

Jazz in the Native Yards

Carol Martin, 'Going 'Native' in Cape Town Brings Music back to the 'Hoods', a chapter in ***Writing my City: Ordinary Capetonians on their Extraordinary Home***. Open Book Festival/Writing my City; 2019. pps 115-118.

The smell of corn cobs and boerewors on the braai which oozes charcoal white smoke, meets the nose which points to sniff out other table stalls of second-hand books, and textile and ceramic craft items splashed with colourful designs. People are buzzing about the Kofiffee mobile kiosk as 'Thaps' churns out cappuccinos or hot chocolates. There's a slight warmth in this winter air as one saunters through the yard to enter the auditorium of Guga S'Thebe Community Center in the heart of Langa, Cape Town's oldest township off the National Highway, N2. The yard with mosaic wall art bustles with musicians and patrons rubbing shoulders as both place their drink or food orders at the auditorium's 'snack' window...or buy an affordable late lunch of curried beef and veggies with fluffy rice from the 'food pot' table.

It's 4 o'clock on a sunny Sunday afternoon. Once inside the auditorium, the high roof with a few art works on the walls frames the seating area for some 120 plus people. The 'Wine Shaq' table offers a variety of independently distributed wines from the Cape Winelands – always 'local is lekker' in attitude and taste. One carefully nurtured wineglass will last through the first set as patrons take their seats. The band numbers five well-seasoned musicians. A hush falls as the gig begins...and the experience continues...

This is Jazz in the Native Yards, bringing the music back to the 'hood'. The Natives are at home! The patrons are also multi-cultural, coming from various demographics of the wider municipality. The home legends are being heard...and remembered.

The 2019 South African Music Awards (SAMA) voted '**Neo-Native**' by pianist Bokani Dyer as the best jazz album. Dyer has been exploring what it means to be 'native', he coming from a mixed family of Botswana African and Zimbabwe European cultures but brought up and groomed in South Africa. Cape Town pianist and multi-instrumentalist, Hilton Schilder, brought out his '**Alter Native**' album in 2017 as a statement about his musical and cultural roots combined with modern jazz influences. Another SAMA nominated pianist, Sibusiso Mashiloane, states in his newest album, '**Closer to Home**', how ancestral and contemporary African musical traditions can wed nicely with contemporary improvisational styles in sound. The Native is back! These artists are examples of bringing their music back into those neighbourhoods from which they have learned much of their craft.

Jazz in the Native Yards, while proudly endorsing the otherwise unfortunate apartheid address for township communities resident in 'NY' numbered streets, is enthusiastically spreading its philosophy of taking those 'hood musical styles to other 'hoods. After all, Cape jazz and South African jazz emanated and developed their unique sounds from many back yards during apartheid restrictions on township residents' movements. In turn, this provided relief – comic and musical – for both artists and patrons in weathering the debilitating effects of racial, economic, and political separation from the country's wealth and opportunities.

Jazz in the Native Yards traces its ancestral footprints to the 1960s when impromptu live jazz sessions took place every weekend in Cape Town's townships and elsewhere. Back then, jazz enthusiasts listened to Josh Sithole who made the penny whistle famous, even on street corners of major cities. The Nofemele brothers played The Manhattan Brothers covers with

unsurpassed flair. The Ngcukana brothers from Gugulethu performed with their father Mra and the legendary Abdullah Ibrahim, and became a regular feature in the community yards.

Then, a change in access evolved: Post-apartheid Jazz clubs moved more to town centers, requiring enthusiasts to leave their home areas, and find often expensive means of transport to evening events which also charged fees higher than what true jazz fans from marginalised communities could afford. This restrictive gap in access to the quality legendary music has now been revealed: many arts and culture promoters no longer wish to dominate live jazz through another form of exclusionary, middle class opportunity to hear quality music.

Ironically, as these town 'clubs' started closing down for various management and financial reasons in the past 10 years, the call from communities became loud and clear: *"We want the music here, with us!"* Thus, live jazz started brewing again in Native Yards and communities throughout Cape Town's metropolis; in restaurants, in a bakery, at an artisanal ginney or beer brewery, at cultural centers, like Langa's Guga S'Thebe, and even in musicians' homes. Those opportunities to preserve the proven legacies of jazz giants like Winston Mankunku Ngozi, Robbie Jansen and Cups Nkanuka, were taking hold, partly thanks to appreciative and discerning younger musicians who saw value and integrity in preserving musical histories. These well-trained musicians also wanted live platforms to strut their stuff.

Since the Native Land Act of 1913 defined separate development with the later enforcement of the Group Areas Act in 1950, non-white South African citizens found themselves in unattractive and unsustainable economic and social conditions, unable to break out of their township confines to pursue a more progressive life. Instead, undesirable forms of behaviour plunged them into gangsterism, drug peddling and alcoholism.

In contemporary times, Jazz in the Native Yards seeks to avoid a downward spiral by grooming human creativity, especially among the youth from marginalised communities. Its projects were born in 2015 and JiNY developed a social movement that encourages the use of live jazz performances as platforms for diverse musical voices to be heard and seen. Young and older musicians can 'meet and greet' each other on these platforms. For instance, Marimba specialist, Bongani Shotsoananda from Gugulethu, often comes to afternoon concerts at the homey 'Kwa Sec' house where weekend gigs feature a variety of South African and international bands. Another legendary jazz pianist, Tete Mbambisa, and Langa singer Ncediwe Sylvia Mdunyelwa, pop in to see what the younger ones are doing. Sometimes, these venues hold workshops before the live performances, further adding to the artistic excitement.

"It's about 'Experience,'" says Koko Kalashe, one of the founders of JiNY. *"We want to create spaces and opportunities for more social cohesion for Western Cape residents, a positive ambience of backyard performance venues for residents and visitors alike to get to know and understand South Africa's diversity, rather than just focus on its marginalised communities."* These spaces, safe but simple, grow paying audiences who thereby offer opportunities whereby artists can actually earn an income rather than rely on free or sponsored concerts.

So where does one 'catch' these audiences? JiNY has 'Routes': musicians can perform at centers which have sizeable data bases of patrons, like the annual Stellenbosch Woordfeest as part of the musical program; then a Sunday afternoon at the Delheim Wine Estate pulling in residents from Franschoek and surroundings, then continue on to Khayalitsha's Isivivanda Center; then on to Mitchells Plain's Alliance Francaise Cultural Center (still in progress). That's

the 'Eastern Route'. Patrons and fans who live along the way can catch quality performances and be able to afford paying for the experience.

The 'Central Route' comprises of Gugulethu's Kwa Sec which is a private home space for smaller crowds; then to Nyanga Arts Center (still in progress) which receives supports by the Belgium government... then on to Langa's Guga S'Thebe Cultural Center for larger crowds and continue on to the Alliance Francaise in central Cape Town CBD or to an arts and culture gallery on Bree Street.

All of these routes seek to engage the moneyed class and less economically endowed residents in experiencing together the fruits of musical achievements of the younger and older legends coming from these communities. Adding to the Experience are people's video snippets on social media, selfies with musicians, and other pictorial stories which show patrons' excitement. Clinking wine glasses, rattling coffee cups, audience members dancing, and an inside fire roaring to keyboard runs - people experience joyful fun and amusement in the vibey arena. And when the experience is good, you sure will want to return and find your new-found friends at the next gig...and on and on it goes. Socializing, appreciating, learning, seeing, asking questions, understanding, liking, tasting, telling others - the experiences expand.

Performing in 'Native Yards' does not benefit just local musicians and local patrons. Word spreads, rippling through social media, radio, print media outlets, and country Embassies. When South African musicians work on projects overseas, namely in Europe and seldom in USA, international visitors, musicians, and music business promoters hear about the 'hood happenings, and know where to go. Fundors like ConcertsSA, the Italian Consulate, Swiss promoters, and others, enable music students and their teachers to collaborate and spread music in the 'Hoods.

Indeed, the Legends listen from their ancestral heights in pure delight!

The 'Hoods breathe Cape Town weekend jazz (31 July 2018)

Artists and patrons moan that there's no longer steady jazz 'clubs' in Cape Town! When Carlo Mombelli took to the Olympia Bakery's stage, he defied such thinking. *"I had the most amazing concert last night...in a movie theatre! The Labia! Smelling all that popcorn. Then, I come here to a bakery (Olympia) and smell the bread..."* The unconventional Johannesburg-based Mombelli, with his eclectic band of merry men – aspiring and inspiring pianist, Kyle Shepherd; his able-bodied faithful drummer, Jonno Sweetman, and young rising star on all stages, guitarist Keenan Ahrends – guarantees performances oozing with meditative qualities, yet packed full of emotion when crescendos shout with rage. Thanks to Paul Kahanovitz's **Slow Life** brand of musical offerings, the Bakery transforms at night into a cozy listening venue for quality live jazz. Similarly at his other hand-picked venues, such as the Labia movie theatre, which kicked off on Friday with Mombelli's crew. However, sound continues to be an issue from the Bakery's flat stage which should be elevated for better viewing of the band. And that piano...!!

As the Bakery morphs, Mombelli excels, with a standing audience to tell the story. Like the conflicting colour scheme of his purple and green attire, he works his electric bass with sounds of multiple strings at different registries, then adds his wispy, child-like voicings with alien precision. His awkward looking body molds his bass guitar. At high treble range, the bass cries in other-worldly, unrecognisable sounds. But that's what jazz is. A basic theme holds him to earth by guitarist Ahrends and pianist Shepherd's occasional classical comments.

The audience remains in deep spaces, meditatively moving between spirit-breathing and reality-testing. Fortunately, they knew when not to clap, but to let the refrains finish. Cacophonous outbursts resolve back into joyful harmonies as Mombelli exhibits his new materials. The introspective, closed-eye Shepherd also catches these melodic meditations, which is why the two gents are such a worthy match. Mombelli's compositions are beyond tribe, self, and country. They hit spirit realms common to all ears – if we would just listen!

The ending song tells a touching story: Mombelli had not seen his father, who now resides in Athens, Greece, for 36 years. One hears the tender, thoughtful harmonies of this beautiful mellow piece, the peace of reunion and affirmation. And here lies the genius of his bassist – to elicit emotions and a sense of joy...in the living.

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Jazz in the Native Yards (JiNY), which hails as an arts managing agent from Gugulethu, a suburb of Cape Town, continued the weekend jive in other 'hoods', starting with a 3 course luncheon of cheese fondue at Delheim Wine Estate and wine pairing, all deliciously enraptured by Spanish guitarist Luis Gimenez Amoros and his trio.

Gimenez works at University of the Western Cape in Capetown as a researcher of the traditional mbira instrument and fuses Spanish musical styles with African rhythms, including the North African Berber, West African Gnawa and Saharawi and soukous, Afro-beats, and Cuban music. And those are the exciting sounds one hears as one sips the delicious and matured estate wines. The Delheim 2016 Shiraz was particularly conducive to the foot-tapping, body-swaying effects caused by the trio.

The Estate is surrounded by rich vegetation and gardens on the north side of Stellenbosch's mountain range as well as family-reared Jack Russells. Sunday jazz luncheons operate during this Winter season until end September so don't miss it!

After wiggling around for two sets of Afro-Latin beats, drive back towards Cape Town and stop in another JiNY 'hood, at Gugu S'Thebe Cultural Center in Langa, which is the longest established township in Cape Town. Here, another local crowd of listening enthusiasts nestle into the large auditorium, with snacks and wine on offer, for a late afternoon of saxophonist McCoy Mrubata with his hand-picked younger musicians. McCoy is familiar to all, having come from these parts, and grown up in the township jazz scene of South Africa. He's home, and plays like it, with nostalgia, since residing in Gauteng's Johannesburg has made him a 'Gautownian' as musicians flee from Cape Town, sadly, to have more lucrative work in Gauteng.

So 'native yards' touches hearts of locals, be they living near or migrating to wine estates, or to other ethnically and financially diverse neighbourhoods. JiNY plans to continue its venue sitings wherever the people want jazz, whether it be at the Alliance Francaise cultural center in the city, or out in African townships of Stellenbosch, or in homes such as Kwa Sec house in Gugulethu. Music has no boundaries but pulls us into one.

Check JiNY on Facebook and at www.jazzinthenativeyards.co.za

Percussionist John Hassan Revives the Moses Molelekwa legacy through another Jazz in the Native Yard Experience (31 July 2019)

In February 2001, the South African music world was shocked suddenly: a young brilliant pianist, Moses Molelekwa, and his manager wife, Flo, were found dead in their central Johannesburg office. The Cape Town fans and musicians held an unforgettable mourning gathering at Good Hope Center to mark this untimely passing of an unusually talented artist at age 27. Last Sunday, 28 July in 2019, a day after a national public Memorial for another extraordinary Legend, Johnny Clegg, the Cape Town community came together to honour Molelekwa's legacy, with an added delightful feature of Molelekwa's son, Zoe, at piano.



Moses Molelekwa – credit Shadley Lombard

The Tribute, conceived by percussionist-composer John Hassan of the South African Afro-Latin band, Hassan'adas, revived appreciation for a notable period in South Africa's jazz history when young guns moved their artistry through the 1980s apartheid hurtles into the 1990s new political dawn.



John Hassan -Credit T Visagie

Moses Molelekwa was there, fired up by both family support and the times to 'find himself' as his first 1994 album, ***Finding One's Self***, suggested. At age 22, his mastery and level of maturity with improvisation and technique were shaking heads. By the time he released his second album, ***Genes and Spirits*** in 1999, Molelekwa had toured and mentored with other legends, such as Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, and Cuba's own Chucho Valdes. Then, dead at age 27.

There will be more to applaud about Molelekwa and his musical legacy when the very tall son Zoe returns to perform in Cape Town next month. His parents' deaths left 6 year old Zoe to the care of Moses' musically innovative father, Jerry 'Bra Monk', who made sure little grandson Zoe would grow up in the finest of musical traditions through the Moses Molelekwa Foundation, established to provide learning opportunities to young musicians. Remarkable stories abound.

A Jazzy experience before the concert: Traditional beer, beaded watch bands, and books for sale

It needs to be mentioned, again, that events sponsored by Jazz in the Native Yards aim at giving patrons an experience of jazz which which they will marvel at for days/weeks after. Always get to a JiNY concert early. This Moses Molelekwa Tribute concert on Sunday was held at the popular Guga S'Thebe Cultural Center in Langa township, 15 minutes from Cape Town's CBD.

As you walk into the Center, wall paintings, murals, and a wide range of hand-made beaded and sculptured items meet the eye, splashing colourful artistry that seems authentic and honest. Tables are lined up with these artistic varieties seeking to not just welcome patrons to the musical event, but engage them in tasting, viewing, and maybe even buying some of the enticing offerings coming from the township artisans. This is how 'the experience' begins: The delectable smell of Waga's Fries draws one into conversation about how a 'special' variety of potato can be turned into a healthy snack; it's grown as a project at the Cape Town University of Technology Belville campus garden by horticulturalist, Wanga Ncise.

Taste the fry, slightly brown and crisp, and coated with tasty herbs and bread crumbs, and you'll see why a potato can be transformed before your very eyes! Snack in hand with this crunchy fry, the eye feast continues through the tables: beautifully beaded watch bands with red watch faces to die for; cloth earrings and jewelry. I liked the traditional beer keg on the second-hand books table! Now that entices one to read, neh?

Finally, entering the open courtyard of Guga with its mural walls and drinks 'n snacks kiosk beckoning, one finds another table of home-made curry stew with rice and salad. If the weather did not call for sprinkles, more artists' tables would distract and beckon from this courtyard. The music starts. Hassan has rightly provided a space for two young musicians to kick off the event: Pianist Nobhule Ashanti and trumpeter Keitumetsi 'Tumi' Pheko.

When 24 year old Zoe sits down at the piano for a few songs, a deafening silence spreads through the audience of some 110 patrons, with photographers slowly inching close to the stage like cautious chameleons to get that careful shot of Zoe's head hung low over the keys, his dreadlocks obscuring his good looks. His rendition of his father's classic 'Spirit of Thembisa' stayed true to form.

Hassan's band then explodes into Latin and Molelekwa tunes, with several songs taken from Hassan's own Afro-Jazz repertoire with Hassan also playing guitar. Stellar musicians make up his band: Lucas Khumalo (bass guitar), Trevino Isaacs (piano), Nathan Carolus (guitar), and the cream of Cape Town's jazz scene comprising of drummer Kevin Gibson, and saxophonist Buddy Wells (saxophone). Hassan tells how he and Moses were once flatmates in Johannesburg which is why Hassan is passionate about remembering his dear friend's legacy. *"We are starting with one show in Cape Town and hope to take the show to other provinces*

in time. The idea is to bring Moses' son Zoe and musicians from the Moses Molelekwa Foundation to join us in future performances."

Tributes are usually to the artist in passing, but they allow for the sponsoring promoter, Hassan, to also promote his own music. *"The object of this project is to celebrate Moses' music. It is not a benefit concert but rather a tribute to Moses Molelekwa,"* says Hassan.

Criticism might be cast as to the balance between a tribute and self-promotion, but Hassan's contributions and passion certainly got the audience enthused, appreciative, and dancing with his bouncy reggae 'Peace and Love'!! He has educated and re-engaged listeners to be aware of the unusual, yet forever resounding sounds of the genes and spirits of Moses Molelekwa, an artistic gift to South Africa's musical and cultural legacy. Such awareness raising will continue with Zoe Molelekwa's upcoming tour which will focus more on his father's music and on Zoe's own growing library of compositions and favourites. Stay tuned for more on the Molelekwa!

COSY VENUES for LIVE JAZZ make Cape Town winters hummmm (15 July 2017)

Jazz in the Native Yards series offers pleasant Sunday afternoon outings to hear the best of South Africa's live music performed in Cape Town communities' back yards. Hosted by jazz-entrepreneurs, Koko Kalashe and Luvuyo Kakaza, residents in Gugulethu just outside of the Cape Town business district, Sunday concerts feature some of the finest local musicians who pull in visiting international partners where available to join in the festive gigs. The two men and their funding partners envision the best for both artists and live music buffs – to provide platforms for up and coming artists which bring talents and entertainment directly into local appreciative communities.

Guga S'Thebe Community Center is one of these venues, just off the N2 national highway on the Langa turnoff. Centered in Langa, the oldest Black community and one nearest to central Cape Town city, its auditorium is well equipped with a sound system, and even a first floor room where a radio station, like the community station Fine Music Radio (101.3FM) can broadcast live shows. Drinks catering is permitted, too.

This happened when the inventive Swiss drummer, Dominic Egli, joined by his fellow Swiss double bassist Raffaele Bossard, saxophonist Christoph Irrniger, and South African trumpeter/flugelhornist Feya Faku, a firebrand at improvisation, hit the stage in this cozy venue on Sunday, 9 July 2017. Excerpts from their *Pluralism* series of three CDs, the latest entitled *More Fufu!*, rocked the stage for two exhilarating hours.

The local crowd intermixed with other suburbanites from outside of Langa listened quietly with discerning ears then exploded their enthusiasm during breaks with cheerful talks, selfies and group photos with the musicians, and a little wine on hand to warm already bustling hearts. Supported by the Swiss fundor, Prohelvetia, this *Pluralism* quartet recently completed their six night South African tour, certainly with a bang at Guga SThebe.

Their usually sold-out gigs consist of a variety of African rhythms and sounds ranging from West African 'high life', aka 'fufu', to Sahelian Mali tuareg, to Afro-Peruvian, to local South African goema. Egli can open a song about Mali playing the mbira, and then swing into a very explicit African drumming sequence. His versatility is heightened by equally versatile fellow Swiss players who hover sonically around Faku's horn which punctuates with rhythmic detail. "Fufu", in French slang, means 'crazy'. But as a common West African dish, often served with a slimy, chillied ochre soup, Fufu connotes symbolically food for the soul that sustains. The latest *Pluralism* CD, *More Fufu!* admirably follows through the Afro and fusion themes started in the previous two albums. It seems Egli and his group simply cannot run out of songs for us!

Faku had met Egli in Basel, Switzerland. Out of their ensuing friendship came a song, *'The River Crosses the Path'* played on Faku's endearing fugelhorn. You couldn't hear a pin drop in the hall, as all were spellbound by his gripping delivery. The song had a gospel flavour, pensive, telling a story. You could hear the emotion. Egli then presented his first goema composition. Inevitably, the gig had to come to an end, but not without a standing ovation, an ovation applauding the pluralistic and interactive characteristics of this truly Euro-African band. By the end of this Sunday's gig, the audience is vibey, greets each other, even if strangers, and one leaves this community center having made a friend or two. Jazz in the Native Yards has hit the eager pulse for live jazz close to home. All look forward to their offerings, come rain or come shine!

