

A study of the impact of sound checking in Sungura live performances in Harare

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Abstract

Adequate sound reinforcement equipment and expertise to operate the system are vital. This paper looks at preparations by musicians and sound engineers before and during performance events. Live events require ample time to set up equipment and to do sound check to ensure efficiency. Costs for equipment hire force organisers to put little attention to sound check. Sound check enables performers to work and interact with sound engineers. Without sound check sound engineers are unable to effectively deal with problems during performances. The research was qualitative with 40 participants. Four Sungura band managers were randomly sampled. A total of 11 sound engineers were purposively selected and 18 Sungura musicians were chosen with due regards to age (young and old) and experience. Seven patrons were randomly sampled to find their opinions on levels of loudness of sound at performance shows. The study followed the conceptual framework of balanced sound mixes as an industry standard requirement for live performance sound systems. The study shows that; sound check is trivialised yet it makes or breaks live performances. We noted that some Sungura performers and sound engineers were strangers with communication breakdowns on stage. Some musicians performed under the influence of alcohol and that took away their performance. Myriad problems were associated with alcohol and coming late on stage, demanding for high volumes of sound unnecessarily and ending shows abruptly. Certain Sungura musicians openly blamed sound engineers for lack of sound check. Some sound engineers felt that Sungura musicians took all credit although it was a collective effort. Sound checking should be given adequate attention to allow performers and sound engineers to produce

balanced sound. Performing musicians and sound engineers should work together in sound checking.

Key words: audio processing, levels, live performance, musicians, sound engineer, sound check, sound reinforcement, Sungura

Introduction and background

In this article, we examine the crux of live sound reinforcement with the intent to discuss the importance of sound check by identifying various factors that are incidental thereto (Ballou, Ciaudelli and Schmitt, 2008). We explore the reality of the experience by engineers and Sungura musicians in the process of live sound reinforcement including sound checks, and the circumstances that make and or break live performances in the given preparations and sound checking (Pack, 2017). The study holds that as a matter of principle, sound check is meant to make the sound system output suit a given genre (Thomann, 2017). In this paper, our focus is on Sungura since it has unique features that are reflective, made up of tenets that are of meticulous Zimbabwean musical beats and styles. It is through sound check that the amount of space allocated to musicians and the setting, in terms of positioning of individual equipment units, can be determined.

According to Lashua & Cohen (2010) and Bennett (2017) sound checking comes as a requisite requirement for live performances to ensure that all anticipated problems are dealt with before the main performance takes place. Further, sound check gives the musicians and the sound engineers a common operational ground where they can make a collective effort to make the sound balanced (Light 2016; McIntyre and Thompson 2021; Wang, Huang, and Tseng 2017). The sound engineers take time to make sure the musicians are satisfied with the projection of sound through their monitors and the front of house sound systems.

Sound checking, is undertaken to make sure that the sound output from the instruments is balanced. Izhaki (2017), Gibson (2020) and Jillings (2023) inform that balancing of sound is done through use of the equaliser (EQ) to allow different musical instruments to blend with coherence in both

soft and loud instruments. Each instrument should fit into the context of the mix without dominating or being undermined. Jillings (2023) and Kenwright (2020) consolidate the importance of a balanced sound output as a core requirement for live performances. In this study, sound checking and creating a balanced mix of sound are critical to the success of a live performance. Kenwright (2020) posits that balancing sound is more than what meets the ear. In that view, there are special listening skills required to place each instrument in the context of the mix and that creates a balance. The sound engineer will apply some special tools for the levels of each instrument and positions in the stereo field to make sure there is clarity in the whole mix.

Having been immersed in live performances for a period spanning more than twenty-four years as performers ourselves, we have observed with some enthusiasm, factors that determine the success of live performance shows. Stein (2018) mentions that each live performance is predisposed to unique challenges even though certain advantages could be connected with each venue or environmental factors relating to the setting of equipment. Sound checking is therefore a necessity. We have observed live performance situations characterised by lack of sound check by musicians due to various reasons, some of them genuine and others petty. In some occasions, sound check is taken for granted as musicians appear on stage just at the time of their performance slot. Our shared experience observed that there have been some circumstances where musicians get engrossed with too many engagements and they end up reserving only sufficient time to fulfil each booking, at the expense of ample sound checks.

The above-referred situations are at times further exacerbated when equipment hire is based on the number of hours the equipment is taken away. Given the above factors, organisers often cut costs by setting up the equipment just early enough for performance and downplay sound check since longer periods with hired equipment would attract huge costs. Consequently, sound check is then only done within a performance thereby compromising the quality of such a performance. In such cases, the engineers sacrifice some of the groups of performers, as they spend time tweaking the sound system settings. Sound engineers end up with no time to give their best to sound check hence they also struggle to keep the revellers entertained.

Under normal conditions, sound engineers need ample time to set up their equipment with minimal interference (Burton, 2012). This allows them enough room to set all their processing tools based on the venue's acoustics requirements and to ring microphones for feedback. Most importantly, it enables engineers to exclusively come up with appropriate settings for each band of musicians. The above considerations become critical to catering for the unique genre-specific special performance styles and requirements. Each musical genre such as Sungura requires specific sets of instruments and settings to meet the musical performance needs at the venue (Stein, 2018). Sungura performances require guitar clarity because they are predominantly melodic in nature.

In Zimbabwe, the highest number of performing and recording musicians belong to the Sungura fraternity. At Sungura dominated performances sound checking should therefore give some precedence to Sungura sound requirements. Basing the overall sound check on a different genre where the performances are dominantly Sungura, poses a glaringly negative effect on the Sungura music. Sound check is meant to, apart from create a conducive performing setting, ensure optimum sound output and tune-up that does not place speakers and the entire sound system at risk of overdriving or succumbing to unnecessary feedback (Burton, 2012; Pack, 2017; Thomann, 2017 and Stein, 2018). Sound engineers ought to do sound check to lay a smooth foundation for a flowing performance. That also ensures that all the different musical inputs fit well into the contexts of the overall mix.

Focus of the study

This paper examines the practical experiences of doing live performances including sound checking by sound engineers and performing musicians in the Sungura music genre. We analyse the role of sound checking prior to the show. The study also examines how the quality of sound relates to the process of sound checking. As researchers we also brought the factors that affect the execution of sound check or lack of it under the spotlight. The study makes recommendations to come up with proposals to effectively deal with problems associated with live performances especially by Sungura musicians. The paper draws standpoints from the participants' approaches and practices coupled with industry requisite standards in doing live performances in general.

Conceptual principles

The study takes a conceptual basis of creating balanced sound mixes as propounded by Izhaki (2017) and Gibson (2020). Balancing the mix involves a knowledgeable person adjusting appropriate frequencies of musical instruments with an aim of combining them in a coherent way. The knowledgeable person is a sound engineer who sits on a mixing desk and listens to the sound to determine levels of each instrument in relation to the overall mix. Kenwright (2020) goes further to say that the sound engineer will also deal with problems that may arise before and during the live performance. Through critical listening, the sound engineer will provide solutions to the musicians and also provide a healthy listening environment for the patrons. In view of the above, this entails creating a balanced mix within the levels of loudness that do not cause any threats to the health of the listeners.

According to Evans (2011) it is vital to make sure that a sound engineer understands the nature of the venue, the adequacy of power supply, and people to consult prior to the onset of the event. The study takes a contextual basis on the concept of preparation for live sound reinforcement in live performances, as creating a balanced mix is the core business of the sound engineer. Co-operation between performing musicians and sound engineers is a critical component to have the effective sound output in live sound reinforcement. Boyce (2014) posits that sound check assures full functioning of the equipment in relation to the performers and the sound engineer. Primarily the sound engineer is the person in charge of the sound check to ensure a trusted operation of the sound system. The engineer verifies the microphones, power cables and all the audio equipment to be used and guarantees efficient running (Gary & Jones 1989; Bartlett & Bartlett 1999). The above requirements need ample time to put in place. Effective communication between the engineer, the technical team and the performers warrants a balanced sound output hence it cannot be substituted with other ways of doing things. The study also upholds the need for balanced mixes to enable the performers to fit into the ideal context of the live performances in any given venue. Gibson (2008) mentions that each style of music has its own traditions as to how it is to be mixed, hence mixing requires an art that suits the style of play. In dealing with Sungura music the engineer needs to follow a mixing approach that gives the guitars, drums and vocals a balance. Sound check becomes a basic necessity to troubleshoot all obstacles relating to the sound system before the actual performance takes place (Huber & Runstein, 2018). The same scholars observe that engineers and Sungura musicians should uphold strict adherence to all the steps and requirements of the

conceptual principles for live performances which are; setting up, placement of microphones, positions of monitors and front of house equipment, regardless of the nature of venue. Sound checking is the pinnacle of live performances.

Methodology

Guided by Bhattacharjee (2012) this study is positivist as it seeks to interpret a situation of live performances and, in particular, sound check in the field of the study. We intent to establish certain stand points relating to the conceptual framework for live sound reinforcement for live Sungura music performances. We based our collection of data on a qualitative research paradigm (Schutt, 2018). As researchers we involved ourselves as part of the performing musicians' fraternity to conduct interviews and make observations that informed the research (Lune and Berg, 2017). A total of 40 participants were included in this study. The participants were as thus; four band managers, 11 engineers, 7 patrons and 18 Sungura musicians. The band managers were randomly sampled, while the engineers were purposively selected from those with experience of working with Sungura bands. The patrons were purposively picked on the basis of their capacity to give an objective view of the levels of loudness of sound at the performance shows. All Sungura musicians were selected based on stratified random sampling to enable age, years of experience and popularity to be factored in the study.

Some data were also gathered through observations and critical listening to the live performances that we attended. As researchers we also employed snowball sampling and interviewed musicians and patrons who attended Sungura live shows, to solicit for views concerning the live music performances selected for the study (Creswell, 2014). Live performances were selected at random, to allow for both upcoming and prominent Sungura musicians to be involved as part of the sample. The research investigated the involvement of sound engineers, Sungura musicians and patrons to study human behaviour in connection to sound checks in the study (Kothari, 2004). It is important to mention that for ethical reasons the data gathered through observations, interviews and our involvement is confidential hence anonymity on the part of informants is upheld. In this study, we concealed the identities of the participants to avoid the likelihood of causing harm hence there is no reference to names in the presentation and analysis, this is as advocated by Israel and Hay

(2006). The information is presented through using qualitative descriptive analysis of the details in concurrence with Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, West, and Namey (2005).

Presentation and analysis

The gathered information reveals that there are varied views on the role of sound checking with regards to Sungura music live performance shows. Most of the Sungura musicians plying their trade in Zimbabwe, especially those based in Harare, have personal engineers to attend to their live sound performances. Just 20% of the total population of musicians involved in the study engaged some occasional sound engineers. The majority of the young and upcoming Sungura musicians struggled to make ends meet financially. Most of them regarded engaging permanent engineers to do their sound as an unnecessary strain on their financial wellbeing. Regardless of that, the majority of the Sungura musicians were grateful for the work that the sound engineers were doing in their live shows. The space below articulates the views by musicians, their band leaders, sound engineers and observations that we made during live Sungura performance shows.

The musicians' views

A sizable number of 15 Sungura musicians concurred that it was quite important to engage permanent sound engineers to do both sound check and the live performance shows. In that view, the majority of them including young and upcoming musicians held that proper planning was indeed a valuable point in management of Sungura live performances. Regardless of the fact that some of the musicians had permanent sound engineers, we noted that not all live performance shows were preceded by sound checking. We also observed that every show for all the Sungura musicians presented unique characteristics as each of them bore some notable merits and demerits. Most of the bands that usually travelled together as one team had a common routine of ample sound check before undertaking their live performances. However, some cases relating to the above scenario include involvement in car accidents. Some of the bands encountered problems of delayed arrivals at their performance venues. In some places, shows started off badly and ended badly due to lack of sufficient time for setting up and sound checking.

Some musicians held the view that the success of live performance shows was a combination of luck and thoughtful planning ahead of every show. Furthermore, they also upheld the importance

of advertising of every live performance that needed to be well timed. The above view has merit as most of the shows were targeted strategically to coincide with month end or just around end of the month. The above view was underscored by one prominent Sungura musician saying, “no matter how well rehearsed a band is, it cannot play to an empty venue hence the need to be timeous and advertise rigorously to enable many people to attend.” He argued together with other musicians saying that it was more important to advertise than to do sound check to as a way to ensure that the show is resoundingly attended by patrons before the band goes on stage.

Some Sungura musicians in the study mentioned that at times, some of their members only gathered courage to go on stage through drinking beer and other performance enhancing narcotics. However, in most cases, some of the band members’ behaviour was a cause for concern as they delayed coming to the venue and avoided sound checks. It was noted that the some of the said band members, including their leaders, did not see anything wrong with drinking before and during the live performance shows. Some of the band leaders expressed zero tolerance to late arrival, mediocre performance and taking narcotics or alcohol. One band leader was quick to mention that, “*Kana tiri pabasa tinoita zvebasa tozoita zvemafaro tapedza*” literally he meant that, “When we are at work we do work and we can have fun after” he went on to say that, “*Tose tine mabasa akasiyana siyana kana ndiri pangu pabasa ndinopakoshesa nokuti ndopanobva mari yangu*”, by these words he meant that, “We all have different jobs and when I am at my job I value it because that is where I get my salary”. The musician implied the importance of valuing one’s profession and to treat one’s work with sincerity. This also includes taking all the processes of live performances. A prominent Sungura artist said that he was very strict on how his band prepared for performances; punctuality was considered a high priority including an assurance to balanced sound through sufficient preparation and sound checking. This means he did not leave anything to chance.

A total of 16 musicians mentioned that, when they perform with their members under their own sound engineer, they find their performances very successful. They claimed that they faced challenges with other non-resident sound engineers particularly those that had never done any performances with them. This problem was confirmed by a band leader who said, “*Vazhinji vacho vanenge vasingazivi zvemagitaro vanongoita zvedancehall chete saka vanopedzisira vakonewa*

kuita sound yedu zvakanaka". His sentiments are that, "Most of them do not know how to mix guitars, they only know dancehall music and they end up failing to produce good sound". The knowledge to create a balanced mix is however based on a number of factors such as one's knowledge and specialisation in the type of music. Indeed, mixing differs according to tenets of each musical genre. The above sentiments by musicians are based on the knowledge of sound they expect to hear hence their views should not be trivialised. Most of the Sungura musicians know what kind of sound they expect when a sound engineer who is not well versed in the Sungura genre is on the desk, hence they complain. The above problem is also compounded by musicians who come to the stage very late when the performance is supposed to take off as soon as the band gets onto the stage. Hence, there may never be ample time to do sound check. A problem of this magnitude is quite common when organisers of performance events do not provide space for band sound engineer to work with the resident engineer to help in shaping the character of the sound for the bands.

Coming onto the issue of sound check, the band managers mentioned that it is imperative to have ample time to undertake sound check prior to each live performance. They also held that each venue presented potential challenges that should be troubleshooted by band members in consultation with their sound engineer before the arrival of patrons. As a matter of importance, the band should take time to set and have a feel of the venue before the crowd gathers. The majority of 14 musicians presented the view that hiring a venue for any given performance was costly and at times the amount spent may not be redeemed by the band after. Loss is therefore imminent. In many instances, the time for sound check was sacrificed so as to reduce costs of hiring the venue. A few bands faced challenges as they did not own musical instruments hence they paid to hire the instruments. They also deliberately avoided paying a lot to hire a venue which may not give them any profitable returns at the end. One of them submitted that, "in many cases, we would rather avoid sound check so that we maximise on time to perform to the audience." From the above views it is important for bands to plan and adequately prepare for live performances. Regardless of circumstances faced by some of the bands, sound checking remains a critical component of the Sungura live performances.

Sound engineers' perspectives

Our interaction with the sound engineers shows that there is a lot of work that goes on in a Sungura live performance show. The engineers we interviewed and observed mentioned that most of the shows they preside over are appreciated by their clients. However, the issue of planning has been a bone of contention with some musicians always attacking the sound engineers especially when things do not work out. The sound engineers who worked with bands on a permanent arrangement expressed the importance of rapport in order to get the best out of the mixing process of the live sound. One sound engineer said, “I know what the artist wants and I always try to make sure that he gets that.” He went on to say that,

“Sometimes it is difficult when we get to a venue late and there is little time to set up for the show. The musicians may end up not happy with the way I do my sound and they fail to understand that the band would have arrived late for the show. In that case I feel the musicians should understand our plight.”

The above sentiments reveal that there is a need for the sound engineer and the musicians need to relate well in the performances. The lack of working rapport creates breakdowns in communication between the sound engineers and musicians as expressed by the above sound engineer.

In some shows that we attended, we noted that the musicians kept on asking the engineer to increase volume on their microphones from the first song right to the end. Although giving cues and asking the sound engineer to undertake certain tasks is acceptable, incessant loud calls on the engineer throughout may depict low levels of communication between the engineer and the artist. There could have been a different way of interaction if the engineer and artist understood each other’s expectations. The interviewed engineers indicated to us that some musicians did not appreciate them when sound is done well. One sound engineer submitted that,

“musicians give more credit to their bands when sound is perfect and when things go bad, they level the blame on sound engineers instead of making it a collective responsibility of both sound engineers and musicians.”

The implication of the above is that some of the alluded problems may be eliminated in live performances if bands and their engineers all undertake sound checking together. We also noted that this problem was rampant in situations where musicians took to the stage under the influence of liquor and were also late for the sound check. The sound engineers also concurred that at times they are asked to do a service at a performance at short notice in a venue that presents exceptional challenges. In such circumstances, regardless of the effort to make an acceptable sound output, they remarked that they are not appreciated.

Another sound engineer who uses a digital mixing desk, mentioned that he prioritises taking measurements of the room response before he deals with sound equipment and that helps him to adjust the production of sound in any given venue. He held that his approach can only work best in situations where there is ample time. At one big event that we attended that was graced by prominent Sungura musicians, we noted that the event was nearly a flop because all the prominent musicians did not come with their sound engineers. Furthermore, they did undertake a properly constituted sound check and revellers were up in arms with the performers until, one of the sound engineers rescued the situation. A general sentiment held by many sound engineers was that a problem with fellow sound engineers was their failure to accept advice from other sound engineers. Specifically, at big live performance events most of the sound engineers do not accept advice to make the sound better. One engineer said, "If a sound engineer fails to solve a problem, they cannot humbly accept views from others fearing sabotage, that is a very sad thing in our industry". The above view suggests that the sound engineering field is polarised as some members cannot accept advice from their fellow practitioners. Usually, sound engineers accept advice from their own friends whom they trust and rely upon to get the job done. One can even make a quick phone call to ask for help to avoid suicidal experiments.

A view that was shared by a majority of sound engineers was that some Sungura musicians could not appreciate that sound systems need to be upgraded as their fans increase with time. They allege that when the system is small sometimes the musicians will still expect the sound engineer to push the system beyond its output limits. However, this does not work because that destroys the system. Another sound engineer said that, "I hope one day we will be understood by our clients so that we work together as a team". By implication the sound engineers' views suggest that some of the

Sungura bands continue to use old equipment while expecting good results which actually fails them. It also suggests that there is less mutual understanding between sound engineers and Sungura musicians. On the same note, one wonders why Sungura musicians cannot invest in buying equipment and yet they earn revenue through their shows. Despite of the economic difficulties in Zimbabwe, Sungura musicians should invest in purchasing new equipment for their music business since they earn revenue from their music performances.

The sound engineers held that it was important to maintain a professional practice in dealing with sound. However, at times they are forced to do things hurriedly because some musicians come to the stage drunk and confuse them. Another prominent sound engineer mentioned that he did not like working with musicians who take alcohol on stage and he went on to say he prefers working with principled Sungura musicians who can respect themselves and others and avoid taking alcohol on stage. He further explained that, he had been disappointed by some Sungura musicians who are not organised hence he decided to avoid such business deals. We probed them further and we were informed that most of musicians who drink alcohol fail to come on time for the performances. They keep nagging the sound engineer with endless demands which stifles their efforts to come up with acceptable sound. One sound engineer had this to say, “Imagine that the venue is full and the band has not arrived and the system is set and sound checking has not been done. What should a sound engineer do in that case?” The sound engineer mentioned he would not mind if it happens once but it would be a cause for concern if it became a routine. This challenge was indeed a serious matter which worked against the progress of many musicians.

Perceptions of Sungura patrons

Although the study examined the technical issues in live sound performances of Sungura music, we found it necessary to check on the patrons’ opinions of loudness levels. A view that all the sampled participants shared was that the Sungura musicians were doing a good job to entertain them. All the sampled revellers mentioned that some bands pushed their sound levels very high and that is too hush for human hearing. Even though they complained paradoxically some of the patrons enjoyed excessive loudness. Largely this view on loudness was made by people attending family shows that are held in places where the patrons do not drink alcohol. As for the venues that included drinking spots, our participants enjoyed everything. This could be due to states of a

drunken stupor that the attendees could not complain about sound. It also became apparent that most day time shows had successful live performances with balanced sound.

The majority of the fans that attend Sungura shows at nightclubs and bars tend to be of little sobriety and their view of the goings on in the live performance shows tends to be less objective. Regardless of this observation, there are some fans who told us some objective views about the Sungura shows. One of them said, “I know I am drunk but the sound coming from the system is good and the sound engineer is doing a good job, the sound is just like a CD playing, very clearly”. He went on to say, “We know what we like and the music is just as we want it to sound and that is very good”. In spite of the drinking public within the Sungura shows some revellers were still objective of what they expected to hear from their favourite genre. It was also interesting that some of the patrons could shout loudly when some microphones or guitars disappeared from the mix. A notable comment we observed was, “*Wedzera mawatts pagitare relead iro*”. With these words the reveller meant, “raise the volume for that lead guitar”. The revellers know when things are well and not well and they shout. Such a scenario was very common when the band did not have a sound engineer but they had one of them doubling as performer and sound engineer. Due to his position behind the sound he failed to give an objective view of the front of house sound which a dedicated sound engineer would easily handle and keep the revellers happy. Some of the groups we observed did not have sound engineers and their sound checking was defeated by the fact that the output of sound did not have checks and balances from the crowd’s view.

Findings

While it is generally acknowledged that sound check is fundamental to a good live performance, our research has found out that the process does not receive the necessary attention in reality. The magnitude of the anticipated audience determines the size of the sound system to be used. In turn, the size of the preferred sound system also determines the amount of set up time required and the amount of time to be dedicated to fine tuning the system, with a band in action. Prominent Sungura musicians and combined shows usually sell out and attract significant numbers of people to attend. Such scenarios call for timeous logistical work, to ensure glitch free performances.

The most prevalent predicament at live shows is the punctuality of musicians. Most musicians only aim to be at the venue just minutes before they are supposed to perform. “You know what, because of pomp and undue pride some musicians feel as if they are downgraded and used if they are asked to do sound check,” said one sound engineer. “Yet when they play, they want the best sound and they keep shouting...,” he added. Every musician looks forward to performing with the best sound. It is unfortunate that the interaction between sound engineers and some performers only becomes a priority when something is not well with the sound.

Another sound engineer said that for most of the bands he does sound for, some instrument players who get to experience gear for the first time, tend to get carried away by sound effects and it ends up being more of a rehearsal than a sound check. In such a scenario, salient issues like monitoring volume may be easily overlooked even though they are important.

“Boys rinoita sound nemaCD ka iri rinotadza kushanda nemazvo, saka kana tave kurova live system inenge yaakukosora waona”, said one bassist. In this he meant that the boys (sound engineers) who use CD tracks to test their sound system fail to balance the sound and when we play live instruments we experience problems. The crude signal from a live instrument needs a lot of attention in order to fine tune it and attain the best sonic character of sound for each particular instrument. With a pre-recorded track one may quickly establish whether a signal is passing efficiently through the various components of the system, and also set the general EQ of the gear based on their knowledge of the track used.

“It is sad we had to shift gear last moment to accommodate excess musicians on stage, and we ended up experiencing feedback and system hiccups,” remarked one sound engineer after a Sungura music performance. Often musicians just storm onto the stage on invitation by the host, at times with a large troupe of performers. No formal preparatory communication is done between musician and system provider or sound engineer. This leads to a misinformed layout that musicians tend to override as they leap onto the stage, thereby compromising placement of various pieces of equipment to avoid feedback and even, worse still, phase cancellation and mixing of cables too.

A well-known musician said he had problems when he participated in combined shows. In such circumstances, it is often a case that a general template of sound is used across all performers

regardless of the specific special needs of musicians according to musicians' taste of individual instrument sounds and the overall sound mix as well. It is often a headache to deal with musician preferences while a show is running. Another maze of a situation is when gear is to be hired for an occasion. When the condition is such that a system is hired based on time, it becomes economic to have the kit at prime time and do away with 'less weighted' stages such as sound check.

Conclusions

The study shows that the Sungura genre has grown immensely in wooing a large fan base among Zimbabweans across different ages. The organisation of live Sungura performance shows has been marked with careful planning by the majority of the musicians. However, some of them exhibited some traces of unprofessional practice marked by lack of serious concerns on sound check. In their bid to reduce expenses many Sungura bands sacrificed the vital role of sound checking. This trait was observed among prominent and upcoming Sungura musicians in Zimbabwe.

Sound engineers and Sungura musicians faced communication challenges which manifested during shows where the musicians could keep shouting at the sound engineer. This characteristic revealed that there was a problem especially where performers dealt with non-resident sound engineers in a live show. The sound engineers face difficulties managing sound, especially when working with bands that come late and drunk on stage.

Indeed, sound checking is critical for live performances, it was noted a great number of Sungura musicians did not value sound checking and some of them do not do proper sound checking and leave everything to chance and experience. Such a trait downplayed the credibility of even prominent musicians. The main reason for forgoing adequate preparations was to cut costs. Such measures were deemed to be counterproductive hence this could place a negative impact on their business.

Recommendations

Effective sound check involves total complimenting between the sound engineer and the performing artist. As such, this research highly recommends cooperation between these two in order for both to be fully satisfied. The sound engineer needs the musician to play in order to

ensure that signal lines are in order, apart from balancing the mix. The musician, in turn, has specific volume and effect preferences that the sound engineer has to fulfil. Therefore, a friendly environment has to prevail between the two, resulting in excellent work from both sides.

Sound engineers often use pre-recorded tracks on sound checks. While this gives them confidence over the performance of speakers, it does not guarantee the functioning of other lines as this would be occupied by various live sound inputs, and how they relate in terms of volume and EQ. As such we recommend that every instrument used on a particular channel should be tested on that particular channel and most deserving, by the very player who uses that particular instrument.

Timeous arrival at the venue is highly recommended. This enables the sound engineer to locate power points, ascertain voltage and current compliance to system requirements, as well as map out appropriate set up or lay out. This helps to prevent feedback as well as avoid unnecessary last-minute adjustments as haphazardly laid cables. A smart layout allows performance to flow without fear of cables being trampled upon or performers tripping on cables.

We note with concern the loss of character in terms of sound tenets suffered by many musicians during combined shows. In a bid to cut on costs, and probably lack thereof, most musicians do not bring along their personal sound engineers when they perform at a sponsored platform where everything is literally provided. However, this research notes that it is the personal sound engineer for each musician who knows better the sound preferences of that particular musician's band. This includes the instruments which require special effects or prominence, as well as the depth of the overall mix.

A significant state of sobriety also makes a performance easy because there will be easier coordination as well as rational judgement of the situation's requirements. Sungura music uses a number of guitars, without sound check, such guitars may crowd the mix to an extent that some lines would go without even being heard. Moreover, sound check ascertains proper tuning and assignment of effects to allow each of the guitars appropriate space in the stereo spectrum.

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