

Let's get loud

A deaf dance troupe is wired for sound. By Henrietta Cook

Ross Onley-Zerkel turns heads when he cruises down the street in his car.

The St Kilda resident always blasts out heavy hip-hop bass lines.

It may appear Onley-Zerkel simply likes loud music. But the real reason the 35-year-old cranks up his stereo is because he is deaf, and he experiences music through vibrations.

"Sometimes when I have the windows down I don't realise how loud it is. It's quite funny because so many people look at me, but I don't care," he signs to his interpreter.

Onley-Zerkel has channelled his love of hip-hop into Deaf Can Dance, a dance company made up of deaf dancers.

The group encourages integration through dance workshops and puts on performances at popular festivals and

events. This year, Onley-Zerkel hopes to turn the group into Australia's first professional deaf dance company.

The dance enthusiast recently came a step closer to achieving his dream when he was named as one of five winners of the Vodafone Australia Foundation's World of Difference program.

As part of the initiative, Onley-Zerkel will receive a salary that will allow him to quit his day job and dedicate himself to community organisation Arts Access.

"I'm so excited. Our company gives deaf people another way to express themselves and promotes a real feeling of excitement.

"We would like to tour Victoria and hopefully Australia, and if we are really good we might one day perform overseas." **ehw**

