

Sensitive notes

Emma Rixt Zwart, 16/11/2024

We, the audience, are sitting in a square around the floor. In the middle, we welcome Shishani, accompanied by a pianist and a string quartet. On the opening night of What You See Festival 2024, artist Shishani shared songs of their new album *Whispers* and, for me, turned the night into an affective, personal journey inwards.

Let me start with my struggle of doing justice to the performance by writing this, because to be honest I can barely recall any of the songs that were played. Nevertheless, I vividly remember the way I experienced the music, which may be the exact effect the music was meant to achieve.

From the corner where I was sitting, I could not see Shishani's face. The pianist and a few players of the string quartet were turned towards me with their backs, but the cello was turned directly at me. Upon seeing the cello, I realized that this was the first time that I would hear a cello perform live since my father's funeral. Just the presence of the instrument made me travel through time. Memories of concerts my father and I went to arose (my father worked at an orchestra) and I started to wonder if he would have enjoyed what I was about to hear.

Amidst my thoughts, and already a few songs into the concert, I noticed my classmate beside me had tears in her eyes. In an effort to try to comfort her I gently touched her arm. This created a very special exchange. We locked eyes shortly and in that moment I felt completely understood. Seeing her be emotional, a state I would have expected myself to be in, I noticed that I was not. Her physical emotion brought me right back into my own body, back to the right here and now, and out of my mind and the past. My emotions, that were present in words and images from memories, became physical. Often when I experience physical emotions regarding my father, it expresses itself in crying. Now, it was as if I saw her living my emotions, making it possible for me to let go of them.

After this exchange, I turned towards the cello again. I noticed how the instrument was placed on the ground, only a few meters away from my foot. The body of the cello, where the bow was touching the strings, was at the same height as my other foot. Seeing the cello again, with a clear mind, I started to feel the soundwaves it produced. I opened up and the harmonies that the cello made with the other instruments washed over me like waves. The floor and the air transmitted the waves to my feet, and through my feet they entered my body. The music replaced my thoughts, and made my father feel just as close to me. As if the instruments were expressing my emotions, making it possible for me to let them go.

This album was made to experience physically. That's why Shishani decided that, for now, you can only listen to it live or via a CD or a record. *Whispers* is about Shishani's personal journey inwards and learning how to listen to your inner voice. The album title evokes a feeling of gentleness and thus matches with Shishani's self-proclaimed title of 'gentle warrior'. The subjects they touch upon in their lyrics in combination with their voice create a unique sound that could be described as gentle fightsongs. Their music transcends genres by combining soul, indie, R&B, hip-hop and jazz with influences from Namibian music culture. Shishani's composition and the choice in music instruments create a soft, but no less piercing, atmosphere. Shishani's music is a gentle invitation for the spectators to travel inwards, to listen to their inner voice and feeling.

For me, I was reliving memories, instead of listening to (what I would describe as) my 'inner voice'. I tuned into my inner, affective senses – or my inner fight. The affective exchange between my body and the music, *and* between me and my classmate, made my brain surrender to my body. My interpretation-reflex, which could maybe be described as my inner voice, wasn't listened to, but rather silenced. This allowed me to take my journey inwards, and for the duration of the concert, I could let go.