

# Instrument of the People

## Pre-task: Lessons in Perseverance

If there are two key lessons to take from Jacob Wulana, co-founder and leader of the Tidal Waves, they are perseverance and humility. His hunger to learn and grow as a musician persuaded him to learn the guitar. He was mentored by Blackey of Brenda Fassie and the Dudes, to help him read and write music, to know the scales, notes and chords, and to develop his playing technique.

Busking on his own was the perfect exercise for Jacob to get to know himself as a guitarist and to learn to cover himself as a player, alone. By disciplining his craft like this, he became an excellent player. His becoming the guitar addition to Tidal Waves took them to new heights of success. They started the Thursday nights (Sheila's nights) Reggae sessions at Tandoor in Rockey Street and it became a popularly celebrated event.

But Jacob had started out as a busker with a hat, on Rockey Street, Yeoville. Buskers are underground artists. They are not scared of the crowd. They use the experience busking gives them, to develop their art. So it was that Jacob got his sound together through busking, by learning on the street, using it as his stage. He was at least earning while he was doing it and was also becoming better known.

Soon Jacob was running between gigs in Rockey Street, performing the opening set as a reggae guitarist and then, in the interval, performing solo keys in another venue. Then, during the intervals there, he was rushing back for his second sets as reggae guitarist.

This determined, hard-working attitude is also a signature of Tidal Waves and how they finally became so celebrated in Pretoria. Their first gig in Pretoria had only two people in the audience but the band played as though the place was full, from the heart. One of the two people in that audience booked them for another show. That next show had only four people in the audience but one of them booked Tidal Waves for the Oppikoppi festival. Their first Oppikoppi festival performance had an audience of five people. By the third festival they were the main act on the main stage, performing to tens of thousands of people.

Another typical aspect of Tidal Waves is the humility of the musicians. Their selfless approach to their audience has built bridges between the Africans and Europeans of this country and brought a greater sense of unity and consciousness to their audience.

There have been occasions when Tidal Waves were playing in Pretoria and people in the audience would come forward and say to the band:

“You know what, I was racist. My friend asked me to come and hear and see your band and I've changed my mind. I'm feeling shit about my behaviour. I'm no more racist.”

Reggae music is a pioneers of social cohesion and nation building, breaking the apartheid barrier long before 1994. A reggae musician is like a doctor. And reggae music is like an injection. When the reggae injection is given to people it works on the metabolic system. “When it hits you feel alright,” sang Bob Marley. And when you feel good about yourself and others, that is when you do good for one and all.

This healing quality of music comes from a deep sense of spirituality. Afro-Reggae is the musical expression of the Rastafarian way of life. The religious belief and practice have historical ties to the Ethiopian people and to Emperor Haile Selassie, to Jamaican and Caribbean anti-slavery and anti-colonial actions. It is also influenced by Marcus Mosiah Garvey. Rastafarianism is expressed through a vegetarian food diet, the use of marijuana for worship, a distinct style of dressing and fashion and the teachings of Pan Africanism. Rastafarianism has been adopted by diverse world cultures with their own interpretations and ways, who show an alignment to its beliefs and practices.

In South Africa, Rastafarian communes are spread across the country. They are in the Cape Flats, in Gqeberha, in Durban, Joburg and Mbombela or Nelspruit as it was called.

Rastafarianism and reggae music was the first activism for the legalisation of marijuana in the whole world. Now, with the relaxation of laws concerning cannabis and the valuable use of the plant for healing, producing textiles and clothing, it should be an opportunity in the future for Rasta businessmen and women and could help grow the reggae brand.

Jacob describes this spirituality of Rastafarianism in the context of giving: “The spirituality is that thing when a person, the receiver, is the one that feels it more than anyone. It’s that thing that gets into the receiver and make the receiver feel okay. That is the spirituality of it.”

Tidal Waves have made themselves the perfect example of the spirituality of their Afro-Roots Reggae because of the way they truly broke down barriers in Pretoria.

The Tidal Waves journey to the top is an example of the interconnected nature of humanity or ubuntu. Reggae is the perfect social recipe because reggae is non-sexist, non-political, non-religious. Reggae music is just about love, peace and happiness. Reggae is a well-respected genre in South Africa, with some fantastic female performers too, like the late Mama Aura Msimang, who worked with Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff. Another is the lioness of South African reggae, Nkulee Dube and another is Lucky Dube’s backing singer, Sister Phumi. However, there is still so much more that Afro-Roots Reggae can accomplish in South Africa.

## **Now answer these questions:**

### *Reflection: Social Cohesion*

Social Cohesion is a South African national focus. Why would this be a priority for a diverse nation like South Africa? What is your experience of social cohesion and who can you describe that is really doing a good job of bringing people together?

### ***Task: Social Cohesion***

How can the music you make alone or with your group address this social cohesion imperative? Put lyrics to one of your songs that support social cohesion. Record the making of your social cohesion initiative as a podcast.

### ***Research question: the use of cannabis***

Research the uses of cannabis in medicine.

- What is the impact of cannabis in healing?
- How do you think cannabis can help reggae music do more?

### ***Activity: Inspired by the Reggae way of life***

Select three styles, three songs of culturally nuanced reggae music, like Ethiopian reggae, Jamaican reggae and South African reggae.

- Put them together in a playlist as a compilation.
- Write out your playlist, including all the songs' details: names; composers; performers; publishers and short descriptions of the songs.
- You can share your playlist with your friends and classmates.
- If it's professional enough, you can promote your playlist on the streaming platforms for the benefit of reggae music.

### ***Activity: Busking***

Busking strengthened Jacob in three key areas: finances; more shows; and learning on the stage of the street.

- How do these three benefits of busking relate to your own musical output?
- To move your talent to a professional level, would you consider busking? How will you do this?