

FREEDOM

Post-task : Music and Freedom

The call for an African Renaissance has remained unanswered since the 1950s, when African countries first freed themselves from colonialism. The concept was first articulated by the Senegalese, Cheikh Anta Diop in a series of essays beginning in 1946, which are collected in his book *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in Culture and Development, 1946-1960*.

There have been significant All Africa cultural festivals, in Dakar, Senegal in 1966 and with FESTAC in Lagos, Nigeria 1977. These festivals created the impetus for this moment. However, not everybody is convinced an African Renaissance is possible. Some see this quest as a romantic, escapist desire by cultural and intellectual leaders. They believe it will always be elusive and not attainable.

The concept of African people and nations overcoming challenges confronting the continent and achieving cultural, scientific, and economic renewal is surely both desirable and attainable? Millions of African people still live in abject poverty, with the gems in their culture, traditions and festivals eclipsed in earning potential by Western imports. Radio, television and print media imitate and promote lifestyles of the Western world. Political freedoms and true democracies are still rare to find. South Africa remains one of the most divided societies in terms of the haves and the have-nots. Facilities like running water, sanitation, health care and education are yet to reach each African family in the country.

South African President Thabo Mbeki, during his term of office, also dabbled in spreading the gospel of the African Renaissance. But, is it merely a post-apartheid intellectual agenda that still has a long way to go?

Music is a wake-up call for solidarity. Music helps us remember what a free past looked like. Music is a tool for remembering the promises of self-rule in Africa. Through music, we can reach out and connect to role model nations in the world and we can defeat the helplessness brought about by fear. Music in its various forms, from popular music to struggle and religious music, can raise awareness and alert people that civil action might be necessary to bring about change.

But, alas, the musicians themselves, seeking quick monies, the platforms like radio and television owned by the hostile government and private forces and the deviation of continuing to imitate and mimic international stars, renders music ineffective at times. The potential of music being a catalyst for social and political change is still there, but it must be worked hard to be successful.

Here are the questions to test your grasp of music and freedom

1. A cultural activist and multi-media artist gives back to their community. What is your community?

What has it given to you?

And, how do you want to give back to it?

2. Sifiso Ntuli's favourite musician in exile was Hugh Masekela. In your opinion, what has been Hugh's cultural and musical impact?

3. South Africa has not yet realised its promised freedom?

In your opinion, what would a musical industry that is free look like?

4. South African music in exile drew from many freedom songs.

Can you find one song that resonates with you and play it on your instrument?