

Pre-task: Creative African music

Mark Fransman grew up in a church in Hanover Park. His mother was a choir master in the church at the time and his father a preacher. That is where he learnt his sense of music, harmony, singing and cultural gospel music, like Kaapse Afrikaans koortjies.

Mark is deeply immersed in the Cape Town jazz scene performing and recording as a multi-instrumentalist – guitars, vocals, saxophone and his signature instrument piano – for which he won the Old Mutual Jazz Encounters contest in 1999 and launched his career.

Mark combines many musical genres in an eclectic approach that has propelled jazz music beyond the known, beyond the chops and phraseology to the ears of non-musicians and the hearts of his community.

Mark was turned onto jazz when he first heard John Coltrane at the age of 9 years old. He went to bed with the music. And to this day he still goes to bed with the music. This is because when you sleep with music, it goes into your subconscious where it can do amazing things. The sub-conscious mind is a gateway to the super conscious mind. And that is the direction of higher vibration.

Mark's higher vibration has taken him to meet and learn from great musical mentors. Cape Town guitarist Errol Dyers was Mark's first gateway to Cape Jazz. Then he met Winston Mankunku and played with other local greats, such as Basil Coetzee, Robbie Jansen and Hotep Galeta. Mark learnt much from playing with Zim Ngqawana. Zim was more than a musician – he was an alchemist. Mark has also spent a long time playing with pianist and bow player, Hilton Schilder.

But, the single most important thing he has learnt from this remarkable musical journey is: "I learnt to listen," as he said. "The music was one thing, but when they talk that was the real thing."

The talk is the real story and it takes you to that space of personal power and the origin of their great musical careers. By listening to the stories of the giants of our music like Winston Mankunku, we come to learn the resilience of their human spirit. What is it that allowed them to overcome all adversity to become master musicians? By identifying with their experience and relating it to our own – we begin to inform our unique approach to the process of making music. And as Miles Davis said, "It is 80% attitude, 20% notes."

All these great mentor musicians have accumulated great wisdom, experience and knowledge. Mentors want to pass on their knowledge. Mentoring is a natural process of passing jewels from one generation to the next. From others we may learn, and then, when we are ready, we will teach others. Teaching is important. It is not about following the process of the teacher and relating that to your process. Teaching is about going on a journey together. Teaching involves understanding the art of learning.

However many young musicians miss out on mentoring because they don't ask. Asking is the most simple and powerful thing. Because you will get an answer. This idea that there are barriers between people is an illusion. Approaching one another should be easy.

In Mark's music we hear the compassion, improvisation and experimentation of South African jazz. We hear the crisp minor melodies and enigmatic melodies of Cape Town's influence. Mark's specific approach and style of music isn't informed by any known genres. He calls himself "A Creative African musician". A creative African musician plays highly spiritual music. This music cannot be boxed or defined. It is an open ended music that expresses freedom of being.

Now, answer the following Pre-task Questions

1. John Coltrane's composition "Love Supreme" was in reverence of the 'infinite love,' GOD or source. What a great composition does is it creates a point of connect between musicians and audiences. A great composition goes to that deeper ethereal space of connection. Have you ever felt a real connection with your audience? What do you think brought about that connection?
2. Mentorship is a key to learning in music. Have you been mentored and, if so, by whom? What did you learn? And whom would you like to be mentored by? And how will you approach them?
3. Freedom cannot be boxed in. Freedom and jazz go hand in hand. What role does freedom play in your musical process? And what do you do to increase your freedom in your music making?
4. Music can take its shape in the subconscious mind. This is why we practice musical patterns – to engrain them into our subconscious mind. Can you recognise your own subconscious mind? Are you feeding it with the music you love the most? And can you express your personal link between your subconscious and the super-conscious mind – or what some refer to as the ether?