

The life of an independent musician in South Africa

INSIGHT INTO THE COSTS TO HOST A CONCERT TOUR.

A performance budget of an independent musician in South Africa to perform can amount to R140 000.00 (which includes amongst other things: flights, accommodation, venue hire/s, advertising, music, royalties and the purchases thereof, food and drinks, contracted musicians, fuel, car hire and insurance, etc.)

This figure is based on a week long tour from Johannesburg to Cape Town, with three performances. It is similar to the one I did, for the Cape Town performance I hosted in 2019, in collaboration with Lapithos Olive Growers. (Online: www.lapithosolives.co.za)

In many instances musicians join forces to assist each other in keeping the costs of the performance as low as possible.

Hosting a performance includes amongst other aspects:

- 1) performance venue and area for patrons and accessibility for them etcetera.
- 2) choice of repertoire
- 3) choice of instruments
- 4) marketing material and platforms
- 5) rehearsal dates and time
- 6) availability of other co-musicians

The area and your audience plays a major role in what your final repertoire will include for each performance.

Further - if the musicians involved for the performance are multi-instrumentalist, the performance can be presented with various instruments being utilised, bringing variety to the performance as well. Examples can be an organist and pianist, clarinettist and saxophonist etcetera.

Another music reality aspect is the fact that many “musicians” in South Africa are permanently employed otherwise (often nine to five employment in another sphere of employment, because music itself is on average not sufficient to earn a living in South Africa); this has a direct impact on the time available to all the parties to schedule rehearsals. A regular occurrence for this to be scheduled can be rehearsals on Sundays and/or late evenings after work, with rehearsals every second week for four to five hour sessions. Thus - the rehearsal hours going into a performance is four to five hours combined sessions and additionally individual sessions in-between normal work and life of three to four hours per week for each performer. {this can be less or more - depending on the repertoire chosen and the date/s of the performance/s}. This excludes travel time and the costs to the rehearsal venue. That is about twenty-five hours of joint rehearsals, excluding own private rehearsals to study the repertoire.

The sad reality Instrumentalist/Classical musicians face in South Africa is that we are often overlooked when sponsorship/funding is ‘available’/on the table for a financial year budget, for consideration by the Government Culture Department or production/record labels.

Many artists are forced to walk the “independent artist” route, which includes:

- self studies to ensure high quality material is released. (Bursary opportunities for classical music are very limited or even non-existent.)
- self funding for CD's, publications and performances.
- self management for marketing, administration, planning, logistics etcetera.

The above budget places the focus on the costs of performing.

In real artist life - we generally make the decision of 'taking a calculated risk' with such a tour, especially a tour which falls outside your normal operational province. The only way to recover these expenses is with people attending concerts, which was a massive challenge before Covid and was always an unknown until the concert night.

NOW in addition we are facing the uncertainty of Covid and the South African regulations on Lock-Down Rules, combined with it's province boarder crossings and limitations that are forever changing.

I am referring to the following quote of a well known production manager in RSA, Mr Frans Swart, who owns Lefra Productions and produced many successful productions (on TV, on stage at arts festivals and in theatres): https://af.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lefra_Produksies



Die regering en die minister van sport, kuns en kultuur, Nathi Mthethwa, het teater in die land doodgemaak, sê Frans Swart van die produksie maatskappy Lefra. “Ons moet lewendige teater in die land hê, anders gaan ons nie oorleef nie.” – Netwerk24

“The government and minter of sport, arts and culture, Nathi Mthetwa, has brought death to the performing arts” “ We need active theatre in the country, otherwise we will not survive this”

As well as the South African Comedian Mr. Marc Lottering, who spoke to *TshisaLIVE*, about his concern and experiences as an artist in South Africa. Herewith the link: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2021-09-02-covid-19-is-not-the-only-killer--marc-lottering-calls-out-government-for-letting-artists-starve/>

In my opinion; both gentlemen are correct.

Many individual artists are either focussing on recordings or similar/different projects instead, because of the uncertainty and unpredictability of lock down announcements by the South African Government - individual artists cannot disburse capital with zero prospect that the planned performance will be presented and may face the predicament of travelling to Cape Town, as my example used and then being trapped in another province as rules can change any moment, with the situation of ongoing expenses and not being able to perform nor return home.

Lock-down has been difficult for us all.

Based on information from acquaintances, in the music industry, many artists planned, spent capital and even travelled to the performance destinations - to face the worst fear of all, cancelled performances, with the wasted expenses.

Herewith some insight into the work/planning and financial state of an ensemble/orchestra in South Africa:

An Orchestra in South Africa normally host four Major Concerts per year - recently the number being rehearsed and hosted is one.

The expenses involved to manage an orchestra is similar to the following stated below:

The costs to rent a theatre/hall/concert venue = R 2500.00 - R30 000.00 p/day depending on the concert, venue chosen and availability.

Adverts;

Radio: 20 X 30 second radio adverts = R30 000.00 for the weeks building up to the event.

Facebook/Social media adverts: R 100.00 p/medium chosen for the weeks building up to the event.

Flyers and posters: R200.00

Operational costs:

Printing costs (music): R 1000. 00

The above mentioned does not include any additional musicians when an orchestra member is unavailable, the Conductor's remuneration etcetera.

Thus it is clear that if the concert is hosted in a theatre of R30 000.00 with ticket sales @ R160.00 p / person x 200 pax - This will only "re-cover" the venue expenses and not any other expenses nor showing any profit.

Furthermore:

** a person can only image the snowball effect if a concert has to be postponed, where advertising and a venue has already been booked and paid for.*

**hosting a concert at only 50% capacity (as per the recent Covid regulations) is not financially viable. The concert will be hosted at a loss.*

Should this be done, the ticket sales for the concert will have to be increased by 150%, in order to cover the normal running costs of a concert, with no profit.

The South African artist milieu is a sad face and the state of affairs within the minority classical genre is enough to make any up-coming artist nervous about the future.

Classical musicians in South Africa are feeling forgotten and disregarded for many years already, unsupported and ultimately with recent events, very lost. What the future may bring will depend on ourselves and our actions, as the past decades have proven.

Personally, I shifted my focus on other means to keep in touch with audiences and show that I am active in the music industry, irrespective of Lock-Down rules and regulations.

Ultimately this period has taught me to place my focus on other subject matters that I always wanted to explore.

But one of the most challenging aspects I have found with the lock-down Worldwide, is seeing different countries dealing with the “new-normal” and still managing, going back to hosting events, performing and socialising - while here in South Africa, we are forbidden (depending on the level) or have limited choices which does not justify the costs involved.

However, in a year where my plan A went out the window, and had to be placed aside for a while, it is my belief that there is something to be learnt, within every situation or struggle we may find ourselves in!

In all honesty, BEST COVID LESSON: There is nothing wrong with Preparing and Planning, we may be postponing plans, but always have a Plan B, Plan C or even a Plan D up your sleeve and to remember that tomorrow is not guaranteed nor do we know what the future may hold.

COVID doesn't know that Musicians can speedily:

*improvise,

*analyse,

*adjust

and we Just Keep Going and Never give up! Despite all the challenges and facing biggest curve-ball of all - NO CONFIRMED FUTURE PERFORMANCES.

We are living in the 21st-century world and we will be breaking down the barriers caused by COVID and the regulations to bring world-class music to all via other means because we know that music is beneficial for everyone and will thus enable people to develop some form of independent non-medical cure throughout the duration of COVID which will continue to be part of our lives for a lengthy period, it seems.

There has been a lot of research done recently on the COVID situation, the Long-term medical effects thereof and the mental health consequences of COVID worldwide - We do not have any more time to waste, as many people have already lost the battle!

"Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts." - Winston S. Churchill