

Vogue Evolution: Dance crew to make Bay Area debut

Kimberly Chun, Special to The Chronicle
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Courtesy Vogue Evolution

Leiomy "Mizrahi" Maldonado (center) plans to break down vogue moves at this weekend's festival.

IMAGES



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As the transgender principal diva at the center of Vogue Evolution on the fourth season of MTV's "America's Best Dance Crew," Leiomy "Mizrahi" Maldonado showed America just how far voguing has come since Madonna paid tribute and "Paris Is Burning" scorched movie screens. Yet a certain very young demographic might know her best as the teacher in the video for Willow Smith's "Whip

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My Hair," the adult who cut through the classroom and whirled her waves with as much abandon as any swaggering youngster.

Just don't say Maldonado schooled the kids, in any sense.

"That little girl doesn't need any teaching," she says of Smith, with a deep, earthy chuckle, by phone from New York City.

Maldonado has done her part, though, to tutor the world about the highly energetic, Dramatics-style moves coming out of her city's underground ballroom scene, vaulting beyond the style's foundation of hands, spins and duckwalks. Check Maldonado's top-speed splits and daredevil dives across the stage on "ABDC," as well as her twirling, feline turn during "Deja Vu," which out-Beyoncé'd the diva herself.

Maldonado may not have started Vogue Evolution - Artistic Director Devon "Pony Zion" Webster initiated the brainwave of uniting the group's rival voguers to compete on the MTV show - but as a dancer, and the sole transgender member, she seemed to become the face of the troupe.

"We felt like everyone needed to know more about voguing, because it has changed over the years," say Maldonado, 24. "Now it's upgraded - it's more enthusiastic and more fun to watch."

The child of the House of Mizrahi isn't a stranger to innovation: Her signature, head-tossing Leiomy Lolly move has filtered onto Britney Spears' video for "If U Seek Amy" and, in a nod that feels like a compliment returned, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga's "Video Phone." She's also a mistress of the dip and its more ferocious sister, the death drop - the former popularized in Chris Brown's "Shawty Get Loose."

Still, Maldonado didn't expect the amount of love Vogue Evolution received. "It was surreal," she says. "We didn't know how America was going to open up to our style, because we're an LGBT crew and sometimes society is still ignorant. It was an eye-opener. But it shows you that talent speaks for itself. It made us push forward."

Vogue Evolution makes its Bay Area debut this weekend as part of the 10th Fresh Meat Festival, the annual showcase of transgender and queer performers. The four-day event also features ballroom world champions Robbie Tristan and Willem DeVries, Sean Dorsey Dance, Gay Asian Pacific Alliance Men's Chorus, hula ensemble Na Lei Hulu I Ka Wekiu, trapeze by Cohdi Harrell and more. Maldonado says that for Vogue Evolution's performance, she plans to serve up a performance titled "Vogueology."

"We're going to break down a lot of the techniques in voguing, showcasing things we can't show on TV," she says. "We're gonna kick butt."

8 tonight-Sat., 7 p.m. Sun. \$15-\$20 (sliding scale). Z Space at Theater Artaud, 450 Florida St., S.F. www.freshmeatproductions.org.

E-mail comments to 96hours@sfgate.com.

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