

# Cultural Relations

BETWEEN  
SWITZERLAND  
AND APARTHEID  
SOUTH AFRICA



Stephanus Muller and Chris Walton (eds)

Cultural Relations between Switzerland and  
Apartheid South Africa



STEPHANUS MULLER AND CHRIS WALTON (EDS)

# **Cultural Relations between Switzerland and Apartheid South Africa**

Basler Afrika Bibliographien 2025



The open access version of this book has been published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.



Hochschule der Künste Bern  
Haute école des arts de Berne  
Bern Academy of the Arts

2025

Published by

Basler Afrika Bibliographien

Namibia Resource Centre & Southern Africa Library

Klosterberg 23

PO Box

4010 Basel

Switzerland

[www.baslerafrika.ch](http://www.baslerafrika.ch)



The Basler Afrika Bibliographien is part of the Carl Schlettwein Foundation

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Cover image: Niklaus Troxler's 1994 poster for the Willisau Jazz Festival. Courtesy of Niklaus Troxler

Cover design: Candice Turvey, Spiritlevel

ISBN 978-3-906927-74-9

eISBN 978-3-906927-75-6

<https://doi.org/10.53202/LH FY9620>



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**Steff Rohrbach** writes for the Swiss magazine *JAZZ'N'MORE* and was responsible for jazz at the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia for seven years. He has also been involved in cultural management, communication and organisation for numerous institutions and festivals including the Montreux Jazz Festival. From 2015 to 2023 he was responsible for communication and project management at the Institute Jazz of the Basel Music Academy (Jazzcampus). He has published many interviews, essays and reviews, including for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *WOZ Die Wochenzeitung*, *Die Weltwoche* and elsewhere.

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**Lineo Segoete** is a storyteller who has been active variously as a curator, writer, translator and cultural consultant in Africa, the USA and Europe. She has spoken at symposia and held workshops in Switzerland, Austria and Germany, to mention but a few. Her research interests include arts education, intertwined histories and disrupting coloniality. Segoete is the convenor of the Maseru Working Group and co-convenor of the larger Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) of the Another Roadmap School.

**Bruno Spoerri** is a Swiss composer and performer who began his career as a saxophone player and arranger with various jazz groups. In 1965 he started working with electronics and composed the music for feature films, many short films, documentaries and over 500 commercials. He toured in Europe, USA, Canada, India and Africa with Reto Weber, Joel Chadabe, Joel Vandroogenbroeck, Albert Mangelsdorff and many others. Spoerri has also taught jazz history and electronic music and has published books about the history of both jazz and electronic music in Switzerland. He continues to perform in various groups today.



**Astrid Starck-Adler** is Professor Emerita of German and Yiddish Literature (University of Basel & Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse). She introduced Yiddish Studies at both universities and one of her research fields is Yiddish Literature in South Africa. Together with Dag Henrichsen, she edited the volume *Lewis Nkosi. The Black Psychiatrist. Flying Home! Texts, Perspectives, Homage* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2021).

**Christian Steulet** was a historian, editor and translator. He taught jazz history at the École de jazz et de musique actuelle in Lausanne. He was initially responsible for the jazz sub-project in the SNSF research project documented in the present volume, but died of a heart attack on 8 May 2020. He had already conducted several interviews for this project, three of which have been edited and expanded for publication here by Steff Rohrbach. We are grateful to Christian's family for allowing us access to his files.

**Jasper Walgrave** graduated in history, political sociology and development studies, with professional experience in Portugal, South Africa, Switzerland and Belgium. From 2003 to 2006 he was project coordinator for the SA-Flemish project for Community Arts Centres, based at the South African Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) in Pretoria, and from 2007 to 2019 he worked for Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, initially in South Africa, then later in Zurich. In 2024 he obtained his PhD at the University of Fribourg with a dissertation entitled "A Culture of Discreet Complicity. Swiss men mediating culture to and from South Africa 1948–1994".

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# Introduction

*Chris Walton & Stephanus Muller*

This book has its origins in the papers given at a conference organised in May 2023 by the Bern Academy of the Arts HKB (Institute Interpretation) in collaboration with the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, the Centre for Africa Studies at the University of Basel and Africa Open Institute at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. The conference was the culmination of a research project at HKB, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), on cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa, 1948–1994.

At first glance, organising a large-scale research project on cultural relations between two such seemingly different countries might seem odd, even absurd. South Africa is a geographically vast, mineral-rich, subtropical ex-colony of the West with a long history of racial segregation, political oppression and stark social inequality; Switzerland is a tiny, landlocked state some six thousand miles to the north with no (overt) colonial history, no natural resources bar grass and water, an alpine climate, and republican, democratic traditions that stretch back several centuries. But during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political and economic circumstances drew them ever closer; and this, in turn, had repercussions for cultural production, exchange and diplomacy.

It was only in the late 1990s that the close relationship between Switzerland and South Africa became a topic of open discussion. The catalyst for this was the Volcker Commission, set up in 1996 under the former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank Paul Volcker to investigate the dormant accounts held by Swiss banks in which Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany had stored their valuables. After the Second World War, the banks had erected bureaucratic hurdles to prevent Holocaust survivors and their descendants from accessing their funds. The findings of the Commission were damning to Switzerland, the public fallout considerable,<sup>1</sup> and questions subsequently began to be asked about Switzerland's role in providing economic and political support for other non-democratic regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Parallels were soon inevitably being drawn – rightly or wrongly – between Switzerland's links with Nazi Germany and its economic and political support for fascist South Africa. In February 1997, the Swiss Federal Council was still insisting that no Volcker-style

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<sup>1</sup> See Independent Commission of Eminent Persons, *Report on Dormant Accounts of Victims of Nazi Persecution in Swiss Banks*, at [https://www.crt-ii.org/ICEP/ICEP\\_Report\\_english.pdf](https://www.crt-ii.org/ICEP/ICEP_Report_english.pdf) (accessed May 2025).

investigation into Swiss-South African relations was necessary. But a torrent of negative articles in the press meant that by May 2000, the Federal Council had no choice but to commission just such a report. They assigned the task to the Swiss National Science Foundation and appointed the historian Georg Kreis to oversee it. It was given the title “National Research Project 42+”, NFP 42+ for short, and its goal was to investigate the economic, diplomatic and administrative relations between Switzerland and South Africa from 1948 to 1994 (thus from the election of the first National Party government in South Africa to the first fully democratic elections, after which the ANC assumed power). Ten subprojects in all were set up, whose results were published either in paper form, online, or both.<sup>2</sup> They ranged from an investigation of the political reports sent to Bern by the Swiss Embassy in South Africa<sup>3</sup> to discussions of the Swiss churches and missions in South Africa<sup>4</sup> and of South African sanctions and Swiss politics.<sup>5</sup> Georg Kreis drew on all these projects in his large-scale Final Report that “summarises the ten projects and relates them [to each other]”, which was published in 2005 in German and in 2007 in English translation.<sup>6</sup>

The scope of NFP 42+ was unprecedented at the time, as was the candour of its results, and its final report was a model of its kind. However, the project’s official remit had three significant consequences, as Kreis stated openly. First, the field of intelligence was excluded from the remit of NFP 42+, and in fact official fears of what Kreis & Co. might find and reveal resulted in the active destruction of incriminating material by the Swiss agency in question, as Kreis explains in his Introduction to his Final Report.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the research for NFP 42+ was conducted almost solely in Switzerland from a Swiss perspective with Swiss-based researchers, though Kreis openly admitted that “It would ... have been desirable in

<sup>2</sup> See NFP 42+ “Beziehungen Schweiz – Südafrika”, at [www.snf.ch/de/rtpTAr8376DfTqCe/seite/fokusForschung/nationale-forschungsprogramme/nfp42plus-beziehungen-schweiz-suedafrika](http://www.snf.ch/de/rtpTAr8376DfTqCe/seite/fokusForschung/nationale-forschungsprogramme/nfp42plus-beziehungen-schweiz-suedafrika) (accessed November 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Michael H. Bischof, Noëmi Sibold and Andreas Kellerhals-Maeder, *Südafrika im Spiegel der Schweizer Botschaft: die politische Berichterstattung der Schweizer Botschaft in Südafrika 1952–1990*. Zurich: Chronos, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Caroline Jeannerat, Eric Morier-Genoud and Didier Péclard, *Embroided. Swiss Churches, South Africa and Apartheid*. Berlin etc.: Lit Verlag, 2011 (*Schweizerische Afrikastudien – Etudes africaines suisses*, 9).

<sup>5</sup> Christoph Hefti and Elke Staehelin-Witt, *Wirtschaftssanktionen gegen Südafrika während der Apartheid. Die Wirkung der offiziellen Handels- und Finanzsanktionen und der Einfluss der Schweizer Politik*, at: [www.bss-basel.ch/images/stories/bss-basel/downloads/bss.-studie\\_wirtschaftssanktionen\\_apartheid.pdf](http://www.bss-basel.ch/images/stories/bss-basel/downloads/bss.-studie_wirtschaftssanktionen_apartheid.pdf) (accessed November 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Georg Kreis, *Die Schweiz und Südafrika 1948–1994: Schlussbericht des im Auftrag des Bundesrates durchgeführten NFP 42+*. Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2005; and Kreis: *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994. Final report of the NFP 42+ commissioned by the Swiss Federal Council*. Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2007. The quotation here is from page 61 of the English version.

<sup>7</sup> See Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994*, 35.

one or the other case to have had a bit more South African expertise as a permanent element in the programme”.<sup>8</sup> This Swiss perspective is also why sources in Afrikaans do not figure large (the bibliographies of the individual reports contain sources in French, English and German, but Afrikaans books are listed only in English translation, such as F.W. de Klerk’s *Die laaste trek*).<sup>9</sup> Finally, NFP 42+ also excluded any in-depth discussion of cultural relationships between South Africa and Switzerland, though Kreis included a highly informative, nine-page chapter on them in his overall report,<sup>10</sup> confirming that cultural issues played a substantial role in relations between the two countries. The reason for this omission was understandable at the time. Focusing on arts and culture was inevitably going to take a back seat when the prime purpose of the project was to reveal the large-scale economic and political connections between Switzerland and the apartheid state.

In fact, as Kreis’s brief chapter intimates, cultural relations blossomed between Switzerland and South Africa in parallel with their increasing importance as trading partners. It was not least in order to rectify the omission of culture from NFP 42+ that the Bern Academy of the Arts (HKB) initiated a new research project in 2019, also funded by the SNSF: “Cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa, 1948–1994”.<sup>11</sup> Georg Kreis generously supported our project, even when it was still in its conceptual phase. Without his earlier work, our project would have been impossible, and without his later assistance, it might never have come about at all.

There were five subprojects to this new project: an overarching study of Swiss cultural connections with South Africa, primarily through the lens of state diplomacy; a project looking at classical music; another investigating jazz; one looking into Afrikaans translations of Swiss literature; and one investigating South African theatre in Switzerland. Our partner institutions included Africa Open Institute at Stellenbosch University in South Africa (Prof. Stephanus Muller) and the Department of Modern History at the University of Fribourg.

Our project began in the autumn of 2019. Just half a year later, the Covid pandemic struck. A few days before the first lockdown, one of our team arrived in South Africa for what was supposed to be an extended research visit. We only just managed to get him back on the last flight out of the country, travelling on a lengthy, circuitous route with stops in Central Africa. Just a few weeks later, the team member responsible for the jazz subproject, Christian Steulet, died quite unexpectedly of a heart attack. We were lucky that Steff Rohrbach was able and willing to take his place several months later, and we are especially

<sup>8</sup> Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994*, 61.

<sup>9</sup> See Hefti and Staehelin-Witt, *Wirtschaftssanktionen*, 134.

<sup>10</sup> See Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994*, chapter 6.10, “Cultural and scientific relations”, 483–491.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/182311> (accessed November 2024).

grateful to Christian's family for allowing us access to his files. Steff had known Christian well and was able to revise some of the interviews he had conducted but had been unable to bring to publication. This is why three of the chapters in this book are listed as jointly by Christian and Steff.

No less than two years elapsed between our first and second team meetings. Over the course of the project, our team members have also endured several deaths among family and friends – not just from Covid – though one of us has also boosted the population by having two babies and another has become a grandparent. Covid meant we had to change our way of working, not least by moving as many of our activities as possible online. It was a matter of no little surprise that many of the people we wanted to interview, some of them of an advanced age, were readily amenable to engaging on Zoom or Skype. One of the odd-est things any of us experienced during the project was perhaps an interview conducted in Afrikaans in a house in the Alps at 1600 metres above sea level during a snowstorm, the interview partner being a former member of the South African Prison Band sitting at home in Johannesburg at the height of summer. But not everything can be done online. We were fortunate in that Africa Open Institute at Stellenbosch University was able to facilitate excellent research assistants to help us with interviews and archival research on the ground in South Africa. Chatradari Devroop, then at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and later at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Pretoria, also provided local assistance, as did colleagues at universities in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein. We owe them all our sincere thanks.

Sometimes, of course, the vicissitudes of Covid could not be overcome. Just a couple of days before one of our assistants was due to fly to Pretoria to interview the opera singer Mimi Coertse, her small son came down with Covid and she had to stay in the Cape (regrettably, we were unable to organise any follow-up interview before Mimi's health thwarted our plans altogether). On another occasion, one of our team members travelled to Pretoria for archival work, only to be locked out of the archive the next day because of a local case of Covid. Our project also coincided with a period of widespread power cuts and water rationing in South Africa that provided even more complications. Some of the individual subprojects had to be tweaked and adjusted to cope with shifting circumstances, though this also occasionally resulted in previously unforeseen, positive outcomes such as the book on the coloured South African repeteur Gordon Jephtas, edited by three of the contributors to the present volume and also published by BAB Verlag in Basel.<sup>12</sup>

Writing or editing a book on South Africa necessitates careful consideration of terminol-

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<sup>12</sup> Hilde Roos, F.-J. Davids and Chris Walton, eds., *"I'm Sorry. I am what I am." The life and letters of the South African pianist and opera coach Gordon Jephtas (1943–92)*, Basel: BAB Verlag, 2023.

ogy, also because different terms are connoted differently in Europe, Africa and the United States. This fact caused problems even before our research project began. The peer reviewers employed by the SNSF to assess project proposals, like all such research bodies across Europe, tend to be white, liberal, middle-aged, Central European academics whose experience of the English-speaking world is focused on the United Kingdom and the United States of America. This means, for example, that the use of the word “coloured” has to be explained carefully. In the USA (and often in the UK), its use is considered offensive (and would rightly result in the automatic disqualification of any research proposal in which it figured). In South Africa, however, it has a specific historical and political meaning, referring to a diverse group of people categorised as “coloured” under apartheid – a label many thus categorised still use today themselves, particularly in official or legal contexts, while others reject it in favour of terms such as “Khoi”, “Black”, or more localised identifications. We were also candidly advised to avoid the word “race” throughout in our proposal, as the mere mention of the word could be considered by many (white, middle-aged, liberal, Central European) peer reviewers as in itself racist. But since apartheid South Africa was founded on spurious notions of what “race” is supposed to be, and since the word is used openly by South Africans of all races, avoiding it when talking or writing about apartheid South Africa can result in linguistic absurdities (we nevertheless decided to replace “race” with “ethnicity” in our project proposal, as the latter term still remains largely untainted in the Global North). Retaining the nomenclature of apartheid in order to write about it naturally risks perpetuating the offensive notions that lurked behind that nomenclature, and while we have no straightforward answers to the linguistic conundrums that we have faced, we can only assure our readers that we have given intense thought to them. We wish to note that we here follow the custom of the New York Times and elsewhere by capitalising the word “Black”. However, on the recommendation of a colleague who happens to be coloured, we use this term in the present book in the lower case throughout in order to give it an adjectival function similar to “white”.

This volume represents the first sustained attempt to document and analyse the cultural dimensions of Swiss-South African relations during apartheid, drawing together archival research, critical essays, and rare oral histories – including invaluable interviews with jazz musicians – for a multifaceted perspective on transnational cultural exchange. In doing so, it addresses a notable gap left by NFP 42+, expanding the historiography beyond economic and political frameworks to foreground music, theatre, literature and translation as key arenas of encounter. By recovering overlooked narratives, exposing the complexity of complicity and resistance, and attending to the mobility of artists, texts and instruments across borders, this book opens new avenues for understanding how culture functioned as

both a site of soft power and a means of subversion during an era of Cold War tensions and apartheid repression.

The present volume includes papers from the conference held in Basel in May 2023 along with several essays that similarly emerged from the project and a number of interviews with musicians from the jazz scene and its periphery. We are grateful to all the authors who have contributed to this volume – both those who gave papers at the conference and those who joined us later. We also owe thanks to those who have provided illustrations. We have in all cases endeavoured to ensure the rights to the images reproduced here. If we have inadvertently used images whose rights lie elsewhere, we kindly request that the rights holders contact us.

Our thanks are due to the many people who agreed to be interviewed in the course of our research or contributed in other ways, including Rob Allingham, Michael Blake, Isabel Bradley, John Wolf Brennan, Pim Broer, Christine Canu, Bernard Caplan, Michelle Cooper, John Coulter, Bob Degen, Frederick Fourie, Pienaar Fourie, Pieter Fourie, Athol Fugard, Ronald Gehr, Roland Jung, Stephan Kurmann, Jürgen Leinhos, Johannes Lüthi, Mannie Manim, Rose Ntshoko, Esther Nyffenegger, Walter Prystawski, Barbara Pukwana, Dietbert Reich, Jill Richards, Cobus Rossouw, Renée Sigel, Paul Simmonds, Danie Stander, Louis de Stoutz, Harald Strebel, Niklaus Troxler, Obed Ureña, Barend van den Bergh, Fritz Weber, Beat Wenger and Aude Widmer (see also the acknowledgements in the individual chapters below).

Special gratitude goes to Georg Kreis, to the team of the Bern Academy of the Arts (Thomas Gartmann, Martin Skamletz, Daniel Allenbach, Reto Witschi), to the team of Basler Afrika Bibliographien (Dag Henrichsen, Christian Vandersee, Heidi Brunner, Susanne Hubler, Petra Kerckhoff, Corinne Lüthy, Jasmin Rindlisbacher, Lisa Roulet, Sarah Schwarz, Micha Seitzinger, Reto Ulrich and Antonio Uribe), to Veit Arlt and the Centre for Africa Studies at the University of Basel, to Claude Hauser of the University of Fribourg, to SUIISA (especially Andreas Wegelin and Noah Martin) and to everyone at Africa Open Institute at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. The archives and libraries consulted are listed at the close of this book.

*Solothurn & Stellenbosch, June 2025*

# Part I

## Historical Foundations and Early Encounters



## Introduction to Part I

The four chapters that follow lay the groundwork for this volume's exploration of the cultural ties between Switzerland and South Africa by examining early, often overlooked, intersections between the two countries. They extend the temporal reach of the project beyond the apartheid years (1948–1994), and in doing so illuminate the *longue durée* of Swiss–South African relations as a precondition for the exchanges – and entanglements – that would follow in the twentieth century. They show how routes of migration, religious mission, institutional exchange, material circulation and architectural influence formed a slow but steady lattice of cultural contact, out of which later alliances, complicities and solidarities would grow. These foundations help us understand how seemingly improbable relations – between a small, landlocked European country and a geographically distant, racially stratified society in the global South – could become not only possible, but also culturally productive and ideologically fraught.

Chris Walton's opening chapter provides a wide-ranging and often surprising account of the earliest cultural contact between the two countries. It reveals that, even in the nineteenth century, music was one of the first forms of cultural transmission, with Swiss songs – such as Martin Usteri's "Freut euch des Lebens" – heard in the South African interior by travelling Europeans. Walton shows how such seemingly benign forms of musical export existed alongside deeply racialised European travel writing, missionary reports and ethnographic images that trafficked in ideas of "civilisation" and "primitivism". His chapter underscores how early Swiss representations of Africa, and of South Africa in particular, were shaped by imperial imaginaries, and how these imaginaries laid the cultural groundwork for later economic and political engagement. By the time apartheid was instituted in 1948, a century of discursive and visual preparation had already primed Swiss publics to view South Africa through the double lens of exoticism and affinity – a dynamic that would persist throughout the Cold War period.

The second chapter, by Lineo Segoete, shifts the focus to missionary knowledge-making and its role in shaping the politics of language and literacy in Southern Africa. Her essay examines the standardisation of Sesotho orthography by Swiss Protestant missionaries, and particularly the linguistic legacy of Eugène Casalis. Segoete traces how these early philological interventions, driven by evangelical and colonial motivations, also laid the foundation for a written Sesotho tradition – a paradoxical process in which tools of cultural domination inadvertently enabled localised cultural expression. Her analysis complicates any clear-cut narrative of "cultural exchange", showing instead how asymmetrical power relations,

theological paternalism, and the technologies of print coalesced into enduring linguistic infrastructures. This contribution connects closely to one of the book's central themes: how Swiss actors were not merely distant observers of South African society but often active participants in shaping it – sometimes unintentionally so – through their cultural, religious and intellectual practices.

Annemie Stimie Behr's chapter follows the trail of objects rather than words. Her focus is the Hans Adler Collection, a repository of Southern African material culture assembled by a German immigrant businessman. By examining the biographical journeys of selected objects within the collection, Stimie Behr offers a nuanced cultural biography of things: how they were acquired, displayed, and narrated over time. Her analysis shows how Swiss institutions helped to shape ethnographic discourses about Africa and Africans, often under the guise of neutrality. Yet the chapter also gestures to the possibility of re-reading such collections differently, opening them up to questions about provenance, agency and restitution. In so doing, she invites us to think about the ethics of collecting as a form of cultural relation, and the ways in which material culture functions as a record of both encounter and erasure.

The final chapter in this section, by Thomas Chapman, transports the reader into the world of architecture and urban planning. His study of civic centres designed by the Swiss-born Kirchhofer architectural firm for apartheid-era South African cities brings into view the transnational flows of modernist aesthetics – and the ideological work they performed. Drawing on archival plans and site visits, Chapman examines how these designs simultaneously imported Swiss ideals of compact urbanity and became inscribed in the spatial logic of segregation. His contribution foregrounds the ambivalence of cultural transfer: how a seemingly neutral architectural vocabulary could become complicit in apartheid's racial spatiality. At the same time, his analysis resists moralistic closure, instead opening space for critical reflection on how design ideals travel and mutate within politically charged contexts.

Taken together, the chapters in Part I provide a set of historical coordinates for the reader. They demonstrate that cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa were not the accidental by-products of economic expediency or Cold War diplomacy alone, but emerged from deeper, entangled histories of migration, mission, aesthetic aspiration and epistemic power. These early encounters – musical, linguistic, material and spatial – were often marked by asymmetry and inequity. Yet they also produced enduring cultural infrastructures and institutions that would continue to shape the possibilities and limits of South African cultural life well into the apartheid era.

# 1 Tracing the Paths of Culture between Switzerland and South Africa

Chris Walton

The earliest documented instance of cultural exchange between Switzerland and South Africa – the earliest, at least, that our investigations have unearthed – was musical. It is mentioned in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) of 29 May 1839, in a single sentence tagged onto the end of an untitled article about opera performances in Lausanne. It runs: “Travellers in South Africa have heard people singing and playing ‘Freut euch des Lebens’ by our Martin Usteri”.<sup>1</sup>

“Freut euch des Lebens” is probably the most famous Swiss song, long sung in schools and heard across the German-speaking world as a melodious *carpe diem* at the close of societal gatherings of all kinds. Most are unaware that it is actually Swiss at all, though its text – as the NZZ rightly states – was by the minor Swiss poet Martin Usteri (1763–1827) and its music reputedly by Hans Georg Nägeli (1773–1836), a composer and publisher based in Zurich (it is still debated whether Nägeli actually composed the tune or adapted it from elsewhere).

This first example of intercontinental cultural dialogue was also the last for a long time. On those few other occasions in the mid-19th century when the newspaper-reading population of Switzerland learnt anything of southern Africa, it was generally about how the good peoples of the North were bringing the Good Word to the “wild peoples” of the South, disseminating hymns and tracts to boost the Protestant cause.<sup>2</sup> As the decades passed, the odd travel report on southern Africa and its fauna and flora was published, advertised or reviewed,<sup>3</sup> and the various wars and skirmishes between colonials and the indigenous also received occasional mention. From 1870 onwards the discovery of diamonds in Southern

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<sup>1</sup> In *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 64, 29 May 1839. All translations here by the present writer unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, anon., “Einige Züge aus dem Leben eines Missionars unter den wilden Völkern”, in *Christlicher Volksbote aus Basel*, 9, 27 February 1834.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Andrew Cole’s book in German translation by J. Hasskarl entitled *Das Kap und die Kaffern: oder Mittheilungen über meinen fünfjährigen Aufenthalt in Süd-Afrika*. Leipzig: Arnoldische Buchhandlung, 1858, advertised for sale by the Schulthess bookshop in Zurich in *Eidgenössische Zeitung*, 14(204), 25 July 1858.

Africa caused a spike in enthusiasm.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise, the main Swiss interest in the Far South seems to have remained confined to missionary matters, often with a hint of White Saviourism and occasionally even with a competitive edge, as if the rising numbers of “Hottentot” (sic) Christians at the Cape were a commodity one might measure as one would wheat or gold (“there are now 40,000 Christians in South Africa ... 30,000 in Sierra Leone ... 80,000 in New Zealand” enthused the *Intelligenzblatt für die Stadt Bern* on 7 August 1847).<sup>5</sup> Every now and then, a Swiss missionary would return to his home country to drum up (financial) support in order to boost his conversion figures. After the export of “Freut euch des Lebens”, the only notable Swiss cultural contribution to Southern Africa in the 19th century seems to have been the Lesotho national anthem. It has a text in Sotho, written by the French missionary François Coillard (1834–1904), that he himself set to an existing melody by the Basel composer Ferdinand Laur.<sup>6</sup> But the declamation of Coillard’s Sotho hymn does not actually fit the Swiss melody, instead imposing incorrect, European emphases on the African text.<sup>7</sup> It would be overly simplistic to interpret this case as an unwitting blueprint for similarly skewed Swiss/African cultural encounters over the ensuing one-and-a-half centuries (historians of South Africa have long been fond of blunt metaphors, however inappropriate); but from a historical perspective, there is no doubt that it reflects the dominant hegemonic paradigms all the same.

A cursory perusal of the daily press in Central Europe in the 19th century suggests a certain transnational uniformity in attitudes towards southern Africa. People were interested in its fauna, its diamonds, its wars and its missionaries (though in Catholic regions such as Austria,<sup>8</sup> the last of these does not seem to have appealed as much as it did in largely Protestant Switzerland). There was some emigration from Europe to the South; young South Africans began visiting Europe for their tertiary education; and the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902 prompted outpourings of sympathy for the Boers across Central Europe.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, anon., “Die Gold- und Diamantenfelder Südafrika’s”, in *Der Bund*, 22(2), 3 January 1871.

<sup>5</sup> Anon., “Bibel- und Missionsfest in Bern, den 5. August 1847 (Schluss)”, in *Intelligenzblatt für die Stadt Bern*, 14(188), 7 August 1847.

<sup>6</sup> See Andreas Baumgartner and Matthias Schmidt, eds., “*Unser Land*”? *Lesothos schweizerische Nationalhymne* = “*Our Land*”? *Lesotho’s Swiss national anthem*. [Basel]: Christoph Merian Verlag, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> See Musa Nkuna, “(Un)forced errors? The Relationship between Words and Music in the National Anthem of Lesotho”, in Baumgartner and Schmidt, eds., “*Unser Land*”? 173–77.

<sup>8</sup> See *ANNO Historische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften*, the Austrian national Library’s online database of newspapers and journals at <https://anno.onb.ac.at/>. A full-text search for “Südafrika” in the 19th century turns up hits in three figures in the Austrian press, a perusal of which – while by no means able to claim any incontestable scholarly accuracy – does seem to confirm that the interests of the Swiss and Austrian press were not worlds apart (accessed December 2024).

Monies were gathered for the Boer cause from all over Switzerland, and an “Action Committee” of Zurich even decided to send a Swiss doctor and a Swiss nurse to help the Boer wounded.<sup>9</sup> It was also to Clarens in Switzerland that Paul Kruger retired after the defeat of the Transvaal and its Orange Free State ally (he died there in 1904).

Switzerland itself seems to have attracted little attention among South Africans at this time. Students wishing to travel to Europe to complete their studies seem to have chosen Swiss universities but rarely<sup>10</sup> – though that is hardly surprising, given that the most prestigious tertiary institutions were located elsewhere. English-speakers tended to choose the United Kingdom for their studies, while Afrikaners often went to Germany or Holland. As has been well documented, several leading lights of the later National Party attended universities in Germany in the interwar years, such as Nico Diederichs, Max Eiselen and Hendrik Verwoerd. The last of these studied variously in Berlin and Leipzig in the mid-1920s, even marrying his wife Betsie Schoombie in Hamburg in 1927.



Figure 1.1. The “Switzerland” at the Aswan Dam on its journey south across the African Continent. Photograph by Arnold Heim, December 1926. ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Dia\_006-057. Creative Commons.

<sup>9</sup> See the brief untitled report on page three of *Der Bund*, 52(189), 10 July 1901, second issue of the day. Numerous newspapers reported on the progress of donations for the welfare of the Boers, see for example anon., “Sammlung für die Buren”, in *Zuger Nachrichten*, 13(149), 30 December 1899. Sending two medics to help in a war whose dead and injured reached well into six figures seems overly cautious of the Swiss, though I suppose it’s the thought that counts.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the matriculation lists of the University of Zurich, which have been digitised up to 1924, list just five South African students up to that date.

South Africa got a burst of Swiss publicity in the late 1920s through the derring-do of the Swiss aviator-cum-photographer Werner Mittelholzer (1894–1937), who had come to prominence with flights first over the Alps and then to more distant destinations including Iran – each time publishing a book about his endeavours full of extraordinary aerial photographs.<sup>11</sup> In 1926 he set out on his longest journey yet: an expedition to cross the whole of the African continent in a seaplane (named, of course, “Switzerland”) together with three fellow Swiss: the geologist and photographer Arnold Heim, the writer René Gouzy, and the co-pilot and engineer Hans Hartmann. They flew via Naples, Athens, Alexandria and Luxor (photographing Vesuvius, the Acropolis and the pyramids along the way) and then via Lake Victoria to Mozambique and South Africa, landing in Cape Town on 20 February 1927 after a journey of two-and-a-half months. Mittelholzer’s fame meant he was able to publicise his trip well in advance to gain maximum publicity (a long report detailing his preparations – covering no less than two-thirds of a full page of the *NZZ* in October 1926 – was preceded by a proud note from the newspaper’s editors that they alone had the sole rights to Mittelholzer’s words).<sup>12</sup> In Mombasa, Heim and Gouzy left the plane and took the sea route, joining up with Mittelholzer and Hartmann in South Africa. Heim, the expedition’s official geologist, also made trips to the gold, diamond and platinum mines of the then Transvaal and Orange Free State (including, of course, the Big Hole of Kimberley).

After enjoying the hospitality in Cape Town of the Swiss Club and the Governor General, Lord Athlone, the seaplane was dismantled and returned to Europe by boat, along with its crew. And as soon as their journey was complete, Mittelholzer and Co. produced a book with over 200 magnificent photos from the air and on the ground: *Afrikaflug*.<sup>13</sup> It was reprinted several times and remains a fascinating document, full of detail about their route, the geographical and geological peculiarities of the lands they traversed, the animals they saw, and the logistical problems that they faced and solved. But it also remains very much of its time in its tendency to portray the indigenous people they met along the way as little more than noble savages. Two plates depict Black people gathered to gawk in supposed “astonishment” at the technological achievements of white society (namely the railways and the seaplane). There are six photos of happy natives dancing and drumming “in honour of their guests”<sup>14</sup> (i.e. Mittelholzer & Co.) and there are numerous close-ups of bare-breasted

<sup>11</sup> Werner Mittelholzer, *Die Schweiz aus der Vogelschau*. Erlenbach-Zurich: Eugen Rentsch, 1926; and Mittelholzer, *Persienflug*. Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1926.

<sup>12</sup> See Werner Mittelholzer, “Die Vorbereitungen zum Schweizer Afrikaflug”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 147(1593), evening edition (4 October 1926).

<sup>13</sup> Werner Mittelholzer, René Gouzy and Arnold Heim: *Afrikaflug*. Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1927.

<sup>14</sup> See plates 79 to 84 of Mittelholzer et al., *Afrikaflug* (the plates are numbered throughout but are printed on unnumbered pages).





*Figure 1.2. The Big Hole of Kimberley. Photograph by Arnold Heim, 26 February 1927. ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Dia\_007-048. Creative Commons.*

young Black women (on more than one occasion, the subjects of these images are expressly described as “Schönheit[en]”<sup>15</sup> – “Beauties”, which leaves little doubt as to what has attracted the attention of the white male gaze). In one particularly crass example, the feeding habits of the “civilised” and the colonised are contrasted on the same page. In the top half of one page, Heim and Mittelholzer are shown sitting at a makeshift table in the bush, drinking from China cups, presumably at breakfast, with three American explorers posing behind them; everyone is dressed smartly. The lower half of the page features a photo of a topless Black woman, also in the bush, standing while breastfeeding a baby; beside her stands another topless Black woman, also holding a child, with four more small children in front of them.<sup>16</sup> For all their admirable scholarly endeavours, the default position of Mittelholzer & Co. was to infantilise and sexualise when depicting colonised peoples of colour. When his plane finally landed in Durban after many near-mishaps as they crossed the African interior, Mittelholzer breathed a veritable sigh of relief: “Durban ... looks thoroughly European ... We had the feeling that we had completely returned to civilisation”.<sup>17</sup>

After surviving the Second World War largely untouched on account of its neutrality and its astute political and economic manoeuvrings with the surrounding Axis powers, Switzerland enjoyed a post-war boom that lasted until the oil crisis of the 1970s. The increasing wealth of the Swiss middle classes and the post-War popularity of air transport now opened up new, potential avenues for tourism. Within two decades of Mittelholzer’s flight, ordinary Swiss were able to contemplate following in his aerial footsteps (if they had enough money). As we have already noted, a major focus of interest in South Africa from the 19th century onwards was its “exotic” animals and peoples. So when Swissair began expanding its opportunities for travelling to the tip of Africa in the years after the Second World War, it is hardly surprising that its designers should have seized on this aspect for their posters. In 1952, the artist Viktor Hasslauer designed a Swissair poster to advertise flights from Geneva to Johannesburg (printed by Jacques Bollmann AG of Zurich). We refrain from reproducing it here because it would be inappropriate in our context to disseminate its racist tropes.<sup>18</sup> It offers many of the most obvious clichés: a smiling, half-naked Black “native” is gazing up admiringly at Swiss technology in the form of a four-engine airliner flying overhead; he is playing a drum, presumably signifying the primordial passions of the Dark Continent; and in the background are indistinct figures similar to those in San rock art (which was already

<sup>15</sup> Mittelholzer et al., *Afrikaflug*, plates 125 & 160.

<sup>16</sup> See *Afrikaflug*, plates 134 and 135.

<sup>17</sup> *Afrikaflug*, 191.

<sup>18</sup> The interested reader can view it online in the Swiss Federal collections at [www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL\\_53\\_INST:posters/1235845080003978?lang=fr](http://www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1235845080003978?lang=fr) (accessed November 2024).





Figure 1.3. Cape Town: The Lion's Head as seen from Table Mountain. Photograph by Arnold Heim, 1 March 1927. ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Hs\_0494b-0062-117-AL. Creative Commons.

known in the West), apparently dancing in front of straw huts (shades of Rousseau's "noble savage" again, of course).

We naturally find these racist clichés offensive today, though we owe it to Hasslauer to consider him in the context of his own time. He was actually situated on the left-wing of Swiss politics and had contributed to a charitable campaign to help the survivors and victims of the Second World War in Europe alongside other left-wing and centrist Swiss artists such as Gregor Rabinovitch and Hanny Fries.<sup>19</sup> Hasslauer had also designed posters in 1947 and 1948 for the Swiss winter aid charity<sup>20</sup> and in 1950 for the Swiss Socialist Party.<sup>21</sup> I have been unable to find out for sure, but it seems likely that Hasslauer had never been to South Africa, had probably never met an African person, and probably only knew of Africa from Mittelholzer's *Afrikaflug*, the Tarzan films, and the racist stereotypes found in animated films of the era from the USA.

<sup>19</sup> Anon., "Die Schweizer Spende an die Kriegsgeschädigten = Le don suisse aux victimes de la guerre", in *Die Schweiz = Suisse = Svizzera = Switzerland: offizielle Reisezeitschrift der Schweiz. Verkehrszentrale, der Schweizerischen Bundesbahnen, Privatbahnen ...* [et al.], 1945, No. 3, 18–19, here 19.

<sup>20</sup> See [www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL\\_53\\_INST:posters/1235013840003978?lang=fr](http://www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1235013840003978?lang=fr) and [www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL\\_53\\_INST:posters/1235341140003978?lang=fr](http://www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1235341140003978?lang=fr) (both accessed November 2024).

<sup>21</sup> See [www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL\\_53\\_INST:posters/1237996720003978?lang=fr](http://www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1237996720003978?lang=fr) (accessed November 2024).

Hasslauer's view of South Africa as a place of exotic, natural beauty and of happy, dancing, drumming, simple hut-dwelling Black people in awe of Western superiority was also the view of the place that the white South African authorities of the time endeavoured to maintain. The National Party had assumed power in the South African elections of 1948 and thereupon embarked on an immense expansion of segregation, introducing laws over the ensuing years that regulated all interactions between the different population groups: where they could live, what education they could get, what beaches, park benches and shop doorways they were allowed to use, and with whom they were allowed to have sex. The South African government also initiated a major immigration programme to attract whites from outside the country in order to bolster their numbers in the face of an ever-increasing Black population.<sup>22</sup> As is documented amply elsewhere, opposition to apartheid in the West – running in part in parallel to anti-segregation movements in the West itself – resulted in calls to boycott South Africa: economically, culturally and in sports. The murder of unarmed Black protestors at Sharpeville in March 1960 triggered demands for broader anti-apartheid measures in the West. South Africa left the Commonwealth in early 1961 when it declared itself a republic, independent of the United Kingdom. The United Nations called for economic sanctions against South Africa in its Resolution 1761 of 1962,<sup>23</sup> and South Africa was suspended from the Olympic Games in 1964 and banned from them in 1970. Economic divestment from South Africa increased in the 1970s, and the UN instituted an arms embargo in 1977 with its Resolution 418.<sup>24</sup> Calls for a cultural boycott started early. The British Musicians' Union urged its members to boycott the country from 1961 onwards, university academics began signing pledges to boycott South Africa that same decade, the UN officially called for a cultural boycott in 1980 and in 1983 its Special Committee Against Apartheid instituted a register of artists who performed in South Africa in defiance of calls for that boycott.<sup>25</sup> Politics in South Africa gradually became more polarised. State brutality and violent resistance to it intensified after the Soweto Uprising of 1976, when Black schoolchildren were killed at a protest against the introduction of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the report in *Time* magazine about the enticement policy for foreign whites that was organised by the apartheid government. Anon., "South Africa: Go South, Young (White) Man", in *Time*, 24 January 1964.

<sup>23</sup> See the relevant documents on the website of the United Nations: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/204274?ln=en&v=pdf> (accessed November 2024).

<sup>24</sup> See <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/66633?ln=en&v=pdf> (accessed November 2024).

<sup>25</sup> See Detlef Siegfried, "Aporien des Kulturboykotts. Anti-Apartheid-Bewegung, ANC und der Konflikt um Paul Simons Album 'Graceland' (1985–1988)", in *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 13 (2016), 254–79.

Switzerland's neutrality had made it a natural home for many of the world's major international institutions from the late 19th century onwards, from the Universal Postal Union based in Bern to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Lausanne and the League of Nations, the World Health Organization and the United Nations, all in Geneva. However, Switzerland's own view of its neutrality forbade it from actually participating in some of these organisations, while also empowering it to ignore directives issued by others. South Africa might have been expelled from the Olympics by the Swiss-based IOC, but the Swiss Foreign Office itself was still declaring sports to be a "private matter" as late as the mid-1980s and accordingly refused to censure Swiss sportsmen who took part in South African competitions.<sup>26</sup> Being "neutral" also meant that the Swiss government – which from 1959 to the present day has been run by a stable coalition of the biggest parties across the political spectrum (known popularly as the "Zauberformel" or "magic formula") – did not feel bound by any of the resolutions passed by the United Nations (which it in any case did not join until 2002). From the 1960s onwards, as other trading partners slowly began to shun South Africa, Switzerland assumed ever greater importance. The South African diamond company De Beers – the world's biggest, dominating some 80% of the uncut diamond trade – set up a branch in Lucerne in 1975 and moved its headquarters there in 1988. In the late 1950s, South Africa had also become the world's biggest producer of gold, and by the early 1970s, three quarters of its production was being imported by Swiss banks.<sup>27</sup> By the end of apartheid, Swiss banks ranked fifth in the list of South Africa's overall creditors – an astonishing fact, given the relative size of the Swiss economy compared to South Africa's other major trading partners.<sup>28</sup> Switzerland saw no legal reason to refuse to engage with South Africa; and on a political level, the latter's commitment to the Western, anti-communist cause during the Cold War provided a further mitigating reason for Switzerland's support (as it was a reason for the hesitance of the USA, the United Kingdom and other Western countries to sever their close ties to South Africa).

Educational links also continued unabated throughout the apartheid period. In 1973, Switzerland set up a postgraduate scholarship programme, awarding two scholarships per country to a host of nations across the world, including South Africa and the communist countries of the Eastern Bloc. From the start, at least one of the two annual scholarships allocated to South Africa was supposed to go to someone who was not white. But since it seems that no one made any concerted effort to inform Black students of this opportunity, and since it was in any case the policy of the apartheid government to ensure that only whites

<sup>26</sup> See Georg Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994*. Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2007, 481–82.

<sup>27</sup> Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa*, 318–19.

<sup>28</sup> Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa*, 317.

had access to adequate tertiary education, it is logical that no suitable Black candidates presented themselves. So the scholarships continued to be allocated to white South Africans.<sup>29</sup> It was suggested in the late 1970s that such scholarships should be awarded specifically to Blacks, but this was rejected by the then Swiss ambassador Eduard Brunner on account of being “discriminatory”.<sup>30</sup> The sophistry this demonstrates rather takes one’s breath away, but such attitudes were hardly untypical of the time.

There is, however, a notable instance of official dialogue in cultural matters that was initiated between the white Afrikaner establishment and Switzerland that ultimately proved of lasting benefit to South Africans beyond the racial divide. In 1961, Gideon Roos (1909–1999), Director-General of the South African Broadcasting Corporation since 1948, was forced out of his job for being inadequately committed to the policies of the governing National Party.<sup>31</sup> He was from a prominent Afrikaner family – his father, Paul Roos, had been a famous Springbok captain, and the school named after him in Stellenbosch continues to bear his name today – but whereas numerous prominent National Party politicians had studied in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, Gideon Roos had followed his undergraduate studies at Stellenbosch with a BLitt in international law as a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford (where he was also a rugby Blue). After leaving the SABC, Roos set up an independent, South African pendant to the United Kingdom’s Performing Rights Society that had up to this point also been responsible for administering such rights in South Africa. This new society was initially named the South African Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers, though when its chosen acronym, “SAFCA”, was found to be in use elsewhere, it was renamed SAMRO in 1966, the “South African Music Rights Organisation” (its first word later being changed to “Southern” when SAMRO expanded its activities).<sup>32</sup> Roos soon affiliated SAMRO with the Confédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Auteurs et Compositeurs (CISAC). Before the decade was out, he had also set up a sister organisation to cater for dramatic rights, namely DALRO (Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The present writer was one of the two recipients of such a *Bundesstipendium* from the United Kingdom in 1986. I remember meeting fellow South African scholars at the time, since we all came together regularly for social activities; none of them was Black. These scholarships still exist, though now under the name “Bundes-Exzellenz-Stipendien”. See [www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/de/home/bildung/stipendien/bundes-exzellenz-stipendien.html](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/de/home/bildung/stipendien/bundes-exzellenz-stipendien.html) (accessed November 2024).

<sup>30</sup> Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa*, 504.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the brief report on his resignation in anon., “Gideon Roos”, in *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 April 1961.

<sup>32</sup> The reasons are mentioned by Gideon Roos in a letter to SUIA of 29 November 1966. This and all the other correspondence mentioned here between SAMRO and SUIA is held today by SUIA, who kindly granted us permission to consult their archives. Our thanks in particular go to Andreas Wegelin and Noah Martin.

<sup>33</sup> For general biographical information, see, for example, Southern African Music Rights Organ-

SAMRO was for many years essentially a family business, for Roos also employed his sons Gideon Junior and Paul at SAMRO. The former looked after the technological side of SAMRO's business, dealing with IBM and others in early efforts at computerisation, while the latter in time assumed his father's position as CEO. What at first glance looks like a typical instance of apartheid-era, Afrikaner musical nepotism<sup>34</sup> would in fact appear to have been promotion based on merit, for SAMRO proved a spectacular success under the auspices of Roos Senior and Juniors – so much so that over the years it was able to channel millions of rand into competitions and scholarships that became a prime means for young South African musicians and composers to study abroad.<sup>35</sup> Nor was membership of SAMRO confined to whites. Strike Vilakazi, for example, the composer of the famous protest song “Meadowlands”, joined SAMRO not long after it was founded. Royalties were calculated by SAMRO according to the same formula, regardless of the skin colour of the artists in question. Over the years, SAMRO has provided a major source of income for Black South African musicians.

The Swiss equivalent of SAMRO is SUIISA, whose history began in 1924 under the name “GEFA”, an association that was made a cooperative society under its present name in 1941. Roos made contact with SUIISA and its director Ulrich Uchtenhagen in early 1963 because he desired information on SUIISA's tariff system while setting up his own in South Africa. It seems that the two men met at some point over the next three years (presumably at an international meeting, since both organisations were members of CISAC), though the correspondence between them (mostly in English, occasionally in German) remained sporadic until April 1967, when Roos wrote to inform Uchtenhagen that he would be passing through Switzerland in May of that year (accompanied by Gideon Junior) and would like to visit SUIISA's premises to become better acquainted with its operations. The meeting went ahead, friendships were established, and a long correspondence ensued that moved on to first-name terms within the next couple of years. In order to differentiate Gideon Senior

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isation: “Obituary Gideon Daniel Roos. 28.9.1999 – 9.3.1999”, in *Ars Nova*, 31(1), January 1999, 56–57.

<sup>34</sup> Space here is insufficient to deal with this topic in depth, but a close look – for example – at the staff lists of South African university music departments from, say, 1970 to 2000, would reveal a network of familial and sexual relationships. The major music compositions in South Africa in the late apartheid era also occasionally featured family connections between winners and jury members. The cases known to the present writer must remain undisclosed here, not least for legal reasons.

<sup>35</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the first notable instance of corruption at SAMRO only occurred many years after the last Roos had departed. See anon., “Samro's Dubai scandal deepens” about the disappearance of nearly ZAR 40 million in ca 2017 when SAMRO became involved in a scheme to set up a performing rights organisation in the United Arab Emirates. See [www.news24.com/business/samros-dubai-scandal-deepens-20180902-2](http://www.news24.com/business/samros-dubai-scandal-deepens-20180902-2) (accessed June 2025).

from Junior (for the latter figured large in the dealings between the two societies), the son was soon generally referred to as “Rööсли”, a Swiss diminutive of his Afrikaans surname (the Afrikaans word “roos” meaning “rose”, and “Rösli” being Swiss-German for “little rose”; the surname “Rööсли” with a double vowel is still common in Switzerland today. Gideon Junior even began signing himself thus in his own letters to SUIA).

Further meetings took place, also at international gatherings, while mid-level staff members with specific expertise were sent on exchange visits to each other’s offices. Gifts of South African wine were gratefully received (and also shared with colleagues in the SUIA offices), Uchtenhagen arranged for a Swiss watch of Roos’s to be repaired, and a warm relationship was clearly established. Roos even asked advice on the possibility of setting up an annual South African singing competition similar to one he had experienced in Montreux (though it seems nothing came about).<sup>36</sup> Despite the gifts, the mutual hospitality and the almost brotherly concern that emerges from their letters, the prime topic of their highly detailed correspondence nevertheless remained their work. SUIA had been tasked by CISAC with drawing up a list of all composers, lyricists and music publishers affiliated to its various societies (the “CAE” list), and the correspondence between Uchtenhagen and Roos makes it clear that the former provided the latter with regular updated copies of the list. Nor does the correspondence between the two men shy away from nitty-gritty cataloguing issues that were potentially divergent in their respective countries (one minor example is found in a letter from Roos Senior of 16 August 1968, for example, where he asks whether SUIA would place the surname “De Villiers” under “D” or “V”). Agreements were also drawn up between the two societies regarding the collection and distribution of royalties for performances by artists registered in the other’s jurisdiction. And SUIA’s experience proved vital in computerising SAMRO’s operations. It is also notable that Roos’s South African citizenship did not prevent him from travelling behind the Iron Curtain – in a letter to Uchtenhagen of 26 April 1969, he mentions an imminent trip to an INTERGU conference in Yugoslavia (i.e. the copyright organisation “Internationale Gesellschaft für Urheberrecht”) and hopes to see him there. The Roos family connection to SAMRO only ceased in 1999, when Paul Roos stepped down as CEO.

Whereas SAMRO offers an instance of Swiss expertise that was beneficial to South Africans both Black and white, the South African state was throughout these years otherwise focused on whiteness in its dealings with its foreign business partners. From the 1960s onwards, South Africa began inviting international personalities on carefully designed propaganda tours of the country in hopes that they might afterwards influence public opinion

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<sup>36</sup> See the correspondence between the two men of 1968.



back home. A detailed study of such visits by Swiss personalities was published in 2003 by Roger Pfister (he counted 44 of them in the nine-year period alone from 1967 to 1976).<sup>37</sup> It seems that every such visit included a trip to the Kruger Park to see the local wildlife. On several occasions, the visitors' itinerary also included dancing shows by Blacks at mining camps – all in order to promote a fiction of happy, dancing natives amidst exotic fauna similar to what Hasslauer had imagined for his *Swissair* poster several years earlier. These visits proved a remarkably good investment. Those invited included Peter Dürrenmatt, the cousin of the writer Friedrich, an important Swiss parliamentarian and editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Basler Nachrichten*. He returned from a visit in 1968 utterly convinced that the apartheid government was on the right track.<sup>38</sup> Peter Vogelsanger, the Chairman of the Swiss Protestant Churches and vicar of the Fraumünster in Zurich, was invited to visit South Africa in 1976 and afterwards wrote a long article for the *NZZ* that mixed gentle criticism with copious praise for how the South African church and state authorities were endeavouring to master the many problems they faced. Vogelsanger was especially impressed that whereas the Swiss media had a brief, weekly religious programme (“Das Wort zum Sonntag”), South African TV ended every day with a full religious broadcast. Vogelsanger also assured his readership that “so-called ‘petty apartheid’, that offensive segregation between black and white, even down to park benches and pissoirs, is swiftly disappearing”.<sup>39</sup> It wasn't, and it didn't, not for several years. But Vogelsanger clearly felt no reason to doubt the veracity of the propaganda he was fed.

South Africa had for many decades been on the itinerary of European musicians, often as a stopping-off point for extra concerts on their way to perform in Australia (Percy Grainger had visited in 1903, where his exploits included walking from Pietermaritzburg to Durban in 18 hours and jogging with a troupe of “Zulu warriors”).<sup>40</sup> One of the first recorded visits by a Swiss musician to South Africa was by the harpsichordist Isabelle Nef in 1956 (see the chapter by Annemie Stimie Behr below). But such visits only assumed real political significance in the 1960s, when South Africa began to be excluded from international organisations and as the boycott movement gathered momentum. In fact, many of the world's most prominent musicians, both Swiss and others, began visiting South Africa in these years. The catalyst for this was almost certainly Igor Stravinsky. He was invited to

<sup>37</sup> Roger Pfister, “Pretoria's endeavours to improve its apartheid image in Switzerland”, in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* = *Revue Suisse d'histoire* = *Rivista storica Svizzera*, 53(1), 2003, 94–105.

<sup>38</sup> Pfister, “Pretoria's endeavours”, 102.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Vogelsanger, “Die Kirchen und die politische Entwicklung in Südafrika”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 197(115), 18 May 1976.

<sup>40</sup> John Bird, *Percy Grainger*. London: Faber & Faber, 1982, 88.

visit the country in 1962 by Anton Hartman – conductor, leading member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, and Head of Music at the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Stravinsky's visit in the May of that year included conducting his music (with rehearsals prepared for him by Robert Craft, who accompanied him everywhere), meeting the press (though cameras were banned) and also – of course – attending dances at a mining camp and a trip to the Kruger Park. Stravinsky also conducted a free concert for the local Black population in the Kwa-Thema township outside Springs. This was the result of a good deal of haggling between Hartman and the composer's representatives because performing for free was not something to which Stravinsky generally agreed.

Stravinsky and Craft were fully aware of the political import of this tour and had already been urged (in vain) not to conduct segregated concerts. Craft's published diary of the visit is a superbly liberal, superficially objective account that places Stravinsky in a positive light. But it also confirms indirectly that the authorities' ruse of including a trip to the Kruger Park had been eminently successful. Of his 12 pages devoted to South Africa, over five describe the fauna and flora of the Park in detail.<sup>41</sup> As in the accounts of visiting writers in the 19th century, exotic animals in South Africa continued to trump just about everything else. For foreign dignitaries, it seems that almost any instance of human inequity or racism could be expunged by the graceful sight of giraffes, lions and wildebeest.

This visit of Stravinsky to South Africa has prompted considerable interest in recent years, with scholars focussing on the seemingly subversive aspect of his having conducted in a Black township. The concert was long remembered fondly by local Black musicians as having been a unique opportunity to experience modern music, as they themselves reported in interviews given to Michael Dingaan for a BBC radio programme in 2017 (the BBC website's blurb for the documentary still calls it "the story of Igor Stravinsky's ground-breaking concert for a black audience in apartheid South Africa").<sup>42</sup> This is one of the many occasions when black and white merge into grey. For the enthusiastic locals, Stravinsky's concert was clearly a "ground-breaking" experience. But it was also exactly what the apartheid authorities wanted. They were always happy for international visitors to perform for a Black audience (or coloured, or Indian, or whatever). All that mattered was that the audience was segregated. Every performance or lecture before a segregated audience was confirmation of the rightness of apartheid. Getting Stravinsky to visit – the most famous composer of the era – was Hartman's most spectacular coup, and there is little doubt that it opened the doors for

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Craft, *Stravinsky. Chronicle of a friendship. 1948–1971*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1972, 155–66.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Dingaan, "Stravinsky in South Africa", at [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p058zhsn](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p058zhsn), broadcast in 2017 (accessed November 2024). For a more critical view of Stravinsky's visit, see John Hinch, "Stravinsky in Africa", in *Muziki*, 1(1), 2004, 71–86.



many others to assume that visiting South Africa was a natural thing to do. Over the coming years, a whole host of international names visited South Africa, invited either by Hartman, by his friend Hans Adler, the Secretary of the Johannesburg Concert Society, or by both of them – from Pierre Boulez to Karlheinz Stockhausen. We cannot prove it, but it seems likely that Adler’s status as a former Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany – thus a former victim of racism himself – might have helped to convince his European visitors that he could not possibly be acting in the interests of a similarly fascist, racist regime (though in fact he was).

What none of the artists knew was that they were almost certainly being bugged during their tours. During the present writer’s tenure as chair of music at the University of Pretoria (2001–2005), old bugging equipment was discovered by workers removing partition walls in the artists’ dressing rooms of the Musaion, the Music Department’s concert hall and a standard venue for foreign artists from the 1960s onwards (Stockhausen had lectured there in March 1971, for example).<sup>43</sup> Regrettably, any recordings made were probably destroyed during the transitional period in the mid-1990s, just before the ANC came to power. Just what the authorities might have hoped to gain from dressing-room chatter remains obscure.<sup>44</sup>

The first prominent Swiss visitor in the “post-Stravinsky” period was the composer Heinrich Sutermeister, who arrived in 1964 for a performance in Afrikaans translation of his opera *Die schwarze Spinne* (“The Black Spider”, now *Die swart spinnekop*). Sutermeister was a prominent composer at the time. His early operas had been given their first performances

<sup>43</sup> I was informed later that day by the member of staff directly involved in the renovation of the space in question, though the university authorities regrettably spirited all the evidence away before I had a chance to inspect it. He recently confirmed the story again to me.

<sup>44</sup> In her memoirs, Stockhausen’s sometime partner Mary Bauermeister – who accompanied him to South Africa in 1971 – mentions his having indulged in a sexual fling (she uses the German noun “Flirt”) when in South Africa. So perhaps the authorities hoped for some kind of *kompromat* against visiting artists, though it remains a mystery as to how they imagined they might use it. Bauermeister also mentions the inevitable visit to happy mining dances and a safari. She furthermore writes that she and Stockhausen were shown by Steve Biko and his colleagues around Soweto. This tale has been retold many times in glowing terms along the lines of “Black revolutionary” and “musical revolutionary” coming together in a metaphorical act of brotherhood. However, Bauermeister writes of having been invited to Soweto by white students of the National Union of South African Students, who in turn supposedly organised Biko as their guide. NUSAS was in fact the primarily white organisation from which Biko had seceded in 1970 to set up the (Black) South African Students’ Organisation. An extensive investigation has turned up no proof that Biko was in Johannesburg at this time, let alone that he did guided tours of Soweto for NUSAS, or even met Stockhausen at all. Bauermeister’s account of their visit to South Africa smacks embarrassingly of White Saviourism. See Bauermeister, *Ich hänge im Triolengitter. Mein Leben mit Karlheinz Stockhausen*. Munich: Edition Elke Heidenreich bei C. Bertelsmann, 2011, 264–271. See also anon., *BikoHausen: Steve Bantu Biko and Karlheinz Stockhausen in Johannesburg, 1971*, at <https://contemporaryand.com/exhibition/bikohausen-steve-bantu-biko-and-karlheinz-stockhausen-in-johannesburg-1971/> (accessed 12 June 2025).

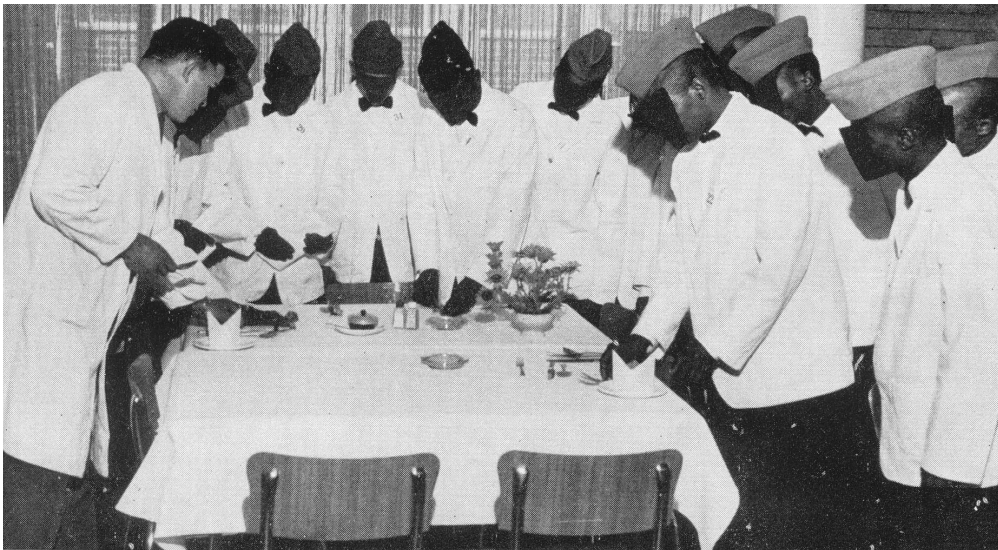


Figure 1.4. The catering corps of Leeuwkop Prison in Johannesburg, the “model prison” to be shown to prominent foreign visitors. Private collection.

under Karl Böhm in Dresden, and in 1953 the world première of his Requiem had been conducted in Rome by Herbert von Karajan, no less, with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as the soprano soloist. The cost of Sutermeister’s visit to South Africa was funded partly by his South African hosts, partly by Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council. He gave various lectures to segregated student audiences and was taken on the inevitable trip to the Kruger Park. The political import of his visit was underlined by an hour-long audience with the then Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, facilitated by the Swiss writer Hans Jenny (a former member of the Swiss fascist organisation *Nationale Front* in the 1930s, the author of white supremacist books such as *Afrika ist nicht nur schwarz* (“Africa isn’t just Black”), and at this time a prominent member of the Swiss-South African Association). Verwoerd seems to have charmed Sutermeister, assuring him among other things that “the Negroes [sic, “Neger”] do not find segregated park benches and lifts offensive”<sup>45</sup> (the same petty apartheid that according to Peter Vogelsanger, quoted above, was “swiftly disappearing” 12 years later). Sutermeister was also taken on a visit to the Black prison Leeuwkop in Johannesburg, though clearly without being informed that it was a kind of Potemkin village that was put on the itinerary of those whom the state wanted to convince of its kindly, humanitarian approach to public justice.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Typewritten report from Sutermeister to Luc Boissonnas, the head of Pro Helvetia, dated 26 April 1964. Held in Sutermeister’s archives in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich.

<sup>46</sup> Conversation between the present writer and a lawyer who trained in Johannesburg and visited

Sutermeister understood no Afrikaans, so was presumably unaware that the Afrikaans translation of his opera had occasioned an ideological shift in which Gotthelf's folk horror tale became a pro-apartheid work warning of the supposed theological and biological dangers of interracial sex. The Alpine farmers now become "boere", which in a South African context denotes white Afrikaners; the devil's sexual contact with the "boer" girl Christine leaves a dark mark on her, ultimately turning her into the black spider that spreads a black plague across the land. Metaphor in the original German acquires a literal connotation in Afrikaans. At this time, leading apartheid theorists such as Geoffrey Cronjé believed in all seriousness that "blackness" was a kind of disease spread through sexual intercourse, hence the imperative to prevent relationships across the colour bar.<sup>47</sup>

Sutermeister's visit prompted a protest from Abdul S. Minty from the anti-apartheid movement in London. There was a brief flurry of articles in the Swiss press, at which Pro Helvetia wrote to Sutermeister, disingenuously asking "Whether you perhaps had the impression that people of other races were from the outset excluded from your lectures at the universities of Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Stellenbosch ...?", at which Sutermeister wrote them a long report about how he had spoken openly before different (i.e. segregated) audiences. This seems to have satisfied them.<sup>48</sup>

One year later, in 1965, the Lucerne Festival Strings under Rudolf Baumgartner embarked on a long-planned tour of South Africa, organised largely by Hans Adler<sup>49</sup> and supported once more by Pro Helvetia. Since the problems with Sutermeister, the latter had become more cautious. So for the Festival Strings, Pro Helvetia stipulated that "an appropriate ["angemessen"] number of concerts should be given not solely for white audiences but also for Black music-lovers".<sup>50</sup> The Strings accordingly gave eleven concerts for whites and one, much shorter concert for a Black audience at Dorkay House in Johannesburg. Apart from the absurdity that a ratio of eleven to one could ever be considered "appropriate", it is clear that Pro Helvetia was still oblivious to the fact that playing for a segregated Black audience

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Leeuwkop in the 1960s.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Geoffrey Cronjé, William Nicol and Evert P. Groenewald (eds.), *Regverdige rasse-apartheid*. Stellenbosch: Christen-Studentevereniging-Maatskappy van Suid-Afrika, 1947, here 83–88. Cronjé also exercised a considerable influence on cultural life in South Africa, both as a senior academic and as a member of various boards, including that of the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal.

<sup>48</sup> See Chris Walton, "Farbe bekennen: Schweizer Künstler und der Apartheid-Staat", in: Thomas Gartmann (ed.), *Als Schweizer bin ich neutral. Schoecks Oper 'Das Schloss Dürande' und ihr Umfeld*. Schliengen: Argus, 2018, 286–311.

<sup>49</sup> For more information on Adler, see Annemie Stimie Behr's chapter in this book.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Pro Helvetia to Rudolf Baumgartner of 26 February 1965. Held by the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern.

was the problem, not a solution.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Stravinsky or Sutermeister, the Festival Strings were not taken to the Kruger Park on their tour, probably because taking a chamber orchestra would have been inordinately expensive, though they did attend the usual happy mining dances. Their experience of South African fauna was largely confined to watching the apes they saw on a bus tour around the Cape Town area.

Further Swiss musicians and ensembles visited South Africa in the years thereafter. Not even the United Nations' call for a cultural boycott of South Africa in 1968 had much of an impact – after all, Switzerland still wasn't a member of the UN. Hans Adler organised a tour for the oboist and composer Heinz Holliger in 1969, and in 1971 the Ensemble Vocal de Lausanne went there on tour. Pro Helvetia again provided much of the funding in the latter case, though they had begun to qualify their support by insisting on the necessity of non-segregated events. As in the case of the Festival Strings, however, all their concerts ended up segregated anyway.<sup>52</sup>

The only case of a Swiss ensemble turning down a visit because of apartheid seems to have been the Zurich Chamber Orchestra in 1974. A tour was agreed with Pro Helvetia and the

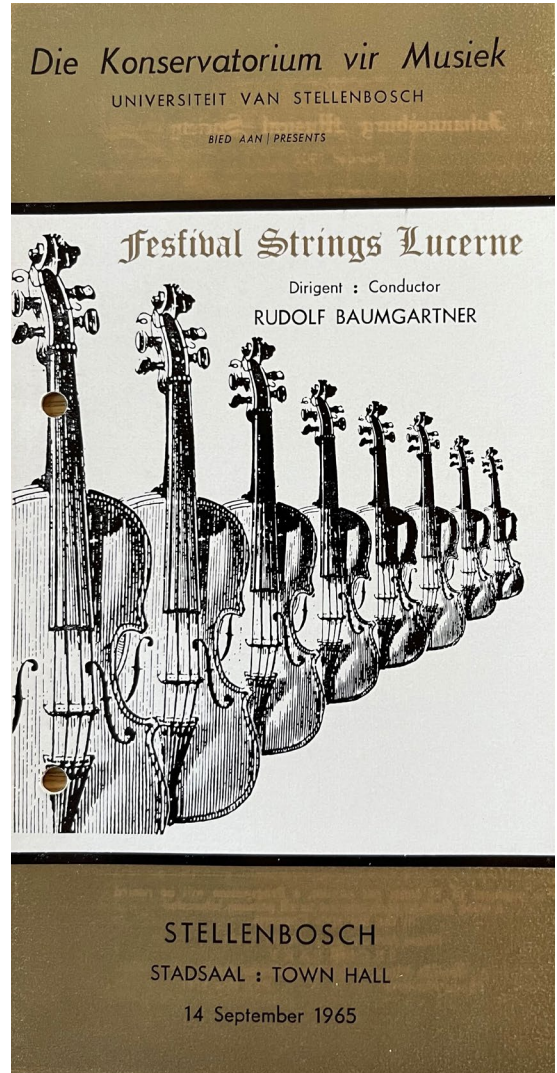


Figure 1.5. The programme for the Stellenbosch concert of the Lucerne Festival Strings in 1965. Courtesy of Esther Nyffenegger.

<sup>51</sup> For more information on this tour and the concert for Blacks held at Dorkay House, see Annemie Stimie Behr's chapter in this book.

<sup>52</sup> See Walgrave, *A Culture of Discreet Complicity: Swiss Men Mediating Culture to and from South Africa 1948–1994*. Doctoral thesis, University of Fribourg, 2024, 98–101.



South African authorities – all concerts to be segregated, of course – but then the orchestra management realised that one of its number, the violist Francisco (Franz) Ureña Rib from the Dominican Republic, would be classed as being of “mixed race”, which would normally prevent him from appearing on the podium with his (officially “white”) colleagues. The possibility was raised of his being issued with the papers of an “honorary white” for the duration of the trip. But quite apart from the potential embarrassment of his having to prove his “honorary whiteness” whenever asked, this solution also entailed possible risks. For if he strayed from his group for any reason and forgot his pass, he could have been arrested for being in a “white” area without permission.<sup>53</sup> The precise nature of the discussions between the Chamber Orchestra and the South African authorities remains unclear, but the version of the story Ureña Rib told his family was that his orchestral colleagues (and their conductor Edmond de Stoutz) had refused to allow one of their number to be treated differently, and so cancelled all plans for the tour.<sup>54</sup>

There were also Swiss musicians among those who followed the glossy promises of the South African government that attracted up to one thousand Swiss emigrants each year in the 1960s and '70s.<sup>55</sup> The present writer has spoken to three of them, and it is clear that they regarded South Africa as just another country to which one might emigrate, like Australia, New Zealand, the USA or Canada. It was a country that had a so-called “race problem”, of that they were aware, but so did the USA at the time, and that never stopped anyone from visiting there. And when these young musicians arrived in South Africa, they lived a life very similar to that in Europe, except with better weather, nicer living conditions, and servants. They played in white orchestras, gave concerts for white audiences, gave instrumental lessons to white children, and so on. And the fact that internationally famous musicians visited South Africa to perform – such as Igor Stravinsky – simply confirmed that they were living in a “normal”, Eurocentric country. While from our perspective today it is difficult to see how anyone could live in apartheid South Africa without being subject to serious cognitive dissonance, we must remember that racism remained entrenched in Western Europe far longer than we might be comfortable to acknowledge. It was not until 1995, for example, that Swiss law finally became compatible with the UN’s International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965 when Article 261bis was accepted in a national referendum, forbidding discrimination of people on the basis of race.

<sup>53</sup> When the coloured South African répétiteur Gordon Jephtas was offered a job in Pretoria in 1986, he was also offered a pass as an “honorary white”. See Roos, Davids and Walton, eds., *I’m Sorry. I am what I am*, 178.

<sup>54</sup> E-mails to the present writer from Louis de Stoutz of 19 June 2022 and Obed Ureña of 22 June 2022. See also Walgrave, *A Culture of Discreet Complicity*, 134–35.

<sup>55</sup> Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994*, 152.

The Europeans in the South African orchestras of the 1960s and '70s did enjoy certain advantages that were very different from back home. Many returned home to Europe or the USA after a few years, and some of them developed a neat scam. If one of their number was known to be leaving the country soon, he (for the foreign members were generally men) would go to a hardware shop and buy an expensive electronic item – such as a fridge – on hire purchase, putting down the minimum amount (say, ten percent). He would then sell it on to a friend in the orchestra for well under the new price, and when he left the country shortly afterwards, the shop where he'd purchased it had no idea where he'd gone and no recourse to legal action, so had to write off its losses. Theft, it seems, wasn't really theft if you were white.<sup>56</sup>

Some Swiss artists did not even have to visit South Africa physically to profit from it. As Paula Fourie explains in her chapter in this book, the writers Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch were among the most-often performed modern playwrights in South Africa from the 1960s to 1980s, often in Afrikaans translation. Despite Frisch's reputation in particular for being staunchly on the left, the first proof that we have that he was at all concerned about audience segregation is a letter from his secretary to his publisher of 4 February 1978, allowing a production of *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* to go ahead at the main Cape Town Theatre as long as (in the words of his publisher) "everyone ... has the possibility of buying an entrance ticket".<sup>57</sup> It was true that ticket sales were open to everyone; but neither Frisch nor anyone else bothered to ask whether anyone except whites could afford them. And in fact, the theatre was largely boycotted by the coloured and Black communities at the time, meaning that the production was to all intents and purposes "whites only" anyway. It took Frisch until 1986 to reject performances in South Africa.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes, an Afrikaans translation could bring a play perilously close to apartheid propaganda – such as in the Afrikaans translation of *Andorra* that was performed in Pretoria in 1964 not long after Sutermeister saw his own *Schwarze Spinne* at the same theatre. The "whites" and "blacks" of Frisch's play, the latter clad in the traditional colour of European fascism (like the "blackshirts" of Benito Mussolini in Italy and Oswald Mosley in England) lose their metaphors in Afrikaans.

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<sup>56</sup> This was told to me by a Swiss musician (name withheld) who played in a South African orchestra in the early 1970s. He assured me that he hadn't made use of the trick himself (and for the record: I've known him for over a decade as someone scrupulously honest and I believe him; nor was he referring to any of his few Swiss colleagues in his orchestra).

<sup>57</sup> Letter to Frisch from Helene Ritzerfeld, Suhrkamp Verlag, 31 January 1978, and the reply of Rosemarie Primault of 4 February 1978 on behalf of Frisch. Held by the Max Frisch Archive, ETH Zurich.

<sup>58</sup> Frisch's secretary added his remark "Bitte lieber nicht" ("Rather not, please") to a letter from his publisher of 29 October 1986 asking for permission for an Afrikaans translation to be published and performed in South Africa. Max Frisch Archive, ETH Zurich.

Andorra thus becomes a “white” country in danger of being overrun by the evil “Blacks”. But as Paula Fourie has elsewhere observed, we have to be cautious before assuming that what seems from our perspective to be crass and superficial is exactly that. The people responsible for translating and directing the plays of Frisch and Dürrenmatt in South Africa were mostly of a liberal disposition (including those responsible for *Andorra* in 1964) and frequently used these plays to engage in double-speak to convey anti-apartheid sentiments in a manner that would survive the red pen of the apartheid-era censors.<sup>59</sup> It is possible that by focusing on superficially obvious parallels with apartheid we are ignoring subtle acts of potential subversion and are allowing ourselves to be triggered into the same reaction that the translators hoped to elicit from the apartheid censors.

Examples are hard to find of Swiss cultural representatives who travelled to South Africa during the apartheid era with the express intention of engaging with their Black contemporaries. The only notable example we have come across is the artist Theo Gerber. He was born in Thun in 1928, studied at the Basel School of Design (the Kunstgewerbeschule), but spent many of his early years travelling in Europe and across Africa (reputedly covering some 40,000 km in North and West Africa in the mid-1950s). He settled in France in 1962 but continued to travel over the next three decades. He visited Soweto in 1988, gave workshops to Black artists and organised scholarships to help the best of them to study in France (such as Avhashoni Mainganye, who has spoken warmly of Gerber’s mentorship and of their common friendship with the author Zakes Mda).<sup>60</sup> Several of Gerber’s paintings of the 1980s and ’90s thematise his relationship with South Africa, and in 1989 the Kunstmuseum Olten even organised an exhibition of Gerber’s Africa-related works entitled “Mayibuye iAfrika – Afrika komm zurück”.<sup>61</sup> He died in 1997, just a month after a state visit to Switzerland by Nelson Mandela, who was presented with one of Gerber’s African works while in Bern.<sup>62</sup>

There were a few Black South Africans who, like the abovementioned Mainganye, were able to make short-term study visits to Europe thanks to the intervention of individual Swiss (another was the musician Shalati Joseph Khosa, who is the topic of a chapter by Chatradari Devroop below). But in the field of classical music at least, most of the South Africans who came to Europe in the years under consideration here were white and already possessed

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<sup>59</sup> See Fourie’s forthcoming book, *Those Who Have Eyes Will See. Translations of Swiss Theatre in Apartheid South Africa*, which engages extensively with these complex issues. The Boydell Press, in press.

<sup>60</sup> See Nolan Stevens, “Liberated Mind: a conversation with Avhashoni Mainganye”, at Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI), <https://asai.co.za/mainganye-liberated-mind/> (accessed June 2025).

<sup>61</sup> See Anneliese Zwez, “Glut des Engagements. Theo Gerber im Kunstmuseum Olten”, in *Solothurner Zeitung*, 14 September 1989.

<sup>62</sup> See Alisa Klay’s brief exhibition guide: “Kunstmuseum Thun. Theo Gerber. Science Fiction. 4. Februar – 16. April 2023”. Thun: Kunstmuseum Thun, 2023.

the necessary background to help establish themselves on the European scene, such as the soprano Mimi Coertse, based in Vienna but who enjoyed her first big solo success in Basel, or the tenor Deon van der Walt who settled for several years in Zurich (both discussed in the chapter by Hilde Roos below). The exception to prove the rule was the répétiteur Gordon Jephtas (see the chapter here by F.-J. Davids), who came from the coloured community and rose to the top of his profession first in Switzerland and later in New York. Two South African youth orchestras also visited Switzerland, thanks to the offices of a rich South African expatriate who with his American wife set up an international festival of youth orchestras in Switzerland in 1969 (see my later chapter in this book).

By far the most fascinating story of South African artists in Switzerland, however, took place far removed from the official channels responsible for cultural exchange and beyond the bounds of “classical” music. From 1959 to 1968, a jazz club – the “Café Africana” – existed in the old town of Zurich, directly opposite the Zurich Central Library, in what is today the Hotel Scheuble. It became a second home to numerous exiled South African jazz musicians such as Abdullah Ibrahim (then known as Dollar Brand), Sathima Bea Benjamin, Dudu Pukwana, Johnny Gertze and Makaya Ntshoko, who played there alongside Swiss musicians such as Remo Rau. The South Africans had managed to get Swiss visas in large part thanks to Paul Meyer, a Swiss graphic artist who had lived in Hillbrow in Johannesburg in the mid-1950s, where he mixed with many local Black artists and intellectuals, and whose apartment and immense record collection were reputedly open to everyone (in his memoirs, Hugh Masekela recalls visiting Meyer in around 1955 when the latter was having an affair with Miriam Makeba).<sup>63</sup> Meyer had returned to Switzerland in around 1959, but thereafter maintained contact with his Black colleagues from South Africa.<sup>64</sup>

As is explained in the last section of this book, it was at the Café Africana that Brand and Benjamin were “discovered” by Duke Ellington when he happened to be on tour in Zurich. He procured them a recording contract, and within just a few years Ibrahim was one of the most prominent jazz pianists on the international scene. He often returned to Switzerland, his saxophonist Pukwana married a Swiss woman, and his drummer Ntshoko even settled permanently in Basel. The white South African pianist Chris McGregor also played at the Africana with his then band the Blue Notes, and in the 1970s he returned several times to

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<sup>63</sup> See Masekela and D. Michael Cheers, *Still Grazing*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004, 77–79. Meyer is absent from Miriam Makeba’s own memoir, though she there relates how a car with three “Swiss boys” who’d seen her singing in the townships stopped to help her when she was involved in a car accident in 1955. It is unclear if Meyer was one of them, and if this was when he and Makeba became acquainted. See Miriam Makeba in conversation with Nomsa Mwamuka, *Makeba. The Miriam Makeba Story*. Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2004, 38.

<sup>64</sup> See the chapters below on jazz and on Lewis Nkosi, another friend of Meyer’s.



Switzerland with his new band, the Brotherhood of Breath, whose impact on the local scene proved at least as consequential as that of Ibrahim & Co. a decade earlier (there was also an overlap in their line-ups; Dudu Pukwana variously played with both McGregor and Ibrahim).<sup>65</sup>



Figure 1.6. The Zähringer Quick café on the Mühlegasse in 1957, soon to be the Café Africana (today the Hotel Scheuble). Zurich, Baugeschichtliches Archiv. Creative Commons.

Johnny Gertze died in 1983, Chris McGregor and Dudu Pukwana in 1990. The surviving Black South Africans from the Swiss jazz scene of the 1960s and '70s have consistently refused to be interviewed about their experiences – often with good humour, though not always (in one case, a single, polite e-mail requesting an interview resulted in a threat of legal injunction). We must, however, acknowledge that the Black exiles arriving in Zurich in the early 1960s were forced to exist in extremely precarious circumstances that are difficult for us to comprehend today. Post-Sharpeville South Africa offered no humane opportunity to pursue a career, but in Switzerland they found themselves without permanent residence or job, often forced to play for a pittance, and at the whim of authorities and employers alike. Their worries were existential; and we must respect their refusal to talk about their experiences. But they remain central to any consideration of the cultural links between South Africa and Switzerland, so

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, the interview with John Wolf Brennan in this book.

the final section of this book is devoted to them. Two Swiss jazz musicians who were present in the Africana – Bruno Spoerri and Richard Butz – offer their reminiscences here, and in a series of interviews with relatives, friends and colleagues of the South African musicians of the Café Africana, Steff Rohrbach has succeeded in reconstructing the narrative of South African jazz in Switzerland while respecting the silence of the men at the centre of it.

The historical investigations of Georg Kreis and his colleagues into the business relationships between Switzerland and South Africa (NFP 42+) revealed a steady increase in economic ties during the 1960s and early 1970s. As we have elucidated here, these economic relations find a surprisingly direct, concurrent correlation in the cultural ties between the two nations, whether in the field of music, literature or journalism. But while certain areas of economic activity between South Africa and Switzerland continued to grow into the 1980s, the cultural situation seems to suggest that matters were already starting to take a different direction by the mid-1970s. The Soweto Uprising of 1976 made more people in Europe aware that South Africa didn't have a "race" problem; it had a white supremacy problem. With regard to Switzerland in particular, this shift in opinion can be observed (albeit in overly general terms) by reference once more to Swiss graphic design.

In 1960, the Swiss artist Raymond Dennler designed a poster advertising Outspan oranges in Switzerland. I, too, remember eating Outspan oranges in northern England when I was a child in the late 1960s, though no one there – or in Switzerland – seems to have given any thought as to their origins in the racial inequities of the South African agricultural sector. But by 1974, just two years before the Soweto Uprising, the same fruit was used by the burgeoning Swiss anti-apartheid movement for a quite different design purpose.<sup>66</sup> The poster child of the South African agricultural economy here becomes an instrument of political opposition (see Figs. 1.7 and 1.8 below).

It was also in the mid-70s that the plays of Athol Fugard began to be performed in Switzerland. His name was first mentioned in the *NZZ* on 8 April 1963 (albeit incorrectly spelled) when his *Blood Knot* was played in London. He got another brief mention eight years later when the South African authorities gave him back the passport they had confiscated from him,<sup>67</sup> and on 26 November 1971 the *Neue Berner Zeitung* brought a tiny report about police raids in South Africa, during which the police had removed a volume of Chinese poetry from Fugard's apartment.<sup>68</sup> But then there is a Swiss flood of Fugard beginning on 8 November 1973, when the *NZZ* wrote glowingly of a performance of the *Blood Knot* in a tiny theatre

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<sup>66</sup> "Non aux produits d'Afrique du sud". Delémont: Campagne ANTI-OUTSPAN, [ca 1974]. See <https://permalink.sn.ch/bib/chccsa000012158> (accessed May 2025).

<sup>67</sup> Anon., "Ausreisebewilligung für den Dramatiker Fugard", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 252, 3 June 1971, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the day.

<sup>68</sup> Anon., "Kein Kommentar", in *Neue Berner Zeitung*, 52(249), 26 October 1971.







Figure 1.8. Anti-apartheid poster from Delémont urging a boycott of Outspan oranges. Bibliothèque de Genève / ProLitteris.

in Aarau, claiming that it was his first-ever performance in any German-speaking country.<sup>69</sup> There follows a series of regular reviews in the paper of Fugard performances abroad, until finally, on 19 December 1976, Swiss Radio broadcast a radio play by Fugard (*Blood Knot*, here as *Mit Haut und Haar*), which was followed up by a large review article in the *NZZ* on 14 January 1977.<sup>70</sup> Early in 1978, a play by Fugard – *Buschmann und Lena* – was finally produced at a major Swiss theatre, the Theater am Neumarkt in Zurich. In the years thereafter, his name was rarely out of the Swiss-German press for long.<sup>71</sup> Quantitative research of this kind cannot provide any conclusive evidence of a trend. But this sudden, sustained interest in Fugard in what was and remains a fundamentally conservative newspaper suggests that some subterranean rupture was occurring in relations between Switzerland and South Africa, despite the fact that trade between the two countries was still booming. It is tempting to posit – despite all the necessary caveats – that the actors in the Swiss cultural field here sensed the inevitability of change several years before Swiss politicians and businessmen came to similar conclusions.

There are several final, interlinked issues that have to be raised in this overview of cultural relations between apartheid-era South Africa and Switzerland, precisely because they are almost completely omitted from the individual essays and interviews published here. In the course of the research conducted by the present writer and his colleagues for this book, four topics came up repeatedly, regardless of the skin colour or social class of the person under discussion: sex, drugs, alcohol and violence. These are still taboo for many people in South Africa. So while several of our sources were willing to be candid, they all insisted on remaining off the record (a decision that we regret, but respect).

As is to be expected with any cross-section of humanity, a certain number of the figures discussed in this book were gay when homosexuality was still illegal in South Africa, necessitating the kind of subterfuge and dissimulation that must have taken an immense psychological toll. In at least two cases discussed in these pages, both since deceased, these men married women, though only in one case have we been allowed to discuss this openly (Gordon Jephtas, who died of Aids in 1992 and was publicly outed after his death).<sup>72</sup> There were also Swiss who seem to have gone to South Africa specifically to use their whiteness and economic advantage to procure easy sex across the colour bar. On at least one occasion, an orchestra had to rescue a guest conductor from police custody when he was caught having sex with a woman who was not white; this was illegal under the terms of the so-called

<sup>69</sup> H.T., “Innerstadtbühne Aarau”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 519, 8 November 1973.

<sup>70</sup> Mw, “Dialoge aus der Apartheid”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11, 14 January 1977.

<sup>71</sup> See the two essays on Fugard in this book by Franziska Baumann.

<sup>72</sup> See Roos, Davids and Walton, eds., “*I’m Sorry. I am what I am.*”

Immorality Act of 1957.<sup>73</sup> According to the sources, even Paul Meyer, the jazz aficionado who helped Dollar Brand and others to get visas for Switzerland, used his position of power for sexual leverage with Black women.<sup>74</sup> This does not necessarily mean that those who from our perspective might seem to have been “victims” were themselves without agency. But there is no doubt that the power disparities inherent in apartheid South Africa naturally lent themselves to all manner of coercion, exploitation and abuse that inevitably also encompassed sex, regardless of its local legality or illegality and of the nationality of those involved. And this is but the tip of the iceberg. The only time that the present writer slept badly after an interview for this project was after being informed of a case of historical paedophilia by a (white, deceased) South African composer with whom he had been acquainted<sup>75</sup> – though such stories abound on the classical scene and in the corridors of university music departments in South Africa.<sup>76</sup> And as for violence: the case of the tenor Deon van der Walt, who was shot by his own father in a case of murder-suicide, was reported openly in the newspapers at the time. But domestic violence, apparently often fuelled by alcohol, was admitted or intimated about several musicians discussed in these pages, both Black and white.

It might seem overly inquisitive, even cruelly prurient or unscholarly, to mention these issues here, especially since we are prevented from discussing them in detail. But to leave them utterly unmentioned would mean ignoring some of the most disturbing aspects of cultural life in South Africa that inevitably also featured in that country’s relationships with Switzerland. The Swiss-related instances we have encountered in the course of our research offer merely a small-scale snapshot of a much bigger issue. But none of this should surprise us. When the state itself authorises violence and coercion on a massive scale against huge swathes of its population, giving a small minority the means to subjugate the rest, it is inevitable that this power imbalance, the violence it condones and the concomitant moral degradation that both instil should seep into every field of human endeavour, especially into that field where our innermost needs and emotions find public and private expression: the arts. Were we to remain silent about this here, later scholars would rightly accuse us of blindly perpetuating taboos, protecting perpetrators and further silencing the already voiceless. We cannot right past wrongs, and we are forbidden here from even naming them. All we can do is acknowledge our impotence in this regard and hope that later generations will be able to tell unfiltered truths.

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<sup>73</sup> Source withheld.

<sup>74</sup> See Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 2012, 137; see also the jazz chapters below. As Richard Butz recounts in his chapter, Meyer was murdered in Geneva in 1988.

<sup>75</sup> Source withheld.

<sup>76</sup> Sources withheld.

## 2 A Nineteenth-Century Swiss Missionary Encounter with Sesotho Orthography

*Lineo Segoete*

My interest in the orthography of Sesotho began at a very young age. I was confronted with, and tried to understand, why my first name, Lineo, is spelt the way it is instead of with a /d/ (as it is pronounced). I also experienced some confusion about my surname, spelt with a /g/ (which is considered Setswana) instead of with an /h/ in compliance with the currently accepted Sesotho orthography for carrot, which is what the whole word, “Segoete”, means. I only started learning how to write Sesotho when I was in Grade 5 because I attended a school where the primary medium of communication was English.

Another memory, this time from when I was a teenager: One of my mentors pointed out during a Sunday school lesson that when we spoke of “Mafora”, we were referring to the French missionaries as well as their Swiss counterparts, as both groups were native speakers of French; the Sesotho word for French is “fora”. I discovered, subsequently, that the Swiss missionaries were quite influential in Lesotho. Among them were people like David Frédéric Ellenberger (1835–1919), who wrote *History of the Basuto, ancient and modern*<sup>1</sup> (1912), and Adolphe Mabile (1836–1894), who was responsible for setting up the Morija printing press. He then went a step further with the launch and publication of the *Leselinyana* newspaper (published from 1863 to 2006), thus playing a pivotal role in introducing a literary tradition among the Basotho.

This essay considers the mutations of Sesotho orthography at the end of the nineteenth century, and the role played by Swiss missionaries in establishing Sesotho as a written language. In particular, I trace the work of Édouard Jacottet (1859–1920), a French-Swiss missionary who lived in Lesotho for 36 years from 1884 until his death in 1920, when Lesotho was a crown colony in the British Empire after first being declared a British Protectorate in 1868. I show, through the example of Thomas Mofolo’s novel *Chaka*, how empowerment through missionary education was fraught with the tension of how such education could lead to the emancipation of the individual.

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<sup>1</sup> David Frédéric Ellenberger and J.C. MacGregor, *History of the Basuto, Ancient and Modern*. London: Caxton, 1912.

## The Orthography of Sesotho

Sesotho is a language of the Bantu people spoken in Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, eSwatini, South Africa and Zambia (it is known in the last of these as siLozi, which emerged there among Basotho settlers in the early 19th century).<sup>2</sup> It is closely related to Setswana and Sepedi. These three languages, Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi, are clustered together as Sotho-Tswana because of their linguistic and cultural characteristics as well as a common ancestor in the person of Chief Malope, a Mohurutshe chief who broke away from the Barolong somewhere in the vicinity of Ethiopia during the 13th century.<sup>3</sup> The Setswana language itself has nine official dialects: Sekwena, Sengwaketse, Sengwato, Serolong, Setlharo, Setawana, Setlokwa, Sekgatla, and Selete. However, for the purposes of this paper, we will focus on only three: Sekwena, Sefokeng and Setlhaping, as these were foundational to what developed into Sesotho as we have come to know it.<sup>4</sup>

“Sesotho” was first committed to paper in 1812, when Hinrich Lichtenstein published “Ueber die Sprache der Beetjuanen” as an appendix to his account of travelling to the interior of South Africa from 1803 to 1806.<sup>5</sup> Several missionaries later also wrote about Sesotho, including Eugène Casalis, who penned a booklet in 1841 called *Études sur la langue Bechuana* (“Studies on the Bechauna Language”) referring to Sesotho.

European missionaries in Africa did important work for the colonial enterprise, no more so than when they coded the languages of colonised people. As Itumeleng Matumo puts it:

In their scrambles for souls, missionaries would move into an area, which was in most cases a part of a language community, learn the local dialect, set up a mission printing press, churn out reading material, thereby giving the dialect an orthography without taking into consideration the entire community’s language. Missionaries had put a great deal of time and knowhow into producing the dialect orthographies. The orthographies were, as it were, an extension of their selves.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Rotse”, a term coined by missionaries, means “plain” in the Makololo language. It refers to the Barotse floodplain of the Zambezi River, on and around which most “Lozi” live. Natives tend to refer to themselves as the “Lozi”, and not “Rotse”.

<sup>3</sup> Mohlomi A. Moleleki, “Lexicography in a Multilingual South Africa”, in *Lexikos*, 9(1), 30 August 2012, 241–47.

<sup>4</sup> David B. Coplan paints a comprehensive picture of this trajectory. See *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa’s Basotho Migrants*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, 29, 33–36, 101–02.

<sup>5</sup> Hinrich Lichtenstein, *Reisen im südlichen Afrika in den Jahren 1803, 1804, 1805 und 1806*. Berlin: C. Salfeld, vol. 2, 1812, 619–34.

<sup>6</sup> Itumeleng Z. Matumo, “Phonological Considerations for Unifying the Orthographies of the Sotho Languages”. Master thesis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1969, 8.



As Matumo affirms, the production of orthography is hardly an innocent exercise. When one makes a people's language uniform, it is easier to control how they speak and, by extension, how they think. Cluver puts it more succinctly:

Once the "languages" were standardised and taught in the mission schools, clearly demarcated language zones were created... the combination of these factors led to the development of more general feelings of separateness or nationhood, that did not exist prior to the arrival of the missionaries.<sup>7</sup>

The missionaries could draw upon King Moshoeshoe himself to justify their efforts in constructing a Sesotho orthography:

My language is nevertheless very beautiful... thanks to the little books of the missionaries, it will not be altered... I only see words that are being changed because they are Setlhaping<sup>8</sup> words. My language remains my language on paper. If that paper came from some remote corner of the Maloti, and if it arrived by itself at Thaba Bosiu, it would be recognised as a Mosotho.<sup>9</sup>

In July 1928, the Advisory Committee on Bantu Studies and Research in South Africa considered the matter of the orthographies of the South African Bantu Languages. It set up the Central Orthography Committee (COC) and charged it with dealing with the question of reforms in the various Southern Bantu languages. The COC in turn set up sub-committees for the various language groups. Among them was the Suto-Pedi-Chwana (SPC) Sub-Committee, whose instruction was to evolve a uniform orthography to serve the three main subdivisions of the so-called Sotho languages: Southern Sotho (Sesotho), Northern Sotho (Pedi) and Western Sotho (Tswana).<sup>10</sup>

There is no information as to how the COC went about obtaining delegations from Botswana and Lesotho. However, indications based on attendance show that Sesotho was to be reformed by a team comprising representatives from the Morija Press (Protestant), Mazenod Press (Roman Catholic) and the South African authorities. From 1930 onwards the development of the orthography of each language followed its own course. The Sesotho of Lesotho thereby remained the accepted standard until 1959 when the revision of the orthography for Southern Sotho by the Union of South Africa's Department of Bantu Education in consultation with the Department of Bantu Administration and Development did

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<sup>7</sup> August D. de V. Cluver, *Language development in South Africa: A LANGTAG report*. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Setlhaping falls among the Sotho-Tswana grouping of languages and is closer to Setswana than it is to Sesotho.

<sup>9</sup> Coplan shares this quote from one of the earliest missionary texts as the orthography was being developed. See *In the Time of Cannibals*, 35–36.

<sup>10</sup> Matumo, *Phonological Considerations*, 11.

not include a delegation from Lesotho, thereby separating the orthography of Sesotho into two: Southern Sotho (South Africa) and Sesotho (Lesotho) despite their syntactic, semantic and phonetic connections.<sup>11</sup>

This orthographic divergence helps explain inconsistencies such as the use of “l” instead of “d” in names like “Lineo” (instead of “Dineo”), reflecting orthographic conventions specific to Lesotho that differ from the Southern Sotho standard in South Africa. As such, spelling has become a subtle marker of linguistic and geopolitical affiliation.

### Édouard Jacottet (1858–1920)

Édouard Jacottet was a French-Swiss Missionary of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) who lived in Lesotho for 36 years from 1884 to 1920.<sup>12</sup> At the time, Lesotho had become a crown colony of the British after first being classed a British protectorate since 1868.<sup>13</sup> Jacottet was born in February 1858 as the second of seven children in a family that was part of the Protestant-Conservative Neuchâteloise elite.<sup>14</sup> His accomplished father, Henri-Pierre Jacottet, despite living only to the age of 45, had been a deputy to the Grand Council of Neuchâtel (1855–1856 and 1859–1873), co-founder of the Neuchâtel Liberal Party, a professor of law at the Neuchâtel Academy and author of *Le droit civil neuchâtelois* (Neuchâtel Civil Law), which was published posthumously by his brother, Paul, the co-founder of the Neuchâtel Liberal Party.<sup>15</sup>

After his father’s untimely death, Édouard Jacottet was determined to follow in his footsteps. He wanted to emulate what he perceived to be his father’s decisive character and clarity of mind, albeit more in the direction of service to the church.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, after reading a report by a family friend, Adolphe Mabilie, about the need for missionaries in so-called Basutoland, Jacottet decided to join the ministry with the aim of becoming a missionary. He began his preparations by training himself to speak Sesotho phonetically (the language of “Basutoland”) and by studying texts that he was able to obtain from Glasgow before his first trip to Lesotho. When he arrived in July 1884, it was immediately apparent to him that the language he had acquired bore little resemblance to the spoken language he encountered.

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<sup>11</sup> Matumo, *Phonological Considerations*, 12–14.

<sup>12</sup> Jacottet’s murder by poison in 1920 remains unsolved to this day. See Tim Couzens, *Murder at Morija: Faith, Mystery, and Tragedy on an African Mission*. Johannesburg: Random House, 2003, for a discussion of the deed and the suspects.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Moloantoa Lelimo, *The Reasons for the Annexation of Lesotho 1868: A New Perspective*. Bloemfontein: Univ. of the Orange Free State, 1998, 59.

<sup>14</sup> As documented in the *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/004543/2007-03-21/> (accessed 11 April 2025)

<sup>15</sup> Couzens, *Murder at Morija*, 143.

<sup>16</sup> Couzens, *Murder at Morija*, 150.

Upon his arrival in Morija, Jacottet was charged with taking over temporary directorship of the Theological School. Constrained by the uncertainty imposed by limited resources and wars,<sup>17</sup> his work included offering lessons in general (European) history and short courses on pastoral epistles. However, the lack of resources available for the school frustrated Jacottet. He therefore supplemented his work by teaching at the Bible School and the Normal School<sup>18</sup> to improve his command of the Sesotho language, which he described as “detestable”.<sup>19</sup> Jacottet’s engagement with Sesotho can be illustrated by two examples from the newspaper *Leselinyana*.

#### Grammar ea Sesotho (Sesotho grammar)

Those among us who work with the Sesotho Grammar have spotted several issues we find difficult to accept/agree with. This is what prompted me to make a request to the publisher to include these few lines in *Leselinyana*; I am making a request to our grammarian, Reverend Jacottet to please break down for us how we would go about phrasing when we speak of the parsing of these words (sentence);/I would have liked. Some say: ke ne ke (I would have): is an auxiliary verb, whereas others say that in Sesotho the auxiliary verb contains its own subject, and the principal verb has its own subject. Therefore, I would like to invite Reverend Jacottet to come and resolve this matter for us.

By labelling something an auxiliary verb (refer to Kruger’s grammar, pp 39–45), based on this reasoning, each auxiliary has its own subject because they wield the power of the principal verb.

We would also like to request Reverend Jacottet to create a Model of Parsing for us. Also, [Jacottet’s grammar p. 11] states that a noun prefix precedes words that have to do with the proper noun; and we see clear evidence of this in our language. However, would it not be more appropriate for the noun prefix to be combined with those words in this manner: My beautiful axe got lost, but yours is still around ... Meaning, those words would assume the prefix of the noun and the prefix will no longer have to be written as a separate word. On this matter we also invite Reverend Jacottet to come and help us resolve the dilemma.

To you readers of *Leselinyana*, we will continue to highlight any issues we come across, and we will be most appreciative when our Grammarian comes to our aid.

Cranmer Matsa Sebeta, Matelile, 15 April 1896

(Reverend Jacottet is on vacation in Europe, however, I trust that others can also attempt these questions).

<sup>17</sup> A number of wars took place in the region during the period 1879–1915: the Basotho Gun War (1880–1881), the Xhosa Wars (1779–1879), the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), the First and Second Anglo-Boer Wars (1880–1881 and 1899–1902), and the Sekhukhune Wars (1876–1879).

<sup>18</sup> The land allotted to the Paris Mission was used to establish mission stations and schools. All mission stations had schools attached to them, and these were the responsibility of the missionaries’ wives. The different schools were: the Normal School (a High School for boys) (1868), the Bible School (for evangelists or deacons) (1875), the Theological School (1882), the Industrial School (1838) and the Girls’ School (1871).

<sup>19</sup> Couzens, *Murder at Morija*, 173.

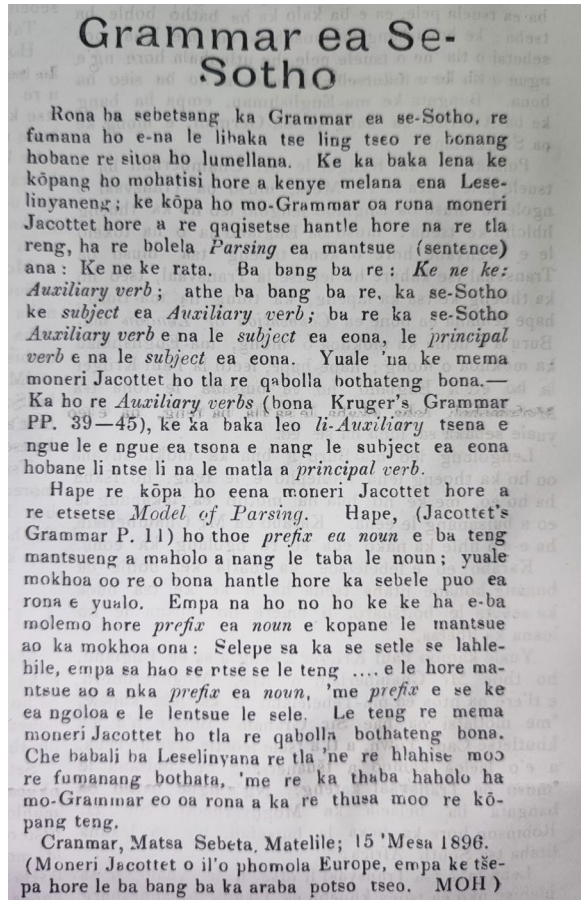


Figure 2.1. Leselinyana, April 1896.

Sebeta's letter in *Leselinyana* is addressed to Jacottet and touches on auxiliary verbs and parsing (the process of breaking down a sentence into its component parts) as they relate to Sesotho. The letter concerns itself, in the main, with two questions:

1. Whether or not an auxiliary verb and a main verb should be linked to their own individual subjects in the context of Sesotho grammar, as suggested by Kruger's text<sup>20</sup> that claimed that auxiliary verbs and principal verbs are interchangeable.
2. Whether to combine the noun-prefix with the noun's associated adjective or not. This confusion remains a concern for users of written Sesotho to this day.

This passage shows that Jacottet initiated his process of mastering Sesotho by first teaching Sesotho in English, or in other words, he applied English grammar terminology and rules

<sup>20</sup> F. Hermann Kruger, *Steps to Learn the Sesuto Language*. 2nd edition. Morija: A. Mabile, 1883.

to attempt to articulate those of Sesotho grammar, hence Sebeta's use of those terms even though his letter was written in Sesotho.

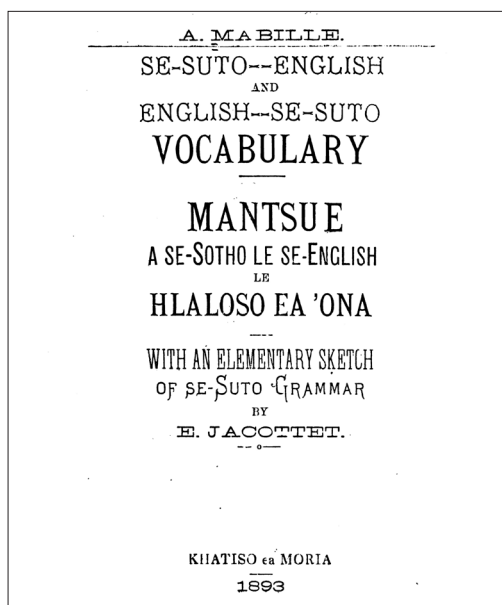


Figure 2.2. The title page of Jacottet's first Sesotho Grammar.

In this Preface to his *Se-Suto-English Vocabulary*, published in 1893, Jacottet appears to acknowledge his ignorance of Sesotho and seemingly elevates the voices of “natives” as custodians of the language's grammar. He states:

Although the grammatical facts mentioned in the following pages are far from giving a complete view of se-Suto Grammar, still they are correct as far as they go. Both the rules and examples have been submitted to educated and competent natives, as well as to other se-Suto scholars. I am responsible for any mistakes which may be detected in this Sketch and I shall feel grateful if they are pointed out to me. Philology, like any other science, can only progress by co-operation.

In his Preface to *A practical method to learn Sesuto*, published 13 years later in 1906, Jacottet writes:

The wish has been often expressed that a practical Sesuto Grammar should be written for the benefit of the numerous Europeans who desire to learn the language. It is this want which the writer endeavours to supply in this little treatise, comprising practical rules of grammar as simply stated as possible, graduated Sesuto-English Exercises, and a Vocabulary of the most useful words.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Édouard Jacottet, *A practical method to learn Sesuto. With exercises and a short vocabulary.*

## PREFACE.

The compiler of this new and enlarged edition of the *se-Suto-English Vocabulary* has considered it advisable, in order to complete its usefulness, to have it prefaced by a short grammatical sketch of the *se-Suto* language and has entrusted to me the task of making the desired "Sketch."

I am sorry that I could not make it a little shorter; but it is preferable to run the risk of being thought too verbose than to give an altogether insufficient exposition of the language.

I have only given what I consider the most elementary rudiments of *se-Suto*—the least one must know in order to speak it correctly.

It has been my aim throughout to be as simple as possible, making the least possible use of grammatical terms which might prove puzzling to the general reader.

Those, to whom some of the contents, more especially the observations printed in small type, appear as of more scientific than practical importance, may omit such parts. Nevertheless I believe them to be of great value in forming a correct knowledge of the language.

Of the fact that there are many imperfections in this "Sketch" no one is more aware than the author. It must be remembered that it does not profess to be a complete grammar, but merely a short and elementary exposition of a very interesting language.

Though elementary, this Sketch could not have been written without the great help received from colleagues and from grammatical treatises which have previously appeared, and of which Endemann's *Versuch* and Kruger's *Steps* are by far the most important.

I strongly recommend Kruger's treatise to every student who desires to obtain a thorough knowledge of *se-Suto*. Any one who takes the trouble to compare it with my Sketch will see how greatly I am indebted to it.

Although the grammatical facts mentioned in the following pages are far from giving a complete view of *se-Suto* Grammar, still they are correct as far as they go. Both the rules and the examples have been submitted to educated and competent natives, as well as to other *se-Suto* scholars. I am responsible for any mistakes which may be detected in this Sketch and I shall feel grateful if they are pointed out to me.

Philology, like any other science, can only progress by co-operation.

E. J.

Thaba Bosiu,  
Basutoland.  
12 June, 1892.

Figure 2.3. The preface to Jacottet's Sesotho Grammar.

Yet, despite referring to native speakers in principle, Jacottet increasingly became the spokesperson for policies of the Sesotho language and was influential during the General Missionary Conference in July 1906 in matters concerning language standardisation. According to the conference report,<sup>22</sup> a committee consisting of representatives from the three main churches at the time – Protestant, Catholic and Anglican – was assigned the task of standardising the Sesotho language, and Jacottet's voice was the most prominent in this regard. According to Tshokolo Makutoane, the discussion on orthography at the conference considered the most contentious issues to be the representation of vowels, the use of semi-

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Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1906, [v]–viii, here [v].

<sup>22</sup> The published report became available in 1907.

vowels (w, y), and the use of “d”.<sup>23</sup> *A practical method to learn Sesuto* was published after the conference with the word “Sesotho” itself written in the way Jacottet preferred, i.e, Sesuto. For Jacottet, the orthographic exercise was not grounded in consultation with native Sesotho speakers, and his target audience – as confirmed in the passage cited from the preface to *A practical method to learn Sesuto* – was not the people who spoke the language.

### The Case of Thomas Mokupu Mofolo (1876–1948)

By the time Protestant missionaries began opening formal schools between 1868 and 1887,<sup>24</sup> they already had a legacy of tutoring small batches of local converts who contributed to their publications. With increased literacy, outspoken locals were raising concerns about the discrepancy between how Sesotho was spoken and how it was written. The extent to which their questions were taken seriously was determined by the ingrained perceptions of equality held by the missionaries. Notably, in addition to the teaching of literacy, the study of the Bible and instruction in the spiritual values and teachings of the Christian faith, the missionaries emphasised European cultural values. Students had to adopt a European name, wear European clothing and practise European eating and living habits.<sup>25</sup> How well the students assimilated these qualities determined the extent of their “progress” and acceptance as equal interlocutors.

Local converts who progressed to the level of becoming teachers, catechists and, later on, priests, could be entrusted with the task of imparting knowledge introduced by the missionaries to their countrymen and women. Life at the Morija mission at the turn of the twentieth century provides evidence to suggest that local intellectualism, or what we might call indigenous knowledge, was accepted conditional to conforming to the missionaries’ expectations and modelling. A case in point was the way in which the Morija mission responded to Mokupu Thomas Mofolo’s third novel, *Chaka*, published in 1925.<sup>26</sup> Mofolo (1876–1948) was a Mosotho writer who wrote his first fiction in 1905. He was entrusted to the missionaries by his father after they insisted that Mofolo should continue his studies

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<sup>23</sup> Tsjololo J. Makutoane, “The People Divided by a Common Language: The Orthography of Sesotho in Lesotho, South Africa, and the Implications for Bible Translation”, in *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78(1), 2022, 1–9, here 8.

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 18 above.

<sup>25</sup> Extracted from T. Mothibe and M. Ntabeni, “The Role of the Missionaries, Boers and British in Social and Territorial Changes, 1833–1868”, in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho, 1500–2002: The Role of the Missionaries, Boers and British in Social and Territorial Changes*, ed. N. Pule and M. Thabane. Roma: History Department National University of Lesotho, 2002, 35–58.

<sup>26</sup> The first two novels are *Moeti oa bochabela*. Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1907, and *Pitseng*. Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1910; they were followed by *Chaka*. Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1925.



in spite of his father's inability to cover tuition fees. According to Gill, in April 1904 Rev. Alfred Casalis wrote:

[Thomas had now] undertake[n] the necessary studies to become a useful member of the Mission. With his teaching diploma, his written and spoken fluency in English, his impeccable written and spoken Sesotho, rich in idioms and vocabulary, and having read and observed widely, he was now ready and he offered me his services.

Mofolo was paid the full salary of a qualified teacher. According to Casalis, "Mofolo quickly became the best collaborator in the extension of our work, both intellectual and religious, through books and newspapers."<sup>27</sup>

In *Chaka*, Mofolo writes a fictionalised account of the epic demise of the controversial Zulu warrior king Shaka kaSenzangakhona. Unlike in his earlier works, Mofolo does not condemn what would have been perceived by Europeans as the uncivilised and tribal way of life. Through exploring the intricacies of Chaka's life with nuanced detail, Mofolo humanises the experiences of the character and his society.

*Chaka* is not straightforwardly a historical novel; it traverses the genres of folktale, legend, fable, saga, fantasy and myth, all integrated with allegorical threading. Mofolo also added the rhythm and narrative devices of praise poetry, while the inherently Eurocentric quality of the novel is reflected in Mofolo's use of Biblical jargon and conventions of the Western novel for dramatic effect through language devices – such as how he portrays Chaka's mass killings of those who defied him, including how he orchestrated his own mother's death.<sup>28</sup> The defiant experiment that was *Chaka* delayed the book's publication by thirteen years, not because of a negative judgement regarding its literary merit, but because of the subject matter and Mofolo's expressed dissidence in writing it as he did despite the missionaries' wishes. Adebayo Williams writes: "*Chaka* the book, was a threat because Chaka the man represents an Implied critique of one of the great tropes of colonialism: the myth of the under-achieving black savage who deserves to be dragged to civilisation screaming and yelling."<sup>29</sup>

Mofolo had used the tools the missionaries worked so hard to cultivate in him to advance the civilising mission, to tell an explicitly African and non-Christian story instead. Unsurprisingly, the missionaries also declined to publish a fourth manuscript by Mofolo, *L'Ange*

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Gill, "Thomas Mofolo: the Man, the Writer and his Contexts", in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 53(2), 2016, 15–38, here 32.

<sup>28</sup> See "Thomas Mofolo", <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/mofolo-thomas> (accessed 1 April 2025).

<sup>29</sup> Adebayo Williams, "Towards the Biologics of Cultural Production: The Literary Politics of Thomas Mofolo", in *Alternatio*, 6(2), 1999, 5–23.



*déchu* ("The Fallen Angel"), which, as the title suggests, continued to explore the territory of mythology, fable and saga.

Mofolo and Cranmer Sebeta<sup>30</sup> were founding members of the Basutoland Progressive Association.<sup>31</sup> Their choice to distance themselves from the church was the highest level at which they could exercise their emancipation. Sebeta started the very first chapter of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Lesotho and opened his own school in Matelile, and Mofolo wrote *Chaka* and *The Fallen Angel*. While Sebeta thrived, Mofolo's life ended in misery. He left the mission after being charged with adultery, and he divorced his wife. He attempted living in Zambia, but left, he said, because the weather there did not agree with him. He later went to Johannesburg to join Ernest Mabile, who had been expelled from the PEMS for his dealings as a recruiting agent. It was through their connection that Mofolo was dispatched to the Leribe district in Lesotho in 1912 as a subagent for the Eckstein/Rand Mines group. He accumulated enough wealth to establish a mill in Teyateyaneng in 1921, as well as a mail/taxi service between there and Ficksburg. With his success, he extended his operations in the 1920s as a recruiting agent for several diamond mines, farms, and a number of Natal sugar estates. In addition, he opened stores in Bokong and Teyateyaneng. His luck turned when in 1937 he sold his property to buy a farm in Matatiele, South Africa. This move led to bankruptcy thanks to a futile struggle to protect himself from the Land Act in South Africa.<sup>32</sup>

What both characters have in common is that they were bold enough to challenge Jacottet and the other authorities in the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society to forge their own course. While the mission initially supported the trajectory that most converts took, the missionaries became at odds with those converts who strayed from the ideologies and conduct expected of them by the mission. The thirteen years it took for *Chaka* to finally be published, alongside the intense scrutiny and editing it was subjected to, is testimony to this fact.

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<sup>30</sup> Sebeta was raised in the Mabile household only to leave the Protestant mission and found his own independent school at Matatiele in 1888. The Ethiopian Church of Rev. Mangena Mokone, established in 1892, had a large impact on the Witwatersrand, and by the latter part of the 1890s, links were established with the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a church run by Black Americans that preached a doctrine of self-reliance and Black pride. Sebeta was eventually ordained as a minister of the AME and set up its first Lesotho congregation in 1908.

<sup>31</sup> See Stephen Gill, "Thomas Mofolo: the Man, the Writer and his Contexts", in *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, 53(2), 2016, 15–38.

<sup>32</sup> Paraphrased from Alain Ricard, "Towards silence: Thomas Mofolo, Small Literatures and Poor Translation", in *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, 53(2), 2016, 48–62.

## Conclusion

The orthography of Sesotho is an explicit example of Lesotho's colonial encounter with Swiss missionaries; an encounter that complicates the accepted narrative pertaining to their impact on Basotho cultural life and identity formations. Written Sesotho bears traces of where spoken language and written language in the colonial project collided with the religious imperative of civilising, winning souls and, inevitably, exercising power over those whose language was thus standardised on the page. Eventually, it was inevitable that someone like Mofolo would take the tools of writing and challenge those from whom he received them. Yet the orthography of Sesotho still marks the authority of the missionaries who standardised it, retaining in its distance from the spoken word an enduring witness to the discreet assaults that shaped contemporary cultural expression in Lesotho. I have no intention of changing my name from "Lineo" to "Dineo", because the history is worth remembering and repairing. As far as stubborn sentiment goes, Lineo is, after all, my grandmother's name, and I do not want to defile it. It keeps me alert to the complexities of how the past is always present and available to help shape our tomorrow.

### 3 Vignettes from the Travels of Things: A Cultural Biography of Objects in the Hans Adler Collection

*Annemie Stimie Behr*

Hans Georg Adler (1904–1979) was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1904 into a prominent bourgeois family of the Jewish community. Political circumstances led to his emigration to South Africa in 1933, where he established himself as a businessman and as a major figure in the music life of his adopted city of Johannesburg, the chairman of its Musical Society and a vital player in upholding Eurocentric music traditions.

Shortly before his death in 1979, Hans Adler received an honorary doctorate from the University of the Witwatersrand (“Wits”) in Johannesburg in recognition of his having bequeathed his private collection to the University, and in honour of his contribution to the musical life of the city. His collection comprised 19 musical instruments including a 19th-century travelling piano and several harpsichords that speak to Adler’s particular interest in early music. His collection also included books, musical scores and rare manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> In 1980, the University hosted a memorial for Adler at which his collection was exhibited to the public, combined with the launch of an accompanying book edited by the University’s music librarian, Reuben Musiker.<sup>2</sup> The collection was initially housed in the University’s Performing Arts Library, where it was used as an educational exhibition for local students and those visiting from other institutions. Although assembled through commoditised transactions at European auctions, the collection underwent a process of singularisation within the context of Adler’s personal history, becoming no longer mere commodities but unique signifiers of cultural identity, personal loss and historical preservation. The content of the Hans Adler Collection is meticulously described today on an amateur blogsite<sup>3</sup> that proved a valuable source when writing this chapter. When I visited the collection in 2023, it was stored at the School of Arts in a room normally inaccessible to students or the public.

While my primary object here is the material in the Hans Adler Collection, I found the bulk of my data in two separate collections housed in the William Cullen Library, which

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of the collection on the home institution’s website, visit [www.wits.ac.za/campus-life/arts-and-culture/the-hans-adler-collection/](http://www.wits.ac.za/campus-life/arts-and-culture/the-hans-adler-collection/) (accessed May 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Reuben Musiker, *Hans Adler Memorial Volume*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand library, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://hansadlercollection.blogspot.com/> (accessed May 2025).

is the University's main library on the same campus: The Johannesburg Musical Society Collection, which comprises 31 boxes of documents (call number AG2572) and the Musica Viva Society Collection of 36 boxes with 370 files (call number A1458).<sup>4</sup> These collections contain a wide range of documentary materials including correspondence with agencies, institutions and individuals worldwide. My aim for this chapter was to identify and examine Adler's correspondence with Swiss entities. A comparison of information derived from the three abovementioned collections produced a narrative that is presented here in layers, offering both insights into the biography of Hans Adler and a window onto the history of cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa during the later twentieth century. Most striking is the extent to which these correspondences shed light on the provenance of several instruments in the Hans Adler Collection at the Wits School of Arts. Tracing Adler's interactions with Swiss actors also reveals an alternative narrative resembling a cultural biography of objects. I shall draw on testimonies from these archives to examine the musical instruments and texts in Adler's collection and the movements of his instruments as they accompanied visiting artists on their tours to South Africa.

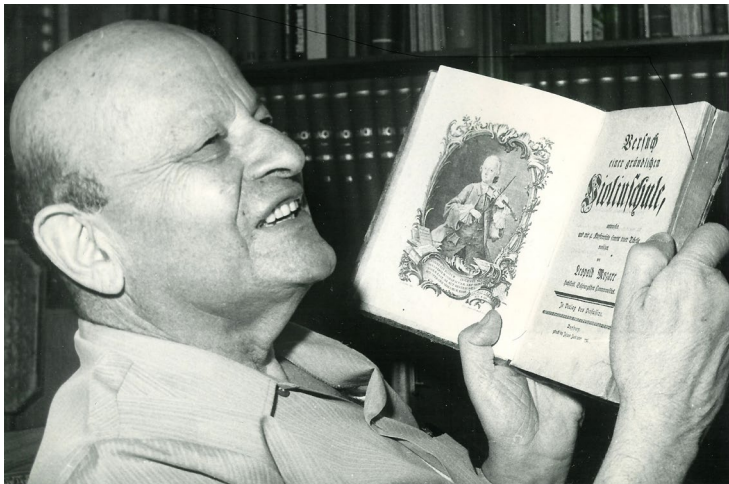


Figure 3.1. Hans Adler, probably mid-1960s, with his first edition of Leopold Mozart's violin treatise. Photo courtesy of Eric Adler.

<sup>4</sup> The Musica Viva Society was an organisation separate from the Johannesburg Musical Society (JMS), though it, too, was based in Johannesburg and their functions were similar. Under the leadership of Peta Fischer from 1954 to 1965, the organisation thrived, but its activities ceased in 1980; see C.M. Fisher, "Musica Viva-Vereniging, Die", in *Suid-Afrikaanse Musiekensiklopedie*, ed. Jacques P. Malan, vol. 3, 1984, 298. The archivist at the William Cullen Library explained that a collection is typically named after its donor, which in this case is the Musica Viva Society. The bulk of the material in the Musica Viva collection pertains to the activities of the JMS rather than to its own because the collection is named after the donor of the material, not the original owners (information provided by the archivist of the collection).

At the heart of this cultural biography of objects lies the dialectic between commoditisation and singularisation, as elucidated by Igor Kopytoff.<sup>5</sup> Objects, imbued with layers of meaning, traverse fluid boundaries shaped by cultural, economic and social forces. A cultural biography of objects operates on the premise that any given object exists somewhere along a continuum between two opposite poles: a completely commoditised world in which everything is for sale or exchangeable, and a completely de-commoditised world in which everything is singular, unique, and unexchangeable. While these conditions do not exist in their pure forms, objects are caught in a tug-of-war between these magnetic fields that push and pull them in various directions. A perfectly commoditised world would be characterised by homogeneity resulting from excessive lumping, a perfectly de-commoditised world by heterogeneity stemming from excessive splitting. In Kopytoff's model, the opposing forces are commoditisation versus culture, where commoditisation is often associated with things, and culture with people. He also asserts that societies construct objects and people alike, and cultural processes can transform both things and people. In Kopytoff's model, singularisation is regarded as the most potent form of de-commoditisation. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai<sup>6</sup> proposes that one can measure the extent of decommodification by examining the regimes of value attached to objects in their historical contexts. He also observes that regimes of value do not always imply a complete cultural consensus but do necessitate a certain level of value coherence, which can naturally fluctuate. These theoretical underpinnings provide a lens through which to examine the genesis and evolution of the Hans Adler Collection.

Hans Adler's father held the position of Chief Magistrate of Frankfurt-on-Main, while his mother, Johanna Nathan, was a renowned singer: a student of Julius Stockhausen who sang for the likes of Brahms and Tchaikovsky, and even performed at the funeral ceremony of Clara Schumann in Frankfurt in 1896.<sup>7</sup> After her marriage, she was expected to abandon any right to earn an income of her own, though music continued to be a part of family life.

Growing up, Adler immersed himself in music. He took piano lessons initially, so he later wrote, with a former pupil of Clara Schumann,<sup>8</sup> later with Eduard Jung,<sup>9</sup> and he frequently

<sup>5</sup> Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process", in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 64–92.

<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value", in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 3–63.

<sup>7</sup> See Mary Adler and Elisabeth Staehelin, "Eine Čajkovskij-Photographie mit Widmung an Johanna Nathan", in *Tschaikowsky-Gesellschaft Mitteilungen* 13, 2006, 4–8, here 8.

<sup>8</sup> Musiker, *Hans Adler Memorial Volume*, 4. The source does not identify the name of Schumann's pupil.

<sup>9</sup> Eduard Jung (1884–1959), German pianist, taught at the Hoch'sche Conservatory in Frankfurt am Main, where his students included Adler's Frankfurt contemporary Theodor Adorno.

played duets with his father. Adler's wife Gertrud also came from Frankfurt and knew the Adler family as a child. After his death she wrote the following about his early years:

Hans often heard her [his mother] singing to the accompaniment of his father, who, though he was a judge by profession, was an accomplished amateur pianist. Many music lovers and professionals came to their home to play, to listen and to converse. Paul Hindemith was among their friends, also Gaspar Cassadó,<sup>10</sup> who later became a close friend of ours.<sup>11</sup>

Adler's father died on 4 July 1918. This loss of the family breadwinner, compounded by the economic malaise of the immediate post-war years, might explain why Adler earned money by playing piano in jazz clubs when he became a student. He attended courses in music history at the University of Berlin and in musicology and law at the University of Frankfurt. However, the assumption of power by the Nazi Party in January 1933 made it impossible for Adler to finish his studies, given that he was Jewish. That same year, he sought refuge in South Africa.<sup>12</sup> His mother Johanna remained in Germany, however, and was first deported to Theresienstadt in the summer of 1942 and then murdered soon afterwards in Treblinka.<sup>13</sup>

Adler arrived in South Africa with the basis of his later collection in his luggage, including assorted documents, first editions, scores collected by his father, and pictures of Tchaikovsky, Busoni, and Brahms with dedications to his mother – all witnesses to the wealth of culture that he had been compelled to leave behind. Emigrants such as he were only allowed to take belongings that could fit in a “liftvan”, which might have included furniture, paintings and other valuables.<sup>14</sup> It is unclear whether Adler managed to bring any furniture or instruments with him to South Africa, though it seems unlikely.

Adler found employment in Durban at an import and export company called Moshal and Gevisser Ltd, a company that had been founded by a previous generation of Jewish immigrants to South Africa who had arrived from Lithuania at the turn of the century in the wake of the Eastern European pogroms. By the time that Adler arrived in South Africa, what had begun as a kosher boarding establishment in Durban managed by the Moshal family had become one of the preeminent wholesale trading entities in South Africa.<sup>15</sup> Adler did not abandon music, however, and started performing jazz in Durban clubs and playing on

<sup>10</sup> Gaspar Cassadó i Moreu (1897–1966), Spanish cellist and composer. He toured South Africa three times at Adler's invitation, in 1953, 1955 and 1957. See <https://classicalmusicianstoza.blogspot.com/2014/06/gaspar-cassado-spanish-cellist.html> (accessed May 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Musiker, *Hans Adler Memorial Volume*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Musiker, *Hans Adler Memorial Volume*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> See Adler and Staehelin: “Eine Čajkovskij-Photographie mit Widmung an Johanna Nathan”, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Mendelsohn and Shain Milton, *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History*. Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2008, 112.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Gevisser, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2012, 82.

SABC radio. In 1935 he married Gertrud Stein, whom he had known since his school days in Germany, and who had also moved to South Africa to escape Nazi rule. It is not known whether the pair travelled together or separately. In their early years, they had to move every other month due to neighbours being disturbed by Adler's music-making with friends and his practising for SABC engagements.

In 1936, they moved to 11 Mazoe Road, Emmarentia, Johannesburg, which was where they subsequently raised their three children. Adler remained in Moshal and Gevisser's employ and worked his way up to become Joint Managing Director, a position he held until his retirement in 1950. While his working life was spent in the commercial sector, his spare time was devoted to music-related activities. He collected music books, scores, manuscripts, first editions and rare reference works, taking time off during his business and leisure trips to Europe to search for potential acquisitions. He managed to amass a noteworthy collection of musical scores dating from the 17th century onwards and even two incunabula (Martianus Minneus Felix Capella's *De Musica* and Boethius's *De Institutione Musica*).<sup>16</sup> Adler also built up a collection of musical instruments – mostly keyboard instruments – dating from the 16th to the 20th centuries. His many rarities included the first edition of Maurice Ravel's composition for five hands at two pianos entitled *Frontispice*. The story, writes Musiker,<sup>17</sup> is that Ravel, facing financial difficulties, had this piece published in a Paris fashion magazine in 1919. This violated his exclusive publishing agreement with Durand et Fils, who soon obtained a court order to halt the distribution of such an unauthorised publication. The court also required the destruction of thousands of printed copies, leaving only a few "illegal" copies in circulation. Adler found two of these copies in the attic of an old Parisian antiques dealer. In 1950, he donated one of them to the British Library.

## The Music Room

The heart of the Adler home was the music room where he displayed his collection of signed photos of musicians, rare music books and manuscripts.<sup>18</sup> Adler had arrived in South Africa with few possessions and little money. This discrepancy between possessions and capital may have been a source of tension within him, with material goods accordingly perceived as a more secure form of wealth than money. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why Adler

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<sup>16</sup> Incunabula are books, pamphlets, or broadsides printed in Europe before the year 1501. Musiker, *Hans Adler Memorial Volume*, 1. See also <https://hansadlercollection.blogspot.com/2018/05/boethius-1492-incunabula-treatise-on.html> (accessed 17 February 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Musiker, *Hans Adler Memorial Volume*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> For pictures of Adler's music room, see anon., "Hans Adler Keyboard Music Collection and Library", at <https://www.scribd.com/document/127417570/Hans-Adler-Keyboards-Music-Collection-and-Library> (accessed 30 April 2024).

later converted much of the capital he earned into material possessions, his choice of the latter originating in personal values<sup>19</sup> that were informed by his childhood in Germany, his parents and their domestic music-making, all of which had been lost to him.

In the biography of things in the Hans Adler Collection, music thus functions as a currency. Just as notes and coins represent the intangible value of money in tangible form, music can also be materialised. However, music as a sonic expression cannot escape its temporality, even when recorded. It has a beginning and an end, unlike books, pictures, or instruments, which possess greater permanence and can be admired at any given moment. Adler's father's music books and his mother's pictures served as reminders of a time and place where they had led cosmopolitan lives, participated in civic life, and moved in elite circles. This was the life that Adler sought to recreate in South Africa, and he spent his lifetime supplementing and augmenting these materials with his own music books and pictures of celebrity musicians. It is as if Adler's collection allowed him to continue his parents' lives that had been cut short, and that his desire to capture the evanescence of music in different material forms may have reflected a longing to achieve a sense of permanence in a life that circumstances had rendered painfully impermanent. The "regime of value" here is of the individual, who, Kopytoff argues,<sup>20</sup> justifies his valuation of things from autonomous and parochial systems of aesthetics, morality, religion, or specialist professions.

### The Wall of Fame

During the period when Adler worked in the commercial sector, Europe was being ravaged by war, and significant political changes were unfolding in South Africa. The rise of Afrikaner Nationalism, which had an active antisemitic component during the 1930s and 1940s,<sup>21</sup> culminated in the National Party's election victory in 1948. Many Jewish citizens in South Africa were accordingly worried about their future in their adopted country, not least because the new political structures of apartheid, whose racial segregation had echoes of Nazi racial policy, were still being formulated.

As it happens, Afrikaner anti-Semitism largely dissipated in the ensuing years. But in these uncertain times, Hans Adler sought to emulate his parents' European cosmopolitanism, viewing his home as a social establishment for entertaining internationally renowned musicians, diplomats and others. Echoing the old European salons, these gatherings were centred on intellectual and cultural exchange rather than politics or economics. However, while their spirit was open and liberal, their reality was exclusive and elitist, subscribing as

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<sup>19</sup> Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value", 3.

<sup>20</sup> Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things", 82.

<sup>21</sup> Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa 1930–1948*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2015.



they did to Eurocentric notions of civilisation; the musicians and intellectuals whom Adler welcomed there were also (inevitably) all white.

Many photographs in the archives show artists in Adler's music room, reading from books or listening to musicians performing, as if the music room were a stage or a scenic backdrop, intended both to impress his guests visually and to signify the presence of European culture in this corner of Africa.<sup>22</sup> To his mother's pictures of famous composers, Adler added signed photos of the many international musicians who visited him in South Africa. In Adler's music room, his "wall of fame" represented social distinction and the creative achievements with which he and his guests could identify, while the library around the remaining walls symbolised his erudition and intellect, embodying a particular historical, cultural lineage that Adler was helping to preserve and advance. The objects in Adler's collection continuously accrued value in domains that transcended the economic sphere through a process that Kopytoff calls "singularisation", a form of "decommodification". The operating "regime of value" in this setting is that of the European salon.

### Keyboard Transactions

Adler was elected the Chairman of the Johannesburg Musical Society in 1952. It had been founded in 1902 by a group of amateur musicians in the aftermath of the Second Anglo-Boer War and over the ensuing decades had grown into one of the most prestigious institutions in South African music life. It also possessed the resources necessary to be able to invite international artists and ensembles to perform. Its prestige was heightened in the 1950s thanks to Adler, who invited some of the most renowned international musicians of the time, from Isabelle Nef (1956) to Jean-Pierre Rampal (1959), Ruggiero Ricci (1961), the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra with Karl Münchinger (1962), Maria Stader (1963), the Lucerne Festival Strings (1965), Alphons and Aloys Kontarsky (1967), Heinz Holliger (1969) and even Karlheinz Stockhausen (1971), whose visit to South Africa was a highlight of Adler's career. Adler was in contact both with various artists' agencies in the northern hemisphere and with other South African concert organisers including the SABC, so that the costs of a visit to South Africa might be spread across different institutions and different provinces. The Johannesburg Musical Society still exists today. It is the oldest music society in the country, has more than 200 members, and hosts ten concerts every year, often featuring well-known musicians from abroad.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For the "Wall of Fame" in Adler's music room, see anon., "Rare and Noteworthy Exhibits at Hans Adler Music Museum, Witwatersrand University", at [www.scribd.com/document/124220630/Rare-and-Noteworthy-exhibits-at-Hans-Adler-Music-Museum-Witwatersrand-University](https://www.scribd.com/document/124220630/Rare-and-Noteworthy-exhibits-at-Hans-Adler-Music-Museum-Witwatersrand-University) (accessed 30 April 2024)

<sup>23</sup> Lilla Fourie, "More than a Century of Beautiful Music in Johannesburg", in *HomePlus* 50,

We do not know when Hans Adler started collecting instruments, but it seems that his collection gained momentum in the 1950s, after he retired from the commercial sector and focused on his role as an impresario. He acquired an assortment of rare instruments, predominantly keyboards, the earliest of which was from the 16th century, the latest from the 20th. Among these treasures were a clavichord, a glass harmonica, an early 17th-century harpsichord, a 1689 Milanese spinettino, and a French iteration of the harpsichord known as a clavictherium.<sup>24</sup>

In 1957, Adler acquired a set of eight keyboard action models from Neupert, a German manufacturer, to illustrate the evolution of sound production in keyboard instruments over the centuries.<sup>25</sup> In 1965, he bought an Italian upright clavichord from the late 1500s that was probably used in a monastery in the south of France to lead prayers and hymns. He also bought a 17th-century Italian harpsichord that featured a Flemish painting on the inside of the lid, was decorated with garlands, and had been rebuilt by a French maker a century after it was built. This harpsichord was purchased at Sotheby's, as was a Broadwood piano from 1788 featuring a five-octave keyboard with ebony and fruitwood crossbanding (Adler later had this instrument restored by Hermann Gertz of Johannesburg). Adler's collection also included a harpsichord originally made by Ferdinand Weber – a friend of Handel's in Dublin – that he bought at Christie's, plus a square piano that he acquired in 1969 from the estate of his friend, the cellist Gaspar Cassadó. In 1970, Adler also bought a silent, practice piano made in 1825 for use during long stagecoach journeys. It has a mirror attached to it, allowing the musician to watch their finger movements and facial expressions while playing, and its keyboard slides into the frame, making it surprisingly easy to use, even on bumpy roads.

Perhaps the most valuable instrument in Adler's collection was the "Landowska" harpsichord, bought at auction in 1971, a 16th-century Italian instrument with delicate Gothic oak carvings and a Renaissance painting on its lid that has been attributed to Andrea del Verrocchio.<sup>26</sup> It apparently belonged to the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska. A much-reproduced photograph exists of her sitting at this same harpsichord in 1937.<sup>27</sup> The sound-

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14(3), 2019, 43. The Society's current activities are listed at [www.jms.org.za/](http://www.jms.org.za/) (accessed 17 February 2025). They maintain an active page on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100052802115442](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100052802115442) (accessed 17 February 2025).

<sup>24</sup> The information in this section is derived from: <https://hansadlercollection.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>25</sup> See anon: "Hans Adler Keyboard Music Collection and Library", at [www.scribd.com/document/127417570/Hans-Adler-Keyboards-Music-Collection-and-Library](https://www.scribd.com/document/127417570/Hans-Adler-Keyboards-Music-Collection-and-Library) (accessed 17 February 2025).

<sup>26</sup> Anon., "Hans Adler Keyboard Music Collection and Library".

<sup>27</sup> It is variously reproduced on Wikipedia and elsewhere, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanda\\_Landowska](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanda_Landowska) (accessed May 2024).

board of the harpsichord is inscribed with the Latin phrase “Musica Laetitiae Comes, Medicina Dolorum”, meaning “Music is a companion to joy and a medicine to sorrows”.<sup>28</sup>

Adler was happy to welcome musicians and students who wanted to explore his collection, providing detailed explanations and demonstrations of each instrument’s construction, mechanics, historical significance and unique attributes. His collection attracted interest from many quarters, but Adler staunchly resisted pressure to sell it abroad.

The keyboards in Hans Adler’s music room were acquired through transactions across cultural boundaries in which Africa and Europe were delimited spheres of exchange. This segmentation is an example of singularisation and is not a separation of the material, but of the society that values the material in a certain way. The instruments were obtained from elite auction houses such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s, or from selected antique dealers in Europe, or requested from specialist instrument manufacturers. These traders were “establishments”, not “outlets”, and their patrons were “clientele”, not “customers”. Regular individuals would be out of place in this context. According to Appadurai, this is one of the social arenas in which the politics of value is also the politics of knowledge: one must be well-versed in instruments and music history to appreciate the value of any early music instrument. This observation is supported by the ways in which the collection was used as an educational resource for musicians and students.

### Isabelle Nef and Travelling Keyboards

In October 1954, Adler invited Isabelle Nef (1895–1976), a Swiss professor of harpsichord at the Geneva Conservatoire, to perform in South Africa the following year.<sup>29</sup> When Nef accepted the invitation, she proposed a programme that included Baroque and Classical music as well as new works by Swiss composers. Since transporting a harpsichord from Switzerland was difficult, Adler offered his own six-pedal Pleyel harpsichord for her use in Johannesburg. He mentioned that he had bought the instrument six or seven years before from Musik Hug in Zurich.<sup>30</sup> Nef replied that Pleyel was her favourite make, but that it would be appropriate for only part of her repertoire. She suggested that she might obtain a Neupert harpsichord that would be ideal for what she wanted to play and light enough to

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<sup>28</sup> An SABC radio interview with Hans Adler exists in which he talks about his collection of instruments: [https://soundcloud.com/aldercraft/01-track-1-ha?si=1d888efee2cc4e3bac1d863941ea6bce&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/aldercraft/01-track-1-ha?si=1d888efee2cc4e3bac1d863941ea6bce&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing) (accessed 12 June 2025).

<sup>29</sup> The information given here on Nef’s tour is derived from the Musica Viva Society Collection, A1458, Box E54, Correspondence with Isabelle Nef, 1954–1958, 1961–1963, located in the William Cullen Library, Historical Papers Department, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Hans Adler to Isabelle Nef, 13 November 1954 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

travel with her. In December 1954, Adler asked Nef whether a harpsichord recital for 1,800 people would be viable. Nef's secretary replied in the affirmative, but also suggested that Adler consider amplifying the sound of the instrument, as Nef had done in a performance of Frank Martin's Harpsichord Concerto.<sup>31</sup>

Adler and Nef continued their correspondence regarding her potential concerts in South Africa, discussing which instruments to use, the programmes, and logistical considerations. Despite some setbacks and postponements, Adler and Nef remained determined to make the concerts happen and sought support from the Swiss government.

In January 1955, Adler postponed Nef's visit to South Africa, citing an already full schedule of artists, and adding a disclaimer that "South Africa is not yet mature enough to accommodate two or three artists at once".<sup>32</sup> In August 1955, he wrote to Nef again, pleased to hear that Neupert was making her a new harpsichord and proposing that, when she finally came, they should play a sonata for two harpsichords together. Adler also suggested that Nef inform Bern or Zurich of her proposed visit, so that they in turn could inform the Swiss Consulates in South Africa.<sup>33</sup> Nef's tour took place in February 1956, and Adler and Nef indeed performed works for two harpsichords together, with Adler on his Pleyel and Nef on her newly manufactured Neupert. The tour included a two-harpsichord broadcast for Radio Geneva from Adler's music room.<sup>34</sup> The events of Nef's 1956 tour to South Africa allow for interesting observations on the nature of cross-cultural transactions. Adler owned a French Pleyel that he had purchased in Switzerland, while Nef, who was based in Switzerland, had a German Neupert made to order with which she then travelled to South Africa. The trade of musical instruments between France, Germany, and Switzerland demonstrates the degree of coherence in cultural values between these countries. I suggest that the travels of both the Pleyel and Neupert instruments signify the way in which European cultural values were also channelled from Switzerland to apartheid South Africa. As Adler and Nef performed on their respective harpsichords, Kopytoff's notion of singularisation becomes evident. These instruments, commoditised through their purchase in Europe, are singularised through their use in cross-cultural performances, becoming objects that embody Swiss-South African cultural relations. Their value extends beyond monetary terms, reflecting the cultural diplomacy and ideological exchanges between the two countries. One review of a performance in Johannesburg reads:

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<sup>31</sup> Frank Martin's *Concerto pour clavecin et petit orchestre* (1951–52), dedicated to Nef.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Hans Adler to Isabelle Nef, 15 January 1955, written in French (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Hans Adler to Isabelle Nef, 26 August 1955 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>34</sup> A recording can be heard here: <https://soundcloud.com/aldercraft/sonate-pr-2-clavecins-en-sol> (accessed 11 June 2025).

To hear so fine a harpsichordist as Isabelle Nef is in itself memorable. That she should have found a good second here in Hans Adler is matter for rejoicing. But what really made last night's concert in the Selborne Hall unique was that, for the first time in Johannesburg two harpsichordists appeared on the same platform.

[...]

Placed in the body of the [Selborne] hall, the texture of the harpsichord gained much, but this exquisitely limited music will surely remain an acquired taste – caviare to the general [sic].<sup>35</sup>

From the critic's vantage point, Nef appears Elysian – an entity inspiring momentary awe during a brief encounter that will most likely never be repeated. But the distance between Nef as an ideal individual and the society of the salon is shorter because the degree of shared values is greater. In the smaller-scale, intimate setting of the salon, those present would be able to converse with her, even while awe and admiration remained present. The possibility of envy could also arise, given the closer proximity between the members of the salon and the individual on stage.

Adler, however, straddles the worlds of salon and stage. He is closest to the ideal represented by Nef, and for the time they make music together, he is elevated from the salon to exist alongside her. It is an exercise in transcendence that he practices by musicking among the stars, not only with Nef but with many of the artists whom he invited to tour South Africa. Adler continuously moves between these two worlds, and the materials in his collection move with him.

## The Lucerne Festival Strings in Letters and Newspaper Clippings

The Musica Viva Society collection, which contains materials of the Johannesburg Musical Society, offers insights into Adler's negotiations with the Lucerne Festival Strings in the 1960s.<sup>36</sup> In 1961, the orchestra's agent, the Bureau International de Concerts et Conférences Charles et Camille Kiesgen, proposed a South African tour for the orchestra in 1963 or 1964. Adler reminded Charles Kiesgen of this proposal in February 1962, expressing his interest in hosting them in January 1963. He explained that "[i]t is usual for these chamber Orchestras to receive a subsidy from their respective Government, and should that be the case, then I would be prepared to consider the matter more fully". Kiesgen replied that the orchestra requested postponing the tour to 1964. In July 1962, Adler expressed frustration to Kiesgen regarding the Bureau's failure to book the tour discussed:

<sup>35</sup> D.L.S., "Harpsichords at Selborne Hall", in *Rand Daily Mail*. 21 February 2025. A clipping of this review is available at [https://hansadlermusic-mediainfo.blogspot.com/2013/02/blog-post\\_21.html](https://hansadlermusic-mediainfo.blogspot.com/2013/02/blog-post_21.html) (accessed 17 February 2025).

<sup>36</sup> The information in this section is derived from the Musica Viva Society Collection, A1458, Box E46, Lucerne Festival Strings Orchestra, 1961/62, 1964/1965, 1968, 1976 William Cullen Library, Historical Papers Department, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

I am surprised that you were unable to negotiate an offer in view of the fact, that their Secretary wrote 2 weeks ago to somebody in Johannesburg, that the Orchestra is keen to come to South Africa July/August 1963. All the time I hear from you that artists are fully engaged and can't consider to come to South Africa, yet if you tackle them direct, they seem to be only too pleased to negotiate. Sometimes I wonder if that is the same case with Zino Francescatti, about whom we had a lot of correspondence in the past. Quite frankly I am surprised that you are not able to offer him to me, particularly in view of the fact, that quite recently he visited North Africa. Surely South Africa is a better proposition, and should you be unable to secure for me these good artists, then I must find my own way to negotiate with artists on a direct basis.<sup>37</sup>

Kiesgen's response shifted the blame onto the artists themselves. His reply to Adler, written in French, stated: "I act according to the instructions of the artists and not on my own authority".<sup>38</sup> Enclosed with his reply was a lengthy letter from Mia Niederöst, the Orchestra's secretary. From this letter, it appears that a series of interactions had taken place between Niederöst and a Mr Leemann of the SABC and Cyril Fischer of the Musica Viva Society, which included correspondence that was mistakenly delivered to Adler. Niederöst's letter recounts a meeting involving Rudolf Baumgartner (the director of the Festival Strings), herself and Leemann, who conducted radio interviews for Johannesburg while stationed in Bern. Leemann had expressed an interest in the Festival Strings, and mentioned his intention to recommend them to his contacts upon his return to Johannesburg. After a considerable period, Leemann reconnected with Niederöst, inquiring about the orchestra's continued interest in a tour to South Africa. The orchestra responded positively but noted the impracticality of scheduling such a tour before July-August 1964. This response inadvertently ended up in Adler's possession.<sup>39</sup>

Adler replied to Kiesgen, noting that Niederöst's account was inaccurate, that she had indeed indicated the availability of the Festival Strings in 1963, and that he was no longer interested in negotiating with the orchestra.<sup>40</sup> Kiesgen's response included the following comment: "Artists are frequently unreliable, and generally the Swiss are less frivolous than others. I see that this time again I was attributing to a Swiss secretary qualities that she does not possess".<sup>41</sup>

It is possible that the orchestra's apparent hesitance to tour South Africa was for purely financial reasons (perhaps their tour to Mexico that took place the next year, 1963, was dominating their plans at this time). But it is also possible that they had been influenced

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Hans Adler to Charles Kiesgen, 6 July 1962 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Charles Kiesgen to Hans Adler, 20 July 1962, written in French (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Mia Niederöst to Charles Kiesgen, 18 July 1962 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Hans Adler to Charles Kiesgen, 23 July 1962 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Charles Kiesgen to Hans Adler, 26 July 1962, written in French (Musica Viva Society Collection).



FESTIVAL STRINGS LUCERNE

1/8/65

FINAL TOUR PLAN (subject to alteration)

MONDAY 30/8 18.40 dep. ex Zuerich (SR 228)  
19.30 arr. Frankfurt  
21.00 dep. ex Frankfurt (LH 700)

TUESDAY 31/8 10.30 arr. Johannesburg (Hotel Victoria)

WEDNESDAY 1/9 20.15 1st Concert "Johannesburg Musical Society" at University Great Hall (programme 1)

THURSDAY 2/9 20.15 Concert "Pretoria Musical Society" Pretoria at the Voortrekker Hall. (programme 1).-- Pretoria 55 km from Johannesburg by private cars/bus and return to Johannesburg after the concert.

FRIDAY 3/9 19h - 22h } 40/45 min. tape recording, and 60 min. Record-  
SATURDAY 4/9 10h - 13h } ings for the Permanent Transcription Library  
14h - 17h } of the SABEC Studio 1H

SUNDAY 5/9 15.30 SABEC Broadcast before an invited audience (2 parts each about 38 minutes)

20.45 2nd Concert "Johannesburg Musical Society" at Civic Theatre (programme 2)

TUESDAY 7/9 late afternoon: Concert for Non-Whites

WEDNESDAY 8/9 7.30 dep. by 'plane to Durban (SA 501) Being 6.20 Durban at 11/14/1965  
8.20 9h arr. Durban (Royal Hotel) re Durban; m. Botkin  
eve Concert in Durban for "Durban Music Society" (programme 3)

THURSDAY 9/9 9.00 dep. by 'plane ex Durban to Port Elizabeth (SA 501)  
10.15 12h arr. Port Elizabeth  
eve Concert Port Elizabeth Programme 3 (Hotel Elizabeth; 1st hall)

FRIDAY 10/9 11.45 dep. by 'plane ex Port Elizabeth to Cape Town (SA 501)  
12.10 14.10 arr. Cape Town (Cliffon Hotel)

SATURDAY 11/9 eve Concert "Cape Town Concert Club" in conjunction with University of Cape Town) - programme 2

TUESDAY 14/9 eve Concert Stellenbosch University (programme 1).-- Stellenbosch 35 km from Cape Town by private bus/car and return to Cape Town after the concert.

WEDNESDAY 15/9 eve Concert "Cape Town Concert Club" (programme 3)

THURSDAY 16/9 15h dep. by 'plane ex Cape Town to Johannesburg (SA 308)  
17.20 arr. Johannesburg (Hotel Victoria)

FRIDAY 17/9 20.15 3rd Concert "Johannesburg Musical Society" at University Great Hall (programme 3)

SATURDAY 18/9 11.15 dep. by 'plane to Bulawayo (SA 250) Bus at 9.50 at Vic Hotel  
12.50 arr. Bulawayo Hotel Victoria - Programme 3 (cost 15-15-0)  
eve Concert Bulawayo (concert may take place possibly on Sunday afternoon).

MONDAY 20/9 7.30 dep. by 'plane ex Bulawayo to Salisbury (RH 840)  
8.30 arr. Salisbury (Hotel Ambassador) Programme 3  
eve Concert Salisbury (Celebrity Subscription Concerts)

TUESDAY 21/9 14.45 dep. by 'plane ex Salisbury to Johannesburg (SA 257)  
17h arr. Johannesburg, in transit  
20.30 dep. ex Johannesburg to Frankfurt (LH 701)

WEDNESDAY 22/9 8h arr. Frankfurt  
9.40 dep. ex Frankfurt to Zuerich (LH 310)  
10.30 arr. Zuerich

0-0-0-0

checked by H. Friedman

Figure 3.2. Festival Strings Lucerne: Final Tour Plan, 1965. Musica Viva Society Collection A1458/E46 MUSICA VIVA SOCIETY: Lucerne Festival Strings. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.



by international anti-apartheid sentiments, especially after the global outcry that occurred following the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. It was in early 1964 when Rudolf Baumgartner reached out to Adler again, citing discussions he had had with the Swiss soprano Maria Stader and her husband, the pianist Hans Erismann, who had both toured South Africa and who now spoke “with great enthusiasm about their concerts in South Africa under your supervision”.<sup>42</sup> Baumgartner’s letter acknowledged the previous misunderstanding but requested a fresh start, emphasising the orchestra’s interest in touring South Africa in 1965. It is worth noting that the conversations surrounding the orchestra’s concerts in apartheid-era South Africa were initiated by the orchestra, not Adler.

The Lucerne Festival Strings toured South Africa for three weeks in September 1965. Their itinerary included performances in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, Durban, Cape Town and Bulawayo in what is today Zimbabwe, with one concert arranged for “non-whites”. This last concert was a condition placed on them by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, who had provided considerable funding for the tour, but were wary of adverse reactions from the anti-apartheid movement and believed that a single concert for “non-whites” would preempt criticism.<sup>43</sup> Ahead of the orchestra’s arrival, the Johannesburg daily *The Star* reported that the Festival Strings were the first European orchestra to visit South Africa in three years.<sup>44</sup>

The newspaper clippings in the archives testify to the overwhelmingly positive reception of the orchestra’s performances. There are frequent references to the youthfulness of its members. One reviewer comments on their playing as follows:

They come from a country which has practised social harmony for centuries. It would be surprising if some of that mansuetude had not spilled over into their music-making.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 3.3. Dorkay House in Johannesburg today; the sometime home of Union Artists. Private collection.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Rudolf Baumgartner to Hans Adler, 20 March 1964, written in German (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>43</sup> Regarding the criticism to which a recent Swiss visitor, Heinrich Sutermeister, had been subjected by the anti-apartheid movement, see Chris Walton, “Farbe bekennen: Schweizer Künstler und der Apartheid-Staat”, in: Thomas Gartmann (ed.), *“Als Schweizer bin ich neutral”. Schoecks Oper “Das Schloss Dürande” und ihr Umfeld*. Schliengen: Argus, 2018, 286–311.

<sup>44</sup> “Music lovers queue for tickets in dark”, in *The Star*, 19 August 1965 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

<sup>45</sup> Oliver Walker, “Green charm of Lucerne”, in *The Star*, 6 September 1965 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

The final tour plan in the archive lists the dates and venues for all performances, except for the concert marked: “late afternoon: concert for Non-Whites”,<sup>46</sup> for which no venue is listed. The circumstances of this sole concert leave little doubt that it was regarded by everyone as a box-ticking exercise. In fact, not everyone who took part can today remember having played for Blacks at all. One who does remember is the solo cellist Esther Nyffenegger, who said it was held at a “community centre” with an audience of a little more than 100 people.<sup>47</sup> The venue was in fact Dorkay House on Eloff Street in Johannesburg, the home of the Black organisation Union Artists, and the audience – thus Nyffenegger – looked as though they had been brought in at short notice, some of them apparently straight from work.



*Figure 3.4. The Lucerne Festival Strings boarding their South African Airways flight. Photo courtesy of Esther Nyffenegger.*

<sup>46</sup> “Festival Strings Lucerne; Final Tour Plan” (typed document), Musica Viva Society Collection.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Chris Walton in Zurich, 9 March 2022.

After the concert, the members of the Festival Strings were given a full-length performance of the latest musical organised by Union Artists, namely *Sponono* by Alan Paton and Krishna Shah. Performing a musical for the foreign guests suggests that the evening must surely have entailed planning of some kind – or perhaps Union Artists had been asked to perform, and were only informed at the last minute that they were going to have to host a concert as well as give one. After the event, the head of Union Artists, J. Dlamini, wrote a letter of thanks to Adler:

[...] I wish to express our greatest gratitude and appreciation for the most generous gesture by you and the Johannesburg Musical Society for the great privilege we had to witness a most memorable performance by the world-famous FESTIVAL STRING LUCERNE members on Tuesday, 7th September, 1965.

This was indeed a most wonderful experience and treat for every one who attended the performance.

We trust that we shall always maintain this existing friendship and co-operation, of having such rare privileges to witness performances by such music celebrities.<sup>48</sup>

In 1968, Niederöst contacted Adler again to explore the possibility of a second concert tour, but this never materialised in his lifetime; the Festival Strings did not return to South Africa until after the end of apartheid.

## Conclusion

In tracing the journeys of the objects in the Hans Adler Collection at the University of the Witwatersrand, we not only gain insights into the life of its benefactor but also uncover the complex web of Swiss-South African cultural exchange during a period marked by apartheid and political isolation. The exchanges between Adler and various Swiss artists are marked by cultural artifacts that move fluidly along the continuum described by Igor Kopytoff, caught between commoditisation and singularisation.

Adler's collection reflects the intricate balance between the commoditisation of European high culture and its singularisation through personal histories and local contexts in South Africa. In Kopytoff's terms, the objects in Adler's collection — from rare harpsichords to manuscripts — can be seen as travelling across cultural boundaries, accruing value not only in monetary or aesthetic terms, but also as symbols of a broader ideological connection between Switzerland and South Africa. While the instruments were commoditised in European markets through prestigious auctions and elite transactions, their integration into

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from J. Dlamini to Hans Adler, 9 September 1965 (Musica Viva Society Collection).

South Africa's cultural life reflects their singularisation, representing not just rare commodities but markers of cultural exchange, identity, and resistance.

The case of Swiss collaboration with South African cultural institutions reveals a key contradiction in Western liberal approaches to South Africa. On one hand, Swiss artists and institutions maintained a cultural agenda that sought to promote European values, particularly through performances and collaborations such as those facilitated by Adler. On the other hand, Switzerland's political stance during apartheid, characterised by its neutrality and detachment from economic sanctions, demonstrates the divergence between cultural and political regimes of value. This tension illuminates the internal contradictions within Western liberalism — a system that could advocate for the expansion of European culture in South Africa while turning a blind eye to the political realities of apartheid.

In this context, the Adler Collection emerges not only as a cultural biography of its objects but also as a prism through which we can examine broader Swiss complicity in South Africa's cultural and political history. The instruments, objects and musicians that travelled from Switzerland to South Africa carried layers of cultural meaning, ultimately shaped by the regimes of value that operated within both countries. The Swiss involvement in South Africa's musical life during apartheid reflects how culture can be commoditised and used to promote political ideologies, even in the face of ethical and political contradictions.

Thus, Adler's collection and the Swiss artists involved in these exchanges represent more than just a transnational dialogue of music and art; they serve as a case study in how regimes of value shift and transform across time and space, embodying the moral ambiguities and ideological entanglements of the era.

## 4 Compact Urbanity in Contrast: Revisiting Civic Centres Designed by the Kirchhofer Office in Apartheid-Era South Africa

*Thomas Chapman*

Concerted attention was to be given to the creation of a coherent urban scene primarily in the [Sasolburg] town centre and preferably wherever possible throughout the town as a whole – with emphasis on planting as an indispensable element to be introduced from the beginning. Buildings were intended to be fused into concerted groups, modulated by the interplay of mass and space. Compact urbanity was to contrast with suburban openness ... The development of the town centre reflected the gradual growth and maturing of the town in which people of many walks of life and diverse interests had come to settle and lead their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Max Kirchhofer 1982

### Introduction

The Kirchhofer Office was responsible for some of the most progressive urban design schemes of the apartheid period in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> This office was established in 1940 as a sole proprietorship, “Max Kirchhofer Architect and Town Planner”, but was, in effect, a partnership between the married couple Max and Tanja Kirchhofer (née Labhart), who emigrated to South Africa from Switzerland in 1937. Both were architects trained at the Swiss Federal Technical University (the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, hereinafter ETH Zurich) and were active members of the Swiss chapter of the influential Modernist architecture organisation known as CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne). The office completed more than twenty major urban design projects in South Africa but is best known for its work on the new towns of Sasolburg and Secunda for the state-owned energy company Sasol (Suid-Afrikaanse Steenkool, Olie en Gaskorporasie). Some observers have questioned how such a prestigious public commission during apartheid could be awarded

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<sup>1</sup> Max Kirchhofer, “The Planning of Sasolburg and Secunda: Achievements and Prospects”, *Town and Regional Planning* Special Issue, 1982, 2–15.

<sup>2</sup> Apartheid was enforced in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. The Kirchhofer Office was in business in South Africa from 1940 until 1982.

to foreigners rather than members of the Afrikaner Broederbond.<sup>3</sup> In truth, the Kirchhofer Office's involvement was illustrative of a broader trend that saw international professionals recruited to work on public projects, such as Sasolburg, owing to their unique technical prowess. A closer look at the civic centres of these new towns reveals how a liberal urban design agenda could infiltrate a state-controlled environment through the efforts of such foreign design professionals.

## Civic Centres in the South African Liberal Imagination

The urban design history of South Africa in the latter half of the twentieth century remains largely unexplored due to its entanglements with apartheid planning. Over 80 civic centres constructed across the country between 1940 and 1980 stand as forgotten relics of a vibrant urban design culture that often contradicted apartheid ideology. Civic centres were commonly conceived as two or more publicly accessible buildings arranged around open-air, car-free plazas to engender new centralities in urbanised areas. Unlike in many European cities, urban designs that prioritised pedestrian movement and comfort were highly unusual in the South African context.<sup>4</sup> Many civic centres, such as the one created in Sasolburg, were located within planned new towns attached to industry. Others, like the Johannesburg or Cape Town civic centres, were developed on consolidated land parcels in built-up areas as part of urban renewal or expansion efforts.

For the most part, civic centres were located in areas supposedly restricted to the “white group” under the Group Areas Act.<sup>5</sup> However, this restriction mainly applied to “primary”

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<sup>3</sup> See Walter Peters, “Max Kirchhofer and the “New Town” of Sasolburg: Creating the Spatial and Architectural Framework”, *Architecture South Africa*, August 2015, 51–62, here 55. The Broederbond was a secretive, exclusively male organisation in South Africa that aimed to promote Afrikaner culture and advance Afrikaner political power. Operating from 1918 to 1994, it played a significant role in shaping the policies of the National Party and exerted influence over public sector employment during the apartheid era. See “Afrikaner Broederbond | South African History Online”, [www.sahistory.org.za/article/afrikaner-broederbond](http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/afrikaner-broederbond), (accessed 17 July 2023).

<sup>4</sup> See William Holford, “The Pedestrian in the City”, *South African Architectural Record*, June 1961, 19.

<sup>5</sup> The Group Areas Act refers to three acts of parliament, passed in 1950, 1957 and 1966, which created the legal framework to establish where people of different races could exclusively reside. See “The Group Areas Act of 1950 | South African History Online”, [www.sahistory.org.za/article/group-areas-act-1950](http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/group-areas-act-1950) (accessed 12 July 2023). Throughout this essay, the designations of apartheid racial classification (“white”, “Black”, “coloured”, “Indian”) are used in the historical contexts where they were applied. This is not an acceptance of these categories of classification, but an inevitability in writing an article about an urban design process that consciously engaged with these categories. Because these classificatory terms occur so frequently in the article, the constant qualification of these terms by quotation marks, qualifiers like “so-called” or descriptors like “historically designated racial classificatory category” become too cumbersome and impractical. See also the general comments on these issues in this book’s Introduction.

residential accommodation because the continuous physical presence of people designated as “non-white”, both as workers and consumers, was essential to the economy of white areas.<sup>6</sup> The so-called “architects of apartheid” viewed the South African economy’s reliance on “non-white” people as an existential threat and formulated laws further to restrict and segregate inhabitants of “white”-zoned areas. These laws, bundled together by critics under the term “petty apartheid”, did little to restrict racial mixing but still succeeded in marginalising and discriminating against people designated “non-white”.<sup>7</sup> The compact urbanity of civic centres made visible this failure of apartheid legislation to separate people according to putative racial categories.

Most civic centres within new towns prioritised shops and services, but differed from ordinary retail centres due to the integral role played by local governments in their planning and utilisation. Local governments often established their offices and council chambers within these projects, actively promoting the incorporation of social infrastructure components such as theatres and libraries. These actions exemplify how the public space of a civic centre could be envisioned on local terms, momentarily free from the totalitarian logic of national apartheid. Furthermore, well-resourced municipal engineering departments, often chaired by prominent liberal professionals, provided nurturing environments for progressive urban design ideas. The impact of such work and ideas should not be overstated. Despite the potential for local governments to resist certain aspects of apartheid, people designated “non-white” were still systematically denied the right to vote in local elections on issues directly affecting their lives.

Civic centres were mostly designed by urban designers trained abroad and affiliated with one of the two main liberal, English-speaking universities of South Africa, the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the University of Cape Town.<sup>8</sup> Beyond this affiliation, the projects more broadly embodied the social agenda of South African liberalism during apartheid, which gained prominence among the white, English-speaking business community. Prior to the abolition of apartheid in 1994, South African liberals generally opposed the system on the basis of classical liberal principles emphasising individual liberties and human rights.<sup>9</sup> Influential liberal figures within the private sector, such as Harry Oppen-

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<sup>6</sup> Apartheid-era “influx control” laws allowed the secondary accommodation of Black servants in white areas. See Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers under Apartheid*, revised edition. London: Women’s Press, 1989, 235.

<sup>7</sup> Jagger Kirkby, *Sentiments of Segregation: The Emotional Politics of Apartheid in South Africa, c. 1948–1990*. Lund: Lund University (Media-Tryck), 2022, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Wits and UCT during apartheid are referred to as “liberal bastions” in Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948–1994*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 114.

<sup>9</sup> See Merle Lipton, “White Liberals, ‘the Left’ and the New Africanist Elite in South Africa”, in *International Affairs* 76(2), April 2000, 333–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.00138> (accessed



heimer, primarily critiqued apartheid from an economic efficiency perspective.<sup>10</sup> Civic centres can thus be critically examined in the context of a somewhat compromised South African liberalism, mainly due to their shared ties to extractive capitalism. Although civic centres promoted the convergence of people from different racial backgrounds in defiance of apartheid, the underlying commercial rationale of these spaces could be equally exclusionary.<sup>11</sup>

## The Sasol Commission

The story of the Sasol enterprise is, in many ways, about the triumph of Afrikaner Nationalism over liberal business interests in the early years of apartheid. Established in 1950, Sasol took over the South African licensing of the “Fischer-Tropsch” process from Anglovaal, a South African mining conglomerate founded by English immigrants.<sup>12</sup> The Fischer-Tropsch process, invented in Germany in 1925, offered a method of liquifying South Africa’s substantial coal reserves into oil. This idea made sense to government leaders, who, in the early 1950s, were concerned about the country’s dependence on foreign oil and anxious to provide a hedge against looming sanctions against the apartheid regime.<sup>13</sup> The location of the Sasol operation at the northern tip of the Orange Free State province was ultimately determined by massive coal deposits and the adjacent Vaal River that provided the water essential for the industrial plant. The site was also only 80km from Johannesburg, the country’s central economic hub and primary Sasol product market.

The Kirchhofer Office was commissioned to design the Sasolburg new town in 1951, with a “crisp” planners’ brief to accommodate 10,000 white people “in an environment in which they could lead contented lives”. A roughly equal number of Black people was to be accommodated in the vicinity “within the framework of government policy”.<sup>14</sup> Although loose guidelines for apartheid planning had been set out in the first Group Areas Act of 1950, technical specifications for separating white and Black residential areas had not yet been promulgated. The Kirchhofer Office’s appointment coincided with Hendrik Verwoerd’s promotion as the Minister of Native Affairs in the Afrikaner Nationalist government.<sup>15</sup> Ver-

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11 June 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Cardo, *Harry Oppenheimer: Diamonds, Gold and Dynasty*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2023, 128.

<sup>11</sup> South African liberalism originated in the Cape province of South Africa in the early 1800s. The slogan of the so-called “Cape Liberals” was “equal rights for all civilised men”, a notion easily adapted to the spatiality of the civic centre. See Martin van Staden, “The Liberal Tradition in South Africa, 1910–2019”, in *Econ Journal Watch*, 16(2), September 2019, 258–341, here 266.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes Meintjes, *Sasol, 1950–1975*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1975, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Nancy L. Clark, *Manufacturing Apartheid: State Corporations in South Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, xi, 160.

<sup>14</sup> Kirchhofer, “The Planning of Sasolburg and Secunda: Achievements and Prospects”, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Verwoerd later became the prime minister of South Africa and is considered by many to have



Figure 4.1. General layout of Sasolburg and Zamdela. Redrawn from the original by the author.

woerd became actively involved in the Sasolburg project brief, resulting in the unambiguous placement of the 200Ha industrial plant between the white residential area to the north, called “Sasolburg”, and the Black residential area to the south, called “Zamdela”. The ministry also interrogated the road network plan to minimise interaction between residents in the two areas.<sup>16</sup> These engineering solutions would not alter the increasing economic ties

been the chief architect of apartheid. See for instance, Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948–1994*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Oranje, “Stories from Coal: Influence, Context, Personality and Result in Random Order in the Planning of Sasolburg”, paper presented at the Planning History Study Group’s Biennial Symposium, held at the University of Pretoria’s Hammanskraal Campus, 2-4 September 1996, 263–86, here 282.

between Sasolburg and Zamdela, guaranteeing a continuous Black presence in the so-called white space. Despite apparent failures of the master plan to restrict interaction between residents of the two racially designated areas, Sasol viewed the Kirchhofer Office's work on Sasolburg as a great success. Sasol continuously employed the office for over 30 years, primarily on iterations to Sasolburg (1950–1982) and, for a shorter period, on the new town of Secunda (1975–1982), which accompanied a second coal-to-oil plant 150km away.

## Exploring Swiss Connections

The Kirchhofer Office secured the Sasolburg commission following a series of high-profile projects for prominent Swiss organisations operating in South Africa during the 1940s.<sup>17</sup> These connections were largely forged through an influential network of professionals and industrialists that welcomed Max and Tanja Kirchhofer as graduates of ETH Zurich and participants in the CIAM IV conference on urban planning in 1933.<sup>18</sup> The pair opted to leave Europe in 1936 in part because of the perceived danger of an outbreak of war in Europe, but also because of an urge to “go beyond the seas” and “test the validity” of the knowledge they had acquired in the relative safety of Switzerland.<sup>19</sup> Although they never again practised in Switzerland, the pair maintained strong ties to their home country, spending the final years of their lives there.<sup>20</sup> Considering this, few researchers have realised the potential for Swiss archives to reveal additional layers of understanding to projects like Sasolburg, particularly in relation to apartheid. Most previous studies rely on corporate and state archives in South Africa, supplemented with writings by Max Kirchhofer in South African architecture and planning journals.<sup>21</sup> While these sources provide first-hand accounts of the Sasol new town

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<sup>17</sup> The Kirchhofer Office's archive lists, for instance, several projects for Everite, as well as private projects for a member of the company's owning family, E.D Schmidheiny, between 1946 and 1950. “List of Jobs: Max Kirchhofer Architect and Town Planner 1940–1982”, n.d., Personal Archive: Ann Vorberg (Kirchhofer).

<sup>18</sup> The pair's main professional work after graduating in 1935 had been upgrading the Langstrasse quarter in Zurich under the banner of CIAM. This work had been done under Max Kirchhofer's cousin Rudolf Steiger, an influential Swiss modernist architect and founding member of CIAM. Steiger had undertaken a number of projects in Switzerland for the Eternit corporation, which began operating in South Africa in 1941. A letter of recommendation written by Steiger in 1937 was likely a factor in Eternit becoming one of the Kirchhofer Office's first major clients in 1941.

<sup>19</sup> South Africa was not the only choice for the Kirchhofers, who considered the United States and South America as possible alternative destinations for a new life. The Union of South Africa was chosen because of the ease of immigration for Europeans at the time but also because of the internationalist image conveyed by the Union's prime minister, Jan Smuts. From lecture notes: Max Kirchhofer, “Talk to South African Institute of Architects”, 12 January 1982, in “New Towns: collection Max Kirchhofer (c.1950–1980)” held at the gta Archive at ETH Zurich.

<sup>20</sup> Tanja Kirchhofer died in hospital in Zurich in 1974.

<sup>21</sup> See Max Kirchhofer, “Sasolburg O.F.S. Report on the New Town”, in *South African Architectural Record*, March 1958, 18–35; Kirchhofer, “The Planning of Sasolburg and Secunda: Achievements

projects, writing and compilation occurred under intensive government scrutiny and thus reveal little of the apartheid context. The most comprehensive donation to a Swiss archive was made to the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) after Max Kirchhofer died in 2009.<sup>22</sup> The BAB collection contains much of the preparatory material that preceded the published articles, including letters, notes and speech transcripts, all of which provide a candid take on the South African political context.<sup>23</sup> This material also contextualises the Sasol projects within the Kirchhofer Office, notably by situating them amongst other urban design projects for clients in the private sector operating outside the apartheid regime.<sup>24</sup>

### Photographing Multiracial Use

After the office closed in South Africa and its surviving founder, Max Kirchhofer, repatriated to Switzerland in 1982, numerous opportunities arose for him to lecture on the Sasol new town projects. The Kirchhofer slide collection at the ETH Zurich's Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) Archives consists of 156 images specially prepared for these lectures. The slides are organised in the same order as the photographs in a special edition of the *South African Journal for Town and Regional Planning*, which features Max Kirchhofer's comprehensive analysis of the Sasol projects. The journal covers various subjects, including regional interventions and architectural details. One remarkable difference in the slide collection is the addition of 45 photographs of people from different racial demographics collectively occupying the civic centres. These photographs depict everyday scenes of people going about their lives: walking, shopping, sitting and talking. Few visual clues reveal that these events are occurring at the peak of apartheid in the early 1980s. However, while African men in the photographs are dressed similarly to the white men, many African women wear the monochrome polyester uniforms typical of domestic workers in apartheid-era South Africa. It is clear from the literature that racial integration in public spaces like this was a major problem for the national government throughout the apartheid

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and Prospects".

<sup>22</sup> Donations to the BAB were made by Ann Vorberg (née Kirchhofer), the daughter of Max and Tanja Kirchhofer and an architect based in Bellinzona, Switzerland. Vorberg grew up in South Africa and worked in the Kirchhofer Office on the Sasol new town projects before moving to Switzerland in the early 1980s.

<sup>23</sup> The BAB collection also comprises a vast array of personal materials that offer anecdotal evidence regarding the political leanings of Max and Tanja Kirchhofer, including clippings from liberal South African newspapers focusing on the period after the Soweto Riots of June 1976 and an extensive collection of publications by liberal institutions operating in apartheid South Africa, chiefly the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Urban Foundation.

<sup>24</sup> One example of these projects is the Rosebank District Centre, realised in 1983 for a consortium of private property owners. The project involved the closure of a major road to create a pedestrian mall, like in Sasolburg.

period. Several apartheid leaders viewed white employers who relied mainly on Black workers as “bad industrialists” and “bad housewives”.<sup>25</sup> Stephen Sparks affirms this, claiming that the Sasolburg of the 1960s and ’70s “can usefully be treated as a sociological microcosm of the foundational contradiction at the heart of apartheid: the demands upon the labour of African women and men and the simultaneous disavowal of their presence”.<sup>26</sup> The 45 photographs in the gta collection raise thought-provoking questions that extend beyond mere domestic economics. These include why African people were attracted to the civic centres of the “white” towns, where these individuals originated from, how they travelled there, and whether they felt welcome. The photographs offer an opportunity to re-examine the urban design of the Sasol new towns with these questions in mind.



Figure 4.2. Sasolburg Town Centre, 1980. Photograph by Max Kirchhofer.

### Urban Design of Sasolburg

By 1980, the collective population of Sasolburg and Zamdela was around 46,000, divided equally between the two racially designated areas.<sup>27</sup> While low-rise family housing on large

<sup>25</sup> Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 64

<sup>26</sup> Stephen J. Sparks, “Apartheid Modern: South Africa’s Oil from Coal Project and the History of a South African Company Town”. Doctoral thesis, the University of Michigan, 2012, 135.

<sup>27</sup> From the 1980 South African National Census. Sasolburg refers specifically to the white resi-



stands in “white” Sasolburg produced a relatively sparse density of 25 people per hectare, Zamdela contained four times this amount of people. This difference can be attributed to the government-mandated construction of single-sex hostel compounds in Zamdela, built to house Sasol’s male African workers. Oranje and Peters have written extensively about how the Kirchhofer Office struggled with the Department of Native Affairs (DNA) regarding the urban design of Zamdela.<sup>28</sup> Whereas the focus of these discussions is primarily on lost battles to retain more family housing for Black workers, less attention has been given to pedestrian connectivity strategies implemented without any significant changes from the DNA. Pedestrian connectivity between Sasolburg and Zamdela was restricted to a single sidewalk that ran the 2km



*Figure 4.3. Connection between the green belt and civic centre at Sasolburg, 1980. Photograph by Max Kirchhofer.*

length of the Sasol industrial plant. Although this provided some measure of control over Africans moving between the two areas, within white Sasolburg, the pedestrian network was much more liberating. The Kirchhofer Office gained recognition for its adaptation of the American “Radburn Pattern” as a master planning strategy in the project.<sup>29</sup> Like the Radburn Pattern, the “Sasolburg Pattern” backed residential stands onto a network of pedestrianised greenbelts interspersed with schools. Unlike “Radburn”, “Sasolburg” did away

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dential area called Sasolburg and excludes Vaalpark, which the Kirchhofer Office did not design. Zamdela refers collectively to the adjoining Black townships of Zamdela and Coalbrook.

<sup>28</sup> Oranje, “Stories from Coal: Influence, Context, Personality and Result in Random Order in the Planning of Sasolburg”, and Peters, “Max Kirchhofer and the ‘New Town’ of Sasolburg: Creating the Spatial and Architectural Framework”.

<sup>29</sup> Named after the town of Radburn in New Jersey, USA, designed by the planners Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, which introduced an innovative way of separating pedestrians from traffic: Tom Avermaete and Janina Gosseye, *Urban Design in the 20th Century: A History*. Zurich: gta Verlag, 2021, 183.

with traditional cul-de-sacs so that pedestrianised greenbelts behind houses were not only accessible from backyards but from almost every public street. When the Kirchhofer Office argued for these greenbelts, the narrative was largely centred on the plight of “little children” getting safely to-and-from school.<sup>30</sup> Strategically left out of the conversation was the far greater use of these greenbelts by Africans, who travelled mostly on foot.

In addition to Africans moving between Zamdela and Sasolburg, the white residential area accommodated a significant Black population in formal “servant quarters”. Paradoxically, while the DNA imposed restrictions on domestic workers in Sasolburg through influx control measures, it authorised the construction of backyard dwellings for domestic workers in the majority of houses within the white town. An estimated 1,800 Black domestic workers were employed in Sasolburg by 1965. This number broadly aligns with a count of single-family houses completed in the white area by the late 1950s.<sup>31</sup> By 1980, the number of single-family houses had grown to 5,245.<sup>32</sup> Although the exact ratio of domestic quarters was not documented, all seven typical house plans published in a 1958 journal article incorporated between one and two “servant quarters”, commonly adjoining a vehicular garage.<sup>33</sup> Judging from the letters of complaint to the Town Clerk highlighted by Sparks and photographs in the gta collection, domestic quarters and greenbelts in Sasolburg operated as a complementary system.<sup>34</sup>

A diagrammatic layout of Sasolburg prepared by the Kirchhofer Office indicates how the system of green belts in the white area was designed to converge in the civic centre. Key photographs from the gta collection show African men and women approaching and leaving the civic centre via the green belts. By framing these linear parks as “movement routes”, the Kirchhofer Office sidestepped a 1953 law termed the “Reservation of Separate Amenities Act” (RSAA). This act gave local authorities the power to restrict public buildings or outdoor spaces for exclusive use by a single racial group but acknowledged the multiracial use of “public roads or streets”.<sup>35</sup> The Kirchhofer Office maintained this strategy in the civic centre by arranging a linear complex of buildings around a 600m pedestrian mall anchored on the southern end by a theatre and on the northern end by a supermarket. The line of buildings flanking the mall contained shops and services such as doctors’ rooms, which, like streets, were not racially designated. A second ring of buildings parallel to this contained

<sup>30</sup> Kirchhofer, “The Planning of Sasolburg and Secunda: Achievements and Prospects”, 7.

<sup>31</sup> 1479 houses had been completed in the white area of Sasolburg by 1958. See Kirchhofer, “Sasolburg O.F.S. Report on the New Town”, 28

<sup>32</sup> Kirchhofer, “The Planning of Sasolburg and Secunda: Achievements and Prospects”, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Duncan Howie, “Sasolburg – Visual Development of The Town”, in *South African Architectural Record*, April 1958, 24–31.

<sup>34</sup> Sparks, “Apartheid Modern: South Africa’s Oil from Coal Project”, 161.

<sup>35</sup> Governor-General, “Reservation of Separate Amenities Act”, Pub. L. No. 49, 1953.



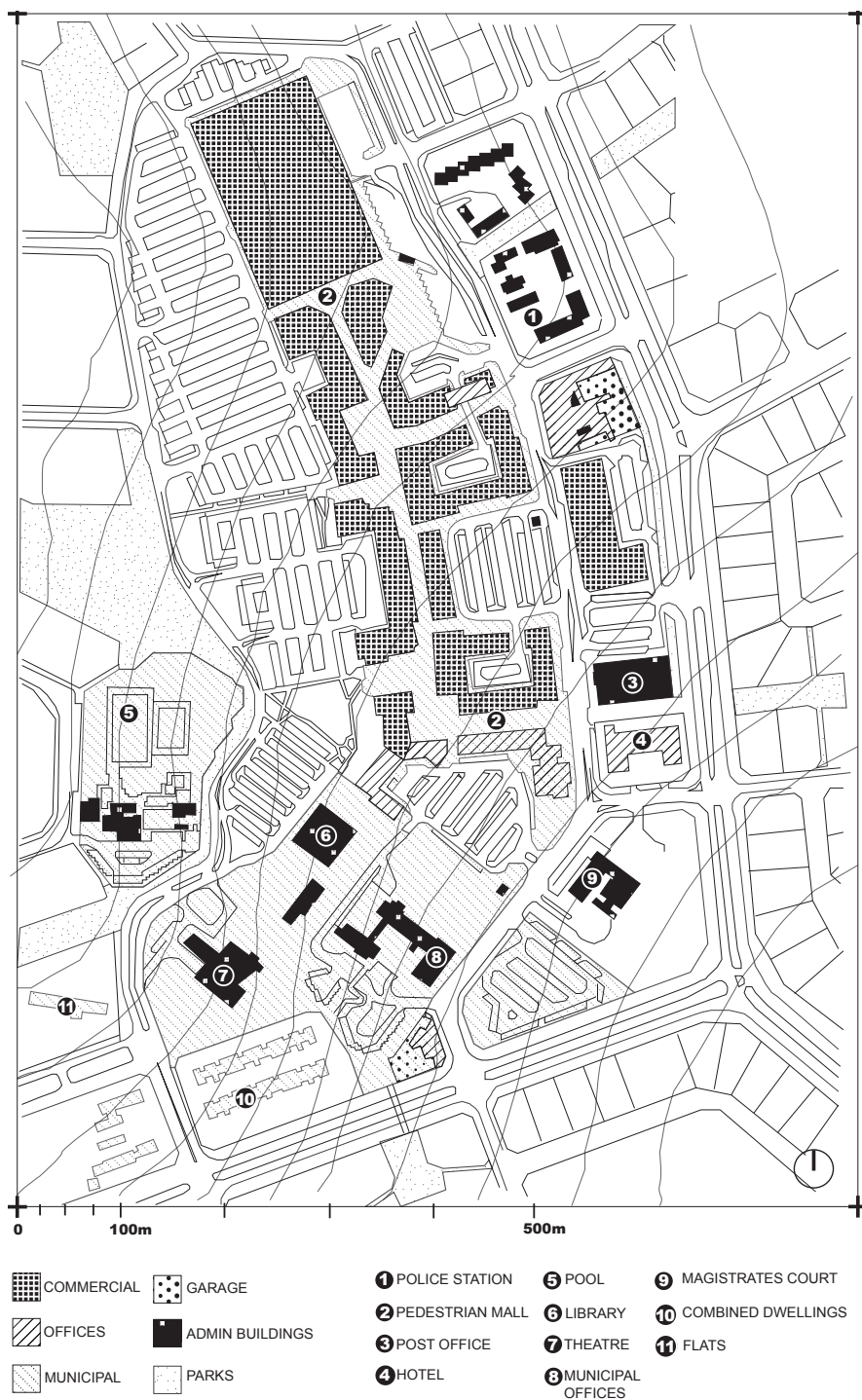


Figure 4.4. Urban design layout of Sasolburg Civic Centre. Redrawn from the original by the author.

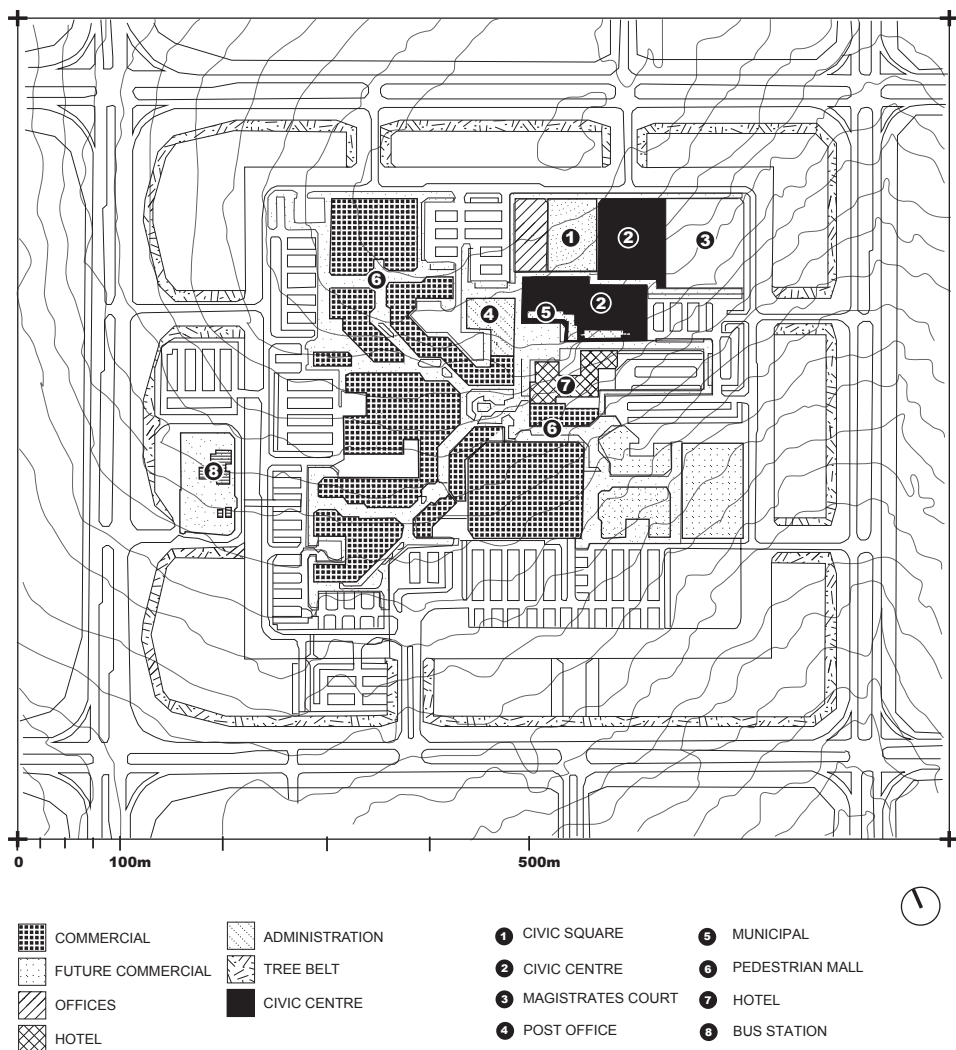


Figure 4.5. Urban design layout of Secunda Civic Centre. Redrawn from the original by the author.

a police station and post office, which under the control of the national government were mandated to have separate entrances for “Europeans” and “non-Europeans”. With an average width of around eight metres, the pedestrian mall widened in several instances to form larger gathering spaces shaded by trees. From multiple photographs in the gta collection, we see these spaces used by Africans, not just as thoroughfares, but also for gathering. Had the spaces been separated from the pedestrian mall, there would be a strong case for the designation of use by a single race, as required by the RSAA. Several critical indoor public spaces in the civic centre, such as the theatre and library, remained unavoidably for exclusive use

by white people. These buildings were part of a complex on the southern end of the civic centre, which also comprised municipal offices and a magistrate's court. The connection of one of the largest greenbelts to the civic centre at this point, however, ensured that the unrestricted outdoor spaces surrounding the buildings remained accessible for use by Africans.

### Urban Design of Secunda

The brief for Secunda in 1974 called for "the spirit of Sasolburg" to be "infused into the new town".<sup>36</sup> Its fundamental difference from its model predecessor was that Secunda did not include an adjacent Black township like Zamdela.<sup>37</sup> The masterplan for Secunda followed a largely similar pattern to the white town of Sasolburg and was underpinned by a network of pedestrianised green belts converging in the civic centre. The form of the Secunda civic centre, however, was notably different. Where Sasolburg employed a linear pattern surrounding a pedestrian mall, Secunda was a perfectly square complex with a rectilinear pedestrian core. Prior to designing Secunda in 1974, the Kirchhofer Office embarked on a study tour of new towns in the United Kingdom in that same year. The itinerary included towns such as Cumbernauld and Stevenage, which both exhibited more self-contained town centres than Sasolburg and may have guided some of the decision-making on Secunda. Photographs in the gta collection of the Secunda civic centre are as striking as those of Sasolburg in testifying to their multiracial use. Considering that the closest Black residential area was more than 10km away, it is likely that the Africans in the photographs are domestic workers residing in backyard quarters in the white town.

### A Lavatory Block in the Civic Centre

Using photographs such as those reproduced here, and written correspondence, it is possible to deduce that the Kirchhofer Office subverted apartheid planning regulations within the constraints of commercial practice and working for a state-owned entity like Sasol. This subversion turned into resistance in letters to authorities, where the Kirchhofer Office complained, for instance, that Zamdela was not being built according to the initial design and was therefore "incapable of fulfilling even the most modest of human endeavours".<sup>38</sup> No previous studies of the correspondence have revealed specific intentions for the civic centre in the white town to be used by Africans. A recently discovered letter written by Max Kirchhofer to the Sasolburg Town Engineer, dated 9 November 1976, illustrates a clearer

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<sup>36</sup> Max Kirchhofer, "The Planning of Sasolburg and Secunda: Achievements and Prospects", 1–28.

<sup>37</sup> Sasol developed a township for Black workers of its plant at Secunda, called Embalenhle, but this was situated over 10km away and designed by others.

<sup>38</sup> Sparks, "Apartheid Modern: South Africa's Oil from Coal Project and the History of a South African Company Town", 197.



*Figure 4.6. Black women resting in the gardens of the Sasolburg Civic Centre after shopping. Photograph by Max Kirchhofer.*

position in relation to the racial dynamics of the civic centre. In 1970, the office had been approached by the town council to prepare a design for a lavatory block for Black visitors to the centre and adapted the brief to incorporate a “recreation area”. Kirchhofer later determined that the town engineer had not considered any of the detailed proposals by the office and simply built a nondescript block of toilets. In a four-page response to this, Kirchhofer wrote:

The idea of establishing a recreation area for the Black people coming to the town centre as workers, shoppers and visitors arose out of the realisation that the much-needed lavatories would attract people in considerable numbers and that the surrounding area naturally would become a meeting place. In the interest of the orderly development of the town centre as well as for the comfort of the Black people, a layout of adequate extent provided with shelters and facilities for gathering, relaxation and play was considered necessary in addition to the sheer need for lavatories.<sup>39</sup>

The toilet block issue allowed Kirchhofer candidly to express more general feelings about race and urbanism in Sasolburg. He ended the letter as follows:

<sup>39</sup> Held in the personal archive of Ann Vorberg, the daughter of Max Kirchhofer.

The callous scrapping of the scheme without any justification demonstrates an utter lack of understanding of the constructive process necessary in the development of the physical environment. As regards the delicate balance of effort and achievement, the abandonment of the scheme in the manner in which it has been done means not only the loss of the remuneration payable by your Council but it is also a waste of my time and my goodwill. With the patience I have developed over the years for the slow process of urbanisation, I have not yet given up hope that a matter of this nature could eventually be handled with more sophistication.<sup>40</sup>

This correspondence with the Sasolburg Town Engineer occurred at a pivotal time in the apartheid period. Just five months earlier, the Soweto Student Riots had once again brought the violence and injustices of apartheid to international attention. Kirchhofer's appeal for a toilet block for Black people "eventually" to be handled with "more sophistication", offers a veiled critique of the very same system, and a hope for a change in the future.

## Conclusion

After closing the Kirchhofer Office, nearly two decades passed before the formal dismantling of apartheid, which Kirchhofer witnessed from afar. Among his newspaper clippings in the BAB Archive is an interview with the South African poet Breyten Breytenbach from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in 1997 in which he laments that after the "initial euphoria [of liberation], we were simply too unprepared for the disillusionment". Breytenbach's words reverberate in the realm of urban design as well: many of the post-1994 spatial interventions intended to transform political freedom into a tangible socio-spatial reality have fallen short. In this light, the Kirchhofers' success in creating more inclusive civic spaces within the constraints of apartheid assumes renewed importance.

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<sup>40</sup> Held in the personal archive of Ann Vorberg.



# Part II

Music, Theatre and Performance as Cultural Exchange



## Introduction to Part II

If the chapters in Part I of this volume chart the early contours of Swiss–South African cultural entanglements, the contributions in Part II turn to the heart of cultural production: to music, theatre, and performance. In doing so, they explore how the live, embodied, and public nature of these arts made them potent sites for both complicity and contestation during the apartheid years. The essays gathered here examine performance not simply as entertainment or artistic endeavour, but as a domain through which ideologies were staged, identities negotiated, and diplomatic gestures enacted. They highlight how Swiss and South African agents – musicians, singers, actors, directors, broadcasters and audiences – navigated the ambiguities of cultural exchange across an international order increasingly defined by boycotts, sanctions and moral scrutiny.

A central concern of this part is the paradox of performance under conditions of political injustice. Music and theatre, in particular, were forms that crossed borders even as those borders hardened under the apartheid regime and its international critics. South African artists, excluded from global circuits by the cultural boycott, often found refuge and recognition in Switzerland. Meanwhile, Swiss institutions, festivals and media offered stages and airwaves on which South African stories could be told – but not always in ways that resisted the apartheid state’s narratives or its interests. The chapters in this section thus interrogate the double life of cultural exchange: its potential as soft power for an oppressive regime, and its capacity to foster critical transnational solidarity.

Hilde Roos’s chapter on the South African tenor Deon van der Walt exemplifies these tensions. Van der Walt’s career, which took him from the conservatories of South Africa to the opera houses of Europe and ultimately to a base in Zurich, reflects the opportunities afforded to white South African musicians during the apartheid years. Switzerland, with its geographical centrality, political neutrality, and porous cultural borders, provided a strategic home for a singer of his talent. Yet his story, as Roos shows, is not simply one of artistic success. It is also a tale of personal isolation, ambiguous identity, and the silent complicities that allowed South African artists to thrive abroad while apartheid endured at home. Van der Walt’s life and career raise difficult questions about how artistic mobility could insulate performers from political realities, and how Swiss cultural institutions became entangled in the moral complexities of hosting South African talent.

Chris Walton’s contribution on South African youth orchestras in Switzerland shifts attention to institutionalised forms of musical exchange. His study reveals how, in 1970 and later, Swiss audiences and cultural organisations welcomed youth orchestras from South Africa

under the banner of fostering artistic excellence and international friendship. These tours, however, were shaped by the stark racial exclusions of the apartheid state: youth orchestras were entirely white, and their foreign tours functioned, in part, as cultural diplomacy for the South African regime. Walton's analysis illuminates how Swiss hosts, even those motivated by genuine musical enthusiasm or a commitment to youth development, became unwitting partners in a politics of segregation disguised as artistic engagement. At the same time, his chapter gestures to moments of disruption: instances when the cultural boycott, or the voices of Swiss critics, challenged the official narratives that these tours sought to promote.

The double focus on Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot* in Swiss radio translation and the staging of his play *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* in St. Gallen – both analysed by Franziska Burger – provides a powerful case study of theatre as a site of moral and political negotiation. Fugard's work, already charged with its searing critique of apartheid, acquired new layers of meaning in Swiss performance and broadcast contexts. Burger demonstrates how radio translation and theatrical staging mediated the political messages of Fugard's plays for Swiss audiences: sometimes amplifying their critical force, sometimes domesticating their radical edge. The scandal surrounding *Statements* in St. Gallen, where the play's themes and staging provoked backlash and censorship, reveals how, even in a country famed for its neutrality, an encounter with South African theatre could expose deep social anxieties and ethical fault lines. These chapters underscore theatre's capacity not only to reflect politics but also to generate it – transforming cultural exchange into cultural confrontation.

Together, the chapters in Part II build on one of the book's central claims: that cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa during apartheid cannot be understood outside the moral economies in which they operated. Performance was never just performance. In every concert hall, opera house, radio studio and theatre, choices were made – about repertoire, about casting, about invitation and exclusion – that echoed the global debates over apartheid, cultural boycott, and the ethics of international exchange. Switzerland's position as both a haven for South African artists and a trading partner of the apartheid regime made it a crucial, if complicated, stage for these dynamics.

In tracing these histories, this part of the volume invites readers to reflect on performance as a form of cultural diplomacy, an instrument of ideology and, sometimes, a vehicle for dissent. The arts could serve as the handmaidens of state propaganda, but they could also provide a language of critique, a space for imagining alternative futures. The chapters that follow illuminate the fragile, negotiated character of cultural exchange at a time when the world's moral attention was focused on South Africa – and when Switzerland, through its cultural institutions as much as its economic ties, was deeply enmeshed in the struggles over what forms of relation were possible, permissible, or just.

## 5 Deon van der Walt (1958–2005), a South African Tenor in Zurich

Hilde Roos

Vocal studies were on the curriculum from the outset when the first South African conservatories and music colleges were founded in the early 20th century. Local professional opportunities were meagre, however, and the prevailing colonial mindset, cultural isolation and the sense of identification that white South Africans felt with Europe meant that it remained the prime source of inspiration for South African singers. Many of them accordingly travelled to Europe for further training and employment possibilities. Cecilia Wessels was one of the first; born in Bloemfontein in 1895, she studied at the South African College of Music in Cape Town then moved to London where in the 1920s and '30s she enjoyed much success as a dramatic soprano in the operas of Verdi, Wagner and others. She returned to South Africa in 1938.<sup>1</sup> After the Second World War, numerous South African singers settled in Europe for longer periods of time to establish an international career, some of them assuming a foreign nationality in order to circumvent the problems that came with a South African passport during the years of the cultural boycott. Emma Renzi (\*1926) studied in England, then moved to Italy and in 1963 became the first-ever South African to sing at La Scala in Milan. She also gave guest performances at other great European houses and at the Metropolitan Opera in New York before returning to live in South Africa in 1979.<sup>2</sup> Mimi Coertse (\*1932) left for Europe in 1953. She began her international career singing the Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* in Basel in Switzerland in 1955, but soon after accepted a permanent position as a coloratura soprano at the Vienna State Opera, where she remained for the next 20 years and was made "Kammersängerin" in 1966. She returned to South Africa permanently in 1973, where she became a national icon.<sup>3</sup> Some of her con-

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I am grateful to Chris Walton for supplying information from the Zurich Opera House and other Swiss sources.

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Philip Malan, "Cecilia Wessels", in Jacques Philip Malan (ed.) *South African Music Encyclopedia* IV. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1986, 482.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Philip Malan, "Scheepers, Emmarentia (Emma Renzi)", in Jacques Philip Malan (ed.) *South African Music Encyclopedia* IV, 208–10.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Philip Malan, "Mimi Coertse", in Jacques Philip Malan (ed.) *South African Music Encyclopedia* I, 1979, 283–85. See also Wouter de Wet, *Onse Mimi*. Cape Town: Perskor, 1976 and Mimi Coertse and Ian Raper, *'n Stem vir Suid-Afrika*. Pretoria: Litera, 2007.

temporaries spent much of their careers in Britain, such as the mezzo-soprano Noreen Berry (1931–2012)<sup>4</sup> and the dramatic sopranos Joyce Barker (1931–1992)<sup>5</sup> and Elizabeth Connell (1946–2012);<sup>6</sup> in contrast, Marita Napier (1939–2004), who sang the great Wagnerian soprano roles across the world, settled in Germany and assumed German nationality through her husband, the baritone Wolfram Assmann.<sup>7</sup> Hanlie van Niekerk (1927–2005) also focused her career on Germany and Austria, though she returned to South Africa in 1968 to marry Lourens Muller, the then Minister of Police, who insisted that she cease appearing on stage.<sup>8</sup> As this short list suggests, opportunities for study abroad were primarily the preserve of white singers; the exception to prove the rule was the tenor Joseph Gabriels (1937–1995), who began his career in the Eoan Group, an amateur association specifically founded for the coloured community of South Africa that performed operas on a regular basis from the 1950s until the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> He left to train in Italy in 1967, eventually settling in Milan with his family. He sang once at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York (in February 1971) and became an Italian citizen in 1972. He had a number of contract engagements in Europe for Verdi roles, but his classification as “coloured” under apartheid meant that he had no prospects of a professional career back in his native South Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Deon van der Walt was born in Cape Town on 27 July 1958 to Sheila and Charles van der Walt.<sup>11</sup> His family moved to the town of Sasolburg in the Free State when he was three years old, after which his brothers Marcel and Adriaan were born.<sup>12</sup> He was accepted into the prestigious Drakensberg Boys Choir in 1971, remaining there as a boarder until 1973 when he returned home to attend Sasolburg High School. He graduated in 1976, then did his year of compulsory military service, singing in the South African Air Force Choir “Die Kanaries”

<sup>4</sup> Anon., “Noreen Berry”, at <http://operascotland.org/person/3313/Noreen-Berry> (accessed 12 November 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Philip Malan, “Joyce Barker”, in Jacques Philip Malan (ed.) *South African Music Encyclopedia* I, 1979, 129–130.

<sup>6</sup> Barry Millington, “Elizabeth Connell Obituary”, in *The Guardian*, 19 February 2012, [www.theguardian.com/music/2012/feb/19/elizabeth-connell](http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/feb/19/elizabeth-connell) (accessed 12 November 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Eridine Madeleine Roux, “The Life and Career of the South African Dramatic Soprano Marita Napier”. Master thesis, University of Pretoria, 2008, chapter 1, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Anon., “Hanlie en haar minister”, *Rooi Rose*, 15 January 1969, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Muller and Hilde Roos (eds.), *Eoan: Our Story*. Fourthwall Books, 2013. See also Hilde Roos, *The La Traviata Affair – Opera in the Age of Apartheid*. University of California Press, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Mabel Kester, “South Africa’s Classical Music Ambassador Made His Mark in Verdi’s Territory”, in *Jambo Africa Online*, 2020. <https://www.jamboafrica.online/south-africas-classical-music-ambassador-made-his-mark-in-verdis-territory/> (accessed 12 November 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Jacobus Buys, “(De)constructing the Archive: An Annotated Catalogue of the Deon van der Walt Collection in the NMMU Library”. Master thesis, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, January 2014, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Personal email from Isobel Rycroft, 14 November 2023. Regarding the Swiss-designed new town of Sasolburg, see the chapter by Thomas Chapman in this book.



Figure 5.1. Deon van der Walt in the 1980s.

(The Canaries).<sup>13</sup> In January 1978, van der Walt enrolled for a Licentiate in singing at the Conservatorium at Stellenbosch University, studying with George van der Spuy.<sup>14</sup> During this time, he won numerous competitions and established himself on the local singing circuit. He gave his debut at the Cape Performing Arts Board (today Cape Town Opera) in the role of Jaquino in Beethoven's *Fidelio* in early 1981, and left for Europe in June of that same year, winning First Prize at the Summer Academy in the Salzburg Mozarteum.<sup>15</sup> He was offered a contract at the Opera House in Gelsenkirchen in Germany in 1982, then spent a year at the Munich Opera Studio before moving to the Stuttgart Opera in 1984.<sup>16</sup>

Van der Walt's career took off in 1985. He sang Count Almaviva in Michael Hampe's production of Rossini's *Il barbiere de Siviglia* at the Royal Opera House in London in the first half of that year (though Harold Rosenthal in Opera judged him "promising, if not particularly elegant"<sup>17</sup>); in May, he stepped in to sing for an indisposed colleague in Bach's B-minor Mass at the Schaffhausen Bach Festival, winning praise from the critic of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ),<sup>18</sup> and on 4 September 1985 he signed a contract with the Zurich Opera for guest performances in Othmar Schoeck's opera *Massimilla Doni* for the 1986/87 season, at CHF 6,000 per performance plus one twelfth of that (thus his contract) for each day of rehearsal.<sup>19</sup> This was a considerable sum of money; for purposes of comparison, renting a three-room apartment in the centre of the city of Zurich cost more or less CHF 2,000 per month at the time.<sup>20</sup>

Schoeck's opera was also given a concert performance at the Lucerne International Festival in the summer of 1986, coupled with an LP recording. The cast was almost the same

<sup>13</sup> Buys, "(De)constructing the Archive", 9.

<sup>14</sup> Buys, "(De)constructing the Archive", 9.

<sup>15</sup> Buys, "(De)constructing the Archive", 9.

<sup>16</sup> Buys, "(De)constructing the Archive", 10.

<sup>17</sup> Harold Rosenthal, Review in *Opera*, May 1985, 571.

<sup>18</sup> RWf., "Schwerpunkt Chormusik", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 116, 22 May 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Contract held by the Stadtarchiv Zürich, shelfmark VII.12.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the advertisements for apartments in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* at this time, on [www.e-newspaperarchives.ch](http://www.e-newspaperarchives.ch) (accessed March 2024).

as had already been engaged to sing at the Zurich Opera the following winter, though it was here under the baton of Gerd Albrecht (the Zurich production, in contrast, was conducted by Ferdinand Leitner). *Massimilla Doni* features an opera within an opera, and van der Walt sang the role of the tenor Genovese. The *NZZ* sent its leading critic to Lucerne, Andres Briner, who wrote of van der Walt's "superbly clear voice".<sup>21</sup> His performance in the Zurich production brought forth similar praise. Peter Hagmann wrote in the *NZZ* of his "magnificent mellifluousness",<sup>22</sup> and the Bernese daily *Der Bund* was similarly impressed at how he "hit the mark" with his "expressive character tenor" voice.<sup>23</sup> Van der Walt's contract mentions two matters that are noteworthy. The first is his nationality: South African. Most countries were upholding the cultural boycott against South Africa, and individuals who broke it were often faced with controversy (as was the case with Paul Simon when he released his *Graceland* album in the same summer of 1986 when van der Walt was singing Schoeck in Lucerne). It remains unknown whether or not van der Walt ever acquired any other nationality, but it would seem that his being South African in the mid-1980s was not a hindrance to his career in Europe. The second notable matter in his contract is that it states he was married. In 1983 van der Walt had indeed married his university sweetheart and fellow singing student Angela Ablett. Their marriage did not last long, with the couple formally parting ways in 1988.<sup>24</sup> For the rest of his life van der Walt remained single. Those who knew him testify to his personal charm, and he apparently had a large circle of friends in South Africa and elsewhere. Numerous people who knew him – numerous enough to warrant broaching the topic here – have also spoken of having assumed that van der Walt was bisexual. However, no proof of this exists.<sup>25</sup>

Van der Walt's success in Zurich and elsewhere was presumably what prompted the Opera House there to offer him a more permanent contract. I have been unable to view it, since it remains covered by privacy laws in Switzerland, but according to his longstanding vocal coach Brenda Rein, he was obliged to give just fifteen performances per year and was free to sing wherever else he wanted. This arrangement apparently remained in place until his death in 2005.<sup>26</sup> Getting a work permit as a foreigner in Switzerland was difficult in the 1980s unless one's prospective employer could argue convincingly that one could perform a service for which no local Swiss was qualified, but the Opera House generally had no prob-

<sup>21</sup> ab (Andres Briner), "Die Liebesentwurrung. Schoecks Opera 'Massimilla Doni' in Konzertaufführung", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 211, 12 September 1986.

<sup>22</sup> hmn. (Peter Hagmann), "Doch lieber konzertant?", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 44, 23 February 1987.

<sup>23</sup> -tt-, "Ungebrochene Faszination der Dekadenz", in *Der Bund*, 138(46), 25 February 1987.

<sup>24</sup> Personal message from Angela Ablett, dated 15 April 2024.

<sup>25</sup> This was mentioned by a broad number of sources who nevertheless wish to remain unnamed here.

<sup>26</sup> Personal e-mail from Brenda Rein, 15 October 2023.

lems in procuring working visas for the top singers it employed. Van der Walt accordingly made his base in Switzerland, but continued to sing internationally, giving his debut at the Vienna State Opera in 1988 (as Ferrando in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*), at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1990 (as Belmonte in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*) and at La Scala Milan in 1991 (as Tamino in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*).<sup>27</sup> By the age of 32, van der Walt had become the first South African man to sing at all the most prestigious opera houses in the world. His Tonio in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* in Zurich in 1988 alongside Edita Gruberova was a triumph,<sup>28</sup> and they later recorded the opera together with the Munich Radio Orchestra.<sup>29</sup>

Switzerland's geographical position at the heart of Europe, its political neutrality and low tax regime made it strategically an advantageous place of residence for a high-earning South African artist. Van der Walt rented an apartment on the Rigistrasse on the Zurichberg, an upmarket suburb just a tram ride from the centre of town that still boasts many Jugendstil villas. In 1988, van der Walt bought a small wine farm outside Paarl in South Africa that he named Veenwouden, installing his father Charles and his brother Marcel to run it (the sources state that it was some 16 hectares in size).<sup>30</sup> It still exists today, still run by Marcel van der Walt.<sup>31</sup>

Van der Walt brought out the South African pianist Brenda Rein to work as his vocal coach from 1991 to 1998. She lived at his apartment throughout. According to Rein, she was never registered with the Swiss authorities, had no work permit, and worked with van der Walt in an informal arrangement.<sup>32</sup> South African citizens did not need a visa to enter Switzerland at that time, though they were officially limited to staying for no more than 90 days, twice in a calendar a year, with at least one month in between these two visits. But they were forbidden from working without a permit, and they were also unable to visit the surrounding countries without a proper visa. It is thus clear that Brenda Rein was working illegally; she also paid no tax. She only very occasionally accompanied van der Walt on foreign engagements, because it meant she had to travel back to South Africa each time to obtain a visa for the country in question.<sup>33</sup> She assisted van der Walt with learning new repertoire, teaching him new opera roles and working on his interpretation of the music, though she has remarked that he was an exceptionally good sight-reader. She also prepared

<sup>27</sup> Buys, "(De)constructing the Archive", 29–40.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Hagmann, "Stimmenglanz, Bilderpracht, Kabarett. Neuinszenierung von Donizettis 'La fille du régiment'", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 272, 21 November 1988.

<sup>29</sup> Released on Nightingale Classics in 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Buys, "(De)constructing the Archive", 10.

<sup>31</sup> See [www.veenwouden.com](http://www.veenwouden.com) (accessed March 2024).

<sup>32</sup> Personal e-mail from Brenda Rein, 28 October 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Personal e-mail from Brenda Rein, 28 October 2023.



him for his compact disc recording of Schumann's song cycle *Dichterliebe* accompanied by Charles Spencer (released on the Nightingale label in 1994). Van der Walt's colleagues at the Zurich Opera recall his being well prepared before rehearsals began, and that he barely needed any assistance from the in-house répétiteurs.

Van der Walt's archives were donated to Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth in 2007, where he had been an honorary professor from 1996 onwards. These archives contain primarily scores, recordings, programmes and books (including many cookbooks, wine books, a Swiss-German dialect dictionary and three "detox" diet guides); there are almost no letters and no documents whatsoever of a personal nature.<sup>34</sup> Programmes in the archive suggest that some 85 percent of van der Walt's performances in the 1990s were outside Switzerland – which seems to be confirmed by an interview with him for an article published in *Die Taalgenoot* in 1999, when he remarked that he had spent only two weeks in Zurich during the previous seven months.<sup>35</sup> His frequent absences from Zurich, combined with Rein's apparent difficulties in travelling outside Switzerland, might have been reason enough to cease employing her, though she maintains that when they parted ways in 1998 it was in fact for financial reasons: escalating costs on the family wine farm back in South Africa apparently meant that van der Walt could no longer afford to keep her.

Van der Walt's career continued in the northern hemisphere into the 2000s. He had occasionally sung the more lyric roles of the heavier repertoire (such as Narraboth in Richard Strauss's *Salome* and David in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*), though he sensibly did not follow the lead of other Mozartian tenors (such as his Zurich colleague Francisco Araiza) by branching out into heroic roles, even if he did record individual arias from a somewhat heavier Fach such as "Che gelida manina" from Puccini's *La bohème* and Don José's "La fleur que tu m'avais jetée" from Bizet's *Carmen*.<sup>36</sup> Instead, he began to sing more operettas (such as Offenbach's *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*, which he sang in Zurich and Graz in 2003/4). The critics liked his comic turns but were otherwise no longer as enthusiastic as they had been. In 2000, Peter Hagmann of the *NZZ* complained of "stiffness in his upper register, incessant problems with intonation and deficient diction" in his performance as Orpheus in Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice*.<sup>37</sup> Problems with his wine farm in South Africa also proceeded unabated. He claimed to the *New York Times* in 1996 that "I may be 6,000 miles from my winery ... but there is nothing going on there that I don't know about",<sup>38</sup> and his

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<sup>34</sup> It has been catalogued by Buys. See "(De)constructing the Archive".

<sup>35</sup> Ina van Rooyen, "Deon van der Walt", in *Die Taalgenoot*, August/September 1999, 6.

<sup>36</sup> On the CD *Deon van der Walt*, with the Munich Radio Orchestra conducted by Ralf Weikert on the Arte label, released in 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Hagmann, "Operngegenreform", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 67, 20 March 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Frank J. Prial, "AT LUNCH WITH: Deon van der Walt; A Perfect Marriage of Wine and Opera", in

German agent later claimed that “Time and again, he said he had to rush back to South Africa to iron out problems with his father”.<sup>39</sup> In April 2005, van der Walt removed his father Charles from his position as manager of the wine farm. Relations with his brother Marcel apparently also deteriorated. Deon van der Walt performed at the Zurich Opera House for the last time on 3 March 2005, singing in Richard Heuberger’s operetta *Der Opernball*; there followed the title role in Weber’s early trifle *Abu Hassan* at the Semperoper in Dresden on 21 May. It seems that he then returned home to reorganise things at the wine farm (whether or not he returned in between to sack his father in person remains unclear). Be that as it may, there were concrete accusations later that year that he had suffered physical assault in his family,<sup>40</sup> and claims that he wanted to remove his parents from the Veenwouden estate altogether and was going to remain permanently in South Africa. Perhaps the vocal problems alluded to above by Peter Hagmann had worsened, or perhaps he simply wanted to return home. This will remain speculation, because matters soon came to a head. On 29 November 2005 Charles killed his son, shooting him twice in the chest. He then turned the gun on himself, committing suicide by a single shot to the temple.

Van der Walt had never ceased singing in Zurich, but for the last five years of his life he had essentially disappeared from the pages of its newspapers except when his name was mentioned in the advertisements of the Opera House. He had apparently been relegated to the status of a minor member of the ensemble, whose usefulness now lay almost solely in the light repertoire. It would also seem that his voice had begun to deteriorate at roughly the same time that he ceased working with Brenda Rein, though it is impossible to say for certain whether these two facts were connected. Those who worked alongside him at the Zurich Opera have only vague memories of him today. Several sources have claimed, however, that he began drinking, and that this intensified in his later years, affecting his work;<sup>41</sup> it is striking that he was just one of many South African musicians of his time, Black or white, to develop an alcohol problem.<sup>42</sup>

On 2 December, three days after his death, Marianne Zelger-Vogt, one of the leading arts correspondents of the *NZZ*, published an obituary three paragraphs long:

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*New York Times*, 3 January 1996.

<sup>39</sup> As quoted in Ziegfried Ekron, “‘Damn Farm Cost Deon his Life’”, on *News24*, 30 November 2005, URL: [www.news24.com/news24/damn-farm-cost-deon-his-life-20051130](http://www.news24.com/news24/damn-farm-cost-deon-his-life-20051130) [accessed March 2024].

<sup>40</sup> Marlene Malan, “Murdered Singer’s Family Strife” <https://www.news24.com/news24/murdered-singers-family-strife-20060108> (accessed 30 October 2023).

<sup>41</sup> Due to the sensitivity of the matter my informants prefer to stay anonymous.

<sup>42</sup> The better-known examples include the jazz musician Hugh Masekela and the composer Arnold van Wyk, though there were many others who will remain unnamed here so as to avoid giving unnecessary offence. There is still a stigma attached to alcoholism in South Africa. See also the close of Chapter One above.

It is a tragic irony of fate: The tenor Deon van der Walt, who on stage always portrayed gentle or comic characters, has met a violent end. [...] His focus was on the one hand the lyrical tenor roles in the Mozart operas but on the other hand the classical belcanto roles such as Tonio in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* and Carlo in his *Linda di Chamounix*, both of which are feared because of their extreme high notes.

Van der Walt developed a special flair for Offenbach's operettas, in which as Paris in *La belle Hélène* ... as Piquillo in *La Périhole* and as Prince Paul in *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* he was able to present to the full his decided talent for the comical. It was in an operetta role, Paul Aubier in Heuberger's *Opernball*, that he gave his farewell last season to his Zurich public – for ever, as is now clear.<sup>43</sup>

Van der Walt's trajectory exemplifies the complexities of South African musical mobility during the apartheid era, revealing both the opportunities and the limitations afforded by Switzerland's neutral yet deeply entangled position in global geopolitics. His career, marked by international acclaim and a base in Zurich, unfolded in a space where the cultural boycott of South Africa was inconsistently enforced, allowing artists like him to navigate between local belonging and global professionalisation. Yet his life also gestures to the personal costs of such navigation – the erasures, silences, and frictions of a career lived between continents, between public acclaim and private distress. As with many of the figures discussed in this volume, van der Walt's story is a reminder that cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa during apartheid cannot be understood in simple terms of resistance or complicity, but rather demand attention to the ambiguities, accommodations, and fragile solidarities that shaped artistic lives in this transnational field.

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<sup>43</sup> Marianne Zelger-Vogt, "Zum Tod des Tenors Deon van der Walt", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 282, 2 December 2005.

## 6 South African Youth Orchestras in Switzerland

*Chris Walton*

The literature on the South African musicians who came to play in Switzerland during the apartheid era has hitherto focused on the jazz scene. This is hardly surprising, as Switzerland was for several Black South Africans an important stopping-off point on their way to international fame,<sup>1</sup> and remembering how Europe welcomed representatives of an oppressed people is always a more attractive proposition than remembering how it welcomed representatives of their oppressors. The adoption of Resolution 2396 by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 2 December 1968, which called for a cultural boycott of South Africa, made it increasingly problematic to invite South African artists to perform in Europe. But Switzerland did not join the UN until 2002, so still felt at liberty to ignore all calls for a cultural boycott until it was no longer expedient to do so in the 1980s.

In contrast to the likes of Dollar Brand & Co., who were unknown abroad when they moved to Europe in the early 1960s, the white South Africans who visited Switzerland to perform during the apartheid era were generally already leading musicians in their field (such as Mimi Coertse, who sang in Basel in the mid-1950s, or Deon van der Walt, who made his home in Zurich when he joined the Opera House in the mid-1980s). To the best of our knowledge, only two South African orchestras were ever invited to perform in Switzerland during these years. They were both youth orchestras, and their tale begins in a chic dental practice in central London.

The practice in question was run by one Lionel Bryer (1928–2006), who was born in Bloemfontein in South Africa, attended the local boys' school, Grey College, then studied medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg before being awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to University College, Oxford, where he devoted much time to his two principal private passions: sports (he was a rugby Blue and played cricket for his col-

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I am grateful to former members of the youth orchestras mentioned here for providing detailed information on their tours: to Frederick and Pieter Fourie of the Bloemfontein orchestra, and to Michael Blake, Isabel Bradley, Bernard Caplan, Ronald Gehr, Jill Richards, Paul Simmonds and Barend van den Bergh of the SABC Junior Orchestra. For reasons of discretion, I do not always specify which piece of information was provided by which former member, though I naturally have all such details in written or oral (i.e. recorded) form.

<sup>1</sup> See the chapters by Richard Butz, Bruno Spoerri and Steff Rohrbach/Christian Steulet in this book.

lege) and music (playing violin in his college orchestra). A research fellowship to Harvard followed, after which he returned to London to set up a dental practice in Chelsea (later moving to the exclusive Cadogan Square in Knightsbridge). He married Justine Iris Albert (known to all as “Joy”) in 1956.<sup>2</sup> Originally from Boston, she had studied at the Sorbonne in Paris in the late 1940s and later worked in public relations and artistic management (her company for a while even had the US comic Bob Hope on its books).<sup>3</sup> Lionel Bryer’s practice attracted many prominent personalities, one of whom happened to be Blyth Major, the managing director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the founder/conductor of the Midland Youth Orchestra. Major also had knowledge of South Africa, having spent the years 1951–53 conducting the Durban Municipal Orchestra, and this no doubt provided another talking point between the two men.<sup>4</sup> Major was apparently keen to take his youth orchestra on a tour to Europe; Bryer (a keen skier) suggested Switzerland. Out of this emerged the idea of organising a festival – also in Switzerland – where several youth orchestras from different countries might be brought together. Joy Bryer (whom *The Times* in its obituary described as “feisty”)<sup>5</sup> seems to have played a major role in these matters right from the start, with her celebrity contacts an obvious advantage (a simple Google search will bring up photos of her smiling and hobnobbing with all manner of the rich and famous, from Herbert von Karajan to the Pope). She and her husband registered a British charity in 1969 by the name of “International Youth Foundation of Great Britain”, whose stated aim was to organise an “international festival of youth orchestras”.<sup>6</sup> For its first president, they were able to get Edward Heath on board – a keen musician and former organ scholar of Balliol College, Oxford, who was at the time the leader of the opposition in the United Kingdom and was elected Prime Minister in 1970. The Bryers were very well connected: for their first-ever International Festival of Youth Orchestras, held in St. Moritz in August 1969, they engaged Leopold Stokowski and Walter Susskind to conduct, and invited eleven youth orchestras to participate: one each from the UK (Blyth Major’s Midland Youth Orchestra), Canada, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland, and four from the

<sup>2</sup> Our information on the Bryers is derived from various obituaries, e.g. Alasdair Steven, “Obituary: Joy Bryer, co-founder of the European Union Youth Orchestra”, in *The Herald*, 12 December 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See Anon., “Orchestrating the talents of Europe’s youth”, in *Politico*, 17 April 1996, at [www.politico.eu/article/orchestrating-the-talents-of-europes-youth/](http://www.politico.eu/article/orchestrating-the-talents-of-europes-youth/) (accessed October 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Anon., “The Second International Festival of Youth Orchestras” (programme book for the Festival). [No place (London?)]: [no publisher], [1970], 26.

<sup>5</sup> Anon., “Joy Bryer obituary”, in *The Times*, 28 November 2018.

<sup>6</sup> See GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY DATABASE, <https://uia.org/s/or/en/1100049430> (accessed September 2023).

USA. The Festival was held in a “specially erected concert tent which seated an audience of 1,300 and had a specially designed stage and acoustic shell”.<sup>7</sup>

The second Festival, held the next year, was even more ambitious. Its glossy programme book reflects the elevated circles in which the Bryers moved, with messages of greeting from Edward Heath (now Prime Minister), the Swiss Federal President Hans-Peter Tschudi, the Chairman of the Swiss National Tourist Office Werner Kaempfen, and Leonard Bernstein (though he did not attend in person). Blyth Major was still involved, now appointed the official “Festival Director of Music”; his responsibilities included conducting the massed fanfares at the start of the event.

The various orchestras invited went on individual tours of Switzerland from 14 to 17 August 1970, then came together for the opening ceremony in the New Schoolhouse of St. Moritz (which had only recently been completed). Daily concerts by the individual orchestras followed, with Rudolf Schwarz the main guest conductor, and on Saturday 29 August the best musicians from all the orchestras combined for the final concert in St. Moritz, conducted by Walter Susskind and with Max Rostal and Leon Goossens as soloists (Maurice Gendron had been due to perform Haydn’s Cello Concerto in D major, but had taken ill, and that work was replaced by Arnold Cooke’s Oboe Quartet with Goossens). The following day brought a Gala Concert in the Zurich Tonhalle. This year, the nine orchestras invited came from the UK, Canada, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, the USA – and for the first time also featured an ensemble from South Africa: the Orange Free State Youth Orchestra of Bloemfontein, conducted by Jack de Wet.

This invitation to the Bloemfonteiners – just over a year after the UN had called on the world to boycott South African culture – was naturally the work of Lionel Bryer himself, who was keen to include his hometown in his new venture. Jack de Wet (1927–2018)<sup>8</sup> had studied in Pretoria and Amsterdam, then played for three years in the SABC Orchestra before moving to Bloemfontein as the first violinist of the Free State String Quartet – a post that also entailed teaching his instrument at the local university. He founded the Free State Youth Orchestra in 1961, and his success as a pedagogue led to a rapid increase in his student numbers. He left the Free State String Quartet to concentrate on teaching, and by the time of his Youth Orchestra’s invitation to St. Moritz in 1970, there were up to 150 children active in the various ensembles run by de Wet in Bloemfontein. The nature of society at this time naturally meant that all those children were white, just as their schools and the University in Bloemfontein were peopled solely by white students and white teaching staff. The

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<sup>7</sup> Anon., “The Second International Festival of Youth Orchestras”, 11.

<sup>8</sup> The biographical information on de Wet given here is largely drawn from David Bester, “Jacobus Gustavus de Wet’s contribution to violin pedagogy in South Africa”. Master thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2016.

Youth Orchestra comprised just strings (10 first violins, 9 seconds, 6 violas, 6 cellos and one double bass).<sup>9</sup> They performed on 15 August at the Fraumünster in Zurich, on 16 August in Pfäfers Church in Bad Ragaz, on 20 August in the Catholic Church of Flims-Waldhaus, on 21 August in the Gemeinde-Schulhaus in Klosters, and on 24 August in St. Moritz. Their programme each time comprised the following: Francesco Geminiani's Concerto grosso in D, op. 3 No. 1; the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in e minor by Pietro Nardini (soloist: Jan Repko); an "Adagio K. 156" by Mozart arranged for string orchestra (presumably the second movement of the String Quartet in G major K. 156); a Sinfonietta by Hans Maske (1927–1976), a German-born South African who had studied with Arnold Bax in London, then spent much of his later career teaching at the Windhoek Hoërskool (and who published reviews in the local press under the name "Hansliek");<sup>10</sup> Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins in B minor, op. 3 No. 10 (soloists: Suzanne de Villiers, Marianne Malan, Abrie de Wet and Deon Schoombie) and then Ralph Vaughan Williams's Concerto Grosso. At the Gala Concert on 30 August, the South Africans joined the youth orchestra from Zurich in playing the "Larghetto e affettuoso" and an "Allegro" (i.e. either the fourth or fifth movement) from Handel's Concerto grosso in G minor, op. 6 No. 6 under the baton of the Swiss conductor Rätö Tschupp (the remainder of the Gala Concert was given over to the orchestras from Tacoma USA and Bulgaria). It was again presumably Bryer who ensured that the orchestra from his native country participated in the final concert. According to the enthusiastic review of the concert in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), two other orchestras were in the audience; the others had probably already returned home or were on their way.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that when Bryer signed the souvenir programme book of Frederick Fourie – a fellow Grey College alumnus – he wrote his best wishes in Afrikaans.

The NZZ sent one of its main critics to St. Moritz in mid-August – but to attend a concert that Herbert von Karajan conducted in the New Schoolhouse at 5 p.m. on Saturday 22 August with a slimmed-down ensemble from the Berlin Philharmonic (he was also, nota bene, a resident of St. Moritz). They played a Bach programme featuring the Third Brandenburg Concerto, the A-minor Violin Concerto and the Orchestral Suite in B minor. Karajan apparently disappeared swiftly afterwards, to the chagrin of the young musicians in attendance, though he had at least arranged for them to attend free of charge, sitting in the gangways and wherever they could find a space. If the critic stayed to attend the concert by

<sup>9</sup> These are the players listed in the official programme, though the number of members mentioned in the press varies. It is possible that there were late additions whose names were submitted after the programme had gone to press.

<sup>10</sup> This biographical information is taken from Ernst van Biljon: "Die musieklewe van Windhoek vanaf 1890 tot 1971". Master thesis at the University of the Orange Free State, 1982, 276–85.

<sup>11</sup> "df.", "Fröhlicher Abschluss", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 408, 3 September 1970, morning edition.



the Hungarian youth orchestra in the same venue later that evening, he did not write about it afterwards – though as a rule, leading newspapers do not send their principal critics to youth orchestra concerts held outside the principal metropolitan areas. Two of the smaller dailies took the trouble to comment on the Festival, however. On 29 August, the reviewer of the *Engadiner Post* noted that the Bloemfontein orchestra demonstrated “an astonishing homogeneity and a very beautiful sound; the vigour of its music-making is astonishing, as is its creative maturity”.<sup>12</sup>

On 3 September, the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* (a Catholic newspaper that ran from 1904 to 1991) reviewed the St. Moritz performance of the Bloemfontein orchestra, noting that its members had the youngest average age (14) of any of the orchestras at the Festival, and that they achieved “Erstaunliches” (“astonishing [results]”; “erstaunlich” was also the word used by the *Engadiner Post* above). The reviewer praised the state support that the orchestra clearly received, while mentioning in passing that “on the other hand, [our] democratic principles mean we cannot approve of a selection principle that has been driven to extremes” (a rather convoluted, roundabout way of regretting that the orchestra was completely white).<sup>13</sup> This is the only public criticism we have been able to find about the presence of a white South African orchestra at the Festival, though it still prompted a response. A week later, a letter to the editor from a “W.M.” in Zurich was published that in a manner hardly less convoluted took exception to the reviewer’s objections, writing that “it has very little to do with any extreme selection principle if young people come together who all have a talent for music ... and especially if they bring much joy and idealism when they play together”.<sup>14</sup> Two days later, the same newspaper brought a long report on the Festival in general, though without going into many specifics.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that no fewer than five out of Bloemfontein’s 32 players were selected to perform in the international orchestra for the final concert in St. Moritz (a decision seemingly made by the musical powers-that-be at the Festival, not by Bryer for reasons of national solidarity) suggests that their standards were indeed high (these were the orchestra’s leader, Suzanne de Villiers, her sister Louise, Francois Henkens, and the brothers Frederick and Pienaar Fourie). Given the pedagogical success of Jack de Wet throughout his career (he was for several decades one of South Africa’s most renowned violin teachers), this should not

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<sup>12</sup> “gf.”, “St. Moritz. 2. Internationales Jugendorchester-Festival 1970”, in *Engadiner Post*, 77(99), 29 August 1970.

<sup>13</sup> “G”, “Gültige Leistungen am Jugendorchester-Festival”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 66(205), 3 September 1970.

<sup>14</sup> W.M., “Musikförderung in der Schule”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 66(213), 12 September 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Anon., “Impressionen rund um das Zweite internat. Jugendorchesterfestival”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 66(207), 5 September 1970.

surprise us. What's more, Suzanne de Villiers was chosen to play the first violin in Arnold Cooke's Oboe Quartet in the final concert in St. Moritz and was also named the best young violinist at the Festival alongside the Bulgarian Mira Vladimirova. They were both awarded a scholarship to study for a year with Max Rostal in Bern. De Villiers (the granddaughter of M.L. de Villiers, the composer of the South African national anthem *Die Stem*, as one report expressly mentioned)<sup>16</sup> was just one of several members of the Bloemfontein orchestra who later pursued a career in music. In this she was joined by Abrie de Wet, Pienaar Fourie, Albie van Schalkwyk, Juergen Schwietering and Jan Repko.

The parents of the children involved had to find a considerable sum to cover their travel costs, which the newspapers of the day stated to be ZAR 23,000 in total (thus roughly CHF 115,000 at the then exchange rate). The provincial administration of the Orange Free State donated ZAR 5,000 to the tour fund, and while we have been unable to determine the precise amount owed by the family of each travelling member, it was presumably into three figures, which was a very large sum in rands at the time<sup>17</sup> (we should recall that the rand was still very strong, worth roughly 5 Swiss francs). Frederick Fourie (whose parents also had to fund his brother Pienaar) recalls his father getting sponsorship from Bradlows, a furniture company in Bloemfontein (Bradlows was Jewish-owned, and Fourie's father had extensive contacts in the Jewish community; he had even visited Israel to study irrigation techniques and their possible application in South Africa). Fourie still recalls the bewilderment of the South Africans when they first saw a city on a lakeside – Zurich – for none of them had been outside South Africa before. They were also astonished when they arrived at Klosters for their concert and a local band of about a dozen people came to the platform to play for them in greeting as their train pulled in. There was even a butcher among them, playing in the band, still with his apron on. Fourie never forgot the impression of how music could seemingly be part of the natural fabric of a community.



Figure 6.1. Members of the Bloemfontein Youth Orchestra in 1970. Courtesy of Frederick Fourie.

<sup>16</sup> Joe Sack, "Free State Orchestra triumphs in Europe", in *Opus*, New Series, 2(1), 16–18, here 18.

<sup>17</sup> Anon., "Jeugorkes kry R5000", *Volksblad*, 8 August 1970.

One of the orchestras present at the Festival was the District of Columbia Youth Orchestra from Washington D.C. (hereinafter DCYO), which the Bloemfonteinners today recall as being largely Black, and which the South African press described as “the predominantly Negro District of Columbia Youth Orchestra”,<sup>18</sup> though in fact it was clearly a multi-racial ensemble, judging from the extant photo of its concert in St. Moritz.<sup>19</sup> According to the reminiscences of the South Africans, the DCYO arrived at Zurich Airport at the same time as them, though the two ensembles were kept apart (whether those in charge were aware of the irony of this apart-ness remains moot). The South Africans heard rumours that members of the DCYO wanted to protest at the presence of a South African orchestra and prevent it from performing, so they were uneasy when a large contingent of the DCYO sat at the back of the hall for their St. Moritz concert on 24 August. However, the South Africans recall that Jack de Wet appeared on the conductor’s podium wearing a large emblem of the DCYO, which was apparently taken as a gesture of good faith, and no protests were forthcoming. Several of the Bloemfontein members were even invited to the DCYO’s farewell party at the end of the Festival – though they were taken aback at the copious amounts of alcohol being imbibed and at what seemed to the South Africans to be overt demonstrations of drunken lasciviousness among its members. (Regrettably, my efforts to contact the DCYO to try and ascertain their members’ perspective of the tour have remained without any response, while our efforts to locate surviving alumni using the DCYO’s online lists have proven fruitless).<sup>20</sup>

In 1971, the Festival moved to the Théâtre de Beaulieu in Lausanne, whose 1,600 seats made it far bigger than anything that St. Moritz could offer (it still markets itself today as “the largest theatre in Switzerland”).<sup>21</sup> Czechoslovakia, England, Norway, Singapore, Switzerland and the USA were the countries represented. Lausanne remained the chosen venue the next year, 1972, when the Festival began branching out: the invitees included two orchestras from the USA plus one each from Australia, Canada, France, Holland, Japan, Yugoslavia, the UK and South Africa (the Johannesburg-based Junior Orchestra of the South African Broadcasting Corporation), then two choirs (from Japan and Switzerland) and two ballet companies (the University of Cape Town Ballet School from South Africa and the

<sup>18</sup> Undated, untitled clipping from an English-language South African newspaper (though obviously from 1971) in the archives of Frederick Fourie.

<sup>19</sup> The only photo we have found of the DCYO in St. Moritz in 1970 is here: [www.dcyop.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/1970-DCYO-in-Switzerland-1024x707.jpg](http://www.dcyop.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/1970-DCYO-in-Switzerland-1024x707.jpg) (accessed September 2023).

<sup>20</sup> I emailed the address given on the DCYO website ([www.dcyop.org/](http://www.dcyop.org/)) and did an extensive Google search for alumni of 1970 listed at [www.dcyop.org/alumni/alumni-list/](http://www.dcyop.org/alumni/alumni-list/). When it finally seemed as if I had located one such alumnus, it turned out that he was suffering from major health problems, had caught Covid just a week earlier, was in an ICU, and was unlikely to re-emerge. I decided not to trouble his family by contacting them.

<sup>21</sup> See <https://beaulieu-lausanne.com/en/theatre-de-beaulieu/> (accessed October 2023).

Boston Dance Theatre School from the USA). The glossy programme again featured greetings from Edward Heath and the Swiss President (who was now Nello Celio), but they were joined this time by Leonor F. Loree II, the Vice-Chairman of Worldwide Banking at the Chase Manhattan Bank, whose Foundation had now become a major sponsor of the Festival (the Bryers were clearly very good at networking; according to a report in the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, the Bank donated USD 25,000).<sup>22</sup> Loree was given two full pages to wax lyrical about the charitable achievements of the Bank, and his little essay was illustrated by a large photo of happy, smiling Black children in a play area funded by the Bank in a former “debris-ridden vacant lot” in Brooklyn.<sup>23</sup>

The 1972 Festival opened on 24 July 1972 (again with massed fanfares conducted by Blyth Major) and offered daily concerts up to and including the Gala Concert of 6 August, which was held – as in 1970 – in the Zurich Tonhalle. And as the previous time, the various ensembles toured Switzerland before and after the Festival proper. The UCT Ballet School performed at the Théâtre municipal in Annecy on Tuesday 25 July (thus just across the border in France) and in the Lausanne Theatre on Friday 4 August. The School had been founded in 1934 by Dulcie Howes (1908–1993) and was a rarity in South Africa in that it had long allowed a small number of “coloured” dancers to train over the years, the most famous of them being Johaar Mosaval (1928–2023), who had moved to the United Kingdom and joined the Sadler’s Wells Ballet in 1952. And the ensemble that flew to Switzerland in 1972 included at least three members who were officially classified as coloured – two dancers and its director at the time, David Poole (1925–1991). To be more precise, Poole was a formerly coloured person. He had grown up in District Six and had trained at the UCT Ballet School before moving to England to work. He was fair skinned, and when he returned to South Africa in 1959 he had himself classified officially as “white”.<sup>24</sup> He succeeded his former teacher Dulcie Howes as the head of the UCT Ballet School in 1969, and by all accounts made concerted efforts to improve the chances of his fellow coloureds on the Cape Town dance scene<sup>25</sup> (we contacted UCT’s Centre for Theatre, Dance & Performance Studies, today’s successor to the Ballet School, in an effort to gain further information on its Lausanne tour and on Poole’s policy towards coloureds, but regrettably met with no response). Poole was also responsible for the choreography of the first item on the School’s touring

<sup>22</sup> Sda, “Internationales Jugendorchester- Festival in Lausanne”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 67(172), 26 July 1972.

<sup>23</sup> Anon., “The Fourth International Festival of Youth Orchestras” (programme book for the 1972 Festival). Bourne (Lincolnshire): [no publisher], [1972], 29.

<sup>24</sup> See Hilde Roos, *The La Traviata Affair. Opera in the age of apartheid*. Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2018, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Communication from Hilde Roos, October 2023.

programme in 1972, namely *Cirque*, which was danced to Bach's *Orchestral Suite No. 3* in D major, BWV 1068. This was followed by *Peter and the Wolf* to Prokofiev's music, choreographed by Frank Staff, and then *Fiesta Manchega* to (taped) music by Jacinto Guerrero, choreographed by Marina Keet.



Figure 6.2. The SABC Junior Orchestra in Lausanne, 1972. Courtesy of Paul Simmonds.

First row from bottom, from left to right: David Kohn, Leonard Pietjou, Stephanus Jooste, Nico Jansen van Rensburg, Linda Quayle, Julianne Fitchett (leader), Walter Mony (conductor), Harold Taswell (SA Ambassador to the UN), Mrs Taswell, Ockert Botha (general manager), Neville Dove (piano soloist), Annette Emdon, Otten Gabler, Isabel Hand, Ann Mony (chaperone), Willie Burger (chaperone).

Second row, f.l.t.r.: Jeanne Burger, Cornelia Vermaas, Elsabe Lamprecht, Bruna Cazzolato, Brenda Isakoff, Bernarda Vorster, Jill Richards, Wilhelmina Vermaas, Gerrit Eikenaar, Hazel Sibson-Walker, Ronald Gehr, Colin Iverson, Gertruda Bodenstein, Vivienne Wood, Konstanze-Marie Ahlers, Brigitte Bremer, Inge Redinger, Catherine Germiquet, Maureen Rosenburg, Marietjie van Drimmelen, Loret van Zyl, Desiree Bonfiglio, Ursula Sinovich, Wilbert de Roo.

Third row, f.l.t.r.: Colleen Nero, Noeleen Pienaar, Robert Buning, Raymond Sargent, Christopher Neeves, Richard Thomas, Pieter Venter, Charles Drake, Maria Hartman, Dolf Schutte, Jan Louw, Floris Coetzee, Cecily Dixon, Janine Griffiths, Marie Mendalow, Louis Johnston, Annalie Ahlers, Mywfanny Cotton, Hans Vonk, Johannes Grobbelaar, Fiona McKeller, Peter Jaspan, Louis Hirschorn, Alistair McDonald.

Top row, f.l.t.r.: Heine Toerien (radio correspondent), Peter Rohner, Francois le Roux Malherbe, Bernard Caplan, Izak van der Walt, Heinz Bauer, Tertia van Emmenis, Anna van Niekerk, Barend van den Bergh, Paul Simmonds, Colin Hartley, Michael Blake.

The SABC Junior Orchestra left Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg on 19 July 1972 and gave its first concert in Rapperswil on 21 July, its second in Broc (in Canton Fribourg, near Lake Gruyère) on 29 July, and then moved to Lausanne to perform at the Festival proper on Monday 31 July. Their programme was: a Concert Overture in D by the South African composer Gideon Fagan (1904–1980), a Concerto in E for Double Orchestra by Johann Christian Bach (presumably his Symphony in E major op. 18 No. 5 for double orchestra), Camille Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto (soloist: Neville Dove), Malcolm Arnold's *Four Cornish Dances*, and Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture*.

Given the plethora of concerts on offer, it is again unsurprising that the South Africans did not feature much in the national press, with *Die Tat* (a politically centrist daily) the only exception, which on 12 August published a review of the Festival by one Walter Gyssling. He offered high praise for the orchestra from Brisbane, but then also added that the concert by the SABC Junior Orchestra was “worthy of mention, the highlight of which was the performance of the Piano Concerto in G minor by Saint-Saëns by the pianist Neville Dove, who displayed technical virtuosity and remarkable artistic ability, and who is only 20 years old”. Gyssling found Fagan's Overture “quite pleasing”, but didn't like the Malcolm Arnold.<sup>26</sup> He also wrote briefly about the Lausanne performance of the UCT Ballet School, describing it as “an evening aimed wholly at merriment” that was “executed excellently” – though he said more about the Ballet School's international contacts than about its actual dancers (stressing Dulcie Howes's sometime career in Anna Pavlova's company and the success of its choreographer alumnus John Cranko).

The SABC Junior Orchestra's concert in Broc – a picturesque but out-of-the-way place – prompted articles in the local press. The Fribourg newspaper *La Liberté* in fact brought two articles, both on the same page – a general overview that offered little except to confirm that the exotic foreigners found Switzerland “very nice”,<sup>27</sup> and then an actual review of the concert itself that praised the orchestra's “brilliant” performance. Fagan's Overture did not appeal much – the reviewer stated merely that it “at least served to get the orchestra going” – and they also noted certain imprecisions in Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. But it was Neville Dove who was again “the highlight of the evening” thanks to the “precision and sobriety of his playing. He managed to introduce enough of his personality to prove that, for him, technique does not necessarily take precedence over interpretation”.<sup>28</sup> One G.G. also reviewed the concert in Broc, finding Fagan “an endearing neo-Romantic, though perhaps a little backward [attardé]”, once more being impressed most by the Saint-Saëns, in which

<sup>26</sup> Walter Gyssling, “Musizierende Jugend aus fünf Erdteilen”, in *Die Tat*, 12 August 1972.

<sup>27</sup> M.Fl. (presumably Michel-R. Flechtner; see below), “A la découverte de la Suisse”, in *La Liberté*, 31 July 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Bf, “Le S.A.B.C.: Junior Orchestra de Johannesburg à Broc”, in *La Liberté*, 31 July 1972.



Dove “dazzled the audience with his mastery and panache, playing expressively in every one of his solo passages. This promising talent was then greeted with a standing ovation”.<sup>29</sup>

After the close of the Festival, one Michel Flechtner offered an overview in *La Liberté*, declaring it “without any doubt a success”. Of the soloists, he singled out Neville Dove and Marja Bon as the best (the latter having played Willem Pijper’s Piano Concerto with the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Amsterdam). Of the two ballet companies at the Festival, he gave the most praise to the South Africans, judging their evening “a great success”. He also praised several of the orchestras, then added: “technically speaking, the Youth Orchestra of South African Radio was not on the level of ensembles such as those of Pittsburgh, Milwaukee or the Netherlands, but *Romeo and Juliet* and the Second Piano Concerto by C. Saint-Saëns were performed with great musicality”.<sup>30</sup>

The SABC Junior Orchestra had been founded in the mid-1960s jointly by Anton Hartman, the apartheid functionary and Broederbond member who was Head of Music at the SABC throughout that decade, and Walter Mony (1929–2009), the Orchestra’s conductor. He was a Canadian-born violinist and violist who had studied at the Royal College of Music in London, had moved to South Africa in his 30s, and was later appointed to the staff of the Music Department of the University of the Witwatersrand (hereinafter “Wits”). The Junior Orchestra provided a training ground for Mony’s own students, their peers from the University of Pretoria, and talented instrumentalists from the region who had not yet left high school. We do not know how the invitation to Lausanne came about, though it probably came from Bryer via Hartman.

The SABC Junior Orchestra, like that of Bloemfontein, was naturally all-white. But it, too, had many talented musicians in its ranks who later became prominent on the music scene.<sup>31</sup> Neville Dove studied at the Juilliard School in New York and embarked on an international career as a pianist and conductor. The orchestra members on the Swiss tour in 1972 who later pursued music included Paul Simmonds (double bass), who later specialised in the clavichord and harpsichord, moved to Switzerland, and won the German “Preis der Schallplattenkritik” in 1997; Michael Blake (also double bass) became a composer, emigrating to England to avoid military service, then returning to South Africa in the 1990s to found the country’s national section of the International Society of Contemporary Music; Jill Richards (flute) has for many years been one of South Africa’s best-known pianists, especially for contemporary music, and has worked closely with Kevin Volans; and Annette Emdon and Robert Buning (both percussion) later sat for many years on the board of SAMRO, the music rights organisation of South Africa.

<sup>29</sup> GG, “Musique d’été sur la scène brocoise”, in *La Gruyère*, 1 August 1972.

<sup>30</sup> Michel-R. Flechtner, “Où sont les limites de ces musiciens?”, in *La Liberté*, 12–13 August 1972.

<sup>31</sup> The orchestra’s alumnus who is surely best known today had in fact left it a year or so before the Swiss tour: the composer Kevin Volans.



Although the Junior Orchestra was all-white at a time when anti-Black, anti-communist propaganda was actively supported by the South African authorities, this should not lead us to suppose that any kind of “white solidarity” was the norm among its members, not even in an informal setting in which all the participants were supposedly bound together by a love of music. In fact – thus the reminiscences of those involved – the orchestra was clearly divided into two groups, with the Afrikaans-speaking students from the University of Pretoria (at the time a completely Afrikaans-speaking institution) and the English-speaking students of Wits associating little with each other, neither in rehearsal breaks in Joburg nor when they went on tour to Switzerland (one English-speaking participant even used the word “hostility” to describe relations between the two factions. It seems that not even teenage hormones were enough to bridge the entrenched culture gap between them). Nor did the orchestra stand out in Switzerland for being completely white, for the same applied to most of the other orchestras, with the exception of a youth orchestra from Pittsburgh, which had a few Black members. One of the South African girls present can still recall her astonishment at the time that the Black Americans did not speak any African languages, but conversed in English instead – proof enough, she admits today, of how successful had been the indoctrination to which she and her peers had been subjected in South Africa.

While the Afrikaners and the English-speakers apparently did not mix much, the tour otherwise seems to have been perfectly convivial. One member recalls a reception at Rapperswil at which an abundance of local wine caused the inebriation of certain accompanying staff. They also remember a particular parent having somehow procured a free ticket as a chaperone, but who disappeared after Rapperswil in order to enjoy a Swiss holiday on his own, turning up again just in time for the flight back home (we have been regrettably unable to cross-check this information or get the other side of the story). Otherwise, the tour was marked by the usual teenage friendships, crushes and occasional disappointments. One of the English-speaking South Africans apparently caused a stir among her Afrikaner peers by demonstratively hugging Black musicians from the Pittsburgh orchestra (the effect was naturally intentional, and all part of the English/Afrikaner inter-orchestral tensions). One of the South African girls went to the movies with a few friends she’d made from other orchestras, and took a particular liking to a young, curly-haired percussionist from the Merseyside Orchestra by the name of Simon Rattle.

As in the case of the Bloemfontein orchestra two years before, the costs of participating were considerable. The South African authorities again provided a certain amount of subsidy (we are not aware in this case of just how much), but the families of the members had to find ZAR 200 per child (presumably a similar amount to the costs incurred by the Bloemfonteiners). That was a large amount at the time (equivalent to CHF 1,000 at the then

exchange rate). In one respect, however, the trip of the SABC Youth Orchestra was different from that of its Bloemfontein predecessor. The latter was a string orchestra and had chosen its programme accordingly. The SABC Orchestra, in contrast, was determined to present a full symphonic programme. The problem was that they didn't have enough brass players, who accordingly had to be sourced from elsewhere (Arnold's *Cornish Dances*, for example, feature a tuba solo, an instrument lacking in the orchestra at the time). Mony found the players he needed in the South African Correctional Services Band. All young South African white men had to do a year's military service at the time (it was later increased to two years), though it was possible to opt to join the prison service instead of one of the branches of the military. Musicians were also fortunate in having the option of avoiding direct participation in the border wars by joining a band. Each of the different forces had its own band, and this was also the case with the Correctional Services, whose band was based in Kroonstad, some two hours by car from Johannesburg. With the help of the SABC (presumably through Anton Hartman, who had excellent connections to the government), the Band released several of its conscripts so they could join the tour.

Apart from being the home to the band, Kroonstad Prison was notorious for holding political prisoners, especially Black women. Those incarcerated at the time of the SABC Junior Orchestra's tour included Dorothy Nomzansi Nyembe and Amina Desai; later prisoners in Kroonstad included Thandi Modise, Sibongile Mkhabela, Caesarina Makhoere (who later wrote a book about her experiences entitled *No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid*)<sup>32</sup> and Winnie Mandela, who was sent to Kroonstad in 1975. Information on conditions at Kroonstad Prison nevertheless remains patchy, especially for the early 1970s.<sup>33</sup> Volume Four of the multi-volume report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission contains harrowing testimony of the degradation and abuse suffered by Black women prisoners under the apartheid regime, but the prisons where this happened are hardly ever named<sup>34</sup> (one implicit sign of the paucity of information on Kroonstad is to be found at the close of the brief article on it on the longstanding website South African History Online, whose "Further Reading" at the time of writing includes a link to Booking.com's accommodation offerings

<sup>32</sup> London: Women's Press, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Besides Makhoere's memoir (see above), the following offer some information (though not very much) on Kroonstad and the women held there: Cherry Clayton, "Post-colonial, Post-apartheid, Postfeminist: Family and State in Prison Narratives by South African Women", in *Kunapipi*, 13(1), 1991, 136–44; Kalpana Hiralal, "Narratives and testimonies of women detainees in the anti-apartheid struggle", in *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 29(4), 2015, 34–44; and N.P.Z. Mbatha, "Narratives of women detained in the Kroonstad Prison during the apartheid era: A socio-political exploration, 1960–1990", in *Journal for Contemporary History*, 43(1), 2018, 91–110.

<sup>34</sup> See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Report* vol. 4, especially 314–17, available at [www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/index.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/index.htm) (accessed June 2025).

in the town).<sup>35</sup> To the best of our knowledge, the (male) conscripts in the Kroonstad band were not involved in any activities at the women's prison, where the warders as a rule were women. Nevertheless, their participation in the tour of the SABC Junior Orchestra underlines the close connections between the SABC and the authorities, and thereby the implicit propaganda value of a tour to Switzerland, an important trading partner as yet uninvolved in the UN boycotts. It seems that not even a youth orchestra in South Africa was able to function properly without the aid of the apartheid-era military structures.

The International Festival of Youth Orchestras left Switzerland for good after the 1972 Festival in Lausanne, moving in 1973 to Aberdeen in Scotland where it remained for several years. In 1975, another invitation to South Africa was issued, this time to Eoan, the coloured amateur opera company of Cape Town, despite the fact that most of its members were no longer "youths". They gave concerts in Aberdeen at the Festival itself and in London, where they were joined by a former member, Gordon Jephtas, who had left South Africa several years earlier and was enjoying a successful career as a *répétiteur* at the Zurich Opera House. He offered several coaching sessions to Eoan's singers in London before he returned to Switzerland and the Eoan members left for South Africa.<sup>36</sup>

The SABC Junior Orchestra seems to have gone on just one more international tour: in 1981. But since the unrest in Soweto in 1976, the international boycott had spread to most of the Western world, and almost no one wanted anything openly to do with South Africa. So the SABC had to be satisfied with an invitation from one of its fascist brother nations in the fight against international communism: Paraguay – which had been ruled for almost thirty years by Alfredo Stroessner. The tour also included stops in Argentina (then at the height of its "Dirty War") and Uruguay (also still under military rule). And this time, the propaganda aspect of the event was explicit – even the Paraguayan defence minister attended a reception for the orchestra.<sup>37</sup>

As for the Bryers: they left the International Festival of Youth Orchestras behind and instead decided to set up a youth orchestra of their own. This was the European Union Youth Orchestra, which they founded together with Claudio Abbado in 1976. The full story of how the European Union's flagship youth ensemble was set up by a boycott-busting South African dentist from Bloemfontein is one that is still to be told.

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<sup>35</sup> See anon., "Kroonstad", at [www.sahistory.org.za/place/kroonstad](http://www.sahistory.org.za/place/kroonstad) (accessed October 2023).

<sup>36</sup> Roos, *The La Traviata Affair*, 210, and Roos, Davids and Chris Walton (eds.), "Sorry. I am what I am." *The life and letters of the South African pianist and opera coach Gordon Jephtas (1943–92)*, especially 153–54, 160–61. See also the chapter by F.-J. Davids in this book.

<sup>37</sup> See the SABC documentary "SABC Junior Orchestra 1981 South American tour" at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_Qlu-0Guas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_Qlu-0Guas) (accessed October 2023).

## 7 Listening to South African Apartheid on Swiss Radio: Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot* and the Translation of Passing

Franziska Burger

Athol Fugard's play *The Blood Knot*<sup>1</sup> was given its first performance on 3 September 1961 in Dorkay House, a former factory building on Eloff Street in Johannesburg that had become a multiracial cultural centre in the 1950s and was home to both the Union of South African Artists and the African Music and Drama Association. The play had a cast of two, the brothers Morrie and Zacharias, who were played by Fugard himself and Zakes Mokaë. This was, it seems, the first time in the history of South Africa that a Black and a white actor were on stage together in a play.<sup>2</sup> It was also one of the last for many years: The Group Areas Amendment, adopted in 1965, finally enforced the segregation of actors and audiences in South Africa's theatres.<sup>3</sup>

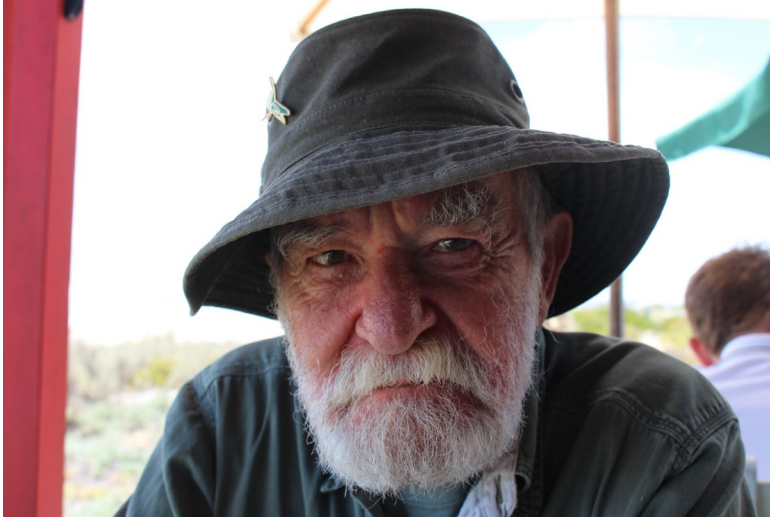


Figure 7.1. Athol Fugard. Photo by Paula Fourie. Private collection.

<sup>1</sup> The play was later revised and the definite article dropped from its title; we retain the original title here.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Walder, *Athol Fugard*. London: Macmillan, 1984, 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Loren Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*. London: Methuen Drama, 2020, 82.

*The Blood Knot* was staged at the Intimate Theatre on Rissik Street in Johannesburg two months after its world premiere, and afterwards went on to tour the world. It was Fugard's breakthrough as an internationally successful playwright. The South African literary scholar Dennis Walder describes it as "a passionate duet which probed and revealed the feelings associated with that perennial South African subject – race".<sup>4</sup>

Despite their specifically South African themes, Fugard's dramas were considered universal in import and received substantial international recognition.<sup>5</sup> In the 1970s, his plays were taken up by S. Fischer Verlag of Frankfurt am Main – also the German publisher of Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller and others – and began to be translated and performed with regularity in the German-speaking countries.<sup>6</sup> Several were also given as radio plays at this time. The online database of radio plays run by ARD (the joint organisation of Germany's regional public-service broadcasters) lists German radio productions from the Weimar Republic to the present (including both the Federal Republic of Germany, hereinafter "West Germany", and the German Democratic Republic, hereinafter "GDR") and shows that there were seven adaptations for radio of plays by Fugard, five of which were produced by the Rundfunk der DDR ("GDR Radio").<sup>7</sup> Between 1976 and 1987, four plays by Fugard were also adapted as radio plays for Swiss-German Radio, DRS:<sup>8</sup> *The Road to Mecca*, *Aloes*, *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*, and *The Blood Knot*. All four thematise race and depict the lives of people in South Africa during apartheid. It would thus seem that in terms of the dissemination of his work on the radio, the German-language reception of Fugard was focused on Switzerland and the GDR.

### Switzerland and South Africa – Apartheid as a Global Problem

When the National Party began implementing its apartheid policies after coming to power in 1948, it enjoyed tacit support from the West, and there was initially little support for

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<sup>4</sup> Walder, *Athol Fugard*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Walder, *Athol Fugard*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> The S. Fischer website gives details of the German first performances of Fugard's works. See [www.fischer-theater.de/audio/autor/athol-fugard/t4061776](http://www.fischer-theater.de/audio/autor/athol-fugard/t4061776) (accessed May 2024).

<sup>7</sup> See <https://hoerspiele.dra.de/kurzinfo.php?sessid=gpqifdhc80aqcij3u0v2fromv6> (accessed May 2024).

<sup>8</sup> *Der Weg nach Mekka* (*The Road to Mecca*, 1987, directed by Klaus W. Leonhard, translation by Jörn van Dyck), *Aloes* (*Aloes*, 1982, directed by Klaus W. Leonhard, translation by Jörn van Dyck), *Aussagen nach einer Verhaftung auf Grund des Gesetzes gegen Unsittlichkeit* (*Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*, 1977, directed by Mario Hindermann, translation by Jörn van Dyck), and *Mit Haut und Haar* (*The Blood Knot*, 1976, directed by Joseph Scheidegger, translation by Frank Heigert and Walter Czaschke). "DRS" ("Radio der deutschen und rätoromanischen Schweiz") was the name of the state German-Swiss radio station until 2011, when it was reorganised with Swiss TV as "SRF" (Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen).

the burgeoning anti-apartheid movement.<sup>9</sup> Calls for a boycott of the apartheid regime by decolonised countries such as India (1947) and Jamaica (1959) went long unheeded, not least because of the Cold War. South Africa was considered a bulwark against communist influences in Africa,<sup>10</sup> while the most important anti-apartheid organisations in South Africa itself, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the African National Congress (ANC), were openly supported by the Soviet Union. It is also in this context that we should view the popularity of Fugard's work in the GDR.<sup>11</sup>

From the 1960s onwards, human rights and the ethics of the market became increasingly important in the West. But while most Western European countries began to suspend their relations with South Africa, Switzerland – being an officially neutral, non-aligned country – did not participate in international boycotts and remained an important trading partner to South Africa until the final years of apartheid, especially in the diamond and gold sectors.<sup>12</sup>

When the economic crisis of the mid-1970s forced countries to intensify their participation in global markets, this went hand in hand with increased cultural transfer between different continents and countries. Human rights activism also experienced an upsurge, mainly in the Global North. The historians Knud Andresen and Detlef Siegfried have described how a broader understanding of apartheid as a global problem developed during the 1970s and 1980s that became gradually more detached from the South African context and mutated into an understanding of apartheid as an oppressive form of racial discrimination in its broadest sense.<sup>13</sup>

This view seems to find confirmation in an article in the Swiss daily newspaper, *Die Tat*, on 17 December 1977 about a radio programme on South Africa, presented by Swiss Radio DRS, that included a broadcast of two radio plays based on dramas by Fugard (*The Blood Knot* and *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*). The author “sg” – Hans-Peter Sigrist, who was the editor in charge of film, TV and Radio at the paper – writes that “several aspects of life in South Africa will be shown” in the programme, and adds:

Apartheid is not only a South African problem, but ultimately a worldwide problem: apartheid takes place wherever there are privileged and underprivileged people, and this does not only

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<sup>9</sup> See Knud Andresen and Detlef Siegfried, “Apartheid und Westeuropäische Reaktionen”, in *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, 2, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> See Sue Onslow, *Cold War in Southern Africa. White Power, Black Liberation*. London: Routledge, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> See Andresen and Siegfried, “Apartheid und Westeuropäische Reaktionen”, 198.

<sup>12</sup> See Georg Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994. Final Report of the NFP 42+ Commissioned by the Swiss Federal Council*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007, 317ff.

<sup>13</sup> Andresen and Siegfried, “Apartheid und Westeuropäische Reaktionen”, 204.

refer to the different population groups within individual countries, but also to the relationship between the peoples themselves.<sup>14</sup>

In what follows, we shall investigate the way in which the radio adaptation of *The Blood Knot* engages with apartheid and race, how race is represented in translation and dramaturgically, and what this tells us about Switzerland's relationship to race and its position in relation to the apartheid regime.

### ***The Blood Knot: Plot and Origins***

As Fugard states in his introduction to *The Blood Knot* (1975), his early plays were written in part in response to his time working in a native commissioner's court in Johannesburg, where "non-white" people were tried for refusing to follow the apartheid-era restrictions on where they were allowed to live, work and travel. Failure to present a pass upon demand would often be punished by a short prison sentence. Fugard describes this job as an eye-opening experience that had an impact on his later work for the theatre, where he focuses particularly on topics of race and class: "The six months I spent in that Court Room was a traumatic experience for me as a white South African. I saw more suffering than I could cope with. I began to understand how my country functioned."<sup>15</sup> This was the time when he was writing and staging his first plays together with people who had almost no experience as actors.<sup>16</sup>

As already mentioned above, *The Blood Knot* brought Fugard his international breakthrough. It explores the exclusion suffered by people because of racial segregation during the apartheid regime by depicting the life of two brothers, Morrie and Zachariah. They live in a shack in Korsten, a "non-white" slum near the factories on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth. They are both coloured, but whereas Zacharias is perceived as being Black, Morrie can "pass" as white. When Morrie suggests that Zach – to overcome his longing for a woman – should answer a woman's ad looking for a penfriend, a series of events is unleashed. The woman, Ethel Lange, turns out to be white: "She becomes both a fantasy and a threat, the object of a legal crime in apartheid South Africa."<sup>17</sup> Zacharias encourages Morrie to meet

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<sup>14</sup> Sg, "Apartheid im Hörspiel", in *Die Tat*, 297, 17 December 1976. Translation by the present writer.

<sup>15</sup> Athol Fugard, *The Blood Knot*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975, v.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the reception of Fugard in South Africa see Hilary Burns, "The Long Road Home. Athol Fugard and his Collaborators", in *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18(3), 2002, 234–42; Kolawole Olaiya, "Deconstructing Apartheid's Global Gaze. Death and Resistance in Fugard et al.'s *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*", in *Global South*, 2(2), 2008, 75–91; Caroline Davis, "Publishing anti-Apartheid literature. Athol Fugard's *Statements Plays*", in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 48(1), 2013, 113–29; Khaya M. Gqibitole *et al.*, "Identity, Politics and Restriction in Athol Fugard's Art. Writing and Liberalism in Apartheid South Africa", in *Literator*, 39(1), 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Kerry-Jane Wallart, "The Word and the Stare. Or the Intermediate Transparency in 'The Blood Knot' by Athol Fugard", in *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 35(1), 2012, 63–72, here 64.



Ethel Lange instead, since he can “pass for white”. It transpires that Morrie has been living as white for some time before returning to his brother. When Zacharias returns home one day with a second-hand suit that he has bought for Morrie for his rendezvous with Ethel, this triggers memories of the trauma Morrie experienced when he began dressing as a white man and how, when living as a white, he too had taken advantage of his new social status and exploited Black and coloured people. Morrie hurls racial insults at his brother, who responds with threats of violence.<sup>18</sup> In the subsequent dialogue, the two brothers reflect on the question of how a white man behaves and performs his identity. As the South African literary scholar Loren Kruger has written, the different experience of race divides the two brothers: “the play depicts the intimate conflict between two differently black men who act out obsessions with race on each other’s bodies and minds”.<sup>19</sup> Having internalised apartheid deeply, the two brothers act towards each other in a mutually corrective way, inciting each other and pushing each other back into their respective social roles as a Black man and a man passing as white.<sup>20</sup> As the German literary scholar Haike Frank writes: “The brothers show to themselves, each other and the audience that apartheid is a form of theatre and theatrical performance.”<sup>21</sup> Frank analyses Fugard’s play from the point of view of social role-playing, but segregation also has major legal and economic consequences, some of which are material and affect lives at all levels. The concept of “passing” is dramaturgically central to *The Blood Knot*, and helps us to deconstruct race as a socially and politically constructed phenomenon.

### The Radio Adaptation: Translating “Racialised” Bodies into Language

*The Blood Knot* was first translated into German by Frank Heigert and Walter Czaschke and published by Henschelverlag of Berlin (GDR) in 1974 (entitled *Mit Haut und Haar*, literally “with skin and hair”, a German phrase meaning roughly “lock, stock and barrel”).<sup>22</sup> Which translation was used at the play’s first-ever production in German, at the Innerstadt-Bühne Aarau in Switzerland in November 1973, directed by Ingold Wildenauer, is unknown.<sup>23</sup> Heigert and Czaschke’s translation of 1974 was used at what the literature er-

<sup>18</sup> See Athol Fugard, *The Blood Knot*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968, 158–59.

<sup>19</sup> Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*, 78.

<sup>20</sup> See Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*, 81–82.

<sup>21</sup> Haike Frank, *Role-Play in South African Theatre*. Bayreuth: Eckhard Breiting, 2004, 76.

<sup>22</sup> Athol Fugard, “Mit Haut und Haar. The Blood Knot. Ein Stück in Sieben Szenen”. Translated by Walter Czaschke and Frank Heigert, in Joachim Fiebach, *Stücke Afrikas*. Henschelverlag: Berlin 1974, 159–256. Even though the publisher’s information in this edition states that the first translation of the play was published in 1970 by Suhrkamp Verlag of Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp has been unable to confirm this when asked by the present writer, pointing out merely that S. Fischer Verlag was the actual owner of the performance rights.

<sup>23</sup> See the review by “H.T.” in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 194(519), 8 November 1973, morning edition.

roneously claims to have been the first production in German, at the Volkstheater in Rostock in the GDR in March 1975.<sup>24</sup> A second translation was made by Allison Malherbe (now as *Blutsband*) and published by S. Fischer Verlag of Frankfurt am Main in 1976.<sup>25</sup> This was used for what elsewhere has also been claimed to be the first-ever German production, this time in Cologne in 1976 (the Fischer Verlag website confuses matters even further by claiming that this translation was first performed on 19 April 1978 at the Staatstheater in Braunschweig).<sup>26</sup>

It was the version by Heigert and Czaschke that was used by Swiss Radio DRS for its adaptation in 1977, though the original 90 pages of the play were shortened by about a third for this purpose. The excisions were primarily of passages where the two protagonists refer to the Bible and their beliefs, but also where they recollect their childhood, especially their mother. Apart from the problem of length, adapting a theatre play for the radio brings several further challenges. One of these is that whereas in the theatre, bodies themselves speak, produce meaning, and embody meaning, in radio plays, everything depends on the language and the voice.<sup>27</sup>

The adaptation by Radio DRS starts with a prologue that is not in the original, and is given before the title of the play and the people involved are announced. It comprises fragments of the actual text of the play plus several small additions, and serves to introduce the two protagonists to the audience: “Ich heisse Zacharias Pietersen und ich bin Schwarz” (“I’m Zacharias Pietersen and I’m Black”), says one voice; “Ich bin Morris Pietersen und bin Zacharias Bruder” (“I’m Morris Pietersen and I’m Zacharias’s brother”), says the other. There follows a short dialogue to contextualise their relationship:

[Zacharias:] Morris, ich möchte dich mal genau anschauen.

[Morris:] Den Bruder zum ersten Mal genau anschauen? Schliesslich bin ich schon ein Jahr hier.

[Zacharias:] Du gehörst schon zur helleren Sorte, bist du überall so? Keine Stelle ein bisschen dunkel? Ich muss schon sagen, mit nichts an bist du schon ein strahlendheller Bursche.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See Loren Kruger, *Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 295.

<sup>25</sup> 1976 is the date given by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, see <https://d-nb.info/770176054> (accessed May 2024). Loren Kruger in *Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South* gives 1979 as the publication date.

<sup>26</sup> See [www.fischer-theater.de/theater/stueck/blutsband/970395](http://www.fischer-theater.de/theater/stueck/blutsband/970395) (accessed May 2024).

<sup>27</sup> See Dorothea Volz, “Fremde Sprachen, fremde Stimmen. Spielarten der Alterität”, in W.-D. Ernst, N. Niethammer, B. Szymanski-Düll, A. Mungen (eds.). *Sound and Performance. Positionen, Methoden, Analysen*. Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2015, 427–38.

<sup>28</sup> This dialogue is a collage of fragments from scene four; see Fugard: *The Blood Knot*, 1968, 146–47 or Fugard, “Mit Haut und Haar”, 223–24. Even though the radio version is officially based on Heigert and Czaschke’s translation, it differs greatly from it.

This short passage is a collage of phrases from Scene Four of Fugard's play, presumably collated specifically by the translator or the production team to transpose the audio-visual material of the stage production, which presupposes the performative means of theatre, and make it suitable for the radio. The additions and ellipses in this passage are given here in square brackets:

[Zacharias:] ... Morris! [...]

I want to have a good look at you, man.

[Morris:] It's a bit late in the day to be seeing your brother for the first time. I been here a whole year now, you know.

[...]

[Zacharias:] You're on the lighter side of life all right. You like that ... all over? [...]

Not even a foot in the darker side, hey! I'd say you must be quite a bright boy with nothing on.<sup>29</sup>

This new prologue overall offers an important key to the main theme of the play: race and racial passing. This passage can be seen as a counterpart to the character description that also appears in Fugard's original text: "There are two characters, ZACHARIAH and MORRIS. ZACHARIAH is dark-skinned and MORRIS is light skinned."<sup>30</sup>

The translations by Walter Czaschke and Frank Heigert (1974) and by Allison Malherbe (1977) add similar introductions: The former states: "The play has two characters: Zachariah and Morris. Zachariah is dark-skinned, Morris light-skinned."<sup>31</sup> The introduction by Malherbe is slightly more differentiated, adding further information: "The play has two [characters]: Zachariah and Morris, both of them coloured, in other words not Black. Zachariah is dark-skinned, Morris light-skinned."<sup>32</sup> This indicates that Malherbe was more aware of the historical context of racial inequality in South Africa and the specific concept of coloured identity.

There is a second passage in Scene Five that differs from the original: In the English version there is a sentence in this scene that is spoken by Zacharias to his brother Morrie: "You must learn your lesson, Morrie. You want to pass, don't you?"<sup>33</sup> The context of this scene implies that Morrie should pass for white. In the radio play, however, "pass" was translated quite differently: "Du möchtest doch über die Runden kommen?" which means "You'd like to make ends meet, wouldn't you?".

<sup>29</sup> Fugard, *The Blood Knot*, 1968, 146–47. In the version of 1975, 64–66, the second sentence is closer to what is used in the translation: "[Look at] your brother for the first time? I been here a whole year, now, you know".

<sup>30</sup> Fugard, *The Blood Knot*, 1968, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Fugard, *Mit Haut und Haar*, 161.

<sup>32</sup> Athol Fugard, *Blutsband. Ein Stück in 7 Szenen*. Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1977, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Fugard, *The Blood Knot*, 1975, 78.

It is notable that this sentence as translated by Heigert and Czaschke, and used in the Swiss Radio production, is similar to the translation by Malherbe. The latter writes: “Du willst doch was erreichen”,<sup>34</sup> meaning “You want to achieve something, don’t you”. Both imply here an accomplishment, a success, something that can be learned or achieved and is independent of one’s racial or social status. It connects and equalises racial passing and social mobility. The idea is created that racial identity can be “earned”, just like a social status that can be improved by one’s behaviour and earnings. The translation “Du willst doch was erreichen”, in Malherbe subtly reinforces this idea. It suggests aspiration and personal ambition, but crucially detaches the concept of “passing” from its racial and legal specificity within the apartheid regime. In foregrounding a generalised sense of striving or upward mobility, it neutralises the violence and risk that come with racial passing in the South African context. Like the Swiss Radio translation, it erases the coercive structures that make passing necessary in the first place.

### Race in South Africa

In southern Africa during the apartheid era, coloured identity, as a historically specific and socially constructed phenomenon, referred to people of mixed racial ancestry descended from European settlers, slaves brought from the Dutch East Indies, indigenous Khoisan peoples and others of African descent.<sup>35</sup> When segregation was implemented by the colonial state, social identities such as coloured, Black and white became legal classifications. After the election of the National Party in 1948 and the introduction of apartheid, several laws were established to enforce this segregation: The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Amendment Act (1950) criminalised interracial marriage and sexual intercourse. Under the Group Areas Act (1950) “non-white” families were forcibly displaced to the outskirts of towns.<sup>36</sup> The coloured community’s “intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population”,<sup>37</sup> denied them membership of the “superior”, white social group, while at the same time bestowing mild privileges when compared

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<sup>34</sup> Fugard, *Blutsband*, 1977, 190.

<sup>35</sup> See Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006, 469–70.

<sup>36</sup> Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, 470–471. For a discussion of attitudes toward coloured identity in the anti-apartheid movement, see Mohamed Adhikari, “‘You Have the Right to Know’: South Africa, 1987–1994”, in L. Switzer and M. Adhikari (eds.), *South Africa’s Resistance Press: Alternative Voices in the Last Generation under Apartheid*. Athens, OH: University Press, 2000, 349–54.

<sup>37</sup> Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, 469–70.

to the section of the population designated Black. The result of this is described as follows by the South African historian Mohamed Adhikari:

Coloured assimilationism together with the insecurities engendered by their intermediate status meant that the most consistent, and insistent, element in their expression of identity in daily life was an association with whiteness, and a concomitant distancing from Africanness, whether it be in the value placed on a fair skin and straight hair, the prizing of white ancestors in the family lineage or taking pride in their assimilation to western culture.<sup>38</sup>

This status, Adhikari argues, led to coloureds becoming one of the most marginalised groups, notable for their “lack of political or economic power”.<sup>39</sup> One of the most pernicious effects of being classified “coloured” was that the white minority continued to function for such individuals as a point of reference as they tried to defend the few remaining privileges of their designated racial status. This is evident in the attitude of Morrie, who ashamedly reports how he, when he passed as white, also reproduced derogatory and discriminatory attitudes towards Black people. As Adhikari puts it:

As important as such measures imposed from above were, one cannot ignore the complicity of coloured people, both individually and collectively, in the implementation of segregation. They often exploited, supported and sometimes even demanded segregatory measures where these were seen to be to their advantage.<sup>40</sup>

The racial segregation that the apartheid regime implemented led to social, political and economic inequality. It is in this legal racial labyrinth that the idea of “racial passing” makes sense that is dramaturgically at the heart of the *The Blood Knot*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “passing” as follows:

To be accepted as or believed to be, or to represent oneself successfully as, a member of an ethnic or religious group other than one’s own, esp. one having higher social status; spec. (of a person of black ancestry in a racially segregated society) to be accepted as white. Later also: (of a transsexual) to be accepted as a member of a different sex.<sup>41</sup>

In the context of *The Blood Knot*, “to pass” means to pass as white, i.e. as a member of the supposedly superior racial and social class, with all its privileges and rights. The “instrumental and material motivations”<sup>42</sup> for Blacks to pass as coloured or for coloureds to pass

<sup>38</sup> Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, 479.

<sup>39</sup> Adhikari, *Genocide on Settler Frontiers: When Hunter-Gatherers and Commercial Stock Farmers Clash*. London: UCT Press, 2013, xix.

<sup>40</sup> Adhikari, *Genocide on Settler Frontiers*, xiii.

<sup>41</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Passing”, at [www.oed.com/view/Entry/138429?rskey=G39LMh&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138429?rskey=G39LMh&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid) (accessed 1 May 2024).

<sup>42</sup> Adhikari, *Genocide on Settler Frontiers*, xiv.

as white were the hope of acquiring social mobility in some cases, and full civil rights in others. The precondition in each case was anonymity, “permitting [individuals] to resort to imaginative role-playing in their self-representation”.<sup>43</sup>

“To try for white” – as “passing” is also called in South-African English – but to be revealed as coloured would mean that one “would have suffered not only from legal prosecution but also from severe social stigmatisation”.<sup>44</sup> “Passing” deconstructs the idea of racial essentialism and the idea that whiteness is a birthright – something so essential to apartheid. It is racial segregation that makes passing possible and necessary; it is “a response to policies, in this case, state enforcement of apartheid”.<sup>45</sup> By translating “passing” as “to make ends meet”, as happened in the German translation of *The Blood Knot* broadcast on Swiss Radio, this aspect is erased and no longer inviting of critical reflection.

### Translating as a Way of Reading

The prologue at the beginning of the radio play is proof that those in charge had thought carefully about the transferability of a stage play and the representation of race to radio. In the case of the radio production of *The Blood Knot*, two translation processes effectively took place: one from text to radio, the other from English to German. “Translation” is here understood in the etymological sense of a “carrying over”.<sup>46</sup> The prologue shows that both translation and the transfer into another form of representation can be understood as contributing to new forms of meaning-making. Both techniques aim to transfer content and to render the original meaning understandable. The theatre and translation scholar Sruti Bala has argued that “the practice of translation and the reflection on processes of translation are often stitched into the protocols of performance. The translator’s note is thus not an appendix or preface to the performance, but woven into the textures of performance practice”.<sup>47</sup> Translation therefore becomes inextricably integrated with staging a performance.

Nevertheless, asymmetries and gaps remain that cannot be overcome in language and performance. The Indian literary theorist Gayatri Spivak believes this is why translators should understand the process of translation as “reading”. In a translation, every word opens up new dimensions for the readers that are not accessible to them in their everyday lives: “If you are making anything else accessible, through a language quickly learnt with an idea that

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<sup>43</sup> Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet both. Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 47–48.

<sup>44</sup> Frank, *Role-Play in South African Theatre*, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> Sruti Bala, “Necessary Misapplications: The Work of Translation in Performance in an Era of Global Asymmetries”, in *South African Theatre Journal*, 33(1), 2020, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Bala, “Necessary Misapplications”, 7.

you transfer content, then you are betraying the text and showing rather dubious politics.”<sup>48</sup> In the case of *The Blood Knot* this is true for the translation by Allison Malherbe (1977) as well as that by Walter Czaschke and Frank Heigert (1974). Not only the content of the text, but also elements of culture and identity should be part of the translation and transferred into the other language.

In order to overcome (colonial) hegemony, it is the responsibility of the translator to respect the asymmetry between original and translation. The prologue to the radio play of *The Blood Knot* can be read as a kind of translator’s note, declaring the politics of the translator. The fact that the translators have not translated “passing” with an equivalent that allows the original meaning to remain, removes an important key to the interpretation of the play in the transferred language. Regardless of whether this is a sign of inaccuracy or ignorance, this mistranslation allows for certain deductions about Switzerland’s attitude to racial issues.

If we combine these findings on the challenge of translating terms and concepts related to race and passing with Hans-Peter Sigrist’s opening comment that apartheid is a global problem that affects all people (without even mentioning the concept of race on which apartheid in South Africa was based), the question arises as to what kind of understanding of race existed in Switzerland.

## Switzerland: Whitewashing Racism

Whiteness is helpful in understanding the structural significance of race for the distribution of power and attention, which is exemplified by the translation and radio adaptation of *The Blood Knot* for Radio DRS.<sup>49</sup> Whiteness is used as a normative reference of social and political life in Switzerland, and in this analysis will be used as a “conceptual tool for analyzing Swiss society”.<sup>50</sup> It describes a hierarchical social system that stems from imperialist colonial history<sup>51</sup> in which white people are assigned hierarchically higher positions in comparison to people classified or viewed as Black. These power relations permeate all social, cultural,

<sup>48</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, “The Politics of Translation”, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 322.

<sup>49</sup> See Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters. The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1996; Patricia Purtschert, *Kolonialität und Geschlecht im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Geschichte der weißen Schweiz*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2019; Jovita dos Santos Pinto et al. (eds.), “Einleitung: Un/doing Race – Rassifizierung in der Schweiz”, in *Un/doing Race. Rassifizierung in der Schweiz*, ed. dos Santos Pinto et al. Zurich/Geneva: Seismo Verlag, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Anne Lavanchy, “Glimpses into the Hearts of Whiteness: Institutions of Intimacy and the Desirable National”, in *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, ed. Patricia Purtschert and H. Fischer-Tiné. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 278.

<sup>51</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *La chair de l'empire: savoirs intimes et pouvoirs raciaux en régime colonial*. Paris: La Découverte & Institut Emilie du Châtelet, 2013.



and economic elements of a society, and lead to non-white people being racialised, othered, exoticised and objectified; they inevitably have to negotiate their marking and deviation from the white norm. Critical whiteness tries to show structures, mechanisms and processes through which white people seem to profit from segregation and racism.

Noémie Michel and Manuela Honegger, the first scholars who engaged critically with whiteness in Switzerland, propose an understanding of whiteness as a “vanguard narrative that articulates together the modern ideas of ‘race’ and ‘progress’”.<sup>52</sup> In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the history of whiteness in Switzerland is, on the one hand, specific to its history and geography and, on the other hand, must be placed in the context of transnational processes, especially imperialism, colonialism and racism.<sup>53</sup> In the nineteenth century, Switzerland showed little ambition to become a colonial power. At that time, however, an image of Switzerland was formed that still has an impact today, as Michel and Honegger write: “A narrative claiming that the exceptional political institutions and values forming ‘Swiss purity’ had to be protected from any foreign elements legitimated this consolidation of a specific Swiss national space. We call this narrative the protection of Swiss purity.”<sup>54</sup> This can still be observed, for example, in the context of the discussion about “Überfremdung”<sup>55</sup> (the state of supposedly being overwhelmed by foreign immigrants). Even in the 21st century, there is little Swiss awareness of Switzerland’s role in the history of colonialism and the slave trade, as an important trading partner for colonial states, or through the missionary endeavour. Historical research is only slowly starting to show the extent of the country’s involvement.<sup>56</sup> Allied to this lack of historical awareness is a persistent belief that racism is not a problem that affects Switzerland. Immigration by people with “other” origins has become racialised in the national discourse, just as discussions of “foreigners” almost exclusively take place in the context of migration and the asylum system.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Noemi V. Michel and Manuela Honegger, “Thinking Whiteness in French and Swiss Cyberspace”, in *Social Politics*, 17(4), 2010, 425.

<sup>53</sup> See Anne Lavanchy and Patricia Purtschert, “Weissmachen der Nation. Intimität, Race und Geschlecht in der Schweiz”, in J. dos Santos Pinto et al. (eds.), *Un/doing Race. Rassifizierung in der Schweiz*, 140.

<sup>54</sup> Michel and Honegger, “Thinking Whiteness in French and Swiss Cyberspace”, 431.

<sup>55</sup> See Michel and Honegger, “Thinking Whiteness in French and Swiss Cyberspace”, 432.

<sup>56</sup> See Thomas David et al., *Schwarze Geschäfte. Die Beteiligung von Schweizern an Sklaverei und Sklavenhandel im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*. Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 2006; Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994. Final Report of the NFP 42+ Commissioned by the Swiss Federal Council*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007; Patricia Purtschert et al., *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2012; Jovita dos Santos Pinto et al., “Einleitung: Un/doing Race – Rassifizierung in der Schweiz”, in dos Santos Pinto et al. (eds.), *Un/doing Race. Rassifizierung in der Schweiz*; Dagmar Konrad, *Missionskinder. Migration und Trennung in Missionarsfamilien der Basler Mission des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2023.

<sup>57</sup> See Anne Lavanchy and Patricia Purtschert, “Weissmachen der Nation. Intimität, Race und Ge-

This lack of recognition of racism in Switzerland is also manifested in the lack of an appropriate vocabulary. In the context of current discussions on racism in Switzerland, Jovita dos Santos Pinto points out that there is not only a lack of awareness about whiteness, but that it is also obvious that a large part of society lacks the appropriate anti-racist terms to describe people of colour without having to resort to images such as the savage or the victim.<sup>58</sup> This is still the case. It is almost as if race does not exist in Switzerland, and is only engaged with as a reality if it exists outside its borders.

## Conclusion

I argue in this essay that to translate “to pass” with “to make ends meet” disregards the full relevance of racial segregation and its consequences for the inhabitants of the country on which *The Blood Knot* is based. This mistranslation, I hold, builds on a long history of racial indifference and ignorance about Black people that has its roots in imperialism. Because – as Michel’s and Honegger’s work shows – Switzerland tries to uphold a notion of purity by geographically “outsourcing” racial questions, there is little direct engagement with race. Within this context, the mistranslation of the phrase “to pass” is evidence of a larger social erasure and negation. Down to the present day, as dos Santos Pinto notes, there is no adequate vocabulary for race in Switzerland.

My focus on the mistranslation of “passing” in the adaptation of Athol Fugard’s *The Blood Knot* for Swiss Radio DRS invokes a broader background to show why translators might have “failed to read” the original text and all its subtleties. Just as Sigrist in *Die Tat* suggested that apartheid is a universal phenomenon wherever injustice occurs, racial issues are also seen as generalist problems that take place at an individual level. I argue that this negates the significance of state-imposed segregation and its impact, especially on the Black majority. Just as apartheid is seen as a general problem of hegemony, race is also universalised and thus racialisation is not only erased but made invisible. In the final instance, this instance of mistranslation shows how English is not simply English, but in its South African locution also conveys markers for racialised people to which translators should listen.

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schlecht in der Schweiz”, in dos Santos Pinto et al. (eds.), *Un/doing Race. Rassifizierung in der Schweiz*, 143; and Anne Lavanchy, “Racisme et racialisation – mettre en mots la discrimination raciale”, in nccr (National Center of Competence in Research) on the move, <https://nccr-onthemove.ch/blog/racisme-et-racialisation-mettre-en-mots-la-discrimination-raciale/>, 2019 (accessed 1 May 2024); and dos Santos Pinto et al., *Un/doing Race. Rassifizierung in der Schweiz*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Faulhaber, Daniel, “Wer sind hier die Affen im Zirkus?”, in *Die Wochenzeitung WOZ*, 12, 21 March 2019. See <https://www.woz.ch/1912/basler-fasnacht/wer-sind-hier-die-affen-im-zirkus> (accessed 4 April 2025).

## 8 A Theatre Scandal in the Swiss Provinces: Fugard's *Statements* in St. Gallen

Franziska Burger

In 1977, a theatre scandal broke out in the small town of St. Gallen in eastern Switzerland, triggering a discussion about artistic freedom and censorship.<sup>1</sup> The occasion was the Swiss premiere of the play *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* by Athol Fugard at the “Studiobühne” of the St. Gallen City Theatre (the Stadttheater) in a production directed by its Head of Spoken Theatre, Joachim Engel-Denis, five years after the play had been given its world premiere in Cape Town.<sup>2</sup> The primary cause of the controversy was the nudity of the two main actors, Volker K. Bauer and Ute Zehler, who were on stage without clothes throughout the performance. There were anonymous calls for the theatre’s public subsidy to be cut (apparently stemming from certain local conservative politicians),<sup>3</sup> to which the theatre management responded by removing the play from their repertoire after just five performances.

*Statements* is about the relationship between the mixed-race, married headmaster Errol Philander, who lives in the township of Bontrug, and the white library manager Frieda Joubert. Their secret relationship crosses legal and moral boundaries: Not only is the aptly named Philander having an extramarital affair, but he is in an interracial relationship that defies the apartheid laws – the “Immorality Act” of the title. What is more, in order to be able to meet his lover, he has to sneak into a library at night that is in a “white” area of town, thus in contravention of the Group Areas Act of 1950 that specified which races were allowed to visit which urban or rural areas in South Africa.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of the Immorality Act is placed dramaturgically at the centre of the play, dividing it into two halves, the first taking place before the arrest, the second during the in-

<sup>1</sup> As it is not known which scenes were cut or how the text was handled, it is not possible to analyse the production in St. Gallen in more detail. Newspaper reports, reviews and official political documents will therefore serve as points of reference for a more precise analysis.

<sup>2</sup> In German: *Aussagen nach einer Verhaftung auf Grund des Gesetzes gegen Unsittlichkeit*, published by S. Fischer Theater Medien in 1976, translated by Jörn van Dyck. The play was originally published together with the plays *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, both written by Fugard together with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, under the title *Statement Plays* (1974).

<sup>3</sup> See the references to the various newspaper articles given below.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.sahistory.org.za/article/group-areas-act-1950](http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/group-areas-act-1950). All links in this essay accessed in August 2024.

terrogation in the jail. The moment of caesura comes when the lovers are caught due to their denunciation by a neighbour, arrested and interrogated. The policeman's brief statement at this point sums up the entire play:

[Against this image of the two lovers, a plain-clothes policeman, Detective Sergeant J. du Preez, walks on. He carries a police dossier and notebook. His statement is dictated to the audience.]

POLICEMAN: Frieda Joubert. Ten, Conradie Street. European. Errol Philander. Bontrug Location. Coloured.

Charge: Immorality Act.<sup>5</sup>

*Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* thus centres on one of the laws that was issued before apartheid, but in time came to define it. The South African Immorality Act was passed in 1927 and prohibited "illicit carnal intercourse between Europeans and natives and other acts in relation thereto".<sup>6</sup> An amendment came into force in 1950 that expanded its remit to ban sexual relations between "Europeans" (i.e. whites) and all "non-Europeans" and also clarified exactly what was meant by "immorality": "Illicit carnal intercourse' means carnal intercourse other than between husband and wife".<sup>7</sup>

The South African literary scholar Dennis Walder has noted that this play is not easily approachable and is characterised by its formal experimentation. Catherine M. Cole, a dance and literature scholar, suggests that the relative lack of success of *Statements* with international audiences was a result of its addressing specifically South African issues with too few global points of reference, unlike Fugard's better-known plays such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island* or *Blood Knot*:

When [*Statements*] travelled abroad in 1974, London audiences may have had context [sic] to understand and appreciate the play's fractured, Brechtian style; however, they did not have an understanding of key context crucial to propelling the play's action: specifically the Immorality Act and Group Areas Act.<sup>8</sup>

We shall here consider how a South African play was able to trigger a theatre scandal in Switzerland, and how the circumstances in St. Gallen compared with the situation of the work's initial performance run in Cape Town, five years earlier.

<sup>5</sup> Athol Fugard, *Statements [Three Plays]*. [4<sup>th</sup> impression]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Immorality Act, 1927. See [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Immorality\\_Act,\\_1927](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Immorality_Act,_1927) (accessed 15 October 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Immorality Amendment Act, 1950, 3.7. (ii). [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Immorality\\_Amendment\\_Act,\\_1950](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Immorality_Amendment_Act,_1950) (accessed 15 October 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Catherine M. Cole, "Statements before and after Arrests. Performing at Law's Edge in Apartheid South Africa", in Umphrey, Martha Merrill, Lawrence Douglas, and Austin Sarat, eds., *Law and Performance*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018, 128.

## Staging a Scandal in St. Gallen

On 2 June 1977, the daily newspaper *St. Galler Tagblatt* published an anonymous report of how this production of *Statements* had prompted strong reactions, as proof of which they had consulted Dr Paul Bürgi, a member of the Swiss Council of States<sup>9</sup> for the FDP (the Swiss Liberal Party) and the President of the City Theatre Cooperative:

[There have been] certain individual productions whose relative permissiveness has provoked a number of critical voices – initially from members of the Christian Theatre Association [the “Christliche Theatervereinigung”], later also from other visitor groups. *Statements* ... proved to be the crystallisation point for these negative voices, with various hints of possible subsidy cuts and financial “punishment” for the theatre. In the Cantonal Council, too, such voices had been raised in certain quarters, and he – Dr Bürgi – said that he did not doubt the seriousness of these threats.<sup>10</sup>

Even though the journalist here refers to other productions having been criticised, the discussion that ensued in the media referred exclusively to *Statements*.

It is striking that the precise identity was never revealed of those demanding subsidy cuts. The Christian Theatre Association was an organisation in St. Gallen that for several decades had block-booked large numbers of seats for its members at theatrical productions throughout the year, and so on its own had considerable financial sway. Its president, Fritz Wittensöldner, nevertheless insisted in the St. Gallen daily *Ostschweizer Anzeiger AZ* of 3 June 1977 that “While we oppose these obscene performances, the Association has not intervened”.<sup>11</sup>

The opposition of members of the Cantonal Council is also mentioned in several articles at the time, though also without naming anyone – a fact that was itself mentioned in a newspaper on the other side of Switzerland, namely in the *Basler Zeitung* of 6 June 1977, when the journalist Rolf Wespe wrote that “it is a typical characteristic of these attacks on the Theatre that it’s thus far been impossible to find out who’s behind them, even though it must be members of the St. Gallen Cantonal Council. The Head of its Finance Department, August Schmuki [also a member of the Theatre’s Board of Directors], has declared that the executive has not intervened”.<sup>12</sup>

The Zurich daily newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger* mentioned the aforementioned Paul Bürgi as having been a direct addressee of the complaints, as he apparently told the newspaper

<sup>9</sup> The second chamber of the Swiss Parliament, similar to the US Senate, comprising representatives of each canton.

<sup>10</sup> Anon., “Unerwünschte ‘Aussagen’. Stadttheater St. Gallen: Stück abgesetzt”, in *St. Galler Tagblatt*, 139(126), 2 June 1977.

<sup>11</sup> See rhg, “Stadttheater-Zensur: Moral oder Politik?”, in *Ostschweizer AZ*, 73(106), 3 June 1977.

<sup>12</sup> See Rolf Wespe, “Theaterskandal in St. Gallen. Subventionskürzungen angedroht”, in *Basler Zeitung*, 6 June 1977.

that “the most serious impact came from the initiatives of cantonal parliamentarians who spoke of subsidy cuts in the same breath as their outrage over the nude scenes”.<sup>13</sup> The subsidies to the City Theatre that were placed under threat by members of the cantonal parliament were essential for the survival of the institution:

It is only in the last five years that the city of St. Gallen has enshrined a permanent subsidy system in law. At cantonal level, the theatre has no legal entitlement to financial support. Of the 1.1 million Swiss francs provided by the canton, 900,000 come from the lottery fund. This money is approved annually by the Grand Council via the budget.<sup>14</sup>

All the same, Peter Baumgartner noted in the *Tages-Anzeiger* of 6 June 1977 that the “influx to the St. Gallen Stadttheater has hardly ever been as great: with seat sales of 85 percent, it is probably the best-attended theatre in Switzerland”.<sup>15</sup> These figures naturally stand in contrast to the claims made at the time that the Theatre was ignoring the desires of its audiences.

In response to the threat of budget cuts, Bürgi and the theatre’s director, Wolfgang Zörner, declared that they were prepared to resign if the worst came to the worst, as long as this would ensure the continued subsidisation of the Theatre.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, the result of the discussions was that the production of *Statements* was removed from the programme after just five performances.

This decision to cancel the play was defended by the theatre management to several daily newspapers on the grounds that the production was “lacking” in quality. Paul Bürgi told the Bernese daily newspaper *Der Bund* that this is why he had been able to convince Zörner to cancel the production: “Because the play itself is not artistically outstanding’, Bürgi said, ‘it wasn’t worthwhile fighting a holy war for artistic freedom.’”<sup>17</sup> August Schmuki also commented that local audiences could not be expected to cope with certain theatrical content and performance styles: “It would have been wiser not to do this play here, given that the St. Gallen audience reacts differently from that in Zurich, for example”.<sup>18</sup> Schmuki is here no doubt referring to St. Gallen’s longstanding reputation for conservatism. Even though the city of St. Gallen is officially Protestant (it is the capital of the canton of the same name that was created in 1803), the majority of the canton’s population is Roman Catholic,

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Baumgartner, “Das Theaterensemble spricht von Erpressung. Fugard-Stück in St. Gallen vom Spielplan abgesetzt”, in *Tages-Anzeiger*, 6 June 1977.

<sup>14</sup> Baumgartner, “Das Theaterensemble spricht von Erpressung”, 6 June 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Baumgartner, “Das Theaterensemble spricht von Erpressung”, 6 June 1977.

<sup>16</sup> See anon., “Unerwünschte ‘Aussagen’”, 2 June 1977.

<sup>17</sup> rwr, “Vom Einfluss ‘einflussreicher Kreise’. Das St. Galler Stadttheater setzt ein Stück ab”, in *Der Bund*, 6 July 1977.

<sup>18</sup> Wespe, “Theaterskandal in St. Gallen”, 6 June 1977.

and the city is the seat of one of the six dioceses in Switzerland. The influence of the church was also reflected in the cantonal council itself. From 1976 to 1980, 92 of the 187 council members were representatives of the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP). The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) reported similar statements from Paul Bürgi:

The intervention of the Theatre's board of Directors has affected a relatively insignificant play. It happened because the criticism of the Stadttheater could no longer be ignored – the possibility of subsidy cuts from the public purse was already being raised – and, as Dr Paul Bürgi told the press, “in order not to jeopardise either what has already been achieved or the prospects for continuing work on the current artistic level”. The cancellation of *Statements* must therefore be seen as a warning shot across the bow of the Stadttheater and its director.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, there are only a few newspaper reports about the production itself. One of them, by S.H. in the NZZ, published prior to the public discussion about it and before the decision to cancel the play, discussed several productions at the St. Gallen Theatre before dealing with *Statements*. It is notable that the reviewer anticipates the criticism that would lead to the cancellation, for he questions the significance and added value of the actors' nudity for addressing the apartheid system and a forbidden interracial relationship:

I think everyone has enough imagination to visualise the harshness and cruelty of the racial problem around sex in South Africa with its latent fears of discovery and punishment, even without this long carnal display. This has nothing to do with prudery, more with taste and aesthetics.<sup>20</sup>

However, there were also voices in the media pointing out the significance of nudity as a stylistic device and as a carrier of meaning, and they argued that it made reference to the political and moral level of racial discrimination in South Africa. The *Ostschweizer Anzeiger* AZ wrote: “So *Statements* contains two kinds of dynamite: It denounces racial discrimination, and there are two people naked as they act on stage in the play; it is political and moral dynamite, in other words”.<sup>21</sup>

*Die Weltwoche* of Zurich also emphasised the meaningful effect of naked bodies, in view of the conditions during apartheid and the law against immorality:

[I]n *Statements After an Arrest* by the South African Athol Fugard, a play against the up-close, i.e. humanly comprehensible aspects of apartheid, the two protagonists have to move about naked for four-fifths of the time, simply because the dramaturgy of the play – which is not exactly brilliant, but important and topical – demands it.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> K.H., “Reaktion auf zu viel Nacktes. Auseinandersetzung um das Stadttheater St. Gallen”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11/12 June 1977, emphasis in the original.

<sup>20</sup> S.H., “Von Shakespeare bis Fugard. Theater in St. Gallen”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11 May 1977.

<sup>21</sup> rhg, “Stadttheater-Zensur: Moral oder Politik?”, in *Ostschweizer AZ*, 73(106), 3 June 1977.

<sup>22</sup> Anon., “Memo. Aufstand der Spiesser”, in *Die Weltwoche*, 8 June 1977.



Ruedi Brunner, writing in the Zurich liberal daily newspaper *Die Tat*, also emphasised the importance of naked bodies for the production:

This politically and artistically highly explosive play (subtitle: *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*) brings the South African reality to the stage: the physical relationship between whites and coloureds, which is forbidden by law, and the powerlessness of people literally left naked at the mercy of this cruel machinery.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to this review, Brunner also wrote a comprehensive piece for *Die Tat* on the events in St. Gallen and how they were being reported, pointing out the irony that a play criticising a political regime in Africa was being cancelled in a small Swiss city due to pressure from local politicians:

An explosive play has died with it. A committed play against intolerance and outright arbitrariness: did they hold up a mirror too directly to the gentlemen who are in charge here? Because for those who reserve the right to make arbitrary decisions, denouncing arbitrariness is a red rag to a bull. The moral apostles of St. Gallen are evidently more comfortable with non-committal, aesthetically more pleasing theatrical fare – despite empty seats in the audience. But this is exactly how the vigour of critical artists is broken. New, unconventional ways of challenging the audience are blocked.

Will St. Gallen soon become an artist's nightmare?<sup>24</sup>

The complaints about *Statements* – which seem to have come predominantly, if not exclusively, from the ranks of local politicians – do not chime with the views of the critics, who while generally allowing criticism of the artistic quality of the production, nevertheless deem the demands to cut the theatre's subsidy to be disproportionate, in light of the explosive nature of the subject matter and the means chosen to depict it on stage.

The situation in St. Gallen escalated shortly before the summer break. Shortly after the play was cancelled, in the run-up to a theatre festival beginning in June, a Fiat 126, intended as the first prize in the raffle held in the context of the festivities, was set on fire in the city. It was parked in front of the main entrance to the Stadttheater. The following words were spraypainted on a wall right next to it: "Naked truth is forbidden: censorship rules here".<sup>25</sup>

The theatre nevertheless entered its summer break without having been subjected to any concrete, adverse consequences. In the November session in St. Gallen of the Grand Council that same year, the continuance of the cantonal subsidies was approved without any further discussion. Two days later, on 23 November 1977, the last day of the session, two cantonal councillors submitted motions on the theatre programme. The St. Gallen State

<sup>23</sup> Ruedi Brunner, "Nackte auf der Bühne: Skandal. St. Gallen: Politiker gegen Künstler", in *Die Tat*, 2 June 1977.

<sup>24</sup> Brunner, Ruedi, "Nackte Zensur", in *Die Tat*, 2 June 1977.

<sup>25</sup> See AZ, "Eskalation im Theaterkrach?", in *Ostschweizer AZ*, 73(109), 8 June 1977.

Archives contain a document from the State Chancellery with two “simple questions” that were submitted in the 23 November 1977 session of the Grand Council. They are from Lore Rohner-Bossart, CVP (of Altstätten), on “Questionable productions in the St. Gallen Stadttheater” and from Paul Köppel, CVP (of Widnau), on “Programming at the St. Gallen Stadttheater”. The cantonal government agreed in principle with the criticisms levelled by these two councillors, but in its official reply, sent on 16 March 1978, it referred them to the separation of powers that is relevant in a democratic state:

The Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for the repertoire of the Stadttheater as proposed by the director of the theatre. The State Council respects the autonomy of the Stadttheater. At the same time, it trusts that all sections of the population will be catered for by means of a balanced programme and responsible artistic planning.<sup>26</sup>

For the audiences and politicians, the issue now seemed to be closed, and the theatre and its programming were no longer questioned.

### Censorship in the Theatre – Theatre Scandals

In its article of 8 June 1977, the *Weltwoche* had written of the cancellation of *Statements* that “The scandal, of course, is once again not the performance, but the fact that several Philistines are able to prevent it”.<sup>27</sup> But are we justified in calling the events in St. Gallen a “theatre scandal”? The theatre scholars Wilmar Sauter and Henri Schoenmakers have observed that theatre history is full of scandals, and that we can observe a great number among them that are similar and are repeated time and again: “They can be created or provoked consciously, both explode spontaneously when they are the least expected. And just like anecdotes from the theatrical world, the (hi)stories of scandals often offer entertaining reading afterwards”.<sup>28</sup> Sauter and Schoenmakers claim that theatre scandals, despite the seeming variety in their manifestations, in fact have a certain element in common, namely the discussions subsequent to the theatrical event that actually triggers the scandal,<sup>29</sup> which they emphasise is closely bound up with the role of the audience. A production can make individual spectators feel that their values and norms are being called into question or even attacked, leading them to pursue their “reception” of the production outside the realm of the

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of the Grand Council of the Canton of St. Gallen, 1976/1980, 23 November 1977. Points 61.77.29: Simple request from Rohner-Altstätten: “Fragwürdige Inszenierungen am Stadttheater St. Gallen” and 61.77.31: Simple request from Köppel-Widnau: “Programmgestaltung am St. Galler Stadttheater”.

<sup>27</sup> Anon., “Memo. Aufstand der Spiesser”, in *Die Weltwoche*, 8 June 1977.

<sup>28</sup> Wilmar Sauter and Henri Schoenmakers, “General Introduction”, in Vicki Ann Cremona, Peter Eversmann, Bess Rowen, Anneli Saro and Henri Schoenmakers (eds.), *Theatre Scandals. Social Dynamics of Turbulent Theatrical Events*. Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2020, 2–12, here 4.

<sup>29</sup> Sauter and Schoenmakers, “General Introduction”, 5.

theatre: "Scandals are very interesting because they make norms and values of spectators and of others involved in the scandal explicit and highlight in this way delicate elements of their frameworks of reference".<sup>30</sup> In contrast to most of the topics with which researchers are engaged in theatre history, analysing a theatre scandal takes us beyond the moment of the actual performance and places the audience itself centre-stage.

The theatre scholar Peter Eversmann has offered a broad interpretation of the "theatre scandal":

"Theatre scandals" range from gossip about the (alleged) off-stage behaviour of an actor or actress to the willful attempts at shocking an audience: from bans on productions by (self-) censorship to outbursts of violence by spectators before, during or after a show; from outraged debates in the press to upheaval in political institutions.<sup>31</sup>

Eversmann emphasises that we have to investigate the values and norms violated by the production that is at the heart of the "scandal" and also explore what groups of people felt scandalised them, and for what reasons.<sup>32</sup> He compares such scandals with the outbreak of a disease in which other people are infected. However, his analyses are hardly applicable to the case under examination here, as the scandal in St. Gallen did not erupt either during or immediately after the performance, but was essentially "outsourced".

By contrast, Neil Martin Blackadder defines theatre scandals as "counter performances of affronted spectators".<sup>33</sup> In such a situation, two camps face each other: The theatre-makers and the scandalised group of recipients who thereupon initiate a "counter-performance". Each group pursues a different goal, that of the protesters often being the cancellation of the production they have seen:

Certainly neither side stands to win anything tangible, but often there is more at stake than merely which group will dominate during the encounter. Those who protest against a new play feel strongly that such work ought not to be produced, because, for instance, they consider its subject matter or language inappropriate for the stage, or they believe the ideas it expresses pose a threat to social order, or they regard the piece as disrespectful toward some members of their society.<sup>34</sup>

He goes on to say that the decisive factor in a theatre scandal is often a discrepancy between the attitude of the theatre-makers and the expectations or norms of their audience:

<sup>30</sup> Sauter and Schoenmakers, "General Introduction", 5.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Eversmann, "Spreading Like Wildfire: the Genesis and Evolution of Theatre Scandals", in Cremona *et al.*, *Theatre Scandals*, 33–64, here 13.

<sup>32</sup> See Eversmann, "Spreading Like Wildfire", 15.

<sup>33</sup> Neil Blackadder, *Performing Opposition: Modern Theater and the Scandalized Audience*. Westport CT: Praeger, 2003, IX.

<sup>34</sup> Blackadder, *Performing Opposition*, X.

Any opposition expressed in response to a theatre performance must stem from a discrepancy between what is presented on stage and what the spectators consider acceptable; but the criteria, the standards of measurement, can and do vary substantially.<sup>35</sup>

But it is not just the case that the spectators feel scandalised by what they see; conversely, the audience does not fulfil the expectations placed on them by the theatre-makers. Theatre scandals are thus events in which the unspoken agreement between the audience and the performers on stage is broken.

In the case of St. Gallen, there is no evidence that any “counter-performance” manifested itself in the audience, neither during the performance itself nor immediately afterwards. The few newspaper reports of the actual production indicate that everything in fact proceeded quietly. The “scandal” only emerged after a delay, and did so anonymously, in the moment when the theatre was threatened with having its funding cut or cancelled.

Blackadder admits that theatre scandals do not always have to be spontaneous, and he also takes into account that they can be planned in advance by (individual) audience members. It can thus be a conscious decision, taken in advance of attending the theatre, to provoke a scandal in it. In the case of St. Gallen, it can also be argued that while one or more small groups consciously decided to protest against a play, this was a means to an end as their ultimate target was actually the St. Gallen theatre as an institution and as a recipient of public subsidies. This group, being aligned with local politicians (and possibly comprised of them), could rely on official backing and be sure that their protest would trigger public discussion.

Whereas Blackadder defines theatre scandals as a form of counter-performance, Schoenmakers discerns in them a “natural” dramaturgy. Not unlike Eversmann, who uses the image of an outbreak of disease to describe theatre scandals, Schoenmakers draws a comparison with earthquakes: Tectonic shifts create friction that is discharged in the form of tremors: “Metaphorically, scandalous theatrical events can be considered earthquakes in the cultural landscape; norms and values ‘bump, scrape or drag against each other’. After which a new equilibrium is reached, at least for some time”.<sup>36</sup>

Also unlike Blackadder, Schoenmakers expands the scope of the theatre scandal to encompass phenomena other than the performance situation. He does so by explicitly taking into account both the media and cultural policy. This means that a mere description of a theatre event can result in a scandal, without everyone involved having to have been present at an actual performance. The theatrical event itself here recedes into the background, displaced by an overarching question of artistic freedom, norms and values, as well as a socially represented understanding of theatre. He also categorises theatre scandals in order of size:

<sup>35</sup> Blackadder, *Performing Opposition*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Sauter and Schoenmakers, “General Introduction”, 33.

We define a big theatre scandal as an event occurring during or outside a theatrical event, which causes negative emotions and evaluations. These are communicated publicly in order to criticise, control, stop or prevent what is going on or could go on in the theatre and involve more people or institutions in society than the ones in a (possible or actual) performance. The negative emotions of anger, irritation, disgust or fear inside and/or outside the theatre lead to conflicts about what is acceptable within the theatre. Interestingly enough, it is not necessary for spectators in the theatre to have the idea that they are attending something scandalous. Also, it is not necessary that the people who cause the scandal have seen the performance in question. The act of trying to prevent a performance can already lead to a scandal when it causes a public discussion.<sup>37</sup>

These arguments would seem to apply to the scandal generated around *Statements* in St. Gallen. The fact that the newspapers reported mainly on the later discussions about the production instead of on the production itself shows that this scandal was located primarily in the cultural and political debate that the production triggered and that demanded its cancellation. There are no reports of booing or of audience members having left the performance prematurely, so we may assume that the audience present neither felt scandalised, nor was especially aware of any scandal until after the fact.

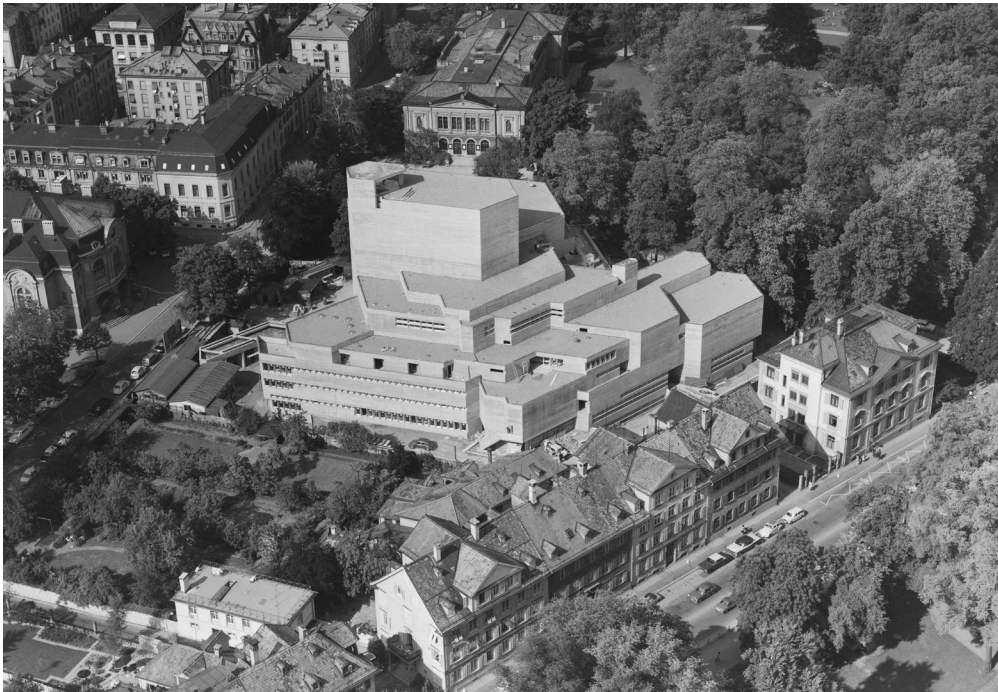


Figure 8.1. The St. Gallen City Theatre, erected in 1967 (incorporating the main stage and the smaller Studiobühne). ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Com\_F67-10666. Creative Commons.

<sup>37</sup> Sauter and Schoenmakers, "General Introduction", 34.

## Nudity in the Theatre – St. Gallen and South Africa

The St. Gallen production of Fugard's *Statements* took place on the Stadttheater's small, separate "studio stage" that was commonly used to present theatrical formats of an experimental nature. So it should have been a surprise to no one that it was the venue for a production like that of *Statements*. The reviews referred to the nudity of the performers, but to hardly any other aspects of the production in question.

Actors appearing on stage unclothed is a phenomenon that only emerged in the 20th century, and the meaning attributed to the naked body has changed repeatedly over the course of time. In the 1960s and '70s, the understanding of nudity on stage in the West was closely associated with the student revolts and their protests against the bourgeois order. Their demands for the liberalisation of sexuality was central to this context.<sup>38</sup> Nudity was used as a means of forcing discussions about societal taboos.<sup>39</sup> The body was "ideologised"<sup>40</sup> and became "the symbol of a political cause".<sup>41</sup> It was both a medium of negotiation and an object of it.

The reactions to *Statements* in St. Gallen can be understood against this background. The expectations of certain audience members were broken by what was seen as "uncivilised" behaviour on the part of the performers, who mixed what was public with what was deemed by some to be private. This interpretation of nudity, however, does not wholly coincide with the meaning that it carries in the play in its original South African context. "What sets Fugard's work apart from others created during the same period", writes Loren Kruger, "is its focus on the conflation of sex, nudity and racism: the three biggest taboos of the time".<sup>42</sup> Catherine M. Cole is of a similar opinion: "While anti-apartheid theatre in the 1970s and 1980s bravely took on a whole range of apartheid's many pathologies and obsessions, Athol Fugard's *Statements After an Arrest under the Immorality Act* is unique in its bold focus on interracial sex".<sup>43</sup> She goes on to say that "The proliferation of amendments to the Immorality Act over many decades was symptomatic of the apartheid state's attempt to control one of the basic human acts: skin on skin, the connection of Self and Other".<sup>44</sup>

Cole argues that Fugard's play uses the relationship between Philander and Joubert to make us "think about the performativity of the apartheid legal prohibitions (nakedness on

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<sup>38</sup> See Ulrike Traub, *Theater der Nacktheit: zum Bedeutungswandel entblösster Körper auf der Bühne seit 1900*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010, 10.

<sup>39</sup> See Traub, *Theater der Nacktheit*, 13ff.

<sup>40</sup> Traub, *Theater der Nacktheit*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Traub, *Theater der Nacktheit*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> See Loren Kruger: *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London: Routledge, 1999, 101ff.

<sup>43</sup> Cole, "Statements before and after Arrests", 131.

<sup>44</sup> Cole, "Statements before and after Arrests", 131.



stage, mixed-race audiences without separate amenities, etc.) that had to be defined in order for this play to be staged in Cape Town in 1972”.<sup>45</sup> In other words, by showing the play to a mixed audience – which was also officially forbidden at the time – the content of the play was doubled both on a semiotic level and in the physical being of those present: the Group Areas Act of 1950 forbade mixed public gatherings at any kind of public entertainment, and p. 47 of the Amendment of 1965 stated that “racially mixed casts or audiences were prohibited from public entertainments unless a permit was secured”.<sup>46</sup> The police would regularly descend on venues to control or disrupt their activities, while those involved in anti-apartheid theatre were also placed under observation. Fugard was one of several people to have his passport confiscated in the 1960s, making it impossible for him to attend performances abroad for several years. When *Statements* was first performed in Cape Town in 1972, it was the first-ever production in a new theatre venue, “The Space / Die Ruimte”, whose owner, Brian Astbury, had registered it as a club that was admissible to “members only”, which enabled those involved to circumvent the Group Areas Act and perform in front of a mixed-race audience (Astbury was also the husband of the actor Yvonne Bryceland, who played Frieda Joubert in the first run of *Statements*). The Space in Cape Town and the Market Theatre in Johannesburg were the two places in South Africa where an anti-apartheid theatre was able to evolve. As Loren Kruger explains:

The Space and the Market had resources unavailable to their predecessors ... because their white managers’ access to liberal capital offset the lack of government subsidy. This capital deflected government meddling and enabled the place and occasion for social assembly as well as anti-apartheid culture, even when apartheid violence dominated global news.<sup>47</sup>

The “scandal” in St. Gallen can seem like a storm in a teacup compared to the circumstances under which Fugard and his colleagues had to stage *Statements* in South Africa. Nevertheless, there are parallels to be observed between them, for in both cities, St. Gallen and Cape Town, the limits of state intervention in artistic freedom were being tested. In St. Gallen, anonymous but weighty voices from local politics and (it is implied) the Roman Catholic Church (to which many local politicians belonged) were trying to influence programming by threatening to cut subsidies and cancel block-bookings for the City Theatre. In the words of Blackadder, this was a “counter performance of affronted spectators”<sup>48</sup> who turned the theatre into a place of negotiation on central social issues such as the freedom of art and

<sup>45</sup> Cole, “Statements before and after Arrests”, 128.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African state*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, 110.

<sup>47</sup> Loren Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*. London: Methuen Drama, 2020, 121.

<sup>48</sup> Blackadder, *Performing Opposition*, 2003, IX.



the purpose of state-subsidised, cultural institutions. However, while they were in the short term successful – after all, the production of *Statements* was cancelled – it became clear that in the longer term, those “affronted spectators” were in St. Gallen a minority that was ultimately unable to override or undermine the separation of powers inherent to the democratic foundations of Swiss society.

At almost the same time, theatre in South Africa was functioning as a place of dialogue and as a bulwark against state repression (with the state-supported Calvinist churches playing a far more active role than that of the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland). For this reason, the South African literary scholar Loren Kruger has suggested that in the moment of the performance of *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*, the theatrical space took on the same significance as the library for the two protagonists in the play: it became a place where people disregarded the laws of segregation to meet, instead, as equals. It became a place of “counter-publicity” in which the performativity of the apartheid laws themselves became the subject of the evening and the exchange between all those present.<sup>49</sup> In both cases, the theatre space becomes a place of negotiation of reality, and of its possibilities and impossibilities.

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<sup>49</sup> Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*, 13.



# Part III

Literature, Exile, and Intellectual Dialogues

## Introduction to Part III

Part III of this volume turns from performance and material culture to literature, exile and intellectual life as key vectors of cultural relation between Switzerland and South Africa. This section explores how texts were translated and circulated, how exiled writers and thinkers moved across borders and languages, and how ideas – about race, nature, politics and belonging – travelled between two countries with seemingly little in common, but whose historical entanglement grew ever more complex during the apartheid years. The chapters that follow show how the literary sphere – broadly conceived to include books, letters, oral narratives and even yodelling – became an arena in which South Africa was interpreted, reimagined, distorted and occasionally contested from within Swiss cultural frameworks.

Literary and intellectual relations between South Africa and Switzerland were never merely decorative. They were embedded in networks of Cold War cultural diplomacy, missionary endeavour, liberal internationalism and white solidarity. These chapters trace the circuits through which South African literature was made legible (or illegible) to Swiss audiences; how Swiss literature was translated and instrumentalised in apartheid South Africa; and how exiled South Africans engaged critically with their host country from within, often unsettling its image of neutrality. Collectively, they foreground the asymmetries and tensions inherent in any such relationship, while also recovering the fugitive solidarities and microhistories that shaped lives and texts across borders.

The section opens with Jasper Walgrave's study of Peter Sulzer, a key figure in the dissemination of South African literature to German-speaking readers in Switzerland during the second half of the twentieth century. Sulzer's long career as an editor, critic, translator and public intellectual was marked by an ambivalent liberalism. On the one hand, he helped introduce important South African authors to a European audience; on the other, his framing of these authors tended to downplay the radical and structural critique present in much Black writing, favouring instead voices that conformed to a more palatable image of opposition. Walgrave's meticulous analysis of Sulzer's editorial strategies and ideological positioning offers a sobering account of how literary representation – understood here as a form of cultural brokerage – was implicated in the politics of apartheid and the West's often cautious response to it.

Paula Fourie's chapter complements this by inverting the direction of cultural flow, investigating how Swiss literature was translated into Afrikaans and received by South African readers during the apartheid years. In a context of increasing political isolation, translated literature served as one of the few sanctioned windows onto the world for Afrikaans

readers. Fourie shows how particular Swiss authors – especially those dealing with religious themes, existential crises, or moral renewal – resonated with the self-image of the Afrikaner intelligentsia. But translation was never innocent. In many cases, the ideological registers of the source texts were subtly reconfigured to suit apartheid-era cultural values, revealing translation as an act of appropriation and adaptation as much as of linguistic fidelity. Her chapter draws attention to the cultural role of Afrikaans as a medium both of insularity and cosmopolitan longing, and of how Swiss texts could be made to speak – sometimes uncomfortably – to South African anxieties about identity, belonging and decline.

In the chapter that follows, Astrid Starck-Adler and Dag Henrichsen turn to the life and work of Lewis Nkosi, one of South Africa's most incisive literary critics and novelists, who spent periods of his long exile in Switzerland. Their essay examines Nkosi's intellectual engagement with Swiss institutions and cultural life, revealing how he navigated and critiqued the liberalism of his host country. Nkosi's writings from this period – and his marginalia, letters and unpublished notes – demonstrate his efforts to "provincialise" Europe, even as he drew on its literary traditions and publishing infrastructures. His critique of Swiss respectability and its hidden complicities with racial capitalism form part of a larger project of intellectual resistance. For Nkosi, exile was not merely displacement, but a vantage point from which to think Africa and Europe together, critically and uneasily. This chapter, like others in this part, suggests that the legacies of apartheid and colonialism were not simply exported; they were reflected back from within the very institutions that imagined themselves as neutral observers.

Féroll-Jon Davids's contribution continues the exploration of intellectual and emotional life in exile through a close reading of the letters and papers of Gordon Jephtas, a coloured South African pianist and répétiteur who spent time in Switzerland. Jephtas's story is quieter, less canonical than Nkosi's, but no less revealing. His writing reveals the ambivalence of Swiss hospitality, where racial difference was often minimised in discourse but lived in practice as exclusion or marginalisation. Davids treats Jephtas's documents not just as historical evidence but as a minor archive of feeling, chronicling the disorientation of exile, the professional struggles of a racialised artist in Europe, and the subtle forms of institutional resistance he encountered. In doing so, the chapter enriches the volume's aim to recover the granular, affective texture of South African lives in Switzerland – beyond official narratives or grand gestures of cultural diplomacy.

Chatradari Devroop's chapter on Shalati Khosa offers a brief but evocative microhistory of educational and cultural exchange during apartheid's final years. Khosa travelled to Switzerland as part of a short-lived programme intended to foster cultural understanding. But his experience – fragmentary, bureaucratically constrained, and culturally disorient-

ing – highlights the limits of such idealistic projects when they fail to account for structural inequality or local context. Through a careful reconstruction of his sojourn, Devroop shows how individual encounters could be burdened with representational expectations far beyond what they could carry. His chapter reminds us that cultural relations were often scripted from above but lived from below, in improvisation, confusion, and small gestures of accommodation or resistance.

The final chapter in this part, by Willemien Froneman and Stephanus Muller, takes a different route into Swiss–South African cultural exchange: through the unlikely medium of yodelling. Their essay examines how Swiss yodelling entered South African popular music in the mid-twentieth century, and how it was appropriated into settler-colonial fantasies of whiteness, pastoralism and “nature”. Drawing on musicological, archival and theoretical sources, they argue that this cultural migration of sound produced a “passaggio” – a performative passage between nature and culture, Europe and Africa, kitsch and seriousness. Yodelling, in this account, is not merely a folkloric curiosity but a sonic trace of transnational racial imaginaries, where the alpine echo found an improbable afterlife in the South African veld. In closing the section with this analysis, the volume gestures to the deeper affective and ideological undercurrents that structured Swiss–South African cultural life – undercurrents that sometimes passed as entertainment, but always carried the weight of history.

Together, these chapters expand the framework of cultural relations beyond the visible performances of music and theatre into the more intimate, intellectual and affective domains of reading, writing, translation, memory and exile. They offer a polyphonic account of how South Africans in Switzerland – and Swiss actors engaging South Africa – negotiated identity, complicity, solidarity and dislocation through the written, spoken and sung word. Literature and thought, as this part shows, were not merely reflective of broader relations; they were constitutive of them.

## 9 Peter Sulzer and the Conservative Representation of South African Literature to a German-Speaking Readership, 1948–1994<sup>1</sup>

Jasper Walgrave

### Introducing Peter Sulzer

When the Cape author Richard Rive, classified by the apartheid government as coloured and whose works were often banned, visited Zurich during a European trip in 1962, he was hosted by Peter Sulzer (Winterthur, 1917–2009). In his memoir *Writing Black*, Rive describes his host as “one of the first continental critics in the field of African and South African literature”, but also as “angular and scholarly” and a man who “seemed to have lived most of his life in a library”.<sup>2</sup>

Sulzer was a theologian and historian. He worked at the Winterthur City Library from 1948 until his retirement in 1982. From 1966 onwards he was its director. Apart from researching and writing about music and local history, Sulzer’s main passion was South Africa and its literature. Outside work hours, over the decades, he researched and wrote a great amount on this topic: a book on the viewpoints of the Black intellectual elite, one on South African society as seen through the eyes of Afrikaans writers, four anthologies of African writing (of which three are of South African literature), and various translations of literary works from English, Afrikaans, Sesotho and later also isiZulu and Sepedi. He published many articles and letters in the Swiss press: in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), the *St. Galler Tagblatt*, the *Landbote* of Winterthur, the *Schweizer Monatshefte* and others, and he built up the Africana collection of the Winterthur City Library.

In the absence of any clear or coordinated policy of cultural exchange between the two countries (apart from propaganda campaigns),<sup>3</sup> Sulzer’s ideas and work not only testified to his genuine passion for literature and interest in South Africa, but also offered a tool to raise

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a chapter about Peter Sulzer in my PhD dissertation: “A Culture of Discreet Complicity: Swiss Men Mediating Culture to and from South Africa 1948–1994”. Doctoral thesis, University of Fribourg, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rive, *Writing Black*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1981, 67.

<sup>3</sup> See Georg Kreis, *Die Schweiz und Südafrika 1948–1994: Schlussbericht des im Auftrag des Bundesrats durchgeführten NFP 42+*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2005, 487.



the credibility of a more general political-economic Swiss approach towards South Africa that was utilised in the war of opinions. There is no hierarchical dimension to the relationship between these two dynamics; rather, one could describe it as a situation in which cultural action stems from one individual's initiative – often with artistic and cultural, ideological motives – but where a synergy exists with broader political instrumental positions and motives.

From the 1930s until the mid-1960s, Switzerland implemented a campaign under the title “National Spiritual Defence”<sup>4</sup> (NSD) that was a confirmation of a hitherto hardly defined common identity of “Swissness” (as opposed to the multitude of cultural centres through the cantons that constitute the country) in reaction to totalitarian threats to the north in Germany and the south in Italy. After the Second World War, the “other” against which the NSD profiled “Swissness” was in the first place the communist threat from the East. The NSD was the framework within which conservative, Christian elites, close to the political and economic power of the country, dominated cultural discourse and policy, and the ways through which Switzerland was culturally represented abroad, most visibly through the establishment of Pro Helvetia (the Swiss Arts Council) as a working group in 1939 and as a foundation in 1948.<sup>5</sup> The NSD would celebrate the Swiss as virtuous, hardworking, God-fearing and rural, with a proclivity for quality and reliability. Apart from being strongly anti-communist, the reference to the Swiss missionary past (and present) fitted perfectly within that construct. It is possible to see parallels with the ideological construct of “the Boer”, in the sense that the Boers, too, used religion to create a national ideology of cohesion in tension with the modernity of industrialisation during the twentieth century. The connection to God and the land, and the anti-communism of the National Party, were shared attributes of both processes of identity formation. Members of the Swiss expatriate colony in South Africa were generally more closely allied to the ideas constituting Boer culture than the perceptions of an English colonial white culture, and became strong defenders of the racial policies of the National Party government.<sup>6</sup>

Sulzer, coming from a religious, evangelical Winterthur trading family, could be called a child of National Spiritual Defence. His deep interest in South African culture and literature

<sup>4</sup> In German: “Geistige Landesverteidigung”; and in French: “Défense Spirituelle Nationale”. The English translation is somewhat problematic due to the polysemy of the word “spiritual”. Here it would be a generalisation of anything related to the mind: cultural, religious, intellectual, etc.

<sup>5</sup> This episode of the NSD, its elite character and its defining role in Swiss cultural foreign policy, is discussed in Claude Hauser, *Entre culture et politique. Pro Helvetia de 1939 à 2009*. Lausanne: Payot, 2010. See also Pauline Milani, *Le diplomate et l'artiste – Construction d'une politique culturelle Suisse à l'étranger (1938–1985)*. Neuchâtel: Alphil, 2013; Matthieu Gillabert, *Dans Les Couloirs de La Diplomatie Culturelle Suisse. Objectifs, Réseaux et Réalisations (1938–1984)*. Neuchâtel: Alphil, 2013; Thomas Kadelbach, “Swiss Made”. *Pro Helvetia et l'Image de La Suisse à l'Étranger*. Neuchâtel: Alphil, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Kreis, *Die Schweiz und Südafrika 1948–1994*, 138–39 and 214.

was enacted through this cultural ideology. From his Swiss perspective, he would mediate South African culture and literature to Swiss and German-speaking audiences for four decades.

The Swiss diplomatic archives show that as early as November 1947, Sulzer wrote a letter to the Swiss consul in Johannesburg, asking about the possibility of employment.<sup>7</sup> In 1949, Sulzer tried to locate a copy of the *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa*, a comprehensive study commissioned and published by the private, liberal South African Institute of Race Relations.<sup>8</sup> He wasn't able to find one, as the only local copy had been borrowed by Reverend Ernst Rippmann, the then head of the Swiss Mission in South Africa, based in Zurich. Sulzer contacted Rippmann and, in Sulzer's words, from that moment onwards Rippmann became his pillar of support for many years with regard to his work on South Africa.<sup>9</sup> It was the *Handbook on Race Relations* that made Sulzer aware of Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*, and it was Rippmann, among others, who suggested that if Sulzer wanted to travel to South Africa to do research, he should explore the thoughts and views of the Black intellectual elite.

Sulzer's initial approach is revealed in this passage in his introduction to *Schwarze Intelligenz*, published in 1955 as a result of his first trip to South Africa in 1952/53:

It is in no way my intention to denounce South Africa, this beautiful country which I have come to love during my journey. My wish is that the only European state on the Black Continent may keep thriving and continue to develop strongly.<sup>10</sup>

This statement derives from the time before the majority of African nations became independent, and shows how Sulzer recognised South Africa as a white, European state, and that the denunciations that implied a "problem" with this understanding were not aligned to his agenda.

Sulzer's most prolific period of work on South Africa was between 1952 and 1964, and coincides both with the post-war period of National Spiritual Defence, and with a period before South Africa became widely stigmatised on account of its racial policies. This changed

<sup>7</sup> File E2200.35-01#1970/193 Vol.6, letter dated 24 November 1947. Bundesarchiv Bern, Switzerland.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Hellmann (ed.), *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa*. Cape Town etc.: Oxford University Press, 1949. The Institute of Race Relations (IRR) was founded in 1929 and is committed to "non-racialism and classical liberalism". In the post-apartheid political context, it has concentrated on opposing labour laws based on race discrimination and the weakening of property rights. See <https://irr.org.za/about-us/history> (accessed July 2025).

<sup>9</sup> This information derives from the personal and unpublished memoirs of Sulzer, in the possession of his family, who kindly shared two pages with the author.

<sup>10</sup> Sulzer, *Schwarze Intelligenz. Ein Literarisch-Politischer Streifzug durch Süd-Afrika*. Zurich: Atlantis-Verlag, 1955, 8. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from German into English are by the present writer.

in the mid-1960s as a result of the Sharpeville massacre, the subsequent development of what is designated grand apartheid, and the wave of political independence that swept the African continent. It also coincides with the period before Sulzer became the director of the Winterthur library. After this period, Sulzer would publish one more anthology, in 1977, and only became more active in the late 1980s and early 1990s, after his retirement.

## Sulzer's Representation of South African Literature

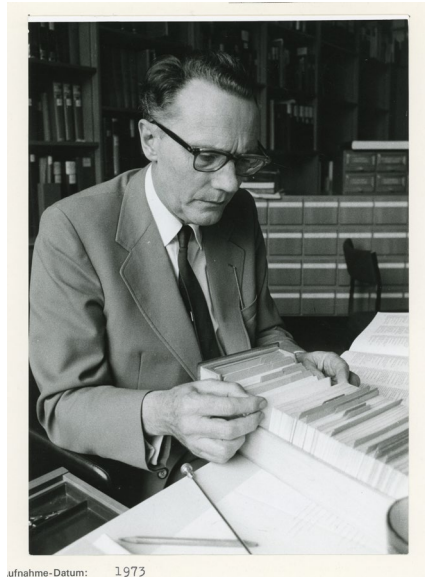


Figure 9.1 Peter Sulzer in his office at the Winterthur City Library. Courtesy of Winterthurer Bibliotheken: [bildarchiv.winterthur.ch](http://bildarchiv.winterthur.ch) / photo Lajos Kotay.

Sulzer's first South African literary project was a translation of Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*, published in 1952 by Manesse Verlag.<sup>11</sup> He made it from the heavily abbreviated English version of 1949,<sup>12</sup> which could hardly have satisfied him, given that he possessed a pronounced literary sensitivity. *Chaka*, to him, was a critical picture of the old, pre-colonial African culture, written by a very eloquent African author schooled by Swiss missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society in Lesotho. This clash of the old rural culture with modernity is at the centre of Sulzer's ideas at the time, which focused on how an essentially rural and pre-modern population might adapt to Western life to find its place in a "white society". His stance reflects the paradox of the missionary endeavour, i.e. the perceived perpetuation of essentialist cultural and developmental differences, and the educational activity aimed at

making the "native" more Western, a process intended to erase these perceived differences.

Sulzer's fascination with this tension was continued in his next project, namely to translate the seminal book *Ingqumbo Yezinyanya* by the eminent Xhosa scholar A.C. Jordan,<sup>13</sup> which the author himself, in collaboration with his wife Phyllis Ntantala, had translated into English as *The Wrath of the Ancestors*. This work also centred around the tension between the old rural culture and the newly acquired Western culture of urbanised Black people.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka, der Zulu: Roman*. Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 1953.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka the Zulu*. London: Oxford University Press, 1949.

<sup>13</sup> A.C. Jordan, *Ingqumbo Yezinyanya*. Lovedale: The Lovedale Press, 1940.

Despite Sulzer's many efforts to find a publisher for his German translation of Jordan's and Ntantala's English translation of this isiXhosa novel, it was never published.<sup>14</sup>

Sulzer had more success with an anthology of Black African writing, *Christ erscheint am Kongo* ("Christ appears in the Congo", 1958), which he published with Eugen Salzer Verlag in Heilbronn,<sup>15</sup> a publisher specialising in books of original German literature and in Christian literature. This anthology fitted the latter category, and its title suggests that Sulzer and many of his contemporaries would conceive of the emergence of an African literature as proving the success of the missionary endeavour.

In these early years, it seems that Sulzer rarely succeeded in establishing strong connections with a Black intellectual elite. He would spend much more time talking about them with white missionaries, writers and professors, than with them. His growing networks with white South Africans, especially Afrikaans speakers, eventually shifted his attention to the field of Afrikaans literature. This became his next focus, resulting in an anthology of mostly white (but also coloured and Black) writers in Afrikaans: *Glut in Afrika* (1961).<sup>16</sup> This publication followed a second research trip to South Africa at the end of 1960, partially funded through a research commission for Artemis Verlag (which published *Glut in Afrika*). Sulzer agreed to research the writing, publishing and trading of books in South Africa for Artemis, and during this trip he compiled information to write a large, two-volume monograph, in his own words his most important work, on South African society as seen through the perspective of Afrikaans writers. Despite efforts that continued until the mid-1990s, this book was never published. One chapter, "Schwarz und Braun in der Afrikaansliteratur" ("Black and brown in Afrikaans literature"), was published separately by the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in 1972.<sup>17</sup> The *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* under the editorship of Hein Willemsse published an English translation of another chapter in 2017.<sup>18</sup> This chapter is about the Black author Arthur Fula, who wrote in Afrikaans and also featured in *Christ erscheint am Kongo* and in *Südafrikaner erzählen*.<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Sulzer had a talent and a passion for the craft of literature, and was able to recognise and appreciate literary quality. He was not indifferent to the formal quality of the writing, and with regard to translations from Sesotho, he was enamoured by

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<sup>14</sup> Correspondence with Raeber Cie. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Sulzer, *Christ erscheint am Kongo: afrikanische Erzählungen und Gedichte*. Heilbronn: Salzer-Verlag, 1958.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Sulzer, *Glut in Afrika: südafrikanische Prosa und Lyrik*. Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1961.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Sulzer, *Schwarz und Braun in der Afrikaansliteratur*. Basel: Basler Afrika-Bibliographien; Schwäbisch Gmünd: Afrika-Verlag Der Kreis bei Lempp, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Sulzer, "Arthur Fula", in *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, 54(1), April 2017, 228–46.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Sulzer, *Südafrikaner erzählen*. Zurich: Gute Schriften, 1963.

the rich imagery of the language. Where other European translations of Sesotho tended to adapt this imagery to Western expectations, Sulzer's German translations were more faithful to the original.<sup>20</sup>

However, much of Sulzer's assessment as to what constituted "good literature", and how to represent it, was primarily concerned with content rather than form or style, and specifically with the psychology of South African race relations as represented through literature. This led him to establish an analytical approach based on classifications and categories. He distinguished between older Afrikaans writers (e.g. Jan van Melle) with a more paternalistic approach, and new writers like Uys Krige (whom he befriended) and Jan Rabie. Whilst van Melle (a Dutch immigrant who often wrote in Dutch but was published in Afrikaans) focused on the hardship of the Boers' rural life and their oppression by the British, Krige and Rabie were important authors in the movement of the Sestigers (progressive Afrikaans writers active in the 1960s), challenging South African norms and taboos at the time. Krige spent some time in Europe and was active in the fight against fascism in Spain, whilst Rabie was a proponent of a stronger African character and influence in Afrikaans literature.<sup>21</sup> In his appreciation of these authors, Sulzer pays special attention to the inner strife and the psychological struggle of their fictional characters. When the writers became too engaged with attacking the injustice and power dynamics of race relations in South Africa, he found that they diverged from what he regarded as their cultural essence.<sup>22</sup> Sulzer also interpreted the ways in which coloured writers dealt with their position of racial subordination as psychological and cultural characteristics, finding in their work a propensity to lament. He writes:

In the prose as well as in the poetry of the Cape coloured [writers], I was always struck by the juxtaposition of two forces working in opposite directions: protest and acceptance, revolt and surrender. The interplay of these two basic forces gives rise to a spiral movement that expresses itself in poetry as a tendency towards the eccentric and takes shape in emotional outbursts and in violent discharges of mental tensions.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Simone Schlegel, *Peter Sulzer. Sein wissenschaftlicher Nachlass und seine Rolle als Vermittler afrikanischer Literatur in der Schweiz*. Seminar: "Die Fremde ordnen. Afrikanische Quellen in Schweizer Archiven". Seminar paper, University of Zurich, 2012, 18.

<sup>21</sup> See Eep Francken, "De onbekendste Nederlandse bestseller Bart Nel, de opstandeling van J. van Melle", in *Tussen twee werelden. Het gevoel van ontheemding in de postkoloniale literatuur*, ed. Theo D'haen and Peter Liebrechts. Leiden: Uitgeverij Meulenhoff, 2001, 37–58, here 49. Also Judy H. Gardner, *Impaired Vision: Portraits of Black Women in the Afrikaans Novel, 1948–1988*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991, 100.

<sup>22</sup> Sulzer, *Schwarz und Braun in der Afrikaansliteratur*, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Sulzer, *Südafrikaner erzählen*, 6.

And then:

The reason for lamenting and accusing is always a feeling of being hurt, of being disadvantaged. Since this feeling seeks expression in lamentation and accusation, the mixed-race poetry in the Cape is almost entirely expressionistic, in contrast to the realistic literature of the Boers, but also in contrast to the realism and self-contained manner of some poets of Black South Africa.<sup>24</sup>

The objectivation of Black people within Sulzer's treatment of race relations, which allows him to ascribe dissent to psychological and cultural characteristics rather than to imposed injustices, is also clear in his description of the characters appearing in South African fictional writing. When it comes to describing these, Sulzer went to great lengths in creating classifications, as in this example:

On the three basic types – "Naturel" (reservation native), "jong" and "meid" ("servant boy" and "maid"), mine boy – six perspectives almost exclusively apply: the primary hostile, the humorous, the aesthetic, the ethnological-sociological, the poetic-subjective, and the intuitive identifying with Africa.

But

The image of the intellectual African is missing from Afrikaans literature.

[...]

Where the Black agitator and his precursor, the "cheeky native", appear, there is usually a connection with the mission school. "Booia", the city boy, is the prototype of the "frustrated native" who has acquired education in the mission school and is then not allowed to apply it in the environment that has become familiar to him. [...]

(The support given by the Ecumenical Council of Churches to the forces in Southern Africa aimed at the overthrow of the existing order gives new food to this view).<sup>25</sup>

These examples point to how Sulzer applied, in his view, a scientific method that attempted to establish a certain authority to his writing. At the same time, these quotations show how he applied his convictions on South African race relations, as evidenced by his perspective on the Ecumenical Council of Churches.

### The Erdmann Anthology of 1977

After a period of relative silence on South African topics (this could be due to his greater attention to research on music, to a bigger workload once he was promoted to director of the Winterthur City Library, and to the frustration of not finding a publisher for *Südafrika*

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<sup>24</sup> Sulzer, *Südafrikaner erzählen*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Sulzer, *Schwarz und Braun in der Afrikaansliteratur*, 23.

in *Spiegel*), Sulzer responded positively to an invitation from the Horst Erdmann Verlag to make a new anthology of South African writing for their series *Moderne Erzähler der Welt* ("Modern storytellers of the world"), funded by the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, a West-German federal government agency tasked, like the Goethe Institute, with international cultural exchange and exposure.<sup>26</sup>

For his anthology, Sulzer adopted the logic of the grand apartheid of the time, which was characterised by the development of Bantustan homelands based on ethnic separation. Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei, Lebowa, Gazankulu and Qwaqwa all obtained nominal self-government between 1972 and 1974.<sup>27</sup> Sulzer's main concern was thus not only to represent literature from white, Black, coloured and Indian authors in English and Afrikaans, but also to provide an example of texts from the languages of ethnic entities: in isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.<sup>28</sup>

Here for the first time, Sulzer also included white authors writing in English. Until now, he had omitted them formally in his anthologies because they were well-known in the Anglophone world of letters, though their omission also meant that he was able to avoid a number of voices more openly critical of apartheid. In this book, however, Sulzer wanted to limit inclusion to authors based in South Africa, arguing that this was necessary for practical reasons, and to represent "... not a reality ideologically drawn from exile or even one that was imagined, merely perceived".<sup>29</sup>

Sulzer wanted to make an exception for the dissident Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach who had lived in France, due to the power of his poetry, the pertinence of the South African experience in his writing, and his stature. A correspondence between Erdman Verlag and the editor of Meulenhoff in Amsterdam, Laurens van Krevelen, acting as Breytenbach's agent (for the writer was at this time imprisoned in Pretoria), reveals an initial reluctance from the author and his agent. Van Krevelen stated that he could not allow the inclusion of Breytenbach's work because the exclusion of other authors in exile implied the exclusion of the strongest voices of opposition to apartheid. Sulzer answered van Krevelen personally, and seems to have convinced both him and Breytenbach to relent:

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<sup>26</sup> Horst Erdmann, who managed the publisher, was given a prison sentence in 1982 for having swindled 1.7 million marks of government funds destined for cultural development work, of which this anthology was a part. See "Türken gebaut", *Der Spiegel*, 3 May 1981.

<sup>27</sup> The Bantustans of KwaNdebele and KaNgwane, intended for the Ndebele and Swati people respectively, were only established after the publication of this anthology. The fact that Sulzer did not include texts in isiNdebele and Siswati reinforces the impression that he followed the logic of apartheid policy in selecting his texts.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Sulzer, *Südafrika, Moderne Erzähler der Welt*. Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1977.

<sup>29</sup> Breytenbach Correspondence, 2 July 1976. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).



When Breyten Breytenbach still was a youngster of 12 years, I travelled round in South Africa to meet African writers and politicians, forming on my own an idea of the problems of Black and Coloured South Africa. I met Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Dr. Xuma, A.C. Jordan and many others in 1952. So I feel I have a certain right to concentrate now again on authors of Black South Africa whose names are still unknown, doing so for them the same as I did for now well known authors at a time when the world was still sleeping safely and soundly snoring away Africa and its problems. I went to South Africa on my own, visited locations (without permit), schools and missions ... and it costed [sic] me a lot of money. Please try to understand me, and give way to the publication of Breyten's chapter from *Seisoen in die Paradys* which is an excellent piece of literature.<sup>30</sup>

The outcome of this appeal was Breytenbach's inclusion, as well as the inclusion of other famous names like André Brink, Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee. Despite the inclusion of these illustrious authors, the Erdmann anthology by Sulzer did not sell well, and was badly received.

In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, Werner Ross wrote a scathing critique, which had the effect of discrediting the book and wiping out any possibility of a commercial success:

Since the series is semi-official, subsidised by the German Foreign Office, the editor, the Swiss Peter Sulzer, considers prudence to be the mother of all virtues and has, for example, simply left aside all emigré authors, Black, brown and white. Otherwise, he says, "there would simply have been no room left for the others in this 400-page volume". He also believes that apartheid has a positive side for the Blacks: "Shying away from making political statements, which has resulted from the controversy over the politics of separate development, has borne positive fruit in that Bantu writers are now increasingly turning to other subjects with success, including their own historical past ... and purely internal, family matters. In this way, they have embarked on a path of self-enlightenment free of political constrictions". They are thus fortunate, according to this perfectly hypocritical sentence, in having been freed from all politics.<sup>31</sup>

The Erdmann anthology illustrates how Sulzer's position had shifted between the mid-1950s, when apartheid was still in an early phase and international condemnation much less vocal, and the 1970s, when the international Anti-Apartheid Movement was firmly established, with important branches set up in French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland. In the 1970s, Sulzer made no mention of any directly critical views on the apartheid laws, and was seemingly a firm believer that Black South Africans belonged in the homelands and that the international campaign against apartheid was communist-inspired foreign agitation by people who neither knew nor understood South African realities. This position echoes that of many of Sulzer's contemporaries, who were often close to the eco-

<sup>30</sup> Breytenbach Correspondence, 5 February 1977. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>31</sup> Werner Ross, "Literatur Afrikaner und Afrikaaner. Eine Anthologie mit südafrikanischen Erzählungen", in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 February 1978, 20.

nomic elite in Switzerland with interests in South Africa, and who founded organisations like the “Club der Freunde Südafrikas” (Club of friends of South Africa). Sulzer became involved in this organisation from its start in 1972 and later also in the “Arbeitsgruppe Südliches Afrika” (Working group for Southern Africa, “asa”), which was established in 1982, just at the time when he retired. He also travelled again to South Africa during the 1980s, either with the asa or with friends from Winterthur. He visited old friends from his previous travels, and made use of his connections with the South African embassy in Bern. It was at this time that Sulzer also returned to translation. He now translated another four novels from four different South African languages, of which three were published. After finally being able to go back to the original Sesotho text of *Chaka*, he managed to translate it from the unabridged original, also relying on the work done in the meantime by Daniel Kunene (who published a new English translation with annotations in 1981)<sup>32</sup> and Chris Swanepoel, who published the first Afrikaans translation under the title *Tjhaka* in 1974,<sup>33</sup> and with whom Sulzer became friends. Subsequently, the Unionsverlag commissioned Sulzer to translate the Afrikaans novel *Toorberg* by Etienne van Heerden, which was published in German as *Geisterberg* in 1993.<sup>34</sup> Sulzer’s last published translation was the more historical *Shaka* from the 1937 isiZulu original by R.R.R. Dhlomo, published in Cologne in 1994.<sup>35</sup> The very last translation by Sulzer that is mentioned in his correspondence was by the most famous author to write in Sepedi, Oliver Kgadime Matsepe, namely *Kgorong ya Mosate* (“At the Court of the King”, 1962; in Sulzer *Am Hof des Häuptlings*), which Sulzer finished by the late 1990s but never published.<sup>36</sup>

It is striking how even in the late 1980s and 1990s, after all the tumultuous events over the decades since the start of his engagement with South Africa in 1952, Sulzer retained a focus on old Black literature that dealt principally with pre-colonial references to rural Black life. It is also not entirely surprising that his publications sold only very few copies, and that despite efforts to rewrite *Südafrika im Spiegel der Afrikaansliteratur* under a new title, focusing on the Sestigers, he was unable to find a publisher.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See also Daniel P. Kunene, *Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989; Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1981.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Mofolo and Chris F. Swanepoel, *Tjhaka*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1974.

<sup>34</sup> Etienne van Heerden, *Toorberg*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1986; translated into German by Peter Sulzer as *Geisterberg*. Zurich: Unionsverlag, 1993.

<sup>35</sup> Rolfes Robert Reginald Dhlomo, and Peter Sulzer, *Ushaka: mit Einem Nachwort von Peter Sulzer*. Cologne: Rüdiger Koppe Verlag, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Correspondence with the South African Embassy, Bern. Letter to Anita Meister, 26 March 2003. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>37</sup> Correspondence with Etienne Britz, 6 December 1993. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

## Two Other Swiss African Literature Specialists – Elisabeth Schnack and Al Imfeld

Sulzer was not the only Swiss literary figure interested in South African literature during apartheid. The most visible mediator of African literature in German in the 1950s and 1960s was the German Janheinz Jahn (1918–1973). In Switzerland, Diogenes Verlag published an important anthology of South African literature in 1962, edited by Elisabeth Schnack, and entitled *Das Grüne Gnu und andere Erzählungen aus Südafrika*. Diogenes was developing a series of anthologies of books from the African continent and asked Sulzer to do one about South Africa. He had to decline, as he was travelling, and was busy with his book *Glut in Afrika* and writing *Südafrika im Spiegel der Afrikaansliteratur*. So Diogenes contacted Elisabeth Schnack, a prolific professional translator of literature from English into German, who had already translated various South African works (her translation of Peter Abrahams's 1950 novel *Wild Conquest*, for example, had been published as a serial in the *NZZ* in June and July 1952 under the title *Wilder Weg*).

Schnack contacted Sulzer, and he gave her permission to use some of his translations from Afrikaans and Sesotho. The communication between the two became rather acrimonious, however. Sulzer had insisted on a multitude of corrections in his Afrikaans translations just before Schnack's book was typeset, to the despair of Schnack and her editor. Sulzer and Schnack also argued about linguistic details, as for instance when she described the word "Mädel" (for "girl") as rather "Nazideutsch",<sup>38</sup> an opinion with which he strongly disagreed.<sup>39</sup>

Fundamentally, this disagreement intimated a difference in opinion regarding South African race relations. Schnack was not an anti-apartheid activist, but she did display a greater recognition of the deep injustice that was imposed on the basis of race in South Africa. She complained, however, that when Black South African writers focused too much on their anger and the injustice, the aesthetic quality of their literature deteriorated:

But other voices are also heard: "Is it necessary for us to justify our desire for freedom? And if so, to whom are we responsible? By whose standards should we be judged?". These are no longer oblivious voices, but self-confident voices. And nothing is as unappealing as self-righteousness, nothing as dangerous as when these thoughts are elevated to a cult.<sup>40</sup>

This citation is from a long article Schnack published in the *NZZ* in 1962, promoting *Das Grüne Gnu*. Despite her mild criticism of the South African racial context, the cultural attaché of the South African embassy at the time, Deneys Rhodie, wrote a three-page letter to

<sup>38</sup> It probably reminded Schnack of the name of the Nazi youth movement for girls, the "Bund Deutscher Mädel". However, the word "Mädel" – meaning simply "girl" or "lass" – would arguably not have had the same negative connotations for a Swiss.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence with Diogenes Verlag, 27 July 1962. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>40</sup> Elisabeth Schnack, "Erzählkunst in Südafrika", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 14 October 1962, 17–18.

Sulzer, complaining about Schnack's comments about South African racial dynamics.<sup>41</sup> This reveals that as early as 1962, there existed a significant level of trust and complicity between Sulzer in his campaign to win Swiss souls for the National Party's version of South Africa, and the people responsible for propaganda at the embassy in Bern.

The most important, critical Swiss voice on South African literature during the apartheid period belonged to the theologian Al Imfeld (1935–2017). Imfeld had wider geographical interests than South Africa, and wrote about authors from the whole African continent. He also had a significant interest in African liberation movements, especially from the early 1980s onwards. He published on South African literature, and wrote more extensively about not only the latterday significance of *Chaka* by Mofolo as a book of resistance to white rule, but also about the position of Mofolo in his time, as someone who wrote an implicit critique of colonial rule and whose voice as a writer after *Chaka* was therefore largely silenced by missionary and white publishing institutions. Imfeld wrote:

However, both Sulzer in his biographical epilogue to the German *Chaka* and Jahn in *Muntu, Umrisse der neoafrikanischen Kultur* either remain too attached to the individualistic and evade politics or are too influenced by Mofolo's two preceding stories. It seems to me that both saw in him a pupil of the mission rather than a rebel; a religious pilgrim rather than a man hounded and hunted by the system; a man who harmonised rather than one who tore open unresolved contradictions.<sup>42</sup>

Imfeld labelled Sulzer and Schnack "liberals", and then distanced himself from them through a critique of liberalism:

Like Schnack, Sulzer is not "ill meaning", but very interested, sympathetic, patriarchal, like a father to people who simply have to learn to wait, because no one can have everything at once ... Chaka's way cannot be the [right] way, for it is "bloodthirsty". This is all true, but in contrast, the black man wants to dismiss white hypocrisy or an acknowledgement that the white story is also bloodthirsty and full of violence. Here again we are at the intersection and focus of liberalism, which likes to speak of the "clash between old and new cultures", but not of the class struggle or the degrading drudgery of workers in the mines, the restriction of movement by the pass system, the shunting around of male workers according to economic needs, and not simply fatalistically joining a "stream to the city". These cultures are all old and new because they are always in flux. Boer culture, just like the culture of the black peoples, is full of traditions, old, outdated, new in the making, defensive, waiting, tentatively grasping, moving on, visionary, illusionistic, utopian and petty bourgeois. Driving a wedge between white and black

<sup>41</sup> Correspondence with South African Embassy, Bern. Letter, 17 October 1962. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>42</sup> Al Imfeld, *Vision und Waffe: Afrikanische Autoren, Themen, Traditionen*. Zurich: Unionsverlag, 1981, 16.

is pointless because this separation, division, apartheid or bantustanisation has no basis in “aesthetics” but only in power.<sup>43</sup>

The correspondence between Sulzer and Imfeld was limited, not very generous, and at times acrimonious.<sup>44</sup>

## The Representation of South African Race Relations through Literature

I am particularly pleased with your comment on p. 47 that racial issues are sometimes better reflected in the form of novels and novellas than in purely factual books and that therefore scholarship must take fiction into account to a large extent.<sup>45</sup>

Peter Sulzer in a letter to Wahrhold Drascher, 1958

Sulzer’s view on South African race dynamics evolved from a perspective showing understanding and empathy with Black aspirations, including qualified criticism of legal racial segregation,<sup>46</sup> towards a hardened defence of apartheid that entailed accusing the detractors of apartheid South Africa of being communist-inspired agitators with no knowledge of the reality of the country. His work contains no reference to working conditions or the labour relations of Black workers.

Just like the Swiss ambassador Franz Kappeler during his tenure from 1956 to 1963 (the period when the first Bantustans were being created), Sulzer had a great belief in the National Party government’s idea of establishing viable structures of political self-government and economic development for Black South Africans, which in practice meant allotting them a small percentage of South African territory comprising scattered bits and pieces of land. These fragments were to be given “autonomy” as multiple pseudo-independent nations (Bantustans).

In *Schwarze Intelligenz*, the focus was largely on what Sulzer called the disillusionment of Black people with the capacity of white people to lead them. According to Sulzer, assistance and guidance from the supposedly more capable whites could help Black people to advance. But his analysis also admitted that any such trust was being abused to the detriment of Black people due to the self-interest of the whites. Sulzer called it the “plight” of the

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<sup>43</sup> Al Imfeld Archiv at Stiftung Litar, D-15-01-j. Manuscript “Das Gesicht des Liberalismus”, 31 October 1989; the manuscript contains the remark “New version [made] one year later”.

<sup>44</sup> Correspondence with Al Imfeld. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>45</sup> Correspondence with Wahrhold Drascher. Letter from Sulzer to Drascher, 16 June 1958. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>46</sup> Peter Sulzer, “Der Rassenkampf in Südafrika”, in *St Galler Tagblatt*, 14 November 1952.

white man in their interactions with Blacks to understand them, apply humanist principles, and strive to help them to achieve a better life.<sup>47</sup> He clarified his vision on the white claim to Africa (and thus also to South Africa) as follows:

In Africa, we have since time immemorial been engaged in plunder. It was the hunting ground of traders in ivory, fur and slaves, and today it is the playground of gold and uranium diggers, photographers, journalists and writers. Africa is the natural object of the scientist, the merchant, the cameraman, the man of letters. One enriches oneself with it, uses the cheap labour of its people and loses their affection and respect. But the task of our time regarding Africa is no longer to ask: what can I gain in Africa? But: how do I win over the African?

And:

By “encounters”, I do not mean at all the elimination of social barriers between representatives of different skin colours; on the contrary: one becomes aware of the differences of race in the process.<sup>48</sup>

Sulzer strongly identified with white South African culture, which seemed based on a commonality of whiteness, and in the European descent of white South Africans. For him, white South Africans belonged to the cultural descriptor “abendländisch”, namely “Western”. To Sulzer (as to many others of his time, like the Swiss Ambassador Franz Kappeler), people became “cultured” when they were proselytised and educated according to the customs of the West. Until that was achieved, they were “barbaric” and uncultured, living in “old” Africa (“Altafrika”). Western culture was thus not only the culture of white South Africa; it was white Western culture in general, and also Sulzer’s culture. He therefore had no difficulty in speaking of “our” culture and in including white South African culture within it. In his criticism of white South African authors who had gone “too far” in criticising race relations in South Africa, he wrote:

And so it seems to me that the Afrikaner is once again one step behind. Twenty years ago, when he could have taken the nascent development in hand, he closed himself off to what was new. Today, however, when his firmness is needed in the fight against the self-destruction of our culture, he is beginning to lose his mind.<sup>49</sup>

### Peter Sulzer’s Networks

Surveying five decades of Sulzer’s work on South African literature, it is tempting to view him as a singular, solitary character, working according to a highly personal logic, and failing to reach the large readership he wished for. This is partially true, and his somewhat

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<sup>47</sup> Sulzer, *Schwarze Intelligenz*, 39–45.

<sup>48</sup> Sulzer, *Schwarze Intelligenz*, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Sulzer, *Schwarz und Braun in der Afrikaansliteratur*, 33–34.

recalcitrant conservative position would have contributed to this after the mid-1960s, when the liberation movements enjoyed increasing support.

However, Sulzer also created important networks. His work was highly regarded in certain circles, which in turn had a significant impact on the ways in which South Africa was perceived in Switzerland and in Europe. His extensive correspondence held in the archives of the Winterthur City Library reveals a network of people with whom he corresponded frequently and in depth, often confiding positions and opinions on the situation in South Africa.

In his early engagement with South Africa, Sulzer approached South African race relations through the work of the missionaries. Later, he engaged with a white South African elite, with whom he cultivated contacts for his journalistic work, and later for his work on Afrikaans culture. Related to this network, he also engaged with a European conservative elite that had a significant impact on Cold-War thinking in Europe.

Sulzer developed a much closer relationship with the South African embassy in Bern than with Swiss diplomats in South Africa. In his later years, he became actively involved in several Swiss friendship organisations focused on South Africa. These saw it as their mission to “rectify” what they perceived as inaccuracies in the European public discourse, particularly regarding the generalised condemnation of South Africa’s race policies.

Ernst Rippmann could be described as a liberal theologian who was concerned with the plight of Black workers in South Africa. Rippmann travelled there in 1934 after being appointed head of the Swiss Mission in South Africa. On the basis of that experience, he wrote a book which could be seen as a type of predecessor to *Schwarze Intelligenz*, entitled *Weisses und schwarzes Südafrika heute und morgen* (*White and Black South Africa, Today and Tomorrow*).<sup>50</sup> Although Rippmann was critical of South Africa’s racialised labour relations, he was clearly convinced that the people of South Africa should be separated according to racial classification, and that there should be separate residential areas and separate education for white and Black people. The Swiss missionaries had a long history of opposing Boer aggression against Africans, and of promoting a form of self-determination.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, the missions, and especially the Paris Evangelical Mission in Lesotho at Morija,<sup>52</sup> had created a tradition of publishing African literature, thus providing a basis for what we know today as a literary tradition in Bantu languages.

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<sup>50</sup> Ernst Rippmann, *Weisses und schwarzes Südafrika heute und morgen*. Zurich: Wandererverlag, 1936.

<sup>51</sup> See for instance Tim Couzens, *Murder at Morija*. Johannesburg: Random House, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> The Scottish Lovedale Mission, located in the town of Alice, later became Fort Hare University, and had a significant literary production. Sulzer visited both Morija and Lovedale on his 1952/3 trip, during which he interviewed many writers and intellectuals. He included references to many of them in *Schwarze Intelligenz*. See also the chapter by Lineo Segoete in this book.



After the publication of *Schwarze Intelligenz*, corresponding with the missionaries became less important to Sulzer. The role of the missionaries also dwindled when the South African government nationalised the mission schools from the 1950s onwards and later also the mission hospitals in the early 1970s.<sup>53</sup> In preparing for his trip to South Africa in 1961 sponsored by Artemis Verlag, Sulzer wrote to a number of individuals who had influential networks that could assist him in researching the position of white South Africans (and especially the Boers) in relation to issues of race. One of the intellectuals he contacted and with whom he initiated an intense correspondence of mutual respect and like-mindedness was the German professor Wahrhold Drascher. Drascher had published a book entitled *Die Vorherrschaft der weissen Rasse* (*The supremacy of the white race*) in 1937, which earned him an appointment as a professor in *Auslandskunde und Kolonialwissenschaften* (Foreign Studies and Colonial Studies) at the University of Tübingen in 1939. Paradoxically, his description of the superiority of the white race as a whole, and the importance of maintaining unity within the white race to maintain its domination, was contrary to the Nazi ideology of the time, and the book was banned. This banning assisted Drascher in being rehabilitated after World War II, and he was allowed to retain his position at the University of Tübingen as professor in Foreign Studies until his retirement as professor emeritus in the early 1960s. Drascher spent a few years in Southern Africa, where he established a wide network of intellectuals and policy makers. In 1960 he published a book on the end of colonialism, *Schuld der Weissen?* (*Is the white man to blame?*) which was widely read and reviewed, also in South Africa. Sulzer wrote a glowing review about this book for the *NZZ*.<sup>54</sup> He admired Drascher's basic analysis that decolonisation resulted from the loss of faith by "non-white people" in white rulers, after having seen them slaughter each other on the battlefields of World War II. This loss of faith, Drascher maintained, was used by communists to impose a false ideology of blame on "the white man", whilst the colonial endeavour in fact contributed positively to the development of colonised territories. Sulzer and Drascher got along well, and early in 1960, Drascher visited Sulzer at his Winterthur home.<sup>55</sup>

Drascher was one of the speakers at the conference organised by the Institut für Auslandsforschung (SIAF) in Zurich in June 1964, along with fellow prominent conservative thinkers like Wilhelm Röpke, Thomas Molnar, Erik von Kühnelt-Leddihn and the former Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (from 1956 until the end of 1963), Roy Welensky. The series of lectures presented in the summer semester was entitled

<sup>53</sup> Caroline Jeannerat et al., *Embroided: Swiss Churches, South Africa and Apartheid*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011, 105–113 and 131–141.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Sulzer, "Schuld der Weissen?", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 27 August 1960.

<sup>55</sup> Correspondence with Wahrhold Drascher. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

“Aktuelle Probleme Afrikas” (Current problems in Africa) and took place at ETH Zurich between 4 May and 29 June 1964.

Drascher invited both Sulzer and Hans Jenny to attend his lecture on 15 June and to go to the supper that followed it. It was at this event that Sulzer became acquainted with the head of the SIAF, Albert Hunold,<sup>56</sup> and his third wife, Maximiliane née Braunschmidt. Sulzer spoke at length about his work, and Albert Hunold subsequently asked to borrow some of Sulzer’s publications. Maximiliane requested Sulzer’s bibliography so that she might buy some of his books as a birthday present for her husband. Hunold then invited Sulzer to the second season of a series of readings about Africa that was organised by SIAF. Sulzer accepted this invitation gladly and suggested that he should speak about a chapter of his book *Schwarze Intelligenz* entitled “Bantu und Buren” (“Bantu and Boers”). This lecture was planned for February 1965.

This connects Sulzer to the network around the neo-liberal thinktank of Mont Pèlerin as well as to the movement of Moral Re-Armament that gathered in Caux, a few kilometres east of Mont Pèlerin.<sup>57</sup> Hans Jenny spent many decades in South Africa and wrote various apologetic books about the country and its policies.<sup>58</sup> In 1968 he and his wife founded the Stiftung für Abendländische Besinnung, which organisation was also a member of the Wilhelm Röpke Gesellschaft, another Swiss organisation of a conservative economic elite, which promoted neo-liberal ideologies against criticism from the left.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Correspondence with Albert Hunold / SIAF Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>57</sup> The Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) was a highly influential neo-liberal thinktank created at the end of World War 2 on the initiative of important neo-liberal ideologues like the Austrian Friedrich August von Hayek (the later Nobel Laureate). The Moral Rearmament Movement was a broad movement created by the American Reverend Frank Buchman that established its European base in Switzerland and was a central voice in the strong Swiss anti-communist movement. A few scholars have recently researched extensively on the role of the Moral Rearmament Movement. See in this regard Audrey Bonvin, *L’utopie conservatrice du “Réarmement moral”: discours et mutations d’un mouvement international (1961–2001)*. Neuchâtel: Alphil, 2024; Cyril Michaud, “For God’s sake, wake up! Le Réarmement moral sur le sol helvétique (1932–1969). Une internationale des croyants face au spectre communiste. Organisation, réseaux et militance”. Doctoral thesis, Université de Lausanne, 2021.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. Hans Jenny, *Das neue Afrika. Kontinent im Umbruch*. Zurich: Edition Interfrom, 1980; Hans Jenny, *Afrika: woher? wohin? Reisen, Begegnungen, Gedanken*. Bern: Kümmerly & Frey, 1988; Hans Jenny, *Südafrika. Vom Chaos zur Versöhnung. 20 Essays*. Herford: Busse & Seewald Verlag, 1992.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Niggli et al., *Die Unheimlichen Patrioten*. Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 1979, 406–407. The *Stiftung für Abendländische Besinnung* (Foundation for Western reflection, in 2005 renamed *Stifting für Abendländische Ethik und Kultur*, the Foundation for Western ethics and culture) supports people who promote western thought and culture, most visibly with its yearly prize that is named after the Foundation. The Wilhelm Röpke Society existed for only a few years in the early 1970s and was set up to spread the ideas of the famous neo-liberal economist Wilhelm Röpke, who had been a founding member of the Mont Pèlerin Society.

Sulzer had good contacts with the South African embassy in the early 1960s, as evidenced by his abovementioned dialogue with the press attaché Deneys Rhoodie about Elisabeth Schnack. These relationships became closer and more productive over the years. Sulzer would send the embassy his books and writings and would also ask them for materials for his research. The embassy hosted a press attaché working for the State Information Office from the late 1950s onwards. It is this organisation that developed a wide campaign, largely illicitly funded, of propaganda throughout the world, including Switzerland, which eventually led to the Muldergate Scandal.<sup>60</sup> It seems highly likely that Sulzer was instrumentalised in this propaganda machine, and that he participated knowingly and willingly.<sup>61</sup> Like Drascher, the Information Attachés of the South African Embassy received invitations for supper at Sulzer's home.

In 1976, the Information Attaché Albert Warnich sent information about the Transkei to Sulzer at his request when he was preparing an article for the *NZZ* on this first autonomous Bantustan. In his letter, Warnich asked Sulzer to make sure to mention the *Bantoe Belegingskorporasie* ("Bantu Investment Corporation") in his article to show how the South African government was making an effort to assist the economic development of the Transkei. Sulzer's article was published during his holiday, and when he returned, he was angered by the way the *NZZ* had edited it down to the extent of it no longer being something that he could let stand under his name. He subsequently sent a copy of his original article in manuscript to Warnich to ensure that his relationship with the Embassy was not damaged.<sup>62</sup> By this time, Sulzer was in full alignment with the South African Embassy, and his relationship with the South African officials in Bern was one of mutual interest and benefit. The independence and credibility of Sulzer's voice during this time was therefore compromised.

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<sup>60</sup> This scandal was brought to light in 1977 by two journalists who revealed how millions of rands had been channelled from a defence budget to the propaganda machine of the state, without parliamentary scrutiny, under information minister Connie Mulder. It led to the sacking of Mulder and eventually to the demise of Prime Minister John Vorster. See e.g. Ron N. Nixon, *Selling apartheid: South Africa's global propaganda war*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2015. Deneys Rhoodie's brother Eschel Rhoodie (1933–1993) was the Public Relations Officer and Secretary of the South African Department of Information in the 1970s and deeply involved in this illicit propaganda campaign.

<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, for most of the period that Sulzer communicated with the Embassy, there was simultaneously an Information Councillor ("Informationsrat") and an Information or Press Attaché ("Informationsattaché"). It is likely that they performed the same functions but had different management reporting structures. One can assume that the Attaché reported to Foreign Affairs, while the Information Councillor reported to the State Information Office or Information Department.

<sup>62</sup> Correspondence with the South African Embassy, Bern. Letters of 16 September 1976 and 2 November 1976. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

Sulzer's correspondence held in Winterthur confirms that his journey to South Africa in 1974, in preparation for the compilation of his Erdmann anthology, was supported by the South African Department of Education.<sup>63</sup> This arrangement, which entailed Sulzer giving a series of lectures on Black South African literature, happened when the campaign to legitimise the policy of establishing Bantustans was at its height. The fact that a European scholar specialised in literature in various Bantu languages was delivering a series of lectures reinforcing the thinking behind this policy would have been very useful for the propaganda of the South African government.

The Erdmann anthology itself was funded by the West-German government, which had enjoyed a functioning cultural agreement with South Africa since 1962 that was not suspended until 1985. Investigating the extent to which the German and/or South African governments assisted Sulzer's travels, research, lectures and the publication of his anthology will have to remain a topic for future archival research.

It seems likely that some of the public relations work undertaken by organisations like the *Club der Freunde Südafrikas* and the *Arbeitsgruppe Südliches Afrika* would also have received support through the propaganda budget of the South African Embassy in Bern.<sup>64</sup> Sulzer was an active member of both the CFS and the asa, and in the 1980s would assist in setting up the itinerary and programme for the group travel organised by the asa. He was also a regular contributor to the bulletin of the asa, though the articles he contributed were not always signed. The exact extent of Sulzer's role in these organisations, and the Swiss networks that he nurtured through them, remain to be determined.

## Epilogue

As Georg Kreis's research has shown, the run-up to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 divided public opinion in Switzerland. It seems that it was impossible to remain neutral regarding South Africa; one either had a clear position against apartheid, or one defended it against its detractors.<sup>65</sup> Peter Sulzer's engagement with South African literature from the 1950s through to the early 1990s presents a compelling yet complex portrait

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<sup>63</sup> Correspondence with the South African Embassy, Bern. Letter to Michiel C. Botha, 12 December 1977. Special Collections of the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland. Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009).

<sup>64</sup> Annina Clavadetscher, "Die Arbeitsgruppe südliches Afrika (1982–1992): unabhängiger Informationsdienst oder Sprachrohr des Apartheidregimes in der Schweiz?" Master thesis, University of Bern, Philosophisch-historische Fakultät, 2019, 93. See also Annina Clavadetscher, "Südafrika-Propagandist oder 'Nostalgie-Club'? Die Aktivitäten des Clubs der Freunde Südafrikas zwischen 1973 und 1994". Seminar paper, University of Bern, Philosophisch-historische Fakultät, 2016, 21 and 27.

<sup>65</sup> Kreis, *Die Schweiz und Südafrika 1948–1994*, 222–226.

of cultural mediation defined by personal conviction, ideological commitments, and changing global circumstances. Initially marked by curiosity and a cautious empathy towards the complexities of South African race relations, Sulzer's work evolved into a robust, and increasingly defensive, alignment with the apartheid state's justifications. His early forays into translation and literary analysis reflected an interest in fostering understanding. But over time, these efforts became intertwined with Switzerland's broader conservative and economic interests in South Africa.

Sulzer's enduring network with Swiss and South African conservative elites underpinned much of his later work, contributing to a narrative that both engaged with the perspectives of white, European-descended South Africans and reinforced them. This ideological shift is evident in his anthologies and analyses. Despite including a broad spectrum of voices, Sulzer often muted or filtered the most critical and subversive elements among them. His resistance to broader anti-apartheid sentiments mirrored the reluctance of Switzerland's political and economic circles to sever their deep ties with South Africa, underscoring the intersection of personal and national interests.

As a cultural bridge, Sulzer's legacy is not simply one of literary dissemination but of selective representation. His translations and commentary offered German-speaking audiences a curated view of South African literature – one that both preserved the voices of various racial groups and subjected them to the conservative cultural lens that framed his work. This duality – of passionate advocacy for literature and alignment with the ideologies of the status quo – highlights the tension between art as a vehicle for understanding and art as a tool for reinforcing prevailing power structures.

By the time that democratic change came to South Africa in 1994, Sulzer's lifelong project had lost some of its relevance. The legacy he left behind has thus become a testament to the delicate role of cultural mediators who must navigate the shifting sands of political legitimacy and artistic integrity. Sulzer's career reflects the compromises and convictions that shape cross-cultural understanding within a charged political framework, offering a unique, albeit contested, window into the Swiss-South African cultural and ideological nexus of his time.

## 10 Swiss Literature in Afrikaans between 1948 and 1994: An Overview

Paula Fourie

### I

In 1929, Gottfried Keller's *Kleider machen Leute* was published in Afrikaans as *Vere Maak die Voël*.<sup>1</sup> Translated by Antoinette Elizabeth Carinus, a writer known for her children's verses and translations of continental theatre for early Afrikaans touring companies, it was the first instance of Swiss literature translated into Afrikaans. In 1945 and 1947, the schoolteacher and translator Francois J. Eybers published the first Afrikaans edition of Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*.<sup>2</sup> Several competing translations would follow in the second half of the twentieth century, ensuring that the Afrikaans child could encounter the most famous German-language Swiss work in their mother tongue.<sup>3</sup> But this was still only the beginning of cultural transmission from Switzerland to South Africa in the form of translated literature. From 1960 onwards, there was a noticeable uptick as novels and plays by Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch were translated into Afrikaans.

These translations were the subject of my postdoctoral project.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of my research, only half a dozen translations of Dürrenmatt and Frisch were known to me, though it quickly became apparent that there were many more. Trawling second-hand bookshops, scouring the open-access *Encyclopaedia of South African Theatre, Film, Media and Performance (ESAT)*, consulting the archives of apartheid South Africa's four Performing Arts Councils (established in 1963 to replace the National Theatre Organization) and interviewing their surviving artistic and administrative heads, I added one title after another. Nearly four years later, my project ended up including seventeen translations: six novels and ten plays. Three of the plays were even translated more than once, offering the tantalising

<sup>1</sup> Gottfried Keller, *Vere Maak die Voël*, translated by A.E. Carinus. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Johanna Spyri, *Heidi*, translated by F.J. Eybers. Pretoria: Unie Boekhandel Uitgewers, 1945; Johanna Spyri, *Heidi: Deel II*, translated by F.J. Eybers. Pretoria: Unie Boekhandel Uitgewers, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Johanna Spyri, *Heidi*, adapted by Florence Hayes, illustrated by Erika Weihs, translated by Bartho Smit. Publisher unknown, 1955; see also Johanna Spyri, *Heidi*, translated by Pieter W. Grobbelaar. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> The result of this project, since complete, is a book entitled *Those Who Have Eyes Will See*. Woodbrige: The Boydell Press, in press.

ing possibility of investigating changing attitudes towards translation over time. Provided, that is, I was able to locate the Afrikaans texts in question.

Thanks to a lively trade in second-hand Afrikaans books, I was able to find the texts of all six translated novels: Dürrenmatt's *Das Versprechen* (translated by Peter Blum as *Die Belofte*, 1960), *Die Panne* (translated by Bartho Smit as *Teenspoed*, 1961), *Der Verdacht* (translated by André Rossouw as *Die Prooi*, 1964), *Der Richter und sein Henker* (translated by André Rossouw and Daan Retief as *Die Regter en Sy Laksman*, 1964) and *Grieche sucht Griechin* (translated by Wilhelm Grütter as *Griek Soek Vrou*, 1964), as well as Frisch's *Stiller* (translated by Mauritz Preller as *Ek is Nie Hy Nie*, 1966).

The only playscript that was commercially published is Bartho Smit's translation of Dürrenmatt's *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (*Die Besoek van die Ou Dame*, 1962). Finding the rest has provided one of the challenges of this research project, due, in no small part, to the general neglect suffered by many South African archives.<sup>5</sup> But it is also due to the fact that nearly all the translators are dead, while the actors, directors, designers and arts administrators who were involved in staging them are old and often have little to no recall of specific productions.<sup>6</sup> The scripts that have reached me have thus done so haphazardly, and through various avenues.

The Afrikaans translation of Frisch's *Andorra* by Ants Kirsipuu and Wilma Stockenström (*Andorra*, 1964) was known to me at the outset. I found Pieter Fourie's Afrikaans translation of Dürrenmatt's *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* (*Die Huwelik van Mnr. Mississippi*, 1972) in the National Drama Library in Bloemfontein. Leonora Nel's stage adaptation of Bartho Smit's translation of Dürrenmatt's *Die Panne* (*Teenspoed*, 1962), and Merwe

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<sup>5</sup> The historical papers held by the Performing Arts Council of the Free State (PACOFs) were lost in 2008 to water damage, for example, while the archives of the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) are undigitised, unsorted, and incomplete.

<sup>6</sup> My interview with Pieter Fourie, the artistic head of CAPAB Drama from 1968 to 1983, contains few remembered details of either the Afrikaans *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi*, which he translated in 1972, or the Afrikaans *Biedermann und die Brandstifter*, which he directed in 1978. Mannie Manim, the technical director of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre when the Afrikaans *Der Besuch der alten Dame* was staged there in 1962, remembers nothing about the production itself, nor about the Afrikaans *Andorra* staged by the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) in 1973, even though he was their administrative head and the show's lighting designer. Cobus Rossouw, who played the lead role of Andri in *Andorra* in Schiess's production in 1964, can't remember much about the production except that he was in it, nor about staging the same play at the Performing Arts Council of the Free State later that same year. Other potential interviewees, like the 90-year-old writer Wilma Stockenström who translated *Andorra*, declined to be interviewed entirely and only communicated that she was not involved in the translation at all, despite being co-credited on the script with her (now deceased) husband Ants Kirsipuu. Pieter Fourie, interview with the author, 16 October 2020; Mannie Manim, interview with the author, 27 November 2020; Cobus Rossouw, telephone conversation with the author, 29 March 2023; Louise Viljoen, e-mail correspondence with the author, 27 February 2019.



Scholtz's translation of Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (*Die Brandstifter*, 1978) were provided by South Africa's Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (DAL-RO). Nerina Ferreira's translation of Frisch's *Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie* (*Don Juan of die Liefde vir die Meetkunde*, 1974) was provided by Danie Stander, a researcher who recently concluded his own postdoctoral research on Ferreira. Thanks to programmes, newspaper clippings and oral testimony from author interviews, I know where and when all these plays were staged.



Figure 10.1. The cover of the programme book for Merwe Scholtz's translation of Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter*, staged by CAPAB in the Nico Malan Theatre in 1978, directed by Pieter Fourie. Private collection.

I am still missing the Afrikaans texts for some of the other translations I have become aware of, specifically those staged by the Swiss immigrant Mario Schiess. It was Schiess who was responsible for the first presentation of a Swiss play in South Africa when he staged *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* in German in 1961 in Pretoria. As a theatre director working with the amateur Volksteater, Schiess was to become a driving force behind many of the first Afrikaans translations. Newspaper clippings and programme fragments in his private archive indicate that he staged a total of five Afrikaans translations in the 1960s. Of these, only an Afrikaans *Andorra* is in my possession. To find the remaining scripts, another translation of Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (*Die Brandstifters*, 1962) and translations of three Dürrenmatt plays – *Die Physiker* (*Die Fisici*, 1963), *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* (*Die Huwelik van Mnr. Mississippi*, 1966) and *Der Meteor* (*Die Meteor*, 1967), I am still searching amongst the papers in his private archive as well in the National Archives in Pretoria, where the Volksteater materials are kept as part of the former SENSAT (Sentrum vir Suid-Afrikaanse Teaternavorsing) collection.



Figure 10.2. Max Frisch (left) and Friedrich Dürrenmatt (right) in the Kronenhalle restaurant in Zurich, 1963. Photographer: Jack Metzler. ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Com\_L12-0059-0008-0021. Creative Commons.

I am also missing the texts of other translations that I know about only through singular mentions in archives or newspaper clippings. One of these is the Afrikaans radio drama *Skemeraand in Laatherfs*, a translation by S.J. Pretorius of Dürrenmatt's *Abendstunde im Spätherbst* (*Episode on an Autumn Evening*) that was reported on by *The Argus* on 1 October 1973.<sup>7</sup> Another is *Biografie: Ein Spiel*, whose existence in Afrikaans is documented only by a record card in the archives of Suhrkamp Verlag showing that the rights to produce it as *Biografie* were given to Aart de Villiers in 1969, and that it was performed the following year.

In the case of still other translations, the situation is reversed and all that I have is a script. Recently, Petrus du Preez from the Drama Department at Stellenbosch University found among the department's papers an Afrikaans translation of Dürrenmatt's *Der Mitmacher: Eine Komödie* by G. H. Hesse entitled *Die Medepligtige: 'n Komedie*. It bears the logo of the University of Pretoria, but there is no mention of this play in their record of productions held from 1965 to 1997. In a similar case, Temple Hauptfleisch, the founder and chief editor of *ESAT*, sent me an undated and anonymous script entitled *Jan Alleman en die Saboteurs*, yet another Afrikaans translation of *Biedermann und die Brandstifter*. The performance history of both translations, if any, is still completely unknown.

## II

From this fragmentary documentary evidence, I have begun to piece together a narrative about these translations, investigating why they were done in the first place and by whom, so too the role that they played in Afrikaans literary and theatre history. But in this provisional report, I would nevertheless like to make a first attempt at such an explanation. It centres on the fact that in the context of twentieth-century South Africa, translation was practised for two distinct but entwined reasons, most obviously to introduce new literatures and ideas within the Afrikaans cultural sphere, but also to develop and promote the Afrikaans language itself.

Having originated on the farms and in the kitchens of slave-owning households in the 17th-century Cape Colony, Afrikaans's rise as a language of science and culture took place in a milieu dominated by English and Dutch, the official languages of the Union of South Africa after 1910. It was only in 1925, the year after the National Party first won the most parliamentary seats in a general election, that the formal definition of Dutch was broadened to include Afrikaans. And in 1961, the year South Africa was declared a republic, the status of Afrikaans and Dutch was reversed – henceforth, the former would include the latter. In the years that followed, Dutch all but disappeared from South Africa, with Afrikaans put to literary, administrative, political, medical and academic use. It owes its meteoric rise, in no

<sup>7</sup> Bennie van Rensburg, "Dürrenmatt Highlight in Radioteater", in *The Argus*, 1 October 1973.

small part, to translation, with a clear connection discernible between translated literature and the development of Afrikaans itself.<sup>8</sup>

Language rarely stands apart from the interests of those who speak it, and the rise of Afrikaans also had political reverberations. Promoted as the language of white Afrikaner nationalism, its fate has been tied since the early twentieth century to the broad national interest of Afrikaners as a population group. Its canon was bolstered through translation, as it was claimed that the world of international literature had the potential to elevate Afrikaans – an indigenous language created by a colonised people – to the same level as the colonial and to further “the ideal of elevating Afrikaans and the readers of Afrikaans in the march of the nations”.<sup>9</sup> The interviews I have thus far conducted support this notion, suggesting that translated theatre, in particular, played an important role. When questioned about the apartheid government’s heavy investment in the arts, Mannie Manim, the administrative head of drama at the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) from 1967 to 1973, mused:<sup>10</sup>

Those days they had a name for it, which was *Kultuur met ’n hoofletter K*. Met ander woorde,<sup>11</sup> it was culture with this, this terrible capital K. Because that was what was so important. To show that they were culturally advanced, that they were up there with the European nations of the world, you know, that they were able to further all these various cultural activities. And that’s all I can put it down to. That that was their aim, was that, you know, a decent civilised society would have these things. And then, going with that, of course, was the fact that they had to be pure white.

As twin pillars of post-war Swiss literature, it is no surprise that Frisch and Dürrenmatt were destined for the Afrikaans stages of apartheid South Africa. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the repertoire of Afrikaans theatre companies consisted overwhelmingly of translated works, but not only of German-language Swiss literature. During those years there was a surge in translation from English, German, French, Italian, Spanish and Dutch into Afrikaans. But apart from providing an instant repertoire to draw on, translated theatre became ever more important as the basis from which an original, modern Afrikaans theatre could grow. When studying in Europe in 1957, Bartho Smit remarked: “Ek kan nie insien hoe ons ’n Afrikaanse teater kan opbou sonder om werke soos dié van Shakespeare, Racine, Schiller, ens. in Afrikaans beskikbaar te hê nie” (“I cannot see how we can build up an Afrikaans theatre without having works like those of Shakespeare, Racine, Schiller, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> See Marisa Keuris, “Die Veranderde Wêreld van Afrikaanse Dramevertalings en Verwerkings: Enkele Opmerkings”, in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 60(1), March 2020, 3–15.

<sup>9</sup> Etienne Britz, “Afrikaans as Vertaalmedium is Twintig Jaar Agter”, in *Die Burger*, 5 August 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Mannie Manim, interview with the author, 27 November 2020.

<sup>11</sup> “... Culture with a capital ‘C’. In other words ...”.

available in Afrikaans").<sup>12</sup> Indeed, once Smit had returned from his studies abroad, he went on to translate Dürrenmatt's *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (1962).

The cultural ambitions of a young *volk* aside, translated novels and plays were also a way to introduce new literatures and ideas into the oppressive atmosphere of apartheid South Africa. In some instances, they could even facilitate opposition against the regime. In 1963, laws governing the arts culminated in the formation of a Publications Control Board that could prohibit publication for various reasons. Early evidence suggests that presenting foreign texts in Afrikaans translation was one way in which both independent and state-subsidised theatres could circumvent such censorship, it being easier to present provocative subject matter in canonical foreign plays than in original local plays.<sup>13</sup> The people who ran the state-subsidised theatres also actively pursued strategies that allowed them to produce provocative theatre in translation. Manim remembers, for example, claiming that scripts were still being translated and therefore unavailable for submission to the board; in this way, he managed to have Camus's *Les Justes* staged in 1969 with André P. Brink's provocative title, *Die Terroriste*.<sup>14</sup>

A provisional look at some of the translators and directors behind the Dürrenmatt and Frisch translations supports this theory. I do not mean to suggest that all of them overtly opposed the apartheid regime. Being an Afrikaans writer or artist in the second half of the twentieth century was complicated, and most of them, if they criticised their fellow-Afrikaners, did so from within.

A case in point is Bartho Smit, whose own plays were perceived as so politically challenging to the regime as to be turned down repeatedly by the state-funded theatres.<sup>15</sup> Yet, as his contemporary Jack Cope noted at the start of the 1980s, "For all this, Smit remains a staunch Nationalist and continues to hold a job as head of the literature department of the most powerful printing and publishing group in the country".<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that a closer look at his translation of *Der Besuch der alten Dame* reveals Smit walking a tightrope

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<sup>12</sup> Bartho Smit to Hermien Dommissie, correspondence, 22 May 1957, National Archives of South Africa: South African Centre for Information on the Arts, Centre for Theatre Research, Hermien Dommissie Collection, document 555/1129.

<sup>13</sup> Mannie Manim, interview with the author, 27 November 2020; Pieter Fourie, interview with the author, 16 October 2020; see also Danie Stander, "Wat 'n Mens nie is nie, kan 'n Mens Altyd Word: 'n Spel met Ouderdom en Gender in Nerina Ferreira se Vertaling van Astrid Lindgren se Pippie Langkous-reeks" in *Tydskrif vir Nederlands & Afrikaans*, 27(1), 2020, 74–98, here 78; see also Pieter Fourie, interview with Danie Stander, 14 June 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Mannie Manim, interview with the author, 27 November 2020.

<sup>15</sup> See Bartho Smit, *Sestigers in Woord en Beeld: Bartho Smit*. Johannesburg: Perskor, 1984.

<sup>16</sup> Jack Cope, *The Adversary Within: Dissident Writers in Afrikaans*. David Philip: Cape Town, 1982, 142. Smit worked for Afrikaanse Pers.



between communicating the ideas in a foreign source text to the target culture and having that same text accepted by its gatekeepers.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 10.3. Bartho Smit in the offices of the publishing house Afrikaanse Pers, 1967. Photo by Anna Rudolph, National Afrikaans Literary Museum and Research Centre (NALN).

Smit was one of the Sestigers, a group of Afrikaans writers who gained prominence in the 1960s (“sestig” meaning “sixty”) and who had a reputation for challenging the apartheid regime. The critic A.P. Grové, a founding member of the Publications Control Board, once went so far as to describe the typical Sestiger as a “selfverklarde inkterroris” (“self-declared ink-terrorist”) who, unlike his or her predecessors, was no longer the “draer van die Afrikaanse gedagte” (“carrier of Afrikaans thought”).<sup>18</sup>

Wilma Stockenström, who with her husband Ants Kirsipuu is credited as the translator of *Andorra*, followed in the wake of the Sestigers with her own individual critical viewpoint towards Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>19</sup> In my reading of their translation, I posit their rendering of “Schwarze” as “Swartes” and “Weiße” as “wit” as a way of connecting *Andorra*’s core concerns to apartheid racial categories, thereby turning Frisch’s play into Afrikaans protest theatre. Its potential to speak to the South African situation was, after all, not lost on the play’s director Mario Schiess, who also commissioned the translation. Negotiating for the English performing rights in 1963, he had written:

I feel South Africa needs this play and that it will make more impact in this country than anywhere else in the world. Its presentation becomes almost a moral duty because of the racialistic policy followed here. At the moment the theatre is still free of state-controlled censorship but parliament is this very moment debating a Bill which will impose this.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Paula Fourie, “Was Dit Nie Vir Vertaalde Werke Nie: ’n Simptomatiese Lees van *Die besoek van Die Ou Dame*”, in Bartho Smit: *Koördanser tussen triomf en tragedie*, ed. Temple Hauptfleisch and Marisa Keuris. Pretoria: Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns, 2023, 133–170.

<sup>18</sup> A.P. Grové, “Inleiding tot die Literatuur van Sestig”, in *Die Afrikaanse Literatuur Sedert Sestig*, ed. T.T. Cloete, A.P. Grové, J.P. Smuts and Elize Botha. Cape Town: Nasou Bepers, 1980, 3.

<sup>19</sup> See T.T. Cloete, “Wilma Stockenström”, in *Perspektief en Profiel: ’n Afrikaanse Literatuur-geskiedenis: Deel 2*, ed. H.P. Van Coller. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1999, 608.

<sup>20</sup> Mario Schiess to Peter Witt, correspondence, 30 January 1963, private collection.

All told, Schiess was responsible for no less than five presentations of Frisch and Dürrenmatt in Afrikaans on apartheid South Africa's stages. In the case of the translated novels, there is little to no reception history to speak of. There is also no available correspondence between translators and rights holders, the relevant Afrikaans publishers being defunct and untraceable in some instances, and in others, unwilling to open their archives to researchers.<sup>21</sup> Yet the biographical details of the translators do provide clues as to why these novels were translated, and what the translators wanted to achieve with them.

To dwell on but one example: The celebrated poet, Peter Blum, who translated Dürrenmatt's novel *Das Versprechen* in 1960 as *Die Belofte*, was openly critical of the apartheid government. An Italian emigré who had arrived in South Africa at the age of twelve, Blum spoke several languages, including German, English, French and Italian, before he finally mastered Afrikaans as a university student in Stellenbosch. Blum relocated to London in 1960, and after 1966, distanced himself completely from Afrikaans and Afrikaans literature on political grounds.<sup>22</sup> It seems safe to conclude that he was concerned more with introducing new ideas to Afrikaners than with bolstering Afrikaans and the cultural prestige of its speakers. As was Athol Fugard, who labeled ideas "a fundamental source in terms of human action" and once mused in the same breath, "Without ideas, nothing is going to change".<sup>23</sup>

### Swiss Literature Translated into Afrikaans Between 1948 and 1994: A Timeline of Productions and Publications

- 1960 *Die Belofte*, Peter Blum's translation of Dürrenmatt's novel *Das Versprechen* (1958), is published by Human & Rousseau, Cape Town.
- 1961 *Teenspoed*, Bartho Smit's translation of Dürrenmatt's novella *Die Panne* (1956), is published by Human & Rousseau, Cape Town.
- 1962 *Die Brandstigers*, an Afrikaans translation by Rita Elferink and Marie van der Merwe of Frisch's play *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (1958), is staged in Pretoria by the director Mario Schiess and the amateur drama group Volksteater.

*Die Besoek van die Ou Dame*, Bartho Smit's translation of Dürrenmatt's play *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (1956), is staged by the Johannesburgse Toneelkomitee in a production directed by Fred Engelen. The premiere took place on 29 October 1962 as part of the inauguration of Johannesburg's Civic Theatre.

<sup>21</sup> The archives of the Afrikaans publisher Human & Rousseau are unsorted and are presumed to contain too much personal information, financial and otherwise, to be opened up to researchers. Michelle Cooper, e-mail correspondence with the author, 5 June 2023.

<sup>22</sup> See B.J. Odendaal, "Peter Blum" in *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis: Deel I* edited by H.P. Van Coller. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1998, 250–261, here 251.

<sup>23</sup> Athol Fugard, interview with the author, 11 November 2020.



- 1963 *Die Fisici*, T.C. Nel's Afrikaans translation of Dürrenmatt's play *Die Physiker* (1962), is staged in Pretoria by director Mario Schiess and the amateur drama group Volksteater.
- 1964 *Die Prooi*, André Rossouw's translation of Dürrenmatt's novel *Der Verdacht* (1953), is published by Simondium-Uitgewers, Cape Town.
- Die Regter en Sy Laksman*, André Rossouw and Daan Retief's translation of Dürrenmatt's novel *Der Richter und sein Henker* (1954), is published by Simondium-Uitgewers, Cape Town.
- Griek soek Vrou*, Wilhelm Grütter's translation of Dürrenmatt's novel *Grieche sucht Griechin* (1955), is published by Human & Rousseau, Cape Town.
- Andorra*, Wilma Stockenström and Ants Kirsipuu's translation of Frisch's play *Andorra* (1961), is staged in Pretoria's Little Theatre by the director Mario Schiess and the amateur drama group Volksteater.
- Kirsipuu and Stockenström's translation of *Andorra* is presented by the Performing Arts Council of the Free State in Bloemfontein's Civic Theatre in a production directed by Cobus Rossouw.
- Leonora Nel's stage adaptation of *Teenspoed*, Bartho Smit's translation of Dürrenmatt's *Die Panne*, is staged by the Pro Arte student group at the University of Pretoria under the title *Spel*.
- 1966 *Ek is nie hy nie*, Mauritz Preller's translation of Frisch's novel *Stiller* (1954), is published by Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, Johannesburg.
- Die Huwelik van Mnr. Mississippi*, Rita Elferink's Afrikaans translation of Dürrenmatt's play *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* (1952), is staged in Pretoria by director Mario Schiess and the amateur drama group Volksteater.
- 1967 *Die Meteor*, Henriette Lemmer's Afrikaans translation of Dürrenmatt's play *Der Meteor*, is staged in Pretoria by director Mario Schiess and the amateur drama group Volksteater.
- 1970 *Biografie*, an Afrikaans translation of Frisch's play *Biografie: Ein Spiel* (1967), is staged in November 1970 in a production directed by Aart de Villiers. No further details are known.
- 1972 *Olympia en Haar Vryers*, Pieter Fourie's translation of Dürrenmatt's play *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* (1952), is staged by the Performing Arts Council of the Free State (PACOFs) in a production directed by Fourie.
- 1973 Kirsipuu and Stockenström's translation of *Andorra* is presented by the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) in Pretoria's Breytenbach Theatre and in Johannesburg's Alexander Theatre in a production directed by Truida Louw.

- Die Huwelik van Mnr. Mississippi*, formerly entitled *Olympia en Haar Vryers*, Pieter Fourie's translation of Dürrenmatt's play *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* (1952), is staged by the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) in a production directed by Fourie. It runs in the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town from 25 October to 10 November and in Stellenbosch's H.B. Thom Theatre from 14 to 17 November.
- 1975 *Don Juan of die Liefde vir die Meetkunde*, Nerina Ferreira's translation of Max Frisch's play *Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie* (1953), is staged by CAPAB in a production directed by Mavis Taylor.
- 1978 *Die Brandstigers*, Merwe Scholtz's translation of Frisch's play *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (1958), is staged by CAPAB in the Nico Malan Theatre in a production directed by Pieter Fourie.
- 1979 Kirsipuu and Stockenström's translation of Frisch's *Andorra* is staged by the Universiteitsteater Stellenbosch in the H.B. Thom Theatre in a production directed by Johann van Heerden.
- 1980 *Die Fisici*, Robert Mohr's translation of Dürrenmatt's play *Die Physiker* (1962), is presented by CAPAB at the Nico Malan Theatre in a production directed by Mohr. The opening night took place on 12 March 1980.
- 1983 Commissioned by the Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO), Bartho Smit translates Dürrenmatt's 1979 stage adaptation of his novella *Die Panne*, once more using the title *Teenspoed*.

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## 11 Lewis Nkosi and Switzerland: Provincialising the Global North

*Astrid Starck-Adler & Dag Henrichsen*

The South African writer, journalist and literary critic Lewis Nkosi (1936–2010) lived in Basel during the last 12 years of his life. In 1995, he met Astrid Starck-Adler, then a Professor of Yiddish at the University of Basel, during a conference on Sub-Saharan literatures at the University of Tel Aviv. They crossed paths again in 1997 at the African Literature Association (ALA) conference, Fescapo Nights in Michigan: African Film and Literature, held in East Lansing. Later, he joined her at the Unterer Rheinweg, in the heart of Basel, along the Rhine. Nkosi was a widely travelled and cosmopolitan professor of literature who escaped into exile during apartheid in 1960 and subsequently lived in England, Zambia, Poland and the United States. He maintained a complex and ambivalent relationship with the Swiss border city of Basel. While he enjoyed living in a city defined by its borders, he equally relished crossing those borders as often as possible, maintaining his nomadic lifestyle – now frequently accompanied by Astrid. This dynamic relationship reflected a worldmaking practice in which his home country remained the intellectual core of his artistic and scholarly pursuits, always viewed through contrasting frames and spaces. Basel and Switzerland were just two among many such contexts. For Nkosi, “flying home”<sup>1</sup> symbolised a persistent yearning throughout his more than 30 years of exile, giving rise to an intensely creative yet often sorrowful intellectual realm he called “Home and Exile”.<sup>2</sup> Within this space, he held up mirrors to the world at large, reflecting its complexities and contradictions.

In 1965, he wrote about the similarly exiled jazz musician Dollar Brand (later Abdullah Ibrahim), who frequently performed in Basel and Zurich during the early 1960s, reflecting on an evening they had spent together in London: “Anguished and homeless, finally cut-off from the life-sustaining tradition of native culture, we all got drunk that night”. He added, as if to write about himself: “From Dollar Brand’s minor tragedy can only come growth, for it is the mark of the adult artist to know and accept that in a deeper, symbolic sense maturity means: ‘You can’t Go Home Again’”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Flying Home” is the title of Lewis Nkosi’s one-act play, first published in Astrid Starck-Adler, Dag Henrichsen (eds.), *Lewis Nkosi. The Black Psychiatrist. Flying Home! Texts, Perspectives, Homage*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2021, 47–87.

<sup>2</sup> See Lewis Nkosi, *Home and Exile, and other Selections*. London: Longmans, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Nkosi, “Dollar Brand”, in *The New African*, 2 April 1965, 29–30, here 29.



*Figure 11.1. Lewis Nkosi in 2006. Photo by Henri Vigana. To celebrate the production of Nkosi's play *Le psychiatre noir* in Fort-de-France in Martinique, the journalist, photographer and filmmaker Henri Vigana made this magnificent portrait of him. It bears witness to the encounter of two men united in their fight against oppression and for human dignity. We honour their memory.*

In April 1994, with the advent of South Africa's first democratic election, Lewis Nkosi contributed an essay to the South Africa-themed monthly *Folio* magazine of the widely read Zurich newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ). In his piece entitled "Europas Stammeskriege. Der kritische Blick eines Südafrikaners nach Norden" ("Europe's Tribal Wars: A South African's Critical View of the North"), Nkosi explored the centrality of South-North perspectives

and postcolonial studies. He challenged colonial imaginaries of "Africa" prevalent in Western societies – particularly in Europe and the United States – by turning them on their head. Addressing Swiss and German readers, he reminded them of their own "wars, superstitions, and racist paranoias".<sup>4</sup> The emergence of post-colonial South Africa provided him with the opportunity to question "grand narratives" about the world and to emphasise – with reference to sub-altern studies – the importance of re-defining terms and concepts such as modernity, periphery, difference and Otherness. Nkosi argued that South Africa, with its violent past, the resistance and resilience of its Black majority, and the critical engagement of its artists, had a powerful message to convey to a German-speaking audience. He could have opted to write more narrowly for the NZZ on one of his enduring themes – "Art Contra Apartheid: South African Writers in Exile" – the title of his only essay previously published in Switzerland.<sup>5</sup> Instead, he chose to provincialise the global North, advocating for a critical and nuanced understanding of cultural diversity in contrast to the "barricades", both intellectual and otherwise, that he critiqued. Was he already aware, even then, that Switzerland was grappling with its own legacies of Cold War barricades, concepts and boundaries?

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Nkosi, "Europas Stammeskriege. Der kritische Blick eines Südafrikaners nach Norden", in *NZZ Folio*, 4 April 1994, 14–16.

<sup>5</sup> In the Geneva-based journal *Genève Afrique*, 18(2), 1980, 67–70.

There is no record of reactions to Nkosi's *NZZ* essay,<sup>6</sup> nor do we know to what extent his perspectives were considered novel by newspaper readers in Switzerland and Germany. Academically, postcolonial and subaltern studies had barely gained traction at Swiss universities at the time.<sup>7</sup> Politically, the small anti-apartheid and Third World movements that had emerged primarily in the early 1970s had largely lost momentum by the mid-1990s. It was only then that revelations surfaced about the Swiss central state's surveillance of some of these movements and their activities in earlier decades. A broader Swiss and German audience was first introduced to Lewis Nkosi's work in 1987 through the German translation of his debut novel, *Mating Birds*, published as *Weisse Schatten* ("White Shadows") by the Zurich-based Diana Verlag.<sup>8</sup> What follows is an exploration of some of Nkosi's Swiss connections, both personal and intellectual, before 1994.

### Imaginarities and Brief Encounters

Was there no South African compatriot with whom Lewis Nkosi could "do" Zurich or Geneva once he began his European exile in 1961/62? The phrase "to do" references Nkosi's essay "Doing Paris with Breyten", in which he reflected on his early visits to Paris from 1963 onwards, where another exiled South African writer, Breyten Breytenbach, was living at the time.<sup>9</sup> As Nkosi noted in his essay, his first encounters with Paris actually began in his hometown of Durban, where, as a youth, he discovered the works of Dumas, Flaubert, Hugo and Balzac in a mobile library designated for "non-whites". It was also during this time that he came across James Baldwin's debut novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), which is set in Harlem, New York, but which Baldwin had completed while staying in an Alpine chalet with his Swiss lover, Lucien Happersberger, in Leukerbad (Loèche-les-Bains) in the Swiss canton of Valais.<sup>10</sup> Nkosi may have encountered Baldwin's essay "Stranger in the Village" (1953/55)<sup>11</sup> in 1961 when he met Baldwin for the first time in the New York apartment

<sup>6</sup> The *NZZ Folio* editor Claudia Kühner thanked Lewis Nkosi in a letter for his contribution "which is exactly what we were expecting", 11 February 1994. Private archives of Astrid Starck-Adler.

<sup>7</sup> See in general the volume by Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk (eds.), *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> See also below.

<sup>9</sup> In Lewis Nkosi, *Home and Exile*, 80–87. See also Lindy Stiebel and Michael Chapman (eds.), *Writing Home. Lewis Nkosi on South African Writing*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2016, 167–79.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Nkosi, "The Mountain. In Search of James Baldwin", in *Transition. An international review*, 79, 1999, 102–125. A colleague of Nkosi's in Durban, Obed Musi, who met Nkosi when he entered the newsroom of the isiZulu newspaper *Ilanga Lase-Natal* in the mid-1950s for his first contract as a journalist, remembered that Lewis "used to carry a copy of James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* under his arm". See Mike Nicol, *A Good-Looking Corpse*. London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1991, 336. Lewis Nkosi and Astrid Starck visited Lucien and Jeanine Happersberger in Sion, Switzerland, in 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Whilst living in Johannesburg, Nkosi regularly visited the Witwatersrand University Library.

of his South African friend Vusi Make.<sup>12</sup> In this essay, Baldwin reflected on the winters he spent in the Swiss mountain village and addressed themes that were also central to Nkosi's concerns: the "race issue", racism, the imposed construction of inferiority, and the profound sorrow and hatred these forces engendered.

Between 1956 and 1960, while working in Johannesburg as a journalist for *DRUM* and *Golden City Post*, both popular magazines among African readers, Lewis Nkosi encountered many European visitors. Among them were individuals involved in the production of *Come Back, Africa* (1959), the first anti-apartheid film, directed by the New York filmmaker Lionel Rogosin. Nkosi, along with his *DRUM* colleague Bloke Modisane, co-wrote the film's script, and both also appeared on screen. Rogosin assembled an international crew for the project, including two Swiss members: Walter Wettler, a renowned sound artist, and Ernest Artaria, a cameraman from Basel, as well as the Israeli cameraman Milek Knebel. Together, they spent several months shooting the film in 1958.<sup>13</sup>

In Johannesburg, Lewis Nkosi also met the Swiss-German freelance graphic designer and jazz enthusiast Paul Meyer, who often hosted gatherings in his apartment for music listening, inviting friends, including Nkosi.<sup>14</sup> After relocating to London, Nkosi likely visited Switzerland for the first time in 1964 during the Swiss National Exposition (the "Landi") in Lausanne, held from 30 April to 25 October. Dollar Brand delivered astonishing solo performances at that event, having been invited by Paul Meyer. Meyer had previously facilitated opportunities for Brand, the singer Sathima Bea Benjamin (later Brand's wife), the drummer Makaya Ntshoko and the composer-pianist Chris McGregor to perform in Zurich, offering them a path to escape apartheid South Africa.<sup>15</sup> Nkosi knew most of these musicians from

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis Nkosi, "Encounter with New York I", in Nkosi, *Home and Exile*, 60.

<sup>13</sup> See "Milek Knebel's Notes on the Making of *Come Back, Africa*", in Lionel Rogosin, *Come Back, Africa. A Man possessed*. Johannesburg, STE Publishers, 2004, 136–42. Also <https://villonfilms.ca/main/emil-milek-knebel-interview-transcript.pdf> (accessed 24 February 2025). Lewis Nkosi met Knebel again in Bologna in 2000 on the occasion of the screening of the digitised film.

<sup>14</sup> The Swiss jazz musician and historian Bruno Spoerri related to Astrid Starck that Nkosi had told him (in Bern in 2004) that Paul Meyer's friends in Johannesburg always knew where to find the keys to Meyer's apartment in order to listen to his records. Meyer and Nkosi met again many years later when Meyer took him to his father's chalet in the Swiss Alps. See also the chapters on jazz in this book for further information on Meyer.

<sup>15</sup> Astrid Starck recalls in particular the jazz concerts of the Dollar Brand Quartet with the bassist Johnny Gertie (Gertze), the drummer Makaya Ntshoko and the singer Sathima Bea Benjamin during the summer of 1963 in the 'Tis, i.e. the Basel jazz club Atlantis. At that time, the Quartet also gave concerts in St. Gallen, at the jazz festival in Ascona and, as mentioned, in Lausanne in 1964. See Bruno Spoerri, "Jazz Biographies: BRAND, Adolph Johannes 'Dollar'": [www.fonoteca.ch/cgibin/oecgi4.exe/inet\\_jazzbionamedetail?NAME\\_ID=4628.011&LNG\\_ID=FRA](http://www.fonoteca.ch/cgibin/oecgi4.exe/inet_jazzbionamedetail?NAME_ID=4628.011&LNG_ID=FRA) (accessed 20 April 2023). Bea Benjamin related to Bruno Spoerri that it was Meyer who introduced her to Dollar Brand, both being fans of Duke Ellington. Ellington, in turn, met Brand in Zurich in 1963. Personal communication from Spoerri to Astrid Starck, 5 August 2018. See also the jazz essays in



his time in Johannesburg. In his 1965 essay on Dollar Brand, cited earlier, Nkosi described jazz as a “musical language, which is both tender and violent, serious and comic – a language that periodically reveals the menace of interior sounds and voices from the midnight violence of our South African streets, recollected in the tranquillity of exile”.<sup>16</sup>

How could Lewis Nkosi have travelled to Switzerland after going into exile in 1960/61?<sup>17</sup> Initially, he left South Africa for London in 1960 on a one-way exit permit, which rendered him stateless, homeless, and a nomad. His visa for the United States, where he became a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University in 1961/62, allowed him to return to the UK, though he did not obtain British nationality until 1967. By 1962, as a literary and radio journalist based in London, Nkosi had already begun travelling regularly to West and East Africa, including a trip to Makerere in Uganda for the first African Writers’ Conference for English-speaking Africa. By 1965, he had visited several European capitals. It seems likely that he held a British travel document of some kind, which would have facilitated the acquisition of visas for short-term visits to Switzerland.

When he eventually settled in Basel in the late 1990s, Nkosi used his British passport, which officially permitted only a temporary stay in Switzerland, a non-EU country. This requirement forced him to leave the country periodically in order to re-enter. At times, Basel’s local authorities showed little understanding for a world citizen caught between evading and being ensnared by the bureaucratic intricacies of exile.

### **Publishing and Reading Lewis Nkosi in Switzerland and the German-Speaking World Before 1994**

In Swiss anti-apartheid and solidarity circles, Lewis Nkosi was known and, to a certain extent, recognised by an academic and literature-focused audience even before the 1980s. While he published exclusively in English, a few of his essays from the 1960s and 1970s were translated into French and German. However, the limited scope of his readership becomes evident when examining the efforts of Al Imfeld, the Swiss theologian who, after meeting African and African-American writers and intellectuals – first in New York in 1963 and later in Zimbabwe – began promoting African literature in the German-speaking world in the early 1970s. Working alongside a small group of West German journalists, Imfeld sought to introduce these works to a broader audience. In his autobiographical reflections, he noted that:

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the present volume.

<sup>16</sup> Nkosi, “Dollar Brand”, in *The New African*, 2 April 1965.

<sup>17</sup> We could not access the files of the Swiss immigration police (“Einreise- und Fremdenpolizei”) in the National Archives of Switzerland, Bern.

... there were only three translated African authors and books on the German book market, namely two South African writers, Thomas Mofolo with *Chaka* (translated by Peter Sulzer), Peter Abrahams with *Mine Boy* and Camara Laye with *Einer aus Kurusa* (original title *L'enfant noir*).

In the former GDR, the German Democratic Republic, one could find additional translations of African works. Because this happened during the Cold war the existence of these books from Africa was for the West a conclusive proof of their suspicion that all contemporary African writers were at heart staunch Communists....

Most people in the German-speaking part of Europe had no idea that in the meantime there existed a vivid and ambitious African literature.<sup>18</sup>

The preface to the German anthology *Moderne Erzähler der Welt: Südafrika* ("Modern Storytellers of the World: South Africa"), published in 1977 and edited by the Swiss literary scholar and librarian Peter Sulzer, remarked: "In Germany, where reading and translation are popular, contemporary South African literature has received surprisingly little attention".<sup>19</sup>

The anthology mentions Lewis Nkosi only briefly, noting his role as a former journalist for *DRUM*, and explains that many contemporary (and exiled) South African writers were excluded from the volume due to space limitations.<sup>20</sup> As early as 1961, Sulzer had observed that "South African literature in the English language has been largely documented and is accessible to the average educated European in its original form."<sup>21</sup>

Imfeld makes the significant observation that it was German-speaking radio journalists, particularly those at Deutsche Welle (Voice of Germany) in Cologne, who helped introduce African literature to German-speaking audiences from the 1970s onward: "Broadcasting paved the way".<sup>22</sup> Nkosi himself was deeply involved in broadcasts on African literature and interviews with writers from London during the 1960s. However, it is unclear whether he also engaged directly with Deutsche Welle.

Given this context, it seems that only a limited broader audience in Switzerland was aware of the journalist and writer Lewis Nkosi. The earliest German translation of his work was the short story "Potgieters Besitz" ("Potgieter's Property", originally entitled "Potgieter's Castle"), published in the 1974 West-German anthology *Sklave im eigenen Land. Unter-*

<sup>18</sup> Al Imfeld, "How I found the African Poem", published 7 July 2015 on [www.alimfeld.ch/english-articles/384-africa-poems](http://www.alimfeld.ch/english-articles/384-africa-poems) (accessed 20 April 2023).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Rehs, "Preface", in *Moderne Erzähler der Welt: Südafrika*, ed. Peter Sulzer. Tübingen and Basel: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1977.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Sulzer, "Einleitung", in Sulzer, *Moderne Erzähler der Welt*, 13. Sulzer was regarded as a conservative scholar and probably chose not to support young (and exiled) writers too prominently, given their outspoken critique of apartheid. See the chapter by Jasper Walgrave elsewhere in this book, which discusses Sulzer's literary activities in relation to South Africa.

<sup>21</sup> In Peter Sulzer, *Glut in Afrika: südafrikanische Prosa und Lyrik*. Zurich and Stuttgart: Artemis, 1961, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Al Imfeld, "How I found the African Poem".

*drückung und Widerstand im südlichen Afrika* (*Slave in One's Own Country: Repression and Resistance in Southern Africa*).<sup>23</sup> Its publication date reflects the growing proliferation of anti-apartheid and solidarity movements in the German-speaking world during that period.

Two events in West Germany in 1979 and 1980 significantly boosted the visibility of African literature. The first was the 1979 Horizonte festival in Berlin, where African writers, including Dambudzo Marechera, Dennis Brutus and Lewis Nkosi, read poetry “to a small audience”, as noted by Al Imfeld. This festival provided the impetus for the second event: the 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair, which had African literature as its focus. According to Imfeld, “It was the first time the book fair had such a focus, and it was such a big success that from then on each year the book fair profiled a different country or region”.<sup>24</sup>

Lewis Nkosi was among the many writers invited to the fair and participated in a panel discussion alongside James Matthews and Buchi Emecheta. In some undated notes, possibly from the Frankfurt Book Fair, Imfeld recorded a few characteristic remarks from Nkosi. These comments capture his wit and incisiveness, typical of his engagements at such events: “We come and offer categories”, and “I want white SA to tell about how to be an oppressor”.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, at the Frankfurt Book Fair panel discussion, Nkosi put forward “aggressive theses”, challenging the notion of a “South African literary culture”, which he claimed did not exist.<sup>26</sup> He likely participated in the protest against the presence of South African publishing houses at the fair, criticising their complicity in the apartheid system and their failure to publish Black writers.<sup>27</sup>

### “Mating Birds”

Six years later, in 1986, Lewis Nkosi’s debut novel, *Mating Birds*, was published to instant acclaim, firmly establishing his reputation as a novelist. The following year, it was published in German as *Weisse Schatten* (*White Shadows*)<sup>28</sup> by the Zurich-based Diana Verlag in a translation by Eva Bornemann, a British-Austrian writer, journalist and translator. Diana Verlag, originally founded in 1934 in Zurich by Simon Menzel as Humanitas Verlag to publish authors banned in Nazi Germany, shifted its focus after World War II to translated

<sup>23</sup> Edited by Kay-Michael Scheiner, Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Al Imfeld, “How I found the African Poem”. For an in-depth report on the 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair see Barbara Harrell-Bond, *Africa asserts its Identity. Part I The Frankfurt Book Fair*. American Universities Field Staff Reports 1981, 1, 10–13.

<sup>25</sup> Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), archives, Personenarchiv Al Imfeld, PA. 96, III.3.1.8.

<sup>26</sup> In a brief tape recording of parts of the discussion on 5 October 1980 by the exiled South African journalist Ruth Weiss, Nkosi argued that there existed only “national literatures”, in the absence of a “South African culture”. BAB, archives, Personenarchiv Ruth Weiss, TPA 43. 131, 21:45–22:34.

<sup>27</sup> See Barbara Harrell-Bond, *Africa asserts its Identity*, 1 and 10–13.

<sup>28</sup> *Weisse Schatten* was initially published as a hardcover book.

English literature under its new name. The German publication of Nkosi's novel coincided with translations into Dutch, French, Italian, Portuguese, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish and Polish, virtually simultaneously.

Lewis Nkosi was typically invited by publishers to give readings from his books, but it remains unclear whether Diana Verlag in Zurich extended such an invitation. Only a few brief reviews of the German edition of *Mating Birds* have been identified in Swiss newspapers. One review, entitled "Begehre niemals eine weisse Frau! Erschütternde Geschichte eines Opfers des Rassismus" ("Never Desire a White Woman! Shocking Story of a Victim of Racism"), by Ralf Dörner, appeared on 19 February 1988 in the regional daily *Limmattaler Tagblatt*. Another review, written by Fridolin Furger and entitled "Visionen der Freiheit" ("Visions of Freedom"), was published on 1 March 1988 in both the *St. Galler Tagblatt* and the *Appenzeller Tagblatt*.

One of the novel's readers was almost certainly the Swiss writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt, who closely followed developments in apartheid South Africa. His absurdist short story "Die Virusepidemie in Südafrika" ("The Virus Epidemic in South Africa"), written in 1989 but published posthumously in 1994,<sup>29</sup> features a fantastical virus that reverses skin colour – turning black skin white and white skin black. This transformation leads to bizarre outcomes: "black Whites" wear white badges marked "White" in black letters, while "white Blacks" wear black badges marked "Black" in white letters. Rather than erasing differences, the chaos escalates into civil war, as no one can determine who is truly a "black Black" or a "white Black".

Dürrenmatt's story also includes a satirical reference to Swiss complicity with apartheid, featuring "white" Swiss bankers visiting South Africa. When violence erupts, they flee back to Zurich, only to discover they have become "black". This clear critique highlights the entanglement of Swiss banks and the Swiss state with South Africa's apartheid regime.

In *Mating Birds*, Lewis Nkosi introduces a character from Zurich, Dr Emile Dufré, a Jewish psychiatrist and German-Swiss émigré to South Africa. Dufré's surname is an anagram of Sigmund Freud, reflecting the character's intellectual lineage. Dufré engages in extensive conversations with the novel's main character, Sibiya, an isiZulu-speaking man sentenced to death by apartheid courts for the alleged "rape" of a white woman. Their discussions centre on Sibiya's childhood and upbringing in rural South Africa, with Dufré relying on his scientific methods, which he considers universally applicable. However, Sibiya challenges this

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed analysis of the short story, initially published by the Zurich newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger* on 14 March 1994, see Jacomien van Niekerk, Waldo Grové, "'Race' and Nationhood in Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Die Virusepidemie in Südafrika*", in *Acta Germanica*, 2017, 45–58. Also: [https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/63711/VanNiekerk\\_Race\\_2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/63711/VanNiekerk_Race_2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (accessed 3 November 2023).

presumption, asking: “What can a Swiss-German Jew say to a black South African convict that can ease the pain and loss and create between us a bridge of communication across vast differences of social background and history?”<sup>30</sup>

While Dufré painstakingly searches for reasons why Sibiya became a “rapist”, Sibiya dismantles the psychiatrist’s preconceived ideas about race and sexuality, exposing Dufré’s complicity with the racist apartheid state. Nkosi employs a narrative with an “open end”, as Umberto Eco might describe it, inviting readers to reflect on the underlying dynamics revealed in the two men’s conversations. These exchanges lay bare the absurd and criminal mechanisms of apartheid, where a Black person is presumed either subordinate or guilty of a crime.

This theme connects directly to the ideas Nkosi articulated in his 1994 essay for *NZZ* readers: South-North perspectives, the relational nature of categories and concepts, and the importance of provincialising dominant narratives, including Western academic theories and practices. Despite the significance of these themes, Swiss reviews of *Mating Birds* scarcely mentioned Dufré. This prompts a critical question: Who, apart from Lewis Nkosi, has referenced Swiss emigrants to South Africa, like Emile Dufré, in South African literature? And more broadly, who else has interrogated the role of Swiss emigrants as agents of Western imperial ideology and culture in such works?

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis Nkosi, *Mating Birds. A Novel*. London: Constable & New York: St Martin’s Press, 1986, 41.

## 12 “Coloured nature... isn’t that easy to shake off”: Gordon Jephtas in Switzerland

*Féroll-Jon Davids*

By the time the South African pianist and répétiteur Gordon Jephtas passed away in New York in July 1992, it can be said that he had freed himself from the racial oppression of the apartheid regime and the psychological scars it left behind. In a 1986 interview with the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jephtas conveyed a fundamental understanding of the harsh realities of apartheid in his homeland:

The first thing a child learns in South Africa is color [sic]... You are told that whites are superior[,] Coloured people not quite as superior and the black man is an animal. It is something that is in the air. You feel it everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

Gordon Jephtas, classified as “coloured” in South Africa, left his country in 1965 to pursue his passion for opera, as apartheid legislation prevented “non-white” individuals from attaining professional status in the arts or holding positions at arts institutions. Despite these obstacles, he became a highly sought-after vocal coach specialising in Italian opera. Over the course of three decades, largely spent outside South Africa, Jephtas worked at several prestigious opera houses, including the Zurich Opera, the Chicago Lyric Opera and the San Francisco Opera. He also assisted renowned conductors such as Nello Santi, Nicola Rescigno and Oliviero de Fabritiis, and coached some of the most prominent figures in the opera world, including Renata Tebaldi, Plácido Domingo, Montserrat Caballé and Luciano Pavarotti.

However, his self-imposed exile from South Africa came at no small cost and was not without challenges. Jephtas left behind the Eoan Group,<sup>2</sup> where his journey as a vocal coach had begun. Once he was abroad, his status as a foreigner meant he frequently faced difficulties with work permits. On occasion, he also worked illegally to gain the experience needed

<sup>1</sup> Mancy Melich, “South African finds life away from home”, in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 October 1986.

<sup>2</sup> A cultural and welfare organisation founded in 1933 in Cape Town by the British immigrant Helen Southern-Holt to improve the lives of the coloured community of District Six through “Western civilising” methods: elocution classes, lessons in literature, drama and ballet, and eventually a choir. By 1956, the choir section had morphed into an amateur opera company and produced the first “all-coloured”, full-scale Italian opera, Giuseppe Verdi’s *La traviata*, in Cape Town. See Hilde Roos, *The La Traviata Affair: Opera in the age of apartheid*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018, 18–25.

to advance his career.<sup>3</sup> Had he remained in South Africa, he would have had to relinquish his aspirations of a professional life in opera. Alongside these career obstacles, Jephtas also struggled with deeply personal battles. This chapter does not focus on Jephtas's professional trajectory but rather turns inward. Utilising his 28-year correspondence with the coloured South African soprano May Abrahamse as the primary source, this chapter presents his lived experience of racial identity under apartheid and examines how his extended exile – particularly his years working at the Zurich Opera House in Switzerland – shaped his evolving relationship to his colouredness. From August 1972 to mid-1977, Jephtas was employed at the Zurich Opera as a vocal coach. It was during these years – marked by growing professional recognition and personal freedom – that the most significant shift in his thinking about coloured identity took place, as reflected in his letters.

In 1950, South Africa's National Party enacted the Population Registration Act, which classified all South Africans according to race: white, coloured, Black, and Indian.<sup>4</sup> Those classified as "white" enjoyed a network of privileges, while "non-white" individuals were deprived of equal rights. The term "coloured" in contemporary South Africa is understood differently from elsewhere. It does not serve as an umbrella term for all "non-white" individuals, nor does it carry the same derogatory connotations as it does in the African-American context. The historian Mohamed Adhikari explains that in South Africa, "coloured" uniquely describes "a person perceived to be of mixed racial ancestry".<sup>5</sup> However, during apartheid, the category of "coloured" and the notion of colouredness were far more complex than this definition suggests. The subdivision of the "non-white" category into coloured, Black and Indian was a deliberate tactic to divide these groups and prevent a unified anti-apartheid movement.<sup>6</sup> In maintaining these divisions, the National Party fabricated a second-class citizenship for the coloured community, exempting them from certain laws applicable only to Blacks and providing them with resources denied to Blacks.

A common perception of the coloured community is that it emerged after the onset of Dutch colonisation at the Cape in the 1600s, implying that the South African coloured community is the product of miscegenation from illicit relationships between Europeans

<sup>3</sup> Féroll-Jon Davids, "Gordon Jephtas (1943–1992): A coloured life in opera". Master thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2021, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Union of South Africa. 1950. Population Registration Act (Act No. 30 of 1950), in *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1950*, 275–99, see 279. Available at: [www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive-files2/leg19500707.028.020.030.pdf](http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive-files2/leg19500707.028.020.030.pdf) (accessed June 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Mohamed Adhikari, "Predicaments of Marginality: Cultural Creativity and Political Adaptation in Southern Africa's Coloured Communities", in *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in southern Africa*, ed. Mohamed Adhikari. Cape Town: UCT Press, 2009, vii–xxxii, here viii.

<sup>6</sup> Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005, 35.



and non-Europeans.<sup>7</sup> This led to assumptions that coloured individuals were consequently “deficient in positive qualities associated with racial purity and handicapped by negative ones derived from racial mixture”.<sup>8</sup> The notion of racial “purity” has repeatedly found favour throughout history, while racial mixing has been met with disdain, as evidenced by Nazi Germany and the Jim Crow era in the USA. Similarly, when South Africa’s National Party rose to power in 1948, it stigmatised coloureds as a race that was “lacking, excessive, inferior, or simply non-existent”.<sup>9</sup> For instance, in a 1983 interview with the *Sunday Tribune*, the future first lady Marike de Klerk offered this perspective on the coloured community:

[Coloureds] are a negative group. The definition of a coloured in the population register is someone that is not black, and is not white and is also not an Indian, in other words a no-person. They are the leftovers. They are the people that were left after the nations were sorted out. They are the rest.<sup>10</sup>

The National Party, however, believed that, being descendants of European colonists, coloureds were more “civilised” than their Black counterparts. Consequently, the coloured community received better housing than what was deemed necessary for Blacks and was granted limited opportunities for secondary and tertiary education. They were also exempt from certain curfews, pass laws, and other restrictions applicable only to Blacks.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, despite being treated as a “higher” class of human being than Blacks, the negative connotations associated with their racial “impurity” left some coloured individuals feeling shame, discomfort and resentment toward their own identity.<sup>12</sup> The young Gordon Jephthas internalised these negative perceptions, having absorbed an ideology that described him as somehow “deficient”, “less than white” and “inferior”. His letters to May Abrahamse, which touch on various topics, also contain several references to “coloured nature” and his own colouredness. These letters, to the author’s knowledge, are the only surviving documentary evidence that allows us to trace the shifting perspectives of a South African coloured musician grappling with the personal and professional consequences of apartheid. Through a close reading of these letters, I have identified passages that allude to coloured identity and will discuss them here. Using Adhikari’s model of coloured identity during apartheid as a

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<sup>7</sup> Adhikari, *Not White Enough, not Black Enough*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Adhikari, *Not White Enough, not Black Enough*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Zimitri Erasmus, “Introduction: Re-imagining Coloured Identities in Post-apartheid South Africa”, in *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, ed. Zimitri Erasmus. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001, 13–28, here 16.

<sup>10</sup> Adhikari, *Not White Enough, not Black Enough*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Adhikari, “Predicaments of marginality”, vii–xxxii, here xiv.

<sup>12</sup> Erasmus, “Introduction: Re-imagining coloured identities”, 13–28, here 17.

framework, I have grouped Jephtas's statements on coloured identity into Adhikari's various categories, which are explained as follows:<sup>13</sup>

The coloured community occupied an intermediate position between blacks and whites.

Some coloured individuals internalised the negative and derogatory connotations of colouredness.

Some coloured people expressed a desire to assimilate into the dominant white society.

The coloured community's responses to their marginality determined their perceptions of identity.

Adhikari's first point refers to the coloured community's second-class citizenship fabricated by the National Party to inhibit the rise of a unified anti-apartheid establishment. Jephtas's status as coloured thus meant that he was by default positioned between Blacks and whites. However, Adhikari's subsequent points are more relevant to Jephtas's statements in his correspondence.

The findings from Jephtas's letters reveal that during the first 12 years of his correspondence with Abrahamse, he repeatedly expressed negative views about his identity, often making bitter remarks regarding his colouredness. He perceived coloured identity as an obstacle or handicap – more mental than physical – and frequently blamed his “coloured nature” for his inability to assert himself.<sup>14</sup> One of the earliest examples comes when he was 20 years old and travelling abroad for the first time. He shared his experience with Abrahamse as follows:

The main purpose in writing to you was to tell you about some Jamaicans we recently met. Both Didi and I thought and expected that the West Indians were people with natures and minds like our people – we were pleasantly shocked.

First of all, they are much better bred, spoken and read than we could hope for. They have a fantastic command of language and whereas our people very often have difficulty in saying what they think merely because they have not a command of English or Afrikaans, these people can present a logical and understandable point of view with the utmost facility and ease...

While we were there, they discussed radiography, compared American and English economics. Yes, it is fantastic – Didi and I just marvelled. Perhaps if our people were less interested in skin colour and hair quality, they could reach the same intellectual status – but will they!!!!!!<sup>15</sup>

This extract not only highlights the inadequate education afforded to the coloured commu-

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<sup>13</sup> Adhikari, *Not White Enough, not Black Enough*, 8–17.

<sup>14</sup> Davids, “Gordon Jephtas (1943–1992)”, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Jephtas, 1963. Letter to May Abrahamse, 28 December. Eoan Group Archive, Documentation Centre for Music and Research (DOMUS), Stellenbosch University (all further letters from Jephtas listed here are also held in the Eoan Group Archive).

nity by the National Party, but also shows that the young Jephtas was astonished to discover that people who resembled him in appearance could be so different from his community back home. His encounter with a West Indian family revealed to him that skin colour, contrary to the lessons of apartheid, was not a determinant of intellect, culture or intelligence.

Let us fast-forward eight years to February 1972: Jephtas, now 28, was living in Italy and facing professional struggles. He was unemployed, financially burdened, and at times gave vocal coaching sessions in return for a plate of spaghetti. The Italian immigration authorities even issued him with 10 days' notice to leave the country, although this was later rescinded. By this point, Jephtas felt that he should have achieved more in his career. While many of the factors responsible for his difficulty in finding work were bureaucratic in nature, Jephtas, in his depression, provided Abrahamse with a specific reason for his misfortune:

... I used to be so exemplary at fighting back tears and facing whatever the situation was ... There are strong moments when I ... decide, well, I have talent and so I must pull myself together – but when the real situation appears I chicken out. Man, I seem to have been running – and running – from something inexplicable that bugs me but cannot shake it off – and as the thirty-years age blinks in the near future (I'll be 29 next week), the thought that I should really already have reached someplace – but this subservient, yes-boss, coloured nature that I was born with and lived with for 28 years isn't that easy to shake off.<sup>16</sup>

Adhikari argues that expressing specific views of colouredness shapes an individual's identity.<sup>17</sup> At this particular point in his life, being coloured was something that Jephtas deemed negative and undesirable – an impediment to professional success. Yet ironically, one year later, despite achieving significant success – being appointed as a vocal coach at the prestigious Zurich Opera House and as an assistant conductor at the Lisbon Opera – Jephtas's self-disparagement over his coloured identity persisted. In April 1973, he wrote to Abrahamse:

[The conductor Nicola] Rescigno talked about [getting me to] Dallas [Texas]. I'm very interested in their '74 season – *Lucrezia Borgia* (Donizetti) with Beverly Sills. This season they do *Coq d'or* (Rimsky-Korsakov), *Marriage of Figaro* (with [Victoria] de los Ángeles) and *Andrea Chénier* – none of which particularly interests me – just look at me! – can't escape my origins, climb one step on the ladder and think I'm higher than God himself – coloured, coloured!! I try so hard – and worse! Counting those chickens as soon as the egg has been laid.

Anyway, I do have another chicken – the agent, Ansalone, has re-signed me for next year's Lisbon season. The operas he will tell me in Milan – just my luck! – I don't like Lisbon. I can hear you thinking – "Never happy! Us humans" (no, I forget, we are not human, we're coloured, not even black – and after all, only "black is beautiful").<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Gordon Jephtas, letter to May Abrahamse, 26 February 1972.

<sup>17</sup> Adhikari, "Predicaments of marginality", ix.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon Jephtas, letter to May Abrahamse, 4 April 1973.

Jephtas's sardonic remarks reflect not only the entrenched patterns of thinking that were indoctrinated under apartheid but also the negative conceptualisation of coloured identity that was not uncommon among coloured people and other racial groups subjected to the distorted logic of apartheid.<sup>19</sup>

From August 1972 to mid-1977, Jephtas was employed at the Zurich Opera as a vocal coach, and it is in his letters from Zurich that we observe the first notable change in his attitude towards his identity. His letter to Abrahamse, dated 14 January 1975, when he was 31 years old, marks the first shift in his thinking:

The longer I am abroad, the more I realize that we as [coloured] people, we do have talent and are capable ... we people have it to be great. We are too busy being sorry for our unfair lot – and we are right – we have been humiliated – but the young have to learn to say “Screw you”.<sup>20</sup>

Other examples from this period read as follows:

Every while I get letters from other friends at home with cryptic comments like “do you still have to wait around for whatever comes your way” – and I spend weeks trying to understand what they mean to know – and then even more weeks to unfathom our coloured mentality – my own way of thinking has been so tainted by my Italian sojourn – that I don't even know where to start...

I am so thrilled about the Eoan Group's overseas visit<sup>21</sup> because I really want to work and pass on to all the artists what I have learnt – of course what has taken me 10 years to learn cannot be taught in 15 days – but it is better than nothing. I do so hope not to be completely misunderstood by whoever is coming – my biggest competitor will no doubt be “the white man” – but I mean to fight that in my way – for me [it] is important to impart that we coloureds have something to offer – once we have learnt what is required and forget our humiliation problem; be proud of what we are and make the very most of what we have going for us. Then we can get on to the job of perfecting our good things.<sup>22</sup>

What brought about this shift in attitude, and what drove it? The first answer lies in Jephtas's own words to Abrahamse: the longer he was abroad, living in an environment drastically different from apartheid, the better he was able to make sense of his situation from a distance. The second answer is more complex and multifaceted.

During Jephtas's first two years in Zurich, he changed residences frequently, but in June 1974, he found a more stable living situation when he moved into a platonic flat-share with a colleague from the Zurich Opera, Johannes Lüthi, where he stayed until 1976. In an inter-

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<sup>19</sup> Erasmus, “Introduction: Re-imagining coloured identities”, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon Jephtas, letter to May Abrahamse, 14 January 1973.

<sup>21</sup> The International Festival of Youth Orchestras invited Eoan to its 1975 Festival held in Aberdeen. See also Chapter 6 above.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon Jephtas, letter to May Abrahamse, 13 June 1975.

view, Lüthi explained that although he and Jephtas led largely separate lives, they regularly shared meals, particularly Sunday brunches, which were often communal affairs, joined by Lüthi's girlfriend and whomever happened to be Jephtas's boyfriend at the time.<sup>23</sup> Sources, including Jephtas's colleagues and friends from Switzerland,<sup>24</sup> confirm that Jephtas lived a relatively open homosexual life in Zurich. However, this was not common knowledge among his family and friends back in South Africa – and with good reason. Under apartheid, homosexuality was a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment, and considered so subversive that the military ran brutal “conversion” programmes aimed at “curing” it.<sup>25</sup> For Jephtas, who already bore the weight of being coloured, being gay in apartheid South Africa would have only compounded his struggles. Switzerland, on the other hand, had decriminalised homosexuality in 1942, which meant that Jephtas was free to express his sexuality without fear of reprisal. It is possible, then, that this freedom to live openly as a gay man also enabled Jephtas to confront and embrace his coloured identity without shame or humiliation.

Another potential catalyst for this shift in perspective may have been Jephtas's professional environment at the Zurich Opera House, which had engaged him for his skills as a vocal coach, regardless of his race or status as an immigrant. While this does not mean that he never experienced racism in Zurich, there is no mention of any such incidents in his letters, nor do his Swiss friends recall any. His role as a vocal coach also required him to interact with international opera singers, each with their own unique personalities and cultural backgrounds. This constant exposure to diverse individuals and cultures at the Zurich Opera House may have further contributed to Jephtas's evolving relationship with his coloured identity. By 1988, by which time he was firmly established in the USA, Jephtas had stopped signing his letters with his name, opting instead to use the term “boesman”. According to the *Dictionary of South African English*, when used in English, “boesman” is an “insulting term for a ‘coloured’ person”.<sup>26</sup> However, Jephtas's letters suggest that he used the term with a sense of pride, possibly indicating by this stage in his life (at 45) that he had fully embraced his coloured identity.

<sup>23</sup> Johannes Lüthi, interview conducted by Chris Walton in August 2022.

<sup>24</sup> This information derives from numerous interviews conducted between 2021 and 2022 with acquaintances of the late Gordon Jephtas by the editors of the book *“Sorry. I am what I am.” The Life and Letters of the South African Pianist and Opera Coach Gordon Jephtas (1943–92)*, ed. Hilde Roos, Féroll-Jon Davids and Chris Walton. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Robert M. Kaplan, “Treatment of Homosexuality during Apartheid”, in *BMJ*, 329 (18–25 December 2004), 1415–16.

<sup>26</sup> *Dictionary of South African English*, “Boesman”, at: <https://dsae.co.za/entry/boesman/e01015>. (accessed 8 July 2023).



*Figure 12.1 Gordon Jephtas in the USA, late 1980s. Eoan Archive, Stellenbosch.*

## **Conclusion**

Gordon Jephtas's time at the Zurich Opera House, and more broadly his experience of Swiss society in the mid-1970s, played a pivotal role in reshaping his understanding of his coloured identity. More than simply a place of professional advancement, Zurich offered Jephtas a form of exile that allowed him to distance himself – both physically and mentally – from the racialised oppression of apartheid. The multicultural environment of the Zurich Opera House and the relatively progressive social norms of Switzerland provided Jephtas with an opportunity to reevaluate his self-worth, free from the constraints of apartheid's dehumanising racial hierarchies.

What is striking in Jephtas's evolution is that his shift in identity was a gradual process that unfolded over years of introspection. His letters show a clear trajectory from self-

loathing and internalised racism to a more empowered, albeit complicated, embrace of his colouredness. This transformation was likely facilitated by his experiences abroad, where he encountered individuals from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, thus undermining the reductive binaries of apartheid.

The importance of this transformation cannot be overstated. Jephtas's life and letters underscore the profound impact of apartheid on the individual psyche of a man born into the coloured community, where one was often trapped in a paradoxical position – seen as “superior” to Blacks but still regarded as “inferior” to whites. His letters reveal the extent to which apartheid's racial ideologies were internalised, not just by its oppressors, but by its victims too. Yet by the end of his life, Jephtas's use of the otherwise derogatory term “boes-man” as a self-identifier suggests that he had reclaimed and redefined his racial identity on his own terms. This act of reclamation is significant: it demonstrates that identity is not a static construct but rather a dynamic and evolving process shaped by both external circumstances and internal reflection.

Ultimately, Jephtas's journey is emblematic of the broader struggles of the coloured community under apartheid – a group caught between privilege and oppression, acceptance and exclusion. His experience illustrates how identity, when subjected to systemic marginalisation, can become a site of both vulnerability and resistance. Jephtas's transformation from a man burdened by his colouredness to one who ultimately embraced it with a sense of pride is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of profound adversity. His story serves as a reminder that identity is not merely assigned by societal categories but is continuously constructed and reconstructed through lived experience, personal reflection, and, in Jephtas's case, the liberating potential of exile.



## 13 Shalati Khosa's Swiss Sojourn

*Chatradari Devroop*

In February 1971, Shalati Joseph Khosa, a young Black South African musician, began a study visit to Switzerland by attending a preparatory French course in Lausanne and accordingly joined the social club set up by the students' representative council. This club undertook recreational and social activities such as excursions, sporting events, dancing and drinking. On one occasion, the club organised a trip to a Swiss resort, something the young Khosa had never seen before. The preparations for this trip raised Khosa's expectations, as he expected to see the equivalent of the "Big Five" of the Kruger National Park from back in his home country. But on arrival at the Swiss resort, Khosa's enthusiasm was dashed when he realised that the animals in question were domestic goats and donkeys.<sup>1</sup> Such disappointment later prompted him to admit:

I wished they had taken us to a world-standard zoo, if there was any. I did not ask anyone if there was any, lest I lowered the spirit of the fun of the excursion.<sup>2</sup>

Both goats and donkeys make interesting domestic animals; goats are known for their resourcefulness and ability to survive in harsh environments, donkeys for their strength and stubborn nature. These animals provide an irresistible analogy for us here.

In the context of Switzerland's relations with South Africa during apartheid, the characteristics of these domestic animals arguably reflect the different approaches of the two countries. Switzerland, like the stubborn donkey, was known for its neutrality and commitment to cooperation and diplomacy. It maintained diplomatic relations with South Africa while trying to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between the apartheid government and anti-apartheid activists. Swiss organisations also offered humanitarian aid to human rights initiatives in South Africa.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Matsebatlela, "S.J. Khosa: Man of Song" (unpublished), 58. Manuscript in possession of Drs Emmanuel Matsebatlela and Reuel Khoza.

<sup>2</sup> Shalati Khosa, cited in "S.J. Khosa: Man of Song", 58.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Roger de Weck, "Switzerland and its Past: An Uncomfortable Relationship", in *TRANSIT*, 4(1); Georg Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994: Final report of the NFP 42+ commissioned by the Swiss Federal Council*. Bern: P. Lang, 2005; Alison April, "Switzerland's relations with South Africa 1994–2001". Master thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1; and Roger Pfister, "Die Schweiz und Südafrika während der Apartheid Kontroverse und 'Agenda-Setting' nach 1998", Zurich: Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, 2000, 1.

Apartheid South Africa, in contrast, like the domestic goat, put its own interests first and pursued policies that prioritised the white minority over the Black majority. The apartheid regime was widely condemned by the international community for its discriminatory policies and human rights violations, and faced extensive economic sanctions and boycotts.<sup>4</sup>

These cultural misunderstandings and the complex relationship between Switzerland and apartheid South Africa form the backdrop for examining Khosa's musical journey through the lens of communicative function. It is in this context that the Swiss sojourn of the musician Shalati Joseph Khosa unfolds: a life caught between the atrocities of apartheid and the hypocrisy of Switzerland, whose economic interests ignored human rights while extending an olive branch through its missions.

I frame my arguments theoretically using Roman Jakobson's<sup>5</sup> communication model, emphasising his concept of phatic function (from the Greek word "phatos", meaning "to speak"), which refers to the use of language in social interaction to establish and maintain social relationships rather than convey specific information.<sup>6</sup> For Malinowski, the "phatic" function of language serves not only to convey information, but also to establish and maintain social relationships.<sup>7</sup> Jakobson<sup>8</sup> extended Malinowski, suggesting that the phatic function was not limited to face-to-face communication, but also applied to other forms of communication, such as writing, telephone conversations and music. I argue that Khosa's artistic contribution has a phatic function: it connects him to others who share his experiences or appreciate his work, creating a sense of belonging and community.

Before exploring how Jakobson's communication model illuminates Khosa's musical experience in depth, it is important to understand the biographical context of his life and musical development. The following snapshot provides essential background for appreciating how his musical journey bridged disparate cultural contexts.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Detlef Siegfried, "Aporien des Kulturboykotts. Anti-Apartheid-Bewegung, ANC und der Konflikt um Paul Simons Album *Graceland* (1985–1988)", in *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, 13, June 2016, 254–79; Barbara Masekela, "The ANC and the Cultural Boycott", in *Africa Report*, 32(4), 1 July 1987, 19–21; Tscherina S. von Moos & Theo Leuthold, *Together not Apart: Dokumentation einer Südafrika-Boykott-Aktion in der Schweiz*, Zurich: Leuthold Press, no date.

<sup>5</sup> Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics", in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A Sebeok, Boston: MIT Press, 1960, 350–77.

<sup>6</sup> Etymology, origin and meaning of "phatic" by etymonline, [www.etymonline.com/search?q=phatic](http://www.etymonline.com/search?q=phatic) (accessed 9 April 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Foundations of Faith and Morals*. London: Oxford University Press, 1936, 313.

<sup>8</sup> Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics", 5.

## Shalati's Snapshot

Shalati Joseph Khosa was born into a polygamous religious family in the rural village of Xi-hoxani in Limpopo Province, South Africa. His parents, both musically inclined, met while singing in a church choir. Risimati, his father, was a clergyman and a composer of church songs who founded a church in Shingwedzi. Nyanisi, his mother, was known for her exceptional singing and improvisational skills. When he was born, his strict, religious parents named him Joseph after a distant uncle – a biblical name that he later came to appreciate.<sup>9</sup>

Although official records state Khosa's date of birth as 15 May 1936,<sup>10</sup> he disputed this, claiming that it was the birthday of his sister, who was born five years after him.<sup>11</sup> All his birth records were destroyed after his father's death, as was apparently common practice at the time. Apartheid policy required Black South Africans to have a second indigenous name for their "dompas" registration (their permission to relocate or move around). So in his teens, Khosa spontaneously chose Shalati or Xilati, a name associated with his clan that stood for unity and friendship. He later proudly claimed that Shalati stands for "all the good things that life can offer".<sup>12</sup>

Khosa's musical journey began under the tutelage of A.J. Mahlale, a well-known Tsonga poet and musician. During his primary school years, Khosa revealed his compositional talent by writing the song "Mahumi Ya Yeriko" in response to his teacher's request that he compose a work in the style of the hymn "Walls of Jericho".<sup>13</sup> Khosa's secondary education at Lemana Douglas Laing Smit Secondary School (some 15 miles south-east of the town of Louis Trichardt) provided him with further musical opportunities. He received lessons there from Lybon Mtsetwene, who taught him scales, rhythmic patterns and tonic-solfa notation. His musical education culminated in 1962 when he earned a teaching diploma from the University of the North (today the University of Limpopo), where his talents blossomed under the tutelage of Professor Lekhela Ernest Pelalo, who directed the university choir. This experience brought Khosa into the choral music scene, where he was to leave a lasting impression.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Matsebatlela, "S.J. Khosa: Man of Song", 8–23; Kgaugelo Mpyane, "'Mintirho ya vulavula' ('Deeds talk'): A Reflection on the Contribution of South African Choral Composer Shalati Joseph Khosa (1931–2013)", unpublished mini-dissertation, University of the Free State, 2015, 9; Yvonne Huskisson & Sarita Hauptfleisch, *Black Composers of Southern Africa: An Expanded Supplement to The Bantu Composers of Southern Africa*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1992, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Kgaugelo Mpyane, "Mintirho ya vulavula", 2015, 9; Huskisson & Hauptfleisch, *Black composers of Southern Africa*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Matsebatlela, "S.J. Khosa: Man of Song", 10.

<sup>12</sup> Matsebatlela, "S.J. Khosa: Man of Song", 22.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas Reid, "S J Khosa – Composer and Music Educator – in Conversation with Douglas Reid", in *Ars Nova* 24(1), 1992, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Matsebatlela, "S.J. Khosa: Man of Song", 24–42.



Figure 13.1. Shalati Joseph Khosa conducting (undated). Courtesy of the Khosa family.

Paul Robert, a Swiss doctor at the Masana Hospital (now the Mapulaneng Hospital) – one of three such institutions run by the Swiss Mission in South Africa<sup>15</sup> – facilitated a donation of brass instruments from Switzerland in an effort to promote music among the local population. He also pledged money to the local Gazankulu government and challenged them to match or exceed his offer to establish a music scholarship for a promising local talent. This person would receive musical training abroad and then return to share their knowledge with the community.

Khosa was a teacher at Shingwedzi Secondary School in the township of Xitlhelani at this time, and he was awarded the scholarship. In order to take up this opportunity, he had to resign from the Ministry of Education with no guarantee of future employment upon his return. He left his family behind for 18 months to continue his studies abroad. Khosa was already familiar with the tonic sol-fa system used to notate choral music in South Africa, but before leaving for Switzerland, he also had to learn staff music notation. In this, he was aided by a Mrs Dippenaar, a local music teacher and pastor's wife, who taught him the basics.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See Anon., "Working paper research project 'history of health systems in Africa': Swiss mission hospitals and rural health delivery in the 20<sup>th</sup> century", *SNIS Final Report Working Paper*, 2008–2010, [https://snis.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2008\\_Harries\\_Working-Paper.pdf](https://snis.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2008_Harries_Working-Paper.pdf) (accessed 9 April 2025).

<sup>16</sup> See Mpyane, "Mintirho ya vulavula", 16; Huskisson & Hauptfleisch, *Black Composers of Southern*

On 27 August 1971, Khosa travelled to Switzerland; it was his first-ever flight. Upon arriving in Geneva, he was met by Reverend Pieter Ouwerhand, a familiar face from the Elim Swiss Mission Station in South Africa. Together, they journeyed to the Département Missionnaire in Lausanne, where Khosa received a warm welcome in French. Recognising the need to learn the language, he was provided with a cassette recorder and a tape containing basic French lessons by a Monsieur Pfluger at the department. Khosa was then escorted to Romanel-sur-Lausanne, a small town just north of Lausanne, to meet his private music instructor, Gérald Gorgerat.<sup>17</sup>

Khosa spent his first three months attending French lessons at the Diavox Language School in Lausanne.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Gorgerat began giving him evening lessons in music notation and scales for the keyboard using a method he had devised himself (which he named “NELGER”). Khosa soon composed a song about learning French that was later performed at a concert. The language school’s social club, organised by its student council, helped Khosa to integrate into Swiss society. He was elected head of the beginners’ French class and took part in various cultural and social events, visited tourist attractions and learned about Swiss customs.

After completing his language course, Khosa concentrated on studying music under Gorgerat’s guidance. These lessons included music theory, harmony, composition, a practical knowledge of wind instruments, and orchestration. Khosa accompanied Gorgerat to primary schools in the canton of Vaud and to Swiss pre-schools in Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Savuit-Lutry and Lavigny (for variously abled children), but also in Paris, Mitry-Mory, Dijon, Mâcon and Strasbourg in France. He also shared his Xitsonga-Shangana drumming skills on these visits. Through Gorgerat’s connections, Khosa participated in musical training seminars for teachers and educators in Nancy, Dijon, Paris and Annecy.<sup>19</sup> He also visited music instrument manufacturers and was able to attend concerts abroad in the Sibelius House in Finland and in Westminster Abbey in London. Khosa also performed as part of Gorgerat’s private quartet, which consisted of a trumpet, bassoon, clarinet and flute, and performed on drums in churches in Lausanne and Neuchâtel. He proudly reported having been paid for these performances.<sup>20</sup>

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*Africa*, 9; Reid, “S J Khosa – Composer and music educator”, 17.

<sup>17</sup> See Matsebatlela, “S.J. Khosa: Man of Song”, 55–56; Reid, “S.J. Khosa – Composer and Music Educator”, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Aude Widmer, archiviste communale, Romanel-sur-Lausanne, e-mail to Chris Walton, 23 March 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Christine Canu (née Gorgerat), e-mail to Chris Walton, 12 February 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Matsebatlela, “S.J. Khosa: Man of Song”, 60.

Khosa's stay in Switzerland lasted nine months.<sup>21</sup> He returned to South Africa in June 1972 and was appointed to a teaching position at the Tivumbeni College of Education in Tzaneen in his home region, eventually also earning a Master's degree in Music Education from the University of Pretoria (1996). He was later awarded an honorary doctorate for his contributions to South African music from Omega Global University, a Christian tertiary institution based in Mpumalanga.<sup>22</sup> Khosa was a prolific composer, with some 850 choral pieces to his name. He passed away on 3 July 2013.<sup>23</sup>

Having traced Khosa's journey from rural South Africa to Switzerland and back, we can now examine how his musical development across these contexts reflects a fundamental continuity that can be understood through Jakobson's communication model.

### **Jakobson's Communication Model and Khosa's Phatic Sameness**

Khosa's musical development and Swiss sojourn acquire particular significance when viewed against the backdrop of South Africa's post-apartheid scholarly interest in Black cultural practices. After 1994, there was a heightened interest in the cultural practices of the majority Black population of South Africa.<sup>24</sup> An important focus in this period of scholarship was the contribution of composers nurtured by the church and often working under its patronage.

In an era increasingly aware of postcolonial contexts, the church was no longer regarded as innocent of colonial complicity, for it had been a participant sometimes willing, sometimes reluctant, in an ideological state apparatus intent on reproducing the oppressive status quo.<sup>25</sup> However, views of the role of the different churches and denominations have become more differentiated, for they had also been a venue for interesting experiments within an otherwise colonially informed framework, drawing musicians from marginalised African, often oral traditions into practices hitherto dependent on notated music, and applying them to the institutional purposes of liturgy and worship. The introduction to written music and the requirements of a religious denomination were not necessarily exercises in alienation but contained the seeds of a hybridisation enabling the freeing of creative energy as much as its constraint.

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<sup>21</sup> Reid, "S.J. Khosa – Composer and Music Educator", 18.

<sup>22</sup> The sources consulted, including Khosa's family, mention an honorary degree; S.J. Khosa's own curriculum vitae lists Omega Global University as the awarding institution. See <https://ogu.org.za/> (accessed 9 April 2025).

<sup>23</sup> As mentioned further above, Khosa's age is not known for certain. Most accounts of his life give the year of his birth as 1936. See Matsebatlela, "S.J. Khosa: Man of Song", 10.

<sup>24</sup> Heather Jacklin and Peter Vale (eds.), *Re-Imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique, Theory and Post-Apartheid Society*. Durban, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Selina Palm, "Reimagining the Human: The Role of the Churches in Building a Liberatory Human Rights Culture in South Africa Today", PhD thesis, University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2016.

Khosa's own musical journey exemplifies this complex relationship between church patronage and African musical expression, as his religious background and Swiss mission connections directly facilitated his musical education and international exposure. His case raises the question of how an African musician could be transplanted to another musical environment (Switzerland, in this case) and flourish there. I believe that it is because Khosa heard a deep musical commonality during his stay in Switzerland, a commonality not at the level of content, but at the level of form. To understand how Khosa could flourish musically in a seemingly foreign environment, we must examine the underlying communicative functions that transcend cultural differences.

Departing from the assumption that music is a form of communication, I wish to invoke the work of Roman Jakobson on the functions of language present in every successful act of communication. Jakobson identified six functions of language<sup>26</sup> that demonstrate the multifaceted nature of human communication: the referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic. The referential function pertains to the conveyance of information, describing or representing objective reality. The emotive function expresses the speaker's emotions, attitudes, and feelings towards the subject matter. The conative function focuses on influencing the behaviour or actions of the listener, often through commands or requests. The phatic function is dedicated to establishing, maintaining, or terminating social connections such as greetings or small talk. The metalingual function is utilised when language is used to discuss or clarify aspects of language itself, as in definitions or explanations. Lastly, the poetic function is characterised by a focus on the aesthetic and creative aspects of language, such as sound shape, rhythm, rhyme and imagery often found in literature and artistic expression.

Given the prevalence of music as accompaniment to movement and dance that will have formed the musical vernacular of the young Khosa, the music to which he had initially been exposed might be categorised as phatic. His musical upbringing in South Africa, with its emphasis on communal participation and connection, exemplifies this phatic function where music serves to establish and maintain social bonds. In moving from Gazankulu to the Canton of Vaud, Khosa will have encountered Protestant choral music – a form of music that aims to narrow the gap between the receiver and the divine and is in that sense phatic. The coordinated chanting of the laity is in fact a radical subordination of musical content and musical realities to the task of collective prayer. It was into this environment of sophisticated phatic music that Khosa arrived, as a practitioner of one refined phatic music encountering another. From this perspective, it should no longer be assumed that Khosa's musical achievement and struggle was against the shock of immersion in a musically alien

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<sup>26</sup> Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics", 3–7.



environment. I suggest in Khosa's music a fundamental continuity at the level of musical function during and after his Swiss sojourn, with the only difference between his African and Swiss experience being the expression of the phatic function in dance on the one hand, and in institutions of post-Reformation worship on the other.

Despite the surface differences in musical styles between his native traditions and the Swiss choral practices he encountered, both served the fundamental communicative purpose of establishing connection – whether between community members in dance or between worshippers in prayer. Khosa's compositions after returning to South Africa, including his extensive body of choral works that synthesised African and European elements, demonstrate how he maintained this essential phatic function while incorporating new technical elements from his Swiss training.

In using Jakobson to suggest the appropriateness of "sameness" rather than "difference", commonality rather than alienation, Khosa's music poses questions about musical alterity, and how one should approach the meaning of interactions between an African composer of sacred music and his European (in this case, Swiss) peers. Much work remains to be done to arrive at a full estimation of Khosa's musical contribution, and how it was inflected by his years in Switzerland. Thinking of him not as an exotic cultural anthropological exception, but a fellow composer engaged in communication that is universally human, might be the most productive way to do so.

## 14 Singing Cowboys and Alpine Goat Herds: The Passaggio of Culture to Nature in Afrikaans Yodelling

Willemien Froneman & Stephanus Muller

“She taught me how to yodel”, sings Santa Vorster on her 1968 album, *My Friend Mr. Echo*.<sup>1</sup> And although it is doubtful that the then 15-year-old Vorster, billed as “the yodelling princess”,<sup>2</sup> had ever gone “across to Switzerland where all the yodelers be”, and even less likely that she had met “a yodellin’ gal up in a little Swiss chalet”,<sup>3</sup> her cover of the 1963 Frank Ifield song became enough of a signature for her that she would continue to perform and record the song for many decades. On the liner notes of her 1966 EP record *Die Swerwerskind* (*The wandering child*), we read that Vorster stumbled “into the limelight” upon winning a national talent competition, after which she underwent training with Charles Jacobie, described here as “South Africa’s famous interpreter of folk music”.<sup>4</sup> On the album cover, Vorster appears in a satin Western fringe shirt and a Stetson hat, and the liner notes ask: “How does a 12-year-old school girl from Vereeniging succeed in taking the outstanding musical heritage of Nashville, Tennessee and interpreting it in an intimate, personal manner?” Or, one might add, become a yodelling princess?

Given the country-and-western origin of Ifield’s song, the context of Jacobie’s tutelage of the youthful Vorster and her own cultivation of a country-and-western image on a number of her albums, “She taught me how to yodel” is obviously less about Switzerland, and more about the United States. And this would also hold true, to a lesser or greater extent, for the other songs she sang with reference to Swiss themes: “Switserse bergliedjie” (“Little Swiss mountain song”),<sup>5</sup> “Skaters Jodel”,<sup>6</sup> “Swiss Lullaby”,<sup>7</sup> and “Somerdag Jodel” (“Summer’s day

<sup>1</sup> Santa Vorster, “She Taught Me How to Yodel”, *My Friend Mr. Echo*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMueDT8Ee34](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMueDT8Ee34), Gallo Records, 1968. All links in this essay last accessed in August 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Santa Vorster, *The Yodelling Princess*, CBS EXP 2147, 1966. Vorster was born on 26 March 1953.

<sup>3</sup> Santa Vorster, “She Taught Me How to Yodel”.

<sup>4</sup> Santa Vorster, *Die Swerwerskind*, Gallo Records, 1966. Original in Afrikaans. All translations here are by the present writers. An EP (“extended play”) record was a kind of “mini-album” with several tracks at 45rpm.

<sup>5</sup> Santa Vorster, “Switserse bergliedjie”, *Die Swerwerskind*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-jCNvFWKUw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-jCNvFWKUw), Gallo Records, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Santa Vorster, “Skaters Jodel”, *Yodelling Along with Santa Vorster*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTxjCGmWO2I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTxjCGmWO2I), CBS ALD 6968, 1966.

<sup>7</sup> Santa Vorster, *The Yodelling Princess*, CBS EXP 2147, 1966.

yodel”).<sup>8</sup> But just as clearly, country and western songs like “Yodel Sweet Molly”<sup>9</sup> (from *My Friend Mr. Echo*) reference something that is decidedly, essentially, irreducibly the yodel, and therefore also connoted to Swissness.



Figure 14.1. Santa Vorster’s album *Die Swerwerskind* (“The wandering child”, 1965). Private collection.

There is a historical narrative to be told about how Santa Vorster, and other Afrikaans popular music artists, became yodellers in twentieth-century South Africa. And it is one that positions Switzerland at the interface of a global and an Afrikaans imaginary of what it meant to be European and “white”, and within the context of a country where “non-European” was understood, according to the signage that petty apartheid employed at railway stations

<sup>8</sup> Santa Vorster, “Somerdag Jodel”, *Die Swerwerskind*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_H3irVVY58](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_H3irVVY58), Gallo Records, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> Santa Vorster, “Yodel Sweet Molly”, *My Friend Mr. Echo*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dfmHvHtNRs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dfmHvHtNRs), Gallo Records, 1968.

and on park benches, as “Black”. To be sure, the yodelling that is of concern here is not the differentiated understanding of Alpine yodelling described by Baumann and Leuthold,<sup>10</sup> but rather its spin-offs in English-language popular music that date back to the nineteenth century. And yet the story of Afrikaans yodelling emerges somehow in this triangular configuration between South Africa, the United States and Switzerland. In this essay we approach the meaning of Afrikaans yodelling not, in the first instance, historically. Rather, we treat yodelling in twentieth-century South Africa within a framework of language and song belonging more properly to the ethnomusicological, as a “liminal utterance”, listening to it as form of non-semiotic vocalisation in Afrikaans – i.e. as a vocal phenomenon on the speech-song continuum not unlike ululation or scatting.<sup>11</sup> This enables us to imagine a place for the yodel in Afrikaans linguistics and phonology, and to locate it within a theory of sound production, cultivation and pronunciation in language at the centre of how Afrikaans as a language, and Afrikaners as a *volk* in the process of becoming, made race essential to sound, and sound to race. In other words, we consider the yodel first as a phenomenon in a linguistic soundscape concerned with theorising how to “sound white”, and not only how to reference whiteness in language. But first we pick up the trail of Santa Vorster’s cowboy boots and trace its American referents, where the story of country-and-western yodelling rolls back in time to the nineteenth-century visits of the New World by yodelling Swiss performing troupes. Both perspectives, ideological and historical, are necessary to understand how yodelling functioned in popular Afrikaans music not as a simple referent to Swissness, but as a complex procedure of disavowal.<sup>12</sup>

### The Blackface “Culture” of Yodelling

In the early 1840s, two related performance traditions gained swift popularity in the United States, practically supplanting that of opera: the trend for “mountain singing families” and blackface minstrel shows.<sup>13</sup> The formation of “mountain families”, as discussed by Hans Nathan in his research on the “Swiss Family” Rainer, was preceded by a similar European movement, and its rapid spread across the United States is attributed to the very same fam-

<sup>10</sup> See Timothy Wise, “Yodel Species: A Typology of Falsetto Effects in Popular Music Vocal Styles”, in *Radical Musicology*, 2, 2007, 8.

<sup>11</sup> See Jeffers Engelhardt and Estelle Amy de la Bretèque, “Editors’ Preface: Speech, Song, and In-Between”, in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 49, 2017, xv–xix, here xv.

<sup>12</sup> For disavowal as an aesthetic modality of whiteness, see Willemien Froneman, *The Groovology of White Affect*, New York: Palgrave, 2024 and Willemien Froneman, “The Ears of Apartheid”, in *Social Dynamics*, 49(1), 2023, 100–115.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Nathan, “The Tyrolese Family Rainer, and the Vogue of Singing Mountain-Troupes in Europe and America”, in *The Musical Quarterly*, 32(1), 1946, 63.

ily who toured the United States between 1839 and 1843.<sup>14</sup> The Rainers were actually a Tyrolean family<sup>15</sup> who transplanted from Europe the idea of family performances (sometimes with made-up familial ties), establishing the group arrangement that was adopted by their successors in America, with one or two sisters in the middle and the men flanking them, each resting his hands on his hips or belt. They also popularised informal ensemble singing and free “mountain style” improvising in the concert hall. As Hans Nathan noted, the Rainers “made a deep impression on American minds”, which “accounts for the otherwise inexplicable fact that all later American [family] troupes had ‘Alpine songs’ in their repertoire”.<sup>16</sup> But there were other factors that contributed to the Rainers’ success. One only has to read Walt Whitman’s “Introduction” to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* to understand how the American landscape, including its references to mountains and wide open spaces, was at this time considered the source for the poetic national imaginary.<sup>17</sup> The American nationalist attachment to the common man, so evident in Whitman’s poetry, also led to an interest in folk music (in both Europe and America) and in “melodies that suggested the wide vistas and clear air of the Alps”.<sup>18</sup>

If the European and adopted American performance style of “Alpine singing” already contained an element of parody – replete with Tyrolean costume, yodelling, whistling, ventriloquist acts and spoons used as musical instruments – four unemployed white performers made this explicit when they staged “African-American styled spoof” in blackface of the Rainer family’s concerts under the name The Dan Emmett Virginia Minstrels. A song like “Sauerkraut is Bully” shows how the yodel existed side by side with folk music, country-and-western music, slave music, blackface minstrelsy, and mocking satire of Germanness and its cultural signifiers. Such spoofs were premised on impersonating a (generic German) musical national identity, and became a standard part of the blackface minstrel show.

As this potted history shows, the very first instances of the blackface minstrel show in America contain historical referents to Switzerland. The songs by Al Bernard and similar writers of the era represent the death throes of this mongrelised form of entertainment in which one witnessed the strange spectacle of white men impersonating the fictitious “coon”

<sup>14</sup> Nathan, “The Tyrolean Family Rainer”, 64.

<sup>15</sup> Although repeatedly described in the English-speaking press as a “Swiss” family, the Rainers were Austrian; one of the group’s founders, Felix Rainer, nevertheless claimed to have learned his art while working in Switzerland. See Sandra Hupfaut, “Die Tourneen der *Geschwister Rainer* und *Rainer Family* – Rekonstruktion der ersten ‘Kunstreisen’ als Sozialgeschichte eines kulturellen Transfers im frühen 19. Jahrhundert”. Doctoral thesis, Innsbruck: Leopold-Franzens-Universität, 2016, 22 and 92.

<sup>16</sup> Nathan, “The Tyrolean Family Rainer”, 64.

<sup>17</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The Original 1855 Edition*. No place: American Renaissance Books, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Nathan, “The Tyrolean Family Rainer”, 67.

while yodelling to trite Swiss images. Yodelling, in these contexts and at this time, now seemed useful only for its comic element and not for its beauty. Yet, soon, in the rural music of America, a new romanticism would give the yodel a place and purpose, where it no longer needed stock imagery as its excuse to exist. This new style could be heard in yodelling's saviour from the South, Jimmie Rodgers.

And it is through Rodgers, and his influence on South African country-and-western music, that we return to the commercial success of Santa Vorster, and her mentor, Charles Jacobie (1928–1988), the Afrikaans country singer who became known (presumably with reference to Gene Autry) in 1960s South Africa as “die Singende Beesboer” (The singing cowboy), and who is regarded by many as the father of country music in South Africa.<sup>19</sup> Dale Cockrell and Suzanne Strauss attest that country music in South Africa “has long been associated with rural, lower-class, Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans whose culture has often been an embarrassment to those of the middle classes”<sup>20</sup> and is, to a considerable extent, a reflection of country music in the United States. So to trace Jacobie back to Jimmie Rodgers, whose early music displayed “a unique and special yodeling style”, is unsurprising. What is not entirely expected, they write, “given the conventional wisdom that the audience for country music was and is white, rural, and lower-class”, is that “black, urban South Africans seem to have been particularly drawn to Jimmie Rodgers”.<sup>21</sup> In fact, as Cockrell and Strauss affirm, Rodgers's first recordings of 1927 were already available in South Africa by the late 1920s. They hear in Griffiths Motsieloa and Ignatius Monare's “Aubuti Nkikho” of 1930 a clear reference to Rodgers's “blue yodel” songs, and also point to William Mseleku and Philemon Mokgosi as examples of the plaintive blue yodel, the expressive glottal break, and the onomatopoeic use of the falsetto.<sup>22</sup> Where country music from the United States therefore provided a shared point of reference for white and Black consumers of this music, and manifested in particular kinds of expression for Black urban musicians, for white South Africans, in particular Afrikaners, the existing vernacular brand of country music was called something else: boeremusiek.

In all of these forms of South African musical expression, the yodel remained present as a rich sonic signifier of its layered Swiss and American meanings. But in South African music the yodel also acquired further density as a sonic signifier. The sonic referent to the

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<sup>19</sup> Jacobie was, not surprisingly, also a yodelling man, as his own rendition of “Somerdag Yodel” attests, and also his “Mockin' Bird Song”; he also used falsetto (as an onomatopoeic device) in songs such as “Blou trein” (Blue train).

<sup>20</sup> Dale Cockrell and Suzanne Strauss, “South African Country Music”, in John Shepherd and David Horn (eds), *Bloomsbury Encyclopaedia of Popular Music of the World*. Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, vol. 13, in press.

<sup>21</sup> Cockrell and Strauss, “South African Country Music”, in press.

<sup>22</sup> Cockrell and Strauss, “South African Country Music”, in press.

Alpine landscape in the form of the mountain echo had a special meaning in its South African context, where J.M. Coetzee memorably described the landscape as lacking in a vertical dimension and therefore in aesthetic prompts towards the sublime.<sup>23</sup> When considered thus, yodelling in South Africa could be understood as bringing into the sonic landscape a non-South African, European spatial referent in yodelling lyrics such as Santa Vorster's "Switserse Bergliedjie" when she sings and yodels about "die eggo-klank ver oor die berge heen" ("the echo sound far above the mountains") "in hierdie land van ons moedersbond, hier in die berge so blou" ("in this land of our mother's bond, here in the blue mountains"). It is the alien potential of this "non-South African" sound associated with the yodel that concerns us in the next section.

### The Racial "Nature" of Yodelling

The ideological underpinnings of Afrikaans linguistics – particularly the branches of phonetics and phonology – are remarkably under-researched. The key figure in the establishment of Afrikaans phonology, Pierre de Villiers Pienaar (1904–1978), was awarded a PhD from the University of Hamburg in 1929 after he conducted research in general linguistics and the phonetics of Afrikaans at the Department of Experimental Phonetics under Prof. Giulio Panconcelli-Calzia.<sup>24</sup> Upon his return to South Africa, De Villiers Pienaar had a glittering academic career notable for its many pioneering achievements. Much of his work was concerned with audiology, therapeutic interventions in speech, voice pathology and diagnostics and hearing. He was a prominent figure in civil society, serving on many boards and councils, most notably on the Language Advisory Committee of the SABC from 1957 to 1968. In 1963, the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns awarded him their "Erepenning" (Honorary Medal) for his work in the field of Afrikaans Phonetics. He did not only produce work in Afrikaans and English in his discipline, but also wrote literary texts and, as a lover of opera, a small book entitled *Opera en Sanger* (1951; "Opera and Singer"), of which more later.<sup>25</sup>

De Villiers Pienaar was an outspoken and active Afrikaner nationalist, and was the initiator and co-editor (with the author C.M. van den Heever) of the *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner: Die eerste beskrywing van die boere-volkslewe in al sy vertakkinge* ("Cultural

<sup>23</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Pentz Publishers, 2007, 54–57.

<sup>24</sup> Panconcelli-Calzia was one of the 900 signatories of the *Bekennnis der deutschen Professoren zu Adolf Hitler* in November 1933. The biographical information on De Villiers Pienaar is taken from Myrtle L. Aron, "Pierre de Villiers Pienaar", in *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 20(1), 1973, 7–13.

<sup>25</sup> Pierre de Villiers Pienaar, *Opera en Sanger*, Johannesburg: Afrikaanse pers, 1951.



History of the Afrikaner: the first description of the Boers' national life in all its branches"), published in three volumes in 1945, 1947 and 1950.<sup>26</sup> De Villiers Pienaar wrote an extended chapter in volume II, entitled "'n Kultuurhistoriese beskouing van die klankbou van Afrikaans" ("A cultural-historical perspective on the sound structure of Afrikaans").<sup>27</sup> Here he referenced Wilhelm von Humboldt by describing language as a living force, an *energeia* in the life of a *volk*, a force that flows from and is fed from the psyche of the *volk* of which it is an instrument in order to reveal its thoughts, its desires and its feelings to the members of the *volk's* collective.<sup>28</sup> Still following Humboldt, De Villiers Pienaar asserted that the gift of language, essential to being human, was biologically grounded. This meant that the sound of language, also Afrikaans, was biologically, racially encoded. The Afrikanervolk, according to him:

...is a product of racial mixing, mostly the Dalo-Northern, heavy, blond, elongated skull type (Germanic, plus minus 80%) with the shorter, swarthy, truncated skull, Alpine race (French, plus minus 15%). As a result, further, of these biological processes of intermarriage in the same group for almost ten generations, we all possess some inherited factors which we have in common. We carry a racial stamp, for example with respect to facial features, body length, body weight, eye colour, hair colour, etc. ... the Boer is taller than his ancestral races ... our facial and skin colour betray our Alpine influence, predominantly derived from the French Huguenots...<sup>29</sup>

The latter part of this passage is a quotation from the 1942 book *Rasse en Rassevermenging* ("Race and Racial Mixing") by the racial ideologue Gerrie Eloff,<sup>30</sup> and De Villiers Pienaar built on these beliefs by showing how this mixed European heritage influenced the sound structure of Afrikaans through the form of the lips and teeth, the tongue and tongue base, the form of the nose cavities, the shape of the jaw, etc. Although he considered the influence of Dutch, French, German and English on the sound structure of Afrikaans, and even acknowledged the possible language variants and contributions to the Afrikaner *volk* from Poland, the Baltic states, Scandinavia, Hungary and Switzerland, De Villiers Pienaar remained adamant that there could be no influence on the sound structure of Afrikaans from the "non-white" groups with whom the early Afrikaners came into contact. Racial superiority, he averred, would have prevented any such influence. This, he maintained, was as true for

<sup>26</sup> *Die kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*. Edited by C.M. Van den Heever and Pierre de Villiers Pienaar, 3 vols. Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1945; 1947; 1950.

<sup>27</sup> Pierre de Villiers Pienaar, "'n Kultuurhistoriese Beskouing van die Klankbou van Afrikaans", in *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*. Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1947, 96–138.

<sup>28</sup> Pienaar, "'n Kultuurhistoriese Beskouing", 96.

<sup>29</sup> Pienaar, "'n Kultuurhistoriese Beskouing", 97.

<sup>30</sup> Gerrie Eloff, *Rasse en Rassevermenging: die Boerevolk gesien van die Standpunt van die Rasseleer*, Tweede Trek-Reeks. Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1942.

contact with the “Hottentots” as with the “Cape Malays”, and when the Boers ventured into the interior of South Africa, their contact with the “Bantu races” resulted in no influence on the sound of their spoken language, as the cultural divide between the two groups prevented this. He writes:

Contact with the Bantu came only after Afrikaans had already been stabilised as spoken language (1780). Also, the feeling of cultural superiority that was by then very strongly developed and viewed the Bantu as barbarians, would have prevented the Bantu languages from exercising an influence on Afrikaans.<sup>31</sup>

It is the purported “civilised” sound and tone of Afrikaans, as contrasted with the sound of “barbarity”, that concerns us in this section. For in De Villiers Pienaar’s hierarchical and genotypical construction of sound, the yodel – despite its prevalence in Afrikaans popular music of the time – would have signified a major departure from his sound ideal for Afrikaans. The fact that a sound like a yodel could emerge from a white-Afrikaans body would have, and did indeed, present De Villiers Pienaar with a set of rather intractable problems concerning the physiological link between race and sound. In the racial system of apartheid that was codified in the linguistic science of Afrikaans by De Villiers Pienaar and his contemporaries, the yodel represents a contradiction, and a conundrum.

A cursory technical consideration of the yodel is important if we are to explore this contradiction. For our purposes, the yodel’s distinguishing feature as a form of vocalisation on the speech-song continuum is that it exploits and highlights the break between the natural and falsetto voice, or, as sometimes described, between the “chest” and “head” registers. Timothy Wise coins this distinguishing registral shift the “yodeleme” – something like a “phoneme” that describes the irreducible part of the yodel, common to all its various cultural iterations. Wise finds that in that “key moment”, musical change occurs along three axes: “melody, in that a pitch change always occurs; rhythm, in that the pitch change brings about a musical articulation; timbre, in that the articulation is accompanied by a switch between two ‘voices’ or registers”.<sup>32</sup> Whereas the objective of Western-style voice training is often to erase the break between registers, encouraging singers to transition between registers in smooth glissandi, in English-language yodel styles, the switch between the two registers is accentuated with a percussive “break”, or what in physiological terms is described as the “glottal” or “epiglottal stop”. In his cultural history of the yodel, Bart Plantenga describes this break as the “temporary hesitation of sound with the epiglottis [the cut-off valve between the air passage and the food passage] moving up and down to cause that click or audio

<sup>31</sup> Pienaar, “’n Kultuurhistoriese Beskouing”, 128-129.

<sup>32</sup> Wise, “Yodel Species: A Typology of Falsetto Effects in Popular Music Vocal Styles”, 32–33.

glitch” that is so distinctive of yodelling.<sup>33</sup> These three features of the yodel: the transition between “chest” and “falsetto” register, the epiglottal “click” at the moment of transition, and the yodel as a form of speech-melody with a particular intonation, sometimes suggestive of meaning, allow us to imagine a slot for the yodel in Afrikaans phonology.

In 1939, almost a decade before “Die klankbou van Afrikaans” was published, when he was still teaching at the University of the Witwatersrand, De Villiers Pienaar published a short manual entitled *Praat u Beskaaf?* (“Do you speak in a civilised way?”). Although, unsurprisingly, he doesn’t explicitly mention yodelling, he does discuss vowel sounds that deviate from the normative “basis of articulation” of the Afrikaans language.<sup>34</sup> He writes of the epiglottal stop that it has an “unpleasant scraping sound produced by the vibration of the throat valve” and that it “does not belong under normal speech sounds” in Afrikaans,<sup>35</sup> and continues: “It is used only in exclamations like sa::, sa:: that is used to call out to dogs”, or “when you are shouting at someone far away” as in “ko::s, kɔm hi::r (Koos, kom hier!) [Koos, come here!]”.<sup>36</sup>

Illustrating his overarching concern with the performative aspects of speech (he suggests, for instance, that the expressive capacity of the tone of voice could be controlled and “played”, “like a musician plays the piano”),<sup>37</sup> De Villiers Pienaar argued that it was important to grasp what he called the physiological and psychological “ground rules” of proper elocution for effective communication. This was true for all Afrikaans speakers, but particularly important when educating children and when training church ministers, politicians, teachers, actors and opera singers. It is in this context that De Villiers Pienaar was interested in the use of the falsetto register. In a section with the heading “Other uses of the vocal cords”, which also includes discussions of whispering and stage whispering, vocal range, voice colour, vibrato, tremolo and ventriloquism, he contrasts the “forceful” and “full-sounding” tones of the chest register with the different sounds produced in the falsetto voice:

With the falsetto register we can produce the same series of sounds, but we can normally go higher ... the tone of the voice is not so rich in overtones, somewhat thin and less powerful ... A surprising amount of energy is lost in the production of such a voice, and the sound is unpleasantly constricted, or brashly compressed due to force.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> For a fascinating illustration of yodelling technique, see Hugo Zemp’s film *Head Voice, Chest Voice*, 1987, available here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvDcXrBGaCg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvDcXrBGaCg). The glottal stop is illustrated at 1’40” (accessed 12 June 2025).

<sup>34</sup> T.H. le Roux and Pierre De Villiers Pienaar, *Afrikaanse Fonetiek*. Cape Town: Juta, 1927, 42–43.

<sup>35</sup> Le Roux and De Villiers Pienaar, *Afrikaanse Fonetiek*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Le Roux and De Villiers Pienaar, *Afrikaanse Fonetiek*, 34.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre De Villiers Pienaar, *Praat u Beskaaf*. Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers, 1939, 49.

<sup>38</sup> De Villiers Pienaar, *Praat u Beskaaf*, 49.

Elsewhere he is concerned with the impact of the falsetto register on the purity of voice colour:

The voice colour also has to be pure, without aspiration that indicates faulty locking of the glottis or wrong use of breath. It has to use the chest register with trills and the vocal cord-as-whole, instead of squeaking with a falsetto voice ... Also, when the falsetto voice is used, such a voice is thin because the voice normally moves upwards by at least an octave.<sup>39</sup>

In these discussions of the “power” and “full-bodied” tones of the chest register versus the “thin” “chirps” produced in the falsetto voice lies an implicit value judgement, also of yodelling. In his earliest work, published in 1930, De Villiers Pienaar highlighted the importance of an “economy of means” (“arbeidsbesparing”) in the development of phonemes over time (see also the quote above) and in the evolution of human cultures more broadly, referring to it as a “fundamental psychological principle” to conserve energy and remove redundancy.<sup>40</sup> Again, the sheer extravagance of yodelling in terms of the energy expended in its production would presumably disqualify it from the cultural development associated with such an evolutionary narrative of sonic production. De Villiers Pienaar noted, too, the interrelationship between the psychological and physiological in how ideophones change over time: “The mind cannot fashion a change that is impossible for the physiological mechanism, and vice versa, and therefore the articulation of a strange sound will only succeed when a habit has been formed by the mind.”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps this is why another phonologist, Meyer de Villiers, all but excised the consonant /z/ from the Afrikaans language, because the sound occurs “only in loanwords” and is “in conflict with our sound system”.<sup>42</sup> That despite the fact, as William Shetter noted in a 1959 review of *Afrikaanse Klankleer* (“Afrikaans Phonology”), that “[e]ven the word Zoeloe alone, which must enjoy relatively high frequency in South Africa, would seem to oblige us to recognize /z/ for most speakers”.<sup>43</sup> The notion that fundamental aspects of the yodel (the epiglottal break, the use of the falsetto, the excessive use of energy), like the sound /z/, were fundamentally in conflict with the normative Afrikaans sound system,

<sup>39</sup> De Villiers Pienaar, *Praat u Beskaaf*, 138.

<sup>40</sup> Pierre de Villiers Pienaar, *Die Fonoposotie en die Fonotopie van Afrikaanse Afsluitings- en Vernouingsklanke binne die Spraakmolekuul*. Lisse: NV Swets & Zeitlinger, 1930.

<sup>41</sup> De Villiers Pienaar, *Praat u Beskaaf*, 88.

<sup>42</sup> Meyer de Villiers, *Afrikaanse Klankleer: Inleiding tot die Fonetiek en die Fonologie*. Cape Town: Balkema, 1958, 111–12. Pienaar, too, excised /z/ from the Afrikaans language, noting that, apart from a few loanwords like Zulu and zebra, “Afrikaans het g’n stemryk variant van s in die sprektaal herken nie”; De Villiers Pienaar, *Die fonoposotie en die fonotopie*, 1930, 75. In his earlier publication he continued to spell the word with an /s/, “Soeloe”.

<sup>43</sup> William Z. Shetter, “Review: Afrikaanse Klankleer; Inleiding tot die Fonetiek en die Fonologie”, in *Language*, 35(2), 1959, 345.

suggests an intuited “otherness” associated with both; an otherness demonstrably inflected by the racialised biological determinism illustrated earlier.

Speech intonation was another aspect of De Villiers Pienaar’s implied evolutionary system for language. In his insistence that Afrikaans was “in its essence Diets” (Middle Dutch) and thus formed part of a Dutch-Germanic pan-nationalism immune to influence from indigenous “lower-order” languages, the sonic architecture of Afrikaans distinguished itself from its European heritage only in terms of the emotional aspects of speech intonation (i.e. where intonation was put in service of emotional expression) and not in what he termed “characteristic tone” (which “distinguished the intonation of one nation from that of another”) or “semantic tone” (where “differences in intonation were used to express differences in meaning, as is the case in Soeloe [sic]”).<sup>44</sup>

This was an important distinction, since it enabled Pienaar to attribute a “heightened emotionality” to Afrikaners in comparison to their European counterparts, “evidenced in a greater flexibility in intonation and greater variations in the dynamic accent and tempo” – all while dissociating Afrikaans from tonal languages like Chinese and Zulu.<sup>45</sup> The “tone” of tonal languages, as Wim Welmers noted in 1973 in his book *African Language Structures*, was at the time still erroneously thought of “as a species of esoteric, inscrutable, and utterly unfortunate accretion characteristic of underprivileged languages – a sort of cancerous malignancy afflicting an otherwise normal linguistic organism”.<sup>46</sup> The Afrikaner’s “more flexible” intonation melodies were thus not to be confused with the “malignancy” of tonal languages, or with what de Villiers Pienaar conceived of as racial differences in vocal range that could be attributed, in the racial science of the time, to genotypical variation of the larynx.<sup>47</sup>

De Villiers Pienaar’s normative description of speech intonation, the falsetto register, excessive energy production in vocal production, and the epiglottal stop as “civilised” forms of language usage, and his acceptance of the biological determinism of the time as fundamental to the sound of Afrikaans, ties the early science of Afrikaans phonology to race. In doing so, it also ties Afrikaans phonological research of the era to the ideological construct of white Afrikanerdom as somehow aligned to sounding European in speech, to speaking “European” in sound, and, as De Villiers Pienaar’s interest in opera confirms, to sounding European in making the kinds of sounds recognised as singing and music.

Still, these prescriptions for sounding “civilised” in Afrikaans do not explicitly mention yodelling, and yodelling entails more than simply using the falsetto register, Wise con-

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<sup>44</sup> Le Roux and De Villiers Pienaar, *Afrikaanse Fonetiek*, 179–80.

<sup>45</sup> De Villiers Pienaar, *Praat u Beskaaf*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> William E. Welmers, *African Language Structures*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973, 179–80.

<sup>47</sup> See De Villiers Pienaar, *Praat u Beskaaf*, 48

firms.<sup>48</sup> But it turns out that De Villiers Pienaar himself made the link that allows us to connect yodelling as a “musical device” (Wise’s term) to his ideological construct of Afrikaner identity-in-sound. Not surprisingly, he did so in his own small introduction to his book *Opera en Sanger* (1939), where he writes:

Especially for men, it is possible to produce an even higher voice type. The usual trilling mode of the vocal cords for the so-called chest voice, is two cords located together and blown away by the breath, in order, resiliently, to open and close. Resulting little passages of air cause wave movements in the air and we hear that as voice, with a particular pitch that changes as the passages of air per second change. When we change the trilling mode, the edges of the vocal cords are stretched and the air passes over the edges to induce the onset of trilling, comparable to the movements of a bow over a string, we hear a less powerful voice, the so-called falsetto voice, that also enables the male voice to reach considerably higher pitches. We also hear great singers (like Tauber) sometimes use the falsetto for a specific purpose, and yodelling is a breaking through of the chest voice to the falsetto voice. The falsetto is particularly well-loved by our native races and many Asian nations.<sup>49</sup>

And, at the end of this section, he notes: “The transitions from full chest register through the middle voice (voix mixte) to the falsetto voice (or the head voice) happen so gradually in the case of trained singers that no break is discernible.”<sup>50</sup>

Yodelling exploits and highlights precisely this “break”. Indeed, for Wise, yodelling’s “audible break in the vocal register while singing has become a significant marker separating the aesthetics of the ‘popular’ from that of the ‘classical’”. In positioning the falsetto, the epiglottal stop and, ultimately, yodelling itself, as outside the bounds of “correct”, “proper” and “civilised” voice production – and even outside the sound system of Afrikaans – De Villiers Pienaar’s normative judgement extends not only to what the Afrikaans voice should become ideally, but also disassociates from what it should disavow materially, i.e. the often unruly Afrikaans singing and speaking voice as is manifested in regional dialects and popular recorded sound.

## Conclusion

Considering the technical production of the yodel, and finding its purported problematic technical production in the phonology of Afrikaans where its constitutive aspects are described and disavowed, we argued that the yodel is heavily invested with racial taboos that are uniquely South African and Afrikaans. Through the work of De Villiers Pienaar, we have been able to trace how the culture of sound held implied physiological (and racial)

<sup>48</sup> Wise, “Yodel Species: A Typology of Falsetto Effects in Popular Music Vocal Styles”.

<sup>49</sup> De Villiers Pienaar, *Opera en Sanger*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> De Villiers Pienaar, *Opera en Sanger*, 31.

meanings, not least because of the way De Villiers Pienaar framed the voice in biologically essentialist terms that could be shaped through training. If Afrikaners yodel, this thinking implies, they develop a physiology and a sound that is not clearly discernible from the Black world to which they (supposedly) did not belong. That this happened in popular musical culture rather than opera, affirms the imperative of training the Afrikaans voice towards “civilisation”, and away, as it were, from the yodel.

In its referencing of American country-and-western music and Swissness, the yodel provides a window on how the Afrikaans body, in the moment of pleasure associated with the transgressive production of sound associated with the yodel in Afrikaans, is inextricably enmeshed through the very language of its enunciation, Afrikaans, with the Black body. Rather than being a referent of American country-and-western music, or banal Swiss stereotypes, the yodel in Afrikaans actually references the obsession with race in the very essence of the sound project associated with Afrikaans and the shaping of Afrikaner nationalist identity.

Afrikaans yodelling is not only to be understood as a zone of transgression from an ideological sound purity developed alongside twentieth-century racial science. In the explicit connection to Switzerland in the country-and-western yodelling songs of a singer like Santa Vorster, there is also an attunement to a European folk idea with particular import in Afrikaner nationalist ideology. This idea is illustrated in De Villiers Pienaar’s writing on Afrikaans phonology and phonetics when, for example, he links the continued evolution of Afrikaans to its ties with Germanic languages and culture – ideological ties that, at least in part, must speak to the appeal of yodelling to a white Afrikaans audience. But, as we pointed out earlier, this fascination with “folk music” as a European (and specifically Swiss) referent also had a distinct American genealogy in which the Swiss yodel had become inextricably enmeshed with early forms of blackface performance. The South African country-and-western yodel is, in other words, much more than a simple rehearsing of sonic Swiss cliché, or an American country music trend. It is a multivalent sonic gesture in which the nascent racial science of early twentieth-century Afrikaner intellectuals mingles with ideas of European and American topography, folk music, satire, country-and-western and minstrelsy in a relationship between yodelling and racial constructs.

What is confounding about this relationship is its simultaneous claims to pleasure and disavowal that are illustrated so clearly by the popular successes of Santa Vorster (for example) and the pedantic prescriptions about language use by De Villiers Pienaar. Earlier in this chapter, we had pointed out how country music from the United States provided a shared point of reference for white and Black consumers of this music, and how it manifested in a particular vernacular brand of country music for Afrikaners, called *boeremusiek*. Willemien Froneman has argued the importance of understanding the affective appeal of *boeremusiek*



as just such a conundrum. For Froneman, boeremusiek “allows whites to entertain the idea of racial hybridity while repressing its associated anxieties, and therefore alongside its opposite: the idea of racial purity”.<sup>51</sup>

Yodelling in South African country music functions, we argue, in a similar way. Heard as a form of voice production at the limits of the sound system of Afrikaans, yodelling as it emerges from white Afrikaans bodies signifies a material refutation of De Villiers Pienaar’s sonic racial classificatory system. At the same time, the Swiss referents in Santa Vorster’s songs, especially when heard as resoundings of blackface minstrel performance, mask this indulgence in racial otherness by foregrounding a white, Alpine, proto-European connection. In this way, the yodel makes Switzerland apartheid South Africa’s fetish object, where ideations of the pure mountain air serve to divert the attention from the real object of desire: the aesthetic pleasures of giving up on racial purity.

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<sup>51</sup> Willemien Froneman, *The Groovology of White Affect*, 153.

# Part IV

Jazz

## Introduction to Part IV

Of all the cultural forms that moved between South Africa and Switzerland during the apartheid era, jazz is perhaps the most symbolically and politically charged. Rooted in improvisation, hybridity and transgression, jazz provided South African musicians with a language through which to speak back to colonial and apartheid violence, even as it opened pathways to global stages and solidarities. In Switzerland, a country often imagined as culturally reserved and politically neutral, jazz arrived not only as music, but as message – carrying with it the struggles, aspirations and contradictions of its practitioners. The chapters gathered in this final part explore the complex history of South African jazz musicians in Switzerland and the equally complex ways Swiss musicians, journalists and organisers received, amplified, interpreted and sometimes commodified their presence.

Where other sections of this volume deal with bilateral exchanges shaped by institutions or translations, this part is animated by live encounter. It is built around interviews, festivals, performances and networks – those spaces in which Swiss and South African lives intersected through music, often without the benefit (or burden) of official mediation. It tracks the arrival of South African musicians in exile, the role of Swiss festivals in providing platforms, the activism that emerged from these musical gatherings, and the shifting perceptions of jazz as it travelled between its local roots and global circuits. What emerges is a textured account of cultural relation grounded in sound: one that moves between anti-apartheid solidarity and ambivalence, visibility and marginalisation, belonging and displacement.

Richard Butz's chapter sets the scene with a panoramic account of how South African jazz came to Switzerland, focusing on key figures such as Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), Chris McGregor and the Blue Notes, and Joe Malinga. He recounts how these artists, often forced into exile, found in Switzerland not only a stage but a form of temporary refuge. The chapter also maps the role of the anti-apartheid movement and initiatives like "AfriKatribik" in St. Gallen in creating platforms that were explicitly political, recognising jazz as both art and resistance. Butz, himself deeply embedded in the Swiss jazz scene, offers not only a historical narrative but a personal testimony to how cultural activism shaped – and was shaped by – South African musicians in diaspora. His chapter provides a crucial link between grassroots cultural organisation and the broader geopolitics of the Cold War, race, and musical diplomacy.

Bruno Spoerri follows with a closer study of Abdullah Ibrahim's time in Zurich, combining biography, musical analysis, and archival memory. Spoerri, a major figure in Swiss

electronic and jazz circles, recalls his own interactions with Ibrahim and reflects on how Swiss audiences received the pianist's evolving style – at once spiritually inflected, politically grounded, and musically expansive. Spoerri's contribution is marked by a quiet attention to the affective resonances of Ibrahim's music: how it evoked home and exile, loss and transcendence, within the acoustics of Swiss performance spaces. His reflections remind us that musical exchange does not always take place on equal terms. Even within the apparent openness of jazz festivals and improvised sessions, hierarchies of perception and access persist – shaped by race, geography and economics.

Steff Rohrbach's chapter, "Harmonies of Foreign Climes", functions as a meta-reflection on the processes of listening and memory. Drawing on his experience as a jazz journalist and organiser, Rohrbach offers a lyrical meditation on the political and emotional texture of South African jazz in Switzerland. He moves fluidly between past performances, personal recollections and broader cultural currents, charting a soundscape in which Swiss provincialism and global Black consciousness were brought into improbable proximity. The chapter's evocative tone is matched by its critical edge: Rohrbach does not romanticise the history he recounts, but rather underscores the contingency and fragility of the encounters it describes.

The remaining chapters take the form of interviews – oral histories gathered during the course of the research project that bring the voices of musicians and organisers into the foreground. Christian Steulet and Steff Rohrbach's interview with Six Trutt, "Abdullah Ibrahim in Ichertswil", recounts one such encounter, situating the musician's presence in a small Swiss village within the broader story of his international career and spiritual journey. In the interviews that follow – with Rose Ntshoko, Bob Degen, Stephan Kurmann, Jürgen Leinhos, Barbara Pukwana, John Wolf Brennan and Niklaus Troxler – a mosaic of perspectives emerges: musicians, activists, festival organisers and fellow travellers reflect on what it meant to host, play with and be changed by South African jazz artists.

These testimonies do more than supplement the written record; they reveal how memory, emotion and political awareness are shaped by musical encounter. Musicians like Ntshoko and Pukwana speak to the difficulties and solidarities of exile; organisers like Troxler and Leinhos reflect on the ethics of programming and the power of art as protest. Again and again, the theme of *listening* recurs – not just to the music, but to the lives behind it, to the stories displaced by apartheid and often rendered inaudible by conventional archives. These interviews allow us to hear those stories, if only in fragments, and to acknowledge the role of Swiss venues, audiences, and fellow musicians in sustaining – however unevenly – the careers and communities of South African jazz exiles.

Taken together, the chapters in Part IV close the volume with a return to one of its most insistent questions: how do cultural relations take shape under conditions of inequality and

displacement? In jazz, these relations were often forged not through formal agreements or state policy, but through improvisation – through shared rhythms, borrowed instruments, late-night sessions, word-of-mouth invitations. And yet, improvisation was not a space of pure freedom. It was circumscribed by visa regimes, racism, financial precarities, and the burdens of expectation. Swiss jazz culture, for all its openness to South African sound, remained marked by structural silences and blind spots. What the musicians and organisers profiled here teach us is that solidarity, like jazz, is always unfinished: a practice of listening, adjusting, and making room.

In foregrounding jazz to conclude the volume, we also acknowledge its status as a music of passage – between South and North, exile and home, oppression and possibility. Jazz, as these chapters show, became not only a soundtrack to Swiss-South African cultural relations, but one of its most profound modes of encounter.

## 15 When South African Jazz Came to Switzerland: Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), Chris McGregor and the Blue Notes, Joe Malinga and other South African Jazz Musicians, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and “AfriKaribik” in St. Gallen

Richard Butz

The appearance of Abdullah Ibrahim’s trio, then called “The Dollar Brand Trio”,<sup>1</sup> with the drummer Makaya Ntshoko,<sup>2</sup> bassist Johnny Gertze<sup>3</sup> and the singer Bea Benjamin<sup>4</sup> at the “Café Africana” in Zurich in 1962 was an event on the local jazz scene. The Africana was

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<sup>1</sup> The following chapters about jazz include footnotes with brief biographical details on the musicians discussed.

<sup>2</sup> Makaya (also Makhaya) Ntshoko (born 1939 in Cape Town, died 2024 in Basel). South African drummer and boxer. He played with Abdullah Ibrahim’s trio from 1958 onwards and recorded in a sextet with Hugh Masekela and John Mehegan in 1959. He also recorded with The Jazz Epistles (see below). After this now legendary group was dissolved, he founded The Jazz Giants with Kippie Moeketsi, Dudu Pukwana, Gideon Nxumalo and Martin Mqijima. He emigrated to Europe and later lived in Copenhagen, where he recorded with Stuff Smith (1967), Benny Bailey (1968), Dexter Gordon (1968 and 1969), Ben Webster (1969) and Hugh Masekela (1972). In 1974 he founded the band Makaya & the Tsotsis (see below). In 1975 he appeared alongside the saxophonists Joe McPhee and Pepper Adams at the Willisau Jazz Festival and also worked with the pianist Mal Waldron and the bassist Johnny “Mbizo” Dyani. Makaya Ntshoko spent his later years in Basel, where he died on 27 August 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Johnny Gertze (1937–1983) played bass but also trumpet, guitar and saxophone. He played in The Jazz Epistles, in a quartet led by the pianist Anthony “Tony” Schilder, and in a quartet led by the saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi. He came to Switzerland in 1962 to play with Dollar Brand and also worked in Europe with the pianist Joe Haider and with Bea Benjamin. He returned to South Africa in 1968, after which he played with the saxophonist Winston Mankunku. He played on various records by Abdullah Ibrahim.

<sup>4</sup> Sathima Bea Benjamin was born Beatrice Bertha Benjamin on 17 October 1936 in Johannesburg and died on 20 August 2013 in Cape Town. Her father was from the island of St Helena, while her mother had roots in Mauritius and the Philippines. She was classified as “coloured” by the apartheid regime. She and Abdullah Ibrahim married in 1965 and were divorced in 2011. For biographical information, see Rasmussen, ed., *Sathima Bea Benjamin – Embracing Jazz*. Copenhagen: Booktrader, 2000 (with two CDs); Carol Ann Muller & Sathima Bea Benjamin, *Musical Echoes. South African Women Thinking in Jazz*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011; Carol Ann Muller, *Focus: Music of South Africa (Focus on World Music)*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, here 158–201; Robin D.G. Kelley, “The Making of Sathima Benjamin”, in Kelley, *Africa speaks, America Answers. Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*. Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012, here 120–61.

very popular (despite being completely alcohol-free) and was the then focal point for jazz and blues (Champion Jack Dupree, Curtis Jones) in Zurich.<sup>5</sup> Ntshoko and Gertze had played with Ibrahim<sup>6</sup> in South Africa before joining him and Benjamin in Zurich. Writing in 1966 for *Drum Magazine*, Ibrahim reflected on his reasons for leaving:

Night club owners were hostile and avoided me and my music like the plague. The feeling was mutual, though, because I had decided long before, they were not going to turn me into another juke box. [...] The scene was a mess and after long hours of discussion with Bea Benjamin and close friends one fact emerged, we had to go.<sup>7</sup>

Bea Benjamin, who later adopted the artist's name "Sathima Bea Benjamin", was already in love with Ibrahim, and they married in London in 1965. There are different versions of how and when the couple arrived in Europe and in Zurich; whether they flew directly to Zurich,<sup>8</sup> or perhaps via Paris<sup>9</sup> or via London, where Ibrahim was supposedly a member of the band for the musical *King Kong* (his participation in *King Kong* is often stated as fact, though it is by all accounts untrue).<sup>10</sup> Benjamin once told the jazz writer Sally Placksin that she and Ibrahim also "gigged around in bars and bistros, little clubs in little towns and bigger cities in Switzerland",<sup>11</sup> and that they had also worked with a West Indian jazz-oriented group playing "cha-cha-cha-music".<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In October 1983, shortly before he died, Johnny Dyani described "The Africana Club" as "one of the best in Europe at the time". Quoted in: Carol Ann Muller & Sathima Bea Benjamin, *Musical Echoes – South African Women Thinking in Jazz*, 128. After closing down as a jazz club, the Africana became the Hotel Scheuble.

<sup>6</sup> Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand) was born Adolph Johannes Brand on 9 October in Cape Town, converted to Islam in 1968, adopted the name of Abdullah Ibrahim and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca two years later. He was classified as a "mixed-race" or "coloured" person in South Africa during the apartheid era. Given that the extant documentation refers to him as "Dollar Brand" during his early years in Europe – including the flyers, posters and record covers reproduced here – we generally refer to him thus, and as Abdullah Ibrahim thereafter.

Ibrahim has two children with Sathima Bea Benjamin: a daughter "Tsidi" (now Jean Grae, born in 1976 in Cape Town, who is a rap artist) and a son, Tsakwe. There is to date only one book about Abdullah Ibrahim, Lars Rasmussen's *Abdullah Ibrahim: A Discography*. Copenhagen: Booktrader, 1998. For biographical information, see Ibrahim's website <https://abdullahibrahim.co.za/> (accessed 14 October 2024) and Lars Rasmussen, "Abdullah Ibrahim: 'A Messenger of Cosmic Harmony'", in the liner notes for *Abdullah Ibrahim: A Celebration*. Munich: Enja Records ENJ-9476-2, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Muller & Benjamin, *Musical Echoes*, 128.

<sup>8</sup> This is according to the biography published on Ibrahim's website, [https://abdullahibrahim.co.za](https://abdullahibrahim.co.za/) (accessed 14 October 2024). Benjamin herself has stated that this version is correct.

<sup>9</sup> Rasmussen, *Abdullah Ibrahim: A Celebration*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> This claim is found, for example, on Wikipedia, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah\\_Ibrahim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_Ibrahim) (accessed 14 October 2024).

<sup>11</sup> "Sathima writes", in *Sathima Bea Benjamin – Embracing Jazz*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Sally Placksin, "To me, Music is such a direct Way for one Heart to speak to the other", in *Sathima Bea Benjamin – Embracing Jazz*, 14. The "cha-cha-cha" group mentioned by Benjamin was prob-



In Switzerland, the Dollar Brand Trio found quite a lively jazz scene, though it was admittedly rather backward-looking. Jazz in Switzerland had started in the late 1920s when the first jazz groups were formed and a number of records with jazz-influenced popular music were released. Concerts by visiting jazz musicians from the USA and the rest of Europe were relatively common, for instance by Sidney Bechet, Albert Nicholas, Coleman Hawkins or Louis Armstrong. Up to the 1950s, Swiss jazz was dominated by trad and swing jazz. Cool jazz and bebop had not yet gained a firm footing. As a result, the Swiss jazz community, musicians and aficionados alike, was split into two camps: traditionalists (the majority), and modernists (a small minority).<sup>13</sup>

Terms like “world music” or “world and ethno-jazz” were not yet known. Apart from the activities of the Ghanaian drummer Guy Warren, the Nigerian drummer Tony Allen and US musicians such as the pianist Randy Weston, the drummer Art Blakey, the clarinetist Tony Scott and the bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik (whose father was Sudanese), the exploration and integration of African music into jazz was only just beginning. In Switzerland, knowledge about jazz and of non-traditional African music outside the USA, Canada and Europe, was practically non-existent.<sup>14</sup>

Dollar Brand’s Trio remained on and off for about three years in Zurich, but the impression they left on the Swiss jazz community lasted much longer. It also marked the beginning of a growing interest in South African jazz and African music in general that developed into a lively, still ongoing “musical conversation” between South African and Swiss jazz musicians. Modern Swiss jazz at the time of the Trio’s arrival in Zurich was strongly influenced by hard bop in the style of Art Blakey, the Adderley Brothers, Lee Morgan or Horace Silver. But the musicians of the Ibrahim Trio freely mixed Christian hymns, South African, Arabic

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ably the ensemble run by the Barbadian saxophonist, pianist, highly respected music teacher and choirmaster Chester Gill (1928–2003), who settled in Basel in 1960. See the chapter by Bruno Spoerri below. The connection with Gill is also mentioned by Robin D.G. Kelley in Kelley: *Africa speaks, America answers*, 150–51. Kelley also states that Ibrahim and Benjamin worked as a duo not only in Switzerland but also in Germany and Scandinavia before settling down in Zurich. Kelley’s information is based on the liner notes written by the Swiss journalist Bruno Rub for the album *Bea Benjamin with Dollar Brand: African Songbird*. As-Shams GL 1839. Johannesburg: The Sun Records, 1976.

<sup>13</sup> For jazz in Zurich, see *Jazz in Zürich*. Double CD. Edited and liner notes (also translated into English) by Patrik Landolt and Nick Liebmann. Intakt Double CD 009/2004. Zurich: Intakt Records, 2004. This double CD contains three tracks connected with South African jazz: Dollar Brand: “Bra Joe from Kilimanjaro”; Irène Schweizer & Louis Moholo: “Angel” and “Dollar’s Jungle, Op. 51”, a homage to Abdullah Ibrahim, composed by Remo Rau and played by the Remo Rau Memorial Quintet.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this topic, including chapters about the lives and the music of Guy Warren, Randy Weston, Ahmed Abdul-Malik and Sathima Bea Benjamin, see Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers, Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*, 2012; and Norman Weinstein’s *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1993.

and even Malaysian traditional melodies, Cape Town carnival tunes, various styles of township music, Xhosa and Khoisan music and driving rhythms with American jazz, with strong references to the music of Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk. At that time, Swiss jazz musicians showed little to no interest in their own traditional music. After encountering the music of Ibrahim's trio with its strong African influences, it took the trumpeter Hans Kennel and the saxophonist Jürg Solothurnmann twenty years before they felt able to record *Swiss Flavor* in 1983, the first attempt to connect traditional Swiss music with jazz.<sup>15</sup>

Swiss jazz lovers were surprised, sometimes even shocked by the music of Dollar Brand and his trio, but probably less so by the rather classical jazz singing of Sathima Bea Benjamin. In my experience, knowledge about South Africa in Switzerland was very limited at the time. Up to then, hardly anyone knew anything about the thriving jazz scene in urban South Africa, and it is very likely that there was little to no knowledge of the fact that South African jazz went back to the late 1940s or even earlier, as is documented in the recordings on *Jazz and Hot Dance in South Africa 1946–1959*.<sup>16</sup> Nor would anyone have known that Dollar Brand had already recorded with the Jazz Epistles, who comprised the trumpeter Hugh Masekela, the saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi, the trombonist Jonas Gwangwa, the drummer Makaya Ntshoko and the bassist Johnny Gertze, with *Jazz Epistle – Verse 1*, the first jazz album by a Black South African band, having been released back in 1960.<sup>17</sup>

The album *Something New from Africa*, released in 1959, was perhaps somewhat better known, featuring kwela jazz by Lemmy Special, the Solven Whistlers and Miriam Makeba.<sup>18</sup> But in general there was a widespread ignorance about South Africa, culturally and politically. Many in Switzerland still admired the Boers for their fight against the British; others admired Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, for his role in the siege of Mafeking (now Mahikeng) during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). Some might have read Peter Sulzer's German translation of *Chaka* by the Basotho author Thomas Mofolo,<sup>19</sup> or

<sup>15</sup> Alpine Jazz Herd, *Swiss Flavor*. Unit Records – UNIT 4003. Zurich: Unit Records, 1983. / *Alpine Two*. Unit Records – UNIT 5002, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> *Jazz and Hot Dance in South Africa 1946–1959*. Harlequin Records HQ 2020. Crawley, West Sussex: Harlequin Records, 1985.

<sup>17</sup> The Jazz Epistles (Kippie Moeketsi, alto sax; Hugh Masekela, trumpet; Jonas Gwangwa, trombone; Abdullah Ibrahim, piano; Johnny Gertze, bass; Makaya Ntshoko, drums), *Jazz Epistle – Verse 1*. Continental Records – CONT 14. South Africa (place unknown), 1960. Reissues: Gallo Records AC56. Johannesburg: Gallo Record Company, 1990. / African Classics, Celluloid 66892-2. Paris: Celluloid Records, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> *Something New from Africa*. Decca Records LK 4292. London: The Decca Record Company, 1959.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas (Mokopu) Mofolo (1876–1948), translated by Frederick Hugh Dutton, *Chaka: An Historical Romance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931; translated by Peter Sulzer as *Chaka der Zulu*. Manesse Bibliothek der Weltliteratur, Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 1953. The original was written in Sesotho and first published 1925. See the above chapter by Jasper Walgrave on Peter Sulzer.

maybe Stuart Cloete's *The Turning Wheels*, which had been translated into German as *Wandernde Wagen*.<sup>20</sup> However, in my experience the Swiss general public hardly posed any critical questions about white supremacy in South Africa or its racist thinking, let alone its implementation of increasingly rigid apartheid laws, the discriminatory character of society in general or the sinister role of Swiss banks and commerce in supporting the apartheid regime both directly and indirectly. In Switzerland, the perception of South Africa was that it was a country of law and order where one could swim in the ocean and bathe in the sun, where tourists could observe wild animals and maybe listen to some kwela music in their hotel lobby while sipping a cocktail.<sup>21</sup>

The Dollar Brand Trio came to Zurich with the help of the Swiss graphic artist Paul Meyer, who had lived in South Africa in the 1950s before relocating to Switzerland in about 1959 (the precise date of his return remains unknown). Meyer loved jazz, but only if played by Black artists. According to Robin D.G. Kelley, his proclivity for Black women was second only to his love of jazz. He claimed to have slept with Miriam Makeba<sup>22</sup> and once, in Cape Town, even made sexual advances to Beba Benjamin. She politely refused, and Brand intervened.<sup>23</sup> In spite of this incident, which Benjamin only related to Kelley in an interview, Meyer assisted the Dollar Brand Trio in getting permits to enter Switzerland. Meyer later moved to Geneva, where he ran a record store; he was tragically murdered there in June 1988.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 15.1. CD cover of *The Jazz Epistles: Jazz Epistle Verse 1*. African Classics. Paris: Celluloid Records 66892-2, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Cloete (born 1897 in Paris, died 1976 in Cape Town), *The Turning Wheels*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1937; *Wandernde Wagen*. Berlin: Verlag Wolfgang Krüger, 1938.

<sup>21</sup> See Mascha Madörin (with Martina Egli and Gottfried Wellmer), *Apartheidschulden. Der Anteil Deutschlands und der Schweiz*. Stuttgart: Brot für Brüder, 1999; *Quer denken: über Antikolonialismus, Südafrika-Solidarität, Kritik am Schweizer Finanzplatz, feministische Wirtschaftstheorie und Care-Ökonomie – ein Lesebuch mit und über Mascha Madörin*. Zurich: Edition 8, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Their affair is confirmed in Hugh Masekela and D. Michael Cheers, *Still Grazing*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004, 77–9.

<sup>23</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, “The Making of Sathima Beba Benjamin”, in *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 137, 160 and 209 (footnote 48). According to Kelley, all of the other published versions of Benjamin’s experience with Paul Meyer omit this story.

<sup>24</sup> Anon., “Un disquaire assassin”, in *Journal de Genève*, 23 June 1988. The trumpeter Hugh Masekela describes Meyer as follows: “Paul was from Basel, a short, blond, blue-eyed man with a film star’s looks. He was extremely friendly and spoke with a strong German accent.” See Masekela and D. Michael Cheers, *Still Grazing*, 78.

Life for the Trio was not easy in Zurich. Benjamin especially found it difficult to adapt. Looking back, she wrote:

I can remember how very cold it was, the wonder of seeing snow for the first time, the culture shock I experienced, the longing for the sun and the tenderness and warmth of my people affected me a great deal and after a few days "I longed for home". But there was no turning back.<sup>25</sup>

A certain Mr O. Hugentobler,<sup>26</sup> the manager of the Africana, had contributed financially to defray the travel costs for Makaya Ntshoko and Johnny Gertze, but he paid the Trio very little. Bruno Spoerri mentions their earning the paltry sum of 50 Swiss francs per night, and apparently Hugentobler even charged the musicians for their (soft) drinks.<sup>27</sup> In retrospect, Benjamin finally found good words for her time in Zurich, telling the jazz writer Sally Placksin in an interview: "All in all I think Zurich treated us kindly, and we had to have a home base. But it was a slow, and sometimes brutal existence. It was really paying your dues".<sup>28</sup> The story of how Dollar Brand/Abdullah Ibrahim met Duke Ellington in Zurich and of the private concert given for him at the Africana has been told many times. This crucial meeting led to the highly acclaimed album *Duke Ellington Presents The Dollar Brand Trio*, recorded in Paris in 1963 and issued by Reprise Records one year later.

This label was founded by Frank Sinatra, and for a time Duke Ellington acted as its artists-and-repertoire man. Benjamin fared less well, however. Although Ellington admired her singing very much and recorded her at the same time as the Trio, Reprise Records did not regard the result as commercially viable. The recordings were eventually released in 1997 as *Sathima Bea Benjamin: A Morning in Paris*. Duke Ellington performs on two tracks, Billy Strayhorn on one and Dollar Brand on all the others. Also involved were Svend Asmussen (pizzicato violin), Makaya Ntshoko and Johnny Gertze.<sup>29</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley speculates that

<sup>25</sup> "Sathima writes", in *Sathima Bea Benjamin – Embracing Jazz*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> No information is available about Hugentobler (first name unknown). According to the Swiss jazz critic and musician Nick Liebmann, he didn't particularly like jazz and once even refused to let John Coltrane play at a jam session after the Africana had officially closed for the night. See Nick Liebmann, "Free Jazz – vom Abwerfen harmonischer und rhythmischer Fesseln", in Bruno Spoerri (ed.), *Jazz in der Schweiz. Geschichte und Geschichten*. Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2005, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Bruno Spoerri, "Das Café Africana – Jazzmekka der sechziger Jahre", in Ueli Staub (ed.), *Jazzstadt Zürich. Von Louis Armstrong bis Zürich Jazz Orchestra*. Zurich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2003, 87–8.

<sup>28</sup> Placksin, "To me, Music is such a direct Way for one Heart to speak to the other", in *Sathima Bea Benjamin – Embracing Jazz*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Duke Ellington Presents the Dollar Brand Trio*. [Paris]: Reprise Records RV 6027, 1964; *Sathima Bea Benjamin, A Morning in Paris*. Munich: Enja Records ENJ-9309 2, 1997. For the complete story of how Abdullah Ibrahim and Sathima Bea Benjamin met Duke Ellington, see Sally Placksin, "To me, Music...", in *Sathima Bea Benjamin – Embracing Jazz*, 14, the liner notes for the album by David Hajdu, and Carol Ann Muller & Sathima Bea Benjamin, *Musical Echoes – South African*



Figure 15.2. LP Cover of Duke Ellington Presents The Dollar Brand Trio. [Paris]: Reprise Records RV 6027, 1964.

“essentialist notions of culture had rendered Benjamin illegible – not African enough for some, not American enough for others, and certainly not commercial enough for a market that traffics in familiar, digestible commodities”.<sup>30</sup> However, Benjamin’s career took a turn for the better when she started her own Ekapa label in 1979, producing and distributing her own music and some of Ibrahim’s. In total she released eight albums on her label, featuring several pianists including her husband.<sup>31</sup>

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*Women Thinking in Jazz*, 129–40. There also exists an earlier record of the original Dollar Brand Trio: *Dollar Brand Plays Sphere Jazz*, recorded on 4 February 1960, released for the first time on the blue Continental label of Gallo Records, reissued on CD together with The Jazz Epistles: *Jazz Epistle – Verse 1*. Spain [no city]: Essential Jazz Classics EJC55768, 2022. Michael Sheldon claims in the liner notes for the CD reissue that Abdullah Ibrahim performed at the “Africana Club in St. Gallen”. He probably means the Africana in Zurich.

<sup>30</sup> Kelley, *Africa Speaks*, 160.

<sup>31</sup> On the Ekapa label, Sathima Bea Benjamin produced the following records in her name: *Sathima Sings Ellington* (1979), *Dedications* (1982), *Windsong* (1985, also on BlackHawk – BKH 50206. San Francisco: Blackhawk Records, 1986), *Memories and Dreams* (1988, also on BlackHawk Records – BKH 50203, 1986), *Lovelight* (1988, also on Enja Records ENJ 6022–2. Munich: Enja Records, 1988), *Cape Town Love* (1999, also on Booktrader Records BOK 8. Copenhagen: Booktrader, 2000), *Musical Echoes* (2002) and *Song Spirit* (2006). *Cape Town Love*, together with *Embracing Jazz* (produced by Sathima Bea Benjamin and Lars Rasmussen), is also included in the book *Sathima Bea Benjamin – Embracing Jazz*, 2000. With Abdullah Ibrahim she appears in addition to *A Morning in Paris* on Abdullah Ibrahim, *Dollar Brand, Featuring Sathima Bea Benjamin – Boswil Concert 1973*, *African Songbird* (AS-Shams GL1839. Johannesburg: The Sun Records, 1976), *Liberation South Africa – Freedom Songs* (SAFCO Records A-001. South African Freedom Committee, SAFA, 1978) and on Dollar Brand Trio: *The Dream*, issued as an unofficial release on Jazz Music Yesterday, Italy, 1990. Benjamin also recorded with Abdullah Ibrahim for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in late 1968 or early in 1969. This record was for internal use only. In 1959 she recorded the album *My Songs for You* in Cape Town as Beattie, together with Abdullah Ibrahim and produced by him, but the result was never issued. With Kenny Bar-





Figure 15.3. The Volkshaus in Zurich (here in the late 1970s). ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Com\_LC1000-032-001. Creative Commons.

Life in Switzerland remained personally and professionally difficult for the members of the Dollar Brand Trio. The Zurich Jazz Festival did not feature them, and the already existing Lugano Jazz Festival waited until 1978 before inviting Ibrahim to play, alongside the trumpeter Don Cherry. In the 1960s there were only a few functioning jazz clubs, which meant that opportunities to give concerts were few and far between for Dollar Brand and his colleagues, and these were mostly organised by private jazz enthusiasts. The Swiss jazz scene at the time was still rather traditional and was unreceptive to new sounds, especially those of the avant-garde, which was erroneously called “free jazz”. The concerts “Jazz at Midnight” in Bern, where Dollar Brand played during his time in Zurich, were an exception. One concert that remains unforgettable was given at the “Volkshaus” in Zurich on 31 October 1964, when Brand performed with Kenny Clarke, Sahib Shihab, Jimmy Woode and Bea Benjamin.

Thanks to concerts like these, and others by John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk and Charles Mingus, avant-garde jazz began to win greater acceptance. It should also be noted that local jazz critics were initially often rather hostile to modern jazz musicians. In my personal archive I have an undated review of a concert given by Dollar Brand in Schaan in Liechtenstein, in which the critic described him as “Der fesche Dollar” (“The smart Dollar”) and dismissed his music in a clearly racist manner. My subsequent letter of protest was not published.<sup>32</sup>

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ron (piano), Buster Williams (bass) and Billy Higgins she recorded *Southern Touch*. Munich: Enja Records ENJ-75015 2, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> Elmar Vogt, “Klavierspielereien von und mit Dollar Brand im Schaaner TaK”, in *St. Galler Tagblatt*,

One Swiss musician who was especially touched by Dollar Brand's music was the pianist Irène Schweizer.<sup>33</sup> She often heard him and the Trio at the Africana, where she also regularly played with her own trio that was sometimes expanded to form a quartet. Looking back on the "Africana years" she described Ibrahim's music as "balm for my soul".<sup>34</sup> She soon after began to incorporate South African tunes in her own repertoire. In 2007 she played with the Swiss saxophonist Omri Ziegele on his duo album *Where's Africa*, followed by *Can Walk on Sand*, this time as a trio with Makaya Ntshoko on drums.<sup>35</sup> Other Swiss musicians who listened with interest to the music of The Dollar Brand Trio were the saxophonist Bruno Spoerri (see his chapter below), the trumpeters Hans Kennel and Jürg Grau and the pianist, vibraphonist and composer Remo Rau,<sup>36</sup> who was responsible for programming the concerts at the Africana at the time.



Figure 15.4. Flyer for a concert by Dollar Brand, Bea Benjamin and band at the Volkshaus in Zurich, Saturday 31 October 1964. Private collection of Richard Butz.

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undated (late 1960s). The article makes reference to "jungle drums", "missionaries in a cauldron" and other racist tropes.

<sup>33</sup> Irène Schweizer (born 1941 in Schaffhausen, died 2024 in Zurich), an internationally renowned Swiss pianist and feminist activist. For a biography and her musical activities, see Christian Broecking, *Dieses unbändige Gefühl der Freiheit – Irène Schweizer – Jazz, Avantgarde, Politik*. Berlin: Broecking Verlag, 2016.

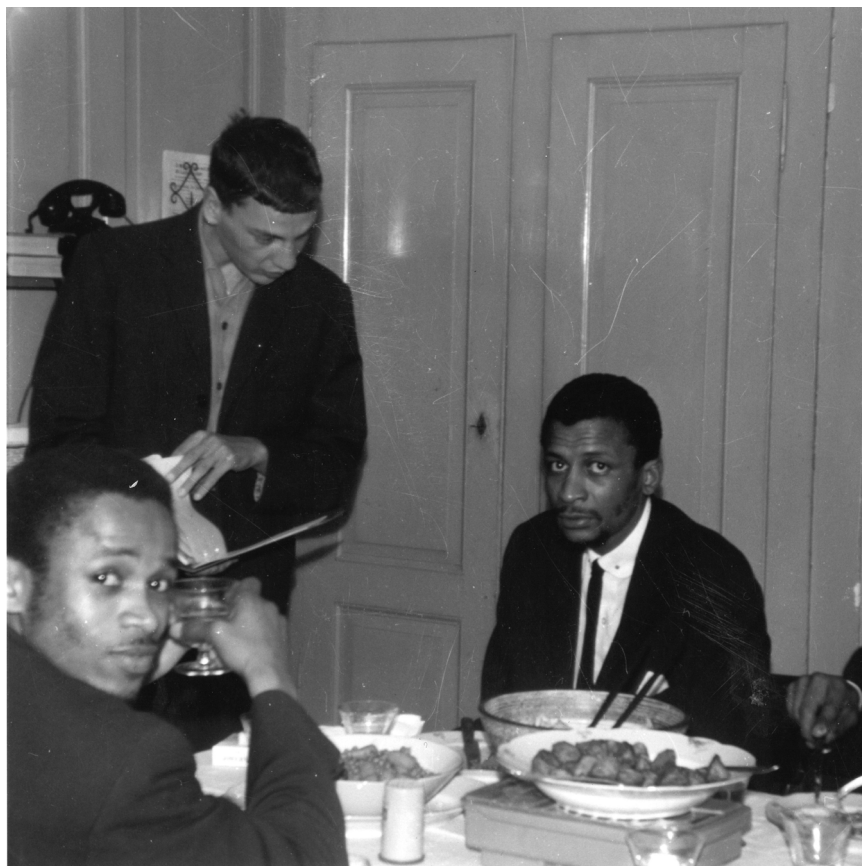
<sup>34</sup> In Christian Broecking, *Dieses unbändige Gefühl der Freiheit*, 51. This book contains many more interesting statements by Schweizer and other musicians about Abdullah Ibrahim, the Blue Notes and other South African musicians, among others from Rüdiger Carl, Louis Moholo, Bruno Spoerri, Peter Brötzmann and Evan Parker.

<sup>35</sup> Omri Ziegele (born 1959 in Rehovot, Israel), lives in Zurich. Under the title "Where's Africa" he has recorded the following four albums: *Where's Africa*, with Irène Schweizer. Intakt Records Intakt CD 098; *Can Walk on Sand*, with Irène Schweizer and Makaya Ntshoko. Intakt CD 167; *Going South*, with Yves Theiler (keyboards, organ, melodica, vocals) and Dario Sisera (percussion, drums). IntaktCD 284; *That Hat*, with Ives Theiler and Dario Sisera. Intakt CD 375. Zurich, Intakt Records, 2005, 2009, 2017 & 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Remo Rau (born 1927 in Yokohama, died 1987 in Zurich) was a carpet merchant, musician (piano, vibraphone) and composer. He studied composition with Wladimir Vogel (1896–1984) and experimented early on with free jazz and Indian ragas as well as with pop, funk and world music. He was active as an organiser and as a promoter at the Africana until it closed down as a jazz club and then continued his organising activities with the concert-series "Modern Jazz Zürich". Rau was friends with Ibrahim, Benjamin, Johnny Gertze, Makaya Ntshoko and the musicians of the Blue Notes and helped to promote their music.



At the tender age of 19, I was often present when the Dollar Brand Trio played at the Africana and, like Irène Schweizer, I was mesmerised by what I heard. It was new and exciting music. In 1960 I had started a little jazz club in St. Gallen with the help of some of my friends, equipped with a terrible, untuned piano. I nevertheless dared to invite the Trio to our club, and the result was an unforgettable concert. Before the concert, my mother, a very open-minded person, invited the Trio to dinner at our home. She cooked a hefty Swiss meal, and the wine flowed freely and plentifully.



*Figure 15.5. From left to right: Makaya Ntshoko, Richard Butz and Dollar Brand in St. Gallen in 1963. Private collection of Richard Butz.*

Ibrahim always remembered my mother with great affection and invited her to every concert he later gave in St. Gallen. These were many in number. There was a follow-up in our quite miserable successor club, this time with Sathima, in a small downstairs theatre, then one in a restaurant considered hip at the time and others in various other venues, in a

church, at parties, once even out on the green, and finally in the Tonhalle, the main concert hall of St. Gallen. Ibrahim and I remained on friendly terms, and we often chatted after concerts. I sometimes drove him around in my battered Skoda car, and once I even happened to meet him in New York.

I emigrated to Freetown in the late 1960s and worked there for almost five years as a bookshop manager at the University of Sierra Leone. During my years there, I organised several book and art exhibitions as well as a number of concerts, including one with Miriam Makeba, who was at the time living in exile in Conakry, the capital of neighbouring Guinea. I was also asked by Radio Sierra Leone to host a weekly jazz programme called “Just Jazz”.<sup>37</sup> When I returned to St. Gallen in 1973, my friend the jazz aficionado Beat Burri had just started his own Cameo label. He began by recording the album *Newborn Light* with the Polish jazz singer Ursula Dudziak and her husband and compatriot, the violinist and saxophonist Michal Urbaniak. The label’s second (and last) album was the fabulous *Good News from Africa* with Abdullah Ibrahim and Johnny Dyani.<sup>38</sup>

I helped to promote the album, and we organised a concert with the duo in St. Gallen. In a concert review, I described the music of the duo as “dark, bitter and sweet”.<sup>39</sup> Shortly thereafter, Burri sold the album to Enja Records. It’s recognised as a masterpiece today and is still in their catalogue.<sup>40</sup>

The year 1973 was an especially fortuitous year for Ibrahim. He was also recorded live this year in the Alte Kirche (the “old church”) in Boswil in Canton Aargau. This concert was released as an LP ten years later.<sup>41</sup> In the same year (1973) he received the “Montreux Jazz Festival Grand Prix”, and in the following year he brought his somewhat chaotic but invigor-

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<sup>37</sup> Radio Sierra Leone started as the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service in 1934 and merged with the United Nations peacekeeping radio station Radio UNAMSIL to form the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, or SLBC, in 2010. “Just Jazz” was started by the Sierra Leonean broadcaster Roland Bock, who had got to know and like jazz when he lived in the UK before returning to his homeland.

<sup>38</sup> Johnny Dyani (1947–1986), a bassist and composer who also played the piano and sang, was one of South Africa’s most influential jazz musicians. In exile he became a vital voice in the anti-apartheid movement. He travelled to the Antibes Jazz Festival with the Blue Notes in 1964, which comprised Chris McGregor (piano), Dudu Pukwana (alto saxophone), Nik Moyake (tenor saxophone), Mongezi Feza (trumpet) and Louis Moholo (drums). Like the rest of the band, he stayed in Europe afterwards, initially in Zurich. His early death was hastened by alcohol and drug abuse.

<sup>39</sup> Press review by Richard Butz (R.B.) of the concert “Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand) & Johnny Dyani” in St. Gallen on 8 December 1973, published in *Die Ostschweiz*, St. Gallen, 12 December 1973.

<sup>40</sup> “Dollar Brand Duo – Johnny Dyani”, *Good News from Africa*. Cameo 102. St. Gallen, Cameo Records, 1973. First released on Enja Records as ENJ-2048-2, 1973. Since then several releases on Enja Records and other labels.

<sup>41</sup> *Abdullah Ibrahim, Dollar Brand, Featuring Sathima Bea Benjamin – Boswil Concert 1973*. Colomba – SAKB473. Boswil: Colomba Records, 1983.



Figures 15.6a, b & c. The Dollar Brand Trio in St. Gallen in 1963 (Dollar Brand, piano; Sathima Bea Benjamin, voice; Johnny Gertze, bass; Makaya Ntshoko, drums). Private collection of Richard Butz.



ating “African Space Program”, a small version of a big band, to both St. Gallen and Willisau.<sup>42</sup>

Dollar Brand/Abdullah Ibrahim had begun touring extensively through Europe already back in 1964, playing for long periods at the legendary Jazzhus Montmartre in Copenhagen.<sup>43</sup> He was replaced at the Africana in Zurich by a new and musically even more adventurous group of South African jazz players: The Blue Notes, directed by the pianist and composer Chris McGregor,<sup>44</sup> the trumpeter Mongezi Feza, the alto saxophonist Dudu Pukwana, the tenor saxophonist Nikele (“Nik”) Moyake, the bassist Johnny Dyani and the drummer Louis Moholo, later also known as “Moholo-Moholo”.<sup>45</sup> Chris McGregor was white, but the rest of his band was not, and as a mixed ensemble the Blue Notes had no future in their homeland. Shortly before leaving for Europe – they made first for France and then for Zurich – the band recorded a number of tunes as documented on *Township Bop*.<sup>46</sup> Compared to Ibrahim’s music, the music of the Blue Notes was wilder

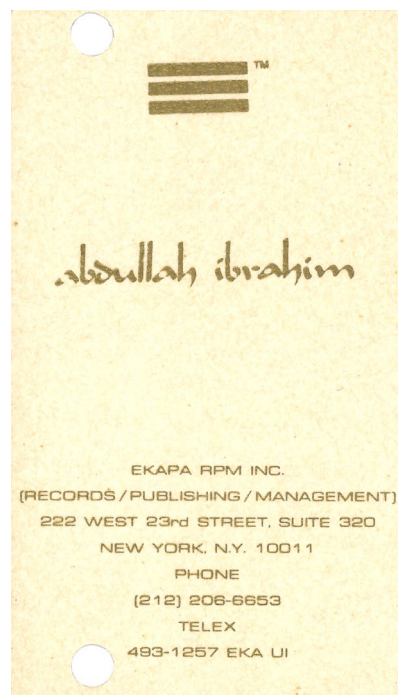


Figure 15.7. Abdullah Ibrahim’s calling card in New York. Private collection of Richard Butz.

<sup>42</sup> Abdullah Ibrahim, *African Space Program*. Enja Records ENJ-2032 (LP) and ENJ9211 (CD). Munich: Enja, 1974 and 2013. Several reissues on Enja Records and by other labels.

<sup>43</sup> At the legendary Jazzhus Montmartre in Copenhagen (1959–1976), the original Dollar Brand Trio was recorded live in 1965, the results released as *Anatomy of a South African Village* in 1965 on the Philips-Fontana label as 888 314 ZY, followed by several releases on other labels. A second live album, recorded at the same time, was released as *Round Midnight at the Montmartre* by Black Lion Records of London as BLC 76011 in 1988.

<sup>44</sup> Chris McGregor was born on 24 December 1936 in Somerset West (South Africa) and died on 26 May 1990 in Agen (France). A pianist, composer and bandleader, founder of the Blue Notes and later of the Brotherhood of Breath.

<sup>45</sup> Only one original member of the group survives today: the saxophonist Ronald Irving “Ronnie” Beer (born 1941 in Cape Town), who gave up music after his return to South Africa, then later settled in Ibiza where he worked as a carpenter in boat building. All the other members of the original Blue Notes have passed away: Mongezi Feza (born 1945 in Queenstown, died in London in 1975); Johnny “Mbizo” Dyani (born 1947 in East London, died in West Berlin in 1986), Nikele (“Nik”) Moyake (born 1934 in Addo, died in Port Elizabeth in 1969), Mtutuzeli “Dudu” Pukwana (born 1938 in Port Elizabeth, died in London in 1990) and Louis Moholo (born 1940 in Cape Town, where he died in 2025).

<sup>46</sup> The Blue Notes, *Township Bop*. Recorded by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in 1964, first released by Prosper Records as PRP CD 013, Beckenham, 2002. The musicians involved on its various tracks are: Chris McGregor (piano, on all tracks), Dudu Pukwana (alto sax),





Figure 15.8. LP cover: Good News from Africa, with Abdullah Ibrahim and Johnny Dyani. St. Gallen: Cameo Records (*Beat Burri*) 101, recorded in 1973, released in 1974. Private collection of Richard Butz.

and more avant-garde. In a later book about Chris McGregor, the French musicologist Denis-Constant Martin described the band as follows: “They were fire, modernity with roots and fragrance, feeling and emotion; they were moved by an incredible energy which made their disappearance backstage almost painful”.<sup>47</sup>

Just like their South African predecessors in Zurich, McGregor and his band members did not find it easy to live and work there. Brand and Benjamin had been living in a small room in the rather desolate basement of a student dormitory, sharing cooking and washing facilities with others, and they helped the Blue Notes to settle there too at first (including

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Nik Moyake (tenor sax), Mongezi Velelo (bass), Early Mabuza (drums), probably Dennis Mpali (trumpet), Mongezi Feza (trumpet), Johnny Dyani (bass), Louis Moholo (drums) and Sammy Maritz (bass).

<sup>47</sup> Denis-Constant Martin, “Introduction”, in: Maxine McGregor: *Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath*. Flint MI: Bamberger Books, 1995, i–v, here i.

McGregor's wife Maxine).<sup>48</sup> The Blue Notes, too, were poorly paid at the Africana. Maxine McGregor mentions their having received a sum of CHF 120 per day for the entire band for playing five hours of live music; they had to pay for their own drinks.<sup>49</sup>

Their second address was in a rundown, cold house, several kilometres away from the Africana, to which they had to commute on foot. At least the owner, a widow, was kind to them and fed them cakes and blood sausages. A little later, alternating with the Africana, they got an engagement at the Blue Note Jazz Bar in Geneva. In the spring of 1965 they were invited to perform at the first Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club at Gerrard Street in London. They remained there, feeling more at home because of the language and London's very lively, constantly expanding South African community. After their arrival there, they soon recorded *The Chris McGregor Group – Very Urgent*, an album that was highly acclaimed but not well marketed at the time.<sup>50</sup> Nikele ("Nik") Moyake was replaced by the tenor saxophonist Ronnie Beer. Moyake had by then returned to South Africa; he was already very ill and died of a brain tumour in Port Elizabeth in 1969.

In 1967 McGregor started a big band that he named The Brotherhood of Breath, comprising a mixture of South African and British musicians and later also featuring some from the European Continent. They went through many incarnations and grew into an influential, successful free jazz big band. The Brotherhood played several times in Willisau at the invitation of the founder of the Willisau Jazz Festival, Niklaus Troxler.<sup>51</sup> Their first



Figure 15.9. Flyer for concert of Abdullah Ibrahim and Johnny Dyani in St. Gallen, 8 December 1973. Private collection of Richard Butz.

<sup>48</sup> Bruno Spoerri recalls them as having lived on the Venedigstrasse. See his chapter in this book.

<sup>49</sup> Maxine McGregor, "From the Antibes Jazz Festival 1964 to London", in *Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath*, 81.

<sup>50</sup> The Chris McGregor Group, *Very Urgent*. Polydor 184137. London, Polydor Records, 1968. Band members: Chris McGregor (piano), Mongezi Feza (trumpet), Dudu Pukwana (alto sax), Ronnie Beer (tenor sax), Johnny Dyani (bass) and Louis Moholo (drums).

<sup>51</sup> Niklaus Troxler (born 1947 in Willisau), lives in Willisau and works as a graphic designer and poster-artist. He started organising jazz concerts at the end of the 1960s and founded the Willisau Jazz Festival in 1975. For information on Niklaus Troxler, all the concerts and the Festival, see Niklaus Troxler and Olivier Senn: *Willisau and All That Jazz. Eine visuelle Chronik – A Visual History 1966–2013*. Bern: Till Schaaap Edition, 2013, and <https://willisaujazzarchive.ch>. Since 2010,



Figure 15.10. A flyer for Chris McGregor's *Blue Notes* at the Café Africana in October 1964. Note also the appearance of Irène Schweizer and Remo Rau on the programme that same month. Private collection of Richard Butz.

concert in Willisau (1973) was recorded live. It was released the following year as the first album of the Ogun label.<sup>52</sup> Troxler also programmed Ibrahim several times, for example with a quintet which included the legendary tenor saxophonist Basil “Manenberg” Coetzee and the outstanding trumpeter Feya Faku in 1995.<sup>53</sup>

After the breakup of the original Dollar Brand Trio, Johnny Gertze returned to South Africa. He died there of a brain tumour in 1983. The drummer Makaya Ntshoko stayed in Copenhagen and finally settled in Basel, where he died in August 2024. He played several times in Willisau, for example with Irène Schweizer and with his own group, Makaya & The Tsotsis.<sup>54</sup>

In Zurich, Irène Schweizer developed a lasting friendship with the members of The Blue Notes, especially with the drummer Louis Moholo. In 1986 they performed together at the Zurich Jazz Festival, where the

performance turned into a loud and robust protest against the apartheid regime and Swiss complicity in it. Just a few days earlier, news had broken of the untimely death of the bass player Johnny Dyani. Like many others, he too was a victim of apartheid and suffered from a difficult life in exile. The festival concert was recorded live and issued a year later by the Zurich-based Intakt Records.<sup>55</sup> In 2003 Schweizer went on tour with Louis Moholo to South

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the Festival has been organised by Niklaus Troxler's nephew, Arno Troxler. See also the interview with Niklaus Troxler in this book.

<sup>52</sup> Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath: *Live at Willisau*. London: Ogun Records OG 100, 1974. Reissue: Ogun OGCD 001, 1994. The Ogun label was founded by South African bassist Harold Simon “Harry” Miller (born in 1941 in Cape Town, died in 1983 in an accident near Baarle-Nassau in the Netherlands) and his wife Hazel in 1974. The label is still active.

<sup>53</sup> For all the South African musicians who played in Willisau, see <https://willisaujazzarchive.ch> (accessed 14 October 2024). Fey Faku died suddenly while on tour in Basel in June 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Makaya & The Tsotsis, *Makaya & The Tsotsis*. Munich, Enja Records 2042, 1974. / *Happy House*. SteepleChase – SCCD 31651. Copenhagen: SteepleChase Records, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Irène Schweizer & Louis Moholo. Liner notes: Richard Butz, Intakt Records 006. Zurich: Intakt Records, 1987.



Africa. According to Schweizer, the tour was difficult. She had to take the responsibility of keeping it together musically because her colleagues were drinking heavily and smoking marijuana. But she enjoyed the experience of visiting the country and meeting its people.<sup>56</sup>

I first heard the Blue Notes at the Africana and afterwards helped to organise a pretty wild and raucous concert in the little town of Bischofszell in Eastern Switzerland. As far as I remember they played hardly any concerts outside of the clubs in Zurich (the Africana) and Geneva (the Blue Note Jazz Bar). There is also hardly any reference to them in *Jazz in der Schweiz* (2003), edited by Bruno Spoerri.<sup>57</sup> However, Spoerri mentions them in his contribution about the Café Africana in *Jazzstadt Zürich* (2003).<sup>58</sup> When I was living in London, I encountered The Blue Notes again when they played at the old Ronnie Scott's. Strangely enough, they never made it to Ronnie Scott's new, more genteel place on Frith Street, and when I otherwise wanted to hear them I sometimes had to go to rather obscure places such as rundown pubs in South London. All the same, I followed their musical activities, and later those of the Brotherhood, with great interest and pleasure. For a while I lived in London's "Little Venice", where Chris McGregor and some of the Blue Notes also stayed, and occasionally I spoke with them. I met Mongezi Feza just a few days before his untimely death. Back in Switzerland, I heard the Brotherhood again in Willisau, and I was also present at the abovementioned Jazz Festival concert that Irène Schweizer and Louis Moholo gave in Zurich. I took an active part in the protest on stage and was subsequently asked to write the liner notes when the concert was released as an album.<sup>59</sup> The renowned Swiss jazz critic Peter Rüedi, who still writes a weekly jazz column in the right-wing *Weltwoche* magazine, called my text "full of the pathos of the barricades". Looking back on it, I'm still proud of that assessment.

In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, the Anti-Apartheid Movement ("Anti-Apartheid Bewegung der Schweiz", hereinafter "AAB") was officially founded in 1975; it had been preceded ten years earlier by the "Mouvement Anti-Apartheid Suisse" in French-speaking Switzerland. St. Gallen also had a forerunner to the AAB, namely the "Informationsgruppe Ostschweiz", which became a part of the AAB in 1985.<sup>60</sup> The connection between political activities and culture was perhaps more pronounced in St. Gallen than elsewhere in Switzerland. There were exhibitions, discussion events, bank vigils, protest actions, literary readings

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<sup>56</sup> Christian Broecking, "2003 Tour durch Südafrika mit Louis Moholo: King Louis is back", in Broecking: *Dieses unbändige Gefühl der Freiheit – Irène Schweizer – Jazz, Avantgarde, Politik*, 302–304.

<sup>57</sup> Bruno Spoerri (ed.), *Jazz in der Schweiz, Geschichte und Geschichten*, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> See Bruno Spoerri's article about the Africana in *Jazzstadt Zürich*, 87–88.

<sup>59</sup> Butz, *Irène Schweizer & Louis Moholo*. Liner notes.

<sup>60</sup> The archives of both movements are located in the Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv in Zurich. They are not available online but can be consulted by appointment.



Figure 15.11. CD cover: Irène Schweizer Louis Moholo, also featuring Dudu Pukwana. Zurich: Intakt Records 006, 1987. Recorded live at the Zurich Jazz Festival in 1986.

and numerous concerts, most of them as a part of the cultural project “AfriKaribik”, which saw performances by Abdullah Ibrahim, Louis Moholo, Mahlathini & Mahotella Queens, Philip Tabane & Malombo, Donald Kachamba’s Kwela Band, Dudu Pukwana & Zila and Joe Malinga with Mandala or with Southern Africa Force. The writer Lesego Rampolokeng and the Dub poet Mzwakhe Mbuli also performed there. The African National Congress (ANC) activist Dulcie September<sup>61</sup> came to St. Gallen in 1986, invited by the St. Gallen branch of the ABB. Two years later she was assassinated in Paris, which only served to intensify the anti-apartheid movement in St. Gallen.<sup>62</sup>

The abovementioned Joe Malinga, a saxophonist and flautist, was another fascinating musician from southern Africa who came to Switzerland. He was born in 1949 in eSwatini (formerly known as Swaziland) and later recalled visits to his school by the tenor sax player Winston Mankunku and later by Abdullah Ibrahim. It was these visits, he claimed, along

<sup>61</sup> Dulcie Evonne September (1935 Athlone, Cape Province – 1988 Paris).

<sup>62</sup> For a full account of the AAB in St. Gallen, see Pius Frey, “Die St. Gallen Anti-Apartheid-Bewegung”, in *Aufbruch. Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Ostschweiz*, ed. Marina Widmer & Johannes Huber. Schwellbrunn: Toggenburger Verlag, 2016, 120–123.

with his exposure to the music of Philip Tabane, Ray Charles and Charlie Parker that sealed his love for jazz. After finishing school, he first worked as a journalist, then left his homeland in 1971, going first to the USA and then to Austria, where he enrolled as a music major in flute and saxophone at the University of Graz. He made contact with other musicians, jammed with them and eventually founded various groups made up of schoolmates from the United States, Africa and Europe. Malinga toured extensively in Europe, living first in Austria and later in the Netherlands. He often visited Switzerland, where he had many friends in Chur and where he recorded his first album, the moving *Tears for The Children of Soweto* in 1970.

In an interview conducted by Jasper Walgrave in 2023,<sup>63</sup> Malinga recalled with fondness his collaboration with Swiss musicians such as the saxophonist René Widmer, the bassist Hämi Hämmerli and the composer and pianist Mathias Rüegg, as well as with Paul Rostetter, the owner of Brambus Records. He also got to play with South African musicians including Johnny Dyani, Dudu Pukwana, Churchill Jolobe, Chris McGregor, Mervyn Africa, Louis Moholo and Abdullah Ibrahim. “Bra” Joe Malinga returned to South Africa in 1998 to



Figure 15.12. LP cover: Joe Malinga: *Tears for The Children of Soweto*. Chur: Canova Records CA 113, 1980.

<sup>63</sup> Unpublished interview by Jasper Walgrave with Joe Malinga, 18 August 2023.

work at the University of Venda, where he devoted his time to introducing music as a part of the curriculum in primary schools. For reasons unknown, he gave up performing music himself.<sup>64</sup>

The South African jazz connection with St. Gallen continued until 2003 in the form of the cultural projects “Musik in der Klubschule” and “Kultur im Bahnhof”. Since then, concerts with South African musicians have been organised regularly by “kleinaberfein (kaf) st. gallen”. The list of musicians who have performed here is long and includes names such as Zim Ngqawana, Paul Hanmer, Nduduzo Makhathini, Carlo Mombelli, Siya Makuzeni, Makaya Ntshoko, Louis Moholo, Kyle Shepherd, Keenan Ahrends, Thandi Ntuli, Marcus Wyatt, Bokani Dyer, McCoy Mrubata and Hilton Schilder as well as the Swiss-South African groups Bänz Oester & The Rainmakers, Skyjack and Dominic Egli’s Plurism.<sup>65</sup>

If I endeavour to sum up the Swiss-South African jazz connection here, the following lines, written by Abdullah Ibrahim, seem appropriate: “So many theories of east and west abound / one thing is certain though / this earth / is round”.<sup>66</sup> Ibrahim and all the other South African and Swiss jazz musicians named above, along with the many jazz aficionados involved in this steadily growing project, have indeed helped to make the world a little bit rounder.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Whilst in Europe, Joe Malinga recorded in Switzerland with Mandala, featuring Clifford Thornton, in *Tears for The Children of Soweto* (1980); with the Joe Malinga Quintet he recorded *One for Dudu* (1982); and with Southern Africa Force he recorded *Sandile* (1984) and *Vuka* (1989). None of these four records has been reissued and they are hard to find, but there is an excellent compilation available, containing all but one track of *Tears for The Children of Soweto* plus three other tracks: Joe Malinga: *Ithi Gqi*. Brambus Records – 199011-2. Mühlehorn: Brambus Records, 1990. A record exists with Joe Malinga as a member of Fanakalo, under the title *Ogun (African & Brazilian Jazz Portraits)*, though no further details are known, nor is the year of release. Malinga died in June 2024 and is buried in his ancestral home of Gege. See Gwen Ansell, obituary “Rest in peace Dr Joe Malinga: writer, scholar, and jazzman par excellence”, <https://sigswenjazz.wordpress.com/2024/06/04/rest-in-peace-dr-joe-malinga-writer-scholar-and-jazzman-par-excellence/> (accessed 26 February 2025).

<sup>65</sup> There is no archive of the concert activities of “Musik in der Klubschule” and “Kultur im Bahnhof” (both part of the “Migros Klubschule St. Gallen”), but for “kleinaberfein (kaf) St. Gallen” see [www.kulturrichardbutz.ch](http://www.kulturrichardbutz.ch), where the archive has been accessible since 2025 (“Archive 2015–2017” & “Archive from 2018 onwards”). The archive for 2013–2015 is missing. “kleinaberfein” was run by the author of this article until late 2024 and has been replaced by “kulturrichardbutz.ch”.

<sup>66</sup> Dollar Brand, “Africa, Music and Show Business. An analytical survey in twelve tones plus finale”, in: *Seven South African Poets: Poems of Exile collected and edited by Cosmo Pieterse: Dollar Brand – Dennis Brutus – I. Choonara – C.J. Driver – Timothy Holmes – Keorapetse Kgotsile – Arthur Nortje*. African Writers Series 64. London, Ibadan and Nairobi: Heinemann, 1971, 3–11, here 3.

<sup>67</sup> The Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel and the Bird’s Eye jazz club in Basel have played an important role in presenting South African jazz in Switzerland. Organised by Veit Arlt, the latter has been presenting South African jazz musicians in Basel and in the rest of Switzerland regularly since 2004. Since 2006, the Centre for African Studies has also offered regular residencies to South African musicians. For more information, see Veit Arlt, “South Afri-





Figure 15.13. Poster for the concert of Joe Malinga and Southern Africa Force, 24 October 1986 in St. Gallen. Private collection of Richard Butz.

can Jazz: the Basel connection", in V. Arlt, S. Bishop and P. Schmid (eds.), *Explorations in African History: reading Patrick Harries*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005, 79–85. Available at [www.baslerafrika.ch/product/explorations-in-african-history-reading-patrick-harries/](http://www.baslerafrika.ch/product/explorations-in-african-history-reading-patrick-harries/) (accessed 14 October 2024). Arlt has also published several articles about South African jazz; for details see <https://zasb.unibas.ch/de/personen/veit-arlt/> (accessed 14 October 2024). South African musicians appear from time to time at the Afro-Pfingsten Festival in Winterthur, which started in 1990. Musicians presented at this Festival have included Abdullah Ibrahim (1991), Miriam Makeba (1996), Busi Mholongo (1999), The Mahotella Queens (1995 & 2000), Sibongile Khumalo (2001), Ladysmith Black Mambazo (2003) and Hugh Masekela (2001 & 2012). For a full list, see <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afro-Pfingsten#:~:text=Das%20Afro%2DPfingsten%20Festival%20findet,afrikanischen%20und%20afroamerikanischen%20Kulturen%20befasst> (accessed 14 October 2024).

## 16 Dollar Brand in Zurich – Taking Notes

*Bruno Spoerri*

In 1962 – I recall it being on 1 February – I was invited to a jam session at the parents' house of my friend Rico Flad<sup>1</sup> in Erlenbach. Flad was one of the first modern jazz drummers in Switzerland. He lived in a large house and was regularly organising parties, especially after concerts by American jazz musicians.

This particular party was after a concert by Art Blakey in Zurich,<sup>2</sup> and the pianist Cedar Walton from Blakey's band was there, playing with Zurich musicians – the bassist K.T. Geier<sup>3</sup> and the drummer Alex Bally.<sup>4</sup> After a while, another guest sat down at the piano: a Black musician whom no one knew. He played a very individual kind of music that sounded in part like Thelonious Monk, but also had something very folk-like about it. At times it was almost reminiscent of children's songs in its simplicity. But he also played Charlie Parker's piece "Barbados" with Geier and Bally. It turned out that this stranger was from South Africa and had been brought to the party by Paul Meyer. It was Dollar Brand.

Paul Meyer<sup>5</sup> was a die-hard jazz fan, a graphic designer and a close friend of the jazz clarinetist and journalist Ruedi Fischer, who recalled him as follows:

Paul Meyer went to the same grammar school as me in Basel, which specialised in mathematics and science. But before finishing school he left to start an apprenticeship with the graphic designer Ferdi Afflerbach. Paul's father was a postal worker. They were from a Catholic family

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<sup>1</sup> Rico Flad (1926–2008), Swiss jazz musician. He played the alto saxophone from the age of 13 onwards, taking lessons at the Zurich Music Academy and with the American jazz saxophonist Glyn Paque. But when he was given a drum set as a present, he switched instruments. In the early 1950s he was mainly active with musicians from Olten, such as Umberto Arlati. He also played with Arlati in George Gruntz's Octet (1952), which recreated the sound of Miles Davis's legendary "Birth of the Cool". His parents' house in Erlenbach was a favourite place for extended jam sessions with illustrious guests such as Duke Ellington, Joe Zawinul and, as reported here, Dollar Brand (later "Abdullah Ibrahim"). Flad stopped playing in 1971 when he moved to Canton Ticino.

<sup>2</sup> Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers played at the Volkshaus in Zurich on 1 February 1962. His musicians included Curtis Fuller on trombone, Wayne Shorter on tenor sax, Cedar Walton on piano, Freddie Hubbard on trumpet, Jimmy Merritt on bass and Blakey himself on the drums.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Theodor ("K.T.") Geier (1932–2020), a German-born bass player who moved to Switzerland in the early 1960s.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Alexander "Alex" Bally (born 1936), a Swiss jazz drummer.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Meyer (1932–1988), Swiss graphic artist, jazz fan, record-shop manager, resident in South Africa in the 1950s. See also the chapter by Richard Butz in this book.

and Paul was also very religious himself. He played the piano at the time – mainly Chopin, but was then introduced to jazz by me.<sup>6</sup>

After finishing his apprenticeship, Paul went to South Africa as a graphic artist and stayed there until about the late 1950s. His role model was the priest Trevor Huddleston, who had become involved in the anti-apartheid movement early on. It was in South Africa that Paul met the American jazz clarinetist Tony Scott, among others, and he also made contact with many Black musicians – that was in the darkest days of apartheid – including Dollar Brand. There is even a tale that Paul was sent to jail on one occasion for taking photographs in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The author Lewis Nkosi<sup>7</sup> told me in Bern in 2004 that you always knew where the key to Paul's flat was. You could just turn up at his place and listen to music. Paul is also said to have been in a relationship with the young Miriam Makeba. To disguise herself, she always came to him with a laundry basket under her arm, as if she were a domestic worker.<sup>8</sup>

In his book *Africa Speaks, America Answers*,<sup>9</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley states that it was Paul Meyer who introduced Bea Benjamin to the music of Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith, and also brought her together with Dollar Brand. Meyer organised a concert entitled "Just Jazz meets Ballet" in 1959 and helped Bea to get her first concert with Dollar. After Meyer left South Africa – thus Ruedi Fischer – he cultivated many contacts with South African diplomats back in Switzerland, and above all kept up his relationships with South African musicians. It is possible, though not certain, that Meyer also had contact with the American filmmaker Lionel Rogosin, who shot *Come Back, Africa* in 1956 (released in 1959). But we do know that the Swiss cameraman Ernest Artaria<sup>10</sup> and the Swiss sound engineer Walter Wettler<sup>11</sup> were employed on this film. Wettler told me that Rogosin shot landscapes during the day with an empty camera, and that the real film, in which Miriam Makeba made an appearance, was shot secretly in the evening.

Meyer later took over the record shop Disco-Club,<sup>12</sup> which specialised in jazz and had been founded by the jazz musician Alain Dubois in Geneva in the 1960s. Paul became known as "Disco-Paul". He knew the entire jazz repertoire and was able to find all manner of pressings, both legal and illegal. He also became involved in the distribution of Cabasse

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Ruedi Fischer, 27 June 2004.

<sup>7</sup> See the chapter in this book by Dag Henrichsen and Astrid Starck-Adler.

<sup>8</sup> See the chapter in this book by Richard Butz, and Hugh Masekela and D. Michael Cheers, *Still Grazing*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004, 77–79.

<sup>9</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers, Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, 136ff.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Artaria (1926–1971), Swiss photographer and cameraman.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Alfred Wettler (1921–2000), Swiss sound engineer, worked e.g. for Deutsche Gramophon.

<sup>12</sup> Disco Club, Terreaux 22, Geneva.



loudspeakers. Ruedi Fischer recalls Paul as being “an extremely good-natured and helpful person, though his business dealings were not always entirely transparent. He was repeatedly suspected of making crooked deals and apparently often operated on the boundaries of legality”. On the night of 21 June 1988, Meyer was killed in his record shop in Geneva, quite possibly by an acquaintance whom he had helped out. But it remains unclear what actually happened or who the perpetrator was. His widow, Kiwano Meyer, originally from Japan, remained thereafter in Geneva. They had married long after Paul’s time in South Africa, so she hardly knew anything about his activities there. What we know for certain is that it was Paul who managed to bring the South African musicians Dollar Brand, Makaya Ntshoko and Chris McGregor to Switzerland by helping to procure them the necessary visas.

A few days after the party I described above – my first experience of Dollar Brand chez Rico Flad – I got a phone call from Paul Meyer, inviting me to play with Dollar Brand at a small, informal jam session in a leisure centre in Zurich. It was an odd occasion. Dollar ostentatiously turned his back on me and started to play a piece. As soon as I began, he changed the key and I had to adjust accordingly. He did this several times before finally becoming friendlier. Over a period of time, this initial encounter actually turned into a good relationship. He’d frequently ring me in the middle of the night to tell me about his experiences and problems of the previous day.

I’ve questioned several people about that time. Their memories were mostly very unclear and impossible to verify. Lewis Nkosi and Dollar Brand also didn’t want to talk about their time in South Africa, nor about their early months in Switzerland. Alex Bally and Michele Morach recalled that Dollar played for a month on his own and in a duo with Bally “in a bar next to Racher’s”, a stationery shop in the Niederdorf, the centre of Zurich’s old town.<sup>13</sup> This bar did indeed exist and occasionally employed a pianist, but we have no proof that Brand really played there. The most plausible story is the one told by Hans Kennel, a jazz trumpeter from Zug. He heard a dance band run by the saxophonist Chester Gill<sup>14</sup> at the “Capitol” in Lucerne, presumably in late 1961. He noticed that the band’s pianist played very much in the style of Thelonious Monk. He got talking to him and found out that Paul Meyer had already tried, in vain, to organise a gig for him at the “Jazz Café Africana” in Zurich. Kennel then joined me in making a second attempt with the man who ran the Africana, a Mr O. Hugentobler.<sup>15</sup> We both played regularly at the Africana and he trusted us, which is how we were able to convince him to hire Brand on a provisional basis.

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<sup>13</sup> Racher was for several years after 1956 based at Marktgasse 12 in Zurich.

<sup>14</sup> Chester Gill (1928–2003), a Barbados-born musician who studied singing at the Basel Music Academy in 1960, then worked as a music teacher and helped to shape the musical life of the Basel region for over 40 years. He also directed the Chester Gill Singers.

<sup>15</sup> See the chapter by Richard Butz in this book.

So in the course of 1962, Dollar began to play regularly at the Africana, first alone, then possibly also with the drummer Alex Bally, and occasionally with the singer Bea Benjamin, who was apparently already in Zurich by then. Then he played with the bassist Johnny Gertze and the drummer Makaya Ntshoko who had meanwhile also arrived in Zurich.<sup>16</sup> In a telephone interview that I conducted with Makaya Ntshoko on 20 October 2002, he said: “I came to Switzerland in 1962. Johnny and Bea were already there then. I was the last one of the Trio to come – they were already playing in the Africana. Before, I was in London with a jazz opera.<sup>17</sup> I met Paul Meyer in South Africa – he came to the airport in Basel to pick me up. He was the one who got things going for us all”.

The trio soon came to the attention of Heinz Wehrle, who worked at Radio Zurich and was responsible for the jazz programme there. A test recording exists from Radio Zurich from 5 March 1962 entitled “Spirituals and Blues, sung and played by Dollar and Bea”, with seven tracks in total. On 5 October 1962, the trio recorded a further five tracks for Radio Zurich. I found these tapes again after a long search, along with a photo from this time of Dollar Brand, Rico Flad and the sound engineer Klaus Koenig.<sup>18</sup>

At the Africana, Brand’s trio played from 5 to 7 p.m. and again from 9 to 11. The 7 to 9 slot was for local musicians from Zurich. But joint sessions very often took place in which musicians such as Hans Kennel, Franco Ambrosetti and myself played with Brand’s Trio. In the winter of 1962/63, Walter Gloor recorded the Trio live at the Africana at least twice. The tapes resurfaced a few years ago and give a pretty clear picture of how they played back then. I copied these recordings onto CD and sent copies to Bea Benjamin in early 2006.

The musicians apparently lived in a kind of flat-sharing community on Venedigstrasse<sup>19</sup> at the time, along with the saxophonist Thomas “Hudson” Keller, possibly also the radio journalist Elfie Leu and Jacques Rohner. Chris McGregor also lived at the same address when his Blue Notes played at the Africana in 1964. They, too, had a shoestring budget: Hugentobler paid him and his six musicians a total of CHF 120 per evening.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See the interview with Rose Ntshoko in this book.

<sup>17</sup> This was *King Kong* by Todd Matshikiza.

<sup>18</sup> These extant recordings are: “Dollar and Bea Brand, Spirituals und Blues”, sung and played by Bea and Dollar, test recording, Studio 2, Radio Zurich, 5 March 1962, 11–12 o’clock, sound engineer Klaus Koenig (tape No. MG 15938):

“I should care” / “I’m glad” / “I’ll make” / “All god’s chillum” / “Boulevard east” (Brand) / “Smoke gets in your eyes” / “The stride” (Brand); Jazz vocals with Bea Benjamin and Dollar Brand, Heinz Pfenninger (bass), Fritz Stähli (drums), Studio 2, Radio Zurich, 24 July 1964, 14–18:00 (tape No. MG 20672): “Prelude to a kiss” / “Together” / “I love you” / “Ekuseni” (Brand).

<sup>19</sup> The Venedigstrasse in the Zurich suburb of Enge was at this time popular with students and in the late 1960s became a site for squatters protesting against the high price of apartments in the city. See also the chapter by Richard Butz in this book.

<sup>20</sup> See Ian Carr: *Music Outside. Contemporary Jazz in Britain*, London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973, 94f. Chris McGregor’s next visit to Zurich was with his Brotherhood of Breath at the Zurich



*Figure 16.1. Rico Flad, Klaus König and Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim) in Zurich in 1962. Photo by Candid Lang. Courtesy of Bruno Spoerri.*

Duke Ellington made a guest appearance with his big band in the Zurich Kongresshaus on 19 February 1963. Bea Benjamin, with Paul Meyer's assistance, lured Ellington to the Africana, where he was enthusiastic about what he heard and promptly engaged The Dollar Brand Trio and Bea for recordings in Paris. We – the Hans Kennel Quintet – accordingly had to stand in for Brand & Co. at short notice at the Africana on 24 February.<sup>21</sup> It seems to me that Ellington was initially primarily interested in Bea Benjamin – either way, he apparently recorded Bea Benjamin first, then the Brand Trio, though Benjamin's LP was not released for another 34 years.

Brand's Trio also gave other concerts in Switzerland, such as in St. Gallen (organised by Richard Butz – see his chapter in this book), at the jazz festival in Ascona in August 1963, organised by Giorgio Gomelsky (which was completely rained out) and at the 1964 Expo in Lausanne. Radio Zurich recorded Dollar and Bea together again on 24 July 1964, with the Swiss musicians Heinz Pfenninger on bass and Fritz Stähli on drums; they also recorded a concert in the Zurich Volkshaus of 30 October 1964. However, none of these tapes are extant today.

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Jazz Festival in 1972. For more information on McGregor's impact on the Swiss scene, see the interview with John Wolf Brennan in this book.

<sup>21</sup> See the liner notes for the LP/CD *A Morning in Paris*, recorded with Benjamin that February, but only released on the Enja label in 1997.

In June 1963, I wrote to the German jazz promoter Joachim-Ernst Berendt to recommend The Dollar Brand Trio to him. I also told him that Dollar had composed a suite for string quartet. But Berendt only responded some time later, when Dollar was already on the road to success.

My relationship with Dollar became difficult over the next few years, as it did for others, too. Alcohol had a devastating effect on the musicians in his circle. From time to time, Dollar also became convinced that everyone was betraying him. This was understandable, given all he had endured in South Africa, but it was often quite unexpected for his friends in Europe. In 1973, at Dollar's request, I engaged the well-known sound engineer Peter Pfister to record a concert that he was giving in the old church in Boswil. But a few days before the event, I was informed that Dollar had suddenly changed his mind as he was somehow convinced that I was trying to exploit him. So he sent for another sound engineer – with me having to cover the costs of Pfister's cancellation. I was understandably angry. On the evening itself, I spoke to Dollar about all this, though he denied everything. Since then I've been careful not to have anything to do with him. Others who had helped him (such as Jakob Bill) have told me about similar experiences.

I did try to speak to Dollar several times – now Abdullah Ibrahim – when working on my publications on the history of jazz in Switzerland. But he was evasive every time, and no interview came about. It was clearly unpleasant for him to be reminded of it.

### **The Café Africana in Zurich**

The Café Africana opened in May 1959 on the site of what had been a less attractive, cheap restaurant, most recently under the name “Zähringer-Quick”, which was rumoured to have been frequented by Lenin during his time in Zurich. The owner was Louis Scheuble, though the manager of the place, as mentioned above, was one O. Hugentobler.

The saxophonist Victor Burghardt once told me how he had been on the lookout for a venue for his band back in 1958, and that he then persuaded Hugentobler to organise occasional jazz evenings. These were successful and led to the idea of converting the restaurant into a jazz venue. It was decorated with African artefacts with the help of the graphic designer Robert O. Schmid. In the first few months, the pianists Joe Turner, Arty Peyer and José Meyer played there along with others.<sup>22</sup> Hugentobler was an odd fellow. He could be extremely generous – it seems he even paid the travel costs for some South-American musicians – but he could also be incredibly stingy and rude to his artists. According to reliable reports, The Dollar Brand Trio didn't earn more than CHF 50 a night.

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<sup>22</sup> Beat Kennel runs the website <https://bazillusarchive.ch/> which offers extensive information about the Africana, including a floor plan (accessed May 2025).

By around 1967, the appeal of the Africana was waning in Zurich (as was the appeal of jazz in general there). Rock bands performed there for a while, then came disco parties and DJs. Hugentobler moved on and the building was converted into the “Hotel Scheuble” that continues to do business today. Its foyer still features a few remnants of its former furnishings.

### **Remo Rau (1927–1987)**

The concerts by Zurich musicians in the Africana – always from 7 to 9 p.m. – were organised by the pianist Remo Rau, who also often helped to smooth over the difficult relations between Dollar Brand and Hugentobler. Rau was born in Yokohama in 1927, the son of a Swiss expatriate businessman. He studied classical oboe there, played in various chamber ensembles, but returned to Switzerland in 1942 where he continued his classical training with Charles Dobler in Solothurn and Wladimir Vogel in Zurich. In addition to composition, Rau studied oboe, clarinet and saxophone at the Zurich Academy of Music. Basel musicians such as Robert Suter (1919–2008) and Lukas “Cheese” Burckhardt (1924–2018) remember him as an extremely talented saxophonist and clarinetist before a bout of tuberculosis in 1949 forced him to give up playing wind instruments and spend a long period convalescing. He afterwards took up the vibraphone and piano instead, though with the same degree of commitment and intensity.

Rau had a part-time job at a Zurich carpet company and spent the rest of his time on his musical projects. He also played a key role on Zurich’s jazz scene by acting as a promoter for the Africana, then later for the “Modern Jazz Zurich” concert series. He had extremely broad musical horizons. He wrote operas, concertos and chamber works, but was also interested in every facet of jazz.<sup>23</sup> He used to recount how it was the hard-bop pianist Horace Silver<sup>24</sup> who had initiated him into the harmonic and rhythmic secrets of what was probably the most popular jazz style at the time – that was back in the years of the Africana – with Silver sitting next to him at the piano for hours on end. Long before anyone else on the Swiss jazz scene, Rau was experimenting with twelve-tone rows, raga scales and just about every conceivable type of folk music alongside pop, funk and salsa elements. It was with his quintet – including Hans Kennel on trumpet and me on saxophone – that Rau made his first attempts at free jazz in the early 1960s. His later bands, to which he gave imaginative names such as “Jungle Sob Soul Boppers” or “Ensemble Musica Giganthropos”, were important in

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<sup>23</sup> Rau’s archive – including the autographs of many of his compositions – is held today by the Zentralbibliothek Zürich, shelfmark Mus NL 97.

<sup>24</sup> Horace Silver (1928–2014), American jazz pianist, composer and arranger. He performed in Zurich occasionally in the 1960s, e.g. on 18 October 1962 with his Horace Silver Quintet at the Kongresshaus, advertised, for example, in *Die Tat*, 8 October 1962.

the musical education of many young musicians such as Jürg Grau, Peter Hanel, Thomas Moeckel and Nick Liebmann.

Remo Rau was a visionary. He remained active as a concert organiser, but later also realised ambitious multimedia projects. His events such as “Ballet and Jazz”, “Ava and Edam” and “Multi-Media Dance Theatre” received much local acclaim, though his pioneering ideas met with little understanding from the major Swiss cultural institutions. His interdisciplinary works more or less fell between the cracks. He died of cancer and a broken heart in 1987.

## 17 Harmonies of Foreign Climes

*Steff Rohrbach*

The jazz historian Christian Steulet dealt extensively with oral history and was accustomed to engaging with its subjectivity and the shifting emphases that emerge through memories and recollections over the passing of time. He was similarly adept at the various methodologies to be employed in order to analyse and evaluate with the necessary objectivity whatever he found. We had known each other since the 1990s when I worked at the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia and he was on its Foundation Board. He and I shared a mutual interest in jazz and he occasionally came to Basel, where I live, either to look through the archives of Basel's best-known international jazz musician, George Gruntz, or to visit the University's Centre for African Studies or concerts at the Bird's Eye, the renowned Basel jazz club.<sup>1</sup> And yet we never really got around to discussing the South African jazz musicians who had come to Switzerland in the early 1960s. Christian died unexpectedly in May 2020, not long after having begun work on the jazz history topic for the research project that is documented in the present volume. When I was subsequently invited to continue Christian's work on the project, it was clear to me that I would have to proceed as he had begun, by conducting assorted interviews with the people who had witnessed the South African jazz exiles firsthand and played with them.

After reviewing Christian Steulet's files, I decided first to finalise three interviews that he had conducted, namely with the pianist and composer John Wolf Brennan, whom I had known since the 1990s, with Barbara Pukwana, the widow of the South African saxophonist Dudu Pukwana, and Six Trutt, neither of whom I yet knew. Numerous details had to be checked and clarified, further information was often required, and the revised texts submitted to the interviewees for confirmation that the content was correct.

As it happens, Christian and I had already been planning to meet up. He had not yet managed to speak to the South African drummer Makaya Ntshoko (1939–2024), who had lived in Basel for a long time and whom I knew well, and with whom I felt I had a trusting relationship. So Christian and I decided to arrange a joint meeting with him. Things turned out differently, but Makaya still became the focus of my work for the current project.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Bird's Eye" was founded in 1994 by the bassist Stephan Kurmann, who was also its artistic director until 2022. Kurmann worked with Makaya Ntshoko in several ensembles. See the interview with Kurmann in this book, and also [www.birdseye.ch/](http://www.birdseye.ch/) (accessed June 2024).



I first heard about Makaya in the mid-1970s when friends told me that they had drummed with him out in the forest. I was already familiar with Makaya's colleague Dollar Brand (*aka* Abdullah Ibrahim), whose music I liked immensely. I was always moved when I heard it on the radio. Friends told me that Brand had played several times in a small village in Switzerland. Precisely where it was remained a mystery to me – until I got involved in the current project and Six Trutt gave me the answer. I had seen both Ibrahim and Makaya perform – though not together. Later, when I set up a concert series in the 2000s on behalf of the Cultural Foundation of the Canton of Thurgau, I engaged Makaya twice: on 15 September 2005 with “Where's Africa?” (together with Omri Ziegele and Irène Schweizer) and on 23 February 2006 with “Makaya and the New Tsotsis” (Andy Scherrer,<sup>2</sup> Vera Kappeler,<sup>3</sup> Stephan Kurmann<sup>4</sup> and Makaya again). Makaya lived in the same Basel neighbourhood as me, so for the first of these gigs, I drove him and his drum set to the venue, the Eisenwerk Frauenfeld. On the journey home, he told me how his great success with the musical *King Kong* in South Africa had led to a longer engagement in England.<sup>5</sup> This was also the reason why he and others had been issued with South African passports in the first place. Some members of the ensemble stayed in Europe, but Makaya flew home instead. Dollar Brand had by now moved to Switzerland and asked Makaya to join him there and play as a trio with the bassist Johnny Gertze – they'd already often played together back in South Africa. Makaya accepted, and they thereafter performed regularly at the Café Africana in Zurich. And Makaya also told me of Joe Zawinul's invitation<sup>6</sup> for him to join the famous fusion band Weather Report that he had founded and led together with the saxophonist Wayne

<sup>2</sup> Andy Scherrer (1946–2019), the most prominent Swiss tenor saxophonist, who also taught and worked as a first-rate piano accompanist.

<sup>3</sup> Vera Kappeler (born 1974) is an unconventional Swiss pianist with a classical and jazz training, and occasionally also plays the harmonium.

<sup>4</sup> Stephan Kurmann (born 1958), Swiss jazz bassist, founder of the Bird's Eye jazz club in Basel in 1994 and its director until 2022. See also the interview with him in this book.

<sup>5</sup> The musical *King Kong* by Todd Matshikiza and Stanley Glasser was a hit in Johannesburg in 1959 and went on tour to London in 1961 where it was less successful, but at least provided several Black musicians (including Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela) with a means of leaving South Africa. See e.g. Tyler Fleming: *Opposing Apartheid on Stage. King Kong the Musical*. Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020. It is often stated in the literature that Dollar Brand was also involved in *King Kong* in London, but this tale is spurious. See also the chapters by Richard Butz and Bruno Spoerri in this book.

<sup>6</sup> Josef Erich “Joe” Zawinul (1932–2007) was an Austrian pianist, keyboardist, composer and bandleader who wrote the hit “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy” for the Cannonball Adderley Quintet in 1966 and the title track of the Miles Davis LP *In a Silent Way* in 1969, one of the first fusion albums. He played on both that album and on Davis's LP *Bitches Brew* (1970). At the end of 1970, Zawinul founded the band Weather Report with the saxophonist Wayne Shorter, which was described by *DownBeat* in 2001 as the “best jazz band of the last 30 years”. Initially, Miroslav Vitouš was on double bass, then later Jaco Pastorius on electric bass. The band broke up in ca 1986. See also the below interview with Stephan Kurmann.

Shorter.<sup>7</sup> But according to Makaya, they already had a young Black man on the drums – it might have been Alphonse Mouzon, it's not certain<sup>8</sup> – and Makaya didn't want to take the job away from him.

Pierre Favre<sup>9</sup> was very close to Makaya. When I rang him to tell him that Makaya had died in August 2024, he replied: "Ah, I knew that something like this had happened. I sensed it because we were so close. We'd recently visited Irène Schweizer together in the nursing home, with whom we'd both played". Pierre told me years ago how Joe Zawinul had wanted Makaya to play African music to him in Los Angeles so that he could record it secretly. But Makaya had realised what he intended doing, and refused. Pierre repeated this story when I visited him at home in Uster in Canton Zurich on 7 November 2024. "The way he spoke of me was the way I spoke of him. We opened up a world to each other, played together several times and liked each other. Makaya was such a pure and honest person".

Makaya said to me twice in the Bird's Eye club that we ought to meet – but whenever I called him, he didn't pick up the phone. I tried over several weeks, then weeks became months. I wrote to him and put the magazine through his letterbox in which I'd published the interview with John Wolf Brennan. I suspected that he might have had bad experiences with the press before, so I wrote him a note, promising not to publish a single line of any conversation with him without his permission. Late one evening, I met him by chance on the street. He apologised and explained that he'd had a dental operation that made it impossible for him to speak. Another time, I bumped into him while shopping, but he was in a great hurry and scurried off through the racks of products. In short: Makaya didn't want to talk to me "officially" about his life story. Margriet Naber also had the same experience when she tried in vain to contact Makaya for her biography of John Tchicai.<sup>10</sup> He had already told me a short version of his life, and ultimately all that remained was for me to accept his decision. I told him this at another chance meeting in the supermarket, but also mentioned that I intended speaking to people who knew him well. Makaya replied with a mischievous smile that I would do what I wanted anyway. "So I'll be doing the same as you", I replied with a grin – and we laughed together.

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<sup>7</sup> The tenor and soprano saxophonist Wayne Shorter (1933–2023) was one of the most influential jazz musicians of his time. On the recommendation of John Coltrane, he joined the second classic Miles Davis Quintet alongside Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams.

<sup>8</sup> Alphonse Mouzon (1948–2016), an American jazz and pop drummer.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Favre (born 1937 in Le Locle), an internationally renowned Swiss percussionist and teacher.

<sup>10</sup> John Tchicai (1936–2012), born in Copenhagen of Congolese-Danish parents. Was very much influenced by Lee Konitz and was the only European to play a major role in the development of free jazz in New York in the mid-1960s. He later became heavily involved in the Frankfurt project "Jazz against Apartheid" together with Makaya Ntshoko and others. See Margriet Naber, *John Tchicai: A Chaos with some Kind of Order*. Nijmegen: Ear Mind Heart Media, 2021.

I revised Christian Steulet's texts and conducted my own interviews between January 2021 and December 2024; they have since all been read, corrected and approved by the interviewees themselves. Christian had already spoken to John Wolf Brennan about the impact on the Swiss jazz scene of the Willisau concert given by the South African pianist Chris McGregor and his band the Brotherhood of Breath in 1973. Christian had also visited Barbara Pukwana in London and Six Trutt in Ichertswil in Canton Solothurn. It was Six and his family who had provided Dollar Brand/Abdullah Ibrahim with a European "home base" for many years. But my two requests for an interview with Ibrahim, South Africa's most famous jazz musician, were promptly turned down. He didn't want anything to do with our topic. This was not surprising, for many people who emigrated because of apartheid are notoriously reluctant to talk about the time they left their homeland. But at least I was able to bring Six Trutt (then aged 86) together once more with the 89-year-old Ibrahim when I took him backstage after a concert given by the latter at the Kultur- und Kongresshaus Luzern (KKL) on 20 April 2023. But even on this occasion, it was still impossible for me to make any direct contact with Ibrahim. It was the last time that the two men met; Six Trutt died on 24 January 2024.

The American pianist Bob Degen, who has lived in Germany for many years, was a member of "Makaya & The Tsotsis" in the mid-1970s. I interviewed both him and Jürgen Leinhos on the same day in Frankfurt. The latter had helped to set up Jazz against Apartheid in Frankfurt alongside the South African bassist Johnny Dyani. Makaya had also played a decisive role in the organisation. I was furthermore able to visit Stephan Kurmann, the Basel bassist who founded the jazz club Bird's Eye and who now lives mainly in Brazil. It was Pierre Favre who introduced me to Makaya's daughter Rose – whom I didn't yet know – at the jam session "Honoring Makaya Ntshoko" at Bird's Eye on 16 December 2014. She kindly also agreed to be interviewed for this project. It's always a great pleasure to meet Niklaus Troxler, the great graphic design artist and the founder and longstanding director of the Willisau Jazz Festival. He engaged numerous South African musicians for his programmes right from the very start of his concert-organising endeavours, thereby enabling us to view our topic from a different perspective. Christian Broecking's mammoth biography of Irène Schweizer, published in 2016, also proved an important source, as it contains no fewer than 31 references to Makaya.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Christian Broecking, *Dieses unbändige Gefühl der Freiheit: Irène Schweizer – Jazz, Avantgarde, Politik: die autorisierte Biografie*. Berlin: Broecking Verlag, 2016. It contains 479 pages. Also published in English, translated by Jeb Bishop, as *This Uncontainable Feeling of Freedom: Irène Schweizer – European Jazz and the Politics of Improvisation: the Authorized Biography*. Berlin: epubli, 2021.

In the person of Makaya Ntshoko, my research into cultural relations between apartheid South Africa and Switzerland became focused on a single protagonist of the South African jazz scene: a modest but unique, world-class drummer who escaped the inhumanity of racial segregation and oppression but who, despite all his talent, ultimately did not find the great happiness abroad that he sought, nor did he bestraddle the world of jazz as his gifts deserved. My conversations with his daughter, his fellow musicians, colleagues and concert organisers provide us with different perspectives on his life and work, resulting in a small-scale social study that could well stand as paradigmatic of the fate of numerous other South African emigrés. And these conversations also shed new light on Switzerland itself – a society that was ultimately unable to provide a real home for these South African musicians and their music, and which often offered only a disharmonious ground in which familial and cultural discord became entrenched.

## 18 Abdullah Ibrahim in Ichertswil: An Interview with Six Trutt

*Christian Steulet/Steff Rohrbach*

For many years from 1973 onwards, the farmhouse in Ichertswil in Canton Solothurn owned by Six and Renate Trutt served as Abdullah Ibrahim's home from home when he visited Europe. Christian Steulet spoke with Six Trutt (1936–2024) on 4 October 2019. On 20 February and 21 August 2023, Steff Rohrbach met Six and his son Daniel in order to revise and update Christian's interview, which is given here in its final form.

"Felli Farm" is the name of the Trutt family home as given on the LPs that were recorded there. It's been many years since it was a real farm and today stands alone, almost secluded, on a slight incline by the edge of the forest near Ichertswil, some five miles to the south-west of the city of Solothurn. In 1961, Ichertswil amalgamated with the neighbouring parish of Lüterkofen and is today a tiny town with some 900 inhabitants. The Felli Farm exudes a warm, cosy atmosphere. Together with the beauty of its surrounding landscape, this makes it hardly surprising that so many musicians have felt at home here. And the fact that it is the actual home of a music-loving, generous, open-hearted family is the icing on the cake. Six Trutt, the *pater familias*, was a gifted amateur musician who played cello in the Solothurn City Orchestra<sup>1</sup> and was also a passionate jazz pianist who performed on the local scene with his own trio. His wife, Renate, died in 2018. They had three sons together: Samuel (\*1962), Emanuel (\*1964) and Daniel (\*1961). Daniel works today as a sound engineer and was present during both conversations in 2023.

**Christian Steulet/Steff Rohrbach:** Where did you grow up, Six, and how did you come to music – and to jazz in particular?

**Six Trutt:** We lived in Interlaken, where I got lessons on the piano and organ. But then it was decided that wasn't enough and that I should learn the cello too. But for that I had to go to the music school in Bern, the Conservatory. So I took the train to Bern every week until I was 15 or 16. It was thanks to Graeme Bell & His Australian Jazz Band that I discovered my first jazz chords. I started to play boogie, and I recall that my strict mother didn't at all like what I was playing with my left hand. She played the piano well herself, took me with her to classical

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<sup>1</sup> The Stadtorchester Solothurn was founded in 1917 and still exists today, giving several concerts a year. It comprises primarily amateurs but employs a professional conductor and engages professional soloists.

concerts, and ran the Musikhaus Stöcklin, the music store in Interlaken, which sold instruments and sheet music. It was there that we met other musicians, such as those from the Concertgebouw Amsterdam.<sup>2</sup> A famous American pianist also came by looking for a harpsichord or a spinet and practised in our shop – I sat next to him, though I don't remember his name.

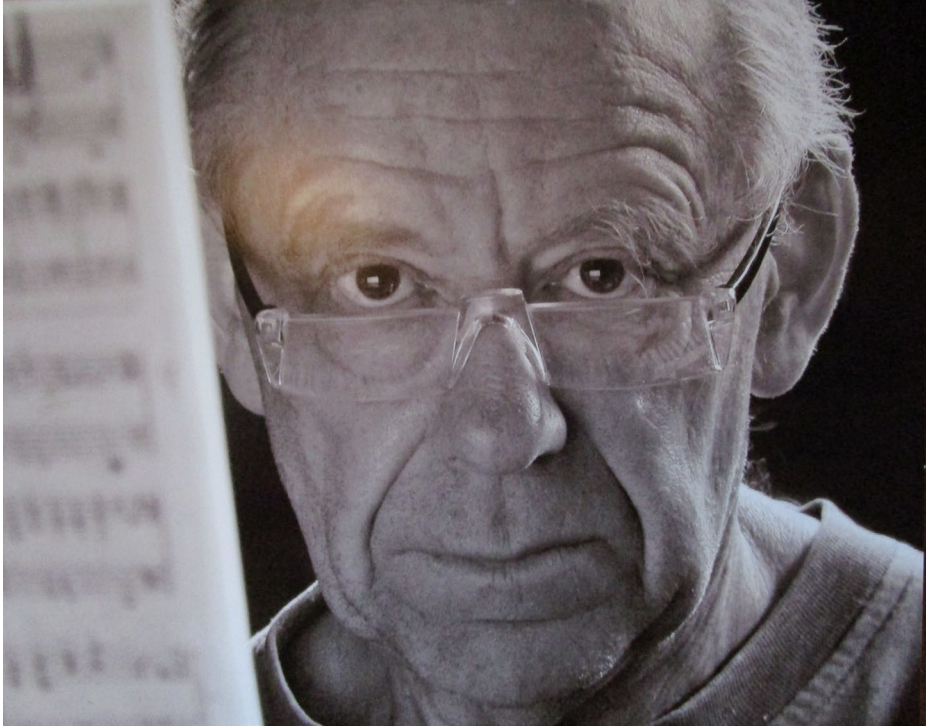


Figure 18.1. Six Trutt.

But jazz fascinated me more and more. I also dabbled in composing. It took me months to manage to write a blues. I often played alone because good bass players were a rarity. Then I had to do my military service, and after that I did an apprenticeship as a music dealer at Musik Hug in Basel [the main music shop there]. I made a tentative return to classical music and took part in an amateur performance of Puccini's *Turandot*. But jazz was getting more important to me, and I often went to the "Atlantis" [a restaurant and jazz club in central Basel], sometimes even playing there myself. Hazy Osterwald<sup>3</sup> came to the Hotel Belvédère in Interlaken every season. He was already a household name, of course. I also played with him, though not in public.

CS/SR: *How did things proceed from there?*

<sup>2</sup> The Concertgebouw Orchestra from Amsterdam played in the Kursaal in Interlaken in the summers of 1946 and 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Hazy Osterwald (*recte* Rolf Erich Osterwalder, 1922–2012), Swiss bandleader and singer.

**Six:** Well, then love intervenes. You get to know a girl ...

**Daniel Trutt:** ... that was in the music shop in Interlaken. Six was born in Freiburg im Breisgau in Germany in 1936, but when the war broke out, he was sent to live with an aunt in Switzerland. Renate, my mother, originally came from Cologne. She was working in a hotel in Wilderswil [just outside Interlaken] and was a jazz fanatic. She was looking for a specific record, Six asked what kind of nutcase could be looking for music like that – it was perhaps a recording by Sidney Bechet. – And, well, here I sit today!

**Six:** I met a former work colleague of mine from Basel who was running Musik Hug's shop in Solothurn. He said he missed working with me, that his current employee didn't have a clue about music, and that I could start working for him at any time. I was supposed to take over from my mother in her shop in Interlaken, but I had a few months during which I was able to go and work in Solothurn. Those few months then turned into 38 years.

**Daniel:** You started working at Musik Hug in Solothurn in around 1958. You even met Dizzy Gillespie there once, when he was playing in Solothurn. There's a photo of you with him.

**CS/SR:** *Did you work at Musik Hug in Solothurn until retirement?*

**Six:** No, no!

**Daniel:** He stopped there in about 1982, when Musik Hug reorganised its business all over Switzerland. He was 55. After that, he opened the "Katzenhotel Felli", a boarding kennel for cats, and ran it for almost 30 years.

**CS/SR:** *But you surely couldn't make a living from that, could you?*

**Daniel:** Oh yes!

**Six:** The cat hotel was a success!

**Daniel:** There were usually between 30 and 40 cats here, each of which brought in CHF 16 a day – that made quite a pretty sum altogether.

**CS/SR:** *Did you always live here in the "Felli"?*

**Daniel:** We lived in different places, but came to this house in 1971.

**CS/SR:** *Six, were you only playing jazz by then?*

**Six:** No, I wasn't. I was also playing cello in the City Orchestra. But I was playing more jazz, that's true – my goal was always to improvise, to be able to just sit down and play. I still do that today [in 2019], when I'm able to play for a few minutes without pain. Or with Daniel, who experienced the whole scene and sometimes also played bass in my trio.

**CS/SR:** *Is it true that you first heard Abdullah Ibrahim in the Café Africana in Zurich?*



**Six:** That's right. A friend rang me to say that Dollar was playing there with his Trio and that I simply had to be there, he'd get us tickets ...

**CS/SR:** ... *he was playing there with Johnny Gertze and Makaya Ntshoko ...*

**Six:** ... it was in 1963. The same evening when Duke Ellington turned up later. And that's when our "liaison" really began.

**CS/SR:** *What struck you about how he played?*

**Six:** His improvisations impressed me, his way of playing – which is something you recognise immediately with him. Why is that, I wonder? It's a good question, but not easy to answer, which is why he captivated me so much. I just liked his music, and it influenced me too. The thing I love best is to play like he does – even today, when I can. But of course, what I really love most is to hear him play solo.

**CS/SR:** *Did people notice that he was playing a different kind of jazz from what they knew back then?*

**Six:** To me, his music just exuded an aura – and when he improvises, everything seems to come from his soul. It's difficult to describe.

**CS/SR:** *He also composed his own repertoire.*

**Six:** Sure, I also have a few books of his music. I sometimes sightread pieces from them when I can't do anything else – otherwise I still improvise. After all, the actual harmonies of Dollar's music aren't necessarily difficult.

**CS/SR:** *Bea Benjamin, Ibrahim's girlfriend – whom he married in 1965 – managed to get Duke Ellington to come to the Africana. He was playing in Zurich on 19 February 1963. Ibrahim's concert was extended that night because of him. Ellington then invited Bea Benjamin and the Trio to a studio in Paris four days later to make recordings. He recorded first with her, and then the Trio played. The record was called: Duke Ellington Presents The Dollar Brand Trio and was released in 1964.*

**Six:** I don't know that one!

**CS/SR:** *The tapes with Benjamin were reputedly lost, but in 1997 they were released under the title: A Morning in Paris. Ibrahim and Benjamin went to London in 1965 and then to America soon afterwards. But how did he come to visit you in the "Felli"?*

**Six:** I was in the Solothurn Jazz Club, of which Jürg Solothurnmann<sup>4</sup> was also a member. We organised a concert with Dollar in 1973 at the Lehrerseminar,<sup>5</sup> where they had a grand piano.

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<sup>4</sup> Jürg Solothurnmann (born 1943 in Zuchwil, Canton Solothurn), Swiss jazz saxophonist.

<sup>5</sup> The Solothurn Teachers' Training College, today the Pedagogical Department at the FHNW University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland.

Dollar wasn't some Jarrett type who needed an absolutely top-class instrument. Though it had to be a good one and in tune, of course. After the concert I went up to him and shook hands. Suddenly he asked: "Do you have a piano?" Yes we did, a Schmidt-Flohr, my first piano. Would we let him come and practise? Then he came to our place and my wife said to me: "Hey, Dollar's sleeping here, he likes it here".

**Daniel:** I remember that well. After the concert in the Lehrerseminar he asked: "Do you know where you could play the piano here?" Sure, in the Restaurant Chutz, not far from there. Renate spoke with him and invited him back to our place: "Our house is your house, you can be our guest if you don't have anywhere else to stay".

**Six:** Later on, he rented a house here in the village, very close by, and lived there with his musicians. I had a grand piano, so he always came round and practised and made his phone calls. Wow, he'd be on the phone for ages!



*Figure 18.2. Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim) plays at the Lehrerseminar, the Teachers' Training College in Solothurn, in 1973. Photo courtesy of Six Trutt.*

**CS/SR:** *Organising tours?*

**Six:** Yeah, I'm sure of that as well. We got on very, very well, though he wasn't always easy. I experienced times when he was very impulsive. Once, someone started recording his playing without asking, and he went over and ripped out the tape. But really, it should be perfectly natural just to ask permission. I filmed him too, just for me, but of course I asked first. Back at the beginning, that would have been impossible ...

**CS/SR:** *So you made recordings of him, also at his concerts?*

**Six:** Sure, at concerts too.

*CS/SR: Did he sometimes – like other South Africans – harbour a sense of rage in him that was triggered by his exile, by apartheid and racism?*

**Six:** Yes, of course. You had to be careful about what you said.

*CS/SR: You said he was here often – was that every year for a few weeks, here in this house?*

**Six:** Yes. And he also played in Lucerne, I remember that. He wasn't one to talk a lot, but after the applause he pointed to us – Renate and me – and said: "I'm going to be staying with them for two weeks". No one knew us, so that was nice. His manager was there – he had a funny name, Norbert Eierding<sup>6</sup> – I rang him up yesterday, and he still knew us: "Yeah, Renate and Six, I know, those were good times ...". Dollar always came with him. He himself didn't drive – or did he? Sometimes he hired a car.

*CS/SR: So his manager was also the driver?*

**Six:** Yeah, but he's had a new impresario for the past three or four years. Bea always came along, his son Tsakwe and their daughter Tsidi – he always had the whole family with him.

*CS/SR: He was living in America.*

**Six:** Yes. He lived for a long time in the Chelsea Hotel in New York City. But he was always here when he came to Europe. We got on well with him, to be sure – but you had to know him properly. There were also moments when I realised that you had to take care, and he's a dyed-in-the-wool advocate of Black people. He also showed that.

*CS/SR: Did you visit him in New York?*

**Daniel:** I visited him. My father had been in the USA in 1960 for an exchange year. He travelled there on a ship, where he met Bill Evans. They chatted together and even played together!

**Six:** That was fantastic! There were three grand pianos on board, and there were other musicians there too. I can't remember their names, but we played together every night – just spontaneously, as you do. He wasn't world famous yet. That was funny. He had his own views on playing and his chords were unique!

**Daniel:** You've still got an original menu from the "Birdland" [the jazz club in New York] with the signatures of all the musicians who were playing there back then.

*CS/SR: You played with Bill Evans? Incredible! But to get back to Abdullah Ibrahim: did you ever have an argument with him?*

**Six:** Once, he said: "I'm cooking for you, my meal". And he cooked wonderfully and made desserts with all kinds of things that we didn't know. And I said something to my wife. He

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<sup>6</sup> "Eierding" literally means "Egg-thing".

understands German well – he spent a lot of time in Switzerland – and that annoyed him. But then it was over again. Otherwise, we never had an argument.

*CS/SR: Did you also play together here?*

**Six:** Yes, but not in public. Dollar gave me lots of music to copy, all kinds of things. He also played the cello and the soprano sax. I was usually on bass.

*CS/SR: Did you also hear him play the flute and the soprano sax?*

**Daniel:** Yes, a lot. We sometimes heard music when we went to bed, and heard it again when we got up ... You could hear him playing the saxophone and the flute in the forest, others of them also played there, and when he was here together with several musicians, there was music coming from every room, even from the sauna.

*CS/SR: Did you also play music by him in your trio?*

**Six:** Yes, we did play some pieces. Back then, I could play them all by heart.

*CS/SR: How long was he here each time – was this his base in Europe?*

**Six:** To some extent. He was often here – on a regular basis, and once he came with his whole band, thus with 15 musicians. They were giving a concert in southern Germany. All of them except Dollar slept on the floor, even under the grand piano. And he had them all well in hand, wow! – it was crazy, really like in the army, if something at some point didn't go the way he wanted!

He still calls when he's here. "I've got a concert. Tickets for you?" In Geneva? That's impossible, we can't take the car anymore, especially not that far. He understood that. And yet he's already so old himself. But he always called, even when he played in a church in Zurich. He liked his peace and quiet, but still used to phone a lot.



*Figure 18.3. The Trutt family home in Ichertswil. Photo courtesy of Six Trutt.*

**CS/SR:** *So he brought his family along – Bea, Tsakwe and Tsidi, who became the American rapper Jean Grae?*

**Daniel:** Really? He came with his wife and son. Tsidi was six years younger, she was born in Cape Town in 1976, and I never saw her myself. But I always played with Tsakwe when he was here. Once, I was taking photos of him and Dollar came at us like a Fury. I had to take the film out of the camera.

**Six:** He didn't like being photographed. That didn't please him at all.

**CS/SR:** *He converted to Islam in 1968 and called himself Abdullah Ibrahim from then on. Did you hear anything about that, or talk to him about it?*

**Daniel:** No, as far as I'm aware, that was never a topic of conversation. My parents got to know him as Dollar Brand, and in the family we always spoke of Dollar ...

**CS/SR:** *Did you hear anything about the Japanese martial arts that he practised – and perhaps still practises? About his interest in Zen and Budo?*

**Daniel:** He always put on a white robe and had a multi-pointed metal star to practise with, and which he used to throw into the wooden wall down there. We watched him and were allowed to fetch the throwing star – we almost couldn't get it out of the wall, it was stuck so deep. Dollar had such energy. He was a very wiry but muscular man, without an ounce of fat on him and highly fit! He practised daily and was always incredibly focused in everything that he did. He didn't smoke, he didn't drink, and when he ate, he didn't speak to anyone and almost seemed to meditate. He was strict – with himself and with his musicians.

**CS/SR:** *Six, did meeting Brand and spending time with him change the way you played yourself?*

**Six:** I took on a lot of his stylistic elements. I was really taken by his music, that's true. My sons thought so too, they'd say: "Always Dollar – you should play how you want!" I also liked Monty Alexander. He gave three wonderful concerts here: solo, and in a duo and a trio.

**CS/SR:** *So you discovered a different way of playing jazz and improvising?*

**Six:** Yes, that's right, I was always playing with my trio. Jazz – jeez, that's a vast field, just think of everything you could play! Right from the beginning, when he gave concerts with his band, Dollar always used to start on his own, sometimes with a soprano sax. He recorded two albums here, but he played solo, for almost two hours. The first concert here in the "Felli" farmhouse was in 1974 ...

**CS/SR:** *... Was it a public concert?*

**Six:** Sure, it was public. I've kept all the flyers that show who played when. He was always down there in his rented farmhouse, then he'd come up here to practise. And he said: "Why don't you make a concert? It's such a beautiful place!" I asked who should play, and he pointed to himself. So that's what we did. Of course, a lot of people came – just sitting on the floor.

Dollar was the first person to reawaken music in me. And he enabled me to take this big step into his music, his jazz – something that’s lasted until today.

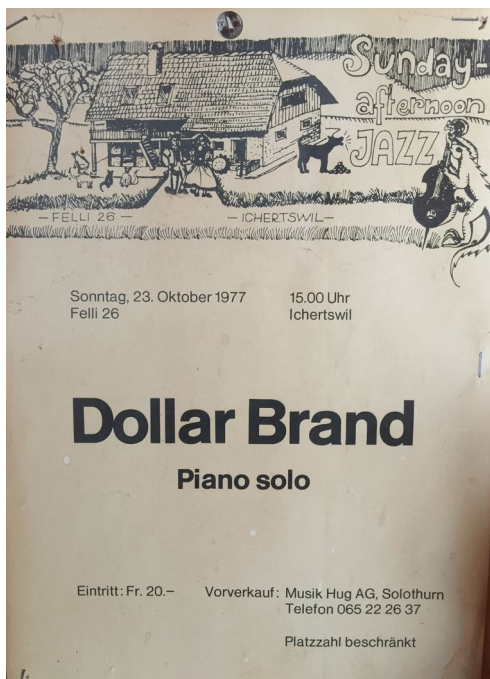


Figure 18.4. The homemade flyer for the concert of Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim) in Ichertswil in 1977. Courtesy of Six Trutt.

CS/SR: Was it a different kind of music-making that took place here?

Six: He always came up to practise here, for hours on end! Over time, he got to know the neighbours, and he said: “When you come, I’ll always play music for you!”

CS/SR: His music has a strong spiritual component. Did people feel that too?

Six: Yes, his music really gets a hold on you, lots of people said that. Now let’s go upstairs to the music room!

[They move upstairs]

Daniel: Here, on the upper floor, is where the grand piano stands. Everything is practically the same as it was back then. The concerts took place here from around 1973 until the ’90s. When we recorded, we strung the cables over hooks. I was still too young back then, it was before I became a sound engineer myself. The tapes they recorded here were made into the LPs *Matsi-diso* and *South African Sunshine* and released in 1981 and 1982.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The reverse of both LP covers states: “Recorded Live at Felli Farm, Ichertswil, (Solothurn Schweiz) ... 12.10.80”.

Dollar played many a concert here – and even gave one for my mother’s car. Someone had driven into her red Citroën 2CV in a car park. It broke the drive shaft on the right, they had the damage repaired, and Dollar gave a concert to cover the costs. Our mother always cooked for everyone and was assiduous in keeping a diary, collecting lots of things and filing them away, also with lots of newspaper clippings. We’ll have to sort through it all one day and order it.

The simple, homemade flyers from our concerts are almost all still hanging here: Horace Parlan (also with Andy Scherrer, Peter Frei and Peter Schmidlin), Jasper van’t Hof, Nana Vasconcelos, Papa McKenzie, Egberto Gismonti, Monty Alexander in a duo with Emily Remler, Six with Jürgen Wuchner and Aschi Frei, Fritz Pauer with Isla Eckinger and Billy Brooks, the Chet Baker Quartet, Zbigniew Seifert, Herbert Joos, David Friesen, Alberto Canonica, the Joe Henderson/Tete Montoliu Quartet, Doug Hammond in a trio with Steve Coleman and Muneer Abdul Fataah, Tommy Coe, Stu Goldberg, Art Lande, Aki Takase, Attila Zoller, Kirk Lightsey, Don Friedman, Paul McCandless, Randy Weston, Passport, Eberhard Weber, Billy Brooks, Jack DeJohnette, Ted Curson, Richie Beirach, and many others. The Dave Holland Quintet played here with Steve Coleman, Kenny Wheeler, Julian Priestler and Marvin “Smitty” Smith, after the “Felli” had already become Holland’s preferred “motel, refuge, rehearsal venue, base camp” for his European tours, as it says on one of the flyers.

*CS/SR: They all played here? That’s incredible! How did that come about?*

**Daniel:** That all happened through Abdullah. Sometimes the musicians just arrived at our door, and at other times they’d ring beforehand and say: “Dollar sends best wishes”. It also sometimes happened that Gaby Kleinschmidt, the German agent, would call if a band had a day off, for example. Then they’d play here in front of 70 people who just sat on the floor. They played for their board and lodging and for whatever people paid to get in.

**Six:** Gaby Kleinschmidt knew what I liked.

**Daniel:** All the costs were covered – it wasn’t like it was a business. We all helped out: Renate and we three sons. We cleaned, one of us supervised the car park, another did the till.

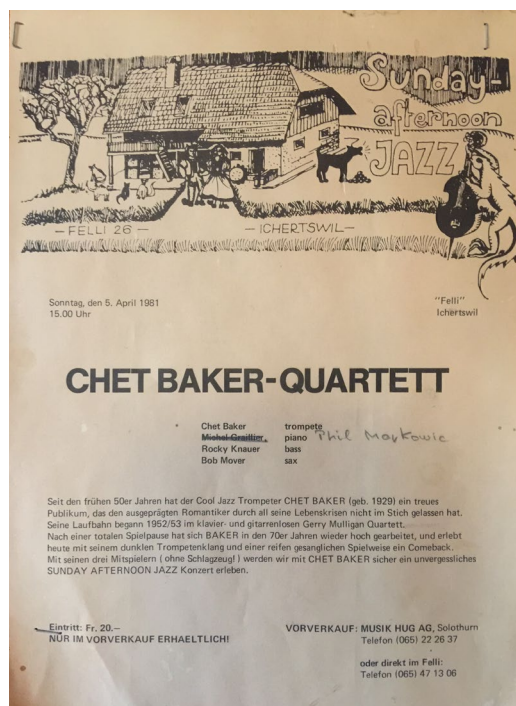
*CS/SR: Didn’t you ever want to become a musician, Daniel?*

**Daniel:** I took piano lessons from my strict aunt, then I switched to the guitar and finally to the bass. I attended the Jazz School in Lucerne briefly, and took lessons in Basel. I like playing and I’ve been in a band for 25 years. But I dislike the theory. And because Six early on was dealing with tape machines and microphones, with Bauer Studio, EMI Records, the sound engineer Peter Pfister and ECM here in our house, I found that technology and electronics fascinated me more. So I became a sound engineer.

**SR:** *Last April, we were all together at Abdullah Ibrahim’s concert with his band Ekaya at the KKL in Lucerne. Afterwards, you had a warm reunion with him backstage. At the beginning of the concert, he played solo for about 25 minutes, only hinting at his themes, not exploring them, and then afterwards the band played, with him keeping them on a tight rein. How did you find the concert, given that Ibrahim is now 89 years old?*



Figure 18.5. The homemade flyer for the concert of the Chet Baker Quartet in Ichertswil in 1981. Courtesy of Six Trutt.



**Daniel:** It's true that the musicians in the band came across a little like soldiers. But there were a lot of musical memories of our time – and we're not completely objective. We experienced so much with him, we heard everything a hundred times and for hours on end until he got things just the way he wanted. For us in Lucerne, it was very moving, and that will remain the case for us – like with all his music.

## 19 Interview with Rose Ntshoko

*Steff Rohrbach*

Rose Ntshoko is the daughter of the South-African/Swiss jazz drummer Makaya Ntshoko. This interview was conducted on 2 May 2024 at her home in Riehen on the outskirts of Basel. Her father died in Basel just under four months later, on 27 August 2024.

**Steff Rohrbach:** *Rose, when and where were you born?*

**Rose Ntshoko:** In 1965, but the fact that I was born in Charlottenburg in Berlin is more or less a coincidence, because my father was on tour there, and my mother had gone with him.

**SR:** *On tour with Dollar Brand?*

**RN:** I don't know, but it could have been, because we then went to Copenhagen and Sweden – and that had to do with Dollar. It was also a time when my mother was often annoyed because we hardly ever made any money. Sometimes she even had to look for potatoes out in the countryside to try and help us get by. Of course, that was the worst time. Our salvation came when a family in Berlin took us in.<sup>1</sup> My mother helped them with the housework and we were given board and lodging in return. My parents didn't get married until after I was born, so my surname was officially Gyger. And because my mother was single, I had to be given a legal guardian – that was the case in Berlin at that time. My parents had to get married so that they could leave Germany with me, though there were additional difficulties because my father didn't have any proper papers back then ...

**SR:** *He was probably stateless, like other South Africans who were abroad at the time.*

**RN:** I recently found a certified copy, dated 9 August 1965, of an old passport that had been issued by the Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria, presumably for the tour of England with Dollar Brand.

**SR:** *... that doesn't seem likely, since Dollar seems to have come to Switzerland directly from South Africa. But the musical King Kong was exported to London in 1961. It was apparently on tour in South Africa for around two years before that, sweeping through the country like a storm.*

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<sup>1</sup> According to Ursula Ntshoko-Gyger's biography, the family of three lived in Berlin/Charlottenburg in 1965 c/o Giese on Westfälische Strasse 41, then in 1965/66 in Copenhagen, Sweden and Zurich, from 1966 to 1970 on the Gartenstrasse in Binningen c/o the Dörrig family, then from 1971 to 1978 at Holeerain 24 in Binningen, from 1979 to 1981 in Basel at Burgfelderstrasse 30, and from 1981 to 1988 at Thiersteinallee 73, also in Basel. Binningen is de facto a suburb of the city of Basel.

*Makaya told me that King Kong, which had an almost entirely Black cast, had been invited to London thanks to its great success in South Africa, and that this was the only reason why they had been given passports in the first place.*

**RN:** I think a lawyer in Berlin then wangled things a bit with my parents' papers so that they could get married. When they later divorced, my mother asked me what I'd prefer: whether she should keep the name Ntshoko, or go back to being called Gyger, as she was before the marriage. Since I was already called "Ntshoko", it would have seemed strange to be called Rose Gyger suddenly. Later, I wouldn't have cared about it. But today, as the last Ntshoko in Switzerland, I'm actually proud of my surname.



*Figure 19.1. Makaya Ntshoko and Rose in Charlottenburg, Berlin, 1965. Courtesy of Rose Ntshoko.*

**SR:** *You came to Switzerland after Copenhagen and Sweden – but when was that?*

**RN:** It wasn't long after, maybe a year, maybe two, I don't know exactly. I can check it up using photos: We were still in Sweden in 1966, but then there's a picture that was taken in Binningen near Basel. So we were back in Switzerland after about a year. We lived on the Gartenstrasse in Binningen, in a very cosy little two-room house ...

**SR:** ... *you remember that?*

**RN:** Yes, because we stayed there for a few years, roughly until I started primary school. I remember the owners of the house, and the pretty little garden where my mother said to the local priest: "Look, if I want to talk to God, I can sit here in the garden and don't have to come

to church". These are memories that have stayed with me – including trips to Mariastein.<sup>2</sup> My father was around for quite a while back then. But it wasn't a good time for my parents. Fortunately, we had nice neighbours, and Binningen became my real home. I enjoyed a good upbringing in an idyllic place with a village atmosphere, where people looked out for each other.

**SR:** *When did your parents get divorced?*

**SN:** That was in 1977.

**SR:** *So your mother stayed with Makaya for quite a long time, which suggests that they had good times too.*

**RN:** I'm sure there were, but she had a really tough time.

**SR:** *Did you do an apprenticeship?*

**RN:** No – my last year at school was bad. I was tired of it and got a teacher I didn't like at all. She acted like an army officer's wife and tormented me. I turned off and "went bad". When her mother died, I listed extra professions in my career studies class like "undertaker" and "corpse washer". She threw me out. But because she didn't want to give me any marks or issue me with a leaving certificate, the school authorities got involved. They included the sister of the researcher Elisabeth Kübler-Ross,<sup>3</sup> with whom I'm sure you're familiar. She intervened and wanted to get to know me, despite my teacher cursing me, and invited me to her home for coffee and cake. She was very sweet and wanted to know what had happened. I told her my version.



*Figure 19.2. Makaya Ntshoko and Rose in Binningen, 1969. Courtesy of Rose Ntshoko.*

<sup>2</sup> A Catholic monastery some eight miles from Binningen.

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004), a Swiss-born American psychiatrist famous for her model of the "five stages of grief".

SR: *That must have been in around 1981/82?*

RN: I was 16 or 17. I had a nice afternoon, and I was given a report card based on my most recent grades, which weren't too bad. But I didn't know what I wanted to do after school. Earning some money was the obvious choice, so I worked in a jeans shop in Steinenvorstadt.<sup>4</sup> One day, someone came in, saw me and asked: "Hi Pumpi, where are you?"

SR: *Pumpi?*<sup>5</sup>

RN: My boss said that just wasn't on – though up until then, everyone had called me that. My mother called me "Pumpeli". My name, given to me by my father, is actually "Mbumbulwana", which was my grandmother's first name. But of course nobody could pronounce it, so it became "Mbumbi". But on my ID card my name is "Rose", which is the name my mother had wanted for me. My boss called me Rosie, and I later finally decided on Rose ... Anyway, after my time as a shop assistant, I spent four years in administration in the graphics department of the Coop newspaper. Then I went to commercial college in the evenings, but gave up after about six months and afterwards worked for four years in personnel administration at the department store chain ABM – doing bookkeeping, cashing up and everything. I really enjoyed it, except for having to work on Saturdays after going out on a Friday evening. I later completed commercial college after all, doing an intensive course for a year, full-time. My mother advised me to go to a job placement office and I took her advice. "What would you like to do?" a lady asked me. "Something like you!", I replied – and that's how it turned out for a few years. First I was busy placing jobseekers in manual and technical professions, then afterwards in commercial jobs. Eventually, I set up my own business, finding permanent jobs for commercial and technical staff and managers.

Slowly, however, my health got in the way. I was also dating someone for a long time, a long-distance lorry driver, and he wanted to emigrate to Canada. I would have been up for it, but I suggested that we should first go there on holiday and have a look around. One day, however, he disappeared off to Calgary to work illegally, which I only found out about through his employer. But just like in Switzerland, after three months they checked on him and he had to come back. I had heard about that and knew that he was working as a long-distance lorry driver again, so I waited at the customs post for him for days, even through the night, it was quite crazy. I eventually found him there. We got together again, but something was broken for good.

My flat was too big and too expensive, and my health wasn't good. I had severe back pain, and besides being self-employed, I was also working as a caretaker and part-time in a cannabis shop. In short, it was all getting too much. During a holiday in Greece I developed an eye infection, but I didn't want to go to the doctor there. Back in Switzerland, an antibiotic had to be injected directly into my eye and it became clear that something was wrong with my body. After a long time, they finally found out that I had Crohn's disease – all of this came on at almost the same time. I had to stop working. My doctor then wanted to certify me as 50-percent fit for work again and I had to go to the job placement office because I wanted to

<sup>4</sup> A shopping and entertainment street in Basel where several cinemas used to be located.

<sup>5</sup> In Swiss-German, "Pumpi" is a generic schoolyard insult.

sign in for the other 50 percent. I was referred to the disability forum, where I was sent to a rheumatologist, and I also had a paralysed shoulder. All of this went on for seven years, and social services also got involved.

I was lucky that there was a bakery opposite my flat that was run by a Tamil couple who always asked me for advice in administrative matters. I used to draw up order and delivery notes for them and helped them more and more, working too much again and showing everything to their daughter, who was supposed to take over these tasks. Then came my back operation, I had problems walking, and then I had to get a new flat because living on the fourth floor without a lift was no longer an option. I found a very basic, affordable, ground-floor flat with a backyard on the Inselstrasse that was fit to be redecorated. We stayed there for seven years, then our tenancy contract was cancelled and the house was sold off to speculators. It was really difficult to find a new flat, but I was lucky and had really good help from a property manager. I've been here in Riehen for ten years now, and have been able to reorganise things and catch up on what I'd previously rather neglected.

SR: *Have you been musically active?*

RN: Well, I used to be in various youth bands and choirs. Later, I responded to an advert from Chester Gill when he was looking for people for the musical *Godspell* in Basel. After that, I also took part in his musical *The Picture*, which went on stage in 2000. We actually hoped to continue on a professional basis, but that fell through because of the money. I wanted to organise my professional life in such a way that I'd have been able to take part. Instead, I joined a blues rock group and also sang in the Chester Gill Memorial Choir – which I've joined again. In 2007 I founded the "Voicetale mixed choir Basel", of which I became the chairperson. Music is actually my world, and it's helped me through the biggest crises.

SR: *Did Makaya tell you anything about South Africa, perhaps about how he grew up?*

RN: He always kept it secret and didn't tell me much about it ... I don't think he was able to talk about it.

SR: *... not even how he came to the drums?*

RN: Not even about that – and he didn't want me to go to South Africa either. He was very much against it, and didn't like it at all when he heard that I was going to go anyway. It's only now that he's beginning to realise that it was actually a good thing that I went.

SR: *Do you know anything about his parents and grandparents?*

RN: His father, my grandfather, mended bicycles and played the church organ. My grandmother was just "Mama". An aunt showed me the township where the family used to live, also the site of their house, though it's no longer there.

SR: *When were you in Cape Town?*

RN: I was there in 2012 with my partner, plus a girlfriend of mine and her husband. I kept

hearing from my father that you weren't allowed to sit on a bench as a Black person under apartheid. So it was negative stuff, which is why for a long time I wasn't particularly interested in the country. That trip came about as follows. I was looking for a subject for a tattoo, something that would be appropriate to me and my roots. I went on holiday to Crete, as I had done many times before. There I met a stewardess who raved about South Africa, just like a colleague of mine. She said she went to South Africa every year, on her own, and even as a single woman she never had any problems. And she told me how beautiful it was in Cape Town. That convinced me. My doctor also recommended the trip, and I had a good friend who ran a hotel in Cape Town. We rented a campervan for three weeks and also stayed in bed and breakfast places on the way so we could also have a shower. I'd organised everything from here. We planned the route all the way down the country, but couldn't do everything because of the weather. But Hermanus is so beautiful – and that was where I heard whales singing for the first time in my life. Hermanus is very clean – but that also means that a lot of white people live there, which also has its disadvantages. I didn't find Stellenbosch pleasant at all – the beautiful white church, everything well maintained, and our landlady at the bed-and-breakfast place wanted us out of our room at ten o'clock sharp. She only had religious (almost sect-like) programmes running on her TV, and she couldn't believe that I, a Black woman, had organised our whole trip. On our first weekend, we went to a gospel service in Cape Town, but to my utter astonishment everyone there was white.



*Figure 19.3. Rose and Makaya Ntshoko at the latter's 75th birthday event at the Bird's Eye jazz club in Basel, 2014. Courtesy of Rose Ntshoko.*



SR: *Then you met one of Makaya's sisters?*

RN: One of them, yes. Both aunts live in the township, and a female cousin of mine accompanied us there. I had made contact via Facebook. My aunts had once sent me a postcard when I was a small child, and I'd always kept it. At first we didn't want to go "people watching" in the township, but my cousin, who knew her way around, said we absolutely had to go there.

SR: *How many siblings does Makaya have?*

RN: Nine. My father grew up in the township of Langa, a neighbourhood of Cape Town, and one of my cousins took us to the Langa Methodist Church. That's where things got really exciting. The "sisters" there were dressed in red and played music with a kind of "slapping cushion".<sup>6</sup> They were so impressed to meet Makaya Ntshoko's daughter, who was also the grandchild of their former organist. And the organ is actually still there in that Methodist church. You can't quite get to it, because it's kind of packed away on account of being broken, and there's probably not enough money to renovate it. It made me very emotional, and even the music on the street immediately brought tears to my eyes, it touched something deep inside me. The people there still believe in the ancestors. My father once advised me that if I had problems, I just had to talk to my grandmother and she'd help me. That seemed a bit difficult to me, as I'd never met her. But then my aunt took me by the hand and walked with me through the township, showing me everything including the cemetery and my grandparents' grave. There I experienced the ritual of calling the ancestors. I had come this far, they said, and that it was important that I should be protected. My aunt gave me a herb in a jar, which turned out to be sage when I got back home to Switzerland and opened it. It was a very impressive, beautiful experience.

SR: *Have you been in contact with your relatives since then?*

RN: Yes, with the one cousin or another. We write to each other sometimes. A male cousin of mine has also got in touch; he too is a drummer.

Apollo (Anthoney) Fikile is another cousin. He visited here once. He's a really dedicated musician and an actor and stayed with my father for a while. There's another cousin I like, Thuso Sebape. I have a wonderful video with him and my aunt who used to be a singing teacher. Neither of us knew that we would meet up that day. I was already crying, and when she heard I was outside the door, she came out crying too – and we fell into each other's arms. It wasn't until we were back home in Basel that I received this wonderful video "Saphela ..." from Thuso – you can also see it on YouTube.<sup>7</sup>

SR: *So you don't know how Makaya got into the drums? He was already close to music through his father, who played the church organ.*

<sup>6</sup> This is a custom found especially in the coloured churches of the Western Cape, where members of the congregation clap on leather cushions to create a percussive accompaniment to their singing. See Marie Jorritsma: *Sonic Spaces of the Karoo*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011, 48–49.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAqIHyy1dOU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAqIHyy1dOU) (accessed November 2024).



*Figure 19.4. Rose and Makaya Ntshoko at the Senevita retirement home in Basel in 2015. Courtesy of Rose Ntshoko.*

RN: That's an interesting question – I'll have to ask him ...

SR: *Maybe in his old age he might be a little more receptive and would open up to you. You might still learn a few things from him ...*

RN: ... that's true, but unfortunately we rarely had the kind of close father-daughter relationship that we should have had. I would have loved to learn the drums from him. I had a few lessons with him, and he even gave me a Mapex drum set once. But I had to sell it due to lack of space and money. I regret that very much today. I'll also never forget how he once helped me to understand the Etta James song "Damn Your Eyes" better and to sing it more truthfully.

SR: *But you did have contact with him, didn't you?*

RN: Once or twice a year, on my birthday and at Christmas or thereabouts. But otherwise hardly ever. I also had half-siblings, and I'd have liked to get to know them too.

SR: *Makaya had other children?*

RN: Yes, two. After the divorce from my mother, he soon had a new relationship that resulted in a boy and a girl, Saba and Makaya. But, not surprisingly, they had the same conflicts as we did with my father. I would have loved to have been the big sister of my two half-siblings – but we didn't get the chance.

SR: *Makaya also boxed. Did he tell you about it?*

RN: An acquaintance once told me that my father was also known in boxing. I did some research on the Internet and found a report on him from the boxing club in Basel ...

SR: ... *so he also boxed in Switzerland?*

RN: Yes, I think he was a flyweight champion once, though I don't know whether that was in

South Africa or Switzerland. In any case, he was visiting somewhere in connection with boxing and they recognised him.<sup>8</sup> He also did aikido – yes, he was tough! It's also evident now. He's not doing "physio", he's in training! [After his recent hospital stay] he was able to recover within a short time, also thanks to his ambition. He wants to cycle again, that's his big goal. A nurse jokingly said: "probably with training wheels" – but no, no, not at all!

SR: *Makaya once belonged to the house rhythm section in Copenhagen, in Berlin and in Munich's "Domicile"<sup>9</sup> together with the Swiss bassist Isla Eckinger...*

RN: ... the name rings a bell. But like many of the things he experienced, I have no idea about that. It must have been after the divorce. By the way: I still have to sift through and organise all my father's documents. He collected everything, and there's still a lot of his e-mail correspondence. It's a shame that I don't have access to his laptop. Maybe I'll find the right one among my father's many passwords – or get help from a specialist.

SR: ... *did Makaya really learn to work with electronic messages?*

RN: Yes, for a while he had an expensive device, but had to have it repaired many times and it was always the device's fault ... It was nice, though he was in an old people's home in between and that didn't suit him at all. He took his notebook along with him, but it wasn't working any more. That was one reason for him to get out of the home several times. Another time it was because he had to have his mobile phone repaired. Whenever a nurse came into the room, he seemed very busy on his laptop, saying he had to write back to his manager and that everyone was always contacting him and looking for him – though he didn't even have his password any more...

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.swissboxing.ch/de/news/15](http://www.swissboxing.ch/de/news/15) about an exhibition of boxing photographs at a private boxing museum in Basel: "Numerous guests from all over Switzerland came to honour the museum ... Among them were the Bernese legends Hans-Rudolf Bauder, Fritz König, Peter Häfeli and his wife, the former South African lightweight champion and professional drummer Makaya Ntshoko and many others ..." (accessed November 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Makaya was the house drummer at the "Montmartre" club in Copenhagen in the 1960s, at the "Domicile" in Munich and at the "Jazz Jamboree" in Berlin in the 1970s.

## 20 Interview with Bob Degen

*Steff Rohrbach*

The son of a guitarist and a dancer, Bob Degen<sup>1</sup> was born in Scranton (Pennsylvania) in 1944. He began piano lessons at the age of four and started performing with his father when he was ten. In 1961, Degen went to Boston to study at Berklee College of Music, where he was taught by the legendary pianist Margarete Chaloff,<sup>2</sup> the same who – for varying lengths of time – taught greats such as Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea and Steve Kuhn.

After completing his studies, Bob Degen went to Germany in 1965, where the musicians with whom he played included Dexter Gordon, Art Farmer and Attila Zoller. The following year, he attracted attention when he played in the Gulda Competition that had been set up in 1962 and whose jury in 1966 included Jay Jay Johnson, Julian “Cannonball” Adderley, Art Farmer, Ron Carter, Mel Lewis and Joe Zawinul – all famous names in the history of jazz. In 1967, now a versatile and sought-after pianist, Degen returned to Boston to form a trio with Paul Motian<sup>3</sup> and Mark Levinson,<sup>4</sup> with whom he then went on tour.

From 1969 to the end of 1971, Bob Degen travelled the world with the authorised “Original Glenn Miller Orchestra” directed by Buddy DeFranco.<sup>5</sup> He then settled in Frankfurt am Main in Germany, where he often played with the trombonist Albert Mangelsdorff<sup>6</sup> and the saxophonist Heinz Sauer.<sup>7</sup> From 1973 to 1999 he was a member of the in-house jazz ensemble of the regional radio station, Hessischer Rundfunk. It was led by Albert Mangelsdorff

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.bobdegen.de](http://www.bobdegen.de) (accessed June 2024)

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Chaloff (1896–1977), a well-known US piano teacher; see <https://forum.pianoworld.com/ubbthreads.php/topics/1773834.html> and [www.classical-scene.com/2020/04/03/comm-ave-music/](http://www.classical-scene.com/2020/04/03/comm-ave-music/), both accessed June 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Motian (1931–2011), an influential American drummer who played in the 1960s with Coleman Hawkins, Mose Allison, Pharoah Sanders and Charles Lloyd, then ventured into free jazz in a trio with Paul Bley and Gary Peacock.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Levinson (born 1946), American bassist who also played in a trio with Paul Bley and Barry Altschul, then later founded several companies to manufacture audio equipment including Daniel Hertz SA in Switzerland.

<sup>5</sup> Buddy DeFranco (1923–2014), Italian-American clarinetist and composer.

<sup>6</sup> The German trombonist Albert Mangelsdorff (1928–2005) was one of Europe’s leading jazz musicians.

<sup>7</sup> Heinz Sauer (born 1932), German saxophonist, released the duo album *Ellingtonia Revisited* with Bob Degen in 1980. He also worked with Christopher Dell and Michael Wollny.

and also featured Heinz Sauer. Over the course of his career, Degen has played with many international musicians.

“Makaya & The Tsotsis” was the name of Makaya Ntshoko’s quartet in the mid-seventies, which included Bob Degen on piano, Heinz Sauer on alto and tenor saxophone and Isla Eckinger<sup>8</sup> on bass. Degen also recorded the trio album *Sequoia Song* with Makaya Ntshoko and Isla Eckinger in 1976, and he can be heard on many other recordings in a wide variety of constellations, mostly with small-scale bands.

This interview was conducted in Frankfurt am Main on 14 May 2024.

**Steff Rohrbach:** *Bob, you came to Europe in 1965. According to your entry in the Rowohlt Jazzlexikon, you had already played with Sam Rivers,<sup>9</sup> Pete LaRoca<sup>10</sup> and Gary Peacock<sup>11</sup> back in Boston, where you studied music.*

**Bob Degen:** With Sam Rivers in around 1961/62, but not with Pete LaRoca or Gary Peacock, both of whom I appreciate and also knew. That’s reported everywhere, though it’s incorrect. But I did play with Tony Williams for a short time back then<sup>12</sup> ...

**SR:** *... and you were in a trio with Paul Motian and Mark Levinson, with whom you went on tour. And you played in Germany with the bassist Manfred Eicher,<sup>13</sup> who soon afterwards founded the famous Munich label ECM. Is that right?*

**BD:** We recorded my first LP under my own name on 25 May 1968 in Villingen: *Celebrations*, with Manfred Eicher plus Fred Braceful<sup>14</sup> on drums – he was living in Stuttgart at the time.

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<sup>8</sup> Isla Eckinger (1939–2021), Swiss bass player and vibraphonist who lived variously in Hollywood and in his native Switzerland from the 1980s onwards. He worked with the likes of Philly Joe Jones, Ben Webster, Warne Marsh, Mal Waldron, Jimmy Cobb, Andy Scherrer, Roman Schwaller and Dexter Gordon.

<sup>9</sup> Sam Rivers (1923–2011), one of the most important musicians of the jazz avant-garde. Composer, bandleader and multi-instrumentalist.

<sup>10</sup> The New York drummer Pete LaRoca (1938–2012) earned his living mainly as a lawyer. The drummer Max Roach heard him in the New York club Birdland and recommended him to the saxophonist Sonny Rollins.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Peacock (1935–2020), American bassist who was stationed in Germany with the US Army and played with Europeans such as Hans Koller, Albert Mangelsdorff and Attila Zoller as well as with the Canadian Paul Bley and Americans including Roland Kirk, Bill Evans and Jimmy Giuffrè. From 1983–2014 he was part of the legendary Standards Trio with the pianist Keith Jarrett and the drummer Jack DeJohnette.

<sup>12</sup> At 17, Tony Williams (1945–1997) was recruited by Miles Davis as a drummer in his second quintet with Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock and Ron Carter.

<sup>13</sup> Manfred Eicher (born 1943), German double bassist, played with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, then in Joe Viera’s free jazz trio and also with Bob Degen, Marion Brown and Leo Smith. In 1969, he founded the label ECM Records (Edition of Contemporary Music) in Munich together with Manfred Scheffner and Karl Egger.

<sup>14</sup> Fred Braceful (1938–1995), a Detroit-born drummer who came to Germany with the US Army and stayed there. He worked with Wolfgang Dauner, Abdullah Ibrahim/Dollar Brand, Marion Brown, Robin Kenyatta, Mal Waldron, Bob Degen, Albert Mangelsdorff and Manfred Schoof.

**SR:** *And almost 30 years later, on 29/30 April 1997, you recorded Catability in New York with two musicians who are still very active on the scene today. Michael Formanek<sup>15</sup> was on bass, Bill Stewart<sup>16</sup> on drums. Most of the tracks on it are by you.*

**BD:** Yes – we were recording for the Enja label, which was great. I took the pieces along with me, then we rehearsed very briefly and recorded everything in three or four hours. The record was released the following year, produced by Matthias Winckelmann (1941–2022), who had founded the label together with Horst Weber in 1971.

**SR:** *When did you get to know Makaya Ntshoko?*

**BD:** That was in 1965. I had just come to Germany and Makaya was playing at the Jazzgalerie. He made up the house rhythm section together with two Austrians: Hans Rettenbacher<sup>17</sup> – a



*Figure 20.1. Bob Degen.*

<sup>15</sup> Michael Formanek (born 1958), American bassist who has worked with Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson, Fred Hersch, Lee Konitz, Tim Berne, Mary Halvorson, Kris Davis and others.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Stewart (born 1966), American drummer who worked with two of the great jazz guitarists: John Scofield in the 1990s and Pat Metheny at the turn of the millennium.

<sup>17</sup> Anton (Hans) Rettenbacher (1939–1989), an Austrian bassist who also played with Friedrich Gulda, Manfred Schoof, Stan Getz, Eric Dolphy, Rolf Kühn, Don Ellis, Thelonious Monk and the Hans Koller Quartet.

very good bass player who later also played with Volker Kriegel<sup>18</sup> in the band of Dave Pike<sup>19</sup> – and the pianist Fritz Pauer.<sup>20</sup>

**SR:** *How did the album “Makaya and the Tsotsis” come about in 1974, with you, Heinz Sauer,<sup>21</sup> Isla Eckinger and Makaya?*

**BD:** Matthias Winckelmann wanted to make a recording. So we went to the Sinus Studio in Bern on 6 August 1974 – without any pieces! Everything you hear is played completely freely – i.e. not from the music.

**SR:** *It’s a dense, convincing music that still sounds modern today.*

**BD:** It was all improvised. After that, we played all over Switzerland, also chez Niklaus Troxler at the Willisau Jazz Festival in late August 1976. We were on the bill after Paul Bley’s Trio and – thankfully – before the Charles Mingus Quintet, not after them!

**SR:** *It seems you’ve got a good memory! According to the Festival archive, you played on 28 August 1976, before the trio of Paul Bley, Gary Peacock and Stu Martin. Martin also played the next day in a percussion quartet with Pierre Favre and the two South Africans Louis Moholo and Makaya Ntshoko, and it was then that the Mingus Quintet came on to close things up.*

*You were influenced somewhat by the Canadian Paul Bley, but also by Bill Evans – would you agree?*

**BD:** Yes, I’ve always loved Paul Bley, he’s a very creative person, he’s wonderful! I heard him with Henry Grimes and Roy McCurdy, and they made a record with Sonny Rollins entitled *Sonny meets Hawk!*, “Hawk” being Coleman Hawkins. Paul plays a fantastic solo in “All the Things You Are”, do you know it?

**SR:** *I know the piece, but not the record with Bley’s solo.*

**BD:** You absolutely have to listen to it, it’s a classic!

**SR:** *Did you go on tour with Makaya?*

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<sup>18</sup> Volker Kriegel (1943–2003) was a German guitarist, illustrator and writer who influenced jazz-rock and became famous with Klaus Doldinger (Passport) and the United Jazz and Rock Ensemble.

<sup>19</sup> David Samuel “Dave” Pike (1938–2015), American vibraphonist who played with Harold Land, Dexter Gordon, Paul Bley, Volker Kriegel, Eberhard Weber and the Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland Big Band.

<sup>20</sup> The Austrian pianist Fritz Pauer (1943–2012) worked with Hans Koller, Don Byas, Dexter Gordon, Jimmy Woode, George Gruntz, Ray Brown, Johnny Griffin, Sheila Jordan and Albert Mangelsdorff. In 1980 he released the LP *Live At The Berlin “Jazz Galerie”* with Jimmy Woode and Billy Brooks. He ran the Swiss Jazz School in Bern from 1982 to 1984. Friedrich Gulda recorded the LP *Fata Morgana* with compositions by Pauer in 1971.

<sup>21</sup> Heinz Sauer (born 1932), German saxophonist who worked with Albert Mangelsdorff and many others, and whose recordings have garnered numerous awards..



**BD:** I don't know how often we played, because we didn't do long tours back then. But we also played quite a lot in Germany, for example at the Domicile jazz club in Munich – both in the old venue and the new.<sup>22</sup> And we also played at the East-West Festival in Nuremberg.

**SR:** *Makaya was an insane drummer.*

**BD:** Oh – and how! He was incredible! He had amazing timing, everything was just right, and he was – he is – a wonderful human being! We never had any problems, and had a lot of fun together – although “Tsotsis” means gangsters, as Dollar Brand explained to Matthias Winckelmann when he told him about Makaya's new group (Makaya had always told us that the word meant “friendship” ...).<sup>23</sup>

**SR:** *Makaya's daughter, Rose, says the word also means “gypsy” – perhaps the meaning depends on the context. The Tsotsis existed before Makaya left the scene for a few years. Did he also write music as the leader of the Tsotsis?*

**BD:** No, we always played freely, without any music, nor did we ever rehearse anything. We just went on stage and improvised. That was often how it was back then. I spent 26 years playing under Albert Mangelsdorff in the “hr-Jazzensemble” (the jazz ensemble of the Hessischer Rundfunk), from 1973 to 1999. And, of course, we played specific pieces in the ensemble, just not with Makaya.

**SR:** *What was the reason for your staying in Europe?*

**BD:** I had a lot to do. Besides working with the radio's jazz ensemble and with Makaya, I was also busy with two or three other groups and had plenty of work. In 1974 we founded the group Voices with Heinz Sauer, Günter Kronberg, Günter Lenz and Ralf Hübner.

**SR:** *Did Makaya say anything about himself and South Africa?*

**BD:** Not really, nothing special, no. There was just once that he told a story about how they were sitting somewhere in public and when they looked around there were eyes everywhere, the eyes of lions, hungry lions ... [laughs]. I don't know much, except that he grew up in Cape Town. Makaya didn't talk about it.

**SR:** *Did you have any contact with Makaya later?*

**BD:** He came to the jazz club Bird's Eye in Basel a few times when we played there. But otherwise, it was impossible to stay in contact with him. I never saw him and tried calling him in

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<sup>22</sup> The Domicile was a famous jazz club in Munich, founded in 1965 on the Siegesstrasse in Schwabing; it moved to the Leopoldstrasse, some 300 metres away, in 1976, and closed for good in 1981.

<sup>23</sup> “Tsotsi” is a word of indeterminate, probably Sotho origin, generally accepted to mean a (Black) “gangster” (the most famous example today being the antihero of the 2005 Oscar-winning film *Tsotsi* by Gavin Hood, based on Athol Fugard's eponymous novel).

vain. Makaya didn't answer the phone. I sent him postcards, but he didn't respond. That's why I don't have much to tell you.

**SR:** *Are you still playing?*

**BD:** Sure, yes. In Frankfurt and everywhere, but everything has changed since Covid. In October I'm playing at the Frankfurt Jazz Festival with the big band of the Hessischer Rundfunk (with Shannon Barnett on trombone as a special guest). They want to do something with two pianos, with Sebastian Sternal<sup>24</sup> on the second piano. He's a very good pianist.

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<sup>24</sup> After enjoying success with his "Sternal Symphonic Society", the German jazz pianist and composer Sebastian Sternal (born 1983) today concentrates on his trio with Brad Mehldau's bassist Larry Grenadier and Pablo Held's drummer Jonas Burgwinkel.

## 21 Interview with Stephan Kurmann

*Steff Rohrbach*

The jazz bassist Stephan Kurmann<sup>1</sup> was born in Basel in 1958 and has been a professional musician since 1978. He has accompanied greats such as Chet Baker, Wild Bill Davison, Mal Waldron, Harold Mabern, Sal Nistico, Philip Catherine, Hans Kennel, Adrian Mears, Alvin Queen, Sandy Patton, Lee Konitz, Kirk Lightsey and Steve Grossman. Kurmann has toured Europe, Asia, the Americas, Australasia and Africa and recorded numerous albums. He began playing the electric bass in 1971 (teaching himself) and graduated from the Swiss Jazz School in Bern as a double-bass player in 1987. In that same year, he founded his highly acclaimed long-term band, the “Stephan Kurmann Strings”, with whom he has released five albums and performed at the Montreux Jazz Festival. He has also played in numerous other bands as a sidesman. Kurmann was furthermore a member of the Basel Sinfonietta, a symphonic orchestra founded in 1980 by young musicians with the intention of presenting new music and experimental works.

Kurmann demonstrated considerable courage in 1994 by founding the Bird’s Eye, a jazz club in Basel that you can still “drop in and leave at any time” for a moderate price, as the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary brochure aptly puts it. In Beatrice Oeri, Kurmann found an ideal, long-standing president for the organisation that ran the club: someone who was willing to attend every evening event and provide the necessary leadership and support. This was a stroke of luck, and not just for Kurmann himself, who was its artistic director until his involuntary retirement in 2022 and often also performed on stage himself as a bassist. It was also a stroke of luck for Basel audiences and for the jazz scene overall, which now gained a new, significant performance venue that attained international renown and became part of a large-scale jazz network. The Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel, headed by Veit Arlt,<sup>2</sup> also regularly presents African and African-Swiss projects there.

Stephan Kurmann expanded his enthusiasm for jazz with a love of Cuban music and, later, for the music of Brazil – the country that today is where he spends most of the year. This interview was conducted in German in Basel on 5 December 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.stephankurmann.com](http://www.stephankurmann.com) (accessed June 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Veit Arlt (born 1979) is the Managing Director of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel and coordinates its Master’s programme in African Studies and the Graduate Network African Studies Basel.

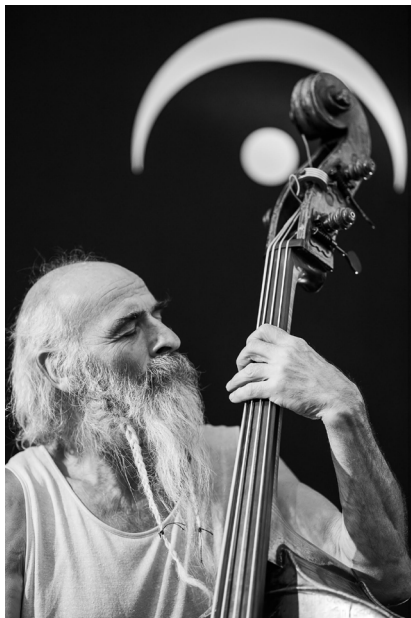
**Steff Rohrbach:** *Stephan, you played twice in the concert series I organised in Frauenfeld, namely “jazz:now”: in 2003 with your “Strings” and in 2006 with “Makaya & The New Tsotsis”. Andy Scherrer<sup>3</sup> was on tenor saxophone (a longstanding performing colleague of yours), Vera Kappeler played piano, you played bass, and Makaya was on drums. How did you become a double bass player, and how did you meet Makaya?*

**Stephan Kurmann:** As a teenager, I played the electric bass with friends and wanted to take lessons because I realised that I needed a few theoretical and practical “skills”. At that time, however, there were no lessons available for the electric bass, not even at a jazz school. I was advised to learn classical guitar, as that would help me. But then I heard Stanley Clarke’s double bass on Chick Corea’s album *Return to Forever* ...

**SR:** ... *the same Stanley Clarke<sup>4</sup> who became famous for his electric bass and for fusion (i.e. jazz-rock) and was just as successful as a double bass player.*

**SK:** Yes. I had already heard a double bass with King Crimson that tempted me to switch from the electric to the acoustic bass – especially as there were teaching opportunities for double bassists outside classical music. Peter Bockius (\*1941), a German double bass player, was living in Basel at the time, so I took lessons from him.

**SR:** *How old were you back then?*



*Figure 21.1. Stephan Kurmann at the Bird’s Eye Jazz Club in Basel. Photo courtesy of Mark John.*

<sup>3</sup> Andy Scherrer (1946–2019), saxophonist and teacher at the Swiss Jazz School Bern, played with Gary Burton, Cedar Walton, Kirk Lightsey, Benny Bailey, Dexter Gordon, Kenny Clarke, Abdullah Ibrahim and others, and was a member of Mathias Rüegg’s Vienna Art Orchestra from 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Clarke (born 1951), American bassist and composer. See <https://stanleyclarke.com> (accessed July 2025).

**SK:** I was about 16 or 17 years old and rented a double bass from Musik Hug – but it wasn't playable at all. I went back to Hug and said something was wrong. The soundpost was missing! But I immediately took a liking to the double bass and played free jazz with two colleagues, André Schütz on drums and Kurt Würmli on saxophone. Then the three of us attended the jazz workshop that the Basel Conservatory – today known as the Music Academy – offered on Tuesdays in the hall of the Totentanz restaurant in Basel, which we could afford. It was run by the flautist and visual artist Peter Fürst (1933–2021) together with Makaya Ntshoko. It was great fun! Peter Fürst hired me “on the spot”: they needed a bass player in the workshop ensemble that rehearsed on Wednesdays, and in Basel the only others were Peter Bockius and Martin Müller – and of course Isla Eckinger, though he was usually on the road. That jazz workshop was my “nursery”. During the week, various bands rehearsed in the Totentanz pub, and their sessions were open to the public, you could go in and out, it was a really good concept. There were concerts at the weekend, so I manned the ticket desk and was able to listen to the music for no charge. On my free Wednesday afternoons, I cleaned for Peter Fürst's stand construction company ...

Makaya played the drums in our workshop ensemble. Peter Fürst played the flute, his son Markus played the congas, and when Makaya was giving concerts somewhere else or was indisposed, Markus also played the drums. So as a 17-year-old I was actually already playing with Makaya, almost every week!

For me, that was the first of the four phases in my career, taking me “from apprentice to master”. It was a phase of “unjustified certainty”, when you feel sure of everything, even though you don't actually know anything about anything. You're not even aware of it, but you do a lot of things right in a playful, open-minded way.

**SR:** *What music did you play with this workshop ensemble?*

**SK:** We tried to copy the concept of the Art Ensemble of Chicago: African grooves with long solos, then free improvisation. It was a simple concept that also worked at our level. It was great with Makaya. His skills helped, of course, and he held everything together with his “grooves” when he was fit (which wasn't always the case back then). It was his final phase in The Dollar Brand Trio with Johnny Gertze, and he was also playing with Mal Waldron – and in my innocence, I had no problems playing with him too. Makaya soon retired for several years and made a major lifestyle change. He worked for a plumbing company<sup>5</sup> and hardly played any more. I used to visit him at work and can still see him hammering on a metal sheet like a madman ... I was a fan of his, and he liked me too.

**SR:** *If you listened to him playing the drums, you couldn't figure out exactly how he played the rhythms and how he managed to do it so precisely – but it was always perfect.*

**SK:** He has this incredible beat, he whips the cymbal and drives the sound forwards. There was a certain aggression and anger involved – and that's understandable, because of course he'd experienced incredible injustice.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Rose Ntshoko, Makaya's daughter, it was a metalworking and plumbing company.

SR: *What happened next?*

SK: A few years passed and I entered my second phase – my phase of “justified uncertainty”. The singer Brigitte Bader asked me to play a gig. I was already playing regularly to earn money back then – and after taking a break of many years, Makaya was back here on drums alongside me. I played, but compared to Makaya, every other note I played was suddenly “off”. He was truly playing jazz, whereas what I was playing was something else. That was when my eyes were opened, so to speak, and I realised that I still had a lot of work ahead of me.

SR: *You then graduated from the Swiss Jazz School in Bern ...*

SK: ... yes, but I was already playing gigs with teachers from the Jazz School before then. A friend of mine, the drummer Jürg Werber, urged me to attend. I didn’t really want to go there – many of the musicians I’d played with hadn’t graduated from a jazz school either, and I didn’t think you could learn jazz at a school anyway. The greatest jazz musicians were self-taught and never went to school. Jazz schools didn’t even exist in their day.

An additional reason for enrolling at the school was that I’d refused to do military service and knew that I would be punished by being sent to prison.<sup>6</sup> I had heard that I would be let out of prison each week to attend college. After passing the entrance exam, I indeed got time out of prison – though not for the Jazz School, but for the weekly rehearsals of my band, because that was my livelihood, and the rules meant that I shouldn’t lose my means of making a living just because I was refusing to join the army.

SR: *The idea of self-taught jazz musicians is at least partly a myth. After all, many took classical lessons, and many went through the Berklee College of Music in Boston, which has been dedicated to jazz training since 1945. And it’s easy to forget that some of those musicians who were supposedly self-taught had actually trained in a US Army band. And young musicians naturally learned by hearing their elders play and by playing with them. Back then, however, musicians sometimes got week-long engagements in clubs, which Max Roach in conversation with Peter Rüedi and Franz Biffiger<sup>7</sup> once called “the conservatory of the street”. This can hardly be compared with how things were later, or even today.*

SK: Playing with others was also my “conservatory”, and I was lucky enough to be able to play with many older people, such as the saxophonist Christian Baader. The guitarist Peter Brugger gave me theory lessons in the pub, after rehearsals. But the school was also a big help in that you met up with lots of interested people, learning together and forming bands. So I went to the Swiss Jazz School, but stopped after two years because I was getting so many requests to play rehearsals and concerts that I had to choose between college and engagements. Of course, I preferred to play, and concentrated on that completely for a while.

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<sup>6</sup> Military service has been compulsory for all males in Switzerland since the founding of the modern Swiss state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until a civilian alternative was set up in 1996, it was usual for those refusing to join the military to be sentenced to several months in prison.

<sup>7</sup> In Roach, “Just Play These Goddamn Drums” in *DU – Die Zeitschrift für Kultur* 12 (1996), 32–48, here 32.

Later, when a proper diploma was introduced to reward graduates from the Swiss Jazz School,<sup>8</sup> I went back and finished my diploma – even though I never used it later. I used the time back at the Jazz School to focus intensively on composition and arranging.

**SR:** *You set up the “Strings” after graduating from the Swiss Jazz School in Bern in 1987, didn’t you?*

**SK:** Yes, that was when I founded the “Stephan Kurmann Strings” with Andy Scherrer on saxophone, a string quartet and the drummer Doug Hammond, who was living in the Black Forest across the border in Germany at the time, close to Basel. When he left the region, I asked Makaya to be our drummer, and he agreed.

**SR:** *Didn’t Doug Hammond return again later?*

**SK:** No, that was over, though we continued to play together in other constellations. But it was fantastic for me to have Makaya in the band. Not that it wouldn’t have been good with Doug, he’s also a great drummer, of course. But I was connected to Makaya through my whole history. All the same, it wasn’t that easy with him, because Makaya is a totally free spirit, and with this band, with my compositions and arrangements, I had clear intentions in mind. Makaya, on the other hand, plays best when he has a free hand. I made that possible as best as I could.

Incidentally, there is a piece on *Alive in Montreux*, namely “Sketches 1989 Part II” that I composed for him, with his beat in mind. Like all five “Strings” albums and our Montreux video with Makaya, it’s freely accessible on my homepage.<sup>9</sup>

The “Strings” ushered in my third phase, that of “unjustified uncertainty”: a time when you should by now have realised what’s going on, but you’re still making mistakes. We played quite a few concerts, toured with a bus that I drove, I had to take care of everything, it was quite exhausting. The string players also had less experience back then. I had to give them lots of cues and show them a lot of things. It was challenging.

I remember a concert at the Café du Soleil in Saignelégier in the Jura, which is a hotel and a restaurant as well as a great venue. It was a very energetic concert, which the musicians also really enjoyed. It was great fun and had a fantastic atmosphere. We played a very fast piece as an encore, but I was exhausted, I couldn’t really play any more and therefore played in a very distracted manner. Makaya was next to me. He whipped the cymbal and said quite loudly: “it doesn’t just stop!”. That was a justified slap in the face for me and a lesson for life.

**SR:** *But Makaya wasn’t with the “Strings” all those years, was he?*

**SK:** He told me several times that I had to make sure I had another drummer available, as he couldn’t always be there. At that time I’d fallen quite in love with Cuban music and so hired Julio Barreto,<sup>10</sup> who’d moved to Switzerland ...

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<sup>8</sup> An “SMPV-Diplom”, the diploma of the Schweizerischer Musikpädagogischer Verband (the Swiss Association of Music Teachers).

<sup>9</sup> See [www.stephankurmann.com](http://www.stephankurmann.com).

<sup>10</sup> The Cuban drummer and percussionist Julio Barreto (born 1967) is a member of the Gonzalo



SR: ... and what about the percussionist Willy Kotoun?

SK: He'd joined us shortly after Doug Hammond left. He and Julio had got to know each other years before in Cuba and were bosom friends. But Willy and Makaya also got on very well.

SR: *You played a few concerts in South Africa with a band formed around Makaya, didn't you?*

SK: That was years later, in 2007, with the "Swiss South African Jazz Quintet" that Veit Arlt had put together for concerts in Switzerland and South Africa. Andy Scherrer didn't want to fly, so Domenic Landolf replaced him in South Africa on tenor saxophone. Feya Faku (trumpet) and Colin Vallon (piano) were there, then Makaya and me. We played at a festival in Grahamstown,<sup>11</sup> in New Brighton – the township next to Port Elizabeth where Feya comes from – in Joburg, Cape Town and several townships. Makaya was celebrated wildly down there! He had already returned to South Africa once before, but without playing. That's why there was so much interest this time, including from the media, and crowds of people came to the concerts everywhere, including his old acquaintances and his family!

I also went to South Africa a second time, later, this time with the pianist Bokani Dyer, Donat Fisch on saxophone, Mats Spillman on trumpet and Norbert Pfammatter on drums.

When Makaya got me to join the new edition of his quartet "Makaya & The New Tsotsis", together with the "Swiss South African Jazz Quintet", it felt like my fourth phase, one of "justified certainty" – precisely because I had been chosen for this and for other bands.

SR: *How did you experience Makaya back then?*

SK: Makaya was and always has been Makaya. He's witnessed my entire development and helped to shape it. I was able to learn so much from him and through my interactions with him. I always visit him when I'm in Basel – and I will be eternally grateful to him.

SR: *Did you learn anything from Makaya about the time before he emigrated?*

SK: Not really, he was very reserved. Leaving your people behind in times of need is a cruelly difficult decision, even if it was very understandable, and everyone is entitled to leave a country that is engaged in violence ...

SR: ... especially after the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 and its consequences. The racial segregation there was disastrous, especially for creative artists. Besides all the other instances of harassment, marriages between whites and Blacks were forbidden, as were mixed-race music groups, for example ...

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Rubalcabas ensemble and has played with bassists such as Ron Carter, Charlie Haden, Miroslav Vitouš, John Patitucci and Buster Williams.

<sup>11</sup> The Swiss saxophonist Roman Schwaller also took part in the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

**SK:** Even though racism is an artificial construct imposed on people for specific reasons, it still meant leaving family and friends behind in a difficult situation. And the question then arises as to how to deal with the dilemma of having left your home and your loved ones behind, possibly never to see them again. Your inner conflicts are not diminished just because you've moved into a seemingly more peaceful, more prosperous part of the world!

Before I went to South Africa, I also got to know musicians of a different generation – people such as Hilton Schilder, for example, who first played at the Bird's Eye club in 2004, who was active in the resistance and had lost many friends in the liberation struggle. Significantly, his best friend and long-time musical partner was a white man with light blonde hair – the trumpeter and accordionist Alex van Heerden, who died in a car accident in 2009.

**SR:** *But of course, that was much later. Many of the earliest emigrants took refuge in alcohol and other drugs and succumbed to illness; quite a few died as a result, including friends of Makaya. Others managed to find a way out in time. Do you know anything about Makaya's family background?*

**SK:** He has many siblings, but Makaya didn't talk about them either. The topic of South Africa was difficult for him. I suspect it's something in his life that he's not proud of, or that he's even ashamed of. But it's precisely things like that that we should talk about. We should talk less about the things we're proud of.

**SR:** *Do you know anything about Makaya's invitation from Weather Report to join them in New York?*

**SK:** It was Los Angeles, not New York! Sure, that's an anecdote that did the rounds in Basel: "Makaya's got a plane ticket to L.A. from Weather Report" – and when he came back, he supposedly complained that they were playing rock (and not jazz)! I asked him what was true about the story. Makaya laughed, but confirmed it was true. He'd indeed been invited by them and had flown to L.A. Wayne Shorter and Joe Zawinul led that legendary band and were often on the hunt for suitable drummers – something that wasn't easy. Of course, Makaya would have given their music a completely different slant because he wasn't a fusion drummer. He said that he had to go to concerts to hear what they were playing. But there was already a young drummer there and he didn't want to take his place.

**SR:** *That corresponds to the version that Makaya himself told me years ago ...*

**SK:** ... To be honest, I don't quite believe it, and rather think that the music was too unfamiliar to him. As interesting as it would have been to hear Weather Report with Makaya, in the long term the band needed a drummer who would always adapt stylistically to them. Makaya is a great individualist – though at the same time he was also a wonderful team player.

**SR:** *I share your doubts. There are other versions of the tale explaining why he wasn't engaged by them. For example, I heard from a reliable source that Makaya distrusted Zawinul for wanting to "steal" African rhythms from him, and that Zawinul had started recording him secretly. It is also possible that health reasons were an obstacle.*

**SK:** Sonny Rollins and others are also said to have been interested in Makaya after Duke Ellington discovered The Dollar Brand Trio with Gertze and Makaya in the early sixties. Makaya told me that in one place or other,<sup>12</sup> the complete John Coltrane Quartet was sitting in the front row at one of the Trio's concerts: John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones!<sup>13</sup>

**SR:** *In 1965, Makaya was also part of the house trio at the Jazz Gallery or Jazz Jamboree<sup>14</sup> in Berlin, and in the clubs Montmartre in Copenhagen and Domicil in Munich. It's said that Makaya, despite being physically small, had tremendous physical strength. It's even been claimed that he was a South African flyweight boxing champion before becoming a musician,<sup>15</sup> and that he trained boys at the Basel boxing club ...<sup>16</sup>*

**SK:** Yes, that's right! And speaking of energy: Old Schmidli<sup>17</sup> told me that Makaya was once being constantly provoked by a guy at a bar. He didn't react for a long time, just stayed calm, but then suddenly: boom – and the guy in question was flat out on the ground several metres away. Makaya's reaction had been lightning fast and very precise. And I myself remember a street party we went to together, where he punched me in the stomach, just for fun, but still with a certain amount of aggression. He didn't follow through with the punch and stopped just before he would have hurt me, but I got the feeling that he could have punched right through me. He possessed a primal force. Then there was the time when I neither ate nor drank for seven days ...

**SR:** ... *when you were nourishing yourself only from light, as people have said?*

**SK:** It is not about the light, but about the energy that we all live off. The fact is that I didn't eat anything for seven days, and, more importantly, I didn't drink anything either and after that stayed on just fruit juices for another 48 days. Makaya grew up in the township of Langa just outside Cape Town, with what I find the insanely beautiful Xhosa language with its click sounds.<sup>18</sup> He told me that in his culture, as an initiation ritual to enter the adult world, you

<sup>12</sup> John Coltrane is said to have heard the Dollar Brand Trio at the Cafe Africana in Zurich, where The Dollar Brand Trio played in 1962 after arriving from South Africa. It is possible that Coltrane was indeed joined there by the other members of his quartet.

<sup>13</sup> Irène Schweizer later recalled: "I saw the Coltrane Quartet once again in Zurich in 1962, when they performed at the Volkshaus". See Irène Schweizer in interview with Christoph Wagner: "Die Jazzwelt ist keine Männerdomäne mehr" in *WochenZeitung WoZ*, 19 May 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Either the Jazzgallery or the Jazz Jamboree; the sources are contradictory here. For the Jazz Jamboree, see [www.music.org.za/artist.asp?id=236](http://www.music.org.za/artist.asp?id=236); Bob Degen spoke of the Jazzgallery. According to Anja Gallenkamp (*Berliner Jazzgeschichten*, <https://jazzgeschichten.de>), the two names were not linked to a specific address, but were used to describe series of concerts.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Gsteiger, "Eine Hommage zu Lebzeiten", in *Basler Zeitung BaZ*, 16 December 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Christoph Keller, "Das volle Leben im Exil", in *WochenZeitung WoZ*, 6 May 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Schmidli (1937–2001) played guitar and banjo with the groups PS Corporation, Hot Mallets, The Tremble Kids and Buddha's Gamblers, among others. He's known in Basel as "der alte Schmidli" ("old Schmidli") in contrast to "der kleine Schmidli" ("little Schmidli"), namely Peter Schmidlin (1947–2015), the drummer, founder and director of the jazz label TCB in Montreux.

<sup>18</sup> The Xhosas are the second-largest ethnic group in South Africa. Their language, with its click sounds, was made famous by Miriam Makeba's performances and recordings of "Qongqothwane

go into the forest alone for one month at the age of fifteen and eat and drink very little. That had been an important experience for him, and he had a lot of understanding for my so-called “light nourishment process”.

**SR:** *Apart from the Strings and the New Tsotsis, did you have any other joint projects with him?*

**SK:** We had many other collaborations. In between those two bands, we also formed a trio with the pianist William Evans<sup>19</sup> to work with the singer Othella Dallas.<sup>20</sup> And we once played with the US singer Alice Day for a whole week at the legendary Atlantis, the “-tis”, as it’s still called in Basel today. William had brought her along. That was before her gigs with our band Cojazz.

**SR:** *It’s fair to say that if it weren’t for his health problems – which were typical of emigrants – and without the break that he took because of them, Makaya would surely have reached the very top of the jazz world.*

**SK:** It’s true, without his problems and the years when he withdrew from the scene, his path could have taken him who knows where (even without taking on the Weather Report job). But for a musician, your career doesn’t have to be your main goal, and it’s not everyone’s cup of tea. Nevertheless, he’s a phenomenon: Makaya has been living in Basel for decades, and even on the jazz scene here, which is overall pretty small, hardly anyone knows who he is. I’m simply grateful that I was able to get to know him, that I could learn from him and play unforgettable concerts with him. Playing with him was always, really always a special experience!

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(The Click Song)”.

<sup>19</sup> The US pianist William Evans (born 1956) came to Switzerland in 1995 to teach at the Bern Academy of the Arts. He has worked with Dizzy Gillespie, Eddie “Who” Harris, Sam Rivers, Mongo Santamaria, Andy Scherrer, Jimmy Woode and others.

<sup>20</sup> Othella Dallas (1925–2020) was the half-sister of the saxophonist Frank Strozier and a solo dancer with the Dunham Company. She sang on stage with Sidney Bechet, Nat King Cole and others, and Duke Ellington wrote two songs for her.

## 22 “Jazz against Apartheid”: An Interview with Jürgen Leinhos

*Steff Rohrbach*

“Jazz gegen Apartheid” – “Jazz against apartheid” – was a project launched in Frankfurt in 1986 by Jürgen Leinhos<sup>1</sup> and the South African bassist Johnny Dyani, shortly before the latter’s death. Thirty years later, on 27 October 2016, the project made a guest appearance at the Bird’s Eye jazz club in Basel with a concert entitled “Celebrating the music of Johnny Dyani” that featured Makaya Ntshoko on drums – a South African who had long before made his home in the city. The club’s programme states that “Jazz against apartheid” had dedicated an annual series of concerts to the memory of Johnny Dyani ever since his death.

Leinhos managed the project from its very beginnings – which was reason enough to meet him in his home city of Frankfurt am Main on 24 May 2024 to ask him about both the project and Ntshoko.



*Figure 22.1. John Tchicai, Jürgen Leinhos and Makaya Ntshoko in Frankfurt on the morning after a concert for Ntshoko’s 72nd birthday.*

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Leinhos (born 1938) studied sociology and philosophy, was active in the development of digitalisation and founded the initiative “Culture in the Ghetto” in Frankfurt am Main in 1984 and then, shortly afterwards as part of this, “Jazz against apartheid”. See: <https://jazzagainstapartheid.com/team/juergen-leinhos> (accessed June 2024).

## The Personal Background

**Steff Rohrbach:** *Jürgen, we're meeting here at the Hotel Nizza ...*

**Jürgen Leinhos:** ... which was founded in 1993 as an artists' hotel, and where we stayed right from the start. We've put on well over a hundred concerts for "Jazz against apartheid", most of them here in Frankfurt. Accordingly, Makaya Ntshoko has stayed here at the "Nizza" a hundred times.

**SR:** *You were born in Eisenach in 1938 – how did you get into music?*

**JL:** I was involved with music from an early age. My mother used to say: "You were baptised with Johann Sebastian Bach". Both my parents were pretty big music fans, Eisenach was Bach's place of birth and it's a musical city. You just grow into it there. I spent the war with my grandparents out in the countryside, then moved back to the city with my parents. 1950 was the 200th anniversary of Bach's death and the whole town was full of guests, there was an international audience there, and of course I was thrilled and thought: "You're in the right place here!" That was a wonderful, formative event. I finished school in Eisenach and did my Abitur [i.e. the German school-leaving exams], then I moved to Güstrow, a little town in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern region that had a small theatre offering opera, spoken plays and ballet. That was where I met Luten Petrowsky.<sup>2</sup> We remained friends until his death last year; I went to Berlin for his funeral.

**SR:** *Ernst-Ludwig "Luten" Petrowsky was already a well-known musician in Switzerland, even during the communist era, not least because the Swiss record label Intakt Records began early on to document the East German scene.*

**JL:** Luten and Eberhard Weise<sup>3</sup> performed in Montreux as early as 1968! Later, between 1980 and 1990, Luten also toured the world with the "George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band"<sup>4</sup> that was named after the famous Basel pianist, composer, arranger and bandleader who ran it.

Petrowsky was involved in a project in Güstrow with Eberhard Weise at that time, who was a trombonist by trade and worked in the Güstrow Theatre. But he also played jazz piano and later led both the Radio-DDR Combo in Leipzig and – much later – the Leipzig Radio Orchestra. Petrowsky and Weise founded their first ten-man band in 1956, which was very influenced by West-Coast jazz. They collected the relevant literature that wasn't available in the GDR back then. Because I was commuting between Güstrow, Eisenach and Berlin, I had the advantage

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<sup>2</sup> Ernst-Ludwig "Luten" Petrowsky (1933–2023) was a composer and free jazz pioneer who played the saxophone, clarinet and flute and is considered one of the forefathers of jazz in the former German Democratic Republic ("GDR", East Germany).

<sup>3</sup> Eberhard Weise (born 1934), was later chief conductor of the Leipzig Radio Dance Orchestra and leads the German Philharmonic Big Band.

<sup>4</sup> George Gruntz (1932–2013), a Swiss jazz pianist, composer and bandleader, worked for the radio from 1956 and became internationally known in 1958 as a member of the Newport International Band at the Jazz Festival, where he also played with Louis Armstrong. His Concert Jazz Band was unusual in that it consisted exclusively of internationally renowned soloists. See, for example, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/020594/2014-03-06/> (accessed June 2024)

of being able to listen to a lot of West-German radio stations and could record programmes of West-Coast jazz for them on my tape recorder. I realised how much fun it was, working with musicians.

*SR: How did you continue with your training?*

*JL:* From Güstrow, I went to Frankfurt am Main where I studied sociology and philosophy with Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. Then I moved to Kiel because I realised that my subject area of sociology might be exciting, but it was also very out of touch with reality. That was in the mid-1960s – just when digitalisation was beginning.

*SR: Were you in Kiel for your work? What were you doing there?*

*JL:* Yes, I was there professionally. Dr Rudolf Hell<sup>5</sup> was working in Kiel on a digitisation project that was practically a reinvention of the Gutenberg printing press, 500 years later. I worked on it as a developer, but also from a sociological and philosophical perspective, which was of course very exciting. I stayed for two years and then went back to Frankfurt.

*SR: Adorno neither liked nor understood jazz, and used terminology to describe it that is considered problematical today.*

*JL:* Exactly, and that was one of the reasons I wanted to go back. I wanted to finish my studies and argue with Adorno about these ideas of his. I had understood one of the cornerstones of Marxist-oriented sociology, as determined by Max Weber, namely the assumption that everything that has to do with the intellect is bound to class. It was this kind of prohibition of thought, which is also reflected in Adorno's speeches and writings, that I wanted to fight against. It was the same with digitalisation: the capitalists were too blind to understand what was happening with it. Digitalisation wasn't being triggered by businesses, but was a consequence of technological development. Gutenberg's technology was simply too slow, and digitalisation made faster processes possible. The sociological dogma said that this development was a matter for the leading class and refused to realise that it would change the entire world of work and bring about a completely different aesthetic in society.

*SR: What did you do in Frankfurt, how did your life proceed there?*

*JL:* When I came back, Adorno had already died. I continued to work as a developer, had two children who've grown up well – and I went through a lengthy process to establish equal, constitutional rights for me as a single father. After that, in the 1980s, I started to focus on music again.

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<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Hell (1901–2002) invented the Hellschreiber (teleprinter) in 1929, the Klischograph (machine for the mechanical production of printing plates for the letterpress process) in 1951, the Chromograph, a scanner for digitally generated photo typesetting, in 1963 and computer typesetting in 1965. Hell was awarded the Grand Federal Cross of Merit with Star, the Gutenberg Prize and the Werner von Siemens Ring.



## The Launch of “Jazz against apartheid”

SR: *When did “Jazz against apartheid” start?*

JL: We founded “Culture in the Ghetto” in 1984, and the project “Jazz against apartheid” was set up within it. Much of what we did in the first edition in 1986 also had a connection to Frankfurt, because Frankfurt is a banking city that did good business with South African financial institutions. The anti-apartheid movement boycotted South Africa politically and economically: we wanted no fruit from South Africa, and no business with it. There were masses of people lying in front of the big banks. When their employees came out for lunch, they had to step over hundreds of people lying all over the ground.

The movement didn’t comprise a mass of people, but it was well-organised and that made it powerful. Its basis was among the churches, trades unions and peace activists.

SR: *How did “Jazz against apartheid” come about?*

JL: It was obvious that this process, this movement, also had to have an artistic format. We thought about who we could invite from among the exiled South African musicians, and we immediately decided in favour of Johnny Dyani. We discussed everything with him and also jointly decided on the name “Jazz against apartheid”. Johnny came here for various performances. There was a big series at the time called “Songs in the Park” that was practically a protest movement.

We wanted to stage this new project in Frankfurt, which was home to the anti-apartheid movement here, though it was also intended to be active across Germany. It was launched in Berlin, but there were also concerts in other cities. Everything went very well, including the preparations for it. Johnny made a guest appearance in Frankfurt with the Danish guitarist Pierre Dørge<sup>6</sup> and his band. They played at the jazz festival and at “Songs in the Park” in front of thousands of people. And he came with Marilyn Mazur,<sup>7</sup> Harry Beckett,<sup>8</sup> John Tchicai and Makaya Ntshoko – all prominent musicians, great artists, most of them older than him, but Johnny was in good musical hands in his Danish exile. He once spent a week here, and also played in the Jazzkeller with Peter Kowald.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pierre Dørge (born 1946) founded the New Jungle Orchestra in 1980, which he still conducts today. It represented Denmark as its “State Ensemble” from 1993 to 1996 and also played for Nelson Mandela as a kind of “cultural ambassador” for Denmark.

<sup>7</sup> The American-Danish percussionist Marilyn Mazur (born 1956) was the only woman musician ever to go on tour with Miles Davis’s band. She also became world-famous through her collaborations with Wayne Shorter, Gil Evans and Jan Garbarek. She has been particularly successful, however, with her own projects.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Beckett (1935–2010) was a British trumpeter who came to the UK from Barbados in 1954 and played alongside Charles Mingus in the 1961 film *All Night Long*. He also played with Chris McGregor’s Brotherhood of Breath and with other ensembles on the English scene.

<sup>9</sup> The bassist Peter Kowald (1944–2002) came from Thuringia in Germany and played on the European, UK and American scenes with names such as Irène Schweizer, Pierre Favre, Evan Parker and Wadada Leo Smith. He also played with Marilyn Mazur and Jeanne Lee as their second bassist alongside Klavs Hovman.

SR: So *“Jazz against apartheid”* was much more than just a trio with Johnny Dyani, John Tchicai and Makaya Ntshoko ...

JL: ... yes, that’s how the whole thing came about. Johnny chose Harry Beckett, John Tchicai and Makaya Ntshoko for the ensemble, along with Pinise Saul,<sup>10</sup> Lucky Ranku,<sup>11</sup> Ernest Mothle<sup>12</sup> and Thomas Dyani.<sup>13</sup>

But after the start in Berlin, Johnny fell into a coma and the other musicians had to go on tour without him. And when they arrived in Frankfurt, we received the news of his death. We told the band members that no matter what happened, they would be back here a year later and that we’d continue the series. And that’s how it developed down to this day, even though we thought that the end of apartheid would also mean the end of the series.

SR: *Where do the concerts take place?*

JL: Essentially in cultural centres and church halls – there’s always been at least one venue in a church facility from the very beginning. There’s the “Haus am Dom”, the educational centre of the Catholic Church, the “Brotfabrik”, a cultural centre, the “Bessunger Knabenschule”, a cultural centre in a former boys’ school in Darmstadt, the “Main\_Forum” of IG Metall and the “Gallus Theater”, which is located in the Gallus district of Frankfurt and used to be called “Kamerun” – it was once an industrial quarter and was called “Galgenfeld” [“gallows field”] until the end of the 18th century. These places form our basis, but there are also other venues like the Bird’s Eye in Basel or Oakland in California.

## The Eventful Years

SR: *Did Johnny Dyani’s music remain at the core of “Jazz against apartheid”, even after his death?*

JL: Yes, and this is how it happened. The year after his death, the big German Protestant Church Congress took place here in Frankfurt from 17 to 21 June 1987. There were 125,000 people in attendance – and they all wore a scarf against apartheid! We’d been asked to design the musical programme. The closing church service took place in the Waldstadion – where Eintracht Frankfurt normally plays – and it was a huge event with 85,000 participants. Apartheid and the Deutsche Bank were a central theme – 25,000 people marched in protest to the headquarters of Deutsche Bank, which had maintained an uncritical stance towards South Africa’s apartheid government. It was a church event, but apartheid and South Africa were clearly at the heart of it.

<sup>10</sup> Pinise Saul (1941–2016), a South African singer, was a member of Dudu Pukwana’s band Zila and performed with Bob Marley, David Murray, the World Saxophone Quartet and others.

<sup>11</sup> Lucas Madumetja “Lucky” Ranku (1941–2016), a South African guitarist, worked with Dudu Pukwana and others and in 1983 played with Hugh Masekela in London for the celebration of Nelson Mandela’s birthday.

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Mothle (1941–2011), a South African bassist who played with Hugh Masekela and Jonas Gwangwa, and from 1981 onwards with the Brotherhood of Breath.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Dyani (born 1964), a Danish-Nigerian percussionist and singer, stepson of Johnny Dyani.

SR: *What was the significance of this church congress in 1987 and your project “Jazz against apartheid”?*

JL: As “money cities”, Zurich and Frankfurt were particularly important to the international protest. Our concerts were noticed all over the world and were also linked to the 100,000 protesters and the human “carpet” in front of the big banks in Frankfurt. After that church congress, we were also in an alliance with the trades unions and churches. The churches were effective in the fruit and bank boycott, and many church members cancelled their accounts with the banks in question in Switzerland and Germany. The trades unions here were linked with the South African unions and thus also had an influence on the car manufacturers down there.

SR: *Were things only happening in Frankfurt?*

JL: No, I also recall how in 1986, just two weeks after Johnny’s death, there was a fantastic South African evening in Zurich, though the mood was understandably very subdued. First the Chris McGregor Trio played, and Irène Schweizer played a duo with Louis Moholo; then came “Jazz against apartheid” – which the programme still listed as “Johnny Dyani’s South African Project” featuring Johnny himself, Makaya, John Tchicai, Harry Beckett, Ernest Mothle, Pinise Saul, Lucky Ranku and Thomas Dyani. Mbityana Blythe wasn’t in the band. They were followed by Dudu Pukwana with his group “Zila”. The performance by Irène Schweizer and Louis Moholo was very special: they both came on stage, but then hesitated – and suddenly, large banners unfurled from the upper balconies protesting against apartheid and the complicity of the banks with the South African regime.

SR: *That evening took place on 8 November 1986 at the Zurich Volkshaus, as part of the Zurich Jazz Festival. The Swiss record label Intakt Records released the duo concert on LP in 1987, then on CD in 1997.<sup>14</sup> The Festival was supported by the supermarket cooperative Migros, the Swiss Bank Corporation, the Union Bank of Switzerland and the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt. Louis Moholo several times shouted out the title of the piece that gave the disc its name. It’s clearly audible on it.<sup>15</sup> “Free Mandela!” The festival review in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung was very favourable.<sup>16</sup>*

JL: It was a gigantic event, and they set it up very cleverly. And of course there were people in Zurich who were offended, because it was an obvious breach of the rules. But it was important and right – and above all, it was great art.

Incidentally, in interviews that I later conducted with Irène Schweizer and John Tchicai, they both independently pointed out that the first real anti-apartheid concert had taken place back in 1975 [on 30 August] in Willisau in Switzerland, with the two of them plus Makaya on drums and Buschi Niebergall on bass.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Intakt Records, CD 006.

<sup>15</sup> See Patrik Landolt, *Unterwegs im Freien. Zürich, New York, London, Berlin. 37 Jahre Musikproduktion von Intakt Records*. Zurich: Versus Verlag, 2022, 15.

<sup>16</sup> “kl”, “Trübe Stimmung mit wenigen Aufhellungen. Eindrücke vom Internationalen Jazzfestival”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 261, 10 November 1986.

<sup>17</sup> See [www.willisaужazzarchive.ch/concerts/1975/1010.html](http://www.willisaужazzarchive.ch/concerts/1975/1010.html). This was Makaya Ntshoko’s second

SR: *Looking back now, how important was this time?*

JL: The years 1986 and 1987 were decisive for the international anti-apartheid movement. We alone had over ten concerts with “Jazz against apartheid” in the year of that church congress. There was a lot of international pressure on the apartheid regime. You could probably say that this was the beginning of the end of South African apartheid, because the issue had never got so much publicity or resonance in the media before – even the bankers had meanwhile got cold feet.

## Developments in South Africa

SR: *The situation in South Africa itself surely also played a central role, didn't it?*

JL: Of course. Then there was the ceasefire between Angola and South Africa in 1988, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 here in Germany, free elections in Namibia and its independence from South Africa in 1990. These were all decisive factors that finally led to Nelson Mandela's release in 1990 after 27 years of political imprisonment, and then ultimately to the end of apartheid itself in 1994.

SR: *Did most of the artists return to their home country of South Africa?*

JL: Many South Africans indeed returned from exile after 1990, including Louis Moholo and Ernest Mothle from our project, for example. But they also included the South African cultural historian Neville Alexander,<sup>18</sup> now deceased, who had received a scholarship to study in Germany on the strength of his talent, and who wrote his doctorate here on Gerhart Hauptmann and had written about the concept of liberation pedagogy that he wanted to take to South Africa. Neville said to me: “Don't be surprised if we end up in the same situation as the German artists and intellectuals whom nobody wanted after their return from exile after the Second World War”. All the same, he was able to ensure that the new South African constitution recognised ten official languages alongside English.

SR: *And what was it like for those who returned?*

JL: That's exactly what happened – the new South African government didn't care about its culture in exile or about the grand designs and achievements of its cultural workers abroad. After the end of apartheid, many returning from exile became part of the opposition again, as South Africa was now practically a one-party state – at least until the elections that took place in late May 2024 that forced the African National Congress (ANC) into a coalition with the largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA).

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appearance in Willisaus; on 20 March 1971 he had already played with Irène Schweizer, Jürg Grau (trumpet, guitar) and Peter K. Frei (bass) under the title “Makaya Ntshoko meets Irène Schweizer”.

<sup>18</sup> Neville Alexander (1936–2012), South African linguist and an anti-apartheid campaigner alongside Nelson Mandela. He studied in Cape Town, joined the movement in 1957 and received his doctorate in Tübingen in 1961. He was a co-founder of the National Liberation Front (NLF), was sentenced to ten years in prison for treason in 1963, and served time with Mandela in Robben Island prison.



*Figure 22.2. Irène Schweizer at Makaya Ntshoko's 65th birthday celebration in the Bird's Eye Club in Basel.*

## “Jazz against apartheid” in South Africa

SR: *What happened to “Jazz against apartheid” in the “Corona years”?*

JL: We used the Covid period to intensify the project. After things changed in South Africa in the 1990s, we had expanded our project title to “Jazz gegen Apartheid – zwischen Heimkehr und Exil” [“Jazz against apartheid – between homecoming and exile”] and started organising workshops. Daniel Guggenheim,<sup>19</sup> Tobias Delius,<sup>20</sup> Claude Deppa,<sup>21</sup> Allen Jacobson,<sup>22</sup> John Edwards,<sup>23</sup> Christopher Dell<sup>24</sup> and Christian Lillinger<sup>25</sup> joined us – so together with Makaya we now had a double quartet. “You’re the only bandleader who isn’t a musician”, said Daniel Guggenheim with amusement about my role in it ... It’s a project that’s grown.

Then we received the Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo from the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, which is a national “order of peace, co-operation and active expression of solidarity and support”<sup>26</sup> – it’s something like the Federal Cross of Merit in Germany.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Guggenheim (born 1954), Swiss saxophonist who lives in Frankfurt.

<sup>20</sup> Tobias Delius (born 1964), British saxophonist.

<sup>21</sup> Claude Deppa (born 1958), South African trumpeter.

<sup>22</sup> Allen Jacobson, Canadian trombonist, conductor and teacher, in Frankfurt since 1999, has played with Kenny Wheeler, Lee Konitz, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Baden Baden Philharmonic, the European Philharmonic and others.

<sup>23</sup> John Edwards (born 1964), British bassist.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Dell (born 1965), German vibraphonist.

<sup>25</sup> Christian Lillinger (born 1984), German drummer and composer.

<sup>26</sup> See the official South African government website at <https://www.dsac.gov.za/the-order-of-the-companions-of-or-tambo> (accessed July 2024).

SR: ... you received the medal in silver, personally, in 2021 ...

JL: ... that was Vusi Mchunu's doing: Vusi is a South African poet and filmmaker who studied in Germany and was one of the first to work at the "House of world cultures" in Berlin. He had also gone back to South Africa. At roughly the same time that we were awarded this medal, he suggested that we should come to the Cape for five concerts and five workshops, which we gave down there in 2022 and 2023. In the meantime, Vusi Mchunu was given a lifetime achievement prize at the 2022 South African Literature Awards. And this year we are taking the project to the Cape for the third time.

SR: *Wasn't it possible to go to South Africa with "Jazz against apartheid" before then – despite Mandela having become president in 1994?*

JL: Back in 1990, we continued our work in Germany, including workshops to get new musicians interested. What's more, until then there was no one who had the necessary courage and really wanted the project. Now, however, there are people down there who've said they want exactly this project – with everything that's involved in it. That's what's in the works now. I didn't fly to South Africa myself. I used to go there, but it's too exhausting for me today. I'm not fit enough for the long journey there. On the other hand, the journalist and adult educator Elisabeth Ehrhorn, who is involved with us, is accompanying the project in South Africa and has developed a lot more activity around it than I could have done.

SR: *Where is "Jazz against apartheid – between homecoming and exile" performing in South Africa?*

JL: This year marks the 40th anniversary of the "Culture in the Ghetto" project. And it's been 30 years since the new government was formed in South Africa and apartheid was abolished. To mark the occasion, "Jazz against apartheid" will be travelling to the Cape for the third time. There is a Holocaust & Genocide Centre in Johannesburg that focuses on research and teaching. Its director, Tali Nates, received the Goethe Institute's Gold Medal in 2022 and is a member of our project. There'll be another launch event there, and they're also holding an academic conference together with New York at which the topic of culture in exile will play a central role. Everything that the government can't do has to be done by others – and they're doing it because they realise how important it is. The final concert will again take place in the Eastern Cape: in East London – where the Steve Biko Centre is located, and where both Johnny Dyani and Steve Biko grew up and are buried. Two of our closing concerts have already taken place there. There's also an exhibition about exile in the works, based on the one previously shown in Frankfurt.<sup>27</sup> The best German artists went into exile during the Second World War, with many travelling to the USA via Switzerland, including the Nobel Laureate Thomas Mann.

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<sup>27</sup> The permanent exhibition "Exile. Experience and Testimony" at the German National Library in Frankfurt am Main was opened in 2018, with exile publications, the personal archives of writers, philosophers, musicians and holdings of institutional provenance. "It features analogue and virtual special exhibitions and has a varied programme of events presenting different aspects of exile, ranging from historical exile to contemporary phenomena". [www.demokratie-geschichte.de/index.php/4370/deutsches-exilarchiv-19331945](http://www.demokratie-geschichte.de/index.php/4370/deutsches-exilarchiv-19331945)

## Makaya Ntshoko

SR: *Makaya had disappeared from the scene a few years before your project – but did he always return to get involved in “Jazz against apartheid”?*

JL: Makaya was part of “Jazz against apartheid” from the very beginning. Johnny Dyani put the ensemble together and brought Makaya back. Makaya was one of the first to go into exile in Europe, and he initially found refuge in Switzerland. Makaya never missed a single performance, he was always there and never cancelled. He was and remains closely associated with “Jazz against apartheid” and our entire process.

SR: *Did Makaya ever tell you anything about his own story?*

JL: He didn’t talk much, but at the same time he was always the centre of attention and received a lot of affection – he even celebrated several of his birthdays with us in Frankfurt. We always found him to be very active and reliable, especially in his musicality. In pieces such as “Appear”, for example, he simply sets the theme – the piece isn’t entirely undemanding, even for wind instruments, and he played it so fantastically that it became clear that he was the best percussionist for the ensemble. You also have to know that our ensemble only plays Johnny Dyani’s compositions and that all of them are chronicles and portraits of South Africa: they’re about musicians, contemporaries like Kippie Moeketsi, the “Lennie Tristano” of South Africa, of whom everyone said he taught them what South African jazz means.

With songs about the freedom fighter Lilian Ngoyi (1911–1980) or, of course, Steve Biko<sup>28</sup> (1946–1977), we said things that had to be told so that the audience, especially the younger people, could find out what they were all about. Makaya insisted that everything be written down and told exactly as it was and that there couldn’t be anything left to chance – after all, he’s immortalised on the famous Dyani album *Song for Biko*.<sup>29</sup>

Makaya enjoyed a lifelong friendship with John Tchicai. The two of them were very supportive of each other, and John was always a really solid person.

SR: *Makaya was an amazing drummer and played with top people. He once told me that he was invited to play with Weather Report, the famous band of Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter and that he flew out to the USA for it. There are various versions of the story about why the engagement didn’t work out. Makaya himself claimed there was a young Black man on the drums whose job he didn’t want to take away. It’s also possible that he mistrusted Joe Zawinul. Or maybe it was health reasons that prevented it ...*

JL: ... those South Africans were so impressive, we were all fascinated by what they brought with them – from their phrasing to their tone formation, their rhythms and the special nature of their songs that sometimes sounded like hymns – we’d never heard that before.

<sup>28</sup> The civil rights activist Steve Biko (1946–1977) was tortured and died in prison, although it was initially claimed that he had died after a hunger strike.

<sup>29</sup> Johnny Dyani’s album *Song for Biko* with Dudu Pukwana (alto saxophone), Don Cherry (cornet), Johnny Dyani (bass) and Makaya Ntshoko (drums) was recorded in 1978 and released as an LP by SteepleChase in 1994.



But I also wanted to tell you about John Tchicai, who got on so well with Makaya and often worked with him. He lived in the USA again for a few years in the 1990s, this time not in New York but in California. John once played two concerts in Oakland, naturally with Harry Beckett and Pierre Dørge, and the special thing was that Art Davis<sup>30</sup> was on bass, who didn't know anything about this South African music. Makaya was also invited, but didn't want to go there – I don't know why, but it couldn't have been anything to do with his papers because he had a Swiss passport by then. It wasn't for health reasons either. Gilbert Matthews<sup>31</sup> then went to California from his exile in Sweden to play drums.

**SR:** *Makaya obviously coped very well with the generational change in the “Jazz against apartheid” ensemble.*

**JL:** That's true, Makaya has worked several times with all of the former members, and not just in our project. And it also worked out wonderfully with the new musicians who joined after the workshops.

**SR:** *Makaya was also long associated with the pianist Irène Schweizer and the poetic, melodious drummer Pierre Favre.*

**JL:** Yes, Irène Schweizer thought the world of Makaya. I remember the session<sup>32</sup> at Bird's Eye that took place on Makaya's 75th birthday, with many musicians who'd performed with Makaya and where you and I were both present, though we didn't know each other yet. Pierre Favre spoke about what he owed to Makaya, how he'd encouraged him to go his own way. There'd not been a hint of South African jazz that evening until Irène got up – she'd played a lot with Makaya, Louis Moholo and other drummers – and said: “So, let's finally hear some South African jazz”, and she sat down at the piano and played a wonderful duet with Makaya in Johnny Dyani's song “Appear”. Irène was never part of the “Jazz against apartheid” ensemble except in 2012 at the Gallus Theatre in Frankfurt, but she was very committed to it and was part of the struggle against apartheid herself.

**SR:** *Makaya was still to be seen cycling around Basel a few months ago but is now, as we speak, in hospital. He also used to be a boxer, tough as nails, and people say he possessed tremendous strength – and on the drums he demonstrated an incredible, polyrhythmic way of playing that has often been compared to Elvin Jones.*<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The US bassist Art Davis (1934–2007) studied at the Juilliard School and worked with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Max Roach and Dizzy Gillespie and orchestras such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He filed and lost a lawsuit against the New York Philharmonic after accusing it of refusing him a vacant position because he was Black. In the meantime, he had also studied clinical psychology, obtained his doctorate and was practising in Southern California.

<sup>31</sup> Gilbert Matthews (1943–2020) was a South African drummer who also worked with Johnny Dyani, Ray Charles, Sarah Vaughan, Archie Shepp and Roscoe Mitchell.

<sup>32</sup> “Honoring Makaya Ntshoko – Jam Session” took place on 16 December 2014 at the Bird's Eye jazz club in Basel (see [www.birdseye.ch/index.php?p=search&l=de&ptc=w](http://www.birdseye.ch/index.php?p=search&l=de&ptc=w))

<sup>33</sup> The drummer Elvin Jones (1927–2004) was the brother of the trumpeter Thad Jones and the pianist Hank Jones. He played with Bud Powell, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Charles Mingus and Charlie Parker and was hired by John Coltrane in 1960 for his quartet, of which he was a member

JL: He's already been very ill once before – in 2014, I think – and could barely walk. So we also hired Janusz Stefanski<sup>34</sup> to be on the safe side. The two of them already knew each other and shared the drum part. I thought Makaya might play one or two pieces, but in fact he played practically all the sets, even if it was very difficult for him at first. Janusz had done some work in ergonomics and got him a chair with a backrest. After that, Makaya started to feel better physically, and he recovered noticeably over the course of the week.

Two years later it was the other way round. Makaya was healthy again, while Janusz had been seriously ill with lung disease for quite some time but still wanted to be part of it, despite his acute pain. So the two drummers played together again. We all found the two drummers' joint performance immensely impressive and touching – and we all knew that it would probably be Janusz's last concert. He didn't make the trip to Basel because he had to go to the doctor every day. I brought the drum sets back on the Saturday and was told that he had to go to hospital two days later. He died a week after that. It was impressive how the two of them stuck together. They had a presence that was simply incredible: two great musicians, two refugees, two lives in exile.

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until 1965. He played on some of the most famous jazz albums of the time, most notably John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*.

<sup>34</sup> The Polish drummer Janusz Maria Stefanski (1946–2016) defected to the West at the end of a tour in 1981 and became a lecturer at both the Hochschule für Musik in Mainz and the Frankfurt Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst.

## 23 Interview with Barbara Pukwana

*Christian Steulet/Steff Rohrbach*

In 2019, Christian Steulet visited London to interview Barbara Pukwana, the widow of the great South African saxophonist Dudu Pukwana. Steulet recorded their conversation, and the below interview is a transcription edited after his death in 2020 by Steff Rohrbach.<sup>1</sup> A German version of this interview was published in September 2022 in *JAZZ'N'MORE*.<sup>2</sup>

The saxophonist Mtutuzeli “Dudu” Pukwana (1938–1990) was one of the most significant South African jazz musicians to go into exile. His Jazz Giants (which included Nik Moyake, Tete Mbambisa and Makaya Ntshoko) won first prize at the Johannesburg Jazz Festival in 1962. In 1964, Pukwana travelled to the Antibes Festival in France with the Blue Notes (comprising Pukwana, Chris McGregor, Mongezi Feza, Nik Moyake, Johnny Dyani and Louis Moholo). They afterwards played at the Café Africana, the jazz club in Zurich where numerous South African exiles began their international careers. Then they moved to London. Pukwana also played with McGregor’s subsequent ensemble, the Brotherhood of Breath, and with many of the other South African musicians around Hugh Masekela and Dollar Brand/Abdullah Ibrahim. He also played with the Johnny Dyani Quartet (including the “Song for Biko” with Don Cherry and Makaya Ntshoko) and on the album *Witchdoctor’s Son* (1978) with Dyani and John Tchicai. Pukwana further played with Keith Tippett, Mike Osborne, John Surman, Misha Mengelberg and Han Bennink and in the bands Spear (with John Stevens) and Zila (with Harry Beckett, Django Bates and the singer Pinise Saul).

Barbara Pukwana was born in Schaffhausen in 1942. She initially worked as a primary school teacher in Zurich while studying at the “Dolmetscherschule”, the Zurich school for interpreters. In order to complete an English diploma alongside diplomas in French and Italian, Barbara Pukwana moved to London not long after Dudu Pukwana had arrived there. He and Barbara had already met at the Café Africana in Zurich, and they now resumed their relationship, marrying several months later. They stayed in London, where Barbara worked as a translator at the Africa Centre and also taught foreign languages at a secondary school. She began working as a tour guide during the summer holidays, and later limited her teaching to the winter months. She continued working as a guide until 2020.

<sup>1</sup> This interview was translated by Chris Walton.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Steulet, ed. Steff Rohrbach, “‘Dudu’ Pukwana – Südafrikaner im Exil”, in *JAZZ'N'MORE* (September 2022), 58–60.



Figure 23.1. Barbara Pukwana in London, 2022.

**Christian Steulet:** *When did you discover South African jazz? Was it at the Café Africana in Zurich?*

**Barbara Pukwana:** Precisely that. I was teaching in Zurich at the time, and living just two houses away from the Café. An American pianist played on the afternoons, and in the evening it was Dollar Brand – who was not yet called Abdullah Ibrahim. That was my first encounter with African music, and it was absolutely great. I was dazzled by it, and often went to the Africana with my sister. We met people there – the Café was popular – and it became my second home. At some point, a new band came along and changed the whole scene. It was completely different, more turbulent: the Blue Notes from South Africa! That’s how it started, probably in 1964. I got to know the musicians, fell in love with Dudu Pukwana and immersed myself in that scene and their music. Many Swiss musicians were also fascinated by this music from South Africa.

**CS:** *Did you have any previous musical experience, or was this your first real encounter with music, and with jazz in particular?*

**BP:** I already knew some jazz, but it was more like pop music – music that was simply in fashion at the time. There was a jazz band at the institute where I was studying – Irène Schweizer was on drums. I knew her from Schaffhausen. In fact, we’d gone to the same school, and I was in the same class as her younger sister. It was with Irène that I first heard traditional jazz – on records with musicians whose names I don’t remember now. I was familiar with classical music, but seeing people play without music, and hearing them improvise: this was a different kind of music and it fascinated me, because it was created on the spot and never sounded exactly the same twice.

**CS:** *Did the “integration” of Chris McGregor and the Blue Notes in Zurich involve people beyond the “family” circle at the Café Africana?*

**BP:** They didn’t mix much with other musicians. But there were people who were interested in their music because it was something new, completely different from everything that had gone before. People in Zurich knew names like Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, but not South Africans like the Blue Notes. The invitation to the Antibes Festival had

given them the opportunity to acquire passports in South Africa and leave the country. They had to provide a surety to guarantee that they'd return, and they naturally lost that when they stayed in Europe. They got gigs here, though without being famous yet. Abdullah Ibrahim was meanwhile living in London, and arranged for them go there too. Chris McGregor's wife Maxine also worked there and had connections. The Blue Notes went to London after an invitation to Ronnie Scott's – and then they stayed.



*Figure 23.2. The Blue Notes in Zurich, mid-1960s. From left to right: Louis Moholo, Dudu Pukwana, Chris McGregor, Mongezi Feza, Johnny Dyani. Dudu Pukwana wore the same suit at his marriage to Barbara. Photo courtesy of Barbara Pukwana.*

*CS: Did you follow Dudu Pukwana and the band to London?*

**BP:** It was weird: We had only known each other for a few months. I was at the interpreters' college in Zurich and I had to improve my English in London in preparation for my exams. I was also working as a teacher, and when the school year finished, I went off to spend a year in London with a girlfriend. We didn't have mobile phones back then, and Dudu and I had lost contact. My first job was in Sussex. One free weekend, I went to London and saw a concert advertisement for: "Chris McGregor and the Blue Notes". So I went, and my relationship with Dudu continued. After passing my English exams, I stayed in London. Because I also spoke French, I was able to find a job at the Africa Centre. I was able to see the Blue Notes wherever they played. Dudu and I got married one year after that.

*CS: And you got more and more involved in the music business, is that right?*

**BP:** Not right away, because Maxine McGregor and Hazel Miller organised their tours, and I'd started teaching again. When Chris McGregor moved to France, the band played less often and its musicians started forming their own bands. Johnny Dyani focused more on Sweden and Denmark, where the Blue Notes had previously had a three-month engagement. They played completely differently when they came back: totally free jazz. At first I found it terrible, but I got used to it. Dudu had also decided to form his own band, and Johnny Dyani encouraged me to start booking their gigs. Later, I organised one or two tours for the Brotherhood of Breath.

*CS: Was there a rational explanation for their shift to free jazz? Were there any signs of that development back at the Café Africana?*

**BP:** Their music was already very improvisational. But I suspect that it was the impact of their three months in Denmark. And they also had an audience for that music back in London.

*CS: Hazel Miller and others have emphasised the role that the Blue Notes played in revitalising the European jazz scene. Would you agree with them?*

**BP:** Yes. Hazel's husband, Harry Miller, was playing in different groups like they all did. Dudu, for example, also played with folk bands and other bands of all kinds, including Osibisa.<sup>3</sup> He could play with all of them. There was a constant dialogue between different musicians with different ideas and from all manner of backgrounds. In 1965, John Jack took over Ronnie Scott's old venue on Gerrard Street when the club moved into bigger premises. After that the scene switched to the 100 Club on Oxford Street, where the Blue Notes often played, and where I booked most of their performances. The concerts there were sold out every night. The Blue Notes never played at the new Ronnie Scott's.

*CS: These were years when stylistic boundaries fell away.*

**BP:** When I wanted to place concert advertisements in *Melody Maker*, we had to decide whether to call the music of the Blue Notes jazz or rock. The manager at *Melody Maker* insisted on

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<sup>3</sup> An Afro-pop band formed in 1969 in London by several expatriate West African and Caribbean musicians.

“rock” because they didn’t play what was usually considered jazz. Their music was fertilised by other sources, and its musicians gradually decided to realise their own ideas and leave the band. Johnny Dyani created an important scene in Scandinavia. Dudu often went there to record, and Johnny also came to London. Abdullah Ibrahim also often recorded up there in the North, though he lived in London, Paris and the USA.

**CS:** *And Mongezi Feza worked with Robert Wyatt, especially on that wonderful album Rock Bottom, along with Fred Frith, Gary Windo and others.*

**BP:** That’s right. They were all invited. Louis Moholo toured the USA; they travelled a lot there and played with different artists. Dudu also often performed in Holland with Misha Mengelberg and Han Bennink.

**CS:** *Were there any problems integrating in London? The English Musicians’ Union was very protectionist.*

**BP:** The members of the Blue Notes had naturally been compelled to join the Union. When we wanted to work in the USA with local musicians, issues arose regarding travel and work permits. The USA has always been difficult in that respect. Dudu was invited by Abdullah Ibrahim, Jonas Gwangwa and Hugh Masekela and stayed over there for several months for recordings and concerts. It was agreed that the same number of musicians from each country would be allowed to perform in both places. You had to insist on that. I can’t remember exactly, but I’m sure that was organised through the Musicians’ Union.

**CS:** *Did the Blue Notes acquire British nationality, or did they remain stateless?*

**BP:** Initially, they were foreign immigrants without any documents. Later, they were given the choice of becoming British or remaining South African. Louis Moholo remained a South African, but everyone else wanted a British passport. After that it was wonderful, because they were able to travel and didn’t need any more permits.

**CS:** *When did you become a concert promoter?*

**BP:** We made a lot of recordings with the BBC. When Johnny Dyani came to London, I’d call the BBC. After a recording in 1980, Johnny said: “Why don’t you organise other concerts too?” After a concert that Dudu and his band gave in 1982, we decided to take their music to more festivals. So I organised one tour every year. I also got in touch with Gaby Kleinschmidt, who was willing to organise gigs. I didn’t really have time for that, as I was working as a tour guide. I had time off in the winter, but was completely booked out in the summer.

**CS:** *When the Blue Notes and Dudu were in exile, what was their relationship to South Africa? Were they politically active, did they want to return, or was that a closed chapter to them?*

**BP:** The chapter wasn’t closed because they’d left their families there. Dudu’s parents, brothers, sisters and friends were still in South Africa! But he only went back once, to promote a record. They kept in contact by phone and by letter. And when South African musicians came to London, we’d meet them and invite them. I can’t say that Dudu really wanted to go back, because



he knew it wasn't right for him or for his work. But he always kept very close ties. Many South African politicians and artists came to London to visit, or for a tour or an exhibition. There were concerts to help support the ANC, and at New Year there'd be a ball with a party. The ANC itself organised an annual meeting in Amsterdam or Rotterdam and would invite exiled South African musicians and artists to attend. We'd spend a week there each time. It was wonderful to be with everyone, and there were a lot of South African musicians living in Holland. There was also an annual festival for contemporary music in Berlin where Dudu played almost every year. They'd invite a whole number of artists who'd then play in a different line-up each day, with every concert completely different from the one before.

*CS: So there was a proper international network of exiles. Did any South African artists who'd come to London ever return to South Africa?*



*Figure 23.3. Dudu Pukwana, 1980s. Courtesy of Barbara Pukwana.*

**BP:** Many of them just stayed. Some had arrived before the Blue Notes – such as those who came to put on the musical *King Kong*. There was a large South African community here, and London offered many opportunities. Back then, the ANC organised a lot of events and we had some very good friends among the ANC politicians. When they came, they visited Dudu. They were real friends, not just politicians who wanted to stand out from the crowd. It was a true community that really stuck together.

**CS:** *Are there any direct political messages in Dudu's music?*

**BP:** No, nothing direct. But when he talked about the topic in interviews, for example, he always pointed out the difficulties that musicians experienced in South Africa. His music itself was more an act of reflection on his actual life experiences.

**CS:** *Is this why he developed the way he did – because he was searching for the South African heritage that he missed in exile, and which he was trying to conjure up by looking back?*

**BP:** Exactly.

**CS:** *How long did Dudu remain active as a musician?*

**BP:** His last gig was at Wembley Stadium [on 16 April] 1990, for Nelson Mandela's first visit after his release from prison. After that, he went on tour to Germany with Chris McGregor. He took ill there and had to go to hospital. He came back later, but had to go to hospital several times. He died on 28 June 1990.

**CS:** *What changed for you when the apartheid regime ended?*

**BP:** Not a lot. I went to a conference in Durban of our international tour guide association and stayed almost two months in South Africa. I visited Dudu's family and also met other people who'd known him. At the start of my stay, I went travelling with Louis Moholo and his wife Mpumi. We visited the graves of various musicians and also saw Johnny Dyani's family. Dudu's brother had come to London for the funeral, and I then spent ten days in Port Elizabeth with him and his family. Well, to be precise, I stayed with a doctor because everyone said it was too dangerous to stay in the Black area. But I went to see them almost every day, and all the members of his family who lived in the city were invited too. I then went to Johannesburg to meet other members of Dudu's family, travelling there with a friend from Cape Town who was acquainted with the jazz scene there and knew Abdullah Ibrahim very well. I spoke to musicians who'd played with Dudu, and I filmed everything. When we were in Johannesburg, we stayed with Chris McGregor's brother.

**CS:** *Hazel Miller told me about a small tour that Harry Miller made to South Africa in the early 1970s. Did you never organise a tour there with Dudu?*

**BP:** Not in South Africa. I did organise a tour to several countries, visiting Mozambique for the anniversary of its independence, then travelling to Swaziland, then to Gaborone in Botswana, where Jonas Gwangwa had set up a great music scene. We stayed there for a week and also played in Francistown [in northern Botswana], returning to London via Zimbabwe. Then

Dudu, Johnny Dyani and other musicians from London played at “FESTAC ’77: The 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture” that took place in Lagos in Nigeria. The musicians there came from all over the world, and Dudu stayed for a month.

*CS: So you yourself have lived in a world somewhere between worlds ...*

**BP:** My world was the world of teaching and of tourism – with one foot in African literature and politics. At the Africa Centre, where I worked, they organised symposia that were attended by politicians, some of whom I got to know. They included the later President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. The rebels would then present their ideas. I got an idea of what Africa was like during the wars of independence. I was there to translate, and stayed in contact with them all for a long time. But at some point, the way changed in which the centre was being used.

*CS: How important were the wives of these musicians who were in exile?*

**BP:** I don’t know a single musician who could exist without his wife. Musicians need people who believe in them and who can support them. There are only a few big stars, and the others have a very irregular income. But they need a stable basis in life – that’s important. I have both feet on the ground, but artists have everything in their head, and their head is in the clouds. I paid for things when we had a gap in our finances, and I helped to support the tours when they otherwise wouldn’t have got off the ground. And the same was true of Hazel Miller and Maxine McGregor.

## 24 Interview with John Wolf Brennan

*Christian Steulet, ed. Steff Rohrbach*

John Wolf Brennan was born in Dublin in 1954 to a Swiss father and an Irish mother and moved with them at the age of seven to Central Switzerland. He studied music and musicology in Lucerne, Fribourg, Bern and Dublin and has been active as a composer and performer across the boundaries of classical, jazz, rock and other music for many decades. Christian Steulet interviewed him in 2019 about the impact on his life and career of hearing Chris McGregor and his band Brotherhood of Breath in 1973. After Christian's death in May 2020, Steff Rohrbach edited this interview and prepared it for publication in collaboration with Wolf Brennan. It was initially published in German in the magazine *JAZZ'N'MORE*.<sup>1</sup>

**Christian Steulet:** *When did you first become acquainted with music from South Africa?*

**John Wolf Brennan:** My first conscious encounter with African music was in 1973, in the Mohrensaal in Willisau, at a concert that was later released on Harry Miller's Ogun label as the first live recording from Willisau. Harry was the bass player in a wild, anarchic bunch of South African musicians living in exile in London, most of them from Johannesburg, under the "direction" of Chris McGregor. The band name alone is incredible: "Brotherhood of Breath". This concert was and remains legendary – for all kinds of reasons. Willisau had already made a name for itself as the Mecca of new jazz, the classical American music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And here came a group from the continent where Black American musicians have their roots: a band that played jazz but also an early form of world music.

**CS:** *What was special about their music?*

**JWB:** At first it seemed like total chaos, free jazz! My second impression, however, was that there were definitely regulatory elements in all this chaos – though it initially remained a mystery to me how these elements worked. I was 19 years old and thought I knew a bit about music. My musical socialisation had taken place through rock, classical, and Irish folk music. I was totally fascinated and felt like a scientist who has suddenly discovered his exploring gene, someone who can track secret signs. Some kind of communication system had to exist, but I didn't have a clue about it, let alone how it could result in such funky music.

**CS:** *Brotherhood of Breath wasn't a purely South African band.*

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This interview was translated by Chris Walton.

<sup>1</sup> Christian Steulet, ed. Steff Rohrbach: "Interview. John Wolf Brennan und Brotherhood of Breath", in *JAZZ'N'MORE* 4 (April 2021), 22–24.



*Figure 24.1. John Wolf Brennan on Elba. Photo by Dario Britschgi.*

**JWB:** It was clear to us that this music wouldn't have been possible in Johannesburg. It had emerged in exile, in the capital of the last colonial power, of all places. That just added to its topicality. Together with friends from London, a handful of South African musicians had developed a common vision and had created this incredible sound. It reinforced my feeling that any boundaries between "Black" and "white" music must be artificial, post-colonial, culturally acquired – and that social barriers could be overcome by making music together.

**CS:** *And these barriers dissolved in Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath?*

**JWB:** That's how it seemed in any case. The Willisau concert was a happening. Everything was open, and I was especially pleased that people were dancing to the music! Normally, jazz audiences were strict in this regard, being of the opinion that we were listening to art being created, and you ought to devote your reverent attention to it! Dancing was way down on their value scale. But for someone who'd been socialised through rock like me, movement was automatically part and parcel of music.

**CS:** *What impact did this Willisau concert have on you?*

**JWB:** The concert lasted a good two hours and offered everything that was important to me in music. It turned my life completely upside-down. I'd begun playing the piano relatively late, at 11, and I wouldn't have dared to consider becoming a professional musician back then. I started to study musicology at the Catholic University in Fribourg at 21, focussing on the 18th century. The university was conservative – the building we were in is still called "Miséricorde" ("mercy") to this day. It was only after finishing my studies, at the age of 25, that I went to the Conservatory in Lucerne. I'd already attended the Jazz School in Bern, but it was only now that I had the confidence to pursue a career in music. It was a seed that had been planted at that Brotherhood concert.

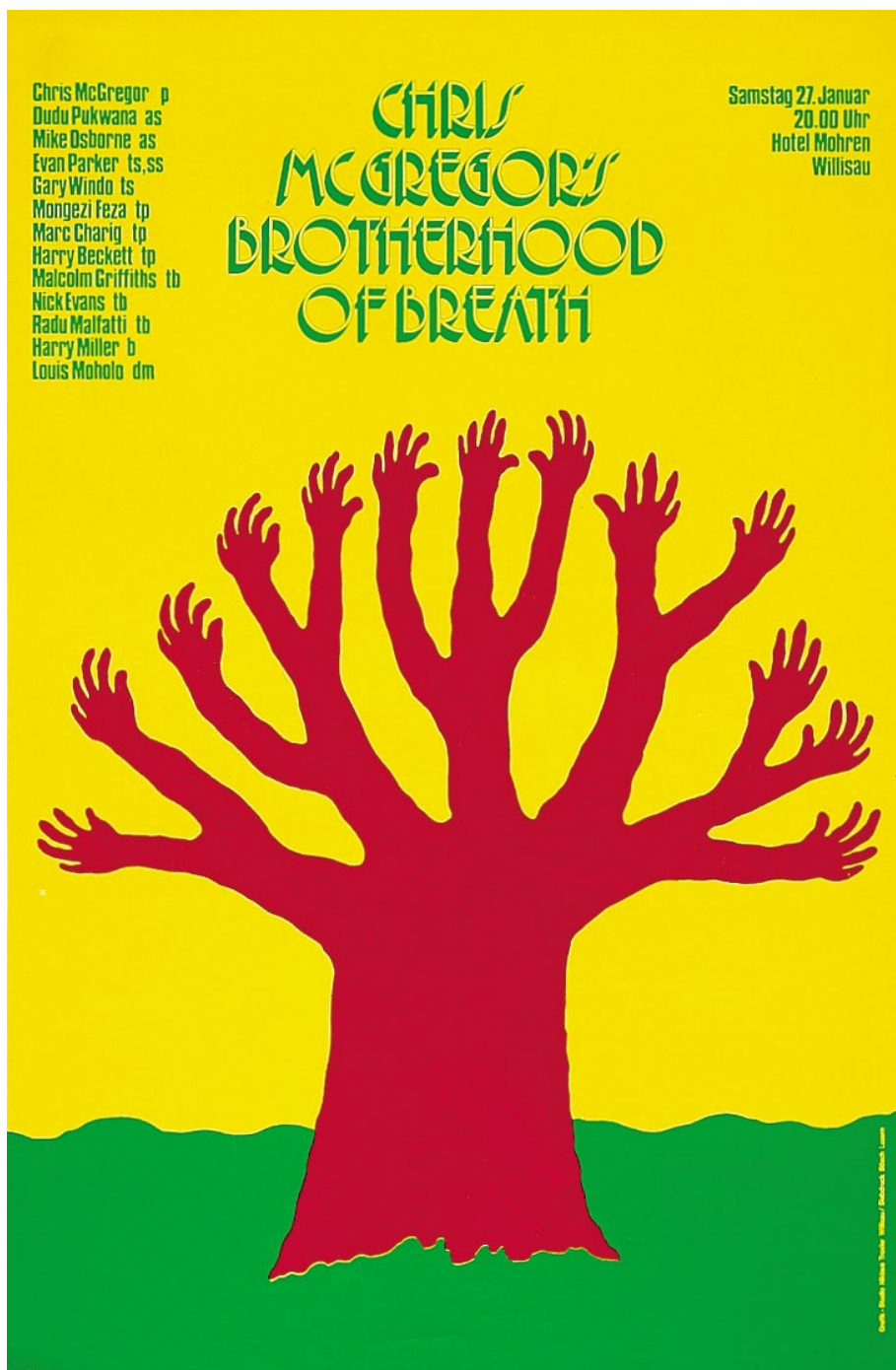


Figure 24.2. Niklaus Troxler's poster for the 1973 concert of the Brotherhood of Breath at the Mohren in Willisau. Courtesy of Niklaus Troxler.



*CS: How did the big band “Mohrenkopf” come about – a name that is obviously regarded today as discriminatory?*

**JWB:** The name was still completely unproblematic at the time. It was connected to the Gasthof zum Mohren in Willisau, the “Möhren”, as the locals call it.<sup>2</sup> Some of the later band members had probably attended the Brotherhood concert. Everyone seemed dumbstruck by this music. It overwhelmed us like a volcano – it was a turning point in the lives of many of us. From then on, we listened to music differently. We became more aware of what was happening in the music. Another point of departure was the Lucerne Carnival (the “Fasnacht”) – but there again, is there anything in Lucerne that doesn’t somehow go back to the Carnival?

*CS: Who played in the big band, and what was your instrumental line-up?*

**JWB:** We were 15 or 16 people, with no fewer than eight saxophonists (René Widmer, Peter Landis, Roli X, Ruedi Bieri, Beat Bieri, Edi Imhof, Beat Grüter, Res Herzog), two trumpet players (Peter Schärli and Peter Leimgruber – the latter being the brother of my later duo partner Urs Leimgruber), the trombonist Teddy Hochstrasser, a guy for the harmonies on the piano (me), Mark Albisser on double bass and three drummers: Fausto Medici, Peter Lengacher and Dave Doran. The band’s secondary name was “Afro-Sponti-Jazz in gäbiger 15-Packung” [“Afro spontaneous jazz in a convenient 15-pack”].<sup>3</sup> We rehearsed every week in the Sedel, Lucerne’s former prison building near the Rotsee lake, and we played at almost all the left-wing festivals. If memory serves, we played together for three or four years. This big group broke up after that.

*CS: You could have carried on with a reduced line-up ...*

**JWB:** Sure, and that’s exactly what happened in my life. The way things developed, I got involved in smaller groups. “Impetus” was a quintet with violin – an instrument that utterly fascinated me, and that still plays an important role in our ensemble Pago Libre today – and recorder. That was naturally a bit strange at the time. And then we had the idea of making chamber music, playing very quiet pieces. As I said, we had three percussionists in Mohrenkopf. When I later played with Marco Käppeli, I realised that one drummer is enough if he can play polyrhythms. But there was ultimately nothing teleological about these developments. They weren’t part of any grand life-plan.

*CS: What remains for you today from your experiences with Mohrenkopf?*

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<sup>2</sup> The Gasthof zum Mohren (the “moor’s inn”) on Mohrenplatz (“moor’s square”) in Willisau dates back to 1574, according to its own website (<https://gasthof-mohren.ch/>, accessed June 2024). The designation has its equivalent in many pub names across England; the movement to change these names has recently gained strength in the English-speaking world and Germany (see, for example, <https://www.stern.de/panorama/themen/mohrenkopf-6882282.html>, accessed June 2024). “Mohrenkopf” (“moor’s head”) was until recently also the accepted name in German-speaking countries for what in English are generally known as “chocolate marshmallows”. Most manufacturers have since renamed their product, given that it is today generally acknowledged as discriminatory. But some chocolatiers in Switzerland retain the name to this day.

<sup>3</sup> “Sponti” was a term used in German-speaking countries in the post-1968 era to designate left-leaning, otherwise unaligned groups given to “spontaneous” political activities.



**JWB:** To prepare for our conversation, I listened to tapes of old recordings and was amazed myself. Despite all the developments of the past 30 years, there's already a surprising number of recognisable characteristics in my music. For example, "Treib", one of my pieces from back then, starts with a riff that could perhaps have come out of rock music. Then in its second part it changes into a seven-beat metre – a metre that you repeatedly find again later in *Pago Libre*. It was like a key. On the surface, this kind of African music has just three or four harmonies and a continuous pulse. But if you delve a bit deeper into the material, you realise that there's a lot more happening rhythmically than just four crotchets in a bar. Sometimes you can feel odd-numbered beats in it, maybe five plus three instead of four plus four. Then it becomes much more interesting. Or seven plus five, which gives you 12. I discovered many ideas like that when listening to Mohrenkopf again. I hadn't been aware of that with *Pago Libre*. Literature was repeatedly a source of inspiration – Wolf Biermann<sup>4</sup> and others. Literary texts and music for the theatre have influenced my harmonic, melodic and rhythmic thinking.

**CS:** *Did you try and establish any direct contact with Chris McGregor's musicians?*

**JWB:** Not straightaway. I wanted to make similar music, but it took six or seven years before I had the courage to take it onto the stage. Years later, in 1997, I spent half a year in London's East End on a scholarship from the cultural foundation Landis & Gyr of Canton Zug. There I had the pleasure of playing with musicians who'd also been part of the Brotherhood, such as Evan Parker and Elton Dean. There's a funny story about the latter that's not widely known. Elton Dean was playing back then in Bluesology, the regular band of the blues singer Long John Baldry (who in turn had started out with Alexis Korner, Rod Stewart as the singer, Jack Bruce on bass and Ginger Baker on drums). The pianist of Bluesology was a certain Reginald Dwight, who chose his stage name in honour of Elton Dean and John Baldry and thereafter became famous as Elton John. The English metropolis was an incredible hotspot!

During my time in London, I played in the band HeXtet with the trombonist Paul Rutherford and the singer Julie Driscoll (the same who later married Keith Tippett), along with the saxophonist Peter Whyman and Chris Cutler on drums. Cutler became really well known with the avant-garde rock bands Henry Cow and Art Bears and as an initiator of the "Rock in Opposition" movement. In the sextet, we set poems by Edgar Allan Poe, Paula Meehan, Theo Dorgan and others, playing them live and then recording them for Leo Records on the album *Through the Ear of a Raindrop*, which is now out of print.

Back then, we talked a lot about the Brotherhood of Breath because everyone had somehow been influenced by it. The South Africans in exile in London created something like Harlem in New York: a humus, a biotope for creative music.

**CS:** *It just took a few years for the seed to sprout ...*

**JWB:** Well, I was naturally making music before and after my studies.

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<sup>4</sup> Wolf Biermann (born 1936), German singer-songwriter and poet. Born in Hamburg, he became a convinced socialist in his teens and moved to communist East Germany at the age of 15. His political writings and songs led to his being banned and in 1976 to his expulsion to the West, where he continued his political activism.

*CS: What does your musical biography look like, then?*

**JWB:** My background undoubtedly provided formative experiences. My mother was a classical singer who always sang three Irish folk songs as an encore at the end of her concerts. My father was a very good amateur classical pianist who ran the Hotel Albana in Weggis on Lake Lucerne and could play anything – Beethoven, Bach, Chopin. I completely reacted against that canon and saw myself taking a different direction. But I always took pleasure in composing and in the architecture of a great string quartet or a moving symphony.

I had different hearts, so to speak. Sure, there was the impact of the Brotherhood of Breath and of improvised music. But I was also fascinated by rock music, and in the early 1970s I was into prog rock with its complex structures and irregular metres. But that was a cul-de-sac: if every bar is constructed differently, then the music doesn't allow you any freedom, and I wanted to improvise.

After listening to Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath, I wanted to free myself from pop. So I set up the free jazz duo "Freemprovisation" together with Peter Schärli, a friend of mine from the Swiss Jazz School in Bern. We played a lot in this duo – firmly believing that we'd have failed to do the right thing if there was anyone left in the audience at the end of a concert. It was a pretty élitist, arrogant attitude, though it was an act of "self-liberation". But my journey was taking me in the direction of jazz, and I now began to study it: John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Miles Davis, then further back in time. Jazz history was a jigsaw puzzle to me that gradually came together, enabling me to place the Brotherhood of Breath in a larger context. I was able to investigate where and how the music of different cultures can cross-fertilise and where it can't, what can emerge when this happens, and what might perhaps flow back again into the mix.

*CS: What was the Brotherhood's impact on your own creative work?*

**JWB:** I founded the quintet "Impetus" in 1979. You can hear in it how the "Afro virus" had developed in me. I began to search for a new combination of classical chamber music, jazz rhythms and folk music, which I later perfected with Pago Libre. That's how I found my musical identity. Looking back, however, a lot of the Brotherhood's polyrhythms remained. Mohrenkopf might have had three drummers and Pago Libre none, but an American music critic was quite right when he wrote that "Pago Libre has no drummer, but in fact they have four percussionists!" In Pago Libre – a drumless quartet – we took rhythmic playing to such extremes that you barely miss the absence of drums. My polyrhythmic experience is manifested there in how a piece can be heard simultaneously as comprising very simple rhythms while also possessing mixed forms that arise out of them.

It's only in retrospect that you hear connections that are "quasi subterranean". When I think back, the continuity in my work is obvious to me – it's the sap that flows through the roots and branches. I'm much more aware of this confluence today than I used to be then.

*CS: Besides what we've already discussed, do you see any further significance in African music?*

**JWB:** If you analyse its patterns in purely harmonic terms, there's usually not much left. It's like doing a harmonic analysis of "I Can't Get No Satisfaction" by The Rolling Stones: in the end, you'll have two chords, but getting to them means you miss the most important things.

Up to and including Dollar Brand, as Abdullah Ibrahim used to be known, African music often had a maximum of three harmonic steps – maybe four. But that's of secondary importance and in fact inessential. The spirit is what counts – what you can hear "between the lines", and the polyrhythmic structure beneath it always plays a role, no matter how simple the chords might be. What counts is the melodic aspect: the melodies that enter your ear and get stuck in your brain. That's the hallmark of this music – and when it came together with anarchic free jazz, the mixture was one I found incredibly fascinating!

**CS:** *Finally, can you sum up the fascination that Africa exerts on us?*

**JWB:** I can offer you a little anecdote to illustrate something of this. Back in 2001, the anti-poverty charity Caritas Schweiz was celebrating its 100th anniversary at the KKL Hall in Lucerne. Two ballet companies were performing: the Zurich Ballet under its director Heinz Spoerli, and Moving Into Dance, a company from Johannesburg in South Africa. The Zurich dancers were utterly perfect and virtuosic and seemed neither male nor female, but androgynous. You could just about believe they were no longer connected to the Earth – they were almost floating. Then came this South African company with fireworks, power and charisma – almost like the Brotherhood. I noticed that the dancers kept touching the floor with one hand, over and over again. Later, I had the opportunity to ask the head of the South African company what the gesture meant. He looked at me wide-eyed and said: "This is our thanks to Mother Earth! After all, it's she who carries us". I suddenly realised that there was a substantial cultural difference here: on the one hand, you had a very European striving to escape the Earth, to break open boundaries, in a virtuoso, internalised, almost disembodied fashion – and then, in complete contrast, there were the Africans who were saying "Hello! We're standing here with gratitude, deeply connected to Mother Earth who bears us. We are, and we dance down to Earth!". I think that's also the force that inspired us back then to form Mohrenkopf.

## 25 Interview with Niklaus Troxler

*Steff Rohrbach*

“A painting is music you can see, and music is a painting you can hear” – thus runs the saying generally attributed to the trumpeter Miles Davis (who also painted, as it happens).<sup>1</sup> Jackson Pollock also reputedly listened to jazz as he created his Abstract Expressionist canvases, drip by drip and beat by beat, so to speak.<sup>2</sup> The connections between the visual arts and jazz could be extended almost indefinitely. In Switzerland, these two art forms have come together most notably in the person of Niklaus Troxler,<sup>3</sup> a renowned graphic designer who has received numerous awards and whose works feature in the world’s preeminent collections, from the Museums of Modern Art in New York and Toyama in Japan to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the museums of Hamburg, Essen and Zurich. Known in the scene as “Knox”, he was born in Willisau in Canton Lucerne in 1947, studied at the School of Design in Lucerne, worked as an art director in Paris in 1971/72 and then set up his own studio back home in Willisau. From 1998 to 2013, he was also a professor of communication design at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart. But the development of Troxler’s unmistakable graphic style was arguably a result of his second passion: jazz. Knox began organising jazz concerts in 1966 and in 1975 founded the Willisau Jazz Festival, whose director he remained until 2009. Thanks to Knox, Willisau was one of the first and most important venues for the South African jazz exiles who visited Switzerland from the 1960s onwards. Ample documentary proof of his activity as both artist and jazz entrepreneur is to be found in the 700 pages and 800 illustrations of the weighty tome *Niklaus Troxler – Willisau and All That Jazz 1966–2013*, published in 2013.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Knox was one of the first concert organisers in the northern hemisphere to engage the finest South African jazz musicians, from the pianist Abdullah Ibrahim – who remains “Dollar Brand” for Knox

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, [Miles Davis Estate]: “Montreal Museum Pays Homage To The Magic of Miles Davis” at [www.milesdavis.com/news/montreal-museum-pays-homage-to-the-magic-of-miles-davis/](http://www.milesdavis.com/news/montreal-museum-pays-homage-to-the-magic-of-miles-davis/) (accessed January 2025).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, The Museum of Modern Art: “Jackson Pollock. One: Number 31, 1950. 1950”, at [www.moma.org/audio/playlist/289/142](http://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/289/142) (accessed January 2025).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.troxlerart.ch/news](http://www.troxlerart.ch/news) (accessed January 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Edited by Olivier Senn and Niklaus Troxler. Lucerne & Bern: Hochschule Luzern – Musik, Till Schaap Edition, 2013.

and many others in Switzerland – to the saxophonist Zim Ngqawana, Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath and many more.

Knox and his wife Ems live variously in Willisau and Berlin. His older brother Walter – another jazz enthusiast – also lives in Willisau, while Knox’s nephew, the jazz drummer Arno Troxler, took over the management of the Festival in 2010. The following interview with Knox took place in Willisau, a somewhat dreamy, tranquil and seemingly provincial town whose festival hall has been transformed into a world jazz stage every August since 1975.



Figure 25.1. Niklaus Troxler.

**Steff Rohrbach:** *Knox, how did you come to organise jazz concerts?*

**Niklaus Troxler:** I used to go to the “Jazz in der Aula” concerts from an early age that Arild Widerøe organised for several years in Baden in Canton Aargau. He was a native Norwegian who returned to Baden after his military service in 1961.<sup>5</sup> He organised swing and bebop concerts, big events, and also brought his compatriot Jan Garbarek along, early on. He frequently

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Rub, “‘...if it ain’t got that swing’: 30 Jahre ‘Jazz in der Aula’”, in *Badener Neujahrsblätter*, 69 (1994), 85–94.

engaged Henri Chaix<sup>6</sup> with his trio from Geneva. They accompanied soloists such as Benny Carter, Lucky Thompson and Ben Webster.

One of my early key experiences was a big double concert in Lucerne. In the first part, Oscar “Papa” Celestin<sup>7</sup> played with his New Orleans Band. They were all around 70 or 80 years old. And the second part featured Sister Rosetta Tharpe<sup>8</sup> – a really great gospel and blues singer who was a reference point for many rock musicians, and who is said to have been one of the originators of rock music itself.

*SR: Is it right that you studied in Lucerne and then worked in Paris at a time when you were already organising concerts in Willisau?*

*NT:* Exactly – and quite a lot of concerts, too. I made the right contacts in Paris. I heard Keith Jarrett with Miles Davis there and hired Jarrett for Willisau. The same thing happened with Chick Corea in 1972. I wanted to come back to Willisau because of Ems anyway, whom I later married. I briefly thought about staying in Paris because there were lots of good concerts going on. But I wanted to work for myself and not as an employee of anyone else – and I wanted to organise jazz concerts: in Willisau! That was how it all started.

*SR: This brings us to how you began working with South African musicians. Dollar Brand was the first one you engaged?*

*NT:* I brought him to Willisau early on, in 1972, even before the first actual Willisau Festival and before the Brotherhood of Breath – they only played in Willisau in 1973. But I had already engaged Irène Schweizer with Makaya Ntshoko in 1971. The concert was called “Makaya meets Irène Schweizer” and featured Jürg Grau (trumpet and guitar), Irène Schweizer (piano), Peter K. Frey (bass) and Makaya (drums). That was Irène’s wish, she really wanted to meet Makaya and put together a group with him. It was important to her. [Troxler points to photos in the Willisau book mentioned above] There’s Makaya, he was a young lad back then. But I had already engaged Irène before that concert, back in 1968, in a trio with Pierre Favre and Jiří (George) Mráz.<sup>9</sup> And she came back the following year, 1969, with Evan Parker and the Pierre Favre Trio, with Peter Kowald on bass. And in 1970 she played in the John Tchicai Trio, also with Pierre Favre on drums.

*SR: Did you already know Makaya in 1971?*

*NT:* Yes, through Dollar, because I’d naturally also gone to the Africana Club in Zurich where they’d played in 1962/63.

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<sup>6</sup> Henri Chaix (1925–1999), Swiss pianist, arranger and orchestral conductor who studied at the Conservatoire de musique de Genève. See <https://swissjazzorama.ch/index.php?id=314>, accessed October 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Phillip “Papa” Celestin (1884–1994), American pioneer of New Orleans jazz.

<sup>8</sup> Rosetta Tharpe, born Rosetta Nubin (1915–1973), American gospel, jazz and blues singer and guitarist who adopted the name “Sister Rosetta Tharpe” in 1944.

<sup>9</sup> Jiří (George) Mráz (1944–2021), Czech bassist, emigrated to the USA in 1968 and only returned to Prague in 1990.

SR: *That was where their trio was discovered by Duke Ellington, along with Dollar's girlfriend at the time, Sathima Bea Benjamin. It was later rumoured that Ellington had his eye on Benjamin.*

NT: That's easy to imagine. She was always there with Dollar, usually to sing a little number.

SR: *I heard her with Dollar Brand in 1995 when she came on stage for a song, maybe two. She sounded quite fragile.*

NT: He'd get her to sing, though not for us. I always wondered: When will she come on stage? But she never came.

SR: *Not even when she was on the line-up for their second concert, in 1974?*

NT: She was always there, but she didn't sing. The first time, in 1972, I actually wanted Dollar Brand to play solo and announced the concert thus in the programme. Then he called me and said they were coming as a trio, with Carlos Ward<sup>10</sup> and Billy Higgins. That wasn't the right way to do things. And then he only turned up with Carlos Ward anyway. In fact, they were a wonderful duo. It wasn't like later, when he'd bring his musicians to the front then send them back again. There was just this wonderful duo on stage. Dollar was already playing solos at the time, but both of them were on the same level and were a really great duo.

SR: *In 1972, on the album Dollar Brand's African Space Program with Sathima Bea Benjamin (vocals), Roland Alexander (tenor saxophone, percussion), Carlos Ward (alto saxophone), Joe Gardner (trumpet), Johnny Dyani (bass), Roy Brooks (drums) and Joe Malinga (flute and percussion), Dollar not only played piano, but also the soprano saxophone and flute.*

NT: That's right, he didn't just play the piano. Bea was in the line-up with us, but she didn't come on stage and didn't sing.

SR: *I've tried in vain to contact Dollar but was sent two refusals, probably by his wife. I invited the 86-year-old Six Trutt and his son Daniel to a concert that Abdullah Ibrahim gave at the Culture and Convention Centre Lucerne (KKL) in spring 2024 (entitled "Solo & Ekaya") as I wanted the two old men to see each other again. Dollar was known to have spent a lot of time at the Trutt family home in Ichertswil. Six has since died.*

NT: What, Dollar played at the KKL? I hadn't realised that! But yes, I occasionally visited Six at home on a Sunday, and Dollar was there several times. It was brilliant!

Makaya didn't think much of Dollar anymore, and when he used to drink he would even swear at Dollar. I've been deeply troubled by Dollar's behaviour, especially when he's on his ego trip and treats his musicians so appallingly. If he only played solo, I might want to hear him. But back in the day with Six, that was something! And back in the old church in Boswil!

SR: *He also made an album in Boswil.<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Carlos Ward (born 1940), American saxophonist, flautist and composer.

<sup>11</sup> Abdullah Ibrahim | Dollar Brand | Boswil Concert 1973 featuring Bea Benjamin, see <https://abdul->



NT: Before that, he'd not been in the area for quite a while. I think he'd gone back to South Africa.

SR: *According to the biography on his homepage,<sup>12</sup> he and Benjamin married and went to the USA in 1965. At some point – probably much later – they lived in the famous Chelsea Hotel in New York. But he apparently travelled back to Cape Town in 1968, later lived in Swaziland (today eSwatini) and then Cape Town again before moving to the USA.*

NT: Either way, he hadn't been heard in Europe for a long time – though it may have seemed longer to me because I was still young. I was attending the School of Arts and Crafts in Lucerne at the time. And it was there, in around 1969/70, that Thys Flüeler organised a concert with him in the hall of the Union Hotel. Thys had heard him somewhere beforehand and then engaged him. Only insiders knew about it. I advertised it throughout the arts and crafts school. It was a sensation for us, a wonderful concert – just like his solo record at the time, simply marvellous! I made sure that I could get hold of him, just like I always did, because I was already organising concerts. That's how it came about for us. He wasn't on tour, it was his only concert in Switzerland and it was such a hit! He didn't have a big audience yet, but insiders knew about him. There was his solo record, his trio's record produced by Ellington, and *Anatomy of a South African Village*,<sup>13</sup> the record that I still love hearing, and which I find as incredible as the first time I heard it. It's since been re-released several times by different labels. Makaya and Johnny Gertze are also on it.

SR: *What was your relationship like with Dollar Brand back then?*

NT: I had a good relationship with Dollar, absolutely. I always called him Dollar when he rang on the phone. "Hey, Dollar", I'd say. "Don't call me Dollar!" he'd respond. But then I'd reply that I knew why, because he loved the dollar – I always made a joke out of it.

SR: *He's also still "Dollar" for the Trutt family ...*

NT: ... of course! But he always spoke well of me – even when I turned him down when he wanted to play in Willisau and I had to tell him that I wasn't interested. People have told me that he used to rave about Willisau elsewhere. Even despite his not being on the programme very often.

SR: *He played in Willisau just four times.*

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[lahibrahim.co.za/record/dollar-brand-featuring-bea-benjamin-boswil-concert-1973/](http://lahibrahim.co.za/record/dollar-brand-featuring-bea-benjamin-boswil-concert-1973/) (accessed October 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Anon., Abdullah Ibrahim Biography, at <https://abdullahibrahim.co.za/biography/> (accessed October 2024).

<sup>13</sup> The trio recorded the album *Anatomy of a South African Village* on 30 January 1965, live at the Jazzhus Montmartre in Copenhagen. The eponymous title track was commissioned in 1964 from Dollar Brand for performance with his trio and the Danish Radio Orchestra. See Martin Kunzler, *Jazz-Lexikon*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002, 133) and [www.allmusic.com/album/anatomy-of-a-south-african-village-mw0000100757](http://www.allmusic.com/album/anatomy-of-a-south-african-village-mw0000100757) (accessed November 2024).

NT: That's right. But the "African Space Program" was of course very important to him.<sup>14</sup>

SR: *Johnny Dyani also played in that concert ...*

NT: ... exactly! I also hired Johnny several times. And I thought the world of Makaya! After the early concert in 1971, I engaged him at the first Festival along with the saxophonist John Tchicai, then in 1975 in the "John Tchicai-Irène Schweizer Group" together with Buschi Niebergall (bass). That concert was released on record the following year, entitled *Willi the Pig*.<sup>15</sup> John Corbett, a journalist and producer from Chicago, reissued it on CD in the year 2000.<sup>16</sup> And after that Festival, I had Makaya play with the Joe McPhee Trio and the synthesiser pioneer John Snyder on 11 October.<sup>17</sup> That was a concert I organised with Werner X. Uehlinger, whose label Hat Hut Records released the concert as its second-ever LP.<sup>18</sup> Joe McPhee and Makaya went well together. The disc was later reissued as a CD, I think also by John Corbett in Chicago.<sup>19</sup> I was a big fan of Makaya's and invited "Makaya & the Tsotsis" to the Festival in 1976. That was a must!

SR: *Makaya's LP of the same name came out soon after that. You can't tell from the music that they'd gone into the studio in Bern to record without preparing any music in advance – at least according to what Bob Degen has told me.*<sup>20</sup>

NT: I listened to the record again after I learnt of Makaya's recent death. The live music is also brilliant, the pieces are fully played out, Heinz Sauer is super and Bob Degen too – I didn't even know he was still alive. He was always modest and underrated as a pianist. And Isla Eckinger is great, of course!

SR: *Makaya played at the same Festival a second time.*

NT: That was in the "Drum Music Concert" on 29 August 1976, with Pierre Favre, Stu Martin and Louis Moholo.<sup>21</sup> We had to use a trick because I'd set up an extreme programme for the

<sup>14</sup> This concert took place in Willisau on 18 May 1974. See [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1974/1093.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1974/1093.html) (accessed January 2025).

<sup>15</sup> John Tchicai-Irène Schweizer-Group, *Willi The Pig (Live At The Willisau Jazz Festival)*. Willisau: Live Records, WIL-1, 1976. See [www.discogs.com/de/master/259423-John-Tchicai-Irene-Schweizer-Group-Willi-The-Pig-Live-At-The-Willisau-Jazz-Festival](http://www.discogs.com/de/master/259423-John-Tchicai-Irene-Schweizer-Group-Willi-The-Pig-Live-At-The-Willisau-Jazz-Festival) (accessed November 2024).

<sup>16</sup> [Chicago]: Atavistic, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> See [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1975/1014.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1975/1014.html) (accessed November 2024).

<sup>18</sup> It was the label's second LP in 1976, "B". The LP "A", of 1975, was Joe McPhee's *Black Magic Man*. See [www.jazzlists.com/SJ\\_Label\\_HatHut\\_ABC.htm](http://www.jazzlists.com/SJ_Label_HatHut_ABC.htm) (accessed November 2024). See also Joe McPhee: *The Willisau Concert featuring John Snyder and Makaya Ntshoko. The Mekka of Creative Music in Europe*. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3\\_49gNbb9I&list=PLh-8ZxDxRQ1ZSUL8i1M-ujI7xrb7u6Cb29](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3_49gNbb9I&list=PLh-8ZxDxRQ1ZSUL8i1M-ujI7xrb7u6Cb29) (accessed January 2025). The album starts with a remarkable solo introduction by Makaya.

<sup>19</sup> The CD was released in 2017 by the Chicago label Corbett vs Dempsey. See [www.discogs.com/de/release/11438666-Joe-McPhee-Featuring-John-Snyder-3-And-Makaya-Ntshoko-The-Willisau-Concert](http://www.discogs.com/de/release/11438666-Joe-McPhee-Featuring-John-Snyder-3-And-Makaya-Ntshoko-The-Willisau-Concert) (accessed November 2024).

<sup>20</sup> See the interview with Bob Degen in this book.

<sup>21</sup> See [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/people-acts/act/drum-music-concert.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/people-acts/act/drum-music-concert.html) (accessed January 2025).

last night. We had both the Schlippenbach Quartet and the Charles Mingus Quintet on stage, one after the other, because that Sunday was the only day that both groups were able to play. I'd heard from some French people I knew that while Mingus was a bass player and not a pianist, he'd check out the grand piano before a concert. If he wasn't satisfied, he wouldn't play at all. So we decided to have the grand piano retuned on a lorry in an industrial shed between the two concerts. To do this, we had to move the stage elsewhere, and I wanted to use the drummers to bridge the gap. Dannie Richmond heard about it – he was Mingus's drummer – and he really wanted to be in it, but it was too late because the four drum sets were already set up. They played for about an hour, the grand piano was set up during the break, Mingus indeed played a few chords on it – and gave the thumbs-up. It had worked. I'll never forget that occasion, it was wonderful! After that, Makaya didn't come back for quite a while.

*SR: According to the archives, he performed with Hannibal Marvin Peterson's Sunrise Orchestra in 1977, then with Where's Africa, Omri Ziegele and Irène Schweizer in 2005, and with John Tchicai and Vitold Rek in 2008.*

**NT:** He married a woman from Willisau. Makaya himself told me. She lived near the Mohren Restaurant. I think her surname was Hofer, and I'd known her as a child.

*SR: That was his second wife, who was the mother of his younger daughter and his son.*

**NT:** I never saw her with Makaya. I was in Basel a few times when he played at the Totentanz, where the iron sculptor Peter Fürst used to organise concerts.

*SR: But you engaged Makaya again in 2005, along with Irène and Omri.*

**NT:** Irène told me that she was playing African music with Omri, to which I replied that it would be nice to have Makaya with us again.

*SR: So it wasn't Irène's suggestion?*

**NT:** No, but she asked if he was playing again. I'd heard that he had started up a "Tsotsis" band again.

*SR: They were the "New Tsotsis", featuring Andy Scherrer (saxophone), Vera Kappeler (piano) and Stephan Kurmann (bass).*

**NT:** Anyway, we asked Makaya and he agreed to come. Omri also liked the idea. The trio was actually intended only for Willisau, but fortunately they kept it going. It was a good thing, and resulted in a nice record. Later I had a phone call with Tchicai. We were just chatting, and he said that he'd like to play in Willisau again, that he was now playing with the Polish bassist Vitold Rek, but that he'd like to add a drummer. I suggested Makaya, and asked him myself. So their trio played in the "Forum" that we set up here in Willisau for a while. The musicians had fun together, and Tchicai had already organised three or four additional concerts in Germany. I was pleased to have suggested it, but no record was made of it. That's a pity!

*SR: Let's move on to the concerts with Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath.*

NT: Yes. That was even more intense! The first took place in late January 1973 in the Mohren, which was also released as our first Willisau LP. I had previously heard the band at the Zurich Festival, which still took place in the Cinema Urban.<sup>22</sup> I have to tell you: They played just insanely! But that festival had strict time slots for each concert, so our dear friend Bruno Spoerri came onto the stage and wanted to bring their concert to a close. But the audience was of a very different opinion and screamed and screamed and wanted to hear more of the music. So the organisers simply turned off the musicians' microphones! I was really annoyed with Bruno, and it only upset the audience even more. You can't do that, even if the time slots for three or four groups are tight. Anyway, I then met the musicians backstage and engaged them for a whole evening.<sup>23</sup> That was two weeks after I'd brought Irène Schweizer's trio<sup>24</sup> and just before Keith Jarrett<sup>25</sup> performed solo. That all happened in this short space of time, it was unbelievable!

SR: *You engaged the Brotherhood for March 1975 and again in late August, at the Festival itself.*

NT: That was on the first evening of the Festival. I already knew them by then, and I put them on the programme several times afterwards. This led to the Mike Osborne Trio with Harry Miller and Louis Moholo. Harry was very active, which was also reflected on the Festival programme. He and his wife Hazel founded the Ogun label that was the first to release the Brotherhood concert. That's the one with the tree on the cover. After that, I designed several record sleeves for Ogun.

SR: *Can you tell us about the incident with the Brotherhood back in 1973?*

NT: Ah! That was when three or four of them spent the night at the police station! I hadn't realised that they'd already arrived the day before the concert. We'd got permission to extend alcohol licensing hours after the concert at the Mohren. We were already at home when the police rang us at about four o'clock in the morning to say they had three or four musicians at

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<sup>22</sup> That Zurich concert took place on 16 September 1972. Alexis Korner and Snape were among those playing that evening. Bruno Spoerri has described this episode as follows: "The controversial performance by Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath remains unforgettable. They had returned to the city where he had started his career outside South Africa with the Blue Notes back in 1964. After an hour of the most intense free music, no one made any attempt to clear the stage for the bluesman Alexis Korner. After several fruitless interventions, ultimately the curtain was simply drawn across the stage – but a few seconds later, the indefatigable Dudu Pukwana was already standing at the front of the stage, playing on. Then Alexis Korner finally arrived to play his blues-soaked music. But after just a few numbers he announced: 'Let me introduce some friends', and the whole Brotherhood was back again. The critic of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* declared that the 'miserable, chaotic way they blew their instruments and made a racket, each against the other defies description' and added that it was 'maddening'. But other listeners were still raving about this event for years afterwards". Bruno Spoerri (ed.), *Jazz in der Schweiz – Geschichte und Geschichten*. Second edition. Zurich: Chronos, 2006, 142.

<sup>23</sup> This concert took place on 27 January 1973. See [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1076.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1076.html) (accessed January 2025).

<sup>24</sup> Irène Schweizer (piano), Buschi Niebergall (bass), Allen Blairman (drums), 14 January 1973. See [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1075.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1075.html) (accessed January 2025).

<sup>25</sup> Keith Jarrett's solo piano concert took place on 30 March 1973. See [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1079.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1079.html) (accessed January 2025).

the police station, and they'd have to stay in the cells while they sobered up. I rang back in the morning, but the police told me they were all fast asleep, so we left them there. I went to the police station around midday. There they were, in the sobering-up cell: Louis Moholo, Dudu Pukwana and Mongezi Feza, the trumpet player. They'd wandered around town the previous night, drunk, playing brass instruments and making a racket, at which the police had to go and arrest them! So I fetched them from the police station and took them to the Mohren. The others were there, waiting for them and laughing, ready to rehearse. But now the real trouble began, because they'd stolen the trombone that belonged to Malcolm Griffiths.<sup>26</sup> He was angry and told them so. There ensued a loud argument between the three of them and Malcolm that descended into racism. He not only refused to play that evening, but also left the Brotherhood and never performed with them again. They still had two trombonists – Radu Malfatti and Nick Evans – but they were supposed to have three. Malcolm sat at the mixing desk when the concert was recorded, truly depressed. I just think now that it was really tragic. It was unbelievable. But Chris McGregor remained relaxed and was certain that it would all turn out well. He was just a kind man. But when he slammed the piano lid shut and told them: Now focus all of you, we're going to play! – it worked. Unlike Dollar, he had his musicians under control in a kind way. He was a marvellous person! He brought everything together, time and again, while letting his wild bunch play and let their hair down. They might have had problems amongst themselves, but they then turned them into something positive on stage. Chris understood them wonderfully. He had a talent for making positive musical energy out of it all.

SR: *And how did the audience react?*

NT: It was great – it was a huge party, and of course they played much more than could be put on the LP. We invited them several times again after that – twice in 1975 – and it was always sensational. The same was true when we invited individual members of the Brotherhood. It's all in the book. And Mongezi Feza – did you get to know him?

SR: *Unfortunately not.*

NT: Hey, he was great! When he came back in 1975, before the Festival (which is always in late August/early September), we sat together in the Mohren and he said he'd like a large glass of red wine. When they brought him one, he looked very downhearted and said: "Oh no, not this glass, a big one!" He recalled having been given red wine in a Burgundy goblet two years earlier, so he went to the cupboard, pointed to the corresponding glass, and was very happy when they brought it. It's just a tiny episode, but it's things like this that stay in your memory. Mongezi unfortunately died soon after that Festival, in December 1975. He was only 30. It was probably a heart attack, not the result of alcohol or drugs. He was pretty careful about that kind of stuff, so we were all perplexed.

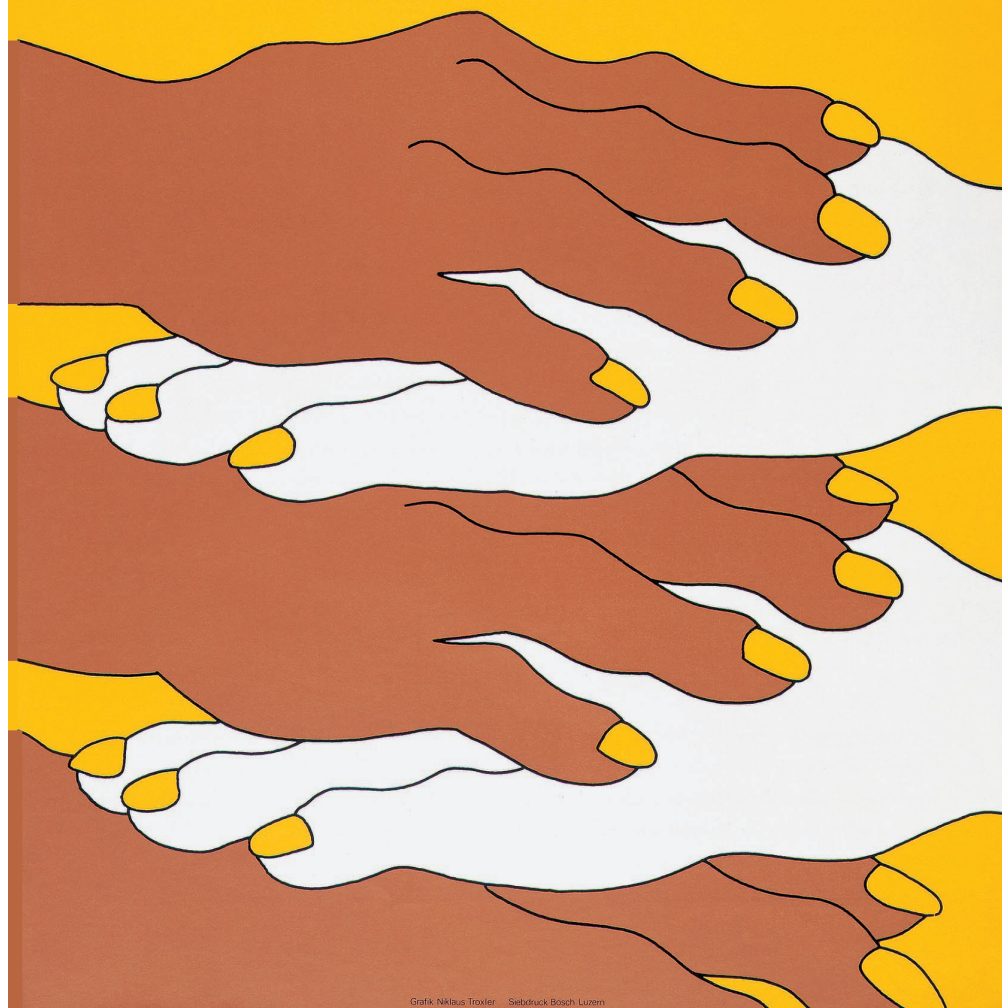
<sup>26</sup> Malcolm Griffiths (1941–2021), British trombonist, played as lead trombonist with the Buddy Rich Big Band, then as a session musician in the UK (including on The Pogues' "Fairytale of New York"). He and Moholo seem to have got over their dispute, as they later played together again, including in Isipongo at Willisau on 29 August 1976. See for example John Altman, "Malcolm Griffiths (1941–2021). Tribute" in *UK Jazz News* (21 January 2021), <https://londonjazznews.com/2021/01/21/malcolm-griffiths-1941-2021-tribute-by-john-altman/> and [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1976/1111.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1976/1111.html) (both accessed January 2025).

Willisau Freitag 21.März 20.00 Uhr Hotel Mohren

Chris/McGregor's

# BROTHERHOOD OF BREATH

Chris McGregor Alan Skidmore Mike Osborne Dudu Pukwana Elton Dean  
Evan Parker Mongezi Feza Harry Beckett Mark Charig Nick Evans Radu  
Malfatti Harry Miller Louis Moholo



Grafik Niklaus Troxler - Siebdruck Bosch Luzern

Figure 25.2. Troxler's 1975 poster for the Brotherhood of Breath in Willisau. Courtesy of Niklaus Troxler.



SR: *And did you engage the Blue Notes in Willisau too, with Mongezi, Dudu, Chris and everyone too?*

NT: No, I never did!

SR: *Had they already disbanded when you started organising concerts?*

NT: No, they were still playing! I used to help William Patry (1946–2009) a bit. He organised a festival in Nyon in Switzerland for two or three years. He invited the Blue Notes and there's a recording of them there, it's a double album.<sup>27</sup> Technically it's a rather poor recording, but the quartet's concert was sensational. Mongezi was no longer with them, but Chris McGregor, Johnny Dyani, Dudu Pukwana and Louis Moholo were playing. I never had them in Willisau.

SR: *But Johnny Dyani played in Willisau several times.*

NT: Yes, and he also gave a solo concert in 1978. That came about quite by chance. He was playing in a trio with David Murray<sup>28</sup> and Andrew Cyrille.<sup>29</sup> They brought out a Hat Hut record in 1978 entitled *D3 Family*.<sup>30</sup> Johnny had already played in Willisau two or three days earlier and told us he'd also like to play solo here. So we managed to include him. He sang and spoke wonderfully, played the piano and drums besides his bass, he did everything. A few years ago I got a call from Sweden. They had a cassette tape of the concert – every group received a cassette tape of their performance from us. But Swiss Radio had also recorded that concert, and they asked me to design the cover. It was released as a double vinyl disc entitled *African Bass Solo*.<sup>31</sup> I also wrote the liner notes and had photos to go with it. They released it at 45 rpm. The record begins with Johnny's voice with its "click" sounds. His sons gave their consent for the release. Johnny's stepson Thomas Dyani, a drummer and vocalist, has played in Willisau several times.

Later, at my last Festival, in 2009, we had a concert with Zim Ngqawana (whose name I admit I can barely pronounce).<sup>32</sup> He came with his absolute dream line-up, the Zimology Quartet with William Parker,<sup>33</sup> Matthew Shipp<sup>34</sup> and Nasheet Waits.<sup>35</sup> I would love to have that on record as it was such a great concert. I always wanted to make a record with Zim, who was a real star

<sup>27</sup> We have found no such album. It was probably the extract from the concert on magnetic tape of which the Swiss National Sound Archives holds a digital copy (shelfmark FN 26BD 1393) mentioned by Christian Steulet in his article "Der Wandel der schweizerischen Jazzszene im Spiegel von JazzNyon", in *European Journal of Musicology*, 16(1), 124–135, here 135. See <https://doi.org/10.5450/ejm.2017.16.5783> (accessed January 2025).

<sup>28</sup> David Murray (born 1955), American tenor saxophonist, bass clarinetist, composer and bandleader.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Cyrille (born 1939), American drummer.

<sup>30</sup> Re-released on CD: Basel: Hat Hut Records, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> *Johnny Mbizo Dyani, African Bass, Solo Concert, Willisau Jazz Festival 1978* (Gatefold), a recording by Swiss Radio DRS.

<sup>32</sup> Zim Ngqawana (1959–2011), South African tenor saxophonist, flautist and percussionist.

<sup>33</sup> William Parker (born 1952), American bassist.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Shipp (born 1960), American pianist.

<sup>35</sup> Nasheet Waits (born 1971), American drummer.



in South Africa, but he died two years after his sensational performance in Willisau, the only one he gave there.

In 1990, we were planning a big evening for 14 June, a “South African Jazz Night”<sup>36</sup> with a group formed around Dudu Pukwana called “South African Friends”, featuring Thomas Dyani and Ernest Mothle, and then Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath. But Chris died about two weeks before the concert. Roland Perrin<sup>37</sup> was already playing the piano for Dudu’s ensemble, and he now also played the tour with the Brotherhood, “in honour of Chris”, so to speak. Barbara Pukwana was also there. But Dudu seemed so tired and weak, I was really worried about him. There’s a photograph of the event where you can see how sick he was, how weak he looked – and yet he was otherwise such an energetic man. He really wanted to play and made such an effort. He played both concerts, but died too just two weeks later. It was so tragic.

*SR: Barbara Pukwana told us that he died on 28 June 1990 in hospital.*

*NT: And that was after Chris had died two weeks before our concert! But to end our conversation on a more positive note: I recently heard a beautiful concert very close to here, in Sursee. The tenor saxophonist Marcel Lüscher played a programme exclusively with pieces by Dollar Brand at the Sursee Jazzcafé<sup>38</sup> together with its “resident trio” of Peter Estermann (piano), Rafael Jerjen (bass) and Raphael Woll (drums). It was wonderful, wonderful!*

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<sup>36</sup> See [www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1990/1295.html](http://www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1990/1295.html) (accessed January 2025).

<sup>37</sup> Roland Perrin, composer & pianist, born in New York, today living and teaching in London. See [www.lccm.org.uk/about-us/our-tutors/music/roland-perrin/](http://www.lccm.org.uk/about-us/our-tutors/music/roland-perrin/) (accessed November 2024).

<sup>38</sup> This concert took place on 23 September 2024. See <https://stadtdcafe.ch/kultur/jazzcafe-40> (accessed November 2024).

## Sources

The below bibliography has been compiled to support the wide-ranging chapters gathered in this volume, all of which explore various dimensions of Swiss-South African cultural relations during the apartheid era. It forms part of an integrated system of references that includes a comprehensive and fully referenced footnote apparatus, as well as an extensive index.

While this bibliography consolidates most of the sources consulted by our contributors, it does not aim to replicate all references contained in the footnotes. Generalist online reference works and frequently consulted standard sources, for example, are cited where necessary in footnotes but are not repeated here. Likewise, primary documents from archives are referenced fully in the footnotes to the chapters that draw on such research, but are not reproduced in the bibliography. Researchers interested in locating specific archival documents, correspondences, or names of interviewees may find the index a more effective guide than the bibliography.

## Archives Consulted

Archival research for this study was conducted in several institutions across South Africa and Switzerland. The following archives and collections were consulted.

Materials from the Bundesarchiv in Bern, Switzerland, contributed to Chapters 1, 6 and 9. Chapter 1 drew on material from the SUIISA archives in Zurich, Chapters 1 and 6 from the Zentralbibliothek Zürich and the Stadtarchiv Zürich.

At the William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, two collections were examined: the Johannesburg Music Society Collection (31 boxes; call number AG2572) and the Musica Viva Society Collection (36 boxes, 370 files; call number A1458). These materials primarily informed Chapter 3.

The personal archive of Ann Vorberg (Kirchhofer), held privately in Switzerland, was consulted for Chapter 4, alongside the Archive of Max Kirchhofer housed at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) in Basel, Switzerland.

Research for Chapter 5 drew on documents from the Stadtarchiv Zürich, Switzerland, while Chapter 7 made use of resources from the Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, also located in Zurich.

Additional sources for Chapter 9 and Chapter 11 included the Archive of Peter Sulzer (1917–2009) in the Special Collections of the Stadtbibliothek Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland, as well as the Al Imfeld Archive held at Stiftung Litar, Zurich.

Chapter 10 was supported by extensive consultation of several collections at the National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria, namely the South African Centre for Information on the Arts Collection, the Centre for Theatre Research Collection, and the Hermien Dommissie Collection. The Mario Schiess Private Collection, Stellenbosch, South Africa, was also consulted for Chapter 10.

Primary source material for Chapter 11 was drawn from the private archives of Astrid Starck-Adler, Basel, Switzerland, and the Personenarchiv Al Imfeld, housed at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), Basel.

Finally, Chapter 12 relied on materials from the Eoan Group Archive, housed in the Documentation Centre for Music (DOMUS), Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

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As is the custom in South Africa, names with particles such as ‘de’ or ‘van’ are listed here under their particle (thus “de Klerk, Willem” or “van der Walt, Deon”). Suburbs such as Hillbrow or Rosebank are listed under their city (in these two cases: Johannesburg); apartheid-era townships are listed under their own name.

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**In the decades after the National Party of South Africa assumed power in 1948,** a close economic relationship evolved between South Africa and Switzerland, whose longstanding refusal to join international boycotts enabled it to advance to being one of the apartheid state's most important business partners. But alongside trade in gold, diamonds and much more, the two countries also enjoyed manifold relations in the cultural field, both "official" and "unofficial". Swiss musicians toured South Africa with state assistance, plays by Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch were performed there in English and Afrikaans, South African jazz artists such as Abdullah Ibrahim (*aka* Dollar Brand), Sathima Bea Benjamin and Chris McGregor found enthusiastic audiences in Switzerland, and in the 1970s the plays of Athol Fugard began to be seen on Swiss stages and heard on national radio.

Cultural objects, performances and lives moved between these two countries, accruing symbolic value even as artists themselves often bore the costs—in substance abuse, exile, censorship, domestic violence and early death. The essays in this book reframe Switzerland not only as an enabler of apartheid-era cultural life, but as a site refracted through South African critique.

The essays in this book cover a multitude of topics from jazz to classical music, architecture, linguistics, theatre and literature in translation. They are derived in large part from the papers given at a conference held in Basel in May 2023, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), and organised by the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) in collaboration with the Bern Academy of the Arts and the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel. The authors investigate the activities of official state actors and private individuals, institutions and organisations in order to elucidate understandings and misunderstandings in a field where meanings and intentions were fluid, and where cultural relations existed in a complex process of give and take.

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