



WORD FOR WORDS!

AUSTRALIAN HIP HOP IS PEAKING LIKE GRANDMASTER FLASH WHITE LINING IT. SO IT'S ABOUT TIME A DOCO LIKE **WORDS FROM THE CITY** CAME ALONG TO BLOW PEOPLE'S PRECONCEPTIONS AND APPRECIATION OF IT. **AAROM WILSON** BO SELEKTS IT WITH HIPIDDY HOPPER MAYA JUPITER AND FILMMAKER RHYS GRAHAM.

Australian hip hop's come a long, long way in the last couple of years. It's emerged as an irrefutable force on radio stations across Australia and, most importantly, is attracting the ears of people from all over the taste spectrum. Just look at the Hilltop Hoods for proof. They had the most number of songs in triple j's 2006 Hottest 100, clocking in five big ones – only one away from the all time record – and peaking at number three. They sold out 25 of their 30 stops across Australia for their *Stopping All Stations* tour, and won two ARIA Awards in 2006, including Best Independent Release. Then to string the evidence together, the Hilltops combined with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra to sell out the Entertainment Centre in Adelaide. That's about 7000 people, all there to see Australian hip hop in full effect. Now you gotta check yo head on that one. Oz accented hip hop playing with a 31-piece string orchestra and pulling that many peeps? Inconceivable 10 years ago, or even just a few. Yes, Oz hip hop is beginning to block rock shake it like Missy E wished she still could.

They may be the icing on the popularity cake, but Hilltops are still only part of the story. It's a series of yarns that's now been caught behind the camera and stylishly fashioned into a documentary entering the world of Oz hip hop, *Words From The City*. The full-length doco pokes its head in to the lives, dreams, aspirations and meanings behind Oz hip hop acts such as Koolism, Wire MC, Bliss N Eso, TZU, MC Trey, Hilltop Hoods, plus local heroes Downsyde, Layla and a few sneaking guest spots from other Syllabolix crew. Oh, and Maya Jupiter, one third of Foreign Heights, the presenter of triple j's national Hip Hop Show, hip hop workshopper and a general rock in Oz hip hop since before the beginning of the century. Did I mention hip hop a lot then? Rightfully, so does Maya Jupiter. "I am hip hop, I embody it. I grew up within hip hop culture. It's not different or separate to me, it is me," Jupiter says and assuredly adds, "I choose hip hop as my vehicle to express it." Cue the sound of 'Hip hop hooooooray!'

Yes, this is the feeling in *Words From The City*. It exposes the extraordinary passion and ideals that drive our nation's artists in their quest to spread their love of hip hop, and the messages it can

convey. Jupiter drops some more on this point. "Hip hop to me is unapologetic. When I'm on stage with the mic I feel that I can incite people to feel a certain way for a minute, or at least get them questioning and thinking. I like to give my opinion and perhaps introduce a new way of thinking." It's this kind of attitude that inspired co-directors and writers Natasha Gadd and Rhys Graham to make the documentary. Rhys Graham elaborates, "Hip hop in Australia, as it's evolved, does seem to capture something unique to our culture. It incorporates the

diversity of the artists and their cultural backgrounds – Fijian, Tongan, Mexican, Turkish, Aboriginal,

Pakistani, Chinese and Anglo – with a specifically 'Australian' bent; the very particular ways that we talk about stuff, the things that keep us going or challenge us or inspire us in this culture. We've got a great oral tradition of bullshitting, of cynicism and joking and yarning, and also of this naïve optimism, which flies in the face of all troubles that lie beneath Australian life, and that's pretty unique when you find it embedded in some twisted and brilliant lyrical artistry."

Now, let's get all stereotypical on yo ass and remind you that the ghettos and slums of the US, and then the UK, were the cultural catalysts for the invention of hip hop. Its history is rooted in 'the struggle'. Of course Australian hip hop, although circumstantial backgrounds are different, is well renowned for its bold tackling of inspiring a higher consciousness by commenting on environmental, social and political messages and issues, just as hip hop's daddies did. Graham adds, "It has been around for a couple of decades now, but as it grows some of the more socially or politically conscious artists are reaching greater audiences. This can be an extremely powerful form of expression as it communicates alternative thoughts, opinions and ideas rather than only those picked up by the mainstream media.

"In recent years it has become far more accessible, particularly to people who are totally locked out of mainstream culture. All you have to do is see Wire MC on stage at Yabon or Joelistics of TZU [in *Words From The City*] performing their feisty political tracks to witness the power hip hop has to communicate political views. And people all over are listening." Jupiter adds, "Young people from the hoods of America who were oppressed and marginalised created hip hop. When middle class youth [in Australia] adopted this form of expression we also adopted the stigma of being marginalised. Hip hop is not widely accepted in our mainstream, or by our parents and peers."

Words From The City isn't saying 'Look at Aus hip hop; it's more intelligent, insightful and conscious than other music' though, or that it's necessarily about 'the struggle'. Instead it delivers a snapshot of artists who come from different socio-cultural backgrounds, and have a diverse range of reasons for creating hip hop. The thing all the artists do share is their obsession with their art form. "I don't know that it matters whether you're disadvantaged or not. To me, people making their own music or art, finding their own voices, whether out loud or on the page, being part of their culture and other cultures around them seems to be the only way to stay connected to



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the world and other people," Graham says. "People are always trying to be exclusive — and hip hop is as bad as high art when it comes down to it — and making judgements on who should and shouldn't have a voice... fuck that. It's rare to hear voices on the TV or radio that make any sense to us and our lives, so I'd rather try and listen to different voices and see if I connect what they have to say."

Connect your body to a seat with *Words From The City* in front, whether you're a fan of Oz hip hop or not, and you'll gain a far greater appreciation of Oz hip hop as a multi-levelled art form. It touches so many integral elements of life and creating, and will make you bop your head towards Oz hip hop in a whole new light. Respect.

WHAT: *Words From The City* (Madman)

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joking and yarning.*

