

**FEATURE**

**THE SELF  
(-LESS)  
PRODUCER**

**The story of 3 self-producing artists in the Joza Township  
of Grahamstown**

# THE SELF (-LESS) PRODUCER

Self-producing artists in the Joza Township of Grahamstown

Within the confines of a small 2-by-1 metre room, Mzwamadoda “Azlan” Makalima explains how important it is to him to be a self-producing artist in his own bedroom studio. Situated in the Joza Township of Grahamstown, Azlan’s basic home recording studio, known as Darkie Yam Studios is nothing more than a computer, MIDI keyboard, a microphone and a set of monitor speakers. Not even a light was on the ceiling, having to provide a battery-powered LED for the interview.

But as Azlan took me through

the process of creating a new track, he began to discuss the meaning and significance behind being a producer.

“Here in Grahamstown there are many artists who saw that we lack quality in our recordings. The problem is our studios and so they go outside of Grahamstown to do their recordings. So my main role is to keep artists in Joza and to make music here because a lot of artists claim to have started from Grahamstown.”

It came as a surprise that being a self-producer was more about keeping local artists from leaving the area than it was about making money.

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*Being a producer is about putting your life into your music, as in you are music yourself. - Azlan*

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Suffo producing a track in his studio, J-Extension Productions.

Recording equipment is generally an expensive investment, but it wasn't about covering costs or making profits. As Azlan explains, making music is far more important than making money.

"I used to have a job, but I decided to quit so that I could keep busy by making music. I have to do what I have to do. I have to work with something that I love so that I can give my whole heart to it and know that this is work for me."

On the other side of Makana's Kop hillside, another producer resides in his own bedroom studio. In a small corrugated iron dwelling with cardboard boxes as sound-proofing, Khanyile "Suffo" Bumgane discusses how being a producer means he has the responsibility of teaching

future generations through music.

"Where we stay there are a lot of things that are happening. Every generation that comes changes what is happening. So what I'm trying to do is send messages to these

young ones who are growing up, to say that they gain nothing from robbing people and so on."

Like Azlan, Suffo doesn't record artists or produce music for money. He works as a petrol attendant in order

to cover his studio expenses and living costs. What is more important to him, however, is getting across certain messages to the youth of Joza to live a more ethical and fulfilled life.

In terms of other artists, his studio, called *J-Extension Productions*, is merely a platform for them to record their own tracks

at a cost that is close to nothing.

"When I started recording it was difficult. So I know how it is for these artists who write songs but have no studio to record. I may ask them for like R5.00 to record a beat or track, but I actually do it for people, not for me."

In a nearby extension of Joza is a more improved studio owned by Ayanda "Steal" Mcanda. With a built-in vocal booth, Steal has managed to create a studio that has not only set him back a bag of money, but that is used as a facility to empower both himself and others in the art of music production.

Like Suffo, Steal's studio, known as *ATM Records*, is not intended to be a money-making investment. "For me it's not about being financially independent, because I do have work. But it's more about helping artists who don't have work." Believing that talent shouldn't go to waste, Steal goes on to say, "I know

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*It's more about helping artists who don't have work.*

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that they have this skill of music, so I just want to help them out at the end of the day.”

As a police official, Steal uses his income to build up the studio, as well as his own self-confidence. For him, it is as much about producing music as it is about producing the

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*It's better to teach a person how to catch fish than sharing that one piece of fish with him.*”

self.

Being in a position where he can teach and empower other people drives him to continue growing his studio and production skills.

“If you have a fish, it's better to teach a person to catch fish than sharing that one piece of

fish with him because he's not going to be filled. At least if you teach him how to catch fish, then you know then when you're gone he'll be able to survive for himself. That's my philosophy around making music.”

Regardless of their socio-economic situation, the choice to invest in the art of music production and to build up their own home studios was without the intention of covering those expenses. As previously mentioned, it is as much about self-producing music as it is about producing the self.

But beyond the self is the other, and it is only a selfless producer that invests their time and effort into others that seek the same art. Azlan, Suffo and Steal each built up their studios as a means of assisting other musicians, empowering other producers, and growing the cultural capital of the Joza township of Grahamstown.

Article and photos by  
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Steal in his studio



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