

Drumming in Yin and Yang

Post-task: Drumming Dualities

The drums are known to be intrinsic to African societies. In the same way that Anikki describes the drums as the heartbeat of the band, so are the drums the heartbeat of many African communities. While in western culture, drumming is associated more with entertainment, in African culture drumming also holds ceremonial, symbolic and spiritual significance. For example, ceremonies relating to weddings, births, deaths and other cultural practices are traditionally accompanied by some form of drumming that has its own language and is understood by its own particular ethnic group.

For Anikki, drumming is spiritual. Whether she's playing Western or African drums, drumming is deeper than a passion for her. Drumming is a healing force that can take her to a higher spiritual dimension and world. When looking at different African societies, we see evidence of what Anikki experiences.

In northern Malawi, the Tumbuka people perform a healing dance called the Vimbuza. The dance is part of a mental healing practice using drumbeats through ng'oma, which means 'drums of affliction'. The drumming creates a powerful beat that allows the patient to 'dance out' his or her disease. Through the drumming, patients work through their traumatic experiences as they enter a trance and call on the spirits to help them to heal. Thus, the drumming has spiritual and medical benefits for the body and the spirit. It is an important component of the Tumbuka people's indigenous healthcare provision. Different societies have their own practices that help their communities to make sense of their worlds through this deeply versatile instrument.

Branding

The music industry requires you to have a strong sense of who you are and what you are offering to your audiences. When Anikki started Ladies in Jazz, she understood it was important for the band to make its mark by having an image that would immediately be recognisable. In other words, knowing your brand and brand position is integral to establishing yourself as an artist. There is a saying that goes: 'Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room'.

Anikki is clear that, when it came to branding Ladies in Jazz, she wanted to achieve the following:

- 1) To identify the music. What kind of music will you be known for?
- 2) Image. What is your dress code or style that establishes your identity?
- 3) Attitude. What habits and behaviour will you be known for?

Those are the pillars upon which Anikki built Ladies in Jazz and other bands. Ladies in Jazz was known for its musical versatility. The members were able to perform songs by the likes of Jimmy Dlodlu and other musicians as well as their own compositions. In terms of dress code, they were known for being the jazz performers with dreadlocks, dresses and heels. As a band, they agreed on how to present themselves to the public. Lastly, the band was known for its discipline, quality and dedication to its craft.

The foundation that holds these pillars is knowing yourself. This brings into perspective the duality of you as an artist: a public figure; and you as an individual or private person. Knowing your personal boundaries is very important in an industry that often thrives on competition among artists. The more audiences understand your discipline and strong sense of who you are, the more the focus will be on your music and artistry.

This is something that Anikki holds to and ensures that the private and public personae are kept separate. It is how she's managed to maintain her image and brand over the 40 years that she's been in the music industry.

Yin and Yang

The principle of Yin and Yang is that all things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites, for example female-male, dark-light, old-young. This principle runs throughout Anikki's musical existence. Where drumming is concerned, she embraces both the African and Western traditions of drumming. They coexist within her and are expressed through her ability to see drumming as entertainment and through spiritual practices. These are interdependent elements that form one strong unit. Her success as an artist is embedded in this concept. As an artist, she also embraces the private and public aspects of her life. She draws a firm line between Anikki the artist and Anikki the individual.

Understanding these opposites within yourself as a person will help you to navigate the music industry and ensure that you remain intact at the levels of your body, soul and mind.

Now for some exercises:

1. Whether she's playing African or Western drums, the drums have spiritual and healing connotations for Anniki. This is equally true of the many African societies that use drumming for cultural and other practices.

- What do you understand the spiritual and healing aspects of drumming to be?
- Find out about different spiritual and cultural drumming traditions
Which ones speak to you and why?

Activity: Marching to the beat of your own drum

In this activity you will create your own beat that has spiritual or healing significance for you.

Step 1

Listen to different types of drumming traditions. How are purpose and messaging created in the sound? What speaks to you at an emotional level?

Step 2

Using your findings in Step 1, experiment with different beats and create one that reflects spirituality or healing for you. When you perform your creation, how does it elevate you to another spiritual level?

2. African and western drumming have their own rhythmic styles and meaning. Listen to different pieces, one drumming style and then another that combines the African and the western.

- What do you notice about the different drumming styles?
- Do you feel that they are similar or that there are notable differences?

Activity

In this activity we compare the African and western styles of drumming and you create your own style, combining both.

Step 1

Listen to the African and the western styles of drumming. How do they make you feel? Which appeals most to your spirit and why?

Step 2

Create a piece that incorporates both. What happens when you integrate the styles? Does it enhance the piece? What stands out for you?

3. Anikki speaks of the importance of branding and positioning for artists. Branding is used to create an overall image for and of the artist. It is an important part of the creative process.

- What is your understanding of branding and brand positioning?
- Can you identify the brands and brand positions of some artists?
- What makes their brands stand apart?
- What elements of branding do you find are suitable for you? And why?
- Draft your own personal brand position as a musician.

4. 'Know thyself' is a popular Greek saying. There are artists who have admitted to losing themselves in the industry at some point, being tempted by various vices. It's important to be aware of both the pitfalls and rewards of the industry.

- What do you understand by the maxim 'know thyself?'
- Why do you think it's important for artists to have a grasp of this maxim?
- Can you think of an artist who's experienced losing themselves and having to find themselves again?
- What can you learn from this artist?
- How do you imagine that knowing yourself will help you navigate the industry?

5. Understand the principle of Yin and Yang, all things that exist as inseparable and also contradictory opposites, for example female-male, dark-light, old young. Artists, in particular deal with this principle, being purveyors of creativity. With Anikki, music begins with a creative calling to which she can't help but respond. From the imagination, the chaos, the artist creates something structured. This is yin and yang in action.

- What comes to mind when you think of the yin and yang principle?
- In which aspects is the yin and yang principle present in music?
- Within you, there are opposites, contradictions. These elements make you, the person. Examine your personal contradictions through the lens of an artist.
- What is it about these contradictions that make you a better artist?