

SOULMATES

Students with a passion for dance unite to form a family: Urban Soul Movement

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLIN NI

The two dancers steady themselves, bouncing on their feet, shaking out their limbs to loosen them up. Junior Terry Oh crouches slightly, his hands behind his head. Senior Thai-Vinh Hyunh's right hand grips Oh's arm, left hand grips Oh's knee, and Thai-Vinh lifts himself up parallel to the ground. His face is scrunched in concentration while he strains his muscles to keep his body, legs and feet off the ground. Relying on Oh's stability, Thai-Vinh displays a complete sense of trust in his fellow dancer and friend.

This is a familiar sight for many MVHS students. Urban Soul Movement, a dance club on campus, practices in front of watchful eyes everyday. During lunchtime, they occasionally demonstrate various styles of hip-hop in front of the Field House entrance. They also dance every Friday after school. For them however, this is not practice. It is simply them spending time with their family away from home.

Originally called B-boy Club, Urban Soul Movement is a group that has existed for six years but has recently gained more prominence. The group changed their name

to USM, each word holding a deliberate significance: "Urban" for their style of hip-hop dance, which originated in New York City on 125th Street, "Soul" because of their passion for dance and "Movement" for the motion involved in dance.

Open invitation

The original club existed before members of the current group were even in high school. 2012 alumna Thai-Vu

Huynh introduced the group to his younger brother, Thai-Vinh, who is now the treasurer of USM. Thai-Vinh and the other current members of USM met when they started high school. Despite the relatively short amount of time that they have known each other, they

take pride in their strong sense of camaraderie.

"Dance is my way of connecting with people and expressing myself," Oh, USM's social manager, said. "It's what I love to do with my free time, and it's basically how I met most of my best friends."

And even though most of the members have been a part of the group since they began high school, USM is welcoming and open to new members.

Vice president junior Joy Lee transferred to MVHS as a sophomore and did not expect to make a group of such close friends. When she thinks about USM, one phrase comes to her mind: close-knit.

"When I first came here, I only had a few friends that I knew through our studio, but I just didn't fit in with them really well,"

Lee said. "We all have something in common, and this is what we all like to do. When you dance with someone, you're sharing your work ethic and skills, and you're learning off of each other."

President junior Dillon Chang describes the club as a family. He cannot imagine his high school experience

DEFYING GRAVITY Junior Dillon Chang holds a handstand, a common move in USM routines.



without their support. Because of their closeness, USM does not feel the need to excessively promote their club. Oh said that they did attempt to recruit members when the group first formed, but they do not promote their group as much anymore.

"It's more of if you want to join [Urban Soul Movement]," Thai-Vinh said. "We're just open to anyone."

However, they do promote the club through their performances. They have performed at several school events in the past few years, such as Octagon's Cure Cancer Cafe. They also performed at the 2012 Homecoming talent show.

"We usually keep our performances pretty serious, but we're a pretty weird bunch, and we might as well express that part too," Chang said. "In one performance, there was a part where [2013 alumnus] Sai Mucharla and Oh slow danced."

Facing challenges together

Despite its unique and enjoyable performances, USM has also had its fair share of

difficulties. According to the members of USM, the most challenging aspect of their performances is meeting deadlines, which requires them to choreograph and practice their dances in a timely manner.

Members recalled that preparing for the 2012 Spring Showcase was a tough experience. The entire routine was choreographed within a week, and it pushed all of them to their limits. However, there were also some positive results. The experience taught them to be more prepared to give even better performances in the future.

"Making mistakes is not that bad because you learn a lot from it," Chang said. "So we're trying to prepare [for performances] earlier now."

For USM, the challenges have also brought them much closer together. Regardless of the difficulties the group has faced over the years, they never fail to remember that they are a family.

"The amount of practice makes our bond stronger," Oh said. "Having fun [during a performance] shows that we are a family, not just a club."

DANCING IS MY LIFESTYLE, SO I CAN'T QUIT MY LIFE.

junior Dillon Chang

A collective passion

Aside from being a group of extremely close friends, the members of USM all have an undeniable passion for dance. For Lee, dancing is much more than a hobby.

"I want to [dance] in college, and after that, I want to dance professionally," Lee said. "I love the atmosphere because [the club members] work so hard, and it inspires me to work hard."

Similar to Lee, Chang cannot imagine his life without dance. Dance is a way for him to get to know his friends on a level that he is unable to find elsewhere.

"Dancing is my lifestyle, so I can't quit my life," Chang said. "And by the way a person dances and how they talk about their dancing, you can tell what kind of person they are, whether they're cocky, arrogant or just really nice."

The group's dedication to dance is what drives their friendship and allows them to be as close as they are.

"I feel like even though all our styles are really different, we all come together in the sense that we're all really passionate about it," Lee said.

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JUST DANCE Junior Terry Oh and senior Thai-Vinh Huynh (above) demonstrate the flagpole freeze. Junior Calvin Chang (above right) demonstrates a breakdancing, or b-boying, move called the windmill. Urban Soul Movement's members (right) proudly show off their group symbol with a hand sign.

