

Instrument of the People

Post-task: Original Music for Original People

‘Original Music for Original People’ is the slogan of Tidal Waves. Uniqueness and an original Pan-African identity are the lessons that Tidal Waves share with others, through their infectious blend of Afro-roots reggae.

Known as one of the hardest-working bands, they perform more than 100 gigs every year, all over the world, sharing love and respect through music. Their founder, Jacob Walana grew up in the North-West Province, in a multi-lingual neighbourhood of different cultures, languages and musical styles. He was born in a church house and it was taboo to make music outside the church. However, he negotiated a way through these restrictions and has demonstrated that music is a legitimate career.

Tidal Waves use sounds and beats from Africa, fused with the Western rock sound and Caribbean music. Identity and originality are the signposts along the growth path of music.

For example, Lucky Dube started by imitating Peter Tosh but, when he added mbaqanga beats, guitar and keyboard licks and his dance energy, he replaced the status of the Ivorian, Alpha Blondy as the African King of Reggae.

Look at Dancehall in Jamaica and Dancehall in Africa. These are two very different things. Dancehall in Jamaica is very strong, simply because all the dancehall players consult with the old school, the reggae artists. It is the old-school reggae artists who polish them:

“No, you’re not supposed to do it like this,” they say to the next generation. “You’re supposed to do this. How about this?”

It is the wise who learn from those who have walked the path before them. It is the silly who prefer to make the same mistakes again.

When the reggae musician has found an original musical concept with a positive intention, the next step in his or her career is the music business.

Jacob says you “need to get a good team.” That’s the way Bob Marley rose out of a frustrating music industry in Jamaica. Breaking away from the island and giving his talent to the world to appreciate was a blessing for all.

So, what does a good team look like? There is the administrative team taking care of the three levels of music business administration: the publishing; the recording; and the management. There is the sound team, the engineers and roadies, who produce the live and recorded events. There is the media industry, where print, radio and television play a huge role. Then there is the social media industry, which is a growing sector for promotions.

The growth path is not only a musician’s own personal career but for the

industry and the whole nation. Potchefstroom in the North-West province has experienced the power of arts and culture in job creation and economic development. As a small town, Potchefstroom had nothing, no such business, until they started the Aardklop festival. The festival brought people and business and the town became the economic centre of North-West Province. Samba music is a huge economy for Brazil, as Hollywood is for America. They are the creative economies there. The creative economy is central to the unique identity and expression of South Africa.

Key to the growth of the creative economy in South Africa is education. Music education begins with the indigenous instruments such as mbiras and traditional bows. By introducing indigenous music, the making, teaching and playing of indigenous instruments, the writing and understanding of the rhythms and beats of African music, a good foundation can be laid for a holistic approach to our music as a whole, whether the parts of it end up as African or Western. For the performer, indigenous instruments provide a wonderful transition to Western instruments like piano and guitar.

Indigenous instruments are also an introduction to the indigenous languages. The diversity of South African languages brings the bright composition colours to the music of Tidal Waves. Tidal Waves sing in all South African languages, including Xhosa, Tswana, Venda, Shangaan, Sotho, Zulu, Pedi, Afrikaans and English.

Now answer these questions:

Research Question: Mentorship from the elders

For your artistic, cultural and musical concepts to strengthen, you have to consult the elders. Why? Because these people have walked the road before. They know the path.

- Who do you know that has walked the road before you?
- Can you consult him or her and draw up ten lessons you have learnt from this elder and then share these?

Activity

- Can you take an inspiring phrase from your elder's ten lessons and transform it into your own creation?
- What are you going to create?
- Something very good?
- You be the judge, for sharing your work on the multi-media platforms.

Research Question: What inspires you?

Jacob started to expand his concept by researching great musicians that were coming from Africa and being appreciated abroad.

- Now, what musician in your favourite genre has come from Africa and become appreciated abroad?
- Do some research about him or her and see if you can find what it is that made the musician unique?
- Share these answers in an essay format.

Exercise: Instrumentalism and lyricism in song writing

Song writing in reggae music is a demanding art. To bring out the wonderful composition colours of South Africa, Tidal Waves sing in all South African languages. Our indigenous languages and cultures are what make South African music unique and stronger. All the language and cultural groups have different rhythms and beats. Knowing at least one instrument is not only crucial to playing but also vital when it comes to song writing.

- Find a Reggae song sung in the African vernacular?
- Find out what the lyrics mean.
- Learn the lyrics and sing them.
- Record your version of the song for playback.

Now, see if you can find out more about the musical elements of the song.

- What is the musical content? Can you notate the chord progression?
- What is the lead instrument? Do you play this instrument? Or an instrument in this song? If so, can you transcribe the notes?
- What is the lyrical content?
- How does this touch and inspire you?

Challenge: Create your own reggae song in a South African language other than English. When it is polished, this would be one to record and share.