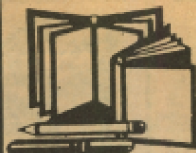


# SKILLS FOR LEARNING



## Acknowledgement

The material for Learning Nation is produced by the Research and Development Department of the SACHED TRUST.  
Any person or small group is welcome to use the material for educational purposes, but should let the New Nation co-ordinator at SACHED know. Phone 23-5746 ext 166.

## What you won't hear on the radio

What's your favourite pop song? Where did you first hear it? Was it played on the radio?  
The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) are the people who control what we hear on the radio. The radio, like all the other forms of the media, does not broadcast songs or information that is critical of the government. The SABC is the mouthpiece of the government.  
The article that follows is about a very brave group of people who are committed to making music even though very little of it will ever be played on the radio.

### The story of Shifty Records

Have you ever heard of Shifty Records? Shifty is an independent record company, committed to original South African music. Lloyd Ross, the person largely responsible for the creation of Shifty says:



Lloyd Ross really hates bubblegum music.

"I dislike artists who sing their throats out, shouting 'squeeze me baby' slogans. How do the people benefit from that?"

Lloyd and a friend started Shifty Records in 1982. At the time they were both playing in bands which played alternative SA music. But things weren't easy.

"Like a lot of bands around at this stage, we were producing good music, music that reflected what was really going on in this country," Lloyd said. "But no recording companies were interested in our music."

Most recording companies in this country won't touch music that is not likely to get played on the radio. Their main concern is money, and records that aren't heard on the SABC don't sell. The SABC just turned up their noses at Lloyd's band. Their music was too political for them.

So Lloyd and his friend started Shifty records and since then Lloyd, who mostly runs the show on his own, has recorded more than 30 artists and bands. There's Sankomoto, a Lesotho band, and some more commercial music like 'The Joburg City Stars', worker's songs and more recently the voices of Afrikaans musicians who have had enough!

Sankomoto was the first band that Shifty recorded. In 1979 Sankomoto was touring South Africa and halfway through the tour the government told them to leave the country. The government did not like their songs and since then the band has not been allowed to come back. Shifty wanted to record Sankomoto, so Lloyd trekked his caravan, filled with recording equipment, into the Lesotho hills to record them

there. There are no recording facilities in Lesotho and Lloyd says that as far as he knows, Sankomoto is the first band ever recorded there.

After the record was made, Shifty struggled to distribute and publicise it. Not many people in SA had heard of this Lesotho band and the local Sotho radio station refused to play the record.

"Sankomoto mix their languages," Lloyd explained. "The SABC said they were impure - they want pure languages. If you have a Sotho line in a Zulu song, then the Zulu radio station won't play it and the Sotho radio station won't either."

Shifty also recorded choral music by union choirs. Lloyd took his recording caravan to the factory floors in Johannesburg. The National Union of Textile Workers invited Shifty to a factory at Braitex and 100 workers gathered in a packing shed during lunch hour to record traditional worker songs.

Other songs were recorded in hostels, church halls and at union meetings. Shifty put together 24 original workers songs composed and sung by 10 union choirs from different factories and industries.

### SANKOMOTA



A man who by now needs no introduction, Mzwakhe Mbuli, the people's poet, has also had his poems recorded by Shifty. His tape, **Change is Pain**, is banned.

Recently, Shifty recorded a second compilation of Mzwakhe's poems. It is called **Unbroken Spirit**.

And the latest addition is the much celebrated music of the Gereformeerde Blues Band, a group of Afrikaans musicians, who are strongly opposed to apartheid and the divisions it has created in our society. They mockingly observe in one of their songs:

Ek sal jou nie 'n lift gee  
Ek sal jou nie 'n BMW  
Ek sal jou nie 'n BMW  
Ek sal jou nie 'n BMW



Mzwakhe Mbuli, the people's poet.

At Shifty there are fine people producing great records. But the records and tapes are hard to sell because the radio won't play most of them. So, if you want to find out more about Shifty Records, write to them at:

Shifty Records  
PO Box 27513  
Bertsham  
2013

Adapted from Upbeat, Number 1, 1986.



Johannes Kerkerrel "sonder 'n BMW".

## Activity

### Exercise 1

- Think about what you have just read by answering these questions.
- Why do you think Shifty is only interested in recording original southern African music?
  - What was the SABC's attitude to playing Sankomoto's music? Why do you think they insist on not mixing languages?
  - Do you know any of the words of Mzwakhe's poems? If you do, write them down and discuss them with your friends. You may even want to learn the words and present these poems to your classmates.
  - Do you think that it is important that Afrikaans musicians are protesting against apartheid? Why?

## Answers

- Your answers will not be exactly the same as ours.
- Shifty wants to encourage talented musicians to play original music and to comment about the political situation in this part of the world. They believe that it is important to give expression to this talent.
  - The policy of the SABC is to use pure languages. This is their way of trying to keep different language groups separate and encouraging division between people.
  - If you don't know the words, write to Shifty and ask them to send you a copy.
  - Yes, it is important because it shows that not all Afrikaans support apartheid. It gives us hope that one day we will live in a truly non-racial society.