

Stopping the Music

**A guide to a story of censorship of popular music
during apartheid**



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Stopping the Music

A guidebook to the film about an anti-apartheid protest singer and the security branch policeman assigned to end his career.

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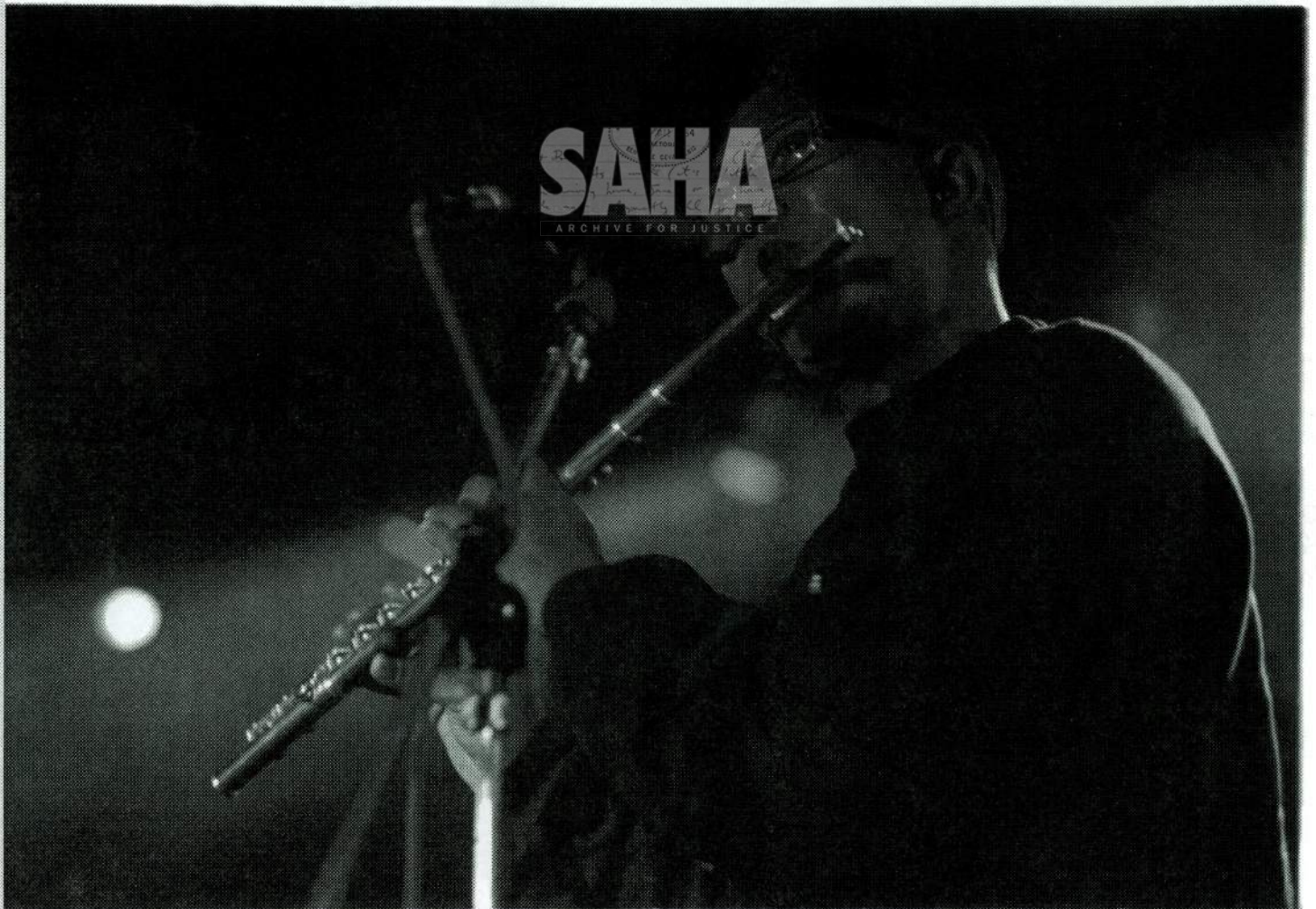
The effects of apartheid on musicians:

When PJ Powers' band Hotline played in Lichtenburg, the audience was divided by a fence: the blacks were on one side and the whites on the other.

The rock group Hawk had black and white members. When they performed on stage in the early 1970s the black members of the band performed behind a curtain so that the audience could not see that the band was a mixed race band. Otherwise the performance would have been illegal.

Jazz musician, Siphso Gumede, described how helpless he felt when he, his girlfriend and child were arrested, driven around in the back of a police van all night before being put into a police cell for breaking the pass law after performing a gig in Cape Town one night: "We were charged with staying in a restricted coloured area - we were not supposed to be there. So you had to say you were guilty and then you paid R50 if you had your ID. And then it was like: 'Guilty of what?' They said, 'You were found in the wrong area' ... And that was ugly because I was looking at myself and saying, 'I'm really hopeless here. My child is being put in the cell and there's nothing that I can do'".

Musician Siphso Mabuse revealed how police confronted him and fellow musicians after a show in a white area late one night "We played in a club in Highlands North. Probably very few, if any, black bands played in Highlands North in these clubs. We were allowed to be on stage, and the only other place we could be was the kitchen, where we had to dress up (and we had our hamburgers) to go play on stage. It was called the Underground, but we were not allowed to interact with the audience. And one of these nights we came out and our car wouldn't start. And everybody had gone home. And we started trying to push the car. And there was a police patrol with a black cop and this boy who couldn't have been about eighteen if not younger. And he said to us, what are we doing here? It's after three o'clock in the morning. And we said, 'We're a band, and we've just been playing in this club and unfortunately our car could not start, so we've been trying to push the car'. Then he asked us for our passes and we showed him, and he looked at them and gave them back to us, and eventually said, 'Get the fuck out of town. Quick. Quick'. We said, 'Thank you boss, can we just start the car?' So we pushed the car and fortunately we managed to start the car".



Siphso Mabuse performing at the Grahamstown Festival 1999. Photograph: John Hogg.

Question:

What do the above examples show us about the effects of general apartheid laws on musicians and their audiences?

What is popular music censorship?



Images of censorship from South African records: hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

Popular music censorship can be defined as a wide variety of inter-related practices (both legal and extra-legal) which hinder the freedom of expression, association and movement of popular musicians to ensure that the articulation of certain facts, opinions or means of expression are stifled, altered and/or prohibited.

In other words, censorship occurs when someone tries to stop someone else from singing about certain things which that person does not want the singer to express. In order for musicians to be able to perform freely they need to be able to sing what they want to sing, collaborate with other musicians who want to perform with them, and go to places where audiences want to hear them. If someone purposely tries to stop any of these things from happening they effectively censor the musician.

Who censored music during apartheid?

As explained earlier, the apartheid government tried to control people through the control of ideas. In order to do this it decided to control publications available in South African shops or which people could import into South Africa. This was done by the South African government's Directorate of Publications. The government also tried to control what people could hear on the radio and see on television. In order to achieve this, censorship committees controlled radio and television programmes. Both the Directorate of Publications and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) would censor music which was contrary to the government's apartheid policy. The SABC also banned music which they felt was contrary to the certain Christian values. The South Africa Police (SAP) and record companies also sometimes censored musicians. The role of each of these institutions in the censorship of popular music will now be briefly explored.

The Directorate of Publications

Banned music on two levels:

1. It could ban music for possession. This was the most severe form of censorship. It meant that it was illegal for anyone to be found in possession of the music in question. In other words, it was illegal for any copies of the album to be found anywhere in South Africa. Those who were found in possession of the album could be sent to jail or fined.
2. It could ban music from distribution. This meant that it was

not illegal to own a copy of the music if you already had a copy when the music was banned. However, it was illegal to import the music or to sell a copy of the record either second hand or new (in a shop).

Broadcasters

There were two groups of broadcasters in South Africa:

1. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) owned and operated by the South African government. It included most of the radio and television stations in South Africa. An SABC censorship committee banned thousands of songs from airplay. This affected both radio play and television coverage. If a song was banned on SABC there was a good chance that most South Africans would never get to hear it.
2. Private Broadcasters. During the 1980s there were two independent radio stations and one independent television station (not owned and controlled by the South African government). These were Capital Radio (based in Transkei) and Radio 702 and Bop TV (based in Bophutatswana). Although these stations did not practice the severe form of censorship which the SABC did, they avoided very controversial music because they were dependent on the South African government for broadcasting licenses.

South African Police

The SAP carried out the laws passed by the government. For



South African Police disrupt a concert performed by the multi-racial band the Dynamics

example, people had to apply to the police for a permit to host a live concert. The police would often refuse performances which they thought would be anti-apartheid or which would encourage the mixing of 'races'. Whenever a live concert took place the police would observe the concert and sometimes stopped the performance if they thought it was anti-government.

Record companies

Record companies often convinced musicians not to record controversial music because they were worried that the government or SABC might ban the music and then they would not make any money off the album. Albums cost a lot of money to make and if they were banned the record company could lose a lot of money.

Self-censorship

Some musicians would avoid controversial ideas in their music when they actually wrote the songs in the first place. This was because they wanted their music to be played on the radio and sold in the shops. If they wrote controversial songs and these were banned, they would not be able to make money from their



Anti-censorship logo

DP 1A



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Tel. No. 456518 X 10

Serial No. P82/12/126

Directorate of Publications
Private Bag 9069
Cape Town
8000



Dear

PUBLICATIONS ACT, 1974
PUBLICATION OR OBJECT

APPLICATION FOR A *DECISION/REVIEW

With reference to your application of 13 December 1982 I have to inform you that the publication or object—

Name and/or description African Convention - Nr 88 199: Side A + B (Gramophone Record)

Author or producer Miriam Makeba

Publisher Verlag "pläpe" GmbH, Dortmund

was examined by a committee referred to in section 4 (1) of the Publications Act, 1974, and that the committee decided that the publication or object is—

- *not undesirable
- *undesirable within the meaning of section 47 (2) (c) of the said Act.

REMARKS:

The committee which examined the publication also prohibited its possession in terms of section 9(3) of the Publications Act, 1974.

In terms of section 9(5) of the said Act, this decision, together with the publication, must now be submitted to the Publications Appeal Board for confirmation or setting aside thereof.

After confirmation, the decision of the Appeal Board will be published in the Government Gazette.

Yours faithfully

S. F. DU TOIT

Director of Publications

* Delete whichever is not applicable.

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What was banned in South Africa?

The Directorate of Publications banned music if they thought that it:

1. Was indecent, obscene or immoral;
2. Was blasphemous and religiously offensive;
3. Ridiculed or brought into contempt any inhabitants of South Africa;
4. Was harmful to the relationship between any groups in South Africa;
5. Was threatening to the safety of the state or disturbed peace and good order;

The SABC

prohibited music if they thought that it:

1. Was rebellious, too political or promoted political struggle (included here were misuse of the national anthem, lyrics

- which might inflame public opinion or songs which unfairly promoted a political party or movement);
2. Was blasphemous or because the censors decided that the songs were religiously offensive (including promotion of the occult, glorification of the devil or if the lyrics created the impression of a Christ-figure different to Christ);
 3. Was sexually overt, mentioned drug use, swear words and offensive words in general;
 4. Referred to the brand name of products. This was presumably because such songs constituted free publicity or perhaps sometimes might have led to charges of libel;
 5. Mixed different languages in a single song. This went against the government's apartheid policy which involved keeping cultures separate.



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Ons Verw. :
 Our Ref. : JRJ/ej
 U Verw. :
 Your Ref. : _____

AAN: **DATUM : _____**
TO : SUPERVISOR: CENTRAL RECORD LIBRARY **DATE : 31/08/89**

ONDERWERP:
SUBJECT : RESTRICTED RECORDS: MEMO NO. 291

Kindly note that the undermentioned vocal items MAY NOT BE USED IN ANY OF THE SABC'S SERVICES:

1. TITLE : PAINS OF LIFE (ZIGGY MARLEY)
 ARTIST : ZIGGY MARLEY & THE MELODY MAKERS VIRGIN VNC5153
 LP TITLE: ONE BRIGHT DAY
2. TITLE : WHO WILL BE THERE (ZIGGY MARLEY)
 ARTIST : ZIGGY MARLEY & THE MELODY MAKERS VIRGIN VNC5153
 LP TITLE: ONE BRIGHT DAY
3. TITLE : A LUTA CONTINUA (MIRIAM MAKEBA)
 ARTIST : MIRIAM MAKEBA PHILIPS STARL 5566
 LP TITLE: WELELA
4. TITLE : SOWETO BLUES (S. TODD/
 ARTIST : MIRIAM MAKEBA H. MASEKELA)
 LP TITLE: WELELA PHILIPS STARL 5566
5. TITLE : HAPO ZAMEZI ^{AMI} (S. TODD/D MASUKA/
 ARTIST : MIRIAM MAKEBA H. MASEKELA) M MAKE
 LP TITLE: WELELA PHILIPS STARL 5566
6. TITLE : DJIU DE GALINHA (J.C. SCHWARTZ)
 ARTIST : MIRIAM MAKEBA PHILIPS STARL 5566
 LP TITLE: WELELA

J.R. JACOBS
HOOFBESTUURDER: AFR. & ENG. RADIOGROEP
 Room 601, Piet Meyer Building / Ext. 2700

CUTTING GROOVES!!

In addition to the 'avoid' labels and scratched out title, the vinyl itself was defaced: diagonal crosses were often scratched into the vinyl in the middle of condemned tracks, so that the needle would jump if a deejay were to disobey the intention behind the 'Avoid' stickers on the cover. A black producer who at the time preferred to remain anonymous (sited in Marre and Charlton, 1985: 46) described the process in detail: "They use a thick pen on the cover of the records they send us to obliterate the title itself so we can never see

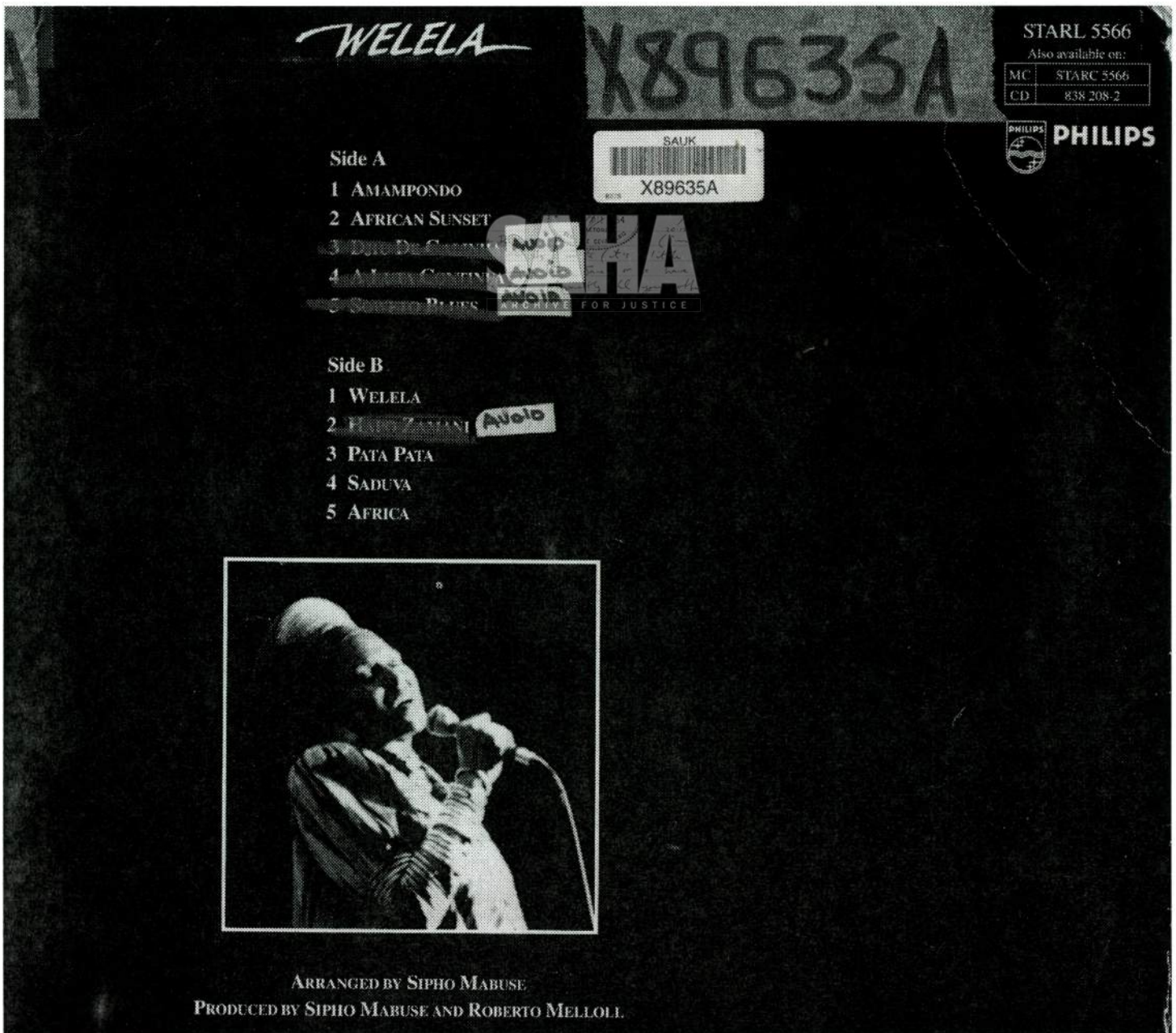
what the original title was. On the actual record, they scoop out the title so it is just not there. On the track, they use a sharp instrument like a knife or razor and cut across it so that when you play it the needle jumps from track to track and you will never understand what it was all about". The practice of gouging records was most commonly executed on records destined for play on Radio Bantu Stations because black deejays were the most likely to disregard record committee orders

QUESTION:

Why do you think the SABC banned far more music and for a wider variety of reasons than the Directorate of Publications?

AVOID AVOID AVOID

An all-white SABC committee regularly held 'record meetings' to scrutinize the lyrics of all music submitted to the SABC for airplay (lyric sheets had to be submitted with music). This committee prohibited thousands of songs from airplay. Once a song was denied airplay on SABC, 'Avoid' was written or a 'To be avoided' sticker was placed alongside the song title on the sleeve of the SABC's copy or copies of the album (see Image).



Banned in South Africa

Here is a list of some of the music banned by the South African government's Directorate of Publications. Can you work out the reasons for the bannings? In some instances the title of the song or album makes the reason for censorship

obvious. In other cases you might need to do a little research. See how many you can work out. Clue: the reasons are either political, promotion of conflict in South Africa, sexual, religious or promotion of drug use.

Artist	Title
Artists United Against Apartheid	Sun City
Harry Belafonte and Miriam Makeba	An evening with
Dollar Brand	Africa tears and laughter
Jimmy Cliff	Give the people what they want
Crossroads Children	Songs from Crossroads
Culture	International herb
Peter Gabriel	Biko
Diamanda Galas	Litanies of Satan
Eddie Grant	Gimme hope Jo'anna
Abdullah Ibrahim	South African Liberation Freedom Songs
Kalahari Surfers	Bigger than Jesus
Roger Lucey	The road is much longer
Miriam Makeba	Pata Pata
Bob Marley and the Wailers	Survival
Mzwakhe Mubli	Change is Pain
George Michael	I want your sex
Pink Floyd	Another brick in the wall
Special AKA	Nelson Mandela
Peter Tosh	Equal rights
Peter Tosh	Legalize it

