

Hip hop eases city's great dividing rage

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There are two Sydneys, **Khaled Sabsabi** believes - one angry, one not - divided by culture, not fences or brick walls.

Rap, the music of the dispossessed, is also increasingly the music of Sydney's poor young. They turn to it for an identity, a voice and a sense of justice, he says.

On the eve of the city's first hip hop festival, **Sabsabi**, 35, a rapper and youth community worker, says young people from Arabic backgrounds are turning to rap music to express rising frustration about the Afghanistan bombings, racism, stereotypes and isolation.

"They see the reports that 50,000 Iraqi kids are dying each year, and then they see reports of 6,000 Americans dying, and it doesn't sit very comfortably with them [so] they're coming in and writing songs about this," says **Sabsabi**, who has run hip hop workshops for the past 12 years.

His latest workshop, the 2168 Project, linking hip hop artists with about 30 youths from Green Valley, Liverpool and Miller in western Sydney, aims to channel this anger creatively and break down stereotypes about young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

There is also a strong job skills component, with students from previous workshops landing jobs running street magazines, working in community radio and starting their own hip hop groups.

"They're pretty angry, especially the kids with Arabic backgrounds," **Sabsabi** says. "First it was the war, then before that we had the rape trials it's something different every six months. All these 'of Middle Eastern appearance' stereotypes are making them feel even more isolated and frustrated so the only way they can build an identity is through hip hop culture, which is about having a voice."

Most of the young people in his workshops are born in Australia, from Arabic, Aboriginal, islander and other backgrounds. They feel invisible in mainstream culture.

"If you don't have any money, or a roof over your head, you can't really relate to all the things that all the mainstream bands sing about, like love and the environment," **Sabsabi** says.

Breakdancer Matthew "Mystery" Peet, an organiser of the Wheels of Steel hip hop festival tomorrow at Marrickville's Steel Park, says hip hop has taken on a renewed importance for inner-west youth.

Marrickville Youth Resource Centre runs workshops in graffiti art, DJ-ing and breakdancing with up to 60 students a week, while Peet's weekly breakdancing classes attract up to 90 young people from all over Sydney.

For the area, where up to 76 per cent of the youth population speak a language other than English, hip hop is the glue that binds different cultural groups.

They have their own role models home-grown artists like graffitist Jason Moses, rapper Rangitangi Harris and DJ Lawrence Bayona and legal walls for artists to use. "The kids come from as far as Campbelltown and the northern beaches to breakdance, just hang out," Peet says. "It's their way of expressing themselves, showing what they can do."