Beyond Memory

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CHAPTER THREE

QUICK QUICK

Towards the late 1950s a new music genre that fused various township music styles emerged – mbaqanga. This genre was preceded by marabi, tshabatshaba and kwela. The kwela era had notably been dominated by hornmen like Spokes Mashiane and Lemmy Mabaso. Mbaqanga is a coinage resulting from a quick rich meal made of various ingredients. According to veteran producer, arranger and composer Sebatana Rupert Bopape, the songs were composed and recorded on the spot just as one prepares “mbaqanga”. It was a quick-quick meal.

In Alexandra township, Aaron Lerole’s Alexandra Black Mambazo performed penny-whistle music that mixed various earlier township styles mostly composed by Zeph Nkabinde. Zeph also had his own songs under the name Zee Zee Nkabinde and His Sax. The band that was also known as Alexandra Shamba Band was formed by brothers Elias Shamba Lerole of Toma Hawk fame and Aaron Jack Lerole, a man I met for the first time performing at Johannesburg’s Rooftop Market. Other members included David Ramosa and Peter Khumalo.

This group reigned on the Alex music scene at the time and introduced a new trend in the music industry. They would open a song with introductory lyrics mostly in Tsotsitaal, which was a street lingo mixing various languages dominated by Afrikaans, isiZulu and Sesotho. Sometimes they would pause in the middle of an instrumental tune and break into song, only to return to the instrumental later. In that era most groups had a female lead singer backed by male voices.

At EMI a visionary from the former Northern Transvaal (Limpopo Province), Rupert Bopape, sought to change that by creating a female group fronted by a
male singer. The arrangement saw the formation of the Dark City Sisters fronted by the late Big Voice Jack Lerole in 1959. The group’s name was influenced by Alexandra’s nickname “Dark City”, earned through its lack of electric lights at night. Their backing band became Alexandra Black Mambazo (Alexandra’s Black Axes). The Dark City Sisters were Joyce Mogatusi, Francis Mngomezulu, Hilda Mogapi and Esther Khoza. The music style produced by the combination of the band and the girls became known as “mgqashiyo”. The popularity of the group took them to various parts of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia as well as other African states. Zeph Nkabinde’s younger brother, Simon was inspired by Aaron Lerole’s big voice and also joined the group. Though he later became world-famous for his performances with the Mahotella Queens, the man who became affectionately known as Mahlathini started his singing career at EMI with the Dark City Sisters. Among the songs he belted out with them was their hit titled Eleventh Year Anniversary. Some of the ladies who joined and left the Dark City Sisters in that era included Susan Gabashane, Dorothy Sosibo, Bessie Tshabalala and Emma Sineka.

From the original line-up it was Joyce Mogatusi and Esther Khoza who sustained the group’s name through the years. In the 1960s new members joined the group in the names of Grace Msika and Audrey Zwane. In 1971 this group that became known for hits like Tamati Yoyo, Vukani Kusile and Mphatlalatsane dissolved. Later in the 1990s when I talked to group leader Joyce Mogatusi in Rustenburg she was married and blessed with a daughter Mmatladi and a son Medupi.

In the early 1960s Rupert Bopape left EMI for Gallo Records. He worked with various bands, but it was a male band originally called Pretoria Tower Boys formed in Tshwane between 1958 and 1959 that caught his attention. Due to the diversity of the band, in 1965 it was named Makgonatsohle Band, a ‘master-of-all’ kind of band. The mbaqanga group’s members were Marks Mankwane (lead guitar), Joseph Makwela (bass guitar), Vivienne Ngubane (rhythm guitar) and Lucky Monama (drums). Leading the band on penny whistle and saxophone was West Nkosi, originally from Nelspruit in the former Eastern Transvaal (Mpumalanga Province). This legendary band whose hits included Jive Mjikisa No. 7, Tsatsawane, Mahamba Yedwa and Madula Shokeng Special also used the name Makhona Zonke Band. In 1989 the band lost its rhythm guitarist Vivienne Ngubane and he was replaced by Sipho Madondo, a former member of another mbaqanga male group, Amaswazi Emvelo.

In order to rival EMI’s Dark City Sisters, Bopape formed another female group and named it the Mahotella Queens. The name was inspired by the endless roadshows that saw them stay at various hotels across South Africa. Though ladies like Windy Mkhise were the first to record under the name, the first well-known faces of the Queens were Ethel Mngomezulu, Nunu Maseko and Hildah Tloubatla. Simon “Mahlathini” Nkabinde was recruited to join the group
as its “groaner” and it was aptly named **Mahlathini and Mahotella Queens**, backed by the Makgonatšohle Band in 1964.

The group’s first hit was Nunu Maseko’s composition, *Thoko (O jola nobani?)*. The Queens were later joined by Nobesuthu Shawe Mbadu and Mildred Mangxola. It is important to note that besides the many albums they released under their name, Mahotella Queens members also recorded music under various names like Soweto Stars, Marula Boom Stars, Mthunzini Girls, etc. They sang mainly in Northern Sotho and isiZulu. Towards the end of the 1970s the group members took a four-year break due to personal commitments such as marriage, maternity leave and raising children. But the show had to go on. In the 1980s the interim membership was Emily Zwane, Thandi Nkosi, Maggie Khumalo, Hazel Zwane, Caroline Kapentar and Sheba Malgas. They released albums like *Thatha Izimpahla Zakho* and *Khwatha O Mone* which were produced by lead guitarist Marks Mankwane. One of the original group members, Nunu Maseko, later formed her own group called Izintombi Zesi Manje Manje (Girls of the Modern Times). The group released albums like *Zenda Zangishiya* (1983) and *Sematsatsa Sane* (1984) produced by Hamilton Nzimande at Gramophone Record Company (GRC). Like the Mahotella Queens they sang in Northern Sotho and isiZulu.

In the meantime, Mahlathini and some members of the Mahotella Queens left Gallo Records to form Mahlathini and the Queens. The period saw the mushrooming of new formations like Mahlathini Nezintombi Zomgqashiyo as well as Peggy and Mahotella Queens produced by Marks Mankwane. Besides composer Peggy Mokhomo, Marks also produced Joyce Thabe’s album, *Modiegi*. Other names of the time included Manzini Girls, Jabavu Queens, Dima Sisters, Lesotho Sisters, Amaxhosa, Durban City Queens, Smother Girls, Mthembu Queens, Flying Jazz Queens, Izintombi Zentuthuko and Izintombi Zomoya. Mahlathini’s rivals included a groaner called Mshengu Shabalala.

Another man who helped shape the group was composer and saxophonist Shadrack Piliso, brother to Edmund Ntemi Piliso of the African Jazz Pioneers fame. Later Shadrack passed away and the father of Mbaqanga and mgqashiyo, Sebatana Rupert Bopape retired to his home in the green valleys of Limpopo Province. When I was still with the SABC, I had the privilege of facilitating a Lifetime Achievement Award for him as part of Peter Tladi’s Standard Bank Jazz vision. By 2005, when I paid him a visit, he had lost his eye-sight but could still vividly remember and narrate the interesting story of his life. He lives peacefully with his daughter Margaret at his retirement home in Mohapene village near Tzaneen.

In 1983 Mahotella Queens released the Northern Sotho hit album *Tša Lebowa* backed by The Beggars, a band known for backing Walter Dlamini as Walter and The Beggars. At that time the Queens’ line-up was Emily Zwane, Maggie Khumalo, Beatrice Ngcobo, Hazel Zwane and Caroline Kapentar. As a group,
Mahotella Queens released a chain of albums featuring memorable hits like *Hamba Phepha Lami*, *Guga Mzimba*, *Ngiyakhala Ngiyabaleka*, *Mahlare*, *Pitšeng Tše Kgolo*, *Tate Ntshwarele*, *Jive Makgona*, *Mogologolo*, *Monna Le Mosadi*, *Thonthodi* and many others.

In 1986 West nkosi re-united Makgonatšohle and Mahlathini and Mahotella Queens for the music of Harry Belafonte’s album *Paradise In Gazankulu*. While busy with the recordings they caught the attention of two Frenchmen who invited Mahlathini and the band to perform in France. The French were so impressed with their performance that they were requested to return to that country with Mahotella Queens: Hildah Tloubatla, Mildred Mangxola and Nobesuthu Mbadu. But before leaving for France the group recorded the album *Thokozile* (1986). On 25 July 1987 they left for Paris to perform in a concert dubbed the “Black Night Festival”. In 1988 they participated in The Nelson Mandela Birthday Concert at Wembley Stadium in the UK. The televised concert was transmitted to more than 60 countries worldwide. Subsequently they toured Europe, England, North America, Japan and Australia. When I asked Marks about the language barrier, he said people in those countries just loved the music and cared very little about the language. To illustrate this he said in Japan they were requested to play *Inyoni Yathi* several times. It was mind-boggling.

In 1990 Shanachie Records released the Queens’ international album *Marriage Is A Problem* (Nyalo E A Tshwenya) produced by Marks Mankwane. It was during this international peak that they released CDs like *Rhythm And Art* produced by West Nkosi who was then the manager of the group. In 1994 they released their last CD with Mahlathini, *Stoki Stoki*, which was produced by the group leader Marks Mankwane marking the 30th anniversary of the group. The backing band line-up was Marks Mankwane (lead guitar), Sam Jagome (rhythm guitar), Joseph Makwela (bass guitar), Joey Mabe (keyboards), Philemon Hamole (drums) and Teaspoon Ndelu (saxophone). The recipients of the Womex 2000 Award for World Music Artist Of The Year, the Mahotella Queens will always be loved by the international community for hits like *Kazet, Stokvel Jive No.1, I'm In Love With A Rastaman* and *God Is On Your Side*. Their collaboration with The Art Of Noise as well as their deal with the big French company, Celluloid Records, will remain some of their international scoops. In 2000 the group released the CD *Sebaibai* as a tribute to the late West Nkosi, Marks Mankwane and Simon Mahlathini Nkabinde (1937–1999). During the era of uncertainty when their fan base was invaded by the disco fever, the band members went into production projects for survival.

Warmbaths-born *Marks Mankwane’s* most known project will always be his *Marks Special* series that featured his lead guitar wizardry as well as his hit composition *Khupamarama*. Besides producing the already mentioned female groups, the lead guitarist from the era of the Pretoria Tower Boys also produced
a successful male group called Abafana Base Qhudeni. But as already seen in other chapters, Mankwane also got involved in other music genres as a producer. His legacy in Sesotho traditional music includes the group Soil, Water and Sun. He also became leader of Mahlathini and Mahotella Queens. Of the Makgonatšohle band members, Marks was the closest to me. He would call from wherever they would be touring around the world to update me on both broadcast and music trends in other parts of the globe. The world respected him as a mbaqanga guitar expert. Testimony to this was his feature on Washington D.C.’s National Public Radio programme “Afro-pop” with master guitarists Dr Nico, Sekou “Diamond Fingers” Diabate of Guinea’s Bembeya Jazz and Matima of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Zaiko Langa Langa. For instance, it was through him that I came to know about MIDEM. This is an international trade show for professionals of all music genres that provides business and a networking market in Cannes, France. The acronym stands for the French name, Marché International Del’édition Musicale. When he died on 17 October 1998 after a long illness, my “international search-light” went out and I felt so lost! The guitar giant was quietly laid to rest at Swart Dam (Mmotong) in the Makapanstad area, north of Tshwane.

The former member of Nelspruit’s Mhlongo All Stars, alto saxophonist West Nkosi’s solo career dated back to the 1950s during the kwela music era. He was born near Nelspruit where he grew up a herdboy. He once told me in an interview that he was given the name West by his mother’s white boss because for the nine months his mother carried him, she always entered her place of work through the western gate of the household. West was inspired by Spokes Mashiane’s Kwela Spokes in 1956 and when he stayed with his grand father in Atteridgeville, Tshwane he worked in Arcadia to buy himself a penny whistle. Interestingly, he worked for the late J.G. Strydom without knowing that he was a Prime Minister. He said he was surprised by some boys in their band who said to him “Your boss is making life difficult for us with his endless laws”. He’d always defend him by saying his boss knows nothing about laws, he’s a fine man who allows them to sell “mbamba” in their backrooms. He only realised the position of his boss when he passed away and there were many soldiers and officials around the house. West joined the Bon Accord Brothers with whom they had hits like Tshwara Mabaka Baby. When the kwela craze faded away in 1959, he switched over to the saxophone.

West joined Zonk Records through son of Stutterheim and talent scout Gibson Kente. He started playing with the likes of Ntemi Piliso, Boy Masaka, Spokes Mashiane, Kid Moncho and Reggy Msomi. He later joined Reggy Msomi’s Hollywood Jazz Band with which he travelled to Zambia in 1964 to raise funds for President Kenneth Kaunda’s United Independence Party (Unip). Later backed by Makgonatšohle Band he had many hits including his 1966 composition, Duba Duba, as well as the Rupert Bopape/Shadrack Piliso composition, 2 By 2 (1968).
Most of these were re-released on a compilation CD titled *Original Sax Jive Hits* (1991) under Gallo Music’s African Classics series. All the hits were originally produced by Rupert Bopape. West’s other albums include the CD *Village Bump* (Gallo Music, 1994).

In 1970 West was appointed producer and talent scout at Gallo Records and formed Abafana Base Qhudeni. He was also behind the success stories of groups like Flaming Souls, Mpharanyana, Patience Africa, Amaswazi Emvelo, Philemon Mchunu, Abafana Bomoya, Nelcy Sedibe, Volcano and O’yaba. Besides his various productions, West Nkosi’s music career will always be associated with Mahlathini and Mahotella Queens, as well as Grammy Award winners Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Those were the two groups that took him all over the world following their fame as their producer and manager. The company talent scout, who initiated the rebuilding of the Zimbabwe Gallo factory back in 1973, was later appointed as Gallo’s company director. In 1997 he was honoured with the SAMAs 3’s Outstanding Contribution Award. West Nkosi died on Wednesday, 7 October 1998 aged 56 after sustaining injuries in a car crash. Mr Duba Duba was laid to rest at the Kanyamazane cemetery near Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province.

Drummer **Lucky Monama** also went into production working mostly with traditional music groups like Bana Ba Kgwale and Johannes Mohlala. He also worked with successful pop music artists like the tshiVenda female singer, Irene Mawela whose hits included *Ha O Nkarabe* (1983). When I met him in 2007 he was responsible for the promotion of traditional music at Gallo Records.

The first electric bass guitar player in South Africa, **Joseph Makwela**, had hit compositions like *X14*. He also had some projects as a producer with groups like The Holy Spirits.

The story and music of the Makgonatšohle Band was showcased in a television series titled *Mathaka*. The sound-track of the shows was also released on a series of albums of the same name produced by the late West Nkosi.

By 2007 the name of the Mahotella Queens was still popular and kept alive by Hilda Tloubatla (lead) aged 66, Nobesuthu Tshawe (alto) aged 62 and Mildred Mangxola (tenor) aged 63. They released a gospel album titled *Siyadumisa* and followed their fame to Australia.

By the 1940s marabi music whose roots stretch back to the 1920s was popularised by jazz performers. Some of the early groups included The Merry Black Birds, The Jazz Maniacs and the Jazz Revellers. Later on, the marabi-swing style gave birth to mbaqanga whose stars also included Strike Vilakazi,
Reggy Msomi, Zacks Nkosi as well as **Wilson Silgee**. A former member of the Merry Black Birds and the Jazz Maniacs, Wilson became very popular at army camps entertaining the Second World War recruits with his band, The Rhythm Shots. The soldiers affectionately named them “King Force and His Forces”. Silgee who was born in Fietas in 1918 rounded off his career in 1983 playing with giants like Dollar Brand, Jonas Gwangwa and Hugh Masekela in Botswana in the Cultural Resistance Festival. He died in early 1985 after a long illness and his peers staged his farewell gig at Uncle Tom’s Hall in Orlando West, Soweto.

The kwela music of the 1950s was actually tin-whistle or penny-whistle music. As various blowers used the whistle to collect pennies from passers-by in the street, the horn became known as the penny-whistle. Kwela earned its name from the isiZulu word “kwela”, which means to climb up. As the police arrested the noise makers they would be screaming “Kwela! Kwela!” which ironically also became the nickname of their police vans. The music was inspired by the tsivilenda “tshikona” and the Bapedi “dinaka” pipes as well as the Scottish military band pipes. Its Mecca was Johannesburg Zoolakhe where various groups would battle it out. Some of the icons of the genre were Skip Phahlane, Willard Cele and Josh Sithole. An attempt to revive the music was later launched by the late jazzman Dudu Pukwana and his band Spears from the UK with the release of the album *Flute Music*. Locally it was one of the well-known kwela music families in South Africa, the Lerole’s. Big Voice Jack Lerole’s album *Colours And Moods* was released by Gallo Music in 1999. Shamba’s son, Tebogo Lerole released his debut with Universal Music. In 2000 he released *6 Faces Of Dr Kwela* (Gallo Records) under the group name **Kwela Tebza** playing the penny whistle with Shamba, Mpho and Tshepo Lerole while Thembi Lerole took care of the vocals. With the support of his parents in 2007 Tebza released *King Kwela* (CCP) sporting new regalia inspired by an annual horse racing event. No wonder the 8th Metro FM Music Awards crowned them Best Styled Artists. The album went on to win MTN SAMA 14’s Best Adult Contemporary Album: African category.

Penny-whistle ran out of steam following Spokes Mashiane’s switch to the alto saxophone. Most penny-whistlers had to follow suit during the Township Jive era of the sixties and seventies. In paying tribute to the hornmen I’ll single out some of the big names of my time.

Besides the world-famous king of kwela music Spokes Mashiane and Lemmy Special Mabaso about whom so much has already been written, there were also musicians like **Boy Masaka** whose real name was Barney Robert Masena, according to industry insiders. This Gallo Records star also used aliases Elim Valenti, Valenti Elim and Mr Joe. The musician who also became known as “Boy Masaka of Brits” following his introductory lyrics to one of his big hits, died in 1978.

Another hit machine of the time was Lazarus Moncho aka **Kid Margo** who
became famous for his *Rock Pata* series of tunes. He performed with the likes of West Nkosi, Albert Ralulimi and even recorded with them as a trio that producer Strike Vilakazi named “Three Blind Mice”. Besides his solo sax jive hits he is known for the music recorded to welcome Lemmy Mabaso from the UK.

Alexandra’s **LEMMY MABASO** became popularly known as Lemmy Special following his hit of the same name. *See You Later* was another hit he recorded as Little Lemmy Special and Big Joe. He played the penny-whistle while Big Joe (Dan Hill) played alto sax. He travelled with the King Kong cast to London in January 1961 as its youngest member. While there he had the honour of performing in front of Princess Margaret. This musician who was with GRC as Lemmy Special for many years produced other monster hits like *KE Special*.

**JOHANNES SPONONO SPOKES MASHIANE** was discovered blowing his penny-whistle lying on his back under a tree near Zoolake while visiting his aunt from rural Northern Transvaal (Limpopo province). He was first recorded by Strike Vilakazi of Trutone Records. Spokes was to be popular for hits like *Kwela Spokes, Mamlambo* and *DOCC*. According to industry insiders he was a reserved person who disliked gossip and lies. Spokes played his part in fighting the injustices of Apartheid as he flew from Johannesburg to Cape Town to raise funds for the Treason Trial Defence Fund. He had his fair share of prison lock-ups as blowing the penny-whistle in the street corners was regarded a public disturbance by the police. From 1964 he became a loner and his popularity waned. When the star (whose totem is an elephant) died, it was the end of an era. Robala Tlou! (R.I.P!)

It was during the time when Spokes left Trutone for Gallo Records that Strike Vilakazi asked Albert Ralulimi to substitute him. Albert’s career started in 1956 and he became known as a member of The Basement Boys. His aliases included Albert Strike, Cassius The Great, Jazz Maninginingi and Kid Mawrong-Wrong. The last name he earned in 1965 after he had to stand in for a horn blower who could not turn up for rehearsals due to an arrest resulting from a crime known as “mawrong-wrong”, walking across the railway lines. Albert was used to counter Kid Margo by also releasing tunes like *Rock Pata 500*. As Jazz Maninginingi, he had a massive hit titled *Meropa Ka Morago*.

**SAMMYBOY BHENGU**’s saxophone was just as unique as Hugh Masekela’s trumpet; you could not mistake it for Kid Margo’s or Bra Sello’s. His backing band was known as Gunguluza Men and some of their hits were *Boekenhout* and *Phelindaba*, which revealed and reflected their love for Tshwane.

Another man who dominated the sax jive scene was **BRA SELLO** aka Sello Mmotong from Daveyton, Benoni. With the production skills of Hamilton Nzimande he churned out massive Christmas-time hits like *Tycoon* and *12-0-12*. He joined Gallo Records from RCA in 1966. His backing band was known as the Abafana Bentuthuko or the Ntuthuko Brothers led by Hansford Mthembu who also had a massive hit with *Vala Nzimande*. Some of their other hits were tracks like *Sika Bopha*. 
The town of Benoni in the former East Rand (now Ekurhuleni), which was another boiling pot of mbqanga music also produced a star named Thomas Phale. He started playing penny-whistle at the age of 17. Affectionately called “Spangane” in Daveyton, he was inspired by the music of Kid Margo, Sammy Boy and Boy Masaka. Later Bra Sello convinced him to switch from penny-whistle to saxophone. In 1968 he joined Mabhoko Sisters and formed a band called The Gold Diggers before joining RPM in 1969 under Mandla Sibiya. After scoring a major hit with a track titled Boyoyo, the group became known as Boyoyo Boys. Between 1969 and 1980 he recorded more than 20 albums either with the band or as a solo artist. His alto sax was well known in most shebeens of the time around Johannesburg. He was with the Boys for the better part of his music career. When other groups crowded the Sax Jive music and fame dwindled, he became a session musician and even had a day job. During the Bump Jive craze, Phale recorded a track of the same name with The Movers at Teal Records under David Thekwane. Thomas also did some projects with Lulu Masilela. He later joined The Soul Brothers and toured the world with them. At these shows that took them to almost 30 venues in cities like London, Amsterdam, Sydney, Frankfurt, Melbourne and Hamburg he was always requested to open the second half of the session with his solo performance. After ten years of no solo album release, keyboardist Moses Ngwenya urged him to record Phale Special in 1991. At the time of his death he was still blowing his horn as part of The Soul Brothers.

Township Jive included other styles like Accordion Jive, Organ Jive and Vocal Jive, which were recorded mostly on the 45 rpm singles. Some of the leaders in Accordion Jive were Ndabane Ndima and Lulu Masilela who had a big hit with 6 Mabone. Lulu played with groups like The Members, The Movers and Boyoyo Boys. Some of his known hits are: Gumboots, Small Time, as well as his instrumental version of The Beatles’ Hey Jude. A producer in his own right, Lulu produced artists like Alson Hadebe. In 2006 he formed the Musicians Organisation of Gauteng for veteran musicians to support each other and share ideas. Its members included John Moriri, Dark City Sisters, Manzini Girls and Izintombi Zesimanjemanje.

Other Accordion Jive hits of the time included Umtata, White House, Amanzi Amancane and Manjomane Jive. Later on in 1992 the country was taken by storm as that Mandeni troubadour, Vusi Ximba wielded his accordion on the airwaves. Today the instrument can still be heard dominating the Sotho traditional music of groups like Manka le Phallang.

Among the best-selling male voices of the time was a group whose name was inspired by Gallo Records’ logo – Abafana Baseqihuendi. The record company has a cock as its logo. This group was founded in 1974 in Johannesburg and although its membership changed with time some of the known names were Robert Mbazo Mkhise who at one stage substituted Mahlathini as groaner.
for the Mahotella Queens, Joseph Mthimkhulu who sang with the Space Queens, Potatoes Zuma, Ray Mkhise and Daniel Nhlapo. They were backed by Makgonatšohle and their first hit was Sadlula Thina, followed by Nkomo Sika Baba. As already indicated, their producer was Marks Mankwane. Their debut album was Umshado Ucwele Amasaka (1975). Another huge album of theirs was Poo Ke Nna, which created so much demand that it was followed up by its isiZulu version release Inkunzi Yimi (Igagasi, 1980). When Potatoes Zuma, Joseph Mthimkhulu and Daniel Nhlapo left the group, the remaining original members Robert and Ray Mkhise invited Harry Sgegede Nhlapo and Jotham Maqhude Nkosi (former Amagugu members) as well as Alson Majozi to join them. Other members who also joined the group were Zenezele Koko, Velaphi Radebe and Paulus Mgodlagodla Mabunda.

In 1978 Joseph Mthimkhulu, Potatoes Zuma and Daniel Nhlapo formed a new group called ABAFANA BESISHINGISHANE (The Whirlwind Boys). The line-up was Joseph Mthimkhulu, Velaphi Mthimkhulu, Potatoes Zuma, Eddie Zuma and Daniel Nhlapo. The group’s debut album Umshado Ka Nomakhosi (Chocolate City, 1979) produced by T. Tiba was released through WEA Records. In 1980 they released Hayi Bo Bantu Bakithi on the same label followed by Izagila Zesi Shingishane (1981), Fill Up The Table (1981) and Re Ya Totoba (1982). When the group dissolved, Potatoes Zuma went solo under the name “Mazambane” and later answered to the call of the ancestors to become a sangoma.


Other male groups of the time were ABATHAKATHI whose albums included Umunt Omdala (Kilimanjaro, 1983) produced by Hamilton Nzimande of Isibaya Productions. Hamilton also had a group named after him called NZIPMANDE ALL STARS.

Another multi-gold selling group was AMASWAZI EMVELO, a name indicating their Swazi cultural background. Originally known as The Californian Kids, some of their albums were produced by Marks Mankwane. Some of their early titles included Sarafina (Substitute) and Umngani Wami (1978) on the Disco Soul label. Their debut single as Amaswazi Emvelo was Okomuntu Nwayi Nwayi (1978), which became a monster hit. The group membership was Albert Motha (lead vocalist), Philip Motha, John Motha and Meshack Mkhwanazi. They were brought together by Gallo director West Nkosi who later also became their producer under the Mavuthela Music Production. Their albums include Mama Ka Nomvula (Ezom Dabu, 1979), Siphuma Eswazini (1979), Jabulani (1980), Thul’ulelele (1981), Umkhovu Wendawo (1981), E-Soweto (1982), Ezintabeni (1982), Izulu Elimnyama (1984), Itshwala Begazati (1985) and Indodemnyama (1987), which featured Mahlathini Nkabinde. Besides the gold awards they collected, they also won the Sarie Award in 1982 as the Best Vocal Group for
their second gold disc album *Umkhovu Wendawo* as well as in 1983 for the album *Ezintabeni* featuring the hit *Ngiyamesaba Umalume*.

The band **ABAFANA BOMOYA** was originally formed in 1966 by George Bhengu and Mboniseni Mkhise in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. They came from Emakhabeleni near Kranskop and lived in the compound of the University Of Natal where they worked. In 1976 they named themselves Abafana Bomoya. In 1982 they participated in an international folk-music festival with Ladysmith Black Mambazo in Germany. They were later joined by Jeff Thomas, “Madabule” Mkhise and “Washesha” Ngcobo. Their albums include *Emakhabeleni* (*Ezomdabu*, 1984).

One male voice group that became internationally known for attracting the attention of Paul Simon was the **BOYOYO BOYS**. Their first major hit was Boyoyo and it also became their name. Their follow-up hits were *Zola No. 4* and *Boyoyo No. 4*, both produced by David Thekwane at Teal Records. The group achieved more than 20 gold records in a glorious career that lasted 15 years until the drummer Archie Mohlala met his tragic death in 1984. The Boys’ biggest hit was *Pule*, which gave birth to Malcolm McLaren’s international hit, *Double Dutch*. Thereafter the group’s name was sustained by Vusi Xhosa, Vusi Nkosi, Lucas Pelo, Philippe Mziza as well as the late hornman, Thomas Phale. Through Rea Music they released the album *TJ Today* (*Boots*, 1988). The title was inspired by the then Johannesburg plate number. In those days T stood for the province of Transvaal, followed by the first letter of the town. However, there were some exceptions and to this day I never knew what they stood for. You’d easily recognise TP for Pretoria, TG for Germiston, TS for Springs, but how Pietersburg became TAL, Potgietersrus TAN, Groblersdaal TCA or Brakpan TO, I never understood and never tried to find out. Some of the group’s hits included on the Rea Music collection series titled *Homeland* were *Alex Jive*, *Daveyton Special*, *Mthwalo*, *Alex Corner* and *Eloff Street*.

Other memorable tunes of the era included *Submarine*, *Skhumbuzo*, *Maokeng Special*, *Jive Sasol B3*, *Mzilikazi*, *Mazambane*, *Bayeza*, *Madiepetsane*, *Isinkwa No Banana*, *Mark Special No. 2*, *Scoop Kwela Jive* and *Impalampala*, which inspired Thomas Phale’s *Platform 14*. Other hot musicians were *Patla Pat Lekganyane*, *Ananias Mokoena* and *General Duze*.

One interesting aspect of the music was how tracks got their titles. If a track was a huge hit, it would become a series, for example *Rock Pata*, *Jackpot*, *Taxi Jive*, *Percy Jive*, *Jive Smodern Jive*, *Lekope Special*, *Mabone*, etc. Other tracks were named after places or roads like *Marabastad*, *Dube*, *Soweto*, *Durban Road*, *Platform1*, *Mamelodi*, *Maokeng*, etc. Events also got their share as in *Apollo 11*. Some instrumental hits gave birth to their vocal versions as in the vocal version of 12-0-12, which was titled *Ingwe Idla Ngamabala*. But the most interesting part was that there could be a track titled *Taxi Jive No. 1* followed by *Taxi Jive 500* without having numbers 2 or 20.
Within this genre emerged a mbaqanga sound enriched by township soul. This style became so popular and would be responsible for exposing both mbaqanga and township soul to the world.

In KwaZulu-Natal two young guys had big dreams and decided to hit the big time in Johannesburg. There were no studios in Durban at the time. The two were guitarist Tusa Mthethwa from Camperdown and drummer/vocalist David “Mdavu” Msondo from Hammersdale. In 1973 the group arrived at the EMI Recording studios in Johannesburg to record their music. Later they were joined by bass guitarist Zenzele “Zakes” Mchunu from Camperdown. They hardly knew that the road ahead would be paved with gold discs, platinum discs, fatal car crashes, international tours and many many awards. They did not know that their musical homes would change from EMI, GRC, Priority Records, Soul Brothers, Tusk Records to Gallo Records!

Placed under the management of the late Titus Masikana, not much was achieved by the mbaqanga band, The Young Brothers. Things changed when In 1974 a GRC representative Moses Jabu Dlamini recruited them to his stable. The mbaqanga they played was fused with township soul and their name changed to THE SOUL BROTHERS. The drummer, David Msondo became their lead vocalist and their producer became Hamilton ‘Vala’ Nzimande. Nzimande later became known for his Isibaya Esikhulu Productions as well as for being producer of the late mbaqanga king, Bra Sello Mmotong (Mr Tycoon). This is the year in which they released their first seven single as The Soul Brothers, Umshoza Wami (My Girlfriend), which went gold.

In 1975 as the organ effect was needed for the soul sound, Soweto keyboardist, Solly Rameetse was introduced to the group and the line-up looked like this:

- Lead vocals: David ‘Mdavu’ Msondo
- Lead guitar: Tusa Mthethwa
- Bass guitar: Zenzele ‘Zakes’ Mchunu
- Drums: Philemon Hamole
- Electric organ: Solly Rameetse
- Saxophones: Hosia Moshupye, Lawrance Mothoa, Mpompi Sosibo

In 1976 Moses Jabu Dlamini became manager/producer, a position he held for 13 years. That very year Solly Rameetse had to travel abroad. Showbiz personality, Jerry Mhlanga tipped off Moses Dlamini about an eighteen-year-old talented keyboardist who was a member of a soul group The Crocodiles in Soweto. His
name was Moses Ngwenya who cut his teeth in music as a drummer. “Black Moses” joined the Soul Brothers. Philemon Hamole was replaced by Bongani Nxele, while Hosia Moshupye was substituted by Johannes “Boy” Mpungose.

On 8 January 1979 disaster struck. Tuza Mthethwa and Mpompi Sosibo were burned to death in a car crash near Villiers, on their way to Johannesburg from Natal. According to their manager, their bodies were only identifiable by their belts and neck-chains. This traumatic experience was reflected in their song *Asisaphelele* (We are no longer complete). Following this blow, the band had to replace the fallen stars. Maxwell Mngadi from Umlazi, Durban replaced Tuza Mthethwa on lead guitar. Mpompi Sosibo’s place was filled by Alexandra Township’s Lemmy “Special” Mabaso on saxophone. Another vocalist was roped in to assist David Masondo in the name of American Zulu from Evander, near Nigel.

In 1979 Sipho Yeni joined the band to help Moses Ngwenya on keyboards. Unfortunately Sipho was later shot dead after their concert in Estcourt as he was loading musical instruments onto their truck. In 1982 after the departure of American Zulu the remaining members released an album titled *Isiphiwo* (talent). The track’s lyrics lament the killing of talented people due to jealousy. They remind enemies that even if you kill a gifted person, you can’t take his talent, he’ll leave with it to his grave. Actually, most of their songs are based on their real life experiences.

In 1984 the band’s bass guitarist, Zakes Mchunu died in a car accident. This was just after their successful trip to London for the recording of their second album *Isithembiso* (The Promise) with Priority Records. In that very year they won the SOHO Award, which was received by well-known record company director, the late Stanley Nkosi, on their behalf. The Soul Brothers’ first on the label, *Isicelo* (A Request), had sold over 200 000 units in three months! In 1985 the band made a powerful comeback with a lineup of 13 musicians, including popular mbaqanga saxman Thomas Phale. In 1988 American Zulu who had already left the group died in his hometown of Evander.

Other members who shared the glory of the band and passed away include Thomas Phale, Japan Motoyi as well as the band’s longtime manager, Moses Jabulani Dlamini. The remaining nucleus of The Soul Brothers is David Masondo and Moses Ngwenya. Another longest serving member is lead guitarist, Maxwell Mngadi. They are true survivors as one of their hits *Usathane Simehlulile* (We’ve conquered the devil) composed by David says it all. Their international tours took them to Germany and Britain where their shows were sold out. In Australia they continued to jam-pack venues including the respected Sydney Opera House. When Dr Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela and Frederick Willem de Klerk jointly received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for transforming the Republic of South Africa into a democratic state, the Soul Brothers celebrated the achievement in Oslo and the Norwegians danced to the soul–mbaqanga sounds of South Africa! In response to the international call to write the translation of their
isiZulu lyrics into English, in 1992 they released the album Uxolo/Peace on Tusk Music’s Kariba Records label with all songs written and sung by David Masondo and translated into English by Dumisane Zondi. Although most of their compositions are in isiZulu, some are in Sesotho including their hit Diketso Tsa Hao (Your Actions). David’s favourite musicians include Mahlathini and Mahotella Queens as well as Joseph Shabalala’s Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Moses’s keyboard playing was locally inspired by champions like Rex Rabanye of The Teenage Lovers in Ikageng and Sankie Chouyane of The Movers in Alexandra. On the international front it was the incredible Jimmy Smith as well as Booker T Jones of the band Booker T and the MGs.

In 2005 they released their first DVD, which was recorded live at the Newtown Music Hall in Johannesburg showcasing their magnificent unbeatable stage choreography. I was humbled by their gesture to feature me in the DVD. They followed up with the release of their album Igobondela. The Soul Brothers are the living legends of South African music; no wonder they’ve won trophies in the annual SAMAs, including Isigebengu (1995), Indaba (1996), Umshado (1997), Idlozi (1998), Amanikiniki (1999), Isigcebhezana (2000), Intombi Yami (2001), Induk’Enhle (2002), Isithothobala (2003) and so on. Their 2007 album, Amacala, was nominated in the Best Mgobonyawo Album category, a section that was won by Thokozani Langa for Phuma Kimi.

The Soul Brothers’ awards are just too many to mention. The following are some of their more than thirty albums:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Album</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Msheza Wami</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Dumela</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>I Feel So Lonely Without You</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>A Ke Niyeko Botsotsi</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>Mantombazane</td>
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<td>1978</td>
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<td>1980</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>Ukhalelani</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>Usathane Simehlulile</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>Ke Kopa Tshwerelo</td>
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<td>1982</td>
<td>Isiphiwo</td>
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<td>1982</td>
<td>Ogandaganda</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>Isicelo</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>Hluphekile</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>Xola</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Usibali</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>Uxolo/Peace</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Isigebengu</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Indaba</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Umshado</td>
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<td>Induk’Enhle</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Isithothobala</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Ugruva Nobani</td>
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</table>
1984  Isithembiso        2005  Igobondela
1985  Isilingo          2006  Into Yamahala
1986  Uthando           2007  Amacala

Other albums include *Ke Nna Monna*, *Kuze Kuse*, *Vala Umlomo*, *Xolisa Umoya* and *Ezinkulu*.

We should remember that the above albums exclude their many compilation like *Ezikulu*, *Ezidlubhedu* and *The Best Of* volumes. It should be remembered that besides their band commitment each of them have other projects on the side. Some of the musicians groomed by the Soul Brothers are Thisha, Imitshotshouvu, Ihashi Elimphlohe, Themba Ngwenya, Paula Mahlab as well as Dennis Gumede and the Teenagers. The group’s lead guitarist Maxwell Mngadi also produced groups like Amazulu Amnyama. Hugh Masekela invited them to work with him on his Botswana project. They featured on Harry Belafonte’s album *Paradise In Gazankulu* performing the track *Sisiwani*, an adaptation of their *Inhlawulo*. The vibrating voice on Deborah Fraser’s 2005 album *Ngikuxolele* title track is that of David Masondo. The sharp-as-a-razor organ on Mbongeni Ngema’s *Stimela Sase – Zola* is manipulated by Moses Ngwenya. Hectic? Passion! The Soul Brothers were finally honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the SAMA 13.

The Soul Brothers’ rivals were mainly groups like *Abangani*, a trio whose albums include *Yiba Nathi* (Music Team, 1986) and *Sivikele* (Music Team, 1987) led by Sibusiso Mbathe. In 2006 Sibusiso was the lead vocalist of Oflende, a mbaqanga group which won a South African Traditional Music Award with their album, *Uyashada*. Oflende consisted of Sibusiso Mbathe, Phathizwe Mbathe and Bheki Hlatwayo. In October of the same year their record company, Thuthuka Records presented them with an award for their performance. At the same occasion another group in the stable, Ali Mgube’s Amasap received a gold disc for the sales of their album *Ungezi*.

*Abakhwenyana* was a four-man group made of Dominic Zuma (leader), M. Mlangeni (keyboards), T. Dlamini (lead guitar) and R Bhengu (bass guitar) produced by Simon Ngwenya. Most of their songs were composed by B Mvubu while B. Dlamini was the percussionist. Their albums include 20/20 (Daylight Beat, 1988) and 4000 (Daylight Beat, 1989), which were released through CCP Records.

*The Special 5* included Bongani Ngubane (lead vocal/percussion), Jabu Ngubane (lead guitar), Mandla Exchange Mkhwanazi (keyboards), Lindani Mbathe (drums) and Mxolisi Ngobeni (backing vocals). Their albums include *Once Bitten, Twice Shy* (Umkhonto Records, 1989) and *Thath’ Ukiss* (Umkhonto Records, 1991) produced by Bongani Ngubane.

*Richard Siluma*’s mbaqanga background has its roots in his group, The Love
Brothers, which consisted of Vusi Mlambo (lead guitar), Mdu Mlangeni (organ), Mathambesobho Kunene (bassist) and John Siluma (drums). One of their major hits was *Nthabiseng*. After meeting producer Velile David Thekwane while working as a storeman, Richard developed a passion for production. In 1978 he was promoted to a Sales Assistant, a position that sent him travelling around the country. These trips allowed him to meet a lot of undiscovered talent.

Meanwhile, with his group The Love Brothers recording with David Gresham Productions he produced 13 top records before the band split up. In 1982 Richard was promoted to the position of Producer. His first product was Ukhamba Lo Mvaleliso, a traditional isiZulu music group from Jeppe Hostel. That very same year the group collected two double gold disc awards. He produced Lucky Dube’s isiZulu vocal album *Kukuwe* (1984, Teal Sound), which was engineered by Peter Thwaites. The musicians on this album were Lucky Dube (lead vocals and organ), Richard Siluma (bass and lead guitars), Isaac Mtshali (drums) and Lloyd Lelosa (synthesiser). Later Richard produced Lucky Dube’s very first reggae attempt, *Rastas Never Die* (Plum Records, 1985) engineered by David Segal. It featured the hit *Fresh Air* co-written by Lucky Dube and Dave Segal. In the meantime, *Ukhamba Lo Mvaleliso* achieved two gold disc awards.

Richard was joined by Lucky Dube and the following year he scored three gold discs, two for *Ukhamba* and one for *Lucky*. From here whatever producer Richarda Siluma touched sold big. Lucky’s group from New Castle, Super Soul, joined them but was later recruited by another producer. This forced Richard to perfect his guitar playing skills as Lucky was already a keyboardist and singer. The two of them formed a backing band that led to Richard’s solo career under the name Richie S. In 1984 he released his debut maxi single, *Change/African Dance* (Gresham Records) produced by Julian Laxton and engineered by John Culverwell with various dubbed instruments played by him and Lucky. It was a huge success. They never looked back and Lucky’s career will be discussed under the Reggae music chapter, Ska Flowers.

Richie S followed up with *African Dance No. 2* (American Mix) and *Love Me Baby*. The popularity of *African Dance* prompted other groups to cover it as on Modaji’s *Kwasa-Kwasa* (Mob Music, 1998) album produced by General Muzka and engineered by Lucas Mokoena. This version added a Shangaan flavour to the tune. Richard’s other release was a love songs album titled *I Was Born In Africa*. Besides his solo career his other productions include Asiza, Zanusi, Albert Botsotsso Ngobeni, Tu Nokwe, Thoko Mdlalose, Ruben Beewa, Zasha, Slaves and Sinakho Dance Band; but his production prowess will always be associated with the successful career of the late reggae superstar, Lucky Dube. Richard continued to develop new talent in both reggae and gospel music. In 2007 he was part of the Golden Oldies Music Festival staged at the Polokwane Showgrounds, which I had the honour of compèring all-night with my former colleague, Brains Mantjiu (Nketsetsetse).
In Harrismith on 2 April 1957 John and Topsy Makaza were blessed with their eleventh child, George Sibulayi Makaza. They sent him to Rainbokspruit School in the Swinburne area of the Free State Province. His studies suffered due to his pre-occupation with the music of the Soul Brothers. He dreamt of singing like them on the radio. He left school only to meet a man who would turn his dreams into reality – Richard Siluma. He joined Siluma’s band, The Love Brothers as a backing vocalist. Soon he started recording and performing with them. His immense talent soon showed and during one of the band’s rehearsals, producer Thomas Masingi urged him to consider a solo career. He obliged and Richard Siluma gave him the green light. A new star was created in the name of Sipho Kheswa. His albums include Owami Lona (DGR).

Another musician who started out as an isiZulu mbaqanga star is Pat Shange. I was introduced to him by the late Cyril Mnchunu’s hit parade on the former Radio Zulu (Ukhozi FM). For as long as I knew him he’s been at Dephon. Some of his many isiZulu albums include Ngicela Uxolo and Iseluleko Zomphakathi. In 1984 he releases hot tracks like Ukonwe Umlomo and Yondla Abalazi. His relatively recent isiZulu self-written and self-arranged hit Ubuthamba Nobani Izolo, which he also produced on Dephon’s Sounds Disco label.

With changing trends he crossed into the Mbaqanga-Soul market, which was popularised by The Soul Brothers. Amongst his successful albums are Man Oh Man, Undecided Divorce Case, I Love Africa, Accused, Tonite You Gonna Give and Sweet Mama. When we met he laughed so much when I told him that I presented his song Undecided Divorce Case on air as “UDC”. His unforgettable hits include Casanova and Just A Friend Of My Daddy. Most of his albums were either self-produced or co-produced with either Phil Hollis or Rick Wolff. Pat moves with the changing times. In 1997 he employed the services of one of the new generation of producers South Africa has produced, Godfrey Pilane aka Guffy (pronounced Goofy). They went into the CSR Studios and came out triumphantly with an album titled I Miss You which was released by Teal Records. His 2004 release Kuyini Ukuphila was nominated for MTN SAMA’s Best Mbaqanga Album category. As a producer he has helped many new musicians including the reggae outfit, Black People’s Choice.