Beyond Memory

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CHAPTER TWO
ALEX SOUL MENU AND BEYOND

Spread out north of the city of Johannesburg is one of the oldest and funkiest townships in the country – Alexandra. History has it that an Afrikaner farmer, Mr S. Papenfus once bought a number of farms around the modern day township. One of the farms, Zandfontein, became Alexandra Township in 1912. This township characterised by streets from west to east and avenues from north to south became home to many black South Africans. I imagine every second black family in South Africa has or had a relative in Alex. It meant different things to different people and ended up with different names like Dark City, Township and Ga-Mampjane. Alexandra is also known for the “Azikhwelwa” bus defiance campaign during the dark and hard days of the 1950s. Its vibrant life was at some stage spoiled by The Spoilers and The Msomi Gang. Despite the murders, maiming, burglaries and robberies, it remained a melting pot of cultural diversity.

Alexandra produced some of South Africa’s music legends like Ntemi Piliso, Lemmy Mabaso, Zacks Nkosi, Caiphus Semenya, Condry Ziqubu, Banza Kgasoane and many others. It was in this environment that the spirit of soul music brought five guys together in the late sixties to form a band called THE ANCHORS. The band was co-led by Collins Mashego and Esrom Kgomo. Other members were bassist Simon “Bra Jika” Twala, vocalists Pepsi Rapoo and Philip Malela. The band had one of the most gifted lead guitarists of the time, Herman Fox. Later on new members joined the group like little Condry Ziqubu, Given Sabela, Mbokoto Nkosi and Jabu Nkosi, son of legendary Jazz muso Isaac “Zacks” Nkosi. Two powerful vocalists from the Mbatha family, Dinah and brother Lucky
came to front the soul group. Some of their hits are *Tell Me* and *Collin Goes*.

In the early seventies the band split up. Simon Twala and Philip Malela formed a new band, **Flaming Souls**. Herman Fox joined them. Collins Mashego became a hot concert compère and later joined SABC television. He became one of the most passionate and creative producers of variety shows. He once invited me and two hot radio jocks to set TV screens on fire. We did. I represented Thobela FM, that smooth and eloquent sports tiger Aubrey Motloung represented Motsweding FM and Lesedi FM was represented by the morning star, Chomane Chomane. What a show! He later produced the historical funeral of Mahlathini Simon Nkabinde. Collins is V-Mash’s father and is a highly positive person under any given situation; the kind of guy who says the glass is half-full, not half-empty. He is an excellent MC. Bassist Given Sabela was later to feature in the recording of Isaac “Zacks” Nkosi’s *Our Kind Of Jazz* album on 30 July 1976. Keyboard wizard, Jabu Nkosi’s and drummer cum vocalist Lucky Mbatha’s duo known as Lucky and Jabu had a big hit titled *Skatana*. They later pursued solo careers with Jabu leaning towards jazz music in the footsteps of his father. By 1984 he was a member of Sipho Gumede’s Afro Fusion band, Peace. Lucky continued with soul music releasing amongst his solo works, the album *Funky Situation* (Bullet, 1987) featuring the hit, *Caught In The Thrill Of Love*. His sister Dinah later joined another Alex band, The Movers. Interestingly, long after their days, the Flaming Souls released a CD titled *Revival* (2006).

As already mentioned, Flaming Souls was started in the early seventies. Its members included leader and bassist Simon “Jika” Twala, keyboardist Kenny Mosito, drummer Gerald Khoza, frontman Philip Malela and lead guitarist Herman Fox. The celebrated soulman Fox was tragically stabbed to death on Christmas Day. The Flaming Souls’ producer was Teal Records’ talent scout West Nkosi and they churned out hits like *She’s Gone*, *Soul World* and *Cracking Guitar* composed by 15-year-old Condry Ziqubu who joined the band as lead guitarist after the death of Fox. Their song *Alex Soul Menu* seemed to have been inspired by African American King Curtis’s *Memphis Soul Stew*. Priscilla Jacobs joined Flaming Souls from Soweto’s Black Hawks to add a female voice to the band. As we already know, Condry later joined Soweto’s Harari in 1980. Gerald Khoza formed a Khoza family band, **The Monks**.

Some of the popular concert venues in Alexandra were Entokozweni Hall on London Road in 12th Avenue, Kings Cinema in 2nd Avenue, as well as the yard of the Roman Catholic Church, where 1st meets 2nd Avenue. These are the centres where sons and daughters of the Jukskei River would dance styles like the twist, tatazela, bump and as well as the monkey jive. Some would even display their hula hoop skills to the rhythm of soul music.

David Thekwane later started a band that spread the Alex soul flavour like wild fire – **The Movers**. Its members were Oupa Hlongwane, Norman Hlongwane, Sam Thabo and master keyboardist Sankie Chounyane who inspired a whole
generation of young fiery keyboardists. Later vocalist Dinah Mbatha fronted the band, as well as Soweto’s young Blondie Makhene. The latter will always be remembered for their hit *Hopeless Love* and the former for *Black Is The Colour*, a subtle protest song with the line “There’s hatred among the blacks”.

Philip Malela of Flaming Souls fame also joined the group, which was later owned by Kenny Sephai. Malela could be regarded as Alex’s “full circle” musician, as he performed with all the major bands of the time in the township. He’ll always be remembered for hits like *She Loves You* and *Mama Liza*. The relationship between The Movers and its founder was later revived and the younger generation of the band included Jabu Khanyile from The Additions, Vusi Shange from The Eagles, Rammy MacKenzie who took over from Philip Malela as vocalist, as well as bassist Jabu Sibumbe and keyboardist Lloyd Lelosa who would later form Stimela with former Cannibals members, guitarist Ray Phiri and drummer Isaac Mtshali.

At the time the Movers were under the same management with Boyoyo Boys; that is why Jabu Khanyile’s voice was used in the mega-hit *Pule*, which was later released internationally by Malcolm McLaren as *Double Dutch*. Drummer, Archibald Mohlala, also played in this band although Mbaqanga followers know him mostly for his work with Boyoyo Boys. The Movers’ discography reads like a Home Affairs ID register. Some of their big hits were *Soweto Inn*, *Bump Jive*, *Special Job*, *Crying Guitar*, *Soul Crazy*, *Where To Find Her*, *Sleep Out*, *Sleep In* as well as their cover version of Johnny Nash’s *Guava Jelly*. The track *Crying Guitar* featured the newly-introduced musical instrument known as the wah-wah paddle.

After the death of soul music star Jacob Radebe aka Mpharanyana, the band paid tribute to him by releasing *Mpharanyana O Re Hopole* fronted by Hope Jamani. Most of their music was later released on a series of compilation CDs by Polygram on the local Teal Records label titled *The Movers: Best Of The Best* and *Township Jive: The Movers – The Hits*. Sadly, one of South Africa’s most brilliant keyboardists, Sankie Chounyane, died in the eighties. May his soul rest in peace. The band’s founder and manager for ten years who stayed in Dube, Soweto died at the age of 48 due to flu-related complications after a business trip to Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. I still remember that this giant of Mbaqanga music was buried on a Saturday at the Avalon Cemetery leaving two boys, a girl and wife, Sarah. I remember this because on the Wednesday before the funeral musicians were asked to meet at Dorkay House to finalise funeral arrangements. By then Velile David Thekwane owned a record company, Tela Records and Tapes. Twenty-one years later, on 25 November 2005, the legend was posthumously honoured with two awards by the Department of Arts and Culture as it recognised the contribution of musical icons of the fifties. His wife received his awards for producer and for leader of The Movers. Interestingly, within a few hours’ time his son Andile aka Wikid also won Metro FM Music Awards’ Best Hip-Hop
category for his CD *Anger Management* also featuring his father’s composition and Movers’ hit *Bump Jive*.

When the Alexandra Township couple, Philip and Rhina Mdluli, were blessed with a bouncy baby boy they hardly knew he would be a superstar. Born in 17th Avenue, **Thami Mdluli** grew up in 18th Avenue to where his family later moved. When Thami was twelve, the Mdlulis moved again, but this time to Tembisa where he grew up with his three sisters and three brothers. In Tembisa he started playing guitar at the age of thirteen. By the time he turned fifteen he was already a professional playing for Sam Mthembu’s Tembisa Happy Queens. In 1979 when the group became the Hot Soul Singers it was so popular that they played side by side with visiting overseas groups like the O’Jays. This exposed Thami to many ideas and together with the other band members they decided to form Sound Busters. After initiating the formation of CJB, he later formed a duo, Taboo, with Buli Arosi.

Thami decided to do part-time productions at Eric Frisch Productions. Eric Frisch had worked with Phil Hollis, but later started his own record company. Some of the musicians Thami produced included Sox, Jimaro, Sensations, Nana Moloi, Malcolm X Makume and Alexandra Brass Band. On his productions Thami had a tendency of releasing dub mix versions of hit tracks. His fans pushed him to follow that trend seriously, and this resulted in his solo project under the name, “Professor Rhythm”. His debut album was titled *First Time Around* (1989) featuring the hit *Sebeletsa Hae*. The next album was *Second Time Around* (1990) followed by *Professor 3* (1991) featuring the hits *Uskamosothotsa* and *Raditaba* (Nozindaba) up to Professor 5 (1993) on Tusk’s Diamond Music label. Some of his other projects include *The Boss* featuring Stella, which released the album *Dance For My Song* (1991) engineered by David Moloele on the Diamond Music Label.

Thami retired from live performances in 1993 and focused on studio productions. Tusk Music tasked him with the production responsibility of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church Choir commonly known as IPCC after John Moriri’s tenure. He never looked back and by the time I wrote this book he had produced 12 albums with them. Committed to the choir, I met him at Zuurbekom as we paid our last respect to “Ntate Moemedi”, the late Comforter Frederick Samuel Modise, one of the great religious leaders South Africa has produced. Together with partner David Moloele, Thami owns a recording studio. His record label is DJ Music, a joint venture with CCP. The label boasts among other products, Chakalaka’s 1999 album *Home*. Thami plays all musical instruments but his speciality and preference is the bass guitar.

One of the members of Thami’s Sound Busters was **Benjamin Ball** who was from Durban. On arrival in Johannesburg Benjamin was accommodated by Thami Mdluli’s uncle in Alexandra township. His solo career was launched by a hit they recorded together called *Flash A Flash Light*. After the success of the debut
the group encouraged him to go solo. Still under Thami Mdluli’s production, he released the album *Kabadzeene* (RPM, 1988) co-written with Cyril Mnculwane. The next recording, *In The Jungle* (Tusk Music, 1990), a reggae album followed with all songs written by Elsie Joseph and engineered by Fab Grosso. His album *Take A Chance* (1991) co-produced by Cyril Mnculwane and Bheki Msani was engineered by Humphrey Mabote. It included a flash mix of *Flash A Flashlight*. At the Alexandra house, Ball was joined by another new member of the band, Johnny Mokhali about whom we’ll read more later.

Around Tshwane some of the hot groups included Soul Fingers whose songs include *Leru Lela*, *Doing Our Thing*, *Boela Gae* and *Love Is Where Life Begins*. Les Vibros had a hit *Ba Ya Khala* and Grant Albert Kekana will be remembered for *Thokolokgolo*, *Re Tla Re Kolobile* and *Tshepang*.

In Springs, two brothers from Kwa-Thema, Mac and Madoda Mathunjwa played in a band called **The Pedlar**s. They were used as a backing band for vocalists who performed at The Pelican Night Club in Orlando East, near the railway station. Some of their highlights include their work with Patience Africa on her album *Siyabonga* (1979) at which stage their line-up was as follows: Mac Mathunjwa (keyboards), Themba Mokoena (lead guitar), Emmanuel E Khumalo (bass guitar), Godfrey Mgcina (drums) and Elijah Khumalo (rhythm guitar). We’ll always remember the band for hits like *Mma Sello* and for their role as Mpharanyane’s backing band.

The Mpumalanga city of coal, Witbank, was represented by Simon (vocals), Chom (keyboards), Bingo (drums) and Sonnyboy (guitar) collectively called **The Soul Crusaders**. This Chom-led combo’s biggest hits were *Swazi Inn* and *Windy*, an excellent cover version of a chartbuster from abroad. We, the locals, had a way of creating our own lyrics to the music for our own convenience whenever it was difficult to grasp the real words. I remember this Soul Crusaders’ *Windy* was known as “Ngwana o a lela, o llela pa sekelala” (A child is crying, he’s crying for a bicycle). This also happened with international music like Michael Jackson’s *Don’t Stop Til You Get Enough*, which we preferred to sing as “Ke bao ka dibotsotso, tšhelete e fedile” (There they are in tight jeans, they are broke). My aunt Pinky was the master of this lyrical cloning. There was a big hit by the group Three Dog Night titled *Joy To The World* (1971) with the opening line “Jeremiah was a bullfrog”. She liked her chorus version so much that even when her musician hubby, uncle Jimmy, told her what the real lyrics were, she continued singing “Joy to the Fischers and the Du Plessis”. The actual chorus lyrics were “Joy to the fishers in the deep blue sea”. She insisted on being left alone with her song.

Much as the Vaal area is known for being home to some of South Africa’s political milestones, it is also home to some of South Africa’s talented musicians. Down in Sebokeng, Vereniging, The Hurricanes were cooking up a storm with hits like *I Can Feel It* and their 1973 sizzler *Expressions Of Love* on the RPM label.
When I saw the name of Ishmael Hlatswayo for the first time it was on Pat Shange’s album *Man Oh Man* on Dephon’s Roy B label. He had written the title track and I liked him as a songwriter. One day in 1987 in the SABC record library amongst the received new releases I saw an album titled *Tamati So* by someone called **Spokes H**. It was on Gerhard “Mlungisi” van Niekerk’s Black Talent Music label. This is the album that taught me a big lesson as a deejay – never to judge a book by the cover. I listened to this unknown newcomer once and put the album aside. As usual, I went to Dakota Record Bar in town for my routine consumer trend observations. Customer after customer was asking for Spokes H. One of the customers asked the seller to play the track for her and I was shocked when everybody in the store started dancing. I realised that the record in demand was the one I had pushed aside in the listening booth. The following week I put it in my charts and the fire just spread wider and wider – a star was born!

On realising the demand, I invited Ishmael for a live studio interview. He took a taxi to Polokwane and after the interview we drove together to Lebowakgomo township where I stay. It was in the days of the CCV television programme “Lapologa”. On arrival I introduced him to Arthur Mafokate who had a group of youngsters called Fame Dance Club so they could share some dance manoeuvres. Even as a youngster Arthur has always been a disciplined and focused performer, so, their meeting became a cross-pollination with the club that went on to win awards in Lapologa dance contests.

Spokes H was a very determined musician who believed in rich lyrics and messages that tell it like it is, without fear or favour. This approach endeared him to many fans and sent culprits searching for cover with tails between their legs. I remember how he took serious offense when township music was labelled “Bubblegum”. I agreed with him and time has put that record straight. Many people still enjoy that music even today while younger musicians either cover, sample or remix it.

Spokes H’s self-written/produced/arranged album *Magosha* (Umkhonto Records, 1989) was engineered by Steven Cooks. It included the track *Katjibane* inspired by the old battered Toyota Hi-Ace combis used as taxis to ferry people on pot holed gravel roads from rural villages to townships and shopping centres. I remember a sticker on one of these taxis reading “O Ska Ntahlale Katjibane” (Please combi, don’t give up on me). His next album, *Under Control* (MGS, 1990), was sold by the title-track and was followed by *Finger Prints* (1991), also self-written/produced/arranged and engineered by Fab Grosso. Spokes also played drums and percussion on the album. Some of his other albums include *Wipe Her Tears Off* (1992), *On My Way Home* (1994), *Dirty Jozi* (1996) and his evergreen *Rafifi* (1997), which sold 87000 copies within a month. It was followed by others like *Nnete E A Baba* (1998), which sold more than 150000, *Izwi’Ngoma* (1999), *The Best Of Spokes H* (2000) as well as the controversial *Morero Wa Mangesemane*,

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an album in which he attacked the local media industry for giving foreign music first preference and promotion while censoring local music for using indigenous languages with the same lyrics freely used by international musicians. Examples of this include Boys II Men’s monster hit ‘I’ll Make Love To You’ from their self-titled 1994 Motown CD. The Babyface-written lyrics read as follows: “I’ll make love to you, like you want me to; and I’ll hold you tight, baby all through the night.” Singing those lyrics in our indigenous languages on the radio would create a national hullabaloo. Do we have freedom of expression or what?

Spokes’s CD ‘Beit Bridge’ (2001) was followed by a compilation album ‘Greatest Hits Of Spokes H, Tsa Thoriso Le Maikutlo’ and ‘Shwashwi’ in 2002. In 2004 the man who will always be remembered for hits like ‘Rabaki’ and ‘Mokanselara’ left his stable, CCP, and joined Bula Music where he released the CD ‘Ka Mora Vene’. By 2007 he had moved back to EMI Records and released ‘My African Groove’ as Letona Spokes H featuring hits like ‘Re Tlo shwa’. Ishmael’s style seems to have inspired younger groups like Rhythmic Elements whose hit ‘2 By 2’ spread into South African night clubs like wild fire. Some of his productions include Cy-Zaah’s album ‘Life Is Short’ (RPM, 1994), which he also arranged. But the artist that put Spokes H on the map as a dynamic writer, producer and arranger was Sea Bee aka Sibi Motloung. Sea Bee’s debut album was ‘I Wanda Why?’ (1994), which featured edutainment hits called ‘Thiba’ and ‘Home Boy’. It carried the stamp of approval – “A Spokes H Production”. Sea Bee followed up with ‘O Kae Molao’ and ‘Qeto’ (2000).

The Vaal also produced a young handsome star with a weird performance regalia called Thiza. Born Thembha Nhlapo in Evaton, Thiza started his professional music career as a backing vocalist for Blondie Makhene in Soweto. However, in 1988 he went solo by joining Gerhard J van Niekerk’s Black Talent Music label, which was also the musical home of his friend, Spokes H. Later in their careers the two joined CCP Records. Thiza released his debut album titled ‘Saka Dibom-Bom’. The title-track became an instant hit but was later banned by the SABC, which suspected it of encouraging activists to drop bombs. As a deejay I was so in love with the track that I resorted to playing the instrumental version that had managed to escape the hangman’s noose. Despite the ban, it achieved platinum status. The System never learned that a ban was a blessing that sent record sales rocketing due to curiosity; or it did but just didn’t care. By 1998 this songwriter/producer/arranger had a streamline of eight albums to his name including ‘Thiza Is My Name’ (1991), ‘Haikonla Lo Problem’ and ‘Nomakanjani.’ Some of his memorable hits are ‘Imini Iyeza’ and ‘Chocolate.’

John Mokoena aka Poppa was a self-taught sound engineer, producer, music arranger and songwriter who owned a recording studio. Working with Spokes H, Thiza and Sea Bee sharpened his skills to produce ‘Die Poppe Sal Dans’ for CO Connection. This finalist of the Hansa Pelsner Cool Sounds Song Writing Competition also produced other hits like ‘Siqhumane.’
When Jiyane Mbere took a kid off the streets he hardly knew that he was paving the way for a future star. The boy grew up to become the hair stylist, Senyaka aka Thula Kekana. He befriended musician Sello Twala who wooed him to the music industry. Senyaka released his debut album Fuquza (1987), which became an overnight success. A humorist and comedian, Senyaka’s career was decorated by controversial songs like Shesa Mpama from the 1999 DJ Walker project produced by Chicco Twala and Themba Dhladhla on the Universal label. Senyaka’s albums include Fuquza Dance (1987), Portuguese (1988), Sophiatown (1989), Willie’s My Connection (1990), Ma-Gents (1993), Mampara (1995), Mabokodo (1996), Brenda Lovey (1997), Fong Kong (1998), Sathane O Maponapona (1999), O Shwa Jwang O Nkolota? (2001), Face To Face With My Lord (2002), The Very Best Of Senyaka (2003), Pay Back (2003), Dikuku Tsa Mumsy (2004) and Sawa (2006). Some of his massive hits were Romeo O A Nkolota as well as Mampara, a track that was part of a professional public dialogue between him and Brenda Fassie. It was through Senyaka that most of us took note of Anthony Motaung of Tsekeleke fame and he has recently discovered some talented young dancers from the streets. Senyaka also appeared in a local television comedy Ashifa Shabba with DJ Fresh and Shonisani “Shabba” Muleya himself. In 2006 he launched a project that would motivate homeless children, distribute food parcels and contribute towards their education. His initiatives in the film industry include Moruti wa Tsotsi.

Tau Bokoda introduced himself to the music industry with the hit Matsatsela. His producer was Sizwe Zako. The success of the debut album was followed by Wa Phopholetsa (1989), which featured the hit Shabalala. On that album he used the name Tau Matsatsela. When he released Imikhaba (Magic, 1991) he had left MFM Records for CCP Records.

Another talented young musician was Peter Chilly Tshabalala aka Bite. Besides his involvement with various productions of the late eighties, he was leader of a trio called CO Connexion (Chilly/Oupa Connection). Some of the CDs they recorded include Socialise (RPM, 1994) and C.O.Connexion (RPM, 1995). Multi-talented Chilly later worked with producer Richard Siluma in gospel projects like Michael Mamatlaruma’s album Re Thaba Le Lena (1998).

Down in Motse-Thabong, Welkom, Vaal Express took the music scene by storm with hits like Bontate Ba Bang produced by Lulu Masilela on the City Special label. Their Golden Highway (1979) was produced by the late David Thekwane. The group later released an album of wedding songs titled Makoti (Sounds of Soweto, 1991) co-produced by Sabata Koloi Lebona and M’Du Masilela featuring favourites like Seanimarena.

William Mthethwa’s backing band, The Young Five, was formed in 1975. Members of Soul Lovers from Pietermaritzburg and Planets from Klerksdorp performed together in Maseru, Lesotho and decided to merge. They were Samuel Moatshe, Raletbelele Mathews Khaile, Johnny Wanyane, Selby Kometsi
and Woodthorpe Motthaloga. When they later backed William Mthethwa they recorded music as William Mthethwa and Young Five. Their mega-hit was *Celebration* a song that celebrated the Christmas of 1983 and of many years thereafter. Their albums include *Wola Ma-Gents*. By 1984 the group’s line-up was: William Mthethwa (from Klerksdorp), Isaac Motale (from Kroonstad), Patrick Lappie and Isaac Molantwa (from Potchefstroom). Later William embarked on a successful solo career, though he would still release some albums like *Our Love Is Over* (Awusuke) with his band. His self-written hot dance maxi single titled *Nightclubbing* (Jive Wire, 1985) was produced/arranged by Peter Moticoe and engineered by Fernando Perdigao.

In my opinion, William was quite ahead of his times with this single because even today it still sets the dance floor ablaze. His many hits include *Botsotsi* and *O Jola Le Clever*. One release that drew him into sharp spotlight was his controversial album *Setjwetla*, which was accompanied by dancing in the nude. It provoked so much debate in the national media to which he responded by saying the song was inspired by a Basotho cultural dance. The storm overshadowed good tracks on the album like *Haak Vrystaat*, *Mphe Borotho* and *Kgwedi E Fedile*. The issue of dancing in the nude did not just go away as it was sustained by another new line in many dance floor tracks, “Ha Ke Rata Nka Tjola, Ho Bontsha Lethabo,” which literally translated means “I am free to take off my clothes as a sign of happiness.”

William later earned himself the title “Mr Everything” for his versatility that saw him release albums in various genres. His reggae albums include *Don’t Cry* and *We Cry For Peace In Afrika*. On the gospel front he had a big hit titled Ema O Tsamaye. He also released the gospel albums *Satane Tloha Ho Nna* (Midnight Beat, 1990) and *Hosanna*; the former dedicated to Aubrey Bano Moloi, a member of his band The Young Five, who had passed away on 1 January 1990. After the unbanning of the African National Congress, William, using the name Zabalaza, dedicated the album *Aluta* (1990) to ANC president Oliver Reginald Tambo for his “endurance, selfless and unqualified wisdom throughout your leadership of the struggle for a free non-racial and democratic South Africa”.

A soccer fanatic who owned a club, William also produced two soccer supporters’ albums, one for Kaiser Chiefs and another for Orlando Pirates both on Teal Records’ Midnight Beat label. The 1991 Kaiser Chiefs album songs were composed by Alinah Maphoso, Dimakatso Moletsane and Zacharia Ndlovu and engineered by David Moloele. The Orlando Pirates album titled *The Ghost* (1992) engineered by Neville Fox was also written by Alinah Maphoso. This trend would later lead to recordings like the national team’s *Ndizani Bafana Ndizani* (1995) produced by Maplanka and Dr House, performed by The Fans and released by Music Team. William also recorded a tribute to the Mathibela Siamese twins, *Mpho Le Mphonyana*, the proceeds of which went into the trust fund he established for them. Besides all these projects he has developed and
produced a number of young musicians.

Some of the hot soul spots in the Free State were Motse-Thabong in Welkom and Maokeng in Kroonstad. I met Sox for the first time at Lebowakgomo Showgrounds where I had arranged for an appointment with William Mthethwa through Eric Frisch’s PRO James Twala. After my interview with William, Sox complained bitterly about being left out and I told him he was welcome to introduce himself. Honestly at that stage I did not know who he was, but after the interview I was convinced Daniel Phakoe was a star in the making. In the interview he told me that he was from Maokeng in Kroonstad where he was mostly known as Sox, the footballer. His schoolmates gave him the nickname at school due to his tendency of pushing his socks down to his ankles. He left his soccer career after an injury that left his left leg crippled. Due to lack of funds, he quit school. Another soccer fanatic, William Mthethwa encouraged him to follow music as an alternative career. Sox joined a local band, Joyco and started playing drums. In 1979 he left Kroonstad for Tembisa on the East Rand where he played with Sam Mthembu’s Hot Soul Singers for eight years.

In 1987 Sox decided to go solo and met another former member of Hot Soul Singers, Thami Mdluli who was a producer at Eric Frisch Productions. Thami produced his debut album *The Master*. Sox’s other projects around that time included *Stay With Me*, a song he composed for another EFP project, *Public Affairs*. The volcano that catapulted him to stardom was his album *Come Back Home* (1988), which featured a monster hit titled *Lejapere* (Horse eater). Some critics accused him of copying Chicco’s style of singing. The album *Soweto* featured a hit simply titled *Masokisi* (Socks). His other albums include *Shame Boksburg*, *Mama* and *Living In The Nineties* produced by Malcolm X Makume. Sox also had a hit *Tsokotla* inspired by a character from a local television drama.

To the South West of Johannesburg, Ikageng in Potchefstroom produced a hot soul band called *The Teenage Lovers*. Its hot property was Rex Rabanye, the keyboard wizard who was Ikageng’s response to Alexandra’s Sankie Chounyane. He had learned to play the keyboards from his father, Samuel Rabanye at the age of fifteen. His bee-hive organ sound earned him millions of fans around the country. Lawrance Goreoang became the guitar maestro of the band. The band’s first big hit was *Botany 500* (RPM, 1974), which was a must-have for every radiogram and hi-fi system owner. Christmas was not complete without it. Other hits that followed included *Soul Goes To Church*, *Last Hope* and *Potchefstroom Road*, which was inspired by their long trips to Johannesburg studios for recordings and dance-hall performances. The band’s musical home was Gallo Records’ subsidiary, RPM.

Later the two musos went solo, Rex Rabanye hitting the country with dynamites like *O Nketsang* and *Moya Moya* while Lawrance Goreoang declared his love for the township with the hit *I Love Ikageng*. One should not forget that it was Lawrance Goreoang who earlier shook the music industry with his
beautiful tune *Hey Mr Moonlight* performed with The Question Marks who also boasted hits like *Julia*. Some of the multi-talented Rex’s paintings can be seen on the walls of the African Methodist Church in Ikageng. By the late eighties the lawman who holds a B.Uris degree had moved from his place of birth to Mmabatho near Mafikeng from where he relaunched his musical career. His other albums include *Somlandela*, *Campus Mood* and *Stop Nonsons*. It is just so sad that such a gifted individual could be failed by his health to a point of losing his hearing. I was almost moved to tears the evening SAMA 12 honoured him with a Lifetime Achievement Award. There he was on a wheelchair receiving the award he so much deserved after inspiring a whole generation of keyboardists. That reminded me of the night Curtis Mayfield was honoured in the same manner at the Grammy Awards. Touching moments! I stood up in front of my television set and applauded. “Long live soulman! Go soulman go!” I screamed. Luckily I was alone in the house and did not have to explain myself to anyone.

To the East of Johannesburg in Katlehong, Germiston The Wavelets backed one of the most powerful voices in township soul – Jacob Radebe aka *Mpharanyana*. Some of the members of this band were Lloyd Leosa who would later be a diligent producer and Stimela’s keyboardist. Their hits included *Se Di Tsebise Mary* and *So Dull Without Her*. In fact, Mpharanyana’s career was mainly associated with three bands: The Peddlars of Springs, the Wavelets of Katlehong and The Cannibals, whose members included Raymond Chikapa Phiri and Isaac “Mnca” Mtshali from Nelspruit. It is not clear how Isaac got his nickname, but in those days clever people were referred to as “Mnca”, whereas in greetings it meant “fine” or “ok”. Any way you look at it, he is a fine and clever drummer.

Most of Mpharanyana’s hits were in Sesotho. His hitlist is longer than that praise singer Kgomedi Shika Lekgothwane’s dedication to Prince George titled *Tša Morena Wa Magaga Mašwana*, the longest praise poem I ever had to memorise at school. Some of the biggest hits of “Abuti Mphari”, as he was affectionately known were *Hlotse*, *Dihwapa*, *Mawela*, *Puleng*, *Sathane (Ba Mo Tshwere)*, *Se Sa Feleng Se Ya Hlola*, *Wa Lla Mokoko* and *Lengolo*. His English tracks *Freak Out With Botsotso* and *Disco* were both Teaspoon Ndelu’s compositions. He also did Sesotho cover versions of Percy Sledge’s *Take Time To Know Her* titled *Nka Nako Ho Mo Tseba* as well as Joe Tex’s *That’s The Way* as *Ke Yona Tsela*.

Jacob Radebe’s producer was Mpumalanga’s hornman, the late West Nkosi and the two co-wrote many of his hits. One of the songs composed for him by Baberton’s Ray Chikapa Phiri was the hit, *Be A Man*. Due to demand in 2001 this soul brother’s music was again released by Universal Music on the CDs *Mpharanyana – The Best Of Mpharanyana* – *Original Soundtrack Recording From The TV Series Mpharanyana* as well as *Best Of Mpharanyana*. Maybe I should explain the “coughing” that decorated his songs. One of the musicians who used to attend his recording sessions told me that what I always thought was “style” was actually a coughing problem. The tape would be stopped so many times during
recording sessions for him to cough, until one day his producer West decided that he should just cough within the songs. To most people it became his trade mark. Funny how creativity can turn obstacles into something positive. This reminds me of bass player, Bill Johnson whose bow is said to have broken in the middle of a performance in Louisiana in 1911. It is said without the bow he continued playing by plucking the strings of his big guitar; that became a new trend, which is still the standard today. Mpharanyana’s life and career always reminds me of Brenda Fassie – a star that shines very bright in a short space of time and leaves us craving for more.

Another male soul singer whose powerful magnetic voice was a breed between Mpharanyana and Phillip Malela of The Movers was Walter Dlamini who was backed by The Beggars. The Beggars were Michael Nyembe (lead guitar), Mzwandile David (bass guitar), Thami Xongwana (organ) and Michael Stoffel (drums). Some of their hits were Mr Postman and Everybody Say Yeah! Walter also became part of a male trio called Wataja. The name represented the names of members Walter (lead vocals), Thapelo (keyboards) and Jack (guitar). The group’s producer was the late guitar king, Marks Mankwane.