

## JAZZ EDUCATION, MUSIC/ARTS CONFERENCES, AND FESTIVALS

### **Singer Babalwa Mentjies: Learning life skills through music and the Arts**

December 11, 2024

*“It’s through theatre, dance, storytelling, the usual arts, and music that youth at risk can learn to take care of themselves and their families, many coming from child-headed households in Khayelitsha,”* sprouts singer and development therapist, Babalwa Mentjies.



*“We try to have different themes in our programs, like the Immune system, gangsterism, teen pregnancy, health issues, and substance and drug abuse. We work with the medical school at Stellenbosch University and create theatre pieces to increase awareness of health issues.”*

Jazz singer Babalwa Mentjies followed her mother from Durban to Cape Town in 2013 to assist her mother, a Social Worker, to establish an awareness and skills training program for youth at risk. Mentjies’s tactic was to use music, and she hasn’t stopped. Her Amathunzi Arts and Development Project was born.

Originally from Makhanda in the Eastern Cape, and credentialed with degrees in Music Performance and Project Management from the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), Mentjies found creative ways, through her own artistry, to help youth understand and research the dynamics of struggling with mental and physical health issues. *“While in Durban, and with my Diploma degree in marketing management, I got a part-time job at the Medical School in the administration – first in Behavioral Medicine working with Psychologists who were counselling staff and students. Then with the Department of Surgery. So I was exposed to a wide range of health issues facing our marginalized Black communities.”* She was also a second breadwinner for her family with siblings, helping her mother to further her own education. This mother-daughter powerhouse filtered down to community upliftment in the end.



Amathunzi Arts and Development Project

Besides assisting her mother's development project in Cape Town, Mentjies joined the Institute of Music and Indigenous Arts Devt (IMAD) at Eluxolweni Primary School in Khayelitsha as a part-time music teacher. It fit nicely into her own project desires; yet, she wanted to add to the health aspects of overall development to the arts therapy. So, in these last few years, her Khayelitsha residence and life has been super busy running her Amathunzi Arts and Development project for youth at risk which offers arts training along with health awareness. *“Collaborations with other organizations is important for our young projects. We partner with SANCA (South African National Council for Alcohol and Drug Dependence) and do role plays about the negative effects of using drugs. Amathunzi works with a rehab center called ‘Unchain our Townships’ where youth involved in gangs can change their lives. “*

Her project works closely with Immunologist, Professor Clive Gray, in his Vukukanye Arts Program started in 2020 in Khayelitsha. His first love is photography, so he captures youth in projects, from 5 years old, and follows them photographically over the years to see any changes in the children's health status. The aim is to care for the immune system. Raising funds for Amathunzi and making it more self-sufficient in its functions remains a huge challenge. One solution, until large companies, corporations, and government recognize this NGO as a legitimate and self-sustaining organization, is to partner, partner, partner.... With the well-established. Examples abound in collaborations with the Isivivana Youth Center, a Family Counselling Center, the Sibongile Day and Night Center for the physically challenged people, with an Early Childhood Development school called Stepping Stones, with a High School having a lot of problems with drug abuse, and so on. All in Khayelitsha.

Even parents require education for self-awareness: *“A few mothers who are invited to attend would get information about diabetes and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) through the role plays put on by their children – at high schools – and would go home and share what they saw or learned with the family. We want to reach the grandparents as well to be more involved. We have amazing poets who write beautiful themes who grasp info from another young leader.”* So it's like an 'each one teach one', without the fancy screens or technologies that convey messages. Just staged role plays!

The immediate issue for Mentjies' growing but young NGO is to gain more recognition and patrons willing to support. As an organization, she feels they are well tooled: *“We have reputable people on board and maintain compliance – as Black people that's what we have to know and show, our compliance and willingness to serve the people. Our books are*

*audited, properly, and we are compliant; others know this. So we are fundable as we have audited statements to share as well as a vendor number with the city. So far, I have invested my own resources into my organization to get it going.”*



Mentjies maintains a hefty schedule of live performances ranging from large concert halls, like the Artscape, to smaller jazz jam circles with friends and revellers in restaurants and clubs around Cape Town.

# “Talk Tones Sessions: An Initiative to grow youth artistry”, Amandla! Magazine, Issue No 37/38, December 2014.

By Carol Martin

This program was started Andre Petersen and his wife, Chantal, to provide exposure for young musicians to meet, listen to and interact with, leading jazz musicians in their town. The Sessions were held at the District Six Museum’s Homecoming Center in Cape Town on Saturday mornings, but unfortunately were short-lived from November to December 2014 due to lack of funding. More financial supports are required if youth are to ‘grow’ the music as part of their own livelihoods.



**Youth Developer Tu Nokwe's Amajika buskers discovered by Japan's Urban Cohesion** (18 April 2022)

*"Amajika should be seen in every corner of South Africa's Townships",* says an impassioned singer/guitarist, storyteller, and youth developer, Tu Nokwe, who also emerged from Durban's Amajika beginnings as a teenager in the 1970s. This rich cultural program resonates from the illustriously musical Nokwe family who continue to hone youth leadership and artistic skills in the often confusing modern urban setting of Johannesburg.



Tu Nokwe at home in Johannesburg

*"I decided to convert my house in Belgravia to the Amajika Youth and Children's Performing Arts Centre, where children come together to practice, learn, and create in areas of music, dance, storytelling, poetry, and hard core drama, about the heady issues they face as children growing up in a more difficult South Africa."*

This legendary grand dame, and soul partner with the late great jazz pianist, Bheki Mseleku, has embroiled her extended family in exciting and creative mentoring, home schooling, leadership training, and artistic styles development. New creative generations emerge and surprise, like 15-year old NoBiko (named after activist Steve Biko) who sings and plays guitar with her 13-year old guitarist brother, Manna, and the swift footed, hip swaging dancing of younger brother, Mfundo, now age 7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxJpcClpc2A>

### **Amajika discovered**

One day in 2019, while drawing a crowd busking on Maboneng street corners in Johannesburg, these frisky children were discovered. Several interested young Japanese musicians started filming these young performers. A year later, Biko was singing Japanese cover songs with proficiency. These children became hits spread all over Instagram and YouTube in the Japanese media.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DX75z-4V8> How did that happen?



Amajika children learning storytelling and dance at Center

Biko explains: *“We youth from the area come together on Fridays and Saturdays at the Amajika Centre to perform dance, music ensembles, poetry, and storytelling with each other. We now have 9 Youth Volunteers at the Centre who teach and mentor us. Our Japanese musician friends look for innovative youth artists in various countries. In their training program called “Urban Cohesion”, which spends several months in a country talent-building with select youth groups like my siblings, I learned the lyrics to Japanese songs. We became a hit in Japan! South Africans singing in Japanese!”* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvGLXbnNke0>

Tu Nokwe admits that Amajika has had an intermittent growth. *“We are always looking for funding, but at the same time, we are blessed with fantastic fellow musicians, like guitarist Bheki Khosa, to teach the kids, mostly by Zoom during the lockdown days. Now, the Amajika Arts and Life focuses on art therapy as a way to build character, spirituality, and creative thinking in youth.”* <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/entertainment/2021-10-11-nokwe-revives-art-therapy-for-children/>

### **The Nokwe family**

The Nokwes have married into other artistic families. Niece Ayanda Nhlantoti, mother to Biko, Manna, and Mfundo, has a cultural program on Yvonne Chaka Chaka’s WOMan Radio, a women-led online radio station, on Fridays from 10am to noon. Her performer husband, Sebone Rangata, who uses the playful stage name of “King Bsorobsarabsa”, teaches drama and music arts with the Amajika children, and actively collaborates in home-schooling his three children. “Biko’s Singing Kitchen” cooks lunches for the Amajika centre children, encouraging the art of cooking accompanied with song. It is all about art as therapy. <https://www.facebook.com/100001053635937/videos/775833813390233/>



Manna preparing dishes

The Japanese arts invaders have also taught select children how to film using the digital camera, so Manna is often seen filming live over Facebook or Zoom the Amajika performances with his borrowed camera or tablet.



The Nokwe Creative Development Foundation was set up as a framework for the development of a Safe House for abused women and children. For those youth over 19 years, the #AmajikaArtsandLife workshops offer training in LAW (Leadership in Artist's World) using JOS Method (Journey of My Soul) developed from Tu Nokwe's own artistic and spiritual journey with Self Management systems which include a Diary and Workbook.

Parental education is encouraged; parents can witness their children's creative sessions at the Centre or on social media live. At #AfricanChild, Facebook live streaming of Centre activities along with Instagram hash-tags all flood Amajika's social media platforms, and engage parents to come and see what their children are doing at the Centre. In October 2021, Amajika's Facebook page praised the parents: *"We are breaking bread with the parents of Amajika Performing Arts #AmajikaArtsAndLife. It was a blessed day, and the children got to show their parents the beauty of their talents and what they have been learning at Amajika. We feel stronger with the parents energy at #Amajika. Let us continue to support the #AfricanChild by all means possible."*



In spite of the wonders of discovery by outsiders, local youth groups still struggle for recognition and funding for their programs. Why shouldn't Amajika be a program in every Township?

**A Cultural/Knowledge/Arts & Music Hub in Gugulethu: Lumkile's Book Joint** (4 October 2020)

A knowledge hub is flourishing in Gugulethu, a community outside of Cape Town, and it's filling up with books and other excitements! Lumkile's Book Joint welcomes literary and arts enthusiasts to enjoy the various events now being planned (yet not launched officially until January 2021) and advertised on their Facebook page.



Blacks Tempi (left), Zami Mdinga, Lumkile Mzukwa (right)

His three car garage attached to his house has become an indoor living room that breathes books on limited wall shelves; more books are in storage. Upon arriving at NY22, House No 32, one parks on the sidewalk of this narrow residential street. Lumkile greets me with hands caked with flour. The smell of scones baking is soon followed by their steaming hot presentation with coffee as we sit down to chat. Lumkile Mzukwa, otherwise a senior manager during the day with PRASA inter-city railways, exhibits his enthusiasm for creating a cultural renaissance, the likes to which he references "The Harlem Renaissance" which was a telling intellectual, social, and artistic explosion of African-American culture centred in Harlem, Manhattan, New York City, during the 1920s. A long table with benches is surrounded by couches for reading or discussions or meetings that may emerge. Two year old son, Ziniti, runs his toy car along the book shelves, passing notable titles of books that could fit on the 'twenty best' or the 'ten best' books of the year somewhere or sometime ago.

Twenty eight years ago, the young Lumkile started collecting books, buying his first new book for Rands 35 in 1991, ***The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid: A social-ethical analysis***, by Mokgethi Motlhabi.



Fast forward to our past decade, Lumkile wants to 'burst the bubble' around formidable individual libraries. One immediately sees how his impressive collection has focused on

content and knowledge about important, ground-breaking events, people and leaders, histories, and political domestic and international issues of note. These are timeless books, appropriate resources as references and for analyses in any discussions about weighted issues of the day.

*“This is the kind of library you would get in Obama’s or Clinton’s house, or Christopher Kitchen’s home. Captains of Industry would have this type of library. So my Book Joint is an example of quality collections, not just the ordinary. It gives an example of what Black people can aspire to, and collect, and get excited about, seeing one of their own with such a passion. Now, we have a tangible example of what it means to collect books and to make your own personal library. It’s something we will forever talk about in terms of relating to our children and each other as individuals”.....*

How will this cultural hub unfold in Cape Town’s Gugulethu post COVID-19? On one Friday evening recently, I enjoyed a ‘Tiny Desk’ sort of musical concert with home-grown Gugulethu jazz trumpeter Blacks Tempi and his quintet. That next day, the Book Joint sponsored a book sale.



We talked about the high cost of buying books. Why would someone buy a book when The Book Joint has it? How could books be shared? This would be a perfect opportunity for a book club. Many ideas were flung about. But it’s a private book collection.

*“My Initial concern is that books get stolen. People who enter this space get excited and want to take a book to borrow. And if borrowed, the book would be misused. I have stories of losing my books. Practically 95% of them were bought from the second hand shops, like CAFDA.”*

So what activities would work to promote a culture of reading and cultivating knowledge? A book club? Reading sessions? Theme days? Musical events? Vinyl discussion evenings? Afternoon jazz and wine sessions? Talks and presentations with various leaders and intellectuals?

*“Yes, the list is long. These activities are innovative and impressive. But for now, it’s planning and ideas in the making that preoccupy my team and me.”*

And what about the sustainability of the Book Joint?

*“I need accountability, and am happy to take donations. But I still want this private. I want to build a top story to expand the space, but I don’t have an NGO mindset yet for the Book Joint. We are planning now: There will be daily activities, like a Monday business talk, Tuesday Book Joint tunes with something like creative art and paintings, Wednesday Black lecturers’ night, Thursday Taste of Jazz; Friday for eating meat/braai and socializing to include inviting a leader for a chat, like Thabo Mbeki, or a Friday food fair to taste various foods displayed by people. Saturday a book sale. Maybe Sunday afternoon live jazz and wine or listening to the old jazz vinyls. The jazz events could take a life of their own with partnership with Jazz in the Native Yards.”*

As Lumkile talked, my thinking kept coming back to how that Elon Musk book on the shelf could be used with, let’s say, five people, without the book having to leave the premises. How do you work with a book?

*“Yeh, I think part of it is to think about what does this space mean to the people looking from inside in, so whatever we do , we tune it right, so that we cater to what people want to see. Do you want people to see this space as a formidable club for sharing a book, or do you want them to see the Book Joint as a diverse space, to play tunes, buy books, talk and hold discussions with important people? On the top floor, I envision, for instance, a bean bag corner and a coffee depot where small groups can to chew and chill on a book. It becomes a social, cultural, intellectual space working all the time, oozing impressions: book sale, book review, live music, vinyl listening, certain people known to come around.”*

The Future?

*“I hope to have a Book Joint movement across the country to promoter affordable book sales and reading culture. We have started with hosting book fairs right here. Our second sale day last week was bigger than the first one, and this shows interest is growing for books. All events are listed on our Facebook page, and we’ll have another sale at end of October. CAFDA and other book sellers bring their books for sale. I want to be able to present “100 best books” in X, Y, Z themes. Books today are written referencing what is already known from past writings. There’s nothing new. But I want my daughter or son who is coming off of matric, for instance, to be able to access the writer of a contemporary book, to be exposed to his or her insights. But for somebody like me who is well read, Nadine Gordimer is enough in terms of the whole South African landscape.”*

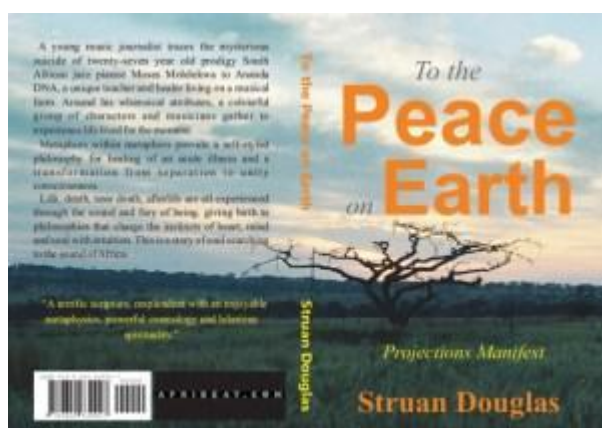
*“We will officially function when we launch the Book Joint – in Jan 2021. Our team wants to make sure we have ongoing activities now till then which government can see, as a build up to the launch. A Brochure will give details about how to enjoy the Book Joint – day activities, talks in the evening, etc. How to pay for these activities and have a membership – all this information will be there.”*

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More questions remain than answers as we watch this space grow, exciting the locals and visitors with a myriad of activities in this truly African hub. Check the Lumkile Book Joint Facebook page. And just maybe Lumkile will have a self-published version of his 39+ poems for sale!!

**Struan Douglas Journeys with Ubuntu Healing through Music** (1 September 2018)

***“Towards the Peace on Earth: Projections Manifest”*** by Struan Douglas (published by [www.afribeat.com](http://www.afribeat.com), 2018) is an engaging account of one man’s journey of healing, with upfront honesty and attempted enlightenment through a rebirth into Ubuntu Africa from European roots. Struan Douglas, an arts journalist and musician, portrays a fascinating, yet mysterious, plunge into the spirituality surrounding the music industry in South Africa, and why all is not always rosy in the perceived healing abilities of this art form.



Douglas’s own contentious struggle with a severe illness in his youth, compounded by insecurities, outrages, and inferiority complexes, found amazing portals of resolve, as his pathways crossed with innovative and intuitively spiritual music producers. Shamanic healing brought the light of love onto the Cullinan farm outside of Johannesburg, affectionately dubbed the University of Celebration, where Douglas lived out his post-traumatic syndrome with an eccentric Frenchman, ‘Ananda’, and an inventive Swiss music producer, Robert Trunz. Together, with an additional eco-healer and photographer, Lianne, the foursome worked the land as Trunz established a music studio where a host of well-known, predominately African musicians engaged with each other to move their artistry forward. A healing in music took place through Trunz’s music label, MELT2000, and writer/musician Douglas found a much needed home in this Musical Energy Loud Truth space.

Or so it seems.



## Struan Douglas

Unsuspectingly, the story leads into dark passages to reveal truths: gory outcomes as some musicians submit to too much stress; a realisation that jazz may not heal, but do the opposite. Douglas sites examples where the creative wizardry succumbs to devilish forces: like the deaths of pianist Moses Molelekwa and saxophonist Moses Khumalo, where mental illness, drugs, and other demons can take hold. Even the central character of this book, the Buddhist inspired 'Ananda', born Andre Masset, and raised in a French orphanage, and found his way into a California prison for 14 years for drug trafficking, surprises the reader with his supposed transformation through African shamanic healing. Here, Douglas becomes his disciple, finding wisdom and healing in his 'master's' spiritual stewardship, until an enormous anger streak totally absorbs Ananda's psyche and soul, and leads to the demise of this Osho-influenced self-designed healer. Trunz on the other hand invents and promotes sound technologies, namely audio speakers, in Switzerland and the UK, and brings them to the Cullinan farm. When he falls ill, the farm becomes a short-lived ecological experiment with notable outcomes, but is resuscitated as a musical hub when Trunz returns. During all of these transmutations of energy and purpose, Douglas is still faced with *quo vadis* issues, and this is what grabs the reader. Uncertainties circulate through the enigmas of life.

This book touches the unavoidable real by opening our minds to what constitutes the 'void', from entering disorientation that can manipulate the mind, to experiencing the beauties of Ubuntu love and respect found on the African continent. Douglas uses the metaphorical 'fifth' to explain: *"As the fifth in music harmonically divides the octave, so the fifth dimension in Spiritual terms co-creates."* (p. 113) The Cullinan farm and its various inhabitants provided this 'nature spirit' space where African griots, drummers, trance-dancers of the Kalahari, and other newer students of sound in his Forest Jam project could co-create. By 2015, Douglas found a new journey, having manifested projections involving a vast healing from this previous trip through the 1980s to the present.



Madala Kunene

One of these manifestations was how guitarist Madala Kunene mentored Douglas to revive his trumpet playing skills. A very readable story, the reader goes away amazed, with a revived spirit that co-creation in music can indeed find causes of illness, and bring joy, growth, and healing to the collective consciousness.

In this lies the enigma of music.

Buy the book online through Lulu or kindle versions, or weblog.

**At NAF 2021: Melvin Peters, Bokani Dyer, Siya Charles, Justin-Lee Schultz, Guilherme Ribeiro, Chadleigh Gowar** (23 July 2021)

This year's Standard Bank National Arts Festival, like in 2020, is exciting, full of new entertainment from growing and seasoned artists, and yes, virtual, waiting for that pandemic to disappear so that we can have a decent fun-filled social and interactive Festival like in past days. I honed in on the Jazz Festival, and found these worthy delights, from both our local stock as well as international contributions. Accessible viewing until July 31, most of these recordings are available at any time, and at reasonable costs. Check these out at <https://nationalartsfestival.co.za>.

**Melvin Peters**



Pianist Melvin Peters, now retired from years teaching at University of KwaZulu Natal in Durban and at the University of Pretoria, offers twists and turns on familiar favourites as well as his own compositions. A splash of the melodic Standard, 'Secret Love', hits this hour's performance running as Peters launches his ambitious piano styles which are full of surprises. Being sure to mix the offerings, Peters' own songs make sure to honour some of the pains of the day. His 'Joy Comes in the Morning' speaks to those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. It is a beautiful rendition of scenes of mixed sorrow and joy, perhaps that life continues elsewhere. Bassist Trevor Donjeany solos with emotion and purpose, leading the piano to continue the melodious theme. Peters confidently solos in another favourite Standard, 'All the Things You Are', starting with a Bach-ish style that morphs into jazzy improv. Then a mellow R&B tune by Donjeany reveals just what expertise blesses the major South African city. Always appreciative of his able band members, Peters ends with a piece in swing by drummer Bruce Baker, rounding out this delightful repertoire of improvisational wizardry.



Bokani Dyer – *Kelenosi*; courtesy: All About Jazz

During his jazz studies at the UCT College of Music over ten years ago, pianist Bokani Dyer was selected for the Standard Bank National Youth Jazz Band which toured Sweden, after which he released his debut album in 2010, and subsequently received top awards for scholarships which spun him into vast jazz worlds. Now, a new and different Dyer presents a NAF program with funky beats and bluesy lyrics, his vocals included. The Setswana title of his recent album, *Kelenosi*, which means ‘alone’ or ‘on my own’, suggests there’s a new-found freedom which is absorbing and intertwining all those past experiences to make some surprisingly new styles: a bit of rap, some hiphop thrown in along with improvised R&B, even a touch of classical music. Written and recorded over two months during the extended lockdown period imposed on South African in 2020, songs in this album present Dyer’s dexterous tendencies to please.

Songs include ‘Quarantine’ with characteristic Dyer upper register runs, clean and distinct. His vocals follow with a moaning for wanting-it-all – Nectar and waterfalls – while scatting along with his piano accompaniment. In ‘Goofy’, Dyer retains his chordal jazz improv, and then switches into a slow, meditative mood portraying a 13th Century Sufi poet introduced with a spoken word voice-over. Dyer sings, raps fast, trying to pitch his at times wobbly voice to the complicated scales he harvests. About 39 minutes into this creative program, Dyer joins keyboardist Clement Carr in a solo duo that reveals a pleasantly agile conversation between the two instruments taking turns unfolding and articulating the melody according to mood. Carr’s staccato taps on his synthesizer keys add character to the piano runs and plucking which Dyer enjoys doing directly on the piano strings.

An interesting attempt at Nigerian highlife and pigeon English, in tribute to musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, provided some humourous vibes with the popular song, ‘She Go Say I Be Lady-O’, with Carr’s synthesizing pulses mimicking that highlife beat. This NAF presentation certainly peeks into Dyer’s windows of changing shades and styles of jazz as he mixes electronic dance music, R&B, rap, salsa and even classical music in his evolving repertoire.

### **Siya Charles Sextet**



Trombonist and composer Siya Charles performed for the National Arts Festival 2021 at Gallery 44 on Long Street in Cape Town on 20 June 2021 to a very small audience in the otherwise very adequate auditorium at the Gallery which in olden days was a Cinema and Theater. Her recorded concert is now virtual in the SB Jazz Festival offerings and not to be missed.

Her sextet, composed of some of the best Cape Town-based jazz musicians, come with the musical DNA from the University of Cape Town’s College of Music; hence, the tight, orderly sound of the three horns: Zeke le Grange on tenor sax, Shaw Komori on trumpet, and Siya

Charles on trombone; then Damian Kamineth on percussion and drums, Sibusiso Matsimela on double and electric bass, and the indomitable Blake Hellaby on keyboard.

This bebop lady has class, swing, melody, and versatility, caroling her band through mbaqanga, ghoema, and contemporary jazz beats, including swing and post-bop. After a few South African local beats, her sextet swung into Andrew Lilly's 'Education' and from then on, her love for swing and bebop took off. *"I love the sextet because of the horns,"* she explained as she confidently introduced her songs and band members' solos. Young Komori's trumpet offered clean runs while Matsimela beboped his way determinedly. Hellaby enjoyed his right hand rustles through the treble range. From African grooves to jazz swing, this was a concert that deserves an album which, hopefully, is soon in its making. The horizon looks sunny!

#### **JUSTIN-LEE SCHULTZ & GERALD ALBRIGHT**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RrluSlKjiE>

Oh boy! Bob James and Jonathan Butler – move over! Here comes 14 year old pianist, scatter and talk-boxer, Justin-Lee Schultz, with a whopping portrayal of smooth, funky, and scatty vocals with piano that ring familiar, yet surprise with some chordal twists and turns. An ambitious band leader, Justin commands his keyboards and talk-box like a pro, and obviously enjoys modulating the vocal frequencies into various moods. Even his falsetto young male voice takes some wandering scat scales to clean heights, again like a pro. Known more in the USA, even though born and raised in Johannesburg until his family moved to Minneapolis, young Justin can top the charts, as did his debut album, *Gruv Kid*, in 2020. About 28 minutes in, saxman Gerald Albright enters to play a familiar tune. .... Consistently, young Justin, who stood and played throughout his set, maintains clear, flawless upper register runs that simply made the piano sing. The use of moving digital images as a stage backdrop for visual effects, and controlled by Justin on his techy machines, tended to visually overpower the otherwise gentle smooth jazzy renditions of this group. A simpler and less techy background presentation would have suited just fine as the viewer watched the captivating highlights of the Schultz youth. Those distractions aside, Justin produced, along with Dad Julius on guitar and 16 year old sister Jamie-Lee on drums, a one hour musical heist worth every Rand penny (R50).

#### **Guilherme Ribeiro**

Playing in what appears a lush, tropical garden, this 7minute 19 second video shows closeups of Brazilian Guilherme Ribeiro on piano and accordion along with a cellist, drummer, and box drummer. Several scenes depict road signs as one travels through this Brazilian countryside, thereby making this engaging visual experience also enticing with the sonorous whims of nature. It's a meditation, a reflective moment, to stop any actions or thoughts, and just try to 'be' for those seven plus minutes.

**Chadleigh Gowar**, bassist. *'Gone But Not Forgotten'* ... at The Fringe



While joyous and hopeful, the spirit behind Chadleigh Gowar's moving presentation pointedly aimed to engage our hearts and understanding about how artists, too, faced vast difficulties during the Covid pandemic grasp on lives near and dear. Gowar's tributes to loved ones who passed during this time (like 'Uncle Neville' and others close and far) were both enticing and melodic, pushing boundaries of mourning into gospel and ballad modes. His band members musically produced a tight sound pleasing, yet saddening, as they portrayed what loss sounds like. Unfortunately, the band members' names were not listed in the program, but one could see the soft drumming of Damien Kamineth and a yearning wail of trumpeter, Jo Kunnuji. Written tributes and sentiments were also presented from Granville Skippers as well as from Gowar himself. Between songs, Gowar told his stories and included one guest, Wendy Julius, who sang her own tribute song and shared how her religious strength brought her through hard family losses. One could appreciate the realities of death these artists were facing, but which moved them to create and sing..... that gone is not to be forgotten.

**Ghanaian Modern Jazz meets traditional Highlife – just barely!** (12 August 2018)

Ghanaian jazz pianist, Victor Dey Jr, wooed audiences at this year's Standard Bank National Arts Youth Jazz Festival in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown), with professional musicians on stage and loads of youthful students of jazz in the audience!



Victor Dey, Jr.

The Diocesan Girls School's large Hall hummed as this pianist fundi, backed by the improvisational wizardry of South African jazz musicians, spinned through modern jazz tunes with a West African rhythmic twist.

With Ghanaian music always a foundation of his artistry, this vibrant soul treats piano keys like cotton, with energy, ease, and an uncanny transparency. His unusual rendition of jazz icon, John Coltrane's, 'Giants Steps' took all by surprise: silky runs reinterpreting familiar melodies with deliberate off-notes and missed beats, all playfully executed. Another composition, 'Mr. PK Ambrose', named for a fellow bassist who featured on Dey's first album, *Makola*, thrilled with its fast pace mounted by both Dey and saxophonist Sisonke Xonti whose runs also caused audience gasps.



Romy Brautenseth (bass), Sisonki Xonti (sax), Marcus Wyatt (trumpet)- Standard Bank

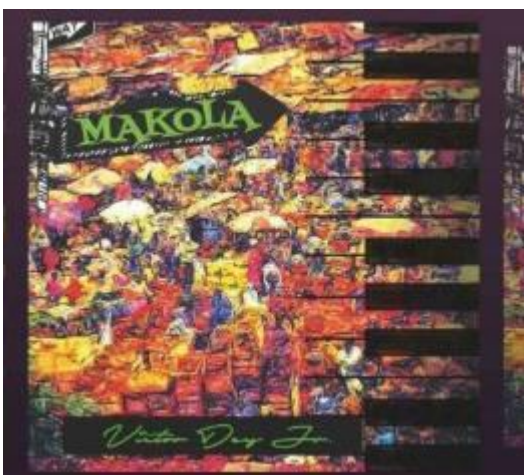
This piece gave all players a chance to triple their usual rhythms, with double bassist Romy Brauteseth stylishly running furiously through her strings. I kept looking for that West African percussive beat of Ghana's famous 'High Life' style, but Dey ran away with more contemporary modalities....or was it that Johannesburg-based drummer, Ayanda Sikade, dubbed in a familial Ghanaian title of 'Nana Ayanda', stole the show with his frenetic drum solos which wowed all?



Afrika Mkiye (left), Victor Dey Jr (middle), Ayanda Sikade (far right)

Whatever one was looking for, or not, this gifted pianist stunned his fellow artists, like pianist Afrika Mkiye, whose fits of bowing and ululations later over drinks in the Hall's cozy outdoor (and heated) bar foyer drew obvious attention.

Dey's latest album, **Makola** (2017), named after Accra's main busy market, contains zesty Ghanaian rhythms mixed with jazz, funk, and Latin American, representing "the spirit of the market which is diversity, movement and business", as Dey puts it.



Playing Fender Rhodes and other keyboards, Dey is well supported by ambitious solos of Bernard Ayisa's tenor & alto saxophones and trumpeter Nicolas Genest. Distinct blues, ballads, and improvisations characterise this album without much West African punch. But there's a reason for that, as Dey and I chatted during afternoon breaks from workshops at the Youth Jazz Festival.

Victor Dey Jr., born in 1980 and being the son of a diplomat, spent his very early years in the UK and Algeria, learning piano as well as cultural dynamics. Back home in Ghana, he completed a Liberal Arts education, and became one of the few who delved into the world of 'modern jazz', thanks to occasional alignment with Hugh Masekela and Stevie Wonder. Granted "Musician of the Year 2014" at the Ghana Vodafone Music Awards, and featured on CNN's African Voices in 2016, Dey's uniqueness was secured and followed. His soft spoken, polite style of chatting set the tone to understand his impressions of South African jazz as he had faithfully listened to different musicians, like Bheki Mseleku and Andile Yenana whom he also met at the Festival. Recognizing the strong jazz culture in South Africa with jazz roots and a special vibe, he continues to learn what he might want to add to his own music. *"I'm looking at the stylistics, how South African jazz is crafted, it's mysterious, spiritual, sometimes dark tones, and what it's telling you – it's difficult to describe. Like Mseleku's "All for One, One for All" song....."*

I suggested he talk with Afrika Mkize who had transcribed Bheki's compositions.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dey is working on his second album with his trio. *"I want something more intimate and intricate."* Maybe some traditional West African beats? We'll see. As we talked about the more traditional Ghanaian highlife of C K Mann, Dey's voice saddened. *"Oh, that is the old highlife. It's changed now. I don't want to say into what!"* He chuckles confirming my worst suspicion.

*"The Highlife is more electronic now, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. But there's a totally different feel about it now ..... It's more like pop with the Akan Twi lyrics, and moving into a more global context."* He suggested that people are playing around this mode, but are moving away from their traditional roots, while understanding the traditional in other more modern contexts.

*"This is interesting because I worked on a project earlier this year, and recorded it, taking older classical songs of Ghana and giving them a more modern jazz twist with a light jazz piano . That is yet to be released with a well known highlife lady singer, Kodjoe Aisah. So, that kind of highlife is not totally dead yet, thank God!"* But are there other musicians willing to keep the traditional alive, and yet move the music forward as improvisational music? *"There are a few guys who haven't yet put their tunes out . They're in that development phase taking so many things in, but it will come."*

This is an issue, remembering how stuck musicians like Ethiopia's Mulatu Astatke were in trying to move Ethio-jazz forward, but the schools of music (and fellow musicians!) refused to do this. So are there music schools for jazz in Ghana?



*“No, not yet. Schools prefer the [European] classical and choral music, and African traditional music. Once in a while, workshops are organized. I just did a tour in Ghanaian universities, sponsored by the American Embassy, but that’s about it. Yes, I’m disappointed, but not surprised. Jazz culture in Ghana was nicer in the 60s and 70s. But what happened is that the soldiers took over the country in coups and forced curfews on citizens who couldn’t go out to hear the live music at night. So the musicians left the country. This is why I’m on a mission to enlighten: organize workshops, give private lessons for payment or free. I’m working on something now at University of Ghana which wants to catalogue my music and start a program – that’s in the pipeline.”*

Hmmm. The creative artist struggles with time management devoted to creating, but then the other teaching/learning cycle with society takes up space, too. *“I’ll make the time,”* Dey says convincingly. *“I’ve done some things with neighboring countries like Togo and Benin. My band may be performing at the Lagos International Jazz Festival in Nigeria, too, next year! But I have loved what I have seen and learned right here with South Africans at this Festival!”* His eyes gleam.

Well, it’s reassuring to this writer that jazz, with some roots in tradition, won’t die. I’m watching Dey Jr. like a hawk! Catch his Youtube video at:  
<https://musicians.allaboutjazz.com/victordeyjnr>

**Pianist Adrian Iaies adds Argentinian jazz pazzaz at NAF Youth Jazz Festival 2018!** (29 August 2018)



Adrian Iaies at Standard Bank National Arts Festival 2018 in South Africa

With a career stretching back more than 30 years, and 25 albums as a band leader, and more than 300 concerts all over the world, Argentinian jazz pianist Adrian Iaies is just plain hard to describe. His exhausting list of awards and accomplishments would woo any jazz lover to his musical haven. But it's listening to his sometimes quirky technique, sometimes mournful and romantic moods, his slow fox trots and ballads, and then bursts of emotional tango beats and all-that-swing, all with an improvisational twist of notes, chords, and harmonics, that intrigues. Born in Buenos Aires in 1960, Iaies landed (July 2018) in South Africa's National Arts Festival heartland of Grahamstown, now renamed Makhanda, his first SA visit, to bless patrons with his brand of jazz.



Percussionist Facundo Guevara – FB

His Colegiales Quartet was made up of the illustrious percussionist, Facundo Guevara, bandoneon player Federico Siksny, and young double-bassist Diana Arias who is originally from Colombia. It was bassist Arias whose performance outranked many seasoned professionals with her very pronounced and fast paced runs and solos with a variety of classical American, South American, and African beats.



Diana Maria Arias at NAF 2018-Standard Bank

Can the Tango have a jazz 'swing'? You bet. This NAF performance proved that the classic tango rhythms can and do manoeuvre into other sound spaces.

Iaies, who is also the Artistic Director for the annual Buenos Aires International Jazz Festival as well as the Director of one of the city's finest cultural centers, La Usina del Arte, considers himself first and foremost an improvisational jazz pianist. His many albums cut across various genres of 'world', including Argentinian folkloric, European classical, and Latin music. From traditional bluesy swing of early American jazz to Strayhorn moods to tango-esque styles to funky rhythms which remind one of Oscar Peterson's occasional break with tradition to John Coltrane's broken off-beats, there's something to please most listening ears.

\* \* \* \* \*

I caught up with Iaies during one of his breaks from workshops and rehearsals which occupied his, and all other illustrious teaching musicians', time at this bustling Standard Bank Youth Jazz Festival, a welcomed part of the NAF that brings some 350 music students from all over South Africa to study, jam, and perform with another 150 professional local and international jazz musicians.



Tango Reflections

**CM:** Let's talk about how you relate with the South African jazz sound. What has been your impression about what you've heard so far?

**AI:** *I come from a classical music heritage through my mother but I also listened to jazz artists, like John Lewis and Duke Ellington growing up. I love the small groups, not the big bands. I discovered African music later because the first artists I brought to the Buenos Aires international jazz festival was Randy Weston. I had attended his gig in New York to check out if he was in good health to travel 14 hours to Argentina. He was in his mid 80s then. My first pick, however, for that festival, was Dollar Brand. I have no special approach in African music. My main teacher has been my drummer, Fecundo, because he has a special interest in*

*the global music. I'm also now looking at including South African jazz at the BA international jazz festival this year! I would also love to return back here to record with local artists.*

**CM:** Piazzolla Escalandrum band performed in Cape Town a while back. Its leader, Daniel Piazzolla, said he was tired of the tango in its traditional form and wanted to move it forward.

**AI:** *Yes, people talked about Aster Piazzolla's music like it was a step toward jazz. His traditional music had nothing to do with jazz. Juan Carlos Cobian\* music is the closest to my favourite composer, Billy Strayhorn. There's the same sophistication, harmony, and chromatic sounds, .... The traditional music has common points with this because the repertoire includes great sounds, great harmony, .... You can play the traditional Tango in the same way you play songs by Irving Berlin .... Because it's rhythmic music.*

**CM:** In South Africa, there is a continual debate about what is "South African jazz". It boils down to cultural roots.

**AI:** *We were just talking about this with Thandi Ntuli. I told her she has one tight band. They are patient. They take their time to reach the climax. They [South African musicians] are very kind people so their culture speaks through the music.*

**CM:** When I listen to Brazilian music, with its mixtures, like in Argentina with Spanish and indigenous sounds, etc, I get a sense of the frantic, the dance type of music, that's very lively.

**AI:** *In the workshops, the student asked some very smart questions about these mixtures, like how do you learn music. The important thing is the musical form and rhythms, and where the composers come from, like from sub-tropical climates or freezing south pole areas. In our workshop, we spoke about the three main groups of people in Argentina: one which stems from the indigenous Inca people, then the people in the eastern part of the country stemming from the Europeans, and then the group mixed with Africans.*

**CM:** That's quite a variety of influences, then, in your own jazz.....

**IA:** *We as musicians need to understand these different regions. That's why I experiment a lot with my drummer, Facundo, who comes from Mendoza, because he has a wide exposure to different world regions. Also, how do you learn music? Through oral traditions. There's no self-taught musician. We learn from others and traditions, what's around us. This is very important.*

**CM:** Explain further.

**AI:** *Fecundo is a very good teacher. When we leave Argentina to perform elsewhere, we notice how people behave in their countries. This is very educational. But when I return to Buenos Aires, I need some days to get used to BA again. Elsewhere, I see everyone is smiling, but back in BA, it's not like that- it's more black and white, more dark than light.*

\* \* \* \* \*

At this point, the piano was being tuned in the hall where we were chatting. Iaies volunteered to test it out, thus leaving our cozy chat, while Facundo and I continued. Facundo added, "I grew up looking to Africa as I understood this was the source, so this is my first trip to Africa. With my background in Argentinian folkloric percussion, I understand African rhythms." We spoke about how Africans and other South Africans had latched onto American jazz, pop and the Blues during the Apartheid era, and how this has influenced South African jazz compositions.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Buenos Aires International Jazz Festival, which Iaiés has run as Director since 2007, is scheduled from 14 – 19 November 2018.

\* Juan Carlos Cobián (1888–1942), an Argentine bandleader and tango composer, led the “evolutionary” tendency in tango which was perceived as tending to concert music than to traditional dance music. As a composer, he and Enrique Delfino paved the road for the road for avant-garde tango. To this extent, Cobián was such an evolutionist that the publishers did not accept his early tangos because they regarded them as ‘wrongly composed’. The truth is that they were far beyond the popular music of the time.

(from [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan\\_Carlos\\_Cobi%C3%A1n](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Carlos_Cobi%C3%A1n))

**WHERE IS SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ HEADING? Muizenberg Jazz Festival 2017** (11 October 2017)

Where are the venues? I can't do late nights! I really don't understand this 'improvisation' thing – sounds like noise to me. These are comments heard from many who wish to support our local musical talents, but cannot find a comfort level with 'jazz'. Rather, the uncertain keep gravitating to what they already know – that vibey afternoon restaurant with a blues guitarist, that music club nearby that plays electric or rock/pop.

While jazz enthusiasts, or those who would like to learn more, speculate about 'how is jazz doing in South Africa', curious and hopeful attitudes seem to be growing. Let's hear from our Festival performers:

Pianist **Bokani Dyer** admits there are a lot of powerful young voices on the scene right now. He feels part of something, like being plugged into the rest of the world, with a new wave of younger musicians who are proud of their South African heritage and ready to explode it through the arts to other continents. For instance, Dyer is presently compiling for publication a more comprehensive South African '**REAL**' book of compositions of musicians from all parts of the country. This would educate the public at large about these worthy artists and enable the less well known artists to present their profiles.

Saxophonist **Buddy Wells** really enjoys the directions which South African jazz is taking, with exciting young composers and players pushing the boundaries, like Reza Khota, Bokani Dyer, Kyle Shepherd, and the 2017 Standard Bank Young Artist for Jazz, Benjamin Jephta, to name a few. Likewise, **Bongani Sotshononda** sees that bright future: "*In the past 5 years,*



Bongani Sotshononda at Native Yards

*having been introduced to many extremely talented musicians, I can safely say that the world needs to watch this space. In the past, seasoned musicians from Europe and America at international jazz festivals used to scare us as these artists were on top of the game. Now, in my opinion, our local jazz musos, thanks to their dedication, are on par with some of the world's best talents!"*

Trombonist **Jannie 'Hanepoot' van Tonders** says SA jazz is going through a period of renewal, where a lot of young musicians are receiving an education which was not available 20 or 30

years ago. *“Since the advent of jazz being taught at our universities (however limited or lacking in direction some of those programmes might be), the result has been a new generation of jazz musicians who can read and write, and even have qualifications to work at recognised institutions such as music schools and universities. This wave of education, together with the valuable work done by Capetown-based grassroots institutions like IMAD, The Little Giants, and the Delft Big Band, is bringing about a new era with many skilled young musicians practising and teaching their craft. Unfortunately, the lack of infrastructure and funding supports, amidst a seemingly corrupt government not able to grow the economy, minimizes opportunities to develop latent talents in music and the arts in general.”*

On the other hand, pianist **Ramon Alexander** is seeing how the young South African composers are digging deeper within themselves for a more personalized, individual sound that seems to steer from a local sound to a more globalized one.



Ramon Alexander album

*“In South Africa, like in America and Europe, you will always have the forward-thinking ‘Pioneers’ competing with the ‘Conservatives’, the preservers of tradition. I believe that if you have a balanced pool of both the ‘Pioneer’ and the ‘Conservative’, you will always have a wonderful, diverse body of work within our South African music community. Diversity is key.”*

Warning! The ‘scouts’ in the corporate industries are enticing teenagers with fame and greed, says **Jazz Yard Academy Chris Petersen**. *“We encourage the kids to be confident and to have faith in the goals they have set in life, but sometimes at performances, ‘scouts’ by-pass the JYA adult personnel and secretly approach the kids with financial offers. This is a scourge that makes it very difficult for us to keep the kids focused on the bigger picture. Yet, with more education for youth, particularly valuable interactions with the Cape jazz legends, we can ensure the proliferation and sustainability of Cape Jazz music worldwide.”*



Muriel Marco

Singer/pianist **Muriel Marco** speculates whether the artist is freely exploring and playing for the audience, or is the artist playing for the market? *“There has been a tremendous exploration beyond boundaries by the musicians, and supports for venues and festivals are growing. Unfortunately, there still isn’t a steady venue in Capetown that can support daily concerts.”* The repetitive mantra from worried musicians continues to haunt: How can we creatively explore with our craft if the basic financial supports are hard to find?

In terms of the overseas market, there is heightened demand for South African jazz to collaborate, through performances, cultural exchanges, and workshops, with host country musicians and their educational institutions, according to saxophonist **McCoy Mrubata**. *“Our music is being studied abroad and we are always asked to conduct workshops and master classes when we tour in other countries.”* Likewise, trumpeter **Keegan Steenkamp** gets motivation from seeing his colleagues, as in his **MSMF** band, search for that stronger sense of direction in sounds and styles. *“I see young musicians growing up to be less influenced by international trends and styles, it’s already happening, and the ripple effect has begun. My generation is partly a product of it. That consciousness in these young creatives is what I think will help bring back a bigger audience for South African music.”*

### **South Africa’s Sound in Jazz? SAJE 2018 Conference Explains** (11 May 2018)

April is Jazz Appreciation Month worldwide. April in Capetown met with unfortunate drought (rain) for the bi-annual South African Association for Jazz Education (SAJE) Conference 2018 at the University of Capetown’s School of Music Recital Hall.

There was nothing dry about this conference, however, which bustled with robust discussions, performances, panel presentations, papers, and general comradery amongst the enthusiastic jazz geeks. It concluded on 29 April with a whopping concert in one of Capetown’s original homes for South African jazz, Gugulethu. There, in a small cozy friendly venue, called Kwa Sec, Jazz in the Native Yards (JNY), a neighbourhood initiative, brought the sounds to the ‘hood’ in homey style. Capetown continues to be proud of its jazz by respecting its various venues which bring contemporary and more traditional South African

jazz sounds to eager audiences. In fact, that was this year's Conference theme, "The South African Sound in Jazz Today".

Not all was clear, however; several conference presenters expressed their 'confusion' about what is 'South African jazz'? Issues arose that queried meaning, context, cultural identity, and indigenous sounds in 'jazz'. Significantly, to help out were jazz students performing their versions of the SA sound, coming from Eastern Cape's Fort Hare University, an institution notable in producing South African's Black intelligentsia during Apartheid years. Another performance group were Italian and South African students who had collaborated in their training with jazz education institutions in Italy and South Africa. They required little rehearsal time to present a tight and crisp performance.

Jazz in a spiritual context came up among such presenters as pianist Nduduzo Makhathini who admitted, as a healer himself, that music, spirituality, and healing were all integrated. Spirit essentially speaks through sound, referring to sangoma influences from South Africa's Zim Ngqawana, Bheki Mseleku, and guitarist Philip Tabane. Makhathini and pianist Sibusiso Mashiloane challenged how terminologies and theoretical frameworks of the West were articulating African music. For Mashiloane, his music is about his African identity with improvisation viewed as scales and colours that change with various melodic patterns, tones, and rhythms.

SAJE's President, Dr. Mageshen Naidoo, demonstrated with his guitar techniques that produce the African sounds. For instance, specific styles of sounds of the 5 to 1 chordal notes are found in South Africa's indigenous music, particularly in marabi and kwela, and these styles have been fused with an American swing (heard throughout the country during Apartheid years) to create a South African sound.

Sounds of place led to robust discussions about how South African jazz has retreated and reasserted itself, over time, in various urban centers. Art critic and jazz scholar Gwen Ansell stressed how jazz clubs come and go, depending on the politics of the day, and on the expansion of urban centers, as 'jazz' was increasingly commoditized by opportunists.

The business of producing and spreading the SA sound of jazz today unfortunately repeats refrains for better gender inclusion, more effective audience development, and conservation. The Lady Day Big Band, a stunning 18-member, Capetown-based collective, proved that professional female instrumentalists were alive and well, as did vocalist, Ernestine Deane's all-female DUB4MAMA band performance. A robust discussion challenged persistent, discriminatory views held by the less aware public that females appeared better able as vocalists than as instrumentalists. To counter these erroneous beliefs and build on Ansell's point that jazz should reach communities accessibly, one panel of venue promoters discussed the neighborhood approach to hosting quality bands. Venues in townships, along with social media advocacy, video streaming, online sites including internet and local radio, all must play a part in building appreciative audiences.

Another question: Which SA jazz should be played now? Professor Mike Rossi warned that teachers and promoters should not limit the jazz repertoire to those notable past artists who popularized SA jazz to the world earlier, but highlight the current wave of new expressions being explored by the younger trained artists.

In this respect, trumpeter composer Mandisi Dyantyi spoke about the harmonic complementarity between influences on SA jazz, namely the fusion being explored between

African hymns, western classical, and African American jazz connections. These have, he admits, rhythmically and melodically extended SA jazz sounds into exciting musical spaces.

The Conference may not have answered heady questions that remain, but the debates have already spun minds and hearts to further support that never-ending search for qualifying What is South African jazz?`

For information on SAJE details, see [www.saje.org.za](http://www.saje.org.za)

**REVIEW of Workshop #4, “Sustainable Training and Development” of SAACT** (7 March 2015)

*“You all know what black duck tape is used for, right?” And your “DI box” and “comset” should be working OK. “Oh, and don’t forget to check the jack-to-jack and the plug strip,” says the facilitator. If this sounds like music babble, that’s exactly right. “And you artists need to know terms used when stage managers and sound engineers are producing YOUR show!”*

This was how the final of four workshops ended an impressive “Sustainable Training and Development” program during February 2015 at the Cape Town International Convention Center. For the past four years, the South Atlantic Arts and Culture Trust (SAACT) and ESPAfrika, with supports from the Western Cape Education Department, has sponsored these educational events for a variety of school bands from all economic zones of the municipality. Seven Cape Town high school bands were represented as the ‘focus’ schools for this year’s

training program, and their bands will perform at Artscape for the public on Sunday afternoon, 22 March before the CapeTown International Jazz Festival starts that Friday, the 27th. Topics of the workshops included festival overview, marketing, hospitality and logistics, safety overviews, and technical stage overview.

Charl Babyboy Pilwan, age 31, was the guest artist and spoke to the awed youth audience on this Saturday, 28 February. His illustrious life and work in various countries since arriving in London in 1998 to school there landed him big-name contracts with principally Asian bands as their singer. Cape Flats-born Charl has finally returned to his original home of Cape Town. Here he hopes to work more with youth, and be a model for those aspiring youth bands and artists, particularly helping them understand the whacky world of the music business. He offered worthy advice for the teenage initiates: *“Be humble, stay grounded and proud of where you come from, and work hard. Be nice to people, particularly the production companies AND engineers who record you. Don’t burn bridges, but be open and receptive to your colleagues. Start at home and get your supports, if at all possible, from family and friends.”* Oh, and ‘branding’ yourself is also important.

Charl’s own journey wasn’t easy in terms of supports, as he started his foreign experience living on the streets of London – a dark hole in his youth – but ended up with his own production company, a branch which he is opening in Cape Town. He knows how to talk to youth: *“I had to learn to cut my own hair ‘cuz Chinese people don’t know how to cut black people’s hair,”* he recounted about his time working on the Chinese island of Macau. He is also proudly South Africa, boasting a big South African flag tattoo on his arm. *“Finish your education,”* he also implores youth.

But it was the indefatigable Camillo Lombard, an extraordinary operator from the heart, who always wins the kids’ respect. His advice is: *“Be ready! Manage your band! Know the songs well beforehand so that it’s easy to step into rehearsals with a thorough familiarity of the songs. Practice, and stay humble.”* Interesting how the term ‘humble’ keeps popping up when speaking to youth. *“Your attitude translates to your aptitude. Fly high!”*



Focus Schools Workshop 28Feb 2015: credit C.Martin

Did the youth audience understand all this? I talked with some of the students: *“It sounds like alot of work.” “Ya, it’s important to have good band members who are your friends.”*

Many commented on how helpful the “Skills Transfer Manual” was; the Manual covered the four workshops plus offered homework and skills practice during the week. I asked how they felt about Charl’s comment that musicians need to get to know each other, and did these youth do this during the workshops? *“Well, there wasn’t really time to mix. The program was quite full.”* So, I’m wondering how, in the future, bands at workshops can interact more personally, rather than just in rehearsals or on stage.

I asked the girls why there weren’t more females in the bands. *“There’s quite a few of us, but we don’t easily get a chance to practice.”* Several girls had asked questions during the plenary, but were not seen at stage demonstrations during this workshop. Questions revolved around how to start a production company and technical aspects of producing the right sound for a particular venue.

I wonder if host, Craig Parks of ESPAfrika, and his other facilitators (all male) could have tried a bit harder to encourage that public exposure of girl instrumentalists on stage. There’s always female singers, but I witnessed the girl’s instrument bags shoved under their tables while the guys licked their reeds, readying for a sound demonstration. At lunchtime, I managed to be entertained by the Chris Hani High School’s male acapella choir humming through their full mouths.

The bands came from these high schools: Chris Hani, Elsie River, Heathfield, Langa (Music Project), Pinelands, Settlers, and Wynberg. Follow-up mentoring at each school by Lombard and others will prepare the bands for their Festival stage performances, again, thanks to the WCED.

**Parlato and Washington: TWO AMERICAN JAZZ ARTISTS FROM DIFFERENT ILKS.....**  
**Post-CTIJF 2017 Notes from the Underground #1** (8 April 2017)



Kamasi Washington; courtesy John Lamparski

They grew up in the same city of Los Angeles. They both studied ethnomusicology at the University of Los Angeles. Both come from musical and artistic families who supported their

artistic growth. The common thread of rhythm, sensitivity, and intelligence punctuates their exceptionally unique sounds. Yet, their styles of improvisation are as different as their own ethnic backgrounds and communities.



Gretchen Parlato at CTIJF 2017

Songbird Gretchen Parlato's quiet, whimsical and careful emoting style vs saxophonist Kamasi Washington's protesting, raw but enlightening sonic outbursts in his choral, orchestral, and improvised music on the large Kippie's stage of the Festival, she on the listening stage of Rosies.

### **Gretchen Parlato**

Parlato hisses, clicks, and hushes into her microphone while clapping gentle beats with her hands, supported by husband, Mark Guiliana's off-beat clickety clacks on basic drums. Born into a richly musical family in Los Angeles, CA, Parlato has cultivated musical dimensions from multiple sources who have lavished praise on her, like American jazz musician of note, Wayne Shorter: *"There's simply no one out there like Gretchen Parlato."*



Gretchen Parlato band at CTIJF 2017

Her performance on the Rosies Stage at the Capetown International Jazz Festival 2017 brought sighs and awe to a highly charged crowd which gave her a standing ovation after her riveting and rhythmically enduring concert. We floated home after her last ballad, a catchy ditty that rang in the head for days.

In her Masterclass, offered a day before her performance, Parlato stressed the three levels of analysis she uses to characterise and deliver a song: On a more basic level is the emotional, with the tools to feel and indulge the impulses, messages, and tones of a song. *"Examine what the lyricist or song writer is trying to convey in the music and what emotions affect the listener or deliverer of the song."* At the middle level is the technical, how a song is constructed, what techniques are used to deliver the song. *"Ask yourself: what process did*

*the writer go through to write the song.*” At a higher level is the spiritual, how the song connects with others, and what higher thoughts or consciousness are realised because of the song’s delivery and message. She had started her Masterclass with a 10-minute unspoken meditation to introduce the audience to her process of creating. That mellowed all.

In chatting with Parlato, she explains her stylistic technique with humble recommendations: I asked: what did she want to convey in her songs, whether written by her or by others? *“Every song I perform is an extension of my personal connection. There should always be some work with a song about ‘the story’, but also a personal injection, about what is genuine and honest for me.”*

She has sung on some 70 albums and produced four of her own. And what is genuine and right for her now? *“Every album is a portrait of what’s happening in my life. The last album “live in NYC” contains love songs that question our life, the meaning of life, our existence, why we’re here. I wrote these songs with what was for me a twist of irony and sarcasm, but someone else might interpret them differently. I think that’s good – to allow the listener to have their own interpretation. A song I sang five years ago, if sung now, would come from a different place in my life experience, and be expressed that way.”*



I found Parlato exudes a strong confidence with herself. *“It comes from being honest and true to myself.”* We discussed what suggestions she could give to those female singers coming from marginalized backgrounds, for instance the Black South Africans musicians, in how to project themselves with honesty and confidence?

*“Everyone has pain and pleasure in their life, at different degrees and intensities. One should do soul-searching to find out who they are, their background and history, and find out what their talents or gifts are. Find out what their learned behaviour is, does it come from their parents, or from some event that happened that caused a change? Then try to write about it, in poetry or words. I recommend journaling. I journal so that I can record that stream of consciousness that flows.....It just might turn into a song, or just bring out some truthful thinking about oneself. This is about getting comfortable with yourself, and your agency. Everyone has something to share, whether it is sorrow, or tragedy, or something uplifting. This is when confidence comes, when you see that truth, and you’re willing to share it. Then your song becomes helpful and therapeutic to others who hear it.”*

Parlato’s music is very polyrhythmic, so she explained where that comes from. *“Yes, my high school, Los Angeles School for the Arts, exposed me to the different arts, with a West African drum teacher, teachers from the UCLA Ethnomusicology Department where I studied later, with Javanese ensembles, and many other groups. Then, at UCLA, I pursued the cultures and rhythms through music and dance.”*

## Kamasi Washington

On the other large Kippies Stage, saxophonist Kamasi Washington exploded with his 10-piece band, including his own brother, Rickey, on a delightful flute.



Kamasi Washington at CTIJF 2017

Washington's three-album *The Epic* (Brainfeeder label) stirred up critics' charts and listeners in 2015, and contains his own compositions in collaboration with a variety of artists ranging from choral to hip hop to orchestral to electronic grooves. Indeed, an epic fusion.



*The Epic* album cover

As we chatted, he explained his epic three-disc album : *“I wanted the album to speak my own mind for a change. I had always been playing other people’s music. I wanted something that was completely me, to put it all out there at once. There were some consultations about the songs with masterful musicians, but because the musicians were close friends, I could run with it freely.”* Thundercat, the electric bassist, is one of Washington's top five musicians he applauds, as he led his Masterclass listeners to understand what influenced him to 'break

away' from other mainstream jazz and make his own fusions with a variety of hip hop, R&B, and choral genres.

Washington humbly presented his wish to know South African musicians better, citing Hugh Masekela as a big influence on his early musical years. *"My father used to play Hugh's records over and over, and I grew to really dig him. This opened my ears also to other Africans, like Fela."*



Kamasi Washington Masterclass at CTIJF 2017

As an African-American, Washington confirmed a desire to spend more time with Africans (aka indigenous or 'black') on this continent because he felt a connection. *"I listened to the kids outside this hotel playing drums and dancing. My African-American culture comes from here – it is African culture. I feel a connection. My dual connection is to Africa and to my own community – I think about troubles here in Africa as being similar to ours at home."* He says he learned a lot from the Academy of Music of Alexander High School in Beverlywood, Los Angeles, *"but it's in my home area of Watts (which experienced serious riots during the 1960s civil rights marches) where I hear the rhythms, language, tones, and emotions from my people, and where I feel free to express myself".*



Kamasi Washington being interviewed 2 April 2017

What messages, i.e. political, is he trying to convey, if any, in his music? *"I guess music and politics are intertwined. I don't force the music either way, just infuse it with my views on society. I don't see myself as a politician, but I have strong views on how the state of things should be or currently is. I don't present anything directly political, but try to infuse my thoughts and sensitivities into a song."*

And how does he see jazz education in American black communities, mentioning how 'decolonizing' of curriculum is now an important issue in South African arts, in the curriculum, and in learning processes? *"We call it 'institutionalizing' which has caused lots of problems with the arts, with equality issues. Schools in urban African-American communities don't have music programs at all. And where music is taught in the other schools, African-American music isn't necessarily taught. That's why I've stayed close to my cultural community of Watts. Our other issue in schools is to obtain instruments, just to be able to have classes. African-Americans grow up with music in churches where there's some instruments, but our schools don't have the instruments for teaching and learning."*

The CTIJF 2017 event was all the richer because of these two incredibly innovative artists and their bands.

**Reedman Salim Washington: Decolonise and Fund Jazz Education, Please** (4 July 2021)

During his recent Afrika Love concert tour in Cape Town, reed and wind instrumentalist, Professor Salim Washington came with a purpose and message about the jazz art form. As head of the Performing Arts Department at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) in Durban, American-born Washington was bidding farewell to South Africa for a year to create and teach at Columbia University in his former home of New York City.



Respecting both African and African-American traditions, he wanted to pay tribute to one of CapeTown's leading jazz legends, Winston 'Mankunku' Ngozi, who lived and thrived in Gugulethu's jazz culture during Apartheid days. Winston would have turned 78 this year, had he lived. Thanks to Winston's brother, Thuli Ngozi, who continues to keep Winston's tenor saxophone under safe cover, Washington was able to perform his Kwa Sec concert in Gugulethu with that precious saxophone to the fans' delight.



Salim Washington (l.) with Thuli Ngozi (rt.)

Respecting the life of such elders, Washington laid flowers at Winston's grave in the huge Gugulethu cemetery; this seemed to spur Washington to eloquently reverberate through that saxophone Winston's living Spirit in such songs as the ever popular 'Yakhal' Inkomo'.

Besides several recent albums (*Dogon Revisited* (2018) and *Sankofa* (2017)), plus his composition in The Alchemy Project entitled, 'Afrika Love', honouring his ever loyal pianist, Afrika Mkize, Washington continues to focus on the importance of jazz education that heralds past legacies as well as current new themes. This importance attracted All Jazz Radio (and others) to pursue with Washington what his strategies are for promoting both formal and non-formal jazz education. Courting wisdom from decades of political activism, writing

and composing, performing, and raising four children in New York, Washington was earlier drawn to South Africa's experiences in dismantling institutional Apartheid, as well as the contemporary currents running through its jazz culture. A Fulbright Scholarship landed him at Durban's UKZN in 2009 after which he continued his fascinating journey from 2013 to cultivate South African jazz talents, musicality, and the contributions of transatlantic and Pan-African jazz culture.

### **Critical Issues Facing South African Jazz**

Washington admits that South Africa has one of the finest jazz cultures in the world. However, he sees two burning issues facing the jazz scene in South Africa: One is the lack of official support for the art form, and secondly, the notion of credentialing for lecturers at tertiary and secondary education levels needs reform.

*"Jazz in South Africa gets more support from the Nordic countries than from government. In KZN, this government gives millions of Rands to support the Philharmonic Orchestra, which is lovely to have, but maskandi musicians don't get millions of Rands, jazz musicians don't get millions of Rands. We're supposed to be decolonial, post-colonial, but the European art form is supported in a way that jazz can't dream of receiving such support. So that's a big concern to me."*

*"Regarding the credentialing for lecturers of music, there are jazz experts who have not pursued graduate and post-graduate degrees, but get their expertise from the bandstand. Their lifestyle and mentoring with others makes them jazz masters. But these masters are not allowed to teach jazz in the formal way, in schools! It is a concern of mine because somebody like Winston Mankunku Ngozi could not teach saxophone!"*



Winston Mankunku with Mike Perry: Credit Mike Perry Images

*"So we have a whole generation of students who are learning from teachers who may be experientially removed from this lifestyle jazz culture. Yet, these people are called 'experts'. The real experts are sometimes languishing in peculiar situations, [poverty, lack of opportunities, etc] when they could be called on to teach the younger generations. I've noticed there are a lot of great players emerging who are also consulting with those legendary musicians out there to learn more. So I'm not afraid of these seasoned musicians' contributions dying out."*

Schools can tend to be elitist, yes, and young musicians, like Sisonki Xonti and others from the area townships schools, could have benefited from a Winston in the classroom – a

win-win for both, giving employment to the jazz master. Yet, in the past twenty years, UCT has churned out teachers of music who are teaching at secondary and tertiary levels, which are producing more and more trained musicians. Then there are the smaller music programs, like IMAD (Institute for Music and Indigenous Arts Development), the Cape Town Music Academy, and The Little Giants, that are training youth and offering performance venues.

*"And that's a great thing. I just wish we had it in the other provinces. KZN schools in townships don't have music programs, even extracurricular activities at all. This is one of the stronger points about the Western Cape, though."*

## **Mentoring**

*"In my own way, in my own teaching and as head of the Department of the Performing Arts at UKZN, I'm trying to introduce mentoring. This means there's a pedagogical distinction which brings different results from a 'schooled' candidate. In a school, the candidate is chosen to be mentored. Even though I'm entrenched in the formal school system, I try to bring the nonformal aspects into learning as well."*

So what does that look like?

*"I didn't learn jazz in school. In fact, I dropped out of school; that wasn't the place where I would learn the music that I wanted to play. And the opportunities to join a big band were dwindling so a young person is almost forced to go into a school to learn. I think we need to know how to transform the conservatory for the purpose of jazz, because its pedagogy is set up on this 19th Century conservatory model, which has its virtues, but there are other virtues to bring to the music perspective."*

Regarding mentoring, the South African Association for Jazz Education (SAJE) had funded a mentorship program called Sisters in Sound, more or less patterned on the USA program of Sisters in Jazz. As happens in the arts, the funding ran out – for both programs. Washington thinks such mentoring is extremely important for young females and should be revived.

*"That would be a beautiful thing. Jazz has been a boys' club for too long a time. It's time to expand. Female teachers are important. Women have been instrumental as teachers and as models – the black female voice is the sound of jazz. Young girls' working conditions are horrible and, unfortunately, they are sexually molested, so they give up. We need to bring to account these men who abuse women as this might help increase females to enter and stay in the industry. I have talented women who underperform, and I expect there are things they're not telling me because I'm a man. Maybe more female educators would help that. In the US, there are a number of scandals in the tertiary institutions, so there may be more scandals outside of the schools that affect women negatively."*

## **Back to New York – What Next**

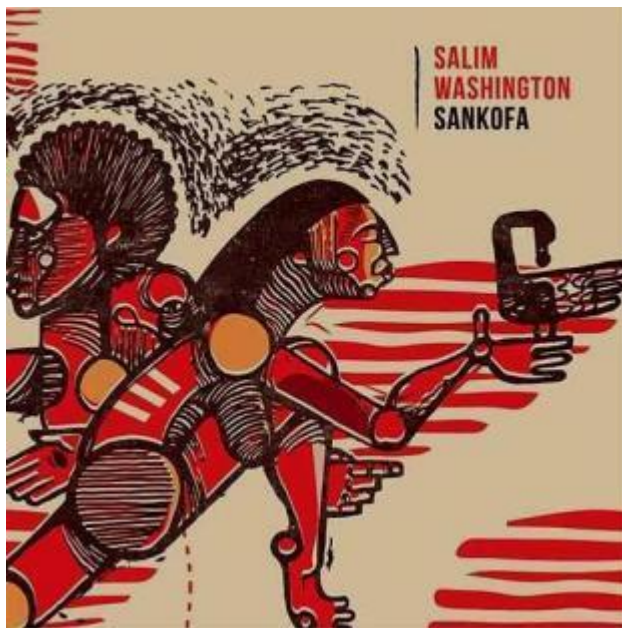
In September, Washington becomes an international visiting professor for the academic year with Columbia University's newly minted African American and African Diasporic Studies Department.

*"I'm super excited about that. I will be teaching two classes which I think will center around either South African jazz literature or South African practices. I'm still formulating it all in my mind. I also plan to teach a seminar on John Coltrane who formed the body of my earlier PhD"*

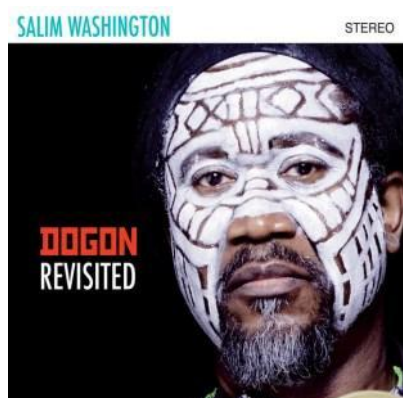
research. I plan to use this seminar to help me write a book about him and his music. Teaching at Columbia will require a lot of preparation.... And I'll be performing in New York as well. I raised my 4 children there. We lived in Harlem before it became gentrified."

### Albums and Lockdown

Two albums were produced during Washington's tenure with South African music: **Dogon Revisited** (2018) preceded by **Sankofa**, released in 2017.



*"Sankofa (2017) represented my experiences in living in South Africa and the influences South African music had on me. The Sankofa bird is a Ghanaian symbol of the return of Diasporic Africans to the motherland. The idea is that you keep your eye on the past while moving forward with the wisdom of the past. So all that embodies my personal journey which means 'Sankofa' as I had returned to the Motherland. I brought together South African musicians whom I felt shared my sentiments about music and life."*



*"Dogon was recorded earlier but released in 2018. It was supposed to be a recording when I knew I would be moving to South Africa to do my Fulbright in Durban. So it is emblematic of what it was like for me to be a New York jazz musician."*

The lockdown period since March 2020 proved fruitful for Washington as he could complete eight orchestral scores.

*"I've had this dream for a decade, and now, these compositions are finally being finished. I want a jazz ensemble, a philharmonic orchestra, a choir – either an African American or South African choir – I think a South African choir, and a 3-person percussion ensemble that could play African, South African, Brazilian and Cuban styles. I'd also like to have a female and a male poet to bridge between the semantic content and music, and give vent to direct social commentary to compliment the music."*

This process started with the **Sankofa** album and will continue during his USA residence.

*"An earlier album, **Harlem Homecoming** (2006), was the result of the songs that grew up on the bandstand during my New York performance days. At that time we were recording live at St. Nick's Pub in Harlem and we were also recording me with strings. So this was an earlier attempt to get to this grand vision I had to perform with strings. I was dabbling, trying to get my chops together."*



### **The Alchemy Project with 'Afrika Love'**

Another current project Washington will enjoy contributing to is The Alchemy Project involving 5 musicians who come together from different parts of USA (and Washington's South Africa) to perform and record each other's compositions. Washington's 'Afrika Love' song offers an endearing and memorable tribute to a favourite South African pianist, Afrika Mkize, who, one day, just phoned Washington to say 'I love you'. Musicians include Salim Washington (tenor sax, flute, bass clarinet, oboe), Erica Lindsay (tenor sax, clarinet, alto flute), Samantha Bashnack (trumpet), Michael Ventoso (trombone), Sumi Tonooka (piano), David Arend (double bass), and Chad Taylor (drums).



*"We have two grants from the Chamber Music of America to perform and record new works. Erica Lindsay and Sumi Tonooka are the grant holders but our work together was interrupted by Covid so we couldn't meet up and perform. But we start work for 2021/2022 with rehearsals as soon as I get to New York. It's a great group and has really helped me to grow as a composer. And I'll be in the company of other seasoned, adventurous, intelligent composers."*

No doubt, his exploits in USA will enrich his pedagogical baggage when he arrives back in Durban in 2022. As long as he doesn't get too lost in his favourite city of New York which he considers ***the cultural capitol of planet Earth!***

*"New York was my golden period, particularly in the 1970s with pop music. I thought that was how music was supposed to sound. Now, when I hear the current music, I realize that that was a golden era! Like when I was performing at St. Nick's Pub in Harlem, it was an extraordinary time, and I said to myself, let me enjoy it while it's happening."*

**Nicky Schrire comments About Jazz with SAJE:** (September 2017)

(From the South African Association for Jazz Education (SAJE) **Newsletter #41**, September 2017, page 7)

**Learning to Teach - Teaching to Learn – Nicky Schrire**

I started teaching when I was a student at the SA College of Music. I was an aural tutor and appreciated getting to play “teacher teacher” and earn some extra income. Towards the end of my degree, I was hired as a part-time saxophone teacher at Wynberg Girls’ High School. Out of my depth (and out of love with the instrument), I’d drag my feet into the school to teach beginner saxophonists, trying desperately to remember a time when I didn’t know how to fit the reed into the ligature, or I had to think twice about which finger action resulted in a “G” note.

After I’d moved to New York to embark on an intensely steep learning curve, I experienced a newfound confidence when I returned to South Africa. Suddenly, due to good fortune, I’d experienced things and learnt lessons that I could share with students back home. I had something to offer. I felt empowered and my confidence as a teacher grew. I could lead eighty Rustenburg High students in a circle-singing workshop, or give a master class to jazz students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. But, perhaps, the biggest teaching lesson came in the form of a single phrase delivered during graduate school. Chris Rosenberg, my pedagogy lecturer at the Manhattan School of Music, was an avuncular, engaging, and infinitely wise man (and also a sublime jazz guitarist). Midst drawing up imaginary course curricula and lesson plans, he gave us this nugget of gold: Teach the student, not the subject.

I’ve been a part-time lecturer at the SA College of Music at UCT in Capetown for nearly two years now. I love working with university level students, and specifically those interested in studying jazz. I don’t consider myself a jazz musician anymore, but I have a newfound appreciation for why jazz is an invaluable foundation - not just for other musical genres, but for life. Can you think on your toes if something goes awry? Can you adapt quickly and successfully? Can you work with others? Can you put your own stamp on something you didn’t necessarily create? I’m aware that I don’t have an education degree - both my undergrad and Masters were performance degrees. So, every lesson and student that I teach is an invaluable opportunity for me to learn more about teaching. Here are some aspects of the work that have encouraged, challenged and surprised me (likely not news to more experienced teachers! But, perhaps, useful for newer teachers like myself): -

Don’t forget to teach an approach or practising methodology to the student before teaching the subject. This has been particularly true when teaching improvisation, especially for singers. Many students never learned how to practise. They don’t know the power of repetition; how to break up longer phrases into smaller, bite-sized pieces for efficient practice; or how struggling through written transcription will halve the time it takes to learn a solo. It’s also worth remembering that in teaching the student, not all students learn the same way. Some pupils are theoretically minded while others run a mile at the mention of chordal analysis and tritone substitutions. Find a system that works for the student, e.g. working aurally; in-class repetition; relating concepts back to theory. –

The psychology of learning an instrument is fascinating. I can see a student shut down mentally when they don’t understand a concept. Some students become visibly frustrated and angry, while others retreat and mentally check out of the lesson, though they remain physically in the classroom. How do you coax someone back into engagement when all they want to do is escape frustration and confusion? It’s different for every person, but I’ve learnt not to push students to grasp concepts immediately. My own experience has taught me that most of what I learnt at university only made sense years after graduation. Maybe it’s the great aggravation and joy that hindsight delivers. It’s only with the benefit of time spent away from a subject that we are able to sift through information and finally absorb it. –

I love being a student. My past teachers are the most revered figures in my life, even decades after learning with many of them. And my singing teachers were particularly influential in offering support and guidance as I was discovering how to be a musician, and how to be and sound like myself. Each lesson had therapeutic effects and benefits and I've sorely missed having a teacher figure in my life. I recently started having lessons with a wonderful teacher in Cape Town. Her methodology combines Alexander Technique, eurhythmics and classical techniques. It is difficult for me to understand and to practise, but it's precisely because it is challenging and foreign to me that I return, week after week. But I've also realised that learning again is expanding my offerings as an educator. When I identify a student's vocal challenges but feel stumped as to what a possible antidote may be, I discuss the issue with my teacher. Not only does she offer exercises to correct the niggle, but I walk away understanding the anatomical cause of the problem. It is my version of teacher-training.

Mostly what I've realised is that if I'm not learning from another teacher, from an experience, or from the students themselves, then I'm a teacher with limited abilities.

**The Kirby Ensemble of classical works will excite music fans** (23 November 2022)  
(as posted on Facebook page of Africa Jazz Radio before it was discontinued)

Having won the Schock Chamber Music Competition this year, again, the ambitious Kirby Ensemble of five undergraduate classical music students at the University of Cape Town's College of Music plan to wow the crowd this weekend, again! When the organizers of the

2022 Jazz & Classical Encounters Festival, Volume 4 (at the Spier Wine Farm Amphitheatre in Stellenbosch) reached out to the Cape Chamber Music Collective (CCMC) to recommend a classical music ensemble, these young enthusiasts were chosen. *"We had only formed our Ensemble earlier this year, but have performed in four concerts to date with Beethoven and Schumann works. Spier will host our fifth concert,"* sparked spokesperson and violinist Kaitlin Downie, a fourth year student at the College. *"CCMC conducted 12 projects a year amounting to 60 concerts. They want to spread chamber music to Cape Town and Western Cape environs. One of their passions is to pay musicians well."* It's about time!

The Ensemble is composed of a string quartet of students in different years of their study: Nic Bruiners (4th yr) on violin 1, Kaitlin Downie (4th yr) on violin 2, Micaela Arries (2nd yr) on viola, Ashlin Grobbelaar (1st yr) on cello. Additionally, pianist Gerhard Joubert (3rd yr) makes up the string quintet. The two women in the Ensemble, Kaitlin and Micaela, have their sights on continuing with post-graduate studies and performing with ensembles, orchestras, and other entities. Asked if they might 'cross over' into jazz and improvisational modalities, a bit of silence befell the discussion. But Kaitlin eagerly told her story about working a little with fellow student saxophonist, Ashley Laity, who had composed a piece for string quartet, flugelhorn and percussion. *"We also worked with a Dutch violinist to improvise on classical pieces. Jazz is interesting; you live on the edge!"* quipped Kaitlin.

So, how do the five work together?

*"We all share equal roles in deciding what to play. As a new Ensemble, we're still talking about the different repertoires we would like to play, like more 20th Century works, like with Shostakovich. We're also looking at the work of Florence Price [an African American pianist teacher and composer in America's segregated South and Chicago in the 1930s and 40s], and the blues influence in that American classical music of the time."*

What about composing? *"Oh, that's too difficult. There's just so much already in the classical genre."*

Why the name 'Kirby' Ensemble?

*"The Kirby Collection is a room inside the South African College of Music with more than 600 African, Asian and European instruments. It also has sound recordings, databases, reports, catalogues amongst other things. We decided to name ourselves after this collection because it's a unique collection to SACM and we wanted to honour that since we are all students there."*

Where do you think South African music is heading, generally? Are there good signs of growth?

*"It's moving in the right direction, I think, since more people are noticing local South African talents, especially in Capetown. More halls are being filled after the pandemic. A lot of musicians lost income, but I think people are now coming out without the pandemic restrictions. Capetown is becoming the hub."*

This weekend's Kirby Ensemble of young talents might prove what marvels await CapeTown if it is to become South Africa's 'hub' for quality music.

(Originally published at  
<https://jazzconnection.co.za/jazz-cuisine-ecology-prince-albert-journey-2-jazz-festival-3-7-may-2023/24/04/2023/>)

**Jazz, cuisine, & ecology: Prince Albert Journey 2 Jazz Festival, 3-7 May 2023** (24 April 2023)

The small Karoo town of Prince Albert will soon light its fires to celebrate its youth, community spirit, and entrepreneurial endeavors with its visionary “Journey to Jazz” music festival, 3-7 May 2023!

<https://pactrust.co.za/journey-to-jazz/> <http://www.journeytojazz.co.za>

There’s something ‘special’ about Prince Albert, and entrepreneurship is the name of the game, for young and old. The town is cradled by the Swartberg Pass, a UNESCO Heritage site which speaks to the celebration of Jazz through UNESCO’s International Jazz Day held across the globe annually on the 30th April. (Off National Highway N1 eastward, about 4 hours from Cape Town)

Patrons are encouraged to buy their tickets soonest, and book their accommodation with a myriad of houses boasting living and meeting spaces all over the town. The focus on this town is centered with the Prince Albert Community Trust (PACT), a project operating quite successfully over the past decades, to engage youth in skills training, creative planning, and active projects, all which aim at sustaining an entrepreneurial future for growing generations of talents in this rural area of South Africa’s Little Karoo.

The keynote speaker at this year’s J2J will be Professor **Thuli Madonsela**, the former Public Protector of South Africa, and PACT’s Patron, who brings years of experience in applied administrative law principles within public service.

How can a festival build talents and community cohesion.... In this case, through ‘jazz’? The purpose statement of PACT <http://www.pactrust.co.za> highlights how this Festival Project succinctly answers this fundamental question:

*“PACT is committed to serving as a change agent by making a lasting impact through empowering and enabling the youth of the greater area it serves, while fighting to transform the current status quo of inequality still so deeply embedded in our society.*

*Collaboration, faith, hope and love – these are the building blocks that form our foundation of positive, transformational community engagement....with aims to build trust and bridges within the community.....A multipronged organisation, PACT considers and evaluates every initiative through the lens of how it can create opportunity, build social cohesion and answer real needs.....for the welfare of the disadvantaged community of Prince Albert and the greater municipal area of Klaarstroom, Seekoeigat and Leeu-Gamka.”*

Education, Health and Well-Being, and Youth and Skills Development are key aims in creating this transformational community resilience. According to **Naaim Briesies**, the Pact Center and Regional Leader, *“ours is a wholistic approach to community empowerment. We seek to provide alternative futures to more than 2000 local young people, between ages 1 to 35, by having them co-drive and co-produce all aspects of running a festival. This includes adopting an innovative inclusive approach and a solution-based mindset.”* The youth’s skills mix includes not only performing as artists and crafters, but producing and running events which includes various activities in festival production, like sound engineering, handling media and communications about the event, filming and photography, and marketing events.

Local and outside mentors’ work starts from inside the community’s leadership. Briesies says, *“We want youth to believe in us (mentors) as they see our own growth and want to do same. Then, the energy flows. Our young photographers are already training the younger students. It’s organic. Once started, you can’t stop.”*

So, what training and activities grow these young entrepreneurial talents? There are resources both inside and outside the town which co-partner with PACT, such as organizations, groups, individuals, and companies that can bring in trainers, funding, and physical equipment for seating patrons and running stages, for instance. But all planning and infrastructural development is locally-driven. PACT also uses a national Afrikaans cultural association for promoting Koi and San languages and cultures, and the musical roots of brown communities in the Western Cape. That's another full story.....

**Ingrid Wolfaardt**, PACT's Executive Team Leader, based in Paarl, has adopted the PA community as her own! *"We are going to showcase our talents because the brown community of the Western Cape takes on all the different cultural mixes. Just look at the roots of where the community was born, 350 to 380 years ago, due to the slave trade with South Africa, with the Dutch East Indian Company coming through – over 100 different connections make up this community. This fascinating community conventionally looks like it has no cultural sway....because there's no written down recipes, there's no novels about this community, by this community. One or two poets – very scarce, etc etc."*

**Azuke Ntapane**, PACT's Team Leader for Governance & Compliance, adds value. *"At this J2J festival, we'll be showcasing young people at every single level..... from hospitality, to logistics, to music production, to stage and sound management, you name it. Our own people will be MCing these events, not only to our own community, but also to the provincial and national and global communities."*

So PACT seeks to turn around a perspective that this community has no specific culture, and re-discover what makes this culture so amazingly rich. Wolfaardt continues: *"It's a very delicate culture. It's not obvious. One has to engage with this culture with a sense of humour, with the story telling, the manner of dancing, etc etc. All get showcased. So we start with these young people in a concert. At first, we had an audience of 50 people sitting on plastic chairs and we ended up with some 5000 people at this concert. There were young people doing the production, on a committee to plan and do the photography, the video, all aspects of staging the event. It was a jol!"*

In Prince Albert, showcasing talents means expanding the circle of connections. Azuke continues: *"We say, you've got to make your own connections. You've got the confidence; you've got the skills; we've taught you about invoicing, how to run a business, so you have the strength to produce the product."*

In order to celebrate international Jazz month and day of April 30, PACT has co-partnered with others who conduct planning mentoring with the PACT youth. **Brenda Sisane**, an accomplished journalist, broadcaster and community organizer known for her radio broadcast of jazz programs on KAYA FM, is the 2023 Creative Director for J2J. Award-winning composer and pianist **Bokani Dyer** is the Artistic Director of the inaugural J2J. Other festival development players include those who produced past Cape Town International Jazz Festival (CTIJF) events, such as the Media agent, **Networxpr**, **Eastern Acoustics** for sound engineering equipment, the internationally renowned photographer, **Louis Botha**, who is based in Prince Albert, and a host of other notable facilitators.

The music lineup includes: MIKE ROSSI ROOTS AND ROUTES; DEREK GRIPPER; AMANDA TIFFIN TRIO; MELANIE SCHOLTZ; KYLE SHEPHERD TRIO; and RAMON ALEXANDER. Other events engaging the ecology and cuisine of the area are listed on the website, mainly during

the daytime. For more information: [www.journeytojazz.co.za](http://www.journeytojazz.co.za)  
#journeytojazz #pactjazz #jazzmusic #jazzlovers #princealbert



PACT J2J movers and shakers

(Originally published at <https://jazzconnection.co.za/prince-albert-lights-up-its-second-karoo-journey-to-jazz-festival-with-youth-in-charge/20/05/2024/>)

**Prince Albert lights up its Second Karoo Journey to Jazz Festival with youth in charge** (20 May 2024)

The first thing that tends to hit one's open soul, when new arrivals start to move around this hidden Karoo gem of Prince Albert town, is the message on young villagers' faces. They seem to light up, not in a phony or inquisitive way, but rather their eyes pierce yours, with a welcoming smile that surprises. Theirs is the first move, a hand shake request with a reciprocal smile, eye contact, and *'Welcome to our festival'*, followed by *'What's your name, young lady?'* Mission accomplished, connections made, all is well.

Prince Albert Community Center (PACT) former Team Leader and now custodian and Manager of the well-lit and popular Showroom Theatre where festival events take place, Naa'im Briesies quips: *"Our youth go through training and on-the-job skills development by working in sectors of event management, festival planning, and teamwork. They run the show!"*

Hardly unpacked upon arrival at my comfortable cottage for rent that weekend, I found myself, rather, wandering down the main road and settled into a couch on the pavement in front of the Showroom. There, I became engaged with Naa'im and his co-Manager, Renichia Mooneys, in lively chats about what changes are taking place with the Festival compared to last year's experience. Both leaders had spent several years running PACT, but moved into other leadership positions. Renichia went off to obtain her Bachelor's degree at Stellenbosch University, and now both were accepting jobs with more responsibilities in their home town. *"Development of skills is all about the realm of possibilities"*, they quipped. A musician as well, Naa'im has developed over time his own band, 'Gellyblik' offering motivations to youth to practice their own creativity.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/w7VXnwXv7vHrTMN5/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

*"Ours is a wholistic approach to community empowerment. We seek to provide alternative futures to more than 2000 local young people, between ages 1 to 35, by having them co-drive and co-produce all aspects of running a festival. This includes adopting an innovative inclusive approach and a solution-based mindset."*

The youths' skills mix includes not only performing as artists and crafters, but producing and running events which includes various activities in festival production, like sound engineering, handling media and communications about the event, filming and photography, and marketing events. During the events, it was common to see a young man or woman aiming their Canon camera at the stage or audience, capturing the essence of the moment.

Meet Mierav, who is 1 of the 10 learners from the Zwartberg High School in Prince Albert. The 10 learners attended a photography workshop at the PACT Centre during the Journey To Jazz (2024) festival sponsored by Canon. The learners were given an assignment of photographing a product which makes it look like it's being advertised. Mierav's photo of the product stood out and she has won herself a Canon Camera proudly sponsored by Canon South Africa. She has mentored with Nina Zimolong, an International Fashion, Commercial, and Fine Art Photographer and also Canon's brand ambassador.



### The Showroom Theater

The Showroom Theater has a long history of purpose, functions, and a life blood which moved from being a car showroom to being the cultural hub of the town! Because no one seemed to want to buy the property for some hefty millions, it finally sold to the non-profit PACT for a pittance. Boasting some 140 seats, and a wide stage, it was the perfect 'meeting point' and no-frills hub for this music Festival. Its buzz extended to the couches outside lining the pavement for greets and meets.

Even Artistic Director, jazz pianist Kyle Shephard, could be seen chatting up the bartenders on opening night, as the Theater prepared for the hoards of thirsty ticket-holders. All festival staff seemed ready to engage, often in animated conversations, with patrons as they filed into the towns' other venues having shows. As an experienced music curator himself, Shepherd is realizing a dream – to engage youth in the Karoo in the creative arts. He, himself, boasts a number of accomplishments and awards not only within the jazz genre, but also writing scores for a number of films, television series and theatre production, many gaining wide recognition

One popular restaurant venue, the African Relish, known for its daytime cooking lessons for patrons and thin-based pizza varieties, hosted evening performances on its lawn under a tent with atmospheric aplomb of lit table candles. Our young waiter, Wayne, from the village, trained in hospitality, did not hesitate to announce to my table, with utter confidence, that this was his first evening to work at the restaurant. He seem calm, and gallantly served us always with a smile!

Another popular barber shop in town found Italian pianist Giovanni Guidi getting a head and face shave, having just 'flown in' from overseas, via Namibia, to perform with his trio. He delighted in our interview inspite of the barber having to work around our chats and his facial movements!

On Friday, Guidi gave a moving performance: Beginning very energetically with lifts off piano stool, and some heavy strumming from bassist, then swings into a soft ballad with fancy runs that keep one awake. Guidi goes off some where after the melody is set, then comes back... Like exploring voids having some sort of voice and content. It was a sonic ride, through familiar tunes and, albeit, some strange sounds.

Other international artist took over stages along with local South African bands fitting into a tight program schedule over these five days. That's another discussion.

Rinichia offered words of wisdom about her journey. After she finished her first degree in social economics at Stellenbosch University, she postponed doing her Honours because of her desire to continue to build training programs and opportunities for youth in Prince

Albert. *“Last year 1500 tickets were sold; this year 3000 tickets! The North End community is supporting the festival, also. They come to shows during the year, and are asking more about programs. They’re happy to see people they want to see.”*

PACT now keeps a data base of unemployed youth. Opportunities turn up, like working at a guest house, and the tourism sector is booming with openings coming up regularly. One training this year was in Project Management and critical skills like starting one’s own business, managing one’s time, etc. Such training is leading to actual jobs. And what about sponsorships? *“When we know job bursaries are available, we let youth know and help them to apply. One girl is at SUN in her first year. The problem with keeping the data base accurate is that applicants don’t tell us if they get a job or go for further schooling.”*

*“Some youth go into retail, agriculture, antiques collection, but mostly tourism.”* Small businesses?

*“We plan to have workshops on SMMEs after this festival in late May. We have the coffee shop at PACT, and try to train in specific skills, for instance, how to start their own businesses, the barber shop business, taking photos for weddings, etc. We have connections for assistance in workshops, and the National Youth Development Agency will assist us. Also SITA with some money.”*

PACT, as an NGO, is funded mainly from private donations, but it would like to also be a source of funding for skills development and training. Artists in Schools Project, run by the Western Cape Education Department, is mainly in the High School where PACT facilitates the training. *“Your waiter you spoke about was part of this program and got a job at African Relish. Another artist, Gloria, is performing with Ramon’s band. Maybe she will go on to a bigger stage!”*

And it’s all about getting bigger and better! Next year’s crop of youth coming out of various training programs during this year, and practicing/working at various festivals and events in Prince Albert, and perhaps elsewhere, will convince us this is a jewel of a place and project. Worth booking accommodation a year in advance!! Festival dates are already set for 1-4 May, 2025.

(Originally published at <https://jazzconnection.co.za/rhythmic-and-instrumental-surprises-excite-fans-at-standard-bank-joy-of-jazz-29-30-september-2023/06/10/2023/>)

### **Rhythmic and Instrumental surprises excite fans at Standard Bank Joy of Jazz 29 – 30 September, 2023!** (6 October 2023)

This year's Standard Bank Joy of Jazz Festival pleased with a healthy mix of intergenerational musical talents not often seen at various clubs and festivals within South Africa. A healthy mix of women musicians of all ages with male artists, domestic and international, featured a wide array of musical genres that proved that 'jazz' is an eclectic art form that crosses all sorts of styles (try hip hop, electronica, or semi-'classical' harp or cello), cultural groups (some indigenous African 'Ntu', others mainstream Western), and rhythms (from marabi, mbaqanga to Latin swing to hippity hop). Many instruments were deployed by those multi-instrumental talents who enjoy spreading different sounds made by not one double bass, but by two (Marcus Wyatt's band) or even three (Herbie Tsoaeli's band) on stage performing together. Even the baritone sax and bass clarinet was heard resonating. Stringed instruments of violin and cello also carried melodies. Some highlights for this writer are presented below, but by no means cover the vast musical personalities exhibited in this two night fest of sounds.

See an impressive video taken of Carlo Mombelli with cellist Susan Mouton – <https://youtu.be/pAnOB7BWM8E>

Thanks to the Standard Bank Joy of Jazz sponsorships, the enigmatic Carlo Mombelli band kicked off on Friday's large Conga Stage with his unique brand of fretless bass-and-two-finger plucking subtle melodies that crescendo, with loops that repeat phrases to eventually soothe the soul. His accompaniments were enhanced by Kyle Shepherd's piano runs, Jonno Sweetman's wispy brushes, Sisonke Xonti's bass clarinet, and the cello of Susan Mouton for added effect.



Carlo Mombelli – credit Joy of Jazz

Mombelli's music surprise – it's soft, melodic entry point builds its message into a fast-paced, almost frantic howl, sometimes including his own voiced yells, and then finds resolve and subdues what seems like a momentary melodic crisis. Mombelli is spell-binding! A perfect kick-off hour for this Festival.

Another surprise was the Marcus Wyatt's band featuring two double basses of Romy Brauteseth and Shane Cooper, all three who hail originally from South Africa's Eastern Cape Province.



Marcus Wyatt & Romy Brauteseth-credit Siphwe Mhlambi

Fans were delighted to hear some songs composed by Brauteseth whose debut album is soon to finish (after a long successful musical journey – it is welcomed!). As a graphic designer also, I strongly suspect that the visual optics with colourful images behind the band might have been choreographed by her. She and Cooper took turns highlighting exciting melodies (important to both of them) on their basses in duets that truly pleased the ear with both rhythm and tone.

The evening was somewhat marred by the jarring and abrasive electronica which Jazz-cum-Hip Hop pianist-composer-vocalist, Robert Glasper from USA, presented, along with his not so funny swear words and somewhat drunken swagger with drink in hand, punctuating this already fouled sonic air. Apparently, sound technicians had to stop the concert mid-way in order to 'fix' issues of his electronica sound delivery.

Time to leave, and become soothed by the popular Swiss harpist, Andreas Vollenweider, whose band included songbird voices of three notable South Africans, Ayanda Nhlangothi, Vusi Nhlapo and Vuyo Tshuma. Vollenweider was kept on stage by the fans who simply refused him to end his set..... blessing the packed audience with almost 1 ½ hours of blissful jazz harp in song!

Catching his full 1 ½ hour performance the next evening, the Dinaledi stage lit up again with delight in what became a highly meditative musical offering, with the occasional swing, rock, and blues thrown in. At age 70 now, Vollenweider admitted he had to sleep after his set. His band oozed surprise with a plethora of instruments from multi-instrumental musicians: one artist (who isn't, but should be, named in the program) played violin, accordion, wooden flute, and a mouth harmonium. Vollenweider took turns with his rattles and percussions inbetween harp takes. No piano was required either. <https://youtu.be/2rGk0sIOEC8>

One remarkable finding was this: After Vollenweider plucked only two notes at the start of a song, fans burst into whistles, oos, and ahhs, announcing their familiarity with that song and appreciation as they hummed along. This happened with several songs. One is stunned at how this sizable audience was obviously tuned in to Vollenweider's musical history over the years, if not decades, or 40 years of the harpist's musical journey! It is no wonder, then, that with 15 million records sold, a Grammy Award, 19 albums, an international concert activity with more than 500 concerts in the most prestigious auditoriums in the world,

Vollenweider songs would be known by many. A most remarkable achievement, indeed.

The second evening at Joy of Jazz became expectedly full as the Conga and Dinaledi Stages welcomed another stellar lineup with The Hugh Masekela Band kicking off at Conga with wonderful renditions of both Bra Hugh's trumpet style as well as his voice imitations by vocalist Selema Mkgothi. It really seemed real – Hugh was indeed in the room!

Self-taught guitarist Cameron Ward, who as a young 20-something was groomed in the then touring-in-exile Masekela's band, held the central platform so diligently and flawlessly. Other members, like Fana Zulu, Sydney Mavundla, and Mlukeki Chuma, supported the bubbly energy in the large room!

Trying to find an up-front seat in Dinaledi was the next challenge, as fans spilled forward to seat themselves for the next two performances. Getting a drink outside was more of a challenge, in spite of a very efficient cash-less system using a digital technology of loading money (only from a credit card) onto a wristband platform powered by Howler. Prices were high..... but worth every minute in order to enjoy saxophonist McCoy Mrubata's Brasskaap band, featuring trumpeter Lwanda Gogwana and baritone sax of Gareth Harvey, who blew some of the finest styles of South African jazz produced today.

See a video of McCoy Mrubata band with Gareth Harvey on baritone saxophone  
– <https://youtu.be/RYrwX6yQhqw>

The night ended with the spiritual tonic of pianist and Blue Note Label artist, Nduduzo Makhathini, supported by the energetic Cuban drummer Francisco Mela, and a seasoned double bassist Zwelakhe-Duma Bell Le Pere.

Makhathini's compositional style and lyrics called upon the Supreme Spirit of 'Ntu' to bless us fans with his petitions for more love, light, and justice in this world. Vocals from Makhathini's wife, Omagugu, added a feminine calling to this ritual of hope, a fitting ending to an otherwise quite boisterously defined evening of eclectic jazz styles. Le Pere seemed to be using a double bass which was seen used by several bands and showed pock-marked scars on its front. That didn't deter as this tired bass experienced a rather hilarious faux-paw when Le Pere's heavy strumming literally caused the collapse down of its weakened brace!! But Le Pere kept on playing, even though having to bend lower in an awkward pose. That bass might be headed for a doomed ending even though it produced adequate sounds and some theatrics! The night simply couldn't accommodate listening time to enjoy other artists, like Zoe Modiga, Alexander Beets, Zonke, and Titi Luzipo, but digital platforms will help fill in the sonic misses.

Sadly, many of the SBJOJ website artist profiles are outdated, showing biographies and accomplishments up to a few years ago, and not to the present time. It would have been helpful to also give some background tips about fellow band members performing, as they highlight the compositional integrity of their band leader. A case in point is double bassist and South-African born Zwelakhe-Duma Bell Le Pere, who studied jazz in Hartford in USA and at Boston's Conservatory of Music in USA, and comes from a family stock of anti-apartheid stalwarts. His style and composition messages should be watched closely as he performs with quite notable American and South African artists.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jwzxbNHbRA>

(Originally published at

<https://jazzconnection.co.za/music-festival-sa-with-a-lifestyle-twist/27/01/2024/>)

### **Music Festival SA with a Lifestyle Twist: AfroFestSA** (27 January 2024)

Remember those music festivals you've attended with multiple configurations ranging from the large convention center spaces, to smaller auditoriums, to even smaller and more intimate restaurants, clubs, or galleries? All depends on the attitudes from planners in given countries, with respect to their own cultural expressions and types of patronage.

As the southern tip of South Africa, known for hosting migrants wanting end-of-year holidaying, party atmospheres, and uplifting scenic overtures, Capetown came alive with one cultural festivity that suited all tastes as well as praising Heritage.... 'AfrofestSA'. This 'newby' festival, an implant from a yearly feast of African music held in Canada, has now birthed itself in South Africa.

But it has 'Lifestyle' attached to it. Let's explore.

Over a 10-day period in December 2023, this 'Mother City' used popular venues known for their supports of live music and the cultural arts. The resulting intimacy and comradery has not only supported entrepreneurial goals of those small businesses, but induced and spread a pride in hosting the plethora of musical talents that have attracted the seasoned public at large. A lifestyle of appreciation has emerged.

So, what's your musical fancy? Traditional, Marabi, Goema, Hip Hop, Jazz, Afrobeat, Rhumba, Neo Soul, Salsa, Marabenta, Afro-Rock, Folk? Take your pick... from live Music to DJs....The sounds from South Sudan, Jamaica, Angola, Nigeria, Mozambique, Canada and South Africa all excited!

In just the first five days, some 15 acts took place in frequented community clubs ranging from Muizenberg's The Commons at Surfer's Corner to Observatory's Taste of Madness to Athlone's Joseph Stone Auditorium. In the final weekend of the Festival, another 31 acts held at Cape Town's Camissa (original peoples of the Cape) heritage site of The Castle exhibited impressive dance routines and musical swings through all sorts of Afro-genres and fusions including bebop, swing, Afro-jazz, amapiano rhythms, South African-specific compositions, including First People's traditional bow and Cape-specific 'goema'. This festival moved body and soul.



## Hilton Schilder on traditional Bow

Called a 'music and lifestyle festival', there was little shortage of experiences one could have..... The Commons features a balcony-with-a-view that overlooks False Bay waves full of surfers donning wetsuits, and sun-ups for the early birds seeking healthy breakfasts after yoga sessions. The inside features an indoor used book store and vinyl/DJ setup for curated Saturday (or any day) listening. In another 'village' environment in the City, the cozy restaurant, Touch of Madness, boasts small rooms for intimate dining and conversations, a concert room, and outdoor patios laced with vines hanging over worn wooden tables. For larger crowds, the Castle's outdoor grounds offered sit-on-the-grass spaces, with movable chairs offering opportunities for crowds to meet and greet under the clear night skies.

Even visual artists find cause to doodle about the stage happening! Solidarity flag-holding protesters coming from their respective marches sat quietly, enjoying the festivities. Fortunately, Capetown's weather at this time provided little threats of rain; yet a stealthy wind gust often lurks and can pounce in haste! We must be honest!

*"We want to increase awareness and appreciation of African arts and culture in live performances accessible to audiences,"* explains festival director, Jai Reddy. *"That's why we are using various venues in Cape Town where concerts can continue to reach their local communities."* Reddy and team reiterate one of the noble objectives of this Festival: building community friendships and solidarities.

Thanks go to the Canadian-supported mother festival, Afrofest, based in Toronto where Capetown-born Michael Stohr, together with two others, was part of its inception, and ran it for 25 years. The reins were handed over to Peter Tor and under his management AFROFEST has become the largest free African Music Festival in North America. As AfroFestSA runs an annual festival, African artistic histories will be able to expand more widely within Africa. Stohr explains:

*"It started in 1989 with Hugh Masekela, then in exile, on the bill! Afrofest was the right festival in the right city at the right time. African immigrants coming to Toronto were looking for a place in the city where they could bring together the cultural beauties of the African continent for all to see. So in Afrofest's first weekend, it brought together some 150,000 people in Toronto."*

While attending festival activities, one notices the inclusion of youth and women musicians who proudly share their musical flavours, enticing listeners to their original compositions, South African Standards, a mix of jazz-rap, African percussion with various rhythms, improvisational and more cerebral jazz, Afro-Latin beats that get spirits dancing, and melodic songs with marimba/vibraphone supports. Some bands were led by female artists, like young bassist Tiana Amari, or singer Ernestine Deane, both South Africans employing a healthy mix of female and male artists. Then, from late night venues, DJ electronica gave dancers cause for all sorts of body movement therapies.

A noticeable thread of intergenerational collaborations honoured young and old together – a united front – to grow South African musical and artistic cultures.

Babes Ndamase

The legends, like drummer Babes Ndamase, tenor saxophonist Khaya Mahlangu, double bassist Mlungisi Gegana, and the elder emeritus of piano, Dr. Tete Mbambisa performed with the 'up-and-coming', inquisitive musicians who take their work seriously. One objective of AfrofestSA is to engage talents in local communities by conducting skills and social development programs. Remarkably, this was happening right on the stage, for instance, when the newer recruits in the youth development program, called Little Giants, performed with seasoned graduates of that learning program, many who were mentors in the program.

Year 2024 will see AfrofestSA actively engaging in workshops and other hands-on mentoring programs that boost both morale and skills amongst those particularly coming from marginalized communities, who otherwise would lack such opportunities. One can then look forward to another smorgasbord of youth/elder collaborations in the next celebratory AfrofestSA 'music and lifestyle' fest 2024!

(Originally published in <https://jazzconnection.co.za/stellenbosch-university-jazz-studies-grow-amidst-classical-music-choices/24/08/2023/>)

### **Stellenbosch University Jazz Studies Grow Amidst Classical Music Choices** (24 August 2023)

Accomplished Western Cape jazz pianist, Ramon Alexander, has nourished his musical creativity through an informal journey outside of institutional training. He now teaches and grooms jazz bands using mentors of note.



Ramon Alexander

Classically trained musician and teacher, Felicia Lesch, noted the dearth of jazz studies in a predominately classical-focused University Music Department and set out to do something about this void. Thanks to the emergence of the annual Youth Jazz Festival at the National Arts Festival in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown) which showcased youth talents, Lesch could start her students' migration to participate in this popular exposure.



Felicia Lesch

### **Ramon Alexander chases inner creativities**

His artistic childhood veins ran unintended towards a sonic, finger-tapping goal. Shoving aside his viticulture training with a degree from Stellenbosch University (SUN), Alexander preferred to learn, perform, and compose improvisational music using local Western Cape rhythms and sounds. His mentorships with legendary musicians in 'Cape jazz', like Ibrahim Khalil Shihab, Merton Barrow at The Jazz Workshop, the late saxophonist Robbie Jansen and others, has paid off. One finds this dynamic pianist establishing and grooming a 'Maties Jazz

Society' band with SUN music students originally from George and other areas outside of the big bad cities. Fellow team member and head of Jazz Studies at SUN's Music Department, Felicia Lesch, took Alexander under her wing in 2004 to teach introductory jazz theory and jazz piano in the Music Certificate Program presented at the Conservatory in Stellenbosch, thus swelling jazz tutorials to two full time lecturers.

The team has worked hard over the past 20 years plus, but it hasn't been easy. Alexander's story hasn't been easy, either.

*"I did informal music training through my youth. At five years old, I was playing tunes trying to imitate my brother who was my mentor. Then at age of eight, I moved to Mossel Bay, where I stayed with my elder sister and took piano lessons."* When his parents divorced, this small boy struggled with his creativity, even taking up water colour painting for reasons he still doesn't understand. *"The time I should be studying or practicing piano, I'd be drawing!"* Maybe migrating eventually to drawing on the piano?

The first music he heard live was from his Moravian church upbringing in Mamre. *"The big tradition was the brass band with a Western choral. It wasn't particularly interesting to me then, because I grew up listening to Bob Marley at home. "* He had fantasized about being a composer. *" In Grade 4, in class, I would write down lists of classical composers' names, for no reason at all. And I learned the Greek alphabet which I still know today! For no reason at all! Even a top band in America , called Modern Talking, had a hit song called, 'Brother Louis, Louis, Louis'. I asked my sister, please, for my birthday (a week after Christmas), could I get an LP of Modern Talking?"* What was this young boy searching for?

While learning classical music until age 15, Alexander was part of his school's band which he enjoyed. *"That enabled me to go to the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown and be part of the Youth Jazz Festival. But I remember telling my brothers, 'but I don't really like jazz'. I preferred classical music."* With admirable perseverance and mentorships, he was selected as pianist for the Standard Bank National Youth Big Band in 2004, and later joined the SUN Music Department Jazz Studies. This, in spite of graduating that same year with a B.Sc. Agric in viticulture and oenology from Stellenbosch University.

With his ESP band, formed during University days, Alexander has produced two albums: *Picnic at Kontiki* (2011) and *Echoes from Louwskloof* (2015). These enabled him to perform in 2016 at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival. One notable recording production includes *Essence of Spring* (2018) by Cape Town jazz icon Ibrahim Khalil Shihab, a key mentor. SUN's 'Maties Jazz Society' now makes the rounds to venues and festivals, even in rural towns as at the May 2023 inaugural 'Journey to Jazz' Festival in the Karoo's little Prince Albert town.

### **Felicia Lesch, SUN Jazz Studies <sup>1</sup>**

Fast forward back to the late 1990s..... Lesch had joined the SUN Music Department with specific interests to introduce 'jazz' as a music form, through a 'bridging' program with the classical music curriculum.

She remembered 'that guy' who was performing in live jazz concerts in and around Stellenbosch, a jazz-absent university town of historical note. As Ramon Alexander passed by her office window in 2003, she raced to talk with him. 'That guy' soon became faculty number 2 in her Jazz Certificate-developing program; the rest is history. *"In Stellenbosch,*

*there was no jazz around. I took my school kids to Grahamstown at that time, but thought there must be other kids in the Stellenbosch area who would want to go, also. So I found Ramon and asked him to help me with this. We found a few music students to join and that's how we started getting jazz somehow of interest in the Music Department. "*

Together, Lesch and Alexander opened up to those classical music students who were interested in also studying improvisation and music theory, handy eloquent terms to get around the concept of 'jazz' in this predominately conservative, classics-centered, music conservatory in a predominately Afrikaans-speaking university and urban territory of the Western Cape. Lesch remarks: *"The Certificate program was the easiest way to start the jazz section of the Music Department. In 2005, we offered improvisation and jazz theory, and students in the Degree program (Classical) studied with Ramon as well. In 2009 we got the jazz band installed as the official credit-bearing jazz band ensemble."*

They took on piano student, Melisizwe Plaatjie, who displayed an exuberant talent for improvisation, to help groom the band members. Sure enough, he was chosen to join the National Youth Band formed by the 2023 National Arts Festival in Makhanda. He even won the best student trophy one year.

But all was not smooth. The conservative tastes and preferences beyond foundational training for the Euro-centric classical music art form often took precedence by decision-makers over this free-flow 'jazz' which was spreading in training institutions throughout the country, with the University of Cape Town (UCT) down the road quickly expanding its post-94 music curriculum in all musical genres. *"I came in as Orchestra Manager",* say Lesch, *"but my passion was in community engagement. I had the full support of the Director, but it took 3 years to get curriculum established. There were delays, and there were seasons where things delayed, then went forward, like that."* Over time, various jazz teachers came on board part-time: the late pianist Andre Petersen, Melissa von der Spay, Throy Petersen from the Hugo Lambrechts Music Centre. But it was piano student, Melisizwe, who has carried the teaching passion to advance jazz studies and support the 2021-formed Maties Jazz Society band.

Lesch and her team managed to entice academic decision-makers to see value in just what 'jazz' means, considering the wealth of music coming from various localities – home-grown music – in the country. Was there a fear of losing an ethnic homogeneity, that the home-grown sound coming from some sections of South African society was not sophisticated enough? That maybe swing and dance music was too pedestrian or 'honky tonk', as the Americans would say? Lesch took up the challenge to restore jazz as a worthy music item. *"We now have the jazz band accredited. Students playing in the symphony orchestra can also join the jazz band for the experience. This means when they go to teach their own students, they will know how to start up a jazz band which, in turn, will qualify to participate in the Makhanda Jazz festivals. Concerning the curriculum, we have matched what the classical music department is doing, but in a jazz sense, and explained why we were deviating from the set classical curriculum. Also, the classical music students see those who can perform in jazz also have a classical background."*

Upholding a high quality of standards was key for promoting this jazz art form. Lesch and team hope to start a satellite teaching program in George so that students can do a Certificate program at home before coming to SUN. *"We want to instill dignity in all of our students because they come from backgrounds of challenges – socially, culturally, etc."* The classical music students need to see that those who can perform in jazz also have a classical

background.

There are still few female students taking up the jazz banner. Insecurities abound. *“We need to move into more informal mentoring styles of building jazz musical talents. For instance, we have a male drummer from the Maties group mentoring a lady drummer. She sits next to the drummer, and we see her fears just shred away in place of confidence. The students at the back are smiling because she was known to lack so much confidence in herself.”*

While insecurities of a non-musical nature may pervade the souls of female students bold enough to cross over into the improvisational world of jazz music, Lesch and team continue to their strategies to bolster confidence. *“We try to give the ladies a part in the band, and encourage them not to pass on some of the arrangement parts to a male player. Sometimes I tell a lady horn player who looks flustered to just take a walk; you wouldn’t believe her insecurity. She’s good, but to have her play as though she’s feeling good is a challenge. She played fine at the concert in April.”*

Some strategies to build confidence are hard. *“I like the Berklee model. ....at the beginning of term, students can choose which teacher they would like to study with. And they can change teachers if need be. Here at SUN, it’s different and limited. Also, I try to split the lady students in class to not sit together, and encourage them to mix with male performers at gigs. If they stay away from class, we will communicate with their parents, if necessary.”* Jazz is deemed more difficult to learn, but Lesch and Alexander are seeing the confidence levels growing now. *“The younger students are looking up to the older ones now. A lady might have an attitude in class, but will want to sing at the Baxter concert hall, for instance.”*



Maties band at Klein Karoo Classique Festival

So, how can students and their mentors build a program in jazz that’s sustainable? Even though SUN may be a complicated place, it’s becoming more diverse and upgrading curriculum. Accrediting a jazz band is one way. The annual Woordfees festival in Stellenbosch, which started out as a literary festival, now incorporates the arts and music programs, sometimes going outside the Afrikaans linguistic vein of the festival. Alexander explains, *“Festivals are bringing the arts to the people that can open eyes to the outside world. It’s the WAY we bring the jazz to the community; it’s LIVE so people can SEE it!”*

Footnote 1: Co-ordinator of the Music Certificate Programmes at Stellenbosch University, and also teaches at the Redefine Western Cape Music Education Project, Serves on Board of Directors of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra.

(Originally published in <https://jazzconnection.co.za/professor-mike-rossi-reviews-the-re-release-of-the-jazzanians-we-have-waited-too-long/04/02/2024/>)

**Professor Mike Rossi reviews the re-release of The Jazzanians: We Have Waited Too Long**  
(4 February 2024)

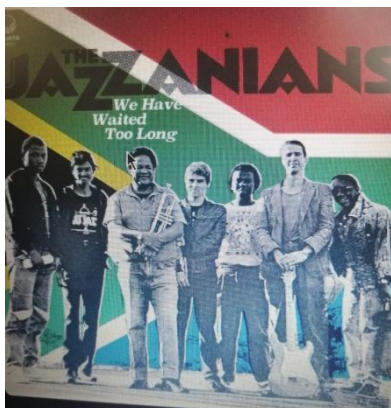
Album review by Mike Rossi, 6 January 2024 (Emeritus Professor, University of Cape Town, South Africa)

**Personnel on album:** Johnny Mekoa: trumpet/valve trombone, Andrew Eagle: guitar, Zim Ngqawana: alto saxophone/flute, Nic Paton: tenor & soprano saxophones, Melvin Peters: piano/keyboards, Victor Masekela: bass, Lulu Gontsana: drums/percussion.

Released by **Ubuntu Music 2024**. Originally recorded and mixed at Sound Crew Studio, Natal, South Africa, 1988.

**Album track order:** *Bayete, Zandile, Peace Meal, Badisa, We Have Waited Too Long, The Rainbow, Se Hamba Nabo.*

**The Jazzanians: We Have Waited Too Long**, (2024 version) takes the listener to another time and place – South Africa in the late 1980s. Originally recorded and released as a vinyl LP in 1988, **The Jazzanians** was a history-making mixed race student jazz ensemble formed by Darius Brubeck following his introduction of the first Jazz Studies course in Africa at the University of Natal in 1984.



The group would go on to achieve international fame in 1988 following their invitation to perform at the Detroit NAJE (National Association of Jazz Educators) Conference. The late 80s would also witness a watershed period in South Africa's history where apartheid would be mainly dismantled by the decade's end with Nelson Mandela's prison release in 1990. Throughout South Africa's darkest period, many people associated with the Arts often protested against apartheid through their works and projects. The Jazzanians were part of a struggle that went well beyond music. Following the success of the 1988 US tour and visit, as

the saying goes, things would never be the same. For example, throughout the ensuing forty years South Africa witnessed and experienced a countrywide explosion in the field of Jazz education in the informal and formal sectors from school to university level. This re-release is an important reminder of the power of music and also acknowledges those who participated and contributed in some way to ***The Jazzanians: We Have Waited Too Long***.

The 1988 recording showcases a group of eager jazz studies students from the University of Natal, Durban, who would all later attain success across a wide range of fields within the music industry. Each member gets an opportunity to shine and plays with a young wide-eyed abandonment, and musical maturity that represents a seasoned sounding group despite their short time together. Sadly Johnny, Zim and Lulu would pass on but not without leaving an indelible mark on jazz and jazz education in South Africa. For example, Johnny Meko went on to complete his M. M. at Indiana University, returned to South Africa and literally built a music school from the ground up in Gauteng. Zim Ngqawana also went on to study in the States and create an international name for himself as a South African jazz icon with his composing talents, incredible playing and multi-faceted ensembles. Lulu Gonstana performed and recorded with top local and international bands and artists, including Darius Brubeck's ***Afro Cool Concept***. On a personal note, with regard to music curriculum changes that have taken place throughout South Africa over the last decade, this album is an important resource that documents this unique and popular group and a fascinating period in South African history.

Five out of the seven numbers on the album were composed by the ensemble members. 'Bayete' by Andrew Eagle and Zim Ngqawana opens the CD with a bit of maskanda guitar before the infectious groove kicks in. The rhythm section, and particularly Lulu Gontsana on drums and Victor Masondo on bass, go about their business in setting the groove on this piece as well as throughout the album. Fine solos are played by Johnny, Andrew and Zim.

'Zandile', composed by Victor Ndlazilwana, co-founder along with Meko of the famed Jazz Ministers, is now included in ***The South African Jazz Real Book Vol. 1*** (published by jazz.co.za). The opening bass riff by Victor Masondo with Lulu at his side sets things off before the alternating themes enter. The piece is reminiscent of 60s cool and the vibe continues with thoughtful and un-rushed ideas by Johnny on trumpet and Zim on alto saxophone. 'Peace Meal' slows the tempo and quiets the mood by featuring a lovely keyboard introduction by Melvin Peters. Following this, Meko, Eagle, Ngqawana and Peters (again) offer up melodic solos, often exchanging ideas.

'Badisa' by Nic Paton places the spotlight on the horn section and features the composer on soprano saxophone. The choral like intro establishes a warm glow before kicking into a higher gear and mbaqanga groove. Some tasty bass playing throughout by Masondo brings a smile to listeners before Peters launches into his solo that demonstrates his prodigious technique as a topflight pianist.

The title track 'We Have Waited Too Long' mellows the mood, opening with a rubato acoustic guitar statement by Eagle followed by question-and-answer phrases traded between the horns and rhythm section. Masondo's excellent solo clearly demonstrates why he is considered one of South Africa's top electric bass players and a master of trade-mark South African jazz style and technique. Zim displays his instrumental versatility on the flute and is given ample room to stretch out.

'The Rainbow', composed by Darius Brubeck has become a standard within the South African

jazz cannon and is still performed by the Darius Brubeck Quartet. Fun is had by all with solos from around the ensemble. Johnny Meko's snippet of Giant Steps brings a chuckle! The final track, 'Se Hamba Nabo' finds the Jazzanians riding off into the sunset not knowing that some forty years later they would return and remind the jazz world of their extraordinary contribution to jazz and jazz education in South Africa.

Overall, the album offers what could now be considered a case study for appreciating South African performance styles and techniques. Listeners and young musicians alike will appreciate the powerful "ensemble" style, as well as individual solos from each band member that contribute to the "sound" of jazz in South Africa.

***The Jazzanians: We Have Waited Too Long*** will be released on CD and vinyl in April 2024. For more information about the ***Jazzanians*** and the formal introduction of jazz education in South Africa, please refer to Darius and Catherine Brubeck's ***Playing the Changes: Jazz at an African University and on the Road*** (UKZN Press and University of Illinois Press) and the documentary film, ***Playing the Changes: Tracking Darius Brubeck***, (Red Cloak Films, Amsterdam).