



## SHOUTING WORDS FROM THE CITY!

In 2004 Peter Costello commented that rap music was “evidence of moral decay.” Natasha Gadd and Rhys Graham explored the claim’s validity on film. BY MIRIAM KAUPPI

➤ The seed that grew from the Costello broadside was *Words from the City*, a documentary on Australian hip hop. “We knew there was more to it, especially the hip hop we had been hearing,” says Gadd. “There are very articulate voices in hip hop and we thought we needed to explore that.” *Words from the City* is as much a social document as it is a film about music. It follows some of Australia’s best known acts (Melbourne’s TZU, Koolism from Canberra, Downsyde from Perth, Adelaide’s Hilltop Hoods and others) and documents the way these artists reconcile their personal and cultural identities. As Gadd puts it, “hip hop is people talking about who they are and where they come from. Often it

is from marginalised cultures.” This merging of the personal and political is a cornerstone of Australian hip hop.

“I think about language and I think about words and that’s what was taken away from me. All they left me with was English,” says Wire MC from Sydney’s inner-city suburb of Redfern. “I’m thankful that I have the capability to use hip hop as a platform for myself and my people, because that’s what I do as a black man.” Because the documentary looks in from outside the scene, the film’s eye is keenly trained on the creative process of the artists it follows. “We were constantly blown away by the skill level of these people,” says Gadd.

“Everyone pretty much works from home. They gather people

around them that inspire them. It is a DIY environment – getting by with what they have available to them.”

The film highlights the collective view of music that hip hop encourages. “Anyone can rap,” says Gadd, “you don’t need money to make this kind of music,” and this is where the practice of improvised freestyle rhyming comes from. “That’s the beautiful thing about hip hop,” says TZU’s Joelistics, “you can’t censor it. If you hesitate you lose your flow.” This is the film’s central comment. Hip hop is a form of personal expression, much the way poetry has been seen in English literature. Or, as Seed MC puts it: “When you’re freestyling, you summon corners of yourself. You access your courage.”

*Words From The City* is available now via Madman



LAYLA: Part of WA’s Symbollix crew, her *Heretik* album is featured in *Words from the City*.