



SONIC NUANCES *By Siya Makuzeni*

Module 2: Pre - Task

Singer and trombonist, Siya Makuzeni is a band leader, collaborator, composer, arranger and lover of music. She performs widely in cross-over bands and in styles ranging from jazz to electronic and groove. Siya started off with classical and baroque music and then learnt jazz at high school. She has always been interested in the different facets of music, not only performance but also what it means and entails to make music and be a musician. She is currently at the forefront of the surge of freshness on the South African music scene.

Having an open mind

Siya has a real passion for music. And ever since she discovered that music was something she was going to do as a profession, she began to realise that there is a huge amount of space for expression. From early on she began to explore the many different musical styles and genres.

Having an open mind starts with listening to a wide variety of music. Siya has always loved all sorts of different genres. She imagine a middle ground where different influences can be drawn from and different ideas fused to create a multi-layered music. She works with fusing and melding genres. Jazz as a genre is quite diverse all over the world. Siya

has fused jazz with new soul, hop hop or classical; or electronic and drum and base and melded it with rock music. This complete love for melding genres and musical influences has fed into the imagination of the musician.

Having an open mind is really expanded through collaboration and interacting across styles and with different musicians. This becomes a reference point for gauging your knowledge against other styles. This influences the way you hear and write music and get into that free space where your own unique voice and typical sound can come out.

As Siya says, “There is so much music when people are less scared to be themselves.” How do we take that risk, take that leap of faith into the unknown? How do we prepare ourselves for the great surprise of creating something new? By knowing we are supported.

Many people would assume a voice must sound ethereal and sweet, but what about a voice that is growling, bending notes, singing like a sea-gull or doing any number of strange or unexpected sounds? Through experimentation and the freedom to be herself, Siya began to explore the possibilities of finding her own unique voice.

There are only certain things you and only you can do with you voice that nobody else can do. There is no better training ground than experimentation and the freedom to experiment. This is the nurturing space in which to grow. Some people call this the deep-end and say the only way to learn to swim is just jump right in. So, experimentation is therefore not a comfortable space and never will be. However, it is a rewarding space. When you throw yourself right in to the deep end, you will see which way the current flows. Go with it and see where it takes you. This is what the great musicians call learning whilst playing, learning on stage or learning on the job.

Vocals is an instrument

Siya Makuzeni says there is really no other vocalist like Ella Fitzgerald. She uses her voice as an instrument, delving deep into the music and showing what else is possible with vocals?

Siya is both a vocalist and a trombone player. Having both instruments to draw on definitely affects the way she improvises and composes, adding a lyrical approach and more dynamic tone projection to her output. And as she says, "I definitely recommend all vocalists to pick up another instrument."

Any kind of instrument in your periphery is going to be helpful in learning composition, understanding harmony and arrangement. As a vocalist who plays another musical instrument you can widen your application of harmonic logic.

Now answer these questions

1. What is your voice capable of doing? Where are your strengths and what are the points you need to improve upon? What do you like doing with your voice?
2. Cross-over is a term describing many different elements coming together to make one coherent musical expression. What musical elements would you ultimately like to choose in creating a unique expression that fills you with excitement?
3. What are the different nuances that people will be able to pick up from your vocal capabilities? What are the compositional elements in your music that an audience will be able to pick up on as unique? And how would you be able to convey these elements in an arrangement?
4. For Siya using the voice as an instrument has taken her more into the avant-garde musical space where there is freedom to be innovative and use different sound effects in the musical approach, where the approach to a vocal solo is no longer in being lyrical and having a phrase that goes over the entire bar, but can take on a percussive element. Imagine using your voice as a drum!

Now, find a song you love and improvise over the rhythm of the song:
What amazing things can you do on top of this to stretch the boundary of
the vocal timbre and tonal basis?



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