

# LOCAL NOISE

## **Mark Pollard**

September 2004, Sydney.

Mark Pollard, Tony Mitchell, Nick Keys.

---

### **Summary:**

“Significant for me is something that helps take the culture to the next level, and I don’t associate that personally with major labels. So to me it is the people from the grassroots who’ve done it, because at the end of the day, what the majors put out comes from that, whether they like to admit it or not.”

We met with *Stealth* magazine editor Mark Pollard in September of 2005. His knowledge, passion and diplomacy in discussing a huge variety of issues within and around Australian hip-hop was a demonstration of the crucial role he has played in fostering the culture. Mark spoke about his early teens, making tapes with friends in summer and doing gigs at under-18 shows around town. He spoke about his entry into the scene as an 18-year-old through the Cell Block Youth Centre and the 2ser radio program The Mothership Connection, which he took over from Miguel D’Souza. Mark talked about what he considered to be the most significant moments in Australian hip-hop in the last few years, including the solidification of Obese Records and the success of The Hilltop Hoods. Mark also had many salient points to make about identity and music, the issue of accent and American mimicry, over-ocker Australian vernacular and the connections between gansta rap and rural Aboriginal Australia. Mark also told us about the distribution of *Stealth* globally and the feedback he gets from kids in the country as well as the focus of giving coverage to little known scenes overseas.

### **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.

**MP:** Mark Pollard

**TM:** Tony Mitchell

**NK:** Nick Keys

**TM:** Can I just take you back to when you first got involved in the hip-hop scene?

**MP:** My involvement in hip-hop came about in my early teens. I'd always written poetry, I'd always written, since I was four- or five-years-old, diaries and stories, and I just started mirroring this music where you could fit a lot of words into a small amount of time. So, I started trying to do that myself, trying to rephrase the stuff I would usually write about, you know. A lot of it was really a form of catharsis, a place where I could put my teenage emotions.

**TM:** So you started in the scene?

**MP:** Yeah, I started writing rhymes when I was probably 13 or 14, I've got about four or five books full, just adolescent rhyme, and I sort of had a loose collective of mates when I was about 15-years-old, and we called ourselves B'n'S, and we'd spend our summers doing like a sample CD with an instrumental on one side and maybe a tape with a sample and maybe run the instrumental. You'd hear the click of the tape when some sample came in, and we'd just rhyme over that. It was just good fun.

**TM:** What suburb was this in?

**MP:** Well, I moved around a lot, my dad was mainly on the northern beaches from about the time I was eight, then we were around the inner city, Drummoyne, I spent most of my teenage years in Glebe, but a lot of my mates at that time were from the eastern suburbs. We recorded a few tapes; I've still got them around.

**TM:** Did you ever perform in public?

**MP:** Actually I did. I used to get into under-18 things, like MC battles, but it wasn't really battles back then, I mean they called them battles, but it was like you got up on stage and had two minutes to rhyme.

**TM:** So it was kind of like an open mic?

**MP:** Yeah, it was an open mic.

**TM:** And where were they, what kind of places?

**MP:** A lot of the under-18s were in, like, the Cazzy [Castelorzian] Club in Kingsford, Déjà Vu, which was next to Macca's on Pitt Street. They were all over the place; there weren't many events for kids so you'd pretty much go wherever you could. So I did a bit of that scene and started to meet a few people at that time, like a couple of guys from Illegal Substance, they were a couple of years older than me and they were just starting to perform around then. But from there I just went and did my own thing, until about 18 or 19, when I met a lot of guys down at Cell Block youth centre, people like ESP, Bonez, Mass MC, Vice Versa. It was run by Peacefender, and that was where I started doing a lot more performances, with those guys, more community-orientated stuff. And that's when I went on the Mothership Connection [2SER radio show] 'cause Miguel had a pretty open-door policy, and I used to freestyle up there every couple of weeks. But also, what pre-dated that, I was just starting to get on the internet, and I liked sharing stories with like-minded people, so I started doing interviews when I was 18 and just put them up on a shitty little web page that I designed, which was called Kanga Stylez. It was pretty primitive, but I ended up with 30 or so interviews on there and ended up meeting people – I met Miguel. I was getting sent stuff from a lot of the independent art-

ists I knew from overseas, so I approached Miguel with some of their releases, and also with the aim to rhyme on the show, which was pretty overwhelming at the time 'cause it was the show I'd listened to for five years. That was the time when he [Miguel] – though he never really explained it to me and I can only guess – but he was getting a little bit over it all, he needed to find his own direction in life, 'cause he was putting so much energy into this. So after three months of going up there fairly often, he just decided to pass it over to me. I think he wanted someone from outside of the scene politics, who was younger and could grow it in their own way, as opposed to just transplanting a bunch of their mates onto the radio show. So, to get back on track in terms of the magazine, I did a Mothership Connection newsletter, which was a four-page thing. I taught myself how to use Microsoft Publisher and a few other design programs. Did that, and then just decided I wanted to do a magazine, 'cause I was writing for *3-D* at the time, doing the radio show, yet I still felt a lot of the people I believed in weren't getting the exposure. And not even exposure in the corporate publicity sense, but just in terms of their stories. And that was the birth of *Stealth*. It was just done on a whim.

**TM:** How did you finance it?

**MP:** Well, the first year I was earning \$150 a week working in multimedia, 'cause that's what I wanted to do, so I took the low pay just to get a bit of experience. I was starting to teach myself design programs like Photoshop, Illustrator and the web design stuff as well. Once I came up with the idea I started getting quotes from companies for printing. Have you got a copy of the first issue?

**TM:** Yeah, I think I do.

**MP:** It's pretty rudimentary. It came out during 99. I started in December 98, I was asking printers for quotes, and one of the printers handled the tour of the Young Black Teenagers a few years earlier so he was a bit open to helping me get something off the ground. He gave me a quote, I'm not sure what it was, maybe two or three grand, but he said he'd do it for whatever advertising I could raise, so I raised \$1200, which is funny for me now, 'cause I had nothing. I was just this young crazy dude ringing people up going 'I wanna do a magazine, will you support it?' That was June 99 when that came out.

**TM:** I always remember you at the Urban Expressions, you came along once with a kind of press kit for all the artists, giving them basic information about how to market themselves, which I thought was really impressive, it seemed to me like a lot of people on the scene didn't know the ropes about how to be professional and get their product out there, how to get publicity and stuff. So it seems like *Stealth* magazine was really valuable for that, to just give people a kind of focal point.

**MP:** With that whole press kit thing, because I run a business and I've got a business mind, I've always been pretty conscious. I want *Stealth* to be a passionate business or a business that comes with passion. Sometimes I feel I've pushed it a little hard by doing the press kit, by explaining project timelines and marketing budgets, because it feels very hyper-capitalist in the style like American hip-hop's become. But at the same time I saw so many people I know who are dark and down and struggling 'cause they love what they do, but they can't do it full-time and they're always struggling for money. I said, I'm gonna bite the bullet and put my money where my mouth is on some of these things and got some of that type of stuff out. I don't know how helpful it was or whether people paid attention.

**TM:** I think they did. I mean when you look at the scene now, you look at how much product there is, it's almost at the point with Australian hip-hop where it's hard to keep up with everything. There's so much stuff coming out, there's so many new crews out there performing.

**MP:** Yeah, there's a lot of activity out there. I think, especially the last five years there has been this movement – in the 90s it was sporadic, a good release would come out somewhere then something else

would happen, people would do a show here and there – but towards the late 90s, especially since 2000, one group from one city would put something strong out, they'd work out how they want to tour and then they'd connect themselves with another crew, say an Adelaide group would connect into a Melbourne crew. At the same time with Sydney crews it finally triggered how they needed to do it, and all of a sudden you've got all of us moving forward at the same time. I think that there's a united strength, and it's not a coincidence, it's all from networking. The other thing I talk to a lot of people about is you compare hip-hop in Australia to skate and surf; the people with the money, who make the decisions, are in their 40s and 50s, whereas the hip-hop people are 25-35, even younger than that. And these are the people running events, doing international tours, magazines and labels, it's really young and it's a learning curve. That's the other thing with *Stealth*, some people say we should be like *Rolling Stone*, and try and be really authoritative, and it kind of ties in with the business side of things, but in essence, I want *Stealth* to be a passionate business, like a family business, but that still has that world wide impact. So I don't know if we can achieve that, I don't know if there are too many companies that do, and some of them might seem hypocritical, so when we do stuff like this, it is completely subjective. But I'm still conscious that people that write do document history. They may not create it actively, but there is a sense of that.

**TM:** Yeah sure, I think that *Stealth* is an important historical documentation of Australian hip-hop over the last five years, and there is very little else. I mean, apart from *Stealth* all you can do is cut out things from *3-D*. It's really just bits and pieces, I mean *Stealth* is the most authoritative thing out there by a long shot. Then you've got the occasional article that comes out in the mainstream press, which is usually pretty badly informed and full of mistakes. But I'm glad it's not like *Rolling Stone*, which I don't think is all that authoritative anyway. With *Stealth*, there is a much more participatory sense, you've got people writing for the magazine who are creating music in and from the scene. It's almost like a peer magazine in that sense.

**MP:** I think that's been enabled by the internet, take say our message board, where we can have people come in and contribute, and I can see people coming in and posting 120 posts and I can see what they're about, even if I've never met them I'll find out if they're a b-boy of a graff writer and perhaps that's similar to what we want to do, which is probably why they are there in the first place and they just get absorbed into the machine.

**TM:** Just to update your '15 moments in Australian hip-hop', what do you think has been the most important events?

**MP:** Sydney-wise or nationally?

**TM:** Nationally.

**MP:** The triple j Hip-hop Show. The change in operations of Obese Records.

**TM:** In what sense was there a change?

**MP:** Well, it's sort of had a few different people involved and they are all still involved in one way or another, but Pegz really came on board and said, you know the cliché, we're really going to take it to the next level, and he's just worked his arse off in doing that. It's really cool having seen this before it started, having talked to them before they've done it. 'Cause right now, Obese is the label young guys want to be on, you know, all the 15- and 16-year-olds recording demos. And the other thing I love at the moment is that people have almost given up on majors, and they're like 'Fuck it, I don't want to be on a major, they're not going to pay me well, they're gonna be shit to deal with, here's Obese, part of the community'.

**TM:** Do you think 1200 Techniques is a significant moment, you know, 'cause they are on a major and

have got significant sales?

- MP:** It's a big question. I think what 1200 Techniques is significant in, and this is not to take away from their music, but the fact that they are on a major label means a lot of 'old rock dogs' had to back them. I was at Music NSW and I met a lot of guys who've been involved with groups like Silverchair and Grinspoon, and these guys are starting to see 1200 Techniques move records and they've thought 'Wow, I didn't know hip-hop could be like this, with good production values, but most importantly, also selling units'. So, they are significant in that they have opened up some of these rock guys to what hip-hop can do. But these rock guys don't do hip-hop so well, so to me it's not that significant for exactly the same reason.
- TM:** What about Hilltop Hoods getting a gold record, that's much more significant in a way. I mean, they got onto the triple j *Hottest 100* with two tracks.
- MP:** triple j is probably not as strong as it was in 2000 when the Hip-hop Show first started. I remember being in a major labels office once, and one of the artists got added onto high rotation, this was like 98, and everyone in the office was jubilant because that means they were probably going to sell 2000, or 4000, or 6000. They can kind of rate it based on who picks it up. But because of everything from Play Stations to internet to all the other radio stations and shows that have come on, it doesn't really have that immediate impact anymore. But yeah, Hilltop Hoods' success can be seen as being set up by Obese, in a way. The Hoods have been doing the same thing for ten years, in an evolving way, but Obese were really critical in setting up the crews around the country who helped do the shows, getting the respect for Obese to be aspirational, and getting the Hoods to fit into that puzzle. So [back to the important moments] definitely Hilltop Hoods.
- TM:** There is also the compilation that Josie Styles did, *Straight from the Art*, which was also from a major label. It was probably the first compilation done by a woman, and the first on a major since *Down Under By Law*.
- MP:** It depends what we say is significant. Significant for me is something that helps take the culture to the next level, and I don't associate that personally with major labels. So to me it is the people from the grassroots who've done it, because at the end of the day, what the majors put out comes from that, whether they like to admit it or not. For a couple of years there, triple j were only playing these extremely Anglo, piss-take hip-hop tracks on high rotation, like saying 'If you're going to pay out Leb kids for wearing Fubu, we'll put it on high rotation 'cause I'm an eastern suburbs inner city white kid, I understand where that's coming from'. So is that significant? Or the novelty tracks that they supported? 'Cause there were five to ten tracks that got up there, and this is not taking anything away from the artists, they are just doing what they do, but the infrastructure was saying if you do that, and you make us laugh, then we're going to support it. So that's significant in one way, 'cause it gave a lot of other people something to react against culturally, and it was influential in another way 'cause a lot of these guys got pretty good sales from it. In the last two years it's hard to pick out something that stands out apart from Hilltop Hoods, it's like triple j helped that infrastructure at the same time as people were getting to a more mature stage and working out how to put tours on and all that.
- TM:** One thing that strikes me is that now you've got groups like Curse ov Dialect, TZU and maybe Sista She who seem to doing completely different things with hip-hop, they are kind of taking hip-hop into another kind of area, mixing it up with all sorts of other things. Do you think that's a healthy development?
- MP:** I don't think it's unhealthy. I'm too diplomatic in my answers sometimes, but I've stopped defining what is good and bad for people 'cause it's up for them to decide. When I was young it was all about

the four elements, you know, underground versus mainstream, but at the end of the day if someone can connect to something, and it's hip-hop, that's great. The fact that these guys are doing some hybrid stuff, their version of hip-hop, that's great. That doesn't mean I need to be judgemental about it, whereas a lot of young kids are still going through the period of defining themselves by what they don't like, are maybe not into it. And maybe people who follow Curse ov Dialect would come across Aussie underground and think 'I'm not into that'.

**TM:** Curse have had a lot of criticism, especially in the States, with the album they released on Mush. I read a lot of reviews which were really quite damning, basically saying, 'This isn't hip-hop'. They often perform in more avant-garde-type contexts.

**MP:** You need all the shades of hip-hop, you don't get change or paradigm shifts in music and culture without groups that aren't the same, so you need someone like them to come along and do crazy performances, so an underground hip-hop guy can see it and say 'You know, I'm not going to dress up all crazy, but I see where they are coming from, and I'm going to try and make my shows better', then they go and make their shows better. Then a young kid looks up to that, wants to do music the way the underground guy does it, you know, it's just the way culture evolves.

**TM:** Curse certainly introduced an element of theatricality with their costumes and stuff; it's all quite radical. But, there's always this sense with hip-hop that there is this incredible orthodoxy, almost like there are people around who are gatekeepers, who make the rules, who kind of institute by-laws, it's really rigid. I was talking to Morganics and he was talking about the early days of Sydney hip-hop in places like Penrith, going to the gigs he said he felt like he was at a Nuremberg rally or something, which is a bit of a harsh comment.

**MP:** Yeah, that's a bit of an exaggeration, but I understand what he's saying, 'cause when I was 18 or 19 and rhyming myself, sometimes you'd meet up with people you respect and they'd spend half the time talking about who not to like. A handful of those people are still active, and I just lost respect. It's like 'I'm talking about something I love, why do you have to tell me who not to like just 'cause you've got insecurities about it.' It definitely exists, but as soon as triple j started doing the *Hip-hop Show* and people started seeing that they could do national tours frequently if they had good music, it opened everyone's eyes up, and they didn't have to be focused on that petty interpersonal stuff. Because in Sydney it always used to rotate between who was doing what, say in 98/99 it would be, say Next Level copping something about some random thing, it would be Trent Roden or me for not playing some guy's track five times in the one show. As soon as triple j came along that stuff just went away, people realised there is a bigger pie.

**TM:** So who were you told not to like, and for what reasons?

**MP:** Oh, there are pretty well documented differences between parts of the scene, especially back in the late 90s in Sydney. I swear you'd have to start to get an answer to that question, you see, by me saying it, I feel like I'm buying into it by repeating it, giving it another life and I don't want to. It's all about context, and probably by my answers you can tell, you can define yourself in and out of any argument, but the thing is, if someone is asking your opinion, then for say Blaze, his context and his background and the publication he is writing for and the attitudes associated with that, that is his response to it. The same for Curse ov Dialect, if you just want to look at it from a theatrical level, or just from a musical level, then you can. But there are definite gatekeepers, you know, a lot of them have softened up.

**NK:** Sir Rec's a bit of gatekeepers isn't he?

**MP:** Well he's very strong willed, and strong minded, but you see, with these guys, you've got to understand where they come from, and I'm not talking about where they live. I mean, when I was young-

er, you'd be the only guy at a party who liked hip-hop and you'd have to almost hide it – it was like you had leprosy. So, for these guys who wore it on their sleeves, this is what they do, this is who they are, for someone to criticise it, you're criticising who they are. And only when people get older do they realise that their identity is not just about the music they're into.

**TM:** Talking about that, you know there's still this cultural cringe element when talking about Australian hip-hop, I get it from my students, they say, 'It sounds wack, Australian accents sound wrong, they are not convincing', and it seems to be quite engrained, that mentality.

**MP:** It'll change. I feel sorry for Australian country artists who sing in Tennessee accents, or Texan accents, to me that's just shameful and embarrassing. Again it comes down to 'What are they doing?' You see, for us, hip-hop is more of a folklore-type attitude as opposed to a mainstream entertainment-type attitude. But the fact is now that it's becoming successful, the two are starting to cross over and it's becoming something else, purely by the fact that it's successful, not because any one is pushing it there from the grassroots. I won't cover an artist who raps in an American accent who's Australian. Generally, it's native tongue, native accent. Sometimes I do cover Scandinavian artists who rap in American accents 'cause that how they're taught. But it takes on another dimension when it's copy and paste of New York style, if they've got their catch phrases and pulled them into a rhyme, OK, this is going on the third line, like say: 'what's up y'all', 'throw your hands in the air' or whatever, I'm using dumb examples but if that stuff starts to come on top of the native accent then that's where I draw the line.

**TM:** Then there is the other extreme, MCs who seem to be going out of their way to use ocker accents and ocker references and talk about vegemite and Don Bradman, to an extremely self-conscious degree.

**MP:** Yeah, I understand, I sometimes feel that, but there's a few reasons for it, and I think the first question is: what's wrong with that, because it's Australian, that's where they come from, we do eat vegemite. Maybe we go to Macca's as well, and that's American, why not talk about your experience, and Don Bradman is part of our experience. So when people say this whole over-accentuating Australianism, it's like do you know who Don Bradman is? Have you ever played cricket? Have you ever played AFL? So the rappers in the US talk about basketball players, is it really that different? It's probably people like Bias B, Reason and Lazy Grey that really came out ocker, but then if you talk to them, that's how they are. I've spoken to them about this, 'cause after they came out like that, you get all the 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds doing that more on an aspirational level, 'cause they want to fit into this thing, because that's their perception of what it is. As soon as that happened, you look at Bias B and Reason and they start doing tracks about the environment, Reason does stuff about Indigenous land rights, and you're like 'Hang on, isn't talking about Indigenous land rights as Australian as talking about Don Bradman?' So, it's kind of like the Curse of Dialect thing, someone takes it up, a few people mimic, and then they go and it takes a few years for these guys to realise 'Oh, hang on, I've got to offer something else'.

**TM:** Any thoughts about indigenous hip-hop and where that's going?

**MP:** I don't have a massive exposure to it, I mean, is it fair to call it Indigenous hip-hop? Isn't it just hip-hop? It's like saying 'Curse of Dialect hip-hop'. What's the commonality of the race, does that mean ESP is a 'Greek hip-hop producer' or is he just a producer? So the Indigenous question is like, I've never known how to answer it. It's like women in hip-hop, women tennis players, women chess players, Greek chess players, Indigenous chess players. It's an interesting study from a sociological point of view, but for me, I've always felt awkward when that stuff gets transplanted onto hip-hop. You look at our generation; it's multicultural and multiracial so then to separate it...

- TM:** That's a good point, and you've got groups like Downsyde who are actually really mixed race, who are more or less doing the multicultural thing in themselves. A book just came out that was written by a couple of guys I know, called *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places*, which is basically a study of Aboriginal popular music, reggae, country, all that, but the chapter on hip-hop is really tiny, and really kind of scraping the bottom of the barrel. It was like it was barely existing in this survey. There seems to be this kind of need in Australia to define and document Aboriginal music. And there are all sorts of ways in which Aboriginal story telling connects really strongly with hip-hop and the kind of stuff Morganiacs is doing, going around the country teaching Indigenous kids how to MC and beatbox, to try and connect hip-hop with their own culture, which I think is very distinctive.
- MP:** It's great. Working with young people, period, regardless of race. It's awesome. Hip-hop's a great vehicle of self-expression. Because they've got this little self-contained thing that they can put their energy into: breaking, graff, MCing, all of that stuff. I guess with a lot of young Indigenous kids it's a matter of getting the exposure and access to resources, which are the same issues we were facing in western Sydney ten years ago, so it's a matter of time, there is no reason why they shouldn't be more prolific.
- NK:** Hopefully they'll sound less like Easy-E or any other American gangster.
- TM:** Well that's another problem in Aboriginal communities isn't it, that's all they're exposed to quite often.
- NK:** All their clothes are Eminem and D12 and that's what they listen to.
- MP:** But is that any different to an Anglo kid dressing up in black for heavy metal? In a hundred years do you think they are going to look back and see it as any different? Probably not. You've got hip-hop as entertainment and hip-hop as a social/political vehicle so....
- TM:** Yeah, it seems there is this problem with Aboriginal music, it's like there's these expectations that it always has to be politically and socially significant, that's what [mainstream society] expects of them.
- MP:** Yeah, if these kids are watching videos of 2Pac and seeing how strong he looks with his crew behind him, and how much people talk about him, and they're in this remote community where they feel over policed and have no resources, why wouldn't they want to dress up like this guy to feel strong for an hour?
- NK:** Well that's where the connection comes from, that resistance, gangsta resistance.
- TM:** And an identification with African Americans as being in a kind of similar position to what they are.
- MP:** And is that code for a vehicle of resistance against white Australia? Or police? They don't have to think too much, their retort to a cop might just be something from a rap track, 'cause it's there, it's in their mind.
- NK:** That's right though, their cultural output is always defined by their Aboriginality as opposed to their music.
- MP:** It's the same with females in hip-hop; I had a chat to Maya about it. It's like, are people doing books on female tennis players? It all started male-dominated. Even when you go to gigs now, it's mostly male, so is it really that unequal a representation?
- TM:** It's changing I think, quite drastically. Things like Ladies First, which you were involved in, I thought those were really important events in the sense that it really provided a focal point for women MCs and a show of strength.

**MP:** Well, that was just a great night.

**TM:** But it was more than that, because then there was a second one and it was like these events provided a role model to aspiring women MCs. You know, there are people out there they could look up to and then that film came out, *All the Ladies*, and that took it further. I think now there is a really strong women's scene, not only in Sydney, but all over Australia, people like Lioness in Brisbane.

**MP:** Some of the issue with 'gender' and 'indigenous' is that the agenda is promoted by government-funded bodies, sometimes academia, people doing masters degrees wanting to talk to people about women in hip-hop. And if it's got an agenda before it starts even getting pushed, then you know, that Ladies First night was a great night, regardless of gender. If there are these pre-existing agendas that come from decision makers 20 or 30 years older saying that if you can pick this minority group and you want to do a documentary about it we'll support it – is that really what hip-hop culture is about? So it becomes something else.

**TM:** It's a question of looking at it from outside and looking at it from inside. I guess this issue of media representation is still a big one. There is still very little by way of TV programs about Australian hip-hop, I mean you can count them on one hand.

**MP:** I don't think that's a bad thing necessarily, because again, their agenda is different, they need shows that are going to have advertising which means the show is going to be innately *not* about the culture, it'll be the pop version.

**TM:** Not necessarily, something like SBS or ABC is capable of doing something that is reasonably serious...

**MP:** But they want that Anglo, politically correct angle, I've seen the programs that got funded. This is extremely cynical, but it's like 'OK, what am I going to do this year? Hip-hop's cool, I like it, my brother's into it, I want to make a documentary, what angle will get up, OK, let's do Pacific Islanders, let's do Indigenous'. If the government was serious about getting this documented and getting this out then why not take some of the people from the communities, I'm not talking about your communities, but from the communities the documentary is about, be it gender or race or whatever, give them the skills, get them to do it. Often, it's from the outside in. Organics being the exception. So something like that could work, but it's still going to have that politically correct agenda, which is wrong because hip-hop has never been politically correct, so how can you put something on top of it and tell it to be something else? And only for business reasons?

**TM:** On that issue, I think Australian hip-hop is far less politically incorrect than American hip-hop. Australian hip-hoppers are generally not homophobic, and those kind of issues tend to get dealt with reasonably intelligently in Australian hip-hop.

**MP:** Even the issue of level of intelligence in hip-hop is questionable, because I know you're on about the cultural angle, but I find that really Anglo, I used to think like that all the time, 'I've got to be intelligent', and you dismiss anyone who isn't. But it's like, well, this is self-expression. And you also look at the first ten years of hip-hop, how many dudes were running around saying 'bitches' and 'hos' and 'I'm gonna shoot you'? That was part of it, but you look at the first guys and they were dressing up like they could've been in the Mardi Gras in their video clips. So that [gangsta rap] really started to come in the 90s and a lot of it comes back to the fact of who was releasing it, and who was covering it, and they weren't black media organisations, they weren't black record labels, or black distributors, though there are a handful. So it's kind of like, again, it's come from outside the culture, so I often wonder, OK, it might have been like that on the street but did it get perpetuated by people outside the culture, giving it the business reason. So a young black guy now who wants to make money has either got to go to the NBA/NFL or he's going to rap about bitches and hos. I don't know, that's a

simplistic equation, but I wonder how much of that has come from outside the culture.

**TM:** When you were talking about the early days, with people dressing up, who were you thinking of in particular?

**MP:** All of them, because it all just came out of the P-Funk era, Grandmaster Flash, everyone was wearing crazy stuff.

**NK:** OK, let's say hypothetically SBS has a hip-hop show, a 45-minute hip-hop show going, are you interested? Is that a good thing? Obviously it would depend on what you were just saying, who's doing it, who's pushing it and what's the agenda. But if it came from inside the culture, do you think that could be beneficial?

**MP:** Beneficial in what way? Would I watch it? Yeah. Would it increase sales? Probably.

**NK:** I suppose I'm thinking in terms of deepening and widening the culture as well.

**MP:** I don't think it would necessarily have a massive impact on a cultural level, except possibly by introducing new people to it who might go on in life to invent, create and evolve. Just by the sharing of information, in the same way that the internet has done. I mean, I was at a point last year where I was going to make a DVD/magazine every quarter, and that would either be the premise for the TV show, or just for the sake of it, giving a new face to what's going on. I don't know, they are a lot of different ways to do it.

**TM:** It's still that Australian hip-hop is incredibly under-represented in terms of things like *Rage*, or any kind of standard TV/video shows. It's very hard to see a group's clips on the current media channels.

**MP:** *Rage* has done a pretty good job in the last couple of years I would say. There aren't a lot of clips, and there aren't a lot of good clips. And so they [*Rage*] have certain production values, but Downsyde, 1200 Techniques, Koolism, they all get spun but it's just not in that 8am – 9am slot, which is the top 20, top 30.

**TM:** Well, it's probably never going to be in that time slot.

**MP:** I don't know, I think someone will break through. But then again, I've gone from caring if they do; because I'd rather them make good music that I can relate to from a selfish level.

**TM:** That's the other great thing about *Stealth* is that you've got videos on the CD accompaniment, and that's another really important resource because sometimes that's the only access people have to it. What sort of sales are you at now?

**MP:** Well, we print 8000 a quarter; well we aim it to be a quarter. Sales wise, we probably sell three-quarters of them within six-12 months, but there's always returns. I mean, most magazines only sell 50% and we do better than that. Because a lot of our magazines go direct to stores which sell out, like record stores. Most magazines that just go through newsagencies are doing 50%, so we're quite targeted. I guess the other thing that's changed in Australian hip-hop is that now with triple j and our magazine going into the country means that a lot of our subscribers and a lot of the feedback we get is from country kids. So it's changed from a year or two ago when you feel like you're the only person in the community into hip-hop. Some of the feedback we've been getting from kids in regional areas, or even from some cities, because it become a voice on triple j, it's almost replaced punk, 'cause it has a stronger local identity, it's got the accent. And some kids love it; they only listen to Australian hip-hop.

**TM:** And what about overseas distribution?

- MP:** We go through Tower Records, so that puts us in about 20 countries. We sell direct to a few stores. I used to have distribution that was pretty solid in 2001 but it's so hard to make money because by the time you've shipped it over there, you pay all this money in freight and then you may never even get paid by the distributor. A lot of them went down in 2001. So really, in the last year or two I've thought I'm going to go directly through Tower, and sell direct to the stores that pay me upfront, and the rest of it is just going to be focusing on Australia. I'd rather give the magazine to an Australian kid rather than spending all this money shipping it to America where they never pay me.
- TM:** Another thing that I think is really good about *Stealth* is that it's not just Australian; it's more than Australian and US hip-hop. Like you've put in the Korean Stuff in this issue, so it is situating Australian hip-hop in a bit of a global context.
- MP:** Yep. That's kind of always been my aim. Hip-hop is a global culture. I even feel weird when, like this issue we did a scene report, I'd rather be covering guys on their own merits, but it's an easier selling point to go 'OK, here's the Korean scene report, have a read'. 'Cause at the end of the day, all of these guys have really similar stories. It might just be that say a kid in Australia has had certain struggles, and a Spanish kid from a Basque background has had got different struggles, but it's still...
- TM:** There's a connection, absolutely.
- MP:** There is a struggle, and so I want to show that, I guess because in Australia we are pretty far away, we don't always see it. But a lot of the Australians are open to anything from overseas that's got good production values, so I wanted to show to them that they're not that alone. Especially in the late 90s, you know, we might not really fit in en masse compared to like the R'n'B scene and rock, but look at all these other people like us. Blaze gave me a comment about the Korean article, he said, 'cause he's pretty open to all the overseas stuff, he said, 'Shit, these guys are just like us, but over there'. And that's the point. And it makes the guys overseas, who are even less represented than they are here, feel good, because to them they're getting international coverage.
- TM:** No, I think those scene reports are really important, just for information about what's going on elsewhere and seeing the connections and similarities. And also breaking the language barrier.
- MP:** My vision I guess, is that I'd like to somehow be able to set up a situation, even if it's just with a magazine or actually getting involved with tours where there's complete cross-board, cross-pollination. Guys in Japan working in Korea, we've got an Aussie MC over there, Singaporean producer, Scandinavian graff writer, whatever, 'cause we're all the same, it's just these artificial maps and borders that separate us – and language.
- TM:** And there are a lot of people in the Australian hip-hop scene who do have international connections already, you know, Mass MC with Italy, Maya with Mexico, Blaze with Finland, it's there, it would be great to be able to develop those links further.
- NK:** I was thinking that there is a real possibility for the internet to be the vehicle of this cross-border pollination that you're talking about. It can also be the new tapes. Because tapes were such an integral part of hip-hop, and both of you still have tapes. So through the internet you can get cross border distribution, say perhaps, 50 cents for one track.
- MP:** Yeah, there's a lot of potential, but don't forget that the tapes are just a medium, same as vinyl. You can be a purist all you like, but it's still just a medium.
- TM:** But the tape era is over. No one's making them anymore, and the ones that were made were in such small batches that most of them have kind of disappeared. Most of them were released in lots of 50 or so which got circulated and then disappeared.

**MP:** People would dub them and you wind up with crazy situations like a ninth generation dubbed tape.

**TM:** In fact in the interview that Koolism did in *Stealth* they said they didn't have their tapes anymore. So that was one of the important phases. And I guess it was at a time where there was such limited resources that that's all people could afford to do.

**MP:** I mean this was at a time when spending \$500 bucks to get a 100 tapes made up was a big investment, let alone your equipment to do it.

**TM:** So things have really developed incredibly since then haven't they? Now it's reasonably cheap to put out your own CD, and virtually anybody can release a CD.

**MP:** Which is good and bad.

**TM:** Do you have to listen to a hell of a lot of stuff?

**MP:** Yeah, I get probably about 20-30 things a week from all over the place. There was a real glut a couple of years ago, because a lot of the overseas labels started reissuing everything and then because it was so easy also. It was kind of around the time of Anticon, not saying they are culprits, but around the time they started to get active, four or five years ago at their peak. 'Cause it was all self-made, they got etched out of the mainstream industry 'cause of the way they were, made this collective and just started doing their own thing. And a lot of people saw that they could do it, so they started to do it. Sol, one of the main guys from Anticon, who I was talking to at [the Newcastle] *Sound Summit*, he said, 'Man, I think we've become the excuse for people to make shit music, just 'cause they could'.

**TM:** Do you still listen to virtually everything you get given?

**MP:** Yeah, I listen to everything, at least once. I'm pretty quick with my decision. But the thing is, when you've listened to so much stuff, you kind of know if you're going to like it, and if it's suitable for your magazine.

**NK:** So do people just send you the tracks they make, like home demos?

**MP:** We stopped getting that. Without sounding like a dickhead, I think that the past couple of years since we raised the production values is the reason. I used to do radio, so I was one of the first points of call. But now guys are like, 'OK, I think we need to be a little bit stronger for the magazine to take us seriously'. And that's cool, 'cause it saves me a bit of time.

**TM:** It seems that Urban Expressions has kind of faded. Do you think the need for those type of things is no longer there?

**MP:** I think the main thing with those sorts of events is it gives the community a reason to get together aside from 'I'm performing tonight and it's my show, I'm headlining it'. It gives that sort of platform. The main reason I wanted to do it was because I always get asked questions, I was like 'Let's put something on and have other people'. Doing the media stuff can get tiring, having to have an opinion about everything, all the time, and having to know the answers to everything. So that's what I think the conference is good for. It's probably not as mystical, especially with the internet now, like information-wise. You can look up how to get CDs made up, how to press vinyl. So it's probably not as necessary. They always felt a bit strange, but they served a good purpose I think.

**TM:** Well yeah, because that's how someone like Maya got involved in the scene, she was doing R'n'B up until she came to Urban Expressions and discovered the whole scene.

**MP:** I remember when she put her hand up to ask the first question!