

Comment on CCWG document: South African College of Music (SACM) Jazz

Dear Anthea

The outcomes of the CCWG were openly published and quoted in 'Black students 'undervalued' at UCT' (Mail and Guardian, July 2018). This has caused harm to the department and its staff and is at the very least defamatory by nature both to the department and especially the staff in the jazz programme.

In a department which has produced some of the finest new generation South African performers, I am confused how a document of this nature could have passed the scrutiny of publication in an institution where peer review and proper research are so highly valued. Information purported to be fact is actually the opinion of one individual and/or a very small group of individuals. There is a blatant conflict of interest in the submission and the content shows absolutely no understanding of the discipline of jazz, its practices and traditions. The proclaimed 'truths' in CCWG document are informed by persons who do not in anyway participate in any activities in this area of study and or attend any of the many platforms for engagement that the programme is involved in. As such I have several questions regarding what procedures were followed or not and who is responsible for this.

1. What official mandate does the person who requested to assist in engaging SACM staff and students (with respect to decolonising the curriculum) have?
2. What oversight or peer review structures secure that the outcomes of such a working group are indeed an accurate representation of what went on and who participated. Who takes responsibility for the publication and its assertions or recommendations?
3. How do the official processes of the department regarding actual curriculum reform and transformation relate in any way to this document?

Regarding the submission on SACM (pg 42 - 49) and with specific reference to jazz, several blatant untruths in the document must be corrected. The owners of the data should be exposed as well as the methods used to inform their outcomes and consequent recommendations.

1. The meetings were well attended and the outcome of the CCWG was intended to facilitate an open dialogue session with staff and students.

The meetings were NOT well attended. It was asked that minutes or outcomes be circulated for comment by staff who were unable to attend due to lecture commitments. Repeated requests were met with no response.

*2. Contestation at SACM so far had led to strained relations between staff and students. This was heightened during campus shutdown in 2016, which saw **the founding of Inkqubela**, a group of mostly black students who raised critical issues about curricula, how non-teaching staff were treated, and the need for decolonisation at the college. To get their voices heard, Inkqubela occupied C Sharp Cottage, which was formerly a stable but currently houses African Music, for almost three months.*

There is a clear conflict of interest here as the persons responsible for the submission to CCWG were formative in creating the Inkqubela and its occupation of the C sharp cottage. As such their submission is

informed by the rationale of the group and its collective mandate. Academic staff are still severely traumatised by the events surrounding this group with very little if any support from UCT management

3. The introduction of Jazz seemed to indicate a desire for the SACM to have more global reach; where Jazz is seen as falling within a global paradigm (and) The manner in which Jazz is taught and subdivided into different modules mirrors the logic of Western classical organising principles.

This shows no understanding of the discipline of jazz and the history of the programme. Jazz is an all-encompassing artform. Its tradition is rooted in both Western Classical harmonic practice and African melody and rhythm. The dynamic synergy between these opposing forces has resulted in a music form that symbolically defines the very essence of the South African musical context and resonates in a space where the struggle against institutionalised oppression culminated in great South African musicians like Abdullah Ibrahim, Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba and Bheki Mseleku. Jazz was introduced in 1989 in a rapidly changing South African landscape by the then forward thinking Dean of the Faculty of Music. The intention was to expand opportunities of study to include a key discipline which had been very much a part of the political struggle against Apartheid and which was already present in the international university space since the early 70's. The course structure was and is informed by this and by accepted international practice.

4. Another key area of contestation within the metaphor of the conservatoire speaks to the issue of academic readiness and instrument preparedness. The discourse of student preparedness amongst staff seemed to focus more on what students lack rather than on what they bring.

This statement exposes a complete lack of understanding of the discipline on the part of the author(s). The development of skill in jazz (what students may 'lack') is precisely designed to facilitate creative work. By its very nature jazz embraces far-reaching cultural influences and continues to absorb influences as the discipline evolves. What the students 'bring' is what the discipline is all about and this is evident in the massive archives of student projects dating back to the inception of the programme. These are testimony to the endless and infinite possibilities afforded by the genre. Are the individuals who compiled the CCWG even aware of this? Do they even attend our concerts??

5. While African music and Jazz are both actually peripheral to Western Classical music, Jazz is awarded a higher status..... While students on the margins might fall into either African music or Jazz, it is the Jazz students who are awarded higher social status.... Certain disciplines and their repertoires were found to enjoy more prestige than others. Western classics and Jazz (With a particular privileging of American genres) enjoyed more prestige than African music at the South African College of Music.

In a university, which values proper research, these statements surely have no value at all. How were they determined? What method of qualification was applied? Who owns the findings? Who attends all our concerts and recitals to make this finding? Who is responsible for allowing this to be published?

UCT jazz has produced some of the finest new generation South Africa jazz musicians including award winning singer Judith Sephuma, Universal artists Selaelo Selato, Musa Manzini, Jimmy Dlodlu, Nomfundo Xaluva, Standard Bank of the year artists Kesivan Naidoo, Bokani Dyer, Mark Fransman, Melanie Scholtz, Shannon Mowday, Shane Cooper and many more, all of whom have an ongoing and constructive relationship with UCT jazz. The programme continues to mutate with the ever-changing dynamics of the industry and contextual challenges of South African educational landscape. It does this constructively and with the support of its alumni and hopefully UCT. The CCWG document is extremely damaging for the

image of SACM, and at the very least is poor PR in a space where we have such opportunity to show our successes.

I am confused how this ended up as a published document for public consumption. These are not opinion pieces but will remain set in stone as an account of the department and its history, to be quoted and form part of research going forward. While I understand this is a platform for comment, I feel justified in asking for a proper response as this impacts directly on my ability to do my job as well as my good standing in a community, a large portion of which read papers like the Mail and Guardian.

Regards

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