect Season*. Recently, he co-directed BKLYN FLEX, an original youtube series for Thrash Lab, as well as documented Angolan street dancers in Luanda and on a European tour. He serves as director, producer, cinematographer, and co-editor on *Flex Is Kings*, his second feature documentary.

Christopher K. Walker (editor/producer) has worked on feature and short documentaries as well as television documentary series. *Triangle: Remembering the Fire* (Editor/Associate Producer), a short documentary memorializing the men and women who perished in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911 through interviews with the descendants, aired in March 2011 on HBO and won the prestigious Columbia duPont Award for excellence in journalism. Most recently, *Hard Times: Lost on Long Island* (Editor/Associate Producer), a feature documentary on the human fallout of the Great Recession, premiered at the 2011 Hampton's International Film Festival and won the Audience Award for Best Documentary. The film aired on HBO in July 2012 to critical acclaim. Recently Chris has edited content for *Os Kuduristas*, a project documenting Angola's exciting "kuduro" music and street dance scene.

Ryan Hancock (Additional Camera/Co-Producer) is an artist and musician based in New York City. He recently served as cinematographer for *Flex Is Kings*, a forthcoming documentary about Brooklyn street dance. He's also served as art director for various music videos, worked as a sculpture fabricator, run a small custom cabinet and furniture shop, been a night clerk in a convenience store, done door-to-door sales, herded cattle as a farmhand, and driven a horse-and-buggy. Ryan's work has been published internationally in various art and culture magazines such as *Oh Comely*, *F5*, and *VUU Collective's Super Special*. He is currently scoring a short film about artist Bryan Lewis Saunders and handling props and special effects in tabletop food commercials.

Joshua Woltermann (Soundmixer/Co-Producer) has worked with some of the industry's most respected contributors including Bill Moyers, Ric Burns, and Errol Morris. Woltermann received his BA in film from New York University and completed his masters at the Documentary Institute at the University of Florida. In 2010, *The Man Behind the Curtain*, co-directed with Michael Nichols, debuted at the Globians Documentary Festival in Berlin. Joachim Polzer called Woltermann a young filmmaker to watch, saying he "shows an intrinsic talent for going really deep to understand the human condition." A native of Kentucky, Woltermann lives and works in New York City.

TECHNICAL SPECS

Country of Production	USA
Language	English
Running Time	83 minutes
Shooting Format	HD
Aspect Ratio	1.78
Sound	5.1
Production Companies	Deidre Schoo Productions No Weather Productions
In association with	Aletherium

PRODUCTION CREW

Directors	Deidre Schoo & Michael Beach Nichols
Produced by	Deidre Schoo
Producers	Michael Beach Nichols & Christopher K. Walker
Executive Producers	Edwin Sherman & Taylor Gillespie
Co-Producers	Ryan Hancock, Joshua Woltermann, & Goldcrest Post NY
Original Music	Tranimal
Cinematographers	Deidre Schoo & Michael Beach Nichols
Editor	Christopher K. Walker