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DURBAN.

Music



Down South Records

Words and Music for
Africa by:

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Peter Hubner
Piet Botha
Philip de Bruyn
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Rod McKuen
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Vuli Yoni

PLEASE EDIT & ADVISE

July 1986

AIMED AT SOME PRIVATE COMPANIES & PEOPLE
ON BEHALF OF { 3RD EAR RECORDS
SHIRAZ RECORDS
EMCEE STUDIOS
PRE AZANIAN PRODUCTIONS
3RD WORLD PRODUCTIONS, etc.

WHERE TO SOUTHERN AFRICAN POPULAR MUSIC?

The future of 'alternative' (contemporary) music in Africa as heard by 3rd Ear Music (Est 1966).

Some background/proposals/suggestions.

This letter serves to outline why 3rd Ear Music needs investors - why we believe that it is vitally important, (not only for us) that we try and consolidate/co-ordinate some aspects of local 'alternative' music, as soon as possible.

A) INTRODUCTION:

Popular 'art' seems to become more visible/vocal during times of political/social upheaval. To 'Capatalise' on this predicament would be considered exploitive/opportunist by many. However, 3rd Ear Music (and friends) have survived for 20 years outside of the 'established' music industry - our main asset, besides experienced music people, is our credibility.

Our involvement in almost every aspect of the alternative music industry places us in a unique position - now we need assistance from committed people who are interested in Southern Africa's musical future not only for financial rewards, but for the obvious/necessary social benefits.

3rd Ear Music is still being 'carried' by a few individuals, who are finding it extremely difficult to apply their specific talents due to lack of 'finance'. I understand that we are not unique (in a typical 'business dilemma') but given the local unique music situation, we have a very strong case to make by asking for assistance. We can help to establish a viable musical venture (at present in chaos) and bring it into line with what ordinary everyday South Africa is about (not star studded America) where people can express themselves through words and music and be listened to regardless of class or culture. We want/need to communicate and we can. The 'we' are people who work with records, management, Road crews, studios, writers, photographers, video and film agents and artists, all contribute and work toward the ideal



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/and work toward the ideal.....

South African music situation.

B) A BRIEF 3RD EAR HISTORY/INVOLVEMENT:

Since 1966 - 3rd Ear Music and friends have been a major driving force behind the preservation, production and promotion of indigenous contemporary words and music.

Ironically because of our international isolation more attention is being focussed on local music than ever before by the 'established' record companies and the S.A.B.C. It is only recently that they have started to listen and promote local music (as apposed to selling records and/or programming 'hits').

Since our first international hit (Master Jack in 1968) we have been pleading with radio and record companies about the importance of investing in local music and musicians (as apposed to the large profits and small outlay of importing ready-made international recorded product) and the negative effect that these 'imports' have on the local listeners/musicians when the content (performance) is over looked. Records and music are supposed to be related.

No-one is ungrateful for this international exposure (many of us love to learn and listen) - however short term 'record sales' at the expense of local music involvement has cost this country dearly. Record companies have simply become wholesalers for international 'product' and ignored their social (and business) commitment to South African music. There have been a few exceptions. However local 'record' successes never fail to fall apart or break-updisillusioned

In the 60's and 70's many talented South Africans 'had' to leave and apply their experience in other countries. The now clichéd phrase about there being 'more South Africans than any other foreigner running the British and American record/music industry' is nothing to be proud of. Our performers have always been restricted to imulating successful international acts.

Radio, T.V. and record executives avoided any local music that did not sound/look like the imported 'product'. They make the impression that records are what contemporary music is all about - the performance aspect (the content) being almost completely neglected until the boycotts. Now it's a desperate attempt to buy local. We believe the established industry will soon be unable to supply or sustain local music on their own. They wouldn't know where to start looking/listening.

In the good record sale years record companies invested in administration and equipment - not music. They have become top heavy. With the threat of losing international labels and local support what will happen?.

What has happened is that in spite of all this 3rd Ear Music remained committed to local music, musicians and the logistics of performing in AFRICA. We had to ignore (as far as possible) local established

/local established.....

channels - and in the process we managed to innovate a number of unique ideas and alternative methods of getting local music across.

Here are some examples of on going projects initiated by 3rd Ear Music:

1970 The very first 'Audio/Sound Reinforcement' company - out of which has come a multi-million rand industry. (Similar letter/proposals were sent out in those days, asking people to invest in this 'service industry', but it took 'outside' interest to realise the potential and get it started.

1971 Independant multi-track mobile recording studios, record labels, distribution and marketing.

1968 Music publishing - to concentrate entirely on African sounds and get songs/sounds to performers everywhere.

1969 Alternative music venues - we've run more than a dozen clubs and 3 theatres. Today this is another profitable industry

→ 1971 The ~~FREE~~ PEOPLE'S CONCERTS considered by many as the most important annual event for contemporary bands - also used since it's inception as a means to raise money and collect clothes for the under-privileged.

1968 Annual national jazz and folk festivals in cities and townships.

C) PROPOSALS

We have tried every possible means and method ^{to} motivating South Africans to ~~take~~ importance of listening to our own, through tapes, letters, records, articles, interviews and many meetings with the 'established' outlets.

Although many people/companies have been sympathetic/understaing to the obvious benefits of 'listening local', for the most part they have been contractually obliged to overseas 'product'. We have had very little support, other than re-investing every cent we have made (we have had a number of commercial successes/hits over the years).

Now there seems to be a sudden interest in local music that is almost overwhelming. Unfortunately it seems a little too late.

→ In a changing South Africa there will be no place for old stvle record companies. They may be changing sides now becuase of political pressure and cultural isolation but it will not help; infact they would be considered as exploitive/opportunist as they have been in the past. The kev word here is simply 'credibility'.

3rd Ear Music and it's many associates may never have had the financial clout and influence that the established importing companies have had, but we do have many, many years of collective experience that we believe will continue to benefit local music in a new South Africa.

Areas in which we are involved and that need consolidating are:

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/Areas in which we are involved and that need consolidating are:-.....
.....

1) Music Publishing

A highly lucrative area whereby South African words and music are offered to record, T.V. and film companies, performing artist and schools everywhere.

We are trying to establish a U.S.A. office with some 3rd Ear people in Canada and the U.S.A. Although our main aim is to service Africa to the North.

We have over 400 registered South African compositions and there is great interest in the U.S.A in our writers.

2) Performance and Artist Management (Since 1968)

The main area that has kept 3rd Ear Music alive, but one which we need to streamline and service. Our innovation of university radio stations and a performing campus 'circuit' (1971) is already operational to a point and needs urgent administrative support/sponsorship.

These are over 15 colleges and campuses with a few million students and the 'alternative' local performers that we can/do provide are ideal not only as entertainment but mainly as a means of 'bringing people together/communication'.

3) Record Productions/Recording Studios (Since 1970):

Another area that can/does provide cash flow and that is currently operational - although 3rd Ear Music is now only marginally/indirectly involved with a number of these studios, because of 'running costs' we are involved in the operating and production side only.

At this time we have 2 people in the U.S.A. trying to tie-up master-tape and video leases. To be specific there is a great interest in Roger Lucey in California, New Mexico and Canada and 'Shifty Records' have negotiated certain releases for the U.S.A.

We must emphasize that the South African experience can be communicated most effectively via the medium of music - so we are not talking about cover version type sounds, but rather records that may sound a bit different and that cannot be divorced from the performers.

4) Tape/Record Libraries: (Since 1966)

There are a number of people whose tape/record collections are available to us - our own library has now over 1½ million feet of locally recorded tape with many dozens of commercially released records.

/Continued 5.....

Tape/Record libraries continued.....

We plan to do a series of radio programmes (and even video's) that we hope to syndicate to Africa, Europe and campuses, both here and in the U.S.A.

Out of these libraries/collections we also hope to produce a book on recent local music history. We need to catalogue and index the entire news and tape library.

5) Administration

(Offices and Equipment)

This will depend on the size of investment and administration that we can solicit.

Ideally we would like a clean start, but given the current South African financial situation, we do understand that this may not be feasible, so we can utilize what premises and equipment belongs to us and our associates. In the long term much of this should be brought together under one roof with 'collective' administration

6) Training of People:

Implimenting all of the above would mean massive opportunities for many people.

Through the years we have created many job opportunities and trained a number of people who have all (without exception) gone on to be successful in the 'service industry'.

We need to swap record and audio engineers with people from Japan and the U.S.A. We need to 'entice' musicians who study abroad to come home.

D) OPERATING:

Music/entertainment will continue to be in demand regardless of the inevitable political changes that are coming. The big question is who at this time has the experience, determination and credibility to survive these changes and sustain part of the local popular/alternative music scene?. 3rd Ear Music and associates have been part of these changes for 20 years.

If we cannot raise finance/interest in our operation we will of course continue as before, for as long as we can - it would be a great pity though if we cannot convince you of our potential. We need funds independently of the established companies to maintain our credibility and keep our musical integrity.

E) IN CONCLUSION:

You may have noticed that like this proposal ^{our} 'business' is based on ideology/dreams - ideas that need to be channelled and distributed in an orderly fashion. It is in this area (where idealism and finance meet) that most of the current damage to South African Music has been

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/E) In Conclusion continued.....

/Of the current damage to South African Music has been.....

caused, largely because the public (and many musicians) have been brought up to accept imported multi-million dollar productions as 'music'.

In the true tradition of Africa, much of our planning will depend on circumstance rather than choice or tried and tested marketing methods and promotional techniques developed in the West. This initiative/idealism must be given a chance to develop out of our past experience - where, for example does music start and technology end in relation to where we are?. The answer lies in our getting back to basics in a highly technical world.

Musicians and technicians need to keep in contact with people and in touch with each other - and the only way to do that is through live performance: clubs, concerts and campaigns that 'involve' people using technology, rather than the other way round.

With investment/commitment we can survive and help other to do so as well. Buy South African, Africa depends on it.

3RD EAR MUSIC
