

# The state of play in South Africa

By [Martin Myers](#)

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The current local music industry reality is riddled with flu-like symptoms; not life-threatening, but committed, passionate specialists are in dire need of returning it to good health.



Image supplied: Martin Myers

The output of music is non-stop, and we all know streaming helps discovery, but we have foundational problems to remedy first.

The artists' remuneration structure needs to change so that creators get their fair share. This is not only a local challenge but an international one.

## Come to the party

The likes of Apple Music need to be transparent and engage with creatives in South Africa at appropriate thought-leadership, industry-focused conferences to empower artists to use the tools available on these streaming apps to the collective benefit of all invested in its ecosystem.

That system, in turn, needs to promote collaboration and support actively, and yet all too often business seems to run on

one set of rules designed to benefit the platform first and foremost.

Remember, creatives are its lifeblood, and yet get shown the door when challenging its host around royalty returns and marketing support. This needs to stop.

The same applies to the collection agencies; Sampa, Capasso, Samro and Risa. The South African Music Awards (Samas) remain in perpetual disarray - one just needs to reflect on 2022's well-documented shambolic delivery.

And yet, it remains unchallenged and unaccountable to its constituency. All these agencies collect money on behalf of artists. When artists apply for funding or assistance, they invariably get the run-around and a standard cut-and-paste reply, with no concrete empirical answers to their rejections of applications. Sampra is notorious in this regard.

## **Live is on legacy-driven life support**

Live music venues are closing fast. Braamfontein's once-popular Leano (formally The Orbit) shut its doors only last week. The Cape Town Jazz Festival moved to 2024 due to a myriad of excuses that do not bode well at all.

Major global stars are not touring SA in a hurry due to the weak rand. Think the likes of Taylor Swift, Adam Lambert and Queen, The Rolling Stones, Bruno Mars, et al.

South Africa has dialled back to the 1980s, and early 90s, when all we saw were legacy acts only invested in escaping a northern hemisphere winter. It's 2023, and current international shows are thin on the ground. Ronan Keating in March and UB40 featuring Ali Campbell are just two in a myriad of examples.

## **The flip sides**

Radio, both terrestrial and streaming, has impressive figures, and SA music is supported big time.

One only needs to chat with Jarrod Aston from Radio Monitor to see what is happening with accurate data delivery. Radio Monitor is a vital tool for artists to track airplay, and any act releasing music should invest in the system to track their airplay.

SA's biggest song of last year - Q-Mark & TpZee feat. Afriikan Papi - *Paris*, had 6157 spins and 656.5m impacts from September 2021.

It's important to note that KO feat. Young Stunna and Blxckie were in second place, despite only being released in August 2022, 11 months after the number one song.

It remained at this position for 20 consecutive weeks and is the first ever song to do that, local or international.

The second most consecutive number one was Zakes Bantwini's *Osama* with 11 weeks.

Here are the Top 10 biggest radio stations by listenership as of March 2022:

- Ukhozi FM
- Umhlobo Wenene
- Metro FM
- Motsweding
- Gagasi FM
- Lesedi FM
- 947
- 5FM

- YFM
- Jacaranda

## Future-focused

Music discovery is fundamental and traditional radio is on the decline due to outdated curation strategies not informed by the audiences it aims to appeal to.

So, where do fans find new SA music? The playlists of most stations have very little variety – the same songs in a different order, all going for the same, highly competitive market.

City by-laws for music needs to become easier to navigate so that artists can create events.

For example, on 21 May 2021 during Covid restrictions, an event was delivered by an independent promotor in Cape Town. That single show had five artists and created over 39 paying job opportunities on the night. The creative economy brings a six-time multiplier effect to the greater economy.

Artists also need to have more skin in the game by supporting each other much more, especially when doing live shows to help create that 'wow' factor that makes you want to attend the live event.

## Onward and forever upward

The economy is tough, the recovery is still ongoing, and loadshedding does not make events more uncomplicated.

These are the cold hard facts we need to negotiate, so build each other up and respect the paying fans. Take ownership and responsibility for your patch; I believe there will be a bumper harvest if we all play along.

## ABOUT MARTIN MYERS

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