

Sounds of the Cape

Tradition and improv find musical foundations at Rootspring with Amathongo (16 August 2019)

An evening at Rootspring, a tall house originally built for an opera singer, just meters to Muizenberg's False Bay beach, is guaranteed to swallow patrons into a vortex of known and unknown musical originality – wedding the traditional with improvisation that produces acoustically pleasing and sometimes surprising sounds. There's also an experience to be had as the nontraditional seating ranges from movable chairs and large stuffed cushions on a bouncy floor made for dancing, to pillows on the stairwell to enhance the view onto the stage as well as the sound – in last Saturday's case – of the five-piece Amathongo group.



Hidden away on the raised wing of the large main room is a wooden stove firing much welcomed heat on this wet wintry Cape Town night. Patrons arrive early to chat with friends and peg their seats, and perhaps open that bottle of wine they've brought and hope the cork doesn't break into the bottle. When the gig starts sharp at 7pm, a hushed silence welcomes the incredible sounds and rhythms that break out for the first set.

Amathongo, an ethnically diverse group of musicians, entices you to connect with 'ancestral spirits', which is the isiZulu meaning. In keeping with Rootspring's philosophy of promoting musical creativity, Amathongo describes itself as an evolving world music project, unique, South African and original. Its use of improvisation is also deeply rooted in traditional African styles. The sound strongly features traditional Southern African musical bows and other traditional African Instruments made popular by singer Madosini with her varieties of Uhade bows, and Pedro Espi-Sanchis on traditional flute. Get ready for a journey that beckons the listeners to explore their own ancestral roots!

What makes a concert exciting is to see how each musician projects sounds within a classical musical scoring that allows for free flow solos. Pianist Hilton Schilder, known for his allegorical stories around the Cape *goema* music, most recently on his album, ***Alter Native***, brings a spirituality to his piano. Coming from the legendary Cape Town musical Schilder family, Hilton has mastered traditional instruments that are home to the khoi/san roots of the Cape.

The keeper of the ancestral soul of Amathongo is Madosini on Xhosa bows, who centers the musically emotive storytelling within the group. All add their vocals to her isiXhosa praising and healing chants. Madosini is also the comic, with body language and facial expressions that jerk suddenly, waking up the otherwise meditative audience.

Madosini's fellow singer and percussionist, Lungiswa Plaatjies, adds vocals and rhythms which enchant. Seasoned by her uncle, Dizu Plaatjies, professor of African indigenous music at University of Cape Town, Lulu as she is called, became lead female vocalist of South Africa's famous Amampondo group with her uncle. Their album, *Ekhaya*, became a popular eclectic, Xhosa-language version of Marvin Gaye's Inner City Blues. Lulu has also reached music heights by being the first South African female musician to play the imbira and incorporate it into her compositions. See her performance in the Digital Links below. One of Rootspring's visionaries, guitarist Johnny Blundell, adds strings and box percussion that makes Amathongo sound eclectic with raps of folk and jazz.

But the eyes stare at the antics of Pedro Espi-Sanchis, known as 'Pedro the Music Man' from his long-running children's television series in the 1990s. Rarely seen with Amathongo lately, Pedro proudly presents his kelp pipe flute, stringed guitar on tortoise shell, and a gourd-cased mbira in the Digital Link below. Born in Spain and raised in France, Pedro has pleased audiences in South Africa for over 30 years through performances, education with young audiences, and storytelling. He can leave kids (and adults) spellbound as he shows how found objects can make music – paw-paw leaves, kudu horns, cow-bells, calabashes, seaweed, and more. It was the latter that he played on this inspiring Amathongo evening at Rootspring that excited – a Lekgodilo flute made from kelp pipe. Go down to your friendly Cape Town beach and find some black rubbery kelp pipe, cut it properly, and start blowing! Pedro shows how in the Digital Links below. According to this instructive vimeo, the flute produces a Lydian scale which becomes chromatic after the 6th degree. It is here where the roots of Jazz, i.e. improvisation, started from early times.

Johnny Blundell, who also comes from an illustrious musical family in Cape Town, has visions and support to make Rootspring one of the most eclectic, original, and progressive musical venues in greater Cape Town. Well-marketed with its newsy email Newsletter, it tells well in advance the types of bands booked for the month ahead.

Addendum: Sadly, Rootspring is no longer active but is planning its way forward where possible. Also, Madosini, the matriarch of traditional sounds, passed away in December 2022 just before her 79th birthday.

Ibrahim Khalil Shihab Quartet exuded history, texture, and good ole acoustic jazz at District 6 Museum's Homecoming Center (30 May 2016)

Having cruised the south Pacific Ocean, I find Irving Berlin's 'How Deep is the Ocean' rings a familiar sensation about what "unfathomable" means, like true love, which is what makes this song rich and textured. The brilliant artistry of pianist Ibrahim Khalil Shihab does just that for 24 minutes in his solo piano album, 'Solo Piano', cut in 1999. Known as Chris Schilder of Pacific Express in earlier days, and who converted to Islam in 1975, this Capetownian is no less magical in his musical renditions now. With his fellow team members named below, 70 year old Shihab wishes to revive himself with both established and younger musicians in South Africa.



Ibrahim Khalil Shihab. Photo: David Harrison

Friday's concert portrayed an extremely gifted and powerfully alert pianist who excels at improvisation and message. His Scarlotti-styled runs in some pieces reverberated throughout the well-packed hall. Even without an acoustic grand piano which he would prefer, his two electric pianos admirably served for the evening's performance and managed to do justice to his messages.

In conversation with double bassist, Lionel Beukes, earlier, even Beukes had to haul out his thin Latina semi-electric bass to match Shihab's piano that evening. *"I've returned from years in China, and want to continue to perform our South African music, and to promote Ibrahim who has been too silent for too long,"* says Beukes. *"I teach at the Cape Town Music Institute with its musician head, Camiillo Lombard, and try to match our good students with the jazz dons like Ibrahim."*

Indeed, Friday's offerings (promoted by Classic CT) presented 20-year old drummer Liam Webb, formerly from South Peninsula High School jazz band and soon to attend UCT's College of Music, in his first jazz gig. A student at CMI, Webb displayed confidence and humility during the performance as he was occasionally mentored by Beukes and Shihab. Webb was allowed a drum solo in a Shihab piece, 'Pursuits', which Webb pulled off in clean pizzazz. Another generation later was Buddy Wells whose tenor and alto saxophones provided impressive, clean, and consistent accompaniment to Shihab's piano runs. The varieties of songs this Quartet played wooed the audience with classic standards, like the whimsical "When You Wish Upon a Star", with Buddy's smooth slides in tone. Shihab originals gave tribute to another legendary don, the late Winston Mankunku, in 'Spring', and to elder Chinese people exercising in a Shanghai park across from where Shihab and Beukes worked at the Hilton Hotel.

The concert ended fittingly with a fast-paced 'Bo-Kaap', another original, which showed everyone's skills. Shihab is well on his way to performing and, in the near future, recording his pile of compositions which he let to lay for so many of the rainbow nation years. We can look forward to

more mastery from this legend as concert halls gear up for more acoustic jazz performances. A new era to be launched??

Pianist Ibrahim Khalil Shihab revives a musical era in *Essence of Spring* (2018): CD Review (28 February 2019)

Listening to *Essence of Spring* (2018), a remake from its 1969 debut, is like experiencing an intergenerational revival, as the Elder Legend performs with his younger proteges, but without copying the past. It's a musical history of an era in which composer Ibrahim Khalil Shihab, formerly Chris Schilder, performed with the popular Pacific Express band. Fifty years onward, Shihab, now in his 70s, has resurrected those popular songs, fusing them in this album with more contemporary jazz compositions.

Album producer and fellow pianist and protégé, Ramon Alexander, joins in this stylistic revival, moving Shihab's songs from a swing era, including favourite American Standards, to present-day Cape goema rhythms.



Ibrahim Khalil Shihab and Ramon Alexander

Shihab's Quintet is performing *Spring* this March, first at next week's Woordfees at Stellenbosch University, and then at the Capetown International Jazz Festival (30 March on Rosie's Stage). The album is a celebration of style, but not necessarily story. The listener enjoys a mixture of motown, dance swing and blues, Latin, some improvised free jazz, and of course, the local Cape goema so richly conserved by the Schilder family generations. Key, here, is Shihab's satin piano solos, rich and graceful.

There's electric and acoustic which provide moods with textures along with Shihab's pentatonics that suggest the bluesy-ness of an era. His famous 'Give a Little Love' is, according to Gary van Dyk writing in the album notes, "one of the anthems" of South African music. Van Dyk's 'notes' are themselves an enlightening review of the album, telling us about the 'Why'.

The younger musicians shine, while staying true to the legendary: The subtle yet pleasantly rhythmic inuendos of drummer Annemie Nel feature throughout, particularly in the last piece, Shihab's remake of a classic, 'My Funny Valentine'. Hear a soothing Shihab piano interpretation with Nel's drums and the slight touch of delicacy by Lionel Buekes' acoustic bass. Saxophonist Zeke Le Grange fires through the opening song, 'Spring', with a bossa feel and runs, followed by Shihab's piano solo. The sax harmonies continue with trumpeter Marco Maritz accompanying the vibrant goema drums in 'BoKaap', as Shihab celebrates contemporary Cape jazz styles. Le Grange's imitative stance holds well with Shihab's fast paced keyboards in the liquidy 'Cancerian Moon'.

Different vocalists interpret other Pacific Express songs: in 'Angel of love', Heinrich Frans's familiar vocals and scats offer convincing emotions along with Alexander's piano supports; Deon Manchess croons out lyrics in 'I Hear Music', suggesting just relax and let the music take you far and away to find that dream and never be without a song!

Shihab is not afraid to wander across the “free jazz” modalities, thanks to guitarist, Reza Khota, known for his improvisational voicings, as ‘In Pursuance’, and where Asia meets Latin in Shihab’s unsuspecting ‘Jing’an Park’ with a surprising but cute ending.

Cape Jazz Piano, Vol 5, says it all: a CD Review (11 February 2019)

For anyone wanting to learn more about, or just listen to the tried and tested tunes from the Cape jazz legends, this album guarantees without disappointing. It's perfectly listenable, even for those inevitable urban traffic jams as delightful tunes and rhythms spew forth from the comforts of your car's (no doubt) excellent sound system. Designed and produced by Paddy Lee-Thorp and recorded at Milestone Studios in Cape Town in 2018, rarely does an album harness the clear articulations and different styles of key pianists known to also 'cross over', from the Cape goema and musical inflections unique to this part of South Africa into other 'genres' of songs made popular by their highly melodic, soulful, and danceable content...yet stay true to "Cape jazz". Let's explore.

Jazz pianists were asked to play songs rated as 'standards' of the Cape. Most played at least one of their own creations which will have you melt away into their enticingly simple stories, even with reinterpretations.



Hilton Schilder, known for both his love and mastery of Khoisan instruments, teases with his two piano-crafted Khoisan Symphony pieces – the listener at first hears a familiar ballad-style which breaks out into rhythmic goema, and returns to the melodic soul. We return to the camp fire after the hunt.

Ramon Alexander stays true to tradition, again with ballad intros that break into a zesty Cape goema in 'Club Montreal' (written by Tony Schilder, father of Hilton). Alexander has always explored the emotions and musical depths of his musical gurus and this song perks with loving affirmation.

In his next presentation, 'Kaapse Medley', Alexander plays his own piece, 'Take Me Back to Cape Town', with that love for the rhythmic and soul-lifting Cape sound...yet, with a twist.

Mike Perry, known to have played with local legends of saxman Winston Mankunku and Robbie Jansen, has revived his 'Green and Gold' song, a tribute to the new South Africa, and the well-versed 'Crossroads' which depicts those township days announcing that freedom-is-here. These tunes are not just copies; they're expressing something awesomely new about realities 20 years hence. Just listen.

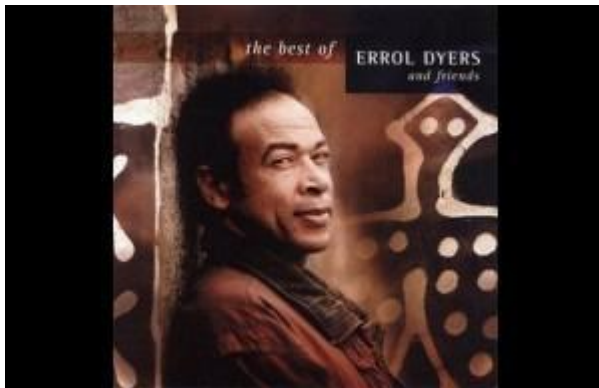
But the real don of this album is Ibrahim Kalil Shihab's (aka Chris Schilder, uncle to Hilton) medleys. His popular and reinvented 'Give a Little Love', commonly voiced over the years by many Capeys, is refreshingly presented as its author finds slippery and then defined routes to truthfully navigate this essentially beautiful tune of love, as bluesy as it is. A remarkable interpretation and so listenable. Likewise, his 'All Through the Years' continues to push his own sound into that contemporary style of improvising on the theme. Just listen.

This is why 'Cape Jazz Piano' is a collector's item; the songs are ageless, ever storytelling, and ultimately danceable and celebratory... yet still evoking newer messaging and sound styling. I wonder in awe what Volume 6 might look like!

Errol Dyers: Your Music made even dogs dance! (30 July 2017)

Dear Errol,

Your transition to the loving world of spirit has left many of us gabbing and cackling about how to keep Cape jazz alive and appreciated, as you so eloquently tried to do. Maybe you have not liked such terms as 'giving tribute' or 'legacy', attributed to you and your ilk, but applause and celebrations for your contributions to South African and specifically, Cape music, will continue.



We've heard many ideas and suggestions flowing during mad chats after your passing about how South Africa must retain and honour its artistry for generations to come. A common theme seems to run throughout: preservation of one's music through written charts, and archiving written and digital materials for public access. Your close musical friend, Hilton Schilder, said in an interview: *"My father was a prolific composer, but I don't have any charts or anything written down."* Others have commented: There needs to be financial assistance arrangements for musicians while they're living for emergencies, illnesses, and the like; South African and Cape jazz needs more airtime on the radio and general media in order to counter the "dumbing down" on youth ears of the increasing American—and-other playlists congesting soundwaves through cellphones and other digital media. *"The little ones get clouded by a certain mode of thinking, that it's cool to jive to American music"*, Schilder continues.

Singer/guitarist Tina Schouw cries out during a recent music memorial evening: *"What's needed is faithful observation, social responsibility, and interaction in both accessing local music, and generating appreciation for it. Musicians must submit their performance sheets and materials to SAMRO in order to be paid for their contributions. We must be more pro-active!"*

Dear Errol. You knew all this, and advocated for it. But...are the journalists and responsible social media having their say? Fewer, if any now, newspapers and magazines are carrying articles or pages on the local legacies. All Jazz Radio suggests, along with many others, that a collective blog is needed as a platform for informing, debating, and archiving about our Cape jazz legacies. Arts journalism has now morphed into 'celebrity' journalism, as very well pinned by journalist, Ryland Fisher: *"We need good quality and thoughtful journalism at all levels and in all media forms to which people can contribute. In social media, it's about numbers. But blogs can be updated as more like-minded people contribute. There's value in community strength."* The same has been echoed throughout the years by jazz journalist, Gwen Ansell, in her wordpress blog. Lack of acknowledgments to local artistry IS a worrying trend. A few community radio stations, like Bush Radio and Fine Music Radio, based in Capetown, and a scattered few in other parts of the country, do sponsor worthy programs that offer local and international jazz. But that vast majority of

terrestrial stations subsidized with profits choose the obvious – the marketing of income-generating brands of artistry, regardless of quality or intention.

You, Errol, were adamant about the importance of musicians choosing record labels that were truthful to the cause of artistic mastery and cultural expression. And schools of music – all must offer a healthy balance that favours, and flavours, local heritage – Cape music – South African Standards – over the aping of American music, no matter how good. Stories! You cried. It's about hearing those indigenous stories, and learning from them!

Dear Errol. We know that even a dog danced at your Muizenberg concert – 'Sugar' shook with your Cape goema jazz, and spread the word, as featured in your first album, ***Sonesta***. What musical memories you have left to us today will stimulate more dancing and celebrations to make your legacy remembered, revered, and pushing artistry forward in these new times.

With love and great respect,
All Jazz Radio team of presenters and fans
30 July 2017

“Love Letter to Cape Town” draws out the indigenous bloodheart of Tony Cedras, a CD Review
(3 October 2015)

This album, full of harmonies, draws us into a world not of fantasy or fancy lyrics, but of soundscapes echoing the joyous resonations of originality from the ancient language of a First Peoples, the Khoisan.

The indigenous bloodheart of multi-instrumentalist Tony Cedras, born in Cape Town in 1952, an early mover in the Cape jazz scene, then long exiled overseas and active in the anti-apartheid activities, is also known for his arrangements with the early band of Paul Simon. Cedras announces his return to his Cape homeland in this beautifully organized album recorded in Cape Town at Milestone studios and published in 2015 by Zurich Sessions Featured Artists.

A block buster array of musicians matching the spirit of this Khoisan soul make up this exceptional album. The promo video on his website doesn't show Cedras playing accordion for some reason, but gives a good feel about the other musicians that make up this album. Deeply anchored in his heart is the preservation and recognition of the Aboriginal Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa, and his album certainly raises awareness of their dwindling, yet vibrant, heritage and culture. Appropriately, his ancestral soil is felt in the opening track, ' //Hui !Goeb', with Cedras' flugelhorn and Khoisan chanted clicks presenting soundscapes of the Ancient Nation's Sacred Sites "where rainclouds gather". Cedras says, *"As a descendant of an Ancient Nation, I am inspired by the significance of our Sacred Sites and it is central to my creativity."*

The next track, 'Genesis', offers a melodic tour through our original peoples of Africa, from South Africa to Tanzania to Zambia and beyond. Typical South African beats with congas are heard, absorbed with horn harmonies. Three energetic strumming guitars of Cedras, Errol Dyers on acoustic, and the notable Steve Newman on Soprano, along with backing vocals, explain Cedras' life journey: *"My life's journey is one that exposed me to a myriad of cultures; I have always been curious about individual life stories and relocation. Irrespective of the motivation of movement, it brings about a new beginning that ultimately defines who we are."*

Probably the most beautiful, but not a Cedras original, song on this album is his unique arrangement of 'Yakal Nkomo' of the late great saxophonist, Winston Ngozi Mankunku, with rhythmic mbaqanga beats dancing nicely out of Cedras' accordion. Cedras also plays guitars, keyboards, drums, and synth bass in this rendition, the latter which skilfully produce the off-colour sound of protesting bellowing bulls. Cedras says, *"Reflecting on my musical career is to acknowledge those who inspired me. This was a favourite composition of the late Mankunku, a legendary tenor saxophone player whom I met in the early 70's. He had an encouraging spirit and was an inspiration to my musical career."*



Tony Cedras at Straight No Chaser

'Horizons' was written by Cedras in Botswana and recorded during his 1989 Graceland Tour with Paul Simon. It's a song about Africa's gift to world humanity, rapidly strummed on the guitars of Cedras and Dyers, with entrancing backing vocals.

Other songs convincingly present the sounds and feel of journeying through Africa dragging South African origins along, from Elsie's River outside of Cape Town to a Congolese ballad sung crisply by Freshly Ground vocalist, Zolani Mahola, and back to South African folkish strings of Rayelle Goodman's violin and Cedras' guitar in 'Autshumao Suite', a stunningly joyful upbeat piece. Cedras songs move between a very danceable masqanda beat of 'Black Brown Cheri White' to Mahola's crystal clear ballad voice in the churchy 'Mother Song'.

The album ends with a melodic middle eastern flair, 'Journey to Alkebulan', thanks to Rustin's double bass stringing. It seemed a bit dour after the previous joyful uplifting songs, but the album's presentations resonate long after the headphones come off.

If there was ever an album to pick up your spirits and move on, this is it! Transformative. This is not background music. You sing and hum along, and can't keep yourself from dancing!

Soundcloud sources mention genres of his album as "African jazz, jazz, klopse, goema". It fits into no category – I could venture to say the album is "traditional but contemporary South African folk". Or better still, just plain "music" that draws out the emotions, hopes and dreams!

To Learn more about the South Africans performing on the album, go to Cedras' website: <http://www.zurichsessions.com/featured-artists/tony-cedras/>. The Zurich Sessions is a musical get-together of some of the finest international and Swiss musicians and promotes collaboration with others.

Tony Cedras passed away in January 2014 at age 72.

Guitarist Allou April & singer Sandra Butler croon Butler-style (11 May 2022)

The reorganized Blue Room at Cape Town's premium Grub & Vine restaurant on Bree Street celebrated the end of International Jazz Month (April 2022) befittingly with another 'April' performing his bluesy works.



Allou April 27 April 2022-credit CM Martin

Journalist Rusana Philander was there to also capture the various Spirits hovering through the evening's repertoire: guitarist Allou April and crooners Heinrich Frans and Sandra Butler who took to the stage. Both singers boasted a special acquaintance that has influenced their musical careers: internationally renowned, South African-born guitarist, Jonathan Butler, now residing in California, to whom this tribute concert was dedicated.

Rusana tells it at it was.

As a tribute to California-based guitarist of note, Jonathan Butler originally from Cape Town, the brilliant guitarist, composer and singer Allou April wrapped up International Jazz Month of April at Cape Town's new jazz venue, the Blue Room, with flair as the Butler 'sound' and legacy was upheld by vocalists Sandra (sister to Jonathan) and another Jonathan Butler fan, Heinrich Frans who mentioned *"Every time I listen to Allou performing, I am mesmerised at how masterfully he plays the guitar."*

April relayed the story of the first time he heard Jonathan Butler's '7th Avenue' song on the radio and recorded it on a cassette tape. *"It was 1988 and I was rewinding the tape and listening to the song over and over. '7th Avenue' is also the name of the street where Jonathan grew up in Belgravia, Athlone, a suburb of Cape Town."* April's first session also included the song 'Elizabeth' which Jonathan wrote for his mother.

After doing his fantastic rendition of 7th Avenue, April was joined on stage by singer Heinrich Frans who sang 'Sarah, Sarah'. Other stories were told: Heinrich related how he was honoured to have travelled and performed with the Grammy nominated artist in 2003.

Later, the audience delighted in a real treat when Jonathan Butler's sister Sandra came on stage and sang his famous song: 'Falling in love with Jesus'. She recalled how she and Jonathan grew up in a family of 17 siblings in Belgravia. *"Jonathan is my baby brother,"* she recalled. *"Every time I see candles like in the venue tonight, I think of our days growing up in 7th Avenue. Before leaving for shows at night there would always be candles burning, but when we came home later it was completely dark. I remember the night Jonathan was born and the nurse told my mother that that was to be her last baby! We have wonderful memories of growing up in 7th Avenue."*

Another friend of Jonathan Butler, Colin Daries, told me: *"One day while driving in the car, Jonathan called me. He told me that Stevie Wonder asked him if he could sing his song: 'Falling in love with Jesus'. This is one fond memory I have of Jonathan."*

That evening's concert featured the young bassist, Charlton Daniels, who offered impressive solos that added to April's bluesy vocals and strumming. Another young gun, Brynne Bailey, was on keys and seasoned drummer, Damien Kamineth, added his usual flair to the tribute.

Bassist Eldred Schilder embraces family solidarity in album 'Tenziah' 10 September 2022

As creatives try to make up for time and efforts 'lost' during those down COVID months/two years in producing decent products, family solidarity has offered an important remedial touch to soften the musician's angst. Bassist Eldred Schilder benefited from this family embrace which instilled in him at an early age some pretty expert musical sounds and improvisation techniques from four Uncles, his close cousin Hilton Schilder, and from other family active in the arts.



Born in 1959 at his family home on Princess Street in Harfield Village, a suburb of Cape Town, his home was relocated by the apartheid system to the Cape Flats where his sonic environs were heavily filled with the traditional *goema* (klopse) beat, a Cape form of jazz which his family DNA would perpetuate.

His musician father, the late pianist Richard Schilder, who was also a goldsmith, taught young Eldred songs on the piano, and Uncle Philip Schilder mentored Eldred on bass over time. Jazz pianists Uncle Tony Schilder, and Uncle Chris Schilder, renamed Ibrahim Kalil Shihab after converting to Islam, left a profound mark on Eldred's growth as the latter performed in various popular bands that emerged in the Cape Flats.

Eldred has just released the digital version of his album, entitled ***Tenziah*** (combining the names of daughters Tenielle and Keziah) on all internet streaming formats. All songs, composed, arranged, and produced by Eldred, speak to the values, remembrances, and influences of his Schilder dynasty, with some special hand-picked local and talented young musicians, like drummer Damien Kamineth who has a special touch for the *goema*, and saxophonist Jed Petersen who also carries the Cape sound in his family genes. Other established local pianists, George Werner, Andrew Ford, and cousin Hilton add important flavour and wisdom to the sonic cultural histories being conveyed. Songs remember another Uncle Trevor Parker, Eldred's mother and wife, his father Richard, and, of course, his Uncle Philip.

One hears a remarkable array of musical styles on the seven songs ranging from a Cape *goema* to ballad, and some contemporary improvisations and blues, each positioned to tell a story about a family member. Befittingly, the album starts with honouring Eldred's two daughters, Tenielle and Keziah in 'Tenziah' (which combines the daughters' names), having an upbeat rhythm carried

melodically by Jed Petersen's alto saxophone. 'Mr. P' honours mentor Uncle Philip and has a distinct lower register theme rooted by the bass, perhaps reminiscent of Mr. P's mentoring Eldred on the bass guitar.



Eldred with cousin Hilton Schilder

The two ladies in his life – his wife in the song, 'Beatz', and his late mother in 'Remembrance', which features cousin Hilton on piano – are listening favourites with thoughtful dialogues between piano and saxophone. The rhythmic tempo in 'Beatz' portrays the boundless energy of Eldred's wife, Beatrice. Here is where saxman Petersen shines, giving emotional timbre to the songs. In 'Honeysponge', a tribute to Uncle Trevor and son Trevor Jr., a clever mix and match of themes emerge from the higher pitched tone of Petersen's soprano saxophone along with pianist Andrew Ford's eloquent synthesiser. The last two songs are reserved for Eldred's father, Richard: 'Africa Blue' is soft and reflective; then 'The Two Richards', as though continuing the Schilder legacy.

More live concerts coming up will offer songs from this album and will include a myriad of other compositions Eldred has compiled and saved over the years. Having performed and recorded with a number of well-heeled South African and international musicians, his discography list will impress. This album is just a taster of more to come. Buy and stream his album on all major digital platforms. The album in CD format was launched in early 2023.

Claude Cozens Trio Album Review of *Jubilee Jam* (11 September 2014)

Cape Town drummer, Claude Cozens, has pushed the compositional envelop to give an entirely fresh expression to the idioms of Cape jazz. His trio which includes the innovative pianist, Kyle Shepherd and bassist Benjamin Jephta, simply gel and provide improvisations so intense and empathetic that one's breath stops. This is his debut album, *Jubilee Jam*, released in 2014 became an instant rave and was followed by a new album in 2016, *Claude Cozens Trio: LIVE at SBIF 2016* which earned him the Standard Bank Young Artist for 2016 in Jazz.

Cozens writes on his Website bio:

"Jubilee Jam was recorded in a live fashion capturing the improvisational nature of the music and musicians. While his music naturally reflects the rich and diverse sounds and rhythms of his home town Cape Town and the African continent, Jazz and other modern genres, Cozens has already ventured beyond that in his quest to write his own story and carve out his own unique identity as an artist."

Jubilee Jam contains very pleasant ballads, tone-poems, and melodies – without a lot of improvisation or frantic cornering of melodies to reach their resolve, but with soft, thinking episodes. A mixture of 'jazz' genres, with hints of modern fusion, gospel, and a bit of funk, makes this first CD of Cozens not just a winner but fun to listen to! He and his fellow Cape musicians named above grew up together, and speak the "same musical vernacular", as Shepherd says in the album's sleeve. What could be musically tighter? Shepherd said, in his interview with a Bush Radio presenter, Nigel Vermaas, "It's bizarre that Claude isn't playing more around town. Jephta is another one you don't see much." And this, coming from a well-travelled Kyle Shepherd who knows what rewards hard work can bring.

'Fynbos Spirits' starts this album with a church gospel sound and a bass rhythm keeping pace to the treble runs of Shepherd's electric fusion. Drums become prominent, as though announcing nature's grand gift of the Cape's fynbos. This is a tuneful gem! Likewise, with '13 Corfu Ave', a tribute to where Cozens used to live. One hears a nice contemporary fusion, again with pronounced, but not over-powering, drums.

The cover song 'Jubilee Jam' is joyously repetitious with Shepherd's Rhodes keyboard, following the prescription of Cape Goema rhythms of the bass. Cozens uses only sticks, and no brushes on this piece. It is meant to convey jubilation and joy...for nothing, really. Continuing the jubilee spirit is 'Overflow', an energetic contrast to the quieter songs in the album. 'Platkop' features the bass with piano treble and clanging drums and symbols, like celebratory church bells. A monologue by the bass explains this energy. Cozen's upbeat refrain, again, gleefully expresses gratitude for abundance received. That's so terribly hopeful in this day 'n age!!

Influenced by the Bob James-ish modern fusion, Cozens is searching for this modern sound as part of his journey of discovery. 'Electric Street' features Shepherd on electronic keyboard which resonates with lovely clear, almost pure, runs in the upper treble. His other 'fusion' with subtle goema beats is heard in 'Song for Peninah' with its enduring electric bass solo. The very melodic 'Hangberg Mountain' has that mix as well.

'Baden Powell' is a pretty memorial to a great hero of a noble cause. A tuneful duet between the bass and piano suggests a deeply spiritual dialogue going on. Cozens's brushing and popping make this very listenable piece the most beautiful one in this album, I think!

'Love Stain' is a slow, mercurial piece that makes you think of what might have gone wrong, in spite of the lovely solos from the bass and piano. Another gem.

'Mr. English' is dedicated to fellow musician and trumpeter, Darren English, driven by memories of Cozens and Darren's time together in Norway as students. This is celebratory, with eager refrains from the trio individually and collectively. One can almost hear Darren's funky trumpet in appreciation!

'Cape Lion' has an interesting bass dialogue with energetic drums again, while piano runs scurry into the soundscape. Is the lion stalking? Is Claude Cozens romanticizing the past? *"When I saw that huge lion, I saw an image very powerful. I imagine early Cape Town beaches with those lions prowling around, once upon a time,"* Cozens says in his interview with Vermaas on the latter's Bush Radio program (9 September 2014). It's nice to hear a bit of fancy in jazz, I think!

Some pieces end with long repetitions by the instruments while Cozens makes his points with drums and cymbals gleefully announcing the final refrain. After all, he says, he wrote his music for the drums. His subsequent CDs tell more!

From his website, Cozens is proud to quote from other jazz critics and fans, especially given the fact that his trio's performances received standing ovations: at the 2015 Cape Town International Jazz Festival; at the Artscape Arena; and then on the main stage at the National Youth Jazz Festival in Grahamstown.

"Cozens employs sentimental melodies and goema rhythms — dominant idioms in Cape jazz — in beautifully creative ways. His melodies lend themselves to modal exploration; his rhythms break up and fit themselves perfectly back together like puzzle pieces. With partners Shepherd and bassist Benjamin Jephtha, Cozens uses the historic language of Cape jazz to have some very fresh conversations."
- Gwen Ansell

Cozens writes: The new (2016) solo album ***On The Go*** is an electronic work capturing the mood and emotion of the ancient Cape cultures deriving from a complex historical past. The music is brought forward with hard grooves, futuristic sounds and electronics. External influences are apparent.

After graduating from the University of Cape Town in 2012, Cozens began a new chapter of working with young students in various primary and high schools teaching primarily drummers and the concept of jazz whilst still performing with his trio and an array of artists. Renowned for his distinctive, open-style percussive drumming technique, Cozens is at the forefront of a new generation of rising talent who, according to arts journalist, Atiyah Khan, is trying to carve their own path in South Africa.

Born on 27 February 1989, Cozens is fast establishing himself as one of South Africa's most revered and sought-after drummers. He is also a talented pianist, composer and music tutor. Apart from leading his own Trio, Cozens' compelling energy and drumming inventiveness has seen him perform with a wide array of creative artists, inter alia, Hilton Schilder, Herbie Tsoaeli Mark Fransman, Feya Faku, Andre Petersen, Kyle Shepherd, Bokani Dyer, Darren English, Neo Muyanga, Nduduzo Makhathini, Zoe Modiga, Buddy Wells, Keenen Ahrends, and Mandla Mlangeni, many of whom he has gone on to record with. He has performed at other top performing venues and festivals in South Africa and abroad including The Edge of Wrong Festival, The Pan African Space

Station, The South African Association of Jazz Education Festival, Victoria Jazz Scene, Oslo (Norway) and Kulturhus Trondheim (Norway) for Nelson Mandela's birthday Celebration.

Abavuki Celebrates a Brotherhood of Afro Fusion marimba/brass style (14 June 2021)

“Wake up and let’s go!!” motto determines how a 20 year old brotherhood-in-music reacts to its artistic challenges of the day. This Xhosa-speaking group, calling themselves ‘Abavuki’, from Cape Town’s oldest ‘township’ community of Langa, have lived and supported each other’s musical growth with undying loyalty. Let’s just say, they are Brothers at heart and mind!



Abavuki

concert at 44 Gallery on Long, CapeTown, 12 June 2021

Abavuki say their style is unique, in that they play the traditional African instruments (drums, percussion & marimbas) along with brass (trumpet, saxophone and trombone) , vocal harmonies, and the occasional dance jive, that Abavuki ‘shuffle’. Infectiously energetic, these young men, now in their mid 30s, present a vibrant and contemporary Mzansi sound that is also mixed with kwaito, jazz and Latin American rhythms.

A viral pandemic has not reduced their vigor honed by a past decade of overseas tours performing in music festivals in some 13 countries including China, Algeria, and Germany. Even a two month cruise gig in 2010 as the Resident band on the Viking Line ferry operating between Sweden and Finland. These multi-instrumentalists and multi-award recipients have journeyed from busking as young teenagers at Cape Town’s popular V&A Waterfront (sometimes without a permit) to full time musicianship joining other bands as the professional career and financial needs called for their individual participation.

Coming from some rough neighbourhoods of Langa, all was not easy to make some survival money as a young teen. *“Some of us started playing informally with local bands, such as The Little Giants, and Jika. We were first African drums, brass plus vocals and took to the streets with this unique sound. As we got booked more and more, we added dance, then marimbas,”* explains Sabu Jiyana who went on to study traditional African music at the University of Cape Town’s College of Music. *“We had fun busking and made a lot of money at the Waterfront, like one hundred bucks (Rands) a day for each of us was a lot of money at age 13/14!”*



Sabu Jiyana – credit www.rauschenbach.de

So how did they afford to get their marimbas and these brass instruments as teenagers? Luck found them: A marimba-maker, Andile, in Langa needed to test out his marimbas before delivering to the customers. So he gave some to the teens who profited with busking on streets and at the Waterfront.

“Andile organized gigs for us, but didn’t pay us, but said we would eventually get our instruments. We called ourselves ‘Abavuki’ which means ‘wake up early’ and go busking, which is what we guys loved doing! Andile called us one Sunday saying he had a gig for us for R700 at the Switching On the Lights in downtown Adderley Street as part of the Christmas celebrations. At that point, we kids had never played together with marimbas. So we all frantically rehearsed together in the Railway Station toilets! We were given only 10 minutes to perform, at the corner of Wale and Adderley.”

That was in 2001. Their luck continued to grow.

“That’s when we met Beverley who lived nearby and heard us playing. She offered to stick with us and help us get gigs from then on. We were 13/14 year old kids, and we thought everyone would take us to London and other places, like what happened with Amapondo who were famous at that point.”

Beverley Gough managed Abavuki from that time until she passed away in 2019, much to the sadness and loss felt by the group who called her a Mother to them. In 2002, the group met a couple from USA who tape recorded them. *“We still were ‘borrowing’ Andile’s marimbas until one day, after the recordings and when we had the CDs in hand to sell at our gigs, Andile took our marimbas away. We couldn’t gigs or sell the CDs!! “*

Never deterred but always driven, Sabu explained how they would find marimbas and ‘steal’ them, make some money from them, and then pay the owners for the instruments. *“We had just reassured the owners that we were ‘borrowing’ the marimbas!”*

So what is so unique or special about Abavuki? It’s their style, they explained.

“ There are marimba ‘groups’, but we call ourselves a band because we are a brotherhood, like

family, we're brothers. At the time, there were only two bands that played marimbas with brass, one of them was Amaondo. We came along and changed the game... We made a decision to not be 'a marimba band', but a band that uses marimbas. So you would think someone is playing a bass guitar when he would be playing a marimba using 3 sticks. When Kim plays soprano marimba, it will be highlights or cues for the brass to play, for instance, while the tenor marimba will carry a melody."



Kim Masala (left); Sabu Jiyana (right) on 12 June 2021

This certainly seems to bring out the versatility of this wooden marimba. *"Instead of playing chord progressions and your own thing, you'll play an actual melody on the bass marimba or tenor marimba while mixing rhythms."*

So far, according to spokesperson, Sabu, the Abavuki songs have not been scored or archived for younger players to study. Why not?

"We found that if a teenager listens to the music and really catches on to it, he or she will learn it. Some local projects for kids eventually disappear, money disappears due to corruption, etc. Some kids join for the wrong reason, maybe to get money quickly. But our young man who has joined us was serious about learning our music, so we have taken him on. Covid has interrupted a lot of what teaching we wanted to do in the schools in Langa, like Thambani Primary School and Langa High School. And not everyone takes African music seriously – they like their kwaito and stuff. But we're on a mission....."

The 'mission' has been tough during COVID lockdown, now a year and one month without playing together as a brotherhood, just surviving with individual gigs here and there. Some South African musicians have used this period 'off' to compose more songs for later recordings and concerts. Has Abavuki?

"When we started as a 14 piece band, we had three fundamental goals to achieve: getting instruments; recording albums; and traveling internationally. We've achieved these and continue to develop these goals with more instruments. We'll do a different album than previous tours. Regarding developing songs, a band member will throw out an idea and we'll all work on it together. Noone dominates."

But then COVID hit!

“Covid became frustrating because we were used to being together and making music together. We would get rusty on our instruments. However, we would share ideas, but get discouraged by the whole environment. It’s been tough. The idea of our 20th anniversary launch tomorrow [12 June 2021] is to say to organizers that ‘we are still here’.”¹

And Yes, they are here! The future sees these jolly musicians push forward with more exciting compositions and local and world tours, COVID-permitted. It’s simply amazing how they have stayed as closely knit together as the audience witnessed on that June 12 evening of 20 years celebration! In all their credits, they never fail to give tribute to their deceased band members: Gaz Matsila and Thulani Mtyi. And always to Beverley Gough, their band manager (2001-2019).



Abavuki in 2019; credit: Paul Reichle

View Abavuki in action here, and check out that Abavuki dance shuffle that is their signature act!

Albums ‘Decade’ and ‘Africa Got Soul’ and other Abavuki albums are on Spotify, Soundcloud, and other digital platforms. See their Facebook page.³

¹ <https://youtu.be/K91i06QJIAA>

²

<https://www.abavuki.com/videos?wix-vod-video-id=44fb17ff082e4aed819404c9dcd912aa&wix-vod-comp-id=comp-jzsgxhd9>

³ <http://www.facebook.com/Abavuki>

IKaggen Sky People Heal and Relax through Indigenous Music Therapies (2022)

A therapeutic sound journey awaits if you find this stellar trio of sound artists by the fire, with candle-lit darkish spaces which helped draw out the mystical, the rhythms, percussive beats, and subtle healing chants of the Ikaggen Sky People. This evening of May 12, 2022, at the rounded venue of The Forge in Kalk Bay on Cape Town's Peninsula, the sounds cast spirit-inducing spells of relaxation, timelessness, haunting memories, maybe fear – and – flight emotions, elation, and maybe a healing which the listener needed.



Nkosenathi Ernie Koela (Mntana.WeXhele)-photo supplied

Spearheaded by multi-instrumentalist producer and performance artist, Nkosenathi Ernie Koela, otherwise known on recordings as Mntana.WeXhele, IKaggen Sky People presents sonic explorations that channel stars, the grains of sand and a vast collection of Southern African folk mythology, all embodied in the Mantis (IKaggen) which symbolises the presence of the supreme being in earthly life. It is said that IKaggen once appeared to people to break the void of darkness.

For one hour and 35 minutes, three musicians coordinate their presentation in meditative and evocative ways that induce the listener to explore the mystical. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQJ3LXwOqag>

From click sounds of the First Peoples of southern Africa, to lyrical guitar motifs, to an assortment of stringed traditional African instruments, percussion, and shakes, Koela has molded out his ancestral spiritual footprint on contemporary music for healing. A Ph.D. student at the University of Cape Town specializing in indigenous music therapies, he explores how healing practices through sound creates space that manifests spiritually and materially, in body, soul, and mind. Koela has been a performer and instrumentalist for over 16 years, and has taught traditional instruments focusing on their history, spiritual significance and importance. This he does as

testament to his ancestry of a long line/s of traditional instrumentalists, diviners/ healers (amaGqirha namaXhwele) that run in his family, and who are masters of traditional San, Bantu, and Nguni music/heritage.



Dizu Plaatjies - credit: Sipiwe Mhlambi

At the forefront of Koela's professional growth is his mentor and teacher at UCT, Dizu Plaatjies, founder of an internationally renowned marimba group, *Amampondo*, who is known to move between African traditional instruments, like the Mbira, Uhadi, Umhube, and more contemporary maskandi style acoustic guitar. During this evening's performance, a wide range of percussive textures were shared between Koela and Plaatjies, enabling listeners to reflect on how such textures touched their body and heart.



Derek Gripper

Adding to these gentle sonic bubbles that enveloped the venue's ether, Derek Gripper's guitar hummed out subtleties and yearnings characteristic of his West African kora adaptations and griot-style chanting, repetitious yet soothing to the soul. For years, Gripper has explored and played with kora specialists, like Malian Toumani Diabate, even taking Bach music and fusing

interpretations with oral traditions of Africa. The output is nothing short of magical improvisations with harmonies expressed through the acoustic guitar's simplicity.

Thirty some minutes into the evening's performance, the trio cleverly shifted into a danceable movement enhanced by Koela's wooden flute, and an expressive percussion, all that harnessed sounds of nature that seemed to infuse spiritual blessings into humanity's much needed healing process. The trio were well imagining musically the vibrational energy of |Kaggen that embodied deep listening to the land, sand, and the stars.

The evening ended with Plaatjies' plea that such music honouring ancestral Spirit as well as nature's endowment on us earthlings should be recorded more and made available for study and extension. "For how do we motivate the younger ones to carry the sound?"

Thanks to supports from Concerts SA, the Norwegian Embassy and SAMRO, The Sky People can touch the ears and emotions of a wide range of soul seekers with their inventive sonic tentacles.

Review of Pops Mohamed/Dave Reynolds Workshop, 7 March 2015 by Carol Martin (2015)

As part of the Music Exchange, Red Bull Studios, and SA Concerts collaboration, two extraordinary music specialists in African traditional instruments came together in Cape Town on 7 March 2015 for a workshop with an audience involved in the music industry. Pops Mohamed specializes in a variety of African instruments, but on this day, he showcased the wonders of the Mbira Kalimba, or 'thumb piano', and the African mouth bow and kora instruments. His partner in crime, Dave Reynolds reigned in his steel pans which offered historical juxtapositions with African xylophone sounds and rhythms. Their exchange was part of a wider concert performance schedule that reached the public in Cape Town with not only eclectic traditional African sounds, but messages from histories of how such instruments emerged.

Such was the focus of this Saturday workshop – to have the music industry give more serious thought to supporting a future which continues to preserve these cultural artefacts and their history as well as their application to our contemporary musical world. Reynolds, an award-winning South African composer and multi-instrumentalist, gave an impressive background to his and Mohamed's enthusiasm for their cause: He cited the 'father of African ethnomusicology', Hugh Tracey, who, for some 40 years until his death in 1977, travelled widely in southern Africa recording music of the various societies, and learning some 20 African languages in the meantime. His son, Professor Andrew Tracey, born in 1936 in Durban, continued his father's legacy. Together, they had founded Kwanongoma College of African Music in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in 1960. Andrew continued to research southern African music focusing on the various sounds in the mbira and xylophone families of traditional instruments. This explains Andrew's passion for steel pan instruments, which also explains why Pops Mohamed and Dave Reynolds are a natural duo to perform such traditions.



"The business of music involves learning the future", said Reynolds. This implies preservation. One way to do this is to NOT see culture in an instrument: *"I deliver my own identification, what is me, when I play the pans,"* he says. He explained that the steel pans are a hybrid percussion developed in the Caribbean islands amongst slaves who were not permitted to make drums of skins. So you

see an instrument for what it can deliver, and in this way, that instrument can travel and combine with other sounds. It's not only rooted to a 'culture'.



Pops Mohamed, who grew up in Benoni and is known for his wide range of musical styles, has led the struggle to bring cultural music history of African peoples to the present and beyond. He cited an interesting history of how the hand piano, Kalimba, was popularized by the American pop group, **Earth Wind and Fire**, back in the 1960s-70s, and had bought rights to the Kalimba's symbol which originally was produced by Dr. Hugh Tracey! But it was Mohamed's own time period of growing up that molded his appreciation and eventual collaboration with the great South Africans of the 1960s struggle against apartheid. Hanging out with his Dad at shebeens back then, or making a home-made guitar and playing it in the high school bands, and jamming with the penny whistlers – all remained as memories, such fun never recorded.

It was in 1996 that Mohamed committed to a mission to protect and preserve this 'cattle music', as the apartheid enthusiasts called it, the music of the indigenous. In London, the drum 'n bass platform of DJs became an opportunity for Mohamed to expose young people to African indigenous sounds. *"Go with your signature – tell people about your instrument as a viable South African technique. Then mix it with all the other styles and modes of music, the pop, funk, classical, and jazz, in helping to appreciate how such sounds can produce authentic compositions. And be proudly South African about it."*

Besides delving into the instruments' roots, the duo added flavour by performing their pieces. It's when Afrikaans vernacular hip-hop artist and rapper, Jitsvinger (alias Quintin Goliath), joined in a jam to add the traditional Khoi spoken word to the duo's presentations that the indigenous mixtures bubbled harmoniously. The versatility of Mohamed's exchange between the mouth bow with attached gourd, alternating with his mbira and kora and bird whistle, also highlighted the occasion. The audience not only listened, but also participated by passing around rattles made from metal keys and bamboo and bean shakes which added soft percussive rhythms.

Time ran out, after this two hour session, with listeners eager to talk more, considering what stimulation they would take home with them that day. Similar workshops are being conducted by Pops and Dave this week at other Capetown venues, and more concerts have been added. More is yet to come from this inventive and inspirational duo in the future.....which is what preservation is all about.

Pianist Charles Louw's CD appreciates original music from where our musical souls evolve

(21 August 2024)

(Presently available at

<https://musicallymine.wordpress.com/2025/05/30/pianist-charles-louws-cd-appreciates-original-music-from-where-our-musical-souls-evolve/>

Capetown-born Charles Louw has been around the block in difficult, impoverished communities and knows well, after several hard decades, the power of music to transform, heal, and excite. Hailing originally from the gangster-troubled Township of Mannenberg, Louw has managed, through illustrious mentors, to hone valuable social and political activism skills from mid-1970 in order to uplift community solidarity through music.



Significant influences on this jazz pianist included his grandparents' coaching (as he regrets not growing up with a father), the social and musical alchemy of the church providing access to several musical instruments and being included in early bands with musicians like guitarist, Nazeem Brown, and the late bassist Spencer Mbadu. A highlight of Louw's early musical development was mentoring with flautist and saxophonist legend, McCoy Mrubata, who taught him the basics of music literacy and introduced him to the Nyanga Arts Center for further artistic development in those days. Brown performs with him to this day. Popular jazz bands back in the day took in this young, floundering multi-instrumentalist who tried and tested techniques with sound and style with stalwarts like Robbie Jansen and Jonathan Butler. Louw was blessed with a guest spot at Butler's farewell concert with Butler's popular Pacific Express band. Several years touring with the South African Police Band also widened Louw's repertoire in performing big band marching and swing songs.

After touring both within South Africa and overseas, it was his academic studies at the University of Cape Town's School of Music that established his firm resolve to promote local and original compositions with the Cape sound. *"It's about appreciating and supporting our Original music from where our musical souls evolve,"* Louw confirms, an important value he teaches to youth in his several decades long Mamela Project. Always seeking the authentic, Louw's grounding in gospel, jazz and ghoema sounds was also greatly influenced by the music of Abdullah Ibrahim during the 1970s.

"Covid hit our program hard. Had to stop. Now, post-Covid, we have 50-60 kids to work with at Manenberg High School on Saturdays for instruction. They practice what they learn at the school on Tuesdays."

Because of the distance to join with other instructional programs within Cape Town's wide sector of 'Townships', and the risks faced by students, Louw admits he has tried to get the local taxis to provide transport as part of their social responsibility in their communities. *"It's particularly risky for girls to walk distances even within Manenberg or from Phillippi. And teachers are*

predominately male. We plan to approach more female music teachers to get involved, as well as try to make more instruments available to the kids.”

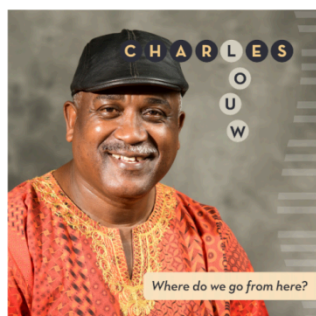
Audience Development and Marketing Oneself

Louw admits frustration, not unknown amongst many of his local musical comrades, when it comes time to receive an income and financial rewards for their artistry and creativity. *“We know we don’t get the supports we need – I mean from Government, family, venues, media, the audience, friends, etc. People say it’s not worth being a musician..... but we know we must play both for the love of the music and to receive some recognition.”* What seems like an impenetrable wall of appreciation has stimulated Louw to not give up on creating, performing, and calling on audiences to proudly support ‘our original music’. *“So **‘Where do we go from here’** dawned on me that we need to develop our musical identity more. It’s easy to play at a nightclub some cover versions of a George Benson and get sucked into just playing those popular American songs, and get no recognition. I love Benson and Joe Sample and those guys and their music, but they have already shared with the world their stories. They have an Identity. These musicians, like also Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea, have an Identity. But fellow South Africans don’t share our ‘story’ out there as well.”*

Louw pines that when asked to pay Rands 200, local audiences query the identity of ‘this local guy’. *“People from our localities don’t mind paying a 1,000 Rands or 5,000 Rands to see an overseas artist perform, like a George Benson; but if Charles Louw is performing somewhere smaller for only R200, they query the ticket price !! So how do we develop the audience to react with pride towards our local artists? It’s about audience development!”*

Louw admits that taking time and reserve energy to market oneself can distract the artist from his/her creativity, having to learn the sometimes intricate technicalities in promoting oneself. *“It’s a matter of balancing these things and making sure my creative side isn’t compromised or caught up with having to learn or manage the operations of producing my music.”*

Where do we go from here?



Louw’s debut album presents very listenable original compositions with band members he has performed with for several decades, since his teenage years. *“I learned alot from these earlier apartheid days. I felt we needed some hope which is why my album starts with three songs, ‘Have Mercy’, ‘Peace’, and ‘Sunshine and Hope’ as a way forward. I was using music as a healing for the pain and sorrow that had developed in many of us.”*

In ‘Kinnes va’nie Tjatjies’, or the Children of Mannenberg, Louw remembers the gang violence which killed innocent people, particularly children. *“So I asked myself, what can I do for these children... This violence is ongoing, so the song is ongoing.”*

Lots of musicians are now talking about 'home' in their music. Louw was in Standard 8 when he wrote 'Going Home' which is a bluesy, melancholic piece sounding out how Louw grew up without a father. *"I started playing this melody when I was feeling very down, as though I would be dying soon. This world was not my home, so it has a spiritual context."* It's interesting that this theme should still be prominent decades later, witness the themes of pianist Sibusiso Mashiloane whose doctoral thesis as well as several albums talk about the nature of 'Home' in his South African context.

During the 1970s, Louw was active in school politics, considering the plights of inequalities faced by the majority of rural peoples living under Apartheid. Louw met a commander 'Lizo' in the Umkhonto we Sizwe resistance front who shared a lot of history about the country with young Louw. *"Then when I heard that Lizo was sentenced to life imprisonment, I decided to write this song, 'Hamba Hahle', as a go-well tribute."* Lizo was later released but was killed in a car accident.

"Then, I saw on the news famine and hardship in an African country, and I saw it here also, on my doorstep. That's when I approached the Lions Club about visiting outlying areas of our country in order to witness the beauties of our African heritage and soil. That's when I wrote 'African Landscape' to capture such diversity we live in."

When he reflects on winning his Kanna Award in 2006 for Best Contemporary Music at the KKNK Festival in Oudtshoorn, Louw feels he has to revisit those areas, get his band set up, and write proposals for supports. This means taking time between growing and marketing his creativity through live concerts and reaching out to that sympathetic public eager to support both his educational efforts as well as performances in various venues countrywide.

He is aiming big! *"I'm planning my birthday concert on 15 February, 2025 at Artscape in the Arena Theater and am working through the Artscape Theater's CEO, Marlene leRoux, who was a Board member of the Mamela Project. I'm also working with the poet Diana Ferrus, and write music to her poetry. Before Covid hit, I had planned to do a concert at SABC Studios in Sea Point – and to videotape my life story on stage and leave it for the people of Manenberg. Now, it's time to do just that!"* Louw hopes to bring bassist Herbie Tsoaeli and saxman McCoy Mrubata down from Johannesburg for this big bash 63rd birthday concert!

But before that, he hosts a big fundraiser for his Mamela Project with other youth and professional bands at Plumstead's Havana Nights on Sunday, 8 September 2024, starting 3pm. Tickets at R100 through <http://www.piratesteakhouse.co.za>. Stay tuned!

Where do we go from here' CD is available on Spotify and YouTube platforms for streaming and purchase. It's worth a good listen....and as part of one's personal collection.

Bongani Sotshononda's Marimba & Indigenous Orchestra Meets Jazz: Live in Cape Town (1 December 2020)

There's something light, playful, and pleasantly swinging about the xylophone....or should one say, the African chromatic marimba which plays both black and white keys.



Bongani Sotshononda is reputedly one of the very few in South Africa who has mastered his marimba, custom-made to his own specification by a manufacturer in Grahamstown. Sotshononda was encouraged, or in his own words, 'forced' by his then manager, Henry Shields, who ran the Marimba Restaurant at Cape Town's International Convention Center back in the early 2000s, to acquire and master a chromatic marimba.

This second album with his Indigenous Orchestra, *Live in Cape Town*, just released, attests to this mastery, resonating joy, Africanness, swing, and soft ballads with an honest intent to please the ear, heart, and soul. Some up-and-coming stars, like the self-taught Stephen Sokuyeka on trombone, and Mpumelelo Mnyanana on saxophone display a daring creativity, effectively mixing their solos with some otherwise intricate rhythms from the percussions. Watch this riveting YouTube of his Artscape concert In October 2020:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OrrtD71WFs&t=4s>

All songs presented are composed by Sotshononda except for two songs with Hebrew lyrics inspired by Shields and arranged by Sotshononda. For instance, 'Malacha Hayam' offers a soft Middle Eastern sonic lift held together by the horns, marimba and Ricky Kleinsmith's piano. The steel pans and African drum add that Caribbean and West African rhythmic ting with freshness and innovativeness, as in 'Alvinu Malchenu'. This being the longest song on the album showcases the tight expressions of all instrumentalists.

Besides his 10-piece instrumental orchestra, lead singer Fancy Galada faithfully carries longing, joy, and emotion, thanks to her deep, broad vocal style that soothes. Her rendition of 'Bulelwa', a song Sotshononda wrote for his sister, the last born after four brothers, is both beautiful and lilting in tone accompanied by the soft ballad rings of Dave Reynold's steel pans.

What's the message in this album, I asked?

“Music is not about where you are based. It’s about all the different backgrounds, combining sounds and techniques so as to come out with something different. The western influence, along with African and Arabic influences, and others, are all combined for exciting arrangements. I was always fascinated by the Arabic scales when practicing. Track 8 has a lot of Arabic influence.”

The album sings to a ‘new day’, full of lessons to be learned. Sotshononda writes on his album cover: *“Decision was mine...Let the lesson be mine”*, an ominous suggestion to always be aware and upbeat about what’s happening. Ironically, after these uplifting songs, the album ends with warnings about the ineptitudes and failures of government to attend to its people, in *“Ubulala”* (You Killing the People). Lessons are indeed to be learned. And who says the classical Harp can’t fit with African indigenous sounds?



Dave Reynolds

All Jazz Radio had a chat with Bongani Sotshononda about his album and beyond.

CM/AJR: This year of the COVID has really hit you creatives hard, hasn’t it? How have you treated the year?

BS: *For me, it has been a time to be creative and compose. I got to record this second album, for instance. We have to think outside the box now and find outlets for our music. I wasn’t particularly happy with my first album – it wasn’t really a professional product and I wasn’t mature enough to see some shortcomings.*

CM: So times of stress, like happenings this year, perhaps pushed you to produce?

BS: *Yes, there were different levels of stress during this pandemic. I also realized that being married to someone who was not an artist was a blessing! My wife could work full time as she is in marketing.*

CM: Talk about how and why you chose the marimba and vibraphone as your main instruments.

BS: *My schooling at St. Mary’s here allowed me to start with a music program, followed by high School in Bokaap, then two years at UCT and music tuition at MAPP. I loved the mallets and the traditional marimba, but it was diatonic and limited to only two key scales. This meant I couldn’t play diverse sounds with other instruments, so I moved to the chromatic marimba, similar to the xylophone, with all the other keys. So my marimba was custom made by someone in Grahamstown. Growing up, I listened a lot to mostly American vibraphonists, like Milt Jackson, and Bobby Hutchinson. Also, Dizu Plaatjies was a huge influence on me with his Amapondo band and*

his encyclopedia of traditional instruments. Then playing with the Phambili Marimba and Brass Ensemble. I was also fortunate enough to work with our local musicians like Basil Coetzee, Robby Jansen, Hotep Galeta, Lulu Gontzana, and Rene McLean at the Waterfront, early 2000s!

CM: You have modern instruments in your band, including the classical harp, the horns, all mixed with other indigenous instruments, like the marimbas, African harp or kora.

BS: *Yes, I'm working on getting more flutes, too – modern ones, like what Buddy Wells plays and also traditional flutes.*

CM: Maybe the flute made from seaweed...? Let's talk about where you are fitting into the jazz or improvisation genre with your instruments?

BS: *It's world music so I travel with my instruments and I'm always influenced by other people's traditional instruments. I end up melding different musical traditions and rhythms. For instance, I have mixed up the lyrics: in the second track of my album, 'Anozarwa' is chanted in Shona language of Zimbabwe and means a baby is born. In tracks 7 and 8, Henry Shields inspired me and introduced me to a Gaza musician and activist, Hair Dalal, so I learned a lot about Jewish and Arab music. I just gave them an African touch. Also, I've chosen singer Fancy Galada because we have worked together since the 90s, and I like her very strong vocal technique, and skills in arranging from my lyrics.*

CM: This seems to confirm your 'indigenous' orchestra which absorbs ethnic expressions. So where do you see your instruments moving African jazz?

BS: *In South Africa, I think I'm one of the few using the chromatic marimba in jazz. I have a project with guitarist Jean Pierre 'JAV' Josefinn from Reunion Island, our first album being **Trapdanza** with musicians also from Madagascar and Mozambique. JAV has produced two more albums: **Baladiroots**, which includes Jean Pierre and other musicians from Reunion. The other album has no name yet, but includes the same musicians as in **Trapdanza** album. Then, I am collaborating now with retired UCT professor, Mike Campbell's Big Band, which also brings together Jean Pierre's JAV band with Reunion influences which are mixed sounds from the south west Indian Ocean peoples. It's a nice partnership to bring our two bands together, with singer Nonfundo Xalala, to produce Southern Indian Ocean sounds in jazz.*

CM: What musicians would you like to collaborate with... within the jazz tribes in this country: the Joburgers? The Port Elizabeth/Capetown types? Or the Durbanites? What about a possible working relationship with Nduduzo Makhathini?

BS: *It will happen. I like the way he thinks – out of the box. More South Africans need to do this. A mix of unusual combinations is needed. And Sibu Mashiloane – He's another one. Those guys are more indigenous jazz. Moses Molelekwa started that revolution. I saw him in 1997, in France, performing for the first time live.*

Next year, I want to do a lot of concerts in this project (Indigenous Orchestra). I can put together an 8 piece band to perform at Kwa Sec on a low budget. The thinking here is let's share our music and be happy with a small remuneration.

CM: What about live streaming as some platforms and artists are doing these days? I'm thinking of people like Leonardo Fortuin and Blake Hellaby who are pushing the music virtually – a positive side of COVID. Or check out the Urban Sessions organized by Aymeric. What do you think?

BS: *South Africa will take a while to get into this. It's good, though, to give people a month of a ticket so that people can watch streams at their own time.*

DIGITAL LINKS

See Amathongo perform: <https://youtu.be/cIClz9zfBE>

The late Madosini of Amathongo: <https://youtu.be/Gemr9gru72U>

Lulu is the first South African female musician to play the imbira and incorporate it into her compositions.

<https://sarafinamagazine.com/2019/05/14/a-conversation-with-lungiswa-plaatjies/>

Pedro Espi presents his kelp pipe flute, stringed guitar on tortoise shell, and a gourd-cased mbira.

<https://youtu.be/XUFgqiCIYDk> and shows how to make the items

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=89&v=AN1OAXyjf9c

Allou April at his best: <https://www.facebook.com/613492305/videos/650518903021213/>

.....to be continued.....