



Words from the world of hip-hop

MICHAEL BENNETT

There was once a time when the idiom "Australian hip-hop" would draw gasps and invoke laughter from music industry folk and paying concert-goers alike.

How times have a-changed. As summer sets in, capital cities around the nation are trucking in the bottled water and getting the portaloos in place for the throng of music festivals that each year list on their bills more and more locally grown Australian hip-hop.

Summer time is indeed the time for music. For filmmakers and hip-hop diehards Rhys Graham and Natasha Cadd, a snapshot of the 2005-06 summer was all the canvas they needed to bring to life their long dreamt-of feature documentary that tracks the summer activities of some of Australia's biggest hip-hop names.

From shows to rehearsals, into their homes and musical playgrounds the writing and directing duo, both in their early 30s, invited themselves into the lives of some of the most unheralded musically creative minds in the country. *Words From the City* is the finished product and it's a story about beats, rhymes and life.

WFTC premiered at the Adelaide Film Festival earlier this year and was nominated for five AFIs at last night's awards. Graham, Cadd and producer Philippa Campey spent two years raising money and developing the project and though their AFI success didn't translate into any awards it has been the icing on the cake.

"It's pretty outlandish really,"

Graham told *The West Australian*. "We are pretty pleased about it."

The driving factor, he says, for making the film was to steer clear of an overview piece.

"People, when they make films about music, often want to define musical forms but one of the beautiful things about music is that it has such individual importance. We just let the individuals tell their stories and really capture the energy and creativity."

Exploring the method, diversity and imaginative processes of Australia's hip-hop players, the documentary does lift the lid on what many see as a baffling music genre.

The Hilltop Hoods, Coolism, Downsyde, TZU, MC Layla, Bliss 'n' Eso, MC Trey, Wire MC and Triple J's Maya Jupiter all reveal why hip-hop is a part of them and they a part of it. Graham says Australia has a great storytelling culture and hip-hop is a good example of that.

"We don't think of ourselves as a culture based in words but we do have a really great oral, storytelling culture."

From social and political rage to personal and cultural storytelling, the film takes in the personal thoughts of the artists as they wax lyrical in laneways and parks, at festivals and in nightclubs. WFTC delves into the diverse environments that shape these artists and their urge to make their voices heard.

Graham says what is always mindblowing about hip-hop is the place artists come from.

"The common misunderstanding about hip-hop is that it is the US form but ultimately it is about integrating beats and rhymes with

who you are and where you are from. In order for it to be truly hip-hop it has to be very truly about defining yourself and the place you're from."

Graham was blown away by the incredible creativity the artists invested in the music and their complete passion for words. "They are always looking for more interesting, clever, witty, more complex ways of talking about things," he says. "You found that no matter who they were or where they were from they came to it with a love of words and that's something that is totally inspiring."

Moving from one corner of Australia to another, the high-definition, 90-minute feature takes in a diverse range of locations, a backdrop for the making of music.

The crisscross over Australia transports the audience to Canberra, Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney as well as smaller destinations like Busselton, Parramatta, Redfern, St Kilda, Warrandyte and Cairns. Graham said the final product was a film that he would like to see and is a moment in time that captured what is happening in Aussie hip-hop.

"If other people come and see it and get off on seeing their suburbs in a different way or on seeing the workshops that are happening, or these amazing performances then that is great as well," he says. "There is a sense the culture of hip-hop is bigger than the individual, which is different to the way Australia is going these days."

Words From the City screens on the ABC tonight at 11.20.



Beat masters: Emseed and Joelistics, above, in Rhys Graham and Natasha Cadd's documentary *Words From the City*.