

# LOCAL NOISE

## **Hyjak n Torcha**

05/03/05, Backstage, Big Top, Luna Park, Sydney.  
Hyjak, Torcha, Tony Mitchell & Nick Keys.

---

### **Summary:**

“Well, the whole accent debate has been going on for so long, I’m kinda over it, I don’t really care, if they’re a good MC they are a good MC, either way. Some people can push it to a point, but at the same time, you hear some Australian MCs who talk normally and then you hear them rap and they’re ‘Oh, g’day mate, all right, vegemite,’ and they push the ocker accent. So, I don’t know, whatever feels natural to you.” [Hyjak]

Backstage at Luna Park for *Park Jam*, the first international hip-hop event of its kind in Australia, we caught up with Hyjak n Torcha. The conversation included their personal stories of getting into hip-hop, influences and inspirations and the process of making an album. They both also talked about some of the wider aspects surrounding Australian hip-hop, including its marginalisation by the music industry, its rise through a DIY ethic and what and who hip-hop represents.

### **About:**

This text is licensed under a Creative Commons Attributed-Sharealike-Noncommercial license. For details on the terms of this license, please see <http://www.creativecommons.org/nc-sa-a2.0/>

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.

**H:** Hyjak

**T:** Torcha

**TM:** Tony Mitchell

**NK:** Nick Keys

**TM:** You're signed to Obese?

**T:** Yeah.

**TM:** How's that working out, 'cause they've got quite a big stable now?

**T:** At the moment it's fantastic, because it's an underground label, an independent label, so we're getting what we really need from what it is. It's not major promotion at the moment, but it's a growing thing, and that label is becoming bigger, which means we'll grow with them. It's no good to start at the bottom and go to someone [big label] 'cause they'll just stuff you around.

**H:** And the other thing is, we don't have huge cash advances that we have to pay back. Like, a lot of the big labels, you get stuck on that, so we can pretty much say what we want, do what we want, 'cause the label is run by Pegz who's an MC as well, he's just like us, so it's all good.

**TM:** Apart from this CD [Drastik Measures], are you doing any live performances around Australia at the moment?

**H:** We're kinda chilling on that at the moment. We've done rounds on that album, but know we've got to work on a new album 'cause we're sick of our own show.

**T:** We've done a year of touring the same album, so it's time for some new stuff.

**TM:** And how did you hook up, particularly with Kye?

**H:** Kye lives down the road from me actually, just around the corner, and we hooked up one time at the local pub.

**T:** A lot of people smoked together.

**TM:** Where's this?

**H:** In Bondi. So yeah, just from there we hooked up, and kept it going.

**TM:** And with the stuff that you did on this album with Kye, was it kind of written with the three of you, more or less?

**T:** Just in the studio, really.

**H:** Yeah, we just got a whole bunch of weed, and a bunch of drink and whatnot, and sat back and said 'Can you come up with a hook for this?' and he came through...

**T:** It was quick yeah...

**H:** And he flipped it, and it was just spur of the moment.

**T:** All together it took maybe five or six months.

**H:** Nah, longer than that, maybe nine.

**T:** Yeah, maybe seven or eight months, but we were only doing the tracks once a week, recording, so pretty much you go through the week, you've got a week to make a track and then you sit down and

record it. It wasn't overly thought about as much as it could have been, but that was the circumstance, we were doing heavy stuff.

**TM:** And Lil' Harris is part of that scene, that sort of Kiwi ex-pat scene in Bondi, isn't she?

**H:** Yeah well there's a lot of Kiwis in Bondi. She's from the old school in Bondi, a generation before me, but a lot of cats I know knew her and they said she was a tight singer, so Bonez got her through one day to sing on Torcha's track – we didn't even know she was going to do it...

**T:** Yeah, no, she just heard the track and said 'You want me to sing on this?' and she just did it, it sounded mad so we left it.

**TM:** And you've done a track with Hilltop Hoods as well. How did that happen, did you do it here?

**H:** We'd been talking about it before they really blew up, because their last album is when they really got big, but before that, we'd been going over, I did a track for their album a while ago. So we've been connecting with them for a few years, so it was just right that we'd hook up with them and do something, and then they just so happened to blow up, so it was kind of lucky.

**NK:** Do you think you guys have been helped sales-wise from the Hoods blowing up?

**T:** Not really. It's not a big advertisement or something. We did a track with them because they are our mates, at the time we were doing that track they were just putting their album out, so it wasn't anything about that. They were just doing the same as us, putting their shit out, we were both on the same road.

**H:** They weren't too big when we did that. But I guess it must have helped a little bit.

**T:** Yeah, then again...

**NK:** It probably helped everyone out.

**T:** Yeah, they helped everyone out because now everyone had heard Aussie hip-hop, once, properly. So people would go 'Oh, what else is out there?' so it's good for everyone.

**TM:** What's your take on Oz hip-hop, how do you define Oz hip-hop, do you think it has a particular identity which you contribute to?

**H:** I think people calling it Australian hip-hop, 'Support Australian hip-hop' this and that, I think it's cutting ourselves off straight away there, 'cause you don't hear Americans say 'Support American hip-hop'. When you say 'Support Australian hip-hop' it's like it's a retarded kid that you've got to be nice to. I think that holds us back, I think we should just think of it as a worldwide thing.

**T:** But then again, on the same foot, we've got our own sound, so then you've got the name Oz hip-hop, we're representing ourselves, which is Australian music, we're not doin' something that anyone else is doin' 'cause it's our music. So, on the same side you got good and you got bad, but the only the bad thing is that really you just want to say whether it's good music or bad music – that's all there is in the world. There's not this, and that, all these categories and shit, if it's good music it's good music. We've got our own sound.

**NK:** About the whole 'Support Oz hip-hop' thing, there is no mainstream support from the industry, so....

**TM:** With a label like Obese, they are very much an Australian hip-hop label, they push Australian hip-hop and they are pushing it overseas as well, I know Pegz has been in Japan.

**H:** But they also have a few American artists that they have been signing to the label, like Grand Agent

and stuff, and a few others.

**TM:** Right, so it's not exclusive, but it's a force for Australian hip-hop.

**T:** It's a Australian hip-hop thing that he wants to push, and he's behind, so he recognises what's good here and he's going to push that, which is mad, because no one else is doing that. You need someone to be doing that, and he brought it up, and he's the only person really that was going to start.

**TM:** How's this done sales-wise, this album?

**H:** Yeah, it's been going well, we put it out, we didn't really know what to expect, we didn't think we were going to sell this amount or this amount, but it's done well, last I checked up it's around the 10,000 sales, so that's not too bad, for a first album as well.

**TM:** What is your view on the New Zealand hip-hoppers using the American accent?

**H:** Well, the whole accent debate has been going on for so long, I'm kinda over it, I don't really care, if they're a good MC they are a good MC, either way. Some people can push it to a point, but at the same time, you hear some Australian MCs who talk normally and then you hear them rap and they're 'Oh, g'day mate, all right, vegemite,' and they push the ocker accent. So, I don't know, what-ever feels natural to you.

**TM:** I think a lot of people are very conscious about sounding broad and ocker, and making lots of Australian references.

**H:** Just rap how you talk, that's it.

**TM:** But then you could argue that the people who rap in American accents aren't doing that?

**T:** But you know, you were commenting on places like New Zealand, they grew up like that, so they do that stuff. Everyone does rhyme in an American accent, that's the law. Here, at least we've started a norm where it's not – here you do what's real.

**H:** All of the New Zealand MCs, like Deceptikonz and that, they rhyme in American accents, but you can hear the twang you know...

**T:** And all their words are pretty much real, so it's a hard thing you know, to call.

**TM:** But you've got other genres like country music in Australia which uses American twang.

**T:** Well, the country music singers, Australian ones, they sing full American. Most singers in Australia sing American. You know that rock group, from Melbourne, that blew up...

**H:** Jet.

**T:** Jet, they sing full-on American. You think, where are they from, they sing one song in English, one song in American, you know, and they blew up around the world. But that's a different genre, you don't get disrespected in that. But this is hip-hop and hip-hop is very real, so everybody's looking at what you're saying, at what you're doing, and you've got to be real otherwise they'll take it to you straight away.

**NK:** That is an important point though. Rock music is so effected by America that the rock music singing voice is essentially an American one, even when you pick up a guitar with mates and have a strum, you sing in an American accent.

**T:** That's it, and no one gets hit up over it, because that's the norm, in hip-hop, you've got to be real, you recognise reality.

**TM:** I was listening to this yesterday [their album *Drastik Measures*] and a track that particularly stuck out was ‘My Life’, and I’m not even sure which one of you did it...

**T:** All of us.

**TM:** OK, so whose life is it?

**H:** Well, the chorus is about – OK, so usually when I say to myself ‘OK, today I’m going to chill, I’m not going to drink,’ I end up drinking more than I do on a normal day – so that is kind of my life, and I was the one who wrote the chorus. So yeah, battling alcoholism.

**T:** So Jack [Hyjak] had the chorus and we just jumped on it.

**TM:** But to take that a bit further, do you think hip-hop really is about autobiography, about telling your own story.

**H:** Yeah, a lot of it is.

**T:** Your own thoughts, yeah.

**H:** Yeah, it is about telling your story, about what you do day to day, and I think why it is so effective is because people hear that and they relate to that, they say ‘That happens to me too!’ So, that’s how it punches people.

**TM:** Yeah, it sort of reminded me, there’s a track that Koolism does, where Hau talks about his childhood and his upbringing, and a similar kind of thing.

**H:** Yeah, we’ll Hau’s a Tongan, and I’m sure there’s lots of Tongans who can relate to his rhyme and him.

**TM:** What’s your ethnic background, just out of interest?

**T:** I’m half-Australian, half-Polish. I got a bit of Australian, a bit of wog, a bit of everything.

**H:** I’m not to sure about it, everytime I ask my parents, they start going on about Portuguese, Spanish, French – I don’t know, I think they just make it up, I don’t even know what I am.

**TM:** So you wouldn’t say it has a great impact on your life, your ethnic background?

**H:** Nah, nah, not really.

**TM:** But does it in your case [Torcha]?

**T:** I speak German, Croatian, Polish, whatever. Everyone I work with are all wogs, my mother is born here, so she’s Australian, but all my family lived overseas for about five, six years, so I got a culture there and a culture here, so I take a bit of both.

**TM:** Right, have you been back to Poland?

**T:** Yeah, I’ve been back there. I lived in Germany for five, six years.

**TM:** I know there’s a Polish MC called Leroy that people have told me about...

**T:** What, in Australia?

**TM:** No, in Poland.

**T:** Poland yeah, oh OK, I’ve never heard of him.

**NK:** Have you heard much Polish hip-hop?

**T:** Nah, I met up with a few of the DJs who used to live here, and he was telling me about the whole scene, yeah, but, it was hard enough to remember speaking German, and Croatian, and Polish as well, it gets too mixed up, 'cause they use all the slang, so it's hard for me to dig it, I like to hear something that I can understand.

**TM:** Have you ever tried MCing in German?

**T:** Yeah, I have. 'Cause I've been over there, but most of the dudes I hooked up with there were rapping in English, and they've got some mad talented people rapping.

**TM:** 'Cause there is a big German language hip-hop scene there, isn't there?

**T:** It's huge, it's unbelievable.

**TM:** So lots of Turkish hip-hoppers as well.

**T:** Yeah, lots of Turkish hip-hoppers in Germany as well, I met heaps of them over there.

**TM:** 'Cause one thing I find – I've interviewed a lot of people – there's a very high proportion of MCs who seem to come from non-Anglo backgrounds, it's something that stands out.

**T:** I don't know, maybe it's that you come to Australia and you feel like a minority, and you relate to what to they're saying, in a minority way. You know, it's usually that it's a working man's music. It's about a struggle, this and that. But everyone goes through it anyway, but that's what it is, you know. It's right, you get a lot of ethnic people who get into it. But in Australia, I find that you get lots of Anglo people who listen to it, get into it and love it.

**TM:** There's also a growing bunch of people who don't particularly like hip-hop, but are getting into Australian hip-hop.

**T:** True man, you go down to Melbourne and a lot of people there, they can't stand American, but they listen to all the Aussie stuff.

**TM:** Going on from that, what are your big influences, people you've looked to as role models, or learnt from?

**H:** Really, for me, anyone who came through with something different, like, for example, Big Pun, he was the biggest fatter MC ever, and he would make jokes about his weight, and he came on with humour and that was something new to me.

**T:** We sort of draw from everything you know. When I was young I guess I bought KRS-One, I bought De La Soul, I bought N.W.A, all in the same week. That was the first time I bought hip-hop, and it was totally different music, and all different within themselves, you got one daisy rapper, hippy stuff, you got one going full hardcore stuff and then one guy teaching you politics. So, you know, you draw from all these different people, they are speaking to you, and you take what you can.

**NK:** So, you guys come in – you know how they talk about there being the first generation wave and the second and all that – do you guys consider yourselves to have come in on the second, on the whole N.W.A/Public Enemy tip?

**H:** Yeah, I'm only 22, so I definitely wasn't in the first wave.

**T:** I remember going to shows in 89. I can't remember before that, but I know I always used to listen to Jazzy Jeff and stuff like that, what was coming out, and we were amazed by it, and from there, it was

all I listened to it, so that was a wave back then.

**TM:** So, do you feel that hip-hop needs to be saying something, in terms of the lyrics that the MCs are producing? What I'm trying to say is, I guess, are you into the kind of socially conscious, message rap kind of stuff?

**T:** That's the thing – him, me, we live different lives, we do different things. When you have friends, they all do different things; when you get people who just rap politics, that's not all you do in your life, it's not all politics, you go out, you have fun, you do this and you do that. So we rap about everything, because we do everything. We've got a song about politics, a song about weed, a song about partying, a song about wars, about everything. We're not looking for a image to stand behind, for just one thing. I don't like that idea of someone saying, 'I'm just a party rapper, or...' you know what I mean.