

# Rolling Stone SA: Another year another dollar?

 By Johann M. Smith

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Last year, Bizcommunity interviewed editor-in-chief Miles Keylock on the exciting [launch of Rolling Stone SA](#). Some questions remained unanswered and others have only come to the fore very recently. The debate regarding the ongoing success of RS SA remains a nail-biting affair - the opinions are as clouded as the future of print media remains a hotly contested debate.

Naturally, a follow-up anniversary interview was on our hit list.



**Q. According to you, people think you were (and still are) crazy for launching RS SA. The future is exciting and uncertain, no doubt. So just tell us this: How do you feel after the first year of Rolling Stone SA, especially as the first editor? (And hopefully not it's last ... )**

**A.** *I feel amped. We have 16 issues under our belts and we are still rolling. We've started to open that glitch in the contemporary SA culture matrix and document and share our stories alongside those of global artists. The content speaks for itself. We've had Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, Die Antwoord, Spoek Mathambo, BLK JKS, Arno Carstens, HHP, Trevor Noah and Cama Gwini on our covers. We've also run in-depth features on Felix Laband,*

*Karen Zoid, Piet Botha, Isaac Mutant, Fruits 'n Veggies, The Great Apes, Zebra & Giraffe, Rian Malan and more. Hell, we convinced Malan to write on music again. We helped Bongani Madondo get his groove back. It's been a pleasure and honour to work with such fantastic writers and read them expressing themselves. We've also reached out to Africa with stories on Oliver Mtukudzi, Nigerian Afrobeat, Zambian hip hop, Malian desert blues and young Congolese musicians. So yeah, we're representing.*

**Q. Any personal comments from Mr Jann Wenner (RS founder) onto you or anyone else at RS SA?**

**A.** *"We love what you're doing. Keep on doing it."*

**Q. Last time you excitedly recalled going to the biannual RS international personnel conference. You were particularly impressed that everyone was happy. Can you express any similar sentiments now?**

**A.** *Hell yes. We're a happy family. Everyone who works for RS is doing it because they're allowed to express themselves creatively - it's really not about cash.*

**Q. If not cash, what is the most rewarding bit? Perhaps in the form of an anecdote you can share defining everything RS SA has grown into and how it could potentially age?**

**A.** *Yeah, when we were going through a bit of a "personality crisis" back around June last year, we reached out and asked America for help. "If it isn't about the music, it isn't about anything" was the message. We realised that the SA music scene is still in its infancy - you could probably compare us to the US RS in the 1970s.*

**Q. Please explain your attempt with augmented reality first used with the interactive cover of Arno Carstens.**

**A.** *It's a way of connecting print and the digital world. Every RS cover that is augmented allows the viewer to access video content of the cover artist. Once you've downloaded the "Layar App", all you need to do is point your smartphone at the cover and watch.*

**Q. I wonder what Lennon would make of that possibility, being rock 'n' roll's definitive dreamer... What were the total readership views you got in the end? Enough to guarantee a steady flow of interactive augment reality covers in the ongoing future?**



*A. Good enough. "Behind the scenes" with Trevor Noah was our best so far. We're planning on upscaling the augmented reality content of the RS covers during 2013.*

**Q. RS family has always prided itself on documenting the evolution of pop culture, and especially through the medium of print. Regardless of the method, the current SA story is told mostly through Twitter feeds, disposable WhatsApp texts, Soundcloud seconds and random procrastinate-seducing treasures on YouTube. Please explain why have you thus far:**

**\* a) Not integrated print and online more in a manner that would benefit the story? Especially considering it's the most important facet of RS?**

*A. We follow Jann S Wenner's advice: "Print you dive into, the Internet you surf." In-depth, long-form features are best read in print. We are in the process of curating our own archive of South African stories which subscribers will be able to access online. Plus, we are integrating more of the Rock & Roll content (news section in RS) - Q&As for instance - from print onto the website.*

**\* b) Reported on any statistics even remotely related to consumer technology with special regards to everything that you stand for - especially the business end of SA pop culture?**

*A. We have two feature stories planned on precisely this.*



**Q. You mentioned in an earlier discussion that RS SA will feature much more local content in 2013, and, therefore, syndicate less content from the international RS editorial pool. Explain in vivid detail why we should be excited and what this means - please be specific.**

*A. We have so many South African stories to tell! We've only just begun to share them. We get letters and emails every month asking for in-depth interviews with our rock, hip hop, kwaito, house and jazz heroes. So, let's just say we've got a killer line-up this year. As far as syndicating less content from Rolling Stone America goes, well - we always need to select global stories that strike a chord with South African readers. Obviously we'll syndicate the big US stories - especially the music icons. Over the past year America is extending its pop*

*cultural focus into television, film and comedy - these stories often have a regional resonance. In a nutshell, we need to represent.*

**Q. How much of SA content has been syndicated elsewhere? What have the results been? And how much relevance do we have outside?**

*A. Some. Australia and Russia were very interested in Die Antwoord. Interestingly, Japan regularly asks us for kwaito and, more recently, hip hop stories.*

**Q. You claim to have rewritten the rules on reporting about SA music. Were there any rules to begin with - what were they, and what are they now?**

*A. Rules? Perhaps not. Let's just say that we're challenging those unwritten rules that suggest editorial coverage of SA musicians has to be watered down into tabloid-driven sound bites about why an artist of album is "hot or not". It's back to the future for us: the way forward is to resurrect passionate, ecstatic writing about music and everything that it embraces. This is real rock 'n' roll! It's an attitude.*



**Q. You have often sentimentally quoted Lester Bangs words describing rock 'n' roll as an attitude, as a force of life, as a shriek mellifluous burst of unarguable affirmation. But what started with the blues concluded with a Twitter update from 10 minutes ago (most likely by Slash). Attitude or none, we went from tolerating slavery with slide guitars, to sticking it to the man, to teenage rebellion and drugs. Somewhere it all went wrong, perhaps mostly because for the most part we're always only "okay". Nothing grinds. The cycle seems to have run its course and we're at the bottom. Can we start looking up?**

*A. Sentimental? Hell yes! The reason Lester's words have become a mantra is because he*

*speaks to what is needed right here, right now. In order to answer the question: "How do we live in this strange place?" We need to re-hear everything as affirmation. We need to create shit, do shit. And write about it - so, sure we have to "start looking up". Cosmic jazz visionary Sun Ra called it best: "We have tried the possible, now it's time to imagine the impossible."*

**Q. If any, what's the adage of this generation?**

**A.** *"We can't be contained."*

**A comic version might read: @World Lester Bangs can be rest assured: his quotes will never be a Twitter feed - none of them fit.**

#### Ten quick-fire questions

1. **On behalf of future generations: why document music when you can make it?**  
*Shit, to paraphrase Zappa and Costello, there's a certain "jouissance" in dancing around architecture, isn't there?*

2. **Will there ever come a time that you won't be able to fit in and endure the "kids" and their music? And, just out of interest (and with great respect), when was the last time you interviewed or attended a live event with someone who's your age?**

*Are you kidding? I am a kid. "Their" music is my music. Last live events with people my age: Kesivan and the Lights at The Mahogany Room; Arno Carstens at Mercury Live.*

3. **What are your official AMPS stats? And why are they not mentioned in your rate card?**

*We are not a member of AMPS yet.*

4. **Can we expect any insights offered by you at this year's Music Exchange?**

*Yes. I'm gonna preach the rock 'n' roll gospel: print is not dead!*

5. **For the Fokof fans: Who will be writing the token RS in-depth feature regarding their decade-long existence? And what can we look forward to?**

*Well, for the record, it's not going to be a "token" feature. It's going to be a no-holds-barred pop cultural critique of what they once meant written by a talented young writer for whom they really mattered.*

6. **Who or what is the next big thing in SA?**

*RS recommends: Nakhane Toure is a gifted young singer-songwriter (he's better than Thom Yorke at the same age). Beast have the DNA to blow up internationally - if they want it enough. The Brother Moves On have started to write real songs. But shit, Cama Gwini is rocking hard! DJ Clock is producing an indie rock band (confidential for now) - so who knows? How does kwaai-indie-pop grab you?*

7. **Hey, it's been kwaai for a while. But then again, it can always go kwaaier. Yeah, it grabs. What do you want the world at large to know and understand most of all?**

*Don't give up, possibility is everywhere.*

## 8. What's the next step we need to take?

*Let's stop fighting turf wars. Let's all work together.*

## 9. What is, or are, the key role(s) that RS SA will be playing in 2013?

*Continue to provide a space for conversations that do not get published anywhere else.*

## 10. Any last words?

*Read and riot!*

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## ABOUT JOHANN M. SMITH

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