

POWER OF A SONG

Pre-task : Whart sells music?

Singer and songwriter, Masauko Chipembere was born in exile in the United States, Los Angeles California, far away from Africa. His parents were Malawian and involved in the political struggle in Malawi. Masauko remembers his father as a nervous politician with staunch Pan Africanist ideas. His father chose to open his letters outside because he was afraid his political opponents might send a letter bomb and blow up the house. Music always had a soothing quality for Masauko as he listened to his mother singing. His mother was influenced by the music she heard, growing up in Malawi, such as the music of Miriam Makeba and Dolly Rathebe. In 1994 Masauko returned to South Africa from exile and formed the successful musical duo BlkSonshine. Masauko is currently based in Costa Rica.

So, what sells music? A great song ...always will, always has! You have to have something deeper, a great book, a great story, a great recording, a great song. You have to go to the ethereal world, that deeper point that connects with the customer. Have you got something they like or are inspired by: your lyrics; who you are; what you say and what you represent? Do you touch people's hearts? That is what a great song does.

Developing an ear for a good song

Growing up in Los Angeles, Masauko lived across the road from Caiphus Semanya and Letta Mbulu. Their son Mosese went to his mother's creche. Masauko was continually around these artists. He thought Caiphus was the coolest black man around. He drove a Peugeot. He had a pretty wife and he was a musician. And, from that early age of seven, Masauko decided he wanted to be like Caiphus. Caiphus bought Masauko his first record label where he started listening to the music of Bob Marley and Steel Pulse. This really influenced him and brought the idea of Africa into his consciousness.

After school, Masauko met South African-born producer Russel Pope in Los Angeles. Russel left South Africa in 1960 and went on to an incredibly successful music career as manager of the hugely successful pop group - Supertramp. He engineered, recorded and produced at a high international level, including at Abbey Road Studios where the Beatles had recorded. Russel had an incredible ear for a hit song.

He described it this way: "Have you ever gone to a family with four daughters?"

Have you ever noticed one is always more gorgeous than the rest?"

The mother of the daughters will tell you they are all as pretty as each other. And that's the way a songwriter is. A songwriter is like the mother of his or her songs. The songwriter thinks all of them are just as beautiful as each other.

But, one of them sticks out from the crowd with something the others don't have. The songwriter can't see it because he or she is too close to it.

One of Russel Pope's solutions to identifying a good song is to collaborate with another songwriter. He said, "If you are going to get good at song-writing, you always need to put yourself next to somebody who writes different to you but very strong. It creates a supportive competition – you are writing, they are writing and you are making each other better – feeding each other's songs in the best way you can, to embellish them for the better of the collective."

Now answer these questions

1. Hugh Masekela said, "If you want to get to the people, sing a wedding song." What is a popular wedding song from your tradition or another that you love?

2. What is your favourite poet? What is your favourite poem? And can you put it to a rhythm?

3. Song-writers switch words around to find their true meaning. For example, Fela Kuti took the word "democracy" and altered the meaning to "demo," and "crazy" meaning a demonstration of craziness. Can you think of a word in common use that you can alter to bring a real and transparent meaning to it?

4. Do you like to write songs alone or do you have a friend you collaborate with? Can you describe your musical similarities and strengths?