

Amapiano Awards: South Africa's dance music scene spreads its joy across the world

By [Sanya Osha](#)

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In 2019 amapiano began to dominate South Africa's dance floors to such an extent that, by 2021, the first South African Amapiano Awards were held to mark the rise of the country's most infectious new music export. In 2022, the South African dance music genre continued to expand its galloping world-wide reach. The annual awards are now an established event in South Africa's music calendar.



Source: unsplash.com

Amapiano is a soulful mix of grooves, sonic textures and moods that can be by turns hectic, smooth, melodic or simply enchanting. It is also defined by its unique percussive bass. Breaks within songs are punctuated by brief staccato beats (or signatures) scrawled by the synthesised sounds of the African log drum. In short, it's a fresh new DJ-driven dance music sound with upbeat piano melodies, a slowed-down dance beat and a rolling drum sound.

Its ever-growing influence is a joyful celebration of South Africa's decades-long contribution to global dance music.

The rise and rise of amapiano

Amapiano sprang out of the townships of South Africa's Gauteng province as early as 2012 and is continually evolving through musical innovation, public adulation and commercial viability. The craze has spread to parts of southern Africa and to countries in West Africa such as Nigeria and Ghana. In Nigeria, artists are releasing amapiano tracks and albums with an Afrobeats flavour. The East African nations of Kenya and Tanzania are also catching the bug. And amapiano artists are touring the globe.

Unlike hip-hop music, amapiano is still in its infancy and exudes an infectious innocence coupled with multiple waves of mesmerising sounds and grooves. For now, there isn't much of hip-hop's bad blood, enragement or despair to impede the burgeoning scene. There's something novel and expansive about the carefree and optimistic sounds of amapiano.

Today, the most exciting celebrities to be found in the South African music scene come from amapiano. Focalistic, DBN Gogo, Pabi Cooper, Reece Madlisa, Zuma, Daliwonga, Lady Du, Nkosazana Daughter, Sir Trill and many more new heavy hitters all drink from the fount of amapiano.



Those left behind

But just as amapiano continues to rage through the South African music spectrum with ingenuity, confidence and creativity, its victims are left perplexed in the dust. Prominent house music DJ Prince Kaybee and Durban's prodigiously talented Afropop crooner TNS have spoken out about how amapiano is monopolising the music industry to the detriment of other genres. Even hip-hop mainstays like the late AKA knew that the biggest threat to their genre is amapiano.

Consequently, many hip-hop artists hopped onto the bandwagon with amapiano-inspired tracks – from Cassper Nyovest and Khuli Chana to Costa Titch and Reason.

Those in the spotlight

At a glance, the nominees for the 2023 South African Amapiano Awards feature all the usual suspects. The self-styled king of amapiano Kabza De Small leads with nine nominations, followed by Young Stunna with eight, DJ Maphorisa and Daliwonga. There are also several upcoming aspirers on the list, like Toss, Mas Musiq, Kelvin Momo and Q-Mark and TipCee. For the first time, this impressive spread also includes a few prominent Nigerian and Ghanaian stars – Davido, Wizkid, Goya Menor and Nektunez.

Indeed the deluge of amapiano hits in the past year was almost overwhelming and the story gets even more promising. Msaki, a multi-talented South African vocalist, had a fruitful collaboration with Kabza de Small. Ami Faku, ordinarily an R&B singer, dazzled fans with features on a few of Kabza's infectious cuts. By comparison, the celebrities of other genres appear rather staid.

Across the world

On the international front, amapiano stars are beginning to gain greater exposure from frequent festival appearances across Europe and Africa. London is fast becoming an amapiano hot spot with excursions led by the likes of Major League DJz, TxC, Pabi Cooper, DBN Gogo, Focalistic, Maphorisa, Boohle and others going on extended jaunts overseas. TikTok dance challenges by eye-catching influencers and ordinary users alike flood social media, creating constant viral sensations.

These diverse exploits and activities foreground a much-needed independent mindset because amapiano still lives in a space somewhere between underground and mainstream. From production to promotion, there is a can-do, do-it-yourself attitude among amapiano artists that promises to shift paradigms of how music is both appreciated and consumed. It also

reflects how the most interesting developments in music such as jazz, punk, grunge, hip-hop and now amapiano, invariably emerge from underground scenes.



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TikTok and other social media platforms are upsetting and redefining the meaning and nature of hierarchies and democracy in music. Artists now possess digital technology within their reach to create viral frenzies and remain independent.

Sometimes it is easy to think that amapiano is evolving much too fast for its own good. Already, the corporates are no doubt lurking over its fresh offerings, dreaming up ways to exploit the amapiano craze. After all, other youth music movements like hip-hop in the US and K-pop in South Korea have become ultra-commercialised.

However, before this can happen, South Africa's amapiano artists continue to dispense the sheer bliss of making music, collaborating widely and moving freely between clubs and countries. For now, there is joy, release and optimism in amapiano. It's a glorious moment to witness a genre burst loose with distinctive flair, ebullience and ingenuity from the impoverished townships of Gauteng with a goal to take over the world.

The 2023 South African Amapiano Awards took place on 2 April 2023.

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