



The BeAt

# Hip hop jumps forward

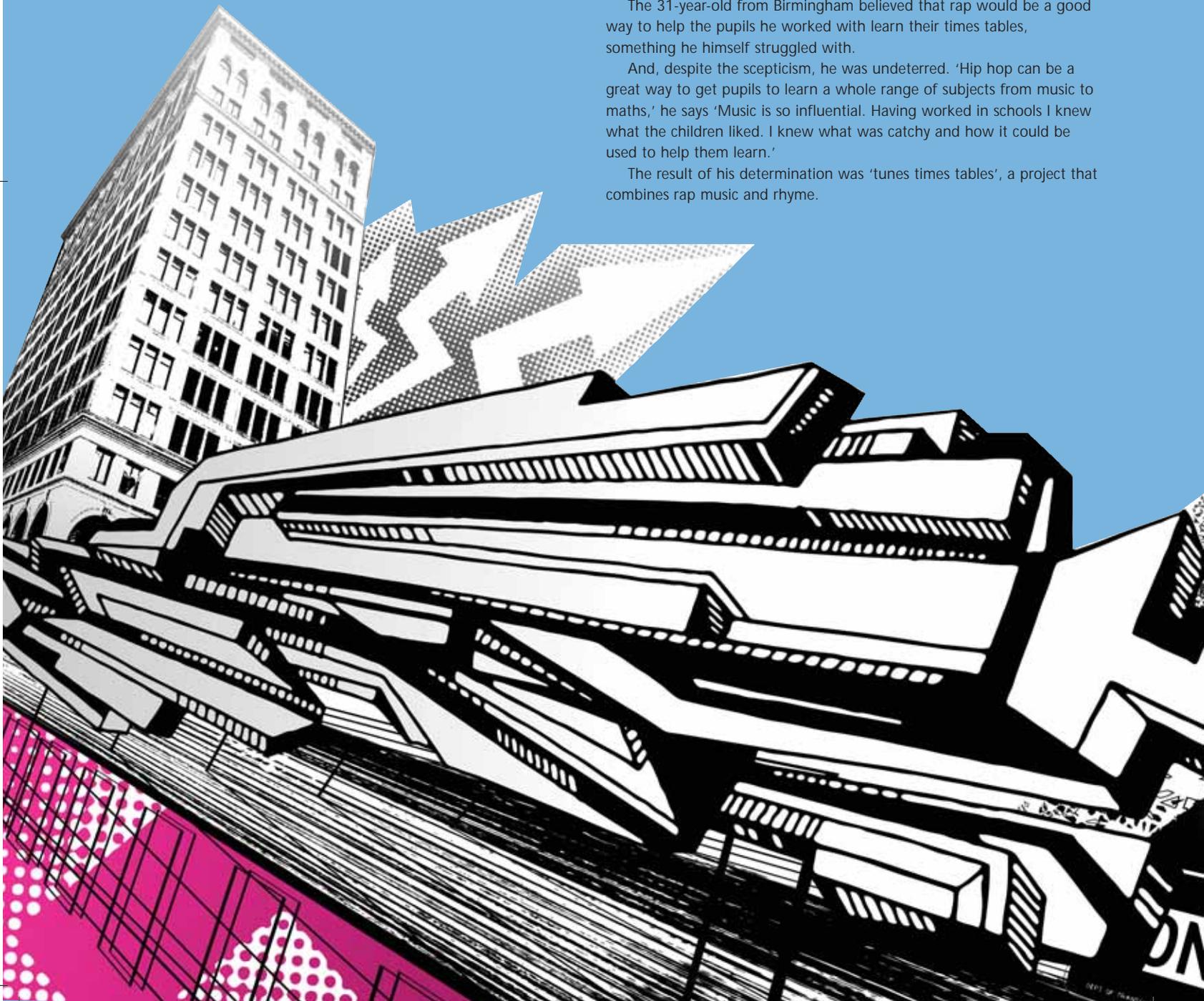
**Vic Motune** looks at what might become a new tool in music education

**W**hen former learning mentor Clifford Harding decided to create a project that would use rap music as a teaching tool in the classroom his friends and colleagues were sceptical to say the least.

The 31-year-old from Birmingham believed that rap would be a good way to help the pupils he worked with learn their times tables, something he himself struggled with.

And, despite the scepticism, he was undeterred. 'Hip hop can be a great way to get pupils to learn a whole range of subjects from music to maths,' he says 'Music is so influential. Having worked in schools I knew what the children liked. I knew what was catchy and how it could be used to help them learn.'

The result of his determination was 'tunes times tables', a project that combines rap music and rhyme.



## 'Students learned to construct their own beats, and then produce and record sounds'



Sogojeva is not alone in her enthusiasm. Through its 'Hip Hop Beats, Rhymes and Life' course, Sheffield College wanted to bring disaffected learners back into formal education by giving them an opportunity to create their own music.

Students learned to construct their own beats, and then produce and record sounds, a process which was mostly done on computer.

'What was fascinating to observe during the practical musical composition stage was the manner in which the learners showed an implicit understanding of the general structure and style of music and hip hop music,' says Matt Hines, lecturer in English and communications at the college

'They were then able to quickly adapt this learning to their own work, and at the same time bring their own understanding, likes and dislikes, to the creative process.'

And it is an approach that has paid dividends.

'The course has had a real impact on the students involved,' he says, 'Many of our learners have remained in college and are now taking courses within the mainstream curriculum. Students have re-integrated

Photos:

with the traditional college environment, and are more aware of opportunities for their own progression and development that they may not have considered previously.'

But not everyone in the world of music education is keen about bringing hip hop into the classroom.

Although support for the idea is growing, it will be a tough battle convincing head teachers and school governing boards that a form of music often derided by politicians can be used effectively in class.

A big part of the problem lies with what hip hop has become in recent years.

It's global success has transformed it from a rebellious, but largely positive form of youth expression in the late Seventies and Eighties to the overly commercialised, multi-billion dollar industry it is today. Hip hop's success has also seen it derided as misogynist, sexist and violent.

According to Martin Smith from Access to Music, one of the UK's largest providers of popular music education, resistance to the idea of hip hop in the classroom also stems from lies the musical preferences of the average music teacher.

'I think that a lot of music teachers don't understand or don't know about these styles of music and thus, perhaps, feel a little uncomfortable in teaching them to their pupils,' he says 'But I think things are changing. There are some really interesting, dynamic music teachers out there who recognise that hip hop has a lot of educational potential and can work alongside more traditional forms of music teaching.'

'Hip hop doesn't really differ from other types of popular music in the way it's put together. You've got beats, you've got bassline, you've got keyboards and guitar, you've got sampling, all things you'll find in a number of styles of music.'

Access to Music has been incorporating rap into the courses that it

runs for several years and has been encouraged by the positive feedback. But Smith acknowledges that it may well be some time before hip hop makes an appearance on the national curriculum.

However, he believes that those in the music education community who are incorporating hip hop into their lessons are sending out an important message.

'The great thing about hip hop is that it is all about creativity and improvisation whereas classical music is more about learning your instruments to a very high level and playing somebody else's music. And we should be passing onto young people the idea that music is about creativity and inspiration.'

'The great thing about hip hop is that it is all about creativity and improvisation'

