

# Kim “Busty Beatz” Bowers and Lisa Fa’alafi (Hot Brown Honey)

Jennifer Ashlan, Lawyer at McCullough Robertson Lawyers, sits down with Kim “Busty Beatz” Bowers and Lisa Fa’alafi (Hot Brown Honey) to discuss their careers in the entertainment industry and International Women’s Day.

**JENNIFER ASHLAN:** Busty Beatz and Lisa, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me about your experiences in the media and entertainment industry. In light of International Women’s Day, this edition we are putting a spotlight on some of the talented women in the media and entertainment industry. Could you please tell us about yourself, Hot Brown Honey and its members, and how it all began?

**BUSTY BEATZ:** Hot Brown Honey. Who we are. We are the theatrical explosion you didn’t know you needed!! Steeped in the Word of the Mother and packing a potent punch of Hip Hop politics, Hot Brown Honey will make you laugh until you cry, clap until your hands bleed and shake every part of what your mama gave you. With lighting, music and costume set to ignite the change we want to be, Hot Brown Honey is an extraordinary production that spins tradition on its head, going above and beyond to challenge boundaries and embrace resilience. Equal parts theatrical masterpiece and social activism, a stellar posse of phenomenal women smash stereotypes in an unapologetic celebration of our similarities and differences. Hot Brown Honey have lit centre stage at the most prestigious venues and festivals across the globe, making noise with their fierceness and shattering preconceptions in an inspiring explosion of Colour, Culture and Controversy. Fighting The Power Never Tasted So Sweet!



Hot Brown Honey was born of the desire to see more (much, much more) hot black, brown and mixed bodies on stage. Hot Brown Honey started as a club night for Black, Brown and Mixed women to tell their stories – those of us that do not fit the boxes or adhere to the tropes that are so limited across the stage, page and screen for Women of Colour.

**LISA FA’ALAFI:** Hot Brown Honey is our attempt to break through those gates. To play the main stage, the stages as the leads, to gather

some of our talented sisters and give voice and reclaim stories from misconstrued, twisted images that bombard our televisions and newspapers while having a shitload of fun doing it. We have created a space to tell our stories and create theatrical representations to counter and dismantle structural oppression, stereotypes and daily micro-aggressions. It is the space where we decolonise and moisturise. It is where we re-imagine our identities and our world as a Matriarchy. Word to the Mother!

**ASHLAN:** Did you have any goals in mind when putting Hot Brown Honey together? What challenges have you faced in working towards those goals? What successes have you celebrated?

**FA'ALAFI:** Our inspiration comes from Intersectional Feminism, theatre as a vehicle for social change as well as our personal experiences of being Black, Brown and Mixed women intersecting on stolen land known as Australia. In a time when movements like #blacklivesmatter are hitting our Facebook feeds asking everyone to examine their own position, we are adding to this conversation. Hot Brown Honey represents a unique point of view coming out of Australia that isn't blue eyes, Neighbours, Home and Away unreality. In the Words of Audre Lorde, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house". In the case of Hot Brown Honey, we have stolen the keys, turned up the beats and started a riot.

**BEATZ:** The biggest challenge we've faced, and continue to face, in putting the show together is colonisation. It has not been good for any of us. Post colonisation ain't a thing. We live the continuing effects daily. Structural oppression, racism, stereotypes and micro-aggressions follow us, as do the actions of the powers that be. As Black and Brown Women, as Women of Colour, as Women of First Nations heritage including Xhosa (South African), Tongan, Gamilaroi (Indigenous Australian) Samoan, Indonesian and Maori, we come up against massive issues that intersect, including race, gender, misogyny, body image, sexuality, culture – there are so many more. The personal is political and we carry the load. But it is where we intersect that makes us powerful. The spark where our pathways connect and combine gives us strength. We are resilient. We are creative. We laugh in the face of adversity. We celebrate our similarities and differences. We Fight the Power. In the words of Arundhati Roy: "Our strategy should be not only to confront the empire, but to lay siege to it. To

deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe." We also have a three metre high Bee Hive who embodies the Word of the Mother. Try moving that across the world!

**ASHLAN:** What is your favourite thing about performing in Hot Brown Honey?

**FA'ALAFI:** I love watching our audience transform throughout the show. You feel their energy go from shocked, to elated, dance party vibes to raging against the system. It's hard to describe, but you can feel the journey, you can see the faces of Black and brown women, smiles wide as we sing our earworm track *Don't Touch My Hair*, or the women giving a standing ovation in tears after an act around domestic violence, or the white men and women who feel empowered to rise with us screaming at the top of their lungs #MakeNoise. Before COVID-19 we were loud and proud and taking over spaces with next level Matriarchal power!

**ASHLAN:** Hot Brown Honey has performed all over the world, including at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and in London, Vancouver and New York. Have you found the Hot Brown Honey message resonating in some locations more than others?

**FA'ALAFI:** Our message is basically asking for everyone no matter what their skin colour to rise to make change. And the injustices felt by marginalised people is a universal issue. So from Stockholm to Brisbane, Dublin to Auckland our audiences could identify with us, even if it wasn't their first-hand experience. I think our hardest shows have been in Australia, when you challenge parts of the ingrained Australian identity it can be too confronting for some. In Perth, we played 36 shows straight and most nights we played to probably a 50% elated audience and 50%

hostile audience. It was hard, to say the least, knowing that literally sharing our lived experience can bring people to rage. But to counter that, some of our best shows have definitely been at Queen Elizabeth's Hall, London, where a superbly multi-race audience over 800 large were standing on their seats making noise with us. It was an incredible moment and it felt like we were literally Decolonising the Queen's kitchen!

**ASHLAN:** Hot Brown Honey's cast changes quite regularly, and there is obviously no shortage of amazingly talented women of colour available to work with you. Do you have any thoughts on the arguments often heard that there simply isn't the talent available to cast people from minority backgrounds, or to represent their stories on screen and stage? Do you have any thoughts about how representation can be increased?

**FA'ALAFI:** This argument is so outdated and incorrect. There are so many talented POC performers ready to go, making work on the fringes. Most people use that ideology to stick with what they see as safe programming or "what the market wants". Representation can be increased when people in those positions of power step aside!! When top down roles are held by people of colour then we will see real change. There is no longer any excuse, Black Lives Matter has made it impossible for Arts companies and organisations to continue to not diversify their admin and production teams, their front of house and even their Boards. The industry is now demanding change, people are speaking up, some people are stepping down and organisations are being asked to be accountable. I see some real change coming and I cannot wait!! Our sector needs to reflect the diverse faces of Australia!! In the words of Margaret Cho: "The power of visibility can never be underestimated".

**ASHLAN:** Having worked in the industry for many years, what has been the biggest change you have seen? What changes do you think (or hope) are on the horizon in the next few years?

**FA'ALAFI:** I want it to be normal to see a female and or a person of colour as CEO or the Artistic Directors of major arts organisations. I want to see more diverse stories on our major television stations. I want to see the government acknowledge how important artists are to the wellbeing of the nation. Look, it's the same thing I've wanted since I began in the industry 20 years ago and maybe, just maybe, it might be easier for young artists starting out today.

**ASHLAN:** COVID-19 has hit the entertainment industry hard, particularly for touring acts who were suddenly grounded. Hot Brown Honey released an amazing range of merchandise in 2020. Can you tell us about the particular challenges (and any wins!) Hot Brown Honey has dealt with during the pandemic?

**FA'ALAFI:** Unfortunately for us having international touring come to a halt has meant we have had to just stop, re-evaluate and primarily put our families' health and wellbeing first. Most of the team lives all over the country so for us to come together even in Australia is a huge financial risk for our small company. We relied on touring the world to sustain our team, and without that it's been very difficult to recover. We, like many artists, have had to reimagine our entire practice. We tried some fun digital content, tried creating shows via ZOOM, started working on our HBH Album remotely, mentored people across the world in phone conversations, and out of necessity finally took merch online. We knew pretty early on that our show really only works live so we have chosen to wait out this unprecedented time in history and then do what we do best, Decolonise one stage at a time and have an amazing, powerful time doing it.

**ASHLAN:** What advice would you give to young women, and particularly young women of colour, wanting to break into the entertainment industry, and make it a viable career?

**FA'ALAFI:** Find and connect with other women of colour in the arts. You can become each other's best supporters and advocates. You don't

have to navigate this primarily white patriarchal system alone, there are many women who have come before you, reach out to them! As far as viable, that's a trickier one. Our industry right now is really struggling to exist. I have my fingers crossed for all the amazing young artists to come that our wider community starts to see us as valuable, otherwise it's going to be a pretty boring world without music, dance, theatre and beautiful art to look at.

**ASHLAN:** International Women's Day is all about celebrating the progress of women's achievements and forging a gender equal world – the theme this year is #ChoosetoChallenge. Are there any champions of equality or particular women in the industry that inspire you?

**FA'ALAFI:** Over the last six years of touring nationally and internationally, we have had the opportunity to build in-depth relationships with creatives, thinkers and game changers from around the world, sharing experiences and forging bonds that nourish on many fronts.

The ongoing value of these communications have been immeasurable. We have had the opportunity to connect into a global story, a universal truth telling and connection which has resonated for us as artists as well as audiences. So shout out to the game changers:

- **Yvette walker** - Artistic Director Black Bleep / QLD Independent Artists Alliance
- **Teila Watson** - Indigenous Poet / Singer / Advocate
- **Bhenji Ra** - Transdisciplinary Artist / House of Ra
- **Kim Senklip Harvey** - Indigenous Theorist and Playwright
- **Rosanna Raymond** - Pacific Sisters / SaVAage K'lub / Artist poet cultural commentator.

This list could go on and on!!!

**ASHLAN:** Thanks once again for you time, Busty Beatz and Lisa. On behalf of CAMLA's readers, we appreciate you sharing your experiences and hopes for the future of the industry.

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