

MOBO winning star Akala performs at the British Library

Award-winning hip-hop star Akala performed to rave reviews at the British Library in central London on 26 November 2010.

He had been joined by other prominent hip hop artists M K Asante and Saul Williams from the USA and Britain's Lowkey for a panel discussion about hip hop and the English language, during which a filmed contribution from legendary hip hop founding father KRS-One was also shown, which looked at the contribution that hip hop has made to the English language. As part of the discussion, Saul Williams performed poetry from his book "The Dead Emcee Scrolls" and received a standing ovation.

All the contributors stressed the importance of knowledge and reading as a means of empowerment and enlightenment for young people. The discussion was followed by a live stage performance by artists including Akala, Lowkey, Doc Brown and others.

The event formed part of the British Library's new exhibition which opened on 12 November 2010. Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices is the first ever exhibition exploring the English language from Anglo-Saxon runes to modern day rap.

The event was the finale of a tour of libraries across the country by Akala this year. The tour has been in partnership with the national charity The Reading Agency and Akala's Hip-hop Shakespeare Company. Continuing Akala's extensive youth work, it is part of a major drive to fire up young people about reading and transform the way they think about libraries, and is part of The Reading Agency's ongoing campaign to bring reading into the 21st century, inspiring more teenagers to read and get involved in creative activities.

Akala, winner of the 2006 Best Hip-Hop Artist MOBO Award, has recently released his latest album DoubleThink - inspired by three works of dystopian fiction: George Orwell's 1984; Aldous Huxley's Brave New World and Yevgeny Zamyatin's We. He has also received his second MOBO nomination, in the Best Hip Hop Artist category for the 2010 MOBO Awards (20 October).

Akala says: "I was really excited and humbled to end my UK tour at this monumental British Library event. It's such an honour to feature alongside such a profile of artists and thinkers, but I also feel it is incredibly important to be part of an event like this as it puts hip hop in its proper cultural context – a way of promoting social and creative expression. I also hope that these performances will challenge preconceptions and encourage young people to develop a passion for reading and words, using the arts in order to express themselves."

Ruth Harrison at The Reading Agency says: “The Reading Agency is proud to have been able to bring together one of the UK’s leading hip hop artists Akala and the British Library for an exciting event exploring language, culture and society. It’s a fantastic finale to Akala’s successful public library tour where young people have been inspired by and engaged with reading and words.”

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Notes to editors:

- Event information:

Voices of Hip-Hop

Date: Friday 26 November 2010 (18.30 - 20.00)

Venue: The British Library

Tickets: £10 / £7.50 concessions (includes entry to LATE at the Library)

Rap and hip-hop are among the most influential cultural forms of recent times. The art of verbal flow over beats that shot to prominence in late 1970s US cities has gone on to global popularity and a presence in every language. Join Akala, Saul Williams and Lowkey for a discussion of how words impact at street level, followed by a live stage performance by Akala and guests. The session will be chaired and introduced by writer and film maker M K Asante, Associate Professor of creative writing and film, Morgan State University, Baltimore, who is both the USA’s youngest-ever university professor and author of *It’s Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation*.

LATE at the Library

Date: Friday 26 November 2010 (19.30 - 23.00)

Venue: The British Library

Tickets: £7.50

Open house at the British Library, with a chance to explore the inspirational *Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices* exhibition and experience the dextrous lyrics of Akala and full band, plus special guests including Lowkey and Doc Brown.

Tickets to both events are available at <http://boxoffice.bl.uk>, by calling 01937 546546 (9am-5pm Mon-Fri) or in person at the British Library. Presented by the British Library in association with The Reading Agency and London Borough of Camden

Black History Forum, and with the support of the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library.

- The British Library's free Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices exhibition will run from 12 November 2010 – 3 April 2011. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to see and hear the English language, from 5th century runes to 21st century youth-speak. For more information, go to: www.bl.uk/evolvingenglish
- The Reading Agency is an independent charity whose mission is to inspire more people to read more. It specialises in spreading reading by working with public libraries, and also teams up with prisons, publishers, unions, businesses, broadcasters, and others. It is supported by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.readingagency.org.uk).
- Akala's new album DoubleThink is out now. For more information about Akala and his Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company, go to: www.akalamusic.com and www.hiphopshakespeare.com/site/

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom and one of the world's greatest research libraries. It provides world-class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. The Library's collection has developed over 250 years and exceeds 150 million separate items representing every age of written civilisation. It includes: books, journals, manuscripts, maps, stamps, music, patents, photographs, newspapers and sound recordings in all written and spoken languages. www.bl.uk