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POSTCARD

VOL 1



FEATURING

MAZBOU Q
BROOKE SINGER

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Kia ora koutou katoa, welcome to Songstarters Volume 1!

I'm delighted to introduce the very first NZ Music Commission | Te Reo Reka o Aotearoa's Songstarters zine.

Often people think writing a song is really easy. But it can also be a frustrating process – how many times have you sat down to write some lyrics, only to have a complete mind blank? Believe it or not, this is something that still happens to even the most experienced song writers.

So how to start writing a new song?

This zine has been created to give you some ideas on how to approach song writing – and

maybe even learn some new writing techniques from our wonderful featured artists!

In this first issue, we've asked Hugh Ozumba (better known as Mazbou Q) and Brooke Singer from Wellington-based band French For Rabbits to each choose one of their tracks, and describe their song writing process and how that song came to be.

Thanks for reading – and I hope this zine inspires you to come up with at least one new song!

Ngā mihi,
Jess Bailey

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**NEW ZEALAND
MUSIC COMMISSION**
TE/REO REKA O AOTEAROA
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MAZBOU Q

HUGH OZUMBA



DON'T STOP REGARDLESS

Hugh Ozumba is a multi-talented musician and community figure born in Liverpool, UK of Igbo Nigerian descent. His musical education in classical piano formed a strong foundation and as a teenager Hugh's musical expertise broadened into drums, guitar, bass and vocals.

Hugh's passion for writing and producing music took shape in 2008 with East of Eden who went on to become an iconic name in NZ's heavy music scene.

His music technology expertise and software skills saw Hugh employed at Serato as a Test Automation Engineer. He branched into a solo career taking his music nationwide and beyond, including a tour of the UK.

Hugh now primarily produces and performs alternative, conscious Hip-hop as Mazbou Q. His

particular brand of Hip-hop pushes the boundary of the genre and captivates those with a deep appreciation for musicality. He takes inspiration from the likes of Fela Kuti, The Roots and Black Star as he confronts his listeners with socio-political commentary and creatively engages them in the complexities of his unique cultural identity, culminating in the full length 2021 album 'THE FUTURE WAS.'

Branded as 'The Rap Scientist' on Tik Tok, Hugh has amassed over 128,000 followers analyzing and dissecting various rhyme and rhythmic techniques used in hit rap songs. Covering music theory concepts like syncopation, polymetric rhythms, displacement and rapping 'behind the beat', Hugh is being lauded for illuminating the musical complexity of a genre often mistakenly not considered as such.

For those of us in the African Diaspora, there exists a deep longing in our hearts to see freedom. The stories, images and footage of a continent wrought with extreme poverty and constant violence shaped the identity of many of us growing up. Outside of the continent, it seemed that wherever there were communities of Africa's children, similar hardship would also be.

I distinctly remember feeling horribly embarrassed in social studies class, watching a typical World Vision ad featuring malnourished children with flies crawling on their faces, knowing that this is what my classmates thought my life would have been like back in Nigeria. Or learning about the transatlantic slave trade, knowing that people who looked like me were made the property of people who looked like them.

We would then go home from school to eavesdrop on our parents lamenting over the hopelessness of our home countries. They would speak of the corruption and bad governance that had driven them away to find better lives for us in places like Aotearoa. We would also read about the disproportionate levels of crime, imprisonment, low education and poor health outcomes afflicting Black communities in the U.S, South America, the UK and the Caribbean. It seemed, as a young African person, that to be demonized, disenfranchised, disempowered and devalued was my inheritance.

Nevertheless, somehow a sense of hope survived the trauma of such an upbringing. Hope that one day, somehow things could change for Africa and her descendents.

"KNOWING THAT PEOPLE WHO LOOKED LIKE ME WERE MADE THE PROPERTY OF PEOPLE WHO LOOKED LIKE THEM"

It's this hope which inspired my song, Don't Stop Regardless. The song is my contribution to the world of Afrofuturism, a term which "...can be understood as a wide-ranging social, political and artistic movement that dares to imagine a world where African-descended peoples and their cultures play a central role in the creation of that world." [1]. In Don't Stop Regardless, I ask the listener to imagine a time-traveler from a future dimension where the continent of Africa is totally liberated from its colonial and imperial shackles. This Africa is united, prosperous, advanced and thriving (think Wakanda). The time-traveler has been tasked with returning to the past (our present) in order to meet with the members of the global African diaspora and share a piece of his embodied hope with them.

The message is simple: Keep fighting for freedom and don't stop regardless of the obstacles and barriers you might face. The message is one of hope.

“I’M FROM A DIFFERENT STARSHINE A WORLD THAT EXISTS WAY DIFFERENT TO YOUR KIND”

The two part single begins with a 27 second intro track entitled “The Arrival”. This piece is characterized by ominous ambience and a cinematic drone which evolves into a haunting chord progression, foreshadowing the reprise of the main song. A deep voice renders a cryptic sounding narration on top, which reflects the internal monologue of the time-traveler once he ‘arrives’ in our timeline.

The main track ‘Don’t Stop Regardless’ then immediately kicks off. The opening lines proceed to depict the communication between the traveler and the diaspora from his perspective.

I’m from a different starshine
A world that exists way different to your kind

The traveler goes on to describe his world as one where there is no expectation of a life of suffering. The problems that plague African descendants in our timeline such as poverty, slave labour, disproportionate imprisonment, systemic racism and self hatred no longer exist in his own. Another key contrast of this world is its departure from capitalist structures in favour of a new system where the central purpose of labour is not to accumulate wealth but to empower the wider community:

And we like to hard grind,
Not for real estate or cream,
Nah, we do it for the love
And to elevate the team

The track is unified by the anthemic hook “We don’t stop regardless!”, insinuating that this utopia was arrived at by ceaseless struggle, and that we too can reach this destination if we adopt the same attitude.

The main sonic elements of the track are a fusion of Hip-hop and Afrobeat. Afrobeat is “a genre [which] is largely the creation of Nigerian artist Fela Kuti who, with his band Africa 70, forged a rhythmic mix of West African beats (predominantly Nigerian and Ghanaian) and American jazz, soul, and funk, which was shot through with a potent streak of political



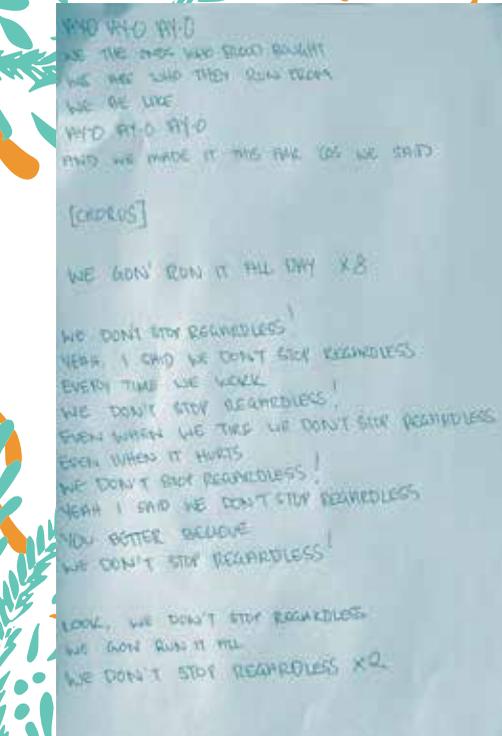
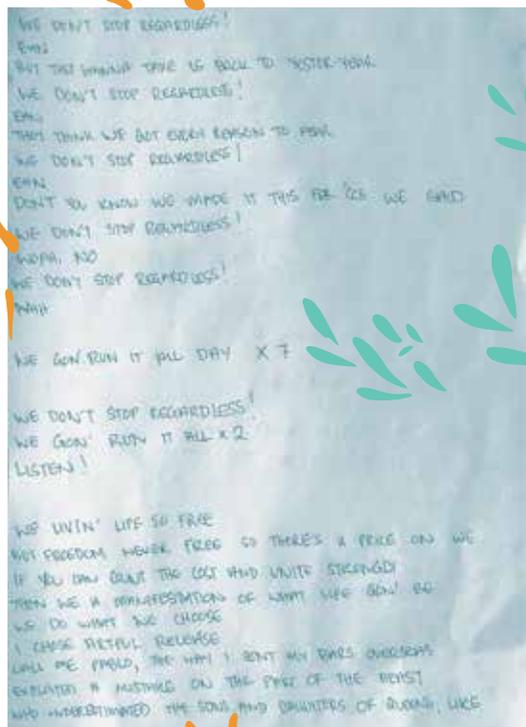
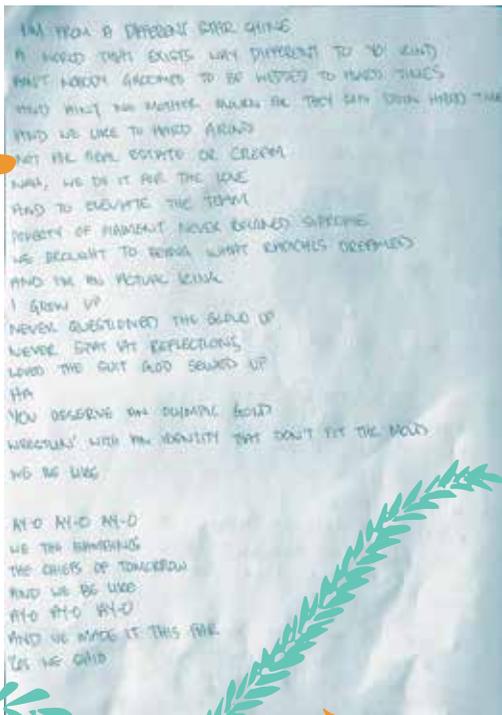
awareness.” [2]. The use of these genres is symbolic of one of the central themes of the song, and indeed my discography thus far; the unification of continental Africa with the African diaspora, including African Americans - a relationship that has been rife with historical tensions [3]. Afrobeat’s signature elements can be heard in the song’s horn lines, repeating interlocking guitar and bass riffs and percussion textures throughout the song.

These elements are contrasted with a pulsating heavy bass synth and vocal FX in the reprise section (“We gon’ run it all day!) reminiscent of EDM style music, as a hark to the futuristic aspect of the story.

The fusion of the three sonic styles - Hip-hop, Afrobeat and EDM - help tell the story of a collision between future and present worlds, centered on Africa’s descendants.

Whilst Don’t Stop Regardless is about Africa, the overarching message is one of hope. Hope is a force with the potential to bind us together, heal past traumas and inspire us to imagine greater futures for ourselves and our communities. My own hope is that the message of Don’t Stop Regardless can speak not only to the African diaspora, but to many indigeneous cultures around the globe who are fighting for freedom against colonialism, or the effects from a complex legacy of it. I also hope that every individual, regardless of background, culture, or circumstance, can be inspired to overcome their tallest hurdles.

Knowing that hope is such a powerful force, I therefore encourage every artist reading this to go about creating hope-filled art, and inspire your communities to discover what may be possible so long as you don’t stop regardless of whatever challenges come your way.



References
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[3] Abua, J (2020) *The Fiasco Between Africans and African-Americans*. UAB Institute for Human Rights Blogs. <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2020/06/10/the-fiasco-between-africans-and-african-americans/>

BROOKE SINGER

BROOKE SINGER

Brooke Singer is a songwriter, producer and educator based in Wellington, New Zealand.

She writes and performs in dream-pop quintet French for Rabbits who are pioneers of atmospheric, delicate dream-pop in New Zealand. Performing together for nearly a decade, career highlights include international tours, opening for Lorde and Agnes Obel, and nominations for the NZ Music Awards, The Silver Scroll and the 2022 Taite Awards. They have racked up 12+ million streams on sleeper hits "The Other Side" and "Goat" and had their music featured in TV series such as Vampire Diaries and Being Human.

Singer also works as a producer/engineer for others, with releases by Martin Sagadin, Tessa De Lyon and others on the way. In recent times she has worked as an educator, teaching at Massey University and helping to co-ordinate Girls Rock! Aotearoa programmes. She can also be found playing keyboards in the Anthony Tonnon band.



About "The Overflow": You know that anxious feeling...where your heart feels like it is squeezing tight in your chest? It might skip a beat, or flutter about and you feel like you've forgotten how to breathe? In a roundabout way, my song The Overflow is about that feeling - the beginning of a panic attack.

Over the years, I have discovered that I am a sensitive, optimistic and creative person and I also lean into logic. If I find myself feeling anxious, the logical part of me tends to try and rationalize what I am going through. The Overflow is a song that feels like these different parts of me in conversation - the sensitive soul and the analytical mind.

In the chorus, I wrote the line "It's just a river, a current. It's just a heartbeat, out of time" to explain the feeling inside of myself...as if to say "it's nothing to worry about!". This energy feeds into the sound of the song as a whole. I wanted it to feel breezy, optimistic and reassuring.

The instrumental riff that opens the song and comes in again before the second verse is like a gentle beam of light, plucked guitar, delicate droplets of synth, and electric piano.

In the bridge, we used the instrumentation to express that feeling of spiraling anxiety. It drops down to just guitar and the harmony vocals singing a short "huh" sound that reminds me of a rapid breath, before the lead vocals come in over the top, and the drums take over the

rhythm the "huh" were keeping before the song breaks into a drum fill, chaotic bass run and soaring, psychedelic harmonies.

About writing the song: For this song, I started writing at the piano - I like to write in an old notebook...sometimes I use the note app on my phone too.

"IT'S JUST A RIVER, A CURRENT. IT'S JUST A HEARTBEAT, OUT OF TIME"

I try not to overthink things at first - what rhythms and words phonetically feel nice in my mouth? Be intuitive here...I think of it as a flow state where you move with curiosity and no judgment. Write down any words that come to you.

Next, when things start to form a shape... my logical brain steps in and asks: is this making sense (and does it need to)? Does each lyric fit the song theme or story? What word rhymes with the last? This can be like doing a crossword puzzle. I think about what best serves the song.

I often will take a half-finished song to the band because I feel like the timbres and sounds can be a HUGE part of telling the story. How can the instrumentation musically express the feeling of a heart beating out of time? How can we make the song sound warm and reassuring?

“HOW CAN WE MAKE THE SONG SOUND WARM AND REASSURING”

A provocation for you to make you think about how timbres and sounds can help you illustrate your songs lyrics, emotion or overall theme.

Take some song lyrics that you've already written or any other piece of text you can find nearby: a page from a book, a poem or even a newspaper. Think about how you could use sound to musically express the words you're reading?

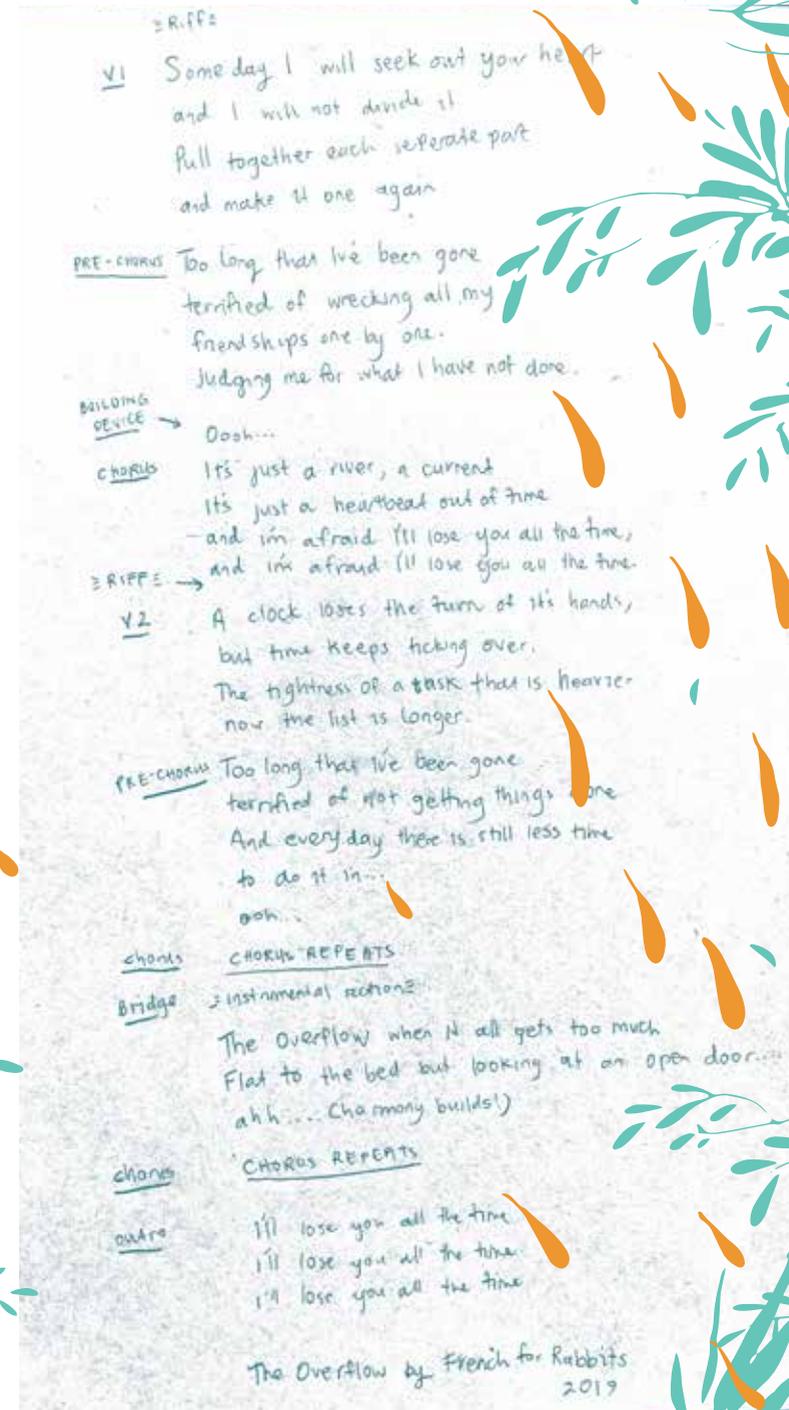
Questions you could ask yourself:

What is the overall feeling of the text? Is it sad, happy, angry?
On the instrument I play - what could I do to express that?

For example, something staccato or plucked might feel more exciting and light. Something played legato or held might feel more calm, steady or sad.

Are there individual lines or words that might indicate what you could do with the melody? The instrument parts? The tempo? The dynamics?

Look at this line: “Her arms fell heavily to her side”
Perhaps the melody could drop down in pitch as you sing “fell heavily”? Perhaps you could use a weighty timbre underneath that line? A bassoon or a cello?



NOTES

V1 Someday I will seek out your heart
and I will not divide it
Pull together each separate part
and make it one again

PRE-CHORUS Too long that I've been gone
terrified of wrecking all my
friendships one by one.
Judging me for what I have not done

BUILDING
DEVICE → Oooh...

CHORUS It's just a river, a current
It's just a heartbeat out of time
and I'm afraid I'll lose you all the time,
and I'm afraid I'll lose you all the time.

↳ RIFFE →

V2 A clock loses the turn of its hands,
but time keeps ticking over.
The tightness of a task that is heavier
now the list is longer.

PRE-CHORUS Too long that I've been gone
terrified of not getting things done
And every day there is still less time
to do it in...
ooh...

CHORUS

CHORUS REPEATS

Bridge

↳ Instrumental section:

The Overflow when N all gets too much
Flat to the bed but looking at an open door...
ahh... (Harmony builds!)

CHORUS

CHORUS REPEATS

outro

I'll lose you all the time
I'll lose you all the time
I'll lose you all the time

The Overflow by French for Rabbits
2019



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