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Passion play

A documentary captures the never-say-die spirit of two Mumbai's b-boys



The first few minutes of *Breakin' Mumbai* are filled with swagger, an attribute easily associated with b-boying or breaking. Fort Minor's "Remember the Name" plays in the background as acrobatic moves from the dance are juxtaposed with the song's attitude-laden lyrics, "Yeah, for those of you that want to know what we're all about. It's like this y'all. C'mon." Directed by Aakriti Kohli, Sandeep Kumar Singh, Sumit Singh, Shweta Ghosh and Gin Khan Siam, who made the film as part of their graduate project at the School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, *Breakin' Mumbai* isn't the film to get a comprehensive view of the breaking scene in Mumbai – that would easily run over two hours – but it certainly is an engaging starting point.

In comparison to the canonized Indian classical dances and popular styles like jazz, we thought breaking has not been explored and given the respect it deserves," said Aakriti Kohli about how they came to select breaking as the subject for their film. The film acquaints viewers with the world of breaking through two b-boys: Mohammad Gani aka b-boy Gani from the RocFresh crew and Aman Singh aka b-boy Ganjman from Underground Breakers. Gani is a resident of Cheetah Camp in Mankhurd. His parents are not in favour of him breaking even though he is quite skilled at it. (Dancing is forbidden in his religion, says Gani, so his trophies are kept at his crew member's home). A late entrant in the breaking circuit, Singh is a resident of Labour Camp in Matunga. He is famous as the boy who was injured at a brawl in Shahu Gardens where his crew was practising. What binds both is their passion to pursue b-boying, a style that emerged in New York in the 1970s. Through their stories, the five filmmakers take viewers to the unlikely practise grounds of Mumbai such as Juinagar railway station and Sion Fort, where youngsters converge to polish their moves. "The film is a larger comment on the kind of spaces Mumbai offers to people for leisure," said Kohli.

The documentary packs a lot in its 33 minutes running time. We see how the burgeoning community seeks inspiration from YouTube videos, the local jams (informal dance competitions), and many pop cultural references – the appearance of Govinda pulling off similar moves two decades earlier in "I Am a Street Dancer" from *Ilzaam* is a highlight. Almost seven months in the making, the film stays true to the title. "Breaking is a character in the film but so is Mumbai," said Kohli. "It is about the interaction of the dance with Mumbai."

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The film's scene stealers are its earnest Hindi-speaking protagonists. While the rookie Singh isn't seen dancing as much, we presume, because of the accident, the more-experienced Gani is constantly on the move. He wakes up at 5am and heads to work – as a call centre employee who sells slimming oil. The filmmakers don't just focus on Gani's terpsichorean skills but also his cocky attitude while battling, which in b-boying lexicon is to take on an opponent. "It is about doing better than him and taking him down," says Gani, "About teasing him."

Gani's story is more fraught and solemn than Singh's, but the latter brings much-needed lightness to the proceedings. Two of the finest moments in the film belong to him. One involves Singh dancing at Linking Road market with a slipper on one foot and a shoe on the other. Soon, a vendor starts mimicking his moves. The best though is when Singh's mother expresses disappointment at her son's tea-making skills. It is a touching moment which suggests that Singh may execute a perfect applejack (bending the legs around the neck while balancing on the hands) but making a decent cup of tea still eludes him.

Breakin' Mumbai will be screened on Fri Sept 14, 7pm.

By Suhani Singh on September 14 2012 7.34am

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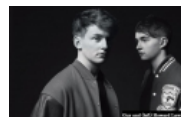
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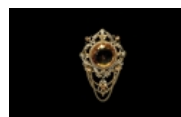
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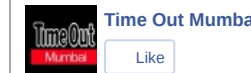
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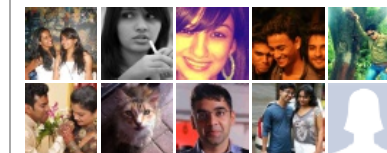
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Fuck Button's best album so far

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