

Hip Hop hasn't died - streaming is helping South African Hip Hop multiply

By [Setumo Thebe-Mohlomi](#)

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There is a line in AKA and Nasty C's *Lemons (Lemonade)* that goes "People say Hip Hop died, that's nonsense", and while South Africa's Amapiano scene is currently in the midst of a major global moment, there is still a massive appetite for South African Hip Hop which is, in part, being fed by music streaming services.



Image by [Jordy Torres Villalta](#) from [Pxabay](#)

One need only look at the Spotify Wrapped data for 2022 - where the top 10 streamed artists in the country include Hip Hop artists like Blxckie, Nasty C and A-Reece who have racked up millions of streams between them.

As the world marks the 50th anniversary of Hip Hop this year, we should be celebrating our local Hip Hop talent. This weekend, Cotton Fest (Johannesburg) and Spotify will be showcasing the history of the Hip Hop movement in South Africa, and celebrating some of the pioneers of the genre in an installation at the event.



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24 Jan 2023



There is a lot to celebrate

A look at Spotify data which shows where some of South Africa's current crop of Hip Hop talent has been streamed in January is an interesting exercise. It makes sense that A-Reece, AKA, Blxckie, Cassper Nyovest, Nadia Nakai and Nasty C are most streamed at home. It even makes sense that the USA and the UK feature as key markets for all six, given that they predominantly make their music in English.

But it's when you look at AKA's popularity in France, Cassper connecting with the German market, Nasty C's popularity in India, Blxckie's listenership in the Netherlands, or Nadia Nakai and A-Reece's influence in Malawi that it becomes clear that South African Hip Hop is not just alive and well - it is sprouting across the globe. This is a powerful example of how South

African talent, when put on the global stage that streaming provides, will undoubtedly shine.

Part of why Hip Hop will never die, is because it is about so much more than the music. Hip Hop has always been deeply intertwined with culture. Whether it's the breakdancing and graffiti which initially helped to grow the movement, the conscious rap movement of South Africa in the 80s, or the various iterations of fashion from Hip Hop brands like Amakipkip and Phat Farm, through to luxury threads and the bling lifestyle - Hip Hop touches so many aspects of people's lives.

It's why an events like Cotton Fest, the brainchild of beloved rapper Riky Rick has such wide appeal. He understood that Hip Hop is about the culture, tying together his love of the music, fashion, food and sport. The festival, which has now become a tribute to his life, can best be described as a cultural festival, rather than simply a musical one.



Setumo Thebe-Mohlomi, Editor, Spotify South Africa



Riky Rick - A true champion of entrepreneurship and youth empowerment

Lerumo Maisela, Kena Outdoor 2 Mar 2022



Those not attending the Cotton Fest (Johannesburg) can still get their fix of local Hip Hop through our [Mzansi Raps playlist](#).

Showcases and playlists of this nature are some of the ways that Spotify is helping local artists - whether they be Hip Hop legends or rising stars - connect with their fans and find new ones but the platform also provides them with an array of tools and support to grow their audiences.

And while some might argue that South African Hip Hop is dead, overtaken first by Gqom and then by Amapiano, the truth is that throughout its history in South Africa, Hip Hop artists have been fighting for their time in the sun.

The evolution of Hip Hop in South Africa

Hip Hop first arrived on South Africa's Cape Flats in the late 80s, with founding fathers like Black Noise, Prophets of Da City and Brasse Vannie Kaap subverting the status quo, embracing their Black identity and agitating for political change.

Gigs, mixtapes, the radio and record deals were the ways for Hip Hop artists to share their message. But in the days of government censorship and unpaid gigs, success in the music industry as we would define it today, seemed far out of reach.

In fact, it was only in 2004, nearly 16 years after the genre first arrived on South African shores, that the first Hip Hop album went platinum. Pitch Black Afro's *Styling Gel* was released in the midst of one of South African Hip Hop's golden eras. It was a period characterised by the introduction in the 90s of shows like *Jam Alley* and *Yizo Yizo* and the advent of youth radio station YFM, which were a celebration of Hip Hop music and its culture.

But those who were around in these glory days, when the push and pull relationship between Hip Hop and Kwaito started to emerge and artists like HHP, Skwatta Kamp, Mandoza and Tumi and the Volume captured audiences across the country, will also remember the piracy adverts. So bad was piracy at the time, that adverts declaring piracy a crime on par with stealing a car were aired on radio and TV. While piracy is still a major concern for artists - streaming services like are creating a place where fans can legally access music, in a way that still benefits the artist.



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That generation, who were largely multilingual, rapping in amongst others Zulu and Tswana gave way to a newer generation more influenced by American Hip Hop - who rapped in English, dripped in gold, and emulated the vocabulary and the beef they'd seen play out on the international stages. It was in 2016, nearly 30 years after Hip Hop found its way onto the Cape Flats, that AKA released the first English, South African Hip Hop album to go platinum.

Globally, the advent of streaming has accelerated the path to platinum and multi-platinum sales. In South Africa, where it has taken decades for Hip Hop artists to grow their following, streaming is now providing an opportunity for artists to speak to millions of people around the world. We've also seen each of South Africa's distinct Hip Hop eras inspire a new generation of artists who embody the consciousness, flow or attitude of those who came before them.

So no, Hip Hop has not died - it has just found ways to multiply and streaming services are helping them do that.

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