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## A Music Therapy Story From Eersterust, South Africa

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### Introduction

Eersterust is East of Pretoria, and was formerly a 'township', specially created for 'colored' (mixed-race) people. It has a long history of social problems, unemployment, drug syndicates, crime - which is where this story comes in. The setting is a community centre in Eersterust, called Youth Development Outreach (YDO). Here the Adolescent Development Programme runs as part of the rehabilitation of adolescents who are in conflict with the law - and are referred to YDO from the courts.



### The Construction of the Story

As music therapist I work at YDO one afternoon per week with an open group, with adolescents involved in assault cases. This story grew out of a process of the group constructing a story through listening to a series of CDs - music that I had chosen. I had a flip chart on which I transcribed the story as they presented different aspects of it. Before playing the CDs I asked the group what our story should be based on, and they decided that the story would be about Eersterust, their home-town.

This is the story as it unfolded: (The text is a direct transcription of the group's story)

#### **CD1 (Mountain Retreat, Kogi Bridge)**

It was a small, restful town, as the new generation's children grew up. Life was lived, going with the flow. It was a quiet night, and scary.

#### **CD2 (Saint-Saens: Carnival of the Animals: Wild Asses)**

There is drama in the village. They start shooting each other while there was a party. There was a mysterious feeling. They were drunk and started shooting each other. There was a car chase, the police were chasing them.

#### **CD3 (Rachmaninov, Piano Concerto no 2 - opening section of first movement)**

People were hiding, they were scared. Bodies were lying helplessly. Someone was looking for them with a gun. There's blood all over the place. The police ran away - they were being shot.

#### **CD4 (Saint-Saens; Carnival of the Animals: The Swan)**

There was a funeral. People were crying- they want them back. Tragedy. They were upset and lost the ones they loved.

#### **CD5 ( Rhythm of the Night: Moulin Rouge)**

Celebration of the dead - those who are dead were once in the world of crime and sin and now they can rest. People were excited. After-tears.

After the celebration the village again was quiet.

At the end of the story, someone said that Eersterust is not like this. It is not quiet and restful. We then discussed what Eersterust is really like and the group made the following comments:

- Party
- Shooting
- Crime
- Mafia - bosses
- Drugs/alcohol
- Gangsters
- Glamour boys

## The Story and It's Context

This is a story in the moment - one that will not necessarily be 'told' or remembered. As therapist, my role in the above process was that of facilitator and scribe. The group created the story in its entirety: a story about life in Eersterust as they live and experience it.

The context for this storytelling process, is in Eersterust, a largely mixed-race community East of Pretoria. Whilst there has been a long tradition in South Africa of music and healing in the traditional sense, Eersterust is a suburb much like any other suburb in the city, albeit economically and socially disadvantaged. Much of 'Western' society is reflected in the lifestyle, and musical tastes of its people - largely American rap, hip-hop, kwaito and house.

Storytelling that includes music, performance, and dance is the norm in many societies. Such a comprehensive system accesses the emotional, physical, spiritual, and cognitive aspects of our beings in meaningful ways. In my group process, the storytelling is an opportunity to express the paradoxes of life in a suburban context with the kinds of social problems often associated with economic disadvantages anywhere in the world.

In subsequent groups, I will most likely develop these themes of expression to help the group come to terms with the dilemmas of life in contemporary African society, which is a highly complex mixture of developed and developing, modern and traditional lifestyles, with aspirations towards First World values. In consultation with members of the community, this kind of work provides an opportunity to learn how music therapy can become relevant in a range of contexts. What is always important is remaining engaged with, and sensitive to, the context.

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