

2023

The Songwriter's Diary x Afrodaze New Zealand Music Industry Project

A summary of the experiences and needs of artists and music professionals of African descent in Aotearoa, New Zealand by Makanaka Tuwe and Afrodaze in collaboration with Mukuka Musowa and The Songwriters Diary

AFRODAZE

**The
Songwriter's
Diary**

In September and October 2022, The Songwriter's Diary and Afrodaze hosted a conversational circle and webinar to understand the experiences of artists and music professionals of African descent in Aotearoa and the support they need to have sustainable and successful careers.

As a result of these two gatherings, we drafted a document that summarizes the key themes. We are thankful to everyone who joined the conversation and shared their experiences, needs and dreams with us. Thank you to Dave Borrie, Pippa Ryan-Kidd, Michael Giles, Sylvia Betham, Robert Westall for joining us and sharing tips about releasing music, distributing music, media engagement and music business management and accounting.

ABOUT THE SONGWRITER'S DIARY PODCAST

The Songwriter's Diary Podcast is an insightful look behind the curtain of artists, songwriters, music producers, composers, and other music industry professionals. Each episode includes an in-depth conversation with a special guest about their art, practice, or how they navigate the music industry.

ABOUT AFRODAZE

Afrodaze is a musical platform whose main mission is to spread the potency of Afrobeats, Afro-Pop, Afro-House & Sounds of the Diaspora. In addition to hosting events, storytelling, platforming emerging artists and curating fire playlists, part of our mission is to contribute to equitable futures for music creators and professionals of African descent.

Thank you to the New Zealand Music Commission for funding this project through their Capability Grant 2022.

ABOUT MUKUKA MUSOWA

Mukuka Musowa is based in Tāmaki Makaurau, where she operates as an artist, artist manager, podcast producer/host, and creative freelancer. With a passion for supporting emerging artists, she has made it her mission to help new artists navigate the New Zealand music industry.

Mukuka manages emerging artists at Creative Pwele Management, where she also helps artists outside her roster with music project management and PR. Mukuka manages Ch! Nonso, SEREBII and Zambian based artist Nayo Mvula.

ABOUT MAKANAKA TUWE (SHE/THEY)

Makanaka (Maka) Tuwe is a Storyteller, Educator, Researcher and Cultural Producer who focuses on intersectional and indigenous approaches for social transformation and collective wellness. She specializes in building platforms, initiatives and campaigns from a decolonial lens that facilitate healing, dialogue and social change action. She is the Founder of Afrodaze and Sesa Mathlo Apothecary.

CONTRIBUTORS:

The following project is funded by the New Zealand Music Commission with Mukuka Musowa being the grant recipient and overseer. The document was written by Makanaka Tuwe.

30 participants

6 African countries represented

2 Caribbean Islands represented

Some participants also shared European, Maori and Pacific ancestry.

Participants were based and had lived across New Zealand in:

Auckland

Dunedin

Hamilton

Invercargill

Rotorua

Wellington

Whangarei

Participants had varying levels of engagement in the music industry including as performers and behind the scenes as event producers and sound engineers:

Radio show hosts and producers

DJs

Audio Recording and Engineering

Instrumentalists (saxophonist, piano, guitar, bass)

Singer/Songwriters

Solo artists

Band members

Session musicians

Rapper/MC

Producers/Head of Production

Tour Manager

Event Producers

Promoters

Fashion stylists

Music Director

For coherence, key themes from the conversation are organized into two categories:

(a) experience in the music industry and

(b) support needed.

43.3% of respondents were dissatisfied with how the music industry supports artists and music professionals of African descent.

36.7% of respondents were dissatisfied with the access to roles in the music industry i.e. job opportunities, funding, invitations to showcase.

EXPERIENCE IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

To begin our conversation, we asked participants what sort of experiences they had had thus far in the music industry. Although some had not yet connected with industry bodies or had experience in the performance space, others cited positive experiences including receptiveness from audiences. One mentioned being connected to Māori and Pasifika communities, and how this was supportive to their career and sense of belongingness within the industry, as they mostly worked within those communities. Another mentioned that as a new artist she would not have been able to predict the experiences she's had, which are all milestones for her.

The three main themes from the conversation regarding experiences in the music industry were:

- Cool, different, and tokenistic
- Lack of cultural awareness resulting in missed opportunities
- Lack of awareness of intersectionality in male-dominated industry

Cool, different, and tokenistic

While most participants cited positive experiences within the music industry and their participation, some noted that it often felt like they were adding to the diversity card. Oftentimes they are usually the only ones [of African descent] in the room, as band members, session musicians, interns, on festival lineups or at music school.

One artist made a comment about how their Blackness was 'beneficial' as it provided legitimacy to productions, especially in genres and music traditions with Black roots such as hip-hop and reggae. This was followed by a discussion about how the identity of participants was treated as either cool, different or a tokenistic addition. Some participants are met with perceptions about what kind of music they should make and what type of artist they are. It was mentioned that the music industry and to some extent audiences project assumptions of Black culture that leave artists and musical professionals in a space where they can't fit into the mold. One participant jokingly mentioned how difficult it can be to be met with these perceptions when their imagery of performing barefoot does not fit into the imagery and expectations the industry has of an artist of African descent. Another mentioned how scary it was to create music in an environment that felt like it had no appetite for something new.

"I found myself almost stopping before I started because [I wondered] I'm I actually going to be able to bring in my own identity at all".

These preconceptions narrow the scope of work that artists and music professionals of African descent are

offered. This results in missed opportunities for both the artist and the industry, as it minimizes the potential of what the artist can offer and the contributions they could be making to the industry. As one participant stated it blocks creativity and expression.

Lack of cultural awareness resulting in missed opportunities

While some participants shared the minimizing effects of preconceived notions on creative expression and production, others spoke to how these perceptions are informed by a lack of cultural awareness. This lack of cultural awareness also extends to how their projects are mismanaged. Although some artists have found support managing their brand, they struggle to find support managing the cultural elements of their projects. One participant mentioned how challenging it can be to have a team that does not understand how to execute an idea that involves cultural elements whether this be visually as music videos and artwork, or storytelling via press releases and media material. This results in a mismatch and misconnection between the music, the visuals, and the story, impacting the execution of the project. Overall, there was consensus that there is a need for cultural sensitivity that is currently lacking in the music industry.

"For me a crew that brings the art to life is missing. Like a production crew, artist crew, all the things that are needed to release music and produce a video. These are areas that need someone to understand me as an artist, where I come from and the style of music that I make. I have had issues finding the right videographers and video producers who can bring the emotion of the song to visuals and create work that is comparable to international standards that match the level that is being produced within similar genres".

"I could be confident within myself and what I could write and produce, but I've struggled to showcase my culture in my music here. From trying to find an audience to finding a support network".

"I've found that publicists here don't know what to do with my sound".

“Culture is important and it’s important to keep that solid amongst ourselves, otherwise people will tell our stories in an inaccurate way that won’t be received by our primary audiences and international audiences”.

Lack of awareness of intersectionality in male-dominated industry

Participants that identified as women also mentioned the prejudice they faced within the industry because of the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Three shared their perspectives on the challenges they face when working or attempting to work in a male-dominated industry and how discouraging it can be at times. They keep bumping into barriers whether in interpersonal interactions, the lack of support from funders or as previously mentioned, regarding ‘sound’ and what should be produced.

“I feel like I’ve mainly had positive experiences but as I’ve been diving more and more into music production and the [redacted] space I think I’ve kind of been fighting with people’s preconceptions of me. Being a woman, being a producer, it’s a lot harder to kind of get people to take you seriously and truly believe you’re doing what you’re doing. My most recent experience is having to be forward and pretty vocal”.

SUPPORT NEEDED

In terms of the support that is needed, the conversation began with highlighting the different opportunities that people of African descent have and continue to create for each other. Some of the gaps that were identified such as limited spaces to connect over music have led to the creation of different platforms and events that showcase local African talent.

“I have no prior experience with event management but when I realized that there’s a gap, I was able to pull something together to offer people”.

Another participant noted that at the beginning of their career they connected with other artists of African descent who were able to show them the ropes as well as assure them that they are audiences that will enjoy their sound. Two artists said that they are hopeful as there are a few more professionals of African descent in the music business who they can ask for help (e.g how to write a funding application), collaborate with, or get advice from. They also look forward to more networking opportunities like the Conversational Circle where they can connect with more people in the music space as cultural representation matters to them.

“Seeing a lot of people in here [Conversational Circle]... I’m excited about these platforms where we are all just put in a room together. It’s always a good time when we do gather. I’m looking forward to being around people in a setting where we are focused on the same thing as it’s really hard for me as an artist to create those scenarios for myself. That’s what I’m excited about”.

The three main themes from the conversation regarding the support needed for a sustainable and successful career were:

- Where do you start?
- How do you plug into the machine?
- Access to spaces and venues

Where do you start?

The most expressed sentiment during our conversation was where does one start, especially when it comes to presenting and showcasing music. Although some artists noted that things are now easier due to the availability of streaming platforms for releasing music and social media for promotion, others felt something was missing. A participant noted that releasing music and it being available on a streaming platform doesn’t equate to anything if one doesn’t have a marketing strategy or connections in the media to amplify it. Another mentioned that they feel like they have everything ready

including a network of people but are struggling with presenting and showcasing what they've made.

“For those of us that are creating the art and spending time developing our craft, the issue is, how do I reach an audience? Where is the audience? Who lets me get in contact with an audience?”.

Other participants mentioned challenges with getting people to show up for their shows, gigs, and events. This led to a discussion about self-management, the many hats that artists wear from performer, to promoter, to booking agent, and the burnout they experience from working odd hours while also juggling day-jobs. They highlighted a need for support with management, booking agents and accessing promotional platforms.

Others noted that as they are at the beginning of their careers, they need mentorship from people who have experience in the industry as they currently lack understanding of how the New Zealand music industry operates.

How to plug into machine

Most participants felt there was a 'cheat code' or 'manual' that everyone else had access to apart from artists and music professionals from minoritized backgrounds. These 'manuals' related to showcasing, industry events and accessing funding and financial support. One participant used the analog of being a puzzle piece trying to figure out how to fit into the bigger machine.

“It seems like there is a foreign secret code when it comes to [accessing] New Zealand music industry knowledge”.

For some of the participants that had experience prior to migration, their entrance into the music industry was due to social media as opposed to engagement with the local scene. They have found that audiences in their countries of origin are the ones that amplify their work. While maintaining a relationship with those audiences is important, they have found themselves in a unique position of having to start again without local experience, knowledge, or connections. They highlighted a need for support networks or webinars like the one hosted with music industry professionals to make connections with

the local industry and to gain an understanding of the support that is available to them.

Other challenges that were mentioned in relation to 'plugging' into the machine were practices like meeting for drinks or after hours that are normalized, which might not be culturally appropriate. For instance, if artists or their managers are expected to have drinks with industry professionals, what does that mean for women in the industry and for those from ethnic minorities who have different customary practices for engagement.

In terms of financial support, participants mentioned needing support with how they can work with limited funds. From how to invest into their music career to how they can utilize the resources they have effectively. Other participants had questions relating to music funding, including being unsure of what the criteria is and unclear on the level of quality of music required to get approved. This led to a conversation about the inaccessibility of some funding applications including the language that is used. One participant mentioned that while there is an increase in artists of African descent receiving funding, they have noticed a pattern of the same people accessing funds.

“We come from a continent that represents 54 countries, one person cannot and does not have the capacity to be representative of the community. Nonetheless it's all first steps towards more inclusivity and representation in the New Zealand music industry”.

The conversation regarding financial support highlighted the need for funding categories or grants that are specifically for creatives, artists, and music professionals of African descent.

Access to spaces and venues

Although there are some spaces for people of African descent to gather, event producers noted that they have difficulty accessing spaces and venues. They've found that venues are hesitant to host events that cater to a predominantly African audience. This was confirmed by some participants who are live performers, who said that discriminatory practices also posed a challenge to them accessing performance spaces. Coupled with not necessarily knowing about industry events or how to

access them, this limits their opportunities not only to perform but to network.

In some instances where artists have been invited to engage with the industry, they have mentioned it's felt like their presence was a last-minute addition.

This ranges from being booked last minute for shows with no adequate time for preparation or promotion to being ignored at industry events. One participant stated that at industry events it seems like the industry folk have no time for minoritized communities and it felt like some of the interactions are dismissive. This highlighted the need for culturally sensitive support networks, platforms or events that can connect artists and music professionals to the industry.

WAY FORWARD

Although some of the gaps identified aren't necessarily unique to artists and music professionals of African descent, from the conversation we had we have the following recommendations:

- We recommend that industry bodies and music industry professionals engage in training that will begin to help them understand intersectionality. Training will build their capacity and capability to support their engagement with not just artists and musical professionals of African descent, but with creatives from minoritized communities. Training will also attend to minimising the cultural insensitivity that was highlighted in our conversations.
- We recommend that there be investment into support networks and spaces for artists and music professionals of African descent to connect with other people of African descent within the industry, as well as the wider local music community. As noted throughout the report, there are limited spaces for this community to showcase or network. In addition to support networks, we also recommend resources such as the webinar and other workshops that focus on the operational aspect of the music business i.e accounting.
- We recommend that there be creation of a funding category or resources designed specifically for the African creative community.

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