

# VISIBLE 2008

VISIBLE is an innovative arts mentorship program that has given a kick start to many newly arrived African musicians including local hip hop legends Diafrix, Senegambian *griot* Jali Buba Kuyateh, and Ethiopian master musician Dereb Desalegn. Driven by Victoria's peak multicultural arts body, Multicultural Arts Victoria, Visible was established in 2005 with a small pilot project involving five African groups funded by VicHealth. The program has expanded considerably since then with support of state and federal arts funding bodies, and has seen a wealth of new African Australian music talent explode onto the arts scene both locally and internationally.

According to the Department of Immigration, an average of 3500 Africans have settled in Victoria each year for the past five years making them one of the largest and fastest growing multicultural communities. MAV's Visible program has targeted artists within these African communities to provide opportunities for them to develop and showcase their musical talents, whilst also offering the wider public a glimpse of the vibrant and diverse arts and culture they have brought with them to Australia.

Visible coordinator Anita Larkin says, 'These artists come from incredibly rich cultural backgrounds with a lot to offer but the system is different here and they face barriers like language and negative stereotyping...if they can get a helping hand to get started and get their music out there...once they do, presenters and audiences are pretty quick to pick up on their unique talents.'

In 2006, nine groups participated in the Visible program under the mentorship of well known local artists such as Nicky Bomba, Kavisha Mazella and Valanga Khoza. Visible 2006 saw some unique cross cultural collaborations such as the teaming up of local East African hip hop act Diafrix and traditional West African *griot* musician Jali Buba Kuyateh. This superb duo was picked up by Arts Projects Australia to open the FINA Cultural Festival earlier this year. And then there was Ethiopian *azmari* musician Dereb Desalegn who created an entire album with local reggae musician/ producer Nicky Bomba, *Drums and Lions*. This recording led to performances at WOMAD in Australia and the UK as well as an Arts Victoria funded tour to perform at WOMEX international world music expo in Spain in October 2006. And the collaboration is still going strong with a 2008 national Drums and Lions tour funded through kultour multicultural arts touring network.

A very important milestone for Visible in 2006 was the production of the first annual Visible compilation CD and its launching at the Visible concert at the Arts Centre, Hamer Hall as part of the *Mix It Up* program. *Mix It Up* is an initiative of the Arts Centre working in partnership with Multicultural Arts Victoria. The inaugural 2006 Mix It Up program was devised specifically to celebrate Victoria's cultural diversity and shared heritage and employed and presented an extra-ordinary range of local, national and international artists (800 in total) and attracted a total attendance to major events of 160,000. Visible 2007 saw the production of the second Visible compilation CD and its launching at the Visible concert as part of the Arts Centre's 2007 Mix It Up program.

In 2008 the Visible project has seen a boom of new talent from African, West Papuan, East Timorese and Indigenous communities coming on board and getting together to create a world class album with producers Nicky Bomba, Airi Ingram and Momo (Diafrix).

The album includes fifteen tracks that cover an amazing range of styles from Afro beat, to gospel, to Saharan blues reggae, songs from the tropics, hip hop, rnb, soul and the pulsing rhythms of the ancient Mandinka empire in West Africa. Launched at the Arts Centre this year as part of Mix It Up, Visible 2008 delivered a power packed program of performances from Grrilla Step, Diafrix, Tabura, The Public Opinion Afro Orchestra, The Black Jesus Experience, Little G, Alter Egos and Afro Habesha Band to an audience of over 1500. Following on from the success of the launch, several of the Visible 2008 acts have been picked up for the opening of the 2008 Melbourne International Arts Festival at Federation Square.

Throughout the project's four years, well known reggae artist, Nicky Bomba has played a key role in mentoring, recording and pushing along the development of the Visible program. Bomba sees Australia as a rich melting pot of cultures ready to be served up, and Melbourne as the emerging world music capital of Australia. He says the ideas, melodies, instruments and rhythms coming from artists in the Visible program have offer much to the Australian music industry - "There's a lot of established Aussie talent out there but we need to nurture these new people coming up that have decided to make Australia their home – we need to connect the two with a view to creating a new Australian sound," he says. Bomba would like to see governments committing to funding on a five-year basis instead of yearly and says that Visible is really the heart of what should be happening in the arts at a national level.

To catch some of the Visible artists live in action come down to Kulcha Jam on the third Saturday night of every month at The Horn 20 Johnston St Collingwood. These are some seriously sweet jam sessions with flavours from all around the world. See [www.myspace.com/kulchajam](http://www.myspace.com/kulchajam) for dates and artists.

Visible 3 CD is available:

- by phoning Multicultural Arts Victoria 03 9417 6777 to order - \$19.95 plus \$5 postage/ handling
- Blue Moon Records 54 Johnston St Fitzroy - \$19.95