

# LOCAL NOISE

## **Muphin**

19/9/05, Prahan, Melbourne.  
Muphin, Tony Mitchell, Nick Keys.

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### **Summary:**

“I think it’s important to have diversity. I don’t think people outside of the actual scene have witnessed how diverse it is. A lot of people see the American style hip-hop and either think that’s Aussie hip-hop, or others just see it as the beer raps and barbeques and what you were saying. They seem to miss a lot in between, which is kind of what the Hoods have done, they’ve opened up a lot of doors and got a lot of people thinking about what Aussie hip-hop actually is and try to find other stuff.”

When Local Noise was in Melbourne we caught the train to Prahan to visit the Obese Records store, where we met up with Muphin and interviewed him in his lunch break. In a long discussion, Muph spoke about being on Obese, working in the store four days a week and seeing it’s growth from the inside. Muph also told us about his childhood in Eltham, the early influences of US hip-hop and being introduced to Australian scene through DJ FX. He talked about the influences of everyday conversation and experiences on his lyrical style, honesty in rapping, as well as the fight hip-hop has had to be accepted in Australia, and the misunderstanding of it by the industry. In a widely ranging interview, Muph also touched on the making of the video ‘Heaps Good’, graffiti culture in Melbourne, the TV show The Heavyweights on Channel 31 in Melbourne and the degeneration of the battling since the release of the Eminem film 8 Mile.

### **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.

**M:** Muphin

**TM:** Tony Mitchell

**NK:** Nick Keys

**TM:** So, have you been involved with Obese since the beginning?

**M:** No. I came into it. I knew a lot of the guys who started it through my older brother, but I've been on the label for about three years now, so I've seen it grow, to a certain extent. Especially how rapidly it's grown in the last four years, probably even more so in the last two years with the ascent of artists like Hilltop Hoods.

**TM:** Because it's ten-years-old now isn't it, Obese Records?

**M:** Yeah, the shop is ten-years-old now. With distribution and the label side of things, well, Reason was the first release in 2000, I think.

**TM:** Is that still available?

**M:** *Solid?* Um... no.

**TM:** Yeah, I couldn't manage to find it. And that's the problem with a lot of the early stuff, it's disappeared, and it's really a collector's items now.

**M:** Yeah, I think a lot of that's because when we were putting out releases years ago it was so hard to sell in big quantities, so you'd get small quantities and then leave it. And a lot of artists like that idea of it being a limited run. It's an odd thing when you think about it, but I guess a lot of artists are precious about their music and they like the idea of it being sold out – even if it's just small numbers. They like that people have to really dig to find it.

**TM:** So, you got into hip-hop through your brother basically?

**M:** Basically, yeah.

**TM:** And were you involved in any other of the elements, like graffiti?

**M:** No, it's always been rapping with me. It started with him introducing me to Run DMC and US artists like that, and I guess from there the creative urge came for me to start writing my own things. I got tired of mimicking artists that I was listening to and so I started drawing influences from the way I was living and what I was seeing, putting my own spin on it. So it started with my brother introducing me to a DJ who became the DJ of a group we made called Puah Hedz, and we did some tapes and some CDs. And then he [the DJ] introduced me other people he knew in the scene – 'cause when I first got into hip-hop I didn't even know there was an Australian hip-hop scene at that point, it wasn't until later that I realised that there were releases coming out. So it was quite vital meeting DJ FX, it really opened my eyes to the fact there were more people out there doing this sort of thing.

**TM:** Are Puah Hedz still going?

**M:** Not at the moment. We've discussed doing more material, but I've kind of gone off and done my own thing and the other members aren't as focused on the music side of things – they've got other things going on in their life. DJ FX still DJs a fair bit and does workshops. It got to the point where working in a group you find yourself compromising on things that you don't really want to be compromising, and that stretches friendships. And also it being my brother, we just needed the space away – but we'll see what happens.

**TM:** And does he still work as a solo MC?

**M:** No, he's doing the *Oz Cella* – which now has turned into the *Rap Cella*, so he's working on that.

**TM:** And that's an international thing, mainly Americans yeah?

**M:** Yeah, mainly Americans, but it's got stuff from the UK, Canada, Australia and a few other little places. He's just trying to build on that so his attention is focused on that these days.

**TM:** Does he get any money out of doing that?

**M:** Well... no. Not at the moment, he's trying to get it going, and he's getting a few little dribs and drabs – because he's trying to get people to advertise on the web space – but no, not much reward. He's put a lot of work into it.

**TM:** Yeah, it's an incredible labour of love.

**M:** Well that's it, that's what it's driven from, but it would be nice to see him able to make some money out of it, but so far he hasn't.

**TM:** I saw a video he did from one of the *Stealth* CD-ROMs, and he talked about the *Oz Cella* on it. You got the impression he was a little bit embittered, in a way, that he had put so much effort into it and no one really acknowledges it or gives him credit.

**M:** Well that's right, they haven't recognised him. In a way, he's giving a lot of free exposure to a lot of artists and people who want to do research and find out who has worked with who. You know, 'Oh, I really like this guy I want to find out what else he has done', but they use that service and are like 'Whatever', without realising the work that has gone into it. It's a bit sad really.

**TM:** Exactly right, because it's very detailed, like he goes through every release and lists all the different people who have collaborated on it. It's really painstaking.

**M:** I actually did a few of them for him with the *Rap Cella* and it takes a long, long time. Because sometimes with albums, certain MCs won't get credited, so my brother said you have to listen to each track and work out who it is and have them in there, even if they are not credited. So it's not even just going through the booklet and getting the information, he takes it to that extent.

**TM:** Wow. It's an incredible task. So when did you hook up with Plutonic?

**M:** OK... have you guys spoken to anyone from Nuff Said yet?

**TM:** We're talking to MC Que tomorrow.

**M:** OK. Excellent. Basically what happened, was that I had done Puah Hedz stuff and then my own solo release, and then I gave a copy to Prowla who runs Nuff Said with a couple of other people, and he asked me to be on a compilation of theirs. So I was on that and Prowla already knew Plutonic Lab and he heard the song and said I want to do a remix for it, so he did a remix for the track 'Not Your Average'.

**TM:** What year was this?

**M:** This was 99... maybe 2000. And the compilation was called *Beats From the Vaults Volume 1*. I really liked his remix and from then on we kept in contact and did a few beats on *More Than Music*, which came out on Obese Records in 2003 – I think it was 2003. So we kept working on tracks after that, and one day I just called him up and said 'Why don't we just hook up together and make a group?' and he said 'OK'.

- NK:** He seems to be incredibly prolific, his name pops up almost everywhere with Melbourne releases.
- M:** He is. And the funny thing is that a lot of people don't realise how much he has done. When you go through his back catalogue – he's done stuff in the UK, a lot of Australian stuff obviously, he's done soundscapes for short films – and it's only since he's had his own solo albums more recently that people have realised how much work he's produced. And he's very selective with who he will work with. And that [producing] is basically what he does, he loves it and that's his life.
- NK:** It seems he does production for everyone. He's done stuff for A-Love...
- M:** Yeah, he's done a few tracks for her.
- NK:** And on this *Mamma's Kitchen* [Mix CD released after ten years of Obese Records] release he's mastered the whole thing, as well as produced a heap of the tracks on it?
- M:** Yes! Well, he used to master a fair few of the Obese releases, so he's done a lot of work.
- TM:** How are Obese doing internationally?
- M:** The Hoods have toured Europe, but I think at the moment Obese is still not entirely satisfied with the scenario at home. Basically, we want to look after home first, we want to get more exposure here and then concentrate on the international market. Because, as far as it has come, it is still growing and there are a lot of people who still don't know what Aussie hip-hop is – there's still a lot of people who cringe and go 'Oh, what's that?' That's sad in a way, but I think Aussie hip-hop is fighting to get more acceptance in its own country. I think Obese, in its form, is trying to master that first. But there's been a few sales here and there, and I know there are a lot of people from the US who have liked a lot of stuff from Obese. Though, it's probably more that you get their opinions and views when they tour here and they get to see the support act, who they might really like, and then they might come into the shop and say 'What's the local stuff you've got that we can listen to?' and they want to buy some. Rather than being pushed outwards, it's more when people come here and see the inside. But in the next few years there is talk of expanding overseas, possibly the Japan market, or the UK – because they are starting to pick up on our scene, mostly because we are so receptive to their stuff in the UK. There's heaps of similarities between the scenes, we're both trying to make music and break into the scene without compromising who we are as artists, and not trying to mimic other styles as a selling point.
- TM:** Not trying to use American accents.
- M:** No. There is a sense of pride and honesty, I guess.
- TM:** It seems there are a lot of affinities with the hip-hop here and over in the UK in that both are struggling to emerge.
- M:** For sure. There's a few that have broken through in the UK like Roots Manuva. And that, to me, shows that it is possible. And there are a few grime artists like Dizzie Rascal and Lady Sovereign who, even in the US do OK.
- NK:** Which is incredible, because the US market is so insular.
- M:** Yes, it is.
- TM:** One of the people we've talked to in Sydney is Josie Styles...
- M:** Right, yeah I was just staying with her.
- TM:** She's great, very generous and perfusive. She seems to have spend some time in the UK and has

hooked up with the Lowlife guys. And she also brought out... oh what was his name?

**M:** Lotek?

**TM:** Yes, that was it. Koolism have had some connections with the UK also, so it seems that the connection has been quite fruitful.

**NK:** I think that you could say that the connection is the independent label connection...

**M:** Yes.

**NK:** Because as we were saying, they are both struggling scenes and there is no major record industry recognition so people have to do it of their own volition.

**TM:** One thing that constantly strikes me about the Australian hip-hop scene is that it's had to rely on small independent labels and a whole do-it-yourself ethos the whole way through.

**M:** Yes, for sure.

**TM:** Because basically the mainstream music industry doesn't understand hip-hop...

**M:** Not at all, not even slightly.

**TM:** It hasn't the first idea about how to market it, and as a result of this – it's almost been a positive effect in some ways – there's been a strong network of people who have done things themselves and are really organised, who have had to do it all on a grassroots level.

**M:** Definitely. People who are doing it themselves, I think, proves that they have a passion for the culture, whereas what can happen once the majors get involved, is you get artists who see the chance to make money, and they don't care about much else – a little bit of fame and a lot of money.

**NK:** The rider.

**M:** Yeah. A lot of Australian hip-hop artists, particularly the ones who have been around for a long time, they are quite scared of all the majors. You hear the horror stories of all the debts. They give you a nice advance, but then you have to pay back the debts if it doesn't do that well, and so forth. From what I've seen, the type of artist who gets signed on Obese has a sense of paying dues. There's a sense with Obese that you have to get out there at the shows, put out your own product, save up for your own equipment, your own studio – make it all happen for yourself. It seems once that's all happened, then Obese might consider signing you. I don't think they are into just signing up someone who hasn't proved that they are going to stick to it, and that their hearts are in the right place.

**TM:** So I was interested in how you hooked up with the Perth scene – Downsyde and Layla – and how they managed to get signed to Obese?

**M:** Well the Syllabolix crew have been doing stuff for a while, Downsyde released their first CD totally independently, and then the second was on Hydrofunk. Then the Matty B CD came out on Obese. I guess it's a case of us hearing their stuff already, and knowing what they were capable of – we liked it – and so the offer was there for them if they ever wanted to release stuff on the label. That's generally what happens with interstate acts. Word gets around.

**TM:** And I guess it was in their interests to get a deal with an east coast label. They would have really needed the distribution elsewhere in Australia.

**M:** Well that's right, so I guess it works well for them. I guess the downfall of being all the way over in Perth is the flights. I think that's why they tend to come east and tour for a month – otherwise they'd

go crazy with all the travelling.

**TM:** Have you been over to Perth?

**M:** It's one of the few places I haven't been. I've been meaning to, but it's similar in a way to Downslyde. There is three of us in Muph n Plutonic – with a DJ as well – so it's quite expensive and then plus the charge on top of that. It's been spoken about, fingers crossed about that one. But I've been down to Tassie a few times, I don't know, I guess it doesn't feel quite as isolated as Perth, even though it's [Hobart] a very small city. It's amazing how passionate they are in Tassie about their Oz hip-hop. The last show we did was a sell-out, and they were so into it, it was really good to see.

**TM:** How many people was that?

**M:** I think it was 400. It was only a small venue, but they said they had to turn away 100-150 people.

**TM:** The other thing we wanted to talk about was your video clip, because we talked to Anto the other day and he gave us a copy of the video clip he'd done with you, 'Heaps Good'. Maybe if you could talk a bit about that...

**M:** OK. Basically, he'd already done the TZU clip ['Dambusters'] and we were looking around for someone to do our clip and I liked that one, and so did Pegz, so he got in contact with Anto and brought him in and asked if he had any ideas. He showed us some stuff on his computer, one of which was a little sketch drawing he had done on some post-it notes to another beat, just a 15-second promo-type thing. We really liked that idea, and basically it was all in his hands from that point on – we had about three or four meetings beforehand and he went through the storyboard with us and we queried him on how it was going to be put together. We shot it in two days, and yeah, it was all on him pretty much, he had complete creative control, within reason, like we'd say something if we didn't want to do it. He was the genius behind that.

**TM:** It looked like he'd shot some of that in a studio?

**M:** Yep, he shot some of it with a white screen and us wearing black clothes, so he could get definite lines when he was drawing us on the post-it notes. And he made those post-it note suits that we had to wear. He shot all that office scene in a warehouse, he hired someone to set the whole thing up. The worst part of it was the bit where we are holding up the notes and our lips are moving, that just took hours! Sitting in the same position, holding each frame, having to get the fingers just right, so the paper was in the right spot and the lips would sync.

**TM:** It sounds torturous.

**NK:** But the video turned out really well.

**M:** Yeah, well we are really happy with it. We've got a lot of feedback. The new PSP [Playstation Portable] has a new memory card, and they were interested in putting that clip on their actual memory card, just for the first production run. I'm not actually sure if that went ahead. And he's taken the clip to a few festivals and done quite well. So it's good. It would have been nice if it received a little more play possibly on TV. See, I'm not sure how they go about picking what gets played these days, I'm a little sceptical about whether there is major label backing that has more influence than independent. I guess that comes back to the whole struggle of getting your stuff out there and being heard and being seen, etc.

**TM:** And *Rage* seems to be very hit and miss with what they play and if they are going to play it then it seems to be at four am.

**NK:** They push those local content laws as far as they can get with it don't they?

**M:** Yes.

**NK:** It's like they say, 'OK, there's a certain percentage of Australian stuff we have to play, so let's play it from four to five am'.

**M:** Yeah, but having said that, when it first came out I think they played it three weeks in a row at midnight or one am, which isn't too bad, so I was happy with that.

**TM:** And in Melbourne you've got the show on Channel 31?

**M:** *The Heavyweights*. They've been shooting it and working on it for about a year and a half I think. We did the first episode for them and that was shot at least a year ago, so they've been working on it and building it up. So it's getting better.

**TM:** Have those shows been recorded and kept?

**M:** Yes, they have. They are pretty much pre-recorded, even though it's got that live feel to it. They record it, then edit it and then play it. And they keep them all. I think they've done about 20 episodes now.

**TM:** Right, so there is a Channel 31 archive that will save all that material?

**M:** Yes, they have it all.

**TM:** So Muphin Plutonic have basically done two albums now?

**M:** No, we've only done one. Plutonic Lab is a separate identity, and he's done two. I've also done two with a separate identity, under Muphin. So we joined forces to make one album, though it's going to continue now I think. I don't think I'll be doing much under Muphin anymore.

**NK:** What about the name Muphin? Where did that come from?

**M:** Oh, I got that when I was a kid, with a haircut I had. That's it; it was that simple, my haircut looked like the top of a muffin – obviously not an English muffin, but a muffin nonetheless. It's kind of stuck with me I guess.

**NK:** How much does the experience you had a kid come through in your lyrical content? Because the track on *Mamma's Kitchen* is called 'Family Affairs', and also I've listened to a lot of your other stuff which is also...

**M:** Yeah. Obviously everyone's childhood effect who they are, but I think now days with the *Hunger Pain* album, lots of bits on that are not even referring to it literally, but it's strongly affected the types of music that I'm making. It's important in terms of the persona of the music, the honesty – I try not to think about it – but I think I'm honest with my music and my childhood affected that.

**NK:** Where did you grow up?

**M:** In Eltham. It was quite a young community and I lived on a street where there were a lot of kids and there was a lot of cricket on the road and a lot of kick-the-football-on-the-street. My dad used to take us down the oval to play footy. I guess it was quite a typical upbringing, but just because I was around kids I had a fun childhood. Since then, I've met a lot of people in the hip-hop scene who haven't been that fortunate and it makes me feel lucky in many ways. So a lot of times I try and approach things from my own view and then with other songs I'll almost look through the eyes of someone else, or what I see other people as having seen, stuff they've gone through, and try and present that in the song, if not for me, then for them – if only in a small way.

**NK:** In many ways, it's probably that kind of angst that you're talking about – that so many others in the hip-hop scene carry around with them – which comes through in their lyrical content. For me, it's where a lot of the rawness comes from; they are like untold stories of difficult lives. It doesn't fit the straight up Australian narrative of beers, barbeques and all that.

**M:** Yeah, and I think it's important to have diversity. I don't think people outside of the actual scene have witnessed how diverse it is. A lot of people see the American-style hip-hop and either think that's Aussie hip-hop, or others just see it as the beer-raps and barbeques and what you were saying. They seem to miss a lot in between, which is kind of what the Hoods have done, they've opened up a lot of doors and got a lot of people thinking about what Aussie hip-hop actually is and try to find other stuff.

**TM:** Well I certainly find that with my students, because I play them a lot of Oz hip-hop, and often their reaction is quite superficial, things like 'Oh, we don't really like it, we don't like hearing Australian accents', which strikes me as being ridiculous, 'What? You expect them to rap in American accents?' And they say things like 'Well, hip-hop doesn't really fit the Australian accent', and you ask 'Well how much have you actually listened to?'

**M:** Well that's right. The first time I heard Australian hip-hop I was probably quite the same, it's was like 'wow', the accent stood out a lot. But the more you listen to it the less you notice it. I mean, of course, you'll know it's an Australian but it won't stick out like a sore thumb – it will sound natural.

**TM:** What does stick out like a sore thumb is when you get Australian trying to imitate Americans.

**M:** I think that's just a load of crap.

**NK:** And if they tried to take it to America they'd be laughed at.

**M:** Yeah, I think you'll find a lot of them would say 'Well, why are they trying to sound like us? If I want to get hip-hop that sounds American then I'll buy my own records!' You know what I mean?

**TM:** Yeah, exactly.

**M:** Why try and sell ice to the Eskimos?

**NK:** And that's another thing the Oz scene and the UK scene have in common is the development of their own accent from a really early stage, and we've talked to Mystery from Brethren, who's been around since year dot, and he was telling us that the idea to start rapping in an Australian accent in the 80s came first from UK records they managed to hear that were in British accent.

**M:** Yeah, fully.

**TM:** I was wondering if there is any Australian stuff, like poetry or bush ballads or anything like that which has influenced you at all? Is there a local influence?

**M:** Like fellow writers?

**TM:** Yeah.

**M:** Um... not particularly, for me the influence is from the music itself rather than outside sources. Which is a little boring actually, but that's the way it is.

**NK:** Well, the creative urge is just to get up and do something, so you're your own influence in that way, and you were also saying honesty is important to you...

**M:** Yeah.

- TM:** I guess someone like Reason has the whole being a history teacher element to draw from. I was really interested in him saying that he's actually more committed to being a history teacher than an MC.
- M:** I draw more influences from conversations and I generally have a notepad handy, so I can just take down notes for ideas and things like that.
- TM:** Conversations with other people? Any particular people?
- M:** Oh no, any people, it could be a conversation I had with someone in a milk bar. It might be something as simple as observation, things you see, and the way people react. A lot of the times when you're feeling like people aren't very generous and aren't very giving – you're going through a dark time, I remember feeling pretty shitty one day – and I was just about to buy a ticket to the train and this lady came up to me and said 'I don't need this ticket, you have the ticket'. And that made the rest of my day great, and those kinds of things inspire me, I don't forget those things, I write them down and might go into one line in a rap.
- TM:** So you're working semi-full-time in the Obese shop?
- M:** Yep, I work in the shop four days a week and then the rest of the time is doing music at the moment.
- TM:** So you must get people coming into the shop who are very eccentric and off the wall...
- M:** Yes! We get all kinds, we get all kinds definitely. That keeps the day interesting and gives me more to write about. It's also interesting having worked there, a lot of people would be surprised at the different age groups we get in. Of course, we get a lot of young kids but we also get a lot of married couples come in. Frank was telling me once he had a 70-year-old guy come in to buy something. So it's not necessarily limited to kids.
- TM:** I think when we were talking to Brethren something like this came up and it's often family connections, like people's brothers-in-law will hear it and get into it and start supporting it. That whole family connection thing is all part and parcel of hip-hop in a way; your crew, your 'hood, and your family. It's all these kind of connections that are like family connections.
- M:** Very much so.
- NK:** Yeah, that story was from the Brethren interview. Wizdm's brother-in-law hated US hip-hop, hated it with a passion and then he showed him a couple of Aussie hip-hop things and now he said he's the first one to buy every Aussie hip-hop album that comes out. So for him, I guess as soon as he started hearing that local accent and local stories it all gelled for him. And my mates from school are all the same, never really dug hip-hop, but as soon as they started hearing Aussie accents and situation in life that they understood...
- M:** Well, it's relatable, it's instantly relatable.
- TM:** There is that beer-rap stuff which is quite cliché in some ways, and sort of pushing the Aussie stereotypes a little far, but on the other hand there is a lot of stuff that is talking about everyday life and in a natural Aussie accent. It seems to me there is no need to push the nationalism too far.
- M:** Yeah, no. You don't need to do that. But I think there is a place for it all, where it can all sit comfortably. Because a lot of local stuff is more battle raps, and there's a place for that too. And I quite enjoy that. For me, battle raps is purely for entertainment and enjoyment, where as other artists – say like The Herd – they delve more into politics and try to get people to think.
- TM:** They are careful not to do that all the time... they have a few more tricks.

- M:** Yeah, no, they don't just do politics.
- TM:** Yeah, because they have a whole party vibe to them as well. We talked to Urthboy and Ozi Batla and they talked about the politics but in a way they wanted to distance themselves from it a bit, so as to avoid being pigeonholed as only political.
- M:** Well, that's right. And Urthboy's solo album, that was one of my favourites, and it didn't have a whole lot of politics from what I can remember.
- NK:** Yeah, it's a dope album that one. He got that mastered in the States as well.
- M:** Yeah, a lot of people are going elsewhere for the mastering, I know we now get our stuff done in New Zealand. The whole quality of the recording process and the packaging has really evolved; it's gone from tapes to records and CDs, full-colour record covers. It used to be just stickers. Even though people are still doing it in bedroom studios, these bedroom studios are a lot more highly equipped these days and the equipment is a lot more affordable. Most artists are pushing to get the best sound quality as well as the best lyrics.
- TM:** Whereabouts in New Zealand?
- M:** I'm not actually sure. It's not like everyone goes there, it's just been the last couple, just testing out a few different places I think.
- TM:** I guess because New Zealand hip-hop has had so much major label support, there must be more of an infrastructure there.
- NK:** Yeah, The Herd boys were saying that a lot of the Aussie guys who do the mastering are so rock-centric that they just butcher it.
- M:** Yeah, well that's right, they just don't have the experience I guess.
- TM:** Well, listening to that Ransom compilation, *15 Years of Australian Hip-hop on Vinyl*, the early stuff just sounds so rough because it's mostly done in rock studios.
- NK:** The only other thing I was going to ask was about the graffiti in Melbourne, because it's just mind-boggling, coming from a Sydney perspective. That Hurtsville line we've been catching is incredible and the Sandringham line out to where we are now is awesome too. Is that hoody you're wearing now...?
- M:** Burn Crew. Flick and Puzzle put it together and I think Duro has got something to do with it. Yeah, I think it's been going for three or four years and they put a clothing label out, and most people in the scene know who they are, so it's just kind of taken off. But on the graff, I guess with Sydney you had the Olympics and they wanted to clean up and they got really strict about it. But in Melbourne it's not quite like that, there's a lot of legals going around these days.
- TM:** There are a lot of legals in Sydney now too, people like Mistery are running regular workshops. But I guess with the Commonwealth Games coming up, Melbourne might start cracking down too?
- M:** Well, yeah, that's right. Melbourne's always been very strong on graffiti, it's always been, I'd say, the dominant part of the hip-hop culture, in a way.
- NK:** Much more access to the train lines from what I've seen. Sydney is much more locked down in terms of getting to the trains. You really got to be at the I'm-gonna-bolt-cutter-this-fence-type attitude to get in.
- M:** Which is a lot more work and a lot more risk.

**TM:** Going back to what you were saying about battling, have you been in some battles?

**M:** I have, I've been in a few, I won one, which was called Verbal Mechanics. That was a battle they were meant to hold in each state and then have an Australian final, so I won the Victorian final, and I think only three states had them so it never went ahead on a national level. But battling has changed a lot since 99-2000 when I went in that battle.

**TM:** Right, yeah, well I know when we ask a lot of people in Sydney about battling they sort of groan and say 'Well, *8 Mile* really fucked it up'.

**M:** Well it has. And also, when I was battling it was more about the freestyle, and freestyle to me is just making everything up on the spot. Nowadays with battles, and MCs will openly admit it, they come to the battle prepared with lines that they are going to say, prewritten raps, basically. They aren't ashamed to say it either, and fair enough, that's the way it's done now, but for me, that's not a freestyle battle.

**TM:** To me, ciphers appear to be a much more positive freestyle environment, it's much more collaborative, people working together. Have you been involved in many of those?

**M:** Oh yeah, heaps over the years. Not so much these days but when I first started that's all I would do, apart from write raps. Being in a cipher was always the highlight of a party. I've been around a fair bit now and it seems to go on a lot after we finish our shows, we usually try and talk to people after the show.