

ROHO

THE AGE OF MASKS

Opening sequence score. One boy, one inherited spirit, one breath between fear and speed. African Orchestral Rock, built so every layer can stand on its own as a character stem.

THE FILM IN ONE LINE

FEAR → LINEAGE → RELEASE → SPEED

Leo is trapped under the fallen statue of his late aunt, the last Cheetah Roho. Without his mask, he reaches some of her power anyway. The score follows him from held breath to full sprint through a futuristic Cape Town, finishing in flashes of gold.

The audience is young teens and young adults, and the first stop is festivals and cinema. So we write it as a film score, not a cartoon theme. Big, but never cute. **Emotion comes before spectacle.** If the release moment doesn't land quietly first, no amount of drums will save it.

SOUND IDENTITY

FOUR PILLARS

CHOIR AS THE ROHO

The voices are the aunt and every Cheetah before her. They don't sing a song. They speak to Leo in short chants and fragments, in Zulu, isiXhosa, Swahili and English.

GUITAR AS LEO

Leo is one exposed, picked line. Fingerstyle, maskandi-leaning, nearly alone at first. The same line becomes the heroic riff later.

ORCHESTRA AS THE WORLD

Strings and low brass carry weight, scale and the city. They arrive late and earn their entrance.

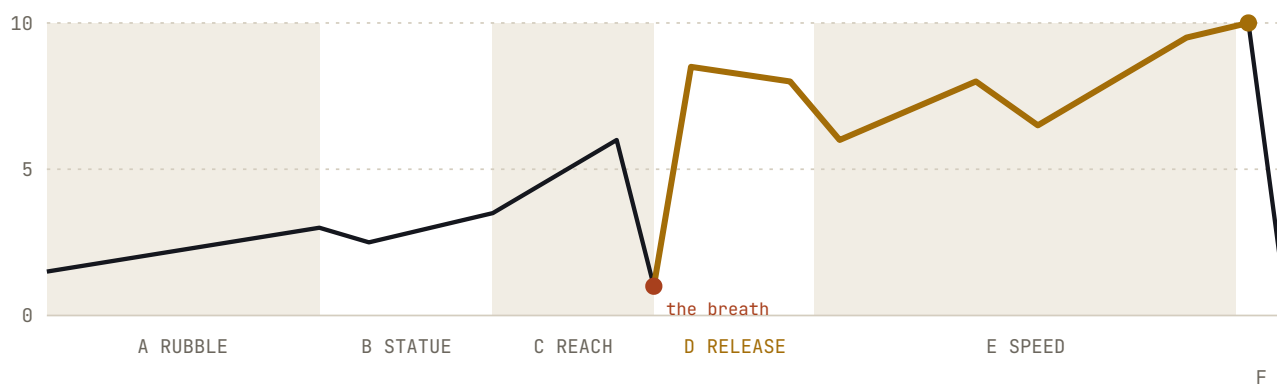
MODERN SA LOW END

For a futuristic Cape Town, the bass is a log-drum style bass with gqom-weight kicks under rock drums. That is the "now" sound, and it's ours.

ENERGY MAP • 0-10 ACROSS THE SEQUENCE

THE SHAPE

Times are proportional until we have the locked picture. The deepest drop sits right before the biggest release.



SIX SECTIONS

A

RUBBLE — TRAPPED

ENERGY 1→3 FREE TIME, FELT ~72 BPM E MINOR

FEELING	Dust settling. Heartbeat. Breath. Small and close to Leo.
MUSIC	No drums. A low drone (bowed or synth) and room tone. Leo's motif appears once on solo guitar, unfinished. It stops before its last note.
PERCUSSION	Heartbeat on a frame drum or hand on a drum body. Debris textures: gravel, metal, a shaker played like breathing.
PRODUCTION	Mostly sound design. Leave space for dialogue and SFX. Low-pass world, close-mic'd guitar.

B

THE STATUE — HER PRESENCE

ENERGY 3 ~72 BPM E MINOR

FEELING	Grief and lineage. He's under her, literally.
MUSIC	First choir entry: the Roho motif, hummed or on one sustained word, very soft and wide. Strings hold long notes under it.
LYRIC IDEA	"Don't be afraid" passed between voices in three languages (see chant bank). Her voice, then the ancestors'.
PERCUSSION	Heartbeat continues, slightly slower. Nothing new.

C

THE REACH — POWER WITHOUT THE MASK

ENERGY 3→6, THEN 1 PULSE APPEARS: 72 → FEELS FASTER

FEELING	Something answers him. Disbelief turning into will.
MUSIC	Leo's motif and the Roho motif overlap for the first time (counterpoint). Pulse arrives in 12/8 under it. Strings rise, choir starts a rhythmic whisper.
THE BREATH	Just before D: cut almost everything. One beat to a full bar of near-silence. One voice or one guitar note. This silence is the most important bar in the piece.
PERCUSSION	Rolls and swells, ending in the cut. Group foot stamps or a single low impact can be the "door opening".

D

RELEASE — THE GOLD

ENERGY 8-9 144 BPM (DOUBLE THE OPENING PULSE) E MAJOR

FEELING	Joy and power. The same boy, in a new light.
MUSIC	Leo's motif completed for the first time, now in E major (same root, new mode). Choir sings it with him in full voice. Then the band lands.
ORDER OF ENTRY	Melody + choir first (1-2 bars), then drums, bass and orchestra. Emotion first, spectacle after.
PERCUSSION	Full kit backbeat in 4/4 with a 12/8 timeline pattern (bell or struck metal) running across it.

E

SPEED — INTO BATTLE

ENERGY 6-9.5 WITH DIPS 144 BPM E DORIAN / E MINOR RIFFING

FEELING	Running, dodging, striking. Exhilarating, a little dangerous.
MUSIC	Leo's motif becomes a fast riff (diminished: same notes, shorter values). Choir chants short rhythmic words on the hits. Strings play driving ostinato.
DYNAMICS	Every 8 bars, change one thing. Drop the drums for a dodge, stop on a strike, bring back the choir for a leap. The dips keep the action from becoming a wall.
HITS	Mark every golden flash as a hit point. Each hit gets a stop, a stab or a choir shout, not just "louder".

F

THE STRIKE — TITLE

ENERGY 10 → 0 HARD CUT

FEELING	One blow. Then the title card.
MUSIC	The full theme in augmentation (long notes) over the fast groove, everyone at once for a few bars only. End on a single unison hit and the choir's last word, then silence or a dust tail.

TWO MOTIFS, ONE TRANSFORMATION

MOTIF 1 • LEO

LEO'S QUESTION

Four or five notes, about two seconds, singable on first hearing. It reaches up and hesitates. Written on guitar.

A • small • solo guitar • minor • unfinished

C • overlaps Roho motif • counterpoint

D • complete • E major • full voice

E • diminished → the action riff

F • augmented → long heroic notes

Same notes every time. Only rhythm, mode, register and orchestration change. The audience should feel they've heard it grow.

MOTIF 2 • THE ROHO / HIS AUNT

THE LINEAGE LINE

Slower, lower, falling or circling. Built for voices. Owned by the choir, never by Leo's guitar until the very end.

B • hummed, distant, one word

C • answers Leo's motif (call & response)

D • sings Leo's motif with him (they merge)

E • fragments become rhythmic chants

F • last word over the final hit

Call and response between these two motifs is the story: she calls, he finally answers.

WORDS FOR THE VOICES

Short words and phrases, used as motifs, not verses. Each word has a job in the story. All of these need a check with a first-language speaker for meaning, pronunciation and stress before we record.

WORD / PHRASE	LANGUAGE	MEANING	WHERE IT GOES
Roho	Swahili	Spirit, soul	The title word. Two syllables, a natural shout on F and on hits.
Ungesabi	isiZulu	Don't be afraid	B • the aunt's voice, soft

WORD / PHRASE	LANGUAGE	MEANING	WHERE IT GOES
Musa ukoyika	isiXhosa	Don't be afraid	B · the ancestors answering
Usiogope	Swahili	Don't be afraid	B/C · the Roho itself. Same message, three languages = lineage
Vuka	isiZulu / isiXhosa	Wake up	C · rhythmic whisper building to the breath
Phakama	isiZulu / isiXhosa	Rise	D · the release word
Gijima · Kimbia	isiZulu · Swahili	Run	E · both three syllables, fit triplets across the 4/4
Rise	English	—	D/F · English sparingly, at the biggest moment only

Open question for the team: the film is set in Cape Town, where isiXhosa is the main African language. The brief names Zulu and Swahili. Swahili makes sense because "Roho" is a Swahili word. We suggest adding isiXhosa so the city itself is in the choir. Confirm with the director.

WHO DOES WHAT

ROLES IN THE ROOM

LEAD · COMPOSITION & ARRANGEMENT

- Writes both motifs and their transformations
- Writes choir lines and chant rhythms
- Owns the cue map and hit points
- Decides entries, drops and what gets cut

PERCUSSION

- A–B: heartbeat, breath, debris. No groove.
- C: swells and rolls into the cut
- D–E: 12/8 timeline pattern across rock backbeat
- Group stamps as low impacts, not decoration
- Plays the hits, not just the groove

INSTRUMENTALIST

- Voices Leo's motif or the countermelody
- A–C: exposed, intimate, drone and harmonics
- D–E: ostinatos and riffs that lock with the drums
- Records clean takes that work as solo stems

PRODUCER

- Session tempo map: free 72, then 144
- Orchestral palette, rock kit, log-drum bass
- Sound design: dust, debris, risers, the breath
- Mix space: choir and melody on top, always
- Stem routing and bounces (below)

PITCH USE

STEMS AS CHARACTERS

Each stem must hold up alone for at least 8 bars, so it can play under a character card in the pitch. Bounce from bar 1 at full length.

STEM	CONTENTS	CAN INTRODUCE
Leo	Guitar motif, all forms	Leo
Roho	Choir	The aunt, the Cheetah Roho, the mythology
City	Orchestra (strings, brass)	Futuristic Cape Town, world-building
Pulse	Percussion + kit	Action, other Roho holders
Ground	Bass / log drum	Antagonists (pitched down, slowed)
Dust	Sound design, FX	Trailer transitions

GUARDRAILS

WHAT WE AVOID

No savanna

No wildlife ambience, no "sunrise over the plains" opening shout. This is a city in the future.

No decorative drumming

No hand-drum loop running under everything. Percussion carries structure and hits.

No slogan chants

Avoid "Amandla" and "Ubuntu". They carry heavy political and commercial history and read as stock.

No wall of sound

Maximum three things fighting for attention at once. If a new layer comes in, something leaves.

No vague "ethnic" textures

No generic world flute or sample-pack chants. If it's African, we know where it comes from and why it's there.

No borrowed hooks

References guide feel and pacing. No melodies, chant phrases or riffs lifted from them.

REFERENCES

WHAT WE TAKE FROM THEM

REFERENCE 1

youtube.com/watch?v=XH6IT_tsSUI

Take: *to fill in at camp* (pacing of the build, choir placement, drum entry)

REFERENCE 2

youtube.com/watch?v=s7DyXVTEhOc

Take: *to fill in at camp* (energy of the action section, low end, hits)

Language for the room: talk in section letters (A–F), energy numbers (0–10), bar numbers and named hit points. "Make D an 8 until bar 9, then 9" beats "make it bigger".

SETTLE IN THE FIRST 15 MINUTES

OPEN QUESTIONS

- Picture length and is the cut locked?
- Frame rate and where hit points fall (timecode)
- Which instruments can our instrumentalist play?
- Choir: real singers, our own voices layered, or library?

- Who has final say on language use and pronunciation?
- Dialogue and SFX over the score, or music-only cut?
- DAW, sample rate, stem naming
- Deadline and what "done" means for today

THE METHOD

A song starts from a feeling and finds a form. A score starts from the picture and finds the feeling inside each moment. The picture gives you the form for free. Your job is the material (motifs) and the decisions (what plays when).

PREP

01

15 min

WRITE LEO'S MOTIF ON GUITAR

- E minor, open strings. 4–5 notes, under two seconds.
 - Test: can you hum it after one listen? Does it stop on a question?
 - Record 3 versions on your phone. Pick one.
-

02

10 min

TRANSFORM IT FOUR WAYS

- Play it in E major. Does it sound like release? If not, move one note.
 - Play it twice as fast as a riff. Then slow and long.
 - If it survives all four, it's the right motif.
-

03

10 min

SKETCH THE ROHO LINE

- Hum something lower and slower that answers Leo's motif.
 - Sing "Ungesabi" or "Roho" on it. Find where the word's stress falls.
-

04

15 min

LISTEN TO BOTH REFERENCES WITH A PEN

- Note timestamps for: first percussion entry, biggest silence, choir entries, the drop.
 - Fill in the References panel in the team brief.
-

05

10 min

PICK YOUR THREE NON-NEGOTIABLES

- Example: the breath before D, melody before drums at D, choir owns the Roho motif.
 - Everything else is negotiable in the room.
-
-

AT CAMP • IN ORDER

BUILDING THE CUE

01

SPOT THE PICTURE

Watch it three times. Write timecodes for every moment the music must react to: statue reveal, first power, the dash, each strike, title. These are your hit points.

02

LOCK THE TEMPO MAP

With the producer, set free time for A–C and 144 bpm from D. Nudge tempo so the big hits land on downbeats. Adjust tempo, not picture.

03

WRITE THE SKELETON, ONE LINE PER SECTION

For each section: melody, bass note, pulse. Nothing else. Play it top to bottom against picture before adding anything.

04

WRITE THE TRANSITIONS FIRST

The breath (C→D) and the final hit (F) decide whether the piece works. Get them right before filling the middle of E.

05

ADD COUNTERPOINT

In C and D, set Leo's motif against the Roho line. Rule of thumb: when one moves, the other holds. Contrary motion at the climax.

06

ARRANGE BY ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION

Every 4–8 bars, add one element or take one away. Never add two at once. In E, plan the dips as carefully as the peaks.

07

RUN THE MUTE TEST

Solo each stem. Does it make sense alone? Mute each stem. Do you miss it? If you don't miss it, cut it.

08

FINAL CHECK AGAINST THE BRIEF

- ☐ Fear is audible in A without being loud
- ☐ The release lands emotionally before the drums
- ☐ Leo's motif is recognisable in every section
- ☐ African elements carry structure, not decoration
- ☐ Never more than three things competing
- ☐ Each stem works alone for 8 bars

TALKING TO THE TEAM

GIVE DIRECTION LIKE THIS

INSTEAD OF

"Make it more epic here."

"Something more African."

"Can the drums be crazier?"

SAY

"Bar 33 to 40: energy 8. Add low brass on the motif, drop the shaker."

"Run a 12/8 bell pattern against the backbeat from D."

"Hit 4 is a stop. Kick and choir shout on the downbeat, then one bar of nothing."

When you hear something you didn't write and it's better, keep it. Your job is the vision, not every note.

Draft v1 · chant bank needs first-language review · timings proportional until picture is locked