

LOCAL MUSIC CONTENT

A Submission to the JBA from David Marks

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A. Introduction

I support, in principle, a "phased" in local content quota of recorded music as suggested by the Association of South African Music Industries (ASAMI) and the Musicians' Union of South Africa (MUSA).

However, I argue that the strategy is being ill-conceived and that enforcing, by law, a local content quota, we will do more harm to South African popular music and culture than good; only the Record 'Industry' and a few Johannesburg professionals will benefit.

The issues have been clouded in vested self-interest and emotions - very little, if any, consideration seems to have been given to the facts, i.e. the inevitable impact that future Broadcasting and Digital Technology will have on the presentation and management of local music in general ('Intellectual Property' specifically), and to the promotion and protection of our rich and varied cultural heritage in relation to the international demands that will be made on our musicians, and the manner in which these "assets" will be administered and carried.

- (1) The debate has so far centered around the Johannesburg-based Record Industry (ASAMI) and the professional musicians who service it (MUSA); SALCA, etc;
- (2) Despite claims that ASAMI and MUSA have consulted widely with various community and other professional organisations throughout the country, this certainly does not seem to have been the case;
- (3) It is estimated that approximately 80% of South Africa's music (commercial and cultural) emanates from outside of the PWV and approximately 75% of that comes from the KwaZulu/Natal area alone;
- (4) If South African popular music culture is to have any impact internationally, then Radio (and TV) should consider presenting all forms of Music Live!, in very much the same way as sport is sponsored and broadcast;
- (5) South Africa in transition is in a good position to set international standards instead of always following the USA and UK.

B. Background

Although I no longer represent any particular music constituency, I speak with some experience and knowledge and find it inconceivable that the SA record industry, who for 30 years ignored our pleas to invest in local Arts and Culture, Training and Development, having used the SABC as a convenient 'shop front window' for their imported 'product', now advocate a short-sighted and short term solution that could impact negatively on our ability to be heard above the din and racket of this imported 'product'.

The potential and talent in South Africa suggests that we should have, by now, been a major international exporter of 'intellectual property', not a dumping ground for 'pop' waste and taste.

Nobody is saying that record companies should disappear - what people in the 'music' business are suggesting is that unless the industry adapts to the challenge of change and becomes more artist and less product orientated, they will disappear.

Record companies in South Africa have become, by and large, retailers. What I have been trying to get across is that somehow, given the future digital transmission of music and the industry's expertise, they need to get closer to "the workers", i.e. musicians - those who must produce the local content that the industry needs to survive!

Almost every major Record Company massed their fortunes through lucrative imported product and fashion arrangements, despite the cultural embargo; they now find themselves unable to 'compete' internationally because they cannot export "coals to Newcastle", and Radio and TV will, in the near future, fulfill the functions of record companies as we know them.

One cannot deny that the South African Record (not Music) Industry (ASAMI) has expertise, potential and (individual) talent in marketing and distributing 'product' - this does not give them the right to 'call the tune', so to speak, without considering all the aspects and involving all the players in open debate.

I therefore submit the following for your consideration:

C. First point of order - narrowing the commercial and cultural gap

- (1) Performance and development of South African music is central and paramount to this theme - saving the South African record industry who have no connection to our music roots and whose functions are exclusively commercial, should not be. The direction in which this local content quota drive is headed, suggests that only the PWV record companies and a few professional recording artists will benefit - people on the ground will remain excluded from the process.
- (2) Given the future of digital broadcast technology, there is a void of information; there are no constructive development programmes (for presenters and performers, i.e. to create a viable local music infrastructure); the past liaison between the South African Record Industry, the State and the SABC, will make an enforced local content quota, at this time, a retrogressive step for all South African music and musicians. It will marginalise many thousands of musicians and forms of music - i.e. those who cannot afford to record their musical works and who would not be considered "commercial" by the industry.

All South African musicians and those who present their music on TV and Radio should be given a fair chance, on a public broadcast service at least, to gather information and perform through LIVE TV AND RADIO BROADCAST, before we can consider a percentage of local recorded content.

- (3) Radio jocks do not know who is who in the South African Music Zoo. They receive all their information about music on CD or in print from the record companies.

With respect to the many talented and well-intentioned radio and TV music presenters (DJ s) who keep us informed about international pop stars and developments of international music personalities and trends, I doubt if any one of them can name one developing unrecorded musician performing anywhere in the country. It is not entirely their fault - 30 years of international isolation within an industry that has made no attempt to reconnect to South African art and culture (i.e. by simply attending or supporting live music performances) has left local radio and TV out of music development. Our DJ s are at a distinct disadvantage - there is an unwritten 'formula' by which South African music is 'promoted' and it has nothing to do with music performance or development - it relates only to popular recorded product, submitted to them by the record companies.

D. Creating an infrastructure - Radio/TV presenters

- (1) The analogies with South Africa sports, sponsors, radio and TV may be frequent. I listened to a radio/TV sports presenter (DJ) commenting on the Soweto Marathon the other day. Besides the ~~insipid and~~ dreadfully out of place background European library music,* the camera crews were on target and in focus. The production team, directors and the "DJ" had obviously done their homework - they must have known and met, had supper with, enquired about and done some travelling to present this programme - mentioning not only the well-known professionals, but unheard-of local runners with potential and talent. The presenter brought a lot of information to the attention of the broader public that even made me pay attention. There was a wealth of information about young runners whom I had not heard of before.

If sports presenters (DJs) simply sat back, never attending any amateur sports meetings, waiting for the sports goods manufacturers to feed them with information and material, what sort of sports development would we have?

Imagine for a moment that the local sports writers and presenters never attended a rugby, cricket, soccer or boxing match and, despite this, they were given a higher status than the sports talent they report on? I'm not joking! This is precisely what happens, has always happened and seems to continue to happen with South African music. I have never in 30 years seen a representative of any major record company, or any radio station (bar one) ever attend a 3rd Ear Music concert. Despite the fact that we have produced hundreds of concerts and festivals; we have managed dozens of clubs and have communicated with literally hundreds of thousands of South Africans since 1968. Was this because we were considered "too alternative" and a threat to the safety of the state?

*If local content is to have any meaning, the SABC should start by helping to create a South African mood music catalogue of indigenous sounds, FX and music and not, as they so frequently do, use French and Canadian mood music catalogues for local TV and radio productions.

- (2) The Record Industry in South Africa has created a "culture" of TV and radio DJs who have become all-powerful figures in this country - more so than the talent and music that they promote and present. Where else in the world does the DJ arrive at a show by limo or helicopter while the local band they are being paid to introduce has to haul their equipment through the crowds and sleep backstage? And now we want to increase these "powers" by law?

Only one TV presenter and two record company executives have officially accepted invitations to popular live productions that I have been involved with, e.g. Music for Africa, Guitars for Africa, Free Peoples Concerts, Jabulani and Mamelodi Jazz Festivals, Tribal Blues, Splashy Fen, etc, etc. (The SABC at that time, I imagine, would send the special branch.) Under these circumstances, one must ask what sort of trust has been developed between musicians on the ground and those who now profess to control their careers by presenting their recorded works?

E. Development and training - musicians and presenters DJs

- (1) Can we take a good fighter out of the dust of a township or the garage of a suburb and throw him into an Olympic ring? Why then should we throw a band of young inexperienced musicians into a multi-track recording studio in the hope that they can cope in a highly competitive and sometimes ruthless world of international popular recorded music, however talented and obvious their abilities might be? There should be a process, from an early stage, where the channels of access are open and not blocked by expensive current imported taste, opinions and personal commercial preferences. A good talented sports person can be picked up and identified on merit by those sports presenters whose local knowledge and information could have an effect on the course and direction of that particular sports person's career - relative to, not reliant on, international standards and criteria. Young South African musicians believe they can "make a record" and sell it "overseas" without being seen and heard live! It is a sad fallacy. We would not send a recorded video tape of an athlete to the Olympics and expect the person to be selected.
- (2) If the men and women in control of our radio buttons and TV digital gadgetry can reach millions of hearts and heads, I would assume that they have a responsibility to all concerned. In a perfect world they would be beholden to their sponsors, of course their particular music or sport discipline, and the public, not to mention their own credibility and status. This, to me, seems to make obvious sense - why then is it so different and difficult in the world of local music where the audiences are far more diverse, far larger and where there is far more money, believe it or not, than there is in sport? Given the facts and figures, music is, they say, the world's largest industry! Musicians get far more sponsorship attention than sports persons do in most western countries. This is not the case in South Africa. Sponsors seem to have very little faith because of this lack of infrastructure and lack of respect that South Africans have for musicians.

So in our perfect world, when there is potential and talent, those in the process of making selections, opinions and critique on merit, should be the ones who know what local music is all about! The access - the channels and challenge of what it is to be an unknown and to make your way through the hybrid of well-known popular established musicians - this should develop a challenge and excitement all of its own, for all concerned. Those DJs who make the recommendations and spot the talent and those who get to learn and know about this talent could be the focus of a local content initiative - *not* the record industry, radio or TV.

- (3) There are very few middle people in the music industry at this time (i.e. print media critics, radio DJs and TV presenters) who local musicians trust. I know of very few musicians who do not wax cynical when it comes to the tastes and the credibility of these music middle people and the record companies at large - I know this is an unkind thing to say. However, I live by example and experience - when I have been in a town for almost ten years and our major newsprint and radio critics, DJs and TV presenters have *never ever* attended a single performance of ours, then something is not right. If we weren't attracting people through the gates and the doors, I would admit that "selling" unheard-of or unrecorded (but good) musicians is a waste of time. But the public's overwhelming presence, through word of mouth alone, disproves the industry's claim that our festivals, concerts and musicians are not "commercially" viable. With long-term support and the obligatory lucky breaks, many of these so-called non-viable musicians have become self-supporting and popular, often having to leave the country to survive! When there is a show that attracts thousands and is often sold out, with the only empty seats in the entire place being those meant for the critics and DJs, then something is wrong.

F. In summary - getting music closer to the people via radio and TV

(1) The Record Industry

The process by which the professional musicians, the musicians' union (MUSA), and the record industry (ASAMI) want to drive this local content issue is completely out of line with the realities that exist. Before the IBA make a local content decision they must make certain that the laws governing this criteria take all the aspects of local music and the current lack of infrastructure into account - we can't just change the system to suit the industry without levelling the playing field, as they say. Citing Australia, Canada and France as examples is extremely misleading - despite the USA and UK musical onslaught that these countries were faced with, musicians had a ground-swell of music support - a vibrant, almost patriotic support. South Africa has nothing of the sort.

(2) Independent Radio and TV - Future Technologies

An enforced quota system will turn the South African people off - satellite receivers and cable will be the order of the day and the option of the future, and our music and musicians will, once again, struggle to be heard. Access to this technology will not be restricted to urban city people - rural communities will, with the expansion of the computer and "call phone" industry, have equal access to their favourite music.

(3) Musicians - Play Live To Survive

After all these years of isolation and bombardment by imported multi-million dollar record and video productions, most of the South African public do not favour South African music because they do not know that it exists ... i.e. in its purest performance form. This is what ASAMI, MUSA and the SABC should be addressing. Musicians by and large are still considered unreliable imitators of international pop sounds. Even by law in this country a musician is basically defined as a 'vagrant'. With this sort of "respect" there is a lot of work that radio and record companies need to do before we even consider phasing in or looking at a local record content quota.

(4) Commerce - Culture - Technology - Sponsors

Live music content means performance; it means more contact between commercial interests and cultural development; it means more contact between those who drive the technology and those whose talents are used to keep that technology alive and functioning. There is the problem of our disjointed past that has to be considered and there is this void of disrespect, no connection between young and old, despite the amazing progress that international popular recorded music has made in closing not only cultural, spiritual and geographical gaps, but the age gap as well.

(5) Infrastructure Or Lack Of It

There is no future for South African music without building a foundation and creating an infrastructure. It does not make sense for us to build from the top down, especially when the industry's ivory tower was built on imported records.

(6) Exclusive And Elite

Enforcing a local music content quota without radio and TV playing and broadcasting music live will only serve short-term interests of PWV-based record companies, the studio elite and a few lazy DJs. It will be a disaster for South African music, arts and culture in the long run. An enforced local music quota will marginalize the many diverse cultures and sounds that do not "sell well" on CD and tape, e.g. classical, opera, boere musiek, maskandi, certain choral music, folk, rock, country music, etc.

(7) Digital Broadcast

Record/CD "sales" in 5-10 years' time will not mean "units" across the counter when digital broadcast transmission becomes a reality - other means of "carrying" intellectual property to the public will have been developed. We should prepare for this inevitable future *today!*

(8) In Conclusion

Local content quota drive should relate to live, regional performances and broadcast only - for at least the next five years. Leave expensive recorded productions to those popular artists who can afford it and to the discretion of the DJs whose work it is to connect music and musicians to the people; we need to train and encourage DJs to *listen* to local music from the roots up and not from the top down, hiding in the shadows and shade of popular imported international product.

Just because South African musicians cannot afford to compete on the same technological and production level as their American and UK counterparts, does not mean that their talent and abilities are any less. This is the perception that has been created by both the industry and DJs. We can all be proud of our music talent and potential in this country, but we will never hear it if we continue with this undemocratic and draconian local content quota idea.

PLAY LIVE TO SURVIVE! That's the only way South African music is going to survive! We have a current crisis and a dilemma that should, in the true spirit of what contemporary music is all about, be a pleasure and good fun to sort out and resolve - i.e. we need to think creatively and work together in harmony: if we don't, we will not be heard because nobody will want to listen!