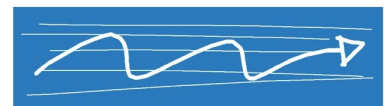


# GEOGRAPHIES OF SOUND

New Music South Africa

Bulletin of the South African Section of the  
International Society for Contemporary Music

Issue 16/2017



International Society for Contemporary Music  
Société Internationale pour la Musique Contemporaine  
Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Musik

**New Music SA Board (as of 2017)** - Douglas Scott - Malcolm Dedman - Lukas Ligeti - Aidan Erasmus

**Contact Information**

*Email:* [information@newmusicsa.org.za](mailto:information@newmusicsa.org.za)

*Website:* [www.newmusicsa.org.za](http://www.newmusicsa.org.za)

**Bulletin Editorial Board**

Aidan Erasmus

Coila-Leah Enderstien

© NewMusicSA 2016 ISSN No. 1684-0399 Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Editors or NewMusicSA

# CONTENTS

- 4      **EDITORIAL**  
Aidan Erasmus
- 5      **NEWS**  
Coila-Leah Enderstein
- 11     **INTERVIEWS**  
*In Conversation with Meryl Van Noie*  
Coila-Leah Enderstein
- 23     **COMPOSITIONS**  
*Sigwaca Lesihle*  
Cara Stacey
- 26     **ESSAYS**  
*Disciplining Geographies and the Black Avantgarde*  
Asher Gamedze
- Stained Spaces: An Ethnographic Snapshot of the  
Stellenbosch University Performance of Ingoma Yomzabalazo*  
Gavin Robert Walker

# EDITORIAL

South Africa has a tenuous yet dynamic relationship with what we might term geographies that sound. In fact, one can argue that geography is especially resonant in the locales where our politics are grounded, in the ideologies that we might ascribe to, and even in the very disciplinary bounds within which we are situated. The linkages between the geographic and the phonographic presents itself more than just its referent to writing, and it is at the intersection between the two that speaks bounds about the ways in which we locate our sounding out and how our sounding out is located.

This year's issue of the New Music SA bulletin takes up the question of what it would mean to think a geography of sound/a sonic geography/a geographic sonicity. Within this question, we tackle multiple phrasings of this question, whether it be soundscapes and the critique thereof, the dialectics of space and place, aural responses to and within geopolitics and how contemporary music making is in itself a certain geographic formation. From Asher Gamedze's essay on the networks of jazz and race in Cape Town, to Cara Stacey's composition, to Gavin Walker's reflections on the institutionalisation of space and place, this issue offers a different route into and out of music-making in our contemporary moment.

Aside from its thematic, this issue also documents the work of New Music SA over the past year. The South African section of the International Society for Contemporary Music has continued its work in the promotion and support of contemporary music in South Africa.

*Aidan Erasmus*

# NEWS

## **New Website**

NMSA launched a new website earlier this year. All subscribers are encouraged to visit the new site and make suggestions as to what they would like to add, or have changed. NMSA members are asked to consider whether they would like a page dedicated to them on the site.

## **Re Mixing Music**

The works of three young South African composers, Lungiswa Plaatjies, Kingsley Buitendag and Prince Bulu were premiered on 28 January as part of the Johannesburg International Mozart Festival. The composers received guidance from Composer-in-Residence Neo Muyanga on the mixing and re-working of Western Art Music and African Art Music. The works were performed by members of the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra and Dizu Plaatjies, after which Neo Muyanga and Dizu Plaatjies led a discussion regarding the creative process.

## **Madness: Songs of Hope and Despair**

Conceived by psychiatrist Dr Sean Baumann, 'Madness: Songs of Hope and Despair' was a collaboration between composers Galina Juritz and Dizu Plaatjies, illustrator Fiona Moodie and video artist Koeka Stander that took form in an 80 minute multimedia cantata with a live ensemble of nine opera singers and seven musicians conducted by Chad Hendricks. The combination of music, sound design, song and imagery attempted to portray the complexities and wonder of mental illness and psychotic experiences.

Following successful performances at the World Psychiatry International Congress and a single performance at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town at the end of 2016, the production ran from 9 - 19 February 2017 at the Baxter. The work was also presented as part of the online MOOC course "Medicine and the Arts: Humanising Healthcare", and was screened by the Institute for Creative Arts as part of the 2017 Medical Humanities lecture series in September.

## **Ingoma Yomzabalazo—'Songs of Struggle'<sup>1</sup>**

Black Thought Symposium and music partners Iphupho l'ka Biko ('Dreams of Biko'), student collectives from the University of Witwatersrand (WITS), presented a series of events in the Western Cape from 15 - 17 February 2017 under the title Ingoma Yomzabalazo—'Songs of Struggle.'

---

<sup>1</sup> (Adapted from Marietjie Pauw's report for Africa Open)

Performances of struggle songs were used both as interventions and as an academic caucus.

Performances and discussions took place at The Barn (UWC), the Fisser Hall at Stellenbosch University (see essay), the Pan African Space Station (PASS) at the Chimurenga offices in Cape Town, and Rands in Khayelitsha. Africa Open – Institute for Music, Research and Innovation sponsored the series with financial and logistical support due to prior contact with the groups.

### **PurPur Festival**

Michael Blake and Pierre-Henri Wicomb's PurPur Festival took place on 3 March at YoungBlood Gallery, Cape Town, collaborating for the first time with the Sterkfontein Composer's Meeting, where Swedish duo Axelsson-Nilsson were this year's performers in residence.

Works composed and developed at the meeting by Clare Loveday, Lloyd Prince, Samora Ntsebeza, Albert Feder, Miles Warrington and Lise Morrison (South Africa), and Charles Langwa and Milton Wabyona (Uganda), along with pieces from the 2015 meeting, were presented by the duo. Swiss duo Interzones (Franziska Baumann and Christoph Baumann) also performed works of their own and by Pierre-Henri Wicomb. Miles Warrington, Theo Herbst and Meryl van Nooie (the UCT Tech Ensemble) also presented works including the world premiere of Herbst's 'Mendi, wandmusiek.' Pianist Coila-Leah Enderstein gave the South African premieres of Christina Viola Oorebeek's 'Afterwalk', a work she commissioned from Pierre-Henri Wicomb, and the concert premiere of Michael Blake's four-hand-piano set 'From the Stoep' (2012).

### **Blind Mass Orchestra**

William Kentridge's Centre for the Less Good Idea launched in March 2017 with a season of events presenting collaborative work created by more than 60 Johannesburg-based multi-disciplinary practitioners. Founded in December 2016, the Centre aims to nurture local artists by creating and supporting experimental, collaborative and cross-disciplinary projects.

Composer and artist João Renato Orecchia Zúñiga was one of the collaborating artists of Season 1. The composer worked with a 10 piece orchestra, experimenting with process scores and animated scores. The ensemble comprised Thandi Ntuli (piano), Tlale Makhene (percussion, voice), Ann Masina (voice), Tsepo Poeo (cello), Waldo Alexander (electric violin), Mpumelelo Mcata (electric guitar), Tshepang Ramoba (electronic drums), Dan Selsick (trombone, EWI electronic wind instrument), Janus

Fouché (theremin, artificial intelligence programming) and João Renato Orecchia Zúñiga (Chole Kulcha Harp, analogue synthesizer, electronics).

### **Neo Muyanga at the National Arts Festival**

As the Featured Artist at this year's National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, composer Neo Muyanga presented Solid(T)Ary Work, a solo presentation that contemplates modes of resistance through a survey of the tradition of protest song in the global south. The Neo Muyanga Trio (Andre Swartz, Peter Ndladla and Msaki) also presented a collection of songs and music.

### **South African electronic music in Boston**

The Northeastern University Department of Music presented electronic and multi-media music by South African composers Theo Herbst, Neo Muyanga, Meryl van Noie, Njabulo Phungula, Cara Stacey, Miles Warrington, Pierre-Henri Wicomb, Jurgen Bräuninger, Ulrich Süsse and Dimitri Voudouris at the Fenway Centre in Boston, United States, on 21 October. The event was curated by Professor Dennis H. Miller and featured Professor Hubert Ho on piano.

### **Klipdas launch**

On 25 October, YoungBlood Gallery hosted the launch of Klipdas Studio and Productions, a company aimed at promoting contemporary art music through collaboration across all arts in South Africa. The event featured new electroacoustic works by South African composers Matthijs van Dijk, Wayne C. Simpson and Lise Morrison, which were performed by Wayne C. Simpson, Carla Ferreira, Roxane Steffen and Thomas Ferreira.

### **Betwixt series**

Cara Stacey and Nicola du Toit's series 'Betwixt' was launched in February 2017 as a platform for new, experimental music performance. There have already been four Betwixt events this year, taking place across venues in Cape Town and featuring artists such as The ShhArt Ensemble, Camilo Ángeles (Argentina), Jill Richards, Rheza Khota, Luca Forcucci (Switzerland/Italy), Keenan Ahrends and Louise Westerhout, Mcimbi Stars, Sibusiso Nkambule (Swaziland) and the Sahel Trio. Follow 'Betwixt' on Facebook or Instagram if you would like to stay informed about forthcoming events.

### **Other premières**

On Friday 30 June, the West Coast Youth Orchestra, director Carina Brown, premiered Malcolm Dedman's Our Rainbow Nation in the Curro Langebaan

Independant School, Langebaan, Western Cape, prior to a European tour in July. The piece was written for them as a request for a piece that includes African Marimbas and Kalimbas as solo parts.

On 22 August, the Kayser String Quartet and pianist David Smith gave the première performance of David Kosviner's Durban Essence. This work, in one movement and for piano quintet, was commissioned by SAMRO.

On 7 September the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra premiered Hendrik Hofmeyr's Symphony 11 - The Elements, in celebration of the composer's 60th birthday, as part of their Spring Season at the Cape Town City Hall.

Clare Loveday's 'Heatwave for clarinet and piano' and 'van jou water drink' for marimba were premiered by Morne van Heerden (clarinet) and Mareli Stolp (piano), and Magda de Vries (marimba), at the Conservatory Hall in Potchefstroom in September. The composer's Saxophone Octet 3 was premiered at the Crossing Paths concert on 25 October 2017 at the Birmingham Conservatoire Recital Hall, Birmingham, UK, which also included performances of her works Red Herring for baritone saxophone and Untitled for saxophone quartet.

## **ISEA 2018**

The International Society for Electronic Arts 2018 conference will be held in Durban, South Africa from 23 - 30 June 2018. The ISEA2018 theme of 'Intersections' positions creative technological innovation as an activist engagement into public space and public practice. Submissions for various kinds of presentations will be accepted until 1 December 2017. Further information can be found on the website: <http://www.isea-web.org/symposia/current-isea-symposia/>.

## **Album releases**

*Maxim Starke - 'OFFWORLD' (February)*

OFFWORLD is made up of a collection of audio samples and experimental recordings gathered over the last 15 years, plus some new elements added to the mix. Digitally sculpted into a conglomerate soundscape, it includes instrumental contributions by vocalist/guitarist Matthew Rice, drummer Byron R. Howell and features cover artwork ('Recurring Dream') painted by Helmut Starcke.

*Lieva Starker - 'Weerspieëlings' (April)*

The album consists of five South African works for solo violin, including specially commissioned works by Pierre-Henri Wicomb and Lise Morrison. The album also features a work by Hendrik Hofmeyr that was composed for

the artist ten years ago, alongside works by Clare Loveday and Kevin Volans.

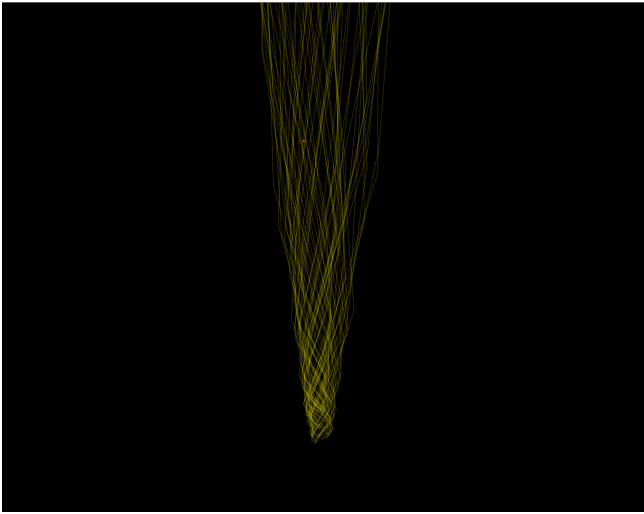
*Renée Reznak - 'From my beloved country' (July)*

The South African born, London based pianist's new album features works by Neo Muyanga, Kevin Volans, Michael Blake, Rob Fokkens, Hendrik Hofmeyr, Peter Klatzow, David Earl and David Kosviner. Some of the works were commissioned by Reznak, including 'Hade Tata' (Neo Muyanga, 2013), composed in honour of Nelson Mandela.

# INTERVIEW

# IN CONVERSATION WITH MERYL VAN NOIE

*Coila-Leah Enderstein*



Meryl van Noie is an educator, technologist and composer. She studied jazz composition at the University of Cape Town in the late '90s, her first experiments in electronic music taking place in a small room at the South African College of Music (SACM) with a motley collection of analog gear belonging to the school.

After graduating, she became acquainted

with more technology through her job as education liaison for music instrument distributor, Paul Bothner Music, introducing tech-anxious teachers to equipment that could revolutionise music education. Meryl went on to expose over 20,000 children to music technology through her work over twelve years at the Sound House, an organisation started by The Baxter Theatre Centre, with British sound engineer Karin Johnstone as the first Project Manager. It was housed and supported for a number of years by the Baxter Theatre Centre, and later funded by Paul Bothner Music, the National Lottery Foundation, the SAMRO Foundation, as well as the Cape Town Science Centre, amongst others. The project was nominated for a BASA award twice.

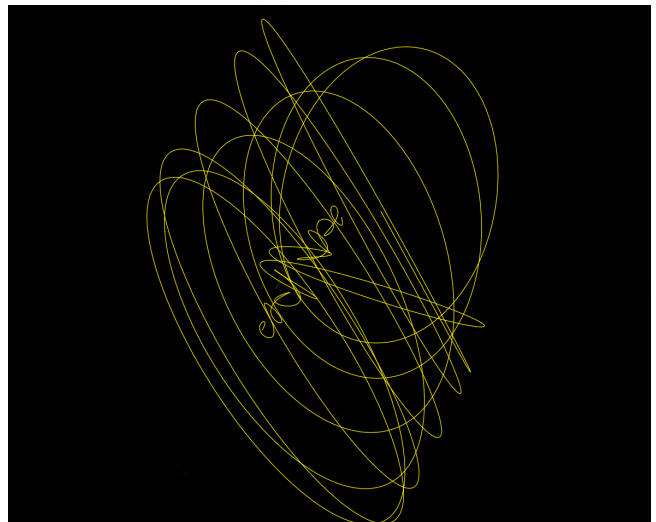
Meryl now forms an integral part of the SACM Music Technology department, spearheaded by Theo Herbst in 2013. Meryl has been composing electroacoustic music for a number of years and was one of the commissioned composers for the 2016 New Music SA Unyazi Festival of Electronic Music. She wrote and performed the piece GW150914 at Unyazi and subsequently at the PurPur Festival of Transgressive Arts in 2017. On 12 June 2017, I asked Meryl about this piece, what led her to it, and what lies ahead. Here are some extracts I've chosen from our conversation.

\*\*\*

**CE:** Your journey with electronic music and technology seems to have been coupled with explorations into education all along.

**MvN:** It has. I know you were asking me about my own writing as well, but it actually started with education first, and even when I was quite young I always knew that I wanted to give back and help other people, it was always important to me. Learning and then passing that onto someone else, I think that's just part of who I am, and I'll probably always do it that way. Because obviously while you're teaching, you're learning and you're researching, also for yourself, and then you can explore other things.

[...] After that [SoundHouse] I ended up here at UCT, which I suppose was a natural progression in some way. For my own work it's been the same sort of journey in a sense. I started out composing jazz and then I did a number of film composing jobs. I used to write jingles, dabbled in song writing and spent a lot of time learning how to write lyrics. At some



point I felt that wasn't rewarding for me because in the industry [...] you're always writing to someone else's brief, and you're always going to have to adapt your creativity to what the client wants and not necessarily what you think is best. That's when I started writing what I wanted, some more experimental stuff, which pleased me and not necessarily other people.

**CE:** Without a commercial aim in mind?

**MvN:** Exactly. Without an angle or anything like that. So it was an evolution: I kind of went through all these phases [...]. I see lots of young people here now who are set on

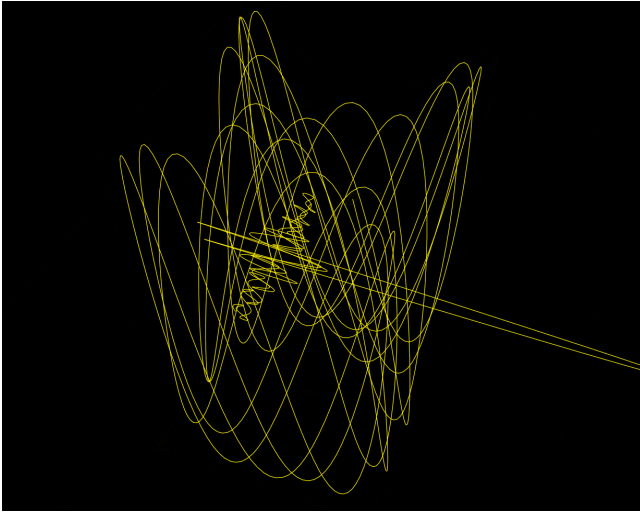
the film and jingle industry. That's their choice and they need to go through it. And maybe some of them will also go through the same journey I did, or maybe they won't, I don't know. That's just how life works I suppose.

**CE:** Speaking of your first electroacoustic composition, what are your thoughts thinking back on it now? Do you remember it?

**MvN:** I think I was just flailing in the dark, quite honestly. I was trying to do something interesting, something different. The first one I did was a poem by Pablo Neruda. I love his poetry, so I thought that it could be really nice to record these words, speak them, and then see if I could add some music to it, which I did. Then, as I worked I realised [...] I could do even more interesting things - maybe chop up the words and displace them, do the same with the music. So it evolved. I still have it somewhere. It's not terribly good, but for me that was the first exciting thing. I thought, "There's so much more, so much possibility," and then I kept doing my own little studies, trying out new tools, learning new techniques and then finding an idea that I thought was interesting and wondering, "Can I apply these new techniques that I've learned to it?" I still like to do that.

**CE:** For me that is probably what's most appealing about electroacoustic music. There are so many possibilities and you continue to add to those possibilities as the technology develops and as your knowledge of it and your skills develop. And it's also daunting. Let's talk a little bit about your approach nowadays. How do you decide what kind of sounds you want to use and, in a practical sense, how do you go about collecting those sounds?

**MvN:** The way I work now is, usually some crazy idea will pop into my head and I'll think, "That's a great idea, so now I have to just figure out how to make that work." And I like that challenge. [...]. I'm always recording, so I might walk around with a recorder and record random sounds, either short ones or longer ones, and listen to them later, cut them up, use them. I try to file them. At the moment I'm not very organised, but I



started out having a good categorisation of sounds [...].

I think the one event that probably taught me a lot was a workshop called Crossings<sup>2</sup> [...]. James Webb was the mentor for the composers, so it was Pierre-Henri Wicomb, Ross Dorkin, and myself [...]. I thought his conceptual approach was

really interesting and it opened a door in my mind as to how to think through processes. It [...] doesn't necessarily matter if you approach it from a very [...] rigid or structured musical way. Sometimes it's actually nice to come from a completely different perspective and then apply your musical techniques and knowledge to what you want to achieve.

[...] There were composers, lighting designers and choreographers and we were all working on pieces at the same time [...] I love collaborating with people because it does change everything. The first piece I did with Mziyanda Mancam, the choreographer, was great because we clicked immediately. [...]

I was pushed very hard to write fast, which I'd never really done before... some interesting things happened because none of us had too much time to carefully ponder everything [...]. During this period I learned a new process, which I still like to use now: compose a framework, let's say it's four, or five minutes... then add the detail later on, almost like painting or sculpting: start off with a shape or with some sort of loose structure and add the detail as you go. Before that, I'd been writing the opposite way: I would write small sections and know that this section is finished, then move on to the next section, and so on.

**CE:** And then subsequently link them together somehow?

---

<sup>2</sup><http://www.gipca.uct.ac.za/project/international-dance-performance-crossings-3/>

**MvN:** Yes.

**CE:** It's fascinating to me how in this context different artists delineate those boundaries, because of how much possibility there is: all the things you could do to each sound, the way you could link them, not to mention how you could decide how they come out in the space, and all those things, which, I guess, also make it quite an appealing form.

**MvN:** The possibilities really are endless. It's a series of decisions. I try not to overthink it initially, and just follow the initial idea [...]. Eventually it writes itself, as far as I'm concerned. Sometimes it's conscious, and sometimes it's an accident. I quite like that.

**CE:** Let's talk a little bit about GW150914, which is the piece you performed at the Unyazi Festival last year and also at PurPur Festival at the beginning of this year. How did you come across this idea and is it the kind of material that appeals to you usually?

**MvN:** That one was a self-set challenge. And at one point I was going to give up on it [...]. The Unyazi festival, four or five female composers were commissioned to do works [...]. The theme of the festival was Infrastructure [...] so I was thinking that infrastructure is very suited to electroacoustic music because immediately you think of machinery, structures, electrical networks, circuit boards...

I've always been interested in science, the universe, space, how things work, how interconnected people are, and the planet is. As much as we all like to sit in our little rooms and silos, we're all connected and we all need to work together. The universe for me is an extremely exciting subject because research and science are still evolving and we're discovering more and more of it and things I was taught at school are now proven to be completely untrue [...]. So I decided that I was going to use that as my infrastructure concept, and I looked around for what I could use as musical material [...].

I came across the Ligo Centre website<sup>3</sup>, which was an incredible source because when I was working on this piece during early 2016 this event had just occurred a few months earlier. Scientists had captured the first gravitational wave sounds for analysis, ever, at this centre [...]. I read through the website and then more scientific papers about gravitational waves. I thought, "This is exactly the concept I was looking for and it plays right into the theme of 'infrastructure' because it is so far-fetched, yet it is so close to what we are and what we're trying to discover." These gravitational waves collided, billions of light years away, so in a weird sense it's like listening back into time [...].<sup>4</sup>

As I was doing more research, I found that with gravitational waves, in order to analyse the data, scientists had to plot them into the frequency spectrum, which meant they became audible. I got hold of the files - they're freely downloadable on the website. I think there were six files in total and they're just wind sounds effectively, but the interesting thing is that there is a chirp, which is like a little musical sound... they call it a blip or a chirp: as the collision happens, there's this little 'click', which is beautiful.

This seemed perfect, because then I knew what I could do. I knew I could stretch them, rescale the frequencies, transpose them - with digital software that's completely possible. I could repeat them, layer them and process them however I liked, and re-organise them so that they were much more musical. So that's the task I set myself [...] and it was quite a difficult project, because I had six short little sounds and I needed to create a ten minute work. But it was very rewarding in the end. I'm very glad that I saw it through, even though I did want to give up many times!

**CE:** I'm sure. Did you only use those sounds?

---

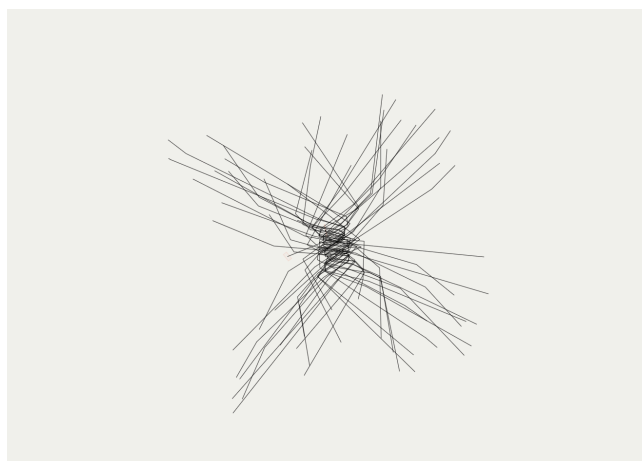
<sup>3</sup> <https://losc.ligo.org/events/GW150914/>

<sup>4</sup> "On September 14, 2015, the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO) received the first confirmed gravitational wave signals. Now known as GW150914 (named after the date on which the signals were received), the event represents the coalescence of two black holes that were previously in mutual orbit." (van Noie, M. 2016. 2017 Unyazi Festival of Electronic Music Programme)

**MvN:** Only those sounds, nothing else, because that was [...] just the constraint I set myself. I could have used other sounds I suppose, but I thought the piece would lose its integrity if I did, so I didn't want to do that. Some of them are stretched very long, some of them are almost copied in a sense, but then re-organised, into almost variations, staggered, and then layered and processed in various ways.

I wanted to create the essence of the gravitational waves themselves, which would have been long and continuous and not short and disjointed. So, that was the great difficulty of that piece, to try [...] and send the material through a funnel, and then hone it to sound like a moving, musical piece. That took a little bit of work, but it got there in the end. It's still not where I would like it to be, I still work on it. I'd like to write some more variations, or maybe even use other sounds, I'm not quite sure. I learned a lot during that piece because it forced me to learn new techniques that I hadn't used before.

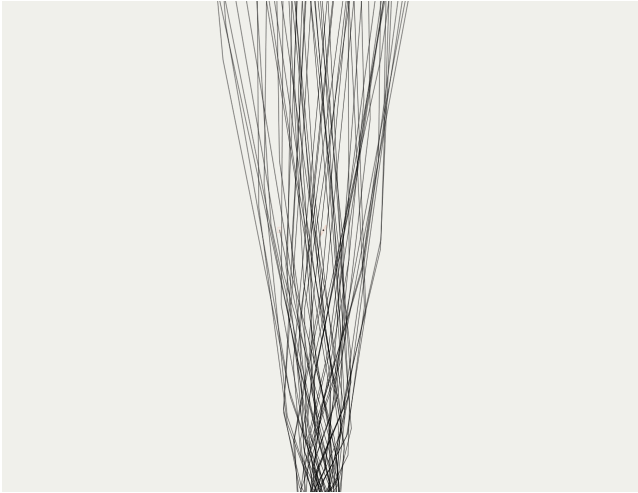
**CE:** [...] Not only did you set yourself this challenge, there was also another element to the performance of piece and that was the visualisation that you controlled in real time using software called 'lannix'.<sup>5</sup> Can you tell me a little bit about that?



**MvN:** I knew that I wanted to add the visual aspect [...] because if we could hear the gravitational waves as well as see them, it would be incredible. That didn't quite work out the way I planned it to. [...] The audio is something that I sculpted over a period of time, so it was then preset. I used lannix to improvise the visuals. I used two mathematical curve shapes and manipulated the parameters to have the two 'gravitational waves' interact with each other along with the music.

---

<sup>5</sup> The images interspersed in the text of this interview are of Meryl Van Noie's score. The original performance was yellow on black, which appear earlier in the text.



Initially, my big concept was to have the two interlinked and actually have the frequency, volume and other processing changes affect the visuals, but I ran out of time before the festival to actually get that to work efficiently. It was starting to get there, but it wasn't working correctly, and I had to be realistic. So I decided to

improvise the visuals. I think it at least gave the audience a sense of what I was trying to do. But that's something I'm still working on as well. As a musician [...] to enter the world of visuals, animation and computer programming is quite a learning curve. I'm not giving up and will keep working on it.

[...] What I'm really interested in is to be able to interlink sound and visuals and for the moment the tool I prefer is Max MSP/Jitter. I'm working my way through that so that I can do more exciting projects.

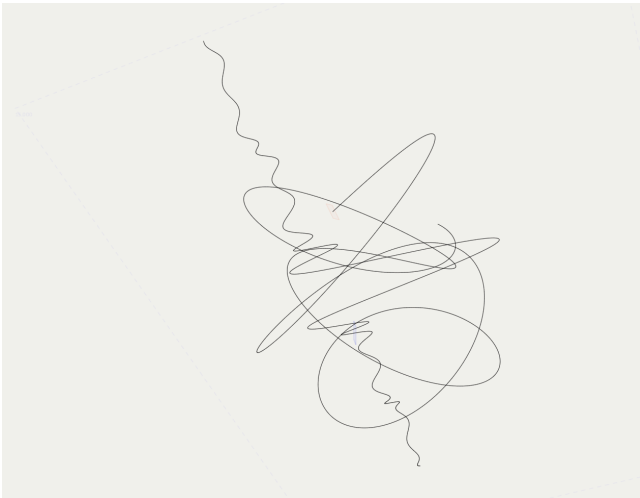


**CE:** I really hope that we'll be able to see that some time soon. You mentioned that works were mentioned for women

composers for Unyazi Festival. So obviously that's in an attempt to counteract the lack of representation in this sphere, not to mention generally the lack of platforms for anyone who's writing this kind of music in the context of coming out of art music [...].

**MvN:** [...] It is difficult, there aren't many opportunities, so I just keep writing for myself as much as I can, so that I can get better. I've been very lucky, over the last few years I've

had an opportunity to perform something probably about once a year, one new piece. So that's been good. It would be nice to be able to do more.



**CE:** What are you working on the moment sound-wise and are there [...] any objectives you have for the near future?

**MvN:** [...] At the moment it's probably the science connection, because music is such an abstract thing and people don't necessarily think of it as important. [...] I really want to try and write music that links

it to the hard sciences in some way, or to be able to make some sort of musical commentary on science.

There are a couple of things that I'm thinking about and I can't really tell you because I don't know if I'm going to be able to make any of them work in the end! [...]

About a year ago, I came across a piece - it was a university group of people [...] a programmer, a composer, scientist and a software engineer [...]. They had recorded and were tracking the radioactive data around Chernobyl and had a live feed of it. And then, one of the technicians and the musician imported the data into music software, and used the signals to generate music.

I find that kind of thing quite interesting, as a means to generate material. I'm always looking for different ways of generating material. Yes, you can always go out and record sounds, but there are also other ways and means to find material, like the gravitational waves... If you think in terms of computer technology, everything is built on ones and zeros. All you really need is an interpreter between the one field and the other, and suddenly there's a new palette to work with. That's what I'm aiming at.

[...] I think this is happening elsewhere in the world, people are interacting and they are collaborating. Here it's still very lonely, and you're kind of on your own. You're lucky if you find someone you can work well with. Even then, it might not be the right kind of help. [...] It's difficult to find a like-minded engineer, scientist, musician and an audiovisual specialist, for instance, to be able to work on bigger projects. I think people in South Africa are bogged down with what they do, and the opportunities are already so few and far between, to put projects like that together is not the simplest thing. But if we did that, we would find the most amazing things could happen. It doesn't mean that it's impossible, it means we have to work a bit harder and do more research than we planned for, which is what I've found every time. The learning curve gets bigger every time, but the results are worth it, you just have to keep doing it and then you'll get there, hopefully.

**CE:** Or you'll get to the next space...

**MvN:** You'll get to the next plateau, yes, that's exactly how I see it. But there are so many new technologies, there's virtual reality now, there are 3D printers... all sorts of things. All of those things are waiting to be musical instruments in some form. And to me that is exactly what music should be. Music has always had a very close relationship with technology - all instruments are technology. The piano evolved because it needed to be more expressive and bigger, and more dramatic. Likewise with indigenous instruments, there are various evolutions. So I really think that there is a direct connection between evolution and music, and yet somehow we've reached a place where we are on a plateau and we're kind of stuck. It's almost like we already have all the instruments we need, but do we really? I don't think we do, we don't have all the instruments we need yet, because we haven't stopped evolving yet.

**CE:** Who knows where things will go. Evolution may well mean having to deal with a lack of technology, at some point. If we make it that far, I suppose. I don't really think we will,

but anyway, on that light note, I think we'll wrap it up! Thank you so much for your thoughts.

**MvN:** It's a pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity.

# COMPOSITIONS

## SIGWACA LESIHLE

### *Cara Stacey*

Cara Stacey is a South African musician, composer and researcher. Cara is a founding member of Inclement Quartet and collaborates with percussionist and drummer Sarathy Korwar in the project Pergola. Her debut album 'Things that grow' features Shabaka Hutchings, Seb Rochford, Ruth Goller, and Crewdson (released in September 2015, Kit Records). Her forthcoming collaborative album with Peruvian composer and flutist Camilo Ángeles will be released later in 2017.

Cara holds a Masters in musicology (Edinburgh), and a Masters in performance from SOAS (London). She has recently completed her doctoral research through the South African College of Music (UCT) and SOAS, exploring the music of the makhweyane braced-bow of Swaziland. Cara has worked with diverse musicians such as Matchume Zango, Juliana Venter, Mandla Mlangeni, Reza Khota, and Brydon Bolton. She is a member of the Shh..Art Ensemble and a co-founder of the Cape Town-based concert series, 'Betwixt'. Cara is based between Cape Town and Swaziland.

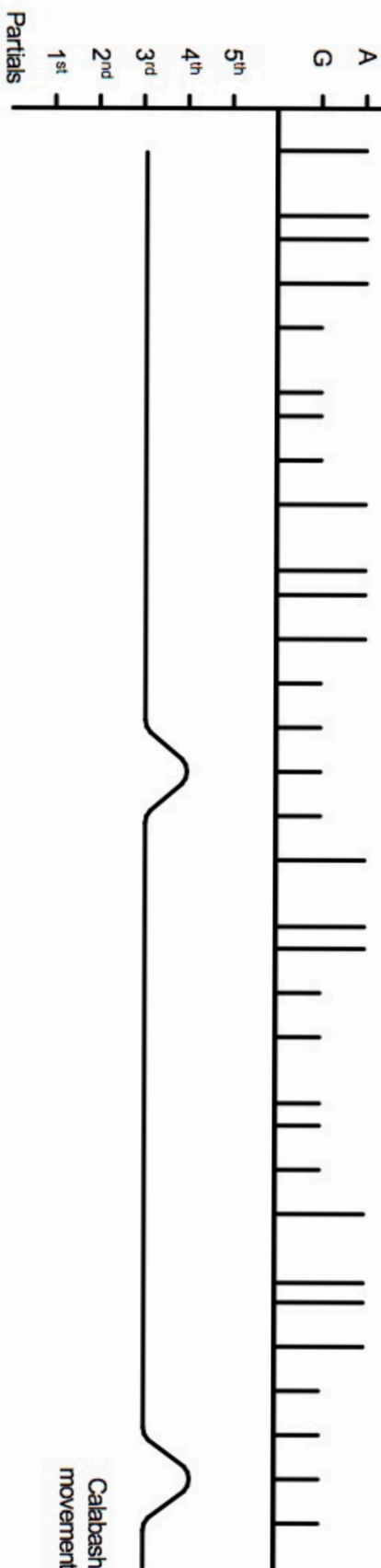
# Sigwaca Lesihle

Cara Stacey  
Lyrics created with Vusi Sibandze

Overtone  
engagement



Fundamentals



Calabash  
movement

Sigwaca lesihle ngulesishoshako  
Lesindiza etulu siftole sagila  
Ubogawula ubheke, wena weKunene  
Kulukhuni emhlabeni

*The beautiful bird that creeps  
When it flies high it finds a knobkerrie  
Please be careful when chopping wood  
You [singular] of Kunene [of the Swazi Nation]  
Life is hard*

# ESSAYS

# DISCIPLINING GEOGRAPHIES AND THE BLACK AVANT-GARDE: JAZZ IN CAPE TOWN

Asher Gamedze

*When things get oppressive or repressive politically, the arts break free.*<sup>6</sup>

I'm interested in how the above quote can help us think through and locate, conceptually, geographically and historically, jazz in its complex relationship with Cape Town's racist and classist, repressive and oppressive spatial processes. If we think historically about jazz, with regards to its position in society, as well as the people who have made it and the spaces they've played in, the notions of 'marginality' or 'fringe' appear to be apt signifiers. Of course there have been certain periods and places, where jazz has not been marginal, but has been popular, not in the radical sense, but rather trendy. In these cases, certain jazz artists or musicians, and even styles of jazz, have been far from fringe. However, notwithstanding these exceptions, in this piece we will be listening to jazz in Cape Town as a Black art form and considering its marginal relationship to space.<sup>7</sup>

We will think about jazz's ambiguous, and ambivalent, dialectical, and marginal relationship with space (in Cape Town), both historically and in the contemporary moment. This, in order to improvise around and consider what the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the (Black) avant garde might be. In our attempt to get at this theorisation we move through some of Fred Moten's ideas on Black performance and some of his considerations on the avant garde. We then explore some of Cape Town's history through the marginal spaces of jazz that have managed to exist between the

---

<sup>6</sup> Quoted Al Young in film, *Cecil Taylor: All the notes*, 2003, directed and produced by Christopher Felver.

<sup>7</sup> There are myriad ways one can engage the question of jazz and space, in this piece I have chosen merely one. One important angle, which I largely neglect in this piece, and a topic for further study would analyse the dynamics within jazz spaces with regards to who is in the space, who feels safe/not in the space, how people engage within the space, practices and notions of transcendence of space, etc. Some of these questions, while closely related to this piece, are beyond its immediate scope as well as that of the current bulletin.

cracks and under the radars at certain points, and, at other points, have been annihilated along with other Black spaces.

### ***Improvisation I. The Black avant garde***

Poet, philosopher, and academic maverick, Fred Moten provides us with a few ideas that can be explored and expanded upon in this investigation. He flows:

The idea of the avant-garde is embedded in a theory of history. This is to say that a particular geographical ideology, a geographical-racial or racist unconscious, marks and is the problematic out of which or against the backdrop of which the avant-garde emerges. The spectre of Hegel reigns over and animates this constellation. His haunting, haunted formulations constitute one of the ways racism produces the social, aesthetic, political-economic and theoretical surplus that is the avant-garde. There is a fundamental connection between the (re)production and performance of the surplus and the avant garde."<sup>8</sup>

We are not too interested here explicitly in the Hegelian theory of history to which Moten refers, rather, we are interested in historical construction of racism and racist geography, and in the ways in which the avant garde is produced by or emerges from those relations of racism. Part of Moten's pursuit here is "an assertion that the avant garde is a black thing... and an assertion that blackness is an avant garde thing;"<sup>9</sup> a pursuit in which I am also invested and investing.

Regarding this investment, it might be appropriate here to improvise an imagination of what the Black avant garde might be beyond what Moten has offered us above: The Black avant garde is what is left, it is what could not be destroyed, or appropriated by colonialism, or assimilated into colonialism. It is what has always been there but it has been pretended to not exist. The avant garde is all the things white supremacy could never imagine Black people to be. It is what marabi is to Verwoerd. Johnny Dyani elucidates:

That's what I'm saying now when I say that the marabi thing, you see... my mother's talking in this tradition. So we, or the young officers, or the young black people of this generation they are in the same level of the white man complex: we have to prove to

---

<sup>8</sup> Fred Moten, 2004, *In the break: The aesthetics of the black radical tradition*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, p.31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p32-33.

him. There's nothing to prove to him, you know, fuck him. Fuck the boer. Just tell him. So my mother was talking in terms of this marabi kind of thing.<sup>10</sup>

It is our thing that simultaneously is, and demands its own frame of reference. Us on our own terms. It is creativity, it is life, it is life and creativity against all odds. And in that sense, it is a Black thing, a deeply necessary Black thing. It is the possibility of creating and creative life within circumstances of impossibility.

Relatedly, Moten's usage of 'surplus' refers to "the ongoing possibility or hope of a minoritarian insurgence"<sup>11</sup> which extends his assertion that Black performance is embedded with, or is itself, a critique of capitalist modes of value. This is useful in considering the construction of space under colonialism/apartheid capitalism because of how jazz intervenes in space as a critique of capitalist time-space regimes, and reimagines, repurposes and represents an alternate spatial dispensation.

In acknowledging the different context from which Moten writes, there are obvious divergences in the historical experiences of Black people on either side of the Atlantic and many of Moten's ideas require some form of transposition to find grounding and relevance in our context. However there are also many parallels and similarities. There is a disturbing way in which Cape Town can, like the diaspora, feel disconnected from the continent in deliberate ways. One of the most deliberate ways people are disconnected is through the historical experience of dispossession and the ongoing denial of land and space that is safe, secure, potentially productive and accessible to and for Black people. On the question of land, the avant garde has a spatial politics:

"[T]he avant garde is not just a temporal-historical concept but a spatial-geographical one as well... Constraint, mobility and displacement are, [therefore] conditions of the avant-garde. Deterioration is crucial to the avant garde, as well: as a certain aesthetics, as an effect of disinvestment, as a psychic condition: the decay of form and the internal and external environment of regenerative aesthetic production... But there's rematerialisation of bourgeois space-time that is also what and where the avant-garde is."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Johnny Dyani (interview Aryan Kaganoff, December 1985), 2010 "The forest and the zoo," *Chimurenga: The curriculum is everything*, Kalakuta Trust: Cape Town.

<sup>11</sup> Moten, 2004, *In the break*, Endnote 14., p.263.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40. Author's italics.

This transposes itself very interestingly onto Cape Town's colonial geography and the history of space and jazz in Cape Town. As we will see in the course of this investigation, jazz in the step mother city exists in some kind of spatial limbo between the concepts of displacement and disinvestment, decay and regeneration, constraint and autonomy, mobility and improvisation, forced removal and foreclosure, haunted by the combined articulation and material forces of white supremacy and colonial capitalism.

### ***Disciplining geographies***

In Cape Town and in apartheid and in colonial city planning more broadly, we might usefully think about the concept of 'disciplining geographies' - geographies designed to discipline and geographies that need to be disciplined - as a way of understanding the broad range of spatial processes employed to impose a particular spatial order. Cape Town's spatial order, at different moments in time, has been informed by various versions of visions of a settler city. And one of the central considerations over the last few hundred years (and still probably at the top of the list!) has been around how Black labour can be exploited without having to make proper considerations for the healthy, safe and fulfilling reproduction of Black social life. In other words, how to plan a city that effectively facilitates capitalist production and reproduction, allows for the continued extraction of Black labour, AND, crucially, discourages or disables insurgency and democracy.

Colonialism and apartheid (and neoliberal capitalism) were wildly ambitious, massive projects of social engineering. Such great lengths went to, to impose particular imaginations of society on reality. And those visions of society were so highly ambitious they required intensive processes of disciplining all the members of society to conform to them, to not disrupt dis order. The process of disciplining took place everywhere: at home, in schools, in where people were told they could/not live, or where they were forcibly removed to, where you were asked for your passes, in jail, in the line at the pass office, on the radio, where people's children couldn't play, where people couldn't go to hospital, where you went to work, where you couldn't go to the beach, where you could drink, and where you couldn't dance or listen to music.

The mechanisms of discipline ranged from brute force and open violence, to 'dompasses'. From aggressive and racist dogs in the suburbs, to forced removals. From the building of townships and their very layout – one way in one way out, to 'influx control'. From the coloured labour preference policy, to curfews, and buffer zones between residential areas...<sup>13</sup> The process of disciplining under colonialism and, more intensively, under apartheid, was deeply geographical: space was intended to do the work of reinforcing apartheid identities by keeping those of the 'same race' together, and those of 'different races' apart. This is discipline.

Moving forward in our process of thinking through the Black avant garde in this context, I want to put forward *the anti-disciplinary* as a central concept or a central impulse. Let's hold onto the idea that the Black avant garde has a spatial character and indeed a spatial politics, and also hold onto Moten's assertion that constraint, mobility and displacement are some of the conditions for its emergence. Then, if we consider how particular urban spaces were/are disciplined - how they are designed, constructed and monitored to be used - and how jazz might disrupt that, I think we might be well on our way toward our theorisation of the Black avant garde and its basis. But first let us quickly consider its spatial basis: Cape Town and its relationship to Black people.

### ***The construction of the Cape: A short spatial history of racism***

I think only realised I was Black when I moved to Cape Town. There is a visceral way in which you are confronted with your own Blackness, that is to say, confronted by the violent racialised othering of whiteness, in Cape Town. Cape Town has a long history of excluding African people. One of the earliest acts in the process of inventing and constructing this place, geographically and ideologically, was the growing and grooming of Van Riebeeck's hedge. The hedge, still a tourist site in Kirstenbosch Gardens, was grown in 1659/1660 as part of the colonial settlement's boundary which cut off Khoi people from their grazing lands. These boundaries were resisted but were enforced with

---

<sup>13</sup> Since the early 1990s many of these mechanisms have not been legally enforced by the state but since then we have seen the rise of neighbourhood-level public/private initiatives such as the Business/City/Community Improvement Districts which currently do a great deal of 'disciplining' work that the state used to do. See my 2015 article with Bradley Rink in *Mobilities*, "Frictions in the human-capital mobile assemblage."

violence and resulted in countless battles and wars – some won by the indigenous people, but most ultimately won by the colonists. And so began the history of Cape Town – the basis of which is the violent dispossession of African people.

The successive two hundred years, the majority of it under slavery, would build on and extend Cape Town's capacity and proclivity for dispossession and violence, and the twentieth century in the newly formed post-war South Africa continued the process. The step mother city's jaunt in the 1900s was heralded in by the establishment of Uitvlugt/ Ndabeni, the first location in the Cape Colony – where Black people were moved to and forced to live - in 1901. The 1913 Land Act which extended the Glen Grey Act of 1894, dispossessed African people at large of what land they had left after centuries of war. They set aside only the crumbs of the most unproductive rural land- the 'reserves' - for Black settlement and ownership. This set the groundwork for later acts of colonial violence such as the (Natives) Urban Areas Act of 1923 which made it very difficult to obtain permanent residency in urban areas for people classified as Black African. These racist processes were sharpened and given more muscle in the apartheid period through the Population Registration Act and Group Areas Act of 1950 which attempted to discipline (and forcibly remove) the people and the geography in line with the vision of separate development and separate spaces. This impulse was extended by the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 which dispossessed those classified as Black African of their South African citizenship, making them subjects (citizens?) of the Bantustans (reserves).

Particular to the western part of the country, and, importantly for us, Cape Town, was the 1955 Coloured Labour Preference Policy stated that the Western Cape was the natural home of white and 'coloured' people, not 'Black Africans' (whose natural homes were the Bantustans, many of which the people assigned to them had never before seen). If there was employment available in the Western Province, this law said that it could not be given to a 'Black African' if there was a 'coloured' person available to do the work. This effectively created 'coloured' people as a buffer zone between white and 'Black African' people in the Cape, dividing and ruling the Black population and ensuring the uninterrupted dominance of whiteness in the Cape. This meant that many 'Black African'

people were either forcibly removed from the Cape, or lived and worked in highly precarious conditions under the radar of the law.

\*\*\*

While this, above, is a highly simplified, utterly uncomprehensive list of spatial processes that have historically constituted Cape Town as a product and producer of racism, it is intended to give a sense of the macro-level attempts to discipline a place and its population to conform to the white supremacist logic of racialization. As well as these macro-level processes, the micro level mechanisms of disciplining, including police harassment, carrying passes and having them checked, and the dynamics of people's individual journeys from home to work and back, are just as important and also provide the backdrop for understanding attempts to build and sustain Black social and cultural life in a racist city. Next we look at where jazz has put itself in this racist historical geography.

#### ***Imagined conversation on Jazz geographies<sup>14</sup>***

*Asher:* Maybe an interesting place to start this discussion is in the 60s and 70s, particularly after the mass-scale forced removals under the Group Areas Act. Many people speak about the 1960s in Cape Town, particularly the second half of it and through to the 1970s, as the time that the segregated geography was really pursued and implemented as an apartheid principle. I'm interested in where, within all of that, in that oppressive context, Black art existed...?

*Gwen Ansell:* Yeah, by the early 1970s, Black cultural life was segregated and regulated with the clear intention of annihilating autonomy... But a vibrant, independent social life survived, and in far more than officially sanctioned forms...The most basic form of cultural resistance was simply finding space to do what was forbidden. The problem of space – physical and political – was worsening.

*Asher:* So in this shortage of Black space, where at this time were you cats playing?

---

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the text in this (imagined) interview between myself, Gwen, bra Winston and bra Tony, are quotes from Gwen Ansell's 2004 book *Soweto blues: Jazz, popular music and politics in South Africa*, p.143-171. The text in italics are my own imagined additions, the normal font comes straight from the book.

*Winston Mankunku Ngozi: What you have to understand ne, is that in the 70s, work was scarce. We had to travel to Port Elizabeth, Joburg; we were touring all the time... we never stopped playing. Never! Never went away from the music. We'd be at home. Some work, practicing, listening. It's just we weren't seen...*

*Tony Schilder (interrupts): Ya, I would also say that all we had left was our love of music. Those were the days when every [musician's] house had a piano and all the musicians used to get together in someone's house. So it became a very home kinda thing at that time.*

*Asher: That's interesting that you mention 'home', that you invoke the notion of home, because in so many ways it seems like jazz doesn't have a 'home' per se in the Black spatial nightmare that is Cape Town. So it's interesting that even without a permanent space in the city, the music still has a 'home'...*

*Anonymous 1: (interjects) Ya, as Tony said, the music really was all we had and as bra Winston said, we were always with the music and it was always with us. So in that sense, even if we weren't playing at 'home' or any space for that matter, the music would still have a home. Which is maybe more of a spiritual thing than a physical space, you know...*

*Asher: Yeah definitely, that makes a lot of sense. I'm really trying grapple with this question that we've been discussing about where, geographically jazz fits in in Cape Town. But you add a really important dimension to the conversation, that it's also a spiritual thing and for that reason the question about where it is, is not purely geographical... (pauses)*

*Gwen: Yeah, and also, by the end of the 1970s, around the turn of the decade, in the so-called post-Soweto moment... I mean... earlier, a lot of musicians went into exile, but after the 1976 moment, many musicians were now choosing to stay in SA and wage their cultural battles here. Their reasons ranged from simple homesickness to an understanding that freedom was not a geographical location.*

*Asher: Aweh, ya definitely, I feel like that really speaks to questions and experiences of exile and inxile and the location of the Black avant garde which, like the impulse toward*

freedom, is perhaps not physically, permanently rooted or located. But is a persistent spectre punctuating in between, a movement, mobilising and galvanising Black spirits and haunting those of Europe as Marx and Engels said of communism... (pauses)... but I mean, the geographical question still really fascinates me. You know, jazz in Cape Town has historically been, and is currently, *oddly located*. Its location is rooted in a sense of temporariness or a feeling of fleeting....

*Lindokuhle Nkosi: Yeah that question has fascinated me too, you know, does this [jazz] happen in spite of the city? In spite of the aggression of its administrators and its looming mountain, the segregated geography and temperamental winds and citizens? Or does this groove ooze out from the gaps and fissures? Does it boil and bubble – magma in the underground tunnels and subways, escaping like a whisper because of the pretentious facades and not despite them?*<sup>15</sup>

*Asher: Sho... I think that's really the crux of it, and your line of questioning seems to really question the dialectic of jazz and space without necessarily asking for an answer, you know? In the sense that what you are asking – does jazz exist because of, or in spite of disciplining geographies – is potentially not actually answerable but is a tension that animates the music and the struggle for it...*

### ***Improvised and fugitive space***

I love this photo (Fig.1), I think it captures so much. Perhaps most strikingly, most obviously, it's a male-dominated space which, for the most part, is probably indicative of the scene (and society) at large. But also the image captures the spirit of



*Figure 1. Photo taken by Ian Bruce Huntley, Room at the Top, Strand Street, 1964. Musicians, left to right: Barney Rachabane (alto), Dennis Mpale (drums), Tete Mbambisa (piano) and Timmy Kwebuluna (bass).*

<sup>15</sup> Lindokuhle Nkosi, August 2013, "The new thing", *Chimurenga Chronic*, Kalakuta Trust: Cape Town. Again, the normal text is quoted, the text in italics is invented by me.

improvisation so articulately. The 'piano stool' is clearly a 'put-together' affair with bra Tete sitting on two cushions on top of the chair for additional height. Another classic in this photo is Dennis Mpale, who is obviously best known for his trumpet-playing but in this instance is caught doing business behind the drum kit; and Timmy Kwebuluna, probably the original drummer at the session is playing bass. I get the feeling of a jam session from the picture, a fun time, cats possibly experimenting with new techniques, sounds, tunes, or in Dennis' and Timmy's cases, different instruments.

Jonathan Eato gives us some more information on the venue:

The Room at the Top was a makeshift venue on Strand Street in central Cape Town. It was one of a series of rooms hired by drummer Selwyn Lissack, initially as somewhere to practise without disturbing his suburban neighbours. 'I used to go into the city and rent an office, and then I'd soundproof it and go at night and try and practise. So the Room at the Top was another of these venues... and we'd turn it into a nightclub [where] the public had access.'<sup>16</sup>

This description allows us some insight into some of the anti-disciplinary tendencies forming the backdrop of this image. It was only possible for these sessions to take place here because Selwyn Lissack, a white drummer, was able, financially and legally, to rent this space in the white city – intended to be an office space. There is here a way in which racism makes it impossible for Black people to access space in the city but through the access of whiteness coupled with an anti-disciplinary spatial orientation to the racist geography, it becomes possible to get together and create.

If we think here back to Moten, we can open this up a bit more. He suggested that part of the Black avant garde's spatial politics is a reconfiguration of bourgeois space-time. Here, at Room at the Top, these cats are in the Cape Town CBD in a space that was zoned for business, offices as Selwyn mentions above. A disciplined usage of this space would probably not be a group of Black men playing jazz at night. If the cats were caught in the city at that hour carrying instruments, humming a Thelonius Monk tune, with a certain swagger, they would almost certainly be disciplined in some way by the law. They have

---

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Eato (with quotation from interview with Selwyn Lissack), 2014, "The Ian Bruce Huntley Archive," p.30.

completely undermined the intended, disciplined usage of white urban space and turned it on its head into a fugitive space of Black (albeit, in this instance, exclusively male) art.

Their usage of the space is unimaginable by racist thinking: Could Verwoerd imagine a bunch of Black men playing some of the most sophisticated, technically challenging modern music in 1964 in an office on Strand Street?

\*\*\*

Abdullah Ibrahim released two records in the mid-70s that conceptually frame the spatial character of jazz and its political orientation in the period, but also more broadly perhaps. In 1973 he released *Underground in Africa* and, in 1974 *Mannenberg is where it's happening*. *Underground* was marked with musical echoes of its spiritual home, so deep it was in the Cape Town underground that it was recorded in Johannesburg, on Rashid Vally's new independent Mandla label. Following the recording of the album, most of the rest of the band, excluding Ibrahim, then still Dollar Brand, toured Angola for 9 months during the final moments of the independence war. I was in that context where they "began shaping their own view of music as a voice for struggle."<sup>17</sup>

'Underground in Africa' is a great metaphor for the location of Blackness within Cape Town. Forced to the fringes, ejected from the centre, Black people make life and move around on the margins of the step mother city. Underground, and in fugitive spaces, Black people construct their own worlds, often, or always darkened by the cold shiver of settlerdom's shadow. These worlds are constructed as alternatives, radical responses to what is given, or, as a question of survival.

*Mannenberg is where it's happening* extends this line. The spatial logic and political imperative of this album's title can be read within the Black Consciousness (BC) tradition. Black Community Programmes (BCP, circa early 1970s) were a manifestation of BC ideas of looking inward at ourselves and investing in and building Black communities that can support themselves without depending on the government or having to enter into potentially compromising relationships with white liberals. There is a definite parallel

---

<sup>17</sup> Gwen Ansell, 2004, *Soweto blues*, p152.

between the BCP approach and the approach of this album. As a response to Group Areas Act which destroyed many existing, living Black communities and built lifeless, soulless, stark, grid-based, crude townships, such as Manenberg, Ibrahim insists that these otherwise dire, neglected places are actually where it's at. Why? Not because all the hippest venues are there but because that's where the people are and that's where you gotta be, that's where you gotta build if you are committed to Black struggle.

It is no coincidence then, given the band members' sojourns in Angola at the pinnacle of the independence struggle, and the radical orientation of the music and its framing, that 'Mannenberg' (the song) involves itself intimately in the anti-apartheid movement of the mid-late 1980s. This was a period of close spatial entanglement of the supposedly separate spheres of politics and culture in very explicit, but also complex ways.

'Mannenberg' gets played at UDF rallies and other community rallies by Basil Coetzee and Robbie Jansen, the original horns on the album. The tune becomes iconic, a struggle anthem of sorts.<sup>18</sup>

This unofficial relationship of 'Mannenberg' with the UDF and Abdullah's long relationship with the ANC cultural wing, given the BC orientation I read into the album, seems somewhat dissonant or inconsistent due to some of the ideological schisms between the movements. However, to discuss music and politics within a partisan framework is limited and limiting given that the work and social position of music in African societies goes far beyond what is understood to be politics. What is important here is the spaces in which jazz chooses to locate and involve itself both conceptually and symbolically – underground and in Mannenberg – and physically – with Black people in struggle.

### ***Improvisations II. Wrapping bars/up***

I have been in Cape Town now for almost ten years and I have watched and played gigs all over this fragmented place. In the ebb and flow of spatial processes in which jazz finds its fringe, we are currently in an interesting moment. Last year, Tagore's in Observatory, after years of threatening, finally, tragically closed; Straight No Chaser, formally the Mahogany Room, in the CBD, also closed around a similar time; Swingers, in Wetton,

---

<sup>18</sup> See John Edwin Mason, 2008, "The making of Mannenberg", *Chimurenga Magazine*.

swung its last chorus a couple of years earlier. These were some of the mainstays of the creative jazz scene in the 2010s; theirs, and others', closure ushered in a new chapter in a long history of displacement.

Many jazz venues have closed, now, not as a result of apartheid or colonial spatial planning, but due to the rationalising and disciplinary geographical tendencies of neoliberal capitalism. Not incidentally, the effects of this contemporary manifestation of capitalism on Black people and Black spaces bear deep similarities to those of apartheid and colonialism. What distinguishes the contemporary period perhaps is that the market rather than the state disciplines the geography and the people. And its mechanism of discipline, its motivation or justification for displacing Black people, is profitability which serves as a proxy for race, rather than race itself. Most of the jazz venues have closed because they could not afford to stay open - buildings get sold, or rents or rates go up, all of which forces jazz out and displaces Black art.

However, on the underside of gentrification, in the cracks between, on the margins, in the pocket, jazz, from being forced out, has challenged this displacement and has resisted the disciplinary drive of gentrification. An example of this resistance is Reza Khota's recent (June 2017) "Inner Space Tour" which showed how, from within these conditions of closure, jazz has insisted on its own existence, its own importance. It has insisted on existing on its own terms, not those of festival promoters or the corporate gig scene.

In the last year or so, after an initial period of decline following the closure of a series of venues, jazz has refused constraint and has instead repurposed interstitial spaces and popped up in odd locations: Theatre Arts Admin Collective and the Bijou in Observatory, Guga S'thebe in Langa, Greatmore Studios in Woodstock, Jazz in the Native Yards – Kwa Sec in Gugulethu, the Slave Lodge, Blah Blah Bar and Pan African Space Station/Chimurenga HQ in town, Alma Café in Rosebank, Olympia Bakery in Kalk Bay, none of these are designated jazz venues. These pop-up or put-together gigs take a lot more work to set up and organise than gigs at venues with their own infrastructure and, this effort itself, is reflective of the resilience and persistence of jazz and the deep need for creative expression, especially for Black people in a space like Cape Town.

Jazz's displacement and its temporary homes in the various improvised venues bring their own particular sets of challenges. Paramount here is the question of access – where is the gig, how do people get there, is it safe, is there entrance cost, how much is it, and who do all of these factors include/exclude? The struggle for the material conditions that will allow for the re/production of Black social life continues and the land question remains pertinent and ever urgent. Without land and space, these spaces are susceptible to closure due to their inability to operate profitably within capitalist modes of value.

### **Post.Scripts**

The avant garde, then, is not a geographical location, nor is it geographically located, necessarily. It manifests in marginal and fringe spaces between geographies in flux, geographies produced by the material forces of racial capitalism. In this sense, there is something creative and generative about the spatial condition of precarity because it produces both the need and the drive to continually create fugitive space as a matter of Black survival, for the reproduction of Black social life under or away from the shadows.

On impossibility: the avant garde is all the things white supremacy couldn't imagine Black people to be, it is fugitive defiance and autonomy. In the face of annihilation it is the persistent insistence on life/creation/art. In this sense one can see how Blackness is an avant garde thing. The very possibility of the existence and persistence of Black social and creative life in a city like Cape Town is a contradiction. It exists within but almost despite or in spite of its context. Cedric Robinson's ambivalent assertion finds resonance here: the Black radical tradition cannot be understood within the context of its development, nor can it be understood outside of them.<sup>19</sup>

Considering all this, imagine now the future: What will jazz sound like after the revolution, when Black people have secure space in Cape Town? What will the avant garde be playing when Black people are no longer considered moveable objects by the spatial forces of racism that up until now have structured and shaped the city? How free will the music be when the objective conditions of people's reality are more conducive to their humanity?

---

<sup>19</sup> Cedric Robinson, 1983, *Black Marxism: The making of the black radical tradition*, Zed Press: London.

# STAINED SPACES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT OF THE STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE OF INGOMA YOMZABALAZO

*Gavin Robert Walker*

Dr. Gavin R Walker has a PhD in ethnomusicology from The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His research interests include, but are not limited to, decolonisation and transformation in South African higher education; colonialism and marginalisation; the social, political, and economic determinants of public health; medical ethnomusicology and medical anthropology; and HIV/AIDS and TB edutainment interventions in South Africa. Gavin is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Africa Open: Institute for Music, Research, and Innovation at Stellenbosch University.

\*\*\*

It is February in the picturesque Cape Winelands town of Stellenbosch. The mid-summer sun glares brilliantly from the whitewashed walls of the Konservatorium and falls upon the welcoming redbrick forecourt. The Music Department sits on the corner of an avenue lined with rows of groomed oak trees close to the heart of Stellenbosch University's central campus area. There is a notable chill of air-conditioning as I enter the building. The warm summer glow disappears behind me at the entrance as there is no natural light within the expanse of the Fisser Hall. A cavernous space filled with hardwood flooring and a mass of

identical faux black leather and chrome seats that have been disturbed from their usual uniformity to create a more relaxed audience and discussion space. The light hum of air-conditioning continues to drone quietly as the chattering of unintelligible conversations in Afrikaans and English resonate throughout the pristine hall. Each utterance is directed and reflected skillfully around the space by wooden panels and foam dampeners.

I am attending the Stellenbosch leg of the Black Thought Symposium's *Ingoma Yomzabalazo: Song as Struggle and Resistance* Caucus, a symposium entitled 'Reflections on the Bana(abi)lity of Song in Struggle'. Black Thought is a collection of black students, musicians, activists, and scholars from the University of Witwatersrand who come together to create 'a platform for black students to interface and discuss issues that speak of the black condition' (Mbhele cited in Mpemnyama 2015). They have been invited by Professor Stephanus Müller, Director of the Africa Open: Institute for Music, Research and Innovation at Stellenbosch University. I take my seat and as I scan the hall, I am struck by the homogenous mass of European faces. Only my partner and a handful of others break the monotony of whiteness.

After some warm and pleasant introductions from Professor Müller, the members of Black Thought open the symposium. I could examine in some detail the discussions that were cultivated during the event but I believe, as important as those discussions were, that the main issues were raised by the art that was created in that space. As the performances begin, the space plays host to unfamiliar sounds of ongoing struggle, sorrow, anger and resistance. The concert hall space of this historically conservative institution is quite literally disquieted by the soulful melodies and harmonies that sonically represent black struggle. The memories of those who had used their voices and their songs to demand freedom in the past resonate throughout the hall, aided by the very panels and dampeners that were designed and placed strategically to facilitate the optimum sound and sonority for music of the European tradition, the Germanic forbearers of South Africa's Afrikaners. The interplaying grooves of jazz and vernacular melodies themselves convey a far more detailed history of struggle than words for anyone prepared to listen.

There is a palpable discomfort. It is as if the very walls are in anguish at their own precision and ergonomics of resonance. But it is for this very reason that it is so important that this music is played in this space. It is imperative that songs of struggle engender discomfort in these locations. These are spaces of so-called high culture, a culture whose white hands are stained as red as the forecourt bricks with the blood of erasure. These are the spaces whose opulence becomes profane when juxtaposed with the violence of

ongoing black poverty. As the hall fills with the sounds that represent a shameful and bloodied history, there is a sense that this particular audience, in this particular space, in this particular geography does not know quite how to respond to being confronted with beauty, frustration, anger, and the complexities and contradictions that exist within the struggle repertoire. They do nothing but sit in silence.

Participation is a fundamental component of the performance culture that surrounds South Africa's liberation music. To participate is to become a collective and there is indeed strength and anonymity in numbers. Often, these songs have no known composer or author and stylistically lend themselves towards participation through call and response structures and cyclical melodic and harmonic patterns. Participation strengthens community and allows for collective grieving in the face of oppression, cultural erasure, forced relocation, arbitrary imprisonment and violence. By sitting in silence, the spectators were overtly illustrating how alien these cultural practices are to them, to us, to me. These are practices that have developed under oppression that the vast majority of Stellenbosch University graduates have never and will never experience.

Those precious few minutes of disquiet are perhaps best explained by activist and music producer Sifiso Ntuli. He argues that struggle songs communicate in far more powerful and meaningful ways than just rhetoric, suggesting that

A song is something that we communicate to those people who otherwise would not understand where we are coming from. You could give them a long political speech – they would still not understand. But I tell you: when you finish that song, people will be like "Damn, I know where you niggas are coming from. Death unto Apartheid!" (cited in Hirsch 2002).

Liberation songs have been a common expression of the desire for freedom across many ages and geographies. For struggle pianist and composer Abdulla Ibrahim, in the documentary film *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony* (2002), it is unlikely that there has ever been a liberation or protest movement that has not, at some stage, used music or song to rally people to their cause, keep up morale, or mourn those who have

fallen or been arrested. Black Thought introduced these meanings into an alien space (the concert hall) within and alien space (Stellenbosch University and town). In doing so, they were able to challenge the comfortable status quo of whiteness, opulence, and indifference.

### **References**

Hirsch, L. (Director), Dean, S. S., & Markgraaf, D. (Producers) (2002). *Amandla!: A revolution in four-part harmony*. South Africa: ATO Pictures.

Mpemnyama, Z. (2015). Black Thought Symposium: Rethinking society, *Wits Vuvuzela*. Retrieved from: <http://witsvuvuzela.com/2015/03/21/black-thought-symposium-rethinking-society/>













