

## Music Beyond Entertainment: Changing The Mind-Set Of Kenyan Artists

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### Abstract

This paper takes analytical, descriptive and practical approach to unveil some new musical perspectives and useful strategies for peace and social change engagements by musicians in Kenya. While it is obvious that music entertains, it is not obvious that many of our musicians are well positioned to effectively use music to bring about peace and social change as it is sometimes desired. This paper therefore, proposes (a) Singing and Leadership (b) Percussion for Inclusion (c) Nonviolence (d) the Creative Process in Peace-building (e) Motive for Motion (f) Song-writing (g) Storytelling and Project Presentation (h) Trauma and Music (i) Workshop Leadership (j) Drum Circles (k) the Musical Playground (l) Composing Communities as critical areas our musicians should be enlightened to be able to effectively contribute to the peace and social change initiatives in the society. The paper is a reflection of my personal experience during the infamous 2007/08 post-election violence in Kenya as a composer and performer, and how my training in advanced community music leadership has impacted my creativity particularly in the use of the power of music to connect communities and to bring about some social change.

**Keywords:** Creativity, Drum circles, Lyrics, Nonviolence, Social change, Storytelling

### Introduction

The ever-increasing engagement in reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts by musicians in Kenya through the National Unity, Integration and Social Cohesion initiatives since the infamous 2007/2008 post-election in Kenya is quite commendable. However, there is need to empower the musicians more on how to strategically and tactically use the power of music to connect communities and influence the desired positive social change. While it is true that music played a crucial role in the process of peacebuilding and reconciliation in the case of Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence (Njuru, 2017, p.1), observation shows that the majority of musicians engaged in the peace and social change initiatives in Kenya are perceived more as entertainers rather than peacemakers because of lack of proper training in this field to diversify their musical engagements beyond entertainment.

In this paper, I explore the possibilities of musicians becoming more resourceful in peace and social change initiatives in Kenya through community music leadership training particularly on how music is used in different contexts as a medium for self-representation, as political testimony, and as a catalyst for social change. This paper begins with an exploration of the concept of peace and social change in the existing literature. First, I argue that the institutes of peacebuilding and conflict management studies in Kenya should incorporate music education in their curriculum and the NGOs find a way to train musicians in this context for effective service provision.



I then examine the capacity building model for peace and social change as provided by the Musicians without Borders in the Netherlands and relate it to the experience I had in 2007/2008 as a musician during the post- election violence in Kenya. Based on the data collected, I find that:

- a) Music can be an alternative form of expression for taking part in peace and social change initiatives.
- b) Music may be used as a form of non-violent dialogue, giving musicians and the community another way to express themselves and even teaching alternative modes of addressing conflict (Pruitt, 2011, p.81)
- c) Capacity building in Community Musical Leadership may improve the ability of Kenyan musicians to engage more effectively in the ongoing national unity, integration and social cohesion programme
- d) Finally, capacity building programme can broaden the musicians' worldview of vast opportunities for community service and socio-economic growth.

After presenting these key findings, I discuss challenges and limitations to the use of music as a tool for bridging divides, connecting communities and healing the wounds of war in the Kenyan scenario.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Much has been said about the power of music to bridge divides, connect communities and heal the wounds of the post-election violence of 2007/2008 and the recent political upheavals in Kenya in which thousands died or were internally displaced and a huge amount of property destroyed. What perhaps has not been discussed much is how musicians in Kenya can be empowered and encouraged to incorporate conflict prevention, peace-making and reconciliation into their work as peacemakers not merely as entertainers of the political elite whose decisions and actions tend to disregard the wishes of the majority of Kenyans in many instances. There is need to train the musicians in community music leadership particularly in peace building and conflict management. The problem is that whereas there are many institutions offering full or short courses in peace building and conflict management in Kenya, there seems to be none that works with the departments of music in the various institutions of higher learning to train musicians in this important unit. Everybody seems to think only in terms of Music Therapy which again is not commonly taught in Kenya. This paper points out certain aspects of training that would enable the musicians to effectively serve as peacemakers or rather as agents of national unity, integration and social cohesion regardless of whether they meet the requisite academic qualifications for study at the university or not.

### **Objectives of this paper**

This paper seeks:

- a) To encourage musicians to use the power of music to bridge divides, connect communities, and heal the wounds of war.
- b) To advocate for training of musicians in Kenya to incorporate conflict prevention, peace-making and reconciliation into their work as part of the national unity, integration and social cohesion network.



- c) To inspire more people in Kenya to engage as peacemakers and use music beyond entertainment to transform lives
- d) To point out areas for further study

## **Literature Review**

### ***Music and Peace***

As an art, music can also be an important tool for contributing to campaigns, protests, and other activism in non-violent ways (Branagan, 2003). This is line with the philosophy of Musicians without Borders by including music, can make a significant contribution to non-violent political engagement and expression by using innovation and engaging audiences in a way that enables movements to quickly spread far and wide. Music may also help by giving people the sense of the good that can come from working well together, trusting and supporting one another in reaching a goal (Pruitt, 2011). Slachmujlder (2005) likewise proposes that music can: promote personal healing and facilitate the restoration of relationships through allowing expression in a non-threatening manner. This signifies potential for cultivating positive peace in which everyone can participate.

### ***Music and Social Change***

The power of music as a platform for social change is undeniable. As deep structural and technological changes in society have reshaped livelihoods, music has been the ‘soundtrack’ for many of these changes (Moisala&Diamond, 2000).

Social change is the transformation of culture and social organisation/structure over time. In the modern world, we are aware that society is never static, and that social, political, economic and cultural changes occur constantly. There are a whole range of classic theories and research methods available within sociology for the study of social change. However, there is very little on what how the musicians should empower and reposition themselves as agents of social change especially in Kenya.

### ***Peace and Social Change in the context on the 2007/2008 Post – election Violence***

One of the major challenges we continue to face at the close of the twentieth century is the achievement of genuine reconciliation and lasting world peace. In the past, the effects of war were limited, but today our potential for destruction is beyond imagination. In many parts of the world, local and regional conflicts are causing misery to millions, and have potentially far-reaching global consequences (Henderson, 1994). Kenya, especially during the political crisis in 2007/2008 has not been an exception to the above phenomenon.

The country has suffered the effects such as divided and polarized society along ethnic and regional identities as opposed to shared national identities, common values and aspirations; exclusion and marginalization of certain sections of the society from state governance and economic development especially ethnic minorities, women and youth; slow economic growth and opportunities for meaningful employment of large sections of the population especially the youth; proliferation of armed gangs and militia every election year (Constansia Mumma–Martinon, 2012, p.30).

Although many music scholars and researchers agree that music played a crucial role in the process of peacebuilding and reconciliation in the case of Kenya’s 2007/2008 post-



election violence, there is very little reported on how the composers, arrangers, performers, producers, promoters of such music were empowered to effectively use their art for peacebuilding and conflict management.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the Musicians without Borders' concept of capacity building for peace and social change where they use the power of music to bridge divides, connect communities and heal the wounds of war in many parts of the world including Rwanda, Southern Sudan, Kosovo, Palestine etc.

#### ***Nonviolence and nonviolence communication***

Train the Kenyan musicians the philosophy of nonviolence and nonviolent communication so that through their musical actions they can help the rest of the community understand that through nonviolence courage displaces fear; love transforms hate; acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. With such training, the composers with craft and package songs that will strategically and tactically highlight the factors such as (a) poverty which is largely manifested through unemployment, homelessness, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, infant mortality, slums etc. (b) Racism or tribalism evidenced through prejudice, ethnic conflict, sexism, colonialism, ageism, discrimination against disabled groups, stereotypes etc. (c) Militarism in form of war, imperialism, domestic violence, rape, terrorism, human trafficking, media violence, drugs, child abuse, violent crime and so on.

Help the musicians seeking to engage in peace and social change initiatives on how to package song messages in line with the six principles of nonviolence as described in Dr. Martin Luther King's book, *Strides toward Freedom*.

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. Musicians should engage in a manner that encourages people to spiritually, mentally and emotionally resist evil fearlessly without being violent at all.
2. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding. The songs and related activities should convey messages that purpose to redeem and reconcile the people and make them feel part of the beloved community;
3. Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people. The songs and related activities messages should highlight the evil being fought instead of profiling a particular community as the perceived evildoers
4. Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform. The songs and related activities should help the victims to accept suffering without retaliation. This is indeed difficult but if approached well can make people understand that unearned suffering is redemptive and has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities.
5. Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate. The songs and related activities should help people to resist violence of the spirit as well as the body. Nonviolent love is spontaneous, unmotivated, unselfish and creative.
6. Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice. The songs and related activities should have deep faith that justice will eventually win. Nonviolence believes that God is a God of justice.



Encourage the Kenyan musicians to research to understand and articulate the issues, problems or injustice facing a person, community, or institution. They should always apply the appropriate nonviolent communication when necessary.

### ***Psychological First Aid***

It is necessary for the musicians that seek to work with people affected by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event to be introduced to the Psychological first aid (basic principles of support to promote natural recovery). This will help them to understand how to help the victims feel safe and connected to others.

It is necessary for the musicians that seek to work with people affected by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event to be introduced to the Psychological first aid (basic principles of support to promote natural recovery). This will enable musicians to help the victims feel safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful, access physical, emotional and social support, and make them feel able to help themselves. Psychological first aid aims to make the musicians produce and use music that aims to reduce initial distress, meet current needs, promote flexible coping and encourage adjustment.

It is important to note that Psychological first aid is:

- a) NOT debriefing
- b) NOT obtaining details of traumatic experiences and losses
- c) NOT treating
- d) NOT labelling or diagnosing
- e) NOT counselling
- f) NOT something that only professionals can do
- g) NOT something that everybody who has been affected by an emergency will need.

### ***Singing and Leadership***

Guide the musicians on how to strategical and tactically involve the participants or victims to sing in such a way that allows for leadership roles in turn. Let the choice of music and the singing style facilitate some reactions and connections amongst the participants such that even long after singing is over, participants can well connect with the song and with each other as one lovely group – it helps them to relive the wonderful moment. Community music-making is based on working together to create music, giving each participant the opportunity to develop his/her own musical potential within the context of a supportive group environment.

### ***Percussion for Inclusion and Drum Circles***

Musicians Seeking to lead drum circles and percussion for inclusion as a tool for bridging divides, connecting communities and healing the sounds of war should be trained or guided to familiar with three overarching features of the drumming intervention in the context of this discussion as outlined by Perkins,(2016, p. 11).

- a) The specific features of drumming, including drumming as a form of non-verbal communication, as a connection with life through rhythm, and as a grounding experience that both generates and liberates energy;





- b) The specific features of the group, including the group as a space of connection in and through the rhythmic features of the drumming, as well as facilitating feelings of belonging, acceptance, safety and care, and new social interactions;
- c) The specific features of the learning, including learning as an inclusive activity in which the concept of mistakes is dissolved and in which there is musical freedom, supported by an embodied learning process expedited by the musical facilitator.

A drum circle is any group of people playing (usually) hand-drums and percussion in a circle. They are distinct from a drumming group or troupe in that the drum circle is an end in itself rather than preparation for a performance.

### **Group Song-writing**

Song-writing with a partner or in a group can be a lot of fun. But what if the creative juices aren't flowing? Here are ten exercises you can do with your bandmates or fellow songwriters to help you get ideas rolling and creativity pumping (David, 2018)

- a) *Assign roles*: Sometimes it really can help your creativity to restrict your responsibilities. Try assigning specific roles. If you're working as a pair, have one person write the melody, while the other writes the lyrics. Some of the greatest songs in history were written this way
- b) *Flip it*: If you frequently assign roles like above, you may find that your primary task in collaborations has become just writing music, or just writing lyrics. But if you're ever stuck, try flipping everything upside-down, and swapping roles with your partner. You'll be surprised at the great ideas the two of you may come up with given your new responsibilities.
- c) *Slice it up*: Similar to the above, try dividing the task between the writers into sections. You could write a verse, and someone else could write the chorus. Or you could even subdivide the song into smaller chunks, going line by line. Letting someone else continue your thought and finish your musical sentence may lead to some interesting ideas
- d) *Object writing together*: Hopefully, by now, you've tried object writing. But did you know that you can do object writing in a group as well? Just like with the original exercise, set a timer and pick a word for the group, then start writing using sensory language for 10 minutes. Once the timer is up, take turns to read out loud what each of you wrote. See if you can find some inspiring song ideas
- e) *Bags*: Sometimes physical objects can help spark stories and ideas. Dump everything you have in your backpack or purse on a table and see the conversations and stories that the different objects bring forth. These tissues, where have they been with you? Have they helped you through happy and sad times? How about that pen? What has it written? What stories has it told? Write a song about that
- f) *Crumpled bits of paper*: This one is from Andrea Stolpe (songwriter and instructor who had had songs recorded by such artists as Faith Hill, Julianne Hough, Daniel Lee Martin, Jimmy Wayne). The concept behind this exercise is to challenge you with a narrative that isn't your own. Have each person grab a piece of paper. Set the timer for 10 minutes and write down one thing that you've wanted to tell someone for a long time but have been too afraid to say. Get descriptive, but try to stay anonymous. Don't use names or specific references that would identify you or the person on the receiving end of the conversation. When the timer goes off, have everyone crumple up their papers and throw them into the



- middle of the room. Then each one of you will go and pick up a random one of the crumpled pieces, the goal being that each one of you will have someone else's untold story. Now write a song based on the emotions enclosed within the letter you picked.
- g) *Photos and words*: Another one that I like from Andrea Stolpe is her Photos and words exercise. First, print out a bunch of different photos, and then each write random words on small pieces of paper. Fold them all and put them in a container (or hat). Then, pull out one random photo and one random word and try to write a song about anything that this photo and word may bring up for you. If you select your own photo, you can choose to share the story behind the photo or not. Sometimes letting your co-writers create their own story around what they see can result in some very interesting ideas. Also, try to incorporate the random word in the song lyrics.
- h) *Rewriting reimagined*: This one is a particularly fun one. First you'll need to pick an existing song that everyone knows. This could be something as famous and standard as "Amazing Grace." Your job as a team is to first write new lyrics to the melody of Amazing Grace. They can be about absolutely anything you want. In fact, the further from the original you can get the better. You want to match the original melody's rhythm and rhyme scheme as much as possible. So count the syllables in each line of the original melody and match that. Analyse the original rhyme scheme and follow it in your new lyrics. You should be able to sing these new lyrics to the original melody without any hiccups. Once you're done with this part, strip away the original melody, and what you're left with is your new lyrics. Now write a brand new melody to these lyrics. Change chords, keys, and the tempo however you please. Remember, the further from the original the better. After you complete this double rewrite, you'll end up with a brand new song that has a new lyric and a new melody that sounds nothing like Amazing Grace (or whatever song you were writing from)
- i) *Multiple melodies*: On occasion, you will want to start writing your song melody first. One exercise worth trying is to have someone choose an eight-bar chord progression. Next, go around giving each songwriter a chance to sing own melody on top of that chord progression. You can just sing to dummy lyrics (temporary lyrics that are about nothing, like Omelets, waffles, baby greens, give me very vivid dreams) or on Na-na-na. Each one of you will probably sing something different and unique. With each turn, you can either sing a new melody or build on something someone else has sung. Eventually one of you may stumble on the melody that makes everyone go "ooh." Work off of that for the remainder of the song.
- j) *Homemade Top-lining*: Top-lining is how almost all modern pop and R&B songs are written. It consists of writing a song (melody and lyrics) on top of a fully produced instrumental track. Thus the term top lining—writing melodic lines on top.

If utilized well, this approach to group Song-writing will generate some sense of unity, integration and social cohesion between or amongst the participants regardless of their diversity.

### ***Storytelling Presentation Techniques***

Storytelling in presentations is a powerful way to grab attention, hold attention, and to change beliefs because it works in the same way that it does in our favourite books and movies:

- a) Stories build suspense by introducing a hero, a challenge, a journey, and finally, a resolution that delivers the hero into an improved reality. (Didn't we all read all 7 books in



the *Harry Potter* series because we had to see Harry and his cohorts overcome the evil of Voldemort?)

- b) Stories cause chemical, physical, and emotional responses in listeners. When stories make people feel things like trust or kindness, the brain releases oxytocin, which motivates cooperation by enhancing empathy. This means that stories make people more likely to adopt new ideas and act based on those ideas

Train the musicians the storytelling presentation technique for use in song writing or when sharing critical messages with the affected community.

### ***Use of music with Special Needs Population***

Musicians seeking to work with special needs population should be trained to understand that combining music with movements doesn't just get the body moving. It engages several areas of the brain and benefits people with disabilities in other great ways as well. A recent study indicates that participating in musical experiences can have a favourable impact on speech and communication skills and in the social, emotional, behavioural, and motor development of children on the autism spectrum as well as children with other developmental disabilities (Srinivasan & Bhat, pp.5, 15).

Some critical awareness on the part of the musicians will enable them select and use music and movement activities that offer participants the opportunity to practice speech and communication skills, make eye contact with others, and socialize thus enhancing inclusion and a sense of belonging.

### ***The Musical Playground***

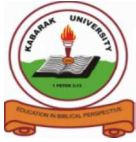
During the 2007/2008 post-election violence, most of the musicians that visited the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in their camps sang for the victims and donated clothing and foodstuff. Whereas this was a great initiative and quite an effort towards taking care of the IDPs, children were not given special musical activities. Where they were, the content was more suitable for the adults in terms of the message and musical activities.

There is need to train the musicians on how to plan and execute the musical playground for children affected by conflict and traumatic experiences. This will enable them give the children the opportunity to explore, discover, experience, learn and develop imagination. Well informed musicians would not just focus on performing their music for socio-political or socio-economic gains, but would focus more reaching out to the victims of war or other form of violence. The Playgrounds are typically designed for the active kids who are jumping, running, and climbing which in essence discriminate against kids of other abilities. A well informed musician would incorporate musical activities for everybody. Music is success-oriented; people of all abilities can participate.

### ***Conclusion***

This paper has highlighted the challenges of engaging artists in peace and social change initiatives without first ensuring that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills for the same. It is hoped that this article will encourage the artists seeking to involve themselves in different programmes combining music and social change to deepen their leadership skills while exploring concepts related to creativity, improvisation and nonviolence. Through proper training, the artists will be able to use music as a tool for inclusion and bridging the divides within the various community settings; gain a clear understanding of the concept of





nonviolence and be able to carry out this philosophy in practical activities; be able to adapt pedagogical and didactic forms of working that are based on creating a safe environment; lead a training workshop for fellow musicians in need of similar empowerment.

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