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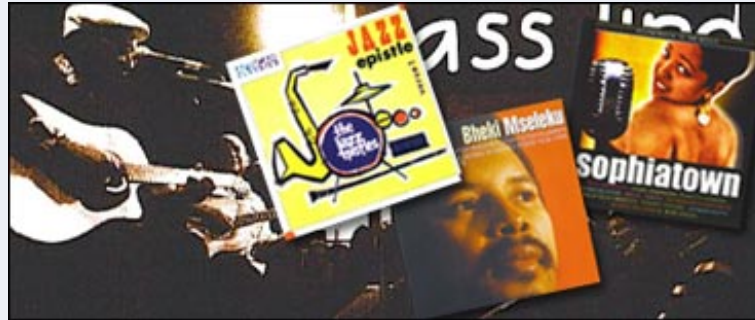
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Posted on June 8, 2005



My Journey to South Africa (4/15 - 4/27/05)

On reflection, my visit to South Africa was a whirlwind. In short, I traveled from Durban to Capetown and Johannesburg in twelve days (not including travel time). My trip was sponsored by the National Physician's Ambassador Program, who organized a demanding and enlightening itinerary. Despite my busy schedule I was determined to experience jazz in a live setting, whenever and wherever possible.

As things developed, Capetown turned out to be THE place. There I visited the CD Warehouse, where I spent the better part of an afternoon listening to a wide range of South African music. Coincidentally, in the Jazz Department I was fortunate enough to meet Eric Alan, the host of Jazz Rendezvous on FMR 101.3, Capetown's Arts & Cultural Station. In short order, Eric brought me up to speed on the Capetown jazz scene. Moreover, he was kind enough to recommend a number of excellent recordings by local jazz artists.

All things considered, my attempts to experience jazz in a live setting yielded mixed but pleasant results. At "Marimba", a popular restaurant and performance space, I enjoyed the sweet sounds of Robert Bongani and his trio. At Mannenberg's, perhaps Capetown's most popular jazz venue, I caught a local Soul/Jazz group called "Just Us." Unfortunately, when I arrived in Johannesburg, I learned that the world-famous jazz club, Kippies, was forced to close its doors due to structural damage.

In spite of that, I departed South Africa with a variety of excellent recordings. Some of which I present to you here as a cross-section of South African jazz, past and present.

1. Jazz Epistle - Verse One (Gallo Music Productions - 1960) - No collection of South African jazz would be complete without this classic recording. Historically speaking, the Jazz Epistles were the first black South African jazz group to make a modern jazz recording (think Bebop with an African tinge). Verse One was recorded during the 1950's, a time when great

players came together in the spirit of freedom and hope. The group consisted of would be superstars, such as Hugh Masekela (trumpet), Dollar Brand, who would later change his name to Abdullah Ibrahim (piano), Kippie Moeketsi (alto saxophone), Jonas Gwanga (trombone) and Johnny Gertze (bass).

Despite the fact that the Jazz Epistles duration was short-lived, they were highly influential. Hugh Masekela refers to Verse One as his favorite recording. Jazz Epistle, Verse One is required listening for anyone who is interested in the roots of South African jazz.

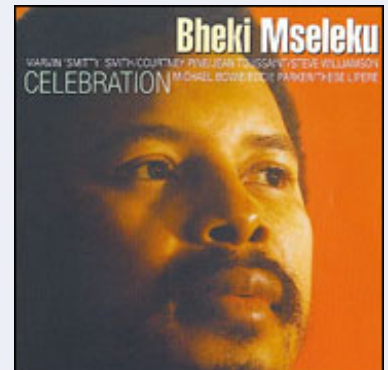
2. Bheki Mseleku - Celebration (World Circuit/Sheer – 1991) - Multi talented Bheki Mseleku is one of the supremely talented musicians who left South Africa during the 1970's to escape the oppression of the Apartheid government. Recorded in London, Celebration marks his debut. The recording gained Mseleku a well-deserved nomination for the British Mercury Music Prize and Album of the Year. Celebration features artists such as: Courtney Pine, Steve Williamson, Eddie Parker, Jean Thiocyanate, Michael Bowie and Marvin "Smithy" Smith). Celebration is a fine debut by pianist, vocalist, saxophonist, guitarist, composer and arranger, Bheki Mseleku.

3. Sophiatown (Soundtrack, Little Bird Productions in Association with Ochre Media - 2002) The Sophiatown soundtrack is the companion to the DVD of the same name. In a nutshell, the film takes a nostalgic look at the history of Sophiatown (a suburb of Johannesburg), where artists and intellectuals lived and performed together in harmony. In what can only be described as an act of ideological spite, the Apartheid government bulldozed Sophiatown in order to make way for an all-white community called "Triomfi" (Triumph). Consequently, the residents of Sophiatown were forced to relocate to a suburb called the Meadowlands.

Director Pascal Lamsch brilliantly captures the spirit of Sophiatown by reuniting some of the artists who resided and performed there. The all-star cast includes a bevy of South African artists: Banzi Bangani, Jonas Gwanga, Abdullah Ibrahim, the Inkspots, Thandi Klassen, Abigail Kubeka, Jack Lerole, Lammy Mahoso, Tete Mbambisa, Stamp Manana,



1. **DOLLAR'S MOODS**
2. **BLUES FOR HUGHIE**
3. **UKU-JONGA PHAMBILI (MEANING "LOOK FORWARD")**
4. **I REMEMBER BILLY**
5. **VARY-OO-VUM**
6. **CAROL'S DRIVE**
7. **GAFSA**
8. **SCULLERY DEPARTMENT**



1. **CELEBRATION**
2. **ONE FOR ALL - ALL FOR ONE**
3. **ANGOLA**
4. **BLUES FOR AFRIKA**
5. **THE AGE OF INNER KNOWING**
6. **THE MESSENGER**
7. **JOY**
8. **SUPREME LOVE**
9. **CYCLE**
10. **CLOSER TO THE SOURCE**

The Manhattan Brothers, Hugh Masekela, Dorothy Masuka, Pat Matshikiza, Makhaya Ntshoko, Barney Rachabane and Dorothy Rathebe.

4. Jazz at the Bassline, Volume 2 (Sheer Sound - 2000) - Jazz at the Bassline documents the historic Bassline, a venue that opened its doors in 1994 and closed in 2003. The Bassline was an inter-racially mixed jazz venue where "People mixed as comfortably as the music." In addition, the Bassline's relationship with Embassies and sponsors resulted in many international acts passing through its doors. Over the years the Bassline provided the platform for the rise of many up-and-coming artists, including: pianist Moses Molelekwa, guitarist Vusi Mahlasela, Louis Mhlanga, Madala Kunene and Baba Serakoeng, pianist Andile Yenana, vocalist Ringo Madlingozi, saxophonist Zim Njgawana and many others. Jazz at the Bassline - Volume 2 makes for an excellent introduction to South African jazz and beyond.

5. Andile Yenana - We Used to Dance (Sheer Sound - 2001) - We Used to Dance marks pianist Andile Yenana's debut as a leader. As a young man, Yenana's soul was nurtured by all forms of black music, including: Motown, the Philadelphia Sound, South African jazz, the Blues and Gospel. After completing his studies at the Natal University Andile moved to Johannesburg, where he began collaborating with some of the more seasoned musicians in the South African music scene. Yenana's quest to find his own voice and develop a chemistry resulted in the landmark recording, Voice:

A Quintet Legacy. We Used to Dance is an impressive debut by Andile Yenana, a gifted pianist and composer. Featuring: Feya Faku (flugelhorn), Sydney Mnisi (saxophone), Kevin Gibson (drums), Marabo Morojele (drums) and Herbie Tsaaeli (bass).

6. Simphiwe Dana - Zandisile (Gallo -2004) - Vocalist Simphiwe Dana recently received the award for the Best Jazz Vocal Album of the Year at the South African Music Awards. In a word, she is the talk of the South African jazz, soul and African music worlds. Dana's voice is nothing short of astounding. Moreover, she is a gifted composer and lyricist. Musically speaking, Zandisile combines jazz, soul and African music. Zandisile is a mesmerizing debut by Simphiwe Dana, certainly a name to watch.

Coincidentally, I departed for home on the Freedom Day (4/27), a day set aside to celebrate the 11th anniversary of the fall of Apartheid. It was a privilege for me to participate in this historical occasion. I send my best wishes to all of my new friends in South Africa and would like to extend my appreciation and congratulations to the National Physician's Ambassador Program for a job well done.



1. **YINI MADOVA**
2. **NDINGUTOVA**
3. **ARCHIVE - CAN THEMBA**
4. **VOICE - DOLLY RATEBE**
5. **NTYILO NTYILO**
6. **VOICE - DON MATTERA**
7. **MEADOWLANDS**
8. **VOICE - HUGH MASEKELA**
9. **SCULLERY DEPARTMENT**
10. **NDENZENI NA**
11. **HUGH MASEKELA & JOE MOGOTSI**
12. **KARTBOY & DON MATTERA**
13. **MBUBE**
14. **JIKELE EMAWENI**
15. **VOICE - NELSON MANDELA**
16. **SOPHIATOWN**



Tomas Peña
Co-Editor

Recommended reading:

Soweto Blues - Jazz, Popular Music and Politics in South Africa by Gwen Ansell
(Continuum Books)

Recommended DVD:

Sophiatown (Currently unavailable in the U.S.)

Artists Information:

1. Bheki Mseleku and Andile Yenana: Sheer Sounds: <http://www.sheer.co.za/>
2. Simphiwe Dana: Gallo Music Group: <http://www.gallo.co.za/>

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