

FOREWORD

South Africa possesses one of the richest popular music traditions in the world, surpassed in its variety and inventiveness perhaps only by the United States. From *marabi* to *mbaqanga*, from *boeremusiek* to bubblegum, from *kwela* to *kwaito*: as varied as are the many peoples of South Africa in origin, culture and pigmentation, so dizzy is the array of popular music styles and genres that one encounters here. Yet the risk that future generations of South Africans will not know their musical roots is very real. Of all the recordings made here since the 1930s, thousands have been lost for ever, for the powers-that-be never deemed them worthy of preservation. And if one peruses the books that exist on South African popular music, one still finds, despite their wealth of scholarship, that there are misspelt names and inaccurate dates, and that their authors have on occasion jumped to conclusions that were not as foregone as they had assumed. Yet the fault lies not with them, rather in the fact that there has been precious little documentation in South Africa of who played what, or who recorded what, with whom, and when. This is true of all music-making in this country, though it is most striking in the musics of the black communities. Part of the reason, at least, is obvious: apartheid-era Bantu Education was a means of mass subjugation intended not only to deny our black fellow citizens a future, but also, through withholding access to higher learning, to prevent them from recording their past. The goal, albeit unstated, was to ensure that the impossibility of a future and the absence of a past would resign the masses to an unquestioning acceptance of an immutable present of servitude. With few exceptions – such as the moving, but all-too-brief autobiography of the brilliant Todd Matshikiza (his *Chocolates for my Wife*, now almost fifty years old) – the little that was committed to paper about black music was done so by whites who, however liberal, well-meaning and empathetic, were by virtue of their colour on the privileged side of the great divide that apartheid was constantly endeavouring to render unbridgeable.

The present book is invaluable to all of us, in South Africa and beyond, because it offers a first-hand account of the South African music scene of the past decades from the pen of a man, Max Thamagana Mojapelo, who was situated in the very thick of things, thanks to his job as a deejay at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). This book is based on his diaries, on interviews he conducted and on numerous other sources, and we find in it not only the well-known names of recent South African music – from Hugh

Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa or Johnny Clegg to Brenda Fassie – but a countless host of others whose contribution must be recorded if we and future generations are to gain an accurate picture of South African music history of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The breadth of coverage here is astonishing, and this book also serves as eloquent testimony to the fact that music is a prime instrument of breaking down those artificial barriers that the previous regime had erected. For the musicians of whom we read here are black, white, coloured, Indian, classical, jazz, pop, crossover, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu – indeed, there could hardly be a better picture painted of the South Africa we would all like most to see, in which men and women are united for a common purpose, irrespective of what any politicians of the past (or present) might claim divides them. But music is not just a great leveller: above all, it uplifts. We, the readers, are left here above all with a sense of Mojapelo’s joy in music and of his enthusiasm and deep empathy for his fellow human beings; and this, in turn, uplifts us too.

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INTRODUCTION

Thobela!

The story you are about to read is based on my experiences before, during and after my career as a deejay at the SABC. At the end of the book you will have gained insight into the music industry in South Africa and its connections beyond. You'll also have an idea of the role played by the media in supporting the industry. I hope to generate a lot of discussions, debates and arguments around the what, who, when, how and why amongst you wherever and whoever you are. I know there will be different opinions and versions of how certain events "actually" unfolded. Whatever comes out of those interactions will influence other individuals to write from different angles. You will notice as you read this book that it was also enriched by conversations amongst musicians, radio personalities, music industry executives and concert promoters.

In my career as a radio deejay/presenter there have been two statements that haunted me day and night – one from a foreigner and the other from a Premier.

Just after the 1990 release of Dr Nelson Mandela, I had the privilege of securing an appointment with one of the most gifted sons of our soil, Caiphus Semenya – he of the Quincy Jones school of excellence. Arrangements for the interview were facilitated by Condry Ziqubu, whose lead guitar Katse is in love with. Both grew up in Alexandra Township. Our venue was one of the modest lodges in Midrand. Caiphus had not yet relocated to South Africa. During the interview we touched on the subject of local music content in the media. He told me about the observations of his friend from Los Angeles, who had followed him to South Africa. When he asked him about his first impressions about this country he said, "On arrival I was very excited to see the blue skies and the wide open spaces. I turned on the radio to listen to the music of Africa. None. I fiddled with the tuner, but station after station rocked me with American music.

I am so disappointed, there's nothing new, there's nothing to learn." He then summed up his response with the phrase that still haunts me, "I have not left the States. I have not left."

When Simon Mahlathini Nkabinde was buried in Vosloorus on Saturday 7 August 1999, the SABC sent me to speak on its behalf. President Thabo Mbeki had been in office for less than four months. His wife, Zanele, Ministers Ben Ngubane and Penuel Maduna, Gauteng's Premier Mbazima Sam Shilowa as well as other dignitaries were amongst hundreds of mourners who packed the Vosloorus Community Hall to capacity. The MC's were two giants of our music industry – Moses Jabulani Dlamini and Stanley Nkosi; both have since followed Ndoda Mahlathini to the other world. May their souls rest in peace. In welcoming the President, Premier Shilowa said: 'I am told, Comrade President, that you once said that "Until lions have their own historians, their history and stories would always be told by hunters." I don't know if you did say it, but that's what I've been told. If you didn't say it, I think you should have said it.

The words from these two statements kept ringing in my head until I was convinced I had to do something about them. When I was appointed station manager for the SABC's Thobela FM radio station on 10 October 1997 I grabbed the opportunity with my two hands to address the first statement – "I have not left."

As coach of my radio team I sold my local content bias idea to my staff and instead of playing ICASA's prescribed 20% we went 90%. Regardless of the criticism we received from some of our own brothers and sisters, I am still proud of the dent we made in knocking self-pride into the heads of many of our countrymen and women.

In writing this book I am addressing the second statement – lions having their own historians. The story of the development of the South African music industry is a long, winding and sometimes twisted but fascinating one. The main challenge in telling the story is the unavailability of detailed information on some groups, artists and individuals, most of whom have already passed on. Some record companies' press releases laid more emphasis on the music released than on the individuals behind the product. However, some did a splendid job.

Most of the information in this book is from my notebook as a radio deejay/presenter. The material mostly consists of my interviews with the musicians themselves or their peers, sleeve covers and general media reports over the years. This is mostly the reflection of how the music influenced my career as a deejay, how together with other deejays we contributed to its growth, how I have remained addicted to it, as well as my impressions about the vibrant industry and its politics.

Every day of my life I live to thank God for blessing me with the talent as a teacher that has empowered the youth in the classroom for eight years, touched many people's lives from behind the microphone as a deejay for fifteen years,

transformed our society as a station manager for five years and finally re-written our history as a writer of academic books to support the government's National Curriculum Statement in the spirit of transformation.

Live and tell!

Max Mojapelo
Lebowakgomo
18 July 2008

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