

Melbourne student Antonella Formosa, 19, is one of Australia's hottest girl rappers.

I grew up in a musical family. When I started to get into hip-hop, around four years ago, I was more of a fan than anything. It was my friends who convinced me to start rapping. I've always written poetry and songs, so it was a natural evolution – especially since I've always listened to a lot of music at home. My parents were into funk, soul and jazz, and hip-hop uses samples from those styles. The main thing I love about it is that it's uncensored. It's pure expression with young people saying whatever they feel like, even if it's rude or controversial.

When I was 16, I met a guy called Draino, from Melbourne group the Puah Hedz, through mutual friends. He said, "If you can write poetry, I'm sure you can rap. Come into the studio." My first attempt was pretty terrible. But the second track, called *Some People*, ended up on their album, *Despite The Odds*. (I cringe when I hear it now!)

I did my first show with those guys, supporting American group Mystik Journeymen at a club called Revolver. I had to sneak in because I was under-age. It was amazing. Since then, live shows have been my favourite part of the whole

"I RUN MY OWN HIP-HOP LABEL"

experience. My DJ, DJ Brand, and I did a show on a day that was 40 degrees outside. We had at least 300 people, and it was over 45 degrees inside with no ventilation. I was jumping on stage and running around with sweat dripping off me, but it was a really great show.

I've had people come up to me and even email me, to say things like, "You've inspired me to do something." It's so good to be able to do something that affects people's lives and inspires them. The rapping community is pretty supportive of each other. Even though there are so few girls doing hip-hop, we don't really get dissed by the guys. It's hard to say how many girls are doing hip-hop in Australia, but it's not many. As far as I know, there's

about 15 girls releasing albums. There's about one girl to every five boys who rap. Because there are so few girls, you need to be aware of how you're portrayed. I don't like the idea of flaunting myself in skimpy clothes for attention. I like people to say, "She's got skills." I wear comfy clothes on stage so I can run around. When I go out, people are surprised when I put heels on. I try to be myself, and that's how my music is, as well. I've got songs that are

money at first, then started spending it on small things I needed, like a filing cabinet and laptop. Recording my album ate into it a bit, too. I also set up a website, dualityrecords.com. I'm taking my time with the album. I'm very picky, so I'll record a track then scrap it two days later. I've got about three or four songs left to record, then it's finished. It's called *Equilibrium*, and I go under the stage name A-Love. It's a mix of party songs, some aggressive, battle-type songs and some personal stuff.



about life experiences, and I like to add personal things, like I'll rap about the suburb I live in. I've also got fun songs about nothing, but they get the party moving. That's what I like to do live. I don't like to get too intimate or depressing; I like to put on an energetic, fun show. I've had radio airplay with some of my songs, in particular one called *Petty*, which was high rotation on Triple J. *Petty* was on the album, *Culture of Kings 2*.

But my big break came last year, with the NESCAFÉ Big Break Awards. I entered with the idea of starting my own record label. I was confident I'd done my best, but it was a major surprise when I won \$20,000. I was really cautious with the

I'm now at uni finishing my degree in anthropology, but I'd love to be able to make a living doing this. I'm hoping the business will grow so I can put out other people's records. As Australian hip-hop artists, we're looking for recognition. I want people to know about us, and how we differ from American hip-hop. We sound different because we have different accents, and we have different issues to talk about.

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Find out more about Antonella and her music at her website, www.dualityrecords.com