

LOCAL NOISE

Lazy Grey

05/03/05, Big Top, Luna Park, Sydney.

Lazy Grey, Tony Mitchell, Nick Keys.

Summary:

“Being – you are – like a representative from planet Earth of where on that Earth you come from, it’s like ‘Attention planet Earth!’ and you are reporting back and stating your claim and you’re saying what you’re doing here, and if you’re on the other side of the world, you’ve got to state your claim as well, you can’t be the same as these dudes here just because they were good. It’s like ‘Yeah, I love your shit, but we’ve got to say it from here’. It’s point of view, you can’t act like you are from somewhere else when you’re not.”

We caught up with Lazy Grey backstage at the Big Top in Luna Park, as part of the Park Jam hip-hop festival. Lazy was very welcoming and humble in his manner as he talked about his influences and growing up in the early days of the Brisbane scene, and the role of graffiti and breaking in this early gestation of hip-hop in Australia. He also spoke of tape culture and 80s influences from America. Whilst always humble, Lazy is also very much a straight talker, articulating excellently his views on the rise of Australian hip-hop, being a product of one’s environment and the different vernaculars in Australian cities. He touched on (of course) the accent debate, but also discussed the role of swearing in ordinary everyday language, hip-hop and masculinity, and the complexity and contradiction of patriotism and flag-waving in relationship to hip-hop. Having just released his first fully-fledged album, *Banned in Queensland* with Crookneck records, he talked about the making of the album.

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.

LG: Lazy Grey

TM: Tony Mitchell

NK: Nick

TM: OK, obvious question, why the name, Lazy Grey?

LG: It comes from the old hundred note, the grey, and they used to be called 'lazy greys', so it's just the old grey notes, and now they are green so it's a bit of a relic.

TM: What were your main influences coming up in the Brisbane scene, were people like Katch an influence at all?

LG: Basically, Katch, Angus [DJ Bribe], and basically it was a lot of graffiti influence. We were young tackers, and everything was off graffiti, so the music was a side thing then. So you're into graffiti, you're into hip-hop, and you listen to rap music, you know what I mean. So, basically, I looked up to all them dudes for years and they painted the town for years and I tried to do graffiti, but I was terrible, so I had to rap. What do you call it? 'Find your angle' – I was just a bad graffiti artist, so I just started rapping. In terms of influences, I'd say every graffiti crew from the 80s. It's changed now, but that was the inspiration back then.

TM: Was there much of a breaking scene in Brisbane?

LG: Well, everything went hand-in-hand, graffiti, breakdancing. If you were a breakdancer you were a graffiti artist. It [MCing] wasn't around. I mean, you'd get drunk and spit a lot of raps but that's it. Look at graffiti in Australia: it's world class and always has been, from the 80s. MCing is not, but everything has been growing, and I just reckon it's at different stages. But definitely it would be [in terms of influences] graffiti, and a couple of dudes, like Katch, who did graffiti – he's a DJ, but he's a graffiti artist.

TM: I just mention it because I think it's pretty much the same in Sydney, where it sort of started with graffiti and breaking mainly, and the music scene took a while to develop.

LG: Yep, hand-in-hand, if you did this you were listening to this, if you danced you did this; it just went hand-in-hand. And then things evolve and change, and you get different limbs of the trunk and things go off.

NK: What do you think about the thriving of Australian hip-hop?

LG: Same as everything, good and bad. Like, I hate it because anyone can just grab a mic and just rap because you've got the foundation laid for you to do it. But then again, you've really got some good artists; so the more there is the more you are raising the bar. So, I love it and I hate it. I definitely love it because every time I turn on the radio I hear this, and all me mates are listening to that. And before you were doing your own thing, and it was, like, hidden, it was like you're smoking drugs, it's like you listen to hip-hop music, it's not accepted. So you say 'Oh, OK, I'll do this on the side'. But yeah, I just reckon, good and bad. I like all the people who are getting play on the radio, but at the same time it's like yeah, look at the long run. It's not the 100 metres sprint, it's a marathon.

NK: But it's a bit like that in early days I've heard, Robby Balboa was saying the same thing, when he went to parties back in the Nirvana era, there was only the smallest crew who were into hip-hop, who were usually out the front or the back of the party by themselves.

LG: You're not hated. It's not like being a smoker and being told you have to sit in the corner, people just don't understand about the stuff we do. You don't want to ram things down people's throats, if they

don't understand it, well fair enough, so you just do it on your own, and you do it quietly. It's just different now, it's different.

TM: How long have you guys [Lazy Grey and the people he plays with] been going as a crew?

LG: Well, in different ways [since we were] growing up and stuff. And again, through friends who make music, through writers and stuff. It's not one crew, it's like 20 crews and you might make a bond with a couple of guys and then go off on a tangent. You know, they're like projects, you do projects and then you move on.

TM: And this [*Banned in Queensland*] is your first album?

LG: Yeah, this is my first official album. I've got another one, called *On or Off Tap*, which was released in 98, and that was just self-funded. Sold 600 copies or whatever. So this is the second one but the official one, like I signed – you could say – as an independent artist to Crookneck. So this is the first time I'm fully coming out and have made a stamp, before it was just, 'OK, I'm doing a couple of shows, here's my CD'. And we had a tape before that, called *On Tap!*, which we did in 97/98.

TM: There seemed to be a big cassette culture around the mid 90s, everyone seemed to be producing tapes. And now they are collectors' items.

LG: Bloody oath. Well now, people go 'DJs do mix tapes', but they are CDs. And they are called mix tapes to this day; it's just the tangent it has come on. And also, when you were younger, how you heard you music – or how I got into hip-hop – was a dude would pass you a tape, or your brother would say 'check this out' and it would have Easy-E, Ultra Magnetics and all this stuff. And then you'd pass it on to another mate, so tapes were just accessible, and a tape player. Vinyl, not so much.

TM: So what were you're early influences in American hip-hop?

LG: Early influences in the music side of things?

TM: Yeah.

LG: I'm just trying to think of a few guys in particular. I'd say 7A3, Schoolie D, The Boogie Boys, even Heavy D, he had an album out in 86. Back then – it's like Australian music, things change and evolve – and back then, that was hip-hop, and then things changed and you get different sounds and areas and so on, but back then it was just all the sound. It didn't matter if you sounded different, you were part of that. So, anything from the 80s. And then later on it became N.A.S, The Beat Nuts, and all them guys. I just loved the basic hip-hop I suppose.

TM: Anything you think is particularly distinctive in terms of the Brisbane scene, MC styles or anything like that?

LG: Yes. I think everyone is a product of their environment, so if you grew up in this suburb or an hour out of town somewhere, then the people you associate with, your slang – 'cause everyone's got jokes – and jokes become ten years old and the way you talk just becomes the way you talk. I think yeah, definitely. I can pick MCs from Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, roughly on just how they sound, 'OK, I reckon that dude's from Perth'. And I'm usually right. I reckon Brisbane is very [*puts on nasal accent*] 'Hey Cheryl, how ya going?' It's a very nasal accent, and that's how people talk. But, yeah, definitely just a product of your environment, how you talk is how you rap. Of course hip-hop is an exaggeration of things sometimes, so of course the barbeque thing's been done, and, 'We drink heaps of piss, and we smoke loads of dope and we do all of this'. It's just exaggeration of the topic, these things are obvious, but what else are you going to rap about, you know?

...

LG: I listen to a lot of Pommie hip-hop, and I fuckin' love those dudes, and I can hear from where they are from, 'Oh, he's a Southerner, oh, he's not from London,' you can hear where from they are from, Bails MC, I love that bloke. Being – you are – like a representative from planet Earth of where on that Earth you come from, it's like 'Attention planet Earth!' and you are reporting back and stating your claim and you're saying what you're doing here, and if you're on the other side of the world, you've got to state your claim as well, you can't be the same as these dudes here just because they were good. It's like 'Yeah, I love your shit, but we've got to say it from here'. It's point of view, you can't act like you are from somewhere else when you're not.

TM: Mind you, it's much easier to hear different British accents – like, you know the Streets is Birmingham accent.

LG: Yes, love the Streets. But I hate American accents. But I think it's harder with Australian crews, like I couldn't distinguish, like you can, a lot of crews where they are from, if I didn't know. I mean, maybe in some cases Adelaide people seem to be much more intellectual... We *sample [in Brisbane twang]*, they *sample [in Queen's English]*, we say *bastard [in broad Australian]*, they say *bastard [in Queen's English]*. And Perth has little tangents like that, and Melbourne is very ethnic-orientated, you can hear some certain MCs and the way they say the syllables, you can just tell. And Sydney, I think is very international, it's like, you can't pick, you can't put your finger on it, like there is so much going on here that you can't say 'That's a Sydney sound'.

TM: And there's a Canberra sound?

LG: Yeah, well we know the Hospice Crew from Canberra. And Koolism.

...

TM: Hip-hop is a very masculine kind of form in lots of ways.

LG: It is because we are men, but you ask girls, it's a different thing, because hip-hop is what you bring to it. It's like religion, you tap into it, and you can get close to the essence, and that's what it's about. And you're just a speaker man, you're nothing, it's the essence that's pure, you're just a talker on something that you're into. It's like rock'n' roll, if you're into it, tap into it, hone your skills, you get into it and it's the same thing.

TM: But compared to other musical genres, there are a lot more guys in hip-hop, relative to women.

LG: Yep, um, I was going to say, break it down, it's a man's world. Who's running the place? That's just how things are, I didn't set them up, I'm just into the music, so I don't know... Everything is male-dominated, and it's not like we set this up, I like rap, I'm into it, so why aren't there more girls? Well, I don't know, I'm not a girl, it's up to them to do something about it. I'm not a coach, I'm just a talker, I just talk, and that's it, it doesn't really mean anything anyway. Like I say, it's the source that's pure, not us.

TM: A few minutes ago we were down stairs and they were going 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie! Oi, Oi, Oi!'

LG: Shit me to tears.

TM: There is a self-consciousness in some Aussie hip-hop about being Aussie, about being raw...

LG: Well, it's like anything, if you're fighting a war, and you could say we are fighting a war to be recognised... It's not fighting to be accepted, but it's 'Fuck, I feel this, I wanna make this happen in the right way'. So, I think it's a bit of patriotism, though patriotism is bad as well, but if you're fighting a war then you stand up for your side. I'm not down with that... [The 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie' chant] We're not sportsmen. But I just feel that it's that you are passionate for what you stand for,

and you're going up against everyone else and you've just got to stand up and say where you are from. And I think hip-hop is like that. You raise the flag from where you're at, and it is fucked at the same time, but it's just music at the end of the day, and we don't have guns and we don't tax people, we're not the government. They are the ones who raise the flags and do all that shit, we are just the people, and that's it. Seven years ago, I hated Pommie hip-hop, and then all of a sudden I got into, I tapped into it and went 'These dudes are awesome, they are onto something'. And they stood on their own, they didn't rely on something else, they just represented where they were from.

TM: But I think Pommie hip-hop had the same problem as Australian hip-hop, didn't it? In terms of getting recognised.

LG: Well, I've got some early Pommie hip-hop recordings, and it is some of the cheesiest stuff ever, like late-80s sort of stuff, big 808s and everything like that. And the raps were just terrible and they were trying to imitate the dudes from America, and as soon as they realised it – it took a couple of years – mate, it just became incredible.

TM: London Posse were probably one of the first.

LG: Yeah! Was Rodney P in that?

TM: Yeah, he was in with them.

TM: So, what's your view on MCs who use American accents?

LG: If you're a good rapper, you're a good rapper. And it's not a dictatorship here; everyone is free to do what they want. So, 'Cool man, cool', and I can sort of see MCs who put on the twang, but at the end of the day, are you going to stand in front of your friends and family and sort of bung on some accent? It's not like you go to acting school, and [say] 'This my act!' I mean, yeah, you're doing an act in the show, but it's just different, and if you bung on an accent then I feel like 'Dude, just talk to me, man'. I don't know, I don't feel it, but I don't hate on it, I'm just, 'Whatever', because this shit is ten-years-old to me, we were rapping ever since we were young. To me, that shit should have gone out the window years ago, but it's still around, so we've got to deal with it. Everyone's got an imagination, we all like to dream and travel in our rap, and go off into a world, but you've got to come back and go 'Boom, I'm here'. It's cool to have an imagination, but when you start bunging on shit, then it's terrible.

TM: Have you been involved at all in the teaching side of hip-hop?

LG: I'm not a teacher mate, it's a bit selfish in a way, but at the end of the day it's an inner battle, like you are just battling yourself, like 'Right dude!' and everyone has to figure it out for themselves. And I am just trying to do that, 'cause I never went to no friggin' school... I understand and I respect all that stuff. If I'd be good or bad at it I don't know, but I'll never attempt it, because I'm on me own little quest, I just want to write a better rap, and make a better beat.

TM: You mentioned it before, but you use a lot of expletives in you music, is that because it sort of flows, and that's the way you speak?

LG: When I talk now, you'll hear a few dirty words, and I suppose when you're rapping and rhyming, you might be trying to say a point, and it's impact, I think. I might try and say a few different combos of words, but it feels more natural to say it like that [swearing], so I do. It might sound a bit too much, but when you listen to someone talk, you don't realise how much people swear, you really don't, and everyone just goes 'Oh, fuck this dude, this cunt here'. You don't realise how much you're saying it and then you write it and get it on a track, and you rewind it and listen to and it stands out. But it's how people talk, and I just think that it's how people think too, 'Ah for fuck sake, I came with

all my mates into this place'. If you're angry or pissed off, and that's not the whole basis of it, but it's like fuel.

TM: [The track] 'Painted in Blood', there were two versions of it, what was the impetus for that?

LG: OK. The last version is the original, and I just made that and knew it was for Ken Oath – the dude I rap with, and for – did the track, everything sweet, and then I get sent the mixes for the thing, and they've basically turned the main sample down, and turned the bass up and distorted it. So Ransom, he didn't mix it, he re-mixed it, so he didn't add any sounds, he just turned the music down, kept the beat going, turned the bass up and fuzzed it out. So he re-mixed it, not remixed it. So I was just like, 'Yeah, that's killer. Damn, that's going on it'. And with CDs you usually get a little extra, and on vinyl just your stripped back album, so this CD has a couple of extras on it. But yeah, 'Painted with Blood', I love it. Ken Oath is great on that track, too. It got voted on *Ozhip-hop.com* as the best appearance on an album.

TM: You've got a lot of guests on the album don't you? There is Brothers Stoney, Blunted Stylist production on one of them; It gives it a lot of diversity, doesn't it?

LG: Yeah, well Blunted Stylist is basically one of the Resin Dogs producers and he was the one that introduced me to sampling when I was younger. So he produced a couple of tracks for that. I got me mate Lenny – myself and Lenny and the Brothers Stoney – so we did the Brothers Stoney track. I had to get Bias B on there, he's me mate, and Ken Oath. So I think there was three local dudes and one interstate dude, and there is 16 tracks. And I was trying to make a point of making a solo album, so not getting everyone, certain albums come out and every track has someone on it. But the dudes that are involved are me friends. I've only got a couple anyway, I got all of them on there, all four of 'em!