

Ursula Rucker. Truth Keeper

*Until you have walked, run, fought a mile in her shoes
Don't you dare stand in front of me and tell me
What a woman must do
Ursula Rucker*

Anyone lucky enough to have seen Ursula Rucker at the 2004 FVA will know why D. Kimm has been planning to make her a Guest of Honour ever since. Born in Philadelphia, Ursula Rucker first came to attention as a collaborator with that city's The Roots. A product of urban inspired hip-hop and spoken word, her work is marked by incisive writing about social issues and concern for community. Sensual, enigmatic, Ursula Rucker is one of a new generation of powerful female performers, lovely women with lovely minds.

People often talk about Ursula Rucker's wondrous mezzo-soprano. But it is passion that makes her sonority so affecting. Ursula Rucker is not a "nice" girl. She talks straight about knowledge in the real, carving her language with care. She does not shield us from the things she uncovers in the depths of life or in herself. Ursula Rucker is the real thing, and that authenticity makes her performances soar. When she claims a connection with the Egyptian goddess Ma'at, responsible for protecting the flame of truth, the rule of law and moral justice, she does not do so lightly.

Sojourns as mother, woman and poet

Ursula Rucker is the mother of four children. She has a journalism degree from Temple University. Her performing career began in 1994 at an Open Mic event at Philadelphia's celebrated Zanzibar Blue jazz club. From there, she went on to work with avant-garde groups like London-based electronic band 4hero, Jamaladeen Tacuma, King Britt, The Silent Poets, Josh Wink, and Bahamadia.

Mixing musical genres, never straying far from her hip-hop roots, Ursula Rucker's solo output includes *Supa Sista* (2001), *Silver or Lead* (2003), *Ma'at Mama* (2006) and *Ruckus Soundsysdom* (2008). It is work that blurs the boundaries of poetry, with compelling stories (like the tragic "Return to Innocence Lost" for The Roots) grounded in social activism.

Her eloquence ranges from women's lives to slavery, love and politics, but it is her inimitable delivery that brings something new to spoken word. From talk-over to flow, Rucker mixes up the patter with meticulous attention to the music. Her language, powerful and finely assembled, has been compared to that of activist poets Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni. Like them, she claims the right to be maternal, militant, feminist and feminine.

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