

Music industry trends shaping 2018

By  Martin Myers

30 Jan 2018

As we close the first month of 2018, I was privileged to speak to David Alexander, CEO of Sheer Music Publishing to find out about key trends in the music industry for 2018 in South Africa and Africa .

David Alexander is the founder, owner and managing director of [Sheer Publishing \(Pty\) Ltd](#), the fastest growing independent music publishing company in Africa.



David Alexander

Sheer Publishing represents African songs and songwriters for the world. Their clients include; Zahara, Kwesta, Eric Wainaina, Chris Chameleon, Suzanna Owiyo, Cassper Nyovest, Stonebwoy and Sauti Sol.

Sheer Publishing also represents international publishers in Africa – some of their clients include Kobalt Music (The Weeknd), Mushroom Music (Kylie Minogue), Mute Song (Nick Cave), Hillsong Music (Hillsong United).

David founded Sheer Music Publishing in 1996 to exploit a gap in the local Jazz scene. Today, Sheer Publishing has a vast catalogue rich with diverse South African, African and international chart music ideal for licensing purposes.

Sheer Publishing offers a one stop solution for all deals and has music placements on movies such as Black Panther, The Girl, Marty & Martha, District 9 and the Oscar winning Tsotsi and the Academy Award nominated film, Searching for Sugarman.

Sheer Publishing has featured music on television shows such as Generations, Isibaya, The Road, Private Practice, Jacob's Cross and Big Brother, and has been instrumental in successful commercials such as Castle Light, Vodacom, MTN, Makro, Cadbury's PS, Wimpy, Engen and Ackermans.

■ ***You are a music publisher –what do you do in a nutshell?***

I represent songs and songwriters. I collect money from radio, television and digital services like Apple Music and mobile service providers – anyone that uses music to sell to their customers. Songwriters tend to hate the administratively intense side of copyright management – music publishers step in and help them with this part of their business. We also amplify the opportunities for the song so that they earn more money for our clients; we look for opportunities on TV shows, films and commercial advertisement for our songs and songwriters.

■ ***Who do you work with?***

I work with the people who compose the melody and write the lyrics for music – collectively known as the songwriter. Sometimes these are the same people that you see performing these songs on stage, but in many cases they are not. Often our clients work in studios making music that the public hear on radio, television and in cinemas, yet they are unaware of who wrote the song or how much effort went into making that perfect piece of music that the performer brings to life.

■ ***What makes your company special?***

Sheer Publishing was started 21 years ago to represent South African jazz music. As we grew the company, we always focused on our local culture – putting that first. Now Sheer Music Publishing is a pan-African music publisher; so we represent songs and songwriters from across the African continent. Our vision is to be the first world-class music publishing company out of Africa.

We do represent international music catalogues, but our focus has always been on building value for our African clients. We are grateful to now represent songwriters from most countries across the continent.



Cassper Nyovest

■ ***We are 30 days into 2018 – what are the new revenue streams for songwriters?***

The revenue streams for music haven't changed, we just use different names to identify the old ones in a new technology setting. The increased mechanical rate set in the US by the copyright board is an example of just that – a right that governed the printing of sheet music and the replication of cassettes and CDs is now the same right that we are applying to extract value for the songwriter from Spotify and YouTube.

■ ***Do you see your role changing with Spotify's imminent arrival in SA?***

No, in fact services like Spotify increase the number of unique transactions for each song. Each of these transactions at a fraction of a cent in value. Someone has to have the software and people to process these millions of unique transactions and spit out a statement and payment for a writer. The fragmentation of databases in the music industry still remains a challenge for the songwriter – one that publishers are solving in the short to medium term until smart contracts and the block chain step in to resolve this challenge.

■ ***How can a publisher help a creative – do you only work with the songwriters?***

Often we serve as the intersection between the songwriter and artist, the artist and the label, and the song and the TV show/film or advertising campaign. The best thing about my job is that I don't do the same thing every day. The different creative spaces that we work in on behalf of our songwriters keeps me in a constant state of wonder and amazement every day.



Kwesta

■ ***What is the best revenue stream for an artist – is it only songwriting?***

Like many things, it depends. For a performing artist, if they are selling out large shows, that will definitely be the best revenue stream. Many of our songwriters are not performers, they write for the artists or for TV shows and films – and in

that case songwriting is their best revenue stream. A great song will be a retirement plan for the writer if correctly managed, so it's a responsibility we do not take lightly.

▀ **What are areas of growth in the music industry for 2018?**

Streaming services will grow in number of customers and the value they deliver to the music industry. On the African continent, cheaper data and stable electricity and internet connections, along with localised pricing, will mean more subscribers and more value. This is critical, as the bottom has fallen out of the physical music market and sales are plummeting at a faster rate than we have ever seen before.

More audio and video will be consumed than ever before and more of the value that is currently being exploited by the technology companies will return to the music industry. We finished the last year with major deals announced with YouTube and Facebook, and I think we will see revenue sharing becoming more transparent, benefitting all the participants and not just the top 5%. The latest US judgment I referred to above is critical in returning value to the songwriters, even if it is phased in over the next five years.

Technology is changing and VR will enter into the space of reported income and exit the "tech to watch in the future" columns. Smart speakers will become commonplace and we will become accustomed to speaking to our speakers and getting rewarded with music that it thinks we want to hear. Understanding this new relationship between smart speaker and music selection will be important to staying relevant.



Sauti Sol

▀ **Will we find a breakout act from South Africa in 2018 that takes on the world beside Black Coffee, Ladysmith, and Goldfish?**

Yes. Artists like Jeremy Loops are selling out medium size venues all over the world and his new album has collaborations with amazing songwriters from a bunch of our international publisher stables. The Parlotones' new albums have also had a similar treatment and the songs are fresh and exciting. Hip Hop artists like Kwesta, are working with global artists to increase his reach and grow his brand, and Cassper is investing in his live show to grow the value of his brand. In all of these examples, South African acts are taking deliberate steps to invest in themselves and grow their brand equity – this kind of critical analysis and engagement is essential to grow the careers of our songwriters.

ABOUT MARTIN MYERS

Co-owner at Triple M Entertainment, founder Music Exchange, manager Sipho Hotstix Mabuse

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