

# South Africa's musical zeitgeist: Amapiano's global takeover

 By [Phiona Okumu](#)

16 Jun 2022

This week, as South Africans commemorate Youth Day and as African Americans commemorate Juneteenth, residents of the world's largest city will wake up to a billboard loudly heralding the arrival of Amapiano on the global stage with one of its innovative Godfathers as its face.



Source: [www.unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

Allegorically, Kabza De Small, his latest album *KOA II Part 1* and the genre widely accepted as the voice of young South Africans today, are going transatlantic in a full circle moment.

Throughout musical history, the innovation and themes central to music across the African content have inspired the development of new genres and subcultures worldwide. Jazz, blues, and gospel music all have roots in Africa - and in the modern day with the advent of streaming services like Spotify, music from Africa has once again seen an explosion in its influence and global popularity. One such international African music sensation is the popular South African genre, Amapiano.



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Amapiano has been the word on everyone's lips since South African music fans and party-goers saw it emerge in 2012. A musical movement entrenched in the experiences and culture of the South African youth, it is the product of the evolution of South African sound that, for many, originally began with Kwaito music in the 90s. And, like Kwaito, Amapiano acts as a keen view into the ethos of its time, despite not being expressly sociopolitical. And, as a musical movement, it isn't only speaking to the South African zeitgeist - it has seen massive popularity worldwide, with a transcendental impact within, and beyond, the African diaspora.

## The artists innovating the scene

With consistent chart-toppers, Amapiano musicians are dominating the South African music landscape. Kabza De Small, Mellow and Sleazy, DBN Gogo, and Focalistic are only a handful of the dozens of South African Amapiano musicians headlining the scene.

Rising stars like Uncle Waffles, Kamo Mphela, and Pabi Cooper are quickly coming onto the musical radars of more listeners. The top Amapiano artist on Spotify, DJ Maphorisa (who is no stranger to the industry, having worked as a producer for artists like Drake and Wizkid) consistently amasses millions of Spotify streams both in South Africa and globally. It's a genre that's shaping the culture - and, further to this, female artists like Lady Du and Boohle are pioneering the scene in big ways by breaking through the male majority in dance music spaces.

## Amapiano's spread across the world

Amapiano artists aren't only seeing prominence on their home turf, with massive international audiences making up a significant chunk of the genre's listenership. Millions of Amapiano's Spotify streams come from countries such as the UK, the US, and Nigeria - evidence of the genre's widespread popularity.

The distinctly South African sound speaks not only to the South African diaspora but also to other African diasporas across the globe, establishing Amapiano as a dance movement sweeping cross-cultural dancefloors.

## Inspiration in the genre's history

As mentioned, Amapiano is the great-grandchild of generations of popular South African music genres. Kwaito preceded the emergence of South African Deep House, which gave rise to Gqom, and most recently, Amapiano. Each genre uses tangible inspiration from its predecessors, with Amapiano utilising distinctly Kwaito rhythms and basslines, and stylistic inspiration from Gqom.

An example of this is the 2022 Amapiano track *Love I Need* by Uncle Waffles, Tony Duardo, Dinky Kunene, BoiBizza, Yedda, Nvocho - which pays homage to the South African classic *Destiny* by Malaika through a beautifully incorporated sampling of the track's iconic melody.



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African musical innovation is taking the world by storm. With dedicated listeners and acclaim from international industry giants, the Amapiano genre has seen South African musicians finding new access to overseas audiences. With the widespread use of streaming platforms such as Spotify, these international listeners are exposed to music that they may otherwise not have come across. From this, the ability to connect with potential fan bases all over the world has been

building new roads for South African musicians to take centre stage.

In its emergence as a genre of party anthems and dance music staples, Amapiano particularly captures the youth's contribution to the South African musical zeitgeist. And as the innovative musicians of the genres before it provided the foundation for the next South African musical evolution, the next generation of musicians will look to Amapiano for their own unique musical inception and inspiration.

## ABOUT PHIONA OKUMU

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