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# UNDERSTANDING THE MUSIC BUSINESS

In Kenya, this area of entertainment holds great investment potential, but still largely untapped due to varying industry handicaps. With the government being at the centre of implementing policies in the sector, creatives are now demanding better and more, writes Barry Silah

**A** recent industry talk session dubbed 'The Business of Music' held at Goethe Institute in Nairobi laid bare the chaos and drama surrounding the music industry, and how best to navigate them. Industry players are collectively calling on a more decisive front to find a lasting solution to a sector that employs thousands across the country, especially in areas of regulation, copyrights and marketing.

With many moving parts that often need to be integrated, the music industry is today evolving at a fast pace thanks to changing trends, technological shifts and advancements that every day change and shape consumer behaviour.

Singer and performing artiste Willis Chimano (of Sauti Sol) is categorical that structure is key and having the right people around is more beneficial.

"I recall when we started out, it was haphazard because we were just friends who shared a common goal. It took time before we realised this was actually a business. We were raw and naïve, and in fact green in how we approached things. It was not until we got a manager on board that we realised the value of structure. Our sound was not mainstream and I also think some folks wanted to change our identity.

"Things such as financing, imaging and production seemed foreign, but once we got to understand the curve and the industry, it became apparent why working with professionals was important. Before, we just appeared in gigs to be seen and it was kind of ragged and uninformed, but those were lessons, which kept us ahead since we went

through them in real-time," says Chimano.

## Know your audience

He contends, albeit nonchalantly, that it is more beneficial to the artiste to know his audience and his trade better, especially with times changing so fast.

"Social media is big and an important tool for any artiste because it helps with visibility. Once we were discovered after some stints at Alliance Francaise, our management was deliberate on how they wanted us to be in the eyes of the world. Therein lies the element of professionalism, and so all props have to go to our first producer Waweru (Robert) and manager Lincoln and afterwards Marek (Fuchs) and team. When we did one of our initial group tours, everyone had a role and understood it perfectly. Besides the meetings and rehearsals, a key component was using our tools and resources to reach the masses," he says.

He adds, "It was strategic and well mapped because we wanted to be different and this is where our creative team and publicist did a splendid job. As creatives, we only had the duty of writing, producing and performing,

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Angela Mwandanda



Mike Mutenyoo



Nonsizi Agnes

management came into play," she says.

**Industry disruption**

Angela, who is the Recording Industry of Kenya (RIKE) national coordinator, adds that the entrance of Ogopa Dee Jays into the market literally changed the landscape for them aside from other fringe artists who morphed into superstars.

"We knew that the industry was cut-throat, and so, we had to be deliberate in our own ways to survive and remain relevant. The coming in of Ogopa who had a unique sound presented an opportunity for us to get better recognition. Radio stations were also taking interest in local music, especially Capital FM and Kiss FM, which was a good thing overall. In summary, we were taught how to activate our talent and broaden it and as Tattuu, we took it upon ourselves to push doors and chase after gigs because we had good mentors and teachers. The goodwill was also there and it gave us a lift.

"My message to the new acts is stay relevant, be willing to learn and most of all resilience and patience is key in this business. Also understanding laws of content and copyright is absolutely mandatory, so that as a creative you do not become blind or ignorant. There are opportunities in this industry if only the right channels are used," offers Angela.

During the panel discussions hosted at a packed auditorium by TV host and publicist Nonsizi Agnes, the significance of networking and collaborations in the industry was emphasised. Players in the sector are warning that unity of purpose is crucial in smoothening the rough edges of the sector.

Talent manager and digital marketer, Mike Mutenyoo, has seen it all in the industry and his experience is helping him revitalise the ecosystem where he operates. "In every business there are challenges and opportunities and music is no different. I sit at a vantage point because I know and understand the workings of the sector so well. An artiste simply has to know how to package themselves and be unique and this for me would be the best sell point. With the corporate world always seeking partnerships with creatives, then diversification of skillset is also critical. For instance, a musician can also be a producer of sound that can be used in film and also be a songwriter. The aspect of versatility is what I always try to push to my clients and friends in the industry," he shares.

Reflecting on the journey the Kenyan music space has undergone over the years, Mutenyoo opines that it's still a growing industry.

He says: "Unfortunately, our music sector is still in formative stages. We need more government support through workable policies and also the right legislation. We need to strengthen copyright laws to protect our creative work and sweat because piracy is dragging us behind. We also need to see the Collective Management Organisations being streamlined, so that they work for artistes' rights because this is a multi-million sector."

**Professionalising the sector**

Mutenyoo adds that Kenya's music space is coming from an era where the musical value chain was just haphazard, but now there are rules, so everyone needs to take recognition of that fact. "I would also strongly advocate for well-trained music professionals who can help take this conversation forward with their insights and input. As a country, we have had an interesting, but irrelevant discussion of identifying a Kenyan sound, but with multiple cultures, I think everyone can do a good job and find an audience as long as it can sell," he says.

Shinde suggests rights owners must understand their obligations, so that they could protect what they own.

"Intellectual property has to be retooled or relooked at differently. We need government agencies to be more alive to this sector and all consumers of music must be ready to remunerate the owners of the music played. As an organisation, RIKE, for instance, is ensuring that we lobby for collating data for distribution and also work with the National Assembly to fight against vices such as piracy. It is when we begin to open our eyes that we can become more aware," she says in conclusion.

as opposed to before as greenhorns whereby everyone was left to their own devices. Today, all our lessons made us create an empire with an intention of investing in new talent through skills sharing."

Former Tattuu member, Angela Mwandanda aka Shinde, explains how beginning as outsiders carved a perfect niche for them to discover extra in the journey of fame. "All of us began and met at Phoenix and two of us were dancers who actually performed with Nameless. However, the key issue is the people we interacted with overtime literally opened doors for us. We were on the outside, but got our way into the limelight through deliberate efforts. Remember back then there was no social media, and so we took it upon ourselves to ask questions and do the heavy lifting even before anything like



Chimano

**SWEETNSOUR** By Ely Gitau

**Risper Faith: I feel like I'm underrated**

Socialite and entrepreneur Risper Faith wants you to see her for who she really is, flaws, glam, drama, love and everything in between. The *Nai-Rich* star who has previously appeared on *Nairobi Diaries*, another reality series, wants to show viewers her most authentic self in the new Showmax Original reality series. "So many people out here are faking lives and sugarcoating everything. If I've had beans and black tea for breakfast, there's no need of logging into Pinterest to download croissant pictures and share that as my breakfast. I want to show viewers that even celebrities who have made it are just regular people with real problems and real lives," Risper says, adding that the reason she joined *Nai-Rich* was because she felt like she's underrated. "In the past, when I was try-

ing to chase fame and build up my brand, I got caught up in so much fakeness lies along the way. But when I decided to turn my life around, my blessings started flowing, everything good in life came to me so yes, I don't believe in sugarcoating anything," she says adding that Phoina is her co-star in the series because she's a friend. On how she handles the pressure and scrutiny that comes with being in the public eye, Risper says being in the public eye for over 10 years, she has learnt to grow a thick skin. "That's all it takes for you to handle everything and deal with the pressure. Also, I always keep away from any gossip about me, I don't check the blogs, I don't read the comments, and the people around me know this as well, not to share any gossip stories with me," she intimates.



**Producers Teddy B and Ihaji in copyright administration agreement with IPAMS**

Kenyan music producers Teddy B and Ihaji have signed copyright administration agreements with IP Advisory and Management Services Ltd (IPAMS). The strategic partnership is aimed at ensuring that both producers are fairly compensated for the commercial use of their music compositions across all platforms. Under the terms of the agreements, IPAMS will administer the copyrights of the two music makers, focusing on tracking, collecting, and securing royalties from entities using their music. The company's role will include managing re-

lationships with broadcasters, streaming platforms, and any commercial entities benefiting from the producers' creative work. "This partnership is a big move for me in securing the value of my work. With IPAMS on board, I am confident that my rights as a producer will be protected and my royalties collected," said Teddy B. IPAMS will oversee the administration of royalties, licensing agreements, and legal compliance, making sure that Teddy B and Ihaji receive their rightful earnings from any use of their music compositions. "The music industry is rapidly evolving, and ensuring that creators are compensated is more important than ever. I'm excited to have IPAMS handle my copyright administration, so I can focus more on creating music," Ihaji said.

