

ARTICLES

Breaking Out - Youthful Visions

INTERVIEW – Artist of the Week, Marcus Wyatt at Joy of Jazz (27 September 2014)

I caught up with 43 year old trumpeter Marcus Wyatt during the Joy of Jazz Festival in Sandton a few weeks ago – he seems to be everywhere in Jozi! First, at The Orbit jazz club in CBD the Thursday night before Joy of Jazz started, with bassist Benjamin Jephta and pianist Kyle Shepherd. Then, somewhat hidden at US crooner Gregory Porter’s concert with a huge orchestra.

Regarding his newest Language 12 album entitled ***Maji Maji: in the Land of Milk and Honey***, he explains the title: “*Maji is like muti. It’s an album about protection, as ‘maji’ in Kiswahili means water, and water sustains life. Water keeps us sane.*”



We talked:

CM: How different is this album from your previous one?

MW: *It’s the same **language 12** which is music, but it can go anywhere, just like the creativity of music, without genre, without specific definition. This **Maji** album is probably the most accurate representation of who I am in my growth as a musician. I grew up playing everything and not just straight ahead jazz – drum and base, orchestral, West African. What makes me most proud about this project is that you recognize all these elements but there’s not a preconceived feel, and it doesn’t sound like anything else.*

CM: Siya – your vocalist is quite beloved to you?

MW: *We’ve been together for many years. There’s only one solo song of hers on the album; the rest of her vocals are with all of us. Her songs “take you places” thanks to the collective. This album is really hers. She’s done all of the lyrics.*

CM: I love how her voice emotes. She has a range which sounds 'African'. You have mixed your own cultural identity, and through her, your music has the flavour of many different styles and themes.

MW: I grew up as an English speaking white South African, this being the least cultured of all the groups in South Africa. We are probably the strongest ethnic group seeking a cultural identity, because we have the biggest reason to find this. On the positive side of all this, it allows me to choose and take from the different cultural groups, cultures that I am engaged with. I'm not locked into a 'culture' and therefore I'm free to explore.

CM: I see you haven't used the accordion yet, in the South African Afrikaans sense. What about Melissa (van der Spey) for that ethnic dimension?

MW: I would definitely like to use her in the future, particularly her voice, with me playing vuvuzela and her singing, and in a mascandi style. The Vuvu has a place in South African history, like the kudu horn!

CM: I don't think many people understand that or have thought of it in that way, so you can pioneer that attitude. You're in a position to evoke ethnic sounds without having to be part of that community! Nice! So, who have been your greatest influences – in the music world?

MW: Who is the person I would default to? Well, my dad was chairman of the folk club in PE (Port Elizabeth) when I was growing up so I listened to Tony Cox, Steve Neumann, David Kramer and those guys. At the house I listened to a lot of blues and folk. I played in the Navy band so several musicians helped me on the path. Other band members, like Buddy Wells and [the late] Dave Ledbetter, whom I think is one of our most underrated musicians, helped a lot. In JBG, saxman Sidney Mnisi influenced me with his energy and do-or-die attitude. Others like Herbie (Tsoaeli, acoustic bass) and Carlo (Mombelli, bass) have been a big influence for many years. Ach....so many influences.

CM: But.....Siya?

MW: Yes, she is THE person. I can write pages on her. She is such an inspiration in what she brings. Language 12 is SHE. International artists? Mono DiBongo on Robben Island; musos in Europe/France, like those guys in Paris – Braka and Nicola and Daniel (tuba player). A gig with them at the Grahamstown Festival was great; the vibe of audience was one of surprise.

CM: What are your next projects?

MW: I've always wanted to promote the non-commercialized jazz exiles, like Chris McGregor and those of his time, who were pushing our jazz heritage, at least in Europe. The Blue Notes Tribute Orkestra, meant to be less Euro-centric with its spelling, buckled me down to write for this 13 piece orchestra. There is nothing recorded for release yet, but there are a few recordings in Europe. I've tried to sell the project of the Blue Notes Tribute to festivals here, but no luck.

CM: Isn't there a 'heritage jazz festival' being bandied about among musicians and promoters here? What about interests by the SA Concert series?

MW: I don't know, but I would love to travel the heritage band around to schools and their communities. The "Jozi Unsigned" company is interested in this. Even Language 12 has performed out of the country more than within RSA – mainly in India and Europe. Heritage jazz music needs to get out there to the public– such as at the upcoming Fringe Fest in Cape town, and at the Crypt.

I was left thinking how South Africa might provide that 'land of milk and honey' and that 'Maji' for the rich jazz heritage it still has, among the living, both older and younger. It's about protecting history and artistry, and nourishing it for future generations.

The Whacky Dance of Bombshelter Beast in a Sculpture Garden (15 March 2018)

How would you like your music? Sculptured around a terrain of hills, valleys, boulders, and ponds, all sculptured by the artist himself, Dylan Lewis, who turned this land into a fairy-like garden for his own giant and small sculptures?

Or sculptured in old-school kwaito with a gypsy swing by a clownish band of Balkan enthusiasts and jazz aficionados, all dressed in multi-coloured, polka-dotted overalls, some with Afrocentric designs, and painted faces to match their costumes?

The Stellenbosch Woordfees 2018 turned heads by offering a unique experience to 'concert goers' who thirsted for something different, interactive, and outdoorsy, as art-meets-music-meets South African talents at their best. And interactive it was, as the Saturday, 10 March, event at the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden outside of Stellenbosch joyfully took off from 6pm. Early birds could enjoy feasting on the visual beauties of mountains lit up by a distant cloudy sunset. A lone duck in the garden's pond peacefully lulled lookers-on, oblivious to what was about to happen.

The Polish accordion player, Speedy Kobak, serenaded us in the garden with Italian love songs. The stage was set; the band had finished their sound check. But by 6.30pm, where was the band?

As I sat on a small rock watching the waning sun reflect in the docile pond, sounds emerged: the eye followed, catching the saxman (Sisonke) standing under a giant sculpture on a mound on the other side of the pond; then trumpeter and leader of the band, Marcus Wyatt, dressed in bright red overalls with a hat to match, bellows out nature's sound of a trumpeting elephant; then a petit singer dancing on another mound; then far to the left, the oomp pah pah of the blaring sousaphone, with only its bright silver head moving in a comical sway through the reeds near a stream that feeds the pond. Then, the trombone howls. The instruments magically form a harmonic union as the musicians meet on the same path and lead the dispersed crowd of some 50 people closer to the stage.

The party begins! This is how the Bombshelter Beast likes it: an inspiringly beautiful setting, outdoors, so that their whacky and wonderful sonic outbursts can engage listeners. The three lead singers carry the comradery, pulse, and zaniness of the songs composed and arranged by legendary jazz trumpeter Marcus Wyatt. The singers entice the audience with a scatty rap, funny facial expressions, and funky hip-hop dances, with linguistic jols between them in different South African languages.

They're a motley lot: Pule (meaning 'rain' in Setswana) is 'white' with impressive experience in African cultures where he raps in Zulu and other South African languages. Sort of a Beast Johnny Clegg on staccato steroids. His style moves from funk to heavy metal screams to hip-hoppy humour. It's no wonder that he has also studied to be a clown, and is now embarking on a Ph.D. in Linguistics.

The two African lady singers, one large and voluptuous with a huge head of hair, the other thin and petite with large wide eyes, add to the clownish humour. Their exaggerated burlesque dancing and singing extends to jumping into the crowd to wiggle about and make faces. The dancing crowd howls in appreciation. The Army helmeted sousaphone player,

himself larger than life, and a 60-something opera singer, made their contrasting mark on the skillfully choreographed stage from which hung various country flags to add to the splash of colourful textiles.

These free-spirited AfroBalkan musical buffs fit coincidentally with artist Dylan Lewis's connection with his 'authentic, untamed inner nature', and the non-judgmental inspirations from nature which tames and nurtures this 'authentic wild self' to find an inner peace.

One would hope that the Beast could match this paradox. And alas, its raucous and occasional outrageous outbursts did mellow as its *Dance of the Chicken*, the title of the Beast's album, resolved into skadubhall and free-fall. Maverick and ragtaggy? YES!! And delightfully festive!

But why the Balkan take? Composer Wyatt was asked to write a soundtrack for a film called *Taka Takata* in 2010 about a clumsy football team that plays in a parking-lot. The film has yet to be released and features several comedians, including Trevor Noah. Wyatt ended up writing a lot of Balkan music about this ragtag football team, and through networks and reworkings, converted scores to become the Bombshelter Beast. Wyatt boasts popular albums in the jazz genre, such as with the *Voice*, *The Prisoners of Strange* with Carlo Mombelli, *Language 12* (music being the 12th South African official 'language'), and the *Blue Notes Tribute Orchestra* (tributes to past legends).

For some reason, the Beatles's song, 'Octopus's Garden', kept ringing in my ears afterwards, spurred on by the 'Chicken's Dance' of the Beast, both songs reminiscent of a love affair with nature and its wonders.

See Video: <https://youtu.be/jiGE4595wO4>

Carol Martin chats with Cape jazz trumpeter Darren English (4 December 2014)

One meets few young persons who seem to just have that blessing to meet the right people in the right circumstances at the right time, and have the God-given skills to positively recognise, absorb, and exploit those opportunities that result from such contacts. An astrologer would go astro in analysing Darren's chart. It makes us all jealous! So how is young Darren English taking up these straight balls (to use a pool expression - his favourite game) to grow himself and his artistry? Most of us know curved balls...

Let's go backward: 24 year old jazz trumpeter Darren, currently visiting his Muizenberg family, is soon to leave for Tuscany, Italy, to meet his heart-throb friend Whitney, a New Yorker, who is finishing her Ph.D. in Anthropology. Hummm..... an interesting pull for Darren. While in Italy, he will hopefully play in "a few festivals". From there to France...then to Alaska.

Darren is invited to feature as 'the young artist' with the Sitka Jazz Festival in Alaska in Feb 2015. One of the many contacts he made while he played the USA jazz circuit this year after finishing his Masters degree at Georgia State University in Atlanta, paid off. Darren doesn't know what the program will be yet or who he's playing with, except he will play with one small and one big band. Ok, so after Alaska? Who wants to be in freezing Alaska in the middle of winter, pray tell?? *"The jazz will warm you up there. They know!"* cackles Darren.

In February, Darren plans to return to a more southern Atlanta, his second home. By then, maybe the northern hemisphere freeze will start to thaw. *"There are two special individuals, Ralph and ChaCha, who have adopted me."* Ralph deejays with a jazz radio station WRFG [98.3 FM].

I am happy to hear this because Darren had just arrived in Atlanta in September 2012 to start a Masters program at Georgia State. I had also arrived for a short visit. Through Jazz Education Network (JEN) based in USA, I had arranged for newly-arrived Darren to appear on WRFG-FM to talk with me and the DJs about South African jazz. Little did I know dear DJ Ralph had eyed Darren as a son to adopt!

It's about contacts....

So when Darren's visa to stay in USA expired, after finishing his academic program this year, Darren gasped. Then he met Hot Shoe Records, an Atlanta label. Tony Wasilewski, its owner, who 'had heard about Darren', approached him in July 2014 to "do an album" with some of Darren's compositions and top notch musicians. Darren didn't realize that Tony was listing him as the 'youngest musician' in the album, paying for the whole album's production costs, and even organizing for Darren's new USA visa under the Record label! Three years! Darren thanks GOD for Tony.

See: <http://www.hotshoerecords.com/news-2.htm>

"We connected over music, because in South Africa, I was into sports cars and building an old Porsche, a BMW.... And Tony was into the same thing, but on an actual budget! So Tony would invite me for breakfast at a restaurant, and would come in his super-renovated Porsche model xxx"

It's about contacts.....and cars.....

So Atlanta is like your second home? *“The way people accepted me in Atlanta was amazing. Particularly, my mentor Joe Gransden, and my professor, Dr. Gordon Vernick. I’d play every week, and people seemed to genuinely love me. I feel undeserved. Ralph helped me to get my motorcycle, which you knew then. Ralph is like my Dad now.”*

Yes, I knew Darren’s bike! During my second visit to my newly-bought condo near Piedmont Park in May 2013, where the Atlanta Jazz Festival was rocking the town, dear Darren rocked up in his heavy Harley, with obvious exhaust vibes uncharacteristic of good Jazz sounds. I cringed as I thought neighbours would freak out in this quiet neighbourhood, at the sounds of this belching dinosaur rex!

Settle? *“I just want to perform and share. You’re either good at your art, or not. I’ve got a job at Georgia State University, even with a Masters degree, if I want, and also a proposal in to another school in Atlanta. I’ll teach trumpet, or drums. And I can play piano with combos. Prof Gordon has been a great father at University, strict but fun and understanding. By default, I’ve been surrounded by good people!”*

Yeah...good contacts....

How do you feel coming back to Cape Town? *“Some of my mentors say, ‘This isn’t the place for you’. I came from a hectic busy schedule back in Atlanta, so I just chilled when back home. I do miss meeting up with those musicians here doing things. But sometimes, I feel I don’t fit here. There’s not many places to check out to play in. But I remember all those great musos I met when I was 13 or 14 years old, when I played in Grahamstown. I played in Russell Gunn’s Jazz Orkestra at the Atlanta Jazz Festival, and Joe Gransden’s big band. Both helped me grow in ways I never imagined.”*

Longterm plans? *“Whitney was accepted in a law program at University of Arizona, but went off to complete her Ph.D. in Anthropology. So I thought I might do law with her! But I would still play the circuit when I return to Atlanta.”*

Good fortune seems to follow Darren...

Darren did his Masters thesis on the life and work of late saxophonist, Nic LeRoux, with whom Darren shares a birthday, 9 June. Dr. Vernick offered him a scholarship in Atlanta, but this was only for tuition and he needed funds for living in USA. At the last minute, in 2012, he won the SAMRO Overseas Award just before he flew away! Before that, Fine Music Radio had awarded Darren two awards. Darren has received 100% on his recital marks at UCT. FMR paid out R20,000 and then SAMRO gave R170,000. Darren was flying high! *“I had prayed a lot for guidance. I think it’s God....And I thank SAMRO immensely!”*

“God has been too good to me. I never paid for schooling through college, my brother had started med school. My parents struggled. For my Honors, I received more funds than I needed to spend! Extra money went into my car hobbies. I still appreciate a good looking vehicle.”

Jazz trumpeter Darren English imagines hope in debut album *Imagine Nation*, with tributes to Nelson Mandela (24 May 2016)

Capetownian trumpeter, Darren English, kicks off his debut album by Hot Shoe Records (2016) with an original, 'Imagine Nation' a call to youth to make a better day! The first of a three part suite, it's a melodic song mostly in the minor keys, and shows Darren's wide range of tones on his trumpet.

Nostalgically, I still 'imagine' those Monday night jazz jam sessions at Cape Town's Swingers when 15 year old Darren, wearing his Beatles hairdo, and always accompanied by his indefatigably supportive father, Trevor, would silence the packed crowd with his trumpet wizardry. We knew we had another South African catch of a musician who would go places. Indeed he has, 11 years later, cutting this debut album, after having finished his Master's degree at Georgia State University in Atlanta where he continues to teach jazz studies and perform with various groups in USA. Hence, my affectionate 'Darren' reference.

'Body and Soul' presents a rather interesting start with a duo between a bowed double bass and Darren's muted trumpet. It seems he has deliberately made his trumpet sound flat, confident, with a no frills technique, no vibratos. A simple rendition of an ole classic. Smooth runs characterize Darren's offerings as he faultlessly scales his instrument's prowess with dignity and pureness. You'd think he's been playing for decades!

The faster paced 'Bebop', a Dizzy Gillespie classic, displays a fluid trumpet with clean runs and boppish attitude. Drums and bass click away, heralding Darren's pace, with a lovely solo by bassist Billy Thornton. The even faster paced 'What a Little Moonlight Can Do' introduces Grammy song lark, Atlanta-based Carmen Bradford, who shows off her impressive credentials behind her bebop vocals. I hesitate to compare such uniqueness with other greats, but I must say, her scat, tonation, and jazzy pitch brings about memories of Carmen McRae and Nancy Wilson for me. Her mood control in 'Skylark' excelled.

The album mellows its pace with a moving and emotional presentation of Nelson Mandela's wise words from radio interviews, as he brought South Africa's democracy forward, with advice. 'Pledge for Peace', a second Darren original as part of the 'Imagine Nation' theme, supports imagining a nation leading a peaceful parade towards responsible freedoms. This song carefully mixes interviews with interplays between trumpet and tenor sax, all which fill the sound space with sunshine and hope, but with caution.

Midway in the album is the third song of the 'Imagine Nation' theme, 'The Birth' which appropriately describes Darren's longing for a new nation free of the apartheid past. A long piece, almost 12 minutes, it contains impressive trumpet runs, syncopation with rhythmic gaps of sound, off beats, behind beats, etc. Greg Tardy's tenor sax is electric. This piece is full of conversation, dipping a lot into fast bebop, then softer slower ballad moods punctuated with horn dialogues...signifying no births are 'easy' or smooth. A very ambitious original.

Kenny Banks Jr's piano in the Frank Loesser song, 'I've Never Been in Love Before', provides classic bebop thrills alongside Darren's muted and even accompaniment. This duo piece is a real hit in the album! 'Bullet in the Gunn', another original and a tribute to another trumpet mentor, Russell Gunn, features blistering trade-offs between Darren's trumpet and the wailing sax of Greg Tardy in occasionally frantic conversations.

The last track, 'Cherokee', presents fast runs by each musician, feasting on and sparring with each other's energies, but they tended to blend into one men-otaneous sound piece for me. I'm not one for blaring horns, but I felt these frantic snorts turned a reputable classic into a blah blah race run. On the other hand, having heard Joe Gransden's trumpet at jazz jams in Atlanta several years ago, which the younger Darren also attended, it is obvious that Gransden's style and wit has firmly rubbed off onto Darren's technique. The two men simply gel and Darren knows it, and is proud to have such a mentor.

Darren English remains a formidable 'young gun' far beyond just South Africa's jazz scene, and has been blessed with craft and skills to carry him holistically into a successful future. I am also very proud to say that Darren's success carries with it a notable humility, yet adventure, in learning to be better. Just better! Watch his space!

The album features: Darren English (tpt); Kenny Banks Jr. (pno); Billy Thornton (bs); Chris Burroughs (dms) + Carmen Bradford (vcl); Greg Tardy (tenor sax); Russell Gunn (tpt); Joe Gransden (tpt).

CD Review by Carol Martin of the Kyle Shepherd Trio's album "Dream State", featuring guest artist Buddy Wells (16 September 2014)

This CD from Sheer Sound has again brought its main artist, pianist Kyle Shepherd, closer to the edge of innovative, spiritually-influenced compositions that are ever evolving during his still young musical journey. ***Dream State*** boasts two discs of 21 songs, all composed by this 2014 Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year for Jazz. Kyle loves to quote from the late saxophonist and mentor, Zim Ngqawana, *"The music must lead us towards ourselves."*

This trio featuring drummer Jonno Sweetman, and double bassist Shane Cooper (with awards most recently from SAMRO who bestowed his debut ***Oscillations*** album as best Jazz album of 2014), celebrate their remarkable five years together. Another CapeTownian, the popular tenor saxman Buddy Wells, features handsomely where the goema sounds swing their magic.

There is nothing staid in these albums; just when you identify with the familiar, the trio takes your mind on another journey of sometimes discordant, sometimes healing sounds, changing chord structures, and erratic rhythms. The songs evoke, jostle, steer, and placate. Out of discomfort comes a peace. Just listen meditatively, feel the flow, be patient, and then arrive at a state of oneness, of balance, having been tunefully connected – as the band is connected with each other in superb synchronicity. This is what ***Dream State*** portrays. Kyle refers to advice from Abdullah Ibrahim, another mentor: *"Abdullah said create music significant to YOU. Then if people are moved by the music, that's all I ask for. It just takes hard work and introspection."* How so!

For those who want to cut straight to the Cape goema rhythms and familiar melodies, several tracks will welcome you: In Disc 1: 'Xamissa', 'Our House, Our Rules', and 'Siqhagamshelane Sonke' with its 1-3-4 chords and Buddy's sax. In Disc 2: 'Xahuri'.

For the meditative and more ethereal ballads, try in Disc 1: 'Transcendence' with Buddy's prayerful sax solo, and 'The Seeker' which speaks for itself. In Disc 2: 'The Painter', 'Fatherless', and 'Rock Art'.

Jonno's drums always complement without dominating. Kyle's one note drill in several tracks sets what might appear as a monotonous pace until he matches this foundation with chords which swing into his usual Cape jive, while the drums and bass get equally excited with this conversation. Listen carefully to 'Re-invention'. It's faultless.

DISC 1

This disc starts out with a very uncharacteristic Shepherd melody in 'Zikr City – Desert Monk' in a minor key; yet it moves whimsically through what sounds like cityscapes and bustle; then into a quiet peace of a void – a soundless desert. 'Family Love' holds a special liking to my ears – Buddy's tenor sax melodically takes one on a saunter on a cloudy day through the park, and breaks into a Cape jive of celebration. 'Flying without Leaving the Ground' offers a chatty bass solo with an uncertain piano. The bass keeps you grounded and keeps you there during the subsequent crescendos of the piano and drums as you gradually experience a spiritual liftoff. This is appropriately followed by 'Transcendence'. Nirvana is somehow near...but not quite...

DISC 2

If you haven't left the ground yet, the second disc starts out with an ominous directive, almost funereal, about what appears to me to be stray bullets flying about the Cape Flats. Appropriately titled, 'Cape Flats', the underlying rumblings from Shane's double bass and Jonno's larger drums, and slowly paced piano chords suggest discomfort about hidden realities faced by dwellers. This shifts from [maybe] an out-of-harms'-way feeling into the next piece, 'Black Star, Unsung Hero', almost as though a young lad or lass managed to escape those bullets and rise above the violence to effect peaceful surprises on all. This is one of the more hauntingly beautiful songs of the album.

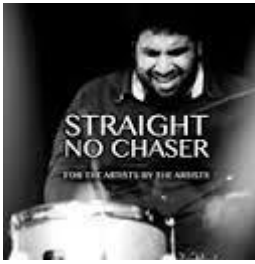
The placement of songs on the disc cleverly conveys the merging of themes. After a serious and unnerving dialogue about 'Rituals', where Shane's bass cleverly mimics Kyle's left hand walk-about, the listener finds relief with 'The Painter' with Buddy's melodic sax and an almost rock-ish roll from the drums. I see colour and texture evolve, resting the eyes, yet tickling with aural fantasies. It's for Melissa.

But just after settling back into a meditative pose, 'Doekom' startles with a frantic, atonal whine of confusion. I found this the least pleasant song on the track, probably because of its heavy left hand, again warning of the ominous. Indeed, was it a "Muslim witch doctor's" prescription for protection from gangsterous earthlings? One wonders whether the doekom was protective or murderous, a karmic magic potion or...just some profound spiritual realism? An impressive bass keeps up a scary pace.

The way Kyle breaks up chords harmonically allows one to anticipate and sing along, while not knowing the song! And even if the song seems uncomfortable, it ends up on a cheerful resolution. I smile. A characteristic Kyle "selfie" seems to be heard in 'Fatherless', perhaps a bit autobiographical, with clear chordal statements. 'Senegal' has a jumpy, Arab flavour of minor chords. I picture impressive derbies of horses in colourful regalia kicking up dust. This is followed by 'Rock Art', another mercurial but melodic piece, in memory of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. It suggests we meditate on the land's ancestral wisdom.

The final track, 'Ahimsa', if you managed to get through the previous 20 without exhaustion, is a beautifully crafted tribute to two gurus for peace – Gandhi and Mandela. It is a befitting closure to the ***Dream State*** as well.

Gig Review – Other worldly haunts of the Kyle Shepherd Trio by AJR Webitor Carol Martin
(24 March 2015)



Kyle Shepherd and his merry bassist Shane Cooper and eclectic drummer Jonno Sweetman offered another “Kyle special” at Straight No Chaser Club on Friday and Saturday, 20 – 21 March. In fact, I went twice!!



Kyle, Jonno and Shane

Both nights seemed completely different in Kyle’s offerings:

On Friday, I heard new compositions, one using daunting loops of electronica for all instruments. This is Kyle’s “other worldly haunts”, as I would call them, as he brings his audience into a less melodic, highly improvisational, but no less emotional soundscape of electronic whispers, cries, and groans. His other pieces brought us back to the acoustic world of reality as we know it, a lovely fusion of his Cape ghoema rhythms in that key of C major which he delivers so well.

On Saturday night, I must confess I had just come from the Kunnuji Experiment concert at the College of Music, where I was inundated with West African sounds. Perhaps I should not have “dropped by” SNC as my mind could not adequately grasp those Kyle compositions, again new to my ears, as it should. What I did note from this eve’s gig was the inexhaustible skill which bassist Cooper displays in his solo runs, plunks, and percussive hits as he adds beats complementing drummer Jonno. The latter excels in tempering his delivery according to the emotion of the minute. The moral of the story is: clear your head, first, before embarking on an evening with Kyle’s trio. They require utter and full attention as they continue their creative journeys...which seem endless, so far. Catch Kyle at this weekend’s Jazz Festival !!

Pianist Kyle Shepherd's sonic scaffolding continues to enthrall: an Interview. (1 March 2017)

Grounding a song with left hand pounding out the steady chords, while the right fingers tickled lines, chords, and pearly runs up and down the heavily microphoned piano, the listener was carried through soundscapes of the Kyle Shepherd Trio's vast repertoire once again.

On 25 February, Shepherd trio fans experienced another jolt as this 2014 Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year pianist, Kyle Shepherd, and his very loyal double bassist Shane Cooper and drummer Jonno Sweetman raised the Reeler Theater roof again at Cape Town's Rondebosh Boy's High School. Coopers' intense plucks and plunks dialoguing with Sweetman's clackety, forceful drums exploded into crescendos of delight as the trio maneuvered through old and new Shepherd compositions.

You could tell, see, hear, and feel these peers listening intently to each other. They had to; and have done so for the past 9 years. That's the make-up of these three masters of their craft as they collaborate, offering their individual sounds. Shepherd's newer compositions crafted a lot of behind-the-beat, and in-front-of-the-beat, and delayed, punctuated beats on several songs, playing around with off beats that are becoming common in his forward-looking musical journey.

The 94-minute session was only interrupted when the pianist looked into the audience, and apologized for the lights still being on. They were quickly dimmed. The thirsty pianist also had to ask for water which might have embarrassed the stage organizers somewhat. But maybe not.

What Shepherd did not tell the audience, even amidst the cameras and sound recording equipment strewn across the stage, was that this concert was the second and final recital required for completing his Masters degree! It would be submitted digitally as a video presentation. But even if the audience knew this, I have no doubts that their applause, standing ovations, whistles and cat calls of appreciation would have been less intense, for this concert was very special, indeed, a culmination of a decade's worth of hard work, commitment, and growth in developing talents.

I caught up with Kyle before his concert:

CM: We live in a strange world where artistry is being stressed out. Some artists are more political than others. Listeners don't want to hear about politics either, preferring to listen to music to relax. Yet some artists are message-givers, like Gregory Porter, who writes his own lyrics. What's your message now?

KS: *In the beginning of my career, I focused on my ethnic and traditional background. After the first 3 albums of this, I felt I had to move on towards more global sounds and transcending borders more. I think borders are human fabrications. I discovered this after traveling for 10 years and meeting people from so many different places around the world, only to see how common we all are. So the music I'm writing now reflects these realizations I've gleaned over the years. I don't feel the strong pull to create cultural music of the past.*

CM: Are you saying that perhaps your music is moving into what some would say is an 'intellectual' mode?

KS: I think a little bit. It had to happen a little bit. But it's not purely intellectual. I had to start combining other elements. Now, the sound is more expansive, but in a concert setting I can go in between these two worlds, and can play just Cape cultural music for 30 or 40 minutes if I feel like it. Or, if I play with Xhosa or Zulu musicians, I feel very comfortable with their type of sound....playing Mbaqanga for 90 minutes or more. Now, with my trio, we have metric challenges in the compositions, but for me, it's what music I'm feeling in my heart that counts.

CM: You're starting to touch on style, and I was wondering how or if your band members are influencing you. How do you collaborate?

KS: We've been together for 9 years. In the beginning, for the first 3 years, I had a singular vision on the sound I wanted to create. I was studying all these cultural influences from South Africa, like what Abdullah Ibrahim and Zim Ngqawana and Winston Mankunku were doing, and I wanted to combine these with my jazz style. And then, I hit a ceiling – from lack of inspiration, and that necessitates a whole different type of research. I started this research with my band members because Shane and Jonno came from a totally different cultural and economic background to mine. So the type of music they were talking about on our planes and buses wasn't the type of music I grew up with. I had a 'lightbulb' moment, thankfully! I realized that if I want to expand my scope, I can start with the people they were talking about.... Mostly rock musicians.

Rock wasn't a sound I knew at all in my upbringing. My Cape flats life – we listened to R&B, soul, smooth jazz – stuff like that. Then I started listening to RadioHead smashing funk and rock, and loved the energy and found the spirit quite akin to what we as a trio do in jazz.....sometimes frantic, sometimes crazy, really energetic. So that's what we do but sonically on a much smaller scale! So Shane and Jonno influenced me in that way. I felt like writing music for all of us and keeping everyone's musical personality in mind. The emotional investment in the sound becomes like their own stuff. I found we are all connected on a much higher level as I wrote for them.

CM: I notice that you seem to prefer the acoustic piano, yet have played the electric piano with other groups, like on Claude Cozen's **Jubilee Jam** album. Is that so?

KS: I have no aversion to the electronic instruments at all – I have a few keyboards at home. I use the electronic more with the film and documentaries I've written for because I love the analog synthesizers. If I could afford it, I'd have a room full of Moogs. I love sounds and the analog ones. This sound is coming back into contemporary music, like Radio Head, and the Little Dragon. They're all using analogs now and I love synthesizers.

But when I think of the trio, I think acoustic, since we're all playing acoustic. If others are playing electronic bass, for instance, I can play electric piano. But it comes down to the sound you want to create with the individual band members.

CM: Sometimes you put things on the piano strings – like cardboard or paper – to get a specific sound effect, which may alter the traditional acoustic sound.... But you convey a message.

KS: Yeah, I like doing that. It's almost like using the analog synthesis without the wires. As you know, I play a lot of other instruments. But I find that sonically, the piano is very one-dimensional. You plunk a note and it stays as that note. With a bass or saxophone, you can bend notes. So I like to create other textures using what we call 'prepared piano' which means putting things on the strings to get sound effects.

CM: Cultivating the traditional instrumental jazz idiom, however it's done, is a lifelong mission. But you are now delving into the world of film scoring. Is this because there are more opportunities in this genre, particularly here where there is a growing film industry in South Africa, or is it something you like?

KS: *On a practical level, I had to make a decision. Here in Cape Town now, there are no more jazz venues to play at, whereas for years I had gigs 4-5 times a week with no problem. I could pay the bills and perform. Now, the film opportunity came. I love film, my wife's a film buff, and her father is a film director. So we take note of the cinematography and the score – we've always done that. And there's composition in film. It's not just compiling pre-recorded music for film; it's actually intense composition. At first, I wasn't sure it was for me, but when I got to the end of my first film scoring which was for **Noem My Skollie**, I felt that this was something I can do, that I would like to do.*

CM: Your songs were featured in other films, like **Action Kommandant**, about Ashley Kriel....

KS: *Yeah, those were already pre-recorded. But for **Noem**, the songs were originally composed for the film. Again, I loved the idea of **Noem My Skollie** because the sound you can operate in is so expansive – from orchestras to crazy sound module stuff which I love. If I could do one or two films a year, I'd be very happy. My ideal life going forward is doing both: performing and film scoring.*

CM: You write poetry. Are you interested in writing lyrics for songs?

KS: *I used to write counterparts to my compositions, but not any more. I used to read live as part of the performance. It's not something I'm particularly interested in doing now. But if I compose something, and there's an inspiration for a text, then that's cool.*

CM: Interested in playing any other instruments?

KS: *(Ha ha ha!). My practice routine now is ... my music is heavily baseline driven. I play this odd-metre repeated chords with my left hand, while with the right hand, I tap out on the snare drum for 30 minutes. This helps to develop rootedness and stamina of my left hand while also keeping the grooviness going. You have to be groovy when you play drums, there's no other way!!! So that's my practice thing, playing odd-time signatures and repeated patterns with the left hand but playing drums at the same time with a drum stick in the right hand. It's also fun.*

I had struggled to make practice fun which is part of the challenge! After ten years of playing, you have to make fun. Otherwise, it's just mechanical. I tell my private students this all the time.

CM: Are you interested in teaching?

KS: *I'm finishing my Masters degree at Stellenbosch University. It was funded by the British Council. I focused on half performance, half research – an orthography of my own process of composing and improvising, and interrogated Abdullah Ibrahim and Zim Ngqawana's process as I know it from their work and writings. This opens up new opportunities, perhaps, for education and teaching, but I don't see myself there yet.*

CM: There was a time when you were collaborating with another group in a festival – with the Beatenberg band. In terms of the future of South African jazz, is your music remaining in the 'jazz' genre, if that's what you want to call it? Many 'jazz' musicians renounce the description, saying "I just play music"!

KS: Yeah. I feel the same. We can't take improvisation away, because the way we phrase is jazz. But now there's so much influence from contemporary music in what we're doing, from classical music to ethnic or primitive music. I can't call it just one thing anymore. But festival producers and record label producers – it helps them to catalogue 'jazz'. The different textures and emotions and themes all piled into one sound – is hard to define.

CM: Speaking about emotions. I found a quote you made that referenced 'emotional disposition of a character in a scene', 'sonic scaffolding for those emotions', – you're using very poetic words here – 'emotional anonymity'

KS: I had to learn how to write when doing my thesis – that was a big thing, to write properly! What I meant by 'emotional anonymity', when I wrote my solo works on my own albums, there's a deep emotional investment in it – like an emotional rollercoaster. But what I like about composing for films is that there's the requirement to just tell the story; my own emotions fall by the wayside, they don't count. By 'emotional scaffolding', I mean create the sound, the spine of what's being seen. What you see on the screen falls onto the sound. The music is a very important part of filmmaking.

CM: You would consider yourself to be a very visual person? You're driven by visuals.

KS: Yeah, I think so. When I see star performances by actors in films, it tells me what kind of sound I have to produce, what I have to compose. For me, it's a welcome release from having to compose something solo or concert music because you have none of that emotional pictorial context. All that content, all the narrative is coming from you, by yourself.

CM: Have you considered doing slides and visuals put to your music?

KS: Right now, I'm collaborating with a photographer. We're doing a performance on 11 May at the Youngblood Gallery in Bree Street. I'll work with his photo projections.

CM: Anything else?

KS: I went through a really bad period with the closing of venues in Cape Town for gigs. It really depressed me. My plea is do something, who's going to help us musicians? Traveling has become very difficult with prices so high. Also, my trio has lost two possible performances in the U.S. because of the change of government there now, and the sponsoring organizations are not sure of funds coming in to support jazz/music efforts. One in New York, one in Washington DC.

But with the film prospects in South Africa, the future is looking brighter now with many film productions in Cape Town and a lot more funding is becoming available. So there's something to do there. As a composer, I'm quite excited about that. But as an artist, I would love to be able to play in concerts and gigs with my trio, with appreciative audiences, and with different collaborations – through jazz and also composing for visual media projects. That's what I'm working hard towards, where I would like things to go. It's like I'm at the beginning of my composing career! It's like ten years all over again. You know, when my first few albums were released, I was flying all over the country doing gigs and launches, driving to radio stations to deliver my CDs, etc., essentially doing the leg work to promote my music. Luckily, with the digital age, things have become a bit easier to promote oneself. But now, with my composing career, I'm doing the same thing, just not physically.

In an announcement made on Thursday, 16 Feb 2017, Kyle Shepherd, who composed the film score for **Noem My Skollie / Call Me Thief**, was nominated for South African Film & Television Award [SAFTA] for Best Achievement in an Original Music Score in a Feature

Film. In a major feat, the film scored 10 SAFTA nominations including Best Feature Film & Best Director (Daryne Joshua). The original soundtrack of the film is now available for purchase, worldwide, on all major digital retail platforms via Gallo Record Company.

An Interview with jazz guitarist Vuma Ian Levin about “Necessary Contradictions” (6 July 2015)

Another vibrant, well-skilled South African guitarist hit Cape Town’s Straight No Chaser (SNC) jazz club with his quintet made up of young European musicians. Vuma Levin has been schooling in Amsterdam and making a professional life for himself, but well remembers his own home shores as his debut album suggests. *The Spectacle of An-Other* contains his original compositions which speak messages I like: Through cultural and national identities, how do we empower marginalised Black South African histories post 1994 to integrate into various spaces and experiences without stigma or enclavist mentalities so prominent in the past?

His evening at SNC drew a relatively large crowd, as do well publicized artists passing through. Levin is not just “passing through” though. He participates in the Standard Bank Youth Jazz Festival (SBYJF) in Grahamstown beginning July 2015, and will hang around our shores for a while during his study break with the Amsterdam Conservatory of Music where he’s working towards his master’s in jazz guitar performance.

Informed by Levin’s facebook page promotional materials, I queried Levin on what interested him in cultural musicology and what he meant by wanting to liberate musical forms from jargonistic and Euro-centric definitions of what constitutes “African music” or “jazz”. My interview with him on 29 June 2015 in Cape Town caught him just before his travels to Grahamstown where, in 2009, he was chosen for the National Youth Jazz Band.

Born in Swaziland from a Jewish South African father in exile with the ANC, and a Swazi mother, Levin could settle back in South Africa only after the new dispensation gave permissions for his parents’ mixed marriage. His father has acted as a DG in government while his mother worked as a consultant with the Department of Education. Settled in Johannesburg, it was only when Levin attended the Sacred Heart College and sang in the school choir that he started his musical training. At age 14, he picked up guitar, watched how buskers on the street fingered their guitars, and sang along with them. Formal musical training continued at the Tswane University of Technology where he studied with the late Johnnie Fourie and other noted jazz musicians for 1 year.

CM: You talk in the South African context about trying to salvage music from the “pre-colonial, colonial, and post colonial” periods that have marginalized black music. What do you mean by pre-colonial?

VL: *That’s a very hard term to define as there’s no written account of what existed in pre-colonial times. That’s not to say that the only way to access history is through the written word. History can be encoded in cultural artifacts – song and dance, written items. One of the early projects of the colonial period was to try to neutralize African culture, a concerted effort to vilify it as needing ‘civilizing’, to rid the natives of their traditional practices, which were central to dispersing history through oral means, etc. This effectively limited access to this history. At the end of the day, the pre-colonial history is hard to define as we don’t have access to it, unless we can salvage something of the traditional. From the Euro centric standpoint, which looks to written history, there’s none of that in African pre-colonial life.*

CM: When you go to the colonial period, what do you consider ‘colonial’ music?

VL: *I consider that music basically from 1652 onwards, when the first settlers arrived and*

settled, up to 1994. Obviously, that's a very broad category with a lot of different phases but for me, that is what the colonial moment is for me.

CM: Something came out of that colonial period?

VL: Yes, basically what was key was the interaction between new colonial settlers and the people already living in southern Africa, or the indigenous peoples. This interaction took hold particularly during the time when King Shaka was defending and conquering lands or borders of expansion. With this increased interaction, between various ethnic groups within South Africa, you develop a trade in culture, sometimes imposed, like with the Christian missionaries. Sometimes it's more organic and fluid. The key thing is that whether art forms are forced or organic interactions, they change, even artificially. Even in the 1980s you had your Winston Mankunku's and Chris McGregor's travelling with their music in Europe, so there was that exchange. And the effects from these exchanges are different at every stage of history.

CM: What about the present?

VL: Post-colonial? Imbedded in the term is the understanding that even though formal colonialism has ended, the power relations which colonialism inculcated in us are so very much in existence nowadays.

CM: Power, yes. There is now a majority power in this country. Do you think the cultural and musical art forms of that majority are coming alive?

VL: I think it's hopeful, but I still think there's a western hegemony on cultural production – a white western one. Through media and business and other institutions, the iconography, I guess, of colonialism remains intact. It's the same in music as well. So I think there's concerted effort, particularly by young music professionals in this country to try to break those boundaries. Like: Kyle Shepherd, Bokani Dyer, Thandi Ntuli, Marcus Wyatt.

CM: Talk more about Carlo Mombelli and your experience or influence with him. I don't see Carlo as being terribly "indigenous" although you have dedicated a composition to Carlo. How would you describe his influence on you?

VL: For me, Carlo was a very early influence. I listened to his music and was inspired at a young age. It's important to realise that terms like "authentic" and "indigenous" are dangerous terms to use in South African context. The moment that a South African subject takes something from the outside world and uses it in a non-reactionary way to express themselves, it becomes a "South African" thing. So English, and French, and Portugese – all these languages are African languages. They've been appropriated by people here and used as a way of articulating their sense of self, and I consider this the same way with music. I consider Carlo's music as authentically South African as a Xhosa composer would be. They are both citizens of this country appropriating something from the outside and using that as a means of expressing what it means to be a South African for himself, and in an organic way.

CM: Carlo's stay in Germany perhaps meant he absorbed other influences, but maybe his own infusion of African-ness in his music might not be seen by European listeners in quite the same way as he would have liked.

VL: It's basically about demystifying Africans because from the European standpoint, there's a mystery about what it means to be "African".

CM: Which is what Kyle (Shepherd) and others are trying to do. Which brings me to your role in trying to demystify this African-ness. This is an important part of your workshops here, to try to correct people's gahgah about: "Oh, here's our boy coming back home to his roots"

type of response from people. We all are born somewhere, but this doesn't mean we have to get stuck in our "roots". I have your quote and I'd like to clarify: 'denigration of historical and contemporary South African music'..... What did you mean by this? Isn't the world trying to bring back this older music of another time?

VL: Well, I think there is this effort to bring it back, but the way it is done is highly problematic. Since Edward Said wrote "Orientalism", terms such as exoticism and primitivism have entered the cultural lexicon, and people are not sensitive to the fact that they are largely engaging in these practices when they try to empower African forms, basically. So the idea is: If you're going to book an "African band", already you may have a preconceived notion of what constitutes an African band. You know how to market that. And if anybody falls outside of that strongly preconceived notion, you're less likely to market them. For instance, how do you market somebody like Bokani Dyer whose music draws from jazz pianist Robert Glasper who doesn't play African art forms? There's an alliance between capital and the colonially inherited notions of what constitutes "Africans". It is only fair that those people who continue to engage in these traditional practices, and who have been marginalized in the past, be given space to do their thing.

CM: So "traditional" doesn't always mean "in the past" ...?

VL: Traditional artists themselves are often a lot more nuanced with contemporary sounds and narratives than people think. They're human beings so can carry messages.... It's a bit de-humanizing to have this preconceived package of beliefs about who they are.

Levin concludes:

So this is an essential feature about what my project is about. These go hand in hand: nuancing African identity and empowering marginalized histories. It is a contradiction because on the one hand, you're saying there's no such thing as traditional African-ness, and on the other hand, there IS such a thing and we need to empower that. It's a necessary contradiction to draw in.

CM: The contradiction helps to empower through debate by providing that debate. It requires a sense of history and social propriety and intelligent debate, doesn't it?

VL: Exactly.

CM: You have on the one hand local South African influences with people who reside here, whatever the expansion of their music art form is. Some are moving on with their sound forms; others are still stuck with what they know best and in the past. Then you have the 'diasporic' influences. Who are these Diaspora you speak about?

VL: I think one definition of "Diaspora" is a large body of people who move from one part of the globe to another. Diasporic musicians can include Africans who have left their African areas. This doesn't only include musicians but the Africans carrying their intellectual diasporic traditions, like Chinua Achebe, Kofi Agawu (a Ghanaian musicologist). But I'm referring also to the music itself, especially in the age of globalization, there's increased motion in music. It's moving around, and again allied to capitalism, not knowing really where the music is coming from. When I was 13 years old, I listened to Radio Head and Massive Attack – that was my music foundation and the music I loved most. So this was diasporic music, which doesn't only refer to Africans moving about.

CM: That's an interesting concept of migration, of people migrating without being "migrants". We all are migrating in our social, cultural, and intellectual forms because there's a world of information out there. This is great. But it's also overload. People are getting

confused – about what they're hearing, etc. And terms we use are not catching up with the informational overload we're experiencing. If you have terminologies that are not catching up, then you get stuck with jargon which influences people's psychology, and the informational 'box' effect. But this is just human nature, isn't it?

VL: *Indeed.*

CM: How do you break through this? It's interesting your European band is playing a type of sound you're trying to cultivate.

VL: *The musicians are craftsmen and creators in their own right. The music I compose has such a strong basis in western harmony, just to be publically clear. I consider myself to have been very well colonized in that regard. My ears are very oriented to western harmony and because we all speak in this western harmonic language it becomes possible to compose songs and interact on that front, particularly with that jazz tradition, from Parker and bebop to contemporary modern jazz up until now. Secondly, we have a shared harmonic language that comes out of the classical music tradition and has been elaborated upon by various jazz artists. Because we have these common points of reference, it makes it possible for us to engage in the conversation.*

CM: Good point...common points of reference. Are you planning on returning to South Africa more permanently now?

VL: *If you asked me this two years ago, when I was finishing my degrees, I would have said, yes, I'm coming back. But with professional obligations, and with things happening in Europe in my favour, I would say, yeah, I'll come back at some other time. I would try to set up some trans-continental arrangements in the meantime.*

CM: If you were to spend time in South Africa, what would you want to do here?

VL: *One has to be realistic about establishing networks and business outlets. I would be very **interested** in working with local musicians. I would also love a job teaching at a University, and having private students. In Europe, I've been lucky with several gigs per month. The band, Aurelio Project, led by a Mozambiquan, has included me in their tours.*

CM: Who influences you in your improvisations? Who do you look up to?

VL: *Carlo, Marcus, Africa Mkize, John Davis, Kevin Davidson, Massive Attacks, Debussy, Ravel and other classical music. The atonality of Schoenberg...*

Vuma Levin played at the 2015 Grahamstown Youth Jazz Festival and also at the Fringe venues. His quintet included Bernard van Rossum (Tenor Sax, Spain), Lennart Altgenug (Piano, Germany), Marco Zenini (Bass, Italy) and Jeroen Batterink (Drums, The Netherlands).

Gigging since Age 7, Persistence Pays Off for Drummer Lumanyano 'Unity' Mzi (8 November 2017)

At age 7, he snuck out of home, walked from Delft to Phillippe to hear his favourite drummer perform...only to discover that the drummer was not there on that day! Here starts Lumanyano 'Unity' Mzi's first gig, when, at that session, the band invited him to play reggae chops which he knew so well from his father, who headed up the popular reggae Azania Band in Cape Town. Mzi showed that he knew the rhythms, but didn't understand the coaching by the bass player: "You play the kick on one, and the snare on three, which is a rock theme." Mzi's musical career, however, had started, and he was having fun!

Born in 1995, and fifteen years after this first 'gig', Mzi thrives daily on his Jazz Performance Diploma studies at UCT's College of Music as well as moving his UNITY Band from one performance venue to another. UNITY actually started while he was still in High School, with his teen friends who were excited to back visiting bands coming from Johannesburg's hip hop scene. He held this tight group well, progressing to serve as the resident band at Cape Town's upmarket Taj Hotel main bar on Thursdays.

Delph singer, Adelia Douw, a teen when she joined the Delph Big Band as the lead vocalist, also joined UNITY. It was then that the Big Band's director, trumpeter Ian Smith, discovered this Delphite, Mzi, but a bit too late to add Mzi to the Big Band. Mzi's father, an avid Rastafarian, was Mzi's main influence, taking his son to rehearsals of his band, yet never taught his son how to play the drums. Instead, Mzi sat next to the drummer and watched every move. Mzi would cry when he wasn't taken to the actual gigs, but determined, he could at least play some songs during rehearsals. Now, as a young adult, he regularly performs at annual reggae festivals, like the Monwabisi Reggae Festival held in Khayelitsha. He has toured in Africa with the All Nations Band to the Gambia, and attended three reggae festivals in the Reunion Islands, one in which his band's backing vocalist was the late reggae artist Lucky Dube's daughter. Sponging off from several genres of music during his high school musical years, Mzi has impressively mixed hip hop, gospel, funk, and reggae into his current curry of improvisational drumming, following such notable percussionists as Frank Paco from Mozambique, Brice Wassy from Cameroun, and Paco Siry from Cote d'Ivoire.

He wants to live up to his name, 'unity', and believes in collaboration to bring people and cultures together. *"I like to break boundaries, and create bridges to minimize racial tensions around us. We must all work together for the cause of music and social cohesion."* In this vein, Mzi is willing to join social/political causes, such as the Marikana issue, by performing with his band at functions that create awareness and support worthy activism. Another example has been his following with the Spoken Word movement, "Lingua Franca", initiated with poets and musicians at Cape Town's Baxter Theater to explore how to mutually support their artistry. Amongst all of these exciting projects, Mzi is finishing his University program, and looks forward to performing with UNITY, touring (as a drummer) with the King Kong production which starts again in Cape Town next week, and writing his music.

His current Band members are: Stephen 'Stevovo' de Souza (bass), Thandeka Dladla (vocals), Lonwabo Diba Mafani (piano), Dylan Fine (guitar), Marco Maritz (trumpet), Ofentse Moshwetsi (alto saxophone), and Lilavan Gangen (percussion).

Drummer Lumanyano Mzi: Give Artists Visas; Let Them Share Global Spaces! (25 June 2022)

Lumanyano Mzi has been visiting his South African home, touring with the internationally renowned Cape Town-based reggae band, Azania, as well as playing a few shows in Cape Town with his friends and colleagues. It's been 18 months since Lumanyano left home to further his education at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston to which he will be returning to start his 4th academic term in September. All Jazz Radio Internet Radio based in Cape Town caught up with him during this brief visit to discover the vast opportunities he has taken up while schooling in Boston.

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Music, rhythm, and message have remained strong cornerstones of growth for this young man since he was 7 years old! Brought up in the township of Delft in Cape Town, Lumanyano's thirst for sonic diversity led him through local bands, studying at the South African College of Music UCT, as well as being part of some international projects. Keeping to his transcultural interests, he was accepted to study at Berklee in 2018 but due to financial difficulties was unable to attend and unfortunately had to defer. A few years later through the great generosity of The Great Hospitality company based in France, CEO Thomas Gamier believed in Lumanyano's dream and awarded him a scholarship to attend Berklee in Boston starting January 2021.



I had briefly joined a mentorship training program which was run by Berklee College of Music, City Music program at the Stellenbosch University about six years ago. During this time I met Berklee professors who were facilitators in this program. On their first day, they were taken to Langa to a performance by Jo Kunnuji which I was a part of and this is where they heard me play. After the performance, two of the professors expressed that Berklee would be the best place for me to go, and they could help with recommendation letters.

When I got accepted to Berklee I was extremely happy as it was a dream come true! But then that was followed by sadness when I saw the scholarship awarded. I knew I was not going to have the rest of the finances! So I chucked the letter away for a while!

Some touring projects became available, including being a band member in the smash-hit musical “Kinky Boots”, at Cape Town’s now-closed popular Fugard Theatre, plus marriage to his favorite other.

Then COVID hit, just another anti-artist whack in the face, divorcing artists from gaining much-needed income from live gigs. But determined, Lumanyano successfully used his time to find funds from here and there, and proceeded to join an amazing international crowd of creatives at the Boston school. His studies are dated up to 2025, and he plans to do his Masters there.

At the College, students can join various ensembles of interest. You can get into the ensembles you want depending on your audition ratings. There are many musical styles that interest me. These past few semesters I did the Berklee Contemporary ensemble, Indian ensemble, The Afro Caribbean ensemble, The Brazilian ensemble, a Jazz Straight-ahead ensemble, as well as a classical percussion ensemble. The ensembles have offered me incredible growth. I do a lot of writing, producing, and arranging, and am learning piano as it’s a required course for my Contemporary Writing & Production Major. My other major is in Performance (in drums).

Whilst at Berklee, who has been the biggest influence in your growth? *Just being there has influenced me on so many levels. I’m playing with incredible musicians and meeting amazing people whom I call friends. I am studying with some of the best professors/musicians in the industry. The percussion department alone has drummers I’ve looked up to since I was a child. For my principal instrument, the drum, so far I’ve studied with Richard Flanagan, Jon Hazilla, Neal Smith, and Billy Kilson. All of these interactions have been a great influence.*

One might think that coming from the African continent might seem like a disadvantage, but in fact, it has been my strongest weapon. Our strong culture and diversity are what sets us apart. That is why being African alone has been exciting; our music is at the very core of what the institution is built on. But coming home, it’s always good to see my friends killing it on the local scene, performing and cutting albums, like Mandisi Dyantyis, Sean Sanby, and Muneeb Hermans to mention a few. It was incredible to listen to Hilton’s Goema Club band live at Hanks the one night. And thank God for social media, we are able to stay in touch.

What’s it like living in the United States, especially with a social climate that hangs heavy with racial tensions? *Honestly, where I am in Boston is an international space, a student city if I may say. I haven’t experienced that sort of prejudice. Rather, I experienced a sense of ‘ubuntu’ from foreign nationals in Boston and at the school. I’m not in spaces where I feel uncomfortable.*

Except when he and his wife moved into their apartment and were eager to meet their neighbors as one would do living in Cape Town. *Well, knocking on the neighbor’s door to introduce ourselves didn’t go over so well; not something Americans do, readily!* Lumanyano admitted he found that people are afraid of confrontation, or not always open to conversation. *But being on the side of cyberspace, with “cyber keyboard wires”, people can appear friendly.*

His name means 'unity' and he won't give up living his message. *Just being an artist speaks for itself. I promote love, peace, and unity through my music and through projects I affiliate with. Let's bring people together. The world is tough, and only art helps us cope.* It is very sad that artists cannot share their love, art, and message that easily through traveling and joining in events. *Open the world up to artists. Give artists visas so they can travel and share their music!! This would benefit society so much!!*

The UNITY Band plans on launching its new project this year. This will be its second album following up on their 2018 debut album ***Fabric*** which won them the 2019 Best Newcomer in Jazz award at the Mzantsi Jazz Awards. The songs were recorded during the lockdown in 2020, and the album is being touched up, for the release.

Lumanyano still needs our help to continue his dream at the Berklee College of Music. If you or your organization would like to help or donate, please feel free to get in touch with him: unitymzi@gmail.com or visit his website at www.unitymzi.com

'Lunar Jazz' vibrations with Moon Songstress, Lisa Bauer, and quintet (7 September 2017)

The Moon Song Project engages vocalist and drummer Lisa Bauer and her favourite musicians in more musical exploration with the full moon, but with a familiar jazzy twist.

Inspired by her connection to the moon cycles, regeneration and the power of vocalisation, Bauer's upcoming concert (Sat, 9 September) at Kalk Bay's vibey Olympia Bakery, hosted by Slow Life, will feature her composition 'Moon Suite', other original compositions, and tunes by some of her favourite, unique American jazz composers and artists.

Her 'Moon Suite' compositions, still in process, and crafted while eyeballing the temperaments of our Full Moon over time, promise to move the audience with "lunar jazz", a concept inspired by colleague Warren Gray. Her stellar quintet of Andrew Lilly (keyboards), Mark Fransman (saxophones), electric bassist Max Starcke, and Andre Swartz (drums) will handsomely complement her sassy, soft yet forceful, vocals.

Earlier, her recently released single, *A Life That's Lead*, makes a pun of a life journey sometimes heavy, but golden with rich creative outcomes. It also includes the rare combo of Bauer playing drums and singing. Bauer's debut 2011 SAMA nominated album, *Finding a New Way*, is a precursor to her 'now found' new ways to sonically nurture our vibrational selves. For that album, she drew inspiration from her musical experiences in New York & San Francisco.

Brought up studying piano, guitar, and violin, Bauer ventured into the drumming world at age 16 through formal training, and then into vocal jazz at the Universities of Cape Town (UCT) and Stellenbosch (SUN), particularly with the acapella group, **Track Five**.



Traditional jazz coupled with motown, funk, neo-soul and New Age characterise the soundscapes which Bauer so eloquently produces, both through her vocals nourished by years of study, mentorships, and practice, as well as through her well-picked band colleagues. She is currently part of a collaborative art project, video installation and exhibition that investigates the highly contentious issue of fracking in the Karoo region of South Africa. A jazz educator as well, she teaches drums and vocals in a formal educational institution and with private students.

While Bauer works on the pre-production for her 2nd full length album of moon songs, enjoy being lunar-stung by her performances around town.

MSMF jazz band: “Music Makes us Brothers” – another Cape Town Special (11 February 2018)

Four guys in their mid-20s, from three different parts of the country, following their individual musical paths under the direction of Muizenberg patriot, trumpeter Keegan Steenkamp, fused a special sound that’s clean, refreshingly different, and soulfully sealed. Named after their surnames (Matsimela-Steenkamp-Mahola-Fine = MSMF), this ‘boy band’, as they unwittingly think of themselves, pulled themselves through the University of Cape Town’s school of music to focus their young energies on creative improvisation with an individualistic sonic touch.

Importantly, it is the symmetry reached by the four gents as they funnel their diverse backgrounds into a matrix homed by Capetownian Steenkamp’s Muizenberg roots. Double bassist Sibusiso Matsimela, originally hailing from Mpumalanga by way of Pretoria, reflects cross-cultural jazz. “*Music makes us brothers,*” he quips as he explains how relaxed and chilled his new home of Cape Town is, after acquiring exposure from overseas training in USA and Italy. The youngest member, drummer Tefo Mahola, hails from Gugulethu, Cape Town, and brings zest, creative texture, different styles and genre to his songs. His compositions depict a jazz with multiple influences. Guitarist Dylan Fine, raised in Cape Town after his parents returned to South Africa during

Mandela days, presents soulful, melodic, and modern styles drawing from multiple influences, from the intricate Pat Matheny to the soft rock of John Mayer.

MSMF proudly performs a mix of contemporary and Old School Hip-Hop, Modern Jazz, and South African jazz, all shaped by the players’ personalities which stamp their individual signatures on their compositions.

The LAPA recently provided a pleasant Sunday afternoon venue for MSMF to perform their originals. Having an African feel with a thatch roof and open interior, it can comfortably seat approximately 50 or more people at tables. The slightly raised stage is carefully designed with lighting which projects alternating pastel colours which streak down the white backdrop of the stage. This effect gives a live neon look when a band is livestreamed through a video camera.

The sound capacity for acoustics is superb. An attractive outdoor sitting area with indigenous plants reminds one about the relatively water-stressed area of Kraaifontein’s Joostenberg Vlakte. But the surrounding vast, flat agricultural veld is brought to life by wide open skies that view distant mountain silhouettes of the Hottentot Holland Mountains bordering the Cape Town Municipality.

The band’s concert reeked of joyful respect for each other’s freedoms; Steenkamp’s trumpet delivering consistently clean notes, never raspy unless intended. In one song, the trumpet presented a hollow sound like an angry cat avoiding its partner. Steenkamp likes to puff up his lips, weary from wear, to get different sound effects. Mahola emotes occasionally with subtle ‘aaahhh’ outbursts, announcing approval as each band member self-absorbs into his own solo. Fine’s guitar plays mostly single note runs reminiscent of R&B and soul with a Scofield-like improv. Fine’s occasional chords struck harmony highs in several songs as did double bassist Matsimela who took its freedoms in tuneful solos that often brought out Mahola’s gleeful approval! MSMF’s repertoire is sure to please, from member’s

individual compositions to songs from master jazz legends, like drummer Louis Moholo Moholo's classic, 'You Think You Know Me but You Don't Know Me'. When funds become available, MSMF plan to record their first album, which promises to be a whopper!

During the concert's break, patrons can use a 'warm up' kitchen to prepare their picnic lunches or snacks accompanied by any drinks (soft or alcoholic) they bring. Besides the live concert venue, i-Studios premises also provide a large house inside which is a recording studio with state of the art audio and video equipment, and five ensuite bedrooms for visiting artists who record their album over several days. This Studio house offers other space for administration, recording, rehearsals, and opportunities to use its other open spaces as an art gallery and recital area.

Founded in December 2014 as an independent Music Record Label and Artist Management Agency, i-Studios seeks to enable artists to develop creatively quality music which engages music lovers of all ethnic backgrounds. *"Our mission is to find raw, undiscovered talent and maximize their musical capacity"* says i-Studios visionary, Leonardo Fortuin, an engineer and entrepreneur. The LAPA and i-Studios is easily accessible from Cape Town, the Northern suburbs, Stellenbosch and Paarl.

Addendum: Unfortunately, due to other callings, Fortuin has not been able to develop i-Studios's mission.

Smooth jazzy fusion from a Ladies' Band, Heels Over Head (17 July 2018)

Spirit lifting, head turning, chuckles and smiles... are utterances from the lively audiences exposed to the Durban-ladies-meet-Cape Town-ladies, under the band name of "**Heels Over Head**", a Durban-based all-female jazz pop band that started in 2008. They nestled us warmly inside Gugulethu's Kwa Sec house with a roaring fire and hard-to-find independent wines on sale. Three Durban gals linked up with Capetownians Nobuhle Ashanti Mazinyane on piano and keys, Tracey Johannes on bass guitar, and guitarist Arianna Carini who started with the Durban group and is presently studying classical Flamenco at the University of Cape Town's School of Music.

HOH's tour, assisted by sponsor SA Concerts from their Durban base, is a collaboration seeking to mentor and develop the talents of other female jazz and blues artists. This echoes the band members' own upbringings in musical families and youth orchestras.

Theirs is a special sound: vocalist and HOH founder Thulile Zama, throws soulful ballads with a vocal control that speaks to ten years plus experience leading the Durban band. The funky blues with Carini's killer guitar adds the pop/rock feel. Drummer Rebekah Doty offers subtle rhythms that don't overpower; Doty also served in a military band before resuming her HOH link. The youngest member of this collaboration, Mazinyane's keys are gentle and melodic. Her hands have matured; she plays with ease.

Their albums also feature pianists Taryn Kasaval and Lindi Ngonelo, bassist Tebogo Sedumedi, and a hot guitarist, Chillie, who ensures the flame endures in the band's sonic fusion. Their first album in 2010, **Could It Be**, contains haunting African jazzics, such as 'Pata Pata', with very danceable rhythms, melting smooth jazz as in 'Betrayed', the lively soul pop of the album's title, 'Could It Be', and the upbeat drum 'n bass funk remix of 'Girlfriend'. This album exudes emotion, purpose, and message, all which has spiraled these 'girls' into a limelight of recognition.

Besides performing in various festivals, like Moshito, and at the 2017 Essence Festival in New Orleans, USA, the group was nominated in 2011 for MTN SAMA AWARDS in the Contemporary Jazz category.

Their 2013 album, **Sondela**, presents a slower groove through the seasoned vocals of the musicians entwined in soft ballad harmonies, as in the popular 'Ntilo Ntilo' and in 'Ngiyak Phica Phica'. Slow smooth jazz in a blues style around love themes, with the occasional mood setting of a trumpet, characterises this album quite differently to the 2010 album. If I had to choose between the two, **Could It Be** explains why the group was SAMA-nominated in 2011.

Vocalist and founder, Thulile Zama, explains how HOH members managed to stay together for 10 years: *"Few bands have survived over the years. We have worked for many years to create opportunities for ourselves. It has been a great experience, both enriching and humbling, and we will continue to offer platforms for female musicians."*

Drummer Rebekah Doty adds: *"We want to be an example to other female musicians and show them that everything is possible. We have performed for so many different audiences throughout the years. Still being together after 10 years is a great motivation to keep the band going."*

The style of the Heels Over Head gals, both on and off the stage, reveals how these well-dressed ladies approach their art seriously but with glee and pizzaz, seeking to musically entertain and make us all feel good...and perhaps ready for more wine and chats! See their YouTubes in Digital Links below.

No links

Keenan Ahrends Quintet sprouts musical narratives at the recent CTIJ Festival (3 April 2018)

Capetownian guitarist, Keenan Ahrends, is exuding maturity and clarity in his musical journey by honestly divulging his experiences with the joys and mistrusts in life.



To a question put to him during the press conference at Cape Town's recent International Jazz Festival, the youthful Ahrends, explains how and why he narrates his stories musically: *"Music has emotions, sometimes through words and pictures. I use tools of texture, emotion, and colour so that my sounds come naturally, maybe not always consciously. Through improvisation, you can allow yourself to play that emotion."*

Simply put, Ahrends seems to know where and how he's headed with his craft, a delightful mix of home-grown Cape goema, grungy blues rock, free jazz, and bits of traditional South African music. A graduate of the University of Cape Town's College of Music, Ahrends has immersed himself in musical open markets for absorbing jazz expressions, particularly from Norway where he studied at its Academy of Music and collaborated with those artists, and from parts of South Africa through his peer friendships.

When asked what influences have helped him to move jazz boundaries, his quaint reply humbly referred to those legends who have pushed the music forward, and the new experimental sounds emerging from 'world' influences, like trumpeter Christian Scott's guitarist, Matthew Stevens, whose voicings led to 'Scott's Move' on Ahrends' album. Then, there are also his peers:

"I don't feel I have to break a barrier or produce a completely different sound, but to respect and admire what my peers are composing. Along with the old, and the new, my peers help me to have a goal in mind, a level to reach, such as a new audience to reach, and unconsciously try to cross genres. Yah, the new, the old, and my peers."

Ahrends clearly admits that it is connecting and playing with his friends that satisfies him the most because these are the few very good players that influence him. Another journalist questions this: But doesn't this run the danger of producing too much of the same sound if you only play with your friends? Ahrends says not really, only if a new guy comes along and tries to convince the group about styling and interpretation, and you silently comply.

A thoughtful question was posed by another: In the 1950s and 60s, there was a collective of jazz artists looking after each other with a common expression of long sought-out freedom.

Now, there tends to be a lot of individualism with musicians leading bands and jamming together, and members changing roles.

So, is there still a space for integrating that kind of jazz approach of collectivism and sharing?
"I think we do, in a different way today. We have a friendship amongst peers where we can interact and, as a band leader, I invite others to play with me. I enjoy that; a lot of playing in each other's projects, with a collective drive to push the music forward. For instance, the initial composer would invite other players to contribute to the writing process. So, yes, I feel that because we have strong bonds with each other, we're not that separated. I'm not clear on how get a collective consciousness per se, but we're all individually going in the same way."

Ahrends suffered a culture shock while studying in Norway in 2009, but got over it.
"We from South Africa come with our jazz language and B-Pop lines, but the improvisation class was like digging into sound and texture and free improvisation and harmony. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed this free improvisation, of making something complex simple. But I thought at times, 'what is going on here?' I enjoyed it."

The Album, released in 2017, narrates Ahrends' experiences with a reflective and honest approach. He has chosen his quintet members well, each providing their unique twist to his stories. Nicholas Williams' piano brings a melodic tenderness to 'Silent Mistrust', a composition that echoes Ahrends' past disappointments. *"This song conveys how I felt when my trust was broken ; I endured it, first, silently, then loudly. Through that composition, I could reflect, because there was something inside me; I had to be tender with myself."* Through his guitar improvisation, he could "tear things apart".

Double bassist, Romy Brauteseth, adds reflective texture on her solos in 'Stories Behind Expressions' and 'Inevitability'. The breathy wails of Sisonke Xonti's tenor sax replicate maskandi sounds unique to South Africa. Further textures and moods are layered by drummer Sphelelo Mazibuko as in 'Brotherhood' and the energetic 'Untitled in 5'. The band is tight; they know each other very well.

But it's the guitar that carries the story line: 'All' swings from a contemplative ballad into an acid rock style which screams help, giving a sense of urgency, but then dips into resolve at the end. A moving piece. 'Untitled in 5' has mixed rhythms reminiscent of a South African ancestral Khoisan dance with an effective and tight duo between guitar and sax only interrupted with a robust Mazibuko drum solo. Ahrends wrote this piece while camping with his family, but couldn't find a suitable title. Same for 'Untitled in 3'.

"It comes from listening to traditional South African jazz music. The chordal placement parts go into a 6/8 time with a harmonically South African tonality. I just liked the sound of 'untitled in'!!"

Ahrends expresses emotional whirlwinds from life experiences, and shakes them off in 'Here We Go Again', a careful slow ballad that builds a story in a pure, soulful way. Then the song erupts; the energetic drum and the emphatic grungy guitar pronounce that life IS hard – but get over it. This well-constructed song sighs in desperation, but with a beauty and release that lingers.

Grungy rock marks these stories; Ahrends stylistically switches from grunge to subtle South African sounds as in *'Past'* and *'Stories Behind Expressions'*. This is why *'Narrative'* is listenable and reflectively memorable.

Guitarist Michael Bester pulls tension in debut album, Now Not Yet (28 February 2020)

Bluesy and jazzy guitar moods of Cape Town-based guitarist and composer, Michael Bester, delight the discriminating ears in his debut album released late 2019.

This guitarist, songwriter, composer, arranger and musical director, as well as proud new Dad and frisbee enthusiast, has made Cape Town his home where he cultivates his growing creative bents. After completing Jazz Studies at Cape Town's UCT School of Music in mid 2000s, Bester took time off to travel and perform in UK, China, and the USA. One hears in the album with its zingy title, **Now, Not Yet**, various influences from these past times as well as a mix-and-match of emotions and separation from family to pursue wider sonic exposures. He calls it "tension".

Hard work pays off. Thanks to winning the 2008 SAMRO Overseas Scholarship for Instrumentalists, Bester could study in New York and perform as a session guitarist. Before that, and now, Bester has recorded and performed with several other bands, like Mango Groove, and with various individual artists at musical festivals, such as with Lira and Loyiso Bala. In 2013 he won a SAFTA (South African Film and Television Award) for Best Film Soundtrack for 'Semi-Soet', along with co-composer Andrew Baird.

Creative leanings found a turning point: After completing his Masters Degree in Contemporary Music Performance and Production at the Berklee satellite campus in Valencia, Spain, in 2017, Bester has concentrated on writing and performing on home soil. That year in Valencia changed his game. *This year in Spain had a profound impact on my artistic identity and my composition process and much of the inspiration for the writing of the music on the album is thanks to that experience.*

The album presents very listenable pieces with mixed ballads, bebop, improvisational chord runs, and contemporary blues. Yet, as the title hints, there is a tension in his compositions that depicts how things are and how they could be, if we could just grasp those things that we are constantly striving to possess or achieve. One hears how Bester might be tempted to swing into a grungy twang and loud rock with his electric guitar, as he has in others' albums, like in Blake Hellaby's latest #Not Jazz, but he harnesses that.

I feel that the compositions on the album represent where I am at in my own growth and development. I am equally inspired both by very simple and very complex music, and can find great beauty in both. My goal is to write music that is beautiful and accessible on the surface, but complex underneath.

Talented band musicians on the album are: Zeke le Grange (saxophone), another SAMRO awardee Kingsley Buitendag (piano), the ever steady Stephen de Souza (upright and electric bass), and the beat man himself, Lumanyano "Unity" Mzi on drums. The opening song, 'Twenty Four', gives all musicians a chance to dissect and be heard, followed by two slow thoughtful ballads: the self-explanatory "Until I see you again", and 'Born Again' with lots of guitar conversation in single notes and clear, clean runs from le Grange's sax. Tempos change as more blues make statements in 'R-Train Blues', a memory of a bad trip on New York City's R-Train, with de Souza's boppish acoustic bass plunk plunks up the scales. 'Influence' carries Buitendag's repetitious piano with haunting undercurrents of mood and blues while Bester's bluesy twanging guitar tells another story. Again, that tension. Breaking up melancholic chords, Bester introduces another mood, slowly and carefully, in 'A Different View', which

bordered on monotony, in high contrast to the punky, almost rock, of the previous song. But this did not distract from the important finales in 'Family Matters' where the mood picks up with le Grange's talkative sax, and the bass and drum bebop nicely, keeping pace.

Bester ends his album with 'The Way Forward', a piece with mood and time changes, in keeping with the album's title, perhaps, signalling what tension will ride the waves as we continue our search for meaning. All instruments go on high alert with a surprise ending. This album should go far in alerting us to what stories may come from this talented guitarist in South Africa's contemporary jazz.

Bester featured in Luna Paige's Illuminar production of 'Her Blues', a wonderful musical stage story of early African American blues...with a female twist. It was a sold out and popular offering during the 2019 Woordfees festival in Stellenbosch, as it told the story about African American women jazz artists performing in those early 1900s smoky blues houses.

Bassist Sean Sanby's steps out of the candlelight into creative spaces: an album review (22 March 2020)

As viral clouds permeate our unsuspecting Sapien world, a sonic light of hope shines into our being. Bassist Sean Sanby wants us to realise our own potentials in his ambitious debut album, ***Out of the Candlelight***.

"Most of the songs were written in high school, like 'Take Me Somewhere', and during and after College," he says during our chat. "I had just gotten my driver's license and was studying for those stressful exams; I just wanted to escape to somewhere, even though Cape Town where I come from is such a beautiful place. You know, in High School you rise in the food chain, but then when you enter College, you get knocked down to the bottom of that food chain and have to make your way up again. Like being thrown into the deep end, and needing to go somewhere..."

This song certainly took this listener off into goema beats and Moses Molelekwa influences. It appropriately ends this story-filled album.

After graduating from the University of Cape Town School of Music in jazz studies, and touring a bit with his band, even venturing to China for an 18 month tour with Matilda the Musical, Sanby became excited to find an explosion of original music in Cape Town among his peers. It was time to crack open his many compositions for public consumption. His sound is influenced not only by the great pianists, Molelekwa as well as Bheki Mseleku, but by Sanby's childhood romps around South Africa with his family, camping as in 'Starscrapers', a song describing a fairy-like twinkling of stars in open spaces. Other influences touched Sanby as he performed in various festivals like Italy's Achevia Jazz Festival where he wrote 'Letters Home', a slow, whimsical nostalgia of missing home. This piece, as well as 'Take Me Somewhere', showcases the close synergy between Muneeb Hermans' trumpet and Jesse Jullies' tenor saxophone, both swinging with Cape rhythms and styles.

Other young musicians featured on the album have their time to shine: Bradley Prince on guitar, Brathew van Schalkwyk on piano as in 'Give Me Time', and Damian Kamineth on drums. They all grew up with Sanby as a Cape brotherhood that has allowed for collaborative experimentation over the years as they share their musical thoughts. 'Dreamers' which enters half way through the album opens a waltzy dreamy temperament as the musicians dream up big ideas that might happen. Sanby believes in dreams; it's part of pursuing that light of progress from the candlelight. 'Rise and Fall' seems to give space to the musicians who effectively take turns at exploring that timidity that comes from moving in and out of sonic opportunities. A well-composed piece.

He gives about equal play time on the electric and acoustic bass. *"I prefer to play acoustic bass on those African-inspired songs, like 'Out of the Candlelight', 'Letters Home', and 'Take me Somewhere'. The acoustic bass has that natural sound, a wooden, weighted African sound and feel to it. The electric bass is more agile and allows me to paint more colours. You can get away with a lot more."* For instance, there was more chordal playing in 'Starscrapers' which, he felt, was not suitable for the double bass.

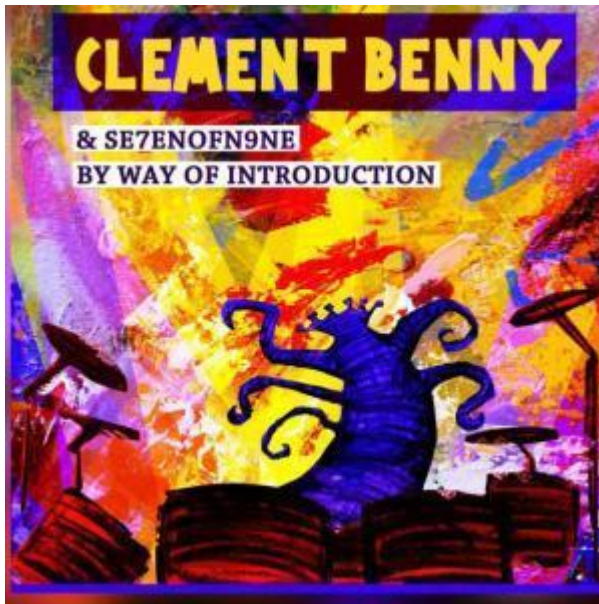
"I find it's fun to adapt songs to either the double bass or electric bass. I sometimes bring to a live gig one of my basses to see how the song might come out differently because the

instrument changes the feel and flow of the song. I explore what is the best way for the song to sound."

The album was recorded and mixed in a few days, and as expected, has a different feel from his live gig launch where drummer Kamineth shows his soft and aggressive approach to the sonic life, as in the bouncy 'Give Me Time'. Sanby's upcoming album has songs already plugged in for "*a more focused album*", he says. It will include more musicians collaborating, and should be a must-hear for fans wanting more from this spirited group of Cape Town friends.

Drummer Clement Benny slithers with octopus grace in his debut album *By Way of Introduction* (27 March 2020)

Drumming takes skeleton control as homo sapiens moves stiffly, sometimes in contorted ways, to carefully maneuver sounds across the drum set. However, jazz artist, Clement Benny, wants to do it differently, and his debut album, *By Way of Introduction*, presents his own sound with a fluidity and grace that pleases.



Born and bred in the Eastern Cape, Benny arrived in Cape Town just in time to join the independent music school, MAPP, for several years to obtain an initial musical footing, after which he joined the growing UCT Jazz Studies crowd in the mid 1990s. Exciting times, which brought Benny in contact with a set of musicians now renowned for their 20 years plus experience in transforming South Africa's jazz music. Hence, his choice for his album of pianist Hilton Schilder with whom Benny toured Reunion Island, and who remains a vast influence on his life; saxman Buddy Wells whom Benny first met through a music competition in 1997 and whom he continued to play with through UCT study days. Others on the album, double bassist Dave Ridgeway and guitarist Allou April were all emerging dons during that early era. His studies under Cuban percussionist, Efrain Toro at UCT, sustained his undying thirst to learn more and more about the drumming craft. Very humbly, Benny admits this as his future mission... to keep on learning.

We talked more deeply about his musical vision and his album.

CM: You've got 9 tracks on your album with interesting mixtures: some goema, some mainstream be-bop, lovely ballads, some lamentations, a little bit of minor keys. What's the album all about?

CB: *I'm not much of a composer, but I've worked with these young composers at the forefront of what jazz is about. And also with Khaya Mahlangu and Africa Mkize – these incredible musicians. But I didn't want this to sound like a drummer's album, because I'm still busy practicing. I'm glad I did the last track on the album, 'Drum Speak', as you will hear my solo with me falling over my own self and making 'mistakes', although Miles Davis said there is*

*nothing like a mistake in jazz! The nice part of the album was that the tracks were all recorded basically live in studio and once. My band members were simply happy with the spontaneity of our collaboration and sound. The only edited track was the Spoken Word one, 'There I Were', which featured an amazing influence in my life, the Reverend Robert Steiner whom I had met in my favourite sports bar, and he became my good friend. He being part Italian, I asked him to write me a poem about what it means to become a God. That's what that song is about – 'There I Were' – which is also a play on words leading to the title of my album, **By Way of Introduction**, where I'm introducing myself as a digital debutante!*

CM: That Track, 'There I Were' it sounds like a lamentation, it's sort of funereal, yet sounds celebratory in a melodic sort of way.

CB: *Well, it's a bit of intellectual music because it's inside me, and we hear music in beats of 3s as waltzes, and in beats of 4, and then the counterpoint between the bass and the sax searching for the beginning of this song. I didn't mean the song to be confusing, but I trusted the band would find a solution. And if you meet the Reverend Steiner, you will find him a very relaxed, approachable man. He's very serious about being the best version of oneself.*

CM: Yes, it's a very moving piece. I also found your album cover rather intriguing with a drummer, arms flying about, but in the shape of an octopus. And then a written form "@seven of nine". What was that all about?

CB: *The seventh daughter of nine refers to a character on Star Trek, and I thought a name like "Seven of Nine" was an unusual way to call someone. And then, when I was studying with Efrain Toro, he made reference to the 9 colours of the rainbow, that we can only see seven primary colours, but not the other two. He told me a rhythm is only up to 9 beats and homo sapiens really doesn't function beyond that, just as we have 88 keys on the piano, but we actually only consciously hear two. This is how playing divisions of 7 inside a metre of 9 becomes actually 7 bars. So to me, it's really an intellectual reference to how I came up with the Seven in Nine on the album cover. Again, a play on words...a bit of math... At a time when musicians talk about technical terms like 'reharmonization' and 'modulations' and 'inversions' ... For me on drums, I can understand the 7 of 9 rhythms where musicians on other instruments may not know these rhythms. It's like your body rhythms are ordered, are like the planets: they don't crash into each other, but rather carry a rhythm!*

CM: (chuckle)OK! You've also got on your album cover an octopus figure. I'm beginning to see between your Seven of Nine and having been influenced by Star Trek, maybe there's an octopus message in all of this! It's an interesting design but what were you thinking? What reference does it have to your music?

CB: *I remember as a kid walking on the beach in East London on very jagged rocks, and I'd see a little octopus in the water, then it would just disappear before I could catch it. I don't think I've ever seen an animal move that gracefully and when you see it in water, it's like watching a beautiful ballet, a beautiful dance, so serene. I was thinking of how can I sit at the drum set, thinking of that slithering octopus, and try to get my bones, my skeleton, more liquid. I mean an octopus doesn't have a skeleton like ours, does it? Yet it holds itself together. I was imagining how to move, to be more liquid, more fluid, and graceful behind the drum set. When I approached my dear friend, Terence Visagie..... He knew I was a Salvador Dali fan. I told him I needed something abstract and silly with a poignant message. That we should all try to move like that.*

CM: So Terence did the design of the cover?

CB: *Yes. I told him I wanted it to be very colourful, with purple and orange to be the theme, with an octopus playing the drum set. You take a drummer like Virgil Donati who plays like an*

octopus. At the end of the day, and after watching a lot of YouTubes of musicians, you have to find who you are and explore, is it enough what you're doing. There are ten year old kids who are playing drums more than I could ever imagine of myself. So I have to have that feeling that I'm OK, and that I have to do what I have to do. And always learn more.

CM: You've summed up the temperament of this album with this liquidity, this graceful serene dancing. It certainly comes through when you're drumming. In fact, I was amazed, from a sound standpoint, at how subdued your drumming was. It makes sense now, because of the flowing melodic nature of the songs in the album. Anything else about the album? Any other album to come out in the near future?

CB: You know that I'm a reluctant band leader, so am not hopeful about having another album out soon. To be honest, there was a group of people who approached me to help fund an album, but I must calculate what that means. I'm still having a debt to pay off for this present album which is why I haven't gone out to make hard copies of it yet. So money is playing a big role. But I also think the next album I would want to do would be more of a concert album.

CM: You mean an album recorded in a live concert?

CB: I'm talking personnel, configuration, orchestration. I'm also thinking of how the drum set could be presented in a more musically creative way. I remember walking into one of my first classes with Efrain Toro and playing what I thought were complex, four way Cuban rhythms for him. And he says, but where's the gravity? What brings everything you're playing back to the center, back to its core? I really didn't know the answer, and so ... Well, I love playing music and whatever people want to hear. But, I do gravitate away from that music where the drum set is there to be just wall paper, I suppose.

CM: Yes, well, that was certainly fulfilled in your **Tune Recreation Committee** work , and in Marcus Wyatt's **Language 12**, and very differently in Abraham Mennen's album, **The Really Revered Whole Story**.

CB: I remember what a privilege it was to play at the then Mahogany Room in Cape Town with these incredible young guys, like Mandla Mlangeni and Nicolas Williams, and others. How fortunate I was to be able to play with musicians as old as my Dad and as young as my son! Those days! In my next project, it's still a mixed secret for me to unravel, but that will come if I keep studying, and practicing and being open to learning from others. And then the next idea makes up your mind for you.

CM: As you say, you allow your bones to wrap around that fluidity, in that caring environment, or spirit, to help you produce what you should be producing; what comes from within, from your talents. This album is a nice beginning.

CB: One thing I would like to change about my approach is to work more with commercial musicians. I wonder, can I do pop work now? I grew up playing pop /funk music, and didn't really know what 'jazz' was until I met these other jazz musicians, like Errol Dyers, Fred Kuit, other musicians at UCT jazz studies. Then listening to Coltrane and Monk and others. But still, there's so much to learn, even on my principal instrument!

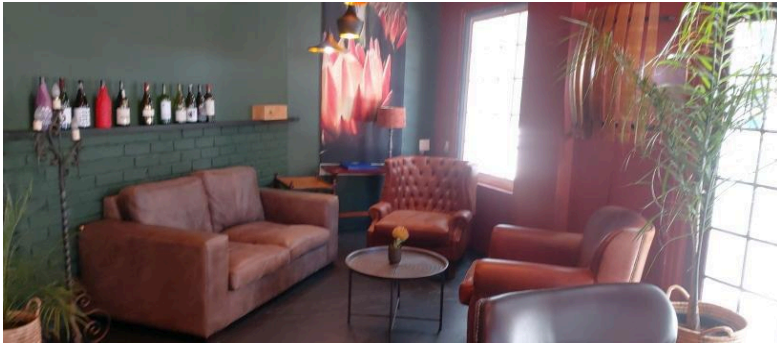
Soft and sensual songstress, Thandeka Dladla, sings jazz, blues, and Afro beats at Intravinous Wine Lounge and Bar in downtown Cape Town! (23 January 2023)

Where to go in downtown Cape Town for a fusion of Elgin area wines with live jazz under soft lights and a local cuisine... and have a much needed 'feel good' experience closer to home?

Music industry buffs have often commented on how the pairing of wine with quality jazz and blues helps anxious workers unwind and de-stress at the end of the day. So, why can't the 'Cape Wine Route' be said to start (or end) in downtown Cape Town? Why must it be away from urban centers only?

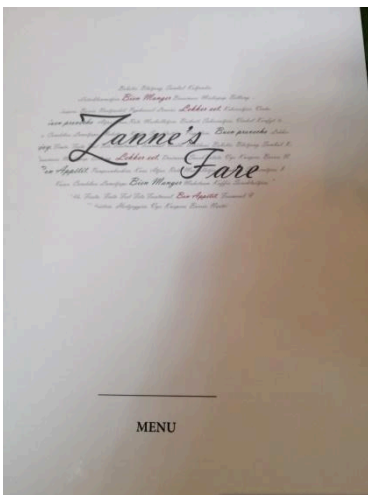


Intravinous, a newly opened wine lounge and bar in the heart of Cape Town's busy downtown, at **110 Loop Street**, wants to curate a no-rush, relaxed imbibing of some of South Africa's finest wines while pairing this experience with quality live jazz in its downstairs, along with a local cuisine upstairs. Wine connoisseur David Burton's residency in the Elgin and Elim regions of the Western Cape led to discoveries about just how enticing the white and red grapes could be – so his selections favour the explosion of wines in the areas of Stanford where he ran a farm shop and could access wines mainly from Napier, Bredasdorp, and the Elgin/Hermanus regions. He realized while working with some of these newer wine producers that Cape Town should provide an active market for them, and he could facilitate that. Hence, Intravinous which meant leaving a legal practice to build this relatively quiet Loop Street space.



“We have a license to sell wine ‘off- consumption’ for those who want to pop in, relax, buy a bottle or package of wine to take home, or just do online buying of wine and come in to pick up the package. We also have an ‘on-consumption’ sales license, of course, for tasting or imbibing on the premises. We are unique in this way to offer customers a range of wines to choose, both for home and in the Lounge.”

Burton’s mission is to address the economically depressed situation of Cape Town’s central business district first and foremost, caused by years of commercial challenges, the Covid pandemic, and infrastructural limitations. *“I would like to arrest this downward trend in the city as well as with the wine producers who need to expose their wines to the locals and tourists. If the city can just turn things around and support these local initiatives, we can succeed.”* Burton feels the now growing community of residents in the CBD seeks comfortable spaces and relaxation closer to home. *“I’d like to build a loyalty program with my customers, with my data base, and a sense of community, so that local Capetonians can develop that sense of belonging, and benefit from the offerings. This could be like building a ‘membership’ of loyal followers who support the cultural arts, wine and cuisine. “*



A delectable cuisine of South African and Cape dishes is on order as well, thanks to the popular menu of ‘Zanne’s Fare’, the name of the restaurant side of Intravinous. Zanne’s is planning to offer all day breakfasts and lunches as well.

Cape Town Music Academy (CTMA)

An important addition to making this Lounge fun and relaxing will be monthly doses of live jazz, supported by the Cape Town Music Academy (CTMA), a not for profit company creating opportunities for contemporary musicians in communities of the Western Cape. This partnership provides win-win initiatives starting with live jazz on the last Fridays of the

month and on the 'first Thursdays', with various promotions to supplement the entertaining experience. Its first launch will be this Friday, January 27, with the illustrious quartet of singer Thandeka Dladla.



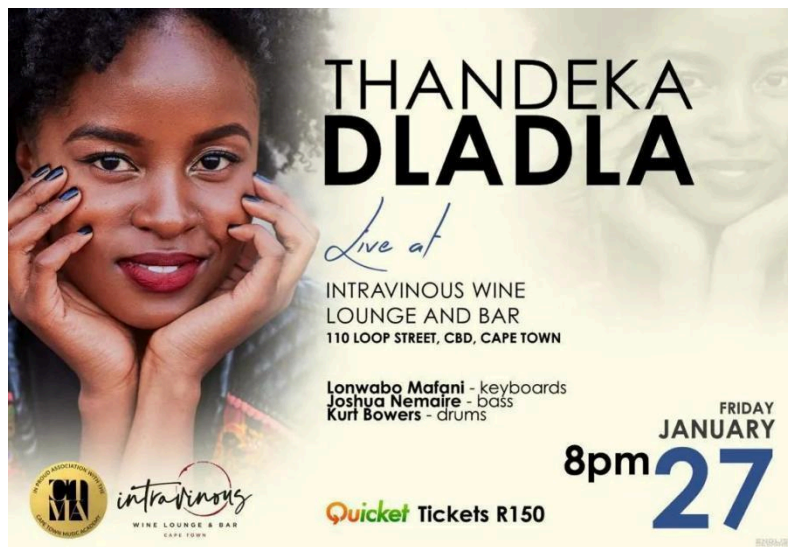
CTMA has been actively supporting a number of live music and education initiatives in the Cape Town area since its start-up as a non profit organization in 2016. It funds travel and upkeep costs for seasoned and newer bands and programs, such as last year's Nouvelles Vibes at Alliance Française to showcase up and coming bands, and a Winter 9-week Sunday's Jazz and Fondue lunch, held at Delheim Wine Estate's cosy cave-style restaurant and featuring local jazz bands. The Berklee College of Music based in Boston, USA, has joined with CTMA's outreach to bring their music professors to Cape Town to give workshops to young music students. Lockdown blues by Covid-19 pandemic enabled CTMA to resort to making both performance and educational videos. <https://www.ctma.co.za/music-videos>

"In this regard," says Burton, "CTMA has a great recipe for me in that they can organize and market to their data base the live entertainment which I can't do as well, so we have a mix of data bases." While jazz may not be everyone's favourite music, a wide enough data base should reach people willing to explore live jazz in their neighbourhoods and support our local talents.

This year from February 2023 to January 2024, CTMA in collaboration with Fine Music Radio (FMR) will host Sunday afternoon gigs, the last Sunday of each month. These gigs, supported by the Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) called Take Note, will showcase emerging young musicians and those who are established. Each gig will be recorded and aired with interviews on FMR. Student engineers will be mentored (hands-on) by a professional engineer at these gigs. Others will receive studio production training at FMR. These students will receive income for working-in training.

Thandeka Dladla

On the bill for Friday January 27 (2023) is singer, composer, and storyteller Thandeka Dladla and her quartet of Lonwabo Mafani on keyboards, Joshua Nemaire on bass, and Kurt Bowers on drums.



Dladla, a regular on the jazz scene for some 10 years now, believes in staying true to oneself. Her video series speaks tips of wisdom in how to operate in the music industry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C17qy2HnQds>. She has featured on several albums, works as a voice-over artist, and boasts valuable experience in music management. Dladla doesn't shy away from singing with fast-paced bands, like **The Unity Band**, and with her own array of local musicians, particularly featured in CTMA's Nouvelles Vibes series last year. <https://youtu.be/20dkwxVicI4>

"Started in May [2022], Nouvelles Vibes is a growing concept that seeks to discover new talent, innovative trends in all genres and offers performance opportunities for young musicians," says CTMA's Project Manager Luvuyo Kakaza. Follow Thandeka on Instagram- @thandeka_dladla Twitter- @thandekadladla

Sadly, Intravenous closed down in 2023, but CTMA's Nouvelles Vibes continues to provide stages for growing musicians.

Uhadi Traditional/Synth Modern – Lwanda Gogwana Expands Xhosa jazz (2 November 2018)

Trumpeter Lwanda Gogwana finds identity through his Xhosa roots in his latest album, ***Uhadi Synth*** (2016).

Songs ring in his native tongue of isiXhosa as he probes cultural roots, deeply exhuming the mythical. A non-isiXhosa speaker won't feel left out when Xhosa lyrics burst out... there's excitement in the presentation alone. In this album, the language of jazz is a language of moods, emotions, and joys energized through traditional modalities with twists of unheard-of improvisation. That's what Uhadi Synth is: the traditional Xhosa single stringed mouth bow, called the 'uhadi', made popular by the late Nofinishi Dywili whom Godwana studied at University, juxtaposed with the modern electronic synthesizer instrument.

But you won't hear the actual 'Uhadi', just its interpretation as story-telling messages by several vocalists, and harmonics by Kyle Shepherd's piano with a repetitive lower registry. Composer, arranger and producer, Lwanda Gogwana, has composed for a number of artists and bands in South Africa. But it's this second album which pegs his own signature to a music he has been exploring since the beginning, starting with his first album, ***Songbook, Chapter 1***, which addressed various influences on this young master's growth.

Gogwana explains: *It's about finding identity, now that young Black South Africans have the freedoms to explore, harvest, and proudly spread their cultural expressions through song.*

Don't feel confused why a synthesizer enters: Shepherd is a lover of synths; he has used them concurrently with piano to enforce his love of the indigenous goema music of historical slave days in the Cape areas and original Khoisan culture. For Shepherd, synthesizers have a way of 'bending' the sounds. For instance, in 'Umculo', Shepherd's spirit-bending chords and characteristic goema twist resonate with gospel nuances. Then, add the influx and settlement of Xhosa people from parts east who settled in the Cape urban centers helps to gel these sounds we hear on this album. The listener gets carried through South African jazz Standards of earlier urban sounds into a melange of more contemporary expressions from youthful inputs: tradition – meets- funk.

Vocalists, like Sakhile Moleshe, offer warm, laid-back, jazzy scats to 'Qula Kwedini' with big band swing styles of the classic 1940s urbanized African jazz, and audio pronouncements about stick fighting in the olden days of Xhosa tradition among boys and men. A stunning piece, 'Yibhluz', and the only song on the album with lyrics, sees history meet the blues: how the sordid colonial history is delivered with a diplomatic wit, which raises issues of whether society now is mirroring its past grievances. Here is a reflective tradition-meets-blues as Gogwana skilfully weaves a dialogue around Zim Ngqawana-influenced pride in culture while youth are pulled towards the secular and mundane. Xonti's sax brings this sultry mood and sarcasm across nicely, as do the vocalists.

Shepherd's piano and repetitive baseline holds the uhadi form on several songs, while Gogwana's horn echoes conversations between the rolling Xhosa hills of his homeland in 'Maqundeni'. He would call this 'a swing feel in Xhosa'. This leads nicely into 'Ndiyagoduka' (I'm going home), an upbeat improvisational song with lots of trumpet triple tonguing and that uhadi-like piano supported by Amaeshi Ikechi's bass sound. The

penetration by the horns exudes an energy that leaves one quite breathless at the end of this album.

On the album:

Lwanda Gogwana – trumpet and fugelhorn

Kyle Shepherd – piano and synthesizer

Sisonke Xonti – sax

Amaeshi Ikechi – bass

Lungile Kunene – drums

Dumza Maswana – vocals

Sandile Maleshe – vocals

Jazz Pianist Zoe Molelekwa brings his “unconsciously South African” repertoire to Cape Town: an Interview (22 August 2019)

All Jazz Radio caught busy Zoe Molelekwa for an interview about what makes him tick with his music and life in general.

CM: With all your current training and family influences, I was just wondering – everybody finds their own style as they grow into their music – so what’s your style? You’ve been influenced; you’ve studied, and probably done a lot of experimentation as well. What kind of sound do you feel comfortable with? What turns you on in playing music?



Zoe Molelekwa – credit T. Visagie

*ZM: Being around my father growing up, and absorbing the music he was playing, was a time very short-lived. I grew up in Soweto which was very culturally rich with music all around. There was so much to pick up from everyone. My one real experience that made me want to listen to jazz was from the old man who lived across the street from where I lived – I grew up with my uncle, on my mother’s side of the family. This man was always playing his LPs, but I could never know who he was playing. So, he challenged me to get to know my father’s music and CDs, and the older music on these vinyls, and how people were approaching this music. My formal music training started with the recorder in the First Grade. Then, I took up violin, then alto saxophone and just listening to different music. The music that attracted me most from South Africa was the **mirabi** and **mbaqanga** variety.*

CM: How did your family support you in pursuing music?

ZM: I had to work for a year after my high school. Growing up on my Mom’s side of the family, they didn’t want me involved in music. So I worked at Exclusive Books for a year after my high school. There, I became very interested in stories, music, and art. I was always listening to music on my headphones, so the store asked me to make a playlist of music to play in the store. People in the store would come and ask me who was playing a song, and what’s the album called, this sort of thing. Some actually would buy the album and show me that they had bought it!

That’s when I started meeting musicians I had heard on radio, through their albums and interviews, and even seeing them at their performances. The first musician I met who helped me a lot was Lwanda Gogwana, the trumpeter. He heard my father’s music being played in the store, and started to befriend me, asked me if I wish to pursue this music, and what my plans were.

Then I was introduced to the pianist, Themba Mkize, who helped me find places where I could study music, and recommended University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN).

CM: Wonderful. OK, I thought on your grandfather's side (Moses' father), you would be groomed as well.

ZM: *Actually, I hardly ever saw my grandfather growing up. I saw him maybe four or five times when I was very young. This was not out of choice. Then when I was ten years old, I ran away [from my mother's family side] because I felt suffocated. I really wanted to have an experience with music at that time. I was playing drums with my father when I was three or four years old. I would walk into his rehearsals and pick up the drummer's stick and start beating. Then I got my own drum kit. When I was picked up from school, I would ask if my father was rehearsing at Kippies. If yes, I would ask to fetch my drum kit so I could rehearse with him. That's the kind of environment I grew up with, and when I no longer had that, after my parents' death, [when I was just six years old] and into my teen years, it really was challenging for me. But the exposure I had at that early age made me continue to listen and try to absorb all the sounds that I loved. So when I finally got an opportunity to study or express myself, I had a certain foundation already.*

CM: When you met up with Mkhize and Gogwana who encouraged you to continue in music, was your family still not supportive?

ZM: *They were...yet in a sense they weren't. I mean, to them, music was not considered a viable career for me. I think also with the circumstances surrounding my parents passing on, and the kind of environment that the music scene can operate in, they were reluctant about me being a part of that, of knowing what that environment actually is. It's funny because even my mother was an artist, and her father was a great actor and musician, James Mthoba, who acted in various productions at the Market Theater [and was artistic director of the Theater], was a pianist in the film **Sarafina**, and worked with other actors, such as John Kani. So it was weird for me to experience this, knowing that there's so much cultural heritage that we have at home that I could actually take so much from. It would also help me on my journey. But they weren't so supportive so it ended up being that way.*

CM: Your mother's father, did he support you?

ZM: *He passed away when I was very young so didn't know him. I tried to be around people I'd like to be like, like musicians. When I was studying privately with Themba Mkize, and I actually lived with him for a while, that's when I met pianist Nduduzo Makhlatini who became another great influence for me.*

He was performing in Soweto with his band when I was on way back to JHB as my UKZN semester had just ended for the holidays. Nduduzo called me and asked me if I'd like to come with two tunes and rehearse with his band. The gig which followed was the first time I had performed my music live! I had been composing and attending performances, just trying to get to know how other musicians prepare for their performances, and what makes the music sound so great. So when I think about how I would present my music, it would come out as though I, too, am trying to set my own path in this music.

CM: Where are you studying music now, and is it your full time love?

ZM: *I'm in my 2nd year at UKZN Jazz Program with one more year to go. It's not my only love but where my passion lies. I envision my performances to have many experiences which include visuals, sound, and words – I'm a poet as well – because I find words can express things we can't feel in sound, or see in pictures. That's the ultimate vision, but primarily, I'd*

like to be a full time musician, perhaps work as an arranger, or a film scorer, but also be involved in art entrepreneurship in the long run.

CM: In what way? The entrepreneurship...

ZM: I think my being around some of the great musicians to whom I and my peers look up to, and getting a sense of how to look at ourselves not only as musicians, but also as a business, teaches us how to make a living. I'm seeing certain things not known to musicians, that could actually really help in their careers. In the immediate sense, that's how I'd like to be of help. Maybe have my own label. But for now, I just want to be a great musician and a great human being!

CM: What are your other interests?

ZM: I enjoy art and also writing.... Literature. I experiment a lot; I write essays, I write short stories; sometimes I write poems . I'm thinking a bit broader to write novels...

CM: What about some jazz journalism?

ZM: People have told me I should consider archiving or journalism – something more serious and worthwhile. I've been very busy just archiving my father's works, trying to put all the content together and package it in such a way that it could be used by those hungry for the music.

CM: I like your mention of stories and poems.... Not everyone can write, but it sounds like you have a facility for that. If you could spend a whole day in a library, what would you want to read?

ZM: I love History, African history. In earlier days, I read the Classics – Edgar Allan Poe and George Orwell. I like philosophy, many different schools of thought, Eastern philosophy, some Buddhist and Zen books. I practice Tai Chi – I've adopted this as a habit to keep me balanced about what troubles me.

CM: I see you have a meditative style when you sit down at the piano, like at Guga S'Thebe during Hassan'adas tribute to your father's music. Where do you think you fit into South African jazz? Where do you feel comfortable – with free flow, traditional, contemporary styles....?

ZM: I like the traditional – it's like the foundation of the tree. In those earlier times, there were different things – socially, politically, and economically – that were influencing not only the way people were living, but the music which was being written for a certain purpose. I might fall under not just the traditional, but maybe the contemporary, African. There are influences, such as kwaito, deep house, hip hop which I've come to like. My father's music was traditional, but also progressive.... I try to have nuances that are unconsciously South African because that's where I come from.

Sound and space need better coordination: Zoe Molelekwa tests Youngblood Gallery

(2 September 2019)

Take the wall paintings and sculptures made from metal, wire, and wood, and put together the sound of a solo baby grand piano and what do you get? Visual art meets musical vibrations producing a soulful push that is once meditative, and gently soothing in this creative space. Then add an able drummer, bass guitar and amplification and the whole sonic experience crumbles. High ceilings of this otherwise delightful gallery simply do not permit loud percussive instruments to work. Framed visual art pieces can survive on well painted or brick walls with some clever lighting effects, but sounds depend on spatial air to carry the vibrations which is why wind instruments and human voices resonate kindly in cathedrals and in lofty no-ceiling structures.

Youngblood Arts and Cultural Development Gallery on Bree Street in central Cape Town, while a space for experiencing awe and wonderment at the visuals on display, finds it challenging to provide a decent sound for a variety of instruments. Pianist Zoe Molelekwa handled his solos delicately on the baby grand piano, so rarely available for concerts in public places. Thank you, Gallery, for this. His repetitive phrasing, almost chant-like, and soft touch of chords splitting apart into runs made for easy and thoughtful music to the ears. When his capable band members chimed in, the upped volume with bass amplification drowned out both piano and bass guitar. Buddy Well's enduring saxophone could rise above the cacophony of sounds and carry the tune well. High ceilings simply don't do justice to the music. Then again, why amplify so loudly in such a small space as the Youngblood's foyer?

Also, musician training – to talk clearly and loudly into the microphone when introducing a song or message – requires attention of the artist to mic deficiencies. It was such a pity that one heard little this evening in spite of this aspiring young musician's attempts to present his hard-worked compositions.

A pleasant arrangement of tables and chairs by the bar provided nourishment and a cosy atmosphere for diners to view the stage just before the show started. But the coffee grinding machine humming during a solo piano just doesn't work; the meditative mood set by the pianist was shattered as wine glasses or cutlery falls. Bars near the seated audience need to shut their noise, not shut down, during an act. Simple.

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In contrast, Guga S'thebe Cultural Center in Langa provided, again, a pleasant, sound-perfect experience when young Molelekwa and his band took the stage last Sunday. Molelekwa's piano solos were delicate, almost Pythagorean in healing, as head hung low, he massaged the keys with a depth of soul, even longing, as he ended his afternoon concert playing one of his late father's songs. We could hear his microphone introductions clearly, in spite of his somewhat timid, perhaps shy, voice timber.

Molelekwa and his drummer Bonolo Nkoane, his bassist Grant van Royen, and saxman Buddy Wells warrant applause for presenting the soulful compositions of young Molelekwa who seems to be well on his way to emulating his late father Moses Molelekwa's creative jazz-bending styles. Caution, therefore, is required in choosing the right sound system for spaces unable to cushion those floating vibrations that easily distort.

(<https://musicallymine.wordpress.com/2025/07/10/drummer-kabelo-boy-mokhatla-dots-his-journey-with-maturity-but-with-a-sense-of-exile/>)

Drummer Kabelo Boy Mokhatla Dots his journey with maturity, but with a sense of exile
(July 10, 2025)

Kabelo Boy Mokhatla is on a run; his two and half years studying at the Manhattan School of Music in New York City on the Hugh Masekela scholarship sees him halfway through his Masters degree, and collaborating with some giants of jazz, either resident in New York or passing through, like pianist Dr. Nduduzo Makhathini and saxophonist Linda Sikhakhane, both hailing from KwaZulu Natal. Recently, Mokhatla performed with these two maestros at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival in April 2025, which says something about his growing expertise in handling the likes of Makhathini-Sikhakhane sonic spirits.



This South African, at age 25, is now launching his second album, the ***Dot Series***, recorded with his U.S. colleagues. This follows on from his previous album, ***Key to Authenticity*** (2023) as his musical journey continues to seek truth guided by the heart's reflections in *“an everchanging landscape shaped by your deepest thoughts”*.

See my article below posted in my jazzconnection review in December 2023. During my recent chatsby phone with him, still based in New York City, my curiosity was heightened to know just what the ‘dots’ contained and how they were expanding his already exciting musical story.

“In a year’s time, I’ll complete my Masters, but am thinking of either taking a break or continuing to study for a PhD.” He admits there’s much to do and think about in his musical and personal journey. This and keeps his pulse on which institution may be hiring teachers or offering study opportunities, etc. But he also sees the urgent need to return home and share the knowledge and wisdom he has gained. *“Some of the connections I have built here could benefit a lot of people who might have the same goals and aspirations I have, so I could build programs to bridge the gap and open pathways for more collaborations.”* That’s very giving of you, I thought.

Many artists are in the same boat, but look to make an income and find opportunities to improve one’s craft, often with difficulties. *“I’m 25 years old and thinking about those futures, but I’m also in a good space of having tuition provided for me, and a roof over my head. So I feel privileged that I can play in concerts that enable me to cover the bills.”* So Mokhatla can continue learning and exploring his true wishes, even taking risks to find those life-sustaining incomes. *“But I still want to come home and keep on learning.”*

Being intrigued by the ‘dots’ – because his first album talks about authenticity – I wondered what meanings he was throwing at the listener. *“An expanded idea – it’s a journey defined by*

my heart. The music becomes what you want it to become. This project was first just for me, I had so many ideas but never really found which one to articulate. So this dot was meant to be a meditation for me to reflect and see where I wanted or could go musically.”

While music helps Mokhatla discover his inner soul connections to self and purpose, he also loves to read books, poetry, literature, and just keep learning. Business and economics are particular favourite subjects to explore. He admits his next four albums will be interconnected, as the Dots are in this current album, showing a continuum of his life’s journey. It’s almost like writing a personal musical memoir as events unfold, rather than waiting for old age to hit! His Dots, long thought about, still need final closure. But finality isn’t possible, he admits: *“My mind is so full of songs, it seems endless in what can be produced!”*

“My next project is ‘But What Does It Mean?’ This is Me asking so many questions. I’ll give my band the music score and see what they play, if it’s what I had in mind. Sometimes they get it, sometimes not. So that’s how I explore, ‘what does it mean’, If the band members say ‘The colour is blue’, then I investigate what that means, and then focus on the true meaning of what I’m composing and what it means.”

Mokhatla found some wisdom from his mentor, pianist Nduduzo Makhathini whom he came to know from his Durban University of KwaZulu Natal studies. *“Nduduzo kept suggesting that I try to define what I wanted to actually do or produce.”* It seems this rubbed off well.



Nduduzo Makhathini – credit Siphwe Mlambo

I asked: What about studying here in South Africa to interact more closely with those artists, like NM and pianist Sibusiso Mashiloane, who have explored themes of home...? *“Being in New York made me realize that what I’m doing here (in USA) I can do anywhere in the world.”* So he is ready to return home to South Africa as a place to pursue further studies, or even to move to Europe or Asia to discover some new things. *“I realized, though, that applying at overseas institutions can result in stipends to study, so that I can study and perform at the same time!”* That sounds realistic, but which is it? Home or abroad, I wondered?

The DOT Series

‘DOT 1’ is a pleasant sing-along ditty with a subtle samba swing, short and sweet. One wonders what comes next.

‘DOT 2’ (Close Your Eyes and Let the Music Flow) is just that: hard hitting drums with a piano pounding incessantly the same octave chord like a heartbeat. Yet we are asked in the title to adopt a meditative posture and be moved from this disabling pounding melody to the end in a resolved harmony, essentially to find order and peace.

'DOT 3' – While the listener's ear is a bit jarred, passing from a very soothing and melodic ballad of 'DOT 1' to discordant sounds from 'DOT 2', 'DOT 3' ('Ke ya go leboga') is a thanks, with contemplative overtones from Mokhatla's spoken word that suggest appreciation, sincerely and not forced. Here, he is offering some compositional surprises that define his own heart, and how his sonic and artistic journey has perhaps been entrapped here and there along the way. It's called 'life'. He also had his mother in mind.

'DOT 4' (In Exile) — one clearly hears Mokhatla's various drum rolls, emotional beats and rhythms. Cameron Campbell's very artful piano runs mixed among his high register chord repetitions, while conversing effectively with the heartbeats of the drum. They are on a journey, indeed. But what do the variety of drum styles mean? *"There was a point in my life – my 2nd or 3rd year in school in New York – I felt exiled. I felt not on the right path. A band member felt the same. This led to a need to form an ensemble, which I did, called 'In Exile' to help us escape these feelings of detachment. The band intentionally composed their songs aimed to offer a relief to those exiled feelings. Members had similar goals. And as we journeyed together, I found we had similar concerns about migration on a deeper level. Gradually, we felt that sense of relief as we composed. And with them, I found a home in our co-creation. Hence, the song 'In Exile'".*

'DOT 5' (Glory Be Thy Name) – This 'Dot 5' threw me abit. This song is clearly reminiscent of the late saxophonist, Zim Ngqawana's own Zimology sounds. It ends the album on a high, hopeful note, connecting the soulfully sonic dots which have laid some pathways for Mokhatla to continue his creative musical journey. There will be another version with strings, maybe.

I mentioned the song had spiritual dimensions; what did this mean? *"As a huge fan of Johannes Brahms and Zim Nxgwana, I'm used to their music. Particularly, Handel's Messiah is one of the most beautiful works which influenced this 'Dot 5' (Glory be Thy Name) song. I don't remember how I wrote that song, there will be another version with strings, so I'm deciding. Many of my friends like this song, which is a special song to me, and took inspiration from all these people. My lyrics are my prayer: 'we call His name', 'reaching for newer heights', 'Glory be Thy name'. It's me praising the High Power, and breaking for the stars in His Presence. So this song is completely different from the first four Dots".* Yes, taking a completely different path. Then, I realized upon listening to DOT 3 that it was an appreciative song and also resonated in DOT 5, so there's a thread moving through the DOTs.

His band members have now graduated and are now off on their own journeys globally. Mokhatla has shared the stage with renowned artists such as Nduduzo Makhathini, with whom he has recently toured in Japan, and with other American artists, like Jaleel Shaw, Dayna Stephens, Terri Lyne Carrington, and Ingrid Jensen, to name a few, as well as a host of local southern Africans, like Steve Dyer, Salim Washington, and others. His album was released in May 2025. The band consists of:

Kabelo Mokhatla- Drums, Voice, and Compositions

Conway Campbell- Bass

Cameron Campbell – Keyboards

Stephan Clement- Trumpet (track 3)

Simon Nyivana- Alto Saxophone (track 5)

Jean Strauss- Tenor Saxophone (track 5)

Kabelo Boy Mokhatla's Key to Authenticity: An Album Review (9 December 2023)

Thembisa-born South African drummer, Kabelo Boy Mokhatla, has developed a remarkable ambition: adopt simplicity as a way of life, and the gentle authenticities of the creative self will unfold and enable any positive human virtues to spill over onto others.



During his current studies on a Hugh Masekela Heritage Scholarship at New York's Manhattan school of Music, Mokhatla's tutelage under renowned American drummer, Kendrick Scott, has strengthened his musical and spiritual journey... to find that key to authenticity. Recorded in February 2023, and released in August, this album promotes honesty, depth, and ingenuity, as explained in the Liner Notes:

"...when individuals are honest and transparent about their thoughts, feelings, and actions, they can form deeper connections with others, build trust, stay true to their art and themselves, and develop more meaningful relationships. In essence, the album is inspired by the belief that authenticity is a key factor in fostering genuine human relationships."

Melody and lyrics highlight how the band, which contains vocals supporting a horn section, support the quest for authenticity. The album starts out on a prayerful tone, soft, and non-assuming. As the compositions build, a lyric in English talks about being true to ourselves, no more hiding, with authenticity as our guide. Styles change on a theme, as in the two-part 'Close your Eyes and Let the Music Flow', where rhythm and bass chords change with lower register sounds as though lamentations have entered the contemplative space. This leads into a disharmony, wailing, disjointedness – as each instrument takes its free reign to comment while being steadied by a lower register drone. Luke Bacani's vibraphone takes maintains the melancholy as horns harmoniously add texture in Bacani's own composition, 'What are we doing this for?'. This interesting arrangement is followed by Mokhatla's orchestral lace of horns with his drum sequences singing over the rhythms. But what seemed like resolve reverted back to cacophony – another instrumental free for all, admittedly somewhat jarring to the ear, intentionally, in the two-part 'Doubt'. Here, Mokhatla **IS** being honest; life's curve balls are felt. Gradually, a frantically fingering piano with unsettled drum rolls and moaning horns gives way to a calm in 'Simplicity' with piano and trumpet pairing with choral resolve, and with a pleasant Latin feel.



The band

The album suggests that Mokhatla may have been considerably challenged in his compositional dispositions to create his sense of authenticity, a feat in itself. But clearly, his sincerity shines through, as he writes: *"It is my sincere hope that this music will not only heal and inspire but also bring peace and emit a positivity..."*

In this day and age, we all need just that! Since the album's release, over 200 hard copies have been sold under two months, with airplay on multiple radio stations, principally in the United States, where it was recorded. That alone is an accomplishment.

The album can be streamed and bought on all major digital platforms.

Breaking Bread with peer duo: Keenan Ahrends and Sisonke Xonti (14 January 2020)

Mankind has always explored ways to bring people (e.g. strangers) together for amusements, discourse, and perhaps wallowing in mystery. From amphitheatres of the early Greeks, to jousts which hurt, to musical bands on a stage with glittering lights and fake smoke jets to wow the audience – all achieve one motive: to make people ‘feel good’ and escape from some horrors of everyday life!

On a more positive note, one could say that ‘breaking bread’ connotes a kinder, more compassionate way of interacting with one’s fellow sapiens, that feeding one another food for nourishing body and mind sustains integrity and societal cohesion.



That happens at a smallish house, at 373 Koeberg Road in Rugby, a suburb of Cape Town: The open plan kitchen becomes the social hub with its fridge packed full of beer and stove top covered with pots full of ‘traditional’ African dishes. That’s for the hungry, at R80 a plate, after the first set of the musical duo of Standard Bank Young Artists guitarist Keenan Ahrends and 2020 awardee saxophonist Sisonke Xonti, both graduates of the University of Cape Town’s School of Music, Jazz Studies.



Both young men played songs from their respective albums: Ahrends ***Narratives*** (2017) which is a delightful mix of home-grown Cape ghoema, grungy blues rock, free jazz, and bits of traditional South African music. Xonti’s ***Iyonde*** album (2018) presents layers of emotion and discourse about some of his life experiences. Both musicians are featured on each other’s album. https://youtu.be/Sq_G9_yDPTo

Back to breaking bread... It’s about having the experience. One must pass through this sociable kitchen in order to get to the listening venue, a long oblong space with cushions (no chairs) and one couch for the elders with unbendable knees. It’s a cozy, meditative space that leads to a patio where the ‘stage’ faces more cushion seating. No amplification, strictly acoustic sounds pleasantly passing over heads silently awed by this improvising duo. During the long break between sets, one engages in vibrant conversations, meeting new people, and

chatting with the cooks-owners of the venue, all animated with spirits flowing (both liquid and heartfelt) as the DJ plays his choice of vinyls that complement the human vibrations of the evening. I watched the men hosts take our drinks, while the ladies dished out generous plates of samp and beans topped with pulled, roasted brisket of meat, red cabbage and grilled zucchini. Thobile Ndenze, one of the managers of these Sunday evening events, explained how it all worked: food, live acoustic music, informalities, with an intergenerational buzz and relaxed, appreciative patrons – all produces a contagious vibe.

A graduate of the University of Capetown's College of Music, Ahrends has immersed himself in musical open markets for absorbing jazz expressions, particularly from Norway where he studied at its Academy of Music and collaborated with those artists, and from parts of South Africa through his peer friendships. Similarly, but on a different musical course, Xonti veered from his study of law to pursue jazz more seriously – *"musicians seemed to be happier people than lawyers"*, he was quoted as saying in one interview.



Xonti was named Standard Bank's Young Artist in Jazz 2020 and is seen collaborating with various bands both in Cape Town and in Johannesburg where he has spent a long residence. Influenced by John Coltrane and the late South African legend, Ezra Ngcukana, from his home area, Xonti mixes fast, clean improvisational runs with textures of emotions, from wailing to soft slower ballads, carefully adapting to his feel of the now.

<https://youtu.be/ksxhGwIZgG0>

I think I made several friends at Breaking Bread, a wonderful venue for intimate house concerts, and the music certainly nourished my weary soul on this Sunday night, making the week ahead sure to succeed.

(<https://musicallymine.wordpress.com/2025/03/17/bassist-nick-ford-believes-keenness-mentoring-and-mindfulness-grows-the-music/>)

Bassist Nick Ford believes keenness, mentoring, and mindfulness grows the music

(March 17, 2025)



Nick Ford-credit Smithphotographyonline

Some creatives have been blessed not only with innate talents but with opportunities to grow those talents from toddler stage. Growing up listening to pianist, composer, and producer father, Andrew Ford, Nick Ford's musical juices, particularly with the double bass, became more fluid and expressive. Anointed with improvisational balm during high school music tutelage at Rondebosch Boy's in Cape Town, Nick received an abundance of good training and mentoring from capable teachers. He is extremely grateful for this, as he ventured onto the live stage with various bands for several years.

A lot of self-learning and mentoring continued after High School, and now, at age 21, Nick Ford has produced his first album, ***Terra Solus***, to much acclaim. His repertoire includes working as a session member with several bands, and even developing his own band with music colleagues, mainly from familiar Cape Town circles.

I sat with Nick on Tuesday, 11 February 2025 before his rehearsal with the Artscape's acclaimed American musical, **Dear Evan Hansen**, which boasts an all-South African cast. I learned that Nick had studied the history of drama and plays in high school, along with jazz theory and performance, preferring to pursue his music through practice with live performances and osmotic mentoring rather than at a tertiary degree level.

CM: I'm always intrigued with the power of mentoring and being mentored.

NF: *I loved hanging out with my Dad at those Winchester Mansions Sunday jazz lunches. And I grew up watching so many people playing. My mentors were willing to show me things, and even play with them. Since I showed my keenness to learn, I could get mentorships quickly. Like with bassist Wesley Rustin who taught me the ways with his upright bass. As creatives, we're so passionate about what we do, we want to share and talk about things.*

CM: Who or what influences you?

NF: *I listen to all sorts of music, and can learn from any kind of music.....can learn storytelling from jazz or folk. Songwriter and guitarist Phoebe Bridgers from the USA has*

been one of my biggest influences.... She has a fine way of connecting with me, and I find her a number one artist. In the jazz realm, I'm a fan of the greats of the 1960s artists, like Wayne Shorter, Miles Davis, etc. That era of the 60s I have studied most.

CM: Yet, your music is very melodic, and not like those 60s improvisational break aways and phrenetic sounds of some jazz musicians.

NF: *Yes, my music doesn't sound like that at all, even though I've listened a lot to that music. I think my music is a unique amalgamation of various influences, especially the rock influence which you can hear on my song 'Continuum'; I love rock music; I listened to rock music all the time during high school! Like the 2000s stuff, the more pop-funky style....*

CM: That's interesting because you tend towards the blues in your album.

NF: *I'm very interested in the traditional harmonic modes. I feel they are useful storytelling devices, like in 'Awakening' which is composed around modes. A mode is a particular scale or collection of notes which I feel each has a unique sound to them.*

CM: Explain further.

NF: *In music there are 12 unique pitches which can be played within an octave. A scale is a subset of that. The order of notes in a scale is very important, as the definition of what the root, 3rd, or 5th is defines how harmony is built from that scale. By reordering the notes of the traditional major scale, we derive the 7 traditional modes (ionian, dorian, lydian, etc.). I feel that each of these modes evokes its own unique emotional reaction, and this heavily influences my approach to composition.*

For instance, in 'Awakening', the first section is in lydian mode, which I feel has an incredible lightness and magic to it. The final part of the song is in ionian mode which has a traditional balancing at the end.

CM: Well, you've done your theory there!

NF: *We had a lot of theory in High School and I watched tons of Youtube to learn more. I had this curious attitude towards understanding the theory without it necessarily being practical or knowing how it all worked.*

CM: I got an impression in the album of 'loneliness' or being alone. You mentioned nature. What led you to this thinking or space?

NF: *The music came about because that's what I was thinking and feeling at the moment. I think loneliness is not necessarily a fearful emotion or something wrong..... but rather can be a beautiful thing.*

*I did a lot of writing for **Terra Solus** last year when I was in JHB in May 2024. I was playing in the band for 'Mama Mia' for quite a long time, and working on the show was a real motivator and kept me moving forward. While I only had a few close connections there, there were definitely great people who made that experience enjoyable. But I didn't like Joburg and was feeling a bit overwhelmed with missing my familiar spaces.... with, I guess, feelings of loneliness.*

In writing my songs, I wanted to capture that along with this nature theme which I've always felt in my younger years. The sky, trees, lighting all felt a different way, so I became more aware of those feelings and wanted to lock into them. I feel that the time of day we are in can have a huge impact on our emotions at that particular moment. That's why songs like 'Awakening' pertains to the morning, or 'Daylight's Requiem' expresses the feeling about the

end of the day, or 'Waltz of Evening' about a feeling in the evening hours.... that kind of thing.

CM: I like particularly 'The Wanderer' You've been on the performance circuit for about three years now, playing with different groups, but life is not always a bed of roses? You're still young and searching... so what have been your challenges?

NF: *Well, I feel that keeping one's mental health focused on mindfulness is important...even positive therapy. I've spent the past 8 years of my life learning how to be mindful.*

CM: Has the music helped?

NF: *Oh, one hundred percent!!*

CM: Do you have other interests besides music that have helped with any healing?

NF: *I love education. I love teaching and sharing ideas, so I'd love to combine that with music some day. I'd like to do more than teach. I'd like to influence education to focus on not so much how to 'teach' an individual, but how those individuals can learn through different types of 'teaching'... I want to know how to empower others to learn. This is a long term goal, it's an interest.*

I think I might have a way for people to approach music in a different way. I'd like see one day if my method is actually good, and if my approach to music education is really worth while.

21-year old Nick Ford has a definite future as he continues to explore, be enlightened, and offer his own skills to push South African 'jazz' genre ahead in exciting and creative ways.