



The right side of the Trax

Dancers meet at a cultural crossroads.
 By Natalie Puchalski.
 Photographs by Peter Weaving

It's Friday night and all over the city, nightclubbers are gearing up to cut loose on the dance floor. But the music's already pumping at Northcote Town Hall, where more than 200 young people are busting a move. In unison, rows of students turn, step and jump to the beat. The large ensemble then splits into smaller groups, which all rehearse their own dance styles. It's a high-energy mix of everything from break-dancing to belly-dancing, and it's all part of a performance that the Anti Racism Action Band (A.R.A.B) is rehearsing ahead of the Melbourne Festival.

The group will be performing *Northern Trax*, a series of installations that feature a combination of dance styles as well as dialogues, musical pieces and video narratives.

Hip-hop is one of the dance styles featured in the show, and at the front of the hall, about 10 teenage boys are moving to the groove of hip-hop beats. Their limbs are like rubber as energy ripples through their bodies in waves. Suddenly, the beat freezes and they bend over backwards in slow motion, like something from *The Matrix*. In seconds, they form a circle

around one of the dancers, who jumps up and does a backflip. It may only be a rehearsal, but it's already looking like a polished performance – the kind that's good enough to take to the streets of Melbourne, which is exactly what A.R.A.B intends to do.

A.R.A.B's artistic co-director and creative producer Kate Gillick says Northern Trax is about doing dance "installations" in city locations such as Flinders Street Station and Queensbridge Square.

"We're bringing the life force from young people to the audience, who can read their stories and performances within the context of those locations."

She watches as another group of dancers wiggle their hips in a traditional Lebanese belly dance. The little coins fringing their colourful hip scarves jiggle as the dancers raise their arms and shake their bodies.

Gillick says the A.R.A.B program started in 2004 as a creative response for young people in northern regions "to increase their self-confidence and also address the issues of racism and cultural identity".

In the past six years, A.R.A.B has grown





to feature young people from 50 cultural backgrounds and has performed to more than 70,000 people.

“We’ve had a large number of participants working with us for a few years now, wanting to do another show and refine their work – so the fact they want to stay is good enough,” she says.

“There are not many ongoing vehicles for this type of expression for young people but we’ve made the commitment to be ongoing so the expressive life of young people has an outlet.”

Escalators, stairs, platforms and underground subways at Flinders Street Station
October 18–23, free

Meet at Degraves Lane (entrance to Platform Artist Spaces)
October 19–22 at 7pm, \$5

Meet at Signal, Northbank (behind Flinders Street Station) October 23 at 7pm, \$5

*For more information,
visit melbournefestival.com.au
or arab-vass.com (from October 1)*

