

# Auditory Receptions And The Psychosomatic Responses To Musical Melodies: Rethinking The Role Of Humour In Raymond Nyathi's Songs

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Humour has been an integral aspect of human culture, facilitating social interaction and providing entertainment. While humour is commonly associated with stand-up comedy, it also permeates various forms of artistic expression, including songs. This paper aims to explore the intricate mechanisms of humour within the context of songs. By examining the different components of humour and their application in song lyrics, this paper delves into the ways in which humour is utilized to engage audiences and evoke emotional responses. The paper also seeks to unravel the multifaceted nature of humour in songs, shedding light on its cognitive, linguistic, and cultural underpinnings. Three songs analysed in this paper have been selected through purposive sampling from Raymond Nyathi's album to highlight the humour in his musical lyrics. The paper establishes the theoretical foundation for the study by drawing upon existing humour theories. Concepts such as incongruity theory, superiority theory and relief theory are explored, providing a framework for understanding the mechanisms through which humour operates in songs. This article employed the qualitative approach and humour analysis to reflect on three purposely selected songs that represent humour in its varied forms. The article recommends, with heavy reliance on the sampled songs, the ways through which humour in songs can be a powerful and pervasive element that enriches the musical experience, at the same time serving as a source of entertainment, communication, and social commentary by employing various techniques such as wordplay, satire, storytelling, and musical surprises.

**Keywords:** humour, songs, lyrics, linguistic strategies, cultural context, emotional impact

## Introduction

Humour in music is a fascinating and multifaceted phenomenon that has been utilised by musicians throughout history, across various genres and styles. Humour in music serves several purposes. Firstly, it entertains listeners, eliciting laughter and joy through clever lyrics, unexpected musical elements, or comedic performances. Secondly, it can provide a means of communication, allowing artists to connect with their audience on a more relatable and lighthearted level. Additionally, humour in music often acts as a tool for social criticism, enabling musicians to satirize societal norms, challenge conventions, or highlight absurdities. Humour primarily consists of jokes (spoken or written words) and actions which elicit laughter or generate mirth (these actions can be described in words) (Critchley, 2002; Ritchie, 2004). Crawford (1994: 57) defines humour as any communication that generates a 'positive cognitive or affective response from listeners.' Romero and Cruthirds (2006: 59) define humour as 'amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization.'

In the world of music, linguistic strategies of humour are employed in songwriting to create humorous effects. Such incorporated techniques usually include, but not limited to puns, wordplay, clever metaphors, and other linguistic devices that contribute to the humour in song lyrics. Such examples, in the unfolding of this study will unveil in the form of case studies of popular humorous songs across different genres that are presented

to illustrate the practical application of these strategies. This unmask the fact that music is language constructed and radiated out in emotionally colourful intonations. Such is twined within a framework of linguistic and creative harmony that embodies nothing beyond the melodic crafting of linguistic items resulting in the beauty of vocal sounds. Hence, the analysis of linguistic items in musical pieces can be very enriching in extracting the role of lexical items in the composition of songs, as well as in deciphering the different layers of meaning compressed within a musical piece.

It can also be conceded that humour is deeply intertwined with cultural norms, values, and references. From a cultural perspective, the context from which humorous songs emanate examines how these songs (though dense with humour) reflect and comment on societal issues, satirise conventions, and employ irony and sarcasm as a corrective mechanism for the ills pervading society. The aspect of humour is therefore instrumental in investigating the cultural relevance of humour in songs and how it evolves over time, considering the impact of social and historical factors. Such humorous songs cut across generational gaps, rebuking and reconstructing lives from the youth to the elderly, from the servants to the kings, from the learned to the mediocre and the like, offering a socio-cultural therapy to mankind.

Humour in music can also affect listeners by delving extremely into the psychological centres of their emotional interiors. It can explore the cognitive processes involved in perceiving and appreciating humour, highlight the role of surprise, incongruity resolution, and cognitive reappraisal. Health practitioners also consider humour one of the potential ingredients for relieving stress and anxiety in psychologically affected patients. Chapman and Chapman-Santana (1995: 153) have the following to say:

Humor can be a useful treatment technique in the hands of some psychotherapists. It may help the patient to see painful life events and situations from less threatening perspectives, and can take the anxiety and guilt out of many difficult circumstances and incidents.

This is based on the understanding that humour in songs can elicit a wide range of emotional responses, including laughter, surprise, joy, and amusement. Therefore, the importance of humour in music cannot be overemphasised.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Human tradition in view of humour, as it is emitted from various domains across artistic creations, has relegated the aspect to the world of kindergarten as a frivolous and less serious propensity that is unfit for the sober and mature. Such commonly held views, though not normally publicly taught or discussed have for long been countered by the belief that maturity and sobriety (aspects that are commonly held as integral components for a sensible being) are highly reflected by the absence of humorous formations which are regarded as unnecessary. This tradition has, for years, robbed many people of the necessary benefits that the aspect of humour have in store for them, which subsequently bear both social and physical rewards in their life. The study holds a strong view that honour in its various manifestations and sources have a fundamental contribution in the health and social wellbeing of humanity. It stands to defeat, unapologetically, the commonly held misconceptions that consign humorous creations as petty interludes of the tedious trail of life's momentous journey. It reinforces the notion that humour is a critical ingredient that should occupy a reputable quarter in the realm of humanity's heavy and problematic existence, for the provisions of relief and natural health remedies.

### **Aim and objectives of this study**

The aim of this study is to analyse humour in Ramond Nyathi's songs.

#### **The objectives of this study will be as follows:**

1. To shed light on the mechanisms of humour and the impact of the humorous elements on the audience's reception and enjoyment of the music.
2. To explore the different dimensions of humour employed by the artist,
3. To highlighting the linguistic techniques, cultural references, and social commentary that contribute to their humorous impact.

### **1. Literature Review**

Literature on humour unveils the concept as a dynamic phenomenon that can be derived from multifarious sources such as literature, art, dance, theatre, and music. Indeed, there have been many studies on humour, especially children's humour (Bender, 1944; Brodzinsky, 1975; Chapman & Foot, 1977; McGhee, 1979; Tennant, 1990). Humour and laughter are also part of therapy with their roles in therapeutic regard being mutually intertwined. In the psychotherapeutic literature, the place of humour is inconclusive.

Freud (1963) acknowledged the importance of humour and made a distinction between humour and laughter. Since his time, there has been much debate about the topic (Shaughnessy & Wadsworth, 1992). Freud depicted humour as a reflection of repressed aggressive and sexual impulses, and laughter as the release of these impulses. Humour was a defense against suffering, helped people cope with anxiety, and allowed a person to

say something he or she could not say in an open way. Mann (1991) felt that humour had attracted little attention in the psychodynamic and the art therapy probably because psychotherapy is meant to be a serious business with painful exploration of personal issues. Humour in psychotherapy might either imply that we are not being scientific, or perhaps evoke an admission to ourselves and to the world that we enjoy our work.

Richman (1996) explored the use of humour in psychotherapy that "has been vigorously defended and severely criticized" (p. 560). He believed however that, when applied sensitively, humour "enriches therapy, increases the mutual enjoyment of client and counsellor, draws people closer together and ... even saves lives" (p. 560). Richman concluded that humour has a place in psychotherapy but should be used with caution. Kubie (1970) observed that humour was damaging and harmful in psychotherapy, while others have stated that humour can facilitate insights (Poland, 1971), alleviate anxiety and tension, increase motivation, and create an atmosphere of closeness between client and therapist (Haig, 1986; Rosenheim, 1974).

Chapman and Chapman-Santana (1995) explore the essence of humour within health institutions. The study indicates how humour can be used to treat patients suffering from hypertension by making them see light as well as the painful situations surrounding them differently. That is humour can make them see and interpret life circumstances positively, which provides a relaxing environment that lessens their stressed focus. The study also proceeded to consider the relevance of humour when addressing difficulty and stressful situations in working environment where people operate under abnormal working environments. Issues to do with parent-child problems are also considered relevant to be addressed in humorous ways so as to engage an affected parent in some form of relief and allow him/her either to cope or join in the discussions with a smiling face. Smith (1994) also reported that humour was effective in reducing anxiety (Nemeth, 1979) and depression, dispelling anger and aggression, facilitating communication and strengthening relationships (Tennant, 1990), reducing stress and mood disturbances. Humour is a universal phenomenon that is exhibited by most cultures. What constitutes humour, under what conditions it is considered acceptable, what are the responses to an instance of attempted humour, and other related questions can shed light on cultural and social beliefs and practices. These cited texts will shed light on how the aspect of humour is conceptualised and presented in both in texts and other forms of presentation.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Humour in song lyrics is a subjective and diverse aspect of music that can be expressed in various ways. Different theories and approaches have been proposed to explain the use of humour in song lyrics. Here are a few prominent theories:

### **1. The Relief Theory**

This theory proposes that humour in song lyrics serves as a release or relief from tension or anxiety. Lyrics that contain witty wordplay, clever puns, or absurdity can create a momentary diversion from serious or stressful topics, providing an emotional release for the listeners. Cooper (2008) says that the relief theory has its origins in the ideas of Sigmund Freud who believed that the pleasure obtained from a humorous event or utterance originated in the unconscious realms of our mind. The process of humour is a defence mechanism on the part of the ego and the superego to circumvent reality and protect themselves from the emotional consequences of adverse real-life situations. Freud also believed that humour (primarily in the form of jokes) was a means by which people could release their suppressed aggressive urges in a socially acceptable manner (Freud 1960; Cooper 2008). Meyer (2000), along somewhat similar lines, proposes that humour is a vent through which people get relief from the tensions that originate in their desires or fears.

### **2. The Superiority Theory**

According to this theory, humour in song lyrics can be derived from a sense of superiority felt by the listener. The lyrics may involve mocking or satirizing others, social norms, or absurd situations. By feeling superior to the subjects of the humour, listeners may find it amusing. The superiority theory says that humour is a manifestation of a feeling of superiority over others or even over one's own former situation (Berger 1987; Cooper 2008). In other words, a humorous utterance can be a sign of the person "lording" it over another person whom he or she considers inferior (in the case of self-deprecating humour, it can be the case that the person is making the humorous comment to distract others' attention away from a gaffe that he or she has committed).

### **3. The Incongruity Theory**

This theory suggests that humour arises from the unexpected or incongruous elements in lyrics. It relies on the element of surprise, where a song presents ideas, words, or situations that don't typically go together. The unexpected contrast can generate laughter or amusement. According to Cooper (2008), incongruity theory is different from the previous two theories in that, while they try to explain how certain conditions motivate humour in people, it focuses on the object that is the source of the humour (joke, cartoon, etc.). More specifically, this theory posits that for an object to have a humorous effect, it has to harbour some kind of

incongruity within itself. The incongruity can exist between what an individual expects and what actually occurs (Veale, 2004).

### 3. Methodology

This research is conducted through the use of qualitative methods to gain relevant information. According to Myers and Avison (2009:112), qualitative research refers to a generic research approach in social research according to which research takes its departure point as the insider perspective on social action. This method is chosen for various reasons, namely; the respondent's perspective is emphasised, it takes people's interpretation into consideration, it allows for flexibility, it is manageable, it does not emphasise issues such as reliability or fairness on its researches and it focuses on processes rather than outcomes. However, its limitations are that it is very subjective in nature; one cannot generalise on the basis of this method. Humour analysis and its similarities to qualitative research has many identifying features including, but not limited to, the following: Use of qualitative data (word, pictures, and photographs); inductive analysis; holistic perspective; naturalistic investigation; context sensitivity; emphatic neutrality; and design flexibility (Creswell 2006; Bogdan & Biklen 2007). Humour analysis can likewise be used to understand how an individual or a group of individuals view the world, albeit through a humourous lens.

### 4. Analysis of humour in Raymond Nyathi's songs

Songs with humour have been an integral part of music across various genres, offering a lighthearted and entertaining experience for listeners. This analysis examines the use of humour in songs, focusing on the techniques employed by the selected artist, the effects on listeners, and the underlying messages conveyed through comedic elements. It explores examples from different musical genres to illustrate the diverse ways in which humour can be incorporated into songwriting.

#### 1. *Ku diza*

This song is all about men who always take their money and give to every woman they meet, only to find out that those women do not love them but their money. They end up broke. The following song supports this assertion:

*Mi dizadiza vavasati , mi endla onge mi na mali,  
va ta mi hluva vavasati, mi ta sala mi lo paa!  
Mi ta sala mi vhithi,  
mi ta salo mi lo chochovolo!  
Mi ta sala milo gaba milomo, tinhongana  
ti nghena. Tinhongana ti tata milomo, ti lava doom.  
Tinhongana tinghenetela non'weni ku laveka fast kill mbvoo!*

(You give women money as if you have more money,  
They will take advantage of you and leave you broke and stranded).

The humour in this song is too much because one can laugh his or her lungs out by just listening to how the artist put his lyrics together. One can forget his or her problems and release stress. The artist used humour to give warning to men who squander their money on women, to be careful as they will end up being broke and stranded.

The artist used humour metaphorically to show the expression of respect to men who squander their money on women. The following lyrics in the song support this assertion:

*That why loko sesi o ze a ku bela callback  
ka selula ya wena.  
Swi vula ku wena u wela ka Department of Airtime.  
You're a minister of Finance, u nkulu wa munhu,  
U nga titekeli ehansi*

(That's why when a lady sends you a callback on your cellphone.

It means that you're in the Department of Airtime  
You're a Minister of Finance. You are a well-known person,  
don't look down on yourself).

The humour in the above lyrics can help one to cope with problems in those unexpected times and help him or her to get through it. It can make anyone feel better from a difficult situation and that is a great benefit. With that said, laughing can decrease stress.

## 2. *Ganga mina*

This song is about a man who wants women to date him and promise to take of them. But he is too stingy. The following lyrics in the song support this assertion:

*Ganga mina ni ta ku tendera dali, ni ta ku tendera  
Wa ni vona a ni tirhi kahle, ni ti bela katara, ganga mina  
ni ta ku tendera.  
Swa timali ni ta ku tsonanyana, ni ta ku diza hi maswidi.  
Swa mnandinandi ni nge xavi kahle, ni ta ku xavela  
Mugayo. Swa maethayimi ni nge xavi khale ni ta ku  
xavela selula, ganga mina ni ta ku hlayisa dali.*

(Date me I will take care of you my darling,  
As you can see that I am not working, I'm just a guitarist,  
date me I will take care of you  
I will be stingy when it comes to giving you money,  
I will give you sweets  
I will not buy you sweet things, I will buy you maize meal  
I will not buy you airtime, I will buy you cell phone,  
Date me I will take good care of you).

The artist used the humour to let the woman who will date him how he will treat her, and how things will be. If one can listen carefully to the words used in the lyrics, he or she can fall on the ground from laughter because no woman in her right senses will date a stingy man. By listening to this song one can laugh even if he/she is faced with anxiety, stress and heartbreak and feels much better.

## 3. *Timeselane*

The song is about a man who is complaining because his boss, in building construction, did not pay him. The artist is making hilarious jokes on the issue, even though he is in a painful situation of not getting his money after a job done. The following lyrics in the song support this assertion:

*Hambi mo ni rhoba mali ya mina n'wina timeselane  
A mi aki makaya ya n'wina. Ku na van'wana va tlela ka  
swiyindlwana swin'wana ongeswo cina makhwaya  
ma Mozambique. Loko meselane yo aka, yindlu a  
yi plastelangi. Loko yo plastela, a yi pendangi.  
Loko yo penda, a ku na nchumu endlwini i holo*

(Even though you can rob me my money, you builders  
You don't build houses for your families.  
There are some builders who sleep at the small  
houses that look like its dancing the Mozambican dance  
If the builder has built a house, he did not plaster it  
If he did plaster it, he did not paint it  
If he did paint it, the house is empty, there's no furniture).

The artist made fun of how the house of the builders looks like. If one can listen to the lyrics while sitting with other people or in a taxi, he or she can even forget himself or herself because of how the artist used his words in the lyrics. He is the best when it comes to entertaining people and helping people to forget about daily problems, by laughing all out.

## 4. *Masokisi*

The song is about a handsome man who is full of himself but wears tone socks. The artist is making hilarious jokes on the issue. The following lyrics in the song support this assertion:

Mi nga n'wi voni ku xonga mbava loyi.  
A masokisi, hansi ka nenge, ma davukile.  
Mi nga n'wi voni ku gwirha mbava loyi.  
A masokisi, hansi ka nenge ma davukile.  
Kondlo ri dyile, a sokisi, hansi ka nenge.  
Ku dakwa na makondlo ndlwini.  
Ende a nga tsemetangi nwala buti loyi!

(Don't be deceived by his looks, his socks are tone.



Don't be deceived by how he is so full of himself.  
His socks are tone under the foot, they were eaten  
by rats, because of the smell, and the rats are drunk  
because of the smell. And he did not cut his nails).

The artist made fun of how dirty the man is. He used hyperbole to describe how the socks are smelling. The man in the song is said to be handsome but dirty. This humorous description of the man creates contrast, at the same time providing some form of comic relief to the listeners. That is, people's emotionally embedded stresses can be purged out as they listen to the lyrics through the songster's use of humour.

### 5. January

In ordinary usage, January is the first month of the year. The month is a commonly loathed one, serving as an icon of bankruptcy. The following song unveils how different classes of people including government official get broke in January. The exempt unveils the universality of the bankruptcy thus:

Hi January ku chayeka na magayisa mamani.  
Ku chayeka na mathicara mamani.  
Ku chayeka na maphorisa mamani.  
Ku chayeka na masocha mamani.  
Ku chayeka na maqweta mamani.  
Ku chayeka na magosha Phalaborwa.  
Ku chayeka na tinqambhi mamani.

(In January, even teachers are broke.  
In January, even Police officers are broke.  
In January, even Soldiers are broke.  
In January, even Lawyers are broke.  
In January, even prostitutes in Phalaborwa are broke.  
In January, even Artists are broke).

The artist made hilarious jokes about how working people can be broke in January. He made it funny in such a way that when you are one of the mentioned professionals, you will not have any stress about being broke but to laugh along with the song lyrics.

### 6. Findings

Humourous songs aim to entertain and evoke laughter in listeners, providing moments of joy, amusement, and lightness. The comedic elements serve as a source of enjoyment and can create an emotional connection between the artist and the humour in songs. This offers an escape from the seriousness of everyday life by providing a temporary respite and a means to unwind. The light-heartedness and comedic relief can offer emotional release and act as a form of stress relief. Humourous songs often capture listeners' attention and leave a lasting impression. The clever lyrics, unexpected twists, and comedic performances can enhance engagement and make the songs more memorable. Humourous songs can convey deeper messages beyond the comedy. They can challenge societal norms, provoke thought, and offer social commentary through satire and irony. By presenting serious subjects in a humourous light, artists can encourage listeners to reflect on and question established ideas and behaviors.

### 7. Conclusion

The paper concludes by summarising the key findings regarding humour in Ramond Nyathi's selected songs and their implications. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the mechanisms of humour in order to appreciate and analyse the comedic aspects of songs across different genres. Furthermore, it suggests avenues for future research in this area, acknowledging the dynamic nature of humour and the evolving trends in music and society.

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