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**The exploration of the dynamics of the South African Indie music scene  
through an auto- ethnographic account of the making and marketing of my  
debut album, *Becoming*.**

by

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

School of Arts

College of Humanities

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## **PLAGIARISM DECLARATION**

I declare that this Dissertation is my own unaided work. All citation, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was used. This thesis is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Music) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.



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Miss Tsholofelo Relebogile Mapisa

## ABSTRACT

This study of the independent music scene in South Africa is motivated by my own experiences of composing, recording, and independently marketing my debut album, *Becoming*. While my journey to becoming a musician required a long-term commitment to the development of musical skills, I found that once I had reached the point of recording my first album, I was poorly versed in marketing skills and knowledge of how to engage effectively with the Indie music scene in South Africa. This study is thus inspired by my own experience (hence the auto-ethnographic methodology) and the need to understand this particular social network, mechanism, and way of being in the world that is called the South African Indie music scene.

The methodologies used for this research include: Autoethnography, Ethnography, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis otherwise known as IPA, which I used when working with four musicians and music business practitioners who exert some influence in independent music in South Africa and who have achieved a measure of success. Their journeys provide a context for my own experiences and foreground the issues that independent artists may confront.

The aim of this research is not to find fixed answers to the dilemmas that remain prevalent in the South African Indie music market, but rather, to dissect, discuss, and explore what may happen when pursuing an independent music career. Through this research, I discovered that many of the tensions between art and commerce pertain to how we think and dichotomise the two. My findings therefore propose a merging of the two – what I present as ‘entrepreneurial artists’ in Chapter Four, to alleviate some of the tensions one may face. Through a detailed analysis of my own choices, the choices of my case studies, and the consequences of these choices, I have sought to clarify the operation of this particular aspect of the South African Music industry.

**Key terms:** *musician, entrepreneurship, autoethnographic, indie/independent*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I started this journey in 2019. Since then, we have survived a pandemic during which we suffered loss and lived in a state of uncertainty. Often, I was uncertain whether this project would come to fruition and whether it would mean anything or be valuable in any way. The person I was then and the woman I am now are different people. I suppose without realising it, I have been in the perpetual process of 'becoming' within this project that has indeed taken many different shapes and forms over the past couple of years. I would like to acknowledge here the people who held me and this project together from the beginning.

Firstly, my parents. Thank you for your patience and your belief in me. All that you both have done for me has led me here. Thank you for consistently speaking life into me and into my work. I am because you are.

To my brothers, Mazisi and Christos, you both inspire me more than you'll ever know (more than I'd like to admit), thank you for rooting for me always. To my close friends and extended family, thank you for keeping me accountable, your interest in this project and your encouragement kept me going at times when I felt like throwing in the towel. To my colleagues who were part of *Becoming* (the album) – Sanele, Sivumintando, Senzo, Nick, Menzi, thank you once more. I am thankful to have found brothers in you. A huge thank you to my colleagues and friends that were part of this research. Your perspectives helped shape the outcome of this project. I am grateful to have learned so much from you.

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Finally, to God be the glory.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Term	Definition	Source
Independent/Indie	Not belonging or affiliated to a major record company.	Oxford English Dictionary.
C.A.M.	Contemporary Art Music	Grebosz-Haring & Weichbold, 2018
D.T.M.H.	Downtown Music Hub	Recording Studio in Johannesburg
Tracking	Involves capturing sound into your DAW (digital audio workstation)	McDonough, 2022
Mixing	Adjusting and combining individual tracks into a stereo or multichannel format.	McDonough, 2022
Mastering	Final process of postproduction where your mix is processed into its final form so that it is ready for distribution, which may include transitioning and sequencing the songs.	McDonough, 2022
Streaming	A method of feeding audio/visual content to your device directly, without requiring you to download files from the internet.	Harris, 2021
Radio Plugging	The process of ensuring that your music is play listed on radio stations.	Lenake, 2020
PR	Public relations is the practice of managing and disseminating information from an individual or an organization to the public in order to influence their perception	Oxford English Dictionary.
Payola	The practice of bribing someone in return for the unofficial promotion of a product in the media.	Oxford English Dictionary.
L.S.M.	Living Standards Measure - a marketing and research tool used in South Africa to classify standard of living and disposable income.	Oxford English Dictionary.
D.I.Y.	Do-it-yourself method of building, modifying, or repairing things by oneself without the direct aid of professionals or certified experts.	Oxford English Dictionary.
Spotify, Apple Music, Soundcloud	Music streaming services/platforms	N/A
CDBaby, Tunecore, Distrokid	Digital music distribution companies (otherwise known as music aggregators)	Herstand, 2022

E.D.M.	Electronic Dance Music - broad range of percussive electronic music genres made largely for nightclubs, raves, and festivals.	Oxford English Dictionary.
<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Source</b>
A&R	Artist & Repertoire – a record label representative responsible for finding new artists for a record label or music publisher to sign.	Berklee, n.d.
Brand	An intangible business and marketing concept that helps people identify a particular company, product, or individual.	Kenton, 2022
Freelance	Self-employed and hired to work for different companies on particular assignments.	Oxford English Dictionary
Entrepreneurship	The activity of setting up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks in the hope of profit.	Oxford English Dictionary
TikTok	A social media platform	N/A
Algorithm	A compilation of rules and data that analyse user behaviour and prioritise content the platform believes the user wants to see and is most likely to engage with.	Cox, 2021
U.G.C.	User Generated Content – Any content (text, videos, images) created by people, rather than brands.	Beveridge, 2022

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# INTRODUCTION

## Begin Again

I have spent most of this day battling to find ways to begin telling or re-telling this story. A recollection of my experiences, as it were. I have read, I have prayed, I have tried to start this story in the arena in which I have placed myself as a musician, which is the South African independent music scene, and I have failed. I have failed because although the South African independent music market is my sphere of interest, it is not where the story begins. This story begins with me – a musician, a storyteller. I will tell this story from the beginning, with what motivated me, an independent artist, on my journey to my debut album, *Becoming*, which ultimately led to this study. Furthermore, I will briefly discuss my research problems and objectives which comprise a number of key questions I asked myself as I manoeuvred through tough terrain while producing my first body of work as an independent artist. I will elaborate on the research aims that underpin my research. Lastly, I will provide an overview of my dissertation structure.

I scurried downstairs to find a sealed copy of my debut album, *Becoming*, I know it is here somewhere. I find it in my mother's old bookshelf, second last shelf from the bottom and I dust it off. After reading the back and front of the jewel case, I retrieve the CD and the 6 panel CD booklet, as if almost to dismantle it, and the first question that comes to mind is 'how did I do this?' The spirit is a funny thing, very silent and knowing in how it operates, but very loud in retrospect. When I made this album, I was driven by the spirit and the desire to tell a story that had been deeply personal for as long as I can remember. I was driven by the need to both introduce myself to myself and to others in a way I had never done before. And now, in retrospect, exactly how I managed to do that seems a bit of a blur. As the child of a divorced family, I have often gone back and forth with the concept of home and family dynamics (in some ways, I still do) and I recall that this is what formed the basis of this album as I read the CD liner notes titled *Home*.

Home is my father's footsteps. I could tell his approach by the way his feet graze the ground. Home is the smell of newspapers. Home is my mother's laugh. I have never had good eyesight but I could see her smile a mile away, from halfway across the hockey field, and from the pick-up zone doors at O.R Tambo International, Terminal B. Home is the smell of Five Roses tea. Home is my nanny's soft hands. Home is the smell of steam irons

and fabric softener. She loves to iron. Home is 'soapie' hour, because even on my own I instinctively find myself on the couch with a plate of food at 8pm. Ingrained in me, as it were. Home is me, or wherever I can smile unashamed of my crooked teeth. Home was once you. And you. Or your scent. I don't know, I notice scents. Sight. Touch. See, my senses had to come alive after home suddenly fell from beneath my feet. I had to find home and learn to live in spaces unfamiliar to me. I've known this for the longest time. I suddenly had to find me outside of what I had defined as part of me. I suddenly had to build a home outside home. Still building. Still becoming.

Home is what motivated me and my artistic journey. The sights, sounds and the people I associated with home or what home should feel like, were what motivated me. Home as a physical structure no longer existed and for so long I had battled with what home was when I was constantly in-between two. Between two homes, between two addresses, between two provinces, between two individuals. What *Becoming* did was allow me to retrace my steps and to find and redefine myself. It allowed me to let go of the parts of my past over which I had no control, and to acknowledge my past for what it was while exploring my identity as a woman and as a creative being. It gave me the license to engage with myself as my own person with my own processes, fears and beliefs learning about life and love, while reflecting on who I am and my experiences as a child. There is some tension between these two individuals; myself as a child and myself as a woman (which reiterates the theme of having constantly been in-between) yet it is this very tension which I believe is an integral part of discovery and evolution, hence the title, *Becoming*. It allowed me to unfold and to meet myself through my previous life experiences and to look bravely towards whatever it is that my future holds. It allowed me to acknowledge my alteration of thought and perceptions of home and what home could be, what it could mean. *Becoming* allowed me to acknowledge that "all things are always in process of change in every respect" (Plato in Bolton, 1975:69). Through this album, I came to understand that "our experience of music - of music making and music listening - is best understood as an experience of this self-in-process" (Frith, 1996:109). Through *Becoming*, I met myself; or at least who I was at that time.

By virtue of the fact that I had independently produced my first album, I had now begun engaging with the South African independent music market as well as the recording industry of South Africa (RiSA). Briefly, independent music refers to music that has been made by an unsigned artist who is independent of any financial backing from major record labels such as Sony, Universal Music Group or Warner Music Group. In plain language, Indie music is music

that is produced by a D.I.Y<sup>1</sup> artist, or on an independent label, without the traditional resources of a major label (Iles, 2019). Similarly, Indie music (or the Indie music market) within a South African context, is music that is released by an artist who is not signed by any of the major labels which include Sony, Universal Music Group, Gallo or Warner Music Group, all of whom had been in control of the South African musical soundscape since the mid 1990s-early 2000s (Shaw, 2007).

Engaging the music 'world' as a musician and a music business practitioner simultaneously was no easy feat. I experienced what I believe was a disjuncture between the music making process (which is, for us, our natural habitat, and a sacred space) and the market (where music exists as a product intended to be consumed for profit). It is this disjuncture or disconnect that motivated me to study the independent music scene in a broader South African context.

Pertinent questions arose from my experience with the creation and the subsequent dissemination of *Becoming* into the marketplace. These questions became my research problems and objectives. My research questions address the difficulties inherent in the balancing act between producing music as a product and producing music as a work of art. Apart from the questions I asked myself regarding my own music-making processes, I also asked myself whether my music was made with a particular audience or target market in mind? Was there an aesthetic compromise in order to fit in to what is becoming an oversaturated music market? I pondered on the challenges I faced (particularly my financial challenges) and what I might do differently in future. My research asks and debates whether it is possible for an independent artist to occupy a commercial space or achieve some significant measure of financial success within the market. This led to my main research question which is:

*What does an independent artist need to take into consideration in order to reconcile aesthetic ideals and economic imperatives?*

In order to approach this question strategically, my research should be underpinned by two objectives. My primary objective is to explore the South African Indie music scene through my own experience. The secondary objective is to analyse my own experience in the context of the experiences of four other independent musicians and music business practitioners who

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<sup>1</sup> A D.I.Y artist is an independent artist who writes, records, and produces their own songs.

together cover a broad spectrum of genres and positions. The purpose of these musicians will be explained further later in this dissertation. Their perspectives help to contextualise my own experiences. Through their experiences, encounters, and challenges within the music industry, I am able to take note of whether I faced similar challenges and how these challenges were navigated.

I highlight and pay particular attention to our shared dilemmas rather than my auto-ethnographic account of *Becoming*. This will ensure that I interrogate my experiences systematically in a way that is not only about my album but will bring to the fore the broader concerns of this research such as the difficulties faced by South African Indie artists in penetrating the market. Beyond this Introduction, this dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter One: Literature Review, Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework, Research Objectives & Questions as well as Research Methodologies, Chapter Three: Becoming - The Musical Process, Chapter Four: And Now? and lastly, Chapter Five: An Imperfect Cadence.

In Chapter One, the focus is on literature that speaks to the following:

- Locating the Study: Music, the Self, and the Industry
- Music in the market – music in relation to the market and its status as a product versus its status as art.

These texts allowed me to question the relationship between being a musician and making a living out of music. In addition, they have enabled me to question my musical identity and soundscape. I am exploring who I am musically and who I am becoming and the ways in which that person exists within the South African Indie music market. This allowed me to formulate the theoretical frameworks or paradigms that underpin this project. My project is founded on the premise that:

- Music is a form of communicative praxis (Frith 1998; Frith 2007; DeNora 2000), and
  - The mechanisms through which that communication takes place are quite complex.
- This praxis is modified by commercialisation and the consequence is often a dichotomous relationship between music as art and music as product (Negus, 1997; Abbing, 2002).

Chapter One therefore includes my literature review under the subheadings 'Locating the study: Music, the Self and the industry', as well as 'Music in the Market', while Chapter Two includes a discussion of the theoretical paradigms, viewpoints and texts of other scholars regarding this research area. Lastly, I discuss my research methods which include Autoethnography, Ethnography and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis otherwise known as IPA. Ultimately, the first two chapters position the study. Chapter one, in relation to other literature that is relevant, and chapter 2 in relation to the theoretical perspectives that have influenced my research.

Chapter Three: The Musical Process – Becoming, focuses on the making of my debut album, *Becoming*, from its inception to its completion. Therefore, most of the information which informs this section is autoethnographic as it includes personal anecdotes and experiences of my music-making journey. Information was sourced from my personal journal notes, records such as invoices and quotes, video footage and audio recordings.

Chapter Four: And Now? largely focuses on the South African Indie music scene and includes insights from South African Music Business author, Jonathan Shaw. In this chapter, I discuss the experience of introducing *Becoming* into the public space including the challenges or setbacks that I faced. This chapter also reflects on my experiences and actions in the context of the experiences of the four South African musicians and music business practitioners interviewed for this research project. Chapter four constitutes in-depth discussions, analyses of the South African independent music scene, and plays a vital role in the achievement of my research aims and objectives.

Finally, Chapter Five: An Imperfect Cadence, concludes this dissertation. In this chapter, I reflect on my research and its findings. Furthermore, I reflect on being an independent musician and my experience with *Becoming* or rather, how this experience has shaped my perspectives on music making and the market. Though this chapter also exposes the limitations of this study, it also considers how such an experience might be used as the inspiration for creative strategies.

## CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Negotiating a path between the production of music that is personally appealing and the production of music for the market is not easy. As a young independent artist, the situations to be faced in relation to this path are often unavoidable. This negotiation (and indeed the purpose of this study) is a response to what is often an irreconcilable dilemma. This research is the study of relationships between music as a reflection on and of the self, music as making identity, and finally, this same music in the market – a source of income. In this chapter of my study, I will present a review of the literature that is relevant to the exploration of the South African independent music scene and the issues that will be addressed throughout this dissertation. I discuss these issues and themes under the following headings: Locating the Study: Music, the Self and the Industry, and Music in The Market. The culture that I am attempting to understand is that which I refer to as the South African Independent (or 'Indie') Music scene. Globally, the Indie music scene has identifiable criteria which may be applied to a particular location. Thus, I am exploring the Indie music scene as a community of musicians and their audiences who enjoy music that is not bound by the imperatives of mainstream labels. Independent musicians are those not signed to a label.

## Locating the Study: Music, the Self and the Industry

The core of this study is autoethnographic in that it is predicated on my personal accounts and experiences as an independent artist and thus offers an autoethnographic analysis of the South African Indie music scene. My study documents and analyses the making and marketing of my first album, *Becoming*.

*The Handbook of Autoethnography* (Adams, Holman-Jones & Ellis, 2016) is a collective project by leaders in ethnographic research around the world. This book is filled with the personal accounts and reflections of each author, and how they used their experiences in order to challenge and derive meaning from their environments. The inquiries reflect on what it is to be human (focusing on specific contexts) and how to better this human-ness or human experience amid adversity. The book is centred around storytelling and narration, and the notion of transformation through such narratives. It grounds my research in autoethnography where experiential knowledge opens a path to broader contexts. Carolyn Ellis refers to autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:1).

Furthermore, Ellis explains that autoethnography is “not simply a way of knowing about the world [but] it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively” (Ellis, 2016:10). This study is a conscious reflection of my actions, challenges, and feelings throughout the process of making and marketing my first album.

This method of writing employs the narrative elements of autobiography and the scientific elements of ethnography to present information or an experience that is culturally relevant. Therefore, autoethnography may be described as process and product (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). It can also be understood as both a methodology and a theory. As mentioned, it is a theory in the sense that it favours experiential knowledge as a means through which broader phenomena can be understood, and a methodology in that it requires that one treats oneself as the subject of study. Therefore, autoethnography relates to my project as a method of research which is both process and product. My project is founded on a personal narrative, the processes and experiences involved in creating my debut album. In addition, my album is autoethnographic in itself as my musical intentions were to express my identity through my experiences. Through this study, I examine my artistic processes as well as share my



experiences of how creating my first body of work changed me and altered my perception of music-making and the creative industry.

I focus on my experiences as a young recording artist facing challenges bridging what I initially perceived as two distinctly different worlds, that is, the artistic space and the commercial space. Later on in the research process, I came to realize that there is a very complex interactive relationship between music as art and music as a product. The issue of this dichotomy between music or the artistic space and commerce weaves its way throughout the thesis. It is addressed and problematized as I proceed.

In "The Role of Risk Taking in Songwriting Success", Angelo Marade, Jeffrey Gibbons and Thomas Brinthaup highlight the risks and challenges artists may face when pursuing a career in music, including rejection. The author's intentions in this article are expressed as follows, "we show that heightened creativity is associated with a willingness to express novel ideas as well as a willingness to repeatedly confront and adapt to the possibility of failure" (Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaup, 2007:125). These ideas resonate with the emotional hurdles or rather, challenges, I encountered during the process of releasing my music in the marketplace.

When music is released for consumption, it will be subject to criticism by a variety of sources including “peers of the trade, music critics, disc jockeys, and the general public” (Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaup, 2007:125). It is a process that can be difficult for most songwriters since creativity is a subjective experience in the sense that what may appeal to one person may not appeal to the next. The authors expand on the notion of creativity by providing the following definitions:

- Creativity is a process that includes sensing missing factors in a novel product as well as forming hypotheses that must be tested and re-tested (Torrance, 1965 in Marade, 2007).
- The ability to produce new techniques or new artistic expressions (Goldenson, 1970 in Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaup, 2007).
- A system that is comprised of three elements: an individual, a procedure, and a new product (Rothenberg & Hausman, 1976 in Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaup, 2007).
- The shaping of a new product that becomes accepted in a specific culture (Gardner, 1993 in Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaup, 2007).

For the purpose of this literature review, I would like to foreground the third definition of creativity as stated by Albert Rothenberg and Carl Hausman. This explanation leads us to the realisation that creativity in itself involves risk-taking because it involves “embracing the unknown and deviating from norms” (Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaup, 2007:126). Furthermore, this text indicates that most successful songwriters exhibit high-risk cognitive styles. This is reiterated here:

Therefore, the inventive, clever, and artistic work of high-risk individuals has the potential to fail, yet it is also more likely to be highly regarded than the work of low-risk individuals. Taken together, this insinuates that taking risks and encountering failure in expressing their novel ideas freely comes with the territory for truly creative individuals (Marade et al, 2007:126). Furthermore, it is suggested that “in addition to being more likely to succeed, individuals with high-risk cognitive styles are also more likely to deviate from current trends and start new trends” (Guastello 1998 in Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaup, 2007:132).

Marade acknowledges and highlights the risks that songwriters ought to consider when pursuing a career in song writing and provides a myriad of case studies of songwriters who were rejected several times by peers, record label executives, and the public before achieving commercial success. One to note is Bob Dylan, who was rejected by three record companies.

Despite this, he continued to write and perform songs and eventually was signed to Columbia Records, which was the largest record company in America at the time. Dylan's innovation was most obvious in his lyrics and how he presented them in song. Because of this, he was believed to have "changed music in the 1960s by bringing poetic lyrics to popular song" (Sounes in Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaupt, 2007:131).

The real-life accounts and case studies covered in this article are the kinds of success stories I aspire to as an independent artist. They highlight the fact that not only is actual song writing a process but so is success – depending on how one perceives success. It is these processes that are discussed and interrogated in this project. In addition, Marade points out how these case studies displayed similar patterns, these patterns "included taking risks in the song writing process, in the marketing of one's song(s), and in putting up one's products for public evaluation. Not only did these successful songwriters take risks, but they also did so with persistence, stubbornness, preparedness, and high self-efficacy concerning their creative abilities" (Marade, Gibbons & Brinthaupt, 2007:141-142). All of which, I have discovered, are essential character traits for performing artists seeking a place in the market. This returns us to the notion of success. What is success in the creative industry, more specifically, the South African independent music market and how do we define and go about pursuing it? A more important question to ask would be, how do we make success tangible? What are the steps and processes we need to undertake to achieve success in what is a non-conventional career path?

In "Re-imagining Career Clarity in Music Professions, Defining Success in Boundaryless Music Performance Careers", Drew Xavier Coles attempts to re-imagine the meaning of the concept of success and aims to "state a case for the conceptualization and analysis of musical career success using existing models of success from other fields" (Coles, 2018:3). He explores the notion of success and what it means in music and other professions within the arts. He discusses the ways in which success can be subjectively viewed and defined within the arts as a 'boundary-less' career path, as opposed to more traditional career paths where success is seen through a more objective lens. Often, music students graduate from universities and other institutions of higher education yet find themselves without a clear idea as to what to do and how to go about starting their career. This is contrary to the experiences of graduates who have chosen more conventional career paths such as finance or law.

He notes that there are many obstacles that hinder the ability to define success in the arts. These obstacles include the following:

1. A vast differentiation between the roles of music performers within one area of practice i.e.: singer–songwriter, a Broadway singer, a wedding band singer all identify as singers but have different responsibilities (Coles 2018:2).
2. Multidimensionality/Versatility. Diogo Pinheiro & Timothy Dowd referred to this concept as “generalism” in the professional world of music and described it as the ability to be conversant in a number of genres and/or the ability to be able to play multiple instruments well (Pinheiro & Dowd, 2009) in Coles 2018:2).
3. Cross-employability. David Throsby & Anita Zednik (2010) demonstrated that those employed in the music industries are often also employed in other sectors (Hughes, Keith, Morrow, Evans, & Crowdy, 2013 in Coles 2018:2).

Differentiation, multidimensionality/versatility, and cross-employability have resulted in art careers (and their processes) being boundary-less and consequently, definitions of what it means to be successful in these art careers are, by the same measure, boundary-less. As a result, it is more important to define success subjectively. Coles reiterates this when he says: “This shift puts more emphasis on subjective measures of success that typically include types of satisfaction and makes employees more concerned with the self-actualization of their own needs rather than organizational goals or predetermined objectives” (Coles 2018:1).

In recent years, careers have taken different shapes from those in the past and because of this fluidity, arts graduates have needed to use their talents in different outlets in order to make a living while they make art (Coles 2018). In this profession, the past is not necessarily a role-model for the present. The dilemma that arises is the gap between the consequences of trying to make music my career and my reality as an arts graduate and an independent musician. I am therefore determined to find ways of intertwining both – making a living through art. In this quest, I have grown to realize that being a musician is not a custom-made path nor a process where success is always guaranteed, depending on how you define success. The process of questioning the relationship between being a musician and making a living out of music is important, not because we have definitive answers but because that is the place at which most musicians find themselves. Through questioning these processes and confronting

these dilemmas, we are able to develop strategies for success in the South African Indie music market. Much like Coles, I believe that “the power to decide the significance of any particular metric for one’s own success is a power best left in the hands of each and every person” (Coles 2018:5).

Further to discovering the nature and extent of these dilemmas and questioning my experiences of music within the South African Indie music marketplace, it is imperative that I take a closer look at myself and how I defined myself as a musician following the release of *Becoming*. Personal creativity is closely tied to issues of identity because the choices one makes in the creative space are closely tied to how one experiences and perceives the world. Questioning my own musical identity requires me to delve into the self. That is; what I like, why I like what I like, and what constructs my musical soundscape. The texts that provided insight into the types of questions I needed to ask were *Questions of Cultural Identity* by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (1996), specifically chapters by Simon Frith; *Distinction* by Pierre Bourdieu (1984); a journal article titled “Music as a technology of the self” by Tia DeNora (2000) and journal article, “One Time for My Girls: African-American Girlhood, Empowerment, and Popular Visual Culture” by Treva Lindsey (2013) focusing on the importance of identity and the ways in which popular culture depicts or represent identities.

*Questions of Cultural Identity* (Hall & Du Gay, 1996) is significant in the way it unpacks the issue of identity as a postmodern subject, or identity as becoming. This refers to the notion of identity being conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent shape or form. It elaborates on how identity is not a fixed ‘thing’ but rather, an ongoing process. Frith reiterates this notion in the following quote:

My argument here, in short, rests on two premises; first, that identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; second, that our experience of music - of music making and music listening - is best understood as an experience of this self-in-process (Frith, 1996:109).

Frith also describes music as an aesthetic process where we discover ourselves through establishing relations with others (Frith 1996).

Furthermore, the book challenges the notion of a ‘unified’ societal identity (identity in relation to one another), and recognises that “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (Hall, 1996:5). Hall further argues that “identities can function as points of

identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected" (Hall, 1996:5).

DeNora describes music as a temporal medium "which people turn to in order to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents, as feeling, thinking and acting beings in their day-to-day lives" (DeNora, 2000:45). She goes on to elaborate that the sense of 'self' is locatable in music, and that "musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity - for identity's identification" (DeNora, 2000:49). Furthermore, that "music's meaning is found in that it is an active ingredient in one's own identity work, in how people often 'find themselves' in musical structures"(DeNora, 2000:49). This rings true to my experience of producing *Becoming*, as though it was an expression of my past, my already existing self and my imagined future, it was an exercise in finding my musical identity and finding that which is also me. This is elaborated further in the following chapter.

I have attempted to find myself, my identity, by attaching myself to "identity hooks" so to speak (hooks such as the genres that influence my music and perhaps more profoundly, hooks such as my gender, race, and class). I have used these 'hooks' or variables that define who I am right now in order to be able to work on my identity. Furthermore, though making music is a part of a personal identity construction process, marketing one's music indeed demands a more self-conscious view of my identity in relation to publicly contested ideas of the roles afforded to young black women in South Africa.

Lindsey (2013) investigates the ways in which popular culture (this includes popular music) depicts African American girlhood and adolescence by using as a case study two separate videos that depict two separate narratives. She discusses the limitations and the developments of pop culture in the representation and inclusion of the African American girl child using a hip hop generation feminist framework as well as a social and cultural theory framework. Lindsey's main objective in her paper was to "assert the importance of popular/public culture for empowering black girls and adolescents, while acknowledging existent limitations and obstacles in mass, digital, and social media" (Lindsey, 2013:22). Lindsey notes the power that mass, digital and social media wields and how these are the primary sites for interacting with ideologies surrounding identity. Mass, digital, and social

media can either challenge or entrench many different stereotypes such as racial stereotypes, gender, or sexual stereotypes.

These debates are tied to some of my own challenges and resonate with my experiences of being a young black woman intent on being herself rather than being a clone of a prescribed identity. These prescribed identities (such as race, gender, class) are quite prevalent in South African society and are limiting because they do not recognise the diversity embedded in individual experience. Although Hall, Du Gay, Frith and DeNora elaborate on issues of identity, Lindsey contextualises this by speaking about issues of young black female identity which has been relevant to my study in that it touches on how identities are represented in music and motivated me to interrogate my own musical identity. In so doing, I asked myself how I have used this identity to communicate effectively through music, which is my primary intention as an artist. Furthermore, whether a shared identity (that is, a shared background and shared stories between me as a musician and my audience) resulted in better reception and better market sales. With that said, I chose to focus specifically on my identity as a creative rather than on these other identities that I inhabit i.e., black and female.

In further discussing popular music as a construction of identity, I take a closer look at *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and briefly discuss his theory of habitus. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu demonstrates how aesthetic value judgements, or tastes, are linked to social context.

In this book, Bourdieu sheds light on the social pretensions of the middle classes in the modern world, paying special attention to the tastes of the French bourgeoisie. He emphasises that preferences (that which is perceived as aesthetically pleasing as opposed to that which is perceived as ugly, or trendy), and other aesthetic choices, are distinctions drawn in opposition to those made by other classes (Bourdieu, 1984). Simply put, he suggests that aesthetic choices create class divisions which ultimately cause distances (or distinctions). With particular focus on the French bourgeoisie of the time, Bourdieu explains this phenomenon by proposing that members of this social group who value high art, value what they value in high art because of their upbringing, including exposure and access. They passively and self-consciously engaged with high art because of their class and consequently, learned how to consume or 'read' art which then informed their artistic decisions about their tastes as well as

their value judgements. This is also reminiscent of Hall's circuit of culture (1997), and is supported by the statement:

Consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception. A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded (Bourdieu, 1984:2).

Furthermore, because of this position, the bourgeoisie were most likely to set the rules that constitute taste within society to gain and/or retain their control over social capital which translates to other forms of capital such as economic and cultural capital.

Bourdieu's theory is further explained through the idea of 'habitus'. Habitus is concerned with the inner workings of human action. It is underpinned by the question 'what motivates human action?' and whether people respond to external stimuli rather than their own habits. Habitus is defined as "a system of durable, transposable, dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations" (Bourdieu, 1990:53). Joe Painter defines habitus as:

the mediating link between objective social structures and individual action and refers to the embodiment in individual actors of systems of social norms, understandings and patterns of behaviour, which, while not wholly determining action, do ensure that individuals are more disposed to act in some ways than others (Painter, 2000:242).

We can understand habitus as a product of history, and further, as "the built-in, subconscious way that we perceive and categorize things in the world without being fully aware that we are doing it" (Jurafsky & Matsumoto, 2017:12) due to the ways in which we were raised which ultimately structured our tastes and actions. This leads me to the question, 'What does this then mean or tell us about the music marketplace in our attempts to understand our position in it as independent artists?' What Bourdieu's theory of 'Distinction' and the argument of 'Habitus' does is form a part of the debate around the notion of identity: not only my identity as an identity that I am constantly in the process of exploring, but the market's identities. It allows me to face the question that underpins this project which is, 'Is it possible to reconcile individual aspirations with the marketplace?' by firstly asking myself "who or what is the marketplace? To whom am I selling this music?" and getting to know that 'person' which in



turn informs me of the nature of decisions about purchase. Furthermore, if my own identity is constantly being explored, constantly growing and changing, constantly becoming, are the people buying or relating to my music changing as well? Can we break or bulldoze our way through the structures of Habitus? Is Habitus mutable? The short answer to this is yes, Habitus can change – it changes constantly; however, it changes within limits inherent in its structure (Bourdieu, 1990). This then leads to a very important question, 'What does this mean then for the domain within which new music (particularly independent music) is allowed to infiltrate the established structures of the marketplace? These meanings and implications are discussed throughout this project.

These arguments about identity relate to the discussion of another subtheme I explored when attempting to locate this study, that is, music as a communicative tool. This alludes to my theoretical framework which I will discuss below. In *Performing Rites* (1998), Frith explores the meanings embedded in musical practices and how they might affect the listener. Further, he discusses the notion of music as a communicative practice or activity and how it affects our social capital. *Performing Rites* unpacks the meanings associated with music, music making and the experience of music.

This book is also relevant to my study in how it asks the question of where to place value judgements. How do we determine whether something is good or not and who determines that? The market (or rather, 'powers that be') or the public? It helps us argue these questions by mentioning that value judgements can only be placed when we know how to listen and what to listen to. This is demonstrated in the quote, "Musical disputes are not about music 'in itself' but about how to place it. What it is about the music that is to be assessed? After all, we can only hear music as valuable when we know what to listen to and how to listen for it" (Frith, 1998:26).

Furthermore, value judgements are also determined by who listens. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of society and social identity (where music is concerned) becomes very integral to understanding decisions about what sounds good. In this book, Frith introduces this debate by saying "our musical pleasures are defined by our social circumstances" (Frith, 1998:269). Subsequently, he expands on this notion by mentioning what Theo Van Leeuwen noted regarding the homology between music and society, "music not only represents social

relations, it also and simultaneously enacts them, and too often attempts to relate musical forms to social processes ignore the ways in which music is itself a social process” (Van Leeuwen in Frith, 1998:270). My argument here is then based on not so much focusing on how or which value judgements were placed on my music, but rather, how my journey with *Becoming* was valuable in exploring my own musical journey and how my own music came into being, as well as exposing the workings of the industry or subculture with which I have engaged, namely Indie music.

These texts are important to my study because they provided me with the theoretical framework which underpins this research and have enabled me to unpack some of my research questions. In an essay titled "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music" in the volume *Taking Popular Music Seriously: selected essays*, Frith examines the aesthetic value judgements made about popular music and how these judgements define our experiences of popular music.

‘Serious music’ and ‘popular music’ have often been pitted against one another because social critics have believed that music can only be taken seriously or deemed aesthetically valuable when it transcends social forces, not when it is determined by them i.e.: popular music. Frith debates this notion while demonstrating how popular music has, or can be, transcendent. His argument is based on the premise that “popular music does not rule out an aesthetic theory but, on the contrary, makes one possible” (Frith, 2007:257). The question that arises is how does popular music make an aesthetic theory possible and perhaps more importantly, how does this quality of popular music manifest in the Indie scene particularly in SA? These debates are discussed further in the following chapters.

Frith goes on to note that popular music is aesthetically valuable when it is able to move beyond itself and its social/commercial forces and limitations, “Everyone in the pop world is aware of the social forces that determine 'normal' pop music - a good record, song, or sound is precisely one that transcends those forces!” (Frith, 2007:260). Further, that ‘good’ popular music has always been heard to go beyond or break through commercial routine (Frith, 2007). He mentions the notion of authenticity found in rock music and how rock, as a popular music, remained subversive and defied commercial logic and in that sense, became transcendent. This is reiterated firmly in the following, “The rock aesthetic depends, crucially, on an argument about authenticity. Good music is the authentic expression of something - a person,

an idea, a feeling, a shared experience, a Zeitgeist" (Frith, 2007:260). Therefore, according to Frith, the value of pop music is seen in how the musician authentically expresses their truth, that successful pop is "dependent on something outside pop, is rooted in the person, the auteur, the community or the subculture that lies behind it" (Frith, 2007:260).

In determining the value of popular music, Frith takes an approach that places emphasis on how popular music constructs the people and how they derive their own meanings through their experiences of popular music. He says, "The question we should be asking is not what does popular music reveal about 'the people' but how does it construct them" (Frith, 2007:261). He maintains that in some ways pop music can be used to tell people who they are and in so doing "defines its own aesthetic standard" (Frith, 2007:261). He notes how popular music creates tastes as opposed to revealing them, by paying special attention to pop charts and their role in the creation of taste communities.

Frith explains how the experience of popular music is largely dependent on positioning or individual placing. He states, "The experience of pop music is an experience of placing: in responding to a song, we are drawn, haphazardly, into affective and emotional alliances with the performers and with the performers' other fans" (Frith, 2007:263). This emphasises how popular music is subject to individual appropriation (more so than any other form of pop culture) thus making it an individualising form, however, because certain music appeals to us as individuals and some not (I would like to lean on Bourdieu's concepts of *distinction* and *habitus* here) popular music is still regarded as something public, something 'for all people' with which they can identify. This is aptly captured in the following quotes:

This interplay between personal absorption into music and the sense that it is, nevertheless, something out there, something public, is what makes music so important in the cultural placing of the individual in the social (Frith, 2007:263),

and

music can stand for, symbolize and offer the immediate experience of collective identity. Other cultural forms – painting, literature, design – can articulate and show off shared values and pride, but only music can make you feel them" (Frith, 2007:264).

Frith writes at length about the social functions of popular music which provide the ways in which value is determined. The first function he notes is that of identity and self-definition which creates a place for us in society. Secondly, is that it "gives us a way of managing the relationship between our public and private emotional lives" (Frith, 2007:265). This can be

observed in the value of love songs and the way they express and communicate feelings that would be hard to aptly communicate using just words. Thirdly, is to shape popular memory and to organise (or re-organise) our sense of time. This is reiterated in the following, “One measure of good music, put it another way, is, precisely, its ‘presence’, its ability to ‘stop’ time, to make us feel we are living within a moment, with no memory or anxiety about what has come before, what will come after” (Frith, 2007:266). Lastly, the fourth function or characteristic of popular music lies in the fact that popular music is something possessed. Frith notes that “in ‘possessing’ music, we make it part of our own identity and build it into our sense of ourselves” (Frith, 2007:267).

In conclusion he mentions how the value of popular music has also been demonstrated through the use of the voice. He believes that “it is through the singing voice that people are most able to make a connection with their records, to feel that performances are theirs in certain ways” (Frith, 2007:269). He emphasizes this point when he says, “Today’s commercial pop musics are, though, song forms, constructing vocal personalities, using voices to speak directly to us” (Frith, 2007:270). This resonates with my own experience because it reiterates that music is a communicative praxis which is a foundational paradigm in my research. Frith’s works remain relevant to my project because of how it explores issues of personal and public identity, value judgements, and ultimately how music is a communicative tool. In addition, his texts give us the platform to not necessarily find fixed answers, but to ask the right questions which encourage further discourse.

Ultimately, my main issues and the purpose of this study lies in reconciling market value and aesthetic value. Frith’s texts offer a path towards discussing these issues by interrogating the relationships between popular music as individual agency and the value of popular music in public space (including the marketplace). Part of what I find interesting in relation to my study is how his arguments intersect or meet at a crossroads. On the one hand he is saying that popular music is valuable with respect to where listeners place value judgements, on the other hand he is saying popular music is valuable in the way in which it transcends these very judgements. Though these arguments seem to be opposing one another, I believe they are rather interrelated and part of one another. These discussions arise throughout this research.

In *Music in Everyday Life* (2000) DeNora highlights the power of music as a function in our day to day lives. Like Frith she sees music not only as a medium through which identity (social and individual) is articulated but more importantly as a mechanism of construction. Music influences mood, creates scenes, and routines, and has been widely recognised as a phenomenon that strongly influences character, social structure, and action. DeNora's work draws on that of Theodor Adorno, who was strongly critical of many aspects of popular music and its relationship to the market but who also proposed one of the founding theories on the relationship between music and society. DeNora notes, "Adorno's work conceives of music as formative of social consciousness. In this regard, Adorno's work represents "the most significant development in the twentieth century of the idea that music is a 'force' in social life, a building material of consciousness and social structure" (DeNora, 2000:2).

This text is relevant to my research as well as my theoretical framework because I am initially concerned with how music functions as an aesthetic in forming or creating my own self and my musical sensibilities. Furthermore, this text highlights the ways in which music is a communicative tool and demonstrates its role in constructing our personal and social realities. It is relevant as it draws attention to music as a social practice, and to how music provides a context for personal experience. Therefore, as a musician I am mindful of the fact that I am engaging in the social practice in which my research is firmly embedded.

## **Music in the Market**

The music industry is unpredictable and the manner in which it operates defies both definition and a predetermined response. A text I pay particular attention to in this regard is that of Dylan Savage (2008). His journal article, "*The Key to Entrepreneurship for Musicians: Marketing and Selling*", provides an overview of the ways in which musicians employ the basic techniques of entrepreneurship for use in their own careers. Most musicians shy away from involvement in the marketing and selling of their work because they have neither sales training nor have they previously sold a product to make a living. Furthermore, the sales techniques employed by commercial salespeople are often viewed as aggressive and highly manipulative, which would discourage any artist and musician from associating themselves with the entrepreneurial side of the music business. The article covers the ways in which musicians can

market and sell without 'losing' themselves, can attempt to be both musician and entrepreneur.

"No matter how good the idea, how great the innovation or how infectious the enthusiasm, a musician is going to have to face the task of selling his product" (Savage, 2008:16). At the outset, therefore, Savage notes the reality of most independent musicians, the fact that at some point they will have to be involved in the selling of their own product. Although this is true, he highlights that this process does not need to be as far-fetched and as difficult as one may think because unbeknown to them, most musicians have already been involved in selling for a notable portion of their careers as selling is embedded in musical practice. The first way a musician is involved in selling is through conviction, confidence, and clarity of interpretation in their playing (Savage, 2008:16). As soon as a song moves from the musician to a recording studio or concert hall in order to be performed, it is participating in the market because at that point it has been put forward for public consumption. Moreover, some musicians sell in other ways, for example where they are aware of the varying tastes in audiences and programme their concerts accordingly. Savage proceeds to mention how knowing your audience, their wants, and desires, is also an important aspect of selling. Though artistic talent and having a stellar product are the most important components of being a musician, value may not always be perceived initially. "If value is perceived, your product will be desired and will sell itself" (Savage, 2008:16). Value can be increased in many different ways; the first is by perfecting your craft. The second is by taking the steps to talk about (and getting others to talk about) an innovative idea or performance.

The above highlights the importance of public perceptions of value. What Savage identifies is that the issue is not whether one's music is good or bad, but rather how people may be persuaded to believe that it is valuable. I recognise that what is perceived as valuable by consumers might not coincide with my own views on value. This leaves me with a choice: Do I create music that appeases the market, or do I create music that I believe is valuable and hope consumers agree? Though Savage notes that a product will sell itself when its value is perceived, he does not reveal who the perceiver might be. He suggests that in order to be successful one must recognise where value ought to be added then take the steps towards that goal.

In discussing music in the market, I examined texts that encompass some global music markets, namely the German and European contemporary music markets. This enables me to discuss and expose the gaps and limitations within our South African independent music market. Brinja Meiseberg studies the German folk music market, which is the third largest genre (in Germany) in terms of popularity and sales. She suggests that there are a number of variables which determine the success of an artist. Factors other than ability may explain the individual success of artists (Meiseberg, 2014). These factors include financial support from record labels, and an artist's socio-demographics. She studies these factors and examines whether artistic performance and ability directly affect financial achievements such as direct and digital record sales. The author calls this the "direct superstar effect" (2014:11). Furthermore, she studies the media presence of artists and how that may affect record sales.

Meiseberg aims to answer or discuss the economic issues faced by most artists which include, "Does it pay more to develop your skills in your core business to perfection or to maintain the current level of skills and invest in self-marketing; and do these effects apply to all folk artists alike?" (Meiseberg, 2014). The author also observes the various types of media presence and their positive effect on financial rewards. However, she also notes that these income factors have different repercussions on physical sales as opposed to digital markets. Furthermore, these effects may vary from low to top selling artists.

Meiseberg's article is relevant to my research because the research questions on which it is predicated are in line with what it is I aim to discuss, albeit in a different context and market. Framing the questions Meiseberg poses throughout her paper, her main research question is, 'What factors determine the success of an individual artist?'. As an independent artist, I have been on a journey to discovering these factors myself and been conscious of them in order to employ these strategies of success in my own career. Meiseberg found that successful folk artists exhibited strong musical ability while musical experience and musical education supported or contributed to sales success. She also found that marketing activities supported the artists' revenue and development of their careers. This would include offering consumers an online domain where an artist is able to offer their merchandise for sale. There are limitations to this study, most of which are similar to my own. These limitations include the fact that career trajectories differ among artists and that despite musical ability, "there will still be some degree of arbitrariness and chance involved in the genesis of a real star"

(Meiseberg, 2014:38). My research is firmly embedded in discussing the variables that may determine success and exposing the journeys of selected independent artists in South Africa.

In a text titled *Contemporary Art music and its Audiences*, its authors (Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018) discuss contemporary art music (which they have abbreviated as C.A.M) and its audiences with specific reference to age, gender, and social class. They note that over the decades, C.A.M has undergone aesthetic changes. The authors pay special attention to new music festivals in Europe in order indicate that such festivals have impacted the way in which contemporary artmusic has developed and has been perceived by or through “promoting aesthetic pluralism, introducing new concert formats, and expanding to unusual venues” (Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018:60). These changes are reiterated in the following; “C.A.M has undergone significant aesthetic changes, incorporating influences from low popular music (Clarke in Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018:60) and electronic/digital music technologies and expanding towards intermediality and audiovisuality” (Ciciliani in Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018:60). As such, C.A.M has become a part of everyday life and has been played in a variety of a different venues. As Tia DeNora notes, “The deliberate expansion to new alternative venues not traditionally used for Western art music such as lofts, art galleries, cinemas, clubs and bars, combines musical activity with other aspects of urban life” (DeNora in Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018:61). This transformation has resulted in socio-cultural changes which include changes in musical experience and tastes (DeNora in Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018).

The authors embarked on discussions about this phenomenon by way of audience surveys undertaken at three European C.A.M festivals: Festival d'Automne a Paris (France), Warsaw Autumn (Poland) and Wien Modern (Austria). The authors employed the concepts of Bourdieu and Schulze with reference to class, taste and lifestyle in order to explore the demographic characteristics and social classes in C.A.M audiences. Their results indicated that C.A.M consumption is (and has been) a “distinctive practice sustained by an exclusive community having considerable education and ‘musical capital’” (Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018:60).



Furthermore, the results of the surveys demonstrate diversity in the age structure of C.A.M consumers, as well as specific patterns regarding knowledge and education, experience, and active involvement with C.A.M. That is, the majority of consumers who engage with C.A.M held a university degree or higher education certificate, were not first-time consumers of C.A.M (specifically the festivals in question), and are involved with C.A.M in some way and as a result have 'high music capital', where "59% were musically active, and 27% were attendees with music professional background" (Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018:63). Ultimately, the researchers found that 'aesthetic pluralism' is able to result in greater social openness regarding social class affiliation (Grebosz-Haring, Katarzyna & Weichbold, 2018).

The above relates to this project in how it addresses or relates to the theoretical frameworks I aim to discuss. As an independent contemporary artist, attempting to define the contemporary art space in terms of genre has proven to be difficult and ultimately, attempting to define its consumers would be just as burdensome. As a performing artist, festivals have appealed to me as a performance space because they tend to strip away this need for definition and categorisation and most often draw the most diverse groups of people. Therefore, it has been a mission of mine to understand these diverse groups (my target market) in order to understand to whom, and why my music would appeal by exposing my music to festivals or festival attendees.

However, I am brought back to my personal dilemma and the tensions that arise between music as product and music as art. These tensions are debated by Hans Abbing (2002) and David Throsby (2004). In "Why are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts", Abbing addresses the two-faced nature of the economy of the arts where on the one hand commerce is dismissed, and on the other hand, acknowledged as vital in its role of keeping the arts (and the creative artist) alive. He suggests that art and commerce join forces to understand the intricacies of the creative industries. Abbing, who is an economist as well as a painter and photographer, sets forth an informed discussion because of his background in these two very separate professions. Therefore, he can provide us with the perspectives of an economist but also the perspectives and experiences of a visual artist practising art on a professional level.

He places the disjuncture between art and commerce at the onset of the book. Throsby notes this as well in his review of the book where he says:

There is an apparent disjunction between the aesthetic value and the market value of art, leading to a 'two-facedness' in the art economy: on the one hand the sacred nature of art presumes a denial, or at least an irrelevance, of money value, yet on the other hand trade in art is a necessity for economic survival. The picture is complicated by the fact that much of the valuation of art, whether aesthetic or economic or both, is socially conditioned (Throsby, 2004:239).

Earlier in the book, our attention has already been directed to this issue when Abbing argues, “But aesthetic value cannot be independent; it cannot rest on the intrinsic qualities of a work of art. Instead aesthetic value is a social value, that is influenced by social circumstances including market value” (Abbing, 2002:76). Therefore, Abbing believes that “economic and aesthetic value are interdependent” (Abbing, 2002:76).

In addition, he notes that this has skewed the scales where art and money are concerned, where some artists earn an exorbitant amount of money and others die poor. Throsby reiterates Abbing’s observations by saying: “In looking at the consequences of this speciality, Abbing is primarily concerned with artists’ incomes. He notes that while some artists have extraordinarily high incomes – much higher than in other professions because of the superstar phenomenon the majority of artistic practitioners are extremely poor” (Throsby, 2004:240). Abbing goes on to provide reasons why this is so, and why average incomes are low in the arts.

What is noticeable and intriguing about this book is Abbing’s tendency to allow his two selves to converse: the economist and the artist. This lends itself to a particularly interesting perspective for me. Throsby mentions that “Abbing recognises what Barbara Hernnstein Smith calls the ‘dual economy of value’ – the dichotomy between aesthetic value on the one hand and financial or commercial value on the other” (Throsby, 2004:240). Thus, he is at odds with himself throughout his book.

Although the author is embedded in the creative background of fine/visual arts and provides arguments based on this background, I find that in many ways his dilemmas relate to contemporary music. Abbing grapples with issues similar to mine, albeit in a different arena of the arts and within different contexts. In the case of my research project, the battle is one that pits music as art against music as product or as something that engages the market, which, as I have noted (and evidently – as have many artists) has resulted in a rather dichotomous space to be in. Indeed, creating *Becoming* was not only an exercise in discovering the self as well as my musical sensibilities, but discovering and uncovering the market within which I wish to exist. In discovering or interrogating this new territory, I found myself constantly bouncing between objective and subjective spaces. My inquiries were rooted in

the question: When a song or a body of work moves from your couch, past your front door and into a recording studio then finally to the market for consumption – does it cease to become a work of art? Does it lose its ethereal essence and become just a number, a binary code – a sequence of ones and zeros? This tension that exists between art and commerce, and having to function as both artist and entrepreneur has caused a sense of disjuncture because the relationships between artistic and market value are not always consistent. It seems we can only hope that good music will always find a place- that it will speak, or ‘play’ for itself.

Making a living out of music requires you to think of music as a business. Jonathan Shaw (2007) presents a clear outline of the workings of the South African music industry in his book *The South African Music Business*. I also studied the latest edition of this book, published in 2017. In this book, Shaw digs deep into the intricacies and nuances of the South African music business and the dynamics that control it. He deconstructs the complexity of the music industry, including the issues of music law, finance, management, and publishing, and reassembles this complexity as an accessible guide that artists may study. However, in so doing, he suggests that artists never lose sight of their primary goal, “In trying to package it [music] and sell it we should never lose sight of what it is that we are actually trying to sell: Magic” (Shaw, 2007:ix). This text not only informs and equips artists and those who wish to be performing artists with knowledge but gets them a seat at the table – so to speak – that is, involved in issues and critical conversations concerning their careers.

The book sheds light on the difficult challenges faced when art is set against business. According to Shaw, “There is a constant fight in the balance of power within the music industry. It is one fought between creative control and profit” (Shaw, 2007:19). This text is essential for my project in that it allows me to place the heart of my project, my album *Becoming*, within a particular context, that is the South African music industry. However, Shaw details the dynamics of the South African music business without providing a detailed analysis of the independent music scene and how to effectively locate oneself in the independent market. This is a shortfall that I have attempted to address in this project.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scepticism about art or music as an endeavour that can survive productively in a marketplace abounds as much has been written about this disjuncture from Theodor Adorno to Keith Negus – whose texts form a part of my discourse. Independent music as a globally recognised genre and music-making method dates back to the 1960s, gaining most of its momentum from the mid-1980s to 1990s through the efforts of popular international Indie rock bands of the time (Shuker, 2001). Perhaps then, before the advent of technology and the rise of modes of production that operate independently of record labels, there may have been a clear distinction between the art of music making and the market, maybe because record labels exclusively took care of the business of music. However, currently these separate realms have been intertwined so that many people who are making music are now selling what they make. The question then becomes, how do we marry these two? How do I make my personal art (that is, the construction, development and moulding of a personal identity through musical action) and place that in the marketplace successfully? With that said, the research design of this research project is interpretivist in that it is based on context-specific settings (Nel, 2017). Interpretivism is defined as:

a research paradigm that is based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective, but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology), and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants (epistemology) (Bhattacharjee, 2012:103).

Hence, the research methodologies I have chosen to use for this project which I will elaborate on in this chapter.

This research project is grounded in the premise that:

1. Music is a form of communicative praxis (Frith, 1998; Frith, 2007; DeNora, 2000).
2. The mechanisms through which that communication takes place are quite complex. This praxis is modified by commercialisation and the consequence is often a dichotomous relationship between music as art and music as product (Negus 1997; Abbing 2005).

The communicative nature of music takes shape in two contexts, namely the personal and the public (Frith in Hall & Du Gay, 1996). I use and make music to communicate with myself and secondly, to communicate with others. Frith highlights this personal and public mode of

communication by saying, “music gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it: musical response is, by its nature, a process of musical identification; aesthetic response is, by its nature, an ethical agreement” (Frith, 1998:272). This quote demonstrates to us how the communicative nature of music provides a context through which people can experience themselves and the world around them. DeNora (2000) expands on this notion by showing how music is engaged as a place where people express themselves. People desire music for themselves because they personally relate and are tied to it (Frith, 2007), and this resonates with the idea that the success of a product in the market (commercial or independent) relies on its perceived value. Therefore, music as a communicative praxis and the marketplace, should not be seen as concepts completely separate from one another. If anything, music is a communicative praxis that exists in the market (public) as well as in the personal therefore one may argue that the personal and the public are both implicated in musical praxis. If music is about interacting with the world, as Frith suggests, then its commercial life will be intertwined with that world.

While the music offers a way of being in the world, the industry does not easily offer access to the various mediums through which music is made public (Shaw, 2007). As an independent artist, I am able to implement and control most of the things commercial record labels can execute such as record my own music through the services of an independent studio, and package and digitally distribute my music. However, I cannot forge the business connections (those that exist between commercial record labels and mechanisms/modes of dissemination such as radio or television) that allow for commercial access to the market because of the complexity of the industry given its existing intermediaries. As William Murray De Villiers mentions, “Unfortunately, in South Africa, music business strategy has always been an elusive, complex and often difficult-to-grasp topic to the majority of the music industry participants” (2006:1). It was my intention to explore ways to exist as an independent artist making art for a living while at the same time preserving my artistic integrity.

The process of allowing your music to become a product through engaging the market is challenging because it is potentially contradictory as one might ask; how does one play into the hands of the market successfully? That is, to be successful without compromising the sound. Essentially, the market is concerned with my album as a product.

While Adorno dichotomises art and music, Negus recognises this as a common approach. However, Negus also recognises the need to reconcile the two as he perceives the industry as both business and a site for creativity:

[...] the industry needs to be understood as both a commercial business driven by the pursuit of profit and a site of creative human activity from which some very great popular music has come and continues to emerge. The problem is trying to bring the two together: most theorists have tended to come down on the side of the corporate machine or the human beings (Negus, 1997:36).

The principal dilemma is that there is often a dichotomy between the notion of art and that of commercial product. This idea is substantiated by Abbing: "as an artist I am convinced that aesthetic value is independent of market value. But as an economist, I disagree with this. As an economist I believe that quality in general corresponds with success in the market" (Abbing, 2002:55). This is the core of my dilemma and through this research project I have found ways of potential resolution.

Ultimately, the title of my recording, *Becoming*, signifies the theoretical foundation of this project. It is not concerned with already constructed identities, rather, it is concerned with processes and focuses on being and becoming through music. The question remains: is it possible to focus on the notion of becoming in musical practice and make a successful living out of it? *Becoming* reflects a view of identity not as a 'thing' but as a process, yet the music industry might see *Becoming* (as in the CD) as a 'thing' once it engages with the market. This is contained in the issues that arise which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

Autoethnography also forms part of my theoretical framework because I essentially engage with ideas, and debate the issues discussed throughout this dissertation within the framework of autoethnography. The act of making music tends to be autoethnographic in and of itself insofar as personal experiences are drawn on and engaged with to challenge and provide meaning. I use autoethnography to establish my way of thinking about my music and how it exists within the South African Indie music market. Furthermore, I employ this methodology to discuss the relationship between these different domains.

In addition, this study is grounded in post-coloniality and economic theories. Post-colonial thinking, as discussed by Achille Mbembe, is defined as "a way of thinking that derives from a number of sources and that is far from constituting a system because it is in large part being

constructed as it moves forward” (Mbembe in Mongin, Lempereur & Schlegel, 2008). Simply put, it is a way of thinking that challenges hegemonic structures by paying attention to lived experience and how these experiences can be used to construct new realities. Mbembe notes, “what characterises postcolonial thinking is entanglement and concatenation, unveiled chiefly through its critique of identity and subjectivity” (Mbembe in Mongin, Lempereur & Schlegel, 2008:3). Postcoloniality emphasises interconnectedness and subjective experience and draws on theories on neo-liberalism — making it a hybridised form of postcolonial neoliberalism (Ranasinghe & Wickramasinghe, 2020). A central feature of neo-liberalism, as discussed by Mbembe, is rooted in the notion of ‘temporariness’ (Mbembe in Shipley, 2010). Mbembe states:

In Africa in particular, temporariness can be described as the encounter - a very regular occurrence - with what we cannot yet determine because it has not yet become or will never be definite. It is an encounter with indeterminacy, provisionality, the fugitive, and the contingent. Temporariness is not simply an effect of life changing rapidly. It also derives from the fact that vast domains of human struggle and achievement are hardly the object of documentation, archiving, or empirical description - and even less so of satisfactory narrative or interpretive understanding. It has to do with the colossal amount of things we literally do not know. It is also - as shown in the best of current history and anthropology of African life forms - that uncertainty and turbulence, instability and unpredictability, rapid, chronic, and multidirectional shifts are the social and cultural forms taken, in many instances, by daily experience (Mbembe in Shipley, 2010:659-660).

These themes of temporariness, uncertainty and entanglement discussed by Mbembe tend to reoccur throughout this project as there are no fixed answers to the dilemma faced and discussed throughout this research, only an acknowledgement of the different journeys that artists undertook. These themes speak to the unpredictability of creativity and the fact that there is very limited accountability that gives one a sense of security. Temporariness, uncertainty, and entanglement manifest themselves through the act of making music itself. The nature of the work of making music and translating it into a means to sustain yourself is often wracked with uncertainty. Music making itself is not like the production of tangible things (ie: the production or manufacturing of cars, the baking of bread – all of which have an already existing and definable market). Music and culture, at its core, is the production of feelings, concepts and experience.

Furthermore, Mbembe notes that “postcolonial thinking stresses humanity-in-the-making, the humanity that will emerge once the colonial figures of the inhuman and of racial difference have been swept away.” (Mbembe in Mongin, Lempereur &



Schlegel, 2008:2). The colonial figures (or power structures) I engage with in this dissertation are that of the market (which is largely controlled by corporate record labels) and the status quo.

Post-colonialism and neoliberal theory are, of course, much more comprehensive ways of thinking about economies of production and positions of power. For the purpose of this study, I will not explore these ideologies in great detail. However, what I aim to point out is that the nature of this experience as an independent artist resonates with these positions of post-coloniality that Mbembe has identified in his discussion of post-colonialism. To further emphasize this discussion, Mfete (2020) states:

“(neoliberalism) is mostly understood by the majority of people as encompassing the following three intertwined characteristics: (a) as an apparatus of institutions, policies and practices, (b) a structure of economic, social and political reproduction espoused by financialisation and, (c) as a system of capitalism for the minority and against the majority. Neoliberalism is a complex system of multifaceted features in ideology, practice, and policy. The most rudimentary principles of neoliberalism are: commercialisation, privatisation of state-owned sectors, decentralisation, deregulation of the market, corporation of public entities and public resources, and the retraction of the state in the provision of social goods.<sup>7</sup> These principles set the foundation of many neoliberal states across the globe. (Mfete 2020:271)

Neoliberalism, in this case, persists with the idea of capitalism that is at odds with post-coloniality in the sense that it favors institutional production of capital in the service of an elite few. The music industry had been fine-tuned, so that, in fact, we had very limited representation of a broad range of music that was successful in the commercial music market.

Neoliberal principles are antagonistic, as it were, towards the ideals of an Indie music maker or the production of an Indie music marketplace because Indie music artists (or Indie music production) challenge the control of money by big corporations. Independent music production erodes that control by giving power to individual, smaller beneficiaries of cultural production.

In addition, the economic theory referred to in this study is that which explains the basic principles of the market. The general motivating principles of capitalism remain fundamental in the marketplace. Through this project, I am to some extent contesting this status quo (the

way of doing things) by searching, asking, and discussing alternative sustainable means of existing as an artist, particularly in the SA Indie music marketplace. My argument is predicated on the idea that there are further economic frameworks that can be valued not only in terms of realising monetary profit, but also profit in terms of a sense of identity, a sense of value, and the freedom to make choices and claim identities in ways that do not result in exclusion from the market.

As an artist, one of my ultimate aims is to realise a profit. My sense of 'reward', as it were, is a capital return. When it comes to music, my capital does not only take shape in the form of money, but also manifests itself in the form of reputation. It is a form of cultural capital in the sense that it works to give value because it is good art – first and foremost. I acknowledge that capital return is just as important as (or related) to cultural capital. The problem with this is that we live in a society where, despite being liberal, we are bound to old ideals which not only trap art but also trap the artists' ways of generating value and an income in a particularly hegemonic system. While I acknowledge that the system is still very much intact, I discuss ways to erode or slowly chip away at it bit by bit.

## Research Objectives & Questions

My research is underpinned by two main objectives. My first objective is to explore the South African Indie music scene through the lens of my own unique experiences when releasing *Becoming* in 2017. The second objective is to analyse my own experience of the Indie music scene in the context of the experiences of four other musicians and music business practitioners who together cover positions within the broad spectrum of the Indie music scene. At the outset, key questions arose that address the difficulties in the balancing act between producing music as a product and producing music as a work of art. My primary question is:

- What does an independent artist need to take into consideration to reconcile aesthetic ideals and economic imperatives?

Furthermore, other key questions (that will assist me to discuss my main question) are seen below and have been split up into personal questions and general questions.

*Personal questions:* (addressed in the autoethnographic part of this research)

- What was the process of producing *Becoming* from a music making perspective and business perspective?
- Do I make music with a particular audience in mind? Based on this having been my first musical product, was there an aesthetic compromise in my music? That is, creating music I thought people would want to hear.
- What challenges did I face emotionally/psychologically and financially?
- How did I market my album? Why did I do it this way? What would I do differently why?

*General/public questions* (intended to address the intention to interrogate my own experience in the context of the three other musicians who were part of this study)

- In what ways can an independent artist occupy a commercial space?
- What are some of the ways in which an independent artist can attain commercial success?
- What type of preparation and skills are necessary to be successful in the market?

These questions were what allowed me to start the interrogation process to understand what exactly happened in my experience with *Becoming* both as a musician and as a music businesswoman. The inclusion of case studies further assisted me in understanding the journeys of musicians operating within the South African Indie music market. I believe that these experiences allowed me to discuss this market within a broader South African context.

## **Research Methodologies**

As stated above, this research is for the most part autoethnographic. Autoethnography is defined as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis 2010:10.). I employ Autoethnography as a post-colonial, experiential methodological approach that allows me to look at personal experience to challenge established/fixed systems or ways of thinking within an established paradigm; the music industry and its inner workings. Colonialism is associated with power and hegemony. Post-colonial (or a post-colonial approach) is one that revisits, challenges, and perhaps in some ways rejects these establishments. As

mentioned by Mbembe, "The postcolony is characterised by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and a lack of proportion as well as by distinctive ways in which identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation" (Mbembe, 1992:3).

Furthermore, autoethnography is viewed as "one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:2). As a method, it combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011) and is not clearly prescribed, instead, tends to be a journey anguished with emergent crises and tensions (Harwood & Eaves, 2017).

With that said, we can say that autoethnography is the narrative analysis of an inquiry and is also self-reflexive. Therefore, I acknowledge my involvement with this research. I am intertwined with this research because I operate as both researcher and part of the subject of inquiry. That is what has made this project unique. Though my perspectives shape this research, they do not purport to be a complete account or reflection of the South African Indie music scene. Perspectives are subject to change and are in a constant state of flux, as is the process of becoming.

The main characteristic of autoethnography "entails the scientist or practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon" (McIlveen in Mendez, 2013:281). In this context, the phenomenon I am intimately related to is the South African popular music industry where I am independently an active participant. Through autoethnography, I analyse and interpret my experiences in order to make meaning or make sense of my inquiry. I use my own experiences to discuss the obstacles I have faced as an independent artist with regard to the production and distribution of my debut album, *Becoming*, and the possibilities of manoeuvring through these issues in better or formative ways. Autoethnography has enabled me to connect my personal experiences to the culture or phenomenon of the music industry.

Ethnography is also a part of my methodology. Ethnography is fundamentally rooted in fieldwork. In the context of my study, the 'field' is the independent music space and the process of making and marketing my debut album. I use ethnography to engage with the field in various ways. Firstly, I am a participant observer as I am already a performer (and the

subject of my own research). Therefore, this research is nuanced in that it is multivocal. Multivocality is based on the reasoning that there are “plural and sometimes contradictory narrative voices located within the researcher that would expand the ways we can perceive and inquire an encounter” (De Beer, 2016:7) and is defined as a “susceptibility to interpretation in a number of different ways; ambiguity, polysemy” (Collins English Dictionary, 2022). Therefore, this relates to my research design as fundamentally interpretivist. The data I sourced for this project came from personal journal notes, records of the creative process, video recordings (my EPK, footage collected of the recording process, footage from my participation at the National Arts Festival 2019, memos to self) and lastly, audio recordings (memos to self).

To further understand this field, I explored and conducted in-depth interviews with other South African artists operating in different genres who have also engaged with the South African music industry as independent artists. For this data, I intended to interview Nduduzo Makhathini (a jazz artist recently signed to Blue Note Records, an American record label owned by Universal Music Group). Unfortunately, I was unable to reach him within the allocated time for my interviews. I managed to interview an equally important musician and music businessperson. I interviewed Nicholas Olsen who is a musician, an attorney and business manager of a South African Death Metal band currently signed to a Czech based label titled Lacerated Enemy Records. I also interviewed Hlengiwe Ntombela, a Gospel artist who released her debut album in 2020 and was later signed to Capitol Music Nashville USA in 2022, and MUZI, an independent Dance/Electronic artist who has achieved wide international reach.

These artists were valuable to my research project because they operate across a wide range of genres which ties into my personal approach to music. Furthermore, each of these artists have independently released music and achieved some measure of success. In addition, I interviewed music business consultant and author, Jonathan Shaw. Though the primary focus is my own experience, the data from these interviews assisted in contextualising and analysing my experience.

These artists were relevant to my study regarding their journeys in the South African music industry. Olsen began his career as an independent artist who had experienced being managed and working towards a successful performing career. He then studied law from the

age of 30 to his late 30s. Currently, he is an attorney who runs his own practice specialising in music and entertainment law. He operates this practice while managing local/global Death Metal band, *Vulvodynia*. His vast experience within music and music management provided me with helpful information.

Ntombela's perspective of her experiences and successes as an Indie in South Africa's Gospel music industry were relevant in that firstly, the Gospel industry in South Africa captures an extensive crowd in comparison to other South African music genres. According to HS&E (Havas Sports and Entertainment), "13% of South Africa's population listens to Gospel, which is more than three times the global average of four percent" (Taylor, 2015). Therefore, it was of interest to know how this contributed to her success as an Indie in the Gospel music market and whether this market offers better opportunities for artists due to the religious sensibility that they have in common with their audiences.

MUZI's perspectives and experiences as an Indie in the South African music industry provided insights as to how he (through his independent label, 'WE.THE.BUNDU') was able to achieve international reach and how different South African audiences (and their consumer behaviours) are from international audiences.

I chose these artists because they provided a wide range of experiences that are different from my own. This allowed me to contextualise my own experience as there is no predictable route or journey as an independent artist in the South African music industry, or any part of the creative industry for that matter. In conducting these interviews, the final layer to my research methodology engaged with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, known as IPA. This is a qualitative approach that is defined as one that "aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience" (Smith, 2015:41). IPA is intended to produce "an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions and it recognizes that this is an interpretative endeavour as humans are sense-making organisms" (Smith, 2015:41). Furthermore, this approach to research looks at a phenomenon and tries to understand how different people respond to it. It was applicable to my research as I intended to explore and analyse how these three artists responded to the phenomenon of the South African music marketplace.

I approached these interviews with open-ended as opposed to set questions as this would allow for discussion and would invite conversation. Bearing in mind the Covid-19 pandemic, I offered the interviewees the option of meeting on Zoom or Google Meets. Through IPA, I was able to interpret the information attained from these interviews to contextualise and measure them against my own experience.

Finally, my research project was fundamentally experiential because my entire inquiry looks at how people experience engaging with the music industry. Therefore, this project is empirical research, which is research that is concerned with gaining knowledge through observation and lived experience rather than a theory or hypothesis. Central to my research project is myself and my own experience of *Becoming*. Therefore, my sources are relevant and valid because they are based on documented first-hand experience. However, because my main sources are my own experiences, much of the data was interpretative. With that said, my methods were appropriate and through careful documentation and reflection rendered reliable information about current experiences in the music industry in South Africa. I was able to review my personal experience in the context of the experiences of others as well as in relation to published resources in academia and public media platforms. This facilitated purposeful engagement with the issues concerning the 'dilemma' — the contradictions between the artist enterprise and the marketplace.



### CHAPTER THREE: BECOMING – THE MUSICAL PROCESS

Preparing to set some time aside to write this chapter, I made myself comfortable, cradled a cappuccino, and decided to watch a few YouTube videos to ‘relax’ the mind. I start off with a live performance of Tracy Chapman’s *Fast Car*, a song I have started learning to play and one I am starting to fall in love with. As I watch, I recall a moment I had been seated in the office of a man who was the MD of Downtown Music Hub in 2015. At the time, (pre *Becoming*), I was in my Honours year at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The two of us were in his office and following the initial formalities and conversations about my visit and review of Downtown Music Studios, he interjected to remark: “You look a little like Tracy Chapman, I hope you play like her too!”. Though I found it quite condescending (as if to suggest that all young black women who play the acoustic guitar and sing should resemble Tracy Chapman as a prerequisite), I did find it intriguing that he should compare me to Tracy Chapman when he had never heard me sing, play, or write music. I was just there on a school assignment – to write a review. I was not necessarily perturbed by the comparison to such a great singer-songwriter (it would not be the first time it would happen). I did however, politely follow up with something along the lines of “Really? Thank you. I’m not quite sure about playing or singing like her. But I play and sing like me. I hope that’s enough, some day.” Little did I know that that brief encounter would mark the beginning of my professional music career through the recording of my independent debut album, *Becoming* at Downtown Music Hub, and strangely (though naturally) a two-year inward battle of constantly proving myself to myself, and to industry gatekeepers, taste makers, PR executives and everything else from which most artists actually want to stay far away. *Becoming* was driven by the creative impulse and desire to tell a story imbedded in and interwoven with who I was. It was a means of introducing myself to myself and to those around me and ultimately, finding or making sense of my own identity, my own musical soundscape, the things that anchor me, a means to find out what drives me.

As Frith argues in his book, *Performing Rites*, “music gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it” (Frith, 1998:272). *Becoming* did exactly that; it provided a context within which I was to experience myself and the world around me. I soon discovered that the music in *Becoming* or the process of creating the music for it, also comprised (or was a construction of) my musical memory, my sonic sensibility, a place of ‘home’ as it were. It

consisted of the sights and sounds I had absorbed throughout my life. It consisted of everything that sounded like home when there was none. Therefore, *Becoming* was as much of a comfort, if not more so to me than to others. Growing up in a South African Christian household with two parents and an older brother, my childhood was characterised by music and a way of listening to music that still speaks true to who I am as a musician. Zionist music and African church hymns often broke the silence and filled the voids; such music was also the backdrop to many of my fondest memories. School drop offs were characterised by a great deal of South African jazz made by the likes of Jonathan Butler, Selaelo Selota and Philip Tabane. Butler's acoustic rendition of Miriam Makeba's *Pata Pata* marks the first time I fell in love with the sound of an acoustic guitar, and I have fallen in love a million times over since then. Shortly after hearing Butler's *Pata Pata* from his 10<sup>th</sup> studio album, *Surrender* I asked my father for a guitar.

Briefly, Zionist music is music that was birthed through the establishment of African Independent Churches (abbreviated as AIC). It is a nuanced type of music which is characteristically cyclic and polyrhythmic (and in certain settings, trance-inducing) in its nature and therefore resonates with many African indigenous musical practices (Mapaya, 2013). It is nuanced in the ways in which music functions in the African Indigenous church setting. As per Jules-Rosette's (1985) analysis of African Church music in Mapaya's study, the music of the AIC can be divided into three different categories:

- hymns (acculturated hymns)
- didactic (instructive, provides church members with moral directives in their daily conduct)
- ecstatic (music that is spirit-driven, praise and worship in style).

(Mapaya, 2013:49)

Certain songs serve certain functions and would only be sung at a particular time. For example, healing songs were sung towards the end of the church service when it was time to pray for the sick or emotionally/spiritually distressed through the laying of hands. An example of this would be *Siyacela/Amen* ([Listen Here](#)) loosely translated as "Lord, we ask/Amen" and *Uphi umhlobo onjengoJesu* ([Listen Here](#)) both of which are hymns. The song, *Uphi umhlobo*

*onjengoJesu* actually an adaptation of the African-American Spiritual, *No, not one* ([Listen Here](#)), would be a song sung for the purpose of healing through prayer.

Other songs which were didactic or instructive in nature tended to be perceived as a form of preaching because of their biblical interpretative function (Mapaya, 2013). One such a song includes ***Ukuhlabelela*** ([Listen here from 0:00 – 0:38s](#)), below are the lyrics:

*Ukuhlabelela kuyamthokozisa, (Singing causes happiness)*

*Odabukileyo, hlabelela! (So to the down-hearted person, sing!)*

*Ukuhlabelela kuyamthokozisa, (Singing causes happiness)*

*Odabukileyo, hlabelela! (So to the down-hearted person, sing!)*

*Uma uqhutshwa umoya, (When the Spirit leads you)*

*Shesha ulalele, (Be quick to listen)*

*Xwaya ukhuleke, (Be cautious and pray)*

*Hlabelela. (Sing!)*

Perhaps without purposefully intending to, I interpreted such songs as a form of storytelling. The structure of this music – cyclic, polyrhythmic with multi-incidental entries, its functions, and the manner in which the music was sung speaks to its multidimensionality and nuances. As Mapaya mentions, “the songs they create, sing and to which they dance as well as the manner in which Black Zionists pray, makes for a splendid performative poetry” (Mapaya, 2013:59).

Further, I believe Zionist music has a tendency to be harmolodic, a trait to which I would like to pay particular attention for a moment. Harmolodics (a compositional theory and term coined by legendary jazz artist and composer, Ornette Coleman) is a term that loosely describes the synthesis of harmony, melody and movement and therefore is a form of free jazz improvisation (Frink, 2016:88). Harmolodics: this was a word I learnt from a fellow University alumni and South African jazz artist studying in New York who believed harmolodics (as defined by Ornette Coleman) was well demonstrated in Zionist music. Harmolodics, as defined by Jones (2020) is “a word that sums up his [Coleman’s] ideas about the equality of rhythm, harmony, and melody – a compositional method that freed jazz from its dependence

on European forms and returned it, in a way, to its roots in a call-and-response tradition” (Jones, 2020). Furthermore, Jones notes that “harmolodic playing could be dissonant, atonal, and cacophonous, and it could be sublime, often in the same moment” (2020, n.p.). From a musical and performative perspective, it is perhaps this freedom from Western and European structures and forms where the connection between harmolodics and African Zionist music is made.

I liked this word because of how it aptly describes what I listened to as I grew up yet could not define. I particularly liked Coleman’s philosophy, “Harmolodic is a real usable word. For one thing, it doesn’t have any gender. It’s not a word that means man or woman, or black or white, or right or wrong, or good or evil. It’s just a word, like a colour” (Coleman, 2020). I wondered whether this had silently been my own philosophy regarding music making, one that I had been unable to articulate all along. Nonetheless, I continue to analyse my sonic sensibilities or sonic ‘home’ through the musical choices I made in *Becoming*.

My album begins with a dreamy one minute 41 second introduction titled *ABC*. The choice of the song title is two-fold, in that the chord progression itself is A major, B minor 7<sup>th</sup> and C major (which then resolves to a minor chord) and secondly, as a representation of the beginning of something. The beginning of my story as an individual, and the beginning of my musical vocabulary. In this track, the first voice that is heard is my father’s. He speaks of his relationship with his mother and how he is different from his siblings. How his mother, fondly referred to as *ugogo* (the isiZulu word for grandmother) enjoys his singing as it reminds her of God, of something other-worldly. My voice, in harmony with the chord progression, is then introduced as he speaks. The second voice is my mother’s voice. In this excerpt she speaks of me. She describes how I am different and how I am unlike my siblings, how I am averse to shouting and raised voices and would often find more peaceful ways of resolving conflict. The song ends as the last voice (the voice of my cousin, Sean Samuels) representing my brothers Mazisi Mapisa and Christos Mabaso, asks of my whereabouts and whether I am in Durban (a place my father often refers to as my ‘spiritual home’). On the face of it, the question posed seems simple. However, it is indicative of the kind of relationship I have with my siblings.

The brief excerpts and conversations heard throughout this track, most of which were secretly recorded during arbitrary conversations with my family, are part of what makes me who I am.

They later gave me permission to use these conversations in the recording of *Becoming*. These conversations somewhat mirror me or each other and introduce the rest of the themes explored throughout this album: themes of rebirth, home, navigation, tension, love, hope and resolution. I use these themes or ideas to position and then re-position myself, to recontextualise the past and present because at its core, music is fundamentally experiential. Music is a phenomenon that can offer alternatives through reinventing an experience, a moment, or person. It is my lived experience that is being constructed through an engagement with music. This lived experience is a process in itself, as is the music. Frith puts it aptly as he states, “that our experience of music - of music making and music listening - is best understood as an experience of this self-in-process” (Frith, 1996:109).

The second song, titled *Show ‘n Tell* is an up-tempo 4/4 track which is significantly inspired by jazz music, particularly the live jazz shows I spent most Wednesday nights listening to during my undergraduate degree at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Furthermore, it is an ode to my background, a mixture of jazz and the complex polyrhythms celebrated in African music. The first 8 bars of the song begin with the percussionist playing on congas and bongos while I play chords (A Major and C Major) on the acoustic guitar. We are then joined by the rest of the band — drums, bass, piano and guitar. Lyrically, *Show ‘n Tell* introduces the theme of hope. Hope is the direct English translation of my SeTswana name, *Tsholofelo*. These are the lyrics:

*Birds fill the sky,  
like tears fill my eyes,  
like leaves fill the trees,  
like water fills the seven seas.”*  
It ends on a hopeful note;  
*Like a pocketful of roses,  
one day happiness will show itself,  
and on that day you will notice,  
that your smile will be on show ‘n tell,  
show ‘n tell.”*

This last stanza is reminiscent of the well-known English nursery rhyme or folksong, *Ring around the Rosie* in the borrowed but adapted first line, “a pocketful of roses” instead of “a pocketful of posies” (which is a small bunch of flowers). However, instead of implying or being some kind of euphemism for the Great Plague (otherwise known as “The Black Death” or Bubonic Plague) of the 1600s, it speaks to hope, to finding happiness and ultimately, to rebirth. Indeed, this theme of rebirth is implied visually as well. In the cover art of the album, I am dressed in a white dress and captured seated in the middle of a wrecked house looking out a window. This image suggests rising above adversity despite one’s surroundings, thus referencing regeneration and rebirth. Furthermore, my dress code in the album art alludes to rebirth/baptism in the Christian religion as white dresses/robes are worn for a baptismal. Through this image and the song *Show ‘n Tell*, I felt I was introducing myself – as if I had been born again. See Figure 1 (album artwork).



Figure 1: *Becoming* album artwork

*Show 'n Tell* is then followed by *Day Dreaming*. Here, my femininity and the side of me that still wants to believe in love despite having grown up in a divorced home, begins to surface. It is a tender 3 minutes and 37 second song that opens with chords in A flat major and C# minor. In *Day Dreaming*, I innocently, almost carefully, profess my desire for a love I perhaps have not yet experienced. Throughout the rest of the album, there is a tension that exists between my two identities (one as a child and the other as a woman). Though I acknowledge that the process of becoming at this point in my life includes the transition from childhood to womanhood. In *Day Dreaming*, I am firmly positioning myself as a woman deserving of love in spite of what I have seen or come to believe as a child. It is as if belief in what I am singing about heals my inner child. For the rest of the album, I recognise this tension as an integral part of self-discovery and evolution, hence the title of the album, *Becoming*.

Perhaps in a broader context, *Becoming* alludes to identity and self-definition as mentioned by Frith. In addition, *Day Dreaming* allowed me to say things I would probably not have been brave enough to say upfront thus referencing Frith who mentions as part of what makes popular music valuable, is that it “gives us a way of managing the relationship between our public and private emotional lives” (Frith, 2007:265). I grew up shy to admit or acknowledge romantic feelings, especially because of how vulnerable I believe they would make me. *Day Dreaming* was me defying that urge and firmly positioning myself as a woman who can be, and who desires vulnerability. Ironically, these tensions between our public and private selves are not only prevalent within the music but, as I soon discover, these tensions are evident in the trajectory of my musical career.

The *Becoming* album offers 6 further tracks. The track listing is as follows:

- 4: *Feels Like Home* (in which I feature pianist, Sanele Phakathi, on tenor vocals, and a 9-piece string ensemble called the Ionian String Ensemble led by violinist and conductor, Lindumuzi Mngoma)
- 5: *Still Waters Run Deep* (abbreviated to S.W.R.D.) featuring the Ionian String Ensemble
- 6: *Wind & Wave*
- 7: *25 Sinsaut* (a poem)
- 8: *Benediction* (featuring the Ionian String Ensemble)
- 9: *You'll Never Know*.

See Figure 2 below: *Becoming* liner notes and back of CD jewel case

I choose to focus and discuss the first three tracks because the processes discussed here are applicable to the other tracks in *Becoming*. Adhering to no particular genre, the band and I articulated this musical journey through a blend of different styles of music while remaining sonically cohesive. The band and their roles comprised:

- Sanele Phakathi (piano, keys, string composition),
- Sivumintando Mdamba (drums, sound design)
- Nick Pitman (electric guitar and effect pedal)
- Senzo Mdamba (electric bass)
- Menzi Mkhize (percussion)
- Tsholofelo Mapisa (vocals, song writing, acoustic and electric guitars)
- Feature: Ionian String Ensemble conducted by Mr Lindumuzi Mngoma



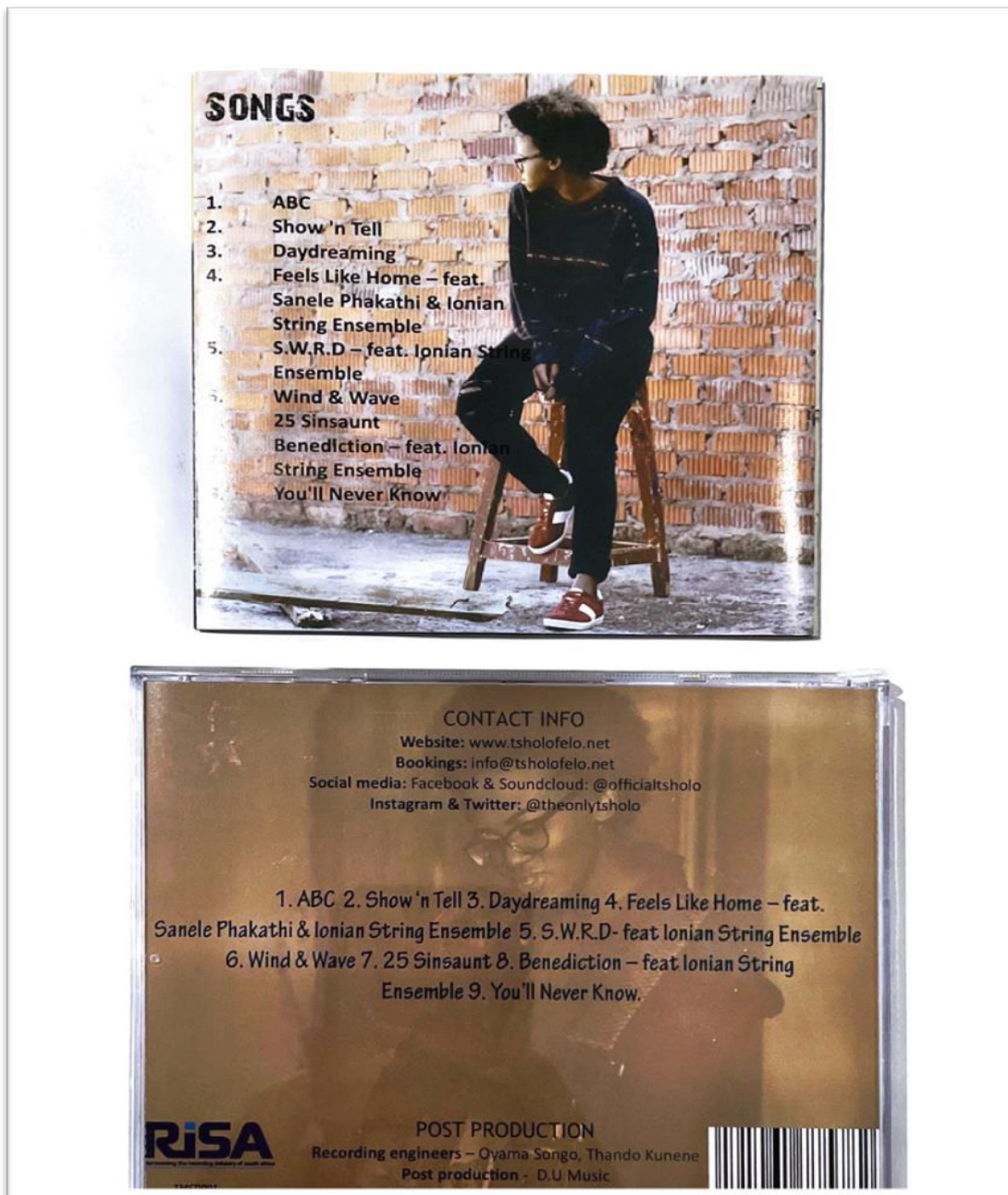


Figure 2: *Becoming* liner notes and back of CD jewel case

## The Recording Process

In November 2016, I began preparations for the album recording at Downtown Music Hub (abbreviated as D.T.M.H) with D.T.M.H studio engineer Oyama Songo and Thando Kunene. Songo, a studio engineer at D.T.M.H with whom I was well acquainted introduced me to Kunene. The team familiarised themselves with the music through cell phone recordings of my songs that would eventually comprise *Becoming*. The three of us decided on a full band recording setup

which would require me to book Studio 1, the biggest and most accommodating studio for a six-piece band in the hub. Excited, nervous, and brave, I was finally ready for what would be the trip of my young life and budding music career, and although I did not know then, would form the basis of my research inquiry many years later. The recordings were to take place in January 2017 as I wanted to hit the ground running. With financial backing from my family, I booked an 8-seater Hyundai H1 from Avis at King Shaka International (Durban) for 4-day rental. The band and I left Durban on the 9 January and set out for Johannesburg.

The album recording process, for which we were well rehearsed, commenced on Tuesday 10 January 2017. After setup and a quick run through of the music, we began recording. On that day in particular, we concluded around 16:00 and followed a similar working schedule daily until the 12 January subsequent to which we celebrated my first ever recording experience. However, this was merely the beginning as we still had to compose the music for the string ensemble (accomplished by pianist, Sanele Phakathi) and add the orchestration to the original sound recordings at a later stage. Weeks later, I returned to Johannesburg alone to refine our mixes and to improve and track vocals. 'Track/Tracking' in this instance refers to the process of recording individual pieces of music, where each musical instrument is given its own track in the mix. Phakathi had also completed composing the music for strings. I forwarded the sheet music to Mr Lindumuzi Mngoma, who is a violinist as well as the conductor of the Ionian String Ensemble, a group of young string players based and trained by Mngoma in Soweto, Johannesburg. At the time, Mngoma also sat on the board of Downtown Music Hub.

On the 1 February, I was joined by Phakathi and drummer, Sivumintando Mdamba. The second stage of studio sessions began on the morning of 2 February 2017. During this time, we tracked a 9-piece string ensemble for the songs *Feels Like Home*, *Still Waters Run Deep (S.W.R.D)*, and *Benediction*. On 3 February, Phakathi and Mdamba returned to Durban. The post-production process (that is, mixing and mastering) followed shortly.

Postproduction was handled by Songo, under the auspices of his company D.U Music. At times during this process, he would call me into the studio to listen to the music and refine what was necessary before pressing the final master copy. This was a process in which I was fully involved despite my lack of expertise in post-production. It was a tedious but fulfilling experience in itself and opened my eyes to just how much work truly goes into making a final

musical work of art. The dynamics of a particular song and the way the sounds pan from one speaker to another are all purposely actioned and all require a meticulous application of skill, intention and time. This process saw the sonic story of *Becoming* coalesce as my becoming was translated into song. This is reiterated by Songo, “I had to kind of take different elements from everything that she likes in terms of just moulding the sound, from the recording process all the way to the mixing and to kind of like have a final sound that’s uniquely hers” (Songo, 2017).

For the postproduction process, Songo used Corrinne Bailey Rae’s album *The Heart Speaks in Whispers* (May 2016) as a sonic reference for how he would mix and master *Becoming*. Once again, this was a process in which I was very involved. On some occasions I would bring in a few members of the band to help me make certain decisions. I had formed a very organic relationship with my colleagues, almost all of whom had, like me, been students at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Though they respected my leadership, we all were comfortable and free to shape the sound and steer the ship towards a common goal. Pitman (guitarist) affirms this during an interview where he states, “it’s really nice because she does trust us almost completely with making her music what it is, and we’re really fortunate to be with great musicians so it’s easy” (Pitman, 2017). This fluidity is also well expressed by Mdamba (bassist) when speaking of his favourite song on the album. Mdamba states, “my favourite song would have to be *Day Dreaming*. We were actually here at the Jazzy Rainbow rehearsing for Tsholofelo’s gig and she just played it ... I don’t know where it came from or whatever she was doing, but I just followed her and she liked it” (Mdamba, 2017). I believe that this openness that existed between us as friends and musicians was vital in creating *Becoming* because we all respected each other musically and were all invested and eager to put our best foot forward. Kunene also helped manage the relationships between us by ensuring that though everyone had the space to express their views and listen in on the postproduction sessions, I would be the one to make the final call on all decisions. Commenting on the experience of working on *Becoming*, Kunene states:

Tsholo’s sound is very authentic, especially where we are sonically as a culture right now, so it was so refreshing to hear someone who’s doing her own thing - firstly, originally and not being afraid. Even though when you create music it’s one of those things you’re so fearful to do. But with her she was like ‘this is who I am, accept me’ (Kunene, 2017).

On the 14 May 2017, *You'll Never Know* was released as a single from the album and made available for free download on music streaming sites Soundcloud and Audiomack. Finally, on the 2 June 2017, *Becoming* was digitally distributed through a digital music distribution company called *CDBaby* on all major online platforms including iTunes, Google Play Apple Music.

Ultimately, though, the music and the process of creating *Becoming* ends or becomes — as it were, my identity through the music I had made, and my identity as an individual continues to be in the process of becoming. I am perpetually becoming, and simultaneously, the music in *Becoming* is now a representation of that process (that is, the process of becoming) although *Becoming* (as in the product) now 'is'. It is almost as if I 'arrested' that information for a moment. There are many interrelated processes involved in creating music just as there are in identity. These processes keep shifting and changing with time, all of which allude to Hall's conceptualisation of meaning through what he has developed as the 'circuit of culture'.

The circuit of culture, as described by Annabelle Leve, (2012) "emphasizes the moments of production, representation, consumption, regulation and identity, and the interrelated articulations of these moments" (Leve 2012:1). Through this study, I am articulating certain processes in order to better understand myself, as well as to better understand the contemporary phenomenon or subculture of the South African independent music market. Hall's conceptualization of this as a circuit recognizes this phenomenon as a process that's never ending, and that, in fact, the relationship between the different points on the circuit are shifting in relation to each other. Where one started off thinking about music and the idea of music as art and/or music as product, one begins the process of looking at the different elements of music production and dissemination in relation to one another as they evolve in that circuit of culture. I recognize that these elements are actually shifting in response to each other rather than being separated in a linear fashion.

## **The Costs**

The financial implications of being an independent artist through this particular undertaking are nothing I was prepared for or could have imagined. Overall, producing the album required capital well over R50 000 from pre-production (that is, rehearsals and booking rehearsal studios) all the way through to the final product. As such, I have broken down these costs under the following titles: Travel, Studio, Post-Production, Digital & Physical Distribution bearing in mind that some of these costs are estimates as not all costs were documented and accounted for at the time. Furthermore, I have provided invoices/statements as appendices and supporting documents to this particular section of this chapter.

### *Travel:*

These amounts were spent between the dates 09/01/2017-03/02/2017.

• H1 Hyundai minibus hire:	R11,662. 43
• Tolls & Food (Cash):	R3000.00
• Driver Flights:	R1533.44
• Sanele Phakathi (bus tickets):	R660.00
• Siya Mdamba (flights):	R1700.00
• Driver for the week:	R896.00
• Subtotal:	R19,451.87

(Appendices 1–3)

### *Studio:*

These amounts were spent between the dates 10/01/2017-02/02/2017.

• Studio 1 – 1 session (6 hrs):	R1755.00
• Studio 1 – 1 session (6 hrs):	R1755.00
• Backline hire for 2 sessions:	R5600.00
• Studio Engineer for 2 sessions:	R1500.00
• Studio 1 – 1 session (6 hrs):	R1755.00
• 9 piece string ensemble (3 hrs):	R5265.00 (paid in cash)
• Studio Engineer 1 session:	R800.00
• Subtotal:	R18,430.00

(Appendices 4–10)

### *Post-Production:*

• Mixing (8 tracks)	:	R550 per track
• Mastering	:	R200 per track
• Subtotal	:	R6000.00

(Appendix 11)

### *Digital Distribution:*

• You'll Never Know <i>CDBaby</i> Single Submission	:	R 132.39 (\$9.95)
• UPC Barcode Single Submission	:	R66.53 (\$5.00)
• Becoming <i>CDBaby</i> Album Submission	:	R651.97 (\$49.00)
• UPC Barcode Album Submission	:	R266.11 (\$20.00)
• Subtotal	:	R1117.00

(Appendices 12 and 13)

The amounts on the above mentioned appendices appear in US dollars. I converted these amounts to Rands using the 2017 USD to ZAR exchange rates.

### *Physical Distribution:*

1000 CD Copies (DM Pro)	:	R13,452.00
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(Appendix 14)

### *Other/Promotional efforts:*

• Photo Shoots	:	±R4000 (2017 & 2018 photo shoots)
• Make up	:	±R1,800
• Zareef Minty Holdings PR	:	R7000 (R3500 per month for 2 months)
• Mel Media EPK shoot	:	R6500
• Subtotal	:	±R19,300.00

(Appendices 15–18)

Therefore, the grand total would be the sum of all these costs:

R19,451.87 + R18,430.00 + R6000.00 + R1117.00. + R13,452.00 +

±R19,300.00 = ± R77,750.87

## Sales and Successes

The total sales generated from *Becoming* amounted to \$93.29 (R1,424.62) for digital purchase and streaming (Appendix 19) and 128 physical copies sold (@R100 each). Furthermore, a SAMRO royalty payout of R2,391.93 was received for airplay on KAYA FM, the first radio station to play songs from the album. The accumulated total for sales thus far would be R16,615.68.

Clearly, the costs of production far outweighed the album sales generated from *Becoming*. However, the sense of accomplishment that I felt in the wake of producing the album from its preliminary stages through to the final product, the fact that it came into being, far outweighs the profits or monetary gain. Nevertheless, I am well aware that the model that is implicit in my description of the process of producing *Becoming* is not sustainable as it requires a considerable amount of personal investment. Having said that, it is at this point that my dilemmas began to surface. So far, I had been fully engaged as an artist in the creation of *Becoming* insofar as music making is concerned. Towards the end of this music making process however, I was thrown into different roles that may have moved me further and further away from the music. I had to be the one marketing, I was the project manager responsible for logistics, I was the accountant responsible for invoicing, I was responsible for, amongst other things, following up on payments. Essentially, I was my own artist manager and having to take on all these roles meant I was overextending myself as these roles all required different skill sets. Though I was certain I could make the music, the consumption of that music turned product exceeded my scope.



As De Villiers (2006) mentions, music business strategy particularly in South Africa tends to be elusive and difficult to grasp for most industry participants. Indeed, my experience showed me how little I knew about *music as business* or the music industry in South Africa, particularly for an independent artist. To put it bluntly, I had no *strategy* in place. Much like Negus (1997) I needed to confront or understand the music industry as both “a commercial business driven by the pursuit of profit and a site of creative human activity” Negus (1997:36) and recognise that these two truths can co-exist.

Though the experience of creating *Becoming* was invaluable, the financial outcome (having made a financial loss) presented me with a conundrum that further emphasized this dichotomy between the creative part of being a musician and economically surviving as an artist. As previously mentioned, this dichotomy is aptly described by Abbing who maintains that “as an artist I am convinced that aesthetic value is independent of market value. But as an economist, I disagree with this. As an economist I believe that quality general corresponds with success in the market” (2002:55).

It is through this dichotomous relationship that I began to question my experience and ask: what could I have done differently from an economist's point of view, how do I reconcile music and money? *Should I* reconcile music and money? Part of what Negus (1996) mentions in his text regarding the music industry as both a commercial site and a creative site is the difficulty in bringing these two worlds together. He comments, "the problem is trying to bring the two together: most theorists have tended to come down on the side of the corporate machine or the human beings" (Negus, 1997:36). Here I would like to propose not bringing these two worlds together, I would prefer to combine them or rather, propose that these two separate worlds are a part of one another, perhaps even intertwined. I will unpack this in further detail in the next chapter. The point that arises from this statement is that difficulty only ensues once we try bringing these two worlds together, once we try to do it all.

Ultimately, the achievement of an artist or musician is to create and produce artwork that is of quality and value. How that artwork is marketed and consumed is a different issue altogether, one that will be unpacked further in Chapter Four as I engage with South African music industry professionals and South African independent music industry participants who have trod these paths.

## CHAPTER FOUR: AND NOW?

7 March 2018. It is 11:10 and a rather chilly Tuesday morning in Johannesburg. I am in Germiston collecting boxes of the physical copies of *Becoming*. I open one of the boxes of CDs as a gentleman working for DM Pro (fully known as Digital Media Productions – a company specialising in CD and DVD replication) loads the rest of the boxes into my car and I hold a copy of *Becoming* for the very first time. My pride and joy and my very first engagement with the music industry. Amidst the pride and excitement of seeing myself on an album cover and marvelling at my work and how far we have come, is a question — a silent, incessant, ‘and now? What happens next?’ This question is not unfamiliar because 9 months ago I was confronted with the same question when in June 2017 *Becoming* was released digitally to media platforms including iTunes, Apple Music, Google Play through CD Baby — an online distributor of independent music and that has been described as “anti-label” by its CEO Tracy Maddux (CD Baby, 2022). Now after 9 month’s ‘gestation’ the physical copy is in hand; and the same question is begging a response.

I asked myself “how do I go about distribution?” The obvious solution was to plan and execute an album launch and tour, during which time I would sell physical copies as merchandise in the hope that supporters would be more likely to purchase a physical copy of the album after experiencing it live. As music blogs and digital aggregators such as Tunecore have said; “Selling CDs/USB Flash Drives at gigs can help you finance your next recording session or tour” (Brown, 2022). This would serve the dual purpose of expediting self-distribution and putting money in my pocket to help fund a tour. This seemed like the obvious choice for me.

Such had been my initial thought after the album’s digital release, however, such a launch and subsequent album tour would require further (if not additional) financial investment and sponsorship and I had already exhausted my funds. In the interim, a more viable solution was to create some kind of demand (to make a tour possible and financially viable for prospective investors). I considered contacting radio stations about the digital release, although this came with its own set of difficulties as my emails often went unanswered. Out of a list of 25 music compilers from various radio stations across the country, I identified 10 for whom I believed my music, particularly my single *You’ll Never Know*, would be an excellent fit. Of those 10, none responded.

I looked towards procuring radio plugging services from various companies that offer artist services. Radio plugging is loosely defined as a way of getting new music aired on radio, where a radio plugger (often a public relations specialist) acts as a link between bands/artists and station managers and recommends music that fits the station (Corkin, 2020). This proved to be another dead end for me as such companies were charging thousands per month for this service. One such a company charged R7,000–R14,000 per month for local and international plugging, another charged R10,000–R18,000 per month for their local and international plugging package (across 60 South African radio stations and 10 African stations) or the option of a PR package which consisted of PR interviews across TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, and online media starting from a retainer fee of R20,000 per month. I simply could not afford this.

Shifting my efforts to physical distribution through an independent music distributor seemed to be my next best course of action. Yet, even there I was met with further disappointment as the submission details required by music distribution companies for a young artist starting out in the industry were unreasonable. One company in particular required a marketing plan and budget, radio chart positions and playlisting information outlining which radio stations were supporting my songs, the number of plays to date, as well as a sales history of previous albums — all before they could take stock and even then, this was a decision to be made only if they were satisfied with the information I would provide. How could I fulfil the requirement of submitting radio chart positions when radio compilers were not answering emails and while I could not afford artist services such as radio plugging? How could I have provided the sales history of previous albums if this was my first? These distribution requirements seemed not to be concerned with how good (or bad) the music might be, but how sellable it is. Put simply, it seemed I had not developed enough media presence (or been heard/popular enough) to be considered for physical distribution. This was a disheartening experience to say the least and one that had me feeling as if I was, what Frith calls, “banging against blockages” (Frith, Straw & Street, 2001:125). This ‘undefined territory’ which consisted of complex music media networks and ‘middlemen’ or gatekeepers was the most frustrating part of my journey as an artist, one that almost caused me to quit music making (or the commodification of it) altogether. It seemed that the authors’ words regarding music media networks and mechanisms rang true:

"each of these people [gatekeepers] had the power to stop a release getting to the marketplace; a record that is neither seen nor heard might as well not have been released in the first place. The question then becomes how the gate keepers can be persuaded to let a record through (one answer has been financial inducement or payola)" (Frith, Straw & Street, 2001:124).

Payola, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "the practice of bribing someone in return for the unofficial promotion of a product in the media. I would like to pay close attention to this word for a moment, firstly, because this is a word (and a practice) I was to confront during my journey, and secondly, because this was and perhaps continues to be the reality for many South African independent musicians. Though it is a practice most common in the music business, payola and its roots are said to stem from as far back as the American Civil War. William Randle writes: "During the twenties and early thirties, the music business maintained an underground policy of paying for plugs in various ways. Occasionally, organized flare-ups disturbed the system, but it was never eradicated" (Randle, 1961:106). As a result, this fraudulent practice continued to grow and became a "standard in all communications media" (Randle, 1961:104).

In saying that, we can assume that in as much as payola is not a new practice, it continues to affect the chances of success for new and unsigned artists who need their music aired. It is also a challenge that has been prevalent in the South African commercial and independent music market. In a *Times Live* article, Bonginkosi Ntiwane writes of how (now late) rapper Riky Rick spoke out against payola at the 2017 Metro FM awards and how his rant sparked some debate amongst South African radio compilers and radio heads. Ntiwane states:

In South Africa, a musician's success is measured by how many radio stations play his or her songs, and the music compilers on most stations make it pretty tough for the musos to get their songs onto the playlists. There's plenty of great local music, but payola — the illegal payment or other inducement by record companies for the broadcast of recordings on radio — is a huge hurdle (Ntiwane 2017).

In addition, Jonathan G. Shaw states that international music still dominates our local radio station with 58% of the total airplay while local music accounts for only 42% implying that an international song enjoyed 632 plays in its lifetime, as opposed to 455 plays for a local song in its lifetime (Shaw, 2017). Furthermore, a large portion of the 42% seemed to be 'owned' or dominated by commercial music and controlled by major record labels.

Riky Rick suggested that instead, young artists should focus solely on growing a following on the internet through mediums such as social media, as many international artists have achieved success in this way, however, it is important to note and to acknowledge that international music markets and the South African music market are not equitable. In order to validate this statement, it is necessary to look into the South African consumer statistics particularly where L.S.M (living standards measure) is concerned. The Living Standards Measure is a marketing and research tool used in South Africa to determine the living standards of consumers based on their disposable income. This tool segments the South African market not by categorising according to race, gender, age or any other variable used to classify a population, but by grouping people according to their living standards or what they can afford. (L.S.M Calculator – Eighty20, 2022) There are 10 L.S.M groups in total, with 10 being the highest (or most affluent) and 1 being the lowest. Many income groups, specifically those with a lower L.S.M simply lack access to consistent high-speed internet because of the cost. Therefore, the notion of focusing solely on growing a following on the internet, remains unattainable.

With that said, radio remains a very important medium in South Africa because it is the medium through which most South Africans consume music. Further, *Business Wire* reports that the South African music market is dominated by international music companies such as *Universal*, and that “80% of music sold and consumed locally is international” (South Africa Music Industry Report, 2020). This means that as an independent artist, you only have access to roughly a 20% local market share. These variables contribute to the evidence that the South African music market and the international music markets are simply not equitable.

In Ntiwane’s article, head of programming and music at YFM, Tshepo Pule, was available for comment and reiterates this point by stating “international and local markets are not comparable because in South Africa radio is still a very popular medium in many people’s lives” (Pule in Ntiwane, 2017). Furthermore, a producer interviewed by Ntiwane goes on to comment “The music industry here is fairly young so payola is helluva expensive – it’s around R15,000 – which guarantees a song’s high rotation on the station” (Ntiwane, 2017). The producer referred to (who requested to remain anonymous) is said to have music playing on global music platforms but not in South Africa.

The year 2017 moreover, saw the protest of several artists who marched against such practices by the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation). Carlos Ncube, of the Music in Africa Foundation, wrote:

The group, consisting of both young and established musicians, marched from the Sentech Tower in Brixton to SABC's Radio Park in Auckland Park where a memorandum of demands was handed to management. The memorandum says music from upcoming artists was not being played on SABC radio stations because presenters accept 'brown envelopes' from those who can afford to pay for airplay. It says even after the implementation of the 90% local content policy, which was introduced by former SABC chief operations officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng, their music was only stored and not played (Ncube, 2017).

'Brown envelopes', according to this article, refer to payola. This 'brown envelope' was not a concept new to me as I had pursued airplay for *Becoming*; in fact, an SABC employee was the one who suggested it. For my personal integrity (and quite frankly – my pocket), this was out of the question.

Once again, I was caught "banging against blockages" (Frith, Straw & Street, 2001:125) and back to square one, to that same question – "And now?" I wondered whether the music business experience was different from that of a signed artist's experience and ultimately found that though there are differences where ownership is concerned, the business of music was just as unkind to the signed artist. The only thing that seemed to make it worthwhile was the music itself.

Joni Mitchell, a Canadian born singer-songwriter whose career spans 50 years and who is considered a big part of American music culture due to the hits she wrote during her career, often commented on the pain and discomfort of the business side of music before her retirement. "When money meets up with art, there is a lot of pain, and it's the pain of ignorance, and I don't want to meet up with that ignorance again. My work is personal, too vulnerable. That's why I quit making records"(Mitchell in Hilburn, 2004) she says in an article written in 2004 by Robert Hilburn of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Furthermore, commenting on the 'evils' and what she feels is wrong with the music business, Mitchell says:

I heard someone from the music business saying they are no longer looking for talent, they want people with a certain look and a willingness to cooperate, I thought, that's interesting, because I believe a total unwillingness to cooperate is what is necessary to be

an artist - not for perverse reasons, but to protect your vision. The considerations of a corporation, especially now, have nothing to do with art or music. That's why I spend my time now painting (Mitchell in Hilburn, 2004).

Nonetheless, Mitchell enjoyed a successful career as a folk musician; though she alluded to disliking being called a folk musician as it was imposed on her because she was a girl with blonde hair and a guitar (Mitchell in Hilburn, 2004) during which time she released some of her most famous songs such as *A case of you* and *Big Yellow Taxi*. My point here is this, to those that consider themselves purists, the music itself will always be worth the trouble of getting it out into the public. It is perhaps a case of the choice between two evils – does one stop making music because the business of music is only about money and not about music or does one hold onto the hope that good music will always find a way? Because of my experience with *Kaya FM*, I would like to believe the latter.

Songs from *Becoming*, particularly *You'll Never Know* and *Daydreaming* (a song I had not even chosen as a radio single), found themselves on frequent rotation at Kaya FM with little effort on my part. In October 2017, I was booked to play at a 40<sup>th</sup> birthday dinner party. As per usual, I arrived at the venue an hour earlier for a short sound check before the event. During the sound check, one of the sound engineers seemed very impressed with what he heard from me and asked whether my music was released. At the time, *Becoming* had already been released online. He asked whether I was on radio to which I casually responded, “not yet” and told him the truth of how most radio stations just do not respond (though I had never tried to contact Kaya FM initially as it did not appear on the radio compilers list I mentioned earlier). I was unbothered by this, but it seemed to anger him (more than it did me) that I was not getting any airplay. He asked for the title of the album and said he would contact a friend at Kaya FM and get him to listen to it. I did not think much would come of this interaction but some weeks later, I was contacted by *Kaya FM* requesting my album link and biography. Some weeks later, I heard songs from *Becoming* play on the radio for the very first time. Apparently, this was not the first time it had been played but it was the first time I had heard it. Since then, I have been called back for interviews by *Kaya FM* presenters including one particularly special programme called *Kayasette* hosted by *Proverb*, a South African musician and entertainment personality.



Apart from Kaya FM, I did succeed in achieving a fair amount of airplay (and interviews) through various community radio stations such as TUKS Fm, VOW Fm, and Unisa Radio through the efforts of a PR agency I hired for a short while, but I mention Kaya FM's scenario in particular because it was the first time my music was played nationally. It was a unique experience in that playing on Kaya Fm was not the consequence of any effort on my own part, but somehow my music got itself there. It gave me a glimmer of hope and a sense of validation as a musician and recorded artist and proved that good music could have a place and would be as relentless as the music business in occupying that place. The ways in which it finds that space need not be through the conventional routes, networks and mechanisms which have proven in both past and present to be frustrating for the artist, but perhaps we should focus our efforts on how these systems can be bypassed, how we can manoeuvre and reconstruct (by in fact deconstructing) structures and create pathways for our music to flow through. In retrospect, getting on South African radio was no longer my goal, getting my music to people was.

## **The South African 'Indie' Music Scene**

In exploring the South African independent (colloquially known as "Indie") music scene, my position in and experience of it, I acknowledge that this area of study is but a minute part of a much larger machine, that is, the South African music industry or industries. These industries comprise a number of diverse individuals and businesses that make up the music industry (Shaw, 2017). Shaw provides an overview of these separate but inter-related industries by discussing the music industry's supply chain and he discusses the culture cycle (as introduced by UNESCO)<sup>2</sup> The culture cycle, as defined by UNESCO, is a flexible model that is used to study cultural industries. This cycle is concerned with processes and looks at the five stages required to create culture: Creation, Production, Dissemination, Exhibition/ Reception/Transmission, Consumption/Participation. The interactions between these different phases tend to be complex (Shaw, 2017:43-44).

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<sup>2</sup> The culture cycle lays out in five stages or linkages all the processes required to produce, disseminate, and highlight cultural expressions, as well as to receive, use and understand them. (Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2022).

I have discovered that there is a dearth of research on the South African independent music scene in particular and this may be for a number of reasons. Firstly, the South African music industry or industries are relatively young, comparatively speaking. Therefore, the business model for operating as a musician is still based on an older business model or ways of thinking, where the primary objective may be to be signed to one of the principal commercial record labels in South Africa which include Sony, Universal Music Group, Gallo and Warner Music Group, which have been in control of the South African musical soundscape since the mid-1990s—early 2000s (Shaw, 2007). Secondly, the notion of independent music is complex. Shams Quader reiterates the complexities and difficulties of defining independent music (though his focus was on central Sydney’s independent music scene) as he states:

Independent music is a complex concept. It has meant different things at different historical moments of popular music and within academic, music press and industry discourses. Even though what independent music refers to might not be substantive, it has tended to signify an oppositional ethos comprising practices related to maintaining distinction from commercialised popular music. Historical narratives of popular music reveal that independent music or Indie, has been defined and re-defined, from signifying an ethos of resistance comprising anti-major record label and anticorporatisation attitudes, to rubrics of sound aesthetics, marketing categories and niche audience segments (Quader, 2020:ii).

In speaking of the complexities and nuances of the South African music business in particular, Shaw notes this at the outset of his book *The South African Music Business* where he mentions that “the music business is a complex and tough career to be in ... The balance of power within the music industries is fought between creative control and profit” (Shaw, 2017:39). As previously mentioned, De Villiers also notes the difficulties in deriving definitions of the music business (and further, defining independent music within a South African music business context) by saying “Unfortunately, in South Africa, music business strategy has always been an elusive, complex and often difficult-to-grasp topic to the majority of the music industry participants” (De Villiers, 2006:1).

To arrive at a clear understanding of what is meant by the independent music scene in South Africa and how both I and others have participated in it, I will define or strip independent music down to its bare minimum definition(s). Here, independent music refers to music that has been made by an unsigned artist and is independent of any financial backing from major record labels such as Sony, Universal Music Group or Warner Music Group. In layman’s terms,

Indie music is music that is produced by a D.I.Y (do it yourself) artist, or on an independent label, without the traditional resources of a major label (Iles, 2019). It is here that I am firmly embedded and the place from which, together with the other artists and music practitioners, I have found myself located as we have engaged in the South African music market independently – that is, without the resources of a commercial record label.

In discussing and dissecting the South African Indie music scene and its variations, I have conducted interviews, taken part in discussions and collected rather interesting and informative anecdotes from past and present members of the South African independent music scene. These are individuals who are operating within the South African Indie scene in one way or another, as musicians, as music business practitioners, and as educators. Together, they cover a broad spectrum of genres and positions. I approached these interviews and discussions with open-ended as opposed to set questions. I found that this approach enabled me to retrieve much more information about their experiences in music (including music business). It also illuminated the possibilities or consequences that may arise from certain choices, be they aesthetic, personal or business choices. Further, I found that this organic approach to inquiry provides me with a holistic view of the subject, one that is based on meaningful lived experiences. As mentioned by Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley in Quader, I am of the view that “ethnographic fieldwork necessitates meaningful interaction with individuals (Cooley & Barz in Quader, 2020:13) to encapsulate the whole picture that explains how these individuals describe and structure their world” (John Creswell in Quader, 2020). Each of these interviews and discussions took approximately 30-40 minutes and were audio recorded and later transcribed. During these transcriptions, I discovered that a number of different themes arose from all these discussions and experiences, some of which are shared, some of which are unique, but all of which are relevant. Therefore, I will discuss the South African Indie music scene in the context of the following themes: Aesthetic freedom, The difficulties Indies might face, Independent music as a business model, and Digital D.I.Y.

## ***Aesthetic Freedom***

One of the appealing features of the Indie music scene is that it allows for greater control over the aesthetic aspects of the music. Therefore, I have been able to enjoy the freedom to make musical choices that I desire, which I may not have had if I had been signed to any major label - hence my interest in this area of study. Among many things, independent music has been characterised by aesthetic freedom, a break away from mainstream or mass culture attitudes towards an emphasis on individuality and independence with regards to music making and music consumption. Though independent music emerged in the 1960s as a rebellion of sorts, what Quader aptly describes as a critique of the commercial mainstream (Quader, 2020), I believe it to have offered musicians a different or more accepting way to exist as musicians from a music making perspective. As Lumen mentions, “musicians would generally sign with independent record labels, among other reasons, to create music aesthetically independent of mainstream market imperatives (Lumen in Quader, 2020:8). Through this way of making music, I believe musicians can be more open to explore their individuality and identity and it is through a shared identity, between the musicians themselves and their target audience, that they are able to enjoy a successful and financially rewarding career in independent music. This has certainly been the case for some of the musicians I have been able to meet and speak with. In the interviews and discussions about understanding the aesthetic freedoms independent music offers, the musicians spoke fondly of their musical processes and their ability to move in between subjective and objective spaces and draw from different inspirations (sonic or otherwise) to create music that best describes or encapsulates their own musical and/or personal identities.

One such an artist is MUZI (real name Muziwakhe Mazibuko), a South African independent Dance/Electronic artist who has achieved wide international reach. I conducted an insightful interview with MUZI right before his 2022 North American tour for his latest work, *Interblaktik* (2021). My very first encounter with MUZI was during my undergraduate degree. He was living in Durban, and we decided to meet on campus largely because we had mutual friends and came from the same town in Northern KwaZulu Natal – Empangeni. He was down to earth, awkwardly funny and very open to sharing both valuable information and experiences in the early stages of his career. Since that first encounter in 2013/14, I have followed his career and kept an open line of communication with him as he continues to be one of the young independent artists whose journey in the South African independent music scene has inspired my own. In an interview with Anelisa Kubheka, MUZI says:

I realised I don't need to be anything besides myself and if I continued to do that it would all work out in the end. Making music on my terms means having my signature on everything that I do – a little bit of Muzi in everything I produce, whether it's artwork and/or directing music videos (Kubheka, 2018).

His music is a blend of E.D.M (Electronic Dance Music) with an emphasis on African rhythms and sounds he grew up listening to as a child. As such, he is inspired by many different genres and musicians. During our interview, I asked him who inspires him and why. There were some notable mentions and his response led me to a broader understanding of how he approaches music making and sound aesthetics in general.

Further, how this particular backdrop of music has enabled him to seek out and carve out his own unique sound. MUZI mentions *Coldplay* as one of his sonic inspirations, a band whose lead singer and co-founder Chris Martin recently sought MUZI out after hearing his remix of *Coldplay's 'Orphans'* in 2019. *Sondela* from MUZI's album *Zeno*, happened to be a favourite of Martin's and as luck would have it, the pair met and released *Sondela Forever*, a remix of the song *Sondela* featuring Chris Martin on keys. On mentioning his sonic inspirations, MUZI enumerates his inspirations as follows:

*Coldplay*, with regards to song writing and the feeling their music has. *Linkin Park*, with regards to following a non-linear way when it comes to arranging a song and having 'stop and start' moments in their instrumentals that sort of have this tension and release. *Daft Punk*, with how they just kept it about music and they made it theatrical with their masks and their music videos. How they [*Daft Punk*] opened a world through their music – we don't know what they look like we just know their music and their visuals. I look up to that. Brenda Fassie, with how she used to write super meaningful songs on 'vibey beats' - I like the idea of being able to write a really good song on a sad instrumental or write a really sad song on a happy beat. I like that playing of energies. *Harari*, a Zimbabwean band from the '70s, Sipho Hotstixx Mabuse was in it also. I just like being able to compare a time where David Bowie is doing his thing, and we have Harari. When Madonna's doing her thing, we have Brenda Fassie. That sort of idea of disco music was happening all over the world and we had our own interpretation of it. I'm inspired by that, sonically. There are many artists though. But I like being inspired not only musically but also by the packaging of the music and how the artists move(behave). Most of these artists are people who took chances" (Mazibuko, Personal Interview 2022, 18 April).

This notion of 'taking chances' is indeed a common theme throughout these interviews, a necessity to survive as an independent artist particularly in South Africa. Taking chances and betting on yourself, usually at your own expense, is not without risk. However, the more this chance-taking or gamble as it were pays off, the more confident we become in our independent journeys and this in turn affects even our creative output. Central to this is freedom according to David Walzer is:

Once the independent musician grows in confidence, both musically and technically, their sense of control and belonging increases as well. In a way, as the recording class emancipates itself from the confines of a major label hierarchy, independent musicians experience unparalleled freedom. This D.I.Y autonomy fuels their creative inspirations regardless of whether or not the project makes money (Walzer, 2016:22).

When asked whether he makes music with a particular audience in mind and who his target marker might be, MUZI responded:

I don't have a target audience, I also don't make music with a particular audience in mind. I make music for myself. Once I've released it, it's not mine anymore, I'm not in control of whether a 40-year-old hears it or a 12-year-old hears it. It's not mine anymore. I'll create with creative targets...so I'll be like, my target is 'I want to make 3 videos for this album', or 'I want to do a BTS (behind the scenes) for this song like that. It's things that I'm in control of. I'm not in control of my audience (Mazibuko, Personal Interview, 2022 18 April).

From a commercial music-making perspective, this way of thinking seems rather contradictory or counter-intuitive in the sense that being able to define your sound and your target audience first before selling a single song seems to be a prerequisite to establish an effective marketing strategy. As Shaw mentions, "when an artist has signed to the company, the label will market the artist's recordings to an appropriate audience and create plans and strategies for the album itself" (Shaw, 2017:389). In the case of MUZI, and many comparable independent producers, the opposite logic applies. His approach to music making is to relinquish the need to establish, create or control an audience. In this way, an audience is gradually and organically created in and of itself. In addition, however, I would like to take up a point made by Shaw regarding target audiences. As a tactic to establishing an audience, Shaw mentions the need for an independent artist to profile their consumer. During our interview Shaw stated:

Generally, your music consumer matches you, because you're the one making the music—but not all the time. If you think of Amy Winehouse, Norah Jones. They are very young artists, but their music had this older appeal which was just timeless. Michael Bublé even. If you think of those artists, they're creating music which fits a slightly different demographic. A good thing would be to go and model this, to look at another artist with the same consumers and see what they did to become successful and then you prototype this, out of that process you can get a whole lot of ideas" (Shaw, Personal Interview, 2022 21 March).

To pursue the point made by Shaw regarding consumer profiling and how MUZI has 'profiled' (by in fact not profiling) his consumer, I examined data sourced from Spotify regarding my 2022 release. As part of its features, Spotify employs a useful feature and tool called Spotify

for Artists. This feature allows artists to manage their own profiles, pitch new music to playlists and source unique and insightful music and audience data. Through the power of AI, Spotify for Artists can profile your listener for you. The pie charts below show my audience demographic based on my 2022 single release. It is interesting to note that these graphs were pulled 6 days apart and they fluctuated (slightly) within those days. See Figures 3 and 4:

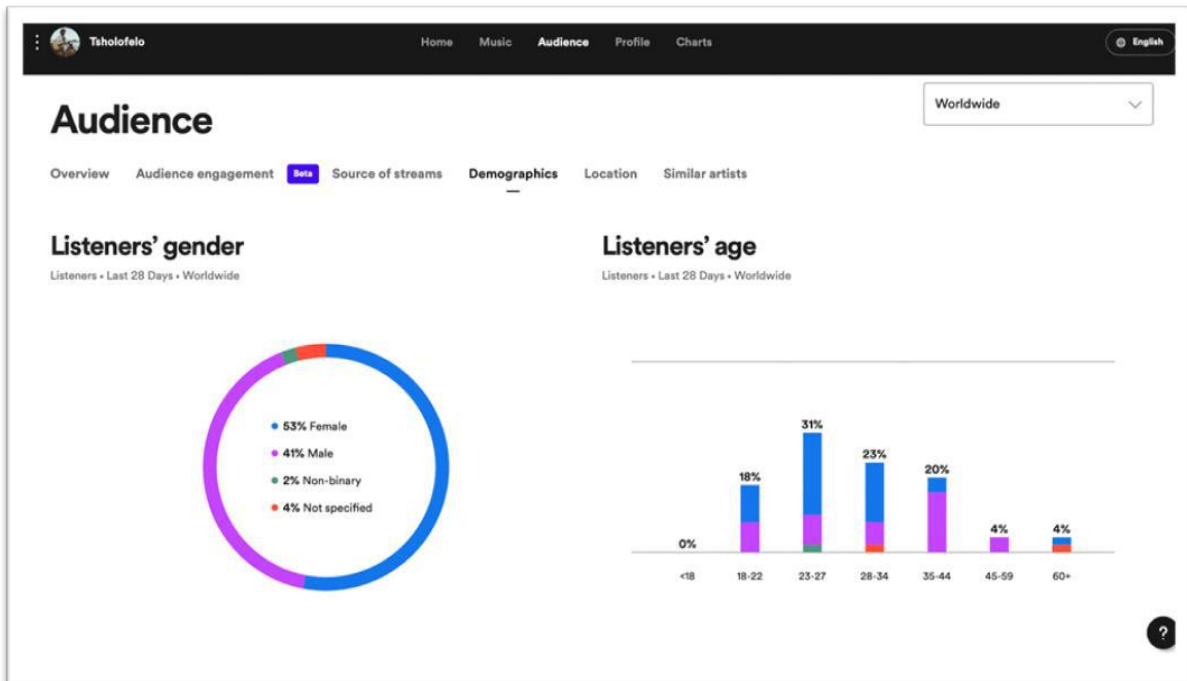


Figure 3: Tsholofelo's Audience Demographic 24/08/2022(Spotify for Artists, 2022)

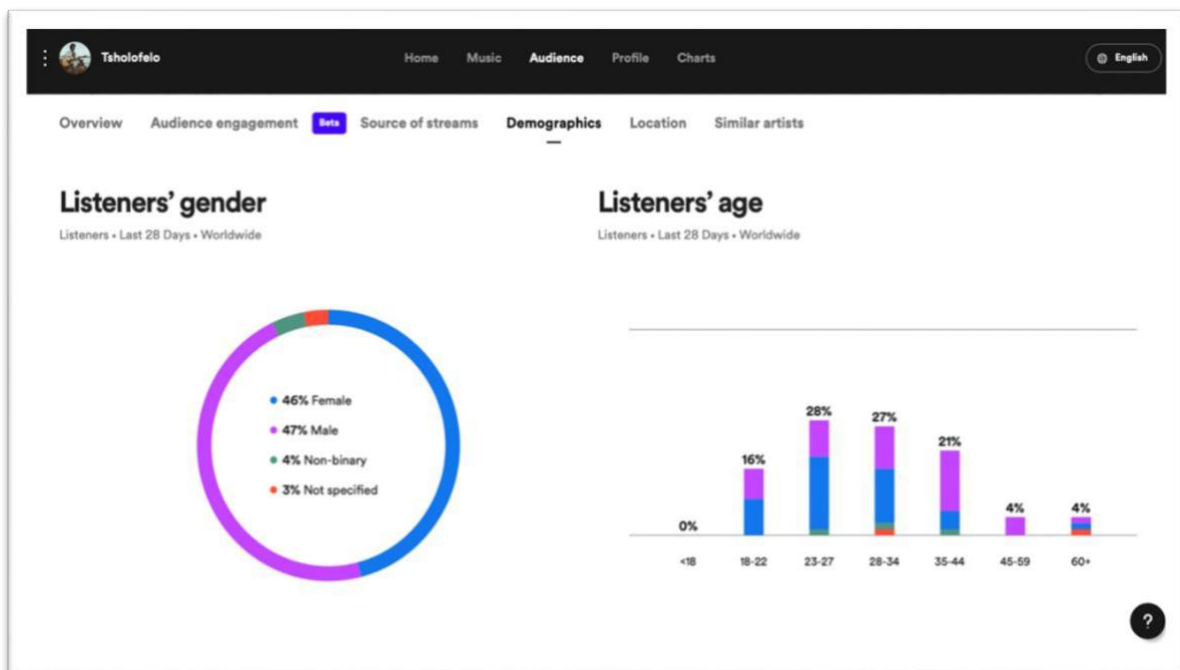


Figure 4: Tsholofelo's Audience Demographic 30/08/2022 (Spotify for Artists, 2022)



In the first chart, my listeners were predominantly women between the ages of 23–27. This profile is similar to my own although at 28 I am slightly older than this age group. Six days later (as seen on the second chart) my own age group (28–34) began to catch up and it seems more men began listening to my music. On average, my main Spotify audience demographic consisted of women whose ages range between 23–44 years of age. Of interest, is that neither race nor geographic location is accounted for in these charts although we can assume through audience members that interact and engage with me personally on other social media platforms, (i.e., direct messaging via Instagram) that my audience demographic consists mainly of young black women based in South Africa. This affirms both the point made by Shaw that oftentimes an artist's music consumer will match the artist themselves, as well as MUZI's approach to audience building. However, this data is not fixed – fluctuations will occur for many different reasons. Firstly, there are a number of platforms on which audiences engage with music including Apple Music, YouTube Music, and Tidal. This was simply an example using data provided by Spotify (and Spotify users). Secondly, data will fluctuate depending on the music (some may or may not appeal to certain demographics) and lastly, data may change as an audience grows.

Herein lies my point: although MUZI views himself as an artist who does not have a target audience (and does not think of one during his music *making* process, which I believe is the correct approach), I am inclined to attribute his success to the fact that his consumer profile aligns with his own and the music he makes is such that he himself would enjoy and listen to. Furthermore, MUZI has separated his artistic endeavours into that which he can control, and that which he cannot. This is what Shaw describes as the push and pull mechanism, where the 'pull' is the music/product (essentially, what you can control) and the 'push' is the reception or the incentive to buy the music (over which you have little influence, essentially, what you cannot control). In the case of my own experience with the marketing and promotion of *Becoming*, although I could control the making of the product as well as its submission to radio stations and programme curators, I could not control whether or not I was playlisted nor could I control a listener's decision to click the link and play my music. Once I accepted this fact, which was not without its own difficulty, I felt freer.

This freedom continues to be apparent in MUZI's approach to aesthetics within the electronic dance music soundscape in the sense that he has not compromised his sound to satisfy international appeal. In fact, it is perhaps his particular sound together with his persistent determination to hold onto that sound that brought about his international appeal in the first place. During our discussion, I asked him whether there ever was an aesthetic compromise in his music, and whether he had ever had a moment of making music based on his fanbase or audience reaction (that is, repeating a particular aesthetic pattern because his audience reacted positively to it). He answered:

Not really. I've had those moments of 'oh people are reacting more to this song (of mine)' but I'm not going to remake that song. I love developing in increments, but once I've developed from a place, I'm not going to go back there regardless of how many people like that. I'm going to continue adding onto it, I'm going to continue shaping my sound because it's mine – you know, people like it cause I made it. So, I'm going to make something else that you might like. It's a feeling thing, once I'm not in that space why would I want to feel that? \*laughs\* I'm past it. No one knows how much it takes to make a song, how much soul you have to put into it and how long you have to lay on something for, and then have to make it concise. Make it 3 minutes. And then clean it up. Like all of these things, it's not easy to repeat that process when I see myself as a purist in terms of being an artist. So I'm not going to repeat what I've done, I'm going to do something else" (Mazibuko, Personal Interview, 2022 April 18).

Dominik Bartmański and Ian Woodward (2020) mention the importance of freedom and how it characterises independent music particularly within the electronic dance music scene in the prologue of their book *Labels: Making Independent Music*. Here they comment:

Freedom is key. It is not genre-specific but instead tends to be highly valued across different genres of electronic music. Freedom as a kind of ideal condition of 'pure' artistic pursuit is perhaps a most contradictory concept to the economic logic of capitalism. Why? As many artists we interviewed say: because it's priceless. Crucially, it is the freedom of choosing the timing and direction of your emotional, creative and economic energy. That freedom often feels absolutely invaluable ... When it comes to musical expression in independent labels, freedom counts as an indispensable value (Bartmański & Woodward, 2020:6).

Indeed, it appears that freedom is two-fold; on the one hand; *freedom from* external control i.e.; commercial labels, and on the other hand; *freedom for* the artist, i.e., the ability to be in control of one's own career and artistic direction (Bartmański & Woodward, 2020). Each comes with its own set of difficulties and advantages and may be a double-edged sword. Although an artist might exercise aesthetic freedom, the difficulty of presenting this aesthetic product into a mediated marketplace is in fact not freedom in my opinion.

In light of these discussions regarding the aesthetic sensibilities and the notion of freedom prevalent in independent music, I asked MUZI about his position on identity(s) and how they are represented in his music based on a music video he released called *Zulu Skywalker*. I asked him how he has held onto his identity or showcased his own identity despite further commercial demand. He answered:

I think the first thing I did with that is keeping my real name *\*laughs\**. Also, like, I created my 'number' before I started. My number being what I want to achieve, how much money I'd like to have etc all of that. I created that before I made a cent. The whole point of that was to not deter from that thing (that number and those goals) regardless of what happens in the future. So it's like, knowing that you're enough...because you'll get into spaces where your integrity is constantly challenged, you'll be put in positions you might not like sometimes. So it's always good to remember your 'why' then keep people who know your 'why' around you. So like, I haven't changed my friends, I haven't changed my life that much regardless of what happens. I'm still simple, I'm still the same Muzi. I play video games, I'm honouring all the dreams I had as a kid. I'm not getting into a space and thinking 'oh now I need to be this!', you know? So I think that's how I keep it intact. I'm myself. And I'm like that as a human. There is no artistic performance, it's just me being me. There's no gimmick, I've never done anything that's made me feel that way. I've lost a lot of opportunities because some of them would've made me feel like that. So I always take it like it's not my opportunity then. My music is my story and you can't take my story away from me, *I have to tell it the way I want to tell it*. So I'm just sticking to that, it's not easy though (Mazibuko, Personal Interview, 2022 April 18 April).

As difficult as it may be, MUZI has found a way to successfully be a South African independent artist in a way that has seemed to allow him to retain or hold onto who he is. He has accomplished what Frith mentions when referring to the value judgements placed in popular music. That successful pop is "dependent on something outside pop, is rooted in the person, the auteur, the community or the subculture that lies behind it" (Frith, 2007:260).

### ***The Difficulties Indies Might Face***

My musical path is very much like that of many of my musical peers. It is that rare, problematic experience of finding exactly what one wants to do with their time on the planet but discovering that such an experience does not enable one to keep an active cell phone, much less food to eat. The ability to earn a living wage is quite possibly the central concern of musicians, and I believe it has something to do with the way the musician has been discursively constructed in society ... The seemingly contradictory values of creativity versus business, leisure versus work, and freedom versus conformity, for example, are constantly at play in a musician's world. People who work and operate in more conventional circles often say that they are jealous of me because I get to do what I love, yet I doubt they are jealous of my economic situation, which is not unbearable, but certainly could be better (Schicke 2011:1).

The above quote by Schicke has been and will continue to be the rhetoric of many musicians and performing artists at one or more points of their careers, more especially independent artists. As has been established, making a living out of music can be difficult as it is a path that is uncertain and can never be guaranteed. What is even more interesting though, is that oftentimes musicians do not think of the difficulties they may face before taking the leap — myself included. Whether that be deemed bravery or stupidity is a different conversation altogether (perhaps it is a combination of both), however, it is important to briefly expose and discuss the challenges one might face when choosing this path, particularly for the South African independent artist because most people that will choose to pursue a career in music will likely begin from this position.

During the interviews and discussions with the artists I chose to speak with for this chapter, we highlighted many challenges faced and I discovered that many of us have similar experiences. We experience the same fear, the same uncertainty of venturing into obscure ground and unknown territory but we tend to experience it in the middle of whatever particular musical project we are working on – at the point at which this music that we make meets the market. As Shaw mentions, oftentimes we “face the difficulty of operating by ourselves and losing perspective because it’s you” (Personal Interview, 2022 21 March). It is your art, it is your career. Rather peculiar challenges were faced by a friend and artist I sat down with, Hlengiwe “Hle” Ntombela who released her debut Gospel album titled *Y.K.O.E: Your Kingdom on Earth* in 2020 during what we believed to be the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her insights presented an interesting case study.

Hlengiwe Ntombela popularly known as “Hle”, is an award winning South African Gospel artist whose career has grown over time yet seemingly exponentially. Her debut album peaked at the number 1 position on Apple Music’s Gospel Albums chart in 7 countries and enjoyed relevant positioning in the U.S. & Canada across a variety of streaming platforms. This success was followed by 3 South African Music Award (SAMA) nominations, including Female Artist of the Year and Best Live Audio-Visual Recording, and she ultimately won the award for Best Contemporary Faith Album (Motown Gospel, 2022).

Hle and I first met at University (UKZN) where she was completing a BMus majoring in Jazz while I was studying for my BA Mus in Popular Music. The questions I asked for this interview were open-ended. I had particular interest in her experience with releasing her debut album and her motivation behind going forward to release her album (which was recorded live in 2019) during a pandemic which had caused major shock waves in the music industry (local and abroad) resulting in the halting of live performances due to restrictions on social gatherings. I wanted to know how she achieved such a feat, and what had resulted. I began our discussion by asking her when she had decided to pursue a career in music, and what challenges she faced at the outset. Ntombela responded:

I was actually studying interior design when I discovered I had a calling to music. Even then I still didn't consider studying it until the following year which was meant to be my graduation year funny enough, that's when I started studying Jazz (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6).

On the challenges she faced when making this decision, she responded:

Though I come from a musical upbringing, I felt I had to start from ground zero because music is not as simple as it sounds. When you theorise and learn of its history and put a term to each thing you think you know, you realise you absolutely don't know. Also, you feel a respect and honour towards music and everything you hear in a song. That for me was challenging in how it humbled me. I had been well known already for my raw musical abilities to my peers. But I still had to arrive at an institution (UKZN) and firstly admit I'm not as deserving of the recognition I was given in order to learn more (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6).

Ntombela had already gained some measure of popularity before pursuing a BMus degree as she was a lead vocalist of the South African Gospel choir, *Joyous Celebration*. The decision to pursue a degree in music when she was both a working musician with access to an existing network and held a qualification in interior design, is of particular interest to me. Although I did not ask her this question, I interpreted that her decision to pursue a music qualification was motivated by the desire to discover her own sound and self through music so that she could express herself and create music in the way she wished. Part of achieving that is learning/re-learning and can be seen as a form of 'artistic development'. The difficulties mentioned at the beginning of our discussion are relatable and were mentioned by Shaw during our interview as well, that more often than not, the first and most apparent challenge independent artists face is "being in unfamiliar ground and learning everything from scratch" (Shaw, Personal Interview, 2022 March 21). Similar challenges were mentioned by MUZI, who

prior to pursuing a fulltime career in E.D.M (electronic dance music), was studying towards a medical degree in Durban. Mazibuko dropped out of med school and was faced with many challenges after such a bold decision. When asked what challenges he faced after leaving the 'safety net' that was medicine, he responded:

Every possible challenge. I had a bursary, and my accommodation was paid for and my schooling was paid for and my food was paid for. So when I dropped out I had none of that. My challenges were getting a place to stay, getting a place to make music, getting food, the challenges of *starting from scratch*...like, you don't know anyone so you've got to go to parties and start mingling with people, going to music conferences and all of that just to meet people and maybe get a gig, find out what's happening that weekend and try to force yourself into the gig or something. Playing for free. Yeah, just a lot of challenges all interlinked to the decision of you wanting to follow a dream (Mazibuko, Personal Interview, 2022 April 18).

Years later with a BMus degree in hand and a very promising career Ntombela was faced with a different set of challenges that would require more from her. I asked her what challenges she was faced with as a young artist preceding her 2020 release. Ntombela responded:

A myriad of challenges. Writing the songs, producing them with the team, executive producing, marketing the show, the list goes on. I actually recorded the album in 2018. So between 2018 and 2020 was a struggle doing everything from pocket and not compromising. I had to sometimes choose between funding my album and having essentials like a bed or food to be able to release a worthy product. Being a woman, it was very hard to be seen as a capable, hardworking leader. My whole team was of men, the industry is of men. I had to prove to them that what I wanted to do is really going to be groundbreaking. It was so difficult. Other challenges I had to ignore really for the sake of the bigger picture (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6).

We often take lightly the struggles that artists will be presented with when creating an album independently. More particularly, the financial investment that is often required from the artist themselves, from sponsors and family members. All for a dream, for something that may or may not yield financial results. What is important to note as well is Ntombela's need to 'prove' herself in a male dominated industry. A study conducted by USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative revealed that women still fall behind men as artists particularly in fields such as song writing, producing, and engineering (Limbong, 2022). Furthermore, the study showed that women only made up 12.7% of songwriters over the past decade. (Limbong, 2022). However, there have been advancements as Andrew Limbong notes that "women of color in particular have made strides on the artist front – making up over half of the female artists in 2021, as well as outpacing white women as songwriters" (Limbong, 2022). Though these statistics are

based on figures sourced from the international Billboard Hot 100 Year-End Chart since 2012, this gender disparity is nothing new in the South African music scene, as well as the South African Independent music scene.

Moreover, I asked Ntombela how the challenges in the previous question changed after the release of 'Y.K.O.E' and she responded:

Firstly, I'm not hungry anymore! Secondly, I'm award winning, so the recognition changes for certain doors. Having to prove yourself worthy to be heard, worked with, allowed is not as much of a struggle anymore. Now my work ethic speaks for me. I'm even in TV production now. Something I didn't know would happen this soon. Challenges are different, but I get happy that it is a new challenge and not the same one. That tells me we are growing (Ntombela, Personal Interview 2022, May 6).

The Covid-19 pandemic that had been devastating much of the world reached South African shores on the 1 March 2020. The South African government declared a National state of Disaster and implemented Alert Level 5 [a national lockdown that prohibited all movement and travel (unless permitted) for all South Africans and all residing in South Africa] from midnight 26 March to 30 April 2020 (COVID-19/Coronavirus, South African Government).

For most of the year, South Africa switched between Alert levels 4 and 3 which still prohibited large gatherings, and this would become our reality for the foreseeable future. This pandemic hit the South African cultural industry aggressively and left many artists unable to provide for themselves (Hoek, 2022). Many found themselves forced to take on alternative, more secure kinds of employment and many popular arts venues had to close shop due to financial difficulties. These were the sentiments of Daphne Kuhn (owner, producer and artistic director of Sandton Theatre) who remarks "It's been absolutely impossible to keep our heads above water" (Hoek, 2021). It was a curve ball no one could have foreseen, and one from which we have not yet recovered despite the lifting of the National State of Disaster as of 5 April 2022. Yet, it is during such a time that Ntombela released her debut album. This 'gamble' and what resulted was of particular importance to me. Hence, I asked Ntombela how releasing an album recorded live in 2019) in 2020, would affect her career. Ntombela responded:

Releasing an album during a pandemic would have been very hard ... debuting a career during a pandemic??? That is way harder! When it became clear that trying to wait it out was going to take forever, I had to make a decision to jump in the deep end. However, everything we needed for the release was closing down. That made it worse, since we had to be creative in finding ways around it. I had to be strategic. I realised that a lot of (if

not all) artists were waiting it out. They wanted to have interactions with people. As much as I would have wanted to have a tour and launch, I knew I couldn't. But I knew that no one was willing to release during that time, cause they were sceptical of making losses rather than profit. So I decided to use the opportunity since no one was there for the people sitting at home, their isolation. So, I released with little to no competition and managed to get much attention from consumer, distributor, airplay, media. It cost me a lot, but it did the job that would have taken me 5 years to do, in one. By the time people were catching on to how things work now, I was ahead of them (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6).

There is a popular saying by Albert Einstein that says, "in the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity" (Chesterman, 2020). I believe this was the case for Ntombela regarding the 2020 release of Y.K.O.E. While most independent artists release music and then follow this with an album launch and tour, Ntombela was forced to think outside the box as the normal route was not an option. In her case, doing things in a different way and facing rather different challenges and obstacles resulted in greater success. There are a number of factors that may have contributed to her success generally and the success of her debut album in particular. One is the genre within which she has firmly positioned herself. Shaw's discussion of the music consumer statistics of South Africa mentions that "consumer statistics reflect the diversity of South Africa, with Gospel music the most liked genre, according to the South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF) (Shaw, 2017:278).

With that said, Ntombela was able to move past a problem Shaw describes as most artists' 'post problem', which is the difficulty or inability to understand your consumer. During my discussion with Shaw, he noted that "in South Africa, your market is a lot more narrow than markets in the states (USA). So, if you're an artist and you create a specific product that's aimed at a specific market you need to ask yourself, of that market how many people are going to purchase this work? In SA, the answer tends to be narrow" (Shaw, Personal Interview, 2022 March 21). I believe part of Ntombela's success in the South African market was her ability and her team's ability to understand her market. I asked her who her team was, who the key players were and what their roles were in ensuring the success of her album. Ntombela responded:

Firstly we had to make sure we had a memorable enough [album launch] night that would last long enough in people minds till we release. So, there was a *project director and planning team* of the live show. Then it was making sure that whatever we visually and audibly create resembles the night of the show so it invokes the same feeling every time they[consumers] encounter it. So there was a *creative director and creative team*. Then



we needed to introduce the artist and their music to the masses. So, we needed the *distribution and marketing team* (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6).

Here, the importance of having a team to support and counter most (if not all) challenges is highlighted. As Shaw notes, this team creates a structure which achieves certain goals for the artist and helps them in their career (Shaw, 2017:309). He adds, “A team, like that surrounding a music artist, consists of two basic building blocks: people and resources. Both are used to achieve certain objectives” (Shaw, 2017:310). He enumerates the role of management by breaking down the broad functions a team undertakes. These are:

- Direct the artist toward their objective
  - Communicate
  - Create a balance between outputs and inputs
  - Create equilibrium with the surrounding environment
  - Create a high level of synergy with the highest possible level of productivity
- (Shaw, 2017:310–311)

Ntombela is managed by the T-effect, a South African artist management company run by Nhlanhla Ndimande and Tshiamo Letswene. This company has been widely recognised for its years of experience in management of Multi Award-Winning musicians from different genres in the South African music market. Ntombela’s experienced management team coupled with her positioning and understanding of her consumer, all contributed to her success. The fact that her management understood her consumers and that they were aware that consumers would purchase her work even during a time of financial crisis, is what may have been her advantage. Furthermore, the synergy between her live show (in 2018) as part of what promoted her digital release in 2020 was likewise advantageous. As Nel mentions, “Live music can offer the consumer a unique social experience that digital music cannot. Digital music is complimentary to this experience, offering easy, regular, and virtually instantaneous access to the music *and its associated memories*, as well as being an independently marketable product” (Nel, 2017:74).

A further primary contributor to Ntombela’s success was the availability of an existing fan base. A study by Sipho Malembe discusses the ways in which Christianity and the Christian church facilitates the success of Gospel musicians by providing them with a ready-made audience due to a shared ideology and shared texts. He states: “Christian churches and the

music industry, although generally perceived as unrelated or even opposed in the nature of their operations, both have a stake in Gospel music (Malembe, 2017:iv). Gospel musicians therefore enjoy audiences that consume and fully participate in the Gospel music market as well as other Christian products thereby creating a link between Gospel music (as a Christian product) and commerce. Malembe continues:

Based on the fact that two thirds of the South African population are Christians, and on that more than 90% of the population prefers Gospel music to other genres of music, one can therefore conclude that the majority of Gospel music consumers are associated with Christianity or belong to one Christian church or the other (Malembe, 2017:231).

It is no wonder then that Gospel music remains among the top selling genres in South Africa. With the right team, and the talent to pull off a music career, success in the Gospel music industry in South Africa would be highly likely.

Moreover, Ntombela was also able to trust her team because of their vast experience in music management and music business and she was able to delegate work in an efficient manner.

As Justice Baiden mentions:

Not everybody's meant to be an entrepreneur, some people are meant to be role players. So you have to understand as an artist, or as an executive, the independent route means that you need to have a well-oiled machine. You need to have a huge grasp on what the business is like and also a huge grasp on how to build a company (Baiden in Mench, 202:n.p.).

With reference to her team, I also asked Ntombela if she handles every aspect of her business and she noted that although she is hands on with every aspect, she delegates tasks to her management team and finds ways to make payment to the aforementioned team from percentages to remuneration (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6). According to Shaw, "Artist managers are essentially staff employed by the artist to manage business affairs. They usually take a percentage of the artist's income" (2017:52). Shaw illustrates the possible construction of an artist's management team as follows:

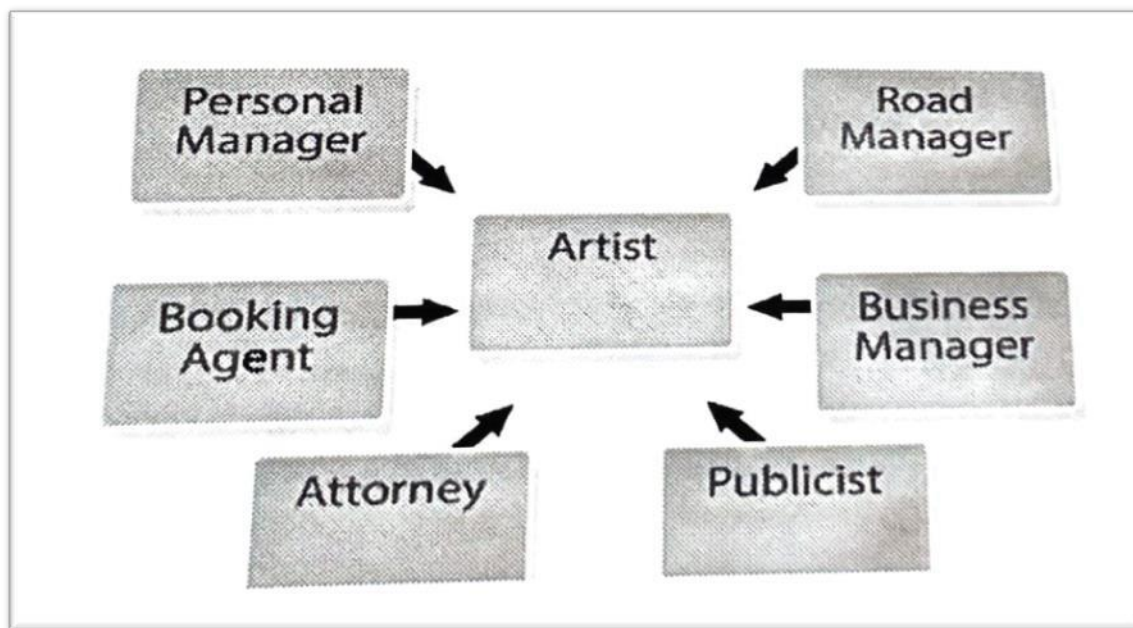


Figure 5: Artist Management (Shaw, 2017:52)

However, it is important to note that a fully-fledged management team is not a privilege initially enjoyed by independent artists. Shaw acknowledges this by commenting on booking agents for example, “generally the artist only takes on an agent when their live schedule is bringing in enough money to support an agent” (Shaw, 2017:333). Furthermore, Shaw acknowledges that a team may be built over time, and that initially an artist may do everything alone and attract other members gradually. This process is delineated in his book where he briefly describes the artist’s career lifecycle as follows:

When the artist first begins their career, they may have no need for management. At a point further down the line the artist may find that it has become impossible for them to both perform the creative function of being an artist as well as perform the management function. The artist's career might follow the following lifecycle:

1. The artist is small, unknown and inexperienced.
2. They attract smaller management members.
3. They get 'discovered' by a small label.
4. They record and release their first album.
5. Some success attracts the interest of a major label.
6. A new and experienced management team is taken on.

7. They have a full-time career as major artist.
8. A lack of sales precludes the artist's popularity.
9. The artist then retires.
10. Only the most fortunate make it past step 3

(Shaw, 2017:317)

Fortunately for Ntombela, she has reached Step 5 due to the factors discussed above that have aided and determined her success thus far. The manner in which Ntombela has dealt with challenges (some of which are unique) highlights the fact that individual artistic paths are never identical. In addition, the importance of creativity whether in music making, or music marketing, is foregrounded. With reference to the trajectory of her career, I asked Ntombela if she would sign a record deal if presented with the opportunity and if so why, bearing in mind she was already able to achieve a great deal as an independent artist. She responded:

I see myself as a business, right? So what I did was, invest in myself so I have control of my craft and most importantly so I have a good reason to bargain when the opportunity to sign with a label comes. So, I recorded and marketed my first album (audio and visual) independently. Then worked with an amazing distribution, management and marketing company to make sure that it becomes a great success on the continent and beyond. It received the awards and success that caught the right attention. Record labels were interested; however I was interested in a specific deal that would allow me to still own my masters. With the success we had achieved from the first album it was very hard for this specific label to resist. They finally agreed to my terms and now I am signed to an International label, Capitol MUSIC Nashville (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6).

Ntombela's 2020 release and its subsequent success and the doors it has opened is admirable. As it stands, she is the first South African artist to sign an exclusive record deal with Motown Gospel — the world's leading Christian music company (Modise, 2022). The co-executive directors of Motown Gospel, Monica Coates and EJ Gaines, spoke highly of Ntombela, "As a powerful multimedia presence, Hle seamlessly combines creativity and beauty with personal ministry. Hle elegantly transcends culture. We are delighted to partner with her in her vision to reach a global audience" (Motown Gospel, 2022). Indeed, her story reminds me of Frith's view that "Everyone in the pop world is aware of the social forces that determine 'normal' pop music - a good record, song, or sound is precisely one that transcends those forces!" (Frith, 2007:260). Perhaps Hle will be met with a different set of challenges now that she is signed to a record company. Her journey continues to be an interesting one to follow.

In addition, though I have highlighted and discussed a number of challenges and difficulties with which Indies may be faced, there are others mentioned by Shaw that did not surface in my case studies. During our interview, Shaw added that mental health issues may tie into the difficulties Indie musicians face. He refers to his own experience saying that as a music producer he had a problem with the fear of judgement and developed social anxiety disorder because of it. The value judgements made (these would be made by consumers, media, colleagues) are often at play in a musician's world and it is only the tough who are able to bear the brunt and still create music despite these judgement calls and ideas of how they should or should not sound. "Artists may not understand where they sit, so the dynamic is weird. Art is subjective, there is no right or wrong but having a preference is okay. A lot of the times artists don't know what their own opinion about how their sound should be at times" (Shaw, Personal Interview, 2022 March 21).

Often, I believe the contemporary artists' dilemma includes the inability to understand their sound in the sense that at times they may not be able to place or locate themselves within a particular genre. This certainly was the case for me. I believe that this predicament is mainly experienced once the music is intended to engage with the market. The process of allowing yourself to become a product by entering the market is ambiguous because it is at that point that we begin to ask ourselves how we fit into this market. It is rarely the music or the quality that is problematic, it is the question of connecting to the market that leaves us feeling isolated. I believe this to be a very fundamental issue that artists — myself included need to bear in mind as we often take the failure of an album as a personal affront and begin to doubt our art and ourselves because music-making (particularly for the Indie artist) is a deeply personal endeavour. It seems the only way to safeguard our sanity is to remember why we engage in music making in the first place. As Dominik Bartmański & Ian Woodward acknowledge:

not to be forgotten is the simple fact that at independent labels things are often done for the fun of it, for the sheer satisfaction of producing something on your own that was not there before. Things are also done for the sake of reckless experimentation and personal interests; they are done out of passion, too, and the desire to be recognized by one's peers. The musical change, let alone the cultural one, often comes as an unintended by-product, and perhaps that is the best thing about D.I.Y cultural production (Bartmański & Woodward, 2020:25).

## ***Independent music as a business model***

The amount of factual information about the South African music scene, particularly information available to independent musicians within South Africa is very limited (Shaw, 2017). As a result, there is much pertaining to the South African music scene that remains misunderstood and is yet to be documented. This is the motivation behind this study. What has been most notable in the journeys of the artists I have spoken to thus far is how they have embodied their entrepreneurial skills and associated themselves with a small team whose objectives are to further the artist's career. Frith states that, "individual artists and performers are rarely in a position themselves to get their work to the public. They need to contract other people – agents, promoters, publishers, record companies – to organise and promote concert tours, to manufacture scores and records and CDs" (Frith, Straw & Street, 2001:104).

First to pay attention to, is the preparation these independent artists took in order to engage the South African independent market as well as their business attitude(s). This preparation is aside from their artistic development which would include learning their craft and improving their playing. However, these artists understood that they too are a business like any other. Though their main focus was streamlined into their creative endeavours, they understood that in order to maintain this they had to generate a significant amount of money and manage their businesses in an efficient manner. During our discussion, I asked MUZI what steps he took in forming his independent record label, WE THE BUNDU and the motivation behind that decision. His answer was:

The first bit of money I got, I paid for a logo. That's how it started; it started as a logo. It started as an imprint of something – making it real with a picture. From there onwards obviously it's setting up everything around it. I was looking to sign with a label at the time and everyone [labels] thought the music was good but no one knew where to fit it in, so I've always been the type of person that's like if I can't get through the front door I'll get in through the window or whatever. So, I was like 'well I believe in myself so I'll just start it' because I was already doing it. What does a label do? You make the music, you package the music, you market and distribute the music. So if I was making my own album cover, I was packaging the music cause that's all internet. If I was making the music I've already taken away studio time, if I'm putting the song on soundcloud, I'm distributing it. The only thing I didn't have was marketing so I'd start using my social media as a marketing tool. So, everything that I do, even if I do it with other labels or other distributors, it's always me and them. I'm never just like fully plugged into something, it's mine, I'm hiring them to do that particular thing. Cause essentially that's what it is when you're an artist you are the business and you're the product. You could

also be the boss of the product. Some artists just like being the product, I like knowing the entire value chain from inception to listeners ears. I wanted to know everything so that I could also build my leverage. Yeah, that's how that happened. It was really necessity at that point (Mazibuko, Personal Interview, 2022 April 18).)

To further MUZI's point, I look at Malembe's (2017) study where he interviews co-founder of Gospel mega choir *Joyous Celebration*, Lindelani Mkhize. Mkhize had been recently appointed as executive director of A&R (Artist-and-repertoire) at Universal Music, one of the major labels in South Africa. A small part of the role of an A&R executive includes being responsible for acquiring artists, thus, A&R directors have been usually described as "talent spotters' – continually engaged in seeking new acts and material" (Malembe, 2017:141). When asked about how he felt about this formal appointment Mkhize responded:

I look forward to unearthing talent across the continent. I am also excited about prospects of igniting a fusion of music that will appeal to us all as Africans, these are exciting times. I want to go back to allowing artists to create the music and ensure that the record company will create the brand. Also, at the end of the day it is all about market share. So I intend to increase Universal's footprint in South Africa and Africa (Mkhize interviewed in Malembe, 2017:142).

What I found particularly unique about this interview and Mkhize's response in particular, was how he mentioned allowing the artist to create the music while the record company creates the brand. This is important for me to note because it is important for independent artists to recognise that they (independent artists) do both. You are, in some ways, your own A&R manager responsible for developing yourself and your craft, as well as your brand.

It seems that this way of doing things (that is, an artist creating a record label and signing themselves) is not an uncommon practice in the global independent music market and certainly seems to be a growing trend locally as well. According to an article published by Forbes, on a global level, "independent musicians are the fastest growing segment of the global recorded music business" (Daniels, 2019). Melissa M Daniels notes that though major labels continue to grow at a steady rate, the independent music market seems to be growing exponentially. However, she also notes that despite this prolific growth, most independent artists are still not earning enough as:

Earnings still remain a big obstacle for those who wish to make their living in music — the survey found about eight in 10 musicians do not earn enough from their music careers to not worry about their financial situation. About half of independent and label artists alike

say they often have cash flow problems because their income isn't predictable (Daniels, 2019).

The above could be dependent on a number of different factors including the environment of the artist, the geographical location and social and cultural context of the artist, and where they are primarily based and operate as well as the economy of that area. By this I mean, the presiding structures and whether those structures are still intact. In South Africa as I imagine in many areas of the world, the major record labels remain dominant and control most of the music marketing networks. Be that as it may, it is important to note the shift into independence that has occurred in South Africa and how this offers a new way of existing as an artist.

Furthermore, as we have now established that a supporting team in place is integral to potential success in the market, I spoke to Nicholas Olsen in this regard. He offered interesting perspectives as Olsen is a musician turned qualified attorney based in South Africa, and now runs his own practice specialising in music and entertainment law. Furthermore, he is currently the business manager of an established South African death metal band called *Vulvodynia* that is currently signed to a Czech based label; Lacerated Enemy Records. Further, Olsen is currently studying for his Master's degree on the monetisation of music at Stellenbosch University, Western Cape. I asked for his perspective on what he believes most managers look out for in deciding to work with an act, and his response was:

There are the clichéd comments but basically someone that's driven and has a clear vision of what they want to do. Of course, if you're starting from scratch the manager would have to see what potential there is insofar as making a financially successful career goes. And of course, good art or good music and financial success does not always coincide; you know, it's got nothing to do with the merits of the music in that sense. But there is a market for everything in a way and it's about whether that market is something that particular individual or that manager has a vision and whether it aligns with that artist. So, a lot of it is very esoteric initially. In the beginning there are a lot of technical things that need to be communicated to an artist so they understand how this whole system works but basically, the vision of the manager would need to align with the vision of the artist. Not every manager is the right manager. But if those two things align and there's a vision to where it can go and both parties understanding what the potential is then there tends to be a good partnership. That's my experience as an artist and as a manager (Olsen, Personal Interview, 2022 July 15).

Besides talent and potential, an artist with vision coupled with a team that is set on achieving that vision will lay the foundation for a successful career in independent music. This certainly



seems to be the case for all my interviewees. The size of the team may vary, but the artists vision and goals should largely remain unchanged as this allows for business and creative strategies to be put in place. Olsen added that the reality is that there is no clear path or answer with anything, but if you are able to look at the big picture and apply what you can do in a particular direction by looking at what is possible and executing that, one can begin to work oneself up that way. This is the premise of this research, that is, to discuss the possibilities for an independent artist in South Africa.

The second aspect of understanding or discussing independent music as a business model focuses on the different revenue streams that may be generated. Simply put, where is there money to be made and how does one make a living through music? Knowing the answer to these questions might help alleviate the cash flow problems mentioned earlier. Furthermore, with the cost of living rising globally, independent artists have found themselves backed into a corner and needing to be creative in sustaining themselves and their careers. During my discussion with Gospel artist “Hle” Ntombela, I asked her what her supplementary streams of income are. Ntombela responded:

What’s funny is that I made my music the source of every other business I run. I’ve learnt the power of following a calling. It pays for everything! I have a boutique shop that sells premium street wear named after my first album. I have an independent record label. I have an events company. I have a singing group and I have a foundation (this is not a source of income, but it has been sponsored by my other endeavours) (Ntombela, Personal Interview, 2022 May 6).

Evidently, Ntombela has found ways to sustain her career outside of music through entrepreneurial projects that are all linked to her music or are a consequence of her music. As suggested by Shaw, this “diversification into other areas in the music business while the principal artist is a success can help in sustaining their career in other areas of the business” (Shaw, 2017:317). In addition, I also asked Olsen about the various income streams that are available for independent artists and his response was:

Money is made from concerts of course, from merchandise ... that’s a big thing if you’re in pop music. It’s an important revenue stream because we’ve lost physical [physical CDs] in a way, so your music becomes a business card for whatever else you’re selling which is your live concerts and your merch. And then there are people who get into things such as affiliate links and push products [a type of influencer marketing strategy between artists and other businesses] but that snowballs the bigger your profile is on social media and that can be used by some artists although it can also backfire in the sense that you land

up being a salesperson and not an artist and people can see that. And then, of course, publishing and that has to do with the various forms of royalties you can collect as a performer, recording artist and songwriter. These income streams [publishing] should be put in place early on. They're not immediate revenue streams but if you set them up properly from the outset, they become more and more significant. Of course, as an artist's profile grows more opportunities come up. Another is some artists do *subscription based* super fan orientated setups through Patreon for example, where they might release exclusive content. I know the guys I work with are proficient guitar players so some of them do lessons through Patreon and hangout and talk about recording music so there's a bit of a music community there as well (Olsen, Personal Interview, 2022 July 15).

In summary, the different revenue streams the artists I have spoken to have employed are:

- Concerts / Gigs
- Merchandise / branded clothing
- Publishing deals
- Subscription based exclusive content through platforms such as Patreon
- Teaching/Lessons.

I would like to further categorise these revenue streams according to the categories used in the RSFAM (Revenue Streams for African Musicians) report 2022. This report was conducted by the Music in Africa Foundation between May 2021-September 2021 in response to the challenge presented by the dearth of relevant information regarding the revenue streams of musicians in South Africa. It is possibly the biggest research undertaking of its kind in South Africa and saw the interviewing of 3000 music practitioners from all nine provinces. The goal was to highlight existing revenue streams in SA in order to equip musicians and music practitioners with current information so that they are able to make informed decisions regarding their careers and adopt new revenue streams which may allow their work to become more sustainable (Music in Africa Foundation, 2022). The revenue streams from which my interviewees profited in relation to the categories presented in the RSFAM report were as follows:

- Live music revenue: Fees paid to performers as compensation for live performances.
- Services revenue: Revenue that music creators generate from rendering specific services. For example, teaching, session work fees and producer fees.
- Brand related revenue: Income generated from the artist's personal brand. For example, product endorsements and merchandise sales.

- Music Rights revenue: Royalties collected through performances, broadcasting, publishing, record labels, etc.

(Music In Africa, 2022)

The report presented very interesting insights and revealed that live music revenue is still the highest grossing revenue stream in South Africa and makes up 30% of total revenue reported across all revenue streams. Services revenue followed at 25%, music rights revenue at 19%, and brand related revenue at 10%. Though I will discuss some aspects of this report further in Chapter Four, what this section on revenue streams indicates is that there are some revenue streams that lag behind and are not being extensively explored while others (namely live music revenue) steadily increase. Further, this report also helps us discern just how my interviewees positioned themselves and exploited these working revenue streams within their own careers. Additionally, the RSFAM report facilitates our attempt to predict the direction in which the independent markets will move in future. As Olsen mentioned, physical CDs are becoming more obsolete. Shaw confirmed this during our interview. I asked Shaw the following question,

With the influx of information and technology, the Indie scene is getting stronger (and smarter) and the generic record label model of business has become more and more obsolete. Given these changes, where do you see the South African music industry in the next 5 years?

Shaw responded:

The big push now is to artists services, a lot of the majors are now working on that model now. For example, you can get into distribution deals as opposed to a record deal. But since we're looking at Indies, they do this too. Technology is moving in the direction towards artists services such as CD baby, SubmitHub, Reverbnation, SongPusher, Tunecore, - they link you with playlisters such as Spotify playlists and the Spotify curation feature is now able to tell you where your music is most likely played, and you can focus on those groups of people. It is also moving in the direction of social media as previously discussed.

Further:

CDs will be a thing of the past. Older consumers will adopt things very slowly, but they will adopt. With Jetline and Musica closing shop, it's very telling. It's happening. USBs are going to be a thing. The younger generation are streaming so that's happening. I think in the next 10 years when the 10-year-olds become the 20-year-olds, the main way of listening to music is going to be through subscription or, and this is what I [Shaw] predict, it's going to be through some sort of block chain based NFT situation. So, if you post a particular thing through Facebook, every time you listen to it through *Facebook* it'll do

pay-outs directly to the artist. So it's about the trackability and reliability of that token. Whenever you share a thing (via a formalised streaming structure or just generally on the web) royalties will be able to be earned through that. That will do away with the need for stores. I think music will become a lot more fluid in the future as opposed to where it is now which is very compartmentalised – who knows (Shaw, Personal Interview, 2022 March 21).

In both these answers, Shaw is referring specifically to music distribution channels and music marketing in particular. I believe these to be the important aspects of this music making chain we have explored because as discussed, the music making (that is, song writing, recording, postproduction) is the 'easy' part – it is the part in which we easily exist as independent musicians. It is that which comes after that (that is; physical distribution, marketing, and monetisation) where we are faced with difficulties. However, technological advancement engaged through the internet has allowed artists far more control over their careers. As Daniels mentions, "For artists, technological advancements that allow them to share their work with the world fuels their ability to make music and build their career at their own pace, and with their own style" (Daniels, 2019:n.p.). This has never been more true, and it is what I refer to as 'Digital D.I.Y'.

### ***Digital D.I.Y***

The advances in technology (namely the internet) and the ability to share music online opened up an entirely different world socially and culturally. It was two-fold in the sense that it caused disruption, as mentioned by Brandon Sked "listeners no longer felt the need to pay for music. Rather, listeners can download as much music as they wanted for free, courtesy of file-sharing platforms such as Napster"(Sked, 2020:iii). This resulted in the monetary value of music constantly fluctuating, a reality we still live with as not much money is made from streaming if you are an independent artist starting out in your career. However, it also created ease of use. Now consumers of music did not only consume music through watching live performances of their favourite artists and purchasing vinyl (a process that required money and time) but had immediate access to any music they wanted at any particular time. Indeed, "the freedom afforded by digital distribution not only gave users greater access to more music faster, but it also questioned how much control the record industry actually had over consumers" (Sked, 2020:18). Fast forward to the present day and such technological advancements have further impacted other aspects of the music industry. As we have

discussed, the internet has brought about 'bedroom producers', so that record labels have become redundant. With CDs phasing out and South African CD shops closing down i.e., Jetline and Musica, digital distribution channels or aggregators such as CD Baby, Distrokid, and TuneCore have made distribution as simple as sending an email which returns the agency to the independent artists as they digitally distribute their own music. It is no longer only commercial record labels that have access to these networks/channels. Furthermore, the independent music scene in South Africa has also gained a foothold in the digital space as Shaw mentions, "South Africa, while having an incredible amount of independent labels, has seen many lose market share in the physical record space; but this is probably an indication that most independent labels are increasingly utilising the digital market space" (Shaw, 2017:256).

As discussed with Shaw, change continues to occur at a global level as artists adopt this do-it-yourself model of music business. During my discussion with Olsen, I asked him to describe the ways in which a self-managed independent artist may distribute and market their music. His response was:

Well distributing the music is probably as simple as getting a Distrokid account (This refers to digital distribution which is where we are in terms of music distribution now). Marketing-wise there's different types but it all matters. From the outset, your family, friends...those are very important people in the beginning. That community and those networks need to be solidified and taken advantage of and people need to feed off each other and that really does give you a push. There's nothing like having interaction with real people. That's the most powerful thing in building the initial interest no matter where you are. People always think they have to go to Joburg and be in the big city...it's not really true. The value of interaction wherever you are is really important, it's social networking. Of course then there's media such as artist blogs ..again if you know what music you're making then do your best to send music to those type of people[media outlets]. I find a very useful tool is 'SubmitHub' – I got into that during Covid. It's basically a site that connects playlisters, bloggers, Tiktokers, Instagram influencers etc with artists that are trying to get reach and trying to market themselves (Olsen, Personal Interview, 2022 July 15).

Olsen believes that these D.I.Y possibilities can be a lot more useful and effective for independent artists in the early stages of their careers and he has relied on these methods far more than on traditional methods. Based on his own experiences as a musician, he believes traditional models to be a waste of money and I tend to agree with this opinion because of my own experiences. Olsen comments:

One of the problems people have found themselves in with the traditional PR models where you hire a publicist who has the emailing lists and knows people directly, is that you pay them a large sum of money and you don't get feedback or guarantees. I make the joke sometimes that I've experienced times where I think if I had filmed myself flushing the money down the toilet, I would've gotten more coverage just because of how ludicrous that act of flushing money down the toilet is...it would've created more hype. And what that means is without feedback you don't really know what you're doing and you're shooting into the dark with your next release. Not that you make music for other people but if you think there's a market out there for what you're doing and you're trying to make money out of it and it appears that the market doesn't like it, you just got to kind of rethink. It's like selling anything really. Again, art and money don't always coincide. So yeah, I've found that SubmitHub is a very useful tool – you spend about R1,500 which at least isn't R10,000 which is the very least you'd pay for a PR company (Olsen, Personal Interview, 2022 July 15).

Furthermore, Olsen notes that although all these tools are available, ultimately an artist still faces the difficulty of being marketable in the first place and understanding that success in this sense cannot be guaranteed because art and market value will not always coincide. As Shaw maintains, “the problem with this perceived market is that a consumer may like a genre, consume it but not purchase it” (Shaw, 2017:265). Exposing your art to reception and offering yourself for public evaluation is not without its own risks and that ought to be understood but it should also not hinder creative pursuits. Olsen reiterates this by commenting:

it's so difficult to tell how you market something and how you make it successful because in the end you're dealing with subjective things, you're dealing with a general social consciousness of people and how they are perceiving music and art and what they're feeling at the moment. Maybe they don't feel a song that's upbeat at that particular time or maybe they're looking for a song that's upbeat and it's not...it's a lot. You can't really figure some of that out. So how you market it is all dependent on the vision you have and the vision will inform the way that you market. The other thing is to not be so obsessed with making it as well, it's a balance because you can overshoot the mark. It's a balance, the whole thing (Olsen, Personal Interview, 2022 July 15).

One of the most powerful tools the artists I interviewed employ in independently marketing their own music within this digital D.I.Y framework, was social media. We can understand social media as an effective marketing (and communicative) tool for artists who are, in essence, cultural entrepreneurs existing as human brands in the South African music industry (Nel, 2017). As data from my interviewees has indicated, part of their success was rooted in the fact that they understood and positioned themselves as businesses (or human brands) and invested their time and their resources in this business. They understood that establishing these businesses (themselves) would mean establishing their products or anything these

businesses would sell in future. Their products would sell themselves by virtue of the fact that they had been established as products coming from a credible and trusted brand. That is where value is created. Not in the product but in the person behind the product because ultimately, people do not buy products, people buy people (Nedkova, 2015).

As Violeta Nedkova, a writer, relates of her own experience:

Every time I get a compliment, it's on a personal quality, not an actual product or result. For example, people will say things like "you've inspired me" or "your enthusiasm is contagious" or even "I love the way you write like we're friends", and those things have nothing to do with what I'm selling. *And yet, they are WHY people buy* (Nedkova, 2015:n.p.).

Similarly, musicians create the initial interest and value in the music product (Graham & Burnes in Nel, 2017). The question then becomes, how do musicians go about creating this value. It seems, having a social media presence (which does take time to develop) and allowing people a window into your persona, is what builds credibility and perceived authenticity and trust. Establishing oneself as a brand with particular ideas, beliefs, style, messaging, and personality, and communicating that to the consumers consistently plays a major role in the career span of an artist. As Nel states, "It is what makes them unique as a human and not just as a product or service" (Nel 2017:125).

Social media platforms allow musicians to connect with potential fans directly (which was a process otherwise regulated by major labels) and in doing so, to gradually establish a fanbase or music community. The two case studies in this research combined have amassed an Instagram following of 138800 followers (with Hle having 108000 followers and MUZI having a following of 30,800) and counting. A social media community that is big does produce a potential consumer base. With a community this large, it is likely that their musical endeavours and musical products (or products related to their musical work) would sell as consumers have become invested in these brands as people and perhaps see themselves through them. Renaud Lunardo's view is that the personality of the musician is what makes them appealing to their audience (Lunardo in Nel, 2017). Nel states: "Consumers borrow from the brand identity of musicians to construct their own self-identities" (Nel, 2017:127). Therein lies the power of music coupled with effective and authentic marketing through social media; it has this self-actualising tendency to allow an artist to create and recreate themselves many times over much like ordinary people do. Frith also makes mention of the fact that on the other side of this, where the consumer is concerned, the consumer is

drawn into emotional alliances with the performer's art and therefore possesses it. As Frith states, "in 'possessing' music, we make it part of our own identity and build it into our sense of ourselves" (Frith, 2007:267). This is where value resides.

The social media platforms in question include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and most recently, TikTok – which has been downloaded more than 3 billion times around the world and has become a cultural phenomenon (Tiktok, 2021). Tiktok's algorithm<sup>3</sup> seems to be its most valuable asset in that it is designed to determine user interest and sends a user-personalised content to keep them on the app for as long as possible. Commenting about the way in which TikTok users interact with music, a music industry analyst, Tatiana Cirisano said, "They're not just listening to music in a sort of, like, lean-back, passive way. They're more likely to do more lean-forward activities, like creating playlists or listening to full albums or streaming or buying merchandise" (Cirisano in Venkat, 2022:n.p.). TikTok users can also respond to music and participate in trend making using their own videos through features the app provides, namely participating in a popular dance challenge or singing a song and therefore re-popularising it. Furthermore, Cirisano compiled comprehensive consumer behaviour data and her data revealed that "TikTok users are more likely to spend money on music, and be invested in it" (Venkat, 2022:n.p.). Her data revealed that:

- 40% of active TikTok users pay a monthly subscription for music, compared to 25% of the general population.
- 17% buy artist merchandise monthly, compared to 9% of the general population.

Cirisano goes on to comment,

It's changed music listening from being a one-way relationship where a song comes out and you listen to it on your own, to something that you participate in. I don't think that any other social media app has done that to this degree. TikTok is peak U.G.C (user generated content) in that way (Cirisano in Venkat, 2022:n.p.)

Of course, there are dark sides to Tiktok or any/all social media platforms in that they can be addictive and cause burnout. Data collection from these apps continues to raise concerns and cause controversy. One such an example is that TikTok's algorithm allegedly reads and may

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<sup>3</sup>A stream of videos curated to your interests, making it easy to find content and creators you love powered by a recommendation system that delivers content to each user that is likely to be of interest to that particular user (Mullery, 2022).



remove content it believes may be controversial and will shadow-ban<sup>4</sup> it. This content may include matters such as racial oppression, politics, class, and sexual orientation. The act of shadow banning may be seen as a form of censorship.

Ultimately, users have related to Tiktok in ways we had not seen before. David Polgar, a tech ethicist and TikTok content advisory council member, states, “it’s not an app on their phone anymore, it’s their livelihood, it’s how they communicate with their friends, it’s how they see the world” (Polgar in Tiktok, 2021). Perhaps this was an aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic and the isolation that people experienced during this period as Tiktok became the most downloaded app in 2020. However, I do believe that the way in which social media is used and how content is consumed tells us a great deal about human nature as well as consumer behaviour. Furthermore, I believe it tells us all we need to know about social media as sites of community. Indeed, “social media are fundamentally changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create” (Aral, Dellarcocas & Godes, 2013:3). It is this community that is integral to music marketing within this digital D.I.Y context.

In addition, is the fact that music streaming platforms such as Apple Music, Spotify and Soundcloud have increased their interactive capacities to the point of becoming a form of social media in their own right. This is noted in a blog titled *Social Factor*. The article stated that apps such as Spotify for Artists and Apple Music are leading in this field as they offer the ability to create artist profiles linked to their music (Social Factor, 2022). In this way, artists are able to create and share playlists with their fans. Artists are also enabled to receive statistics about who is listening to their music, where they are listening from and how frequently they listen. Though this is still a relatively recent practice, it is indeed a vital part of music marketing as an Indie and it aids in understanding consumer behaviour.

With regards to music distribution and consumption, streaming sites and services have revolutionised the ways in which we consume and engage with music. Aggregators (these are basically digital music distributors) such as Tunecore, CDBaby, Distrokid ensure that music is globally distributed to all online streaming sites such as Apple Music and Spotify for a fee or commission. Storm Simpson (2021) aptly refers to these aggregators as the “gatekeepers of

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<sup>4</sup> A shadowban on TikTok is the unofficial name for what happens when TikTok temporarily restricts the visibility of an account (Hughes, 2022).

the digital realm” in that you simply cannot get your music into the digital market place without them (Simpson, 2021).

Unfortunately, because of the instant access/availability of music online as a result of technological advancements (aka Digital D.I.Y) the value of streamed music is in a constant state of flux. ‘Free Your Music’, an app developed in England that enables you to transfer music across different streaming services, recently compiled a table of the amount of income generated per stream. They also compiled a table that reveals how many streams are needed to earn a dollar (R16,52) as well as streams needed to earn \$1000 (R16 526,45).<sup>5</sup> These tables are seen below and have been labelled as illustrations 6 and 7, respectively.

Music streaming service	Avg. pay per stream
Spotify	\$0.00437
Tidal	\$0.01284
Napster	\$0.019
Apple Music	\$0.00783
Deezer	\$0.0064
Amazon Music	\$0.00402
Pandora	\$0.00133
YouTube	\$0.002

**Figure 6: Average pay per stream across different streaming services (Free your Music, 2022)**

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<sup>5</sup> Rand equivalents as at the time of writing this Dissertation.

Music streaming service	Streams to earn \$1	Streams to earn \$1000
Spotify	229	229 000
Tidal	80	80 000
Napster	53	53 000
Apple Music	136	136 000
Deezer	156	156 000
Amazon Music	249	249 000
Pandora	751	751 000
YouTube	570	571000

**Figure 7: Streams needed to earn \$1 and streams needed to earn \$1000 (Free Your Music, 2022)**

It is important to note is that these figures are estimated based on 2021 information from the USA, therefore, they might have changed over time. Secondly, there are many factors that affect overall revenue from streams; these figures are simply a guide. What these tables reveal is that unless you are an international superstar, the local independent artist will not initially make a lot of money from streams. Yet, streaming music online remains the single most important objective for independent artists intent on engaging with the market because it puts the artists in the running, so to speak.

The problem is the fact that even commercial labels have not only cut into the digital market but to some extent, have attempted to control it just as they have done with radio. A new study by consultancy firm, Music Tomorrow, found that the three big commercial labels (UMG, Warner and Sony) benefit the most from curated Spotify playlists and that in most cases they practically control them (King, 2022). Playlists (loosely defined as simply an organised list of songs — usually with some measure of intention behind their curation) are particularly important for independent artists because being chosen as part of a popular playlist may assist in audience expansion and may draw attention to a new release. Ashley King goes onto report, “The study finds that over the last four years, major labels accounted for nearly 70% of the

music featured in the *New Music Friday* playlist on Spotify. Of that number, 30% was UMG content, while 19% was for Warner and 19% for Sony”(King, 2022). That leaves a mere 32% for independent artists (including independent labels) to scramble for. King adds:

The major labels’ share of new music on Spotify playlists like ‘Rap Caviar’ and ‘Get Turnt’ were even higher in the same period. 86% of new music added to those playlists are from artists represented by major labels. ‘Today’s Top Hits’ and ‘Pop Rising’ playlists saw 87% of their content come from major labels (King, 2022).

This is particularly disheartening for independent artists on the rise and paints a bleak picture for South African independent musicians attempting to participate in the market and promote themselves. This is further exacerbated when we take a look into the monopolies behind these streaming platforms. In an article by Forbes that uncovers the economics of music streaming platforms, Benjamin Laker (2020) adds, “This disparity in revenue between the artist and record label is further widened when we examine who owns the streaming giant. Two of the biggest record labels, Universal Music Group and Sony Music Independent, share in Spotify (Laker, 2020). Once again, this highlights the indisputable fact that the business of music is gatekept and tends to be brutal and one must constantly find ways to manoeuvre and adapt.

However, the same study by *Music Tomorrow* confirmed that as of April 2022 available data indicates that the *New Music Friday* playlist recently consisted of about 63% coming from independent labels (King, 2022). This may be an indication of things moving in the right direction as it is a major shift away from the former position where independent artists barely had 30% of their music featured on the same popular playlist. Spotify continues to shift in this direction and much like social media, has allegedly attempted to solve this dilemma by boosting user-created playlists and featuring those playlists to users who share similar tastes (King, 2022). Similar to TikTok, Spotify’s algorithm makes recommendations based on user listening behaviours, so that someone who enjoys a particular genre or artist will be exposed to another Indie artist with a similar sound (King, 2022). Indeed, though one cannot change the system and while commercial labels still manage to enjoy a piece of every pie, artists and consumers together Quader are able to manoeuvre and find innovative sustainable ways to engage with the industry and to use these digital D.I.Y platforms on their own terms.

## Entrepreneurial Artists

*“While not all entrepreneurs are artists, all artists are entrepreneurs”* (Art Archive, n.d.).

This quote offers something of a resolution for my dilemma as an independent artist and rings true. Often, we separate entrepreneurship from art itself. Perhaps as we should. Yet the decision to do so is almost always met with tensions and resistance that are often initially unidentifiable. The purpose of this study was to critically engage with these tensions and attempt to reconcile some of the issues through discussion and interrogation. While it is not possible to resolve or find answers to all issues that arise in debates surrounding independent art and money, I believe the quote above proposes that we reframe our way of thinking about such debates. It presents creativity as a multifaceted endeavour and though it is not a complete answer, I do believe that it is a start to finding one – to establishing some sort of balance. It allows us to approach questions in a certain way. The questions we may now ask are not so much how to reconcile our aesthetic ideals and economic imperatives, but rather, how do I sustain myself and my career?

In a panel discussion/online workshop titled *Recasting the artist as entrepreneur*, the host, Emily Roller, began with a short lecture on the meaning of the notion of equity within different contexts. Equity is defined by The Oxford Dictionary as the “quality of being fair and impartial” (1989). A further definition refers to equity as “justice according to natural law or right” (Equity, n.d.). However, in the business arena, equity means something else altogether. In business and finance, equity is defined as “the percentage ownership and control exercised by individuals within an enterprise” (Law Insider).

In other words, equity means ownership. Simply put, in business, equity does not refer to what is fair and what is just. The differences in these definitions are quite conflicting as they refer to quite different positions; so much so that ethics may come into play. Is it fair or ethical that an independent artist will earn less than a dollar per stream for a song they have poured their heart into? Or that for a signed artist much of that revenue may legally belong to a corporate label? No, it is not fair nor is it ethical. Is it business? Yes. Emily Roller (2022) then suggests that due to this dilemma she is not able to imagine an equitable arts industry. Though in many ways, I agree with her and have accepted the business for what it is, I do believe that an independent career offers some measure of freedom, albeit at cost. I believe it is a constant

renegotiation with yourself and within the market with which you intend to engage. Like Roller, I believe art practitioners need to consider what happens when a work goes into production – which has been the focus of this study. We need to consider what equity means for ourselves, that is, owning our works as independent artists and how much we are willing to give up, collaborate on, or leverage with. We need to begin thinking and reframing our art worlds to accommodate economic discourses rather than to shy away from them. Like Roller, I believe “we can forge new pathways together, we just need a willingness to engage and experiment with the business side of the projects” (Roller, 2022).

Though this section of my study offers no concrete answers (as I had expected), what it aims to do is to address how we think about art and entrepreneurship both independently and in relation to one another. Through this study I have demonstrated that drawing a distinction between art, creativity, passion – the intangible, and the business aspects of art (that is, the proceeds and returns), generates frustration and this gap only widens further. I propose rather that we recognise the entrepreneurship in art and the art in entrepreneurship rather than dichotomising them, as the shift in mind set initiates a new relationship. In so doing, we might find ways for our creative outputs – the ‘fun’ stuff – to run more efficiently and be more sustainable. The key word here is **sustainability**, not getting rich and famous (though that would certainly make things easier) but rather, being able to take care of oneself and live a fulfilling life as an artist and human being.

One of the last questions I asked Shaw during our interview was how we bridge the gap or the dichotomy between the notion of art and that of commercial product? We discussed a quote by Abbing, one which formed part of the theoretical frameworks of this study. Abbing states, “as an artist I am convinced that aesthetic value is independent of market value. But as an economist, I disagree with this. As an economist I believe that quality in general corresponds with success in the market” (Abbing, 2002:55). This dialogue and tug of war between Abbing’s two selves – an artist (painter and photographer) and economist raised questions within me and was of particular interest because it is the place where most artists find themselves. Exactly two decades later; 2002-2022, it is the position in which I have found myself similarly to most independent South African artists. Shaw and I discussed this quote and reached the same ‘conclusion’; that perhaps there should not be a distinction between the artist and the

art entrepreneur because ultimately these worlds are intertwined. During our interview Shaw stated:

The distinction is in our minds. If you'd stop considering that these things are so different you'd be more successful. You are looking at one side of the elephant. Same elephant, many sides. Think to yourself; 'I'm making this album so I can appreciate it in 10 years, so that my kids will appreciate it.' The other side of that is: 'now realistically I need to understand how this aesthetic animal fits into a cultural and market space'. You almost need to acculturate it, you know, warm up to the idea (Shaw, personal interview, 2022 March 21).

Ultimately, Shaw is of the belief that these worlds (art and entrepreneurship) are one and the same. It is indeed possible to have artistic appreciation within yourself or to adhere to certain aesthetic values as an artist, but it is equally important to realise that it may not necessarily work like that when you are trying to put your artistic creation into a market.

An insightful journal article titled *Refining Understandings of Entrepreneurial Artists: Valuing the Creative Incorporation of Business and Entrepreneurship into Artistic Practice*, by Megan Robinson and Jennifer Novak-Leonard aptly explains the ways in which art and entrepreneurship may be reconciled. Essentially, this article concluded that artists that had accepted entrepreneurialism as part of their practice were far more likely to integrate their creativity into their marketing and arts business practice. It reframes and considers, through case studies of artists in different fields, how artists as cultural entrepreneurs use these entrepreneurial skills to advance their careers. However, as the authors mention, the problem is that not many sources for a pragmatic approach to entrepreneurship within the arts are readily available. Robinson and Novak-Leonard state:

While the volume of literature on entrepreneurial training and skill provision for artists has been expanding, less is known about the ways in which artists actively perform and engage with entrepreneurship in their professional practices, or how artists creatively adopt or adapt entrepreneurial behavior to suit motivations unique to their personal careers (Robinson & Novak-Leonard 2021:4).

I believe this is certainly true for South African independent artists – that is, the dearth of literature or training regarding art entrepreneurship 'in action', as it were. This is where I hope this study assists in filling this gap.

Nevertheless, Robinson & Novak-Leonard propose that "As entrepreneurs, professional artists must reconcile their entrepreneurial identity with their artistic one by accepting that their

creativity and skill in the production of art is intimately tied to feelings of satisfaction or fulfilment as an artist, as well as to professional and financial success” (Bass, Milosevic & Eesley in Robinson & Novak-Leonard, 2021:5). Research by Nel also confirmed that “cultural entrepreneurs with enhanced business communication skills, an external focus, and appropriate promotional strategies are more likely to be successful” (Nel, 2017:1).

Several artists interviewed by Robinson indicated that they frequently engaged in entrepreneurial or business practices to sustain their creative livelihood. Similarly, I as well as the interviewees that participated in my study have suggested that to be successful (or rather, sustainable), there are certain business practices that need to be adopted. The case studies in my research have been successful because they consistently operate ‘themselves’ (their art) as micro businesses. However, they do not operate alone, they work with both internal and external team members.

Robinson states:

By implementing business strategies in their artist practice, artists in our sample have positioned themselves to maintain control of their input—their creativity—and their output, the art. While it is likely that the vast majority of artists seek to retain creative control during their production process, entrepreneurial artists are better positioned to actually do so, provided that structures beyond their control maintain accessible pathways to success (Robinson & Novak-Leonard, 2021:13).

It is these ‘accessible pathways to success’ to which I would like to pay particular attention for a moment because the question arises about those particular pathways within a South African context. One of those pathways is funding or monetary support because like any other business, professional artists require capital to run their business and create their art. Secondly, would be entrepreneurial training. As Robinson mentions, “Entrepreneurial behavior is an expectation for freelance workers and other individuals embedded in cultural industry” (Lingo, Tepper & Win in Robinson & Novak-Leonard, 2021:De Beer3). Part of the disconnect experienced by many arts graduates when wanting to make a living through their art stems from the fact that studying and developing our art is divorced from the realities of making our art. This was certainly the case for me, and I suspect it will continue to be a problem unless we begin to reframe our way of thinking and begin implementing business practices (particularly from undergraduate level) with more intention. I have discussed at length some of the strategies my interviewees put in place to run their businesses and be



successful and sustainable in their creative pursuits. These strategies are similar throughout all arts practices including visual artists and graphic designers, yet unique in that they refer specifically to music/musicians that took part in this study. These strategies include (but are not limited to):

- Defining your style/brand identity – this refers to the relationship between you and your consumer. Independent musicians may need to manage their relationships with consumers strategically. Technology and social media have facilitated this relationship which has become more direct and easier to maintain.
- Understanding your audience – this is tied to defining your brand. It could also assist in marketing efforts and allow you to market more efficiently. However, I believe this to be a process that happens over time/organically.
- Understanding and implementing basic marketing and sales practices – this implies entrepreneurship.
- Administration – this refer to administrative duties, particularly being registered with the relevant organisations in South Africa where music making and music licensing is concerned.
- Community/Collaboration – surrounding oneself with good people and mentors that may assist you. This also includes having in place a team dedicated to your success. The reality is that you may operate alone initially, but I do believe much success is achieved once external members are invested. Again, I believe this to be a process that happens organically.
- Access to capital/funding – as previously mentioned, professional art entrepreneurs need capital to run their business – much like any other business.

Of course, no two paths are the same and the aim of this study was never to provide a one-size-fits-all model. The aim has been to dissect, discuss and explore what may happen when pursuing a creative career. The intention was to explore the possibilities for market success and thus for dedicating oneself to a way of making a living as an independent musician in South Africa. The purpose of this study was to find a balance between our aesthetic ideals and realistic goals and one day become formidable business owners who create what they want on their own terms. Ultimately, to practise our autonomy by creating independent music while generating possible business models for the future. This may perhaps be a distant utopian

ideology for now, but in some small ways independent artists are slowly beginning to recreate culture and shift the 'struggling artist' narrative.

## CHAPTER FIVE: AN IMPERFECT CADENCE

*“Are you ready to change yourself? – You know what I’m talking about. Are you ready to go inside yourself and change yourself?” – Nina Simone (Light 2016:3)*

These were the words called out by American singer songwriter, pianist, and activist Nina Simone before her final performance at Mount Morris Park, New York 1969 – a recitation of a battle cry and poem by David Nelson called ‘Are you ready, Black People?’ For this performance in particular, Simone is described as dressed in:

A long yellow and black print dress, her hair teased into a sort of Afro-bouffant, massive silver earrings dangling to her neck – she made explicit the tensions and the possibilities of an event celebrating black culture and black pride in the aftermath of the riots that had erupted urban areas during the previous summers (Light, 2016:2).

Alan Light, author of *What happened, miss Simone?* goes on to describe the disappointment that occurred despite such an electric performance and atmosphere created by Simone and the rest of the star-studded concert line up. He writes: “[...] but once again, on that day and the days that followed, true revolutionary action failed to materialize; the chaos the crowd chanted about did not ensue” (Light, 2016:3).

This short quote and incident narrated at the beginning of Simone’s biography briefly highlights the racial relations, tensions and Simone’s defiance and resilience as a black female performer in a segregated America. The issues experienced in this scenario are not of the same ilk as the ones explored throughout this study in the sense that what Simone stood for and some of the difficulties she faced are considerably different from the difficulties, tensions and possibilities of independent artists particularly the ones described throughout this study. However, I use this anecdote to highlight something else. I use it to highlight her determination to live and thrive as a performer despite a grossly unfair system. This is a character trait that I can emulate, one that seems necessary for independent artists to keep at it – to survive. As Light recalls, “her fight for acceptance had to do with her race, no question, but also with her uncompromising aesthetic and personality” (Light, 2016:14).

Though sadly, Simone’s latter years were spent wrestling with managers and record labels over the ownership of her work (Light, 2016:4), she was known for breaking down barriers, fighting establishments, and proposing radical change through her music. Simone’s life work

was not to single-handedly change or cure American society, but rather to expose the inequalities embedded in it. As she herself mentions:

I am just one of the people who is sick of the social order, sick of the establishment, sick to my soul of it all. To me, America's society is nothing but a cancer, and it must be exposed before it can be cured. I am not the doctor to cure it. All I can do is expose the sickness. (Simone in Proudly Afrikan, n.d.).

Similarly, this study does not aim to change an imperfect system 'overnight' but to expose the discrepancies between art and the market, and further, to propose novel, more sustainable means by which the art and the artist may exist as both artist and art entrepreneur.

My experience with *Becoming* was not necessarily concerned with an already constructed identity(ies) but with processes; a process that involves a perpetual state of growth and evolution. *Becoming* focused on being and becoming through music. This study, however, was intent on marrying the notion of 'becoming' in musical practice with the music market – namely the independent music market in South Africa. As Roy Shuker maintains, "the uneasy alliance between art and commerce is frequently placed at the heart of the history of popular music, but it must be seen as a false dichotomy" (Shuker, 2001:35). Through this study, I have noted that the relationship between music and the market is perceived differently by diverse artists as no two paths are the same. Furthermore, I acknowledge that the nature of this relationship will keep changing (growing and evolving) much like the music industry continues to do.

Though this is my conclusion, this chapter is an 'imperfect cadence' in that it provides no definitive answers for the questions and debates discussed throughout this study. Rather, it proposes how these questions may be resolved by the independent artist themselves through such discussions happening in the first place. A fairer question for ourselves in approaching art and the marketplace perhaps is, "are you ready? Are you ready to change yourself?"

## **Reflections on making and marketing music**

Simone mentioned in her memoir, "music is a gift and a burden I've had since I can remember who I was. I was born into music. The decision was how to make the best of it" (Light, 2016:23). The notion of music as a gift that one engages with almost automatically and without much thought are sentiments that are often shared amongst artists – me included. I too often found

myself gravitating towards wherever the music was and many of my musical choices were determined by my older brother, and my upbringing. “I listened to a lot of what my brother was listening to” (Mapisa, ‘Becoming’ EPK video, 0:00 – 0:52). Though I sang often at church, with my family members (namely my older brother – Mazisi Mapisa), and in school choirs, I did not think anything special of my singing voice until I was 14 or so.

During school holidays, my extended family and I would meet and three of my cousins who were avid Beyonce fans (as we all were) would sing and use hairbrushes as pretend microphones. In one of these girl band practices, I joined them as they sang Beyonce’s “If I were a boy” and harmonised as they sang. One of my cousins stopped to ask who harmonised and initially – a little embarrassed because I thought I had disrupted their practice, I admitted to being the one who did so. They asked me to do it again, shocked that I could actually sing and immediately called my mother and aunt into the room to hear me – this time they had me sing alone. That incident was their discovery of my potential talent, but it was also my own discovery and not just something I enjoyed doing in secret every now and then. As mentioned in Chapter Three, around the same age I had started playing guitar.

Every artist has a story or a point of reference for when they discovered they had some measure of talent. Though I was heavily influenced by my surroundings, my relationship with music was as natural as everything else I did before that incident. Music is a part of everyday life, but for artists, the decision to create music is a decision of *how to make the best of it* as Simone suggested. Further, I believe that choosing to make music for a living is choosing to make the best of this musical gift. I often think that not making music or having a musical career is the easier thing to do. Having a predictable, secure, and carved out path you do not have to question or second guess or ‘figure out’ seems the easier thing to do – but perhaps not the most fulfilling. I realised a while ago when attempting to quit music altogether, that I am actually unable to do so, not because I might be good at it, but because it is part of who I am and is part of the way I process my own thoughts and emotions. Therefore, as I live my being and my becoming, I will always make music and I will always make the best of it. Marketing the music is part of that practice.

This study highlights the need to engage with music marketing so that I can learn to embrace the integration of my own creativity as an artist with entrepreneurship by shifting my

approach and exploring means to achieve that. That is a part of me making the best of it. The current nature of the independent music scene in South Africa is not without major faults (which in fact highlight the dynamics of power) and I recognise through this study that while I am unable to bludgeon my way through these faults and these structures on my own, I am able to manoeuvre through these existing structures and create a fulfilling life for myself through music. I acknowledge that this will require the implementation of new skills that will advance my career – skills such as multidimensionality, versatility, and cross-employability (Coles, 2018). These are skills referred to by Drew X Coles as ‘hurdles’ as he attempted to define success in boundaryless career paths in an article titled *Reimagining Career Clarity in Music Professions, Defining Success in Boundaryless Music Performance Careers*. However, upon further investigation and discussion of the journeys of the musicians featured as case studies in this dissertation, I do not see the skill sets mentioned by Coles as hurdles, but rather, recognise their potential to be used as strengths in this Indie journey. These strengths and strategies have been described by Thomas Cummins-Russell and Norma Rantisi (2017) as diversification and networking. The authors note, “in the music industry, ‘versatility is survival’ (interview in Cummins-Russell & Rantisi 2017) to cope with the challenges of the music industry, music professionals use two related strategies: diversification and networking” (Cummins-Russell & Rantisi, 2017). They are strengths in that they assist in building start-up capital (through other work opportunities where music professionals could be hired by outside parties or production companies for musical work), which we have discussed throughout this dissertation as a critical requirement for the success of any business – particularly that of an independent musician.

Proficiency in the digital space, particularly social media, is integral to the independent artist’s music marketing efforts. Why? Because social media allows people who are separated geographically to connect and form relationships. A study by Hwanho Choi and Bernard Burnes, highlights the importance of producer and consumer relationships in business and marketing practices. They note that the use of social media has altered the ways companies manage operations and further, social media aids in building relationships with consumers in today’s interconnected environment (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010 in Choi and Burnes, 2017). Furthermore, the formation of these relationships has changed the conceptualisation of who consumers are and what their roles entail (Choi & Burnes, 2017). They add, “the recent

emergence of consumer participation and consumer-led markets therefore suggests that markets, their formation, and their development cannot be managed only by producers' traditional means" (Choi & Burnes, 2017:8). This suggests that makers as well as consumers of art are both integral to the success of the product. In addition, that "value is subject to **evolution** – that non-traditional producers such as consumers can contribute to forming value as they continually attach distinct noneconomic (e.g., experiential, emotional, and contextual) values to products" (Choi & Burnes; Figueiredo & Scaraboto 2016, in Choi and Burnes, 2017). This highlights the point that artists should consider art consumers as a critical component in the process of creating value, that both artist and consumer are co-creators of value. It is these bonds or 'emotional alliances' as discussed by Frith (2007) that musicians may benefit from, "whether in terms of psychological support or economic returns" (Choi & Burnes 2017:13).

From a music marketing and business perspective, I believe that the reason for some of the success enjoyed in the case studies explored in this research, is the individual artist's understanding that as an independent musician you are likely to be part of a niche market (within a bigger South African music market) and will only employ a few people. This results in the artist taking on multiple roles – what Coles refers to as multidimensionality. From this, we may benefit from using a systems-based approach in our music business endeavours – doing only what we can and delegating other tasks to the appropriate professionals. This generalised 'systems based' ideology or way of thinking is simply founded on the idea that a unitary whole comprises inter-related and interdependent components (Chand, 2022). This way, our music making and music marketing approaches may run more efficiently, with each member working on specific components at a time.

## **Reflections on research and its achieved aims**

To reflect on this research and its aims, I back peddled and two questions came to mind. They were:

- What was this research about?
- What did I achieve and how?

At its core, I aimed to find ways of firstly addressing and subsequently attempting to bridge the gap between the artist and the South African independent marketplace. I arrived at this

crossroads due to my experience of having independently created my first artistic product. Many questions surfaced during the process of marketing and distributing my album and I found myself at my main research question which was:

*What does an independent artist need to take into consideration to reconcile aesthetic ideals and economic imperatives?*

This question was underpinned by two objectives; firstly, to explore the South African independent music marketplace through the experience of creating *Becoming*. I therefore interrogated and discussed my own creative processes, almost as if to get into my own head and soul the sonic meaning of *Becoming* and how this relates to who I am, and further, discussing the difficulties I faced during and after this experience. My second objective was to examine my own first-hand experiences of the South African independent music scene in the context of experiences of other musicians and music business practitioners. Together these musicians covered a vast range of genres and positions. These musicians and music business practitioners and their area of expertise were:

- MUZI (E.D.M dj, producer)
- Hle (Gospel singer songwriter)
- Nicholas Olsen (rock/heavy metal, band/business management)
- Jonathan Shaw (Music business consultant and author, producer)

Though I had initially planned to interview Nduduzo Makhathini (a South African jazz artist) as indicated in my research proposal, I was not able to do so due to the clashing of our schedules at the stage at which I was conducting interviews. However, after considering the wealth of knowledge and information I received from those that I did interview, and the ways in which this research developed over time, I realised that there was no need to interview Makhathini as my interviewees had already covered all the issues to be addressed.

This research aimed to study the South African independent music market and to discuss the issues faced by an artist in this market in particular. Furthermore, it aimed to find a means to address these issues and ultimately to advance a strategy that would allow an artist to make a sustainable living through music in South Africa (and possibly beyond). I believed this was achieved mainly through the discussions in Chapter Four- “And Now?”, where I conducted interviews and was engaged in the journeys of South African independent musicians other



than myself. Here, I realised that many of us face similar battles and challenges. Furthermore, I was enlightened by how these artists overcame their challenges. I believe it is through community and purposeful engagement that we are able to overcome or at least re-negotiate those challenges.

## **Limitations of the study**

The limitations of this study are to some degree a consequence of my methodology. From the outset, I maintained that this research was based on my own experiences and well as that of others. Furthermore, that this research is nuanced in the sense that it is multivocal. As previously mentioned, multivocality is based on the ideology that there are “plural and sometimes contradictory narrative voices located within the researcher that would expand the ways we can perceive and inquire an encounter” (De Beer, 2018:160). Furthermore, multivocality may be defined as a “having many or different meanings of equal probability or validity” (Multivocality, n.d.). Therefore, this research design was always fundamentally interpretivist in nature. As a result, it tends to be ambiguous, and it will not provide definitive answers to the research questions nor provide a clear path and solution to the issues discussed in this dissertation. However, that was never the aim which was to engage in purposeful and meaningful dialogue surrounding issues of independent music in South Africa.

In addition, this study is limited because the discourses and questions posed throughout may not continue to be applicable in the future as the industry is in constant flux. What may appear to be a potential resolution now, may not apply within the next 5 years. Major changes have already occurred during the writing of this dissertation as, for example, the closure of physical CD stores. On the 27 May 2021, a journalist for *The South African* reported the official closure of all 140 Musica stores across the country after 29 years of operation. Storm Simpson reported: “In January 2021, the Clicks Group announced it would close its Musica shops due to the shift in the way people consume music, movies and video games – digital streaming has made physical media somewhat redundant. Therefore, the closure is not a surprise” (Simpson, 2022). Musica officially closed on the 26 May 2021. The music industry continues to evolve and therefore specifics will change rapidly as in the past.

The final limitation of this study is the temporal/time period during which this research was conducted. In my MA proposal, I had indicated the time frame of 2017 to 2021. However, I have included data gathered to this current year – 2022 as I believed using additional data would assist in furthering the discussions in this study. Furthermore, I believed more recent data would be more relevant and more applicable to current issues, thus extending the period of relevance for the experiences and discussions undertaken.

### **Experience as the inspiration for creative strategies: from survival to success**

“Experience is the best teacher of all. And for that, there are no guarantees that one will become an artist. Only the journey matters” (Harry Callahan in Caponigro, 2014).

The above undated quote is by Harry Callahan, an American self-taught photographer and educator born in 1912. Callahan was widely revered in the photography community for his open-minded attitudes, his willingness to experiment and his versatility. It is this approach to creating art and particularly the emphasis placed on the journey of the individual, that relates to the notion of *Becoming* and ultimately the subject matter of this project.

There are no definitive and conclusive answers to most of the questions posed and discussed throughout this research. However, I do believe that what this research has facilitated is discourse and discussion around music entrepreneurship. As a result, it has exposed some of the loopholes, gaps and limitations that currently prevail within the independent music market and one of those gaps is the dearth of pertinent industry research. At the outset of this project, I discovered that few academic sources and studies of the South African independent music market are available. This absence was also mentioned in Shaw’s *The South African Music Business*, which was one of my primary sources. Shaw states, “The amount of statistical information on the local South African music scene, especially that available to the independent music businessperson, is small” (Shaw, 2017:249). He continues:

In addition to (or maybe as a consequence of) this, there is a lack of understanding about the fundamental operation of the South African music industries. There is a lot about the business of music that is not understood or that is misunderstood by many new artists and even those working within the industry. Specifically, there is a lack of human resources for the business aspects of the industry (Shaw, 2017:249).

Through this project, I have presented experiential information as opposed to statistical information. As a result, my first recommendation in using experience as an inspiration for

creative strategies for those in pursuit of an independent music career, is for an increase in documented resources and especially experienced based resources from within the education sector. I chose to explore experiential information because there were limited resources available. Part of what I believe was my 'rude awakening' is the fact that little I learned in my undergraduate degree applied to how music works in a market environment, nor was a sufficient amount of advice offered as to how to actually begin having a career in music. Simply put, although my tertiary education did teach me about making music, it did not adequately equip me for a music career. I do believe that there ought to be an adjustment in the curriculum – one that is more pragmatic and purposefully leans into developing an individual's basic business skills in an effort to understand and introduce the student to music in the market. Though there has been a steady increase in documented data and analyses about the music industry, a more formal introduction as in a compulsory music business module ought to be put in place.

Furthermore, I believe that creative approaches to education are needed. Universities should shift their approach in hiring educators and perhaps look into bringing active music entrepreneurs on board. A shift in policy that acknowledges experience in the industry would facilitate the building of a music course that assists students forge a place in the commercial world. This what Walzer refers to in his paper about independent music production and entrepreneurship in a contemporary society. Like Walzer, I believe that "these entrepreneurs bring recent, practical experience in how to produce and promote music in a 'new' industry—a business rife with tighter budgets and smaller profit margins" (Walzer, 2016:11).

Walzer goes onto suggest the ways in which this may be possible. He states:

A "successful" Indie artist can answer questions about how they accomplish certain goals by documenting aspects of their work in the studio, booking gigs, connecting with audiences, and the like. These activities can be recorded and distributed via podcasts and through the Internet. Students that wonder how to accomplish their goals can now access this information through YouTube and in social media outlets (Walzer, 2016:11).

I would describe this as ethnography (or ethnographic documentation) through digital media which could be useful in increasing experience-led education by those actively participating in the market in order to better understand the administrative aspects of the music business. This form of education could even be extended in other fields of the creative/entertainment industries such music, film, theatre. Walzer states, "The implications are both pedagogical and

industry-specific in scope and may appeal to music business and audio scholars alike” (Walzer, 2016:11). Through this active method of education, music students are shown first-hand the realities of music making as well as music in the market and how roles in this industry intersect. In addition, this data may be used in different ways by researchers and lecturers and can be adapted/updated as the industry changes (Walzer 2016). Walzer concludes by stating “perhaps, then, a new form of ‘Indie research entrepreneurship’ will shed light on the music industry and recording practice for years” (Walzer, 2016:29).

With regards to education, I believe more needs to be taught about music rights, which according to the RSFAM (Revenue Streams for Music Creators in South Africa ) 2022 Report, tends to be a grey area of music business inaccessible to most Indies. As Olsen mentioned during our discussion:

One of the problems is that a lot of the business aspects particularly in relation to publishing is mystified and made to seem like a dark art and no one understands it. But actually, it works a particular way and if one understands how it works one has better ideas of what’s possible” (Olsen, Personal Interview, 2022 July 15).

This was a similar problem identified by the Swedish arts and culture department in an official report titled *Restarting the Arts and Culture in Sweden* in light of the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. The Inquiry states, “A lack of knowledge about copyright and the limited resources of the organisations providing support on such issues, however, stand in the way of achieving fair remuneration” (Swedish Government Inquiry, 2021).

A second recommendation for creative strategies in the future would be support and funding. The creative industries together with the private sector need to create support networks together with small independent music companies and artists to strengthen existing networks (over and above corporate social investment responsibilities). During my experience with *Becoming*, I attempted to raise funds for an album launch and tour by reaching out to the Motsepe Foundation as a possible sponsor as they had been accepting applications for partnership and support for music. Unfortunately, I never received a response from them even after following up. This is so often the case – it looks good for business to appear to support the arts but in practice very often one is never granted the courtesy of a response. With that said there are institutions, such as the Goethe institute, and BASA (Business and Arts South Africa) which have attempted to meet the needs of independent artists by providing support

and as a result have narrowed the gaps and limitations experienced by independent artists when engaging with the creative industries. Their efforts should not go unnoticed. I maintain more private institutions (other than the ones mentioned above) need to lean into this. Funding and access to funding remains fundamental for any business. Funding through long term grants for independent business owners could prove worthwhile for music entrepreneurs as well as funders themselves. Through partnering with entrepreneurial artists, funders are partaking in creating cultural and economic value through the arts.

Policy or cultural reform is my third recommendation, one which I tended to avoid because I do not see how that could effect change immediately. However, I do believe that changing or at the very least, discussing existing policy is part of the long game for which we ought to start preparing ourselves. Shaw notes that though the government has recognised the knowledge gap and has slowly been involved in research, “as yet, however, South Africa does not have a music industries policy strategy in place as of 2015” (Shaw, 2017:249). Where policy is concerned, I would suggest that government should hire or partner with young qualified independent artists and business owners who are actively engaging in the market to spearhead their own policies and implement this change to innovative ways of thinking required by the industry. In this way, the creative industries as well as their artists and professionals will be further valued, supported, and strengthened.

The notion of creative entrepreneurship as a creative strategy towards success is one I further emphasise. Thinking of art entrepreneurship as a creative endeavour in and of itself may allow us to reinvent the dynamics of the industry. If we are able to apply our music making processes to entrepreneurship by asking: ‘what are some of the characteristics that are in play when we create music?’ then ask or discover ways in which those processes may be applied within the field of entrepreneurship, we would have already changed our mindset towards the market and perhaps relieved ourselves of the resistances we often feel when engaging market. As musicians we are both artists (as producers of art) and are the reason an *art market* exists in the first place, therefore, there should be no reason to feel displaced.

This may allude to the notion of parallax as described by Slavoj Žižek, Parallax can be defined as the apparent displacement of an object, caused by a change in observational position (Žižek, 2006). In other words, through the notion of Parallax, Žižek believes that “the gap

between the individual and the 'impersonal' social dimension is to be inscribed back within the individual himself: this 'objective' order of the social Substance exists only insofar as individuals treat it as such, relate to it as such" (Žižek, 2006:6). He states: "the point is not to overcome the gap that separates thought from being, but to conceive it in its 'becoming'" (Žižek 2006:6). In some ways, I believe this view to be related to Coleman's compositional theory and philosophy of harmolodics (as mentioned in Chapter Three) that being, the synthesis of melody, harmony, and rhythm. Though Coleman's belief is that combining all these aspects of music results in free jazz improvisation (which became a style in and of itself) and a break from existing structures or schools of thought where composition is concerned, similarly, through synthesising creativity and entrepreneurship, both art entrepreneurship and the Indie market may be defined (or redefined).

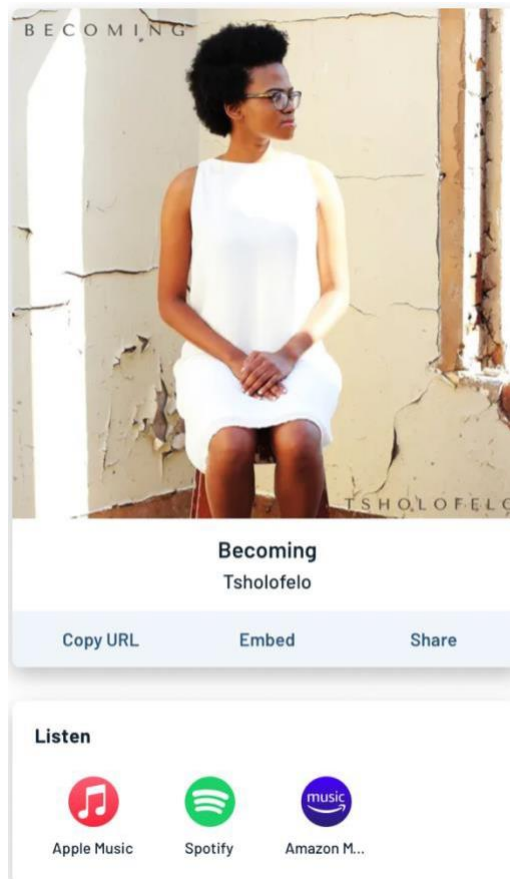
Parallax is built on the idea that, "An epistemological shift in the subject's point of view reflects an ontological shift in the object itself" (Žižek, 2006:17). Simply, what we know about something (based on our perspective of that thing or how we experience it) changes the 'thing' itself. To apply the above to this study, I would say what we know (or will come to know) about independent art in South Africa alters the independent art market in South Africa when our perspectives of ways to engage this market also change. Rather than separating musician and entrepreneur, we may begin to think in terms of applying the paradigmatic foundations of music making to entrepreneurship and applying the paradigmatic underpinnings of entrepreneurship to music making. In this way we might find sustainable strategies of reconciliation.

In conclusion, there are no immutable answers and perhaps for now, the focus should not be to find answers but to ask the questions that might lead to sustainable solutions. The paths we find ourselves on as independent musicians will differ, but exposing that which is still in the dark for many, and making public an experience and journey many of us face as independent artists, may be useful in helping others who wish to be performing artists and open up discourse that may assist the next musicians define their own pathway. There are critical conversations emanating from this study and perhaps initially, it asked a lot more questions than it could answer. But perhaps that is all we need to achieve. Perhaps the interrogation, investigations and the consideration of the possibilities that will emanate from these questions are enough. Becoming is a perpetual process, a constant state of evolution

that is based on a multitude of different possibilities and permutations. Through this research, I have been able to transcend my experiences and discover newer directions.

*For your listening pleasure:*

“Becoming” smartlink (click on image):





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