

MUSICIANS ARE PART OF THE PEOPLE

Barry Gilder

South Africa is a country in struggle. There is no running away from this fact. Whether we are black or white, progressive or reactionary; whether we are musicians or any other member of society we cannot help but confront the fact of the present phase of history that our country is passing through.

As musicians we are daily confronted with the social realities of our country when we have to answer questions like: Where do we perform? What do we perform? How do we perform? To whom do we perform? How do we get the instruments with which to perform? How do we earn a living from our music? Who records our music? Who promotes our music? How is our music distributed?

And as members of society we are also confronted daily with the struggle that is being waged and will be waged, more vigorously, in our country. Whoever we are we cannot ignore the growing struggles for higher wages and basic trade union rights. We cannot ignore the struggles against forced removals, against rent and fare increases, against inferior education, against detention, torture, bannings and censorship, against the growing number of murders of those taking the side of freedom, against the carving up of the South African nation, against the ever-increasing military call-up, against the denial of basic political, social and economic rights to the vast majority of the South African people.

True - some of us do manage to ignore these realities. But now, more than ever before, the act of ignoring these realities is becoming an aggressive act - a positive siding with the forces of oppression. At this time in the history of our country those who choose to ignore the struggles being waged by our people are joining the pitiful ranks of those who have sold their music and their souls to the highest bidder.

Once we, as musicians and as people, have faced up to the realities of our country how do we respond?

There are two responses. One is contained in the words of Victor Jara, a Chilean singer and songwriter who was brutally murdered by the fascist

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the world are calling for the total isolation of the South African regime - politically, economically, militarily and culturally. We do not want the oppressing minority in our country to forget for a moment that they are pariahs in this world. And they know it. That is why they see any breach of the boycott as a victory. We must show them and our friends throughout the world that we will not allow the regime these victories.

Musicians, in fact all cultural workers, can play an important part in this campaign not only by participating in mobilising the people in support of such boycotts, but by themselves refusing to co-operate with those international artists who come to South Africa and their promoters, and also by providing exciting alternatives to the concerts of these boycott-breakers.

At the same time musicians must unite and organise themselves. They must bring themselves together to struggle against their own exploitation by the recording, distribution and media industries. They can do this not only defensively, but also by going out and organising alternatives to these industries.

By pooling their resources they can organise alternative recording studios where progressive musicians can make low-cost, reasonable-quality recordings which can be put out on cassette tapes if cutting discs is too expensive. At the same time they can bypass the profit-seeking record shops by distributing their music through progressive political, cultural and other organisations - in the communities. And they can also seek and organise alternative performance venues - in the townships, in the rural areas, at political meetings - wherever the people are musicians must follow.

While the major record companies, the SABC and their ilk are churning out their distorted idea of popular music, the people will be receiving and responding to another more genuinely popular music, distributed in places they can reach at prices they can afford,

Such an organisation of musicians can also play a crucial part in the

popularisation of a new, revolutionary musical culture. Through such a coming together musicians can also ensure unity with other cultural workers so that a new mass force for change can take its place among the forces storming the crumbling castle of apartheid.

These might sound like grand but vain dreams. But the time has come in South Africa to end idle talk and fuzzy ideas. The people are leading the way. History is pointing its blazing finger forwards. Musicians, no less than other people, must follow the signs.

And in this process the nature of South African music itself will change. It will become a truly national, popular and progressive music. And by so becoming it will take us another great step forward towards the day when our country is free, when our music is a proud and revolutionary expression of a proud and revolutionary people.

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