



## **A-Love Interview**

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A-Love, Tony Mitchell, Nick Keys.

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### **Summary:**

“If you’re talking about women in Australian hip-hop then I think that’s the biggest growth area, as in, women who don’t want to pursue the artist field, but want to go into some sort of business. I feel like a lot of the girls who have been doing that sort of stuff... things like management, promotion, tours; they’ve really got their shit together.”

In this 2005 interview, Melbourne-based FemC A-Love talks to Local Noise about her studies in anthropology and her ideas of hip-hop as mode of cultural and ethnic identification. The eloquent A-Love tells of the rise of females in Australian hip-hop as artists and as administrators, including her own seminal role in some of the first all-female hip-hop shows and displays in Australia.

### **About:**

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Local Noise is an ARC-funded research project from the University of Technology, Sydney. Its focus is on Australian hip-hop, and the localisation of hip-hop in different cultural, societal and educational contexts.

**A:** A-Love

**TM:** Tony Mitchell

**NK:** Nick Keys

**TM:** Have you kept in touch with your Italian background much?

**A:** No, not really, we don't have a lot of family there really. I went and visited last year and we had a look but yeah, not really, it's mainly just contained in our family unit in Australia. So basically, Mum and Dad met here, Dad went back there to study – I think basically [at] the Conservatory there – she joined in, they had me and then they came back.

**TM:** And your dad used to play with the Little River Band?

**A:** Yeah, and then got more into classical stuff after that, and then went back and did his masters, came back and started doing adds and film scores and that sort of stuff.

**TM:** And is he still doing that?

**A:** Yeah, he's doing a TV series.

**TM:** What's his name?

**A:** Rick Formosa. So yeah, and we've lived in Canada, so we're kind of spread everywhere.

**TM:** And you did a BA in anthropology at La Trobe [University]?

**A:** Yeah, I studied under Joel Kahn and Beryl Langer. I've started a new degree. So I've finished the three-year BA and hopefully come back at some other stage and do my honours I think.

**TM:** I've just been down at Melbourne at an anthropology conference, which was talking about second-generation migrant hip-hop in Australia. We were talking about people like Trey, and Koolism, and Maya and people like that, who've all kind of used hip-hop to get back in touch with their homeland culture quite a lot.

**A:** Yeah right, no, it's good, I was saying to Nick before that I did a couple of essays on Pacific hip-hop and that global/local push and pull sort of theory, which was cool. I read some of your stuff for it and *Island Style* and videos like that really helped out. It was really interesting.

**TM:** So you wrote about people like Trey?

**A:** Yeah, Trey and Koolism and stuff like that. 'Cause it was basically just a general question, like: 'Globalisation has eroded pacific identities,' and so I kind of went the opposite way and said well no, actually if you want to look at culture as religion and race, whatever, but I've always done the sub-cultural stuff and so just relating it back and saying 'Well no, this kind of fusion is starting to create new hybridised identities. It's not an erosion, it's a resurgence'.

**TM:** Exactly, like in New Zealand they're kind of starting to rap in Samoan and Maori and stuff like, so it's actually leading to a rebirth of the culture.

**A:** I think that regardless of whether you relate your actual subject matter back to your ethnicity, I still think it's projected, 'cause it's still part of you. Some people have asked me why I don't try to rap in Italian or have more reference to my ethnic background. It's just so much a part of me that it's not an issue, if you know what I mean. I won't actually go out of my way to rap about Italian things, but at the same time it's still a part of what I'm doing, and I think that comes out naturally, rather than rapping in another language or whatever.

**TM:** Have you had any kind of contact with people like Mass MC?

**A:** Yeah definitely, but again, not on that comrade level, it's just another person in hip-hop basically. And we were talking about this before, you know, the more that you interact with people, the more that you sort of realise that everyone comes from some sort of background anyway, so, everyone shares that sort of sense of community in terms of 'Well, you're this and you're that, but let's forget about that and make music'. We're in a community together, we do shows together, cross-pollination of promoters, you know, more on a business or industry level than anything else.

**TM:** That's the great thing about the Australian hip-hop scene, is that sense of community, and people working together isn't it? There's not that sense of battling against people, or competing so much.

**A:** I think that's just coming up. I was saying you know, when I started rapping maybe at the end of 99, I'm 21 now and I would have been 16 when I started rapping, and there was more of that sense of community, and I think now that it's been shown that there's a buck to be made within this culture, as we've seen through Hilltop Hoods and Koolism being nominated for an ARIA, all of that sort of stuff. I think slowly there is a little bit of that push and pull animosity happening. Basically, exactly what happened in the States, is that it was a pretty fertile, amazingly untapped culture until there was some sort of money to be had and then it was the rat race sort of thing.

**TM:** Yeah, but there's not that much money, especially comparatively.

**A:** No, not at all, but where there was nothing, there is now something, and that's the major distinction. Where people were happy to get 50 bucks for a show, now people are charging over \$1000.

**TM:** And you've got an EP out, is that right?

**A:** No. It's still being worked on. It's been in press releases for ages.

**NK:** 'Cause she works for Crookneck, which is the people putting on tonight, and she's doing a law bachelor now, with a view to the music industry.

**A:** Yeah, so hopefully in the end I'll be being doing a lot of contract musician sort of stuff, IP law, all of that sort of stuff, more of the industry focus. Yeah, because I see that as a pretty important way that I can keep involved when I don't want to create music anymore, after a while, and just work them in tandem.

**TM:** So you're involved with the business side a lot?

**A:** Yeah, from just working with Crookneck and researching what I needed to do to start the label when I won the grant money, and through that I thought music law, that could be interesting. So, I've tried to pursue them both on the same path and hopefully be able to work for the smaller labels in Australian hip-hop, on some pro bono arrangement maybe, as well as having some sort of vocation that I'm making money out of.

**TM:** Yeah. There's been a real expansion in the amount of women in Australian hip-hop, and people like Emily and Penny Drop...

**A:** If you're talking about women in Australian hip-hop, then I think that's the biggest growth area, as in, women who don't want to pursue the artist field, but want to go into some sort of business. I feel like a lot of the girls who have been doing that sort of stuff, like Emily, things like management, promotion, tours; they've really got their shit together. People like Josie Styles, who's a really good friend of mine, she's got her show, her column, all that stuff. I find that just as important as the artists themselves, and I'm noticing that a lot more women are in that field, rather than new MCs coming up. There seems to be a lot more women coming through on the business side of things.

Which is great, it's excellent. There was a friend of mine, Eternia, who was out here a little earlier from Canada.

**TM:** Yeah, I was going to ask about her.

**A:** She's incredible. I'm hopefully going to visit her next year and work on some songs together, because we had that one that we did together. But she was actually saying that her manager is a woman. She's had male managers before and there was a real distinct difference between the intra-personal relationship. Just in the context of, I think a lot of men sometimes don't get issues facing women, and might want to put them in a position business-wise that might make you feel compromised on another level. You know, things like doing a photo shoot in a bikini or in something skimpy. And some managers might go 'Oh, cool, that'll boost your record sales,' and a female manager might say 'No way, let's try a different road to success'. So I think that's super important, especially as there's more females in hip-hop, there's also more females in the business side who, you know, who have different angles and think 'OK, we won't go the same as a lot of American female MCs have, let's try and market you in a different way'.

**TM:** I know that Eternia was really impressed with the presence of women in Australian hip-hop, and she also said, which I thought was quite interesting, there was much less sense here of a battle, and a rat race and a real struggle. And you can see that in her style of MCing, it was a much more aggressive sort of style.

**A:** Totally, she's totally aggressive, 'cause she comes from the background, and I think the tall poppy syndrome is really prevalent here, even in the sense that she wants to make it big there and she's got to hustle and hustle and hustle. Whereas here, everyone's kind of a bit more reserved, 'Oh yeah, my set wasn't that good, my track wasn't that good'. But in the States or Canada there's so much competition that if you don't believe in yourself and feel really empowered and say 'OK, I'm this, I'm that, here I am'. If you don't have that confidence in yourself you're not going to get anywhere. That's a major thing that she taught me when we hung out for a week when she stayed with me and we recorded the track and did a show together and a few other things.

**TM:** Can you talk a bit about the track, and making the track with Eternia?

**A:** It was funny actually. Because there was a melting pot of different places where I found out about Eternia, through the 'net – way before I even knew she was coming to Australia – and I just kept gathering these bits of information about this girl who I'd heard on a couple of MP3s. Then it turned out that Prowla from NuffSaid had invited her to do some stuff, and then I found out she was in Sydney on exchange.

**TM:** Yeah, she was here actually, at UTS.

**A:** Yeah, she was here, she's doing a sociology major as well. So that all combined to give me this great impression of this girl. And I finally got in touch with her and she was great, and I said 'look I want you to come down to do a show; I want to try and do a track together.' We just bounced ideas off each other, and it was one of those things that we just hit it off from the very first second we started talking on the phone. So basically we came down and did a show at Revolver, it was really good. And she was in the studio – and Plutonic Lab, who's an engineer and a producer – was doing a lot of stuff for the Nuffsaid tracks that she was doing with them. Plutonic Lab is also my engineer. So she did those tracks and we hung out, listened to a few beats, and just from knowing each other I think the track started to take head and we knew that it would start to be a really powerful sort of anthem track, and we did it live, and it was just right, it clicked, it was at the perfect time. I can't say that that happens very often in terms of working with a producer and a MC and it all just happens without having to try very hard, it was just *bang*.

**TM:** She performed here in the All The Ladies gig here, and they had similar ones down in Melbourne didn't they?

**A:** Ah, no. I organised a gig called Short n' Sweet, maybe three years ago that had Layla, Corfi, myself, Maya Jupiter, Thorn, and I think that was it. And that was where the footage came from for All the Ladies. And we also played at the Globe world cup skateboarding the next day. So that was just an excuse to have a big show and get people to come down and just build on that. So that's where all the filming came from, and I think the interviews developed after that and it all started coming together.

**TM:** Yeah right, because I've seen the film, and I've got a copy of it for our library.

**NK:** There's a couple of different cuts though.

**A:** Yeah, I was just saying, that they've re-worked it maybe three or four times now.

**TM:** Well, I'm not sure which one my one is. And I've also got *Chicks with Decks* as well, Colleen's first film. Is she still making films? You said she was going to make a series of three, is that right?

**A:** I'm not sure, there's always a kind of concept that they keep building on, so I don't think they actually know where they want to take it, but *Chicks with Decks* was her first film, cause she's had lots of experience in the skate world. And for *All the Ladies* her and MC Que did it together, and a lot of the hip-hop stuff was Que's vision and a lot of the video, sort of media side of it was Colleen. They just came together to bounce of ideas.

**TM:** Yes, Que was here when they launched it at the *All the Ladies* night and it got a really great reception.

**A:** Yeah, that's good, because it's a really good film.

**TM:** And recently you've done a track with Evil Ed, for the *Straight from the Art part 2*. How did that come about? Who is Evil Ed?

**A:** Right, well, I decided to go on a trip to Europe last year, around November of last year, and I was kind of going on a pilgrimage to Italy with my parents, because I'd never been there and they were going to show me where I was born and all that. And before then I decided to go to London, and through Josie Styles I got all the contacts of the people she was close with in the UK. She's a pretty big activist for Australian hip-hop, so basically by the time I got there, everyone had *Straight from the Art 1* which came out the week that I left, and I didn't even have a copy. Everyone had a copy of *Stealth*, everyone had a copy of my press release, so it's pretty incredible that she does that sort of thing without rewards I guess, she just sends people's records off to the UK in the hope we can keep building so that artists can tour back and forth all of the time. Evil Ed was one of her close contacts and he really like 'Movin', off that CD. He said 'Why don't you come down to Brighton and see if you like any of my beats'. So I went down, and we got along really well, we kind of lapsed for a while, I had a whole tape of beats that I didn't really use and later on it just so happened that he said 'I'm putting out my album, I want you to be on it, finish your track'. So I finished my vocals, and did a few other things and sent it back, and it kind of all rolled from there, and it just so happened that *Straight from the Art 2* was coming out just before his album, so it's also going to be on his album which is being released in December in the UK. And that's a really good compilation, because he's a producer for MCs, not an instrumental producer, and he does people like Young Gun, Jhest and basically all of the big names of UK hip-hop are on this, so I saw it as a pretty big opportunity to get something out there and build some sort of thing.

**TM:** You started off doing quite a lot of work with Draino and The Puah Hedz, I mean, how did that come about?

- A:** Through the internet I think. I was working in a record store at the time, and Draino approached me seeing if I wanted to stock any of Muphin's products, and he'd just done his first album, *Who I am*, and that all just grew from there. I was already into hip-hop for a couple of years, just listening, starting to get into Australian stuff, trying to breakdance which I wasn't very good at, and he [Draino] started encouraging me to work on something for this little posse track he was doing and it all kind of snowballed from there. Like in high school I used to grow up with kids who were into hip-hop and they were always trying to get me to rap and I always just thought that it wasn't my thing and it should have clicked straight away because I wrote songs when I was 13 and I played guitar and stuff like that, the rapping thing just never crossed my mind. They gave me opportunities to get up on stage, even though I was underage, and be able to start the recording process and know how to do it. So I did a few tracks with those guys over a couple of years.
- TM:** Draino is amazing the way that he's done that Oz Cella, which is just an incredible amount of work.
- A:** Yeah, it's huge. But he's kind of like that, you know, he's obsessive with numbers and databases and in everything else he does. But yeah obviously he's done the whole thing. He used to just have something called The Cella which was trying to be the most comprehensive thing in terms of global hip-hop, which was pretty intense, because it's bad enough with Australian artists, you know, every album, every track, every guest verse and everything that's been recorded...
- TM:** Oh, it's just impossible. So what you've got basically is a lot of tracks on compilations and quite a few guest tracks on other people's records?
- A:** I find it important to keep building, you know, I'm super critical of what I decide to put out, and especially when it comes to an EP/album, because all my favourite albums are pretty incredible and cover a vast range of topics and styles, yet also they maintain some sort of cohesion to them as well. So, I've just been working on some sort of overall concept as well as making sure every track is really good. So in the meantime while I'm getting over my own inadequacies, I've just kept releasing if the opportunity presents itself on a compilation. I think it's important to keep in people's ear and make sure I'm still doing a few things while I work on my own stuff.