

Costa Titch: The rising White South African rap star who embraced Black hip-hop culture

By [Sanya Osha](#)

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Rising 28-year-old South African dancer and rapper Costa Titch (born Costa Tsobanoglou) [died](#) after collapsing on stage on 11 March while performing in Johannesburg.



Source: www.facebook.com

Costa Titch entered the entertainment world as a dancer with Cassper Nyovest, another South African hip-hop mega star, before trying his luck as a rapper, often dabbling in the country's [amapiano](#) dance music genre. He had a huge hit with his track Big Flexa and was destined to shine bright on the country's music scene.

Being white, Nelspruit-born Costa Titch brought new colour and a distinctive flavour to the music scene with his use of African languages, earnest experiments in cultural subversion and elaborate urban dance routines that challenged the "white men can't dance" myth.



Rapper Costa Titch collapses on stage, dies

13 Mar 2023



There are other reasons why Costa Titch's role in the country's music scene can be viewed as either polarising or unifying – depending on one's point of view.

As a White man embracing African hip-hop culture, Costa Titch was a symbol of South Africa's [rainbow nation](#) aspirations – a term coined by the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe different ethnic groups living and working together and moving on from apartheid's brutal past.

Senegalese-American mega-star Akon [believed](#) that Costa Titch was destined for bigger things and could be a game-changing artist. The young singer had recently [signed](#) with Akon's label, Konvict Kulture. His death is another blow to a scene reeling after several high-profile deaths. The most recent was AKA (Kiernan Forbes), the hip-hop star with whom he collaborated several times.

Hip-hop deaths

High profile deaths within the hip-hop community over the past few years have included HHP, Prokid, Flabba, Riky Rick, DJ Dimplez, DJ Citi Lyts, and most recently AKA. Some, like HHP and Riky Rick, [took their own lives](#). Others were murdered – and, though these kinds of homicides haven't reached the gory levels of the US rap scene, they are becoming a disturbing trend.



South African rapper AKA has died

11 Feb 2023



The South African hip-hop scene achieved mainstream acceptance only a few years ago. It's still relatively small compared with the country's other dominant music genres like gospel, house or Maskandi. As such, the loss of several respected artists is bound to have significant reverberations.

That's because their successes [gave hope](#) to young South Africans mired in poverty, violence and uncertainty. The country's townships (low-cost housing projects) created by apartheid spatial planning and informal settlements are [plagued by](#) drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and crime. The rise of figures like HHP and Riky Rick suggested that hip-hop could be a way out for young people.

Rainbow rap

Costa Titch personified an altogether different kind of hope. Unlike many historically ill-equipped youth of his generation, he embodied the kind of promise Nelson Mandela would have liked South African youth to embrace. Here was a White rapper who was fluent in African languages, dressed like an urban hood dweller, danced like the son of a Pantsula (a township street dance characterised by incredible physical flexibility) expert and shot most of his videos drawing heavily on ghetto scenes.

Music preferences, as with most other things in South Africa, have been defined by race. White audiences typically prefer

different kinds of rock and folk music. And black audiences patronise everything from house and Maskandi to rap and soul. But there are artists who defy this rigid rule – as we have seen in countries, such as the US.



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In this way he falls within the bracket of white South Africans who enthusiastically embrace local cultural norms in forging their artistic identities. Others include the late Johnny Clegg, PJ “Thandeka” Powers, Claire Johnston the lead vocalist of the band Mango Groove, and David “Qadasi” Jenkins, a Maskandi musician.

In traversing these apparently rigid racial and cultural divides, these artists are able to hold aloft the flame and promise of a “rainbow nation” and its accompanying multiculturalism. This creed brings much optimism in times of national despair and despondency. This is evident in Costa Titch’s adoption of the urban township lifestyle and the ebullience that radiates from his ghetto-themed videos.

Costa Titch had all the opportunities to remain sequestered within the comforts provided by white power and privilege. Instead he chose to embrace South Africa’s diversity in unambiguous racial, socio-economic and cultural terms. He seemed at home in multiple settings and didn’t appear apologetic about this oddity. Now his promising future will never be realised.

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