

POWER OF A SONG

Post-task : Word Sound Power

Songwriters don't just listen to songs – they also spend a lot of time reading and studying. One of Masauko's favourite poets is e e cummings, whose words and rhymes had such rhythm and cadence to them that it was clear he was using language as a form of music. Reading and interpreting these kinds of rhyming lines have inspired him to write lyrics because he became fascinated that words could be used to create the kinds of patterns that could stick to their listener. Over time he began to realise that this is also the origin of mantra, which is that set of words people use when they are meditating, to go inside themselves to try and influence their own mind in a certain direction.

Songs are a way of shifting consciousness through getting ideas to circulate in the mind constantly. If you listen to poets like Kamau Brathwaite, there are ways, that we can think of words a little differently by their sound.

Masauko traces this form of songwriting as a form of chanting or prayer (not necessarily in a religious context) to ancient Egypt and to a place called Kemet where an African culture existed for thousands of years before Christ. This culture had scribes who would write verses and hymns that would allow for the repetition of certain ideas to make it into society. Writing is a way of influencing the world around you. That is why the first things the corrupt dictators in Africa do is go after the musicians. Just think of the Nigerian government going after Fela Kuti, throwing his mom out of the window.

There is power in what a songwriter does. Masauko's philosophy of songwriting is the idea that we are using words to transform the things around us. Like the Buddha said: "With thoughts we manifest the world." GOD said, "Let there be light." And there was light! Through song can we manifest the world? Masauko is saying this is possible. Popular songs create a call-and-response between the singer and the audience and so a sense of alchemy, where shared ideals and change can manifest themselves.

Open to interpretation

Masauko's South African band, Blk Sonshine wrote many popular songs including *Birds will Sing*, *Soulsmile* and *Me and My People Building*. But one of their most popular songs in terms of radio play was *Born in A Taxi*. It was written by Neo Muyanga. The lyrics go: "I can spend my time loving you if that's what you want me to do?" The song

is timeless. However the lyrics don't specifically refer to anything. As Neo described: "The song is open to interpretation. It means whatever it means to you."

By allowing your lyrics to be a little ethereal, you leave room for the listener and allow more and more people in the audience to vibe with your lines.

Now answer the following questions

1. Masauko is sharing one of his many beautiful compositions with us called *Birds Will Sing*. This is a song about a song. The lyrics go:

"One day my bird will sing a song to heal us all."

For Masauko the bird is a metaphor for the spirit. This is not an original idea and goes back to the famous poet Maya Angelou who wrote: "I know why the caged bird sings?" And it goes back to ancient Egypt where the bird represents the highest mind, the highest spiritual notions.

"The song will give us wings, the song won't let us fall."

"And when my bird does sing, the people will come one."

"All into the love and let that love be strong."

Masauko is imagining this song provoking healing and a feeling of collective solidarity or what we call uBuntu – that we exist for each other and that we are all unified as one.

Now, write out the favourite lines from your favourite, most poetic song and try to interpret the hidden meaning.

2. A great song can be played in multiple formats and used in multiple ways because the message can stay the same. Like Masauko's *Birds will Sing* can be played acoustically, by a big band with a calypso beat at the centre of a celebration.

Now, can you think of a song that you love that has been covered in more than one different musical genre?

3. Masauko believes you can bring things into existence through your words. As a youngster, he sang about returning to Africa from exile and then, in 1994 his family returned to Africa. Think for a moment of what exactly you would like to bring into your existence?

What reality do you want to create for yourself?

Can you put it into words?