

## Edna Manley college now offering Dancehall course

After years of advocating, dancer and choreographer Maria Hitchins has seen her dream of an accredited dancehall course come to fruition.

Hitchins', 'Jamaican Popular Street Dance Culture in the New Millennium' course was added to the curriculum in January. "For several years I've been pretty much bugging the Edna Manley School of Dance about why it is that they do not have dancehall as part of any accredited course. Everything is a process in Jamaica, and I accept and respect that, and now, I can safely say that we have that course," she said. Hitchins added that she had also proposed a theoretical dancehall course to the institution, which she hopes will also be implemented in the upcoming school year. "The course entails going back to basics, the foundation of dancing, especially when it really got popular. We're going to be touching on dance moves from the 1980s up until now - the new millennium." The course will also see several dancers, including Global Bob, Mad Michelle, and Queen Lateisha and Ova Marz interacting with and teaching students.

**TRACKING INFLUENCES** Some of the outcomes listed on the course outline include being able to "pinpoint global influences from external dance cultures that have reshaped the Jamaican popular street dance culture, including hip-hop stunts; detect socio-cultural changes with the Jamaican popular street dance culture's choreography, including performance themes; and recognise Jamaican popular street dance steps that appear in international choreographs". Interestingly, Hitchins told The Gleaner that students from the visual arts school make up the majority of the dancehall class. "I'm not sure if it's because the course was offered very late, so maybe the full-time dance students had already filled out their schedule in terms of the amounts of credits they can do for the semester. I'm sure going forward, as the word spreads, more dancers will join. I can see them outside the class peeking in and really enjoying the groove. I have no doubt that come September, once the course is being offered again, they'll be part of it," Hitchins said. Recognising that cost might be prohibitive to some individuals who wish to enroll, Hitchins told The Gleaner that she was in dialogue with Edna Manley about the possibility of a short course. **MONEY AN ISSUE** "Not everybody will have a whole semester to come and sit down in a dance studio. Money is one factor, but so is time, and we are working on that." In recent times, other dancers have begun offering courses in dancehall culture, one of them being founder of Dance Xpressionz Orville Hall. Last year, Hall announced that he had been given the green light to lead a course in dancehall at his alma mater, Excelsior Community College. Source; Jamaica Gleaner