



Candy Bowers is bringing her one-woman show to the Old Fitzroy Hotel.

# Theatre with a beat

## Drew Sheldrick

IF you've never associated hip-hop with the theatrical stage, it's time to reassess. Performer Candy Bowers is bringing the world premiere of her one-woman hip-hop theatre performance, *Who's That Chik?*, to the Old Fitzroy Theatre next month.

"Hip-hop theatre is a form that's over 20 years old. Hip-hop's not restricted to making records or painting the side of train cars. There's such a strong element of theatricality in hip-hop that it makes perfect sense to put it on the stage," she said.

A mix of rap, spoken word, street dance, stand-up comedy and video, the show is based on Bowers' own life story. She said the project grew from her desire to see more non-white people in the local arts scene.

"I guess in bringing my own story to the stage, it starts feeling like I'm part of the solution," she said.

"Rather than keep asking when that Asian family is going to move into Ramsay Street or when a black character is going to make it onto *Home and Away*, I've decided I can't wait for parts of the industry to agree with me."

Raised in Campbelltown by a South African mother and a Zimbabwean father, and a performer from an early age, Bowers went on to study at NIDA, an experience she said she found difficult.

"I found it a complicated process as a person of colour because I couldn't see myself in any of the characters. When we'd open up the cast list on plays like *Hedda Gabler*, I couldn't see where theatre really fitted in with my culture. I had no Australian black female comics to look up to either," she said.

Despite this, Bowers said, she can see real change coming into the theatrical world.

"I think it's difficult to get young people from diverse backgrounds to watch Shakespeare or solo shows. The wonderful thing about hip-hop theatre and my shows is that it gives these young people something to engage with."

At NIDA, Bowers met actress Saskia Smith and British director-producer Natalie Wise. Together they formed Hey Lady Productions, the company behind comedy duo Sista She (featuring Bowers' alter ego Rasheeda Eda MC), which scored rave reviews at the Sydney Big Day Out, the Adelaide Cabaret Festival, the Melbourne Comedy Festival and at the Edinburgh Fringe. The duo also went on to have their own TV show, *She TV*, on Foxtel's Channel V.

Most recently, Bowers has been commissioned to develop a hip-hop theatrical take on Shakespeare's *As You Like It* for the Bell Shakespeare Company's Mind's Eye program. And she'll take *Who's That Chik?* to the New York Hip-Hop Festival this year.

Despite hip-hop theatre not being well known in Australia, Bowers is optimistic that audiences will be receptive.

"I wasn't going to do a limited production in Sydney and then change the show for New York, where this art form is more popular. I find if you open a world to people, they tend to step in," she said.

***Who's That Chik?* will be at the Old Fitzroy Theatre, Woolloomooloo, from May 5-30. Bookings at [www.rocksurfers.org](http://www.rocksurfers.org) or phone 9380 5553.**