



By Lisa Reinisch

Music is taboo for Muslims - at least if you ask certain religious scholars. It's a minority view, but it still throws up plenty of questions for Muslim musicians and fans. The good news is that *Deen Tight*

by American director Mustafa Davis does not even pretend to have any answers. Instead, the film is a catalogue of personal solutions to the identity crises that many Muslim artists go through or, in some cases, manage to avoid.

Davis interviewed a group of Muslim hip hop artists in the US and the UK about their various ways of bringing together music and faith. Interspersed with clips of live performances, artists like HBO def poets Amir Sulaiman and Liza Garza, former Tupac protégée Napoleon and UK graffiti artist Mohammed Ali speak candidly of their experiences.

Thumbs up to Davis for his choice of focus group. The bandwidth of the artists' attitudes is enormous and this is where the strength of *Deen Tight* lies. For example, Sulaiman sees no contradiction in being a devout Muslim and hip hop artist, while Napoleon has chosen to abandon his career in music and move to the Middle East, believing that neither US nor hip hop culture are truly compatible with Islam. Having been part of the violent gang wars of the eighties and nineties, he has, perhaps unsurprisingly, picked the most extreme path – and one that Davis once walked himself.

After converting to Islam in 1996, Davis threw away his records and turned his back on music "as a way to show God I was serious about my faith". Many of the film's subjects are personal friends of Davis, who – like him – grew up with hip hop, a culture that eventually led them to Islam, but stands in opposition to many of the faith's more puritanical schools.

Made by someone with a deep personal interest in the subject matter and funded by a Muslim scholar and an Islamic foundation, *Deen Tight* could have easily turned out a navel-gazing, proselytising mess, but it didn't. The few cheesy elements are entirely forgivable in the face of the film's restrained, continuously engaging insight into cultural identities lost and found.

For information on screenings of *Deen Tight*, please see the [film's website](#) .

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