

Post-task: The Spirit of Play

Mark has a unique philosophy which he calls singularity. In singularity there is no division between things. There is just one thing. For example, we are all human beings. If you take the human bit away, then we are all being. And being means, just being, right here and right now. Some might call this a holistic approach. But, holistic comes from the word holy which is singular, which is to be one. It comes from a Greek linguistic root and means to be entire, to be one, to be complete.

A musician playing music from that philosophy of singularity does not assume a position; for example: now I am a musician and I am going to play. No –we are musicians all of the time. We don't become a musician every time we pick up an instrument. We are musicians all the time. This is the singularity and having a singularity in the aspect of being one-self.

So, from this starting point of being a musicians and just being, the musician begins to play music. We are always stuck with this idea that until we learn something, we can't play. But, this is not necessarily the case. Music is made for the ears. It comes from the ears and goes to the ears. That is the last destination. If your ears are telling you the music is right – then it is right. From the ears the music goes on, and does something to your spirit and to your heart.

There are many benefits to playing music, just playing, playfully. For many this is known as improvisation and for the great Zim Ngqawana, improvisation was the pathway to total freedom. With improvisation, the music borders on the unknown, where the music is created from a place of inspiration and spontaneity. Here there is no fear, only humility and pure potential.

Improvisation is also a great root of composition. Johan Sebastian Bach said, 'Music, you just play it until it becomes a song.' He was an improviser and he would just play and play, and while he was playing he would hear something and say let me repeat that. And then he wrote it down.

Studio-ography

The music scene in South Africa is one of the most dynamic, undergoing changes for many years. As venues have closed down musicians have constantly had to reinvent themselves and find alternative ways of generating money.

Music is constantly changing. Technology is constantly changing. Think back to the turn of the century - the 1900's when audio recording made it possible for people to listen to other musicians without them having to be present in the live performance. Albums became a way of going where one couldn't go before. Before that if you wanted to listen to someone you had to go and see them perform. Then, radio came along allowing even more access to music and musicians. Over the years this has advanced to the recording of performance clips where audiences can watch performance clips of musicians online.

But, how do the musicians make a living from this? This was always seen as exposure to help promote the musicians live performances. However, live music in South Africa has always been difficult with most venues still paying musicians on what is called a "door deal," or as the musicians say, "a raw deal." That is why most musicians preference playing festivals and touring. This is far more lucrative.

Remember, the business of the musician is not just live performance – it is a holistic inclusion of composing, publishing, recording, touring and also teaching. So your studio set up needs to be a place that speaks to all aspects of your singular musical output.

Mark has managed to put together a solo performing idea that he uses where he has combined his performance space with a videography set-up allowing him to reach a wider audience. With Mark's online performances, the fact that people are tuning in to watch him perform - that is already in his favour and breaking down barriers between audience and musician. Remember, your audience always wants you to succeed, they are spurring you on. Just through the action of performing live you have already won people over.

Mark calls his studio "his happy place." Because it is when we are happy – that we are most productive. Fact! And that allows the music to be what it is. Honesty in the music is important to the listener. This organic approach allows people to come to the music – as opposed to forcing the issue, so as to create a music that people are going to come to. The two words that Mark uses often are acceptance and allowance. Accept the kind of music you make and allow whatever happens to that music to happen.

In your studio – your happy place – there is more space to focus on the great musical lesson that all Cape Town greats have emphasised: "Write your own music." As the great Robbie Jansen said, "You can play music that has been recorded and you have to learn from that. That is good. We all do. But, eventually you can only write about your experience. You have got a certain amount of hair on your head that nobody else has, a certain fingerprint. Why does that not include music, your personal experience?"

Now, answer the following post-task Questions

1. Mark has put together a solo performing idea that he can record and share. Mark's studio speaks to all the different aspects of his music business approach - composing, publishing, recording, touring and teaching. What are the important aspects in your musical approach and how will you set these up in your studio?
2. Due to the struggles of lock-down, Mark had to innovate and looked online to build up a virtual community to rally around his successful brand "Sonik Citizen." He looked to build a platform that could speak synchronistically to all the different social media outlets. You will notice that Mark has branded Sonik Citizen on his cap, T-shirt and the video. Can you identify Mark's approach to brand building? Describe your brand and how you will get it across to the audience?
3. Mark's greatest wish is that this video will inspire you to be more playful. Mark calls this the "spirit of play." For the great performer there is no fear in playing, it is an avenue for expressing your full potential. Who are your great performance inspirations? What do you love to play and how does that inform your composition? And do you experience your musical process coming out of a "spirit of play"? At what times are you most playful with the music?
4. Having taken note of Mark's attitude and approach to informing his own happy place and space, perhaps you would like to tell us about your happy place, how you have made it and how it evokes your own playful approach?