

Pre-task: Music as an agent for change

Dan Chiorboli, founder of Awesome Africa music festival, the Liberation Orchestra and Solidarity Express has dedicated his career to promoting world music through festivals, collaborations and travelling projects. His career has straddled creativity as a Darbuka percussion player, the business of music festivals, cross-border musical collaborations, and the global power of music as a vehicle for conscientising people for long and lasting change. In this episode we delve into Dan's story to learn how to activate the soul in our business practices and to magnify the entrepreneurial spirit.

Resistance Music from Cuba, Italy and South Africa

Born in Ferrara, Italy, Dan comes from a musical family. His grandmother was a concert pianist at La Scala in Milan. She was intrinsically involved in the partisan resistance in the north of Italy. She worked behind the gothic line, a German defence line across Italy during the Second World War, helping partisans escape into safe havens in Emilia Romagna in Northern Italy.

Italy's commitment to global freedom contributed to the Southern Africa struggle for freedom, particularly in the 70s. The Italian town of Reggia Emilia granted the ANC from South Africa and Frelimo from Mozambique a safe haven abroad. Both Samora Machel and OR Tambo stayed in Reggia Emilia and were educated there. The city signed a solidarity pact with the African National Congress (ANC) in 1977 and published *Sechaba*, the official newsletter of the ANC, in Italian.

A famous son of this Italian town was Giuseppe Soncini who worked with Samora Machel in Mozambique, assisting in the struggle for freedom, and corresponded closely with OR Tambo. The liberation link between South Africa and Italy remains important. In 2004, a twinning agreement between Reggio Emilia and Polokwane was signed.

The Liberation Project sought to re-energise and rejuvenate songs from the South African freedom struggle, and mix them with songs from the partisan resistance in Italy. The similarities to Cuba's fight for freedom could not be overlooked. Cuba had a successful revolution over military dictatorship in the late 50s and went on to play a significant central role in Southern Africa's liberation struggle, particularly in the 70s and their military interventions in Angola.

With the mission statement of sharing freedom songs between Cuba, Italy and South Africa, the Liberation Project grew into a cross-border world music band. An international network of friends and collaborators with strong beliefs in human rights, liberation, freedom and equality, came together to research and remember the role music played in the global struggle for freedom.

As Dan says, "We need to go back into our past to look at our future?" South Africa's musical history includes the tremendous role musical icons played in conscientising an international audience to the struggles in South Africa. To make her international audiences aware of the struggles South Africans faced, Miriam Makeba loved to sing the Jeremy Taylor song *A piece of ground*. Hugh Masekela was very active in America and wrote the struggle song, *Soweto Blues*, which remembered the Soweto Uprising of 1976. Johnny Clegg became very well established particularly in France and his famous protest song was *Asimbonanga*, written whilst Nelson Mandela was on Robben Island.

South African have used traditional songs such as *Shosholozza*, the traditional folk song that originated in Zimbabwe, to express the call for freedom, and international artists have joined the solidarity with South Africa's freedom struggle through their own song-writing. British musician Jerry Dammers wrote *Free Nelson Mandela*, and Peter Gabriels song *Biko* about the fatal arrest and brutal interrogation in August 1977 of

Stephen Biko, became world famous. The royalties of that song to this day are still donated to the OR Tambo Trust.

Italy also has many great songs that express the ideals of freedom and resistance. There is the famous partisan hymn, *Bella Ciao as the* anthem from the partisan movement, *Fischia il Venti. Riconquistare La Liberta* is a 1942 composition by Fernando Bruni, the anti-fascist who died in detention in the dungeon of Castello Estense in Ferrara. The Liberation Project also came up with a composition of their own, *I can hear my papa calling*, dedicated to young Italian activist, Karim Franceschi, who volunteered to fight in the Syrian Civil War.

Some of the Cuban liberations songs paint an ancestral link between Nigeria and Cuba, using the Abakuá rhythm from the Kalabari Coast of Nigeria to evoke the mythological stories of the beautiful and brave Yoruba Goddess and Afro-Cuban Aphrodite, Oshún. She was one of the original Libertarians, fighting against the slavers in Nigeria and Cuba.

The concept of change touches the soul of the human condition. We have all experienced change and we all wish to see change, particularly from suffering. Music can bring about change through creating awareness and knowledge sharing on the topics. But music can also bring about change through touching the soul and making everyone aware of the common humanity that we share.

Now, answer the following exercise questions

1. How did you get into music in the very first place? What is the origin of your love for music? And what other artists and musicians have you heard that have touched your soul?
2. The struggle for freedom is ancient, contemporary and present. Are there any injustices or inequalities that you can identify in your own social environment that you think are inhumane? Please tell us what you have witnessed that you wish to change. A powerful step to bringing change is through music. Can you pen some lyrics for the injustice you wish to address?
3. In Southern Africa we learn the importance of humanity from one another. This is part of the famous philosophy of Ubuntu (people depend on other people to exist as people). Is there anyone you know, an elder in your family or community who you can speak to in order to learn more about what has been their fight for human rights, and most importantly whether their struggle for social upliftment has been achieved? What have you learned from them?
4. As a nation, South Africa has experienced so much, from political division to unity and economic inequality. South Africa also has a unique experience in bringing peace and change. What global problems do you see in the world that South Africans can help change? Can we do this through culture? And, what role would you like to play in this?