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## MARKUS THE SADIST

*Writer and director Jonzi D is one of UK hip-hop's most important players. As well as founding and curating the hugely successful Breakin' Convention festival, held at Sadler's Wells for the last six years, Jonzi has performed all over the world as an MC/poet, collaborating with the likes of The Roots and Steve Williamson. His latest work, a collaboration with jazz and urban artist Soweto Kinch and rapper Bashy, is Markus the Sadist, a theatre show which examines the relationship between hip-hop culture and celebrity. Here he tells us about the show and offers some hope for the future of hip-hop.*

Markus the Sadist is a story about a precocious young rapper who's very popular on the battle scene. He finds himself in a situation whereby he can take his love for rap further, get out there and be a successful MC and help pay the bills. Unfortunately to do that he has to submit to the will of the record company who require him to rap in an American accent, mention various products and present a gangster thug image. When he realises he's got caught up in a lot of silliness and his friends have all turned their backs on him he decides to completely change his style. He then uses a big concert where the whole world's watching him to do that. The rest of the story is about what happens as a result. Bashy, who plays the lead in the show, has been in similar scenarios to Markus; for that reason he really feels close to the piece and to the character itself.

There's no doubt that there is a strong relationship between rappers and products. Every single artist out now is part of the marketing campaign of a lot of popular culture youth products. Run DMC were one of the first. At a huge Madison Square Garden gig they made the crowd hold up their Adidas trainers to the song 'My Adidas'. It was a marketing team's dream moment.

Celebrity endorsement affects an artist's creativity but it won't necessarily affect their popularity. I'm an MC and a lover of rap and I think there's been a dramatic change since the golden age of hip-hop in the late eighties and early nineties. There used to be a myriad of different voices and styles. You had your Kool G Raps, your Public Enemies, your De La Souls; all these diverse artists with varying voices came from the environment that created hip-hop: the hood.

The messages in late eighties rap changed frequently, with each new artist bringing a new vibe. Now it feels like the gangsta/bling phase has pretty much stuck in commercial rap RnB for the last 10 years. I think that a lot of commercial music is just vacuous and boring now and rap RnB is part of the whole dynamic. In a way I think Markus is a metaphor for the loss of voices when it comes to music and art at the moment.

When looking on a global level the American voice is the one that runs things. This is particularly the case in hip-hop music, but a lot of popular culture is seen through an American lens at the moment. It almost seems like a Mecca that everybody's reaching out to. The choices that artists here may want to make and the decisions about where we want to take the culture have been completely out-muscled by the voice of the industry saying, 'no, this is what hip-hop is meant to be'.

But I think it's changing. Over the last five or six years artists like Dizzee Rascal have started getting on in the States and the voice of UK rap has never been as strong as it is now. There are large communities of UK MCs developing their own sound. Slowly but surely, it will resurface.

[WWW.JONZI-D.CO.UK](http://www.jonzi-d.co.uk)  
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*Jonzi D was talking to Jo Caird*

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